

# Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter



Editor: M.J.Gee, Technical Adviser: R.Hammond, Distributor: C. Sharp  
Address: All correspondence to 21 Gladstone Street, Hartlepool, TS24 0PE.  
Email: tbc@dial.pipex.com  
Web: <http://ds.dial.pipex.com/watsonpress/tbc>

Thanks to the contributors to this issue:- Mike Leakey; Chris Sharp; Mike Gee; Arnold Illingworth; Graham Megson; Ian Edgar

All unsolicited copy will be most welcome, ideally sent by email, or on 3.5" computer disk, using word processing software, but typed and handwritten copy is equally acceptable. Any topic concerned with birds or the local environment is grist to the mill.

## MONTHLY SUMMARY by Chris Sharp

### July

A Black Tern on Dormans Pool (1<sup>st</sup>) was followed on 2<sup>nd</sup> by a Roseate Tern on Cowpen Marsh the following day. Roseates were seen regularly during the month around the Tees mouth with up to 3 birds recorded. As usual the return passage of waders began during the month though numbers were generally smaller than in previous years. Despite Dormans looking good only 1-2 Greenshanks were to be seen though 32 Black tailed Godwit were seen (19<sup>th</sup>). Little Gull numbers were also low this year. A Black Guillemot passed Hartlepool (10<sup>th</sup>) and was a welcome addition to several County lists. Even rarer a Little Shearwater flew north (15<sup>th</sup>) along with the first Sooty of the year. The following day produced a Storm Petrel and 2 Poms. Three Storm Petrels were also trapped at night (12<sup>th</sup>) in the now annual ringing sessions. An Osprey at Scaling Dam lingered for a few days from 15<sup>th</sup> and a Montagu's Harrier was also reported here on 21<sup>st</sup>. A Marsh Harrier was around Dormans Pool from 22<sup>nd</sup> and unusually large numbers of Sandwich Terns were present around Dormans and Saltholme Pools for the last 10 days of the month. Late in the month saw the first Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers with up to 3 of the former and 5 of the latter, mainly in the Saltholme area.

### August

Highlight of the month was undoubtedly the Caspian Tern found on the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> on Saltholme Marsh. It commuted between here and Seaton Snook until 5<sup>th</sup> and although the 4<sup>th</sup> county record it was the first to linger for any length of time and provided most observers with a welcome county tick. Also on Seaton Snook at this time were up to 4 Roseate Terns and a Long-tailed Skua was seen on 4<sup>th</sup>. A Black Tern was on Saltholme (2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup>). A Spotted Crane was found on Coatham Marsh (5<sup>th</sup>) and stayed for several days though was generally elusive. The following day a Little Egret at Greatham Creek began its long stay and was often to be seen roosting with Grey Herons in the trees at Saltholme Farm. 12 Storm Petrels were trapped at Hartlepool (7<sup>th</sup>) and the following day a Hobby flew over Saltburn. Numbers of Passage Waders slowly began to build up and the falling water levels meant the Reclamation

Pond was particularly attractive with 3 or 4 Wood and Green Sandpipers, several Spotted Redshank and up to 30 Ruff being present around mid-month along with 2 or 3 Garganey.

Sea-watching was generally quiet with few onshore winds though Long-tailed Skuas were at South Gare (12<sup>th</sup>) and Hartlepool (13<sup>th</sup>). An Osprey was at Scaling Dam (13<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>) with a Buzzard there on the latter date. 29 Common Sandpipers were around British Steel (17<sup>th</sup>) and a Bittern was seen at Dormans Pool (20<sup>th</sup>). Several Marsh Harriers passed through the North Tees Marshes during this period with Dormans being the favoured locality. A small fall of migrants (26<sup>th</sup>) produced 6 Pied Flycatchers at Hartlepool along with a few Whinchat and Garden Warblers. Light northerlies late in the month produced 19 Sooty Shearwaters and a Mediterranean Shearwater off Hartlepool (29<sup>th</sup>). Late August is undoubtedly the peak time for Meds in Cleveland.

### September

The first day of the month saw a second Little Egret around Saltholme and both birds remained until at least 17<sup>th</sup>. A Spoonbill was on the Reclamation Pond and a Wood Warbler was at Hartlepool where 3 Roseate Terns passed at sea. The following day saw one of the best sea watches ever at Hartlepool with Great, Cory's, 2 Med and 31 Sooty Shearwaters, Black Guillemot, 2 Long-tailed, 150 Arctic, 50 Great and 6 Pomarine Skuas and 11 Pale bellied Brent Geese. Not to be outdone a Sabine's Gull was off South Gare. Another Cory's and a close in Black Guillemot were seen (3<sup>rd</sup>). 3 Pectoral Sandpipers were seen on Coatham Marsh (7<sup>th</sup>) with one remaining to 9<sup>th</sup> and a Wood Sandpiper was there (8<sup>th</sup>). The adult Glaucous Gull returned to Hartlepool (9<sup>th</sup>) along with adult Mediterranean Gull. A Red-breasted Flycatcher was at Hartlepool (11<sup>th</sup>). 3 Roseate Terns were on the rocks at South Gare (13<sup>th</sup>) with single Little Stint and Curlew Sandpipers on the nearby beach. Attention switched back to sea watching with 2 Long tailed Skuas off Hartlepool (15<sup>th</sup>). 2 more were seen the following day with hundreds of Little Gulls moving north. South Gare again came up trumps with another Sabine's Gull.

A small fall of migrants (19<sup>th</sup>) saw a Yellow-browed Warbler at Hartlepool which stayed until 21<sup>st</sup> and a brief Icterine Warbler at South Gare. A White winged Black Tern was off South Gare late on the same evening. September 2000 though will in future be remembered for its Honey Buzzards. A huge national influx took place from the 20<sup>th</sup> and Cleveland had its fair share. At least 19 birds flew through the area over the next 9 days allowing several observers to finally add this county rarity to their lists. To put the figure into perspective only 20 Honey Buzzards had been previously recorded in Cleveland. Nearly all the records were of fly throughs but records from Upleatham suggested at least one bird remaining in the area for a few days. A juvenile Hobby obviously found Dormans Pool to its liking as it hawked for dragonflies from 22<sup>nd</sup> until the months end. Several Marsh Harriers also passed through the North Tees Marshes at this time. A Lapland Bunting at Hartlepool (20<sup>th</sup>) was the first of a scattering of coastal records of this increasingly rare visitor to Cleveland. A Barred Warbler was at Hartlepool Golf Course (21<sup>st</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>). A Common Rosefinch was at South Gare (22<sup>nd</sup>) with a Barred Warbler the following day. As the wind direction hovered between south-east and south-west good numbers of common migrants were at the coastal localities during this period including several Siskin and Brambling. A Rustic Bunting was in the scrub along Old Cemetery Road, Hartlepool (25<sup>th</sup>). A Little Bunting was present late in the evening (26<sup>th</sup>) at South Gare. An Osprey flew from Crookfoot Reservoir (28<sup>th</sup>). The last day of the month saw an American Golden Plover on the coastal fields between Marske and Redcar, a Yellow Browed Warbler trapped at Saltburn, 2 Barnacle Geese amongst the Greylags on Dormans Pool and 20 Avocets spent a couple of hours on Saltholme Marsh (the largest flock ever recorded in Cleveland).

### October

After the excitement of September, October was to prove one of the quietest for years. Almost continuous South Westerly winds meant few migrants were reported from the coastal stations and sea watching was hard work.

Both the Hobby and Little Egret were still on the North Tees Marshes on 1<sup>st</sup> on which date a Grasshopper Warbler was trapped at Hartlepool (no doubt causing a few increased heartbeats). 79 Barnacle Geese flew over Seaton Carew on the same day – a poor return for this species after last year's excesses. 2 Whooper Swans over Dormans Pool on 6<sup>th</sup> were the first of several reports this month. At least 50 Long-tailed Tits were on Hartlepool Headland (7<sup>th</sup>). An unusual visitor on the coast several other small parties were recorded elsewhere and 8 more were seen on the Headland (14<sup>th</sup>).

A Buff breasted Sandpiper on 7<sup>th</sup> was in the same field as the previous months American Golden Plover and remained to the following day when 200 Pink Footed Geese flew over. A Curlew Sandpiper and 2 Little Stint remained on Dormans Pool until 8<sup>th</sup> but high water levels for the remainder of the month meant passage waders were in short supply. Heavy rain on 11<sup>th</sup> produced a Water Rail and Ring Ouzel at Hartlepool. A Bittern in flight at Dormans Pool (14<sup>th</sup>) was the only bird of interest around mid-month, though up to 11 Goosander were unusually

in Ropner Park. Good numbers of Jack Snipe passed through from 20<sup>th</sup> with up to 13 on Dormans Pool from this date until the months end. Several Stonechat were also here along with 2 or 3 at South Gare. A Lapland Bunting was on Hartlepool Golf Course where a Richards Pipit flew over the following day. A Bewicks Swan flew over Dormans Pool (22<sup>nd</sup>). This is a rare visitor to Cleveland now.

5 Whooper Swans in fields at Thorpe Thewles (24<sup>th</sup>) reduced to 4 the following day and 3 by the 26<sup>th</sup>. Long gone are the days when both Bewicks and Whooper Swans were regular winter visitors to the Saltholme area. A late Red-Backed Shrike was on Coatham Marsh from 25<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> on which date a Spotted Crake was seen in flight on Dormans Pool. The same day saw the only notable sea watch of the month with Little Auk, Red-necked Grebe, Great-northern Diver, 7 Whooper Swans, 2 Velvet Scoter and a Long tailed Duck off Hartlepool.

### November

In contrast to the previous month November 2000 will long remain in the memories. After a quiet first few days when the only birds of note were a Little Auk off Hartlepool (4<sup>th</sup>) a late Swallow on the long Drag (4<sup>th</sup>) and 6 Whooper Swans at Scaling Dam with 1 on the sea at Hartlepool (5<sup>th</sup>) a strong north-easterly with rain on the 6<sup>th</sup> saw good sea-watching conditions with Hartlepool producing Storm Petrel, Little Auk, 8 Pomarine, 7 Arctic and 254 Great Skuas, 5 Manx Shearwater and 40 Pale-bellied Brent Geese. Several Woodcock and Long-eared Owls were also seen to come in-off. A Pallas's Warbler at Marske the same day heralded a great weeks birding in Cleveland. The following day saw another Storm Petrel at Hartlepool, another Pallas Warbler at Zinc Works Road, Great-Grey Shrike at Hartlepool and Pallas's Warbler, Firecrest and 3 Black Redstarts at South Gare. Large Numbers of Goldcrests and Thrushes were at the coastal stations at this time. Two more Pallas were found (8<sup>th</sup>) at Hartlepool and the nearby West View Cemetery. The following day produced a very late Barred Warbler near Greythorp and Firecrests at Zinc Works Road. Hazel Grove and Skelton. 3 Black Redstarts were at Hartlepool. A Richards Pipit flew over Greenabella Marsh (10<sup>th</sup>) and a Bittern over the Long Drag the same day. Of more interest a Hume's Yellow Browed Warbler was found at North Gare. Recently split from Yellow-Browed this was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> county record, the previous record being on 11 November 1994. As this bird was only seen briefly, the North Gare bird attracted many admirers and was one of several found on the north-east coast at this time. Two days later (12<sup>th</sup>) a Desert Wheatear was found at Boulby. A stunning male this was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> rare wheatear to be seen in Cleveland. (Pied Wheatear in November 94 being the other). Boulby cliffs were wet, windy and very slippery but the effort was well worth it as most observers had their 2<sup>nd</sup> county tick in 3 days. As birders made their way home a juvenile Sabine's Gull was found on floods inland of Saltburn. Later it was found on the beach and continued to this routine for the next 3 days. Although reported to be moribund on the beach at Saltburn it was last seen flying off inland!. Remarkably a Juvenile Long-tailed Skua was also off Saltburn at this time and was seen later in the month off Marske (24<sup>th</sup>). Hen Harrier and Black Redstart were

also seen at Saltburn adding to the theory that get a lot of birders in one place and good birds are bound to turn up.

Attention now switched to South Gare. A bird trapped in the Shrike Bushes (9<sup>th</sup>) was identified as a Lesser Whitethroat of the race 'Minula' known as Desert Lesser Whitethroat. This bird remained in the area for the rest of the month. After a slow start momentum to see this bird built up and all the country's leading listers (Johns, Evans, Millington etc) made the journey to see the bird. Presumably the calls for this race to be split will grow even stronger over the next few months in the popular birding press.

Up to 12 long-tailed Ducks were seen off South Gare at this time and 2 Firecrests were also in the Shrike Bushes until at least 19<sup>th</sup>. A pair of Bearded Tits were on the Long Drag (24<sup>th</sup>) with 2 Little Gulls off Marske the same day. An Olive-Backed Pipit was seen in Hartlepool Docks (26<sup>th</sup>). Unfortunately it flew off over nearby houses and could not be relocated. This was the only then 3<sup>rd</sup> county record and like the previous two was only a brief stayer. The month ended with 5 Waxwings reported from the Stockton Barrage area (29<sup>th</sup>).

### RARE BIRDS IN CLEVELAND - Part One: January to April by Chris Sharp

#### JANUARY

1 <sup>st</sup>	Blue Winged Teal	-	Haverton Hole 99 (Until 11 <sup>th</sup> )
7 <sup>th</sup>	Red-breasted Goose	-	Dormans Pool 98
11 <sup>th</sup>	Double-crested Cormorant	-	Billingham Pond 98 (Until 21 April)
31 <sup>st</sup>	Ivory Gull	-	Saltburn 86 (Until 8 <sup>th</sup> February)

#### FEBRUARY

9 <sup>th</sup>	Ross's Gull	-	Newburn Sewer Outlet 83
	Arctic Redpoll	-	Redcar 86 (until 18 <sup>th</sup> )
14 <sup>th</sup>	White-billed Diver	-	Hartlepool 81 (Until 22 <sup>nd</sup> )
	White-billed Diver	-	Cowbar 96

#### MARCH

1 <sup>st</sup>	Parrot Crossbill	-	Birk Brow 91 (Up to 47 until 18 <sup>th</sup> )
11 <sup>th</sup>	American Wigeon	-	Greatham Tank Farm 90 (until 16 <sup>th</sup> )
31 <sup>st</sup>	Arctic Redpoll	-	Guisborough (4 -7 birds)

#### APRIL

6 <sup>th</sup>	Ross's Gull	-	Seaton Carew 75 (also 9 <sup>th</sup> )
	Alpine Swift	-	Kirkleatham 85
9 <sup>th</sup>	Arctic Redpoll	-	Birk Brow 96 (3 birds)
11 <sup>th</sup>	Ross's Gull	-	Hartlepool 84
16 <sup>th</sup>	Black Kite	-	South Gare 88
17 <sup>th</sup>	Short Toed Lark	-	Saltholme Pool 83 (until 20 <sup>th</sup> )
	Great White Egret	-	Reclamation Pond 98 (Until 18 <sup>th</sup> )
18 <sup>th</sup>	Black Stork	-	Coatham Marsh 96 (seen the following day over Hartlepool)
19 <sup>th</sup>	American Wigeon	-	South Gare 98
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Rustic Bunting	-	South Gare 90
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Ring-necked Duck	-	Billingham Pond 88
	Black-winged stilt	-	Cowpen Marsh 93 (until 4 <sup>th</sup> May)
	Savi's Warbler	-	Haverton Hole 94 (until 26 <sup>th</sup> )
24 <sup>th</sup>	Woodchat	-	Billingham Bottoms 71 (until 25 <sup>th</sup> )
28 <sup>th</sup>	Black Kite	-	Leven Valley 97
30 <sup>th</sup>	American Wigeon	-	Cowpen Marsh 94 (2 birds)

As can be seen above finding rare birds in Cleveland in the first 3 months of the year is hard work. Despite this some of the most memorable birds in recent times have appeared during this period. The long staying Ivory Gull at Saltburn and White-billed Diver at Hartlepool still linger in the memory. It is remarkable that both White-billed Divers appeared on the same date.

Not surprisingly more rare birds begin to appear in April. Billingham Pond feature again with Ring-necked Duck. Two of Cleveland's Black Kites were in April a lingering bird would be much appreciated. Spring though tends to be late in this part of the world and its not until May that things really get going but more of that in the next issue.

## NOTICE BOARD

**Hartlepool Observatory:** Please note that the observatory has had to have a new lock fitted. A new key can be got from Chris Sharp at a cost of £3 approx.

**Huntsman Tioxide - Seal Sands Hide:** The birdwatching hide overlooking Seal Sand from the embankment at the back of Greenabella Marsh is now open to the public. A new footpath has been constructed from the Huntsman-Tioxide site to the hide. For safety reasons members intending to use the hide must first report to Huntsman-Tioxide reception in the office block at the Seaton Carew end of the Greatham site. Cars may be parked in the office car park. If reception is closed please report to the main factory security gate.

**Hargreaves Quarry - Access:** 'Zero Waste' are now developing the Hargreaves Quarry site for long term waste disposal. For health and safety reasons there will be no access to the parts of the site which are actively being developed without the use of full personal protective apparel. Eventually these parts of the site will be fenced. 'Zero Waste' are quite happy for birders to continue to use the rest of the site.

The arrangements for **anyone** visiting **any** part of the site are to call at the gatehouse and check in with security. They are happy for people to **drive** along the access road within the site and park off to the right away from the vehicles and haulroad. Eventually this area will be outside their security fence and there will be a gate to drive through. This arrangement should give more security than parking just off the Tees Road (now renamed Huntsmans Drive). Over the years, as the site is developed, the position of parking will change but it is hoped that a good relationship can be maintained between the company and those of us who have an interest in the site.

**Cleveland Retired Men's Association:** This association meets every Wednesday morning throughout the year at the Regency Hotel, Redcar. They would like to know if any member would be interested in presenting a talk or slide show/film on local bird life, to last approx 1hr. A screen, projector stand and extension cable can be provided as can modest expenses if necessary. A warm welcome would be guaranteed. If you are interested please contact Shaun Ivory, 33 Yewtree Avenue, Riverdale Park, Redcar, TS10 4QD. Tel:01642-485356.

**Births:** To Graeme and Michelle Joynt a girl, Lois May on 21<sup>st</sup> November - congratulations.

**Deaths:** It is with great sadness we announce the deaths of two members.

Terry Williams died 5-12-00 after a long illness. Terry will be well known for his devotion to birding Billingham Ponds. He reaped the ultimate reward for a 'patch' birder of not just finding a national rarity at an unpromising place but a first for Britain to boot; a Double-crested Cormorant. Every twitcher in Britain owes him a debt of gratitude.

George Tuffnell died 13-5-00. George had been a member of TBC for 35 years and was a keen birder at South Gare. His most notable coup was the finding, with Edgar Gatenby, of the Terek Sandpiper, which remains the only record.

Our condolences to both families.

## GOA - A BIRDWATCHING PARADISE by Mike Gee

If you have not birded India in general, and Goa in particular, then a treat lies in store. We (my wife and I) visited this small Indian State for three weeks between 17<sup>th</sup> November and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2000. This is a typical time to visit as most of the wintering birds have arrived and some passage migration is still going on. Earlier would increase one's chances of seeing some passage bird groups - particularly cuckoos - and later would make for easier viewing because the trees are a good deal barer, but much earlier brings one closer to the end of the monsoon season with attendant travel difficulties on forest tracks, and much later sees an end to interesting and sometimes spectacular feeding parties.

Goa, like much of India, is the winter home of resident or short distance migrant exotic families of birds such as barbets, bulbuls, babblers, parakeets, hornbills, leafbirds, trogons etc. and many Palearctic species that are rare and much sought after such as Lesser Sand Plover, Pallas's Gull, Fork-tailed Swift, Pintail Snipe, Blyth's Pipit and Amur Falcon. I find this combination irresistible and it makes much of the preparatory work easier because many of the families and genera are familiar. Preparation has also now been made much easier by the arrival, at long last, of two good field guides: Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent, Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp, OUP (1999) and A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent, Kazmierczak & Perlo, Pica Press (2000).

In Goa there is a wide variety of habitats:- estuaries, mudflats, mangroves, rivers, freshwater lakes and marshes, rice paddies,

lowland and montane jungle and excellent sites in each. There is a wealth of information about all the sites. Of particular use are: Goa - The Independent Birder's Guide, Peter Harris, (self-published, 1996) and A Birdwatchers' Guide to India, Kazmierczak & Singh, Prion Ltd. (1998). Both these, and the field guides above, are readily available from mail order book stockists. One other very valuable and more up-to-date source of site information is a trip report by Mark & Sandra Dennis, free from the Internet at [http://worldtwitch.virtualave.net/goa\\_1999.htm](http://worldtwitch.virtualave.net/goa_1999.htm) These three sources also contain useful general information about topics like health, food, bugs, travel to and within Goa, accommodation etc.

Up to the minute information is readily got from the birdwatchers who will be holidaying at the same time as you - Goa is a popular destination attracting enough birders to find what is around without crowding any one site.

Because it can get very hot between noon and four we birded intensively from dawn (a civilised 06.30) until about 12.00 and again from 16.00 to dusk. With the exception of Morjim Beach, which needs to be visited about two hours before or after high tide, all the sites are best in the morning. We therefore alternated working Baga Hill or East Baga - two excellent lowland jungle sites only 10 minutes walk from our hotel - with early morning visits by taxi to the other prime sites. None of these were more than 2 hrs away. A word about taxis: we found it much better once we had found a good taxi driver to keep him for the rest of the time. Otherwise you have to take pot luck with the first in the queue at your hotel and they don't all know the way to the sites despite claiming to know. We can without hesitation recommend Naresh, who can be found at the Beira Mar hotel. (You don't have to stay at the Beira Mar to use him, however.) He proved completely reliable and trustworthy, speaks good English, does know all the sites and is very personable. Taxis are very cheap - the most we paid for a 12 hr day at the furthest site (Bondla) was £20.

In the afternoons we either had a siesta or went to the Beira Mar hotel where you can birdwatch the Baga fields, unusually productive even in the afternoon, from under the shade of a large umbrella, a constant supply of drinks to hand from the bar. This is also a key site at dusk for birds like Painted Snipe, Watercock (which eluded us), Cinnamon Bittern and Slaty-breasted Rail.

Mentioning the Beira Mar Hotel brings me to the question of where to stay. This hotel is in Baga and I don't think anyone would argue about this village being the best part of Goa to be based. Many birders do stay at the Beira Mar, including most tour groups, and it undoubtedly has a prime site right there. However, it is right in the centre of Baga and therefore lively with shops, restaurants and holiday makers (which we were happy to avoid) and nobody enthused about the accommodation there. We were extremely happy at the *Marinha Dourada* hotel near Arpora, only a couple of miles and a £1 taxi ride from Baga. It too has some prime sites on the doorstep, pleasant apartments with good balconies

overlooking the very productive ridge of Baga Hill and is very clean and welcoming with a first class restaurant.

So what finally of the birds? In a three week stay we saw 252 species including 42 lifers and 13 new for India. We could easily have got much nearer to the 300 mark but having been to the Indian Sub-continent several times we did not chase some common Indian and Eurasian species. There were many highlights, particularly from two three-day stays at the Backwoods Camp (highly recommended - contact email: [Loven@goal.dot.net.in](mailto:Loven@goal.dot.net.in) or [Surlawoods@hotmail.com](mailto:Surlawoods@hotmail.com) or tel:91 0832 436109 or fax: 91 0832 224904). We saw the weird - Malabar Pied and Malabar Grey Hornbills, Little Spiderhunter, Sri Lanka Frogmouth and Heart-spotted Woodpecker; the beautiful - Malabar Trogon, Collared and Black-capped Kingfishers, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Grey-headed Bulbul and Black-naped Monarch; the charismatic - Indian Pitta, Forest Wagtail, Pallas's Gull and Besra; the very rare - Ashy Minivet, Tytler's Warbler and Spot-bellied Eagle Owl; the spectacular - Rufus-bellied Hawk Eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle and White-bellied Woodpecker; the very skulking - Banded Bay Cuckoo, Blue faced Malkoha, Grey Jungle Fowl and Indian Peafowl; and many we just happen to like such as - Black-headed, Red-headed and Grey-necked Buntings, Black-crested Bulbul, Wire-tailed and Streak-throated Swallows and Blue-winged Leafbird. We wrestled with sorting Blyth's Pipit from Richard's and Paddyfield Pipits and sorting out the several forms? species? of Herring Gull, viz. *Larus cachinnans*, *Larus heuglini*, *Larus taimyrensis*, and *Larus barabensis*.

All in all we had a terrific time and can thoroughly recommend Goa as a birding holiday destination. We shall go back very soon.

Mike Gee  
December 2000

## WETLAND BIRD SURVEY - AUTUMN 2000 SUMMARY

The general patterns of species abundance this autumn were rather similar to those of autumn 1999; a glance at the summary table reveals that those waterfowl reliant on deeper water again fared well, whereas for dabbling ducks and waders the picture was more mixed. Coverage was good, with 90 out of 92 sector counts undertaken.

Both grebes occurred in high numbers, with little grebe setting a new Teesmouth WeBS record (82, September). Grey heron (83, August) and mute swan (64, July) also yielded new WeBS records. The September cormorant peak of 647 is surpassed only by that of 1995, and surely consolidates Teesmouth's position in the top ten UK sites for the species.

Among the ducks only shelduck (212, October) and teal (600, September) returned seriously below average maxima. Conversely, shoveler (260, September) set a new WeBS record, while pintail (24, September) were also present in good numbers. Pochard (147, October) produced a new seasonal record, while tufted duck (159, July), ruddy duck (71, October) and coot (704, August) all scored well.

Perhaps the most spectacular total of the season was that of the 2261 oystercatchers in October; another new WeBS record. In contrast to the previous autumn, golden plover (1633,

October; a new seasonal record), grey plover (109, October) and lapwing (2709, October) all had peaks well above average.

Passage waders are rather poorly represented in this series of WeBS counts; very few curlew sandpipers, black-tailed godwits and common sandpipers were logged, while not a single little stint or wood sandpiper was recorded. Similarly, the maxima for dunlin (794, September), ruff (19, August), whimbrel (12, July) and turnstone (244, October) were all disappointing. By contrast, the 'shanks' all occurred in excellent numbers, with the September redshank tally of 1675 constituting our best autumn peak since 1988.

Sandwich tern (897, July) again failed to match the big four-figure counts of previous autumns, and while little terns were fairly numerous in July (64), the common and arctic tern maxima (876 and 18 respectively, both July) were merely average.

Following this series of counts, in autumn the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS Site remains of national importance for little grebe, cormorant, shoveler, sanderling and redshank.

MIKE LEAKEY  
WeBS Local Organizer  
November 2000

	Jul 16	Aug 13	Sep 10	Oct 15	Autumn 2000 maximum as % of average peak count over previous five autumns
Little Grebe	13	64**	<u>82</u> **	79**	156%
Great Crested Grebe	25	26	16	<u>28</u>	259%
Cormorant	246**	504**	<u>647</u> **	109*	137%
Grey Heron	29	<u>83</u>	49	49	183%
Mute Swan	<u>64</u>	57	52	25	142%
Shelduck	162	45	23	<u>212</u>	50%
Wigeon	3	11	134	<u>1279</u>	121%
Gadwall	8	50*	43*	<u>61</u> *	90%
Teal	14	384	<u>600</u>	376	73%
Mallard	137	277	<u>400</u>	287	88%
Pintail	1	2	<u>24</u>	17	154%
Shoveler	4	135**	<u>260</u> **	150**	151%
Pochard	33	68	76	<u>147</u>	371%

Tufted Duck	<u>159</u>	118	96	145	139%
Ruddy Duck	19	59	60	<u>71</u>	255%
Coot	529	<u>704</u> *	688*	552*	173%
Oystercatcher	572	398	1051	<u>2261</u> *	158%
Ringed Plover	46	<u>233</u> *	159*	22	101%
Golden Plover	48	67	29	<u>1633</u> *	468%
Grey Plover	1	42	27	<u>109</u>	164%
Lapwing	830	1578	606	<u>2709</u>	235%
Knot	4	42	<u>181</u>	139	203%
Sanderling	73	58	<u>371</u> **	271*	122%
Little Stint	0	0	0	0	0%
Curlew Sandpiper	0	1	<u>6</u>	1	24%
Purple Sandpiper	3	0	0	<u>29</u>	55%
Dunlin	110	580	<u>794</u>	481	68%
Ruff	1	<u>19</u>	10	0	62%
Snipe	10	<u>102</u>	33	6	132%
Black-tailed Godwit	3	<u>7</u>	2	2	25%
Bar-tailed Godwit	5	2	<u>43</u>	17	103%
Whimbrel	<u>12</u>	5	0	0	57%
Curlew	558	710*	703*	<u>756</u> *	97%
Spotted Redshank	0	4	<u>12</u>	0	316%
Redshank	950*	1111*	<u>1675</u> ***	687*	121%
Greenshank	3	<u>35</u> *	22	1	137%
Green Sandpiper	2	<u>5</u>	1	0	69%
Wood Sandpiper	0	0	0	0	0%
Common Sandpiper	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	1	0	30%
Turnstone	55	224	155	<u>244</u>	54%
Sandwich Tern	<u>897</u>	581	172	2	63%
Common Tern	<u>876</u>	555	50	1	97%
Arctic Tern	<u>18</u>	0	0	0	107%
Little Tern	<u>64</u>	4	0	0	225%

Underlined counts indicate Autumn 2000 maxima.

\* Denotes count of >50% of national importance

\*\* Denotes count of national importance

\*\*\* Denotes count of international importance

N.B. 'Teessmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

## A SMALL SWIFT AT UPLEATHAM by Graham Megson

Finding a small swift in Britain should be more difficult than actually identifying it, with only little swift and chimney swift to choose from.

Having done the seemingly hard part, I was left with just this task on the morning of Monday 25 September 2000.

I had stopped near to Upleatham church to scan for honey buzzards during the influx of that species into Britain. Scanning the skyline of Errington woods I found a flock of hirundines at about 500m and immediately picked out a small swift. Switching to my x22 scope I watched it for some minutes, but it was too distant to pick out any details. I drove towards the vet's practice and re-located the bird, though it was hard to follow due to the proximity of trees along the lane. I quickly eliminated chimney swift, a species I have observed in North America on shape, but was puzzled by my failure to detect the expected white rump of a little swift.

The swift was associating with a mixed flock of house martins (75%) and swallows (25%), which were ranging over the valley at a height of approximately 50m (150'). The birds were against either blue sky or near-white clouds. Despite back lighting, it was easy to see the white rumps of the twisting house martins and I would have expected to note the wrap around white rump of a little swift, even given that the bird was not twisting, dipping and fluttering in the same manner. Although I have never seen little swift, I have experience of seeing the similar house swift in SE Asia.

White-rumped swift is said to have a smaller white rump, countered by a more extensive white throat. I looked carefully at the throat, but could detect no white patch. I was also unable to detect the pale throat of a common swift, which joined the flock, suggesting perhaps a stronger silhouette factor than realised.

The small swift rarely spread its tail during the c10 minutes of observation. However, I did clearly see a notch in the tail, a feature which is wrong for both chimney swift and little swift. The notch was relatively shallow, more like a house martin than a common swift or swallow. The notched tail was confirmed by Don Paige, the only other person to see the bird.

The small swift was watched with a common swift, of which there were a few in the area at this time. It was some 20% smaller with a shorter, thicker body (not cigar shaped). It lacked the long, thin rakish wings of the commoner species. At certain angles the underparts of the body reflected grey. It had a more measured flight than common swift, noted as similar to house swift.

Looking through 'Swifts' (Chantler and Driessens 1995) and 'Handbook of the birds of the world' volume 5, reveals that there are actually very few species which match my description, most being ruled out on size and plumage features.

Alexander's swift (pale brown rump shallow fork tail) on the Cape Verde islands looks a good match but is said to be sedentary. Horus swift (*Apus horus* ssp *fuscobrunneus* from SW Angola, Africa), has a brown rump, grey throat and shallow forked tail and is considered to migrate locally or altitudinally. Bates's swift is said to have the most uniform plumage of any *Apus* swift, but has a deeply forked tail and is resident in equatorial Africa. The description of its 'rapid, flickering flight' is, however, dissimilar to my swift.

I have been unable to identify this swift. Keeping an open mind for a minute, the bird could have been an African species. Britain has hosted some remarkable and highly unlikely records over the years and swifts are the most aerial of birds. The weather pattern over the preceding few days had been a strong, warm south-easterly air flow.

One of the joys of birding is the thrill of finding a rare bird and one of the challenges is putting a name to your find. Unfortunately this one got away as they say. So it goes. So it goes.



## BUTTERFLIES AND DRAGONFLIES IN CLEVELAND IN 2000 by Graham Megson

Many observers reckon the spring and early summer of 2000 as being one of the worst in their memories for butterflies. Cool, wet weather subdued many early emerging and first brood insects. However, a flourish of late summer butterflies, including good numbers of migrant species were of interest. Clouded yellows occurred in their highest numbers for many years.

The first butterflies of the year included peacock (11 March), small tortoiseshell (20 March), comma (7 April) and small white (7 April). Late spring emergence included wall (7 May), green-veined white (12 May) and large white (14 May). Orange tips were flying in their

preferred woodland edge habitat on 12 May.

The common blue (first on 22 May) had one of its better years despite a poor spring emergence. Summer numbers were high with 8 on 16 June along the Hart to Haswell Walkway and dozens flying around Greatham Creek as late as 9 September. Dinky skippers were on the wing from 22 May. This butterfly occurs at the Hart to Haswell Walkway in Hartlepool, Gravel Hole NR in Norton, Boulby cliffs and I think at Kilton mine (near Loftus). It is worth looking out for on gravelly substrates, where its larval food plant bird's-foot trefoil grows in abundance.

I was unable to find a warm, sunny day for checking Cleveland's green hairstreak colonies and presume that they might have struggled. Similarly, I did not see first generation holly blue. This insect can fly late into the autumn (I saw one on the Scillies in October) and I would be grateful for news of any October sightings in Cleveland. The small copper was again hard to find this year and I didn't record my first in Cleveland until 9 Sept. My first red admiral was noted on 7 June and first painted lady was on 11 June. Both these species were to become more of a feature in the late summer.

My first dates for the summer species were as follows:

large skipper	9 June
small heath	16 June
northern brown argus	26 June
meadow brown	29 June
ringlet	5 July
small skipper	5 July

Peacocks flourished in the height of summer being seen in many gardens and woodlands.

This year I did not look for white-letter hairstreak, despite noting a few excellent, surviving, mature elm trees.

Clouded yellows had had a good spring along the English south coast and many stayed to breed. The second generation hatch coupled with an influx of late summer migrants led to large numbers in the south. It was inevitable that these would eventually reach the north-east and on 9 September I observed a male at Cowpen Bewley Country Park, followed by one in Saltburn. Tim and Dorothy Nelson saw two or three in the Dormans's pool area on 11 October and Martin Blick noted at least six in the county. Many observers will have caught up with this pretty species this summer.

Immigrant painted ladies and especially red admirals were around in good numbers right up to October.

A total of 21 species breed in Cleveland, with painted ladies and clouded yellows occurring as migrants.

## Dragonflies and Damselflies

A total of 16 species of dragonfly and damselfly were seen in Cleveland in 2000.

First on the scene were the azure damselfly, common blue damselfly, blue-tailed damselfly and the large red damselfly (near Lovell Hill on 13 May). All were flying in good numbers.

My first emerald damselfly was on 16 July, though it will have been flying earlier than this.

The banded demoiselle occurs on the Tees at Yarm and along the Leven. I saw it at Billingham Beck Valley on 21 June, where a small colony has apparently existed for a number of years. Ian Waller watched the first record for Cowpen Bewley Country Park, during his survey work for Stockton Borough Council. This is now a 12 species site, making it as good as Lovell Hill, which has recently been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by English Nature, for its odonata.

Ian also confirmed the breeding of four-spot chaser in the estuary (with an ovipositing female). This species also breeds on Eston Moor.

Stillington played host to a black-tailed skimmer on 21 August, observed by Tim and Dorothy Nelson. This is a very scarce species in the north-east and this may have been the first Cleveland record.

The emperor dragonfly was noted at Stillington ponds. There were two claims of the much rarer lesser emperor in the second week of

August. Following the well publicised presence of a male and female at Rainton Meadows in County Durham (and a record from Spurn), individuals were reported from Kirkleatham Business Park and from Back Saltholme. Neither were present on the following days.

Lesser emperor is straightforward to identify given prolonged views, but beware of female emperors, which are superficially similar. The vagrant emperor is also a possibility in England. It is very similar to lesser emperor, so refer carefully to Brooks 'Field guide to Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland'.

Late summer saw a peak of dragonfly activity, with common darter, ruddy darter, black darter, common hawker, southern hawker all being widespread. Surprisingly after last year's record numbers, brown hawker was decidedly scarce. I did not see one in Cleveland.

Migrant hawkers on the other hand were widespread. My first were on 9 September by Seal Sands and at Cowpen Bewley Country Park.

Rainton Meadows in County Durham also held red-veined darter this summer, and it is only a matter of time before careful scrutiny of common darters turns up this species as a first for Cleveland.



## POSTSCRIPT

Arnold Illingworth found this in the U.S. magazine 'Birdscope' and thought it of interest.

### 'Nature Faking'

Any bird lover knows that in the most unlikely places we can practise our hobby and learn something about the world. On airport runways others see grass and jets where we see Horned Larks or Snow Buntings. In parking lots where others load groceries we watch Boat-tailed Grackles displaying or hear Mockingbirds mimicking a host of local birds.

This privilege of ours - and the fact that birders are now a force in American society - hit home to the CBS television network recently in the most unexpected of venues, the Sunday afternoon golf tournament. I sympathise with the birders who complained in droves about clear evidence of TV 'nature faking'.

Like millions of other viewers this summer, I watched the remarkable Tiger Woods win tournament after tournament. I'll admit that I enjoy watching golf on TV, in part because I enjoy identifying the bird songs one hears behind the commentary. Such a trivial seeming pursuit vividly connects me to natural landscapes all over the world. This is a magical feature about birds, and the public is catching on.

Late this summer the Buick Open in Pontiac, Michigan, really caught my attention. Wood Thrush. Hermit Thrush. Northern Mockingbird. Even White-throated Sparrows in full song. These were great birds for a southern Michigan golf course. The problem arose when just a week later I heard the same birds at the PGA Championship tournament in Louisville, Kentucky. My response was repeated in living rooms all across the country. "No way!". There isn't a White-throated Sparrow within 800 miles of Louisville in August! My faith in the fidelity of live TV was shattered by two realisations: (1) the network was playing bird recordings, not picking up live bird sounds, and (2) the producers had no idea, and apparently didn't care, that they were supplying erroneous biological information about the place they were televising, yet this was a live broadcast.

CBS was showered with complaints. The story about bogus bird sounds was carried by newspapers and broadcasts coast to coast. The expressions of newscasters bemusedly reporting the story suggested that they had missed its most important feature. CBS was not a bit amused, however. As a senior spokesperson explained when I called, they were caught completely by surprise that so many viewers actually listened for, and think about, the sounds of nature behind the golf swings. CBS vowed to abandon the use of dubbed sound and will now use only the sounds they can get from live microphones.

The media is just beginning to recognise that 50 to 60 million Americans now describe themselves as birdwatchers. This is the fastest growing outdoor recreation in every social, racial, and economic sector of North America. Birds are no longer idle decorations and background noise. Instead, they are a way of life for a large and growing segment of society. This fact - increasingly sophisticated appreciation for the wild heritage around us - itself represents a piece of happy and hopeful news about American life. I find this news every bit as uplifting as the superstardom of Tiger Woods.

John W. Fitzpatrick - Louis Agassiz Fuertes Director