

# Archived "latest news" January - December 1999

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24/12/99 Long-tailed Tits are amongst the first of our resident species to begin breeding , in the past we have found birds putting the final touches to their intricate domed nests as early as the first week in March, usually in a bramble bush, higher up in a hedge or in a clump of gorse. Outside the breeding season they are found in loose flocks, often with other Tit species, a flock in Mobberley was methodically working its way along a hawthorn hedge before flying across the road to a clump of birch trees. I counted 34 individuals, a relatively large flock, they must have had a good Summer. Further down the road in a field containing horses was a mixed group of Pied Wagtails, Meadow Pipits, Fieldfares and Redwings, the latter were the most numerous and it appears that there has been an influx during the last few days.



14/12/99 The now annual "Budworth Walk" will take place on Tuesday 28th December, a gentle stroll from Arley to Budworth and back, with lunch at the "Red Lion" always marked by the appearance of one or two non-birders anxious to prove that despite their predilection for warm fires and a good book they're as fit as the rest of us! Another much anticipated event, the KOS Christmas party took place last Friday - the food gets even better, it must be worth joining the Society just to enjoy this yearly feast!! - what's more Barbara's



trifle, made to an old Mobberley recipe made a welcome re-appearance - magic! A further first this year with the appearance of a digital camera (these images were taken using the said instrument). After 40 years helping to push conventional photographic technology as far as it would go I have to admit it's very impressive and can I have one please!



07/12/99 The annual trip to Marshside and Martin's Mere, two reserves in Merseyside run by the RSPB and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust respectively, is always popular with KOS members providing good views of species in the wild combined with an opportunity for a closer approach in the pens at Martin's Mere. Very strong westerly winds blew

for most of the day and we were glad of the shelter afforded by the RSPB's "Sandgrounders" hide on the front at Marshside, large flocks of Pink-footed Geese, Greylags and Wigeon were present but there was little movement with the birds sensibly sitting out the gales. A passing Merlin caused a certain amount of consternation and forced the wintering flocks of Lapwings into the air, many hundreds were counted, it appears that there has been an influx from the continent, with some species anxious to escape the already freezing temperature on mainland Europe, these include Waxwings with many records from the east coast but few so far in our area, although singles have been seen at Sandbatch and Heald Green. Moving on to Martin's Mere we lunched in the warmth of the main building reluctantly venturing out round the hides where we were rewarded by the usual super views of Whooper and Bewick's Swans and a Cattle Egret that had arrived back on the reserve earlier in the day, it was apparently resident for some time earlier in the year! Back in the shop there were some bargains to be had "Where to Watch birds in Scandinavia" by Gustaf Aluén was available £2.49 with the Macmillan Guide only £4.99.

23/11/99 The fields around Mobberley are largely sterile at this time of year with acres of winter wheat and little in the way of food for finch flocks. I was surprised therefore when a flock of 12 birds chose to land in the upper branches of an oak tree rather than pass straight over the area as is normally the case. I'm grateful they did as the call was unfamiliar and I would have otherwise been unable to identify them. They were finches but not Linnets or Redpolls, the flight calls were wrong, a Greenfinch perched with them for a few moments and was noticeable larger, although the light was poor as the weather was overcast and it was approaching dusk I could make out a streaked brown back and a long thin notched tail. The breast feathers were a washed buff colour with streaked flanks, the bill was tiny and light coloured but I couldn't honestly say yellow - although I looked long and hard (they were 40 feet up against the light)!!. When they finally left it was in a very tight flock again with the same contact calls, they flew west over the Tatton boundary - a nice Tatton tick for the year. The birds were Twite or Mountain Linnets to use the old name, very rare on the Cheshire Plain although they do nest in the Pennines and were probably making their way to the coast for the Winter.

19/11/99 A run of easterly winds during the week has brought in a second wave of Winter thrushes, mainly Fieldfares, these now outnumber the Redwings that had been the most numerous until now. Arriving at the same time, more Siskins, seen and heard flying over open country in substantial groups in a general south-westerly direction. Also much in evidence further flocks of Pink Footed Geese heading west to east, I believe there are 23,000 in the Southport area and a massive 75,000 in Norfolk. I watched a flock of c50 for over 15 minutes after they passed over Mobberley at 8.00am on a frosty, crystal clear morning, they passed over the Pennines between Macclesfield and Congleton, unnoticed by most people but a stirring experience for all birders especially if the birds were first picked up by sound; wild, evocative and timeless.

10/11/99 In their book "The Birds of Cheshire" published in 1900 Coward and Oldham described the Water Rail as "....a not uncommon resident.....but owing to it's shy and retiring



habits it has been overlooked in many parts" this is probably still true today, the species is recorded more often in the Winter months, especially during cold spells when the Cheshire Meres freeze over and they are forced from the cover of the reed beds in search of food. They are easily picked out in the Spring having a distinctive "song" but as this is heard mostly at dusk or after dark breeding birds are thus often overlooked. Two birds were present today on Knutsford Moor, one of only 2 tetrads where breeding was confirmed during the County Breeding Bird Survey that took place during the years from 1978 to 1984, also on the Moor a dozen or so Siskins, difficult to see in the Alder trees that are still covered in leaves as the current warm spell continues.

31/10/99 A good turnout last weekend for the marriage of the Societies most eligible bachelor as Barry and Alison tied the knot at St. Peter and St. Paul's church, Crosby, Merseyside. Only a



stones throw from the Seaforth Reserve where it was suggested we might spend a couple of hours on the Sunday morning before heading back to Cheshire, we abandoned this plan due to the strange custom of not shutting the bar until 2:00am in Liverpool, catching many people by surprise, producing one or two bad heads and some amazing gyrations



on the dance floor - reminiscent of the early spring display of Great crested Grebes or even a Blackcock lek when the male members of the party took to floor on their own! (*it was once said that the KOS were not like other bird clubs - true,true*) A fine crop of Hawthorn berries are being enjoyed by good numbers of winter thrushes in the fields around Mobberley village where a passing Green Sandpiper dropped down onto exposed mud at the side of the Birkin Brook as it runs through Gleave House farm.

21/10/99 The first Pink-footed Geese of the autumn were seen on Sunday morning, about 150 birds high over Mobberley, flying from east to west. This is unusual in that our first records are usually of flocks moving from the Lancashire mosses around Martins Mere through the "Cheshire gap" towards Norfolk on the east coast, ie from west to east. Our own "man of the soil" Pete Hall reports the last pair of House Martins together with their second brood leaving Toft on the 17th. of October - 60 pairs nested this year under the substantial eaves of Toft Hall.

16/10/99 On our return from a short break in Northern Scotland Cheshire was full of Winter thrushes, Redwings returned some days ago but only in small numbers, today they seemed to be everywhere and accompanied by chattering flocks of Fieldfares, new arrivals from the north over the past 48hours. Last year we had to wait until the first week in November for the first Fieldfares, perhaps the easterly winds that are predominating at the moment have encouraged



them to cross the Pennines sooner this year.

04/10/99 A cloudless sky tonight with a distinct possibility of the first frost of the Autumn, no Redwings or Fieldfares to report yet although an increase in Blackbirds and Song Thrushes since the last week in September reported from Toft, these will be immigrants from further north, some staying for the Winter others passing through on their way south. There were plenty of Winter Visitors to be seen on Lindisfarne over the weekend when we made our annual pilgrimage across to Northumberland, not via the M6 as planned, this was blocked by an accident, we travelled instead across the Pennines on the M62 and then up the A1 giving us a first look at "[The Angel of the North](#)" a splendid structure that will become as famous as Lindisfarne Castle or [St. James's Park!](#) The Island held large numbers of waders especially Lapwings and Golden Plovers, we estimated the latter numbered around 1500 birds, we lunched at Snipe Point in the shelter of the sand dunes giving a rare opportunity to use the scopes on full power providing close up views of Oysercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Redshanks, Dunlin, Sanderling and Knot. The light was superb and we were able to pick out the different races of Dunlin and even differentiate between juvenile and adult Knot resting only a few yards in front of us. Some passage migrants were still present including Willow Warblers, Blackcaps, two Pied Flycatchers and an elusive Yellow-browed Warbler, but the incoming Winter birds were easier to pickup with Common and Velvet Scoter, Wigeon and Short-eared Owls recorded followed by the first returning Brent Geese on the Snook as we made our way back across the causway on Sunday morning.

**Late News!** The first Redwing Sunday (3/10) at Toft! Also a Peregrine there for most of the week.

22/09/99 No long staying Osprey in Tatton this Autumn but they still pay at least one visit a year, a bird was present on Sunday circling the mere at 9.30am, before leaving to the south after a stay of ten minutes. The work being done on Osprey migration this year using satellite tracking is fascinating and will answer numerous questions about post-breeding movements both in the UK and further south during the Winter months. Go to <http://www.rutlandwater.u-net.com/osprey/> for further details, this is not new, I recall a programme on TV where the technique was used with Wandering Albatross', in addition these birds had data recorders in their stomachs to measure temperature so that when they were re-trapped on their return to the nest site analysis of the downloaded data revealed how often they fed. I wonder what the lower size limit is for these methods, I bet they never manage it with a Goldcrest! A big visible movement of migrants today in the Park, hirundines were passing through all morning mainly Swallows (and what a good year they've had for breeding) but with some House Martins and at least one Sand Martin, as these species leave Skylarks and Meadow Pipits arrive, they too were passing over, mainly towards the south-west together with some unidentified LBJ's with calls I couldn't identify. The Autumn season of indoor meetings gets underway this Friday (24th) with the annual visit of our friend from Rochdale Gordon Yates followed next Thursday (or Friday for those still unfortunate enough to be still visiting the salt mine on a regular basis!) to Lindisfarne for the 25th time, I believe Roy has arranged cake and champagne to mark the

occasion!

13/09/99 As we approached the slipway at West Kirby at the start of the walk across to Hilbre we met the Warden who was updating the information board with data for Sunday's tides. He was very surprised that we were only just setting off at 10:15am and informed us that we had only about 40 mins. to make Hilbre otherwise we would have to sit out the tide on the Middle Eye, so it was quite a dash across the sands, and we only just made it , 32 minutes later we sat on Hilbre getting our breath back watching the incoming tide meet across the rocks cutting us off for the next 5 or so hours. The wind was coming from the land so sea birds were few and far between, we had one Arctic Skua but plenty of Sandwich Terns and a single common Tern, small numbers of Common Scoter passed the Island at regular intervals. Wader flocks were building up with large numbers of Oystercatchers, Redshank and Knot, some of the latter still showing traces of Summer plumage. Amongst the more usual species was a Curlew Sandpiper and a few Ruffs, these are uncommon visitors to Hilbre. A steady stream of Swallows flew south whilst single Wheatears and a Spotted Flycatcher rested on their long migrations to Winter quarters.

Nearer to home a covey of 5 Partridges were flushed by a local farmer during recent combine harvesting, the first he'd seen this year. Some Warblers have resumed song with two Chiffchaffs in Tatton and a Lesser Whitethroat revealed it's presence with a short burst from the tall hawthorn hedge where they successfully nested earlier in the year along Pavement Lane Mobberley.

03/09/99 It doesn't happen very often, but when it does it leaves people in a bit of a dilemma - what to do if I discover a rarity, especially in the breeding season. On one hand it's natural to want to tell ones friends and let them share the enjoyment, but on the other there's a chance of disturbance to the bird and it may be best to keep quiet! Quite properly one of our members kept it to himself when he discovered a Honey Buzzard on his local patch during the Spring, it has never nested in the County and would have been a lifer for many people and a real mega-tick for the area. The bird remained for some time but didn't attract a mate, nevertheless some raptors are expanding their ranges, especially our resident common Buzzards and it may pay to have a good look at all Buzzards next Spring - you never know!

18/08/99 We enjoyed two mid-week outings with our visitor from Iceland, Tatton (of course) and Witton Limebeds. Tatton was it's usual self for August and proved very disappointing, on the other hand our trip to Northwich was much more rewarding, Neuman's Flash held a large flock of Lapwings, we estimated 800 birds, accompanying them were 4 Little Ringed Plovers and a Ruff, they were later joined by three fine Greenshanks. A single Wheatear that we noted proved to be the first record of the year when we mentioned it later to some local birders, one of whom turned out to be Dave Walters who runs the excellent [Witton Area Conservation Group Website](#), this was our first meeting! Across the road on the number 1 Tank were even more goodies, 2 more Greenshanks, 5 Green Sandpipers, 2 Garganey and 2 Spotted Crakes these



last two birds are very rare in the County and were providing many people with a "tick"! Via Budworth Mere we ended up at the excellent "Salt Barge" still selling passable Greenall's bitter, whilst the toasties are highly recommended - hot, crispy and reasonably priced!

08/08/99 Signs now of the changing Seasons with a count of 36 Pochards on Melchett Mere, although a pair of Great Crested Grebes were busy feeding a brood of two newly hatched chicks and a family party of spotted flycatchers in Dog Wood were enjoying the abundance of insects in the continuing run of fine warm weather. The log book mentions good records mid-week with sightings of both Black and Common Terns over the main Mere and a Common Sandpiper on the 6th, there was only one record of this species during the Spring migration. The large "well watched" field of Oilseed Rape has been harvested and then ploughed, a flock of at least 200 Lapwings were well hidden amongst the furrows, they were accompanied by a large flock of finches, I identified Greenfinches and Linnets but was unable to estimate numbers as they were well scattered and never took to the air simultaneously. Welcome back to Cheshire to Edward Rickson now a resident of Iceland, but in the UK for a holiday with his parents, Edward has used the power of the internet to good effect and will be joining us for a few outings during his visit; we may not see many birds Edward but in the true tradition of the KOS we'll stop a bit of ale going bad!

28/07/99 Tatton Park was left to the National Trust by Maurice the last of the Egerton family on his death some forty years ago, it is administered on their behalf by Cheshire County Council, they have left the decision whether or not to allow the MAAF access to cull any Ruddy Ducks that may or may not be present in Tatton up to the Park Rangers. For those that are not aware of this cull it's being carried out across the UK in an attempt to wipe out this import from America which, having escaped from various wildfowl collections, has established itself all over Great Britain in recent times. It's a delightful little creature but has been getting a bad press in certain quarters because it has spread as far south as Spain where it is hybridizing with their White-Headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* and threatening its existence as a separate species. Thankfully the staff have come down on the side of the Ruddy and it will be safe in the Park although the same is not true throughout the UK so its future remains uncertain. I believe the Scottish Wildcat is under threat because, in a similar way, it is hybridising with the introduced domestic cat, so if it's OK to protect the purity of the White-Headed Duck by a cull - what about the purity of our Wildcat? - pass me the shotgun!

18/07/99 Hirrundines seem to be having a good breeding season, family parties of Swallows are to be seen around all the local farms, feeding low over the freshly cut corn fields, themselves populated by large flocks of Wood Pigeons and corvids feeding on the grain scattered amongst the stubble. A pleasant walk through Mobberley initially produced only the odd singing Yellowhammer, but on the return journey we were delighted to hear a Lesser Whitethroat in song and a sudden flurry of activity amongst the Swallows drew our attention to a Hobby flying towards Tatton, an adult bird seen in excellent light gliding overhead no more than 60 feet above us.

09/07/99 Summer finally arrived in Cheshire today with my calibrated thermometer reaching the 30 degree mark for the first time this year, there was little respite in the shade of the trees in Dog Wood such was the humidity, it seemed to be affecting the birds, there was little song - not that there's much at this time of year anyway! - but it was quiet even for July. Only odd Wood Pigeons and Stock Doves were making any real effort but they were eventually joined by a Sedge Warbler in full display flight from the OSR field near the Outdoor Center. Melchett Mere held a scruffy collection of moulting wildfowl and also a pair of Common Terns with a juvenile in tow, this was being fed by the adults with small fish taken from the mere, it's unusual to see them actually fishing, normally at Tatton they normally just take insects from the surface á la Marsh Terns.

01/07/99 Encouraging numbers of Lapwings today, a post-breeding flock of 37 birds seen in Mobberley, not as many as we've seen in the past but greater than the same time last year. Reed and Garden Warblers still in song on Knutsford Moor along with a female Tufted duck + 2 juvs, also there a pair of Little Grebes that seem to nesting in one of the inaccessible areas of the Moor, they appeared together for a few moments but were very agitated as though a predator of some sort was in the vicinity of the nest site.

20/06/99 Apart from having the Park to ourselves, one further advantage to having wet and windy weather such as we experienced today is the opportunity to enjoy the superb views of hirrundines and Swifts we had as they fed low over the ground in the lee of the oaks and sycamores around the Outdoor Center. There were around 300 Swifts in total and at times they passed so close that the sound of their wings slicing through the air could be clearly heard. The nearby field of Oilseed Rape continues to prove interesting with Reed Buntings feeding young and increasing numbers of Linnets and Gold Finches finding it attractive the latter feeding on thistles growing amongst the main crop together with a variety of grasses and wild flowers, these remain unidentified for the time being, but as I retire this week (very early of course!) perhaps I'll persuade some of our botanical experts to help me out during the coming weeks, I'll need to do something to fill all those long Summer days - problems, problems!

08/06/99 Mobberley's Lesser Whitethroats revealed themselves at last this week - two pairs feeding young at their favourite locations- both along overgrown Hawthorn hedgerows through which a good crop of cleavers *Galium aparine* was climbing. The birds seem to be feeding young out of the nest and were very vocal, it was their clock like ticking that first drew our attention to them, hopefully they will try for a second brood and we'll be able to enjoy the song that we missed earlier due to the Lesvos trip. No sign of any Yellow Wagtails in the village and we seem to have lost Corn Buntings altogether.

30/05/99 In the 1970's the *phragmites* reed bed on Knutsford Moor attracted large numbers of roosting hirrundines; 2 - 3,000 birds at dusk was not uncommon. Since then though numbers have declined considerably, but it's not difficult to discover where they've gone to, take a trip to the surrounding countryside and as the light falls at the end of the day they will be found roosting in the fields of maize now grown extensively in Cheshire and used for cattle feed.

Another relatively new crop to the County is Oilseed Rape, this made it's appearance around 12 years ago and it seems to be becoming a useful nesting habitat for some species that are loosing their traditional sites, the Tatton log contains details of a singing Sedge Warbler in the large field of Rape alongside the ODC and whilst I was looking for this bird I counted no less than 7 singing Reed Buntings in the same field! This will make an ideal replacement for the pits that we're loosing so rapidly and it really is bird friendly, Pete Hall -who knows about these things! - tells me the crop is sprayed only once; with hebicide at the start of Spring and is then left until cropping in August so the Buntings will be able to rear two broods comfortably, it would be interesting to know how many birds one of these fields will support and what they are feeding on - but that is bordering on Ornithology and we're only Birdwatchers!! ..... ask our chum from Lesvos! ("in" joke for KOS members only!)

29/05/99 We left Cheshire for the Lesvos trip on the 6th May by which time all the usual summer visitors should have arrived back, some though had failed to appear even by then, especially Yellow Wagtails, Spotted Flycatchers and Lesser Whitethroat. There's no mention of any of these species in the Tatton logbook, although currently the number of observers contributing is as low as I've known it for many years, so it's difficult to know if there is a real shortage or they are around but unrecorded. Passage seems to have ceased, although last Saturday c.200 Swifts were feeding low over the mere in cool blustery weather, I don't imagine they were all local birds. Two broods of Canada Geese (6 and 5 juvs.) have hatched successfully, along with the Mute Swans on Knutsford Moor who have 3 cygnets, also present there a Little Grebe but the incubating Great Crested pair seemed to have abandoned their effort. Meanwhile just down the road in Mobberley Lapwings, Linnets, Skylarks and Yellowhammers all have young and we even saw a pair of Curlews dropping into a hayfield where they have nested in the past but not recently. A Buzzard lumbered over carrying prey and went straight to the tree it used last year, another raptor - just a little faster! - a Hobby "beat up" a huge flock of Starlings before vanishing towards Wilmslow, the Starlings are present in large numbers and seem to be enjoying a really successful nesting season - but what of my favourite bird - the Lesser Whitethroat. They say " a day without wine is like a day without sun", I don't know if that's true, but I wouldn't like to go through a whole year and not hear my favourite's song emanating from some overgrown Cheshire hedgerow, let me know if you have one within reach of Knutsford, they may start singing again soon if they are planning on a second or replacement brood.

22/5/99 25th. Anniversary trip (preliminary report)

The owner of Lesvos' first Cybercafe was adamant that he wouldn't be letting any Greeks use his machines "would you trust a man who owns a sheep?" he asked! This exemplified attitudes on the island, a place of contrasts, its feet in two camps, with EEC funding striving to improve its road network, huge lorries carrying road building material trundled west to the new road widening scheme near Eressos but you were just as likely to round a corner and have to carefully drive past a sun-tanned farmer riding home on his hardworking donkey. We had the impression though that things will start to change quickly for the Island, donkeys are now



outnumbered by Honda mopeds and Toyota pickups and the mobile phone network covers all but the most isolated locations. A good percentage of the population spoke English, especially the youngsters who could always be relied upon for directions when the Tourist map let us down yet again! The kids were a revelation, noisy and ebullient of course but we came across none with the surly, aggressive attitude so common today in the UK, Lesvos may appear to be lagging behind the rest of Europe but from what we saw it's getting it right - slowly. The species count was a respectable 163 not bad when most of the second week was spent relaxing, doing the tourist thing after the first week's avian overload. For those who keep lists there were "lifers" in abundance but for most people Lesvos will be remembered for the sheer number of birds and the spectacular views of species such as Bee-eaters, Red-rumped Swallows, Eleonora's Falcon and the "marsh" Terns etc. etc.! Our thanks go to Roy and Sheila for all their hard work in making this 25th Anniversary trip such a success, a lot of photos were taken during the holiday and these will eventually be incorporated in a more substantial account of events.

5/5/99 Late News - Arctic Skua flying north over Tatton at dusk. The first in recent times!

4/5/99 Marl-pits are one of the features of the Cheshire countryside, they were dug out, usually in the corner of a field, to supply boulder clay or calcareous marl that was spread onto the field as a fertiliser. Marling, as it was known, ceased in the last century as supplies of lime became available, but the pits remained and became important nesting sites for birds, especially Reed Buntings and Moorhens, every pit used to hold a pair of Moorhens or "woggies" as they were known locally. Larger pits attracted Sedge Warblers and Snipe although both have declined in numbers over the years, especially the snipe, which we seem to have lost locally as a breeding species. Some pits have dried out naturally but unfortunately many were filled in by landowners anxious to gain a few more square yards of productive land, but of late quite a few have been reopened and in some cases new ones dug as it was realised that they could be stocked with fish and rented out to angling clubs. We stood alongside a good example in Mobberley at the weekend, carp could be heard making their strange sucking sound as they took food from the underside of the lilley pads, a Moorhen's nest containing about ten eggs could be seen from the waters edge whilst at least two pairs of Reed Buntings had set up shop. Nearby good numbers of Skylark and Yellowhammer were in evidence as well as an encouraging number of Lapwings incubating eggs laid amongst emerging Spring sown barley - the Winter barley seems less attractive probably due to it's greater height.

On the other side of the village an overgrown lane has proved historically to be the best spot around for Lesser Whitethroat but there were none so far this year although Blackcaps were present in large numbers together with a singing Sedge Warbler, unusual in such a location. They are more at home on Knutsford Moor where later in the day one was singing from the phragmites together with a number of Reed Warblers; nearby in Dog Wood a passing Wood Warbler sang from the top of a Beech tree altogether we could hear 8 species of warbler in song together - Reed, Sedge, Willow, Wood, Garden, Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat and Blackcap - we once had ten when Lesser Whitethroat and Grasshopper Warblers were also

present.

Regular visitors to this part of our site will be aware of the 25th. Anniversary trip to Lesbos, so I won't be able to do an update until after we return on 21st. May, it's perhaps not an ideal time to be swapping our Cheshire birds for those of the Eastern Mediterranean and I'll probably miss a Tatton "mega tick", but there may be compensations in the form of Storks, Eleonora's Falcon, Bee-eaters and summer-plumaged waders on their way to the high Arctic!

30/04/99 As explained [previously](#) our Swifts traditionally appear each Spring in time for the local [May Day](#) festivities held on the first Saturday of May each year, sometimes they are back in good numbers, but not this year, only one bird so far - seen over Knutsford Moor on Wednesday (28th.). We can't blame the weather either this time, it really is excellent - blue skies and 20+°C with many species busy feeding young already on a plentiful supply of insects. In no hurry to move on just yet, a few Bramblings still in Dog Wood, joined tonight by the first Garden Warblers of the year, one day I'll learn to separate their song from the Blackcaps!

25/04/99 A special night for the Society on Friday, our 25th. AGM, marked by copious amounts of wine and a birthday cake specially commissioned for the occasion! Less than two weeks now to the anniversary trip to Lesvos - Scillies with the sunshine hopefully. Nearer to home plenty going on in Tatton with no less than three Osprey sightings this week on the 19th, 20th and 21st, normally we have to wait until June when the non-breeding second year birds wander up from Africa, these early records are giving rise to much speculation. A walk from Knutsford Moor to the log book via Dog Wood and the Mill pond produced 9 Willow Warblers, 4 chiffchaffs, 9 Blackcaps and two Reed Warblers - all singing males. The log book contained news of the year's first Cuckoo, heard calling yesterday, 1 day earlier than our 11 year rolling average, while a Common Whitethroat tonight was 5 days early -but nevertheless most welcome!

22/04/99 No less than 82 Curlews over the park last night, flying east and very high, no doubt on their way to their breeding grounds in the Pennines, the first Reed Warbler tonight deep in the reed bed but revealing it's presence with it's [characteristic prolonged and repetitive song](#)

18/04/99 We appear to have been lucky last weekend with the Easter weather, the past few days have been very cold, single figure temperatures by day and frost at night as the winds blew in from the north-east. c.500 hirrundines over Tatton Mere on Friday evening, predominantly Swallows and Sand Martins with only a handful of House Martins, Bramblings are still around in good numbers, they'll move on soon but hopefully a pair of Teal that appear settled on Knutsford Moor may remain to breed. The logbook mentions the first two Wheatear records mid-week and yet another Osprey, this time fishing over the Moor early on Friday morning. Easily resisting the temptation to travel down to Leicestershire for the Crag Martin an early walk through Dog Wood produced 3 Willow Warblers, 5 Chiffchaffs and 7 Blackcaps (all



singing males) whilst on the Mere the first brood of Mallards, Mum with no less than 9 youngsters in tow - I wonder how many will survive?

12/04/99 The first two House Martins tonight, together with c. 200 other hirundines 50/50 Swallows / Sand Martins. Low over Tatton in a strong north-westerly and only 6°C.

11/04/99 The Great Ormes Head dominates the Welsh seaside town of Llanduddno, three miles long and one mile wide, from the top at 679 feet on a clear day the hills of Lakeland and The Isle of Man are clearly visible with the naked eye. The townsfolk use it to their advantage, the summit can be accessed by foot, motor car, cable car and the famous Great Orme Tramway, the Marine Drive runs round the Head from the North to the West shore, with a side road "zig-zagging" up to St. Tundra's Church and the Old Rectory Tea Gardens, serving the best cream teas in Wales! Despite it's popularity and proximity to so much activity the Orme is a haven for wildlife and offers areas where one can get a real sense of isolation. Our field trip on Sunday took us on a circular route beginning and ending at the quieter west shore, via the Marine Drive to the western extremity, across the undulating "limestone pavement" to the halfway station and finally back down again via the Haulfre Gardens path. The early migrants were much in evidence with Chiffchaffs in song from the gardens along the Marine Drive and numerous Wheatears along the top, flitting ahead of us from rock to rock amongst the gorse where Stonechats and Meadow Pipits complained loudly at our intrusion. Better us though than the local Peregrines or Kestrels, we had good views of the latter but not the former, although they are around again this year and perhaps it was they that accounted for the pair of Choughs we watched them chasing on our visit last year, for there was no sign of Choughs this time, only their close relatives, the Jackdaws whose mastery of the air along those wind-swept sea cliffs convinced us that this is their true home rather than the tranquil Cheshire woods where we normally see them.

05/04/99 Just a few showers over the Easter break making a pleasant change from usual, remember last years floods and snow? Still some Winter visitors around of course, Goldeneye peaked at c.30 last week and the annual build-up of Bramblings in Dog Wood has started, they feed in the tops of Beech and Oak trees, not on the ground as they do at other times of the year and it's only their calls that reveal their presence. Summer migrants continue arrive Blackcap and Willow Warbler today, both earlier than our 10 year rolling average, a second Osprey passed through on Sunday morning whilst a pair of Garganey on Knutsford Moor were rare but very welcome visitors on Saturday.

31/03/99 The weather forecast for the next few days gives warm weather (up to 20°C) with winds from the south-east, so there may be an influx of migrants with the chance of an "overshoot" - Alpine Swift now down to 66-1 for a new Tatton bird this weekend! The first Osprey of the year over the main mere at 08:00 this morning, it didn't hang around and flew out of sight to the north.

29/03/99 The first Swallow tonight going to roost on Knutsford Moor with c.60 Sand Martins, 3

days earlier than our 10 year rolling average.

28/03/99 I don't often mention the Societies indoor meetings, after so many years we've seen them all, good bad and indifferent! Last Friday's though was of some significance as it was the last before the 25th. AGM and as luck would have it, one of the better ones - Colin Twist from Liverpool gave an excellent talk entitled simply, "The Birds of Britain" covering about 100 of the most common species, Colin was able summarize their current status and how it had changed over the past quarter of a century. A good example of these changes the next morning with two Buzzards displaying high over "[Fox Harbour](#)" in a clear blue sky, not the sort of sight we could have predicted 5 years ago, let alone 25! Also present in the area 4 singing male Yellowhammers, 5 Skylarks and at least one pair of Lapwings. Meanwhile in Tatton we had no new Summer migrants this morning although two Green Sandpipers in mid-week provided a good record, both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were present but we failed to find the 'lesserpecker reported earlier in Dog Wood. A very welcome flying visit by that increasingly rare vagrant, Garry Healy, up from the wilds of Cornwall for the week - he'll turn up something special - he always does!

18/03/99 We'll have to resume running coaches again for the field trips if they prove as popular as the weekend trip to the Derwent Valley, although I suspect the journey would take a little longer than by car. It took just over an hour on Sunday with the remains of last week's snow much in evidence as we drove out from Glossop along the Snake Pass. Cars are banned on Sundays on the road round the reservoirs and, because we would have filled the shuttle bus that chugs back and to all day, it was decided that we would walk as far as "windy corner" the favourite raptor watching point and then return over the top track back to the car park. The weather was very kind, no rain, blue skies with temperatures into double figures; there are allegedly nine pairs of Goshawk in the area, we didn't see any but had good views of Kestrel, Sparrowhawks and a pair of Peregrines, five Crossbills were a bonus staying long enough for 'scopes to be set up to allow some folk to get excellent views of what was for them a "lifer". Skylarks and Lapwings had returned for the Summer, the latter could be seen across the valley although we couldn't hear them because of the prevailing wind direction, their decline on the Cheshire plain is so marked that in years to come Knutsford birders may well have to travel to this part of the world to see and hear this most evocative Spring display.

13/03/99 A perfect day for early migrating birds and the Sand Martins didn't let us down, they arrived at 2.45pm - two over the "bathing area" bang on schedule, our 10 year rolling average shows the mean arrival date to be the 13th. As far as I know these represent the first record for the area this year - and of course they have provided a winner for the KOS Sand Martin competition! This year's victor comes from a little closer to home, Tim Ditchfield from Lostock who was only 3 hours out and will be receiving an appropriate reward in due course - well done Tim!!

**Late news** - 4 Sand Martins going to roost on Knutsford Moor at dusk plus a singing



## Chiffchaff in Dog Wood!!

## First Records since 1989

<b>1989</b>	<b>8th. March</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>13th. March</b>
<b>1991</b>	<b>13th. March</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>14th. March</b>
<b>1993</b>	<b>13th. March</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>12th. March</b>
<b>1995</b>	<b>11th. March</b>
<b>1996</b>	<b>20th. March</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>11th. March</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>19th. March</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>13th March</b>

11/03/99 No news yet of the first Sand Martins, but with south-east winds and temperatures in the 'teens forecast for the next few days - it's looking good for the 13th. or 14th.!

07/03/99 No new record this year, despite our best efforts no sign of any Summer migrants today, and who could blame them on a day of single figure temperatures and blustery winds from the North-west. They are about though, Eric Hardy tonight mentioned Garganey at Frodsham and a Wheatear on the Welsh coast.

01/03/99 OK times up for entries to the 1999 KOS Sand Martin competition - an encouraging 29 entries ranging from an optimistic 2/3 to a pessimistic 29/3, with most people going for the period 9th to 15th.

<b>Mike Hibbert</b>	<b>Congleton</b>	<b>2/3</b>	<b>4:30pm</b>
<b>Elizabeth Perkins</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>7/3</b>	<b>9.00am</b>
<b>Dave Walters</b>	<b>Weaverham</b>	<b>9/3</b>	<b>10.00am</b>
<b>Chris Driver</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>9/3</b>	<b>5.45pm</b>
<b>Geoff Blamire</b>	<b>Mere</b>	<b>9/3</b>	<b>6.10pm</b>
<b>Will Davies</b>	<b>Tregaron (Wales)</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>9.45am</b>
<b>Nigal Campbell</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>10.00am</b>
<b>John Grassby</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>11.00am</b>

<b>Frank Dearden</b>	<b>Tenterden</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>11.37am</b>
<b>Sue Heath</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>3.15pm</b>
<b>John Sommerville</b>	<b>Sale</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>5.00pm</b>
<b>Terry Heath</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>5.30pm</b>
<b>Shirley Williams</b>	<b>Chapel-en-le-Frith</b>	<b>12/3</b>	<b>8.30am</b>
<b>Brian Grieve</b>	<b>Wilmslow</b>	<b>12/3</b>	<b>8.45am</b>
<b>Ken Wakefield</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>12/3</b>	<b>9.47am</b>
<b>Derek Pike</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>12/3</b>	<b>11.00am</b>
<b>Roy Bircumshaw</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>12/3</b>	<b>11.40am</b>
<b>Tim Ditchfield</b>	<b>Lostock</b>	<b>13/3</b>	<b>11.30am</b>
<b>Jill Thornley</b>	<b>Appleton</b>	<b>14/3</b>	<b>12.30pm</b>
<b>Bob Groom</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>14/3</b>	<b>6.15pm</b>
<b>Sheila Blamire</b>	<b>Mere</b>	<b>15/3</b>	<b>8.45am</b>
<b>F. Campbell</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>15/3</b>	<b>11.20am</b>
<b>Peter Perkins</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>15/3</b>	<b>11.30am</b>
<b>Anita Bates</b>	<b>Mobberley</b>	<b>15/3</b>	<b>6.30pm</b>
<b>Vanessa Cook</b>	<b>Stoke on Trent</b>	<b>16/3</b>	<b>6.40am</b>
<b>Brian Roberts</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>16/3</b>	<b>9.00am</b>
<b>Pete Hall</b>	<b>Toft</b>	<b>16/3</b>	<b>1.00pm</b>
<b>Darren Morris</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>16/3</b>	<b>6.00pm</b>
<b>Karina Stanley</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>17/3</b>	<b>3.00pm</b>
<b>Chris Gledhill</b>	<b>Milton Keynes</b>	<b>20/3</b>	<b>4.30pm</b>
<b>Sue Grassby</b>	<b>Knutsford</b>	<b>29/3 !!</b>	<b>11.05am</b>

21/02/99 I've always had an interest in radio communication and was able some years ago to combine two hobbies, Birdwatching and radio. Whilst doing our annual stint as volunteer wardens at the RSPB Loch Garten we were able to demonstrate how CB radios could be used for efficient cost effective communication across a substantial nature reserve, in fact we were able to establish contact between the forward hide and the top of Cairngorm using two £8-400milliwatt (0.4W) radios sold as childrens toys, great fun! I'm informed that the rest of the birding world has finally caught up with the KOS and CBs are considered essential equipment on places like the Scillies in October, although I can imagine the noise generated by their inappropriate use could cause some distress to the technically challenged! I have always considered Tandy shops a good source for CB equipment, not particularly because of the



knowledge of the staff, but it's always good stuff and if it breaks down they can normally repair it. Tandy have been taken over by Car Phone Warehouse and there appears to be a change of corporate direction imminent; as a result the price of their CB gear has been considerably reduced and yesterday I was able to buy an impressive 80 channel "handheld" for less than £70 - you're normally paying over £100 for these, if you fancy building your own component prices are down by 75%! So if you have been considering a handheld for the twitching season get down to your local Tandys before they sell out. (I've got no connection with the company, in fact some people think Tandy and their equipment are garbage!)

15/02/99 My current morning walk takes me through an estate of bungalows with large mature gardens, the conifers therein are a favourite nesting location for the Greenfinches that breed in profusion on the estate. I don't know where they go in Winter but they vanish around the end of September and reappear again around this time of the year, the first ones returned last week and are very active, revealing their presence by their characteristic wheezing song and a "piu" call reminiscent of and easily confused with that of the Siskin, a species only conspicuous by their absence this year.

Despite (or because of) my non-attendance the Frodsham trip on Saturday went very well, reports emanating from Lilac Avenue mention Short Eared Owl, Little Stints and Smews with the highlight being a close encounter with a flock of 400 Golden Plovers and Lapwings that flew over the edge of No. 6 tank so close that the sound of their wing beats was clearly audible.

10/02/99 The annual build up of Goldeneye seems to have begun again, numbers normally start to increase at the beginning of February, reaching a peak in mid-March. There were 11 on Tuesday and this had increased to 13 at the weekend, the male birds indulging in their characteristic "communal" display so familiar to all Tatton regulars. A little more advanced were a pair of Great crested grebes already nest building on Melchett Mere, these early nests are rarely successful although it sometimes seems to be worth the effort as in previous years broods of young have been recorded before the end of March! A well filled log book indicated a fair amount of activity mid-week from both birds and birders with a flock of 10 Bramblings and 270 Winter thrushes mainly Fieldfare noted on Wednesday, along with a nice record of Bewick's Swan that passed over to the west late in the afternoon.

31/01/99 As I recall the lowest temperature ever recorded in England was -24°C somewhere in Shropshire; on that particular morning I cycled to work and on arrival found the moisture in my breath had frozen on my beard, the local temperature was -16°C. It's difficult to imagine having to survive in the extreme cold currently being experienced in northern Scandinavia where an all-time low of -53°C was recorded earlier this week. In Cheshire we're stuck under a high pressure system giving mild and misty conditions, the thermometer in mid-afternoon is reading 10°C, this has induced more species to begin singing and in Dog Wood today Blackbirds, Tree Creepers and Coal Tits were all joining in the fun. Two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard drumming and the "yaffle" of the resident Greens seemed to be getting louder and louder as the Spring approaches. Meanwhile on one of his local patches John now has no less than four

Long-eared Owls roosting with a further three at another site, whilst on her "local patch", currently the Cook Islands, an e-mail from our Chairperson informs us that the Rarotonga Flycatcher is now down to only 163 individuals - problems, problems!

**Don't forget to [Enter the Sand Martin Competition!!](#)**

21/01/99 It's a month now since the shortest day and the mornings are slowly becoming lighter, I never realized until recently that after the 21st. December, although the days start to become longer, for some days after, sunrise actually gets later and the gain in daylight is apparent only at the end of the day with the sun setting later! Anyway we're heading in the right direction and there have been some subtle signs of Spring - Ravens have been seen in Tatton chasing off Buzzards as though on territory, although I don't think any display has yet been seen, Great Tits and Nuthatches have been very vocal this week and this morning a Dunnock was in full song from a Hawthorn hedge, around the base of which early snowdrops were in flower.

10/01/99 At last some "decent" Winter weather with sub zero temperatures for the last few days, the Christmas holiday period was marked by mild, wet and windy weather ideal for the incubation of the latest 'flu virus which seems to have flattened most of the population of North-west England for up to a week at a time. The first trip of the year today found us in Tatton for an easy morning walk, the weather was crisp and sunny and prompted some early song, Mistle Thrushes have been prominent for some time now they were joined today by a Song Thrush on Knutsford Moor. The Moor pool itself was frozen over, moving the resident Teal onto Melchett Mere and forcing a couple of Water Rails out of the reedbed where they were feeding along the unfrozen feeder stream. Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were both much in evidence the latter already drumming loudly in Dog Wood where we watched a pair of Kestrels in display flight, a superb sight in the cloudless Winter sky.

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