

Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

September 2022 (No.82)



Reg.Charity No.508850

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The Newsletter is issued three times a year

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Any material for inclusion is welcome. Please send to tbc.projects@hotmail.co.uk



Starling 'I love this stuff, me'
See page 15 for fats and birds

Eric James

Monthly Summaries

Chris Sharp reviews the birding highlights of the Spring

MARCH

The long staying and much photographed Black Redstarts remained at Ferry Road, Hartlepool early in the month. Up to four Velvet Scoters were at Redcar and a White-fronted Goose was at Scaling. In what had been a very poor winter for Waxwings, one was at Guisborough on 1st.

A Great Northern Diver was off Marske and single Glaucous Gulls were at Skelton on 3rd and Hartlepool 5th-6th. Two Great White Egrets and a Spoonbill were around the North Tees Marshes from 4th. Single Ruffs were at Bowesfield on 3rd and Saltholme Pools on 7th.

A Green-winged Teal at Saltholme on 8th did not linger. A purple patch at Scaling saw Avocet on 8th, Red Kite on 9th and a Raven on 11th. Others or possibly the same Red Kite were at Lockwood and Margrove on 9th.

Singing Chiffchaffs were reported from 11th and the first Little Ringed Plover was at South Gare on 12th. Five Shore Larks at Skinninggrove on 13th remained until 16th. Two Ravens at Boulby on 15th were seen by one fortunate observer. Surely it is only a matter of time before this species stays around for a few days somewhere in the south of the county.

The first Wheatear and Sand Martin were on the 15th. Two Ruddy Shelduck were at Saltholme the same day. Rumour has it this species will soon be accepted as occurring "wild" in this country. Three Whooper Swans on Saltholme on 17th were one of few spring reports this year.

An Iceland Gull in Albert Park from 20th showed well. Three more Whoopers were at RSPB Saltholme on 23rd. A Waxwing was in Middlesbrough and the first Garganey of the spring was at RSPB Saltholme.

Up to six adult Mediterranean Gulls at RSPB Saltholme meant more breeding was expected following on from last year's first Cleveland record of this phenomenon. Single Cranes were over Hartlepool on 27th and RSPB Saltholme the following day. A Black Redstart was at Scaling on 27th and a drake Common Scoter on Saltholme

Pools on 30th was an unusual location for this species.



Mediterranean Gull Saltholme

Ian Forrest

APRIL

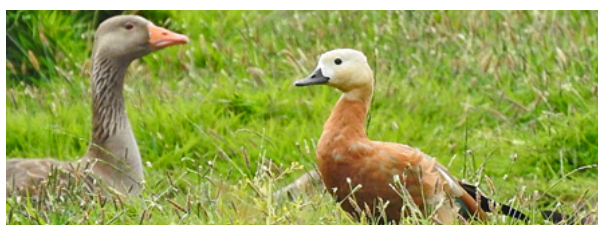


Great White Egrets Saltholme

Simon Stobart

Great White Egrets increased to three in the Saltholme area. A Little Gull was at Scaling on 3rd. The first Ring Ouzel of the spring was also found on this date. Up to 40 Twite still remained at Seaton Snook and four Snow Buntings were still lingering at South Gare.

An Osprey was tracked from North Gare to Hartlepool on 6th. Up to 79 Black-tailed Godwits were along the Seal Sands road along with a solitary Ruff. A Scaup was at Scaling on 9th. The first Willow Warbler and Whimbrel were to be found on 10th. A Glaucous Gull was at Dorman's Pool on 13th and nearby two Ruddy Shelduck were at Saltholme Pools.



Ruddy Shelducks, Seal Sands Road

Ian Forrest

The first Grasshopper Warbler was reeling on 13th quickly followed by Redstart, Reed and Sedge Warblers on 14th. Six Ring Ouzels were at Hummersea on 15th and a Hooded Crow was at Marske. An Osprey was over Yarm on 16th. An Egyptian Goose was at Saltholme on 17th and was joined by two more from 19th.

A Red-rumped Swallow at Margrove Pond on 17th only showed to the initial observer. Another Hooded Crow was at Warsett Hill with one over Dorman's Pool on 18th. A Hoopoe was reported from Saltburn on 18th and what was presumably the same bird from Skelton on 19th. Two Black-throated and a Great Northern Diver were off Marske on 17th.

A Spoonbill was around Saltholme from 18th. Little Gulls were at Scaling on 17th and Saltholme on 18th.



Little Gull, Saltholme

Ian Forrest

Three Scaup and an Iceland Gull were at Redcar on 21st. The following day saw the first Lesser Whitethroat and Cuckoo. Two Wood Sandpipers on Seaton Common on 23rd relocated to the Seal Sands road on 24th. Up to 61 Black-tailed Godwits were at RSPB Saltholme at this time.

The first Common Tern was seen on 25th with the first Garden Warbler on 26th. A Glaucous Gull visited Port Clarence Flood on 26th. After being absent during the winter months for the first time in a number of years a Greenshank was at Saltholme Pools on 28th. Two Ravens were also over Roseberry Topping on this date. A Pied Flycatcher was in Middlesbrough on 29th. Three Green Sandpipers were at Margrove Ponds.

The rarest bird of the spring was an immature drake King Eider off Marske on 30th. An excellent find it was only the second county record but was often well offshore. It remained for four days. The same day saw a fly-through Red-rumped Swallow at Boulby, an Osprey over Ingleby Barwick and the first Little Terns of the year.

MAY

Two Black-necked Grebes on Saltholme Pools on 1st were a fine sight as usual with this species. Two Long-tailed Ducks were off Cattersty. This species had been completely absent during the

winter months. A drake Garganey was at RSPB Saltholme from 2nd. The first Swifts were over here on 2nd. Six Arctic Terns were also present on this date.

A Red Kite was at Scaling on 3rd. Up to three Great White Egrets were around the North Tees Marshes along with a Spoonbill. A Wood Sandpiper, a Greenshank and seven Whimbrel were present here at this time. Both Great Northern and Black-throated Divers hung on off Marske. A small fall of migrants at Hummersea on 6th included two Ring Ouzels, two Lesser Whitethroats and three Garden Warblers. Hardly the stuff to get the pulses racing!

A Hooded Crow was over Margrove Pond on 7th with an Osprey over Cowpen Marsh the following day. Wader passage through the North Tees Marshes increased from 8th. The flood on Seal Sands road proved particularly attractive. Up to four Wood Sandpipers were seen here along with two Greenshank and two Spotted Redshanks over the following few days. A Temminck's Stint also visited briefly on 10th. Several Whinchats were seen at this time with two at South Gare on 10th.

A Hen Harrier was over Seaton Common on 11th. Unseasonal Glaucous Gulls were at Hemlington 11th-13th and at Port Clarence Flood on 11th. An elusive Glossy Ibis was on Cowpen Marsh on 12th and over Saltholme Pools on 14th. This date also saw a Hobby at Zinc Works Road and another summer plumaged Black-necked Grebe at RSPB Saltholme.

A Pectoral Sandpiper and two Wood Sandpipers were along the Seal Sands road on 15th. Small numbers of common migrants at the coast included two Spotted Flycatchers and two Garden Warblers at Hummersea and a single Spotted Flycatcher at Hunley Hall Golf course. The following day saw Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart at Hartlepool. A Blue-headed Wagtail was at Haverton Hole on 17th. With the reduction in Yellow Wagtail numbers in recent years, this sub species has become somewhat of a rarity in Cleveland.

The or another Black-necked Grebe was at RSPB Saltholme from 17th-19th. An Osprey was at Scaling on 18th with a Hobby at Redcar the following day. A drake Scaup and a Curlew Sandpiper added to the bird list at RSPB Saltholme on 19th. A Turtle Dove was present in a Skelton garden on 20th. This species is just about hanging on as an annual visitor to Cleveland. An Osprey was at Scaling and Black-tailed Godwit numbers peaked at 87 at RSPB Saltholme.

A Hooded Crow flew through Marske on 21st. One or two Little Gulls were around the North Tees Marshes and two Curlew Sandpipers were on Seaton Snook on 23rd.

The highlight of the spring for many was the appearance of three Glossy Ibis at RSPB Saltholme on 24th. The birds remained in the area until late June and were even seen nest building at one time. Another was seen at Scaling on 24th. Two Great Northern Divers were still off Marske and a Hobby was at Lazenby on 25th. A Whooper Swan on Seaton Common on 26th was at Greatham Creek on 28th and by Greatham farm in early June.

An Osprey was at Scaling for the last four days of the month. A summer plumaged Red-necked Grebe was on Bran Sands 30th-31st. Three Velvet Scoters were off Redcar. At least three Bitterns were at RSPB Saltholme. The birds showed really well at times. Booming was heard and breeding was suspected.

JUNE

An unseasonal Brent Goose was at South Gare on 1st. A drake Garganey was at RSPB Saltholme early in the month. The reserve also held a Little Stint on 1st and a Pectoral Sandpiper on 2nd.

An Icterine Warbler was trapped at Hartlepool on 4th. It proved to be the only scarce migrant passerine of the spring. The two Egyptian Geese remained along the Seal Sands all month. Two Little Gulls were at RSPB Saltholme from 4th. Velvet Scoter numbers increased to four off Redcar. An Osprey entertained at Lockwood Beck on 7th.



Glossy Ibis Saltholme

Ian Forrest

As usual June proved to be a quiet month. The three Glossy Ibis remained around the Saltholme area, up to five Great White Egrets were present and one or two Spoonbills were also around.



White-fronted Goose, Dorman's

James Robson

Both Whooper Swan and White-fronted Goose were on the North Tees Marshes on 12th. Adding to the unseasonal list of birds present, a Snow Bunting was at North Gare on 13th. A Hobby was at Scaling on 13th, with an Osprey at Long Newton on 14th and a Red Kite over Stockton the same day. Three Red Kites were over Crathorne on 17th.

Two Red-breasted Geese were on Saltholme Marsh from 18th. They remained until the end of the month. Given their arrival date they were presumably escapes from captivity but nevertheless made a fine site. The White-fronted Goose was also present alongside them for a few days. The two Egyptian Geese remained along the Seal Sands road also.

A Black Tern visited Dorman's Pool briefly on 23rd. This was the only record of this species in the first half of the year.

Wader passage increased slowly towards the month end. Up to five Wood Sandpipers were at Phil Stead hide and a Greenshank was on Dorman's Pool. A Caspian Tern on Dorman's Pool on 29th was the third year in succession this former rarity has appeared in Cleveland. Three Ruddy Shelducks flew over Saltholme Marsh on the same day.



Bearded Tit, Dorman's

Andrew Wappet

The month ended with juvenile Bearded Tits at Dorman's Pool and the Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis and Great White Egrets still present.



Red-breasted Goose, Saltholme

Simon Stobart

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Caspian Tern, Dorman's

Clive Prescott



Egyptian Goose, Seal Sands Rd

Ian Forrest

Note : Not the usual number of photographs this time. I used to take them from the Forum, but it's not being used much now and I had to use @teesbirds, which I found after a lot of painful scrolling only reached back to the end of June.



Cattle Egret. Saltholme

BobH

News from the Chair

The last meeting of the Trustees was held on 26th April 2022.

The Trustees have been in communication with Andy Preston, Mayor of Middlesbrough; They attended a Zoom meeting relating to the Portrack Tidal Conversion.

Trustees are still in communication with Stockton Borough Council regarding the Club's objection to the closure of the Long Drag. Unfortunately, due to several reasons this has become a very prolonged and slow process. Hopefully we will have a decision shortly.

I have been in communication with:

Alan Clarkson BBC, RSPB Saltholme, Lucy Mitchell and Ewan Parsons about MOTUS, Hartlepool Power Station and Chris Packham.

I attended a Tees Valley Nature Partnership engagement workshop at Ormesby Hall on 19th April.

The Club also arranged the following successful outdoor meetings:

- Stillington Woods
- Bowesfield Marsh
- Nightjars at Guisborough Forest
- Dragonflies at RSPB Saltholme.

Many thanks to the leaders for giving up their time to lead these meetings.

Julie Mason has been working hard to bring together another exciting series of evening talks for 2022/23, see below. Finding speakers year after year is not an easy task and Julie does a brilliant job in providing us with speakers covering an eclectic range of topics, as you can see below :

5th September 2022 - Stuart Granger An Introduction to Bird of Prey Persecution

*3rd October 2022 - Tim Herring - *"The Tees Rivers Trust – Estuary Restoration".

7th November 2022 - Graeme Joynt - Independent Ecuador

5th December 2022 - Graeme Skinner - Estonia

9th January 2023 - Joanna Dailey - Kielder Ospreys: the story of a thriving population

6th February 2023 - Colin Conroy - *Title to be confirmed*

6th March 2023 - Vic Fairbrother - "The Ring Ouzel: a view from the North York Moors."

If you have any suggestions or recommendations for talks, please speak to Julie.

(Email : juquacker@gmail.com).

See next page for possible developments for Hartlepool Kittiwakes



No to Kittiwakes

Members will be well aware of the development of offshore electricity generated by wind turbines of ever increasing height. One such project is Hornsea Three. Part of the consent order were measures for eco-compensation, drafted by the Offshore Ornithology Compensatory Group (OO CG) which has RSPB and Natural England (NE) as key members. The Red-listed species, Kittiwake, was included as an important species.

From all this, a project was conceived to create additional nesting sites by constructing bespoke artificial breeding “cliffs” with several hundred, especially tailored, nesting ledges. A site at Hartlepool harbour, seaward of the lifeboat station was selected and a planning application duly submitted. However, at the June planning committee meeting the application was refused by 6 votes to 4.

Exactly where this leaves the developers is not clear. A smaller scaled “cliff” would not seem to get around the objections and also not meet the requirements of the OOCG. Perhaps the structure could be sited in a location which does not already support Kittiwakes? Such areas could be coastal Lincolnshire or East Anglia in an unpopulated area of coastline. If the absence of breeding colonies is merely the absence of natural cliff features, the concept may be a “goer”

The feeding areas of the birds in the North Sea have been established already and the travel distance from, say the Bempton Cliffs is acceptable to the colony. The question is “Will the old adage of build it and they will come” apply with this seabird? A courageous management decision awaits that choice.

Of course, Hartlepool might not have been the sole choice of location in our immediate area, but there is already the precedent of one planning refusal. This story is going to run, I am sure.

For details of the application visit the Hartlepool Planning Portal at

<http://eforms.hartlepool.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet>

Application reference H/2022/0009

Ali McLee

If you can't find your way through the planning portal (I couldn't..... Ed), there's an aerial view of the proposed development and comments on page 20.

Some thoughts about the application refusal :

I wonder what aspect of the project upset the planning committee. Perhaps the number of birds nesting round the Headland (there's a lot) gave the impression that the species was doing well. The new nesting site might persuade the birds from nesting on man-made structures such as window sills, which must be an annoyance for householders



or any ledge, such as the fish quay....



or the back of a house in Southgate....



...and anything else that resembles a cliff ledge, including floodlights.....



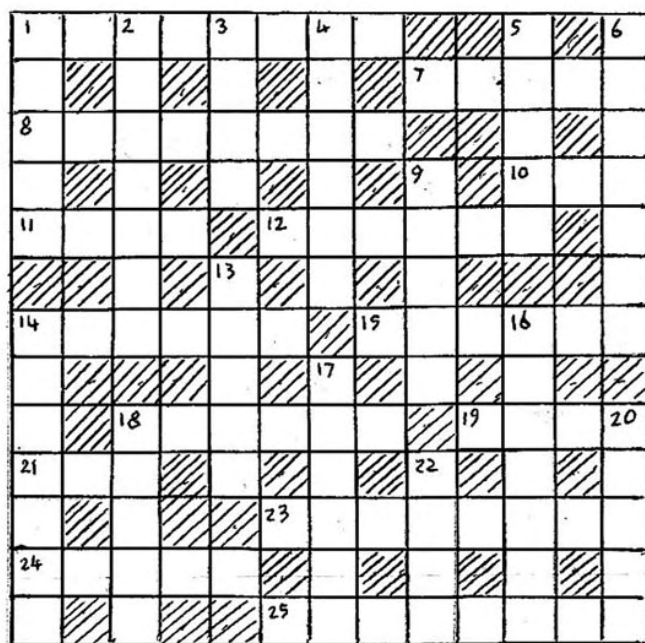
and, of course...



As for the species doing well, it isn't, with declines throughout its whole range. The problems are the usual suspects : pollution, over-fishing and climate warming. These human caused activities are harming Kittiwakes' breeding : parents are unable to find sufficient fish to feed their chicks as the over-fishing reduces their prey and climate change drives their main prey (sand-eels and capelins) further north from their nesting cliffs. The birds are left stuck in a quandary and, in a bid to survive, they must either switch to different prey or try to follow their preferred food further north. Both options will reduce their breeding success as parents as foraging further for food limits the amount of food they can bring back, until they cannot provide for their chicks' needs anymore, leading ultimately to starvation and death., and to a doubtful future for the species.....Ed. continued on page 20,

PS. These photographs were taken in 2015 and 2013 so the situations might have changed since then

No. 9



ACROSS

- 1 Two raptors in one? (5-3)
- 7 Idiot on the point gets Finch (5)
- 8 Russian's cake for a thrush (8)
- 10 Could be golden for a duck (3)
- 11 Young raptor seen in valley as usual (4)
- 12 Magical raptor? (6)
- 14 Wader soaking not well inside (6)
- 15 Deity with humour gets the wader (6)
- 18 Disco termination hides duck (6)
- 19 Boast for common bird (4)
- 21 Maiden name (3)
- 23 Young fish is right back by vent (8)
- 24 Young bird (5)
- 25 Artist in tight surroundings gets the fish (8)

DOWN

- 1 Nest of eagle (5)
- 2 Duck will gallivant with butterfly (7)
- 3 '12 across maybe does to 7 across
- 4 Purged of annelids (6)
- 5 She tears up vine around ten (5)
- 6 Youngster could make vet reel (7)
- 9 Too much water (5)
- 13 Large bird sees brave person on the point (5)
- 14 contorted impudence gets the bird (7)
- 16 Arctic singer? (7)
- 17 Search for polecat? (6)
- 18 Singer spoiled siren (5)
- 20 Funny part of Godwit Tyrone saw
- 22 Scottish stream-maybe hot? (4)

BTO News August 2022

Breeding Birds Survey and Waterways Breeding Birds Survey

78% of Cleveland's BBS squares are currently allocated. Of these, 2022 data from 60% of early visits and 48% of late visits have already been submitted at the time of writing, a significantly lower rate than last year. Well done to everyone who has contributed, and if you have yet to submit data **please do so by the end of August**.

All of Cleveland's WBBS squares are currently allocated, and 50% of 2022 data have already been submitted.

The latest BTO/RSPB/JNCC Breeding Bird Survey report has recently been published. In 2021 146 BBS squares were surveyed in Northeast England, enabling 25-year population trends to be generated for 40 species; of these nine species showed significant increases and ten species showed significant declines in our Region. These are tabulated below.

Increases in NE England	Current 25-year index	Declines in NE England	Current 25-year index
Buzzard	6624	Swift	-77
Chiffchaff	341	Greenfinch	-66
Goldfinch	172	Starling	-53
Great Spotted Woodpecker	124	Yellowhammer	-47
Blackcap	93	Rook	-42
Mallard	83	Swallow	-37
Great Tit	49	Willow Warbler	-31
Whitethroat	41	Curlew	-24
Pheasant	40	Skylark	-20
		Blue Tit	-20

While many of these long-term trends will come as no surprise to us in the light of our local birding experiences, the contrasting fortunes of Great Tit and Blue Tit might be less evident to some. In Northeast England Swift and Rook both show the largest declines within any English Region, while Whitethroat exhibits the largest increase.

The full 2021 BBS report can be accessed here

https://www.bto.org/sites/default/files/publications/bbs_report_2021.pdf

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS)

A special edition of WeBS News has recently been published. Normally spring is the time that *Waterbirds in the UK* would hit doormats, and the WeBS Report Online would be updated with the latest data for waterbird species and sites. Unfortunately, after careful consideration, this has not been possible for the July 2020–June 2021 WeBS year. Despite record breaking numbers of counters taking part, and for the first time over 3,000 sites having had at least one visit during the year, many key waterbird locations could not be visited during the period owing to pandemic-related restrictions. For example, the Tees Estuary WeBS Site suffered a 45% drop in the number of sector visits in comparison with the previous year.

Despite the brief hiatus in reporting waterbird trends, rest assured that survey efforts during the 2020–21 year were valuable, and the data will be used in future. The long-term dataset to is absolutely critical for the conservation of wetlands and waterbirds.

The Special Edition of WeBS News can be viewed via this link

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/wetland-bird-survey/publications/webs-news>

Updates to Population Status of British breeding and Wintering Birds (BoCC5)

Every six years the population status of all birds with regular breeding and/or wintering populations in the UK is compiled by a coalition of the UK's leading bird conservation and monitoring organisations.

A set of objective criteria and the latest available information, including trends from the Breeding Bird Survey, Waterways Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey and the Heronries Census, are used for the status assessments. The criteria include trends in population and range, population size, localisation and international importance of each species as well as their global and European threat status. First published 25 years ago, the result of this is a regularly updated Red List for species of highest conservation concern, an Amber List of species of moderate level of conservation concern and a Green List of species which are faring better. The fifth iteration, *Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC5)*, was published in December 2021 in British Birds.

There are now 70 species on the Red List, 103 on the Amber List, and 72 on the Green List. By contrast, the very first Red List, published in 1996, included only 36 species. The latest Red List shows a net gain of three since 2015; 11 species have been added (Bewick's Swan, Goldeneye, Smew, Ptarmigan, Swift, Dunlin, Purple Sandpiper, Leach's Storm-petrel, Montagu's Harrier, House Martin and Greenfinch), but six others have moved to Amber, and two (Golden Oriole and Aquatic Warbler) have been excluded altogether, as they no longer regularly breed in the UK.

However, the news is not all bad. White-tailed Eagle moves from Red to Green due to increases in numbers, a consequence of protection and reintroductions, and Song Thrush, Pied Flycatcher and Redwing move from Red to Amber due to a lessening of breeding population declines. Five new species to be assessed by BoCC5 were added to the Amber List: Little Bittern, Cattle Egret, Great White Egret and Black-winged Stilt, which all now breed regularly in the UK's wetland habitats but remain scarce. Yellow-browed Warbler was also added to the Amber List as an increasingly regular wintering visitor.

Mike Leahey, BTO Regional Representative for Cleveland

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Yellow-browed Warbler, Amber will do for now Eric James

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2022 SUMMARY

	April 17	May 15	June 12
Little Grebe	<u>15</u>	10	8
Great Crested Grebe	23	27	<u>43</u>
Cormorant	37	49	<u>140</u>
Mute Swan	32	32	<u>46</u>
Shelduck	432*	330*	<u>483**</u>
Gadwall	183*	224*	<u>328**</u>
Teal	<u>352</u>	4	22
Mallard	190	<u>220</u>	168
Shoveler	<u>123*</u>	51	39
Pochard	85	<u>89</u>	66
Tufted Duck	120	<u>144</u>	96
Eider	11	5	<u>24</u>
Coot	174	169	<u>242</u>
Oystercatcher	249	<u>414</u>	226
Avocet	<u>116**</u>	<u>116**</u>	70*
Little Ringed Plover	6	8	<u>9</u>
Ringed Plover	27	<u>239*</u>	36
Golden Plover	0	0	0
Grey Plover	<u>16</u>	4	2
Lapwing	157	<u>172</u>	115
Knot	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	9
Sanderling	<u>18</u>	0	7
Purple Sandpiper	0	0	0
Dunlin	43	<u>273</u>	21
Ruff	<u>1</u>	0	0
Snipe	<u>3</u>	0	2
Black-tailed Godwit	43	<u>68</u>	59
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>18</u>	10	0
Curlew	<u>127</u>	25	97
Redshank	<u>192</u>	7	35
Turnstone	6	<u>63</u>	55
Sandwich Tern	10	71	<u>74</u>
Common Tern	0	39	<u>282</u>
Little Tern	0	12	<u>65</u>

Underlined counts indicate Spring 2022 maxima.

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

** Denotes count of national importance for that species

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 SPRING 2022 SUMMARY

Coverage was excellent with 121 of the scheduled 123 sector counts completed over the three months.

Great White Egret (2, May) and Greylag (429, June) both set new records for the highest peak spring counts utilising data which goes back to 1988. At the opposite end of the scale Sanderling (18, April) set a new record low peak spring count.

Shelduck (483, June) produced their highest spring total since 511 were recorded in 1991. Cormorant figures (140, June) improved with the peak total well above the five year average of 81 birds. Little Tern (65, June) recorded the highest total since 107 birds were counted in 1995, most likely the result of a breeding colony establishing at Seaton Carew. Spring totals were particularly poor for two wader species with Curlew (127, April) producing the lowest tally since a record low count of 117 birds in 2002 and Redshank (192, April) producing the lowest peak count since 186 birds were logged in 2012.

Other notable observations from the spring counts included Whooper Swan (Saltholme West, April and Saltern Borrow Pits, June), European White-Fronted Goose (Cowpen Bewley Landfill Site, June), Egyptian Goose (Back Saltholme, April), Glossy Ibis (three Fire Station Field, June), Spoonbill (Cowpen Marsh and Back Saltholme, June), Pectoral Sandpiper (Cowpen Marsh, May) and Little Gull (Cowpen Marsh, June).

Following this spring's series of counts, the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS recording area is of national importance for Avocet, Gadwall and Shelduck however Sanderling did not reach nationally significant numbers this time round.

Adam Jones

Local Organiser, Tees Estuary WeBS

June 2022



Nationally important ducks

Eric James

Crossword No. 9 Solution

K	N				25 ₅	T	I	N	G	R	A	Y
24 ₄	H	I	C	K		E		R		E		T
E		R			23 ₃	R	O	U	T	L	E	T
23 ₃	E	E		N		R		B		B		I
Y		18 ₈	C	O	T	E	R		19 ₉	R	O	W
R				R		17 ₇	F	D		A		
W	17 ₇	I	L	L	E	T		15 ₅	G	O	D	16 ₆
			L		13 ₃	H	D		O			E
E	Y	A	S		11 ₁	M	E	R	L	I	N	R
I		W		5		M		9 ₉	F			10 ₁₀
8 ₈	R	E	D	S	T	A	R	T		X		V
Y		A		A		O		7 ₇	W	I	T	E
1 ₁	A	2 ₂	G	L	3 ₃	E	4 ₄	L				2 ₂

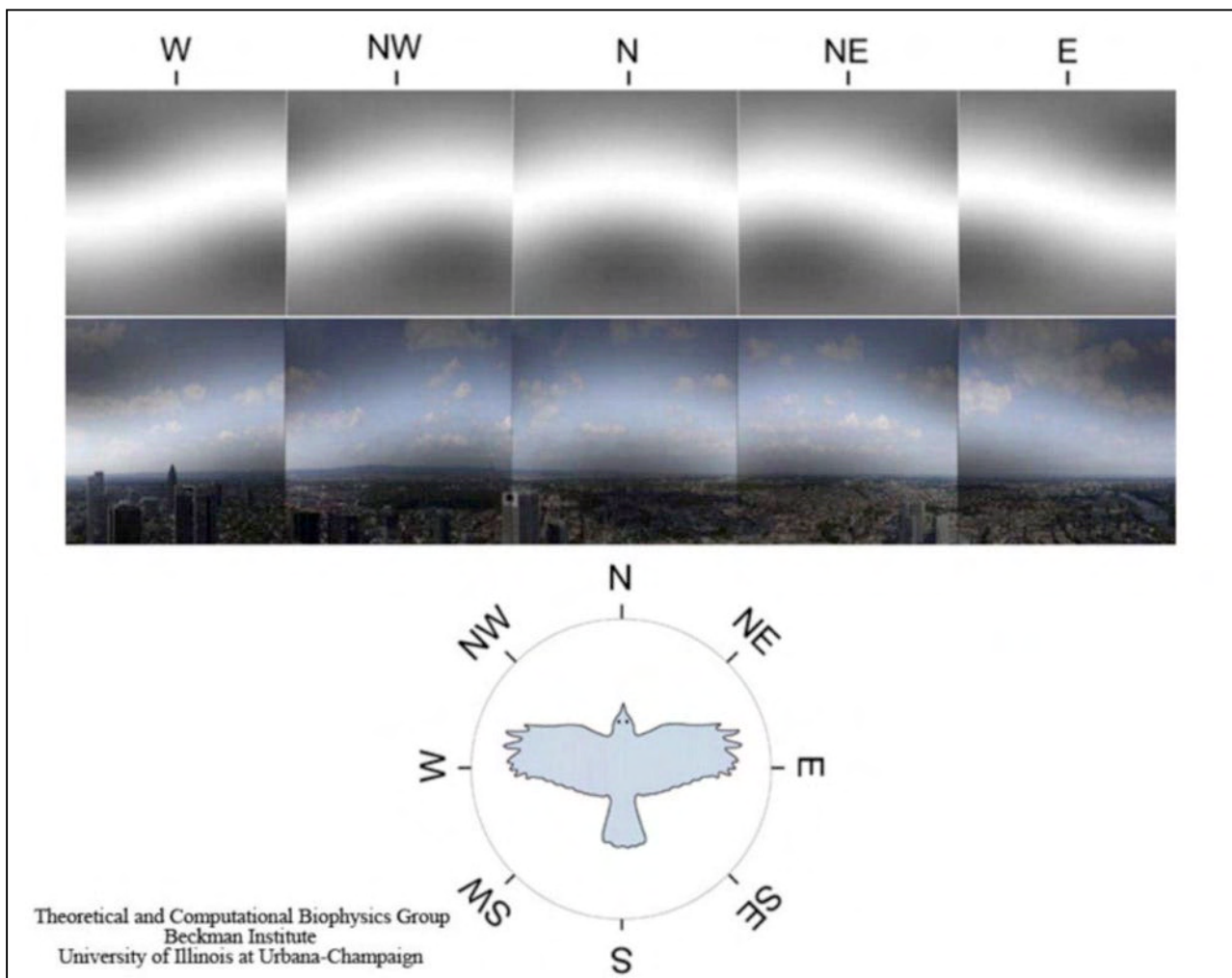
Magnetic navigation in birds

Many experiments have shown that birds can navigate by using the Earth's magnetic field, starting with Robins in the 1960s, then with other species, but the mechanism they use has been difficult to understand. An early hypothesis (1882) was that a conductive fluid in the inner ear could generate an electric current as the bird passes through the Earth's field, in the same way that a generator produces a voltage when wires move through a magnetic field. Lab tests using a model of a pigeon's ear proved it was feasible for detecting the direction. It was long thought that magnetite (a magnetic form of an oxide of iron) in the beak was significant. If the magnetite crystals are small enough, they can move in response to the direction of a magnetic field like a compass needle, though this would not necessarily distinguish north

from south.

A modern hypothesis relates navigation to certain proteins in the eye (cryptochromes). Some of these proteins are involved in setting the bird's internal clock, but one, Cri4, has been shown in laboratory tests to interact with magnetic fields in a way that gives the bird a sense for where it is facing in relation to the Earth's magnetic field. The importance of this protein is demonstrated by tests on Robins which show increased levels of Cri4 during migration when accurate navigation is critical.

This hypothesis not only offers an explanation of how birds detect the earth's magnetic field but also suggests a mechanism of how the bird might perceive the field. Since the Cri4 protein is sensitive to light, especially blue. It is thought that the magnetic field can be seen as a filter, such as shown below,



which would be superimposed on the normal view.

I haven't gone into details of how the protein system works, but let's say it involves Quantum Mechanics and electron spins and you probably didn't want to know anyway, but if you do, try Wikipedia.

Eric James

Fat not always good for Blue Tits

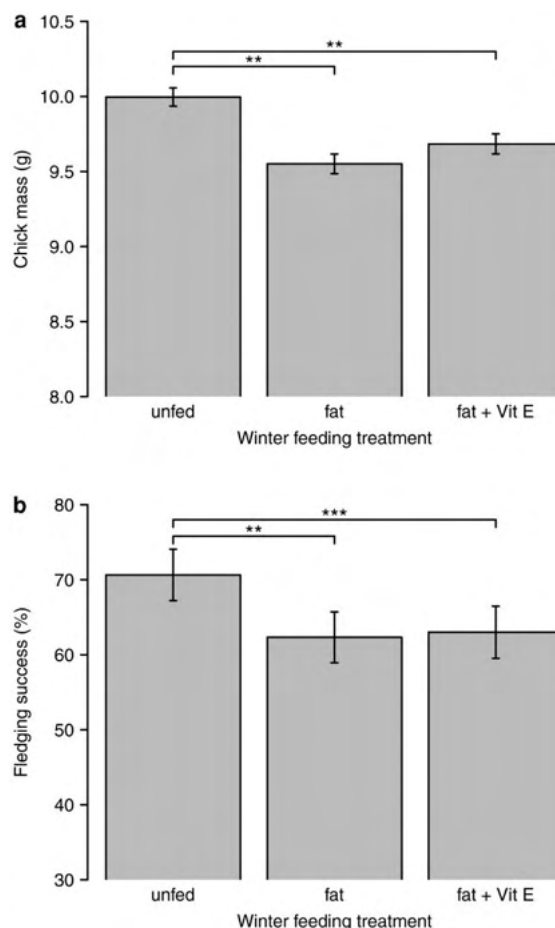
A previous Tit-bit described the enormous amount of food fed to birds and how it benefited bolder species that entered gardens, in particular giving an advantage to Blue Tits over Willow Tits. The implication is that Blue Tits survive the winter better and are in good condition at the start of the breeding season : so an all-round win for Blue Tits..... or is it?

Experiments with Blue Tits breeding in nine (three groups of three) deciduous woods showed that eating fat during the winter can have adverse effects on the breeding success in the following spring. Nest boxes were put up in the nine woods and feeding stations in two groups of three. The woods without the feeders were the controls against which the others could be assessed. The results are based on 467 out of 1038 boxes occupied over three years with each group of woods used as the control once. and therefore avoiding any effects of one group having better habitats than the others. The food was vegetable fat (Crisp'n'Dry), with yellow colorant that makes it more attractive to birds. Fat is an obvious source of calories for winter warmth, but hardly provides a balanced diet. It also increases the metabolism leading to oxidative damage, and, to investigate this. an antioxidant (vitamin E) was added to the fats in one group of woods, in the same concentration as would be found in peanuts.

Another drawback in supplying fats is that the birds are discouraged from searching for their natural food that would give a more balanced diet. The lack of some essential nutrients is evident in the egg yolks, leading to lower chick mass, shown in histogram **a** below. The vitamin E has partially helped, but all winter fat-fed birds had chick masses well below those of birds feeding naturally.

There was some advantage for birds that had the vitamin E laced fat as this vitamin is stored in the adult's body and increases the hatching success. However, there is still the handicap of low nestling weight leading to the same low fledgling success as the birds without the vitamin E, and much lower than that of birds feeding on normal, nutritionally balanced, wild food, as shown in histogram **b**.

One species that is keen on suet without any apparent effect on breeding success must be the Starling. Suet in my garden is in the form of balls and 300g blocks. The blocks are more easily reached and



are favoured as food. Several species feed on the blocks including Blackbirds, Great Tits, House Sparrows (returning after a long absence), but principally Starlings that hog the feeder, often to the exclusion of the other species, unless a Magpie swoops down and scatters everything. Consumption of suet blocks from late autumn through winter suggests that Starlings were taking significant amounts. Six blocks were taken during November 2021, and the same number in December 2021. Colder conditions in January 2022 doubled consumption to 12 blocks, but then fell down to four in February 2022, with a slight recovery in Spring to six in March and the same in April 2022. Consumption rocketed in May when Starlings started breeding and 25 blocks eaten, sometimes two in a single day. Juveniles appeared towards the end of the month in large numbers, with the occasional brood of four suggesting that breeding had not been badly affected by the winter diet. The young birds were still being fed on suet until they realised that they could peck the blocks themselves. The high consumption continued into the start of June and then dropped to one block per day, falling to half this rate in July as the Starlings started to move away. If they were expecting to stick their beaks into the soil for juicy grubs, then they will be disappointed with the dry, rock-hard ground after the hot, dry weather. Perhaps they will come back for more suet?

Eric James

LOCAL OUTINGS AUGUST 2022 TO DECEMBER 2022

SEATON SNOOK

Sunday 28th August 2022

Meet at the end of the Zinc Works Road at 17.00. Join Graeme Joynt for this outing which has been arranged to coincide with the incoming 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 (Tel: 07968572603)

SEA WATCHING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Saturday 1st October 2022

Meet at the Heugh Gun Battery from 9.00 a.m. Join Chris Sharp for this always popular outing. If the weather conditions are favourable almost anything is possible at this time of year. Four species of Skua and two species of Shearwater are the targets. Even if it is a westerly there still should be something of interest to see such as Common Scoter and Teal. If the sea watching is poor there may be something to be found in the nearby gardens.

Leader: Chris Sharp. (Tel: 077654 97100)

BIRD RINGING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Sunday 16th October 2022

Join the Tees Ringing Group to witness a demonstration of how migrant birds are caught, processed and released. It is hoped that a variety of small birds will be caught. Given the date almost anything is possible. Meet at the bowling green by Olive Street from 9.00 a.m.

Leader: Chris Brown. (Tel: 07878 809906)

SOUTH GARE

Saturday 5th November 2022

Meet at the Lifeboat Station at 9.30 a.m. Hopefully a few late migrants should still be present. Geese and Swans may also

be passing over at this time of year. South Gare is a good site for both Snow Bunting and Twite. Both have been regular here in the past few years.

Leader: Bert Mitchell. (Tel: 07870 451648)



TITBITS

A collection of

bird-related

news and facts compiled

by Eric James

Phenology and birds

If you are wondering, here's the Wikipedia definition : **Phenology** is the recording the timing of periodic events in biological life cycles and studying how these are influenced by seasonal and annual variations in climate, as well as habitat factors (such as elevation). It is important for birds that time their breeding to match the time when the prey for their nestlings become abundant. This is especially important for titmice that breed only once a year, timing it so they have nestlings when deciduous trees are coming into leaf and supporting many caterpillars. Rising temperatures can put the timings out of step and reduce breeding success. Early leafing can bring the caterpillar peak before the nestlings are hatched. The good news is that Great Tits, at least, have quickly responded by starting their breeding three weeks earlier. I do not need detailed recording to see the effect of the changing climate, since a glance in the garden at the marguerites which are supposed to flower in September, are in full bloom in mid-July

British breeding seabirds

Previously I pointed out how poor Britain was for endemic species. We do have one strong point

and that is our seabird populations, some comprising a high percentage of the global populations : Manx Shearwater (80% of world population), (Northern) Gannet (56%), (European) Shag (34%), Great Skua (60%), Lesser Black-backed Gull (38%) and Razorbill (20%).

But : Surveys in Scotland of 11 species of breeding seabird show that, after a decline of more than 30% from 1986 to 2011, population levels have since remained fairly stable.

This equates to overall numbers having declined by an average of 32% since 1986 with only two of the species having maintained or increased in breeding numbers over the period (Common Gull and Common Tern, clearly living up to their English names). Arctic Skuas have experienced the largest decline of 78%. One bright spot is that while still below earlier levels, there are signs of some populations such as Guillemot and Kittiwake are stabilising, with some colonies actually showing increases.

Update on Polesia

Following on from the article in the previous newsletter, the area has had some effect on the present events in Ukraine. The infamous 40 mile long Russian convoy was presumably stuck on the road through the wetland. If so, it implies some lack of planning for the so-called Special Military Operation.

When writing about the protests about the E40 waterway, I did wonder what would happen to Birdlife Belarus. The APB Birdlife Belarus was founded in 1998. Since then, over 7,000 people have become members and over 25,000 volunteers and supporters have helped to protect the environment, as well as setting up more than 100 school Clubs and 14 local branches. the APB has worked throughout Belarus. It has done considerable conservation work. Belarus is now being one of the world's leaders in peatland restoration, and this work on ecological rehabilitation of peatland has continued. The APB has co-operated with the government to support this work – more than 17,200 hectares of drained peatland has been re-wetted. APB funded work has extended the area of the ecologically important Almany Mires Nature Reserve, particularly Important for birds and as a Biodiversity area (IBA), by 10,000 hectares, bringing it to a total of almost 104,000 hectares, one of the largest mire complexes in Europe and home to 25 pairs of Greater Spotted Eagles.

But with a President like Aleksandr Lukashenko, a paranoid communist authoritarian and friend of

Putin, it couldn't last. The 'Justice' Ministry closed down the ABP on 18th April after receiving accusations of its partaking in 'extremist activities'. Some employees were arrested and one was sentenced to a six month prison term under suspicion of attempting to destabilise the political situation of the country 'under the guise of protecting birds*'. Even Ian Botham didn't come up with that one in his attacks on the RSPB.

*They had plenty of birds to protect : 283 species of which 11 are globally threatened, 5% are threatened, 12 are near threatened, one is endangered, and ten are vulnerable.

Note : The pie charts (right) show the make-up of the endangered species : LC is Least Concern. Apologies to readers with only the print edition

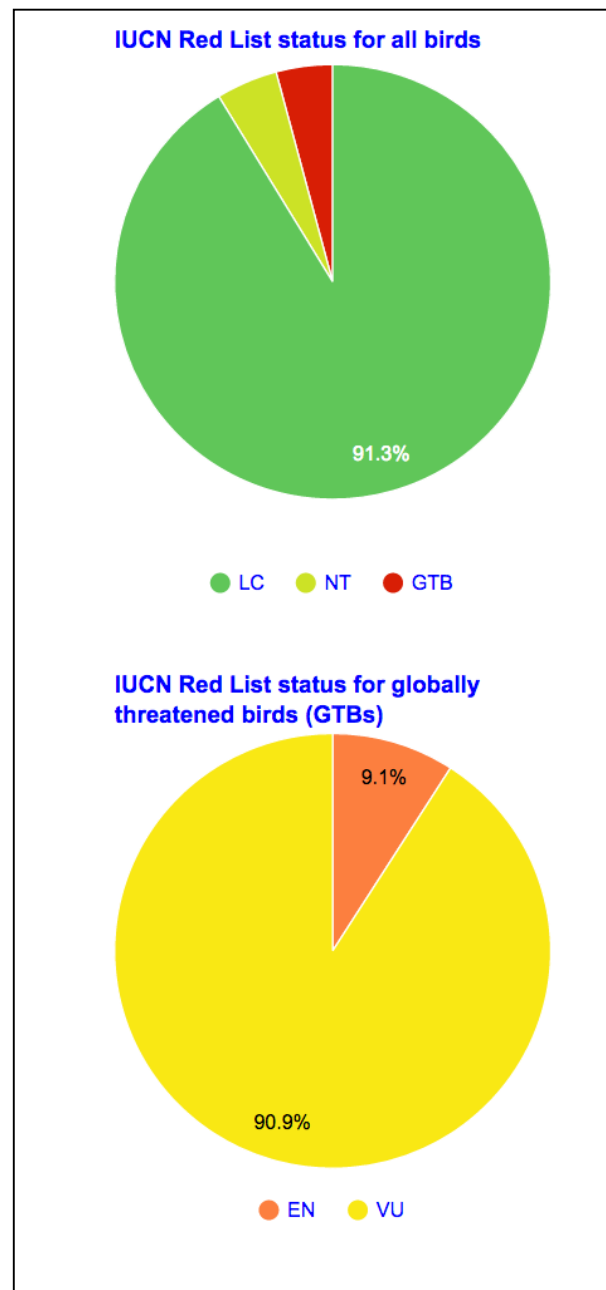
Woodpeckers really are headbangers

Some bird facts are passed round and repeated so often that people can start to believe them. One notable example is that Puffins hold their fish prey with the heads alternately left and right. A moment's thought shows this to be ludicrous. A Puffin's beak and tongue are adapted to holding several fish while catching another, but they can't manipulate caught fish without the risk of losing them. This means that if the first fish caught was swimming to the left, then the bird would have to find the next one swimming to the right; with a hungry puffling waiting to be fed, the parent would not waste time on some spurious idea of neatness.

Another 'fact' is that woodpeckers have spongy bone, in their skulls to cushion their brains when striking wood. Pairs of three of woodpecker species (Black, Pileated, and Great Spotted) were filmed with a high speed camera hitting wood. In the milliseconds after impact, the eyes and beaks slowed down at the same rate, proving no shock-deforming structure protecting the soft material in the skull.

Jackdaw democracy

A report released recently suggested that Jackdaws in flocks exercised some form of democracy when deciding when to move and in what direction. This was based on the birds' calls, unhelpfully referred to as squawks. Konrad Lorenz made detailed studies of Jackdaws by hand rearing them so they were completely tame and their behaviour easily observed. His conclusions were published in his book 'King Solomon's ring', one of the first bird books I bought in the early 1970s when it cost 95p (the Amazon price is now £18.43) .He identified two calls associated with flight : both mean 'fly with



me' with 'Kia' meaning a direction away from home. As the flock moves further from home, longer 'Kiaw' calls predominate, meaning a reversal of direction and a movement back towards home. The balance of the two calls determines the flock's direction. Kiaw is also used to gather up young birds and guide them back to the roost.

Lorenz also describes a loud rattling call which is used by older birds to teach young ones about predators. After the warning call, the young birds will in future avoid that associated predator. The call is also used if a person is seen holding a jackdaw or something looking like one, such as wet bathing trunks.

This was a problem for Lorenz when ringing nestling Jackdaws as the birds would then avoid him and ruin his research. He solved this by

wearing a fancy-dress devil's costume, complete with mask, horns and tail. He was clambering round the roof surrounded by a crowd of rattling black birds while he ringed the nestlings. It was only when he finished that he saw the street below was packed with villagers staring aghast at the diabolical activities above. He could not remove the mask as the birds would recognise him, so after a friendly wave of his tail to the people below, he retreated quickly into the loft. Job done.

It pays to alter your accent to fit in

It is difficult not to smile when hearing a person of obvious Pakistani background speaking broad Geordie. Something like this happens among African Penguins who adapt the calls used to keep track of friends to the equivalent calls of their partners and colony

'Clever bird' study laboratory saved

A Cambridge University laboratory for studying bird intelligence has been saved from closure by a donation of £500,000 raised by public subscription, enough to keep it running for five years. Nicola Clayton's Comparative Cognition lab was due to close in July because of funding difficulties arising from (dare one say it?) Brexit and the pandemic. The birds involved were not surprisingly Corvids and closure would mean rehoming 25 Jays and seven Rooks. What I found surprising was the number of Jays since there is usually the impression that it is the black species that are the intelligent ones. Remembering where hundreds of acorns are buried must need a lot of memory if nothing else.

Gulls switching to a rubbish diet as fish stocks run low has consequences

Gulls, especially Herring Gulls, are a familiar sight on rubbish tips and they don't seem to come to any harm. In fact the British population, currently Red listed, has been supported by food being easily available to juveniles and hence improving their survival rate.

But there's a catch.



Glaucous-winged Gull, far from home Renton Charman

Research on Glaucous-winged Gulls using data spanning 149 years has shown that substituting fish with less nutritious food is linked to

population declines and lower fertility. Researchers at the University of British Columbia looked at 270 gulls' feathers from museum samples taken between 1860 and 2009. Using the ratios of heavy isotopes of carbon and nitrogen, the team derived the dietary habits of these seabirds, all of which had lived in the Salish Sea region of the Pacific Ocean off the west coast at the Canada-US border. They found a decline in heavier carbon isotopes, indicating that the gulls shifted from a fishy source of carbon to a terrestrial source. A decline in heavier nitrogen isotopes implied that their diets had also shifted to a less nutritious source; most probably marine invertebrates and cereal-based organic food waste. So it's not just Blue Tits that miss natural food.

This change in diet correlated with over-fishing in the region in the early 1900s, which is when the gull population dropped.

The isotope analysis relates the decrease of fish in the diet to the time when the forage fishes declined.

Some of the fish species affected by overfishing include one of the gulls' favourite fish species, the highly nutritious eulachon, which is now considered threatened in the Salish Sea area. Another former favourite, the Pacific herring, no longer forms the masses that the gulls feasted on.

But between 1960 and 1986, the gull population increased, perhaps because more readily available refuse, which although less nutritious than fish, helped to support the population. However, field observations show that though many pairs are feeding their chicks on sand lance and herring, some feed their chicks on things like chicken and chips.

The shift to a poor-quality, low-protein diet can also be linked to the gulls' lowered reproductive success, a previous study showing that gulls have been producing smaller and fewer eggs over recent years, which is consistent with a decline in diet quality at egg production time in the early spring.

Since the Glaucous-winged Gull is a generalist feeder, so it can survive on a wide range of food sources. While there is some evidence that switching to a refuse-based diet can help gulls through difficult times, the data reveal a decline in numbers. Their populations should not decline as quickly as specialist feeders such as Kittiwakes. The fact that generalists like the large gulls are in decline is a matter of concern to the researchers

Aerial view of proposed Kittiwake tower and surroundings



Having ploughed through the planning portal, I have some more information. The intention is to attract young first time breeders by broadcasting calls and fixing dummy birds to the artificial ledges. Since breeding pairs are faithful to their nest sites, they will not add to those breeding on Headland buildings, nor attract present breeders away. The Headland population is thriving as shown in the graph below. There are various objections to the development, including PD ports who think it will interfere with port operations. Will a flock of birds halt a cargo vessel? . Any nuisance such as

droppings comes from the present breeders, which with a life expectancy of 12 years, should gradually reduce. The local councillor had no objections, but there were some from private individuals, mostly from the Town Wall, about noise. Others seemed to confuse Kittiwakes with the large gulls and their anti-social behaviours, some objected to the demolition of the Yacht Club, which was used as a community centre. One objector thought it might attract large gulls to harass the smaller Kittiwakes, stealing food intended for chicks or killing adults.

Population of breeding Kittiwake in Hartlepool

