

Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

Summer 2005

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MONTHLY SUMMARY

March 2005

The Great Northern Diver remained at Hartlepool Harbour from the beginning of the month until 14th. Large numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers were present during this time, with 72 being the largest count. Large numbers of Cormorants and several Shags also meant that this area was well worth a visit. A ring-tail Hen Harrier was at Scaling Dam (1st) and a Bittern was seen in flight at Haverton Hole (4th). One or 2 Little Egrets continued to be reported from the Greatham Creek area and a Black-throated Diver was at Hartlepool (6th), along with the Great Northern, and a Red-necked Grebe was there the following day. The latter continued to be seen in the area for the rest of the month. Three Smews continued their winter stay at the Reclamation Pond and up to 5 Slavonian Grebes commuted between here and Seal Sands.

Last month's elusive Ring-billed Gull was reported from Charlton's Pond (11th) and at Billingham Technology Park (13th) and 3 Whooper Swans were on Crookfoot Reservoir the same day. A first-winter Iceland Gull was on Dorman's Pool (14th), with the first Wheatears of the spring being recorded at South Gare and the Zinc Works Road (18th). A Ring Ouzel was at South Gare (20th-21st) and an Avocet was at Saltholme Pools (21st), along with an early Little Ringed Plover. A pair of Garganey was at Scaling Dam the same day. Three Jack Snipe were on Portrack Marsh (22nd) and several Water Pipits were on Seaton Common, along with half a

dozen Scandinavian Rock Pipits. A pair of Long-tailed Ducks was on the Reclamation Pond (from 24th) for a week, while 6 Bearded Tits were still present on the Long Drag at the end of the month. An early Swallow was at Saltholme (27th). Light onshore winds (28th-29th) produced 2 Great Grey Shrikes at South Gare, along with 3 Black Redstarts, 2 Bearded Tits, Ring Ouzel, Woodcock and several Chiffchaffs. A Tundra Bean Goose and up to 21 Pink-footed Geese were on Saltholme from 28th and last year's drake White-headed Duck returned to Saltholme Pools (29th), where it remained until 5th April.

April 2005

A Red Kite and Marsh Harrier flew over Seal Sands (1st), while a Shore Lark and 2 Lapland Buntings were at Cowbar at the same time. Two very early Dotterel were also at Cowbar (2nd), with one still present the following day. Two Avocets were at Saltholme and remained until the end of the month. Several Ruff and Black-tailed Godwits, along with a single Spotted Redshank, were around the North Tees Marshes early in the month. Two Garganeys were at Saltholme (from 6th) and a sub-adult Mediterranean Gull was present at Scaling Dam (11th), along with Barnacle Goose, Peregrine and Little Ringed Plover. A Marsh Harrier flew over Saltholme (13th).

Seventy Black-tailed Godwits were at Seaton Common (15th) and the following day saw a big fall of Ring Ouzels, with *circa* 20 at the end of the Zinc Works Road. The birds remained for a few days, with smaller numbers being seen at South Gare and Hummersea. Good numbers of White Wagtails were also present at this time, with up to 20 in the Saltholme area. A

single Greenshank was at Saltholme (21st).

A Hobby flew over Easington Beck at Grinkle (22nd) and the next day a Cuckoo was at Saltholme. Several Whimbrels showed well on Cowpen Marsh at this time. By now, up to 3 Slavonian Grebes on the Reclamation Pond were in summer plumage and thoughts of possible breeding were entertained as the birds displayed and nest-built into May. Unfortunately, they had gone by mid-May and with the future of the Reclamation Pool being in grave doubt it would seem that the chances of Slavonian or Black-necked Grebes breeding in the County are slim.

A Great White Egret was at Haverton Hole (24th). It later moved to Saltholme and remained in the area until 28th May. This was the 7th record of this former rarity in the past 8 years. Avocet numbers increased to 3 around Saltholme and a Hobby flew past the cliffs at Hummersea (25th).

May 2005

A Wood Warbler sang at Lockwood Beck (1st). Until recently, this species bred in the County but, along with Pied Flycatcher and Redstart, sadly does no longer. A small fall of migrants at South Gare the same day included 100 Wheatears, Whinchat, Tree Pipit and Redstart. Two Black Terns, a Marsh Harrier and Greenshank were all at Saltholme Pools but the highlight of the day for one lucky observer was a White Stork east of Guisborough, seen flying northwards towards Margrove Ponds.

A Wood Sandpiper was at Seaton Common (2nd) and Whimbrel numbers at Cowpen Marsh increased to 7, though passage waders were generally in short supply this spring.

First-summer Iceland Gulls were at South Gare and Cowpen Marsh (7th) and the same day produced a drake Mandarin at Lockwood Beck (which was seen until the end of the month) and a drake Red-crested Pochard at Dormans Pool, which remained until the end of June. Little Gulls were on the North Tees Marshes (from 8th), though numbers remained in single figures. A Black-necked Grebe was at Haverton Hole (12th) and a Temminck's Stint was at Back Saltholme the same day. Eleven Barnacle Geese flew north past Hartlepool (16th), along with a 'Blue' Fulmar. Two Temminck's Stints were on Calor Gas Pool (20th), with a single Little Stint nearby at Back Saltholme. Two Avocets were also in the same area at this time.

A Quail was calling north of the Teesmouth Field Centre (27th). The same day saw an adult Purple Heron at Coatham Marsh. It was still present the following day and was the first ever twitchable bird to be seen in Cleveland. A Hobby also flew over Coatham Marsh (28th), with a Marsh Harrier there the following day. A probable Honey Buzzard was over Dorman's Pool (30th) and the month ended with 2 Bar-headed Geese on Coatham Marsh (31st).

June 2005

The 2 Bar-headed Geese had moved to Seaton Common (1st).

An Osprey was seen over Ward Jackson Park, Hartlepool (3rd) and a Black Tern was around Dorman's Pool (4th–8th). Quails were a feature of the month, though, as usual with this bird, late evening was the best time to hear them. Intensive listening in the early hours of 9th produced 3 at Lingdale, 3 at Grinkle Park, 1 at Pinchinthorpe and 1 at Kilton Thorpe. In addition, on the same evening, 1 on the outskirts of Hartlepool was a good garden tick for this writer. The following day, a White Stork flew in off the sea at Saltburn never to be seen again.

A ring-tail Montagu's Harrier flew over Lockwood Beck Reservoir (14th) but, sadly, it was another bird that did not linger. A drake Ruddy Shelduck stayed a little longer at Saltholme Marsh on the morning of 18th. Wader numbers were generally low, with just the odd Greenshank and Spotted Redshank and a few Black-tailed Godwits and Ruffs appearing towards the end of the month. Two Avocets were at the Calor Gas Pool (25th).

The first significant sea passage of the year took place on 25th, when a single Long-tailed Skua flew past Hartlepool, along with 95 Manx Shearwaters, 21 Puffins and 587 Common Scoters. A Scaup was at Scaling Dam (28th) and an adult Mediterranean Gull was on Saltholme Marsh (29th).

It has generally been a very quiet spring, with no falls of migrants of note and only the Purple Heron to set the pulses racing. We hope for a more productive autumn.

Chris Sharp

NEWSLETTER CHANGES

Hopefully, you will have noticed some significant changes to this copy of the Newsletter. Feedback from the Questionnaire Survey has revealed that most members enjoy reading it but improvements could be made, by having a wider sphere of topics and writers and the inclusion of more images. Over the coming

months, Chris Sharp, Rob Little and myself, with the assistance of the Marketing & Membership Sub Committee, will be ensuring that all the necessary improvements are put in place.

Ted Parker – Chairman

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY

Spring 2005 Summary

	April 10	May 16	June 19	Spring 2005 maximum count expressed as % of average peak count over previous five springs
Little Grebe	7	10	<u>13</u>	54%
Great Crested Grebe	17	<u>26</u>	24	113%
Cormorant	57	48	<u>156**</u>	108%
Mute Swan	36	45	<u>72</u>	133%
Shelduck	214	289	<u>344</u>	100%
Gadwall	<u>78*</u>	60*	63*	85%
Teal	<u>216</u>	1	14	75%
Mallard	180	187	<u>200</u>	94%
Shoveler	<u>53*</u>	33	28	77%
Pochard	18	51	<u>80</u>	131%
Tufted Duck	<u>133</u>	100	89	92%
Eider	<u>14</u>	4	13	41%
Coot	409	380	<u>588*</u>	123%
Oystercatcher	<u>512</u>	362	418	95%
Ringed Plover	25	<u>148</u>	26	47%
Golden Plover	<u>12</u>	0	0	15%
Grey Plover	<u>15</u>	0	1	55%
Lapwing	108	66	<u>284</u>	113%
Knot	<u>13</u>	5	0	10%
Sanderling	189*	<u>307**</u>	6	95%
Purple Sandpiper	<u>104</u>	0	0	164%
Dunlin	5	<u>120</u>	6	51%
Ruff	3	0	0	46%
Snipe	<u>16</u>	0	2	80%
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>25</u>	18	5	65%
Curlew	<u>432</u>	64	276	175%
Redshank	<u>1026*</u>	24	95	97%
Turnstone	<u>158</u>	24	13	94%
Sandwich Tern	0	24	<u>221</u>	126%
Common Tern	0	425	<u>521</u>	118%
Little Tern	0	<u>28</u>	22	145%

Underlined counts indicate Spring 2005 maxima.

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

*** Denotes count of national significance for that species*

NB 'Teemouth' includes Hartlepool Bay

Coverage was good, with 66 out of a potential 69 sector counts undertaken (96%). However, for the second successive May there was no count at Seaton Snook, hence many ringed plover, sanderling and dunlin are likely to have been missed.

Among the wildfowl mute swan (72, June) and coot (588, June) both produced their second best spring maxima on record. Significantly poor performances came from little grebe (13, June) and eider (14, May).

As regards waders, this was the worst WeBS spring peak for ringed plover (148, May) since 1994; however, on 24 May 832 were counted at low tide on Seal Sands. Although only 12 golden plover were recorded in April, this was actually the best showing for three years (the statistics are skewed by the occasional occurrence of migrant flocks of northern birds). After last spring's record seasonal low, 2005 brought the highest spring count of purple sandpiper since 2000 (104, April). The dunlin peak (120, May) was our poorest since 1994, while conversely this was our best spring curlew count since 1995 (432, April).

All three key tern species occurred in slightly above average numbers.

Following this series of counts, the site remains of national importance for cormorant, gadwall and sanderling. Ringed plover loses its nationally important status (at least as regards WeBS core counts).

MIKE LEAKEY
Local Organizer
Tees Wetland Bird Survey

REQUESTS

Sharing Bird Information

Following my request in the last Newsletter, there has been a slight increase in the number of local messages being put on to the Pager services. It would be of great

benefit to local birders if more people would participate. As a reminder, the relevant telephone numbers are:

Rare Bird Alert: 07626 952952

Birdnet: 01623 511679
 (this is a new number and the old one given out in the last Newsletter is now defunct)

Breeding Bird Survey - Drawings

It is hoped to publish the results of the Breeding Bird Survey in late 2006. For the publication we are looking for black and white drawings of each breeding species in 'Cleveland'. We already have some but with 130 drawings needed in total we are hoping Club members could help. If you have any you are willing to let us use or are keen to produce species on request please contact Chris Sharp on 01429 865163 or email chrisandlucia@sharp12756.freeserve.co.uk

Bird Report - 2004

Any outstanding records, photographs or sketches for consideration for the 2004 Cleveland Bird Report should be submitted without delay to the County Recorder, Rob Little at 5 Belgrave Court, Seaton Carew, HARTLEPOOL, TS25 1BF.

TBC Website

The bird reports that are shown on the website are obtained from the two main pager systems, and from some club members who send observations to the compiler. Many sightings are still unreported, especially those which might be of interest to newer members (e.g. the Corn Buntings at Hart).

To encourage more reporting, it is now possible to email sightings to clevelandbirdnews@yahoo.co.uk

Reports normally appear on the scrolling display for a week, and are also recorded in the monthly summaries in the 'Birds and Birding' section. It cannot be guaranteed that all reports can be put on the scroller, but they will be included in the monthly summaries.

Please remember that this does not replace the normal process of submitting sightings. Your observations should still be sent to the Recorder at the end of the year.

BIRDTRACK

What is BirdTrack?

BirdTrack is an Internet based bird recording scheme developed through an exciting partnership between BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland. It is a year-round recording scheme that will use data from birdwatchers' records to support species and site conservation at local, national and international scales. Results produced by BirdTrack will include mapping the migration and movements of birds and monitoring of scarce birds in Britain and Ireland. BirdTrack follows on from the successful Migration Watch project that looked at spring migration in 2002-2004. We know very little about the timing of arrival and departure of winter visitors and this is just one area in which BirdTrack will provide useful information. There are also many scarce

birds where we would like to know much more about their populations.

The development of BirdTrack is an on-going process and new features will be added to the website over the next two years. It is intended to provide a comprehensive bird recording scheme that birdwatchers can use to store all of their birdwatching records.

The local and national results are available on the website for everyone to look at - you don't have to be a BirdTrack recorder. Every night the BirdTrack computer at BTO HQ will look at all the records submitted that day by observers across the country and will produce up-to-date maps and graphs showing the latest in migration, movements and distribution. The species featured will vary depending on the time of year and will remain topical. There are animated maps showing the arrival and departure of migrants and the seasonal movements of birds. For scarce species, such as Hawfinch, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodcock and Water Rail we will be building up a picture of their distribution throughout the year. You can also view your own records through specially designed features.

How will BirdTrack benefit the TBC?

BirdTrack will be working closely with county bird recorders to ensure that your records are also available for use at a local level and TBC has already signed up to receive such records. With your permission, all of your records will automatically be forwarded to the county recorder. This essentially means that there is a single electronic mechanism to submit records which can be used to support conservation at national, regional and local levels and also contribute towards the production of the Cleveland Bird Report. Of course, those rare and scarce species which are required to be formally assessed must also go through the existing review process.

How to register as a BirdTrack recorder

To ensure the integrity of the BirdTrack data it is important that we should know who our observers are and that we should be able to contact them if we have any queries about their records. We will also use email to circulate any important announcements or information about BirdTrack.

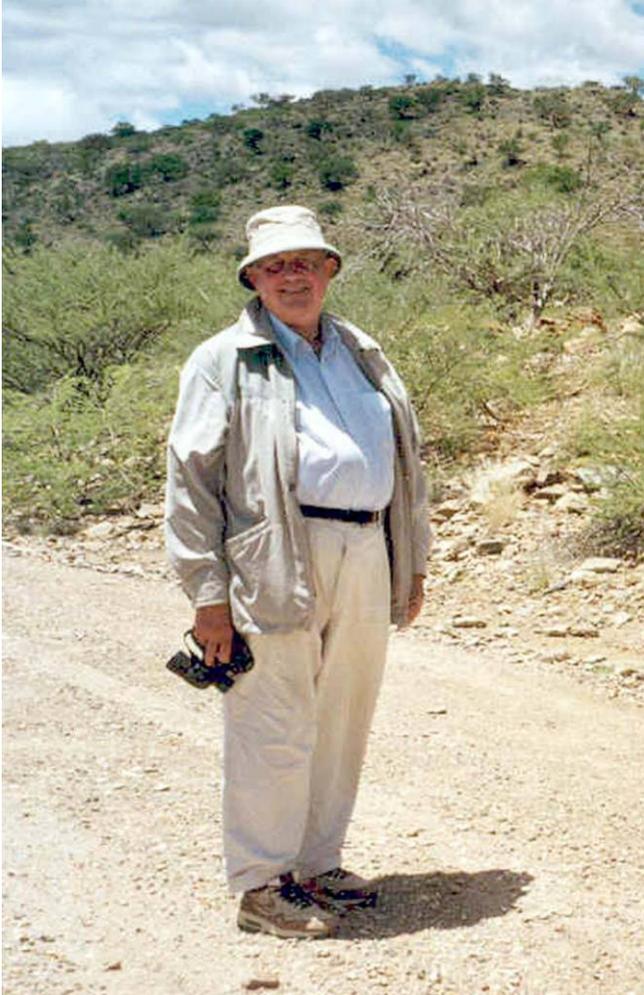
To take part in Bird Track you will therefore need to register as a recorder. This involves entering your name, address and e-mail address. When you register, you will need to choose a password. You only need to register ONCE.

Details on how to join BirdTrack can be found at <http://blx1.bto.org/birdtrack/>

Rob Little

**OBITUARY - PHILIP STEAD
(1930 - 2005)**

Everyone connected with ornithology in the Northern Counties and Hertfordshire will be enormously saddened to learn of the death on 21st May of Philip John Stead, at the age of 74.



His chosen career was as a chartered Structural Engineer but his lifetime passion was Ornithology. Philip's other interests in Lepidoptera, Odonata and Botany made him a rarity nowadays: he was truly an all round naturalist!! His interest in birds developed throughout his childhood, notwithstanding war-time coastal restrictions, so that by the late 1940's, he was a regular watcher at Teesmouth. During his National Service (1951/1953), whilst serving with the Royal Artillery, he stopped a convoy to check out his second Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, which earned him the dubious privilege of being put on a charge!!

As well as birding Teesmouth in the 1950's and 60's, submitting many records to both the Northumberland and Durham and Yorkshire reports, Philip found time to travel to Austria, France, Spain, Sweden, USA, India, Kenya and a collecting expedition to Greece with Liverpool Museum, all in the pursuit of birds. In 1959, he was a participant in two BBC radio broadcasts.

In 1960, among an informal group of Teesmouth birders, he was the driving force behind the formation of the Teesmouth Bird Club, becoming the inaugural Chairman from 1961 to 1963 and later the first Honorary Member. He was a familiar sight on his red 350cc BSA motorbike around the estuary, sometimes driving erratically, especially if he stopped to view a unusual species!!!

Philip wrote two books, both on "The Birds of Teesside", one published in 1964 and the other in 1969. He also contributed to S Vere Benson's book on "The Birds of Lebanon". He produced illustrations for Denis Summers-Smith's monograph "The House Sparrow" (1963). Several short notes in "British Birds" and 'Ardeola' were contributed by him. Philip was the father of modern ornithology on Teesside, following on from where Nelson left off. In their formative years, many bird club members benefited from Philip's guidance. He was a member of the Yorkshire, Northumberland and Durham Records Committees between 1963 and 1972 and Recorder for the Yorkshire Vice County VC65 between 1963 and 1972.

In 1972, his engineering career took him south to St Alban's, although he regularly returned to Teesmouth. He served on the Ornithological Committee of the Herts Natural History Society (later to become the Herts Bird Club) from 1977 to 1984, becoming President from 1979-81 and 1983-84. He was also a member of Herts Records Committee from 1986 till-1994. He contributed many records, one of the last being Dartford Warbler on the county boundary with Bucks and two Red Kites over his garden this spring pleased him greatly.

Later birding trips were made to most of the Canary Islands, Hong Kong and, finally, Namibia in the spring of 2004. We were planning a trip to South Africa's Cape but it was not to be. Some of his many other interests included military aircraft, battlefields and history. After a Canvasback twitch in Cambridgeshire, we visited Ely Cathedral, where Philip noticed that a date card on the tomb of one of our early kings was incorrect. On informing the Dean, he was most impressed, agreeing to change it straight away!!

Philip is much missed by his many friends and close family. He leaves a loving wife, Anne, daughters Clare, Katherine, Judith and a granddaughter.

John S P Lumby

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Meetings

Wednesday, 7th September 2005	Members Night Gary Sharples will give a talk about Portrack Marsh and its birds and Tony Harding who lived in Zimbabwe for many years will talk about the birds and wildlife of this African country.
Wednesday, 5th October 2005	Derek Toomer , the editor of BTO News will talk about the work of the BTO.
Wednesday, 2nd November 2005	Lyndsay Waddell , a gamekeeper near Barnard Castle will talk about bird life in Upper Teesdale.
Wednesday, 7th December 2005	Andrew Walker will talk about Wet Season Birding in Costa Rica

Local Outings

Sunday 28th August 2005	Seaton Snook and North Gare. Meet at end of Zinc Works Road at 9.30 am. Seaton Snook will still have several species of tern and hopefully some Arctic Skuas and several wader species. Further details from Chris Sharp 01429 865163.
Sunday 25th September 2005	Billingham Bottoms. Meet at Billingham Bottoms Visitor Centre at 10 am. A chance to explore this under-watched area. A good variety of woodland and marsh species should be seen. Further details from Dave Laing 01642 316101
Saturday 15th October 2005	Seal Sands. Meet at Teesmouth Field Centre at 10 am. A chance to view Seal Sands from the hide in front of the Power Station. Good views of waders and ducks are assured and the seals should be loafing around too. Further details from Julie Mason 01642 614583

All the above outings should last about 2-2.5 hours

MALLARDS, COOTS AND CANADA GEESE

It has long been recognised that the monthly WeBS counts do not give an accurate picture of the total numbers of some of our commoner water birds. In an attempt to gain a better knowledge of the numbers involved and to encourage members, particularly new ones, to contribute to survey work, the Club is organising counts of as many of the lakes and ponds as possible in Cleveland. These will be undertaken on a monthly basis from this winter, commencing in October 2005 and extending to March 2006.

Hopefully, public parks such as Stewart, Albert, Ropner, Ward Jackson and Locke, can be counted on the same weekend as the WeBS counts. All you would have to do is record the numbers of ducks, geese, Coots, Moorhens, etc you see on each visit.

If you feel you can count an area of water near you please contact me at chrisandlucia@sharp12756.freeserve.co.uk or ring me on 01429 865163.

Chris Sharp

COMMITTEE NEWS

Five-Year Plan

Work is progressing very well on the Five-Year Plan and the Sub Committees have been working hard on key targets. The Charity Commission has approved our revised Constitution, endorsed by members at the April AGM, and we are currently analysing the results of our first Members' Questionnaire Survey for over 25 years. The New Member's Pack is nearing completion and our profile continues to rise with greater press, TV and media coverage than ever before.

Membership Questionnaire

Approximately one third of Club members returned their Questionnaires and we can only assume that those who didn't respond are perfectly happy with the way the Club is being managed. Those who did reply provided extremely interesting and useful comments, on which the Committee and Sub Committees will act to further improve the Club and its activities for members. The broad results of the Questionnaire Survey will be presented in the next Newsletter, once our analysis has been completed.

Local Outings

Two local outings have recently been held: one to Saltholme Pools/North Tees Marshes led by Chris

Sharp and another to Scaling Dam led by Ted Parker. Those members who turned up had an enjoyable couple of hours and we hope to run more to other local sites in the near future.

Hartlepool Observatory

Following the depressing news in the last Newsletter, we are pleased to announce that some progress has been made on two fronts. Firstly, having received a letter from the Club outlining our demise, Iain Wright, MP for Hartlepool, contacted Ted Parker to state that, whilst he supports the regeneration of the Heugh Battery in principle, he has spoken to Jim Knight MP (the Minister responsible for birds in the UK) and they are to have a meeting, following which they hope to engineer a mutually satisfactory solution. Second, following a very productive and cordial meeting with PD Ports (see below), the company has agreed to meet Club representatives to discuss the possible use of the Heugh Lighthouse site as an alternative location for our bird observatory. At last, there appears to be a chink of light at the end of the tunnel and we will continue to press our case until we get a satisfactory outcome. We will keep you informed of any future developments.

Offshore Wind Farm

In January this year, we received a written response from Entec on our Objection Statement and this was considered by the Club's Windfarm Working Party on 18th April. The outcome of the review was that the consultant's response in no way altered our stance. No new evidence was presented. The Working Party prepared a written response, which was approved by the Committee on 25th April, and this was forwarded to Entec and the DTI the next day.

Our statement, submitted to EDF Energy, concluded as follows:

"Having reviewed Entec's comments on our 'Objection Statement', the Working Party unanimously agreed to maintain the Teesmouth Bird Club's vehement objection to the Teesside Offshore Windfarm. This is our 'final stake in the ground.'"

In June, Ted Parker was interviewed by Adrian Pitches for the BBC's 'Look North' programme and he reaffirmed the TBC's opposition to the development. The DTI has still to announce its decision but, provided English Nature and the RSPB hold their objections, we think we have a chance of winning the case against this damaging development. We owe a great deal to the professionalism and hard work of the Redcar residents' group, Save Our Shoreline (SOS), in presenting its objections on visual, noise, beach erosion and other grounds and to Vera Baird MP, who has been extremely supportive and lobbied hard within the Government.

Meeting with PD Ports

In April, following an invitation from PD Ports, Don Page and Ted Parker had a very productive and cordial 'working lunch' with Andrew Ridley, Conservancy Operations Manager, and Jerry Drewitt, Harbourmaster, followed by a trip around the river mouth by motor launch. At the meeting, I gave a brief resume of the Club's history, its activities, the Five-Year Plan and our aspirations for the future. I am confident that the meeting will pave the way for a good working relationship between the Club and PD Ports (formerly the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority), something that hasn't existed for a very long time. The trip around the Tees also gave PD Ports an opportunity to tell us about their work, including their proposals for the new deepwater facility near Tees Dock.



TBC MEETING WITH PD TEESPORT:
From left, Andrew Ridley (Conservancy Operations Manager, PD Teesport), Anna Moody (RSPB), Jerry Drewitt (Harbourmaster) and Don Page (TBC).



TBC MEETING WITH PD TEESPORT:
On PD Teesport's motor launch with Andrew Ridley (left) and Jerry Drewitt (right).

Reed Bed Damage

Anyone who has been birding on the Long Drag in recent months will have noticed serious damage to the reed-beds by roaming cattle, which caused distress and disturbance to breeding Reed Warblers, Water Rails and other species. Following serious concerns expressed by some of our members, we contacted English Nature who met with the grazier, Mr Horne, to resolve the problem but, despite this, there was a second 'invasion' by cattle, resulting in one of our members, himself, chasing over 40 beasts out of the reed beds. Following this, we put our concerns in writing to English Nature and we hope that the problem has now been resolved. If anyone sees any further incidents, please email Ted Parker:

ecparker@supanet.com

Scaling Dam

Water level management continues to pay dividends and 2 pairs of Little Ringed Plovers have bred this summer, with 1 pair producing 3 young on the Reserve. The Scaling Dam Wildlife Advisory Group is currently assessing the feasibility and costs of creating new shoreline in front of the hide and creating several new, large islands. It is also hoped to erect an Osprey tower this year.

Port Developments

The Conservation Sub Committee is to forward comments on a consultant's Scoping Report in connection with a proposed new deepwater port facility near Tees Dock by PD Teesport. In our response, we will raise any issues of concern, highlight the need for any further specific surveys/research and look at ways in which the Club can use its ornithological data to inform the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Seal Sands Toxic Waste Disposal Facility

The Board of INEOS Chlor, owners of the No 5 Brine field at Greenabella Marsh, has decided not to divest the land to Coastal Caverns UK Limited. This effectively pulls the plug on this highly sensitive site being used for underground toxic waste disposal, which is very good news, as the Club had major concerns over this.

Reclamation Pond

We have learnt that the Reclamation Pond and Dormans Pool have been sold to Impetus Reclamation Ltd, the same company that operates the Cowpen Bewley Tip. Work has already started (without our knowledge or input) on the excavation of one of the compensatory lagoons near Cowpen Bewley, where a

large pile of soil has recently appeared near the existing waste tip. Work on the second site at Port Clarence Pools has not yet started but this may possibly spell the 'death knell' for this superb site. It is intended to eventually infill the Pond using material from the surrounding, botanically-rich 'plateau' (including the raised car park on the eastern side) and the site will then see speculative industrial development, possibly involving hazardous or energy-producing industry.



*Reclamation Pond as it was (ca 1983):
Fluctuating water levels, with large areas of peripheral mud (Ted Parker).*

This is lamentable, because a report commissioned by One North East and published last year, concluded that there is a large surplus of industrial development land in Cleveland. Why then do we need more?



*Reclamation Pond now:
Permanently high water levels and no peripheral mud
(Ted Parker).*

Under the North Tees Agreement (NTA), drawn up in 1995, various bodies, including English Nature, RSPB, Cleveland Wildlife Trust, Teesside Development Corporation (TDC) and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, endorsed the loss of the Reclamation Pond in return for the retention of and improvements to Dormans Pool. Ironically, the RSPB had no presence

in Cleveland at that time and the TDC no longer exists! Improvements to Dormans Pool were to include a new hide but, since 1995, events have overtaken this Agreement and the Club has built its own Jeff Youngs Hide, which has been very successful. The TBC was not party to the NTA and this presumably explains why we were the only objector to the Planning Application, which was approved by Stockton Council in 2003. In our Objection Statement, we requested meetings with the Council and developers, but were not afforded the courtesy of a reply by the Council. There is little doubt that, although the Reclamation Pond has changed character in recent years, it is still one of the most important habitats not only in the Tees Valley but also in the whole of the Northern Region. The Club will do whatever it can to raise public awareness of just how important this site is and try to salvage something from

what is an extremely regrettable and unfortunate situation.

Teesmouth NNR Car Park

At the 2005 Teesmouth Bird Club AGM, some members raised concerns about the lack of parking facilities at Greatham Creek for accessing the Saline Lagoon, Greenabella Marsh and the Seal Sands Hide and the dangers this posed to motorists. After raising our concerns with English Nature, English Nature entered into discussions with the site's owners, INEOS Chlor, and it has finally been agreed that the car park will re-open on Monday 18th July 2005.

Ted Parker – Chairman

PROFILE: DAVE SIMPSON

This is the first of a new series of profiles on local birders and is based on 'interviews', with set questions. The first of these features Dave Simpson, who has been a member of the Teesmouth Bird Club since the early 1960's. He talked to Ted Parker about his birding life.

Dave was born in 1939 in the house in which he still lives at Shotton Colliery, Durham. Now retired, he was a joiner by trade. His interest in birds started when he was only 7 years old, when he was shown 2 Waxwings – a near-mythical bird at that tender age. He joined the Junior Bird Recorders' Club (now the Young Ornithologists' Club) in 1951, the RSPB in 1953 and the BTO in 1956. Dave has been birding for nearly 60 years and his Cleveland List currently stands at a creditable 297. His 'local patch', however, is the back of his house at Shotton Colliery, where he has seen an impressive number of birds. Dave's favourite birding site in Cleveland is Hartlepool Headland and its gardens, where he can combine sea watching with looking for migrants. He joined the Teesmouth Bird Club in 1961, only a year after it was formed, and, in many respects, he 'qualifies' as one of its founder members, along with Graham Bell and Phil Stead. The

main changes Dave has witnessed at Teesmouth since that time have involved the terrible loss of habitat, particularly at Cowpen Marsh and Seal Sands.



The optics Dave uses at present are Zeiss 7x42 binoculars and a Leica 'scope, with zoom lens. His favourite book is 'Wild America' by Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher. Dave's other interests, apart from bird watching, include pigeon racing, which he started after the War and continued unabated until 1998. The most impressive birding site he has ever visited is Minsmere, which he likes so much because of its wide range

of habitats, including heath, woodland, marsh, sea, dunes, reed-bed and scrub. The best day's birding Dave has had in Cleveland was finding an Arctic Warbler with Tom Francis at Hartlepool Headland in September 1996, while his best personal finds are Pectoral Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope. Dave's biggest birding disappointment was missing a Black Stork at Holywell Pond by 3 minutes, after being stuck in traffic in the Tyne Tunnel. He was compensated to some extent, however, by a Bonaparte's Gull later that day. The most memorable bird that Dave has ever seen is one that most serious Cleveland listers would give their right arm for – a Dusky Thrush at Hartlepool Headland in 1963. Needless to say, there hasn't been one in Cleveland since. His biggest 'ambition bird' at present is to see a Black Guillemot at Hartlepool Headland – surely an achievable, though difficult, target. When asked about his most embarrassing moment, Dave confidently told me that, unlike most of us, he hasn't had one!

Being such a long-standing member of the Club, Dave has seen many changes in this area over the years, the most dramatic being the loss of habitat around the Tees Estuary, notably Cowpen Marsh and Seal Sands. When asked for his views about the Club, he thinks that it has greatly improved in recent years. Although he cannot make the

evening meetings, Dave is a regular sight around the Tees Estuary, almost always accompanied by his sister, Brenda, who never fails to produce some appetising tit-bit to get the taste buds going! He enjoys reading the quarterly Newsletter and feels part of a 'community' being a member of the TBC.

When asked about his hopes for the future, Dave would like to see Dormans Pool better managed and with more mud and the Club itself acquiring an area of its own to manage for birds. He is desperately worried about the fate of the Reclamation Pond and hopes that this outstanding site can be

protected for years to come. One thing is for sure, the Club will do everything in its power to try and ensure that this happens.

Ted Parker

WHALE & DOLPHIN WATCHING ON THE CHEAP!

For the last few years I have been supplementing my favourite seabird watching with a number of Cetacean watching jaunts, some of which have been reported in previous Newsletters by Alan Wheeldon in his customary meticulous and detailed fashion. As a result of our last trip together across the Bay of Biscay, I volunteered to be a researcher with the Biscay Dolphin Research Programme (BDRP), which has been monitoring the wildlife of the Western Approaches and Biscay for the last 9 years.

In January and February 2004, I duly undertook my two training cruises and in April embarked as "Relief Wildlife Officer" on board the P & O cruise ferry, 'Pride of Bilbao', sailing from Portsmouth to Bilbao. I subsequently completed seven cruises across Biscay during 2004, in April, May, September and November. Only the April cruise lived up to Biscay's reputation for storms, the rest being, at worst, mildly uncomfortable and at best, dead calm.

On each 4-day cruise there is a BDRP Wildlife Officer on board, usually Clive Martin, who is a director and joint founder of the organisation and who delivers two free presentations to interested passengers, as well as two "deck watches" to help people spot the whales for themselves. He also announces sightings to the outer decks and the observation lounge, which offers excellent forward views from below the bridge, in warmth and comfort! As well as dolphins and whales the BDRP records all wildlife, including seabirds, fishes, turtles, migrant birds and insects, which often hitch a lift on board, and even notable invertebrates like jellyfish swarms, cuttlefish and plankton blooms. This important research has yielded a wealth of data, which continue to add to our understanding of cetacean ecology and distribution and which will be crucial for the battle to ensure their long-term survival. BDRP is financially dependent on voluntary contributions, despite the generous cooperation of P & O, and clothing and souvenirs can be purchased at the presentations.

What makes this cruise route so special is that the southbound course crosses the edge of the continental shelf, about 60 miles south of Ushant, and across the

4,000-metre deep waters above the abyssal plain of the North Atlantic. It is here that the North Atlantic Drift current brings nutrient-rich waters from the depths up to the surface and within reach of the visible ecosystem. The course passes round Ushant and into Biscay around midday and, if the conditions allow, the Captain will often alter course so that the Continental Shelf edge is crossed sooner, during mid- afternoon, when the seabed drops from around 200 metres to more than 4000 metres in a few miles. The upwelling of cold nutrient-rich water towards the surface at this submarine cliff edge provides food for the marine ecosystem.

The simplified food chain is as follows: plankton feeding on nutrients is, in turn, eaten by crustaceans, such as shrimps and crab larvae. Small fish, like Sardines, which feed on the plankton and shrimps, are themselves predated by larger fish, such as Mackerel and Sea Bass and even bigger fish, including Yellow-fin Tuna, sharks and billfish, as well as the cetaceans, notably dolphins and whales. Seabirds also take advantage of this bounty and, depending on the season, can include gulls and Gannets, Fulmars, auks, terns and, in later summer and autumn, Manx, Great, Cory's, Balearic and even Little Shearwaters, Storm, Leach's and Wilson's Petrels, Arctic, Great, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, Grey Phalaropes and Sabine's Gulls.

The cetaceans on the northern shelf edge often include Bottle-nosed and Common Dolphins, Pilot Whales, Minke Whales and, further south south, occasional Fin Whales with their huge 8 metre 'blows' appearing like ethereal trees in the middle of the ocean, before their sleek grey backs with the sharp acute fins slide powerfully back into the deep. With a lot of luck, you could also see Sperm Whales, Killer Whales, Risso's Dolphins and even the mighty Blue Whale on this leg of the journey. By dusk, the ship reaches the centre of the Bay of Biscay, in deep water, and wondering what you are missing, this is the time to catch up on food and liquid refreshment in one of the excellent restaurants, bars or even the nightclub for those with stronger constitutions than me! The ferry is a huge floating village, with all mod cons, including two cinemas showing new releases and plenty of quiet lounges and bars as well as a supermarket, swimming pool, beauty salon (no I didn't...but thanks for asking) and other facilities.

Early next morning, the ship arrives at Santurtzi harbour, where coach trips are available to Bilbao (and the Guggenheim Museum) or along the coast to a fishing village, for those on the 4-day Mini Cruise. I usually walk from the ferry through the dreary-looking blocks of flats and up the hill behind the small town, about a two-hour stroll, including birding time. As soon as I get into the scrubby area above the town, my ears are assaulted by a Cetti's Warbler blasting out its song from a bramble patch. On the May trip, Melodious Warblers were singing from the top of the bramble patches, along with Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Stonechats, Whitethroats and Serins. At the old gun battery, two-thirds of the way to the top, views east across to further ranges of hills deserve careful scanning, as I have seen up to 40 Griffon Vultures, Black Kites, Common Buzzards, Red Kites, Honey Buzzards, Peregrines and Hobby, with Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes on the bushes on the hillside. Turtle Doves, Spotted Flycatchers and, hopefully, singing Wrynecks are added to the list on the downward stroll, usually taking about an hour and leaving some leeway before the midday sailing. The Harbour itself has hordes of Yellow-legged Gulls, along with Sandwich Terns and Mediterranean Gulls and Black Redstarts on the warehouse roof.

The northbound trip is often the most productive for cetaceans and watching commences immediately beyond the harbour for Risso's Dolphins, Bottle-nosed and Common Dolphins and Pilot Whales, the latter three almost guaranteed in calm conditions from June through to September. Once over the deep Cap Breton ocean trench in the early afternoon, there is a good chance of the enigmatic Cuvier's Beaked Whale or even Northern Bottle-nosed Whales. In this deeper water, groups of Common Dolphins are often seen, along with the even more athletic Striped Dolphins, leaping vertically several metres, somersaulting and creating huge splashes as they race towards the boat, vying for the best position to bow ride on the pressure wave at the front of the ship. This is the real treat for the passengers on deck or in the observation lounges, as here are wild animals which come towards us and seem to enjoy their contact with humans. When they tire, they drop back along the side of the ship and continue to leap out of the wash waves which arc out from the stern.

Continuing northwards into the deep water of the abyssal plain again, there is the best chance of seeing the great whales, especially the Fin Whales, which are resident in Biscay but much commoner from June through to October, in most years. Rarities have included Sperm Whales with calves, Sei Whale, Humpback Whale, Killer Whale and Blue Whale. Porbeagle and Thresher Sharks hunt the fish shoals, while Basking Sharks Hoover up the plankton. Yellow-fin Tuna can often be seen leaping out of the sea in pursuit of the baitfish, which make the water boil with their frantic efforts to escape. I once saw a group of flying fish being chased by a leaping tuna in this area.

Ocean Sunfish are often seen drifting along the side of the ship, looking like large, anaemic pizzas with a curious eye staring eye and one should always look out for turtles.

The seabirds can be very scarce in this area. Gannets are the most frequent and there is always the chance of Balearic, Great or Cory's Shearwaters, the latter lazily loping along at what appears to be less than stalling speed in light winds. It is in this area that the Little Shearwaters occur most often, as well as Wilson's Petrels, when conditions are ideal. Much more likely in late summer and autumn are flocks of Sabine's Gulls and occasional Grey Phalaropes, terns, Little Gulls and auks. Passing migrants have included Whimbrel, Little Egrets, Ringed Plovers, Grey Plovers, Swifts, Swallows, Turtle Doves and Collared Doves, with stowaways including Whitethroats, Reed and Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Spotted Flycatchers, Song Thrushes and Starlings. Insects, like Humming-bird Hawk Moths, Death's Head Hawk Moth, Hover Flies, butterflies and even beetles can often be found on a dawn sweep of the ships lights.

The final morning of the cruise sails northeast up the western approaches and into the English Channel. In winter, Common Dolphins frequent this area and it is here that they become victims to the Bass Fishery, where hundreds, perhaps thousands are drowned or crushed in the nets of pair-fishing trawlers from our EEC neighbours EACH YEAR! This "by catch" is being addressed by the EEC with its usual lethargy and the customary French denial that there is a problem. Minke Whales and Basking Sharks may also be encountered in these waters and seabirds include Storm Petrels, Fulmars, skuas, Manx and Balearic Shearwaters, Gannets, auks, gulls and terns. Our most unusual sighting was a Black Swan, mid-channel, flying strongly east! Passage migrants are often encountered, especially in poor weather. As the ship rounds the Isle of Wight and enters the Solent, look out for Mediterranean Gulls and Little Egrets, as well as the warships of the Royal Navy and views of 'The Victory' and our old friend 'The Warrior' in the Historic Quay. The ship usually docks around 5 pm and disembarking takes place very soon afterwards to facilitate a 4-hour turnaround, with the next cruise currently leaving at 8.45pm. There is secure parking close to the ferry terminal, which costs about £26 for the duration of a 4-day cruise, and the drive down from Teesside takes around 6 hours.

Details of the cruises can be obtained from P & O at their website POferries.com, but look out for the BDRP Theme Cruises which provide extra watches and access on the ship. www.Biscay-Dolphin.org.uk. There are often two-for-one offers for the mini cruises out of the usual tourist season.

Bon voyage!

Chris Bielby

BIRDING POLAND

Graham Megson gives an account of a trip he made to Poland in May 2005 with Mark Askew, Mike Corner and Ian Boustead. All photographs are by Ian Boustead.

It ended with a flight back to Stanstead Airport in Essex, which was convenient, due to the presence of a Trumpeter Finch at Landguard Point. Some four hours after being in Warsaw we were enjoying a British lifer in Suffolk!

It started with a double blow out after hitting a Polish pot-hole, some two hours and sixty kilometres into the Polish countryside. Aiming to reach our accommodation at a reasonable hour, we were instead stranded for five hours until a replacement hire car was delivered. Meantime, we had gone knocking on doors, attracted a crowd of onlookers and sat through a thunderstorm. This was our first taste of Polish people and the Polish countryside. It was also our first taste of Polish birds, such as the flocks of White-winged Black Terns and Black Terns, with Hobby and male Red-footed Falcon hawking insects. A dead Pine Marten was a road casualty and numerous live mosquitoes made themselves a nuisance. Having awoken our host at the chalet, we settled down for a few hours sleep before slipping into the pattern of early morning to late evening birding.

Our week was divided into five days in the Bialowieza Forest and two days around the Biebrza Marshes. For two full days, we hired the services of a Polish guide, Waldemar Krasowski, who can be contacted at birding@birdguide.pl and we can highly recommend him. The poor lad must have cursed when he saw our bird 'hit list' – hardly the easiest species to find under pressure!



Barred Warbler

We asked for various scarce woodpeckers, Hazel Hen, Tengmalm's Owl and Pygmy Owl! His efforts weren't helped by the wet, cool weather during his two days with us. In fact, it was proving to be a late spring, with species such as Greenish Warbler (which we missed),

Pied Flycatcher, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Citrine Wagtail (also missed) being thin on the ground. Black Woodpecker was seen well and we had good views of a number of birds, including an adult feeding chicks at a nest hole.



Penduline Tit

We also self-found our second target bird on our first full day in the forest - a White-backed Woodpecker. The birding was excellent and we found that good views of most species was the norm, including birds such as Thrush Nightingale, Great Reed Warbler, River Warbler, Corncrake (with care) and Lesser Spotted Eagle. The daily fare included Hawfinch, Common Rosefinch, Serin, Red-backed Shrike, Wryneck and Collared Flycatcher.

Butterflies were harder to find, due to the initial poor weather, with Small-tailed Blue being an unfamiliar species. Two or three Large Tortoiseshells were hard to get good views of. Then we checked a sand pit and a Camberwell Beauty was seen well as it basked in the sunshine. Two others were also seen during the week.



Collared Flycatcher

During our first day with Valdi, we got soaked three times. He called to a Nutcracker, which answered but didn't show and he took us to two or three Hazel Hen locations. This proved to be the hardest species to see

and one which needed full commitment. After Mark had seen one fly across the road, we had it within earshot for ages, giving its distinctive high-pitched call. However, it kept giving us the slip and was only seen once again when it ran in front of me, paused, panicked and flew low into thick forest.



Thrush Nightingale

Together we staked out a reported Three-toed Woodpecker nest hole and soon saw this magnificent species, one of the best birds of the trip. Our search for Grey-headed Woodpecker was proving frustrating, however, and this species eluded us for quite a few days. As darkness fell, Valdi led us into the forest to a known Tengalm's Owl site and called the bird. Within minutes, it responded and Mark was the first to spot it as it flew into a conifer above us. Valdi spotlighted it and, for a few minutes, we watched it staring back at us. A lifer for all four of us and one we would not have been surprised to miss. Nice one Valdi!



River Warbler

Our visit to the Bachury fish ponds and to Siemianowka Reservoir coincided with a showery day, with occasionally sunny spells. Raptors showed well, with White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Goshawk, Osprey and Hobby. Other soaring

birds included the ubiquitous White Stork, a single Black Stork and Common Crane. We followed the railway towards Belarus but didn't reach the border. There is a massive reservoir here, where we saw plenty of birds but could not locate Citrine Wagtail. A trip to the lake at Michnowka was disappointing for birds but a Grass Snake was captured and photographed. Salamanders, however, eluded us despite much log turning.



Savi's Warbler

On the Wednesday, Ian stayed in Palacowy Park photographing birds, while the rest of us paid to be guided into the Strict Reserve – the ancient forest which is non-intervention, apart from some 9%, which is accessible for guided parties. The area of this specially protected reserve is an impressive 10,500 hectares and is what British woodland must have looked like in the distant past but ours is now all felled, isolated, re-planted or managed in some way and we have no true 'wildwood' remaining. Nor do we have the animals associated with large, ancient tracts of forest, such as Wild Boar, European Beaver, Elk and Wolf. It is also why our forest resource cannot hold specialist species that rely on dead timber and large tracts of forest, such as Black Woodpecker. Britain does, however, share a similar flora. The striking feature of the Polish forests was the absence of Bluebell. In fact, Britain holds the bulk of the European resource and we have an obligation to conserve Bluebell woods under European Union legislation.

Only one area of Ramsons, or 'Wild Garlic', was seen. Some quite rare British plants were common here, including May Lily, Solomon's Seal, Herb Paris and others, and, as expected, there was a good representation of fungi, lichens, ferns and mosses. Our final night in the forest area was spent at a Pygmy Owl site recommended by Valdi, but this time the owl did not respond to our calls and we failed to see it.

Our changeover day was particularly busy. We were up early to finally track down a Grey-headed Woodpecker, which we called into an oak, where it gave excellent views. We then tried again for Hazel Hen but it was

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proving equally elusive, so we headed across country to the Biebrza Marshes. Mark dropped us off and headed just as quickly back again, having left his bins in the car park at the Grey-headed Woodpecker site! He re-joined us later having recovered them and we made our way to our second chalet. This was nice and convenient for the Budy Great Snipe 'lek', where we arrived just after 7pm to find double figures of birds already lekking. The most popular lek for birders is viewed from a platform. A walk out to the watchtower was worthwhile for the views, sunset and distant Elk.

Our final full day was spent driving around the marsh hot spots, picking up birds like Ortolan Bunting, Penduline Tit, the rarer grebes, Black Stork, Wild Boar

(in the reeds), Savi's Warbler and a singing Aquatic Warbler in full view. We didn't see Spotted Eagle and wader numbers and variety were very poor. A man photographing marsh frogs turned out to be Dr Peter Evans from Cleveland, but continuing attention from mosquitoes forced only a brief chat!

The trip totals were 153 birds, 15 butterflies, eight dragonflies and damselflies and six mammals (plus two unidentified bats, one of which was possibly a horseshoe sp), a distant Otter or European Beaver and an unidentified shrew.

Graham Megson

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All unsolicited copy welcome, ideally as a word processed computer file, but typed and handwritten copy is equally acceptable. Any topic concerning birds or the local environment is grist to the mill.