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Updated 30th. December 2004

06/01/05 As many of you will know already we lost our only son Neil as a result of an accident on New Years Day. This has turned our whole world upside down and it's difficult to predict how Olwen and I will be affected in the long term. I've no doubt that she and all my birding friends will be encouraging me to pick up the pieces when appropriate, but whatever happens I fear that I won't be able to continue with this section of the website, it requires a considerable amount of time and relies so much on the inclusion of social comment and humour. I'm afraid there's no humour left anymore. So thanks to all who've passed this way over the past 9 or so years, especially regular readers and those of you who've sent me records and given so much encouragement with your kind e-mails.

Tony Usher



Neil Armstrong Usher. 20 January 1975 - 1 January 2005

"Neil was a top man and a good friend. We'll miss him lots, but our lives are richer for knowing him"
"Stimo"

30/12/04 We've enjoyed some seasonal weather over the past week with sub zero temperatures on Christmas Eve followed by snow on Christmas Day; nothing too heavy but enough to give a light covering here on the Cheshire Plain. I don't think it had any effect on the bird life, there's still plenty of food on offer, including in Macclesfield where Derek and Jean counted around 200 Waxwings now on the Rowan trees along Crossall Street, behind the Mercedes garage. On



Tuesday (28th.) we enjoyed our annual Christmas walk round the Budworth area, starting and ending at the Anderton Lift, following a figure-of-eight route taking in the Anderton Reserve and Budworth Mere before retiring to the "George and Dragon" in the centre of Great Budworth, where I'm glad to report the steak & ale pie was up to it's usual standard and the ["Advent"](#), [a guest beer from Sheffield](#) was on top form (I just wonder what effect the breweries "Last Rites" - at 11.5% has on the human mind!). Jill had kindly booked us in to the pub a few days previously, so we had to press on, nevertheless Mark recorded 53 species, including Brambling, Sparrowhawk, Bullfinch, Kingfisher and Water Rail, not bad in a couple of

hours given the time of year - this walk started off a long time ago as an ad hoc affair, but given it's growing popularity we might have to make it an official part of the Societies programme! So that's it for another year with the KOS - our 30th. together as a society, celebrated in May with such a successful [anniversary trip down to Crete](#) and the first year of fieldwork for the new Cheshire Atlas, giving many people their first experience of survey work and the chance to call themselves ornithologists rather than just birdwatchers! - Happy New Year from all of us at the KOS.

23/12/04 I had a pleasant walk round Pavement Lane in Mobberley early today with Barrie Armitt, who'd spent the night at his mum's before jetting off this afternoon for a few days birding in Goa. Barrie is currently living in Blundellsands, a 6 minute cycle ride from work, where he is now Deputy Head of the 6th. form; he sends his regards and seasons greetings to all KOS members who remember him. There were plenty of winter Thrushes around, primarily Redwings, feeding on a still substantial stock of Hawthorn berries. There's been a huge influx over the past week or so, on Monday I went Winter [tetrading](#) on SJ77V, near the end of Runway 2 at the airport, flocks of Redwings, Blackbirds or Fieldfares fed on the Hawthorn, never settling long before moving noisily on, they're still very wary of human interference, something they may have to come to terms with later in the Winter, especially when there's lying snow, and they are forced nearer to human habitation. The carpark at Witton Meadows is now accessible again, with the re-opening of the cantilever bridge from Northwich town center. We parked there on Tuesday (20th.) and had a walk round the Budworth Reserve, we missed out on the Goosander and the two Bitterns but had excellent views of a Kingfisher in front of the observation screen. On the return route, moving away from the mere a new path has been opened, running for about a quarter of a mile alongside the inlet stream, it'll be a super little spot come the Spring. The Neumann's facility is not yet open, but I spoke to a charming young lady warden who told me it will open in January, with an official opening later in the year - so we shouldn't walk round yet, but some people are doing so at the weekend when there is no work going on, and they are turning a blind eye to that - but it wasn't her that told me!

16/12/04 The weather on Sunday, for our annual trip up to Martin Mere and Marshside, was a little warmer than we've endured in the recent past, in fact it was quite pleasant with the mercury hovering around 8°C for most of the day. The number of birds at Marshside was phenomenal with thousands of waders, mainly Lapwings and Golden Plovers, but good numbers also of Oystercatchers, Redshank and Black-tailed Godwits. Wildfowl present included Pink-footed and Greylag Geese, Teal, Wigeon, Pintail and Mallard, all kept in an almost constant state of flux by the activities of no less than four Peregrine Falcons that were hunting over the shoreline - very successfully - they were seen to take a number of waders, returning to their favourite plucking post with the unfortunate victim dangling from their talons. Over at Martin Mere we ate our sandwiches in the warmth and comfort of the main reception building before moving off round the reserve - now now complete with the Harrier hide (left) - the strangest looking construction



I've ever seen on a bird reserve, especially when you compare it with the reserve's original buildings; low and squat with turfed roofs to blend in with the surrounding Lancashire mosses! A real Harrier, of the Marsh variety, and much more pleasing to the eye hunted over the reedbeds in front of the Millers Bridge hide, where Teal floated immediately in front of us in the gutters, with flocks of Wigeon grazing on the turf just above them. As dusk approached a barrow-full of feed was scattered by the staff outside the Swanlink hide, attracting all the 1700 Whooper Swans currently wintering on the reserve, they were top of the "pecking order" with other species lurking round the perimeter, including around 40 Ruff dashing about between the bigger species, taking the odd grain before moving nimbly aside, so avoiding the wrath of the nearest swan. A very civilised evening last Friday (10th.)

in the Jubilee Hall for our annual Christmas Party ([PICTURES](#)) hosted by our Secretary Roy, who also ran the "bring&buy" table, ably assisted by Jill Thornley who organised the food - between them they managed to raise a very commendable £140 towards club funds. This will be added to when we sell, on behalf of the society, a donated copy of the first [Cheshire breeding bird Atlas](#) - now of course becoming quite a collectors item - there's only a limited number in circulation as only one edition was ever printed!

9/12/04 We travelled across to Warrington on Tuesday (7th.) for a morning at the [Woolston Eyes Reserve](#), the weather was a lot kinder than of late and we enjoyed unbroken sunshine and excellent viewing conditions with the light coming



from behind the hides. The wildfowl are in lovely plumage at this time of year and we had excellent close-up views of 10 different species, but there was no sign of the Black-necked Grebe, Hen Harrier or Corn Bunting reported on the Reserve during the previous couple of days. By coincidence earlier in the day, along Pavement Lane in Mobberley, the small resident flock of Buntings; until now only Reed Buntings and Yellowhammers had been joined by a Corn Bunting - formally a common breeding species at that location, but now a bit of a rarity! Talking of rarities, I was in Macclesfield yesterday (8th.) and walked to Crossall Street, behind the Mercedes-Benz showrooms to have a look at the Waxwings that have returned to the berry laden Rowan trees where they were seen last Winter, I had heard there were 7 birds but I soon discovered that there were now c. 60 present. On this occasion they were

very mobile, settling for only a few moments before taking flight again almost immediately, a fine sight though and still attracting a few spectators. Amongst these I was pleased to meet up (for the first time I think) with Alan Booth, a fellow ["tetradder"](#) and long-time visitor to this site and also Kevin Hughes who I've not talked to for many, many years - Kevin used to edit a natural history column in the "Wilmslow and Alderley Advertiser" [I dug out a cutting from 1973, it still reads well!](#)

3/12/04 Drama today high in the sky over Mobberley when I noticed a flock of around 200 Lapwings flying in a tight group over in the general direction of Tatton Park. They were really high and still climbing, much higher than I've ever seen this species before, as I watched the birds the reason for their behaviour was revealed, just below them and equally intent on gaining height was a marauding Peregrine Falcon! Eventually the raptor drew level with the Lapwings, who must have realised the game was up, and they dropped from the sky scattering in all directions, the Peregrine selected it's target, folded it's wings and plummeted downwards. On this occasion though it seemed to have met it's match, the Lapwing waited until the last possible moment before skillfully slipping a few inches to one side, leaving the attacker grasping at fresh air as it dropped towards the ground. (It took me back to the 60's playing for Knutsford Boys Club in the Cheshire and Border Counties Sunday League when the same technique was successfully employed against the hugely aggressive full backs you used to meet up with in places like Sandbach and Cholmondeley - something to do with in-breeding we were told at the time!) Not to be outdone, the birds were still 100's of feet in the air, the Peregrine used it's momentum to good effect and within seconds was able to stoop once again - six times it tried, but the Lapwing used the same trick each time, the final attack coming close to the ground below the tree line after which the two protagonists were seen heading off in different directions. On Thursday (2nd.) we finally got round to some Winter [tetrad](#) on Sugarbrook Farm (SJ78R), but it was hard going on a dark, grey, foggy morning with claggy ankle deep mud for most of our route. A flock of 50 Linnets were feeding in the Sunflower field and in total we saw about a dozen Reed Buntings - there seem to be plenty about this year - I've seen a small flock on a number of occasions along Pavement Lane in Mobberley. A large mixed flock of Thrushes were feeding on hawthorn berries close to the railway line, mainly Redwings and Fieldfares but also a scattering of Blackbirds and Mistle Thrushes. If you get the chance have a look at the current exhibition in Knutsford Library - a mixture of oil paintings and photographs, all the work of our own Terry Heath, I knew he did a lot of photography but the paintings were a surprise!

25/11/04 On Tuesday we had intended to begin the [Winter tetrad season](#) with a visit to Sugar Brook Farm, where John Erlam has produced a whole field full of sunflowers for Winter finch flocks. Unfortunately the weather was at its depressing November worst, so we took the easy option and had a dry, but unproductive morning in the Rostherne Observatory. The weather was somewhat kinder on Sunday (21st.) when I spent a quiet couple of hours on Knutsford

Moor, some big flocks of Tits have built up, one contained around 100 birds - mainly Blue, Great and Coal . A few Goldcrests seemed to be accompanying them as they slowly made their way into Dog Wood, and at one stage they were joined by a welcome stranger - it was a Chiffchaff - these overwintering warblers are not thought to be the birds that breed in the UK, instead they are visitors from Germany that move west rather than south to escape the rigours of a continental Winter. I've seen a few over the years, but they're not nearly as common as the Blackcaps that have become more and more widespread in the Winter months. Moving from one end the size scale to the other, a flock of 150 Pink-footed Geese were feeding on stubble at Ullard Hall Farm (Toft) last week, this is quite unusual, we're accustomed to seeing them pass over at a great height, commuting between East Anglia and the Lancashire mosses , but to have a flock come down and feed doesn't happen too often - they must have been a fine sight.



18/11/04 Last Saturdays field trip to the [Deeside Naturalists' Reserve](#) at Connah's Quay was a very civilised affair as it happily coincided with one of the Societies open days and on our arrival at the Field Study Center we were treated to tea



and biscuits before leaving to brave the elements! Overnight, back in Cheshire, we'd had our first frost of the Winter, so it was quite a cool day with a northerly wind sweeping in across Liverpool Bay. The west hide stands the best part of a mile up the Dee estuary from the Centre so we enjoyed a leisurely stroll in that direction, under clear blue skies with a 10 meter tide coming in rapidly, keeping the ducks and waders constantly on the move. The species list wasn't remarkable, what makes a morning like this such an uplifting experience is the sight and sounds of so many birds in flight at the same time; either as a result of the incoming tide or the activities of one of the resident Peregrine

Falcons taking full advantage of the general confusion! Mallard and Teal flew out of the reed beds as we approached, joining Gadwall further out on the estuary - at this point a Kingfisher was quite a surprise as it flew past - it was a cold day, but not that cold! Of the waders Dunlin were the most numerous, they were present in their hundreds, a smaller flock of Knot rested on an area of turf too high for the tide to reach - probably 4 -500 but difficult to estimate they were very distant. A few Black-tailed Godwits gave close views, although there was no sign of the flock of 2000+ seen recently, a scattering of Lapwings preferred the drier fields where they joined forces with small flocks of Meadow Pipits, Linnets and Skylarks. As is his wont, after a short time birding, John Sommerville wandered off on his own in search of flower pictures for his ever expanding [wild flower website](#). this is hardly the time of year for such activities, but John came up trumps with the rarest species of the day - a single example of Blue Woodruff (*Asperula arvensis*) which, looking at the [distribution map](#) was quite a find, even more so given the lateness of the season!



11/11/04 We enjoyed, or rather endured a morning of what the Irish refer to as "soft weather" on Tuesday as we made our way round Budworth Mere and the Anderton Reserve, under grey skies in a gentle, incessant drizzle. The Neumann's Flash section of the Reserve is due to officially open soon, despite the ongoing problems with Witton Mill Bridge. This is the cantilever affair that leads to the new Witton Meadows car Park, it's currently being refurbished but now subject to delays due to technical problems. Great Crested Grebes were (already or still!) displaying on Budworth Mere, where at least one Kingfisher has set up shop for the Winter and through the mist we could make out Herons perched in the tops of the trees on the opposite side of the mere, presumably staking out their claims in preparation for next year! 2 Black-tailed Godwits flew onto Haydyn Pool as we watched from the hide, for a short time they swam along on the water amongst a substantial flock of Teal and no less than 49 Gadwall. Returning to the car park we again had good views of several Bullfinches, there certainly seem to be plenty around, apparently there's been an influx of birds from Scandinavia and Russia and these can be identified by a slightly different call "like a Trumpeter Finch" - hmmm. right! A more familiar call came from a Willow Tit, amongst the undergrowth, close to Carden's Ferry Bridge; they seem to be hanging on at this location - and also in the Shaw Heath, Knutsford area where Jane Crossen reports two visiting

her bird table again this Winter. Jane is justifiably worried about the future of these, and all the other species that winter in Shaw Heath, when the proposed link road to the Parkgate Industrial Estate is built. This is now a particularly noisy part of our area, in addition to the proposed and the existing road, the flightpaths to and from Manchester Airport mean that EVERY aircraft using it will pass over that part of Knutsford at least once per visit, either on landing or taking off. Progress.

5/11/04 The arrival dates of some of our Winter Thrushes and the periods of heaviest passage through the area is relatively straightforward to pinpoint. This is especially true for the two commonest species, Redwings and Fieldfares - Fieldfares are readily identified by their chattering calls as they pass over in loose flocks, normally during the hours of daylight. Redwings too have a characteristic call, a long, high pitched "seeep" that can be heard not only in the day but also at night as they migrate during the hours of darkness, especially on cold, clear nights during October and November. Give it a try on a favourable night, they don't fly too high, only around 100 or so feet up and it's not difficult to pick them out - a glass of red wine will make the job even more of a pleasure! (just a glass John, leave that bottle where it is!!). Blackbirds are more of a problem, you don't (as far as I know) see or hear large flocks passing through, it's more a sudden realisation, on a particular morning, that the species is everywhere! This was the case on Sunday (31/10) on a trip round the local patch in Mobberley - there they were, feeding almost exclusively on an abundant crop of hawthorn berries, 100's of Blackbirds where yesterday there were only one or two locals. This technique also applies to Song Thrushes, they arrive early with the first Redwings, but because there are so few, it requires a remarkable sensitivity to subtle changes in numbers and behaviour to identify them - a chap who lives in Toft will tell you how it's done! Making my way along Pavement Lane on Sunday I was surprised and delighted to come across a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, the first I've ever seen in this part of the village. It steadily worked its way along, moving from tree to tree, spending a few minutes in each one before moving to the next. The trees were all oak and it favoured the thinner upper branches, where it seemed to finding plenty of food as it progressed upwards, rather like a large Treecreeper.

28/10/04 Some very heavy rain over the weekend seems to have caused pollution problems again on Knutsford Moor, an e-mail from Darren Morris last night brought news of this; the second such incident this year. When I went down today there were plenty of dead and dying fish to be seen, mainly small roach and perch. The Environment Agency were again involved and were using a petrol generator to power 3 devices looking like inverted fans that were being used to churn up the water in attempt to increase the dissolved oxygen level. On a more positive note, with the promise of the best day of the week, on Tuesday (26th.) we enjoyed a mornings birding along the [Goyt Valley](#). If the previous Tuesday was the day of the Redwings, then this week it was the turn of the Fieldfares, flocks were passing through for most of the morning, nothing like the numbers of Redwings we had in Mobberley, but flocks of up to 100 birds were counted. There was plenty of activity amongst the smaller birds, a [larch tree](#) growing in the car park had attracted a small flock of finches, mostly Siskins but accompanied by a couple of Redpolls. Further up the road in the direction of Derbyshire Bridge we followed the path down towards the River Goyt, amongst the golds and browns of the beech trees, now at their autumnal best. The resident species were busy feeding at this time of plenty, Goldcrests, Blue, Great and Coal Tits plus a small flock of newly arrived Bramblings helping themselves to a copious supply of [beech mast](#). Pete Hall had two Bramblings in the gardens of Toft Hall earlier in the week, his first of the Autumn. Following on from [recent notes](#) about the large flocks of Redwings on the 12th of the month, Pete also noted these birds, so they were progressing in a wave at least 5 miles across!



21/10/04 Wintering Stonechats have appeared again in Tatton Park, Roger Barnes reports 2 birds near to Melchett Mere on Sunday morning. I missed these two, perhaps due to the fact that I was trying to count the number of Canada Geese on the main mere - I don't think I've ever seen such a great gathering! Making full use of the available technology, I was able to take a series of digital photos of the flock and then count them at leisure on my return home; there were 1,564 birds, I think this is a record count for Tatton. Also with them 2 Barnacle Geese and 2 Pinkfeet, these last two were "real" wild birds and eventually flew off high to the west when the Canadas became restless and moved the short distance across to Melchett. It's been pointed out that our Winter flocks of Canada Geese have become much less mobile of late

and we don't see many commuting between the local waters: I think this is true, they probably feel safer in the Park, not everyone welcomes their visits. I had a bit of a shock when standing looking over Melchett Mere, a group of cyclists went shooting past - all sweat and testosterone - surprisingly one of them recognised me and, having shouted out my name, jammed his anchors on and freewheeled back down the road. There he was, after 25 years, fetchingly decked out in fluorescent blue and gold lycra and looking irritatingly fit, none other than Malcolm "Monty" Greenhalgh - KOS stalwart from the days, when the Sex Pistols were in the charts, Operation Osprey Warden and our Report Editor in 1978! Having survived 2 marriages Monty is now living in Marlow, which I believe is somewhere to the south of Stoke, where he runs a security company and has formed an attachment with one of the local ladies! News also of another ex KOS member, Garry Healy, who, in the 1990's, managed to turn up more new species for Tatton than anyone in living memory, and currently living in a tent somewhere in Cornwall! Garry is working at a Garden Centre until the end of his contract at the beginning of November when he will pack up the accommodation and head off for a well-earned camping holiday - to Iceland. Camping in Iceland, in November? Yes that's right, and I bet he turns up some good stuff!

14/10/04 A leisurely day on Sunday (10th.) on our October field trip to Frodsham Marshes, normally we would have started with a walk along the Weaver Bend, but decided on this occasion to begin on the elevated track on the rim of the no.6 tank. This decision was based on information passed to our hon.



Chairperson by Bill "Mr. Frodsham" Morton who was able to direct us to a muddy pool on no.5 tank, current home of a nice selection of waders. We weren't able to approach too closely, but with the benefit of some state-of-the-art optics were able to identify Dunlin, Redshank, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint. Closer to us, on the farm fields, large flocks of Lapwings and Golden Plover were roosting, but were being given little peace by the local Peregrine Falcon. This character put on a marvellous display as it hunted far and wide across the marshes, one moment vanishing from view over towards

Runcorn, the next reappearing at breakneck speed scattering potential prey in all directions; it must have eventually caught something because after half an hour or so things settled down and the birds were able to relax a little. By early afternoon we'd only got as far as no.4 tank where eventually our patience was rewarded by the sudden appearance of three Short-eared Owls, excellent views as they floated over the reedbeds against a backdrop of the sun shining weakly through clouds of steam generated by the Stanlow oil refinery, rising hundreds of feet into the air.

There was a spectacular passage of Redwings on Tuesday (12th.). We'd decided to have a walk round Runway2 at Manchester Airport, starting as usual at crashgate-9. We set off about 9:45am and became aware of waves of these super little Thrushes passing over, for more than 2 hours flocks streamed overhead, all appearing from the north-west and travelling steadily to the south-east. Groups of up to 200 birds went by, almost continuously, until about 12:30pm, after that - nothing! We must presume they were Redwings from Iceland; BWP mentions that they Winter in Western France, Spain and Portugal, they must have represented a good percentage of the whole population - there were thousands on the move!

8/10/04 Not much luck "early doors" Thursday on a trip up to the hills looking for signs of [visible migration](#). Visibility got worse and worse on the journey up from Macclesfield, past [Jenkin Chapelas](#) as far as [Pym Chair](#) where it became impossible to proceed at much above walking pace! Conditions improved as the morning progressed, but by then it was a little late, although small groups of House Martins were moving through as we walked along the Goyt Valley in the direction of Derbyshire Bridge, and substantial mixed flocks of Tits and Goldcrests flitted from tree to tree, pausing now and then to give some pretty good views - always worth a look - Firecrest, Yellow-browed Warbler : why not! I was more lucky late this evening (8/10) on a quick walk round Pavement Lane in Mobberley; just before dusk, after a bright, clear day when I was surprised by a flock of 30 or so Fieldfares racing off the fields, over the road and the opposite hedge, then away in the direction of Tatton, hugging the ground and not a single call - most unusual, they just weren't at ease - the first of the Autumn. On Wednesday night we travelled across to Frodsham for the first get together of what I presume we would call the "steering committee" of the new Cheshire [Atlas](#) and the Area Coordinators - 20 birdwatchers (19 male) and only 2 beards - things just aren't what they used to be! Seriously though things have gone very well in this, the first year of fieldwork, out of 670 tetrads 270 observers volunteered to cover 447, as of 4th. October 312 result sheets had been returned (mostly electronically). Our own local 10K square is SJ77 and of the 25 tetrads 23 should have been

covered; 19 have been returned so far and transferred to an excel file as necessary - [example here SJ77B : Crow Brook Nr. Lach Dennis - Dave Hughston \(you will need Microsoft Excel to view this\)](#). Some tetrads may benefit from further work next year, whilst others seem to have been comprehensively covered first time around. The south of the County is the least well covered area and more volunteers are needed down there (yes Barbara, that means you - you can do it!). It's probable that during the third year "flying squads" will be needed to descend on some of these tetrads in order to give a more uniform coverage, luckily the information needed to make these decisions will be readily available due to the hard work of Geoff Blamire who has written the software that will be used to hold and analyse all the data produced during the project. The fieldwork for the Winter section of the atlas will run from mid - November until the end of February, it promises to be a little less demanding than the breeding survey - little more than walking a tetrad and recording the species seen - volunteers will be receiving their documentation soon, as well as a Newsletter to all participants, which will include preliminary results, feedback and comments.

1/10/04 The remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of the Buzzard over the past decade has been well documented, it would now be unusual, at any time of the year, not to see at least one bird during a mornings birding, just about anywhere on the Cheshire Plain. Other species are also currently increasing, perhaps though in a more subtle manner due in part to them being a little less obvious than a Buzzard. Chief amongst these must be the Hobby, [Coward](#) had no nesting records after 1898 and it was exactly 100 years later, in the Spring of 1998 that a pair nested locally (I'm not saying these were actually the first pair since 1898, just the first that I knew of). In the few short years since then they have flourished and over the past couple of weeks there have been a glut of records as adults and youngsters relax a little before beginning their perilous journey south for the Winter. I've seen one regularly on Pavement Lane, Mobberley; Bob Groom has watched two on a number of occasions after Swallows at the roost along Green lane in Knutsford and up to three have been recorded in front of the hide at Rostherne - possibly the birds seen in Tatton hawking insects over the main mere last week and yesterday watched by Darren Morris doing the same over at the [north end of the park](#). Winter visitors continue to arrive, Meadow Pipits are becoming more widespread and this morning a small group of 6 Skylarks were watched, heading south-west over Mobberley and we've even had some Redwings, Pete Hall had 3 at Toft on the 24th. September - 6 days earlier than his first in 2003.

22/09/04 The strong winds have continued for most of the week and [The Knutsford Guardian](#) reports a Manx Shearwater picked up in Lostock Gralam and a Gannet in Wilmslow, both birds appear to have survived and are recovering in the Lower Moss Wood Wildlife Hospital. Derek Pike and Sheila Blamire made their way to the Wirral on Tuesday, choosing New Brighton this week instead of Meols (see below) and enjoyed some success! John Somerville and I remained in



Cheshire and spent the morning at Northwich's Anderton Reserve where a constant barrage of text messages from Merseyside implied that we had made the wrong choice, and it does appear that we missed out on a spectacular passage of seabirds that will go down in the records as just about the best ever. Sheila has drawn my attention to [Steve Rounds website](#) - just take a look at what was available, quite incredible! The work at Neumann's Flash [map](#) seems to be almost complete, we had a quick look at one of the 3 new hides (left) - after the style of the one across the road at Haydyn Pool - basic but functional and perfectly adequate. The RSPB should have a look at this design and perhaps consider sticking a couple up at the Point of [Ayr / Air](#) Reserve, the venue for our September field trip last Sunday. The facilities there are sadly lacking, just a single hide that was already overflowing when we arrived a couple of hours before high tide;

fortunately it was a dry day and reasonable views were possible from outside - I've mentioned before the RSPB's bias towards [Scotland and the East coast of England!!](#) The high tide pushed some interesting birds towards where we were positioned - 3000+ Oystercatchers, 100's Curlew, Common Redshanks, single Spotted Redshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-necked Grebe and Greenshank. As we left a Peregrine flew overhead and Bob Groom and I spent some time trying to get to grips with an elusive yellow / green warbler with a disyllabic call that was flitting quickly through the undergrowth next to the fence round the gas plant. We had one or two speculative guesses, but it soon vanished, leaving us none the wiser. Don't forget this Friday (24th) marks the beginning of the 2004 - 05 Winter season of [indoor events](#) when we welcome back our old friend from Rochdale, [Gordon Yates](#) who will be giving a cine presentation entitled

"White Wings over the Indian and Arctic Oceans". As part of my duties as KOS Lectures Officer I spoke to Gordon earlier in the week - he's on top form! If you've never experienced one of Gordon's lectures, come along and join us - you'll be made most welcome.

16/09/04 What a difference a week can make. Last Tuesday we enjoyed a pleasant stroll over the Great Orme in warm sunshine under unbroken blue skies, but if we'd ventured up there this Tuesday, I suspect we'd have blown off the cliffs and into the sea, such was the force of the wind roaring in from the Irish Sea. We chose instead to make our way across to the Wirral Peninsula where we knew the shelters along the promenade at Meols (pronounced Mellis and [home of Malcolm Stoneway and his Mum](#) and [on again this week!](#)) would provide some protection from the weather, essential if you're using a telescope to try and identify a smallish Petrel, half a mile away, that's giving only fleeting glimpses as it appears briefly from behind the huge waves being generated by a force 9 gale. We arrived some time before high tide and had lovely views of the assembled waders feeding on the shore in front of us, Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Knot, Sanderling, Turnstone and Black and Bar-tailed Godwits. As the tide advanced they were pushed closer and closer to where we stood, eventually being forced into flight when the sea reached the promenade. Winter plumaged waders, black and white with all the intermediate shades of grey, against a backdrop of boiling white surf, grey sky and sea - splashes of colour though with the bright red bills of the Oystercatchers and the legs of the Redshanks plus the subtle buff tinge on the breasts of the juvenile Knots - magic!. A lot further out and a lot more difficult to identify were the more pelagic species - the hon. Chairperson stuck to the task admirably and was duly rewarded with 4 Bonxies, 3 Leach's Petrels and a continuous stream of Manx Shearwaters, other observers up and down the coast on that morning could only add Little Gulls to the list, although larger counts of Leach's were amassed, with no less than 35 at Hoylake passing through during the day.



Back in the Knutsford area Pete Hall had some good records on the same morning we were at Meols. He mentions a large passage of House Martins, the first mass arrival of Meadow Pipits (100 birds) and also 2 late Swifts on their way south.

9/09/04 With the prospect of more decent weather at the start of the week we decided to desert Cheshire, and on Tuesday (7th.) headed across to Wales for a day's birding in the Llandudno area. Inevitably we began on the Great Orme and, after enjoying a pot of tea and toasted tea cakes at the [Rest and be Thankful](#), headed out across the "limestone



pavement" on a warm, sunny morning. There was no sign of the juvenile Dotterel seen a few days previously, in fact it was very quite compared with our last visit in April, Stonechats appear to have had a productive breeding season, we passed a number of family parties as we made our way towards St. Tudno's Church. The Crow family were well represented with Magpie, Carrion Crow, Raven and Jackdaws all noted, plus 3 Choughs indulging in some spectacular aerobatics over the Marine Drive. Light winds meant there was little activity on the sea, a steady stream of Gannets passed through, one or two Fulmars remained in the area, but all the kittiwakes had move on as had most of the

auks although we did see a couple of Guillemots on the water, down below the lighthouse - they have apparently struggled this Summer with the long periods of adverse weather conditions. After lunch we spent a few hours at the RSPB's excellent Conway Reserve, again it was relatively quiet, the tide was out and there weren't too many waders in evidence, although we did have Black-tailed Godwit, Snipe, Lapwing, Curlew and a lone Green Sandpiper. As we made our round the tide began to come in and this prompted more activity; a flock of 16 Dunlin flew past accompanied by a smaller wader - probably a Little Stint, more wildfowl appeared including Pochard, a substantial flock of Wigeon and 2 Red-breasted Mergansers. It was nice to see a Little Egret at Conway, I don't think I've seen one there before, but they must have had plenty; this is a species "on the up" - I believe there were no less than 54 last week on the Reserve at Inner Marsh Farm. Also doing very nicely thank you - the Hobby, Paul Leigh had 3 in Mobberley last week and another observer had 7 different individuals at another location on Wednesday!!

4/09/04 We've enjoyed some dry weather at last; it's been very pleasant and the farmers seem to have been successfully

catching up on lost time, I've seen a number of combines at work over the past week, some busy well into the night. Swifts appear to have left for the south, my last record was of 6 birds over Mobberley on the 23rd of August; September birds are normally considered "late" although, of course, old-timers will remember 1977, when substantial flocks were passing through well into the month. Bob Groom was in Tatton last Friday, the first really decent day for weeks, and was delighted to see 14 Buzzards in flight at the same time, high over the park; also there 2 Ravens and 2 Green Woodpeckers. Wednesday (1/9) found Bob a couple of miles further east in Mobberley, more Buzzards there, this time 6 thermaling over the [Fox Harbour](#) area, plus a couple of Hobbies seen, with a third perhaps heard close by - very interesting! Bob also reports a female Blackcap gorging on elder berries of which there seems to be a huge crop this year; walking into Tatton via the Dog Lodge entrance the tangle of shrubs and bushes showed a predominately purple tinge, the bunches of ripe berries bending down towards the ground. Further on into Tatton beyond Dog Lodge, on a blustery day, a single Sand Martin flew low over the main mere, preferring not to join the other hirrundines as they flocked in the lee of a clump of sycamore trees. A short distance away over on the large stubble field a decent flock of finches seems to be developing, there were around 80 Linnets, 20 Greenfinches and a couple of Chaffinches, I wonder if the Linnets will remain with us throughout the Winter, we used to consider them Summer visitors to the Cheshire plain but in recent years large flocks have been noted in January and February - 200 on Sugarbrook Farm, Ashley and c.1500 on Carrington Moss.

27/08/04 The Osprey was seen over Tabley Mere on Tuesday (17th.), they often hang around for some time, especially in the Autumn, but on this occasion it appears to have moved on, Bob Groom had a good look round last Sunday; no Osprey but he was pleased to see two Hobbies over the park and watched a Robin carrying food to a very late nest. At around the same time that Bob had the two hobbies I saw a bird high over Mobberley, close to one of last years nest sites, it was calling loudly, but I saw it only once and it didn't appear to be a local bird. 3 more species of raptor were seen over a period of 2 hours or so, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Kestrel, the Sparrowhawk was zig-zagging along the top of a low hawthorn hedge into which a sizeable flock of 60 or so House Sparrows had taken shelter; the hawk also put up a flock of c. 90 Lapwings and 50 Starlings that had been passing the day in a stubble field next to the road down towards Springwood Farm. The barley had been harvested some weeks ago during a break in the wet weather, on many farms the crops lie untouched as the deluge continues and our farmers remain unable to get their equipment onto the waterlogged fields. Dave Caveney, who found 2000's Crane, reports a Barn Owl roosting in an oak tree near Gleavehouse Farm in Mobberley, this is an excellent record, as far as I know this is the first for many years in the village, ever since the pair nesting in the roof of Pavement Lane Farm were evicted because the noise frightened the kids!

19/08/04 An early start on Sunday for the annual pilgrimage across the sands of Dee to Hilbre Island, high tide was 11:45am BST which meant leaving West Kirby at 8:45am, and Knutsford at 7:45. A few days previously there had been a spectacular fall of migrating warblers with an estimated 300 Willow Warblers present, none remained though on Sunday, the only passerines present were Meadow Pipits, a few Swallows and one or two passing Wheatears. We had a single Arctic Skua amongst good numbers of Terns, mostly Little and Sandwich, the Little Terns seemed to be in loose family parties, we watched adult birds feeding freshly caught fish to their youngsters, all on the wing - very spectacular! More difficult to identify specifically at this time of the year were the Common and Arctic Terns, straightforward if you live on the coast, but not for us in land-locked Knutsford, nevertheless its easy if you have a good view, this juvenile Common Tern posed just in front of us and I was able to grab a "record shot" through John's 'scope. Wader numbers were down on last year, but as usual the birds that were present allowed a close approach, we were able to note the combination of colour rings on the legs of two of the Turnstones resting in front of us, perhaps we'll eventually be able to discover a little more about these two individuals. More waders on Tuesday, this time closer to home, at [Haydn Pool](#) on the Anderton Reserve near Northwich with 12+ Snipe, 1 Ruff, 1 Common Sandpiper, 5 Green Sandpipers and a single Greenshank. A Chiffchaff was in song somewhere in the tangle of vegetation surrounding the pool and, more unusually in August, a Willow Warbler sang briefly from the same location. Bob Groom has been doing the monthly wildfowl count at Tabley for many years now, and built up a good network of contacts; earlier this week one of the fishermen reported an Osprey fishing over the Mere, as far as I know this is the first record of the Autumn in our area. No Ospreys at Tatton as yet, but Nick Hilton, who works in Knutsford was enjoying his lunch on Knutsford Moor when his attention was drawn to a large



raptor over the reedbed, despite not having his binoculars to hand he was able to positively identify it, initially by it's jizz, as a Marsh Harrier and subsequently as a female / immature bird when it approached close enough for him to see the pale head cap. An excellent record, only the second and the first for many years.

12/08/04 The poor weather continues, with low pressure systems moving in from the Atlantic Ocean unable to penetrate the high pressures now firmly established over mainland Europe. As a consequence we're receiving more than our fair share of the wet stuff; on Tuesday (10th.) 2" (50mm) of rain fell, causing minor flooding throughout the area, Smith Lane in Mobberley was impassable due to 3' of water lying across the road and [The Knutsford Guardian](#) reports that a young lady taking advantage of the situation was trying out her new kayak along Warren Avenue! Derek Pike and Sheila Blamire visited Tatton Park after Tuesday's rain helping with the [BTO's 2003 - 2004 Feeding Swallow Survey](#), they met up with Darren Morris, one of the Park Rangers who said that he'd never seen the main mere so high, they were struggling to remove the wooden shutters of the weir to allow the floodwater to escape! I normally avoid the park at this time of year, after mid-May the [chavs](#) always seem to re-discover it and make Dog Wood as appealing as [Najaf](#) on a hot August morning, nevertheless I ventured in as far as Melchett, and found the water level still very high. Thousands of small fish had gathered at the entrance to the weir, enjoying a copious supply of food that was being washed down in the strong currents generated by the floods. It was interesting to note that the outlet from Melchett had become an inlet and water from the main mere's outlet stream was passing into Melchett, this may become more common if Melchett continues to expand due to subsidence. No sign of any Black Terns in the park, there seems to be plenty in the general area at the moment with birds seen at Budworth and Sandbatch Flashes. A flock of 150 Lapwings mixed with 100's of Wood Pigeons feeding on stubble alongside the track leading to the Outdoor Centre whilst on the main Mere two eclipse plumage Mandarin Ducks were lurking under the overhanging foliage of Higmere Plantation. In [Dog Wood](#), along the channel connecting the main Mere with Knutsford Moor 3 or 4 Water Rails were calling - short contact calls; perhaps a family party, I'd like to think that they've bred on the Moor this year! A reminder for those travelling to Hilbre this Sunday - the tide is early, so we leave Knutsford at 07:45 or West Kirby at 08:45, for those not going, [have a look for us](#) during the day!

05/08/04 Canada Geese are once again on the wing after their annual moult, a flock of 40 or so were resting yesterday afternoon on the water at Mobberley SQ, also there were 2 Green Sandpipers, a third bird was a short distance away on an artificial pond created by some shooters (and not shown on any maps), the sandpipers seem to commute between the two waters, taking flight readily when disturbed, always with that [distinctive thin call](#) given as they leap into the air. Despite the fact that Yellowhammers are still in song, fieldwork for the new [Atlas](#) is just about over: as a 10K square "coordinator" I've already received some record forms from observers covering one (or more) tetrads in SJ77, delivery modes so far include e-mail, "snail mail" and even hand delivered by Dave Hughston from Lostock Gralam! Dave is covering SJ77B, with Lach Dennis just inside the bottom of the Tetrad, this is not Dave's local patch but he's been delighted to see so many Linnets, Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows on his adopted tetrad during 14 visits between mid - April and the end of July. Dave's reaction is typical, and shared by everyone else who has volunteered this time round; they seem to be enjoying exploring new areas and meeting new people, (the vast majority all too willing to allow access to their property - be it hundreds of acres of farmland or just their back garden!) this is not just birdwatching - it's real Ornithology! During work for the last atlas we had even less money than now (I know that's difficult to believe Derek, but true!) and most of my "tetrading" was done on a push bike; I found this to be just about the best mode of transport for the job, ideal for picking up song whilst on the move and easy enough to carry across country for short distances - try that with a Nissan Sunny! KOS members Mark and Heather Eddowes have been enjoying terading by bicycle this Summer, (although I'm not sure I'd be quite as enthusiastic if I had to do the Winter Survey this way as well) Mark has written this [splendid article](#) about his exploits, I think it deserves a wider audience, and would be much appreciated in the pages of the CAWOS quarterly magazine ["Bird News"](#)

28/07/04 An excellent turnout last Friday (23rd) for the final Friday evening walk of the season, round the [Anderton Reserve](#) near Northwich, not too much in the way of birds, but our resident [botanists](#) found plenty to keep them occupied!

Family parties of warblers flitted about in the undergrowth with Reed and Sedge allowing only fleeting glimpses amongst the phragmites reed, whilst up on the Haydn Pool the Black-tailed Godwits were still around in good numbers, accompanied on the night by one Common and 2 Green Sandpipers. More waders, this time in Mobberley, where the Sand Quarry has attracted Common Sandpiper, Green Sand Piper and a Dunlin in full summer plumage over the past week. On tetrad SJ77Z (Mobberley) Nigel Troup came across a female Mandarin Duck with two ducklings on Pedley Brook, just below Gleavehouse Farm; this is an excellent record, we've noted a female bird in this area in the past but never a male, so to confirm breeding is a bonus, especially with this being the first year of fieldwork for the new Atlas, well done Nigel! We've not seen many Hobbies this year, it's been rather disappointing after last year's excitement, but I was delighted to see one on Monday, low over Town Lane, scattering House Martins in all directions! Perhaps they've nested after all, looking at last year's record we didn't come across any juvenile birds until mid-August and they stayed with us until late September.



20/07/04 A double celebration this year for R.S.P.B. Scotland - 100 years of helping Scottish wildlife and 50 years since Ospreys returned to breed in Strathspey after an absence of nearly 40 years; as part of the celebrations the R.S.P.B. organised a series of special evening receptions at the Loch Garten Osprey Centre to thank former volunteers for their contribution to "Operation Osprey". Over the years 7 members of the KOS have spent time as volunteers and so last week, tempted by a free glass or two of wine courtesy of the RSPB, 4 of us (Sheila, Frank, Len and Tony) headed north for a few days on a trip down memory lane, back to Speyside and Operation Osprey Revisited! We were so lucky with accommodation, I found [Balliefurth Farm](#) on the Internet and we were able to book in for all four nights; Balliefurth is a working farm owned by Alastair and Ann MacLennan situated between Nethy Bridge and Grantown-on-Spey - 400 acres sloping gently down from the road to the River Spey with sheep, chickens and cattle producing beef of the very highest quality. Alastair was the winner of the 2002 NFUS Farmland Biodiversity award for the way he has managed his farm to create habitats that are so attractive to various forms of wildlife, Common Terns were nesting on the river, over which fishing Ospreys were often to be seen, and I don't think I've ever seen so many breeding pairs of Reed Bunting, Willow Warbler or Meadow Pipit, all now feeding fully fledged youngsters, seemingly unaffected by the poor weather the area suffered during the previous three weeks. After enjoying one of Ann's legendary full Scottish breakfasts featuring delicious home-made sausages we made our way down the disused railway that runs through the farmyard (now a part of the much longer [Speyside Way](#)) as far as Nethy Bridge to meet up with local tour guide and artist Dave Pullen, newly returned from Spitzbergen and about to set off for a reconnaissance trip to northern Russia! Together with Dave we visited some of the local sites we'd become so familiar with over the years, on the choppy waters of Lochindorb we spotted two Black-throated Divers and an Osprey squandered 15 minutes or so in an unsuccessful search for prey before drifting off to the west in search of a less exposed location. A short distance away on a small roadside lochan a pair of Red-throated Divers had nested unsuccessfully, they were still there and even indulged in a few seconds of display, their eerie calls echoing across the desolate moorland, perhaps pair-bonding in preparation for next year; but before then they will move away from their tiny lochan to winter in coastal waters. Slavonian Grebes still remained on some of the larger Lochs and at one location whilst watching a Grebe we had the inevitable Osprey, a Buzzard and a group of 3 Hen Harriers - Buzzards are now less numerous here than in Cheshire (!) and we were lucky to see the Harriers, they are reported to be suffering at the hands of unscrupulous land owners and their employees. Of the passerines, amongst others, we had Stonechat, Whinchat, Tree Pipit, Crested Tit plus good numbers of Spotted Flycatchers and thousands of Siskins!

The actual object of our visit, the reunion, took place at the Osprey Centre, a new wooden construction built on the site of the original public hide and a very impressive building it is too! Richard Thaxton the Reserve Manager and his current team of full time staff welcomed a good turnout of ex-volunteers and, after sampling the RSPB's wine and cheese and biscuits, we were given a tour of the new facilities. The forward hide has been combined with a second public hide, used in the early Spring to give the public the opportunity to get a glimpse of the increasingly rare Capercaillie; the only bit of equipment I recognised was the superb pair of brass German triple magnification binoculars, complete with imperial eagle and swastika, that were in constant use when we first did our bit back in 1974. A new generator hummed away quietly in the background, providing power for the tills and a whole bank of TV monitors, video recorders and DVD

Players! Talking to people who had volunteered more recently than us it seems that the only thing that has changed for the worse is the social side of volunteering - the camp has gone and been replaced by 3 self-catering chalets on a site some distance away, so now there's no tents, caravans or common room and as a consequence no feeling of being part of a close-knit team, no cheese and wine evenings and no elsans to empty and scrub clean!

PICTURES

12/07/04 It's been widely predicted that as global warming kicks in we will experience short periods of anomalous weather conditions such as the horrible day we endured on Wednesday (9th.), with gale force north-easterly winds sweeping across the southern half of the UK bringing down trees and power lines. Here in Cheshire the temperature at 11am was only 10°C giving me a chance to try out my posh new Winter jacket, purchased some time ago in the sales - I'd assumed it would have been October before getting the chance to show it off! In Tatton Blackcaps, Reed Buntings and Song Thrushes were still in song and I watched a pair of Garden Warblers collecting insects from the sycamore trees on Knutsford Moor before flying off to an unseen nest in the depths of a bramble bush. The previous day we'd enjoyed a stroll round the Anderton Reserve at Northwich, on Haydyn Pool Black-tailed Godwit numbers had built up to 14, they were accompanied by a single Green Sandpiper - but viewing from the main hide is currently becoming more and more difficult because the vegetation in front of the viewing slots has been allowed to grow unchecked and is now impeding visibility. There appear to be plenty of Green Sandpipers around at the moment, with 5 on Witton Brook, 1 at Acre Nook SQ near Chelford and a bird has re-appeared at Mobberley SQ, just up the road from the Ilford factory on the road to Wilmslow. Across the village on [tetrad](#) SJ78V I managed to confirm breeding for Reed Bunting, Buzzard and Goldcrest, all three species were feeding young - the Bunting and the Buzzard were straight forward enough, the Goldcrest required time and patience, but I find that if you can hear the youngsters calling eventually you'll catch a glimpse of one of the parent birds with a beak full of food moving quickly through the foliage. Nothing of any great consequence today (11th) on our trip across to [Lake Vrynwy](#), but at least we enjoyed some reasonable temperatures and no rain all day! As expected, Siskins were giving excellent views as they fed on the feeders in front of the first hide, in the car park of the excellent little cafe opposite the RSPB information centre. Fewer species than in previous years on the walk up the hill to the east of the lake but we did record Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Redstart, Common Whitethroat and Spotted Flycatcher. We were disappointed not to see any Pied Flycatchers this time, although the Warden we spoke to at the far end of the Lake thought they had been around earlier in the season and the BTO had ringed the usual number when they toured the nest boxes some weeks previously. There was no sign of the Ring Ouzels that had bred on the reserve, nor the Crossbills that had been seen in the morning over the path running through the conifers down to the centenary hide, but we were more than pleased here to get excellent views of a Marsh Tit as it fed, with Goldcrests in a boggy area just off the perimeter road. This is a species that is increasing nationally, but not in our part of Cheshire - despite all this Spring's survey work we've not had any, in fact this was the first I'd seen since last year's Vrynwy trip!

03/07/04 Exciting news today from Wales where Ospreys have nested for the first time, at a location between Porthmadog and Bedgellert. Unfortunately it's good news and bad news, 2 chicks hatched successfully but perished in

the awful weather that we experienced a couple of weeks ago, nevertheless the adults have remained in the area and the RSPB and local volunteers will be manning a viewing point at SH595415 from Monday (5th.). On hearing the news my mind went back immediately to [May 2001](#) when the KOS enjoyed a weekend in Wales based in Barmouth and we actually saw an Osprey that weekend: I know it was probably on passage, but well - you never know!! The location is close to [Pete & Liz Hall's](#) cottage at Llithfaen so I think it's a case of booking early next Spring to avoid disappointment! Closer to home, I stopped off along Sudlow Lane on Tuesday on the way to the Anderton Reserve and was delighted to discover 2 Yellow Wagtails in a field of maize, right next to the M6. I only had the briefest of views before they vanished so I don't know if they were adults or young, but it's nice to know they're still around at a location where we know they bred successfully last year. Only 2 members of the Tuesday group at the Anderton Reserve with Jill hard at work and Derek & Sheila probably recovering from the rigours of the [Spitzbergen expedition!](#) so John had all the time in the world to take more images for his ever expanding [wildflower website](#). Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Reed and Sedge Warblers were all still in song and the dense undergrowth held large numbers of young birds at all stages of growth, we were especially pleased to come across a family party of Willow Tits. On Haydn Pool signs of the progression towards Autumn, with the wildfowl moving into eclipse plumage and the resident waders being joined by 7 Black - tailed Godwits and a Green Sandpiper.



28/06/04 Only 0.3% of England's land surface is covered by lowland heathland, in Cheshire it's found at only 2 sites, one of which is Lindow Common, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), readily accessible from the Altrincham road on the outskirts of Wilmslow . On Friday we enjoyed an evening walk round the Common and nearby [Lindow Moss](#), famous for the discovery in 1983 of the remains of "Lindow Pete" who met an untimely end some 2000 years ago and who's body

was "perfectly" [preserved by immersion in the layers](#) of peat that make up the Moss.

Extracts of this peat are now apparently incorporated into a [range of expensive skin treatments](#), the manufacturers no doubt implying either directly or indirectly that something that helped Pete retain his good looks for so long would do just the same for the lucky purchasers of their facial creams - I don't suppose they ever considered using [a photo](#) of Pete when he was found! The whole of the area is a confusion of dank woodland, lanes and muddy tracks surrounding a large area of the Moss from which peat is still being extracted, so we were lucky that two of the party - Sue and John Grassby were familiar

with the terrain and were able to guide us safely round the route which took us from the car park at the Boddington Arms, round the lake in the centre of the Common, across to the current workings, over the old Wilmslow tip and back for a well earned pint! Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs were



still in full song as we walked through the woodland towards the lake where we found only a couple of Moorhens and a collection of Mallards and various hybrids now into eclipse plumage. Further round towards the current workings a Sparrowhawk glided low over the surrounding birch trees, accompanied by a number of concerned hirundines who had drawn our attention to the raptor by their alarm calls which continued until the danger had passed, a well-hidden Blackcap sang from a tangle of undergrowth and we were pleased to hear the songs of so many Blackbirds and Song Thrushes as we progressed round the Moss. Wilmslow Tip is now closed and covered with top soil, emergent vegetation is gaining height rapidly but good views can still be obtained across the Cheshire Plain from the top, which must be about 50' above the surrounding land; some members of the group had Bullfinch and Little Owl on the way up, from where we heard Yellowhammer, Linnet and Common Whitethroat. This is not an easy place to watch, but would be more than rewarding for a persistent observer - it may already be well watched, but I think not as we seldom hear any reports from the area despite it's proximity to Knutsford.

24/06/04 Euro 2004 - Portugal 1 (Helder 83) V England 2 (Owen3, Campbell 90)

and don't you let anyone tell you anything different.

19/06/04 John Erlam has now positioned around 50 nest boxes at various locations around Sugar Brook Farm [SJ78R [map](#)], there are still another 50 to go! The target species is Tree Sparrow and, although they were late going up, some may already have been used, on Tuesday we saw two lots of birds, including one bird feeding a well-grown youngster. Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers were both in song and numerous pairs of Common Whitethroats were noted in the impenetrable tangle of brambles growing alongside the Mobberley to Ashley section of the railway line. We saw only 2 Linnets all morning, but there may be more around later in the year, 200 spent last Winter at Sugar Brook and this year 2 fields of Sunflowers have been sown to supply seed eaters with food during the cold weather. The following day, just down the road on SJ78V, around the southern end of Manchester Airport's Runway 2, a Linnet was in full song together with an encouraging count of 4 singing Yellowhammers, a pair of Reed Buntings were carrying food into the rank vegetation round a newly created marl pit on which a late, newly hatched young Moorhen swam with one of it's parents. Inevitably good numbers of Common Whitethroats were present, plus a single Lesser Whitethroat singing from the depths of an overgrown hawthorn hedge, perhaps now with its mind on a second brood. Having been to Scandinavia a couple of times I have always encouraged people to give it a try, so good luck to Derek, Jean, Geoff and Sheila tomorrow when they head north for 10 days in Norway including 7 days on a converted Russian ice breaker sailing round Spitzbergen!! we'll keep an eye on the [weather reports](#) folks!

14/06/04



Happy Birthday - Derek Pike - 60 today!



13/06/2004 France 2 England 1..... no that didn't happen did it? Tell me I'm dreaming.

12/06/04 We finally identified the mystery butterfly that appeared on our trip to Crete a couple of weeks ago, initially some people thought it may have been a Monarch, but as we didn't have an identification book with us we were struggling. I obtained some good video shots of the insect and this week Bob Groom came round with the appropriate book and we were able to positively ID it as a Plain Tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*) a close relative of the Monarch, hence the confusion. It's an African species occurring south of the Atlas mountains, Arabia and then through tropical Asia to Australia. It was then that we suddenly realised that it must have been blown across to Crete during the fierce sandstorm that occurred during the second night of our holiday when we woke to find the whole island covered in sand, millions of tons of the stuff must have been blown across - quite amazing! On Tuesday we returned to the Goyt Valley in search of some of the species we'd missed the previous Friday, but before turning to the birds we indulged in a little astronomy and had some splendid views of the transit of Venus across the face of the Sun using Sheila's 'scope fitted with some proper astrosolar filter material that she and Geoff had used for the solar eclipse on their trip to



Africa. A little bit of history! Tree Pipits were very prominent with their display flights from the tops of the roadside conifers, we saw 3 singing males, more than at the same location last year, a single Wood Warbler was still in song and we had good views of Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts carrying food to their respective nest sites. Also present were a couple of Spotted Flycatchers, a species that has unfortunately declined over the past few years, especially down on the Cheshire plain, and I was therefore delighted later in the week when Len Mason told me had a pair on eggs at Barclay Hall in Mobberley - doubly pleasing for me because it's on one of my [tetrads](#)!

05/06/04 It's becoming a tradition that our Icelandic correspondent Edward Rickson asks us to provide him with a couple of new ones each time he travels south from Reykjavik back to the UK to visit his parents in Cheadle. This time Pied



Flycatcher and Grasshopper Warbler headed our visitors hit list - in theory pretty straightforward but in practice we struggled somewhat! We first sent him down the Goyt "early doors" on Sunday prior to him having to return his hire car later in the morning; unfortunately we were unaware that the valley car parks are taken over on Saturday night and the early hours of Sunday by youngsters "partying" apparently the noise could be heard 2 miles away! So it wasn't until Monday that Edward was able to begin the search for the Pied Flycatcher that we'd seen the previous week, unfortunately the bird(s) didn't oblige on this occasion although he did have Short-eared Owl and a singing Tree Pipit and it took a visit to Lyme Park later in the week before he was able to have a look at the Flycatchers.

Two years ago when we last walked the 3.2 miles around the perimeter of the number 4 tank at Woolston Eyes there were any number of Grasshopper Warblers reeling from the undergrowth and one individual was watched from only a few yards range right out in the open on the top of a bramble bush, so we travelled over to Warrington on Tuesday confident that we'd have no trouble with presenting Edward with an obliging "gropper" for his tick list. It appeared though that no one had told the birds about our visit and they were keeping a very low profile; the weather didn't help, it was a filthy morning - low grey clouds and almost continuous fine drizzle for hours on end, so it was with some relief that we

finally located a singing bird, a long way out towards the centre of the tank but the [reeling song](#) is unmistakable, so it was just a matter of setting up the 'scopes and locating the bird. Well no, not quite, the bird continued to sing but it proved impossible under the prevailing conditions to say with any conviction - yes that's it!

More Warblers on the path up to the main hide, seven species within earshot at the same time, Garden, Willow, Reed, Sedge, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Whitethroat - good for the time of year, but not as good as Knutsford Moor a few years ago with 9 species in song at the same time - any guesses! From one of the elevated hides we had excellent views of both Sedge and Reed Warblers in the reeds below, whilst on the water family parties of Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes went about their business, the young of both species still small enough to spend much of the day riding on the back of one of the adult birds, safe from the attentions of any possible predators.



29/0504 Despite the weather a reasonable turnout last night (Friday) for the Societies trip to the Goyt Valley, the first "outdoor \ indoor" get together of the year. Although it remained dry for most of the evening there was no sunshine and the light wasn't too good, even on our arrival, and as a consequence we struggled for views of some of the species we'd hoped to see along our usual walk alongside the Errwood reservoir. Apart from Willow Warblers, of which there were many, we heard little in the way of song and I suppose we were lucky that a short burst from a Wood Warbler proclaimed its presence and allowed us to add it to a very modest trip list. A small clump of trees were given a "good coat of looking at" revealing Redpoll, a male Siskin and two Spotted Flycatchers, we had to work hard for Pied Flycatcher though, but eventually bumped into a male bird carrying food close to one of the many nest boxes scattered amongst the oak trees

that line the roadside sloping down to the inlet stream. We missed out on Tree Pipit and Redstart, two species that are pretty reliable along the valley, but by way of compensation as we made our way back to the cars a "roding" Woodcock passed overhead followed a couple of minutes later by two more birds - we used to get breeding Woodcock every year in the Knutsford area and displaying birds were seen frequently in Tatton and Spring Wood Mobberley, but I've not seen any now for some years.

Elsewhere people seem to be enjoying their [atlas work](#), Mark and Heather Eddowes out tetrading on their bicycles report 5 singing Lesser Whitethroats in 4 tetrads to the south of Knutsford whilst in Tatton on SJ78Q Roger Barnes has confirmed Gadwall nesting on the Mill Pool, a first ([but not as impressive as his last first!](#)) Tony Ellis and I were out earlier this week with Roger in Tatton when we witnessed a gruesome event of a kind you sometimes read about but rarely see yourself: we saw a Carrion Crow pounce on a young rabbit - not fully grown but quite a substantial individual, the crow began pecking at it ferociously, at one stage chasing it into a bed of nettles and half flying, half dragging pulled it out into the open again before completing the job with a barrage of blows to the head!

Finally just to "dot the I's and cross the T's" Derek Pike and I were lucky on Thursday out along Mobberley Brook in search of Kingfisher records for the atlas - we'd been walking for only a couple of minutes when a bird shot past, silhouetted against the evening sun with a fish plainly visible in its bill - if only confirming breeding was as easy as that for all our birds!

24/05/04 Members please note - due to ongoing problems at the Sessions House - Please meet up at the Dog Lodge lay-by for the evening trip up to the Goyt Valley this coming Friday (28th.[Booths will be too busy!])

22/05/04 As Sheila explained in her excellent account of the first week of our 30th. anniversary trip to Crete we would have perhaps had more species if we'd gone there 2 or 3 weeks earlier in the season. As it was, during the first week of the holiday, we seemed just to have caught the tail end of the Spring passage and the couple of hours we spent at the raptor watchpoint above the Anari Valley on the 6th of May with streams of hirundines and Swifts passing through will long be remembered - especially when the cry "Bee-eaters!" went up and a flock of 38 drifted by against a backdrop of the spectacular Cretean mountains over which Griffon Vultures and Bonelli's Eagles were soaring. We returned there a couple of times during the second week but failed to find anything of any consequence, in fact additions to the group's list were difficult to come by despite the best efforts of Bob Groom and Terry Atkinson who refused to give up trying and added some goodies including Woodlarks, Hoopoe and Lanner Falcon - perhaps the final count may well have exceeded 100 species.

In the interests of anglo-greek relations we spent some time each evening in the excellent 1+1 taverna just down the road from the [Odyssea Beach Hotel](#) where we were staying and by the end of the second week had got to know some of the locals quite well! Just as we found in Lesvos there was little in the way of crime and great emphasis is placed on family life with Mum and Dad plus the kids often living under the same roof as their grandparents. < rant > How refreshing it was to spend a Friday or Saturday evening in a town devoid of gangs of morons with little interest in anything other than taking to the streets to drink, fight and pass out in gutters.< /rant > Thanks are due to Derek and Sheila for organising the taxis, hire cars and the production of the site guides and





itinerary, to John Somerville for sorting out the maps and updating this website in my absence and of course to our Secretary Roy Bircumshaw who worked so hard sorting out the holiday location, the hotel, flights etc. etc. etc. all with his usual enigmatic smile and air of imperturbability - You're a star Roy!! Despite the attractions of the Greek Islands it's always nice to return home, especially in the Spring, back to the green Cheshire Lanes - or should it be green and white; what a wonderful display of Hawthorn blossom to greet us as we drove back from the airport! I took the car out the morning after our return for a run round Mobberley to charge an ailing battery and was delighted to find Lesser Whitethroats still in song, one at Four Lane Ends and two more along Breech House Lane. Common Whitethroats also seem to have returned in good

numbers, on Wednesday (19th.) we paid a second visit to a [private area](#) within our 10K [atlas](#) square, 5 singing Whitethroats were present along a favourable track where we'd had just one during our first visit. It was another 3 woodpecker day, all three resident species were still present, as were the Ravens - more vocal than ever - a good sign! We watched a Treecreeper vanishing into a narrow crack quite low down on the narrow trunk of mature Hawthorn whilst Reed Buntings were plentiful, some feeding young and others nest building, one pair were using the *juncus* reed in a small pit; a traditional site but other were using a yellow field of Oilseed Rape, a recent change of habitat, I have seen Sedge Warblers also using Rape.

KOS in Crete 30th Anniversary Tour by Sheila Blamire

Crete has spectacular scenery, friendly people, fantastic weather and excellent tavernas, but be warned - you have to work hard for your birds! To be fair, April is the best month for migration, so we always knew that going to Crete in the first week of May (4-11th) was going to be a challenge, particularly when compared to Lesvos, our destination for our 25th Anniversary trip back in 1999, when the total species count was 142 (1 week) and 162 (2 weeks). We did not realise though that both the resident and the migrant breeders would prove so elusive as well! Though being the KOS, we did not exactly go out at the crack of dawn, nor return particularly late, whatever some members of the society said at the time! The grand total after 1 week was just 88, including an unidentified Pied/Collared Flycatcher sp, and several birds seen only by 2 or 3 people. Hopefully, the 10 members staying on for an extra week will add to the total. Because Tony is one of these 10 lazing in the sun for a 2nd week, he has "nominated" me, as Chairman, to write the "official" trip report.

We stayed in a village called Missiria, which turned out to simply be an extension of the spreading suburban sprawl of Rethymnon, one of the 4 largest towns found along the north coast. The excellent new highway runs the full length of this coast, forming the main communication route, and tourism has, and is, building up along this coastal strip at a great rate of knots. The centre of the island is mainly mountainous with impressive gorges; high limestone plateaus, mainly devoted to agriculture, are another feature. From a birding perspective, there are interesting river mouths and bays to explore along both the north and the south coasts, but both the east and the west coasts are rather isolated and hence under explored.

Wed 5th we picked up our six hire cars at 9am and headed off west along the new road. The weather was atypically overcast with rain on and off for most of the day. We started off at Petres River and Gorge, which gave us our first Griffon Vultures, Eleonora's Falcon, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and an all too brief glimpse of a Pied/Collared Flycatcher species. Squacco Heron, Little Ringed Plovers and both Wood and Common Sandpipers were found in the river mouth. After this the fresh water marsh at Georgiopolis added Marsh Harrier, Little Bittern and Purple Heron and Cetti's Warbler. Further west, we found the only Tree Sparrows seen in the week, at Souda Bay Cemetery.

Thurs 6th we drove up the Amari Valley, an area famous for raptors. It did not let us down, again we had several Griffon Vultures, but careful scanning rewarded us with 2 Bonelli's Eagles. However, the highlight here for some was the wonderful sight and sound of 38 Bee-eaters circling overhead, steadily moving north; for others it was the 100s (if not 1000s) House Martins pouring through the valley on migration. This upland valley also gave us our first singing Cirl Buntings, Serins, Golden Oriole, Woodchat Shrike, Turtle Dove, Red-rumped Swallow, Chough and 6 Alpine Swifts.

Fri 7th we again traveled west, this time further on to visit Agia Reservoir. This large, and very popular lake added Black Tern, Blue-headed Yellow Wagtail, Great Reed Warbler and a pair of confiding Moustached Warblers. After lunch we drove to the famous Samari Gorge via Omalos Plateau, where we got our first glimpse, though at some distance, of Lammergeier! A party of 7 Alpine Chough were also seen here, and Griffons of course. Tawny Pipit was a good find whilst driving back over the plateau, plus 3 Woodchat Shrikes.

Sat 8th some of us decided to be more adventurous and visit the only mountainous site in Crete that is easily accessible, the Anogia and Mount Psiloritis Observatory and ski resort. A breath-taking road (in more than one sense) took us via hairpin bends to about 5000ft and snow! Here yet more Griffons, our first Jackdaws (the eastern European race *sommerringii*), Chough, alpine Linnets, and lower down a Long-legged Buzzard. Three of us decided to call in at Plantanes River on the way back (only 1km from our hotel) and were rewarded with the only sightings of Black-crowned Night Heron, Greenshank and Common Snipe. The Black-winged Stilt also seen turned out to be regular there.

Sun 9th took us to the south coast via Kourtaliotiko Gorge with the usual Griffons, Eleonora's Falcon, Crag Martins, Rock Doves (genuine ones!), Peregrine, etc but no Lammergeier unfortunately. After this some members of the Society wanted some culture and visited the Moni Preveli Monastery; those less inclined decided instead to look for Ruppell's Warbler, without success, though we did add Icterine Warbler and Corn Bunting to the list.

Mon 10th after a brief stop at Plantanes River, saw us heading east to the town of Heraklion, or rather to the power station there! This area of rough land looks scruffy and uninviting, but the scrub and reeds were great for warblers with Sardinian the commonest (true for all the areas we visited), then Olivaceous, a few Cetti's, Great Reed and our first Reed Warbler. Crested Larks were numerous and we saw Little Bittern, Squacco Heron and Little Egret on the river and pools which dissected the area. Half the group braved the heavy traffic to continue to Aposelemis River and Gouves Lagoon, 21 km further east of Heraklion, and were rewarded by 7 Curlew Sandpipers (including some in full summer plumage), and new for the list - a lone Garganey and a very confiding Collared Pratincole.

Tues 11th and the last day of the official trip! First call was to Lake Kournas in the west, the largest lake on the island. We were disappointed not to catch up with Black-necked Grebe (seen by some earlier in the week), but we finally got good views of surprisingly obliging Olivaceous Warblers here. A quick look-in at nearby Georgioupolis Lake again gave us Little Bittern and Purple Heron, whilst at Petres River and Gorge three Peregrine Falcons tumbled and chased each other for at least 10 mins, much to our delight. We decided to finish the day at the raptor watchpoint along the Amari Valley. No Bonelli's Eagles this time, instead prolonged views of Lammergeier - at last! What a way to finish the week the bird that everyone wanted to see.

So, we finished on 88 species in total. But more than purely a list of birds we brought back with us some wonderful memories. Hopefully, over the next few days, many photos will be added to this report to enhance those memories.

[KOS in Crete - General Pictures](#) [KOS in Crete - Flower Pictures](#) [Even more pictures from Crete!](#)

03/05/04 Lapwings would appear to be enjoying a good breeding season, while preparing a field for this years maize crop Pete Hall discovered 5 pairs, 2 already had young - 3 and 4 chicks whilst 3 other pairs were still incubating, all three nests contained 4 eggs. Pete says that this is the most nests he's seen on the field in 25 years. Just a short distance from Toft Hall Farm, along Sudlow Lane, we came across more Yellow Wagtails, two newly arrived birds - a male and female in the field next to the motorway close to where we watched them carrying food in June last year. On Thursday we enjoyed a mornings [atlas](#) work on some private land within the SJ77 10k square to which we'd been granted access, the species count wasn't all that high considering the location and lack of disturbance but we were able to add two rather special species to the confirmed breeding category for that particular tetrad. The first was Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, we watched a pair copulating close to the nest hole in the trunk of an old oak tree from where the female bird had emerged a few seconds previously; the second species was Raven, we watched a bird chase off a Buzzard from the air above an isolated clump of trees into which a second bird flew some minutes later carrying food, reluctant to cause any

disturbance, we skirted the wood at a distance of 100 yards or so, nevertheless we'd been spotted and both parents took to the air complaining vociferously until we'd passed safely by.

More returning migrants are turning up daily, On Monday 26th. Paul Leigh had a singing Sedge Warbler on Knutsford Moor and on Sunday (2nd) I was thrilled to hear the [unmistakable rattle](#) of a Lesser Whitethroat emanating from the overgrown hedgerow along Breech House Lane in Mobberley, a really reliable location, they reappear here at the beginning of May every year. Hobbies are around too - I've yet to see one but I'm reliably informed that at least one bird has returned to its breeding site somewhere in our area! Well that's it for a couple of weeks we're off to Crete on the Societies 30th. anniversary trip, it's apparently not in the same league as Lesvos but we'll give it a "good coat of looking at" and see what we come up with! Some of the party are going for 2 weeks and some just for one, John Somerville is going for one week so I'm hoping to bribe him to update the website on his return on the 11th. (a few glasses of red should do it!), last time he took the reigns the number of visitors almost doubled! In addition I have set up a "blog", basically it's an on-line diary that can display pictures and text and can be updated from the web without a web editor, which means if there is a handy cyber cafe we can report on progress on an ad hoc basis. I don't know if I'll use it, but it's available and I might give it a try! it's at <http://www.surfbirds.com/blogs/tony/>.

28/04/04 The warm calm spell over the past few days with temperatures as high as 23°C seems to have encouraged the return of a whole range of Summer visitors. In Toft on Sunday (25th.) Pete Hall welcomed back the first Yellow Wagtail of the year, whilst in Tatton I had a Common Sandpiper on the edge of the main mere plus singing Grasshopper Warbler and Reed Warbler in the phragmites reedbed on Knutsford Moor. Also on the Moor I had to wait some minutes for a singing Garden Warbler to show itself well enough to confirm its identity - even after all these years I still struggle to differentiate between [songs of this species and the Blackcap!](#) It seemed to be busy establishing a territory, moving from place to place over an area of bramble about 25yards square, at one time vanishing into the undergrowth carrying a short length of dead grass; a good record for one of Roger Barnes' tetrads. On the same day Sheila Blamire and Derek Pike were out and about in Peover combining work for the [new atlas](#) and the [BTO Breeding Bird Survey](#), they had a Wheatear plus a Raven, 2 Cuckoos and an early brood of Moorhen chicks. Another Cuckoo was calling from Tatton's Dog Wood the next day, whilst further into the park over the main mere the first Swifts were enjoying the Spring sunshine, I counted at least 12 birds amongst large numbers of migrating hirundines, refuelling briefly before moving relentlessly on to the north. According to reports Common Whitethroats seem to have returned in good numbers although it wasn't until Monday (26th) that I came across my first of the year singing from a hedgerow in Ashley, a few yards from a pair of Yellowhammers that seem intent on nesting in an impenetrable tangle of bramble bushes. Surprisingly these were the first I'd seen in this area suggesting a continued decline, although reports from elsewhere are much more encouraging - Pete reports large numbers in song on his 4 tetrads in the Toft \ Peover area.



23/04/04 Tuesday (20th) found us out "[tetradding](#)" once again, this time on SJ88A on the eastern end of Mobberley over towards Lindow Moss, Burleyhurst Lane connecting Morley Green to Mobberley village runs diagonally across this particular tetrad. To the north and west of the road it's particularly unproductive except for a very small patch landscaped after construction of Runway 2, most of the fields are growing grass to be used for silage, a pretty sterile environment. It's better to the south and west of Burleyhurst Lane although I think we'll be lucky to find more than the 51 breeding species counted during fieldwork for the last atlas. We started in Graveyard Lane, walking as far as Ivy House Farm before heading towards the only large area of water on the tetrad near to Saltersley Hall Farm, on the way passing through the yard at Coppock House Farm - it's a long time since any animals crossed the threshold of some of these farms, except for some aggressive dogs that appear from behind the ranks of BMW's and 4X4 Mercs. as you pass, ready to remove the leg of any unfortunate member of the proletariat who strays too far from the path! No problems at Coppock House Farm though, the owner was very keen on Natural History and gave us some useful information about the local Owl population including Barn Owl and a recent breeding record of Quail! [incidentally some of the original beams at the farm were obtained after the great fire of London when many of the remaining houses were rebuilt without wood and the beams sent up north - not a lot of people know that!] Swallows and House Martins had returned to Saltersley Hall Farm and Willow Warblers, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were generally distributed although we struggled to find any Lapwings, finally coming across 2 pairs near to Runway 2, close to the edge of the tetrad. During our wanderings we met Barry Shaw the County Butterfly Recorder who told us that as well as the 10 Wheatears mentioned previously he'd had a singing Common Whitethroat on the 19th along Lady Lane in Mobberley (on the 31st. March Barry had seen a Small Copper butterfly - the first March record for that particular species) There are still some Winter birds around, we had 3 Fieldfares on Tuesday and on Wednesday a super male Brambling fed in the top of an oak tree in Dog Wood where Roger Barnes

had the first Cuckoo yesterday morning (22nd)

18/04/04 Despite a poor weather forecast and the absence of a few of the regulars a good turnout of 18 members made their way along the M6 and A55 to North Wales for what's become an annual outing to Conwy and Llandudno. Our first port of call was the RSPB Reserve at Conwy where we met up with Mike Duckham, a long time visitor to this website, especially during his time in Holland, and like [Frank Sidebottom](#) a Timperley lad! Mike is now employed full-time at Conwy as a Reserve Warden. We had arrived at high tide and flocks of roosting waders were giving good views, including Dunlin, Knot, Redshank, Oystercatcher, a fine Black-tailed Godwit in full Summer plumage plus newly arrived Common Sandpipers and 3 Little Ringed Plovers. Amongst a good selection of passerines we noted Willow Warblers, Chiffchaffs, 3 immaculate White Wagtails and 8 Wheatears, Bob Groom was lucky enough to come across a Lesser Whitethroat that [revealed its identity by singing](#) for a few moments - hopefully we'll soon have them back in our Cheshire lanes. By the time we arrived on top of the Great Orme the rain had passed over and we enjoyed unbroken sunshine for the rest of the day allowing those that felt so inclined to walk the paths as far as St. Tudnos Church, before descending to the Marine Drive and climbing back up to the car park. We had Peregrine, Raven and Stonechat, with Kittiwakes, Razorbills and Guillemots below us on the sea, overhead 4 Choughs entertained us with their spectacular display flight, climbing high above the cliffs before folding their wings into a lyre shape as they plunged out of sight towards the sea, calling wildly. For some this was the highlight of the day, but running it close must have been the amazing sight of no less than at least 68 Wheatears in view at the same time counted by Roy, Len and Bob on the limestone pavement area - was it something to do with the weather, cloud and rain for the previous 36 hours before a sudden clearance from the west? Large numbers were recorded elsewhere with 57 at Sandbatch, 8 on Warburton wet meadows (Dave Clarke) and 10 on Runway2 in Mobberley (Barry Shaw)



17/04/04 All three woodpeckers were around on Tuesday during a tour of Marbury Country Park [\[map\]](#) we only had Green and Great Spotted but were shown the possible nest site of a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers by a fellow birder who'd just seen a male bird leave the hole, he was quite delighted - it was a "lifer" for him! We counted 9 singing Chiffchaffs, 3 Blackcaps and 3 Willow Warblers amongst the 58 species recorded over a period of 3 hours, including a nice, long staying Little Gull over Budworth Mere and a Kingfisher heading purposefully in the direction of a steep sandy bank up towards the boathouse. We were disappointed to neither see nor hear a Song Thrush all morning, they really seem to have hit the skids over the past few years : on a more positive note we were scanning Neumann's Flash from the perimeter fence and met up with two of the senior engineers (John thought they must have been "Senior" because they both wore ties!) they kindly allowed us to have a close look at one of the new hides, very impressive and overlooking an artificial pebble beach - ideal for Little Ringed Plovers. This is going to be a super reserve when it's finally opened; unfortunately this won't be until the Winter now because of insurance considerations but it will be well worth waiting for. The following day (14th.) Derek and I did some [atlas work](#) on Sugarbrook Farm, between Mobberley and Ashley, again not a Song Thrush all morning but we did have Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers and Blackcaps in good numbers plus singing Linnets and a Tree Sparrow, perhaps the first of many, John Erlam has put up a large number of nest boxes in the hope of attracting Sparrows. Roger Barnes reports the year's first Common Sandpiper yesterday, seen on the side of Tatton's Melchett Mere and across at Longridge Jean Brookes heard 2 Willow Warblers singing from the direction of the Birkin Brook, perhaps reports of their terminal decline have been a little premature!

Please note - we meet at 8:30 am in [Booth's Car Park](#) for tomorrows Trip to Conwy and Llandudno

12/04/04 It's now almost a month since the first Sand Martin arrived back with us and more species are appearing at regular intervals, only small numbers of each so far with nothing spectacular as yet to set the phone lines humming (not that cellular phones have lines to hum of course -but you know what I mean!) I saw my first House Martin over Tatton Mere on Wednesday (7th.) and the "Thursday Group" had a Willow Warbler along New Platt Lane in Allostock the following day - I finally heard one this morning (12th) in Tatton's Dog Wood, John Somerville reports the species present in much reduced numbers so far on Carrington Moss. Out ["tetradding"](#) in Mobberley on Sunday (SJ77) it was encouraging to see Swallows back at every farm visited although, as usual at this time of year some Winter visitors still remain with us, I put up two substantial flocks of Meadow Pipits whilst crossing fields near Warford Grange farm and 6 Fieldfares called loudly as they passed over the same location heading north-east. In Tatton a Redpoll flew over Dog Wood this morning whilst 4 Bramblings in fine summer plumage fed at the top of a group of Beech trees close to the waters edge - they usually remain with us until the first week in May before heading north.

For those helping with fieldwork for the new atlas - The Cheshire and Wirral Bird Atlas website is now live!
www.cheshireandwirralbirdatlas.org We still have 1 vacant tetrad on our 10K square - close to Jodrell Bank - 01565 873508 for more details!

07/04/04 On a wet and blustery Tuesday morning we chose to travel across to Woolston Eyes for a few hours birding - it's one of the few places locally where hides are available to sit out the worst of the weather. The whole reserve was heaving with Black-headed Gulls, forming a formidable shield should any predator stray into the area, of course they also protect the nesting wildfowl, we noted Tufted Duck, Pochard, Ruddy Duck, Gadwall and all three species of breeding Grebes. With the need for increased security around nearby structures there is now a guard permanently posted on the entrance road, so you are definitely not allowed in without a valid membership card, which has to be produced before you're allowed to continue. The Grebes should be safe this year! Chiffchaffs were in song but we didn't hear any of the Willow Warblers that had been around for a few days now, Summer migrants are being widely reported on [Birdguides](#) including a Swift yesterday at Budworth Mere, at least 2 weeks earlier than the average arrival date. Terry Atkinson had an early House Martin on the 2nd. near his home in Altrincham, but we've not had any records so far from Tatton, the best I can offer is the first singing Blackcap on Monday (5th.) in Dog Wood. Across from Dog Wood in the Higmere planation [\[map\]](#) the Herons have successfully hatched and two youngsters can now be watched, although there may have been more because Nick Hilton reports watching one of the parent birds eating a (presumably) dead youngster on 30th. March - cannibalism by siblings or parents is mentioned briefly in BWP, waste not want not!

01/04/04 Some very pleasant weather at the moment with temperatures as high as 18°C encouraging Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies to venture out as we walked the Anderton Reserve at Northwich. We counted 7 singing Chiffchaffs as we made our way round, but apart from a few Sand Martins over Hadyn Pool, these were the only summer migrants on view, although Roger Barnes had a Little Gull nearby on Budworth and a Little Ringed Plover had been seen the previous day. We noted 41 different species including a Water Rail, noisy Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers and a Raven that looks as though it has a nest on the ICI works opposite the Anderton Lift together with 2 pairs of Kestrels. Many people will by now have begun their field work for the new [Cheshire Atlas](#), this is an ideal time for picking up nesting owls, Tawny and Little both become quite vocal at dusk and can be heard at some distance - the first few pieces in the multi-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that will eventually slot together and form the basis of the atlas. Thanks must go out to those who have been working so hard behind the scenes to produce the packs containing instructions, record forms and maps for each volunteer, these are so much more comprehensive than those we had back in 1978 for the last Atlas - not a criticism of the earlier efforts, more a reflection on the improvement in computer facilities! More "tetrading" yesterday when I joined Roger Barnes and Tony Ellis in Tatton (SJ77P / SJ78K), nothing spectacular and no sign of the 2 Wheatears seen on Tuesday up beyond the Old Hall by Bob Groom but we had a total of 54 species - not bad considering we were still only in March.



25/03/04 Chiffchaffs continue to arrive back in the area, we heard 3 singing males on Tuesday during a walk round the perimeter of Manchester Airport and the same number this morning in Tatton's Dog Wood. A Swallow was seen at Redesmere as early as the 17th of March so I was hoping to see one today over the main mere in Tatton, as it turned out there were no hirundines to be seen until I reached Melchett where a flock of 40 Sand Martins were feeding - only Sand Martins not a Swallow to be seen. But I was obviously too late because earlier in the morning at around 8:00am Roger Barnes had 6 over the main mere and Pete Hall welcomed the first bird back to the yard at Toft Hall Farm a couple of hours later! At dusk on Sunday evening I took a walk along Pavement Lane in Mobberley, there was some concern that over enthusiastic trimming of the oak trees there might have upset the resident Little Owls. This appeared not to be the case, I found 3 birds; one calling from the roof of the Blacksmiths workshop and two more - a pair - in a hedgerow oak where I was lucky enough to see them copulating, in silhouette against the dark blue of the last few seconds of daylight. While were on the subject of Little Owls - a bit of inside information - a new book entitled "The Little Owl" is to be launched at this years Bird Fair in August, published by Arlequin Press and coauthored by Dries Van Nieuwenhuyse, Jean-Claude Genot and our own Roy S. Leigh. Roy will be better known to some members as Sam and along with his brother Paul, Garry Healy and Barrie Armitt was one of the Societies junior members 30 years ago when we first started

the Society. I've read one of the final drafts and its not for the faint-hearted, but it will no doubt become the definitive work on the species and sit alongside BWP on many a bookshelf - it would also make a nice prize for next years Sand Martin competition, if there are any spare copies lying around - signed please Sam!!!

19/03/04 A couple of days of settled weather mid-week brought us more summer migrants, in Tatton's Dog Wood Paul Leigh counted 3 singing Chiffchaffs on Wednesday afternoon (17th.) the first of the year, Pete Hall had one in song this morning (19th.) over in Toft. Sand Martins continue to pass through, up to 6 were over the main mere at any one time yesterday, passing quickly through during the daylight hours on their journey north, only one Chiffchaff remained in Dog Wood and a Kingfisher was an interesting sight this time of the year at Melchett Mere. A walk round the lanes of Mobberley, taking in bits of 4 Tetrads proved interesting; the roadside hedgerows were alive with Robins, Dunnocks, Wrens, Chaffinches and Tits but conspicuous by their absence were Song Thrushes, I heard only 2 in song over a period of 2 hours - outnumbered by Mistles! Half-way down Lady Lane the traditional Cheshire scenery comes to an abrupt end as the boundary of Manchester Airport appears - no trees and hedgerows here - no complaints though, with money seemingly no object some interesting habitats have been created! Skylarks were singing over Runway 2, Buzzards soaring over the same spot allowed one big jet to pass underneath them, Reed Buntings and even a Dabchick called from one of the many newly created pits. A bird flew up from a tangle of vegetation, taking an insect on the wing, perched in full view for a few seconds before flying off towards the security fence - it was a female Whinchat - very early, almost too early! but I did get a good view of it and I'm pretty sure of its ID. Looking at the BTO [migration watch site](#) in previous years there have been earlier records of this species, including some in February . On to Smith Lane where I was greeted by that [most evocative of Spring sounds](#) - Lapwings, 19 individuals including 2 pairs calling almost continually as they flew twisting and turning over their chosen nest site - magic!

15/03/04 The weather did little to encourage us on Sunday for the Societies March field trip to Tatton [[map](#)], nevertheless we enjoyed a lengthy walk around the perimeter of the park, braving long periods of persistent rain backed up by a strong south-westerly wind. Despite an absence of Summer migrants we had more than 60 species during our 5 hour visit, quite respectable for the time of year but way short of the [magic 100!](#) In Dog wood we caught a quick glimpse of the incubating Heron across the mere in the Higmere plantation, no trace of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers but at least 2 Greater Spotted drumming - on the final leg of the walk between the mansion and the Knutsford entrance we flushed a Green Woodpecker, they'll shortly become more noticeable when they get a little more vocal. The Thrush family were well represented, Blackbirds, Song and Mistle Thrushes were all in song, and as we made our way from the Mill Pool towards the mansion, close to the war memorial, we came across a flock of Winter Thrushes, mainly Fieldfares but accompanied by a few Redwings. We stopped for a coffee in the excellent restaurant situated in the converted stable block adjacent to the mansion before making our way back to the Dog Lodge lay-by via Beech Walk and Knutsford Moor, the main mere was in view for much of the morning and we were disappointed not to see any Sand Martins, despite several stops to carefully scan its entire length.

So we had to wait until today for the first returning Martins - the honour this year went to Darren and Richard, two of the Park Rangers, who found 3 birds over Tatton Mere at 3:28 pm this afternoon - a quick look down the list of entries confirms Paul Hill from Crewe as the winner of this years KOS Sand Martin Competition - congratulations Paul, a signed copy of "The Fieldfare" by local ornithologist David Norman is this years prize and will be arriving in your post box shortly. Thanks to all who entered this time around and those who spent so much time looking for the first returning birds - especially Roger Barnes, Derek Pike, Jean Brookes and the Tatton Rangers - see you next year!!

13/03/04 Only [7 entries out of the original 76](#) are now in with a chance of winning our 7th. annual Sand Martin competition! Despite our best efforts (observers have been covering Tatton almost continuously for the past few days) we've had no sighting so far, but they won't be too much longer as the wind has swung to the south, with the promise of double figure temperatures from tomorrow onwards. It's the KOS March field trip tomorrow and by coincidence we're doing a Tatton walk so if a Sand Martin does make an appearance it won't be overlooked! Bird watchers have always enjoyed this particular time of the year [read what our first president Bill Mulligan wrote about it 30 years ago](#).

10/03/04 Plenty of activity at the moment in Tatton Park as we still await the first Sand Martin - I'm not optimistic for the next couple of days, only 4°C today and the promise of some snow for tomorrow! 4 or 5 pairs of Great Crested Grebes were displaying on the main mere when we walked round on Tuesday, on Knutsford Moor two birds were busy nest building, we watched then dragging substantial pieces of vegetation into the reedbed. Darren Morris one of the Rangers

reports a pair of Stonechats and displaying Ravens in the deer park, perhaps this is where the 5 Oystercatchers we saw on the edge of Melchett Mere will breed, they are expanding their range at the moment, at the time of fieldwork for the last atlas only 7.16% of tetrads held breeding birds so results from this years survey may make interesting reading. On the subject of the [new atlas](#) I am the area coordinator for the 10K square SJ77 and I'm happy to report that 22 of the 25 tetrads are covered so we need only 3 volunteers to cover the remaining 3 : interested? it's rewarding work and help will always be available, 2 tetrads [2 X 2 k areas] are located in the Peover Heath / Jodrell Bank area and the remaining one in Tabley - [get in touch](#) if you'd like to join in. Moving on to today, Derek and Jean saw evidence of birds on the move this afternoon in the Park, they had 270 Fieldfares and 30 Redwings over towards the war memorial and heard calling Curlews and green Woodpecker in the deer park.

07/03/04 We followed the snow over the Welsh mountains last weekend as far as the village of Llithfaen for a short break at [Pete & Liz Hall's](#) house, 600' asl in the heart of the Llyn peninsula. The most noticeable thing about the village is the silence compared with (our part) of Cheshire, the rush hour lasts for about 10 minutes around 8:30 in the morning after which peace returns for the rest of the day; on one occasion I could hear a Mistle Thrush in song - I couldn't see it, even with binoculars, it must have been over a mile away, but every note could be heard across the valley (Isolated it may be but they do already have broadband!) Pete has produced an information pack which contains a selection of walks, complete with detailed maps - ideal for the more energetic but also very useful for birdwatching bus pass holders built for comfort rather than speed! No migrants in the traditional sense of the word, the first Wheatears are expected at any time, but from above the churchyard at Pistyll we watched 100's of Auks floating on the sea below the cliff face, back on their breeding grounds after spending the Winter out at sea. Across the peninsula Pwllheli harbour proved an interesting place with good numbers of Redshank, Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Ringed Plover giving excellent views even without a 'scope as they fed on the mud exposed by the retreating tide. Our favourite spot though was the village of Porth Dinllaen, hidden behind some ancient sand dunes, with spectacular sea and mountain views the village is accessible only via a walk along the beach from nearby Morfa Nefyn. Turnstones and Purple Sandpipers are regular winter visitors whilst on occasions Choughs are the most numerous corvids, we sat outside the Tŷ Coch Inn drinking coffee on a warm sunny early Spring morning - any pub with a well worn bird ID book hanging behind the bar is worth a visit if you're in the area! No news yet of Sand Martins at Tatton, despite regular visits over the past week by our "volunteers" - I think they're going to be late this year, it was cold in the park this morning when I spent an hour scanning the mere and the wind is currently sweeping in from the north-east.



28/02/04 Despite the imminent arrival of our first Sand Martins (hopefully!) the cold snap continues and is a reminder that global warming is a slow business and we're not going to enjoy a Mediterranean climate for some time yet. We had a mid-week trip out to the Moore Reserve near Warrington - quiet, but predictable given the miserable weather, the pools held a few Teal, Wigeon and Gadwall together with 2 pairs of displaying Great Crested Grebes and plenty of rather noisy Dabchicks. The feeding station was doing good business (I think it's known as the Pond Wood area), we had 14 species including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Siskins and a couple of Bramblings, although I hear that the following day a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was giving good views at the same location. Around the lanes of Mobberley the cold weather has persuaded the Song Thrushes it's just a little too early in the season for song and they've reverted to silent mode for the time being, although the local members of the Tit family are unaffected and the area is well populated with Blue and Great Tits now defending their hard won territories. A single Skylark was in full song at the end of the new runway where a small flock of around 40 Fieldfares were the first I've seen for some time; along Slade Lane the first Lesser Celandines are flowering by the roadside whilst a little further along on Smith Lane I watched a little light sparring between a couple of Lapwings setting up shop on a favoured field opposite the Ilford works. Thanks to everyone who has entered this years Sand Martin competition, the data base seems to have worked ok and the entries can be seen [here](#). I'm always amazed that the first birds are recorded so early, goodness knows what they feed on! Despite the fact that we'll be away this week I have arranged for a group of "volunteers" to visit Tatton on a regular basis and hopefully if a very early bird returns it won't go unrecorded - perhaps our friendly Park Rangers will also have a quick scan over the main mere during the course of the day - especially Monday please Darren!!!

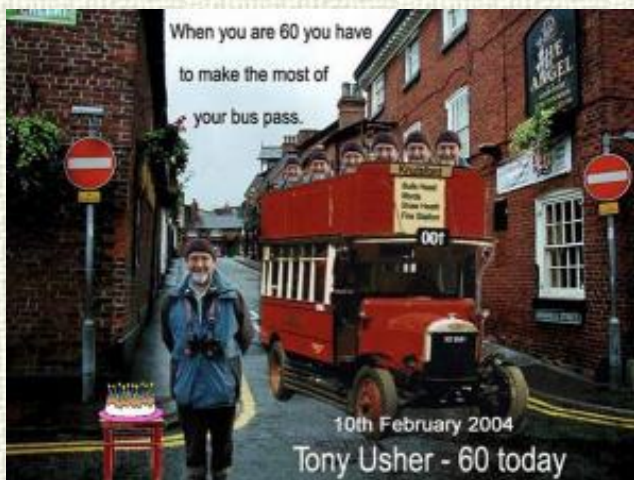
20/02/04 Birding in the Pennines is a pleasure at any time, but especially so at this time of year before the warmer weather brings out too many visitors. We had a mid-week visit to [Wildboarclough \[maps\]](#) hoping to see some Dippers and perhaps even have the opportunity to hear them in song; something none of us had previously enjoyed. Having driven through Macclesfield our first stop of the day was at the roadside overlooking the



Langley Reservoirs, on the road that passes through the village of Langley before climbing over the side of [Shutlingsloe](#). There are actually two reservoirs, the first (Ridgegate) held a few wildfowl including Mallard, Tufted Duck, Pochard and a single male Goldeneye; the second (Trentabank) hosted a similar mixture plus a Great Crested Grebe, with the additional spectacle of the heronry, now with possibly around 10 nests, two of which were being refurbished - one bird standing guard to prevent pilfering, the other ferrying in fresh material in the form of small sticks and twigs up to 18 inches in length. In Wildboarclough we parked near Clough House and followed the course of Clough Brook for a mile, down as far as the Crag Inn. We had a pair of Grey Wagtails and a Raven in tumbling display flight high over the horizon, but no Dippers until just opposite the pub - there we found two birds. They appeared to be a pair - quite happy in each others company, feeding along the brook and obviously used to human company allowing us to watch them from a distance of only a few yards - so close we could see their white eyelids flashing as the birds blinked! Unfortunately on this occasion they didn't sing, but reading the books it appears that dawn and dusk are the best times for this particular species; I don't think we were too early, Dippers are early nesters and sometimes have eggs before the end of February.

16/02/04 A substantial turnout on Sunday for a trip down memory lane - the Shropshire Meres - this was one of the first places [Bill Mulligan](#) introduced us to all those years ago, in fact, although I wasn't able to go on Sunday, I was able to provide a list of birds seen on our first visit in March 1973! The weather was excellent and the party visited 3 sites; Ellesmere, where they met up after the drive from Knutsford, Colemere and a relatively new Reserve - [Wood Lane](#), on the site of a working sand and gravel quarry. 52 species were recorded, not too bad for this time of year, and more than we had in 1973 although some stuff was probably missed in the early days - I did notice though in my notes that we had a Marsh Tit on our first visit, that elusive species (in the Knutsford area) would no doubt still start an argument as to its identity even now! Locally an early morning walk of about 4 miles round Mobberley on a fine sunny morning produced no surprises, species in song included Dunnocks, Robins, Great & Blue Tits, Nuthatch, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Song Thrushes and Blackbird. Only one Blackbird today and a poor count of 3 Song Thrushes; Mistle Thrushes were not singing but they were around in good numbers, and very active at this early point in the season, nest building and defending their patch against all comers. On the road to Knutsford at Shaw Heath the Rooks have returned to their nest site and seem to be spending most of the day perched, nervously watching each other, afraid to be the first to begin nest refurbishment for fear of having what little they have pinched by all the others - no doubt hormones will take over soon and there'll be chaos for a time before the eggs are laid and the whole rookery will unite in the defence of the precious contents of each individual nest.

10/02/04 KOS website hijacked by John "hard drive" Somerville who will receive an appropriate punishment in due course!



06/02/04 Well the cold snap came and went and the accompanying glaciers have retreated back to the north, presumably taking Lord Hutton with them! We now find ourselves in a dry, mild spell of weather, with warm south-westerlies blowing in from the Atlantic. More species have been prompted into song and yesterday morning in Mobberley we had Dunnocks and Song and Mistle Thrushes competing with each other, plus Blackbirds and a lone Chaffinch for the first time this year. In Tatton Great Crested Grebes were displaying on Melchett Mere, where Black-headed Gulls are rapidly moving into Summer plumage, some already having attained their full chocolate brown hoods. Small groups of Buzzards appeared over the park in mid-morning, but there was no sign of the Red Kite that was seen by the park rangers over the weekend - there's no reason why these beautiful creatures won't eventually nest in our area, the various release schemes have ensured a number of hot spots around the UK where they were re-introduced. Eventually they should spread naturally - just as our Buzzards have done over the past decade - so hopefully it won't be long before a sighting over Tatton will become a routine event.



28/01/04 With a rather inconvenient news gap to fill in the lead up to the release of the Hutton report, the BBC resorted to one of its famous weather scares and has spent the last week promoting the approaching cold front to the status of a mini Ice Age! We expected to struggle round Tatton Park [\[map\]](#) on Tuesday, instead the weather was beautiful - bright sunshine all morning and the only problem we had on a foray from Dog Lodge, across to the war memorial via Beech Walk and Melchett, and back via Dog Wood, was that of finding some birds. Remarkably over a period of 4 hours we recorded no Fieldfares, Redwings, Bramblings, Siskins, Meadow Pipits or Skylarks - from a statistical point of view zero counts are just as valid as any other (that's why the results of the analysis of data collected for the [new atlas](#) will be so valuable) but make for a less than entertaining walk at other times. Despite this dearth of records there are birds around; barely a mile away in Moss Wood, Bob Groom had a flock of 725 Chaffinches going to roost the following evening, plus 500 Fieldfares in the same area shortly before dusk. Back in Tatton Nuthatches, Blue, Great and Coal Tits were all very active along Beech Walk whilst over towards the war memorial a flock of 11 Golden Plovers streaking overhead was an unusual sight for Tatton, Melchett held only a few wildfowl, single figures of Mallard, Shoveler and Tufted Duck, although a fellow birder we met later had been through the reed bed and put up 20 Common and 2 Jack Snipe. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming in Dog Wood, from where we could see two Herons "lurking with intent" close to last year's nest. Whilst watching the Herons Jill noticed a small brown bird by the side of the mere and as it flew off, low over the water in the direction of Knutsford Moor, the rest of us caught a quick glimpse against the sun before it vanished - it flew like a Kingfisher, but with Jill having such a good view before it took to the air - there can be little doubt that it was a Dipper, as far as I know there is an earlier record of a bird on the outlet stream at the north end of the main mere, but that was many years ago! Dippers are associated with fast moving hill streams, but interestingly they have been recorded on the Cheshire plain nesting along short stretches of water close to artificial weirs like the one at Astle pool in Chelford, and along the Bollin as it passes Styal Mill - Bob Groom had a bird here only a few years ago. Spring's just around the corner and it won't be long before the Pike-Brooks' and the Sand Martins return from the south! We know when Derek and Jean are due back - but what about the Sand Martins? Well, if you think you can work out

We lunched at Parkgate before walking along the quayside in the direction of Hilbre Island, there seemed to be a shortage of passerines compared with what we saw in previous years; no Redwings or Fieldfares and very few Skylarks and finches. Raptors though were showing well, we had 6 different species - Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Merlin, 2 Peregrines, 2 Short-eared Owls and 2 "ring-tailed" Hen Harriers!

Big problems this morning (16th.) on Knutsford Moor; for the past couple of days we've had long periods of very heavy rain and it appears that the towns sewerage system has become overloaded. Until about 15 years ago whenever this happened the raw sewerage overflowed into the Moor pool rendering it useless for most aquatic creatures. The upgrading of the sewerage system a few years ago has all but solved this problem and a healthy population of fish has established itself in the pool but, as I recall, the improvements were not designed to completely solve the problem and we were told to expect that "once or twice" a year the system would not be able to cope and there would be a discharge into the Moor. This is what has happened today and the water has taken on a milky appearance - 1000's of fish appear to have perished, mainly Roach up to about 4" in length and smaller Perch, lying on the bottom or floating on the rubbish strewn margins gasping for air. Let's hope that by the time the gunge reaches Tatton Mere it's become sufficiently diluted so as not to cause any problems there.

8/01/04 You'll be familiar with the situation; driving, cycling or walking through an area not too far from home, but not part of your favourite "patch", and thinking "you know this looks an interesting bit of countryside - I'll have to have a look round one day". Well, of course, that "one day" rarely comes around and that tantalizing stretch of woodland, water or overgrown patch of gorse and brambles will retain it's secrets for another year! No excuses this year though because 2004 marks the start of fieldwork for the latest atlas of Cheshire birds; basically the same as the last survey, the data from which was so skillfully distilled down to produce the very readable (and now very collectable) "Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire and Wirral" based on the seven year period from 1978 - 84. Again the basic recording areas will be the 670 2Km X 2Km squares or tetrads into which Cheshire is divided based on the Ordnance Survey mapping system, in addition to the breeding distribution, this time an attempt is to be made to estimate the size and distribution of the species present during the winter months. For more details and to register for any tetrad(s) you may wish to "adopt", have a look at the [Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society website](#), don't worry if you think you don't have the appropriate identification skills, help will be available. This is an ideal opportunity to become involved in some real ornithology, it's a worthwhile and significant natural history project, you'll visit new areas, meet new people, learn a lot and have the satisfaction of seeing your name in print when the Atlas is finally published.

As if to remind us that the breeding season is never far away, earlier in the week, in Tatton's Dog Wood and part of tetrad SJ77P we heard both Song and Mistle Thrushes in early song. The Song Thrush will sing in most months of the year, but it's not until early January that we hear the Mistle - Coward's "storm cock" - *early in the year, when the weather is broken, the bird perches high on a tall tree and in exultant and ringing song defies the elements*- SJ77P was the second most productive of Cheshire's tetrads in the last survey with 80 breeding species - will that be beaten this time?

THE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS OF **CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL**



J. P. Guest D. Elphick J. S. A. Hunter D. Newman
CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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