

BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



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BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

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PREFACE

At a time when increasing numbers of birdwatchers are exploring exotic locations in their search for ever-wider ornithological enjoyment, this 18th edition of *Bristol Ornithology* comes as a welcome reminder of the knowledge and pleasure that can be gained closer to home.

From Andy Davis's compilation of twenty years of birds at often-overlooked Blagdon Lake to Peter Hopkin's reminder of an extraordinary seabird month, the message is clear: never forget your local patch.

Even the shorter notes from Terry Bond and the indefatigable Bernard King have a more local bias than usual, and Robin Prytherch's summary of the Club's breeding birds of prey survey whets the appetite for the eventual full version.

But John Tully perhaps puts it clearest in his review of the year, in which he appeals to 'intermittent and local watchers' to put their observations on record. His review is based on the recording slips sent in by 112 members. Let us try to double that number in future.

Meanwhile, on behalf of the Club, I thank everyone - editorial committee and contributors - for their efforts on this issue.

Mike Lord

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A REVIEW OF 1984

by John Tully

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 (for sketch map of the area, see *Bristol Ornithology* 16 (1983):4. Some 10000 slips have been returned by 112 members in 589 monthly contributions. My impression is that the members who clock the highest binocular-hours contribute regularly and provide a reasonable picture of the bird year in the area but that the intermittent and local watchers shy away from submitting reports. This is a shame as I am sure more records would help and I hope those who did not contribute in 1985 make a New Year resolution to do so at least twice during the current year.

The reservoirs signify those at Barrow Gurney, Blagdon, Cheddar and Chew Valley Lake (CVL). Durleigh is referred to separately. The levels refer to the peat moors and heaths in the part of Somerset covered by this review. The Channel means from Bridgwater Bay to Aust. Royal Portbury Dock includes St. George's and Portbury Wharves. A good total of 231 species (excluding obvious escapes) was recorded during 1984 and records of rare birds (unless indicated otherwise) have been accepted by the *British Birds* Rarities Committee (BBRC). Species are generally listed in accordance with the Voous (1977) sequence but it has been thought better at times to ignore this particularly where unrelated species are involved in the same movement. In computing totals, especially of the scarcer passage waders, minimum numbers have generally been used. These have been arrived at by adding up the highest monthly figures in each locality, except where a high count at the end of one month and the beginning of the next appears to refer to the same birds.

The first winter period

The first three months of the year were in general mild, wet and windy, the lowest temperatures only reaching -5C in the area and we had only minor snowfalls in the third week of January. The predominantly westerly winds in January produced rain and strong winds with gale force being recorded on many dates. The gales continued into February and although the third week of the month produced frosty nights and chilly days, temperatures did not dip below -5C at night. Areas of high pressure were present over the country for the first three weeks of March and they gave sunny periods accompanied by cold and often strong winds from the north and east. Low pressure areas were present for the rest of the month with heavy rain and more cold winds from the north-west.

A Red-throated Diver moved up the River Parrett on 23 January and the first-winter Great Northern Diver from December 1983 stayed at CVL until 4 February. Little Grebe rose to a maximum of 13 at CVL with up to three birds at various locations on the River Avon and the other reservoirs. Great Crested Grebes had a good winter with 158 at Blagdon Lake on 14 January and 85 at CVL on the same date. A Red-necked Grebe remained at CVL from December 1983 until 15 January and a Slavonian Grebe stayed through the New Year at Blagdon Lake until 26 February. Finally, a Black-necked Grebe was seen at Durleigh Reservoir on 1 February. Single Fulmars were seen in the Parrett Estuary and at Sand Bay on the 14-15 January and one seen on the 15th at New Passage was being mobbed by several Herring Gulls; two birds were in the Parrett Estuary on 7 February. Half a Gannet in the Brue Estuary turned out to be the wing and head of a recently dead adult. Single Leach's Petrels were sighted in the Parrett Estuary during the gales of 14-15 January. Cormorant numbers at CVL were 20 (max) with a good total of 17 at Steart Island in January. A Shag was seen flying up the Kenn Estuary on 22 January and another fell dead from a roof in Portbury after perching there for two days in February. A solitary Bittern was seen at CVL on 21 January and another was reported there on 25-28 February, peculiar in the fact that it had very grey wing coverts. Mute Swans reached 43 at Bristol Bridge and Bewick's Swans appeared in small numbers at Cheddar Reservoir and CVL with a flock of 40 at Steart on 2 March; juveniles were mentioned in most reports which is encouraging. A Greylag Goose stayed throughout the period with the Canada Geese at CVL whose numbers were 133 in January but by March about 50 seemed to have moved to Blagdon Lake. A March flock of 75 Barnacle Geese in the Parrett was most unusual, and from one bird's ring number it appeared that these birds were from the Netherlands winter flock which breeds in Nova Zemlya. One or two dark-bellied Brent Geese appeared at several places in the Channel, but flocks of twelve off Clevedon on 25 January and 25 at New Passage on 11 March were unusual as was the single bird that turned up at CVL on 10 February.

A colourful male Mandarin Duck paid a rare visit to CVL on 14-15 January (the eighth record for Chew). Wigeon peaked at 800 at Steart on 22 January. Other maximum numbers were Gadwall 52 (Bucklands Pool, 26 February), Teal 605 (CVL, 11 February), Mallard 410 (CVL, January), Pintail 38 (Durleigh, 22 January), and Shoveler 95 (CVL, 18 March). Red-crested Pochards showed up at Barrow Gurney where a female was present on 14 January and single males were seen at Blagdon Lake on 5 February and at Cheddar Reservoir on 11 February. Pochard peaked at 830 at Cheddar Reservoir on 17 January while Tufted Duck reached 324 on the same date at Cheddar. Interesting 'Aythya hybrids' included a New Zealand Scaup-type female Tufted Duck at CVL from 14 January to 31 March, a Tufted Duck x Pochard male at Cheddar Reservoir from 4-12 February and at Blagdon Lake on 25 February, and a Tufted Duck x Scaup male at Cheddar Reservoir on 17 March; this last seemed to have moved to CVL by 31 March. A female Scaup was at Cheddar Reservoir on 4 February and 17 March and a single Long-tailed Duck was at Cheddar on 2 and 17 January. Common Scoter were seen in small numbers with seven off Berrow on 17 March, while a male Velvet Scoter provided a second record for CVL on 21 January. Goldeneye made a record 127 at CVL on 27 March; Smew had a maximum of two at CVL and Blagdon Lake in March. A pair of Red-breasted Mergansers stayed at CVL for nearly the whole three months and Goosander reached a maximum of 56 on 25 February, also at CVL. The Ruddy Duck explosion continues with a total of 850 on CVL and Blagdon Lake on 14 January.

The first three months of the year were disappointing for harriers with no definite sightings. Merlin numbers were steady throughout the period with approximately six per month along the Channel as well as two inland records from Tealham Moor and CVL. Peregrines were also well represented along the Channel and there were three inland records at Barrow Gurney, in the Avon Gorge and at Cumberland Basin; perhaps a future nest site on one of the empty high-rise office blocks in Bristol would justify the buildings as well as help the tourist trade! Water Rails produced up to five birds at the usual sites with new records at Bucklands Pool, Saltford and the Brue Estuary. Coot numbers reached 2250 at Cheddar Reservoir on 14 January. The Oystercatcher maximum was 117 at Berrow in January, whilst Ringed Plover numbered 55 at West Huntspill on 21 February but there were low coastal numbers in March and no inland records over the three months. Golden Plover were 400 at Rangeworthy and 300 at Tadham Moor at the end of January but most of the birds seemed to have left by 12 March. Grey Plover numbered 320 at Steart in January and February. Compared to the previous year Lapwing were in moderate numbers with flocks of 1000 at Brean, Northwick and Tadham Moor; Knot had a high count of 800 at Steart on 4 January but the numbers decreased dramatically soon after that date. Purple Sandpipers wintered at their usual Chittening/Severn Beach stomping ground with a maximum of seven on 24 January. Dunlin arrived in large numbers during the last week of January and 11000 were present in the Clevedon/Yeo Estuary by 19 February. At this date about 33000 birds were on this side of the Channel but numbers fell quickly in the first week of March. Small numbers of Ruff were seen intermittently; up to seven Jack Snipe were at Berrow and Snipe rose to 230 in the Brue Estuary on 4 February. About 18 Woodcock were recorded in a variety of sites while Black- and Bar-tailed Godwits appeared in small numbers around the Parrett and Yeo Estuaries. There were good numbers of Curlew with 670 at Steart on 5 February and Turnstones rose to 194 at Severn Beach on the same date. Amongst other overwintering waders were eight Spotted Redshanks, Greenshanks at Oldbury and Chittening, 19 Green Sandpipers and 15 Common Sandpipers which included five at Barrow Gurney on 2 March.

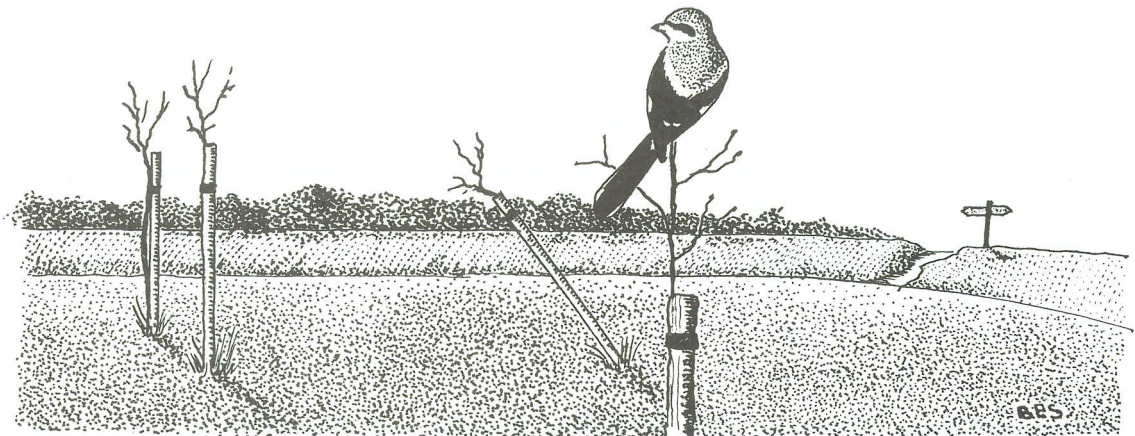
A late Great Skua in the Parrett Estuary on 3 January made an interesting start to 1984. CVL had an excellent number of Mediterranean Gulls with a total of eleven, consisting of four adults, four second-years and three first-years with a record five birds present on 24 March; single adults were also seen at Chittening and Berrow in February. Little Gull numbers reached six in the Parrett Estuary area in January and March, while the reservoirs had an immature at CVL on 14 January and an adult on three dates in March, with two on Cheddar Reservoir on 25 March (one an adult). A partial albino Black-headed Gull was at CVL between 11 February and 8 March; it had an all-white mantle, only a small black spot behind the eye and black on the primary tips. CVL also held up to 50 of the Scandinavian race (*Larus f. fuscus*) of the Lesser Black-backed Gull and ten of the other Scandinavian race (*L.f. intermedius*) on 24-25 March. Also present at the reservoirs were examples of various races of Herring Gull with one of the southern race (*L. argentatus michahellis*) or 'Yellow-legged Gull' at Barrow Gurney on 15 January and others at CVL on 11 and 18 February and 4 March. The northern sub-species (*L.a. argentatus*) occurred as a single at Barrow Gurney on 15 January with two at CVL on 22 January, ten on 11 February and a single in the Avon Gorge on 19 February. Numbers of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were exceptional throughout the South West, and Avon had a share in this influx. Iceland Gulls appeared in good numbers with possibly eight individuals in our area. These involved a second winter at CVL on 2 January, a first-winter at Royal Portbury Dock 29-31 January, four at CVL in February, one adult, one second-winter and two first-winters; also a second winter at Northwick-Chittening from 11 February to 8 March and finally a first winter at South Stoke Tip, Midford on 17 February,

although this latter may have been one of the CVL birds. A first-winter Glaucous Gull appeared at Berrow on 10 January and possibly the same bird was at Chittening and Aust on 11 January. CVL held an adult during 4-18 February and a second-winter bird stayed around Northwick from 5-25 February. In all three months the high winds brought in many Kittiwakes with some washed up dead on the Channel coast and exceptional flocks of 510 in the Parrett Estuary on 2 February and 400 at Aust on 24 March. Guillemots were also blown in on the storms and, although at least five survived, most were picked up dead on the foreshore. Razorbills sadly contributed only four corpses. Little Auk was 'the' bird of January with a live single at Aust and New Passage on 13 January and a further single at Oldbury Power Station on 18 January which unfortunately died the next day as did another taken from a dog near Ham Green. Both now rest in the City Museum. The other excitement was a live Puffin on 12 January in the Parrett Estuary.

Two exotic escapes inhabited the Blaise Estate from the beginning of January to the first week of March and were thought to be Blue-fronted Amazon Parrots (*Amazone aestiva*). A touch of the tropics and the persistent calling was appreciated by most, apart from a pair of Jackdaws who were temporarily displaced from their traditional hole. Eight Barn Owls were recorded in the three months and two Long-eared Owls were discovered, one injured at Weston, the other dead at Chittening. Short-eared Owls fared better with a single at the Brue Estuary on five dates between 6 January and 13 February, two at Royal Portbury Dock on 11 February and singles at Severn Beach/Chittening from 8-29 March with two on the latter date. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker remains scarce but all three woodpecker species were recorded in five minutes and 150 metres in Leigh Woods on 4 January.

Male Black Redstarts were well represented with singles at ICI Hallen Works and West Huntspill until 15 March and 29 March respectively, as well as at Frenchay Hospital on 11 January and Clevedon on 17 March. There were good numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings with several flocks of 400 plus, particularly in North Avon, but the roost at Dinder of about half a million Starlings, 5000 Fieldfare and 5000 Redwing must have been an impressive sight. Fieldfares started to move away in February and Redwing from early March, the last reports of the two species being on 29 April at West Huntspill and 21 April at Arnos Court respectively. Blackcap records for January suggested a minimum of 17 birds, February eight and March 16; after the end of March it is difficult to separate wintering birds from returning migrants, although the main influx appeared to be during 20-24 April. Chiffchaffs overwintering gave six in January (four at CVL) and four in February. Firecrests were reported from Yatton, the Royal Fort Gardens and St. Anne's Park (both Bristol)

Great Grey Shrike



and Sand Bay. Two Bearded Tits were at Berrow throughout the winter and the Great Grey Shrike stayed at Apex Gardens (Burnham) from November 1983 until at least 1 February. A Hooded Crow was reported at Kingston Seymour and another at Yoxter in January, while two Ravens flew over Weston on 2 January and a single was seen at Charterhouse on 25 February. It was a good winter for Brambling with birds remaining until 8 April: noteworthy flocks included 140 at Northwick, 150 at Sand Bay and inland 40 at Compton Martin. Siskins were well distributed in small groups but a flock

of 100 was recorded at Wrington Warren on 18 February. Twite favoured Weston beach with a maximum of 35 in January but they were also present at several other Channel coast sites although not the previously regular one at Portishead. It was a poor winter for Redpoll with most flocks in single figures. A male Lapland Bunting was at Steart on 25 March and single Snow Buntings were at Oldbury on 12 February (female/immature) and the Kenn Estuary on 17 March (male).

Spring migration

April started with a cold depression in the early part of the month which delayed the early migrants. A high pressure system arrived on the 19th and lasted to the end of the month, bringing exceptionally high temperatures (up to 25C) and easterly winds. The system lasted with easterly or north-easterly winds until mid May, when an unsettled period began with some wet periods interspersed with sunny days and winds from the southerly quarter. Mid June brought high pressure and warm sunny weather but on the 21st a low pressure system brought fresh westerlies until the very end of the month when high pressure returned together with a north-westerly airstream.

A Red-throated Diver flew north past Berrow on 27 April. Good numbers of Fulmars were reported with six at Sand Point on 22 June, while a spectacular 1950 Manx Shearwaters were recorded at the same place and date in two hours. A Little Egret was at Steart on 1 June. Wigeon hung about at CVL and the Parrett Estuary in small numbers throughout the three months and Shoveler at CVL reached 97 on 8 April before falling to single figures later in the month and then rose again with a late influx of 43 on 24 June. Up to five Aythya hybrids were at CVL in spring. Common Scoter sightings were regular on the Channel in April and May with a maximum of twelve at Burnham on 2 May. The reservoirs also recorded up to four in April and a female Velvet Scoter was flying up river at New Passage on 12 April. A female Scaup was in the Parrett Estuary on 2 June and Eider were seen in good numbers in the Channel throughout with 13, including three males, off New Passage on 13 May. CVL had 124 Goldeneye on 8 April although these passed on quickly during the month. Single Goosander were at CVL, Saltford and Severn Beach on various dates in April, and lone Red-breasted Mergansers were at the Brue Estuary (1 April) and New Passage (29 April and 8 May). Unusual birds of prey included Marsh Harriers at Apex Gardens on 1 May and CVL on 23 May, and an Osprey at CVL on 6 and 8 May.

Oystercatchers reached 200 at Steart in May but there were no inland records. It was a good year for Little Ringed Plover with ten birds recorded at various sites in both April and May. Ringed Plover peaked at 255 at Severn Beach on 28 May while a female Kentish Plover was at Royal Portbury Dock on 28 April and a male at Blackstone Rocks, Clevedon on 3 May; hopefully they can meet in 1985. The odd Golden Plover lingered at Northwick in early May and Grey Plover reached 145 at Steart on 1 May. Sanderling were present in many Channel areas in April and May and rose to 33 at Berrow on 28 May. An adult Temminck's Stint was at Oldbury Power Station on 28 April and two Little Stints were off Blackstone Rocks, Clevedon on 17 May while one in full summer plumage was at the same site on 14 June. A single Curlew Sandpiper was at Severn Beach on 18 May and Dunlin peaked at 1200 at the same place on 22 April. Five Ruff were at various Channel locations in April, a late Jack Snipe was seen at Westbury-sub-Mendip (8 April) and Snipe were around in small numbers until 15 May. The easterly winds of April and early May produced unprecedented numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits, presumably deflected from their normal migration route up the English Channel from their West African wintering area. The migration began with 76 at the Parrett Estuary on 24 April rising steadily to 1550 which flew past New Passage on the 27th and a magnificent 2100 gathered at the Parrett Estuary on the 28th falling to 1300 on the 29th and 915 on 1 May before tailing off to 52 on 3 May. Further smaller flocks continued to fly up the Channel until the end of May. Black-tailed Godwits appeared only in small numbers. There was also a good Whimbrel passage from 15 April with 767 at the Steart roost on 30 April. Other rarer waders were Spotted Redshank (two intermittently at Brue Estuary), Greenshank (up to three at Channel sites and two at CVL) and Green Sandpiper (up to three throughout the period). Turnstone counts in the Aust - Chittening area reached 183 on 1 May. Arctic Skua showed up from 23 April with a single off Portishead followed by three off New Passage on the 27th and two at Steart on the 28th; four others were noted in May and June. First-year Mediterranean Gulls appeared at Portishead and West Huntspill on 20 April and two further individuals were at the Parrett Estuary on 14 to 17 May. An exciting first for Avon was at Severn Beach on 19 May in the shape of an adult Franklin's Gull accompanied by a Black-headed Gull for comparison. There was an excellent passage of Little Gulls starting in the last week of April rising to a record spring number of 74 at CVL on 1 May with records from many Channel sites together with a single in Cumberland Basin on 20 May. An adult Ring-billed Gull was at CVL on 8 April. Kittiwake produced modest numbers with only 21 at Berrow on 21 April and 25 at Portishead on 19 May. The spring produced an unusually heavy movement of Common and Arctic Terns up the Channel with up to 100 birds involved in daily movements. Sandwich Tern occurred rarely—four at Steart

on 1 May, two at West Huntspill on 27 May, six in the River Parrett on 17 June and two at the same site on 29 June. Five Little Terns appeared in ones and twos while Black Terns produced exceptional numbers particularly in late April with 48 at New Passage on the 26th, up to 37 at CVL in the same period with smaller numbers continuing to be seen until 16 June.

Small numbers of Turtle Dove were noted from 24 April, the first bird being at New Passage. A Ring-necked Parakeet was seen on 1 April at Brean—luckily our area seems safe from colonisation at the moment. Cuckoo was first recorded on 15 April and the first Swift was seen at Southville on 21 April while up to 5000 were estimated at CVL at the end of May and in early June. A Hoopoe was seen and heard at Wraxall on 20 April and a Wryneck was in a Whitchurch garden on 1 May. The Short-toed Lark at Berrow on 9 May was only the second Somerset record (the first was in 1973 at Brean Down). The first Sand Martin record was 24 March at Durleigh and the numbers thereafter were low, reflecting the recent savage decline of the species. Swallows arrived first on 30 March at Blake's Pool and House Martins were at CVL on 1 April followed by a slow build up during April and eventually flocks of several hundred at CVL in May and June. Tree Pipits were reported from 18 April and there was evidence of migration up the Channel in the last week of April with similar movements being noted for Meadow Pipit. There were also two April records of Water Pipit (*Anthus s. spinoletta*) at CVL and Berrow. Yellow Wagtails showed up first at Cheddar Reservoir on 7 April but subsequent numbers were disappointing. Numbers of White Wagtails (*Motacilla a. alba*) were seen at the coast and reservoirs on passage and further singles were at CVL on 5 and 15 May and in Cumberland Basin on 15 June. Nightingales appeared fairly numerous from 22 April when the first song was heard, Black Redstart had five April records, all on the coast, and the first Redstart occurred on 8 April when a female was at Brean Down. Whinchats appeared in small numbers after 15 April and the earliest Wheatear was at Sand Bay on 18 March; two birds of the 'Greenland' race (*Oenanthe o. leucorrhoa*) were at West Huntspill on 27 April. Six male and one female Ring Ouzels were recorded between 31 March and 15 April at or near various coastal locations. The first arrival dates for warblers were: Grasshopper, 19 April; Sedge, 19 April; Reed, 22 April; Lesser Whitethroat, 20 April; Whitethroat, 14 April; Garden, 5 April; Wood, 22 April; Willow, 28 March; all in all a fairly typical year. Spotted Flycatcher made it by 29 April, an average date, and Pied Flycatchers appeared from 3 April. A female Lapland Bunting was at Sand Point on 29 April, an unusual record in spring for a species more normally expected in autumn.

Selected breeding species

Little Grebes at CVL reared five young (four broods) in a poor year while two young were raised from one brood at Portbury Wharf. Great Crested Grebes raised no young at all at CVL probably due to the lowest water levels since 1976 but one brood of three was raised at Orchardleigh Lake. Grey Heron counts produced the following occupied nests: 26 at Cleeve Wood, 24 at Portbury (best since 1973), five at Newton Park (or just outside), five at West Huntspill, four at CVL (Denny Island). Mute Swans reared 14 young from three broods at CVL and the resident pairs at Bucklands Pool and Portishead started with eight cygnets each. Canada Geese raised 66 young from nine broods at CVL and a nest was recorded at Huntworth. Two broods of Shelduck at CVL fledged all 18 young, probably aided by the new floating platforms in Herriotts Pool but below average numbers of juveniles were noted on the Channel coast. Other CVL records of young ducks in a poor year were Gadwall 129 (19 broods), Mallard 227 (38 broods), Pochard two (one brood) and Tufted Duck ten (two broods). No Shoveler young were recorded although three females were present during the breeding season and there were similar negative results from two males and a female Garganey who were probably disturbed by fishing activities. Four female Ruddy Ducks produced no young and Coot numbers were low with 15 young from six broods. The successful breeding of Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Kestrel in Avon continued to be censused for the Club's Bird of Prey survey. Hobby was well recorded but no definite breeding established this year although the regularity at some sites could indicate breeding nearby. Peregrines stayed late at various coastal locations and there is still hope of a return of this species to Avon as a breeding bird.

Oystercatcher bred on the Channel coast with at least two nests being found, and although one failed at the egg stage, the other produced two young—a welcome piece of news for Avon. There was also good reason to believe Little Ringed Plover bred in the county with mating observed at two sites. Its larger relative the Ringed Plover was successful at Royal Portbury Dock with at least two pairs breeding. Redshank made an average year at its usual sites.

Cuckoos made themselves heard as usual and two young were seen to be fed by Dunnocks, one at Severn Beach and the other at Banwell. Barn Owls bred in the county and Little Owl was reported at many sites but with

definite breeding only at three places, although undoubtedly many more pairs were successful. Tawny Owls continue to breed and were reported hooting frequently. Small numbers of Nightjars were at Shapwick Heath. Kingfishers were well reported and there were confirmations of breeding. Green Woodpeckers and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were fairly common and continue to breed successfully, but Lesser Spotted was reported only from five woods with no confirmed breeding records. Twelve pairs of Sand Martins bred at Somerdale, an improvement of two on last year – was this the only breeding in Avon in 1984? Tree Pipits occurred at the usual Mendip sites and a family party of Rock Pipits was at Clevedon in July. Thirteen Dipper nests were found on the Wellow and Midford brooks and a single pair were at Snuff Mills on the River Frome.

Eleven Nightingales were in song at Inglestone Common and a further 20 were at twelve other sites although at a few of these song was not sustained over more than one or two days. Redstarts were still scarce with only Charterhouse, Black Rock, Crook Peak and Weston-in-Gordano providing a handful of singing males – this beautiful bird would be most welcome elsewhere in the area. The Whinchat is another scarce bird with breeding proved only at Burrington Combe while Stonechats occurred on the Mendips and Brean Down with breeding proved at several sites. Cetti's Warbler is continuing to hold its own in the southern part of the area, but Grasshopper Warblers were only reported nine times. Sedge Warbler records included 22 singing males at CVL and 17 at Berrow with breeding proved at Chittingen and Winterbourne - a good year. The more uniform-coloured Reed Warbler was well represented at CVL, 10 males were at Apex Gardens in May and a male was singing in a hawthorn hedge above the coast path near Clevedon in completely 'unsuitable' habitat on 3 June. Lesser Whitethroats had an above average year but few Whitethroats were heard singing at CVL and comments indicated continuing low numbers throughout the area. 1984 was the year of the BTO Wood Warbler survey and it is clear that the main stronghold was Leigh Woods with up to five singing males and one successful nest of four young. Song was also reported from Cheddar, Brislington, CVL, Combe Down, Shapwick Heath, Abbots Pool, Yeo Estuary, Middle Hope, Weston Woods and Brockley Combe, although at least some of these would have been passage birds. Pied Flycatchers are frequently seen on passage but no breeding has yet been recorded (why should they all go to Gwent?, we have plenty of suitable trees with holes!) A breeding bird which is seldom reported is Tree Sparrow with only one record of a pair with young at Marshfield. Hawfinches were present at one site, two singing Cirl Buntings at another and up to eight Corn Bunting were singing near Marshfield. There were no records of this last species at any other site although they are known to occur on Mendip.

Other mid summer observations

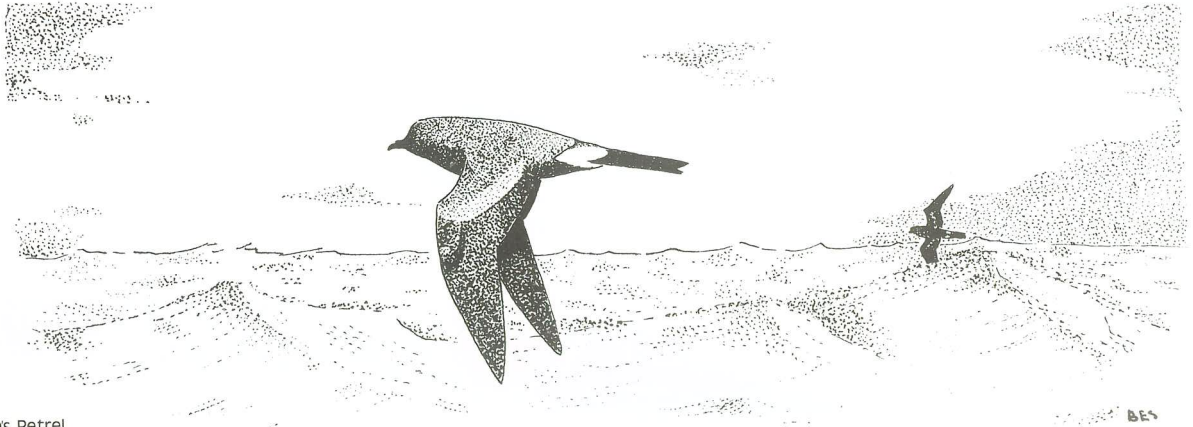
The Channel coast provided a single Fulmar at New Passage on 23 July and three flying south off Berrow on 28 July. Forty five Manx Shearwaters were counted in a brief sea-watch off Brean Down on 12 July and a further 11 and 19 were off Berrow on 15 and 28 July respectively. Also the high number of 114 Gannets was noted off Berrow on 28 July and seven Common Scoter were flying south west at New Passage on 23rd. The influx of American waders to our south and east coasts provided a White-rumped Sandpiper at West Huntspill on 29 July, the first for our area since November 1978. The other excitement of July was an adult summer-plumaged White-winged Black Tern at CVL on 8 July. Three Black Terns at Cheddar Reservoir and another eight at CVL were also welcome in that month. Linnets began the build up of post breeding flocks with 80 at New Passage in July and a similar number in the Clevedon/Yeo Estuary.

Autumn migration

July was a dry, sunny and warm month with temperatures above 20C on most days. August continued dry and warm with high pressure and easterly winds but increasing cloud and rain arrived at the end of the month. September was unsettled with above average rainfall and strong northerly winds in the fourth week. October was dominated by low pressure systems from the Atlantic, providing a predominantly mild but wet period. A bright period mid-month was sandwiched by gale force winds on 4/5th and 18/20th.

The high number of Little Grebes (107) at CVL on 27 August was thought to be due to smaller waters drying up. The largest number of Great Crested Grebes (465) occurred at CVL on 14 October. A Black-necked Grebe turned up on 21 August and was joined by two others on the 27th. They stayed until 15 September and there was some doubt as to whether all three were juveniles or merely one juvenile and two adults. A single juvenile at Barrow Gurney from 22 to 30 September was possibly one of the CVL birds.

Eleven Fulmars were noted in the Channel in the July to October period and modest numbers of Manx Shearwater were noted with the largest movements in mid September. One shearwater was seen being killed by a Great Black-backed Gull near Burnham on 21 September. The 9th of September produced a single Storm Petrel off the Kenn Estuary but nine Leach's Petrel were seen between 9 and 22 September in the Parrett Estuary with a further



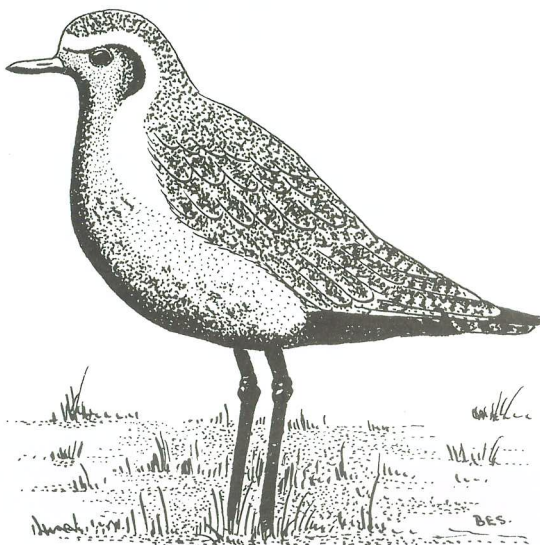
Leach's Petrel

five seen off Burnham on 20 October. The only Gannets of the period were the 114 mentioned previously on 28 July and a single juvenile Shag was seen in flight off the Brue Estuary. A Little Egret brightened up August on the 21st – it was seen flying across the Parrett Estuary. Grey Herons found Blagdon Lake attractive with good numbers throughout and a peak of 33 on 23 September. The find of September was a Spoonbill at CVL on 5 September which stayed until the next day. The hope is that one day the species will return to breed in England, probably in East Anglia – it last bred here in the 17th Century – although its nearest present breeding area is in the Netherlands. There were a record 184 Canada Geese at CVL on 8 July and two dark-bellied Brent Geese were at Steart on 27 October. Shelduck peaked at 3000 on 15 September in the Steart/Parrett Estuary area. Wigeon numbers remained fairly low although there were small flocks of about 50 on the main reservoirs by the end of October. There were 183 Gadwall at CVL on 1 July and 93 were at Cheddar Reservoir on 22 October. August provided 1285 Teal on the 27th at CVL and later peaks of 909 at Blagdon Lake and 1200 at Cheddar Reservoir. Mallard had a high count of 1885 at CVL on 22 July and high numbers were sustained at all sites until a slight fall back in October. A single eclipse male Pintail was at CVL throughout July and into August when there was a small influx of five at Cheddar Reservoir on 28 August, three juveniles at CVL on 26th and a single on the Parrett Estuary on 20th. Eventually 15 were at Cheddar by 22 October and five at CVL on 28th. Garganey showed evidence of passage in August with a maximum of five at Blagdon Lake, two at Cheddar Reservoir and two at CVL. A late bird was seen at CVL on 14 October. The maximum counts of Shoveler were 310 at Blagdon Lake on 10 October, 275 at CVL on 27 August and 113 at Cheddar Reservoir on 13 October. The puzzle of this season was a Marbled Teal which turned up at CVL on 24 August and stayed until 18 September after which it moved to Cheddar Reservoir from 22 September to 27 October before returning to Chew on 28 October. The question of its being the first British record is in some doubt due to the possibility of an escape, but the nearest breeding areas are in Spain and North Africa. A female Red-crested Pochard was at CVL on 14 October. Highest figures for Pochard were 800 at Cheddar on 29 September and for Tufted Duck 515 at CVL on 27 August. A single female Scaup was in the Brue Estuary/Steart area from 18 to 26 October and a flock of five Eider (including two drakes) were at Berrow and Burnham on 29/30 September. Ones and twos of Common Scoter were in the Channel during September and October with a flock of seven off Berrow on 13 October. Goldeneye were around in small numbers and an early Goosander turned up at Chew on 7 October. Ruddy Duck rose to 65 at CVL in September before falling to 21 in October.

The birds of prey produced little spectacular, but single 'ring-tail' Hen Harriers, were seen at Priddy on 4 October, at the Kenn Estuary on 30 September and 28 October, with birds also on the last date at Sand Point and Royal Portbury Dock. Times were not given so the last three sightings could have been of the same bird. Judging by reports of juveniles and family parties Sparrowhawk had a good breeding season. An Osprey flew over CVL on 23 August and

another was seen on 28 August coming from Royal Portbury Dock and flying towards Bristol; CVL provided two more singles, one on 1 October and the other on the 7th. Coastal Merlins appeared from 1 September with two inland records at Tog Hill on 20 October and CVL on 28 October. Hobbies, in pairs and singles, were well recorded until 24 September and Peregrines returned in good numbers from 11 August onwards. Steart and the Parrett Estuary is the most popular area but there were records for most of the Channel coast, less frequently at various reservoirs and also from Keynsham and Thornbury. There were eight Water Rails noted, seven alive and one donated to the City Museum by a Weston-Super-Mare cat.

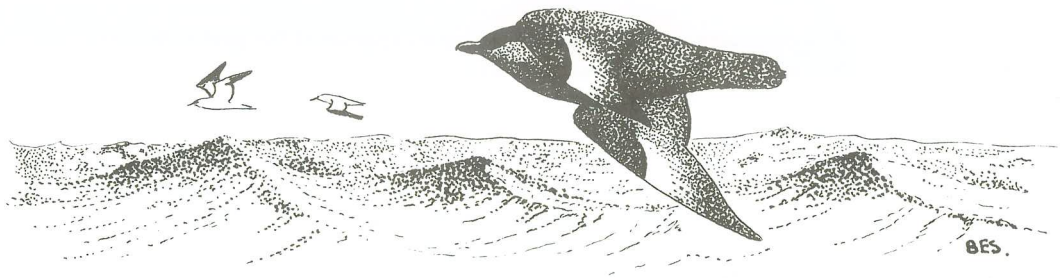
The low water level on the reservoirs produced ideal habitat for waders and passage of many species was excellent. Oystercatchers exceeded 300 in the Steart, Burnham and Berrow area in September and a high count of 20 was at CVL on 21 August. There was a good passage of Little Ringed Plover with 35 in August and one very late juvenile at Cheddar Reservoir on 13 October. The largest numbers of Ringed Plover were also in August, in the second half of the month, with at least 1000 birds along the Channel and 120 at CVL on 16 August. Blagdon Lake and Cheddar Reservoir also held good numbers. An adult Lesser Golden Plover, of the American sub-species (*Pluvialis d. dominica*) and still in partial summer plumage, was discovered at Stoke Moor on 4 October, flying on to Tealham Moor on the 8th before



Lesser Golden Plover

providing excellent views at Cheddar Reservoir from 9th to 26th. Golden Plover built up slowly from August to October in small flocks and Grey Plover also had modest coastal numbers (max 170 at Steart) but with more than usual inland records. Knot numbers made 160 on 4 October on the Parrett Estuary and the Sanderling maximum of 130 was at Berrow on 31 July. The Little Stint passage started on 2 August at CVL and numbers eventually rose to 27 at CVL on 3 October. CVL also provided a Temminck's Stint from 18 to 22 October. July's White-rumped Sandpiper was relocated at West Huntspill on 14-16 August and provided good views down to ten metres. It was a good year for Pectoral Sandpipers with a juvenile at Cheddar Reservoir from 28 August to 5 September and another at the Huntspill River on 13 September. One was at Blagdon Lake on 6 October and was joined by a second on the 9th. Further birds visited Cheddar making five in all for this site. There were good records of Curlew Sandpiper from an early date of 29 July to a late 5 December in a very mild autumn. Fourteen adults in transitional plumage were at CVL in early August and good numbers continued throughout the period. The only Purple Sandpipers were at Severn Beach on 30-31 October and Dunlin built up from the end of July with flocks of 4000 at Steart and Berrow by October. Ruff were well represented at the reservoirs with 30 birds together at both Blagdon Lake and CVL in August. Six records of Jack Snipe were noted from 24 September and Snipe had good numbers in August but were poor thereafter. Black-tailed Godwits reached 170 on the Huntspill River on 5 July and steady numbers were at the reservoirs later in the autumn. Bar-tailed Godwits totalled 108 in the Parrett Estuary on 25 July but thereafter numbers were disappointing. Whimbrel passage was small

and the largest 'flocks' were of twelve with the final record on 23 September. The Steart/Parrett Estuary area held 1150 Curlew on 13 September. Spotted Redshanks had a disappointing autumn with a highest count of just six at Steart in October while Redshanks had a respectable 1400 at the same site on 28 August. A Soviet visitor in the form of a juvenile Marsh Sandpiper was welcome between 20-29 August when it commuted between Cheddar, CVL and Blagdon. It is the second record for the area, the first being in October 1982. Greenshanks had a good passage with a record-equalling count of 40 at Blagdon Lake on 24 August. A juvenile Lesser Yellowlegs was at Avonmouth Sewage Works from 30 September to 5 October and the same site provided eleven Green Sandpipers in August in a pretty unexceptional year for this species. Late July provided the first Wood Sandpiper of the period at CVL and at least ten birds were present at the reservoirs in August, the final bird remaining at Cheddar until 5 October. Turnstone reached 140 at New Passage in September. A Wilson's Phalarope stayed at West Huntspill Treatment Works for nine days in mid October giving good views and Grey Phalaropes appeared at Huntspill, Steart, Burnham, Blagdon Lake and CVL in September and at Cheddar Reservoir in early October. Seven Arctic Skuas were seen in the period, all on the coast apart from a juvenile at Cheddar. A single Long-tailed Skua was seen flying north at Brean Down on 9 September and in all eight



Great Skua

Great Skuas were recorded in September. A single juvenile Mediterranean Gull was at CVL on 10-16 September and about 40 Little Gulls were reported from July to October. A juvenile Sabine's Gull was at Littleton-on-Severn on 13 September. Four of the Scandinavian race of Lesser Black-backed Gull were noted in September and October, three at Chew and one at Portishead and five Herring Gulls of the Mediterranean race were at CVL in the period, as well as one of the Scandinavian race on 14 October. Up to 20 Kittiwakes were also seen in the Channel at various times during the period. Tern movements involved Sandwich (30) from 8 July to 23 September; Common (c200) from 25 July to 25 October, Arctic (c30) from 30 August to 18 October; Little (15) from 21 July to 4 September; Black (c80) from 22 July to 4 November and a juvenile White-winged Black Tern at CVL from 28 August to 1 September following the previously mentioned adult in July. A single Guillemot was at New Passage on 9 September.

Small numbers of Turtle Doves stayed around until 23 September when one was at Barrow Gurney. Similarly juvenile Cuckoos were seen until 12 September. Barn Owls were scarce at one a month apart from a family group of five, and Little and Tawny Owls were reported in moderate numbers. Single Short-eared Owls turned up on the coast after 14 September. A late Swift was over Avonmouth on 7 October while small numbers of Sand Martins were around until the last sighting on 8 October at Saltford but total numbers still seemed very low. A Tawny Pipit was at Berrow on 23 September and Water Pipits were at CVL on 14 and 31 October and at Cheddar Reservoir on the 28th. Single White Wagtails were seen at Clevedon in August and at Bucklands Pool in October. A male and a female Ring Ouzel were seen on passage on 21 September and 28 October respectively and the first Fieldfare was recorded at Abbots Leigh on 5 October. The first two Redwings were recorded at the same site on 28 September. A sizeable movement of 1750 Redwings was noted at Weston on 7 October. Three juvenile Aquatic Warblers were ringed at Chew Valley during 12-21 August and a partial albino Sedge Warbler stayed at Saltford from 5-8 October. Three Firecrests were recorded in September and October and small numbers of Brambling were seen on the coast from 10 October. Siskin showed up from 27 September, Redpoll on 1 September and Lapland Bunting from 27 September. In the case of the last three species numbers rose steadily throughout October with maximum flocks of thirty, eleven and six respectively.

The second winter period

November was mild with light and variable winds until the 21st, after which strong to gale force winds occurred each day. A complex series of low pressure areas at the end of the month caused these gales which reached a peak on the night of the 23/24th. December was also mild but with no gales or extended cold spells. In fact the first frost of the winter did not occur until 17/18 December, a very late date, and even then the minimum for the month was only -1C.

There were two Great Northern Divers, one at CVL on 24 November which probably flew into Cheddar Reservoir on 25 November and stayed until 17 December, and the other at Steart on 25 November. Great Crested Grebe numbers rose to 195 at CVL on 9 December and Cormorant numbers here reached 34. A Bittern was at CVL on 16 December and Grey Herons showed up in good numbers at the same site with up to 25. Mute Swan herds were 58 at Tealham/Tadham Moor on 25 November and 38 at Bristol Bridge on 28 December. Early November (4th) saw the first Bewick's Swan at Blagdon Lake and numbers increased to 25 on 30 November, including six juveniles; CVL had eight (two juveniles), Cheddar nine (no juveniles) and eight were at Severn Beach in December (two juveniles). Small parties of White-fronted Geese were in the Channel and a Greylag Goose was in Bristol City Docks throughout as well as there being eight at CVL on 19 December. A new record of 233 Canada Geese was claimed at CVL on 31 December and 21 Brent Geese were recorded in the Channel in the two months.

The mild weather of December proved ideal for many duck species at CVL and at Blagdon Lake. CVL had 5600 Teal and Blagdon 2000 in mid month and Pochard reached 2000 at Blagdon and 365 at CVL. Wigeon rose to 415 at CVL and 220 at Blagdon Lake, Gadwall 80 and 70 and Tufted Duck 180 and 650 respectively. A Mallard x Pintail hybrid was at CVL on 21 December and Red-crested Pochards turned up in the form of a female on 3 November (probably the bird of October) and a male almost in full plumage in the Brue Estuary. Various *Aythya* hybrids were seen at the lakes and were thought to include Pochard x Tufted, Tufted x Scaup and Pochard x Ring-necked, all very confusing to the ducks and observers. The Marbled Teal resided at Blagdon Lake between 8 and 26 December. Four Common Scoters were recorded in November, (three at CVL and one at New Passage) and eight were in the Parrett Estuary on 14 and 17 December. A treat for a few observers at CVL was a group of five Velvet Scoters on 10 November, three immature males and two immature females, while a single female or immature was at Steart on 25 November. Exceptional numbers of Goldeneye (124) were at Cheddar Reservoir on 23 December and three Smew were seen, two at CVL and one at Blagdon Lake. At least four Red-breasted Mergansers were present at the reservoirs in the two months and Goosanders reached 49 at CVL on 15 December. Ruddy Duck with 175 at CVL on 15 December and 425 at Blagdon Lake on the 23rd put in a good showing.

Birds of prey were well recorded with a Red Kite near Chew Magna on 31 December and five Hen Harriers, three males (one immature) and two 'ring-tails' seen at Steart, the Brue Estuary and CVL. At least ten Merlins were noted on the Channel coast and seven Peregrines also on the coast with up to four sightings at CVL and Cheddar Reservoir. A Spotted Crake was at CVL from 17-20 November and eight Water Rails were at the same site on 2 December.

Waders were unspectacular with one or two exceptions like the Avocet at Royal Portbury Dock on 9 December. Ringed Plover totalled 300 on the Channel coast and five at CVL; Golden Plover flocks included 284 at CVL, 200 at Tealham/Tadham Moors and up to 80 in December at inland sites while Grey Plover were noted only in small numbers apart from 150 at Steart on 18 December. Lapwings increased during November (including a leucistic bird at CVL) until there were approximately 5000 birds in the area in December. About 400 Knot were on the Channel coast in November, mainly at Steart. Seven Little Stints were very acceptable, three at CVL, three at Cheddar Reservoir and a single at Oldbury Power Station. Small numbers of Purple Sandpipers were at Severn Beach and Sand Bay, but nearly 20000 Dunlin were in the area in December. Four Ruff, about 14 Jack Snipe and approximately 500 Snipe were fairly average. Five Woodcock included one on Brandon Hill (Bristol). Parties of 17 and 20 Black-tailed Godwits were recorded in the Parrett Estuary on 21 November and 8 December, five Spotted Redshanks were in the same area in both months while three Greenshanks visited CVL on 3 November. About 15 Green Sandpipers were at various sites with up to six at Avonmouth Sewage Works in November, and wintering Common Sandpipers appeared at five sites.

November provided a Great Skua flying north at Burnham on the 24th and sightings of a first-winter Pomarine Skua were obtained at West Huntspill on 1 December, Clevedon on 2 December and the Parrett Estuary on 27 December.

Two or possibly three adult Mediterranean Gulls were in the gull roosts at CVL and another adult was seen at West Huntspill on the last day of the year. Five Little Gulls were around in November and three in December with records from the lower Channel (five), CVL (two) and Royal Portbury Dock (one). About 4000 Black-headed Gulls were moving down the Channel on 24 November after heavy gales. Two birds of the Scandinavian race of Lesser Black-backed Gull were in the roost at CVL in November and a single in December, and birds of both the Scandinavian and Mediterranean races of Herring Gull were also in the roost during the period. The heavy gales brought 240 Kittiwakes off Aust on 23 November and 200 passing Burnham on the 24th – there may be considerable overlap of the two groups. A Black Tern was flying down river at Chittening on 1 November and possibly the same bird was seen at Steart on 4 November, a very late date. A dead Guillemot was picked up at Chittening on 19 November (bridled form) and another at Weston Beach on 20 December.

A flock of 150 Stock Doves remained at Oldbury Power Station for several weeks. Two live and one dead Barn Owls were recorded and twelve Little Owls were noted in the two months. Short-eared Owls provided good numbers



Short-eared Owl

at Steart (three), Severnside (two), Royal Portbury Dock (two), Clevedon/Yeo Estuary (three) and Kenn Moor. Only three Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were noted at Ashton Court, Hallatrow and Snuff Mills. Clevedon played host to a leucistic Rock Pipit and up to seven Water Pipits were recorded at CVL. Black Redstarts appeared in good numbers with eight singles in November and eleven birds in December mainly in coastal locations but three inland birds were at Cheddar Reservoir, Yatton and Winscombe. Two lingering summer visitors were interesting, a first-winter Redstart at Steart on 10 November and a late Wheatear at West Huntspill on the same date. Fieldfares and Redwings built up slowly in the mild weather and flocks above 100 were exceptional. A male Cetti's Warbler was at Apex Gardens between 28 November and 15 December and an Icterine Warbler was at West Huntspill on 4 November. Good numbers of overwintering Blackcaps were about in this early winter period as were Chiffchaffs with one of the Siberian race (*Phylloscopus collybita tristis*) at Saltford on 8 December. A Firecrest was at Abbots Leigh on 16 November and Bearded Tits were seen at Berrow and the Brue Estuary. Two Ravens were at the Axe Estuary on 5 December. Two aberrant Starlings were observed, one with a white tail and the other a pure albino at Shepperdine. The only Brambling record was a flock of twelve at the unusual location of The Promenade in Clifton in November. A large flock of 120 Goldfinches brightened up Avonmouth Sewage Works in October and November. Siskins were around in small numbers and up to twenty Twite were seen in various coastal sites. Redpolls never materialised in more than handfuls but Lapland Buntings had a good November with six birds being seen and a further single in December. Even better was a flock of eight Snow Buntings at Severn Beach from 25 November with singles at Aust (18th), the Brue Estuary (8th) and CVL (11th). Finally four Corn Buntings were at Chittening on 12 December – an unusual species for this area.

BIRDS AT BLAGDON LAKE, 1963-1983

by A. H. Davis

Introduction

Blagdon Lake, Avon, is sited in the upper Yeo Valley, flanked by the Mendip Hills to the south, and high land between Butcombe and Nempnett Thrubwell to the north. Completed in 1904 with an area of 178 ha (440 acres) it has a capacity of 1692 million gallons. Length of the lake is given as 2.75 km (1.65 miles) with a water perimeter of 11.6 km (7.2 miles). The maximum depth of water is 12.8m (42 feet) with an average depth of 4.2m (14 feet) being shallowest at the Ubley (eastern) end and deepest at the dam end. The lake is surrounded by farmland and mixed and coniferous plantations. Blagdon is close to Chew Valley Lake (2.5 km to the east) and together they form perhaps the most important ornithological wetland unit in South-west England (see Fig.1 for sketch map).

There are differences between the two lakes –Chew is 52 years younger and is twice the size. Blagdon is less exposed to wind action and shore erosion, less turbid, has more oxygen, more extensive submerged macrophyte vegetation, a more varied littoral fauna, and less plankton. Blagdon also has fewer coarse fish such as Roach *Rutilus rutilus* and Perch *Perca fluviatilis* than has Chew, thus affecting the status of Great Crested Grebes, Cormorants, and Goosanders, species that thrive on the large shoals of fry at Chew. Blagdon generally attracts small numbers of these birds, although larger flocks of grebes during the past two years possibly indicates the increased presence of coarse fish. Wilson *et al* (1975 a & b) described a serious increase in nutrients and other materials in the outflow waters of both Blagdon and Chew since the mid 60's. This increase is closely linked to the onset of deoxygenation in the bottom waters, which occurred at Chew in 1972, causing a food shortage which led to high numbers of duck and Little Grebes moulting at Blagdon during August instead of at Chew.

Blagdon is an important water for ducks and waders, but since the completion of Chew in 1956 it has become over-shadowed by its near neighbour. Possible reasons for its inferiority in terms of variety of species are: a) the lake is 'hidden' by surrounding hills, b) it is relatively narrow, and c) its axis is east-west compared with CVLs north-south. A few stalwart observers have covered the lake fairly frequently during the period under review but observer coverage has never been as good as at Chew. More observers visit the lake in years when mud is exposed in the autumn months and to a lesser extent during the winter. The true status of birds during the spring and summer is poorly known, due to poor coverage and this must be borne in mind when reading the passerine section of the systematic list. In general, the lake is poor for terns and gulls; there is no nocturnal roost of gulls, although a daytime roost forms during winter. There is interchange in terms of waders and ducks between Chew and Blagdon, sometimes resulting from disturbance by fishermen especially during the autumn. The lake is also a refuge for ducks from Cheddar Reservoir when sailing there causes disturbance during the winter months.

The Ubley end is of particular importance to birds because of its shallowness, its emergent vegetation (but no reeds!) and its willow scrub. The best passerine breeding habitat is at the dam end with native conifers plus some gardens. The woodland plantations around the lake have recently been managed by the Avon Wildlife Trust. Coniferous trees in a derelict state have been cleared and these areas planted with native deciduous trees to give the plantations a mix of trees of varying ages. The plantations have also suffered windblow problems because of the lack of past management. Hopefully the new management plan will alleviate the problem in the future. Looking forward there is a possibility of a picnic site for the general public in the Butcombe Bay area, and perhaps we can anticipate refuge areas or nature reserves being set up which would stop the disturbance by fishermen. There are no sailing activities, which results in the lake being an ideal refuge for wintering ducks. There are at present two birdwatching hides sited at the Ubley end and at Home Bay Point.

As with Chew, water levels are usually highest in late winter but levels begin to fall from May onwards, and in dry years, mud is exposed especially at the Ubley end. Water extraction during the summer and autumn exaggerates the fall in the autumn. Generally speaking, water rises quickly in early winter until the lake is full again in late winter/early spring. In some years the lake has remained low throughout the winter, for example during 1964/5 and well into the

spring. In other years the levels have remained high throughout the summer and autumn providing little joy for the birds or their watchers.

All records in the systematic list were taken from Somerset Bird Reports 1963-1977, Avon Bird Reports 1978-1983, BOC Bird News, and several personal log books. Records of unusual birds have only been included if accepted by the County Reports concerned. Observers' initials are given for birds seen once or twice during the period under review. In the Wildfowl section reference is made to an earlier paper of mine (Davis 1980) where I summarized the numbers of waterfowl from September 1971 to March 1980, and compared these with results from 1948 to 1962 covered by Atkinson-Willes (1963). In both periods birds were counted at monthly intervals from September to March inclusive, and by taking the average of the three highest counts in each season, a figure representing the regular population was reached—a figure indicating a population one might find when the largest number of a species were present.

A small minority of records listed as 'Ubley' are included. After several species accounts some important records pre 1963 and for 1984 are listed. The pre 1963 records have been extracted from *A Revised List of the Birds of the Bristol District* by H. H. Davis referred to by (D) in the text or *Birds of Somerset* by E M Palmer and D K Ballance referred to by (P&B).

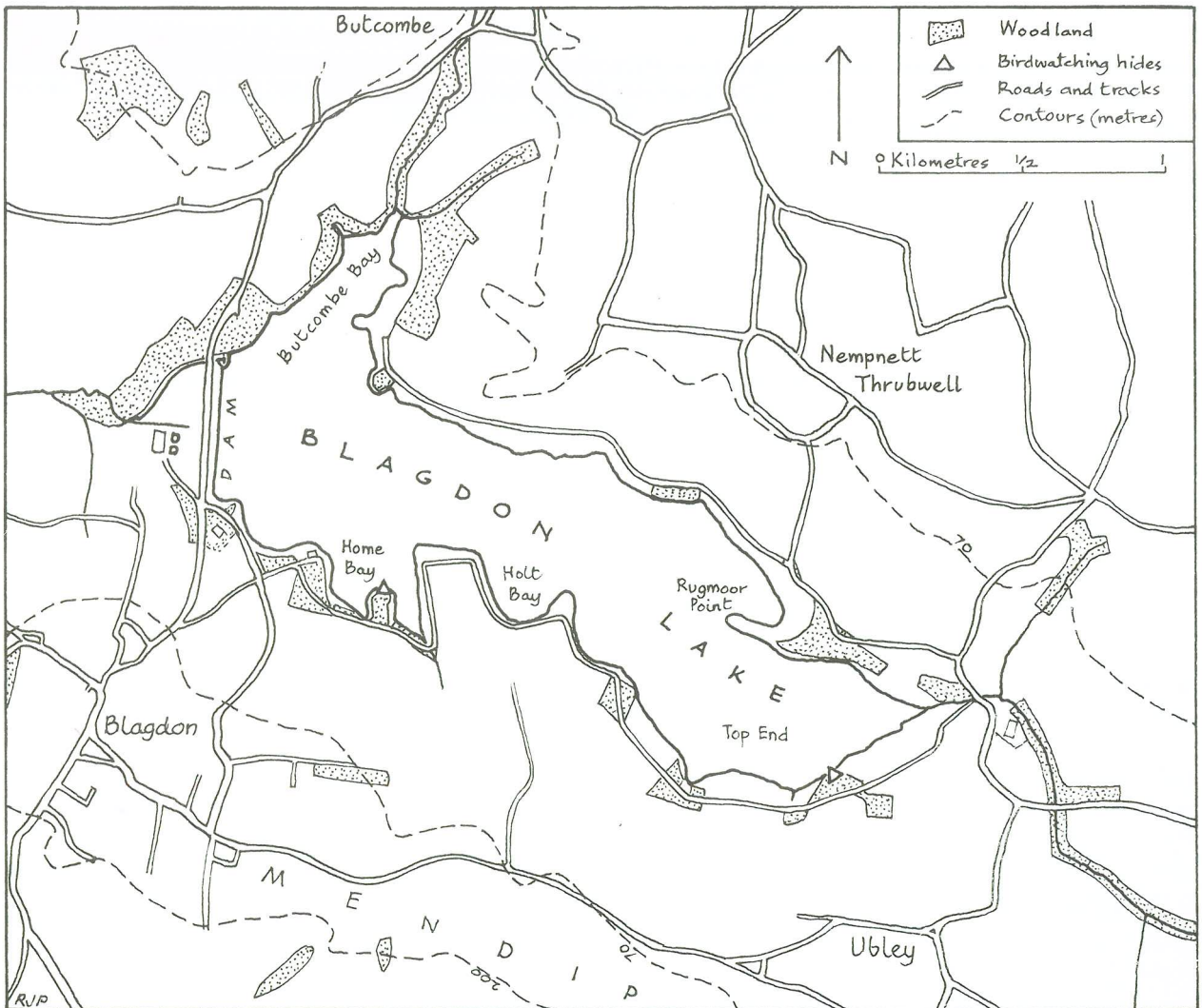


Fig. 1. Map showing main features of study area at Blagdon Lake.

The systematic list

The list contains accounts of most species recorded at Blagdon Lake, 1963-1983. The others are included separately at the end. The sequence follows the sequence and nomenclature of Professor K H Voous (1977, *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species*).

BLACK-THROATED DIVER *Gavia arctica*. Single birds on 4 March 1966 (WLR) and on 9 March 1975 (PJC). (One, early April 1946 (D).)

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER *Gavia immer*. Six or seven birds recorded during the twenty years. Singles on 4-21 December 1965, 30 January, and 19 March 1967, 15 March 1975, early January 1978, 2 December 1979 to 23 January 1980, 20 November to 6 December 1981. (Seen at intervals since 1916 (D).)

PIED-BILLED GREBE *Podilymbus podiceps*. Single bird, the first to be recorded in Britain and Europe, on 22 December 1963 (HAT, RJP). Almost certainly the same bird observed at the Ubley end, 23 May to 6 June 1968 (KELS *et al*). It spent the intervening years at Chew. See Prytherch (1965) and Simmons (1969) for more details.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. Irregularly recorded in very small numbers during the winter months. Mainly a summer visitor from March to early November with the highest counts occurring in the autumn, mainly in September and October. The highest count ever was in 1972 when 74 were present on 21 September. This number was probably due to summer food shortage at Chew, which meant that birds from there moulted at Blagdon. It is thought likely that high autumn counts in other years may have involved birds from Chew. Other counts of over 40 are as follows: 57, October 1966; 42, September 1967; 42, October 1968; 42, October 1971; 46, July and 50, August 1982. An average of four pairs present during the breeding season over the twenty year period, with a maximum of nine pairs in 1972 and 1985. Six broods were recorded in 1967 and four in 1975 and 1981.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*. A breeding species, with its most successful season in 1967 when 17 broods were recorded. Breeding success fluctuates considerably with this species. In 1963 12 broods were counted while in 1964 only one brood was located. Because of low water levels no breeding took place in 1965, but in 1966 9 pairs bred, while 1967 produced the record breeding success. In 1968 four pairs bred and only four juveniles were seen in 1969. In 1971 four pairs were seen with young, but in 1972 six or seven pairs were located during June but there was no sign of any young. In 1973 and 1974 there was no sign of breeding, but in 1975 five broods with seven young were observed. Again in 1976 there was no success due to the drought conditions. From 1977-1980 two broods were located in each year, and in the four years 1980-1983 only one brood was seen but brood counts have not been exhaustive in recent years. The highest count during the 60's was in spring 1967, when 105 were counted on 23 April. From 1970 to 1982 inclusive low numbers were recorded with maximum counts of 46 on 13 April 1972 and 34 on 5 May 1982. The pattern of records through the 60's and 70's tended to show peaks in the autumn months with few during mid-winter (sometimes absent) and an increase in numbers during March and April, often producing the highest counts of the year. An upsurge in numbers occurred during late 1983, with 150 on 30 November and 188 on 17 December; this upsurge is probably due to a recent increase in coarse fish. (In 1984, 158 counted in January, 123 in February.)

RED-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps grisegena*. A single bird on 23 February 1979 was joined by another on the 25 February both staying to 10 April with one remaining to 26 April. This record was part of a nation-wide influx of this species during freezing conditions (LAT, NT, KEV *et al*). (One during 1947 (D).)

SLAVONIAN GREBE *Podiceps auritus*. Only six or seven birds recorded as follows: two on 25 March 1964; single birds, 12 November 1966 to 15 April 1967, 15 October 1967, 18 March, 14 April 1979, 17 December 1983 to February 1984. (Reported on various occasions 1924-1967 (D).)

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*. Minimum of 18 recorded in eleven of the twenty years under study. Two were in spring on 11-13 April 1968, and 22 March 1973. The rest were in autumn: 12 July to 22 November. Two birds were seen 27 September to 11 October 1964, 19 November 1966, 16 September 1973 and on 13 October 1979. (Recorded frequently on various occasions 1938-1946 (D).)

STORM PETREL *Hydrobates pelagicus*. One on 3 September 1983 (KEV).

LEACH'S PETREL *Oceandroma leucorhoa*. One on 3 September 1983 (KEV). Both petrels were part of the dramatic seabird 'flight' around the Bristol Channel during severe gales. (See pp. 117-123).

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Small numbers in all months compared with Chew. Usually counts have been under ten, the highest numbers being in November and December 1978 when up to 16 present.

SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*. Three records of single birds observed on 21 September 1963, 7 September 1974 and on 30 January 1978 (One in 1913 and in September 1923 (D).)

BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*. One seen all Christmas week until 29 December 1981 (Bristol Waterworks). (Recorded on at least two occasions pre 1963.)

PURPLE HERON *Ardea purpurea*. An immature from 12 to 16 May 1963 (RJP *ét al*).

MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*. Bred most years with the most successful year being 1982 when five broods were recorded, but only eleven young survived. Moulting counts of forty and over were made in August 1964 (46), October 1965 (40), September 1967 (55), September 1974 (50), August 1975 (68), June and July 1981 (41), August 1982 (40), and in early June 1983 (66).

BEWICK'S SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*. Recorded annually during the twenty years, except for 1967, with the highest numbers in 1965 when 56 were counted on 4 January, in the winter of 1970/71 when 76 were seen on 30 December, and a maximum count of 92 made on 10 January 1982. In this last year 49 were reported on 12 December. The earliest autumn date was 22 October 1978. During the years when birds were observed in autumn/second winter period six had their first recorded dates in late October, seven in November and five in December. Departing birds have been recorded up to 28 March.

WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*. Four on 7 February 1965 (AHD, KLF, KEV). (Formerly a more frequent visitor especially in the late 50's and early 60's. For example in 1962 the following were recorded: 12 on 14 January, four on 3 November, twenty on 4 November, 18 on 11 November with eleven on the 18th).

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*. Only recorded in three years as follows: 21 on 8 February, one on 20 December 1963, up to 35 from 25 January to mid February 1970, an adult on 20 December 1970 and lastly three on 29 November 1977.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*. Single feral bird on 25 October 1977 (KEV).

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*. One on 1 April 1969. Three on 23-26 March 1974. From 1976 onwards birds started to wander from the rapidly growing population at Chew. In 1976 eleven were observed on 4 and 11 September. In 1977 there was an occasional autumn record of up to 13 birds but none were seen the following year. In 1979 one was observed on 29 April and 30 May while in 1980 two were recorded on 9 March and 19 April. It was only in 1981 that birds were more frequently seen with two on 2 March, up to six from 14 March to 3 May and from 13 October to 6 December. In 1982 birds were present from 13 February to 13 November with a maximum of 16 on the former date. It was in 1982 that the species bred for the first time, a pair raising four young later reduced to two. In 1983 recorded in February, March and July to December with a maximum number of 33 in October. (In 1984 maximum was 82 in November.)

BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis*. One on 4 and 11 September 1976. A single bird on 25 October, with four present on 26 December 1977. One reported 14 March to 8 April 1981. Presumably all escaped birds.

SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*. Very occasionally recorded mainly in the winter months, usually in very small numbers (one/two) but eleven were counted on 19 January 1974 and 32 flew west on 21 August 1982. A pair was seen on 30 May 1965, but this species has never bred at the lake.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*. A few birds arrive in August and September, most from October to December with peak numbers usually in January and February. Low numbers were reported in the 60's (in four of these years the maximum count was under 200) with the largest count of 324 in February 1964. Davis produced a regular number of 255 for the period during 1971-1980 when there were three counts of over 400: 971, February 1976; 450, January 1977; 550, December 1978. This species was commoner at the lake during the Atkinson-Willes survey period, 1948-1962, when a regular number of 375 was produced (counts from September to March) with the highest count being 1300. Numbers at Chew have also declined markedly since the 1960's.

(AMERICAN WIGEON *Anas americana*. One late January/early February 1946 (P&B).)

GADWALL *Anas strepera*. Small numbers occurred during the 60's, with for example, the maximum count in 1966 being 15 on 10 September while the maximum count in 1968 was on 14 April. A gradual increase in numbers noted during the 70's and early 80's when Davis produced a regular number of 35 during 1971-1980 (counts from September to March). The largest gatherings have occurred in September and it was on 11 September 1974 that the record count of 174 was made. Other notable counts include 71 in September 1975, 84 in November 1976 and 83 in September 1977. Generally

speaking most numerous in autumn, September to November, and to a lesser extent in spring with a small population in mid-winter. It first bred in 1973 and it has done so in most years since with a maximum of five broods in 1982. The highest pre 1963 count was 83 on 24 November 1961.

TEAL *Anas crecca*. Usually this species shows a gradual build up of numbers from October onwards to reach a peak in December/January, but in 1975 high numbers were present in September (1160) and October (981), but poor numbers for the rest of the 1975/1976 winter. The highest counts during the survey period excluding the above were: 952 in December 1969, 1487 in January 1974, 1850 in December 1976, 1000 in December 1983. Usually numbers decline after January. Davis found a regular number of 675 (counts September to March) during 1971-1980. A few have been seen in June but no breeding was recorded, although it has bred in the past according to Palmer and Ballance, before 1907, 1915, 1926 and probably other years to 1939. The highest count ever was made in 1956 when 2900 were counted on 8 January. (In 1984 the peak count was 2000 in December). (Green-winged Teal *A.c. carolinensis*. Male 18 December 1949 (P&B).)

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*. During the 1950's, 30-36 pairs bred around the lake (Palmer & Ballance). An obvious decrease in the lake's breeding population noted during the survey period, with a maximum of 12 broods in 1964 (10 were seen in 1967, 8 in 1972, 10 in 1973 and 7 in 1975). Notable counts during the 20 years include 415, January 1965; 759 September 1967; 680, September and 670, October 1969; 433, January 1974; 902, August and 895 September 1975 (highest counts during survey period); 410, November 1976; 550, October 1977; 480 October 1978; 565, December 1980; 780, August 1982; 726, December 1982. Davis produced a regular number of 340 during 1971-80 (counts from September to March). Usually numbers build up during August and September and sometimes a fairly stable population is maintained to January. Generally speaking wintering birds leave from February onwards. (Maximum of 943 December 1984.)

PINTAIL *Anas acuta*. A definite increase in numbers during the 70's with the best numbers in the winters of 1973/4, 1974/75, 1976/77 when the highest count in each winter was: 57, January 1974, 52, December 1974 and 50, October 1976. Davis produced a regular number of 22 during 1971-80 (September to March counts) compared with 5 during 1948-62 (Atkinson-Willes) although that period recorded the highest number ever of 180. In good years a few arrive in September, reaching reasonable numbers October-January with a decline in February/March. (In 1984 peak count of 40 on 15 December.)

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*. Recorded 9 March to 8 October with most birds appearing in August.

Number of birds seen in each month 1963-1983						
March	April	May	July	August	September	October
2	6	9	6	42	15	1

A male on 25 May 1974, two on 26 May 1975 and one on 3 July 1973 may have indicated possible local breeding attempts. Maximum count was at least 12 on 15 August 1975. (Breeding in 1910 and 1947 lacks details, but two pairs definitely bred in 1949 (P&B).)

SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*. Bred in 1973 (two broods) for the first time since 1946 but not subsequently. The largest numbers are in the autumn with a maximum of 445 on 5 September 1974. Other notable counts at this time of year were: 139, October 1968; 194, September 1972; 118, September 1973; 330, September 1975; 175, September, 1977; 100, October 1978; 113, October 1982; 145, November 1983. Notable counts during other months were: 161, February 1968; 96, January and 83, February 1969; 80, March 1972; 75, March 1975. Usually there is a small wintering population, but higher numbers during February and March indicate passage birds.

(MARBLED DUCK *Anas angustirostris*. Bird seen also at Chew and Cheddar recorded on 8, 15, 26 December 1984.)

RED-CRESTED POCHARD *Netta rufina*. During 1974 a female on 11 and 30 March, and a male from 24 September to 11 October. In 1977 a male on 29 April and 11-24 September. During 1978, a female was seen on 8 April, a male on the 19th, a pair on 8 October with two males on the 14th. One on 30 March 1979. (Four records up to 1963 (P&B). One on 5 February 1984.)

POCHARD *Aythya ferina*. A few arrive June to September, mostly October/November with a peak reached December to February, declining during March. Four counts of over a 1000 birds during the twenty years: 1054, November 1965; 1425, January, 2000, February 1977; 1270, December 1983. In some years very poor numbers were recorded, for example a maximum of 175 during the 1972/3 season (September-March), a maximum of 150 in September during the 1975/76 season, a maximum of 35 in November during 1978/9 and a maximum of 76 in February during 1981. The count of 2000 in 1977 was the highest ever and it occurred when large numbers were present at Chew (maximum counts of

3093 January, 2207 February) and counts indicated a total of ca 3500 at both lakes during January/February. The reason for the high numbers was the excellent feeding conditions for ducks like this species, caused by the drought of 1976 which allowed large-scale encroachment of vegetation onto reservoir banks and was followed by rapid flooding in heavy autumn rains. No breeding reported during the survey period although it can be noted here that this species bred in 1936, 1949 and perhaps 1950. Present most years in variable numbers during June to August, mainly moulting males being involved. It must be noted that Cheddar birds regularly move to the lake when disturbed by sailing activities during the winter. (Up to 2000 noted in December 1984.)

RING-NECKED DUCK *Aythya collaris*. Single drakes on 4-21 April 1971; 26 March to 16 April and 30 June to 23 August 1972; 16 March to 16 April and 4 June 1973. This last referred to the same individual that was also seen at Chew and Cheddar. An immature male first observed at Chew in late December 1976 was present during the first half of January 1977.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK *Aythya nyroca*. A male on 12 January 1969 (CR) referred to a bird that was seen at Orchardleigh Lake and Chew late in 1968 and early in 1969. (One shot, November 1922 (P&B).)

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*. Breeding reported in the following years with broods in brackets: 1964 (at least 8), 1966 (1), 1970 (1), 1971 (1), 1972 (4), 1973 (1), 1974 (2), 1975 (2). Largest numbers have occurred in August and September when in some years moulting birds have produced large flocks. The highest count ever was made on 16 August 1972 when 835 were counted. Other high counts at this season were made in 1975 (508, August), 1977 (530, September), 1981 (770, September), 1982 (488, August). Other notable counts include 453 in November 1968, 444 in January 1969, and 475 in January 1978. There were on occasions good numbers passing through during the spring of which 400 on 9 March 1980 was the highest count at this time of year.

SCAUP *Aythya marila*. Recorded in twelve out of the twenty years but not since 1979. Twenty-one records of up to three birds noted in every month with a peak in February (nine individuals). A male was seen on and off throughout 1965.

LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*. Five records one on 12 April 1970: immature male on 26 October 1980; immature male on 4 January (disturbed by sailing from Cheddar Reservoir) and also one, perhaps the same bird, on 8 April 1981. One on 18 December 1983, again an immature male, and again displaced from Cheddar. (Noted singly or in two's on six occasions (D).)

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*. Five birds recorded only – a male on 5 and 6 December 1964, three males on 7 May 1972 and one on 7 December 1974.

VELVET SCOTER *Melanitta fusca*. Two records: an immature male from 15 to 28 December 1963 (MK, RMC *et al*) and a male on 29 January 1966 (KLF). (Immature January-March 1939 (P&B).)

GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula*. During the survey period the highest count was 38 in February 1975, but the following are also good counts: 32, April 1967; 35, April 1968; 34, April 1970; 30, February 1972; 33, February, 31, March 1982. In 1968 twenty were present in the first half of November, exceptional autumn numbers for the lake. Davis produced a regular number of 17 during 1971-1980 (counts from September to March). The highest pre 1963 count for this species was 42 in April. (In 1984 one from 24 August.)

SMEW *Mergus albellus*. Recorded in every year bar two, mostly irregularly, birds often moving to the lake for periods from Chew and Cheddar. Typically one to three birds seen but five (one male) on 4 February 1965, up to six (two males) during January and February 1972 and four during February 1979. An exceptionally late female was present 9-21 April 1972, and a male stayed until 24 April in 1976.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*. Recorded in only eight of the twenty years. Most were 'redheads'. Extreme dates 26 October to 10 March. Up to three seen together. (Noted on various occasions, usually only one or two but up to six (D).)

Number of birds recorded in each month 1963-1983

January	February	March	October	November	December
0	5	3	2	5	6

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*. Recorded in all but four winters, 18 October to 31 March. Usually small numbers seen occasionally (less than ten) but high numbers were present in mid January 1979, when up to 79 were counted in severe conditions, when Chew was frozen and a reasonable area of open water provided a welcome refuge.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*. First appeared at Chew and Blagdon in 1957. These escapees from Slimbridge bred at Chew for the first time in 1960, and probably in most years since then, but it has never bred at Blagdon, although a pair was seen on 1 July 1975. Birds arrive from late August onwards and gradually increase to reach a peak between late December and February. Numbers generally decline from February to late March/early April. There is much movement to and from Chew during the winter months. In 1963 a maximum of fourteen were counted on 28 December, while in 1966 the maximum was five, and in 1967 four. By 1975 maximum counts were reaching over 100 during the winter months and by 1980 321 was the highest number recorded. In the early eighties the rapid increase levelled off somewhat with maximum counts of 330 in 1981, 218 in 1982 and 323 in 1983. (1984 saw a maximum of 425 in December).

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*. Single 'ring-tails' seen on 22 February 1966, 7 January 1977 and 7 January 1979.

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*. Has bred most years since 1963, usually one pair, but two pairs bred in 1968, and in 1975 (when each pair fledged two young). During the breeding survey of this species (1980-83) three separate territories were used around the lake (Prytherch 1984). Seen frequently outside the breeding season.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*. From 1963 to 1970 this species was very frequently seen around the lake, with birds present during the breeding season although nesting was never confirmed. Counts include 5 on 4 September 1965, on 3 January and 10 September 1966, and 6 on 1 October 1967. From 1971 there have been far fewer sightings of up to two birds.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*. Five records only: an immature on 11 September 1965, one on 27 September 1969, and singles on 7/8 April, 10 May 1978 and 26 July 1982. (Seen in 1914, May 1936, 1938 and 1946 (D).)

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*. One observer saw this species on 23 occasions out of 118 visits to the lake from 1965-1983. He noted one record of three (two Ubley end, one dam), three records of two birds and 19 records of single birds. Two were seen at the dam on 6 July 1972, while a juvenile was noted in the same area on 9 August 1972 indicating local breeding. Only three other records related to birds seen in May, June and July. Another observer saw this species on 12 occasions out of 70 visits from 1971-1980 mainly in September to March. One record referred to two birds present, the rest to single sightings.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*. One on 6 December with probably two birds present on 28 December 1964. A male on 27 February 1971, one on 4 November 1973, and a female/immature on 13 September 1980.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*. Ten records, all from July to September with the exception of one on 9 May 1964. Seven records were of single birds, one referred to two, and one to three juveniles seen on 9 August 1972.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*. Single birds recorded on 7 December 1963, 8 February, 6 December 1964, 1 April 1978, male on 13 January and one on 21 December 1979, one on 13 November 1982.

PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*. One observer recorded the species on 15 occasions out of 118 visits during 1965-1983. He noted breeding only once, in 1972, when three females were seen with ten young. Four birds were seen on two other occasions, three birds on two, two birds on four and singles birds on six occasions.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*. All records are detailed as follows: three on 19 December 1964, two on 9 January 1965, one September/October 1966, one on 15 April 1967, singles on 14 December 1968, 5 January 1973, 13 November 1976 and 15 December 1977. At least three were present on 5 January 1977, and two juveniles were observed on 12 September 1981 with a single bird on the 15th. Recorded during winter of 1983. (Has been recorded nesting (D).)

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*. The only reported breeding count was in 1975 when four pairs reared eight young although this species presumably bred in most years. Autumn counts were the highest with 40 on 11 October 1969, 40 in September 1972, a record 80 on 9 August 1972, 30 on 13 September 1981, and 40 on 12 August 1983. Other notable counts were 29 on 17 March 1968, 32 on 25 February 1967 and 35 on 13 April 1973.

COOT *Fulica atra*. Recorded throughout the year. In summer some good breeding season successes when water levels were high. Reported counts are as follows: In 1963, 43 pairs were present on 19 May. In 1964, 16 nests were located in May while in 1965, 25 pairs were counted on 29 May. In 1967, 16 nests were counted on 30 May, while in 1972 30 young were located on 6 July. Low water levels produced only four broods in 1973 and four again in 1974, but in 1975 24 pairs reared 68 young. In 1981, 27 broods were located. Counts of over 1000 birds are detailed as follows: 1050 on 9 October 1965, 1165 in August 1972, 1295 in September 1974, 1645 in August, 1920 in September 1975, 1345 in August, 1360 in September 1978. There was one count of over 1000 in December in 1974 when 1097 birds were counted and one in March when 1000 were seen in 1980. August/September moulting counts depend on conditions at Chew. In some years such as 1975, it seems that birds move to Blagdon after moulting at Chew, before later moving on to Cheddar

where they spend the winter; some then return to Blagdon/Chew in late winter/early spring before finally dispersing. An albino bird first seen in August 1972 and in subsequent years up to 1977 illustrated the pattern described, leaving Blagdon in autumn and wintering at Cheddar, returning to the lake in early spring. The winter population is reinforced by presumed continental immigrants from November to January.

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*. Eleven records: one on 1 August 1964, one on 23 January 1965, three seen on 23 February 1968, while single birds seen on 25 August 1968, and on 2 August 1972. Singles present on 29 September and 12 October 1974 while six were counted on 2 August 1975 with one on 8 October in the same year. Finally single birds on 11 March 1978 and on 18 September 1982.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*. One on 9 May 1974. In autumn single birds on 15 August 1970, 16 July, 15 and 17 September 1973. Four were present on 13 September 1975, while one was seen on 12 September 1976. Two were observed from 3 to 6 September 1980, while single birds were seen on 30 July and 7 August 1982.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*. Recorded most years especially when mud was exposed in autumn. Only two spring records, singles on 9 April 1965, and on 28 March 1976. In autumn recorded from July to November, mainly in August/September with the highest count of 80 on 29 September 1973 which was exceptional. On 26 August 1970, 34 was the second highest count. (In 1984 a maximum of 70 was on 29 August.)

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria*. Only five records: Singles on 15 September, 15 October 1973, 22 February 1975, with three on 29 October and one on 15 December 1977.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*. Once only in spring: one on 3 March 1963. All other records were from 20 September to 29 December: two on 27 September 1964, one from 25 October to 7 November 1964, two on 7 November 1965, a single on 14 October 1972, one from 20 to 29 September 1973. Finally, singles on 27 September 1975, and on 29 December 1977.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*. Breeding season records are few but are detailed in full.

- 1963: A pair on 26 June
- 1964: Two on 2 May
- 1967: One on 30 April
- 1972: Five including pair with one juvenile on 30 June.
- 1973: 13 counted on 13 April
- 1974: Four birds on 9 April
- 1976: One pair with three young plus five other pairs.

Notable counts include 650, September 1974; 615, 2 August 1975; 445, 24 September 1975; 750, September 1978; 600, 16 December 1978; 530, 23 November 1980 and 765 in December 1983.

KNOT *Calidris canutus*. Only three records. Single birds on 13 September 1975, and on 22 August 1976. Two were seen on 24 December 1977. (In 1984 maximum of seven during September).

SANDERLING *Calidris alba*. Once only in spring, one on 9 May 1979. One on 18 August 1974 but eight were seen on 7 December of the same year.

LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*. Only recorded in nine years out of the twenty under survey. 1973 saw the largest numbers especially in September/early October, with a maximum of 40 on the 27 September the same day as 46 different birds were present at Chew. In other years recorded in very small numbers.

- 1974: One-three, 30 August to 14 September.
- 1975: Five on 13 September
- 1976: Four on 12 September
- 1979: One on 17 November
- 1980: One on 1 November.

There were two wintering records of one from late December to early January 1977/1978 and one was seen on 3 December 1983. (In 1984, five recorded during September.)

PECTORAL SANDPIPER *Calidrus melanotos*. Only two records: single birds from 30 August to 8 September 1964 (RMC *et al*) and on 30 September 1975 (KEV), a bird originally seen at Chew. (In 1984, one 6-10 October, a second on 9-10 October.)

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*. Single birds on 22 August and on 9 September 1964. During 1973 up to nine observed from 15 to 30 September. One seen on 25 August 1974, two were present from 14 to 27 September 1975. Single birds from 11 to 14 September 1976 and on 28 October 1978, with two on 5/6 October 1982. (One, September 1913 (D). In 1984, seven on 23 September.)

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina*. Only two spring records: five on 1 May 1976 and in May 1982, but frequent in autumn when water levels are low, mainly during September and October, for example, 70+ on 29 September 1973 and ca 45 on 25 October 1982. Largest numbers recorded during the winter months when low water levels persisted from the autumn: 80 on 6 December 1964, 70 on 17 January 1965, up to 70 in December 1973, and up to 300 during January 1974. Counts of up to 110 during January to March 1976. (In 1984, 50 recorded in August.)

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER *Tryngites subruficollis*. A juvenile from 15 to 20 September 1973 (AHD *et al.*)

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*. Recorded in nine years during the period under review. Notable counts were made mainly in the autumn from mid August to late October with up to 17 in early September 1974, 26 on 24 September 1976 and 18 on 20 September 1980. Early winter through to early spring records are as follows: 13 on 16 December 1978, two on 29 January 1968, at least four on 19 January 1974, one on 30 January 1978, three on 27 February 1965, three on 15 February 1977, 15 on 5 February 1978, one on 14 February 1976, one on 7 March 1976 with three on 13 March 1976, one on 1 and 11 May 1976. (One in spring 1938, and in December 1937 (D). In 1984 maximum of 28 on 24 August.)

JACK SNIPE *Lymnocyptes minimus*. Two on 5 April 1964. Up to four during January 1978. One on 18 October 1982 with two on 19 November 1983.

SNIPE *Gallinago gallinago*. Highest numbers were recorded during the autumn months, especially September to November, when the highest count was 150 in October 1979. Small numbers usually spend the winter months at the lake, but a count of 40 in March 1981 was high for the time of year. There was no breeding record during the survey period.

(**GREAT SNIPE** *Gallinago media*. Singles on 6 March 1949 and 29 December 1950 (P&B).)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER *Limnodromus scolopaceus*. Two first winter birds from 7 October 1977 to 8 and 11 January 1978 (KEV *et al.*). They were originally discovered at Chew on 30 September. (See Vinicombe 1980 for more details.)

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*. One in late December 1978 to 1 January 1979 during severe weather. Again recorded in late 1981 during very cold conditions.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*. In spring, three on 13 April 1968, and three on 31 May 1976. In autumn up to ten 15 August – 20 September 1964, eight on 3 September 1967, one on 2 August 1972, one on 11 September, three on 12 September 1976. One or two from August to 3 December 1978, one on 24 July 1980. (Records of 23 in September 1934, and four in April 1939 (D).)

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*. Recorded in five years out of the twenty. Up to four, 31 August to 2 September 1964; one on 25 and 29 September 1973; one to three birds present from 27 September to 5 October 1975; single birds on 3 and 11 July 1976 and on 15 September 1979.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*. Few records. Three on 27 August 1964 and single birds on 13 September 1964, 13 August 1969, 9 and 16 August 1972 and 21 July 1979.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*. Single birds on 14 March 1965 and in June 1967, 'a few' in July 1973 while one was seen on 13 April of that year. Six were seen on 30 August 1973, and single birds on 12 March 1978, during March 1981, and on 17 July of that year.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*. Recorded when conditions were good for off-passage feeding. Usually seen in small numbers but 15 on 19 September 1964, 17 on 2 September 1973, 9 on 5 October 1975 and the same number on 1 October 1978 were notable counts. No spring records and only recorded twice in November and December. (Seen at least 9 times 1923-1944 (D).)

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*. In 1976 when the water level was low and thus provided good habitat at least one pair was present during the breeding season and presumably breeding was successful as up to nine birds were seen in early July. Apart from 1976, the only records are of single birds in April, July, November and December 1973, two on 19 January 1974, two on 20 September 1975, two on 12 September 1976, one on 4 October 1976, and two on 6 September 1980. (Has bred on various occasions but not since 1939 (D).)

- MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*. One, probably an adult, from 5 to 12 October 1982 (A M *et al*). First seen at Chew on 3 October. (One, a juvenile, 20-27 August 1984.)
- GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*. Recorded when mud was exposed in autumn. Usually small numbers but 20 on 22 August 1964, 42 on 3 September 1973 (a record Avon count) and 40 on 21 September 1980. No spring records. (In 1984 up to 40 in late August.)
- GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*. Recorded annually in autumn, usually in very small numbers (seven at maximum). A very occasional wintering bird, when low water levels persisted during the winter. Much scarcer than at Chew.
- WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*. Only recorded in eight out of the twenty years under study. A minimum of 12 birds recorded 30 July to 1 October, mostly singly but two on 19 September 1965, 15 and 20 August, 5 September 1975 and on 7 August 1982. (In 1984 up to eight in late August.)
- COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*. Recorded in spring and autumn with a maximum of 25 on 5 May 1982 in spring and 19 on 13 July 1971 in autumn. (Breeding record about 1911 (P&B).)
- TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*. One record of a single bird on 24 October 1965 (PJC). (Recorded in the autumn of 1984.)
- RED-NECKED PHALAROPE *Phalaropus lobatus*. One, a juvenile, from 18 to 27 September 1965 (PJC *et al*). (One, September 1921 (P&B).)
- (GREY PHALAROPE. *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Seen on six occasions 1923-1944. One 22/23 September 1984.)
- ARCTIC SKUA *Stercorarius parasiticus*. One on 17 August 1982 (JSR). (Recorded in 1908, September 1914, September 1923 (P&B).)
- MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*. Adult on 2 March 1981 (JSR).
- LITTLE GULL *Larus minutus*. Spring records were a first-winter on 24 and 30 March 1963, and two immatures on 29 March 1980, with a second-year bird on 1 April 1980. The rest of the records were in autumn from 4 August to 8 October. Recorded in seven out of the twenty years, usually singly but maximum counts of four on 29 September 1973 and on 23 August 1974. There was a single winter record of one on 17 December 1983. Only about 22 birds involved. (Singles in 1940 and 1945 (D).)
- BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*. All available records are detailed of day time roost counts: 200 on 5 January 1973, with 100 on 4 August, and 200 on 20 September 1973. 600 present on 21 December 1973, with 500 on 12 January and 600 on 24 December 1974. 750 on 2 August 1975, ca 2500 on 8 February 1981, 1350 in March 1982.
- COMMON GULL *Larus canus*. As with the above species all available records are detailed of daytime gatherings: 133 on 29 October 1966, 150 on 5 January and 50 on 21 December 1973, 50 on 12 January and 60 on 24 December 1974. 130+ counted on 11 March 1978, 130 in December 1982.
- LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*. All available counts are listed. 15 on 8 April 1965, 18 on 7 April 1969, 20 on 5 January with 42 on 13 April 1973. Only five on 4 August but eight present on 21 December 1973. In 1974 30 seen on 12 January, 20 on 23 March, 10 on 9 April, and five on 24 December. Five seen on 2 August 1975, and 12 on 7 May 1977. In 1981 110 counted on 8 February and 200 on 28 February.
- HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*. 60 at daytime roost 8 July 1965. 50 present on 4 January and 80 on 19 December 1970. In 1973, 200 on 5 January, 140 counted on 13 April, 40 on 4 August and 200 on 21 December 1973. In 1974 300 seen on 12 January, 30 on 23 March and 9 April, with 50 on 24 December 1974.
- ICELAND GULL *Larus glaucoides*. First-year bird on 26 February 1967 (AHD, KEV).
- GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*. All records are given. Four birds were present on 14 March 1967 and in March 1970 with a single on 19 December of the same year. One on 13 April and 30 June 1972, with singles on 5 January 1973, 12 January and 24 December 1974. An adult on 31 May 1976 with two on 7 May and on 29 November 1977. One on 30 November 1980, and a single on 4 April 1981.
- KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*. Immature on 28 August 1965 (TBS) and one on 31 July 1976 (SBR).
- SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*. One on 4 September 1971. Six were seen on 21 September 1980 and two were present on 18 September 1982.

COMMON/ARCTIC TERN *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea*. Spring records: 16 on 1 May 1965, one on 16 April 1966, two on 16 May 1976, one on 7 May 1972 and two on 12 April 1980. Recorded usually in small numbers during the autumn passage but higher counts include 38 on 18 September 1965, ten on 23 September 1968, 12 on 20 August 1969, 41 on 12 August 1972, ten on 7 September 1974, 13 on 1 October 1977 and 46 on 21 September 1980. Definite Arctics were five on 9 September 1967, four juveniles on 5 September 1974, with three on the 11th and two on 4 September 1983. Summer records of single Commons on 21, 30 June 1972. (Up to 100, mostly Arctic, in April/May 1947 (D).)

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*. Six records involving nine birds. Single on 10 May 1969, immature on 25 September 1965, one on 30 September and on 14 October 1966, with three on 23 September 1979. Two present on 12 August 1972. (One May 1930 (D).)

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*. Spring records: one on 19 April 1964, 29 on 1 May 1965, one on 23 April 1970, six on 6 June 1970, one on 15 May 1977 and four on 4 April 1980. Recorded during autumn passage from 2 August to 14 October in small numbers generally under five, but 25 on 31 August 1963 and 34 on 11 September 1974, a day which saw large numbers at Chew. (There are records back to 1905, but most are since 1930 (P&B).)

LITTLE AUK *Alle alle*. One on 1 February 1975 (DAC, DE). (Once recorded after gales (P&B).)

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas*. Notable counts include 55 on 1 June 1973, 65 on 21 December 1973, 100 on 18 January 1976, 80 in January 1978, and 82 on 15 February 1978. Breeding probably took place in 1975. Other summer records include three on 30 June 1972, seven on 2 August 1972, three on 3 July 1973, two on 12 July 1974 and one on 15 August 1975.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*. One observer noted this species on only five occasions out of 118 visits during 1965 to 1983. Single birds were seen on 13 April 1971, 23 August 1972, 27 September 1973, 20 January 1978 and 13 March 1982.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*. One flew south over lake on 6 July 1972 (KEV).

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*. Probably under-recorded with only 15 records, 23 April to 13 August, with a maximum of five on 2 May 1964. A juvenile on 12 July 1974 was observed with a Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*). There are three other records of juveniles.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*. Singles on 8 September 1964, 20 June 1974, 30 January 1978, 6 February 1978, 17 December 1978 and during February/March 1979, but no evidence of breeding.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*. Probably quite common nearby but only 14 records (all September to March, and mainly since 1977) as follows. Single birds on 18 September 1966, 21 September 1972, 7 October 1977, 15 February 1978, 23 February 1979, 28 September 1980, 14 December 1980, 15 February 1981, 14 March 1981, 15 November 1981, 5 October 1982, 6 October 1982. Two birds were seen on 12 September 1981 and on 18 October 1981.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*. Singles on 6 and 7 March 1963, 9 April 1972, 21 September 1972, 31 March 1973, 14 April 1973, 23 February 1979, and 12 September 1981. Two birds were present on 2 August 1972, and on 13 September 1980. Most probably under-recorded and could be described as a resident species.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*. Single birds calling in conifer plantation on 11 February (DEL) and on 17 March (RSH) 1973.

SWIFT *Apus apus*. Notable counts: 500 on 21 June 1972, 300 on 6 July 1972, 250 on 2 August 1972, 750 on 9 August 1972, 3000 on 11 May 1974 and an exceptional 10000 on 12 July 1974. Latest date 24 September 1976.

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*. Surprisingly, seen on only 12 occasions during 118 visits by one observer: once in January, twice in March, once in August, on five occasions in September and twice in October, November and December. Another observer saw this species on only five occasions during 70 visits during 1971-1980 mainly September to March.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops*. One on 1 May 1977 (DEL).

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*. Recorded during the breeding season from 1964 to 1968 inclusive, in 1970, 1971, 1975, 1976, and in 1978. Fairly regularly seen at the Ubley end up to the late 70's but very irregularly since.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*. Very few available records. They include one singing on 29 May 1965, on 7 June 1972, on 3 July 1973 and on 9 April 1974. 14 flew west on 15 October 1967, six were present on 21 December 1973 and also on 8 October 1975 and one was seen on 23 February 1979.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*. Extreme dates 12 March 1983 and 12 October 1982. Noteworthy counts include ca 80 on 26 March 1967, 40 on 21 April 1971, 40 on 8 April 1979, 50 on 13 September 1980. Two on 30 June 1972 presumably referred to early autumn migrants.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*. Present throughout the summer. High counts include 250 on 7 May 1977, 100 on 29 April 1979 and 250 roosting on 30 July 1982.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*. Summer visitor and passage-migrant. Counts of 500 and over are detailed: ca 1000 on 15 September 1968, ca 1500 on 13 September 1969, 750 on 21 and 30 June 1972, with 500 on 9 September 1972. At least 1000 on 12 July and on 5 September 1974.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*. The only records are of two on 2 August 1972, one on 17 September 1973 and on 14 September 1976. There is a breeding season record for Ubley in 1968 and one for Blagdon in 1967 (Somerset Bird Reports).

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*. Generally small numbers seen in winter (under twenty) but 62 were present on 14 February 1970 and at least 70 on 15 December 1977. Sometimes detected on spring passage with 70 on 14 March 1970 being a high count. Numerous in autumn especially when good feeding areas were exposed, mainly September and October with several counts of birds moving south; 100 on 14 September 1976 was the highest count at this time of year.

RED-THROATED PIPIT *Anthus cervinus*. One on 24 September 1973 (RMC, MGW) (see Wilson 1975).

ROCK PIPIT *Anthus spinoletta petrosus*. One on 17 February 1963 (PJC). Water Pipit *A.s. spinoletta*. Singles on 12 March 1963, 21 December 1973, 13 November 1976, 29 November 1977, 30 March 1979, 6 October 1982. Finally two Rock or Water Pipits were seen on 18 October 1981.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava*. Breeding records are given for 1963, 1967 and 1980. Highest count in spring was three on 18 April 1971. In autumn usually small numbers, the largest count being at least 20 on 14 September 1976. Seen more frequently in the 60's and up to the mid 70's than during the recent past.

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*. Definite breeding season records for 1964 to 1976 inclusive but this species has most likely bred in most years. Highest counts: ten on 9 August 1972 and 9 on 20 September 1973. Present throughout the year, the dam end being the favoured area where in fact the species breeds.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba*. 35 was the maximum count in February, 31 in March and 22 in May, 40 in August and 200 in September, 50 in November. An occasional breeding record—31 (7 males, 4 females, 20 juveniles) on 12 July 1974 – but probably under-recorded. White Wagtails *M.a. alba* recorded on spring passage: one on 24 April 1965, three on 25 April 1971 and recorded during April 1972.

NIGHTINGALE *Luscinia megarhynchos*. A fisherman reported one singing at the Ubley end on 29 April 1966 (per RJP).

BLUETHROAT *Luscinia svecica*. One, a first winter male, trapped on 30 August 1971 (PJC).

BLACK REDSTART *Phoenicurus ochruros*. Two on 18 November 1967, one on 9 March and on 25 November 1980. Also recorded in 1981 but no details are available for this record.

REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. One on 21 September 1972, a female on 15 July 1973, and one in 1980 (no details).

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra*. Scarce passage migrant. One juvenile on 10 August 1965, one on 18 September 1966, two on 4 September 1970, a male on 21 April 1971, two on 8 September 1972, four on 17 September 1973, one on 14 September 1976 and on 18 October 1981.

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*. Winter visitor and passage migrant. Singles seen on 21 November 1965, a female on 4 November 1972, one on 27 September 1973, a female on 8 October 1975, a female on 15 February 1978, on 3 December 1978 and one on 17 March 1979. Two were seen on 16 October 1976, on 23 December 1977, and on 20 January 1978, with three on 5 February 1978. Four were counted on 13 November 1976 and 19 January 1977. There seems to be a distinct absence of records in late 70's/early 80's.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Singles on 15 September 1968, 29 September 1973 and 11 September 1974.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*. Regular autumn/winter visitor, usually in small numbers: maximum 300. Often feeding in surrounding fields in winter.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*. Regular autumn/winter visitor usually in small numbers: maximum 100. Often seen with Fieldfare in fields in winter.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*. One heard on 30 April 1967, one reeling on 2 August 1972, and one on 21 April 1968.

AQUATIC WARBLER *Acrocephalus paludicola*. One singing in a low hedge on 13 May 1963 (MAW,GS), the only spring record for Britain. One, trapped, on 24 August 1969 (PJC).

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Summer visitor and passage migrant. Breeding season records include four in song during 1964, five pairs in on 30 May 1965, one seen on 21 April 1971, probably three pairs present in 1972, two singing birds on 12 July 1974, three pairs located during July 1976, two singing birds on 7 May 1977 and one or two pairs during 1980. At least 15 were seen on 11 September 1976.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. Heard on 16 July 1972 (AM), and one on 18 July 1982 (KEV) are the only known records although Palmer and Ballance record this species as 'breeding sometimes' up to 1966.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*. Bred in 1966 and 1967. One was seen on 10 August 1965, one was singing on 30 June 1972 and on 3 July 1973. Two were seen on 9 July 1975; a juvenile was seen on 15 August of the same year. Singles were noted on 13 September 1981 and 27 May 1983.

WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*. Summer visitor and passage migrant. Breeding season notes as follows. Four singing birds on 2 May 1964, and two were seen on 29 May 1965. One observed on 24 July 1966 with five pairs present during April 1972. Three on 3 July 1973, two singing birds on 12 July 1974, a pair seen on 9 July 1975. Six males were located on 7 May 1977 while in 1979 four (including two juveniles) were seen on 30 June. One on 18 July 1982, and a singing bird on 27 May 1983.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*. Summer visitor and passage migrant. Breeding season records: one on 17 June 1964, one on 2 August 1968, a singing bird on 21 June 1972, one on 3 July 1973, two males located in the springs of 1975 and 1976. Single males singing on 7 May 1977, 1 June 1980 and 27 May 1983.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*. Summer visitor and passage migrant. Breeding season notes: one on 2 May 1964, one pair plus three in song on 29 May 1965; in 1972, 11 males located on 30 June, 13 males on 13 July 1973, 5 males on 12 July 1974, 3 males on 15 June 1975, 3 males on 7 May 1977, one male on 1 June 1980 and ten males on 19 May 1982.

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*. Not recorded at the lake but there is an interesting record from nearby Nempnett Thurbwell, where in 1971 a brood was ringed and one recovered in Italy during September of the same year.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita*. Summer visitor and passage migrant. Singing male counts included 15 on 2 May 1964, ten on 21 June 1972, ten on 3 July 1973, six on 9 April 1974, eight on 7 May 1977, ten on 8 April 1978. There was an occasional wintering bird during the twenty years.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Summer visitor and passage migrant. Singing male counts included eight on 2 May 1964, five on 29 May 1965, three on 13 April 1973 and four on 9 April 1974.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*. Recorded throughout the year with counts of up to 60 in winter in the 1960's. Highest count in the 70's was 45 on 20 September 1973. Breeds in conifer plantations around the lake.

(FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*. One record at Ubley (P&B).)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*. Summer visitor. Has bred most years with up to two pairs in 1972 and 1973. Nine, including at least four juveniles, on 12 July 1974. A single on 15 September 1968 is the only passage record available.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*. Male on 16 April 1971 (BOC).

BEARDED TIT *Panurus biarmicus*. Two on 21 November 1965 (AHD, DAC, KEV *et al*). Five on 14 October 1980 (BOC).

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*. Seen throughout the year with up to 15 in January, ten in June, 20 in August, 25 in September and 35 in December.

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris*. One observer recorded this species on 24 occasions during 118 visits, 1965 to 1983, and another saw it on 9 occasions during 66 visits, 1963 to 1973. Highest count was ten on 9 August 1972. From the few records available one gets the subjective impression that this species was commoner in the 60's to mid 70's than of late.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus*. Two on 29 March 1974 (JB). One on 12 September 1976 and one on the 14th at a different site (AM).

COAL TIT *Parus ater*. Common resident. Highest count was 60 on 24 July 1966.

- NUTHATCH *Sitta europaea*. Only two records. Two on 18 June 1966 (RJP). One heard, Butcombe Bay, 3 July 1973 (KEV).
- TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*. Present all year round, with highest counts in the period July to September, the maximum being on 17 September 1973 when 25 were seen.
- GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*. One on 14 November 1973 (AHD, AM). One, near Ubley on 28 November 1964 (MK).
- JAY *Garrulus glandarius*. Present throughout the year in small numbers, usually up to four seen. Large flock of 22 on 23 October 1983, which was an invasion year for the country as a whole.
- MAGPIE *Pica pica*. Present throughout the year with a maximum count of at least 14 on 17 January 1965.
- JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*. Resident throughout the year. Roost counts include: 1500+ on 14 April 1964, 4000 to 5000 gathering to roost on 6 and 21 February 1965, ca 2000 on 17 January 1971 and again on 28 October 1973. Site of roost was at Rugmoor Point.
- CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*. Resident throughout the year. Interesting counts include 140 feeding on stranded swan mussels on 31 October 1963; 200 on 14 April and on several dates in November and December 1964. 200 to roost with Jackdaws on 14 April 1964. A Hooded Crow *C. c. cornix* was seen near Ubley on 19 April 1964 (KBY).
- RAVEN *Corvus corax*. One on 10 November 1963, with two on 12 September 1965. Noted occasionally in late 1966 with two on 6 November, and early in 1967 to March 5. Two on 10 and 20 April 1976.
- TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*. Ten on 12 September 1965 (KEV). Noted during the breeding season by MK during the same year.
- CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*. Up to 140 seen in winter. Common breeding bird - the only count available is 41 (in pairs or singing birds) on 29 May 1965.
- BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*. In 1965 up to ten present in February. In 1966 up to six from October to December and in 1972 up to four present from January to March. One on 21 December 1973 and one on 23 March 1974.
- GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*. Up to 240 recorded in winter. Obviously a breeding species but the only counts available are seven on 29 May 1965 including one juvenile, two juveniles on 21 June 1972 with 18 (at least one juvenile) on 30 June 1972.
- GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*. Usually in small numbers - maximum 35 on 9 April 1974. Only seen on 16 occasions out of 118 visits by one observer during 1965-1983. One definite breeding record of two juveniles 21 June 1972, although birds seen in July 1973 (4), July 1974 (3), July 75 (7) and August 1968 (2).
- SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*. Recorded regularly from 1964 to 1973 in reasonable numbers most years. Maxima of 35 in 1964, 32 in 1970 and 50 in 1972. Recorded most years since but irregularly and in smaller numbers.
- LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*. Up to 300 in winter and up to 150 in the autumn. Four juveniles noted in 1974 and one juvenile in 1973, but presumably under-recorded.
- REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*. Recorded regularly from 1964 to 1971 with numbers up to 25. Recorded very irregularly since and only in ones and twos. A Mealy Redpoll *C. f. flammea* was seen on 14 December 1965 (RSH).
- CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*. In 1963 recorded from mid November to end of year with a maximum of 30 birds. Seen again in 1964 from January to 25 April with up to 20 seen during February. In 1966 seen from July to December with a maximum of 15 in July. Since then at least three on 8 February 1967, two on 19 January, one on 23 December 1969, one on 30 June, five on 21 July, three on 15 September and one to mid October 1972. In 1980 five on 4 December.
- BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Up to eight noted on various dates throughout the year. Two pairs noted on 21 June 1972, two birds on 3 July 1973. Juveniles noted in July 1976 although presumably an annual breeding species.
- (SNOW BUNTING *Plectrophenax nivalis*. Has been recorded (P&B).)
- YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*. Two on 19 March 1967. Female on 2 August 1968 carrying food. There is a breeding season record during 1971, then singles recorded 8 October 1975, on 19 December 1981, and on 18 December 1983. Evidence of breeding in the Ubley area during 1975 to 1980 survey by Chadwick (*Avon Bird Report 1980*, pp 38-39).
- REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*. Recorded mainly from March to September, very occasionally in other months. Highest count was 18 on 15 March 1980. Up to six pairs were recorded during the breeding season.

Other common or regularly occurring species noted were Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*, Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*, Great Tit *Parus major*, Rook *Corvus frugilegus*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*.

Hybrids and escapes

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus*. One 30 April - Sept 18 1983. Moved between Blagdon and Chew.

White-headed Duck x Ruddy Duck. Male 19-24 December 1981, and again during January and February 1982. This bird was first seen in Staffordshire in the 1980/81 winter and was at Chew on 28 February 1981.

Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*. One seen during 1983.

Tufted Duck x Pochard (Lesser Scaup type). Male from November 1980 to 14 March 1981, and on 13 March, 11 April 1982.

Tufted Duck x Pochard. Male 8 April 1978.

Chiloe Wigeon *Anas sibilatrix*. One occasionally during 1978.

Ring-necked Duck x Tufted Duck. Male on 3 and 10 April 1977.

Red-crested Pochard x Pochard. Male on 16 January 1982.

Key to initials of observers

J Barber, P J Chadwick, D A Cottle, R M Curber, A H Davis, D Embling, K L Fox, R S Harkness, M Kendall, D E Ladhams, A Merritt, the late W L Roseveare, J S Rowe, R J Prytherch, C Rutter, T B Silcocks, K E L Simmons, G Sweet, the late H A Thornhill, L A Tucker, N Tucker, K E Vinicombe, M G Wilson, M A Wright, K B Young, Bristol Ornithological Club, Bristol Waterworks, and Somerset Bird Report.

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A 'FLIGHT' OF SEABIRDS IN SEPTEMBER 1983

by Peter Hopkin

Introduction

Unusually high numbers of seabirds were reported in the Avon and North Somerset area during the four days, 2 - 5 September 1983. This article attempts to discuss the causes of this influx and the distribution of the records involved. Although small by comparison with the wreck of Leach's Petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* which occurred in Somerset between 23 October and 9 November 1952, the event was notable for the variety of species involved. Fisher and Lockley (1954) have distinguished between a 'wreck' and a 'flight' of seabirds, and to follow their definition this event should be described as a 'flight'. This occurs when seabirds are displaced close enough inshore to be easily seen in large numbers, while a 'wreck' involves large numbers of dead and dying birds being washed up on the shore and found inland.

Coverage and records

The records of live birds were supplied by twelve observers who responded to enquiries and an appeal in the Club's *Bird News*. Inevitably some records were not supplied and it is beyond the scope of this article to include everything; more details can be found in the relevant county bird reports. It was fortunate that the first day of gales occurred on a Saturday and so the most important areas received thorough coverage by regular observers. Some key sites were, however, poorly recorded; in particular only one observer supplied data from Brean Down (2 man-hours) and nobody appears to have visited Sand Point during the period. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of observer effort over the period in terms of 'man-hours' and this must be a major factor in accounting for the number of seabird records at each site. Greatest effort over the four days was clearly at New Passage and in the Bridgwater Bay/Brue/Parrett/Burnham areas. A summary of the records used is tabulated, showing numbers of birds and species recorded (Fig. 2). Information concerning injured and dead birds was supplied by the RSPCA Wildlife Field Unit at Hatch Beauchamp, Somerset.

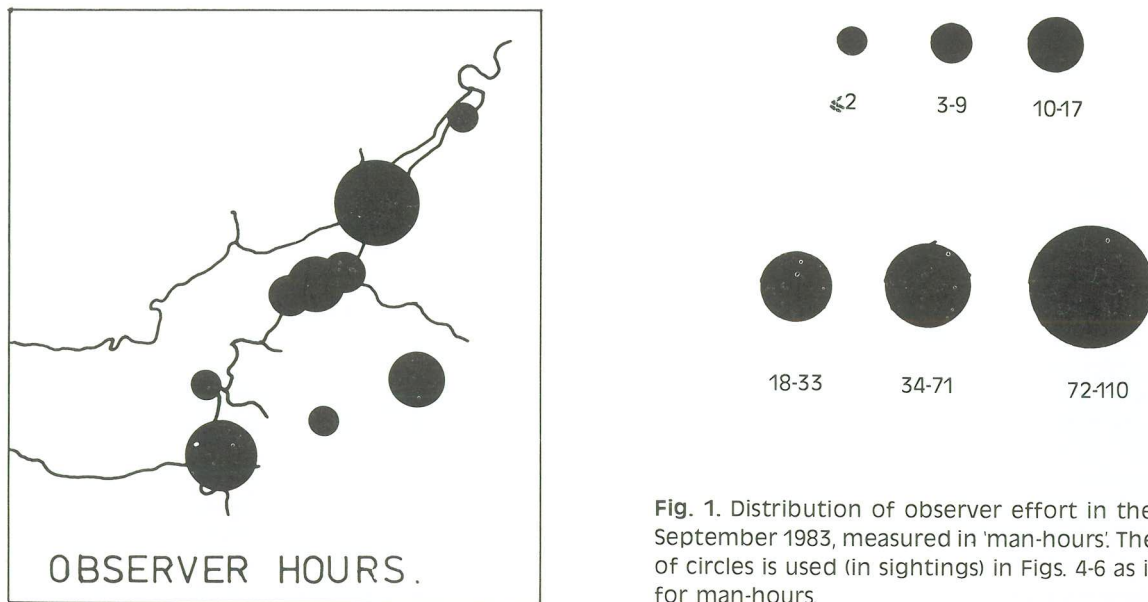


Fig. 1. Distribution of observer effort in the period 2-5 September 1983, measured in 'man-hours'. The same scale of circles is used (in sightings) in Figs. 4-6 as is used here for man-hours.

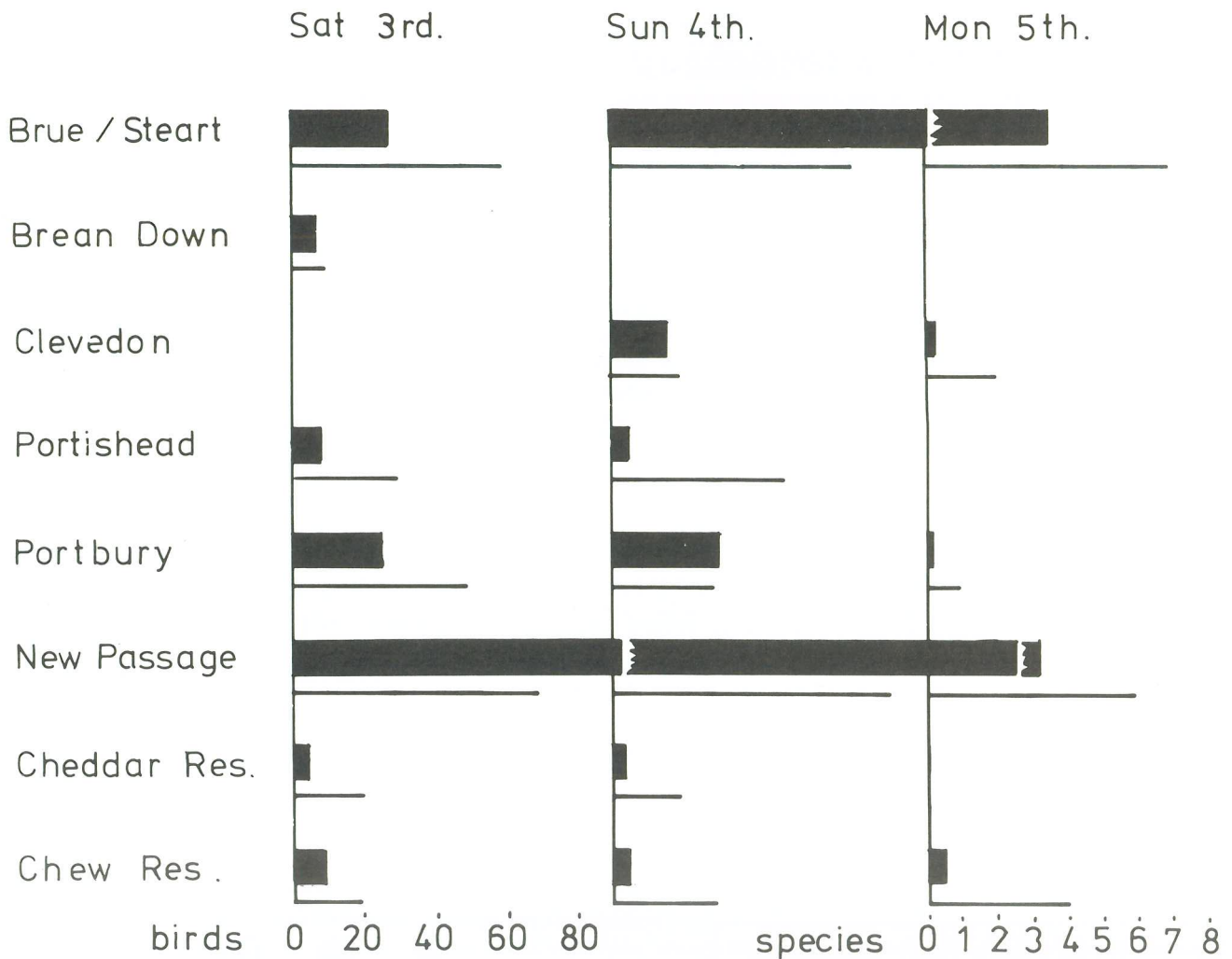
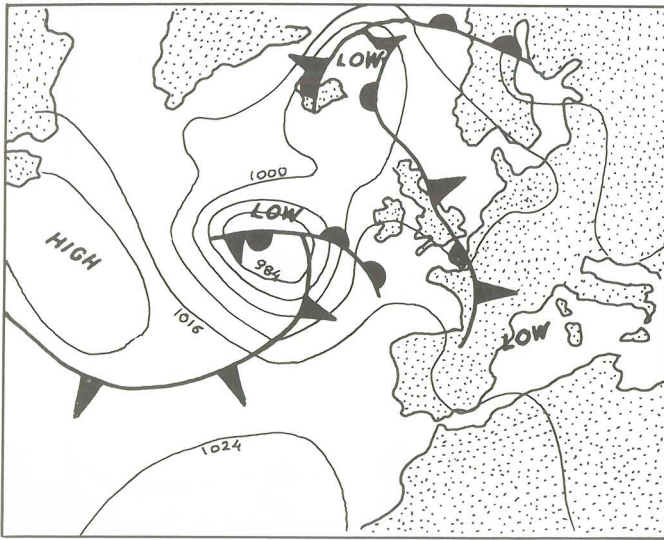


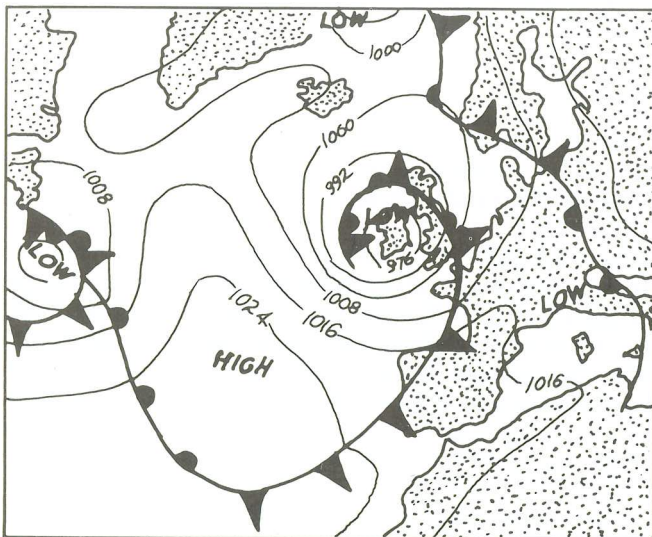
Fig. 2. Tabulation of numbers of birds (solid blocks) and species (solid lines) recorded.

Weather conditions

The displacement of seabirds into the upper Bristol Channel was a direct result of two closely spaced depressions bringing gale force winds over several days. The Atlantic chart for noon on 1 September (see Fig. 3) shows the initial depression approaching the British Isles from the south-west, bringing low pressure, strong winds and rain. A second low pressure area was meanwhile forming off Newfoundland and appears on the chart for noon on 2 September. The area of high pressure separating the two is shown to collapse into a weak ridge, allowing the second depression to cross the Atlantic very rapidly. At the same time the leading depression was bringing severe south-westerly gales, rain and thick cloud to South-west England overnight and causing the first displacements, especially of petrels. Winds in excess of force eight were recorded on the South Wales coast, becoming more westerly towards dawn as the low pressure moved east. These winds blew steadily up the Bristol Channel, moderating during the afternoon of 3 September. The high pressure ridge allowed a brief lull until the morning of the 4th, but during that afternoon winds increased from the south and by dusk a steady force seven south-westerly was funnelling straight up the estuary, causing problems for some birds in the upper Channel. The fronts associated with the second depression passed overnight and by the morning of the 5th winds had decreased to force three or less as high pressure again started to build from the south. Although a few birds stayed inshore, the majority had been able to escape into the open sea and this, combined with limited observer activity during weekdays, resulted in very few records after 6 September.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 3. Atlantic weather chart at (a) noon on 1 September and (b) noon on 2 September 1983.

Species recorded

Nine pelagic species were observed in sufficient numbers to merit analysis and five others deserve some comment.

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*. One found exhausted, five sight records. Fulmars are scarce in the upper Bristol Channel, so six records in two days is noteworthy. This species is normally very well adapted to severe weather in the North Atlantic and is known to anticipate and move away from weather that restricts feeding. During late August and early September, however, many post-breeding adults will be relatively close inshore to their breeding colonies and these, together with many inexperienced young birds, will be at risk from gales at this time. Four of the sight records were in the upper Channel, at New Passage and Avonmouth, of birds moving easily downchannel towards the open sea. The fifth was perhaps disorientated, flying up the River Parrett. One exhausted bird was found at West Pennard, but soon recovered and was released.

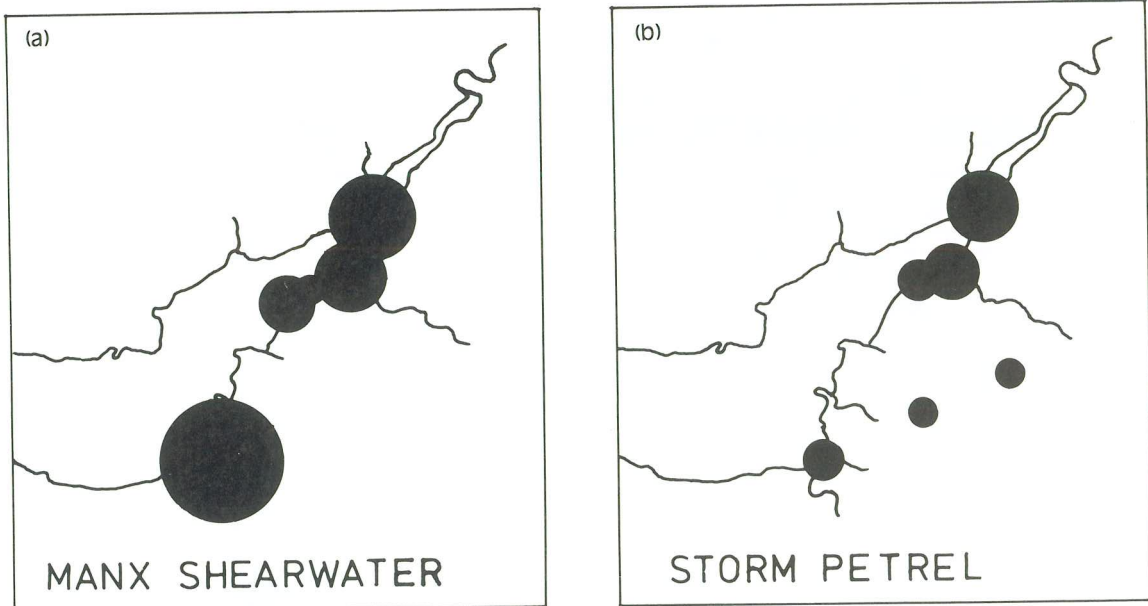


Fig. 4. Distribution of (a) Manx Shearwater and (b) Storm Petrel sightings.

MANX SHEARWATER *Puffinus puffinus*. Two found injured, 235 sight records. Manx Shearwaters are regularly seen in the Bristol Channel, as mid-summer feeding parties, but rarely off New Passage or, indeed, further south on the local coast during the autumn. Unlike the Fulmar, Manx Shearwaters tend to be slower to respond to poor feeding conditions and are easily displaced, being thus concentrated into the narrowing Severn Estuary or a lee shore such as that at Burnham. The majority of coastal records were of birds involved in compensatory movements, passing south-west down the lee coast off New Passage, Avonmouth, Portishead and Clevedon. The greatest concentration of sightings was in the Brue/Stear area on the 4th, when at least 69 were reported, although about 50 were seen off New Passage at the same time. Birds were taking advantage of the morning's lull to move out of the estuary, although as the wind strengthened during the afternoon many became effectively trapped in Bridgwater Bay. Some were suffering from exhaustion, one was killed by a Great Black-backed Gull and two injured specimens were found inland at Taunton and Shepton Mallet. Most birds soon managed to disperse out to sea, but even in the calm conditions of the 6th a minimum of twelve were still present in Bridgwater Bay.

STORM PETREL *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Two found dying, 51 sight records. Storm Petrels are very rare in the upper Bristol Channel, all records relating to storm-driven vagrants. The largest numbers previously recorded at any one time were in December 1929 (14 in Somerset) and October 1952 when at least 13 were found among some 2000 Leach's Petrels (Palmer and Ballance 1968). In view of this the 53 current records, when compared with 66 for Leach's Petrel over the same period, form an exceptionally high proportion of the total. Storm Petrels are normally considered more resilient to prolonged adverse weather and feeding conditions; they winter well to the south, off South Africa. Leach's Petrels, wintering in the sub tropics, would be less well adapted to strong winds and are normally the commonest species involved in wrecks, albeit later in the autumn. The main offshore dispersal of Storm Petrels does not occur until later in September, but observations off South-west Ireland at the end of August indicate many birds on the move and hence susceptible to displacement. Most of the sightings were at New Passage and Royal Portbury Dock in the upper estuary and were of birds moving downchannel with difficulty with a headwind pushing them close inshore. Occurrence inland is very rare, with only one previous record for Chew Valley Lake. In the present influx two birds were at Chew and one at Cheddar Reservoir throughout the day on the 3rd, frequently harassed by Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and showing signs of exhaustion by the afternoon. None were seen inland on the 4th but on the 5th another appeared at Chew and was chased by a Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. Only two Storm Petrels were reported as being found, both in Taunton.

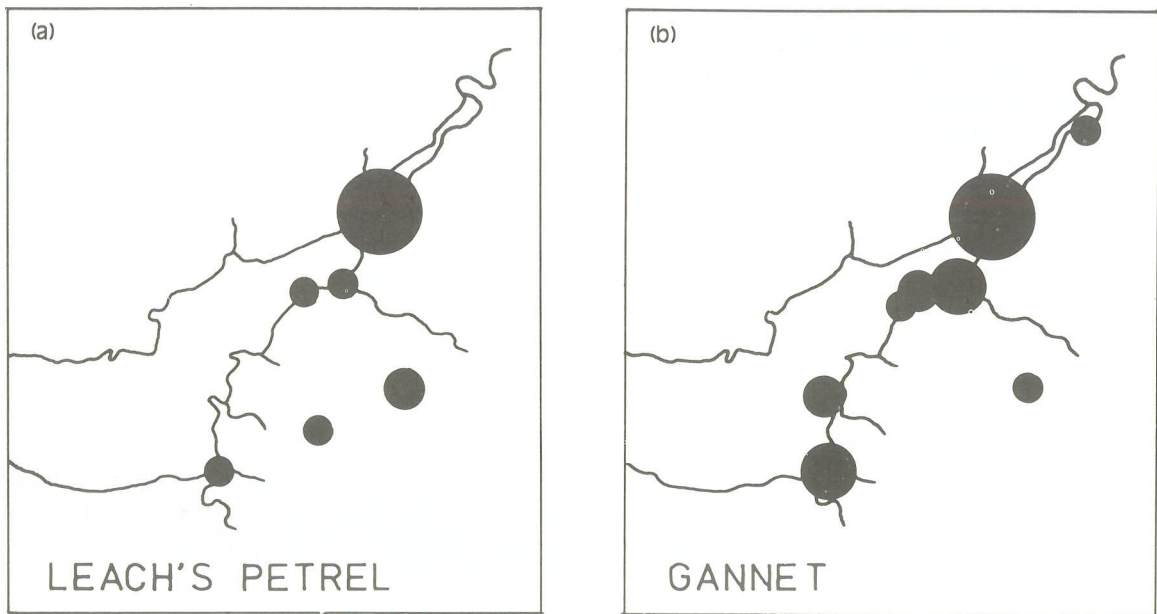


Fig. 5. Distribution of (a) Leach's Petrel and (b) Gannet sightings.

LEACH'S PETREL *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. 66 sight records. Other than at their restricted and almost inaccessible breeding sites, Leach's Petrels are rarely seen anywhere in Britain except as an autumn storm-blown bird. Major wrecks are well documented for 1891 and 1952 (see Boyd 1954). In the latter, over 2000 were counted in the old county of Somerset, with 120 inland. While occurrence on the coast and at the inland reservoirs in September 1983 was not particularly unusual, it is surprising that none were found exhausted or dead. Both petrel species were heavily recorded on the first day, 3 September, but relatively few afterwards. Thus the gales were probably strong enough to displace some birds but neither prolonged nor late enough to cause a genuine wreck, as happened in 1952. There were approximately 52 records from New Passage (with different estimates from different observers), but the species was seen in small numbers elsewhere down the coast and in comparatively large numbers inland with seven at Chew on the 3rd being most notable. Most birds were 'hover' feeding close inshore and moving only slowly downchannel. Harassment by gulls was recorded several times.

GANNET *Sula bassana*. Eleven found exhausted or dead, 90 sightings. Despite the presence of large breeding colonies in Pembrokeshire, Gannets are only irregularly recorded in the upper Bristol Channel after gales. They are well adapted to strong winds and are large enough to settle safely on the water with winds in excess of force eight. Being large and conspicuously plumaged they can, however, be observed at much greater ranges than low flying, dark seabirds such as shearwaters and are thus likely to be more fully recorded. Adult, or near adult, birds predominated, generally moving easily downchannel and out of the estuary. At New Passage, visibility was so good that birds could be seen moving both north-east and south-west on two consecutive days, demonstrating how the narrowing of the estuary above this point forces birds to turn back into the wind. One straggler was seen further upriver, at Oldbury on the 6th, and another stayed at Chew from late afternoon on the 4th until dusk on the following day. Eleven mature Gannets were found suffering from exhaustion, of which five died. They were found mainly on the Somerset Levels at Aller, West Pennard, Westhay, East Huntspill, Bridgwater and Mark, but with others at Brean and Bath.

PHALAROPES *Phalaropus* spp. Sightings of one Red-necked Phalarope *P. lobatus* and two Grey Phalaropes *P. fulicarius*. Grey Phalaropes are annual in the area after westerly gales, so the two at Cheddar Reservoir on the 3rd and 4th were typical. On the other hand, Red-necked Phalaropes normally migrate south-eastwards from their northern breeding grounds and are rare in South-west England in autumn, so that the adult also at Cheddar, on the 4th, was very unusual. Phalaropes are always at risk in rough seas, as they are unable to stay on the choppy surface and are easily blown downwind.

SKUAS *Stercorarius* spp. 31 sightings of four species. Arctic *S. parasiticus* and Great Skuas *S. skua* are occasionally seen in the Channel after severe autumn gales, but both Pomarine *S. pomarinus* and Long-tailed Skuas *S. longicaudus* are very rare in the area. That all four species should be present within a four-day period is unprecedented. 18 Arctics, ten Greats, one Pomarine and one Long-tailed were recorded, none of which were reported as showing signs of stress, and all were apparently successfully moving out to sea. Three Greats and one Arctic were seen inland at Chew, but none stayed longer than an afternoon. Skuas, especially Arctics, regularly migrate overland, which could account for many of the sightings in the Channel, notably twelve at New Passage. Pomarine Skuas are normally, although not exclusively, pelagic and so the immature seen off Portishead would presumably have been storm blown.

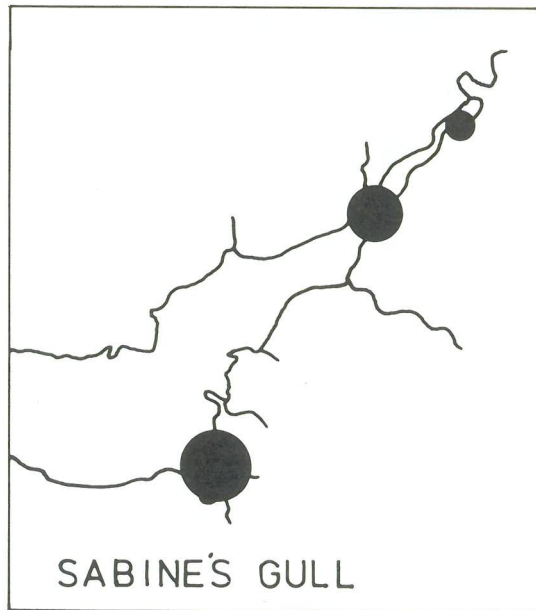


Fig. 6. Distribution of Sabine's Gull sightings.

SABINE'S GULL *Larus sabini*. 44 sightings. The numbers of Sabine's Gulls seen off British coasts in autumn are dependent on south-westerly winds. After leaving their breeding grounds in Canada and Greenland, they move south-east across the Atlantic towards the Iberian peninsular and large numbers appear to concentrate in a staging area in the northern Bay of Biscay. Harrison (1983) mentions flocks of over 1000 being seen off the Brittany coast in late August. These gales were at a perfect time and position to involve some of these birds, with south-westerly winds pushing them into the Western Approaches, and then east into the Bristol Channel. Summer-plumaged adults accounted for 84% of the birds, which in view of the date is to be expected. Juveniles disperse some weeks after the adult population and at this time would still be in the north-west Atlantic. Some 32 sightings were around the Burnham area, where there was a direct lee shore. Birds seen here were mainly feeding and resting close inshore, especially in sheltered spots, in company with other species of gulls. The remainder were off New Passage and showed a similar movement pattern to the Gannets. This species of gull is clearly resilient, as none were seen or found inland, and only one seen further up the estuary, at Oldbury on the 6th.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*. Five sightings. Compared with the number of Sabine's Gulls, the paucity of Kittiwakes was one of the most notable features of this 'flight'. There have been several wrecks on the Somerset coast. Chadwick and Wright (1958) describe the wreck of February 1957 when 135 birds were involved, most of which died of starvation because they were unable to return offshore. Palmer and Ballance (1968) mention two large compensatory movements of displaced Kittiwakes off Steep Holm and Minehead, where the wind had moderated quickly. All such wrecks were, however, between October and February and it would thus appear that gales in early September are too early to involve a large number of birds. The main post-breeding dispersal of this species does not reach a peak until October so that in the first week of September the majority of birds would still be concentrated around their breeding sites, close inshore. This would make them less susceptible to displacement and drift. The five birds seen were all in the Huntspill/Brue area: two adults and a juvenile on the 3rd were high up and quickly blown inland and were later seen moving out west over the sea. The following day two adults were also seen moving westwards, towards Stert Island.

AUKS (Alcidae). Four species of auk—Guillemot *Uria aalge*, Razorbill *Alca torda*, Little Auk *Alle alle* and Puffin *Fratercula arctica* have been recorded in the Severn Estuary and inland in Avon and Somerset, but are generally classified as storm vagrants. The majority have been either dead or dying, with Guillemots and Little Auks most frequent. Despite the variety of other seabird species involved in this gale, it was not surprising that no auks were recorded. Auks are perfectly adapted to severe pelagic conditions and need an additional factor to initiate a wreck. Two well studied events illustrate this, the most recent being in February 1983 in the North Sea, when about 31600 auks perished (Hudson 1984). The main cause of death was starvation, caused by strong and unusual winds which forced birds into unfavourable feeding areas. More relevant to the Severn Estuary is the September 1969 wreck of Guillemots and Razorbills in the Irish Sea, where a combination of weather, moult and pollution stresses caused fatalities (Cramp *et al* 1974). The September 1983 gale was thus too transient to cause problems for resident species, and probably too early to involve Little Auks only just dispersing from their High Arctic breeding grounds.

Conclusion

To summarise, these gales occurred at an early date in September when many birds were vulnerable. The winds were of sufficient strength to cause a simple displacement of species, especially those starting to move offshore after breeding such as Storm Petrels and Sabine's Gulls. Subsequent compensatory or reorientation movements were also observed and the gales were insufficiently prolonged to cause more than temporary problems for the majority of the birds involved.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the following for providing records and comments: John Aldridge, Roy Curber, Andy Hawkins, Malcolm Kemp, Norman Lacy, Brian Lancaster, Robin Prytherch, Brian Rabbitts, Trevor Silcocks, Brian Slade, Geoff Upton, RSPCA and the Bristol Weather Centre.

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NOTES

Feeding behaviour of Kittiwake Inland

The morning of 7 April 1984 was heavily overcast with a cool north-westerly breeze. An adult Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* was present at Barrow Gurney reservoirs, Avon, where, apart from occasional short flights, it spent its time swimming on the water and feeding. Eventually it left, flying off strongly to the west.

The Kittiwake was feeding by picking food items from the surface and the assumption was that it was feeding upon items which were floating. The bird would extend its neck forward and peck sharply at the water and this action was repeated many times. Occasionally the bird would 'up-end', tipping forward and lifting its rear end showing its under tail coverts and part of the dark legs but still not penetrating the surface of the water with its bill.

The bird was too distant for the food items to be identified with certainty but during April substantial numbers of non-biting midges (Chironomidae) hatch and are to be found on the surface of the water. Small insects, detectable through a telescope, could be seen across the surface of the water and may have been of this family.

Both *The Handbook* and *BWP* indicate that insects form a minimal proportion of a Kittiwake's diet and give little or no information on the inland feeding habits. In *BWP*, the habit of picking items of food from the surface is described as 'surface-seizing', one among several methods that the species uses in its normal maritime habitat. It would seem that in this particular case, the activity was an adjustment to the unusual circumstances in which the bird found itself, combined with a food supply which it would not normally encounter.

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Coot chick's attempted defence from attacks by Lesser Black-backed Gull

On 25 July 1948, I witnessed an attack on a Coot chick *Fulica atra* by a Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* at Chew Magna Reservoir, Somerset (now Avon). Brief details have been published (*Brit. Birds* 44 (1951): 288) but having recently reread my field notes I feel that a fuller account should be published. My wife and I had been present at the reservoir for some time: it was rather quiet. Then we noticed an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull alighting on the water near an adult Coot with its single chick. The chick was at least a week old, still with red coloured bristles around its head. By quickly lunging forward the gull captured the chick in its bill. The gull then flew off high over the reservoir, returning to alight on a mud bank not far from where the chick had been captured. Throughout this the parent Coot appeared unconcerned. The gull flew up again but after settling it released the young Coot only to maul it this way and that. Nevertheless, several times the victim managed to regain its feet and adopted a defensive posture. By bending slightly forward, with tiny wings out-stretched and head lowered, it pivoted around to face the gull. It was indeed a remarkable defensive posture in so young a bird, and moved us a great deal. In the meantime the adult Coot had left the water and run over the bank to attempt to drive the gull away. This was unsuccessful and so the attack on the chick continued. Obviously it would not have been long before the chick was killed and no doubt swallowed. This was more than we wished to witness and we made across to rescue the creature. But the whole episode ended in a most interesting and unexpected manner. As we bent down to pick up the chick it regained its upright stance and scuttled through a small hedge nearby to find refuge and concealment in a clump of reeds *Phragmites* a little further away.

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Hunting behaviour of Peregrines

On 12 October 1984, at Steart, Somerset, I was watching an immature male Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* which was resting on the ground on Stert Island. It made one or two short, low flights, returning to the ground again each time, before rising in much more purposeful flight, flapping its wings rapidly and gaining height to a considerable distance, then circling around on stiff wings in the classic 'waiting-on' hunting position. Suddenly it angled sharply downwards with rapid wingbeats, stooping onto a Feral Pigeon *Columbia livia*. The initial stoop failed and the Peregrine swung back in pursuit of the pigeon, fairly low over the island. Quite unexpectedly, an immature female Peregrine rose up from the ground, the presence of this bird having been entirely undetected prior to this. The two Peregrines attacked the pigeon in tandem, one bird stooping down and forcing it to fly low, the other then flying in low and forcing the pigeon to fly up, where it was promptly attacked once more by the first bird. The attack lasted perhaps not much more than a minute, containing the original long stoop, close pursuit, mini-stoops (referred to in Bond 1981) and several ground-level dashes, quite evidently intended to force the pigeon high for the second Peregrine.

Eventually, a mini-stoop by the male caught the pigeon at speed and knocked it in a tumbling ball of feathers to the ground. The female promptly landed on the ground beside the pigeon, whilst the male seemingly lost interest in the encounter and flew off. The pigeon was not dead and began struggling across the ground. The female jumped into the air and landed on the pigeon. A brief tussle took place before the Peregrine flew off two or three metres once more. This was repeated two or three times before the pigeon finally succumbed and the Peregrine then began to feed.

References to Peregrines hunting cooperatively in pairs are surprisingly not frequent in the literature and several major books do not allude to it at all, for example, Bannerman (1956), Grossman and Hamlet (1964), Brown and Amadon (1968) and Brown (1976). In other cases, the references are not detailed, as in Cade (1982) which merely refers to males sometimes cooperating in hunting, while *The Handbook* only quotes one instance and *BWP* merely repeats the older references. Treleaven (1977) mentions 'paired' Peregrines hunting together on their breeding grounds, with a similar mention in Bent (1961). This is picked up by Ratcliffe (1980) who mentions cooperative courtship hunting, and both he and Treleaven refer to team hunting with newly fledged young on the breeding grounds, the adults crippling but not killing the prey in flight, the young then being able to take over the pursuit. Meinertzhagen (1959) has a startling instance of a group of eleven Peregrines hunting in the same area, although apparently not cooperatively, and certainly in special man-assisted circumstances. 'Casts' of two Peregrines being flown in falconry is quoted by Ratcliffe. Cade refers to Peregrines landing and stalking after prey that has put into cover to escape, this being more usually associated with young birds. Harris (1979) describes what he terms 'hop-hunting' on the ground by adult birds, and their habit of occasionally taking ground prey is mentioned by Ratcliffe.

What made the Steart observation particularly interesting was the combination of several unusual, or at least little quoted, aspects of behaviour. In part, it was a full hunting partnership as described for 'paired' birds, yet it involved two immature birds. In part, with the disabling but not killing of the prey, there were suggestions of the parent/young behaviour of summer months. The final 'hunt' of the still living prey on the ground may have suggested inexperience on the part of the female Peregrine in administering the '*coup de grace*' or merely be illustrative of the difficulty a Peregrine encounters with live prey on the ground (Bond 1981).

My thanks are due to Mr & Mrs David Peart for their willing help in tracing less accessible reference material.

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Roosting behaviour of a vagrant Laughing Gull

A juvenile Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* was present at Newlyn Harbour, Cornwall, from 15 January 1978 to 23 March (*Brit. Birds* 72 (1979):526). I was fortunate to rediscover this bird which had been at St Ives during December 1977 (*Brit. Birds* 71 (1978):506). At Newlyn, the gull fed across the mud banks at low tide or visited the places where fish were being gutted. When resting it joined many other gulls and Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* on the gunwales of either one or the other of two small fishing craft anchored very close offshore. The Laughing Gull then offered excellent views, but inevitably, with birdwatchers and particularly photographers moving as close as possible to get an even better view or shot, many of the birds were flushed and flew away. The Laughing Gull seemed more reluctant to depart, but instead dropped to the wood floor of the boat where it became very difficult to observe. It would stay in this position for an hour or so and many observers missed the bird when it was hidden thus. The Laughing Gull behaved similarly a number of times when the other birds were flushed from around it by the close approach of observers. The greater tolerance of the gull thus gave it the opportunity to move into a more concealed resting place where it was doubtless more comfortable.

Bernard King

Laughing Gull dropping and retrieving an object whilst in flight

Whilst visiting the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, Florida, USA on 14 March 1978, a very hot and sultry day, I was attracted by Laughing Gulls *Larus atricilla* calling as they soared high over the sea. One in particular caught my attention because it was holding a dark round object in its bill which it soon dropped. The gull immediately swooped down to catch the object just before it reached the water. Then, with wings firmly spread, the gull soared upwards (in a manner reminiscent of the nuptial flight of a Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*) to rejoin the other gulls, only for the performance to be repeated many times during the next fifteen minutes after which all the gulls departed.

Bernard King

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

FIELDWORK, 1984

Breeding season Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels

1984 saw the completion of this Club survey which has run for five years. This note summarizes the results of the fifth season combined with the previous four. The complete results of the survey will be published in full in a future issue of this journal. The objective of the survey was 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 qualified 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). Many records were taken from the usual reporting slips, and a few others, who are particularly keen on birds of prey, sent in additional details.

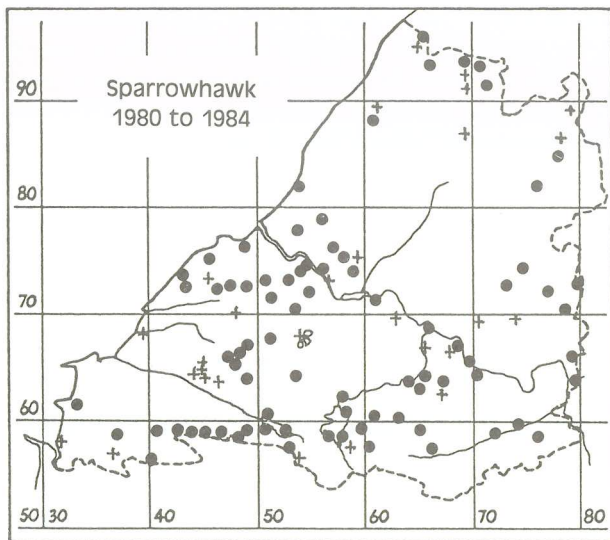
Excellent coverage was achieved once again and although this was enough to give an almost complete picture for the Buzzard, it was still not sufficient to fill some large gaps in the Sparrowhawk and Kestrel maps. The records plotted in Figs 1, 2 and 3 (detailed below) are for the five years combined. All this has been achieved with the help of the many members who have carried out field work and then taken the trouble to send in their records.

SPARROWHAWK. Records from March to July were asked for. Fig. 1 shows 79 definite pairs (12 for 1980, plus 24 for 1981, plus 15 for 1982, plus eight for 1983, plus 20 for 1984). Add to this 28 more sites where occupancy was suspected (a net increase of three) to give a total of 107 sites.

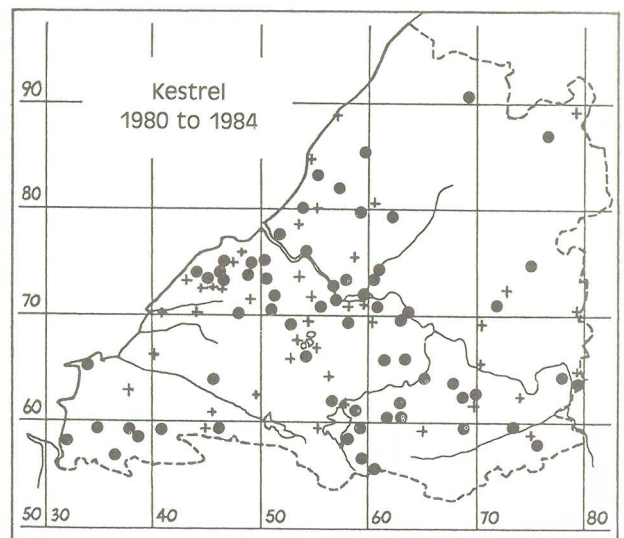
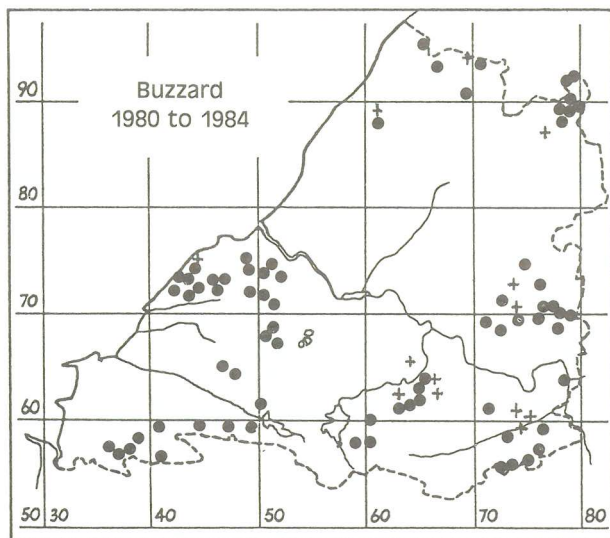
BUZZARD. Records from February to July were asked for. Fig. 2 shows 72 definite pairs (22 for 1980, plus eight for 1981, plus seven for 1982, plus 18 for 1983, plus 17 for 1984). With the 13 sites where occupancy was suspected (a net loss of four) the overall total is 85 sites.

KESTREL. Records from March to July were asked for. Fig. 3 shows 66 definite pairs (17 for 1980, plus 17 for 1981, plus one for 1982, plus five for 1983, plus 26 for 1984). The large increase in 1984 was achieved not just by confirming suspected sites, only 9 were confirmed, but by finding new sites. The outstanding 42 suspected pairs (a net loss of three) adds on to give a total of 110 sites.

Robin Prytherch.



Figs 1,2 and 3. Breeding season records of Sparrowhawks, Buzzards and Kestrels respectively, in Avon 1980 to 1984 inclusive. Each dot indicates one pair of birds and is centred on the general area of their apparent territory. (Not all territories are occupied each year.) Each cross indicates the location of the additional suspected sites.



CLUB ACTIVITIES, 1984

For those fortunate enough to take part, the fortnight's birdwatching trip to Cyprus in April was undoubtedly the highlight of the Club's year. Although the arrangements were made this time by Ibis Tours it still remained very much a BOC enterprise, led by Club member Nigel Tucker and shown around the Greek part of the island by former member Gordon Rayner, who lives in retirement there. The 16 members who took part found that, despite the still horrendous typically Mediterranean attitude to birds, April in Cyprus was a memorable time.

The weather played an important role back home for those taking part in the Club's two weekend trips. In May strong winds kept most birds with their heads down along the Suffolk coastline, while the Solway trip in November suffered from heavy rain on one of its two days. Fortunately geese do not mind the rain, and the birdwatchers learned to put up with it.

Birding on a Club basis got underway as soon as the year began, with a New Year's Day visit to Tadham and Tealham Moors to chase away any hangovers. During the year a total of 25 field meetings, including coach outings, were held. There was just one cancellation through lack of support. Too few members wished to take part in the summer social, scheduled for Staple Plain on the Quantocks. Not even the lure of free beer could tempt them. Individual members lent a hand with conservation projects at Chew Valley Lake during the year, while others set about beginning a BTO Common Birds Census type of survey for breeding birds in Leigh Woods. Peter Hopkin and Dorian Buffery spearheaded a move to make and erect nest boxes here, too. We had end of year troubles with *Bird News* after our printers folded, but in true stiff upper lip tradition, the publication barely faltered.

Indoor meetings

19.1.84	The Golden Eagle - Mike Everett
16.2.84	Members' evening
15.3.84	Gulls - Rob Hume
13.9.84	The Severn Estuary - Peter Ferns
18.10.84	The Robin - David Harper
15.11.84	Birds of Antarctica - Julian Hector
13.12.84	Annual General Meeting

Publications

Bird News continued to be published monthly, but *Bristol Ornithology 17* appeared rather later than its nominal December publication date.

John Barber *Honorary Secretary*.



