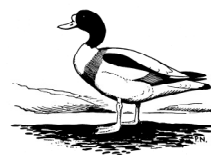


Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

March 2009 (No.42)



Reg. Charity No.508850

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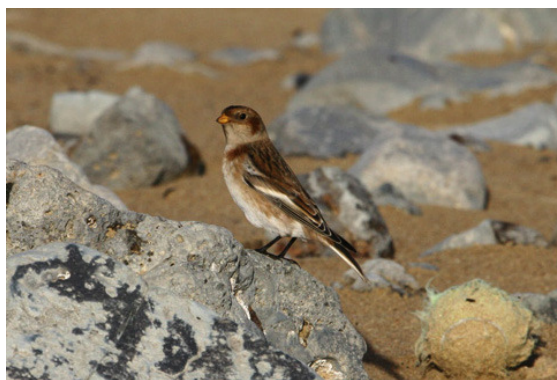
MONTHLY SUMMARIES

Chris Sharp reviews the birding highlights of the late autumn and winter periods, which proved to be extremely eventful, with a number of rare and scarce birds, including a second record for Britain on the RSPB's new Saltholme Reserve.

NOVEMBER

After a very quiet October, November proved to be an excellent month's birding in Cleveland. A Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler at North Gare on 1st was very elusive and only showed to the initial observer. Migrants at South Gare on the same day included Lapland Bunting, Waxwing, 5 Snow Buntings, Woodcock and small numbers of winter thrushes. At Hartlepool the following day, Barred Warbler, Firecrest and Black Redstart were all to be found and both Long-eared and Short-eared Owls flew in off the sea. Two Waxwings were by Greatham Creek the same day. An obliging Radde's Warbler showed well at South Gare on 3rd and this was the 7th record for Cleveland. Based on previous occurrences, South Gare seems to be the place to find one. A Rustic

Bunting at Hummersea the same day unfortunately only showed for 5 minutes and was not subsequently relocated.



Snow Bunting, South Gare

Malcolm Corps



Radde's Warbler, South Gare

Martyn Sidwell

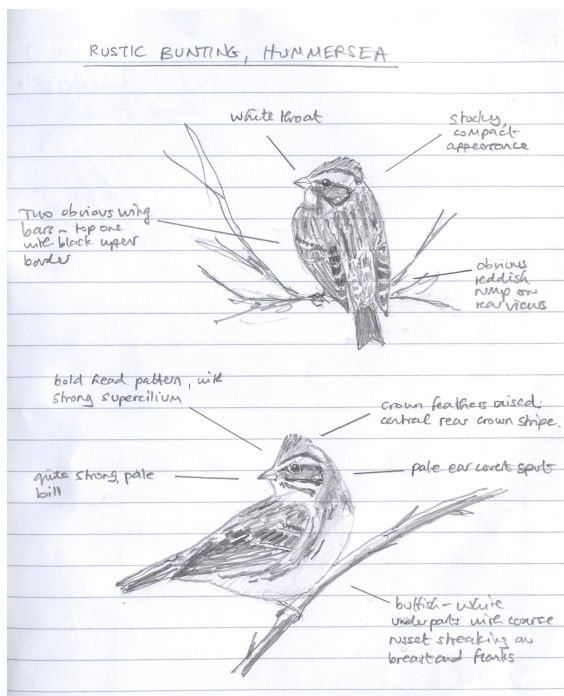


Two-barred Crossbill, Bilsdale

Martyn Sidwell

A White-fronted Goose was in the fields between Redcar and Marske from 4th. The 6th saw ideal late autumn fall conditions and many thrushes were grounded at the coastal sites and good

numbers of Woodcock were also recorded, with 15 at Hartlepool alone. Up to 7 Waxwings were also here but South Gare fared even better, with an amazing 55 passing through. Single Yellow-browed Warblers were present at South Gare and Hartlepool. The following day, 2 Pallas's Warblers were trapped at Hartlepool and common migrants continued to be reported along the coast. Twenty Waxwings were at Easington and 13 Snow Buntings were seen at Coatham.



Rustic Bunting, Hummersea

Ted Parker

Just outside Cleveland, a male Two-barred Crossbill at Bilsdale gave stunning views as it fed on peanut feeders in the garden of a remote farmhouse. This immaculate bird attracted hundreds of birders thanks to the extraordinarily kind and accommodating nature of the farmer.

A Lapland Bunting was at Cattersty Gill on 9th, with another Yellow-browed Warbler at Locke Park the same day. The wintering Twite flock returned to Greenabella Marsh, with 32 present on 10th. A Siberian Chiffchaff in a Skelton garden on 12th showed well for 10 minutes, giving its distinctive Bullfinch like call. A Black Redstart was also at Hartlepool. A late Arctic Tern was at Hartlepool on 13th and 3 Whooper Swans flew south here. Large numbers of Snow Buntings were at North Gare at this time, with up to 137 counted. A drake Blue-winged Teal was at Back Saltholme on 14th and the following day saw a Cattle Egret at the same locality, though, surprisingly, this only remained for one day. It was only the 2nd Cleveland record, the previous one being as long ago as 1986. With the increase

of this species in Southern England during the past few years, Cattle Egret had been predicted for 2008 and so was not unexpected. One suspects that it will not be another 22 years until the next one! A late Yellow-browed Warbler was at Hartlepool at this time and 8 Pale-bellied Brent Geese were on Seal Sands, along with a Black-throated Diver. Small numbers of Goosanders were seen at a variety of inland waters, with 8 on Priory Pond, Guisborough proving particularly attractive.



Cattle Egret, Saltholme

Geoff Icton



Peregrine, South Gare

Ian Forrest



Merlin, Seaton Common

Ian Forrest

The Waxwing invasion continued apace. The biggest flock reported was 190 at Skippers Lane Industrial Estate. A Taiga Bean Goose was near Brotton from 18th to 20th. Sea watching at Hartlepool on 21st produced 2 Bonxies and a Glaucous Gull. Late Arctic and Sandwich Terns were also around the harbour at this time, along with 2 Great Northern Divers. The latter moved to nearby Jackson's Landing, with one of the birds lingering until late December. Single Storm Petrel and Little Auk were seen off Hartlepool on 24th, with a Black Guillemot and 3 Great Northern Divers the following day. A probable Siberian Chiffchaff showed well at Billingham Green on 29th and 30th and a Dark-bellied Brent Goose was at Greatham Creek. Up to 10 Ring-necked Parakeets were in Ward Jackson Park and a Firecrest was at Portrack Marsh on the last day of the month.



Great Northern Diver juvenile

Ian Forrest

DECEMBER

An adult Glaucous Gull was around Saltholme early in the month. Two Hen Harriers were at Sleddale on 4th, with a Black-throated Diver off Parton Rocks, Hartlepool the same day. Up to 3 Water Pipits were at the usual wintering site along the pipeline at Haverton Hole and 1 or 2 Barnacle Geese appeared on Saltholme with the Canadas and these increased to 5 by the month's end. Mediterranean Gulls were much in evidence this winter, with adult birds regularly at Hartlepool, Newburn, Hemlington Lake and Seaton Carew, the latter locality holding up to 3 birds. A Spotted Redshank was wintering at Back Saltholme, with possibly the same bird regularly reported at Greatham Creek. A Red-necked Grebe was off Parton Rocks on 7th and 48 Brent Geese over Cowpen Bewley on 9th was a large winter count for Cleveland.

Mid-month was very quiet. Sea duck numbers were down on previous years and divers and grebes were also in short supply. A Bar-headed Goose joined the goose flock at Saltholme for a

few days. Reports of Glaucous Gulls increased from 20th: 2 adults were around Saltholme and immature birds were reported from Seaton Common and Hartlepool. Eighty Pink-footed Geese flew over Skelton on 22nd, with 14 Goosanders here. Little Egrets were well in evidence on the North Tees Marshes and up to 7 were also roosting in Rossmere Park. Short-eared Owls, too, were showing particularly well around Greenabella Marsh, where Twite numbers reached 44. A Rough-legged Buzzard was reported from Scaling Dam on 28th. What was presumably last month's Greenland White-fronted Goose re-appeared at Hemlington Lake on 28th and remained here until the New Year, occasionally being seen at Stewart's Park. A female Smew at Crookfoot Reservoir from 30th remained until February. The main event of the year for most, however, came on the last day, when an unusual, grey-winged gull was found at RSPB Saltholme by Reserve Warden Toby Collett and Club member Chris Brown, and was identified from photographs as Britain's second Glaucous-winged Gull. It was re-located the following day and remained in the area until 10th January, though it did go missing for long periods as it fed on the local tips with thousands of other gulls. This mega rarity attracted hundreds of visitors from all over the UK and abroad and certainly put RSPB Saltholme on the map even before its official opening! Though elusive at times, most people, with patience, eventually got superb views of this incredible rarity for our area.



Little Egret, Cowpen Bewley C.P.

Ian Forrest

JANUARY

Apart from the Glaucous-winged Gull, year lists got off to a fairly slow start in early January. A Caspian Gull was near Cowpen Bewley tip on the first day of the month with it, or other birds, being reported from the North Tees Marshes over the next 10 days as avid gull watchers descended on the area. Four Mealy Redpolls were at Coatham Stob and several Glaucous Gulls and a

third-winter Iceland Gull were seen during this period. Snow Bunting numbers were low, with fewer than 20 at South Gare. A Long-tailed Duck was here early in the month, along with a Great Northern Diver. The regular wintering adult Yellow-legged Gull returned to the Tees Barrage and, nearby, up to 5 Jack Snipes were on Portrack Marsh. Waxwings continued to be reported in large numbers, with the Ingleby Barwick area proving particularly attractive. Sleddale produced a good selection of raptors mid-month, with at least 2 Rough-legged Buzzards from 14th, these remaining in the area until mid-February. Also seen here during this period were several Common Buzzards, 3 Hen Harriers, 2 Peregrines, 2 Merlins and several Sparrowhawks. Stillington Forest Park proved particularly attractive in January, with up to 100 Siskins and 25 Lesser Redpolls (which included several Mealies), along with regular reports of a Green Woodpecker. A Black-throated Diver was off South Gare on 19th.



Glaucous-winged Gull, Saltholme

'Marty'



Rough-legged Buzzard, Sleddale

Renton Charman

RSPB Saltholme opened to the public on 21st and the well-used café over the next few days produced Peregrine and Merlin and who knows what will be seen from here over the coming years. However, the Glaucous-winged Gull will take some beating! A pair of Barn Owls showed well on Greenabella Marsh and others were seen at Dorman's Pool later in the winter and at a variety of inland locations. It appears that this species is doing particularly well in Cleveland at

the moment and undergoing a welcome revival. Three Mandarins and a Pink-footed Goose at Priory Pond were of unknown origin but, nonetheless, the former made a splendid sight. A wintering Lesser Black-backed Gull was at Hemlington Lake, along with long-staying Mediterranean Gull, Greenland White-fronted Goose and Barnacle Goose.



Barn Owl, Greenabella

Ian Forrest



Scaup, Cowpen Bewley C.P.

Ian Forrest

A Scaup at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park on 27th was much appreciated, as this species is now becoming harder to see in our area. A Bittern was on the Long Drag on 28th, before being seen on subsequent days on Greenabella Marsh and nearby Greatham Creek. Another bird was on Coatham Marsh at this time, these records bringing aspirations for breeding on RSPB Saltholme before too long. A Hawfinch was a good find on the Castle Eden Walkway just south of the A689. Now that the wintering birds at Hutton have gone this is an extremely difficult bird to catch up with in Cleveland and is probably extinct as a breeding species. Unfortunately the bird was only present for two days. Several Common Crossbills were also in the area, along with a flock of Brambling. The last day of the month saw a Great Skua passing Saltburn, 3 Water Pipits on Coatham Marsh and a Velvet Scoter off Parton Rocks, the latter species being very scarce this winter.



Hawfinch, Castle Eden Walkway

Mick Brennan



Common Crossbill, Thorpe Wood

Mick Brennan



Whooper Swan, Cowpen Bewley C.P.

Ian Forrest

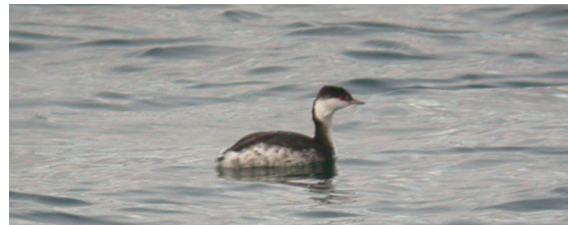
FEBRUARY



Little Auk, Hartlepool

Ian Forrest

Northerly winds on 2nd produced single Little Auk, Blue Fulmar, Velvet Scoter and Great Northern Diver. First-winter Iceland and Glaucous Gulls and an adult Yellow-legged Gull were on Seaton Carew beach and a Grey Phalarope was off South Gare the following day, along with a Slavonian Grebe and a Little Gull.



Slavonian Grebe, South Gare

Courtesy of RealBirder



Red-necked Grebe, Hartlepool

Ian Forrest

A Little Auk showed well in Hartlepool Harbour on 4th and a Green-winged Teal on Bowesfield Marsh the same day remained for a fortnight. Up to 12 Ruff were also here, in what is becoming a main wintering area in Cleveland. A Red-necked Grebe in Hartlepool harbour on 7th remained until the month's end, by which time it was in nearly full summer plumage. A Great Northern Diver also

favoured the Harbour area. A female Scaup was on the Reclamation Pond from 9th and a Red-throated Diver showed well from the Visitor Centre at RSPB Saltholme from 10th. The Slavonian Grebe was still showing at Bran Sands on 13th. Two Dark-bellied Brent Geese were at Seaton Snook (15th). Up to 56 Great Crested Grebes were on the sea off Seaton Carew at this time. A single Velvet Scoter was off Parton Rocks from 18th. A Black-throated Diver flew past Hartlepool on this date.

A Great White Egret flew over the Long Drag on 21st but unfortunately did not linger. A Greenland White-fronted Goose was at RSPB Saltholme on 22nd and may have been the relocating Hemlington Lake bird. A Tundra Bean Goose was here the following day, appearing with 9 Pink-footed Geese and, with a single Dark-bellied Brent Goose also on the Reserve, it meant that 7 species of geese could be seen in one day in the area. They all remained until the month's end. A Black-necked Grebe was off Redcar on 24th and a Red-necked Grebe was off South Gare on 26th. Twite numbers increased to 57 at Greenabella Marsh and the month ended with birders dreaming of warmer days and the first spring migrants.



Twite, Greenabella

Ian Forrest



Brambling, Castle Eden Walkway

Ian Forrest



Lesser Redpoll, Stillington

Ian Forrest



Ring-necked Parakeets, Ward Jackson Park

Ian Forrest



Willow Tit, Weary Bank

Mick Brennan



Spotted Redshank, Greenabella

Ian Forrest

CLEVELAND WATER BODY SURVEY 08/09

Members are reminded to send in their completed count forms to the end of March 2009 to Chris Sharp, 20 Auckland Avenue, Hartlepool, TS26 0AN (email: chrisandlucia@ntlworld.com) as soon as possible, please. We would like to thank all of you who have given up time to undertake the survey and a full report on the results will appear in the 2009 'Cleveland Bird Report'.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

'GOODBYE' TO MEMBERS OF THE CLUB'S MANAGEMENT

Brian Hague and Linda Watson have both come the end of their four-year periods as Ordinary Members of the Committee and we would like to thank them for their significant contributions during what has been an eventful, busy and 'life-changing' time for the Club. The Committee is currently seeking replacements.

Brian has also retired as a member of the Conservation Sub-Committee and so, too, have Chris Bielby, Derek Clayton and Russ McAndrew. All of these have played major roles in the heavy workload of this group and their contributions to our lively debates on key issues have been greatly appreciated. They will all be missed and the search is now on for replacements. To this end, Toby Collett, Assistant Warden of RSPB Saltholme has kindly agreed to join the Conservation Sub-Committee. He will be a valuable addition and we greatly look forward to working with him.

FIVE-YEAR PLAN (2004-2009)

In April, our Five-Year Plan, launched at the April 2004 AGM, comes to an end and the Committee has held a special meeting to review progress. To say that we are delighted with what has been achieved would be an understatement, with virtually all but one of our 12 targets met and, in some cases, significantly exceeded. Here, and in the table below, are just some of our achievements over the past 5 years:

- Revising and modernising the Club's Constitution to align it with our current activities.
- Complete re-structuring to enable a greater workload to be undertaken by 3 sub-committees.

- Change of venue for our members' evening meetings
- Revamping of the Newsletter
- A drastically improved and updated website
- Production of a new Application Form
- Production of Club posters to promote our organisation
- Sale of bespoke TBC garments through special deals with suppliers to boost corporate image
- Dramatically raising the Club's profile regionally and nationally by involvement in key issues
- Publication of '*The Breeding Birds of Cleveland*'
- Brokering new legal access agreements to Dorman's Pool and the Reclamation Pond
- Continued improvements to the '*Cleveland Bird Report*'
- A significant increase in the number of members submitting bird records
- The resumption of local outings
- The resumption of day trips after an absence of many years
- More people doing more things than ever before

These achievements are the result of a magnificent team effort, supported by our members, and have completely transformed our Club by giving us a clear vision and sense of direction. We hope that our membership has directly benefited and that the Club will continue to go from strength to strength.

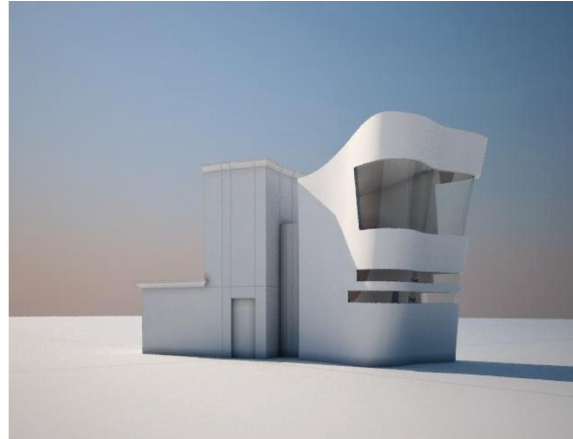
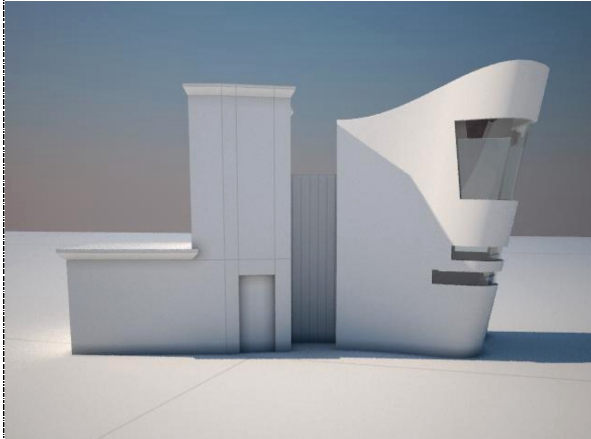
FIVE-YEAR PLAN (2009-2014)

The Committee held a special meeting to discuss the way forward after the conclusion of our first Five-Year Plan in April 2009. We 'brainstormed' "*What happens now?*" and "*Where do we go from here?*" "*Do we want more of the same?*" and "*Is there a danger that we might take our foot off the gas?*".

To resolve these issues, the Committee has decided to launch another Five-Year Plan with 10 Targets to take us to 2014 and this will be presented to members by our new Chairman, Ali McLee, at our April 2009 AGM.

TARGET	END OF 2003	TO APRIL 2009
Increase membership to 350	259	450
Increase attendance at Club meetings to 70 per meeting	38	72

HARTLEPOOL OBSERVATORY



3D image of the new observatory : the proposed new building is the section on the right

(Courtesy of JDDK)

Our architects, Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall Limited (JDDK) of Newcastle, are now firming up our preferred option for the new observatory at Heugh Lighthouse, Hartlepool. The option was chosen following extensive consultation with a sample of over 40 members, many of who will use the new facility. We are delighted with what the architects have produced.

The new observatory has faced a number of significant constraints, most notably the light beam from the existing lighthouse, which has reduced the height of our building from three floors to two, and the existing Coastguard communications mast, which has prevented us from extending laterally along the seaward side of the compound. Nevertheless, the new building will be poles apart from the old lookout we used to occupy in the Heugh Battery and will have a modern, curved, 'ship's funnel' appearance. It will accommodate a total of 26 people, all of whom will have uninterrupted views of the sea from the two floors. Access to the observatory will be via the existing gateway, for which TBC members will have keys. PD Teesport has indicated that it may be possible to demolish one of the brick structures inside the lighthouse compound to provide some secure internal parking.

The new-build will be connected to the old coastguard lookout and the latter will accommodate a spiral staircase to connect the two floors in order to free more viewing space. An internal platform lift for the disabled will be incorporated within the new building and this must be provided or the project will not receive funding and is desirable in any event to ensure that the less able-bodied can fully access the new facility. The old coastguard building will also house a small 'common room area' and exhibition

space and will have an electrical supply for lighting and tea/coffee-making facilities.

Representatives of Hartlepool Borough Council's Planning Department and PD Teesport endorsed the design at a meeting on 18th February and the Feasibility Study should be completed by the end of March 2009. This will then give us a broad indication of the costs of construction and design fees and the firmed up outline drawings will allow us to go out and seek funding. Our aim is to have a new observatory on site within the next five years.

THE PHIL STEAD MEMORIAL HIDE



Over the past few years, the Club has had a series of discussions with RSPB concerning the erection of a hide dedicated to the memory of one

of our early pioneering members, Phil Stead. Over £2,200 was raised by Phil's widow, Anne, from donations in lieu of flowers from Phil's funeral, to which some of our members have also contributed.

Following a meeting with Dave Braithwaite and Emma Birnie of the RSPB on 23rd February, we believe that this project can now be progressed. The Committee has been holding the donations and other contributions in readiness and it is hoped that within the next year a new hide will be constructed by the RSPB overlooking the large pool behind the fire station. The Club is to at least match-fund the money raised from Phil's funeral and this will help RSPB to seek funding for the residual sum to enable the project to become a reality. The hide is to be located over the interesting pool to the rear of the Fire Station and will be a lasting memory to a great stalwart of the early Teesside birding scene, who is greatly missed by all who knew him.

CLUB REPRESENTATION AT FORMAL EVENTS

RSPB Saltholme

The Club has been and is to be represented at a number of local and regional events. Our Chairman, Ted Parker attended the official opening of RSPB Saltholme on 6th March 2009, along with many others organisations and individuals who have been involved with or interested in it. There were representatives from the project architects (Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall Limited), the contractor (Lumsden and Carroll), the Project Team (led by Kevin Bayes), Teesside Environmental Trust (RSPB's project partner), sponsors and many others. The event was addressed by several dignitaries, including Graham Wynne, the RSPB's Chief Executive, and Kate Humble, the RSPB's Vice-President. A very nice buffet was much appreciated by the invited guests. The whole event was both enjoyable and momentous, and we wish the RSPB every success in the future for their magnificent reserve.

Retirement of John Mann

Our Chairman and several other members of the Club are to attend the retirement celebration for the Chairman of INCA (Industry and Nature Conservation Association) at Nature's World on 27th March 2009. John has greatly supported the Club over the past few years and was largely instrumental in paving the way for our successful bid for £18,500 of Landfill Tax Credit funding for *'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland'*. John has been very easy to work with and we shall greatly miss his advice and support. We wish his successor,

Bob Pailor, who joins INCA from the Environment Agency on 1st April, every success in his new post and hope to strike up an equally friendly relationship with him.

Middlesbrough's Becks – Friendship Group

The Club has been invited by the Environment Agency to join a group which will look at ways of improving the beck valleys in Middlesbrough, focusing on Ormesby Beck and the surrounding Environment. The first meeting is on 23rd March 2009 and will be attended by Vice-Chairman, Ali McLee. TBC has already commented on some of the strategic aspects of managing the beck valleys for wildlife and public enjoyment.

Launch of 'A Living Landscape'

Ali McLee attended the regional launch of this significant initiative, which was organised by the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and was held at The Sage, Newcastle, in March.

The Wildlife Trusts have a vision to create a network of landscape-scale projects throughout the UK. These projects will jointly create *'A Living Landscape'*, transforming the future for wildlife and providing a more sustainable future for communities rich in opportunities for learning and enjoyment. The Trusts aim to re-connect fragmented habitats in our towns and countryside to transform the landscape within a generation. The Wildlife Trusts have identified 150 separate large-scale projects, from the mountains of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, across the breadth and diversity of the English countryside, which will transform the landscape and quality of life of local people. The success of these projects will require an investment in high quality project development and management by people who know their local area and its wildlife intimately. The Trusts are seeking an investment of £10m, which will pay for 40 project officers for a period of five years to take forward the early development and delivery of a selection of these projects.

Read Alistair's report on page 14

Did you know.....

'Jenny' isn't the only personal name given to the Wren. The bird has also been called 'Kitty' (or sometimes 'Kitty-me-wren'), 'Bobby' (in Norfolk and Suffolk), and 'Sally' (in Ireland).

(Source : Francesca Greenoak, All the Birds of the Air)

ACCESS TO THE 'TRIANGLE' AND CAUSEWAY, BACK SALTHOLME

Following discussions between TBC and RSPB, we have been informed that the 'Triangle' at Back Saltholme, where birders have traditionally parked for many years, is to be closed off to vehicles. Advance notice will be given and it is possible that closure may occur in April 2009. This area now belongs to the RSPB, which has grave concerns over how unsafe this area is in relation to the very busy A178 Seaton Carew Road. In the event of a serious accident, the RSPB would carry some liability as landowner.

Regarding access to the causeway, this will be closed to all people during Reserve opening times. Dave Braithwaite, Site Manager, however, is keen that access at other times is maintained for TBC members only for scientific bird recording, with all relevant records being submitted to Tom Francis, the Cleveland Recorder. Access will be solely to the causeway and not to other parts of the Reserve. Club members will be expected to 'police' this as far as possible to prevent unauthorised access, though such policing should not be 'heavy-handed'. Any significant incidents should be recorded and sent to Emma Birnie, Reserve Warden.

All members wishing to visit the causeway outside Reserve opening times will need to undertake a brief health and safety induction and should submit their names to Emma Birnie at RSPB Saltholme (Tel: 01642 546625; email: emma.birnie@rspb.org.uk). Members wanting to do this must hold a valid membership card.

ACCESS TO RSPB SALTHOLME OUTSIDE OF OPENING HOURS

Some TBC members who regularly visit the North Tees Marshes in the evenings have enquired about access to RSPB Saltholme when the Reserve is closed (ie. before 10.00am and after 5.00pm between 1st April and 30th September and after 4.00pm for the rest of the year). Discussions have taken place with Dave Braithwaite and Emma Birnie of the Reserve's management and an agreement has been reached which will be of major benefit to Club members.

From the outset, it has to be understood that the situation has changed and Saltholme is now in the ownership of the RSPB, which has to take account of protecting its expensive assets, as well as ensuring that the health and safety of visitors is not compromised. It will not be possible for birders to wander freely over the site as they

have done in the past because, at the end of the day, it is the RSPB that is ultimately liable for any incidents involving injury to people. Disturbance to nesting birds is also a concern, as is the enjoyment of the thousands of visitors from near and far who will visit the site in the future (over 14,000 have already visited Saltholme during the first 6 weeks).

The RSPB recognises, however, that it will be desirable to have a human presence on site after the Reserve has closed; first, to help 'police' the site to report anti-social activities and, secondly, to ensure that bird recording continues outside of opening times. Dave Braithwaite is also keen to ensure that TBC members continue to have access to an area that they have been watching for many decades. The key elements of the agreement are:

- There will be a group of TBC volunteers, who will be issued with keys to the car park and hides, and will be responsible for managing security on site after closing time in the evenings.
- For health and safety reasons, two volunteers, working together, will be needed each evening on a rota system, which will be managed by Emma Birnie, RSPB Head Warden.
- The volunteers will be responsible for unlocking and locking the access gate and the hides and admittance will be solely for TBC and RSPB members, via the showing of membership cards.
- Volunteers must ensure that visitors adhere solely to pathways and do not wander off on to other parts of the Reserve. They must also ensure that all visitors have left the site before locking up the gates and hides for the night.
- Keys will have to be signed for and their duplication will be strictly prohibited. Any instances of the key system being abused may result in the offending members being excluded from the arrangement or, at worst, the agreement being withdrawn.

It is intended that the rota system will start on 1st April 2009 and any Club member who would like his or her name to be included should contact Emma Birnie at RSPB Saltholme (Tel: 01642 546625; email: emma.birnie@rspb.org.uk). Volunteers must be fully paid-up members of the Club. The system will only work if there are sufficient volunteers to form a rota, so the more volunteers who apply, the better.

BIRD RECORDING ON RSPB SALTHOLME OUTSIDE OPENING HOURS

Club members visiting the Reserve outside of normal opening times are requested to report immediately to the RSPB any important sightings of scarce or rare birds, such as uncommon waders (eg. Broad-billed, White-rumped and Pectoral Sandpipers), egrets and herons (eg. Great White and Cattle Egrets, Purple Heron), wildfowl (eg. American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck), raptors (eg Honey Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier) and other birds. Visitors wanting to see mega rarities, such as the recent Glaucous-winged Gull, will need to be managed on site and it is vital that early reporting of such birds is adhered to so that the necessary arrangements can be made to ensure that all birders get to see and enjoy good birds.

In the event of a rarity being found, members should contact Emma Birnie (tel: 07872 157735) email: emma.birnie@rspb.org.uk) or Toby Collett (tel: 07595 654912. The number of the Visitor Centre is 01642 546625.

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION 2010

The Committee has been busy planning early for this momentous occasion and have appraised potential venues and secured a performance by singer and comedian, Vin Garbutt.

Whilst we have still to finalise matters, it is likely that the event will be held at the Riverside Stadium, home of Middlesbrough Football Club. To avoid any clashes with football matches, the date has been changed from a Saturday to, provisionally, Friday 26th November 2010. The facilities here are excellent and we will have views out over the pitch. A sit-down hot meal is planned, rather than the usual finger buffet, and it is intended that the evening be as relaxed and informal as possible, with casual dress.

To date, 53 members have placed their names on a provisional attendance list. We hope to accommodate at least 150 people, with the cost of tickets being between £15-£20 maximum. We will easily sell all our ticket allocation and it is recommended that if you wish to attend, you book early to avoid disappointment. For the sake of fairness, we are limiting sales to one per Ordinary Member and two for Family Members, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Should you wish to book a place, please contact Ted Parker (tel: 01642 275369 or email: ecparker@supanet.com) or, alternatively, **complete the form on page 21** and return it to him. No deposits are required at present and an expression of interest is without obligation.

TBC TRIP ON 15th FEBRUARY 2009 TO NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND

*In this feature, **Chris Bielby** reports on the Club's first organised day trip for many years, which he led to North Northumberland.*

An intrepid pioneer band of 35 club members embarked on this first field trip organised by the Teesmouth Bird Club for many years. The weather looked very promising with bright skies and light winds forecast and none of the rain or snow that had blighted birding in recent weeks.



Our first scheduled stop was Lindisfarne and after crossing the causeway on a falling tide we disembarked in the main car park near the village. The impressive view across towards the castle encompassed the pasture and pools, which yielded our first sightings of Mute swan, Common Teal, Lapwing, Golden Plover, Curlew, two Black-tailed Godwits and a lurking Sparrowhawk. Several Fieldfares, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks worked the fields and hedgerows and some distant Brent Geese flew in to land frustratingly out of sight in the fields behind the mere. Fortunately a scan of the nearby harbour revealed two Dark-bellied Brents resting on the mud and, nearby, a Grey Plover, several Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwits and, offshore, Shag, Eider and a couple of Red-breasted Mergansers.

Graham Bell rendezvoused with us here and with his expertise and local knowledge we continued to walk around the harbour to the Heugh overlooking the channel towards the Ross Back Sands and the distinctive needles that act as navigation markers for the channel. The more experienced birders got busy with their telescopes and quickly found distant Slavonian Grebes and two Long-tailed Ducks. These proved to be rather uncooperative, staying on the surface for only a few seconds, too briefly to allow telescopes to be set up for other viewers without great perseverance and a lot of luck! Some closer Shags, Eiders and Mergansers proved to be easier targets, fortunately.

Flocks of the more usual Pale-bellied Brents were viewed in the distance, but more Bar-tailed Godwits, Grey Plovers, Curlews and Redshanks gave closer views. We walked back through the village and the local House Sparrows, Blue Tits and Great Tits seemed to be watching us as we made our way back to the coach. In the distance, Fulmars were circling around their nest sites on the Whin Sill crags below the castle. During our alfresco lunch break here, the keener (less hungry?) watchers spotted Short-eared Owl over the fields behind the mere.

The next leg of our trip led us back across the causeway and round to the lay-by above Budle Bay. Once again the experts got busy 'scoping the beautiful vista below us and soon picked out the distant flocks of geese happily consuming the farmers' crops (5 geese eat as much as one sheep, apparently, so we could see about 500 sheep's worth of geese!) The mixed flock included about 800 Pale-bellied Brents, at least 40 Barnacle Geese, some 200 Pink-footed Geese and several hundred Greylags. The beautiful spring light enabled comparisons of the different species guided by the experts who so willingly loaned their 'scopes and expertise. Graham exclaimed that we were very fortunate to be seeing so many geese at this ideal location as they had been absent from this site in recent days. They were very flighty and gave the opportunity to learn some of the key features of the different species in flight, as well as hearing their calls.

We continued down to the side of Budle Bay where more scanning added estuary species like Shelduck, Wigeon, Pintail, Knot, Mallard, Teal, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, as well as distant flocks of Brents, Barnacles, Pinkfeet and Greylags. John Grieveson picked up a very distant Peregrine skimming across the sands beyond the estuary before it landed on a rock giving clear if distant views through our 'scopes.

Our next destination was Bamburgh and specifically, Stag Rocks. The coach driver inched his way down The Wynding below the magnificent castle and along to the car park in the dunes. We made our way to the shore and once again 'scoped the shoreline and the sea beyond the breakers. Almost immediately, we spotted Slavonian Grebes amongst the Eiders and Common Scoters beyond the breakers, as well as the jaunty Long-tailed Duck drakes, already displaying to their drabber females. On the rocks, Turnstones, Sanderlings and Purple Sandpipers shuffled around amongst the seaweed, seeking out the invertebrates, which also attracted Oystercatchers and Redshanks. Rock Pipits foraged higher up the beach and one or two Red-

throated Divers flew by well out to sea, joining others on the water in the distance, where a few Guillemots and Shags were also visible. A single Porpoise showed briefly and a Stonechat worked its way along the fence and dunes by the road behind us. As we made our way back to the coach, we watched the Fulmars circling below their nest ledges and window sills of the castle.

Our final destination was Seahouses, where Rock Pipits showed well on the rocks, with close Eiders, Oystercatchers and Herring, Great Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls. Another Porpoise showed intermittently off the harbour mouth. Many of us enjoyed the excellent local fish and chips to round off a very enjoyable day and ensure our survival on the long drive home.

My total number of species for the day was 77 but it is likely that others saw more. I hope that everyone enjoyed the trip and would like to give my personal thanks to Graham Bell for his guidance, to Julie Mason for organising it, and to them and all the other experts for so willingly sharing their skills, knowledge and telescopes to enhance the enjoyment of everyone.

REPORTS ON LOCAL OUTINGS

SUMMERHILL, 10th JANUARY 2009

Unfortunately, nobody turned up for this outing, except the leader! This was a pity, because stunning close-range views of Willow Tit were to be had at Summerhill and the Ring-necked Parakeets performed well in Ward Jackson Park.

BOWESFIELD MARSH, 22nd FEBRUARY 2009

The day started with some light rain but by the time the group of 10 members assembled it was bright and dry, sufficiently so to inspire a Skylark into song. We covered the TVWT reserve where Teals, though fewer than earlier in the month, were still present in good numbers, as were Shovelers and Pochards. Other species were Gadwall (two pairs), Goldeneye (3), and the usual Mallard, Tufted Ducks and Coots, with the odd Cormorant, Grey Heron and Mute Swan. Passerines included Stonechat and Reed Bunting. After negotiating the muddy track to the upstream section, there was a brief view of a Lesser Black-backed Gull and, on the river, a Little Grebe. The large, shallow pool attracts surface-feeding waterfowl, such as the flock of Wigeons, as well as Teals, Mallards, Shovelers and a Shelduck. The pool is also well used by waders. It was too late in the season to expect any very large plover flocks and only two Lapwings were noted. However, there were many Redshanks and the few Curlews were joined by a flock of

about 50 birds flying in. Also seen were two Oystercatchers and several Ruffs. It is not unknown for Bowesfield to hold more Ruffs than the whole of Teesmouth. The area round the pool is well used by Woodpigeons and these were accompanied by Stock Doves. There were also Redwings, another species that is attracted to this location. Bowesfield Marsh is less visited than other similar areas and it is hoped that these tours will help remedy this.

Eric James

HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND, 9th MARCH 2009

Nineteen members met by the old observatory on a blustery day. We walked around the sea front towards the harbour. The rocks between the piers held the usual gulls and among them was a superb adult Mediterranean Gull in full summer plumage. There was no sign of the summer-plumaged Red-necked Grebe seen earlier in the week and there was little in the harbour area apart from a single Guillemot. On the way back, however, a first-winter Glaucous Gull showed well just past the Heugh Breakwater. At this point heavy rain had us hurrying to our cars and we drove the short distance to Parton Rocks. Small numbers of Eider and Common Scoter were offshore, along with 2 Red-throated Divers. We then walked back south towards the Town Moor. The tide was coming in fast, pushing the waders nearer to us and fine close views were had of Purple Sandpipers, Turnstones and Knots, along with a Rock Pipit. Another adult Mediterranean Gull was also offshore here.

Chris Sharp

LOCAL OUTINGS SPRING/SUMMER 2009

*The following local outings have been arranged for members by **Chris Sharp** during the Spring and Summer of 2009. They include a variety of interesting venues, each with its own suite of birds, so please attend one (or more) if you can. The Club is very grateful for the personal time leaders give for the benefit of members, so it is important that as many as possible turn up for these events.*

WEARY BANK, NEAR YARM

Sunday 26th April 2009

Meet at 8.00am at the bridge over the River Leven on the Cleveland boundary for a chance to see, or at least hear, all 3 woodpeckers (this is now the only reliable site for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Cleveland, though it is by no means guaranteed). Goosander, Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Common Buzzard and Marsh Tit, along with a selection of early summer migrants, may

also be expected. For further details contact the leader, Alistair McLee (tel 01642 787305).

FLATTS LANE

Tuesday 5th May 2009

Meet at 9.30 am. at Flatts Lane Visitor Centre and join Geoff Myers to look for a wide variety of summer visitors and breeding birds. This offers a good chance to brush up on your ability to distinguish the songs of difficult pairs, Garden Warbler and Blackcap, and Lesser Whitethroat and Whitethroat. For further details ring Geoff on 01642 461850

NIGHTJARS IN GUISBOROUGH FOREST

Saturday 6th June 2009

Meet at 8.45pm. by the track next to the first house in Hutton Village. This trip is weather dependent and as the traditional site is becoming overgrown, the Nightjars may not return this year. There is an alternative site nearby where Nightjars were present in 2008 but it involves a longer walk. Please check the Website in the days leading up to the walk or ring the leader, Mark Askew, on 01287 638190.

SEA WATCHING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Saturday 8th August 2009

Join Chris Sharp, Ted Parker and Don Page from 8.30am to 11.30am to help with the identification of seabirds as they pass this famous sea watching site. The variety and number of birds seen will be very much influenced by the weather, particularly the wind direction. Hopefully, there will be some Manx Shearwaters, skuas, terns, auks and a variety of sea ducks passing. There will be tips on how to separate the very similar Guillemot and Razorbill and other sea birds. For further details ring Chris on 01429 865163.

NORTH TEES MARSHES

Wednesday 26th August 2009

Meet at 9.30am in the lower Teesmouth Bird Club car park at Dormans Pool and join John Grieveson for a look for waders in the area. A good variety of species should be present at this time and the route taken will depend on which pools are particularly attractive at the time. Species that may be expected include Wood, Green and Curlew Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff, Dunlin and other besides. For further details ring the leader, John Grieveson, on 07922154955.



BTO HANSON BIRD CHALLENGE 2008 AT SCALING DAM

*In this feature, **Martin Blick** looks back at the most successful year ever at Scaling Dam during the 2008 BTO Hanson Bird Challenge. Martin is a key player in this event on behalf of Northumbrian Water and puts in numerous hours at Scaling Dam during Challenge years.*

Northumbrian Water entered Scaling Dam for the British Trust for Ornithology Hanson Bird Challenge for the third successive time in 2008. The competition is held every second year and is open to any industry with land available or used by birds and other wildlife. There are various categories and Scaling Dam is in the medium-sized area of water section and competes with about 8-10 similar water bodies in the UK. The aim is to record as many species of bird as possible during the calendar year and, consequently, the more time birders spend on site, the more birds are seen and the greater the chance of winning the competition. Birds must be seen 'using' the site rather than simply flying over, although birds of prey and members of the Swallow family can be counted because they are usually searching for prey as they move through.

During the first year in 2004, a total of 146 species was recorded, while in 2006, this dropped to 140. In both years, birders were on site on about 210 dates, equating to 4 days per week throughout the year. A competition year is divided into four quarters of 3 months and the birds seen during each quarter are reported to the BTO, which is responsible for keeping the 'scores'.

What would 2008 bring? Well, by the end of March, less than 100 species had been recorded but April proved to be excellent, with White-fronted, Bean and Egyptian Geese, Red Kite, Rough-legged Buzzard, Goshawk and Hen Harrier, all very scarce birds at Scaling Dam, plus the only 2008 records of Kittiwake, Ruddy Duck, Yellowhammer, Water Rail and Great Grey Shrike. In addition, a Common Crane flew over but could not be counted, as it wasn't using the site.

By the end of the second quarter, the total stood at 130, with Mute Swan, Spoonbill, Ring Ouzel, Grey Partridge, Little Gull and, the best bird of the year, a Black Stork all being recorded. Unfortunately, the latter was only seen by the writer, despite much subsequent searching of the area. Interestingly, there was an influx of escaped wildfowl during the second half of May, with 3 Baikal Teals, a Wood Duck and 2 White-faced Whistling Ducks. Sadly, these last four species are not countable for the BTO Challenge.

In the third quarter, sightings gathered apace and the total rose to 154 by the end of September, 8 more than our previous best for a full year, and still with three months to go! Species recorded included the only Scaup, Black-necked Grebe, Yellow-legged Gull, Kingfisher, Redstart and Marsh and Willow Tits. Other notable species were Honey Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier, Hobby, Temminck's Stint, Spotted Redshank and Pectoral and Wood Sandpipers.

During the last 3 months, very little was anticipated to turn up, as most of the expected regular and scarce species had already been recorded. However, 5 more species were added to the list: Jack Snipe, Hooded Crow, Barn Owl, Twite and Waxwing, bringing the 2008 total up to 159, 13 more than our previous best. During the year, birders were on site on at least 245 days throughout the year, equal to almost 5 days per week. Despite this, there were still some species that should have been recorded but weren't, namely Bewick's Swan, Garganey, Smew, Red-breasted Merganser, Curlew Sandpiper, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, any flycatcher and Mealy Redpoll. All of these have been seen at Scaling Dam on at least one occasion in the past 3 years.

After each quarter, the BTO produces a list of all of the sites involved in the Challenge and Scaling Dam is always in the top three. In 2008, we achieved second place at the end of the year, beaten only by the much bigger, lowland Ogston Reservoir in Derbyshire.

LAUNCH OF NORTH EAST REGION LIVING LANDSCAPES STRATEGY

In March I represented your club at the regional launch of what is a nationwide strategy of operating a more holistic approach towards conservation in the UK. Until relatively recently, the conservationist's approach has been to designate reserves on a simplistic basis of protection and often these are small, localised and exist as anomalies in the surrounding countryside. (This has given rise to the perhaps cynical remark "Is it a reserve or a ghetto?"). There is some truth in such a comment, however, when you consider the associated problems of water level control in reserves surrounded by farmland; species dispersal and re-colonisation issues; requirements of some species of large areas of habitat for successful breeding; problems of management on a small scale resulting, if not careful, in an expensive form of "wildlife gardening". I could go on, but I am sure you get my drift. Today what we are talking about is big picture and broad brush thinking, hence the term of "Landscape Strategy" conservation.

Certainly, it is possible to see how such an approach could be taken in certain of the areas highlighted at this launch, e.g. Keilder Forest and its surrounds; Druridge Bay and coastal retreat habitat creation; and Durham coast. I do have a problem in understanding how such an approach could be applied to proposed areas in Cleveland, such as the linear wooded gills of East Cleveland and the multiple ownership of the Middle Tees area. Although not led by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, what does promise to be a successful approach, using the landscape strategy, is the plan to create a contiguous wetland and grazing reserve, as a multi ownership swathe across the North Tees area. We must wait and see about that one. Never the less, the club is supportive of this initiative led by the Wildlife Trusts in their role of leading the programme.

The keynote talk by Chris Packham, was both uplifting and at the same time sobering. His theme was that of encouraging a wider public to be not merely aware, but actively concerned and animated about conservation issues through the medium of landscape. This, he believed, can be achieved by the wider, and simplistic appreciation, of the beauty of landscape as a whole. Many people visit the countryside regularly, but their understanding of what they see, is often minimal and at worst superficial. Older visitors may still remember the "old countryside" of their childhood, but those younger have no such recollections and take it at face value and do not know what is missing.

Chris went on to itemise the problems of today's countryside and its management, and I do not think that I need to spell them out to club members. However he gave a particularly poignant example of the Stone Curlew. This is a Biological Action Plan (BAP) species, which has most obligingly met all its breeding targets set it, and then some. But, and this is a big "but", the bird has only done so by the artificial creation of bare areas in arable fields or by the diligent marking of nests by devotees to ensure protection from cultivation.

This is a totally artificial situation and has no naturalness in it. Never-the-less we then go on to congratulate ourselves on our success. On a country-wide basis, the removal of "set-aside" grants means that the benefits to many species of farmland birds, enjoyed over the last 10 years, has now disappeared. We have stopped wildlife gardening in other words.

If we want a countryside with naturalness in it, and no contrived, subsidised, expensive wildlife management contortions, there has to be a new way forward and one way is that of a "Living Landscapes". Support it dear members.

Suggested reading " Say Good by to the Cuckoo" by Michael McCarthy. ISBN 9781848540637.

Alistair McLee

HEMLINGTON LAKE

John Regan reviews this formerly under-watched site located within the urban edge of Middlesbrough and outlines its breeding and passage birds. Surrounded by housing, it is an important green space and one of the few large water bodies in the south of Cleveland.

Background

Hemlington Lake is situated about 5 miles south-east of Middlesbrough. It was built in 1972 and was designed as a balancing pond to control the surface water entering Bluebell Beck from the new housing development at Hemlington. It was formed by constructing an earthen dam across the open valley and allowing the water to build up behind it. The lake covers an area of 8.3 acres and has a maximum depth of 7 feet. It is a designated SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) and over recent years, work has been carried out by Groundwork South Tees to try and improve the site for both wildlife and public recreation.



View from west side of lake looking north



View from west side looking south

The site is surrounded by housing, which skirts around a green belt. Several small plantations of trees are dotted around the lake and there is a wooded island and a reed-filled ditch at the western end, which provides some cover for nesting birds; otherwise lakeside vegetation is non-existent. The lake is managed by Middlesbrough Borough Council for recreation purposes and is mainly used for fishing and occasional canoeing; consequently, it suffers from a great deal of human disturbance and, sadly, anti-social activities.

Access

The official car park to access the lake can be reached by turning off Stainton Way onto Hemlington Hall Road, and then a third right onto Nuneaton Drive, which leads you into the car park. A footpath allows an easy walk around the whole lake.

Birds

The lake doesn't hold a great variety of breeding birds, though a pair of Mute Swans nest each year with varying degrees of success. Otherwise it's limited to Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe. Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting breed occasionally in the reed-filled ditch at the west end, while Blackcap breed in nearby scrub.

In winter small numbers of duck occur, mainly Tufted Duck and Pochard, with peak counts of 39 and 36 respectively, these pulling in a drake Ring-necked Duck in the winter of 2006-2007, probably the lake's rarest visitor. Goosander used to occur in healthy numbers in the 1990s, with up to 40 birds, but this species seldom visits now. Kingfisher can be found regularly in winter along the reedy ditch, with occasional Water Rail and Jack Snipe. Also, a regular Mediterranean Gull has been present for the last seven winters.



The Hemlington Mediterranean Gull

Eric James

Other scarce birds seen here over the years have included Slavonian, Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, Bewick's Swan, Garganey, Osprey, Iceland and Yellow-legged Gulls, Black Tern and, recently, Greenland White-fronted Goose. It is always worth a look at this site, particularly during spring and autumn passage and in winter, as 'good' birds are still to be found here, and much still remains to be learned about its wider ornithological value.

PROFILE – GRAEME JOYNT

*Many will know Graeme as the principal editor of 'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland' and the 'Cleveland Bird Report' so, with the atlas having recently been published and proving to be so successful, **Ted Parker** met with him to delve deeper into the person behind the face.*



Ironically for a staunch Hartleputdean and Newcastle supporter, Graeme was born in Middlesbrough 42 years ago. He lived with his parents in Rotherham between 1967-74 and then in Hartlepool, where he still lives today. By profession, Graeme is an Environmental Health Officer with Hartlepool Borough Council. He owes his interest in birding to a teacher when he was at primary school in Rotherham, who used to take children out on to the school field and point out birds to them. Many of the children quickly grew out of this but Graeme didn't and he is still as keen as ever today. His father took him birding many times to the North Tees Marshes when he was in his teens and this helped to keep the fire for birds alive. He also remembers a particularly inspiring day out with Don Page in 1980, when he saw lots of places and new birds that he had only dreamt of seeing. Nowadays, with a Cleveland birding career spanning 35 years, Graeme has amassed a very impressive local list of 334, the most recent addition being the Glaucous-winged Gull, the second record for Britain, which graced the North Tees Marshes from late December 2008 into early January 2009 and, being totally unexpected, was greatly appreciated by Graeme and many others.

Graeme's favourite local patch is, naturally, in Hartlepool, at Seaton Snook, which, in the past, has produced two excellent finds for him – Kentish Plover and Pied Wheatear. He also likes the Headland, where he loves to sea watch during the autumn. Another local area he visits frequently is the North Tees Marshes, particularly Greenabella Marsh (in Hartlepool again!) for its waders and wildfowl.

In his formative years, Graeme's favourite bird book was *'Birds of the Western Palearctic'*, an epic work edited by Stanley Cramp, which opened his eyes to Western Palearctic birding. He remembers pouring over images of, to him, seemingly unobtainable birds such as Raso Lark, which breeds on only a single small island of the same name in the Cape Verde archipelago. He has now seen this species and many more besides and is now one of the leading British Western Palearctic listers, with an astonishing 757 species. This list has been amassed through many trips throughout the region, including 'exotic' places such as the Azores, Cape Verde Islands, Egypt, Morocco and Turkey, as well as most of Europe. His favourite contemporary book is the *Collins Field Guide*, which he likes for its accuracy and quality of the illustrations. The optics Graeme uses are 10 x 42 Leica binoculars and a Kowa 'scope.

The most impressive birding site he has visited is Madera Canyon in Arizona, which he describes as very scenic and the quality of the birding outstanding, with exciting species such as Elegant Trogon, Painted Redstart and Mountain Pygmy Owl – "*you just know you're going to see something as soon as you arrive – it has that atmosphere.*" Graeme's best day's birding was also abroad, this time in China in May 2000, in a small wood, christened by the 12-strong Teesside contingent on this Wildwings trip (of which I was privileged to be one) as the *'Magic Wood'*. This small, rather open wood no bigger than a football pitch lies within a sea of rice paddies and is the only cover for miles around. Consequently, it is a magnet for migrant birds. Graeme says that as soon as the party arrived at the wood on that day in May, it was clear that something phenomenal was happening. Literally thousands of birds of many species were moving through the wood, including Lanceolated, Radde's, Two-barred Greenish, Pallas's, Thick-billed and Yellow-browed Warblers, Siberian and Grey-backed Thrushes, Siberian Blue Robins and Siberian Rubythroats, and Schrenck's Little Bitterns flew out of the woodland ditches. It was estimated that 4,000 Radde's Warblers alone passed through the wood during Graeme's visit! His best day ever in Cleveland was in May 2006, when he was part of a four-strong group that broke by a mile the

Cleveland record for the most species seen in a 24-hour period: the staggering total of 152 included such local rarities as Nightjar, Wryneck, Osprey and Shore Lark. Graeme feels that this record will never be broken. When asked about his most memorable bird, he had no hesitation that this was Great Grey Owl, which he describes as "*awesome*". His ambition bird is to see Brown Fish Owl in the Western Palearctic – a difficult, though not impossible, task.

In terms of best personal finds, Graeme cites the Pied Wheatear at Seaton Snook on 6th November 1994, a first for Cleveland, particularly as this is one he had specifically set out to find that day, having guessed the place where it would be most likely to turn up! A Pacific Golden Plover on 5th August 1995, which he found with Tom Francis, also sticks in Graeme's mind as a great personal find. This, too, was the first for Cleveland. When asked about his biggest birding disappointment, Graeme told me that this was having to share a bed with Colin Dodsworth for 13 out of 14 nights in Colorado and Arizona; the only night he spent alone was in a scary motel with a large window in the door when he would have welcomed the company! His most embarrassing experience was in Turkey in 1996, when he reversed his car to get a better look at a rather attractive young lady and backed into a local's car and had to pay him off to stop the incident being reported to the police. His proudest moment came with the publication of *'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland'* in November 2008, which was an ambition that took over 12 years to achieve.

Among the changes Graeme would like to see in the future are more young people coming into birding and efforts to combat climate change being directed towards the protection of existing habitats, such as the rain forests, as well as reducing carbon emissions. When asked about his views on the Teesmouth Bird Club, he considers that it has gone from strength to strength in recent years and is now a very professional organisation. He feels that the Club is better regarded in local issues and has become a stakeholder in big decisions. He is also highly complimentary about what has been achieved by the RSPB at Saltholme. The only downside is the lack of junior members, which he accepts is a difficult problem to redress.

Graeme's aspirations for the future are to produce a book *'The Birds of Hartlepool'* within the next few years and to see 800 species in the Western Palearctic, which no-one has yet achieved. He wants to continue to be a supportive and active member of the Club, including its Records Sub-Committee, and contribute as much as possible.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2008/2009 SUMMARY

Coverage was good, with 126 out of a possible 130 sector counts undertaken over the five winter months.

A new Tees WeBS record of 671 was set by greylag in December, easily surpassing the 413 recorded in November 2001. New seasonal records were set by little grebe (43, February) and tufted duck (219, December). The mute swan peak (63, January) was the second-highest on record, while that of cormorant (196, November) was the best winter figure since the 283 counted five years previously to the day. It was an average winter by recent standards for both wigeon (1943, January) and teal (815, November); the same could also be said of shelduck (599, February), numbers of which were remarkably stable throughout the three midwinter counts. Maxima of gadwall (163, February), shoveler (85, February) and coot (870, December) were the poorest since 2001/2002, and in the case of mallard (273, December) since 1997/1998.

The oystercatcher peak (816, February) was the worst since way back in 1991/1992, the last time it fell below three figures. It was a mediocre winter for both lapwing (3383, December) and golden plover (935, December), yet – somewhat surprisingly – grey plover (196, January) yielded its best WeBS return for a decade. More expected was the second-best winter black-tailed godwit peak on record (48, November). Curlew numbers reached healthy levels in late winter (1103, February).

The litany of wader populations falling to record-breaking lows is considerable, and comprises knot (586, February), dunlin (69, November) and bar-tailed godwit (22, January). Incredibly, not a single ruff was recorded by WeBS in the entire winter. In addition, the purple sandpiper maximum (38, February) was the second worst ever, while that of sanderling (181, December) was the poorest for sixteen years. Whilst we have become accustomed to declines in many of these species, the abrupt drop in this winter's redshank peak (783, December) was not anticipated. This is the lowest figure since the winter of 1986/1987, barely half of the recent five-year mean and perhaps a consequence of the unusually cold winter.

Following this winter's series of counts, and measuring our five-year means of annual winter peaks against the criteria for international and national importance, the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS site remains of national importance for

gadwall and redshank. Sanderling no longer qualifies for this status.

Mike Leahey

WeBS Local Organizer

March 2009

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All WeBS data are collected on behalf of the WeBS Partnership, which retains exclusive rights to the sale or supply of these data for commercial purposes

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2008/2009 SUMMARY

Species	November 9	December 21	January 11	February 8	March 8
Little Grebe	22	16	8	<u>43</u> *	15
Great Crested Grebe	11	3	17	<u>20</u>	10
Cormorant	<u>196</u> *	155*	58	138*	81
Mute Swan	62	57	<u>63</u>	40	38
Greylag Goose	188	<u>671</u>	182	181	211
Shelduck	487*	574*	582*	<u>599</u> *	453*
Wigeon	1321	1573	<u>1943</u>	1561	1226
Gadwall	137*	81	76	<u>163</u> *	114*
Teal	<u>815</u>	631	502	560	384
Mallard	143	<u>273</u>	225	294	242
Pintail	18	2	38	<u>60</u>	17
Shoveler	48	58	60	<u>85</u> *	43
Pochard	59	78	78	<u>110</u>	54
Tufted Duck	130	<u>219</u>	174	184	181
Eider	5	<u>8</u>	4	0	3
Goldeneye	47	65	46	<u>78</u>	34
Red-br. Merganser	<u>40</u>	31	26	36	35
Coot	802	<u>870</u> *	853	521	441
Oystercatcher	745	687	469	<u>816</u>	362
Ringed Plover	50	41	<u>73</u>	57	29
Golden Plover	218	<u>935</u>	114	93	0
Grey Plover	84	116	<u>196</u>	149	66
Lapwing	1925	<u>3383</u>	1558	1723	492
Knot	204	553	465	<u>586</u>	94
Sanderling	21	<u>181</u> *	41	82	66
Purple Sandpiper	5	2	11	<u>38</u>	6
Dunlin	<u>69</u>	21	28	49	26
Ruff	0	0	0	0	0
Snipe	3	8	<u>11</u>	5	3
Black-tailed Godwit	<u>48</u>	29	14	20	22
Bar-tailed Godwit	2	20	<u>22</u>	21	2
Curlew	218	795*	815*	<u>1103</u> *	944
Redshank	712*	<u>783</u> *	405	497	384
Turnstone	<u>237</u>	170	133	84	74

Underlined counts indicate winter 2008/2009 maxima.

* indicates a count of >50% of national significance

N.B. 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

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