

# 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@sarahgee.com](mailto:tbc@sarahgee.com)

Newsletter Web-site: <http://www.watsonpress.co.uk/tbc>

Thanks to the contributors to this issue:- Chris Sharp; Alan Wheeldon; Mike Leakey; Rob Little; Brian Clasper.

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

An Osprey was at Scaling Dam (2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>). Passage waders began to build up in numbers as usual from early in the month with a few Wood Sandpiper and Greenshank on Dormans Pool being the highlight during the first 10 days. The 12<sup>th</sup> though produced a Temminck's Stint and a Pectoral Sandpiper on Greatham Saline Lagoon. The following morning an adult White-rumped Sandpiper was around Greatham Creek/Cowpen Marsh. Even rarer the following day a Semi-palmated Sandpiper was on Dormans Pool but unfortunately flew off before many had the chance to view this, the 3<sup>rd</sup> county record. The now annual ringing of Storm Petrels at Hartlepool saw 12 caught on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 10 on 27<sup>th</sup>. A pair of Roseate Terns were found breeding in the county – a welcome addition to the county's breeding birds. 2 Juvenile Long-tailed Skuas were seen at Hartlepool (18<sup>th</sup>). 2 Curlew Sandpipers were around the North Tees Marshes (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>) and Black-tailed Godwits peaked a 67 on Dormans Pool (26<sup>th</sup>). A Honey Buzzard was over central Middlesbrough (31<sup>st</sup>) and the month finished with Green and Wood Sandpipers and Spotted Redshank on Dormans Pool along with a Marsh Harrier.

#### August

A Temminck's Stint was on Dormans Pool (2<sup>nd</sup>). The following day saw a small fall of migrants at Hartlepool, which included a superb male Red-backed Shrike and an obliging Icterine Warbler. Later in the day a summer plumaged White-winged Black Tern gave close views on Seaton Common. Up to 15 Wood Sandpipers were also in the area along with a couple of Green Sandpipers. A Black Tern was on Dormans Pool and a Marsh Harrier over Cowpen Marsh. 2 Storm Petrels were trapped at the headland on the evening. Small numbers of Wood Sandpipers continued to be seen around the North Tees Marshes over the next few days along with a few Ruff and Spotted Redshank. A Curlew Sandpiper was on Seaton Snook (7<sup>th</sup>). An adult White-rumped Sandpiper was found here the following day and remained in the area until the

19<sup>th</sup>. It was generally elusive occasionally being seen on Seal Sands and at high Tide on Greenabella Marsh. A single Little Egret remained on the North Tees Marshes all month. A northerly blow on 10<sup>th</sup> saw 3 Sooties and 20 Bonxies off Hartlepool. Another Red-backed Shrike was found at Zinc Works Road (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>). Marsh Harriers increased to 3 at Dormans Pool around mid-month. A Bittern was on Dormans Pool on 18<sup>th</sup> and remained into September, being occasionally seen in flight. A Pectoral Sandpiper and 2 Little Stints were at the Tidal Pool (19<sup>th</sup>). Attention switched to sea-watching on 25<sup>th</sup> when 2 Cory's Shearwaters flew past Hartlepool. The following day 3 Long-tailed Skuas flew past but the Fea's Petrel, which had flown north at Flamborough and Filey sadly failed to reach Hartlepool and the assembled hordes. A Black Redstart and several Pied Flycatchers were in the gardens at this time. Another Red-backed Shrike was on the Long Drag (28<sup>th</sup>). The month ended with up to 4 Curlew Sandpipers on Greenbella along with 41 Black-tailed Godwit. Water levels remained high in the Saltholme/Dormans area and consequently passage waders were hard to find with the lack of muddy edges. Kingfishers however were prominent with several seen on the North Tees Marshes. Intriguingly a juvenile Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was trapped at Pinchinthorpe Hall late in the month. This species has become increasingly scarce in Cleveland in recent years. One wonders where the parents were!

#### September

The first week of the month was fairly quiet with just a few Garganey around Saltholme and the Little Egret at the Saline Lagoon being the only birds of note. A probable Raven was over Dormans Pool (7<sup>th</sup>). Bittern and Marsh Harrier continued to show on Dormans Pool (8<sup>th</sup>) on which date a Spotted Crake was found on Coatham Marsh and a Honey Buzzard flew over Marske. A huge fall of migrants occurred on the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Torrential rain and south-easterly winds produced ideal conditions. The most obvious species of the fall were Crossbills with 80 at Hartlepool, 115 in Hartlepool docks and 100 at South Gare. Many observers had their best ever views of this species as they struggled to find

food to eat. Garden Warblers were also a feature with at least 50 at South Gare. Inevitably several unusual birds were found amongst the commoner warblers and flycatchers and South Gare produced 2 Greenish Warblers, Red-backed Shrike, Wryneck, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Wood Warbler. Hartlepool could only respond with an elusive Barred Warbler and a Wood Warbler. 68 Pale-Bellied Brent Geese, 1 Long-tailed Skua and 4 Sooty Shearwater also flew past the headland.

The 10th saw warm sunshine but many of the migrants remained and new birds were found. South Gare now had 5 Red-backed Shrike and 2 or 3 Wrynecks. Another Wryneck was at Zinc Works Road. 2 more Greenish Warblers were found at Hartlepool and the nearby Jewish Cemetery. Barred Warblers were at Cattersty Gill and Zetland Road Park, Redcar and Red-breasted Flycatcher and Icterine Warbler were found at Hummersea. Nearby 3 Dotterel were in fields at Boulby and a Honey Buzzard flew over Seaton Common. For the following few days migrants remained common at the coastal locations. A Red-breasted Flycatcher was in Locke Park (11<sup>th</sup>) and another Greenish Warbler was found at Hartlepool (12<sup>th</sup>). Both Greenish Warblers at Hartlepool were trapped, both being in the hand together on 13th. A Honey Buzzard was briefly sat on the cliffs at Boulby (12<sup>th</sup>) – this species is becoming more regular in Cleveland in recent years. Attention switched to sea-watching (13<sup>th</sup>) and Hartlepool produced single Sabine's Gull, Red-necked Phalarope and Pomarine Skuas. The following day saw 4 Long-tailed Skuas, Sabine's Gull and an adult White-billed Diver which flew north close in at Hartlepool. This was only the 3<sup>rd</sup> county record and was a real bonus for the half dozen observers who were in the process of "packing up" to see a Greenish Warbler in the hand. The 15<sup>th</sup> saw Great Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, 102 Sooties, 76 Manx, 2 Long-tailed and 5 Pomarine Skuas and 4 Sabine's Gulls amongst hundreds of Little Gulls. The same or another Red-necked Phalarope was also off the headland and a single Sabine's Gull was off South Gare. A single Red-backed Shrike was at South Gare (16<sup>th</sup>) with a Great Northern Diver in the bay. The long staying Greenish Warbler was last seen at Hartlepool on 17<sup>th</sup> on which date a Sabine's Gull was offshore. The sea-watching continued to reap rewards and a light north-westerly (20<sup>th</sup>) produced 2 Balearic Shearwaters, 5 Pomarine Skuas and a single Long-tailed Skua, Sabine's Gull and a Black Guillemot. The adult Glaucous Gull returned to Hartlepool headland at this time.



A fresh northerly wind (22<sup>nd</sup>) produced an astonishing total of 1914 Sooty Shearwaters passing Hartlepool headland. To put this figure in some perspective, the previous record count was 509 set only last year and prior to that the record was only 206! In addition on 22<sup>nd</sup> a supporting cast of 213 Manx Shearwaters, 27 Scaup, 84 Barnacle Geese, 9 Velvet Scoter, Red-necked Grebe, 2 Black-throated Divers, Sabine's Gull, 12 Long-tailed Skuas, 9 Pomarine Skuas and 2 Little Auks made for a memorable day's sea-watching.

All 4 species of Skuas again flew past the following day but the Sooty total was only 15! A Lapland Bunting was at Hart Warren the same day. The 26<sup>th</sup> saw 484 Barnacle Geese fly past the headland with 47 on Dormans Pool late in the day. 3 drake Mandarins were on Crookfoot, remaining into October. A first-winter Mediterranean Gull was here (27<sup>th</sup>) with a Little Gull the following day. A Pectoral Sandpiper on Dormans Pool (28<sup>th</sup>) was the final highlight of a super month's bird watching in Cleveland.

### October

A late Common Sandpiper was by Greatham Creek (1<sup>st</sup>). A Long-eared Owl flew in off the sea the following day at Hartlepool and a Lapland Bunting was also there. 69 Barnacle Geese were over South Gare (4<sup>th</sup>) with a Jack Snipe on nearby Coatham Marsh. A Common Rosefinch was briefly at Hart Warren (5<sup>th</sup>). Another northerly blow on 6<sup>th</sup> produced 61 Pomarine Skuas, 172 Sooty Shearwaters and 24 Velvet Scoters. Large numbers of thrushes arrived at the coast on 8<sup>th</sup> with Redwing being the most prominent species. Good numbers of thrushes were seen over the next few days. Other species prominent in the fall were Brambling, Siskin and Blackcap. 2 Barred Warblers were at Hartlepool (10<sup>th</sup>), 1 being trapped. On the same day a probable Short-toed Lark flew over the nearby Golf Course. 15 European White-Fronted Geese were on Dormans Pool (11<sup>th</sup>). Rarer still was a Great White Egret on Portrack Marsh on the same day. It remained in the area for a week occasionally venturing to the North Tees Marshes. This species has now been recorded in Cleveland for each of the past 6 years. 4 Bewick's Swans on Dorman's Pool (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>) were a welcome sight of this former regular winter visitor to Teesmouth. The long staying Bittern was still on Dorman's Pool at this time. South Gare came up trumps with Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warblers (12<sup>th</sup>) on which date 3 Firecrests were at Saltburn and I was at Hart Warren. These Firecrests were part of a mass arrival

on the north east coast at the time. The Pallas's Warbler remained until 14<sup>th</sup> on which date a Barred Warbler was at the Gare. Another Barred Warbler was at Hartlepool (15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup>), a Shore Lark was at Cowbar (15<sup>th</sup>) and a Firecrest was at Hartlepool (16<sup>th</sup>). The second White-billed Diver of the autumn flew north at Hartlepool (18<sup>th</sup>). In addition a single Leach's Petrel, 21 Bonxie, 3 Long-tailed Duck, 3 Velvet Scoter and 230 Little Gulls were also recorded. 2 Shore Larks were on Hartlepool Town Moor (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>). This species was a regular winter visitor in the 1960's and 1970's but has become increasingly scarce in recent years and any records are now well received. 3 Bewick's Swan were on Saltholme Marsh (20<sup>th</sup>), two Black Redstarts were in the Jewish Cemetery (22<sup>nd</sup>) on which date a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was found at Guisborough/Hutton Gate and remained in the area for a few days. A Firecrest was at North Gare (24<sup>th</sup>). A late Little Stint was on Saltholme Pool (28<sup>th</sup>) along with a Green Sandpiper. After an absence of 12 days the Great White Egret was seen over Cowpen Marsh (30<sup>th</sup>) and remained on the Long Drag until early November. A poor month for rarities by recent standards.



## November

The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw lots of thrushes at the coast. Chief amongst these were Blackbirds. Several Woodcock were also seen, along with 4 Swallows. The following day 4 more Swallows were over Hartlepool Golf Course along with a House Martin.

A Rough-legged Buzzard was in Sleddale (7<sup>th</sup>) and was seen intermittently until 12<sup>th</sup>. The area also held 2 Hen Harriers and Peregrine. A Bearded Tit was on the Long Drag (7<sup>th</sup>) but 8 were seen here (9<sup>th</sup>) and Bearded Tits continued to be reported from here until 24<sup>th</sup>. 2 Little Auks and 2 Great Northern Divers flew past Hartlepool (9<sup>th</sup>) with Great Northern Diver, Bonxie and Pomarine Skua being seen here (14<sup>th</sup>). 11 White-fronted Geese went past the headland (16<sup>th</sup>) along with 51 Red-throated Divers. The most Short-eared Owls for many years were around the North Tees Marshes mid-month with at least 10 in the Greatham Creek area alone. Two Waxwings over Skelton (18<sup>th</sup>) were the first of the winter with 4 at Billingham and 5 at Castle Eden Walkway (25<sup>th</sup>) and 30 by the A66 at Thornaby (30<sup>th</sup>) being also seen. A late Firecrest at Hartlepool (21<sup>st</sup>) was trapped on 23<sup>rd</sup> and proved to be an adult female. A strong south-easterly on 22<sup>nd</sup> produced good numbers of Little Auk flying south. 553 were counted along with 4 Velvet Scoter, 92 Eider, 6 Little Gull, Long-tailed Duck and Bonxie. Several hundred Little Auk passed the following day along with a Great Northern Diver. Up to 25 Twite were at Greatham Creek (23<sup>rd</sup>) and a redhead Smew was on Saltholme Pool the same day into December. 5 Bean Geese flew around Scaling Dam early morning (26<sup>th</sup>) without landing and the month ended with a Slavonian Grebe on the Reclamation Pond (30<sup>th</sup>).



## Wildlife Observations from the Plymouth to Santander Ferry during 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> September 2002.

Whales and dolphins are fantastic creatures and the sighting of them in the open sea triggers off both excitement and wonderment. All whales dolphins [and porpoises] belong to an Order of marine mammals called Cetacea and are collectively known as cetaceans. Until recently, European waters were considered by many people to be comparatively impoverished in terms of cetaceans. However, dedicated surveys carried out in the mid-1990's principally to obtain information on the status and distribution of cetaceans in the English Channel and Bay of Biscay, revealed a high density of cetaceans and exceptional diversity of species. Such surveys also served to inform the general public of the great potential that ferries offer for watching whales, dolphins and seabirds so close to the United Kingdom. Results over the past 6 years or so indicate that the Portsmouth - Bilbao crossing is better than the Plymouth - Santander crossing for rorquals, notably Fin Whales. With the exception of minke whale, all rorquals are large to very large. The name rorqual is derived from the Norwegian word 'rorvhal' which refers to the series of throat grooves that extend underneath the lower jaw. The best locations for large cetaceans are stated to be at the southern end of the Bay of Biscay where water is at its deepest.

Alistair McLee, Chris Bielby, Ken Baldrige, and I undertook the Plymouth - Santander crossing during 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> September 2002. In September 2001 Chris, Ken and I had travelled across the Bay of Biscay from Portsmouth to Bilbao and so we were looking forward to comparing our observations from the two crossings. On the Plymouth - Santander crossing the ferry travels slightly further to the west than that bound for Bilbao on both journeys, but less time is available for sea watching. The bonus is that the lookout is forward facing [below the bridge] and so gives a panoramic view of the sea. Also the forward movement of the boat produces an updraft that leaves observers in a sheltered position in most winds. Scopes set on 20/30X wide angle can be used effectively. The species totals for birds and mammals often equal those seen from the Bilbao boat. On reaching Santander however, there are no convenient places to go and bird watch or look at butterflies etc., unlike the area above and behind Bilbao.

We left Darlington at approximately 11.45 p.m. on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September and after five-and-a-half-hours, having travelled some 397 miles, parked up on the dock side at Plymouth ferry port - an excellent journey in Alistair's new Primera DXL - a quite superb car.

The City Centre of Plymouth is located to the south of the A38 Main South Devon Highway. Follow the signs to Millbay Docks and Ferries, which are situated to the south west of the inner city ring road. The Port of Plymouth is the historical second home of the Royal Navy and is located at the mouth of the River Tamar in the South West of England. Also at Plymouth is the commercial part of the port, known as Millbay Docks. As well as having a large modern passenger Terminal and extensive vehicle-marshalling areas to ease the flow of traffic, the Port provides modern berthing facilities for the many cruise ships which call here. The Terminal offers a cafe for meals and refreshments, and a commission-free Bureau de Change. A free car park is also available for anyone leaving their car. The Main Terminal offers disabled toilet facilities and low-level pay phones. Assistance is available for passengers with special needs, arrangements for which should be made when booking or at the latest, checking in. Sailings leave Plymouth twice a week - on Mondays and Wednesdays from March to November. The 24 hour luxury cruise allows you plenty of time to unwind, take in a film or two, shop and enjoy the fabulous French Cuisine or simply sea-watch 'til you drop existing on several-day old buns and pasties with the odd sip from a flask full of brandy-laced coffee to keep you going...

After unsuccessfully attempting to snatch a few minutes sleep, we decided to make a move: the car was emptied of baggage, locked, and left in the spacious free car park. Then we headed for the departure lounge, where we whiled the time away reading, chatting and eating. Then in no time at all we were boarding Brittany Ferries' magnificent flagship the 'Val De Loire' which was launched in 1987. It has a service speed of about 20 knots and a capacity for 580 cars and 2140 passengers.

### Outward Bound - 9<sup>th</sup> September

Quickly depositing our modest travelling bags in our less-than-spacious but quite adequate en suite outside cabin on Deck 5, Ali and I hurtled to the observation area overlooking the bow of the ferry to secure four spaces. We discovered that there were only eight other like-minded souls and so there was plenty of space for everyone, unlike many other trips where birders/whale men have stood three deep bristling with telescopes.

We left Plymouth harbour at 9.30am on a calm, mild morning with heavy cloud cover. The next sixty minutes produced a few Manxies, two close Great Skuas, Shag, singleton Puffin and Guillemot, a Grey Wagtail and the Eddystone lighthouse. The Eddystone rocks are about 14 miles south of Plymouth. The lighthouse - built in 1882 by Sir James Douglass and the fifth to be built on the site, was automated in 1983. Shortly after 10.30 a.m. we noted our first two Harbour Porpoise [we were to see seventeen in total] that were quickly followed by three others. Then at 10.55 a.m. our first Great Shearwater appeared, followed five minutes later by another Great Skua and two difficult-to-get-onto Storm Petrels. A Sooty briefly accompanied the second bird. At 11.15 a.m., between four and eight Harbour Porpoise passed us quite fast on the starboard side. Our second Great Shearwater appeared shortly afterwards and then a raft of at least thirty Storm Petrels entertained us. Better still a Leach's Petrel was with them and superb close views were obtained. Stormies continued to cross the bow for the next ten minutes or so.

The sun finally broke through at midday, as it had threatened to do for some time, producing a fierce glare to port. Good views were had of another Great Skua, two Sooty Shearwaters and one Storm Petrel, cutting very close across the bow. Things became even quieter until at 1 p.m. when Chris spotted two blows and saw a Minke Whale. Although it was been head on to the ferry, the rest of us were unable to get onto it. Some time later, we learned that it had breached twice off the starboard side. Scant consolation came in the

form of three more Harbour Porpoise. By now, the Finisterre lighthouse on Cape Finisterre was to the east of us.

Not until 3.15 p.m. did things pick up when we came across a gathering of birds on the sea. They were mostly Gannets but included at least two Great Skuas and two Storm Petrels. A Cory's Shearwater was seen briefly together with singleton Sooty Shearwater and storm petrel and then a Manxie and another Great Skua soon followed. Best was all was a Great Shearwater which passed by close in.

Incidentally, most of the daylight on this outward journey was spent crossing the English Channel and passing the Brest Peninsula of France, crossing the bulk of the Bay of Biscay, generally the most interesting area, during the hours of darkness. Consequently we didn't get the best of the birds or cetaceans, which are mainly to be found in the deep water (below 1000m) in the central Bay of Biscay.

By 4.50 pm there were very few birds visible, with just the odd Great Skua, Fulmar, Manx and Sooty Shearwater and tiny Storm Petrel to keep us half on our toes. The rest of the afternoon and early evening were spent passing fairly close to France, before finally entering the northern Bay of Biscay. At around 6 o'clock we had our first short shower of rain and we began to see a few more birds. There were good numbers of Gannets and what were probably tuna splashing about. Several distant 'comic' terns and yet another Great Skua were noted. Fifteen minutes later we saw our first Sabine's Gull – a pristine adult. A heavier rain shower passed and in the distance there were many more squalls. A single Storm Petrel flying ahead of the ferry, feeding, was suddenly followed by a marauding party of at least thirteen Great Skuas and then, best of all, some twenty-six Sabine's Gulls – fourteen adults and twelve juveniles! Then at least two juvenile Long-tailed Skuas appeared in what was a very hectic period, but we were by no means complaining. This was what we had come for!

A fishing boat came into view. It was enveloped by a cloud of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, both adults and young and mixed in were four Cory's and several Great Shearwaters. For the first time, we ran helter-skelter up through the ship, to watch from the side of the ferry. At 7.35 p.m., we slipped into 'artist mode.' The sky had become an attractive blue laced with pink tendrils, the sea a dark bottle-green and there was a sensuous buffeting wind coming from the west. Five minutes later we decided to call it a day. We estimated that we would have reached the deep water of Biscay at around an hour after nightfall, and would have passed out of it by around an hour before sunrise, so we would just miss what was probably the most productive area, and hence would not see quite as much as we had hoped.

After a superb meal three-course meal with wine, we crashed out, individually dreaming of all manner of things but collectively hoping that the second half of tomorrow would be magical. Someone kept shouting out 'Kylie, Kylie' but modesty prevents me from naming the tortured soul.

### Outward Journey – 9<sup>th</sup> September

<b>Cetacean Sightings</b>		
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	One
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	Seventeen

<b>Principal Seabird Sightings</b>		
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	Five
Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	Twelve
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Thirteen
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Four
Storm-petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	Sixty-nine
Leach's Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	One
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Two
Long-tailed Skua	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>	Two
Great Skua	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	Thirty-three
Sabine's Gull	<i>Larus sabini</i>	Twenty-six

### Outward Journey - 10<sup>th</sup> September

We were up like the proverbial black larks and in the observation area with telescopes rampant by 6.50 a.m. to watch the sun rise ten minutes later. A Turtle Dove left the ferry and headed off for the warmth of Spain. We could see Spain quite clearly by 7.20 a.m. and fifteen minutes later we were moving past large gull rafts. Very little viewing time was at our disposal before the estimated time of arrival [8.15 a.m.] at Santander. Even so managed four distant Cory's Shearwaters, one Great, five Sooty and one Manx Shearwater, an Arctic Skua, fabulous views of another close-in Leach's Petrel and three Black Terns.

<b>Principal Seabird Sightings</b>		
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	Four

Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	One
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Five
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	One
Leach's Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	One
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	One
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Three

Enjoying birding under a sunlit blue sky, we passed two Peregrines perched on the old lighthouse [with apparently unconcerned pigeons close by] and a scattering of Cormorants and gulls on the rocks below. Five Sanderling scurried along a narrow stretch of beach as we entered the wide bay before docking at sunny warm Santander. Of course we had all enjoyed the 24 hour crossing, but we knew we had not seen the best of Biscay.

We decided to stay on board as the return journey would commence in two hours or so. Coffee and croissants were like manna from heaven. Bird species seen from the static ferry were few and far between but did include a female Common Whitethroat, innumerable Yellow-legged Gulls, several Lesser Black-backed gulls, eleven Little Egrets, a few Sandwich and Common Terns, several Grey Herons and two Black-necked Grebes. Considerable numbers of what Chris thought were Grey Mullet littered the ferry sides, presumably feeding on something we did not care to dwell on. As we left the quayside at 10.15 a.m. we noted no fewer than ten distant Common Buzzards.

### Return Journey – 10<sup>th</sup> September

The return journey promised more than the outward, as leaving Santander at 10.15 am, meant we would be crossing the whole of the Bay of Biscay during daylight. There was a slightly stronger north-easterly breeze blowing. The two Peregrines had disappeared; presumably they were off breakfasting somewhere but not on coffee and croissants. Soon after leaving the harbour we began to see Sooty Shearwaters whilst small numbers of Common Terns were littered here and there. At 11.40 a.m. a Sabine's Gull appeared on the port side. It briefly landed on the sea, then was up again and like a diminutive tri-coloured ghost suddenly disappeared from view.

Ken disappeared below deck for cups of coffee - a brave decision this but soon he was back and the coffee tasted all the better for the Sabine's Gull sighting. Ken's return was perfect – he had missed nothing and barely minutes had past before we obtained excellent views of another Leach's Petrel. The strong sunlight bleached the upperwing covert bar a 'Snowcem' white.

Then, shortly after 11.55 a.m., came the first whale 'blow' [or breath] high into the air – in fact there were four such 'blows' which remained visible in the air for several seconds on the distant horizon to port. According to the seasoned cetacean watchers they had been made by at least one Fin Whale. This excitement was followed by a single Sooty Shearwater close in and then a lovely Great Shearwater even closer. A whale then 'blew' on the port side only three-quarters of the way out but did not surface again. Then at 12.05 p.m. we came upon the first large rafts of mixed shearwaters. Three quarters were Greats, the other quarter being made up of Sooties. There were in fact three such rafts and the first was disturbed by the collective threat of a Great Skua and a Lesser Black black-backed Gull whilst an Arctic Skua observed proceedings from a safe distance away. Even better were several Fin Whales, 'blowing' high into the air. Sheer magic and a moment to savour. Or at least it would have been if we had been afforded the time to do so, for another adult Sabine's Gull was spotted just above the horizon, then more Sooties and finally four Great Shearwaters that came round the bow. It was now 1.10 p.m.

Just ten minutes later we came across three more close Great Shearwaters and, even better, nineteen Sabine's well spread out, some in flight, others on the water. We were able to watch the gulls for a full seven minutes. Every now and then tuna sp. made the surface of the sea literally 'boil as they fed in a frenzy. Another whale 'blew' straight ahead but did not repeat the exercise. A singleton Great Shearwater gave wonderful views as it planed beneath the bow.

The sea appeared to be getting calmer and calmer and the sun was still out. We had sporadic 'blows' and witnessed a large rorqual as it broke the surface. Several of the more seasoned watchers wondered whether it had been a Sei whale. In fact according to the experts it had been another Fin Whale – apparently a young one and the sighting provided a cautionary note re cetacean identification. Incidentally Fin Whale is second only in size to Blue Whale!

Shortly after 2.05 p.m. we glimpsed five sizeable fins – undoubtedly our first dolphins. They turned out to be Bottle-nosed Dolphins and there were eight of them in all. A distant flock of waders, some thirty strong, turned out to be Whimbrel, repeating a sighting we had had on last year's crossing from Bilbao to Portsmouth. Fifteen minutes later we were watching at least six, possibly eight Risso's Dolphins. Meanwhile a solitary Sabine's justified more than a mere glance as we all continued to watch the Risso's, a large robust dolphin with a tall sickle-shaped, backward-curved fin. As they closed in we could make out their bulbous heads, general pale grey colouration as well as extensive scarring on their bodies.

What proved to be our only Balearic Shearwater then flew past on the port side and was quickly followed by a Manxie but much better was awaiting us just around the 'nautical corner'. It was precisely 2.30 p.m. when the first Little Shearwaters of the trip appeared. The two birds briefly landed on the sea and then flew away, showing off their distinctive 'common sandpiper' flight.

Two Arctic Skuas then appeared and were quickly followed by a group of eight small juvenile skuas. Shell-shocked after watching the Little Shearwaters, I concentrated on just two birds and they were both juvenile Long-tailed Skuas. The skua group gained height and

flew off in a tight knot: they may well all have been Long-tails but...

Another six to eight Bottle-nosed Dolphins appeared moving in slow fashion. Some observers opined there were between sixteen and twenty in total. Forty-five minutes later, several large splashes undoubtedly made by large fish [tuna sp., or mackerel?] attracted a single juvenile Gannet as well as eight Great Shearwaters. Four Greats were so close that we almost ran them down. At 3.20 p.m., there was another whale 'blow' high into the air, which hung there for several seconds. Then several dolphins disappeared in the distance while our third Little Shearwater flew past on very fast whippy wings and then landed. Just five minutes later a mixed school of Common and Striped Dolphins was called out but their identification, primarily based on the manner they jumped into the air, was left undetermined. In good light the two species can easily be separated by flank markings but in poor light or at great distances they can be difficult to tell apart. Although there are subtle differences in body shape and behaviour, flank markings are always required to confirm identification.

At 3.45 p.m. we had wonderful views of a Fin Whale which initially surfaced dead ahead – it had not previously 'blown.' We continued to watch it until we were distracted by a further three Little Shearwaters that were accompanied by their minder – a Great Shearwater. Two Little Shearwaters broke off and went directly across the bow. Then we raced up onto the top deck and were able to observe two Fin Whales, apparently a mother and a calf as they repeatedly broke the surface, at one time heading straight for the ferry. Suddenly a Cory's Shearwater appeared and then we quickly returned to the observation area overlooking the bow.

Tuna sp., were jumping out of the water at two separate places whilst another whale 'blew' to starboard and a Cory's flew languidly across the bow showing off its pale bill and dark hood. It was all happening and the time was now 4.40 p.m. A raft of twelve Great Shearwaters floated off to starboard. At least two Pilot Whales appeared off the starboard side. Because the ranges of Long-finned and Short-finned pilot whales overlap in the Bay of Biscay and because specific identification is very difficult at sea, observations are generally recorded simply as 'Pilot Whale.' Then another distant whale 'blow' meant everyone's attention was concentrated on a particular patch of sea but the whale had gone.

Then followed another really hectic period with Cory's, Greats and a few Sooty Shearwaters, appearing just about everywhere. Great Shearwater numbers soared well over four hundred whilst Cory's numbers went into triple figures. Whilst we kept trying to count the shearwaters, an impossible task, further Little Shearwaters appeared, including a singleton extremely close in, which showed off its dark beady eye. Another half-a-dozen or so Pilot Whales appeared and yet another mixed school of Common and Striped Dolphins was called.

At 6.15 p.m. a solitary Great Skua crossed the bow whilst yet another raft of greats which included a single Cory's was spotted. A school of striped dolphins [a definite sighting this] came towards the ferry head on, then two more Little Shearwaters 'fast-flapped' past, making our total now eleven. A Sabine's Gull was called out from somewhere to our left which then briefly became a Kittiwake and was then quickly corrected to a juvenile Little Gull. It proved to be the only error made during the whole trip. Ironically a beautiful adult Sabine's Gull followed on behind the little gull and both veered off to starboard.

It was now 6.35 p.m. and three small dolphin sp., suddenly appeared dead ahead close to the bow. Then even quicker, five petrels sp., went under and then round the bow 'in a flash' and were immediately lost to view. A Common Dolphin tail-walked towards the port side. Just after 7 p.m. a small school of Common Dolphins showed really well whilst a second juvenile Little Gull appeared. Conditions had remained just about perfect with little or no wind for some considerable time.

We experienced a beautiful sunset and then the last Storm Petrels put in an appearance followed by four more Sabine's Gulls, with several dolphins playing 'beneath' them. Finally several Bottle-nosed Dolphins appeared – sedate but large adults. We continued to watch until 8 p.m. when the light had truly gone. The last seven hours or so had been absolutely magical and the wildlife sightings made during that period were what Bay of Biscay crossings are all about. Wholly elated we returned briefly to our cabin and then repaired to the up-market' restaurant to partake of yet another superb meal with a bottle of white wine – a lively little number! After some splendid animated conversation, we decided against watching the cabaret [which apparently included a magician whose sleight of hand was slower than the flight of a Cory's] and also against winning thousands of euros in the casino. Instead we returned to our cabin and crashed out.

<b>Cetacean Sightings</b>		
Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	Nine
Unidentified Rorquals	<i>Baleanopteridae</i> sp	Eight
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	Twenty-two
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	Thirty-seven
Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	122
Pilot Whale sp.	<i>Globicephala</i> sp	Nineteen
Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	Six
Unidentified Dolphins	<i>Delphinidae</i> sp	Fifty-three

<b>Principal Seabird Sightings</b>		
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	103 plus

Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	460 plus
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	Eighty-nine
Little Shearwater	<i>Puffinus assimilis</i>	Eleven
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Seven
Mediterranean Shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	One
Storm-petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	Fifteen
Leach's Petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	One
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Eleven
Long-tailed Skua	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>	One
Great Skua	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	Thirteen
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Not counted
Little Gull	<i>Larus minutes</i>	Two
Sabine's Gull	<i>Larus sabini</i>	Twenty-seven

### 11<sup>th</sup> September

By dawn we were back in the English Channel, a couple of hours outside Plymouth. The morning proved to be something of an anti-climax [what wouldn't be?] with only the odd Gannet and Lesser Black-backed Gull making it into our notebook. We docked just about bang on time, at 9. a.m. and were soon heading back to where the car-and-a-half was parked. We then spent some considerable time unsuccessfully looking for Cirl Buntings at Wemsbury and then drove on to Budleigh Salterton where we chose the only day that the glossy Ibis went walk-about. An impressive incident-free drive back to the North-east brought our Bay of Biscay trip well and truly to a close.

I cannot recommend too highly the experience of whale- and seabird watching in the Bay of Biscay. Do not be put off by the fact that whales and dolphins may show only a small proportion of their bodies at the surface and may only be seen briefly. Occasionally wonderful views are obtained – witness the Cuvier's beaked whales, various dolphins and fin whales alongside the ferry on last year's Portsmouth to Bilbao trip. To re-iterate, although the outward crossing did not really live up to our expectations, and the birding was often hard work, the return journey far surpassed our greatest hopes, with near constant interest and some truly spectacular and memorable sights. I thoroughly recommend the Plymouth – Santander crossing to anyone who is interested in seabirds or cetaceans.

If our observations are anything to go by, any crossing that goes through central Biscay during daylight at this time of year could be very exciting indeed, and could rival any pelagic trip in Northern European waters for excitement and quality species. The weather, sea conditions, birds and cetaceans and on-board facilities were excellent. I very much enjoyed and appreciated the company of my three colleagues as well as that of the eight other dedicated birders/cetacean watchers. However, special thanks must go to Chris for orchestrating the whole trip.

Two Bay of Biscay trips under the belt now but the whole experience must be repeated yet again – and soon. It really is a value-for-money experience. I simply cannot wait for 2003 – hopefully to undertake the Portsmouth – Bilbao crossing. I wonder if Chris will be able to wave his magic wand yet again?

**Alan Wheeldon**

## A Little Goes A Long Way

On 10<sup>th</sup> September 2002, Chris Bielby and I, together with Ken Baldrige and Alistair McLee, the two other members of our 'team' had an opportunity to observe no less than eleven Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis* in the Bay of Biscay, from the Brittany Ferries' flagship the 'Val De Loire'. We were some sixty feet above the surface of the sea, stood in a very stable, open-air observation area, which afforded unrestricted views to the front of and out over the bow. The area was stable enough for us to use telescopes on relatively high magnification, without any problems whatsoever, throughout both crossings [Plymouth – Santander and back].

The Little Shearwaters were observed at various ranges, from well inside two hundred metres to something approaching eight hundred metres. Weather conditions were excellent, with a slight north-easterly breeze, good sunlight and a relatively calm sea. Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* were sometimes directly close by if not actually *alongside* for direct comparison.

Little Shearwater is a black-and-white shearwater. Whereas Manx can appear distinctly brown in bright sunlight, none of the eleven Little Shearwaters showed such a brown cast. Little is also smaller than Manx. It has a more extensively whiter underwing compared with Manx and has a distinct two-toned upperwing pattern. Little also has a white 'face' in which a dark beady eye is surrounded by white and this white area serves to emphasise the dark sides of the neck.

Based on these observations, manner of flight, structure and wing-pattern are all-important. Accurate documentation of all these features is imperative.

Flight: Little Shearwater always flew low with infrequent tilting glides. Wing beats were 'whippy' ['snappy'] and fast or very fast. There was far less shearing than in Manx. The relatively weaker flight with wings arched did undoubtedly suggest Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. This latter feature could be seen particularly well on birds flying directly or almost directly away.

Structure: Relative to Manx, Little Shearwater is not so long-bodied nor as long-winged nor as long-tailed but it does have slightly broader wings and a blunter wing-tip. It also shows a cute rounded head-shape.

Upperwing-pattern: Little has a pale [silvery] inner wing panel [paler than the blackish upperparts] that appears to be made up of the secondaries and most of their coverts. This well-defined silvery area did contrast with the primaries, scapulars and mantle, even at distances well in excess of 400 metres.

Underwing pattern: The whole underparts of Little are almost entirely white with the wings having thin black trailing edges and tips.

The white-faced appearance and silvery panel on the upper surface of the wing were both very obvious when using a 30 x wide-angled lens up to and beyond 400 metres. The silvery wing panel was particularly easy to see when a Little Shearwater was flying away. However, at approximately 800 metres I found the white 'face' not as distinct a feature.

On a cautionary note, the foregoing are of course, subjective statements and eye sight [as well as optical equipment] varies considerably from one observer to another. Even so, perhaps such subjective observations made in *such* prevailing wind and light conditions and at *such* distances may be of some assistance.

So, having said all that, perhaps the satisfactory identification of a Little Shearwater off the Cleveland coast remains one of the most difficult challenges facing keen sea-watchers. To date, as one would expect, only a handful of records have been accepted both locally and nationally.

For the time being, and until the next time it happens as it surely will [although in all probability I won't be present!] I can at least continue to feed off my vivid memories of eleven superb little seabirds – believe you me, they will go a long way.

I must thank Chris Bielby for the constructive comments he made on the original draft of this short note.

©Dan Halloween

## Bulletin Board

### New Recorder

As many of you are now aware, Graeme Joynt has resigned as Recorder for Cleveland having held the post since 1994. During the last couple of years, Graeme's desire to spend more time with his family, especially his young daughter, Lois, has become too strong. He has also expressed his wish to get out into the field more often, although watching his favourite football team, Newcastle United, seemingly continues to be a barrier to this!

Nevertheless, although he is no longer Recorder, Graeme's experience will not be totally lost to the Records Committee. He will continue to serve as a Compiler for the Bird Report and also continue to coordinate the Breeding Birds Survey until its conclusion. Consequently, he will still have a major role to play in recording Cleveland's birds.

Over the term of his tenure as Recorder, the quality of the Bird Report has improved immeasurably. Some of the innovations which have found their way into the report during this time are colour photographs, both inside and on the cover, 25 year reviews of selected species and many improvements to procedure in the assessment of records.

On behalf of the Bird Club and the Records Committee, I would like to thank Graeme for his dedication, meticulousness and above all the enthusiasm he has brought to the Records Committee.

The club has appointed me as Graeme's replacement and all records should now be submitted to me at 5 Belgrave Court, Seaton Carew, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS25 1BF. Phone: 01429 428940. Alternatively, for those with internet access and a desire to submit records electronically, please visit the TBC website at <http://www.teemouthbc.freeserve.co.uk> for instructions.

### Rob Little

#### Counters Required

Kevin Bayes from the RSPB, the project manager for the Teesmouth International Nature Reserve is keen to have members of the Bird Club involved in all forms of survey work for the new reserve. So we are looking for volunteers, willing or not to get involved and set a data baseline from which increases in bird populations due to improvements in habitat and can be measured.

It is early days and the first objective is to obtain good data on the wintering wetland birds. Some areas of the new reserve such as Saltholme Pools are currently surveyed as part of the monthly WeBS counts. There is a large area on the western side of the reserve which includes the Haverton Hole complex of pools and the newly formed wet meadow areas between Saltholme and Haverton which are not currently counted. Ideally, we would like these counting at the same time as the WeBS counts but if that is not possible at counting at other times will be OK. We are also investigating the possibility of including these areas in the WeBS scheme. No decision has been made on how the area could be split up to facilitate a quick count by several observers but this can be done once we know who is interested. January 2003 is the anticipated start of these counts so we need to get organised quickly.

The breeding bird populations on the reserve also need to be monitored and we are expecting some guidance on which species are of particular interest from a conservation standpoint from the RSPB. Again, we have some data for the reserve area from the Breeding Bird Survey, but as that is tetrad based and only part of the reserve has been covered to date there are large areas not yet covered. Again these are in the western half of the reserve area.

If you are interested in counting either the wetland bird or breeding birds or both, I will be pleased to hear from you.

### Rob Little

### Gordon Clark

It is with great sadness that we recently received the news of Gordon Clark's death. An appreciation will appear in the next issue.

Ed.

## WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2002 SUMMARY

	July 21	Aug 18	Sep 22	Oct 20	Autumn 2002 maximum as % of average peak count over previous five autumns
Little Grebe	20	50**	104**	36*	166%
Great Crested Grebe	13	<u>16</u>	11	8	99%
Cormorant	198**	320**	438**	166**	96%
Grey Heron	34	<u>66</u>	50	44	115%
Mute Swan	68	76	<u>95</u>	41	194%
Shelduck	92	58	54	<u>365</u>	117%
Wigeon	5	13	1412*	1413*	143%
Gadwall	27	81**	192**	201**	244%
Teal	21	822*	968*	725*	149%
Mallard	159	<u>461</u>	343	258	107%
Pintail	0	10	24	<u>25</u>	134%
Shoveler	11	162**	245**	202**	159%
Pochard	78	<u>111</u>	48	46	172%
Tufted Duck	157	<u>191</u>	99	61	159%
Ruddy Duck	28	74	<u>77</u>	63	175%
Coot	581*	895*	1187**	1099*	225%
Oystercatcher	567	805	<u>1261</u>	816	91%
Ringed Plover	32	322**	45	11	143%
Golden Plover	93	1	0	<u>990</u>	219%
Grey Plover	27	<u>66</u>	18	27	124%
Lapwing	565	395	370	<u>1098</u>	102%
Knot	38	39	9	<u>42</u>	51%
Sanderling	358**	148	126	113	113%
Little Stint	0	<u>3</u>	0	1	21%
Curlew Sandpiper	<u>4</u>	1	1	0	21%
Purple Sandpiper	8	6	21	<u>35</u>	78%
Dunlin	701	1303*	380	237	141%
Ruff	7	<u>13</u>	7	0	57%
Snipe	5	8	15	<u>46</u>	149%
Black-tailed Godwit	36*	55*	126**	59*	733%
Bar-tailed Godwit	15	16	<u>38</u>	32	81%
Whimbrel	<u>18</u>	11	1	0	120%
Curlew	638*	645*	634*	234	89%
Spotted Redshank	1	0	<u>4</u>	1	91%
Redshank	1386**	1575***	1268**	1360**	104%
Greenshank	10	<u>13</u>	7	2	48%
Green Sandpiper	0	<u>4</u>	0	0	65%
Wood Sandpiper	0	<u>1</u>	0	0	50%
Common Sandpiper	2	<u>16</u>	0	0	229%
Turnstone	117	241	<u>291</u>	235	80%
Sandwich Tern	<u>974</u>	230	15	0	104%
Common Tern	<u>696</u>	365	24	0	82%
Arctic Tern	<u>10</u>	0	0	0	61%
Little Tern	<u>26</u>	0	0	0	71%

Underlined counts indicate Autumn 2002 maxima.

\* Denotes count of >50% of national importance

\*\* Denotes count of national importance

\*\*\* Denotes count of international importance

N.B. 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

## WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH AUTUMN 2002 SUMMARY

Coverage was good, with 90 out of 92 sector counts undertaken.

This proved to be a good season for virtually all our wildfowl species. Those setting new Teesmouth WeBS records comprised little grebe (104, September – our first three-figure count), mute swan (95, September), gadwall (201, October), tufted duck (191, August), ruddy duck (77, September) and coot (1187, September – our first four-figure count, and our first of national importance). In addition, the autumn brought the best seasonal total for wigeon since 1994, and for teal since 1995. Shoveler yielded the second-highest count on record, and even the shelduck peak was slightly above the seasonal average.

The autumn's ringed plover maximum was the best for four years, while in October golden plover were nearly as numerous as lapwing. Among the *Calidrids*, there were poor performances from knot, little stint and curlew sandpiper, but the dunlin peak (1303, August) was well in excess of the norm; strangely, the one good sanderling count (358) of the autumn came in July.

This was an exceptional autumn for black-tailed godwit; the peak of 126 in September was over seven times the seasonal mean, and double the previous BoEE/WeBS record set in 1991. By contrast, curlew counts were unremarkable yet incredibly consistent from July to September (638, 645, 634) but very low in October (234).

For the fourth consecutive autumn, the redshank peak (1575) exceeded the internationally-important threshold. However, greenshanks, green sandpipers and wood sandpipers were scarce. The common sandpiper peak was entirely derived from an unusual flock of 16 at North Gare in August. Once again, tern figures were generally somewhat mediocre.

Following this series of counts, in autumn the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS Site remains of international importance for redshank, and of national importance for little grebe, cormorant, shoveler and sanderling. For the first time, gadwall gains nationally-important status.

### MIKE LEAKEY

#### WeBS Local Organizer

November 2002

### Who Is Sylvia?

On the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2002, a male Subalpine Warbler was discovered on South Gare by Nick Preston. It was a typically small and dainty Sylvia, relatively slim and graceful with a proportionately short, slim, square-ended tail and long, moderately pointed wings. Its head was rather flat-crowned with a relatively short and thin bill. It had a typically fast and direct flight.

The flight was seen to good advantage when it was occasionally encouraged by excited aficionados to fly from bush to bush. Indeed this provided a graphic illustration of the species having 'free and agile movements.' It also proved to be a durable individual, even surviving a 'stoning attempt' which recalled the famous scene depicted in Monty Python's wonderfully irreverent 'The Life of Brian.'

Populations of all three European subspecies [including *S.c.moltonii*] are long-distance migrants. Migrants are more common in spring than autumn on Cyprus and in Israel indicating loop migration of *S. c. albistriata* which occurs as far west as NE Algeria and east to Israel where it is said to be scarce but regular and Jordan where it is described as scarce.

*S.c.cantillans* and *albistriata* are separated by almost 300 km in N Italy and no indications of intergradation have been detected. Populations become larger from west to east. Seasonal plumage variation is mainly limited to males but there are strong age- and sex-related differences. Geographical variation is distinct in males and in vocalisations.

Males from eastern populations have deeper and darker underparts than western ones. However, judging colour of male underparts requires careful examination in good light and must take account of plumage wear and any wetness.

#### *Sylvia cantillans cantillans*

Mainly coastal and continental Europe, from Iberia east to Italy.

Characterised by its predominant relatively dark-tinged, cinnamon-orange [or chestnut-orange] underparts in typical adult male plumage. Males never red-brown as *S. c. albistriata*. The extent of this underpart colouration leaves only the smallest and ill-defined [obscured] pale mid-belly patch and sub-moustachial stripe.

First-summer males typically have less intense and more restricted reddish-orange colouration.

#### *S.c.albistriata*

S.E. Europe [east from Slovenia] and W Turkey. In spring typically moves east around the Mediterranean.

Distinctive due to the darker predominantly wine-red [brownish brick-red or chestnut-brown] underparts of male which are largely confined to throat and breast and usually sharply demarcated from more extensive whiter belly. Flanks indistinctly coloured pink-grey or grey-white. White submoustachial stripe broader than other races. When fresh,

usually has throat/breast more extensively flecked white. Upperparts darker and purer grey than other races, but appearing silvery-grey when worn. Deep orange iris diagnostic of both adult male and female.

First-summer males often have the throat and breast colour less solid and slightly paler than adult males. Upperparts slightly brownish. Iris brownish olive-grey.

Common contact call a diagnostic hard disyllabic 'tret.'

Differs structurally from *cantillans* in having longer, less-rounded wing, longer primary projection and larger bill.

In both continental races, *cantillans* and *albistriata*, there is a partial pre-nuptial moult in adults, undertaken on the breeding grounds during late June to mid-September, involving some body feathers, tertials and rectrices.

Adults of both races have rather distinct moult limits in the wing, mainly between innermost, winter-moulted, remiges and those outer ones which were left unmoulted. Primary coverts are moderately worn and centred darkish grey, fringed greyish to brownish-grey. In both races, adult male's eye-ring deep reddish-orange, mostly orange. Iris reddish-brown to deep orange-red.

There is a partial post-juvenile moult on the breeding grounds [late June to mid-September]. This is followed by a first pre-nuptial moult on the wintering grounds in late-September to late-March. This nearly always includes tertials, often some innermost greater coverts, secondaries and [more rarely] primaries. Part of the body feathers and lesser wing-coverts are also renewed.

So, first-summer birds of both races retain some [worn] juvenile primary-coverts, centred pale brown and fringed buffish to greyish-brown. Unmoulted juvenile outermost rectrices are characteristic, being duller and having less pure white edges and tips although extreme wear can cause some confusion. Juvenile primaries and secondaries are browner than adult ones, as well as being distinctly faded and worn.

Iris usually dark olive-grey to dull olive orange-brown [mostly males] but males can have duller orange or orange-brown iris and thus approach adults. Iris is never deep orange. However, ageing in spring using iris colour is not recommended and is best used as a supporting criterion.

Common contract calls vary racially. Nominate *cantillans* gives a Lesser Whitethroat-like 'tek'. In *albistriata* the commonest call is a dry 'tret' [structurally like two simple 'tek' elements given in rapid succession]. Note that other *cantillans*-like 'tek' calls can be interspersed with typical 'tret' calls for example, when alarmed, but never as a common contact call.

Only the male sings. Songs are geographically less variable and sub-specific than calls although poorly-studied.

### The South Gare individual

In flight appeared darker and possibly slightly larger than the majority of others I have seen but of course, that is a subjective observation. Upperparts – greyish but with distinct blue-tones. Solidly dark-centered tertials with well-defined pale fringes. Flight feathers dark brownish-grey. Striking wide white

submoustachial stripe.

Underparts – dark vinaceous [no hint of orange] chin, throat and upper breast, with the throat showing some white streaking. Rest of underparts wholly greyish-white, greyer along the flanks, whiter on undertail-coverts.

Call: A single 'teck.'

Is it the case then that this individual may safely be assigned to *S. c. albistriata*? Irrespective of whether it can or cannot, has the subspecies, which may, according to some authorities, approach allospecies status, previously been recorded in Cleveland?

### References:

Hadoram Shirihai, Gabriel Gargallo, Andreas J. Helbig; Alan Harris [Illustrator], David Cottridge [Photographic editor and field photographer] [2001] *Sylvia Warblers: Identification, taxonomy and phylogeny of the genus Sylvia*. Christopher Helm.

### Sylvia Al-Bistriata