

Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

Issue 36. Winter 2007

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MONTHLY SUMMARY

***Chris Sharp** summarises the highlights of what proved to be a very mild winter period. Images have been kindly supplied by Ian Boustead, Chris Bell, Steve Clifton, Ian Forrest, Geoff Icteton and Martyn Sidwell. This account is a 'diary' of the key birding events: many of the scarce species have yet to be considered by the Records Sub Committee.*

NOVEMBER

Good numbers of Little Auks were seen off the coastal stations early in the month, with at least 1,700 off Hartlepool and 256 in 1 hour off South Gare on 2nd. Smaller numbers were recorded over the next couple of days. A Black-throated Diver, Long-tailed Duck, a single Manx Shearwater and 2 Woodcocks (in off the sea) were also reported from Hartlepool on the same date. A Shore Lark was at Crimdon Dene on 3rd, along with a Twite and a Snow Bunting. A Greenland White-fronted Goose, a very uncommon visitor to Cleveland, was at Saltholme the same day, where it remained for the rest of the winter, along with a small flock of Barnacle Geese. A Yellow-legged Gull was on Dormans Pool on

5th and the regular adult at the Tees Barrage remained throughout the winter. Four Whooper Swans flew over Hartlepool on 5th and a stunning drake Ring-necked Duck was found on the main lake at Stewart Park next day, where it remained until 19th. A Mandarin was also present in the park at this time, along with an escaped Eagle Owl. Up to 5 Whooper Swans were at Scaling Dam, along with 2 Long-tailed Ducks, the latter still being present in February. Sea watching off Hartlepool on 11th was very rewarding, with a Grey Phalarope and a Surf Scoter both being recorded, along with 8 Little Auks. A Black-throated Diver was seen off South Gare and a single observer saw an adult Bonaparte's Gull briefly on the beach at Saltburn on 13th. Much to the relief of an appreciative crowd, it reappeared the following day and gave stunning, close-range views. This was only the second Cleveland record and with the previous one being 29 years earlier it was a County tick for many local birders. The bird was presumably the same one that had spent much of the autumn at Newgiggin, Northumberland. Unfortunately, it had gone the following day but 2 Whooper Swans were on the sea and a late Swallow remained at Saltburn until 26th.



BONAPARTE'S GULL, SALTburn
Chris Bell



SHORE LARK, CRIMDON DENE
Ian Forrest



LITTLE AUK, HARTLEPOOL
Ian Forrest

Six Whooper Swans were on Dormans Pool on 15th and a Great Northern Diver was off Hartlepool the same day. An Iceland Gull was on Seaton Common on 17th and a Rose-coloured Starling was also reported there briefly. A very late Common Sandpiper was at Scaling Dam on 18th, with a Spotted Redshank still around Greenabella at this time. An adult Iceland Gull was at Marske on 20th and the same day saw a Whooper Swan and a Greenland White-fronted Goose on the Blast Furnace Pools at South Gare. Both birds remained for several days. North of the Tees, several Brent Geese were reported.



GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE, SOUTH GARE
Ian Boustead



DARK-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE, POWER STATION FIELDS
Geoff Icton



GREAT NORTHERN DIVER, SOUTH GARE
Martyn Sidwell

Four Long-tailed Ducks were off Marske on 25th, along with a Great Northern Diver. A Firecrest on the Long Drag on 26th was an unusual location and the first of the year. The month ended with a Black-throated Diver off Saltburn and a Jack Snipe at Portrack Marsh.

DECEMBER

A Little Gull flew past Redcar on 1st and, nearby, between Marske and Saltburn, both Great Northern and Black-throated Divers showed well along with 5 Velvet Scoters. An Iceland Gull was on Saltholme on 3rd and an out of season Red-necked Phalarope flew south at Hartlepool the same day. Three drake Long-tailed Ducks were off Hartlepool on 6th, along with the wintering flock of Eider and scoter, which included 3 Velvets. Two Mediterranean Gulls were wintering at Hartlepool, with another nearby at Newburn, 2 more at Seaton and several on the south side of the river, including one at Hemlington Lake. As recently as the early seventies, this species was an extreme rarity in Cleveland, with a regular wintering adult at Hartlepool often being the only record in the year. Sea watching off Hartlepool on 10th produced a

Little Auk, Great Northern Diver, Red-necked Grebe and Scaup. What was presumably November's Ring-necked Duck reappeared at Hemlington Lake for a day on 14th. A White-billed Diver, which tracked south through Tyne and Wear and Durham via the pagers on 17th probably flew south at Hartlepool but was too distant to clinch the identification. Numbers of Water Pipits around Haverton Hole were lower than the last few winters, with only 1 or 2 being seen. With the weather remaining mild, no cold weather movements were reported.



WATER PIPIT, HAVERTON HOLE
Steve Clifton



SECOND-WINTER MEDITERRANEAN GULL, NEWBURN
Geoff Icton



RING-NECKED DUCK, HEMLINGTON LAKE
Martyn Sidwell

Up to 18 Black-tailed Godwits were wintering on the North Tees Marshes but Slavonian Grebe and Smew, a feature of recent winters in the estuary, were completely absent. A Firecrest showed well below the car park at Dormans Pool on 23rd. Over the Christmas period, 3 Great Northern Divers were between Marske and Redcar, up to 3 Peregrines were in the Salholme area and 2 or 3 Little Egrets were around Greatham Creek. More Purple Sandpipers were present this winter than for a number of years, with 83 at Newburn being the highest count reported. A Chiffchaff was at Portrack Marsh on 30th.

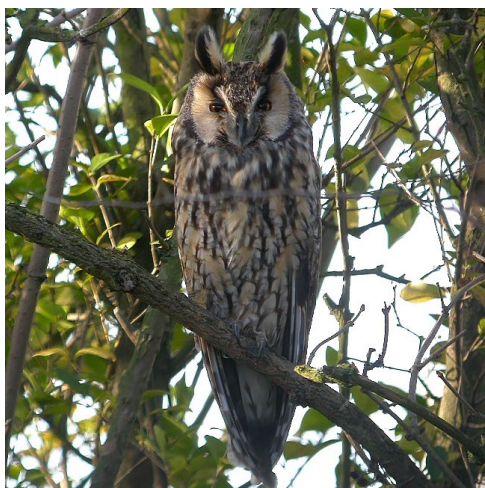
JANUARY

As usual, year-listers were out in force on 1st but the mild weather meant scarce birds were at a premium. The long-staying Ring-necked Parakeet was at Acklam Hall and the wintering Green Sandpiper was at Portrack roundabout. Other Green Sandpipers were seen during the month at Cowpen Bewley and the Fire Station Pool and 30 Twites were on the Long Drag. The latter were not easy to see this winter as they spent long periods absent from their usual Greenabella wintering site. One or 2 Hawfinches were around the usual location at Hutton Gate and a small roost of Long-eared Owls was on the North Tees Marshes.

The sea between Redcar and Saltburn proved attractive in the early weeks of the year, with 1 or 2 Black-throated Divers, along with unprecedented numbers of Great Northern Divers, presumably a product of the storms that raged at this time. They were regularly to be seen offshore, with a maximum of 15 on 6th. Two Slavonian Grebes, a Red-necked Grebe, several Velvet Scoters, Scaup and Long-tailed Duck were all offshore during the early part of the month. For many, however, the highlight of the winter was a first-winter Black Guillemot, which was found off the end of South Gare breakwater on 6th and remained for a week. It showed incredibly well and was the first long-stayer in Cleveland since a bird at Hartlepool in 1969. About 30 Snow Buntings were also at South Gare. This is a declining species in Cleveland; flocks of over 400 could be seen on both sides of the river in the late sixties and early seventies but numbers have gradually declined since.



RING-NECKED PARAKEET, ACKLAM
Martyn Sidwell



LONG-EARED OWL, NORTH TEES MARSHES
Ian Forrest



TWITE, SEATON SNOOK
Geoff Icton



BLACK GUILLEMOT, SOUTH GARE
Geoff Icton



SNOW BUNTING, SOUTH GARE
Martyn Sidwell

The Ring-necked Duck of 2006 reappeared at Hemlington Lake on 10th and was recorded there on several dates until 26th. Presumably it was hiding on some small pond elsewhere locally on the days it wasn't at Hemlington, though its location was never found. The escaped Eagle Owl relocated to Middlesbrough Station and made the national news. With the weather remaining mild there was again no cold weather movements during the remainder of the month. The geese at Saltholme continued to show well, though the White-fronted Goose could sometimes be elusive amongst the many Canadas and Greylags present. Two Waxwings were at Skelton on 19th in what was a poor winter for this species. Two Little Auks were off Hartlepool on 23rd, along with 4 Brent Geese and an Iceland Gull off South Gare the same day. Three Ring-necked Parakeets were regular at Ward Jackson Park, Hartlepool and up to 5 Little Egrets roosted at nearby Rossmere Park. Corn Bunting is a rapidly declining species in Cleveland and 5 around Dalton Percy was the largest number reported. Towards the end of the month, several Mealy Redpolls were at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park, Great Crested Grebe numbers peaked at 39 at Newburn and a

Greenshank was reported on the Long Drag on 30th.

FEBRUARY

A Red-necked Grebe was off Hartlepool from 2nd to 5th and 3 were also between Redcar and Marske, along with 2 Black-throated Divers. Twenty Whooper Swans flew over Seaton Common on 4th and 7 were over Cowpen Bewley on 9th. A Waxwing was at Billingham on 11th and the same day saw the only flock of the winter at Skelton, where up to 30 birds were regularly seen up to the end of the month.



WAXWING, SKELTON
Ian Forrest



TREE SPARROW, COWPEN BEWLEY WOODLAND PARK
Ian Forrest



GREAT NORTHERN DIVER, GREATHAM CREEK
Ian Forrest

Continuing the extraordinary winter for Great Northern Divers, 5 were on Seal Sands on 13th, with 1 or 2 still present until the end of the month. A quiet ten days saw little in the way of new arrivals, until up to 7 Lapland Buntings graced Cowbar from 23rd. This is now the most reliable site for seeing this once regular wintering bird in Cleveland and is listed nationally as one of the best places to see it. Birds of prey were much in evidence at Sleddale, with 3-4 Common Buzzards, Peregrine and Goshawk all on the menu. As the mildest winter for many years came to an end, birders were already dreaming of the delights the spring would bring. A fall of migrants would be a start!

BATS OF CLEVELAND

*Following his very interesting talk to the Club in November last year, **Ian Bond** reviews the status of bats in Cleveland. Ian is an Ecologist with Hartlepool Borough Council and has a particular interest in bats. Club members are urged to pass on any bat sightings to Ian to help build up a more complete picture of their status in Cleveland.*

Throughout the world, over 1100 species of bat have been discovered. Most of these are in the tropics, with fewer and fewer species further North and South. As far as we know, there are 17 species that regularly occur in Britain. In the Tees Valley, again as far as we know, 8 species regularly occur. These are listed below.

PIPISTRELLES

These are the smallest and by far the commonest British bats. It has recently been discovered that the Pipistrelle is actually two different species. They can be told apart by the frequency at which they echolocate, with what is now known as the Common Pipistrelle echolocating at around 45kHz and its sister species, the Soprano Pipistrelle, at around 55kHz. There is some deviation from these frequencies within the two species and in practice it isn't always possible to assign a Pipistrelle to one or other species based on just their calls. As the species were only separated in 1996, most records just refer to Pipistrelle species. Recent studies have found that Soprano Pipistrelles are more of a habitat specialist, favouring riparian habitats, whereas the Common Pipistrelle is probably the most generalist of all British bat species. The small, fluttery bats, which are seen flying around houses, will almost certainly be Common Pipistrelles.

To date, there has only been a single record of Soprano Pipistrelle from Cleveland, near Thorpe Bulmer Dene in Hartlepool in May 2006. It is likely that Common Pipistrelles are ubiquitous wherever there is suitable foraging habitat but most tetrads in Cleveland are still waiting for the dot of confirmation. Pipistrelles actually seem to have a strong preference for modern housing, rather than the old buildings and belfries that are traditionally associated with bats. Each Pipistrelle bat will eat around 2,000 midges every night, which is ok by me!



NATHUSIUS' (LEFT) AND SOPRANO PIPISTRELLE BATS

MYOTIS BATS

Most British bat species belong to the genus *Myotis*, which means "mouse-eared". These bats are difficult to tell apart but, in my opinion, they are all very cute. Their echolocation calls are of a similar frequency to Common Pipistrelles but sound slightly different. It isn't too difficult to distinguish *Myotis* bats from Pipistrelles with a bat detector but it is very difficult (virtually impossible with some species) to tell one *Myotis* species from another on this basis. Most records just go down as *Myotis sp.* The species can generally be told apart in the hand and one is very distinctive in its flight pattern. In Cleveland we have the following four species:

WHISKERED: These are only slightly larger than Pipistrelles and have a fairly similar flight pattern; in the hand their most noticeable features distinguishing them from Pipistrelles are the shape of the flap of skin inside their ear (the tragus) and their shaggy fur. These bats seem to prefer older buildings. There are only two Cleveland records of this species from Eaglescliffe and Stillington. These were both of individual bats. No roosts are known in Cleveland but a large colony at Middleton-in-Teesdale may be one of the most important nationally.

BRANDT'S: These are so similar to Whiskered bats that they were only distinguished as a separate species in the 1970's. The most obvious difference is the shape of the penis; not much help if you're looking at a female bat! Two Cleveland roost sites are recorded in Tony Wardhaugh's 1994 *Vasculum* article on '*Bats & Their Roosts in Cleveland*', though no locations are given.

NATTERER'S: Pretty much as cute as a bat can get. These have pinkish faces and fringe of hairs on their tail membrane, which gives rise to their alternative name of Hairy-tailed Bats. They tend to be a woodland bat and haven't been found very often in the North-East. There is a long-established roost of this species at St. Mary's Church in Long Newton. Until recently, this was the only known Cleveland site but the species has now been found in small numbers at a site in Hartlepool.

DAUBENTON'S: Also known as the Water Bat. It roosts under bridges and hunts by flying low over rivers and ponds, sometimes taking insects off the water surface. Its flight is quite distinctive as it flies continuously within inches of the water. Only two roost sites have been reported but a number of new feeding sites have been identified in the past few years. It is likely that it will be present on most still water bodies and larger watercourses but we are still a long way from knowing that for sure.



LONGNEWTON CHURCH: ONE OF THE KEY SITES IN CLEVELAND FOR NATTERER'S BAT Ian Bond



JUVENILE LONG-EARED BAT, UPSALL HALL Derek Enderby

NOCTULE BAT

Britain's largest bat. Roughly hamster-sized with an eight-inch wing on each side. Noctules have a distinctive flight pattern, flying high and fast while it is still light, often being mistaken for swifts, until they suddenly pull a 90-degree dive. They nearly always live in trees and can be quite noisy. If you hear a tree squeak, you've probably found a Noctule colony. No Cleveland roosts have been identified but the species has been recorded flying in small numbers at a few sites.

LONG-EARED BAT

Their ears are the length of their body, hence the name. This is the most easily recognised species, if you manage to see one, but the hardest to track down. They don't come out until it's well and truly dark and their excellent hearing means that they don't need to make very loud calls, which gives them the alternative name of Whispering Bat - very frustrating for bat workers! They usually roost within 500m of woodland and tend to be closely associated with this habitat. There are less than 20 records of this species but that still makes them the second most frequently recorded bat in Cleveland.

It is possible that a few other species of bat are present in Cleveland, the most likely contenders being Nathusius' Pipistrelle and Leisler's. Lesser Horseshoe and Barbastelle were present in Helmsley until at least the 1940s, so you never know.

If much of the above gives the impression that our knowledge of bats in Cleveland is fairly rudimentary then that would be a pretty good summary. I would be very grateful for any additional records that anyone is able to supply, particularly if the species can be identified. Whilst most bats can be difficult to tell apart in flight, even by the more experienced, two species, Noctule and Daubenton's have very distinctive flight patterns and can be identified with some confidence. Also the location of any bat roost is very useful information, regardless of whether or not the species is known. If anyone has any records which they would like to pass on please contact me on ian.bond105@ntlworld.com or Tel: 01429 523431.

BLACK GUILLEMOT AT SOUTH GARE

*The occurrence of a long-staying Black Guillemot at South Gare in January 2007 was a major event in Cleveland, as it is a difficult species to see in our area and constituted a welcome addition to some long-standing birders' Cleveland Lists. In this interesting feature, **Chris Bell** reviews the ageing of the bird and its local and national status.*

On Saturday 6th January 2007, Alan Kraus discovered a Black Guillemot on the sea, off the end of the breakwater at South Gare. It remained in the area until 12th January, making it the longest staying example of the species in Cleveland ever. Although adults in winter plumage and juveniles are quite similar, the South Gare bird can be safely aged as a first-winter.



BLACK GUILLEMOT, SOUTH GARE (2007)
Geoff Iceton

This is mainly due to the fact that the large white patch on the upperwing coverts has obvious internal dark markings. This wing patch is unmarked white in adults at all times of year. Another feature supporting the age of the South Gare bird as a first-winter is that the pale rump is strongly marked with dark bars, giving it a greyer appearance than the normally all white rump of a winter adult. Of all the Cleveland records, only six have been aged as immatures, however, 13 of the previous records were un-aged. The bird appeared to be in very good health, and was seen to dive and feed on numerous occasions.

The views at times were stunning, often down to just a few yards, and provided most observers with their best ever views of the species in Cleveland.

National Status

Seabird 2000 lists a UK population of 37,500 birds in the period 1998 to 2000, though the vast majority of birds breed in Scotland; particularly in Orkney and Shetland, with a smaller numbers in Ireland, as well as a small population in Wales. The only breeding site in England is at Saint Bee's Head in Cumbria, where there are around seven pairs. There is recent evidence of a small wintering population around the Farne Islands, Northumberland, with around 4 birds in 2004.

Ringing Recoveries

Black Guillemot is a normally very sedentary species that rarely ventures far from its breeding areas. An example of this is that of 42 UK ringing recoveries, 37 have been recovered less than 100km from their ringing site. For example, a bird ringed as a chick at Isbister, Whalsay, Shetland in 1982 that was later recovered at Quendale, South Mainland, Shetland represents the furthest movement of any Black Guillemot rung by the Shetland Ringing Group.

There are, however, a few longer-range recoveries: for example, a bird ringed on Fair Isle, Shetland, in 1953 was recovered at Blackwater, Essex in November of the same year. Another bird ringed on Fair Isle, Shetland in July 1969 was recovered at Filey, North Yorkshire in February 1978. There are also two recoveries of Swedish rung birds in the UK. A bird rung in June 1960 was later recovered at Winterton, Norfolk in July 1960 and a bird rung in June 1978 was later recovered at Budle Bay, Northumberland in February 1979. With this in mind it is, perhaps, impossible to determine the exact origins of the South Gare bird.

Previous Cleveland Records

Although the species has become slightly more regular in Cleveland in recent years, most, if not all of the records in the last 10 years have been of birds seen briefly on seawatches. In fact the last truly twitchable Black Guillemot in Cleveland was also at South Gare, way back on 13th October 1991, over 15 years ago! Prior to that, the only bird to remain for more than one day was at Hartlepool from 27th to 31st August 1969.

The 2007 bird was the 32nd record of Black Guillemot for Cleveland since the first was "captured" at Redcar on 6th March 1883. It was not until 25th September 1953 that the species occurred again in Cleveland, when an

immature was recorded at Hartlepool. Records to date (not including the current bird) can be grouped as follows:

Pre 1950	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
1	4	11	4	1	3	7

There is an obvious peak to records of this species in Cleveland in the 1960's, though this was, perhaps, helped by a remarkable record of 4 together at South Gare on 16th November 1969. However, in the 30-year period from 1970 to 1999, the species has only maintained an average of about one record every four years.

Since 2000 it has become much more frequent in Cleveland, and has been just about annual, with seven records up to the end of 2006, including an impressive 3 in 2000. I suspect that this recent increase is probably down to the increased amount of effort put into seawatching on our coast, as well as better optical equipment, rather than any genuine increase in population numbers. Black Guillemot has occurred in Cleveland in all months of the year, but there are two distinct peaks, in September and November.

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8	2	9	3

The September peak could perhaps be explained by the fact that most Auks leave their breeding cliffs in late July/August to moult offshore. Presumably, a few Black Guillemots get caught up in post-breeding dispersal of other Auk species once they have completed their moult? As for the November peak, it could be that a few birds get blown southwards during the frequent northerly gales that we experience at that time of year, though the paucity of records in October is difficult to explain.

All records of Black Guillemot in Cleveland in the last ten years are listed below:

24/09/2005 – Hartlepool, (adult), flew south.

07/09/2004 – Hartlepool, (winter plumaged), flew north

20/09/2002 – Hartlepool, (juvenile), flew north

09/11/2001 – Hartlepool, (un-aged), landed on sea

03/09/2000 – Hartlepool, (summer adult), flew south

02/09/2000 – Hartlepool, (winter plumaged/ juvenile), flew north

10/07/2000 – Hartlepool, (first-summer), flew north

PROFILE – JULIE MASON

*In this Profile, **Ted Parker** talked to Julie Mason about her birding life. Julie is a long-standing member of the Teesmouth Bird Club and sits on both the Committee and Marketing and Membership Sub Committee, where she has been instrumental in designing our new Application Form. She is also Honorary Secretary of the Teesmouth Field Centre.*

Julie was born in Stockton in June 1973, where she still lives today. She has been a Senior Test Engineer with Rapra Technology for 18 years, where she tests rubbers and

plastics. Julie has been birding for at least 26 years and has seen 225 species in Cleveland. Her favourite local patch is Teesmouth and the North Tees Marshes, to which she was first introduced by Angela Cooper through the Cleveland Watch Group. She has many fond memories of birding in this area over the years, including a Peregrine causing havoc among the birds at Seal Sands and the constant calling of feeding Common Terns during the summer when birdwatching from the Hartlepool Power Station Hide. Julie's most-liked alternative site is Hartlepool Headland, where she greatly enjoys spending many hours seawatching



The optics Julie uses are a Swarovski STS80 'scope and Swarovski 10 x 50 EL binoculars, which she chose for their superb quality and light-gathering, which aid identification. Her favourite bird book is the 'Collins Bird Guide' because the illustrations are so clear and she carries this everywhere. In addition to birds, Julie also has a very keen interest in mammals. When asked about the most impressive birding site she has ever visited, Julie was emphatic that this is Titchwell, which she visits at least once a year. She feels that this reserve has a relaxed atmosphere and the birding is always very good, with close views making it an ideal place for photography. Julie saw her first Surf Scoter here last year and she also says that the bacon sandwiches are good too! Her best day's birding in Cleveland was during a sea watch off Hartlepool Headland in August 2005, with

excellent close range views of a Cory's Shearwater, Manx Shearwaters and Pomarine, Great and Arctic Skuas to name but a few. Her best personal find in Cleveland was all 3 species of diver and 3 species of grebe together on Seal Sands in front of the Hartlepool Power Station Hide. Julie says she has had numerous birding disappointments and admits there are many birds on her "must try harder next time list", particularly those which have showed 2 minutes after she has left! These include Caspian Tern, Purple Heron and Laughing Gull.

Julie is enthusiastic about the most memorable bird she has ever seen - Great Grey Owl in Sweden in April 2006, which, she said "took her breath away", while in Britain last year's 'wreck' of Little Auks was an event she will always remember. Until that day,

Little Auk was one of her main 'bogey birds', which she had previously tried very hard to see, including turning blue on Heugh Breakwater one February while looking for two birds. Like buses, she expected one but in the excitement she had lost count after an hour. Julie's ambition bird in Cleveland is King Eider but, with only one unseasonal record at South Gare in July 1998, she may have a long wait.

Julie has had many embarrassing moments, such as saying "Penguin" instead of "Peregrine", while with a group of other TBC birders. She also disclosed that whilst in Norfolk last year she completely forgot that a Black Guillemot has white winter plumage and, now that this is known, wonders whether any future bird records will be accepted from her!

The most significant changes Julie has seen in the local area are the impacts that changing industries, people and lifestyles are having on wildlife habitats in our area. She considers that the pressure for development land for industry, housing and even landfill is resulting in a significant contraction of our wildlife corridors.

When asked what changes she would like to see concerning birds or birdwatching, Julie stated that, as Secretary of the Teesmouth Field Centre, she thinks it is important to educate and encourage young people to appreciate birds. She feels that you don't necessarily have to take up the hobby seriously but an education that includes migration and the endurance of some birds will only help towards a brighter future.

Julie considers that, as a Club, we are very lucky to have such good birders within our membership, who are willing to help with identification and share their knowledge. She concluded by saying that *"it is important that the TBC becomes a strong voice to help protect the birding sites of Teesside for future generations"*.

NORTHEAST RED KITES COORDINATED SURVEY 2007

As you are probably already aware, the release of juvenile Red Kites from the Gateshead area has reached a key year in its project programme. Many of the young birds are likely to attempt to breed this spring. Actually, there were five precocious breeding attempts at least in 2006 from which five young were fledged. Already in 2007 there are

10–12 likely paired birds known already but coverage is far from thorough, with much unknown. Our Club has been invited to participate to cover the Cleveland area and perhaps possible locations to the south of our county in the northern part of North Yorkshire. A report of the whole exercise will be made available to the participating clubs for their annual report of 2007. If you wish to participate in this exercise on 7th and 14th April, then contact me on :

canda.mcleee@virgin.net or call 01642 787305 and I shall be pleased to forward information on survey methodology. Choice of survey locations is on a first come, first served basis.

In addition to Red Kites, please could observers record sightings of ALL raptors at their chosen sites, particularly if breeding activity is noted (eg display), as this will provide vitally important information for our the Club

Alistair McLee (**Conservation** Sub-Committee)

CLEVELAND WATER BODY SURVEY

Would all observers please send their counts for January-March 2007 inclusive on the form previously provided to: Chris Sharp via email at chrisandlucia@ntlworld.com or by post to: 20 Auckland Way, Hartlepool, TS26 0AN by 30th April. I would like to thank all those who have given up their time to take part. The results of the survey will be published in due course and will supplement records for the Cleveland Bird Reports for 2006 and 2007.

NEWS UPDATE FROM THE COMMITTEE

CHANGE OF VENUE FOR MEMBERS' EVENING MEETINGS

The Committee is delighted to announce that, at its last meeting on 13th February, it was unanimously agreed to move evening meetings to the Lecture Theatre at Stockton Library from September 2007. Meetings will now be held **on the first Monday of each month** from September to April inclusive, commencing on 3rd September at 7.30pm. The facilities are modern, bright and excellent for our requirements. The room is bigger than the present one we use at the 'Billingham Arms Hotel', with a screen mounted on the

end wall. There is ample comfortable seating, no stairs to negotiate and there is access to the venue direct from the car park only a few strides away. The car park is floodlit, has CCTV, is located next to Stockton's central Police Station and has more than enough spaces for our needs. We can also have tea and coffee facilities. Members would be expected to pay a modest price for drinks on the night, though, at our first meeting on 3rd September, they will be complimentary. We have to vacate the room by 9.30pm at the latest, otherwise we have to pay the Caretaker overtime!

REQUEST TO TBC MEMBERS FROM THE CIVIL NUCLEAR CONSTABULARY (CNC)

As regular visitors to Teesmouth will be aware, police officers of the CNC regularly conduct counter-terrorist patrols in the vicinity of Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station. They often stop members of the public and ask them to account for their presence, particularly if they are in the possession of cameras or optical equipment. Recently, on a number of occasions, officers have encountered people who have stated that they are members of the Teesmouth Bird Club and, whilst the police have no concerns over Club members' presence, they would like membership cards to be carried as proof of identity.

The Chairman has given an undertaking to the CNC that he will make Club members aware of the situation and request them to carry their membership cards.

HARTLEPOOL OBSERVATORY

With the kind assistance and hard work of Ali McLee, the Club has submitted 2 bids for 100% funding of the Feasibility Study – one to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the other to the Northern Rock Foundation (NRF). The HLF has initially informed us that our project is a very interesting one and has requested some further details. We expect a response from the NRF some time in late March/early April. If we are successful with either of these, we will instruct our selected architectural consultants to commence work as soon as possible. Those who would like to know more about the project can view the consultant's Brief on our Website.

HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

In recognition of his long-standing support of the Club, not the least through his organisation of and participation in the Huntsman Tioxide annual sponsored birdwatch on Greenabella Marsh, the Committee is delighted to announce that it is to bestow an Honorary Life Membership on Tony Marron. The sponsorship has raised a significant amount of much-needed income for the Club over the years and forged good links with a major industrial partner in the Tees area. There will be press coverage of this during March and a formal presentation will be made to Tony at the April AGM.

TEESSIDE OFFSHORE WIND FARM, REDCAR

The Club has recently responded to the Appropriate Assessment produced by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and a copy of this can be found on our Website for those who are interested in reading this. An Appropriate Assessment must be carried out by the consenting authority, in this case the DTI, for the offshore works, if requested by any statutory consultees, such as Natural England. It is restricted solely to the environmental impacts on European designated sites – in this case the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) and does not look at the wider issues outside such zones. In the Redcar case, therefore, a consideration of the collision risks to the large numbers of migrating seabirds off Hartlepool and South Gare during the spring and autumn was not included. In our response we drew attention to this and the fact that we were not consulted on the first draft of the Assessment, issued in July 2006. We also raised concerns about the validity of the Ornithological Consultant's methodology in calculating highly accurate avoidance rates (to 2 decimal places), the lack of knowledge about the effects of wind farms on seabirds during adverse weather conditions and at night (which the Assessment itself admitted) and the fact that the turbine morphology has not yet been decided. The DTI's document concluded that, despite the lack of knowledge, it is satisfied that the environmental impacts on bird species within the SPA will not be significant. We are disappointed that the RSPB has withdrawn its objection to the wind farm. At the time of going to press, however, Natural England's objection still holds.

SHARING BIRD INFORMATION

Members are requested to put all significant sightings onto the Pager Services, as follows:

Rare Bird Alert 02070 382820
Birdnet 01623 511679

Please submit your sightings to Eric James for inclusion on the Club's Website (tel: 01642 310103; email: clevelandbirdnews@yahoo.co.uk) or enter them directly onto the Website via the 'Members' Sightings' section.

Ted Parker

SALE OF SIGNED MIDDLESBROUGH FC FOOTBALL SHIRT

Middlesbrough Football Club has kindly donated a signed football shirt for auction by the Club, with the proceeds going towards the publication of the Breeding Birds Atlas. Would anyone interested in making a bid for the shirt please send this to Ted Parker, either via email: ecparker@supanet.com 'phone (01642 275 369) or letter (to 9 Morton Carr Lane, Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough, TS7 0JU). The shirt will go to the highest bidder, whose name will also appear as a sponsor in the Atlas if they so wish.

LOCAL OUTINGS 2007

MONDAY 23rd APRIL – COATHAM MARSH AND SOUTH GARE: Meet at 10.00 a.m. at Coatham Marsh car park. The first summer migrants should be around and a few late winter species should still be present at the Gare. **Leader John Sharp (Tel 01287 633976).**

SATURDAY 26th MAY – LOCKWOOD BECK AND SCALING DAM: Lockwood is one of the best sites in Cleveland for Spotted Flycatcher, which should have returned by this date. The reservoirs could hold anything at this time and Osprey is always a possibility. Meet at Lockwood Beck car park at 10.00 a.m. **Leader Ted Parker (Tel 01642 275369).**

SATURDAY 9th JUNE – NIGHTJARS IN GUISBOROUGH FOREST: Meet at the first house in Hutton Village at 8.30 p.m. Woodcocks and Tree Pipits are virtually guaranteed in addition to excellent views of Nightjar. This outing is weather-dependent. **Leader Mark Askew (Tel 01287 638190).**

SUNDAY 15th JULY – RSPB SALTHOLME:

A visit to the reserve to view the progress of this major project, which is scheduled to be completed in spring 2008. Meet at 10.00 a.m. on site at the reserve car park. Access is off the A178, approximately 30m south of the Fire Station. **Leader: Dave Braithwaite (Tel 07881 916274).**

Would all those wishing to attend any of these outings please contact the respective leaders in advance in order to avoid zero attendance.

FUTURE OF THE RECLAMATION POND

Ted Parker reviews the current situation regarding the Reclamation Pond.

BACKGROUND

The Conservation Sub Committee and Reclamation Pond Working Party have been working hard over the past few years to establish the future of the Reclamation Pond, one of the prime ornithological sites in Teessmouth. Ecological data has been gathered, including bird counts, moths and botanical records, which underline just how important this site is. This information has been fed into the Environmental Impact Assessments carried out recently by ecological consultants appointed by two developers who have an active interest in the site – Vireol plc and Thor Cogeneration. Various meetings have taken place with the site's owners, Impetus Waste Management, and the two developers. Some Club members attended Thor Cogeneration's recent public consultation in Billingham on 2nd March.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Reclamation Pond was originally part of the inter-tidal Tees Estuary and was created in the late nineteenth century. It was never reclaimed and has since become one of the most important habitats around the Tees Estuary, initially for waders and gulls and, more recently as a result of higher water levels, wildfowl, grebes and Coot. There have been recent attempts at breeding by Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes and has nationally important counts of Coot, Gadwall, Little Grebe and Ruddy Duck. It regularly attracts large numbers of gulls, some of which in the past have included Franklin's, Ring-billed and Caspian. Common Terns commute here from nearby Saltholme to feed and Black Terns

occasionally patrol the site during the spring and autumn periods.

The Reclamation Pond was formerly owned by ICI but was transferred to Impetus Waste Management, following renewal of Planning Permission to infill the site, which was granted by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council in 2003, subject to a number of conditions. The latter included the construction of two compensatory sites at Cowpen Bewley and Port Clarence Pool. The Teesmouth Bird Club was, sadly, the only objector and attempts to raise awareness among the Planners of how important the site is in their Borough fell on deaf ears. The main reason for the Club being a 'lone voice' almost certainly has its roots in the 1996 'North Tees Agreement', drawn up between ICI plc, Teesside Development Corporation, English Nature, Cleveland Wildlife Trust and RSPB, under which the use of the Reclamation Pond for industrial development was agreed in exchange for the enhancement and transfer of Dormans Pool to a nature conservation body. It was also stipulated under the Agreement that the site should not be designated. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's revised Local Plan reflects this agreement and the Reclamation Pond was designated for industrial use. The Teesmouth Bird Club was not party to the Agreement.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

As far as we are aware, following the advertisement of the site by Impetus Waste Management, two developers have come forward: Vireol plc, who want to build an ethanol biofuels plant on the southern area between Huntsman Drive and Reclamation Pond; and Thor Cogeneration, who have submitted a Planning Application to develop the northern, triangular plateau between Dormans Pool and the Reclamation Pond for an energy plant. Impetus will prepare the development sites in advance and this will mean reducing and levelling the plateau areas to create flat land. No material is to be taken off site and will be used to infill the Reclamation Pond. We have been informed that the infilling will occur in 4 phases: Phases 1 (southwest quadrant), 2 (northwest) and 3 (southeast) are conditional on the creation of a 4m high bund along the western side of the site, the maintenance of the hydraulic link by the creation of a ditch (rather than a culvert) between the River Tees, Reclamation Pond and Dormans Pool and the construction of the mitigation measures at Port Clarence Pool. It is proposed to start work on the bund in July and this will take about 5-6 weeks. The 3 phases are all linked and, according to

Impetus, will result in a reduction of the actual water area by about 8%. It is programmed to complete Phases 1-3 by the end of 2007, which is very much sooner than we had ever anticipated. Phase 4 (northeast quadrant) is linked to the completion of the compensatory site at Cowpen Bewley Landfill and is much longer term.

COMPENSATORY SITES

Port Clarence Pool: This will be located between Petroplus and the Calor Gas Pool and includes a large area of open water and associated marginal vegetation. The northern pool will not to be lined as this is required to flood seasonally and then recede and possibly dry up, depending on the summer weather. The environmental consultant's rationale for this is that seasonal flooding and drying out will ensure maximum diversity of species. Work is programmed to commence in the near future and construction will take 6-8 weeks. Impetus may hand over the completed scheme to the RSPB and we are pressing for vehicular access, in view of the extremely dangerous conditions on the A178.

Cowpen Bewley: This is a huge area covering 400 acres. Levels have been increased to a gradient of 1:25 to aid run-off, which will shed into clean water ditches. A total of 1.3 million square metres are to be capped with clay, which will be generated by the digging out of 6 large lagoons, of which 2 are complete, 1 is nearly complete and the topsoil strip on the remaining 2 has been finished. It is intended that the lagoons will fill up naturally with rainwater and be 6-7m deep at their deepest points (the Reclamation Pond is only 1m deep). All dirty water is to be collected in a separate ditch system. There is some unknown toxic waste on site, which will need to be addressed. It was agreed that access for bird watching should be provided, particularly as this site is intended to compensate for the loss of the Reclamation Pond, which has been watched by TBC members for the past 60 years or so.

THE CLUB'S STANCE

The Conservation Sub Committee is currently reviewing Thor Cogeneration's Environmental Statement and will formally respond to the DTI and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council in the near future. We will strive to secure the Club's access to Dormans Pool and the Reclamation Pond is maintained and the best possible schemes for the two compensatory sites.

CLEVELAND BIRDING SITES – WEARY BANK

*In this feature, **Ali McLee** takes a look at a less well-known Cleveland site he frequently visits in the well-wooded valley of the River Leven, downstream of Weary Bank, near Yarm. This highly scenic area can produce a good array of woodland and riparian species during the spring and summer, including all three woodpeckers.*

Background

The Tees has surprisingly few tributaries of any size in its lower reaches, the main one being the River Leven. The Leven rises on the northern edge of the North York Moors National Park and wends its way west and then north through Stokesley and Hutton Rudby over flat, floodplain farmland. From Hutton Rudby and onwards via Crathorne, the stream has cut itself a young valley all the remaining way to the Tees. The river is very diverse in this stretch, with stony riffles and glides, interspersed with deep pools with gravel or mud bottoms. As the river meanders, the outer bank edges are steep and constantly eroding. Depending on the contours of the land by the riverside, there is either tree cover or pasture. The riverside is lined with Alders and Crack Willows, while the woodlands on the North Yorkshire side have a good range of species, including Oak and Ash. On the more open slopes, Hazel and Hawthorn scrub predominates and there is a large patch of Gorse below the Castlelevington earthworks.

Location, Access and Strategy

Weary Bank lies about 1.5 kilometres to the southeast of Yarm and is accessed from the east via the A1044 Leven Bank Road/Green Lane or, from the west, along the B1264 (Green Lane), both of which skirt the southern edge of Yarm. Turn off Green Lane a few hundred metres from the A67/A1044 Kirklevington roundabout and head south along the minor road for several miles, cross the A19 and park near the bridge at Weary Bank by the river.



VARIOUS VIEWS OF WEARY BANK – A HIDDEN GEM IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF CLEVELAND.
(All photographs kindly supplied by Ali McLee)

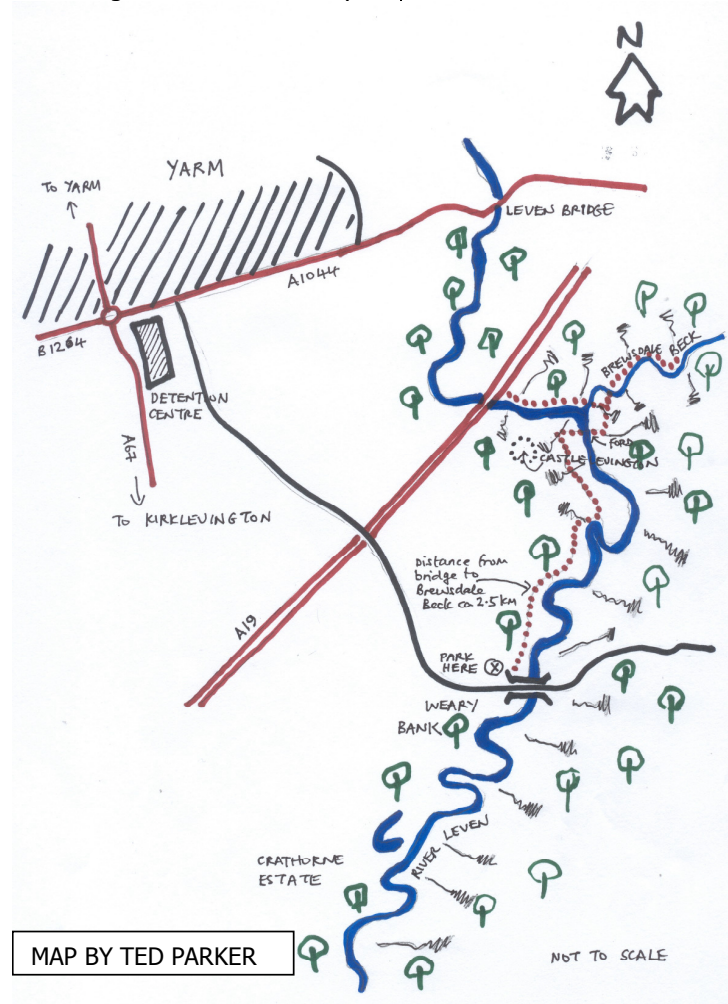
You can then follow the Leven downstream on the public right of way as far as the A19 viaduct, though an OS map is advised. If one wishes to walk the full length, a second car at the opposite end may be useful to save having to retrace your steps. If you choose to go

along the public footpath further downstream than the confluence with Brewsdale Beck, then the river will have to be forded (usually a wellie job in summer), to pick up the path on the other side. Up- and downstream from the Weary Bank bridge, the river forms Cleveland boundary with North Yorkshire on the right hand bank. Upstream of the bridge, on both sides of the Leven, is the private Crathorne Estate.

Birds

The best birding time to visit is early morning in Spring, before the canopy is too leafy. Even if you don't want to walk the full stretch, simply standing on the bridge and staying alert can be rewarding. I find this my

favourite spot to hear Lesser Spotted Woodpecker calling and drumming just over the boundary in Yorkshire and a sighting is always possible. Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker are much more likely, however. Remember to check under the bridge for otter spraint and tracks. This is a typical spot but all muddy edges along the banks should be scrutinised. Sadly, Water Voles are long gone, thanks to the Mink. Look upstream to see the Grey Herons commuting to and from the heronry in the Crathorne Estate. Walking downstream keep your eyes open for Kingfishers darting over the water and hopefully their call will prepare you for the "bolt of blue" fly-by.



Goosander breeds in the area and the incubating adult females fly up and down, calling others off the nest to assemble a fishing team to feed collectively on the River Tees. If you do come across a brood on the water, please not to approach too close and split up the brood. The same goes for Mallard. Further downstream, on the steep, grazed valley sides, there are ant nests and here is the best place for your third

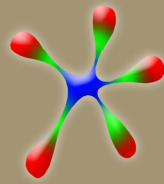
woodpecker – the Green. On the rocky stretches of the river, you will be unlucky not to see Grey Wagtail, which is a local speciality. However, its partner bird, the Dipper, has never bred here and I believe the watercourse is too slow and not rocky enough but they may turn up in winter.

As you amble slowly along, a good range of woodland and riparian birds will introduce

themselves – warblers, thrush species, titmice (including Willow and Marsh), Moorhen, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel. Common Buzzards have recently started to appear in the area and may eventually breed, as there is ideal habitat available for them. Below the ancient earth works of Castlelevington is a natural amphitheatre, which, on certain evenings, attracts large numbers of hirundines and I cannot believe that these do not attract Hobby on occasions. I have had fleeting views of a falcon species, which provoked a massive response from swallows, which a Kestrel would never do. Hobby is now nesting further north in the area so.....

A dusk visit to the bridge area will reward you with a sight, or at least the call, of a Tawny Owl and I am advised by the gamekeeper that there are still a few Woodcocks to be seen roding in the failing light. Sadly, like many other places in our region, the Turtle Dove is now gone. This used to be heard calling all day downstream at Brewsdale Beck. Daubentons Bats quarter the river here and I have seen overhead Noctules racing around when the day shift of Swifts has clocked off. The river downstream of the ford towards the viaduct sports similar woodland species and Jays are more regular. The deciduous woodlands here are more ancient and botanically more interesting.

I hope this brief account will encourage you to visit this charming, hidden little patch and you will share your sightings with the Club's Recorder.



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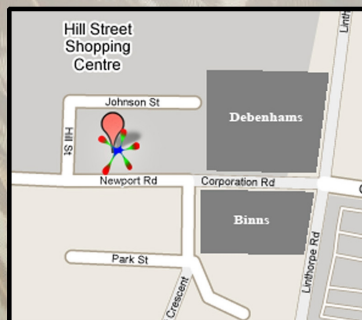


Goldcrest by Ian Forrest

Nature Optics Day

Wed 25th April

11am - 8pm



As the North-East's newest Sports Optics dealer, RGB tech would like to invite all the members of Teesmouth Bird Club to an open day dedicated to Nature viewing equipment.

The latest scopes, Digi-scoping kits, Binoculars, tripods and accessories.

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