

Archived "latest news" January - December 1997

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Latest Highlights (Mostly Tatton Park)

01/01/97 361 Skylarks, 36 Pink-footed Geese plus a single Jack Snipe.

04/01/97 Green and Great spotted Woodpeckers, c.50 Siskins, 1m Goosander.

The year began in a most disappointing manner, mainly due to the weather on the day of 1997's first field trip - the long drag to Carsington Water near Ashbourne in Derbyshire. The visibility when we left Knutsford was pretty good but grew worse and worse during the journey to our destination - when we eventually arrived it was down to around 50 yards and made viewing impossible. Nevertheless the facilities provided were excellent and we resolved to re-visit the site sometime during the Spring. Fortunately we happened upon a most convenient hostelry and enjoyed a good lunch before heading back to Cheshire.

12/01/97 1M Gadwall, 4 Water Rails, 15 Redpolls, Brambling - few and far between this Winter, Black-throated Diver flew over at 11.10am and landed 2 miles away on Rostherne Mere 5 minutes later.

14/01/97 25 Corn Buntings going to roost on the Moor.

18/01/97 The mild spell prompted a number of Song Thrushes into song and a Great-spotted Woodpecker was drumming in Dog Wood. 129 Ruddy Ducks was a record count and as usual the high numbers came at the end of a relatively cold period of weather.

25/01/97 Signs of Spring in the mild weather, 4 Song Thrushes, many Dunnocks and even the odd Chaffinch in song. Still plenty of Winter visitors of course with a female Goosander and 300 Redwings; some sub-song from the latter. 27 Goldeneye as the late Winter build-up begins.

08/02/97 Plenty of woodpecker activity - 3 drumming Great Spotted, 1 Lesser Spotted and a Green calling loudly. Wildfowl numbers down 14 Goldeneye, 63 Tufted duck and only 7 Pochard. A Merlin has taken up residence in the park and is causing a certain amount of consternation amongst the small bird population!

The February trip, on the 9th., to The Wirral was much more successful, the day was fine

and sunny and probably contributed to a better than average turnout. Despite the very high tide (10.4 meters) Parkgate proved a relative disappointment with only single examples of Peregrine, Merlin and Short-eared Owl on show. Skylarks and Linnets were much in evidence and formed the bulk of a considerable passerine representation. Highlight of the day was the early morning visit to Inner Marsh Farm, birds earlier displaced by the previous high tide remained in large numbers with over 1000 Wigeon, 20 Bewick's Swans and many Pintail being joined by a superb male Smew, all viewed at close range under perfect viewing conditions. Waders on our local patch are few and far between -except of course for Lapwings and the odd Woodcock and Snipe- so we were all delighted to be able to enjoy super views of Black-tailed Godwits and 7 winter plumaged Spotted Redshanks.

15th & 16th February 1997. Now many Song Thrushes in song, joined this weekend by a Mistle Thrush and the first Skylarks. A pair of Canada Geese on territory on the Moor with 4 pairs of displaying Great Crested Grebe - one pair were already nest building on Melchett. Up to 8 Buzzards seen and the two Ravens have started Displaying!! A Sheduck was present on both days with Grey wagtail and 250 Redwings on the 15th.

22nd & 23rd February 1997. A weekend of rain and strong winds, not to the liking of the Song Thrushes, who seem to have decided it's still Winter after all and had all but stopped singing, Mistle Thrushes were more active and two pairs were disputing territory in Dog Wood. Wildfowl numbers were low with only 2 Pochard and 9 Goldeneye accompanying a flock of 100 Tufted Duck mainly on Melchett Mere. Mid week a flock of 100 Siskins were counted and at least one Raven was present on the 22nd. The Corn Bunting roost had fallen to only 3 birds at dusk the previous evening.

01/03/97 Some low-life has pinched the log book, not only the book but the box as well; I know we're always being told our records are valuable, but this is ridiculous! Big counts of Winter thrushes today with c60 Redwings and more than 200 Fieldfares, a zero count of Pochard, but 62 Tufted Ducks and 10 Goldeneye were still present, the latter should build up to around 50 as the month progresses. A pair of Curlew were on territory in the Deer Park, where I saw only a single Buzzard - at our Monthly indoor meeting last night a friend told me of a pair of Buzzards on his nearby farm that have been seen in "talon grappling" display during the week. Also during the past seven days the elusive (for me) Ravens have been observed carrying nesting material.

02/03/97 Good news and bad news about the Ravens - they are nesting but not in Tatton - they have chosen Rostherne and commute to Tatton to feed at the offal pit. Two more sites with displaying Buzzards, one in the park the other in Mobberley. The earliest record (in Tatton) of our first true Summer migrant, the Sand Martin, is the 8th. March so it's all hands to the pumps on Friday 7th. to see if this can be beaten, this of course won't further the cause of British Ornithology or be significant in anyway at all but it's good fun!

7 & 8/03/97 The weather was perfect for migration, warm and sunny with a light wind from the south-east, but alas no sign of Sand martins in the park. News though of a bird of this species seen at nearby Rostherne on the hardly believable date of 27th February. [In 1938 the Cheshire naturalist A.W. Boyd](#) reported a flock of 6 on the 20th. March as being unusually early! Earlier Springs - global warming?? Perhaps our quest to be the first to see each species at the start of each season could serve a useful purpose after all! The warm weather (14°C) prompted Lapwings to begin their beautiful and evocative display - friends had 4 Buzzards displaying and good views of the 2 Ravens apparently flying towards Mobberley. Also on the wing in the warm sunshine Peacock and Brimstone butterflies.

09/03/97 Society trip to Pennington Flash, Leigh; another good turnout for perhaps one of the least attractive venues, nevertheless always an interesting selection of waterfowl on view. Keith took on the role of Leader for the day, fresh from India, Nepal and South Georgia he insisted we walk all the way round, no mean feat for some of the committee!! No summer migrants but super views of displaying Grebes with, in the background, a trim male Smew enjoying the late winter warmth, not yet tempted to begin its long journey to the high Arctic. Also nice to see and hear a pair of Willow Tits now sadly missing from Tatton but still instantly identified by their characteristic calls, now supplemented by the Wood Warbler like piu-piu-piu. After lunch-time butties, across to the new reserve at Hope Carr, with a conducted tour of the Information Center by the ever smiling Warden, the facilities are excellent and visiting school kids should be well impressed. Despite all mod cons and interactive computers the reserve itself held dissapointingly few "real" birds, but things will no doubt improve when the waders start passing through.

11/03/97 It's not often that Chiffchaffs return before Sand Martins but this has been the case today, two Chiffchaffs in song 12.30 pm. in Dog wood followed at dusk by the first Sand Martin of the year - Magic!

16/03/97 Late news from the Tatton Logbook (the new version, well hidden - but if you want to know the location send me an e-mail) 40 Curlew in the Deer Park on the 6th, a single Green Sandpiper on the 7th and on the 9th a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker showing every sign of nesting. No Sand Martins today but 5 were counted on the 12th. Many Siskins in the Alder trees around Knutsford Moor, all very vocal with much sub-song; in full song at least 4 newly arrived Chiffchaff in Dog Wood. On the Mere a pair of Mandarin ducks of unknown origin together with 84 Tufted Ducks, 1 drake Pochard and 33 Goldeneye.

22/03/97 The first Wheatear of the year - unusually, a female was found at 10.30am by the Mill Pond, not the earliest record but ahead of schedule - average arrival date for this species since 1989 is 4th. April. Up to 12 Buzzards enjoying the good weather with some display observed, Tufted duck numbers holding up well with 92 counted, but Goldeneye now

down to 23. Two Green Woodpeckers were heard "yaffling" at separate locations and a Lesser-spotted was present near the Old Hall. A pair of Long-tailed Tits were watched putting the finishing touches to their nest, located low down in a Bramble bush.

31/03/97 Usual observers all away over the holiday period on domestic duties so no entries in the logbook since Friday 28/03 when c.120 Sand Martins were present at dusk. A check tonight revealed no hirrundines at all present, so we're still waiting for the first Swallow over the Mere.

02/04/97 Right on schedule, 3 Swallows seen early morning, but not present at dusk with the roosting Sand Martins (c 40). Over a week earlier than the 8 year rolling average were a total of 4 singing Blackcaps seen today by a number of observers at separate locations in the park. There are still Winter visitors around with a small flock of Redpolls located by Darren, one of the Rangers, and a single Brambling high up in the Beeches, the latter remain until May every year but become more and more elusive in the emergent foliage at which stage they are located only by call.

06/04/97 Better weather today than yesterday when high winds and persistent rain made life difficult for c. 200 Sand Martins and c. 20 Swallows feeding low over the main Mere. The first Willow Warblers were singing from Higmere Plantation today but the undoubted star was an Osprey high over Tatton heading North-east in a puposeful manner.

09/04/97 Stonechat on passage in the deer park early a.m. joined at dusk by 5 Little Gulls (4ad. 1 first summer) they may have roosted but weren't present the next morning at opening time (8.00a.m.)

10/04/97 The first male Wheatear and the first House Martin

12/04/97 The Leighton Moss Reserve was recently voted the best bird Reserve in Britain and, given a day like the Society enjoyed there today, it's difficult to disagree (having said that it's not the best place to be on a wet day in February!) The weather was beautiful; warm and sunny, and the three resident pairs of Marsh Harrier were providing splendid views as they carried nest material to the chosen locations. Bitterns were "booming", Bearded Tits proved elusive, we could hear them well enough but none were seen. Summer migrants had begun to return, of special interest were a pair of Garganey and the first singing Reed and Sedge Warblers. Excellent!

13/04/97 Meanwhile back in Knutsford there were no new Summer visitors early a.m. , Tufted Duck numbers were still well up at 103 but Goldeneye are down to 14 having peaked mid-week when 40 were present. A late evening visit provided the first Yellow Wagtail of the year, a brightly coloured male, accompanying a flock of 15 migrating Meadow Pipits.

19/04/97 More arrivals today and during the past week: on Tuesday the first Reed Warbler was singing on the Moor, yesterday a Common Sandpiper was seen on passage and this morning an early Swift was hawking insects over Tatton Mere.

26/04/97. Analysis of data held on a homebrew birding data base is a lot quicker with this posh new computer. A number of regular summer migrants (14) occur in sufficient numbers to make valid statistical analysis of arrival dates possible. It's been said that our summer visitors have all appeared early this year and this is borne out by the figures. so far, of the 11 species recorded to date, none have been later than the average taken from data covering the last 8 years. Earliest was a Reed Warbler (-12 days) with the first Swallow spot on the mean (2nd. April). The average deviation being -5 days.

Plenty of much needed rain today, a friend always says that this is the ideal day to bring down irregular visitors and this proved to be the case with a female Pied Flycatcher and a singing Wood Warbler found in Tatton, neither uncommon but not annual visitors. Also present 4 Yellow Wagtails and a Common Sandpiper. I had my first Cuckoo but one has been present since Wednesday (22/4).

28/04/97 The M6 Motorway lies only about a mile from the Town so when the wind is from the west there is a constant background noise, normally filtered out by the human brain, but a real pain when listening for well hidden songsters deep in the reed bed on the Moor. It took sometime therefore to pick up the metallic reeling song of a Grasshopper Warbler that will hopefully spend the Summer with us - again not an uncommon species but they don't breed every year.

02/05/97 The songs of the Blackcap and Garden Warbler are very similar (to most people, including me) so it's best to sit and wait until identification can be confirmed visually at this time of year. This can take some time in the case of the Garden Warbler as they tend to be more elusive than the Blackcap. This was the case on Wednesday (30/04) and it took around 10 minutes before I caught a glimpse of our first Garden Warbler of the year in Dog Wood. No problems with the Common Whitethroat seen tonight showing well in song flight close to the Moor, meanwhile 8 Black Terns were hawking insects low over the surface of the main mere.

03/05/97 The 8 Black Terns left shortly after 7.00am together with the first Common Tern of the Summer. Two Wood Warblers were in song in Dog Wood at the same time, but they too were on their way before 8.00am.

06/05/97 There has much talk in the media recently concerning global warming and the rapid change to Mediterranean type of Spring in the UK. All probably now forgotten as last weeks heatwave is replaced by single figure temperatures and heavy wintery showers. 100's of hirrundines, mostly Swallows, were feeding over the main mere, they were accompanied by a superb Arctic Tern - our most frequently recorded "Sterna" Tern - and

always a delight to see.

17/05/97 The last of our regular Summer visitors have now returned - Sedge Warbler today and Spotted Flycatcher midweek. The recent cold and wet weather may have had a detrimental effect on the breeding success of some species, the two broods of Canada Geese produced so far consisted of only a total of three young, although a nest of Reed Buntings discovered this week now contains five well-grown chicks.

25/05/97 We suffered two major storms this week, over two inches of rain (50mm) falling during one 48hour period, despite this life had to go on - birds with young have no option! The Reed Buntings (see above) fledged successfully and the resident Mute Swans have now have four cygnets in tow; meanwhile in the phragmites reed bed of Knutsford Moor around a dozen male Reed Warblers and single Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers were in full song at dusk after one of the mid-week downpours. The Lesser Whitethroat is a Birdwatchers bird - unnoticed by the general public and located mainly by ear during the Spring - so learning it's distinctive song is essential. An overgrown lane in Mobberley is a traditional site for this species, and today two singing males were located during an early morning visit in welcome warm sunshine.

The first Summer outdoor meeting found us in the Goyt Valley on Friday evening, the rain held off but it was cool and most species were not too active, nevertheless we were rewarded by good views of Common Sandpiper, Pied Flycatcher, Tree Pipit and a superb male Hen Harrier. Plans for the first holidays of the year were discussed in the Pub afterwards (all our trips end in a Pub!) it seems that over the next month members will be travelling to Bulgaria, Finland, western Canada and the Seychelles - I will of course be making my way down the A55 to Llandudno!!

01/06/97 Some habitats don't change much over the years; one such area is situated in Mobberley, we knew it as kids as "Fox Harbour" and its birds and their status can be regarded as a "benchmark" or measure of how some species are faring in their battle against modern farming methods. I visited the site this week and was saddened to observe the decline in some species over the past few years. In 1975 there were 10 singing Willow Warblers along a stretch of stream about half a mile in length, this year there were just 2. Yellowhammers were down in numbers and the remaining Corn Buntings had vanished altogether but perhaps the greatest decline has been in the population of that most beautiful of waders - the Lapwing. Years ago at this time of year every field would have held one or two pairs, the parent birds would have been making a real fuss on the approach of any human being, on my visit last week I didn't see a single bird. The weather this year has not helped these ground nesting birds, we've had to put up with some low temperatures and very heavy rain, so hopefully this is the reason and not due to a permanent decline.

13/06/97 Plenty of activity on the local patch still as many species busy themselves with

second or even third broods, this week I've seen both Blackbirds and Song Thrushes carrying nesting material. On the Moor Water Rails have been heard calling loudly - they have never been proved to breed there but they undoubtedly do. A group of members try to visit Scotland at least once a year, normally as volunteer Wardens at Loch Garten - but this time seven of us have rented a house near Tain and next week will be giving the flow country a bashing. Red and Black-throated Divers no doubt, but why not dream - what about Temmincks Stint?

21/06/97 Well the Scotland party returned with 114 species under their belts (those that could still fasten them!) including 3 species of diver and White-tailed Eagle, but no breeding Temmincks Stint, but of course you need something to go back for! I've been promised a day-by-day account from young Armpit and this will be available if he ever completes it.

27/06/97 The second outdoor indoor meeting was to have taken us to Merebrook Reservoir but a last minute change of plan found us once again in the Goyt Valley. On our last trip a male Hen Harrier was seen, unbeknown to us it was one of a pair and a nest was discovered just above Derbyshire Bridge at the "Cat and Fiddle" end of the valley. Hen Harriers are as welcome on the grouse moors as cats in my back yard so in order that they avoid a similar fate the RSPB have set up a 24 hour watch on the nest. We enjoyed superb views of both birds and also an intruding Peregrine Falcon from an observation post about 200 yards from the nest, manned by "the Barbers" unselfishly doing their bit even at the risk of missing out on a Rostherne mega-tick!

13/07/97 A good turn out today for the Anglesey trip and a new record for the outward journey to [South Stack](#) completed in less than 2 hours for the first time by John "not another 50 mph limit" Somerville. Visibility here was not good with mist and initially squally showers, these though soon dispersed as we waited in the cliff top Cafe for the rest of the party to arrive. Stonechats were seen from inside the Cafe but we had to brave the weather for excellent views of Razorbills, Guillemots and Puffins from the shelter of Elin's Tower. Stars of the show as usual at this location were the Choughs, although this year a very photogenic young Wheatear perched on lichen covered rock and flocks of Manx Shearwaters brought in by the strong westerly winds made it a close run thing. Second stop of the day was at Cemlyn Bay, although by now we had lost Commander Perkins and his mottley crew who had succumbed to the promise of more ice cream and luxury hides at the Conway RSPB reserve. Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns were present albeit in smaller numbers than in previous years, no Roseate Terns were seen and it appears they have not bred this year. On the return journey we briefly stopped at Newborough before making our way to Conway where Barry spent sixty quid on two books - it's a hard life teaching! - the rest of us made do with good views of Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers in adult and juvenile plumages, Greenshanks and Black-tailed Godwits.

27/07/97 Canada Geese undergo a period of flightlessness lasting up to 4 weeks around

the end of June during which they loose all their flight feathers simultaneously, this moult is now over and today a large flock was calling loudly as they passed over the town. In Tatton young Great Crested Grebes were on both Melchett and the main mere with families of Tufted Duck on the Mill Pond and a pair of Ruddy Duck accompanied by four youngsters also on Melchett. Meanwhile a late Reed Bunting was still feeding chicks in a nest on a pond near to the War memorial.

09/08/97 We've been to many bird reserves over the years but the one at Seaforth Docks in Liverpool remains by far the most incongruous lying as it does in the centre of the City's Freeport and requiring a pre-arranged permit before one is allowed in past the security lodge manned by substantial Scouse Policemen. It is though, well worth the trouble, affording superb views of mainly migrant species at the appropriate times of the year. We were perhaps a little early for anything exotic but being able to study the various plumages of the resident Common Terns at close quarters made a pleasant change from our usual distant views of this species over the Cheshire Meres! A handful of Black-tailed Godwits, some in Summer plumage were the forerunners of many more in weeks to come, but the star of the show was a superb juvenile Greenshank chasing fish fry in a shallow pool immediately in front of the main hide. Our second stop of the day was on Frodsham Marshes, the Weaver Bend held two families of Tufted Ducks and large numbers of Dunlin and Reshank, two Green Sandpipers were also present flying from the far bank towards the town. The new No. 6 tank contained a third Green Sandpiper, a Greenshank and Little Ringed Plover but the best bird of the day was undoubtedly a female Marsh Harrier hunting along the edge of the ship canal against a background of Liverpool's two new Cathedrals and the huge ICI chemical plant just across the River Weaver.

31/08/97 It's a pity that the local ringing group has stopped its activities on Knutsford Moor, in past years they provided many interesting and useful records concerning late Summer movement through our area. Today the reed bed appeared deserted but because of past ringing records we know that not to be the case. Fortunately not all species spend their time in dense reed beds and we were able to watch - and try to count - two large Finch flocks on farmland in Tatton Park. The first consisted of c. 200 birds feeding on rape seed - mostly Greenfinches, but accompanied by a few Linnets and Chaffinches. This was a substantial number for Tatton so we were more than surprised to find a second group of c.400 birds on a nearby stubble field, this time Linnets outnumbered Greenfinches, again a few Chaffinches were also present. Some birds were bathing in shallow pools adjoining the field, flying down from a tall wire fence already crowded with many Swallows and House Martins, themselves feeding up before beginning their long journeys back to Africa

05/09/97 September Swifts are something of a rarity, although in 1977 or thereabouts large flocks were to be seen well into the month, this though was an exception and in recent years the vast majority have departed by mid-August. We were therefore delighted to see a bird in Mobberley on the first of the month and a second today (4th.)

06/09/97 The first September gale (almost) and it coincided with the annual trip to Hilbre Island. Considering the high winds encountered on the slog across the sands to the Island the birding wasn't as good as we had anticipated, although better than in recent years when sunbathing was the order of the day. Three Leach's Petrels were seen but only at a distance, Great and Arctic Skuas were harrassing the other sea birds but there was no sign of the Pommerine Skua seen on the previous days high tide. Terns were passing through in resonable numbers, they included three Black along with the more usual Common, Arctic and Sandwich, also seen were a number of Little Gulls, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Manx Shearwaters. Waders present included the ever present Oystercatchers accompanied by Dunlin, Knot and Bar-tailed Godwits, for a short time a Purple Sandpiper sheltered from the incessant wind behind a rock just a few feet from where we sat. The wind blew, the birds fed and rested as the tide ebbed and flowed round this remote part of North west England, many minds were elsewhere today, but Nature knows nothing of Princesses, it never has and never will.

14/09/97 A pleasant, warm autumnal morning in Tatton prompted no less than seven Buzzards to take to the air at once "thermaling" high over Hanging Bank Wood, joined at one stage by two Sparrowhawks, but no sign of the Hobby present mid-week. Signs of the changing Seasons with 30 Siskins on the Moor and a steady passage of Meadow Pipits to the south, still though plenty of Hirrundines and four late Swifts over the main Mere at 8.00 am.

21/09/97 Ruddy Duck breed sporadically in Tatton and are late nesters, nevertheless a chick only a few days old seen this week is exceptionally late. A Whinchat was present in the Park yesterday, on passage -they don't breed locally - a welcome visitor, not observed annually. Two Ravens today along with the now usual crop of Buzzards, the finch flock has greatly diminished, only 60 Linnets counted this week compared with the 300+ counts of recent weeks.

10/10/97 A Spotted Flycatcher on 23/9 was the latest ever record for this species. On 4/10 we had a Crossbill, it was seen on two occasions during the day, probably annual but perhaps under-recorded. Best of the recent records was a possible Hawfinch seen flying from a tall lime tree near the Old Hall, the Observer wasn't sure of the ID and so wasn't claiming it, but it's well worth passing attention in future.

We're moving house - a time of great stress!! Until we're sorted this particular section of the site - "Latest News" may not be regularly updated - apologies in advance to my reader The Extract below from "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allen Poe may be considered appropriate by those who know me and the Little Lady!!

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of

the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was--but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me--upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain--upon the bleak walls--upon the vacant eye-like windows--upon a few rank sedges--and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees--with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium--the bitter lapse into everyday life--the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart--an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it--I paused to think--what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?

19/10/97 The first winter visitors seem to have arrived back in good numbers, there were 15 Fieldfares in Tatton on 14/10 with 105 Redwings counted flying west a day earlier. A late Swallow was present on the 15th. Today was more like Spring than Autumn, temperatures in the 20's and an abundance of joggers and mountain bikers, my attention was drawn to a familiar call from the top of a Sycamore tree, a male Brambling was busily feeding amongst a flock of about 20 Chaffinches, they appear on passage every year around this time before vanishing for a few months , only to re-appear in late Spring.

26/10/97 About 26,000 Pink-footed Geese winter in the North-west of England, mainly around the Southport area. They sometimes stray in our direction and early on Wednesday morning a straggling flock of c.100 passed over Knutsford and Mobberley -a memorable sight on a perfect early Autumn Morning. Bramblings have increased in numbers, 20 were in Tatton this morning, along with 8 Redpolls and about 35 Siskins. In total 9 Little Grebes were present, a good count, also in the Park 23 Teal, 6 Goldeneye and 2 Gadwall.

2/11/97 A Common Sandpiper that appeared in Tatton last week lingered until today, the latest ever record for this species - replacing one of our long standing records dating back to 1968, it was being accompanied by a single Dunlin. The first Jack Snipe of the season was flushed from the reed bed that surrounds Melchett Mere on 29/10, a day later what may prove to be the last Swallow of the year was hawking insects over the main mere.

9/11/97 The Common Sandpiper remained in Tatton until yesterday, but couldn't be found today to liven up a very mediocre morning with little of note seen during a walk of some three hours in cloudy and overcast weather - apart from good views of a Raven, my first in the Park, although two birds have been seen regularly by many other observers. I've no doubt we will have more luck next weekend when the Society visits The Wirral for another "highest tide of the Century"!

15/11/97 The two lads in the Chippie at Parkgate apologised for the poor tide today but

assured us that the previous night the water had come right up to the quayside and had it done so today success would have been assured. As it was things weren't too bad on the bird front with 4 Short-eared Owls in the air at the same time, as the incoming tide flushed them from the reeds. 2 "ring-tailed" Hen Harriers were also present, this combination causing panic amongst the other species giving the assembled watchers good views of Wigeon, Curlews, Black-tailed Godwits and mixed flocks of passerines, mainly Skylarks and Chaffinches - no sign though of the usual Water Rails nor any Bramblings amongst the other Finches.

After our stop at the Parkgate chippie we travelled on to the RSPB reserve at Inner Marsh Farm - incidentally none but the brave should attempt to eat a full portion of fish and chips from the establishment at Parkgate there is more than enough to feed a car full of hungry birders! The Reserve was quiet but there was plenty of room in the hide where we had good views of a "red head" Smew and a family of Bewicks Swans.

30/11/97 We have been promised some cold weather this week, with snow on Tuesday, perhaps in anticipation of this first cold spell of the winter good numbers of Pink-footed Geese were moving over this morning 240 at 9.05am, 130 at 9.15am, 5 at 11.00am and 25 at 11.45am all flying purposefully in an easterly direction. On one occasion a friend was birding at Northwich and being on high ground was able to follow a flock in flight over the Cheshire plain, they crossed the Pennines around the Congleton area on their way apparently to Norfolk.

07/12/97 The Societies trip to Martins Mere and Marshside today went well, things got off to a good start at Southport's Marine Lake where we had good views of the long-staying Great Northern Diver that frequents the southern end of the water close to the pier. As usual the weather at Marshside was terrible with strong winds and driving rain, in the past this has meant only a fleeting visit but since our last trip the RSPB have erected the "Sandbaggers" hide, close to the road opposite the Sand plant and a real haven on days like today (as I recall Southport F.C. share the same name!) There were birds in abundance with huge flocks of Pink-footed Geese and Wigeon as well as good numbers of Lapwings and Ruff - these were kept in a constant state of anxiety because of the close attentions of marauding Peregrine and Merlin. There was a record count of Whooper Swans at Martins Mere, I think it was 940, no sign though of the Lesser Yellowlegs or the resident Barn Owl, but a nice flock of c.20 Tree Sparrows as we made our way out was adequate compensation.

14/12/97 They must be running short of Pink-footed Geese around Southport as, on Friday, a flock of 260 passed over Mobberley heading south-east towards Norfolk - although we might see some returning soon, as the forecast for the coming week is for sub-zero temperatures with the chance of snow, especially in the East. Highlight of the day though on Friday was the annual [Christmas Party](#), nice to see such a good turnout, probably due in no small way to the superb food that has become a hallmark of the

occassion and less to do with my game of charades that ended in such chaos and controversey ! Good numbers of Teal on the Moor today, they were very active - as were many species in the mild weather with Mistle Thrushes and Dunnocks both in song.

21/12/97 Overwintering Blackcaps have been increasing in numbers over the past 20 years, this year though we have not had any locally so a male of the species on the Moor today was a welcome sight, it was in the company of a loose, mixed flock of Tits and finches. Also present in the flock was a single male Brambling and a super little female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, nice to see one at this time of year when they are very elusive - we normally have to wait until the breeding season when one or two pairs can be located by call.

30/12/97 It's become something of a tradition over the Christmas period for members to get together to enjoy one or two walks around areas of local interest, normally ending at a suitable hostelry - in fact always ending at a suitable hostelry! John "Stormin' Norman" Summerville planned todays route around the Marbury area - easy going in Summer - but a little sticky today following seemingly uninterrupted rain so far this Christmas. What a contrast in scenery beginning with Marbury Mere, unchanged for so long with the church and village of Budworth visible through the mist as we began our walk, this is [A.W. Boyd country](#) and he would have felt at home today walking along the side of his favourite Cheshire Mere with it's Great Crested Grebes, Goldeneye, Wigeon and Shovelers. The water level at Neumann's Flash was very high but what a pleasure to see so many Lapwings, we estimated 2,500 but there could well have been more, as we watched they were joined by 60 Golden Plover, a splendid sight silhouetted against a low, watery Winter sun. The hide on No1 tank (built to withstand all but a direct hit from an I.C.B.M) afforded good views of a large flock of Teal, the males were getting quite frisky and their calls could be heard from some distance as we made our way back to Marbury via a frustrating encounter with two LBJs - feeding on the seed of mugwort two Redpolls showing some of the characteristics of the Continental race c.f.flammea (Mealy Redpoll) with pale underparts and wide, well defined wingbars were seen at close quarters, but we couldn't make our minds up and resolved to discuss the matter further over a pint or two in Comberbatch's "Spinner and Burgamot" - the homemade Steak and mushroom pie is highly recommended.

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