

Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

Issue 39 published March 2008

MONTHLY SUMMARY

Chris Sharp summarises the main birding highlights of an eventful winter quarter, which produced some excellent sea watching and a new bird for Cleveland. Please note that this report is merely a diary of events and records of scarce or rare birds have yet to be ratified by the Club's Records Sub Committee. Images have been kindly supplied by Martyn Sidwell, Ian Forrest, Jamie Duffie and Steve Keightley.

NOVEMBER 2007

Early in the month, up to 29 Dark-bellied Brent Geese were on Seal Sands, along with a late Arctic Tern. Nearby, 20 Twites were on Seaton Snook and 5 Whooper Swans were on Dormans Pool on 1st. A single Little Auk passed Hartlepool on the same date and was the forerunner of an excellent month for this species. Several flocks of Pink-footed Geese flew south through Cleveland, with 220 past Hartlepool on 2nd and 110 over Sleddale next day. Sea watching at Hartlepool on 3rd produced a few Pomarine Skuas and several Little Auks, together with small numbers of Long-tailed Ducks and Velvet Scoters. The following day, 9 Pomarine Skuas, 52 Whooper Swans, 75 Pink-footed Geese and a single White-footed Goose flew south, along with 2 Great Northern Divers. The same day saw a Rough-legged Buzzard circling over Seaton Common and 13 Whooper Swans over Skelton. Thirty-nine Little Auks passed Hartlepool on 5th and a very late Osprey was reported from Scaling Dam on 6th, 2 Black-throated Divers were off Hartlepool on 6th and 2 more passed Skinningrove the following day, along with a Grey Phalarope.



LITTLE AUKS, HARTLEPOOL

Ian Forrest



TWITE, SEATON SNOOK

Ian Forrest



SLAVONIAN GREBE, HARTLEPOOL

Ian Forrest



LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER, SEATON SNOOK Jamie Duffie

A single Waxwing flew over Skelton on 8th and the numbers of Little Auks increased from 8th, with 520 past Hartlepool on this date, along with single Black-throated and Great Northern Divers. The following day, 1,135 Little Auks were recorded, along with 2 Grey Phalaropes and a Leach's Petrel. Nine Great Northern Divers flew past on 10th, along with 2 Pomarine Skuas and 184 Little Auks. The peak of the Little Auk passage was on 11th, when 2,874 were seen off Hartlepool and many others were off a variety of other coastal localities. In addition to Little Auks, 5 Great Northern Divers, 2 Black-throated Divers, 4 Storm Petrels, a late Sooty Shearwater and a variety of sea ducks meant a good day's sea watching for those present. A Slavonian Grebe was in Hartlepool Harbour during this period and good numbers of Woodcock were reported, with an impressive 17 flushed at South Gare 10th. Smaller numbers of Little Auks continued to be reported over the next few days and a Grey Phalarope was on the sea off South Gare from 12th to 13th, with another reported off Hartlepool Marina on the latter date. A Long-billed Dowitcher on Seal Sands on 13th was a long-awaited Cleveland first. Although initially only seen distantly on Seal Sands, it was much closer the following day on Seaton Snook but sadly didn't remain. A very late Sandwich Tern was also around Seal Sands at this time. Six Bewick's Swans on the Reclamation Pond from 16th remained into 2008 and were the first wintering birds in Cleveland for many years. Good numbers of Bramblings continued to be seen at Lockwood Beck.



BRAMBLING, LOCKWOOD BECK

Ian Forrest



WHOOPER SWANS, DORMANS POOL

Ian Forrest

Mid-month, 6 Waxwings were in Marske on 16th but no large-scale invasion was took take place in the 2007/2008 winter, with just a few small flocks noted. Little Auks continued to be seen late in the month off Hartlepool, with 22 on 19th, along with Sooty Shearwater and a Great Northern Diver. Eleven Pomarine Skuas and 3 Black-throated Divers were seen on the 23rd. Sea watching at Hartlepool on 25th produced Sooty Shearwater, Storm Petrel, 39 Dark-bellied Brent Geese, Red-necked Grebe and Pomarine Skua, ending an excellent season, one of the sunniest on record. A Glaucous Gull was at Haverton Hole on 20th, 18 Barnacle Geese were at Saltholme (remaining for much of the winter) and up to 3 Long-tailed Ducks were on Seal Sands at this time. A Black-throated Diver was at Jackson's Landing from 27th and remained into February. Ring-necked Parakeets showed well at Ward Jackson Park, Hartlepool from late month, with up to 7 very vocal birds. They continued to be seen into 2008 and look set to be a permanent fixture on Cleveland's birding scene.

DECEMBER 2007

Many observers commented on the large numbers of Siskins passing through Cleveland

in the late autumn/early winter and up to 150 could be seen at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park. Seven Waxwings were in nearby Billingham Cemetery on 1st, with one remaining for a few days. Thirty-four Snow Buntings were at South Gare on 2nd. This species is now very difficult to see north of the river. A Slavonian Grebe was off Newburn on this date, along with 2 adult Mediterranean Gulls. One of the gulls was to be regularly to be found on the lighting columns in the car park for much of the winter.



FEMALE SCAUP, COWPEN BEWLEY WOODLAND PARK
Ian Forrest



LITTLE GULL, COWPEN BEWLEY WOODLAND PARK
Ian Forrest

A juvenile Hen Harrier at Scaling Dam was a welcome find and it remained to winter in the area. Up to 6 Pale-bellied Brent Geese were on Seal Sands throughout the month and single drake and female Scaup were in the Saltholme area. Eleven Whooper Swans joined the 6 Bewick's on Dormans Pool on 22nd, reviving memories of the years gone by when both these species were regular winterers at Teesmouth. A Little Gull at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park pond was an unusual winter visitor and remained here for the rest of the winter. A Dipper showed well at Hutton Gate at this time and up to 5 Little Egrets roosted at Rossmere Park, Hartlepool, late in the year.

JANUARY 2008

The New Year began with a second Black-throated Diver joining the long-staying bird at Jackson's Landing but this only remained until 5th. Up to 21 Red-breasted Mergansers were also here during the month. Thirty-four Twites were on Greenabella Marsh and 1-2 Water Pipits were at Haverton Hole. A Slavonian Grebe was on Bran Sands for the first few days of the month and a Bittern at Coatham Marsh from 2nd lingered for a few days but was generally elusive, as usual. Three adult Little Gulls flew past Parton Rocks, Hartlepool on 4th and a first-winter Glaucous Gull and a Velvet Scoter were also at this site among the wintering Common Scoter and Eider.



BLACK-THROATED DIVERS, JACKSON'S LANDING
Ian Forrest



FEMALE SMEW, PORTRACK MARSH

Ian Forrest

From 10th, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were regularly reported from the landfill sites around Teesmouth, with up to 3 first-winter Glaucous and 2 Iceland Gulls being involved. An unusually long-staying, juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard was at Sleddale from 6th remaining into March and often gave superb views. Scaling Dam produced 104 Pink-footed Geese on 6th.



FIRST-WINTER, GLAUCOUS GULL, HARTLEPOOL
Steve Keightley

The same day saw a Black Redstart at Skinninggrove, which remained for the rest of the month and nearby at least 10 Lapland Buntings were at Cowbar. This is the most reliable site for this species in Cleveland and is one of the few recognised sites on the east coast of Britain. Four Waxwings were around Nunthorpe for a few days from 12th and a drake Smew visited Back Saltholme briefly on 13th. Small numbers of Jack Snipe were seen at Portrack Marsh and Holme Fleet around this time and the latter site held a Whooper Swan for a few days from 22nd.

One or two Barn Owls were regularly reported at dusk from between the Zinc Works Road and the Teesmouth Field Centre. Birders not only got good views of the owls but were often the subject to investigation by the military police at the Power Station – a reminder to carry your TBC membership cards! A first-winter Iceland Gull was at Hartlepool on 26th, along with a Slavonian Grebe. A Long-tailed Duck was off Seaton Snook late in the month and a ring-tailed Hen Harrier was over Dormans Pool on 27th. Nearby, at Saltholme, 1-2 Peregrines could be seen daily, harassing the local waterfowl and waders. A redhead Smew at Portrack Marsh from 26th was a first record for this site and it remained into February.



WAXWING, NUNTHORPE Martyn Sidwell

FEBRUARY

The month started well, with a Red-necked Grebe in Hartlepool Harbour on 1st. A second Rough-legged Buzzard was at Sleddale on 2nd and a Hen Harrier was also seen here regularly at this time. Five Snow Buntings were seen near Lockwood Beck and another Iceland Gull was on playing fields near the Fire Station on the Trunk Road, Redcar from 3rd. A Water Pipit was on Coatham Marsh on 3rd. With the mild weather continuing and February being the sunniest on record, winter birding was fairly quiet, other than the continued presence of white-winged Gulls.



ICELAND GULL, REDCAR

Martyn Sidwell

Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park was a popular spot, with wintering Blackcap at the feeding station, Scaup and Little Gull on the pond plus the usual Tree Sparrows, Siskins and occasional Willow Tit. A first-winter Caspian Gull was at Cowpen Bewley Landfill Site on 9th and Norton Churchyard was visited by many birders for the first time from 10th,

when a Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler was found here. It was only the 4th Cleveland record and the first to be found wintering. It remained until the month's end and a pair of Blackcap was also wintering here. Six Waxwings were in Stockton from 15th, on which date the long-staying Black-throated Diver was last reported.



HUME'S YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER, NORTON Ian Forrest

An immature Whooper Swan was at Crookfoot from 17th, with 28 Pink-footed Geese present on this date. A Bittern was at Coatham Marsh again on 19th and a small flock of Redpolls at Billingham Bottoms late in the month included at least 1 stunning Mealy.

NEWS UPDATE FROM THE COMMITTEE

NEW TBC LICENCE AGREEMENT FOR ACCESS TO DORMANS POOL AND THE RECLAMATION POND

The Committee has negotiated and signed a Licence Agreement with Impetus Reclamation Limited, securing our access to Dormans Pool and the Reclamation Pond for at least the next 5 years, which is termed *'the Licence Period'* in the official document. The Licence came into force on 10th December 2007 and access to the sites is now strictly for TBC members only. The key elements of the Licence are:

- *'Designated Land'* defined in the Agreement to which the TBC has access refers to Dormans Pool and the Reclamation Pond. Access to the former will now be via the lower track.
- The *'Designated Parking Area'* refers to the lower car park at the Jeff Youngs Hide but members are also allowed to use *"such other area suitable for the parking of private motor cars that the Owner may*

from time to time during the subsistence of this Licence designate". This includes the upper car park at Dormans Pool.

- Members visit the sites at their own risk and Impetus will not be liable for any claims arising out of death or injury to persons or loss, damage or theft of property. The Club's insurers have seen a copy of the Licence Agreement and are happy with its contents. They will indemnify Impetus against any claims arising from members.
- TBC has given an assurance under the terms of the Licence that we will not bring any tools or equipment on site, other than those used for the discharge of our activities.
- Members must not leave any rubbish or litter on site, obstruct trackways when the Owner's vehicles require access or impede the Owner in his execution of his normal activities on site. We will not be liable for the activities of unauthorised persons or rubbish deposited by non-members.

The Licence may be terminated immediately if the Club is in breach of any of the conditions. A current TBC membership card must be carried at all times and produced if requested by security staff. People who fail to comply with these new arrangements or are not members of the TBC will almost certainly be requested to leave the sites by security staff.

A full copy of the signed Licence Agreement is held by the Chairman, Ted Parker, and is available for inspection at any time, on request. We are grateful to Impetus Reclamation Limited for continuing our access to these important birding sites.

ACCESS TO THE POWER STATION FIELD AND SEATON SNOOK

Some members will be aware that we have experienced occasional difficulties with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC) when birding on the Power Station Field and the jetty by the old blockhouse at Seaton Snook. On one occasion, in November last year, birders who were assembled for Cleveland's first Long-billed Dowitcher were actually requested to leave by two armed officers, despite the fact that British Energy don't even own the site (it is owned by PD Teesport). Surprisingly, dog-walkers and bait-diggers have not had the same treatment meted out to them.

In view of this unacceptable situation, the Chairman has written to PD Teesport and also had a meeting with them. The company was very sympathetic and has had discussions with the CNC and confirmed that they have no problem with TBC members using the Power Station Field and blockhouse area for birdwatching purposes. The CNC are apologetic and are to write to the Club. Members can now feel reassured that they can access these areas without cause for concern but we have been requested by PD Teesport to carry a current TBC membership card.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW COUNTY RECORDER

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Tom Francis as the new County Recorder for Cleveland. Tom was the sole nominee from the Records Sub Committee and his appointment was unanimously ratified by the Club's Committee.

Tom is a long-standing Cleveland birder who has been a member of the Records Sub Committee on and off for many years and plays a key role in the production of the '*Cleveland Bird Report*'. Hardly a day goes by when he is not out birding around the Tees Estuary and he is widely respected as a top-class birder. We offer him our congratulations and best wishes in his new role, which is a demanding one. All records should now be sent to Tom at 108 Ashton Road, Glebe Estate, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees, TS20 1RE or by email at mot.francis@ntlworld.com



ADVICE TO REDCAR AND CLEVELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Conservation Sub Committee has recently completed a review of over 300 potential housing sites across the Borough. We have identified sites where conflicts may arise and indicated those which we consider to be inappropriate on ornithological grounds. We have also provided information on Bran Sands Lagoon, the use of sites outside the two Special Protection Areas in Cleveland by SPA-listed species and highlighted the importance of the Redcar-Marske coastal fields for birds. This work was provided free of charge as a 'thank you' to the Council for its generosity in sponsoring our forthcoming '*Breeding Birds of Cleveland*'.

COMMENTS ON MIDDLESBROUGH'S BECKS

The Club provided feedback in response to a consultation by the Environment Agency regarding the future use and management of Middlesbrough's becks (notably Ormesby, Spencer and Marton West Becks). We commented on what we consider to be the key problems and how the areas might be improved in the future, both for birds and leisure use.

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 also submit your sightings directly onto the TBC's Website via the '*Members' Sightings*' section, as soon as possible, as they are a vital source of information to both local and visiting birders.

2007 'CLEVELAND BIRD REPORT'

Sketches and photographs are urgently required for possible inclusion in the 2007 '*Cleveland Bird Report*'. Please submit any you consider suitable as soon as possible to the County Recorder, Tom Francis, at 108 Ashton Road, Glebe Estate, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees, TS20 1RE or by email at mot.francis@ntlworld.com

All photographs submitted must be of birds taken in Cleveland during 2007 and, if included in the report, full acknowledgement will be given. The images, if emailed, should be sent as JPEGs and of reasonably high resolution for reproduction.

2008 HUNTSMAN TIOXIDE SPONSORED BIRDWATCH

This year, Huntsman Tioxide have very generously agreed to support another sponsored birdwatch on Greenabella Marsh as part of the biennial BTO Hanson Bird Challenge. In 2008 it will be on Sunday 11th May and we would like as many members as possible to be involved. You don't have to be an expert and this event is perfectly suited to those members who have only recently taken up the birding bug and the more experienced birders. The more people the better, as the more species we see the greater our income from sponsorship. The day normally runs from 09.00-16.00 hrs but we will make a further announcement on the Website nearer the time. Anyone who is interested in helping, even if just for an hour, please contact Graeme Joynt on 07968 572603.

The Club is very grateful to Huntsman Tioxide for continuing to support us in this way and the income from sponsorship will be used to promote and conserve the birds of the Teesside area.

LOCAL OUTINGS – SPRING/SUMMER 2008

TUESDAY 29th APRIL – FLATTS LANE COUNTRY PARK

Join Geoff Myers for good selection of summer visitors which should be seen and heard, with a variety of warblers the main target. Meet at Flatts Lane Visitor Centre car park at 9.30 a.m. Leader: Geoff Myers (Tel 01642 461850).

SATURDAY 10th MAY – PORTRACK MARSH.

Join Gary Sharples for a walk around this excellent, under-watched area. The variety of habitats should produce a good selection of reedbed and wetland species and possibly some passage waders. Meet at the 'Talpoire Hotel' car park at 9.30 a.m. Leader: Gary Sharples (Tel 01642 790155).

SATURDAY 7th JUNE – NIGHTJARS IN GUISBOROUGH FOREST.

A repeat of last year's very popular outing, Nightjar is the key target species, though roding Woodcock and Tree Pipit are almost guaranteed. Please note that this outing is weather dependent. Meet by first house in Hutton Village at 8.30.p.m. Leader: Mark Askew (Tel 01287 638190).

SATURDAY 2nd AUGUST – WADERS ON THE NORTH TEES MARSHES.

A good selection of passage waders should be present and most of the hotspots on the North Tees Marshes will be visited. Meet at Dorman's Pool Car Park at 10.00 a.m. Leader: John Griveson (Tel 01642 650569)

SUNDAY 17th AUGUST- RSPB SALTHOLME.

Join Emma Birnie, the new RSPB Saltholme warden, for a guided walk around this exciting project. The Visitor Centre should be virtually complete and you could be one of the first to look around. Meet at 11.00 am at the RSPB Saltholme Car Park.

IF ANYONE WOULD LIKE TO LEAD A FUTURE LOCAL OUTING TO A FAVOURITE SITE PLEASE GIVE CHRIS SHARP A RING ON 01429 865163

REPORTS ON LOCAL OUTINGS

RSPB SALTHOLME, SUNDAY 20th JANUARY 2008 – LED BY DAVE BRAITHWAITE

There was a great turnout on a gloomy January Sunday and TBC members set a record for numbers in a party yet to visit Saltholme! It was a cold and very damp Sunday morning on 20th January and, given the weather, I was expecting a couple of car-loads of only the very keenest enthusiasts. When the main road between Port Clarence and the Seal Sands roundabout was blocked with the cars of those TBC members eager to get a look behind the scenes at Saltholme I realised the level of interest there is in this exciting project. I didn't count the cars but there were almost 50 visitors in the group. Despite the weather, we were able to get a look at the steel frame of the new Visitor Centre, walk down to the almost complete Saltholme Pools Hide and look at the

foundations for the Paddy's Pool and Family Hides. A couple of hours soon passed and whilst on site we enjoyed great views of an adult female Peregrine Falcon perched on an old power line pole in the middle of the reserve. The non-stop questioning about the project was wide ranging and the only quiet moments were when the group was in the Saltholme Pools Hide, enjoying superb views of the wildfowl and wishing the reserve was already open. Not long now folks, as it will be open in late autumn and another privileged 'behind the scenes' visit is already planned for TBC members for Sunday 17th August at 11am...the weather should be better! Look forward to seeing you there.

Dave Braithwaite,
Saltholme Site Manager

**HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND, SUNDAY 10th
FEBRUARY 2008 – LED BY CHRIS SHARP**

Eight members met by the Heugh Battery at 9.30 a.m. on a very foggy morning and visibility was down to about 100 metres! The rocks in front of the old Club observatory were exposed and the usual variety of waders was present, with Purple Sandpiper, Turnstone and Knot giving close views. A walk around to the harbour produced the regular adult Mediterranean Gull but unfortunately the visibility was such that we couldn't see the sea and could only imagine what delights were hiding in the mist. A walk to Parton Rocks was agreed to be a waste of time, so we headed for Jackson's Landing to look for the long-staying Black-throated Diver. Fog again shrouded the area and all we could manage was a single Red-breasted Merganser. We decided to cut our losses and headed inland to Ward Jackson Park where bright sunshine greeted us, as did the target species, Ring-necked Parakeet. We had super views of 3 of these birds at the regular spot opposite the Park clock.

Chris Sharp

**SEAL SANDS, SATURDAY 8th MARCH
2008 – LED BY JULIE MASON**

Despite the strong winds, eight members, including three new visitors, assembled at the Teesmouth Field Centre. A watch from the Hartlepool Power Station hide produced excellent views of Red Throated Diver, Long-tailed Duck, Eider, Great Crested Grebe, Red breasted Merganser, Shelduck, Grey Plover, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Knot and Redshank.

Julie Mason

ATTENDANCE AT EVENTS

The Club actively participates in events run by other organisations and Vice-Chairman, **John Fletcher** took part in two during the early part of the year:

**'DUCKING AND DIVING', HARTLEPOOL
HEADLAND, SATURDAY 12TH JANUARY
2008, 10.30am-12.00pm (NATURAL
ENGLAND, HARTLEPOOL COUNTRYSIDE
TEAM AND TBC)**

This event was led by Carl Watts and assisted by John Fletcher. The aim was to show interested people to some coastal birds, including Purple Sandpiper, Knot and Turnstone and other species, such as Eider and Common Scoter. In terms of birds it was a reasonable success, with good views of RT Divers. About 10 people turned up for an interesting morning.

**'BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS', WARD
JACKSON PARK, SATURDAY 26TH
JANUARY 2008, 10.30am-12 00pm
(NATURAL ENGLAND AND TBC)**

This was an introduction to bird identification for the whole family and was led by Carl Watts. About 15 people attended and the morning was very fruitful, giving people the opportunity to see the famed Ward Jackson Park Ring-necked Parakeets.

REPORTING POLLUTION INCIDENTS

Anyone who has been birding at Teesmouth during late February and early March will have noted the huge amounts of rubbish blowing off the Seaton Meadows landfill site at Tees Road/Brenda Road, to the south of Seaton Carew. Despite the fact that 2008 has generally seen a very windy start to the year, tip operators are required to control airborne rubbish blowing of their tips and polluting adjacent areas. In the case of the Seaton Meadows site, this has simply not been the case and during late February and early March huge amounts rubbish, including of polythene bags, have caused serious and widespread pollution of the adjacent Seaton Dunes and Common. This area is not only a SSSI but also part of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site. It is also a component of the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve, managed by Natural England. The rubbish has collected in the muddy creeks and pools, lodged in fence and

hedge lines and is spread over a very wide area. Such a level of pollution is unsightly, damaging and totally unacceptable.

In instances such as this, the Club has agreed a reporting procedure with the Environment Agency. Club members, or any concerned member of the public, should ring the Agency's Incident Hotline as soon as possible after witnessing an event on its freephone number 0800 807060 (free from landlines only, not mobiles). It is open 24 hours a day and the staff will take details of the incident, including its location, nearest road number/name, nature and extent of the problem and your name and address (if you wish to give these, otherwise you can remain anonymous). If you give your name, the Agency will ask you if you require any feedback from them on their action taken. I know that incidents involving the Seaton Meadows landfill site have recently been reported to the Agency on a number of occasions. As every report is logged, please ring the Hotline when you see something: don't assume someone else has done so and the more people who ring in about an event, the better.

The Agency also wishes us to report other incidents, including water pollution, illegal salmon fishing, fly-tipping, dumping of fridges and freezers (such as at South Gare), illegal burning of waste (eg wire burning, old tyres, etc) and poaching. Please report all incidents you see - if you don't, the incident won't be logged and nothing will be done.

Ted Parker
Chairman

CLEVELAND WATER BODY SURVEY 2008-09

During the winter of 2008-09 from September to March inclusive, we are going to repeat the Water Body Survey carried out in 2006-07 and we would be most grateful if those members who took part in the last one and covered specific sites would do so again. If you cannot assist, please let **Ted Parker** know and alternative arrangements will be made.

This year, we are going to be more selective and those sites that yielded very few birds, apart from an odd Coot or Moorhen, will not be covered. Counters of these sites will be informed in due course and we will put a revised sites list on the Website and in the next Newsletter. Excluding the normal WeBS sites, the water bodies and counters included in 2006-07 were as follows

SITE NAME	GRID REF	WeBS	COUNTER
HARTLEPOOL			
HART RESERVOIRS	NZ 482344		Chris Sharp
WARD JACKSON PARK	NZ 489325		Russ McAndrew
ROSSMERE PARK POND	NZ 503299		Graeme Joynt
SALTERSGATE LAKE, WYNYARD			John Grieveson
WYNYARD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE	NZ 431268		John Grieveson
BRENDA ROAD POND (TEES BAY RETAIL PARK)	NZ 511302		Russ McAndrew
SEATON CAREW GREENSPACE	NZ 515297		Graeme Joynt
SEATON CAREW GOLF COURSE	NZ 526290		Graeme Joynt
STOCKTON-ON-TEES			
COWPEN MARSH RESERVOIR	NZ 500240		Richard Taylor
COWPEN BEWLEY WOODLAND PARK	NZ 475255		John Crussell
BILLINGHAM BECK COUNTRY PARK PONDS AND BECK	NZ 453225		Graham Lawlor
BILLINGHAM BOTTOMS (BECK BETWEEN OLD ICI SITE AND THE TREATMENT REED BEDS)	NZ 455220-465214		Ian Lawson
NORTON BOTTOMS PONDS	NZ 454217		Ian Lawson
BELASIS HALL TECHNOLOGY PARK LAKES	NZ 475234		Colin Dodsworth
JUNCTION POND, BILLINGHAM	NZ 461232		
WOLVISTON VILLAGE POND/DUCK POND	NZ 450254		Tom Francis
TEESSIDE RETAIL PARK	NZ 565192		John Blackburn
OLD RIVER TEES	NZ 465192-458182		John Blackburn
LUSTRUM BECK TRASH SCREENS POND	NZ 478203		Denise Gamesby
CHARLTON'S POND, BILLINGHAM	NZ 468232		Colin Dodsworth
PIPELINE POOLS SOUTH OF COWPEN BEWLEY	NZ 485237		Derek Clayton
STILLINGTON POND	NZ 377240		Martin Blick
ROPNER PARK	NZ 432184		Bill Irving
BOWESFIELD POND, HARTBURN	NZ 433178		Jamie Duffie
BOWESFIELD MARSH			Richard Taylor
BARWICK POND LNR, INGLEBY BARWICK			No counter
PORTRACK MARSH	NZ 463195		Gary Sharples
CARLTON PASTURES (FISH PONDS)	NZ 397217		Martin Blick
ELEMENTIS PONDS, URLAY NOOK	NZ 412156		Ali McLee
AISLABY POND	NZ 395135		Ali McLee
INGLEBY BARWICK (WEST OF RIVER)	NZ 440169		
RIVER TEES (TEES BARRAGE TO PR DIANA BRIDGE)	NZ 449192-462191		Colin Dodsworth
RIVER TEES (DIANA BRIDGE TO SURTEES BRIDGE)	NZ 462191-447178		Martin Blick
RIVER TEES (SURTEES BRIDGE TO THE HOLMES)	NZ 44178-449162		
RIVER TEES (THE HOLMES TO BASSELTON WOOD)	NZ 449162-442156		Bill Hall
RIVER TEES (BASSELTON WOOD TO PRESTON HALL)	NZ 442156-431157		Bill Hall
RIVER TEES (PRESTON HALL TO EAGLESCLIFFE)	NZ 431157-430140		Martin Blick
RIVER TEES (EAGLESCLIFFE TO RIVER LEVEN)	NZ 430140-430127		No counter
RIVER TEES AROUND YARM	NZ 430127-416122		Bill Irving
RIVER TEES (YARM TO COUNTY BOUNDARY)	NZ 416122-402111		No counter
NORTON DUCK POND (NORTON HIGH ST)	NZ 442223		Tom Francis
NORTON HALL			Keith Ryan
MIDDLESBROUGH			
ALBERT PARK	NZ 499191		George Alderson
STEWART PARK LAKES, MARTON	NZ 514164		John Regan
EASTFIELDS FARM LAKE AND PONDS, NUNTHORPE	NZ 555132		Ted Parker
HEMLINGTON LAKE	NZ 490145		John Regan
POOLE HOSPITAL LAKE, NUNTHORPE	NZ 533134		Eric James

SITE NAME	GRID REF	WeBS	COUNTER
NUNTHORPE CARRS	NZ 539145		Eric James
WHINNEY BANKS POND	NZ 472187		Stewart Hinley
ACKLAM HALL POND	NZ 487168		Stewart Hinley
YARM POND	NZ 418126		Bill Irving
COULBY NEWHAM POND	NZ 501153		Martin Blick
REDCAR AND CLEVELAND			
CARR POND, ESTON MOOR	NZ 563174		No counter
LAZENBY RESERVOIR (A174 GREYSTONES R/BOU)	NZ 569195		Graham Megson
LAZENBY RESERVOIR (A174 GREYSTONES R/BOU)	NZ 570193		Graham Megson
ICI WILTON HQ LAKE	NZ 581203		Graham Megson
ICI RESERVOIRS (KIRKLEATHAM)	NZ 586204		Martin Blick
LOVELL HILL PONDS, NR GUISBOROUGH	NZ 597189		Mike Corner
MARGROVE PARK PONDS	NZ 651161		Don Page
REDCAR BOATING LAKE	NZ 598254		Linda Watson
LOCKE PARK LAKE	NZ 594248		Linda Watson
NEW MARSKE RESERVOIR	NZ 613207		Graham Megson
YEARBY POND, NR DUNSDALE	NZ 599199		Ted Parker
BROTON GOLF COURSE PONDS	NZ 690205		Norman Walker
UPLEATHAM POND	NZ 627194		Brian Hague
MOUNT PLEASANT PONDS	NZ 605175/605173		Brian Hague
TOCKETTS BRIDGE POND	NZ 619178		Brian Hague
GUISBOROUGH HALL	NZ 623164		Brian Hague
BUTT LANE, POND	NZ 620160		Vic Fairbrother
DUNSDALE PONDS, NR GUISBOROUGH	NZ 624164		Brian Hague
HUTTON HALL POND, HUTTON GATE, GUISBOROUGH	NZ 603144		No counter
GUISBOROUGH BRANCH WALKWAY PONDS			John Sharp
BLUE LAKE, GUISBOROUGH	NZ 603144		Mark Askew
SKELTON POND	NZ 657196		Graham Megson
SKELTON CASTLE LAKE	NZ 657196		Damian Money
CATTERSTY POND, CARLIN HOWE	NZ 702199		Norman Walker
LINGDALE FISHING POND	NZ 676174		No counter
GRINKLE HOTEL POND	NZ 741153		Martin Blick
UPTON COTTAGES POND	NZ 751193		No counter
BOULBY POND	NZ 746195		Mark Askew
LIVERTON ROAD PONDS	NZ 716139		No counter
RUSHPOOL HALL POND	NZ 667204		Graham Megson
RUSHPOOL HALL LAKE	NZ 666205		Graham Megson

A summary report of the 2006-07 Survey will appear in the 2007 '*Cleveland Bird Report*'.

NORTHERN RED KITES SURVEY 2008

Once again the Club is being invited to participate in the survey of potential breeding pairs of Red Kites, originating from the Gateshead reintroduction programme. In conjunction with Durham and Northumberland Bird Clubs, members are asked to survey likely breeding sites in their area on Saturday 5th April to look for displaying pairs, as it is at this time of the year that breeding activity is most obvious. The instructions on the Website (see below) detail time of day and a variety of likely locations in our area worth looking at. Our Northeast birds do not necessarily use areas of extensive woodland but small coppices in quiet locations or wooded gills are worthy of scrutiny. More important is to be in viewing location that commands wide views of the sky and hillsides which provide an uplifting breeze. Even if you don't see any kites, last year's survey provided important sightings of

other birds of prey, including displaying Common Buzzard and Goshawk, which should also be recorded. Good luck and make a name for your self!

Email: info@northernkites.org.uk

Tel: 0191 4961555 for details.

Website: www.northernkites.org.uk

Alistair McLee

HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS AT SCALING DAM

During late February and early March, Northumbrian Water carried out planned habitat improvement works, reported in the Issue 33 (Winter 2006) edition of this Newsletter. For budgetary reasons, the works were not as extensive as originally planned but, nevertheless, have radically altered the configuration of the shoreline of the Reserve immediately in front of the hide. A new

scrape has been excavated, with several small earth islands and excavated low spots, the latter to ensure that water is retained even during dry periods. A small, protective 'peninsula' has also been constructed from imported stone, which is to be fenced off to prevent access. It is hoped that the scrape will significantly extend the shoreline and attract birds closer to the hide, especially waders. The reservoir has yet to fill up to its normal, agreed level after being lowered to allow access for machinery and it will be interesting to see how the scrape develops with time. The species already recorded include Mallard, Redshank, Greylag Goose and Black-headed Gull and, in its present state, it looks good for Water Pipit, which has been seen recently on the reservoir at the time of writing, and passage Pied Wagtails. Our thanks are due to Martin Blick, who spent a considerable amount of time working with the machine driver to get the optimum ground profiles and, of course, to Northumbrian Water for organising and funding the scheme.



EXCAVATION OF THE SCRAPE

Don Page



'PENINSULA' CONSTRUCTION

Don Page

Ted Parker – Scaling Dam Wildlife Advisory Committee

REQUEST FOR NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

In addition to the Club Committee, which takes strategic decisions about the Club, we also have 3 sub-committees, which deal with the more detailed aspects of our work. These are Records, Conservation, and Marketing and Membership and we are always looking for new members to join them and make a contribution. In the case of the latter two, you don't have to be an expert but just willing to meet 4 times a year to discuss issues which are important to the local area and the Club, such as membership, subscriptions, sponsorship, special projects, planning applications, sales and promotion, and services to members, to name but a few. The Records Sub-Committee is responsible for the production of the annual *'Cleveland Bird Report'* and differs from the other two in that it has a four-year term of office for Ordinary Members, as outlined in the annual reports. For this group, you will be expected to have a reasonable knowledge of local birds and identification, as it vets all Cleveland bird records on an annual basis, including those of scarce and rare species. In view of this, it is probably suitable for more experienced birders.

To ensure a healthy injection of new ideas, we are always looking for new members. Don't be daunted: the Marketing and Membership and Conservation Sub-Committees are ideal for new members to join, meet new people and become more involved in the work of the Club. It is not an onerous commitment but a worthwhile, enjoyable one, reflected in the very low drop out rate and high levels of attendance at meetings. If you would like to join any of these groups, have a particular skill you think we would find useful or simply wish to find out more about their work, please contact the respective Chairmen, as follows:

Full Committee and Conservation	Ted Parker 01642 27539
Marketing and Membership	Chris Sharp 01429 865163
Records	Tom Francis 01642 890630

We also welcome new members on to the full Committee. Again, you don't need to be an expert, just enthusiastic and willing to attend 3-4 meetings a year. This is also ideally suited to new members and if you are interested, please contact Chris Sharp

PROFILE – IAN FORREST

Anyone who regularly visits the Club's Website cannot have failed to notice the stunning array of pin-sharp photographs which grace the 'Gallery' section. Many of these are the work of local photographer and birder, Ian Forrest. In this feature, Ted Parker talked to him about his lifelong interest in birds.

Ian was born in Barnard Castle and spent his early years there until his family moved to Stockton when he was five years old. He lived here for many years until finally moving to Billingham in 1989, where he still lives today. Ian is married and retired in 2007, after 24 years as a police officer with Cleveland Police. He has been interested in birds for as long as he can remember and was influenced greatly by his father, who was also a keen birdwatcher.

Ian doesn't know how many birds he has seen in Cleveland as he is not an avid lister but he does keep a list for his favourite local patch, Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park, where he saw 77 species in 2007. Ian likes the way this site has developed over the years, particularly the woodland areas, and the range of habitats attracts a good variety of birds. His second favourite local area is Seaton Snook and Common, where he also spends a lot of time watching and photographing birds.

The optics Ian uses are entirely Swarovski: the ATS 80 HD 'scope and 8.5 x 42 EL binoculars, which he chose for their superb optical quality. His photographic equipment comprises Canon 40D and 20D bodies, with Canon 400mm f5.6 and 100-400mm zoom lenses. He has been interested in photography since his childhood days and was again influenced by his father, who was a keen photographer and did all his own processing. Ian ran a photographic club while at Manchester University and has continued his interest to this day, as our Website admirably testifies!



IAN FORREST

Like many other birders, Ian's favourite book is the Collins 'Bird Guide', which he finds a superb reference book and regards it as the "birdwatcher's bible". Apart from photography, his other interests include hiking and fishing, although birding has now largely superseded these activities. Leighton Moss in

Lancashire and Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire are the two most impressive birding sites he has visited, as he loves reedbeds and coastal birds. Ian can't single out a best birding day in Cleveland, as he simply enjoys every day out in the field but finding and photographing a Shore Lark at Crimdon in November 2006

was memorable. His biggest birding disappointment was missing a Common Crane on fields near his local patch at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park whilst on holiday in Scotland. Ian finds it difficult to name his most memorable bird but Black Grouse is one of his favourites, which he describes as a "majestic bird". He is more emphatic about his two 'ambition birds', Wallcreeper and Nutcracker, but as he doesn't travel abroad he accepts that his chances of seeing these are slim.

His most embarrassing moment was during one of his regular trips to Aviemore, when, at Loch Garten, he called a Northern Wheatear, which was in front of the hide, a "Bearded Tit" to the assembled crowd. A genuine mistake one feels! When asked about any changes he would like to see in the birding scene, Ian said there weren't any that really came to mind but he is happy that more and more people are now getting interested in birdwatching.



SHORT-EARED OWL, ZINC WORKS ROAD: One of Ian's many superb photographs, taken on 9th March 2008.

His views on the Teesmouth Bird Club, of which he has been a member for about 6 years, were encouraging in that he has noticed a marked change of attitude over recent years. Some visiting birders remarked on the "frosty reception" they got from local birders, who appeared to form 'cliques' and information was not freely volunteered. This, he says, has now changed completely and the comments he now gets from people are very complimentary and that Teesside birders are always willing to give help and advice. Ian is also full of praise for the Club's Website. He is directly involved with Bird Forum and he receives many compliments about the quality of the TBC's website and the up-to-date birding information it contains.

Changes Ian would like to see in the local environment include the resolving of the problems of waste blowing off Teesmouth's

waste tips, the pollution from which has recently been widespread and unsightly, extending as far as Seaton Snook and the Power Station Field. Regarding RSPB Saltholme, while he welcomes this in general, Ian does have concerns about future access by Club members to Saltholme. His aspirations for the future are simple: to continue what he's doing now and to enjoy his birding.

Ted Parker

WINTER BIRDING IN THE WESTERN ALGARVE

*In this feature, **Chris Bielby** reports on a number of trips he has made to a part of Europe he particularly loves, the Western Algarve in Portugal, which can produce some excellent birds for those wishing to have short winter break. Images have been downloaded from various sources.*

The Algarve is the southern coastal region of Portugal, so called because it is the "windy coast", facing the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the frequent onshore breeze, the climate is mild and usually warm, a fact recognised by the thousands of northern Europeans, largely Brits, Germans and Dutch, who regularly "winter" there. Added attractions include the Portuguese themselves, who are usually very friendly and amiable, and the superb golf courses and beaches, together with abundant accommodation in the many resorts. There is easy access via Faro airport, with connections to most British airports and cheap package deals, especially in winter.

As well as these attractions, southern Portugal also hosts a wealth of birdlife, easily accessible to the casual birder, as well as the fanatic. As I class myself as a fanatical casual birder, the area suits me fine and this feature is based on my own experiences of several years' visits, always in mid February or late October.

We have always stayed near Carvoeiro, which is about halfway between Faro and the western tip of the Algarve, some 40 minutes by road. Our villa is about 300 metres from the coastal cliffs and "villa ticks" have included Lesser Kestrel, Peregrine, Blue Rock Thrush, Bonxie, Gannet, Balearic and Cory's Shearwaters, Cattle Egret, Little Owl, Crag Martin, Spotless Starling, Sardinian Warblers, Serins, Blackcaps, Iberian Chiffchaffs,

Goldfinches and Greenfinches are the commonest garden birds, with occasional Azure-winged Magpies and Hoopoes.



AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE: A Portuguese speciality.

The nearby cliffs and scrub-covered valley hold Dartford Warbler, Black Redstart, Spotless Starling, Stonechat, Alpine Swift, Red-rumped Swallow and Yellow-legged Gulls on the cliffs. In October, my regular dawn visit to the cliffs is usually accompanied by a constant passage of flocks of small passerines, mainly finches and pipits, with many Serins, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches and small numbers of Bullfinches. Offshore, the gulls are joined by occasional Mediterranean and, on two occasions, an Audouin's Gull.

Sandwich Terns winter offshore and the occasional Caspian Tern cruises by. If the sardine fishing fleet is close inshore, especially in October, the hordes of gulls will be joined by Bonxies, Gannets and Cory's Shearwaters and Balearic Shearwaters, along with the occasional Arctic and Pomarine Skuas. In bad weather with strong onshore winds, look out for Storm and Leach's Petrels and there is always an outside chance of Wilson's and Madeiran Petrels to whet the appetite! Oddities passing offshore have included Greater Flamingo, Cattle and Little Egrets, Spoonbill and Common Scoter, with small numbers of auks.

At around £100 per week, car hire is very cheap in the Algarve and with petrol about the same as in the UK, trips out are a daily routine. One of my favourite routes is a visit to the most westerly tip of Europe, at Sagres and Cape St Vincent. A few miles to the north of Sagres, is the lighthouse at Cape St Vincent and as you drive along the road, pause at the Fortealeza Beliche car park.



ALPINE ACCENTOR:

This is relatively easy to see at Cape St Vincent.

The fort at Sagres, is well worth a visit for its information centre but especially for the cliff top path, which will yield good views of Black Redstarts and Crested and Thekla Larks (if you enjoy a challenge), with Sardinian and Dartford Warblers, Blue Rock Thrushes and Peregrines on the cliffs. Offshore, you could hope to see just about any North Atlantic seabird in the right conditions, as well as cetaceans. I have seen Bottle-nosed, Common and possibly Striped Dolphins from the fort cliffs but it has great potential for anyone who puts the effort into it.

Check the cliffs here for Blue Rock Thrush, Peregrine, Chough and Alpine Accentor. Raven, Stone Curlew and Little Bustard are also possibilities a bit further inland, as well as flocks of larks and Golden Plover. Try to get to the lighthouse car park before the busloads of tourists for the best chance to see the Alpine Accentors, which winter on the cliffs, just north of the lighthouse and give close-range views. In October, we have caught the tail end of raptor migration, with flocks of Booted Eagles and occasional harriers and local birders say that August and September raptor passage can be spectacular. I once saw a Griffon Vulture here in February, so anything is possible.

A scenic return route north to Aljezur then east along the minor road through the mountainous Monchique region, involving a trip up the highest mountain, Foia, can yield Rock Bunting, Black Redstart and Woodlark around the restaurant and, with luck, views of raptors, as well as a fantastic vista of the Algarve coast. The road heads southwards towards Portimao (where White Storks nest on the towers of the elegant suspension bridge). Continuing east along the Odeluca valley towards Silves can produce White Storks on the chimneys and Lesser Kestrels on the castle in summer. There are a couple of viewpoints across the tidal reaches, where various wetland species, including Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Little and Cattle Egrets and

White Storks can be seen, whilst Cetti's Warblers shout from the bushes and occasionally Common Waxbills clamber amongst the reeds. Overhead, Common Buzzards soar, occasionally being joined by Booted Eagles and Ospreys.



THEKLA LARK: A good identification poser!

A few miles northeast of Silves lies Baragem de Arade reservoir, the hills around which can be good for raptors, especially Bonelli's Eagles. Look out for Southern Grey Shrikes on the overhead wires and Cattle Egrets, Hoopoes and Azure-winged Magpies in the cultivated land and orange groves.

The coast of the Algarve is famously scarred with many large concrete resorts and over-manicured golf courses, but the few remaining areas of marsh and estuary can be superb. A very good area is the Pera Marsh, south of Alcantarilha and locally known as Salgados. This large, freshwater marsh lies behind sand dunes and is bordered on one side by a golf course. It is critically threatened by further development despite being scheduled as a reserve. It holds good numbers of Purple Swampheens (the biggest concentration in Portugal) and many other wetland birds, including Greater Flamingo, Spoonbill, Black-winged Stilt, Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper and many ducks. Harriers and occasional Booted Eagles patrol overhead, whilst White Storks, Grey Herons and Little and Cattle Egrets patrol the margins. Rarities have included Red-crested Pochard, Black-shouldered Kite, Pectoral Sandpiper, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron and, in October 2004, 3 Black Storks drifted in off the sea one evening. Mediterranean Gulls and Caspian Terns regularly roost with the commoner gulls and Sandwich Terns. The reeds and scrub hold Crested Larks, White Wagtails, pipits, Hoopoes, Stonechats, Fan-tailed Warblers and Bluethroats, with, occasionally, Common Waxbills, Southern Grey Shrikes, and, on one

occasion, a Tawny Pipit. Crag Martins hawk over the pools, joined in summer, I am told, by Black-winged Pratincoles and Black, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns.

My favourite trip is to the plains of Castro Verde, only an hour's drive up the A2 toll road, which takes you to the real Portugal of isolated small towns and whitewashed villages, with acres of open plains with scattered cork oaks. Turn off east, north of Ourique, to Castro Verde, then turn left at the roundabout with the concrete sheep (honest!) and head along the N123 towards Mertola. Try to concentrate on your driving whilst passing the Corn Buntings and Southern Grey Shrikes on the telephone wires and White Storks nesting on the poles. Calandra Larks, Hoopoes and shrikes can also be seen. Red Kites patrol the plains, with Common Buzzards, Hen Harriers, Ravens and occasional Booted Eagles and, more rarely, Bonelli's Eagles. Stop by each bridge over the small rivers and check out the scrubby banks for Cetti's Warblers, Kingfishers, Green Sandpipers and Fan-tailed Warblers. Opposite the village of St Marco de Ataboeira is a track across the plains (marked by a signboard with a bustard's head), which leads south. Check each side carefully for the huge Great Bustards, which will be flocking and displaying in February.



GREAT BUSTARD

I have seen flocks of up to 22 birds, along with Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Flocks of Little Bustards (up to 40) and Calandra Larks (over 200) wheel up from the plains and Kestrels, Red Kites and Buzzards are joined by Lesser Kestrels in late February. Little Owls peer from any mound of rubble and White Storks soar on any thermal. Less predictable species have included Great Spotted Cuckoos, the rare Black-shouldered Kite, Spanish Sparrows (sometimes under the Storks' nests) and Bonelli's and Spanish Imperial Eagles.

Hen Harrier, Merlin and Common Crane also winter in the region and Woodlarks frequent some of the oakwoods. The castle at Mertola has a nest-box scheme for Lesser Kestrels and

Crag Martins feed overhead. Further to the north, visit the Pulo de Lobo on the Guadiana, for a spectacular gorge with Crag Martins and Blue Rock Thrush in winter and the promise of many raptors in summer. We followed the Guadiana south and saw an Otter under the bridge over the Rio do Vasco last February.

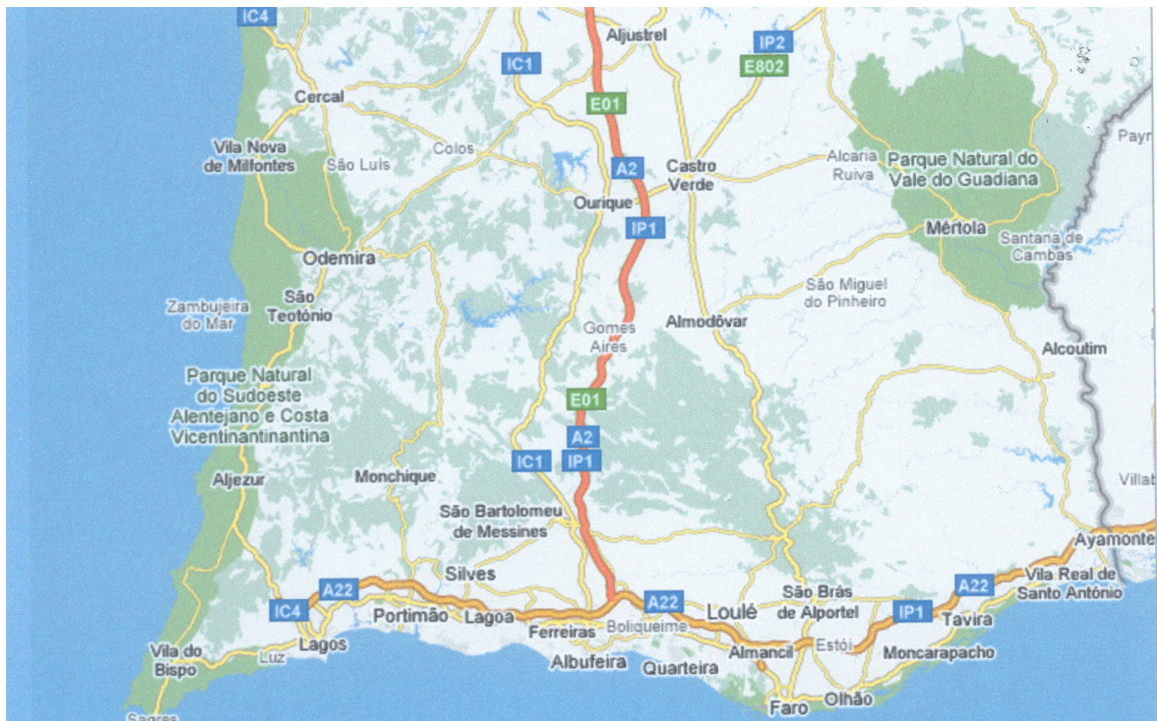
This account gives only a flavour of the birding potential of a region which is seriously under-watched and I hope to visit it again in the future. Hope to see you there!

Useful texts:

'Where to watch birds in Spain and Portugal' by Rose;
'A Bird Watching Guide to The Algarve' by Kevin and Christine Carlson;
'Finding Birds in Southern Portugal' by Dave Gosney.

Please send any records to: CEMPA, Centro de Estudos de Migracoes E Proteccao de Aves, Servico de Estudos do Ambiente, Rua da Lapa 73, 1200 Lisboa, Portugal

Chris Bielby



THE WESTERN ALGARVE (FROM 'GOOGLE EARTH')

SLEDDALE

*In this feature, **Ted Parker** reviews this beautiful, moorland site on the southern edge of Cleveland, which is renowned for its birds of prey and other upland species.*

Background

Sleddale lies within the North York Moors National Park and is on the extreme southern boundary of Cleveland. Part of it lies in North Yorkshire and, even for those familiar with the area, it is often difficult to determine on which side of the boundary a bird you have seen has occurred! I have been visiting this area for over 40 years and never tire of the place, as it is so peaceful and, to my mind, the most beautiful part of Cleveland. The mood and

atmosphere change dramatically with the weather and this adds immeasurably to any visit.



VIEW UP SLEDDALE FROM THE CHEVRONS (Ted Parker)



SLEDDALE FARM FROM PERCY CROSS RIGG: With Guisborough Forest in the background. (Don Page)

Sleddale consists of an upland Heather moor plateau, which is dissected by a relatively wide valley, through which Sleddale Beck runs, first southwards and then in a southeasterly direction into the Esk Valley. Sleddale Farm lies near the head of the valley on the Cleveland side and must surely be the one of the remotest farmsteads in our area. Guisborough Forest provides an attractive backcloth to the north, while on the North Yorkshire side to the west, there are sweeping, panoramic views of the forested Cleveland Hills towards Kildale, Baysdale and the Pennines beyond. The upper valley around the farm has been reclaimed from the moor and is now used for sheep pasture, which enhances habitat diversity and provides feeding areas for species that otherwise would not occur, such as Fieldfare and Redwing. There are some patches of Gorse and Bracken and the area is criss-crossed by old drystone walls, so typical of the North York Moors. Isolated Scots Pine and Rowan trees are

dotted sparsely across the valley sides and these provide ideal vantage points for raptors, such as Peregrine, Kestrel, Common Buzzard and Rough-legged Buzzard.

Access

Access to Sleddale is via two main routes. If approaching from the west, drive around Great Ayton on the A173 (Guisborough Road) and bear immediately left after the bridge over the River Leven on to Easby Lane. Follow this road for several kilometres until you reach a T-junction, signposted Easby and Kildale. Turn left here and follow the road through Easby and Kildale village, then past the cricket ground on the right and, after crossing over the Esk Valley railway line, turn left at the first crossroads onto Percy Cross Rigg (the right turn is signposted to Westerdale). This narrow road takes you up on to the highest parts of the rigg, from which there are expansive views over Sleddale. Make sure you park off the road as it is regularly used by other vehicles.

If approaching from the A171 Whitby moor road, drive around Guisborough on the Guisborough Bypass and, on reaching the end of this, go straight on at the roundabout, signposted to Whitby and then past Charltons village. Climb up on the A171 to the high moor at Birk Brow and continue along this road for about a kilometre or so, down a dip (with Lockwood Beck Reservoir on your right) and, after this, take the first road on the right, signposted to Castleton and Hutton-le-Hole.



SLEDDALE FARM AND GUISBOROUGH FOREST FROM PERCY CROSS RIGG

Don Page

Continue along this road for a about 1.5 km until you come to a right turn, marked by a concrete-style bus stop. Follow this road down a steep bank, through Comondale village and keep going until you reach the Westerdale crossroads referred to above and turn right here on to Percy Cross Rigg. In my experience, the best vantage points are:

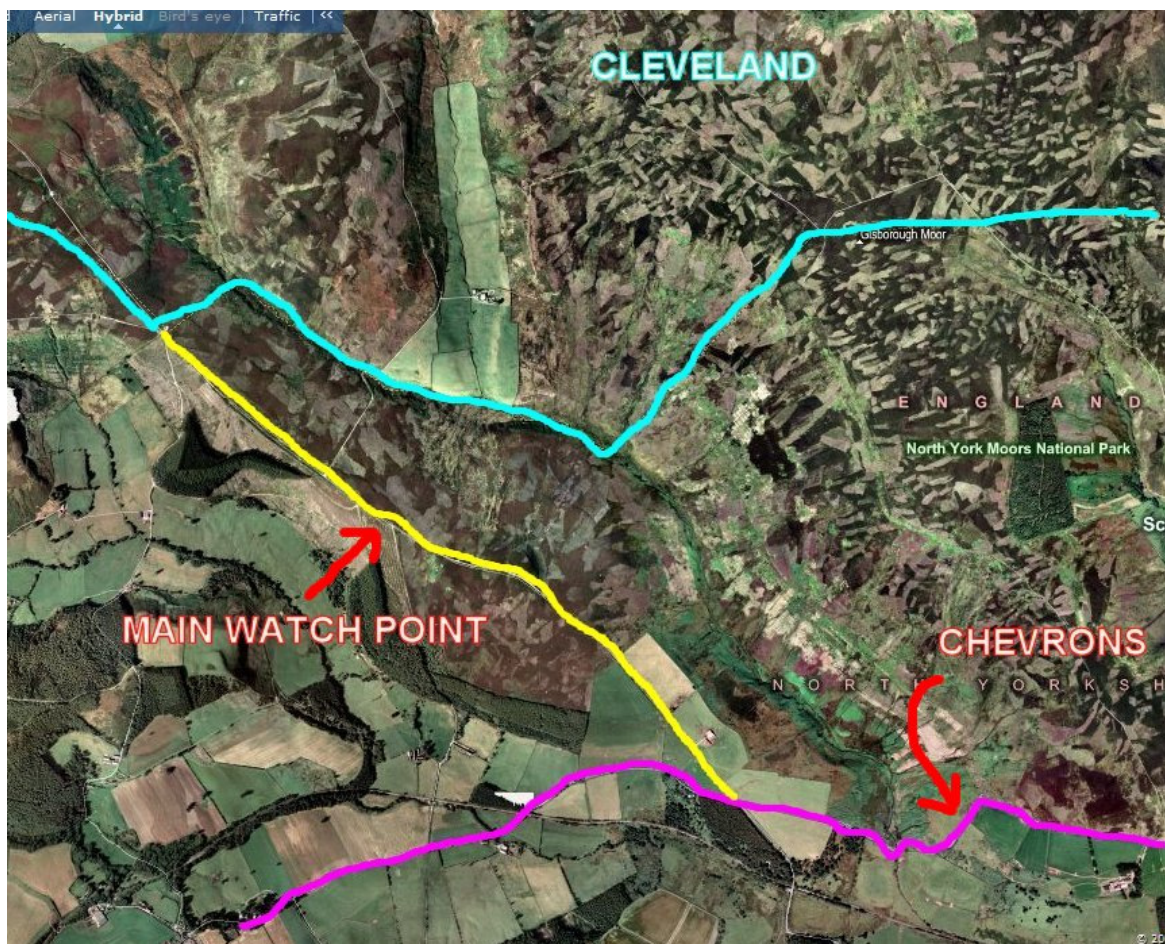
- near the top of the first bank, after the cattle grid, looking back (southeast) down Sleddale towards the Comondale road;
- on the highest parts of the rigg, where there are two or three pull-ins (arrowed), which give views over Sleddale Farm and Guisborough Forest, and

- just after the Iron Age hut circles (marked by a timber knee rail fence).

Away from the rigg, another very good place to watch from is on the Comondale road, from the sharp right-hand bend, marked by a metal chevrons traffic sign (arrowed on the map).

Birds

Although a beautiful place, the birding at Sleddale can be either 'feast' or 'famine' and sometimes a watch of several hours or more produces nothing more than a Kestrel and a few *corvids*, if you are lucky! However, at other times it turns up trumps and the birding can be very good.



AERIAL VIEW OF SLEDDALE SHOWING THE MAIN VANTAGE POINTS: The yellow line is the road up to Percy Cross Rigg; the purple line is the Kildale to Comondale road; and the blue line shows the Cleveland/North Yorkshire boundary. Sleddale Farm can be seen near the top centre of the photograph and the dark line running across the bottom is the Middlesbrough to Whitby Esk Valley railway.

Sleddale is particularly noted for its raptors and is undoubtedly one of the best places in Cleveland to see them, though you will have to put in some hours to build up a decent list. In recent years, they have included Osprey, Marsh and Hen Harriers, Common and Rough-

legged Buzzards, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine, Merlin, Kestrel and Red Kite. A Rüppell's Griffon Vulture even graced its skies for two days in March 2007: sadly, this was an escaped bird but was, nevertheless, an impressive sight in the early morning sun, as it

was mobbed by a small flock of Lapwings over the moor near Guisborough Forest. Sleddale provides the best chance of seeing Rough-legged Buzzard in Cleveland. This is a very scarce species in our area and is not annual, so it is amazing how over the years, birds have regularly picked out this valley, particularly as most are juveniles making their first migratory trips. The longest-ever staying individual was still present here in mid-March 2008, after first being seen in early January the same year and, unlike others, it was relatively easy to see, favouring the eastern end of the valley near the Comondale road. The combination of open moorland, with scattered Scots Pine and Rowan trees, boulder-strewn areas, grazed upland pasture and large expanses of coniferous and mixed woodland probably mirrors its habitat in Scandinavia, from where our birds almost certainly originate. Common Buzzards are best looked for over Guisborough Forest or the well-wooded slopes of the adjacent Esk Valley and in late 2007 up to 6 were present in the air on one occasion. Perhaps the best time to see birds of prey is from mid-February onwards, when they are more active as they begin their territorial displays, which, in the case of Goshawk, Peregrine and Common Buzzard, can be dramatic. My strategy is to choose a relatively sunny, clear day with a stiff breeze blowing from the west or southwest, which pushes air currents off the Cleveland side of the valley. Scan the skyline and forest areas continually and make sure you have your telescope set up and ready to use. The birds are easier to locate when above the horizon but are not always on view for long and vigilance is a pre-requisite for success here.



JUVENILE ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD, SLEDDALE, MARCH 2008
Martyn Sidwell

During the spring and autumn, Sleddale acts as a flyway between the inland moors and the coast, as witnessed by movements of Skylarks, Pied Wagtails, Siskins, Meadow Pipits and occasional Snow Buntings. Birds of prey,

such as Osprey, Sparrowhawk and Marsh Harrier occasionally pass through. As you drive up the rigg, keep your eyes open on both sides of the road for Stonechats, which almost certainly breed here. Red Grouse are relatively common and often give close range views. Small birds occasionally commute between the forest areas and if you park by the Iron Age hut circles, it is sometimes possible to see Common Crossbills and Siskins flying across the open moor between Guisborough Forest and the Larch plantations of the Esk Valley. Great Spotted Woodpeckers sometimes do the same and are a rather unusual sight as they fly low over the bleak, treeless moorland. A small, residual belt of Larch trees from the now felled Lonsdale Plantation often holds Siskins and, in the late autumn of 2007, over 150 were present, accompanied by 2 Mealy Redpolls. A Ring Ouzel was also seen here last November.

Like Rough-legged Buzzard, Sleddale has traditionally been one of the few sites in Cleveland where Ravens have been seen. This species is rare in Cleveland, with few long-standing birders having encountered one in our area until 2006, when one was seen in late February and up to three were present in early April. This bird, so typical of uplands elsewhere in Britain, should become more regular due to a population explosion outwards from their current breeding areas, though whether it will survive in an area where traditional game-keeping is still rife remains to be seen.

Breeding species are confined to typical upland species, such as Red Grouse, Lapwing, Curlew, Golden Plover, Snipe, Kestrel, Meadow Pipit and Stonechat. Pied Wagtails almost certainly breed in the drystone walls and Dunnocks, Linnets and Wrens nest in the isolated Gorse clumps and patches of Bracken. Song Thrush breeds in the vegetation around the farms and Ring Ouzel used to breed but sadly no longer does so in Cleveland. In the winter, the pasture and stubble fields around Sleddale and along the Kildale to Comondale road often hold large numbers of thrushes and, in late 2007, a flock of over 500 Fieldfares fed on the fields near Percy Rigg Farm, along with smaller numbers of Redwing and Blackbird.

I would strongly recommend a visit to this beautiful site. Be patient, be vigilant and be prepared to put in some hours and you will eventually see most of the special birds that Sleddale has to offer.

Ted Parker

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Mens & Ladies Fit Trojan Polo Shirts
only £12.95

Please contact JULIE MASON on 07789 731429 to obtain an order form for embroidered items

arco[®]

Arco Limited, Malleable Way, Portrack Lane,
Stockton-on-Tees
Tel: 01642 617441
Near to the Asda Superstore

Trade Counter Opening Hours:
Mon-Fri 8.am - 5.pm Sat 8.30am - 12.30pm

We have opened two accounts with ARCO, the outdoor clothing outlet on Portrack Lane, Stockton-on-Tees, and members will receive a 20% discount on all clothing and footwear on production of a valid Club membership card for direct purchases at their store.

We can now also offer members bespoke polo shirts, fleeces, hats and sweatshirts incorporating the Club logo. Samples are available for inspection at members' monthly evening meetings. Orders for bespoke garments should be placed with Julie Mason, 11 Redmire Road, Stockton, TS18 4JR (Tel: 07789 731429). She can also be contacted by email at juliemason@redmire1.freemove.co.uk

The bespoke clothing is delivered free to your door and we are grateful to ARCO for these arrangements.