

# BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



14

# BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

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## PREFACE

Brian Slade has long been studying the birds at Berrow. The marsh, dunes and seashore form a habitat mixture attractive to many species of birds. Brian records carefully what he sees and this has enabled him to produce a fascinating paper for this issue of *Bristol Ornithology*. Perhaps other members will be inspired to put their records in order for future publication.

This issue contains reports on the Club's fieldwork activities in 1980. Results are encouraging and should improve. Fieldwork is not the preserve of an elite within the membership; the more members taking part the better and the more worthwhile is likely to be the final result.

Once again our thanks are due to the Editorial Committee who have burned the midnight oil to produce *Bristol Ornithology* 14. Thanks also to Keith Vinicombe for his excellent review of 1980, and to all contributors, illustrators and those who helped with the fieldwork.

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## A REVIEW OF 1980

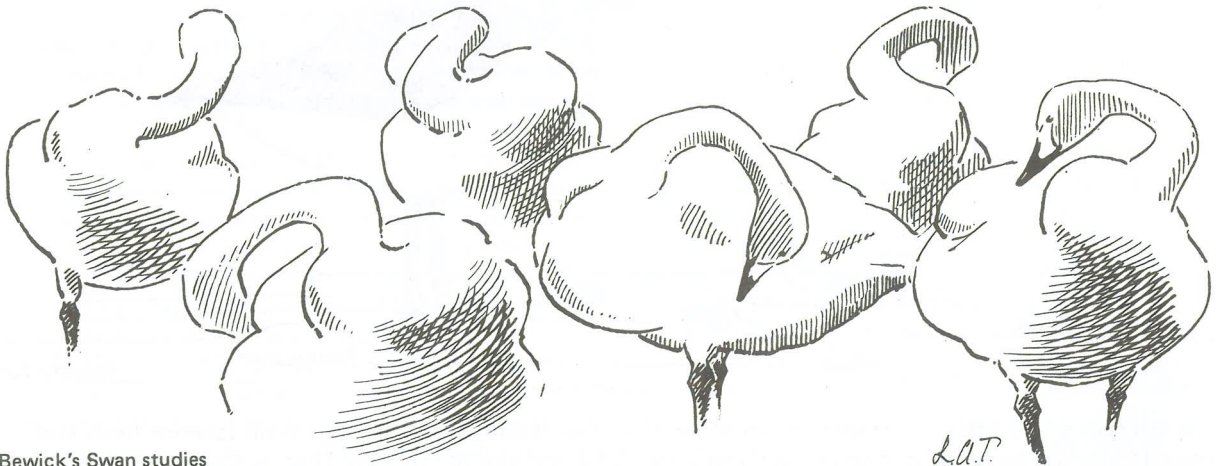
by Keith Vinicombe

As in 1979, the area covered by this review involves the county of Avon and the northern half of Somerset, south to the Bridgwater area and east to the Wiltshire border. Readers unfamiliar with the area will be able to find an annotated sketch map in *Bristol Ornithology* 13 (1980):77. The birds are generally listed according to the Voous (1977) sequence but unrelated species are sometimes treated together when it has proved more convenient to do so. Some of the more interesting records are indicated in a bold type. I would like to thank Chris Newman for help with the production of an earlier draft.

### The first winter period

Following the severe freeze-ups and the resultant cold-weather movements of early 1979, it was something of a relief to return to relative normality in early 1980. Even so, January was rather cold but conditions were not severe enough to provoke any extensive hard-weather movements. Although some snow did fall, much of the period was relatively mild, with westerly gales occurring on several dates. February and March were also mild but more wintry conditions developed in mid March, the cold easterly weather inhibiting the eagerly awaited arrivals of the earlier summer migrants.

In typical fashion, we begin this year's review with divers. Two Great Northern Divers remained from 1979: one at Cheddar Reservoir on 1 January and another at Blagdon Lake until 23rd. Grebes were present in typically low late winter numbers, the only notable concentration being 98 Great Crested Grebes at Cheddar on 20 January. A Slavonian Grebe was also discovered here on this date, remaining until 7 February. Cormorant counts continued their downward trend at Chew Valley Lake, where shooting resulted in a maximum of only 34 in early January. No Bitterns were reported in the area during the winter or at any other time during the year.



Bewick's Swan studies

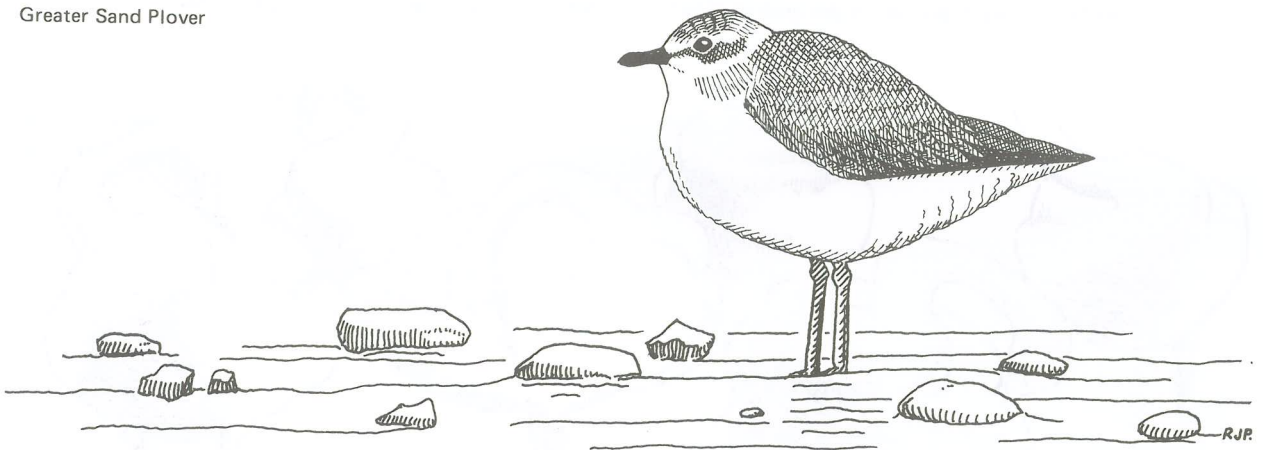
The highest count of Bewick's Swans was 62 at Durleigh Reservoir on 20 January, no doubt birds moving across from the south Somerset Levels. Very few White-fronted Geese were reported but the Pink-footed Goose from 1979 remained at Chew until 10 February. The two escaped Barnacle x Snow Goose hybrids remained at the lake until June. The only other notable geese were 19 Brent Geese at Steart on 22 February, including one pale-bellied bird *B. b. hrota*. Duck counts were unexceptional. Wigeon numbers returned to normal following the huge influxes a year earlier. Up to 2000 were estimated at Steart but a maximum of 518 at Chew in mid January

saw a continuation of the trend towards reduced numbers at this once favoured locality. The only notable concentration of wildfowl occurred at Steart on 10 February when, as well as the Wigeon mentioned above, there were 800 Teal, 1500 Mallard and 60 Shoveler. A week later, there was a notable count of 83 Pintail at Durleigh. Turning to *Aythya*, up to 37 Tufted Ducks wintered on the River Avon at Saltford, continuing a trend started during the previous winter. The only Scaup reported was a female at Durleigh on 10 February. Following an influx of Long-tailed Ducks in late 1979, two first-winter males stayed at Cheddar until 30 April and a female remained at Chew until it was joined by a first-summer male on 15 May; the two could then be seen displaying together until 26 May. About four Smew were reported, including two which were undoubtedly veterans of previous winters: a male at Blagdon until 9 March and a female at Chew until the very late date of 3 May. Two other brownheads appeared at Cheddar on 2 January and at Buckland's Pool on 4 February, the later a 'first' for this locality. A male Red-breasted Merganser at Clevedon on 1 January (from 1979) was followed by a brownhead from 15-24 February. Goosanders reached 45 at Chew on 10 February and, more unusual, up to 15 were seen on the River Avon at Saltford until the middle of April. Eight Goosanders flying northeast over Stantonbury Hill on 15 March probably indicated that birds were commuting between Chew and Saltford. Another Goosander (a male) put in an unusual coastal appearance at Berrow on 21 March. Ruddy Ducks continued their phenomenal increase, apparently unaffected by the severe weather a year previously. Up to 409 were counted on 12-13 January (167 at Chew and 242 at Blagdon), declining to 331 by 10 February (21 at Chew and 310 at Blagdon). Coot numbers at Cheddar were low, with only 350 counted in mid January, but typically high late winter numbers were present at Blagdon and Chew.

Peregrines involved about nine or ten individuals but Merlins were surprisingly scarce with singles reported only at three coastal localities. Short-eared Owls were also few and far between, with only three coastal reports.

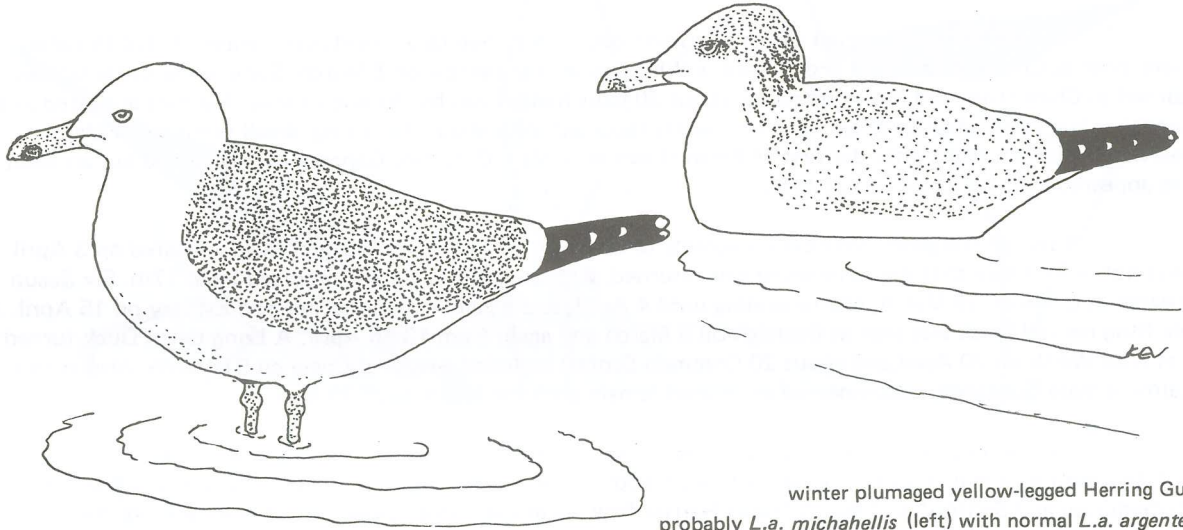
Wader counts were, on the whole, unexceptional, as might be expected in a relatively mild winter. Our old friend the Steart Avocet was a predictable resident until 19 April. The **Greater Sand Plover** which appeared at Chew in late 1979 was undoubtedly the star attraction of the New Year. It continued to 'pull the crowds' until

Greater Sand Plover



it was last seen on 10 February. It spent much of the New Year feeding with Lapwings in the lakeside fields and managed to survive some spells of severe cold and snow. A full account of this record can be found in *Brit. Birds* 73 (1980):583-586. As to be expected, the largest flocks of Lapwings and Golden Plovers were found on Tealham and Tadham Moors, where there were up to 10000 Lapwings and a record 1500 Golden Plovers, as well as 400 Dunlin, 234 Snipe, 15 Black-tailed Godwits and a Spotted Redshank. Jack Snipe were reported from Berrow (seven), Chew (one), Clevedon (seven) and Sand Bay (five). Other interesting waders included three Little Stints at Steart (possibly involving the birds seen at Chew in December), three Purple Sandpipers at Severn Beach and two at Sand Point. Two wintering Common Sandpipers were seen but only four Ruffs were reported; up to seven Curlews remained at Chew from 1979.

The series of coordinated gull roost counts begun at Chew in 1979 continued until March 1980. Following a count of nearly 31000 gulls in December 1979, it was something of a surprise to discover an abrupt decline to only (!) 17730 in January 1980. These included 9750 Black-headed, 7010 Common, 255 Lesser Black-backed and 635 Herring. Up to 11600 Black-headed Gulls roosted at Royal Portbury Dock in mid January (declining to 4200 at the end of the month), perhaps explaining the reduction in numbers at the Chew roost. Overall numbers at Chew were similar in February, although there were more Black-headed (12000) and fewer Common (5200) and a virtual



winter plumaged yellow-legged Herring Gull, probably *L.a. michahellis* (left) with normal *L.a. argentus*

disappearance of Herring Gulls (55). March, as expected, saw a huge reduction, with only 1260 gulls recorded, mostly Common Gulls. Closer attention to the Chew gull roost resulted in a predictable upsurge in records of unusual species. On 9 February, there were four sightings of adult Mediterranean Gulls, involving at least two individuals; at least one adult remained until 22 March while a second-winter bird was seen on 8-9 March and a first-winter on 30 March. The greatest reward for hours of patient scrutiny came on 22 March, when an adult **Ring-billed Gull** spent three quarters of an hour in front of Moreton Hide; although a 'first' for Avon there can be little doubt that this American gull would prove to be quite regular in the area if such intensive gull searching was continued. A yellow-legged Herring Gull, probably of the Mediterranean race *L.a. michahellis* was also seen at the lake on 3 February. The only other unusual gull in the area was a Kittiwake at Cheddar on 1 January.

The Shore Lark at Berrow (from 1979) was seen until 23 January when it was joined by a second individual; one was seen again on 8 March but they proved much less easy to locate than during the previous winter. Pied Wagtail roosts developed in the middle of Bristol, with up to 500 at Cumberland Basin and 300 in the Haymarket, apparently oblivious to the thousands of shoppers milling around nearby; up to 2000 were also reported at Oldbury Power Station. Less seasonal, however, was the **Yellow Wagtail** that remained at Chew (from 1979) until at least 5 January. About eight Black Redstarts were reported, including four at Avonmouth, while Stonechats were, unlike the previous winter, widely scattered both on the coast and inland. Blackcaps were again widespread with at least 37 reported at 23 localities in January and February. Numbers seen were not as high as in the previous winter, however, as birds did not have to depend so much on suburban gardens in the milder weather. Chiffchaffs occurred at seven localities, with three at Avonmouth. The Firecrest present at Sand Point in 1979 remained until 9 March, while others were seen at Blaise Castle, Hanham (two) and Stock Hill (at least two) in January and February. Two pairs of Bearded Tits were present at Berrow in January and up to four were also seen at Chew until mid March. Pairs of Ravens were seen at Aust Warth, Brean Down, Loxton and Marksbury. Winter finches were fairly scarce, with up to 30 Bramblings, 45 Siskins and 30 Redpolls reported. Fewer Twites were recorded than in other recent winters, maxima being 19 at Portishead until mid March and eight at Hallen on 6 February. Up to three Crossbills were present at Stock Hill in March and a Corn Bunting was seen on two occasions at Berrow. Mild weather provided a foretaste of spring with both Blackbirds and Robins observed nest building in late February.

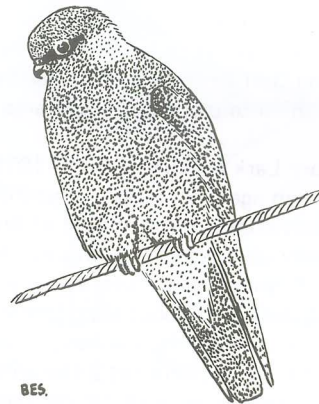
### Spring migration

April was mainly dry, dominated by a 'blocking' anticyclone producing cool northerly air which hindered the arrival of most summer migrants. For a short period in mid April, however, the anticyclone moved westwards, bringing in warm air from the south producing some larger arrivals of summer visitors and some overshooting vagrants. May continued settled with easterly and southerly winds. Cold, northerly air became dominant after mid month but the last week was wetter with cyclonic weather again predominating.

An interesting and varied spring migration begins with two rare inland occurrences of Red-throated Divers, both at Chew, on 2 March and 1 April; a third was seen at Berrow on 8 March. Summering Little Grebes returned to Chew from mid March onwards; about 30 pairs had arrived by the end of May. Fulmars appeared in the Channel in late March and up to six were frequently reported throughout the spring. Small numbers of Manx Shearwaters also appeared after the first at Brean Down on 2 May. Only two Gannets were reported but an adult Shag appeared at Brean Down on 31 March.

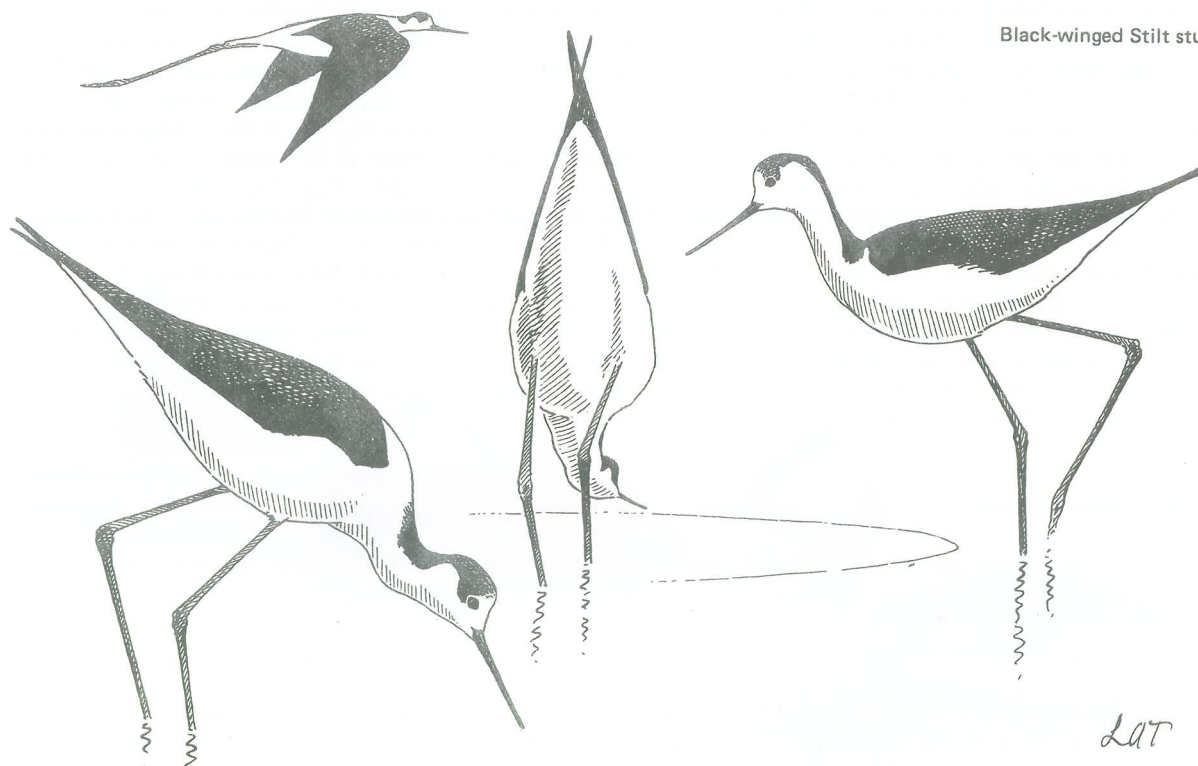
A pair of Garganey were early migrants to Chew on 10 March and another male appeared on 3 April. It was not until 3 May that the summering pair returned, with an additional male reported from 17th. Six Scaup appeared at Chew on 29 March, one remaining until 4 April, and a pair was seen at the Yeo Estuary on 15 April. A male **Ring-necked Duck** was seen at Durleigh on 9 March and again from 13-16 April. A Long-tailed Duck turned up at Aust Warth on 20 April and about 20 Common Scoters included a male at Chew on 31 March. Also at this locality, a male Goosander accompanied an injured female until the late date of 26 May.

It was a notable spring for raptors, beginning with an Osprey which flew north at Brean Down on 6 April, followed by a male Hen Harrier at Berrow on 10th, a **Red Kite** at Brean Down on 11th and another over Otterhampton and Saltford on 13th. A Marsh Harrier flew north over Brean Down on 27 April and another was present at Steart on 2-3 May. Chew was obviously the place to be during the weekend of 3-4 May, with a Marsh Harrier and an Osprey on 3rd and a Marsh Harrier and two Ospreys on 4th. Five Peregrines were reported during



Red-footed Falcon

April and a late Merlin appeared at Brean Down on 2 May. The rarest raptor of the spring, however, was a first-summer male **Red-footed Falcon** seen alongside the M5 at Highbridge on 23-24 May. The M5 also produced a Long-eared Owl on 16 April, when one was regrettably found dead near the St. George's Interchange.



Coastal wader passage proved to be quite eventful, the chief prize being a male **Black-winged Stilt** that graced the scrape at Steart from 30 May to 1 June; a female **Kentish Plover** was a rare visitor to Sand Bay on 5 May. About a dozen Little Ringed Plovers passed through in addition to four breeding birds which arrived at Royal Portbury Dock on 12 April. Sanderling passage reached a peak at Berrow on 1 June when 151 were counted. Single Little Stints were recorded at Steart on 19 April and 5 June and Curlew Sandpipers appeared at Royal Portbury Dock on 13 May and at Steart on 1 June. Ruffs continued to be scarce, the only spring migrants being four seen at Chew on 1 March. Peak Whimbrel passage occurred between 26 and 29 April, when at least 525 were recorded, and on 2 May when at least 940 were seen. A number of Spotted Redshanks appeared in Bridgwater Bay in March and April with up to ten at Steart and nine at the Brue Estuary. About a dozen Green-shanks and 14 Green Sandpipers also passed through, including up to nine of the latter at Royal Portbury Dock. Common Sandpipers reached a peak in late April, with up to 15 at Chew and 37 at Cheddar.

Five Great and seven Arctic Skuas were reported at Brean Down and two Arctic Skuas were seen at Chew on 31 May. About 31 Little Gulls were seen between 8 March and 1 June, including six at Oldbury on 19 May. An impressive total of 400 Kittiwakes flew up-river at the Severn Bridge on 29 March (indicating a cross-country passage) and 72 passed Brean Down on 4-5 May; a first-winter bird was also seen at Chew on 30 March. Passage of *Sterna* terns reached a peak on 4-5 May, when 50 Commons passed Brean Down, 132 Common/Arctics appeared at Chew and 345 passed north at Severn Beach. Four Little Terns and two Sandwich Terns appeared on the coast, while about 100 Black Terns between 12 April and 15 June included a peak of 30 at Chew on 11-12 May.

Amongst the first spring passerine migrants during March were three Black Redstarts, including one at Blagdon on 9th. A Rock Pipit showing characters of the Scandinavian race *A. s. littoralis* was seen at Cheddar on 18-19 March and a Lapland Bunting frequented Royal Portbury Dock from 22-29 March. An April movement of Collared Doves was again noted on the coast, with at least 39 moving at Brean Down and 46 moving in the Berrow and Burnham area. There were some large coastal falls and movements of commoner migrants in April and May. On 4 April there was a fall of Wheatears and Chiffchaffs, with 56 Wheatears at Middle Hope and 80 at Brean Down



as well as 100 Chiffchaffs also at Brean. Seventeen Ring Ouzels appeared between 29 March and 3 May and a Fire-crest was seen at the Yeo Estuary on 7 April. The next major falls occurred during warmer southerly weather in mid April, these including 100 Willow Warblers at Sand Point on 13th. About 13 Pied Flycatchers passed through from 10 April onwards. Rarities at this time involved Hoopoes at St. Philips, Bristol, on 9 April, at Wookey Hole on 12th-13th, at Clapton-in-Gordano on 14th-15th and at Barrow Gurney Hospital on 25th. A *Savi's Warbler* at Chew on 16th was only the second recorded at the lake, the first being as long ago as 1960. White Wagtails *M. a. alba* reached a peak in the second half of April, with as many as 36 at the Brue Estuary on 25th. Migration tailed off in the latter half of April and it was not until the first week of May that the floodgates really opened. Hirundine passage reached a peak in early May, including 1000 Swallows which passed Sand Point on 7th. Coastal movements of Yellow Wagtails were heavy, with a peak from 2-5 May including 50 at Avonmouth, 52 at Brean Down, 107 at Portishead and 100-200 at Royal Portbury Dock. Tree Pipits reached a peak at about the same time, with an impressive total of 56 at Brean Down on 2nd. Wood Warblers are always unaccountably rare at coastal migration points but one was reliably reported at Brean Down on 2 May, with two present on 3rd; another appeared at Royal Portbury Dock on 11th. Northerly hirundine and wagtail passage was also accompanied by small movements of Goldfinches and Redpolls, including 36 of the latter over Sand Point on 5 May.

### Selected breeding species

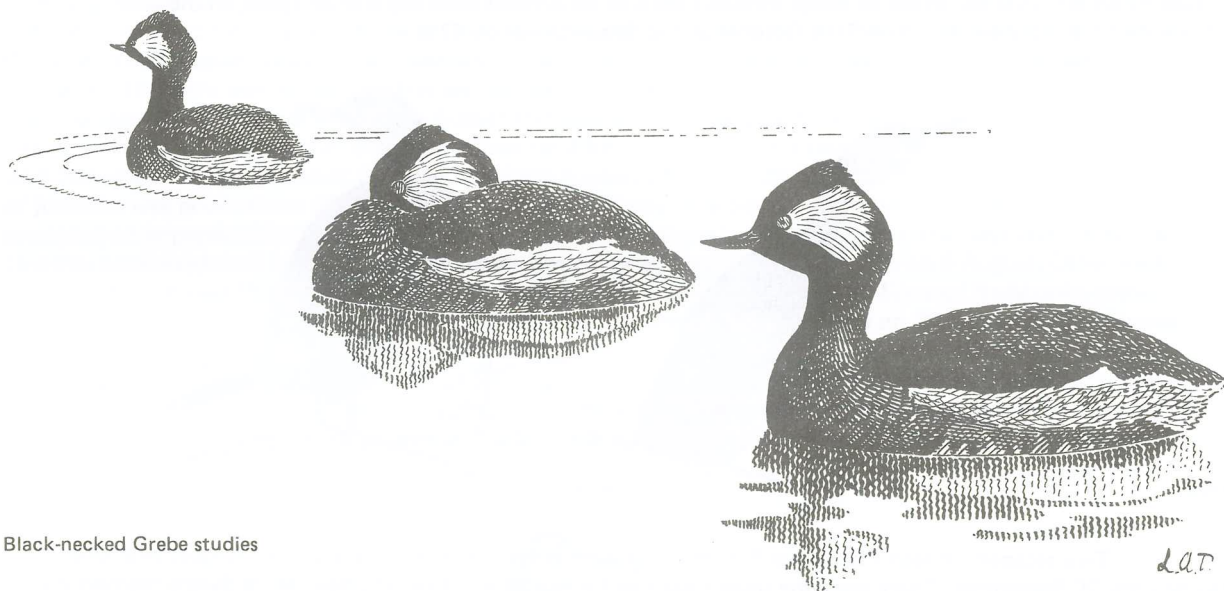
Slow moving depressions produced a wet and chilly June and unsettled weather continued into July producing below average temperatures associated with northerly and westerly winds. An anticyclone developed over western Europe from 22nd but frequent thunderstorms prevented the establishment of the warmer summer weather that was so eagerly awaited.

The high water levels at Chew resulted in a good breeding season with about 243 broods recorded. Little Grebes equalled their previous record year (1971) and Great Crested Grebes had their third best ever season. Ducks, however, were less successful and Garganey again failed to breed despite the presence of a pair and an unmated male throughout the summer. At least four pairs of Ruddy Ducks were also recorded. Brood totals were as follows: Little Grebe (c.28), Great Crested Grebe (53), Mute Swan (five), Canada Goose (eight), Gadwall (15), Mallard (44), Shoveler (three), Pochard (four), Tufted Duck (nine), Ruddy Duck (two plus one duckling attached to a Pochard brood) and Coot (72). Other interesting wildfowl included a pair of Teal with six young at Shapwick and two broods of Gadwall at Durleigh.

On Steep Holm, 49 Cormorant nests were noted in May. About 71 occupied Grey Heron nests were reported in Avon. Hobbies were recorded at twelve localities between May and August with breeding recorded at two of these. Quail continue to be scarce with seven birds reported at Marshfield and a female with young at Hunstrete. A Water Rail was heard at Chew on 3 May but there was no further evidence of its presence during the summer. Breeding waders included a pair of Little Ringed Plovers at Royal Portbury Dock, pairs of Ringed Plovers at Royal Portbury Dock and at Steart and two Woodcocks roding at Shapwick Heath. A visit to Denny Island (off Avonmouth) in late May resulted in the discovery of 40 pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls. Gulls on Steep Holm, however, have suffered a large decline in recent years, not that many people will shed tears over this! Totals for 1980 were 555 pairs of Lesser Black-backed, 2723 pairs of Herring and 30 pairs of Great Black-backed; Herring Gulls have declined by two-thirds since 1975.

Barn Owls were recorded at 21 localities during the year, a marked reduction on the 30 localities in 1979, and Nightjars continued to maintain a toehold at Shapwick Heath, where up to three were reported during June. The elusive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was recorded at about 30 localities during the course of the year. Another scarce breeding bird in our area is the Sand Martin but about 24 pairs were recorded along the Rivers Avon and Chew. Dippers were reported more widely during the year with records from Beckington, Clevedon, Freshford, Rode, Saltford, St. Catherine, Winford and Wick as well as the usual areas around Midford and Combe Hay. Wheatears bred at Loxton and two more were seen at Royal Portbury Dock during late June; while these may have been early migrants or non-breeders the possibility of future breeding at this locality should perhaps be borne in mind. The BTO Nightingale survey resulted in a special effort to try to discover the true status of this species in the

area. As a result, at least 70 singing males were reported from about 25 localities with the largest concentrations, as usual, at Inglestone Common (21 singing) and at Shapwick Heath (twelve singing). Grasshopper Warblers were recorded at about 26 localities and Wood Warblers at eleven. Breeding season Willow Tits were seen at Midford and Stock Hill and pairs of Ravens, another local rarity, were reported at Brean Down, Marksbury, Shiplate Slait and Uphill. Another BTO survey carried out in 1980 was a national Rook census. Results in Avon indicated a total of 7930 nests, a 21% increase over the 1975 total. Breeding season Hawfinches were seen in Leigh Woods and at Henbury, Cirl Buntings were seen at Steart, Draycott, Axbridge and Cheddar (where up to eight were seen from September to November) and singing Corn Buntings were present at Marshfield (22), Priddy (one) and Saltford (two).



Black-necked Grebe studies

### Other mid summer observations

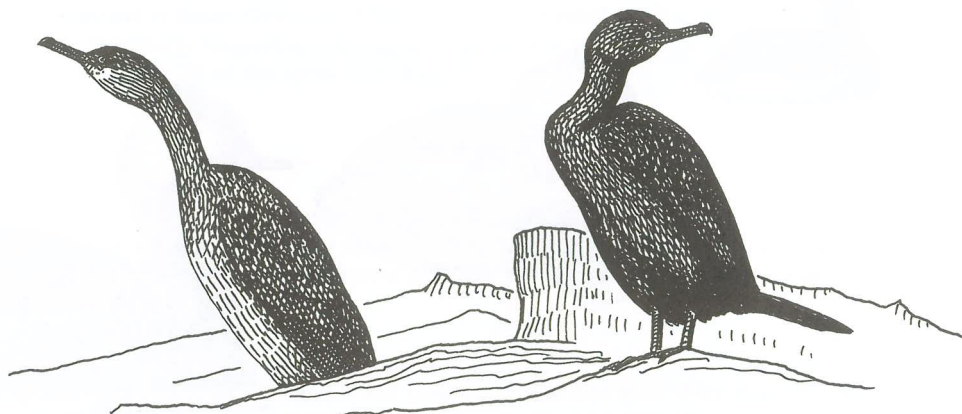
There was an interesting record of a summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebe at Chew from 15-19 June; it seems rather surprising that this species has never established itself as a regular breeder at the lake. The usual mid summer movements of Manx Shearwaters were reported with up to 470 at Brean Down and 69 at Sand Bay. Gannets continued to be scarce with a maximum of only five off Brean Down. Unseasonal wildfowl included a Brent Goose at Steart on 5 June, a Pintail at Chew on 8th and a female Goosander (with a damaged wing) which remained at Chew all summer and into 1981. The usual large feeding concentrations of Swifts occurred during the frequent spells of inclement weather; up to 10000 were estimated at Chew in late May. A blue-headed Yellow Wagtail was seen at Steart on 13 July but as it apparently lacked a supercilium it seems unlikely to have been a normal *M. f. flava*.

### Late summer moult gatherings and the autumn migration

The first half of August was unsettled but anticyclones dominated the weather from mid month. The end of August and the first half of September were dominated by westerly winds and strong gales on 12th-13th produced the largest ever influx of American waders, with Ireland and Cornwall as usual receiving the lion's share. From 18th an anticyclone developed over Europe and the fronts dividing the two air masses became slow moving, producing some exceptional falls of waders and terns during the weekend of 20th-21st. October was also dominated by depressions, with gales early in the month. Some cold easterly weather occurred in mid month but westerlies again became established after 20th. Another anticyclone appeared at the end of October, bringing cold easterly air straight out of Siberia.

Moulting Great Crested Grebes reached 412 at Chew on 7 August, but most other counts were lower, seldom rising above 300. More impressive were some very high counts of Little Grebes, these being due to their excellent breeding success. Numbers reached 125 on 24 August and 110 on 17 September, the highest counts since the record 147 in September 1959.

The mid September gales produced the expected crop of coastal seabird records. Two Fulmars appeared at Weston-Super-Mare on 10th and three were seen off Brean Down on 14th; 117 Manx Shearwaters included 80 at Steart on 13th and one was seen at Severn Beach on the late date of 26 October. Two Gannets in mid September were followed by another in late October. The rarest seabird in October was a Leach's Petrel at Chittingen on 9th. A small wreck of Shags involved birds at Sand Point on 9 September (two), in the Axe Estuary on 14th, at Steep Holm on 7-11 October and at Brean Down on 11th.

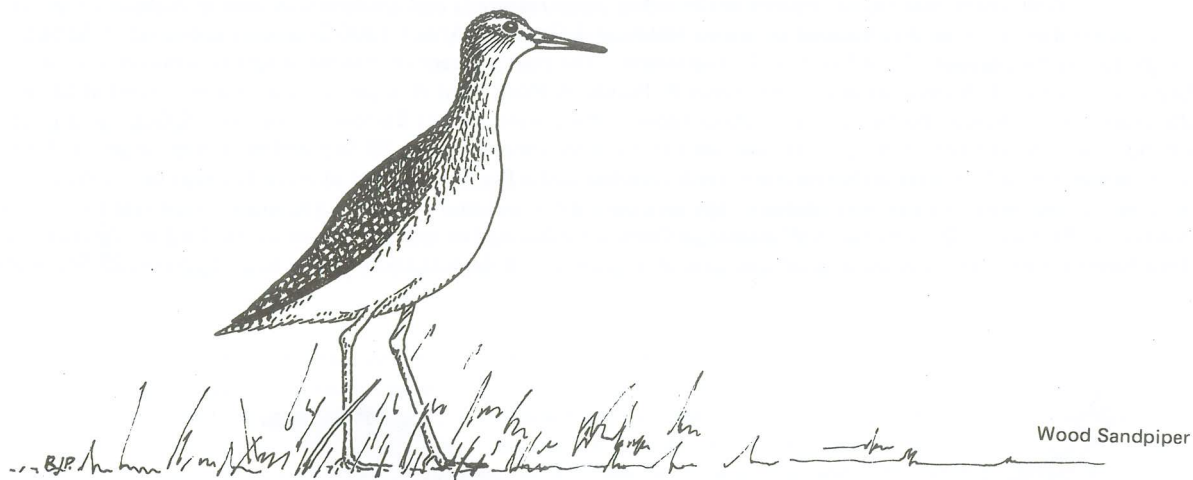


Shags

Two escaped Chilean Flamingos *P. r. chilensis* were present at Steart from 21- 23 August with one staying until 20 September. There were the usual moult gatherings of wildfowl at Chew. Mute Swans reached the high total of 126 on 2 August while Canada Geese reached 113 in July and 128 in October; they were joined by seven Greylags and an escaped Barnacle Goose. Four Barnacle Geese seen at the Yeo Estuary and at Sand Point on 19 October are likely to have been wild birds as there were widespread reports of small numbers around the country at this time, due to the dispersal of migrating birds by gales. About 850 Shelducks had gathered to moult at Steart by 1 June but the peak numbers (up to 1500) were not until September and October. At Chew, dabbling ducks in August included 315 Gadwall, 540 Teal and 235 Shoveler. Over 5000 Mallard were present in the area in August and September, including 900 at Durleigh, 1600 at Steart and a high count of 2160 at Chew; the latter no doubt included birds from Blagdon Lake as this locality was rendered unusable by the presence of large numbers of trout fishermen. Up to 635 Teal were present at Cheddar in September but Garganey passage was poor, with up to four at Chew and one at Cheddar. An eclipse male Red-crested Pochard was a predictable visitor to Cheddar on 8 August; it was then seen intermittently until 12 December. Up to 725 Tufted Ducks moulted at Blagdon and Chew in August and careful scrutiny of the flocks was well rewarded. A female **Ring-necked Duck** appeared at Chew on 15 June, remaining until mid August when it moved to Cheddar, where it was last seen on 13 October; a second female appeared from 3 August to 21 September but this bird proved to be an obvious escapee as it bore a yellow colour ring, indicating beyond doubt that not all the Ring-necked Ducks seen in Britain are genuine trans-Atlantic vagrants. An eclipse male Scaup was also present at the lake from 6 July to 30 August; this species has become quite a regular moult visitor in recent years. Three Common Scoters were seen at Berrow in July but none appeared on the reservoirs this year apart from a later bird at Barrow Gurney on 12 October. Early autumn records of Goldeneye have become more frequent in recent years, no doubt associated with the increase in the Scottish breeding population. An eclipse male appeared at Chew as early as 2 August and it was joined by a second bird on 15 September; another was recorded at Blagdon from 24 August to 13 September. Two brownhead Red-breasted Mergansers appeared at Blagdon on 26 October and a female or juvenile Ruddy Duck made an unusual coastal appearance at the Yeo Estuary on 25 September. Moulting Coots reached a good total at Chew on 7 August when 1790 were counted.

Unusual raptors included a female or immature Marsh Harrier at Chew on 19 September and two ringtail Hen Harriers in the Sand Bay area in mid October (with one until late November); another was seen at Northwick Warth on 2 November. The only Osprey of the autumn was a late individual at Cheddar on 30 October. About eight Merlins appeared from 23 August and four Peregrines from 9th included one inland at Chew on 23rd. Hobbies were widely reported in August and September, no doubt indicating that this species is not quite as uncommon as is generally supposed.

We begin the waders with the Steart Avocet which duly reappeared on 9 August but, surprisingly, it was not reported after 12 November. Migrant Oystercatchers appeared at the reservoirs, with peaks of 21 at Chew on 6 August and 13 during the fall of 21 September. At least 25 Little Ringed Plovers passed through with up to eight at Chew on 13 August and three at Cheddar in September. Inland Ringed Plovers reached a peak of 83 at Chew on 30-31 August. Grey Plovers reached 150 at Steart in late August but peak Sanderling passage was in late July when 150 were seen at Berrow; five also appeared on the reservoirs during the course of the autumn. The main passage of Little Stints was in late August and September, peak counts being six at Cheddar on 27 August, five at Berrow on 14 September and ten at Chew on 23rd. Only three were reported in October, with the last seen on 4 November. About six adult Curlew Sandpipers appeared between 26 July and 9 August but the main passage of juveniles was poor: about 25 were reported, almost entirely in September. The unusual weather of 21 September produced an impressive fall of 63 juvenile Ruffs at Chew, followed by 18 at Blagdon four days later. Black-tailed Godwits continued their local decline, the maximum count at Steart being only 268 on 9 August. Other waders at this locality included 1500 Curlews and 1300 Redshanks in late August. Up to 20 Spotted Redshanks gathered at Steart in early August but the peak on the reservoirs was later with 24 at Chew on 20 September; ten appeared at Cheddar during the fall of 21st while up to 20 were present at Steart at the end of October. Peak counts of Greenshanks included eleven at Cheddar on 29 August and 20 at Chew on 16 September but these were eclipsed by a record Avon count of 40 at Blagdon on 21st, 35 of these departing south over the Mendips during late afternoon. Up to 15 Green Sandpipers were present at Chew in late August and up to 13 at Royal Portbury Dock a month



Wood Sandpiper

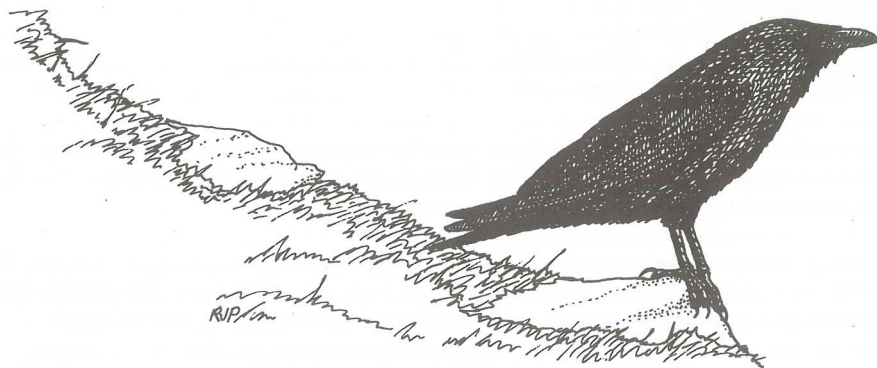
later but Wood Sandpipers were extremely scarce with only three reported during the course of the autumn. Counts of Common Sandpipers were also unexceptional with up to 16 at Royal Portbury Dock, 22 at Clevedon-Yeo Estuary, 21 at Cheddar and 27 at Chew, mainly in early August.

A good crop of unusual waders began with an adult **Temminck's Stint** at Chew on 30-31 August. The September gales, however, produced a good number of American waders. Two juvenile **Pectoral Sandpipers** were present at Chew from 7-21 September and another was seen at Durleigh from 14th-19th. A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** appeared at Cheddar on 7th and another put in a brief appearance at Chew on 16th. A first-winter **Wilson's Phalarope** was present at Chew from 13-23 September, followed by another at Cheddar from 17th-28th.

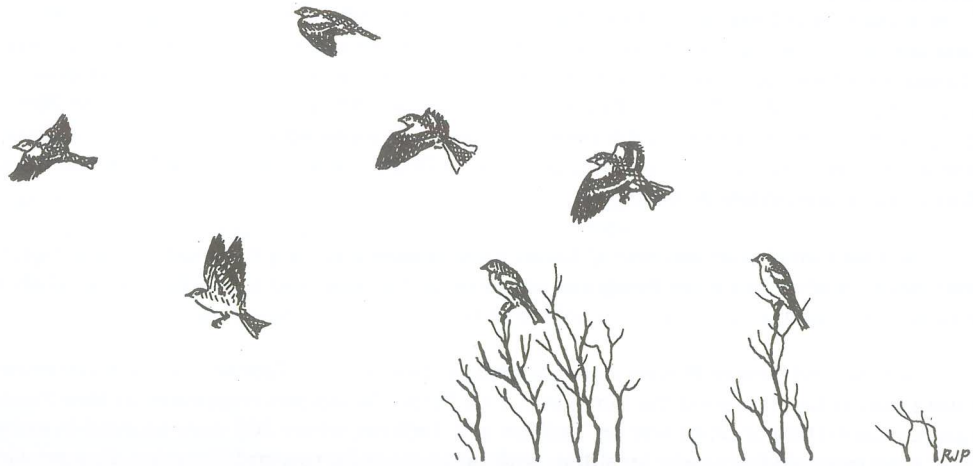
There have now been about nine records of this species in our area since the first in 1967. The Wilson's Phalaropes were followed by a **Red-necked Phalarope** at Steart on 26 September and single Grey Phalaropes at the Axe Estuary on 9 October and at Chew on 11th-12th.

Arctic Skuas continued to prove themselves to be fairly regular visitors to Chew and the third recorded during the year was an adult on 31 August; one was seen off Brean Down on 26 July and three on 7 October. A Great Skua was also seen off Brean on 30 August. Little Gulls occurred between 17 August and 8 November but passage was unexceptional with ones and twos mainly at the reservoirs. Associated with the large influx of American waders was an unprecedented wreck of juvenile **Sabine's Gulls**. Four appeared on 13 September at Chew, New Passage, Berrow and Steart, the latter remaining until 19th; another was seen in the Axe Estuary on 14th and a sixth off Sand Point on 11 October. Inland passage records of seabirds have become less unusual in recent years, more intensive watching proving that skuas and Kittiwakes are not infrequent at inland waters, particularly during calm, anticyclonic weather conditions. R. A. Hume (*Brit. Birds* 69 (1976) : 62-63) analysed records of Kittiwakes in the Midlands and concluded that there was a fairly regular passage through the area in spring and late autumn. Our area had never witnessed a really large inland movement but on 25 October at least 72 **Kittiwakes** were counted at Chew, the majority appearing over the lake in late afternoon and leaving westwards in small groups through Herons Green Bay. The influx occurred in calm, anticyclonic weather and coincided with an exceptional movement along the south coast. The largest movement of Black Terns occurred on 25-26 July, when up to 186 were counted at Chew; this influx occurred a good week or two earlier than previous influxes of this nature; the vast majority of the birds involved were adults. Small numbers then occurred until 20 September when 60 dropped in at Cheddar during the unusual weather. Over the following days up to ten were seen at Blagdon, 25 at Chew and 26 at Steart. A juvenile **White-winged Black Tern** appeared at Chew on 25 August, the 13th to be recorded at the lake since the first in 1966. The unusual weather of 21st produced a large influx of *Sterna* terns: there were 167 Common/Arctics at Steart, 30 Commons at Chew, 46 at Blagdon and 50 at Barrow Gurney. Eight Sandwich Terns appeared at Chew, six at Blagdon and two at Cheddar; a Little Tern also turned up at Chew and two others were seen at Steart. Other Little Terns appeared at Berrow on 13 September and at the Axe Estuary on 11 October.

A Wryneck was found injured at Clevedon (later released) and another was seen at Abbots Leigh, both on 5 September; another was trapped on Steep Holm on 4 October. About 1300 Swallows appeared at Abbots Leigh during the passage of the front on 21 September. The peak passage of Yellow Wagtails occurred on 19 September, when 115 were present at Avonmouth Ponds. A Rock Pipit *A. s. petrosus* appeared inland at Chew on 25 September, followed by two more on 25 October; others were seen at Barrow Gurney on 19 October and at Cheddar on 3 November. A Ring Ouzel was seen at Wootton-under-Edge on 28 September, a Nightingale at Filton on 5 September, a Firecrest on Steep Holm on 5 October and a Pied Flycatcher at Abbots Leigh on 21 August — all these species are normally very scarce in the area during the autumn passage. Late migrants included a Willow Warbler at Berrow on 26 October, a Wheatear at Chew on 2 November and a Swallow at Saltford on 29 November. Two Ravens were seen in unusual localities: one at Berrow on 16 August and another at Saltford on 25 September.



Raven



migrant Chaffinches

Chaffinch migration reached a peak in mid October: over 1000 per hour were moving northeast at Chittening on 15th, while 5000 flew south in 1¼ hours at Berrow and 1280 flew west in one hour at Sand Point on 19th. A Twite and a Lapland Bunting also flew south at Berrow on 19th and two Corn Buntings flew southwest at Sand Point on 1 November. Despite the preponderance of American vagrants during September, the rarest bird which occurred during the September gales came from the opposite direction. An immature **Yellow-breasted Bunting** was seen at Berrow on 13 September; although there have been some 86 British records of this species (up to 1979) this bird, which breeds eastwards from northeast Europe, is still regarded as something of a speciality of Fair Isle. Unfortunately, it proved to be a one day wonder, much to the dismay of the large number of bleary-eyed observers who found themselves plodding up and down Berrow golf course at dawn on 14th!

### Second winter period

An anticyclone over northern Europe drew in bitterly cold air from central Asia until 8 November. A milder period was then followed by westerly weather with heavy rainfall forcing the levels to rise at the reservoirs. Colder northerly weather dominated the end of November and the beginning of December. Milder southwesterly air until mid month was followed by a cooler west to northwest airstream as an anticyclone developed to the southwest of the country.

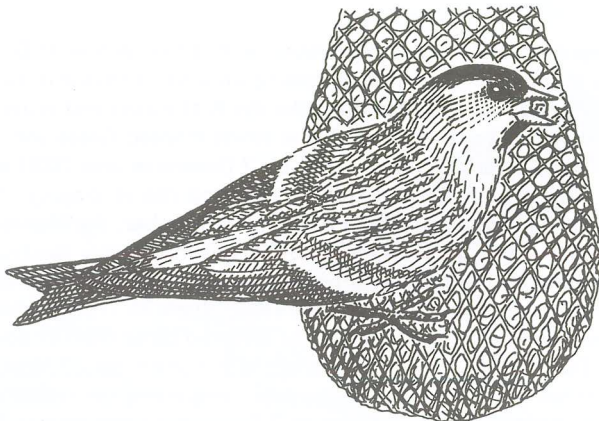
A further influx of Shags occurred in early November, with a first-winter at Brean Down on 1st, followed by three first-winter birds at Chew on 2nd, two remaining until 9th and one until 13 December. These inland records mirrored those in 1979 and may indicate that, like the Kittiwakes and skuas discussed above, the Shag is more regular at the reservoirs than hitherto appreciated. A few White-fronted Geese and about eight Brent Geese were seen on the coast. About 510 Wigeon had arrived at Chew by 2 December and 2000 were estimated at Steart three weeks later. During the same month, Teal reached 760 at Chew and 755 at Blagdon. Most impressive, however, was a large passage of Shoveler at Chew, reaching a peak of 820 on 2 November, the highest count at the lake since 1961. A male Mandarin was an unusual visitor to Chew from 16-30 November, only the fourth ever recorded at the lake. It seems likely that the bird originated from the feral population in southeast England as it coincided with similar occurrences in Cheshire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire (*Brit. Birds* 74 (1981) : 107-108). The maximum count of Pochard was 750 at Blagdon on 23 November but these involved birds from Cheddar disturbed by sailing. Two first-winter male **Ring-necked Ducks** were present at Orchardleigh Lake from 23 November into 1981 and these were the fourth and fifth to be recorded in the area during the year, continuing the recent upsurge in records. Three Scaup were seen at Northwick Warth from 26 October to 2 November (with two to 8 December) and four were present at Steart on 30 November; single females or immatures also appeared at Chew on 29 October and 30

November. An immature male Eider at Clevedon from 9 November to 9 January 1981 was followed by seven females or immatures at Brean Down on 30 November and one at Sand Point on 15 December. A first-winter male Long-tailed Duck turned up at Cheddar on 18 October, staying into 1981 but visiting Blagdon on 26 October. A Velvet Scoter was seen at Chittening on 9 November, providing a record of a species which remains quite a local rarity. Eleven Goosanders flew southeast at Severn Beach on 23 November and five flew north at Brean Down on 30th; in December there were 58 at Chew on 6th, ten at Saltford on 24th and one at Clevedon on 28th. Ruddy Ducks reached 363 at Blagdon and Chew on 2-4 December; up to 25 appeared at Barrow Gurney in October and November (when the water level was low) and four also occurred at Orchardleigh Lake in late November. Coot reached a peak of 2000 at Cheddar also in late November.

A male Hen Harrier was seen at Steart in November and December and it was joined by a ringtail on 30 November. Seven Merlins and three Peregrines appeared on the coast and single Short-eared Owls were seen at Chittening and Huntspill, surprisingly, the only ones recorded during the period.

A thousand Golden Plovers were counted on Tealham and Tadham Moors in December and 200 Grey Plovers were seen at Steart around the same time. Five Purple Sandpipers reappeared at New Passage in December. The largest concentration of Snipe was on Tealham and Tadham, where 303 were counted in early December. Jack Snipe were reported from eight localities, with up to six at Berrow and Clevedon. Scarcer wintering waders included nine Ruffs, three Spotted Redshanks and three Common Sandpipers. The only unusual gulls were adult Mediterranean Gulls at Durleigh on 12 December and at Chew on 21st and a Kittiwake in Weston Bay on 28th. An unidentified auk at Steart on 30 November was the only one reported in the area during the whole of 1980!

Some interesting roosts developed during the early winter: up to 1000 Woodpigeons at Chew, 125 Pied Wagtails at the Haymarket, Bristol and at least 300 in Keynsham. Most impressive, however, was a remarkable roost of **Redwings** that developed at Stockwood, Bristol. Numbers rose from 6000 on 29 November to 12000 on 21 December and as many as 14000 on 27th. They were joined by 700 Fieldfares on 16 December. It was another good winter for insectivorous birds: eleven Black Redstarts, ten Blackcaps and twelve Chiffchaffs were reported. Up to seven Bearded Tits were present at Chew from 25 October and two more were seen at Steart on 23 November. Single Snow Buntings were reported at Severn Beach, Royal Portbury Dock, Sand Bay and Steart in November. In contrast with other recent years it proved to be an exceptional winter for finches. **Bramblings** in particular were very numerous, with up to 1000 at Claverton in late December, the largest flock recorded in the area since 1972. Small numbers of Redpolls were seen but **Siskins** were also very common throughout the area, with up to 60 at Stock Hill and 100 at Saltford. Twite, however, continued their downward trend with four at Clevedon on 13 November and up to eleven at Portishead in December, while Crossbills continued to be recorded at Blagdon (five) and at Stock Hill (eight).



Siskin

# THE BIRDS OF BERROW 1973 to 1980

by B. E. Slade

## Introduction

In an earlier paper in *Bristol Ornithology* (Slade 1973) I summarised the results of a study of the bird life of Berrow marsh, sand dunes and nearby shore, undertaken from October 1968 to May 1973. Since then many new species have been added to the list of birds recorded in the area and alterations to the site have meant that a large part of the original study area is now very difficult to watch. It was therefore felt that the time was now right for the account to be brought up to date.

## Changes

A general description of the habitat is given in the 1973 paper, but a map showing the main features is repeated, with modifications, as Fig. 1. During 1973 extensive alterations to the area began when a new nine-hole golf course was created, part of which crosses the study area, removing large tracts of hedges and several acres of marshland, this including an area of damp scrub which contained one or two pairs of Grasshopper Warblers *Locustella naevia*. A large part of the clearance work took place in the spring and many nests must have been destroyed and it may not be just coincidence that the Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* have not bred since. Also during this period a pond was dug and has rapidly been colonised by Sea Club-rush *Scripus maritimus* especially at the shallower north end, this area rapidly drying out during periods of low rainfall. The main area of the pond has rather steep banks and has attracted several so-called freshwater waders but is however far too easily disturbed to be of any great importance.

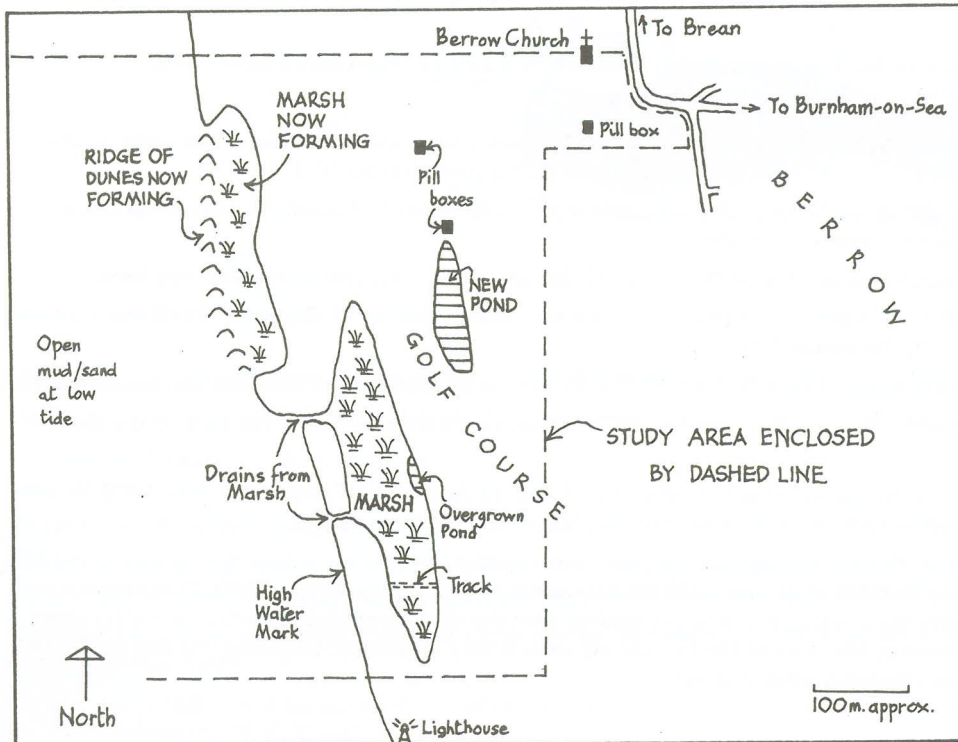


Fig. 1. Map showing main features of the study area at Berrow.



More natural changes can be witnessed on the foreshore and where in 1968 one would find bare sand there has been a gradual progression to a fairly large and still expanding marsh. Reeds *Phragmites communis* have just colonised the site and are likely to spread rapidly. We are witnessing the formation of a new coastal reedbed and this throws some light on how the original one was created. (Incidentally the main reedbed is not shown on the OS maps for 1949 and so is presumably of recent origin).

### The Systematic List

The list follows the sequence and scientific nomenclature of Professor Dr K. H. Voous (1977, *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species*). Observers have been named where the species has only been noticed once.

- RED-THROATED DIVER *Gavia stellata*. Single offshore on 8 March 1980 (A. M. Slade, B. E. Slade).
- BLACK-THROATED DIVER *Gavia arctica*. One in almost full summer plumage flew south on 3 November 1974 (B. E. Slade).
- LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. One on 27 September and two on 25 November 1980, all on the new pond. Not previously recorded.
- GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*. Two on the sea on 16 April and one found dead on 30 July 1979. Not previously recorded.
- FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*. 13 on 5 June and one on 6 June 1977. Two singles on 24 June 1978. One 15 April 1979.
- MANX SHEARWATER *Puffinus puffinus*. Considerable increase in sightings since 1977. Between 1977 and 1980, 1892 were recorded, extreme dates being 22 May and 17 July. A single on 2 September 1973 and 10 during September 1980 are the only records outside this period.
- GANNET *Sula bassana*. Most sightings July/August, 38 being noted during the period under review. Two adults have been found dead.
- CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Status unchanged. Max. 14 on 3 July 1977, 14 on 23 April 1978.
- BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*. Single on 20/21 January 1979.
- GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*. Has been noted with increasing frequency since the formation of the pond on the golf course, especially at dawn and dusk. Max. six (two adults and four juveniles) on 10 July 1979.
- MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*. Status unchanged. Unpredictable in its appearances and usually in very small numbers, with birds seen either on the new pond or in flight.
- BEWICK'S SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*. One on the sea on 15 January 1978. This species remains rare here.
- WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*. A total of 159 on four dates between 17 December 1978 and 7 January 1979. 13 flew south-west on 22 December 1979.
- CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*. 13 on 10 June 1979 with two on 23 September 1979. Not previously recorded.
- BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla*. Two on 28 December 1977 and six on 22 October 1979. All were of the dark-bellied race *B.b. bernicla*.
- RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*. One (immature) on 4 and 10 June 1978. Female on 8 July 1979. Whether they were wild birds or escapes from captivity is hard to tell. Not previously recorded.
- SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*. Present throughout the year, peak numbers usually being seen during July at the time of the moult. 1336 on 2 July and 600 on 9 July 1978 are noteworthy as are 930 on 8 July 1979. These two years appear to have been unusually good, especially when compared with the years immediately before and after when peak numbers were low. However, the state of the tide during visits is very important, birds soon moving to Steart when the tide comes in, only returning when it is well out.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*. Recorded mainly between November and February. Of 220 seen since 1973, 134 were recorded in January 1979.

GADWALL *Anas strepera*. Three on 1 January 1980 (A. M. Slade, B. E. Slade).

TEAL *Anas crecca*. 45 recorded between 8 August and 18 January with the exception being a pair on 4 May 1975. Most birds are seen on the new pond but are so easily disturbed that they rarely stay long after dawn.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*. With the exception of 1976 which was a very poor year for this species at Berrow, the status appears much the same as previously, with about three pairs attempting to nest but with little success. Max. counts 211 on 28 September 1975 and 231 on 19 August 1978.

PINTAIL *Anas acuta*. 24 recorded on six dates, mainly in October/November.

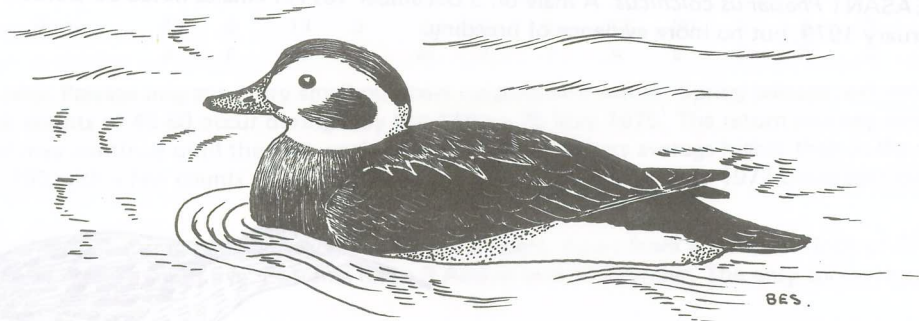
SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*. Irregular winter visitor.

Shoveler	Birds	15	7	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

POCHARD *Aythya ferina*. Seven on 3 November 1979. Female on 26 July 1980.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*. One flew north on 2 January 1979 (B. E. Slade).

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*. Nine (two immature males) on 14 April 1979 were seen drifting out with the tide (B. J. Hill, B. E. Slade).



LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*. One storm-driven bird on the pond on 4 November 1979 (B. J. Hill).

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*. Peaks in April and July reflect trends in other parts of the area.

Common Scoter	Birds	0	3	4	18	0	11	43	0	2	2	3	1
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*. Single 'brownheads' on 27 October 1974 and 23 January 1979, both seen in flight.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*. Three on 9 November 1975 (B. E. Slade).

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*. Two flew north-east on 24 February 1979. Male on 21 March with another on 24 September 1980.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*. Immature on 7 May 1978 flying over and later dropping into the reed-bed (H. J. Johnstone, B. E. Slade).

**HEN HARRIER** *Circus cyaneus*. Remained a rare visitor until a flurry of records in 1977/80, starting with one present on 16 October 1977. A 'ringtail' was present on four dates between 7 January and 11 February 1978 and there were two males at a roost in the reedbed from 23 December 1978 to 21 March 1979 with one of them remaining until 6 April 1979. A female was also present at the roost on 6/7 January 1979 and hunting the area on the afternoon of 13 January 1979. A male flew in to roost on 17 November 1979 and was seen leaving at dawn the next day. A male flew west on 10 April 1980.

**SPARROWHAWK** *Accipiter nisus*. A pair hunts the area throughout the year with immatures noted most years. Some evidence of passage through the area, two females and a male soared away to the north-east on 11 April 1980 and a female/immature flew south-west out to sea on 2 November 1980. The average number of sightings during the period under review is 19.25 per year, rather higher than previously.

**BUZZARD** *Buteo buteo*. Remains an uncommon visitor. Two on 12 April and a single on 9 October 1974, two on 16 February 1976 and one 14 October 1977 are suggestive of migrants or winter wanderers. A single bird fed regularly on the golf course c.100 metres to the north of the area 16-20 February 1977.

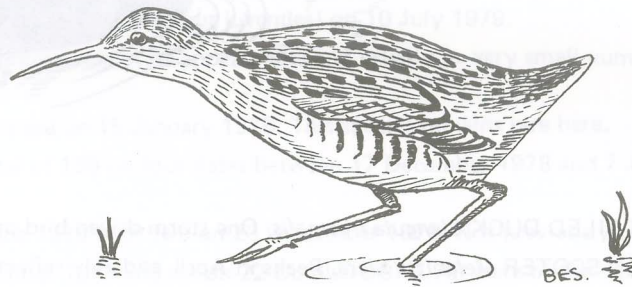
**KESTREL** *Falco tinnunculus*. One or two present throughout the year. Average number of sightings 15.37 per year. This would almost certainly be raised by increasing the visits made at dusk which appears to be an important feeding period for this species.

**MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*. Only five records during the period under review: a female on 6 January 1974, one on 5 November 1977, a male 12 October 1979, a female on 16 March 1980 and a female/immature 13 September 1980.

**HOBBY** *Falco subbuteo*. Singles noted 29 August 1976, 19 August 1978, 29 September 1979 and 9 August 1980, all being immatures.

**PEREGRINE** *Falco peregrinus*. Nine sightings since 1973: two each during August, September and December with singles January, February and November.

**PHEASANT** *Phasianus colchicus*. A male on 3 December 1977. Females noted 29 October 1978, 28 January and 11 February 1979, but no more evidence of breeding.



**WATER RAIL** *Rallus aquaticus*. Winter visitor in small numbers. Usually up to eight but possibly more. Arrives most years between the middle and late October but occasionally in September. There are three August records, singles on 26th 1979, 9th 1980 and two on 28th 1977. Usually leaves late February or during March. Two May records possibly indicate passage through the area, although with a May record in 1977 and two birds present in August breeding cannot be ruled out.

**MOORHEN** *Gallinula chloropus*. First noted on 20 May 1973 but since then three pairs have bred annually. They are generally shy birds at Berrow and are most often seen at dawn or dusk, which raises some doubt in my mind that prior to 1973 I had overlooked them.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. Present throughout the year. Spring peaks occur during May (although in 1979 it was reached in April), usually 50-90 with a maximum of 132 on 11 May 1975. Autumn numbers are generally higher than in the spring but peaks have been reached on dates between 1 August and 3 November. Usually the maximum numbers are between 130/265 but counts of 326 and 349, both in September, are noteworthy.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*. Singles noted 7 July 1974, 30 July 1978, 10 August 1978 and 29 August 1979.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*. Mainly a passage migrant. Spring passage usually March/May reaching its peak during May of usually under 250 (1000 on 20 May 1973 was exceptionally high). Return passage commences mid-July and continues to October. Between 200 and 400 peak numbers are reached in August or September. Small numbers are occasionally recorded between November and February with December being particularly favoured.

KENTISH PLOVER *Charadrius alexandrinus*. One 19 May 1973 (R. Angles).

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. Primarily a cold weather migrant. Very small numbers have been seen during the spring and autumn migrations.

Golden Plover	Birds	73	0	1	8	0	0	0	3	0	4	1	26
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola* All records fall into the periods Jan/Feb. or July/Oct. Of the fifty birds recorded 50% have been in July. Both this and the previous species are common in winter at nearby Steart.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. Cold weather migrant sometimes in large numbers. Small post breeding flocks noted in some years.

Lapwing	Birds	6219	2856	0	0	4	9	54	14	98	67	111	3030
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

KNOT *Calidris canutus*. Mainly an autumn passage migrant. Irregular at other times of the year.

Knot	Birds	43	0	13	0	2	0	1	17	96	6	9	0
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*. Passage migrant. Very small numbers occasionally winter. Spring passage, extreme dates 18 March to 6 June. Peak counts of 45-60 occur during May but 116 on 25 May 1975. The return journey commences the last week of July and may continue until the first week of November. Numbers average higher than in the spring with maxima usually 66-150 with a few counts exceeding these figures, 203 on the 31 July 1977 being particularly noteworthy.

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*. Autumn passage migrant in small numbers. Apart from a compact flock of 27 on 30 September 1973 numbers rarely exceed five. Extreme dates 3 August and 14 October. The only spring record is of a single on 10 May 1978.

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*. 11 recorded during the period under review. Apart from two on 17 May 1975 all were during August or September.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*. Reported in every month. A flock of c.5000 present during the winter (up to 8000 on occasions). Numbers fall during March only to rise again in May. There are only a few June records. Autumn passage commences in July with a steady build up to the mid-winter peak.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*. Singles on the shore on 29 September 1977 and 19 August 1978. Not recorded previously.

JACK SNIBE *Lymnocyptes minimus*. Continues to be a regular winter visitor. Up to eight present most winters; the first arrivals are seen in October (earliest 6th) and leave in late March or April (latest 13th). This species favours areas of low vegetation and is recorded more frequently now in the marshy area forming on the foreshore. Many of its previous haunts in the old marsh are becoming overgrown.

SNIBE *Gallinago gallinago*. Passage migrant and winter visitor with very small numbers passing through in July/August. The winter flock arrives in late September and departs in April. The flock rarely exceeds 20 but c.100 present on 29 November 1980.

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*. One on 20 March 1979 in the dunes near the southern end of the marsh (B. Rabbits).

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*. A decreased autumn visitor occurring almost exclusively in July/August.

Yearly totals since 1973.	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
	44	0	733	57	2	1	16	0

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*. A spring and autumn passage migrant, usually under 20 present but 80 on 2 May 1976 and 60 on 11 February 1979. Small numbers occasionally seen during the winter.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. Passage migrant in April/May and July/August. The main movement through Berrow appears during the first ten days of May especially in the evenings when flocks flight to the north or north-east. High counts include 336 on 7 May 1978. Nearby Steart is one of the country's major roost sites for spring migrants.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*. Recorded in every month with generally under 150 but 251 on 29 October 1977.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*. Singles on 1 September 1974, 24 July 1977 and 3 September 1978, all flying over.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. Remains rather scarce at Berrow. 73 recorded since 1973 of which 25 were in July.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*. Uncommon. Four spring records all in May. 18 recorded between 28 July and 9 October. Mostly seen in flight but occasionally on the pond.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*. Nine between 31 July and 1 September, again mostly flying over. Not previously recorded.

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*. Two flew north on 26 May 1974 as did one on 22 May 1977. Single birds on 5 and 19 August 1978 were seen at the pond, the latter flying down to the shore to join other waders feeding there. Not previously recorded.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*. Nine spring records (April/May) with 12 in the autumn (July/August).

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*. Mainly an autumn migrant. Of the 38 recorded since 1973, 30 have been in July (5), August (20) and September (5). A small spring passage is indicated by records in April (2), May (3) and June (1). The remaining records are one each for January and December.

ARCTIC SKUA *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Singles on 25 April and 5 May 1974, 26 April 1975, and 7 May, 5 and 9 June 1977. Seven were seen on 2 May 1976, six of which were in a compact flock close inshore and were associated with a large flock of Common/Arctic Terns.

GREAT SKUA *Stercorarius skua*. Two north on 2 September 1973. One on 26 May 1975. Two north and one south on 6 June 1977. Two spent at least 1½ hours in the area on 13 April 1979. A single on 23 September 1978 with one long dead found 29 October 1978.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*. Immature flew south on 6 October 1979 (B.E. Slade).

LITTLE GULL *Larus minutus*. Singles on 2 September 1973, 3 December 1978, 8 March and 17 May 1980. A flock of nine (three adults) flew south on 5 May 1974.

SABINE'S GULL *Larus sabini*. One on 13 September 1980 (R. Angles).

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*. The commonest gull at Berrow, recorded in every month. Peak numbers late July or August are usually 800 but 1280 present 17 August 1975. There is a lot of movement between the study area and the farmland to the east of the village. The peak numbers appear to be moulting birds which generally depart after the moult leaving a wintering flock of c.100.

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*. Recorded in every month but very few June records (one 1978 and two 1979). Birds arrive in the area in July reaching a peak c.150 in August or early September, most appearing to moult before numbers gradually decrease to an average winter flock c.50. Most have left the area by the last week of May.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*. Arrives in the area during February, from then until mid-November reported in every month but mostly in small numbers, rarely more than 15, with a peak c.30 in late April/May. Up to three occasionally seen in the winter months. A single bird of the Scandinavian race *L.f. fuscus* was present on 19 February 1978.

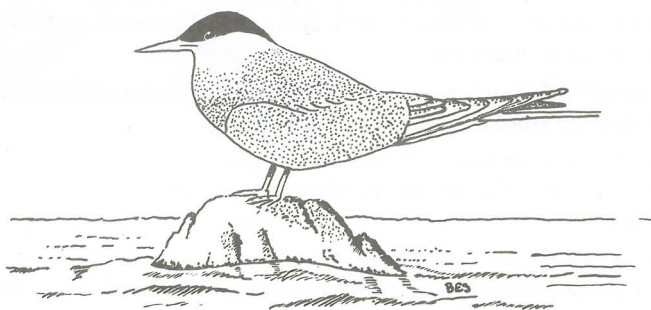
HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*. Present throughout the year in small numbers, usually up to 25 but on occasions 60. Large numbers pass over the area in the evenings to their roosting sites on Steep Holm and Stert Island:

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*. Present throughout the year in very small numbers and probably decreasing. Max. counts for 1974, 1975 and 1976 were 17, 14 and 10 respectively whereas the last four years' max. is only eight.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*. 174 recorded on eleven dates during the period under review, the largest flocks being 38 on 5 June 1977, 50 on 13 February 1975 and 65 on 20 April 1976.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*. 20 recorded between April and October. Most in June (five) and July (seven) but none since 1977.

ROSEATE TERN *Sterna dougallii*. Single on 10 and 11 June 1979 (B. J. Hill, B. E. Slade).



COMMON/ARCTIC TERN *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea*. Although both species have been identified most records refer to 'Commic' Terns. A total of 873 have been recorded, between April and October. Max. 600 on 2 May 1976.

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*. One on 19 May 1973, five on 18 August 1974, two on 19, 20 and 21 May with four on 19 August 1978. Singles on 14 April and 15 August 1979 and on 27 April 1980.

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*. One on 22 August with four on 26 September 1976. Singles on 29 August and 2 October 1977. Two on 4 June and 9 September 1978 and a single on 18 September 1979.

GUILLEMOT *Uria aalge*. Singles on 11 May 1975 and 2 October 1977 were new records for the area.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*. Little change in status. Breeds on nearby farmland and visits the area in small numbers.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*. About three pairs breed, otherwise mainly a passage migrant in small numbers. Larger flocks noted during cold weather.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*. Appears mainly as a spring passage migrant in April/May (Slade 1978 b). Records for 1978-80 show no change in the pattern of occurrences.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*. Passage migrant mainly in the spring in very small numbers. Only c.12 in the last seven years.

(RING-NECKED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*. Single on 5 September 1979. Not previously recorded.)

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*. A pair present every year but very few young seen.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*. Single bird seen at close range on 17 March 1979 (B. J. Hill, B. E. Slade).

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*. Fluctuating passage migrant and winter visitor. One or two present most winters, generally arriving mid-October and leaving mid-April but very rarely recorded into May.

SWIFT *Apus apus*. Common summer visitor. Parties of 40 usual in late summer.

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*. Singles on 7 October 1979, 24 January and 20 September 1980, all seen at the pond.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*. Pair bred successfully in 1979 on adjacent land and after the single young had fledged both it and the parents stayed in the area until the end of August when the adults left. The young bird remained until 13 September (see Slade 1978a for more details of this breeding record).

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*. A few present in the gardens and farms near the study area but only occasionally seen on the golf course.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*. One or two sightings most years probably of birds from nearby breeding sites.

WOODLARK *Lullula arborea*. Singles noted 19 October 1975, 10 October 1976, 29 October 1977, 12 November 1978 and 6 and 21 October 1979. They reflect the bird's status as an autumn migrant in very small numbers along the Severn Estuary. One also seen on 26 February 1978.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*. Breeding population decreased from five pairs in 1968 to one pair in 1980. Otherwise apart from a small wintering population of c.6, mainly an autumn passage migrant and cold weather migrant.

SHORE LARK *Eremophila alpestris*. A single on 7 November 1978 was joined by a second bird on 30 December both remaining until 31 March 1979. One on 14 December 1979 remained in the area until 8 March 1980. Normally favours the upper shoreline.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*. Only c.75 recorded since 1973. Most records refer to April/May and July/August. Earliest date 13 April and the latest 8 October.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*. First arrivals usually mid-April, birds leaving by mid-October. About 2000 roosted in the reedbed August/September 1979 and about 500 roosted in 1980; it is possible that this roost has been overlooked in the past.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*. Local birds usually arrive about 10 May but one or two passage birds occur from 23 April onwards; most have left by 16 October with the latest 9 November. Numbers generally up to 30 but late summer flocks have reached 160 (18 September 1977).

RICHARD'S PIPIT *Anthus novaeseelandiae*. One on 17 October 1976 (B. E. Slade).

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*. Small spring passage in April/May (earliest 11 April) and in the autumn in August/September (latest 30 September).

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*. Small breeding population, of c.6 pairs, and a winter flock. Most springs produce a small northerly passage while in the autumn, in September/October, there is a much larger movement to the south.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*. A spring and autumn passage migrant in very small numbers. 15 came to roost in the reedbed on 29 August 1979.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*. Primarily an autumn passage migrant.

Grey Wagtail	Birds	1	2	0	1	0	1	2	29	42	32	3	2
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba*. Breeds on nearby farms but frequently feeds on the golf course and along the foreshore, generally under ten but occasionally up to 25. Autumn passage September/October in variable numbers (104 in 3 hrs on 6 October 1979). *M.a. alba* (White Wagtail) identified most springs in April/May. Max. 15 on 20 April 1975.

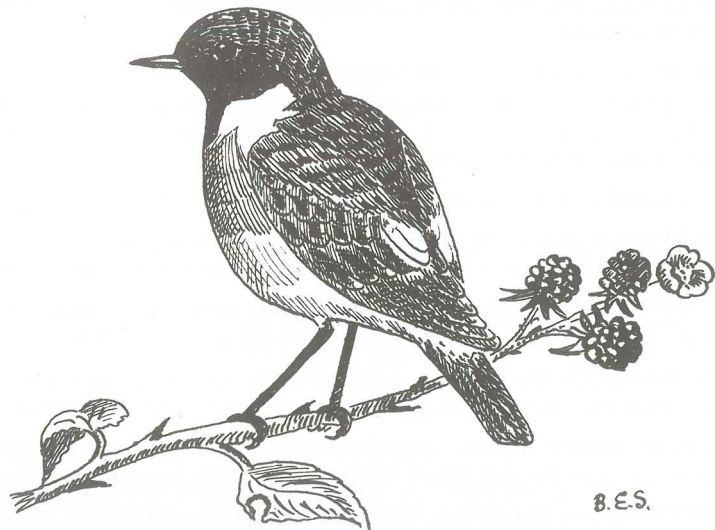
WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*. Breeding population of about five pairs. Frequently up to 15 in the marsh in the winter. Paired very well during the cold winter of 1978/79.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*. Common with about 18 pairs breeding in most years.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*. A minimum of three pairs breed.

REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. A migrant with single birds on 12 September 1974, 29 April 1978, 14 April 1979 and one or two in early September 1979 with another on 30th.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*. Regular in very small numbers in April/May and again in August/September, occasionally into October (max. five on 6 October 1979).



STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*. Three pairs bred regularly until 1972 but none have since. However 2 or 3 juveniles were present during July 1978 and again in 1979. Appears now as a passage migrant and winter visitor in very small numbers (c.4).

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Small numbers (max. 6) pass through from March to May (earliest 18 March) and August to November (latest 12 November). Summer records of a female 5/6 June 1977 and a male with a juvenile on 13 July 1970.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus*. Immature on 13 September 1977 and a male on 6 April 1980. Not previously recorded.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*. About 15 pairs breed, augmented in October by grounded migrants.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*. Arrives in the area in late October, small flocks then present until late March, occasionally into April. Max. 510 on 26 October 1975.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*. About three pairs breed. There is an influx with other thrushes in October.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*. Generally arrives during the second week of October. The few seen during the winter, mainly at dawn, are from the roost about 1km to the north. Most have left by the end of March.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*. Breeds in nearby gardens. A few feed on the golf course and small numbers pass south with other thrushes in the autumn.

CETTI'S WARBLER *Cettia cetti*. Singles on 1 October and 28 November 1978. Not previously recorded.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*. Two or three pairs bred regularly until 1972 but is now only a spring migrant in very small numbers (April/May) and possibly in the autumn but is more difficult to locate during this season.

AQUATIC WARBLER *Acrocephalus paludicola*. Two on 26 August 1973 with singles on 7 July 1974 and 1 September 1976.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. About 12 pairs breed but there were 18 males singing on 15 May 1977 (possibly including birds still on passage). Arrivals occur in mid-April to early May and most have gone by mid-September with a few stragglers to the end of the month. A late single was on 4 October 1980.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. Up to eight pairs breed. Earliest date of arrival 17 April but usually does not arrive until May. Strong passage on 28 May 1978 when 18 singing. Leaves August/September with the latest 17 September.



LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*. Breeding population c.3 pairs. Spring passage indicated by six singing males on 13 May 1979. Most arrive during the first two weeks of May (earliest 14 April) and leave in September (latest 18 September).

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*. Seems to have stabilized at c.3 pairs after none in the crash year of 1969. Nine singing males on 20 May 1979 indicate passage through the area. The earliest date of arrival is 10 April but late April or early May is more usual. Local birds appear to leave in August with a few sometimes into September (latest 18 September).

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*. Singles on 15 May 1977 and 26 August 1979. Not previously recorded.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*. One pair breeds. Up to four present in most winters otherwise a passage migrant. Most wintering birds are seen in the Sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* and Elder *Sambucus nigra*.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*. One or two pairs breed. Passage migrant from March (earliest 6th) to September. There are a few winter records. 50 were present on 4 April 1980.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Only one pair usually breeds (none in 1980). Arrives later than the previous species (earliest 5 April) and also leaves earlier. One very late bird on 26 October 1980.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*. Small numbers, up to c.8, between September and March but very few after the 1978/79 winter until the autumn of 1980. Singing male present May/June 1977.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*. Single on 7 December 1980 (B. J. Hill).

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*. Single on 22 August 1976 (B. E. Slade).

BEARDED TIT *Panurus biarmicus*. Two pairs bred successfully in 1979. Small flock present in some winters, arriving in October and leaving in March.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caedatus*. Small flocks wander the hedges and attempt to breed when the population is at a high level. Very hard hit in the cold winter of 1978/79.

COAL TIT *Parus ater*. Scarce autumn migrant. 47 recorded between 28 September and 1 November.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*. Present throughout the year. Max. 44 on 12 October 1975.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*. Recorded in every month but usually in small numbers. A maximum of nine comprised two family parties.

JAY *Garrulus glandarius*. Singles flying south on 27 April 1973 and 20 May 1979.

MAGPIE *Pica pica*. Very obvious with three or four pairs breeding.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*. Breeding colony nearby. Small numbers feed in the area but 300 have been seen, probably birds leaving the roost near Berrow Manor. Flocks of up to 30 noted flying south in some autumns.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*. There is a rookery nearby (33 nests in 1975) and birds are often seen feeding on the golf course and the foreshore.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*. One or two pairs breed and there is also a non-breeding flock of c.50 but numbers rapidly rise in the autumn to c.200 (242 in January 1979), the foreshore being a favoured feeding area.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*. Two on 12 April and a single on 4 October 1974. (One soared to the south on 16 August 1980 near the study area.)

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*. Seen throughout the year. Large numbers pass south during the autumn migration. A roost of many thousands forms in the marsh in August but is deserted in October.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*. Breeding birds nearby visit the area in the summer to collect food for their young.

TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*. Apart from a pair feeding their five fledged young on 15 June 1975 almost exclusively an autumn passage migrant in October or early November. Very few recorded since 1977. Max. 109 flew south in 1½ hours on 24 October 1976.

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*. Very rarely recorded after March when the small winter flock of c.20 (occasionally 50) leaves. Common autumn passage migrant late September to November. On occasions over a thousand an hour pass south (5000 in 2½ hrs on 19 October 1980).

**BRAMBLING** *Fringilla montifringilla*. Occasionally small numbers (max. 15) join the wintering finches but mainly known as an autumn migrant, mostly in October. About 250 recorded during the period under review but thought to be under recorded.

**GREENFINCH** *Carduelis chloris*. Recorded throughout the year but not proven to breed in the study area. Winter flock of 60-100 most years and a reasonably common passage migrant September/October.

**GOLDFINCH** *Carduelis carduelis*. Spring (April/May) and autumn migrant (September/November) but numbers generally small in the spring. Locally bred birds frequent the area in July/August and a flock of c.15, on occasions 40, winter as long as the weather is not too severe.

**SISKIN** *Carduelis spinus*. Irregular autumn migrant. About 115 recorded during the period under review, including 52 seen on 8 October 1978.

**LINNET** *Carduelis cannabina*. Common breeding bird, with perhaps 15 pairs in most years. The post-breeding flock usually reaches 60-80. There is a small spring movement in April/May (max. c.60) with a return movement in September and October (max. 222 on 28 September 1975). The wintering flock of c.25 is absent during colder winters.

**TWITE** *Carduelis flavirostris*. Single on 19 October 1980 (A. M. Slade, B. E. Slade).

**REDPOLL** *Carduelis flammea*. Small spring passage in April/May (11 recorded) but more frequent in the autumn, in September/November (c.85 recorded). Seven reported during the winter.

**BULLFINCH** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Resident with c.3 pairs breeding. Noted in 1976 (22), 1977 (7) and 1978 (8) flying south with other autumn migrants.

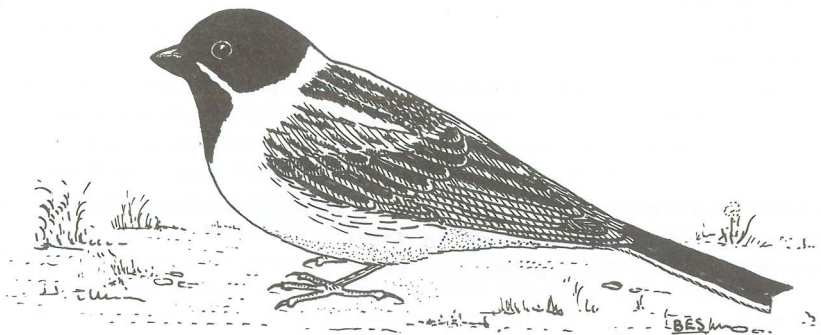
**LAPLAND BUNTING** *Calcarius lapponicus*. Singles on 26 October 1975, 29 October and 6 November 1977, 19 February 1978 and 19 October 1980.

**SNOW BUNTING** *Plectrophenax nivalis*. Six on 18 January 1976 and a single on 27 November 1977.

**YELLOWHAMMER** *Emberiza citrinella*. First recorded in the area in 1974 (male on 31 March) so the 134 recorded between 10 October and 14 November 1976 were very remarkable. It has since reverted to its former rare status with two feeding with finches on 21 December 1979 and a single flying south on 19 October 1980.

**YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING** *Emberiza aureola*. Immature watched at close range on 13 September 1980 (A. M. Slade, B. E. Slade).

**REED BUNTING** *Emberiza schoeniclus*. Six to eight breeding pairs. There is a winter flock of c.20 with a few every autumn flying south with other migrants. Now a regular visitor to gardens in the area (c.12 present in some winters) arriving late December and staying until April or even May.



CORN BUNTING *Miliaria calandra*. First recorded in the area on 18 January 1976 when two birds were present; two more joined them on 1 February and were last seen on 8 February. They arrived back in the area on 24 October and stayed until the end of the year reaching a maximum of seven. In 1977 first seen on 20 November but stayed through the winter until 18 April (max. 10 on 12 February). Three recorded in the area between 13 November 1978 and 1 January 1979. The only records for 1980 were singles on 26 January and 26 March. The birds probably used the area as a roost, moving back to the farmland during the day.

#### Acknowledgements

I am indebted to all the observers who sent in records to *Bird News* and *Somerset Birds*. I would like to thank in particular M. Eskins and B. J. HiH who allowed me to use their unpublished records and to my son Andrew who helped search the literature for records.

#### Appendix A: species recorded at Berrow (study area), 1968-72, but not subsequently.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*  
 Greylag Goose *Anser anser*  
 Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*  
 Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*  
 Razorbill *Alca torda*  
 Puffin *Fratercula arctica*  
 Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*  
 Bluethroat *L. svecica*  
 Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*

#### Appendix B: species recorded at Berrow, 1973-80, but outside the study area.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*  
 Little Owl *Athene noctua*  
 Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*  
 Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*  
 Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
 Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

#### Appendix C: species recorded at Berrow, 1924-67, but not subsequently and not necessarily in the study area.

Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*  
 Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*  
 Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*  
 Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*  
 Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirrus*

#### References

- Slade, B.E. 1973. The birds of Berrow marsh, sand dunes and shore. *Bristol Orn.* 6:30.  
 — 1978a Hoopoes breeding in Somerset. *Bristol Orn.* 11:21.  
 — 1978b Movements of Collared Doves. *Bristol Orn.* 11:35.

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## NOTES

### Hunting behaviour of Peregrine low over water

On 26 August 1973 an immature Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* was present at Steart, Bridgwater Bay, and during the afternoon exhibited an unusual and especially persistent type of hunting action. When first seen, the Peregrine was stooping down after a Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* which, in an effort to escape the attack, plunged into the water in the main channel of the River Parrett. The Peregrine swooped up and then down low over the water once more, appearing to be trying to snatch the wader out of the water. The plover splashed around vigorously on the surface of the water and then took off and flew away low towards the far bank of the river. The Peregrine promptly returned to the attack, stooping down from a fairly low level. At the last moment, in desperation, the plover plunged back into the river, its attacker swooping up and then twisting down several times in further efforts to pluck the wader from the water. Under this harassment the plover, with some splashing, rose from the water once more, promptly being forced to drop into it again. As the Peregrine dived down there was again much splashing with the wader apparently trying to take evasive action, although it was not actually seen to submerge.

On the next occasion that it took off, the Ringed Plover made for the safety of the far bank where it landed and remained for some time. The Peregrine immediately lost interest once the other bird was on dry ground. It flew off steadily, rapidly gaining height, and was soon lost to sight.

The hunting pattern was not that of the classic long stoop, nor of close pursuit, but more a series of high speed runs towards the intended victim, often culminating in a short upward climb to twenty or thirty feet above the wader before a 'mini-stoop' down on to the bird.

Terry Bond,  
*Joyter-bi-Yur, 2 West Town Avenue, Brislington, Bristol BS4.*

(Extended observations of Peregrine hunting, particularly of actual kills, are relatively rare. Although the stoop and the close pursuit methods are well-known, there seem to be innumerable variations, the bird being remarkably versatile. Related observations of Peregrines hunting low over water occur in *Brit. Birds* 58:297 and 74:264, involving Manx Shearwaters and Pochard respectively. Eds.).

### Behaviour of Peregrine attacking Mallard

On 18 January 1981 a female Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* was watched at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, where it was present throughout the day. It was seen to hunt on one occasion in a rather unexpected manner. The Peregrine was first noted in a shallow stoop at a female Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* which was flying low over the ground along the bank of the River Severn. There were muddy pools along the bank, and with the tide low, the thick mud of the estuary was well exposed, with the result that the incident took place some distance away from the open water of the river. The height from which the Peregrine commenced this attack was not noted. As the Peregrine neared the Mallard, the duck crash-dived into one of the small, muddy pools and evaded the falcon. The latter swooped up, gained height to some eight metres and then flew down at the Mallard once more. The duck appeared to be stuck in the thick mud, trying to run and flapping its wings, but making little progress, despite desperate efforts. The Peregrine swooped up and the attack was repeated twice more, although the bird made no actual contact with the duck.

Abandoning the attack, the Peregrine circled around and landed on the river bank on an area of apparently dry ground beside the muddy pool. Here it sat and appeared to be watching the Mallard intently. Apparently unnerved, the duck redoubled its flapping in the mud and eventually succeeded in taking flight. The Peregrine promptly took off in pursuit, but this time the duck made its escape, and the Peregrine returned to the river bank where it remained sitting for the next couple of hours.

Two thoughts are prompted by this behaviour. Firstly, when intended prey takes refuge in water or on the ground, are the subsequent 'mini-stoop' attacks a serious effort to catch or injure the victim, or are they intended to flush the prey into further flight where they are more vulnerable to the Peregrine's attacks? Secondly, when the Peregrine landed beside the duck, was this a deliberate effort to flush the duck into further flight?

Terry Bond

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### Behaviour of Bobwhites during tropical rainstorms in Florida, U.S.A.

During or soon after tropical rainstorms at Maitland, Orange County, Florida, U.S.A. in March 1978 I observed the following interesting behaviour of eight Bobwhites *Colinus virginianus*, which were probably a family party. R P subsequently observed similar behaviour. As they scurried in typical manner through the open grass, the main stalks being some thirty cm high and thus sometimes obscuring them, the quail looked very wet and bedraggled. At regular intervals as they moved through the grass the birds, singly or collectively, would spring vertically into view and with rapid 'shuddering' movements of their bodies and with partly open wings, would disperse much of the excess water from their feathers. The 'spray' was clearly visible during these exercises. Rather comically perhaps, this interesting behaviour would be repeated as they went on their way. We have consulted the American literature, including Paul L. Johnguard's *Grouse and Quails of North America* (1973): 408-430, but we cannot trace records of the phenomenon described here. Neither is it mentioned in R.J. Kennedy's review on direct effects of rain on birds (*Brit. Birds* 63 (1970): 401-414) and his feeling that this subject is one to which no more than passing interest has yet been given is one that we share. It is hoped that this note, although dealing with a species not (yet) established in Europe, will prompt publication of further similar observations.

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### Two White-rumped Sandpipers at Chew Valley Lake

At about 11.45 on 27 October 1978 at Chew Valley Lake, Avon, Dorian Buffery and I were watching three Spotted Redshanks *Tringa erythropus* and two Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* feeding on exposed mud beyond Stratford Pool. We were about to leave the area when I noticed a small wader feeding some 100 metres from us. I drew DB's attention to the bird and he used his telescope to obtain a better view. After a brief look, something disturbed all the birds and the small wader took flight. I watched it carefully through 10 x 50 binoculars as it flew into the mist towards Wick Green Point. I scribbled some brief notes: 'small wader, appearing like a longish Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* but larger; short bill and legs and long pointed wings in flight'. I was fairly sure that I had seen a white rump but I was not absolutely certain. We rushed to Wick Green Point where we carefully scanned a flock of Dunlin *C. alpina* but all we could find was a Little Stint *C. minuta*.

At about 13.30 I returned to Stratford Pool and as I scanned a party of Dunlin with my 25x telescope I came across a wader that resembled the earlier bird. After a few minutes of close observation I was astonished

when a second bird, showing exactly the same features, walked into my field of view. After about 20 minutes, a helicopter flew overhead and disturbed the birds; one flew on its own into Stratford Bay and the other disappeared with Dunlin in the opposite direction. Both had white 'rumps' (more correctly, white upper tail coverts), black tails and dark, fairly uniform wings with a suggestion of a faint wing bar. They were indeed both White-rumped Sandpipers *C. fuscicollis*. DB also saw the birds before they were disturbed and he agreed with my identification. Later the same day, G. J. Upton and K. E. Vinicombe relocated one individual and KEV saw both in flight during the following morning. One subsequently took up residence at Wick Green Point and remained there until 2 November, during which time it was seen by many other observers.

*Description:* Slightly bigger than Little Stint but only slightly smaller than Dunlin, but lower looking due to shorter legs. Very distinctive shape with long appearance due to very long primaries projecting well beyond tail. Body quite dumpy. Short, slender dark bill, appearing about same length as head, and slightly decurved at tip. Short dark legs, flexed when feeding. Horizontal carriage, with a 'front-down/end-up' appearance. In shape, perhaps suggested a large version of a Temminck's Stint.

Dark crown giving capped appearance. Noticeable whitish supercilium from bill, turning down and then up again behind eye. Darker, greyish area from bill through eye. Throat paler. Noticeable pectoral band, consisting of fine dark streaks on a brownish-grey background, ending abruptly on breast. Additional streaking on sides of breast, on feathers overlying carpals. Rest of underparts white. Pectoral band somewhat less obvious when bird viewed from front. Back grey, streaked black, bordered by narrow white line along upper edge of scapulars, forming indistinct 'V'. Scapulars dark grey-brown, with noticeable white line along lower border. Median coverts grey-brown with noticeable clear-cut pale edgings. Greater coverts with pale tips only, forming slight panel. Tertiaries dark, edged pale. Primaries blackish. Legs blackish. Plumage indicated that they were juvenile birds.

In flight, long, narrow wings angled back at carpals. Distinctive white upper tail coverts contrasting strongly with uniform black tail. White area quite narrow and less extensive than white rump of Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*. Narrow white wing bar. Flight vaguely recalled Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* with slightly similar flicking wing action. GJU heard one bird give a thin, mouse-like call.

*Feeding action:* Crept along ground, rapidly picking at mud, occasionally probing with tip of bill. Feeding action recalled Temminck's Stint.

These birds occurred during a record year for this species, with 18 recorded in total (*Brit. Birds* 72 (1979) : 521 and 73 (1980) : 507). Other late October/early November birds were seen in the Isles of Scilly and Suffolk (two). These birds were the first to be recorded in Avon and were the seventh species of Nearctic wader to be recorded at the lake.

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### Feeding association between Common Gulls and Coots

An interesting performance occurred at Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset on 11 March 1951 when seven Common Gulls *Larus canus* were observed flying approximately five metres above and just behind a closely packed party of about 50 alarmed Coots *Fulica atra*. Sometimes, because of the varying wind conditions, the gulls were forced to fly away from the Coots but they always returned and, with rather slow wing beats and occasional momentary hovering, held their flight position while the water birds swam hurriedly across a wide expanse of shallow water. From time to time one or more of the gulls plunged in among the Coots, partially or wholly submerging for a few seconds during which time the Coots scattered, only to regroup a little later. It appeared that in swimming in the shallow water the Coots caused much sediment to rise to or near the surface, enabling items of food to be obtained by the gulls. This behaviour was only discontinued when the Coots reached deeper water and then ceased as suddenly as it had commenced.

Feeding associations between Little Gulls *Larus minutus* and Razorbills *Alca torda* and between Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* have been recorded previously (*Brit. Birds* 58 (1965) : 192, 65 (1972) : 259, 69 (1976) : 506) where fish disturbed by the diving waterbird appear to have been the prey. The behaviour observed here seems more analogous to the associations previously noted between Black-headed Gulls and ducks such as Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Pochard *Aythya ferina*, and Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* (see *Brit. Birds* 61 (1968) : 31, 68 (1975) : 295-296, 73 (1980) : 411-412) where organisms brought to the surface by turbulence were the more likely source of food.

Bernard King

Gull Cry, 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall.

### Behaviour of an autumn Wilson's Phalarope in Cornwall

A Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* was present at Marazion marsh, Cornwall, in the first and second weeks of September 1967 (see *Brit. Birds* 61 (1968) : 343). It fed energetically in typical fashion, leaning well forward with bill and head almost touching the ground, and its legs bent, causing its tail to slant upwards and giving it a curious 'toppling-over' appearance. It was able to take small insects, apparently *Diptera*, from the ground, as well as those hovering nearby. When feeding in this way in the very soft ooze near the reedy areas of the marsh its throat, fore neck, belly and much of the rest of its underparts, even the under tail coverts, became coated with slime and from a distance these areas looked black, instead of their usual brilliant white, giving the impression of an entirely different species. What particularly interested me was the phalarope's habit of leaving the locality at intervals to fly across the nearby road to bathe in freshwater some 350 metres from its feeding grounds. There, elaborate bathing and preening occurred before it returned to its original site to resume active feeding.

Bernard King

Gull Cry, 9 Park Road, Newlyn, Penzance, Cornwall.

### Unfamiliar song of Chiffchaff

In late April 1968 Ronald Lance reported having found a warbler with an unfamiliar song near Yatton, Somerset (now Avon). Following his precise details we visited the locality on 28 April and after a while found the bird solely by its unusual song. This consisted of a series of sweet and sharp notes, given in the manner of a Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: 'twee, twee, tweeseep, tweeseep, ..., twee, twee', lasting three or four seconds. The bird was inclined to spend fairly long periods in the cover of a thorn hedge bordering grassland, and this, together with its sluggish movements, seemed to us to rule out both Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. Nevertheless, spasms of singing with occasional familiar 'tweep' calls were heard, but it was not until at least twenty minutes had elapsed before the warbler suddenly appeared on the topmost vertical branch in that part of the hedge. Its plumage verified that it was in fact a Chiffchaff: Upperparts brownish with a greenish sheen in some lights, but lighter on mantle and rump with a little yellow on the shoulders; slight pale supercilium, with light buff to sides of face; underparts light brownish to light greyish; bill pale brown with yellowish-brown at base of lower mandible; legs and feet dark. The Chiffchaff remained in full view for at least two or three minutes without moving away from its perch; its sweet song with a few sharp notes intrigued us a good deal. Then, suddenly, it started to give the characteristic 'chiff, chaff, chiff, chaff' which it maintained until it eventually left the area.

According to Rosemary Jellis (*Bird Sounds and their Meaning*, 1977:160-163) the song of the Chiffchaff is remarkably consistent over most of its range, apart from in those races found in Iberia and the

Canary Islands. On a subsequent visit to Burgos, in northern Spain, on 3 June 1968, RMC heard a Chiffchaff of the race *P. c. ibericus* in song and thought it similar to the one heard at Yatton. However, the fact that the latter also gave the more normal song would seem to rule out the possibility that it was a vagrant of this race.

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 11, Weatherly Avenue, Odd Down, Bath BA2 2PF  
 Bernard King  
 Gull Cry, 9 Park Road,

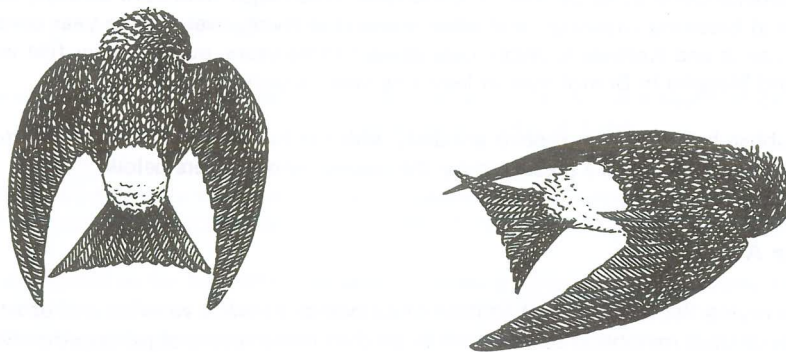
### Communal sunbathing by House Martins

As I drove through the village of Hawkesbury Upton, north Avon, on 23 August, 1980, I noticed a large flock of House Martins *Delichon urbica* circling around a barn straight ahead, beyond the road junction I was approaching. When stopped at the junction I noticed that many of the birds were settling on the red-tiled barn roof and that others already there were in sunbathing postures. I pulled back and parked the car in a position where I could watch the House Martins without disturbing them. It was 3.00pm on a fine sunny afternoon.

I estimated that there were approximately 300 martins settled on the sloping roof (which was about 7m x 3m). About a third of these birds were in sunbathing postures. There were an additional 100 or so birds flying nearby. Unfortunately, passing cars repeatedly flushed the martins although they quickly returned to the roof. On resettling one to several birds immediately adopted a sunbathing posture, quickly followed by more and more birds. Each sunbather was in roughly the same attitude with wings slightly splayed, tail fanned and upper-tail coverts raised. Head and neck feathers were also raised and the head was rolled over on one side (see Fig. 1). One or two birds remained as if transfixed in this posture even when the others were flushed and had flown off calling in mild alarm. When a small cloud obscured the sun all the House Martins immediately dispersed. However, during the short period that I had them under observation it was clear that the martins were very attracted to the roof all the time the sun shone on it. Most of the birds were juveniles.

Despite the brightness of the day it was only warm in places sheltered from the fresh NNW wind. The side of the roof being used by the birds faced roughly south and was thus out of the wind. The angle of the roof was such that at 3.00pm the sun's rays must have been falling almost perpendicular to it, no doubt heating the red tiles considerably. The combination of sheltered position, direct strong sunlight and heated surface must have provided ideal conditions for sunbathing.

Although sunbathing behaviour in birds is widespread I could find only two records of House Martins doing so. One was a sighting by J.C. Rolls, not detailed, in R.J. Kennedy's review of this subject (*Brit. Birds*



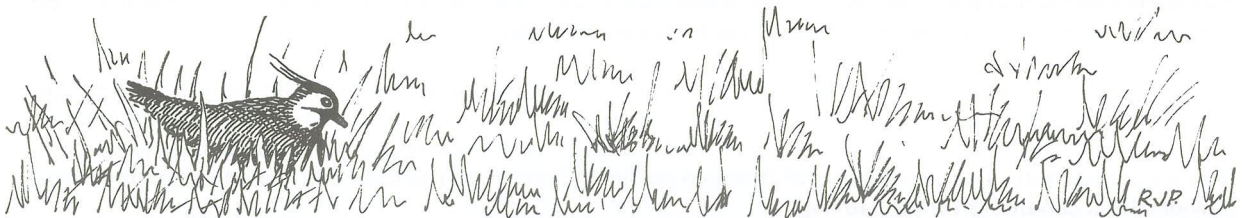
RJP

Fig. 1. Postures of sunbathing House Martins on a roof at Hawkesbury Upton, north Avon.



62(1969): 249-258). The other involved about 600 birds but the observer, Noble Rollin, noted very little sunbathing. The birds were settled on electricity cables and 'occasionally individuals postured' (*Brit. Birds* 41 (1948): 304-305). In his review, R.J. Kennedy points out that sunbathing is commonly recorded as a social act, often birds being stimulated by the sight of others posturing, whether of the same or a different species. My record involving hundreds of a single species might appear to be unusual, but the behaviour must surely be relatively common in such a social bird. I have traced only one other similar record: Bernard King saw some 300 Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* ... 'many of them were ... obviously sunbathing', at Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset (*Brit. Birds* 63 (1970): 37-38).

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## FIELDWORK, 1980

In 1979 the General Committee decided to undertake three major fieldwork surveys, each starting in 1980. These were to be on a) breeding Lapwings (and other waders) in Avon, over a three year period, b) breeding season Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels in Avon, over at least three years, possibly over five years, and c) breeding Carrion Crows and Magpies in Bristol over at least one year, hopefully more.

We hope to publish brief progress reports annually with the full results detailed in *Bristol Ornithology* when appropriate. The first year's results are presented by the respective organisers below.

### Lapwing breeding survey in Avon, 1980.

The task of surveying the breeding distribution of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and other waders in Avon is to be achieved by means of Club members' records (sent in on *Bird News* record slips) together with similar information from members of the Bristol Naturalists' Society. It is hoped that a full picture can be built up over a three year period. No local survey of breeding waders has been made since the British Trust for Ornithology Atlas survey of 1968-72 which was based on .10km squares of the National Grid.

I decided to use a 1km square basis (on the same grid) for the records, which would give a reasonably detailed picture over the county. I asked for sightings to be located by a six figure Grid Reference; this gave a unique position and reduced the possibility of confusion when more than one observer reported from the same general area. These records were plotted on a map (Fig. 1) to give an impression of the distribution. A 1 km square was considered to be occupied, whether it contained one pair or twenty pairs. The results of the first year's survey work were:

1980 : 115 pairs recorded in 42 squares.

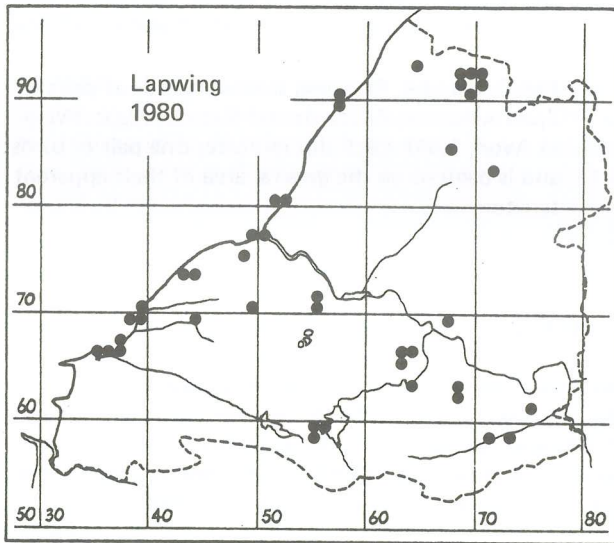


Fig. 1. Distribution of breeding Lapwings in Avon, 1980. Each dot indicates a 1 km square in which Lapwings bred.

The distribution map shows some significant patterns with apparently large areas completely devoid of breeding Lapwings, most notably large areas to the north and east of Bristol, along the eastern border (south Cotswold ridge) and low lying land in the south west. The occupied squares have shown an emerging pattern with three distinct areas:

1. Coastal region from Avonmouth to Woodspring Bay (including the Gordano Valley):  
14 squares = 33% of total
2. An area bounded by Aust – Charfield – Yate:  
9 squares = 21% of total
3. South-eastern corner of the county (Keynsham – Paulton and south of Bath):  
10 squares = 24% of total

There are also other more scattered sites in an area between Long Ashton, Chew Valley Lake and Weston-super-Mare. Densities varied greatly with the highest at coastal and low lying sites with 75 pairs (65% of total) at an average of 4.7 per 1km square, compared with inland/upland sites with 40 pairs (35% of total) at 1.5 per 1km square.

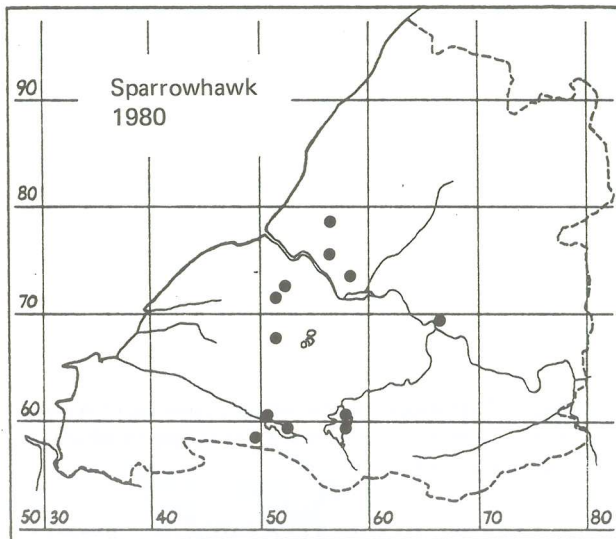
Results received so far for 1981 have already added a lot more and hopefully 1982 will see a concentration on areas which have obviously been under-recorded, e.g. Kenn Moor, Puxton Moor and the Cotswold ridge. Thanks are due to all the Club members who submitted records without which the survey would not be possible and to Harvey Rose who provided information from B.N.S. members.

David Payne.

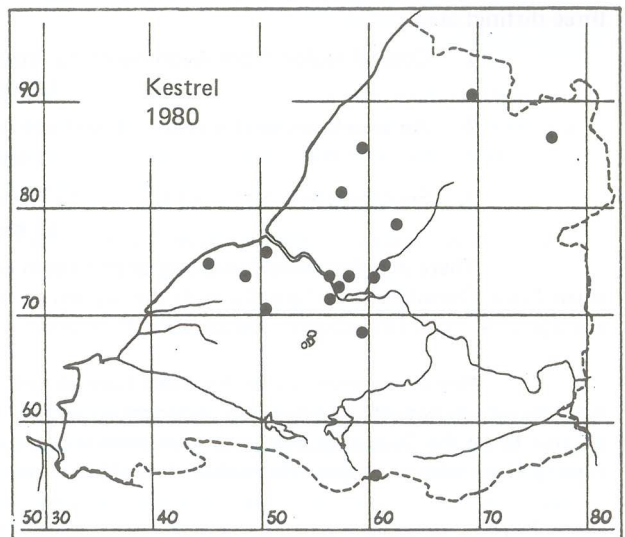
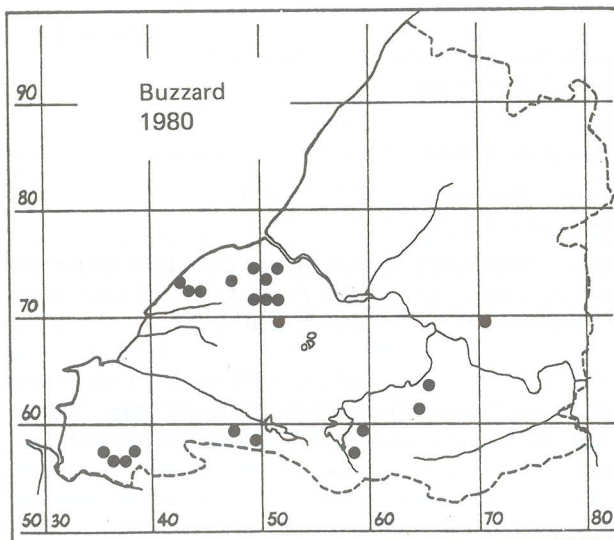
### Breeding season Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels in Avon, 1980.

The objective of this survey is to map the pairs of Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus*, Buzzards *Buteo buteo* and Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in Avon during the breeding season. Pairs do not have to breed successfully to qualify; the minimum requirement is that a pair maintains a 'breeding season' territory. At the other extreme a family party late in the season would also indicate a positive record.

I extracted the information mostly from *Bird News* record slips. Members were asked to make extra notes, such as Grid Reference, display, territorial encounters, food carrying and flight direction. The Grid Reference is the single most important piece of extra information; without it the record is often almost valueless. I also asked



Figs 2, 3 and 4. Breeding season records of pairs of Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels respectively, in Avon, 1980. Each dot indicates one pair of birds and is centred on the general area of their apparent territory.



those members specially interested to carry out extra fieldwork. This they did very willingly and I am grateful to them. They and others who have helped will be fully acknowledged in the final account. The results for 1980 were very encouraging and if subsequent seasons are as successful we should be able to present a very complete picture at the conclusion of the survey.

**SPARROWHAWK.** Records from March to July were asked for. Fig. 2 shows 12 definite pairs including three in Bristol. There were 15 additional suspected sites for pairs, most of which will hopefully be confirmed in the coming years.

**BUZZARD.** Records from March to mid August were asked for, although territorial activity can be seen even earlier, particularly during good weather in February. At the end of the season young birds often stay with their parents into September, sometimes even later. Fig. 3 shows 22 definite pairs. There were seven additional suspected sites and four single birds were holding territories.

**KESTREL.** Records from March to July were asked for. Fig. 4 shows 17 definite pairs, nearly half of them in Bristol. In addition there were 36 suspected sites. This species could well turn out to be the most difficult to cover thoroughly. Hunting birds are conspicuous but beyond that observations often lead to frustrating results. There were massive clusters of records at certain points along the M5; whether they will reveal breeding pairs time has yet to tell.

Robin Prytherch.

#### Breeding Carrion Crows and Magpies in the City of Bristol, 1980

A survey of nesting Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* was organised and the results plotted on a grid representing 1 km squares. Members of the Club were responsible for one or more squares and their efforts were supplemented by casual records and organised searches in under-reported areas. Nest sites were recorded in so far as the observer was able to identify the tree species. A parallel survey was undertaken by the Bristol Naturalists' Society in which nesting Magpies *Pica pica* were recorded, and information was exchanged between the two surveys.

The City boundary bisects a number of 1 km squares but if squares which are more than half within the City are counted and those less than half within the City are ignored one arrives at a total of 113 squares. On this basis, 152 Carrion Crow nests were confirmed within the City, giving a density of 1.35 nests per square kilometre. The Magpie survey revealed 103 nests at a density of 0.9 nests per square kilometre.

There are in fact 85 squares wholly within the Bristol City boundary (i.e. not bisected by the boundary). Table 1 shows the number of nests per square for both species, using these squares only.

**Table 1.** Number of nests per square

Number of nests	Carrion Crow	Magpie
0	30 squares	43 squares
1	24 squares	19 squares
2	14 squares	17 squares
3	8 squares	4 squares
4	3 squares	2 squares
5	5 squares	0 squares
6	1 square	0 squares

There were 14 squares containing nests of neither Carrion Crow nor Magpie. The most prolific square contained eight nests — five of Carrion Crow and three of Magpie, in Arno's Vale.

An analysis of nesting sites was also undertaken. One pair of Carrion Crows nested on a gasometer, and another pair tried (but failed) to nest on a signal gantry at Temple Meads station. The remainder confined themselves to nesting in trees, the most popular being: Oak *Quercus robur* 30%; Plane *Platanus hybrida* 14%; Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* 12%; and Lombardy Poplar *Populus nigra* 11%. By comparison, the Magpie survey revealed that 56% nested in Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*.

Alec Kirchner and Don Walter

## CLUB ACTIVITIES, 1980

A marked revival in fieldwork and a record number of thirty meetings combined to make 1980 stand out as an especially busy year for the Club. Details of the Club's surveys and the results for 1980 are given in the fieldwork reports above; many of the lessons learned will be invaluable for future years particularly as several of the surveys will require several seasons to build up a complete picture.

The Club worked closely with other organisations during the year, liaising regularly with the Bristol Waterworks Company to help the interests of birdwatchers and birds at Chew Valley Lake and co-operating with the Bristol Naturalists' Society in the production of the Avon Bird Report. In addition, representations were made to the authorities concerned on such diverse but bird-orientated subjects as a new yacht mooring at Clevedon, the Severn Barrage and threatened woodland at Henbury.

The Club suffered an unhappy loss in October, with the death of Stanley Crick. The announcement of a fund to be set up in his memory was made at the Annual General Meeting.

There were 22 field outings during the year, to venues both new and familiar. Among the old favourites were the New Forest, Steart, Brean and Radipole, while other destinations ranged from Gare Hill for a beginners' meeting to the Royal Portbury Dock. Longer trips were made to Stodmarsh, for a week-end in May, and to Holy Island for a week in October.

Indoor meetings were similarly varied, with one of the most memorable being a talk without slides or notes by Alan Mitchell, on Birds and Trees.

Club membership for 1980 stayed around the 550 mark, with the RSPB film show once again producing welcome funds.

### Indoor meetings

Held at St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple School, they were:

- 17.1.80 Starlings — Dr. Chris Feare
- 14.2.80 The Little Owl — Derick Scott
- 13.3.80 Birds and Trees — Alan Mitchell
- 18.9.80 The Great Grebe Winter — Richard Chandler
- 16.10.80 Expedition to Antarctica — Bob Bell
- 13.11.80 Redstarts — Bob Morgan
- 11.12.80 Annual General Meeting at Clifton R.F.C.

### Publications

*Bird News* continued to be published monthly, and *Bristol Ornithology* 12 appeared at the beginning of the year.

Mike Lord *Honorary Secretary*.

