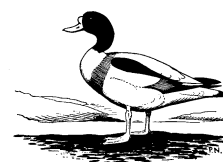


Teesmouth Bird Club ***Newsletter***

April 2021 (No.78)



Reg.Charity No.508850

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NOVEMBER 2021

This was a rather uneventful month, with very mild weather for more than half of it.

The largest group of Mandarin seen in Cleveland, five, were at South Gare on 4th, a Slavonian Grebe was at the same place next day, and an arrival of Cetti's Warblers was evident on 6th, with five at Haverton Hole, and one on Coatham Marsh from 7th.



Slavonian Grebe

Ian Watson

Single (rather late) Yellow-browed Warblers were at Cowbar and Hartlepool on 8th, an Iceland Gull and a Black Redstart were at South Gare on the same day, the first of very few Waxwings was at Hartlepool on 9th, and a Bittern was on Coatham Marsh from 10th, the same day as the last Swallow of the year.

Very little was seen mid-month; a Northerly wind from 19th created almost no sea-watching, but at least seven Great Northern Divers were spread between Hartlepool, Seal Sands and South Gare on 21st, a Black-throated Diver was at South Gare on 22nd, the same day as two Ruddy Shelducks began a six-week stay around Saltholme, and a second Bittern joined the first on Coatham Marsh on 23rd, both birds staying into Dec.

The first Glaucous Gull of the winter passed Hartlepool on 26th, then an Iceland Gull was there from 27th to 29th, but perhaps the least exciting bird of the month was a potential Northern Eider (currently a subspecies) present off Redcar with about 100 Eider from 28th. Being very similar to 'normal' drake Eider, it could well have been there for days, weeks or months without being noticed.

The 28th was also the morning that the first real frost of the winter was recorded, down to -1C.

DECEMBER 2020

A Pomarine Skua passed Hartlepool on 1st and a Black Redstart was by the harbour entrance there on the same day. Next day a Glossy Ibis was seen briefly at Haverton Hole before flying North, but it was another three days before it was re-located on Cowpen Marsh. It then was seen on Greatham Tank Farm on 6th and Cowpen Marsh again on 10th and 14th.



Great White Egret

Ian Forrest

A Black-throated Diver joined the Great Northern Diver in Hartlepool Marina from 5th, the number of Great Northern Divers around Cleveland reached at least ten on 9th, a Black Redstart was at Skinningrove on 11th, the first (five) of very few White-fronted Geese flew past Redcar on 19th and a Red Kite was in the Wilton Lane area, also from 19th.

The wind turned Northerly on 24th, bringing the first snow of the winter, as well as a late Great Skua past Hartlepool. Storm Bella passed to the North West of Cleveland overnight on 26th-27th, bringing gale force winds and heavy rain, then clear skies overnight on 27th saw the temperature drop to below freezing, creating ice on many areas of freshwater on 28th. More snow fell on 29th but did not last long.

An Egyptian Goose found on Ward Jackson Park lake on 28th stayed into 2021, and the second Waxwing of the winter was at Skelton on 29th, also staying into 2021.

Overnight on 30th saw the temperature drop to -2 C, resulting in most freshwater being frozen over on 31st.

Birds staying over into 2021 included Black-throated Diver in Hartlepool Marina, two Spotted Redshank, a Greenshank and an Avocet in the Greatham Creek area, Green and Common Sandpipers at Portrack, Bittern on Coatham Marsh, at least three Marsh Harriers and a small number of Bearded Tits on Dormans Pool.

JANUARY 2021

A Velvet Scoter was on Seal Sands on 1st. Both the Black-throated and Great Northern Divers were in Hartlepool Marina and they remained until mid February. The Egyptian Goose left Ward Jackson Park on 2nd. Marsh Harrier numbers on the North Tees Marshes increased to 5. Water Pipits were at Greenabella and at Dormans Pool early in the month.

A first winter Little Gull was found at Kilton on 7th and remained until 24th. Three Velvet Scoters were with the Common Scoter flock off Parton Rocks on 9th. A Glaucous Gull was here on 13th.

Blackcaps continue to winter in greater numbers in Cleveland with up to 4 in a Billingham garden for much of the winter. Two Ruddy Shelduck were on Cowpen Marsh 16th-17th.

Great Northern Divers were much in evidence during the month. Up to four were at South Gare. This site also held good numbers of Snow Buntings with 83 recorded on 23rd. A smaller flock was also on Seaton Snook where over 100 Twite were also regularly recorded. What were presumably the same flock were occasionally to be seen at Greatham Creek.



Twite

Lockhart

Four Velvet Scoters were off Saltburn on 26th. The Northern Eider continued to be seen off Redcar at this time being last recorded on 1st February.

Having been absent for some weeks the single Avocet reappeared at Greatham Creek on 28th. In what proved to be a poor winter for white winged Gulls a Glaucous Gull at Redcar on 31st was one of very few reports. Crossbills are always nice to see and c100 at Wynyard on 31st must have been a splendid sight.



Crossbill

Ian Forrest

The first two weeks of the month were particularly cold with many of the water bodies freezing over. Despite the very cold temperatures the likes of Smew and Red-necked Grebes were noticeable by their absence.

Early in the month there were few birds of note. Two Great Northern Divers remained on Bran Sands and a second winter Mediterranean Gull was at Newburn. A first winter Iceland gull was in fields at Kilton on 6th.

The coldest weather was from 10th. A Razorbill joined the rarer Divers in Jacksons Landing at this time. Numbers of Golden Plover surpassed 2,000 on Seaton Common and 200 Skylark and 150 Yellowhammers were at Saltburn. Woodcocks were recorded in good numbers as were Fieldfare with a flock in excess of 1,000 around Seaton Common.

A Glaucous Gull was at Redcar on 11th and two Cetti's Warblers were singing at Bowesfield. Up to three Mediterranean Gulls were at Newburn. Two Jack Snipe were at Cowpen Marsh on 14th with another at Portack the same day.



White-fronted Geese

Ian Forrest

Red Kites were over Ingleby Barwick on 17th and Stainton on 18th. A Great Egret was on Saltholme Pools from 20th having been absent since late 2020. The long staying Slavonian Grebe was still on Bran Sands. A

White-fronted Goose was at Cattersty on 21st with seven at Margrove Ponds on 22nd and twelve at Cowpen Marsh from 25th.

Avocets began to appear from 24th with 13 at Port Clarence Flood. A Green-winged Teal was nearby on Back Saltholme the same day remaining into March.

A 1st winter Iceland Gull was present in fields at New Skelton on 26th and a Spoonbill on 28th at Saltholme Marsh brought a touch of elegance to the end of the month.

UPDATE ON VIC'S OUZEL BOOK

When I was typing my comments on the Ring Ouzel book, I was wearing my computer glasses so when I looked at the price of the book, it was slightly out of focus and I looked at the \$ price. The actual price is £21.95, though Vic has copies at a discount price of £15.95. You can contact him on 01287 633744. As a further recommendation, the book has been selected as British Bird's Book of the month

Book of the month

The Ring Ouzel: a view from the NorthYork Moors by Vic Fairbrother and Ken Hutchinson Whittles Publishing, 2020

Many of us will not routinely see the Ring Ouzel on its breeding grounds. Those of us who bird patches on the east coast will probably see it in small numbers in spring and autumn (and while it's optimistic to be thinking already about those early spring migrants, in a lockdown we should take whatever crumbs of comfort where we can). And while we are locked down this account of the 'moorland Blackbird' in one part of its British breeding range is a really good read, well worth the price tag of around £20 and a great credit to the two authors.

GARDEN BIRDWATCH CHALLENGE 2020

In December 2019, we decided to run the first Teesmouth Bird Club Garden Birdwatch Challenge and twelve members across Teesside and North Yorkshire took part. Three of the four Teesside local unitary authorities had recorders, with only Hartlepool missing.

A magnificent eighty-two species were recorded in 2020, and these birds were either seen or heard from our gardens/properties. For the regular BTO Garden Birdwatch participants this was an opportunity to not only record the birds in our gardens, but also list what was flying overheard or calling from our neighbourhoods.

January, is typically a month when we start off trying to get our year list up and running, venturing out to catch sightings of birds that are winter visitors or long stayers from the previous year. A chance to blow away the cobwebs and burn off those extra calories gained during the Christmas period seeing birds. In our gardens, it can be a slow month possibly a little over indulgence by our avian friends means that our feeders often stay full for weeks rather than days once the weather takes hold. The Winter 2019/20 was the 5th wettest, as well as the 5th mildest for the UK (since 1862). February arrived with several named storms, but the temperature stayed relatively mild for our area. The first two months of the year is probably the time when all our recorders spotted the same eight species that achieved a 100% recording rate, Woodpigeon, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Starling, Blackbird, Robin and Goldfinch.

In March, things started to change with more visitors to our gardens together with a much drier and more settled weather pattern. Birds started looking for nesting sites and the air was filled with song and calls. It was also in the month of March that our lives changed significantly as the UK went into lockdown following the global spread of the Covid-19

virus. The words staying home and staying safe were not really part of our daily vocabulary, how things change. Birdwatching is a fantastic hobby that can be enjoyed in lots of different ways, but with our wings clipped we stayed home and needed our avian friends to come by. Many of us recorded birds of prey circling over our homes with Common Buzzard and Sparrowhawk noted in TS8, TS14, TS18 and TS19. The recording rates for Common Buzzard and Sparrowhawk were 58% and 83% respectively for 2020. A peak count of six Common Buzzards circling in DL10 during the year would have been a welcomed sight. In TS18 we regularly have flocks up to fifty Jackdaw, that take to the skies on a morning and late afternoon as a communal fly together filling the air with their tchack calls. It wasn't until two of us recorded this occurrence that I realised how far they fly over Stockton. The first Chiffchaff was recorded in March in TS7, just ahead of one calling near my garden on 4th April.

The sunniest April on record kept our spirits up and the club twitter feed was filled with garden sightings as members searched the skies for birds. My own list at this stage was a lowly twenty-three species, so I must confess to upping the ante in April. The usual night time hum of background noise in the Stockton area was much lower due to lockdown, so it meant that I could hear the birds on Ropner Park lake if I listened from an upstairs window. A couple of nights added Coot, Teal and I did manage to catch some nocturnal migration of Redwing on the 4th. In April, I also did a full day of recording birds flying over my garden and their direction of flight. The house faces East, so it was relatively easy to tally up the flybys that were not lower level residents. The highlight of the day a Great-crested Grebe heading South, a first record for the garden. Although I largely turned into a pigeon watcher, birds flying from West to East were by far the most numerous and the least was from South to North. Lesser Black-backed Gulls also arrived in April and in TS18 they were present the throughout the summer which I think from memory is the first-time. I certainly don't recall seeing as

many pairs (3), so maybe they are nesting on the flat roofs of the new school buildings in the area. An early House Martin was recorded in TS7. Ring-necked Parakeets were more vocal in April and were also easier to see flying over my garden in TS18 typically up to six most days. First Willow Warbler and Blackcap were recorded in TS14 in the 2nd week of April. Another notable record was a flyover by a Merlin in TS8 during April too.

In the month of May, recorders noted several young fledglings in their gardens, Starling, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Robin, House Sparrow and Woodpigeons. The first Swifts were noted in TS7, TS8, TS18 and TS19. A single sighting of a Sand Martin on 16th, followed by a singing Cuckoo on the 29th were notable records in TS18.

It was good to hear of successful breeding from the other participants in the challenge. In our garden, it was a different story with young Blackbirds and Jackdaws dying due to the wet weather and our Blue Tit lost its mate, so nothing fledged from our birdbox.

As lockdown eased the summer months of June and July were quiet times for our recorders with resident garden birds feeding fledging's or recovering after breeding with feathers worn and tatty. In TS14, a juvenile Bullfinch and Great-spotted Woodpecker were recorded. In TS18, a juvenile Coal Tit was a notable record along with a flyover by a Peregrine on the 21st July.

In August, I finally added House Martin to my garden list on 15th after trying for several months to spot one as they do nest on the edge of the housing estate. However, the August highlight for me was a Whimbrel calling as it flew over the house on 23rd heading East towards to the coast and a new record for the garden. A Kestrel circling over the house on 31st August was a highlight and from the records from other participants a late one as this species was previously seen in DL10, TS8, TS10, TS14, TS15, TS16, TS18 and TS19 with a 75% recording rate. The Whimbrel, was not the only wader to be seen

or heard during the year; Lapwing (TS8, TS10 & TS15), Oystercatcher (TS10, TS15, TS16 & TS18) and finally the only record of Turnstone was from TS10 of Redcar.

Two notable records in September for my garden were a Tawny Owl on 23rd and a flock of 200 Pink-footed Geese over the house heading North on 24th. Five participants recorded Tawny Owl during the year in TS8, TS15 and TS18 whereas, three recorded Pink-footed Geese flyovers in TS15 and TS18, although the Geese flocks continued to flyover throughout October. Two other owl species were recorded during the year Barn & Little and both of these were seen in TS15. As last few hirundines slowly headed South, some of our winter visitors were already present in our gardens.

Two notable records for October were a flock of Whooper Swan over TS7 and a flock of fifty Barnacle Geese over TS8 were the only sightings of these two species. In October I recorded a new garden bird when a single Tree Sparrow dropped on to the peanuts on the 24th. A new visitor for me, but this species had previously been recorded in TS7, TS8, and TS15 during the year. These sightings were welcome additions to a mainly wet and dull month.

November started with another new species for my garden with a brief resting Pied Wagtail on our roof on the 1st. This species had previously been recorded in TS10 and TS15 early in the year.

The final month of the year arrived and I spotted two Mute Swans flying over from the

garden on 13th in TS18. This was the last new addition of the year.

One other noteworthy bird was the inclusion of Rascal the Racing Pigeon in the DL10 species list whom I am sure dropped by pretending to be tired and lost just to take part. After gaining full fitness following some TLC the bird left to continue its journey.

So, who managed to record the most species from their garden?

Participant	No. of Species
Ali McLee	57
Phil & Kim Clark	48
Julie Mason	42
Ken Smith	40
Paul Dukes	37
Terence Saunders	37
Barbara Crinson	34
Eric James	32
Rex Earnshaw	32
Mike & Sheila Blackburn	29
John Hart	28
Keith Robson	18

Congratulations to Ali McLee on winning the first Teesmouth Bird Club Garden Birdwatch Challenge 2020.

Thank you to all that took part and submitted records. As the organiser it was good to read your emails and reports over the year. We would welcome more members joining in.

Julie Mason

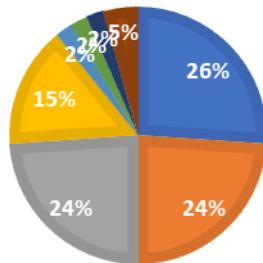
Bird Species Recorded

Pheasant	Rook
Canada Goose	Carrion Crow
Barnacle Goose	Coal Tit
Greylag Goose	Marsh/Willow Tit
Pink-footed Goose	Blue Tit
Mute Swan	Great Tit
Whooper Swan	Skylark
Mallard	Sand Martin
Teal	Swallow
Swift	House Martin
Cuckoo	Long-tailed Tit
Feral Pigeon	Willow Warbler
Stock Dove	Chiffchaff
Woodpigeon	Blackcap
Collared Dove	Goldcrest
Coot	Wren
Great-crested Grebe	Nuthatch
Oystercatcher	Treecreeper
Lapwing	Starling
Whimbrel	Blackbird
Curlew	Fieldfare
Turnstone	Redwing
Black-headed Gull	Song Thrush
Common Gull	Mistle Thrush
Herring Gull	Robin
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Stonechat
Cormorant	House Sparrow
Grey Heron	Tree Sparrow
Little Egret	Dunnock
Sparrowhawk	Grey Wagtail
Common Buzzard	Pied Wagtail
Barn Owl	Meadow Pipit
Tawny Owl	Chaffinch
Little Owl	Brambling
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Bullfinch
Kestrel	Greenfinch
Merlin	Linnet
Peregrine	Common Crossbill
Ring-necked Parakeet	Goldfinch
Jay	Siskin
Magpie	
Jackdaw	

% Recording Rates

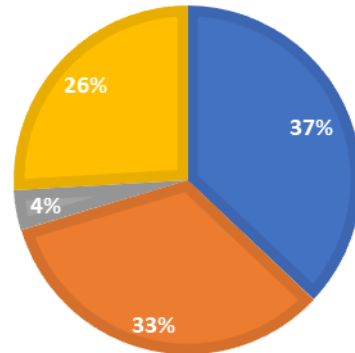
FINCHES

- Goldfinch
- Greenfinch
- Brambling
- Common Crossbill
- Chaffinch
- Bullfinch
- Linnet
- Siskin



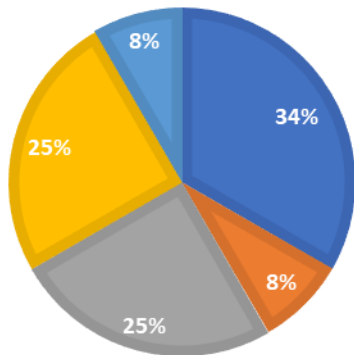
RAPTORS

- Sparrowhawk
- Peregrine
- Kestrel
- Common Buzzard



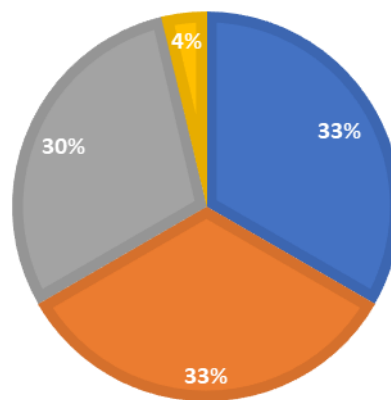
WADERS

- Oystercatcher
- Curlew
- Whimbrel
- Turnstone
- Lapwing



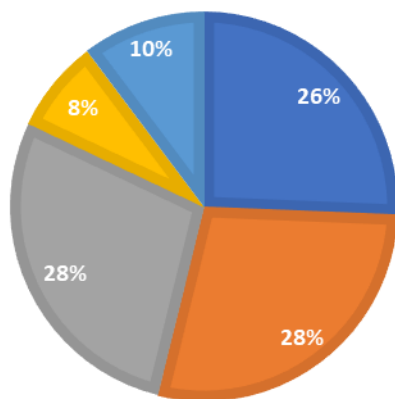
HIRUNDINES

- Swift
- House Martin
- Swallow
- Sand Martin



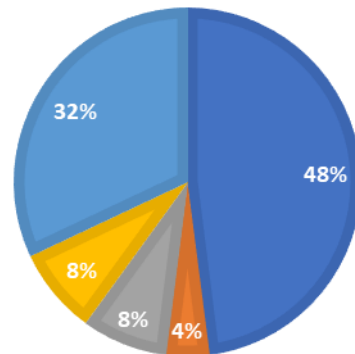
CORVIDS

- Jackdaw
- Magpie
- Carrion Crow
- Jay
- Rook



THRUSHES

- Blackbird
- Mistle Thrush
- Fieldfare
- Song Thrush
- Redwing



FOXGLOVE COVERT NATURE RESERVE – CATTERICK GARRISON

Attendees at a club meeting some years ago, may recall one of the civilian volunteers involved with this reserve, giving a talk. Since then, the site has developed even further and even more worthy of a visit-increasing from its original 28 acres to over 100 today. (Google for details).

The founding idea for the reserve's creation was that of Major Tony Crease, who appreciated early on, that public access was a crucial requirement and soon after statutory designation was conferred. This was followed by the creation of a management group and the rest is history. What is less well known is the life story and career of Major John Crease himself.

A Scot by birth, he joined the army aged 15, and by hard work was promoted to major, serving in the First Gulf War, returning from Iraq in 1992 to a Catterick posting. It was then that the germ of an idea to create a nature reserve was planted. However, perhaps less well known amongst his achievements was his contribution to popular music.

In 1971 he became Pipe Major for the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and in that role he was the inspiration of the number one hit "Amazing Grace" which led to the Pipes and Drums of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards receiving a golden disc.

His passion for conservation led him to the position of team leader of Operation AUK – an annual assessment of seabird populations on Cape Wrath, N W Scotland. However, his enduring legacy will remain as Foxglove Covert, visited by more than 500,000 people. In his retirement, he continued to oversee the reserve as commander for the Military Training Estate.

Major Tony Crease, MBE BEM, died peaceful at home in North Yorkshire at the age of 73 – a passionate and knowledgeable conservationist.

(exerts from The Darlington and Stockton times 15/01/2021)

Ali McLee

THE IRRESISTABLE RISE OF THE RING-NECKED PARAKEET



Ring-necked Parakeet, Ward Jackson Park Eric James

There are surprising aspects to the invasion by Ring-necked Parakeets, not least their adaptation to relatively cool areas, especially when compared with the natural range of parrot species, which shows a definite liking for warmer habitats



Natural range of birds of the parrot family

Although the range of the Ring-necked Parakeet is towards the northern edge, and its success and spread is in stark contrast with other parrot species, a third of which are in danger of extinction.



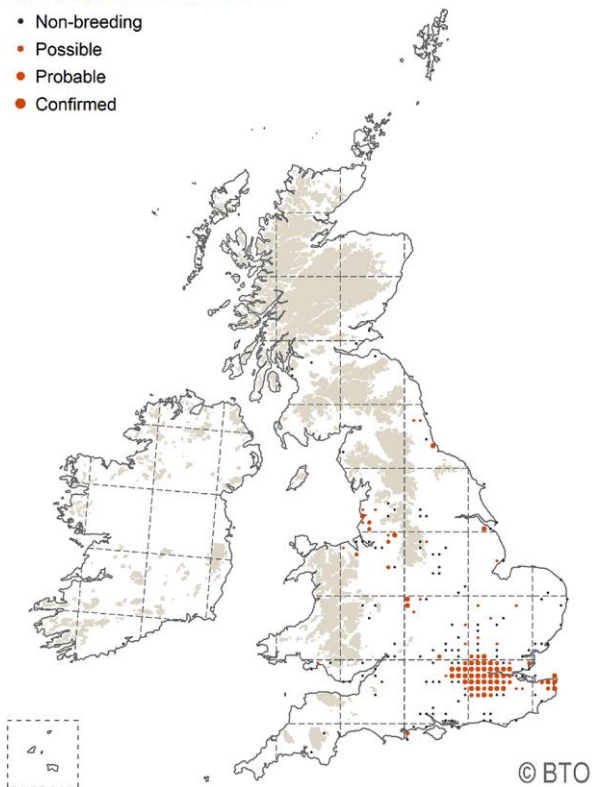
Natural range of the Ring-necked Parakeet

Their range does include the Himalayan foothills so it indicates some ability to withstand low temperatures, at least in the sub-species *Psittacus krameri borealis*, which was described living on the Indian subcontinent and is often kept as a cage bird. According to genetic evidence, it is this population from which the European parakeets are descended. Their ability to withstand cold conditions is helped by roosting in urban areas which are some degrees warmer than the surrounding countryside, and also have bird tables and free food. In Azerbaijan, where winter temperatures are near zero, the birds roost in oil refineries where gas is flared off, providing warmth.

There are figures available for the parakeet populations in European countries, but with rapid increases, they will be out of date. It does seem that Britain has the highest number with about 30,000 individuals (and increasing by 30% per year), qualifying it as a common bird. Although they have only recently come to public attention, there are earlier records of their presence. In 2016, excavations in London found a wall painting dating from the 1st century AD, part of which shows an unmistakable pair of green parakeets. In more recent times, the first recorded UK sightings in the wild were in Norfolk in 1855, but the birds don't seem to have survived for long. A breeding pair with five offspring was reported living in a tree in Lincoln's Inn Fields in central London in 1886, but again didn't persist.

Breeding Distribution 2008–11

- Non-breeding
- Possible
- Probable
- Confirmed

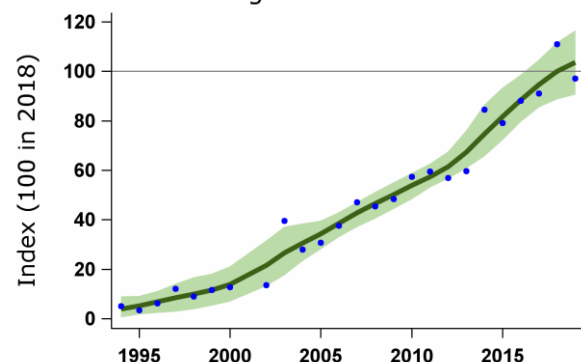


Breeding distribution, National Survey 2008 - 2011

The modern birds are probably derived from pet birds. How they escaped is a source of urban myths. One of the first is that they escaped from the set of the Humphrey Bogart/Katharine Hepburn film 'The African Queen', parts of which were filmed at Worton Hall studios in west London in 1951. Another story is of Jimi Hendrix releasing a pair in Carnaby Street circa 1968.

A more dramatic version was a mass escape from an animal pound at Heathrow Airport or an aviary that had its roof blown off during the Great Storm of 1987.

BBS UK 1994–2019 Ring-necked Parakeet



Population trend in Britain

BTO

Such myths are not restricted to Britain. The parakeets in Brussels were supposedly started in 1974 when a zookeeper released a flock to brighten up the city, which was otherwise only noted for bite-sized cabbages. However, this story is undermined by the first recorded sighting being in 1966.

With London and parts of Kent having the highest density of the birds, there was a tendency to assume that the origin was there, but analysis of the spacial distribution from the 1960s onwards suggests there were several sources over a long length of time, either deliberate releases or the birds escaping, at which they are remarkably proficient.

Recently, the Radio 4 'Broadcasting House' programme included an item on the parakeet spread and asked listeners to send in their sightings. A report from Glasgow was quickly followed by one from Aberdeen, but both were trumped by a record from Thurso, the northernmost town in mainland Britain. There are records from parts of Wales, but none yet from Ireland, where you might imagine a bright green bird to be popular.

Eric James

THE ODDITIES OF MIGRATION

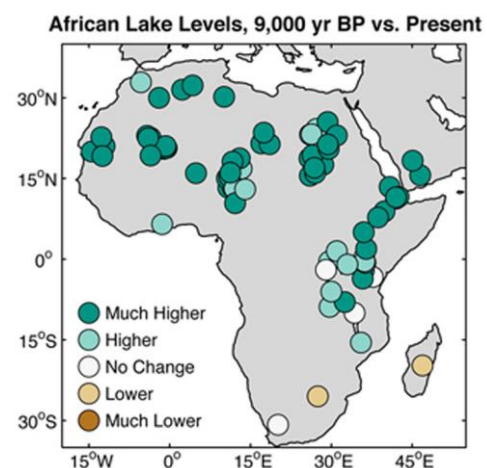
Or are Cuckoos really British birds?

Living in temperate latitudes in the northern hemisphere, bird migration seems to be an obvious phenomenon. Birds breeding in the high Arctic have no chance of surviving the winter and fly to our relatively mild location while our mainly insectivorous summer visitors must move south for the winter.

How the migration of summer visitors came about is not so obvious. There are two possibilities : northern birds gradually moving further south to avoid the cold, or southern birds moving north to find new breeding areas, and so avoiding competition in the original breeding area. In the Americas, the genomes of many species have been studied to construct the evolutionary relationships.

The main finding was that birds were initially in north America, but some that migrated south remained in their wintering areas in south America and evolved there into the present birds.

It seems unlikely that a similar sequence occurred in the Afro-Palearctic migration system, since insectivores such as Cuckoos and Swifts are hardly likely to originate in Europe. In this case, birds breeding in Africa, slowly expand their breeding range northwards to avoid competition for nesting sites. There is a problem here, of course, namely the Sahara, which would not suit a species from the equatorial forests. The answer to this is that there is a cycle in the climate in Africa caused by changes in the Earth's orbit interacting with the wobble in its axis. The effect of this is the occurrence of an African Humid Period every 20,000 years or so, the last one being about 9000 years ago. Rainfall then exceeds evaporation loss and vegetation grows even in the Sahara, with extensive lakes, some as large as the present day Caspian Sea.



Humans occupied the Sahara, as demonstrated by cave drawings of pastoral scenes with abundant elephants, giraffes, hippopotamuses, aurochs (the wild ancestor of domestic cattle), and antelopes, including some being pursued by bands of hunters.

The present Sahara presents a significant barrier to migrating birds, made worse by tectonic plate movements gradually increasing its size (only a few millimetres a year, but over geological times, this adds up). The routes taken by birds is partly based

on the location of feeding areas, and partly on wind directions, using tail winds where possible and avoiding head winds.

Swifts breeding in six locations in Sweden have been tracked using miniature geolocators. In both spring and autumn, the birds made large detours from the direct route to avoid the widest part of the Sahara.

The BTO has tracked Cuckoos since 2011, finding that they winter in the Congo rainforests or the mixed forest-savannah at the edge, which they usually reach at the end of August, though one bird took until 3rd October. Routes vary :

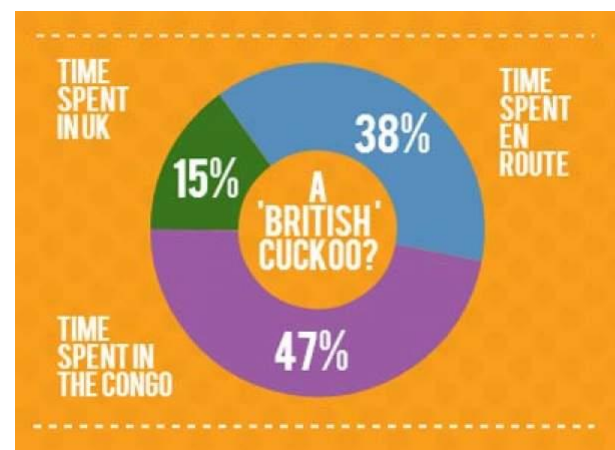


Cuckoo movements 2019 to 2021

Some birds, especially in autumn, follow the west coast of Africa, but one, having spent some time in northern Iberia, then flew to the Po valley in the north of Italy, where it fattened up and then flew south to cross the Sahara at about its widest. Returning birds in spring often paused in the Ivory Coast to fatten up for the northern journey over the desert.

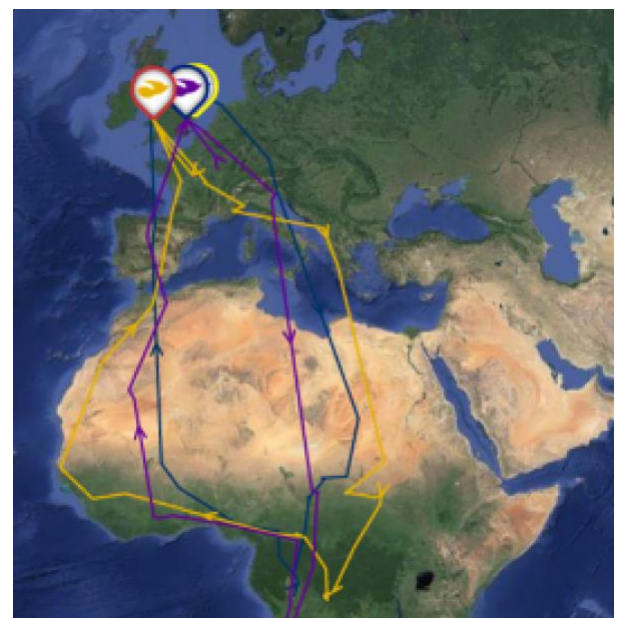
There is an interesting correlation between migration route and areas in the UK where the population is falling. Cuckoos migrating via Spain were much more likely to die before they reached sub-Saharan Africa than those migrating via Italy. It was also found that the birds using the Spanish route came from those parts of the UK where the species is declining, and that the proportion of Spanish-route birds in a local population correlated with the degree of recent population decline seen in the region.

What is also evident is the difference in time spent in breeding and wintering locations and in migrating



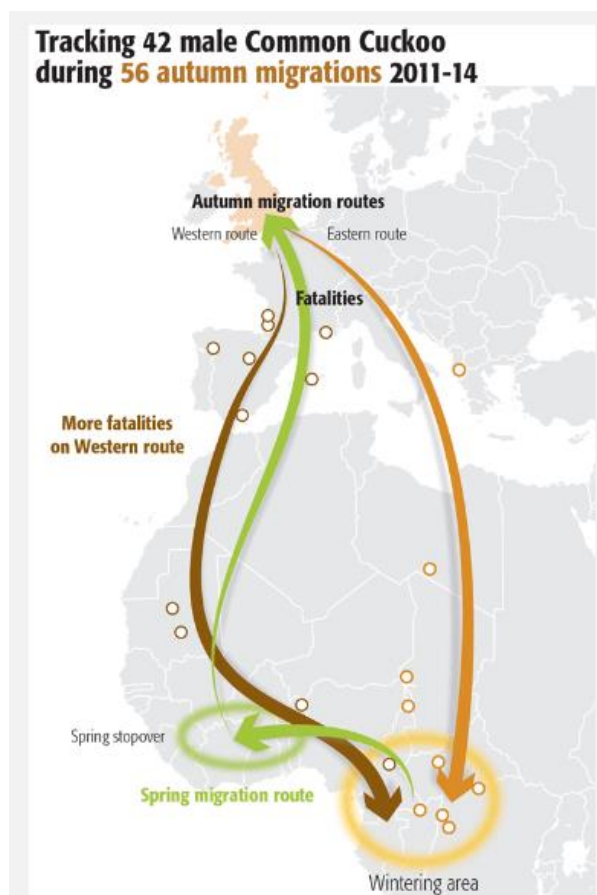
So are they British birds, spending more than three times as long in Africa than in UK?

(below) Routes taken by three birds in 2013/14 with southerly migration through Italy and the Balkans and northward migration through west Africa and Spain



The long migration south is typical of the relaxed autumn movements which do in some

cases follow the west Africa route. The direct route north demonstrates the urgency to claim the best nesting locations



The fatalities on the western route show up well on this composite map of Cuckoo migrations. This study included information from 42 male Cuckoos tagged at nine different breeding locations in England, Scotland and Wales, and tracked over 56 autumn migrations between 2011 and 2014.

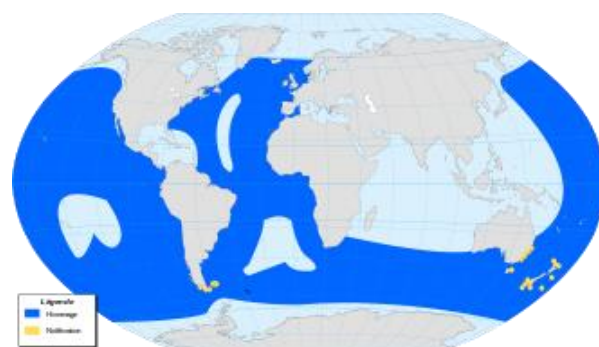
The BTO is now starting a similar tracking project to study Swifts, another species with declining numbers, and another with only brief time spent in Britain. Only one bird (A320) has been tracked, but it showed that the wintering range is extensive and can reach as far south as Mozambique (just opposite to Madagascar). No doubt much more information will be found from future measurements on other birds.

How migration strategies develop has been shown by an unintended experiment on Blackcaps. Continental birds originally moved south-west to winter in southern Spain or Portugal, but since the 1960s increasing numbers are moving north-west to Britain. The attraction is thought to be the food we provide in our gardens, though there is still a preference for warmer parts of the country. My personal experience of Blackcaps in the

garden in winter is that they like the berries on *Leycesteria formosa*, variously known as Himalayan honeysuckle, flowering nutmeg, Himalaya nutmeg, granny's curls and pheasant berry. The species now has two separate populations with different genomes. All the Spanish wintering birds have the same genome, even if their breeding locations are widely separated. I have wondered what would happen to any off-spring from a mixed mating : would the young birds fly west and end in the Atlantic Ocean. The problem does not arise since the British wintering birds arrive back first and only pair up with their own kind.

It's not just migration has changed, there are now physical differences becoming evident. German Blackcaps wintering in the UK possess browner plumage on their backs, rounder wings, and longer and narrower beaks than Blackcaps that migrate south. The change in the beak shape makes more suitable for picking small items in bird foods rather than for swallowing fruits such as olives

One of the most well known north-south migrations is, of course, that of the Arctic Terns which breed in the northern hemisphere and fly, down to the southern oceans round Antarctica, effectively seeing permanent summertime. What is less mentioned is that the Sooty Shearwater does the same thing the opposite way round by breeding during the austral summer and then flying large circuits round the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans and, if weather conditions force them into the North Sea, pass Hartlepool Headland.



Range of Sooty Shearwaters (blue) and breeding locations (yellow)

Impressive as these journeys are, they are still the basic moves between latitudes for different seasons. Much stranger are the migrations of the Ancient Murrelet. These

birds breed on islands off the coast of British Columbia; geolocators fitted to birds in 2013 and 2014 showed that from July to November they cross the Pacific from east to west to winter in waters near Japan, China and Korea, at about the same latitude as the breeding sites and with no obvious difference in conditions. In February, they make a rapid return, taking just one month. In all, they travel 16000 km for no apparent reason. One hypothesis is that they originally lived in the west Pacific and only colonised north America recently, so their autumn movement takes them back to their ancestral home, in the same way that Wheatears return to Africa from Siberia and Alaska.

Things are not always as simple as they seem.

Where they are common, there are problems from noise, damage to crops, and competition with native hole-nesting birds. People living close to roosts have great difficulty when trying to sell their houses.

Crop damage includes cereals, but especially fruit, which the birds will peck once making it worthless and then leave it.

Competition for nesting holes has extended to Spain where the birds peck to death and take over nest holes of the endangered greater noctule, Europe's largest bat.

In Israel, the native population of Hoopoes has fallen in areas where parakeets have occupied nesting cavities in date palms. Their earlier breeding gives the parakeets the advantage of occupying the cavities before the Hoopoes have a chance. There is a worse problem in Hawai'i where the parakeets could threaten the survival of the remaining endemic bird species.

Closer to home, Nuthatches, Starlings, tits, woodpeckers and bats could all suffer from burgeoning parakeet numbers and, while a single bright green bird might be a pleasant novelty for us who feed garden birds, they could soon overstay their welcome when many are hogging the feeders and driving out 'our' birds.

So what to do with them? The two obvious methods of shooting and contraceptive baits

both have difficulties. Shooting is hardly possible in the usual built-up habitats, and the birds' long lives mean contraceptive approach would have to continue for many years.

It looks like we're stuck with them.

A REAL TALKING PARROT

The parrots mentioned in December Newsletter were, in most cases, literally parroting sounds they had learned or been taught, the only possible exception being Rocco who ordered his favourite foods via Alexa. However, there has been one African Grey who could talk and understand the meaning of words. He was called Alex, which was an acronym for **A**nimal or **A**vian **L**earning **E**xperiment



Alex and owner/trainer Irene Pepperberg

There are many animals that display behaviour which we would consider intelligent, mainly the great apes and dolphins. Apes have been trained to communicate by sign language, but it was assumed that the different structure of the avian brain would not be capable of language.

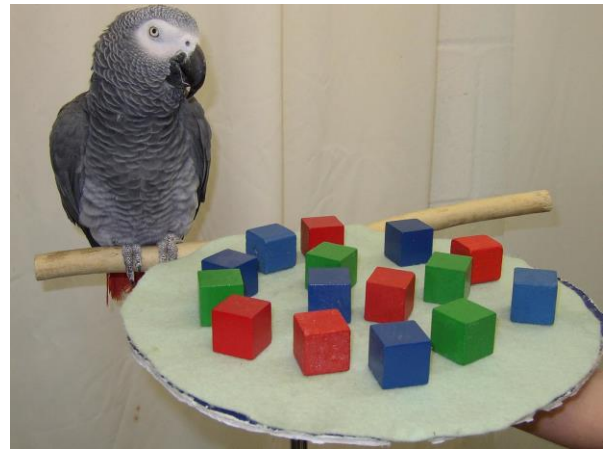
I was surprised to find Alex hatched in UK in May 1976, and his first owner clipped his wings so he never learned to fly. He did get to the US, where Irene Pepperberg bought him as a one-year-old from a pet shop. Teaching Alex involved two people using the model/rival technique where one person acts as trainer and the other as student. If the 'student' correctly obeys instructions, a reward is given. This encourages Alex to take the place of the 'student' by learning the meaning of the words. The two trainers swap

roles to show the generality of the process. Later on, Alex took the place of the 'student' when other parrots were being trained. When he was alone in his cage, he would talk quietly as though practising saying words

Alex eventually learned over a hundred words, could count up to six, and identify 50 different objects, seven colours, five shapes, and different materials such as wood, cork, wool and plastic. He understood the concepts of bigger, smaller, same and different. Pepperberg did not claim that Alex could use "language", instead saying that he used a two-way communications code. There were sceptics, but Pepperberg's careful scientific methods were robust enough to refute criticism.

He did achieve an ability that sign language apes never managed: when shown his reflection in a mirror, he asked, "What colour?", becoming the first non-human animal to ask a question. He remembered 'grey' after being told six times. In addition, when asked a question by Pepperberg, he could reply with a question of his own.

A common criticism of tests which show animals having unexpected abilities is the 'Clever Hans' effect. Clever Hans was a horse that seemed to be able to do arithmetic calculations. There was considerable scepticism as horses are not thought to be bright. The horse would answer an arithmetic question by tapping with a hoof the appropriate number of times. It was suspected that the horse was responding to unconscious signs from the trainer to stop at the correct number. With the trainer hidden from the horse, it continued tapping. Alex could answer questions from other people. To avoid a simple case of associating a word with just a particular item, he was asked to pick, from a mixture of shapes, an item that was green and had three corners



Alex and a test of counting

One of the best demonstrations of his use of language occurred when Pepperberg, after a frustrating meeting, stormed silently into the lab where Alex was, and instead of his usual whistle, he said, "Calm down." In addition, if Pepperberg and assistant were talking and made a mistake, Alex would correct them.

If presented with a new object, he would want to be told its name, and on one occasion, invented a word, banerry, for an apple by combining banana and cherry.

For mental abilities, Alex was level with the great apes and dolphins, but emotionally was equal to a two-year old child and could show the behaviour of the Terrible Twos. If bored with tests, he would say, "Wanna go back", meaning to his cage, and if really bored, would sweep all the test items on to the floor. If asked a question twice, he would deliberately give the wrong answer the second time. He showed surprise and anger when confronted with a nonexistent object or one different from what he had been led to believe was hidden during the tests, so would be a terrible audience for a stage Magician. If he asked a researcher for a banana, but was given a nut, then he would ask again and if still given a nut, he would throw it back

After 30 years of training, Alex was still making progress, but it all stopped on 6th September 2007 when he was found dead in his cage. He had been well the evening before, saying his usual farewell to Pepperberg as she left the lab, "You be good, I love you. See you tomorrow."¹

This was a shock as he was 31 and the expected lifespan of an African Grey is at

least 45 years, and examination found no sign of disease.



Eric James

BTO NEWS MARCH 2021

Covid-19 Guidance

At the time of writing BTO guidance on surveys and fieldwork states that these activities can go ahead, at least in England. The guidance is available online at <https://www.bto.org/community/news/202103-bto-and-covid-19>

Wetland Bird Survey

Two key sectors of the Tees Estuary WeBS site are now vacant, and new volunteers are urgently needed. Seaton Common was ably covered in recent years by Keith Ryan up until his death in 2020. More recently, Russell McAndrew has retired from the Hartlepool Bay sector, where he has carried out the monthly survey for decades (Russell is undoubtedly one of the longest-serving counters in the whole of the UK). If you can assist by taking on either of these sectors please contact the Tees Estuary WeBS Local Organiser Adam Jones at Saltholme adam.jones@rspb.org.uk

Breeding Birds Survey and Waterways Breeding Birds Survey

After participating in the survey since its inception some 25 years ago, my predecessor as BTO Regional Representative and BBS Local Organiser Vic Fairbrother has reluctantly retired from his three squares.

While Mark Askew has agreed to cover two of these and Chris Sharp has taken on the Thornaby square, there is still a cluster of four vacant squares in East Cleveland, as well as two between Stockton and Darlington (see below).

Please do consider taking part in the Breeding Bird Survey. Most long-term volunteers find getting to know the breeding bird communities of a single 1km square a fascinating and rewarding experience. Only two sessions per 1km square are required between April and June (plus an additional short reconnaissance visit to record habitat) each taking no more than two hours. The following squares are available to allocate for 2021.

NZ3114	Lingfield, Darlington
NZ3717	Longnewton
NZ6811	Moorsholm Moor
NZ6914	Moorsholm
NZ7016	Liverton
NZ7017	Liverton Mines (Kilton Beck)

While all BBS squares are important to the survey, those with a history of continuous coverage are especially valuable. Full details are on the BTO website <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/bbs> where you can find further details and register. Alternatively, please contact me on 07510 996977 or mikelaquila@hotmail.com if you think you can help.

Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey

The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of both existing and new wet grassland breeding wader habitats in England for declining species such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe. The 2021 survey will re-visit sites from previous surveys carried out in 1982 and 2002, entailing up to four visits between mid-April and the end of June to count and map all waders within allocated sites featuring wet grassland. Further details are available on <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/breeding-waders-wet-meadows>

Bird Trends 2020

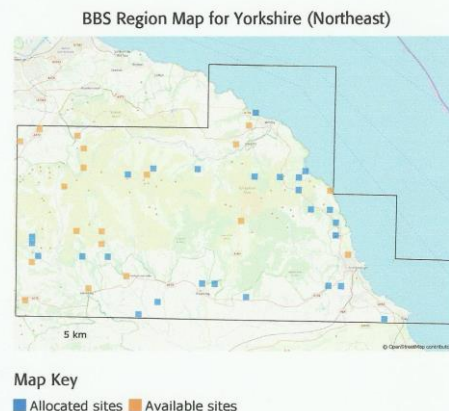
Published in March 2021, the BTO's latest Bird Trends report is a one-stop shop for information about the population status of the common breeding birds of the wider UK countryside. The report is based on data gathered by the many thousands of volunteers who contribute to BTO-led surveys. For each of 121 species, users can quickly access the latest information on trends in population size, breeding performance and survival rates, as measured by our long-term monitoring schemes. It all makes for fascinating reading, available at <https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/birdtrends/2020>

Mike Leakey, BTO Regional Representative for Cleveland
mikelaquila@hotmail.com
07510 996977

BREEDING BIRD SURVEY OPPORTUNITIES IN THE BTO YORKSHIRE NORTHEAST AREA

Firstly, I should introduce myself. I am Nick Gibbons and I have recently taken over from Graham Oliver as the BTO Regional Rep for Yorkshire Northeast. I used to live in Norfolk close to the BTO and have been volunteering with them for some years both on the BBS and various other surveys such as Woodlark, Nightjar and Willow tits.

Looking at the 'available' squares for the BBS of my new area it is noticeable that there are lot in the north-west section (see below). This is where we have very few people living within my BTO boundary, but with a large population to the north. As such I would like to make contact with anyone who may be interested in 'defecting' across this artificial boundary and undertaking a BBS square in the York NE patch.



I am sure most of you are aware that it does not involve a massive amount of work and contributes enormously to our understanding of ongoing bird populations and feeds directly into the national biodiversity indicators. I believe there are also so nice sites up there, just a long way from home for my population centre.

I look forward to hearing from at nicholas.gibbons123@btinternet.com or 07790 113025. I do have a Twitter account but struggle with it, but as a last resort - @BTO_YorkNE.

Thank you to the Teeside Birders and especially for Mark Askew for help in getting this far.



TITBITS

A collection of
bird-related

news and facts compiled
by Eric James

Turn that light off!

Artificial lighting can have various effects on birds, including night-time singing of Robins (with the resulting spurious claims of Nightingales), though tests have shown that

disturbed sleep can have adverse effects on health and breeding success.

One series of tests to measure the extent of sleep disturbance had magpies and pigeons in an aviary for three nights. The birds were fitted with sensors to detect brain activity. On the second night, the birds were exposed to lights of a similar intensity as street lighting, both white and amber (as from sodium bulbs).

Magpies were mostly affected by white lights, losing 76 per cent of their non-REM sleep, while pigeons lost about four hours of sleep in total, regardless of the type of light.

In the wild, birds have to get accustomed to night illumination or change habitat. Both Magpies and pigeons can sleep in the light conditions in the test, while some pigeons, perversely, have been seen roosting directly opposite bright white security lights.

A less obvious species that can suffer from lights is the Manx Shearwater. The juveniles leave the breeding colonies at night to avoid predatory gulls and fly out to the open sea. To do this they aim for the horizon, which is usually slightly brighter than the rest of the sky. Problems arise when there are any near by seaside lights, which attract the birds and if they land, they have difficulty in taking off and are vulnerable to attack by roaming mammals.

Penguins feeding in groups

A previous tit-bit mentioned that a single penguin when hunting would give brief calls, thought to attract other birds since they have greater feeding success in groups. As a group, the birds can herd fish to just below the water surface, and any fish that has been 'kettled' and tries to escape can be snapped up easily by a penguin.

Penguin monitoring from the comfort of your home

To monitor penguin populations in Antarctica, and to study the effects of climate change and reduced ice, Tom Hart and a team from Oxford University are photographing penguin colonies with fixed cameras. As there are too many photographs for the team to analyse so they have set up a project called

Penguin Watch (penguinwatch.org) where volunteers, more than a million so far, but more always welcome, can flick through on-line photographs, clicking on adult penguins, chicks and eggs, plus any other birds that are visible. In addition to the information gathered from the photographs, it can be used to train an Artificial Intelligence machine which will be able to process future photographs automatically.

Another disease to worry about

As if we didn't have enough medical problems, we've got Lyme disease to think about. The worst affected areas are the south of England and Scottish Highlands and Islands, but the North York Moors are also considered as a potential infection area.



The tick that carries the disease, and you won't even feel it

NICE report round 2,000 to 3,000 new cases of Lyme disease are thought to occur in England and Wales every year, but prevalence data is thought to be incomplete as GPs and hospitals are not obliged to report any infections so the total could be as high as 8,000

My only experience of the tick was in Canada, though fortunately not in a Lyme disease area. I probably picked up when pushing through tall vegetation in pursuit of a Lesser Yellowlegs. Having removed it, we tried to wash it down the sink in our motor caravan, but a minute later the tough little so-and-so crawled back up; trying to finish it off by squashing it with back of a spoon also failed, the little beast being as hard as a small pebble

One of the clearest signs of Lyme infection are characteristic “bulls eye” lesions around the site of a tick bite, although this is not definite since in some countries this is also caused by a different tick-borne disease which requires different treatment.



The sign of a tick bite

nhs.org

So if you are on the moors, then it's trousers tucked into socks and don't even think about shorts.

If you think you have been infected, get to your GP as soon as possible as antibiotics can treat the condition, though you might need to be referred to a specialist if symptoms persist.

Threat to the Tagus estuary

Birds as we all know like estuaries, but it is unfortunate that governments wanting new airports are also keen on them.

The Tagus estuary in Portugal is one of the world's most important wetlands with more than 300,000 birds regularly wintering there. The Portuguese government are aware of this importance but it hasn't stopped them from wanting a new airport, Montijo, there.

This will directly destroy part of the wetland, but the problem extends beyond the of the airport itself. To avoid the risk of bird strikes, it will be necessary to scare birds away from a much wider area.

This project in Portugal fails to comply with both EU and their own national environmental laws that safeguard protected sites against developments that risk serious harm to ecological health (fancy that! You can ignore EU rules without the bother of leaving the EU).

Tracking migrating animals, an update

Following the titbit in the last Newsletter about tracking a Robin crossing the Channel, Alistair McLee informs me that the system I described is part of a larger project, Motus, which aims to construct monitoring stations in migration areas in Europe and the Americas



Motus monitoring stations, March 2020

As you can see, eastern North America has a dense array of stations, so let's hope Europe catches up. The tags that are fitted to animals range from 0.02g, which last for one to three months and are suitable for dragonflies and butterflies (Painted Ladies, perhaps) up to 3g, lasting up to three years, for larger animals. Developers have recently released solar-powered tags that last indefinitely, or for the lifespan of the animal. For more details, try the link below

<https://partnersinflight.org/the-motus-wildlife-tracking-system-working-collaboratively-to-cover-more-ground/>

Fooling the egg thieves - sometimes

We've all got similar opinions about egg collectors, but it's not just birds that suffer. In Costa Rica there is a trade in marine turtle eggs.

However, the poachers have a new obstacle to getting away with their ill-gotten gains: 3D-printed decoy eggs with GPS trackers, called InvestEggator. The decoy eggs, about the size of a ping-pong ball, were developed by conservation organisation Paso Pacifico in Nicaragua as a means to fight wildlife poaching. They can track eggs that have been illegally removed and could help identify the chain involved in their illegal trade. The fake eggs resemble turtle eggs in size and shape and contain a GPS transmitter, SIM card, charging ports and a battery pack.

The team placed a decoy egg into 101 turtle nests on four beaches in Costa Rica. This didn't affect the hatching success of the other eggs.

A quarter of the fakes were taken, and the team was able to track five of them via location signals sent every hour. These eggs were taken from two green sea turtle nests and three Olive Ridley sea turtle nests (No, I don't know who Olive Ridley is or was, and neither does Wikipedia).

Most of the eggs stayed in the local region, but the decoy taken furthest identified a trade chain. The egg was taken 137 kilometres inland over two days, to a supermarket loading bay and then to a residential property.

The poached eggs are considered a delicacy in parts of Central America (poached or otherwise), so they are not bought by collectors, unlike birds' eggs.

The scheme didn't always work and there were reports of poachers realising that the eggs were fake. One decoy stopped sending signals 43 kilometres from the beach it originated from, and the investigating team later received photographs of the dissected device. Like our egg collectors, part of the attraction of stealing turtle eggs is getting one over on the law enforcers. Long-time Club members might remember a talk by a Police Wildlife Liaison Officer at a Club meeting at the Billingham Arms : he recounted a tale starting with Scottish police becoming suspicious when a well-known egg collector was seen taking a close interest in a nest, collectors never carry stolen eggs home as they might be stopped and searched, so the Scottish police were not surprised when the man went brazenly to the local post office with a parcel addressed to himself (It's legally difficult for the police to interfere with Her Majesty's Mails). The police at the collector's home town obtained a search warrant which was executed as soon as the parcel was delivered; it contained a chocolate Easter Egg, representing two metaphorical fingers.

Plastic in the sea again, or is it?

Much of the plastic pollution in the sea is considered to be in the form of microfibres, typically 1mm long.

Textile microfibres are big contributors to marine pollution because they are readily shed from clothes during general wear and tear and laundering, and drift through the air or wash down drains into waterways. A single machine wash of polyester clothing, for example, releases half a million textile microfibres.

Ocean surveys have tended to count all microfibres as plastic, based on the assumption that natural fibres like cotton and wool biodegrade too quickly to persist in marine environments.

So, sticking to cotton and woollen clothes isn't going to help. Research has found that only 8 per cent of fibres were plastic such as polyester or nylon. The rest were natural fibres including cotton, which made up 50 per cent of the total, and wool, which made up 12 per cent, and others like silk, hemp and linen. These figures are surprising because almost two-thirds of textiles manufactured today are synthetic. It is possible that natural fibres degrade more slowly than previously thought, and that most of the cotton and wool fibres currently floating in oceans are pollution from previous decades when they were the most common textiles used in clothing.

One possible reason for this slow breakdown of natural fibres is that when used to make clothes, they are often dyed and coated in chemicals such as flame retardants, and these might reduce their biodegradability. As an example, an intact dyed cotton waistcoat was discovered in a 133-year-old shipwreck.(it might be a sign of age, but I'm tempted to add 'and the Timex was still working' – but you probably need to be of pension age to remember that advert).

A Herring Gull by any other name would pinch your chips

In a recent radio interview, an expert said the chip-stealing birds were not seagulls but more accurately called Urban Gulls. But at no point in the interview were they called Herring

Gulls. Why this reluctance to give them their proper name?

A bright aspect of global warming

Global warming is playing havoc with wildlife, as demonstrated by David Attenborough's recent 'Perfect Planet' television series.

But there is a bright spot: in Europe, ivy is expanding, its autumn flowers providing a late season nectar for insects and berries for birds when there are few other sources.

The increase is partly explained by temperature, but ivy is also helped by being evergreen, and nitrogen pollution from agriculture and burning fossil fuels.

If you want the advantages of ivy without damaging your brickwork, there are shrubby bushes made by propagating non-climbing flowering stems

STEVE NORMAN 30.11.45 – 18.5.20

This will be a very personal tribute to a much loved brother, and life-long best friend.

I would have been 11, Steve 9 when we started to develop an interest that eventually grew into a lifelong passion for what we both came in time to regard as the most wonderful life-form on this planet - birds. Around our mid-teens we joined the then still fairly fledgling Teesmouth Bird Club and as of April 2020 we had been members for 58 years. Over the next decade or so we were fortunate enough to record a number of significant bird observations for both Teesmouth and Yorkshire.

The next important landmark in both our lives came in 1968 when we both married - within three months of each other.

By 1970 we were both I think feeling the need to shift our focus away from pure recording to something different and more in depth and about that time we started various bird-related projects on a site at Wilton, Lovell Hill Ponds, a fantastic wetland and scrub habitat then, with a wonderful array of

breeding birds - principally warblers, soon to become Steve's favourite species.

In 1971, Gordon Follows a bird ringer, moved to Teesside from Lancashire and made contact. Within a few months he had taken us both on as trainees. As of September 2021 we would both have reached the milestone of 50 years as ringers.

It was in this field that Steve realised his talent for data analysis in relation to warblers - particularly the Willow Warbler. He wrote numerous papers on the subject of feather moult for several journals, (including Ibis), a topic frankly that always bored me rigid but fascinated him. In these he produced many original and thought-provoking observations. Steve and I also collaborated on separate papers dealing with the autumn and spring migration of the Willow Warbler and the account for this species for the BTO's Migration Atlas. Collaborated is putting it rather generously as Steve did 85% of the work and I got 50% of the credit, which typically he never begrudged me.

Mortifyingly for him, Steve lost his wife, Flo to cancer in 2006, and he subsequently seemed to lose all motivation and incentive to carry on with his moult studies. He frequently remarked to me in later years that although he had fresh ideas he would like to pursue he just couldn't seem to muster the energy and drive to do so.

From the mid 1980's for many years Steve, Flo and Jean my wife and I went on annual summer holidays together somewhere in Europe. These were wonderfully enjoyable times with days following a very predictable pattern. Steve and I would be up and out at dawn and off somewhere or other for four hours or so of solid birding. We would then return for breakfast and to take our wives where they wanted to go and do, but our binoculars never left our necks as almost invariably we always seemed to be able to find an interesting looking patch of habitat behind a beach that we could investigate for birds.

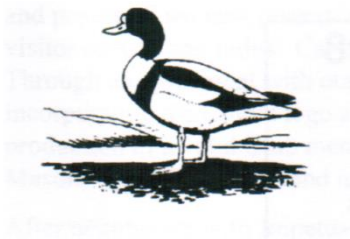
Following Flo's passing, sadly, but unavoidably really, these holidays ceased. Steve couldn't cope with the thought of going to favourite destinations of hers. He was really lost, I think, for some time until he decided to visit Gibraltar in 2007 - somewhere totally new with no "holiday history" for him. It was a brilliant choice. He had a great time and was invited the following year to return as warden cover for a period over March and April. I accompanied him to offer support and frankly we had a great three weeks there, either recording thousands of birds of prey arriving from Morocco or catching and ringing species rarely seen in the UK. Soon after this the resident spring warden retired and Steve was asked to take over the job which he readily accepted, filling the post from then on until 2017, when he reluctantly had to admit that his knees were no longer up to the job. I know how much he enjoyed his times in Gibraltar, the role gave him a new and real purpose in life and he made many friends over there, and I personally am so very grateful to those who offered him the post. The benefits weren't all just one way though; the observatory acquired a top-notch, enthusiastic and committed birder and ringer, so it was very much a reciprocal arrangement.

In many ways Steve and I have always been more like twins than brothers two years apart. We've always held the same outlook on life in general, the same interests outside of birds, the same sense of at times, outrageous humour. Basically, we were like two sides of the same coin, and when one side of such a coin is erased then the worth of it is much more significantly reduced than by just half. The only solace Steve's family can take from his demise is that it happened just minutes after he had finished a round of his Tree Sparrow boxes. So he went out 'in the field', so to speak as he no doubt would have wished.

I know that along with his daughters and grandchildren, I am going to miss, for a long time to come, Steve's companionship, steadfastness, common-sense, irreverent

humour and un-waning enthusiasm for anything to do with birds.

Wilf Norman



TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB

Registered as a Charity No. 508850

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

THE CLUB COMMITTEE

(Chairman) **Barbara Crinson**
(Vice Chairman) **Steve McDonnell**
(Hon Secretary) **Chris Sharp**
(Hon Treasurer) **Mark Askew**
(Ordinary Member) **Alistair McLee** (Co-opted)
(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)
(Ordinary Member) **Barbara Keville** (First Appointed 2020)

RECORDS SUB-COMMITTEE

(Chairman) **Alan Crossley**
Chris Brown
Graham Megson
Ian Kendall
Chris Bell
Ian Foster
Chris Sharp
Ian Boustead

CONSERVATION SUB-COMMITTEE

(Chairman) **Alistair McLee**

Honorary Treasurer's Report 2020

Despite the inevitable disruption to activities after March, club income and expenditure was fairly routine. Postage was particularly high, partly because more reports had to be posted as we were unable to hold meetings in the second half, but also because some of the 2019 postage had been carried over to 2020. Based purely on 2020 figures, it is difficult to gauge what impact the COVID-19 pandemic will have on our main source of income, membership subscriptions. The signs are promising with an encouraging level of subscriptions received in early 2021, many through the newer option of PayPal.

While we have not been able to hold members attended meetings for a while, everyone is hopeful of some normality from the autumn. Most expenditure is associated with the bird reports and feeding stations, and this has carried on throughout. As such, we propose to hold membership fees at their current rates.

Mark Askew



REPORT FROM THE CHAIR FOR 2020 THE YEAR OF COVID



I think everyone will agree that this has to have been the weirdest year on which to base a report, since the founding of the Club. Countless organisations worldwide will be analysing the past year and looking extremely hard for the positives! Uncertainty concerning the timing and extent of restrictions has been the biggest challenge and sparked hesitation in trying to plan anything. However, as you know, we eventually held a belated online AGM and thanks both to Mark Askew and Julie Mason, we have succeeded in holding a couple of Trustees Committee meetings and additional meetings for members with invited speakers. At this point, I must thank Brian Clasper for delivering the first in-house talk, before we took the plunge and invited an external speaker. The feedback we received from members who attended these online events was very favourable.

Other achievements over the year, of course, include the publication of the high quality Annual Report. Thanks go to Chris Brown and the team of compilers for this sterling effort and, at this juncture, I must offer huge thanks to Martin Blick who has compiled the monthly summary for the report since 2009 to date, and over the last few years has produced the four-monthly round-ups which appear in the newsletter. It must not be forgotten that Martin also put together the summary for the Annual Report from 1975-2000. He believes it is time for someone else to step up to the task, so please come forward if you feel able to help.

The Records Committee has had a bit of a reshuffle so that now the committee comprises: - Alan Crossley (Chairman), Graeme Joynt, Chris Brown, Tom Francis, Geoff Icton, Martyn Sidwell, Chris Sharp, Chris Bell, Ian Kendall and Ian Foster.

Alistair McLee continues to keep track of all that is happening with regard to proposed developments and conservation issues affecting the county and responds accordingly on behalf of the Club.

The Trustees sadly lose Mike McGrory from the committee this year and we all thank him enormously for his tremendous support and the work he has undertaken throughout his time both as a past Chairman and general committee member. On a plus note, Keith Smith has agreed to join us on committee, and we look forward to working with him and hope that he finds the role fulfilling and satisfying.

Compliments still regularly appear from external sources in my inbox regarding our website, so gratitude goes, as always, to Jamie Duffie. I must also thank Simon Stobart for his diligent approach to updating the Gallery section on the website. He and I have been working well together over recent months, with some input from a few other members, to put together the historical records of the scarce birds found each year in the county. We have chosen to include some record shots, if any were available, and, of course, some birds escaped the lens altogether! The work is still in progress.

Another project under serious consideration is an involvement of the club with MOTUS bird tracking, which we hope to establish at Hartlepool Headland. We are still at the early stages but will keep members informed of progress via future newsletters.

Following the passing of Denis Summers-Smith, the Trustees decided that we should honour Denis by contributing £500 to his Tribute Fund, administered by the BTO. I am including a transcript of the letter received from the BTO below my report, which explains more about the fund.

As most people are aware, Graeme Joynt is the recipient of the Ted Parker award for last year and since we have been unable to present this award to him in person, the Trustees have made the decision not to present anyone else with the accolade this year. Hopefully, Graeme will be able to attend a meeting in the autumn to receive his award and let's hope we can hold a face-to-face AGM at the same time.

On a personal note, I must say a massive thank you, particularly to Chris, Mark, Ali, Julie and the other Trustees, and, of course, Martin, for their unbelievable support throughout my three-year Chairmanship. It has been an honour and, as the first female Chair, I hope I did the girls proud! I am now looking forward to supporting Steve McDonnell in all of his future endeavours to lead the club. Steve will be Acting-Chair until he is voted in as a formality at the AGM.

Barbara Crinson

TRANSCRIPT OF LETTER RECEIVED FROM BTO

Dear Barbara

Re: Denis Summers-Smith Tribute Fund

Thank you for your letter of 16 February enclosing a cheque for £500 from Teesmouth Bird Club for the Denis Summers-Smith Tribute Fund. We are so grateful for this generous support. Please pass on our heartfelt thanks to your members for this kind donation, given in recognition of Denis' long history with Teesmouth Bird Club.

With wonderful support like this BTO can continue Denis' legacy – supporting early career scientists in their development, with access to funding, the support of BTO scientists and use of our long-term datasets, some of which span over 90 years. Investing in their future will advance our knowledge of the natural world and help us inform conservation, delivering real change for years to come.

Thank you once again for supporting the BTO.

With kindest regards

Samantha Rider
Legacy Officer

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
2020	451	270	162			14	5

As can be seen from the above table the club membership only declined slightly in 2020 despite the restrictions imposed on our activities by the coronavirus pandemic.

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.

As in previous years the many hours of free time given by certain members is worthy of mention. Special thanks go to Jamie Duffie who edited the newsletters in 2020. In addition, thanks go to Martin Blick for producing the monthly summaries and Eric James for continuing to provide much material for publication.

Jamie also doubles as our website manager and 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 recent years and it is better than ever and more user friendly. Subscriptions can now be paid by PayPal and many members used this facility in 2020.

The annual bird report is also a publication the club can be rightly proud of. As a current 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. This year more than twenty compilers were involved in the writing of the report. 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 and Graeme Joynt continued to assist Alan in his duties as recorder to ensure a smooth transition process.

Last of all much thanks must go to Barbara Crinson who will be stepping down as Chairman at the AGM. Barbara has worked tirelessly on behalf of the club in her three year tenure as Chairman. Fortunately Barbara will be remaining on the committee and her input will be greatly valued.

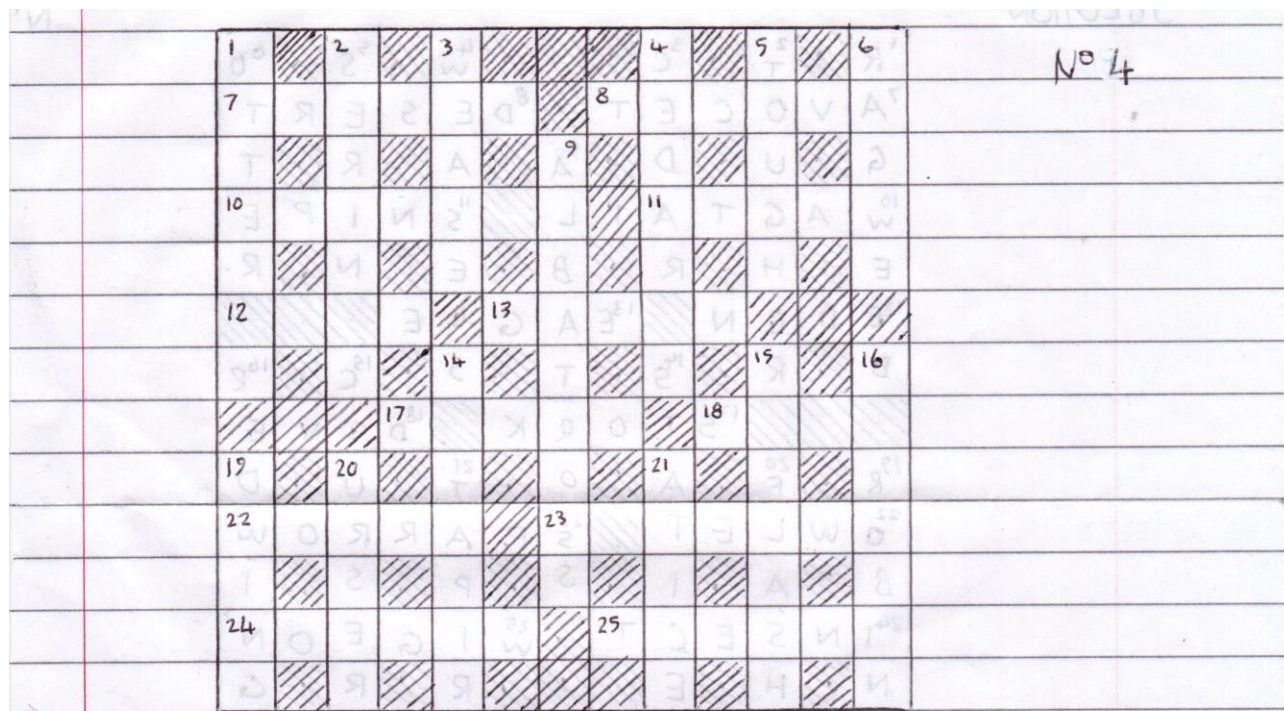
Chris Sharp

TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB						
Statement of Income & Expenditure for 2020						
(with 2019 for comparison)						
		2020		2019		
		Income	Payment	Income	Payment	
Subscriptions		4232.73		4498.61		
Gift Aid		872.44		925.79		
Interest		428.57		489.74		
Meetings			211.60		471.60	
Lecture Fees			164.00		633.00	
TBC Gen Publications		349.44		255.83		
Bird Report			2500.00		2500.00	
Printing & Stationery			521.00		332.00	
Postage			1129.13		226.40	
Subs to other Societies			50.50		50.50	
Recorder's expenses			0.00		137.97	
Insurance			268.80		268.80	
Sundries		0.00	16.00	0.01	0.00	
Website			300.00		2053.46	
Donations		500.00	0.00	15.00	0.00	
Feeding stations			745.59		1290.26	
Hide repairs			65.00		0.00	
Events expenses			0.00		82.80	
Little tern vols			0.00		1044.00	
Lockwood feeding shelter			0.00		854.43	
Data provision		55.00		220.00		
		6438.18	5971.62	6404.98	9945.22	
	Excess Income		466.56		-3540.24	
		6438.18	6438.18	6404.98	6404.98	
	Balance B/F 2019		60290.10	Balance B/F 2018		63830.34
	Excess Income		466.56			-3540.24
	Balance 31.12.2020		60756.66	Balance 31.12.19		60290.10
	Cash In Hand		0.00			0.00
	Bank Current Acc		799.38			761.39
	Deposit A/C 'PSMF'		0.20			0.20
	NSB Investment Acc		59957.08			59528.51
			60756.66			60290.10

CROSSWORD 3 SOLUTION BY BILL IRVING

SOLUTION	¹ S		² B		³ M			⁴ W		⁵ G		⁶ R	Nº. 3
	⁷ M	E	R	L	I	N		⁸ O	R	I	O	L	E
	E		O		R		⁹ C		A		R		D
	¹⁰ L	L	A	M	A		¹¹ O	S	T	R	I	C	H
	T		D		G		R		H		L		E
				¹² T	E	E	M	S		¹³ A	L	B	A
	¹⁴ C		¹⁵ F		S		O		¹⁶ B		A		D
	¹⁷ O	W	L	S		¹⁸ B	R	O	A	D			
	W		U		¹⁹ L		A		R		²⁰ G		²¹ L
	²² B	I	T	T	E	R	N		²³ N	U	R	S	E
	I		T		V		T		O		E		A
	²⁴ R	E	E	L	E	D		²⁵ T	W	E	E	T	S
	D		R		L				L		N		T

CROSSWORD 4 BY BILL IRVING



CLUES ACROSS

- 7 Wader finds cave to change (6)
 8 Where 500 trees are processed (6)
 10 Bird like excited dog? (7)
 11 Chopped pines reveal wader (5)
 12 Simply a famous garden (4)
 13 Old comic bird? (5)
 17 Bird famous for new arrivals? (5)
 18 Flyer seen in wood over there (4)
 22 Youngster rips up towel (5)
 23 Small bird will fight before dispute (7)
 24 Eg beetle in group of people (6)
 25 Duck sees false hair one cut (6)

CLUES DOWN

- 1 Plant we raged about (7)
 2 Maybe her goat makes her stronger (7)
 3 Conifer seen in fenced area (5)
 4 Do they go 'pop'? (7)
 5 Bird to rinse out (5)
 6 Mammal seen in coot territory (5)
 9 It could be wandering (9)
 14 Search first at ice for plant (7)
 15 Rare bird seen at Aintree? (7)
 16 Russian Faction for winter visitor (7)
 19 It's on the cards in December (5)
 20 Short lived area of water? (5)
 21 Mammal I trap in error (5)