

BIRD NEWS

Number 61 January 2004



Ring-necked Duck • Turnstone

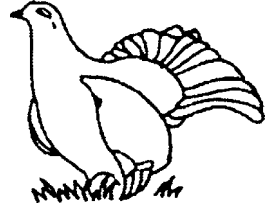
The Peak Birds Project 2002 - 2007

Cheshire and Wirral Atlas Update

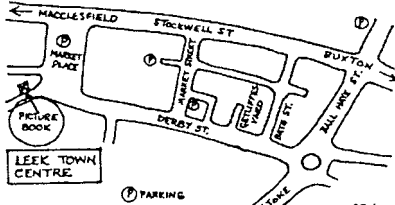
Raptor Persecution on the Cheshire Moors

PICTURE BOOK

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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: Firecrest by Ray Scally

Other illustrations by Tony Broome and Ray Scally

Guest Editorial

At a time when it might reasonably be expected that the Guest Editorial would concentrate on the preparation work currently under way for the Cheshire and Wirral Breeding and Wintering Atlas, I make no apology for turning my attention to a different issue.

I suspect that the majority of CAWOS members will also be members of the RSPB or will have seen their statistics relating to Birdcrime¹ in the national press. In 2002, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 141 incidents of shooting and destruction of birds of prey, a further 102 poisoning incidents involving birds of prey and a further 38 incidents involving illegal taking, possession and/or sale of birds of prey. All these figures were increases on the totals for 2001. It should be borne in mind that the figures relate to incidents actually reported—the likely number of such incidents occurring annually but which go unobserved or are not reported for other reasons is very difficult to guess at but could be staggeringly large.

None of the 281 incidents in 2002 relate to Cheshire and it might be easy to think that the majority are limited to such out of the way places as the bleakest moorland of Scotland or, nearer to home, perhaps Lancashire or Cumbria. However, elsewhere in this edition of *Bird News* there is a report of a Red Kite found dead, alongside poisoned bait, close to the Cat & Fiddle pub in the Cheshire part of the Peak District National Park. It is likely, if not actually certain, that this is the bird seen just west of the Cat & Fiddle on 20th September and which frequented the Wildboardclough area from 17th October to at least 3rd December 2002. As if this killing isn't bad enough, a pair of Hen Harriers, previously seen hunting over Cheshire moorland last spring, disappeared mysteriously². The female vanished first, leaving behind two eggs in a nest at a site above the Goyt Valley; also within the Peak Park, just over the county boundary in Derbyshire, a few days later the male also vanished—further details can be found elsewhere in this edition of *Bird News*. It seems pretty obvious that Cheshire is not immune from Birdcrime.

My first reactions to these news items, heard separately, were varied. Regarding the Red Kite my reaction was of anger while initially, at least, the news of the Hen Harriers' 'desertion' brought almost a shrug of the shoulders, a feeling of 'what else do you expect?' before that too turned to anger and disgust. Quite a lot of time has passed since hearing the news and the fact that the RSPB has now released details of both incidents frees CAWOS also to publish details to the membership. Time perhaps for a more considered view.

I have tried to see things from the perpetrator's point of view but this is not easy. Perhaps the Red Kite was not the target, maybe an accident befell the female Hen Harrier and the male just left the area. In east Cheshire a great deal of time, effort and private money is being put into managing already existing moorland and re-creating moorland suitable for grouse and, incidentally, habitat which benefits various species of conservation concern. It is easy to see how anyone involved in such legitimate pursuits might view with horror the depredations which they consider any species of large raptor could wreak on their efforts. So far as I know there is nothing at all to link these people with the two incidents but suspicions are rife among the local birding community and unfounded or not such suspicions do no favours to the hunting fraternity. The feeling is that the perpetrators are incapable of placing any value on the existence of birds such as the Red Kite and Hen Harrier above what they perceive to be their own interests. It must be realised by them that they are in a minority in society in general and that there are a large number of people besides themselves who enjoy the hills of east Cheshire for more peaceful pursuits just as legitimate as their own. They appear to be incapable of glorying in, or even appreciating, the existence, for its own sake, of such species in a wild and free state. On the other hand, it is unclear just how many people revelled in the sight of the Red Kite in Cheshire during the last months of its life but in addition to the many birders, it was enjoyed by any number of cyclists and walkers who stopped to see what was going on and were shown the bird by the local birders. When Hen Harriers bred successfully above the Goyt several years ago well over 100 local birders gave freely of their time in helping the RSPB, who wardened the site full-time during the course of breeding and in the process showed the birds to many passers-by. Perhaps the destroyers might ponder on the pleasure gained by others and wonder what they themselves are missing. Somehow I doubt it.

At the end of the day the poisoning of the Red Kite was an illegal act for which there can be no excuse. It also seems likely that an illegal act or acts may have taken place against one or both Hen Harriers. In the absence of evidence which can be acted upon it looks as if the perpetrator will escape paying any price for his crime. While birders visiting the east Cheshire hills should be on the lookout for suspicious behaviour (and report any such observations to the RSPB Investigation Officers, without involving themselves in potentially confrontational situations), it is difficult to imagine what else can be done. I find it ironic that over 60% of the total Peak District National Park Authority's budget of £6.59 million of national and local tax-payers' money for the year ended 31st March 2003 is accounted for under the headings 'Promoting Understanding' (including 'Environmental Education'), 'Recreation Management' and 'Conservation of the Natural Environment'³. However much effort the Authority is putting into these aspects it is not having the success one might hope for so far as birds of prey are concerned. While not wishing to lay any blame at the door of the Authority, this funding does help to support the way of life of many residents of the Peak District of which the perpetrator may be one. It might not go amiss were CAWOS members to take any opportunity to bend the ears of Peak District wardens, or other employees they encounter, on the subject of illegal persecution of birds of prey. A 'drip-drip' policy might have some long-term effect but I'm not holding my breath.

Turning to better news: firstly, at the time of going to print, 262 tetrads out of a total of some 670 have been allocated for the Cheshire and Wirral Atlas Project—don't miss out on helping with this landmark venture, see within to find out how you can contribute. Secondly, it gives me great satisfaction to congratulate the *Bird Report* team (of which I am proud to be a small cog) on the arrival, before Christmas, of the 2002 *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report*. I have already heard comments to the effect that this Report is the 'best so far' and that may well be the case. What is absolutely certain is that it is the biggest ever annual report produced on the birds of Cheshire and Wirral. Mark Feltham, the new Editor, has introduced a number of welcome changes to the way information in an already excellent 'Systematic List' is presented. This list is supported by a fascinating 'Ringing Report' and a number of interesting articles. To my eyes, the front cover, the photos and other illustrations are superb. The amount of work involved has been enormous but the final result has, in my opinion, repaid the efforts of all involved.

Steve Barber

References

- ¹ *Birdcrime 2002* published by the RSPB (www.rspb.org.uk/Images/birdcrime%202002%20report_tcm5-41265.pdf). If this link doesn't work go to the RSPB web site, then via 'Policy' to 'Wild birds and the law', then to 'Publications'.
- ² 'Rare birds vanish from nest' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/england/derbyshire/2977428.stm>)
- ³ Peak District National Park Authority Accounts year to 31/3/2003: (<http://www.peakdistrict.org/ctte/resources/reports/2003/030627Item6-1app1.pdf>)



Note: the copy date for the next issue is 6th March - please be prompt

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

OPERATION EASTER

Friday 5th March 2004 at the Civic Centre, Knutsford

We're pleased to announce that, following the AGM on Friday 5th March 2004, Steve Hogarth, Cheshire Constabulary Police Wildlife and Crime Liaison Officer and Anthony Smith, Senior Crown Prosecutor, CPS Chester will give an illustrated talk entitled 'Operation Easter', a real-life 'whodunnit' about a recent wildlife case and how it was successfully pieced together.

The defendant was a professional egg collector who used the journals of an historic egg collector, John Walpole Bond, in his pursuit of the Golden Eagle. He also targeted Osprey, Chough and Peregrine Falcon and contributed to books on egg collecting. The case underlines the importance of a close working relationship between the police, CPS and RSPB.

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 period September to November.

Leach's Petrel

The first record of the autumn was two+ off New Brighton on Sep 9th, followed by singles at Hilbre on Sep 23rd and Hoylake on Sep 23rd and 26th. During early Oct, a modest number were seen starting with one off Hoylake on 4th. On 6th, 11 flew past Hoylake, five Hilbre, four Leasowe and two New Brighton. Next day these sites held 22, 27, 2 and 20+ respectively, while five flew past Meols. On 8th, numbers were reduced with one off Hoylake, 14 Hilbre and five New Brighton. Four flew past New Brighton on 9th and were followed by one there next day, as well as eight recorded from Hilbre and two from Leasowe.

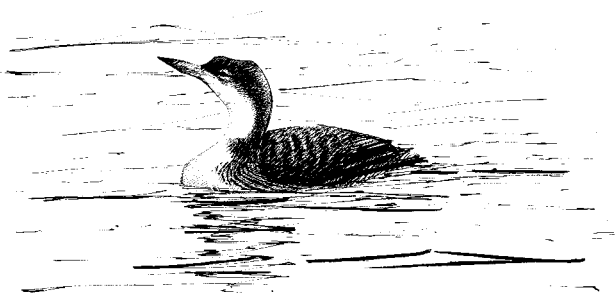
SITE REPORTS

Dee Estuary

The only double-figure counts of Little Egrets were at Neston Marsh, 14 on Nov 23rd and 10 on Nov 25th. A Spoonbill visited Burton Marsh on Oct 17th. A drake Green-winged Teal was at Neston Marsh (Nov 25th). Up to four Hen Harriers regularly roosted at Parkgate. Peak wader counts at Heswall included 17,600 Knot, 8,700 Dunlin and 3,000 Black-tailed Godwit. 11 Curlew Sandpipers off Caldy (Sep 6th) was the only high count of that species. A Guillemot off Heswall Shore on Oct 9th was unusual. A Water Pipit at Neston on Oct 23rd was followed by two next day. 1,000 Fieldfares passed over Burton on Oct 13th but the earliest Redwings were c20 at Heswall on Sep 21st. On Sep 7th, 15 Chiffchaffs were at Heswall Sewage Works. A Firecrest was at Sealand Road, Chester (Nov 15th). A Bearded Tit appeared at Neston (Nov 22nd) with two present next day. A Lapland Bunting visited Burton on Nov 1st.

East Cheshire area

A Great Northern Diver at Rostherne (Oct 2nd) was only the eighth reserve record. A Little Grebe at Poynton Pool from Nov 10th was a good site record and 311 Cormorants at Rostherne was a new Nov record. Rostherne had irregular sightings of a Bittern. Groups of two and five Whooper Swans visited Chelford SQs (Oct 12th) with two also at Rostherne



(Oct 27th and Nov 1st). An escaped Black Swan was near Poynton Pool (Oct 9th). Large Pink-footed Goose movements included c600 over Higher Poynton on Sep 28th, c600 over Poynton on Oct 4th, two large skeins over Tytherington on Oct 27th, c850 over Rostherne on Nov 1st, 500+ over Broken Cross, Macclesfield on Nov 16th and c350 over Bollington on Nov 17th. 236 Greylag Geese at Rostherne was a new Oct record. A Ruddy Shelduck appeared at Mobberley SQ on Sep 4th and a Hen Harrier was at Macclesfield Forest (Nov 20th-21st). A Goshawk flew over Rostherne on Sep 27th and a Buzzard over a Poynton garden (Sep 5th) was only the fourth there. Hobbies were at Marton Heath on Sep 15th and Gawsforth on Oct 1st. A Peregrine visited Tower's Road Fields, Poynton and nearby 700+ Golden Plovers at Adlington Driving Range was a site record. Two Grey Plovers dropped into Rostherne (Oct 3rd). A Woodcock was at Prince's Wood (Nov 9th and 20th) with a Jack Snipe at Tower's Road, Poynton (Nov 9th) and a massive 52 Snipe at Adlington Driving Range (Nov 20th). A passage Greenshank was at Mobberley SQ on Sep 4th. One or two Green Sandpipers were at Bottoms Resr and Rostherne during Oct/Nov. Three Short-eared Owls at Shutlingsloe was a good find. A Shorelark was reported briefly at Sutton Common on Nov 1st, if confirmed it will be the first inland record for the county. The last



Swallow family left Toft Hall Farm on Oct 10th, but five flew over there on 12th. A Yellow Wagtail at Adlington Driving Range (Sep 14th) was a good find. Up to eight Waxwings were at Paradise Street, Macclesfield from Nov 11th to 17th. Dipper sightings came from Bosley Aqueduct, Danebridge, Riverside Park, Three Shires Head and near Wincle. Two Wheatears were at Adlington Driving Range on Sep 12th. An estimated 4-500 winter thrushes flew over Toft Hall Farm each hour (Oct 13th) and the first Redwing was at Poynton

on Sep 30th. A late Spotted Flycatcher was at Prince's Wood on Sep 17th. A long-staying Great Grey Shrike was at Bosley Aqueduct from Nov 5th to 23rd. Six Tree Sparrows were at Rode Heath (Oct 29th) and 40-50 Bramblings at Rostherne was a high count (Oct 28th). 500+ Goldfinches were reported at Riverside Park (Sep 11th).

Frodsham area

c150 Greylag Geese flew over the Score on Oct 9th. A Ruddy Shelduck appeared at No6 tank on Nov 9th when a Scaup was on the Weaver Bend. A Long-tailed Duck was at the Weaver Bend (Nov 8th and 12th). A wing-tagged Red Kite flew south on Nov 9th. An Osprey flew over Norton Marsh (Sep 7th). Peak wader counts included 500+ Grey Plovers and nine Curlew Sandpipers. Two Pectoral Sandpipers visited the Score (Sep 27th). A Green Sandpiper was at No6 tank on Nov 9th. Single adult and 2w Mediterranean Gulls were at No6 tank on Sep 11th. On Oct 23rd and 26th, a Great Grey Shrike visited No6 tank.

Hilbre

The only Black-throated Diver reports were singles on Oct 7th and 24th. A Black-necked Grebe offshore (Oct 4th and 8th) was a good find. The first returning Brent Geese were seen on Oct 6th when 40 flew past Point of Ayr towards Hilbre. A Gadwall on Sep 27th was the first since 1987. Three Eiders on Nov 17th was the first record of the year. Three Hen Harriers on Oct 1st was probably a record day count here. Single Wood Sandpipers appeared on Sep 1st and 20th. Skua sightings included two Pomarines on Oct 7th, five Arctics on Oct 7th and single Greats on Sep 9th, 11th and Oct 4th. A Mediterranean Gull on Oct 4th was followed by three Little Gulls on 8th. A juv Sabine's Gull was found (Oct 4th and 10th) and a Black Guillemot visited (Sep 10th). The last date for Arctic and Common Terns was Oct 8th. A migrant Long-eared Owl on Sep 9th was a good find. During Oct, the peak day counts of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits were 80 and 1,500+ respectively. A Richard's Pipit (Nov 1st) was only the fourth here and the first since 1994. Wagtail passage on Oct 1st included 26 Greys and 30 Pieds. A fem Black Redstart (Oct 2nd) was the second this year. Migrating Redstarts arrived on Sep 7th and Oct 2nd. Four Ring Ouzels on Oct 12th was a record day count for the autumn. A Reed Warbler (Sep 12th-13th) was the fifth here. Garden Warblers were noted on five dates to Sep 9th. A Yellow-browed Warbler was trapped on Oct 13th - it was the sixth here. 30 Goldcrests on Oct 11th was the peak autumn count. A Firecrest (Sep 4th) was the earliest ever autumn record. A Great Grey Shrike on Oct 22nd was only the second here. Three Snow Buntings arrived (Oct 19th and 26th) with one on Nov 16th-17th.

Inner Marsh Farm

A Bittern was seen on Sep 2nd and Oct 28th. Five Barnacle Geese appeared (Nov 7th). Two Egyptian Geese arrived at Shotwick (Nov 14th). The Green-winged Teal was seen from Nov 17th. A Garganey was seen on Oct 1st-2nd, 9th and 12th. A redhead Smew was present briefly (Nov 6th). A Spotted Crake was found at a private site near Shotwick Fields (Oct 14th). An Osprey flew over (Sep 7th) and the last Little Ringed Plovers departed on Sep 5th. A juv Pectoral Sandpiper on Sep 1st was followed by another bird on Oct 1st-2nd. At nearby Shotwick Fields, 14 Jack Snipe were counted (Oct 14th). The only Wood Sandpiper was present on Sep 3rd and an adult Mediterranean Gull was seen two days earlier. The last sightings of White Wagtail and Lesser Whitethroat were Oct 15th and Sep 12th respectively.

Nantwich area

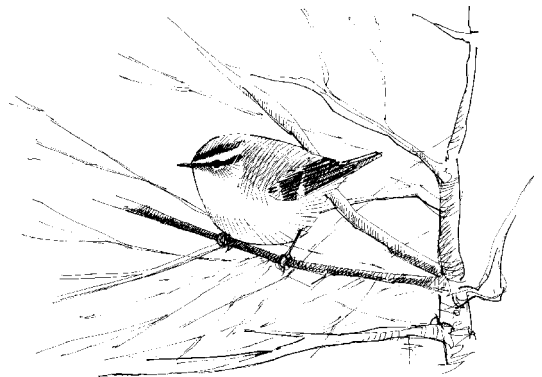
Three presumed escaped Lesser White-fronted Geese were at Chapel Mere (Oct 22nd) and 925 Canada Geese at Bar Mere (Nov 26th) was one of the largest flocks recorded in Cheshire. At Bar Mere, three Barnacle Geese and a Bar-headed Goose were seen. A Goshawk was reported from Cholmondeley (Oct 16th). The last Hobby sighting was at Hurleston on Sep 6th. Two Red-legged Partridges were at Hurleston on Nov 20th and three Quail at Bar Mere on Sep 17th were quite late. Hurleston hosted single Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers on Sep 4th and a Stonechat on Oct 11th. Up to 100,000 Starlings roosted at this site in late Nov. A Snow Bunting was reported at Deer Park Mere (Nov 26th).

Northwich area

A long-staying Great Northern Diver visited Budworth Mere from Nov 21st into Dec. The same site hosted a Bittern from Nov 27th. Two Ruff were at Budworth Mere and nearby a Black-tailed Godwit visited Marbury No1 tank. A Spotted Redshank arrived at Neumann's Flash (Sep 2nd) before moving to Marbury No1 tank (Sep 6th). Green Sandpipers were at Budworth (Nov 22nd) and on Witton Brook (Oct 14th). Three Wood Sandpipers were reported at Marbury No1 tank on Sep 18th and nearby three Yellow-legged Gulls roosted at Neumann's Flash. A migrant Black Tern dropped in at Budworth Mere (Sep 7th). A Long-eared Owl was found near Marbury No1 tank on Oct 16th. A late male Whinchat visited Witton Brook on Oct 9th with one/two Stonechats there on Oct 9th-10th. Another pair of Stonechats passed through Whitley Reed on Oct 16th.

North Wirral Shore

Single Balearic Shearwaters flew past Hoylake (Oct 4th and 6th). Five probable Balearic Shearwaters flew past Hoylake (Oct 4th) with four on Oct 7th and five passed Meols (Oct 7th). A Honey Buzzard flew over Leasowe (Sep 6th) then over Meols Sewage Farm. A total of 15 Sparrowhawks moving through Hoylake (Oct 1st) was a good count. An unconfirmed report of a Black Grouse came from Wallasey (Oct 21st), perhaps it was one of the released birds from east Cheshire (see 2002 *Bird Report* for details). A Water Rail at Leasowe lighthouse pool was a good find. An American Golden Plover was reported at Leasowe lighthouse (Sep 20th). Hoylake Shore hosted 2,000 Bar-tailed Godwits and 10,000 Knot. Up to 17 Purple Sandpipers were recorded off Leasowe/Wallasey during Nov. Grey Phalaropes passed Leasowe (Oct 8th and Oct 25th). Skua sightings off Hoylake included Pomarine (Oct 7th), and up to four Arctic and Greats. The only other Pomarine Skua flew past Leasowe (Oct 6th) and an adult Mediterranean Gull was there (Oct 26th). Single Sabine's Gulls were off Hoylake (Oct 4th) and New Brighton (Oct 7th). A late Little Tern was at Meols on Oct 8th and a Little Auk flew past New Brighton on Oct 6th. A Barn Owl visited Meols sewage works and a Kingfisher was at Lingham Lane, Moreton. A Wryneck appeared in a Hoylake garden (Sep 5th) and a Tawny Pipit was at Meols (Sep 7th). On Oct 1st, Hoylake had 1,200 Meadow Pipits over and 15 Rock Pipits fed here on Oct 24th. A Nightingale was found in an Upton garden (Sep 4th) and a Black Redstart visited Hoylake (Nov 8th). Six Stonechats were at Moreton in Nov. Two Ring Ouzels flew west past Hoylake (Oct 12th) and an eastern race Chiffchaff was at Meols next day. Peak counts of Goldcrests were 75 at Hoylake on Oct 13th and 60 at Meols/Leasowe on Oct 9th. Single Firecrests appeared at Meols (Oct 13th) and Hoylake (Oct 21st). Nine Snow Buntings flew east past Hoylake on Nov 3rd and one was at Wallasey from Nov 25th.



Red Rocks and West Kirby

A Black-throated Diver was offshore on Oct 29th. Up to six Scaup were seen at the Marine Lake (Oct 22nd to Nov 21st). One Common Scoter was on the Marine Lake from Oct 8th to 23rd (three on 13th) and 18 flew past on Oct 29th. One observer had her fifth ever Hen Harrier at Red Rocks on Oct 14th. The same person notched up a probable American Golden Plover which flew past Red Rocks on Oct 16th. A late Whimbrel was seen (Nov 21st). A 1w Mediterranean Gull visited the

Marine Lake. A juv Black Tern lingered briefly on Sep 7th. A Richard's Pipit was at Red Rocks (Oct 20th) and 750 Meadow Pipits were counted (Oct 2nd). Up to six Stonechats were found in Oct. Two late Reed Warblers were seen on Oct 2nd. At least two Yellow-browed Warblers were at Red Rocks (Oct 2nd) and an eastern race Chiffchaff was seen (Oct 13th). One/two Firecrests were present on Oct 21st. Migrants on Oct 2nd included 120 Coal Tits and 65 Greenfinches. A Great Grey Shrike lingered by the golf course (Oct 21st-22nd) when it then flew towards Hilbre. Three Twite were seen in Oct. Single Lapland and Corn Buntings flew over on Oct 19th and Oct 13th respectively.

Sandbach Flashes

Five Bewick's Swans visited Doddington Pool (Nov 7th). A Garganey was regularly seen in Sep. The last Hobby was seen on Sep 14th with two at nearby Arclid SQ on Sep 21st. A late Curlew Sandpiper appeared (Oct 3rd) but two Spotted Redshanks on Sep 2nd was the only record for that species. A Pectoral Sandpiper was seen on Sep 24th. Up to four Yellow-legged Gulls were regularly seen in Sep. Three Sandwich Terns passed through on Sep 9th and a Black Tern appeared on Sep 13th. The last Swift was seen on Sep 5th with the last Sand Martin and Swallow on Sep 27th and Oct 17th respectively. A Richard's Pipit was reported at Maw Green Tip on Oct 10th, if accepted this will be the third truly inland (non-coastal/estuarine) record ever within the current county boundaries. A Yellow Wagtail was last seen on Oct 13th and a Spotted Flycatcher was present on Sep 12th.

Warrington area

A Black-necked Grebe arrived at Houghton Green Flash on Oct 4th. The returning Bittern at Moore NR was seen (Oct 7th, Nov 21st, 25th). A Little Egret visited Fiddler's Ferry and Moore NR between Sep 7th and 11th. This was quickly followed by a report of a Great White Egret at Fiddler's Ferry (Sep 13th). 303 Pink-footed Geese flew over Moore NR (Oct 5th) and a Honey Buzzard appeared at Risley Moss on Sep 4th. This last site also hosted a Goshawk with another at Woolston Eyes. At least six Sparrowhawks flew over Hough Green (Oct 1st). Single Ospreys passed through Risley on Sep 9th and Oct 1st. A Hobby was at Lymm on Sep 1st and three were at Risley (Sep 4th) with the last one seen on Sep 29th. Moore NR hosted a Bar-tailed Godwit. An adult Mediterranean Gull was at this site on Nov 21st and 28th with a possible Caspian Gull there on Sep 8th. Three 1w Kittiwakes flew upriver past Fiddler's Ferry on Sep 11th. Three Sandwich Terns flew over Risley on the late date of Oct 14th. A possible Woodlark was reported flying south over Moore NR on Sep 11th. 100+ Skylarks fed at Sink Moss (Oct 2nd). 112 Meadow Pipits flew over Hough Green (Oct 1st) in four hours. A White Wagtail was at Sink Moss on Oct 2nd. Three Waxwings flew over Risley (Oct 24th) and six Stonechats were at Fiddler's Ferry in Oct. The last Whinchat was at Risley on Sep 24th. On Oct 13th, a Ring Ouzel, 683 Fieldfares and 593 Redwings went through in five hours at Risley. c50 Tree Sparrows were found near Heatley and a Crossbill flew over Risley.

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Thanks/acknowledgements to:- www.birdguides.com, *Birdwatch*, *Birdwatching*, J. Canovan (Rostherne Mere NNR), CAWOS Web Site Forum (www.cawos.org), D. Cookson (Swan Study Group), Hilbre Bird Observatory, G. Howard (Macclesfield RSPB), C. Hull (Nantwich Naturalists), B. Perkins (Sandbach Flashes log), R. Smith (www.deeestuary.co.uk), www.surfbirds.com and anyone else who passed records on.

~ THE CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ATLAS ~

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE IN SOME WAY TO THIS IMPORTANT PROJECT

~ SEE PAGE 28 FOR DETAILS ~

RUMOURS... RUMOURS...

*Whilst sitting in the hide at Rostherne recently, on a rather misty day, a birding colleague suddenly declared, "Aren't penguins getting smaller these days". Was she looking at the Cormorants, the gulls, the ducks, or what? I turned to see where her 'scope was pointing to find she was looking at her biscuit!

Society Spotlight

If you would like to see your group or society under the spotlight, send in all relevant information, including how you started, specific aims and any other interesting snippets! Ed.

SOUTH MANCHESTER RINGING GROUP JOIN US!

In the last couple of years we have had a number of long-standing ringers retire or move to other areas and so we are seeking to restore our membership.

We are able to take on a small number of new trainees to learn the skill of bird ringing to serve an 'apprenticeship' with a qualified trainer. We operate in the South Manchester and Cheshire area as part of the national scheme run by the British Trust for Ornithology which describes ringing as "both an art and a science".

You might like to look at the relevant page on the BTO web site:

<http://www.bto.org/ringing/ringinfo/become-a-ringer.htm>

Please let us know if you are interested. Subject to a minimum age of 16 (the younger the better!).

Contact: Clive Richards on 01625 524527

RSPB CELEBRATES 25 YEARS ON THE DEE ESTUARY

Back in 1979, the Society purchased Gayton Sands, creating a major wildfowl and wader sanctuary on this important estuary. Since then, further land has been bought and management agreements made on both the English and Welsh sides of the estuary, resulting in a total reserve area of 5,415 hectares dedicated to safeguarding the future of some of our most special birds.

The Society has planned, with its partners, a packed programme of events to celebrate this important milestone, from the opportunity to watch wildlife spectacles such as high tide birdwatching and raptor watching at Parkgate to a variety of social events.

The RSPB has a number of active local groups that will be organising a variety of walks, talks and activities, with something for everyone, so why not get involved?

Contact your nearest group below for more details:

RSPB Chester Group - contact Bernard on 01829 782 243

RSPB North Cheshire Group - contact Cliff on 01925 817 874

RSPB Liverpool Group - contact Chris on 0151 480 7938

RSPB North Wales Group - contact Maureen on 01492 547 768

RSPB Wirral Group - contact Martyn on 0151 342 7813 / 648 4371

Copies of the *Birdwatching Diary 2004* are available from:

Inner Marsh Farm RSPB Reserve and the Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre at Thurston, or from the following web site: <http://www.deeestuary.freeserve.co.uk/highbird.htm>

BTO HANSON BUSINESS CHALLENGE

2004 heralds the start of the new BTO Hanson Business Challenge. Moore Nature Reserve and Arpley Landfill Site have been entered into the biennial challenge in the restoration category. In the 2002 challenge we came second in our category for number of bird species, and won first prize for our community involvement. This year we would like to repeat the success, and so I would ask everybody to keep their eyes peeled when around the reserve and the tip. Please let me know of any sightings, and thank you to those of you already posting sightings on the web site.

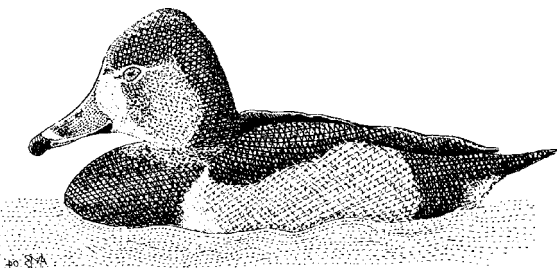
Our performance in the last BTO challenge created a lot of good publicity for the reserve, and hopefully we can repeat that success and win another award.

**Paul Cassidy, Warden, Moore Nature Reserve and Arpley Landfill Site,
Forrest Way, Sankey Bridge, Warrington, WA4 6YZ Tel: 01925 444689**

County Rarities

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

The so-called less rare *Aythya* ducks used to have a bit of mystery attached to their identification, but most of that seems to have vanished over the years with regular occurrences (often of returning individuals). However, whilst records of Ring-necked Duck now seem regular, Ferruginous Duck seems to have reverted back to being a rare species in the true sense of the word. Ring-necked Duck brings back some fond



memories for me, it was one of the first birds I twitched on my own, from London, down to Slapton Ley in April 1970, via a mini-bus full of nuns and some guy selling cattle stunning equipment!

When I got there, I remember scanning the water thinking a male Ring-necked Duck would stand out easily, I was disappointed; it took two hours to finally locate the bird, asleep with one of the several large rafts of Tufted Ducks on the water. Of course, when the bird started to move about, wing stretch, etc. the features became more obvious, and the general jizz of a squatter-bodied shape, emphasised by a long tail and long bill, and peaked back to the head, looked very different from Tufted Duck. This was an adult male, so it showed the black upperparts, head and breast, that neat white patch in front of grey flanks, an obvious grey wing bar, against the white one on Tufted Duck, and, not surprisingly, a dark grey bill, with a black tip and white sub-terminal band. So where you could class male Tufted Duck as a “black and white” duck, a male Ring-necked is much more “black and grey”. In eclipse, from late June onwards, the ring round the bill of male Ring-necked almost goes, and everything goes browner on the upperparts and the flanks become muddy brown, too. However, that head shape remains, and the bill and tail always look longer than Tufted Duck. This is also true for females and first year birds, although in some, the head shape is less distinctive.

Adult females look more like female Pochards rather than the bland female Tufted Ducks, with a neat capped appearance, made up of a dark crown, buffy lores and throat, along with a pale eye ring often with a thin white line running back across the face. Female Ring-necked Ducks also have a Scaup like pale patch at the base of the grey bill, which also shows that black tip and white sub-terminal band. As females move into eclipse, the plumage gets duller brown, and they end up looking like juveniles do. By late autumn, most 1st year males have got some of that black and grey effect to their plumage, but they remain easy to confuse with Tufted Duck, as the crown can be quite flat, and you need to go for that combination of long billed, long tailed effect (often cocked) to clinch an ID here.

Clearly, the escape potential will always cloud some records, and you also need to rule out hybrids, since this seems legendary amongst *Aythya* species for some reason. I always feel hybrid ducks show some of each parent well, a sort of half and half effect, so if some key Ring-necked duck features just are not showing, it probably isn't one!

Hugh Pulsford

Comment

The statement in the 2001 *Bird Report* is, in my view, misleading. It indicates that the record at Marbury CP of a male on Apr 10th and 11th constituted the twelfth record for Cheshire and Wirral. A review of the BBRC, and from 1994, the CAWOS Rarities Team, *accepted* records, tells a different story; all refer to males.

The first record was of a bird at Rode Pool from May 1st–7th 1978. It was accepted by BBRC after the 1980 record from Billinge Green on June 1st–8th had been published. There was then one recorded from Frodsham Marsh in 1983 from Oct 30th–Dec 24th. In 1984, there were birds claimed

at Woolston Eyes from May 26th until Aug 28th (and again on Sep 16th) and at Frodsham Marsh on Aug 31st. The latter was, however, not accepted by BBRC. So the total to this point was four birds.

In 1985, Woolston Eyes had a bird from Jun 25th until Jul 30th and there was another sighting at Frodsham Marsh from Aug 22nd—24th. These would probably relate to the same bird and so would be the fifth county record. The following year, in 1986, Woolston again had a Ring-necked Duck, thought to be the returning bird from 1985, from Jun 14th—Sep 14th. Another bird, at Fiddler's Ferry from Aug—Sep, was possibly never submitted and so not accepted. Still only five birds.

The last BBRC accepted record was in 1991 from Woolston Eyes from Feb 5th—8th. This was down in the *Bird Report* as a 1st w male, but not published as such in *British Birds*. With another male from there in 1994 from June 10th—12th, could these relate to a regularly returning bird to the reserve? If the age of the 1991 bird was not established fully, the total could still only be five birds up to this point (or is it six or seven?). The same comment applies to the next record, in 1996 on Nov 10th, of a bird on the River Dee at Eccleston, submitted as a 1st w bird - or was it an adult female or an eclipse adult? Possibly the eighth record. In 2001, there was the bird at Marbury CP from Apr 10th—11th. An adult male. Was it the sixth or ninth record?

So it isn't, in my opinion, twelve, but what it actually is isn't clear. It all hinges on the ages of two birds and the ageing and sexing of this species isn't especially easy unless you are looking at an adult male. We can re-look at the 1996 record and hopefully the 1991 record with a view to the above. This Nearctic species of duck is surprisingly rare in the county considering our geographical position and the fact that BBRC took them off their rarities list because they were so common. And why haven't we recorded any females? Comments from the observers are welcome.

Tony Broome

RARITIES SECRETARY

We are sad to say that, due to his main interest moving away from birding, Dave Walters has resigned as CAWOS Rarities Secretary - a position he has held for the last two years. During that period he made a significant contribution to the Rarities Team. As well as being a full member of the decision-making process, he brought in new working practices to enable the efficient follow-up, cataloguing and referencing of county rarities.

However, we are pleased to announce that Howard Fearn has agreed to take over the position of Rarities Secretary. We hope he 'enjoys' carrying out this important role, and manages to keep the team organised, a challenge in itself! He will also bring a great deal of expertise with him, having been birding since he was eight (starting around Rostherne). He's travelled extensively as well, including several years spent in Cape May, USA, so there are very few species on the British List that he hasn't seen somewhere in the world. From now on, please send Rarity Forms to:

Howard Fearn, 37 Ollershaw Lane, Marston, Northwich, CW9 6ES
Tel: 01606 330358 E-mail: howardfearn@cawos.org

2003 BIRD RECORDS

Please submit your 2003 bird sightings as soon as possible!

We prefer to receive records in an electronic format, via e-mail or on a floppy disc, if at all possible. This reduces our workload and also the possibility of errors with manual input.

The preferred format is a spreadsheet (or table) with the minimum column headings of: Date, Species, Site, Number, plus Comments for extra detail or to put the record in context.

If you are at all unsure how to send in your records please get in touch - a few minutes on the phone could save both you and us a great deal of time!

E-mail electronic records to: submissions@cawos.org

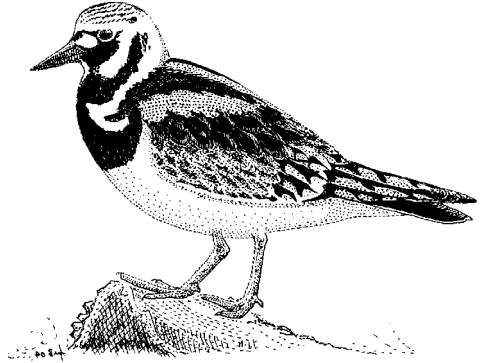
Send paper records to: Phil Oddy, 4 Swan Close, Poynton, Cheshire, SK12 1HX.

For advice contact: Sheila Blamire tel: 01565 830168 e-mail: sheilablamire@cawos.org

Species Spotlight

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

There is no more enigmatic species of wader than the Turnstone. It is very aptly named - after its habit of turning stones to look for invertebrates, which live under and between rocks on the coastlines of Britain. It is an extremely attractive species of wader with short, bright orange legs ideal for scrabbling around on seaweed covered rocks, short stubby bill - perfectly suited for turning stones, and brightly marked upperparts giving the Turnstone its new name - 'Ruddy Turnstone'. In summer its black mask stands out more and it is a very beautiful bird indeed.



Turnstones winter on and around Hilbre which, along with Middle Eye, is ideally suited to the Turnstone's needs with plenty of rocky shoreline for feeding. To say that Turnstones only winter on Hilbre is actually incorrect. They leave Hilbre in April/early May heading northwards to their breeding grounds in Greenland and Arctic Canada and adults begin to return in July (three of our colour-ringed birds from previous years were spotted on 11th August this year), with young birds following on. So they only spend about two months of the year away from Hilbre. Some years the only month of the year you don't see Turnstones around Hilbre is June.

Between August and April they can be found all around Hilbre and Middle Eye, but the favoured localities are along the east side of either island and at the north end of Hilbre.

On Hilbre the Bird Observatory has been ringing Turnstones around the island since 1957. This is done in the hope that the bird, if it has been fitted with a colour ring sequence, will be identified if seen elsewhere; if the bird has been fitted with a BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) ring, then it can be specifically identified if recaptured or, unfortunately, found dead.

The reason we believe that Hilbre's Turnstones are from Greenland and/or Arctic Canada is that we have caught a bird that had been ringed in Iceland and we have also had a recovery of one of our birds, also in Iceland. The first was ringed at Midnes in south-west Iceland on 26th May 1957 and was trapped on Hilbre on 6th December the same year. The second was ringed on Hilbre on 30th August 1964 and was recaptured at Snaefellsnes, Iceland, on 18th May 1972, presumably on its way to its breeding grounds.

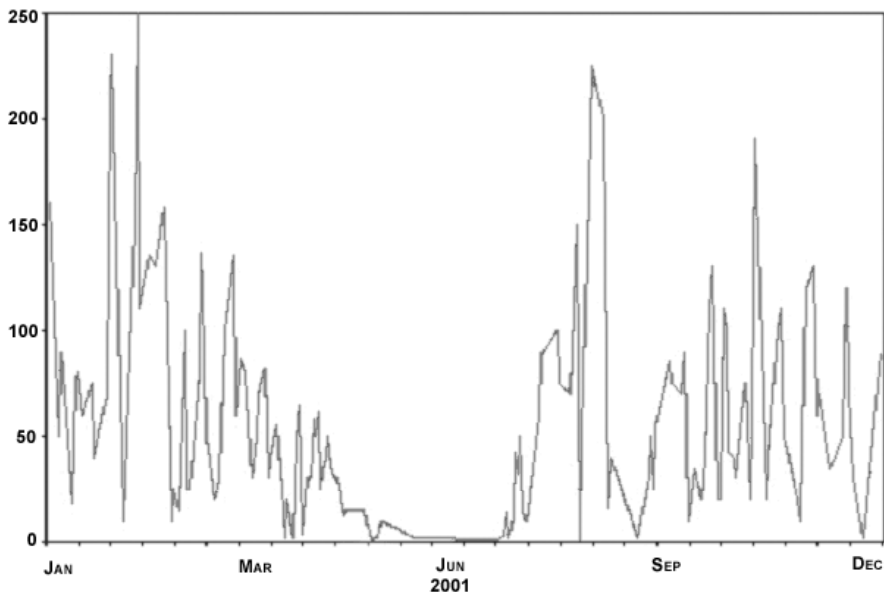
Turnstones do not breed in Iceland, but pass through on their way north to, or south from, their breeding grounds in Greenland and Canada. Furthermore, one of our colour-ringed birds was spotted at Seaforth Nature Reserve - not that far you might think! But it was accompanying another colour-ringed bird that had been ringed in Canada!

Hilbre Bird Observatory also had the first foreign recovery of a British-ringed Purple Sandpiper in Greenland, way back in 1964; perhaps another indication of breeding areas of some of our wintering rocky coastline waders.

Turnstones also breed in Fenno-Scandinavia and east to Russia, but it has been found through ringing that those birds winter in north and west Africa. Some of these birds however, pass down the east coast of Britain (as you might expect), but some have been recorded on the west coast as well.

The best places to look for Turnstones in the Dee estuary are at Hilbre itself, but also around the Marine Lake at West Kirby and any rocky outcrop along the north Wirral coast - such as Dove Point (Meols) or Fort Perch Rock (New Brighton).

The graph shows the daily counts of Turnstones made by Hilbre Bird Observatory during 2001. The figures are clearly affected by high tides, in other words when there is a large tide Turnstones congregate on Hilbre, which also makes them easier to count, as they tend



to roost over the tide in one place. The histogram clearly shows the month of June being the only true quiet month.

At Hilbre Bird Observatory and Ringing Station, we look forward to our next recovery of a Hilbre ringed Turnstone; perhaps it will be from Canada.

Please report your sightings of any colour-ringed waders at Hilbre to the Bird Observatory or via e-mail. Also visit our web site at: www.hilbrebirdobs.co.uk

Steve Williams, Hilbre Bird Observatory. E-mail: steve@hilbrebirdobs.fsnet.co.uk

Check out the web cam sited on Hilbre at <http://coastobs.pol.ac.uk/cobs/webcam/> Ed.



COLLARED GREYLAG GEESE

As part of a project to measure potential exposure of geese to agricultural pesticides, the Wildlife Ecotoxicology Team at the Central Science Laboratory in York, have fitted orange, lettered collars to a number of Greylag Geese. Some of the collars also contain radio transmitters. So far we've been working mainly in the Ripon area, but we plan to work elsewhere as well later on.

We are collecting data on where exactly the geese spend their time, and measuring how much of their time they spend on arable farmland, where they could be exposed to pesticides used there. The data we collect will be used by the UK Pesticide Safety Directorate to improve methods of pesticide risk assessment. Our data makes a real difference, which filters down to what farmers use and how they use it.

If you notice collared Greylags in the course of birding, please let us know. We have set up a phone number you can call at any time to report sightings, which is 01904 462750. Please programme your mobile phone with this number and tell us about any sightings - this can save us lots of time searching for birds that have moved.

Don't assume that someone else has reported a bird - often everyone else is making the same assumption! In particular, just now we have lost track of AKC and AKD, so if you see either of these birds, we'll be particularly grateful!

If you'd like more information about this project, phone the 'goose hotline' number, or e-mail me privately. Thanks in advance for any sightings you phone us with!

**Phil Prosser, Field Biologist, Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York, YO41 1LZ
Tel: 01904 462750 E-mail: p.prosser@csl.gov.uk**

Projects and Surveys

BTO BREEDING BIRD SURVEY GOES ON-LINE



The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is now providing a wealth of information on the status of our birds. This simple but extremely effective survey involves only 2-3 visits to a 1km Ordnance Survey square at the start of the breeding season, to count and record all birds seen and heard. The results of the survey have been providing extensive data of bird populations and habitats throughout the country by over 2000 observers and all for around 4-6 hours in the field per year per observer.



British Trust for Ornithology

There is good coverage in Cheshire with over 40 sites being surveyed in 2003, however there are still plenty of additional squares available that need surveying. This data will make a large contribution towards us being able to continue to keep track of changes in the breeding numbers of 52 common and widespread species in the North-West region. However, coverage remains sparse in some parts of Cheshire and by increasing the number of sites surveyed, we will be able to monitor the fortunes of more bird species.

In a drive to make collection of data more cost effective and simple, the BBS is now available to surveyors on-line. As of 6th October 2003, BBS is therefore available via the new BBS home page, see www.bto.org/bbs. Essentially, for current and future observers this means that the system will be available for submitting the 2004 survey results.

The primary aims of the new BBS web pages and the BBS-Online applications are to:

- Enable BBS observers to submit their BBS data on-line using 'BBS-Online'.
 - To provide greater feedback to existing BBS observers and Regional Representatives.
 - To provide BBS results and information about the scheme to the wider public.
 - To recruit new BBS observers by appealing to a potentially new audience.
- Reduce paperwork and manual form checking work.

All the 2003 data have been entered manually as in previous years; however, the main promotional emphasis will be aimed at getting existing BBS observers to use BBS-Online in 2004 and beyond. For those without Internet facilities, however, all bird counts can still be submitted on the usual paper forms.

So how will the new system work? Firstly, Regional Representatives will still retain control over recruitment and allocation of BBS squares and will also send out recording forms to observers. Observers will still be able to submit records manually as per the current system, as well as electronically via BBS-Online. Consequently, the type and number of forms sent to observers will depend on how they propose to submit their records.

Existing observers will be contacted by their Regional Representative to determine the chosen method of recording and new volunteers will also have the choice.

To take part in BBS, you do not need to know the calls and songs of every breeding bird species in the UK. However, you do need to have a reasonably good knowledge of the calls and songs of most common and widespread breeding species, e.g. Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Willow Warbler, Great Tit, etc.

As part of the BTO's ongoing commitment towards training, we supply a free cassette to all new BBS volunteers, containing the songs and calls of the more difficult to identify species found in lowland Britain. A second cassette is given to volunteers who take on an upland square and concentrates on species typical of upland habitat.

For further information contact your Regional Representative or alternatively, if you are unsure of who to contact get in touch with myself or Mike Raven at the BTO in Thetford (01842 750050).

**Paul Miller, BTO Regional Representative Mid-Cheshire. Tel: 01928 787535
E-mail: huntershill@worldonline.co.uk**

THE PEAK BIRDS PROJECT 2002 2007

CAWOS members have contributed to a variety of moorland bird surveys over the past two decades, most recently participating in the breeding wader census of 2002. The bigger picture is now emerging: a six year project, co-led by the RSPB and the Peak Park, aiming to improve the prospects for specialist breeding birds of the south Pennines, most notably Lapwing and Twite.

The efforts of the relevant statutory and voluntary bodies are being co-ordinated, along with over 200 local farmers and landowners, who are responding to the call by entering over 500 ha of farmland into beneficial, DEFRA-funded agri-environment schemes. Results of these and numerous other land management experiments were summarised at a meeting of interested parties at the Park's Bakewell headquarters in late October.

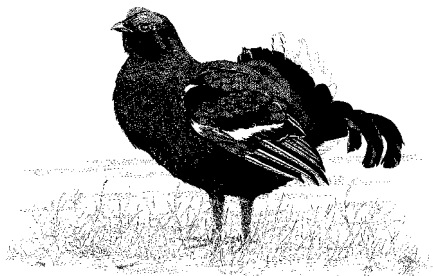
The situation for upland birds overall is very dynamic: some species doing well whilst others continue to experience declines, some lamentable habitat loss and some remarkable habitat re-creation. Recent trends can be crudely summarised as: predators thriving, waders holding their own, passerines suffering.

Much effort so far has been focused on Lapwing. This is the species that farmers seem most willing to help, and the RSPB has been most successful in targeting efforts in areas where small populations continue to breed. Local increases have been achieved by encouraging the retention of spring-sown cereals, controlling invasive soft rush on pastures, and by creating muddy scrapes and small pools in wet grassland by using diggers and by blocking strategic drains/ditches. The interest of the farming community is demonstrated by the fact that 140 of them attended a training day on the Staffordshire moors this autumn.

For Curlew the importance of hay meadows is well recognised, and all agencies are striving to encourage their retention/creation wherever possible (although the loss of them has been catastrophic in recent decades). Curlew and Golden Plover populations would appear to be fairly stable in the Peak District. Snipe are remarkably numerous in their (now few) favoured areas. Common Sandpipers cling on precariously.

There is much concern for specialised passerines, especially Twite and Ring Ouzel. Now almost certainly extinct in Cheshire, Twite have declined so much that desperate measures are being employed, with some success: certain south Pennine populations are being artificially fed with wild bird seed in an attempt to counter the effects of hay meadow losses. Ring Ouzels have suddenly become alarmingly scarce but may be recovering slightly again on the Cheshire fringes (one or two are even overwintering!). The RSPB is working with climbing organisations at Stanage Edge to try to reduce inevitable disturbance there. We have also lost our Whinchats in Cheshire but they are apparently increasing in other parts of the Peak. Their place, in a sense, is being taken by Stonechats, which appear to be establishing a breeding foothold.

Buzzards, Peregrines and Ravens continue to increase, whilst Goshawks, Merlins and Short-eared Owls are apparently stable. Even Hen Harriers made an attempt to breed again in the Goyt in 2003. This is not necessarily all good news, as predation of other desirable species is correspondingly increased, Buzzards regularly taking wader chicks and Goshawks reportedly accounting for young Black Grouse. Yes —they're back... but somewhat controversially. A failed experimental release in Cheshire has been followed by a bigger, more considered programme of re-introduction of Black Grouse to the Upper Derwent Valley by Severn Trent Water this autumn. Not fully endorsed by the RSPB, this experiment nevertheless has the potential to establish a new population in an area considered by many to be capable of sustaining it.



I have been studying Cheshire's moorland birds for 25 years. Despite the losses, for example Dunlin, the general declines and the habitat degradation during that time, I feel there is now genuine cause for some optimism. Why? The landowners themselves are now beginning to act: habitat creation on farms, moorland restoration and species re-introductions. Above all, partnership and co-operation between them and the conservationists is bringing tangible benefits.

R H Blindell, 5 Bash Vale, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 2HF

FACTS AND FIGURES ON FEEDING BIRDS

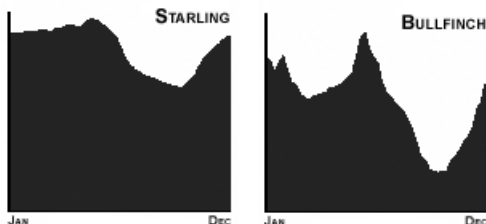
The following figures from the BTO's all-year Garden BirdWatch provide interesting information.

Seasonal Trends

Information gathered by over 16,000 people involved in the BTO's all-year Garden BirdWatch shows that different species rely on gardens at different times of the year.

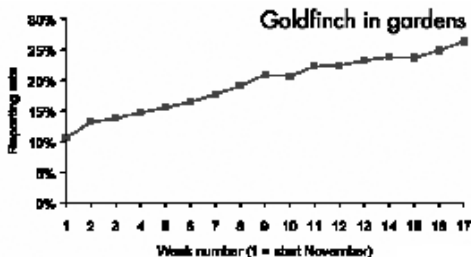
Many **Starlings** move out of gardens in the late summer, to feed in fields, in hedgerows or on waste ground. In November they return.

For **Bullfinches**, peak numbers occur in the summertime, when adult birds are feeding nestlings.



Goldfinches benefit from garden feeding

Goldfinch numbers in gardens have increased dramatically in the last 30 years as birds have learned to take advantage of newly-developed foods, such as niger seed and sunflower hearts. The Goldfinch has recently been taken off the amber list of species of conservation concern — which is excellent news.



From field to garden

Looking at information from farms and gardens it looks as if Goldfinches and other finches and buntings move into gardens as winter progresses and they run out of food in the countryside. This is based on information from BTO data (Winter Farmland Bird Survey and Garden BirdWatch) and is taken from the *BTO/CJ Garden BirdWatch Book* by Mike Toms, which was published by BTO in November for £9.99. Alternatively, join Garden BirdWatch for £12 per annum and you will get the book free.

Local birds

What are the most common birds in gardens in your area? To find out simply go to: www.postcodebirds.bto.org

HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY

Please take part in this year's survey -
encourage your friends and neighbours as well!

Contact: Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF
Tel: 01925 264251 E-mail: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com

Any information is welcome, e.g. numbers, breeding success (or not!), anecdotes, etc.

BREEDING WOODCOCK IN EAST CHESHIRE

BTO/Game Conservancy Trust Breeding Woodcock Survey 2003

Paul Miller's article in the October 2003 issue of *Bird News* painted a rather depressing picture of the breeding status of Woodcock in Cheshire. Other observers who participated in the survey elsewhere in the county had similar negative results. So it is pleasing to be able to report some good news from the east of the county, namely Macclesfield Forest. Those CAWOS members who are familiar with the forest will know that Woodcock are regularly seen roding over the tracks on spring and summer evenings.

The BTO allocated a square to me on the northern edge of Macclesfield Forest, to the east of Tegg's Nose. The observation point chosen was a clearing at the intersection of two footpaths which permitted a 360° view and a clear view of the sky. The first survey visit was carried out on 7th May starting a quarter of an hour before sunset at 20.33 hours. The evening was dry, with a light wind and variable cloud cover. Initially, I thought that I too was going to be out of luck, as I stood around for 24 minutes, being eaten by midges, with neither sight nor sound of a Woodcock. Then at 20.57 hours a Woodcock appeared from the south and circled the clearing heading north-west. By 21.33 hours I had recorded a total of seven fly-pasts, the birds croaking and whistling as they flew over, silhouetted against the night sky. As I walked back down the track, a distance of approximately one kilometre, two further fly-pasts were noted, the last of these being at 21.48 hours only 50 metres from my car. The thought went through my mind that perhaps I could have saved my legs, and conducted the survey from the lay-by!

I returned to the same location on 3rd June, this time armed with a plentiful supply of Jungle Formula insect repellent. With the lengthening days the survey was conducted from 21.14 to 22.14 hours. On this occasion I only had to wait one minute and two Woodcock flew across the clearing one behind the other. Again, a total of seven fly-pasts were recorded at the observation point and during my return walk to the car a further three fly-pasts, with the last of these at 22.36 hours, a bird heard over the lay-by. During the final survey visit on 17th June, a total of five fly-pasts were logged over the one hour recording period, from 21.25—22.25 hours. On the walk back to my car a bird was heard roding at 22.35 hours, on the edge of the forest.

Macclesfield Forest appears to provide ideal habitat, being a water catchment area for Ridgigate and Trentabank reservoirs. There are numerous streams running down off the surrounding hills, which in places create boggy conditions amongst the trees, ideal for feeding. United Utilities have been opening up significant areas, creating new clearings and thinning the more mature stands where the canopy had closed. This has encouraged the growth of understorey such as brambles, bracken and nettles.

Paul Miller mentioned disturbance as a possible reason for the absence of Woodcock in Delamere Forest. Anyone who visits Macclesfield Forest at the weekend will know that the area is extremely popular with cyclists and walkers, many accompanied by dogs. During the habitat recording visit one early afternoon a total of 14 cyclists rode past my observation point in the space of 50 minutes! However, as most people keep to the footpaths, and there are significant blocks of forest with no public access, the birds may remain relatively undisturbed.

Successful breeding certainly took place in 2001, when on 7th August I saw two juvenile birds in the southern half of the forest, with an adult close by. The young were approximately ¾ of the adult's size with short bills and they walked away through the trees.

Woodcock are present in all of the one kilometre squares and a visit to Nessit Hill on 25th June 2003 indicated that the birds are equally numerous in the southern sector. During a one and a half hour watch from 21.00 to 22.30 hours I recorded eight fly pasts, including two birds together. It is difficult to estimate the number of birds breeding in Macclesfield Forest, especially as Woodcock have a polygynous mating system. Older dominant males rode for the longest period and may mate with up to four females in a season.

**Steve Atkins, 33 Kings Grove, Rochdale, Lancashire, OL12 9HR. Tel: 01706 645097
E-mail: steveatkins@tiscali.co.uk**

References:

BTO News Number 244, January - February 2003: 15
British Birds Volume 88, December 1995: 578 - 592

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.

50 YEARS OF CHESHIRE BIRDING

In December 2004 I shall have been a Cheshire birder for 50 years. Besides making me feel old this fact has caused me to reflect on the many changes that have taken place during that time in the Cheshire birding world.

I decided to take up birdwatching (no birding or twitching then), when living on the Wirral, around Christmas 1954. This was primarily because I was bored during the school holidays. An older friend, Dave Ebbutt, was a keen birdwatcher. He kept a diary of all his interesting sightings. As I was of rather a studious nature this impressed me so I decided to take up this hobby. My father bought me the *Observer's Book of British Birds* and I started straight away. I should say that when I started I didn't know a Blackbird from a Song Thrush.

On my very first day in the field, as a newly fledged birdwatcher, I went with a friend and my father's 8x30 Dollands binoculars to Meols promenade at high tide. There we met Dave Ebbutt who was watching a Great Northern Diver! On my first day's birdwatching therefore, I saw a bird as rare as this before I had sorted out the common garden birds. Dave said I would wish that I had seen this bird later on when I had been birdwatching for much longer. He was right as it was many years before I saw another one.

On my following birthday I received the Peterson Mountford Hollom *Birds of Britain and Europe* which was the cutting edge of identification at that time. I also acquired the first three James Fisher's *Bird Recognition* series. I still refer occasionally to these excellent Penguin books with their very useful pie charts of a bird's year. The final book in the series covering the small passerines was never published which is a pity.

I also had James Fisher's *Watching Birds* and Bruce Campbell's *Birdwatching for Beginners*, both of which contained a lot of useful tips for novice birdwatchers. James Fisher's complex system of card indexes was right up my street. Unfortunately, I never really got the hang of it despite thinking that all birdwatchers kept such complex systems of records. However, I did learn to record all interesting sightings and I have kept records of these from 1954 to the present date.

This habit of note taking and submission of records at the year end to the County Recorder appears to be dying out. I constantly meet good birders who do not send in records to the *Bird Report*, often because once in the past a record of theirs was rejected! This is a pity. A great many Cheshire records never see the light of day. The problem is reduced somewhat by the use of log books at prime sites such as Sandbach Flashes.

My father's Dollands were poor quality but they had to suffice for several years before I progressed to East German Zeiss Dekarem 10x50. I thought these were sheer luxury. Today I use Leica bins and scope and birding seems much easier now than it was then. In the '50s I wished for a scope but never obtained one for years. One or two of my friends had the large brass draw tube types that you had to lie down to use if you were in a field, supporting the end on your feet. If you were lucky there might be a tree or wall handy. Tripods were unheard of.

We watched our local patch on the Wirral shore, Meols fields, Red Rocks, West Kirby Marine Lake, etc. We occasionally ventured a little further afield on our bikes or the bus to places such as Parkgate or Burton. This was to see rarities like Glaucous Gull or Bewick's Swan. On one occasion with three friends I was cut off by a high tide at Parkgate and almost drowned as I could not swim at that time. It was a lesson in how quickly the tide overflows the gutters. We had ventured out on to the marsh to some upturned boats with the intention of supporting our scope on these for a better view. It was a very wet bus ride home to face an irate father who had to spend hard earned cash on repairing his bins following their immersion.

There were of course no birdlines or pagers. Information was passed mouth to mouth or, if you were lucky and had a phone at home, occasionally by that method. The best source of information was the late Eric Hardy's weekly column in the *Daily Post*. One read this and if he reported something interesting and if it was likely to still be around one went to try and see it. A good example was the Rough-legged Buzzard that was present in New Brighton for several weeks in November 1955. I well remember walking from Meols to New Brighton to see this bird.

Apart from Eric Hardy the other major Cheshire birdwatchers were Dr Raines and A W Boyd. The latter was famous for his column in the *Manchester Guardian*. I remember meeting him at Red Rocks not long before his death.

Local societies were thin on the ground and were mainly general natural history societies rather than exclusively for birds. The main one covering the Wirral was the Merseyside Naturalists' Association run by Eric Hardy. At that time it produced an interesting annual report covering the whole of the north-west. The national societies, RSPB and BTO, existed but only with a fraction of today's membership. There was also a society, BENA (British Empire Naturalist Association). This body is long gone and probably only remembered now by a few. It is interesting that their main interest was phenology (the study of the times of recurring natural phenomena), which has recently returned to fashion with global warming and its associated likely changes to wildlife behaviour. The Woodland Trust is at present running a survey of the changing times each year of events such as the arrival of Swallows etc.

For most of my birding life, firstly on the Wirral and later in the Macclesfield area, I have been strictly a local patch birder with no interest at all in twitching unless a rarity dropped in close to home. That changed to some extent following retirement in 1994 when I started to make a point of trying to see the rarer traditional British birds from the Observer's book such as Wryneck, Hoopoe, Great Grey Shrike and Firecrest that I had never seen in 40 years of local patching.

I still retain an aversion to twitching extreme rarities. I would prefer to see a species locally as rare as Firecrest rather than a mega rarity such as Black Lark. Indeed, in connection with that latter species in 2003 I delayed a trip to South Stack to avoid the massed ranks of scopes. I wanted to see the Choughs and auks which are of far more interest to me. I fully agree with David Norman's description of rarities as lost birds!

I have had three main local patches over the years: Betley Mere, Danes Moss and Redesmere. My present birding consists of weekly visits to Redesmere and Sandbach Flashes together with occasional visits to the eastern hills. Also, I regularly visit my old haunts on the Wirral.

As I said earlier with modern equipment, bird lines, pagers and the wide variety of excellent field guides now available, birding is certainly easier than it was 50 years ago. I have to say I enjoy it as much now as I did then.

Alan Booth, 160 Gawsorth Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 8UQ

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, current issues, and other such matters. Here are some topics from the last few months:

LEACH'S PETRELS - DOUBLE COUNTING

I was at New Brighton this morning, 7th October 2003, watching Leach's Petrels with the assembled masses. As usual there was much discussion about just how many petrels were in the river mouth. We were all agreed that many of the birds were making good headway out of the river but would then allow themselves to be quickly blown back upriver. This habit would easily lead to double counting if you failed to note birds being rapidly blown back upriver. I never had more than four birds in view at any one time and doubt that there were more than eight individuals recorded in the river mouth between 7:30am and 11:00am.

How reliable do some of the Wirral regulars feel the Leach's Petrel counts are? I suspect the problem is more likely to be a real issue in the river mouths where birds could easily circulate unseen rather than along the coastal edge where the passage is less 'trapped' in a funnel.

Jeff Clarke

Trust the counts from Hilbre, Hoylake and Meols/Leasowe - those birds are moving out and almost never come back. The ones in the Mersey are almost invariably circulating. The other day, I think Hilbre recorded 29, I got 22 (not a continuous watch) and Point of Ayr recorded 27. That said, there have been years where it appears that they do go back for another go, but in general the easterly passage is too far out to see it.

Another interesting point - I have lost count of the number of times I have seen people get excited when they see a Leach's flying with the wind as opposed to against it. The rumps vanish and they look bigger and more shearwater-like!

Jane Turner

HEN HARRIERS

I have had two Hen Harriers, an adult male and an immature male, come in off the sea in the last week [posted 20th October 2003] and Hilbre has had a few records, including three in one day. It's tempting to think that some of the breeding success on the Isle of Man (122 pairs) is leading to overcrowding over there and we are getting the fallout. I went over there in the summer for the Southern Grey Shrike and was amazed to see Hen Harriers acting like Sparrowhawks - crashing through suburban garden hedges. Significantly, there is no grouse shooting on the Isle of Man and a Red Grouse population of about 50 pairs.

Jane Turner

Report of six Hen Harriers coming in to roost at Parkgate on Friday night, 24th October 2003, but possible (probable??) double counting. RSPB reckon there are four around.

Richard Smith

Hilbre has had records of five birds including three on one day and the other two were in off the sea. Pete Williams also suggested they were from IOM - being ever cautious I speculated whether it involved some of the same birds but it appears not. But it is fantastic (whether four or six) to get them back in reasonable numbers wintering on the Dee - wonderful birds.

Steve Williams

I've checked the Falsterbo [Sweden] web site for October and they have not had any exceptional numbers of Hen Harriers passing through, so this may suggest that the improved numbers locally this autumn do not have a Scandinavian origin. Mind you, as a broad front migrant, perhaps numbers on the east coast might be a better indication of any Continental influx.

Jeff Clarke

A PLAGUE OF PHEASANTS

In reply to Gordon Hodgson's query about tame Pheasants in *Bird News* October 2003, last winter we had about 25, with around 17 regularly on view in the garden. This is not too surprising, since we're right in the middle of Pheasant country, unlike the situation that Gordon described. We are surrounded by pastureland, with a wood across the track. Apart from next door, there is no house within 200 yards. We have no fences, only hedges, so the Pheasants can wander in at will.

They've reached an uneasy truce with our cats and are as tame as domestic poultry, but less inclined to panic. They only fly if severely pressed; being hit with a lump of soil has no effect - the best action is to swish an eight foot cane or to run at them. Garden damage includes eating wallflower shoots, pecking daffodil buds, and so on; one spot under my neighbour's seed feeder - a naturally wet area due to a small spring - looked like a poultry run with half the grass scratched away. I've had to stop scattering seed on the lawn —the Pheasants mop it up in no time.

As regards control, last winter's shooting parties had no real effect. The locals believe that the birds are sitting tight or walking, rather than flying, and the dogs are not good enough to flush them out. Now, in mid-November, we're up to three males and five or six females at once, and, unless this winter's shooting is more effective than last year, we'll be plagued again.

As compensation, the garden regulars include Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Tree Sparrow and a good range of woodland birds, with Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Tawny Owl occasionally perching on the higher trees. Two fields away, with the 'scope, perched Little Owl is almost guaranteed when the leaves have fallen.

Alan Straw, Corda Well Cottage, Newbold Astbury, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 3NJ

TIMING OF AUTUMN MIGRATION

The information published in *Bird News* 60 (October 2003) 'Recent Reports' includes the first Sedge Warbler of the 'autumn' that occurred on Hilbre Island on 30th August, with the note that "for some birders 'autumn' passage starts very early with the first returning warblers or flycatchers. Such early birds may be failed or non-breeding birds or individuals which have not been able to complete their migratory journey". Several parts of this note struck me as odd.

30th August is described as if it is an early date for Sedge Warbler but in fact this is already quite late for a Sedge Warbler in Cheshire. To back up this statement with some figures, I have looked up my ringing totals for the last 23 years in Cheshire at a variety of breeding and autumn passage sites for *Acrocephalus* warblers. I have ringed 1781 Sedge Warblers in autumn, 653 of them in July, 947 in August and 176 in September. Of these only 44 were later than 7th September. Assuming that my figures are representative, these data show that at least 90% of Sedge Warblers have left Cheshire by the end of August, and nearly 98% of them have gone by the end of the first week of September.

These figures do not distinguish between adult and first-year birds. For species like the Sedge Warbler, which fly to Africa to undertake their post-breeding moult, the adults leave the area very early, as soon as their young are independent, and usually migrate before the first-years. All of the 'late' birds are first-years, and indeed I have only ever handled two adult Sedge Warblers in Cheshire after 24th August, one on 29th August and the latest ever on 2nd September.

Of course, it can be argued that the date on which a bird was ringed in Cheshire does not necessarily tell us when it left this area, but, with the intensive ringing effort in Cheshire reed-beds and wetlands, if they had stayed around, many of these birds would have been retrapped. Further, we have direct evidence for the speed and timing of Sedge Warblers' southward movement from ringed birds that have been reported from elsewhere. A quick scan through the 'Ringing Reports' in the last 10 years (1992-2001) of *Cheshire and Wirral Bird Reports* shows twenty published records of Cheshire-ringed Sedge Warblers caught by ringers farther south during the same autumn in which they were ringed here. One had reached Sussex by 21st July, 13 were in southern England during August (seven of these being in the first week of August, two in the second week and two in the third week with the latest two in Avon on 22nd August and in Dorset on 27th August), and six were in France on dates between 6th and 29th August. Thus, all 20 of these birds were from 200 to 900 km south of here before 30th August, the date this year of the first of the autumn on Hilbre. As it happens, all of these 20 birds were ringed here in their first year, so none of these is a 'failed or non-breeding bird' but all of them are products of successful breeding during the year. One was especially informative as it was ringed as a chick in its nest at Woolston on 14th June and retrapped on the Sussex coast on 3rd August, showing again how early our locally-bred birds can leave.

The note appended to the October 'Recent Reports' states that "for some birders 'autumn' passage starts very early ...". Clearly, southward passage in August is not just for some birders, it is for some birds; indeed as the figures in this letter show, it is not just for 'some' birds but in fact it is for the vast majority of birds. And these birds are carrying out their annual cycle perfectly normally, and are not just 'failed or non-breeding birds or individuals which have not been able to complete their migratory journey'.

Although this letter has concentrated on Sedge Warblers, similar data are available and similar comments can be made about all of the common warblers breeding in Cheshire and Wirral.

Finally, since 'autumn' was included in inverted commas throughout that section of the October 'Recent Reports', perhaps it is worth pointing out that the human definition of seasons does not coincide well with birds' behaviour. Obviously there are exceptions, but to generalise, almost all birds breed during our spring, and by the start of summer (21st June) the majority of individuals have already finished breeding for the year. For the migrants, the post-breeding (autumn) migration starts soon after the young birds become independent of their parents, and almost all of them have left our area during our summer and long before the human calendars turn to autumn (21st September).

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

TIMING FOR AUTUMN MIGRATION REPLY

On reading David Norman's note above I concur with most of its contents. On the Hilbre Bird Observatory web site, the Recent Sightings page for August simply stated "The first Sedge Warbler of the autumn occurred on 30th [August]." 30th August is not an early date for an autumn arrival of Sedge Warbler at Hilbre, compare for example three birds on 31st July 1999. I would say early August is more typical for the first autumn bird but numbers are very small in the autumn at Hilbre where it is much more numerous in spring. Indeed some years we do not even get autumn records of Sedge Warbler (see for example 1998, 2000 and 2001 *Bird Reports*). It would be very interesting to know where Hilbre's Sedge Warblers originate from.

On the issue of 'autumn' migration the previous month's page [July] on our web site stated: "On the 25th the first returning Willow Warbler of the autumn (yes, autumn starts in July!) was followed by two more on 26th."

Steve Williams, Hilbre Bird Observatory

RESEARCH: BIRDS REVISITING FEEDERS

Have you ever wondered exactly how many birds visit your feeders in a day?

David Glue, in *The Garden Bird Book* (1982) states: "In one garden in Tring, not far from the BTO offices, a careful Garden Bird Feeding Survey count produced a maximum of nine Blue Tits at the feeding station at any one time during the week. Yet in a single day's catching a total of 148 different Blue Tits were ringed there. In fact, experienced bird ringers find that they typically catch ten times as many Blue Tits in a garden as are actually recorded there at any single moment. Greenfinches are even more misleading in this respect: in some gardens the largest winter flock recorded has been of about 40 birds, but more than 1000 individuals have been ringed there."

I had already heard the '10 times equation' for Blue Tits, but the second piece of information on Greenfinches I found both fascinating and 'food for thought'! Have any similar studies been carried out in Cheshire and Wirral? Also how's this for mind-blowing stats: "A ringer caught Greenfinches over a two month period in a garden in North Yorkshire. 288 were caught and ringed but no one had seen more than two at any one time (incidentally, he had a 50% re-trap rate on these birds)."

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

ANTING

Pete Hall, in his always-interesting 'View from the Farmyard' (*Bird News* 60, October 2003) wrote that he had noticed up to nine Magpies sharing a dust-bath but also apparently 'anting' in his stubble field. He wondered if that really was what they were doing, and also how common this practice is amongst birds.

Whenever I want to know the definitive answer on most things in ornithology, I turn to *A Dictionary of Birds*, edited by Bruce Campbell and Elizabeth Lack, published by Poyser in 1985. Sure enough, the Dictionary has a whole section on 'anting', written by the late Dr K. E. L. Simmons, an expert on bird behaviour who for many years, until his death in 2002, was a member of the *British Birds* 'Behaviour Notes Panel', and co-edited the first three volumes of *Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Much of the article is based on Simmons' lengthy paper 'A review of the anting behaviour of passerine birds', *British Birds* 50: 401-424 (1957).

Quoting from the Dictionary, anting is described as "a highly specialised, stereotyped behaviour of passerine birds, whereby certain areas of plumage are treated with the defence and other body fluids of worker ants ... which squirt formic acid". Up to 250 species of passerines, from 40 families, have been recorded anting, but no non-passerines. Birds ant mainly in two ways: directly, by applying ants in the bill to the feathers; and indirectly, by allowing ants to climb amongst their plumage. The direct method is far commoner, typical of babblers, starlings, tanagers and weavers. Birds anting in the indirect manner are mainly the larger species of thrushes and crows.

There is still controversy over the function of anting, and some birds eat the ants afterwards, but it seems to be mainly a form of 'comfort behaviour', a term that includes all sorts of maintenance activities including bathing, dust-bathing, sunning and even smoke-bathing. Anting may well help with feather maintenance, perhaps to combat feather ectoparasites or remove stale or excess lipids; formic acid is insecticidal. Most anting is reported during the period of the post-breeding

and juvenile moult, but it may be that this is just because it is the warmest time of year, when ants are most active and possibly swarming.

So, Pete Hall's acute observations seem to fit the usual pattern, with corvids, during their autumn moult period. The birds that he saw with apparently heavy parasite infestations around their head and neck would probably especially value a good insecticidal treatment.

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

EXCERPT FROM THE KOS WEB SITE (www.10X50.org)

This article by Knutsford Ornithological Society's first president, the late Bill Mulligan, was first published in the *Manchester Evening News* in May 1974.

COURTSHIP IN THE MUD

What brought a remarkable visit to Cheshire by 10 elegant Avocets? Picture the scene and imagine the tension. Committee members are meeting to discuss the business of the Manchester Ornithological Society when a whisper runs round the room - Avocets are at Sandbach. Quick calculations suggest that allowing an hour for the run into Cheshire there will still be half an hour of daylight in which to see the birds.

We find that the whisper is true. There are 10 beautiful Avocets feeding in the shallow waters or on the muddy banks of a Sandbach flash. Only once before in my recollection has the Avocet been recorded in this part of Cheshire, and that was a single bird which stayed only an hour or two some years ago. Now there are 10 - vividly white with strong black markings, long blue legs and a remarkable, steeply up-tilted bill which it uses to sieve out the tiny animal life in the shallow pools. Its elegant beauty is enshrined in the official emblem of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which is an Avocet.

What brought them here to this rather unlovely spot, where the muddy areas, nevertheless, are rich in the nutrients which wading birds love? The answer is almost certainly a capricious wind which caught them on migration and drifted them here. At this late hour, though the sky is darkening, the birds stand out clearly in the cold, grey light. They are strung out in pairs along the bank, feeding industriously in the dark waters. This is joy enough, but when several pairs begin to display to each other, leaping in the air and calling, the spectacle takes a dramatic turn, and raises wild speculation, for attached pairs engaging in courtship display means only one thing - Breeding. Yet who would dare to predict breeding in this busy place with traffic a major source of interference and other human activities very strong? Sadly it is more likely that very soon they will have gone. It's all a matter of luck.

Footnote:

Bill Mulligan

Last year (2002) Avocets finally bred for the first time in Cheshire in a habitat similar to that described by Bill at Sandbach, but minus the disturbance. Bill would have been delighted!

WOODCOCK OR A CLOCKWORK DOVE?

You go for years without ever clapping your eyes on a Woodcock on the ground and then just like buses you get three cracking views in three years. My latest was today [9th November 2003] at Clinton Wood in Widnes. I was just retrieving some Longworth traps after a mammal recording session when I heard a commotion a few inches from my hand. Up sprang a Woodcock, but instead of flying away it ambled away a few yards through the understory staying in full view. It's only when you watch Woodcock walking around that the similarity to a clockwork dove comes into your head. They look like they have been taking lessons from Charlie Chaplin; all they need is a cane and a top hat and the transformation is complete!

Jeff Clarke

HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY REPORT 2002

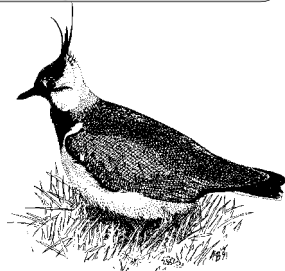
Yearly Summary, Systematic List, Ringing Report, Histograms, Charts and much, much more!

Available direct from the Hilbre Bird Observatory for just £3.00, or by post by sending your name, address and a cheque for £3.50 including p&p (payable to 'Hilbre Bird Observatory') to:

Hilbre Bird Observatory, c/o 129, Ennisdale Drive, West Kirby, Wirral, CH48 9UG

View from the Farmyard

The farmyard at Toft Hall Farm is of a fairly typical estate design, a U-shaped main block making three sides of the quadrangle and the fourth side being made by one side of the L-shaped stable block, detached enough from each other to allow access to the barn at one side and the main drive from the other. The U-shaped building houses the milking parlour, collecting yard, feed stores, potato loft and loose housing for cattle. Beyond these buildings are the Hall gardens, stable yards, young stock housing, the midden and now almost treeless walled orchard. The farmyard was built around 1813 and modern additions have been made in every decade since the Second World War. Of brick construction the old buildings are filled with nooks and crannies, ventilation holes, drains, and cracks caused by 200 years' settling on the shallow foundations. The buildings have changed many times as former uses were replaced by the latest fashion. Grain lofts were replaced by silos, and pitch lofts replaced by Dutch barns with the arrival of the baler were converted into chitting stores for seed potatoes, now also redundant. The shippens are now converted to collecting yards for the milking parlour and loose housing for cows with calves. All in all the buildings are an ever changing receptacle for fashion and fad in farming, and the constant change and constant use over the last 200 years has created many foraging and nesting opportunities for birds.



Watching a Robin a few weeks ago in the farmyard I became interested in what he was about, his song post was the roof of the north side of the farmyard, and from here he could see over his lands to the borders of at least four other territories that I have so far noted. In the absence of any identifiable differences between the Robins it is rather hard to say for sure just who is who. Choosing the best vantage point in the yard I can find, I am able to see as many birds at a time as possible. His main rivals each have their own song posts, and each gives a good view over its territory to those of its neighbours. The farmyard as a rich source of food is always an area of conflict; each bird has to maintain its borders, and to gain access to the most productive foraging sites puts in much effort. Most conflicts involve a good deal of posturing, and much can be achieved by this; as the pecking order has been fought over already and the limits set, these are in many cases now ritualised encounters. Conflict on one side of the territory can lead to an open opportunity on the other for a neighbour. At the time of my writing this, each bird occupies one side of the farmyard and controls territory in whatever lies behind the buildings. Whilst in the open yard itself almost anything goes, an ever-changing landscape of moving machinery, stored equipment and spilt food provides opportunity to feed. Each time we move something in the yard you can bet at least one Robin is on hand. Under each parked wheel or piece of wood are a feast of insects and worms waiting to be taken. To the boldest Robin go the spoils; he or she who can most bear the proximity of humans gets first pickings and once on the food position is 9/10ths of the battle. Robins though don't get it all their way, the farm cats are also on the lookout for food and especially in severe weather conditions when Robins will take that extra little risk, some do fall prey to cats. Our Robins are, however, in an area of immense opportunity, and food is always available here as is water. I shall be watching to see what develops in the yard though the territories are in constant flux and it is very difficult to identify exactly what is going on, especially behind the buildings.

Green Woodpecker has been seen widely around Toft all through the summer of 2003 and into the autumn. Encountering them so frequently has been quite a treat as in most years we have only one or two sightings, and the presence of adult and young birds has led me to wonder just where they have bred. The gamekeeper has also noted the increase of the 'Yaffle' about the estate, his sightings often being in other areas of Toft from mine.

Other creatures seen to have benefited from the good breeding season are rodents, in particular they have thrived in the set-aside grass on Sidder Field. Sidder Field is a long narrow strip; together with its neighbour Lea's Long they were formally known as Grassy and Furzy Sidal

referring back to the days when they were open heath land. Being heath they were dry and free draining in the main, but changes in field boundaries and the extension of plough-lands into the old Moss, incorporated more difficult soils into the field. The drains have been a battleground between farmers' desire to plough and that of nature to return to wet moss for 150 years. Now the downturn in agricultural prices coupled with subsidy payments aimed at more environmentally friendly practice, have led to a cessation of hostilities. The moss intake has been turned over to set-aside grass since 2001; part of the management has been to mow off the grass in July and again in late August or early September. Using a pasture topper the height at which the grass is cut can be varied to suit the job; on the set-aside the preferred height has been 5 or 6 inches. The mown grass is left to decay on the ground; this forms a patchwork of matted dry grass with new emergent vegetation growing around and to some degree through it. During the cut done in late August I was amazed at just how many rodents had set up home in the field, there were hundreds. The bounty was soon spotted by two juvenile Kestrels, which hovered over the tractor as I drove up and down cutting the field in a Corncrake friendly manner (I live in hope). Dropping to the ground the Kestrels were successful in 50% of their attempts to take prey. They enjoyed their feast. Later, after I had sat and eaten my lunch at the side of the field the Kestrels were joined by two Buzzards, which marched and hopped around the new mown grass picking up rodents and beetles from the ground. Though the mowing caused a great deal of disturbance to the rodents, the height of the cut will have prevented too many getting hit by the blades, and as I walked over the field later many were still getting their lives back together.

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

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SYKES'S FERRULE

(for Liz)

The reminder note I came across,
 'ferrule for Mr Sykes', was practical
 and clear. It should have conjured up a stick
 made non-slip by a rubber stop. Instead
 I thought of all the men like Bewick, Ross
 and Tristram; Cetti, Savi, White - a woman
 too, Eleonora - who are bird names
 beyond themselves: swan, gull, quick warblers, thrush,
 a dark-winged falcon. And I imagined
 Sykes's Ferrule booked with them, with character
 to fit the name: something sure-footed, quiet
 and slim - sidling through reeds perhaps - and known
 only by rumour, never seen; alert
 as my wife to her patients' needs!

Peter Walton

(with apologies to Sykes's Wagtail)

Members' Noticeboard

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

For sale:

Opticron Piccolo Mk 2 ED telescope with jacket and case (jacket cost £50 only a few months ago). Cullman 3100 tripod. All for £190 o.n.o. An excellent scope for beginners at a realistic price. Contact: 01565 653811

For sale:

British Birds Bound 1978 to 1991 Vol 78-84 Unbound 1992 to 2002 Vol 85-95 (Sep 1999 missing). All mint. Offers. Tel: 01625 532080

Conservation News

A round-up of news from the CAWOS conservation representatives, who aim to keep an eye on what is going on in their area. If you have any issues or concerns then do contact your local representative (by letter or e-mail preferably). They may be able to help or should know someone who can! The county has been split into eight local authorities and the relevant contact information is listed at the end.

CHESTER

As is so often the case, conservation work in the south-west of the county has been two steps forward and one step back! The first of the forward steps has been the continuing progress of the Broxton Barn Owl Group in reversing the decline of Barn Owls. This year the Group had a record 28 breeding pairs in its area and a record number of chicks were ringed (averaging four young per pair). The majority of pairs bred in specially erected boxes, either on poles or in trees. However, overall fledging success is not known and, based on repeat visits to three boxes, there may have been significant mortality between ringing and fledging, at least for late broods, which may reflect experience elsewhere in 2003.

The second forward step has been a developing relationship with local farmers in helping declining farmland birds. In particular, Lapwings in the Dee valley have been helped by farmers agreeing to complete cultivation and sowing of maize in a very short time period so that at worst only one clutch was lost. This resulted in some encouraging breeding success. An increasing number of farmers seem to be taking up Countryside Stewardship agreements.

The backward step was the over-enthusiastic bank clearance by Environmental Agency Wales staff along streams and ditches in the Dee valley. Fortunately, a site meeting with them enabled them to be shown the results of their action and to discuss impacts on feeding habitat for Barn Owls and other important birds. They have agreed to cut more sympathetically and leave sections of bank uncut in the future.

Neil Friswell, Chester Area Representative

MACCLESFIELD

Plans for the Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road had been published and, although much of the route was in Greater Manchester, there was concern about the implications for nature conservation of that part which lay in Cheshire. The route for the Alderley Edge bypass had been put out to local consultation in October. The planned route put forward by Cheshire County Council had been passed despite local reservations. However, the proposal calling for the railway line between Alderley Edge and Crewe to go via an underground tunnel has been rejected by Network Rail on geological grounds.

Derek Kelly, Macclesfield Area Representative

VALE ROYAL

I can report that work on Neumann's and Ashton's Flashes is progressing at quite a pace. Two new hides have been erected and an extensive area of shingle laid down for breeding waders. Reed planting should also have been undertaken by the time members read this newsletter. It is hoped that Neumann's will be open by Easter, six months ahead of schedule(!), but Ashton's will stay closed 'til autumn 2004.

Paul Hill, Vale Royal Area Representative

WARRINGTON

The situation regarding Houghton Green Pool near Warrington is being watched as there may be a proposal to allow organised fishing there. The pool is becoming more and more important for Wigeon (now over 100 wintering) and Black-necked Grebes. Any increase in disturbance would be detrimental to the birds.

Brian Martin, Warrington Area Representative

WIRRAL AREA

Broken Bank Waste Facility: This new proposal at Shotton could potentially have a major impact on the Dee estuary. The major issues relate to site preparation with the possibility of leaching of noxious material already present at the site and with effective control of leachate and waste during operation together with effective control of scavengers. The Dee Estuary Conservation Group believes that inadequate safeguards are currently proposed or insufficiently detailed in the planning proposal.

North Hoyle Wind Farm: This nears completion. I have recently been notified that the monitoring of the site is to be carried out by the wind farm contractors, rather than independently. This is the first maritime wind farm in the country and there is going to be great interest shown in any data affecting birds (e.g. birds killed by the turbines), so it seems most unsatisfactory that any monitoring is not independent.

Cockling: Apart from the usual over-fishing and disturbance of birds the amount of rubbish washed up on the shore of the estuary has been unbelievable. This includes deflated, inflatable boats, hundreds of red, webbed, plastic sacks and a large amount of general litter. The webbed sacks in particular could be a hazard to birds and many may well have floated out to sea.

Prenton Dell Quarry: Brock PLC has applied to reopen Prenton Dell Quarry to extract clay and provide a possible infill site for household waste. There are at least 30 species of bird that breed in the Prenton Dell area annually. The scrub area around the power sub-station is particularly suited for warblers and finches. In the last three years alone, several species included on the RSPB's list of birds at risk have bred there, including Grasshopper Warbler, Bullfinch, Linnet and Reed Bunting. There is a vigorous local campaign against the proposal and anybody wishing to save this area for its wildlife is asked to write to the local councillor: Anne Bridson, Liberal Democrat Councillor, 25 Edinburgh Drive, Prenton, Wirral, Merseyside.

Richard Smith, Wirral Area Representative

LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Chester	Neil Friswell, 8 Oaklands Crescent, Tattenhall, Cheshire, CH3 9QT. Tel: 01829 770463. E-mail: Neil@nfriswell.freeserve.co.uk
Congleton	Richard Blindell, 5 Bath Vale, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 2HF. Tel: 01260 275084. E-mail: richardblindell@hotmail.com
Crewe & Nantwich	Colin Lythgoe, 11 Waterloo Road, Haslington, Crewe, CW1 5TF. Tel: 01270 582642. E-mail: colinlythgoe@haslington9.freeserve.co.uk
Halton	Jeff Clarke, 90 Simonside, Hough Green, Widnes, WA8 9YN. Tel: 0151 423 4275. E-mail: conservation@cawos.org
Macclesfield	Derek Kelly, 5 Avon Road, Heald Green, Stockport, SK8 3LS. Tel: 0161 282 0273. E-mail: derek_kelly@tiscali.co.uk
Vale Royal	Paul Hill, 1 Clive Cottage, London Road, Allstock, Knutsford, WA16 9LT. Tel: 01606 722938. E-mail: pmh@biota.co.uk
Warrington	Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251. E-mail: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
Wirral	Richard Smith, March Wall, King's Drive North, Caldy, Wirral, CH48 1LL. Tel: 0151 625 2320. E-mail: richard@deestuary.co.uk

RED KITE POISONING INCIDENT

A dead Red Kite was found on the Cheshire moors near the Cat & Fiddle pub on 9 March 2003 by a mountain biker. It was lying next to a half-eaten Red Grouse, which raised suspicions that it may have been poisoned. Analysis by DEFRA confirmed that the kite had been poisoned by the banned pesticide carbofuran, a root-crop nematocide the approval of which for agricultural use was withdrawn in 2001. Carbofuran is implicated in most of the recent cases of illegal poisoning of birds of prey. In Scotland it has been analysed in over 90% of wildlife poisoning incidents in recent years.

As a result of the Red Kite poisoning, Cheshire and Derbyshire police, assisted by the RSPB and DEFRA officers, conducted searches of buildings at Wildboardclough and Buxton on 1 May 2003. No substances were found which could be linked with the Red Kite death but a number of items were seized for pesticide analysis. A gamekeeper was invited by the police to attend at Buxton police station for interview but at the time of writing has so far declined. Police enquiries are continuing.

The RSPB is concerned about bird of prey persecution in the area following the kite death and the desertion of a Hen Harrier nest in suspicious circumstances in May 2003. A fresh shotgun cartridge was found next to the deserted harrier nest, containing two eggs, following the disappearance of the female bird. Birdwatchers are urged to be vigilant when birding on the Peak District moors and to report any suspicious activity or incidents to the RSPB Investigations Unit at RSPB HQ (01767 680552).

Duncan McNiven, RSPB Investigations Unit

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BIRD OF PREY PERSECUTION ON THE CHESHIRE & DERBYSHIRE MOORS

As stated by Duncan McNiven above, on 9th March 2003 a dead Red Kite was found on the Cheshire Moors near the Cat & Fiddle pub. It was found lying next to a half eaten Red Grouse, raising suspicions that it may have been poisoned. Subsequent analysis by DEFRA confirmed that the cause of death was poisoning by the pesticide carbofuran, a root crop nematicide, the use of which was banned in 2001.

In response to this, Cheshire and Derbyshire police conducted searches of buildings at Wildboardclough and Buxton and although no substances were found which could be linked to the kite death, a number of banned pesticides were seized. Police enquiries are continuing.

Worse was to come, however. A pair of Hen Harriers, which had been displaying over Cheshire moorland, were observed nest building in May on the Goyt moors, Derbyshire, very close to the successful 1997 nest site. RSPB and English Nature staff, superbly assisted by local Peak District birders, moved quickly to keep the birds under close observation.

The prolonged absence of the female, shortly after we suspected egg laying had commenced, persuaded us that a visit to the nest was necessary. The nest contained two eggs, but a fresh shotgun cartridge was found within feet of the nest. The female was not seen again and it appears highly likely that she was shot while visiting the nest during egg laying.

These incidents beg two questions. How prevalent is bird of prey persecution (in particular in the Peak District) and what can be done about it?

Dealing with the first question, both Red Kite and Hen Harrier are yet to successfully colonise the Peak District, so we need to consider their fortunes in a national context. In 2003, a total of 11 Red Kites from the UK re-introduction scheme were illegally killed. 10 of these were poisoned (including seven in Dumfries & Galloway alone) and the other was shot. A further two died of suspected poisoning. Although the Red Kite re-introduction programme has been incredibly successful, the continued incidence of illegal persecution (seven of the birds released in Yorkshire have been poisoned since 1999), has slowed the recovery rate below that which could be expected in some areas.

With regard to England's small and declining Hen Harrier population, there were 22 confirmed nesting attempts in 2003, of which eight were successful, fledging 27 young. However, at least six nests failed due to 'unnatural circumstances' and in at least one area, early season moorland fires were suspected to have been started in order to destroy Hen Harrier nesting sites.

In the Peak District, since the successful nest in 1997, harriers have turned up every spring and on at least three occasions have been suspected of attempting to nest. In each case birds have 'moved on or disappeared' and that phrase 'unnatural circumstances' raises its head again! Clearly there is lots of suitable habitat for nesting harriers in the Peak and it is equally clear that the species wants to colonise the area.

Both of the above species are rare in the Peak, so do the fortunes of some of our commoner birds of prey provide a barometer to the levels of persecution to which they are subjected? Speak to a birder in the north Peak and they will tell you that in the last five years, Peregrine and Goshawk in particular have all but disappeared from many of their regular territories. Is this just hearsay, or can we back up these claims with hard data?

Derwentdale has long been known as one of the core areas for Goshawk in the Peak. Yet over the last few years, monitoring by the South Peak Raptor Study Group has revealed appallingly low breeding productivity. An average of eight pairs have rarely raised more than one chick. Yet in the White Peak, where farming replaces grouse moor management as the primary land use, Goshawk breeding productivity is very high. Illegal persecution is the only plausible explanation for the differing productivity between the two populations.

So what can be done about it? One suspects that in the long term, public opinion will be the key determining factor that brings about an end to illegal persecution of birds of prey. If the outcry from the public is so great, will landowners or their employees risk such a wrath? Birds of prey are a key component of the countryside that brings so many visitors to the Peak District. These visitors spend money which benefits the local communities. In this respect, birds of prey can be viewed as a public good and those that illegally persecute them are working against the well-being of their communities. A key role of the RSPB therefore has to be both to promote the problem of the illegal persecution faced by birds of prey but also to show that these birds can have positive economic impacts through the number of visitors who are attracted to watch them.

Catching and prosecuting the perpetrators of bird crime will always be crucial in raising awareness of the scale of the problem. Recently, a man employed as a gamekeeper in northern England has been charged with several offences relating to persecution of birds of prey and is due to appear in court shortly. The introduction of custodial sentences for certain types of bird crime should also help as a deterrent.

A new project, now entering its second year, however, incorporates both deterrent measures and positive promotion of birds of prey. Peak Nestwatch is a partnership between the National Trust, Severn Trent Water, RSPB, Peak District National Park Authority, South Peak Raptor Study Group and the Derbyshire and South Yorkshire police forces. Following a successful pilot in 2003, the project will be employing a seasonal project officer to co-ordinate a range of activities which include:

- * Installation of video cameras on Goshawk nests. These are used both as deterrents to criminal activity, but also to beam back live images of a Goshawk nest to the visitor centre at Fairholmes, Derwentdale.
- * Covert measures, such as the use of a cipher mark (a harmless radioactive fingerprint) which can establish whether an individual has visited a nest site.
- * A series of guided birdwatching walks for visitors, with a special focus on birds of prey.
- * A weekend events programme designed to attract tourists to the area on the back of its importance for birds of prey.
- * Co-ordinated monitoring of nests and reporting of suspicious incidents.

Thanks to these measures, Goshawks enjoyed a better breeding season in 2003 and the link between these birds and local tourism is starting to be made.

On the Cheshire border there is good news, too! United Utilities (UU), on whose land the harriers attempted to nest in 2003, are fully committed to allowing birds of prey to breed successfully on their estates (indeed without the protection afforded to harriers by UU in the Forest of Bowland for over 20 years, it is conceivable that harriers could now be extinct as a breeding bird in England). UU have kindly promised, in advance, to financially support a nest protection scheme in the Goyt, should harriers return in 2004. This means that the RSPB can immediately employ someone to monitor the birds as soon as they turn up, rather than waste time putting together a funding package, during which there is no one on site to protect the birds.

If birds do return in 2004, we will be able to put in place the measures required to allow them a chance to breed undisturbed (experience has shown that it is very difficult to protect a harrier nest if someone is determined to harm it, although the Goyt is one of the few places in England where this may be easier to achieve). Also, depending on where they nest, it may be possible to set up a public viewing scheme, so that birdwatchers and other members of the public can enjoy watching these magnificent birds. So, fingers crossed for the return of the 'sky dancer'!

Roy Taylor, RSPB Regional Conservation Manager, North-West England

It goes without saying that you should neither challenge nor approach anyone you are suspicious of, but call the Investigations Unit at the earliest opportunity. Ed.

Membership News

Welcome to the following new members: P Lawton, H Finch, David King, Steve Williams, John Whittle, David Hinkes.

Archives: A copy of *The Floating Island: Redesmere and Capesthorpe Pools* (1992, Oxenham and Booth) and *A Supplement to the Floating Island: Bird Records 1991 to 2003* (Booth) has been deposited in the County Record Office.

Membership: total for the year was 360, slightly lower than in 2002.

Mersey Estuary: We have received details of a book: *The Mersey Estuary, Naturally Ours*. This is an update of the proceedings of a conference held in 1988 by the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group as a response to the threat posed to the estuary's wildlife by a proposed tidal barrage. The physical development of the estuary, the influence of man and many aspects of its natural history are all traced and brought up to date. The book costs £25.00 plus £2.00 p&p. It is available through selected booksellers, or from The Publication Stockroom, NMGM Enterprises Ltd, PO Box 33, 127 Dale Street, Liverpool, L69 3LA.

A meeting of Council was held on 13 November. Reports were made on the progress with the Atlas and the *Bird Report*; conservation matters were discussed (see 'Conservation News') and it was decided to take no action over the impact of the Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road. In conjunction with Steve Williams of the Hilbre Bird Observatory we would go ahead and produce a *Checklist of the Birds of Cheshire and Wirral*.

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

BIRD REPORT 2002

It seems strange to be writing about the production of the 2002 *Bird Report* in what is now 2004, but I couldn't let its arrival pass without a HUGE thank you to all involved. Preliminary comments through the grapevine have been very positive indeed. Not only, therefore, do the compilers and contributors of various sections, reports, articles, photos, line drawings and maps deserve a mention, but so too all of you who commented on and/or proof-read various draft sections along the way, as well as Harry Scott, the typesetter who did an excellent job.

There are however, two people whom I feel deserve special thanks. The first is Richard Gabb, who was always willing to chivvy people along on my behalf and who was more help than he probably realises (!) and the second is Sheila Blamire, who was an absolute trooper, and who, as with all things CAWOS, does SO much behind the scenes! Many thanks.

Mark Feltham (Editor)

~ THE CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ATLAS ~
available soon: cheshireandwirralbirdatlas.org

CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ATLAS PROGRESS TO DATE

As we go to print, 262 out of the 670 tetrads have so far been allocated to volunteers. Recruitment is going quite well but we still have over 400 tetrads to cover! 131 individuals have volunteered, many of them choosing to cover several tetrads; of those 131, 45 are non-CAWOS members and 86 are CAWOS members. **This is not a very high proportion of our membership of 360 less than 25% in fact and we hope that many more members will come forward to volunteer.**

Some areas are now quite well covered: the Dee estuary, the north Wirral coast, Chester, and the areas around Northwich, Knutsford and Wilmslow, but there are still plenty of tetrads yet to be allocated, especially in the more rural areas.

Visits have been made, or are going to be made, to several local societies and RSPB groups, who have been very supportive and produced volunteers. BTO reps are going to ask all those doing WBS or BBS surveys if they would do the tetrad in which their survey plot is situated.

Adverts for help have appeared in *Birdwatch*, in *The Grebe* (even if they did wrongly name the sparrow in the accompanying photo!) and in the *RSPB Volunteer News*. Adverts have also been sent to *Birdwatching*, *British Birds*, and *Birding World* and to the BTO and RSPB magazines. Posters requesting volunteers have also been displayed in various visitor centres and hides - if you know of a place which does not yet have one please contact David Cogger, who can send one.

It looks as if the Recording Forum to be held on February 28th will be quite well supported both by CAWOS members and by non-CAWOS contributors to the Atlas project.

Coordinators are still required for the following 10km squares:

SJ37	S Wirral/Ellesmere Port	SJ38	East Wirral	SJ46	East Chester
SJ48	Hale/Weston Point	SJ56	Tarporley/Kelsall	SJ66	Winsford
SJ68	Warrington	SJ78	Rostherne	SJ88	Wilmslow
SJ96	Bosley/Wildboardclough	SJ97	Macclesfield		

A 10km square consists of a maximum of 25 tetrads (those on the borders of Cheshire may well have less). Coordinators would be expected to keep in contact with, and help, volunteers if necessary, check the records being sent in and help with recruitment if possible. If you are interested in taking on this invaluable job please contact David Cogger (contact details above).

We are indebted to the Public Rights of Way Unit, Cheshire County Council for providing and laminating maps of the whole recording area which we can use as a base to map which tetrads are being covered and to show how much progress is being made. In return, we have been asked to record any public rights of way which are blocked or difficult of access, and when fieldwork instructions are sent out we will outline the way to do this. In the case of Warrington, Halton and Wirral, which of course do not come under the Cheshire County Council, we are asked to record any problems which will then be passed on.



FEBRUARY

- 5 CADOS 'WILKO'S MYSTERY TRIP' by Roger Wilkinson
- 6 CAWOS '**ON THE EDGE OF SURVIVAL: WETLANDS OF THE WORLD**' by André Farrar
- 8 CRSPB Gigrin Farm & Elan Valley by coach - contact Dave Burt 01244 545246
- 8 HPRSPB Frodsham, IMF and Burton Marsh, by car, meet at Marple at 8:00am
- 9 SRSPB 'THE WILDLIFE OF THE SHETLANDS' by Steve Knell
- 10 ADNHS 'SCILLY THRO' THE SEASONS' by Tim Melling
- 10 MRSPB 'BIRDS OF A WELSH MOORLAND' by John Roberts
- 11 HO 'THE CHANGING SEASONS —WILD YEAR' by Paul Hobson
- 13 MCOS LECTURE (tbc) by Andy Harmer
- 13 SECOS 'NATURE THROUGH THE LENS' by Paul Matthews
- 15 KOS Shropshire Meres, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 9:00am
- 15 SECOS Rossall Point, Fleetwood, Pilling Marsh by mini-bus —ring for details
- 15 MRSPB Slimbridge by coach - contact Tom Gibbons 01625 520317 for details
- 16 HPRSPB 'A LANE IN A POLISH MARSH' by Mike Lane
- 17 MCOS Moore NR, Lapwing Lane, Halton - contact Harold Fielding 01606 882529
- 18 CRSPB 'OWLS OF THE WORLD' by Michael Leach
- 20 NCRSPB MEMBERS' EVENING FUN NIGHT
- 21 ADNHS Pennington Flash leaving at 9:15am - ring for details
- 21-22CADOS Solway Weekend- ring for details
- 21-22MCOS Mid-Wales Weekend — contact Les Goulding 01925 265578

- 22 SRSPB Top Hill Low by coach —ring for details
- 22 NCRSPB North Wales coast field visit —contact Steve Davidson 01925 635967
- 24 ADNHS 'WILDLIFE IN FOLKLORE' by Brian Hallworth
- 27 KOS 'THE DEE ESTUARY' by Martyn Jamieson
- 27 WGBG 'THIS BLESSED PLOT' by Andy Harmer
- 27-29HPRSPB Tees Mouth Weekend, ring for details
- 28 CADOS Tregaron - ring for details

MARCH

- 4 CADOS AGM + MEMBERS' EVENING
- 4 ADNHS SUPPER AND SOCIAL
- 5 **CAWOS** **AGM followed by 'OPERATION EASTER' by Steve Hogarth, Cheshire Police Wildlife & Crime Liaison Officer and Anthony Smith, Senior Crown Prosecutor**
- 5-7 SECOS Norfolk Weekend —ring for details
- 7 CRSPB Sandbach and Neumann's Flashes - contact David Wright 01829 751662
- 7 HPRSPB Eccup Reservoir, by car, meet at Marple at 8:30am
- 8 SRSPB 'JUST A SECOND' by Andy Harmer
- 9 ADNHS 'AUSTRALIA —BIRDS & NATIVE ART' by Peter March
- 9 MCOS Point of Ayr (Talacre car park) - contact Harold Fielding 01606 882529
- 9 MRSPB 'A FLORIDA SPRING' by Steve Knell
- 10 HO 'THE YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK' by Valerie McFarland
- 12 MCOS 'BIRDS & BEASTS OF TANZANIA' by Mike Hems
- 12 SECOS 'GOLDEN ORIOLES IN BRITAIN' by Paul Mason & Malcolm Rains
- 13 NCRSPB Sandbach field visit - contact Tony Parker 01925 726986
- 14 KOS Tatton Park, meet Dog Lodge lay-by, Knutsford at 9:00am
- 14 HO Blacktoft Sands by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
- 15 HPRSPB 'OWLS, RED SQUIRRELS & WILD CATS' by Malcolm Ingham
- 17 CRSPB 'A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER'S YEAR' by John Power
- 19 NCRSPB GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUIZ & HOT POT SUPPER, tickets £5.50
- 20 MCOS North Wales Coast - contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- 21 CADOS Pennington/Marbury - ring for details
- 21 MRSPB Moore Nature Reserve, depart Duke Street car park at 8:30am
- 23 ADNHS AGM + SLIDE SHOW
- 26 WGBG 'BIRDS BY JIZZ' by Jeff Clarke
- 26 KOS 'SPECTACULAR CRETE' by David Cummings
- 28 SECOS Fairburn lngs by mini-bus —ring for details
- tbw WGBG North Lancashire Coast by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details

APRIL

- 2 MCOS AGM + MEMBERS' SLIDES EVENING
- 3 ADNHS PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH
- 4 CRSPB World's End, N Wales - contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670
- 4 HPRSPB Haweswater, by car, meet at Marple at 8:00am
- 6 MCOS Pennington Flash - contact Harold Fielding 01606 882529
- 13 ADNHS 'EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY' by Margaret Curry
- 13 MRSPB 'SEABIRDS AND WADERS AROUND OUR ISLANDS' by Brayton Holt
- 14 HO 'THE BLOOMING ALPS' by Colin Smith/John Walsh
- 16 SECOS AGM & MEMBERS' EVENING
- 16 NCRSPB 'HABITUALLY BIRDS' by John Power
- 18 KOS Conwy RSPB Reserve/Llandudno, meet Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am
- 18 SECOS Leighton Moss by mini-bus —ring for details
- 18 NCRSPB World's End field visit - contact Paul Grimmer 01925 268770
- 19 SRSPB 'A LANE IN A POLISH MARSH' by Mike Lane
- 19 HPRSPB 'DESERT BIRDING' by John Gardner
- 21 CRSPB AGM followed by 'A NIGHT OF BIRDSONG' by David Tolliday (7:00pm start)
- 23 KOS AGM followed by an ILLUSTRATED TALK (tbw)
- 25 MCOS Delamere Forest/Frodsham - contact Paul Kenyon 01606 77960
- 25 HO Loggerheads Country Park by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details

- 25 WGBG Potteric Carr/Old Moor Wetlands by coach departing at 8:00am - ring for details
- 25 SRSPB Dovestones Reservoir meet at 10:00am in main car park off A635 Greenfield
- 25 MRSPB A search for rare birds (venues tbc), depart Duke Street car park at 7:30am
- 25 HPRSPB Staffs Moorlands, by car, meet at Marple at 9:00am
- 27 ADNHS 'A WALK ALONG THE BORDER —OFFA'S DYKE' by John Hill-Watson
- 28 NCRSPB Loggerheads field visit - contact Les Goulding 01925 265578
- 29 MRSPB Spring Stroll at Riverside Park, Macclesfield - contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119
- 30 WGBG 'WILDLIFE IN CLOSE-UP' by David Cummings

MAY

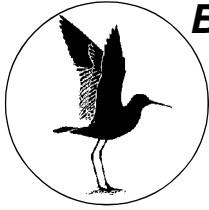
- 4-11 KOS Crete Anniversary Trip (with optional 2nd week) —ring for details
- 8 ADNHS Greenway CP, nr Biddulph & Cheddleton Flint Mill, nr Leek —ring for details
- 8-15 HPRSPB Ullapool Holiday, ring Joan Potts 01663 745208 for details
- 9 WGBG Rutland Water by coach departing at 7:30am - ring for details
- 9 MRSPB A search for rare birds (venues tbc), depart Duke Street car park at 7:30am
- 11 ADNHS 'NATURAL HISTORY OF A CHURCHYARD' by Margaret Williamson
- 11 MRSPB AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
- 12 HO 'THE LOVE OF A SWALLOW' by Dr. Cliff Davies
- 12 NCRSPB Inner Marsh Farm field visit - contact Paul Grimmett 01925 268770
- 14-16 MRSPB Anglesey weekend - contact Tom Gibbons 01625 520317
- 15 MCOS Blacktoft Sands/Old Moor —contact Paul Grimmett 01925 268770
- 16 SECOS Lake Yyrnwy by mini-bus —ring for details
- 17 HPRSPB 'A WALK ON THE DARK SIDE' by Andy McWilliam
- 18 MCOS Loggerheads - contact Harold Fielding 01606 882529
- 20 MRSPB Danebridge evening walk, meet at the Ship Inn, Wincle at 6:30pm
- 20-23 NCRSPB Suffolk weekend - contact Cliff Gibson 01925 817874
- 23 SRSPB Ynys Hir RSPB by coach —ring for details
- 23 HPRSPB Bolton Abbey, by car, meet at Marple at 8:30am
- 24 SRSPB Goyt Valley meet at 7:30pm at Errwood car park
- 25 MRSPB Bollington morning walk, 8:00 to 10:30am - contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119
- 27 MRSPB Lindow Common and Moss evening walk at 6:30pm - contact Peter Kirk 01625 829119

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Soc, mtgs Hale Methodist Church Hall 7.30pm, Sec. Anne Mason 0161 980 8645
- CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldly Valley Community Centre 7.30pm, Prog. Sec. Nick French 01978 856522
- CAWOS Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Soc, 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 Soc, 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 Soc, 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 CoE Primary Sch, Stretton 7.45pm, Sec. Olive Giles 01928 733405
- NNHS Nantwich Natural History Soc, mtgs The Gables at 7.30pm, Sec. Mike Holmes 01270 611577, mike@uimprove.com
- SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs St Peter's Church Hall, Elworth 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
- WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7.45pm, Indoor Prog. Sec. Judith Rees 0161 980 5034

For further information on Outdoor Events contact Jeff Clarke 01928 583905 (work) or 0151 423 4275 (home) or e-mail: conservation@cawos.org OR see the complete 2004 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, Cheshire, WA16 6QG or, preferably please, by e-mail: sheilablamire@cawos.org**



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