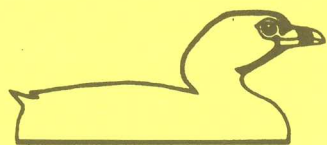


BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



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BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

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PREFACE

Although produced exclusively by members of the Bristol Ornithological Club, the scope of *Bristol Ornithology* 15 is as great as ever, ranging as it does from Severn Beach to Ben White's Racing Track in Florida. Andy Davis has contributed a paper on migration over Keynsham which is supplemented by a note from Malcolm Sainsbury who himself wrote about visible migration along the shores of the Severn in *Bristol Ornithology* 5. John Waldon's observations on Stone Curlews appear at an appropriate moment since Club members on field excursions have come across this bird in Suffolk and Majorca recently. Bristol's new dock, Royal Portbury, has clearly had a major effect on the wildlife in the old St. George's Wharf area, and Mike Dorgan and Gordon Youdale's continuing study will surely yield more of interest in future issues of *Bristol Ornithology*.

I would like to thank the members of the editorial committee for all of their hard work for, unlike waders, they certainly have not had the time to rest on their tarsi! Thanks too to the illustrators, the contributors of notes, those who have undertaken or organized fieldwork, and last but by no means least Chris Newman for his mammoth task in producing such a first class review of 1981.

Don Walter

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A REVIEW OF 1981

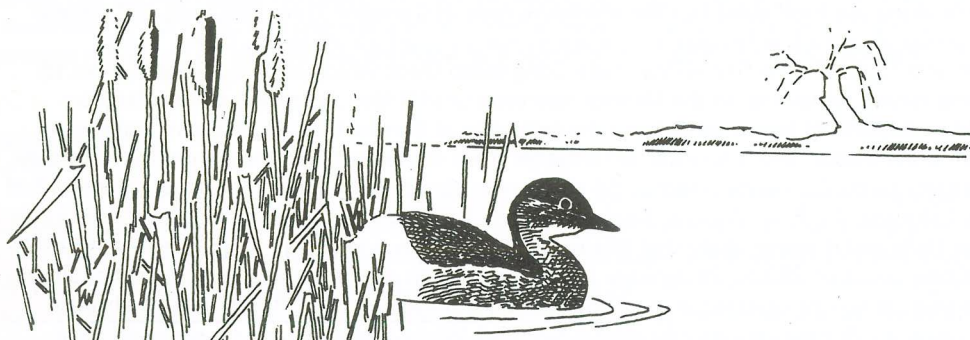
by Chris Newman

As in the past two years, the area dealt with by this review consists of the County of Avon and the northern half of Somerset, south to the Bridgwater area and east to the Wiltshire border as depicted in the sketch map in *Bristol Ornithology* 13 (1980) : 77. Certain terms which have become standard in past reviews are continued here. The Mendip reservoirs cover those at Barrow Gurney, Blagdon, Cheddar and Chew Valley. The Levels refer to the peat moors and heaths in the part of Somerset referred to in the review. The Channel extends from the Bridgwater Bay area to Severn Beach (this last name is also used to cover observations from nearby Chittingen). Royal Portbury Dock includes St. George's and Portbury Wharves.

Species are generally listed according to the Voous (1977) sequence but, as birds do not always follow such lists in their activities, unrelated species are sometimes taken together where this assists in providing a clearer record of associated occurrences. Records are taken mainly from those submitted by some 118 contributors for our monthly report *Bird News*. Some of the more interesting records are indicated in bold type. My thanks go to Antony Merritt and Keith Vinicombe for their constructive criticisms of an earlier draft and also to those 25% of the Club membership who took the trouble to submit record slips in 1981. (One brief note to the other 75% – if you live in the area or even visit it occasionally, why not note down your sightings and send them in? It need not involve much of your time and every additional record can help to produce a fuller picture of our area, and there are plenty of localities which receive little or no coverage from observers).

The first winter period

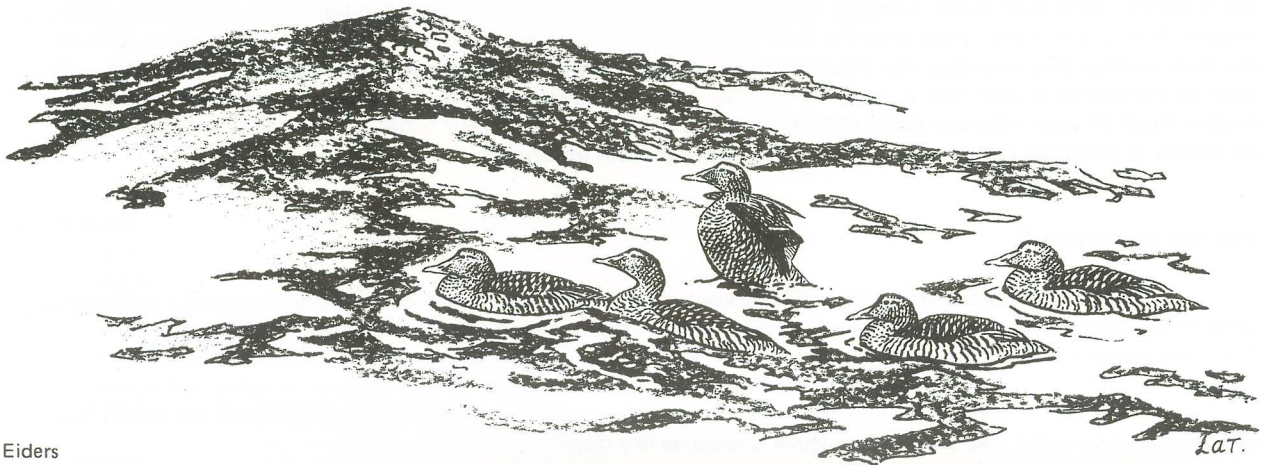
The mild weather which ended 1980 continued into January and February with a westerly airstream producing above-average temperatures and an unproductive period for birds. There was a brief change in mid February giving a short spell of night frosts, with snowfalls on 21st and 22nd, but these soon dispersed with a return to milder conditions. March was one of the wettest on record with rain on 22 days, creating widespread flooding by the second week. This was accompanied by strong westerly winds and it was not until the end of the month that some relief was provided by three successive dry days!



Little Grebe

Traditionally this review should start with diver records but the winter was so quiet that no reports were received of either divers or any of the rarer grebes. Small groups of Little Grebes were well distributed around the area but the highest number of Great Crested Grebes was 25 at Cheddar Reservoir in February. Numbers of Cormorants at Chew Valley Lake were yet again reduced with a maximum of 30, being only a third of those present in January 1977; the continued shooting of this species at Chew seems questionable. For the second winter running no Bitterns were reported in the area.

Durleigh Reservoir again attracted numbers of Bewick's Swans from the south Somerset Levels with 91 there on 14 February. A few small groups of White-fronted Geese were seen along the coast and a dark-bellied Brent Goose *B.b. bernicla* was at Steart on 7 April. Feral geese were represented by single Greylags at Royal Portbury Dock and Chew with the latter also having up to 113 Canadas and 3 Barnacles. Overall duck counts both on the coast and inland were disappointing. An estimated 3500 Wigeon were at Steart in January but numbers at both Blagdon and Chew were again low, with maximum counts of 270 and 383 respectively. The status of this species at the Mendip reservoirs has undergone a definite change since the early 1970's considering that even in the exceptionally mild winter of 1973/74 the count at Chew alone was over 1000. The reasons for this decline have still to be fully explained. Pintail were scarce with the highest count at Durleigh being only 12, very much lower than the concentrations reported from there in recent years. Respectable numbers of Pochard were recorded with possibly 1000 in the area in January, including large flocks at Barrow Gurney Reservoirs and Blagdon Lake, as well as 160 regularly roosting at Buckland's Pool. The highlight of the winter was the appearance of several **Ring-necked Ducks**. The two first-winter males which had appeared at Orchardleigh Lake in the previous November remained throughout the winter (gradually attaining adult plumage) and commuting between the Lake and nearby Marston Park from where they were finally reported on 29 March. Other sightings of adult males occurred at Chew on 8 February and Durleigh from 7-14 March. A female 'Scaup-type' *Aythya* hybrid was present at Chew throughout the winter and two additional female Scaup-like hybrids were present at Bristol Bridge in January.



Eiders

Eider are scarce along our local coast but the immature male at Clevedon from 1980 was still present on 9 January and a small group of up to five females or immatures again turned up off Breaun Down, being reported between 8 March and 15 April. The first-winter male Long-tailed Duck which arrived at Cheddar on 18 October 1980 proved a long-stayer, remaining on the Mendip reservoirs until 9 May, patronising both Blagdon and Chew as well as Cheddar. Reports of Smew came from the reservoirs at Barrow Gurney, Blagdon and Chew Valley. All reports were of 'brownheads' and it is uncertain whether these concerned just one wandering individual or two or three more sedentary birds. Goosander reached 54 at Chew in March and further reports were received of birds moving between the Lake and the River Avon at Saltford. Ruddy Ducks continue to increase; the local wintering flock has quadrupled since 1976 and it seems likely that this expansion still has a long way to go (see *Brit. Birds* 75 (1982) : 1-11). A record Chew count of 383 on 24 January (with over 500 on all the Mendip reservoirs) has already been broken in less than a year, as will be revealed in the 1982 review. A presumed male Ruddy x White-headed Duck hybrid appeared at Chew on 28 February shortly after a reported 'White-headed Duck' disappeared from Blithfield Reservoir, Staffordshire. In the meantime, Coot continue to be our most numerous inland water bird, with between 2000 and 2500 present in February.

Moving away from the water to birds of prey, a single male Hen Harrier was seen in the Combwich area during January and February, while Peregrines and Merlins were recorded from both inland and coastal locations with possibly seven or eight birds of each species present. Only one Short-eared Owl could be found, a single at Steart on 1 February.

Like other groups, waders were present in lower numbers owing to the mild weather but one missing individual is worthy of special note. There have been no winter reports of the Steart Avocet since November 1980, so that the chain of sightings going back to 1952 may finally be at an end. Could it be that the same individual has been involved in all those years? Highest counts of both Golden Plover and Lapwings came from Tealham and Tadham Moors but were unexceptional, with 600 and 3000 respectively. Knot are more often expected on the north side of the Channel, but even so the seven reported from our side were a low number; there were also three Purple Sandpipers at Severn Beach and a Little Stint at Steart. Amongst the estimated 20000 Dunlin along the coast many reports were received of dye-marked and colour-ringed birds, resulting from various research projects. Ruff reached a maximum of nine at Chew, while up to 25 Jack Snipe were discovered in suitable sites, with Woodcock at a further four. Godwits seemed particularly scarce, with records of just two Black-tailed and up to eleven Bar-tailed at Steart; the same location had nine Spotted Redshanks in January, when a solitary Greenshank was seen at Royal Portbury Dock. Some 20 Green Sandpipers and six Common Sandpipers overwintered, while a maximum of 150 Turnstones was present at Severn Beach.

The Chew Valley roost can usually be relied upon to produce a few unusual gulls, but this year just one adult Mediterranean Gull was sighted on 17 January and again on 23 and 28 February. On 2 March, what was undoubtedly the same bird was seen at Blagdon Lake. A first-winter **Glaucous Gull** turned up at Portishead on 25 February and a first-winter Kittiwake was also seen here on 7 January. Auks are uncommon along the Channel and a recently dead Guillemot at Sand Bay on 22 February may have been the victim of the isolated spell of harsh weather at that time.

The recent occurrences of Shore Larks spending the winter on our coast continued with three at Stolford from January until at least 22 March. Water Pipits *A.s. spinoletta* were reported during the winter period, as were Black Redstarts, with three at Avonmouth Docks and singles at Portishead Power Station and Weston-super-Mare. Numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings were low, with the largest flocks being only 750 and 300 respectively. As is now expected, Blackcaps wintered in good numbers with at least 34 being reported, while up to eight Chiffchaffs were encouraged to risk the unpredictable British winter. At Berrow one, and possibly two, Firecrests were present on 4 January while up to six Bearded Tits 'pinged' in the reed beds at Chew. There were two intriguing records of Ravens from the Wells area which, if repeated, could herald a welcome return; a further report of the species came from the Avon/Gloucestershire border, where it may have been visiting from across the River Severn. Bramblings were more widespread than usual, with the largest flock being 175 in the Claverton Down area of Bath. Siskins also appeared in large numbers with small flocks reported throughout the area and an Avon record count of 180-200 along the River Avon between Keynsham and Saltford on 14 February equalled the largest number previously recorded in the old County of Somerset (150-200 at Chewton Mendip in 1971). Redpolls were as widespread as Siskins, but in much lower numbers, no flock exceeding 30. The usual party of Twite wintered at Portishead (with a maximum of 13 birds) and one was also recorded at Severn Beach. Evidence of the small population of Corn Buntings remaining on Mendip was provided by a report of a single bird on 28 February

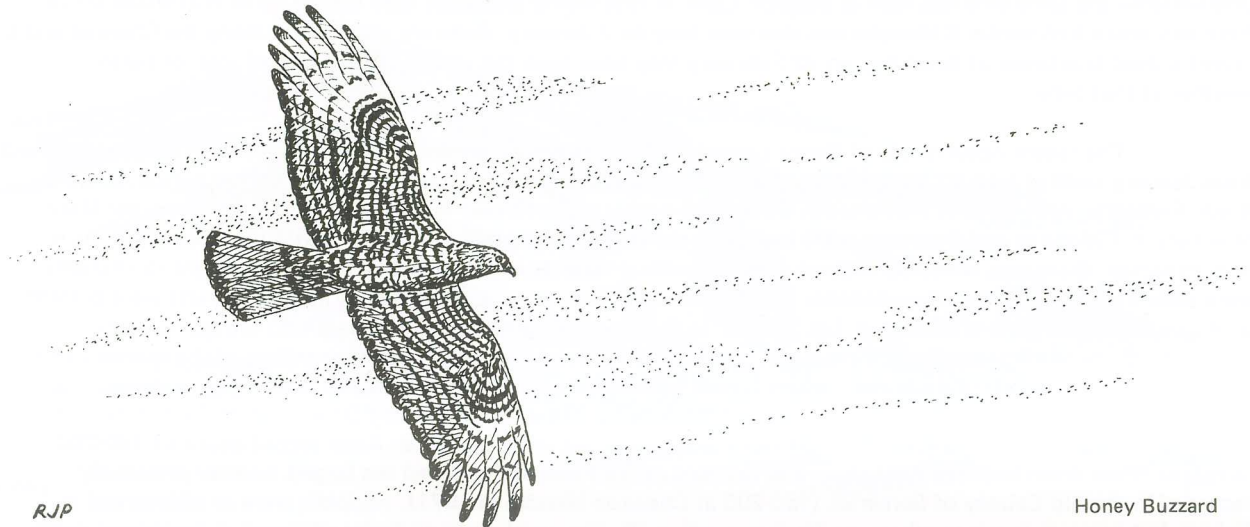
Spring migration

A series of anticyclones covered the country for much of April, producing a period of settled weather but accompanied by east and north-easterly winds with night frosts so that many migrants were in short supply. A brief spell of warmer southerly air in the second week brought a change but this was shortlived with a return to the previous conditions, which worsened on the 25th and 26th with northerly gales bringing unseasonal heavy snow. This cleared within a couple of days but low temperatures continued and as the wind moved to the western quarter, rain followed, and seemed to be with us for most of May, with a total of four inches recorded. Sunshine brought a brief respite on 10th and 11th as a significantly warmer air mass arrived from southern Europe across the North Sea, but the remainder of May stayed damp, windy and cold, discouraging both birds and birders alike.

This section starts, as did the last, recording an absence of divers and the rarer grebes. Fulmar records on the coast began with a dead bird at Sand Bay on 14 March and thereafter one to three birds were reported on nine occasions until 2 June. The gales at the end of April produced an unusual record of a tired-looking Fulmar at Chew between 26th and 29th. When last seen, it was actively feeding on the surface of the Lake and seems likely to have

survived. Accompanying the Fulmar on 26th were at least 50 Kittiwakes which had been blown inland by the same gale and produced a record spring count for the Lake. Other seabirds arrived later with a total of some 70 Manx Shearwaters in the Channel between Bridgwater Bay and Brean Down during the period 3-9 May. Two days within this period were particularly productive for seabirds for one observer. Berrow gave him six Gannets, 31 Common Scoters, three Arctic Skuas, two Great Skuas and two Sandwich Terns on 4 May only one day after he had turned up a single Arctic Skua, four Great Skuas and 33 Kittiwakes at the Parrett Estuary.

On 10 May a **Purple Heron** was present in the Gordano Valley. Amongst the ducks, Garganey were scarce with a solitary male at Chew on 17 April, although a more fortunate bird on Westhay Moor two days later was accompanied by two prospective consorts. Seven female Scaup visited Cheddar Reservoir on 14 April but two males and a further female found Chew more to their liking, staying from 16th to 30th, with one male still present on 2 May. Movements of Common Scoter started early with a male at Chew on 28 February but the usual passage occurred between 31 March and 4 May. Besides those already mentioned at Berrow on the last date a further 16 were seen in the Channel, with an additional record of one at Chew on 18 April.



Honey Buzzard

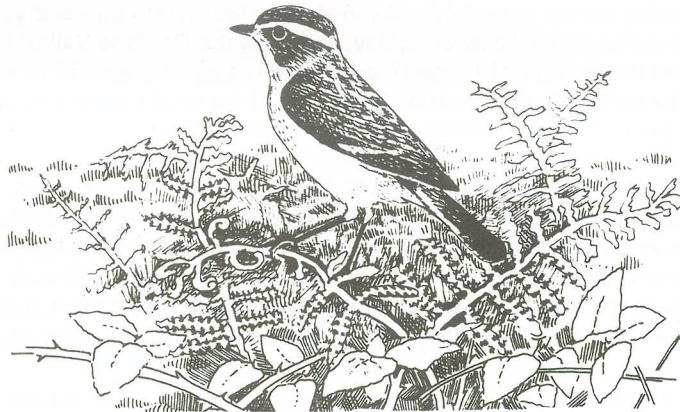
Unusual birds of prey were few and far between — no Ospreys or Red Kites were reported this spring, but there were single sightings of a **Honey Buzzard** at Portishead on 17 May and a female or immature Marsh Harrier at Chew on 3 May, while the previous day a ring-tailed harrier, thought to have been a Hen Harrier, was seen at Sand Point. The first Hobby was recorded in the snow of 26 April!

As well as an Avocet at Steart on 7 April, wader passage produced sightings of about fifteen Little Ringed Plovers along the coast and at the Mendip reservoirs from 14 April onwards, but the highpoint had to be the two male **Kentish Plovers** which appeared at Berrow on 15th and 16th; after a gap of seven years this is the second successive spring in which this species has turned up in our area. Berrow continued to hold most of the more interesting waders, with the only records of Knot and the highest count of Sanderling, 80 on 16 May. Inland the water level on the reservoirs was typically high and five Sanderling at Chew on 30 May were the best of the few birds which managed to find somewhere to land — the maximum counts of Dunlin here and at Cheddar reached a peak of two! Back on the coast, two Purple Sandpipers visited Sand Point in April, but the lack of godwits continued, with only eight Black-tailed being reported and a maximum count, at Berrow, of 26 Bar-tailed. Whimbrel numbers also seemed low, with the prime passage time of the species coinciding with the worst of the spring storms so that the maximum count was only 408 at Huntspill on 6 May. The coast provided three records of Spotted Redshank and four of Greenshank, while a Wood Sandpiper was present at the Brue Estuary on 22 April. The

reservoirs could still accommodate Common Sandpipers and after an influx in the last week of April that part of Cheddar's concrete bowl still above water contained 46 on 29 April and 45 two days later.

Only three records of Little Gulls made it a very quiet spring for this species, with two first-years at Cheddar and one at Berrow all between 4 and 19 April. Counts of Common/Arctic Terns were also low, with not many more than 100 being seen on the coast and only 16 on the Mendip reservoirs – a far cry from the two day period of 4-5 May 1980 when there were 345 off Severn Beach and 132 at Chew. Black Terns were even scarcer, with the only sightings being at Chew: up to six on 9-10 May and one further bird on 4 June.

The first influx of passerines occurred on 14 March with the first Wheatear and good numbers of Chiffchaffs. There was then a typical lull until the short fine spell at the end of the month, by when Swallows, House Martins, Tree Pipits, White Wagtails *M. a. alba*, and Willow Warblers had all begun to arrive, as well as the first of some eight Ring Ouzels; the records of this species included an unusually late male on Black Down on 29 May. The brief period of southerly winds during the second week of April brought in the next main wave of migrants with most species appearing during the period 9th-16th, providing early first dates for Whinchat (9th), Grasshopper Warbler (9th), Sedge Warbler (14th), Reed Warbler (16th) and Lesser Whitethroat (14th).



Whinchat

There were no large falls reported, but further unusual records were a male Blue-headed Wagtail *M.f. flava* at Clevedon on 18 April and a possible Grey-headed Wagtail *M.f. thunbergi* at Cheddar Reservoir on 19 May, while a Wood Warbler, a difficult species to see on migration, was at Berrow on 16 April.

Except for those observers who had the good fortune to make regular visits to Berrow, the spring of 1981 could best be described as 'disappointing' with cold and damp hours in the field producing little except a vague feeling that things could only improve later in the year.

Selected breeding species

The first half of the year was the duller and wettest for forty years and a series of depressions from the Atlantic continued to produce unsettled westerly weather in the first two weeks of June, after which an anticyclone to the west produced a cool north-westerly airflow which persisted to the end of the month. July also began with unsettled weather but, apart from a brief spell of warm southerlies in the second week, most of the remainder of the month saw a return to cool but dry north-westerly winds.

For the fourth summer in succession the water level at Chew remained high and grebes again did well with 25 of some 35 pairs of Little Grebe successfully rearing at least 47 young, while 115 young Great Crested Grebes were produced from 53 broods. This high water level, however, probably caused flooding of many wildfowl nest sites and the cool weather probably also depressed productivity. No young Canada Geese were seen and numbers of Gadwall and Mallard broods were low, with only six and 32 respectively. Garganey again failed to breed; the last confirmed record was in 1978, and the news that only three pairs were proved to breed in

the whole of the United Kingdom in 1980 (*Brit. Birds* 75 (1982) : 159) raises fears that we may have lost this attractive summer migrant as a local breeding species. No Shoveler bred this year, but Pochard produced five broods, the same number as Tufted Ducks, which continue to show a spectacular decline as a breeding species. In earlier years over 30 broods were regularly expected and in both 1961 and 1971 over 60 pairs were successful. Ruddy Ducks had their most productive year since 1973, with six broods providing 16 young.

The survey of breeding raptors in Avon continued in 1981 and combining the sites discovered in the year with those already established in 1980 produced totals for proved and probable pairs of 56 Sparrowhawks, 41 Buzzards and 74 Kestrels (see p.174/5). The last species may still be under-recorded owing to difficulties in establishing territories but two years ago few people could have guessed the size of the Buzzard population in the county. Hobbies were reported from at least 16 locations, an encouraging total even if some reports may have referred to birds on migration.

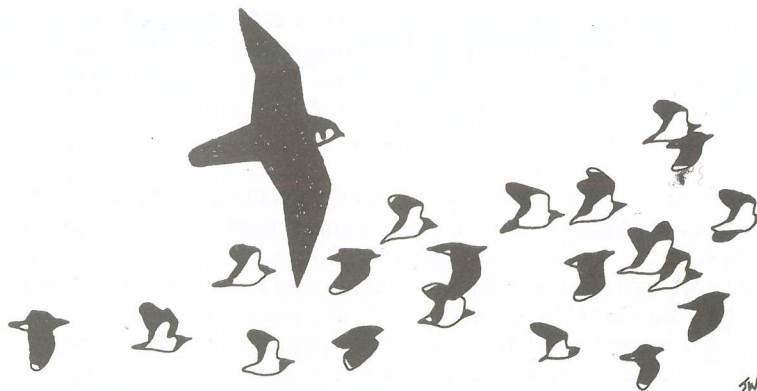
The areas frequented by game birds are often not thoroughly covered by birdwatchers and there are therefore problems in establishing precise numbers but there is some evidence that Red-legged Partridges are increasing in our area, with sightings for the first time exceeding those of Grey Partridge, involving some 19 areas as against 17 for the latter species. No reports of Quail were received, but Water Rails were recorded at Berrow in May and June. The breeding survey of waders in Avon also carried on into a second year and indicated that the coastal region from Avonmouth to Woodspring Bay, including the Gordano Valley, is the prime area holding two pairs of Little Ringed Plover, four of Ringed Plover as well as six of Snipe, 38 of Redshank and a single pair of Common Sandpipers. The same area also contained over half of the total Lapwing population, which was estimated to be in excess of 200 pairs. The only summer records of Woodcock came from Shapwick.

Certain species are uncommon or under-recorded in our area and of these Turtle Doves were reported from eleven localities in the breeding season, while Barn Owls were recorded throughout the year at seventeen. Nightjars were present only at Shapwick. Observers seldom overlook Kingfishers and the 27 reported sites are probably a more accurate reflection of their density than the 14 localities at which Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were recorded. The unobtrusive nature of the latter species means that it is possibly overlooked more often than any other regular breeding bird. Dippers were discovered at 16 sites, most of them as usual on the streams south of Bath.

Of the summer passerine migrants, Nightingales appeared to have a second good year with some 38 singing birds reported at nine sites, while Redstarts again bred on Mendip. Wood Warblers were scarce, the effect of the bad weather being exacerbated in at least one site by damage to habitat. The *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1976) showed Tree Sparrows as present in all the ten kilometre squares in our area, but during the 1981 breeding season records were submitted for only six areas and it appears that this species, although often overlooked, is undergoing another of the inexplicable fluctuations in numbers which occasionally affect it. Redpolls again provided a hint that they breed locally, six being seen at Rowberrow in June, while there was an intriguing record of a Siskin in the Gordano Valley on 21 June. Hawfinches were observed carrying nest material at one regular locality but no evidence of successful breeding was obtained. A small population of Cirl Buntings still maintains a toehold in the area and at least four singing males were recorded at traditional breeding sites, while the commoner but locally distributed Corn Bunting was reported from the Mendips, Marshfield and at two sites near Bath.

Other midsummer observations

Numbers of Manx Shearwaters in the Channel off Brean Down were lower than the last two years, with 173 on 4 July and 202 on 1 August. On the last date 41 Gannets were also observed moving up the Channel. Two Flamingoes at Steart from 26 to 2 August were no doubt escapes, while feral geese involved four Greylags and two Barnacles moulting at Chew. A female Wigeon was also here on 20 June, while a first-year male Goldeneye summered, and provided the first July record of this species at the Lake. Two female Goosander which had sustained injuries also spent all summer here. The seemingly endless capability of ducks to produce hybrids to confuse observers was confirmed in June when a female at Chew was diagnosed as a Red-crested Pochard x Mallard!



There were several summer sightings of Peregrine, an adult Mediterranean Gull was reported at Steart on 24 July, and a Guillemot was in Sand Bay on 13 June. Concentrations of Swifts feeding at Chew reached 10000 on 25 July while Berrow continued its good run with a Golden Oriole on 28 June. Eight Crossbills were sighted at Stock Hill on 23 July.

Late summer moult gatherings and the autumn migration

August was dominated by a series of high-pressure systems producing mainly dry settled conditions. Winds were predominantly light and north-westerly, veering to the south-west in mid month; the last week produced a period of light easterlies. These continued the warm weather into the beginning of September but after the first week low pressure became established although the fronts from the Atlantic were generally weak with fairly light winds. This changed from the 18th when vigorous depressions crossed the country, bringing periods of strong westerly winds and heavy rain. October remained unsettled with low pressure and winds still from the west and north, although brief periods of easterlies did arise, particularly in the third week.

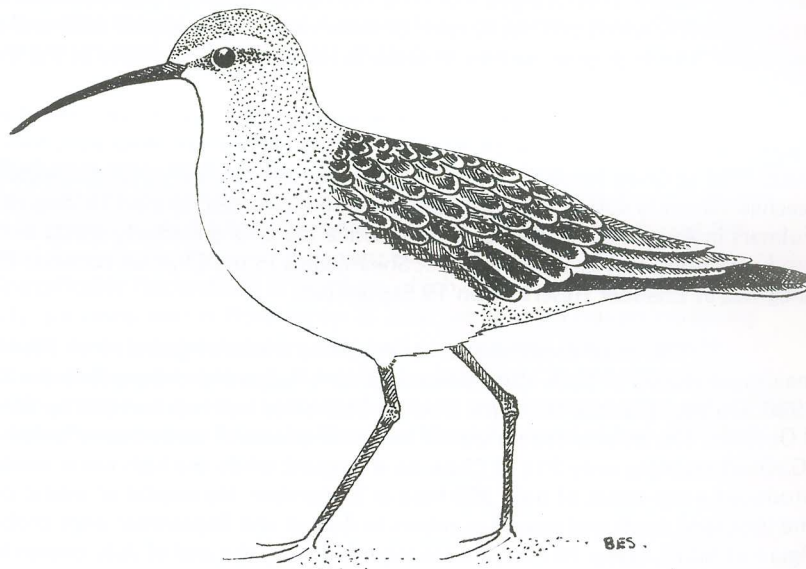
The end of this period completes ten months of the year and there were still no reports of divers although a juvenile Red-necked Grebe did brighten up Barrow Gurney Reservoirs for one day on 22 September. The high water level at Chew made it difficult to establish the number of Little Grebes present but the maximum count reached 70 while 450 Great Crested Grebes were counted here on 15 August. There were five coastal sightings of Fulmars in August and early September, while the strong westerly winds in late September and early October produced four records of single Manx Shearwaters in the Channel between Berrow and New Passage. A juvenile Shag was at Cheddar Reservoir on 19 September.

The usual concentration of moulting wildfowl gathered on the Mendip reservoirs, although at Chew maximum counts of both Mute Swans (98 on 4 August) and Canada Geese (117 on 7 July) were slightly down on 1980. On the coast the Shelduck flock at Steart had built up to 1600 by 25 August and was only 100 less on 3 October. The poor breeding season for some species of duck was reflected in low numbers later in the year (Gadwall reaching only 211 at Chew on 4 August) while the high water levels may have discouraged Teal, which produced a top count of only 350 here in September. No coastal or inland counts of Mallard managed to attain the thousand mark and overall numbers in August and September were probably some 1500 down on last year's figure of 5000. Some 70 Pintail were recorded from the end of July onwards, but Garganey were very scarce with no reports of more than two and probably only twelve birds involved in all. As a contrast, Shoveler seemed to have had a better year, with 430 present at Chew on 19 September. A male Red-crested Pochard at Cheddar Reservoir from 23 August was an expected annual visitor and it was joined by two more on 16 October, although the origins of all sightings of this species in Britain must be open to debate. Other diving ducks were well represented, with Pochard reaching 375 at Cheddar Reservoir in September, while Tufted Ducks produced a high count of 770 at Blagdon on 12 September; it is possible that almost 1000 were present here and at Chew, but disturbance at both lakes makes it difficult to establish the amount of movement between the sites. Scaup were in short supply, one at Avonmouth and two at Durleigh, but Eider continued to be seen off Brean Down with reports of up to six from

3 August into October. There was a good passage of Common Scoter this autumn, with 14 on the coast being eclipsed by 41 on the Mendip reservoirs, including flocks of 17 at Chew and eleven at Barrow Gurney in July. It would probably take a major disaster to affect Coot numbers and there were about 3000 on the reservoirs in September after the moult build-up in August had produced a count of 1560 at Chew on the 15th. A **Spotted Crane** was a rare visitor to Blagdon Lake on 12 September.

For those who look forward to autumn as an opportunity to watch passage waders, including perhaps the odd Nearctic vagrant, 1981 was not a year to have one of the Mendip reservoirs as your 'local patch'. Water levels remained abnormally high, with the notable exception of No. 3 Tank at Barrow Gurney, where remedial works produced an unexpected expanse of mud, and depression set in over the reservoirs as it became clear that few waders would arrive. There can be little doubt that the autumn of 1981 was the worst on the reservoirs since the similarly wet year of 1971 and observers were left to try and keep their feet dry and speculate on the luck of their more fortunate brethren on the coast where at least the water level goes down twice a day!

The main wader flocks frequented their usual locations. Oystercatchers reached 460 at Berrow on 13 September with 562 Ringed Plover here on 31 August and 180 Sanderling on 29 July. At Steart 230 Grey Plover were present in September and the Bridgwater Bay area also held 325 Knot at the end of October, while 1200 Curlew and 800 Redshank had been present at the end of August. The maximum count of Black-tailed Godwits here was 150 on 2 August, indicating that numbers have fallen for yet another year; it was only in the review of 1978 that a count of 620 was noted as the lowest since 1972. Royal Portbury Dock produced a late passage of 60 Whimbrel on 8 September, with a very late bird at Chew on 10 November, while Turnstones were present in good numbers at New Passage (120) and the Brue Estuary (165) in the last week of September. Most of the scarcer waders kept to the coast with seven of the twelve reported Little Ringed Plovers being there as well as all of the

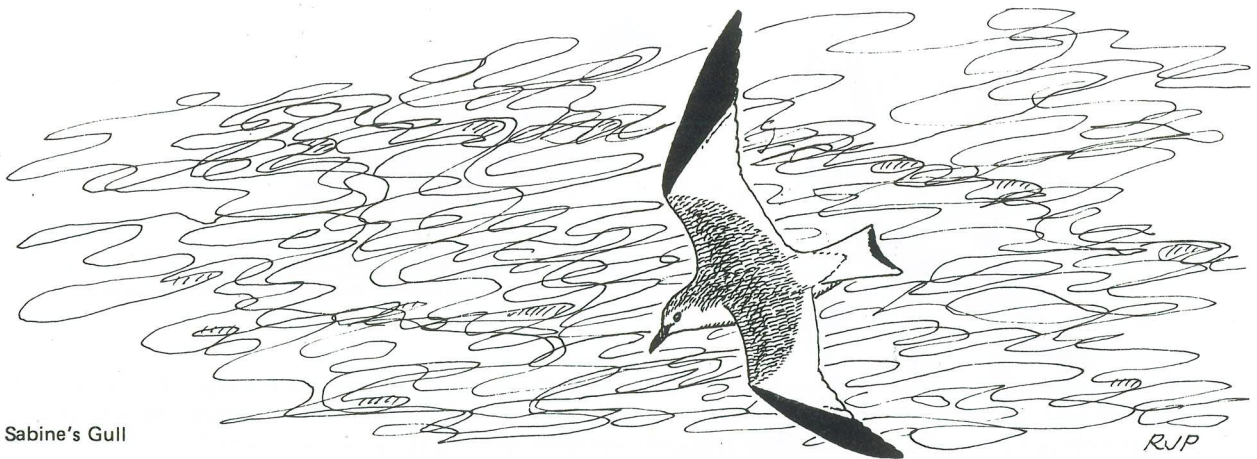


Curlew Sandpiper

Curlew Sandpipers, at least 40 of which passed through from 16 August onwards with one still on the Parrett Estuary until 18 November. Barrow Gurney No. 3 did produce ten Little Stints on 20 September, representing some 40% of all inland records, but this was overshadowed by 14 at Oldbury in the third week, with up to seven at six other coastal locations. Ruff could only manage a peak of 13 at Chew on 20 September, while Greenshanks reached the same number at Barrow Gurney, bettering the maximum of five at the other Mendip reservoirs, a drastic reduction from last year's one-day total of 40 at Blagdon. Both this species and Spotted Redshanks were

scattered in small numbers along the coast, except that the tendency of the latter to accumulate in small flocks in Bridgwater Bay was emphasised when a record Somerset count of 60 were seen together at Steart on 30 August, while 26 were still on the Huntspill River on 23 September. Green and Common Sandpipers were present in below average numbers, with the latter not able to repeat its spring peak. Only three Wood Sandpipers were reported, fitting in with reports from several parts of the country that the species was being seen in lower numbers than usual. No American waders have yet been mentioned in this report and, regrettably, although the gales at the end of September did bring a sprinkling of transatlantic migrants to Cornwall and other counties, none reached our area for the first time since 1972. An unexpected bonus did still arise, however, in the presence of a number of Grey Phalaropes; the first arrivals of this attractive and often very tame wader coincided with a national influx which included 200 off the Isles of Scilly on 23 September, although our figures were more modest, with single juvenile/first winter birds at Chew on 20th and 26th, and at the River Parrett on 23rd. In the next month the period from 10th to 13th produced singles at Stolford and the River Brue, an adult at Berrow and a juvenile/first winter bird at Cheddar Reservoir, with two more at Chew.

Skua passage in the Channel occurred from 8 September with two Great Skuas that month, followed by two more and an Arctic Skua between 9 and 12 October, although pride of place goes to a juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** reported from Aust on 4 October. At least 17 Little Gulls moved through the area (eleven of them at the reservoirs) while on 12 August Chew watchers were delighted to find two yellow-legged Herring Gulls (presumed to be of the Mediterranean race, *L.a. michahellis*) to take their minds away from the dearth of waders. The coastal



Sabine's Gull

watchers, though, had the final say on gulls when a juvenile **Sabine's Gull** was discovered in Bridgwater Bay on 2 October with possibly the same bird seen at Royal Portbury Dock on 4 October. Only three Kittiwakes were reported during the autumn. Fourteen Sandwich Terns were seen between 9 July and 11 October, while the main passage of Common/Arctic Terns produced 26 at Steart on 13 September. Of those specifically identified, there were 25 Commons at the River Brue with 21 more at Chew, all on 10 September. Nine Little Terns were reported, including one inland at Chew on 15 August, while movements of Black Terns between 30 July and 11 October reached a peak of 115 at Chew and 33 at Barrow Gurney on 7 September reported as 'a typical influx in the anticyclonic gloom around the period of the full moon!' Up to 12 were regularly present in the area of the River Parrett in Bridgwater Bay and this same location produced an adult **White-winged Black Tern** on 2 October (the same day as the Sabine's Gull) while a juvenile had been seen at Chew on 13 August, so continuing the annual occurrences since 1966 of this east European marsh tern in this area. All auk records were in October, with Guillemots off the Huntspill River (7th) and Sand Point (31st), and a dead Razorbill picked up at Weston (24th).

Swifts appeared to migrate early this year, with no records after 28 August. **Wrynecks** bred in our area until at least the 1920's but are now classed as a scarce migrant, so that four records during the autumn were quite an achievement. The first at Brean Down on 29 August was closely followed in September by sightings at

Westbury-on-Trym (5th), Chew (trapped on 7th) and Congresbury (14th-18th). Woodlarks have also recently disappeared as a local breeding species and the only record of the year was of one flying over Berrow during a migration count on 17 October, the same day that the last Sand Martin was seen over Brean Down. The organised counts on that day produced heavy numbers of House Martins moving north-east, away from an approaching rain front, with totals of 2000 and 2200 at Brean Down and Sand Point respectively, but these were well exceeded by 4550 during a five-hour watch at New Passage. It is also worth recording the number of Chaffinches seen moving in the same direction during that time: 8000 at New Passage, considerably more than the 1000-1200 at the previous two sites or the 1800 at Royal Portbury Dock. During August 164 Sedge Warblers and 79 Reed Warblers were trapped and ringed at Berrow, no doubt representing migrant birds as well as a proportion of the local breeding population.

Other scarce and late migrants included White Wagtails *M.a. alba* at I.C.I. Severnside Works (17 September) and the Brue Estuary (19 September), a female Black Redstart at Stockwood (19 October) and a Ring Ouzel on Brean Down (15-17 October) while the same site also produced a Chiffchaff resembling the Scandinavian race *P.c. abietinus* on the last date as well as a late Willow Warbler on 25th. A Firecrest was discovered at West Huntspill on 30 October while previously Pied Flycatchers had been seen at Brean Down (1 September) and Odd Down, Bath (7 September) but the three rarest passerines of the autumn confirmed that 1981 was the year to be on the coast. A **Melodious Warbler** at Berrow on 27 August was a good start, but ten days later the Brue Estuary was the site for the fourth Somerset record of **Ortolan Bunting**, only to be surpassed on 17 October by a first for Somerset in the shape of a long overdue **Yellow-browed Warbler**, which was closely observed on Brean Down.



Yellow-browed Warbler

A Raven was sighted over the River Parrett on 21 September, while Lapland Buntings flew south over Berrow and Brean Down on 17 October with another at the Axe Estuary on 24th, the same day that a female Snow Bunting was discovered there.

The second winter period

In early November an anticyclone to the east produced a sunny and dry but cold spell with light easterly winds. By the end of the second week these had changed to south-westerly and north-westerly winds which continued for the rest of the month. Pressure remained high, producing mild conditions which did not change until the end of the first week of December, when a high over Greenland produced clear skies and extremely low night temperatures, dropping to below minus 10°C at times. On the evening of the 10th several inches of snow fell in the north of our area but did not penetrate south of the Mendips; before this could clear a severe blizzard on 13th blanketed the area only for a heavy rainstorm to melt much of the snow in the Bristol area that same evening. Gale force westerly winds, combined with an exceptional high tide and the melting snow, caused serious damage and widespread flooding along the coast. Snow still persisted in many areas, clearing only slowly, and the remainder

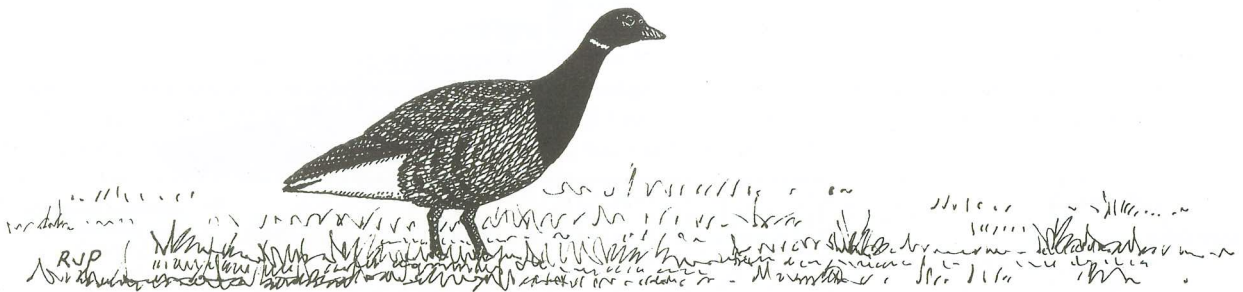
of the month continued cold, but with cloud and fog preventing the recurrence of extremely low temperatures. Twenty four hours of rain on 29th-30th produced additional flooding in some areas.

Divers do still visit our area — single Great Northern were at Blagdon between 20 November and 6 December and on the River Brue on 29 November. The scarcer grebes also managed further appearances: a Slavonian visited Chew for one day on 1 November, a Black-necked was at the same site from 21 November to 8 December and a Red-necked also appeared there on 28 December and remained into 1982, while one of the two Slavonians which had been first sighted at Cheddar Reservoir on 21 December was still present on 31st.

A freshly dead Fulmar was found on Weston Beach on 7 November and the first Bitterns for two years were reported, with one at Chew from 17 December and a second also there by 31st, with both staying into 1982, and one at Royal Portbury Dock on 29th.

Bewick's Swans were recorded in small numbers at eight localities from 1 November, the highest count being 28 on Tealham/Tadham Moor in December. Two Whooper Swans were on Tealham Moor from 17-25 October and a single bird was sighted on the River Parrett on 2 December. In November the only report of White-fronted Geese was of nine flying over Chew on 7th but after the hard weather in December groups were spread along the coast with the largest flocks being at Severn Beach (24), Royal Portbury Dock (29), Gordano Valley (56) and

Dark-bellied Brent Goose

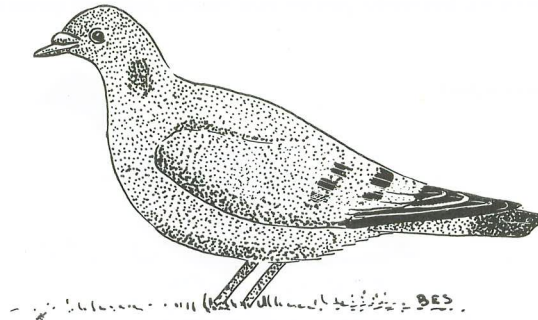


Berrow (49). A single Brent Goose of the dark-bellied race, *B.b. bernicla*, was at Chew on 28 December. No high counts of either Wigeon or Teal were reported, but 500 Shoveler were at Chew on 18 December. One of the male Red-crested Pochards remained at Cheddar Reservoir through December into 1982 while Pochards reached a high total of 660 at Blagdon on 6 December, mainly birds displaced from Cheddar by weekend sailing activity. Three *Aythya* hybrids were reported, Pochard x Tufted males at Blagdon and Cheddar Reservoir with a 'Scaup-type' female at Chew. One Eider was still off Brean Down on 22 November and six females moved south past Berrow on 17 December. Over-wintering by Long-tailed Ducks in recent years continued with a first-winter male staying at Cheddar from 16 October into 1982 and there were records of six Common Scoter with three off Brean Down (7 November) and singles at Steart (1 November), Severn Beach and Chew (both 17 December). A 'brownhead' Smew turned up at Blagdon on 19 December but had moved to Chew by 28th, while single Red-breasted Mergansers were at West Huntspill (10 October) and Sand Bay (29 November), as well as Chew where a 'brownhead' arrived on 31 October and remained into 1982. Goosander reached 57 at Chew in December while 18 seen flying south-west over Keynsham were undoubtedly part of the now accepted traffic between the Lake and the River Avon. At Blagdon, Ruddy Ducks totalled 330 by 19 December, including the hybrid male Ruddy x White-headed Duck first reported in February; there were 380 at Chew on 31st. Coot reached a peak of 2377 at Cheddar in November with 2335 still present on 12 December. At least 29 Water Rails wintered with double figures being recorded from both Chew and Berrow.

There were 20 records of Hen Harrier from nine areas but these may have involved only three or four birds, including one male, with most sightings being in the region of Royal Portbury Dock or the Steart/Berrow

area. All except four sightings occurred after the snowfalls. Merlins were reported at eleven sites from September and Peregrines from at least ten from August while about a dozen Short-eared Owls were at ten locations between 15 October and 31 December.

On 12 December ahead of the worst snow of the period, 3000 Lapwings were at Clewer while 4000 moved south over the Axe Estuary at the rate of 1000 per hour, figures which were dwarfed by a two-hour watch at Berrow when 1169 Golden Plover, 15500 Lapwings and 110 Snipe were counted also moving south. Among more sedentary waders up to three Purple Sandpipers appeared at Severn Beach, six Woodcocks were sighted at widespread locations and eleven Spotted Redshanks were at Steart on 15 November with one still present on the River Parrett on 2 December. Other scarce waders included five Sanderling, five Ruff, 26 Jack Snipe and two Common Sandpipers. After strong overnight winds a Great Skua was discovered dead at Chew on 28 November, only the third record for the Lake, while the gull roost here produced two adult Mediterranean Gulls on 29 November and singles on 3 and 8 December. First-winter Little Gulls were at Cheddar Reservoir (4-9 November) and Chew (16 December) while the latter continued to provide records of yellow-legged Herring Gulls on three dates with an additional report coming from Weston Beach in November. A heavily oiled Kittiwake was at Cheddar on 28 November and a dead Guillemot was found on Weston Beach on 7th, although a live one was seen off Steart on 29th.



Stock Dove

The southerly movement on 12 December involved species other than waders: 400 Stock Doves passed Severn Beach and three hours at the Axe Estuary gave counts of 500 Woodpigeons and the same number of Sky-larks. Uncommon winter visitors included single Shore Larks at Berrow on 15 November and again between 15 and 23 December, as well as one at Stolford on 3 December, and a very tired **Richard's Pipit** at Cheddar Reservoir on 12 December; reports were also received of ten Black Redstarts, 27 Blackcaps and 12 Chiffchaffs.

Heavy movements of winter thrushes took place. After the first records in mid October, it was suggested that numbers arrived early this year and certainly there was a large nocturnal passage of Redwings in the first week of November and on 22nd, 2000 Fieldfares and 1000 Redwings flew over Chew, with these numbers being reversed at the Cam Valley, south of Bath. As with so many other species, the real movement took place on 12 December: 4000 Fieldfares and 2000 Redwings passed over the Axe Estuary, although at Berrow only 1500 Fieldfares were seen, but in a two hour period these were accompanied by the incredible figure of 16300 Redwings, an average of well over 100 a minute.

Bramblings were scarce, no flock exceeding 30, but Siskins were again numerous, a record Chew count of 120 in late November looking small beside a new Avon record count of 263 at Saltford on 23 December, which easily outstripped the previous best set only ten months earlier. Twite returned to the coast with Portishead (11) again providing the highest record, while no Redpoll flock exceeded 20. A Lapland Bunting was at Severn Beach on 18 December and Snow Buntings were at the same site as well as the I.C.I. Works at Hallen and Steart (3) in November. Corn Buntings appeared to be moved by the hard weather; after a single at the Brue Estuary on 1 November there were eight reported from 22 December onwards, from Saltford and Sand Bay as well as the Brue.

MIGRANT BIRDS OVER KEYNSHAM, AUGUST 1975 TO SEPTEMBER 1982

by A.H. Davis

Observations of migration in the Avon, Somerset and Gloucester area have tended to be centred on the coast and at the major reservoirs, particularly Chew Valley Lake. This site is a useful stopping-off point for many migrants, being especially useful for wildfowl, waders, terns and warblers. Very little is known about the routes taken by birds to reach or leave the lake but there do seem to be some preferred lines of approach and departure, rather than just purely broad-front movements to and from all points of the compass. Since 1964 I have occasionally seen wild swans, geese, waders and winter thrushes arriving from the north-east and flying in over the North Shore, Hollow Brook or the East Shore of the lake. Waders have included Green Sandpiper *Tringa ocropus*, Greenshank*, Curlew, Golden Plover, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, and Lapwing. On 14 August 1979, for example, a party of 35 Golden Plover and six Grey Plover flew across the lake, arriving from the north-east and disappearing high to the south-west towards the Mendips, while on 10 September 1966 a party of 16 Curlew and four Whimbrel flew off high to the north-east at Twycross. One conclusion is that these birds had flown or were about to fly along the general line of the River Chew which provides a flyway to the north-east.

Since August 1975 very casual observations from the southern edge of Keynsham have revealed that many birds fly over the town and disappear to the south-west presumably heading towards Chew. (Most birds use the same flight-line as a small gull roost movement during the winter months. See King (1973) for details of a related movement of Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* from the Saltford area towards Chew). Birds have been observed moving south or south-west over the southern edge of the town in a narrow band limited by Queen Charlton to the west and the B3116 to the east, along the general line of the River Chew. Figure 1 shows the general topography of the area. Some movements of migrants such as Meadow Pipits and winter thrushes have been seen at

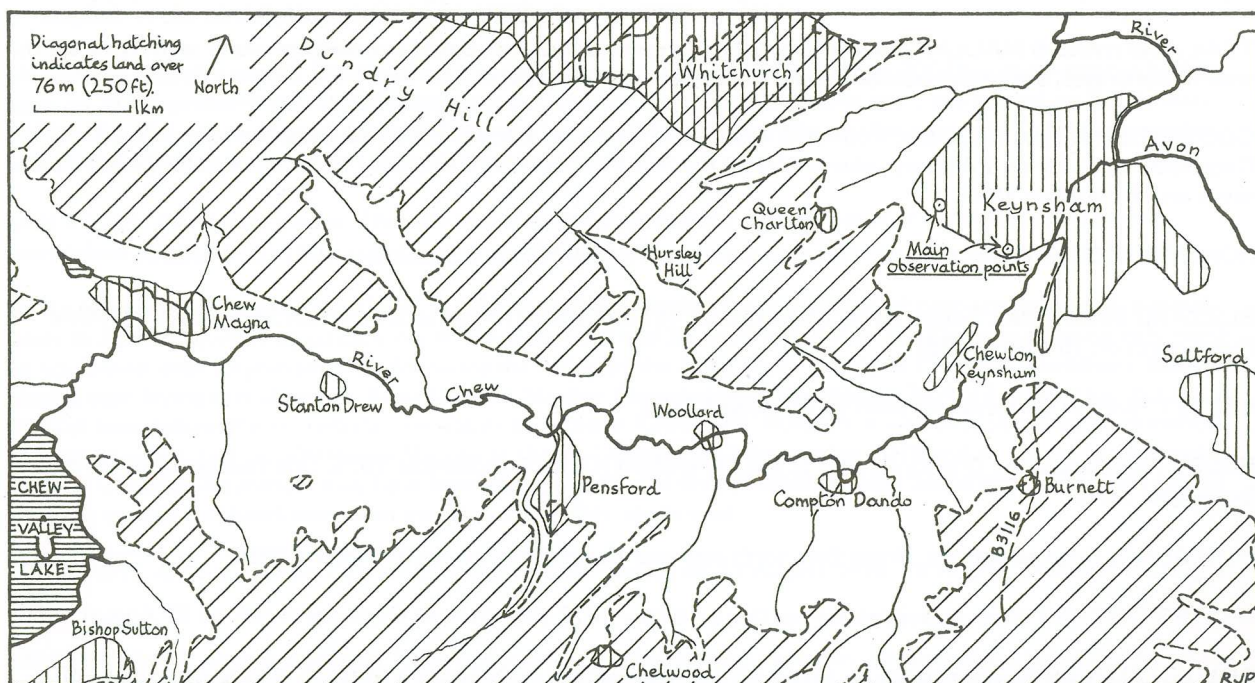
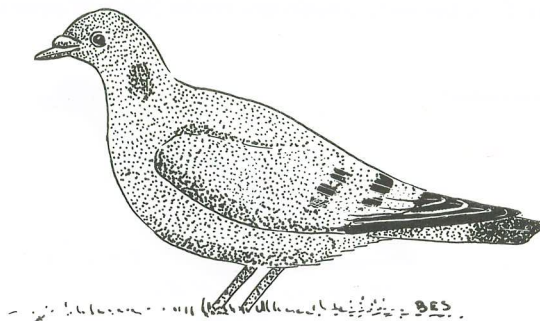


Fig. 1. Map showing main features of the area under observation around Keynsham.

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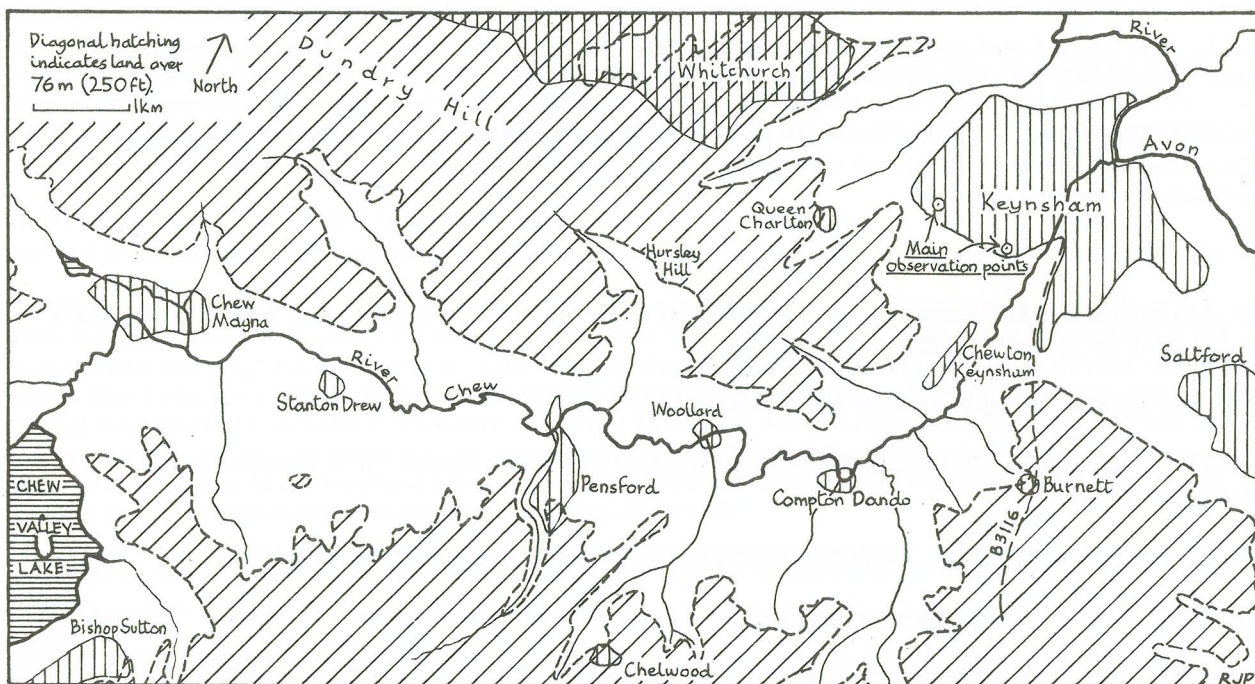


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the top of Hursley Hill so presumably some birds, if not all, fly to the highest ground (between Hursley Hill and Woollard), then follow the lower land to the River Chew at Pensford and then move south-west over the low land to reach the north-east or eastern shore of Chew. This is the actual flight-line used by the gulls which pass over Keynsham during the winter. To a lesser extent some birds have been observed flying in the opposite direction along this route, disappearing to the north-east over Keynsham. Some birds such as hirundines seem to follow the River Chew even more closely. The following list gives details of selected species seen flying over Keynsham or the area immediately to the south. The direction of flight in south-west unless otherwise specified.

Selected list of birds seen

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Four on 2 January 1979, with one north-east on the 5th. One north-east on 26 January with another south-west on 21 September 1980.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*. Single north-east on 18 September 1979. One on 6 August 1980 and again on the 10th. Singles on 8 May and north-east on 9 September 1981. In 1982 one flew north on 9 April, two flew north up the River Chew towards Keynsham on 19 April, one moved north-east on 25 July and four flew north-west on 7 August.

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*. One north-east on 22 April 1982.

BEWICK'S SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*. Three on 21 January 1976. Ten on 28 December 1981.

GREY GEESE *Anser* sp. About 20 on 16 January 1982.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*. Nine over Queen Charlton on 12 June 1976 (Somerset Bird Report — no flight direction given); 19 south at Chewton Keynsham on 12 December 1981.

TEAL *Anas crecca* & MALLARD *A. platyrhynchos*. Occasional very small parties noted, generally seen flying south-west or north-east, the largest numbers being 12 Mallard and four Teal.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*. Four on 1 April 1979. Three on 4 April, ten on 19 December, eight on 20 December 1981. Six on 7 January, plus singles on 8th and 11th, four on 5 February with singles on 12th and 28th, seven on 18 February 1982.

HONEY BUZZARD *Pernis apivorus*. One flew west over Hursley Hill on 4 September 1981 (D. Warden).

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*. Singles flying north-east on 14 February 1976 and south-west on 27 August 1977. One flying north on 25 August 1982.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*. An adult on 25 August 1982.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*. One flying west at top of Pensford Hill on 6 September 1975. One flew south on 23 September 1979.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*. Single flew north-east over Queen Charlton on 20 January 1980.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. One on 9 May 1978 with another single north-east on 27 August 1980.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. About 40 on 31 December 1978 during a blizzard. Ninety with flocks of Lapwings on 7 January 1982, which was the day before heavy snow hit the area.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. Heavy movement west/south-west on 31 December 1978 during a blizzard, 1700 being

counted in one hour. On 7 January 1982, 1000 per hour were moving south-west with smaller movements on the subsequent two days during snow: 150 per hour on 8th and 80 per hour on 9th. A small movement involving groups of up to ten birds flying south-west on the afternoon of 13 June 1981, a day when 425 passed in the same direction over Chew. In 1982, 19 were noted on 17 June going south-west and 35 on 27 June going north-east. Occasionally very small groups seen during the spring moving south-west and odd parties noted occasionally during the late autumn and winter months.

SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*. One high to the north-east on 20 December 1981.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. One on 25 August 1980. Thirteen flew south-west along River Chew on 15 August 1982.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*. Singles on 21 July 1976 and on 25 May 1981.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. One on 25 July 1982.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*. One on 8 September 1981.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*. One on 26 July 1981. This species is regularly observed during the migration period by the River Chew or River Avon in the Keynsham area.

WADERS spp. A wader flying south-west in the early hours of 27 September 1980 gave a soft 'wit' call, low in tone, every few seconds, reminding me of a phalarope *Phalaropus* sp. Another unidentified small wader seen on 28 August 1979.

SWIFT *Apus apus*. About 120 over Chewton Keynsham on 29 July 1981 may have been passage birds as only 20 seen on the next day. Eleven seen going south-west on 13 August 1982 (local birds departed during the first week of August). A late bird flying south-west on 19 September 1982.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*. Two hard-weather movements: the first in 1978 when 200 flew south-west in half an hour on 31 December (1000 south/south-west at Chew in one hour on the same day); the second on 8/9 January 1982 when 100 in one hour on 8th and 70 in one hour on 9th. Occasionally smaller parties in October-December, usually flying south-west.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*. The odd bird seen in spring moving quickly north or north-west. Probably overlooked.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica* & HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*. Small numbers of both species noted in most years in April/May, moving quickly north. Birds on 19th and 24 April and 3 May 1982 were moving quickly north or north-west over Keynsham after following the valley of the River Chew closely at Chewton Keynsham. Both species seen flying east along the River Chew at Stanton Drew towards Pensford on 24 April, suggesting that some birds at least follow the immediate river valley to arrive at Keynsham. Autumn movements obscured by presence of local breeders, but ca. 100 House Martins at Queen Charlton on 3 September 1979 and ca. 80 on 18 September 1981 at Chewton Keynsham may have been passage birds. On several dates through September 1982 small groups of up to twenty Swallows were seen moving very swiftly south-west.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*. One on 29 August 1982. Singles on 13 August 1978, 28 August 1980 and 29 August 1982.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*. Recorded moving south-west every autumn, extreme dates being 22 September and 30 November. Rarely detected during spring passage although grounded birds seen on two occasions in March. Interesting movement north-east on 12 October 1980 when parties of up to 40 seen moving north-east along East Shore of Chew, top of Hursley Hill, Queen Charlton and across Keynsham, the movement at Keynsham continuing for much of the day.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*. Singles noted mid August 1977, 14 August and 8 September 1979, and 24 August 1980. In 1981 singles noted on 21 August and 21 September, with a party of nine on 23 August, a day on which small numbers were recorded at Chew. In September 1982, one on 11th, five on 12th and two on 19th.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*. Two records of single birds flying high to the south-west in mid October 1980. Other singles, again south-west, on 21 July and 5 and 10 September 1982.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*. Small daytime movement north-east on 27 October 1980. On 1 November 1981, 40 flying south-west. Heavy movement on 22 November 1981 when 1300 counted flying south/south-west in one and a half hours during the late morning at Herriotts Bridge, Chew. Flocks mixed with Redwings appeared over Wick Green Point/main reedbed area and continued south or south-west. Flocks of up to 50, again sometimes mixed with Redwings, were seen flying south-west over Queen Charlton, Hursley Hill and Keynsham during the same afternoon. Birds were still moving over Keynsham at dawn on the next day.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*. Often noted moving south-west in October-December, usually during cold weather. Major daylight movement on 22 November 1981 (see above). At Chew 2500 were counted flying south/south-west with Fieldfares during one and a half hours in the late morning. Flocks involved in the same south-westerly movement were observed during the afternoon at Queen Charlton and Keynsham.

JAY *Garrulus glandarius*. One high to south on 13 April 1979.

FINCHES spp. Occasionally small flocks or single birds of Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*, Goldfinch *C. carduelis*, Siskin *C. spinus* and Linnet *C. cannabina* seen flying mainly south-west in autumn/early winter, but birds may be local breeders. No significant movements noted.

Obviously some of the birds noted above were moving only short distances along the flight-line, such as the Grey Herons and the Goosanders which have been seen heading for Chew after feeding on the River Avon between Keynsham and Saltford. The majority of records, however, suggest that the flight-line is of more than local importance. Several interesting questions are raised by these observations. For instance do the birds moving south-west at Keynsham all originate from the River Avon to the east or have some flown southwards along the Cotswold escarpment or even south-east across east Bristol to reach Keynsham? Also, are some of the birds seen arriving along the East Shore of Chew also using the Avon valley but cutting along the line of the A368 through Marksburly-Chelwood or more directly westwards across the Timsbury-Chelwood area along the Midford and Cam Brooks? We know very little about the inland flight-lines used by migrants in our area but with the concentration of observers in the Bristol district it ought to be possible to elucidate some of the problems raised by this study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank John Aldridge, Roger Palmer and Malcolm Sainsbury for the use of their records.

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OBSERVATIONS ON BREEDING STONE CURLEWS

by John Waldon

The Stone Curlew *Burhinus oediconemus* is now a rare breeding bird in Britain but a few are still to be found on the Breckland in East Anglia, chalk downland elsewhere in southern England and increasingly on the arable land that now replaces their traditional habitat. In 1982 I studied several pairs to ascertain their relationship to this changing habitat. During this study I was fortunate to observe several of the breeding and defence displays of this fascinating bird. Although there is an outline of the bird's behaviour in *The Handbook* (Witherby *et al.* 1943), it hardly does justice to its subtle and often complicated mating displays. The bird's reaction to possible danger was often spectacular and deserves a fuller account than that found in the available literature.

Stone Curlews return to their breeding grounds in late March or early April and nesting occurs soon after. On arable land the majority of clutches found were estimated to have been laid in mid April, the mean date of the first egg recorded over three years being 18 April. This may differ slightly from those birds on Breckland where 17 April was thought to be an early date (Glue and Morgan 1974). The breeding season can be a long one and, owing to replacement and second clutches, may last into August. It might be worth emphasising this long breeding season as it increases the chance that visiting birdwatchers may cause disturbance to the nesting birds at a time when nesting is not suspected.

Displays prior to nesting

While observing three pairs of Stone Curlews it was noted that display began six days before the first egg was laid. The same period of time was recorded during the reneating of one pair after the loss of their chicks. Courtship display was seen at dawn and dusk and usually occurred in the vicinity of the future nest, although one pair did display in a field adjacent to that where the nest was situated. No consistent differences in plumage between male and female birds were observed but there were considerable individual variations in plumage, especially on the wing coverts, and this allowed individuals to be identified; after copulation was seen the birds could also be sexed. The most obvious indication that a pair was engaged in courtship display was the male strutting around the female and the surrounding area with his tail raised (Fig. 1). Both birds may be feeding at this time and on several occasions the male fed the female, placing earthworms delicately on the ground in front of her.

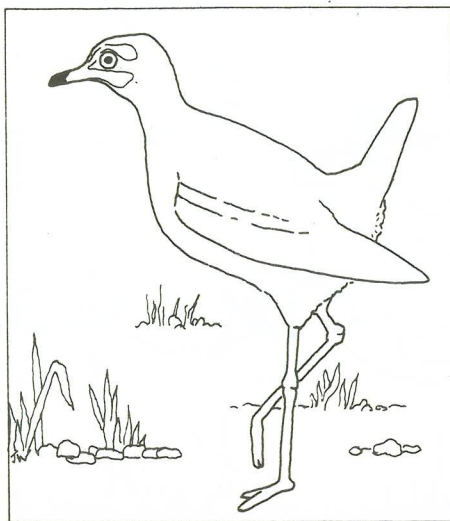


Fig. 1. Male with raised tail.

An unmated male was also seen to walk around a feeding area with raised tail when no female was present. The male may also raise his tail while leading the female over potential nesting sites. At such sites the male settled on the ground and with his feet began to scrape a slight hollow; the female walked slowly to the male and stood close to him. When he rose the female immediately settled into the scrape and enlarged the hollow. While this was happening the male walked away, usually to about 10m and began to scrape. After two or three minutes the female walked to the male and the procedure was repeated. This activity could last up to 1 hour and the area of ground covered was considerable, an area of 500 square metres being found to contain scrapes. During scraping one bird occasionally bowed to the other (Fig. 2). The birds also picked up small stones near to the scrapes and placed them closer to them. During incubation the number of small stones placed in and around the nest increased.

Mating was observed early in the morning and at dusk. On one occasion there was a little display before copulation. The birds were feeding at opposite ends of a field when one flew to an area where the birds had been scraping the previous day. The other bird ran to join its mate and both birds stood parallel and bowing to each other. Both birds remained motionless for 30 seconds before copulation occurred (Fig. 3). After mating the birds

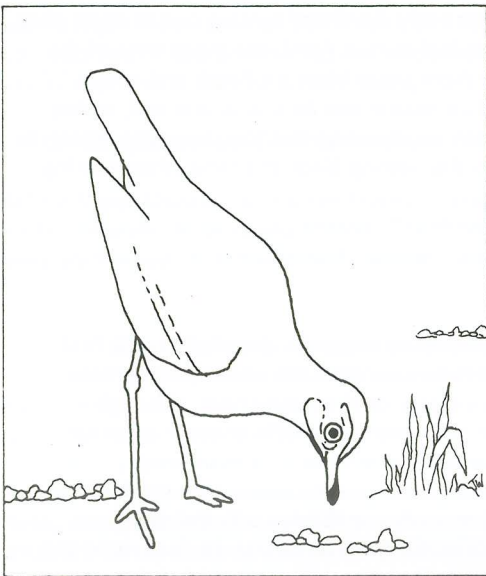


Fig. 2. Male bowing to female.

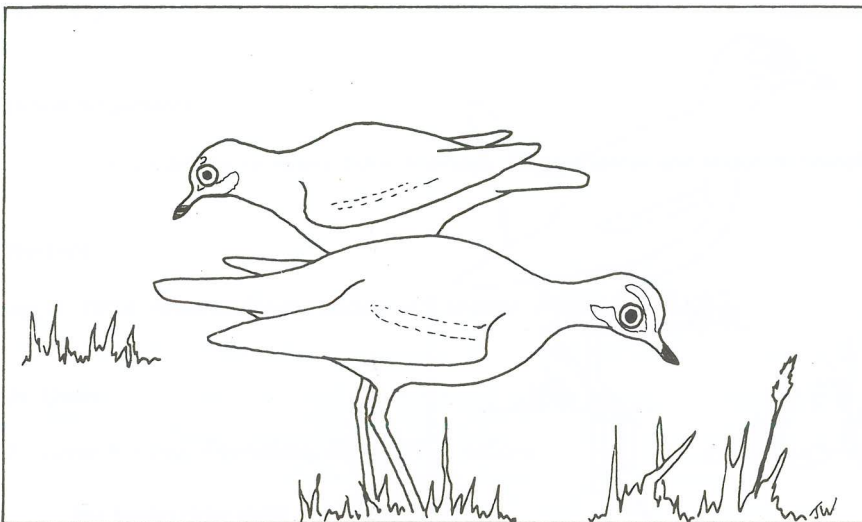


Fig. 3. Display prior to mating.

stood apart for a further 30 seconds and then walked in opposite directions. Within a few minutes the male fed the female and then with tail raised led his mate to a suitable spot to begin scraping. On another occasion a pair that had been involved in scraping suddenly stood parallel with bowed heads and facing in opposite directions. Copulation followed and then the female began preening, the male immediately flying out of the field. At another time the birds stood parallel to each other, vibrating their wings, but copulation did not follow. No similar displays were seen after the completion of a clutch. During all observations prior to nesting the birds remained silent and only on a few occasions were Stone Curlews heard calling at night. This appears contrary to the traditional image of the birds calling frequently and I suspect may be linked with the much reduced population where there is less need for a pair to mark its territory vocally.

Displays during incubation

The only activity that could be referred to as a display at this time was a 'dancing' type of flight that several birds exhibited after a change over at the nest. The brooding bird would rise and the other bird would settle on to the eggs; the former would then walk a few metres and then with raised wings and fanned tail leap into the air twisting and turning. This activity only lasted for about 20 seconds but it appeared incongruous for a bird usually so careful not to draw attention to itself to produce such an eye catching display so close to its nest. The bird's startling black and white wing markings could be seen from a considerable distance.

Occasionally during incubation a third Stone Curlew would be seen close to a pair and their nest and was tolerated to within 20m. This bird was probably one too young to breed: Stone Curlews are thought not to breed until three or four years old (R. Morgan *pers comm.*). One of the pair (unfortunately its sex unknown) after a change over, ran towards the third bird. When it was 1½ metres from the intruder the nesting bird froze, turned and slightly raised its wings and bowed its head (Fig. 4). After 30 seconds the bird relaxed and both then settled into the crop. I suspect that this posturing involved the female of the pair and another male.

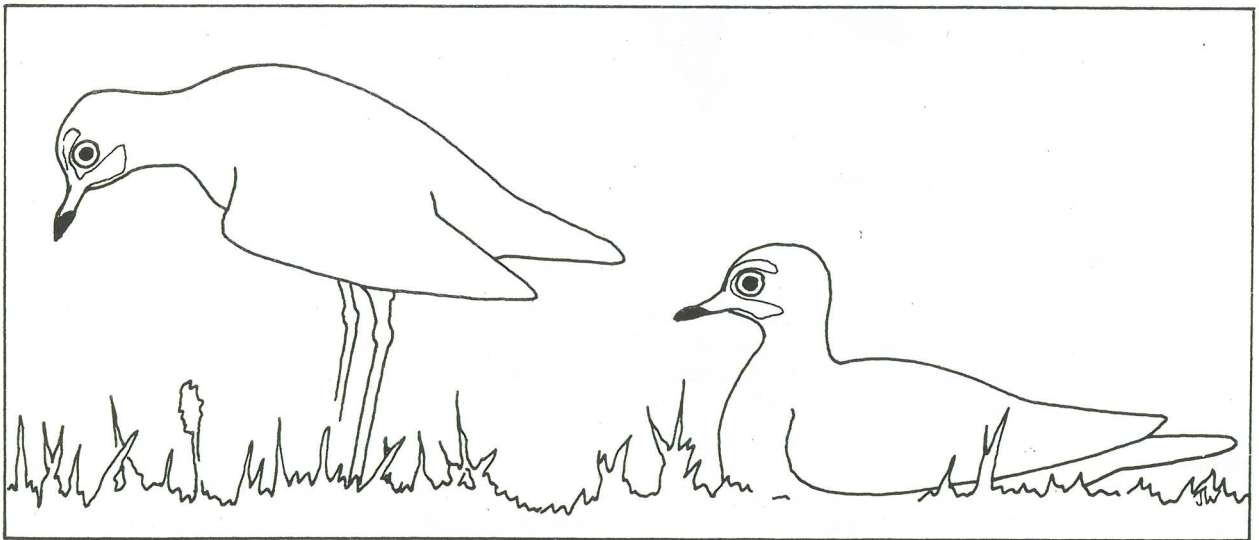


Fig. 4. Breeding bird posturing to non-breeding bird.

Aggressive behaviour

The male and female birds both reacted aggressively to a Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* when it accompanied the male which was bringing food to very young chicks. Both Stone Curlews stretched their necks and slightly raised their wings and ran at the Whimbrel, driving it away from the nest. On several occasions Stone Curlews flew at Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* and Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* driving them away from chicks. When the birds had eggs they crouched at the approach of corvids. Larger animals that threatened the nest or chicks were attacked. A pair of Stone Curlews nesting on downland frequently attempted to drive grazing sheep away from the nest. The brooding bird would rise and stretch out its wings and fan its tail and then run at the sheep. On at least one occasion the bird pecked the leg of the sheep. This would be repeated but if after three or four attempts the sheep did not move the bird would close its wings and run among the sheep and lead them away. Usually only the brooding bird was involved but on one occasion both birds attacked the sheep. A similar activity was seen when cattle approached a pair with young. Both adults flew and ran at the cattle with out-stretched wings. When this appeared not to deter the cows one of the Stone Curlews ran amongst them. This fascinated the cows and they followed the bird away from the area. After the cattle had moved 50m or so the bird flew in an arc back to join the other adult and the chicks. This often had to be repeated until the cattle began grazing in a different part of the field (Fig. 5).

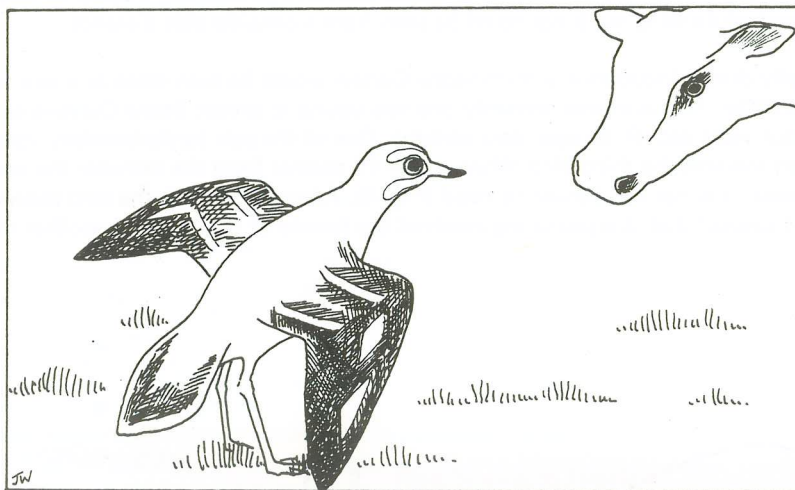


Fig. 5. Stone Curlew driving cow from chicks.

Acknowledgements

This study of Stone Curlews would not have been possible without the co-operation of the farmers and land owners who farm the areas studied. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge their interest and help. I would also like to thank the RSPB for financing and supporting this study.

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A WILDLIFE STUDY AT ROYAL PORTBURY DOCK : AN INITIAL REPORT

by Michael Dorgan and Gordon Youdale

For many years, the St George's Wharf and Portbury areas were attractive both to birds and birdwatchers. Then, in the 1960's, work started on the building of what was to become Royal Portbury Dock, changing the habitat forever. In 1978, the authors were granted by the Port of Bristol Authority the necessary permits to study the bird life of the new port complex. This paper gives the background and findings to the end of 1981.

The study area

The area of study is bounded by the Rivers Avon and Severn to the north-west, north and north-east, by the rail line to the east and by Portishead Dock to the south. Before work started on the dock, the area was largely low-lying fields grazed by cattle, and partly flooded by high spring tides. The birds to be found were those typical of such habitats, including large flocks of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and various ducks. Grass Snakes *Natrix natrix* were also common. Once work started on the docks in the 1960's, however, no ornithologists were allowed access.

Today much of the old field system is either under concrete, in the form of service roads, etc. or beneath the dock itself. More work is planned, including a car terminal which would be built on reclaimed marshy land at present frequented by birds like Heron *Ardea cinerea* and Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, as well as by various amphibians.

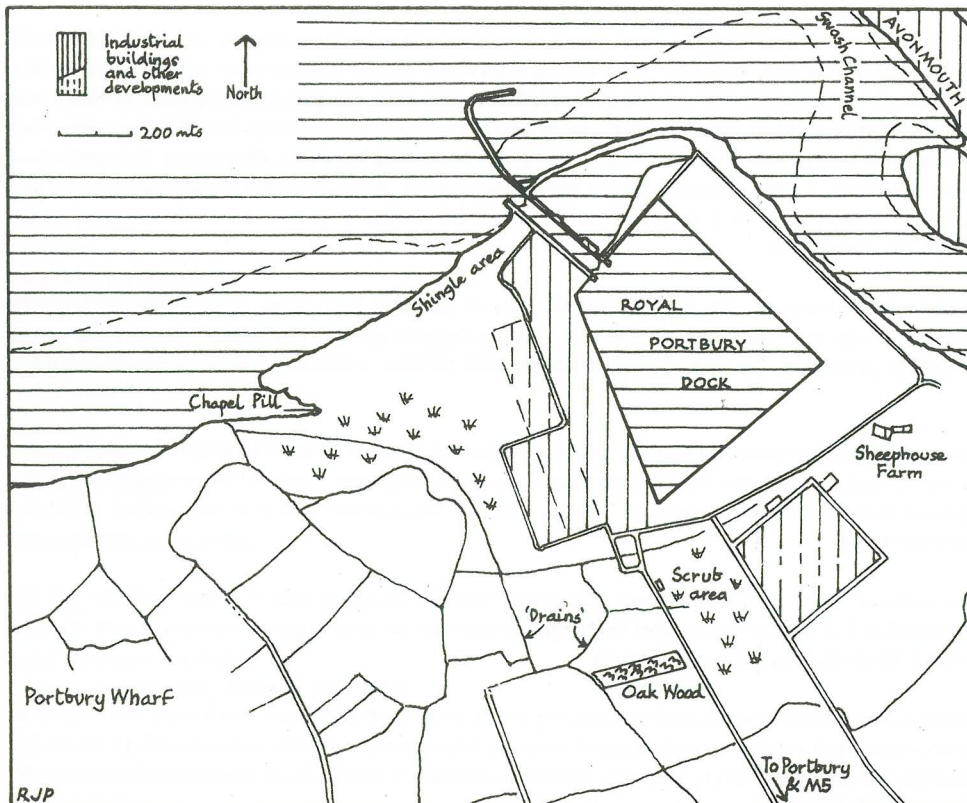


Fig. 1. Map showing study area at Royal Portbury Dock and surroundings.

Improving the habitat

Once the necessary permits had been obtained, we decided the first task would be to clear undergrowth and rides in the small wood consisting predominantly of Oak *Quercus robur* near the main gate. The woodland had become badly neglected, with large areas overgrown with Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Drainage was the next problem; the land surrounding the wood had been built up to a height of more than three metres with clay and soil from the dock excavations. This had altered the water table by several feet until it lay below the surface of the wood. This work was carried out with the help of volunteers from Brislington Comprehensive School, who cleared overgrown ditches.

A first instalment of 24 tit boxes, two boxes for Little Owls *Athene noctua*, one for Tawny Owls *Strix aluco* and one for Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* were erected, followed later by another 12 tit boxes. In the winter of 1979-80, to encourage and help the many flocks of birds visiting the wood, feeding stations were erected in the hope that some of the wintering birds would be encouraged to stay to breed. This proved successful, with flocks of Blue Tits *Parus caeruleus*, Great Tits *Parus major*, and Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, plus smaller numbers of Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Redwing *Turdus iliacus* and Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* all using the feeding stations. At this time flowers such as Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Bluebell *Endymion non-scriptus* and Buddleia were planted and tall grasses cleared from beneath young Oak seedlings.

In the spring of 1980, just as the breeding season had begun with some promise, the new reserve suffered a major setback when vandals wrecked the nestboxes and destroyed many nests. The boxes were quickly replaced, and many were used. All the tit boxes were used by one species or another, and the Little Owl boxes were taken — though by Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*! A ringing programme was started at this time, details of which will be given in a later issue, when there has been more time to evaluate its results. A list of species ringed so far appears in Appendix 1.

Away from the wood and the dock itself, but within the dock enclosure, the field and foreshore are rich in bird life both in summer and winter. The spring migration brings species such as terns *Sterna* spp., Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, and Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*. Summer residents arriving include Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and other warblers. To date 46 species have been recorded breeding in the area, including Lapwing, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, and Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. The future of the Little Ringed Plover as a resident breeder must be in doubt as its preferred nesting sites are all in an area also preferred by developers.

In autumn and winter, despite the disturbance of the past few years, large flocks of birds feed on and around the complex. They include large numbers of Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Redshank, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, and various wildfowl. Large roosts of gulls are also present.

Less usual species recorded during the winter period include Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* and Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*. A full list of species recorded up to December 1981 is held by the authors and it is hoped that a full annotated list will be published later.

The authors' main subject has been the avian fauna of the area, but it is also notable for its insect and other life. In Appendix 2, a list of moths and butterflies recorded to date is given. Among more unusual species, Death's-head Hawk Moth is a notable occurrence.

Despite all the disturbance and continuing work to extend the dock workings, the area is and will continue to be an important area of ornithological interest. Management of the reserve will go on in tandem with efforts to encourage the Port Authority to carry out their necessary works in as least harmful a manner as possible to the complex's wildlife.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those people, too many to mention individually, who have helped with the reserve work, drawing up species lists and generally making our work at Royal Portbury possible.

Appendix 1. Species ringed at Royal Portbury Dock, 1979 – 81.

Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> (1)	Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i> (22)
Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> (5)	Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i> (1)
Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> (1)	Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i> (27)
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i> (3)	Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i> (1)
Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> (6)	Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> (1)
Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> (4)	Blue Tit <i>Parus caeruleus</i> (71)
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i> (8)	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i> (35)
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> (5)	Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i> (5)
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i> (1)	Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> (1)
Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i> (2)	Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> (26)
Tawny Owl <i>Strix aluco</i> (3)	Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i> (2)
Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i> (5)	Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina</i> (2)
Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i> (7)	Twite <i>Carduelis flavirostris</i> (1)
Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> (9)	Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> (1)

Appendix 2. Moths and butterflies recorded, 1979 – 81.

Peppered Moth *Biston betularis*
Five-spot Burnet *Zygaena trifolii*
Death's-head Hawk-moth *Acherontia atropos*
Garden Tiger *Arctia caja*
Ghost Moth *Hepialus humuli*

Large White *Pieris brassicae*
Small White *Pieris rapae*
Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*
Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*
Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui*
Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*
Peacock *Inachis io*
Comma *Polygonia c-album*
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*
Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

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NOTES

Anting by a Mistle Thrush (with notes on Blackbirds and other thrushes)

As I pointed out elsewhere in 1960 (see *Brit. Birds* 53:11-15), the Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* had then been recorded anting only three times though I had also seen one anting in captivity. This was on 9 August 1959, at Woodley, Berkshire, when I gave a juvenile of this species some worker Wood Ants *Formica rufa* in an outdoor aviary. The details are here published for the first time. The bird had been passed on to me to care for on 7 August together with two juvenile Blackbirds *T. merula*, all having been rescued as nestlings and hand-reared by a friend; unlike the others, the Mistle Thrush was absolutely tame and clearly imprinted on man. Unknown to me, it had not learned to feed itself on artificial food, though well past fledging, and was absolutely dependent on live food handed to or placed near it; thus it received only the food that I gave it, so I thought, as titbits and died on 14 August much to my distress. The ants had been collected elsewhere on 5 August and first used in anting experiments in Robert Gillmor's garden in Reading on 5 and 9 August.

After the tests in Reading, I brought the ants to Woodley for the first time (the species does not occur locally) and gave them to the birds in my aviary. Firstly, I handed the Mistle Thrush a single ant then allowed it to pick ants up one at a time from a shelf. It ate the ants eagerly at first – gobbling them down without any preparation – but became progressively less keen and would not take any more after the fifth or sixth, though it continued to accept mealworms; after eating the final ant, it flew to another perch and gave the alarm 'rattle'. As it had swallowed the ants, drops of saliva fell from its mouth on to the shelf and its nictitating membranes were flicked over the eyes as it took the last two; these reactions were evidently caused by the formic-acid that these large and aggressive insects squirt out in defence. A little later, I gave the bird a few more worker-ants: it ate them but shook its head and bill-wiped afterwards, evidently finding them distasteful. When I showed it another, it bill-wiped without having touched the ant! Next, I threw two handfuls of ants on to the floor of the aviary. The thrush watched them for a minute or two, then flew down and settled, fearlessly, near to the mass of ants – starting to ant almost at the very moment it stepped, shuffling its feet, among the insects and bent its head down towards them. It adopted the typical 'active' or 'ant-application' posture immediately (see Simmons, *Brit. Birds* 50 (1957): 401-424, *Ibis* 101 (1959): 368-372, and *J. Zoology* 149 (1966): 145-162 for full details and reviews), thrusting out one wing and twisting the tail round to one side behind it, but seemed – instead of really applying the ant – rather to shoulder-rub (a reaction to irritation in the eye) as it jumped away backwards, having evidently been squirted in the face with acid. It then continued anting with the next half dozen or so workers in a spectacular and peculiar manner, probably a compromise between ant-application and shoulder-rubbing as it continued to be subjected to attack: it would seize the ant and jump away at the same moment, contort wing and tail while almost tumbling backwards, and apply the ant somewhere in the region of the carpus. It also seemed to be acting as if the ants were already on its plumage (see below), pecking here and there to dislodge them! Anting with the next 6-8 ants was much more normal as the bird hopped about to seize ants and apply them to the ventral surface of the underwing in the typical passerine manner. Towards the end of the anting spell, which lasted about five minutes, the thrush was showing definite signs also of 'passive' or 'ant-exposure' behaviour, posturing with trailing wings and tail (which helps the ants to ascend the plumage), but it still continued to apply single ants held in the bill – with vigorous quivering movements down the underside of the primaries of the well-extended wing, tail thrusting round behind. Finally, it moved round eating scattered ants with no further anting, then went for a drink (but did not bathe). Afterwards, back up on a perch, it seemed to be eyeing those ants that had strayed outside the aviary as if anxious to get at them. Shown an ant on the wire, it twitched its wings then flew down to the ground again and ate the few remaining ants there. When I put some more ants out later, it was not really interested; twice, however, it did fly down to them but jumped away and explored a food-dish for mealworms before returning to its perch to oil and preen.

The two Blackbirds did not approach the ants until the Mistle Thrush had nearly finished anting; then they ate ants without anting, as did a wild male outside the aviary wire. When I put ants out again on 10 August, the Mistle Thrush passively avoided them; the Blackbirds just ate one or two cautiously from time to time, gulping

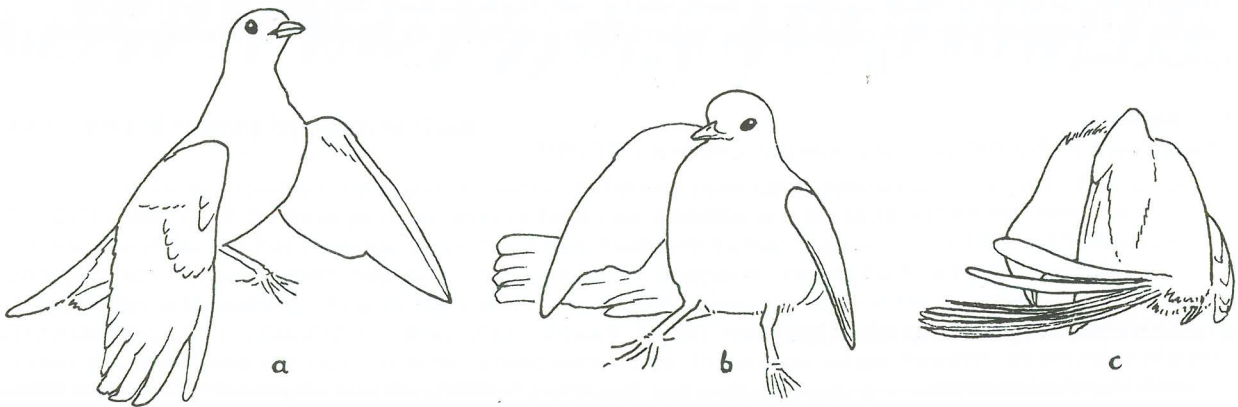
them down with some head-shaking, nor did they ant when given ants again on 20 and 22 August. Obviously keen on the ants as food, the two Blackbirds were discouraged by their acid-spraying and biting attacks from approaching too closely — mainly eating those that strayed away from the main mass. When they did get near the ants, they would jump or back away and often foot-stamp (a reaction to movement underfoot), usually soon retreating up to a perch where they would bill-wipe — and sometimes also head-shake, blink, scratch the bill, peck at the feathers of wing and breast, inspect their plumage (usually looking underneath as if to see if any ants were there), or peck at the tarsus. They readily ate but again did not ant with workers of smaller species of ants (the Yellow Ant *Lasius flavus* and Garden Ant *L. niger* — the two species of ants that the Blackbird seems to use most for anting in the wild), and also ate a few workers of the highly pungent Jet-black Ant *L. fuliginosus* before finding them too distasteful (see Simmons, *Countryman* 55 (1958): 614-621 for tasting experiments with ants). A wild juvenile Blackbird did ant eventually, on 10 August and again briefly on the 23rd, initially very much like the Mistle Thrush had, but only after jumping right inside the big biscuit tin where the Wood Ants were kept outside the aviary (a wild adult Jay *Garrulus glandarius* also anted at the tin on 20 and 22 August).

It seems clear that the Mistle Thrush was anting for the first time; certainly, the bird had never before encountered the Wood Ant — the species that Mistle Thrushes are known to use regularly for anting in the wild (see E. Abma, *Natura* 48 (1951): 164), being one of the few birds to do so. As my earlier anting studies had shown and the present tests confirmed, while experienced individuals do learn (are conditioned by experience) to respond to ants visually, inexperienced ones do not recognize ants by sight (or by touch or taste) as the correct medium for anting but show a purely 'instinctive', unconditioned response to some property of the ants which triggers the reaction automatically. In the case of the Mistle Thrush, as in the majority of others known to me, the effect of formic-acid squirted on the face — and, more specifically, into the nasal cavities — appeared to induce the anting initially. The same seemed true for the wild juvenile Blackbird which, like the Mistle Thrush, did not ant until it got right among the ants. Why the captive juvenile Blackbirds did not ant is not clear; either they happened not to receive the correct basic stimulus or were inhibited in some way.

The Mistle Thrush, like the other *Turdus* thrushes that I have seen anting (the Japanese Grey Thrush *T. cardis*, Blackbird, Song Thrush *T. philomelos*, and American Robin *T. migratorius*), practises both ant-application and ant-exposure behaviour, often more or less simultaneously — i.e., they all thrust out the wings and trail the tail among the ants while also picking up and applying them under the wing (or making the movements of so doing). The observations of Miss B.M. Atkey on a wild Mistle Thrush anting (see *Brit. Birds* 53 (1960): 18) agree closely with my own.

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Turdus thrush anting postures: a) ant-exposure, b) intermediate between ant-exposure/application and c) ant-application. Based on sketches and photograph in Simmons, 1957 (*Brit. Birds* 50: 401-424).

Sunning by a Mistle Thrush

The Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* was not included in the list of birds known to sun themselves ('sun-bathe') compiled by R.J. Kennedy (*Brit. Birds* 62 (1969):257-258). Neither have I traced any published records of sunning in this species during the preparation of a comprehensive review of the subject though there is no reason to believe that such behaviour is rare, merely difficult to observe. Though I have seen Blackbirds *T. merula* and Song Thrushes *T. philomelos* sunning on numerous occasions (with written records for 240 and 33 spells respectively), I only once saw a Mistle Thrush sunning in all the years I have been making notes on the behaviour (1949-1982). This was at the Ubley end of Blagdon Lake, Avon, on 29 May 1968 as I was studying grebes — the Great Crested *Podiceps cristatus* and a vagrant Pied-billed *Podilymus podiceps* (see *Bristol Orn.* 2 (1969): 71-72) — from my parked car between 09.05 and 15.20 GMT on a warm, sunny, still, rather hazy day.

The bird (an adult) was first noted at 12.05 on bare ground right out in the open but not too far from a group of trees and other cover. It was already sunning, squatting down on a path, side-on to the sun with its body quite erect, all contour feathers ruffled, 'sun-wing' drooped, bill open (gaping), and feet out of view beneath the body. Gradually, it leaned away from the direction of the incident radiation until it was in the classical passerine 'lateral' sunning posture (Simmons in prep.), remaining thus for about 20 minutes — mostly quite still, until near the end of the period when it did several head-scratches (using each foot in turn to deal with both sides of the head). By 12.25, when the sun was at its highest, it had moved position so that its back was now to the sun and adopted a new sunning posture with both wings stretched out fully open along the ground at right angles to the body, tail widely fanned and depressed behind, and contour feathers even more fully erected (especially those of the lower back and rump which rose in a great hump) — exposing the flanks and the naked oil-gland; this 'spreadeagle' sunning posture is highly characteristic of many passerines (including the Blackbird, Song Thrush, and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*) and has been recorded also, for example, from nightjars (Caprimulgidae), owls (Strigidae), some hawks (Accipitridae), and some falcons (Falconidae). The thrush remained thus until 12.30 when it reverted to the lateral posture briefly before (at 12.31) scratching seven times at the base of its ruffled head near the side of the jaw, alternating from side to side as before, and then hopped away to settle down again on a grass verge, after head-scratching twice more. It now faced the sun with the bill wide open, all contour feathers ruffled, and the wings drooped in a semi-spreadeagle posture, staying thus until 12.35 when it head-scratched once on each side and resettled side-on to the sun in the lateral posture again, leaning over away from the sun. At 12.37, it scratched once then preened dorsally and frontally for about one minute before hopping on, head-scratching, and pausing inactively in the sun, gaping, for another minute. Having lasted at least 34 minutes, the spell of sunning ended at 12.39 when the bird drank twice then hopped away; it seemed about to bathe but grew alert and was soon after 'rattling' in alarm among the trees.

The sunning behaviour of the Mistle Thrush thus closely resembles that of other *Turdus* thrushes, including the accompanying head-scratching (all performed in the indirect or 'over-wing' manner) and preening; full details will be given in my forthcoming review, together with a survey of the literature and discussion on the nature of sunning.

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An unobtrusive way of observing Quail

The frustration I felt in trying to see my first Quail *Coturnix coturnix* was considerable. Over some ten years I had heard them calling in tall grassland at Tormarton, Gloucestershire, in the summer months but had not managed to see a single one, despite the fact that there have been seasons when Quail were fairly numerous in the locality (for example see *Bristol Orn.* 9 (1976) : 156-7). To rush into fields with the hope of momentarily flushing Quail for the sake of adding the species to my personal list was not what I wanted.

Quail are highly migratory and make long flights to and from their winter quarters in the Mediterranean and Africa, but in stark contrast seem always to be grounded in their breeding places. Is this true? It seemed to me worth while to test the idea in a practical way. So, arriving at Tormarton early one summer day I stationed myself close to a low stone wall overlooking the fields where previously I had heard Quail calling. Some two hours or more had passed when suddenly a Quail flew up nearby and then keeping a little above the tall grasses it plunged into cover some forty metres away. During a four hour stay I observed the behaviour on four occasions. Nevertheless, I found that great care had to be taken not to misidentify Corn Buntings *Miliaria calandra* (which were numerous in the area) for Quail. Both species are small, compact and dull plumaged, and about the same size. Corn Buntings frequently made low flights across the fields where I presumed Quail were breeding.

Furthermore, about a year later at Portland Bill, Dorset, I adopted the same practice. The Quail were calling from corn fields near the Bird Observatory. Over a period of about an hour and a half I saw single Quail on two occasions; they both flew low over the crop. It would therefore appear to be a behaviour not uncommon among breeding Quail, but perhaps operated on a limited scale. As far as I can ascertain this behaviour is not recorded in recent ornithological literature.

Bernard King

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



Inland ground nesting by Herring Gulls

In 1978 I observed inland ground-nesting by Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* in Cornwall (*Brit. Birds* 74 (1981) : 264-5). Of the three pairs two were in fields near Marazion and the third was on the 'turn-round' concrete area of St. Ives bus terminus. Since then I have made two further observations in different habitats in Cornwall which I thought worth recording. On 3 June 1979 I discovered Herring Gulls nesting in a small cottage garden at Mousehole. The gulls had made a nest of dead grasses and bents in the corner of a well kept lawn, surrounded and partly concealed by Honeysuckle *Lonicera* hedges. Residents of the cottage were quite willing for the birds to be there — in due course two young were reared. In the same village, however, an entirely different habitat was used by Herring Gulls in May 1980. A rough nest was built of bents, straw, paper and other artifacts on the concrete path inside the Mousehole Wild Bird Hospital and Sanctuary. Every time the birds were approached lunging aggressiveness occurred with a deal of loud calling. Unfortunately their behaviour became so hostile that it became necessary to remove the nest.

Bernard King

Waders resting on their tarsi

In the winters of 1978/79 and 1979/80 I found several instances of waders resting on their tarsi at the Hayle estuary, Cornwall. (The tarsus is the lower and usually visible part of a bird's leg between the toes and the heel). I noted the behaviour in 10 Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and 5 Turnstones *Arenaria interpres*, the longest period being 15 minutes or so if undisturbed. Rather curiously, it seemed to me, those resting on their tarsi were always seen among the small and shallow rock areas protruding from the mud of the estuary. I estimated that for every Lapwing or Turnstone resting on their tarsi there were 50-80 standing normally. Furthermore, on arrival in the area the birds did not immediately assume the posture but took a variable amount of time to do so, apparently according to the degree of disturbance by man or when large birds flew overhead.

In addition, I have had brief opportunities to see this behaviour in *Calidris* waders: a Semipalmated Sandpiper *C. pusilla* at Stithians Reservoir, Cornwall, on 16 September 1980 and a Baird's Sandpiper *C. bairdii* and two Dunlin *C. alpina* at Davidstow airfield, Cornwall, on 24 September 1980. I was alerted to this behaviour by two interesting notes on waders resting on their tarsi. The first also concerned Lapwings which Geoffrey Boyle observed at Chew Valley Lake, Avon, on 27 August 1975; the other a White-tailed Plover *Charadrius leucura* which Richard J. Fairbank saw at Parkington, Warwickshire, on 27 July 1975 (*Brit. Birds* 70 (1977) : 458 and 71 (1978) : 128 respectively).

Bernard King

Overwintering warblers, 1980/81 and 1981/82.

The 1981/82 winter was the most severe since 1978/79, and produced a larger number of Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* sightings than ever before. In the coldest week, in early January, there were 284 Blackcap-days of observation, and on 10 January 1982 no less than 47 different Blackcaps were sighted in Avon county. Another feature of the winter, again similar to 1978/79, was that many gardens recorded apparently resident Blackcaps, although ringing records suggest that more than one bird is usually present. H.R.H. Lance has ringed 57 in his garden in winter since 1970 and on 20 February 1981 retrapped a bird originally ringed in the previous winter on 17 December 1979.

As table 1 shows, the numbers of apparent individuals has been fairly constant over the last four winters, but the number of Blackcap-days has been far lower in the milder winters. The number of Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* observations has remained fairly static, and there were none in February last winter.

Table 1. Blackcap and Chiffchaff sightings in Avon during four winters.

	Blackcap sightings	Blackcap-days	Chiffchaff sightings
1978/79 *	286	2316	18
1979/80 *	221	1514	19
1980/81	222	523	15
1981/82	308	2444	16

* Figures in these years are adjusted slightly from those in *Bristol Orn.* 13 (1980): 101, in the light of more recent information.

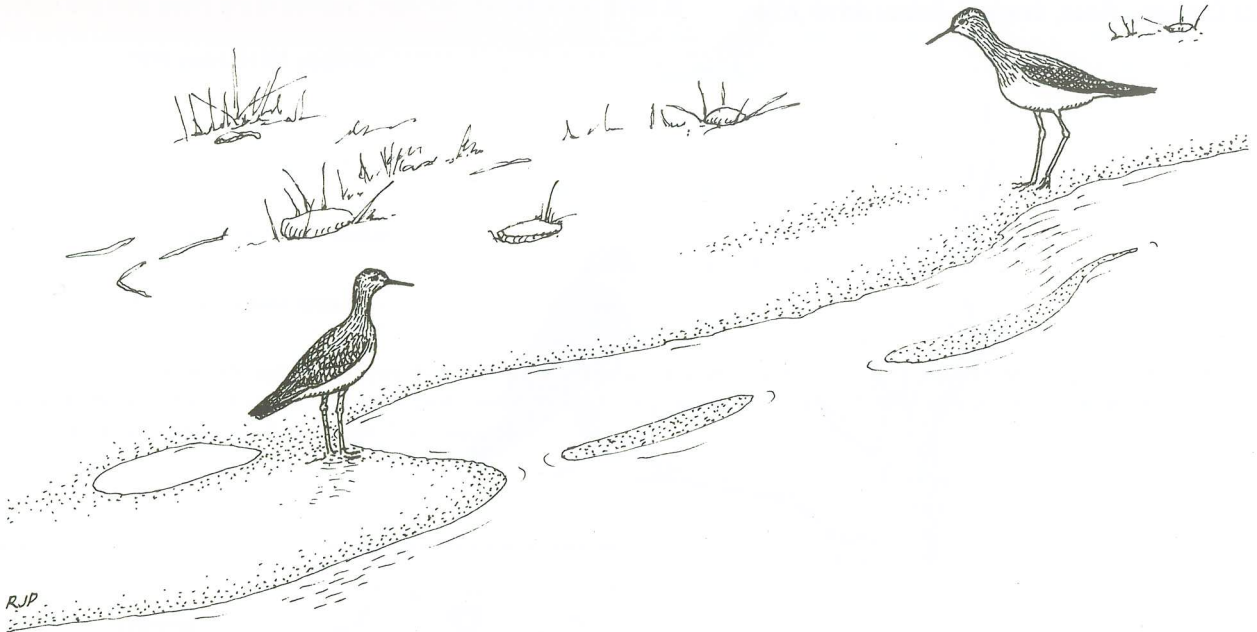
The sex ratio is also remarkably constant at 60% males. Song was recorded on 24 occasions in the 1980/81 winter and on 13 occasions in 1981/82, almost all being in March, with a few of the records at the very end of the month being from suspected migrants. Although overwintering Blackcaps are now regularly seen in gardens, I hope that observers will continue to record every sighting, as this interesting change in habit should be continuously monitored.

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Territorial behaviour of wintering Lesser Yellowlegs

During a prolonged visit to a freshwater pool at Ben Whites Racing Track, Orlando, Florida, U.S.A. on 16 January, 1974, I came across many dozens of waders. There were in the gathering about 11 Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, two of which were continuously bickering over certain feeding places. When they approached one another, persistent calling occurred by both birds. As they came together, standing upright, they almost touched bills with half-hearted jabbing movements, only to break away before they met again within a comparatively short time for the performance to be renewed. Sometimes, however, as they faced each other, heads and necks were stretched forward, but at a downward angle, with bills then almost touching the ground. Keeping these postures they stayed quite still for at least ten seconds or more, before breaking away again to resume normal feeding activity. The other Lesser Yellowlegs were in no way involved. Similar behaviour has been recorded on the breeding grounds (A.C. Bent (1962) *Life Histories of North American Shore Birds*) but the motivation may not have been the same.

Bernard King



Migrant birds in the Keynsham and Saltford area

The influence which the topography of the River Avon valley has upon the movements of birds is easily established by noting the directions taken daily by feeding and roosting Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and gulls, notably Herring *Larus argentatus* and Black-headed *L. ridibundus*. Not so obvious, however, is the concentrating effect which the valley exerts upon the autumn and spring migrations of other species, although the numbers of hirundines and Swifts *Apus apus* passing through the stretch between Newton St. Loe and Saltford in late July and August can be quite spectacular. Combining information supplied by A.H. Davis (see pp. 155-158) with my own observations, based on twelve years residence in Keynsham and four in Saltford, it is clear that there is a fundamental difference in the patterns of movement at the two sites. For instance at Saltford there is a strong finch passage in the autumn and early winter, particularly when the weather is severe, as in 1981. The majority of these birds are Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* which form small groups, about 25-30 strong, travelling west through the relatively deep valley between Bath and Saltford. In the Keynsham area, however, migration does not seem to be very evident, the birds presumably dispersing at Saltford where the valley widens out.

When I lived in Keynsham I frequently heard Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* and Spotted Redshanks *T. erythropus* calling overhead during the night in the autumn. Such a passage of waders is not apparent at Saltford and for these species the main line of movement may be north—south rather than east—west. In this respect the movement of a small group of Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* in the late afternoon of 15 August 1982 may be of interest. Thirteen birds appeared from the north flying over Keynsham, but as soon as the River Chew came in sight they altered course and followed the river until out of sight, now flying in a south-westerly direction.

Raptors also seem to be influenced strongly by the river valleys of the area. Thus a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* which I observed flying up the estuary of the River Parrett near Otterhampton, Somerset on 13 April 1980 I saw again, assuming that it was the same bird, later the same day flying east along the Avon at Saltford towards Bath.

In keeping with many other field observations these sightings lead at present to rather subjective conclusions but it would be useful if other members of the Club started to compile detailed notes of bird migration seen in the area so that a more meaningful analysis can be presented in the future.

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Birds on Brean Down, 1967 to 1978 (supplementary records)

We are grateful to Bob Angles and Brian Slade for drawing our attention to the following records supplementing our paper in *Bristol Orn.* 12 (1979): 49-62.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. The bird noted on 1 September 1969 over the Axe Estuary was actually seen to fly in along the south side of Brean Down (R.A.).

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. Almost fledged bird found in the nest of a pair of Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* on 5 August 1967, thus confirming breeding on at least one occasion in the period (B.E.S.).

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Occupied nest with eggs found inside low stone building in moat-like gully on landward side of the Fort. Otherwise, breeding pairs had only been noted at Brean Down Farm. Exact date not recorded but around 1967 (R.A.).

Ken Hall, Robin Prytherch and Brian Rabbitts
The Anchorage, The Chalks, Chew Magna, Bristol BS18 8SN

FIELDWORK, 1981

Lapwing breeding survey in Avon

The continuation of the Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* breeding distribution survey for 1981 added a considerable amount of information on distribution and density. The same system, based on the 1 km National Grid squares, was again used for recording the data received from members of the Club and of the Bristol Naturalists' Society. The cumulative results from the two years' work are shown in Fig. 1, indicating a good increase in coverage over 1980. As before, a 1 km square was considered to be occupied whether it contained one pair or multiple pairs. The numbers involved were:

1980 : 115 pairs in 42 squares

1981 : 137 pairs in 55 squares

When the two years are presented together the resultant total is

209 pairs in 84 squares.

The distribution map continues to confirm the three areas of main population as in 1980:

1. Coastal/lowland region from Avonmouth to Woodspring Bay
29 squares = 34% of total
2. Northern and eastern area:
21 squares = 24% of total
3. South-east area:
23 squares = 27% of total

The results again confirm that the most densely populated area is the coastal/lowland region with 125 pairs (60% of total) at an average of 4 pairs per occupied 1 km square, compared with inland/upland sites with 84 pairs (40% of total) at 1.5 pairs per 1 km square.

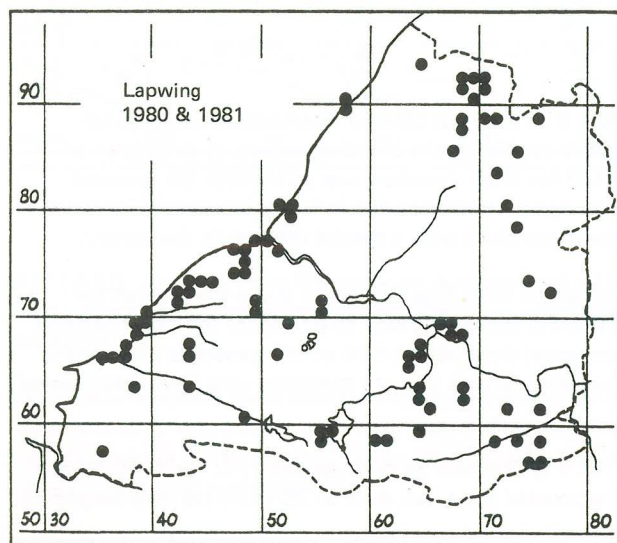


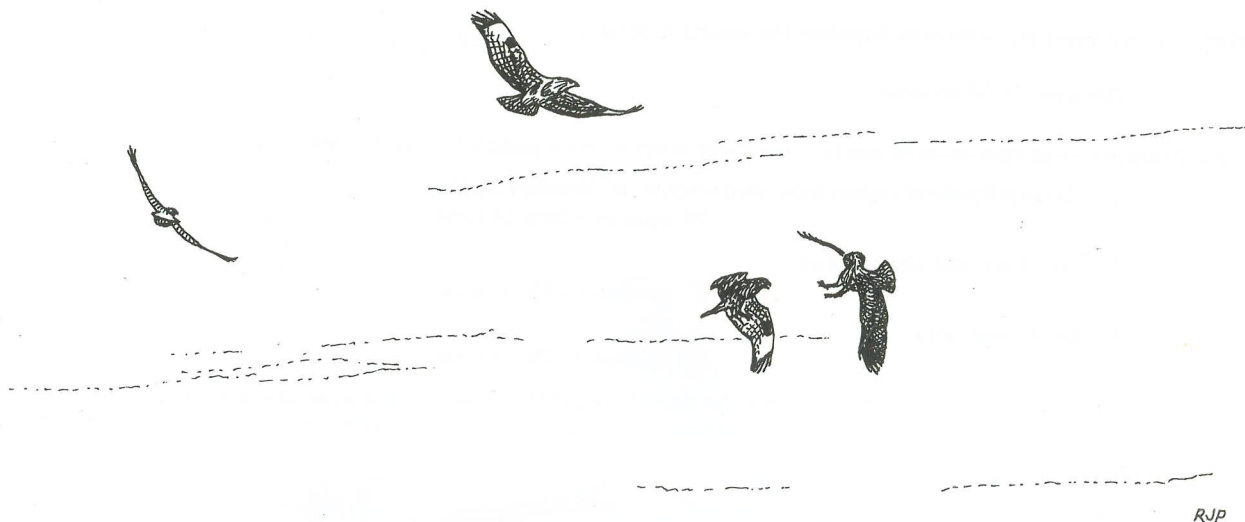
Fig. 1. Distribution of breeding Lapwings in Avon, 1980 and 1981. Each dot indicates a 1 km square in which Lapwings bred.

During 1980 and 1981 a parallel survey of other breeding waders in Avon was carried out, the cumulative results to date being:

Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	max. 38 pairs at 7 sites
Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	max. 7 pairs at 4 sites
Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	max. 4 pairs at 1 site
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	3 pairs at 2 sites
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1 pair

Once again thanks are due to those Club members who sent in records during the season, and to Harvey Rose for collating the records from the Bristol Naturalists' Society.

David Payne.

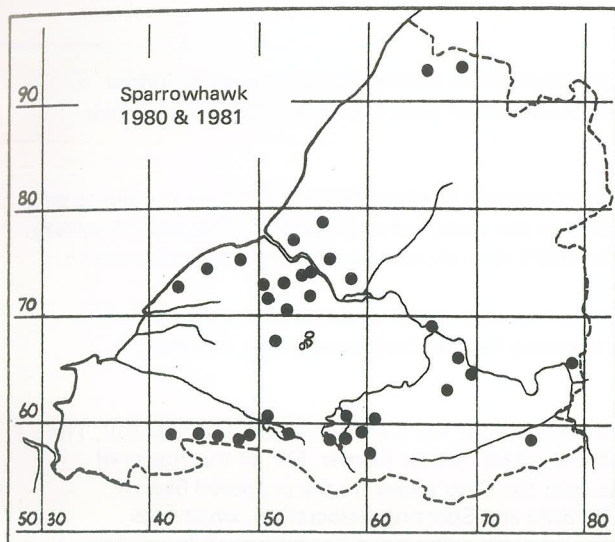


Breeding season Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels

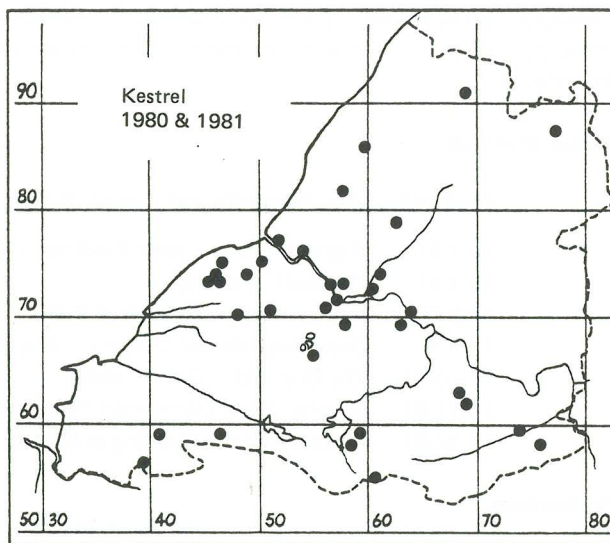
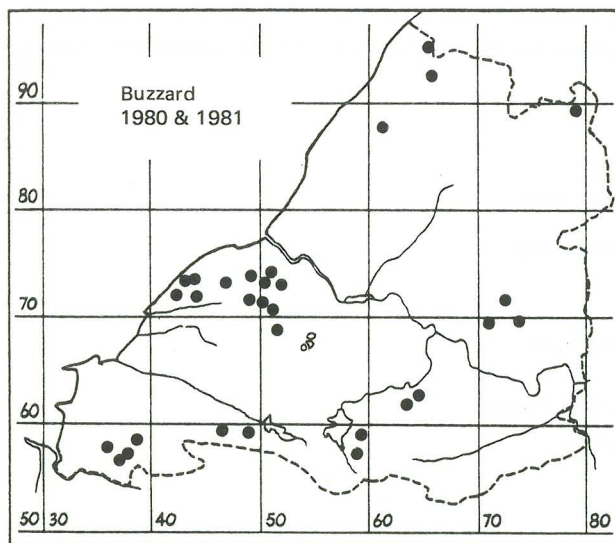
The objective of this survey, which started in 1980, is to map the pairs of Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus*, Buzzards *Buteo buteo* and Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in Avon during the breeding season. A definition of those records which qualify and details of the information asked for from members was given with the account of the first year's results (*Bristol Orn.* 14 (1981) : 138-9). Once again I extracted the information from *Bird News* record slips but also received excellent co-operation from several members with a special interest in the survey.

The results of the second year were as encouraging as the first. Figs 2, 3 and 4 show the records for both years combined. They reveal the gaps and indicate that there is still a long way to go before the Sparrowhawk and Kestrel maps are well covered. The Buzzard map, however, must show about 60% of the expected total pairs. It is now anticipated that the survey will run for a total of five years. Thank you, all members who have contributed. I hope you, and others, will continue to send in records.

SPARROWHAWK. Records from March to July were asked for. Fig. 2 shows 36 definite pairs (12 for 1980 plus 24 for 1981). This figure 'consumed' all of the 15 additional suspected sites, but even so 20 more are now suspected. Most of these should be confirmed in the coming years.



Figs. 2, 3 and 4. Breeding season records of pairs of Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels respectively, in Avon, 1980 and 1981. Each dot indicates one pair of birds and is centred on the general area of their apparent territory.



BUZZARD. Records from February to July were asked for. Fig. 3 shows 30 definite pairs (22 for 1980 plus 8 for 1981). Most of the suspected sites in 1980 were confirmed and more were noted in 1981 making eleven additional suspected sites.

KESTREL. Records from March to July were asked for. Pairs will also defend breeding sites early in winter so observations at this time of year may help to build up the picture of this, the most difficult of the three species. Fig. 4 shows 35 definite pairs (17 for 1980 plus 18 for 1981). Most of the extra sites remain unconfirmed. There are now 39 additional suspected sites.

Robin Prytherch.

CLUB ACTIVITIES, 1981

The year was a typically busy one, with 20 field meetings, three week-end trips, the usual indoor meetings and various calls on the Club's expertise from outside bodies which kept the Committee busy at their 11 meetings.

Membership fell from 584 to 491 after a 100 per cent increase in subscription but activities were as well supported as ever. Several coach outings were fully booked, as were the week-end excursions to Tregaron, Anglesey and Norfolk. Attendance at indoor meetings averaged 110. The RSPB film shows had a record 2,800 attendance.

Fieldwork continued, concentrating on birds of prey, Lapwings and Carrion Crows, with some help being given to the BTO Winter Atlas. The second year of the breeding Carrion Crow survey was, however, disappointing with fewer records received.

During the year the Club lobbied members of Parliament about the Wildlife and Countryside Bill. The Club wrote to every MP in Avon and two Committee members visited Mr Arthur Palmer, MP, at the House of Commons to discuss the Bill. Mr Palmer was also interested to hear the Club's view on the proposed Severn Barrage. The Club was also involved with the new Frampton Wildlife and Sporting Association, which was providing free access to members of associated organisations but excluding the general public on all but public rights of way.

Field meetings during the year ranged widely from the Wiltshire Downs to the Wyre Forest, and from Farlington to the Frome Valley. Beginners were especially catered for with trips to Leigh Woods in spring and Chew Valley Lake in high summer. Indoor meetings were typically varied, ranging from talks on species to armchair travelogues.

Indoor meetings

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

- 15.1.81 Migration: The Latest Findings — Colin Bibby
- 12.2.81 Members' Evening
- 12.3.81 Kenfig — Steve Moon
- 17.9.81 Grey Wagtails and Dippers — Stephanie Tyler
- 15.10.81 The Buzzard — Colin Tubbs
- 12.11.81 Birding in the Dominican Republic — Tim Cleaves
- 10.12.81 Annual General Meeting at Clifton R.F.C.

Publications

Bird News continued to be published monthly. *Bristol Ornithology* 13 appeared in January, and *Bristol Ornithology* 14 in December.

Mike Lord *Honorary Secretary*.



