

# Archived "latest news" January - December 2000

[Current Latest News](#)

[Back to the KOS Homepage](#)

29/12/00 We had the heaviest snow storm for many years during the early morning of the 28th. I measured a depth of 95mm (4") at 9.00am and it was still falling then. Temperatures have not



rised much above freezing since and at a location in Shropshire, which is just to the south of us,  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$  was recorded last night. We're not too far behind, the current reading in Mobberley at 10.00pm is  $-9^{\circ}\text{C}$ . So we have extensive snow cover that's not melting, and in consequence huge numbers of Redwings, Fieldfares and Blackbirds are moving into gardens, on the annual Christmas walk today every Hawthorn and Holly bush seemed to contain several members of the Thrush family

taking full advantage of a good crop of berries. Budworth Mere was partially frozen and most of the wildfowl that were noted here last week appeared to have moved off, although it wasn't possible to see the far side too clearly due to the persistent fog that stayed with us for most of the morning. The woodland bird table had been freshly stocked with seed and there was a steady stream of passerines mainly Blue, Great and Coal Tits but also Nuthatches and plenty of Chaffinches. It was fortunate that we were well wrapped up because the "George" at Great Budworth, whilst having most of the attributes associated with a typical English pub, comfy seats, gleaming horse brasses and bulls-eye windows etc. had failed to provide the roaring log fire to complete the picture, in fact it was bloody freezing! Nevertheless the food was excellent and the steak and ale pie is highly recommended! On the subject of food, I did 36 jacket potatoes for this year's [Christmas Party](#) which took place on the 15th. of the month, they all went first time round so it was a good turn out this year, despite the absence of one or two regulars. Thanks to all who contributed to another successful evening, which probably means everyone there, it really is a team effort, with people either bringing food or organising one of the games or quizzes!

25/12/00 Well, there wasn't a lot of it about and it didn't stick, but it did definitely snow for a short time this morning, enough to give Pavement Lane in Mobberley a seasonal dusting and our first "white Christmas" for some years! Song and Mistle Thrushes have been in song intermittently for some weeks now, they were joined today by the local Dunnocks, nothing too serious, just a few short blasts from the hedge tops as they paused for a few moments during the business of foraging in the hedge bottoms, an activity that seems to occupy them for most of the day at this time of the year. Two Pink-footed Geese flew over in the general direction of the Pennines, I suspect that one reason some species normally move about in large flocks is that individually they don't have a very good sense of direction, so the more individuals there are in a group the more accurate their navigation becomes. Today's pair, whilst moving steadily east were

meandering along, constantly having to readjust their path, a flock of around a 100 birds which is more common deviate very little and appear to know exactly where they're going.

18/12/00 A résumé of the "Thursday Group's" activities kindly supplied by John (Stormin' Norman) Sommerville.

Every Thursday a small group of us, now nearly all retired after hard lives of toil and sweat, go for a walk of about 7 miles. We have a nucleus of 6 walkers with occasional guests who join us when the walking is particularly easy and the weather is good. Though all members of Knutsford Ornithological Society these are not bird watching trips and the walks are selected to give us the opportunity to visit new places with good scenery and interesting sites. Our pace of walking varies between slow and full stop. Bird watching, botanising, bugs or fungi, every opportunity to stop is gladly taken. The only time the group has been known to hurry is when we have walked so slowly that we are in danger of being late for the pub lunch. We have now been walking for a few years and have covered sizeable chunks of Cheshire and the Peak District and to a lesser extent areas of Staffordshire, North Wales, Lancashire and the Lake District. Of late the weather has been so bad that we have been selecting walks where the ground is reasonably dry and we have given wet boggy fields a total miss. Our latest walk on the 14th December started at the car park at the Anderton Nature Park a few miles north of Northwich. We have been known to move quickly for the first 200 yards and the picture shows us doing just this. As we walk through the



first section of the park there is a mixture of scenery with a large chemical works on the other side of the river Weaver. The bushes in the park still hold plenty of berries and there are good numbers of Redwing, Fieldfare, Thrushes and Blackbirds. Our group has been accused of doing more talking than bird watching but this picture shows us looking at the birds over the river Weaver with the Birch trees behind us, though I think one our group has not quite got the direction right. The walk along the Weaver produced good numbers

and views of Tits, Goldfinches, Siskins and Redwing with two male Bullfinches making a very nice sighting. Eventually we reached the new hide overlooking the number 1 tank. It was good to see that a new hide had been built after the last had been destroyed by vandals. There was not much on the water so down to Marbury lane, which being closed at the Northwich end, is great for walking with virtually no cars. We intended to walk along Marbury lane straight to Marbury country park but we noticed that, following the removal of chemical pollution in an old ICI site to the west of the road, the gates were now open with a good path for walkers. Being nosy we could not resist the opportunity so in we went. The picture gives an idea of what this area is like with large grassy areas a good sprinkling of bushes and lots of ponds. Definitely a good site which can only get better. Having



thus added another mile to our walk it was back to Marbury Lane and full speed to Marbury Park to take vantage of their facilities. A short walk from this point took us down to the new viewing area overlooking Budworth mere. Though there were good numbers of ducks on the far side of



the mere one of our members spent most of his time counting Herons, one group alone numbering about 30. Then along the mere and into the wood with the intention of finding Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Everything else but no woodpecker. At the end of the wood we reached the Trent & Mersey canal. After our earlier unplanned detour we were only running a little behind schedule (the word schedule being a bit of a joke) when someone casually wondered what the fungi were on an old fallen tree. One of our group having recently started to learn about fungi and having brought her identification book then gave us

lesson on how hard it is to identify fungi. After a while another member of the group suggested that maybe it would be faster to carry the tree to the pub and do the identifying there. We eventually started moving again and, leaving Marbury Country Park at Marbury lane we crossed to the far side canal for the final leg of the journey back to the cars. A chap passes us with a really good looking Siberian Husky. The dog showed us that it had other talents by promptly catching a squirrel. We had had a good walk with good birds and as final treat a Kingfisher flashed past us showing its marvellous iridescent colours. At last we reached the cars and after a short drive it was into the Cock of Budworth for lunch. The beer here is now Holt's and is very drinkable at £1.15 a pint. The weather had been good and the birds had been great. A good day out.

11/12/00 A small, but select group, for the weekend trip to Leighton Moss on a cold damp day with a strong westerly wind sweeping across the sands of Morecambe Bay. The substantial population of Bearded Tits were keeping a low profile and we saw none during the whole of the day, Teal, Wigeon and Shoveler were present in large numbers and we were lucky enough to have two excellent in-flight views of the increasingly rare resident Bitterns. The Eric Morecambe hide was inaccessible so we travelled the short distance across to Woodwells, where earlier in the day a Hawfinch had been reported, we're not always lucky with this species, but persistence payed off today as the Hon. Chairperson located a bird at the top of a conifer and gave as good a view as we've ever had. Back in Cheshire a group of Whooper Swans have spent the last week in a field adjacent to Seven Sisters Lane, Marthall on the outskirts of Knutsford and his morning more visitors from the north as the first flock of Pink-footed Geese this Autumn passed noisily over Tatton, vanishing in an easterly direction towards the Pennines, I counted 140 birds - there are few better sights and sounds for the birdwatcher.



4/12/00 This November was the wettest since 1922 and the whole of the County is well and truly saturated, Mobberley Sand Quarry in the center of Mobberley opposite the Ivy Bank Trading estate has assumed levels not seen since the mid 60's when it first appeared, in fact extra water has appeared on the west side of the lake, so things should become interesting from March onwards as the Spring Migration gets underway. Redwings, Fieldfares and an increasing number of Mistle Thrushes are making the most of a large crop of Hawthorn berries that are giving the larger bushes a dark maroon hue as they loose their leaves. Close to the end of the second runway (now due to open in February) a small covey of Partridge were well hidden in a field of wheat that had been cut but remain uncollected due to the prevailing conditions.

26/11/00 On our last field trip, to Mere Sands Wood a small mixed flock of Tits contained an overwintering Blackcap. Ringing has shown that these Winter sightings are all of birds originating from central Europe and there is no record in the UK of resident Blackcaps, birds that actually



breed here Winter in Southern Europe or North Africa, returning here from early March onwards. We see them sometimes in Tatton, a bird in Lilac Avenue for three days last week was a first for Derek and Jean, adding to an impressive garden list. The Tatton log details the Autumn's first Bramblings, a flock of 40 on the 11th of November feeding on beech-mast along the main drive to the Hall from the Rostherne entrance, aptly known as Beech Avenue. They were still there a week later on the 18th. An unusual sight

today on the main Mere, no less than 10 Mandarin Ducks, 6 male and 4 females, amongst the tangle of roots and overhanging branches where Higmere Plantation reaches the water, these handsome creatures have, in the past, bred in the Gardens at Tatton, but not for some years now and never in such large numbers.

13/11/00 Our Rostherne correspondent Bryan Roberts reports that the Reserve seems to be enjoying a good run at the moment with two separate parties of Whooper Swans on the 2nd and the 9th, plus a Long-tailed Duck on the 8th. On his way back home through Tatton Bryan had a large flock of c.150 Siskins in Higmere Plantation and suggests it could be the start of a "Siskin Winter"! Our November field trip on Sunday took us to [Mere Sands](#)

[Wood](#) near Ormskirk, 105 acres of lakes and mixed woodland on the site of a disused sand quarry. It has an interesting history and very impressive facilities with a well equipped visitor centre and 7 beautifully constructed hides, including a tower hide that gives panoramic views across the Reserve and the surrounding farmland. Unfortunately the weather was atrocious - cold and windy with frequent heavy showers, so any birds that were present were keeping a low profile, the lakes held impressive numbers of Teal, around 1500, but few other species, only single figures of Pintail, Wigeon and Goldeneye.



06/11/00 Some interesting sightings from members who have been out and about braving the

weather over the past few days. The Thursday club apparently planned a local 9 mile trek around the perimeter of Tatton Park, but due to the inclement weather this was reduced to an all tarmac stroll to the Old Hall and back, nevertheless they did record the first Brambling of the Autumn in trees by the side of the main Mere. Bob Groom spent Sunday morning in the Observatory at Rostherne Mere where he witnessed a remarkable drama unfold when a Peregrine Falcon he was watching left its perch in a waterside oak and dived quickly towards the surface of the Mere. It wasn't immediately obvious what the bird was up to but a sudden flash of cobalt blue revealed the presence of a Kingfisher flying low over the water, at the last second it saw the peregrine and plunged into the Mere emerging a couple of seconds later, long enough to cause its pursuer to overshoot, but leaving itself in a very vulnerable position. The Falcon looped quickly back, gaining height as it did so, allowing a second stoop at the Kingfisher as it accelerated away after regaining the air, the process was repeated no less than five times before the Kingfisher reached the safety of the reedbed that surrounds the Mere.

30/10/00 The Cheshire plain lies on a bed of Keuper sandstone and marls, mostly clays containing within them deposits of rock salt that formed during arid conditions when the plain lay beneath a shallow inland sea. Over the years underground streams have dissolved this salt causing the land above to sink and form some of our Cheshire Meres including Rostherne and Tatton. Commercial extraction of brine which began on a large scale during the 19th. century accelerated this process, causing large areas of water or "flashes" to suddenly appear as the ground collapsed when the salt laden streams were pumped to the surface. One such example occurred in the early 1930's between the northern end of Tatton Mere and the Hall as the ground subsided and a large lake formed. Much of this brine pumping was carried out by a company whose chairman was Lord Melchett, a friend of Tatton's Lord Egerton who referred to the new water as "my Lord Melchett's Mere", the Mere and its name survive still today. This "wild" brine pumping was eventually banned because of the structural damage to buildings being caused all across mid-Cheshire and Melchett Mere stabilised at about 10 acres, nevertheless the natural underground streams remain and as a consequence the surrounding land is slowly sinking and a nice area of *juncus* reed equal in area to Melchett itself now exists. The reedbed is a favourite Winter haunt of both Common and Jack Snipe, when flushed the latter species quickly seek the safety of the reeds, and rarely fly more than about 50 yards before darting back to the ground, so it's difficult to try and estimate numbers. Things are a lot easier with Common Snipe, they tend leave the area temporarily, returning when the source of disturbance moves on, a group of 29 were put up by a couple of dogs cavorting through the reeds, they represented only a small percentage of the population present, the dogs only disturbing a small area. On the mere itself 16 Shoveler, 4 Wigeon and 2 Teal with the first Goldeneyes of the Autumn on the main Mere - 2 male birds, 1 adult and 1 second Winter.

22/10/00 The long-staying Black Tern eventually left Tatton Mere at the beginning of the week leaving little of interest although the logbook records a lone Stonechat near Melchett the previous week. I counted only 8 Pochards during a mid-week visit to the park, looking at our 1975 report the October maximum that year was 145 with no less than 250 during November! I don't recall reading of a decline of these proportions on a National scale, it's probably due to increased recreational use over the years. Dog wood was remarkably quiet, although Siskin numbers have

started to increase rapidly over the past couple of weeks as the early Winter passage takes place. "Nerdy" birders may have noticed this website was reviewed in November's issue of "Internet Magazine" when we were given a very gentle mauling by one of their resident expert designers, still we received 4 out of 5 for content and of course as we all know "content is everything"!

12/10/00 Last weekend's annual pilgrimage to Lindisfarne seems to have gone off smoothly, I don't think the list of species seen will break any records but I believe a good time was had by all and, judging by the make-up of the party, no doubt a few bottles of red wine were consumed during the course of the weekend! Unfortunately I had to miss this years trip being forced to spend a week on the beautiful island of Cyprus! The day time temperature averaged 30+ degrees centigrade even at this time of year and although this wasn't a full "birding" holiday I did get to spend a couple of days out with the binoculars and was lucky enough to meet Jeff Gordon who runs the Cyprus Ornithological Society (1957). Jeff was able to point me in the direction of the islands two endemic species, the Cyprus Pied Wheatear and the Cyprus Warbler as well as a terrific area between the village of Mandria and the sea where a network of irrigation pipes, some fed by pumps driven by splendid 1940's British [stationary engines](#), watered the crops and proved attractive to a huge number of migrants including Isabelline Wheatears, Yellow Wagtails, Tawny Pipits and around 120 newly arrived Red-throated pipits. Highlight though was the sight of a flock of c. 40 Red-footed Falcons cooling themselves in the spray from the irrigation system, either by flying through the water, landing on the ground beneath or actually perching on the sprinkler heads and being slowly rotated as they were given a thorough soaking. No guesses where my vote will be going for the Societies 30th. anniversary trip!! Meanwhile back in Cheshire Bryan Roberts reports a Black Tern in Tatton as well as a few late Swallows and House Martins, the Tern was still there yesterday (11th.). In Mobberley Redwings and Fieldfares arrived last week at Barclay Park and this morning good numbers of both were passing over the village in a southerly direction.

01/10/00 A very late Swift last Sunday (24th) over Shaw Heath (Knutsford) comparing well with our latest ever record in Tatton on 1st. October 1978. Elsewhere an influx overnight of Thrushes, mainly Blackbirds but also Song Thrushes across the area with a constant stream of Skylarks passing over in a south-westerly direction during the early morning. In Mobberley a splendid Orange Weaver Finch has joined the local House Sparrows, Tits and Greenfinches in a substantial garden in the Pepper Street area of the village. It seems quite settled, holds it's own on the feeders and has been accepted by the locals, nevertheless it really does stand out with its fluorescent orange plumage and could well prove irresistible to one of the local



Sparrowhawks!

25/09/00 The Autumn equinox fell last week and as usual most of our Swallows began their migration, small groups could be seen moving in a south-easterly direction during daylight hours throughout the area. In Toft, Pete Hall reports the last of 23 broods departing - there were 13 first

and 10 second broods at Toft Hall Farm; the highest number in living memory. Pete also noticed a large influx of Meadow Pipits and Skylarks during the week, this was something we noticed on Thursday in Mobberley when crossing some large fields of barley stubble, substantial numbers of both species were apparent, especially the pipits, 70 individuals took to the air as we passed diagonally across the fields, and probably represented only a small percentage of the total. Back in Toft a more subtle movement was observed by Pete who detected an increase in Song Thrush numbers, the newcomers habit of perching on the tops of trees and bushes marking them out from the local population. This is an annual event and is of a type that can only be recognised by observers with a "local patch", such events pass un-noticed except by those with an in-depth knowledge and appreciation of their local environment. Incidentally Pete normally expects the Winter's first Redwings within a week of these thrushes - brrr.... I can feel the first frosts already!

20/09/00 You just can't win on a visit to Hilbre Island - or perhaps that should be you can't loose! Given "good" weather like we enjoyed at the weekend you don't have the speciality species such as Leech's Petrel, Sabine's Gull or a range of shearwaters and skuas, but the walk across the sands is easier than it can be with a full autumn gale blowing and once ensconced in a suitable position with a view out to sea or across to the Middle Eye the four or so hours that the tide takes to flow and ebb can be passed in comfort! A small select group for



Saturday's trip due to the current fuel crisis - thanks to Terry and Helen for sacrificing some diesel and LRP respectively so allowing the 80 mile round trip to go ahead! Despite the unfavourable conditions there were

some birds around, at high tide a few Common joined the more numerous Sandwich Terns and at the same time our only Skuas of the day, two Arctic passing south along with some Swallows and a handful of Common Scoters. The most common waders were Oystercatchers and Redshanks but respectable numbers of Ringed Plover and Dunlin were also seen, together with a few Bar-tailed Godwits, Knot, Grey and Golden Plovers. Highlight of the day was perhaps the small flock of Turnstones that landed on the rocks only a few yards from where we were sat, giving us a chance to study at close quarters a whole range of plumages, super views set against a backdrop of blue skies and the swirling grey waters of the Dee estuary.

12/09/00 Hobby sightings continue unabated, at one location dramatic views of four birds - two

adults and two juveniles - were enjoyed as the youngsters streaked skyward towards their parents as they returned carrying prey that was exchanged in a spectacular mid-air food pass. Of current interest in Tatton is a Greenshank that has been in residence on the edge of Melchett Mere for several days now, normally these birds are seen or heard only fleetingly, the Park providing little in the way of food to to attract them. In Mobberley we found two Whinchats feeding along the side of freshly mown hay field, there was a well marked adult and a very pale specimen that was presumably a bird of the year, again these would probably be on passage as it's some years since any were recorded as nesting in this part of Cheshire.

03/09/00 The Tatton logbook has records from the 23/8 of five raptor species in the park that day - Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Buzzard, Hobby and Peregrine. Currently only the Sparrowhawk



appears to have a stable local population, Buzzard, Hobby and Peregrine are all increasing, whilst that of the Kestrel seems to be decreasing. Today in Mobberley conditions were perfect for these species, after a chilly night the temperature rose quickly to 22°C with clear blue skies and excellent visibility. From an elevated vantage point a slow scan with the binoculars revealed numerous birds circling in the strong, late Summer thermals. Just to the west two Buzzards and a Sparrowhawk were joined by a Hobby, all three rapidly gaining height until only the Buzzards were visible to the naked eye, 15 minutes earlier what was presumably the same Hobby had glided low over where we were standing, scattering the local Swallows in all directions, it's boldly streaked breast and rusty red thighs and under tail coverts could be clearly seen as it passed directly over the farm. The 1998 Cheshire Bird Report mentions three pairs nesting in the County, the

first since 1898, the locations of these nests were obviously not revealed.

22/08/00 Each Summer at the end of the breeding season Canada Geese undergo a drastic moult, they loose all their flight feathers simultaneously and become flightless for a period of three or four weeks. During this period they become very vulnerable to predators and prefer the relative safety of some of our larger Cheshire meres where they sit out the moult before taking to the air again around this time of the year. The first flocks have been passing over the area for a week or so, but don't become really active until the winter months when they can be heard at all times of day (and sometimes night) moving noisily between local waters. They are quite sedentary because when they are joined occasionally by escapes such as Bar-headed or Barnacle Geese it becomes evident by noting the daily locations of the strangers that, in general, they rarely move outside an area bounded by Rostherne/ Tatton, Tabley, Shakerley and Chelford.

15/08/00 The Reserve at Liverpool's Seaforth Docks seems to remain one of birdwatchings best



kept secrets, apart from us on what has become an almost annual trip there were few other visitors apart from the regular local birders, a very friendly group who are always willing to help others struggling with the finer points of Gull identification.



Unlike our local Cheshire countryside where little seems to change day by day here on the coast things seem to be in a permanent state of flux with birds constantly on the move throughout the day. Many of the waders still had varying amounts of their summer plumage and we had good views of Golden Plovers, Lapwings, Redshanks, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwits and Curlews. Single Turnstones and Greenshanks put in appearances whilst a pair of Ringed Plovers were fussing over a late brood of downy young. Two rare (for us) Gull species were present, a winter plumaged Mediterranean Gull and a third summer Yellow-legged Gull - not a species I'd like to ID in juvenile attire! All the time right in front of the hide the resident Common Terns, coming and going with food for their hungry youngsters, this seem to consist mainly of sprats and sand eels taken out at sea away from the Reserve, a real jewel in Liverpool's crown, it will be a sad day if the Dock Company ever exercise their ever present option of closure.

09/08/00 When we went up to northern Scandinavia in 1995 one of the most common breeding species we encountered was the Fieldfare, there must be hundreds of thousands of pairs across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia as far east as lake Baikal. Little wonder then we enjoy the company of such large number during the winter months when they move south to avoid the rigours of an Arctic winter. Mistle Thrushes are not as numerous as their northern cousins and tend to be a little more solitary during the breeding season, aggressively defending their patch during the late winter and early spring, nevertheless they are a little more tolerant of each other after rearing their young and small loose flocks form in July and August. One flock seen in Mobberley recently consisted of no less than 54 individuals, this is the largest I've heard of in this area, normally 20 is about the maximum. They didn't loiter and were gone the next morning, perhaps part of an annual southerly movement as autumn approaches.



29/07/00 Something for everyone tonight on the evening walk around [Witton Flashes](#) we parked a short distance from the [Anderton Boat Lift](#) In the Car Park provided for visitors to the lift and the adjacent Country Park. Sheila had brought along the contents of her moth trap to release last



night's haul it included the rare Leopard Moth *Zeuzera pyrina* looking every bit like a miniature Snowy Owl! progress was very slow through the park due to an abundance of flowers that were mostly specifically identified after much heated discussion amongst the KOS (Botanical) group!! Plenty of LBJ's amongst the dense undergrowth including Willow Warblers, Blackcaps and family parties of Whitethroats - Neumann's Flash was relatively quiet, no waders but 100's of Gulls including Yellow - Legged and Mediterranean neither of which we



managed to positively identify. Marbury no1 Tank was more rewarding with good views of 7 Green Sandpipers, 2 Common Sandpipers, 4 Snipe and 5 Gadwall, also much appreciated was the beer on the way home in Comberbatch at the "Spinner and Burgamot" another splendid unspoiled pub with a pleasant atmosphere, good beer and excellent home cooked food.

19/07/00 Whilst waiting for the Hawfinches to appear on our trip to North Wales we were entertained by the antics of a Spotted Flycatcher that appeared to be a resident of the area around the Chapel we were using as a vantage point; this was the first I'd seen this year. Although we have never regarded it as a common species in Cheshire it could normally be found throughout the County without any difficulty, but for the first time in the past 20 years none have nested at Barclay Park in Mobberley, this is a classic location, a substantial Victorian country house with an ivy covered walled garden set in extensive grounds of mature trees and shrubs, so its absence this year is quite worrying. Our thanks to Roger & Jill for their hospitality last weekend when, once again, they hosted the annual garden party and BBQ, the weather could have been warmer but at least it didn't rain this year and we were all impressed with the surprise guest, a fine little male Sparrowhawk that landed in a small tree above our heads remaining long enough to give us good views before departing low over the garden onto the adjacent farmland.

09/07/00 Fans of Coronation Street will be aware of the imminent trial for murder of the Street's current Mister Nasty Jez Quigly, Knutsford's Sessions House was chosen for filming because of it's realistic appearance - it actually looks like everyone's idea of a courtroom! Shooting was taking place today so we had to forego our all-day parking places on the forecourt and park in the



street, our normal spot being guarded by a large chap from Salford, who showed what appeared to be a genuine interest in the KOS and its activities (a potential new member perhaps? he would be ideal as a doorman at the Christmas party if the charades games got out of hand!) The Reserve at Conwy was predictably quiet but we did get excellent close-up views of Whitethroats and Reed and Sedge Warblers feeding young. Highlight of the morning however was a long overdue reunion with Colin Isted, it was Colin who organised the Workers Education Association evening classes way back in 1972 which eventually lead to the formation of the KOS, indeed he became the Societies first press officer on it's inauguration two years later. Hard to believe it had been 26 years since we all last met, Colin was returning from a climbing holiday in Scotland, looking fit enough to

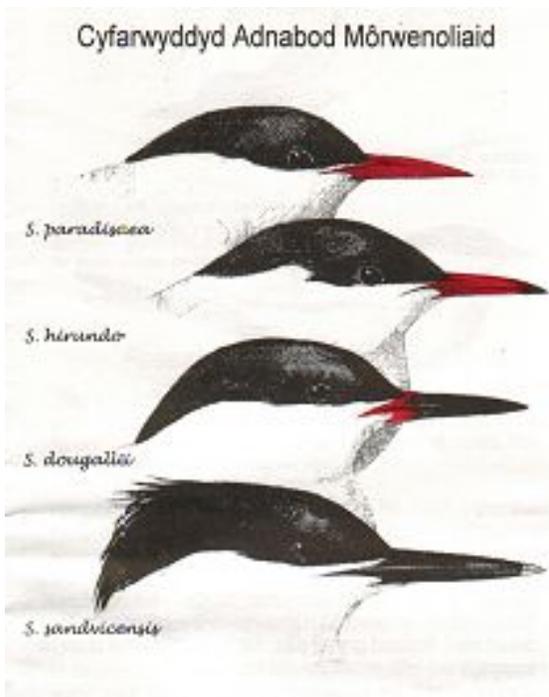
polish off a dozen "Monroes" in a couple of hours before breakfast! After lunch we drove to the village of Llanbedr y Cennin just down the Conwy valley, there in the grounds of the chapel (just as Jill predicted) we found the resident Hawfinches, some people picked up two birds as they flew into a conifer and had good views, whilst most of us had to be content with a fleeting glimpse as these rare finches moved on further up the valley. 50 yards from the chapel is the splendid "Olde Bull Inn" a "proper" pub with excellent J.W. Lees bitter and spectacular views across the Conwy Valley, we availed ourselves of the facilities before moving on to our last stop of the day at the Point of Ayr Reserve, here we had Sandwich, Little and Common Terns together with good numbers of Gulls and Curlews, rather distant view unfortunately as the tide was still out - but we decided to make our way back to Cheshire as by now it was approaching 6 pm and we didn't want to miss Coronation Street did we?

29/06/00 Still plenty of song in Tatton, a mid-week visit produced Reed, Willow and Garden Warblers, Blackcap and Chiffchaff, although of course a little more difficult to actually see at this time of year! Across the fields in Mobberley Goldfinches seemed to have replaced Linnets over the past few years, there were plenty about but only two pairs of Linnets still holding on, unlike the Corn Buntings which have now vanished completely from this part of the county. On the barbed wire round the perimeter of on of the marl pits were a multitude of newly fledged Swallows, waiting patiently as the adult birds collected food from around the cattle that were attracting plenty of suitable insects on a warm but humid afternoon. A small warbler was present at this pit commuting between a willow tree and a tangled clump of Blackthorn and Bramble, it's anxiety call as I approached was not one I recognised immediately but it obviously had young and wasn't just passing through, after a few seconds it showed itself giving good views of a buff coloured supercilium - it was a Sedge Warbler - the first I've seen on a local pit, although Coward in his "Birds of Cheshire" (1900) considered it one of the most common Summer visitors and the marl-pits to be a favourite nesting site.



19/06/00 Last weeks heavy rain caused problems for many breeding birds particularly ground nesters and those species that use river banks such as Kingfisher and Sand Martin. Locally we escaped relatively lightly and not too much damage seems to have occurred, I have been monitoring three pairs of Lapwings that nested on a field of Spring sown wheat, the farmer kindly gave me permission to mark them with sticks placed close to the nests so his "lads" would be aware of their presence when they were treating the crop during it's period of growth. All three seemed to have hatched successfully despite the crop growing so quickly that the incubating birds were soon hidden from view. They have now moved to an adjoining, recently mown hay field and we were able to count a total of 7 young at various stages of growth - an encouraging result for a species struggling to adapt to new farming methods.

12/06/00 I remember the first time we went as a Society to Anglesey it was sometime in the 70's and the day proved to be long and exhausting, the A55 improvements were still years away as was the splendid tunnel under the River Conwy, on the return journey there was the usual mile



long queue going into Conwy and Bill Mulligan daringly directed the coach driver over the Sychnant Pass, stopping en route at a telegraph pole allegedly a favourite with the local Green Woodpecker - it was there!! No problems today with the roads, we made it in under 2 hours and when the new A5 dual carriageway is complete certain members will reduce that by another 15 minutes! There was plenty of activity at South Stack with c.3000 pairs of Guillemots, 300 of Razorbills and around 30 pairs of Puffins all still incubating their single eggs, Kittiwakes were easy to pick out as they flew over the waves far below us and Choughs were about in abundance giving us really good views from the RSPB's visitor facilities in Ellin's Tower. Across the Island at Cemlyn Bay there were no Roseate Terns this year but plenty of Sandwich and Common plus a scattering of Arctic. With a strong wind off the land the birds passed close by us hugging the shingle banks as long as possible before rising

over the summit as they carried beak-fulls of Sprats and Sand eels for their newly hatched chicks.

02/06/00 According to Coward & Oldham in their book "The Birds of Cheshire" (1900) the Tufted Duck had never been seen in the County during the Summer months, in fact it wasn't until 1908 that they bred in Cheshire when a pair were seen with young at Redesmere. Over the years the species was more and more successful until, in 1979, no less than 20 pairs bred in Tatton - but more recently there has been a marked decline with only 1 brood last year. They seem to prefer the larger waters so we were surprised last month to find a drake on a small (but well hidden) pool during the BTO Breeding Bird Survey, it was still there today on our second visit, trying it's best to hide on a water no more than 50ft. long! They tend to be late breeders so any young may not appear for some time yet. Also on today's survey a nice pair of Tree Sparrows, Kestrel, Sparrow Hawk and a Little Owl close to last years nest site in a small hedgerow Oak.

25/05/00 We spent a couple of hours today dodging heavy showers in the fields around the [Fox Harbour](#) area of Mobberley. The Yellow Wagtail [noted previously](#) appears to have moved on but



a female Lapwing was sitting tight on a clutch of eggs on the ridge of a furrow in the middle of the potato field we'd earmarked for the increasingly rare Wagtail. Lapwing numbers seem to be up on the past few years, 5 birds sprang into noisily into the air from a large field of Spring sown wheat as we approached and a similar number were "scrambled" from a field further north to deal with a small flock of immature Lesser Black-backed gulls that flew low over their territory. Also doing well are Common

Whitethroats, 4 males were singing along a half mile length of country lanes, less obvious today were Willow Warblers only two were heard all morning together with a single Blackcap although to be fair this was not their type of country. Two pits held Moorhens, on one an adult was accompanied by two young, although there were probably more, they normally lay around a dozen eggs as any Mobberley resident over 50 will confirm!

19/05/00 Just as we were getting used to the beautiful "Continental" weather over the past couple of weeks Mother Nature has stepped in with a timely reminder that we are in fact a maritime nation and replaced the long, hot days with a run of north-westerlies straight from Iceland (Takk fyrir!) complete with a 10 degree drop in

temperature and heavy and prolonged showers. Breeding birds have enjoyed the settled spell, Long-tailed Tits, Blackbirds, Starlings, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were all busy today in Tatton feeding young, the wetter ground seems to make collection easier for the parent birds. On Knutsford Moor a pair of Great Crested Grebes have been successful, despite the presence of a resident family of foxes, also there a pair of Canada Geese with 4 young



joined forces with two other families giving a combined total of 12 so far. Migrating Swifts are forced lower down in conditions such as we endured today passing so close that it's possible to hear the sound of their wings as they scythe through the air just a few inches away, I always hope [the lice](#) that parasitise these birds don't choose that moment to swap hosts!

14/05/00 A good haul for the Suffolk crew who managed a very creditable 111 species during their 4 days on the east coast including such goodies as Black Redstart, Woodlark, Wryneck and Stone Curlew, based in Leiston, participants were more than impressed with their "digs" in The White Horse Hotel which has earned the KOS seal of approval. Closer to home the first Sedge Warbler of the season could be heard on Knutsford Moor on the 9th, later that day the herring gulls over the main mere were scattered by a passing Hobby, they really are terrified by this little falcon, unlike today's early morning Osprey which was largely ignored as it took a fish from the top end of Tatton Mere. It's likely that this is a non-breeding second year bird so it may

remain in the area for some time, rather [like the 1998 bird.](#)

07/05/00 The AGM last Friday was most enjoyable, after the usual formalities a selection of members slides from the 1999 25th. Anniversary trip to Lesvos were shown, it brought back memories of a super holiday - good birds and [excellent company](#). Six members are currently enjoying a return visit, booked immediately after last year's trip whilst a group of 15 are in Suffolk enjoying the Societies extended weekend trip. Two new arrivals for Tatton mid-week with both Cuckoo and Common Whitethroat on the 2nd, early butterflies included Brimstone, Orange tip, Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshell and Speckled Wood.

01/05/00 No more Common Whitethroats yet but Lesser Whitethroats have arrived back early and in good numbers, we watched a bird feeding and singing early yesterday morning in a favourite location down an overgrown country road in Mobberley, two other singing males have been located in the village without too much effort. A couple of miles away a Yellow Wagtail landed briefly on the roof of Gleave House farm where eventually the newly planted potato fields may prove attractive to this particular species, also on the farm 2 pairs of Buzzards, at least 6 pairs of Skylarks, singing Linnets and Yellowhammers but as yet no Lapwings. In Tatton at least 5 Reed Warblers could be heard yesterday on Knutsford Moor, unfortunately half the reed bed was destroyed today when someone decided to set fire to it! in the long term this "treatment" has proved beneficial but some early nests may have been destroyed. A little further into the Park a pair of Garden Warblers were watched nest building, whilst a few yards away Long-Tailed Tits were being kept busy feeding their young, there could be up to a dozen! News from Toft yesterday afternoon where Pete Hall had good views of a Common Crane over his house, it seemed to be descending towards Toft Pools but despite a lengthy search couldn't be relocated.

25/04/00 Summer migrants continue to put in their first appearances, on Friday (21st) the first Common Sandpiper was seen in Tatton and yesterday (24th.) at least 2 Reed Warblers were heard singing from the *phragmites* reed bed of Knutsford Moor, a couple of Winter species are still present with 2 female Bramblings feeding with Chaffinches in Dog Wood and a superb male Goldeneye on the main mere. The first Swift of the year flew high over the Park early this morning, no shortage of food for this or the hundreds of hirundines also passing through at the moment, the warm, damp weather has produced swarms of insects for them. Meanwhile a search for nesting Lapwings in the Broad Oak area of Mobberley revealed only 3 pairs at the moment and a fine little Common Whitethroat singing lustily from an overgrown Hawthorn hedge, it was our first of the year but I'm informed that they've been present for over a week on Carrington Moss.

17/04/00 An annual autumn trip to The Spurn Peninsular was non-negotiable during the [early years of the KOS](#), it was one of Bill's favourite haunts, but in those days the M62 ended just past Leeds at Knottingley and the long journey put many people off Spurn as a venue, especially when Hilbre became so popular for the September trip during the 1980's. Last weekend's trip to the area was therefore the first as a group for some years, but judging by the positive feedback Spurn may well become a regular destination once again, but in Spring rather than Autumn and

including an overnight stop close to the Reserve. We began on Saturday with a stop at the Fairburn Ings RSPB Reserve just off junction 33 of the M62 where we found the Warden coping cheerfully with staff problems, visitors and the imminent opening of a fine new Visitor Center! A good selection of birds including Twite, Mediterranean Gull, Redpolls, Brambling, Willow Tit and a pair of newly arrived Little Ringed Plovers displaying in front of the Cut hide at the far end of the Reserve. It was then back onto the M62 as far as Goole and alongside the Humber to our second port of call - Blacktoft Sands where we had good views of Marsh Harriers, there are four breeding pairs on the reserve, and a fine Long-eared Owl helpfully roosting a few yards from the footpath. Avocets and Bearded Tits were everywhere but the locals were more interested in a passing Yellow Wagtail - how times change! Roy had arranged accommodation in Withernsea at the Vista Mar Guest House run by Rod and Viv Hirst where we spent a comfortable night, enjoyed a proper English breakfast and received a really substantial packed lunch for the princely sum of £16.45 - real value, as was the agreeable evening meal nearby at the Northfields restaurant, Withernsea may have seen better days but it's not ready to lay down just yet. The walk along Spurn from the visitor center to the light house seemed longer than it did in the 70's, perhaps something to do with the constant erosion altering it's configuration! Passerines were few and far between with the odd Goldcrest, Blackcap and Wheatear but there were plenty of Waders pushed up by the incoming tide and a small flock of dark-bellied Brent Geese gave good views from the peninsula. There was more to see just off the Reserve with a Common Crane for those that missed the Mobberley bird, Ring Ouzel, both Short and Long-eared owls and finally beautiful views of a Nightingale at Sammy's Point as we made our way back to Cheshire.

12/04/00 Spring has turned to Winter again, a huge low pressure system sits over the British Isles giving overcast skies, rain and once again, cold north easterly winds. A matching mixture of



Winter and Summer birds in evidence at the moment in Tatton with the waterside Beeches and Silver Birches containing recently returned Blackcaps here for the Summer and passage Reed Buntings and Summer plumage Bramblings. On the main Mere a group of 9 Wigeon accompanied by 5 Teal, whilst overhead 100's of hirundines, still mostly Sand Martins but more Swallows today and the white rump of the season's first House Martin.

09/04/00 Some interesting records from the Tatton log book today, the first Willow Warblers yesterday (8th) with two birds singing on Knutsford Moor, also there the year's first Mallard ducklings - Mum with 12 in tow. A thrash through the Melchett reedbed last week produced 4 Jack Snipe for Mike Duckham. Pete Hall inadvertently flushed an Osprey from a tree close to Toft Hall at 10:45 this morning, 5 minutes later we watched the same bird over Tatton Park, eventually it flew out of site whilst moving in a northerly direction.

08/04/00 Our visitor stayed with us until Thursday (6th.) a beautiful Spring morning, cloudless skies and little wind, ideal conditions for migration, the Crane appears to have taken full advantage and continued on it's journey to the north. With it have gone the "pager people" on

their own journeys zig-zagging in a loose flock across the North-west of England and beyond in search of the next tick in a seemingly vain attempt to satisfy that insatiable primeval urge so peculiar to some birders. Mobberley enjoyed it's 15 minutes of fame and the bird was the main topic of conversation amongst many villagers, not since the Luftwaffedropped three bombs on Ted Leech's potato fields in 1943 had there been such excitement! Meanwhile in Tatton the first Blackcaps have returned and can be heard singing on Knutsford Moor and in Dog Wood, also from the Moor on Friday a Willow Tit was calling, one was ringed a couple of years ago in Higmere Plantation but since then I don't think there have been many records.

04/04/00 Winter has returned to Cheshire with a vengeance over the past few days with gale force north-easterly winds and daytime temperatures of only 3C. Sand Martin passage is suspended with 100's low over Tatton's main mere picking food off the surface, they have been joined now by a few Swallows, still only single figures although some have returned to their breeding quarters with birds at farms in Mobberley and Toft where the area's first returning Willow Warbler was singing over the weekend. Star bird of the year so far must be the Crane found by a local dog walker on Sunday on a field of winter wheat near to Mobberley SQ, it's one of a number currently being recorded in the UK, presumably the run of easterlies being responsible for drifting them across from the continent on their northerly migration. The bird is very wary and will fly off if someone approaches within 100 meters, although it does seem to have taken to one particular field where it has been found at first light for the past couple of days.



29/03/00 The fine weather from last weekend has continued for the rest of the past week, no rain and long sunny days but predominately north-easterly winds which kept temperatures in single figures. Huge numbers of Sand Martins were present at Tatton I estimated 600 on Tuesday (28th.) but I find it impossible to use the recommended "guestimate" methods for any flocks of hirrundines or Swifts and if someone said nearer to 1000 I couldn't have argued. Perhaps the wind direction has had a bearing on the matter and we're seeing birds that would normally be passing northwards along the coast of continental Europe. An evening visit tonight to Mobberley Sand Quarry (SQ) turned up 2 Oystercatchers and a Ruddy Shelduck!! This bird was in beautiful plumage with no leg rings and flew off in a southerly direction as we approached. Mobberley SQ produced some amazing records in the 1970's and 80's with sightings of such species as Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, both Godwits, Sanderling, Little & Temminck's Stints, Ruff and Whimbrel, unfortunately it's become a lot smaller over the past few years as the water table has dropped but may well turn up a few good records before it shrinks to nothing during the Summer - watch this space!

26/03/99 The first singing Blackcap of the season on Tuesday (21st.) in the grounds of Barclay Hall in Mobberley, very early; the average arrival date in Tatton over the past 11 years is the 10th of April. Sand Martin numbers over Tatton's main mere had increased to c 150 on Saturday,

accompanying them were just 2 Swallows, meanwhile 4 Chiffchaffs were singing in Dog Wood whilst in the lee of a small mixed plantation 2 Chaffinches, a Reed Bunting and 3 Bramblings were feeding on an abundance of early midges. A lunchtime stop at Axe Edge on the Buxton to Congleton road whilst returning from a Book Fair produced 2 Wheaters, a male Ring Ouzel, a Red Grouse and numerous displaying Curlews all just within the County boundary.

22/03/00 110 Sand Martins and the years first Swallow over Tatton main mere tonight.

19/03/00 Early morning visitors to the Park were disappointed not to relocate the Shrike that was showing so well yesterday but by way of compensation Sue and Terry discovered a nice flock of c 20 Crossbills. These birds were in "Swan Clump", a small conifer plantation that was their favourite spot last year.

18/03/00 Still around 40 Sand Martins over the main mere in Tatton with the first Chiffchaffs singing in Dog Wood from the 15th. Despite spending 4 days in Hospital last week with tonsillitis Darren, one of the Park Rangers sprinted to the nearest phone just before noon on discovering a Great Grey Shrike in an Oak tree close to the Mill Pond. Thanks to the marvels of modern technology he was able to alert me to the good news and within an hour a small group of KOS members were enjoying superb views of the Shrike as it made its way amongst the trees along the outlet stream that joins Tatton Mere to the Mill Pond, the light was perfect and through the 'scope were able to note all the appropriate key identification features. This is a rare bird anywhere and is decreasing in number, I can recall only two other records in the Park over the past 30 years - who knows how many years it will be before another appears.



14/03/00 A welcome return on Sunday evening to Eric Hardy with his "Countryside" programme on Radio Merseyside (95.8 FM at 6:30pm) - Eric is reputed to be well into his 90's so his extended absence had been the cause of some concern. One item of news of great interest to us in the Knutsford area was the record at Rostherne Mere of a Sand Martin as early as the 23rd. of February, this is almost unbelievably early but by no means impossible, how things have changed since the 1930's when Boyd had to wait until almost April for the first bird of the year! No news from Tatton on the record from the 4th of March but plenty of activity today when we counted c. 50 Sand Martins over the main mere in a biting cold north westerly wind.

10/03/00 A week of very mild weather with evidence of seasonal movement in the form of an increase in finches, plenty of Siskins in Tatton and even 3 Redpolls in Dog Wood, they've both been well down in numbers this Winter. Coupled with record high temperatures in southern Europe it seemed inevitable that our first true Summer visitors wouldn't be far away and they duly arrived today at 2.25pm, two Sand Martins in from the east low over the mere - congratulations therefore to Sue Heath on winning this years competition, only 5 minutes out - who says KOS members know nothing about Ornithology! .....but wait, it appears that an earlier sighting - on the afternoon of the 4th. is being claimed along with a House Martin on the 3rd! Both would be

the earliest ever records if substantiated, as it stands both sightings were passed onto Park staff by an unknown gentleman from Lower Peover, so it's all in the melting pot at the moment!

### 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>
<b>2000</b>	<b>10th. March</b>

02/03/00 That's it, closing date for entries for the Millennium Sand Martin Competition, the details are listed below. Some very optimistic estimates from Jessie and Debbie and a span of 25 days to the last wild guess from our Hon. President! The 9th and 10th are favourites giving really small periods of opportunity for some - Pete's "window" on the 9th. is only 7½ minutes! I'll make a special effort to be around then though Pete!

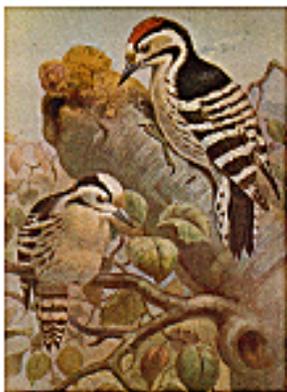
### Entries for the KOS Year 2000 Sand Martin Competition.

28/02/2000	11:00:00	Jessie Maurice	Knutsford
29/02/2000	15:30:00	Debbie Cameron	Didsbury
01/03/2000	09:00:00	Martin Adlam	
01/03/2000	15:00:00	Terry Heath	Knutsford
04/03/2000	09:30:00	Colin Conroy	
04/03/2000	11:00:00	Keith Seaton	Altrincham
05/03/2000	11:15:00	Gordon Hicks	
07/03/2000	17:35:00	Len Mason	Mobberley
08/03/2000	11:30:00	Edward Rickson	Kopavogur, Iceland

09/03/2000	08:45:00	Evan Prosser	Mobberley
09/03/2000	08:50:00	Pete Hale	Market Drayton
09/03/2000	09:00:00	Jane Crossen	Knutsford
09/03/2000	10:45:00	Pete Wilson	Crewe
09/03/2000	11:20:00	Hazel J Raw	Knutsford
09/03/2000	14:30:00	Heather Buttle	Bangor
09/03/2000	14:55:00	John Grassby	Allostock
09/03/2000	16:30:00	Frank Dearden	Knutsford
10/03/2000	09:00:00	Jill Thornley	Appleton
10/03/2000	09:38:00	Sue Grassby	Allostock
10/03/2000	13:45:00	Sheila Blamire	Mere
10/03/2000	14:30:00	Sue Heath	Knutsford
10/03/2000	16:30:00	Jean Brooks	Knutsford
10/03/2000	16:40:00	Pete Hall	Toft
11/03/2000	11:00:00	Betty Thretford	Knutsford
12/03/2000	08:37:00	Ken Wakefield	Schilde, Belgium
12/03/2000	09:47:00	Elizabeth Perkins	Knutsford
12/03/2000	11:47:00	Brian Raw	
12/03/2000	16:30:00	Derek Pike	Knutsford
12/03/2000	18:00:00	Bob Groom	Knutsford
13/03/2000	10:30:00	John Somerville	Sale
13/03/2000	11:00:00	Ian Hubball	Northwich
13/03/2000	11:00:00	Alf Caldwell	Altrincham
14/03/2000	10:15:00	Geoff Blamire	Mere
14/03/2000	13:30:00	Roy Bircumshaw	Knutsford
18/03/2000	14:00:00	Peter Swallow	Stoke-on-Trent
21/03/2000	15:30:00	Barbaros Demirci	Ankara, Turkey
23/03/2000	10:00:00	Peter Perkins	Knutsford

22/02/00 Four consecutive days of settled weather with little cloud and long periods of sunshine produced an increase in activity as each morning progressed, in Mobberley three pairs of Buzzards were to be seen in the air at the same time, a survey carried out by the [Cheshire and](#)

[Wirral Ornithological Society](#) last year found at least 157 pairs holding territory during the breeding season. In Tatton a lone Reed Bunting was singing from the *phragmites* reed bed on Knutsford Moor whilst the surrounding alder trees, now bedecked by their long trailing catkins still provided plenty of seeds for a small flock of c. 20 Siskins, the male birds now very conspicuous in their full breeding plumage. Further into the park two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming in Dog Wood, a Green called from across the mere near the Golf Club and the rarest of the trio, a Lesser Spotted was calling and drumming in the car park wood - the same location Bill Mulligan took us to almost 30 years ago to catch our first glimpse of this elusive little bird.



12/02/00 A mid-week trip to my [favourite part of Mobberley](#) produced nothing of note, so I was surprised the next day when the farmer's wife informed me that they had seen some Skylarks earlier in the morning - but sure enough there they were, 5 singing males high over their favourite fields. Also present a small flock of Meadow Pipits bathing in rainwater trapped in deep ruts formed by passing tractors. Hopefully the Larks will remain, although the Pipits don't nest in the area and will eventually move on. A small but select group today for the trip to North Wales, many of the regulars away on holiday duty Mexico, India and New Zealand!! all no doubt a little warmer than Conway and the Great Orme at Llandudno! The highlight of the day was a late afternoon visit to the Point of Ayr RSPB hide, situated near the now defunct colliery overlooking the Dee estuary with Hilbre Island in the background. Through the gathering gloom we could see many types of waders including Dunlin, Redshank, Grey Plover, Curlews and Lapwings, this is an excellent location and will no doubt form an essential part of the itinerary of future trips to this area.

4/02/00 The inexorable but mostly imperceptible approach of the breeding season continues, more Yellowhammers during the latest trip to Peover for the BTO Wintering Bird Survey and an increase in song over the past week. Mistle Thrushes have been heard for some time and have now been joined by many Song Thrushes together with Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Dunnocks and Greenfinches, the latter increasing rapidly in numbers as wintering individuals return. Warmer weather on Monday even prompted some Chaffinches into life and their first spluttering efforts of the year were a welcome reminder of the hopefully warmer weather ahead.

23/01/00 The first page of this site uses a nice application to produce "movies" when viewed online in a browser, I have used it only to swap between two images, but intended to produce a series of pictures to show a year in the life of a Cheshire [marl pit](#) this would include some shots during a periods of snow. Unfortunately we've yet to have any appreciable falls in this part of the country so that particular little project sits on the backburner for the time being. A visit in mid-

week produced only dunnocks and a wren in the immediate vicinity but a nearby field had attracted a substantial flock of no less than 31 Yellowhammers, they were feeding on freshly spread cow manure that will contain bits of crushed barley, used for winter feed by some local farmers, as well as seeds from the grasses used as bedding for the cows. Variable numbers of Redwings and Fieldfares still add interest, as well as a long staying Peregrine Falcon that seems relatively "tame" although there are no signs of attached "jesses", indicating an escaped bird. Thanks go to our Chairperson, Sheila, for Saturdays party to celebrate her \_\_\_ th. birthday and congratulations also to our President and long time Secretary Peter on his 75th.!



07/01/00 The great return to work started on the 4th of January, but for two of us this year was a little different having retired since the last New Year and whilst everyone else seemed to be returning to the Salt Mine we were able to team up with Derek for a mornings real Ornithology in the form of the BTO Winter Farmland Bird Survey. This project will run for three Winters, 1999/2000 being the first of these, and the aim is to ..... "get an impression of the numbers of birds using farmland and to obtain a clearer picture of the importance of different habitats to these species in Winter". Luckily Derek and Sheila had done the difficult bit, having liaised with the appropriate landowners to obtain access and all that was required on the day was to walk the 1Km. square in the approved manner and note the different species and their numbers. "Our" square (one of 8,000) is also used for the Common Bird Breeding Census and lies in some typical Cheshire countryside in the village of Peover (*pronounced peever!*), the going was heavy at times, the ground this year has had a real soaking. Blackbirds, Song and Mistle Thrushes were present in the hedges, the latter species appear to already be paired-up. Two small (c.30) flocks of Chaffinches were flushed from the centre of stubble fields, one group were accompanied by 5 Bramblings, but the most numerous species seen were Fieldfares(250) and Redwings(50) feeding on closely cropped grass adjacent to farm buildings along Chelford Lane.

01/01/00 The last time we visited Carrington Moss, in February last year, we had good view of the Long-eared Owls that were overwintering in overgrown hawthorn bushes close to the Sewerage farm. This Winter's star attractions are finches; lots and lots of them, in fact I've never seen a bigger flock, we estimate between 1200 to 1500 birds, they were mostly Chaffinches but we saw at least one brambling and heard many many more as they flew overhead. They were

feeding on a huge field that had been used during the Summer for the cultivation of beans these are allowed to die off and are used as high protein animal feed, it's not immediately obvious what the birds were feeding on as the beans are small and very hard. Also present were large numbers of Skylarks, probably in the order of 250, they were recent arrivals and seen to have replaced the usual Yellowhammers that were nowhere to be seen! T.A. Coward (*right*) is the most well known Cheshire Ornithologist and he knew this area well, in fact he was brought up in Bowdon and the tower on Bowdon church is visible from the Moss. In his book "Bird Haunts and Nature Memories" published in 1922 he tells of the area as it was when he was a lad - a proper moor with Red Grouse, Curlew, Twite, Short-eared Owls and nesting Nightjars! - but that was in the 1880's and by 1922 the heather and peat had gone to be replaced with "night soil" from Manchester and the establishment of numerous small holdings and nurseries. Today it's a hotchpotch of waste ground and chemical works with farms round the perimeter and Manchester United's new training complex dumped in the middle somewhere! Coward was the author of many books - not all Ornithological, he was an historian and Chairman of the Manchester Philosophical Society - but he is best remembered for the 3 volume work "The Birds of the British Isles and Their Eggs" published in 1920. Much of the content is based on his own observations and Coward often talked of the importance of accurate note taking in the field. In the past we have often postulated as to what happened to the great man's notebooks on his death in 1933 and what interesting reading they would make, well I think I've found them! They appear to be kept in the Archive Cupboard of the Alexander Library which is part of the Zoology Department Library at the University of Oxford - [take a look](#) The power of the Internet, I assume plebs like us will be allowed a supervised viewing!!



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