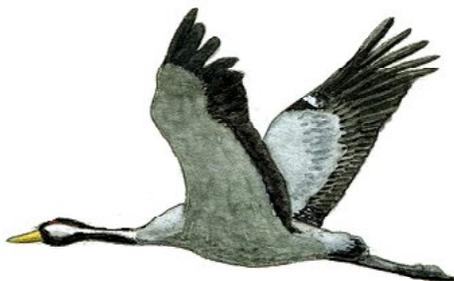
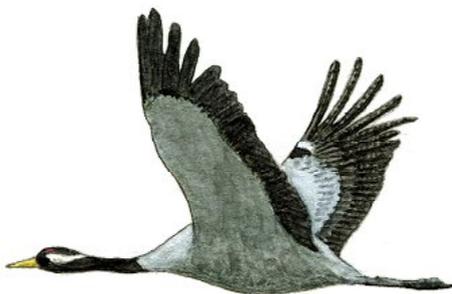


BIRD NEWS

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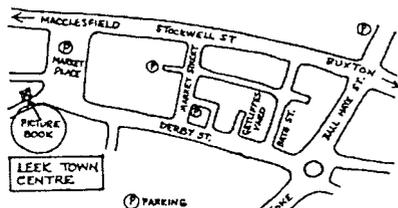
**Red Rocks Update • BTO's Tucker Medal Award
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Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire & Wirral. Please either e-mail or post (on disc) your contributions to the Editor at the address shown above.

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

Front cover: Common Cranes by Tony Broome

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Phil Jones and Bill Morton

Guest Editorial

I am standing alongside a hedge in mid-Cheshire, there are some 15 Tree Sparrows chattering in the cover, Greenfinches and Chaffinches seem everywhere, and along with half a dozen Siskins, are attending a feeding station. There is also a pair of Little Owls prospecting a nest site in the nearby ash tree, a male Yellowhammer and a pair of Bullfinches are visible nearby, a Mistle Thrush is in song at the tree top, and a Lapwing cascades in display over the field ahead.

When I first started birding as a young whippersnapper in the late 1960s, I was lucky to have such tutors and mentors as Peter Grant, Barry Spence and Bob Scott, and when I was not out in the field, I was desperately keen to learn from all available literature. But back then there were few real works of ornithology, and I can still recall many a wet day spent at Dungeness or Spurn where they made me read through pages of the *Witherby Handbook*, and tested me afterwards on key points on various species groups. (No wonder I still hate wader ID!) Of course, the authors of that weighty tome were legends, and Bernard Tucker's name stands out as the field ornithologist of quite simply incredible skill. So it is a privilege to comment here that our own David Norman was awarded BTO's Bernard Tucker Medal, "for outstanding services to the Trust" in December 2002. David is only the second Cheshire ornithologist after Arnold Boyd in 1959, to receive this prestigious award. Such an accolade, for his extensive contributions to ringing, surveys and literature is more than well deserved. However, it is the measure of the man, that he took the advantage to acknowledge collaborative contributions to much of his work in his acceptance speech, and alongside his keenness to link the science with conservation and education. One can, quite simply only be impressed that we do have ornithologists of David's calibre active in our Society today. It is a strength we must build on. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

It was refreshing to attend the AGM this year; there was a plethora of good news, membership continuing to rise, the pain and suffering of the bird records computerisation team resulting in a quality annual report, and a real way forward in terms of capturing and recording our bird data. However, the real possibility to increase the number of members who submit records must remain a critical challenge for the Society in 2003. On the plus side, the Society's conservation efforts recorded a positive impact, our survey data continuing to add real value, *Bird News* remains a valuable asset to the Society's external focus, and the evening events were well attended and appreciated. Clearly, the intensive efforts of a dedicated few benefit the many. As ever, that is a quip to ask for more volunteers, but I won't!

So I guess I am back to my local hedge, it's not bad birding, and I await the descending flurry of song that will tell me my first Willow Warbler is here, or the rattle or scratch that identifies a Lesser Whitethroat somewhere in the thicket. Nevertheless, where is the relevance? I'm afraid it's back to recording our county birds, and what better lead to comment on the CAWOS Recording Forum scheduled for 27th September 2003 to take place at Pool Lane, Sandiway. This year the Forum aims to help those birdwatchers that are relatively inexperienced in fieldwork, survey work and recording, who expressed their concerns when they replied to the questionnaire sent out last year. This is a great opportunity we should not let slip through our fingertips.

As a Guest Editor I have failed to comment on the quality and contents of the rest of the newsletter. I make no apologies! I know the rest that follows is good stuff; David Norman's elevation to the peerage of ornithology should be no surprise and a proud moment for CAWOS birders, and the Recording Forum is critical to enabling all who want to, to be able to submit their sightings to add to the database of bird records. This is for its value in records management, the conservation aspects, present and historic value, but also because it is about birding in our county. There you are, I am back at my hedge again!

Hugh Pulsford

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 7th June - 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 Sheila Blamire know as soon as possible.

Recent Reports

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

SITE REPORTS

Chelford SQs

c140 Pink-footed Geese flew over on Jan 11th and the peak count of Canada Geese was 538 on Jan 5th. The male Ruddy Shelduck reappeared on Dec 8th, 30th, Jan 1st and Feb 16th. 520 Wigeon on Jan 11th was the largest ever count here and 838 Mallard on Jan 8th was a high count. A wintering Garganey was seen on Dec 27th and again on one date in Jan. A Scaup was present until Feb 22nd at least. A Jack Snipe was seen (Jan 11th, Feb 15th-16th, 22nd) with two on Dec 21st. 14 Song Thrushes (Jan 11th) was a good count. Up to six Yellowhammers fed in a stubble field.

Dee Estuary

A Fulmar flew over West Kirby in strong winds on Jan 28th. The peak site counts of Little Egrets were 25 at Burton, 17 at Parkgate and 10 off Neston. 120 Bewick's Swans were off Burton on Jan 13th. 145 Pink-footed Geese fed on Burton Marsh on Feb 21st and 150 flew over Heswall on Jan 4th with 2,000 north on Jan 9th and 102 over West Kirby the same day. 16 White-fronted Geese were off Burton on several dates (Feb 8th-28th). 25 Brent Geese visited Heswall and West Kirby but one at Parkgate was more unusual. An excellent count of 30 Scaup was made from Burton on Feb 16th. A Marsh Harrier visited Parkgate on Dec 19th-24th, 27th and Jan 20th. 18,000 Oystercatchers were between Heswall and West Kirby on Dec 27th. 20 Purple Sandpipers flew past Red Rocks on Jan 23rd with five at West Kirby ML the same day and four on Jan 31st. West Kirby had a Mediterranean Gull on Jan 24th and a Long-eared Owl visited Caldby Golf Course on Dec 20th. A Shore Lark was reported at West Kirby on Feb 1st. Six Water Pipits were seen around Neston Old Quay on Jan 6th and smaller numbers were reported irregularly throughout. Two Waxwings arrived at Little Neston (Feb 12th). A Blackcap was found in a Parkgate garden during Dec. 23 Tree Sparrows at West Kirby (Dec 19th) was a good count. Three Twite were at Neston on Jan 24th. A Crossbill flew over West Kirby ML (Dec 5th) and six were at Burton (Feb 15th and 18th). A report of a Snow Bunting in a Capenhurst garden on Dec 17th was truly bizarre.

Frodsham and Mersey Estuary

A Bittern was seen at the Weaver Bend on Jan 5th. 11 Bewick's Swans were at Hale on Dec 11th and nearby six Whooper Swans were on Frodsham Score in Jan. A Brent Goose over the Weaver Bend in Dec was a good find. A drake Green-winged Teal was at Hale (Dec 8th). Two Little Stints remained at Frodsham on Feb 14th and up to 12 were present in Dec. Five Jack Snipe were counted at Hale (Dec 8th) with one at Pickering's Pasture (Dec 6th). A wintering Green Sandpiper was seen at Frodsham. At New Ferry Tip rare gulls included adult Mediterranean Gull on Jan 23rd and 28th (also two adults on Jan 27th), a 2nd win Ring-billed Gull on Jan 23rd and Caspian Gull on Dec 22nd. A Long-eared Owl was found at Frodsham in Jan.

Hilbre

The peak count of Red-throated Divers was 26 on Jan 18th and a Great Northern Diver was seen on Feb 1st. A Whooper Swan was seen on Jan 18th. Brent Geese were seen irregularly with a peak of 33 on Jan 29th the highest count of the winter in Cheshire. Two Scaup appeared (Feb 12th) with another seen on Jan 21st. A Velvet Scoter was seen on Dec 7th and again on Jan 12th. 31 Purple Sandpipers on Jan 18th was the highest count here with nine Little Gulls seen the same day. A Guillemot was picked up between Hilbre and West Kirby on Jan 25th.

Inner Marsh Farm

Eight Whooper Swans on Dec 2nd was the highest count. A European White-fronted Goose appeared (Dec 30th, Jan 4th and 20th). Then a flock of up to 18 was seen from Jan 27th to Feb 27th at least. A

drake American Wigeon was present irregularly from Dec 9th to Jan 29th. A long-staying Green-winged Teal was also present (Dec 2nd Feb 15th) and it also visited Decca Pools on Dec 25th. A Scaup arrived on Feb 16th. A Long-tailed Duck was seen on several dates from Jan 21st to Feb 13th and a drake Smew was seen on and off from Dec 30th to Feb 27th at least. A Little Stint appeared on Dec 4th and a Long-billed Dowitcher stayed a few days (Jan 28th 31st). Two Barn Owls on Jan 3rd and one on Feb 12th added interest.



Macclesfield area

A Cormorant over Handforth Dean (Feb 2nd) was the observer's first there. A redhead Smew at Lyme Park (Dec 20th to 31st at least) was the first site record. Other (or the same) redheads were at Macclesfield Forest (Jan 23rd to Feb 1st, 4th-23rd at least) and Redesmere (Feb 2nd). An excellent count of 16 Jack Snipe was made at Saltersley Moss on Jan 2nd. A Waxwing was near the Flowerpot Inn, Macclesfield from Jan 31st to Feb 6th with two reported on Feb 2nd. A pair of Blackcaps was in a Wilmslow garden during Dec and another was at Macclesfield (Jan 31st). 70 Bramblings were at Sutton Lane Ends on Dec 14th. Up to 85 Crossbills were at Macclesfield Forest with three at Nessit Hill on Dec 11th.

Nantwich area

A Bittern visited Norbury Mere on Dec 31st and Lea Forge on Jan 12th. Two Whooper Swans visited Marbury Mere (S) on Dec 11th. On Jan 4th, c250 Pink-footed Geese flew over Bar Mere/Deer Park Mere. A single White-fronted Goose appeared at both Bar Mere and Deer Park Mere in Dec with five there on Jan 8th, 14th and Feb 6th. Peak wildfowl counts at Bar Mere/Deer Park Mere included 450 Greylag Geese (Dec 3rd) possibly a county record and 1,000 Canada Geese (Jan 12th). An Egyptian Goose at Bar Mere (Feb 12th) was a good find. Three Mandarin were at Deer Park Mere (Dec 3rd-4th). A Scaup dropped in at Hurleston Resr on Dec 24th. A Red-breasted Merganser visited Bar Mere on Jan 13th. Two Goshawks were reported at Moss Wood (Feb 22nd). 163 Snipe at Norbury Mere (Dec 5th) was an excellent count. Two wintering Green Sandpipers were found at Swanley on Feb 7th. A Mediterranean Gull was at Nantwich on Dec 25th-26th and 30th. Wintering male Blackcaps were at Audlem Road, a Nantwich garden and at Shavington during Dec. A Starling roost near Hurleston Resr was estimated to contain up to 500,000 birds. 60 Tree Sparrows at Bache House was a good count with 200 at Hurleston and 48 at Wilkesley. 100 Bramblings visited Deer Park Mere (Jan 12th). On Jan 25th, 20 Crossbills were at Deer Park Mere with three at Raw Head (Jan 9th).

Northwich area

A Slavonian Grebe was at Budworth Mere (Feb 7th) and one/two Bitterns were seen irregularly in the Coward Memorial Reed-bed from Dec 21st; there were reports of both three and four birds from here between Jan 5th and 12th. 20+ Pink-footed Geese fed on a field at Whitley Reed on Dec 8th. A redhead Smew visited Newchurch Common (Jan 18th-19th, Feb 7th) and a Goshawk flew over Budworth Mere on Jan 31st. Four Jack Snipe were found at Neumann's Flash on Feb 13th. A Green Sandpiper appeared at Budworth Mere in late Feb. Budworth Mere hosted an Iceland Gull on Feb 1st. Two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were feeding at Marbury CP from Jan 31st onwards. Five Waxwings were near Moulton on Feb 13th. A Black Redstart at Winnington on Feb 11th was a good find.

North Wirral Shore

20 Scaup off Meols on Feb 20th was a good count and a probable Red Kite flew over the M53 at Upton spur on Feb 23rd. A wader count at Leasowe on Feb 14th included 3,000 Grey Plovers, 18,000 Knot, 16,000 Dunlin and 5,000 Bar-tailed Godwits. Eight Purple Sandpipers were at Wallasey (Dec 1st and 4th with up to six on eight other dates). An adult Mediterranean Gull was seen at Hoylake, Leasowe, Moreton, New Brighton and Wallasey from Jan 2nd to Feb 16th. Eight Little Gulls at New Brighton on Feb 4th was a good total and a Yellow-legged Gull visited Leasowe on Jan 28th. A Dipper at Arroe Park (Dec 13th) was an interesting find.

Three Blackcaps were in an Irby garden during Dec. Up to four Snow Buntings were at Wallasey by the Lifeboat Station from Dec 1st into March.

Poynton area

A Little Grebe at Poynton Pool (Dec 10th) was a good find. Up to three Cormorants were regular at Poynton Pool in Feb with another over Towers Road Fields on Jan 23rd. The peak counts of Canada Geese there included four consecutive site record counts with 371 on Jan 9th being the highest. 207 Mallard at Poynton Pool on Jan 6th was a new site record. A record 17 Teal were at Hazelbadge



Fields on Jan 27th when seven were at Adlington. Raptor interest was added by an escaped Harris's Hawk at Prince's Wood (Jan 27th), a male Merlin at Poynton Pool (Dec 31st a site first) and a Peregrine at Lostock Hall Farm (Jan 19th a site first). 800+ Lapwings and 200+ Golden Plovers visited Lostock Hall Farm on Dec 31st. A Jack Snipe was at Towers Road Fields on Jan 17th. Up to 4,000 Jackdaws roosted at Wigwam Wood. Brambling sightings included 20+ on Dec 29th and Jan 9th at Poynton Pool.

Rostherne Mere and Tatton Park

A Black-throated Diver at Rostherne on Dec 14th-15th was an excellent record and the first there since 1997. 365 Cormorants there in Feb was the second highest reserve count. A Bittern was seen at Rostherne on 13 dates during the period, and at Tatton a Ruddy Shelduck appeared on Feb 14th. Six Mandarins at Rostherne in Jan was the third highest reserve count and four in Dec was a new monthly maximum. 14 were also at Tatton Park on Jan 26th. At Rostherne, 983 Pochard in Jan was a good count. Two Scaup appeared there on Feb 18th and 20th. A Red-breasted Merganser found at Rostherne on Feb 28th was the first record since 1996. The Red Kite remained at Tatton Park until Jan 13th at least and a Hen Harrier at Rostherne on Dec 22nd was a good find. The over-wintering Green Sandpiper remained all winter at Rostherne with two on Feb 8th and one at Tatton on Jan 15th and 31st. A Barn Owl was present at Rostherne on Jan 13th. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen at Rostherne on Dec 8th and again on three dates in Feb. A Blackcap was at a Knutsford garden on Dec 29th.

Sandbach area

280 Pink-footed Geese flew over Sandbach Flashes on Jan 4th with 300 over the next day. A Mandarin was seen there on Dec 17th and 30th with up to three irregularly at nearby Queen's Park, Crewe. A Red Kite flew over the M6 near Barthomley on Feb 28th. A Little Stint at Sandbach Flashes on Dec 4th was exceptionally late. At Sandbach Flashes waders included a Jack Snipe irregularly, 70 Snipe on Dec 24th and a Green Sandpiper was present on four dates. A Mediterranean Gull appeared at Sandbach Flashes on Jan 12th, Feb 8th and 27th and a Glaucous Gull on Jan 7th-8th was a good find. A group of three Tawny Owl fledglings were found at Quaker's Coppice in late Feb, the eggs having been laid around Christmas week. A Dipper at Arclid SQ on Jan 12th was thought to be of the Continental race. A male Black Redstart was at Crewe on Jan 4th-5th. Single Blackcaps were in gardens at Crewe and Sandbach.

Warrington area (including Fiddler's Ferry)

A Mandarin was at Lymm on Feb 18th. Woolston Eyes had a record 858 Tufted Ducks on Jan 10th. A redhead Smew was at Houghton Green Pool (Dec 16th to Jan 18th at least) with a drake at Woolston Eyes (Dec 11th, Feb 22nd and 25th). A Red Kite flew over Risley Moss on Jan 22nd and a Goshawk was reported at Woolston Eyes on Jan 18th. An adult Mediterranean Gull at Fiddler's

Ferry on Dec 4th was the third site record and another was seen on Feb 22nd. A Ring-billed Gull was at Woolston Eyes No.3 bed on Feb 25th and nearby a Kumlien's type Gull visited Fiddler's Ferry on Feb 2nd. An adult Iceland Gull was present at Fiddler's Ferry (Dec 3rd) and a Long-eared Owl roosted at Woolston Eyes on Feb 22nd. Two Waxwings returned again to Stockton Heath (Jan 26th-28th) before relocating to Orford (Jan 30th). Further singles were at Widnes (Feb 2nd) and central Warrington (Feb 16th-17th). A Blackcap was at Fearnhead in Dec. A Twite arrived at Woolston Eyes (Feb 22nd) and 80 were at Fiddler's Ferry in Jan.

Species Highlights

Stonechat numbers were well down on the previous two winters with only c25 birds noted (c62+ in 2001/2 and c38 in 2000/1). Singles were at Burton, Chelford SQs, Disley Resr, Eaton Hall SQ, Hilbre, Neston, Quoisley, Red Rocks and West Kirby. Twos were at Frodsham, Leasowe Bay, Pickmere, Tatton Park and Weston golf course. The only site holding more birds was Fiddler's Ferry with up to three regularly.

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

Thanks/acknowledgements to:- S. & G. Barber, *Birdwatch* and *Birdwatching* Magazines, D. Bissitt, I. Blagden, R. Blindell, A. Booth, J. Canovan (Rostherne Mere NNR), R. Cockbain, J. Gibson, A. Gradwell, L. Greenstreet, C. Hancock, C. Hull (Nantwich Naturalists), C. Linfoot, A.W. Martin, K. Massey (Fiddler's Ferry), D. Morris (Tatton Park), J. Oxenham, J. Patterson, B. Perkins (Sandbach Flashes Log), H. Raw, G. Rhodes, R. Smith (www.deeestuary.co.uk), J. Thompson, D. Wild, J. Wright and all observers who passed records on.

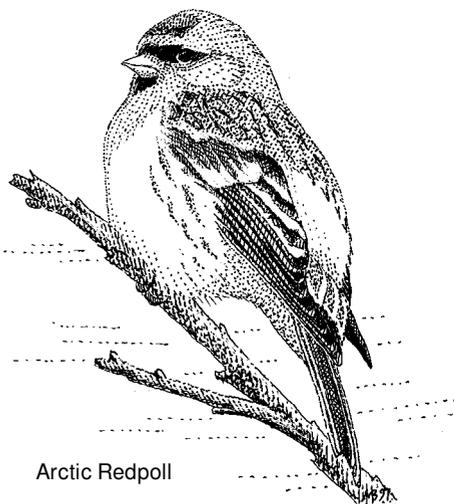
County Rarities

REDPOLLS

To be honest, I have never really paid much attention to redpolls. I don't know why. Even though I have seen them regularly enough throughout the years, historically, unless they were showing a lot of white indicating that they may be something rarer, they have never attracted more than a casual glance.

All that changed when I had the dubious pleasure to be at Titchwell a year or so ago. I was surrounded by keen redpoll watchers of all ages, and by redpolls of about four different species (or just one depending on which pager network, phone info line or birding magazine you paid homage to). Basically, there was utter confusion and mayhem going on around the car park of this premier RSPB reserve, as birders tried to separate out the alleged rare Arctic Redpolls from amongst a flock of 50+ redpolls of differing sizes, and all showing varying degrees of streaking, and white plumage features.

So, what was the problem? Well, redpolls used to come in several races, some of which are now species. There's the so-called Lesser Redpoll, *cabaret* which routinely breeds in the UK, Mealy Redpoll, *flammea* (and possibly *holboellii*, also) from northern Europe and Greenland Redpoll *rostrata* from Greenland. Both of the latter also occur in the UK in varying numbers in autumn and winter. Then there is Icelandic Redpoll (probably *islandica*) which may or may not be another separate race from Iceland, and also the rarer Arctic Redpoll which itself comes in two races, *hornemanni* and *exillipes*, adding even more confusion to sorting out mixed flocks of redpolls. Mealy Redpoll and, if it ever occurred, Greenland Redpoll are both classed as county rarities requiring a description and Arctic Redpoll, a real rarity, needs a BBRC description.



Arctic Redpoll

Lesser Redpoll is a small, dark brown streaked finch, with a black chin, black tipped yellow bill, two buffy or whitish wing bars and no white in the tail. Adults show a red 'poll', and males a pinkish tinge to breast, rump and sides of the face. In winter, they may also show whitish rumps with darker streaks on them and pale mantle braces. They also show broad dark centres to the longest undertail coverts, but these are usually only noticeable from below. Juveniles are a lot plainer and lack the black face markings. Lessers are the smallest of the redpoll family.

Mealy Redpolls differ from Lessers in that they generally appear larger and paler, whiter below, and frostier, less buff, above. There are two even more distinct pale lines down the mantle and whiter wing bars. The rump is even whiter, but on most is still dark streaked, although the palest individuals approach some Arctic Redpolls in all respects. The under-tail covert streaking may be incredibly hard to see properly, but there are usually 2-3 dark feather centres as opposed to Arctic Redpolls' single one in the centre. This is very simplistic and any experienced redpoll fanatic will warn of the dangers of being so general.

Birds of the Greenland (and probably Icelandic) race are darker and bigger than Lesser Redpoll, and share the features of a whitish rump and whiter wing bars. Some will be indistinguishable in the field and Icelandics are usually tentatively identified only in the hand by ringers. Both Mealy and Greenland Redpolls are reputed to have somewhat deeper flight calls than the cheerful, metallic 'cheet-cheet-cheet-cheet' of Lesser Redpolls, but the distinctions are only noticeable if you are experienced with all three.

Confused? Well, you should be, because there are of course lots of birds that are intermediate in plumage and, as with Icelandics, may not be safely racially identifiable. As ever, a good detailed description concentrating on these key features is required and even then, a lot of the features are subjective.

Arctic Redpolls are very like Mealy Redpolls and some birds may simply not be separable in the field. If you manage to come across a classic 'hoary frosted' Arctic Redpoll then all well and good, but otherwise your BBRC description will have to focus in significant detail on the extent of white, plus the amount of streaking, if any, on the rump and undertail coverts in particular. Other features will be the size and shape of bill, because Arctic Redpoll does have a very small, straight pointed bill, and also the extent of streaking on the flanks. They always appear to wear 'boots' as well, with long, white feathering covering their legs.

So, do they occur in the county? The first Mealy Redpolls to be recorded in a report were at the end of 1972 when two birds were misidentified as Arctic Redpolls. They stayed until 1973. And then there were ones and twos in 1975 and 1978. It wasn't until 1986 that Mealies began to be recorded with any kind of regularity, but even so, they didn't get found every year. Huge numbers invaded the whole country in 1995 and 1996 and flocks of approximately 50 and 200 respectively were found in Cheshire. Since then, Mealy Redpolls have become rare again with only a handful of birds in most winters. The big invasion years of 1995 and 1996 also saw the first three records of Arctic Redpolls in the county, a species that associated with the Mealies. There haven't been any accepted by BBRC since.

This group of finches is perhaps misidentified more than any other. For a species deemed so common, a lot of observers still don't realise just how variable the plumage features of Lesser Redpoll can be. They can show pale rumps like Mealies, they can have pale mantle braces, they can have whitish wing bars.... They can be a pitfall for the unwary. Last winter there was a smaller invasion of redpolls into the UK, with lots of Lessers and Mealies from the Continent. There was an awful lot of confusion and Lesser Redpolls were frequently misidentified as Mealy Redpolls. Observers gathered at one much-watched flock in Llandudno even ticked off Twite as Mealies, completely unaware that the birds weren't even redpolls. Identification articles in the popular birding press only seemed to confuse the issue, but did open the debate on when is a redpoll not a redpoll.

The problem the County Rarities Panel will face when they are asked to assess last year's records is that most observers who thought that they were watching Mealies won't have taken notes and without a convincing description are unlikely to have their record accepted by the panel. However, if anybody can provide some decent photographs of any of the reported flocks, they will be invaluable and the Panel would be extremely grateful.

Redpoll taxonomy is an evolving science and this is only intended to be a very simplistic overview.

Hugh Pulsford and Tony Broome

Personality Profile

DAVID NORMAN AWARDED BTO'S BERNARD TUCKER MEDAL

At the British Trust for Ornithology's Conference in December 2002, David Norman was presented with the Tucker Medal 'for outstanding services to the Trust'. The medal is named after Bernard Tucker, one of the co-founders of the BTO in 1933 and one of the authors of the five-volume *Witherby Handbook*. This medal is given for outstanding contributions to the scientific work of the BTO. David is only the second Cheshire ornithologist to be awarded the medal, following Arnold Boyd in 1959, and joins a select group of some fifty recipients.



The citation noted particularly David's contributions to the ringing scheme. Since starting training as a ringer in 1977, he has ringed over 100,000 birds in the UK, most of them in Cheshire and Wirral. He has also trained 15 ringers in his own name and helped with many others at ringing courses and elsewhere, including running one of the first 'weekend' courses, at Woolston, from 1984 annually for 14 years. He was elected to the Ringing Committee 1986-90 (serving on the Training Standards Working Party and the Cannon Netting Technical Panel) and was a member of the Editorial Panel for *Ringing & Migration* 1992-2001.

David's contributions to other BTO surveys were mentioned, including a woodland Common Birds Census (in the West Midlands 1976-78); counting six of Cheshire's heronries for the past 14 years; and personally completing over 3,000 Nest Record Cards (NRCs) and coordinating fellow-members of Merseyside Ringing Group (MRG) in delivering some 20,000 NRCs to the national collection.

He wrote species texts for the major BTO atlases: Chaffinch and Brambling (*Winter Atlas* 1986) and Common Tern, Wood Warbler and Chaffinch (*Migration Atlas* 2002). He also has published papers on a fairly eclectic range of subjects including Little Tern chick growth rates (Gronant) and Common Tern breeding success at the Shotton colony, wader weights in hard weather on the Mersey, Fieldfare biometrics, Grey Heron colony productivity, Wood Warbler survival/mortality and Sand Martin wintering areas, as well as co-authoring the *Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire & Wirral* and writing *The Fieldfare* book in the Hamlyn series of monographs.

David took advantage of his acceptance speech to acknowledge the collaborative contributions to much of his work, especially from colleagues in MRG. He pointed out that, although the medal was awarded for scientific contributions, he was always keen to link the science to two other aspects: conservation and education. Ringing birds, especially, provided many opportunities to contribute to all three. For instance, even something as apparently 'pure science' as measuring wing length and weight of chicks is one of the best ways of telling how well adults are finding food (for example in Grey Heron and Little Tern colonies), a finding of key conservation importance. David also noted that MRG is a charity, the first ringing group to attain such a status, and public education is one of its charitable aims. This is achieved through such means as publications, giving talks and ringing demonstrations, and even just ringing in public places like car parks in Delamere Forest!

Finally, David took the opportunity of standing on the stage publicly to hand over the 840 Nest Record Cards completed by MRG members for 2002.

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RECORD - BIODIVERSITY INFO SYSTEM

As of 6th February 2003 rECORd became a charity (number:1095859). Hopefully this will enable us to find new funding streams to support both the running of rECORd and to allow us to improve our support of biodiversity recording within the Cheshire region.

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Sites to Watch

RED ROCKS

Red Rocks, perched on the north-west corner of Wirral, has long had a justifiable reputation as one of the prime birding sites in Cheshire and Wirral. Due north is the Irish Sea, to the east the massive wader roost at Hoylake and due west Hilbre Island. But let's start at the lovely little reserve, Red Rocks Marsh jointly maintained by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the Wirral Rangers.

My favourite walk in spring is early morning along the path between the reed-bed and sand dunes, overhead Skylarks are singing their hearts out whilst every ten feet or so a Sedge or Reed Warbler will be loudly trilling and whistling proclaiming its territory. But to hear a really weird sound you will have to come down at dusk; if you are lucky a loud insect-like sound will fill the air. Described in my bird book as 'an alarm clock with muffled clapper', it is, of course, the sound of a Grasshopper Warbler. Although described as scarce this species seems to be increasing and we usually get two or three passing through in May, and they may even breed here. Other breeding birds of the marsh and reed-bed include Reed Bunting, a bird sadly in decline across the country, Mallard and Water Rail. You will have to be very patient to see the Water Rail, a secretive bird skulking around the reeds but it does occasionally emerge into the open if it thinks no one is about.

The sand dunes and golf course behind the marsh are also excellent breeding habitats. The dunes are covered with short vegetation such as the dog rose, making it an ideal spot for ground nesting birds such as Skylark and Linnnet. The other main habitat of Red Rocks is, not unsurprisingly, red rocks! This is the sandstone making up Red Rocks Point (also known as Hilbre Point) and Bird Island just a few yards off shore. The point overlooks East Hoyle Bank to the north and east, Hilbre Island to the west and West Kirby shore to the south-west given the right time of year and state of tide all can be fabulous for birds.

Late summer sees the post breeding gathering of terns; at least four species will be seen, from the Little Tern with its wader-like flight to the much larger Sandwich Tern, instantly recognisable by its loud, grating 'kerrick' call. Hundreds can gather here on the sandbank in late July and early August - a wonderful sight. August also sees thousands of waders passing through on their way south. These include Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Sanderling and Grey Plover, the latter looking magnificent in their summer plumage, a jet black chest and silver back.

Autumn brings another spectacular, the passage of sea birds. Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Fulmars, Manx Shearwaters and four species of skua can all be seen but bring a telescope and a load of patience as most of these will be way out to sea. If we have two or more consecutive days of north-west gales in September this will be perfect weather for seeing Leach's Petrel. These remarkably dainty looking birds, little bigger than a sparrow, can be seen fluttering over the waves in their hundreds given the right weather conditions which usually only occur every four years or so. Don't let their weak looking flight fool you, these birds cope remarkably well migrating thousands of miles far out in the Atlantic Ocean, only several days of gales bringing them close to land.

The Dee estuary is one of the most important sites in the country for overwintering waders. Both East Hoyle Bank and West Kirby shore are major high tide roosts and when these sandbanks are covered by the sea thousands upon thousands will fly past Red Rocks Point on their way across the estuary looking for a safer roost. This area is particularly known for huge numbers of Knot, their tightly packed flocks looking like smoke, flashing grey and white in the sun as they swirl around, perhaps trying to escape from an attacking Peregrine Falcon. Flocks ten thousand strong are commonplace and as many as fifty thousand have been seen off Hoylake. Bird Island, sitting as it does above the sandbank, is a favourite spot for roosting Oystercatchers and Cormorants, only driven off the rocks on the highest of spring tides.

The twitchers among you might say this is all very well, but what about the rarities? Well, here's a sample Cory's Shearwater, White Stork, Sabine's Gull, Red Kite, Gyr Falcon, Spotted Crane, White-rumped Sandpiper, Red-throated Pipit, Great Reed Warbler and Aquatic Warbler. Red Rocks is smack on the coastal migration route so virtually anything can turn up; a total of 260 species have been seen an impressive number by any standard.

So come down to Red Rocks at any time of year and you should see plenty of birdlife. To keep up with the latest bird news log on to the Dee Estuary Birdwatching web site www.deeestuary.co.uk.

Directions: From the centre of Hoylake head towards West Kirby along Market Street. Turn right along King's Gap at the roundabout where the A540 starts, then take first left along Stanley Road. Park at the end of Stanley Road. Straight ahead is a great view of Hilbre Island, to the left (south), a path leads to the marsh and sand dunes. To the right (north), is Red Rocks Point (or Hilbre Point) with Bird Rock ahead and East Hoyle Bank stretching for miles beyond that.

Richard Smith

Ringers' Notebook

The small size of Goldcrests always enthral visitors to ringing demonstrations and others who are not used to being close to them, but even ringers who handle them regularly can be amazed at their migrations. At a weight of around 5 grams, they are one of the lightest birds in the world that regularly undertakes major sea-crossings. A nice example of their long-distance movements has come from a first-year male Goldcrest ringed at Arley on 21 October 2001, that was reported from Kirkwall, Orkney, on 25 March 2002. This journey, of 630km, was probably part of the return movement to Scandinavia of a Continental immigrant.

Swallows make the longest regular migratory journeys of British-breeding passerines. One ringed as a chick in a nest near Ashley on 29 July 2002 was unlucky enough to become a road casualty in the Kruger National Park, South Africa, on 25 November. Those who have visited the Kruger Park will know that there are only one or two roads in an area the size of Wales, so this bird suffered ill-fortune in the extreme. I have commented in a previous Ringers' Notebook (*Bird News* 55, July 2002) on the speed of Swallow movements. This one moved 9377km in 119 days from the date of ringing, a minimum of 80km a day, but in fact it was likely to have accomplished the journey much more quickly than that. It probably remained in Cheshire for much of August, and maybe longer, as most locally-bred Swallows stay in the area for a month or two, often visiting the reed-bed roosts.

Several examples were reported during autumn 2002, all involving the roosts at Woolston. Birds ringed as chicks near Macclesfield and Mobberley in early June were caught at Woolston in the first few days of August. Another caught there on 6 September had been ringed in a roost near Stanlow three nights previously, a local movement of 26km. A bird netted at Woolston on 4 September wore a ring from Heysham Harbour (76km north) where it had been caught on 18 August. Finally, one ringed at Woolston on 23 August was caught on 13 September at Swadlincote in Derbyshire, 93 km south-east. All of these birds were first-years. There is now a Europe-wide project, co-ordinated by EURING, attempting to unravel the way that Swallows use roost sites during their autumn passage.

A keen CAWOS member has passed on to me the details of a colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit seen at Inner Marsh Farm on 21 August 2002. This bird, an adult male, was ringed on 4 May 2000 at Alftafjörður, near Höfn, in south-east Iceland, on spring passage. It had also been reported from the Dee estuary two weeks previously, on 7 August 2002 and was later seen there on 10 October 2002. As it happens, this bird was ringed in Iceland, by a visiting team from the University of East Anglia and others, in the same catch as an adult female reported from the Mersey estuary, at Eastham in August 2000. Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits are noticeably bigger, in the hand at least, than the Continental (Dutch) race. It would be fascinating to discover from which race the small numbers breeding in England derive.

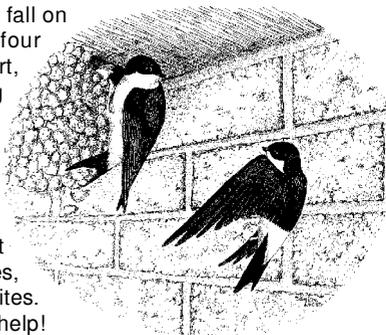
Finally in this Notebook, I would like to mention the sad death of Chris Mead, for many years the Head of the British Ringing Scheme and lately the Public Relations and Media Consultant for the BTO. Chris visited Woolston a couple of times, including a memorable ringing course in 1989, following which he became Patron of the Woolston Eyes Conservation Group. He was a fount of knowledge on many subjects.

Professor David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 6PF. Tel: 01928 711064 E-mail: david.norman@physics.org

Projects and Surveys

HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY 2002

A total of 27 survey forms were returned this year, a slight fall on 2001, with information submitted verbally by another four observers. Unfortunately, owing to an oversight on my part, recording forms were not sent to several long-standing supporters of the survey, but it is hoped that the data for the sites concerned will be obtained in due course. Of the 27 observers who returned completed forms only three were CAWOS members. Although it is encouraging that members of the public are supporting this survey, it would be good to see more CAWOS members involved. Most people in the Society must be aware of House Martin colonies, either near their home or in the vicinity of regularly watched sites. It does not take long to count nests at such sites. Please help!



Arrival

A few observers noted birds at their colonies in mid-April, but the main arrival appears to have been between 22nd and 28th April.

Major sites

Once again, commitments prevented me from arranging access to the huge colony at Styal Prison, nor did I manage a visit to Winwick Hospital. Time only allowed for my continuing survey of the whole of the parish of Antrobus where a total of 118-120 occupied nests was found (cf. 141-144 nests in 2000 and 121 in 2001). The population there is clearly reasonably stable, the fall since 2000 almost entirely accounted for by the complete loss of a colony of up to 19 pairs in 2000, when the owners netted the eaves. Interestingly, if the birds have relocated they must have moved away from Antrobus.

Pete Hall, at Toft, reported a 'quiet year', with just 15 first broods on the Hall, and eight second broods. There were 59 first broods there in 2000, but it seems that some may well have moved to a new housing development nearby where there was a ready supply of mud, while a possible contributing factor was the removal of cattle from an adjacent farm and the consequent reduction in insects. Continued construction work at the AstraZeneca site at Alderley Park has seriously restricted nest site opportunities, resulting in just 17 nests occupied in 2002 (cf. 37 in 2001 and 33 in 2000). There were some second broods, but numbers have now fallen dramatically from previous years.

Stephen Davies sent in interesting information about a colony breeding under railway arches at Hunts Lock, Northwich. There a total of 30 occupied nests were present. It is not clear for how long House Martins have been breeding under this 150-year-old bridge, but the population has been stable for the three years that Stephen has been monitoring it. Another important site is Upper Brereton Park Farm at Huxley, near Tattenhall. On the farmhouse there Helen Campbell found at least 25 occupied nests and good breeding success. She comments that "we have always had a great many nests" with "lots of insects and water around".

Some years ago, when I seemed to have more time, I surveyed several parishes in north Cheshire, one being Stretton on the south side of Warrington. By far the most important site for House Martins there was the farmhouse at Moss Hall Farm. In 1997 47 pairs bred and I understand from the farmer that the population remained high until 2002 when there was a dramatic crash. When I visited in 2002 there were only five occupied nests. As far as I could see nothing had changed; the property had not had any building work carried out or been painted. A strange, sudden collapse.

Breeding success

Many observers found this difficult to assess, but the overall feeling was that 2002 had generally been successful for those birds that bred. For example, C.Woodman, reporting from Little Budworth,

indicates that of the seven pairs that bred on her detached house, three raised three broods and four raised two broods, while at Upper Brereton Farm, Huxley, Helen Campbell's House Martins had 16 first broods and 10 or 11 second broods. Mr G.R. Mellish at Rudheath had excellent breeding success from his birds. All six pairs had first broods each of four young, and there were four second broods, also of four young.

A few observers reported birds arriving late in the season (two sites in late June), while at one house breeding birds did not arrive until August, but then bred successfully. Perhaps they had been displaced from elsewhere. Sheila Blamire's House Martins also arrived late at Mere and although they stayed around did not breed in her artificial boxes as they did in 2001.

There were a number of reports of House Sparrows taking over nests and at least three observers felt that "fewer birds are returning each year". There were the usual concerns about uPVC soffits and gutters and of people removing nests containing young. One observer intends to distribute RSPB leaflets on her estate pointing out the illegality of such actions.

Final thoughts

As stated last year this relatively small sample of House Martin colonies may not be representative of what is happening in the county as a whole, especially when about half of the returns were from the Northwich area. Only one site was covered in the east of the county and two in the south. Perhaps societies in these areas could encourage their members to participate in the survey or otherwise publicise it?

During the forthcoming breeding season I intend to contact many previous supporters of this survey so that, if possible, we can significantly increase the numbers of sites monitored. This is particularly important in order to discover trends at colonies that have been regularly counted in the recent past. I hope, if time allows, to gain access to Styal Prison once again.

As always, my thanks to all those observers (interestingly, mainly female) who gave much of their time in 2002 to studying their local House Martin colonies. I have a good supply of recording forms, which are easy to complete, so I look forward to hearing from as many people as possible particularly from the east and south of Cheshire.

**Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251
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FARMLAND BIRDS MONITORING PROJECT

POSTPONEMENT OF TRAINING

DEFRA have informed me that no sites will be ready for surveying until the autumn due to delays in finalising agreements. Therefore I propose that we postpone training for those who require it, until September, closer to when we will undertake the surveying, which will hopefully commence in autumn/winter 2003.

We still need more volunteers to visit specific farms six times per year twice in Nov - Feb and four times in Mar - Jun. Ideally this would be done for several years. You would walk a transect (a specific line) across the farm, noting target species. Every effort would be made to fix you up with a farm near to your home. If you are interested please contact **David Cogger on 01606 832517 or e-mail memsec@cawos.org.**

This is an excellent opportunity to put something back - please get in touch.

Roy Leigh

County Report Review

CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL BIRD REPORT 2001

This review by JM Thompson appeared in *The Guardian* on January 28, 2003

"This week, the *Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society Bird Report* for 2001 arrived in the post. The main, systematic list of species has been made easier to read, with maps and line drawings, and a major innovation has been the computerisation of records submitted by observers. For this wealth of information to be of use for analysis, it had to be accessible in database format. Some very hard work behind the scenes has made this possible, and it is so easy for those of us who receive and enjoy the finished product to forget that it is all achieved by voluntary labour.

As to the birds in 2001 - this was the year of the foot-and-mouth tragedy, when vast areas of countryside were out of bounds for months on end, but there were still highlights, none greater than the first breeding record for Cheshire of the Little Egret. The County Recorder believes that, had the chosen site not been quiet due to the restrictions, it is doubtful whether this historic event would have taken place. Elsewhere, the appearance of an adult male Lesser Scaup at one of the county's smaller meres in April was only the second record for Cheshire.

Foot-and-mouth cast a shadow even over the Mersey estuary where counts of moulting Shelduck flocks had to be abandoned in July and August, but other results confirmed that the estuary remains one of the most important sites in the UK. Nearer to home, like many others I missed the rare Red-backed Shrike found in June on farmland close to the village - the bird had flown by the time the news was released."

This review by Richard Smith was first published on the Dee Estuary Birding web site (www.deeestuary.co.uk)

"I was pleasantly surprised on opening the package to see that the front cover was a full page glossy photograph of a Wheatear. This immediately gives the report a more professional look and brings it in line with other leading bird reports. But that is not to say I don't miss Tony Broome's wonderful sketches which have adorned the front covers of many a report in the past.

As usual the report itself is full of interest with articles including the history of the Black-necked Grebe at Woolston Eyes, now the most important site in Britain, and an account of the remarkable increase of the Little Egret which in 2001 bred for the first time in northern Britain. It was in 2001 that CAWOS (Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society) chose to computerise all their records - and what a mammoth task it turned out to be. Altogether 47,762 records were received from 795 locations. The total number of species was 272 plus 23 escapes. All this was received in an amazing range of formats and subsequently put into a database specially written for the job by the Chairman's husband. All concerned must be congratulated, both on the completion of the 2001 database and the publication of another splendid report."

Some more comments received.....

"The *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report* is stunning. Well done to all concerned. The illustrations are perfect. Oh and I love the distribution maps."

Jane Turner

"Congratulations on the 2001 *Bird Report* - a great leap forward both in content and presentation."

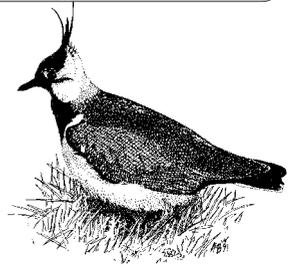
Steve White, County Recorder, Lancashire & North Merseyside

"I might have been remiss in not writing to you and CAWOS to acknowledge the 2001 *Bird Report*, but it's because I am still savouring it and wanted to write when I had finished reading it! I think the change to a colour cover and the removal of the contents to the inside is a great improvement. The systematic list entries are less cluttered in their general appearance too, which I think makes them much more readable - that's the part I've not finished yet as for some reason I start at the back and work forward."

Judith Smith, County Bird Recorder, Greater Manchester

View from the Farmyard

During one of the winter's harder cold snaps I took a walk over the field known to us as the Willet's field, so called after the farmer who once tended the land here. Dick Willet was already an old man when we moved here in 1979; with his wife he had retired to the cottage opposite to ours and was one of the first of the locals to greet us when we arrived. Dick told me that this field had once been five small, hedged fields and during Victorian times had been used as a racecourse for horses. Towards the back of this parcel of land there is a marl pit which holds water. In recent years the water has overflowed onto the surrounding land and now covers some two to three acres; this is due to the breakdown of the deep drainage system.



On my walk I noted that the water had now expanded to its greatest extent ever, crossing the adjacent field and reaching the old carriage way behind the church of St John. The water was almost all frozen this morning and a white frost had covered the surface with a fantastic array of cryptic fern like patterns. Trying to keep to the drier part of the field I drew level with the old marl pit and turned my binoculars toward what looked to the naked eye like a small group of cobblestones. With the aid of my bins I was able to identify them as Snipe. The birds clung to the edge of the only clear water, where several small Willow trees protruded from the pit bank below. The gentle swaying motion of the thin trunks had maintained this small area of water, and the birds had crowded to its edge. Spotting that I had stopped to observe them the Snipe one by one stood up; growing ever more nervous they began to prepare for flight, then with a whoosh they were gone. The 14 sped upward, sideways then upward again and were gone from sight, however they had each left upon the ice an oval patch where the frost had been thawed by their body heat to reveal the clear ice below. It is unlikely that the drainage will be repaired during the present agricultural downturn, so the addition of yet another stretch of water to the farm looks set to provide more interest still. Only today a Green Sandpiper has been present, and during the night I can hear the calls of Teal and Mallard on the water.

This winter of 2002/3 is the first when our garden has not been visited by a small but entertaining flock of Starlings. Their boisterous behaviour provided many happy hours of entertainment, the birdbath and pond being a favourite of theirs. When Liz worked in the local chip shop she would bring home batter bits from the fryer; we would sit and watch them as they fell upon the feast, dropping from the trees like falling leaves. Many of our farmland birds are in decline but the loss of Starling from the garden and no doubt soon the farmyard will bring me some of the deepest sadness. Who would have predicted that decline 25 years ago?

Having seen a Buzzard carrying a Moorhen corpse a year or two ago I had a suspicion that the Buzzard had picked up the bird after it was struck by a car on the hall drive. Throughout the winter one Buzzard has spent a fair amount of time sitting on the rail fence that separates the parkland from the drive, or perching low in the avenue of trees. From both these vantage points it falls upon rabbits foolish or hungry enough to stray under its gaze. Cycling home for my breakfast in early January I chanced upon the Buzzard sitting on one of the four gateposts that once held heavy iron gates to turn stock from the drive into any of four areas of parkland. Disturbed by my amazing speed it was panicked into making an early strike for its intended prey or wasting what could have been hours of effort and patience. Choosing the former it dropped, seizing a Moorhen in its right talon. Startled by the prospect of becoming the Buzzard's breakfast the Moorhen spread its wings, screeched and began flapping wildly. The Buzzard, unbalanced by the commotion, raised its wings to regain some dignity and hopped on its left leg behind the accelerating Moorhen, all the while keeping an eye on my infernal contraption and myself closing upon it. I'm sorry to tell you that everything came to something of an anticlimax. The horrendous sound created by pneumatic tyres, rattling mudguards and 12 stone of hungry farm worker hitting the first cattle grid at speed, provided the extra impetus to the poor Moorhen and it broke free from the Buzzard's grasp. A similar crescendo at the second grid put paid to the Buzzard's appetite and it took to the wing. The Moorhen as with all hens had to tell all the world what had happened. I could still hear its simpering cackle as I powered up the brow of the hill. Two things emerge from this, firstly, Buzzards it would

seem take live Moorhens for breakfast, and secondly farm workers in pursuit of a hearty breakfast are unstoppable.

British Wildlife magazine for February 2003 carried its usual 'wildlife reports' section, the section for birds written sadly for the last time by Chris Mead shortly before his death in January. Chris reported the findings of vertical-looking radar at Rothamsted Research, which had been used by entomologists to monitor the insects flying over a particular area. The findings were staggering, showing that over an area of 1km sq in a typical summer month some 3.5 billion insects fly, equivalent to an area the size of Hyde Park in London having a total of about 1 tonne in weight of insects per month. Chris also pointed out that a Swift requires about 0.5 kilos of food per month for itself, rising to 1 kilo per month when feeding young. The vertical-looking radar also found that migrating insects occur in distinct layers, moving to their chosen compass point up to a height of about 800 metres. It is staggering to know just how much available food there is up there and makes clear why Swift, Swallow and House Martin are to be found high in the sky on hot dry summer days.

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

Conservation News

CHESTER AREA

1. The Broxton Barn Group objected to the expansion of the MBNA Bank on the Chester Business Park on the grounds of loss of known Barn Owl feeding habitat. Nevertheless, the application was approved but with a significant sum of money made available for purchase of an equivalent area within the environs, which would be managed specifically for Barn Owls.
2. A seminar was held in Chester on April 3rd and 4th to celebrate the end of the three year Life EConet Project. This was a European funded activity involving Cheshire and two equivalent areas in Holland and Italy. Its aim was to demonstrate how the provision of wildlife networks or corridors would enhance nature conservation. A lot of the effort had been devoted to establishment of scientific tools, e.g. sophisticated versions of GIS to aid the planning process but also three pilot areas within Cheshire were chosen to illustrate the approach. These areas were Delamere, a farming area at Peover and a section of the sandstone ridge at Burwardsley. As part of the seminar I visited the last of these and, reluctantly, have to say that I was not terribly impressed with the progress made. The only significant development had been work by the National Trust in firstly buying and then improving the habitat of Bulkeley Hill though I'm sure that a lot of useful contacts had been made and plans involving the local community had been developed. Nevertheless, I judge the success of projects such as this by actual progress 'on the ground'. Though planners at both county and municipality level are now aware of the usefulness of the approach, the proof of the pudding will be the actual development of networks now that the project has ended. I suspect that it will make little progress without a proactive lead from some body or organisation such as the Cheshire Wildlife Trust or new funding for the EConet project itself.
3. Chester City Council have finalised and approved its new Development Plan, which will be available to the public very shortly. It contains guidelines for the environment and will be the document against which future planning applications will be judged.

Neil Friswell, Chester Area Representative

HALTON AREA

- a) All Halton residents have now received a comment form regarding the four route options being considered for the new Mersey crossing. It is quite clear from the way the form is written that it is trying to persuade residents to select one of the most damaging options for the wildlife of the upper Mersey estuary. Route 3a will cross two substantial areas of salt marsh including Astmoor Salt Marsh and also straight across the middle of Runcorn Sands. Not good news for the birdlife of Halton!

Jeff Clarke, Halton Area Representative

WIRRAL AREA

- a) Wirral Coastline Improvement - Wirral Borough Council have announced a multi-million improvement project for the Wirral coastline. I gather this will mainly involve the built-up areas of the coast, but as Hilbre has also been mentioned it is obviously worth keeping an eye on it. No details yet.
- b) Airbus Project - transshipment of A380 Airbus wings from Broughton to Mostyn Dock, which will be shipped by barge, starting with two return trips a month next year, reaching two return trips every week by 2009. There is some concern about increased erosion from the barge's wash. This will be monitored in conjunction with the RSPB. The second concern involves re-buoyming, surveys for which will take place prior to every barge trip. It is feared that this might cause much disturbance of birds. The area either side of the channel is an important high tide roost for waders and loafing area for ducks at high tide. The channel itself is an important feeding area for terns, Great Crested Grebes and Red-breasted Mergansers.

Richard Smith, Wirral Area Representative

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SEMMMS MAJOR ROAD SCHEMES (South-East Manchester Multi-modal Study)

CAWOS has been contacted regarding an assessment of the nature conservation value of the following study area and its surrounds. The study area comprises the corridors previously identified for the three trunk roads proposals, which were formally promoted by the Dept of Transport:

1. A6(M) Stockport North South Bypass
2. Poynton Bypass
3. Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road

They are particularly interested in UK protected species and UK and local BAP species within 1 km either side of the road, and it is this area for which CAWOS will be supplying data.

FORESTRY COMMISSION: NEWLANDS PROJECT

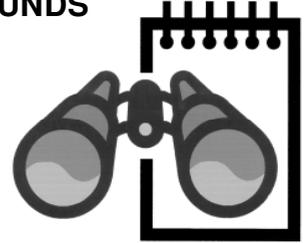
This project is aimed at regenerating disturbed, damaged or derelict land by the establishment of new community woodland. The potential sites being considered within our recording area are Gatewath (SJ575871), Ropery Farm, near Northwich (SJ630742) and Roehurst Lane, near Winsford (SJ651670). If anybody has any current or historical records from these sites and their surrounding areas (within 2km radius), would they please contact me. They are also keen to receive any opinions on this project: its potential for improvement of the ecological status of these three sites, and the potential impacts of the community woodland development on these sites and their surrounding areas.

Sheila Blamire, Database Team. Tel: 01565 830168 E-mail: sheilablamire@cawos.org

Records & Recording

WRITING DESCRIPTIONS LEARNING SOUNDS

In the last *Bird News*, I described the best way of identifying the common bird species that can be found in your garden and the surrounding areas. All *common* species, which, with a bit of patience, interest and enthusiasm, are all readily identifiable. Indeed, putting pen to paper made me realise just how much I still enjoy looking at the everyday birds. Working at Nether Alderley this week, I was chatting to a couple who were interested in birds, but who weren't actively engaged in the hobby. I idly listened to a Greenfinch giving its canary-like song from the top of a tree, the sibilant calls of Long-tailed Tits as they foraged in the hedgerow nearby and the rowdy calls of a flock of Jackdaws spooked by some unseen predator. I mentioned the three species in passing and carried on with my next task.



The next day the lady told me that my bird identification based on calls had made her realise that she and her husband had lived in beautiful countryside for years without using one of their senses – their ears. She asked me how could she learn the calls of the birds so that she could recognise them in future. My advice to her was to buy some of the widely available tapes or CDs that have the calls and songs of all the native species. Listen to them when you get a free moment, over morning coffee, in the evening, or in the car. They will sound bewilderingly confusing at first, but bit by bit, over the weeks and months, order will emerge out of the chaos. Believe me, it will! I used to listen to 12" LPs. Tapes and CDs weren't invented when I was a lad.... There was one that covered the birds of woodland and hedgerows, another for fields and marshes, one for ponds and lakes, another for seashore and mudflats and one for heathland and moorland. But, without doubt, my favourite was the one that had all the birds of the Scottish Highlands on it. I used to listen to the haunting calls of divers, the deep songs of Crossbills in the Abernethy Forest with Crested Tits calling in the distance, Capercaillies and Black Grouse and then the magic of the high tops with trilling Dotterels and croaking Ptarmigan. I couldn't wait to visit these wild places and see them for myself. They were every bit as good as I expected and I went back year after year with my good friend Tony Hughes whose enthusiasm for the wild places was even greater than mine.

All the listening and learning paid off and they made the rest of the identification process relatively simple. Little black dots flying away into the distance, at one time to be dismissed as unidentifiable, suddenly became definite species, with diagnostic calls. Small olive green birds singing at the tops of trees could readily be identified as Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs. They became very different birds and with many other species, the songs and calls were the first indication of their presence, long before they came into view. If I didn't know a call or song, I used to stalk the bird until I could see it and identify it, making a note of what it sounded like to me, using words. I'd then play the relevant record at home and confirm what I thought I had just witnessed. As with plumage features, the more that a species' vocalizations are heard, the more automatic the process of identification becomes. The relationship between a bird's jizz (the combination of its shape and actions) and its calls or song, is a strong mental reinforcement of its true identity. The two become inseparable and eventually even some birds that don't call and that give only fleeting glimpses can be identified based on past experience. You get to a point of *expecting* a certain call.

Bird sounds do become interwoven with your everyday life and one call can trigger a memory of some past event. I always look forward to hearing the sweet song of a Willow Warbler, perhaps in a nearby hawthorn hedge, signalling to me that spring has really arrived. This small warbler will be newly arrived from Africa where it will have spent the winter. Noisy groups of hirundines – Swallows and House Martins, are definitely a summer thing and I can usually put money on the fact that when I hear the first high-pitched 'seeer' of a lone Redwing overhead in autumn, or the restless 'si-si-si-si' of migrant Goldcrests, that the wind will be easterly. Both birds will be newly arrived from Scandinavia or the Baltic countries. A noisy, dog-like 'yapping' never fails to make me look up during November, as the first high skeins of Pink-footed Geese make their way cross country from the Southport area to the fens of East Anglia. The associations are endless and for me, sound is a vital part of my birding.

There is a down side to this expertise though which can annoy the hell out of non-birders. No matter where you are, no matter what you are doing, you are subconsciously listening to the calls of birds around you. Your brain is continually identifying these avian sounds without you even bothering to look up. It can, however, be moderately embarrassing at times. In the past I've been attending site meetings, on the surface listening intently to the other members of the group, when a distant, high, mournful call has made me shout out quite involuntarily, "CURLEW"! The mixture of confused and bewildered looks and my attempts to rescue the situation by trying to point out the dot usually brings these gatherings to a premature conclusion. But who cares, it was a Curlew and didn't it sound beautiful? The number of times it's happened to me is too many to count and I just accept the odd looks and mutterings of 'eccentricity'.

It does improve your garden and patch lists though and there is never a point, as with plumage identification, when you know it all. It's a continually improving expertise that adds a different dimension to birding. It's all back to the beginning of course when you venture further afield. Two weeks in a foreign country in spring really hones all your identification skills, whether plumage or vocalizations. My favourite Middle East venue, Israel, is a simply amazing place, full of strange calls and songs. The first day is totally confusing, even if you've been before, but the calls slowly sink in and even skulking *sylvia* warblers such as Sardinian and Subalpinus become easier with practice. My notebook is usually filled with scribbled renditions of calls next to each unfamiliar species. It's as if the calls and songs that are noted become a separate 'list'. If it's new to me, I'm as interested in these vocalizations as I am the plumage. Species that I'm very familiar with may suddenly utter an unusual call and I have to note it. There are places that are just too 'new' and I don't have the time to learn the calls. In these situations such as Sri Lanka recently, the guides have an incredible ability to pick out all the species on call whilst us visitors are struggling to differentiate the mêlée of sounds and are frantically trying to see 'the bird of the trip'. (It always was if you didn't see it and everyone else did!) They learn the calls from tapes, much as I had done in the past.

I must admit I've never got into sonograms, possibly because I can never actually physically connect them to the species. They are a printed electronic rendition of a song or call based on frequency and duration. Even those species that look and sound very similar in the field can often be identified more readily when their particular sonograms are compared. The *Birds of the Western Palearctic*, the nine huge volumes covering all the birds in this part of the world, are full of sonograms. Have a look, you'll see what I mean. I used to dabble at one time. I had a cheap, battery powered tape recorder (much later in life than the LPs) and a parabolic reflector (still in my garage) and I used to find a likely spot and try my luck at becoming a recording artist. It never really was a success. The wind used to roar across the microphone drowning out my victim and transporting the contraption on the number 92 from Hazel Grove to Stockport and then onwards to my intended destination was awkward to say the least. I gave it up in the end but not before I had recorded the last singing Nightjars on Chat Moss, on the Lancashire Mosses. They disappeared afterwards, due to habitat destruction, never to return. I can't find the tape despite searching but I can still hear the beautifully rich churring of a Nightjar at dusk and its wing clapping as the ghostly silhouette floats overhead..... Magic!

Tony Broome, County Recorder

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING

A recent discussion on UKBirdnet got on to the topic of what the effect is, if any, of putting out a lot of artificial food, particularly peanuts. Does it cause an increase in some species to the detriment of others? It was felt by one correspondent that supplementary feeding just increases the number of Great and Blue Tits, resulting in the local extinction of Willow Tits.

Steve Dudley thought this may have something to do with local extinctions, but in Cambridgeshire they have recently been discussing the demise of their county population of Willow Tits at sites like Woodwalton Fen, where numbers have collapsed at the seeming increase of Marsh Tits. Whether this is related or not they do not know. Certainly no supplementary feeding goes on at such sites, so there is no exaggerated increase in other tit species, which would lead to increased competition for nest sites. A natural increase of other species (as well as Marsh Tits) could of course be taking place, but Steve goes on to say, "We don't yet know this either. As is the case in many places, we have relatively good data for scarce species, but lack good (or even any!) data on more common species such as Great and Blue Tits. Mike Crawley added to the discussion by saying, "I've never

seen the case for keeping and submitting records for all the birds you see to the local Bird Recorder put so well. As birders we need to wake up and realise all the data we collect at a site or sites is useful and could even be used in some future conservation cause”.

The value of monitoring common birds is shown by how the declines of once-common species such as Lapwing, Skylark and Yellowhammer, detected by BTO monitoring, have served to reveal general problems for wildlife on farmland.

We would urge as many CAWOS members as possible to take part in their local surveys - not all are demanding on time or dependent upon high levels of expertise. As Mike Raven, the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) National Organiser, explained in *Bird News* 57, as part of the promotion for BBS they are offering a free set of bird call and song tapes to all new volunteers taking part in the scheme this year. Currently more than 1,700 volunteer birdwatchers collect BBS data, the results of which are then used by the RSPB and Government agencies to set their conservation priorities.

Another long running scheme that urgently needs more participants, is the BTO's Nest Record Scheme. It is perhaps one of the simplest ways for birdwatchers to help monitor the 'health' of the UK's birds. Each year the BTO sends 'alerts' to the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) about serious declines in the breeding performance of birds so that this information can be used to decide how and where to spend scarce conservation funds. As the BTO puts it, "Nest recording is a good example of how you can act locally (record a nest) while thinking globally (contribute to national bird monitoring)". For example, volunteers in the 1960s who recorded the nests of House Sparrows and Starlings must have wondered whether this was really worthwhile, given that the species were so common and were considered such pests. But this information is vital now in helping to understand the declines that have occurred since that time.

Finally, I would like to remind everybody to make sure they *submit their records to CAWOS as well as to the respective body organising the survey*, be it the BTO or another organisation or society. Please do not assume that we will receive your records centrally - this rarely happens and it means that although the data collected by you benefits the overall picture with respect to the state of the UK's birds, your records are lost on a local site or county level.

So do get in touch if you are willing to help with any of the on-going surveys within the county, however little time you are able to manage - it is both satisfying and worthwhile - your contribution really can make a difference. We will make sure that your enquiry is forwarded to the relevant person. And don't forget the CAWOS Recording Forum to be held on 27th September 2003 - places are limited so register now (see page 27).

Sheila Blamire

DATABASE UPDATE

To date over 30,000 records for 2002 have been imported into the CAWOS database, with hopefully many more still to be received, including substantial numbers of records from reserve reports, WeBS counts, BTO surveys, and ringing records. Also, there are still a number of individual contributors who have not as yet sent in their records - **please do so as soon as possible**. If you have records to send in, but know that there will be a delay, for whatever reason, please let us know. If you require help, either with entering your records, or simply need advice on how to submit, again get in touch. Every record is valuable, and adds to our knowledge of the county's avifauna.

**Sheila Blamire, Database Team, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG
Tel: 01565 830168 E-mail: info@cawos.org**

Comments from some of the compilers on the 1st year of the database.....

"All the best and my commendations to the data entry team - even for my small section this has been a great boost."

Simon Edwards

"Well done to everyone involved. What a marathon effort."

Steve Barber

"Many thanks for all your hard work."

Richard Smith

"You're doing a grand job! Compilers have the easy part!!"

Mark Feltham

"Compiling was much, much easier this year, despite my reservations about not cutting and pasting. I think you and others have done a magnificent job and it can only get better."

David Cogger

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.

“AN INNUMERABLE SIGHT OF STARES.....”

If we ignore place-name evidence (which I do reluctantly, as a native of Tranmere - the old Norse “sandbank of the cranes”) the oldest Cheshire ornithological record may well be found in Leland’s *Itinerary* of 1541, when he writes that “an innumerable sight of stares resort at night” to “a great reedy pool” near Spurstow. In the south of the county, a few miles east of Spurstow, we had good cause this winter to remember Leland’s observation.

It began, as far as I was concerned, on February 9th, when Martin Pennell and I were in the hide at Hurlleston Reservoir watching the gull roost. It may help those who do not know the site to explain that the reservoir is situated at the junction of the Llangollen and Shropshire Union Canals. Access is in the south-west corner, across the head of a flight of locks on the Llangollen branch; in our flat local landscape, the reservoir occupies a slightly elevated position, with quite extensive views from the banks, particularly to the east. The hide looks across the water from the west bank, but the view back to the locks and lock-keeper’s house to the south is screened by trees.

We had been aware for some time of small parties of Starlings flying south above the east bank, but at about 5.15 we noticed what looked like a low cloud above the bank - a lengthening cloud which we quickly identified as a mass of birds. Over the next quarter of an hour it was constantly moving, and grew denser; through binoculars we could see there was not a single cloud, but two or three more beyond it. It was reminiscent of one of those mountain days when a veil of mist moves away only to reveal another behind it. Along the whole line of the bank, and well beyond it to the south, was a wheeling, twisting, ever-thickening line of Starlings.

We stayed until dusk, when it was too late to follow up and try to locate the roost. On 14th, my wife and I left the hide at 5.15, as soon as the first small cloud of birds appeared, to walk to the east bank for a better view and to try to pin down the exact site. Approaching the locks, we realised what Martin and I had missed on the earlier occasion because of the restricted outlook from the hide. The power lines across the Llangollen branch to the south, normally fine against the sky, were thickly encrusted with birds. In the field below a black carpet moved. When they rose, there was no question of mist: this was, if not a solid wall, at least a dense curtain of birds, filling the field of the binoculars. When they settled again, a broad black band lay across the green of the winter grass. Off again - flying in a compact, rounded shape like a gigantic swarm of bees. Back to the ground; then, as though on a signal, all the birds on the wires dropped off as one, those on the field rose up, and this huge mass, which had dominated the immediate scene, took off to the east and was absorbed in the greater gathering across the Shropshire Union - seeming to make no difference at all to the numbers. Comically, as we walked away, two latecomers came hurtling in from the west on their own - late for the ball, but clearly keen to catch up with the rest.

We were sure that the birds were roosting in or around some farm buildings, half a mile away and below us, across the lower canal. Two evenings later, as soon as the first birds began to gather, I drove round to visit the roost site itself.

At the farm, the sky above was simply full of birds. Their droppings splashed into the puddles in the yard, setting the surface dancing as though rain was falling. The car was soon liberally spattered. A herdsman, trudging across with his anorak hood firmly up, confirmed that the Starlings roosted in thick cupressus windbreaks planted around the house and buildings. The trees were seething and rustling as the early birds settled in while the rest still circled.

It was a lot more comfortable, and sanitary, to watch from a couple of hundred yards back up the lane. Here, adjacent to the roost, it was possible to see that birds were coming in from all points of the compass, and not all at the same height: some whipped through a low gap in an otherwise high hedge alongside me, hedge-hopping like Sparrowhawks, rising quickly over the hurdle then dropping

down again to fly on hugging the ground. Probably a hundred or more shot through this one gap in two or three minutes. Meanwhile, up above, the swarm continued to circle the roost. And there was of course the noise. We speak of a 'murmuration' of Starlings, but this was much more than a murmur: hard to describe, but a non-stop din, a mixture of buzzing, chatter, and a constant background whistle. It became gradually apparent that the numbers in the air were diminishing. The noise went on unabated, but soon there was just a single flock of a few thousand birds visible over the treetops, edging their way into shelter. By 5.45pm the spectacle was over.

The close-up view was, curiously, less spectacular than when seen from half a mile away: yes, the noise and density were more apparent, but the sheer scale was not. Low down, with vision interrupted by hedges and buildings, one could only see part of the circling flock at any time. The constantly changing shape in the sky, wreathing around, thinning out then suddenly thickening again like smoke from a great bonfire, was best appreciated from further away and higher up - which was why the reservoir bank with its grandstand view became the favourite watch-point.

It was from there, on 23rd, that Peter Atherton, Ian Mumford and I eventually caught up with the raptors, which we knew had to be there. We had watched the build-up around the reservoir, picking up the flights coming in high from the west, remarking that the power lines actually swayed and rose and fell with the weight of birds moving on them, and rather nervously reaching for our headgear as we realised the size of the flock circling immediately above us, but it was not until the whole gathering was twisting above the farm that Peter spotted a Sparrowhawk beating its way out, carrying prey. A few minutes later a larger bird appeared, was completely lost to view in the mass of Starlings, then emerged flying towards us - a Peregrine, heading off in the general direction of Beeston we noted, again carrying food. (Really, even the most inept of raptors could hardly fail in these conditions!)

We waited more or less until the end. It was hard to see, in the failing light, when birds actually dropped into the windbreaks, but there was a gradual diminution of the aerial flock, until a small, dark column, like a dying wisp of smoke over the farm, marked where the last Starlings were dropping in. By now, it was just gone 6pm. In a fortnight of gradually lengthening days the timing had moved back about half an hour; give it a few more weeks and the roost will have gone altogether.

That will be a considerable relief to the Starlings' reluctant hosts at the farm. The story appears to have begun in the winter of 2001/02 with a roost of a few thousand birds. In the closing months of 2002 numbers increased (according to sources at the farm) to about 80,000. Interestingly, in this early part of the winter Nantwich Natural History Society members had recorded roosting flocks of about 50,000 at Cholmondeley (where the birds left apparently after the reed-beds they had been using were flattened), and again at Hurleston (probably en route to the farm, rather than actually roosting at the reservoir). The present huge gathering had been quite recent, following a spell of cold weather with easterly winds which presumably brought a fresh influx of Continental birds; this would help explain why we had not picked up such an obvious concentration earlier - which is a bit of a relief.

To say they have been a nuisance would be a massive understatement. Not only have they showered the yard and buildings, and those working there, with droppings, but that constant noise which is really quite exciting to a visiting birder is another matter altogether when it is kept up most of the night, outside your bedroom window. The birds have ignored attempts to scare them off with both twelve-bores and recorded Peregrine calls, and the latest information is that desperate measures are to be taken: the windbreaks are to be felled, to make sure that next winter does not bring a repetition.

So what about the numbers? Everyone asked, "How many do you think there are?", but how do you calculate the size of flocks like this?

I twice estimated that, from one end to the other, the aerial flock stretched for over half a mile - but that doesn't help, without any real idea of depth or density. I also drew comparison with other Starling roosts, and with wader flocks on the Dee, but memory wasn't good enough to translate this into a meaningful figure. Martin compared it with a roost of bats he had seen abroad, which he had been told numbered half a million. We both felt that we could not remember seeing so many birds together before.

Later, various estimates of around 500,000 appeared - but all were acknowledged to be "guesstimates", never put forward with any degree of confidence, everyone prepared to be proved

well out if somebody came up with something more definite, some people sure this was too low a figure. All our familiar techniques (counting a thousand and multiplying up, estimating how many in the binocular's field and so on) seemed inadequate. I think photography and subsequent counting would have been the only way to produce anything like real accuracy.

I was reminded of a meeting of the Liverpool Ornithologists' Club, many years ago, when the late John Craggs turned up with three slides and a mischievous grin. The slides consisted solely of several thousand irregular dots, resembling a big wader flock in flight; he (and the luckless lab technician who had prepared them for him) knew the numbers on each, and we were invited to demonstrate our counting skills. As I recall, some of us chickened out, most underestimated numbers, and the best performer was adrift by about 20%. Maybe we need more exercises of this sort?

Personally, I am not prepared to go beyond orders of size in assessing the size of this roost: I am sure we were looking at several hundreds of thousands; I wouldn't argue if someone told me I was out by an order, and the figure was really a million. But even that is to suggest a degree of scientific accuracy which I don't really feel.

I am content with Leland's description: this was "an innumerable sight of stares...."

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

(With thanks to Martin Pennell for additional information about the history of the roost.)

GOLDEN PLOVER: A CHANGE IN BREEDING PATTERN

I would like to add a few belated comments in response to the article by John Oxenham and note by Steve Barber in *Bird News* 55 and 56 respectively.

In the Peak District birds of the southern race *Pluvialis apricaria apricaria* are considered to return to their breeding areas during February and March with some records of birds singing on the moors during January. This is well documented in *Derbyshire Bird Reports* from the 1960s to the present as well as by Frost 1978 and Hornbuckle and Herringshaw 1985.

In the Cheshire hills birdwatcher numbers start to increase a week or two before Wheatear and Ring Ouzel arrive and reach a peak during late March/April depending on weather and Easter dates.

During late March, April and early May large numbers of northern race birds *P. a. altifrons* pass through the Peak District using the same fields as 'traditional staging posts' each spring. Two such areas above New Mills, just over the Derbyshire border, were used for many years with birds numbering up to a few hundred. The April flocks mentioned by Steve would appear to fit in with this pattern.

The record of pairs with young on 1st August is very interesting - I saw a bird with young near there (in Derbyshire) on 15th July 1995.

I understand in some areas of Scotland sequential breeding has been noted. The fittest birds get the best breeding territories first and when they leave other pairs move in to breed late in the season. I don't think there is any evidence for this in our area but it's an interesting possibility.

Irene Blagden, 55 Goyt Road, Disley, Stockport, SK12 2BT

References:

Derbyshire Bird Reports

Birds of Derbyshire - R. A. Frost 1978

Birds of the Sheffield Area, including the north-east Peak District - Jon Hornbuckle and David Herringshaw 1985

AMBITIOUS IDEAS

As an experiment, some nest boxes put up in Dog Wood have been temporarily plugged to prevent the 'usual' species from using them. The ambitious aim is that when the plugs are removed in late April the nest boxes will then be available for Pied Flycatchers to use.

Tatton Rangers are also planning to build an Osprey nesting platform in the park, having obtained the plans from Tim Appleton at Rutland Water. It may be a long shot but it's got to be worth a try!

Darren Morris, Tatton Park Ranger

STAR TREK, POKEMON AND RELATIVITY... A BIRDING PERSPECTIVE!

All things are relative. Take today for instance. It's relatively early on a relatively warm morning in late March. I've come to a wetland site relatively close to where I live (Woolston Eyes) to see some relatively rare breeding birds (Black-necked Grebes). Not unusually, I have the place largely to myself, and so, apart from the omnipresent Black-headed Gulls, it's relatively quiet in the little painted hide on No.3 bed. I've already had relatively good views of at least nine grebes and am finishing the dregs of my, now relatively cold, tea. As I scan the reed-fringed pool in front of me it strikes me, however, that since arriving an hour ago, I've seen relatively few other species (35 to be exact). Particularly conspicuous by their relative absence are the passerines, outnumbered, in terms of species, two to one by wildfowl, waders and gulls. Nothing remarkable in that, I guess to use a metaphor, "What do I EXPECT to see out of a Torquay hotel window... herds of wildebeest sweeping majestically across the African plains...?" Unfortunately though, this quiet patch has given me the fidgets. I've got to be back in Runcorn in a few hours and so can't decide whether I should stay and watch the grebes or shoot off somewhere in the hope of adding a few more species to the year list. If I stay, I might be lucky enough to see the Black-necks displaying, a first for me, but if they decide to take a break, I could be staring at the reeds for the next few hours. Decisions, decisions... In the absence of any quick solution (i.e. the lure of a local rarity) I decide to show a little enterprise and apply 'Spock'-like logic to the situation in the hope of coming to a decision. I'm sorry, that was awful - enterprise? Spock? Still, it worked! I decide that I'm going to stay and watch the grebes and NOT go somewhere else to try for a few more year ticks. Here's why...

Whether a member of the UK400 club or a casual, weekend birder we're all subject to two simple rules; (i) there are limits to what CAN be seen at a particular place and/or time and (ii) finding new species gets harder and harder as time goes on; a kind of 'law of diminishing returns'. Why might this be? Well, the Vulcan in me tells me that it's probably something to do with the relatively high ratio of vagrants to residents that we get in Britain. I'll try to explain. As you may, or may not know, the current *British List stands at about 556 species, which is equivalent to about 65% of the species recorded in the Western Palearctic as a whole (our particular zoogeographic zone) but a mere 5% of the 9850+ extant species worldwide. As far as birds are concerned, therefore, Britain is, in the grand scheme of things, relatively impoverished - one reason perhaps why I've seen relatively few species today. More significantly however, is that, of all the category A, B and C species currently comprising the British List only 140 (i.e. a quarter of the total), are actually permanent residents here. I'd not really thought about this until now and was rather stunned that the figure was so low. Put another way, three-quarters of 'our' avifauna, (i) just visit when the weather elsewhere is relatively bad (i.e. winter and summer migrants; about 89 species), OR (ii) pass through on their way to somewhere nicer (i.e. passage migrants; about 30 species), OR (iii) find their way here entirely by accident (i.e. vagrants; about 297 species). No wonder I've hit a dry patch at Woolston, most of the winter migrants have left, most of the summer ones have yet to arrive and half our small stock of resident species are more likely to be found in a wood, on a cliff or up a mountain somewhere! And as for the vagrants, well... they're just that...vagrants...who knows where *they'll* turn up!

Clearly then, there are limits to how many species a site can lay claim to at a given point in the year, thus lowering the odds of seeing as much as you'd like on any one occasion. Obviously really, frustrating maybe, but fair enough. But then there's the law of diminishing returns to contend with too. Imagine - it's January 1st and the new year list beckons. You rack up a respectable number of species and go to bed happy with the start to the year. As luck has it, you get out the next day too. You quickly find though that you're seeing many of the same species and relatively few new ones. The following weekend arrives and you go out again...same story. In fact as the year progresses (apart from slight peaks in the spring and autumn) last year's *easily beatable* total begins to seem less and less assailable because whilst your first ten species took five minutes to bag, your last ten look likely to take five weeks or five months! The weird thing is that even if you widen your search you'll still hit this same wall... and what's more, the same holds true for bird races, county lists, local sites, life lists, foreign trips and world lists. The first birds are easy to get, the next much harder, the next harder still - the only thing that changes is the scale.

The result of all this seems to be a kind of 'levelling out' of birding potential. Take for example well-worked sites, such as Woolston and one or two others. Obviously the more a site is visited in a

given year the more species are likely to be recorded, *but only up to a point*. At Frodsham for example, the average would appear to be about 160 species, at Seaforth one recent report quotes 163 species, at Marshside it's 168. I suspect the figures will not be that much different for Woolston, Inner Marsh Farm and Martin Mere either. Even allowing for the fact that these are necessarily minimal figures (some birds are bound to be missed), they aren't as different from each other as you might expect. The actual species at a site may vary a little, year on year (which is why site lists are always longer than a site's year list if you catch my drift), but the number of species recorded at a site varies relatively little. A similar pattern emerges when you look at things at a county level; 1999 Cheshire 229 species, Lancashire 240 species, Clwyd 225 species; 2000 Cheshire 233 species, Lancashire 241... pretty consistent between sites and years. Now I've no idea what the number of species recorded in Britain as a whole is annually, but I wouldn't mind betting that it's somewhere between 350-380 species and that it doesn't vary too much between years!

So what, if anything, does this tell us? Maybe it's this. Birding is not Pokemon - you CAN'T get 'em all! It's as hard to see your first Storm Petrel if you're a weekender as it is to see your 160th local patch species or, if you're a dedicated UK-wide twitcher, any of the Nearctic thrushes. Whether you're on Hilbre or Fair Isle, birds are no respecters of list length and no matter how often you get out or how many miles you eat up in pursuit of that elusive new species, at the end of the day you're still just as likely to dip as tick! Some birds you'll find easily and see regularly and others you won't EVER! I guess that's the beauty of birding - the *experience* is the same, whatever your level of expertise, however far you travel and wherever you end up. So, next time you're about to dash off somewhere 'else' it may be worth asking yourself why? As a wise man once said "Sometimes there really IS no better place than 'here' and no better time than 'now'." And as a pair of Black-necked Grebes rise up and run across the water in full display, I can't help thinking, that at least for today, perhaps he has a point... beam me up Scotty!!!

Mark Feltham, 39 Brookfield Ave, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 5RE

*The current British List comprises: **Category A** species (those recorded in an apparently natural state at least once since 1st January 1950); **Category B** species (those recorded in an apparently natural state at least once up to 31st December 1949, but not since) and **Category C** species which is a bit of a catch-all for all things 'naturalised'. It includes: *naturalised introductions* (like Egyptian Goose), *naturalised establishments* (like Canada Goose), *naturalised RE-establishments* (like Red Kite), *naturalised feral species* (like European Feral Rock Pigeon, or whatever it is we're supposed to call it these days I blame the Americans!) and *naturalised vagrants* (like some/all Ruddy Shelduck). The British List excludes **Category D** species (for which reasonable doubt exists over a species' status) and **Category E** species the dreaded introductions, transportees and escapes.

BTO NEST RECORD SCHEME 2002

The following introduction and observations are taken from an *Annual Bird Report* written by Gordon Hodgson:

"I have had an interest in ornithology for nearly 40 years since I collected eggs as a schoolboy who didn't know any better. Since 1967 I have kept a record of every nest found or bird seen. During the seventies I started to send record cards to the BTO's Nest Record Scheme but stopped after a couple of years as other family and personal matters curtailed the time I was able to spend birding. I still kept the notebook going but my interest was rekindled back in 1995 when I found both Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler nests whilst out on a family walk to Red Rocks Nature Reserve at Hoylake. Since then I have been more active year-by-year finding and recording nest details. It seemed a logical step to join recognised organisations such as the RSPB, BTO and CAWOS and use the information that I had recorded for a useful purpose. I was also able to supply a list of birds found at Prenton Dell for the Groundwork Trust who have taken over the management of this site on behalf of MANWEB.

Finding a nest, observing it and then recording the details gives me a great deal of pleasure. Being able to do this in a favourite spot, over a period of years, is very rewarding. Changes to local bird populations can be monitored and information fed back to the birding organisations. Changes have occurred over the 35 years that I have been keeping records for Prenton Dell. A number of species are in decline, others are doing rather better.

Some species including Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings, Skylarks and Cuckoos have disappeared completely. Declines in others like Song Thrush, Common Whitethroat and Linnet have been noticeable. Others like Blackbird, Dunnock, Robin, Bullfinch and Woodpigeon have remained stable, whilst Great Tit, Blue Tit, Magpie, Collared Dove and Chiffchaff have increased. It is only by reference to information collected over a long period of time that such comparisons can be made.

2002 has been an excellent year especially with the countryside being open again after the foot-and-mouth restrictions of last year. However, even a good year has its down side. I found three new Long-tailed Tits' nests all were predated. Similarly, a Bullfinch nested in an exposed thorn bush. One week later the bird and eggs had disappeared. The same thing happened with a Little Grebe's nest at Moreton Shore, only this time the eggs and nest went missing. I suspect this was as a result of dog activity in the pond in which it was situated. I could find no sign of the Green Woodpecker that regularly bred at The Dungeon on the Wirral Way. I did not visit last year due to the foot-and-mouth crisis. There was a male yaffling in Stapledon Woods on a couple of occasions during the year but I was only able to find the nest of the Great Spotted. I didn't see a Lesser Spotted anywhere this year.

A major highlight was the presence of a pair of breeding Kingfishers on the Wirral. Until last year I had never seen a Kingfisher in Britain. I read a Countryside Ranger's report in a CAWOS quarterly journal that stated that a pair had bred for many years at a site in Ellesmere Port. I visited the site in late May 2001 and caught a brief glimpse of electric blue disappearing round a bend of the stream in the sunlight. Further observations revealed a nest in a hole in a steep bank overlooking the stream this was another first for me.

I returned in May 2002 with a friend. Whilst standing on a wooden bridge crossing the stream we noticed one of the adults sitting on a branch near the nest site. It sat there for a full ten minutes whilst we observed it through our binoculars from about 20 yards' range amazing! The colours and pose were exactly the same as all those pictures you see in bird magazines and books.

The other special record was the pair of Peregrine Falcons nesting on the tower of Hamilton Square Station in Birkenhead. Several visits rewarded me with some truly brilliant views of both adults and chicks. One night, I saw an adult struggling to fly up to the nest site with a fat pigeon in its talons. The chicks made an almighty racket when the evening meal arrived. On depositing the food, the adult bird then swooped down past my position and headed inland for the town hall rather than back out towards the river, giving a superb view as it zoomed by.

Every nest found or bird seen is special. From the Dunnock's nest in the prickly shrub outside our kitchen window to the Lesser Whitethroat's nest in dense brambles in Prenton Dell, all are a joy to find, observe and record. I hadn't found a Lesser Whitethroat's nest for 23 years. In early May, a male was singing in bramble scrub near the stream next to the power sub-station. I returned several times observing the male only and then the pair together - mapping out the territory. Some weeks later I spotted both birds carrying food obviously to a nest with chicks. Further observation, from a hidden spot some 25 metres away, revealed the rough position of the nest. A simple search of the thick bushes revealed the small, cup nest deep within the stems of the brambles. I was just able to make out the chicks in the nest but was unable to get too close for fear of damaging the nesting environment. I returned on a regular basis until the chicks had fledged. I then was able to get closer to the nest and submit its structure and details to memory for future reference. Subsequently, I completed a Nest Record Card for the BTO."

Gordon Hodgson, 12 Dell Court, Prenton Village Road, Prenton, Wirral, CH43 3ES



DID YOU KNOW.....

The manufacture of the lens, whether for glasses or telescopes, is a fairly sophisticated achievement in the history of technology, but its name comes from that humblest of vegetables, the lentil seed. The Latin for lentil is in fact *lens*. Renaissance scientists, needing a name for the curved platelet of glass used to aid eyesight, focus the sun's rays, study the stars, or build a microscope, could think of nothing better than the resemblance between the shape of this object and that of the lentil seed. Accordingly, they gave it the New Latin name of lens - simply, a glass lentil seed.

WHAT SIZE WAS IT?

I enjoyed Tony Broome's amusing story (*Bird News* 57) about the charming lady who telephoned to report several Lesser Grey Shrikes in her garden, only for him to realise that they were Long-tailed Tits. It reminded me of a story told by Jack Otter, the Leicestershire expert from whom I first learned about birds when I attended his evening classes some thirty years ago. As the well-known local 'bird-man', he was used to getting telephone calls from members of the public and he recounted the following as a warning not to jump to conclusions from inadequate information.

"Hello Mr Otter. I thought you'd like to know that we have a bird in our garden eating from the bird table. It's got a gorgeous orange-yellow crown."

"Oh yes, that would be a Goldcrest. They're Britain's smallest bird ..."

"Smallest bird? You must be joking! It's standing on the lawn and eating from the bird table."

More questioning revealed that their large rural garden had been visited by a Crowned Crane, escaped from the nearby zoo.

Professor David Norman, Rowswood Cottage, Ridding Lane, Sutton Weaver, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 6PF. Tel: 01928 711064 E-mail: david.norman@physics.org

STONECHATS IN THE EAST CHESHIRE HILLS

I would like to add a belated footnote to my article on Stonechats in *Bird News* 57.

My suspicion that the odd pair might be nesting in the hills was well founded; in particular that the male I saw at Redmoor on 11th July 2002 might be one of a breeding pair. I have just discovered that a pair nested successfully in that area in 2002.

J. V. Oxenham, 178 Holmes Chapel Road, Somerford, Cheshire, SW12 4QB

STONECHATS IN THE EAST CHESHIRE HILLS

Following on from John Oxenham's interesting article in *Bird News* 57, I would like to update the information for the Lamaload area.

In autumn 2001 I had an unusually high number of sightings in this area starting with one male on 14th Oct, a pair on three occasions, three or four birds on 14th Nov, peaking at six or seven on 12th Dec. 29th Dec to 1st Jan 2002 was cold, sunny and calm with a deep covering of snow followed by two days of bitterly cold, strong south-east winds and I had no further hill sightings that winter. A bird seen at Higher Disley on 25th Sep, 20th Dec and 1st Jan 2002 was not seen again after the very severe conditions of 2nd and 3rd Jan 2002.

On 12th May 2002 a pair was present with young very close to where the six/seven wintering birds near Lamaload occurred. The birds were moving around constantly between patches of dense gorse and were impossible to count. On 1st Jun a pair and at least two young were still present and one bird remained on 21st Jun.

Lamaload has several areas of sunny slopes covered in gorse within easy flying distance of the regular wintering areas. Similarly, the wintering area in Higher Disley is close to a good gorse covered hillside.

A pair on 6th Apr 2002 was in good breeding habitat just over the border in Staffordshire close to where I have seen birds in recent winters, including this one.

I visited Speyside in autumn 2001 and was talking to a local birdwatcher who led birdwatching holidays. He said Stonechats had an interesting breeding dispersal strategy. Half of the brood remained in the breeding area to winter and the other half moved down to a warmer coastal area. I have been unable to locate any references to this in the literature but I understand one example is given in the new BTO *Migration Atlas* (my copy is still on order so I haven't been able to check this yet). This theory would certainly fit in with my sightings.

One other thing I find puzzling is that some of the males are very bright and others quite dull. Of the three pairs present on 12th Dec 2001, one male was bright and the other two dull. Is it age dependent?

Irene Blagden, 55 Goyt Road, Disley, Stockport, SK12 2BT

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

The Discussion Forum on CAWOS's web site is where people can discuss the Society, local bird sightings, places to see birds, general queries and announcements and other such matters. Here are some topics from the last three months:

PARTIAL ALBINO COMMON GULL

I have an adult winter Common Gull visiting the garden that has the distal 2/3rds of the primary coverts white. At first I assumed that they were missing completely and that the white flash on the wing was the bases of the primaries showing, as occurs most obviously in both Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls in summer. However, these are partly white feathers.

I don't recall seeing many gulls that have albinism restricted to a single feather tract - they are usually all white, all leucistic, etc and I have never seen any case of partial albinism when the feathers themselves are only partly white, it's normally whole feathers.

On three occasions now, when I see this bird flying out of the corner of my eye, it has set off my Franklin's Gull detector!

This follows on from last year when there was a pure albino Common Gull that could be taken for an Iceland Gull if seen out of context.

Jane Turner, January 2003

WELL I NEVER.....

I was intrigued to read the following snippet of information in the *Spring 2003 Newsletter* for a worthwhile charity called 'Animals in Distress - the charity that cares 24 hours a day'.

"The sanctuary had a call from an industrial freight company to say that they had a bird that had flown into the side of a juggernaut. The sanctuary emergency driver went to collect the bird and take it to the vet's. When the driver arrived he was stunned at the size of the bird and was not sure what type of bird it was. The vets identified it as a Common Buzzard not normally seen in the Manchester area. They are mainly found in South Wales on the rocky cliffs. We were informed that at the time of year the bird was found they have started to migrate further north due to the weather conditions. The bird was found to have no broken wings or bones but was in extreme shock. He was brought to the sanctuary and was put in an intensive care unit for a few days. He did not eat and was very disorientated. Then out of the blue he suddenly came round, wanting to attack the staff, which was a good sign. He also started to eat the food that was offered to him. Once the vet was happy that the Buzzard was strong enough it was released into a wooded area as close as possible to where he was found."

Where did they get their information from I wonder? However, how about this for the most logical explanation (author's name withheld to save embarrassment):

"I suspect that what has happened here is that the Buzzard, obviously well away from its normal rocky cliff habitat had attempted to land on the juggernaut - it being the closest approximation to a rocky cliff in the vicinity!"

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

A FEW OBSERVATIONS

Ravens, obviously dissatisfied with their existing nest on a pylon at Rocksavage, have built another one three feet away on the same platform and are currently sitting.

Extensive mammal trapping at a harvest mouse release site revealed the site's avian interest when a trap was opened and a Wren popped out. The traps are laced with castors and seed so the captive Wren was probably content during its incarceration.

On a visit to Chester Zoo last week (13th March) and over the noise of parrots, lions, and monkeys, I heard the familiar sound of a Kingfisher. I followed the sound to find a pair going through courtship along a stretch of water within the zoo. If they breed, it will be the 35th site that I'm now aware of in Cheshire, but I still feel there are probably another hundred and fifty sites yet to be discovered/recorded. If anyone fancies a boat journey down the Dee in April looking for sites, please contact me.

Andy Harmer, 79a High Street, Frodsham, Cheshire. Tel: 01928 735847

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: M Tomlins, Dr S Hollingshead, R Palmer, HM Gumn, J Carroll, DW Rood, K Balcerak, P Flackett, P French, S Hastings-Winch, R Leigh, P French, M Payne and H Smith. We were sorry to hear of the death of Miss SY Ricketts of Alderley Edge.

A meeting of Council was held on January 16th. The following points emerged:

- A grant towards the purchase of Lower Moss Wood, Ollerton, was approved.
- Members of Council and others agreed to liaise with external bodies to get information for the 'Survey of Surveys'.
- Congratulations were extended to all those involved in the production of the 2001 *Bird Report*.

Gift Aid: *a reminder to members that you do not have to fill in a new form each year.* Once you have filled one in we will claim until you leave or let us know otherwise. Last year Gift Aid brought us nearly £500 and with an increase in subscriptions this figure should increase. If you have not already joined the scheme you can do so either by obtaining a form from me and returning it or, more simply, by writing a letter to me stating that you want CAWOS to treat all subscriptions since a date (which you specify) as Gift Aid donations, and that you pay an amount of Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax at least equivalent to the amount claimed back.

**David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD. Tel: 01606 832517
E-mail: memsec@cawos.org**

RECORDING FORUM SEPTEMBER 2003

In the previous three years each Forum has concentrated on getting experienced birdwatchers together to discuss matters of concern about the recording of birds in the county. This year the Forum aims to help those birdwatchers who are relatively inexperienced in fieldwork, survey work and recording and who expressed their concerns when they replied to the questionnaire sent out at the end of last year.

The Forum will take place on **Saturday 27th September 2003** at the Mid-Cheshire Sheltered Workshops, Pool Lane, Sandiway – easy to find as they are just off the A556 and almost opposite the Blue Cap Hotel. We will begin at 10am and finish by 3.30pm. CAWOS will be paying for the hire of the venue but participants will be charged for tea and coffee and are requested to bring a packed lunch.

We will begin with an introductory session in which we will look at the different uses to which records are put and show that every record has some significance.

We will then break up into groups, which will cover the following areas:

1. Fieldwork – how to survey an area and record the birds there.
2. Identifying and writing descriptions of birds.
3. Keeping a record book – which to keep; how to deal with regular records of common species.
4. Sending in both paper and electronic records.

It is anticipated that participants will be in different groups for the morning and afternoon sessions.

The day will end with a plenary session when questions and comments, on both the day's programme and record-keeping in general, will be welcomed.

How to apply: Numbers will have to be limited because of the size of the premises, and CAWOS members will have priority booking until 1st July. If you wish to come, write to the Secretary, David Cogger, 113 Nantwich Road, Middlewich, Cheshire, CW10 9HD enclosing:

- a) a cheque for £3.00 to cover the cost of tea/coffee and administration (payable to CAWOS)
- b) a note saying which of the above four groups most interest you, using the numbers 1-4 to indicate your order of interest - 1 being your 1st choice.

We hope that members will support this new venture for our Society. Please contact the Secretary if you require further information. Inevitably there will be some who would like to attend but will be unable to and we hope to provide hand-outs of the information given at the Forum.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 7th March 2003

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

With membership reaching the highest yet of 370, the Society continues to grow, receiving, as it does, vital and valuable support from both individuals and other county societies and groups.

2002 was dominated by the major project of computerising the county's records. The recommendations on computerisation, made to Council in March 2001, included the statement "The 2001 *Bird Report* would be produced using the new programme". This highly ambitious aim eventually came to fruition in 2002. There were errors and delays, which were frustrating at the time, but everyone worked together to pull through, with the result being a *Bird Report* which the *Bird Report* Team and the Society as a whole can be justifiably proud of.

The database developed by Derbyshire Ornithological Society had given CAWOS the momentum and means to progress computerisation. Without that we probably would not have got started. However, it was always a 'best fit', even with the addition of a verification programme enabling the import of electronic records direct into the database. Now the Society is in the enviable situation of having its own specifically written system. All the 2001 records, and many of the 2002 records received so far, have now been imported into this new database, which will provide the standard for years to come.

Letters of thanks, along with constructive comments on how to improve record submissions, whether electronic or on paper, were sent to all contributors. Thought is being given to how feedback could be extended to take in the submission of rarity descriptions, without increasing the workload significantly of the Rarities Team. CAWOS recognises the need to encourage more people to submit their sightings and to continually improve the procedure, making it more user-friendly and thus hopefully encouraging more participation. If this can be done the additional records will make the database more accurate and thus more valid for conservation purposes.

The Society has sought feedback from as many birdwatchers in the county as possible through a questionnaire sent out to members (which will also be posted on the CAWOS web site). It is hoped this will reveal why some members do not currently send in their records, and to identify what extra help would be required to enable others to start keeping records of their own.

Discussions with rECOrd (the Local Record Centre) to reach a formal agreement regarding the county's avifauna records is ongoing.

The Society has started to transfer CAWOS archived records from the Grosvenor Museum to the County Record Office in Chester. This is a mammoth task as strict archive regulations have to be adhered to.

At the last AGM Jeff Clarke agreed to continue in the role of Conservation Co-ordinator until a replacement could be found. Unfortunately, this position still has not been filled one year on.

The eight Local Area Representatives, each covering a Borough Council within the CAWOS recording area, continued to keep the membership informed of conservation issues within their areas. This year records have been supplied for various projects including:

- Farmland Birds Local Biodiversity Action Plan, a monitoring project due to start later this year.
- The ongoing 'Birds of the Peak District Project', which is looking at the decline of Lapwing and Twite.
- Various informal Farm Surveys to support Countryside Stewardship Schemes.
- And DEFRA, responding to farmland birds hotspot data supplied by CAWOS, set up new Countryside Stewardship Schemes amounting to over £500,000 between 20 farms within the county during 2002.

Also input from the Society was provided where habitat was threatened by development or other activities. Examples of these include:

- The threat to Black-necked Grebes from overhead power lines.
- The new Mersey crossing at Halton.
- The purchase of the greater part of Upper Moss Side Farm, an area which includes large wintering flocks of lowland farmland birds.
- Arpley Tip, where the owners have withdrawn their application to extend the tip over Moss Side farmland, after CAWOS presented a report objecting to the plan, which won strong support from Warrington Borough Council.

Brian Martin continued co-ordinating the House Martin Survey, which entered its 11th consecutive year. In order for CAWOS to support, as appropriate, existing local and national surveys, and to be able to plan and co-ordinate its own activities more effectively for the future, the Society started in 2002 to undertake a 'Survey of Surveys' to establish exactly what surveys are or will be taking place within the county and by whom. This is taking longer than we envisaged, but thank you to those individuals or societies who have so far contributed.

The Society welcomes applications for financial support to assist projects or surveys within the county. Several CAWOS grants were made last year, including:

- A grant to SECOS for financial assistance towards the maintenance of the feeding and breeding colony of Tree Sparrows at Sandbach Flashes.
- A grant agreed towards the purchase of Lower Moss Wood Educational Nature Reserve and Wildlife Hospital.

The *Bird Report* Team has again produced an excellent *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*, incorporating new ideas including an eye-catching colour front cover. However, we are sorry to have received Colin Schofield's resignation as Systematic List Editor after a successful three years in the job. This key role can be very demanding on time, and effort is going into re-defining roles and responsibilities to share the burden. Graham Schofield has also resigned as typesetter, after bringing fresh ideas to the layout of the *Bird Report* over the last two years and Paul Brewster has given up the post of *Bird Report* Distributor. Our sincere thanks go to them for the work they have put in on behalf of the Society.

To reduce stocks held of back copies of *Bird Reports*, these are now available to members and other organisations for the cost of post & package, and a small donation if appropriate.

Bird News continues to receive high acclaim from both within and outside the Society. However, the newsletter is still without an editor, though thanks must go to all the people who have stepped in to write a wide variety of Guest Editorials. The task of cataloguing the wealth of information contained within *Bird News* is ongoing and hopefully this index will be up to date by mid-2003. It will be a valuable source of reference for CAWOS members.

The number of sites within the *Cheshire and Wirral Gazetteer* continues to grow and new, additional sites will eventually be published as an addendum. An electronic version is also available.

The CAWOS web site has not been updated as often as it should have been due to time restraints. However, it is still considered an important window to reach other birdwatchers. A newly designed Discussion Forum will hopefully continue to generate the exchange of information and ideas.

A varied programme of indoor meetings was held, covering:

- Wales's apparently unique population of Merlins.
- The contrasting fates of some of our British birds over the last millennium.
- Rob Fuller, Director of Habitats Research at the BTO, described the main factors that shape our woodland birdlife.
- Late substitutes to the planned programme looked at the attractions of Cape May in North America and Bharatpur in northern India as great birding destinations.

The Society aims to support and help where possible with the organisation and publicity of a number of outdoor events, including various workshops and guided walks. The annual Migration Watch attracted many birders and the High Tide Birdwatches, organised by the RSPB and the Cheshire Countryside Management Service, provided the usual excitement.

A Recording Forum was held on 14th March 2002 which attracted 25 participants. Entitled 'Putting Something Back' its aim was to review progress made since the last forum held in February 2001; to think about the reasons for, and the methods of, recording; and to consider ways in which it can be made more attractive to people.

CAWOS was represented at the:

- 'Official Launch of rECOrd' (the Local Record Centre) at Chester Zoo on 12th July, and contributed a powerpoint presentation about the Society for a specially produced CD distributed to about 200 influential people in the area.
- 'Tomorrow's World for Local Wildlife' Conference at Daresbury Laboratories on 12th October, at which the Society also put up a display stand to promote the role and work of CAWOS.

The CAWOS Photographic Competition, now in its 9th year, drew fewer entries than were hoped for with only three people entering a total of 34 slides and prints. The future of this annual event is being considered.

Rostherne Observatory, managed by the Society, continues to seek ways of bringing in vitally needed income. In 2002 these included an increase in the number of Brownie groups visiting the reserve and a car boot sale being held. Financial problems have been eased to some extent after English Nature agreed to take over the insurance of the Observatory.

In the Chairman's Report last year, I said, "the Society should draw encouragement from 2001 and move into the next year with optimism for the future". I am sure that the air of optimism that continued throughout 2002, and the encouragement received from both members and non-members, will serve to keep the Society buoyant in 2003. Particular thanks go to all the people involved with the running of the Society - their hard work is appreciated.

Sheila Blamire, Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Once again it is pleasing to report an increase in membership the figure of 370 is our highest ever. 28 new members joined during 2002 and there seems to be general satisfaction with the Society. It is interesting that in recent years nearly all those who join renew after the first year and become regular members.

There has been a slow but welcome increase in the involvement of members in the Society's work; well over 50 responded very positively to our request to state problems they face in sending in records, and we have already begun to address this, as I shall explain later. About 12 responded to the appeal for survey work to be done in relation to Farmland Birds, though it is unfortunate that the start of the monitoring has had to be postponed until the autumn. More volunteers for this and other surveys such as those done by the BTO will always be welcome. On the debit side, several key positions are unfilled and volunteers are again needed to make the Society more effective; at present a very few individuals are covering much of the work which needs to be done this is not healthy for the Society. We still have a vacancy for an Ordinary Member of Council, Sheila Blamire is still covering the posts of *Bird News* Editor and Programme Secretary while a new Conservation Co-ordinator is also needed.

For several years now we have held a Forum, which so far has concentrated on getting together what might be called the birdwatching establishment of the county. This year's will take place in September but will have a different emphasis. In response to the demand for more help in keeping records, sending them in and carrying out fieldwork the Forum on Saturday 27th September will be aimed specifically at those people who requested help. We hope that many of them will come along (although numbers will have to be limited) and that the experience of those who have sent in records for many years will be of use to them. Help will also be provided through a series of articles, the first of which has already appeared in the recent edition of *Bird News*.

I have realised the importance of encouraging more people to send in records through another piece of work which has occupied me for much of the winter, i.e. putting the Society's records in order and depositing them in the County Record Office at Chester (by the time I have finished reading through these past records, I shall have glanced at every record since 1980!). I am well aware that Cheshire has a large number of dedicated, experienced and reliable birdwatchers who have been sending in records for many years. However, it is also equally obvious that these committed people are not going to keep on doing so for ever and ever and that we need to train up a new generation who will carry on the good work.

Another of our targets this year is to find out who exactly is doing what with regard to birds in Cheshire and Wirral. So we have commissioned a 'Survey of Surveys' with the aim of finding out what surveys, both regular and occasional, are being carried out and with the parallel aim of ensuring that the results of these come to us so that they can be included in the *Bird Report* to make it as comprehensive as possible. This was brought home to me when, waiting in the dentist's recently, I read an article in *Cheshire Life* about a research student who was doing a PhD on 'Birdlife in the green lanes of Cheshire', whom I will contact if I had not noticed this I wonder if he would ever have known of our existence, or we of his.

On the subject of the *Bird Report*, Richard Gabb and I have taken over the responsibility of distribution and are making a concerted effort this year to find more places which will take copies on sale or return, and to put posters advertising the *Report* in strategic places. If anyone can display one in a hide or on a noticeboard, which does not yet have one, please see me. Looking back through the archives it has been interesting to see how much the *Bird Report* has improved both in quality and in the quantity of records since the early issues – a great tribute to all who have worked on it and have built on what were very solid foundations. Mark Feltham has taken over as *Bird Report* Editor, after a decision to merge the roles of Technical and Systematic List Editors, while Richard Gabb will continue in the key role of *Bird Report* Team Leader, co-ordinating the activities of all involved with the publication. Geoff Blamire has taken over the demanding role of Database Manager but we do need quite urgently to find a new typesetter for the *Bird Report*.

We are continuing to make contact with other neighbouring societies and this year are to exchange reports with Lancashire and Clwyd, whose appeal for records was in a recent *Bird News*. Once again we will be running the usual programme of indoor meetings and welcome four new speakers for 2003/4. The wide variety of topics includes talks on seabirding, wetlands, and Anglesey, while the meaning of titles such as 'A lane in a Polish Marsh' and 'Chasing the Light' will become apparent on the evening. The tally of attendance lists showed that about 80 members attended indoor meetings at some time during the season, though once again the response to the Chester meeting from members in the west of the county and Wirral was disappointing.

My thanks to all those who have helped in any way during the year. Please think about how you can contribute to your society and keep the comments, both critical and praiseworthy, coming in so that we can build on what is already a sound base.

David Cogger, Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT

The draft Income and Expenditure and the draft Balance Sheet were presented to the meeting, but it was stressed that the figures were 'subject to audit'.

Financially, 2002 has been a fairly straightforward year; the Balance Sheet shows that net current assets have increased by a little over £600, with a total surplus of £429. A donation of £50 and one of £20 were made and were gratefully received.

We have continued to support the computerisation and database project and funded the 2001 *Bird Report* with approximately £2,000 out of our income from sales and advertising.

During 2002, £500 was transferred from our CAF CASH reserve account to bolster the current account when we needed to pay for the 2001 *Report*.

The quarterly newsletter costs out to a total of £1,200 per year including postage and after advertising revenue is received.

The management of the Observatory at Rostherne, despite the high cost of insurance, has had a neutral effect on these accounts with permit money in cancelling permit money paid out.

Lower interest rates have reduced our income from reserves, but subscriptions have increased due to the growth in the number of members.

Clive Richards, Treasurer

BIRD REPORT EDITOR

Following the resignation of Colin Schofield, and the decision to merge the roles of Technical and Systematic List Editors, we are very pleased to announce that Mark Feltham has taken over as the new *Bird Report* Editor. Mark, who has written several articles for *Bird News*, became further involved with CAWOS last year when he became a compiler for the section 'Feral Pigeon to Short-eared Owl' in the 2001 *Bird Report*. He also helped with the reformatting of non-compatible electronic records. We wish Mark every success with his new role, confident in the knowledge that he will receive all the support he needs from Colin and the current *Bird Report* Team.

SOCIETY NEWS - HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

If you haven't done so already check out Hilbre's web site at www.hilbrebirdobs.co.uk - it's easy to navigate and contains loads of information about one of Cheshire and Wirral's premier birding sites.

CAWOS COUNCIL AND SUB-COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

There are some vacant positions, plus some sub-committee members are seeking to change their roles, so if any CAWOS members are interested in any of the positions please contact the appropriate Council member to discuss it.

Please do not hesitate to come forward - **WE REALLY DO NEED YOU!**

COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Chairman - **Sheila Blamire**
Vice-chairman - Brian Dyke
Secretary - David Cogger
Treasurer - Clive Richards
Recorder - Tony Broome

ELECTED MEMBERS

Steve Barber
Richard Gabb
Andy Harmer
Phil Oddy
Tony Parker
Vacant

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The following members have been co-opted on to Council due to their expertise in specific areas. Up to five people may be asked to join Council as co-opted members as and when the need arises.

Derek Kelly (Conservation)

Mark Feltham (Bird Report Editor)

CAWOS SUB-COMMITTEES (In alphabetical order) (Chairman in bold)

1. ACTIVITIES SUB-COMMITTEE

Chairman - **Brian Dyke**

a. Conservation Team

Conservation Coordinator - Jeff Clarke (**until a replacement is found**)

Co-opted Council member - Derek Kelly

Local Authority Area representatives

Chester	- Neil Friswell	Congleton	- Richard Blindell
Crewe and Nantwich	- Colin Lythgoe	Halton	- Jeff Clarke
Macclesfield	- Derek Kelly	Vale Royal	- Paul Hill
Warrington	- Brian Martin	Wirral	- Richard Smith

b. Programme Team

Speakers - Sheila Blamire
Venue - Brian Dyke and David Cogger

c. Promotional Team

Workshops - Jeff Clarke Materials - Sheila Blamire

2. FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE

Treasurer	- Clive Richards	Chairman	- Sheila Blamire
Vice-chairman	- Brian Dyke	Secretary	- David Cogger
Auditor	- Norman Scott		

3. PUBLICATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE

Chairman - **Sheila Blamire**

a. Bird Report Team

Team Leader	- Richard Gabb	Bird Report Editor	- Mark Feltham
Council member	- Steve Barber	Artwork/Photos	- Tony Broome
Advertising	- vacant	Proof-reading	- Hazel Raw
Bird Report Distributors	- David Cogger and Richard Gabb		

Compilers

Steve Barber	Rob Bithell	Paul Brewster	David Cogger	Simon Edwards
Mark Feltham	Richard Gabb	Phil Oddy	Tony Parker	Mark Payne
Brian Rimmer	Colin Schofield	Richard Smith		

b. Newsletter Team

Editor	- vacant	Artwork	- Tony Broome
Computer work / layout	- Sheila Blamire	Printing	- Geoff Blamire
Proof-reading	- Hazel Raw	Folding and stapling	- Geoff Lightfoot
Posting	- David Cogger	Advertising	- vacant

c. Web Site

Materials	- Sheila Blamire	Web site host	- Dave Walters
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4. RECORDS SUB-COMMITTEE

Chairman	- Tony Broome
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a. Database Team

Chairman	- Sheila Blamire	Database Manager	- Geoff Blamire
County Recorder	- Tony Broome	Records Secretary	- Phil Oddy
Recording Liaison Officer	- Tony Parker	plus data inputters	(more volunteers needed)

b. Rarities Team

County Recorder	- Tony Broome	Steve Barber	Hugh Pulsford
Rarities Secretary	- Dave Walters	Jane Turner	

c. Survey Team (more volunteers needed)

House Martins	- Brian Martin
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5. ROSTHERNE SUB-COMMITTEE

CAWOS representative	- Clive Richards
Voluntary Wardens representative	- Peter Day
English Nature representative	



MAY

- 4 **The Lost Lagoon, Halton - 7:00am - To book ring: Jeff Clarke 01928 583905**
- 7 NCRSPB Queen Charlotte's Wood evening trip - ring for details
- 9 NCRSPB 'BLACKTOFT SANDS RISING TIDE OF CHANGE ON THE HUMBER' by Ian Higginson
- 10 MCOS Coombes Valley/Churnet Valley - contact Les Goulding 01925 265578
- 11 MCOS AGM & MEMBERS' SLIDES EVENING
- 11 CRSPB Leighton Moss by coach - contact Marjorie Dixon 01244 324268
- 11 CADOS Spring migrants trip - ring for details
- 12 SRSPB Pennington Flash, meet at the Golf Club off A572 at Golbourne at 7:15pm
- 13 ADNHS 'THE PEMBROKE COASTAL PATH' by John Hill-Wilson
- 13 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 13 MCOS Loggerheads day trip - contact Harold Fielding 01606 882529
- 14 HO 'BIRD MIGRATION, GREAT EASTERN FLYWAY' by Mike McKavett
- 15-18KOS Suffolk weekend based in Leiston - ring for details
- 15-18NCRSPB Anglesey Weekend - ring for details
- 16-18LOG Anglesey Weekend by coach - ring for details
- 17 ADNHS Marshside & Rufford Old Hall for cream tea! - contact 0161 928 7896
- 18 **Bird Ringing at Oxmoor LNR - 7:00am - 9:00am. To book: 01928 583905**
- 18 SRSPB Hodbarrow RSPB by coach departing at 7:30am - ring for details
- 18 MRSPB Top Hill Low Reservoir by coach - contact Ian Taylor 01260 275248
- 18 SECOS Ynys Hir by minibus - ring for details
- 19 HPRSPB 'WORKING TOGETHER FOR BIRDS' by Keith Clarkson
- 22 MRSPB Coombes Valley RSPB Reserve, meet at the reserve at 6:45pm
- 25 HPRSPB Walney Island, meet at Marple at 8:00am - ring for details

- 28 MRSPB Lindow Common walk with ranger Paul Hughes - contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119
- 30 KOS Wildboardclough, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 6:30pm
- 30 LOG 'BIRDS OF MOORE & FIDDLER'S FERRY' by Mike Roberts
- 31-1 CADOS Norfolk Weekend - ring for details
- tbc WGOS Anglesey by coach departing at 7:30am - ring for details

JUNE

- 4 CRSPB Nercwys Safari (evening) - contact Bernard Wright 01829 782243
- 10 ADNHS SOCIAL EVENING & plant sale - contact 0161 928 7896
- 11 HO 'BRITAIN'S BREEDING SEABIRDS' by Graham Wren
- 11 MRSPB Alderley Woods, meet at Beacon Lodge car park at 7:00pm
- 11 CADOS Nercwys - ring for details
- 14 MRSPB Clumber Country Park, nr Worksop - contact Ralph Cole 01625 829119
- 14 NCRSPB Coombes Valley & Churnet - ring for details
- 14 CADOS Cumbria - ring for details
- 15 KOS Leighton Moss, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 15 CRSPB Mere Sands Wood - contact Margaret Bain 01244 380447
- 15 MCOS Montgomeryshire - contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- 15 HPRSPB Padley Gorge, meet at Marple at 9:00am - ring for details
- 22 LOG Trip to Trinidad & Tobago to July 3rd - ring for details
- 25 NCRSPB Moore evening trip - ring for details
- 27 KOS Goyt Valley, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 6:30pm
- 28 ADNHS Biddulph Country Park - contact 0161 928 7896

JULY

- 6 CADOS Anglesey - ring for details
- 6 CRSPB South Stack by coach - contact Margaret Hough 01829 770567
- 9 HO MEMBERS' EVENING (tickets to be obtained in advance)
- 13 KOS Lake Vyrnwy, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 13 HPRSPB Coombes Valley RSPB Reserve meet at Marple at 9:00am - ring for details
- 16 NCRSPB Pennington Flash evening trip - ring for details
- 20 SRSPB Middlewood Way Open Day - guided walks, nest box building, etc.
- 25 KOS Anderton/Marbury, meet Anderton Car Park, just past Northwich Tip, at 7:00pm

AUGUST

- 10 Birdwatch, Banks Road car park, Lower Heswall - 8:30am (HW 10:40, 8.5m)**
- 10 SRSPB Old Moor RSPB Wetland Centre by coach departing at 9:00am - ring for details
- 13 In Search of Terns on Hilbre - £1 charge. To book contact: 0151 648 4371/3884**
- 29 LOG 'WATER, WILDERNESS & WATERLOO' by Fred Ledden
- 30 CADOS Flamborough - ring for details
- 31 KOS Hilbre, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:00am or West Kirby at 9:00am

SEPTEMBER

- 1 HPRSPB AGM and MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 8 SRSPB AGM followed by 'WILDLIFE AROUND BRITAIN'S COASTS' by David Tolliday
- 9 MRSPB 'BIRDS OF BROAD ACRES, YORKSHIRE' by Trevor Gunton
- 10 HO AGM followed by 'STRAIGHT FROM THE OLD WIFE'S MOUTH' by Brian Hallworth
- 11 In Search of Skuas on Hilbre - £1 charge. To book contact: 0151 648 4371/3884**
- 13 NCRSPB Blacktoft Sands & Old Moor, Barnsley - ring for details
- 14 KOS Fairburn Ings, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 14 CADOS Teesside - ring for details
- 19 NCRSPB 'JUST A SECOND' by Andy Harmer
- 20 ADNHS Tatton Park for Forester's Walk - contact 0161 980 5000
- 20 Hawk Watch at Wigg Island, Halton - 7:00am - 4:00pm**
- 21 Hawk Watch at Wigg Island, Halton - 7:00am - 4:00pm**
- 21 Migration Watch at Hale Lighthouse - 7:00am**
- 21 HPRSPB Moore Nature Reserve, meet at Marple at 9:00am - ring for details
- 22 HPRSPB 'BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND' by Brian Dyke

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

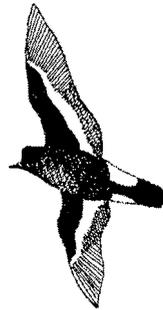
ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Society, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7:30pm, Sec. Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldy Valley Community Centre 7:30pm, Prog. Sec. Nick French 01978 856522
CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society, mtgs Knutsford 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 Peter Griffiths 0161 427 5325 or Pat O'Mara 0161 449 8299 (Outings Sec.)
KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society, mtgs Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road 7:45pm, contact Roy Bircumshaw 01565 634193
LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8:00pm, Prog. Sec. Hilary Unsworth 01925 860155
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 St Matthew's Primary Sch, Stretton 7:45pm, Sec. Carol Davidson 01925 635967
NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society, mtgs The Gables at 7:30pm, Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 611577, mike@uimprove.com
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

For further information on all Outdoor Events contact Jeff Clarke 01928 583905 (work) or 0151 423 4275 (home) or e-mail: conservation@cawos.org OR see the complete 2003 BIRDWATCHER'S DIARY at: www.deeestuary.freereserve.co.uk/highbird.htm

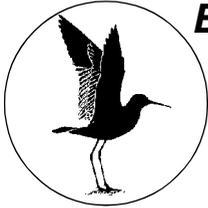
Will **affiliated societies**, who wish to advertise meetings of relevance to CAWOS, please send their programme to:- **Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clamhunger Lane, Mere, WA16 6QG or, preferably please, by e-mail: info@cawos.org**

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APO Televid, 20-60x Zoom + Case £1049

Televid, 32x + Case £699

Televid, 20-60x Zoom + Case £750

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EL Binoculars

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Telescopes

ATS65 HD, 30x + Case £1049

ATS65 HD, 20-60x Zoom + Case £1099

A1/ST80 LD, 30x + Case £999

AT/ST80 HD, Zoom + Case £1059

Zeiss

Binoculars

8x40 £719 10x40 £739 7x42 BGAT £599

Telescopes

65mm T²FL.* + 23x £834

85mm T²FL.* + 30x £1134

(add £35 for Zoom e/p)

Kahles

8x32 £449 8x42 £479 10x42 £499

Kowa

Telescopes

TSN-821/2M, 32x + Case £557

TSN-823/4M, 32x + Case £867

(add £70 for 20-60x Zoom with 820M)

TSN-661/2, 30x + Case £459

TSN-663/4, 30x + Case £678

(£20 less for 20-40x zoom with 660 series)

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Binoculars

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Imminent dates for your diary:

Sun 4th May The Lost Lagoon, Halton, meet at 7am - see page 33 for details

FRESHPAK is pleased to announce that they will resume deliveries to many areas within Cheshire on the 1st Thursday in the month by prior arrangement.

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PEANUTS IN NET	each	.45		
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FORTRESS PEANUT FEEDER (<i>squirrel proof</i>)	£	7.75		
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WIRE PEANUT HOLDER THREE PERCH	£	2.35		
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