

Teesmouth Bird Club

Newsletter



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Thanks to the contributors to this issue:- Chris Sharp; Alan Wheeldon; 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

March

The Black-necked Grebe was still at South Gare (1st). A third-winter Iceland Gull was on Dormans Pool. The Slavonian Grebe remained at Scaling Dam with a second bird being reported on 2nd. Hen Harrier and Peregrine were also regular at Scaling at this time. A Water Pipit was seen at Guisborough and an elusive Bearded Tit on the Long Drag (3rd). An adult Mediterranean Gull was at South Gare (4th). The 3 Smew remained at Saltholme until at least 20th. A Black-necked Grebe was on Saltholme Marsh from 9th. A Red-necked Grebe was on Seal Sands at this time. An adult Ring-billed Gull appeared at Billingham Technology Park (9th) and remained until 26th. At first it was present for less than an hour a day but gradually spent more time at the Technology Park. Remarkably a second bird was seen here on more than one date. What was presumably one of these birds were also seen on Charlton's Pond and Portrack Marsh during this time. Bird of the month though was Crane. On 10th one flew over Saltburn before landing in a field near Upleatham. The following day it or a different bird flew over Yarm. On 17th 5 flew over the Ring-billed Gull at Billingham and were tracked flying south through the county to Wilton. A remarkable flock of 24 were reported flying in off the sea at Redcar on this date.

The following day another was seen briefly on Seaton Common. Prior to these records the largest flock of Cranes seen in Cleveland was 2! Chiffchaffs were reported from 18th.

A Great Northern Diver was in Hartlepool Harbour (21st □ 23rd) and a Black-throated Diver was at Scaling Dam on the same date. A Spotted Redshank was on Greenabella Marsh (23rd) and the first Wheatear was in the Jewish Cemetery (24th).

A Red Kite flew over Skelton (27th). 2 Yellow Wagtails were at Dormans Pool (29th) and were the earliest ever in Cleveland.

An early Little Ringed Plover was on Greatham Saline Lagoon (30th) on which date 3 Whooper Swans flew over Saltholme. The month ended with a Marsh Harrier at Dormans Pool, a Black Redstart at South Gare and 2 House Martins at Coatham Marsh again the earliest ever to be recorded in Cleveland.

April

2 summer-plumaged Slavonian Grebes were off South Gare from 1st to 3rd. Several Water Pipits were on Dormans Pool early in the month along with a Spotted Redshank. The first Garganey of the spring were 3 briefly on Greenabella (3rd). Yet another Crane flew over Dormantown (7th). The following day saw 3 Avocets on the Tidal Pool, 2 Garganey and a Marsh Harrier at Dormans and a summer plumaged Black-necked Grebe at South Gare. The tip at Hargreaves Quarry proved popular for the large Gulls and many were using nearby Dormans Pool to rest and preen. Several immature Iceland Gulls were seen here during April along with a first-winter Glaucous Gull. Mid-month was fairly quiet with just a trickle of summer visitors and cool northeasterly winds. A Buzzard over Flatts Lane was the only bird of note during this period apart from a Quail, which spent 2 days in a small garden in Norton.

Warmer weather arrived from 19th and the birds responded. A Spoonbill initially on Cowpen moved to Dormans Pool. Birders watching the Spoonbill had an Osprey fly north. 2 Garganey were also on Dormans from this date and nearby a summer plumaged Black-necked Grebe was on Saltholme. The following day a Dotterel was at Boulby and 3-4 Ring Ouzels were also in the area. 2 Avocets were on Saltholme Marsh (22nd) along with 3 summer plumaged Black-necked Grebes. A summer plumaged Slavonian Grebe was on Seal Sands at this time. Summer visitors were arriving in large numbers by now with Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers at Haverton (23rd). A Marsh Harrier was over Dormans on this date and again on 26th. A Wood Warbler was singing at Skelton (26th). Passage waders were evident on the North Tees Marshes late in the month with Saltholme Marsh proving particularly attractive. Up to 35 Black-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Common and Green Sandpipers, 3 Wood Sandpiper and several Whimbrel were all recorded but the highlight was Cleveland's earliest Temminck's Stint on

Saltholme Marsh from 27th into early May. An Osprey flew over Dormans (27th).

May

The Temminck's Stint remained at Saltholme Marsh until 2nd. The first Little Egret of the spring flew over South Gare (3rd) on which date an early Honey Buzzard was seen over Middlesbrough. 2 Avocets were on the Long Drag (5th). The only birds of note in the first week of the month were Wood Sandpipers at Saltholme and Coatham Marsh, up to 4 Little Gulls at Dormans Pool and up to 12 Black-tailed Godwit on the North Tees Marshes. A small fall of migrants at South Gare (9th) included Brambling, 2 Whinchat and 2 Tree Pipits. In addition 2 Garganey and a Bonxie were also at the Gare. An adult White-winged Black Tern was at Coatham Marsh for about an hour on 9th before being seen briefly at Saltholme Marsh. It then moved to Bolton-on-Swale in North Yorkshire later in the evening. The following day saw a Spoonbill over Coatham Marsh and a Black Redstart in the Jewish Cemetery. A Hoopoe was reported photographed on the Zinc Works Road that evening and the following morning it was relocated on the nearby golf course. Birders looking for the Hoopoe also found a male Bluethroat singing in the gorse bushes. A constant stream of birders got super views of both birds throughout the day with both still present the following day. A Marsh Harrier was over Dormans Pool and a Roseate Tern was seen at South Gare. A Crane was in fields near Cowpen Bewley Pond on 12th and stayed for 10 days allowing those who missed April's influx to catch up. 2 Temminck's Stints were on the Long Drag (14th) with presumably one of these birds on Dormans Pool in the evening along with a first-winter Glaucous Gull. Large numbers of Dunlin and Ringed Plover passed through the area in mid-month. Dormans Pool was particularly favoured and the new Jeff Young's hide provided superb views. Up to 3 Curlew Sandpipers were present at this time and another Avocet was on Saltholme Marsh (15th) later moving to Dormans Pool and Coatham Marsh. Little Egrets were on Dormans Pool (17th) and Cowpen Marsh (19th). The 19th also produced a drake Green-winged Teal on the Long Drag. This was the first Cleveland record since the recent split though about 10 had been recorded "pre split". A Great Reed Warbler was also recorded on this date in a rape field at Hummersea. It was heard on a couple of occasions and seen briefly in flight. Two Spoonbills were on Dormans Pool (20th). The following day was a Honey Buzzard day with singles seen over Guisborough, Dunsdale and Dormans Pool. 5 Turtle Doves over Cowpen Marsh were unusual and heralded several spring records of this now rare county visitor. 3 Little Stints joined the good numbers of Waders at Dormans Pool (24th). The following day saw probably 9 Spoonbills on the North Tees Marshes with 2 groups of 4 birds and a lone individual. This species has become an expected spring visitor in small numbers in recent years. Several Arctic Terns and a Yellow-legged Gull were on Dormans Pool at this time. 2 Quail were calling near Guisborough (30th) and 15 Black-tailed Godwit were on Saltholme Marsh (31st).

June

May had been interesting if predictable but June was to prove anything but as many observers improved their county lists by

2 or 3. A Quail was calling at Bowsfield (1st). Both Honey Buzzard and Wood Warblers were at Upleatham (2nd). The following day saw the first of the month's rarities with a Great White Egret seen flying south at Hartlepool. This is the 5th year in succession that this former rarity has occurred in the county. The same day saw 2 Avocets on Greatham Saline Lagoon along with a Little Egret and Black Tern and Little Stint on Dormans Pool. Little Egrets had increased to 2 the following day and a Spoonbill was on Dormans Pool. The wind swung around to easterly on 6th and 2 Marsh Warblers were trapped at Hartlepool. 3 Spotted Flycatchers and a Turtle Dove were also seen. A few Siskin Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat were also part of the fall. Early on the 8th a Red-backed Shrike was trapped at Hartlepool. Attention quickly switched to South Gare though after a super male Subalpine Warbler was found along with Marsh and Icterine Warbler. More excitement though was caused by an adult Rose-coloured Starling, which was present with a small flock of starlings on the Cabin Rocks. This was only the second county record, the previous record being in Martin Blick's back garden in Billingham in 1973. Unfortunately for Martin he was away on holiday in 1973 and again in 2002. County tick-hunters were also dashing over to Saltholme where an Egyptian Goose was seen but the bird departed before the masses arrived. The Subalpine Warbler was still at the Gare the following day but it was an Alpine Swift, which was first seen over the Jewish Cemetery, which set hearts racing. With the aid of mobile phones it was tracked along the coast to the Zinc Works Road before spending about an hour flying around the Power Station. It was only the second twitchable Alpine Swift for Cleveland, the previous one being at Boulby in October 1985. The following day produced a summer plumaged White-winged Black Tern on Saltholme Marsh. The 11th saw another Rose-coloured Starling (photographed in a Marske garden). A Broad-billed Sandpiper on Dormans Pool (15th) and a third Rose-coloured Starling at Dormans Pool (17th) brought a bird-filled 10 days birding in Cleveland to an end. The remainder of the month was quiet in comparison though 1-3 Spoonbills, several Little Egrets and Little Gulls lingered in the Dormans Pool area. The Egyptian Goose re-appeared at Saltholme (23rd) this time staying most of the day. Up to 4 Roseate Terns were at Crimdon Dene Mouth (23rd) along with a Ring-billed Gull. Large numbers of Black-tailed Godwits passed through, peaking at 87 on Dormans Pool (26th). A Serin flew over the Zinc Works Road (29th) on which date an Osprey and Goosander were seen at Scaling Dam.

COMMITTEE NEWS

E-Mailing Your Newsletter

With a significant number of members having access to email the club is proposing to email 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 wish their newsletter emailing please let Graeme Joynt know their name and email address at graeme.joynt@ntlworld.com.

Dormans Pool Hide

The hide was finally constructed in May 2002. The hide is a fitting tribute to Jeff Youngs and offers close up views of waders, gulls and ducks. Keys are available from Chris Sharp for £2 plus postage.

Teesmouth Bird Club Web-site

The web-site has seen many additions in recent months including colour photographs of rarities seen in recent years, recent unusual occurrences in the county and various 'trivia' lists including an impressive 'excel' list of the top 25 listers' lists. Thanks are due to Rob Little for his efforts. The website address is www.teesmouthbc.freeserve.co.uk.

Members' Nights

The first club meeting in September 2002 is a members' night. Three or four members, including Graeme Joynt, Vic Fairbrother and Wayne Richardson, will each be presenting a short illustrated talk for about 15-20 minutes. It is hoped to make this an annual event and if any member is prepared to give such a talk in the future could he or she please contact Chris Sharp.

Old Bird Club Reports

We are attempting to sell off our large stocks of old county bird reports. The prices have never been cheaper and sets of the current reports still in print are available from as low as £5. For further details contact our sales officer, John Sharp on 01287 633976.

Parking at Dormans Pool

Under no circumstances must members park on the main road. If the car park is full please park on the tracks off the road and walk back to the car park.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2002 SUMMARY

Coverage was very good, with 68 out of a potential 69 sector counts undertaken.

Great Crested Grebe (25, April), Shoveler (114, April) and Gadwall (86, June) all set new Teesmouth seasonal records. For both Shoveler and Gadwall these were our first totals of nationally-important magnitude in spring. Teal, Pochard and Coot maxima were high, but Little Grebe, Tufted Duck and Eider peaks were all around 50% down on the norm.

Turning to the waders, April brought good numbers of Redshank (1175), Golden Plover (267) and Bar-tailed Godwit (59). The rather early date of the May count failed to capture the peak passage numbers of Ringed Plover and Sanderling, in consequence of which numbers of both species were a mere half of what might otherwise have been expected. By way of illustration, on 23 May Seal Sands held 878 Ringed Plovers. While the WeBS Dunlin maximum may appear respectable, a massive total 1630 was counted on Seal Sands on 16 May.

The date of the June count was evidently too early to coincide with the first post-breeding Lapwing flocks, but it did reveal a substantial presence of Grey Plovers. Curlew were notably scarce throughout; this was comfortably the species' worst-ever spring showing. The same can be said of Sandwich Tern. The low Common Tern peak can be attributed to the lack of coverage of the Bran Sands South sector in June.

Following this series of counts, Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS Site remains of national importance for both Ringed Plover and Sanderling in spring.

MIKE LEAKEY

Local Organizer

Tees and Hartlepool Bay Wetland Bird Survey

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2002 SUMMARY

	April 14	May 12	June 9	Spring 2002 maximum count expressed as % of average peak count over previous five springs
Little Grebe	<u>17</u>	15	6	54%
Great Crested Grebe	<u>25</u>	19	19	217%
Cormorant	59	90*	<u>114*</u>	115%
Mute Swan	18	24	<u>41</u>	114%
Shelduck	<u>344</u>	301	135	102%
Gadwall	66*	47*	<u>86**</u>	244%
Teal	<u>341</u>	7	45	130%
Mallard	176	185	<u>221</u>	104%
Shoveler	<u>114**</u>	47	26	252%
Pochard	<u>54</u>	39	38	124%
Tufted Duck	69	70	<u>71</u>	48%
Eider	15	<u>24</u>	19	41%
Coot	310	259	<u>374</u>	153%
Oystercatcher	<u>574</u>	363	291	85%
Ringed Plover	37	<u>254*</u>	63	49%
Golden Plover	<u>267</u>	0	0	1780%
Grey Plover	10	4	<u>18</u>	212%
Lapwing	103	91	<u>116</u>	46%
Knot	<u>24</u>	0	12	83%
Sanderling	278*	<u>313**</u>	38	49%
Purple Sandpiper	<u>71</u>	1	0	53%
Dunlin	107	<u>244</u>	12	111%
Ruff	<u>15</u>	0	0	261%
Snipe	<u>26</u>	0	3	208%
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>59</u>	13	16	352%
Curlew	102	<u>117</u>	99	35%
Redshank	<u>1173*</u>	40	40	121%
Turnstone	<u>181</u>	43	29	78%
Sandwich Tern	0	<u>32</u>	31	20%
Common Tern	0	92	<u>121</u>	26%
Little Tern	0	8	<u>18</u>	111%

Underlined counts indicate Spring 2002 maxima.

* Denotes count of >50% of national significance for that species

** Denotes count of national significance for that species

NB 'Teessmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay

LOCAL RECORDS OF WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN *Chlidonias leucopterus*

White-winged Black Tern is the smallest of the *Chlidonias* terns. It is a rarer and more easterly relative of Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* and breeds in similar habitat, from Eastern Europe, east discontinuously through Central Asia to China. Unlike Black Tern however, European birds winter inland in Africa, south of the Sahara and in the Far East, from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia through Indonesia to northern Australia.

It is also one of the more frequent national rarities in the British Isles with 722 accepted records by the end of 2000, all but 50 of these since 1958 and between 10 and 40 records annually. A high percentage of records occur in spring, especially May, with most of the remainder in mid to late summer, peaking in August.

Over the years, Teesmouth Bird Club Reports have referred to the county status of White-winged Black Tern as being: 'a vagrant' [after the first record], 'an irregular visitor' [1992], 'irregular on passage' [1995], 'irregular visitor' [1996] and 'an irregular visitor' [2000].

The first British [as opposed to Irish] record concerned an adult shot from a flock of between 15 and 20 Black Terns on Horsey Mere on 17th May 1853 by a keeper employed by a Mr. Risings. Sixteen years later, almost to the day, on 15th May 1869, an adult was said to have been shot by a G. Mussell 'in the marsh at Port Clarence on the north side of the Tees.'

There was then a gap of almost one hundred years before the second record for Teesmouth [and Co. Durham] – an adult in part breeding plumage on the Reclamation Pond during the period 13th – 18th August 1967.

Saltholme Pools, one of several 'hot spots' for this beautiful marsh tern, hosted its very first during the period 13th – 16th 1972. The bird also visited Greenabella Marsh.

Four years were to elapse before the fourth record, a bird that spent from the 26th – 30th May 1976 at Coatham Marsh, Redcar, a site that, just like Saltholme Pools, has repeatedly proved attractive to the species.

During the 10th – 11th August 1977, an immature bird graced Saltholme Pools, and what was probably the same individual was seen at Seal Sands on the 20th August.

Almost exactly two years later, on 11th August 1979, an adult moulting out of summer plumage was located on Dormans Pool and was followed by another individual, in very similar plumage, on Saltholme Pools on 3rd September.

In 1980, an immature was on Saltholme Pools and later moved to Haverton Hole on 17th August. It was not seen subsequently.

The next record concerned an immature that fed on the marshes around Greatham Creek from 30th September until 5th October 1982.

In 1984 a summer-plumaged adult was found around Greatham Creek on the 31st July and remained in the general area until 5th August.

Saltholme Pools came up trumps yet again when a full-plumaged adult was seen there on 29th June 1985. Then an immature spent 1st September on nearby Dormans Pool.

After a rush of five records in six years, it came as something of a surprise that there were no further sightings of the species until 1992. Indeed, some observers had wondered if the drought would ever end. This time however, it was Scaling Dam that played host to a well-watched juvenile for just one day, the 19th August. Record numbers, involving at least 49 birds, occurred nationally in 1992. A marked westerly spring movement happened to coincide with large influxes of other eastern species such as Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*. In Poland, record numbers of about 1,000 pairs of White-winged Black Terns stayed to breed.

The next bird's stay was so brief, that only four birders were able to make contact with it. The bird, an adult in almost full summer plumage, was watched off Hartlepool Headland for just 15 minutes on the 10th July 1995. It then moved north to Northumberland, being seen at Tynemouth and also Seaton Sluice later that same day.

With more authoritative literature being widely available, such as the Helm identification Guide 'Terns of Europe And North America' by Klaus Malling Olsen and Hans Larsson, published in 1995, perhaps many observers [throughout the country] may have felt more confident in precisely ageing adult birds. A second-summer bird was watched on the 'North Tees Marshes' [*sic*] [in fact on the Reclamation Pond and Saltholme Pools] from 29th June until 7th July 1996.

A further break in the continuity of records then occurred, until a juvenile flew north off Hartlepool Headland on 7th August 1999.

On 25th June 2000, an adult toured several well-watched suitable areas, being noted at Dormans Pool, Saltholme Pools and Haverton Hole whilst an immature accompanied 2 Black Terns at South Gare, late in the evening of the 19th September.

In 2001 a superb summer-plumaged adult was found at Saltholme Pools on the 4th June. It frequented both Saltholme and Dormans Pools until 11th.

In 2002 what was considered to be a second-summer bird was discovered at 5.35 p.m. or thereabouts, on 9th May, at Cowpen Marsh, Redcar. As news of its presence was not immediately broadcast by the paging services and as it did not stay very long, many local birders were led a merry dance, the majority failing to see it at all. In all probability the same bird was then reported on Back Saltholme Pool on the north side of the River Tees but after a few minutes it disappeared again. A White-winged Black Tern was then rumoured to have been seen at Scorton Gravel-pits in North Yorkshire later that evening, something in the region of sixteen miles from Back Saltholme, as the smallest marsh tern flies. Irrespective of that rumour, a White-winged Black Tern, probably the same individual as that seen at Coatham Marsh, was discovered shortly after 8.30 a.m. on the 10th May at Bolton-on-Swale Gravel-pits by Nick Dales and watched by the author in the company of Nick, just twenty minutes later. The bird fed incessantly and remained until at least mid-afternoon of that day. It was aged as a second-summer bird.

Finally, a White-winged Black Tern, also considered to be a second-summer, was found on Back Saltholme on the 10th June 2002. Later in the day, it was also seen on both Dormans and Saltholme Pools. However, there was no sign of it the following day.

Like all other such records, this record and that of the White-winged Black Tern seen on the 9th May 2002 will, when received by the Records Sub-Committee, be forwarded to the Secretary to the national Rarities Committee for consideration by the members of that Committee.

Adults in summer plumage are so striking as to be unmistakable. Indeed, few other birds have such a contrasting and characteristic plumage: The head and body are black, the leading upperwing coverts white, as are the rump, tail and undertail-coverts, the underwing-coverts are solid black and the legs red.

Second-summer plumage is much as adult summer plumage but is dull black rather than velvety-black and sometimes brown-tinged. Often there are scattered white feathers on the body and especially the underwing-coverts, which then appear blotchy. The alula and primary coverts are dark-patterned whereas on an adult they are white. The outer four primaries are often darker [and browner] than on adults. There is often a dark bar across the secondaries and the tail can be greyer than on adults and often worn, with several generations of rectrices.

An adult has a partial moult to summer plumage that it commences in early February until early March. On arrival in the Western Palearctic [from mid-April] most, if not all, birds are in summer plumage.

However, according to Schmidt C. 1991 [*Die Bestimmung der Sumpfschwärze Chlidonias*, *Limicola* 5: 93 – 124] some adults probably do not moult completely into summer plumage. The safest subadult characters are dull black head and body, dark alula and primary coverts, spotted underwing-coverts and often four dark outer primaries.

Juvenile plumage is also contrastingly marked, birds exhibiting a dark brown ‘saddle’ [mantle and scapulars], pale whitish-grey wing coverts and white rump. Some juveniles may show a less contrasting ‘saddle’ than others as the grey first-winter feathers start to show through. The plethora of excellent field guides provides more than adequate details with respect to full plumage characteristics.

Full Dates	Location	Age
15 th May 1869	Port Clarence	Adult
13 th – 18 th August 1967	Reclamation Pond	Adult in partial breeding plumage
13 th – 16 th 1972	Saltholme Pools & Greenabella Marsh	
26 th – 30 th May 1976	Cowpen Marsh Redcar	
10 th - 11 th August 1977	Saltholme Pools	Immature
20 th August 1977	Seal Sands	Probably the same immature as above
11 th August 1979	Dormans Pool	Adult moulting out of summer plumage

3 rd September 1979	Saltholme Pools	Adult moulting out of summer plumage
17 th August 1980	Saltholme Pools then Haverton Hole	Immature
30 th September – 5 th October 1982	Around Greatham Creek	Immature
31 st July – 5 th August 1984	Around Greatham Creek	Adult in summer plumage
29 th June 1985	Saltholme Pools	Adult in breeding plumage
1 st September 1985	Dormans Pool	Immature
19 th August 1992	Scaling Dam	Juvenile
10 th July 1995	Off Hartlepool Headland	Adult in almost full summer-plumage
29 th June – 7 th July 1996	Reclamation Pond & Saltholme Pools	Second-summer
7 th August 1999	Off Hartlepool Headland	Juvenile
25 th June 2000	Dormans & Saltholme Pools & Haverton Hole	Adult
19 th September 2000	South Gare	Immature
4 th -11 th June 2001	Saltholme & Dormans Pools	Summer-plumaged adult
9 th May 2002	Coatham Marsh Redcar & Back Saltholme Pool	Second-summer
10 th June 2002	Back Saltholme, Dormans & Saltholme Pools	Second-summer

I owe another debt of gratitude to Graeme Joynt, who kindly read through the article and made several helpful suggestions, which served both to correct minor inaccuracies and add flesh to some ancient bones.

References

A History of the Birds of Durham [Temperley 1951]
 British Birds 86: 42
 British Birds 94: 480
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 Teesmouth Bird Club Reports

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