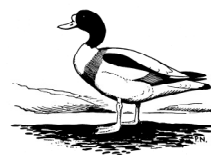


Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

August 2009 (No.43)



Reg. Charity No.508850

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The TBC Newsletter is published three times a year.

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MONTHLY SUMMARIES

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

MARCH

Up to 6 Water Pipits were at Haverton Hole early in the month, a Red-necked Grebe was off Hartlepool and at least one Rough-legged Buzzard was still regularly frequenting Sleddale. The first Avocet of the year was at Greatham Creek on 6th and numbers began to build up in the area from mid-month. A Great Northern Diver was off North Gare on 7th.

There were still 25 Waxwings in Yarm on 10th and a Dark-Bellied Brent Goose at Saltholme on 12th was joined by a Tundra Bean Goose three days later. The long staying Greenland White-fronted Goose was also present at this time, along with small numbers of Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese. The first Wheatear was reported from Hartlepool on 13th. Two Little Ringed Plovers at Teesdale Business Park on 16th were early and a drake Garganey was on Dormans Pool the same day. The adult Yellow-Legged Gull was last seen at the Tees Barrage mid-month.



Tundra Bean Goose, Belasis Avenue

Ian Forrest



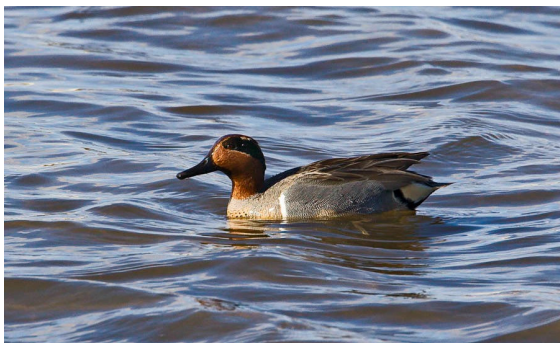
Greenland White-fronted Goose, nr Haverton Hole Ian Forrest



Garganey

Mick Brennan

On 7th, a drake Green-winged Teal on Greenabella Marsh lingered until mid-April and several Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were also reported at the local tips during this time. Long-gone are the times when Hartlepool Fish Quay in winter offered the best chance of seeing these white-winged Gulls. Searching the local tips in early spring is now almost guaranteed to produce one or the other.



Green-winged Teal, Greenabella

Renton Charman



Glaucous Gull, Hartlepool Headland

Martyn Sidwell

Fifty-five Whooper Swans flying north at Hartlepool and seven at Eastfields Farm on 17th were the first of a series of records of this species over the next few days. Fourteen were on Portrack Marsh the following day, along with 19 at Saltholme and 16 at Crookfoot Reservoir. A Green Sandpiper was at the Fire Station Pool mid-month and the long-staying Spotted Redshank was around RSPB Saltholme, along with up to 10 Ruffs. A pair of Garganey was at Saltholme on 19th.

The first Sand Martins were reported from 21st. Two Scaups were on the Reclamation Pond at this time and a single Velvet Scoter was off Hartlepool. Thirty-one Whooper Swans were on the Reclamation Pool next day. Several Common Buzzards passed through the North Tees Marshes and the first Marsh Harrier of the spring was over Saltholme on 29th. At the end of the month, the long staying female Smew was still on Crookfoot Reservoir, up to five Jack Snipes were on Portrack Marsh and 17 Twites were on Greenabella Marsh.

APRIL

A male Marsh Harrier was at Dormans Pool early in the month and a single Little Gull was around Haverton Hole. A Ring Ouzel was at the usual Hummersea stakeout on 3rd while small numbers of Common Crossbill were at Tilery Wood at this time. On 4th, an early Willow Warbler was on the North Tees Marshes and, two days later, a Red Kite was over Eston. A Mandarin was at Locke Park on 8th. A Long-tailed Duck joined the Smew at Crookfoot Reservoir on 10th and the same day saw a single Ring Ouzel on the Long Drag and 2 at Hummersea. The first Sedge Warbler sang at Portrack Marsh on 11th and, on the same date, 2 Common Sandpipers were at Scaling Dam and a pair subsequently bred here, along with a pair of Little Ringed Plover.

Mid-month was fairly quiet, though 25 Waxwings could still be seen at Ingleby Barwick, up to 16 Pink-footed Geese were around Saltholme, 13 Ruff were at Back Saltholme and 14 Black-tailed Godwits were on the Calor Gas Pool. A Greenshank was on Seaton Common on 16th. The first Swift was seen over Saltholme on 18th, along with a Whimbrel. On 19th, the Green-winged Teal was still on Greenabella Marsh, a Cuckoo was at Scaling Dam and 2 Marsh Harriers were at Dormans Pool. A Redstart, now a rare sight in Cleveland, was much appreciated at Hartlepool on 20th and a Spoonbill at RSPB Saltholme the same day remained until early May. Two Common Terns were at Saltholme the following day and a Tree Pipit was at Coatham Marsh on 22nd.

Three Little Gulls were at Saltholme on 25th, with a Whinchat at Warsett Hill the same day. The highlight of the month, however, was 2 Whiskered Terns, which appeared at RSPB Saltholme on the evening of 26th. These were part of a national influx and were a long-awaited first Cleveland record. Two drake Garganeys were on the Port Clarence Floods and good numbers of Wheatears were at the coast, along with small numbers of Yellow and White Wagtails. Three Greenshanks were on Dorman's Pool on 27th and a male Lapland Bunting was briefly at Seaton Common the same day. A Wood Warbler showed well at Zinc Works Road on 29th.



Spoonbill, RSPB Saltholme

Ian Forrest



Whiskered Tern, RSPB Saltholme

Ian Forrest



Whiskered Tern, RSPB Saltholme

Jamie Duffie



Avocet on nest, Saline Lagoon

Renton Charman

MAY

An Egyptian Goose at Scaling Dam on 1st was of unknown origin and, the following day, 2 Red-rumped Swallows flew south over the Long Drag. Unfortunately, similar to past Cleveland records, they passed straight through and a bird lingering for even an hour would be much appreciated. An early Honey Buzzard was over Cowpen Marsh the same day. Continuing the bird of prey theme, an Osprey fished in the river mouth on 4th before flying off north. The following day, a Hen Harrier was at Scaling Dam and a Hobby was over Nunthorpe. Four Arctic Terns were at Saltholme on 6th. Marsh Harriers were at Scaling Dam on 8th and North Gare on 9th. On the latter date, a Great White Egret initially seen at Portrack Marsh relocated to RSPB Saltholme, where it remained

until 27th. The bird was colour ringed and had been ringed as a nestling in France in 2007.



Great White Egret, RSPB Saltholme

Toby Collett

One or 2 Wood Sandpipers were on Seaton Common, with 2 more at Saltholme, and a Pectoral Sandpiper was seen briefly at RSPB Saltholme on 10th, and again on 15th. A singing Wood Warbler was a good find at Moor Plantation near Long Newton on 11th and an Iceland Gull at RSPB Saltholme on 13th was the final spring report. Heavy rain and easterly winds on 14th saw 4 Black Terns on RSPB Saltholme and small numbers of migrants on the coast at this time included several Pied Flycatchers, Lesser Whitethroats and a Wood Warbler at South Gare. Two Icterine Warblers sang at North Gare on 16th but were extremely skulking, showing themselves briefly to only a few. This was the only 'fall' of any note in what was a poor spring for migrant *Passerines*.



Wood Warbler, Moor plantation

Eric James



Lesser Whitethroat, Cowpen Bewley W.P.

Ian Forrest

Spotted Flycatchers returned to Lockwood Beck on 18th and this is now the most reliable site for this declining breeding species. A Hobby was over RSPB Saltholme on the same date. On 19th, 2 fine Black-necked Grebes in full breeding plumage were at the same site. Two Temminck's Stints and a Spoonbill were nearby at Port Clarence Floods and up to 7 Little Egrets were around Saltholme at this time.

Another fly-by Red-rumped Swallow was seen near Cowpen Bewley on 20th and an Osprey was over Newton Woods the same day, along with a ring-tailed Hen Harrier over fields at Hart. Another Osprey was over here the following day and a Hobby was on the Long Drag on 22nd. A Quail at Cowpen Marsh on the same date was the first of several singing birds reported over the next few days and at least 3 Marsh Harriers passed through Cleveland. A White Stork circling over Stockton on 24th flew towards the North Tees Marshes but could not be relocated. Another Hobby was seen over Marske on 25th and the Dark-bellied Brent Goose reappeared at RSPB Saltholme on 28th. A Purple Heron at RSPB Saltholme from 29th showed well for 3 days but often required several hours' patience as it disappeared into the reeds. This was only the second twitchable Purple Heron in Cleveland in recent years, following the last available one at Coatham Marsh in 2005. A Black-throated Diver was off North Gare on 30th and another Hobby was over Saltholme on the last day of the month.



Whinchat, Greenabella

Ian Forrest



Osprey

Ian Forest



Yellow Wagtail, Seaton Common

Jamie Duffie

JUNE

This is traditionally a quiet month and, apart from a little excitement, June 2009 was no exception. A Quail was near Teesside Airport on 1st with a Black Redstart at Boulby the same day. Swifts gathered in large numbers over the Reclamation Pond early in the month, with 5,000 birds estimated there on 3rd.



Swift, North Tees

Jamie Duffie

A Roseate Tern was at RSPB Saltholme on 4th. A Spoonbill was at Scaling Dam on 5th and it, or another, was again reported there on 19th. An unseasonal Bonxie was on Marske beach on 8th and a second, un-ringed Great White Egret at Dormans Pool on 8th only stayed for two days. Sea watching off Hartlepool on 9th produced 18 Manx Shearwaters, 6 Puffins and a single flock of 7 Roseate Terns. Adult Mediterranean Gulls were at Seaton Carew and Saltholme at this time. A Hooded Crow on Seaton Common for 3 days from 10th was a good record of this now rare visitor to Cleveland. A Honey Buzzard was over Skelton on 11th and a Hobby was seen at Cowpen Bewley from 12th-13th.



Hooded Crow, Seaton Common

Derek Clayton

Up to 6 Little Egrets were on the North Tees Marshes mid-month and small numbers of passage waders began to appear, with a Greenshank and 4 Black-tailed Godwits at RSPB Saltholme. The rarest bird, however, was a Terek Sandpiper on the Port Clarence Flood section of RSPB Saltholme on 16th and again early the next morning. After a gap of 29 years, this was the second consecutive year that this species had appeared on the North Tees Marshes.



Terek Sandpiper, RSPB Saltholme

Chris Bell

At least 24 Avocet chicks were around Greatham Creek and a minimum of 108 Little Tern chicks were ringed at Crimdon Dene, representing an

excellent breeding season for this species. A Marsh Harrier was at Scaling Dam on 18th, along with 3 Common Sandpipers. A drake Scaup was on Greenabella Marsh on 20th. Two Pink-footed Geese were at RSPB Saltholme on 22nd and Little Gulls increased to a rather poor peak of 5. The last week of the month saw a trickle of waders, including 2 Spotted Redshanks, 4 Greenshanks and a Wood Sandpiper on the North Tees Marshes. A Pectoral Sandpiper was on the Tidal Pool on 23rd. A Hobby was seen catching Swifts over Dormans Pool on 29th and the month ended with a Red-backed Shrike at Zinc Works Road on 30th.



Scaup

Ian Forrest



Kingfisher, Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park

Francis Tasker

Correction:

The photograph of a Marsh Tit in the last issue of the Newsletter was wrongly captioned as Willow Tit.

This was an editing error for which we apologise.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS OF THE CLUB'S MANAGEMENT

We are delighted to welcome some new appointees to Club management positions. Sylvia Brennan and John Crussell have joined the Committee as Ordinary Members and will be involved in the strategic management of the Club during their four-year tenure. John is a long-standing local birder and Sylvia is a keen photographer, with many of her (and her husband, Mick's) stunning photographs adorning our Website. We are confident that they will make a positive contribution and look forward to working with them.

Toby Collett and Dave Nelson have joined the Conservation Sub-Committee. Toby is well known to many, being the Assistant Warden of RSPB Saltholme and he will provide a vital link between the Club and RSPB. He has an excellent knowledge of nature conservation and will be a valuable addition to our Conservation group. We are delighted that he has joined us. Dave is a long-standing and very supportive member of the Club and already sits on the Marketing and Membership Sub-Committee. As well as being a keen birder, he is very enthusiastic and always willing to help, so the group will be greatly strengthened by his presence.

Ian Foster has joined the Records Sub-Committee. He is an experienced birder and we know he will make a positive contribution to the work of this busy group, which is responsible for producing the annual *Cleveland Bird Report*.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

The Conservation Sub-Committee has been very busy reviewing a number of Planning Applications and other documents, including Red Gap Moor Wind Farm, the new North Teesside Hospital (Wynyard), Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council's Preferred Housing Sites (in its Local Development Framework) and Local Wildlife Sites in Hartlepool District (in conjunction with Hartlepool Borough's ecologist, Ian Bond). We haven't lodged objections to the first two of these but have expressed our strong concerns over the low levels of Mitigation and Enhancement, bearing in mind their scale and high capital value. We suggested that off-site mitigation be investigated, in view of their impact on farmland birds, such as Grey Partridge and Skylark, which are already suffering severe National declines. Objections have been lodged for two of the housing sites selected by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council on ornithological grounds, one in Guisborough along Chapel Beck and one in Nunthorpe (the Swan's Corner field). We have

also been heavily involved with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and Hartlepool Borough Council on reviewing and updating the Cleveland register of Local Wildlife Sites (formerly known as 'Sites of Nature Conservation Importance'), particularly those of importance for birds. Some sites have dropped off the former list and new ones have been added for some Boroughs. If you know of any sites that you think might qualify, please inform **Ted Parker, Chairman of the Conservation Sub-Committee**, along with your reasons why you consider a site to be important. We also have 2 vacancies for membership of this group and, if you are interested in joining, please contact Ted.

MARKETING AND MEMBERSHIP SUB COMMITTEE

The group is currently appraising the electronic storage of Cleveland bird records in consultation with the Records Sub Committee. This will be a major task but one that we need to face in order to make information storage and retrieval much easier. The challenge is to find a simple, user-friendly system which can function as a long-standing database and be 'interrogated' to churn out data in whatever form we require it (e.g. by species, date or location, etc). This will drastically reduce our data request response times for outside bodies and form the basis of records system for many years to come. Graeme Joynt has kindly offered to lead on this and we hope to have a system in place and functioning for the start of 2010.

Sales of *'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland'* are still going strong and, to date, nearly 860 of the 1,000 copies have been sold, which is a remarkable achievement. Although sales have slowed down, there is no doubt that the book will sell out within the next 12 months, so if you haven't bought a copy, now is the time to do so. **Please contact: John Fletcher, 43 Glaisdale Avenue, Middlesbrough, TS5 7PF (Tel: 01642 818825).**

THE PHIL STEAD MEMORIAL HIDE

We are delighted to report that, due to a contribution of £1,000 for this project from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous, the Club has informed RSPB Saltholme Site Manager, Dave Braithwaite, that the total sum we can now provide for a new hide on the reserve dedicated to Phil is now £6,000. Dave has informed us that he is working with the RSPB's fund raising team to try and source the remaining finance for the hide. Anne Stead, Phil's widow, is being kept informed of all developments and she is delighted that the Club has been able to help in such a positive way.

FIVE-YEAR PLAN (2009-2014)

Our new Chairman, Ali McLee, presented the new Five-Year Plan to members at the April 2009 AGM, which will guide what we do up to April 2014. The Plan was unanimously endorsed by those present at the AGM and will form the basis of the Committee's work in the forthcoming years.

TARGET	COMMENTS
TARGET 1: CONSOLIDATION OF THE PREVIOUS FIVE YEARS	• Continue with 'more of the same' to avoid loss of impetus. • Continue involvement in and support for RSPB Saltholme. • Continue to increase sales of TBC bespoke garments. • Target families, e.g. family outings, to encourage junior members to join the TBC. • Possible sale of a paper site guide at meetings.
TARGET 2: TO BUILD A NEW OBSERVATORY AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND	• To have a new building in place by 2014.
TARGET 3: COMPUTERIZATION OF BIRD RECORDS	• To move away from a manual, card-based records system and the storage and other problems that this entails. Possible co-option of a computer expert onto Records Sub Committee or assigning an appropriate existing member to research and take on the task (with help from others within the Club).
TARGET 4: CONTINUE TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP	• Take remedial action if the current upward trend is seriously reversed and to target families in an attempt to get more junior members. Possibly run some local outings solely for families and youngsters.
TARGET 5: COMPUTERIZATION OF MEMBERSHIP RECORDS	• To enable more use to be made of membership information and aid administration (e.g. computerized address labels). • To reduce the burden on the Honorary Secretary.
TARGET 6: TO PREPARE A REGISTER OF IMPORTANT ORNITHOLOGICAL SITES	• Akin to SNCIs and not necessarily the best bird watching sites. Originally part of Five-Year Plan (2004-2009) but target not fully achieved.
TAREGT 7: TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN PRACTICAL CONSERVATION WORK	• To bring together members doing active conservation work, e.g. path clearance, tree/shrub planting, ditch clearance, small construction projects, etc.
TARGET 8: TO SELL 1,000 COPIES OF 'THE BREEDING BIRDS OF CLEVELAND'	• Through the implementation of a comprehensive and successful marketing and sales plan.
TARGET 9: TO INTRODUCE A PROGRAMME OF SUCCESSFUL DAY TRIPS FOR MEMBERS	• To increase the Club's offering to members and provide further opportunities for members to meet, socialise and widen their experience.
TARGET 10: TO DEVELOP TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS	• Workshops. • Bespoke outings (e.g. identification, surveying). • Conferences (e.g. joint one with BTO).

NEW HARTLEPOOL OBSERVATORY

Our architects, Jane Darbyshire and David Kendall Limited (JDDK) of Newcastle have completed their Feasibility Study for our planned new observatory at Heugh Lighthouse, Hartlepool Headland. Their report is comprehensive, thorough and has followed our Brief extremely well and we are delighted with what they have produced. The Study has outlined four potential building options based on different materials for the preferred design (which was featured in the last Newsletter), each with its own price tag, at present standing at around the £300,000 mark. This sum includes the capital cost of the building, Planning Application fees, professional fees (which will include architects, structural engineers, quantity surveyors, project management, supervision of construction and CDM planning co-ordinator). It includes a sum for a site investigation, as we have been informed by Hartlepool Borough Council that there may be former gas tanks below the site, which will need to be located and dealt with. We are also required to include the fees of an archaeologist, in view of the historic nature of the site.

The next stages are to meet with our architects to prune costs down as far as possible and, subject to Committee approval, to initiate discussions with ENTRUST regarding possible funding of the entire project under the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme (LTCS). We will also need to look for potential sponsors because under LTCS regulations we will have to secure 10% of the cost of the project from a third party. Appraising the likely ongoing revenue costs of maintenance and insurance will be vital in order to ensure that we can financially sustain the new observatory in the future.

2009 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Despite repeated requests, over 90 members have still not renewed their subscriptions for 2009. Members are reminded that, after March 31st, those who aren't fully paid up are no longer members of the Club and, therefore, no longer entitled to its benefits, including access to Dormans Pool, the Reclamation Pond and Crookfoot, which is by a VALID TBC membership card. They will also not receive a copy of the '*Cleveland Bird Report*'. Like many organisations, we depend upon prompt payment of subscriptions to help our financial viability and to enable us to conduct our business. We would greatly appreciate it if those concerned would pay their subscriptions immediately.

ACCESS TO THE 'TRIANGLE' AND BACK SALTHOLME

Over recent months, induction sessions for TBC members have been held at RSPB Saltholme, kindly organised and managed by Dave Braithwaite and Emma Birnie. Following these, those attending were issued with '*letters of agreement*' granting access to the causeway on Back Saltholme when the reserve is officially closed. Members signed these as an acknowledgement that they will abide by the conditions. The agreement was for the causeway only and, as made clear in the last Newsletter, members were requested not to wander on to other parts of the Reserve. This arrangement took time to negotiate and reflects goodwill on both sides to make it work. We have to accept that times have changed; the RSPB now own and manage Saltholme for birds not for birders and we cannot wander wherever we want, as we have done in the past. That said, the RSPB has tried to meet us more than halfway by granting us access to the causeway and, through a TBC volunteer wardening scheme, are willing to provide access to some hides out of hours. Apart from potential disturbance to breeding birds, the RSPB has significant health and safety issues to consider in granting special access arrangements and it is vital that we honour the agreement terms.

As many will have noticed from our Website, a small number of members has recently ignored the conditions and wandered on to other parts of the reserve. This is totally unacceptable and, if it continues, may result individual agreements being terminated, or, at worst, the arrangement being withdrawn altogether. It would be a great pity if all had to suffer for the sins of a few. Members are respectfully requested to abide by the terms of their '*letters of agreement*' for the benefit of all who wish to continue accessing this excellent area.

DURHAM BIRD CLUB HIDE AT BISHOP MIDDLEHAM CASTLE LAKE

Keys are now available to members of both our bird clubs at a cost of £6. Send a cheque with s.a.e. to :

Durham Bird Club
c/o 4, Leyburn Close,
Houghton-le-Spring,
County Durham,
DH4 5EF

Any queries to **Steve Evans**
Tel 07979 601231

Email mailto:stevieevans@btinternet.com

MORE VOLUNTEER WARDENS NEEDED

More volunteer wardens are needed to help man the hides at RSPB Saltholme. Their responsibilities will include welcoming and talking to visitors and helping those who need assistance in identifying birds. This is an interesting and rewarding activity and any assistance would be much appreciated by the RSPB.

In addition, more TBC members are urgently needed as paired keyholders for evening access to the Reserve and some of its hides when it is closed.

If you are interested in one, or both, of these positions **please contact the Reserve Warden, Emma Birnie**, at the Visitor Centre, RSPB Saltholme or by email emma.birnie@rspb.org.uk

INCA 20 YEARS OLD

As a corporate member of INCA (Industry Nature Conservation Association), the Club was invited to a celebration of its 20 years of existence in June at the new RSPB Saltholme Reserve. The event was used to publicise the launch of the second edition of *"The State of the Natural Environment of the Tees Estuary"*, or *SONET II* for short. This weighty publication runs to 200 pages and is crammed with data, which demonstrate the changes in the levels of atmospheric and aqueous pollution in our river and estuary. Trends in bird, fish and mammal populations are reported in such detail that it is quite impossible here to even briefly summarise the data held in this work. However, there may be individuals in the Club who want to know specific information. If so, they should contact me in the first instance and I can do a specific "look up" or, if this does not meet their requirements and they wish simply to browse the material, then a loan of the material can be arranged.

Alistair McLee

ORMESBY BECK FRIENDSHIP GROUP

I have been representing the Club at the inception of a group whose broad aims are to improve the environment for the local residents of Berwick Hills, adjacent to the Ormesby Beck. The other organisations involved are the Environment Agency, Middlesbrough Council and local people and businesses. By forming such independent groups, there is an opportunity for obtaining capital funding for programmes which would not be available to the local council alone (e.g. Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery, who use this opportunity already).

For those who do not know the area, it is a north to south orientated narrow strip of land bordered to the east by housing and to the west by the Middlesbrough-Whitby railway line. Some areas to the north end have already been converted into small reed bed/marsh reserves and wild flower meadows. However, much of the remainder is mown grass, abandoned allotments, relict hedging, some nondescript trees along the beck side and a big area of tall lush grassland. Despite this, it is remarkably rich in wildlife. The relatively clean beck holds the obligatory water vole and is a wintering site for Kingfisher and wagtail species. Fish species are stickleback and lamprey. Sparrowhawk hunted successfully at the time of our site visit and I am told that it nests in a tiny copse by the railway line. Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers use the area for summer breeding and the reed bed at the northern end holds Water Rail and the other usual avian inhabitants of such habitat.

The site has a variety of anti-social problems, some of which can be attributed to the sheer lack of amenity. Provision of vandal-proof facilities, such as skateboard and BMX cycle areas, would clearly be beneficial. I am expecting certain contentious points to arise concerning the retention of the long, rank grasslands area and the understandable annoyance of the local householders when it is set on fire towards the end of summer. Hedgerows of the type preferred for environmental and ecological benefits give rise to an atmosphere of seclusion and public unease and appear undesirable. Flash flooding of the beck is becoming a more regular problem. Attractive wildflower meadows, created in some areas, have been mowed inappropriately and, all too often, one sees such problems as initial capital money being available to start a job, but a lack of revenue or will to allow the benefits to continue.

However, it is early days, and the Club will continue its participation in this small but locally important project.

Alistair McLee

ARCHIVE MATERIAL

John Fletcher, our Sales Officer, is attempting to build up an archive of past TBC documents which chart the history and development of the Club, including bird reports, newsletters, newspaper clippings and monthly reports dating as far back as the birth of the Club in 1960. If any members have unwanted material that they wish to dispose of, please don't throw this away but please pass it to **John (Tel 01642 818825)**, who will be pleased to receive it.

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION 2010

Details of the Club's fiftieth anniversary celebration have now been finalised and the venue and performing artist have been booked. As mentioned in the last Newsletter, the event is to be held at the Riverside Stadium on Friday 26th November 2010 where we have booked the Riverside Suite overlooking the pitch. A Friday date has now been chosen to avoid any clashes with the football programme, details of which are not available at the present time.

The event will commence at 7.00 for 7.30pm, with complimentary welcome drinks followed by a welcome by the Chairman. We then have three guest speakers, all of whom will give their perspectives on the Club over the years, and this will be followed by a sit-down, three-course meal. After we have dined, there will be a performance by folk singer and comedian, Vin Garbutt, which members can watch from the comfort of their dining tables. There will a bar available in the Riverside Suite all evening for the purchase of drinks and we hope that the whole event will be enjoyable and relaxing.



Vin Garbutt

Courtesy of Routes Music

In order to help cover some of our costs, tickets will now be priced at £20 per person and approximately 145 tickets will be made available, leaving about 15 for invited VIP guests. To date, 60 members have expressed an interest in attending the event so please don't delay in putting your name on the list without obligation. A few months in advance of the event, we will seek to confirm orders and obtain payment.



Riverside Suite

Courtesy of Middlesbrough F.C.

If you are interested in the event, please contact:

Ted Parker

Tel 01642 275369

Email: ecparker@supanet.com

Alternatively, fill in and send the order form on page 25

TBC BESPOKE CLOTHING

Through our special arrangement with ARCO, members are reminded that they can purchase items of bespoke clothing at reasonable prices. The product range includes fleeces, polo shirts, baseball caps and hats. **All orders must be placed through Julie Mason and not through the store itself.** An order form is provided on **page 25** and this should be completed and sent to Julie with your order. Our bespoke clothing sports the Club's logo and, as well as being smart, warm and comfortable, it helps to promote our corporate image. The product range has a nice selection for presents for friends or family and a small percentage of the purchase price comes back to the Club to help further our work in promoting and conserving birds in the Cleveland area.



**SALE OF THE ORIGINAL COVER
PAINTING OF 'THE BREEDING BIRDS OF
CLEVELAND' BY ANDREW HUTCHINSON**

The Club wishes to sell the original cover painting of a Barn Owl at RSPB Saltholme by Andrew Hutchinson, which adorned the cover of TBC's widely acclaimed book, *'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland'*. The painting was specially commissioned and is unique, with the artist making a visit to the Reserve to ensure an authentic setting for the composition. The painting measures 32cm high x 21cm wide and the Club paid £500 for the full commission. The Committee has decided that it should now be sold to the highest bidder by a system of sealed offers, with the bids starting at three figures.

Anyone who is interested in making an offer for the painting should send their bids and contact

details in writing to: **Chris Sharp, 20 Auckland Way, Hartlepool, TS26 0AN** in a sealed envelope clearly marked 'TBC PAINTING BID', with your name and contact details on the back of the envelope, preferably by recorded delivery. Those not sent by recorded delivery will be acknowledged in writing as confirmation of receipt. The closing date for the receipt of bids is 30th September 2009 and to ensure that the process is fair, they will be opened by a panel comprising of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Honorary Secretary. The sealed bids will be opened on or after 1st October 2009 and an announcement of the winner will be made at our 5th October 2009 evening meeting. Please note that this offer is open to all, including non-members of the Teesmouth Bird Club.

Ted Parker



Andrew Hutchinson was born in Guisborough in 1961. On leaving school, he pursued his artistic interests and studied graphics and illustration for three years, before going on to work as an archaeological illustrator. In 1991, Andrew and his wife moved to the Scottish Highlands, where he had always found inspiration in the dramatic and unspoilt beauty of the Cairngorms. After 10 years here, they and their young daughter returned to his home county of North Yorkshire, to a country home where otters, badgers, foxes and a variety of wildlife are virtually on the doorstep. His success has been established by exhibiting among the world's top wildlife artists in exhibitions in America since 1994. He also stages a one-man show every year in his beloved Yorkshire. He has undertaken many commissions, including work for Land Rover, Barclays Bank, New York Botanical Gardens and the Automobile Association. The Duke of Edinburgh is counted among his many customers.

REPORTS ON LOCAL OUTINGS

RIVER LEVEN AT WEARY BANK BRIDGE, SUNDAY 26th APRIL 2009

This, now annual, event grows in popularity with sixteen turning up on a bright, relatively calm morning - a good listening day in short. The trip involved a walk downstream for about a mile and back again, closely following the river's course. Having such a large number present in the party makes it difficult for everyone to be on the spot when a sighting or a "listening" occurs.

This was no problem when a Common Buzzard appeared overhead and good views were had by all and the diagnostic V-profile was stored for mental reference should one be fortunate enough to see a Honey Buzzard soaring on horizontally held wings. The re-appearance of three Sand Martins was encouraging, as the species has not bred on the Cleveland stretch of the river after being washed out two years ago by unseasonable summer floods. Some of the rear of the party heard the prolonged, soft, purring drumming of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, which refused to repeat the business when the remainder of the group assembled at the spot. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were more accommodating and heard clearly for comparison on several occasions. The resident Green Woodpeckers were completely uncooperative but I was able to show the group some Meadow Ant nests that had been excavated by this species on the dry sunny slope of the ancient castle on the valley side. Some saw a female Goosander, whose behaviour suggested newly-hatched young nearby, so she was not pressed for better views. The usual suspects were also seen or heard: Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Marsh Tit, Jay, Blackbird and Song and Mistle Thrushes. What was a concern that neither pair of Grey Wagtails were present at their regular breeding sites and Chiffchaffs were very scarce. Kingfisher, although present, I do know is very much a sit and wait species and so I was not too surprised to miss the bird on this outing. I was also not surprised to see only one Grey Heron fly over, as the colony on private land upstream of the bridge had been mysteriously abandoned when I had surveyed it in March.

Orange-tip and Speckled Wood Butterflies were also seen and I was particularly pleased to come across a large colony of the locally rare Goldilocks Buttercup.

Alistair McLee

FLATTS LANE WOODLAND COUNTRY PARK, TUESDAY 5th MAY 2009

Twelve members and visitors took part in this morning walk in the woodland and scrub surrounding the Flatts Lane Visitor Centre at Normanby. The weather was fine, giving promise of a good morning's bird watching although, in the event, the birds disappointed a little with fewer species seen than on the equivalent visit in 2008. At least this year one of the specialities of the site, Grasshopper Warbler, could be heard 'reeling', although no-one managed to get a view of this elusive bird. Blackcaps and Common Whitethroats were seen, although Lesser Whitethroats and Garden Warblers, known to be on the site, remained hidden. Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff were singing throughout the morning and a nest of the latter close to a path could be clearly seen by all. Around the feeding sites were Yellowhammers, Bullfinches and Marsh Tits. This is the area where bird traps were found earlier in the spring and members were shown the site and reminded of the value of vigilance when bird watching. Another speciality of the site, Green Woodpecker, was heard in an area to the east of Flatts Lane where it had been very active all spring and was presumed to be nesting. An enjoyable walk in pleasant surroundings concluded at lunchtime.

Geoff Myers

NIGHTJARS IN GUISBOROUGH FOREST, SATURDAY 6th JUNE 2009

Approximately 26 people turned up on a cold and windy night, conditions which did not auger well for watching Nightjars. Sure enough, no birds were seen at the traditional site above Hutton Village and 4 or 5 roding Woodcocks were scant compensation. Next year, we will switch this trip to the new site, where there are now more options.

Mark Askew



LOCAL OUTINGS – SUMMER/AUTUMN 2009

*The following local outings have kindly been arranged for members by **Chris Sharp** during the summer and autumn of 2009. They include a variety of sites. Please contact individual leaders of the trips if you are interested in attending. We would like to thank all the leaders who give up their time for the benefit of our members.*

SEA WATCHING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Saturday 8th August 2009

Join Chris Sharp, Ted Parker and Don Page from 8.30 am to 11.30 am 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 9.30 am 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**.

RINGING AT HARTLEPOOL

Sunday 27th September 2009

Meet at 8.30 am at the Bowling Green, Hartlepool Headland and join Chris Brown and Mike Gee to witness the trapping and processing of birds caught during the morning. At this time of year almost anything could be caught depending on the wind direction. Hopefully, there should be some of the common passage migrants, such as warblers and flycatchers but, if the conditions are right, expect the unexpected. For further details ring **Chris on 01429 233474**.

SOUTH GARE

Tuesday 13th October 2009

Join John Sharp looking for migrants at this well-known hotspot. With favourable conditions, a good selection of birds should be seen including winter thrushes, finches, warblers and pipits. Meet at the Pilot Station at South Gare at 10.00

am. For further details ring **John on 01287 633976**.

HURWORTH BURN AND CROOKFOOT RESERVOIRS

Sunday 15th November 2009

Join Chris Sharp for a look around these two reservoirs. At this time of year a good selection of ducks should be found, along with a few geese. Meet at the car park at Hurworth Burn Reservoir at 9.30 am, which is on the Elwick to Trimdon Road. For further details ring **Chris on 01429 865163**.

SEAL SANDS

Saturday 5th December 2009

Join Julie Mason to look out onto Seal Sands from the excellent hide at the Power Station. A good variety of ducks, waders, grebes and divers can be expected. Meet at the Teesmouth Field Centre at 10.00 am. For further details ring **Julie on 01642 614583**.

Please Note: We are looking for new leaders to take members on short outings to give our current leaders a well-earned break! If you have a favourite local patch and would be willing to lead a short trip, please contact **Chris Sharp (01429 865165)**.

MEMBERS' AUTUMN DAY TRIP

A day trip has been organised for members on **Sunday 20th September 2009**. The planned itinerary to East Yorkshire includes a visit to North Cave Wetlands in the morning and Blacktoft Sands RSPB Reserve in the afternoon. At this time of the year, a wide variety of species is anticipated, particularly waders and raptors, along with Blacktoft's specialities, Bearded Tit and Bittern. The trip will be led by **Julie Mason** and we are proposing to use the same pick-up points as on the previous trip, as follows:

Hartlepool (M & S Car Park) 8.15am

Stockton (Swallow Hotel) 8.35am

Middlesbrough (Dorman Museum) 8.55am.

Please ensure that you arrive promptly at your preferred pick-up, as, regrettably, the bus cannot be held up for late arrivals. Forty-nine seats are available on the coach, the cost being £12 per person, plus an entrance fee to Blacktoft Sands for non-RSPB members (£3.00 adults and £1.00 concessionary). Please bring a packed lunch, drinks and appropriate outdoor clothing and footwear. If you wish to book a place, please send a £5.00 non-refundable deposit to: **Julie Mason, 11 Redmire Road, Stockton, TS18 4JR (Tel: 01642 614583; email: juliemason@redmire1.freemove.co.uk)**.

Please book early to avoid disappointment, as seats will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis.

TWO WEEKS IN THAILAND

Graham Megson and **Mark Askew** recently visited Thailand and the Middle East, and in this feature Graham describes some of the birding highlights.



Graham (left) and Mark in UAE

Mark Askew and I headed out to northern Thailand in February 2009, which is the dry season, and the weather was exclusively hot, sunny and calm. Although our trip was focused on wildlife, particularly birds, we inevitably absorbed a certain amount of culture, not to mention Bangkok's challenging traffic system!

Being new to South-east Asia we did a bit of homework but still had an overwhelming multitude of birds, songs and calls to go at. We had a few particular birds that we wanted to see – otherwise we just made the most of what we were able to find. Everyone had told us about the Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo stakeout at Khoa Yai National Park and we had extended views of this rare, but frankly uninspiring bird.

We selected a few key sites to visit, based on a wealth of Internet information, especially the Thai Birding website. Indeed, we were able to thank its creator, Nick Upton, personally when we met him in the field. Amongst the many birders and others we met, was Chris Goodie, the British birder who is attempting to see all of the world's species of pitta this year (as mentioned in *'British Birds'*). We will follow progress on his website with interest.

Pushing jet lag to one side, we started on the afternoon of our arrival by driving our hire car to Muang Boran fishponds, just south of Bangkok. Our second day started at the Pak Thale salt pans, where we faced the challenge of picking out the rare waders (Turnstone) from the common ones (Red-necked Stint)! Mark soon turned anxiety to delight by locating two Spoon-billed Sandpipers. This was a target bird for us, especially after reading in the April issue of *'Birdwatch'* about the worrying breeding decline in Russia.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Graham Megson



Long-toed Stint

Mark Askew

We took a most enjoyable boat trip out to the Laem Pak Bia sand spit, where plovers were the order of the day, with the newly described and possible full-species White-faced Plover, as well as Malaysian and Kentish Plovers. There was also a good wader roost and a solitary Chinese Egret, a globally threatened species.



Chinese Egret

Graham Megson

That evening found us at the King's Project Reserve, which is an area of gardens, ponds and mangrove forest. We saw plenty of birds, as well as metre-long monitor lizards, the prehistoric-

looking mud skippers and hundreds of fruit bats leaving their roost.

Over the next week we spent several days at two national parks, Khao Yai and Kaeng Krachan. At Khao Yai, we coincided with a public holiday and the campsite was more like Glastonbury, including campfires and all-night singing. Brown-backed Needletail here was a swift that I had always wanted to see.

Pittas are extraordinary birds and require a different type of birding, with eyes to the ground and ears focused on rustling leaves and, at Kaeng Krachan, we saw one of the prettiest, a male Blue Pitta. Alas, we did not fare so well with the skulking pheasants and saw just a brief male Silver Pheasant for all our efforts.



White-gorgeted Flycatcher

Graham Megson

After taking an internal flight north to Chang Mai, we spent time at three sites: Doi Chiang Dao, Doi Angkang and Doi Inthanon. Birding mostly in woodland and parkland, we enjoyed Giant Nuthatch, Slaty-bellied Tesia, exciting thrushes and challenging Eastern warblers. Our final Thailand tally was 301 species, plus seven heard only (mostly owls).



Butterflies, Thailand

Graham Megson



Crab Plovers, UAE

Graham Megson

Our flight with Emirates gave us the opportunity to stop off for two days in the United Arab Emirates and over two days we travelled 1,000 km, visiting desert wadis, parks, beaches and camel race tracks, notching up 84 species of bird, one of the most impressive of which was the enigmatic and rather odd-looking Crab Plover, the only wader that nests underground!



Mark

Graham Megson

Did you know.....

Thailand has over 900 species of birds, nearly 10% of the world total.

(Source : www.thaifocus.com)

THE JOURNEY TO TEESMOUTH

*In this nostalgic feature, **Ken Baldridge** reminisces about his first visit to Teesmouth, which is fascinating for its account of the 'old' Tees landscape before its rapid reclamation from the later 1960s onwards.*

I was born in January 1937 in Darlington, the younger of two sons by three years. Our house was in the outermost street on the western edge of the town, so the countryside began over our back garden's six-foot fence. The two of us, together with other kids in the street, found all our amusements and spare time daylight activities outside "up the lane" and "over the fields". In so doing, we noticed the birds, animals, insects and amphibians, and we got to know them. The die was cast!

I remember many trips to Darlington's Library and Museum to collect books on animals and birds, or to gaze in wonder at the Polar Bear in the Museum. Later, we would be allowed into the Reference Library to discover the joys of Archibald Thorburn's paintings; so much more attractive than those in my little Observers Book, half in colour and half in monochrome. Since both our parents came from Teesside, it was there that we went with our mother on weekends throughout the years of World War II. The Dorman Long Museum was quite close to our grandmother's house and next to it was Albert Park, with birds on the lake.

We had both joined the Junior Section of the Darlington and Teesdale Naturalists' Field Club (DTNFC) and this Society gave our developing interests a further boost. They had excursions and even a bird leader! We hung on his every word. The library of the DTNFC had some wonderful treasures, which we soon discovered; every member's observation in the "*Nature Notes*" part of each week's meeting was recorded into the minutes by the faithful and reliable secretary. We could borrow earlier minute-books and find out what birds had been seen and where; an immaculately long-hand treasure trove of information.

A slim volume in the DTNFC library which the Club had published in the 1930s always took our breath away. It was called "*The Birds of the Tees Valley*", a mine of information on local bird sites like Darlington Sewage Farm and Teesmouth, what you could see there and when. Also in the Club Library was a two-volume set of Nelson's "*Birds of Yorkshire*". This book really launched us to the coast. We had seen the Nelson collection in the Dorman Long Museum, we had even taken our drawing books in and made sketches of all our favourites. I think that book

pointed us towards the Yorkshire side of the estuary. We had been to Redcar with an aunt and seen terns; I had even seen a pair of Arctic Skuas on the sands there and wrote a message in the sand with a stick!

But where was the Estuary of Nelson?

I am not certain where my brother got the exact route of our Teesmouth (South Side) visits from. I know I first accompanied him December 1947, at the age of 10 years 11 months; he had been previously with a school friend from Darlington. We took the train to Grangetown and got off there, left the platform, went under a subway and emerged with a piece of former Teesmouth mudflat on our right; on our left was a slag heap of considerable proportions, perhaps the highest one in the area. I think we read somewhere of visiting birds of prey perching on the slag – to the eyes of a ten year old this could have been the one (possible sources either Nelson or Birds of the Tees Valley). We walked two sides of this roughly square mudflat and then emerged on the seawall of the South Side of the river. This was a long bank of slag, which led towards the large, dark industrial plant at Warrenby or Dormanstown (both names seem to come to mind). Tidal mudflats on our left, green marshes on our right seemed to reach as far as the railway line between Grangetown and Redcar. At high water the ships went up river in the main channel (closer to the sea wall on the south side than to the Greatham sea wall, as we would discover later). Redshank and Shelduck were in the marshes and Knot, Grey Plover and Bar-tailed Godwits I remember on the mudflats (the word "*slems*" comes to mind – a local name for mudflats perhaps?). The seawall path brought us fairly close to the plant before swinging to the left, crossing a slag area (the base of Redcar Jetty perhaps) before we reached the road from Redcar to the South Gare. Mind you, being avid seekers of dead birds we often preferred the tide-line route along the inner side of the Gare. I remember in February 1950 my first ever Twite, a group of 30 or so alongside this path close to the works. They were seen there on several visits.

We would eventually arrive at the breakwater, passing the Lagoon known as "*The Ducky*" on the right, then "*Paddy's Hole*", the small harbour, on the left. The Ducky was a regular Snow Bunting site, sometimes with flocks of 200, and it was also where my first Shorelarks appeared (I got an older brother's rebuke for clumsily flushing them once!).

At the end of the Gare was the Lighthouse Keepers' Station. The Keepers had befriended brother Alan and his pal on earlier visits when I had not been present and they were always ready

with enormous mugs of tea for us to have with our lunches. I remember being very impressed with all the polished metal inside the inner room. I remember Charlie for his wide and constant grin and prominent teeth; the other keeper, whose name I do not recall, was older, quieter, and I think, the senior man. They had a large brass and leather telescope with which to read ships names, but we were allowed to look at special birds with it, under supervision. I had no binoculars; Alan, through his efforts as a paperboy, had a pair of 6 x 30 Ross – but our first Great Northern Diver looked fine through the keepers' telescope. After we'd had our lunch, we thanked them and said our goodbyes and headed back along the Gare to get onto the beach and head for Redcar, often along the tide-line looking for dead birds; in March 1950 we found our first Little Auk corpse.

One visit to South Gare that I will never forget (although not for any birding reason) had begun like many others. On our way to visit the keepers we had walked along the shoreline among the slag looking for anything of interest. Now, as we walked along the top of the Gare, after our usual lunchtime visit, we heard shouting coming from

the gun emplacements on the seaward side of the breakwater. An officer in uniform was yelling at us to lay down flat where we were, then we noticed a crowd of people beyond the gun emplacements and we realised that they were going to fire the guns. Looking out to sea, I noticed a grey warship towing a large vertical lattice-like target. The guns roared and we heard the shells pass over and then saw the tall splashes in the water near the distant target. We put our fingers in our ears and flattened ourselves as much as possible, and waited for it to end. At last it was quiet, the officer approached and was not pleased with us but at the same time he realised we had unwittingly shown him a flaw in his security arrangements.

Our joining the DTNFC also brought a further benefit to our birdwatching; we had the opportunity to join the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union on one of their excursion. Alan and I went on these and so we met Ralph Chislett, the leading Yorkshire ornithologist, a well-known author and photographer. (*"Northward Ho for Birds"*, published in 1933, is on my shelves still). He was also the compiler of the Yorkshire Bird Report each year, so we were able to get copies



Seal Sands, pre-1974 reclamation

M.J.Hudson

of previous years from him. Careful study of other records for Teesmouth led us to interesting initials – other Teesmouth birdwatchers! So Alan made contact with Philip John Stead, another Teesmouth birdwatcher. Phil's father had a car, so they were able to visit both sides of the estuary. I first met Phil in August 1948 and on that first day we all went to the South side.

I think I went to the North Side of the estuary for the first time on 30th May 1948. We walked from the Transporter Bridge to Greatham Creek, the first of many visits. I was impressed with the far-reaching, flat expanse of drained marshes with their winding creeks and occasional pool; the whole area was covered in tall wooden towers which showed where the wells were from which the salt was extracted; scattered across the whole area were the concrete posts erected in World War II to deter glider landings.

We explored the sea walls and sat on the coastal defence pill boxes left over from World War II. We often met the bird shooters, their shooting butts made of slag were all along the top of the sea-wall. They were in use by the shooters when the rising tide in the estuary forced the curlews to leave the mudflats for Cowpen or Greenabella and they would only cross over the seawall at a considerable height, if any bird was not high enough a volley of shots would ring out and the bird would crumple and fall. Often though, the legs swung down or a wing drooped and the wounded bird simply glided away to land beyond the shooters' reach out on the mud. On every visit we made we saw birds that had been shot and died later, washed ashore or running about dragging a wing in the water and mud. Alan once told me the shooters travelled upstairs in the bus with the safety-catch off in case a target appeared. If we were having our lunch on the sea-wall as the tide was rising, we would sit out in full, noisy view so the curlews flew even higher, and when there were no shooters about we felt free to knock butts down. Yes, the shooting was bad even on a Sunday.

In early 1952, I was walking along the sea wall from Graythorpe to Greatham. I had borrowed my brother's latest acquisition, a Broadhurst Clarkson 'deer stalker' telescope. I felt pleased as I had seen my first Glaucous Gull near North Gare already, now from the sea wall I could see a pair of Red-breasted Mergansers, another new one. I extended the scope and advanced, then got down into the slag boulders for some great views. I watched them for a long time it seemed until abruptly they flew off downstream. Carefully I climbed back up onto the path and there, just a few yards away heading my way, was a large policeman on his bicycle, I could even hear his

laboured breathing. He pulled up and looked carefully at me and, especially, the telescope. He thought he'd caught an illegal shooter and was realising his mistake but he was not quite ready to admit defeat so out came his catch question. *"If you are birdwatching, who is Peter Hogg?"* I could answer truthfully that he was a Hartlepool birdwatcher, although I had not met him my brother had. Reluctantly the policeman got on his bicycle and turned round to return to the road; it must have looked a long way. But it was a sign of the times, things were changing, the shooters' time was drawing to a close and the time of the Teesmouth Bird Club was coming.

THE NEED TO GET A HOBBY

*In this feature, **Keith Robson** takes a light-hearted and interesting look at birding as a hobby in more ways than one!*

Being retired leads to all sorts of new opportunities; being appointed chauffeur to one's adult children, for example. Following a drive to deliver my daughter to London, I stayed in Buckinghamshire and having a spare day I Googled *"Where to watch birds in Buckinghamshire"*. The search produced College Lake Wildlife Centre and further reference to *"The AA/RSPB Complete Book of British Birds"* suggested Tring Reservoirs. Being retired, I have not succumbed to twitching, though I do try to see species which are resident British but elusive, e.g. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Hobby. College Lake's website list of highlights included *"dragonflies and hobbies hunting over the marsh, in summer"*.

My spare day was 19th June 2008. I set out for Tring Reservoirs from near Great Missenden to travel along the A413 towards Wendover. What a start to a day's birdwatching – a Red Kite soaring over the verges of the road, low enough to see its beautiful colours and markings on a clear sunny morning. In this region the Chilterns' Red Kites, the result of the first English reintroduction scheme, are numerous and it would be very unlucky not to spot one on a visit to this area. Tring Reservoirs consist of four reservoirs, two of which adjoin the towpath of the Grand Union Canal, so there is a variety of habitats: trees and hedgerow aligning the canal, reedbeds at the edge of the reservoir, rafts for breeding Common Terns and the open water. I walked along the canal towpath, rather than follow one of the trails around the reservoirs. My highlights were Pied Flycatcher, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Common Terns, Grey Wagtail, Chiffchaff and more Red Kites. Almost as enjoyable to watch as the birds were the narrowboats climbing and descending the locks on the canal. A local birdwatcher told

me that Wilstone, one of the four Tring Reservoirs, was the best place to view Hobby, however I was set upon College Lake, as its origin as a chalk quarry made it sound different and interesting.

College Lake is only a mile or so from Tring Reservoirs. It is managed by Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, and in my opinion, very well managed. Along the two miles path around the disused quarry there are numerous hides. I walked only about a quarter of the way and visited six hides, all of which looked down into the quarry and a variety of habitats. Water covers the bottom of the quarry but there are scrapes and deeper water and islands. The sides are variously wooded, grassed and bare chalk. One bare chalk cliff was particularly interesting; pipes had been inserted into the chalk to encourage Sand Martins to nest. However, one pipe appeared to have been taken by a pair of Kingfishers. After a lengthy wait for the latter to make an appearance, a commotion at the top of the cliff caught my attention. There was a "*right kerfuffle*" and I saw what can only be described as a cock-fight. The nearer bird had its red-brown back to me and was largely hiding the other bird, which was losing the fight. The loser disengaged itself, shook its beaten-up feathers and flew off presenting a dark slate grey back. I immediately thought of Hobby but a short flight took the bird into trees and out of view. Returning to the victor, I identified male Kestrel. After further searching for the Kingfishers I continued my walk, passing around the back of the cliff. From a purpose-built viewpoint at the other side of the cliff I noticed that the Kestrel was still perched on the cliff edge. I looked at it through my binoculars to see if it had been injured in the fight but it looked OK and to prove the point flew off. Almost immediately, it was replaced by another bird and a quick look through the binoculars revealed (at last) a Hobby, unmistakable with its white face markings. I went for my telescope but very inconsiderately it flew off behind trees. Disappointingly, it did not reappear to demonstrate its red trousers or its dashing flight. In consolation, however, a life-tick is a life-tick. Presumably the cliff-top edge was a favoured vantage point from which both Kestrel and Hobby could hunt.

If I return to this area I would try to make it in May. I was told that the record number of Hobbies seen in the air at the same time over Wilstone reservoir was 27. The teller had had 8 this year, with an all-time record of 12 previously. Other highlights at College Lake were Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, a Kingfisher (eventually), female Blackcap and many dragon-and damselflies. A local photographer told me

that it was "*a quiet day*", with the gusting wind discouraging butterflies, but he told where to see bee orchids. Seeing these exotic flowers was another first for me.

Any birdwatcher with a couple of days to spare would surely enjoy a full day at each of the two reserves which I visited. Next time I visit, I want to see a development of my hobby – not least its red trousers and dashing flight!



Hobby, but a juvenile and no red trousers!

Ian Forrest

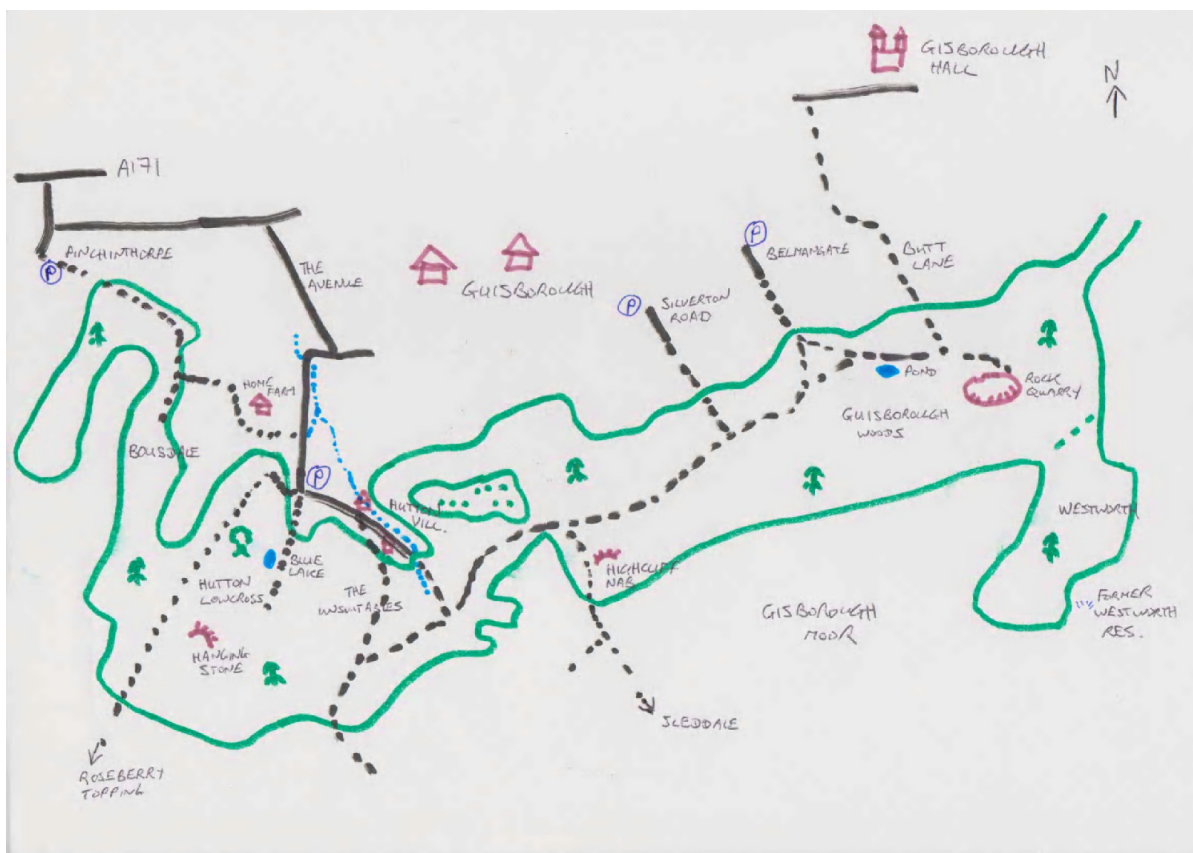
GUISBOROUGH FOREST

Mark Askew reviews this large and important site in the southern part of Cleveland, an area he knows very well. The forest holds a number of breeding species that are locally very scarce and offers the best chance of seeing them. It is now the subject of a long-term management plan by the Forestry Commission to improve its value for recreation and wildlife.



Background

The area covered by this site guide stretches from Pinchinthorpe to the west of Guisborough to Slapewath to the east, a narrow but steep stretch of around 4 miles along the escarpment adjoining moorland. It includes the 470 hectares of Forestry Commission-managed woods of Bousdale, Hutton Lowcross, Hutton, Kemplah and



Map of Guisborough Forest

Guisborough, plus the privately managed Westworth Wood at the southeast corner of the forest. All of the forest lies within the boundary of the North York Moors National Park.

Apart from some older plantations on ancient woodland sites at Bousdale, the majority of the forest was planted in the mid to late 1950s. The planted forest is approximately 85% conifer and 15% broadleaf. Larch predominates in the lower parts of the wooded escarpment, whereas Scots pine is prevalent on the tops and back towards the open moorland. There are some pockets of deciduous woodland that pre-date the plantations, though only in steeper gulleys, for example above Hutton Village. There are significant plots of planted beech woodland and also some oak and sycamore.

The forest is currently undergoing a major transformation, based on the management plan adopted by the Forestry Commission that aims to raise the amenity profile of the forest, creating a more open woodland for leisure use and increasing the proportion of broadleaf to the benefit of wildlife, including birds. This is already yielding dividends, with the recent establishment of Nightjars and a general increase in the diversity of species found.

Location, Access and Strategy

The Forestry Commission-managed woodland has generally open access, although parts may be closed off during harvesting work. Most people access the forest from the north, near Guisborough itself. There is a car park at Pinchinthorpe (NZ 583153) and the visitor centre here is open daily and is a good source of maps and general information. The road to Hutton Village is also popular and, though parking in the village can be awkward, there is usually space on the roadside just past Home Farm on the way up from Hutton Gate at NZ597142. Two roads lead off the housing estate at southern end of Guisborough, giving an easy walk into the central portion of the forest. For Westworth Wood and the eastern part of Guisborough Forest, the best options are either Butt Lane near Guisborough Hall, or from Little Waterfall Farm near Slapewath at NZ633159. A less frequented but interesting option involves a walk or cycle in from the moorland to the south, for example via Percy Cross Rigg or up Sleddale valley.

Once in the forest, there are several 'roads' that enable rapid progress and also plenty of paths that get you amongst the trees and hence the birds. The Cleveland Way skirts the western end of forest and enters near Highcliff, exiting at

Slapewath. This is well maintained and cuts through some of the most interesting parts of the high level woodland. Vehicular access is refreshingly very restricted, though if on foot on the forest roads it is advisable to be watchful for the occasional forestry vehicle or farmer accessing their land. The forest is popular with horse riders, mountain bike riders and dog walkers; all generally get along together fine but it is worth bearing in mind that whilst some paths are barred to bikes and horses, a few others are meant for bikes alone, so pay attention to any signage.

Birds

Whilst much of the original forest is of a similar age, felling in recent years and subsequent replanting or regeneration has created a much more varied age profile and this change will continue for the next few decades. This is having an inevitable effect on the bird population, improving diversity but perhaps reducing the density of some of the common coniferous woodland species, such as Coal Tit. Much of the lower level forest will be kept as continuous cover woodland, with thinning as it matures. There are few real 'hot spots' for birds, the most popular parts tend to be closest to the access points but some of the shyer species may be easier to locate higher up away from most visitors. Try any of the following general areas:

Pinchinthorpe Walkway: The disused railway here is good for warblers, most of the regular breeding 'scrub' and woodland warblers can be seen along the section leading into the forest but Lesser Whitethroat is more regularly found by heading in the opposite direction, under the A173 towards Nunthorpe. The pools south of the visitor centre sometimes have approachable Kingfisher or Water Rail in winter, but may only be of interest for dragonflies in summer.



Hutton Village: The road to the village and the surrounding land is probably the most popular area of the forest with birders. Approaching from Hutton Gate, it's worth stopping near Sandwood Park for Nuthatch and Spotted Flycatcher, plus

possibly Dipper on the stream that runs under the road. Sadly, Hawfinch seems to have died out here in the last few years. The open parkland/farmland along the road to Hutton Village is good for both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Spotted Flycatcher.

Parking near the turning to Home Farm, you have the option of entering the forest in one of three directions and walking a circuit. The path to the southwest leads into an area with a high proportion of broadleaves, which has held breeding Wood Warbler, but this is a rare bird nowadays; more likely are mixed finch flocks in winter, including Brambling. Blue Lake here is too small to attract much waterfowl but may be worth checking for dragonflies. Continuing up the path you can eventually find Hanging Stone, a distinctive millstone grit outcrop which is a good vantage point for views over the forest. In a Crossbill year, watching and listening from such a vantage point will help pinpoint their feeding areas. There isn't a great variety of raptors in the forest, but Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are common. Goshawk has been proved to breed but remain rare, the best tactic would be to get to a high point on the moorland to the south and view over the forest in early spring. Common Buzzard sometimes wanders over the forest and should become established in the future.

A little further up the road, at the entrance to the village, a track known locally as "*The Unsuitables*" heads steeply up into the forest and ultimately out onto the moorland along Percy Cross Rigg. The track passes through the area where Nightjars became established a few years ago; the young plantation here is past the optimum age and there are now better areas for this characteristic nocturnal bird. It isn't appropriate to be any more specific for such a nationally scarce bird, suffice to say they have quite specific habitat requirements so finding your own Nightjar isn't too difficult. Woodcocks are more or less guaranteed to be displaying at dusk in summer and in this area they seem to be in particularly high density.

Back on the road through Hutton Village, motor vehicles are restricted beyond the gate at the end of the village. The village itself attracts Nuthatches, finches and Jays. The woodland behind the houses and up the hill occasionally attracts Wood Warbler, most recently in 2008. It is a good area for Spotted Flycatcher and the stream to the east of the road usually holds Grey Wagtail; try the small waterfall down the track at NZ 602138.

The track up the hill to the south can be taken to access either Highcliff, by turning left at the top, or "*The Unsuitables*" by turning right.

Highcliff: This is another well-known sandstone outcrop, situated on the Cleveland Way at NZ 610138. This area can be accessed from Hutton Village as described above, or from paths into the forest off Hunters Hill estate in Guisborough, for example via Silverton Road at NZ 616147. As well as affording stunning views of the forest and out to the coast, the storm-damaged woodland behind here towards Highcliffe Farm seems to attract more than its fair share of interesting birds. Examples include Tree Pipit, Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart. The moorland in this area can be productive, especially in winter, with occasional Short-eared Owl, Hen Harrier and Merlin. Breeding birds on the pasture and moorland here include Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe and Golden Plover, plus well scattered pairs of Stonechat. Cuckoos continue to haunt the moorland/woodland border areas. The scrub below Highcliff holds breeding Garden Warbler and the crags occasionally attract Fulmars, but there is a little too much disturbance to hold them for long.



Guisborough Wood: This area, accessed easily from Silverton Road, Belmangate or Butt Lane, and has a good mix of woodland and open areas, plus a small pond that attracts dragonflies in late summer. Flocks of Siskin and Redpoll are common in this area in winter, feeding on larch cones especially. Both Lesser and Common (Mealy) Redpolls can be found in winter and whilst Lesser is currently at a low ebb as a breeding bird, the large amount of birch scrub cropping up on cleared areas now may see a resurgence. Siskins also nest in the forest and although hard to pin down in the summer, this or the Highcliff area, are as good as any. Both Willow and Marsh Tits are resident but thinly distributed. The higher areas towards Westworth, including the long disused Rock Quarry, have recently been clear felled and will not be replanted, so those birds such as pipits that like more open areas should find the area to their liking.

Westworth Wood: This privately managed wood now stands apart from Guisborough Forest due to

recent felling. It is more remote and has a different character, due to the presence of grazing sheep. The Scots pines here often hold Crossbills, even in poor years. At the southern end of the wood, the former Westworth Reservoir is now merely a tiny pool, though the stream and damp areas can be attractive to dragonflies. Tree pipits and Stonechats inhabit the woodland edge.

Mammals and Insects

Roe deer are common in the forest and often seen or heard early in the morning or around dusk. Badgers are present though seldom seen. The forest ponds hold the more common dragonflies, such as Southern Hawkers, and Golden Ringed Dragonfly has been seen. Butterflies include Ringlets, Small Copper and, recently, Speckled Wood. A good range of moths is apparently present.

PROFILE – JAMIE DUFFIE

*Jamie Duffie is the person behind the Club's nationally acclaimed Website and a very active local birder and moth enthusiast around the Tees Estuary. **Ted Parker** spoke to him to gain an insight into his birding life.*



Jamie was born in Middlesbrough on 3rd January 1968 and now lives at Hartburn, Stockton. He is an IT consultant by profession. He started birding in 1978 and, amazingly, one of the first birds he saw in his early days was a Terek Sandpiper on the Long Drag – by any standards an excellent bird to start off your birding career! Jamie's experience, coupled with the length of time he has been actively birding, is reflected in his impressive Cleveland List, which currently stands at 335.

Jamie's favourite local patch is the North Tees Marshes, which he likes for the diverse mixture of birds and people. His favourite other Cleveland birding site is Seaton Snook, which sadly is

marred by too many dog walkers who constantly flush all the birds and the dog dirt polluting the environment. Jamie's optics are Leica 10 x 42 binoculars and a Swarovski ATS 65HD 'scope with a 30x and 45x eyepiece. His choice of photographic equipment is based on the results that Ian Forrest achieves and he has recently upgraded to a Canon 40D camera with a Canon 400mm 5.6L lens. When quizzed about his favourite bird book, Jamie cited the same one revered by many other birders, *'The Collins Bird Guide'*, which he finds a great reference that can fit into his pocket. The book has lived in his car since he obtained a copy on its release.

Jamie's main associated interest is Moths, in which he took up in 2001. After the initial hard learning curve using the then only field guide written by Bernard Skinner (which covers the 800 species of macro moths), he says he is slowly moving on to the daunting 2,000 types of micro (very small) moths that inhabit the UK. A good cross-section of the moths that inhabit the Cleveland area can be seen on Jamie's website <http://www.vc66.co.uk>. His recommendation for the best moth field guide today is that by Waring, Townsend and Lewington, which he considers to be far superior to that by Chris Manley; he feels that the latter can be very misleading on the identification of the smaller moths, leading to many mistakes being made.

The most impressive birding site Jamie has visited is Sabine Wood in Texas, which he says is a fantastic area full of American warblers during migration. Nearby, Anahuac was also an exciting area. Regarding his best day's birding in Cleveland, Jamie cannot recollect a specific one, though he does remember being on the Scillies when Cleveland's only Red-eyed Vireo, a rare North American vagrant, turned up at North Gare! He considers his best personal find in Cleveland to be another rare bird of North American origin - a Franklin's Gull in June 1991. His most memorable bird was the Roller at South Gare in August 2006, as it just didn't seem to be something that would turn up in Cleveland.



Roller, South Gare

Ian Boustead



Tengmalm's Owl, Sweden

Ted Parker

The bird Jamie would most like to see in the future is Tengmalm's Owl. His most embarrassing moment took place many years ago when he went to see a Little Crake at Shotton in Cheshire. The bird never showed but while waiting for it to appear he decided to go for a walk around the edge of the deep muddy creeks. On making his way back through the muddy maze, he was confronted with a 5 feet deep and 8 feet wide creek and, not being bothered to find a way round it, he took a nearby plank of wood and placed it across the creek. He started to cross this in front of a few hundred birders now watching him as there was nothing better to look at: needless to say, the plank broke when Jamie was half way across.....! His biggest birding disappointment was knowing about Cleveland's famous Long-toed Stint on Back Saltholme in 1982 but not going to see it on his bike. In fact, his first trip to the Estuary on his bike was two weeks later for a Pectoral Sandpiper.

When asked about future changes he would like to see concerning birds or birdwatching, Jamie couldn't think of anything in particular but was forthcoming about the Teesmouth Bird Club. He thinks that it *"is a great club that does a lot for conservation"* in terms of commenting and liaising on potentially harmful development; however, he would like to see more practical work for the benefit of birds, such as setting up some feeding stations. In terms of changes to the local environment, Jamie would like to see out-of-hours access to RSPB Saltholme developed more fully by the RSPB for TBC members, particularly as the Club has had free access to the Saltholme area for well over 50 years. He sees positive benefits from this, including reporting crime (as has been done in the recent past) and greater recording of birds on the Reserve.

Regarding his aspirations for the future, Jamie would like to improve his identification ability for plants, as his lack of skills in this area often hinders his locating some insect species.

(See next page as well...)

Editor's comment on above: The Committee fully endorses Jamie's view about the Club being more involved in active, practical conservation work and members will note that we have already included this as one of our targets in the new Five-Year Plan (2009-14).

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2009 SUMMARY

Overall coverage was perfect, with all 78 sector counts undertaken.

Both great crested grebe (39, June) and tufted duck (292, April) produced new spring record peaks, while the gadwall maximum was the second highest figure on record at this season. By contrast, the peaks for teal (116, April), shoveler (38, June) and coot (285, May) were all the lowest in spring for a decade or more.

A reasonable passage of small waders was recorded by the May count, with both ringed plover (221) and sanderling (351) maxima being the best since 2003. Dunlin also fared well, with a respectable count of 418.

However, for several other waders this proved to be a dismal spring, with all-time seasonal lows returned by oystercatcher (300, April), redshank (235, April) and turnstone (66, April). Other notably poor performers were lapwing (182, June) and bar-tailed godwit (9, April), their worst spring peaks since 2002 and 1999 respectively. Not a single knot was recorded by WeBS all spring!

Common and little terns were present in average numbers, but sandwich terns remained decidedly scarce, the 24 counted in June constituting the lowest spring peak on record.

Following this series of counts, sanderling regains its nationally important status in spring.

Mike Leakey

Local Organiser
Tees Wetland Bird Survey

Species	April 19	May 10	June 7
Little Grebe	21	14	<u>28</u>
Great Crested Grebe	34	26	<u>39</u>
Cormorant	38	42	<u>96</u>
Mute Swan	66	65	<u>91</u>
Shelduck	325	<u>326</u>	266
Gadwall	105*	87*	<u>159</u> *
Teal	<u>116</u>	0	30
Mallard	164	211	<u>224</u>
Shoveler	33	21	<u>38</u>
Pochard	<u>58</u>	56	32
Tufted Duck	<u>292</u>	198	141
Eider	<u>20</u>	4	0
Coot	262	<u>285</u>	276
Oystercatcher	<u>300</u>	259	265
Ringed Plover	12	<u>221</u> *	18
Golden Plover	<u>1</u>	0	0
Grey Plover	0	<u>4</u>	2
Lapwing	87	132	<u>182</u>
Knot	0	0	0
Sanderling	40	<u>351</u> **	45
Purple Sandpiper	<u>2</u>	0	0
Dunlin	4	<u>418</u>	10
Ruff	<u>4</u>	0	0
Snipe	<u>12</u>	2	0
Black-tailed Godwit	3	<u>5</u>	2
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>9</u>	0	1
Curlew	<u>244</u>	50	79
Redshank	<u>235</u>	37	36
Turnstone	<u>66</u>	27	5
Sandwich Tern	5	4	<u>24</u>
Common Tern	0	141	<u>536</u>
Little Tern	0	<u>17</u>	1

Underlined counts in the table indicate Spring 2009 maxima.

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

NB 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay and the RSPB Saltholme Reserve

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

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