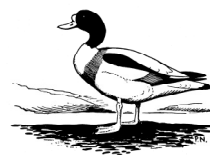


Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

April 2010 (No.45)

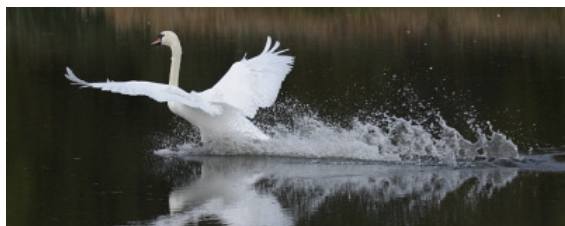


Reg. Charity No.508850

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Where's the swan? See page 20

MONTHLY SUMMARY

Chris Sharp reviews the winter period of 2009-10, which proved to be one of the coldest for over 30 years, with many water bodies completely frozen over, both at sea level and around the Tees Basin. Please note that the Summary is merely a diary of events and records of scarce or rare species have yet to be ratified by the Teesmouth Bird Club's Records Sub-Committee. Thanks must go to all those photographers whose excellent images embellish this feature.

NOVEMBER

Two Jack Snipes were on Greenabella Marsh on 1st and a Black Redstart was at the Jewish Cemetery, Hartlepool on the same date.



Black Redstart, Hartlepool Headland

Mick Brennan

The wintering Twite flock returned to Greenabella Marsh on 2nd, when 36 birds were reported but numbers reached over 100 as the winter progressed. A Slavonian Grebe showed well at RSPB Saltholme from 2nd, as did 1 or 2 Jack Snipes from the Bottom Tank on the reserve. The latter gave many observers a chance to observe these birds on the ground rather than the usual brief flight views after being flushed from underfoot. Several parties of Whooper Swans passed through Cleveland from the 3rd: 31 were at RSPB Saltholme on this date, with a further 15 over the Tees Bay on 6th and 29 over Saltburn on the same date. A Great White Egret was seen briefly on Greenabella Marsh on 4th, before flying off north. Twenty-five Waxwings were by the A66 at Thornaby on 6th. This was the only record of this species in the latter half of the year in stark contrast to 2008, when a large invasion took

place. Ring-necked Parakeets continued to thrive in the Ward Jackson Park area at Hartlepool, with up to 16 reported.



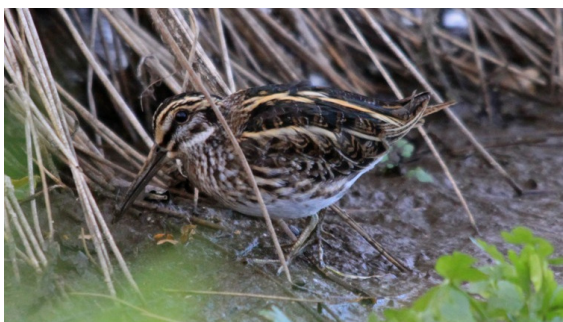
Twite, Greenabella Marsh

Dave Johnson



Twites, Greenabella Marsh

Ian Forrest



Jack Snipe, RSPB Saltholme

Tom Horne



Whooper Swans, Tees Estuary

Dave Johnson

A late Swallow was over Saltholme on 6th. The following day, a Cetti's Warbler was at Bowesfield Marsh. This was only the second Cleveland record, following one that over-wintered at Dormans Pool in 2005. Amazingly, over the next few weeks, at least 5 more Cetti's Warblers were discovered: 2 at Coatham Marsh and singles at Haverton Hole, Dormans Pool and the Long Drag. Most of these remained to winter. Although a highly elusive species, these birds could often be heard calling at length. A late Pectoral Sandpiper was at RSPB Saltholme from 7th, along with 19 Barnacle Geese. A Black Redstart at Hartlepool on 8th and 9th was the last throw of a poor autumn for passerine migration. A male Hen Harrier was flew through at Hummersea on 10th.



Dark-bellied Brent Geese, Greenabella Marsh

Ian Forrest



Smew, Crookfoot

Mick Brennan

Mid-month saw 2 Dark-bellied Brent Geese around Greatham Creek and a Long-tailed Duck on Seal Sands. Up to 30 Snow Buntings were between Seaton Carew and North Gare and 2 redhead Smews at Crookfoot Reservoir on 15th remained into 2010. Two Green Sandpipers were at Billingham Beck, Portrack on 15th.

A pair of 'Northern' Bullfinches was at Dorman's Pool on 21st and a female Scaup was on Seal Sands on 23rd. The flock of sea duck off Hartlepool began to build up late in the month and included single Velvet Scoter and Long-tailed Duck. Another Great White Egret was on the Long Drag on 28th and the same day also saw

473 Pink-footed Geese fly south at Hartlepool and a Great Northern Diver off Parton Rocks. A strong northerly wind on 29th produced a good sea-watch off Hartlepool Headland, with 3 Great Northern Divers, a Black-throated Diver, 11 Great Skuas, 1 Pomarine Skua, 2 Little Auks and a Puffin. A Great Northern Diver was at Jackson's Landing on this date, being joined by a second bird the following day and a short-staying Hooded Merganser, the latter relocating to RSPB Saltholme later in the day.

The last day of the month saw 10 Velvet Scoters, a Long-tailed Duck and a Slavonian Grebe off Hartlepool Headland.



Great Northern Diver, Jackson's Landing Renton Charman

DECEMBER

A Pomarine Skua was on the beach at Steetley, Hartlepool on 1st and on the same date 4 Whooper Swans were at RSPB Saltholme and 4 Water Rails were showing well on the Long Drag. Seawatching at Skinningrove on 4th produced an impressive 4 Black-throated Divers, part of a large, recent movement of divers along the coast (e.g. 41 at Skinningrove during 2 hours on 8th). A Long-tailed Duck commuted between the Reclamation Pond and Seal Sands and 1 or 2 Bitterns were regularly reported from Haverton Hole. The two Great Northern Divers were still at Jackson's Landing, with one remaining into 2010.



Black Redstart, South Gare

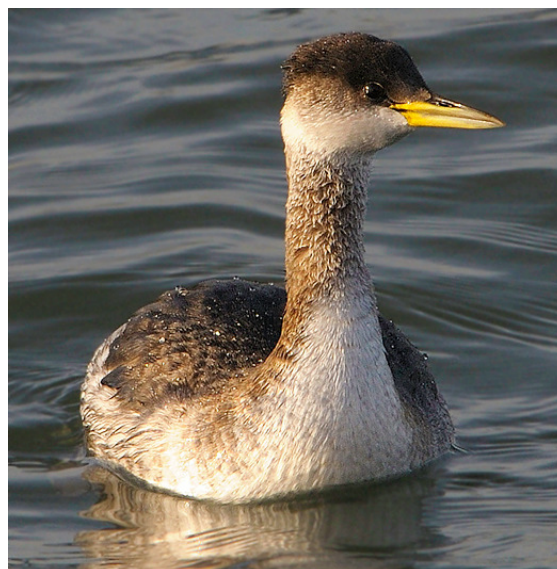
Ian Boustead

A Black Redstart at South Gare was also present into the New Year. A Water Pipit was at RSPB Saltholme on 9th and Twite numbers peaked at an impressive 141 on Greenabella Marsh on 12th. Cowpen Marsh held up to 4 Little Egrets at this time, along with 9 Water Pipits and a Green Sandpiper. Two Whooper Swans were at the same location on 15th and a ringtail Hen Harrier was at Scaling Dam. The flock of Snow Buntings at South Gare reached 117 on 17th.

Mid month onwards saw the weather turn extremely wintry, with heavy snow and freezing conditions for over four weeks. The North Tees Marshes were frozen over, as were the upland reservoirs at Lockwood Beck and Scaling Dam. A Red Kite was over the Long Drag on 19th and a first-winter Glaucous Gull was at Cowpen Bewley Landfill. In contrast to last winter, white-winged gulls were very scarce in our area. Fifty Twites were at RSPB Saltholme on 19th and 4 Long-tailed Ducks were off Redcar Stray.

The most noticeable species affected by the cold weather were Skylark and Woodcock. The former were seen more and more as the winter progressed, foraging for food on beaches and in urban areas. Despite the cold weather, few uncommon birds were noted in the last ten days of the month. Single Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese were at RSPB Saltholme and there were 6 different Mediterranean Gulls between Seaton Carew and Newburn. A male Goshawk was seen hunting Woodpigeons at Coatham Stob on 27th and a Slavonian Grebe was at South Gare on 29th. An immature Whooper Swan was over the Tees Barrage on the 31st and the Great Northern Diver remained at Jackson's Landing into January 2010.

JANUARY



Red-necked Grebe, Hartlepool Headland

Dave Johnson

As usual, year-listers were out in force on the first day of the year on which a Lapland Bunting was at South Gare, along with the wintering Black Redstart. Both Slavonian and Red-necked Grebes were offshore. Hartlepool Headland also had a Slavonian Grebe, along with the wintering 3 Velvet Scoters. Up to 100 Pink-footed Geese were briefly near Cowpen Bewley Landfill and 2–3 Tundra Bean Geese were found amongst them. The same area proved attractive to Brent Geese during the month, with up to 30 Pale-bellied and 2 Dark-bellied reported. A first-winter Glaucous Gull was at the same location on 2nd and a Lapland Bunting was over nearby Cowpen Marsh. The following day, a large movement of Skylarks was noted over Cowpen Marsh and a single Woodlark and 4 Lapland Buntings were identified amongst them.



Water Rail, RSPB Saltholme

Mick Brennan

With the pools on the North Tees Marshes frozen, Water Rails became more obvious than usual and up to 6 could be seen at RSPB Saltholme, along with 2 Bitterns. A ringtail Hen Harrier was over the Peninsula on 4th and then over Greenabella Marsh on 9th. Several skeins of Pink-footed Geese were noted at this time, with 500 over RSPB Saltholme on 7th. A Lapland Bunting was at South Gare, along with about 100 Snow Buntings and the wintering Black Redstart. A Waxwing was over Skelton and the presence of 18 Woodcock here on 7th was an illustration of the large numbers of this species reported during the first half of the month. Several small groups of Bramblings were also seen and Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park attracted up to 4 to the feeding station, along with an impressive 80 Tree Sparrows. Two Mealy Redpolls were also here on 8th. A single Whooper Swan was over Saltburn on 9th, with another at South Gare on 12th. A first-winter Glaucous Gull at Saltburn remained into February and redhead Smews were at Coatham Marsh, Reclamation Pond and Greenabella Marsh. An unseasonal Great White Egret flew over the A66 at Long Newton on 11th.

Mid-month saw 4 Little Egrets roosting in Rossmere Park. A Yellow-legged Gull was at

Cowpen Belwey Landfill on 16th and a Rough-legged Buzzard was reported from Sleddale on 18th, with 1 or 2 Hen Harriers there the following day. Bitterns were seen at Coatham Marsh and PetroPlus Pools and the Hooded Merganser remained around here for the rest of the winter. Its origins are still the subject of much debate. A drake Ring-necked Duck was at Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park on 23rd, where it remained for the rest of the winter, although it would often go missing for several days. A Black Redstart was found wintering at Newburn on 27th and was joined by a second in early February.



Black Redstart, Newburn

Renton Charman



Glaucous Gull, Saltburn

Neil Lay



Bonaparte's Gull, South Gare

Chris Bell

The rarest bird of the month was an adult Bonaparte's Gull which was at South Gare on 29th for a only couple of hours - long enough to be added to several observers' Cleveland Lists, as this was only the third record of the North American *Larus*. A Little Gull and 4 Mediterranean Gulls were also present at this time. Potentially even rarer was a probable American Robin seen briefly at New Skelton by two observers the following day. Sadly, it could not be relocated over the next few days. A Black-necked Grebe on Seal Sands was more obliging and remained into March, often giving close views in Greatham Creek.



Mediterranean Gull, Hartlepool

Ian Forrest



Great Northern and Black-throated Divers, Jackson's Landing

Ian Forrest



Great Northern Diver, Jackson's Landing

Ian Forrest

FEBRUARY

A Black-throated Diver joined the long-staying Great Northern in Jackson's Landing from 2nd for a few days, allowing rare, direct comparison between the two species as they swam side by side! Meanwhile, 2 Red-necked Grebes offshore around Hartlepool Headland, an adult and a first-winter. As usual, a Green Sandpiper wintered on Billingham Beck, near Portrack Roundabout. Great Crested Grebe numbers built up off Newburn early in the month, peaking at an impressive 71 birds. A probable Long-billed Dowitcher at South Gare on 7th was another 'mega' Cleveland bird that was, unfortunately, not seen again.



Goosanders, Belasis Hall Technology Park

Ian Forrest



Goosanders, Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park

Ian Forrest

Goosanders were a feature at this time, with several small flocks at favoured locations such as the Belasis Technology Park, Charlton's Pond and Wilton Lake. Four Tundra Bean Geese were briefly at RSPB Saltholme on 8th, and 22 of the larger and more impressive 'Taiga' variety were equally brief visitors on 13th before relocating to North Yorkshire. A single Waxwing was over New Skelton on 15th. A second-year Iceland Gull was on Seaton Common on 18th, with a different individual at Cowpen Bewley Landfill the following day. Twite numbers peaked at 123 on Greenabella Marsh at this time and a ringtail Hen Harrier was again at Sleddale on 20th. An adult

Yellow-legged Gull was at Cowpen Bewley Landfill from 22nd to 23rd and now that the regular adult has seemingly disappeared from the Tees Barrage this will become more difficult to see in Cleveland. A Lapland Bunting was at North Gare Sands on 25th, while nearby, on Seal Sands, Great Northern Diver, Black-necked Grebe and Long-tailed Duck could all be seen.



Taiga Bean Geese, Saltholme

Tom Francis

At the end of the month, 9 Barnacle Geese were on Cowpen Marsh on 27th, with 2 on Seaton Common the following day. A Black-necked Grebe was off Hartlepool on the last day of the month and Cetti's Warblers were still at Bowesfield Marsh and Dormans Pool. One wonders whether this species will soon be added to the breeding birds of Cleveland.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

BIRD CONSERVATION ISSUES

The Conservation Sub-Committee has had a busy period reviewing and commenting on various official documents and providing bird data to assist research.

The Sub-Committee is currently reviewing Hartlepool Borough Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy Options Report (out for consultation from 29th January to 26th March 2010) to see what implications it has on birds in the Hartlepool area. As part of this process, we are currently providing comments and data on a large area around Brierton, on the southwestern fringe of the town, which has been earmarked for potential housing after the abandonment of the North Docks/Victoria Harbour area.

We have been made aware of an ecological study to be carried out by consultants on the northern half of Dormans Pool in connection with Northumbrian Water's strengthening of potable water supplies in the Seal Sands area. The first phase of this supply will involve the construction of a 400mm diameter twin supply pipe from Saltholme Substation eastwards along the A1185 and terminating approximately 850 metres along Seal Sands Road. Part of this work will involve

the construction of a water main pipe bridge over the railway line which lies to the east of the A185 Seaton Carew Road. Having only just completed a 5-year Management Plan for Dormans Pool in 2009, involving a large amount of research and on-site survey work, we have suggested to the consultants that they may tap into this, if required.

The Sub-Committee has completed a full review of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council's list of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) contained within its draft Local Development Framework. Most of these are based on botanic criteria and so we have added ornithological data to underline the ornithological importance of many of these. We have also identified several new sites not included on the original list. This information has been passed to Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, which is co-ordinating the review of LWS in the Tees Valley on behalf of the 5 unitary authorities.

THE PHIL STEAD MEMORIAL HIDE

Following collaboration between the Club and RSPB, the Committee is delighted that a bid for a hide dedicated to the memory of Phil Stead has now been submitted to the Impetus Trust. If successful, the hide will be ordered and constructed after the forthcoming breeding season. It will be located on the site of the present temporary screen overlooking Bottom Tank. This is an ideal location, not only because Saltholme was a place Phil particularly loved but Bottom Tank has produced some excellent birds over the past year, often at very close range. It has tremendous potential for waders, enhanced by water level management by RSPB. The Committee is grateful to Alistair McLee and those staff members of the RSPB who put the bid together. At the time of writing, we have yet to hear whether it has been successful or not.

TEMPORARY NEW VENUE FOR MEMBERS' EVENINGS

Since January 2010, our temporary venue for evening meetings has been in the Ebsworth Building of the University on Stockton Riverside. The University has made us very welcome and the venue has proved to be a good substitute for Stockton Library, though we do intend to move back to the latter as soon as its refurbishment is complete. The first meeting of the year was severely affected by the very bad winter weather, with only 26 braving the elements. Our February and March meetings were much better attended and had 73 and 56 attendees respectively. Please continue to support the evening meetings, which are arranged for members to socialise and enjoy informative and entertaining talks. Our target is

to achieve at least 70 members per meeting and, to date and since September 2007, we have achieved this on 14 occasions. We made the strategic decision to leave the 'Billingham Arms' after many years, due to adverse feedback from members, and we hope everyone is pleased with the improved facilities, so please continue to support us.

COMPUTERISATION OF BIRD RECORDS

As long-standing members will be aware, for many years the Club has used a paper system for submitting records for inclusion in the 'Cleveland Bird Reports'. Whilst this has generally worked quite well, the system is now outdated, time consuming and has outlived its usefulness. A specially convened Working Party of members has, therefore, been established to appraise various computerised recording systems with a view to gradually switching to the electronic submission of records during 2010. This group comprised Tom Francis (Cleveland Recorder), Graeme Joynt (Editor of the 'Cleveland Bird Report'), Ali McLee (Chairman), Ted Parker (Vice Chairman), Don Page, Jamie Duffie (Website Manager) and Neil Lay, a professional IT consultant and member of the Club who has kindly offered his services to help move this project forward.

The key aims of the electronic system will be to:

- largely replace the cumbersome, outdated paper system;
- record all Cleveland bird records by species, date, location and supporting comments on a database large enough to cope with the volume of records over time;
- 'interrogate' the database to provide information for internal use or for external bodies that pay for our data;
- set up a simple, electronic bird recording system on the TBC's website and to ensure that records from this are easily transferable to the database, and
- act as an aid to research work.

The security and integrity of data, both in terms of input and storage, will need to be fully addressed in whatever system we finally choose and we are aiming to keep things as simple as possible. For those who don't have access to a computer, they will still be able to submit their records in the usual way on record cards so that these records aren't lost. These will then be added electronically to the database by one of the system managers.

Once we have a computerised system up and running for the submission of new records, we

intend to start inputting the vast amount of historic data we hold, currently held in numerous shoe boxes, through a group of willing volunteers!

We are extremely grateful to those who are assisting with this momentous project.

Ted Parker

Vice-Chairman

HARTLEPOOL OBSERVATORY

Ted Parker reviews progress to date on this highly ambitious project – the first of its kind in the UK

Following a meeting in Newcastle with Vice-Chairman, Ted Parker, our architects, JDDK of Newcastle, have carried out a further review of the initial cost estimates for the four options for our new build sea watching facility at Heugh Lighthouse with a view to making reductions where possible without affecting the overall quality of the building. They have also appraised the options with a view to recommending a preferred construction method, taking account of long-term maintenance costs, as these will vary significantly depending on the materials used. The steel option, for example, will require a special anti-corrosive paint application and an ongoing, costly commitment to repainting every 4 or 5 years.

The Committee considered the architects' comments and have agreed to progress the scheme by:

- *Omitting the refurbishment of the existing foghorn building from the scheme and having a stand-alone, new build structure.* Access for the able-bodied to the new building will now be via an external staircase. The disabled will gain access by a ramp and internal lift.
- *Deciding on the GRP (fibre glass) option,* despite this being the most expensive to construct. This decision was made on the basis of low, ongoing maintenance costs. This option will involve casting the shell of the building in a mould, which will make it much easier to achieve, smooth, curved profiles and will allow a through-colour to whatever finish we choose. There will be no future painting commitments, which will drastically reduce future costs. This method will also permit the use of local boat-builders and enhance the profile of the scheme regionally.

The Committee has requested some final clarification from JDDK on VAT (we are unsure whether 'new build' projects and the fact that we are a Charity will exempt us), the projected lifespan of a GRP structure, any constructional

problems anticipated with this option, overall professional fees (for design, contract preparation and management, site supervision, Planning Supervisor and Quantity Surveying services and any Structural, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering inputs.

Following this, we will be seeking funding for the total costs of the scheme. Since the original estimates were prepared, we have established that, because TBC is a Charity and the building will be used for non profit-making activities, VAT will be recoverable. This brings the overall cost of the GRP option down to £273,000. Chairman, Ali McLee, has already been doing some preliminary exploratory work on potential sources of funding and it currently appears that the most viable opportunity will be through the Heritage Lottery Fund, though it is probable that we will have to introduce a community element into the after-use of the building if we go down this route, which could have positive benefits.

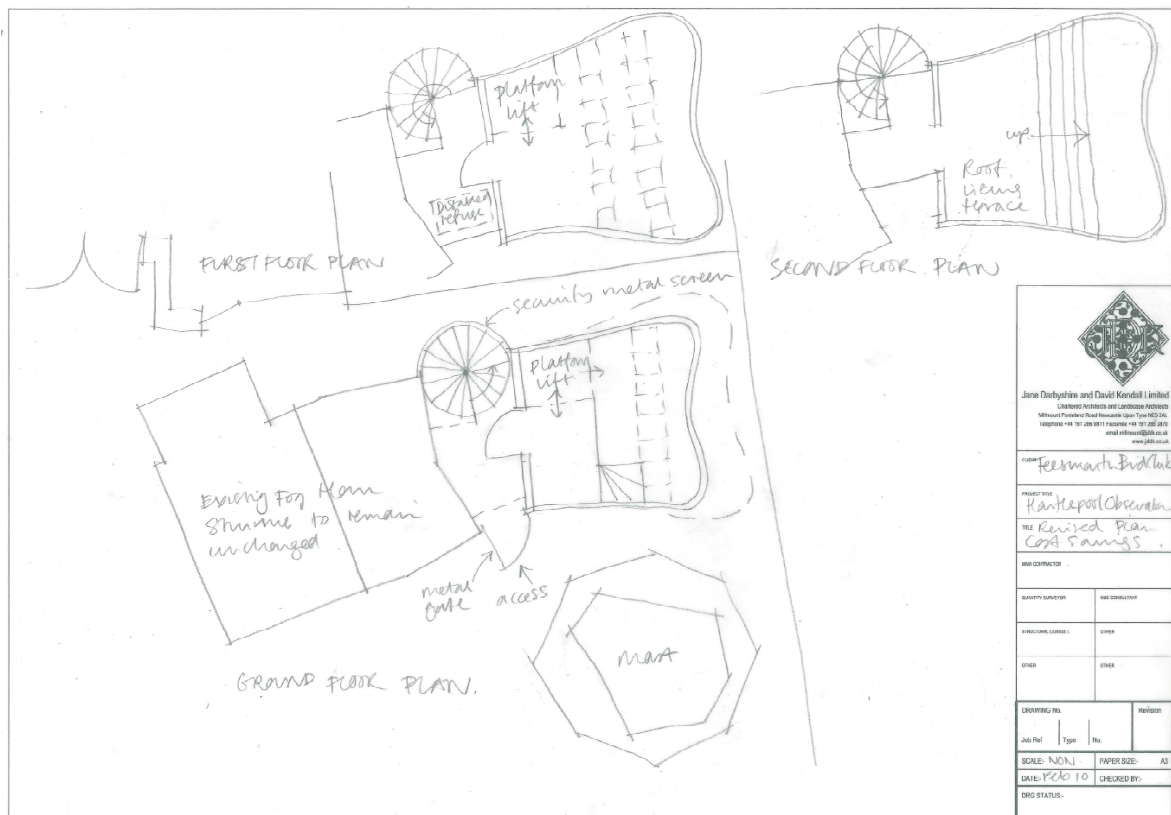
If the project goes ahead, we believe it will be the first ever bespoke sea watching facility to be built in the UK. Its unique, flowing design, prominent location in a Conservation Area and use of local boat-building techniques will make it extremely 'marketable' regionally and nationally, as well as providing a much-needed facility to replace the one we lost.

TBC PROTESTS AT THE CLOSURE OF THE OLD A178 GREATHAM CREEK BRIDGE ACCESS ROAD



Birders who regularly visit Teesmouth will have noticed that access to the old A178 on the south side of Greatham Creek road bridge has been blocked off by the erection of two concrete bollards. This action has suddenly been taken by Natural England, supported by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Highways Department, under the guise of "Health and Safety" after many years of historic vehicular use of the old road without any recorded problems.

Our main concern is that access to the bridge is now denied to disabled members and non-



Sketch of the layout of the proposed Observatory

members who need their vehicles from which to view Greatham Creek and surrounding area. Natural England consider that they have adequately catered for the disabled by the provision of disabled spaces within the TNNR car park on the north-bound carriageway on the west side of the A178, 150 metres or so before the bridge, and by the resurfacing of the existing surface to make it wheelchair-friendly. This ignores the fact that wheelchair-bound birders or those with significant mobility problems now have to leave their vehicles in the car park, cross the extremely busy and dangerous A178, with cars hurtling down at much greater speeds than the 60 mph limit, and then push themselves 150 metres up a gradient before they even reach the top of the old bridge. At least five disabled birders have contacted the Club in dismay to say that they are unwilling to cross the A178 from the TNNR car park by wheelchair and would not be able to push themselves uphill to the top of the old bridge, an area that they used to access easily by car. Consequently, they can no longer visit this excellent site. In a recent presentation by Natural England at our March members' evening, it was stated that a significant part of the organisation's remit is to ensure "access for all" to the environment; it is hard to reconcile this statement with the recent events.



View of A178 from the TNNR car park

To say that many members of the Club were surprised and disgusted by Natural England's action would be an understatement. The bollards were installed on Monday 30th November 2009 and we were only notified of the works by email the previous Friday (27th), which gave us no time to lodge an objection. The timing of the notification over a weekend break was at best misguided, or at worst deliberate and has done little to foster good relations between our two organisations. Presumably, the lack of notice reflects the fact that Natural England knew how unpopular its action would be.

Since the bollards were erected, letters of protest have been sent by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of TBC, and by Mr R. A. Crombet-

Beolens, Founder Chair of the 'Disabled Birders' Association' (now 'Birding for All'). Despite pointing out in detail the problems faced by the disabled, reasoned requests for the removal of the bollards have fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, Natural England actually believes it has improved the situation: in view of this, it would seem unlikely that any of its staff involved are themselves disabled or have a full understanding of what it is like to be disabled. The long-standing 'informal' vehicular access arrangement to the bridge caused no problems in the past and could have remained in place with an appropriate surfacing material for vehicles and pedestrians had it not been for Natural England's insensitive attitude.

In terms of the TNNR as a whole, Natural England would be better directing its energy and resources towards the prevention of illegal activities in the Tees Estuary, particularly bait-digging and beach 'coaling', both of which cause huge disturbance to feeding shorebirds but yet go on unchecked year after year. Actions such as that at Greatham Creek will do nothing to foster good relationships between Natural England and Teesmouth Bird Club, which have been strained over past years due to certain previous actions and attitudes by staff responsible for the management of the TNNR. It is totally non-conducive to birders and, indeed, other disabled people seeking to enjoy the vista from this elevated vantage point.

TBC intends to take further action on behalf of disabled members and non-members. A petition has been raised and has been signed by a significant number of local birders who understand and sympathise with our stance. If you would like to add your name to this, please contact our Chairman, Ali McLee, or Vice-Chairman, Ted Parker, whose contact details are on TBC's website.

HEN HARRIER BREEDING ATTEMPT 2010 – NORTH TYNE DALE REGION

The Club has been approached by site co-ordinator, Steve Temperley, to publicise the arrangements for this season's wardening procedures. In the critical early stages of breeding, all birders are requested to refrain from visiting the site or even looking for harriers if they are unaware of the precise location. Disturbance at this time could cause the pair to relocate to a less amenable area. Once the pair is well established into the breeding cycle, controlled viewing will be possible, ideally in small groups. For details of visiting or volunteer wardening please contact Steve on 07748 077031 or email at stephen.temperley@rspb.org.uk

Alistair McLee

**DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE! BOOK NOW
FOR THE TBC 50th ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION**

The Club's 50th anniversary celebration is on Friday 26th November 2010. The event is now not far off and the Committee is gearing up to finalise the arrangements. To do this, we now need firm bookings from members who wish to attend. Those who have already put their names forward in 2009 as expressing an interest will automatically be reserved tickets, unless they advise otherwise. To date, we have 77 tickets available and these will be issued on a first-come-first-served basis. It is very important that we receive firm commitments, as we want to avoid people dropping out at the last minute, thereby preventing others who wanted to attend from enjoying the evening. Late notification of non-attendance will also increase the overall costs to the Club: the Committee has agreed to subsidise the cost of the evening to the tune of £2,000, this sum being over and above the income from sale of all of 140 the ticket allocation. Dress is informal, as we want the event to be relaxed and enjoyable, so members can wear what they feel most comfortable in. There will be a number of invited VIP guests from regional organisations who have had close associations with the Club over the years. **All requests and payment for tickets must be received before the closing date of 31st OCTOBER 2010.**



Vin Garbutt
Courtesy Routes Music

The event is to be held in the Riverside Suite at the Cellnet Stadium, home of Middlesbrough Football Club. The content of the celebration has been described in previous Newsletters: in essence it will start at 7.00pm with a welcome drink and proceedings proper will start at 7.30pm with a welcome from Club Chairman, Ali McLee, followed by three speakers who will give anecdotal recollections of the Club during its development over the past half century. These will be followed by a pleasant three-course dinner, with guests seated at circular banqueting tables overlooking a dais from which comedian and singer, Vin Garbutt, will give an hour's performance after guests have finished eating. There will a short closing address by the Chairman to end off the evening. Throughout the evening there will be a bar within our Suite from which to buy drinks.

An application form is on Page 31.

TBC BESPOKE CLOTHING

Items of clothing bearing the Club's logo can be purchased at any time from Julie Mason. The current product range, price list and order form are on **Page 31**. The clothing is both stylish and very reasonably priced.

Please note that the order form is for internal TBC use only and should not be used to purchase clothing direct from ARCO. All orders must go through Julie, please and cheques should be made payable to 'TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB'.

**SALE OF TBC LIMITED EDITION PRINTS,
CARDS AND POSTCARDS**

Limited edition prints, greetings cards and postcards depicting the front cover of '*The Breeding Birds of Cleveland*' are still available from John Fletcher. Only 200 of the A3-sized prints were produced and are excellent value at £20.00. They make an excellent gift, particularly when framed, and will accrue value once all copies have been sold, as they are based on the original painting by nationally acclaimed artist, Andrew Hutchinson. We have almost sold out of the A5 greetings cards but, if there is sufficient demand, we may have another print run. They are highly functional and can be used for birthdays, Christmas cards or notelets. They are good value at £5.00 for a pack of 10 cards. The smaller postcards are 60p each.

Orders can be placed with **John Fletcher at 43 Glaisdale Avenue, Middlesbrough, TS5 7PF (Tel: 01642 818825).**

Limited edition prints and greetings cards are also on sale in the shop at **RSPB Saltholme**.

'Birds of Cleveland'

by Martin Blick

This well-researched book covers the status of the 362 species of wild bird found in Cleveland up to the end of 2007.

The book is available to TBC members for £16, a discount of 20% off the full price. It can be obtained from Martin (martin.blick22@yahoo.com) or from the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust at Margrove Heritage Centre, Margrove Park, Boosbeck TS12 3BZ

Tel **01287 636382**

Email info@teeswildlife.org

BTO BUSINESS-BIRD CHALLENGE 2010 : REQUEST FOR RECORDS FOR SITES IN CLEVELAND

HUNTSMAN TIOXIDE

As in previous years, Huntsman Tioxide has entered Greenabella Marsh for the BTO-Business Bird Challenge for the area shown on the map (Page 30). Members are please requested to submit records of **all** species sighted during the year, not just waders and wildfowl. These should be sent to **Tony Marron CMIOSH, IMS SHE Officer, North Tees, SABIC Europe, IMS Workshop Offices, Middlesbrough, TS2 1TT** or email him at: tony.marron@sabic-europe.com

A sponsored birdwatch in connection with this is to be held on Sunday 23rd May 2010 (please see the separate feature for details).

SABIC

SABIC has joined Northumbrian Water, Huntsman Tioxide and British Energy in the Business Bird Challenge, run every two years by the British Trust for Ornithology. Members are requested to send **all** bird records throughout the year on the area defined to the north by Greatham Creek, the west by the A178; the south by Seal Sands access road, and the east by the Long Drag. Outside these boundaries is a strip of land east of the Long Drag, which is also part of the survey area. This includes the Tidal Pool and reed beds and willow scrub running to the south on either side of the Long Drag, as shown on the map (Page 30). All viewing should be from the existing access routes of the Long Drag and the Greatham Creek pathway, only. Records should be sent to : stewart.l.swales@sabic-europe.com

NORTHUMBRIAN WATER

Scaling Dam has again been entered for the Challenge, having come second in its class in 2008, which was a remarkable achievement bearing in mind the competition. Members are requested to record all sightings in the logbook and to tick off species on the master list in the hide at Scaling Dam. The sightings are being collated by Martin Blick and Ted Parker, who both sit on the Scaling Dam Wildlife Advisory Committee and records can also be passed on to them.

HARTLEPOOL NUCLEAR POWER STATION

Julie Mason is co-ordinating the bird records for Hartlepool Power Station site for the BTO-EDF Energy Business Bird Challenge 2010. Please send all your records of birds using the area shown on the map (Page 30). Julie will be sending in records every quarter. The minimum observation is the presence of a species on site,

but if possible please send a count. The Hartlepool Power Station recording area starts at the access roundabout on the Tees Road to the land behind the power station (excluding the horse field) and the right-hand side of the Zinc Works Road as you are travelling down towards the Sand Merchant's Yard at the bottom. Birds can also be recorded if you are using the outlet area in Hartlepool Bay (on the left-hand-side of North Gare, marked by flag structure and usually surrounded by gulls) and also around the inlet in Seaton Channel, on Seal Sands. Please post your sightings on the thread on the Forum, email your sightings to me, pass on your sightings to me at the Club Meetings or post paper records through the Teesmouth Field Centre letterbox. Julie's contact details are: 11 Redmire Road, Stockton, TS18 4JR

Tel: 01642 614583

Email: juliemason@redmire1.freemove.co.uk

For these sites, any relevant records should also be sent to the Cleveland Recorder, Tom Francis. Updates on the progress for each location will be given in future Newsletters.

NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT POST ANY SENSITIVE BREEDING INFORMATION ON THIS THREAD. Thank you for your help.

SCALING DAM AND LOCKWOOD BECK RESERVOIR BREEDING BIRDS SURVEYS

Northumbrian Water is carrying out breeding birds surveys in 2010 for these two important water bodies in the National Park, which they own.

Members are requested to please record any evidence of breeding during your visits, including singing/territorial males, display, nest-building, mating and young birds for **all** species.

Recording should also include the area of Scaling Dam that lies outside of the Cleveland boundary (i.e. the eastern two-thirds). Records for this site can be included in the logbook in the hide, or, for both reservoirs, sent to Martin Blick on email:

martin.blick22@yahoo.com

Northumbrian Water would like to thank members in advance for their assistance.

Ted Parker

Scaling Dam Wildlife Advisory Committee



Greylag family at Scaling Dam

Eric James

GREENABELLA MARSH - A SPONSORED BIRDWATCH BY HUNTSMAN TIOXIDE ON SUNDAY 23rd MAY 2010



As in previous BTO Bird-Challenge years, Huntsman Tioxide has kindly offered to sponsor our Club in return for a day's intensive bird recording on Greenabella Marsh on Sunday 23rd May. During the day, we would like as many members as possible to visit the site and record all species they see, including *passerines*. As the sponsorship is on a 'per species' basis, the more species we record the greater Huntsman Tioxide's chance of winning their Challenge category and the greater the income to the Club. The event also helps to promote Tioxide in the local community as being supportive of conservation. You don't have to be an expert and this event is suitable for both new and more experienced birdwatchers. The day normally runs from 08.00-16.00 hrs. In 2008, we organised a very successful rota system, which ensured that attendance and coverage throughout the day were high, and it is intended to do the same again this year. Even if you can only spare an hour, your help would be appreciated and Ted Parker is to prepare a rota list so that members can decide what hour(s) and during what time of the day they wish to help. All that is required is that you turn up on the day and access the marsh either at the southern (Greatham Creek) end or by parking in the company's office car park and then walking on to the site via the path skirting the security fence. All records should be passed to either Ted Parker, Graeme Joynt or Tony Marron, one of whom will be present at the northernmost hide on site all day, or emailed to Tony at: tony.marron@sabic-europe.com

The Club is extremely grateful to Huntsman Tioxide's continuing generosity. This event has, over the years, raised over £9,000 for our Club and enables Tioxide to have a comprehensive biodiversity database, which includes 216 species of bird. The company has also produced the first UK Industry Biodiversity Action Plan.

All sponsorship raised will go to continue promoting, researching and conserving wild birds in the Cleveland area.

Ted Parker

PROVISION OF MIST NETS BY HUNTSMAN TIOXIDE

As reported in previous Newsletters, Huntsman Tioxide has very generously donated a sum of just over £400 for the Club to purchase mist nets. The nets have now been purchased and will be used by the Tees Ringing Group to add to our knowledge of the birds of Tioxide's excellent site at Greenabella Marsh, with all records being submitted both to the company and to the Cleveland Recorder for inclusion in the '*Cleveland Bird Reports*'.

Huntsman Tioxide has been one of the Club's most generous supporters over the years and we have built up an excellent relationship. In return for the company's benevolence, 6 Club members (Brian Hague, John Fletcher, John Grieveson, Eric James, Ali McLee and John Sharp) kindly donate their time in giving Tioxide staff monthly walks on Greenabella Marsh to show them a range of birds throughout the year. These are greatly enjoyed by all concerned and we are very grateful for the time these six stalwarts provide.

Ted Parker

TBC ROOKERY SURVEY 2010

The survey got underway as planned with all of the known sites allocated. The results will be published in due course and it will be fascinating to compare these with the 1999-2006 Breeding Birds Survey figures to see if there have been any changes. It is interesting to note at this early stage that some members have already reported that a number of Rookeries have disappeared from their original sites and we hope to establish whether these are merely late this year, have gone completely or the Rooks moved to a new site. Several new Rookeries have already been found and are being included in the survey. If any member finds a site that is not on the master list, which can be viewed on the Club's Website, please make Ted Parker aware of this (tel: 01642 275369; email: ecparker@supanet.com) and he will ensure it is counted. A full list of the sites and counters is contained in this Newsletter. Please try and make 2 or 3 visits during March and early April, as Rooks appear to a bit late nesting this year due to recent very cold weather conditions and damage to nests during one of the harshest winter periods for over 30 years.

The Club would like to thank to all those who have volunteered to help with this important research and a full analysis of the results will be published in due course.

Ted Parker

List of sites and counters on next pages.

O.S. SQUARE OF ROOKERY (NZ)	NAME OF SITE	CBBS SURVEYOR	YEAR SURVEYED	NO. OF NESTS	SURVEYOR FOR 2010 SURVEY
31Q	TRAFFORD HILL (SOUTHWEST OF AISLABY)	Wayne Richardson	2003	17	Jerry Todd
31U	DARLINGTON BACK LANE	Richard Taylor	2000	6	Les and Jim Curwen?
31Y	LONGNEWTON (SANDY LEAS LANE)	Eric James	2004	21	Eric James
31Y	LONGNEWTON CHURCH	Eric James	2004	55	Eric James
31Z	WHINNY HILL	Richard Taylor	2004	18	Linda Watson
32R	STILLINGTON	Mike Leakey	2003	35	Paul Sung
32X	GRINDON	Brian Clasper	2003	10	Jerry Todd
40E	LOW FOREST FARM, WEST OF KIRKLEVINGTON	Bill Irving	2000	6	Pat Brunt
41C	EAGLESCLIFFE (NORTHWEST OF WITHAM HALL)	Alistair McLee	2003	7	Ali McLee
41D	ELTON	Colin Dodsworth	2005	3	Ann & Derek Mason
41F	ROAD BETWEEN KIRKLEVINGTON & PRISON	Gordon Follows	2004	113	Ali McLee
41G	YARM	Bill Irving	2004	3	Bill Irving
40J	KIRKLEVINGTON	Chris Bielby	1999	35	Pat Brunt
41M	THORNABY WOOD (A174/A1045 JUNCTION)	Russell McAndrew	2004	6	Harold Redfern
41P	TEESDALE, STOCKTON	Colin Dodsworth	2001	5	Colin Dodsworth
41Q	HILTON VILLAGE	Gordon Follows	2000	8	Paul Glover
41Q	HILTON (HIGH PLANTATION/BARLEY FLATTS WOOD)	Gordon Follows	2000	50	Paul Glover
41U	TEESSIDE PARK	Colin Dodsworth	2003	3	Harold Redfern
41Y	ACKLAM HALL, MIDDLESBROUGH	John Fletcher	2005	4 (occupied)	Dave Nelson/Bob Crawford
42B	THORPE THEWLES	Mike Leakey	2004	41	Ian Bond
42H	WYNYARD	Martin Blick	2005	26	Martin Blick
42L	BILLINGHAM BECK	Dave Laing	2004	13	Paul Glover
42P	A19 LAYBY NORTHEAST OF GUNNERSVALE FARM	Alex Cruikshanks	2000	60	Alex Cruikshanks
42Y	GREATHAM VILLAGE	Stewart Hinley	1999	127	Russ McAndrew/Denise Gamesby
42R	BILLINGHAM	Julie Mason	2004	2	Paul Glover
NEW	NORTON CHURCHYARD	N/A	N/A	-	Gerry Todd
42W	HAVERTON HILL	Martin Blick	2004	6	Martin Blick

Continued on next page.

O.S. SQUARE OF ROOKERY (NZ)	NAME OF SITE	CBBS SURVEYOR	YEAR SURVEYED	NO. OF NESTS	SURVEYOR FOR 2010 SURVEY
	CROOKFOOT	Bernie Beck	2000	17	Tom Francis
43L	ELWICK	Kevin Spindloe	1999	45	Ted Parker/Don Page
43S	HART VILLAGE	Graham Megson	1999	47	Mary and David Wall
43V	RIFT HOUSE, HARTLEPOOL	Russell McAndrew	2000	11	Graeme Joynt
43W	WARD JACKSON PARK, HARTLEPOOL	Chris Sharp	1999	25	Chris Sharp
51C	FAIRY DELL PARK, MARTON	Eric James	2002	11	Sue Antrobus
51C	ST CUTHBERT'S CHURCH, MARTON	Eric James	2002	9	Eric James
51H	GUISBOROUGH ROAD, NUNTHORPE	Eric James	2001-02	52	N/A: Rookery gone.
51L	CHURCH LANE, NUNTHORPE	Ted Parker	2004	22	Ted Parker/Don Page
51R	NEWTON-UNDER-ROSEBERRY	Brian and Ann Hague	2000	12	John Cooke
51S (576146)	WARD'S BELT PLANTATION, PINCHINTHORPE	John Sharp	2000	64	Les and Jim Curwen
51S (576141)	PINCHINTHORPE HALL, GUISBOROUGH	John Sharp	2000	22	Craig Williams
51X	GBW VISITOR CENTRE, PINCHINTHORPE	John Sharp	1999	36	Craig Williams
51S (569147)	COPSE BETWEEN LOW AND SPITE HALL FARMS	John Sharp	2000	3	Stephen Lynas
51X	THE AVENUE, GUISBOROUGH	John Sharp	1999	31	Brian Hague
52C	GREATHAM CREEK	Geoff Icton	1999	21	Toby Collett
52D	GRAYTHORP	Martin Blick	1999	10	Martin Blick
52V	KIRKLEATHAM HALL FARM	John Sharp	2004	50	Lesley Curwen
61C (612156)	RECTORY LANE, GUISBOROUGH	John Sharp	2001	5	Stephen Lynas
61P	SKELTON CASTLE	Graham Megson	2006	220	Damian Money
61S	STANGHOW	Graham Megson	2003	31	Ted Parker/Don Page
61T	LINGDALE	Graham Megson	2004	40	Graham Megson
61V (661189 & 665187)	NEW SKELTON (CEMETERY)	Mark Askew	2005	13 (1 & 12)	Graham Megson
61Z (690198)	BROTTON HIGH STREET	Mark Askew	2005	112	John Money
71D	LIVERTON	Vic Fairbrother	2004	105	Vic Fairbrother
71E (718178)	LOFTUS (BY FORMER ROSECROFT SCHOOL)	Graham Megson	2004	15	Graham Megson
71I	SOUTH LOFTUS	Vic Fairbrother	2005	9	Vic Fairbrother
71J	LOFTUS (EAST)	Mark Askew	2002	92	Graham Megson
71P	EASINGTON VILLAGE	Mike Corner	1999	30	John Sharp

ERECTION OF BIRD BOXES AT SCALING DAM AND LOCKWOOD BECK RESERVOIR

Ted Parker of the Scaling Dam Wildlife Advisory Committee reports on some practical conservation work recently undertaken by the Club.



Geoff Myers checking the new owl boxes

In January this year, twelve Club members bravely turned out in very poor weather to erect three owl boxes at Scaling Dam. Two Tawny Owl boxes were erected in suitable mature trees in the wooded area adjacent to Boghouse Lane and one for a Barn Owl was mounted on the Osprey tower. Northumbrian Water kindly paid for the boxes and it is hoped that they will, in due course, attract breeding owls. We were grateful for the assistance of Geoff Myers and Ali McLee, who have erected similar boxes elsewhere, and all those who turned up to help. Coffee and biscuits were provided by Don Page and Ted Parker, and I think it fair to say that everyone enjoyed the morning despite the weather!



John Money attaching the Barn Owl box



The tricky business of getting the straps round a Tawny Owl box



Geoff completes the fixing of the Tawny Owl box

On 16th March, Ali McLee, assisted by Chris Bielby, Bill Irving and John Redhead, provided and erected 3 plastic Tawny Owl/Stock Dove nest boxes, 2 open-fronted Spotted Flycatcher nest boxes and 10 nest boxes for hole-nesting *passerines* at Lockwood Beck Reservoir. These will be monitored to see how well they are used over future coming years.

Thanks are due to all involved in these two very worthwhile projects. One of our targets in the Club's current Five-Year Plan is to undertake more active conservation work and, hopefully, these are the first of more projects to come.

POTENTIAL NEW FEEDING STATIONS

Following suggestions by several members, the Conservation Sub-Committee has considered a request to establish feeding stations in certain locations around the Tees Estuary. The theory behind this proposal is that the feeding stations will provide valuable, sustaining winter food sources for birds, particularly during harsh weather, and concentrate them in areas where they might be more easily observed. This could apply to 'special' species, such as Twite, which regularly feed on Greenabella Marsh and are a delightful sight on a winter day's birding. Other species, such as Skylark, Linnet, Reed Bunting, would also benefit.

The establishment of feeding stations, however, is not as straightforward as many may think. Most of the area around the Tees Estuary is internationally and nationally important and, consequently, has a hierarchy of designations, including Ramsar site, SPA, SSSIs and National Nature Reserve, and permission would need to be sought from Natural England and/or the landowners to have designated feeding stations. There is also the issue of what type of feeding station – formal ones, with bird tables and feeders, or informal, where seed is simply scattered on the ground in suitable locations? In addition, such a scheme will need a core of volunteers to regularly top up the seed banks during the winter, although the Club would have no difficulty in sourcing and financing seed supplies on an ongoing basis.

At its last meeting in January, the Conservation Sub-Committee discussed the possibility of stepping the feeding station idea up several notches by finding locations where seed might be sown in bulk to provide continual seed crops for birds on designated areas of land, possibly on farmland around the Tees Estuary through Defra's Higher Level Stewardship Schemes.

Our Website Manager, Jamie Duffie, has put at thread on the Forum section to invite comments on this.

REPORTS ON LOCAL OUTINGS

SEAL SANDS

Saturday 5th December 2009

Nine members visited the Teesmouth Field Centre and the Hartlepool Power Station Hide on Saturday 5th December 2009. We arrived at the hide just before low tide and had good views of all the usual waders, including Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lapwing, Knot and Grey Plover. There were good numbers of Wigeon, Shelduck and Red-breasted Merganser

but no divers, which are usually present at this time of year. We also had a good view of Peregrine Falcon as we returned to the Field Centre for a hot cup of coffee.

Julie Mason

BOWESFIELD MARSH

Sunday 17th January 2010

The good news was the weather, the first fine day for a while. The bad news, immediately obvious to the 10 people who had turned up, was the complete freezing over of all the pools in the area. With no waterbirds on the new pools, we made our way down to the river. Two Stonechats gave good views, but the river itself had only the expected Mute swans, Mallards and Moorhens. A single Stock Dove flew over and the sunshine inspired Coal and Great Tits to sing. While walking along the riverside path, a flock of Greylags flew over. We paused by the reed beds where there were a couple of calls from the Cetti's Warbler, but the only birds seen resolutely refused to be anything but Reed Buntings!

The previous weeks of hard weather guaranteed that there would be no large plover flocks on the old marsh area, since these birds are quick to move in response to adverse conditions. There was at least some hope of seeing some waterbirds since five Wigeons circled overhead as we approached. In fact, 21 Redshanks fed on the grass round the pool and 176 Teals were resting on the ice. The usual Pigeons and Corvids had left, but thrushes included Fieldfare and Redwing. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was watched moving along the treetops on the other side of the river.

Three young boys arrived and walked on the ice with an adult who should have known better. Despite this disturbance, the Teals did not flush, suggesting perhaps that the birds were in a weakened condition after the long cold period.

Eric James

COWPEN BEWLEY WOODLAND PARK

Thursday 4th February 2010

Not a good day for my first try as an outing leader: cold and overcast but 5 brave people turned up to join us, and Bob Crawford acted as co-leader. Plenty of birds were on the feeders in the car park with all the usual suspects present, including Robin, Tree Sparrow, Greenfinch, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. We set off to the lake and saw very little until we arrived to find it almost completely frozen over, so fewer birds than usual were present. A few Tufted Ducks, Mallards and Gadwalls were all that we could manage. We decided to try the stream to see if we could find a Kingfisher but no luck again. We

followed the stream up to the lane and walked back along it to the car park. A look at the feeding station and I cut short any further walks on muddy paths with next to no birds. Despite the weather and lack of birds, everyone seemed to enjoy the visit to what, for some, was a new location. I thank all the people who turned up.

Dave Nelson

HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Sunday 7th March 2010

An impressive 27 members met on a glorious early spring morning. Walking from the Heugh Battery towards the harbour we were rewarded with fine views of the regular adult Mediterranean Gull and a selection of common waders including Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone. We then retraced our steps and walked north towards Parton Rocks. The usual wintering sea ducks were present, including over 100 Common Scoters and smaller numbers of Eider. A few Great Crested Grebes were also present but there was no sign of the summer plumaged Red-necked Grebe which had been seen earlier in the morning. Sanderling and Knot were added to the wader species seen and the light was perfect to admire the other birds present. As we walked back, 3 Sparrowhawks flew in off the sea and just as we returned to the Heugh Battery a flock of 54 Whooper Swans returning north for the spring flew right above us along the promenade. A fine end to a lovely morning.

Chris Sharp

LOCAL OUTINGS - SPRING AND SUMMER 2010

WOODPECKERS AT WEARY BANK, YARM

Sunday 18th and 24th April 2010

Join Ali McLee at 8:00 am at the bridge over the River Leven, Weary Bank near Yarm for a chance to see and hear a wide variety of birds, possibly including all three woodpeckers, Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Goosander, Marsh Tit, Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and early migrants. In order to avoid too much disturbance and increase your chances of seeing good birds, Alistair has offered to do two walks. For further details and book a place, please contact **Alistair McLee (Tel 01642 787305)**.

SUMMER MIGRANTS AT FLATTS LANE COUNTRY PARK, MIDDLESBROUGH

Tuesday 4th May 2010

Meet in the car park at 9.15 am at Flatts Lane Visitor Centre for walk in search for summer migrants and other resident birds with Geoff Myers, who knows this area very well. Hopefully, migrants such as Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and

Lesser Whitethroat will be present for members to see and hear, along with many other woodland species. For further details, please phone **Geoff Myers on 01642 461850**.

NIGHTJARS AT GUISBOROUGH FOREST

Saturday 26th June 2010

Meet at 8:30 pm at the top end of Belmangate, Guisborough, for a walk in Guisborough Forest to listen and look for Nightjars. The most reliable area for them has changed and now involves a fairly steep uphill walk along forest roads for over 1 mile. It can be muddy in parts so bring stout footwear. The venue may be subject to amendment as the walk is weather-dependent, so please check the website in the days leading up to the walk or ring the leader, **Mark Askew on 01287 638190**. Please remember to park cars carefully, as the walk starts from a residential area.

SEAWATCHING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Saturday 21st August 2010

Join Chris Sharp, Ted Parker and Don Page from 8.30 am to 12.00 noon to watch 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 wind direction. With luck, there will be Manx and possibly Sooty Shearwaters, Great and Arctic 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 similar sea birds. The visit will also give members a chance to ask questions about the proposed new Hartlepool Observatory. For further details ring **Chris Sharp on 01429 865163**.

TBC DAY TRIP TO RSPB BEMPTON CLIFFS AND FLAMBOROUGH HEAD – SUNDAY 27th JUNE 2010



A summer day trip has been arranged to RSPB Bempton Cliffs and Flamborough Head in East Yorkshire for Sunday 27th June 2010. First visit

of the day will be to Bempton Cliffs to see, smell and listen to more than 100,000 seabirds. The cliffs will be alive with nesting Gannets, Puffins, Kittiwakes, Fulmars, Razorbills and Guillemots, so it is ideal for close views and photographs of these wonderful seabirds. Then we will leave mid afternoon and visit Flamborough Head, which is another ideal birdwatching site for seabirds.



Nesting Gannets at Bempton

The 33-seater coach will collect members at the following pickup points:

Hartlepool (M&S Car Park) 08:00

Stockton High Street (former Swallow Hotel) 08:15

Middlesbrough (Dorman Museum) 08:30

The cost will be £14.00 and a packed lunch will be required.

TO BOOK A PLACE, PLEASE CONTACT JOHN TODD AND SEND A £5 NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT (PLACES WILL BE ALLOCATED ON A FIRST-COME-FIRST-SERVED BASIS, SO DON'T DELAY!)

Email: johnntodd@tiscali.co.uk

Tel: 07810 347333

Address: 1 Henry Street, Seaham, Co Durham.

Please make cheques payable to 'Teemouth Bird Club'.

Julie Mason



Fulmar at Bempton

Eric James

SOARING VISITOR NUMBERS SIGNAL SALTHOLME'S SUCCESS

It has been just over a year since the opening of Saltholme, the wildlife reserve and discovery park, and already 100,000 visitors have passed through its doors. Originally, it was predicted that the reserve near Stockton would attract 35,000 visitors in its first year. Dave Braithwaite, who manages Saltholme, said: *"It's been an amazing time for everyone connected with Saltholme. Little did we expect, when we opened our doors for the first time back in January 2009, that in just 13 months we would welcome our 100,000th visitor. In fact, we had predicted it would take us five years before we were attracting so many visitors every year. Everyone who worked so hard throughout two decades to turn the Saltholme dream into a reality can be justifiably proud of this success – whether that's staff and volunteers, partners, funders and supporters or those people who have visited us and been delighted by what's on offer."*

Dave added: *"Almost 20,000 of those visitors came from outside the local area, so these fantastic figures are also good news for the local economy. We know that, with visitors, comes the money they spend, not just on the reserve but with local businesses, as well. They stay in local accommodation, buy in local shops, fill up their cars locally."*

Saltholme is the result of a successful partnership between Teesside Environmental Trust and the RSPB. It cost over £7 million to develop, with £2.4m of investment from One North East. More than 20 full-time and part-time posts have been created at the reserve. Julia Frater, head of Area Tourism Partnership Visit Tees Valley said: *"This is an amazing achievement for Saltholme. The growth in its popularity over the last year has been a pleasure to see. Saltholme's success has also had a tremendous effect on the Tees Valley as a whole. Local attractions such as the Transporter Bridge and the Teemouth Nature Reserve at Seal Sands are just two that have seen a significant rise in visitors as a direct result of the opening of the wildlife reserve and discovery park."*

And David Kitchen, of the Teesside Environmental Trust, added: *"While our visitors immediately appreciate the wildlife and unique industrial setting of Saltholme, it is easy to forget that the reserve is an immensely successful regeneration model. Saltholme contributes to long-term employment and training and is an exemplar of green tourism in Teesside and the North East. At TET, we believe that this approach will be copied elsewhere in the UK and continue to be a*

successful partnership of conservation and industry."

During the past year, Saltholme has won several awards for architectural excellence, sustainability and customer service. And the wildlife is impressed with what's on offer as well. Numbers of Lapwings, Redshanks, Pochards, Yellow Wagtails and Great Crested Grebes have all increased and rare birds, such as Glaucous-winged Gull (only the second record for Britain), Purple Heron, Citrine Wagtail, Blue-winged Teal, Whiskered Tern and a pair of bitterns have all been spotted.

"Investing in places like Saltholme and the wildlife that thrives there does pay dividends," said Dave Braithwaite. "Such an approach is also at the heart of the RSPB's Letter to the Future campaign which urges politicians to consider the state of the planet that future generations will grow up in when they are making decisions about where to invest money and where to make cuts. More places like Saltholme would mean a safer future for the wildlife that our 100,000 visitors clearly cherish. A healthy, natural environment provides a wider range of benefits from livelihoods to landscapes. By signing the letter, you'll be adding your name to hundreds of thousands of others determined to ensure future generations inherit a world worth living in. people have already added their voices to ours."



Photo shows 100,000th visitor, Ros Priestley, and family with Site Manager, Dave Braithwaite (names from left to right: Dave Braithwaite, Simon Priestley, Ros Priestley, Heather Rainey, Sam Rainey, Andrew Rainey and Lisa Rainey)



The Glaucous-winged Gull at Saltholme

Martyn Sidwell

VICAR'S WASTE – A NEW SITE IN NORTON

Ian Lawson describes a new conservation scheme in the heart of Norton in which he is enthusiastically involved. Ian was heavily involved in the highly successful Great North Park project in Stockton District and published an illustrated book on this some years ago and is using the skills he gained on this new project.

All local birders will be familiar with Norton Church owing to the excellent find of a Hume's Warbler by Keith Ryan in February 2008. The Parish of Norton has now held both this species and Yellow-browed Warbler, the latter found by Geoff Icton in his garden on 25th Sept 1977.



Location of site

A friend of mine acquired the triangular piece of land on the right of the churchyard, just after the entrance, which is known as 'Vicar's Waste'. He asked me if I would like to make it into a small reserve owing to my previous work on the Great North Park and, naturally, I jumped at the chance. I realised, however, that I would need a partner to help me, as I have ongoing health issues, so I asked an old friend, Paul Eastwood, a great all-rounder and a true countryman. He immediately agreed and his enthusiasm is a joy!

We began by getting in touch with Colin Powell and his team from Stockton Parks Department, whose help has been invaluable. Colin began by 'opening up the land' by strimming to see what wild flowers were present. Six new bird boxes were put in place, along with 3 bat boxes. A Tawny Owl box, made by Paul, has also been erected and we have our fingers crossed, as the birds are present in the area.

A bonus of the site is that the northwest corner has a Rookery. I counted 33 birds but, as elsewhere, Rooks are late nesting this year, although two nests are coming on fast. The Rookery will be monitored over the coming months and the results passed to Teesmouth Bird Club for its 2010 Rookery Survey.

Every living thing we see on Vicar's Waste will be identified and recorded for a forthcoming book.

Paul will be covering the mammals and butterflies and I will be recording birds and wild flowers (on your marks, Dave Laing). Colin has a bat detector with an electric identifier, which is exciting, and I will have to "*butter up*" Jamie Duffie in the summer to see if he will give us a hand with moth identification.

The whole project has everyone buzzing as to what we may find, so watch this space!



Hume's Warbler in Norton churchyard

Ian Forrest

MARGROVE PONDS, GUISBOROUGH

Ted Parker reviews this hidden gem tucked away on the edge of the North York Moors National Park a few kilometres to the east of Guisborough. Not only does it have a range of scarce breeding birds but it can produce some surprises during the autumn and spring migrations. As this feature shows, however, Margrove Ponds are worth visiting at any time of year.

BACKGROUND

Margrove Ponds cover an area of just over 7 hectares and lie several kilometres to the east of Guisborough at the base of an old shale tip at grid reference NZ 654162. The tip and surrounding surface features are all that remain of the former Maggra Ironstone Mine (or Stanghow Mine, as it was often referred to), which opened in 1871 and closed in 1928. The route of the old Middlesbrough to Boosbeck railway, which used to serve the Maggra Mine, is still visible at the northwestern end of the main pond. The nearby triangular-shaped village of Margrove (Maggra) Park was built to accommodate the mineworkers and descendants of some of the original workers still live in the village today.

The site is now a Tees Valley Wildlife Trust (TVWT) reserve, although some illegal shooting still occurs here. It has a variety of habitats, reflected in its impressive total of over 150 bird species that have been recorded here, including a number of scarce and rare birds. The site basically comprises of a large, reed-fringed pond

and two smaller ponds, with adjacent willow, blackthorn, hawthorn and elder scrub; deciduous and coniferous woodland; abandoned allotment gardens; pasture; parkland; and rough, tall, rank grassland. The reedswamp is composed of *Phragmites*, *Typha* and *Juncus* and attracts a number of species that otherwise wouldn't occur in this rural environment.

ACCESS, LOCATION AND STRATEGY



Margrove Ponds lie 4 kilometres east of Guisborough and are accessed by turning left off the A171 Guisborough-Whitby Road at Charltons on to the minor road signposted to Margrove Park, Boosbeck and Lingdale (when travelling from Guisborough). Drive past the Margrove Heritage Centre, now the home of TVWT and, after about 500 metres, turn sharp left on to a track, just after Margrove village, which, after 50 metres, leads to a small, two-car parking area. Park here, taking care to leave space for another car if no other vehicles are present, and walk down the main track to view the first and largest of the three ponds on its left (west) side. Slowly walk down the track, scanning the water and reedswamp and the open damp, rough grassland and hedgerows to your left. After about 500 metres, the old Middlesbrough to Boosbeck railway crosses the main track and this is lined with mature scrub of willow, blackthorn, hawthorn and elder and is a very good area for passerines, well worth exploring.

Continue along the track after the old railway to the two smaller ponds: the one to the right (east) is open and easily viewed, whereas the left-hand-side one is now shrouded with common reed, reedmace and soft rush. The former can be good for waders, whilst the other should be scanned for reedswamp species. Don't forget to keep scanning the surrounding hills for raptors which can occasionally be seen during suitable weather conditions (sunny, with a stiff breeze, giving both thermals and updraughts off the hillsides). In addition, scan down the valley to the east towards the coast, as incoming migrants often use this to move inland.

Weekday or early morning visits during school time should be fairly quiet and raptors should be looked for from 10.00 am onwards as the thermals begin to gather strength.

BIRDS

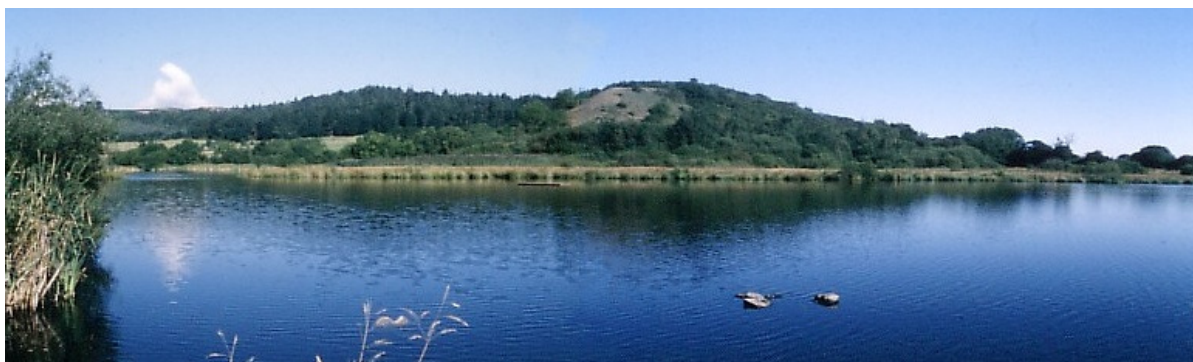
Margrove Ponds are well worth a visit at any time of the year, though the spring and autumn migration periods tend to offer the widest variety of species and best opportunities for a 'goodie'.

During the winter months, scan the main pond for waterfowl, which should include Greylag and Canada Goose, Mallard, Teal, Tufted Duck and Coot. Shoveler, Wigeon and, more rarely, Goosander are also possible. Common Snipe feed in the damp grassland to the left of the track and a scan of the reedswamp and surrounding bushes should produce Reed Bunting. Water Rails occasionally call from the reedy cover and the odd Grey Heron is occasionally disturbed from the water margins. The trees and scrub surrounding the ponds hold a good range of passerines, including Long-tailed, Blue, Great, Coal and Willow Tits and the old railway is a reliable spot for Bullfinch. A scan of the surrounding trees may be rewarded with a perched Great Spotted Woodpecker, which can be traced by its loud "*chip-chipp*" call, and Green Woodpecker is always possible, particularly in the more open parkland beyond the old railway. Less common is Lesser Redpoll and this should be looked for in the willow and alder scrub around the ponds or along the railway. Winter thrushes are often present in good numbers in the pastures and hedgerows north of the ponds, so check this area for Fieldfares and Redwings. The eastern smaller pool often holds the highest single site count of Moorhen in Cleveland, with occasionally 35-40 birds present, along with Mute Swan. Keep checking the sky for raptors: Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine and Kestrel are all regular and there is always a chance of Goshawk and Merlin. Goshawks should be looked for over the surrounding forests, though the late winter and early spring periods are best for this species,

particularly late March and early April.

Spring and early summer birding can be very rewarding, with the woodlands and scrub alive with singing thrushes, warblers and titmice. Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Garden Warbler are almost guaranteed, with Lesser Whitethroat also a possibility (listen for its warbling, Whitethroat-like song with a distinctive rattle at the end). Great Spotted Woodpeckers 'drum' at this time and Green Woodpeckers can occasionally be heard 'yaffling' from the parkland and wooded areas to the north of the ponds. Newly arrived *hirundines* and Swifts often feed over the main pond in considerable numbers during late April and the first few weeks of May and always check through these flitting flocks for something more unusual. In my opinion, Margrove Ponds is a perfect location for an over-shooting Red-rumped Swallow. Approach the main pond quietly, as there is always a chance of a spring Garganey and check the smaller ponds for passage waders, such as Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers. Spring is also a time when scarce or rare birds can turn up, such as Spotted Crake (depending upon water levels) and, if there is some exposed mud, there is always a chance of a Water Rail. Migrant raptors in spring can include Marsh Harrier, Osprey and Hobby. During the summer, the reedswamp holds an outlying population of Reed Warblers away from the Tees Estuary and several pairs of Black-headed Gulls have started to breed in recent years in the *Juncus* on the east side of the main pond. This is one of only a handful of breeding sites in the whole of Cleveland, which has a total of less than 100 pairs of this handsome gull. Other breeding species include Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Moorhen, Coot, Cuckoo, Grasshopper and Sedge Warblers, Whitethroat, Jay, Yellowhammer, Bullfinch and Reed Bunting. Sadly, the healthy breeding population of Ruddy Ducks no longer exists due to the unpleasant National cull over the past three years.

Continued over page



Panoramic view of the largest of the Margrove Ponds

As autumn gets into full swing, flocks of migrating *hirundines* again hawk insects over the ponds and waders and raptors pass through. It is possible that anything can turn up at this time of year, so be alert and check everything! There is a chance of a Black Tern or something even rarer: past rare and uncommon species recorded at Margrove Ponds have included Quail, Pectoral Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Spotted Crake, Mediterranean Gull, Wryneck, Bee-eater, Black Redstart and Great Grey and Red-backed Shrikes. The combination of willow scrub and reedswamp looks excellent for Cetti's Warbler (there were 5 records of this northward-expanding species in Cleveland during 2009) and the hedgerows bordering the damp grassland to west appear ideal for a migrant shrike.

Margrove Ponds have much to offer and have not yet fulfilled their potential, so start birding here and see if you can add to the site's growing list of birds.

A TWITCHER IS BORN

*In this feature, **Keith Robson** takes a light-hearted look at how he became hooked on 'twitching'*



Glaucous-winged Gull

Martyn Sidwell

I had never been "into" twitching. Some years ago I remember turning up at Seal Sands hide to try to see a Ross's Gull. It was an afterthought. It was almost dusk. Three men were in the hide. They pointed out the object bird on the mud in the far distance. They were from the Midlands. One had already been to Norfolk that day and "dipped". They were discussing the lack of identifying features on the bird at the distance involved. One, the dipper from earlier in the day, suddenly declared that he needed to see it fly; promptly left the hide; and was last seen running down the sea wall to the right of the hide, past the huge Port Authority sign proclaiming that "*Trespassers will be exterminated*".

I remember a Sunday morning returning from birdwatching at Hartlepool Headland, joining a throng of birders on the seafront at Seaton Carew. A Paddyfield Warbler was alleged to be in

a bush near the footbridge over the railway. The bird did not show and an awful lot of bush kicking took place.

So twitchers had never impressed me. However, when '*BBC Look North*' announced on their news programme in early January that hundreds of twitchers had been drawn to "*Billingham*" for a Glaucous-winged Gull something stirred within me. I reckon few birders could resist the possibility of a life tick at the start of a new year. So, on Sunday morning, I undertook my epic twitch – all of three miles – to Cowpen Bewley, the railway bridge on the A1185. At 9.15 there must have been over a hundred folk watching a bare ploughed field full of gulls. At 10.00 a.m. I realised that the idea of "*nipping out*" to get this bird (just stick my trainers on, no need for a scarf, don't need a flask of tea) had been a bad one. I was frozen. For light relief and a few year ticks, I drove on to Cowpen Bewley Woodland Park. There I met a party of locals, who had called at Saltholme on the way over to see if the Glaucous-winged Gull was there. It wasn't, but they told me that Little Egret and Pintail were. They also opined that the Glaucous-winged Gull was really a Herring Gull. I decided to retire hurt, via Saltholme, where I was surprised at how many birders had broken away from the Cowpen Bewley hordes and were trying their luck there. The guy getting out of the car behind mine asked if I had seen it. No, and we conversed. He had driven for 2 hours from Nottingham and knew the North Tees Marshes well from previous twitches. We were joined by a third birder as I was relaying the info from the locals. When I mentioned Little Egret he interjected, "*You don't get many of them in Ayr*". He had driven for three and a quarter hours. The Glaucous-winged Gull was not seen that Sunday. Over the next few days, various sightings were reported. On Wednesday 7th January, an idiots' guide to where to see the bird was posted on Teesmouth Bird Club website. It was likely to show at 2.30 p.m. on Dormans Pool. Next day, I had a free afternoon. Ever the eternal pessimist, I ignored my urge to start with a visit to Pudding Poke Farm for Little Owl; if I went there the gull would appear early! So, properly attired this time, I arrived at Dormans Pool at 1.00 p.m. I was surprised to see birders lined up alongside the track leading from the main road peering over the reedbed and not on the elevated viewpoint between Dormans and the Rec Pond. The pool was frozen over, the ice bearing hundreds of gulls (*déjà vu?*). The first birders I spoke to were from Motherwell and Kinross. Never mind the birds, it was really interesting talking to all these foreigners. For the first time in my life I forced myself to concentrate as I scanned through hundreds of birds. I made

myself sort the black-headed from the black-backed, the common from the herring. It was a beautiful afternoon and time passed pleasantly, as I was flanked by a Geordie who knew a bit about Goshawks in Kielder and someone from Carlisle, who had just returned from a fortnight in Cyprus watching (among other things) exotic gulls. At roughly half-hourly intervals, the bird scarer on Hargreaves Quarry Tip banged loud and clear. Whereupon half of the gulls on the tip flew over on to the ice on the pool and half of the gulls on the ice made the reverse trip. So there was much searching and re-searching among each batch of new arrivals. Around 2.30 p.m. a buzz ran along the line of watchers. Not the Glaucous-winged but a Glaucous Gull had been spotted. How confusing! The Glaucous Gull was a beautiful, clean, adult bird. My tick for this species was a grotty, speckled juvenile pointed out to me in Whitby harbour many years ago. So even if the Glaucous-winged Gull would not show, the afternoon would have been worthwhile for me. I continued to scan the gulls and surprised myself by being able to return to the Glaucous Gull, identifying it all by myself. Just after 3 o'clock a bigger buzz, the Glaucous-winged Gull had been spotted. Panic, panic: where are they looking – which pylon is it under? Eventually, I alighted on the second Glaucous-winged Gull ever to visit Britain. It was sitting on the ice, surely a sign of origins in colder climes. But how on earth was it different from a Herring Gull? Again, I deviated from my general lazy habits and I watched this bird for another three-quarters of an hour. These were my conclusions after close and lengthy examination (I apologise in advance for my lack of ornithological terminology). *In profile, the back of its head was flat, not as perfectly spherical as other gulls. Compared with surrounding Herring Gulls its bill was a paler shade of yellow; when it eventually stood, its legs seemed shorter; its wings were a marginally different shade of grey; and when it turned to show its back the wing-tip markings were not as black. I thought I detected a tinge of peaty brown in there.*



Glaucous-winged Gull at Dormans pool

Ian Forrest

My son's American field guide says "*gray (sic) pattern on the primaries (Herring Gull has black pattern in primaries)*". I resolved to carry a Dulux colour chart with me in future. I was envious of my neighbour from Carlisle, who took out his notebook, drew the bird and made notes. On my expressing interest, he rifled through his book revealing sketches and closely written, obviously detailed notes. I wonder how he described the flat head. Walking back to my car, a fellow birder, with evident relief in his tones, said it had been worth the six-hour wait to see the bird. He was from Essex and had been suffering severe frustration, as he had missed the bird by ten minutes in the morning, having had to make numerous stops en route to Teesside to de-ice his windscreen. My pessimism had been ill-founded. As I drove home, I was carried by a feeling of elation, but at the same time, I was glad that feeling did not have to carry me to Essex.

Keith Robson

'BLAST FROM THE PAST' – FRIDAY 6th OCTOBER 1972

Ted Parker recalls a new bird for Cleveland – an event he remembers for a number of reasons, and perhaps demonstrates the lengths some will go to for the thrill of a 'tick'.

It was 5.30 in the morning and dark. The fog was so thick you could almost chew it and I had to screw up my eyes to see out of the car windscreen. I could barely see 30 feet in front of me. I felt very claustrophobic. I was travelling at less than 20 miles per hour but even this seemed to be breakneck speed. There were virtually no other cars on the road and I had a strange feeling of being utterly alone. The light was eerie and, with my car headlamps reflecting blindingly back at me, it was difficult to steer a straight course! I wondered why on earth I had set off in the first place but the lure of a new bird for Cleveland was just too great; I had to go, despite protestations from my wife that I was quite mad.

A journey that normally took me about 25 minutes lasted well over an hour and a quarter and I arrived at my destination with bulging eyes and a nagging headache. Nevertheless, I was here but how on earth was I going to locate the target bird in thick fog, which was billowing in off the sea in rolled blankets, particularly as it was a small *passerine*. On arrival at my destination it was hard to recognise it as a place I had visited many times since I first took up active birding in the early 1960s. No landmarks on view, only the sound of the invisible breaking surf, the smell of salt in the air and the rank chillness of an autumn morning, exacerbated by cold, onshore southeasterly winds. I could have been anywhere

but I was in definitely in Cleveland – at South Gare, in fact.

By 7.00 a.m. there was some reasonable light but the fog was still thick. I parked my car by the Gully near the end of the Gare and wondered again how I was going to have any chance of seeing the bird in these conditions. I needn't have worried: within minutes I heard a bird call – a short, rather metallic "tipp-tipp", quite reminiscent of a Robin. My heart started racing – was this the target bird or was it, in fact, merely a Robin which are regular at South Gare during autumn 'fall' conditions? Such is the 'thrill' (or stress) of birding! I walked a short distance along the wall that runs the length of the Gare, seawards from the Pilot Station, towards the lighthouse, following in the direction of the call. The wall, in fact, was the only landmark I could see. Suddenly, I heard that call again and a small, Linnet-sized bird popped up on to the wall less than 15 feet in front of me. Shaking with anticipation, I raised my old, battered 10 x 50 Jenoptem binoculars to my eyes and there it was – a first for Cleveland for me, and a 'lifer' to boot. I lowered my bins in disbelief; after all, what more could any birder ask? But hang on, I had only looked at the bird for a few seconds, perhaps my ID was wrong. I started to panic but trying to calm my shaking hands, raised my bins again to try and take in some more of its subtle detail:

In my mind, I ticked off the salient features I could remember from my research the night before:

- *Like a small Reed Bunting*: it certainly was, but perhaps it **is** a small Reed Bunting!
- *Obvious broad buffish crown stripe*: yes, clearly visible, particularly in head-on views.
- *Bright chestnut ear coverts, bordered with black*: definitely!
- *Black lateral crown stripe and a broad, buffish-white supercilium*: yes, both present!
- *Black moustachial stripe with contrasting white sub-moustachial*: ok!
- *Black malar stripe*: definitely!
- *Dark eye with white orbital ring*: yes, visible on close range views.
- *Rather stubby bill with straight culmen*: yes.
- *Obvious buffish-white double wing bars*: clearly visible.
- *Buffish-white underparts, streaked with black on the breast and flanks*: easily confirmed.

By now, I knew that I was looking at my first **Little Bunting** and, just to confirm this, a female Reed Bunting obligingly appeared on the wall and I was able to compare the two species side by side, dispelling any doubts. My jittery nervousness was now replaced with a sense of utter elation and I settled down to watch the bird

for a further hour or so, taking detailed notes and rough sketches, but still with a slightly shaking hand. The bird spent most of the time on the ground but perched four times on the wall for extended periods, calling frequently. When nervous, it raised its crown feathers, giving the head a different appearance.



Sketches from Ted's notebook

I believe this Little Bunting was the third Cleveland record and was present at South Gare from 3rd to 7th October 1972, being caught and ringed during its stay. It was part of quite a good 'fall' of scarce birds in Cleveland during a period of classic, migrant-producing weather conditions: prolonged southeasterly winds and poor visibility, which also brought me a stunning little Firecrest in St Mary's Church garden on 3rd and a Barred Warbler at South Gare on 5th.

We are always interested in members' reminiscences from the past.

*If you have any interesting memories you would like to share, please submit a short feature to the Editor, **Ted Parker**, with photos or sketches, if possible.*

THE SPARROW'S REPUTATION

(...or as the French proclaim 'Defense de Passer')

It is perhaps timely, with the bird in serious decline, to stand up in defence of the *Sparrow*, whose dubious reputation must depend to some extent on the accusation that he was responsible for the death of poor *Cock Robin* (Anon. *Tom Thumb's Pretty Song Book*, c. 1744):

"Who killed Cock Robin?"
"I", said the Sparrow,
"With my bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin."

A confession is one thing. But how often have we heard of wrong convictions based on a confession by the accused? Where is the supporting evidence? The only witness to come forward was the *Fly*:

"Who saw him die?"
"I", said the Fly,
"With my little eye,
I saw him die."

Can we rely on the evidence of such an unsavoury character? This was accepted by Mother Lunchtime O'Goose in her re-examination of the case that was reported in *Private Eye* (22.12.06), but this is hardly a reliable, impartial journal and I am not convinced. In any case, the *Fly* did not say that he had seen the killing, merely that "I saw him die". What happened to the bow? Was it examined for fingerprints or DNA? Of course, it could be pure misadventure.

*I shot an arrow into the air;
I don't know how it fell or where;
But strangely enough, at my journey's end,
I found it in the neck of a friend.*

D B Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)

Misadventure it could be, after all:

*All the birds of the air fell a-sighing and a-sobbing,
When they heard the bell toll for poor Cock Robin.*

'All' must include the Sparrow, suggesting perhaps that contrition had set in.

But before we go too far and blame the Sparrow. Could he have even handled such a weapon? Though we cannot ignore the abilities of the *Naval Sparrow*, who is illustrated in *'In Search of Sparrows'* (Poyser 1992), holding a telescope and the lame duck with his crutches.

However, I suggest it is highly significant that there is no mention of a judge or hangman among the thirteen characters, from the *Sparrow* to the *Bull*, in the official record of the event.

Some historians do not think it even refers to a *Robin* or a *Sparrow*, but that the whole story was an attempted exposé of a plot to kill William II, named Rufus after his red hair, Robin Hood, or even Robert Walpole (1676-1745), the first occupant of No. 10 Downing Street, all of whom had enemies in high places. This would not be the last political plot in which the principal characters were concealed by animal names. In 1970, Harold Wilson, who was in favour of curbing the Trade Unions, sought to undermine Barbara Castle's *'In Place of Strife'*. He gave the principal characters code names: he was, perhaps not surprisingly, *'Eagle'*, Barbara Castle *'Peacock'* (one would have thought *'Peahen'* more appropriate) and James Callaghan, Chancellor of the Exchequer, *'Sparrow'*, whom he no doubt thought he could easily manipulate. The net result of Wilson's machinations was to consign *'In Place of Strife'* to the political dustbin.

The *Sparrow* is a highly moral creature, who, apart from the occasional lapse behind a chimney, remains faithful to his wife until death, with no other reputation as a killer. Unlike the victim in this case, the *Robin*, who abandons his wife at the end of the summer and in the following spring flaunts his sexuality with his red waistcoat to attract a new, poor unsuspecting female.

I think the *Sparrow* deserves better.

The purpose of my research has been to remove this calumny and exonerate the *Sparrow*, not to point the finger at the real villain. That is a job for a historian, not a humble naturalist.

Denis Summers-Smith. BSc, PhD, CEng, MBOU.



A multilingual pun!

PROFILE – BRIAN HAGUE

Ted Parker talked to Brian Hague about what lured him into birding and some of the highlights of his long birding career. Brian has made a significant contribution to the TBC over the years: he is a past member of the Committee, Conservation Sub-Committee and the Atlas Project Team, which was responsible for the production of the highly successful 'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland' and is one of the leaders of the monthly guided outings run by the Club for Huntsman Tioxide.



Brian was born in Mexborough, South Yorkshire, and now lives in Guisborough, where he moved to in 1979. Like many of his generation, he first became interested in birds as a nine-year-old through collecting eggs. On leaving school, he joined an engineering firm as a staff student engineer, spending 3 years in various works departments. He subsequently became a draughtsman and for the last 2 years of his 10 years in this job, he was a designer. Brian had always had a burning ambition to be a primary school teacher, however, and was offered a two-year shortened course, which he left with a Distinction in teaching. After two years in the West Riding of Yorkshire, he joined the British Families Education Service in Germany and, after just over 4 years, was appointed Deputy Headteacher of Spanda School, Berlin. He subsequently became Headteacher of Lubbeck School and then Osnabruk School. Brian returned to the UK in January 1979 as Headteacher of Overfields School in Cleveland and then Headteacher of Sunnyside Community Primary and Special School. After his retirement, Brian continued to use his teaching skills and became a part-time lecturer on the BA Education Course at Durham University for 2 years.

In 1954, Brian formed a small group of birdwatchers in Mexborough and linked it with a group of Barnsley birders. In 1955, he co-

founded the Doncaster and District Ornithological Society, of which he was Secretary for 8 years and its President for one. On its 50th anniversary in 2005, Brian was made an Honorary Life Member in recognition of his contribution. During the first half of the 1950s, Brian was a ringer and helped to set up a Ringing Station and, with his wife, Ann (whom he married in 1960), ran an extensive nest box scheme. He also initiated the process that assisted the Yorkshire Naturalists' Trust in founding the Denaby Ings Nature Reserve.



Denaby Ings

Among his many affiliations, Brian is a member of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union, being proposed in 1954 by the late, famous Yorkshire ornithologist, Ralph Chislett, and going on to play a leading role in this organisation. He is a former member of the BTO and BOU and is still a member of the RSPB today, which he joined in 1966.

Brian states that, with his wife Ann, he has been birdwatching for 52 years, though he actually started serious birding 6 years prior to his marriage. In addition to birding, he has also been a keen photographer since 1950 and gave his first illustrated talk in 1956 on '*Birds Watching on Holy Island and the Farnes*' using 3¼" glass slides! Brian and Ann have amassed a collection of over 5,000 wildlife slides, mainly of birds, of various trips at home and abroad. The optical equipment Brian now uses comprises of a Canon EOS 40D digital camera with a Canon EF 300mm f/4 stabilised lens and a 1.4 converter. His optical equipment includes Leica 8 x 42 BA binoculars and a lightweight Kowa telescope.

Brian has no idea how many species he has seen in Cleveland or in his birding life to date and confirms "*I have never been a 'twitcher or a lister'*". He doesn't have a favourite local patch and merely goes where birds are to be seen. He has travelled extensively in Europe and recalls two of his most exciting trips: the first was in an A35 van, which involved a 4,872-mile round trip

starting in central Germany to Varangerfjord in Arctic Norway in 1966, then on to Hammerfest, the most northerly town in Europe, from which he drove south along the west coast of Norway to Falsterbo in southern Sweden and then back to Germany! His second memorable trip was again from Berlin, through the former Yugoslavia to Lake Prespanka on the Greek/Albanian/Yugoslav border. Unfortunately, Brian was arrested and grilled for a day as a possible spy, before being ordered to leave the country within 24 hours! Since returning to the UK, Brian and Ann have birded in Hungary, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Spain, France, Romania, Iceland, Florida, Canada, New Zealand, Morocco, Austria and various Greek islands, and they have just arranged a trip to Texas. During all of his travels, Brian says that the most impressive birding site he has visited is still the Danube Delta.



Danube Delta

His best day's birding in Cleveland was on a cool, bright day in September 2007 on a walk with Ann on Guisborough Moor from Hanging Stone to Guisborough, during which *"we had excellent views of, first, an immature Osprey, then a Kestrel, then a Common Buzzard, then a male Merlin and, last of all, a Goshawk being mobbed by Swallows"*.

His favourite bird book is *'The Handbook of Bird Identification for Europe and the Western Palearctic'* by Beaman and Madge, which he regards as an excellent compendium of ornithological knowledge and illustration. Brian recalls one of his most embarrassing moments came whilst in Spain when, with Dave Cottridge, they were convinced they had a rare heron in their 'scopes, which turned out to be a plastic bucket in the middle of a vast reedbed in a strong heat haze! (Don't worry, Brian, we've all been there!). When asked about his favourite birds, Brian recalled a male Citrine Wagtail in Cyprus, a Lammergeier in the Pyrenees and Bald Ibis in Morocco. He is also very partial to Pink-footed Geese! The bird he would most like to see is the Ibisbill.



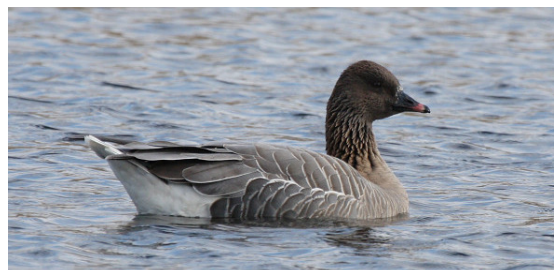
Ibisbill

Steve Gantlett

When asked about his associated interests, Brian cited sailing, which he took up while in Germany, and found he could combine with birding. He sailed on the Dummer See in Germany, a superb birdwatching lake, and for many years shared a 26-foot sailing boat on Loch Lomond when back in the UK. With his wife Ann, he enjoys painting birds and scenes associated with their travels, and both are avid singers and are members of two choral societies. For many years, Brian was a tenor soloist, singing oratorio with many local choirs. To anyone visiting Brian's home, it will be immediately apparent that he also has a keen interest in Geology, particularly Palaeontology, reflected in his large collection of specimens and artefacts.

Changes Brian would like to see concerning birds and birdwatching in the UK include a more generous attitude towards raptors by gamekeepers. He would also like to see more coastal mudflats and marshes protected and created for the benefit of migratory birds and local species. Regarding the Teesmouth Bird Club, Brian has enjoyed the enormous progress made in many aspects and one that pleases him most is the welcome and help given to new members and, in particular, the inclusion of female members. On a wistful note, Brian says *"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could attract some young members!"*

Regarding his aspirations for the future, Brian merely wishes to have *"a goodly number of years to come, with good health for Ann and myself to enjoy together more birds"*. I'm sure we all hope that this is the case.



Pink-footed Goose

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2009/2010 SUMMARY

Coverage was perfect, with all 130 sector counts undertaken over the five winter months.

Little grebe (44, November) and tufted duck (268, November) both set new seasonal WeBS records, while the pochard maximum (123, February) was our highest since 2000/2001. Other than that it was generally an unremarkable winter for wildfowl. The patterns of occurrence for shelduck and wigeon were typically symmetrical around January peaks, though for shelduck the 537 figure reached was the second poorest winter maximum on record (after 2001/2002).

This was an excellent winter for golden plover, the 3057 recorded in December constituting a new all-time Tees WeBS record. The same month 5413 lapwing were counted. Unsurprisingly numbers of both species crashed dramatically in the January freeze. It was the second worst winter ever for both grey plover (114, February) and knot (995, February). Conversely, the same month brought the highest sanderling winter maximum for a decade (353), and the best bar-tailed godwit return since 2002/2003 (140). The curlew peak (1276, February) was of unexpected magnitude, especially by comparison with the other four counts made of this species; this is the second largest WeBS total ever achieved on the Tees.

It was a better winter for redshank than 2008/2009, with the peak of 1210 in December being followed by a steep decline in January and a recovery in February.

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, and regains this status for sanderling.

Mike Leakey
WeBS Local Organizer
March 2010

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Some WeBS winners.....



Tufted Duck



Pochard

...and losers



Shelduck

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2009/2010 SUMMARY

	November 15	December 13	January 10	February 14	March 14
Little Grebe	<u>44</u> *	33	8	14	19
Great Crested Grebe	15	0	2	15	<u>45</u>
Cormorant	<u>176</u> *	96	45	74	123*
Mute Swan	46	<u>71</u>	65	65	45
Greylag Goose	171	<u>240</u>	170	184	224
Shelduck	387	454*	<u>537</u> *	437*	401*
Wigeon	1367	1748	<u>2000</u>	1689	1417
Gadwall	<u>258</u> **	137*	19	84	82
Teal	522	667	352	<u>711</u>	499
Mallard	323	344	312	<u>348</u>	252
Pintail	<u>50</u>	38	41	27	27
Shoveler	<u>150</u> **	85*	46	50	54
Pochard	50	94	56	<u>123</u>	89
Tufted Duck	<u>268</u>	246	115	191	208
Eider	0	<u>28</u>	5	5	16
Goldeneye	27	43	<u>82</u>	<u>82</u>	63
Red-breasted Merganser	<u>44</u>	19	26	37	32
Coot	<u>1153</u> *	817	292	497	341
Oystercatcher	702	<u>858</u>	284	824	673
Ringed Plover	66	<u>71</u>	18	15	54
Golden Plover	1576	<u>3057</u> *	5	678	0
Grey Plover	0	30	31	<u>114</u>	45
Lapwing	2866	<u>5413</u> *	295	2247	272
Knot	420	503	505	<u>995</u>	950
Sanderling	137*	35	215**	<u>353</u> **	225**
Purple Sandpiper	<u>42</u>	33	0	16	7
Dunlin	29	5	<u>122</u>	96	9
Ruff	<u>2</u>	1	0	0	0
Snipe	7	8	<u>9</u>	0	1
Black-tailed Godwit	24	31	22	21	<u>35</u>
Bar-tailed Godwit	6	30	3	<u>140</u>	114
Curlew	527	537	206	<u>1276</u> *	237
Redshank	1081*	<u>1210</u> **	508	1175*	1049*
Turnstone	121	<u>248</u>	82	197	242

Underlined counts indicate winter 2009/2010 maxima.

* indicates a count of >50% of national importance

** indicates a count of national importance

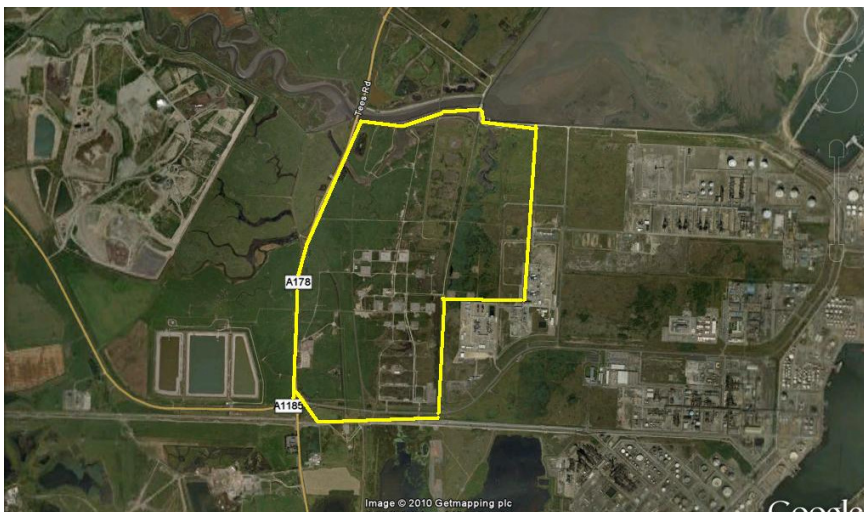
N.B. 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

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.

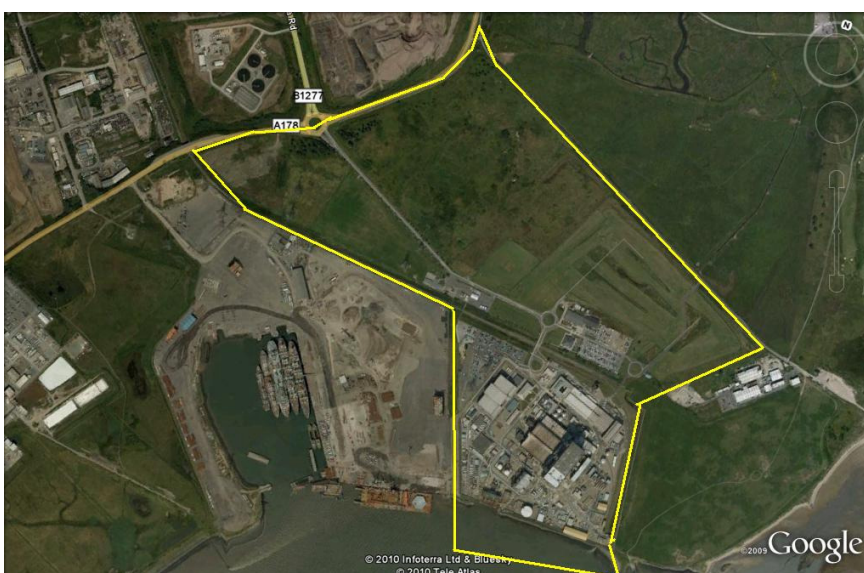
BTO CHALLENGE 2010 MAPS



Huntsman Tioxide



SABIC



Hartlepool Nuclear Power
Station

All maps from Google

TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

NAME

ADDRESS

CONTACT TELEPHONE

EMAIL

I WOULD LIKE TO RESERVE SEATS FOR THE TBC 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ON FRIDAY 26th NOVEMBER 2010 @ £20 PER SEAT AND ENCLOSE £..... AS PAYMENT FOR MY BOOKING.

Please return to: Ted Parker, 9 Morton Carr Lane, Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough, TS7 0JU before 31st October 2010
Please make cheques payable to 'Teesmouth Bird Club'.



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K11 Crew Neck Sweatshirt Black			£16.00
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Baseball Cap Black			£8.00
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SIZE GUIDE

Size	Chest
S	34-36"
M	38-40"
L	42-44"
XL	46-48"
XXL	50-52"
XXXL	54-56"



Prices valid until September 2010