

Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter



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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

March

Flocks of Waxwings continued to be reported with a flock of 50 in central Middlesbrough for much of the month. 4 Smew remained around Saltholme during the month. In a poor winter for geese a single White-fronted amongst a large flock of Greylags by the A19 at Dalton on 9th was a welcome find. Up to 21 Pink-footed Geese were also with the flock. Both Red-necked and Slavonian Grebe were reported on Seal Sands until 13th at least. A Black Throated Diver off Steeley (10th) was one of only a handful this winter. Two Spotted Redshank were on Greenabella Marsh (10th) and 2 Mediterranean Gulls remained around Hartlepool headland.

Summer visitors were slow to arrive with the first Wheatear at South Gare (16th). Black Redstarts were at South Gare 24th and 26th with 1 at Hartlepool on 25th. The last couple of days of the month produced an Avocet on Greenabella, a Firecrest at South Gare and 4 Garganey on Dormans Pool.

April

April got off to a slow start and the momentum stayed that way throughout the month. The restrictions imposed by foot and mouth meant bird watchers were mostly confine to viewing from tarmac roads. The 7th saw an Osprey over South Gare where a Black Redstart was also present. The 4 Smew were still around Saltholme to at least 8th, on which date the first Little Gull of the spring was on the North Tees Marshes and Common Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank were by Greatham Creek. An Iceland Gull flew over Seaton Carew (10th) on which date a Hawfinch was found in a garden on Clavering Estate, Hartlepool. It stayed for 3 days and was only the 4th Hartlepool record in the past 50 years. 75 Waxwings were at Thornaby (11th). 2 Avocets flew over Saltholme Pool (13th) and the following day a Little Ringed Plover was on the Greatham Saline Lagoon. A Firecrest showed very well at Hartlepool (21st) on which date a 3rd Winter Glaucous Gull was at Saltholme. The first Marsh Harrier of the spring flew over

South Gare (22nd). A first year Glaucous Gull was at South Gare (24th). A Pink-footed Goose (25th) and a Dark-bellied Brent Goose (27th) at Saltholme were the last throws of winter. Several Marsh Harriers passed through the County in the last few days and large numbers of Black-tailed Godwits were seen around Saltholme with the peak count of 104 (28th).

May

May is looked forward to as being one of the best months in the bird watching calendar when almost anything can occur if the wind is in the right direction. May 2001 proved to be somewhat disappointing with hardly a fall of migrants of any size. Small numbers of Waxwings continued to be seen in the Middlesbrough area with 16 in Albert Park (10th) being the latest count. A Scaup was on Long Newton Reservoir (4th). A Bluethroat seen by one observer at South Gare (7th) was the only one of the month. A Pied Flycatcher was at Hartlepool (6th) but more unusually a first-summer Red-breasted Flycatcher was trapped there (11th). Only the 3rd spring record for Cleveland it showed well in the Doctor's Garden all day. A summer plumaged Black-necked Grebe was on Saltholme Pool from 10th until the month's end. Another also was reported from Jackson's Landing (20th). Passage Waders were generally scarce with only 1-2 Greenshank on the North Tees Marshes and a single Wood Sandpiper from 10th. 3 Spoonbills were on Seaton Common (13th) moving to Cowpen Marsh. I was still present until 26th. A Hen Harrier was on Coatham Marsh (12th). A Garganey was an unusual sight in Albert Park (14th). Highlight of the month was the Great Reed Warbler on Coatham Marsh (15th-17th) although it proved very difficult to see at times. A Temminck's Stint was reported at Saltholme (15th) with a Little Stint there the following day. Small numbers of Curlew Sandpiper also passed through at this time with a maximum count of 6. Up to 3 Garganey were around Dormans's Pool. A Golden Oriole at South Gare (24th/25th) was generally elusive, a male Red-backed Shrike sang on Eston Nab (24th) and a Honey Buzzard flew over Wilton (31st).

June

Three Wood Sandpipers were on Haverton Hole (1st). A northerly wind on 2nd produced 2 Long-tailed Skuas and 4 Long-tailed Ducks at Hartlepool. The following day single Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas passed along with an incredible total of 7 Storm Petrels. The Long-tails were the earliest ever to be recorded in Cleveland and the Pomarine was the first ever June record. An adult summer White-winged Black Tern appeared on Saltholme Marsh (4th) and remained until 10th. A ring-tail Montagu's Harrier flew over Saltholme (9th) and was briefly seen over Cowpen Marsh. A first-winter Glaucous Gull was reported from Hargraves's Quarry (10th). A Pale-bellied Brent Goose remained around the North Tees Marshes throughout the month, as did the Black-necked Grebe, which moved from Saltholme Pool to the Reclamation Pond. Two Curlew Sandpipers were around Saltholme mid-month. Waders were few and far between with only 1-2 Greenshank and Little Gull numbers were generally lower than normal with 5 being the maximum June count.

A summer plumaged Great Northern Diver flew past Hartlepool (17th). A Spoonbill on Dormans Pool from 22nd until the month's end was identified as last month's bird on plumage details. In the last few years Spoonbills have become regular visitors to Teesmouth often spending several weeks touring the marshes. The possibility of them breeding one day might not be too fanciful. A Great White Egret on the Port Clarence Flood (24th), was the fourth year in succession that this species has appeared in Cleveland. Formerly a great rarity in this country they are now annual visitors and this bird remained into July and was often to be seen with the Spoonbill. A Hobby was present in the Saltholme area from 27th until the month's end. A Male Marsh Harrier was also in the area and a Turtle Dove (a increasingly rare bird in Cleveland) flew over Dormans Pool (30th).

RARE BIRDS IN CLEVELAND - Part 3 August to December by Chris Sharp**AUGUST**

4 th	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Dormans Pool (73 – 14 th)
5 th	Pacific Golden Plover	–	Greatham Creek/Reclamation Pond (95-15 th)
	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Long Drag (89 – 12 th)
7 th	Bee-eater	–	South Gare (97)
	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	North Tees Marshes (86-17 th)
	Caspian Tern	–	Coatham (72)
	White-winged Black Tern	–	Hartlepool (99)
9 th	Bridled Tern	–	Hartlepool (88)
10 th	Baird's Sandpiper	–	Coatham Marsh (97)
	White-winged Black Tern	–	Saltholme Pool (77-11 th)
11 th	White-winged Black Tern	–	Dormans Pool (79)
12 th	Bonaparte's Gull	–	Saltholme Pool (77-2/10)
13 th	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Dormans Pool/Coatham Marsh (98-19 th)
	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Seaton Carew (63-17 th)
	Broad-billed Sandpiper	–	Seal Sands (61-19 th)
14 th	Citrine Wagtail	–	Haverton Hole (94 also 18 th -19 th)
16 th	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Reclamation Pond (75)
17 th	Black Kite	–	Billingham (94)
	White-winged Black Tern	–	Saltholme Pool (80)
19 th	White-winged Black Tern	–	Scaling Dam (92)
21 st	Great Snipe	–	Cowpen Marsh (76)
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	–	Cowpen Marsh (63-24 th)
22 nd	Greenish Warbler	–	Locke Park (73-24 th)
23 rd	American Golden Plover	–	Greatham Creek/Reclamation Pond (84 – 4/10)
25 th	Greenish Warbler	–	Hartlepool (87)
26 th	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	–	Long Drag (97)
	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Reclamation Pond (85-11/9)
27 th	Greenish Warbler	–	Boulby (87-31 st)
28 th	Franklin's Gull	–	Reclamation Pond (91-1/9)
	Greenish Warbler	–	Locke Park (86-31 st)
	Long-toed Stint	–	Saltholme Marsh (82-1/9)
29 th	American Wigeon	–	Long Drag/Greatham Creek (88-1989)
30 th	Blue-winged Teal	–	Reclamation Pond (94-29/9)
31 st	American Golden Plover	–	North Tees Marshes (96-2/9)
	Arctic Warbler	–	Hartlepool (91-2/9)
	Greenish Warbler	–	Hartlepool (89)
	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Long Drag/Dormans Pool (79-2 birds –2/9)

SEPTEMBER

1 st	White-winged Black Tern	–	Dormans Pool (85)
3 rd	White-winged Black Tern	–	Saltholme Pool (79)
	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	–	Long Drag (77)
4 th	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Dormans Pool (99-7 th)
	Citrine Wagtail	–	Dormans Pool (71-8 th)
6 th	Arctic Warbler	–	Hartlepool (84)
7 th	Little Shearwater	–	Hartlepool (90)
	Greenish Warbler	–	Hartlepool (83)
	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Saltholme Pool (77-28 th)
9 th	Blue-winged Teal	–	Coatham Marsh (99-2 birds)
10 th	Red-rumped Swallow	–	Long Drag (95)
	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Reclamation Pond (77)
11 th	Roller	–	South Gare (93)
	Little Bunting	–	Locke Park (89-14 th)
12 th	Little Bunting	–	South Gare (89)
13 th	Greenish Warbler	–	Hartlepool (89-14 th)
14 th	Short-toed Lark	–	Redcar (69-16 th)
15 th	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Reclamation Pond (83-27 th)
16 th	Spotted Sandpiper	–	Long Drag (97-26 th)
	Rustic Bunting	–	South Gare (93)
	Greenish Warbler	–	Hartlepool (67-17 th)
17 th	Paddyfield Warbler	–	Hartlepool (94-18 th)
	Rustic Bunting	–	Hartlepool (76-18 th)
18 th	Greenish Warbler	–	Hartlepool (95)
	Paddyfield Warbler	–	Redcar (94)
	Booted Warbler	–	Marske (93)
	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Long Drag/Dormans Pool (80-20 th)
	Paddyfield Warbler	–	Hartlepool (69-21 st)
19 th	Arctic Warbler	–	Hartlepool (96-22 nd)
20 th	Booted Warbler	–	Hartlepool (99-21 st)
23 rd	Great Snipe	–	Hartlepool (76)
	Black-billed Cuckoo	–	Locke Park (75)
24 th	Little Shearwater	–	Hartlepool (84-2 birds)
25 th	Red-throated Pipit	–	South Gare (98)
	Night Heron	–	Locke Park (96)
	Rustic Bunting	–	Locke Park (94)
26 th	Caspian Tern	–	South Gare (65)
27 th	Broad-billed Sandpiper	–	Seal Sands/Greatham Creek (94-3/10)
29 th -	Baird's Sandpiper	–	Greenabella Marsh/South Gare (86-11/10)
	Rustic Bunting	–	South Gare (84-30 th)
	Short-billed Dowitcher	–	Greenabella Marsh/Seal Sands/Bran Sands (99-30/10)
30 th -	American Golden Plover	–	Greatham Creek (88-1/10)
	Subalpine Warbler	–	South Gare (83)
	Little Bunting	–	Hartlepool (83-1/10)
	White-winged Black Tern	–	Greatham Creek (82-5/10)

OCTOBER

3 rd	Radde's Warbler	–	South Gare (92)
	Little Bunting	–	South Gare (72-7 th)
4 th	American Wigeon	–	Seal Sands (97-9 th)
	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Dormans Pool (80-21 st [3 birds 5 th -6 th])
	Arctic Warbler	–	Hartlepool (79-5 th)
6 th	Rustic Bunting	–	Coatham Marsh (98)
	Alpine Swift	–	Boulby (86-7 th)
8 th	Night Heron	–	Redcar (83)
10 th	Cattle Egret	–	Long Newton Reservoir (86)
11 th	Ross's Gull	–	Hartlepool (92)
	Dusky Warbler	–	Hartlepool (82)

12 th	Radde's Warbler	–	South Gare (91-14 th)
	Red-eyed Vireo	–	North Gare (91-13 th)
	Radde's Warbler	–	Hartlepool (88)
	Wilson's Phalarope	–	Reclamation Pond (63-13 th)
13 th	Great Knot	–	Greenabella Marsh/Seal Sands (96-5/11)
	White-rumped Sandpiper	–	Saltholme Pool (95-19 th)
	Olive-backed Pipit	–	Locke Park (82)
14 th	American Golden Plover	–	Redcar (81-19 th)
16 th	Alpine Swift	–	South Gare (76)
19 th	Little Bunting	–	South Gare (90)
20 th	Olive-backed Pipit	–	Boulby (90)
	Greenish Warbler	–	Redcar (61)
22 nd	Glossy Ibis	–	Wynyard (88)
23 rd	Cliff Swallow	–	South Gare (88)
24 th	Dusky Warbler	–	Seaton Carew Cemetery (81-25 th)
25 th	Little Bunting	–	South Gare (88)
	Red-footed Falcon	–	Saltholme Pool (69)
	Pallid Swift	–	Hartlepool (99)
26 th	Blue-winged Teal	–	Coatham Marsh (87-14/11)
	Dusky Warbler	–	South Gare (85)
	Dusky Warbler	–	Locke Park (99-28 th)
27 th	White-tailed Eagle	–	Boulby (85)
	Paddyfield Warbler	–	Hartlepool (84-28 th)
31 st	Paddyfield Warbler	–	Redcar (96)

NOVEMBER

2 nd	Arctic Redpoll	–	Hargreaves's Quarry (95)
5 th	Short-toed Lark	–	South Gare (94-6 th)
6 th	Pied Wheatear	–	Seaton Snook (94)
	Greenish Warbler	–	Locke Park (66-13 th)
11 th	Hume's Warbler	–	Hartlepool (94)
	Parrot Crossbill	–	Lockwood Beck (90-6 birds)
	Little Bunting	–	New Marske Reservoir (67)

DECEMBER

4 th	American Wigeon	–	Seal Sands (73)
5 th	Arctic Redpoll	–	South Gare (95-6 th)
12 th	Dusky Thrush	–	Hartlepool (59-24/2)
24 th	Serin	–	Locke Park (85-86)

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NOTICEBOARD

Foot and Mouth Disease - Footpath Access

English Nature wish to inform members that as from June 26th the footpath access route to the Seal Sands hides from Greatham Creek Bridge will be re-opened; beach access to North Gare Sands from the Zinc Works road is also open, but the footpaths across Seaton Common remain shut.

WeBS Counts

No news as of July on a resumption of WeBS Counts.

CLOUD CUCKOO LAND by Guano Bohjangle

Those Inscrutable Cuckoos!

How often do you look thrice or even twice at a single silent cuckoo? What about one that chooses to remain half-hidden, as well as wholly silent? Would it merit a second glance?

Just imagine. It is a warm sunny morning in the middle of May. You are in the process of checking the area of Flatts Lane, Normanby, for a Bonelli's warbler – a Western would do. Alas, there is but one showy, shivering Wood Warbler. Nothing whatsoever to register on the mega-ometer. Or is there? You are reduced to concentrating your efforts on trying to obtain good views of a single, silent, cuckoo that persists in haphazardly flitting around you. In fact, it becomes a personal challenge; man against nature. Somehow, you force the many and varied culinary delights of the South Gare café from your mind. You will remain within the tranquil woodland until you have seen the cuckoo well. However long that may take.

To begin with – before your undoubted stealth and fieldcraft skills dig in - you manage only the briefest of glimpses. The fact that it appears to be much more secretive than Common Cuckoo does not set any alarm bells ringing. Why should it? The cuckoo has still not uttered even one solitary [two-noted] call. It is not the slightest bit interested in responding to your expert mimicry. It remains silent as if defying you to identify it. Little do you know that serious confusion lurks just around the corner? For the cuckoo suddenly decides to give itself up. It perches right out in the open, for several minutes, thus presenting you with a real challenge. For one thing, its posture does not seem quite as 'loose' as that of Common Cuckoo - as you remember it. It seems more compact. Of course you have not seen one for some twelve months. Although difficult to judge, the bird appears somewhat small for a Common Cuckoo, less bulky than that species, with proportionately shorter wings and tail. The bill also seems 'stubbier' - slightly shorter, but perhaps heavier at the base, than Common Cuckoo.

Your binoculars start to perform a Riverdance. You take regular deep breaths, then bite hard upon an old piece of leather you keep for such occasions. In doing so, you just manage to keep your emotions in check. You recall seeing many photographs of Common Cuckoos depicting birds as broadly barred below as Oriental Cuckoos. You are well aware of the danger of wishful observation, less so of the marked variation in Common Cuckoos. You try to remember if there are any tried and tested field characters to help with the identification of Oriental Cuckoo. Your memory cells inform you that several differences have tentatively been suggested. Indeed you half-overheard them being loosely discussed by your peers in a local hostelry, after the annual general meeting had been concluded, some months previously. How you wished you had paid more attention to their erudite, animated discussion and less attention to Veronique the new French barmaid from Southbank.

Biting down once more on your trusted piece of leather, you proceed to note the following additional features. The cuckoo is a typical grey morph, which appears to show:-

A large pale grey head and breast, which contrast with the medium grey mantle and contrast even more with the dark slate-grey or dark bluish-grey lower back rump and uppertail-coverts;

Medium-thickness, well-spaced blackish barring on creamy-white or perhaps buffish-white underparts;

Pale buff or strong peachy-buff [allowing for the vagaries of shafts of woodland light] largely unmarked undertail-coverts. There are just a few short dark transverse blotches rather than narrow bars;

A quite dark underwing with a contrasting broad white band across the centre. [In the field, fine details of the underwing pattern of a cuckoo are at best difficult and at worst impossible to determine].

Primaries which appear to fall about 1-1.5cm short of the tail, where the first white bars or spots are located on the tail, back from the pale tail tip. This is one of the very last features you are able to note, for the apparent primary-extension is variable for a time as the cuckoo repeatedly changes its posture and position whilst perched on a wooden fence post.

The adrenaline is, by now, positively oozing. Any foot movement you make produces a swishing sound. The last time you experienced excitement on this level was at the Britney Spears charity concert at Port Clarence. The bird certainly looks promising. If only it would vocalise instead of apparently belonging to the Cuculus Mummies' Society. If only ...

You realise that lengthy observation is essential, but after no more than four or five minutes the cuckoo flies a short distance and is lost to view. In flight it reminds you of a small falcon; a Merlin, say. In any event, other birders need to see it. Your pager is still away being enhanced with a video footage receptor and you have no small change to enable you to make an old-fashioned telephone call. Of course, you always treat speed cameras with the respect they deserve. So burning just a small amount of rubber, you head off in the general direction of South Gare and the café in particular, hoping to find a handful of fellow birders-cum-gastronomes ensconced therein ...

Oriental or Common Cuckoo?

Size: In the field Oriental Cuckoo may often appear distinctly smaller than Common Cuckoo. In fact Oriental is only fractionally smaller.

Bill Difference: Within the literature mention is made of possible slight differences in bill structure. Oriental's bill may appear proportionately shorter as well as deeper at the base [and therefore seem slightly heavier] than that of Common Cuckoo. Perhaps the most that may be said is that a silent cuckoo showing a long slender bill is more likely to be a Common.

Upperparts: Oriental Cuckoo sometimes has a pale grey head that contrasts with a darker slate-grey lower back, wings, rump and uppertail-coverts.

Primary projection: The degree of primary extension may be slightly shorter in Oriental Cuckoo. Even if this perceived feature is correct, it [and indeed other features] may be of limited value on what undoubtedly will be a solitary bird.

Tail Difference: One observer with limited field experience suggests that Oriental shows a slightly shorter and more square-cut tail than Common Cuckoo.

Underpart Barring: Oriental Cuckoo generally does show more prominent broader and wider-spaced black barring on buffish-white rather than pure white underparts. However, there appears to be substantial variation and overlap. Furthermore, many or indeed most Common Cuckoos also show broad dark bars. These may often appear well spaced.

Undertail-coverts: Common Cuckoo can show only a few, albeit broad, bars on the undertail-coverts. On Oriental, this area may be unmarked, or virtually unmarked, rusty-buff, peachy-buff or pale ochre-buff, with at most, just a few short dark well-spaced transverse blotches, but 'odd' Common Cuckoos may be similar. To complicate matters further, Antero Lindholm, a member of the Finnish Rarities Committee states that it is quite common for adult male Common Cuckoos 'from Finland' to show buffish undertail-coverts and vent [although perhaps any buffish tone on the flanks and underwing-coverts would be unusual in Common Cuckoo]. In some other 'populations' the colouration of the undertail-coverts and vent apparently is held out to be a reliable field character.

Underwing Pattern: Oriental Cuckoo usually shows clean white [almost wholly unpatterned] foremost lesser underwing coverts. The rearmost lesser underwing coverts and the median underwing coverts are partly dark grey, partly distinctly barred. At the centre of the underwing there is a broad whitish band formed by the off-white axillaries and the greater coverts. This broad band continues along the white bases of the primaries, all the way to the third or fourth outermost primary on Oriental Cuckoo. However it is the width rather than the length of this white midwing-panel, which may be a more useful character. The lesser underwing coverts of Common Cuckoo are usually strongly and completely barred and the band on the underwing is narrower. However, the white midwing-panel is not shorter and does not just reach only the fifth or sixth outermost primary as the literature suggests but commonly continues to P7 and sometimes even to P8. The broad whitish band in Oriental Cuckoo contrasts more sharply with the grey secondaries and lesser and median underwing-coverts compared to that in Common in which the primaries and bases of the secondaries show more extensive broad white barring. On Common Cuckoo the distal part of the secondaries is dark grey and unmarked and the underwing-coverts are finely barred. The greater coverts can be almost unpatterned grey or distinctly barred. In essence therefore, Common Cuckoo shows a paler and more uniform underwing. That of Oriental Cuckoo appears partly darker and with a more obvious contrasting pale broader band across the centre.

Marginal Wing Coverts: Mention is made in the literature of a perceived difference between the leading edge of the wing in Common and Oriental Cuckoos. In Common Cuckoo the marginal coverts at the wrist of wing are normally white with black barring – at least the inner parts, whereas the outer part which occasionally may be visible in the field, is more commonly white. In Oriental typically they are unmarked white resulting in a mainly white patch below the carpal joint. The problem is that this feature is difficult to see in the field as the primary coverts normally hide those feathers. Potentially a much greater problem is that some Common Cuckoos may also show this feature.

Song: Oriental Cuckoo is stated to hold its head lower than its back, in a hunched posture, and inflate its neck while calling, whilst Common holds its head up above its back and appears not to inflate its neck quite so much. Of course, for spring birds, the song of a male Oriental Cuckoo is stated to be unmistakable – quite different from Common Cuckoo – and is held out to be perhaps the best identification feature. If only the Flatts Lane cuckoo had made itself heard! Transcribing calls is a hazardous business and inevitably is inexact and subjective. So with that caveat, Oriental Cuckoo usually utters four fast 'stuttering' resonant notes – ho, ho, ho ho, often preceded by a guttural noise and followed by a quiet series of six to eight disyllabic bu-bu notes, all of which are similar in both pitch and length. However many notes Oriental Cuckoo may utter, two, three or more, they are softer and slightly deeper, with a definite Hoopoe-like tone [at least in the northern *horsfieldi* subspecies], than those typically uttered by Common Cuckoo.

So what of the Flatts Lane bird? It goes without saying that upon your return to the area, accompanied by a veritable array of replete birding talent, the cuckoo could not be re-located. Well, many of your perceived differences – for example, the cuckoo's 'big' pale grey [contrasting] head, stubbier bill, short primary-projection, short tail, well spaced barring on the underparts, firmer – not so 'limp' posture, may just partly be the subject of individual variation in Common Cuckoos. Indeed there appears to be substantial overlap in a number of characters often used to identify the two species. Hardly any of the supposed identification features mentioned above are easy to be absolutely sure of or free of variation.

The Oriental Cuckoos in Finland

The first Oriental Cuckoos in Finland were observed in June 1998 at Lieksa and at Karstula. Apparently the same birds returned in 1999 when an additional individual was observed at Joutsa. In due course the records were submitted to and accepted by the Finnish Rarities Committee.

In the Spring of 2000 a bird, presumed to be the same individual, again returned to Lieksa. It became evident that the song was subtly but clearly different from the known variation of Oriental Cuckoo. Some observers became concerned about this and several consulted experts had difficulties accepting the records as Oriental Cuckoo. The observation was left under consideration.

This summer, a bird at Lieksa was trapped by Antero Lindholm and studied on 6th June 2001. It was regarded as very similar to and considered probably the same bird as in 1998. One observer has stated that he observed Oriental Cuckoos this May at Old Peak in China. He heard very similar calls to the recording of the Lieksa 2001 bird and interestingly, he says, this call was heard much more frequently at dawn, seemingly replaced during the day with the more usual Hoopoe-like call.

The Finnish Rarities Committee is inviting comments on call, particularly any recordings of Oriental Cuckoo from the western part of its range [recordings from east Asia are readily available] as well as other characters and generally asking whether it is possible to identify the Lieksa bird as Oriental Cuckoo beyond doubt. In due course an article will be published covering potentially relevant field characters as well as literature references, material and background data, acknowledgements, etc.

In Conclusion

As adult male Oriental Cuckoos are almost identical in appearance to Common Cuckoos, and indeed some may be indistinguishable, is then the only failsafe way of correct identification their usually totally distinctive song? Indeed does a failsafe way currently exist? The Flatts Lane cuckoo could well have been a British first; we will never know for sure. Perhaps it should be regarded simply as one further testament to the year's 'silent' spring. What do you think?

References

- [1]Lehman, Paul. Oriental Cuckoo versus Common Cuckoo. *Birding World* 13: 321-323.
 [2]Lindholm, Antero. Oriental Cuckoo at Lieksa Finland, *Birdlife Suomi Rariteettikomitea*.



WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2000/2001 SUMMARY

Disregarding the March count (which was cancelled at the request of the WeBS Partnership, because of the foot-and-mouth outbreak), coverage was good with 89 out of 92 sector counts undertaken, constituting a rate of over 96%.

The winter brought a mixed bag of results for wildfowl. In November, greylag goose (222) set a new WeBS record and tufted duck (162) a new seasonal WeBS record; the shoveler figure (183) was also excellent. December produced high cormorant (242), mute swan (36), gadwall (76) and coot (750) counts, while in January eider (100) yielded a new WeBS seasonal record.

However, four species of wildfowl fared particularly poorly. Once again, the shelduck peak (556, January) is the worst performance on record, and is the first time a Tees winter maximum has fallen below the threshold level of national importance for the species. Numbers of shelduck have fallen dramatically here over the last five years, and the decline has been much more pronounced than any indicated by national indices. The teal peak (787, December) represents the poorest showing since 1977/78. Furthermore, both goldeneye (with an all-time low of 38, in December and February) and red-breasted merganser (34, December) returned very disappointing maxima.

Among the waders, only four species achieved peaks in excess of the norm. These comprised dunlin (366, February), ruff (10,

February), curlew (967, December) and redshank (1441, December). In particular, a consistently high series of redshank counts was received, while dunlin perhaps exhibited a slight recovery in fortunes.

Several waders occurred in numbers which were well below average, and these included ringed plover (the 33 recorded in February constituting the worst showing since 1978/79), golden plover (436, January) and bar-tailed godwit (119, January). Despite a typically-timed late winter influx, the knot peak (2356, February) was not even of national importance.

Though not spectacularly poor by the standards of recent years, it is instructive to compare the winter's purple sandpiper (118, November) and Turnstone (209, November) maxima with the equivalent figures from twelve years ago; in 1988/89, no fewer than 347 purple sandpipers and 689 turnstones were recorded by the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry.

Following this winter's series of counts, and using the five-year mean of annual peaks, the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS site is of national importance for cormorant, shelduck, shoveler, sanderling and redshank. For the first time, knot no longer qualifies as being nationally important.

Mike Leakey - WeBS Local Organizer - March 2001

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2000/2001 SUMMARY

	Nov 12	Dec 10	Jan 7	Feb 18	Mar 11 No count undertaken	Winter 00/01 maximum as % of average peak count over previous five winters
Little Grebe	<u>15</u>	12	3	8		91%
Great Crested Grebe	3	<u>36</u>	25	28		90%
Cormorant	210**	<u>242</u> **	48	61		144%
Mute Swan	29	<u>36</u>	24	15		135%
Greylag Goose	<u>222</u>	4	72	15		151%
Shelduck	421*	513*	<u>556</u> *	397*		61%
Wigeon	1060	<u>1697</u> *	1189	1328		94%
Gadwall	46	<u>76</u> *	16	9		136%
Teal	697	<u>787</u> *	561	646		65%
Mallard	<u>327</u>	259	264	250		81%
Pintail	5	31	16	<u>33</u>		111%
Shoveler	<u>183</u> **	68*	42	49		169%
Pochard	91	<u>127</u>	86	62		80%
Tufted Duck	<u>162</u>	107	57	68		188%
Eider	7	8	<u>100</u>	17		262%
Goldeneye	9	<u>38</u>	27	<u>38</u>		33%
Red-br. Merganser	14	<u>34</u>	23	28		55%
Coot	558*	<u>750</u> *	513	352		217%
Oystercatcher	722	<u>1271</u>	890	932		98%
Ringed Plover	7	1	32	<u>33</u>		47%
Golden Plover	291	316	<u>436</u>	256		49%
Grey Plover	0	83	60	<u>172</u>		71%
Lapwing	2031	4787	<u>5562</u>	2217		96%
Knot	6	246	890	<u>2356</u> *		76%
Sanderling	211*	190*	102	<u>373</u> **		90%
Purple Sandpiper	<u>118</u> *	78	82	115*		70%
Dunlin	264	72	156	<u>366</u>		125%
Ruff	0	2	1	<u>10</u>		109%
Snipe	<u>9</u>	3	3	3		29%
Bar-tailed Godwit	60	73	<u>119</u>	46		43%
Curlew	581	<u>967</u> *	657	897*		116%
Redshank	1195**	<u>1441</u> **	1415**	1203**		103%
Turnstone	<u>209</u>	195	98	184		62%

Underlined counts indicate winter 2000/2001 maxima.

* indicates a count of >50% of national significance

** indicates a count of national significance

*** indicates a count of international significance

N.B. 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

IAN LAWSON REMEMBERS

First a great friend and club member and second a legendary day from the distant past.

Terry Williams

I first met Terry in spring 1983 at a bus stop on Norton Avenue in strange circumstances. He was having a go at a bloke who had stolen his wife's purse at a party he was having in his home. Terry had visited a local pub before the party and seeing the man on his own had invited him back to the party: that was Terry all over – a big heart. After the incident we got to talking and soon realised we had a common interest in birds. I was re-entering birding after phasing out in 1969/70 and was grateful when Terry told me about a pair of Grasshopper Warblers at the Fleet Road Ponds.

I next bumped into him (and Keith Ryan) a year later on Hartlepool Headland and soon we were meeting every Friday night in the Highland Lad to discuss plans for the weekend's birding – either somewhere local or a twitch. Over the years we formed a small group, all different characters, but with the same passion for birds. We had an annual week in Norfolk and later on added visits to The Scilly Isles. Terry's humour brightened many a day and amusing incidents are far too numerous to recount all of them. One in particular worth telling does spring to mind, however, (no, not the rather risqué competition in Norfolk). A Glossy Ibis had turned up at Fairburn and we arranged to twitch it the next day. Expecting distant views 'scopes were the order of the day. On arrival we had real difficulty locating the bird and it was only after a drive along the road bordering the Ings that Keith spotted it on some marshy ground near willow shrubs. We began to creep towards it as quietly as we could but soon realised it wasn't bothered about our presence in the least. Then Terry started, at about 30ft distance, to do his David Attenborough impression, describing how nervous and flighty this species was. He kept the commentary going until we were about 6ft. away from it in full view. It just kept on feeding and we were howling as Terry continued to describe its life style etc. and in the end I just had to dash off crying with laughter.

Nice one Terry! So sad to lose a good pal and be left with a void that can never be filled. Memories last longer than dreams. Your pal, Ian.

September 1965 - The Great Fall

1965 was the year I was first shown the glories of Teesmouth and the surrounding marshes. Birds I had only seen in the limited Field Guides of the day were becoming a reality. I latched onto Tom Francis, who lived only a couple of streets away from me, and soon he was finding me new birds at a fast pace: Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Wood and Green Sandpiper to name just a few.

But that September Tom went on one of his regular forays to Cley so I was left to my own devices. The weather on the 5th was (as Russell MacAndrew explained to me later) perfect for the fall that occurred. I arrived at Hartlepool Obs. and could not help noticing the huge number of warblers and other small

migrants. They were all over the place. Being only 13 years old at the time I was non-plussed to say the least; and thoroughly confused by the sheer numbers of birds involved.

I soon bumped into Edgar Gatenby in the Obs. grounds and he was as excited as I was. All told I think there were five birders on the Headland that day - imagine what we could have missed! There was a Bluethroat in the Bowling Green, and a Wryneck in the, then, Conservative Club gardens (which we missed).

We then decided to head, by bus, for Seaton and North Gare where we came across Chris Bielby who told us of another Wryneck he had seen on the Golf Club roof. Fuelled by this information we set off up the beach to the Gare. Edgar and Jim Henderson were walking just ahead of me when something - the sound of panicking gulls - made me turn round. I looked up and there was what seemed to me to be a huge raptor. I shouted, they quickly got onto it and soon I had Honey Buzzard under my belt.

The extent of this fall is well documented, with Norfolk and Suffolk getting the lion's share of the birds, but we were happy with our lot and I wonder to this day if, with the much greater number of birders covering the area these days and the improved identification skills they undoubtedly possess, how much more would have been found.

CAPERCAILLIE BLUES

David Simpson found this poem in the log at a hotel in Scotland where he was staying. It summed up his feelings exactly, except that he did see Scottish Crossbill. Perhaps it resonates with you, if not for Capercaillie then for some other 'mythical' bird in some other magical place.

Got up this morning
Just gone five
Like the walking dead
I was barely alive

Searched Ganton Wood
To no 'avail'
I just couldn't find
The Capercaillie

Was it not there?
Or was it missed?
Does that bird really exist?
Like the Scottish Crossbill
Which I searched for in vain
I guess I'll just have to come back again

So it's back to Durham
My own locality
With special thanks to Lynn and Dave
For their excellent hospitality

Taken from the Bird Log at 'The Pines', Duthill, Inverness.