

Teesmouth Bird Club

Newsletter



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Thanks to the contributors to this issue:- Chris Sharp; Mike Leakey; Brian Clasper; Alan Wheeldon; Peter Evans; Alistair McLee.

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

The start of the month saw a Black Tern around Saltholme and a 3rd-summer Yellow-legged Gull on Dorman's Pool. Up to 6 Little Gulls were on the North Tees Marshes along with a Little Egret. A Storm Petrel was reported off Hartlepool on 6th. The now annual ringing sessions for this species off Hartlepool headland were more successful than ever with 26 being caught on both the 12th and 26th. A Spoonbill was around Saltholme (10th – 12th) and a Great White Egret was seen on Saltholme Marsh early on 11th before departing to the south. A Bittern on Dormans Pool (13th) remained throughout the summer and often gave prolonged views. Highlight of the month was the Laughing Gull on the fields near Port Clarence on the evening of 16th and again for c45 minutes the following day. It was only the 2nd county record of this North American species and appeared at a time when many Black-headed Gulls were passing through the North Tees Marshes: 3 or 4 Mediterranean Gulls were also present during this time. Mid-month also saw passage wader numbers beginning to increase, with small numbers of Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Greenshank and Spotted Redshank reported on the North Tees Marshes. 20 Common Sandpipers at Greatham Creek and 6 Green Sandpipers at Seal Sands were seen at this time along with a summer plumaged Curlew Sandpiper around Dormans Pool and Greenabella Marsh. A Marsh Harrier was over Cowpen Marsh (19th). An eclipse drake Ring-necked Duck was a good find on the Reclamation Pond (21st). Only the 4th county record it remained until the end of August. A Pectoral Sandpiper was seen briefly on Cowpen Marsh (25th) with a Little Stint on Saltholme Pool the same day. The Spoonbill was again on Saltholme (29th) and remained into August.

August

A Hobby was at North Gare (2nd). 2 Little Egrets at Greatham Creek (5th) was the maximum count of the summer reversing the recent trend for increasing numbers summering on the North Tees Marshes. The low water levels at Scaling Dam proved attractive for waders during the month with up to 30

Common Sandpipers, 5 Greenshank and 5 Little Ringed Plovers being recorded. Marsh Harriers were also regularly seen here at this time. Numbers of passage waders on the North Tees Marshes were also high with the Saltholme/Dormans area proving particularly attractive. Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit were the main species involved, though a few Greenshanks, Wood and Green Sandpipers were also seen. Highlight, though, undoubtedly was the Lesser Yellowlegs found on Dormans Pool on the evening of 13th and present here and on Saltholme the following day. This was a long overdue first for the county and added to the impressive tally of wader species recorded at Teesmouth. Long-billed Dowitcher is now the commonest species not to be recorded on the Tees Marshes. A Temminck's Stint was on the Greatham Saline Lagoon (14th) with a Black-necked Grebe appearing at Scaling Dam the same day.

The first good sea-passage of the year was recorded on 15th with 4 Sooty and 149 Manx Shearwaters, 6 Pomarine and 1 Long-tailed Skua seen off Hartlepool with a Balearic Shearwater passing the following day. An Osprey at Scaling Dam (17th) stayed for a week but much patience was required to see it, as its fishing trips were often hours apart. Up to 4 Marsh Harriers were around Dormans Pool (23rd) with 2 Yellow-legged Gulls were here on the same date. A northerly air stream produced ideal conditions at Hartlepool from 25th – 31st and the sea-bird highlights during this period were Great and Cory's Shearwaters, 6 Balearic Shearwaters, c.1,500 Manxies (29th), 4 Long-tailed Skuas, good numbers of Pomarine Skuas, Storm Petrel and Sabine's Gull. A Wryneck was in a Norton garden (30th). August falls now seen a thing of the past. Hardly any migrants were noted at the coast during the month. The end of August used to be the best time to see Icterine and Barred Warbler in Cleveland.

September

The month was dominated by westerly winds and hence passerine migrants were few and far between. Single Redstarts

at Hartlepool on 3rd and 10th, Spotted Flycatcher there on 4th and 10th and 3 Pied Flycatchers on 12th were a very poor return for migrant watchers at the coast. Two Pectoral Sandpipers were around Saltholme (6th – 8th). Curlew Sandpipers peaked at 4 and Little Stints at 3. Twenty years ago numbers of these 2 species used to reach close to a hundred in most autumns but have become increasingly scarce in recent times. A Common Buzzard was in the Cowpen area (8th – 13th) and a Honey Buzzard was seen over Teesside (8th). The Bittern continued to be reported intermittently on Dormans Pool and a Marsh Harrier was here until 18th. Pectoral Sandpipers were again in the Saltholme/Dormans area from 17th with 3 on Dormans Pool on 21st. The first Pink-footed Geese of the autumn were recorded on 16th with 110 over Upleatham. Both Marsh and Hen Harriers were at Scaling Dam (18th) and a Black Redstart was at South Gare the same day. Sea-watching off Hartlepool (18th – 20th) produced single Long-tailed Skua, 3 Black Terns, c.200 Little Gulls and 862 Manxies (19th). South Gare saw a Lapland Bunting (20th) and a Black-necked Grebe on the sea the following day. A north-westerly blow (22nd) produced 5 Balearic and 4 Sooty Shearwaters, 2 Little Auk, 1 Pomarine and 17 Great Skuas off Hartlepool. The same day produced the second Lesser Yellowlegs of the autumn. A juvenile, initially flighty around the Greatham Creek area soon settled down on Cowpen Marsh and gave superb views staying into October. You wait a lifetime for one and 2 appear in the space of 6 weeks! Barnacle Geese were reported from 23rd when 100 flew past Hartlepool but at least 1,500 flew through Teesmouth (28th). A Goshawk was on Cowpen Marsh (24th) and a Sabine's Gull flew past Hartlepool (26th). A trickle of migrants at the month's end saw a Greenish Warbler reported from Brotton (28th), 5 Black Redstarts at Boulby (29th) and a Yellow-browed Warbler in Seaton Cemetery (30th).

October

October more than made up for a disappointing September. Although no major rarities were found, scarce migrants were present on an almost daily basis from 13th with record numbers of Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers.

A late Wood Sandpiper was on Saltholme Pool (1st) with a Lapland Bunting at South Gare the same day. 2 Yellow-browed Warblers were at Saltburn (2nd). A Honey Buzzard flew low south over Dormans Pool (3rd). Large numbers of Little Gulls were offshore at this time. 3,893 (a county record) were counted passing Hartlepool (3rd). Not surprisingly a Sabine's Gull drifted south past South Gare the same day. A juvenile Sabine's Gull was found on the rocks at Hartlepool the following day. Unfortunately it proved to be unwell and was taken into care but died 2 days later. Other seabirds off Hartlepool at this time included Storm Petrel, a Balearic Shearwater and 32 Puffins. A Pectoral Sandpiper was on Saltholme Pool (5th) along with a Jack Snipe and another Jack Snipe was on Seaton Common. Another Sabine's Gull was off Hartlepool (8th). 4 Barnacle Geese and a Whooper Swan were at Scaling Dam (9th). The next few days saw the Lesser Yellowlegs continue to give close views on Cowpen Marsh and several large skeins of Pink-footed Geese flew over the area. The wind finally turned into the south-east from 13th. Although no rain came with the winds, scarce migrants were to

the fore though common migrants were generally few and far between. The 13th saw Pallas's Warbler and Great Grey Shrike at South Gare, a Red-backed Shrike at Cattersty Gill, a Yellow-browed Warbler at Skinningrove and a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Hummersea. Over the next few days it was a case of find your own Yellow-browed Warbler. Five different birds were trapped on Hartlepool Headland, with others in the nearby West View and Jewish cemeteries, 3 were at Hummersea Farm, 2 at Saltburn, 1 at Boulby and 2 or 3 at Skinningrove. A Hume's Warbler was identified with the Yellow-browed at Skinningrove (15th) although it unfortunately didn't stay long. Record numbers of Pallas's Warblers were also recorded with 12 seen by the end of October (only 27 had previously been recorded in Cleveland). Boulby, Brotton, South Gare, Hartlepool Headland, the nearby Brus Tunnel area and North Gare all recorded this former rarity. Two Great Grey Shrikes were at South Gare with Black Redstarts seen at Hartlepool and South Gare. A few Brambling and Siskin were also noted along with good numbers of winter thrushes and Goldcrest but otherwise the commoner migrants were generally scarce. A Firecrest was at Brotton (18th). The 19th saw a good sea passage off Hartlepool with Grey Phalarope, Balearic Shearwater, Great Northern Diver, 368 Little Gulls, 17 Pomarine Skuas, Long-tailed Duck and 10 Velvet Scoter amongst the highlights. The following day 8 Long-tailed Ducks and 3 Little Auk were seen.

A Raven flew over the car park at Scaling Dam (21st). A Grey Phalarope showed well on the sea off South Gare (23rd). The same day saw a Barred Warbler in the bushes at the end of Zinc Works Road where it remained until 28th. 4 Whooper Swans were on Dormans Pool (24th) and at least 500 Pink-footed Geese passed over here the same day. 2 Black-necked Grebes were on the sea off South Gare for much of the month and a Slavonian Grebe was also here (26th). Several small parties of Waxwing were seen late in the month promising a good winter for this species.

A Dusky Warbler was at Brotton (29th-31st). Calling frequently good views were difficult to come by as it fed on the hillside besides the golf course. A Dotterel was found amongst the large Golden Plover flock at Saltholme Pool (30th) but was only present for about 2 hours when the flock dispersed.



Lesser Yellowlegs – Cleveland 14/08/2003
Photograph by Brian Clasper

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH AUTUMN 2003 SUMMARY

Coverage was exceptional, with all 92 sector counts carried out.

The only conspicuously poor performance among the wildfowl was that of Wigeon (peak of 596), but this may well have been largely attributable to the relatively early October count date. In contrast, Cormorant set a new Tees WeBS record, the August total of 773 surpassing the 676 counted in September 1995. Similarly, Mute Swan (100, August), Tufted Duck (245, July) and Coot (1477, October) all provided new WeBS records, while Great-crested Grebe set a new seasonal WeBS record (30, August). In an otherwise undistinguished series of counts for the species, the September teal total of 1655 was almost two and a half times the size of our recent seasonal norm, and constitutes the best autumn figure since October 1984.

As far as the WeBS counts were concerned this was a poor autumn for the scarcer passage waders, with Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper all faring badly. However, the marked Ruff peak (44, August) was the best since 1993. While Purple Sandpiper numbers continued on a seemingly inexorable decline, August brought a massive count of 2849 Dunlin (the best autumn tally on the Tees since as long ago as October 1976). Yet, if anything, the Redshank counts were even more impressive, peaking with a new Tees all-time record of 2455 in October; this (along with the September total) comfortably exceeded the previous best of 2042 logged in October 1988.

This proved to be an excellent autumn for terns too. In August the Sandwich Tern maximum of 2601 was our best for eight years, while the corresponding Common Tern figure of 1678 constitutes a new Tees WeBS record.

Following this series of counts, in autumn the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS Site remains of national importance for Little Grebe, Cormorant, Gadwall, Shoveler and Sanderling and of international importance for Redshank.

MIKE LEAKEY

WeBS Local Organizer

November 2003

	July 13	Aug 10	Sep 14	Oct 12	Autumn 2003 maximum as % of average peak count over previous five autumns
Little Grebe	28*	<u>70</u> **	58**	17	96%
Great Crested Grebe	12	<u>30</u>	22	21	183%
Cormorant	346**	<u>773</u> **	137**	264**	160%
Grey Heron	50	<u>63</u>	36	62	100%
Mute Swan	73	<u>100</u>	81	56	171%
Shelduck	263	98	123	<u>266</u>	77%
Wigeon	8	0	401	<u>596</u>	52%
Gadwall	39	37	117**	<u>155</u> **	136%
Teal	39	76	<u>1655</u> **	<u>737</u> *	240%
Mallard	84	461	<u>519</u>	276	118%
Pintail	0	0	17	<u>23</u>	107%
Shoveler	14	26	141**	<u>164</u> **	99%
Pochard	<u>63</u>	53	12	13	78%
Tufted Duck	<u>245</u>	237	132	80	175%
Ruddy Duck	35	46	52	<u>68</u>	125%
Coot	964*	1207**	1058*	<u>1477</u> **	213%
Oystercatcher	335	833	1262	<u>1816</u> *	125%
Ringed Plover	27	<u>196</u> *	66	23	80%
Golden Plover	32	5	24	<u>513</u>	82%
Grey Plover	5	29	<u>58</u>	16	98%
Lapwing	753	340	994	<u>1517</u>	131%
Knot	5	<u>70</u>	46	4	85%

Sanderling	137	<u>338</u> **	117	206*	96%
Little Stint	0	0	<u>2</u>	0	14%
Curlew Sandpiper	0	0	<u>6</u>	0	31%
Purple Sandpiper	3	7	2	<u>11</u>	27%
Dunlin	600	<u>2849</u> **	734	250	261%
Ruff	4	<u>44</u>	9	2	237%
Snipe	2	<u>27</u>	33	26	55%
Black-tailed Godwit	22	38*	<u>42</u> *	37*	116%
Bar-tailed Godwit	3	12	<u>43</u>	21	82%
Whimbrel	<u>12</u>	7	1	0	78%
Curlew	<u>789</u> *	773*	685*	599	118%
Spotted Redshank	1	0	<u>3</u>	0	65%
Redshank	847*	1642***	2301**	<u>2455</u> **	155%
Greenshank	3	<u>16</u>	13	7	68%
Green Sandpiper	0	<u>4</u>	0	0	63%
Wood Sandpiper	0	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	0	71%
Common Sandpiper	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	0	0	48%
Turnstone	36	<u>335</u> *	57	179	90%
Sandwich Tern	682	<u>2601</u> ***	176	3	231%
Common Tern	847	<u>1678</u>	389	0	208%
Arctic Tern	1	<u>14</u>	1	1	79%
Little Tern	<u>5</u>	1	0	0	12%

Underlined counts indicate Autumn 2003 maxima.

* Denotes count of >50% of national importance

** Denotes count of national importance

*** Denotes count of international importance

N.B. 'Teessmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

TOM THE POM

The sight of large, robust, menacing, Pomarine Skuas passing along the County's coastline during the autumn months has thrilled both local and visiting birders for many years. I recall one day back in 1985 when Martin Blick and I were sea-watching from localities south of the River Tees. We were treated to some 178 birds moving south. Other, more fortunate observers, witnessed no less than 850 birds flying north off South Gare on the 9th October 1992, when over a thousand were noted at Seaton Carew.

Irrespective of how many you see on a particular sea-watch there is something special about Pomarine Skua's steady, untroubled migration flight, following a direct line, with long series of stiff, slow, almost lazy wing beats and just occasional short glides when passing the crests of waves. Only very infrequently (in very strong winds) are there frequent periods of shearwater-like flight. Interestingly, the active flight of Pomarine Skua has been variously compared to that of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectis diomedea*, Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* and also to large divers.

Large individuals approach the size of Bonxies, a species that, more often than not, is well represented on 'Pom passage days.' Well-fed Poms show off a 'hanging belly' that any England rugby union prop would be proud of.

In 2003, single birds were noted on the 6th and then the 12th August. Numbers increased from the 15th and birds were seen daily from the 25th August to at least the 2nd September, with a maximum count of nineteen birds. Almost all were full-tailed adults, and all but a few were pale morphs: pale morphs are stated to outnumber dark morphs 9: 1. while intermediates are rare. One pale morph, lacking a full tail, was, with indecent haste, named Tom the Pom and lingered for more than three weeks. During the latter stages of its stay it was joined by a second bird.

Although 'Tom' gave good, if not particularly close views almost daily, it was just about impossible to obtain a satisfactory view of the underwing detail so as to help to accurately age the bird. However, it was evident that there was no pale 'double patch' (as on the underwing of a juvenile) which is created by the pale bases to the primaries and their coverts.

On one occasion Tom showed its aggressive mode of attack and an adult Kittiwake, rather than the food it apparently had, appeared to be the target. Tom proceeded to land on the Kittiwake's back, pecking at it and forcing it underneath the surface of the sea. After several seconds however, Tom lost interest and left its hapless victim to recover, which it did. It is quite possible that the attack began as kleptoparasitism (the stealing of food from other birds) and developed into an attack on the gull.

Tom's companion, a bird that was not particularly studied, showed an interesting double white area on the upperwing, somewhat similar to those shown by second-winter birds moulting into second-summer – no, not off Hartlepool, but off the Ivory Coast, during February - March.

Klaus Malling Olsen in his excellent book 'Skuas And Jaegers - A Guide to the Skuas and Jaegers of the World, so superbly illustrated by Hans Larsson, states that there is a frustrating intraspecific variation in the timing of age development of skuas, which take about four years to develop full adult plumage, making safe ageing of all but juveniles and adults in the field almost impossible. There is hope however, because he goes on to say that by classifying immatures according to particular characters most individuals can be linked to an 'age type'.

So just how old was pale-morph Tom? Well, an adult-like head and body was apparent – although it did not look particularly 'clean' and although there was a shorter tail projection than an adult summer, tail feathers are often bitten off or broken. The cap was blackish-brown, the throat and cheeks whitish. The upperparts were basically dark brown with the uppertail-coverts strikingly barred with dark markings on a white ground colour. The underparts sported quite a heavy breast band with some barring along the flanks but the undertail-coverts were never seen to good advantage. Eventually, two local birders did manage to obtain satisfactory views of the underwing and remarked that the bird had uniformly dark axillaries and underwing-coverts typical of adults.

Third-summer birds are stated to have head and underparts as adult summer; however the belly is less clean. The upper-tail coverts usually at least, are partly barred. Underwing-coverts and axillaries are as adult. Tail projection is generally shorter than on adult summer. So far so good, but according to Klaus Malling Olsen, some third-summer birds are probably identical to adult summer-plumaged birds! Fourth-summer birds are as adult summer, although a minority, especially, show some pale barred feathers on the upper tail-coverts!

It seems unlikely that Tom was a non-breeding adult commencing an early moult to winter-plumage. The cap was blackish-brown – there was no suggestion of a hood and the throat and cheeks were whitish. The moult sequence is stated to be cap, neck, mantle, throat, uppertail-coverts, the rest of the head, belly, undertail-coverts and back.

Whilst the head and body moult of adult summer-plumaged birds may commence in early autumn, it is normally limited in the northern hemisphere, although in years with no breeding most of the head and body moult may be completed by early autumn. Normally, however, most of the moult takes place immediately following arrival in the winter quarters in late November - December.

Pale morphs are variable in winter plumage, with some similar to immatures but with uniform dark underwing-coverts and axillaries. Others are closer to summer plumage but have a barred rump. The cap is more diffuse and therefore less contrasting than adult summer and sometimes gives a hooded appearance. The tail is usually not twisted at the tip and is frequently lacking.

It seems the more we learn, the more we have to learn! We must heed what Klaus Malling Olsen says (to re-iterate) that '...individual variation and progression of plumage development make accurate ageing difficult and often impossible'. So, at best, we may say that Tom should perhaps be regarded as a 'third or fourth-summer type'.

It goes without saying that local sea-watchers have been weaned on distant skuas giving tantalising brief views, sometimes in the most inclement weather conditions. Over the years, not many skuas have taken to parading up and down outside the Obs, thus affording an opportunity for prolonged detailed observations.

If only local sea-watchers could have taken advantage of a certain birder's penchant for sandwiches and pastries well past their 'sell-by date'. A nice ripe 2002 sand-eel baguette may well have enticed Tom to land on the promenade, right in front of the Obs. Then, and only then, might we have been able to see whether the legs were wholly black (adult) or whether there were any pale spots on the tarsus (third and fourth-summer types). Up to 20% of the tarsus of third-summer types may be pale and some (but not all!) fourth-summer types show pale spots on the middle part of the tarsus. C'est la vie!

I must acknowledge countless stimulating conversations, regarding the identification of skuas and other seabirds, that have habitually taken place inside, as well as, most recently, outside, our beloved, user-friendly 'Obs.' The majority of these saw Anglo-Saxon usage kept to a bare minimum, unless a seabird of note happened to pass by. Furthermore, traditional sea-watching phrases such as 'Did anyone see that?' are long-gone, dead and buried - at least in Cleveland.

References:

Olsen, K. M. & Larsson, H. [1997] Skuas And Jaegers: A Guide to the Skuas and Jaegers of the World. Pica.
Cleveland Bird Reports for 1985 and 1992.

RED-VEINED DARTER *Sympetrum fonscolombii*

Red-veined Darter is a well-known migrant from Southern Europe and North Africa, where it is common and widespread. In Britain it is an irregular visitor, arriving from as early as the first week in June - usually following strong south-westerly winds, principally to southwest England, although there are scattered records from elsewhere; for example, it has reached Scotland.

Since 1995, Red-veined Darter has bred annually, but seemingly, the few breeding colonies are far from stable. In the absence of the emergence of a second generation, as has happened this year at Pirton (which lies to the south of Worcester) there are usually no sightings beyond mid-August.

It is a robust medium-sized darter dragonfly with a strong, powerful 'jizz.' Mature males have a brick-red abdomen which is yellow-brown in females and immatures. The base of the hind wing usually has a yellow patch but the extent of this colouration varies enormously. The veins in the basal half of each wing, adjacent to the leading edge, are conspicuously red in males and yellow in females, however, from a distance, the wing colouration is strongly influenced by the background and light conditions and sometimes the red veins are difficult to see. The pterostigma is pale yellow with strong black borders. The eyes in males are red above and blue below. If Red-veined Darters land side-on to the observer, the best identification feature is the pterostigma. The red veins can be seen to good advantage, if the darter is closely positioned head-on to the observer.

In July and early August, observers can benefit from seeing Red-veined and Common Darters 'side-by-side' as it were, at Middleton (Heysham) Industrial Estate new pond in Lancashire. The last sighting this year was of a worn male on the 22nd August.

Naturalist Pete Marsh has monitored the Red-veined Darters at Middleton (Heysham) Industrial Estate new pond since they first appeared in the area four years ago. He has spent many hours observing Red-veined Darters in flight over water, particularly during the last two years and has identified some flight characteristics which should stand observers in good stead when faced with finding a few Red-veined among a lot of Common Darters. However, such characteristics do not hold good when Red-veined Darters are engaged in conflict with other insects.

Red-veined Darters tend to 'hug the water' and hardly vary their height at all when flying over water, including coming ashore. Common Darters, however, vary their height on a regular basis, especially when coming ashore, when they usually gradually gain height.

Red-veined Darters do not gradually gain height when hovering; indeed they remain pretty static. Common Darters, on the other hand, often gradually gain height during periods of hovering.

Red-veined Darters have a habit of veering off at right angles to their original flight-line whilst maintaining the same height. This can happen several times in quick succession. Common Darters rarely change direction quite so dramatically and, when they do, it is usually accompanied by an obvious variation in height above the water.

Individual Red-veined Darters often spend longer over water than Common Darter.

To summarise Pete Marsh's informative points, a darter spending a considerable amount of time flying over the water at a *consistently* low altitude, often veering off at 90 degrees and hovering *without* gaining height is a good candidate for Red-veined Darter.

To visit Middleton (Heysham) Industrial Estate new pond, leave the M6 at Junction 34 and head towards Heysham on the A683. Just as you approach Heysham, Middleton Industrial Estate is signposted off to the left, off a roundabout. After a relatively short distance, you will see a large sign on your left indicating Heysham Business Park, the entrance to which is on your right. Turn in here and after a hundred yards or so pull up in front of the security check point. Inform security that you are going to look over the dragonfly pond and drive on for another 200 – 300 yards. On the right there is a new gravelly pull-in, right by the new pond, where you can safely park off what is a busy road. From Junction 34 on the M6 to the site is almost exactly eight miles.

To wet your appetite even more, the Yellow-winged Darter, a very rare migrant from the continent (arriving in Britain from mid-July through August) has been recorded on the site on at least two occasions.

My thanks and those of Archie Feeney and Tom Francis go to Pete Marsh, who is always prepared to give of his time freely and share his considerable expertise and who did just that, when the three of us visited the site on separate occasions.

References:

[1] British Dragonfly Society's website – Check List – Dragonflies. [2] Brooks, S. [1997] Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland, British Wildlife Publishing, Hook, 160 pages.

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OBITUARY – IAN STEWART

Ian Stewart died on January 4 2003, after a long illness. His wife of 59 years, Mary, had died three days earlier. Ian was an engineering student at the outbreak of war in 1939 and joined the RAF as soon as he graduated. Although not a pilot, he went up in the planes he had serviced, to be sure that everything was working and sometimes got to fly them. He also flew gliders. When de-mobbed, he joined ICI at Dumfries and became familiar with the geese of the Solway - useful when he led TBC weekend outings to the area. He became a friend to many of the local ornithologists, some of whom would join us in the pub on the Saturday night. He moved to work at Wilton and his garden in Linthorpe was one of the first locally to host a pair of Collared Doves. He went with his younger son, John, to the Carmargue and we came back with the boot full of dead snakes - road casualties. With Edgar Gatenby, we later camped in the south of Morocco to explore the waders and other birds at the great wetland of Puerto Cansado.

Ian was a serious chap and, even as a student, contributed learned notes on the structure of the syrinx in flamingoes. He was a founder member of Teesmouth Bird Club and served it in many capacities. With Tom Bowbeer and others, he ringed many birds in the grounds of Poole Hospital. He was always ingenious, helpful and cheerful. He leaves three children including John, who is masterminding the conservation work of Fauna and Flora International in and around Vietnam.

Peter Evans

[Apologies from the Editor for the late appearance of this obituary]

NOTICES

Pine Martins and Polecats - Alistair McLee

I have long been interested in studies on polecats and pine martins, and have sent in road kills to the Vincent Wildlife Trust when ever I have come across them driving around the UK. Members may be aware that there is a small population of pine martin based in the N Yorks Moors and there is circumstantial evidence of appearances on the outlying farmland/woodlands. In parallel with this, the Cumbrian population of polecats is spreading eastwards into Co Durham, (a male picked up at Staindrop 5 years ago). I, myself, found a road kill polecat in Peeblesshire last month, and there have been no records from there for a century at least. Given all this, it would be interesting to alert members to the possible presence of these mammals and the sad events of road casualties, which is often the only indication of their presence, in an area. If any member is interested in participating in a local survey of road casualties I would be pleased to hear from them via email at canda.mcleee@virgin.net or telephone on 01642 787303.

Winter River Bird Survey - January 2004

The WWT are launching a first national Winter River Bird Survey which will take place in January 2004. As you are probably aware the WeBs counts concentrate primarily on estuaries and large inland waterbodies such as reservoirs. The new survey aims to cover linear waterways such as rivers – a habitat poorly covered by the existing counts.

The survey requires counters to survey 500m stretches of river, simply counting waterbird numbers on any date during January 2004. Cleveland apparently has some 90x500m stretches as the WWT's definition of a river include the like of Billingham Beck, Hartburn Beck, Lustrum Beck, Carlton Beck etc.

I am attempting to co-ordinate Cleveland's survey. If you are prepared to count even one stretch which would presumably take no more than about 15 minutes please contact me before January. This would appear to be an ideal opportunity for anyone who has considered helping with survey work before. I would imagine that most stretches will have little more than the odd Mallard, Moorhen or Grey Heron. If you would like to walk off those Christmas and New Year excesses please give me a ring. Chris Sharp (01429 865163)



*Lesser Yellowlegs – Cleveland 14/08/2003
Photograph by Brian Clasper*