Dartford Warbler ID ~ Mice and Owls

Dee Estuary Reserves Update

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Bird News welcomes articles, letters and comments relevant to birdwatching in Cheshire and Wirral. Please either email or post your contributions to the Editor at the address shown above.

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Front cover : White Wagtail by Ray Scally
Other illustrations : Phil Jones
Guest Editorial

As I write this, the rain is bucketing down outside my office window. Living in the north-west of England we are fortunate in one way, in that we rarely experience an extreme drought. However, for whatever the true reason may be, global warming or the natural meteorological cycle, the earth’s climate does appear to be changing. Our springs are drier than they used to be with March gales in May, and we have very wet summers. Speaking to various friends at the other ends of the globe, it is the same story. Australia suffers unusual, unseasonal droughts and floods, South-east Asia’s ‘dry season’ isn’t quite as dry as it used to be with floods that destroy crops, and North America experiences extremes with violent storms.

There are indicators closer to home as well. How many butterflies have you seen this year? Very few I would guess. Malcolm Calvert has written a piece on Reed Warblers; they are returning to their breeding sites earlier each year. As well as weather-related problems for our wildlife, there are many man-made problems and wind farms and tidal barrages are top of the list, with both being put forward as options for the Mersey estuary. There is an article in this Bird News relating to these proposals. Wind farms are now common across Europe and on any flight into this region they can be seen sprawling across the landscape. In certain situations, they have been proven to cause havoc with migrating birds, especially raptors and storks that rely on air currents to soar. However, the most destructive solution to our energy needs must be tidal barrages. In South Korea a huge area of intertidal mudflats at Saemangeum has been enclosed by a sea wall, destroying a major feeding and resting site for millions of waders on migration, including the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which has been in all the press recently. A tidal barrage would have had the same effect. Now, a last ditch effort at a few seconds to midnight, has been launched to try and save this species from the ultimate fate, extinction. The cynical side of me says that there is little hope. Human beings are desperate for energy and food with little regard for wildlife. A wader with a funny bill stands out amongst the rest, but several other species may be heading towards the same fate. Great Knot and Nordmann’s Greenshank are the obvious ones, but what about our own waders? Where would they go if estuaries like the Mersey and Severn were made unusable? It is ironic that we are only just being able to understand the complexities of wader migration with the advent of micro-electronic technology, at a time when the environment they need to survive is being destroyed. These long-lived and remarkable birds deserve a stable future and our help.

On a less gloomy and more positive note, our flagship reserve, Inner Marsh Farm RSPB reserve is finally near the end of its transformation from a relatively unknown reserve with limited access, to one that is open to everyone. It has been extended and managed for birds in particular, including several red data species. A lot of hard work has gone into the site and it is a credit to all involved that it is now attracting a wide range of birds as well as other wildlife. Rhian Pierce has written a fine article about this site and I look forward to being able to really enjoy, amongst other things, the waders. They are after all, one of my favourite groups.

Tony Broome

Note: the copy date for the next issue is Sat 15th October - 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.

Note: If YOU see anything of interest in your local paper, on the Internet, or even in the national press, relevant to Cheshire and Wirral, please bring it to the Editor’s attention. Either scan in the article and email it, or cut it out and put it in the post. Please make sure the source and date is clear. Editor’s contact details are on the inside front cover of Bird News.
Species Spotlight

BROXTON BARN OWL GROUP NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2010

Of Mice and Owls – their pellets and what they tell us

For many years now the ringers have made a habit of collecting the owl pellets from the boxes containing breeding pairs and well used roosts. Some of the samples are given to schools or to others such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Chester Zoo to use for educational purposes. A pellet is a ‘build your own mouse kit’ - better than Meccano. Take a pellet and just add water and pick the bones out of that! Each pellet may yield some three to five small mammal skeletons.

Large samples have been sent to academics for analysis; Kane Bride at Manchester and Dr Philip James at Salford. At Salford University the pellets were the raw material for a dissertation by one of Dr James’ students, Rachel Comyn-Doyle, who also carried out a literature survey of work reported in 1910 and 2000 and in other parts of the country.

The main prey of the Barn Owl is the short-tailed field vole which is reputed to undergo periodic population collapses on a roughly three to four-year cycle. This affects the ability of the Barn Owl to breed successfully.

Up to 2003/4 breeding success in West Cheshire seemed to buck the national trend. This possibly reflects the improved access to breeding sites as we erected boxes until 2003 when nest sites were no longer such a limiting factor.

The following tables show West Cheshire (Broxton Barn Owl Group) records of breeding and the related small mammal prey being caught by the Barn Owls:

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<tr>
<td>Pulli ringed</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total nest sites</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
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The corresponding analysis of pellets for the year 2010, and from a good year 2007, and a very poor year 2006 are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006 %</th>
<th>2007 %</th>
<th>2010 %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field vole</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank vole</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood mouse</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common shrew</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pygmy shrew</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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In 2006 the owls were much more dependent on shrews than in better years.

And if we look at the corresponding weights of these small mammals we may begin to see why a good vole population is so vital to the successful breeding of Barn Owls.

Nominal Weight (gms)

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<table>
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<tr>
<td>Field vole</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bank vole</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood mouse</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common shrew</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pygmy shrew</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

An owl has to catch three to four times as many shrews as voles for the same meat ration, but, each prey catch takes the same effort. For the female to reach a breeding weight of about 400gms plus, the owls must work much harder for the same protein gain in a poor vole season when more of their prey is shrew.

In her dissertation Rachel gives us some comparisons with Norfolk and Suffolk and concludes that there is little significant difference in the composition of prey between these counties and Cheshire.
DEE ESTUARY RESERVES – SPRING 2011

Spring has arrived, and dare I say it summer.... We had our first Wheatear sighting on the reserve on my birthday, 13th March and our first Chiffchaff singing on 20th March, with Skylarks, Meadow Pipits and Lapwings filling the air with song - it is a most pleasant place to work. Ten Avocets have been displaying on the pools, the heronry is filling up and the Rooks are having great shenanigans stealing off each other to build their nests above the car park!

Good progress is being made as we near the opening of our reserve extension. The 5-hectare wetland has already been in action with nearly 20 species of wader and three species of swan already recorded. Speaking of swans, the adjacent Shotwick fields have played host to record numbers of Bewick’s (130+) and Whoopers (80).

A Bittern paid a brief visit to the old fishing pools during the cold snap in winter – which bodes well for the future. Several sluices have gone into the new wetland allowing us to control the water levels in the surrounding areas. A 2.5km predator/stock-proof fence is all but turned on at IMF2. Hopefully, this will give any ground-nesting birds more chance as the barrier is designed to keep out mammalian predators. Plus contractors are cracking on with the drystone walling project at Burton Point.

Elsewhere, our badger relocation project has finished with numerous signs of badger using the artificial sett, but thanks to Ron Thomas we know that they are not the only locals using it! There are badgers mating on it which is a rare sight to even the most active badger ecologists! Check it out at: http://www.youtube.com/user/RonThomasPhotography#p/u/28/pTJh8bfz2ME

Our sacrificial crop is currently being mown ready for this year’s sowing, so let’s hope for the numbers that flocked to them this winter with 1000+ Linnets, 30 Bramblings, and 40 Yellowhammers amongst others being the highlights.

The cattle have left us now for the Lapwing breeding season and will return in June. A new project this year is the growing of 8ha of barley down on IMF2 where the longhorn cattle have been grazing. By growing barley on part of IMF2 this summer where the land is too dry to be wet grassland, it will provide stubble cover over winter suitable for feeding Pink-footed Geese, Grey Partridges and wintering passerines such as Skylarks, Linnets and Yellowhammers. It is adjacent to Fingerpost Gutter where the Yellow Wagtails breed and hopefully this will suit them. So keep an eye out!

Bernard Wright

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Sites to Watch

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The sheep on the farm are doing well and the January lambers have finished. There is now a calm before the storm when the remaining 1300 sheep will lamb at the end of March throughout April. A number of young veterinary students will assist Dominic, the shepherd, and will have a steep learning curve in getting their hands mucky. The sheep have all been brought in off the marsh for the March equinox high tide and will now stay inland until after lambing. Some ewes will remain on the marsh which are not in lamb this time. We had quite an adventure mid-January when we had to remove all the sheep last minute on Friday as the winds were whipping up a relatively low tide of 9m and threatening to break the banks over the marsh. Sure enough that weekend the marsh was covered!

It has been hard work bringing the sheep in as there has been so much water left in the gutters and standing in pools in low lying areas that paths normally used have been impassable and long diversions have been necessary. We are trying to encourage the sheep to graze further north on the marsh as there is evidence of overgrazing around the old tip and near Corus to the south. This will hopefully benefit the breeding Redshank by opening up dense vegetation patches to the north.

If you have been down recently you will have seen that the railway bridge just off the path on the way down to the hide has been cleared up in preparation for an extension of our footpath network. The bridge is an excellent viewing point. For the time being, please do not venture any further than the current path. If you see anyone going that way please call them back! Thank you. We have been busy with the help of many volunteers making 49 Tree Sparrow nest boxes (the wood split on the 50th!). These have been erected next to our two areas of sacrificial crop - fingers crossed they will be used.

Parkgate is always a highlight at this time of year as raptors make the salt marsh their home for the winter - 5 (possibly 7) Hen Harriers, 4 Merlins, 4 Peregrines and 1 Marsh Harrier and up to 16 Short-eared Owls! Numbers of Pink-footed Geese on the Dee seem to be increasing each winter as a few reports have totalled at over 2500 individuals. A treat.......  

Rhian Pierce, Farmland Warden  

County Rarities  

DARTFORD WARBLER Sylvia undata

Although not a particularly difficult bird to identify if seen or heard well, it is very rare in our neck of the woods, and its potential confusion species, especially in juvenile plumage are two much rarer species, Marmora's and Tristram's Warblers, so it is worth a comment or two on its key features. Dartford Warblers are a small Sylvia warbler, appearing small bodied and long tailed with a distinctive call and song. Although generally a skulking species, the characteristic pose of a small warbler perched on top of a bush, with long, graduated cocked tail and distinctive grating drawn out “chairrr-r” call, or a rapid “tutututuc” alarm, followed by a short somewhat jerky or skipping flight to another perch will quickly eliminate Dartford from other commoner Sylvia warblers. Adult males are characteristically slate grey or grey-brown above, with dull vinous reddish-brown below, with distinctive white flecks on the throat. 1st-winter males are similar but slightly browner above and paler below. Females are reminiscent of males, but duller with more brown on the upperparts, and generally paler and less vinous below, sometimes with orange-brown or buff underparts. Both have a reddish-orange iris and orbital ring. All reasonably distinctive, and although superficially adult Tristram’s Warbler and maybe even Subalpine Warbler share some of these colourations, each of those has several other individual features to separate these species. However, it is the juvenile plumage where confusion can occur, since until about October or November, juvenile Dartford Warblers are predominately a pale buffish grey-brown above, uniform
pale pinkish buff brown below, with contrasting darker tail and flight feathers. Most of these features are also shared by juvenile Marmora’s Warbler (its allospecies, Balearic Warbler, is treated as the same here). The key difference is the call; Marmora’s has a sharp short “tak” contact note or repeated as an alarm call, very different from Dartford’s longer and softer “chairr-r” notes. Plumage-wise it’s all a bit subtle and birds must be seen well. Overall, Marmora’s has slate-brown upperparts, with little contrast with its upper tail, whilst Dartford is more warmer toned. Facialy, Marmora’s has lores the same colour as the rest of the head and crown, its eye ring is usually grey-brown, and the orbital ring dark red, (cf. whitish lores contrasting with the rest of the head and clearer orange/red orbital ring and usually pinkish – sandy eye ring. Marmora’s Warbler also has dark greyish brown legs lacking Dartford’s yellowish tones. There may also be the potential for some first-winter female Dartford Warblers lacking the vinous red underparts to resemble Marmora’s Warbler, but again the best way of separation is by call.

Hugh Pulsford

DARTFORD WARBLER IN CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL: STATUS

The Dartford Warbler is traditionally regarded in England as a bird of southern heathlands. Indeed, in Birds in England (2005), Brown & Grice describe it as “a flagship species for the conservation of the heathlands of southern England”. In recent decades the Dartford Warbler has increased in numbers and its distribution has widened considerably. A survey in 1994 found breeding Dartford Warblers spread across a larger English geographical range than had been the case for many decades, although still limited to southern English counties. Its national population had nearly quadrupled in numbers since the last full survey in 1984. A look at the Report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel for 2008 shows that the species has spread into East Anglia, Central England, the West Midlands and South Wales with birds reaching as far north as Yorkshire and as far north-west as Anglesey. The results of the current national breeding and winter Atlas should be interesting. However, as an almost wholly insectivorous species, the prolonged spells of icy weather in the last two winters may well have had an adverse effect. The Migration Atlas (2002) says that the Dartford Warbler “is mainly sedentary but some birds do migrate…”. It considers that most birds which appear away from breeding sites “are likely to be juveniles displaced from the breeding grounds by renewed territorial activity after the autumn moult…”

That is the background against which the very few Cheshire and Wirral records may be set. Dartford Warbler was not recorded in Cheshire and Wirral until 1989 when a male was seen briefly at Red Rocks on May 20th. There was a wait of almost ten years for the next bird but this individual, a female, remained at Heswall Dales LNR from 22nd December 1998 to 11th January 1999 allowing many local birders the chance to see it. This was fortunate as the only other two records are for one day only: an immature at Hoylake on 12th September 2000 and a first-winter male trapped and ringed on Hilbre on 22nd April 2005.

Steve Barber

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CAWOS DATABASE

RECORDS UPDATE

In the past, contributors would leave the ‘Count’ column blank and put significant information in the comment field, eg “light overhead passage all morning” and “recorded on 48 days or 17% of total recording days”, etc.

The import into the database now accepts ‘see comments’ in the ‘Count’ column to draw attention to this.

Any queries or other suggestions please email: sheilablamire@cawos.org
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 spring period from March to May.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area
A Goshawk was at the Gowy Meadows on Feb 24th, an Iceland Gull on Feb 19th and Glaucous Gull on Jan 28th. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was near Chester on Mar 5th and a Firecrest in an Elton garden on Mar 25th.

Congleton area
50 Waxwings were at Middlewich on Feb 5th.

Crewe and Nantwich area
1,000 Wigeons were at Sandbach Flashes on Feb 1st, two Scaups at Doddington Pool during Mar and 55 Goosanders at Sandbach on Jan 21st. A Little Egret was at Rode Pool on Jan 25th. Raptors included: Red Kite over Alsager on Apr 26th, Goshawk at Fodens Flash on Mar 25th, Merlins at Elton Hall and Pump House Flashes on Feb 5th and two Hobbies at Elton Hall Flash on Apr 29th. The first Little Ringed Plover returned to Sandbach on Mar 1st when four were present, 15 were present on Apr 22nd, a Ringed Plover was at Sandbach on Mar 24th, Whimbrel at Crabmill Flash on Apr 23rd, Greenshank at Sandbach on Apr 13th and 14th and Common Sandpiper at Sandbach on Apr 6th. Caspian, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were present at Sandbach Flashes on various dates throughout the period, Kittiwake was present during Mar and three Black Terns on Apr 23rd. 192 Stock Doves fed on fields near Elton Hall Flash on Mar 21st, a Bee-eater was at Warmingham on Apr 15th, and two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers near Crewe on Mar 7th.

Earliest migrants noted were: Swift at Elton Hall Flash on Apr 30th, two Sand Martins at Elton Hall Flash on Mar 16th, Swallow on Mar 29th and House Martin on Mar 30th. A Blue-headed Wagtail was at Weston on Apr 19th, Wheatear at Pump House Flash on Mar 14th, Grasshopper Warbler at Maw Green Tip on Apr 24th, Sedge Warbler on Apr 10th, three Reed Warblers at Watch Lane Flash on Apr 10th, Lesser Whitethroat at Maw Green Tip on Apr 16th and Whitethroat there on 13th and Willow Warbler at Fodens Flash on Apr 2nd.

Ellesmere Port and Neston area
131 Bewick's Swans were at Shotwick on Jan 3rd, 81 with Whooper Swans on 16th and 2000 Pink-footed Geese at Parkgate on Feb 19th. A Green-winged Teal was at Inner Marsh Farm on various dates throughout the period and three Garganey were at Inner Marsh Farm on Apr 19th and 20th. A Red-necked Grebe was on Shotwick Boating Lake on Jan 3rd, and a Bittern flew over Ellesmere Port on Jan 27th. A Sacred Ibis of unknown origin briefly visited Inner Marsh Farm on Apr 28th. Up to four Hen Harriers were at Burton Marsh with single Marsh Harrier and Merlin on various dates. Two Avocets were at Inner Marsh Farm on Mar 11th, the first Little Ringed Plover appeared on Mar 27th and nine Spotted Redshanks were at Inner Marsh Farm on Apr 19th. 12 Short-eared Owls were at Parkgate over the high tide on Feb 19th. A Richard's Pipit was at Neston on Mar 21st, 53 Rock Pipits were at Parkgate on Feb 20th and a Water Pipit was at Neston on Feb 3rd and 9th. Two Cetti's Warblers were at Neston on Mar 13th.

Migrants included: Cuckoo at Burton Marsh on Apr 20th, an early Swift at Burton on Apr 17th, Sand Martin at Inner Marsh Farm on Mar 13th, two Swallows and four House Martins on Mar 25th. Seven Yellow Wagtails at Shotwick on Apr 16th, Wheatear at Inner Marsh Farm on Mar 11th. A Grasshopper Warbler was at Neston on Apr 13th, Reed Warbler on 14th and Lesser Whitethroat at Inner Marsh Farm on Apr 18th. A Serin was at Burton on Apr 9th.
Halton area
A Garganey was at Wigg Island during Apr, and two Goosanders on the Mersey here on several days in Mar. A Marsh Harrier was at Wigg Island during Feb with another at Hale on Mar 28th and Apr 18th, Osprey over Hale village on Apr 24th and Merlins were at Hale shore on Mar 23rd and 30th. Waders included: two Avocets on the Mersey at Wigg Island during early Apr, Little Ringed Plover at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 14th, three Jack Snipes at Hale on Jan 28th, 140 Black-tailed Godwits there on Mar 20th and three Whimbrels at Pickering’s Pasture LNR on Apr 19th.

An Iceland Gull was at Wigg Island on Feb 26th, a Short-eared Owl at Hale on Apr 8th and 9th, Rock Pipit at Hale on Mar 28th, and up to 100 Waxwings in Runcorn during Mar. A male Cetti’s Warbler was at Wigg Island from Feb onwards with three Corn Buntings in the Hale area on Apr 20th. Migrants included: two Yellow Wagtails at Carr Lane Pools on Apr 18th, 18 White Wagtails at Pickering’s Pasture LNR on Apr 7th, Redstart at Hale on Apr 17th and two Whinchats and 20+ Wheatears there on 19th. Five Grasshopper Warblers were at Hale on Apr 18th.

Macclesfield area
Wildfowl included: 24 Whooper Swans over Langley Reservoir on Mar 3rd, Common Scoter at Rostherne on Mar 13th, and Red-breasted Merganser there on Jan 23rd and 32 Goosanders on Jan 2nd. A Bittern was at Rostherne on several dates during Jan and Feb, with Black-necked Grebe on Apr 9th, also a Black-necked Grebe visited Tatton Mere during Apr. Red Kites were noted over Sutton on Mar 26th and Wildboarclough on Apr 16th, Osprey at Tatton Park on Apr 30th, Marsh Harrier at Rostherne on Mar 13th and Apr 27th, Hen Harrier at Henbury CP on Jan 2nd and Merlin at Handforth on Mar 9th. Waders included: two Little Ringed Plovers at Lapwing Lane Pools on Apr 2nd, two Woodcocks at Rostherne on Feb 12th, four Green Sandpipers at Rostherne on Apr 8th and two Common Sandpipers at Ridgegate Reservoir on Apr 17th. A Little Gull was at Rostherne on Apr 2nd, Common Tern there on 10th and Arctic Tern on 30th. Two Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were at Rostherne on Mar 11th, two Dippers at Sutton on Feb 15th and possible Black Redstart at Lapwing Lane Pools on Mar 26th.

Migrants included: Cuckoo at Lindow Moss on Apr 26th, c15 Sand Martins at Bottoms Reservoir on Mar 26th, two Swallows at Redesmere on Mar 26th, and a House Martin at Bottoms Reservoir on the same day. Two Redstarts were at Rostherne on Apr 2nd, Wheatear at Shining Tor on Mar 27th, Ring Ouzel at Danebower on Apr 20th, Yellow Wagtail at Rostherne on Apr 27th, Garden Warbler at Marton on Apr 19th and Willow Warbler at Redesmere on Mar 29th. Elsewhere, 30+ Waxwings were in the Macclesfield area during Mar. 30 Tree Sparrows were at Marton on Jan 30th, two Mealy Redpolls and 47 Lesser Redpolls in Poynton during Feb and a Corn Bunting was at Siddington on Mar 25th.

Vale Royal area
20 Whooper Swans were on Frodsham Score during Feb, two Garganeys were at Haydn Pool on Apr 22nd with another at Frodsham Marsh, 20+ Goldeneyes were in the Frodsham area during Mar. A Black-necked Grebe visited Frodsham Marsh during Apr. A Red Kite was over Marbury CP on Apr 9th, with Marsh and Hen Harrier at Frodsham during this period. Four Avocets were at Frodsham Marsh during Mar and Little Stint on Apr 22nd, two Black-tailed Godwits were at Neumann’s Flash on Feb 24th, and five Whimbrels there on Apr 30th, two Wood Sandpipers were at Frodsham Marsh during Apr. 64 Waxwings were in the Northwich area on Jan 20th, Ring Ouzel and Tree Pipit at Frodsham during Apr with several Twite during Feb.

Warrington area
Two Garganeys were at Woolston Eyes during Apr, Ring-necked Duck on Apr 20th and a record 2,603 Tufted Ducks there during Jan. A Common Scoter was on the Manchester Ship Canal at Moore NR on several dates during Feb, nine Goldeneyes at Woolston Eyes during Jan, two Goosanders at Moore NR on Jan 7th and three Ruddy Ducks at Woolston Eyes on Feb 13th. A
Red-necked Grebe was at Woolston Eyes on Mar 2\textsuperscript{nd}, four Black-necked Grebes at Houghton Green Pool on Mar 23\textsuperscript{rd}, Bitterns were at Moore NR and Woolston Eyes on several dates throughout the period along with two Little Egrets. Marsh and Hen Harriers were at Woolston Eyes during Apr, Osprey over Moore NR on Mar 28\textsuperscript{th} and Apr 3\textsuperscript{rd}, Hobby at Moore NR on Apr 17\textsuperscript{th} and another at Woolston Eyes during Apr.

A Little Ringed Plover returned to Rixton on Mar 15\textsuperscript{th}, 28 Black-tailed Godwits on the Mersey at Moore NR on Apr 25\textsuperscript{th}, 12 Woodcocks at Risley Moss on Feb 6\textsuperscript{th}, four Whimbrels at Fiddler’s Ferry on Apr 10\textsuperscript{th} and Wood Sandpiper at Woolston Eyes during Apr. 10 Yellow-legged Gulls were at Moore NR on Apr 1\textsuperscript{st}, six Caspian Gulls were at Arpley on Feb 19\textsuperscript{th}, with Iceland, Glaucous and Kumlein’s Gulls in the Moore area. A Black Tern visited Woolston during Apr, Common Tern at Moore NR on Apr 24\textsuperscript{th} and Arctic Tern at Woolston during Apr. Two Cuckoos were at Woolston Eyes during Apr, 500 Sand Martins in the Bollin Valley at Lymm on Mar 14\textsuperscript{th}, Swallow at Woolston on Mar 26\textsuperscript{th}, Sedge Warbler at Moore NR on Apr 14\textsuperscript{th} and four Whitethroats on 10\textsuperscript{th}.

Wirral area

1,100 Pink-footed Geese were at Heswall on Jan 14\textsuperscript{th} and 212 Brent Geese off West Kirby on Jan 23\textsuperscript{rd}. Two Garganey were at West Kirby on Apr 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1,000+ Common Scoters were off Hilbre on Apr 27\textsuperscript{th}, two Velvet Scoters flew past Hilbre on Jan 6\textsuperscript{th}, a Long-tailed Duck was off Hoylake on Mar 11\textsuperscript{th}. 92 Scaup were off Meols on Jan 20\textsuperscript{th}, 50 Goldeneyes off Hilbre on Jan 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 25 Red-breasted Mergansers on Jan 3\textsuperscript{rd} and four Goosanders there on Apr 15\textsuperscript{th}. 30 Red-throated Divers were off Hoylake on Jan 19\textsuperscript{th}, with Black-throated Diver on Mar 10\textsuperscript{th}, and Great Northern Diver off Hilbre during Jan, 1,195 Great Crested Grebes were reported off Hoylake on Jan 20\textsuperscript{th}, a Red-necked Grebe was off Hilbre on Jan 8\textsuperscript{th}. 228 Gannets were off Hilbre on Mar 31\textsuperscript{st}. A possible immature Little Bittern was reported from a horse paddock east of Leasowe Lighthouse on Feb 11\textsuperscript{th}.

Ospreys were over West Kirby and Newton on Mar 29\textsuperscript{th} and a Hobby was at West Kirby on Apr 16\textsuperscript{th}. An Avocet was at West Kirby on Jan 7\textsuperscript{th}, 24,000 Knots at Heswall on Feb 28\textsuperscript{th}, a Little Stint at New Brighton during mid-Feb, 24 Purple Sandpipers at Hilbre on 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2,110 Black-tailed Godwits at Thurston on Jan 31\textsuperscript{st}, two Velvet Scoters were off Hilbre on Feb 23\textsuperscript{rd} and three Greenshanks were off Hilbre on Mar 31\textsuperscript{st}. A Great Skua was at Hoylake on Apr 2\textsuperscript{nd}, Arctic Skua at Leasowe on Apr 26\textsuperscript{th}, a massive count of 651 Little Gulls were off Hilbre on Mar 31\textsuperscript{st}, an American Herring Gull was at Hoylake on Feb 19\textsuperscript{th} and again into Mar, the first Sandwich Tern was off Hilbre on Mar 14\textsuperscript{th} and Common Tern there on Apr 18\textsuperscript{th}, seven Arctic Terns were at Leasowe on Apr 30\textsuperscript{th}. Nine Short-eared Owls were at Heswall on Feb 19\textsuperscript{th}. Two Shore Larks were at Hilbre on Jan 6\textsuperscript{th} and West Kirby beach on Jan 8\textsuperscript{th}, six Rock Pipits were at Heswall on Feb 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1,700 Meadow Pipits were at Hilbre on Mar 29\textsuperscript{th} and Black Redstart at Leasowe on Apr 19\textsuperscript{th}.

Migrants included: Swift over West Kirby on Apr 28\textsuperscript{th}, White Wagtail at West Kirby on Mar 11\textsuperscript{th} with over 400 in the area on Apr 9\textsuperscript{th}, three Sand Martins at Hilbre on Mar 12\textsuperscript{th}, Swallow on Mar 20\textsuperscript{th}, Tree Pipit at Hilbre on Apr 2\textsuperscript{nd}, Yellow Wagtail at Heswall on Apr 9\textsuperscript{th}, Wheatear at Red Rocks and West Kirby on Mar 13\textsuperscript{th}, Whinchat at Red Rocks on Apr 21\textsuperscript{st}, Redstart at Red Rocks on Feb 8\textsuperscript{th}, Ring Ouzel at Hoylake Langfields on Mar 24\textsuperscript{th}. A Sedge Warbler was at Red Rocks on Apr 9\textsuperscript{th} with Reed Warbler on Apr 8\textsuperscript{th}, Lesser Whitethroat at Leasowe on Apr 21\textsuperscript{st}, Whitethroat at Thurston on Apr 8\textsuperscript{th}, Garden Warbler at Hilbre on Apr 21\textsuperscript{st}, Wood Warbler at Thurston on Apr 30\textsuperscript{th} and Willow Warbler at Leasowe on Mar 16\textsuperscript{th}. A Hooded Crow was at Hilbre on Apr 1\textsuperscript{st}, 49 Waxwings at West Kirby on Apr 16\textsuperscript{th}. 19 Bramblings were at West Kirby on Jan 4\textsuperscript{th}, three Twite at Heswall on Jan 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 129 Lesser Redpolls at Red Rocks on Apr 9\textsuperscript{th} and Crossbill at Red Rocks on Mar 25\textsuperscript{th}. A Lapland Bunting was reported over West Kirby on Jun 6\textsuperscript{th}, with Snow Bunting at Leasowe on Mar 13\textsuperscript{th}.

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Thanks/acknowledgments to: Birdwatching magazine, Rob Cockbain, James Canovan, Dee Estuary website, Macclesfield RSPB, Moore NR website, SECOS, WECG and everyone else who passed records on.
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.

EARLIEST EGG SINCE NEST RECORD SCHEME RECORDS BEGAN

Reed Warblers start to arrive in England in mid-April, but nest building does not begin in earnest until early May. The BTO’s Nest Record Scheme holds several thousand cards for the species. For some time I have been aware that the earliest known egg laying for Reed Warbler was 1st May, in a nest recorded by David Warden at Chew Valley Lake near Bristol. I was not far behind noting a Rostherne Mere nest with a first egg date of 2nd May in 1999. This led to rivalry between the two riparians as we vied for evidence of an April egg - a sort of Holy Grail. On a few occasions at the start of May I have mist-netted female Reed Warblers with fully-developed brood patches and have therefore known that laying had taken place or was imminent. As recently as 2007, I was confident of becoming the joint record holder upon discovering a completed nest on 30th April at the north Cheshire reserve, but it was not to be as laying did not commence until 3rd May.

This year’s early spring settled the matter, but it was my friend in Avon who located a nest of 4 eggs on 30th April, counting back to a clutch start of 27th April. It was fitting that DW should be the victor, as he has steadfastly contributed to the NRC scheme every year since 1958; no mean feat. From my experience with Reed Warblers, particularly with ringing nestlings of known age, I found that mist-netting encounters with juveniles of less than 30 days is unusual. I was therefore pleased to catch a well-developed independent individual on 10th June of this year (ahead of my 14th June 2009 previous earliest); this most probably signified a latest fledging date of 11th May. Allowing for egg-laying and incubation it seems likely that the first egg of the clutch was laid around 27th April.

There is, of course, nothing like a factual record and I wouldn’t wish to be a bad loser.

Malcolm Calvert

Editor’s note: BTO’s Nest Record Scheme (NRS), began in 1939, gathers vital information on the breeding success of Britain’s birds by asking volunteers to find and follow the progress of individual birds’ nests. More info: http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/nrs

TWO CASTLES, ONE SPECIES LIST, TWO BREAKFASTS!

For many years, Sandbach Baptist Church has held a camping weekend over May Day bank holiday weekend, and for the last ten years this included an opportunity for me (with company or on my own) to build a decent early summer bird list, in lovely countryside. Our campsite, at the old Brassey Green chapel site a mile north of Beeston Castle, is surrounded by footpaths, along which I now have many regular avian acquaintances. My route differs, but each year I set out to record as many species as possible between first and second breakfasts (6 to 10 am)! Camping itself is great for birding, if your tent happens to be next to an overgrown, neglected hawthorn hedge! Even before I start my walk, I have a long sleeping bag list, including Bullfinch and Blackcap (the latter deafening at close quarters, though not as infuriating as a Corncrake that once called all night next to my tent in the Orkneys). In my first year there, one unfamiliar song seriously puzzled me, until hours later I finally realised that three pairs of Lesser Whitethroat (did you know that the Atlas reports it to be much of agricultural Cheshire’s commonest Sylvia warbler?) were in territory near the site.

An early start is necessary both to avoid car noise and see the birds at their least shy. That Wren singing on top of the telegraph post at 6am will be deep in the hedge by 9. The early start allows me to spot the male Peregrine on his crag, usually before he has finished warming his wing muscles in the early sunshine, although this year he was already aloft and angrily dog-fighting spectacularly with three Buzzards. Apart from the canal and stream valley (past the well-known Shady Oak pub) there is almost no wet habitat, which limits the possible species total. However, by following a circuit that embraces both Beeston and Peckforton Castles, I have achieved a best total of 53 species (not all seen) between breakfasts! - which gives a picture of how rich this part of Cheshire is. Who has
a larger inter-breakfast total on foot? This year’s list was 50, and I have never been below 45; but interestingly, the list is always slightly different and every year adds something new.

Some hoped-for species can be difficult, like that dratted Pied Flycatcher that some years refuses to sing. Or confusing, like that Song Thrush with the perfect imitation of the Curlew it heard last week. By May 1st, the Garden Warblers and Sedge Warblers may or may not have just arrived, and the Green Woodpecker is usually far off and seems sadly fainter each year. And my former friendly Wood Warbler – alas! – has long been silent. But the unexpected always enlivens my walk, like the flock of Wheatears in the middle of one apparently bare field, or thirty Stock Doves suddenly exploding before me in another. Some sightings are flybys, like the occasional rocketing Mandarin Duck or Kingfisher, or scything Hobby or Swift. Other finds are downright odd, like the Grasshopper Warbler reeling one year from a tiny clump of greenery beside the canal, where it had obviously dropped in only for an hour’s kip. And in 2007 I switched off birds just long enough to wonder what on earth a poppy was doing in flower on the verge at that time of year. It turned out to be only the second Cheshire record of long prickly-headed poppy. Larger things also turn up. One year I slipped quietly into a wood to obey the call of nature, only to find myself next to a fox doing the same!

Other birders on the weekend add to a general camping weekend bird list, with species they’ve seen at the site or en route to it. (One year, however, I ruled out a claim of Red Kite from a camper newly arrived via the M40!) Later each day, I take groups out from the campsite on nature walks. Often these are frustrating (oh, if only you’d been with me at 7am when everything was singing!). However, the flora is rich even if the birds are asleep, and the butterflies are usually fun, with frequent orange-tips and, this year, a wonderful holly blue flying alongside a huge holly hedge, of course. And even rural Cheshire can startle. This year, on a hot sunny afternoon on a quiet Peckforton path, our group disturbed a rabbit – no. Fox? – no. A very alive and urgent badger! Evidently even Mr Brock sunbathes occasionally!

Even better, several years ago, I was looking (as one does) for anything to show to a large walk group, when I spotted something far weirder than I had hoped. Setting the telescope up, I was able to impress the whole of the party – and myself – with crippling views of a Cuckoo trying hard to swallow what must have been either a small grass snake or slow worm! Creation can hold the strangest and most beautiful things – even in the most ordinary places – if you look for long enough.

George Hill
PEREGRINES AT HALE MARSH
On 8th January, whilst sitting in the hide at Hale Duck Decoy Nature Reserve overlooking Hale Marsh, a fascinating incident took place. I saw two Peregrines sitting together on the marsh. One was an adult male and the other a juvenile. They were sitting about sixty feet from one another, when suddenly an adult female appeared, flying over about fifty to sixty feet up and carrying prey. When she was just above the other two Peregrines she dropped the quarry, which was probably a Stock Dove. It hit the ground but was obviously still alive: moving about on the salt marsh. The immature bird immediately flew across to the dove, actually landing on the bird, and began pecking it around the head and back before starting to feed. In the meantime, the adult female landed near to the male; neither of the adults made any effort to go towards the kill or to disturb the feeding juvenile. It appeared to me to have deliberately fetched food for the young bird, which would have been normal in late summer. Being January, this does seem hard to accept and perhaps the prey item was just dropped by mistake. However, the weather had been very severe and this may have had some bearing on the incident.

I have never heard of a Peregrine fetching prey to a young bird so long after the breeding season.

Rob Cockbain

CHESHIRE MERES
A recent unusual observation at a Cheshire mere involved a raptor and a wader. Hearing an Oystercatcher calling, sounding even more agitated than usual, I turned my binoculars on it and saw that it was chasing a Hobby across the mere. If the Hobby had fancied dining on one of the many low-flying Swifts it had quickly changed its mind with the big-billed wader in hot pursuit.

The Cheshire meres have provided me with a number of similarly notable sightings over the years. Some years ago I watched a Peregrine playing with a Cormorant in Tabley Park. It repeatedly positioned itself on the Cormorant’s tail, then bored with its swiftness flew ahead until the Cormorant caught up, then it would resume the rear position. The Cormorant finally pitched down on the mere, scared out of its wits. On another occasion I watched a Peregrine chasing a Kingfisher across Rostherne Mere. The Kingfisher repeatedly dived into the water, then flew on, confusing the Peregrine. The Kingfisher survived to reach the other side of the mere, a narrow escape. Less fortunate was a Daubentons Bat. On a visit to Tatton Mere on a bright, sunny winter’s day many moons ago, I was surprised to see it emerge from a tree hole and fly out over the mere. To my chagrin a Kestrel suddenly appeared from nowhere and scooped up the bat in its talons, proving once again that emerging from hibernation too early and flying in the daytime is not a good idea for a bat!

Bob Groom

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I have never heard of a Peregrine fetching prey to a young bird so long after the breeding season.

Rob Cockbain

PEREGRINE WATCH AT BEESTON CASTLE
At 18:30hrs this evening (15 May 2011) the Ravens raided the Peregrine nest site and removed all four eggs. We do have a filmed record of the attack made by the Thursday evening team of Eric and Dave. This incident followed a period of aerial dispute between the two adjacent nest sites. The Peregrine watch is therefore suspended. Peregrines are not known to second brood so there is little likelihood of the watch being resumed this year. Very upsetting especially after last year’s failure - but well done and many thanks to everyone for another dedicated effort.

Now we can only hope for better luck for the Peregrines in 2012.

Bernard Wright
I hope that you have all experienced a good year and some of you have obtained that ‘lifer’ that has been elusive. With moving house to a different village I felt that we would not have the variety of birds coming to our new back garden that we were lucky enough to have at Barnton - our old address backed onto the Trent and Mersey Canal Tunnel and the area was very overgrown. However, we have a greater selection of birds in our new garden than before, which is I am sure due to the fact that all the houses in the road form a horseshoe and the back gardens form a wildlife corridor that links to the churchyard. We have had a good breeding season with many juvenile birds frequenting the back garden. Hopefully, the list will swell with the winter influx to the feeders. Many of our village primary schools are starting to think “Wildlife Gardens” and it would appear that many are engaging professional bodies to assist them with this scheme. This is taking quite a chunk of the schools’ budgets and I am sure that many of you would be more than able to assist schools with advice. If you have children and grandchildren at primary schools in your areas please pop in and enquire if they are starting a Wildlife Garden and offer your advice; I am sure that the schools will be more than happy to take on board advice given. It will also help to pass on years of experience and interest to get a bit of young blood interested in our hobby. Please keep an eye on any raptor nest sites that you have on your patch, and do report anything that you feel is ‘not right’. House Martin nest sites are also at risk as many people do not want the ‘mess’ and they are quite prepared to knock down any nests that appear on their houses. Please remember that you are the eyes and ears on the ground, you are all out and about at times when others are safely tucked up in bed. If you see a vehicle that you think is acting suspiciously, or see people that you know should not be there PLEASE report it. Description of persons, make and colour of motor vehicles and if possible the registration number, but do not put yourselves at risk. If you do report an incident to the Police, you will be given an incident number. If you do not receive the service you expect, please let me know with the incident number and the date and I will follow it up. I hope you all have a great summer and please keep your eyes and ears open.

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AT BOTH ENDS OF THE COUNTY

For some time now my wife has been nagging me. I don’t mean the usual, general-purpose nagging (“Why don’t you put things away?” or “When are you going to do that…“), though there has obviously been plenty of that too. I mean a specific nagging: “Look. Why don’t you get yourself organised and go over to Hilbre again?”

It’s neither the time nor the place to explain why I dropped out of the Hilbre scene for too many years. It’s not just that forty miles is further, and five o’clock in the morning earlier, than when I was younger. Let’s just say that I took a stupid view that my Hilbre days were over, but that Jane was, as ever, wiser than I and knew how much I missed the island.

Tim Clevees once said that the worst thing about living inland is that it doesn’t matter which way the wind is blowing. He’s right – up to a point. I’ve never lost the habit of listening to the shipping forecast and trying to work out what the prospects are for a decent passage, and many’s the time

One Man’s Birding

A planning application has gone into Warrington Council to create a clay pigeon shoot on Rixton Moss. For those of you who don’t know, this area of mossland lies immediately south-east of Risley Moss Nature Reserve [which has international and local environmental designations – SAC (Special Area for Conservation), SSSI and Site of Local Significance for Nature Conservation], just to the north of the Woolston Eyes Nature Reserve [which is designated as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation], and to the west of Rixton Clay Pits Nature Reserve [which also has similar international, national and local environmental designations]. There is already a clay pigeon shoot immediately to the south of Woolston Eyes not two miles from Rixton Moss.

Rixton Moss (traditionally farmed by smallholding farmers) is still a haven for Red List birds such as: Yellow Wagtail, Corn Bunting, Grey Partridge, Tree Sparrow, and Yellowhammer. We also have Quail on site during the summer. It is also an important feeding area for winter birds such as Skylark, Meadow Pipit, and Merlin. And many birds drop in to feed during migration, such as Whinchat, Wheatear. Hare and water vole are also on site.

A clay pigeon shoot on this green belt mossland could spell disaster for Red List birds on the site. Please take this opportunity to object.

Details are:
Planning Application No: 2011/18349
Location: Prospect Farm, Prospect Lane, Rixton-with-Glazebrook, Warrington, WA3 6EH
Proposal: Proposed change of use to provide clay pigeon shooting club, including the erection of a club house and car park

Go to: http://www.warrington.gov.uk/home/transport_planning_and_environment/Planning/Search_planning_applications/
Then click on ‘I have read and agree to the copyright conditions above’
Then click on ‘Search For a Planning Application’
And enter the Planning Ref 2011/18349

If you wish to object to, or comment on, any aspect of the proposal, quote the above planning application number, to devcontrol@warrington.gov.uk
I’ve sniffed the morning air, or noted something like increased numbers of Willow Warblers in the local bushes, and reflected that this must have been a good day on Hilbre (and often I’ve been correct).

And so this year, at last, I listened to ‘Er Indoors, got my act together, and thanks to the Observatory team and to Land Rover transport (“It’s me back, doctor…”) returned to my old and best-loved stamping grounds. Several trips to the island led me to reflect on the differences between spring there, and spring here in the Deep South.

Take the start of the day. It is still dark as I stand in the kitchen doorway with the essential mug of tea in my hand, and the chorus of birdsong is like a wall of sound in the blackness. The Blackbirds dominate, almost drowning out the Dunnocks, Robins and Song Thrushes, while the Wood pigeons provide a steady background rhythm. Yes, some of them will be singing on Hilbre – but just the odd one or two voices from the gardens or the blackthorn.

It is, obviously, a matter of difference of habitat. On the one hand, there is an extensive range of large suburban gardens; many mature trees, plenty of shrubs, and bird-friendly hedges and lawns create something close to woodland. On the other, a windswept island (“a mere rock”, as an old document described it), with limited vegetation, set in the middle of an expanse of sea or sand, depending on the tide. Of course the birds will be different.

Hearing the first grating call of a Sandwich Tern and looking for it flying up the channel, seeing Gannets diving off the North End, noticing the changing plumages of the waders along the shore, listening to the clear whistle of the Whimbrel – these are peculiar to the coastal site. It is not just a matter of different species, though; there are those birds which I will see and hear in the south of the county, but which I view in a different light on Hilbre.

There are those which, early in the spring, are conspicuous migrants on the island, but which I hardly register as such here in the south. Redpolls, Goldfinches, Chaffinches, Goldcrests: they arrive briefly, feed for a while, maybe end up in the traps or nets, and move on. They don’t belong; they are manifestly visitors. I know the same thing is happening at home, but the subtle distinction between resident or wintering birds, and those passing through, is rarely apparent to me.

Even when the true summer visitors, the sub-Saharan migrants, arrive, I see them differently. If I had to identify one moment as marking the start of spring, it would probably be the sight of the first Wheatear hopping along the west side of Hilbre. Yes, we get a few moving through in the south of the county – but it’s not the same; Wheatears, in my mind, belong on the coast in spring and autumn, or in the hills in summer. Then there are the warblers: at home, I first pick them up by their songs – the early Chiffchaff singing from a bare willow, the repetitive jagging sound of a Reed Warbler alongside a mere, or the scratchy song of a Whitethroat from a bit of scrub.

On the island, they are just small birds avidly feeding in the bushes, as like as not silently; then there is the moment when you realise that one of the birds in the catching box is the first Willow Warbler of the year.

One visitor, perhaps more than any other, symbolises for me the difference, and the contrasting experience of spring: the Swallow. On Hilbre, at high water, they first appear flickering quickly above the water, coming in fast off the sea from Wales, to feed round the island for a few minutes before heading off towards the mainland. This is visible, classic, migration. At home I will probably see my first Swallow perched on the wires in front of a farmhouse, or sweeping around the outbuildings which will be his home for the next few months. In one case, I have watched them arriving; in the other, I have seen them settling in.

So – this year, I have been aware (maybe the more clearly, because I have been away from the island) of two contrasting ways in which I see, and enjoy, the birds of spring. Of course, there are also differences come autumn migration time – but that is something to which I can look forward.

Bob Anderson, 102, Crewe Road, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 6JD
Ringing News

Ringing plays an important part in developing our knowledge of birds. In this new feature we invite ringing groups (or individual ringers) active in Cheshire and Wirral to contribute their own accounts of their activities. In general, the idea is that these should provide a means of updating local birders on the groups’ work - both by way of information about birds ringed or recovered, and news of other events (or incidents).

Future contributions from other groups and/or individuals will be welcomed; contact Bob Anderson 01270 623044 or email robandjj@dircon.co.uk

SOUTH MANCHESTER RINGING GROUP

After one of the wettest and windiest Mays, mist-netting has been very limited indeed, recently. Usually, this is one of the most interesting times in the calendar with a range of species to ring, as well as nest finding and the summer arrivals adding to the mix. First impressions were of a very early season with April having tempted the migrants only to have any progress dampened by the subsequent weather. Higher river levels meant that some Dipper broods were not accessible for ringing in the end, after monitoring the nest progress.

Pied Flycatchers are noted to be ahead at some sites, but then other broods seem quite late; hence an extended season with Lyme Park providing a really stretched first egg to last fledgling period, still ongoing as this is being written [early June]. The National Trust, having not realised the importance of the place when creating the adventure playground in Crow Wood, Lyme, have now kindly arranged for some boxes to be made up to add to/replace the ancient ones there. The disturbance local to the playground was evident though; as you’d expect nearby boxes were unused but... Pied Flycatchers like new boxes and we have actually seen an increase in numbers overall, possibly as a result of the replacement housing. Even so, one pair is breeding in a box that is about 20 years old. Now that’s value for money!

One SMRG member caught an Italian-ringed Swallow breeding at a local farm, for which we await details, and Grasshopper Warbler numbers in Handforth seem to have reflected the good numbers reported on migration. Catching them is supposed to be relatively simple, but I have tried and failed so far. They are still reeling of an evening.

The importance of marginal land on the outskirts of towns continues to amaze me with one site holding seven warbler species. This is despite the motorcycles, dog walkers, den making, fishing camps and the odd fire or two. This is nothing to do with ringing per se, but one can put up a net in these spots and catch an interesting selection of species, albeit in low numbers. Some people call this waste land still, but they are good places.

Clive Richards, South Manchester Ringing Group

WOOLSTON RINGING TEAM

Ringing at Woolston – Winter 2010/2011

This note covers the winter period from October 2010 through March 2011. In this time 1,428 new birds were ringed at Woolston which compares to 1,174 new birds ringed in the 2009/2010 winter period. If we divide each winter into two three-month periods and compare them we find the following. Quarter four of 2010 produced 1,066 new birds compared to 849 in quarter four 2009, and in quarter one of 2011 362 new birds have been ringed compared to 305 in quarter one of 2010. The improvement in quarter four of 2010 reflects the good breeding season enjoyed by the resident tits and finches. The first quarter is always the quietest quarter of any year with both ringing teams reduced to just two or three nets around their respective feeding stations, whilst on No3 bed the endless battle against woodland succession is the focus of attention. A notable feature of 2011 has been the number of Bramblings around No3 bed although they seem to be virtually absent from No1 bed. The total of 78 new birds ringed in the winter period is a record for Woolston.
For the second time in the last four winters, the star bird of the period is a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, in this case a first year male caught on No3 bed in October. Other notable catches included the following. Two young Lapwings were ringed on the loop of No4 bed. The harsh winter weather was not conducive to catching water birds and waders which moved away from the frozen beds but in breaks in the weather Kieran’s penchant for creeping around the reed beds in the dark was rewarded with one each of Snipe and Jack Snipe. A female Tawny Owl was the first adult ringed at Woolston for some years. Four new Great Spotted Woodpeckers in one morning is pretty much unprecedented at Woolston and the event was all the more remarkable because in March there are no new juveniles around to catch. A single female Cetti’s Warbler was ringed in November in what is becoming the ‘traditional’ net ride on No3 bed. One of the three birds caught in the record year of 2009 was controlled as a breeding female on the outskirts of Thornham in north-west Norfolk in June 2010. For the second year running the autumn thrush influx was a damp squib producing just five Redwings and single Fieldfares although, in fairness, Fieldfare is less than annual. Perhaps because of the good breeding season and some later broods, more warblers appeared in October than was the case in 2009 with 10 Reed Warblers, 23 Blackcaps and 22 Chiffchaffs. Not surprisingly, given the severe weather, there has been no evidence of attempted over-wintering.

Irruptive winter finches appeared in good numbers. The record catch of Bramblings has already been referred to, and Lesser Redpoll catches were up from 51 last winter to 109 this time round. Woolston lacks the conifers, in particular the larch trees that attract Siskins, so there can be no better proof that it has been a ‘big’ Siskin winter than the single bird caught on No1 bed. The autumn movement of Goldcrests recovered somewhat from 2009 when only four birds were ringed, although the 2010 figure of 52 is still below the 86 trapped in 2008.

Michael Miles, on behalf of the Woolston Ringing Team

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report the Swan Study Group has ringed a total of 42 Swans, including 7 adults, 26 second year, 3 third year and 6 re-traps.

The maximum counts of flocks of (Mute) swans since June are as follows:

- Acre Dell Pools, Congleton: 73 on 14th Feb, 63 on 6th Mar, 64 on 4th Apr, and 54 on 2nd May.
- Astbury, Congleton: 13 on 2nd May.
- Baddiley Meres: 13 on 15th May.
- Bar Mere: 23 on 19th April.
- Fields near Comber Mere, Nantwich: 29 on 22nd Feb (including 7 Whoopers), and 16 on 13th Mar.
- Comber Mere: 19 on 15th May.
- Dodderington Mere, Nantwich: 2 on 15th Feb, 2 on 18th Mar, 7 on 22nd Apr, and 36 on 20th May.
- Middlewich canal: 50 on 12th Feb.
- Nantwich Boating Lake: 16 on 12th Feb, 16 on 8th Mar, 15 on 26th Apr, and 15 on 3rd May.
- River Dee, Chester: 4 on 2nd and 18th Feb, 4 on 3rd Mar, 6 on 26th Apr, and 4 on 30th May.

Interesting Movements:

CBD6(Green) was originally ringed as a second-year male on 19.01.2005 at Llandrindod Wells Lake, then re-ringed with the above number on the canal at Middlewich on 13.03.2011, seen again there on 17.05.2011. Distance from original ringing site = 123kms.

CS99(G) was ringed as a second-year female on 22.01.2007 at Hankelow Mill near Audlem. Seen at Acre Dell Pools, Congleton on 1.10.2007 (27kms) and Penrhyn Bay, Conwy on 23.03.2011 (91kms).

CT13(G) was ringed as a third-year male on 5.03.2007 at Redes Mere, Macclesfield and seen on 11.06.2010 at Dodderington Pool, Nantwich (28kms). Seen also on 23.03.2011 at Llandudno Boating Lake (108kms).

C375(G) was ringed on 22.11.2008 at Winterley Pool, Sandbach as a female of unknown age and seen at Winterley until 3.01.2006. It has been sighted at Carlton Minniott Park Lake, Thirsk from 9.01.2010 to 19.04.2010. And has since been reported at this Thirsk site during April 2011. Distance from ringing site =140kms.
HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HiBO)

January to June 2011 Ringing Review

The brutal weather of December 2010 was over and the New Year got started with local movements of thrushes allowing the observatory to ring some new birds: Song Thrushes and Blackbirds. Members of the wintering population were re-trapped: Robin, Blackbird, Dunnock, and a Wren from 2008 that were doing well and had coped with the cold weather. A surprise in February was the control on Hilbre of a Long-tailed Tit that was first ringed in Meols in June 2010. Of more significance perhaps was a Rock Pipit, re-trapped on 19th February that was first ringed in October 2009. Rock Pipits have been trapped wintering on Hilbre in most of the last 10 to 15 years but they have all been birds in their first year of life; this bird was the first evidence that adult birds also winter on Hilbre. The status of Rock Pipits on Hilbre and on the Wirral peninsula is not clear with Scandinavian birds and British race birds being observed. Particularly in relation to Hilbre, if it is good for wintering birds what is stopping them from staying to breed? Records from the 19th century (Coward and Oldham) suggest that Hilbre was a major breeding ground for Rock Pipits. What has changed?

Then March arrived and members rebuilt the largest of the Heligoland traps on the island, known affectionately as “the SK”- a reference to a large hill in South Africa, Spion Kop, adopted by Liverpool FC supporters as the name for the famous Anfield Kop. As usual, a Stonechat was caught and ringed early in the month and so were birds that were probably on their way north and east, Blackbirds and Chaffinches for example.

Then the first migrant from the south (if you exclude the Stonechat!) was trapped on 15th March: a Chiffchaff, followed the next day by the first nominate race Northern Wheatear, the first migrant from sub-Saharan Africa. These dates were early for captures on Hilbre. The wind had varying degrees of east in it during March, a major factor determining the number of birds arriving on Hilbre and this wind direction continued for April and into May. The consequence for the observatory and its ringing was the best spring migration season for many years and all kinds of number records being equalled or broken.

2nd April provided 35 birds ringed including the first of two Ring Ouzels caught this year. Catching Ring Ouzels is by no means an annual event on the island so two in one spring is nice for the Obs. Tree Pipits, whilst regular spring migrants at Hilbre, are usually heard flying over so three birds caught and ringed this spring was excellent and the best since the same number in 1985.

2nd May brought the biggest ringing total for a day on the island for several years: 81 birds, mainly Willow Warblers. The day was very unusual as most migration through Hilbre in the spring is over by 9:00am; however, this day birds were still arriving in the early afternoon.

On 6th May the ringers on the island were discussing the warblers that had arrived during the spring so far. The earliest ever Garden Warbler was a notable record and Grasshopper Warblers had turned up regularly throughout the period. All the expected warblers had arrived but the complaint was that there had not been a Lesser Whitethroat (usually a solitary annual occurrence). As often seems to happen with birdwatchers, whingeing works, and a Lesser Whitethroat was found and subsequently trapped on the next tour of the island.

Cygnets in 2011:

In the Crewe and Nantwich area, 20 pairs of swans are known to have hatched 54 cygnets – the best season for three years.

Sightings of all swans should be sent to: David Cookson, 70 Rope Lane, Rope, Crewe CW2 6RD. Tel: 01270 567526. Email: Cheshireswans@aol.com giving details of place (6-fig map ref), colour/character combination of ring and, if with other swans, total number present in flock. All sightings will receive a printout of the history for the relevant bird(s).

David Cookson, Group Leader

NB. Please note that our Swan Reports and Newsletters are now available on our website: www.record-lrc.co.uk/Group.aspx?Mod=Article&ArticleID=G0012001

Sponsored by Roberts Bakery, Northwich.
We had caught Redstarts, Lesser Redpolls, Reed Buntings, and many other finches. The usual harbinger of the end of spring arrived in the form of a Spotted Flycatcher caught and ringed on 21st May and soon after that juvenile birds of several species started to fledge on the island.

A record spring migration from a ringing point of view, that was probably attributable to the favourable winds and local conditions for large parts of the period as this does not seem to have been replicated at other west coast stations.

The secretary of the observatory was on his own on the island on 5th June enjoying a quiet time when he discovered a rather featureless bird in one of the nets that he immediately recognised as an ‘Acro’. Whilst extracting it his excitement grew and his initial suspicions were confirmed when a detailed examination back at the Obs revealed it to be a Blyth’s Reed Warbler, Acrocephalus dumetorum, the first record for Hilbre. He wasn’t on his own for long! This was rather a surprise find in spring (the species being more regular in autumn) – especially considering it was caught on the same date as the Paddyfield Warbler from 2009. The Blyth’s Reed Warbler was the first to be ringed on the Wirral peninsula and only the second to be ringed in Cheshire following one at Woolston Eyes NR on 26th August 2000. An exciting end to the spring on the island.

John Elliott, Hilbre Bird Observatory

MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL CONSERVATION GROUP

The last few months, typically, have been a quiet period for the Barn Owl groups.

The period is one of potential breeding, and so we specifically reduce our activities to minimise the danger of disturbing the birds, and therefore of any abandonment of clutches or broods. We have carried out a few isolated checks just to confirm what is happening, the results of which have not been too disappointing.

What is evident is that the breeding is following a more normal timescale this year, with birds still on eggs at the end of May (or with very young broods), suggesting an August fledging time.

Clutch sizes look quite reasonable (a number with five eggs have been located) but, at this moment in time, we have no real feel for the number of breeding pairs actually out there. We will not really know how the numbers stack up for a couple of months or so, and if or to what extent the impact of the harsh winter weather has had. Fingers crossed.

To repeat our usual concerns and plea - the next few months or so will tell us more about how well, or not, the Barn Owl survived. If you have seen any Barn Owls recently, please could you let us know (either direct, or by our sighting report on the website www.cheshirebarnowls.co.uk). As you will appreciate it is important that we know where the birds are regularly seen.

John Mycock, Chairman of the Mid Cheshire Barn Owl Conservation Group
Tel: 07970 235473 Email: john.mycock@birse.co.uk

RINGING INFORMATION ONLINE

Clive Richards points out that the BTO provides interesting material about ringing and recoveries online. Go to the BTO home page: click on ‘Ringing’ in the Core Surveys panel; then on Ringing home page: click on ‘online reports’. There is then a choice of ringing totals, recovery summaries (nationally or by county in each case) and recovery summaries by species; all are available for the last five years.

http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports
Welcome to the following new members since our last Bird News: Mr G Lowndes, Mr D H Walker and Mr & Mrs Barry. Our current membership stands at 324 which is 27 more members who either joined or paid up, the latter being reminded by Susan Canovan, our Membership Secretary, to whom we are very grateful.

Council has only met once since March but we continue to have a full agenda. We advertised in the last Bird News the position of Treasurer and received interest from one person who was unable to take on the role. So the position is being advertised again in this issue and would anyone with some experience in accounting or bookkeeping please put themselves forward.

Conservation continues to be a big issue with two major projects proposed by Peel Energy. One, to build a 600MW wind turbine generation system on part of Frodsham Marshes; this proposal was rejected by the local Council and has been referred to a public inquiry. Notice has just been received from the secretary of the Department of Energy and Climate Change to say that a pre-inquiry meeting will be held at 13.00h on Wednesday 14th September at the Holiday Inn, Beechwood Road, Runcorn. Assuming all goes to plan then the Inquiry will start at 10.00h on Tuesday 22nd November 2011 at the same venue. A representative from CAWOS will attend this meeting to restate our position. The second proposal is the Mersey Tidal Power scheme and we have just heard that Peel Energy is putting the Mersey Tidal Power project on hold for at least the duration of this term in Government as the scheme is not financially viable under current renewable energy subsidies. So we have some breathing space before it starts again! (See the separate report.)

The indoor meetings have been planned and are included in this issue and I just wish to remind members of our new venue, again see details in this issue of Bird News.

Discussions have continued with rECOOrd with a view to moving our data into their system. At present we are at the stage of looking at the technical feasibility of transferring some of our data to test out their system. Issues over retrieval of information for the annual Bird Report in a timely manner are still ongoing but there is willingness by both parties for this to happen.

On the birding front, the Raven Survey aimed at identifying the number of breeding Ravens in the county is ongoing. Similarly studies on the county’s Goosanders continued up to their departure in the spring. Some Council members participated in the North-West Bioblitz at Norton Priory on 14th June; the outcome was the identification of 1062 species in 24h, reflecting the biodiversity on this ancient site. Around 60 different species of bird were observed including Kingfisher and Hobby.

At the Council meetings held on 14th April 2011 the following points were discussed or agreed:

- The Wigg Island lecture on ‘Bird Frontiers’ by Mike Garner, sponsored by CAWOS, took place and was well received.
- The issue of peer reviewing articles for the Bird Report was discussed as some articles could have benefited from editing so they are more concise and focused. It was agreed that the County Recorder should see all articles prior to publication.
- Council discussed the possibility of getting a tracker for our website, so that we could follow interest in the site.
- The issue of a replacement Treasurer was discussed with regard to the way forward.
- The new subcommittee set up to run Rotherne Mere Bird Observatory had its inaugural meeting and reported that there are 106 permit holders for the reserve. Other news was that Sarah Warrener of Natural England was leaving and Council noted the need to identify who in Natural England we would be dealing with from now on.
- Council approved the next stage of discussions with rECOOrd, namely to start detailed technical discussions to enable a trial of CAWOS data being entered into their system.
- It was agreed to circulate members requesting help with the final year of the BTO Atlas survey in Cheshire, Greater Manchester and north Wales.
- Council also supported having a CAWOS stand at the BioBlitz at Norton Priory.

Ted Lock, CAWOS Secretary
MEMBERSHIP EMAILS

We are using email increasingly to contact members about the programme of talks and also recently, a request for help. We are pleased that we are in touch with most people this way because it is efficient and very cost-effective!

a. If you are not getting these notifications but would like to, then please email the Membership Secretary: Susan Canovan at memsec@cawos.org

b. Please keep us up to date with any changes to email addresses.

We appreciate that some members may not be using the internet/email and it would be handy to know who you are. This means we can keep this shortlist for any possible future mailings to go out alongside emails potentially as needs arise. Please write to:

Membership Secretary, 7 Pownall Rd, Cheadle Hulme, SK8 5AZ

Clive Richards, Chairman

CAWOS BREEDING RAVEN SURVEY 2011

As yet, few completed record forms have been returned. Please will all members who took part in the survey and have records to report, including nil returns where appropriate, send completed record forms (either by email or by post), as soon as possible to:

Mark Eddowes, 59 Westfield Drive, Knutsford, WA16 0BH Email: markeddowes@cawos.org

FRODSHAM MARSH WIND FARM

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change has given notice that a public inquiry will be held into the application to build a wind farm on Frodsham Marsh.

It is expected that the inquiry will begin on 22nd November 2011 at the Holiday Inn, Runcorn. A pre-inquiry meeting has been arranged for 14th September at the same place.

Since the last edition of Bird News certain members of CAWOS Council have been working on this issue. This work has included collating and studying the results of the CAWOS survey carried out over the last winter and into spring. The results and our interpretation of the results have helped form the CAWOS response to a document catchily named ‘Statement to Inform Appropriate Assessment’. This document was produced on behalf of the planning applicant as part of the process leading to the planning inquiry. Its purpose is to try and help define areas of agreement between the various parties prior to the public inquiry. Amongst other things, CAWOS is by no means satisfied that enough account has been taken of the likely disturbance which would be caused to important species which use the proposed wind farm site.

MERSEY TIDAL POWER

On 22nd June Peel announced that it is putting the Mersey Tidal Power Project on hold for at least the duration of this term of Government as the scheme is not financially viable under current renewable energy subsidies. Peel’s official press release can be seen here: http://www.peelenergy.co.uk/news

A preferred option report has been produced on behalf of the Project. This includes the final decision on the type of tidal technology to be used in the Mersey Tidal Power Project. This is available for comment here: http://www.merseytidalpower.co.uk/

It states that, although currently uneconomical, the preferred option for tidal technology on the Mersey came out as a full impoundment barrage. The RSPB have stated “we know this to be the most environmentally destructive type of tidal technology that exists to date, even though Peel have stated in the study that it is broadly environmentally acceptable”. However, for the time being at least, it appears that the Mersey Tidal Power Project will not proceed.

Steve Barber, on behalf of CAWOS Council
ROSTHERNE NEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Members will be pleased to note that a new agreement has been signed with Natural England to run the Boyd Observatory for 2011. In order to take the day-to-day affairs in hand, Peter Day is appointed Vice Chair of the subcommittee and will be ably helped by: Susan Canovan as Permit Secretary, Phil Dell as Treasurer, and Dave Lindsay as Promotions Secretary. A meeting was held in March to effect the handover of the reins and Minutes are posted in the Observatory.

Contact: Mrs S Canovan, 7 Pownall Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire, SK8 5AZ  Email: susancnvn@gmail.com

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 4TH MARCH 2011

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT FOR 2010

The year has seen CAWOS Council continuing to seek ways to make this an attractive, worthwhile and viable Society that achieves its aims. My first year as Chairman, via the various events and Council meetings, has reinforced in me something that I already knew, and that is that the dedicated and hard-working team deserves great recognition. I have the utmost regard for everyone who helps.

In 2010, politicians have led us to all think of the ‘Big Society’ (not a term that is totally understood yet) and to emphasise what charities do, better than government can, it seems. CAWOS is no exception, but is exceptional in that it achieves so much whilst relying on the few. It is this commitment and, of course, modest sums of money, that allow us to function and I hope that CAWOS has managed to raise its profile to members and non-members alike. With a slowly declining membership we compare with other like-minded organisations, losing support similarly. To increase our membership is a continuing goal and we especially need to encourage the young. It is a sad note to mention in this context that nearby societies have closed in the last year including Manchester Ornithological Society and Hale Ornithologists.

We carry on! Top of the profile raising has been to the continued recognition of the Atlas publication - Birds in Cheshire and Wirral: A breeding and wintering atlas and I was delighted to accept the inaugural Marsh Christian Award for local ornithology in London last November. It was a good day out and I was glad to share the glory with some key members of the Atlas subcommittee, including David Norman as author.

Our programme has, I think, met the mark being a varied yet unique set of subjects. I feel a little odd writing about this because I organised the speakers myself and so this might be less than objective. The year started with bad weather and a cancellation but a prompt re-booking helped for later in the year.

The February meeting - ‘Beneath the Dark Canopy’ by Mike Leach took us on a tour of the gloomy world within the tropical rainforest and highlighted some of the risks and difficulties for health (parasites) and photography (lack of light). March and last year’s AGM was counterpointed with Colin Wells’ explanation as to the ‘RSPB’s plans for Inner Marsh Farm’. We have lots to look forward to there, with work still under way to improve access, facilities and habitats as per the plan outlined for the Dee Marsh Reserve. The new season started with - ‘Gateway to Sahara’ by Keith Offord – who had one reaching for the passport with a talk on the birds of Morocco, a relatively near nation but yet so different in terms of culture and wildlife. Next we heard from Nick Williams on his travels from the north of Europe – ‘From the Dummersee to the Camargue’. The final meeting was ‘Wildlife of The Isles of Scilly’ by Tim Melling. The talk was well received with much to warm us on the contrasting snowy evening including butterflies, moths, wild flowers, plus some history. The roads stayed open for us but prudently we did not linger long afterwards.

Chief amongst our regular publications is the Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report and the 2009 year has again reached excellent standards. Our thanks should go out to the editors, Sheila Blamire and Richard Smith, together with Hugh Pulsford our County Recorder. Similarly we must acknowledge with thanks all the compilers who dedicate so much time and effort which cumulatively give us such a fine result. It is definitely a credit to all those involved with its production, resulting in a report that is second to none in my opinion.
Bird News too has been produced on three occasions during the year and again we should thank Sheila for her continuing efforts. It is indeed inspiring that she works so hard for us after her illness and long may she be able and willing to do so. Picking up last July’s Bird News at random, I find articles written by members updating us on single species, ringing reports, commentary, full explanation of Primary Feathers project, terminology, conservation news and articles on identification and status of a species, plus a round-up of sightings, plus diary. At 32 pages this is really a good read and it takes some collating and bringing together. Contributors’ short pieces combine to make a unique blend, I think, with the light-hearted and more serious alongside, to make the issues something to look forward to.

The CAWOS website has represented the Society well since its revamp and thanks go to Mike Hems for his input there. Whilst trying to keep it up to date is the intention, it is surprising how often little corrections and updates are required. Overall though, I think it reflects well on us and it is definitely a worthwhile extension for us.

We have negotiated a one year renewal with Natural England to manage the Observatory at Rostherne and a new committee is being set up in the forthcoming year for day-to-day business. Ray Anslow is to step down as our Treasurer but I have to pass on our real appreciation for his work. Not only has he produced the accounts ably and accurately but he has done so quickly and has brought us up to date by harnessing a computer programme to aid the process. He has helped us advertise and prepare a job description but helpfully, he is happy to train a successor. Several CAWOS grants have been made to support local projects and groups, including Hatton’s Hey.

This report does read a little like a thank you list. Why? It is because the work deserves acknowledgement at least once a year and I am sure no one minds being reminded.

Clive Richards, Chairman

SECRETARY’S REPORT 2010

As with the previous year Council has had a busy year, meeting on six occasions, one meeting being an additional one to discuss the way forward with the CAWOS database.

The Atlas Subcommittee have been active during the year with monitoring phase 2 of the project on education. The Primary Feather’s project is going extremely well, Cheshire Wildlife Trust our co-partners have continued to use Jeff Clarke, who is a very good teacher and birder. Feedback from the schools has been extremely positive, such that some extra money available in the Atlas project is being used to extend this programme to include some additional schools, currently the demand exceeds the resource. Key stage 3-4 of the project is with Halton BC and it has proved difficult to get commitment from the schools as their timetables are less flexible than the lower years. Currently Council is exploring ways to seek additional funding to continue the education aspect of the Atlas project.

The Atlas has highlighted key species which require further study in the county and has been used by the Monitoring and Surveying Subcommittee to organise a follow-up survey on rookeries in the county after the severe winter, the summer warbler survey, the roosting Goosander survey and, the most current, a survey of nesting Ravens in the county.

Council have decided to take a longer term view of how we collect and store our bird data in the future and in this regard held a special Council meeting to explore the options. Our current in-house system is still good for a few more years but we do need to consider alternatives. After much debate and discussion Council decided to explore whether it would be possible to use rECOrd, Cheshire’s Local Record Centre, whose remit is to hold Cheshire’s records for mammals, flowers, fungi, moths, etc and birds. Initial discussions with rECOrd have gone well and we are currently in a second phase of discussing technical aspects to check that we can store and, most importantly, retrieve the bird data in a timely manner for production of the annual Bird Report.

Conservation issues have continued to be high on Council’s agenda with ongoing concerns with regard to the Mersey Tidal Power Scheme and a proposed wind farm at Frodsham Marsh. Council members have been busy working with the RSPB and CWT and producing objections to the Scoping Reports produced on behalf of Peel Holdings. An article on the potential impact of these two schemes on bird life is being prepared for the next issue of Bird News to raise the awareness of the issue to CAWOS members.
Our indoor autumn/winter meetings continue to attract good quality speakers, but attendance has been low and typically no more than 50 members maximum at a meeting. Council has taken the decision to move the venue to a cheaper location starting in October, namely St Vincent’s Church hall in Tatton Street, Knutsford. Full information will be provided in the next issue of Bird News.

The membership currently stands at 297 paid-up members compared to 339 members at this time last year.

On a more positive note I would like to thank Susan Canovan, our Membership Secretary, for her support and my colleagues on Council who have helped me in a variety of ways during the last year.

Ted Lock, Secretary

**TREASURER’S REPORT FOR 2010**

I have pleasure in submitting the Annual Audited Accounts of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society for year ending 31 December 2010, which shows an after adjustments loss of £413.48.

The Society’s income continues to fall particularly from the lower bank interest received due to the continuing national economic situation. Subscriptions have decreased and receipts are now slightly under £4,000 per annum, but it is not proposed to make any amendment in 2012, although Council will be considering the level of subscriptions which will be charged from 2013. My thanks go to Sue Canovan for her invaluable work as Membership Secretary.

The Society has strictly controlled its expenditure in the light of decreased income but budgetted expenditure was over-provided and therefore the projected loss of £1,870 for 2010 was minimised. We have curtailed our expenditure for 2011 through the current Budget; even so, we project a deficit of £1,700 for 2011.

Costs have inevitably risen, with the five Open Meetings now making an annual overspend on income of about £1000, and the two publications result in a net outgoing of £3,900. (Bird News £1,000 and the annual Bird Report £2,900.)

Council have been looking at ways to reduce these costs, and arrangements have been made for the Open Meetings to be held elsewhere for the 2011/12 season. We will ensure that the costs of publications are controlled whilst still maintaining the high standard for which the Society can be rightly proud.

During the year the Society contributed towards the rental of Hatton’s Hey Nature Reserve by making a grant to Mid Cheshire Ornithological Society.

The Atlas Project is now entering its final phase as we continue to work with our partners, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Halton Borough Council. An agreement has been reached with the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Primary Feathers scheme to be extended by 3 months until the end of 2011. The additional cost of approx £3,000 will be met from other budgetted monies not used.

At the time of writing the available budget is £24,378 for which funds of £30,839 (including £4,000 of CAFBank interest which will revert to CAWOS if unused) are on account as will be seen from the Balance Sheet figures. However, these amounts are required to cover the final 18 months of the scheme as no reimbursement claim from Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) has been received since June 2010. The total paid to CWT for the first 9 months’ expenditure (September 2009 to June 2010) of Primary Feathers amounted to £12,700.

I am hopeful that, if the Society decides to undertake future Heritage Lottery Fund applications, the procedures in handling these projects learnt through dealing with the Atlas project will be considered to make such future schemes easier to deal with.

Further Royalties income (£988) from the new CAWOS Atlas have been received and credited to the ‘Designated Future Atlas account’.

The Society was presented with the Marsh Local Ornithological Award which has been placed on deposit with CAFBank, identified in the new ‘Education Fund account’ to be used in specific future activities by the Society.

Finally, I would like to thank our Auditor, Norman Scott, for his continued assistance and I am pleased to say he is willing to undertake the same role next year.

Ray Anslow, Treasurer
SITUATIONS VACANT

TREASURER WANTED - URGENT!!

Due to relocation of present Treasurer to North Lancashire, the Society requires a replacement as soon as possible.

The role of the Treasurer is as a Trustee of the Society, with ultimate responsibility to the Society’s governing Council, and the Charity Commission for the control, maintenance and reporting of the Society’s finances.

A computer system is used but there are no VAT or Payroll elements to the Accounts.

Full initial instruction and future support will be provided.

A job description is available and can be obtained from the Chairman or existing Treasurer.

If you are interested in the role and would like to have a chat about it, the current Treasurer, Ray Anslow, would be pleased to discuss things with you.

Ray Anslow, Treasurer, 17, Hawthorn Road, Bolton-le-Sands, Carnforth, Lancs, LA5 8EY Tel: 01524 733827 Email: rayanslow@cawos.org

ATTENTION!  ATTENTION!  ATTENTION!

CHANGE OF VENUE FOR INDOOR MEETINGS

As from October 2011 our monthly indoor meetings will take place in the hall at St Vincent’s Roman Catholic Church, Tatton Street, Knutsford, WA16 6HR.

This change has been made largely for financial reasons as the new venue will be much cheaper to hire. However, we feel it will be equally as comfortable. The hall has seating for up to 100, facilities for making refreshments and plenty of space for displays and circulation.

Tatton Street leads from Canute Square (which is accessed from the roundabout by Knutsford Heath) towards Tatton Park and both church and hall are very close to the Knutsford entrance to Tatton Park.

As parking in front of the hall is limited it should be restricted to speakers, those bringing equipment for the meeting and those with disabled badges. There is more than adequate parking in the large (and free) car park off Tatton Street, only 100 yards from the hall, and in the street itself.

We hope to see you there.
7th OCTOBER 2011 *** Prompt start - two speakers! ***

‘WETLAND BIRD SURVEY (WeBS)’ by Neil Calbrade, WeBS Research Ecologist BTO
A short talk and update on the WeBS work on the River Mersey, which is one of the key sites currently in need of more counters to enable the long-term ornithological interest of the river being monitored for its protection, having recently come under threat from a proposed tidal barrage. Although this plan is now shelved, the future may well hold further developments, given likely energy price hikes.

‘GALAPAGOS – TIMELESS AND FEARLESS’ by Santiago Bejarano
A look at the natural history of this remarkable archipelago with a special focus on the bird life. Illustrated by beautiful photographs, Santiago will talk about the four species of Mockingbirds found in Galapagos, which were the true inspiration for Darwin and his seminal work, as well as Galapagos Finches and other unique species, like Galapagos Penguins, Flightless Cormorants, three species of boobies, frigatebirds and the enigmatic and graceful Waved Albatross.

4th NOVEMBER 2011

‘BIRDS OF NORTH NORFOLK’ by Allan Parker
Visiting the well known and worthy reserves of north Norfolk, this illustrated talk includes the fauna and flora to be found along this magnificent coastal region. With the incredibly wide range and variety of bird species, present through the seasons, the locality provides so much to interest us.

2nd DECEMBER 2011

‘BIRDING FRONTIERS OF CHESHIRE, WIRRAL AND BEYOND’ by Martin Garner
Renowned for his gift to entertain his audience from the first second, this evening promises to be much more than a clear, enjoyable and interesting presentation on bird ID. Martin’s Frontiers in Birding book gives one an idea as to what to expect exploring the cutting edge of birding and how to really look at birds and push forward the limits of what we know about birding.

6th JANUARY 2012

‘THE SECRET LIFE OF THE NIGHTJAR’ by Phil Palmer
Phil has made an extensive study of the European Nightjar for 20 years. We look forward to a well-illustrated talk with many excellent slides of this rather elusive bird. Although absent from our shores, this talk on a January night should remind us of those warm summer evenings on an English heathland, in an informative and humorous way.

3rd FEBRUARY 2012

‘THE BIGGEST TWITCH’ by Alan Davies and Ruth Miller
Alan was the site manager of the RSPB Conwy and oversaw the Reserve develop into what we enjoy today. Even this dream job could not stop a keen birder turn in a new career direction, to travel the world and fulfil a lifetime’s ambition with The Biggest Twitch. After birding in 27 countries around the world to set a new record, we hope to share his adventures of the ‘2008 big year’. No doubt we will enjoy the fast-paced wildlife travelogue, warts-and-all.

2nd MARCH 2012

AGM followed by AN ILLUSTRATED TALK by Jeff Clarke
Concentrating on the aptly named ‘Primary Feathers’ programme which followed the publication of the Cheshire and Wirral Atlas (and funded by the linked Heritage Lottery grant money), Jeff will demonstrate the good work that has been done - partly in our name and of which we have every reason to be proud. The beneficiaries have been a whole host of Cheshire schoolchildren. There will be tales to tell hopefully, to add some humour; an antidote to any AGM!
The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group proudly presents its 4th

WILDLIFE AND OUTDOOR
WORLD EXTRAVAGANZA 2011

at Marton Heath Trout Pools, Pikelow Farm, School Lane,
Marton, Nr Macclesfield, SK11 9HD

on Sunday 11th September 2011 from 10am to 5pm

Exhibits, craft stalls, demonstrations, competitions and
activities for children, all with a wildlife or rural theme.
Refreshments, teas and snacks will be available throughout the day.

Adults: £4  Under 16s: £2  Children under 5 years: FREE

All monies raised will support the RSPB ‘LIVING CLASSROOMS INITIATIVE’

Thank You to all our sponsors who are making this event possible.

More details: email wow@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

Directions: Pikelow Farm is to the east of the village of Marton and is approached via School Lane, a turning off the A34, the main road between Alderley Edge and Congleton. The farm, which is signposted Marton Heath Trout Pools, is approximately ¾ mile along School Lane. Please take care as this country lane is narrow in places. Parking is FREE in a field close to the entrance to Pikelow Farm.

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THE magazine for North West Birders
Regional bird news through your door every month
Visit: www.birdingnorthwest.org.uk
Or send a cheque for £26 to ‘CAW Birding’
5 Westbourne Road, West Kirby, Wirral CH48 4DG
### AUGUST

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Terns and skuas on Hilbre, 8:15am until 4:00pm, to book ring 0151 648 4371</td>
<td>CADOS Migrants, ring Roger Wilkinson 01244 318343 for details</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>NCRSPB Brockholes Quarry and Cuerden Valley Park, ring for details</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>LOG ‘REED BED MANAGEMENT’ by Mark Champion</td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>CADOS Migrants, ring Roger Wilkinson 01244 318343 for details</td>
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### SEPTEMBER

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>HPRSPB AGM followed by ‘IN SEARCH OF THE CARACARA’ by Richard Stephenson</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>MRSPB Wildlife and Outdoor World Extravaganza at Pikelow Farm, Marton</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>KOS Hilbre, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 7:00am or West Kirby at 8:00am</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>HPRSPB Spurn Point, meet at Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>MRSPB ‘SOME OF BRITAIN’S BIRDS OF PREY’ by David Webb</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>NCRSPB ‘AN ARCTIC &amp; HEBRIDEAN ODYSSEY’ by Gordon Yates</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>NCRSPB Hilbre/Wirral, ring 01925 726242 for details</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>CADOS North Wirral, ring Nick French 01829 271945 for details</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>HPRSPB ‘AREN’T BIRDS BRILLIANT?’ by Stuart Meredith</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>CRSPB ‘BANJUL TO BASSE, GAMBIA – In search of the Crocodile Bird’ by Mike McKavett</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>KOS ‘BIRDLIFE THROUGH FORTY PENNINE YEARS’ by Gordon Yates</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>MRSPB Potteric Carr, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635 for info</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>ADNHS ‘THE NORTH-WEST YEAR’ by Chris Galvin</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>LOG ‘Where Wild Birds Draw Me’ by John Power</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>WGBG ‘A VIDEO DIARY YEAR OF A NATURALIST’ by Peter Guy</td>
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### OCTOBER

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRSPB Hilbre High Tide (9.5m, 2:23pm), meet at West Kirby at 11:00am, ring 01244 380447</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>HPRSPB Old Moor, meet at Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>CADOS ‘EASTERN RUSSIA’ by John Raines</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>CAWOS Short talk on ‘WETLAND BIRD SURVEY’ by Neil Calbrade, BTO followed by ‘GALAPAGOS – TIMELESS AND FEARLESS’ by Santiago Bejarano</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>ADNHS ‘USING HERBS &amp; FLOWERS IN MEDICINE’ by Dr Brian Garnes</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>MRSPB ‘A YEAR AT POTTERIC CARR’ by Allan Parker</td>
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<td>13-16</td>
<td>NCRSPB Long weekend to Hartlepool area, ring for details</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>KOS Potteric Carr RSPB Reserve, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 8:30am</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>MRSPB Conwy &amp; north Wales coast, ring David Tolliday 01625 432105 for details</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>HPRSPB ‘THE FALKLANDS’ by Charles Brown</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>CRSPB ‘OUT AND ABOUT’ by Jim Almond</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>NCRSPB AGM followed by ‘PROJECTS ON RSPB RESERVES IN THE NW’ by Robin Homer</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>WGBG ‘BOTSWANA’ by Geoff Trinder</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>CADOS Migrant Mystery Tour, ring Don Pawlett 01244 677477 for details</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Low tide birdwatch on Hilbre, 10:00am until 3:30pm, to book ring 0151 648 4371</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>WGBG Spurn Point by coach, ring for details</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>ADNHS ‘NATURE IN FOCUS’ by Jim Almond</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>NCRSPB Marbury CP/Neumann’s Flash, ring for details</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>KOS ‘VIDEO DIARY OF A BIRDER’ by Andy Hirst</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>LOG ‘WILD WINGS AND WANDERINGS’ by Cliff Heyes</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>CRSPB High tide watch at Point of Ayr (HT 9.9m, 1:20pm), meet at Caldy Valley at 9:30am</td>
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### NOVEMBER

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CADOS ‘THE BIGGEST TWITCH’ by Alan Davis and Ruth Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CAWOS ‘BIRDS OF NORTH NORFOLK’ by Allan Parker</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>HPRSPB Carsington Water, meet at Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am</td>
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For further information on Outdoor Events within the county see the Birdwatcher’s Diary at: www.deeestuary.co.uk

Will affiliated societies, who wish to advertise meetings of relevance to CAWOS, please send their programme to:– Sheila Blamire, Woodruff Cottage, Clanhanger Lane, Mere, Cheshire, WA16 6QG or, preferably please, by email: sheilablamire@cawos.org

For further information on Outdoor Events within the county see

**AFFILIATED SOCIETIES**

ADNHS Altrincham & Dist. Natural History Soc, mtgs Bowdon Parish Centre 7:30pm, contact Hon. Sec. Claire Joures 0161 928 4513
CADOS Chester & Dist. Ornithological Soc, mtgs Caldy Valley Community Centre 7:30pm, contact Prog. Sec. Nick French 01978 856522
CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Orn Soc, mtgs St Vincent’s RC Church Hall, Knutsford 7:45pm, contact Clive Richards 01625 524527
CRSPB Chester RSPB Group, mtgs St Mary’s Centre, Chester 7:30pm, contact Chris Kay and Peter Stevenson 01352 716886
HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members’ Group, mtgs Senior Citizens’ Hall, Marple 7:45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635
KOS Knutsford Ornithological Soc, mtgs Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road, Knutsford 8:00pm, contact Tony Ellis 01565 632501
LOG Lymm Ornithological Group, mtgs Lymm Village Hall 8:00pm, contact Prog. Sec. Hilary Unsworth 01925 860155
MOS Mid-Cheshire Ornithological Soc, mtgs Cuddington & Sandiway Village Hall 7:45pm, contact John Drake 01928 561133
MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members’ Group, mtgs Senior Citizens’ Hall 7:45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635
NCRSPB North Cheshire RSPB Members’ Group, mtgs Appleton Parish Hall, Appleton 7:45pm, contact Olive Giles 01928 733405
NNHS Nantwich Natural History Soc, mtgs RSPCA, Stapeley Grange at 7:30pm, contact Sec. Dr Paul Griffiths 01270 780626
SECS South-East Cheshire Orn Soc, mtgs Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Sec.Colin Lythgoe 01270 582642
WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group, mtgs Wilmslow Guild HQ 7:45pm, contact Sec. Judith Rees 0161 980 5034

**DECEMBER**
1 CADOS ‘CAPE OF GOOD HOPE’ by Phil Woollen
2 CAWOS ‘BIRDING FRONTIERS OF CHESHIRE, THE WIRRAL AND BEYOND’ by Martin Garner
3  Low tide Birdwatch on Hilbre, 9:00am until 3:00pm, to book ring 0151 648 4371
4  HPRSPB Martin Mere, meet at Memorial Park car park, Marple at 8:00am
4  MRSPB Tittesworth Reservoir, ring Lydia Taylor 01260 275248 for details
6  ADNHS ‘A TASTE OF ISLAY’ by Gordon Yates
9  KOS CHRISTMAS PARTY
9  LOG CHRISTMAS PARTY
9  WGBG ‘LOWLAND NEPAL’ by Robert Davidson
10 ADNHS Annual Christmas walk & pub lunch, ring for details
11 NCRSPB Moore NR, ring for details
11 KOS Marshside and Martin Mere, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 9:00am
11 WGBG Mersey Valley, ring for details
12 CRSPB CHRISTMAS PARTY
13 MRSPB ‘FAIR ISLE’ by Tim Melling
14 CRSPB MEMBERS EVENING at Guildhall

**ADNHS**
8 ‘BHUTAN’ by Margaret Ledger
8 ‘AFRICA - NAMIBIA, RWANDA, KENYA AND SOUTH AFRICA’ by Paul Hobson
12 KOS Connah’s Quay, meet at the Sessions House, Knutsford at 9:00am
16 CRSPB ‘GATEWAY TO SAHARA’ by Keith Offord
18 NCRSPB ‘SPRINGTIME IN THE ROCKIES’ by Brayton Holt
20 NCRSPB Shropshire Meres, ring for details
20 MRSPB Attenborough Gravel Pits, Ian Taylor 01260 275248 for details
21 HPRSPB ‘MEXICO’S WILDLIFE SPECTACLES’ by Tim Melling
22 ADNHS ‘UP THE INSIDE PASSAGE – Vancouver to Glacier Bay’ by Jeff Clarke
25 KOS ‘THE BLESSED ISLE – ANGLESEY’ by Rev. Hugh Linn
25 LOG ‘ARCTIC AND HEBRIDEAN ODYSSEY’ by Gordon Yates
25 WGBG ‘SEABIRD CITY’ by Allan & Susan Parker
26 Birdwatch at King’s Gap, Hoylake, 9:30am until 12noon, no need to book
27 WGBG Tregarron by coach, ring for details
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Alpha dial 07000 BIRDWATCHER (247392)
E-mail: focalpoint@dial.pipex.com/Website: www.fpoint.co.uk
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