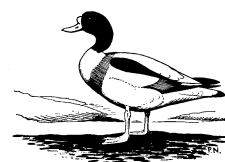


Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

August 2024 (No.88)



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MONTHLY SUMMARIES

Chris Sharp reviews the main birding highlights of the spring and early summer periods, which did not live up to the standard set by last year but was nevertheless interesting.

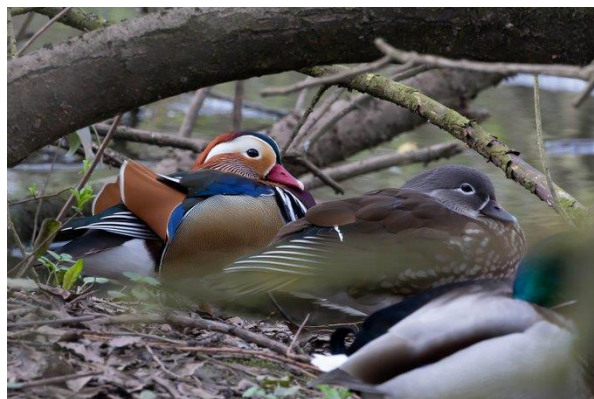
MARCH

Early March saw the long staying Long-tailed Duck still at Scaling Dam. A single Waxwing in the car park at RSPB Saltholme 1st-3rd proved popular. The Spoonbill around Cowpen Marsh remained until the end of the month. Four Egyptian Geese were on Cowpen Marsh from 2nd. They stayed until the summer and a pair bred

raising five young. A Spotted Redshank at Scaling Dam on 3rd was a good site record. A Slavonian Grebe was off South Gare on 3rd.

The wintering Hen Harrier remained around Cowpen Marsh. A Great White Egret was at Haverton Hole on 5th. Two Mediterranean Gulls at RSPB Saltholme on 5th raised hopes that they might stay to breed but sadly this was not to be. Good numbers of Velvet Scoters continued to be reported off Redcar with 23 present on 5th.

A Spotted Redshank was still around Greatham Creek but no Greenshanks were seen this winter. Three Waxwings were on Coatham Marsh on 8th. A pair of Mandarin was at Billingham Bottoms from 9th. The first Little Ringed Plover of the spring was at Scaling Dam on 11th and a Water Pipit was at RSPB Saltholme on 12th.



Mandarins, Cowpen Bewley

Martyn Sidwell

Four Whooper Swans on Seaton Common on 13th were the first northward bound birds of the spring. Seven more were on Saltholme Pool on 15th. A Red Kite over Marton on 14th was the first of a series of spring records for this increasing visitor. The first Sand Martins were at RSPB Saltholme on 15th. A drake Common Scoter was at Scaling Dam on this date and a Red Kite was in Sleddale.

Two Waxwings were at Wolviston on 16th and a Black Redstart was at Boulby. Great White Egrets increased to three on the North Tees Marshes. A 1st winter Caspian Gull was at Portrack on 17th. 65 Whooper Swans were over the Brinefields on 18th and the first Wheatear of the year was present at South Gare. Two Ravens in Sleddale on

19th may have been the pair that successfully bred in the east of the county for the second year running.

More Whooper Swans passed through over the next few days including 15 at Hartlepool on 21st and 42 at Lockwood Beck on 26th. A Hen Harrier was at South Gare on 23rd and was presumably a different bird to the one still present around Cowpen Marsh. The first White Wagtail of the spring was at Greenabella on 26th. A White-fronted Goose at Scaling Dam on this date remained into April. It was a poor winter for this species and no Tundra Bean Geese were recorded.

A Whimbrel flew over Bowesfield on 29th with a Red Kite joining the Hen Harrier over Cowpen Marsh on the same day. The first Ring Ouzel of the spring was at Boulby on 31st. A Little Gull was at RSPB Saltholme and a Water Pipit was also present here. A Mealy Redpoll showed well at the Lockwood Beck feeding station and stayed for a week.

APRIL

A Red-necked Grebe in full summer plumage was at Seaton Snook on 1st and remained between here and South Gare until 22nd. A Black Redstart was at Marske on 2nd and two Red Kites and the two Ravens were in Sleddale. The first Osprey was over Scaling Dam on 3rd with two Black Redstarts at South Gare on this date.

A male Hen Harrier was in Sleddale on 4th. An early Yellow Wagtail was at RSPB Saltholme and three Long-tailed Ducks joined the Red-necked Grebe at Seaton Snook. The first Willow Warblers were on 5th with the first Grasshopper Warbler on 6th. A late Waxwing was at Portrack Marsh on 6th. Two Ospreys were over RSPB Saltholme on 7th along with a Red Kite.



Slavonian Grebe, Saltholme

Ian Forrest

A Whitethroat was at RSPB Saltholme on 8th. A summer plumaged Slavonian Grebe on Saltholme Pool on 9th was a fine sight. Reed Warblers were first recorded on 10th on which date three Ring Ouzels were at Hunley Hall. Both Redstart and Black Redstart were at South Gare on 11th. 20 Whooper Swans flew past Hartlepool. Seven Velvet Scoters were still off Redcar on 13th. Wader passage at RSPB Saltholme saw 195 Black-tailed Godwits and three Ruff. The 14th saw the first Lesser Whitethroat and Tree Pipit. A Bearded Tit was also at Coatham Marsh.

Mid month was fairly quiet with the odd Ring Ouzel at the coast. The long staying White fronted Goose was still around Saltholme Pools. Long tailed Ducks increased to five on Seaton Snook. Redstarts were back on their breeding territories at Newton Woods on 22nd. Two Scaup and an Egyptian Goose were at Scaling Dam on 22nd.

Highlight of the spring was the Dark Eyed Junco which was in a Hartlepool garden from 23rd. It stayed until the 27th and unlike the previous county record which was only seen by the householder in Guisborough, this bird gave great views to all and sundry.



Dark-eyed Junco, Hartlepool

Martyn Sidwell

Three Scaup flew past Hartlepool on 28th. Up to five Ring Ouzels were at Boulby at the end of the month with singles at both North and South Gare. A White-tailed Eagle over Hunley Hall Golf Course on 29th was surprisingly not picked up elsewhere in the county. What was presumably the same bird flew through Cleveland air space on 5th May but was only picked up by satellite.

MAY

The month began quietly. A Black-throated Diver flew past Hartlepool on 2nd. A late Redwing was at South Gare on this date with both Pied and Spotted Flycatcher present here the following day. A Pied Flycatcher and a Garden Warbler were at Hartlepool on 4th and a Redstart was at Seaton Carew on 6th. A Red-throated Pipit was at Old Cemetery, Hartlepool on 7th but only showed to the initial observers. More obliging was the Nightjar at South Gare on 7th, a rare find away from this species' breeding areas.

One or two drake Garganey were around the North Tees Marshes from 5th. Both Bittern and Great White Egret were at Haverton hole on 7th. Two Egyptian Geese were around Cowpen Marsh from 10th and they stayed to breed, raising five young. A Hobby was over RSPB Saltholme on 12th along with four Black Terns. A Red-breasted Goose here the following day was possibly one of last year's returning birds but sadly its origins remain in doubt. The only Wood Sandpiper of the month flew over RSPB Saltholme on 13th as Garganey numbers increased to four.

A Curlew Sandpiper was at Scaling Dam on 14th and a Red Kite flew over Hartlepool. Three Spoonbills were at Cowpen Marsh the following day with another over Saltburn. A Savi's Warbler sang at Haverton Hole from 16th into June and was presumably last year's returning bird. A male Red-backed Shrike was also present here. A Little Stint was on Bran Sands. It was a very poor spring for passage waders. The 17th saw a Temminck's Stint at Saltholme Pools along with a single Little Gull.



Temminck's Stints, Saltholme

Ian Forrest

A Grey-headed Wagtail was a good find at Saltholme Pools on 18th. The first Manx Shearwater of the year flew past on this date. A trickle of passage migrants at the coast at this time included a Pied Flycatcher at Hartlepool, a brief male Bluethroat at South Gare on 19th and a Red-backed Shrike there the following day. A very wet day on 22nd saw an Icterine Warbler at Hartlepool along with a Spotted Flycatcher and a Tree Pipit. More birds were found the following day with Icterine Warblers at Boulby and South Gare, a Marsh Warbler at North Gare and Red-backed Shrikes at Hummersea, North Gare (3 birds) and South Gare (2 birds).

Two more Red-backed Shrikes appeared on 24th with birds at RSPB Saltholme and Dormans Pool. A Blue-headed Wagtail was also on Seaton Common and another Icterine Warbler at Hunley Hall Golf Club. Yet another Icterine Warbler was at RSPB Saltholme on 25th. Ospreys were also over Cowpen Marsh and Scaling Dam on this date.

A Golden Oriole sang at Boulby on 27th and a Curlew Sandpiper was at Greatham Creek. A Black Tern was off South Gare on 30th and two Roseate Terns flew past Hartlepool on 31st. A Common Rosefinch at Skelton on 31st was only seen briefly.

JUNE

A Black-throated Diver flew past Hartlepool on 1st. Yet another Icterine Warbler was found at Brotton on 3rd. The Savi's Warbler continued to reel at Haverton Hole on 5th.



Marsh Warbler, Haverton

Ian Forrest

A very showy Marsh Warbler was found nearby on this date and was present until 14th. More elusive was the Night Heron also found at Haverton on this date. It made brief appearances until 13th. Nine Bee-eaters over Kirklevington for about an hour on this date must have made a fine sight and is easily the largest flock ever recorded in Cleveland.



Night Heron, Haverton

Martyn Sidwell

Four Red Kites, Osprey and Raven were all in Sleddale on 6th. Bearded Tits including juveniles were seen at Dormans Pool at this time presumably indicating successful breeding. Two Spoonbills flew past Saltburn on 8th and a Ruddy Shelduck was at Saltholme Pools. Bitterns were recorded regularly from Haverton viewpoint during the month. It is not known whether breeding took place.

An Osprey was at Scaling Dam on 10th and continued to be reported into July. Two Mediterranean Gulls were here on 11th. Two Curlew Sandpipers here on 13th relocated to Saltholme Marsh later in the day. One to three Little Gulls were on the North Tees Marshes mid month. Two Roseate Terns were present on the main lake at RSPB Saltholme 15th-16th. Scaling Dam continued its purple patch with a Hobby on 16th and more impressively a Red-necked

Phalarope on 17th. Nearby a Common Scoter was at Lockwood Beck on 18th and a pair of Spotted Flycatchers were present. This species continues just to have a toe hold as a breeding species in the county.



Roseate Tern, Saltholme

Ian Forrest

A Hobby was over Tocketts Mill on 21st. Cowpen Marsh held a fine summer plumaged Spotted Redshank on 21st and a Wood Sandpiper on 22nd. Three Cattle Egrets on the North Tees Marshes on 22nd were seen again by the Seal Sands roundabout on 25th. Three Great Egrets were on Saltholme Pool on this date and a Honey Buzzard was over Skelton. Two Greenshanks were on Cowpen Marsh. In what was a great spring for Hobbies, two further birds were seen late month with one at Redcar on 27th and one over Cowpen Marsh on 28th.

A summer plumaged Black Guillemot flew past Hartlepool on 29th. Black-tailed Godwits peaked at 285 on 30th at Port Clarence Flood. Both Roseate Tern and Bittern were seen at RSPB Saltholme also on the last day of the month.

FROM THE CHAIR

Trustees Meetings were held on 30th April and 27th July. Much work has been going on behind the scenes on two major projects, namely the installation of a MOTUS station at RSPB Saltholme and the provision of nesting rafts at Scaling Dam Nature Reserve. Both involve significant capital expenditure and close liaison with partners and suppliers, ably driven by Trustees Barbara Crinson and Steve McDonnell. It is hoped that both projects will come to fruition by the close of the calendar year. The Trustees have also allotted one-off funding to the local Barn Owl Project and to a nestbox scheme at Bluebell Beck, Middlesbrough. A memorial bench to long-serving Club stalwart Don Page has been installed at Lockwood Beck.

Ali McLee has continued the Club's input to local conservation issues, including identification of key bird species for the developing Cleveland Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Environment Agency's plans for managed realignment around the north-east "cell" of Greatham Creek. A new Kittiwake nesting tower is planned on land adjacent to the RNL station at Hartlepool.

The Records Subcommittee held a meeting on 23rd April, and work is now well-advanced on the production of the 2023 Cleveland Bird Report.

The annual Nightjar walk was held at Guisborough Forest on 17th July and a local outing to Seaton Snook is planned for 24th August.

Mike Leakey, Chairman

DON PAGE 23 March 1934 to 15 December 2023

I have known Don for about 50 years. In fact we both joined the Teesmouth Bird Club around the same time in February 1974. I was just starting out as a birdwatcher as a 14 year old and Don had just moved from Whitby to Guisborough and had become more active in the local birding scene.

Don with his banking background became Treasurer of the club in 1977 a position he would hold until 2000 when he retired and was made an honorary member of the club. The club was in financial dire straits at the time Don became treasurer and he organised a raffle to generate some much needed funds. It was typical of Don that he ended up buying half the raffle tickets himself and sold most of the others to his work colleagues. Sadly he didn't win a prize!

Even when he retired as Treasurer Don continued to calculate and submit the club's gift aid application every year to the Charities commission and he was still doing this right up to last year when he finally relinquished the reins.

It was as a fellow birdwatcher though that Don will be most fondly remembered. Don enjoyed foreign birding trips and I accompanied him on several of these along with other local birders, some of whom are here today. Most memorable to me were Canada in 1997 and China in 2000.

Don was a very fussy eater. Amazingly when we went to Canada Don had never before eaten a Pizza. He sampled one for the first time and loved

it. Some of us went back the following year but Don was unable to make it. I remember Don gave Ted Parker an envelope to be opened at the Pizza restaurant. Inside were some dollar bills and a note saying to enjoy the Pizzas on him.

Our trip to China was most memorable and we went with about a dozen or so of our Cleveland birding colleagues. Don had never eaten Chinese before and thought he would survive on a diet of rice. Instead he loved the food and came back a convert. His prowess on the world's worst bicycles on this trip also put the rest of us to shame.

He also had a great love for the Scilly Isles as a lot of us did and would go there most Octobers and stay on St Agnes along with his nephew David and Colin and Celia. He wanted to show Joyce what she was missing and decided to take her on a visit there one spring for a fortnight. Don told me it rained every day and Joyce couldn't be persuaded to visit the Isles again.

Don was very fond of North Yorkshire and its forests in particular. In his later years he did survey work for the forestry commission, recording every bird he saw on these trips. On these occasions he was usually joined by the two Johns, Cutter and Money and Bert Mitchell. He was particularly fond of dusk trips into his local Guisborough forest to record the number of Nightjars present each summer and would often be up here several times each season.

Don was never happier though when he was birding in his local area. Scaling Dam was undoubtedly his favourite location and he would happily sit in the hide for hours seeing very little most of the time but getting excited if he managed to read the numbers and letters on a ringed gull or finding the odd rarity. Sleddale was another loved spot and it was here that he and Joyce used to visit regularly. Joyce's ashes are scattered there and I suspect that is where Don's will be also.

If you ask any of his fellow birders about Don, they will always talk about Don and his coffee. He always carried a couple of flasks with him and if he met anyone out birding he would always ask them if they fancied a coffee. This was a tradition he carried on after he lost his great friend Ted Parker some ten years ago. He and Ted used to be out birding together some three times a week and were often accompanied by the late Mike Corner on these trips. I actually think they spent more time drinking coffee than they did birding but I know these were some of Don's favourite times.

Even after his accident, falling off the end of South Gare and his six months in hospital, Don never lost the love of the outside world. Fortunately as he no longer could drive he had several good friends who would pick him up and take him out birding. Despite the struggles he had with his hands the flasks would always be ready when we arrived to collect him.

When the news of Don's passing went out on social media the comments and tributes from his fellow birders were lovely. To a man everyone said that Don was a true gentleman and one of the nicest guys you could ever wish to meet. I couldn't agree more and I for one will miss a true friend, his company, his humour and his coffee.

D GRAHAM BELL – 90 YEARS YOUNG

Graham Bell will be celebrating his 90th birthday on 27th August. Graham was one of the founder members of the Teesmouth Bird Club in 1960. He served on its first committee and compiled the bird reports for the club until 1967 and was also the club recorder until then. He continued to serve as a member of the records sub- committee for many years.

After moving to Bamburgh in the 1970s Graham would lead the regular TBC trips to North Northumberland, meeting the bus at Budle Bay. He enjoyed giving talks and was a regular speaker at the club's indoor meetings.

Whilst in Bamburgh he formed the North Northumberland bird club and was its chairman for 30 years and remains its Honorary President.

Alan Vittery, a fellow founder member of the club who now lives in Portugal has written a few words about Graham. In addition his ex wife Susan has also written the following.

Graham met me through attending a meeting of the Cleveland (?) Natural History Society, at the Middlesbrough Little Theatre, on St Lucia's Day, December 1964.

(Brian Tinkler the Secretary kindly found someone who lived in Guisborough who could take me home.)

It was Graham & for both of us the first meeting we had attended there. I had begun teaching in Guisborough & arrived by public transport! My parents were very involved with the 200 strong, Yorkshire "Bradford Nats" and my interest in natural history is thanks to them!

Graham attended as a Teesmouth Bird Club representative because The Yorkshire Naturalists

Trust speaker was concerned about development plans for Teesmouth.

On the way home Graham said he was showing a film, in January 1965, in Stockton & perhaps I would be interested to see the volcanic eruption which he'd filmed in Iceland. It was Surtseyan, plus some wonderful birds & Lake Mivaten.

In Stockton I was met off the bus, as I had never been to the YMCA, where TBC meetings were then held to packed audiences.

Teaching French at Grangefield Boys' Grammar School brought Graham from Guisborough. We married in June 1965, two sons were born subsequently & lived there until early 1978, moving to Bamburgh Northumberland, overlooking the North Sea, a lighthouse just below.

Best friend Phil Stead came from Middlesbrough to give "Farne View" his approval! 200 species of birds were recorded from the house in the 20 years there.

Whilst living in Guisborough, a junior bird club was formed & meetings held in a school room. Did Herbert Mitchell, Brian Foster, Nigel Jackson & others become bird watchers as a result..?? Boys at Grangefield certainly did.



School trips to the Farne Islands were an annual feature, in Billy Shiel's "Glad Tidings".

Graham led groups of naturalists around Teesmouth from Newcastle, son Julian in a "papoose" in 1970. He too has become a well established Norwegian birder & meticulous recorder, since moving there in 1995.

We parted company in 1998 after 33 years. Subsequently we have both remarried.

The photograph shows Graham with his grandson Bertie.

DGB (darn good birder)

I first met Graham in the autumn of 1955 when he was at Durham University and a regular visitor to Teesmouth. In a north-easterly gale on 15 October, we were on the North Gare together and marvelled at the spectacle of about 80 Pomarine Skuas sheltering in the estuary. Eight days later, my brother Tony and I walked out from Seaton Carew to the North Gare. About half-way along the beach a delightful Grey Phalarope was feeding in the surf, a new bird for us and a local rarity. Philip Stead joined us on the Gare but, when we told him about the phalarope, he probably assumed we had been mistaken. Graham then arrived and Philip told him: "These young lads think they saw a phalarope along the beach." . . . "They did, and it's still there." Philip made a very hasty departure!

The following October we were sheltering from snow showers at Hartlepool on the 29th, scanning through gulls on the rocks. Graham spotted an adult Mediterranean Gull amongst them - a bird I had hardly heard of at the time and then only the sixth record for Britain. This celebrated bird returned every winter for the next twenty years. His knowledge and teaching skills greatly accelerated my own ornithological development. I was able to repay him in small part when he and Susan visited me in Ankara in 1967 and show him some Anatolian specialities, plus Broad-billed Sandpipers at my local lake.

My latest birding day with Graham was at Stag Rocks on 2 December 2014, before I left the UK for the last time. He had an impressive bird list from his old Bamburgh home overlooking the rocks, but it did not include Lesser Scaup. I spotted an immature flying north offshore but, frustratingly, Graham didn't get onto it. We drove round to Budle Bay and, thankfully, saw it swimming out into choppy water from the southern shore. Like the Mediterranean Gull, an extreme rarity now of more regular occurrence.

Alan Vittery (TBC founder member)

SPEAKERS 2024/25

2nd September 2024 - Our year with Barn Owls by Colin Gibson.

7th October 2024 - Pole to Pole by Brian Clasper.

4th November 2024 - Inn Search of Birds. Pubs, People and Places by Sir John Lawton.

2nd December 2024 - Urban Kittiwakes by Professor Helen Wilson.

6th January 2025 - Just two hours from Teesside by Dr Colin Bradshaw.

3rd February 2025 - Tees Tidelands Programme by Chris Hood.

3rd March 2025 - Sri Lanka and the bird by Ian Hillery

7th April 2025- Annual General Meeting and RSPB Saltholme Update

KIRKLEVINGTON'S PASSAGE BEE EATERS

Wednesday, 5.30 pm, June 5th was another uninspiring, overcast, windy and cold day of the summer of '24. My mood changed when a friend in Kirklevington rang me at home, to say he had a flock of European Bee Eaters in the gardens to the rear of his house, and they had been there about an hour. They were feeding on a swarm of drones of the Tree Bumblebees which were "dancing" around the entrance of a bird box, containing a colony of these bumblebees. Drones, from other nearby, nests had detected the emerging virgin queens and were lustfully attracted.

The feeding flock was best viewed to be counted from the street. The hawking process was quite orderly, with only 1 or 2 in action at any one time and the others perching. There was some vocalisation but not as much as I expected having seen and heard migrating flocks in the UAE. Those could be heard whilst barely visible from the ground. Interestingly too, the non-feeding birds were perched as 3 separate couples – pairs perhaps?

After a quarter of an hour, the whole flock suddenly took off and climbed steeply in a swirling body and headed north with the wind. This provided the best opportunity for my friend and I to count them. Our earlier estimates, from partial views of the group, was 7 -8. His 10 second video, when enlarged later, suggested the number was 9. (This is significant, given a flock of 8, was later seen in Scotland 2 days later). I rang

Chris Sharp to post the sighting on Twitter in case they were seen locally again in the north in Cleveland or County Durham.

After all the excitement, I marvelled at the ability of this high-flying migrating flock, had spotted below them, a partially obscured swarm of bumblebees dancing outside a nest box, fixed below a tree canopy. The local Honey Bee apiary in the village was torpid in the cold, with little activity at the hive entrance, when I visited it after the flock's departure (I thought that my luck might still be holding so I checked later to see if I could find another flock!). If you believe in poetic justice, there is an irony that an insectivorous bird had plundered the brood nest of recently bumblebee species, which has the tiresome habit of depriving hole nesting bird species of a breeding site for a year.

Footnote: A pair of Bee Eaters nested in Middleham Quarry, County Durham in 2002 and a colony returned to an RSPB reserve in England to breed for a second consecutive year.

Ali McLee July 2024

PROFILE: DEBBIE LAWSON

I was born in 1961 and have lived in Stockton all my life, except for 4 years studying Education and Music in York. I worked as a primary school teacher and later on worked for the music service teaching music in schools and running courses for teachers.

I believe that my love of nature and the outdoors began around the age of 5 when I went to live on my grandparent's farm at Whinny Hill, near Stockton. I spent many happy hours looking for mice and shrews in the hay, watching the swallows swooping into the cow barns and walking along the hedgerows picking cowslips (I would never do that now!). There was an abundance of sparrows and I remember being horrified to witness the shooting of sparrows and that it was common in rural communities back then.

My interest in the environment developed and I joined the Cleveland Conservation Volunteers in the mid 70s. I remember hauling abandoned shopping trolleys out of becks and helping to mend Skinningrove coastal steps in the rain.

Birdwatching was never something I did in isolation. Even now, when I go on walks and on holiday, I enjoy the whole experience of being immersed in the landscape, the flowers, the fungi, the mammals, amphibians and insects. In fact, I find it hard not to be distracted and focus solely on birds!

In 2017, my husband Dave and I were able to retire a little earlier, giving me the time to do some 'proper birdwatching'. I joined TBC in 2018 and learned a lot more about birding in Teesmouth

(I thank John Fletcher for that initial tour that got me started). Regular outings with TBC and a number of RSPB local group field trips showed me new habitats and gave me the opportunity to learn from more experienced bird watchers. I'm inspired by the club's Monday evening meetings and talks and I'm in awe at the knowledge and stunning photography presented.

My local patch is the 'Brick Pond' and Six Fields near Hartburn, Stockton. I don't have a favourite birdwatching site, although, following a week staying near RSPB Minsmere earlier this year, I think that I have found the perfect combination of habitats with its heathland, marshland, woods and coastline. To see Dartford warblers, stone curlew, nightingale, bittern, bearded tits and so much more in one day was pretty magical.



I don't have any fancy birding equipment: a pair of RSPB 8x42 binoculars, a Viking Scope and most importantly, my ears! Being a musician, I more often identify birds by their call and song.

My favourite birding book just now is Britain's Birds (RSPB). It has beautiful photographs and I find it particularly useful when comparing features of similar species.

I start an annual bird count each new year for fun but my numbers are nowhere near some member's totals. I don't have high ambitions to seek out rare birds, although every new bird I see for the first time is a joy. I was excited to see my first Hawfinch at Bishop Middleham a few years ago and to see my first snow buntings at South Gare last year was brilliant. A more unexpected first happened years ago when a hoopoe landed right next to us on the side of the hot tub we were in during a family holiday at a castle near

Barcelona. Among my highlights abroad this summer have been close up views of mountain bluebirds near Yellowstone National Park, USA and seeing the variety of different sparrows I did not know existed.

Any disappointments? Not getting a better look at that elusive King Eider off Redcar. He'll be back.

In 2019, Barbara Crinson, our committee chairperson at the time, encouraged me to take part in the Willow Survey, my first ever bird survey. This year, our present chairperson, Mike Leakey, set me off on my first BTO Breeding Bird Survey. I joined the club's Board of Trustees last year and then suddenly found myself nominated as Vice-chair (how did that happen?!). Now I see the good work that goes on behind the scenes. Running the club is only one small part of it. There is a real commitment to supporting many conservation projects in the Teesmouth area, working in conjunction with industry and bodies such as RSPB Saltholme, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Northumbrian Water and others to protect and improve the birding habitats on our doorstep. This gives me hope for the future.

And on this note, maybe we can all do something to inspire the younger generation to take up bird watching and even join the bird club, so that it may continue to thrive.

BTO NEWS AUGUST 2024

Breeding Birds Survey and Waterways Breeding Birds Survey 2024

At the time of writing data has been submitted for over 80% of allocated BBS squares in the Cleveland BTO area.

David Laing has retired from the scheme after completing an impressive 21 consecutive years of surveying his Billingham Beck WBBS patch, along with 5 years on his BBS square. Thank you for an outstanding effort, David!

The Breeding Bird Survey 2023 annual report was published in late spring and is available to download via the BTO website. The document marks thirty years of the scheme, during which volunteer participation grew to a peak of almost 3000 by 2007, reaching a plateau thereafter. A total of 2751 volunteers submitted data in 2023.

The report contains a wealth of fascinating statistics, including long term trends in English regions. BBS Trends in Northeast England over the period 1995-2022 show declines for Collared Dove (-36%), Rook (-39%), Skylark (-20%) and

Yellowhammer (-49%). Species increases include Woodpigeon (+43%), Great Tit (+44%) and Whitethroat (+45%).

<https://www.bto.org/our-science/publications/breeding-bird-survey-report/breeding-bird-survey-2023>

Tees Estuary Wetland Bird Survey

WeBS Local Organiser Adam Jones adam.jones@rspb.org.uk is still looking for volunteers to cover the Coatham Sands North and Redcar & Coatham Sands South WeBS Sectors. The Wetland Bird Survey is the key method used to assess the state of UK waterbirds, and together these sectors constitute a significant proportion of the Tees Estuary's open coast habitat. Please contact Adam directly if you think you can help.

The Winter Gull Survey

An excellent degree of coverage was achieved across Cleveland in January for the Winter Gull Survey (WinGS). Volunteers are now being sought for an additional survey of the same sites in September 2024, with the preferred date being Sunday 29th, though visits can be made a week either side of this. The aim of this additional survey is to monitor gulls at post-breeding aggregations and capture seasonal peaks of species on passage from breeding to WinGS volunteers visit gull roost sites, counting six key species: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. These gulls are all of conservation concern, and their breeding populations are either Amber- or Red-listed in the UK.

Mike Leakey, BTO Regional Representative for Cleveland

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2024 SUMMARY

	April 21	May 19	June 23
Little Grebe	18	4	25
Great Crested Grebe	41	38	26
Cormorant	29	39	124
Mute Swan	37	62	67
Shelduck	280*	242*	167
Gadwall	189*	181*	315**
Teal	291	6	96
Mallard	206	264	204
Shoveler	127*	83	35
Pochard	76	70	32
Tufted Duck	156	161	123
Eider	38	10	17
Coot	231	179	338
Oystercatcher	237	823	318
Avocet	143**	138**	110**
Little Ringed Plover	8	8	1
Ringed Plover	44	87	7
Golden Plover	30	0	1
Grey Plover	2	0	0
Lapwing	280	227	339
Knot	253	8	2
Sanderling	112*	200**	16
Purple Sandpiper	4	0	0
Dunlin	58	53	0
Ruff	0	0	0
Snipe	10	1	2
Black-tailed Godwit	60	4	61
Bar-tailed Godwit	94	7	0
Curlew	130	83	167
Redshank	145	33	41
Turnstone	61	17	0
Sandwich Tern	12	160	73
Common Tern	0	104	128
Little Tern	2	1	1

Counts in bold indicate Spring 2024 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 2024 SUMMARY

Coverage was excellent with 124 of the scheduled 126 sector counts completed over the three months.

For this series of counts the Tees Estuary and Hartlepool Bay recording area was nationally important for Gadwall (315, June), Avocet (143, April) and Sanderling (200, May).

The peak counts for Greylag Goose (1258, June) and Canada Goose (1031, June) set new spring maximum records. Both figures comfortably surpassed the previous records of 537 Greylag from 2023 and 732 Canada Geese from 2019. It appears that this year a larger number of geese selected RSPB Saltholme as a post-breeding molt location.

It was a mixed bag for wader totals with Oystercatcher (823, May) recording its second highest spring total and Knot (253, April) had its best showing since 263 birds were recorded in 2004. Bar-tailed Godwit (94, April) would have set a new spring maximum record however some of the wader roost locations were counted on separate dates which could have led to the total being a slight overestimate. Worryingly, Redshank (145, April) recorded a new record low spring maxima count.

This spring I was interested to see how Black-headed Gull and Common Tern numbers fared after two breeding seasons in which both species were affected by avian influenza. The peak total for Black-headed Gull (1577, April) was below the five-year average of 2408 birds and Common Tern (128, June) also lower than a five-year average of 244 birds.

Other interesting records during the spring included 1 Red-breasted Goose (Saltholme Wet Grassland, May), 3 Garganey (1 Saltholme Wet Grassland and 2 Cowpen Marsh, May), 2 Temminck's Stint (Saltholme West, May) and 2 Roseate Tern (Bran Sands North, May).

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June 2024