

BIRD NEWS

Number 122

March 2023



Up on the Roof
County Rarity: Ring-billed Gull
Update on Hoylake Shore

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(ELECTED AT THE AGM 3rd MARCH 2023)

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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: Penduline Tit, Woolston Eyes by Ray Scally

Other illustrations by Tony Broome, Phil Jones, Bill Morton and Ray Scally

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 17th June 2023

Guest Editorial

As I am writing this, it's officially the first day of spring, despite the fact that it's colder than it's been for much of the winter. Despite this, there is a Chiffchaff and a Goldcrest in the garden this morning, so it's not going to be too long before trans-Saharan migrants start arriving. For me, the event that gets me excited about spring arriving is the first Blackcap or Chiffchaff that arrives with a pollen horn*; matted forehead feathers covered in pollen acquired from large tubular flowers in North Africa or Southern Europe, or when I catch one with sun-bleaching to the exposed primary tips, not something that happens at a Cornish sewage farm over the course of a winter!

Andy Harmer's fascinating article on the surveying of roof-nesting gulls using drones, 'Up on the Roof', reminded me of a sad recent incident. The County's first roof-nesting gulls in Hoylake in 1971, were 'deterred' by the house owner the following year, but despite this setback, the habit became more and more common. This century a colony of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls has become established in West Kirby. Possibly attracted by this ready source of convenient protein was an escaped Red-tailed Hawk, which first appeared in 2013. This striking-looking *Buteo* specialised in feeding on gull chicks, and the sound of their parents objecting to this was a signature of the audioscape of summer mornings in the town. The Red-tailed Hawk had a penchant for sitting prominently on rooftops, the top of the gable end of Dee Hotel was a favourite, or on lamp posts, distractingly for birders, right over the road on Grange Hill. It was a local celebrity and dozens of local residents would notice it, take photos on their smartphone and ask what it was. The hawk was found dead on 1st of February this year. The cause of death is as yet unknown, but natural causes and old age must be likely, but I do worry that highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) might have played its part.

Wildfowl are suffering really badly from HPAI and I noticed that another long-staying and famous resident, Cheshire's summering 'Wendy' Whooper Swan was reported as showing signs of the disease last week. The virus has been turning up in scavenging mammals and might have something to do with the unusually low numbers of raptors reported on the recent spring tide watches at Parkgate. If you do witness any birds showing signs of HPAI please check out the advice here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds>.

I am very pleased to see Richard Smith's article on Hoylake Shore, though it's taken away one of the subjects that I could have filled this editorial with, but I can add a couple of wonderful bits of news. The recovery of the foreshore from its mechanical and chemical abuse has included the appearance of two globally endangered species. I was lucky to have Andrew Goodwin show me several Sea Aster Bees *Colletes halophilus* in autumn, feeding appropriately on Sea Aster flowers. The species is limited to a quite narrow zone of salt-meadow between the Thames and Humber estuaries and on the adjacent North Sea coasts of continental Europe. Recently Andrew confirmed its presence at Heswall and it's also been seen on the Sefton Coast. This solitary bee is globally threatened because of its narrow habitat preference and loss of the habitat it favours through coastal squeeze and rising sea levels.

Even more remarkable is the discovery of around 5% of the UK population of Shore Dock *Rumex rupestris* on the foreshore. This is a plant that has reduced from around 500 to fewer than 313 known plants in the UK in the last survey, with UK holding the bulk of the global population - it's also found in Brittany and Galicia. It's a plant that has chosen an unfortunate niche, at the base of cliffs (or sea walls) with a constant fresh water supply and disturbed/loose sand. Rising sea levels are doing it no favours and over half the known colonies from the late 20th century have been lost. It's as protected as any species of plant in the UK and is even specifically protected internationally under the Bern convention.

Enjoy this edition of *Bird News* - and the spring.

Jane Turner

Editorial comment: *I recommend doing an internet search for 'pollen horn' where you'll find other examples, photos and even research papers. A fascinating topic.

CAWOS News

Council has met only once since my report in the November issue of *Bird News* which was in January, where one of the most important issues is putting forward Council members for another year assuming they are agreeable. This was duly achieved, the only differences were the resignation of John Jones and the Secretary; Ted Lock is standing down following appointment at the AGM in 2008 having spent 15 years in the role. The new Secretary being put forward at this year's AGM is David Hiley who has been on Council for the last two years and also been involved in setting up the Zoom meetings for our talks, where some of you will have met him. Following the circulation of the AGM notice a member came forward and said she was prepared to stand for an ordinary membership position on Council. This is the first time that somebody has volunteered to join Council in my 15 years in the job and we look forward to working with Emma Jenks once she is elected.

David Cogger, who was CAWOS Secretary that I took over from 15 years ago, has been looking after sales of the annual *Bird Report* during that time and informed the Council he wishes to stand down. David has done an excellent job over the years and Council was very grateful for his time, effort and energy and he has been formerly thanked. David Hiley said he was prepared to take on the role of advertising and selling the *Bird Reports*. David Hiley is from the Chester area and therefore more conveniently placed to visit the venues at RSPB Burton Mere and Conwy. We are always looking for new outlets for selling the reports and bird hides to post the information. Should anyone be prepared to do this David will be in a position to send them a poster to display.

Indoor meetings were on the agenda and our Treasurer is making enquires with regard to the availability of our venue in Knutsford, but the relevant people have not been around. But more recent information indicates that the price for hiring the hall has doubled, where numbers attending would be a key factor for covering the cost. There was also discussion whether we should hold a meeting in the west of the County to cater for our members in Chester/Wirral. No decision has been made but with the poor attendance at our Zoom meetings, I think we may need to poll members to see what they would like if it were cost effective to continue. This is a very important issue as we do not organise trips to birding sites, but leave that to the clubs and societies in the County.

Our primary role is the recording of birds in the County and producing an annual report and we are dependent on members giving up time to help make that happen. Records have to be submitted by the end of April 2023 if they are to be included the 2022 *Bird Report*. The BTO has a survey of Woodcock for this spring and any members interested in helping should contact Hugh Pulsford on hughpulsford@kawos.org, who is the CAWOS BTO representative. CAWOS has also been asked to conduct surveys on the Wilmslow moss area year-round to find out what breeding and wintering birds are using the moss area now and over several years while it is recovering. If any members are interested in helping with these surveys, which will start in March, please contact me tedlock@kawos.org.

Council has also considered having a display at the high tide events run by the RSPB at Parkgate, the approval of the warden at RSPB Burton Mere has given us permission to participate.

Ted Lock

MEMBERSHIP

Hello from your new Membership Secretary!

Firstly, I'd like to extend a big 'thank you' to Phil for giving so many years of his time, skills and energy to the role of Membership Secretary. It is much appreciated and I think we can safely say that Phil has most definitely earned his retirement from the job!

Secondly, a warm welcome is given to our new members: Lynne and Tony Bruce, Neil Coyne, Paul Heaton, Emma Jenks, Phil Panton, Phil Rowley, Richard Would and Richard Whitby.

Thanks for joining CAWOS.

Membership update

Of our c300 members some 200 successfully renewed their membership by the correct amount and at the right time. Well done to this 66%. Since then a further 81 members have renewed, bringing the total to 281. There are 5 members who have renewed, but underpaid - if this is you, please do try to send in the remaining amount, however small. I'm hopeful that the remaining 8% will respond to the reminders and renew their membership for 2023.

Thank you everyone for your membership - your continuing support is much appreciated.

If you have any comments or queries around membership, please don't hesitate to contact me at memsec@cawos.org.

Carolyn Bailey

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

In this copy of *Bird News* are the annual reports from myself, the Treasurer and our Secretary. In mine I have stated that 2023 will be my last as Chairman - I cannot sit for 2 hours in a meeting any longer. Someone else will be organising the zoom meetings for the talks programme but I may join just as a member, that very much depends on how I am on the day.

I'm writing this looking out of the window, pretty much the same view as I have had for the last 12 months when I've been unable to get out birding. It's a lovely day and would have been ideal to go and see a Waxwing. Not quite a spectacular winter for the species but there is the odd one around; there are reports from Wigan and Bolton, near but not in the CAWOS area. It is so good to open the door when it is still dark at this time of year and hear that the dawn chorus is starting. This morning I had a Wren singing away, along with the resident Robin - he's been singing for some weeks now. I've seen him fighting with another Robin, maybe one of his young from last year, but it makes no difference our garden is his territory. Soon I will hear Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, the wheeze of the Greenfinch, the tinkle of the Goldfinch along with the calls of Blue, Coal and Great Tits. To me, mornings at this time of year are so refreshing, there are flowers in the garden giving just a hint of colour. March will bring the first migrants back in, Sand Martins, what an uplifting thing it is to see the first returning migrant. They will be closely followed by the Wheatears. Spring time also brings the big tides around the Wirral, keep any eye open for Parkgate high tide; it can be a true wildlife spectacle if tide and wind combine. We are exploring ways of having a CAWOS presence at the RSPB event held in the Old Baths car park so watch this space.

Phil Hampson

CAWOS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 3rd MARCH 2023

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2022

Introduction

2022 was the first year since 2020 that we had no restrictions affecting our birding, although many of us still continue to be very careful. People have continued to do their daily walks as part of everyday life. Sheila and Geoff Blamire still go out daily and by now will have walked in the region of 6000 miles. So from home they are now in Nigeria, where they would be seeing a distinctly different set of birds.

Many of the countryside birds that most of us remember well are now seriously endangered. The Yellowhammer that we all frequently heard with its song "a little bit of bread and no cheese" is now very hard to find. That is just one species. The BTO run annual surveys that continue to reflect the changes, if you'd like to take part please contact Hugh Pulsford, our BTO representative. I am

going to pick one area in particular. Gowy Meadows is an area that is very important for wildlife in general, yet no one counts it for BTO WeBS; if interested in this WeBS location or another then please contact me. One of the reasons I mention these surveys is that our countryside is shrinking with extensive house building in many areas. In many instances we are asked to provide bird data to help with planning objections and give a representative view of the birdlife in an area, but often we can't. We have areas where excellent and meaningful numbers of bird records are submitted. But in others we have very little, for example Danes Moss near Macclesfield. Our bird records for this area are very thin on the ground, when asked to support a very important objection to building there we couldn't help. Yet, many of us know it is visited regularly and rich in bird life. Please record the birds you see whilst out on walks and send them in via the BirdTrack app or on our spreadsheet. The eastern side of the CAWOS area is very light on bird records and is not representative of the species there. Our website has full details of how to add birds to BirdTrack or if you do not want to use a computer/smart phone in this way keep a manual record, complete our manual recording spreadsheet and send it to me. We are more than happy to handle records submitted this way. Please send in your records we do need to have the capability to show the birdlife of an area if asked.

Membership

Our membership has remained at just over 300 throughout the year. We are managing to recruit sufficient new members to cover the people who annually do not renew their membership. But, we are not attracting younger members. This is the same issue for all societies and clubs but we still need to try and bring in younger people.

Council and Subcommittees

As normal, we have had five Council meetings held during the year, now on the third Wednesdays in January, April, July, September and November. One meeting was face-to-face, the others being via Zoom. I'd like to thank every Council member for their help and support over the year. Carolyn Bailey, our new Membership Secretary, has taken over from me in this role, please support her and reply in a timely manner, it always helps to maintain the membership.

Indoor Meetings

All our talks throughout 2022 were conducted via Zoom. We have explored going back to some indoor meetings going forward. The cost for our 'old' location has doubled to a level where we cannot afford to use it without charging members quite a substantial amount to attend. Over 2023 we will continue to review the situation and try to come up with a solution that suits our needs. We are aware that some members are very keen to have a face-to-face meeting to catch up with old friends.

Annual Bird Reports

I have touched on this in the introduction. It was hard on the people involved in completing two *Bird Reports* during the year, thank you every single one of them whatever their contribution. We have now started work on the 2022 issue, mainly for me with the Bird Records. Please remember that the deadline for submitting records to me is **30th April**. I cannot guarantee that any received after this date will be used.

We are now getting c250,000 bird records in BirdTrack. That is the sum of those inputted direct and the ones manually processed, thank you to everyone. Adding in those from other sources adds a further 100,000. But the bird records is just one element that forms the data that the data compilers use to write their sections. The compiler role is key and very important to us. It is a difficult and testing job that a recipient of a completed *Bird Report* will not see or maybe even be aware of. This group of 12 people spend a great deal of time interpreting the data and translating it into words. Each and every one of them is greatly valued and their work appreciated by myself and Ted as co-editors. We then have proof reading and the photographs, thank you to David Steventon and Mark Woodhead for their hard work in these areas. The whole report is typeset for us by Dave Bickerton, who is not a member. Dave has been very supportive and helpful in giving Ted and myself excellent advice. The people who have written reports that we include, our interpretation of the Swan data, or anywhere else - thank you. Hopefully our team will remain the same for the 2022 copy.

I cannot complete this section without again making special mention of and thank you to Graham Palmer, like me he has suffered bad health over the year. From CAWOS thank you Graham for your work with the raw data. Also, personally I would like to record my thanks and I hope you are well enough for us to work together on the 2022 version.

Over March we will be having a review of the whole production cycle to try and improve the guidance for the compilers and maybe our approach in general to hopefully make life easier for all involved. It would not be possible for us to have reached today's position without the combined efforts of the whole team involved, to everyone thank you on behalf of the Society and personally from Ted and myself.

The 2022 *Bird Report* is on schedule and should be published, hopefully, in the autumn.

Bird News

How many know the Editor of *Bird News*, possible not so many. Why? Because this is a role many never see or know about the amount of work that is needed to produce the 3 copies of *Bird News* a year.

Sheila Blamire is the Editor and works away in the background to produce *Bird News*. Please support Sheila and contribute articles to her - it is becoming ever increasingly more difficult to source material for the report. Every issue Sheila has the difficult job of working out the content. If you have a favourite place for birding or wildlife in general in the area then please write something and send it to Sheila. Have you seen something unusual in bird behaviour, or have some hints and tips for a wildlife friendly garden? Or how about someone who has contributed something to conservation, no matter how small. Please have a think and help by sending articles to Sheila.

Council

Ted Lock, our Secretary, is retiring from the role after many years. He has been a support and adviser to me as Chairman and is someone with a wealth of knowledge on many fronts. Ted, from everyone in CAWOS, thank you - a few words to cover the years of work and support.

We have vacancies on Council for Ordinary Members, it doesn't matter that the AGM has passed, we can co-opt onto Council and formalise the role at the next AGM. No need to have a great knowledge of birds, we just need people who can come up with ideas, maybe pick up a small project, help here or there. We need new people, fresh ideas, it doesn't take long to attend five Council Meetings and then spend a few hours on anything that may come up.

I must also thank John Patterson, our Treasurer. This is another key role in the background, but we'd be lost without John's efforts, thank you John.

Website

Our website has been changed and refreshed with a more modern frontage. Thank you to Mike Hems for his continual support and making changes when needed.

Summary

2022 was the year when life became nearer to normal, things have changed but the birds are still out there. Go and enjoy them and give us your records. Please if you are over on the eastern side we really do need them.

If you are interested in working on surveys speak to Hugh, unless for WeBS in which case it is me. Gowy Meadows is there for someone to survey. These surveys all feed into and contribute to the annual *Bird Report*.

Our membership remains steady. It would be nice to see more people joining the Zoom meetings though, the details for joining are on each invitation email. We only have about 10% of our membership active and attending the talks we have. Invite a friend, maybe they'd consider joining if they enjoyed the talk.

Just to finish I have told Council that 2023 will be my last year as Chairman, like other members, I have had a number of health issues over the last 12 months. My sitting through a meeting is very difficult.

To close I would like to personally thank everyone who has helped me during my tenure.

Phil Hampson, Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR 2022-23

Council has had another busy year with the usual five Council meetings, with new members joining Council, leaving only one vacancy for an ordinary member. The two new members have settled and John Jones took on the task, along with Tony Parker, of finding speakers for our programme of talks which is now in place until the start of 2024. Carolyn Bailey has been mentored to take over the role of Membership Secretary under the guidance of Phil Hampson and is now the Membership Secretary looking after subscriptions for 2023.

The number of members signing up for the programme of talks has been very disappointing with only 30 (and sometimes a few more on-line), from a membership of around 300. It was hoped that using Zoom would make the talks available to a wider audience, compared to our indoor meetings in Knutsford, but this does not seem to be the case. Discussion in Council is ongoing about moving back to indoor meetings, I think there is a need to seek feedback from members to help come to a decision.

The Chairman's AGM Report has included most of the key business points during the year. So I will focus more on the key function of CAWOS, namely the recording of birds in Cheshire and Wirral and documenting this annually in the *Bird Report*. Over the last year we have managed to get back up-to-date, following the period when records moved to BirdTrack, by producing the 2020 and 2021 *Bird Reports*. This has been heavily dependent on: members and non-members submitting records; reports from key sites around the County; the team of members who handle the records; compilers who put together the sections; the photographic editor who requests the photographs, checks for quality and prepares the legends; the preparation of the Early and Late Dates section; the Ringing Report from the two ringing groups in Cheshire; letters on key rarities and other findings of interest; validation by the County Bird Recorder and Rarities Committee. Pulling together other important general sections and maps, seeking adverts, proofreading, submitting for typesetting and inclusion of photographs, proof checking again and then sending to printers.

I will be standing down as Secretary of CAWOS at the AGM in March having done the role for the last 15 years and David Hiley, a fellow Council member, will be taking on this role, subject to his election at the AGM!!! I have agreed to stay on Council as an Ordinary Member, subject to the above, for a few years to help David and contribute as editor of the annual *Bird Report*. I have enjoyed my time in the role, met many interesting people active in birding around the County and I would like to thank those that have readily given advice on issues that have crossed my desk.

Ted Lock, Secretary

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR 2022

I have pleasure in submitting the accounts of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society for the year ended 31st December 2022. These accounts show that the Income and Expenditure account achieved a surplus for the year of £363 on our General Fund.

Membership subscriptions of £4,652 were virtually the same as the previous year and database searches contributed a substantial £1,405 to our revenues (up from £805 in 2021). Gift Aid income of £924 was in line with previous years.

The costs of producing the *Bird Report* and *Bird News* remains stable for now but inflationary pressures might become a problem in future. This year, which saw the publication of two *Bird Reports* (2020 and 2021), inevitably increased our costs compared to last year although provision had been made for most of this extra expenditure.

The evening programme meetings were suspended throughout the year but replaced by Zoom meetings for which we receive no income, though we do save on our outgoings such as room hire charges. This year saw £538 of non-recurring expenditure, mainly on the purchase of a laptop. Interest on our deposits at £101 (£47 for 2021) has started to benefit from the recent upward trend in rates.

The results for the year were completely satisfactory and our reserves, which increased by £415, now stand at £43,744.

John Patterson, Treasurer

County Round-Up

Some of the records may be unauthenticated and therefore will require review by the Society's Rarities Panel or the BBRC. This report covers the period from September to December 2022.

SITE REPORTS

Chester area

Hoopoe was at Eaton Hall on Oct 30th, four Waxwings were at Saughall on Dec 9th and Marsh Tit was at Aldford on Dec 15th.

Congleton area

Two Scaups were at Astbury Mere on Sep 9th.

Crewe and Nantwich area

Six Whooper Swans were at Elton Hall Flash on Dec 14th, eight Egyptian Geese at Pump House Flash on Dec 3rd, a Garganey at Elton Hall Flash on Sep 14th with 21 Goosanders at Queen's Park on Nov 18th. A single Bar-tailed Godwit was at Railway Flash on Sep 3rd, Curlew Sandpiper at Elton Hall Flash on Sep 19th and four Dunlins at Pump House Flash on Sep 24th. Cattle Egret was noted at Elton Hall Flash on Nov 6th. Ospreys were at Weston on Sep 24th and Pump House Flash on Oct 24th, Marsh Harrier at Elton Hall Flash on Oct 4th and two Red Kites at Doddington on Nov 20th. Seven Whinchats were present at Maw Green Tip on Sep 8th with four Crossbills on Sep 8th.

Waxwing
by Bill
Morton



Ellesmere Port and Neston area

5000 Pink-footed Geese were at Parkgate on Dec 29th with a single White-fronted Goose on Nov 12th, two Bewick's Swans at BMW on Dec 30th, 25 Whooper Swans on the Mersey Marshes on Dec 11th. A Garganey was present at BMW on several dates with a single Scaup on Dec 23rd. Single Slavonian Grebe was in the BMW/Burton Marsh area on several dates during Oct. Waders included: 41 Avocets on the Mersey WeBS count on Oct 23rd, 39 Curlew Sandpipers at BMW on Sep 11th, 91 Bar-tailed Godwits on the Oct Mersey WeBS count, at least three Little Stints at BMW on Sep 21st with Pectoral Sandpiper from Sep 3rd to 18th and Long-billed Dowitcher on Oct 21st to 29th, 23 Greenshanks at Parkgate on Sep 8th and a Black-winged Pratincole at Ince Marshes during the Mersey WeBS count on Oct 22nd.

A Gannet was at BMW on Sep 26th, Glossy Ibis here from 8th to 30th in Nov, a max of 19 Spoonbills present at Parkgate on Sep 9th and five Cattle Egrets at BMW and Ince on several dates and max count of 37 Great White Egrets on Oct 26th. Osprey was at BMW on Sep 7th, at least 25 Marsh Harriers at Parkgate on Dec 5th with two Hen Harriers on Dec 21st, Red Kite at BMW on several dates and Parkgate on Dec 20th. A Hoopoe was at Ince on Oct 29th, two Merlins at Denhall on Nov 27th. At BMW a single Bearded Tit was noted on Nov 14th, Yellow-browed Warbler noted on several dates during Sep and Oct, two Firecrests on Oct 8th, two Spotted Flycatchers on Sep 3rd with Pied Flycatcher on Sep 5th and 9th, Redstart on Sep 5th, Tree Pipit on Sep 5th, at least six Water Pipits on Nov 14th and Twite on Nov 9th.

Halton area

Grey Plover was at Hale on Nov 1st with Knot on Sep 5th, Curlew Sandpiper at Pickering's Pasture on Sep 23rd, 20+ Sanderlings at Hale on 5th and two Little Stints at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 28th, Spotted Redshank at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 13th, Grey Phalarope flew past Hale on Oct 7th and two Greenshanks at Hale on Sep 11th. A Kittiwake was at Pickering's Pasture on Nov 24th, Little Gull on 8th and Caspian Gull on 14th. Great Northern Diver was at Hale on Nov 20th and a Shag at Pickering's Pasture on Nov 19th. Ospreys were at Wigg Island on Sep 10th, Pickering's Pasture on Sep 13th and Hale on Sep 16th, Marsh Harrier at Hale on Sep 11th with Hen Harrier on Oct 26th, a Red Kite was over Widnes on Oct 19th. Yellow-browed Warbler was at Hale on Oct 22nd, Ring Ouzel at Pickering's Pasture on Oct 18th, four Whinchats at Hale on Sep 8th, Tree Pipit on Sep

2nd, two Water Pipits at Carr Lane on Oct 27th and Dec 31st and Rock Pipit at Pickering's Pasture on Dec 24th. Two Hawfinches were at Hale on Oct 19th with Twite on Dec 30th and 31st and Lapland Bunting on Nov 20th.

Macclesfield area

13 Egyptian Geese were at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 16th, Common Scoter at Redesmere on Nov 2nd and Bollinhurst Reservoir on 18th and Smew at Lapwing Hall Lake on Dec 16th. An unidentified swift was over Plumley on Oct 27th. A Black-necked Grebe was at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 6th to 8th and Mere Farm SQ on Oct 21st. Curlew Sandpiper was at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 18th with Little Stint on Sep 1st, 5th and 6th and four Greenshanks on 7th.

Four Common Terns were at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 5th with Black Tern on 7th, Great Northern Diver at Redesmere on several dates. Marsh Harrier was at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 5th, Red Kite at Danebower on Sep 14th. Tree Pipit was at Acre Nook SQ on Sep 8th. Hawfinch at Tatton on Oct 16th and four Crossbills at Macclesfield Forest on Dec 21st.



Great Northern Diver
by Phil Jones

Vale Royal area

21 Pintails were at Newchurch Common on Sep 29th with a max count of 17 Goosanders at Marbury CP on Dec 31st. 23 Avocets were at Frodsham Marsh on Sep 18th, 10 Ringed Plovers at Neumann's Flash on Sep 13th, Bar-tailed Godwit at Frodsham Marsh on Sep 17th, 84 Knots on Sep 18th, seven Curlew Sandpipers on Sep 17th and six Little Stints on Sep 23rd. Spoonbill was at Frodsham Marsh on Oct 1st with Bittern here on Dec 16th with another at Whatcroft on 27th. Two Ospreys in the Frodsham Marsh area during early Sep, Red Kite at Anderton on Dec 4th and Whitley Reed on 5th. Firecrest was at Barnton on Nov 27th, two Spotted Flycatchers at Dairy House Meadows on Sep 8th, c30 Tree Sparrows at Whitley Reed on Dec 5th and a Water Pipit at Neumann's Flash on Oct 18th. Hawfinch was at Marbury CP on several dates in late Nov with two on Dec 2nd and Lapland Bunting at Frodsham Marsh on Nov 16th. A White-throated Sparrow was in the Northwich area from late Nov into the new year.

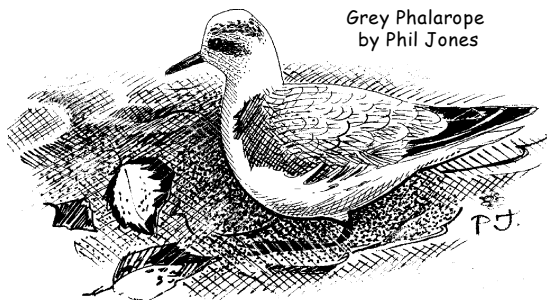
Warrington area

9360 Pink-footed Geese were at Woolston Eyes on Nov 15th, seven Whooper Swans on Nov 12th, three Garganeys on Sep 1st and 13th with a late individual on Dec 6th and eight Goosanders on the Mersey at Moore on Nov 29th. 10,400 Woodpigeons noted over Woolston Eyes on Oct 27th. Two Ruffs were at Woolston Eyes on Sep 15th, Little Stint at Woolston Eyes on Sep 10th, four Greenshanks at Moore NR on Oct 6th. Glossy Ibis was at Woolston Eyes on Nov 25th. Raptors of note included: Osprey at Woolston Eyes on Sep 13th and Oct 22nd, Marsh Harrier at Woolston Eyes on Sep 10th and Silver Lane Pools on Oct 6th and Dec 6th, Hen Harrier at Woolston Eyes on Oct 22nd and Burtonwood on Dec 27th, Honey Buzzard reported at Woolston Eyes on Sep 13th, over 25 Buzzards at Silver Lane Pools on Sep 13th with Red Kite at Culcheth on Dec 22nd. Two Merlins were at Silver Lane Pools on Sep 27th with up to three Hobbies at Woolston Eyes. A single Waxwing was in the Warrington area on Dec 13th, Penduline Tit at Woolston Eyes on several dates in Nov, 450 Swallows over Woolston Eyes on Sep 8th with Yellow-browed Warbler on Oct 3rd and 20th, Siberian Chiffchaff on Nov 19th, 22nd and Dec 6th with Firecrest on Oct 11th. 17,000 Redwings were over Silver Lane Pools on Oct 19th, 2157 Fieldfares over Woolston Eyes on Oct 22nd, single Ring Ouzels were at Silver Lane Pools on Sep 20th and Oct 21st with another at Woolston Eyes on Oct 19th. Redstart was at Silver Lane Pools on Sep 25th with 10 Stonechats on Sep 24th, two Tree Sparrows near Moore on Oct 9th, four Tree Pipits over Silver Lane Pools on Sep 13th and 24th and Rock Pipit at Woolston Eyes on Oct 25th. 24 Bramblings were at Silver Lane Pools on Oct 19th, 36 Lesser Redpolls on Dec 16th, two Crossbills on Oct 21st and two Corn Buntings on Nov 28th.

Wirral area

Wildfowl included: 327 Brent Geese at Hilbre on Nov 16th, 4855 Pink-footed Geese at Heswall on Dec 24th, seven Scaups at Hilbre on Sep 26th, seven Eiders on Nov 29th, three Velvet Scoters off Hoylake on Nov 27th with c8000 Common Scoters on 20th and six Long-tailed Ducks off West

Kirby on Dec 6th and 15th. A max of 36 Goosanders were at West Kirby Marine Lake on Dec 14th. Two Pallid Swifts were at Hoylake on Oct 31st with singles on 27th and 29th and West Kirby on 29th. A possible American Golden Plover was at Hilbre on Sep 20th, Whimbrel at Wallasey on Oct 2nd, seven Bar-tailed Godwits at West Kirby on Sep 24th with 4000 Black-tailed Godwits on 12th and 20,000 Knots at West Kirby on Dec 11th. Nine Curlew Sandpipers were at West Kirby on Sep 7th, 760 Sanderlings at West Kirby on Dec 25th, Little Stint at Hoylake on Sep 11th, 12 Woodcocks at Moreton on Dec 11th, Grey Phalarope at Hoylake and Wallasey on Sep 26th with six Greenshanks at Hilbre on Sep 3rd. c30 Kittiwakes were off Wallasey on Sep 27th, three Little Gulls at New Brighton on Nov 18th, 275 Sandwich Terns at Hilbre on Sep 5th along with 38 Common Terns, two Arctic Terns at Hilbre on Oct 21st. Great Skuas were at Meols and Wallasey on Sep 26th, two Arctic Skuas at Hilbre on 5th, 20 Guillemots at Hoylake on Sep 26th, a single Black Guillemot at Hoylake on Dec 1st and three Razorbills at Hilbre on Nov 5th.



Grey Phalarope
by Phil Jones

15 Red-throated Divers were off Hoylake on Nov 25th and 26th with Great Northern Diver at New Brighton on Sep 26th and Hilbre on Sep 11th. Five Leach's Petrels were off Hilbre on Sep 26th with five Manx Shearwaters the next day, Little Shearwater reported at Hoylake on Oct 1st, 36 Gannets at Hilbre on Sep 5th and 134 Little Egrets at Heswall on Oct 9th. Ospreys were reported at Hilbre, Moreton and West Kirby on Sep 5th and 6th, two Hen Harriers at Heswall on Dec 19th and Red Kite at Heswall on Sep 9th. c500 Skylarks were noted at Heswall on Dec 25th, Yellow-browed Warblers were at Bidston Hill, Hilbre, Meols, Leasowe and Wallasey on various dates during Oct. Siberian Chiffchaff were at Hilbre on Nov 14th and Leasowe on Nov 2nd to 5th and 22nd. Two Firecrests were at Hoylake on Nov 15th, 20,000 Redwings and 4000 Fieldfares over Thurstaston on Oct 19th, Ring Ouzel at Hilbre on Oct 20th, Black Redstarts were at Hilbre on Oct 19th, Hoylake on Nov 22nd, 27th and 28th and Wallasey on Oct 17th and nine Rock Pipits at Hilbre on Oct 16th. 2000+ Chaffinches and 25 Bramblings noted on migration at Hoylake on Oct 24th, Twite at Hoylake on Nov 1st and Heswall on Dec 3rd, 220 Linnets at Hilbre on Sep 11th and 150 Siskins at Hoylake on Oct 24th. Elsewhere a Lapland Bunting was at Hilbre on Nov 14th, two Snow Buntings at Red Rocks on Oct 8th and Corn Bunting at Hoylake on Oct 13th.

Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, Cheshire, WA5 2SG
Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonyparker@cawos.org

Thanks/acknowledgments to: Dee Estuary Website, SECOS, WECG, Dermot Smith (Mersey WeBS), NNHS, Frodsham Marsh Birdlog, *Birdwatching* Magazine, Manchester Bird Forum, whatsapp groups (Cheshire, Marbury and Sandbach), Rob Cockbain, Bill Bellamy and everyone else who passed records on.

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 are clear. Editor's contact details are on the inside front cover of *Bird News*.

Sites to Watch

RSPB DEE ESTUARY RESERVE

Recent Sightings

First published on the RSPB Dee Estuary Blog on 22 Jan 2023 – see <https://community.rspb.org.uk/placestovisit/deeestuary/b/deeestuary-blog/posts/reserve-round-up-january-2023>.



After a settled, dry start to the month, we've had some persistent winds followed by this week's cold snap, making it at times more appealing to stay at home. Despite that, the birds have been on top form, with often a brilliant array of waders, wildfowl and raptors to enjoy even from the comfort of the visitor centre.

The scrape has at times hosted several hundred Black-tailed Godwits, with an occasional Bar-tailed Godwit found by the keenest of eyes and over 100 Knots, a nice highlight during the high tides mid-month. Similarly impressive flocks of Lapwings are often seen harassed by birds of prey; with smaller numbers of Redshank, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Snipe, Golden Plover, Curlew and even a single Green Sandpiper take the number of different waders into double figures from the visitor centre alone.

Also, here in sizeable flocks are Teal, with good numbers of Shoveler, Gadwall, Wigeon, and of course Mallard too, plus Shelduck on the wet grassland. Spectacular flocks of Pink-footed Geese make regular flights between the saltmarsh and surrounding farmland, at times dropping onto the wet grassland to feed, and a couple of Barnacle Geese sometimes amongst them. Smaller numbers of Canada Geese and Greylag Geese are readily found, with two of each Egyptian Geese and Ruddy Shelducks spotted on or around The Mere at times.

It has seemed a quiet winter for swans on the reserve, but Border Pool is a popular spot for Mute Swans, whilst seven Whooper Swans and two Bewick's Swans made a rare dusk appearance to roost here on Thursday. Of the raptors, Marsh Harriers are most active and prominent, with Kestrels and Sparrowhawks also regular. Buzzards soar above the woodland, and we've had three Hen Harrier sightings (two grey adult males) in the past week, and the resident Barn Owl continues to put on starring performances in the last hour or so before sunset.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, and Treecreeper are regular highlights near the feeding station close to the visitor centre, with Long-tailed Tits and Siskins other notable winter residents around The Mere trail. It's been a quiet winter for Kingfisher sightings, but there have been steady reports this week around Willow Pool. Water Rails are notoriously elusive, but with patience can be spotted creeping or fluttering around the pool at Reedbed screen or from Marsh Covert hide.

Further along the Wetland Trail, Stonechat and Reed Bunting perch on reeds and rushes, whilst a few Lesser Redpolls can be found feeding high in alders. Up on Burton Point, Green Woodpecker, Fieldfare, Redwing, Linnet and Meadow Pipit are the pick of birds often feeding on the ground or perched in low vegetation.

The freezing conditions this week have made life hard for the herons and egrets, but Great White Egret and Little Egret can still be seen reliably most days, and a couple of Cattle Egrets have again spent the winter, usually on nearby farmland with Little Egrets in the day, but joining the communal roost on The Mere each evening.

Out on the estuary, the most significant additional sighting to the above is the Short-eared Owl, with a small number being seen at Parkgate since mid-December. Our forthcoming high tide events could be a good chance to see these captivating day-flying owls. Similarly, a Bittern is reported most days on the marsh by the Old

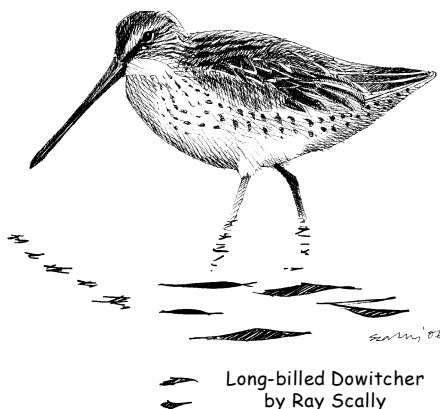


Baths car park, which is also a prime spot at dusk to catch Hen Harriers and staggering numbers of Marsh Harriers flying into their roost at dusk.

Star sighting

One stand-out rarity for this month is a Long-billed Dowitcher that was found in the large godwit flock on the scrape on Wednesday 11th January. This American wader is a relatively scarce vagrant to the UK, but this appearance now makes it four calendar-years running that one has found its way to Burton Mere Wetlands, with the last record as recently as November - and possibly the very same individual!

**Dan Trotman, Visitor Experience Manager,
RSPB Dee Estuary Reserve**



HOYLAKE SHORE

High tide visits to Hoylake have been a joy this winter (2022/23) with large numbers of waders roosting during spring tides. Over 20,000 Dunlins, which have been feeding in the Dee Estuary at low tide, have made for a spectacular sight along with good numbers of Knots, Sanderlings, Oystercatchers and Grey Plovers. Visiting birders, who haven't been to Hoylake since before Covid, will have had a surprise seeing the large area of saltmarsh and embryo dunes which have grown extensively since 2019.

This vegetation has grown up since the Council and Natural England realised it wasn't really such a good idea to spray a strong weedkiller (glyphosphate) onto one of the most protected wildlife sites in the country, i.e. a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Ramsar Site, a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation. But trying to maintain any kind of sandy beach at Hoylake was becoming more and more unsustainable in any case, as the sand level had reached such a height that the vegetation was growing back more and more quickly each time they sprayed it.

However, the growth of the saltmarsh and embryo dunes has caused dismay among some locals who wanted their beach back, whereas others have welcomed the appearance of the rich and bio-diverse wildlife habitat. I should add that the beach was really never more than a strip of wet sand bordered by mud, and any removal of the current vegetation will result in an even greater muddy area - not the golden sands some want to believe were once there.

The current situation is that Wirral Council held a public consultation exercise this summer and are supposed to be coming up with some suggestions as to how to proceed. In my opinion, I fear those who want a return to a beach are going to be disappointed because the Council's hands are firmly tied by Natural England and the fact that Hoylake Shore is a highly protected habitat. Every day that area is growing richer in wildlife and there is no way Natural England will reverse that, and that is beside the high financial cost to the Council of doing anything other than continue to let the vegetation grow.

Embryo Dunes are a rare and important habitat in the UK, in contrast most dune systems elsewhere in the country are old and eroding. The number of plant species growing on Hoylake shore is regularly monitored and, since early 2020, has grown from 24 to a remarkable 209 by late summer in 2022. These plants include such beauties as Sea Milkwort, Strawberry Clover, Prickly Saltwort, Sea Holly, Arrow-grass and Sea Whorl-grass; the seeds were all transported here naturally either by floating on the sea or by birds. There was a rumour spread by some that the waders don't like roosting on the grass but that is patently not true and this winter's wader roosts have been as good as any I've known in recent years. Indeed, I've been pleasantly surprised at the lack of disturbance this winter and concluded that the vegetation has inhibited dog walkers from going out to the edge of the marsh at high tide. Other regular bird visitors to the embryo dunes and saltmarsh are Skylarks, both Rock and Meadow Pipits, Linnets, Snow Buntings, Pied, White and Yellow Wagtails and Brent Geese.

So let's hope that this species-rich habitat is allowed to continue to develop and grow, and that those who would rather have just bare sand learn to appreciate what a wonderful place for wildlife it is becoming.

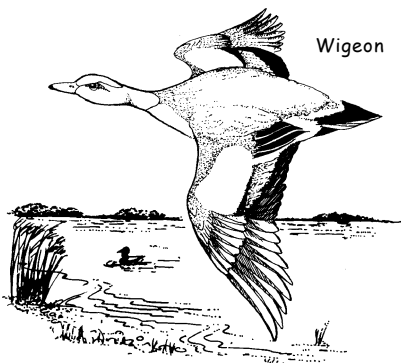
Richard Smith, Email: richard@deeestuary.co.uk (a lot of the above information was taken from Twitter posts by Jane Turner and Joshua Styles, with thanks)

ROSTHERNE MERE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

Newsletter Oct-Dec 2022

Welcome to the Rostherne Mere Quarterly Newsletter covering the last quarter of the year. There was a total of 122 bird species recorded on the reserve in 2022 which is a similar number to recent years.

Wintering waterfowl started to arrive in Oct with numbers of Mallard, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Shoveler and Teal increasing. Pochard numbers were the highest for five years peaking at 51 in Dec. There was a large influx of Mandarin Ducks with 49 logged in Oct and 34 in mid-Dec when several local shallower waters were frozen over. Egyptian Geese were recorded on seven dates with nine seen in Nov. Goosanders flew into roost with 11 recorded on several evenings. Up to six Water Rails were heard sharming in the reed beds in Dec and three Little Grebes were seen on view from the permissive path on several dates. Rarer visitors included Whooper Swan, Common Scoter, Pintail, Black-necked Grebe, Slavonian Grebe and Little Egret.



Up to 600 Lapwings were seen flying above the fields near Gale Bog. It was encouraging to see Snipe in the new wetlands with 15 counted in Dec. The cold snap brought Woodcock onto the reserve with several sightings in Dolls Meadow and Harpers Bank Wood.

There were around 750 Black-headed Gulls and often over 200 Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the evening gull roost, with up to 20 Herring Gulls. Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull and Yellow-legged Gull were also recorded.

The number of Starlings roosting in the reed beds increased gradually to around 20,000 by late Nov. Whilst the numbers were lower than in previous years, they still provided some amazing murmurations. They were often harried by waiting Sparrowhawks. A Peregrine Falcon was often seen hunting around the Mere and a female Marsh Harrier dropped in during Dec. Common Buzzards seen almost daily with six seen on several dates.

A Barn Owl often roosted in the cleft of a tree and Tawny Owls were heard calling near the Observatory on several evenings. A pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were frequently seen visiting the Observatory bird table and a Green Woodpecker was logged in Oct.

The first Fieldfare and Redwings arrived in mid-Oct. Fieldfare numbers were generally low peaking at only 15, while up to 200 Redwings visited the reserve during the first influx.

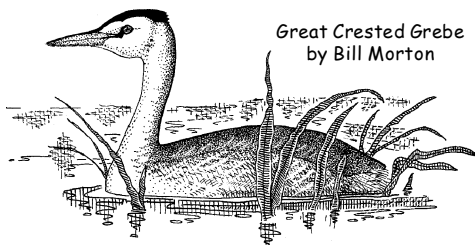
An amazing sight was that of around 5000 Woodpigeons roosting in Mere Covert on a Dec evening, filling the length of the 750 metres of woodland. In addition, there were 22 Collared Doves seen on Marsh Lane during Oct.

Kingfishers were often viewed sitting on perches in front of the Bittern Hide with two seen on two dates. Three Grey Wagtails were seen near Harpers Bank Wood during frozen conditions in Dec. Cetti's Warblers were heard from several locations around the mere almost daily. It was encouraging to see up to eight Chaffinches in front of the Observatory. Rarer species recorded included Brambling, Lesser Redpoll, Stonechat and Ring-necked Parakeet.

Bill Bellamy

TATTON PARK

Hopefully the wet, cold weather will now be behind us as we move into spring. The cold snap at the beginning of December saw an increase of wildfowl on the two large meres here at Tatton. Large numbers of Great Crested Grebes were joined by Goldeneye, Pochard and Wigeon. Tit flocks in the woodlands are always easier to spot with the lack of leaves in winter and a few Bramblings were found along Beech Avenue, feeding on their favourite food, beechmast.



Great Crested Grebe
by Bill Morton

The grass is now growing, and the winter deer feed will cease; they are fed daily with carrots over the winter to supplement their diet and help them regain good condition.

Even in winter, Rooks are showing interest around the rookeries in the park. Tawny Owls are very vocal too in the woodlands seemingly desperate to attract a mate. The breeding Ravens here are also very vocal during this time. There is also a lot of activity around the heronry as they are early nesters too. We normally have around 16 pairs of Grey Herons in our small heronry at Higmere and I do monitor it yearly for the BTO heronry census. Another one of my jobs at this time of year is clearing out and checking the nest boxes in the park. I have a few aimed at trying to attract Pied Flycatchers that I plug up until the end of April to prevent resident birds moving in. Hopefully, a pair will arrive and find a nice empty box in a secluded area of the park. I have specifically chosen valleys with streams in oak woodland. I know it's a long shot, but worth a try, nonetheless.

I have also replaced one of the Barn Owl nest boxes, kindly donated by John Mycock. This is one of the two boxes that were used last year so fingers crossed for success again.

Keen eyes will be scanning Tatton Mere from late February as the Sand Martin season is upon us again. It is a sure sign that spring is here when the first one arrives hawking for emerging insects over the mere and local birders are always keen to spot the first one. Also, it is always nice to hear a singing Chiffchaff in Dog Wood, again very often the first place that they are heard. Dog Wood, even though it is very popular with walkers, is a good place for warblers as there is a good understory to the woodland providing plenty of food and nesting opportunities. As the park is grazed by over 500 head of deer, woodland with understory is quite sparse. This wood is also good to listen to bird song and polish up the call ID skills.

As we move into spring and early summer there's always a chance of a passing tern or wader; the meres again are a good place to look. Whinchats and Wheatears pass through at this time of year and Hobbies are often seen. We are also long overdue an Osprey too!

As we know, spring is a great time for birding and just about anything can turn up. It's just a matter of getting out there and looking!

Darren Morris, Park Ranger

**If you know anyone who might want to advertise
in future Bird News please let me know and
I'll contact them with all the information.**

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@cawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

County Rarities

RING-BILLED GULL *Larus delawarensis*

Ring-billed Gulls are one of those species, that no matter how experienced a birder you are, you can both miss and unintentionally 'string'. They overlap in size with Common Gull, with females being about the same size as large Common Gulls. It's hard to judge size on lone birds, and I find Ring-bills look more like a small large gull as opposed to a large small gull and runt Herring Gulls can be initially more problematic than Common Gulls.

The quickest way to find, or rule out, an adult Ring-billed Gull is to look at its back. They are about the same tone as a Black-headed Gull, so much paler than any Common Gull and crucially have a narrower and weakly differentiated tertial crescent. Common Gulls and 2nd and 3rd-year gulls can quite often have a black ring on yellow bill, so despite this being its nominative feature, it's a long way from being conclusive.

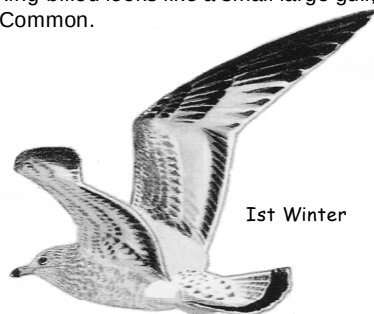
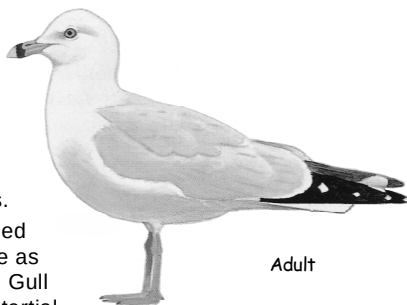
Structure is the best way to locate a non-adult bird. Ring-billed Gull has longer legs, a noticeably broader bill and walks with a high stepping gait - to my eyes very like a Mediterranean Gull rather than the pigeon-like movement of a Common Gull. In flight Ring-billed looks like a small large gull, with notably broader, longer and less rounded wings than Common.

Plumage-wise 1st winters have a clear pale mid-wing panel in flight and dark subterminal anchor marks on the median coverts (Common Gulls have more solid dark centres). The tail band is much messier looking than Common Gull and the head and neck have heavy, round spots. One of the most useful quick features to differentiate from both Common and Herring Gull are the tertials which are solidly dark (not barred like Herring) and have much narrower pale edges than Common.

Second-winter birds show more signs of immaturity than comparatively aged Common Gulls. Most, but not all, show signs of a remnant tail band and some dark marks in the secondaries. Common Gulls have two large oval spots in the primaries whilst Ring-billed has one small round mirror and the tertial crescent feature of adults is present.

If you are lucky enough to find a Ring-billed Gull, it's a species that will need a detailed description covering structure, plumage, and soft-parts, and/or some excellent photos!

Jane Turner, County Recorder



RING-BILLED GULL: CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL STATUS

Not recorded in Britain until 1973 or in England until 1976, this North American bird underwent quite a change in status in the 1980s and has again this century. The first Cheshire and Wirral bird, in its 2nd year, was found off Beach Road, Hoylake on 10th July 1982 and remained until July 18th. This was followed fairly quickly by a 1st winter individual on Rixton Tip on 12th November 1983. These first two birds set the tone for future records in the County with the majority being either coastal (or near-coastal) or linked to the River Mersey. The following account is based on records accepted by BBRC, up to 1987, and by the County Rarity Panel subsequently.

The summer of 1984 was quite remarkable, a 2nd summer bird was at New Brighton on June 28th and was followed by four different adults and a 1st summer bird, all in the Moreton area, from Jul

15th to August 1st with the longest stay apparently of five days. The first mid-winter bird followed on 26th January 1986 when a 1st winter bird was at Red Rocks. The 1st summer bird at Woolston on 8th July 1987 was the last record of that decade.

There were records in all but five of the 20 years from 1990 to 2009 as birds began to be reported from well-watched sites, particularly, but not always, those favoured by large numbers of gulls near tips. The stretch of the River Mersey around Gatewarth, Richmond Bank and Moore NR attracted birds in nine years of this period, usually singles, but including two adults on 9th and 12th April 1999 and intermittently between 4th and 14th February 2009. Elsewhere along the Mersey the Weaver Bend and Woolston had birds on 24th April 1994 and 10th April 1998 respectively. At the coast a 2nd winter bird was at New Brighton on 30th August 1992, while Hoylake had a 1st winter on 20th November 1993, a 2nd winter on 22nd October 2001 and a bird on 3rd September 2004. Nearby Hilbre didn't miss out as 2nd winter birds were there on 28th February 1998 and 27th September 2004. A 2nd winter bird was on West Kirby Marine Lake on 8th December 1998. An adult at Boathouse Flash, Parkgate on 12th October 1997 is the only record from within the Dee Estuary in this period. Inland, sites with tips nearby attracted birds: an adult was at Neumann's Flash on 12th November 1992, while in the Sandbach Flashes area a 2nd winter bird was seen on 5th February 1995 and there were single adults on 23rd and 24th March 2003, 25th October 2007 and from 23rd to 27th February 2008. Elsewhere an adult visited Redesmere on 3rd February 1996 - the only record from a Cheshire mere, and a 2nd winter bird was at Hurleston Reservoir on 30th and 31st October and possibly the same bird there on 25th December 1999.

The Ring-billed Gull account in the 'Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2020' in the July 2022 issue of *British Birds* shows a marked reduction in the annual totals of British records after 2004. In Cheshire and Wirral this reduction is certainly obvious after 2009 as the only two records subsequently are of a 1st summer bird at Frodsham Marsh on 3rd August 2012 and a 2nd calendar year bird photographed at Burton Mere Wetlands on 25th April 2015.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1st winter	1		1								2		4
1st w / 1st summer				1									1
1st summer				1			2	1					4
2nd year				1			1						2
2nd winter			3	1	1			1	1	2	1	1	11
2nd summer				2		1							3
Adult			4	1	2		4			2	1		14
Not aged									1				1
Total	1	7	3	8	0	1	7	2	2	4	4	1	

Ring-billed Gull: table based on month and age at first sighting

As shown in the table, most birds are first noted in Feb and Apr but although the Jul total is high only one bird has been discovered in that month since the 1984 flurry; also, relatively few of those discovered are in their first 12 months of life.

Given its rarity in recent years the next Ring-billed Gull will be warmly welcomed by County birders - let's hope it sticks around!

Steve Barber

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Ringling News

Ringling plays an important part in developing our knowledge of birds. In this feature we invite ringling groups, or individual ringlers, 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 will be welcomed.

COLOUR RING REPORT

It's been a busy few months for the Dee Estuary Colour-ring Birding Group and from the beginning of July to mid-February we have obtained a total of 825 colour-ring records for 15 species. All these have been collated into a database and sent to the various ringling schemes and groups involved, thus making an important contribution into the study of bird movements and migration, and their longevity. Citizen Science in action!

Here are a few highlights:

The noisy Sandwich Tern flocks at Hilbre and West Kirby produced 37 colour-ring records last summer. A lot of chicks were ringed at Cemlyn Bay, on Anglesey, in June and it was good to see 15 of these which had safely arrived on the Dee with their parents. The records show our Sandwich Terns breed all around the Irish Sea and also across the country in Northumberland. It's always fascinating to follow their movements and I was amazed to see that 'Yellow-KDC' had, in 2020, left its breeding colony at Wexford (Ireland) on July 6th only to turn up on the north-west coast of the Netherlands the very next day, on July 7th. Presumably it had flown overland. We saw it at Hilbre both in 2021 and 2022. Of the 27 adult Sandwich Terns we have recorded over the past three years a total of seven have made it all the way to South Africa in the winter. That seems a very high total when you consider that by no means all colour rings will have been read on the terns which make it that far. My guess is that the majority of adult Sandwich Terns fly as far as the southern tip of Africa every winter.

Thousands of gulls also return to the Dee Estuary over the summer and a Black-headed Gull has been returning here every year since 2013, being recorded over 70 times during that period. It was ringed in Poland in April 2013 and we know from sightings of its ring (TMEN on a white ring) that it flies back to Poland every spring. In 2022 it was first seen on West Kirby Shore at the end of July, it was like welcoming back an old friend.

There is currently a lot of research on Shelduck movements, including by Ros Green of the BTO who is doing a PhD at the University of Liverpool specifically on that subject. We have been working with Ros to obtain as many colour-ring sightings as we can and managed 87 records between July and October last year. There have been some very interesting movements including several birds ringed as breeding birds in the Lower Derwent Valley (Yorkshire) making their way to the Dee Estuary. More unexpected were two birds ringed on the Axe Estuary in south Devon - these must have travelled north to moult either on the Dee or Mersey, a movement never recorded before.

It was good to see a small flock of Turnstones feeding on the mud very close to the south end of West Kirby Marine Lake in August, still in full summer plumage. It was even better when we realised one had a white flag with 5TA inscribed on it, which meant it had been ringed in the far north of Canada, at Alert. In the same flock another had been ringed in Finland.

Although Little Egrets seem to be everywhere these days their movements around the country are not fully understood. To that end many have been colour ringed and we saw some unexpected movements with one ringed at Newark-on-Trent, Notts, and another at Wheldrake Ings, Yorkshire, both spotted on Thurstonaston Shore in August last year. Others came from breeding colonies at Hale Duck Decoy (Mersey Estuary) and Penrhyn Castle, near Bangor.

It can be frustrating looking at thousands of Oystercatcher legs in the large flock roosting at Hoylake, hoping to spot a colour ring or two. But our persistence paid off with birds seen which had been ringed in Aberdeen, Exe Estuary, Norway, Iceland (four) and the Netherlands.

Our biggest contribution to 'citizen science' is undoubtedly the recording of colour-ringed Knots – there have been 528 records made during the past few months alone, and the total over the past ten years or so runs into thousands. This winter we have seen Knots which have been ringed on the east coast of Ireland, mid-Wales coast, North Wales, Hoylake, Formby, Ainsdale, Orkney Islands, the Wash, the Dutch Waddensea, the German Baltic coast, northern Norway and various sites on the west coast of Iceland. We have long and detailed histories of some of these Knots and we know, for example, that the 'resident' Irish Sea population migrate to northern Canada largely via south-west Iceland, whilst others moult on the Wash and Waddensea and only fly over to the Dee between November and February. We also know that many of this latter population migrate via northern Norway and are not seen in Iceland.

Many people have contributed colour-ringed records over these past few months but I must mention Steve Hinde who has submitted at least half of all these records, he and I have spent many hours on the mud flats doing our bit for citizen science. If you want to be part of the Dee Estuary Colour-ring Birding Group all you have to do is submit a colour-ring sighting either to myself or copy me in on any submission you may make elsewhere so I can include it in our database. Email: richard@deeestuary.co.uk.

Note there is a monthly colour-ring update on the Dee Estuary Birding Website: www.deeestuary.co.uk.

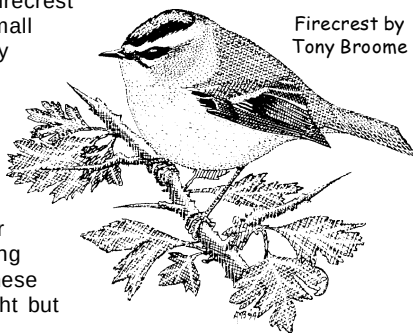
Richard Smith

HILBRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (HIBO)

Ringling October 2022 to January 2023

It is hard to avoid grumbles surfacing in bird reports and ringing reports are not exempt from this approach. My last report highlighted the relatively poor ringing results in the summer of 2022 and could be interpreted as a typical birder's whinge! However, such complaints often have consequences where the world of birds strikes back to show how shallow and short term birders can be.

I acknowledged that a Yellow-browed Warbler turned up on Hilbre on 2nd October in my last report but complained that this was not enough and that Hilbre should have more of these birds. Inevitably another one turned up on 9th October along with a Firecrest and a Chiffchaff. Then it was 13th October and a small purple/brown warbler turned up in the Bird Observatory garden net. The bird species is the only European passerine to have 10 tail feathers; all the other passerine species have 12 tail feathers. It was Cetti's Warbler. These birds have been colonising the UK for a number of years now and there are lots to be found round the Wirral but this was the first one ever recorded, never mind ringed, on Hilbre. 31st October saw a Pallid Swift around the Wirral and it obliged by flying into the Hilbre recording area. Like common Swifts these birds avoid landing so it was never going to be caught but even so it was a record of a bird new to the island.



Firecrest by
Tony Broome

A Brambling and a Sparrowhawk were caught and ringed on 30th October. These are relatively infrequently ringed birds on Hilbre and were a clear indication of a continuing, interesting autumn passage in 2022. There was one day, 20th October, where conditions appeared perfect for migration. The Dee estuary was covered in mist, neither West Kirby nor North Wales could be seen from Hilbre. Lots of birds passed around/over the island and at least 40 Blackbirds and 250 Starlings landed on the island but none were caught. 19th October saw a Garden Warbler caught and ringed. Garden Warblers are not frequently caught on Hilbre and cannot always be easily identified if they are skulking in cover. Their song can be mistaken for a Blackcap and various sound apps can be used to help with identification. One of the obs members was trying the Cornell Labs app with a recording he had made of what he believed was a Garden Warbler and the app came back with Garden Warbler and a second suggestion of Bendire's Thrasher! This thrasher is from the south western United States. Next time you are wondering if a song is Blackcap or Garden Warbler suggest Bendire's Thrasher!

Then it was 13th November and a Lapland Bunting/Longspur turned up but was not caught. However, a Chiffchaff was caught. It was clearly a Chiffchaff, but was equally clearly not a bird of the nominate race that is the bird normally ringed on Hilbre. It turned out to be a Siberian race bird, another first for Hilbre.

December saw a Song Thrush retrapped that weighed 92gm, very heavy for a Song Thrush, and a Blackbird was caught 1st January 2023, the only bird trapped so far in 2023. There can be no complaints about the last 3 months.

John Elliott, on behalf of the Hilbre Bird Observatory

MID-CHESHIRE BARN OWL GROUP

The winter months are, as ever, a period where we get out and about checking, repairing and replacing Barn Owl boxes, ready for the next breeding season. This winter is no different, with plenty of such work keeping us busy. The winter's been cold at times, with some snow, but Cheshire seems to miss the worst of such weather otherwise suffered by the rest of the country. In fact we've had earlier Barn Owl sightings than usual this year already - but don't want to get over optimistic just yet, there's along way to go in 2023.

2022 has proven to be a very good year for Barn Owls in Cheshire overall, with 167 successful breeding pairs having been recorded, with nearly 490 chicks giving a very healthy average of 2.9 chicks per brood - one of better years for successful brood sizes. In fact, that now means we've had seven good years for Barn Owls in Cheshire, averaging between 150 and 190 successful breeding pairs each year. My pessimistic side says we are due a poor year very soon - fingers crossed its not going to be 2023.

As noted in our last article, we've still found no obvious signs of bird flu deaths within the Cheshire Barn Owls. Fingers crossed again in this respect, because we have no obvious controls over this terrible disease at the moment.

As my now usual final comments - we do our best, but it stretches our limited resources to help support these beautiful and iconic birds. We get a great deal of satisfaction out of the conservation work we do. But we are always in need of more help.

To repeat our usual concerns and plea - 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 Tel: 0797- 235437 Email: cheshirebarnowls@gmail.com

RINGING AT WOOLSTON - SUMMER 2022

It is a relief not to have to start this report with an outline of the disruptions suffered during the period under review. It is true that for the second summer running ringing on No.1 Bed was adjusted to avoid any disturbance to the nesting Marsh Harriers but, happily, this may now be considered 'the norm'.

In the six months ended 30th September 2022 ('this summer') 4,188 birds of 57 species were ringed at Woolston, an increase of 1,220 birds (41%) from the total of 2,968 birds of 45 species ringed in the six months ended 30th September 2021. The single most significant cause of this increase is that a number of Woolston's most ringed species clearly had a good breeding season. The majority of birds ringed are 'birds of the year'. The following comparisons (2021 in brackets) give a flavour of the improved breeding year on year: Chiffchaff 854 (456), Blackcap 676 (399), Reed Warbler 512 (328), Wren 164 (84).

We ringed 2,402 migrant warblers compared with 1,420 in summer 2021.

Birds ringed in lower numbers such as Willow Warblers, Sedge Warblers and Dunnocks also showed similar percentage increases. The exceptions to this general trend were Blackbird and Song Thrush, both early breeders where first nests are at risk from bad weather and late leaf growth which leaves nests exposed, and Bullfinch, a late breeder and, traditionally, one of the jewels in Woolston's crown. A total of 79 Bullfinches were ringed compared with 106 in the previous summer, but it is unclear as to whether this is just a 'blip' or the start of a trend.

Other notable features included the continued expansion of Cetti's Warblers with 34 ringed this summer against 17 last summer. At the time of writing the year-to-date total is 56. Last winter's Brambling invasion lingered into April with the last capture on 30th and 134 were ringed in April. Finally, whilst again there were no significant hirundine roosts at Woolston in autumn, for the second year running a short-lived Sand Martin roost formed on No.3 Bed in April. Last summer a single catching attempt was a 'bullseye' and 132 were ringed, whereas this year it was a 'near miss' and, although the roost was a similar size, just 12 were ringed.

The following first ringing dates for juvenile birds indicate that for resident species the timing of their breeding season was in the normal range.

Ringling date of first juvenile for resident species:

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Robin	21-May	27-May	25-May	07-May
Wren	15-Jun	04-Jun	09-Jun	09-Jun
Dunnock	01-Jun	26-May	22-May	11-Jun
Bullfinch	15-Jun	18-Jun	07-Jun	23-May

In the case of our migrant warblers the following table of 'first juvenile' dates indicates that, with the exception of Chiffchaff, 2022 shows a return to 'normal' after a late breeding season in 2021. Although the first date for Chiffchaff is a few days later than normal the species had an exceptional breeding season as has already been noted.

Ringling date of first juvenile for migrant warblers:

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Chiffchaff	06-Jun	04-Jun	11-Jun	24-Jun
Blackcap	28-May	17-Jun	26-Jun	26-Jun
Whitethroat	26-May	07-Jun	16-Jun	16-Jun
Reed Warbler	31-May	09-Jun	09-Jun	22-Jun

After just a single capture in 2021, three Green Sandpipers were colour ringed for the national project. Going forward, it seems likely that the newly developed wetlands on No.4 Bed will be the best wader habitat at Woolston and that most passage waders will pass through there.

Both Blue Tits and Great Tits had a reasonable breeding season in the nest boxes on the reserve with 147 chicks ringed on No.3 Bed (2021-137, 2020-134 and 2019-173).

It is not easy to know what to say about Willow Tits. At the very broadest level they appear to have declined at Woolston in the last few years after many years of apparent stability. Ringing activity has changed on both beds. On No.1 Bed ringing is restricted in the early part of the season to protect the Marsh Harriers and on No.3 Bed habitat succession, and a smaller team, has resulted in no ringing in two areas of the bed where Willow Tits could traditionally be found. Conditions and activity were consistent between 2021 and 2022 so the following comparisons are restricted to those two years:

	2022	2021
Different birds handled (including re-traps)	18	31
Birds newly ringed	15	24
Juveniles newly ringed	15	13

At first sight this is a further worrying reduction but the intriguing feature is the number of adult birds (11) newly ringed in 2021. We reported 2020 as a very poor breeding season but it is clear that a number of juveniles went un-ringed in areas where ringers operated in 2020. The number of newly-ringed juveniles might support the view that the population has stabilized at a lower level than was previously the case. Hopefully, a playback survey will take place in 2023.

For the third year running there was no significant arrival of finches in late summer. After several years of decline, Greenfinches appear to have stabilised with 204 ringed compared with 196 last summer. Three Yellowhammers were a welcome re-entry to the ringing totals.

It was a good year for passage migrants with three Redstarts and a Whinchat on No.1 Bed and a Stonechat on No.3 Bed.

Michael Miles, on behalf of the Woolston Eyes Ringing Team

CHESHIRE SWAN STUDY GROUP

Since my last report in October no swans have been ringed because of Avian Influenza. Of the 33 cygnets we did ring last year 20 have died from Avian Influenza up to the end of 2022.

The maximum counts of flocks of Mute Swans since my last report are as follows:

- Acre Dell Pools, nr Congleton: 27 on 22nd Oct, 30 on 17th Nov, 31 on 14th Dec and 29 on 24th Jan.
- Bottom Flash, Winsford: 24 on 4th Jan.
- Burleydam pool, nr Whitchurch: 7 on 22nd Nov and 14 on 22nd Jan.
- Trent and Mersey Canal, Middlewich: 27 on 16th Dec and 35 on 6th Jan.
- Shropshire Canal, Wrenbury: 16 on 21st Jan.
- Comber Mere, nr Whitchurch: 18 on 6th Oct, 23 on 13th Nov, 5 on 11th Dec.
- Doddington Mere, nr Nantwich: 76 on 3rd Oct, 30 on 7th Nov, 5 on 19th Dec and 2 on 1st Jan.
- Sankey Valley CP, Warrington: 9 on 3rd Oct, 12 on 7th Nov, 19 on 19th Dec and 15 on 22nd Jan.
- Spike Island, Widnes: 31 on 24th Dec.
- Woolston Eyes NR, Warrington: 16 on 6th Oct, 9 on 12th Nov, 8 on 10th Dec and 17 on 22nd Jan.

Longevity Report

CF59 (G) was ringed as a second-year female on 9-7-02 on the River Dee in Chester. Since then it has been seen from 24-1-18 at Priorslee Flash, Telford breeding through to 2022. Last seen 5-1-23 at Priorslee Flash, Telford. Now aged 21 years.

Movements

CT52 was ringed as a second-year male on 9-7-07 at Westport Lake, Stoke and seen at Craigtown Park near St. Andrews, Fife on 1-10-22 = 366kms.

CSL5 was ringed as a female cygnet on 9-11-21 on the Trent and Mersey Canal in Middlewich and was seen at Rivington Reservoir near Horwich on 23-9-22. Found dead = 47kms.

CPF3 was ringed as a male cygnet on 16-11-19 at Bowden Hall, Rode Heath and was seen on 4-11-22 at Centre Parcs, Sherwood, Nottingham = 85kms.

I have written a *Goose Report* (including Mallard) and it will be available for viewing on: <https://cheshireswanstudygroup.wordpress.com/ringing-reports/>

Sightings of all swans, geese and Mallards should be sent to: David Cookson at cheshireswans@gmail.com giving details of place (6-fig map ref), colour/character combination of ring and, if with other birds, total number present in the flock. All sightings will receive a printout of the history for the relevant bird(s).

David Cookson, on behalf of Cheshire Swan Study Group

**If you know anyone who might want to advertise
in future Bird News please let me know and
I'll contact them with all the information.**

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@cawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

Notes and Letters

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

This section is a chance for members to contribute, whether a few lines, or a long article, which might be split over several issues. Some ideas might be amusing (or otherwise!) anecdotes, unusual avian behaviour, special memories, ringing and/or survey stories, and looking back over the years – even back to childhood! The list is almost endless – it's up to members. If you think it's worth writing, other members will think it's worth reading! Also, we are always interested in your views on any of our articles or on the newsletter itself. Ed.

SHARMING

When I read in the latest newsletter from Rostherne Mere about Water Rails heard sharming I had to look up 'sharming' - never heard that expression before! I found this:

The best means of locating a Water Rail is by its strange voice. An old name for the bird in Norfolk was 'Sharmer' or 'Sharming' has since become a standard description of the bird's delivery of its piercing call. It is usually likened to screaming piglets, although a Water Rail's repertoire provokes a wide range of colourful descriptions such as 'heart rendering' and 'facing groans', or a curious rolling out between the 'purring of the cat', to the 'sound of a frog incessantly uttering purring noises' and finally a 'subdued sort of grunt of a cork being removed from a bottle'.

When I contacted Bill Bellamy about what I'd found about 'sharming' he replied:

"I've recently acquired a copy of *British Names of Birds* by Christine E. Jackson published in 1968. It basically tells you what the old names were for every British Bird species in different parts of Britain. Under Water Rail the entry includes:

WATER-RAIL: bilcock Yorkshire; brook ouzel; brook-runner; darcock; grey skit Devon; gutter cock Cornwall; Jack-runner Gloucestershire; oar-cock; rat-hen Yorks; sharming Norfolk; skitty cock Cornwall, Devon, Somerset; velvet runner, war-cock.

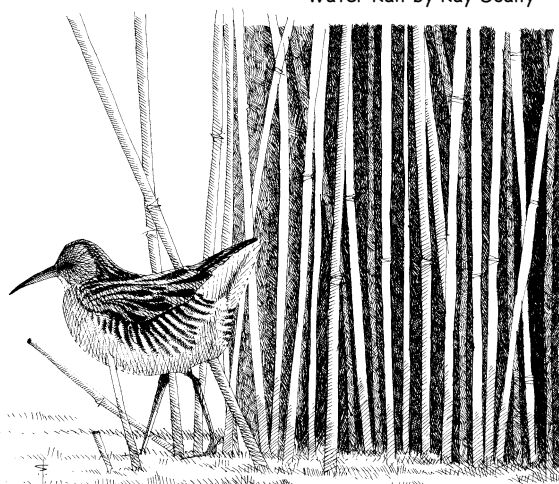
It is a fascinating book. The names for Little Grebe run to nearly half a page including the classics dabchick, arsefoot, dipchick and the old Cheshire name divy duck! My favourite is an old Yorkshire name dive an' dop!"

This prompted me to buy this book!

I also found the following snippets about Water Rails: These rails are versatile and opportunist foragers. They will jump to take insects from plants, climb to find berries, or dislodge apples from trees so they can be eaten on the ground. They are also nest predators, particularly of small birds that nest in reeds such as the Reed Warbler. They will kill birds by impaling or drowning them, particularly if the bird's ability to escape is restricted. They have been recorded as killing a European Greenfinch and a King Quail in an aviary, and small birds trapped in 'bird ringers' mist nets. One bird killed a Twite caught with it in a Heligoland trap.

Sheila Blamire

PS I did find other meanings with 'sharming', but I won't repeat them here!!!



Water Rail by Ray Scally

Projects and Surveys

UP ON THE ROOF

The concluding paragraph for the Lesser Black-backed Gull text in the *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral* is as follows:

“Now that some birds have taken to breeding on buildings, there is no shortage of nest-sites for them, and an abundance of food, either fish or other marine items, putrefying waste at landfill sites or, increasingly, take-away food discarded by humans in urban areas. In view of the rapid development of rooftop breeding in other urban coastal areas it would be good to monitor thoroughly the progress of this habit in Cheshire and Wirral.”

The author of *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral*, Professor David Norman, predicted the spread of this species in 2008 and by 2022 Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (LBG) has become a common breeder in urban sites throughout Cheshire and Wirral. Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (HG), albeit in lesser numbers, has also achieved a similar distribution. Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* (GBG) nests have been found in amongst the larger gull colonies but appear restricted in distribution to the industrial landscape in north Cheshire and Wirral.

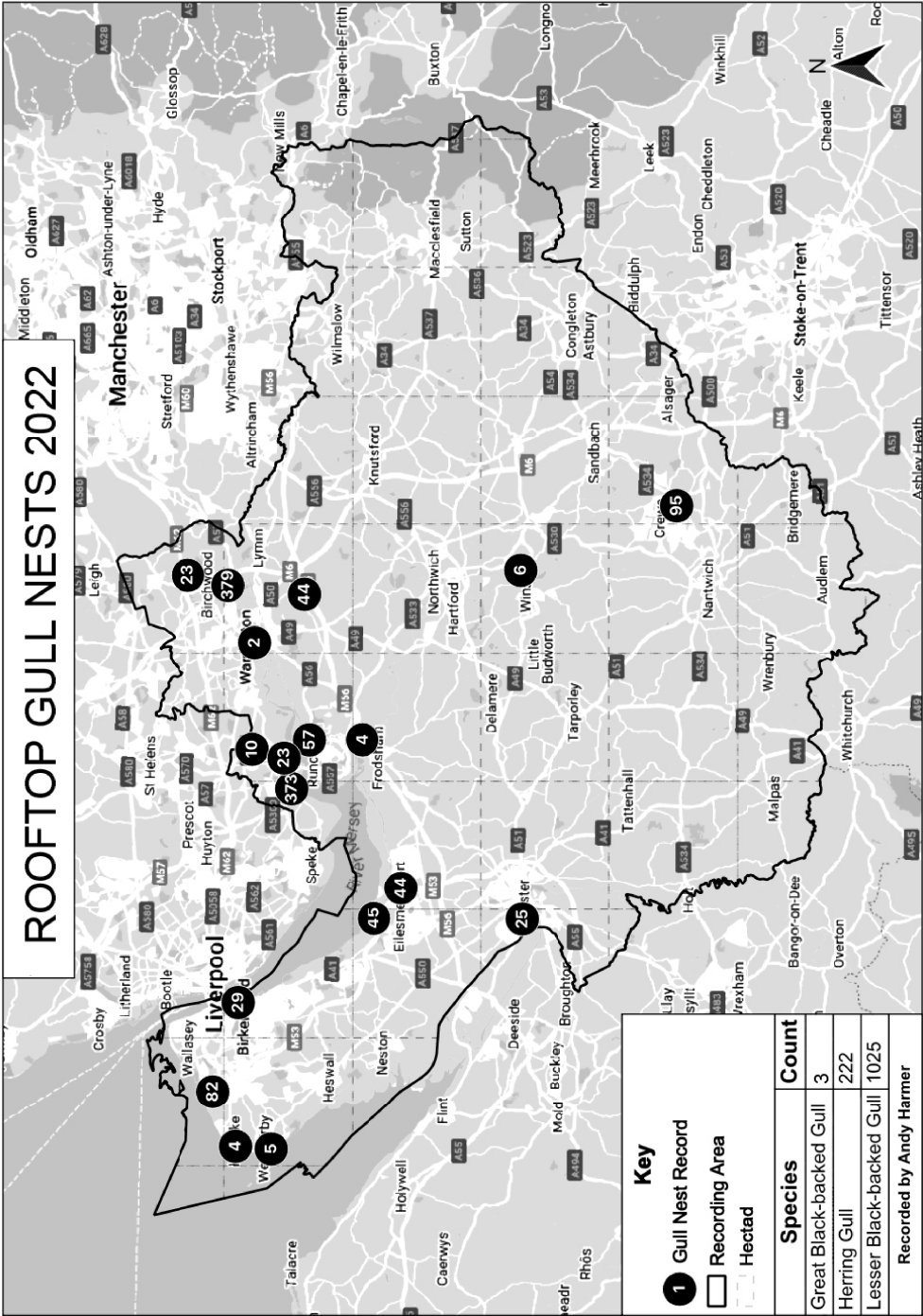


Lesser Black-backed Gull, nest and eggs on asbestos corrugated roof

Unfortunately, there is a significant survey constraint in the recording and monitoring of rooftop breeding gulls and that is the inability to observe nesting habits because of the height of the roofs. The crucial breeding data can be frustratingly just out of reach of the recorder, but help is now here. Drones are now cheap enough for even surveyors with the most meagre of budgets, and the size, weight, and safety features are enough to satisfy the Civil Aviation Authority that some drones (sub 250 grams) can be used even in heavily congested urban situations.

In the spring and summer of 2022, the author of this report used drones to locate 1025 LBG nests, 222 HG nests and 3 GBG nests on commercial and residential structures across the recording area of Cheshire and Wirral. 85 factory and warehouse roofs have supported over 99% of all rooftop gull nests, whereas less than 1% of gull nests were found on the roofs of residential dwellings.

Numbers of nests at the various locations throughout the recording area



LBG outnumbered HG at every breeding colony except for one site at Runcorn, where there were marginally more HG nests. Many breeding colonies had little or no HG interest, whereas others had an almost equal amount of LBG and HG nests. Size of colony, proximity to the coast or 'urban-ness' appears to have no influence on the absence of, or the percentages of, HG.

The author's first drone sortie surveying for rooftop nesting gulls was at an industrial estate in Runcorn, on the south bank of the river Mersey. Prior to the survey, gull activity was observed momentarily from the new Mersey Gateway Bridge, and as the bridge is non-pedestrianised a proper inspection wasn't possible. When the factory was visited later that day, there was no evidence - as is usually the case - to prove breeding, but any birder would wonder why tens of adult gulls in the breeding season were swirling around a site which presumably offered no food. A drone was required.

A cautious approach was required to safeguard any nesting birds, and the drone. A take-off from the ground and a slow, low flight away from the structure was made whilst observing the reactions of the gulls, tentatively ascending the drone to many metres above the roof height, before moving lower to gauge reaction and get a better view. The reaction of the gulls could be observed from a position on the ground, as well as from the drone's on-board camera. The gulls were surprisingly nonchalant and allowed the drone to get closer and closer until it was sometimes less than five metres away from the roof lip. Breeding evidence of three species of gull could be seen, and the survey's first 25 HG nests, 24 LBG nests, and single GBG nest was recorded at this site on this day.

Table: showing the type and number of roofs colonised at each location

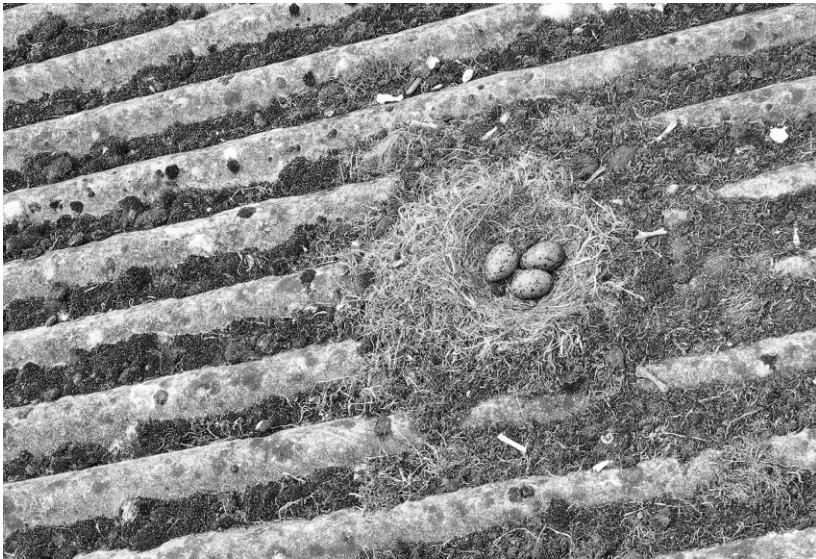
Location	Factories/warehouses	Residential
Appleton Thorn	1	
Birkenhead	7	
Chester	3	3
Clifton	1	
Crewe	4	
Eastham	4	
Ellesmere Port	7	
Hoylake		4
Moreton	14	
Risley	1	
Runcorn	5	
Warrington	1	
West kirby	1	4
Widnes	14	
Winsford	4	
Woolston	18	

Roof Preferences

The narrow scope of this survey means that the results are unlikely to help our understanding of how and why a particular urban area attracts and sustains gulls during recruitment. However, notes on roof types (materials and structure) were made during the visits and these are included within this article along with speculation as to why gulls have a propensity to colonise these types of roofs.

The roof height appears less important than its ability to provide an adequate barrier against mammalian predators (including humans). Favoured roofs have gently sloped, asbestos corrugation, single or multiple ridged, with or without roof furniture such as air vents, pipes, and skylights. The steeper the gradient, the greater the propensity to utilise roof furniture as an anchor point. The roofs usually have sides and edges, which on the face of it provides cover from the worst of the elements, but it should be borne in mind that a precipitous edge is a danger to the chicks so could this be a safeguarding choice?

Asbestos corrugation, compared to metal roofing, offers much better purchase for nests, possibly even when the asbestos is at a steeper pitch. Asbestos corrugation roofs rapidly undergo bio-weathering (bio-covering) and this is expedited by gulls. Gulls ostensibly 'green the roofs' that



Showing gull nest, roof flora and prey remains

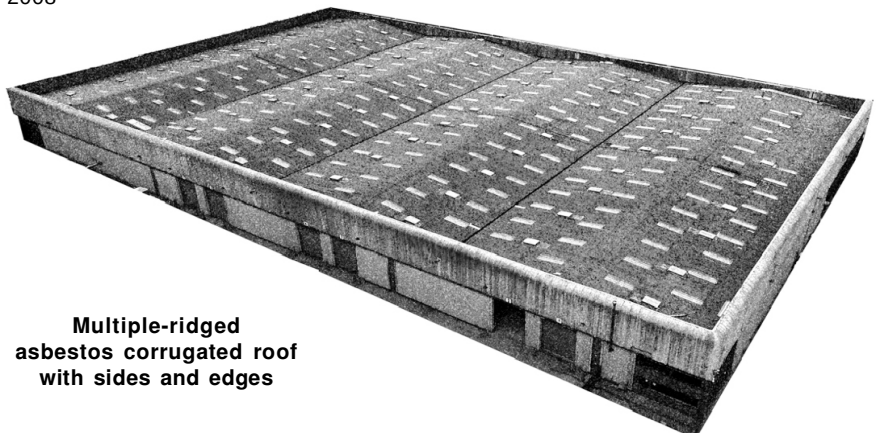
they nest on as their faeces provide nutrients for lichens and mosses, and nest construction brings in plants. Prey-item remains, faeces and plant material can end up in the gutters and valleys of roofs which can impede drainage and then provide drinking water. There is evidence to suggest that nests on metal roofs 'migrate' downwards towards the gutters, valleys, or roof edge, and all of these could be disastrous for eggs and young.

One benefit from choosing an asbestos roof became obvious after the chicks had hatched out. As a drone hovered above a roof in Widnes sending a livestream back, it revealed that both nests on the roof were empty, and predation appeared to be the reason as chicks were nowhere to be seen. It was only when the drone camera viewed the roof from the side that the chicks became visible. The mottled greys and orange hues of the chicks could not have found a better backdrop than a grey roof covered in *Xanthoria* and *Physcia* lichen rosettes.

Andy Harmer Email: andyharmer@btinternet.com

References

1. David Norman, *Birds in Cheshire and Wirral (a breeding and wintering atlas)*, Liverpool University Press, 2008



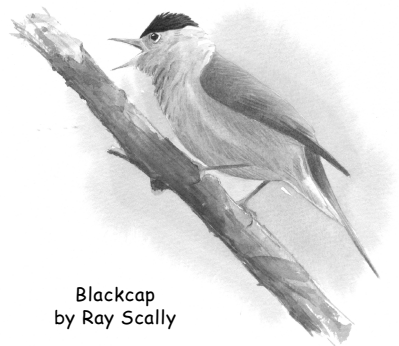
**Multiple-ridged
asbestos corrugated roof
with sides and edges**

Conservation News

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

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM STEVE TURNER

Hope you have all had a good winter spotting and some of you have picked up that missing lifer for your list. Here at Weaverham my feeders have been busy all winter. I have had a pair of Blackcaps on the suet feeders every day as regular as clockwork. I thought with that spell of really cold frosty weather we had they might have popped down south, but they must like the food or the area, as they are still with me. Had Goosanders, Goldeneyes and Shovelers on the Twin Fishing Pits by the Lion Salt Works at Marston for a few weeks, along with displaying Great Crested Grebes and Coots. On Monday the 20/2/23 there were Pink-footed Geese flying over in their thousands very high west to south-east. On Tuesday 21/02/23, whilst on the way to Manchester, a load of them were coming back, again high going south-east to west. Do they know something we don't, or are they just confused? I have seen large coveys of Grey Partridges on land off Aston Lane South by Aston School this winter, both shoots in the area have placed a fine on guns shooting Grey Partridges helping the numbers to recover. I have also seen quite a few on the River Weaver water meadows behind Dutton Locks, along with quite a few Woodcocks coming out of the woods behind the locks to feed on the water meadows at dusk. There are always quite a few Snipe, both Common and Jack on the banks and the dredging beds along the River Weaver going down to Dutton Locks, as long as you are able to miss the packs of domestic dogs being exercised along the same road, but the Leigh Arms does good food on the way back.



Blackcap
by Ray Scally

There is still time to put up some nest boxes. Use up all those off-cuts of wood, we all have in the garage (for that rainy day that never comes), to make your own, or keep your eyes open at garden centres - some are selling them off a bit cheaper to make room for all the summer stock they believe we are all going to buy.

On the grim side bird flu has NOT gone away - it is like Covid it will be there in the background. Please remember if you see dead birds please do not touch them, contact DEFRA 03459335577, let them clear up dead birds, to contain spread.

In the National Press there are still incidents of raptors being poisoned. The Police nationwide are doing a good job at the moment bringing the offenders before the courts where unfortunately they are sentenced to a firm beating with a wet lettuce leaf or a soggy trifle. The punishment does not fit the crime. My point is do not touch what may be poisoned baits - report them to the Police and let them handle them, they are trained to handle toxic items - some of the insecticides these people use are deadly and will KILL.

Other cases in the courts all over the country at present are people who have been found with large collections of bird's eggs. Again these low life are still at it and all cases at present in the courts, have been reported to the Police by bird spotters, as I have stated numerous times before, who have seen something they thought was not right and phoned it in. You will know when something is NOT right and get as much of a description as you can from a distance. Do not put yourselves in danger; use your optics, that's why we have them.

I hope you all have a good summer and get some good days out.

Steve Turner, Conservation Officer, 11 Pinfold Way, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3NL
Tel: 01606 853796 Email: conservation@cawos.org

VALE ROYAL AREA

Rudheath Lime Beds is expected to start work in September. Rightly they have some stringent conditions to adhere to. From an ornithological perspective screening of the works from the wider pools and on-going monitoring will be undertaken.

Roy Leigh, Vale Royal Area Representative

CONSERVATION TEAM

Conservation Officer	Steve Turner, 11 Pinfold Way, Weaverham, Northwich, CW8 3NL Tel: 01606 853796 Email: conservation@cawos.org
Chester	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Congleton	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Crewe and Nantwich	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Halton	Tony Parker, 41 The Park, Penketh, Warrington, WA5 2SG. Tel: 01925 726986 Email: tonymarker@cawos.org
Macclesfield	Vacant - please let Steve Turner know if you are willing to take on this role
Vale Royal	Roy Leigh, 8 Hall Drive, Marston, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6DT Tel: 01606 892032 Email: roysleigh@aol.com
Warrington	Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, Warrington, WA4 2PF. Tel: 01925 264251 Email: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
Wirral	Richard Smith, March Wall, King's Drive North, Caldý, Wirral, CH48 1LL. Tel: 0151 625 2320 Email: richard@deeestuary.co.uk

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 17th June 2023 - *please be prompt*

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



MARCH 2023

- 20 HPRSPB 'PERU – LAND OF THE INCAS' by Brian Anderson
- 24 KOS 'CRANE SPOTTING' by Ashley Grove
- 26 SECOS RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands, ring for details

APRIL 2023

- 17 HPRSPB 'NATURE IN BRITAIN THROUGH THE SEASONS' by Mark Cocker.
Joint meeting with Stockport RSPB.

- 21-24 SECOS Weekend trip to Dorset, ring for details
- 22 KOS Great Orme followed by Conwy RSPB, ring for details
- 28 KOS AGM followed by 'SOUTH AFRICA' by Sheila Blamire

MAY 2023

- 13 KOS Manifold Valley, ring for details
- 15 HPRSPB 'THE PEREGRINE FALCON' by Steve Watson and Richard Sale
- 21 SECOS RSPB Old Moor, ring for details
- 21-24 KOS Trip to East Anglia, ring for details
- 26 KOS Goyt Valley evening walk, ring for details

JUNE 2023

- 11 KOS Burton Mere Wetlands, ring for details
- 11-12 SECOS Weekend trip to Anglesey, ring for details
- 23 KOS Mobberley evening walk, ring for details

JULY 2023

- 8 KOS RSPB Dearne Valley Old Moor, ring for details
- 21 KOS Whitegate Way evening walk, ring for details

SEPTEMBER 2023

- 9 KOS Woolston Eyes, ring for details
- 22 KOS 'THE PEREGRINE FALCON' by Steve Watson

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

ADNHS Altrincham & District Natural History Society <http://mpettipher.me.uk/altnats>
Meetings Jubilee Centre, The Firs, Bowdon, Altrincham 7:30pm, contact Jacky Johnson 0161 928 7896

CAWOS Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society www.cawos.org
Currently held by Zoom, starting at 7:45pm, contact Sec. David Hiley 07484 836652

CRSPB Chester RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/chester
Meetings Christleton Parish Hall, Christleton, CH3 7AS 7:30pm, contact Norman Sadler 01244 335670

HPRSPB High Peak RSPB Members' Group <https://www2.rspb.org.uk/groups/highpeak/>
Meetings Senior Citizens' Hall, Marple 7:30pm, contact David Knass 07879 646856

KOS Knutsford Ornithological Society www.10x50.com
Meetings Jubilee Hall, Stanley Road, Knutsford 8pm, contact Sec. Karina Stanley 07532 833083

MRSPB Macclesfield RSPB Members' Group www.rspb.org.uk/groups/macclesfield
Meetings Macclesfield Community Centre, Macclesfield 7:45pm, contact Ray Evans 01625 432635

NNHS Nantwich Natural History Society
Occasional meetings throughout the year, contact Sec. Roger Crow, 01270 618416

SECOS South-East Cheshire Ornithological Society www.secos.org.uk
Meetings Ettiley Heath Church Community Centre at 7:30pm, contact Mike Tonks 07484 306147

WGBG Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group <http://wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/wgbg>
Meetings Wilmslow Guild at 7:30pm, contact Brian Dyke 01625 525936

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

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NON-EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBER

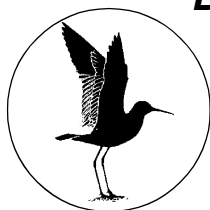
“THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU”

For further information, please contact:

Phil Hampson chairman@cawos.org 01625 260059

Note: the copy date for the next issue is 17th June 2023 - *please be prompt*

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



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**If you know anyone who might want to advertise
in future Bird News please let me know and
I'll contact them with all the information.**

Sheila Blamire at sheilablamire@cawos.org Tel: 01565 830168

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