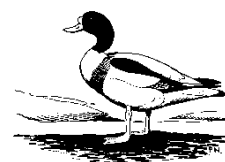


Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

April 2020 (No.75)



Reg.Charity No.508850

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CROSSWORD

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 situation we are currently in I am unable to access the answers to the last crossword and the new crossword. Hopefully both will appear in the next newsletter

NOVEMBER 2019

Having been photographed at South Gare in mid-October, the Kentish Plover was relocated on Redcar Stray on 1st, where it commuted between the beach at Marske to the beach by Zetland Road roundabout depending on the tide and disturbance, until 4th. Also on 1st, an Iceland Gull was at Saltburn and a ringtail Hen Harrier was at Hummersea. Next day another Great White Egret flew over Haverton Hole and a Long-tailed Duck was on Saltholme Pools from 3rd.



Kentish Plover

Rob Young

A strong North-easterly wind on 5th brought a few Little Auks and skuas to the coastline, and a rather late Barred Warbler to Hartlepool, which stayed almost three weeks. The last two Swallows of the year were at Hartlepool on 6th, a Common Scoter was on Scaling Dam and a duck Mandarin was on Lockwood Beck, both on 7th, and a significant arrival of passerines was noted on 9th; these included Pallas's Warblers at Hartlepool and North Gare, an Eastern Black Redstart at Boulby and a Firecrest at Brotton Golf Course. A White-fronted Goose was on Back Saltholme on the

same day. Perhaps the same Firecrest was at Skelton on 15th.



Barred Warbler

Renton Charman

The morning of 19th saw the first real frost, and ice on freshwater, when -2C was recorded. At least five Bearded Tits were on Coatham Marsh and at least three were on Dormans Pool, also from 19th, and a Hooded Crow was on Hartlepool North Sands. Birders looking for the Bearded Tits on Coatham Marsh found two Bitterns and two Cetti's Warblers there on 20th, another White-fronted Goose was seen from 24th, this time on Seaton Common, and four more Cetti's Warblers were located on Portrack Marsh on 26th.



Snow Bunting

Rob Young

A movement of geese was evident from 27th with hundreds of Pink-footed Geese heading South for a few days, a Tundra Bean Goose on Seaton Common from 27th, a Dark-bellied Brent Goose around Saltholme from 28th and

two more Tundra Bean Geese on Cowpen Bewley Tip Pools from 30th.

DECEMBER 2019

This was rather a quiet month, as is frequently the case. Very few frosty mornings were recorded and the only snow fell in the East of the county on 15th but was gone within a day. One White-fronted Goose was with Greylags on Cowpen Bewley tip pools from 1st, being joined by another three on 5th, a Black Redstart was at Hartlepool on 1st, perhaps the same bird being seen between Hartlepool Marina and the fish Quay from 22nd, a late Blackcap was in RSPB Saltholme garden on 4th, eight Pale-bellied Brent Geese were around Seal Sands from 5th, 14 Waxwings were at Saltholme briefly on 8th and a Rough-legged Buzzard was at Scaling Dam on the same day.



Tundra Bean Geese

Ian Forrest

A smart drake Long-tailed Duck was by Saltburn Pier from 17th, a Great Northern Diver was off South Gare from 21st, a Hen Harrier was around Sleddale from 22nd, a Chiffchaff was at Haverton Hole from 25th, a different Great Northern Diver was found dead at Hartlepool on 27th, and seven Waxwings were at Haverton Hole on 28th,

Birds staying into 2020 included seven species of geese and at least two Marsh Harriers around Teesmouth, Greenshank and Spotted Redshank on Cowpen Marsh, Black Redstart near Hartlepool Marina, Green Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper (for second winter) at Portrack, at least 15 Cetti's Warblers spread around five areas of marsh, Bearded Tits on

Dormans Pool, and two Long-tailed Ducks off Redcar

JANUARY 2020

There is always a new-found enthusiasm amongst the birders on the first day of the new year, trying to see and/or find as many birds as possible. It is reasonably easy to see 100 species on 1st Jan, given a bit of planning and some luck, especially with the weather.

No snow fell on Cleveland during the month and the only morning that registered below freezing was 20th, with -2C and thin ice on some fresh water. Two days later it was warm enough for a few butterflies to be noted, and on 23rd, an earthquake measuring 3.0 on the Richter scale with its epicentre in Stockton, shook some Teessiders awake at 5.55am.



Woodlark

Ian Forrest

Bird of the month was found on 1st, a Woodlark by Old Cemetery Road, Hartlepool that stayed at least four days, and was joined by two Snow Buntings and a Black Redstart next day. Two Lapland Buntings were at Hummersea on 4th, one of which stayed for many days, the first two Waxwings of the year were in Billingham from 7th, an adult male Marsh Harrier joined the four or five individuals already around Saltholme from 12th, and a third Black Redstart was found on 13th, this one at Skinningrove.



Black Redstart

Ian Watson

A Glaucous Gull and an Iceland Gull were on Saltholme on 18th, the same day as a Waxwing visited the car park there, the only Scaup of the month was in the river at Preston Park from 24th, a Hooded Crow flew South over Dormans Pool on 25th, and a single White-fronted Goose was in Greatham Tank Farm from 28th.

The last day of the month recorded 14C in the afternoon.

FEBRUARY 2020

This will be remembered as an extremely wet and windy month, with Storm Ciara passing over Scotland on 9th, Storm Dennis following the same track on 15th-16th and several other less severe weather systems creating wind and rain throughout the month. Large parts of the UK experienced flooding and high winds, but here in Cleveland we escaped relatively unscathed. Snow caused chaos on the roads of Durham and Yorkshire on 24th, but almost none fell on Cleveland.

A Hen Harrier was seen, principally in the Lockwood Beck area, from 4th, the first returning Avocet was on Seal Sands on 7th, a very small number of Snow Buntings could be found from 12th, up to three at Hartlepool, eight at South Gare and three at North Gare, and a Red Kite was over Redcar on 14th.

The Glaucous Gull seen on Saltholme in Jan was there again on several dates from 15th, 15 Waxwings were at Bowesfield on 17th-18th, another three Waxwings were in South Bank on 19th, (and six on 26th), a Ruddy Shelduck was

around Saltholme and Cowpen Marsh from 22nd and two Ravens flew over Brotton Golf Course on 25th.

Being a leap year, there was a 29th of the month, but all that arrived was a Great Skua off Hartlepool and more wind and rain in the form of Storm Jorge; this, combined with all of the rain throughout the month, rendered February 2020 in the UK the wettest February since records began.

LOCAL OUTINGS

Please check if they are cancelled before attending due to COVID-19

BOWESFIELD MARSH

Saturday 9th May 2020

Meet in the car park at 9.15 a.m. behind Archers Law for a walk in search of summer migrants and other resident birds with Chris Sharp. Hopefully summer visitors should include Sedge, Reed and Grasshopper Warblers. The "horse field" pond also is good spot for passage waders. The site has been particularly wet of late so strong footwear is advisable.

Leader: Chris Sharp Tel: 01429 865163

NIGHTJARS

June 2020

A very popular annual outing to Guisborough Forest to see the Nightjars. It is intended to visit here on a June night. Seeing and hearing them is very much influenced by the weather. It is therefore the plan to advertise this walk at a later date on the website whenever the weather conditions look favourable.

RSPB SALTHOLME WILDERNESS WALK

Saturday 18th July 2020

Meet in RSPB reception at 10.00 a.m. and join Chris Sharp for a walk around the perimeter of the Reserve. A good selection of summer visitors should be present. Sedge, Reed and Grasshopper Warblers are almost guaranteed. The first returning waders should also be passing through.

Leader: Chris Sharp

SEATON SNOOK

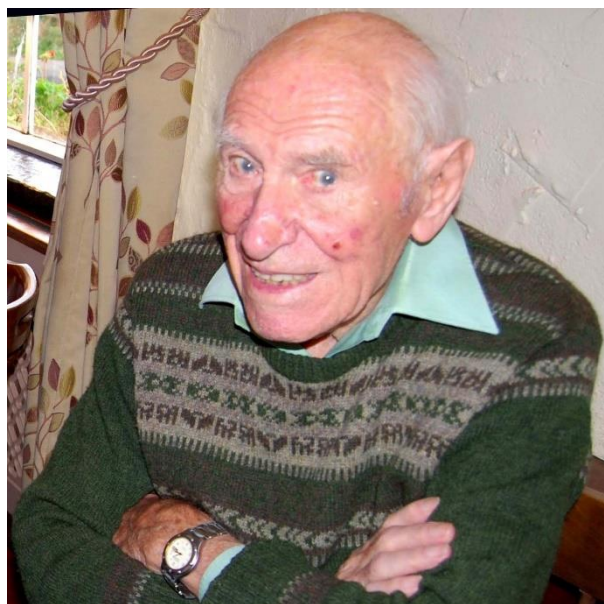
Saturday 29th August 2020

Meet at the end of the Zinc Works Road at 16.30. Join Graeme Joynt for this outing which has been arranged to coincide with a very high tide. Hopefully good numbers of passage waders should be present. Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Knot, Ringed Plover and Dunlin are amongst the targets but something scarcer may be present amongst the large numbers of the smaller waders which are often present here at this time of year. The Snook should also hold several species of tern at this time. Roseate Terns have been regular at this time of year in recent years.

Leader: Graeme Joynt

DENIS SUMMERS-SMITH

by Peter Evans



James Dennis Summers-Smith was a founder member of the Teesmouth Bird Club, was twice elected chairman, and was among the few who have achieved fame in two totally different branches of science - tribology and ornithology.

He was born in Glasgow in 1920, the son of a Scottish solicitor. The family had Protestant connections in Ireland and this came to the fore when they spent holidays in Donegal. His uncle was a keen naturalist and taught him to identify flowers and birds. In 1938 Denis joined a

skeleton force of the Territorial Army, which was organised so that it was ready to receive conscripts on the outbreak of war. He did the first two years of his B.Sc course at Glasgow and was then called up as a 2nd lieutenant in the 9th Cameronians. There was a night exercise, which required following a convoy of vehicles on his motorbike while wearing a gasmask. He went to sleep and when the convoy turned left, he continued straight on. In the absence of a hedge he continued into a field and woke up in Hexham hospital. More seriously, during another training exercise in the dark, he fell off a cliff and was seriously injured. He was told that he had severed a nerve in his spine and that he should expect to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. Fortunately, it was only a blood clot. He recovered, but was pronounced unfit for active duty. His response was to play squash until he was re-graded.

On D-Day, in June 1944, as captain, he went ashore with the Cameronians as part of the second wave to land on Gold beach. Opposition was light and the landing craft were able to come close inshore. The men jumped into the sea and ran to shore, but Denis leapt into a shell hole and, weighed down with heavy equipment, sank and only just managed to struggle back to the surface. He spent the next month in a continuous state of fear, not helped by his best friend being shot in the head just in front of him. They fought through heavy fighting near Caen, on through France and in August he found himself in an armoured vehicle leading the advance from the Falaise Gap. Joy was short-lived as his column met a group of German tanks and he was lucky to escape severely injured, but just alive. After initial treatment at Bayeux he was moved to a hospital in Worcester for assessment of whether he would live or die. This usually took two weeks, but Denis was marginal enough to require four. The hospital had been a sanatorium for TB patients, for whom plenty of fresh air was considered to be a prime requirement, and the nurses continued the habit of leaving the doors open. The local sparrows hopped in on the chance of food and that sparked his interest in the species. He was asked where he wished to be treated and suggested Glasgow. He was sent to a hospital in Cornwall, where neglect further endangered his

life. He managed to have himself moved to a hospital in Glasgow run by Canadian medicals and nurses, where treatment included plenty of time to play bridge. The downside was being injected painfully with antibiotics through thick needles every three hours day and night. It saved his life, but he never lost his fear of the sound of medical trolley wheels. His shattered leg was fitted with metal plates and he was sent to Hexham for physiotherapy. In 1945 he married Margaret Man, his physiotherapist, who had played a major part in getting him fit again.

He took a degree in metallurgy and worked for AEI, near Newbury, where he and Margaret lived in a cottage in Highclere which had no piped water, just a hand pump. He qualified for his doctorate, with a thesis so secret that his assessor had to be security cleared. Then he joined Aldermaston and when this post came to an end he was offered one at Cornell. He sold the house, booked a passage on the “Queen Mary” and was about to head for New York when Eisenhower, the new President, decreed that the job must go to an American. Denis had to find a job urgently and found ICI advertising one at Billingham. Margaret had decreed that she did not want to live in Middlesbrough, so he went for interview with a rather cavalier attitude. This went well and he was told that although the original vacancy had been filled, they would still like him to join. Margaret was pacified with a house in Stockton, where they lived when I first knew him and they later had a house, “Merlewood”, built to his design in Guisborough. ICI recognised that they had recruited someone a bit special and he became a Senior Scientist, which meant no administration and virtual freedom to research as he wished. He travelled to plants all over the world sorting out their problems. He became a world expert on lubricating big machines, including the Billingham compressors, and published several books on the subject.

Although he retired from ICI in 1982, he continued to work as a consultant in this field, acting as an expert witness in civil cases and training young tribologists in Venezuela and elsewhere. He could get by in Spanish and was fluent in German. His last big job was on some

major new electrical generating gear which had been installed at Tierra del Fuego. He flew there to find that the area was deep in snow and he had to wait for the weather to clear a bit before he could make a start. Having sorted out that problem, it was time to retire, or at least to stop suffering the increasing hassle of travelling by air – he was into his nineties.

As soon as he recovered from his wounds, he made a start with the sparrows, which he continued to study in many countries for the rest of his life. The results of his studies and accounts of his travels have been published in a series of books, first on the House Sparrow, then on other members of the sparrow family and on his travels. He clearly had a disturbing effect on the countries he visited as Czechoslovakia, the Seychelles, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iran and Liberia all had revolutions or other major upsets shortly after his departure. Margaret tragically died suddenly when they were in Ethiopia and Denis later married her best friend, also a physiotherapist named Margaret. In order to complete his sparrow studies he needed to see all the twenty odd *Passer* species in the field. He worked steadily through the list, until just two difficult ones were left, the Somali Sparrow, *Passer castanopterus* and the Saxaul Sparrow, *P. ammodendri*. For the Somali we hired a three ton 4WD Bedford lorry equipped with seats, took full camping gear, together with a driver and a cook. Apart from Denis and Margaret, there were Edgar and Margaret Gatenby, Ken Smith, Debbie Reynolds and two friends of Denis from Berkshire. We flew to Nairobi and carried on to Baringo Lodge, where we had to beware of the hippos which came out at night to graze the grass on which we had pitched our tents. Baringo Lodge had a resident ornithologist who, to our surprise, knew where we could find our sparrow. It was at Kapedo, in semi-desert, where a little hospital had water and its discharge produced an area of greenery supporting a number of the sparrows. For the Saxaul Sparrow, Denis needed to go to Russia at a time when such visits were not allowed. He had the necessary support from Russian academics but, although he met eminent Russians in England and tried his luck with

them, nothing materialised until, after glasnost, he was able to complete the set.

He was not averse to enjoying other birds and “Merlewood” had plenty. He benefited from his many contacts in facilitating his travels. In India a tour set up by one of his ICI friends there permitted us to enter parts of Assam not open to foreigners at the time. He was as confused as I was by the numerous plumages of Indian birds of prey, especially as there was no Indian field guide published back then. In his extensive travels through Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Far East he must have accumulated a life list to cherish, but he was never interested in keeping one.

Denis acquired many awards, had friends all over the world and a staggering list of e-mail contacts. He had a huge span of knowledge which far exceeded his specialities. He was widely read, knew his music and when we were staying in India with the tiger conservationist Billy Arjan Singh and his Indian Army brother, Balram, he was quite capable of matching stories of Indian regiments with those from the Scots. These could go on at some length in marked contrast to his telephone conversations, which were notably brief.

He believed fervently in detailed fieldwork to obtain a proper understanding of the population being studied in relation to the habitat. For House Sparrows it meant differences in ecology between city and country birds. He was dismissive of the excessive use of statistical processes, sometimes on small samples, on which some studies depended. He offered assistance to many young researchers and, as they were usually young ladies staying overnight, may have raised some interest with his neighbours. He took part in BTO censuses of farm birds for many years, but sparrows and their decline were his main concern and he pursued their cause with Government as well as in ornithological circles.

After he gave up long haul travel, he continued to walk. He regularly tested his capability into his nineties by taking on the Ingleby Incline. When he broke an ankle in the local forest, his surgeon complained of the difficulty of pinning

it, because it was already full of shrapnel. After his second Margaret died, he sold “Merlewood”, moved into smaller quarters in Guisborough and looked after himself, greatly helped by Stuart and Tammy Worton. Eventually, failing health persuaded him to move to a care home in Saltburn, but he continued to enjoy coming out for lunch every Wednesday and re-telling his stories.

What a man!



TITBITS

A collection of bird related news and facts, compiled by Eric James

PIGEON TOES

Rats are so hated by people that any other despised species is referred to as a form of rat; hence squirrels are ‘tree rats’ and Feral Pigeons are ‘flying rats’.

But no matter how much you dislike Feral Pigeons; it is difficult not to feel some sympathy for those birds with missing toes and other mutilations. While any fine thread that gets wrapped tightly round a toe will lead to its loss, an investigation into the distribution of injured birds and types of shops showed a strong correlation with hairdresser’s establishments ; the trimmed locks should be swept up and disposed with other waste, but any that escape and finish up on pavements are potential hazards to pigeons. Another observation from the investigation was that there are fewer injured birds in town centres where there are grassed areas.



I’m safe here

SINGING AND HAPPINESS

Singing, especially in choirs and other groups, is, I am told, an uplifting and pleasurable experience. Research on Zebra Finches shows that male birds also get an emotional boost when singing to a potential mate. Monitoring the brain of a singing male found activity in the ventral tegmental area, the part that responds to the feel-good brain chemical dopamine. This ‘reward’ encourages the male to sing more. It does not occur if the male is singing with no female present. Further research might discover whether the serenaded female experiences anything similar.

IF YOU DON’T LIKE THE COUNTRY, DON’T GO THERE

Every so often, there’s a story in the newspapers of someone who has moved to the country and then complains about cocks crowing in the mornings. In France, there was a legal complaint about ducks quacking in a neighbour’s farm; the French judge threw out the case.

“Mon dieu! Qu’est-[ce que tu attendais](#) ?”

A SPECIES EXTERMINATED TWICE

To paraphrase Lady Bracknell, ‘To become extinct once, might be regarded as a misfortune; but to become extinct twice looks like carelessness.’ This is what has happened to the Carolina Parakeet

This was the only parrot in the US and was once common and might have gone extinct more recently than thought. According to an analysis of records, the eastern subspecies of the Carolina parakeet might have clung on until the

1940s, three decades later than previous estimates.

[John Audubon wrote in the 1827 book 'The Birds of America'](#) that “This bright green bird with a red and yellow head was once found in much of the US, with its range stretching from the east coast to Nebraska in the Midwest, and as far south as Florida. “The stacks of grain put up in the field are resorted to by flocks of these birds, which frequently cover them so entirely, that they present to the eye the same effect as if a brilliantly coloured carpet had been thrown over them.” He also said that its numbers were declining rapidly. No doubt, the lethal combination of Americans and guns probably had something to do with it.

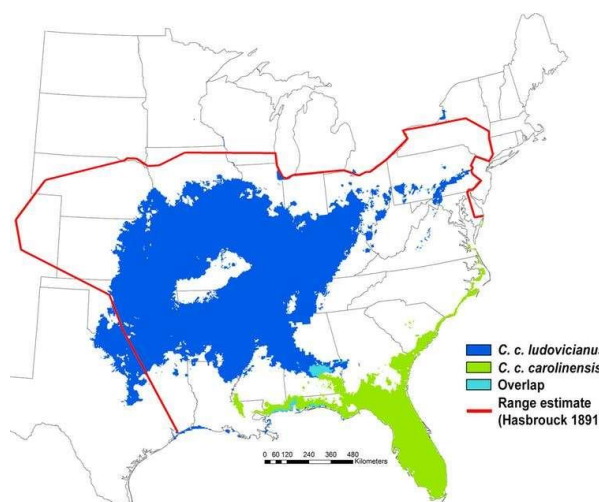
The species (*Conuropsis carolinensis*), consisting of two subspecies, went [extinct in the wild in 1915 according to a 2010 study](#), and the last captive bird died in 1918.

However, a researcher at the University of Connecticut has done an analysis of records of Carolina parakeets to try to work out what happened. In 2017, he showed that [the usual range of the parakeets was smaller than thought](#), and that the ranges of the two subspecies barely overlapped.

Now he then fed his data into a model used to estimate extinction dates. For the western subspecies, the most likely date is 1913, similar to other estimates. But the eastern subspecies, which was mainly found in Florida, clung on until around 1944, the model suggests.



Really all gone now and (below) where the species' range was in 1891, and the subsequent shrinking of the subspecies' ranges



NUTCRACKERS ARE THE REAL TOUGH NUTS

We are all aware of birds which store food for consumption later, notably Jays storing acorns, and suburban Coal Tits dashing back and forth with seeds from feeders before larger birds chase them off, and later baffling householders when sunflowers grow in their hanging baskets ; but the champion storers are the Nutcrackers that build caches of nuts to feed on during the winter. Living up to their name, they smash nuts open, jamming them in rocks to hold them when necessary. The kernels, up to a fifth of the weight of the bird, are carried in the expandable

food pouch and stored in small caches. The birds remember the locations, even when the winter snow is over three feet deep, and 80% of the nuts are subsequently eaten, with the remainder germinating and growing into new trees. The birds also defend their caches and drive off any others that attempt to dig through the snow where food is hidden.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT FOR THRUSH NIGHTINGALES

Researchers have been investigating the songs of Thrush Nightingales in their breeding areas of Poland and Russia and in the wintering area in Tanzania. The breeding season songs have a definite structure. These include pairs of notes that typically start a song, repeated notes and complex trills, and the rhythmic castanet-like notes that typically end a song. However, 89 per cent of the songs recorded in Tanzania lacked a typical song structure, were missing the silent pauses between phrases and had high variation in the sub-notes that make up the song. Consequently, they weren't recognisable as Thrush Nightingale song. One of the researchers said, "this is totally random vocalisation – there's no beginning, no end. It's more like improvising"; the winter songs recorded in the study are more typical of songs sung during early song development and suggest that Thrush Nightingales might be singing during the winter to improve the quality of their song, which is important in attracting a female.

ETHICAL OLIVE OIL

A previous Titbit mentioned the vacuum collection of olives, which has the unfortunate side effect of sucking in roosting birds, leading to enormous death rates. If you want to buy olive oil free from this, there is a website listing ethical companies :

<https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/olive-oil>

A SHORT-EARED OWL IN AFRICA

We associate Short-eared Owls with cold, harsh environments, so one in north Africa sounds

distinctly odd. The bird in question was a female that had bred on Arran and was fitted with a tracker device by the BTO. After some local movements, she returned to Arran for ten days before flying to Devon where she was present on 9th November; next day, she flew south into France, covering 307 miles, a tail wind helping her to an average speed of just over 50 miles/hr. she continued flying further south, crossing the Pyrenees on 13th November, and the Strait of Gibraltar on 24th November to reach Morocco.



The Owl's route from Scotland to Morocco

For more details of the tracking project, including the sad story of another owl, see

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/research-topics/tracking/tracking-studies/short-eared-owl-tracking>

The web address says it all!



Project leader, Ben Darvill, fitting a tag to an owl

PETS: GOOD OR BAD FOR WILDLIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT?

Although pets are said to be good for the mental health of their owners, it is not so clear that they don't have a significant effect on wildlife. Cat owners are aware of this from the mangled corpses their pets bring home.

A questionnaire survey of the numbers of animals brought home by domestic cats was conducted between 1st April and 31st August 1997. A total of 14370 prey items were brought home by 986 cats living in 618 households. Mammals made up 69% of the items, birds 24%, amphibians 4%, reptiles 1%, fish <1%, invertebrates 1% and unidentified items 1%. A minimum of 44 species of wild bird, 20 species of wild mammal, three species of reptile and three species of amphibian were recorded. This is the most direct effect on wildlife, but there are others: the mere presence of a free-roaming cat can instill fear and stress in birds, causing nesting adults to reduce their parenting and even abandon nests.

What happens if birds are attracted to a garden by having food put out? The survey results are not what you might expect: The number of birds and reptiles brought home per cat was significantly lower in households that provided food for birds. However, the number of bird species brought home was greater in households providing bird food.

Another survey, in the village of Felmersham in Bedfordshire, followed the predation by approximately 70 domestic cats over one year. All the prey items brought home by virtually all the cats in the village were recorded and, where possible, identified. A total of 1090 prey items (535 mammals, 297 birds and 258 unidentified animals) were taken, an average of about 14 per cat per year. Twenty-two species of birds and 15 species of mammals were identified. The most important items were woodmice (17%), house sparrows (16%) and bank voles (14%).

Although a pet cat full of Whiskas might not catch as many prey items as a wild predator, the small home territories means that there can be a high density of cats in a given area. Recent work conducted in US, UK, Australia and New Zealand asked pet owners to track their cats using a GPS and record what items the cat

brought back. On average, a pet cat killed between 14.2 and 38.9 animals per 100 acres per year (that's 0.35 and 0.96 per hectare per year if you've been metricated).

If dog lovers are feeling smug at this point, don't. Dogs also stress wildlife. One study found that areas of woodland frequented by dog walkers experience a 35 to 40 per cent reduction in bird diversity and abundance.

On top of all this, there is the problem of pet food. If ingredients in pet food are leftovers from the human food processing then there's no problem, but this isn't always the case. Even if it is, they still have to be processed, packaged and transported. Based on figures from the US, all the cats and dogs consume the same amount of energy as 60 million people, effectively increasing the population by a third

What comes out the other end is an even stinkier problem, equivalent to the faeces of 90 million people, generating 64 million tonnes of greenhouse gases. The future looks even worse, with pet ownership increasing with affluence.

AND WHAT ABOUT INTRODUCED NON-NATIVE SPECIES?

Of course, domestic pets are only part of the problem; the situation is aggravated by large numbers of feral cats. These are especially a problem in the southern hemisphere. Since their introduction to Australia in the 18th century, cats have severely harmed the local ecosystem by preying on native birds and small mammals. They have contributed to the extinction of more than 20 Australian animals – including the paradise parrot, broad-faced potoroo, rusty numbat and desert bandicoot, and no doubt other oddly named creatures – and continue to threaten many more.

In 2015, the Australian government set a target of culling two million of the estimated six million cats living in the wild by 2020. But this has been challenging because the cats prefer hunting live prey to eating poison baits and are too numerous to be controlled by shooting.

The answer is a solar-powered device, called a "Felixer grooming trap", that has laser sensors that detect when a cat walks past based on its

size, shape and gait. When activated, the sensors trigger the release of a toxic gel that squirts onto the cat's fur. The cat later licks the gel off while routinely grooming itself.

The gel contains a commonly used poison, sodium fluoroacetate or "1080" (nothing to do with cider or HD television) that halts the production of energy in cells. The poison is thought to kill cats painlessly because it causes unconsciousness before shutting down brain activity, says the designer. In most cases, the cats get wobbly and sleepy, then lie down and die, an initial trial with two cats in a pen found they passed out within six hours of being squirted and died within ten hours. Another benefit of sodium fluoroacetate is that Australian animals have evolved some resistance to its toxic effects because it occurs naturally in several native plants.

As a test, the researchers recently installed 20 Felixer devices in a 2600-hectare fenced paddock in South Australia that is inhabited by feral cats and native wildlife. Cameras showed that the traps correctly identified, sprayed and killed feral cats, causing their population to decline by about two-thirds over six weeks. No native animals activated the traps and none died. The effectiveness of the traps was confirmed by the observation that cat numbers didn't decline in an adjacent paddock where no devices were installed.

In a separate experiment on Kangaroo Island, the researchers showed they could prevent pet cats from activating the traps by fitting them with special wireless tags. The results are to be presented at the annual meeting of the Ecological Society of Australia. The traps currently cost A\$15,000 each, but they should become cheaper once they are commercialised. Approval is being sought from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to sell them to accredited land managers across the country.

The country whose native fauna has suffered the most is New Zealand. Having been isolated since it split off from Gondwana, it had bats and seals, but no mammal carnivores so many birds became flightless. Things started to go wrong with the arrival of the Maori and the Polynesian rat. By the time the Europeans were arriving

from the end of the eighteenth century, the Moas, giant avian herbivores, were extinct, as were the large raptors that preyed on them.

**WANTED
FOR
MURDER**



TIBBLES

The most notorious extinction happened in 1894 when David Lyall became a lighthouse keeper on Stephens Island. He took his cat Tibbles. The island was the last foothold of the formerly widespread Stephens Island Wren. Within a year, Tibbles had exterminated the wren, which like other potentially vulnerable New Zealand birds, was nocturnal and flightless.

The New Zealand situation is still serious with 40% of native birds & 85% of reptiles being threatened by, or at risk of, extinction. The iconic Kiwi is declining at two to six % per year in areas without pest control: a rate which is fast enough for them to go extinct within one human generation. Europeans brought in other dangerous animals such as the Australian brush-tailed possum for the fur trade, and rabbits, that quickly settled in and started doing what rabbits are famous for, so stoats were introduced to control the rabbits, using the same approach as the nursery rhyme about the old lady who swallowed a fly, followed by a spider, a bird, a cat, a dog, a cow and a horse (she's dead of course). The stoats soon turned their attentions to reptiles and ground nesting birds, as well as spreading bovine TB. The New Zealand government has taken the brave step of planning to eradicate all non-native mammals by 2050. They have started by creating Zealandia, a securely fenced off area round a disused reservoir that supplied water to

Wellington. Endangered animals have been introduced. A success was when a pair of Saddlebacks nested outside the fenced off area, the first breeding record for the mainland for over a century.



Saddleback

Islands are fairly easy to deal with, needing poison on a bait that only appeals to the target animals and can be dropped by air. A more scientific approach involves studying the pests' genomes to develop species-specific toxins that wouldn't pose a threat to native wildlife. Stoats in particular are notoriously hard to catch and poison. Using their genetic sequence, researchers have already developed a stoat-specific poison that stops their red blood cells from carrying oxygen, but for urban areas, only traps can be used. Tests have shown that traps for rats are more effective if baited with only small amounts of used rat bedding, catching up to 50% more than other baits. Popular attitudes have been changed so it is considered to be antisocial if householders do not use traps to catch rats in gardens. People are also encouraged to join groups that set traps and poison baits. There is careful consideration on the sequence of mammal elimination: if the plan started by only killing possums, there would be a risk giving rats a boost, since they eat the same plant seeds. And stoats eat rats as well as native wildlife. The ideal would be to use poisons, traps, lures and genetics to eradicate several species simultaneously. Alternatively, it would be best to take a bottom-up approach, removing prey first and then to move quickly to take top predators out as fast as possible, accepting that in the short term there might be prey switching, possibly to native species.

The danger of eliminating pests in the wrong order was demonstrated by effort to remove invasive feral cats from Macquarie Island in the South Pacific in the 1990s. Once the cats were gone, rabbits bred out of control, devastating the vegetation. The subsequent rabbit eradication cost \$23 million.

After clearing islands, the next step is clearing peninsulas, especially those with only a narrow connection with the mainland so can be easily isolated; further progress will be clearing areas which are connected by predator-free corridors.

All this costs money and the total is expected to be NZ\$9billion. However, this is not as bad as it might sound since controlling stoats and possums (to prevent the spread of bovine TB), and rats costs NZ\$20 million each year to limit damage to crops, and even more in 'mast' years when a heavy crop of beech seeds fuels rodent plagues.

A sign of success is that some native species, are becoming a nuisance in urban gardens and horticultural areas. These include the tui (one of the largest of the honeyeater family, not the travel company), and the kaka (a medium sized parrot which especially suffered from predation by stoats as the female spends 90 days in the nest hole while incubating the clutch; some now nest in the roofs of houses, which solves the stoat problem but provision of unsuitable foods leads to metabolic bone disease (similar to osteoporosis) in the chicks and can be fatal, and the pukeko (Australasian Swamphen), which has a fondness for sweet potatoes. How many of us would object to a Purple Swamphen in the garden, especially if you are doing the Garden bird challenge this year.



Tui – No! – I don't dot the 'i's or cross the 't's



Kaka – fancy these nesting in your roof space?

Eric James

THE ALBATROSS'S REVENGE

Albatrosses do not have much to thank Mankind for, considering that long line fishing is a death trap for the birds. And there was that business with The Ancient Mariner; but a recent development has put the boot on the other foot.

While fishing in International waters is not illegal, fishing in a countries' exclusive economic zones must be declared. Fishing boats are fitted with an Automatic Identification System – used for avoiding collisions and allowing authorities to track them. If it is turned off, there is a strong suspicion that the vessel is operating illegally.

169 Albatrosses (species not named) have been fitted with radar detecting devices and released in the south of the Indian Ocean. Travelling vast distances and being attracted to fishing boats means they can cover large areas and, having located a boat with the Identification System turned off, which they can do from up to 18 miles away, the information can be transmitted immediately to naval enforcement

vessels. This gives it an advantage of speed over using satellites to identify these boats, at least until satellite tracking is sufficiently improved.

...AND THE WHALES'

Whales have even less to thank Mankind for, but Sperm Whales are turning the tables on Alaskan fishermen. Since the moratorium on whale hunting, the Sperm Whale population has grown by 4% per year. Fishing off the coast of Alaska is mainly for sablefish caught on thousands of hooks baited with octopus or squid and attached to enormously long lines on the sea floor. All this is pure temptation to the whales, and they can take a quarter of the catch in a single attack and they can attack several times an hour, while the boatmen are totally unaware of the mass thieving going on. To protect their catch, fishermen have tried sailing close in tandem; they have also tried to confuse the whales' echo location by submerging noise generators. This second method backfired when the whales realised that the noise was a signal that dinner is served. The most effective approach is to find where the whales are and then fish somewhere else.

Sperm Whales are relatively new to this free food, but orcas are old hands (fins?) at stealing fish. Japanese fishing boats have lost half their catch to orcas in the Barents Sea. If revenge is a dish best served cold, then the Barents Sea is certainly the right location.

Eric James

THE CLUB COMMITTEE

(Chairman) **Barbara Crinson**
(Vice Chairman) **Barbara Keville**
(Hon Secretary) **Chris Sharp**
(Hon Treasurer) **Mark Askew**
(Ordinary Member) **Alistair McLee** (Co-opted)
(Ordinary Member) **Dan McKie** (First Appointed 2016)
(Ordinary Member) **Julie Mason** (First Appointed 2017)
(Ordinary Member) **Mike McGrory** (First Appointed 2017)
(Ordinary Member) **Tom Horne** (First Appointed 2018)
(Ordinary Member) **Brian Clasper** (First Appointed 2019)

RECORDS SUB-COMMITTEE

(Chairman) **Alan Crossley**
Chris Brown
Graham Megson
Mark Rowbottom
Ian Kendall
Chris Bell
Mark Askew
Geoff Iceton
Ian Foster

**CONSERVATION
SUB-COMMITTEE**

(Chairman) **Alistair McLee**
Graham Megson
Vic Fairbrother
Alan Snape
Barbara Crinson

Honorary Treasurer's Report 2019

Income this year, as with most, was primarily from membership subscriptions. The continued support of members makes my 'job' easy. We had a higher expenditure than normal, but this was mostly for benefit of members and our interests (i.e. the birds!). For example, a much improved website was launched and anyone who has visited the feeding station at Lockwood Beck will appreciate the improved viewing facilities. The other significant expenditure was provision of expenses (primarily parking fees) for Little Tern volunteers. Another organisation will be helping with that in 2020, but it is hoped that eventually the local authority will make an allowance for the reason the volunteers are there.

I can leave the last sentence as it has been for longer than I remember: There remains no reason to propose any change to the subscription fees at the present time.

Mark Askew



REPORT FROM THE CHAIR FOR 2019

Another year has flown by and I am tasked with the duty of providing members with a round-up of the club's activities since the AGM of 2018. Twelve local outings were arranged over the year, all of which have been well-attended and we have also enjoyed eight entertaining talks at our regular indoor meetings. Three informative newsletters were produced again – thank you to all contributors – and members were also in receipt of a top-quality bird report. I am sure everyone will agree that our modest membership fee offers good value for money!

This year we have also welcomed to the stage, our new website, courtesy of Jamie Duffie. He has worked tirelessly all year, assisted by a small support team, to produce a website of outstanding quality and something of which we should be proud. Indeed, the feedback from numerous sources has been extremely complimentary. As I write this, the gallery of photographs is receiving attention and perhaps by the time of our next AGM, this section too, will be up to date. The website, providing the facility to pay online, has also attracted new members and our total now stands at 465.

The other major achievement this year was the construction of the shelter at Lockwood Beck feeding station. The result of this project has been a revelation and it is very satisfying to see so many people from all walks of life enjoying the facility, able-bodied or otherwise and, of course, it goes without saying that the resident vultures believe it to be the best restaurant in town! Huge thanks to the construction team, alias “The Magnificent Seven” and also to the hard-working staff who keep the station clean and well-stocked! The fairies are not responsible!! A special thank you also goes to the youngsters, who under the guidance of Becky Stanley, Community Wildlife Officer at Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, provided us with a rather innovative and unusual hanging bird

table which has now found its place just outside of the shelter.

As well as Lockwood, the club continues to fund the feeding stations at Stillington, Cowpen Bewley, Saltburn Valley Gardens and Billingham Bottoms.

Despite a busy schedule, our Teesside Ringers are out there keeping tabs on the birds using Stillington and Lockwood, so thanks are due for their hard work and dedication. I also suspect that at the start of the year they had no idea they would be ringing Little Terns at Seaton Carew. The Trustees made the decision to financially support the wardening efforts to protect the colony and I know that one or two club members helped in a practical way. However, if the birds return this year then more help from members to join the team of wardens would be greatly appreciated. Thanks go to Graham Megson for co-ordinating effective protection, raising awareness and chasing funds for such a worthwhile project.

Other club members to thank at this juncture are all of the event leaders and those engaged in promotional activities, John Fletcher who is our Sales Officer, Julie Mason for engaging a variety of speakers to entertain us at evening meetings, Ali McLee for his commitment to addressing the many conservation matters which arise throughout the year, Chris Brown and the compilers for the production of the bird report, the bird surveyors in the club, with special mention for Mike Leakey and Martin Blick for all their additional work in support of the club's aims, and, of course, the representatives on both the Records Committee and the Trustees Committee. The latter is losing Dan McKie and we thank him for representing members over the last four years. The Records Committee is losing Mark Rowbottom, Mark Askew and Geoff Icton but will be welcoming Chris Sharp back into the fold. Thanks go to departing members for all their hard work. Mark Askew, of course, continues with his invaluable work as Treasurer.

From a personal perspective, I hope everyone appreciates the effort that was made last year to regain our access to The Long Drag and have

this route designated as a Public Right of Way. At this point, I still do not know the outcome, but thank you to everyone who gave me help and support to submit our application to Stockton Borough Council.

Barbara Crinson

March 2020

CLUB MEMBERSHIP

	Total	Full	Family	Junior	S/C	Life	Hon
2005	287	134	95	-	39	14	5
2006	317	157	89	-	52	14	5
2007	346	156	119	-	51	14	6
2008	421	176	170	-	55	14	6
2009	487	203	190	1	73	14	6
2010	521	209	209	2	78	13	5
2011	538	225	214	2	79	13	5
2012	548	312	217	1		13	5
2013	509	286	200	2		14	7
2014	488	261	207	2		12	6
2015	476	266	189	2		13	6
2016	480	268	192	1		13	6
2017	470	267	182	1		14	6
2018	453	266	166	1		14	6
2019	465	269	176	-		14	6

As can be seen from the above table the club membership increased in number for the first time since 2012.

At £12 the membership fee still remains excellent value. Despite the fact that the junior membership rate was reduced to only £5 at the AGM in April 2016 the club continues to thrive without any members in this category. The club's subscription rate compares favourably with other county bird watching societies.

As in previous years the many hours of free time given by certain members is worthy of mention. John Fletcher has shown many new members the main bird watching sites in Cleveland and I am sure his efforts are much appreciated. Special thanks go to Jamie Duffie who edited the newsletters in 2019. Jamie has now taken over from Eric James on a full-time basis but Eric continues to provide much of the material for publication.

Our website manager Jamie Duffie continues to oversee a website that gains praise from everyone who logs on. The site is well used and with the ever-increasing use of twitter as a means of reporting sightings and publishing photographs represents the best way of visitors to the area to keep up with what's around. The club has updated and modernised the website in the past year and it is better than ever and more user friendly. Subscriptions can now be paid by PayPal and I am sure this is one of the reasons for the increase in membership in 2019.

The annual bird report is also a publication the club can be rightly proud of. As a past member of the records sub-committee I know the amount of time that is spent collating the records and writing and checking the report. Our new recorder Alan Crossley and the rest of the compilers must be thanked for their efforts. Special thanks must go to Chris Brown who both edited and formatted the report. Although Tom Francis stepped down as recorder at the end of 2018, he continued to assist Alan in his duties as recorder to ensure a smooth transaction process.

As thanks for his work as a member of the records subcommittee for the past 30 years Graeme Joynt will be given the "Ted Parker award" at the AGM. Graeme was both recorder and editor of the report for many years and was one of the team behind "The breeding birds of Cleveland". This award was introduced in memory of Ted and is given to members who contribute significantly to the club and its aims. Graeme follows on from Eric James, Vic Fairbrother, Don Page, Russell McAndrew, Jamie Duffie and Tom Francis as the previous recipients of the award.

Chris Sharp

TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB					
Statement of Income & Expenditure for 2019					
(with 2018 for comparison)					
2019			2018		
	Income	Payment		Income	Payment
Subscriptions	4498.61			4302.00	
Gift Aid	925.79			970.58	
Interest	489.74			437.53	
Meetings		471.60			461.60
Lecture Fees		633.00			350.00
TBC Gen Publications	255.83			560.05	
Bird Report		2500.00			2380.00
Printing & Stationery		332.00			442.00
Postage		226.40			1009.20
Subs to other Societies		50.50			66.50
Recorder's expenses		137.97		0.00	0
Insurance		268.80			268.80
Sundries	0.01	0.00		100	22.50
Website		2053.46			65.71
Donations	15.00	0.00		0.00	200.00
Feeding stations		1290.26			1031.65
Hide repairs		0.00			150.00
Events expenses		82.80			0.00
Little tern vols		1044.00			
Lockwood feeding shelter		854.43			
Data provision	220.00				
	6404.98	9945.22		6370.16	6447.96
Excess Income		-			-77.80
	6404.98	6404.98		6370.16	6370.16
	Balance B/F 2018	63830.34	Balance B/F 2017		63908.03
	Excess Income	-3540.24			-77.80
	Balance 31.12.2019	60290.10	Balance 31.12.18		63830.23
	Cash In Hand	0.00			0.00
	Bank Current Acc	761.39			1146.20
	Deposit A/C 'PSMF'	0.20			645.06
	NSB Investment Acc	59528.51			62038.97
		60290.10			63830.23

Following the Government statement on 23 March, BTO's Senior Leadership Team has reviewed the BTO advice and is asking all volunteers to follow the guidelines presented by the Prime Minister. While the monitoring work undertaken by volunteers is extremely important, it must not compromise public health. To avoid this potential risk, we are requesting that all BTO surveyors refrain from undertaking survey work at sites to which they would need to travel by any means. Please do not leave your home to carry out a survey organised by BTO. The new BTO guidance is here: <https://www.bto.org/community/news/202003-bto-and-covid-19>

Breeding Birds Survey and Waterways Breeding Birds Survey

We ask volunteers to follow the new guidance published by BTO on 24 March. These surveys are incredibly important feeding into research, informing decision-making, monitoring conservation action, and, of course, Government Official Statistics.

We do not yet know how long the current restrictions are likely to be in place and whether it might be possible to undertake late visits (mid May to end of June). We will update guidance accordingly nearer the time, and if data can be collected, consider how best to make use of it analytically.

We also suggest volunteers do not contact landowners to gain access, where permission is needed, until a more appropriate time in order to respect those who are self-isolating.

The latest annual Breeding Bird Survey Report is due to be published on 20 April.

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey

This survey is unfortunately cancelled with immediate effect. Its purpose was to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland and also other breeding wader habitats in England (as provided by agri-environment schemes) for declining breeding birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. All regions of lowland England were to be covered. It is possible that the survey will be deferred to 2021, but it is too early to say whether this will happen.

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and BirdTrack

We ask WeBS counters to follow the BTO guidance. If there are changes to the restrictions in the coming weeks, the WeBS Office can update guidance regarding the planned April Core Count Priority date (which could potentially be moved to later in the month). Contact: Gill Birtles via webs@bto.org

WeBS Online has launched a new feature to import data from BirdTrack, so that volunteers can, if they wish, record data in the BirdTrack apps and then import the relevant list from BirdTrack into WeBS Online as the official WeBS count for the site. You can watch the instruction video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFIF5NVbMKc&feature=youtu.be> or read the guidance https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/07_-_import_from_birdtrack.pdf to find out more. This is an optional feature and WeBS Counters are of course still able to enter counts directly into WeBS Online.

The latest annual WeBS Report is due to be published on 2 April.

Heronries Census

We ask volunteers to follow the new guidance published by BTO on 24 March. We know some volunteers will have made visits to Heronries already. We will review the situation in three weeks and update guidance appropriately. Contact: Ian Woodward ian.woodward@bto.org

Mike Leahey, BTO Regional Representative for Cleveland

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2019/2020 SUMMARY

	November 10	December 08	January 19	February 08	March 08
Little Grebe	<u>38</u>	8	33	19	22
Great Crested Grebe	30	4	6	35	<u>42</u>
Cormorant	64	82	65	<u>83</u>	57
Mute Swan	37	<u>38</u>	27	30	15
Greylag Goose	673	<u>973</u>	550	144	110
Shelduck	279	161	245	<u>384*</u>	357*
Wigeon	2470*	3052*	3802*	<u>4075*</u>	3621*
Gadwall	242*	226*	257**	204*	<u>281**</u>
Teal	788	770	<u>1080*</u>	506	561
Mallard	218	134	<u>298</u>	87	158
Pintail	29	6	<u>39</u>	28	11
Shoveler	<u>185**</u>	66	153*	160*	141*
Pochard	71	55	67	79	71
Tufted Duck	103	84	94	115	<u>142</u>
Eider	<u>43</u>	6	11	8	1
Goldeneye	57	34	<u>60</u>	39	46
Red-br. Merganser	<u>47*</u>	19	31	30	42*
Coot	358	430	<u>497</u>	474	489
Oystercatcher	248	566	554	<u>793</u>	718
Ringed Plover	29	42	<u>48</u>	14	12
Golden Plover	<u>758</u>	58	698	2	320
Grey Plover	108	<u>230*</u>	12	121	65
Lapwing	<u>3256*</u>	1606	2805	2102	294
Knot	339	645	412	593	<u>680</u>
Sanderling	15	<u>177**</u>	39	3	37
Purple Sandpiper	<u>35</u>	5	0	2	0
Dunlin	30	<u>101</u>	17	0	41
Ruff	0	0	0	0	0
Snipe	5	2	<u>12</u>	8	8
Black-tailed Godwit	<u>112</u>	56	43	78	32
Bar-tailed Godwit	19	70	0	<u>111</u>	42
Curlew	468	899*	<u>956*</u>	478	532
Redshank	669*	<u>714*</u>	663*	608*	447
Turnstone	<u>72</u>	36	55	56	60

* Indicates a count of >50% of national importance

** Indicates a count of national importance

N.B. 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

All WeBS data are collected on behalf of the WeBS Partnership, which retains exclusive rights to the sale or supply of these data for commercial purposes.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2019/2020 SUMMARY

Coverage was excellent with 138 of the scheduled 140 sector counts completed over the five months.

Recreational disturbance along shorelines and in coastal bays was recorded by counters on multiple occasions during the winter series of counts, this results in the displacement of roosting waders and also increases the chance of double counting between survey areas. The winter peak counts of species such as Bar-tailed Godwit (111, February) and Grey Plover (230, December) are therefore likely to be lower.

The number of wintering Wigeon in the estuary continues to creep up towards national significance however again fell slightly shy of the 4400 individuals required. Greylag Goose (973, December) tallied its highest winter peak count on record (utilising data which goes back to the 1988/1989 winter).

It was another poor winter for Cormorant (83, February), totals of over 100 individuals have been recorded in 27 of the last 32 years. Ruff look to be on the verge of extinction as a wintering bird in the Tees Estuary with no individuals having been recorded in this series of counts, Purple Sandpiper (35, November) and Turnstone (72, November) are two other wader species who had a poor showing this winter. Black-tailed Godwit (112, November) on the other hand were only one bird shy of equaling last year's record winter peak count.

Other notable records from the winter counts included, Pink-Footed Goose (188, November), Tundra Bean Goose (2, December & January), European White-Fronted Goose (4, December), Pale-Bellied Brent Goose (8, December, January & February) and Iceland Gull (1, January).

Following this winter's series of counts, the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS recording area is of national importance for Gadwall, Shoveler and Sanderling.

Adam Jones

WeBS Local Organizer

March 2020

TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB – Publications

COMPLETE SET Cleveland Bird Reports (1974-2017)
for **£40** (1987 on a DVD) (Postage extra if not collected-10kg).

1974 to 2017 Reports: £2.00 each if available. (Out of print 1974
1976, 1978 to 1988 on a CD) Plus £1.00 for p.& p. per copy.

2018 Report: £5.00 (£7.50 for non-Members) Plus £1.50 for p.&p.
per copy.

Birdwatchers of Teesmouth 1600 to 1960 **£1** +£1 p.&p.

***Teesmouth Bird Reports 1958-1973 on a CD* £2.50**

Birds of Tees-side 1962-67 by Phil Stead £2.50

Birds of Tees-side 1968-1973 by Martin Blick £2.50

Birds of Tees-side (1964) by Phil Stead £2.50 (published in NHS
Transactions).

Breeding Birds of Cleveland: £25

Barn Owl at RSPB Saltholme Print: £2 each (Postcards 5p)

Car Stickers: £1.00

Cheques should be made payable to “**Teesmouth Bird Club**” with orders, and
sent to: John Fletcher, 43 Glaisdale Avenue, Middlesbrough, TS5 7PF.

Please pass on unwanted copies of Club publications to John, particularly those
that are “Out of print”, so that they can be resold to other members.

J.Fletcher j.fletcher666@btinternet.com 01642-818825

9th February 2020

