

Teesmouth Bird Club

Newsletter



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Thanks to the contributors to this issue:- Chris Sharp; Graham Megson; Mike Leakey.

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

November

In early November small numbers of Little Auks passed Hartlepool on most days despite the fairly calm weather. A Storm Petrel was also seen off here (1st). A long-eared owl was seen at Crookfoot (1st). 2 Shore Larks at South Gare (2nd) were presumably the same 2 birds that appeared later in the month at North Gare for a few days. Up to 7 Jack Snipe were at Portrack Marsh during the month and 30 Twite were around Greatham Creek from early in the month. A late report of a Stone Curlew by Greatham Creek (3rd) was of interest. A Great Northern Diver off South Gare (4th) remained in the river mouth for much of the month. The wind veered to the North West on 8th and numbers of Little Auks increased. South Gare recorded 11 along with 24 Bonxies and 2 Grey Phalaropes. The following day the wind went round to a strong northerly. At least 1600 Little Auks were seen off Hartlepool along with 70 Brent Geese and a good duck passage including 60 Long-tailed Ducks (the highest count for many years). 2 Grey Phalaropes also spent the day on the sea just north of the observatory allowing many to see this species in Hartlepool for the first time. The wind was just a light southwesterly the following day but Little Auks continued to pass along with 2 Great Northern Divers and 2 Red-necked Grebes. A Black-throated Diver was off North Gare (11th). 220 Pink-footed Geese flew past Hartlepool (13th) along with 92 Little Auks. 3 Waxwings over Skelton (15th) were the first of a small number of records during the latter half of the month. A Dotterel was a good find amongst 1500 Golden Plover on Saltholme Marsh (18th) and represented the first November record in Cleveland. A Rough-legged Buzzard was on the Cleveland/North Yorkshire border at Sleddale from 25th and often gave super Year lists were off to an average start on New Years Day. The weather continued to be cold and the Slavonian Grebe and Great Northern Diver remained in the Fish Quay. Nearby the usual Glaucous and Mediterranean Gulls were present on the rocks and Steetly held a small flock of mixed Velvet and Common Scoters. A Pale-Bellied Brent Goose was also on the beach here. Birkbrow held a small flock of Crossbills and a

views. An Iceland Gull flew past South Gare (25th). The duck flock off Redcar late in the month included 300 Common and 6 Velvet Scoter and a Great Northern Diver was also off here.

December

The Rough-legged Buzzard was on the moors around Commondale from the beginning of the month until at least 19th often giving good views. Both Hen Harrier and Peregrine were also to be seen in the area. A Red-necked Grebe was on the sea off Newburn Sewer on 1st along with 24 Great-crested Grebes and a first-winter Glaucous Gull. 8 Whooper Swans called in at Crookfoot Reservoir (2nd). A 1st-winter Glaucous Gull was at South Gare and a second-winter Iceland Gull was on the rocks at Hartlepool (6th). 2 Smew were on Saltholme from 7th until the month=s end and being joined by a third bird from 29th. A Lapland Bunting was in the coastal fields between Redcar and Marske on 8th and another was reported by the Seal Sands hide late in the month. This species continues to remain scarce in Cleveland and any sighting are now noteworthy. Gone are the days of small flocks regularly wintering at Teesmouth. A Red-necked Grebe was at Scaling Dam from 11th and 4 Slavonian Grebes were off South Gare (15th). Waxwings were scarce this winter and 4 in Guisborough (20th) was the only report of the month.

As cold weather set in towards the end of the month both Great Northern Diver and Slavonian Grebe were in Hartlepool Fish Quay and another Slavonian Grebe was on Saltholme Pool along with a Scaup.

January

few Mealy Redpolls and a Yellow-legged Gull was reported from Lockwood Beck. 2 Bewick=s Swans spent a few hours on Crookfoot Reservoir (3rd). This species continues to remain a rare visitor to Cleveland. The regular flock of Greylags in the Crookfoot area held 3 Barnacle Geese at the beginning of the year though the flock were often in distant fields. Up to 3

Green Sandpipers were in a stream by Portrack Roundabout. This species has been seen wintering in Cleveland more regularly in recent years. Up to 4 Smew remained around Saltholme during the month and the wintering Twite flock on Greenabella peaked at 51. Unusually several Lapland Buntings were reporting during the month with 1-4 being present at Cowbar, Seaton Common and Cowpen Marsh. This represents the most wintering in Cleveland for some years. A first-winter Iceland Gull visited Acklam School (10th). A Red-necked Grebe was seen intermittently with the Great-Crests off Newburn Sever with another? along with a Slavonian Grebe off South Gare (11th). Possibly the same Slavonian Grebe was on Seal Sands (13th). Several Jack Snipe were on Portrack Marsh along with a drake Scaup mid-month. On the county boundary at Sleddale the Rough-legged Buzzard was again reported along with up to 5 Common Buzzards and several Hen Harriers. Hutton Village was again the favourable locality for Hawfinches. The weather turned much milder for the latter half of the month and consequently little in the note of cold weather movement was noted. Slavonian Grebes were seen on Scaling Dam and on the Reclamation Pond and a Black-necked Grebe was on Seal Sands (27th). A first-winter Iceland Gull was on the sea off Hartlepool (28th).

February

The mild weather continued into February and birders struggled to find any birds of note early in the month. The 4 Smew remained around Saltholme and 2 Black-tailed Godwit were also in the area. A Scaup and 41 Pink-footed Geese were at Crookfoot (4th) with a Lapland Bunting on Cowpen Marsh on the same date. Slavonian Grebes were on Seal Sands (10th) and at Scaling Dam (from 12th). Strong northerlies on 13th saw an early Bonxie off Hartlepool along with several Gannets. A Black-necked Grebe was on Saltholme Marsh (from 19th). The same date a near adult Ring-billed Gull was found at Billingham Technology Park. It stayed for 4 days but was only present for about 40 minutes each day. It was possibly the same bird, which had been present around Stockton the previous winter. A second winter Iceland Gull was seen intermittently on Dormans Pool from 20th and 4 Pink-footed Geese were on Cowpen Marsh at this time. Both Black-necked Grebe and Great Northern Diver were off South Gare (24th) the former staying into March. Circa 50 Snow Buntings were still present here late in the month.

COMMITTEE NEWS

Reclamation Pond B I.C.I. applied in January for planning permission to infill the Reclamation Pond and create a wetland habitat at land south of the Petroplus works opposite Saltholme Marsh in mitigation. Based on the facts that the Reclamation Pond represented the largest body of water in Stockton on Tees and that large numbers of water birds were using the Pond prior to I.C.I. deliberately keeping the water levels high, the committee on behalf of the Club submitted a formal written objection. Other than a formal letter acknowledging the club's objection no further news of this proposal has been received at the time of writing.

Dormans Pool Hide B After the long hold-up due to foot and mouth during 2001 plans are well underway for the construction of the >Jeff Youngs= hide. At the time of writing (mid-March) I.C.I. have commenced work on the car park, shrubs and fencing. The company who are supplying and constructing the hide are currently fully booked on work for the RSPB but it is hoped that the hide will be finally up by the end of May.

Crookfoot Reservoir B Hartlepool Water Company have informed us that a barrier is to be erected shortly at the entrance to the track. The barrier will be closed at dusk and raised at dawn to prevent unauthorised access to the area.

MESSAGE BOARD

Little Tern Wardening 2002

Once again this year INCA has been successful in acquiring landfill tax funds from the Northumbrian Water Environmental Trust (NWET) to finance the wardening and safeguarding of the Teesmouth Little Tern colony. It is likely that the birds will nest again at Crimdon, but help maybe needed at Seaton Carew, or even at South Gare and Coatham.

We are looking for assistance in wardening the site(s) from people who are willing to sit and watch the birds during the breeding season, end of May through to July. Anyone who is interested in helping conserve this rare visitor should contact G. Barber (1 Baalists Court, Greenwood Road, Bellingham. TS23 4AZ Tel: 01642 370 319 Fax: 01642 370 288 Email: plover@inca.uk.com) in the first instance.

We are also looking for someone to take on the co-ordination of volunteers and the bulk of the wardening job on a paid basis. We can just afford to pay for this post at about ,200 per week (just over the government minimum wage), but this may include some weekend and evening hours, dependent on their ability to draw in voluntary cover. The employment would be on a fixed term contract to cover the season (8 weeks extended as necessary).

There will be a get-together of all the volunteers at the Teesmouth Field Centre on the evening of 16th April, but it would be helpful if people could contact G. Barber before then so that they can begin to organise things.

Emailing Your Newsletter

With a significant number of members having access to e-mail it is proposed that the club will e-mail future newsletters to those with

this facility. This should save the club a significant amount of money each year in postage and printing. Could all members who require their newsletters e-mailing please let Graeme Joynt know their name and e-mail address at graeme.joynt@ntlworld.com

THE BIG 100 by Graham Megson

There are of course thousands of different insects, but two groups - the butterflies and the dragonflies and damselflies - have in recent years become popular with many birdwatchers.

For these groups there is good site information and excellent identification guides. Many can be seen as part of summer birding trips, although their emergence times rarely fit well with twitches. The rarer and more isolated species need dedicated trips to see them and it is possible to see all the butterflies and dragonflies in two to three years, the chief hindrance to success being poor weather. Generally warm, sunny conditions are needed, although the odonata (dragons and damsels) become super-active in warm conditions making them harder to locate and follow. Often the best conditions for detailed examination or photography are when it is cooler. Dragonflies tend to fly up into the trees to hang up at night and in unfavourable conditions. Damsels, however can often be found resting in low vegetation, such as amongst rushes. Butterflies rest with their wings closed when they become very difficult to find.

For those who like to set themselves targets, there are 100 butterflies and dragonflies to see in Britain, including a few that occur as rarer vagrants. I reached 99 in August 2001, when I successfully twitched the recently colonised small red-eyed damselflies in Essex.

There are 57 breeding butterflies in Britain (including the re-introduced large blue). In addition a new species has been discovered in Ireland and clouded yellow is an annual migrant. Some of the commoner ones are spreading due to climatic changes. In the north-east we have enjoyed the colonisation or re-occurrence of small skipper, comma and ringlet, with gatekeeper and speckled wood now into North Yorkshire and brimstone stopped to the south only because its larval food plant buckthorn is on its northern limit. Research has revealed that under the current conditions these should be even commoner and ought to have reached their former strongholds of southern Scotland, but they are being held back by habitat loss. Even worse the rarer species are not becoming commoner as the model predicts but are actually becoming rarer. This is due to the loss and isolation of semi-natural habitat. Indeed species such as the pearl-bordered fritillary and the marsh fritillary are now in serious trouble and are the focus of UK Biodiversity Action Plans.

It has been confirmed that a new species of wood white has been found in Ireland, proving that it is not just birders who are interested in splitting! This species was discovered following the examination of the genitalia of museum specimens!

Of the 57 breeding species I have seen, it was the marsh fritillary that I found hardest to see. Many of its known sites, even in its Dorset stronghold, failed to have butterflies flying on my visits. Another difficult species is the mountain ringlet, but only because one requires bright sunshine to see it. The

nearest colony is above Honister Pass in the Lake District, where sunny conditions can never be guaranteed. It also occurs on some of the Scottish mountains, such as Ben Lawers in Perthshire.

The large blue was formerly extinct in Britain but has successfully been re-introduced in a number of south-western counties. Butterfly Conservation organises large blue visits for their members, though these are soon booked up. At least one site has a public footpath across the site from which the insects can be viewed.

To reach the 100 target it is also necessary to see some vagrant butterflies. I have seen Monarch on the Isles of Scilly and large tortoiseshell last year at Languard in Suffolk (possibly ship assisted). My continuing ambition is to see Camberwell beauty, an insect that occasionally reaches our shores in moderate numbers, but which rarely settles for long. A number of years ago the Queen of Spain fritillary bred at Minsmere but this colony soon died out and this remains a rare east coast vagrant. Other possibilities are long-tailed blue, pale clouded yellow and Berger's clouded yellow.

There are 39 breeding odonata in Britain, including the Irish damselfly, which occurs in Northern Ireland and Eire. In 2001 I saw 36 of these, which required six strategic trips, including a long weekend in northern Scotland. The Scottish trip is the most difficult to plan, again because of the unpredictability of the weather. It is, however, worth it for the rare dragonflies and associated wildlife, which for me included white-tailed and golden eagle, Scottish crossbill (or were they parrot crossbill?!), (summer plumaged) black-throated and red-throated divers, crested tit, northern, downy and brilliant emerald dragonflies, azure hawk, white-faced and highland darter, northern damsel, large heath butterfly, twin flower and creeping ladies' tresses. Again, there are a few vagrant species that can be seen with luck, including lesser emperor, red-veined darter, yellow-winged darter and even green darner B an American trans-Atlantic, autumn vagrant.

In total I have seen 99 butterflies and dragonflies in Britain and I have high hopes of seeing both Camberwell beauty and lesser emperor in due course. A trip to Northern Ireland next July should give me the chance to see the two Irish insects and reach the 100 mark.

For enthusiasts, there are a number of excellent books, websites, yahoo groups and videos available. Butterfly Conservation is a fine organisation, doing much to conserve our threatened butterflies. BC can be contacted at Manor Yard, East Lulworth, near Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QP. Telephone: 01929 400209. (Or see: www.butterfly-conservation.org).

Two very useful books are:

S. Brookes, 1997, *Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, British Wildlife publishing.

Hill and Twist, 1996, *Butterflies and Dragonflies: A Site Guide*, Arlequin Press.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH AUTUMN 2001 SUMMARY

	September 16	October 14	Autumn 2001 maximum as % of average peak count over previous five autumns
Little Grebe	<u>59</u> **	28*	98%
Great Crested Grebe	<u>9</u>	5	60%
Cormorant	<u>429</u> **	281**	92%
Grey Heron	45	<u>58</u>	109%
Mute Swan	<u>25</u>	23	49%
Shelduck	50	<u>203</u>	60%
Wigeon	268	<u>534</u>	50%
Gadwall	17	<u>74</u> *	96%
Teal	395	<u>422</u>	57%
Mallard	<u>510</u>	158	117%
Pintail	<u>9</u>	5	50%
Shoveler	<u>81</u>	<u>81</u>	46%
Pochard	10	<u>33</u>	53%
Tufted Duck	<u>39</u>	20	30%
Ruddy Duck	<u>29</u>	26	73%
Coot	<u>434</u>	405	89%
Oystercatcher	619	<u>684</u>	42%
Ringed Plover	<u>37</u>	7	15%
Golden Plover	<u>120</u>	5	19%
Grey Plover	<u>48</u>	15	69%
Lapwing	<u>695</u>	615	50%
Knot	11	<u>13</u>	12%
Sanderling	169*	<u>215</u> *	67%
Little Stint	0	0	0%
Curlew Sandpiper	<u>6</u>	0	33%
Purple Sandpiper	4	<u>18</u>	35%
Dunlin	<u>506</u>	344	48%
Ruff	<u>8</u>	7	30%
Snipe	<u>33</u>	7	51%
Black-tailed Godwit	<u>16</u>	5	67%
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>99</u>	51	268%
Whimbrel	0	0	0%
Curlew	<u>469</u>	416	61%
Spotted Redshank	0	0	0%
Redshank	1457**	<u>1610</u> ***	115%
Greenshank	<u>5</u>	3	17%
Turnstone	232	<u>338</u> *	83%

* Denotes count of >50% of national importance

** Denotes count of national importance

*** Denotes count of international importance

N.B. >Teesmouth= includes Hartlepool Bay.

Since our WeBS Counts did not resume until September, the months of July and August do not feature in this summary. Therefore the totals and percentages given for some species listed in the table are not true reflections of status. Furthermore, it was not considered worthwhile to give totals for terns and some passage waders. Coverage during September and October was not good; although some data was obtained from 43 out of 46 potential sector counts, continuing access restrictions on some sectors caused problems (as did poor visibility on some sectors in October). In these circumstances it is not at all surprising that most seasonal maxima were low. However, four species did yield peaks in excess of the norm; these were grey heron, mallard, bar-tailed godwit and redshank.

The September bar-tailed godwit total of 99 (most of which were on Bran Sands North) is our best autumn figure since 1991. The October redshank tally of 1610 continues a recent return to form for the species, restoring it to internationally important status here.

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

cormorant, shoveler and sanderling. Redshank regains its internationally important status.

MIKE LEAKEY - WeBS Local Organizer *November 2001*

THE SCILLONIAN PELAGIC 2001

In August 2001, two work colleagues decided to go on the annual Scillonian pelagic to see Wilson's petrel and that got me thinking. I was apprehensive about signing up to 14 hours at sea on a flat-bottomed vessel, which had already made me sick on a number of journeys. However, a number of people told me that their pelagics had been on a flat calm sea - nothing like going to the Scillies in October=.

This sounded promising and there was also another persuading factor - the fact that I have been trying to see Cory's shearwater for all my adult life.

So I finally decided in the tenth year of the pelagic, to take the plunge and go. Two new birds almost guaranteed - Wilson's petrel=pinned down= and surely Cory's would be a synch. So it goes.

For the trip I persuaded Ian Boustead and Archie Feeney to accompany me. Then the car brakes failed and I had to take the afternoon off work for a swiftly arranged visit to the garage. Then a tricky piece of negotiation, I had to break it to Ian and Archie that I planned to go via Essex, where I was confident of seeing the recently colonised small red-eyed damselfly - a new dragonfly for me and one that would complete the set (excluding the Irish damsel, which will have to wait for next summer).

We set off early Saturday morning and arrived in Essex around 11 am. Unfortunately the Lea Valley site, near Waltham Abby was useless for the damsel, being private and the lakes being largely obscured by vegetation. So we were forced to go even further east, to Brandon Park, another known site. This proved time consuming as we were snarled up in the inevitable M25 gridlock. So it goes.

Once at the park we found a car park and site map and orientating ourselves, headed to the main lake. Here we scoped the red-eyes on view out on the lake's surface until we picked out the subtly different small red-eyed damsel males. Success.

Having seen eleven species of dragonfly and damselfly, we began the long drive west to Cornwall, listening out for the shipping forecast and trying to remember which sea area the Scillies is in! Now I have been told that the best preparation for a sea journey is a good meal and a good night's sleep. Frankly, we had neither. Eating snacks and arriving in the early hours of Sunday morning, we attempted to snooze in the harbour car park - three of us in a Rover metro. Meanwhile the local boy racers were speeding in and out of the car park and there was a post-nightclub domestic in full swing.

Bleary eyed we joined the queue to bag places on deck and shivered away the cold, wet hours before sailing at 4 am.

The forecast was not good. There was to be no millpond for us. Instead there was a force 5 southwesterly and a heavy swell. Drizzle and spray soon drenched us and visibility by mid morning was extremely poor. For hours we ploughed on, accompanied only by gannets and the odd gull. Flocks of whimbrel passes by, but little else.

The boat was rolling nicely now and soon passengers were dropping like flies, including Archie who retired to the nether regions of the vessel to be ill. I adopted a strategy of staying out in the fresh air and perched myself on a capstan. As the day wore on I was slowly overcome with hunger, tiredness and sickness and it was at this point that I blacked out and crashed to the deck.

I came to, surrounded by legs and feet with the ship's first aider arriving to administer aid. Fearful that a suspected concussion might send me to the sick bed in the very bottom of the ship, I cheerfully advised that I hadn't banged my head and that my immediate preference was to lie where I was. Only when I began to be washed by a pool of sea water swirling around did I seek higher ground and lay out on a bench. Things were not looking good.

The captain intercepted two fishing boats and I roused myself as we circled around them and chummed off the stern to pick up their petrels. Despite the presence of new birds, including a Sabine's gull, there was still not a shearwater or Wilson's to be seen and as the Scillonian 3 headed off for the famous Wilson's triangle I settled back to doze. Spirits on board were low and the .80 was beginning to seem like money badly spent. The phrase =Worst pelagic ever= kept drifting across the decks. So it goes.

Once in the =Wilson's triangle= the crew again began chumming the sea and soon a great shearwater was along side. Literally hundreds of stormies began to appear, attracted from the vast ocean by the smell of the chum.

I was on my feet again and was attracted by a stirring at the back of the boat - a rumour of something good. Assuming Wilson's petrel I darted into a gap and began checking through the stormies. Everyone was assuming Wilson's. So much so, that when the message was broadcast from the tannoy, we thought it was wrong.

>Soft-plumaged petrel in the wake of the boat! =

I was on to it straight away before it sheared away. Ian had seen it but where was Archie? Ian volunteered to look for him down below, but came across him down the starboard side, having roused himself for the chumming and surfaced in time to see it. Many had missed it, but not for long as it pulled back in behind the boat and proceeded to fly behind and up and down either side. Identified as a Fea's petrel, it stayed with us for one hour 20 minutes, giving the most astounding views.

The captain announced that we only had another ten minutes. By now stormies were around the boat in vast numbers and luckily we were well placed when our first Wilson's petrel As we steamed back towards Cornwall the soft-plumaged petrel sheared behind us for a good part of the way, eventually dropping off as the following flock dwindled.

Ironically the weather did a complete u-turn and the sun bore down on us from a blue sky. As the swell dropped off, clothes were discarded, leaving us in t-shirts by the time Penzance was in sight.

We camped in Penzance and were up early for a sea watch the next day, but fog closed in and my attempt for Cory's shearwater failed again. So it goes.

Instead we sought more dragonflies at Marazion, picking up beautiful demoiselle amongst seven species. However, there was no sign of lesser emperors, reported earlier in the week both here and at Drift Reservoir. The aquatic warbler had gone too.

flew alongside. It had appeared in the nick of time. It was joined by a second bird, but they were far from easy to pick up and follow in the rough conditions and some birders on the boat failed to connect.

There were new damselflies for Archie on the way home, so we drove to Bodmin Moor to a site visited by myself last year. This, however, was dried up and worse still, Bodmin was shrouded in cold mist. Fortunately, damselflies are often still see-able in cool weather and we hiked to a larger pool and bog complex. Here we located the two target species B small red damsel and scarce blue-tailed damsel. In fact we found six species of damsel and an emerging common hawkler in just one clump of rushes.

In total we saw 22 species of odonata on the trip, over half the British total. But the trip will be remembered chiefly for the seabird prize amongst prizes, the Fea's petrel.

So it goes.

Graham Megson