

Teesmouth Bird Club

Newsletter

April 2017 (No. 66)



APOLOGY

We would like to apologise for the poor formatting of this newsletter due to various issues. Hopefully normal service will be resumed with the next newsletter.

The TBC Newsletter is published three times a year. Compilation and layout Eric James, distribution Chris Sharp, web download Jamie Duffie. This newsletter was compiled by Sophie Horne. Any material for inclusion in the Newsletter is welcome. Please send contributions to tbc.projects@hotmail.co.uk

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

Chris Sharp summarises a winter period that had several long-staying scarcer species.

NOVEMBER 2016



Eastern Black Redstart, Skinninggrove

Sophie Horne

After the excesses of the previous month it was inevitable that the pace of rarities would slow down and so it proved.

The Eastern Black Redstart at Skinninggrove was still present and was to remain throughout the winter. It proved to be very popular during its stay and was a photographers dream. A Green-winged Teal was at Scaling Dam on 1st along with a Purple Sandpiper and a Common Scoter, the latter two species being unusual at this inland site. Two White-fronted Geese were present here the following day.

Remarkably a second Eastern Black Redstart was found at Hartlepool on 3rd. This bird remained until 13th. Several small parties of Waxwings were recorded during the first week of the month with 24 at Skelton on 4th. Whooper Swans were also passing through the county at this time. 19 passed Hartlepool on 3rd with 15 at RSPB Saltholme the same day.

40 Twite were at South Gare on 2nd with 3 Shore Larks there on 4th. A Jack Snipe was at RSPB Saltholme on 4th.

Sea watching at Hartlepool on 5th produced 3 Little Auks and 4 Pomarine Skuas. The following day saw a late Sabine's Gull along with single Sooty Shearwater, Little Auk, Great Northern Diver and Pomarine Skua. 23 Little Gulls were also feeding off the harbour. A Great Northern Diver sort shelter here from 7th.

Long-tailed duck, black-necked Grebe, Jack Snipe, Long-eared Owl and Scaup were all to be found at RSPB Saltholme at this time. An escaped Gyr/Saker was also present at the reserve and a late Marsh Harrier was at Dorman's Pool on 9th. A Hen Harrier was seen at South Gare the same day.



Long-eared Owl

Ian Forrest



Shore Lark, Hartlepool

Ian Forrest

The Seal sands area saw Great Northern Diver, 2 Velvet Scoters, Red-necked Grebe and Brent Goose on 13th. Four Short-eared Owls were nearby on Coatham Marsh. Two Shore Larks were at Old Cemetery, Hartlepool on 14th.



Whooper Swans

Brian Martin



Glaucous Gull, Hartlepool

Ray Scott

Another was at North Gare the same day. One of the Hartlepool birds remained throughout the winter, no doubt enjoying the feed that was regularly put out for it.

Twite numbers reached 120 on Seaton Snook whereas numbers of Snow Buntings were low. There were 16 at North Gare on 14th but for much of the winter they proved difficult to catch up with on the north side of the river.

A Glaucous Gull was at Hartlepool on 17th and a Slavonian Grebe was on Bran Sands on 18th. Several herds of Whooper Swans passed through mid-month with the Saltholme area proving particularly favourable. A Hen Harrier was at Scaling Dam on 20th. A Black-throated Diver here 22nd-23rd was a good inland find.

The sea off Redcar proved attractive to Velvet Scoters with double figure counts on many days throughout the winter.

The last scarcities of the autumn were a Pallas's Warbler at Hartlepool on 25th and a Richard's Pipit on Seaton Common on 26th. The former was photographed by a non-

birdwatcher having been picked up off the pavement! Fortunately it flew away shortly after.

The last few days of the month saw a Great Northern Diver on Seal Sands along with two Long-tailed Ducks. Twite numbers remained high at nearby Seaton Snook and good numbers of Waxwings began to appear with 52 in Billingham on 27th.

DECEMBER 2016

The Twite flock peaked at 150 at Seaton Snook on 1st. 16 Velvet Scoter were also off Redcar on this date. A Black-throated Diver was off South Gare on 2nd and Great Northern Divers remained on Seal Sands and in Hartlepool harbour.

50 Brambling at Lockwood Beck on 5th was a good count. Green Sandpipers were to be found at their usual winter haunts at Teesside Retail Park and on Billingham Beck. Another was on Fire Station Pool on 10th. A White-fronted Goose was at Haverton Hole on 9th and two Scaup were nearby at Saltholme Pools on 10th.

Two whooper Swans were at Saltholme Pools on 12th. A Chiffchaff at Zinc Works Road bushes remained into the early part of 2017.

Waxwing numbers began to increase around mid-month. The Norton and Thornaby areas proved the most attractive with 350 reported at the latter on 21st.

Three Tundra Bean Geese were at Kilton from 21st and they remained into 2017. Several small groups of White-fronted Geese were also reported at this time with 19 at RSPB Saltholme on 20th and 4 at Bowesfield on 22nd. The Barnacle Goose flock at Saltholme was a hundred strong and with the addition of small numbers of Pink-footed Geese in the area, meant Geese were very much to the forefront at this time.

The last week of the month was fairly quiet. Glaucous Gulls were off Parton rocks and

Skinningrove on 30th. A Great Northern Diver was off Redcar on this date and 5 Scaup were at RSPB Saltholme on 31st.

JANUARY 2017

As usual many birders were out on the first day of a new year and a good selection of birds was to be had. The Eastern Black Redstart was still performing well. All the commoner Geese species were available with Tundra Bean, White-fronted and Brent Geese to be seen on the North Tees Marshes. Five whooper swans visited RSPB Saltholme but were gone the following day.

Snow Buntings were scarce this winter. Four were on Seaton Snook early in the month but they soon moved on. The most reliable were 2 birds at Redcar Stray which remained to the end of February. Two Water Pipits were on Cowpen Marsh on 2nd and a Bittern was at Coatham Marsh on 3rd.



Waxwing, Thornaby

Tom Horne



Tundra Bean Goose

Ian Forrest

Two Corn Buntings at Redcar Fox Covert from 3rd had presumably been present all winter. Great Northern Divers were regularly present at Hartlepool Fish Quay and Seaton Snook

throughout the month. A small influx of Glaucous Gulls included birds at Dorman's Pool, Redcar and Newburn. Up to 17 Water Pipits were reported on 5th on Cowpen Marsh.

A Siberian Chiffchaff was in a Skelton garden on 8th. The Shore Lark continued to be seen at Old Cemetery, Hartlepool.

What was presumably the regularly returning drake Green-winged Teal was at Saltholme Pools from 10th-14th but then went missing until late February. 15 Waxwings at RSPB Saltholme at this time proved particularly popular but larger numbers were present in the Thornaby area. Two Willow Tits in the Haverton scrub were unusual for this location.



Waxwing, Saltholme

Ian Watson



Green-winged Teal, Saltholme

Ian Forrest



Iceland Gull, Hartlepool

Ian Forrest



Iceland Gull, Hartlepool

Tom Horne

A Sooty Shearwater flew past Hartlepool on 13th along with a Long-tailed Duck. The following day a particularly obliging 1st winter Iceland Gull took up residence at Hartlepool fish quay and remained until the end of February. It was often accompanied by 1-2 Glaucous Gulls.

Mid-month saw few new birds appearing, with the Iceland Gull and Great Northern Diver in Hartlepool Fish Quay proving the most popular long stayers. A Great White Egret was at Scaling Dam on 19th and it remained until 22nd. Slavonian Grebes were at Hartlepool on 20th and at Greatham creek on 21st. A Black-throated Diver was also offshore at Hartlepool on 21st.

Numbers of White-fronted Geese began to increase as the month progressed. Up to 26 were present along the Seal Sands road by 22nd but this number had increased to 63 by 26th. Two Tundra Bean Geese also accompanied the flock.

A single Lapland Bunting joined the 2 Corn Buntings at Redcar on 23rd. A 1st summer drake Scaup was at Bowesfield from 26th. Only one Long-eared Owl was in the roost at Haverton Hole but it usually showed well.

Bitterns were also occasionally seen here. A Little Gull was off Saltburn on 29th.



Lapland Bunting, Redcar

Mike Tucker



Lapland Bunting, Redcar

Rob Young

FEBRUARY 2017

With the relatively mild weather continuing into February little in the way of cold weather movement was noted during the month and it was very much a case of "as you were".

A Long-tailed Duck was at RSPB Saltholme early in the month. A Cetti's Warbler was also present here and remained until the end of the month. The Shore Lark remained at Old Cemetery throughout the month.

Numbers of White-fronted Geese continued to increase on the North Tees Marshes and they peaked at 141 along the Seal Sands road on 18th. The number of Waxwings in the county reduced considerably with 21 at Pinchinthorpe on 4th the largest flock reported.

60 Twite were Seaton Snook on 7th. A Bonxie was off Saltburn on 12th and a Caspian Gull was at Hartlepool on the same day. Two Great Northern Divers were at Hartlepool on 12th. Eight Tundra Bean Geese visited Scaling Dam

on 14th. A family party of Crossbills at Lockwood Beck proved attractive at this time.

A Lapland Bunting at Marske on 19th showed well and both Corn and Snow Buntings were nearby. The first Avocets of the spring were recorded on 20th when 7 were on Greenabella.

The Green-winged Teal re-appeared at Saltholme on 24th for two days. The month ended with still over a hundred White-fronted Geese on the North Tees Marshes. In addition the Iceland Gull was still at Hartlepool and the Eastern Black Redstart continued to attract a steady stream of visitors at Skinningrove.

Thoughts began to turn to the promise of the first summer visitors...



White-fronted Goose

Ian Forrest



Avocet, Greenabella Marsh

Ian Forrest



Great Northern Diver, Hartlepool

Tom Horne

SWANSONG: A LIFETIME WITH SPARROWS

I began my study of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* in 1947. I have now watched them in more than 70 countries, from sea level in Tierra del Fuego to over 2,000 m in the Himalayas; from a dentist's chair in Newbury to 340 m below ground in Frickley Colliery in Yorkshire, where a pair successfully reared three young. They still surprise and fascinate me. In 1950, a group of sparrows hitched a lift on a ship from Bremerhaven, Germany, and disembarked on reaching Melbourne, in Australia. A young bird boarded Pan Am Flight 811 from Los Angeles to Sydney on 4th July (Independence Day!) in 1981, but was unlucky in that it was promptly despatched by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Authorities. Another was killed at Lord's, the home of cricket, by a fast delivery from Jahangir Khan in a match between the MCC and Cambridge University on 3rd July 1939. It can be seen, mounted on the match ball, in the Memorial Gallery. But probably the most memorable is the one that interfered with an attempt by the Dutch TV Company Endemol to break the world record of collapsing more than four million dominos in a row. The event was being set up in an exhibition hall by a group of volunteers. They were in their fourth week when a sparrow got into the hall and managed to topple some of the dominos. It was shot. Endemol was fined €200 for killing a protected bird. The stuffed bird can now be seen, mounted on a box of dominos, in the Rotterdam Natural History Museum. In 1980, they even learnt to open electronic doors by flying through the light beam.

In the early 1920s, I paid a visit to the Ayrshire Coast. With my mother's opera glasses, I saw some birds entering nesting holes in a cliff. Initially, I thought they were buntings. Closer observation revealed that they were in fact male House Sparrows. Up to that point I was familiar only with the sparrows in the suburb of Glasgow where I lived. This was in the days of coal fires and pea-souper fogs, so these birds were dull and dingy. An adult male House Sparrow living in open country is, in contrast, a magnificently colourful bird.

I joined the Territorial Army in 1937 and was called up in 1939. In 1944, I was admitted to Ronkswood Hospital in Worcester, having been wounded in France some six weeks after landing on D-Day. Ronkswood had been a TB Hospital, but was converted to a holding unit where wounded soldiers were retained until it seemed likely that you were going to live. I was there for five weeks. Until then the House Sparrow had just been another bird, but my view of the species quickly changed. The ward was at ground level, it was high summer and the doors were kept open. Despite the constant activity, sparrows came in regularly to look for food. I was fascinated by the way they behaved in the busy ward. They were not shy, although always alert to their surroundings. Three years later, having completed my university course that was interrupted by the war, I moved to the small village of Highclere, in Hampshire, and wanted to concentrate my ornithological interest on one species. Petrol rationing limited the distance I could travel. Sparrows were nesting on my house and, recalling the way they had fascinated me when I was in hospital, I thought that they were the obvious choice.

House Sparrows are extremely wary and alter their behaviour if closely watched. I decided to limit my interference with them to colour-ringing, so that I could recognise the individuals. A letter to Elsie Leach at the Natural History Museum resulted in a ringing permit by return of post! My findings on the colonial behaviour of House Sparrows, and

the interactions between colonies in two sixyear studies I carried out (first in Highclere and later in a surburban area of Stockton-onTees, where I moved to in 1954), were published and marked the start of more than 60 years of formal study. Here, I want to concentrate on some more recent findings and ideas that have not previously been

Table 1. Breeding-season density of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (no. of individuals per heactare) in two privately built housing estates in Guisborough, Cleveland.

	Pine Hills (30.0 ha, built 1968–69)	Rivers Estate (35.6 ha built 1950s)
1998	4.6	4.0
2008	1.7	1.6

reported. House Sparrows are primarily vegetarian, but the nestlings require invertebrates, particularly in the first few days of life, if they are to fledge successfully. The adults seem able to anticipate this. At the beginning of the breeding season, they search the shrubs in my suburban garden in Guisborough, in Cleveland. They appear not to collect or eat invertebrates such as aphids, which makes me wonder if they are just checking their availability.

Urban House Sparrows suffered a significant decline in the 1990s. This was first reported in London, but it was not until the late 1990s that I became aware of it. A subsequent trawl through newspaper articles and local bird reports suggested that the decline had actually started about 1990. In 1998 I carried out breeding-season censuses in two privately built housing estates in suburban Guisborough and repeated these in 2008. Table 1 summarises my results.

In 2008, I also began a study of the sparrows in a nearby social housing estate, Dorset Road Estate. Built in the 1950s, this 10-ha estate had the same density of houses as prewar social housing estates in the town centre (48 dwellings/ha), but was very different in that the houses are in long terraces separated by large areas of grass. The grassed areas are mown by the council at about five-week intervals during the growing season, allowing the grass to set seed. There is no chemical treatment so they provide plenty of the invertebrates essential for rearing sparrow

chicks. The houses have pantile roofs giving ample nesting opportunities. I carried out breeding-season population counts in this estate during 2008–13 (fig. 1).

The density of 9.8 individuals/ha in 2008 far exceeded the 4–5 individuals/ha I had previously found in some 30 urban/suburban colonies, mostly in the UK but including one each in Ireland and Belgium. Even more surprisingly, there was a remarkable increase over the six years, which requires some explanation, since I cannot believe that this colony is unique in the east of England, where according to the BTO’s Breeding Bird Survey urban House Sparrow populations are at best stable.

In previous studies with colour-ringed sparrows, I found that adults searched for food for the nestlings within 50 m of the nest. However, the birds from the Dorset Road Estate that collected food from my garden were travelling at least 200 m. And, earlier in the season, they also collected feathers from this distance. According to a study at the University of Granada, the females invest more energy in laying eggs when the male brings more feathers to the nest. Perhaps they identify such a male as likely to be of more help in rearing the young than a philandering one more interested in seeking another female partner.

The fact that the Dorset Road estate is characterised by limited road traffic (access is restricted to a single spine road, limited to one direction of flow) piqued my interest, and prompted the hypothesis that one factor in the urban sparrow decline is atmospheric pollution by particulates (nanoparticles) from the exhausts of diesel engines. The respiratory system in vertebrates has evolved to filter out dust not nano-sized particles. This could be an important factor affecting the development of juvenile sparrows. There is circumstantial evidence to support this hypothesis. A study by the WHO in Europe published in 2005 found that children living in town centres

suffered from respiratory disease and interference with their neurological development. Urban House Sparrows occupy the same environment and could be even more susceptible than humans because of the unique avian respiratory system that gives birds the highest gas exchange rate capacity in vertebrates. The decline of House Sparrows in the UK is greatest in London and the southeast, the area that suffers some of the worst atmospheric pollution in the UK (for example, Marylebone Road, in London, regularly has a value of 70–80 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ – the EU Air Quality Standard is 25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). Pollution in the southeast of England stems not only from the number of diesel-engine vehicles, but also from the drift of polluted air from the Continent. In the west, where the air is less

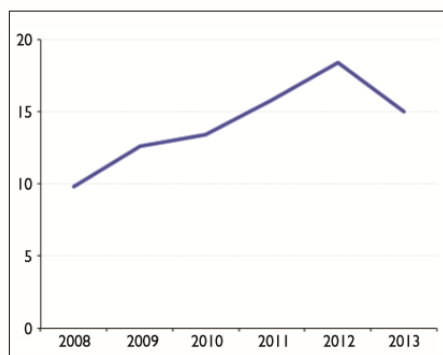


Fig. 1. Breeding-season censuses of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* on the Dorset Road Estate in Guisborough, Cleveland, showing density (no. of individuals per hectare) during 2008–13.

polluted – owing to a lower density of diesel vehicles, the dilution effect of clean air brought in by the prevailing westerly winds, possibly also by the ‘scrubbing’ effect of higher rainfall – urban sparrow populations are increasing. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that road traffic is a factor in urban sparrow decline. For example, Helen Baker, currently President of the London Natural History Society, found that, in a survey of seven tetrads north of Heathrow, House Sparrows were present only in quiet residential streets with light traffic.

The obvious way to test my hypothesis would be to compare the particulate concentration in areas where the populations are stable or

still in decline with that where populations are increasing, preferably using adjacent colonies,



287. The study area in Guisborough, Cleveland, May 2008.

such as mine in Guisborough. Determining the particulate level is neither easy nor cheap, although work at the University of Lancaster has shown that leaves collect particulates when drawing in air through their stomata, offering one potential avenue for further investigation. My problem is that I have no longer the energy nor the facilities to carry out this work but it is, in my view, a potentially hugely important research area, not only for the sparrows – much as I love them – but for a range of other urban wildlife as well as for the children of our own species.

Finally, a word of warning. Carrying out breeding censuses in urban areas is extremely hazardous. I have been interviewed by the police on four separate occasions following complaints about a suspicious character looking at houses through binoculars in the early hours, just when people are getting dressed. Fortunately, the police believed my explanation and on one occasion even suggested that in future I should park my car well away so that I did not provide the means of identification.

Denis Summers-Smith



Denis Summers-Smith's first paper on House Sparrows in BB was published in 1956 (Brit. Birds 49: 465–488), and he has observed with some satisfaction that this editorial extends his contributions to the journal, the majority of them on House Sparrows, to more than 60 years.

British Birds 109 • September 2016

RINGING AT STILLINGTON

The feeding station on the Stillington reserve is now well established, with high numbers of birds using the site. The first ringing session took place there on 9th February – a cold, but relatively windless day. Chris Brown, Eric Wood and Colin Conroy had their work cut out during a 3 hour stint, ringing an excellent catch of 113 birds. The breakdown of the total caught was as follows:- 59 Blue Tit, 21 Great Tit, 9 Chaffinch, 6 Tree Sparrow, 5 Long-tailed Tit, 4 Robin, 3 Coal Tit, 3 Blackbird, 2 Dunnock, and 1 Lesser Redpoll. A flock of about 50 Siskins overlooked the proceedings from the safety of the tree canopies!

The team took along a further 4 ringers on the 18th February, in order to familiarise them with the site and, on this occasion, a further 30 new birds were caught and there were 8 re-traps. Of note, 14 new Tree Sparrows were ringed, a second Lesser Redpoll and different species on the list ringed included a Goldcrest and a Wren. The Siskins remained somewhat mischievous and uncooperative, preferring to



cavort about in the tree-tops – yet again!

LOCAL OUTINGS APRIL-AUGUST 2017

COWPEN BEWLEY WOODLAND PARK

Tuesday 25th April 2017

Join Dave Nelson to explore this local nature reserve. A good selection of common woodland species should be seen and early summer migrants such as Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Blackcap should be well established. Meet at the nature reserve car park at 10.00 a.m.

Leader: Dave Nelson Tel: 01642 824755

SUMMER MIGRANTS AT FLATTS LANE COUNTRY PARK MIDDLESBROUGH

Tuesday 9th May 2017

Meet in the car park at 9.15 a.m. at Flatts Lane Visitors Centre for a walk in search of summer migrants and other resident birds with Geoff Myers, who knows this area very well. Hopefully summer visitors should include the usual warblers including Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap and possibly Garden Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler. Many other resident woodland species should also be present.

Leader: Geoff Myers Tel: 01642 461850

NIGHTJARS

June 2017

It is hoped that the Nightjars will be back at Guisborough Forest this spring. If they are, it is intended to visit here on a June night. Seeing and hearing them is very much influenced by the weather. It is therefore the plan to advertise this walk at a later date on the website whenever the weather conditions look favourable.

RSPB SALTHOLME WILDERNESS WALK

Saturday 15th July 2017

Meet in RSPB reception at 10.00 a.m. and join Chris Sharp for a walk around the perimeter of the Reserve. A good selection of summer visitors should be present. Sedge, Reed and Grasshopper Warblers are almost guaranteed. The first returning waders should also be passing through.

Leader: Chris Sharp

SEATON SNOOK

Sunday 27th August 2017

Meet at the end of the Zinc Works Road at 9.00. Join Graeme Joynt for this outing which has been arranged to coincide with the incoming tide. Hopefully good numbers of passage waders should be present. Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Knot, Ringed Plover and Dunlin are amongst the targets but something scarcer may be present amongst the large numbers of the smaller waders which are often present here at this time of year. The Snook should also hold several species of tern at this time.

Leader: Graeme Joynt

BOOKS WORTH READING

Cuckoos, Cowbirds and Other Cheats

(T. & A.D. Poyser 2000)

N. B. Davies

Although the main theme of this book is a discussion of brood parasitism in birds, there is much more to it than that. Brood parasitism is by no means limited to the Common Cuckoo and the North American Cowbirds, but occurs in about one hundred different species from a range of families, including even a South American duck.

A substantial part of the text is devoted to the Common Cuckoo. The field study and the

experimental work carried out by Davies and his colleagues in Cambridge University are discussed fully and show that brood parasitism is a dynamic process akin to an arms race between the brood parasite and its host. The Chapters on the Brown Cowbird illustrate that this is at a much earlier stage of development than that of our Cuckoo.

The book, however, has much more to it than that. Brood parasitism is set against the background of Darwinian evolution by natural selection so that the reader will end up painlessly with a much better understanding of the natural history of birds. It is not a difficult read, but an excellent introduction if you want to know more about birds than merely being able to identify them. It is packed with information, generously spiced with personal incidents. I learned a lot from it.

Birds of Man's World

(British Museum Natural History & Cornell University Press, 1978)

Derek Goodwin

Derek Goodwin, christened Richard Patrick, but always known as Derek even by his parents!

Derek was passionate about birds. Not only in his day job in the British Museum (Natural History), where he became Principal Scientific Officer for birds, when it was located in South Kensington, but moving to Tring in the early 1970s. Nonetheless, he stayed at his house in Kent where he had a large aviary, commuting to Tring for 2-3 years until he retired!. He was an eminent aviculturist and travelled widely. I first made contact with him in the 1950s, when I asked for his advice on getting House Sparrows to breed in an aviary. It worked!

He published a large number of books, including two substantial monographs: Crows of the World (1976) and The Pigeons and

Doves of the World (1978). But it is not these, but his last book *Birds of Man's World* that is my final recommendation.

This book is not a review of the interactions between man and birds, but a highly personalised account of observations by an internationally recognised and experienced field ornithologist, who at the age of 76 described himself in the following lines.

There was an old man who said: "My! What a beautiful bird I espy." When they asked: "Is it rare?" He replied: "I don't care. So long as it pleases my eye."

Just my own sentiments.

He takes the opportunity of observing the scene where he happens to be, with chapter headings like *Birds in Towns*, *Birds Fed by Man*, *Birds and Bread*, eschewing the opportunity of looking for local specialities and rarities, His enthusiasm is infectious.

Addendum

If you want an exciting travel book with lots of new discoveries about birds, you cannot do better than *The Malay Archipelago* by Alfred Russel Wallace. Oxford University Press (1896).

TIT-Bits

By Eric James

HERRING GULLS : PUBLIC ENEMIES?

Herring Gulls get a bad press these days, though they are rarely given their full name and are just described as Seagulls. The problems started when the birds started to nest on roofs from where they would swoop down at potential predators (such as householders and postmen). They did not usually strike, though their close approach is un-nerving.

Since then, the gulls have taken up stealing food. Scarborough Council recently asked for reports of food stealing. Most reports were during June and July. Records came from

Whitby (West Pier Road), Filey and Scarborough. Of the 22 reports, there were nine of actual attacks. It is thought that closure of local waste tips might be the primary cause, aggravated by people feeding the gulls. The Council have also set up a petition which will lead to a Commons discussion if it reaches 100,000 signatures. Some research in Belgium has shown that the problem birds are males collecting food for nestlings and the frequency depends on the stage the young birds are at.

One Poolie reported birds turning up towards the end of a match and attacking the players. However, another Poolie (our own Chris Sharp), while confirming that the gulls did turn up in expectation of half-eaten pies, they do not attack the players, though it might be a good idea if they did as it would get them (the players) moving.

From limited experience of eating Verill's finest in the Borough Hall gardens, the Headland gulls are well behaved, standing at a respectful distance.

GOING DOWN : IVORY GULLS

There are still plenty about, though the world population is now below 14,000 breeding pairs but with a breeding range covering most of the Arctic, actual numbers are difficult to assess, though aerial surveys showed a fall of 80% between the 1980s and the early 2000s in the population in the important area of the Canadian high Arctic. Many colonies had gone completely and those remaining were smaller, though there was good news in the discovery of 14 new colonies. Birds in Greenland are doing badly, based on data collected from 1988 to 2016 from an icebreaker travelling between Greenland and Svalbard.

The changes are part of a trend seen throughout the twentieth century, which would explain the rarity of sightings in Cleveland (just one during twentieth Century - at Saltburn in February 1986).

The causes of the declines are difficult to identify and it is suspected they might be in the wintering areas. Like other Arctic animals, the species does depend on ice floes so might suffer from the reduced Arctic ice. The fresh water from the melting ice attracts algae and invertebrates, and these attract fish which form part of the birds' diet. The rest of the diet consists of an unappetising mixture of faeces, carrion and offal. It is said that the jaw structure is adapted for dealing with frozen faeces.

Another possible problem is poisoning by industrial waste. Comparison of Canadian museum specimens from 1877 to 2007 shows a 45-fold increase in mercury levels. In humans, mercury causes Minamata disease named after a bay in Japan where the population was poisoned by eating fish that had been swimming in waste water that contained methyl mercury. Even the local cats were affected (dancing cat fever).

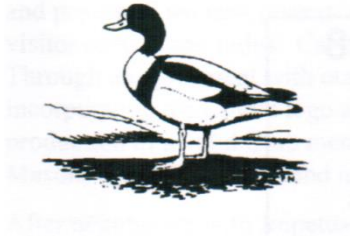
KILLER SLUGS



To paraphrase_ a journalist's rule: bird eats invertebrate is not news, invertebrate eats bird is news. In one sense, many, or most, birds do provide food for invertebrates in the form of being hosts for blood-sucking parasites

Two Polish researchers studying nestling Whitethroats discovered something which is the stuff of nightmares; they were surprised to find the nestlings dead with serious injuries and covered in slime. The slugs concerned are those of the genus *Arion*, these are large and are black or red. A slug had been seen in the nest the previous day; it had gone by the next day and the nestlings were dead. A literature search brought up other, similar observations.

The species that suffer are those that nest low down, such as Reed Warblers, and *Phylloscopus* species



TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB

Registered as a Charity No. 508850

ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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(Ordinary Member) **Dave Nelson** (First Appointed 2015)

(Ordinary Member) **Barbara Crinson** (First Appointed 2016)

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Honorary Treasurer's Report 2016

A steady year, with overalls funds stable. Income was slightly down on 2015, at c.£6400, while expenditure was higher at c.£6500. Some of the higher expenditure can be explained by one-off expenses and year end overlap of postage spend. Postage inflation is a significant factor for the Club and we encourage use of electronic media for newsletter access and collection of annual reports at meetings or similar where possible.

In the coming year we will continue to support the network of feeding stations, popular both with birds and birders! The committee will be considering options for provision of additional stations where appropriately placed.

The continued healthy state of finances allows us to yet again hold subscription rates at their current level, making membership a rare bargain in these frugal times.

Mark Askew



CHAIRMANS REPORT 2016

This Charity's report purpose is to give you an insight to the years activities. We have held eight very well attended meetings as well as the AGM at the Stockton library.

Our Bird walks have been well attended not just by beginners but by our experienced members. The Ringing demonstrations have been particularly well received.

We have also produced three fact filled newsletters. The annual report has been of an amazing standard and understandably well received by the birding plaudits. It is worth mentioning at this opportunity to keep your records coming in, especially utilising the on-line facilities.

Conservation remains a priority and we continue to be involved with the Tees working trust, INCA, Tees ringing group, Natural England & the RSPB. Our input is also valued by many industrial, commercial and residential developments. We have attended many meetings to promote the TBC and most of all the necessity of our wildlife.

I would like to thank Peter Garbutt for all his knowledgeable and valuable input as he leaves the committee.

We finally, with the support of Northumbrian Water authority, opened the revamped Scaling dam hide. The hide is now known as the 'Ted Parker hide' in memory of our late Chairman. The opening day itself, was an emotional occasion for all of us including Ted's family. I wish to thank the team who put the day together and who maintain it.

At RSPB Saltholme the TBC possess two hides, The Phil Stead hide in the main car park and across the road at Dormans, The Jeff Young's hide. We had plans to create another hide at the south side of Dormans but after three years of toil by the committee the attempt is on hold due to planning and litigious complications which are frankly amazing. Our efforts have been substantial and the club is lucky to have such keen stalwarts but the negotiations have ended in deadlock.

We continue to fund feeding stations at Cowpen Bewley, Coatham Stob & Saltburn Valley gardens and now due to the efforts of Barbara Crinson a new one has been established at Stillington Nature Reserve. Barbara has established contact with the local primary school who are involved with the project and we mustn't forget the ringers who have had their first session at the site there controlling a good number of birds. We have contacted other schools to promote 'Birding' so if you have spare ID books and or Optics please donate them at our next meeting.

As you can see we promote the TBC to all ages and certainly our youth are our future.

This is the end of my first year as Chairman and I would like to take the opportunity to thank Mike McGrory for the positive support from my Vice chairman .Thanks to all committee members of all committees whose energy keeps the club going forward, well done

I look forward to announcing the member's candidate for the Ted Parker award for outstanding work for our club as well as the appointment of the new Vice Chairman at the AGM

Brian Clasper

TBC Chairman

April 2017

CLUB MEMBERSHIP

	Total	Full	Family	Junior	S/C	Life	Hon
2005	287	134	95	-	39	14	5
2006	317	157	89	-	52	14	5
2007	346	156	119	-	51	14	6
2008	421	176	170	-	55	14	6
2009	487	203	190	1	73	14	6
2010	521	209	209	2	78	13	5
2011	538	225	214	2	79	13	5
2012	548	312	217	1		13	5
2013	509	286	200	2		14	7
2014	488	261	207	2		12	6
2015	476	266	189	2		13	6
2016	480	268	192	1		13	6

As can be seen from the above table the club membership rose slightly in 2016.It represents the first increase in membership for 4 years though the overall total still compares favourably to the numbers 10 years ago.

Since 2012 senior citizen membership fees have been the same as full membership fees and hence the above table does not split the number of senior citizens but judging by the members attending club meetings and local outings it is safe to assume that the number of members in this age group make up a significant proportion of the total membership. At £12 the membership fee still remains excellent value. Despite the fact that the junior membership rate was reduced to only £5 at the AGM

in April 2016 the virtual non existence of juniors is perhaps a worry for the future. The club's subscription rate compares favourably with other county bird watching societies.

As in previous years the many hours of free time given by certain members is worthy of mention. Both Dave Nelson and John Fletcher have shown many new members the main bird watching sites in Cleveland and I am sure their efforts are much appreciated. Eric James, our newsletter editor for many years sadly was taken ill in late 2016. We wish him well in his recovery. Thankfully Sophie Horne stepped in at the last minute to edit the December newsletter and is willing to continue in the roll until Eric is well again.

Our website manager Jamie Duffie has also overseen a website that gains praise from everyone who logs on. Despite the odd teething problem over the past year the site is well used and with the ever increasing use of twitter as a means of reporting sightings and publishing photographs represents the best way of visitors to the area to keep up with what's around.

The annual bird report is also a publication the club can be rightly proud of. As a member of the records sub-committee for the past four years I know the amount of time that is spent collating the records and writing and checking the report. The recorder Tom Francis, the editor Graeme Joynt and the rest of the compilers must be thanked for their efforts. The 2015 bird report is bigger and better than ever. Thanks must also go to Chris Brown who formats the report before publication.

As thanks for his work as recorder over the past 10 years Tom Francis will be given the "Ted Parker award" at the AGM. This award was introduced in memory of Ted and is given to members who contribute significantly to the club and its aims. Tom follows on from Don Page, Russell McAndrew and Jamie Duffie the previous recipients of the award.

Chris Sharp

TBC Balance Sheet 01.01.2016-31.12.2016

TEESMOUTH BIRD CLUB						
Statement of Income & Expenditure for 2016						
(with 2015 for comparison)						
			2016		2015	
			Income	Payment	Income	Payment
Subscriptions			4645.00		4692.00	
Gift Aid			940.79		998.67	
Interest			336.46		416.87	
Meetings				451.60		391.60
Lecture Fees				235.00		120.00
TBC Gen Publications			444.88		479.95	
Bird Report				2300.00		2400.00
Printing & Stationery				492.30		329.17
Postage				1128.16		425.64
Subs to other Societies				49.50		22.00
Data Provision			0.00		250.00	
Insurance				262.80		530.92
Sundries				0.00		14.00
Website				248.32		194.28
Donations			0.00		10.00	0.00
Dormans pool				0.00	0.00	0.00
Feeding stations				516.34		635.96
Recorders expenses				0.00		61.99
Report editor's computer				195.10		0.00
Biodiversity event				400.20		0.00
Ted Parker plaque Scaling				50.00		0.00
Ted Parker platform				218.50		0.00
			6367.13	6547.82	6847.49	5125.56
	Excess Income			-180.69		1721.93
			<u>6367.13</u>	<u>6367.13</u>	<u>6847.49</u>	<u>6847.49</u>
		Balance B/F 2015	60283.69	Balance B/F 2014	58561.76	
		Excess Income	-180.69		1721.93	
		Balance 31.12.2016	<u>60103.00</u>		<u>60283.69</u>	
		Cash In Hand	0.00		0.00	
		Bank Current Acc	3122.21		4283.60	
		P Stead Mem Fund	644.26		0.02	
		NSB Investment Acc	56336.53		56000.07	
			<u>60103.00</u>		<u>60283.69</u>	

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2016/2017 SUMMARY

	November	December	January	February	March
	13	11	8	12	12
Little Grebe	<u>35</u>	21	29	19	18
Great Crested Grebe	3	12	12	0	<u>34</u>
Cormorant	<u>89</u>	77	81	75	65
Mute Swan	<u>53</u>	49	36	29	33
Greylag Goose	209	209	<u>312</u>	10	148
Shelduck	387*	398*	<u>418*</u>	239	407*
Wigeon	2547*	3895*	2543*	2632*	<u>4059*</u>
Gadwall	123	114	75	49	<u>302**</u>
Teal	871	<u>1178*</u>	574	318	631
Mallard	<u>185</u>	171	181	143	144
Pintail	29	22	23	17	<u>40</u>
Shoveler	102*	48	87	65	<u>123*</u>
Pochard	26	36	57	42	<u>83</u>
Tufted Duck	64	103	87	66	<u>181</u>
Eider	5	11	<u>15</u>	0	3
Goldeneye	21	29	<u>31</u>	24	27
Red-br. Merganser	<u>58*</u>	31	23	34	49*
Coot	396	445	<u>505</u>	253	279
Oystercatcher	<u>1015</u>	1010	667	749	833
Ringed Plover	31	51	<u>61</u>	1	46
Golden Plover	474	<u>2509*</u>	952	165	14
Grey Plover	125	<u>201</u>	184	61	54
Lapwing	3100*	4289*	<u>4363*</u>	2398	352
Knot	267	<u>694</u>	561	272	296
Sanderling	13	85*	<u>119*</u>	39	71
Purple Sandpiper	24	<u>45</u>	0	0	29
Dunlin	572	<u>1011</u>	754	75	78
Ruff	0	0	0	0	0
Snipe	<u>22</u>	5	3	2	7
Black-tailed Godwit	<u>53</u>	5	8	12	29
Bar-tailed Godwit	30	63	36	27	<u>80</u>
Curlew	229	272	469	<u>525</u>	487
Redshank	<u>819*</u>	792*	594	438	507
Turnstone	149	<u>186</u>	106	67	94

* 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

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2016/2017 SUMMARY

Coverage was very good with 132 of the scheduled 135 sector counts completed over the five months.

Wigeon (4059, March) set a new all-time Tees WeBS record, this figure close to the 4400 required to make the estuary of national importance for the species. Winter peaks for mallard (185, November) and goldeneye (31, January) were new record lows (data going back to winter of 1988/1989).

Cormorant also had a poor winter (89, November) recording its lowest seasonal peak count since 1989/1990.

In terms of waders grey plover (201, December) yielded its best winter peak since 1998/1999 and dunlin (1011, December) since 1992/1993, although tidal displacement of birds has the potential to influence overall totals. Avocet (72, March), produced a new winter high as birds began to migrate towards their breeding grounds. The estuary also played host to 1 spotted redshank, 2 greenshank and 1 green sandpiper over the winter period.

Following this winter's series of counts, the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS site is no longer of national importance for sanderling however retains this status for gadwall.

Adam Jones

WeBS Local Organizer

March 2017