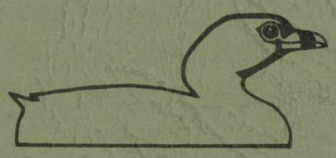
BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



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BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

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PREFACE

The previous issue of *Bristol Ornithology* (No. 4) dealt almost entirely with some of the results of the Club's investigations into the birds of the Bristol Channel. As forecast in that number we are now presenting the first of the occasional papers on selected species. However, the main theme of no. 5 is visible migration. The Club has been carrying out simultaneous migration watches at several coastal localities along the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary since its formation. Many members have been involved in the watches and they will no doubt be intrigued and gratified to see some of the results of their early morning vigils. There are still many problems to be solved and the watches will continue. Our coverage only stretched to Berrow occasionally and so it is encouraging to see that J. V. Morley has been gathering information from that area and beyond. The paper from Bernard King on Lesser Black-backed Gulls heralds a new field venture that the Club hopes to launch in 1973. Even now very little is known in precise figures about the seasonal variations in the gull roosts in our area. In addition, knowledge of flight lines and feeding areas of the gulls will help to build a better picture of the habits of these birds away from their breeding grounds.

Robin Prytherch, Chairman

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A REVIEW OF 1971

by Brian Rabbitts

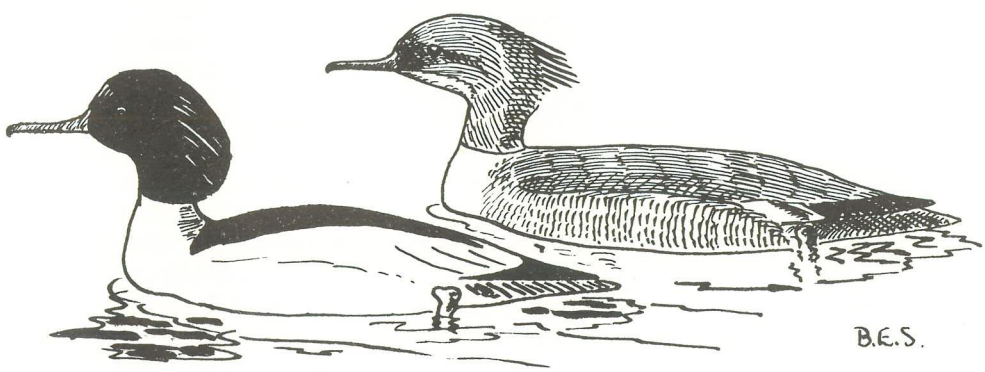
There were almost 140 contributors to this review, condensed from the information supplied to the monthly reports in *Bird News* of the main events and trends of birds observed within a radius of about 30 miles of Bristol (in Gloucestershire and Somerset). Excluding all subspecies and birds suspected of being escapes from captivity, a total of 217 species were recorded in 1971. No records of species on the British Birds list of rarities are included which have been rejected by the national committee.

Reservoirs, often referred to collectively, signifies those at Barrow Gurney, Blagdon, Cheddar, Chew Valley Lake (CVL) and Durleigh; WT is the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge and the New Grounds refer to the adjacent river bank and estuary.

The first winter period

January started on a cold note with snow on high ground, but then the rest of the month was generally mild and wet with rainfall above average and strong south to south-west winds from the 8th to the 10th and gale force in exposed areas on the 25th. The mild weather continued into February and temperatures for the month were above average and it was fairly dry. March was unsettled and rather wet. A mild winter with the result that mortality amongst the birds was low.

A diver not specifically identified was at CVL in January and at the end of the month there were two or three Slavonian Grebes whilst Great Crested Grebe numbers at this locality reached 275 decreasing to 126 at the end of March. Cormorants continue to be present in large numbers and a count of 46 was made in January. A Bittern was noted in February and there were two in March. During the first winter period last year there were record numbers of White-fronted Geese at the New Grounds but this year the maximum was 3500 and elsewhere on the coast and at the reservoirs there were only very small gaggles with maxima of 30 at Sand Bay and Steart. Other geese were not well represented either and reports only came from the New Grounds where there were four Barnacle, a single Bean and up to nine Pinkfeet. Bewick's Swans continue to winter in our area in large numbers with the usual large concentration at the WT with a count of 210 at the end of January and the same month there were up to 98 at Blagdon with one or two dyed birds – part of an experiment by the Wildfowl Trust to trace their movements. February records included 204 which dropped into roost at Durleigh and 104 at Muchelney floods. A sample of counts in Somerset revealed 74 immatures out of a total of 475 or 15.6% and likewise with counts in other parts of the country this indicated a good breeding season for them.



Goosander pair

Of the commoner wildfowl wintering in our area most appeared to have had a good year but, like the general picture in the south-west, numbers of Pochard were low. A rare Nearctic duck, a drake American Wigeon, was recorded at Durleigh on the 23 February. Other duck reported included small numbers of Gadwall with a maximum of 63 at CVL in March, 250 Pintail at the New Grounds in January, 150 at Steart and 75 at Long Load in February, up to 95 Shoveler, one or two Scaup and a Common Scoter at Frampton with up to six at Brean Down. Small numbers of Goldeneye reached a maximum of 38 at CVL while a few were reported away from the reservoirs including the coast and floods. Up to three Smew occurred at CVL and also two Red-breasted Mergansers the beginning of the year whilst Goosanders at this locality reached thirteen.

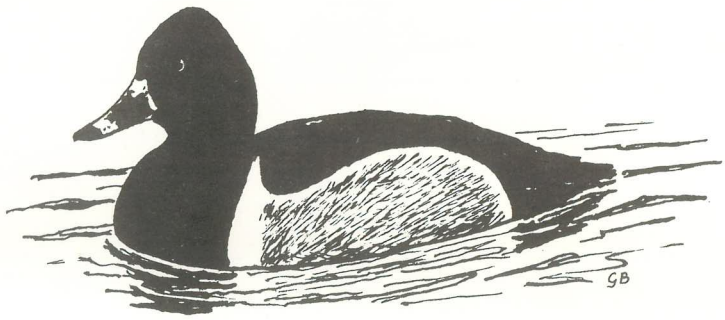
A Rough-legged Buzzard flew over Clewer on the 21 March and the only Hen Harrier reported was at Sand Bay on the 4th of that month. Other raptors sighted included the usual Peregrine at the New Grounds with three records on the Somerset coast and Merlins were reported from several coastal localities also. Water Rails were noted including nine flushed by the high tide from the spartina at Sand Bay the end of February. Maximum numbers of Coot occurred at Cheddar where 1800 were present in January. Of the waders principal numbers of Oystercatchers were at the Axe Estuary with a maximum of 101 and two were reported at CVL in March. Ringed Plover present included about 75 in February at Severn Beach; numbers of Golden Plover, apart from one large flock on the levels, were small; Grey Plover reached a maximum of 53 at Steart the beginning of the year with one inland at CVL and large flocks of Lapwing were numerous. There were up to 120 Turnstone at Chittening while Dunlin numbers indicated up to 12000 in January and 9000 in February with fairly large flocks on the flooded levels. A count of 2800 Knot was made at Sand Bay the beginning of the year and Bar-tailed Godwits were seen in small numbers with a maximum of 65 at Steart. Scarcer wintering waders included Purple Sandpipers at Brean Down and Severn Beach area with up to four at the latter locality, a most unusual record of a Curlew Sandpiper at Clevedon on the 13 February, some sixteen Sanderling, few Ruffs with about eight in January and nine in February, one Green Sandpiper in January, four in February and three in March, one or two Common Sandpipers on the River Avon at Sea Mills, six Black-tailed Godwits, about nine Woodcock, a similar number of Jack Snipe and one Avocet at Steart the end of January.

An immature Little Gull was present at Tadham Moor in January while the highest count of Lesser Black-backed Gulls was made at Frampton with 92 in February and at CVL the previous month there were up to five of the Scandinavian race *L.f. fuscus.* At this locality there was an Iceland Gull on 3 March and a Kittiwake in February with five at Sand Point at the end of January. A count of 450 Collared Doves was made at the same time in the WT enclosures. Barn Owls were present at some six localities and, continuing from last year, Short-eared Owls were unusually numerous with seventeen in February and twelve in March including eight at the New Grounds in both months. Passerines reported included up to nine Water Pipits at the reservoirs with the last of the period at Cheddar on 18 April while a wintering Yellow Wagtail was observed at Chittening on the first day of the year. The Great Grey Shrike present from last December above Wells remained to at least the 20 March and another was recorded at Tellisford on the 3rd of that month. There were some five Blackcaps, one or two Chiffchaffs, a Firecrest at Backwell in January and a Black Redstart was present at Brean Down in January and February with another at Tytherington at the beginning of the year. Fieldfares and Redwings did not appear to be numerous in the area although there were one or two groups of 500 or over of the former. Willow Tits were again recorded away from their usual areas being noted at seven localities while only single reports of Cirl and Snow Buntings were received and very small numbers of Brambling. Small parties of Siskins and Redpolls occurred, there were three Twite at Chittening, a group of 54 Bullfinches at Severn Beach in January whilst Hawfinches were reported from their usual areas on Clifton Downs and at Leigh Woods. A Hooded Crow was sighted near Cirencester in the middle of January and lastly Ravens were noted at three places inland apart from the usual coastal records.

Spring migration

Temperatures for April were below normal and there were large falls of snow on the 26th. For most of the month pressure was high to the north of Britain and low over central and southern Europe, this bringing mainly north-east winds and preventing migration. Westerly winds occurred during the 16th—20th and this is when most migrants arrived in force. May was mainly dry and sunny with temperatures near normal. June was cold and very wet being anticyclonic to the 7th, then cyclonic from 8th—15th this being followed by a westerly airflow to the end of the month.

Two Red-throated Divers flew up channel at Brean Down on 15 May and another diver was present three days later. A Black-necked Grebe was recorded at CVL from the 21 March to the end of the month. Fulmars occurred at Brean Down as usual, the first Manx Shearwater was observed here on 16 April with a few parties in May, two or three Storm Petrels on 24 April were unusual and a few Gannets were seen. Unlike last year there was no large influx into the country of southern herons but a Little Egret was reported at the WT on 24 May. Nationally it was a good spring for White Storks and one was present in the vicinity of Hallen and Compton Greenfield on 23 May. It was a late departure for White-fronted Geese with the last being observed at CVL on 13 April. At the same place and month high numbers of Gadwall were reported with a maximum of 100 whilst the first Garganey in the area was not sighted until the end of March. The second Nearctic duck of the year, a drake Ring-necked Duck, appeared at



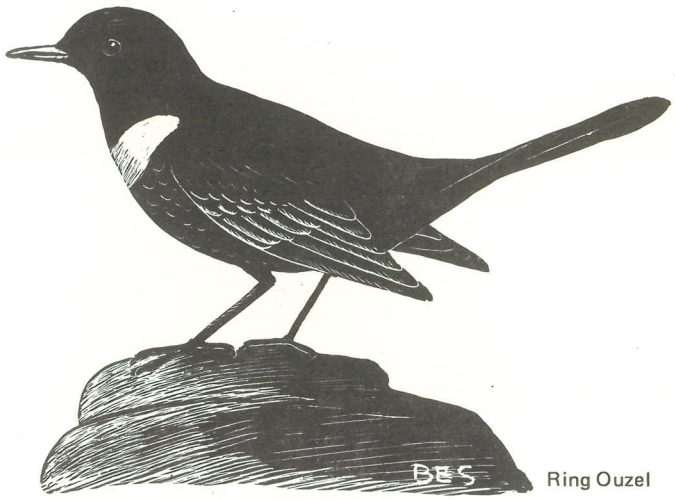
Ring-necked Duck

Blagdon on 4 April remaining to the 24th and was later seen at CVL on 2 May and 23rd. Other diving duck in April and May included one or two Scaup at CVL, small numbers of Common Scoter at Brean Down and two Red-breasted Mergansers also at this locality. Uncommon raptors were a Goshawk at Hunstrete on 16 April and a Marsh Harrier at Brean Down on 15 May which came in from across channel. A Crane was observed flying up channel off Clevedon on 31 March and a Corncrake was reported at Pensford at the end of April.

Maximum numbers of Ringed Plover reached some 560 at three localities in mid-May while highest Sanderling numbers occurred in the second week of June with 70 at the New Grounds and 60 at Berrow. The usual marked Whimbrel passage took place from the 17 April (same date as last year) with most in the first week of May. Numbers reported however pale to insignificance when compared to the large roost on Steart Island where apparently anything up to 2000 occur in the spring. This phenomenon, previously suppressed, can best be watched from Burnham from about two hours before dusk, and is a major event in our ornithological calendar. Other waders included at least five Little Ringed Plovers, Kentish Plovers at the New Grounds 27 April and Berrow 10 June, up to seven Purple Sandpipers at Severn Beach and two at Brean Down with the last on 11 May, Curlew Sandpiper at the Axe Estuary 9th and 10 June, four Ruffs, two Greenshanks, five Green Sandpipers, several Jack Snipe in April, a single Avocet at Steart to 11 April and lastly a Stone Curlew at Patchway on 13 May.

A Great Skua occurred at Brean Down on 16 April and the first Arctic Skua here was on the 18th and there were a further three singles and three on 6 May. Little Gulls were unusually numerous with up to 13 at CVL in April and May with single birds at Cheddar and Huntspill in April and a group of 14 at the New Grounds on 11 June. The now usual large numbers of Kittiwakes in the channel in spring included some 115 at Brean Down on 13 March, 35 at Sand Point the end of the month and at the first locality there was a maximum of 32 in April and 34 in May whilst one was recorded inland at CVL. Tern passage was again very good and there were many more Black Terns in April than last year with up to 15 at CVL while in May there was a movement at Brean Down with 42 on the 6th. The first Common/Arctic Tern was reported on the 16 April and there was a very large passage in the channel with 93 at the New Grounds the end of April whilst at Brean Down in May counts included 236 on 2nd; 200 on 5th; 140 on 6th; 41 on 14th, with, all in, a total of some 670 for this locality. There were five Little Terns seen with the first at Cheddar on 16 April and Sandwich Terns also occurred here and at Brean Down. The odd Razorbill was noted at this locality also one Guillemot and a number of one or other of these species not specifically identified.

Space prohibits enumerating in detail the arrival of summer visitors (see the monthly reports) but most species were late in arriving in quantity owing to the cold weather at the beginning of April. Scarcer passerine species reported included a Hoopoe at Brean Down on 16 May; two or three Wagtails of the race *M.f.flava* (Blue-headed Wagtail) at St George's Wharf on 24 May; a minimum of 40 White Wagtails *M.a.alba* from the end of March; a Great Grey Shrike at Long Ashton on 12 April; Pied Flycatchers at three places the same month; two or three Wheatears at Brean Down and Sand Point at the end of May and in June were thought to have been of the Greenland race *O.o.leucorrhoa*; three Black Redstarts in April; up to five Ring Ouzels at Brean Down and Sand Point and large numbers at Wavering Down with 34 on 3 April; a large party of 200 Siskins at Wotton-under-Edge the end of March,



Ring Ouzel

with the same month up to 70 at Stock Hill including some in full song; similarly many Redpolls were reported singing nearby in a group of 50 at the same time and finally a Hooded Crow was sighted at Chittening on 14 April.

Breeding species (selected)

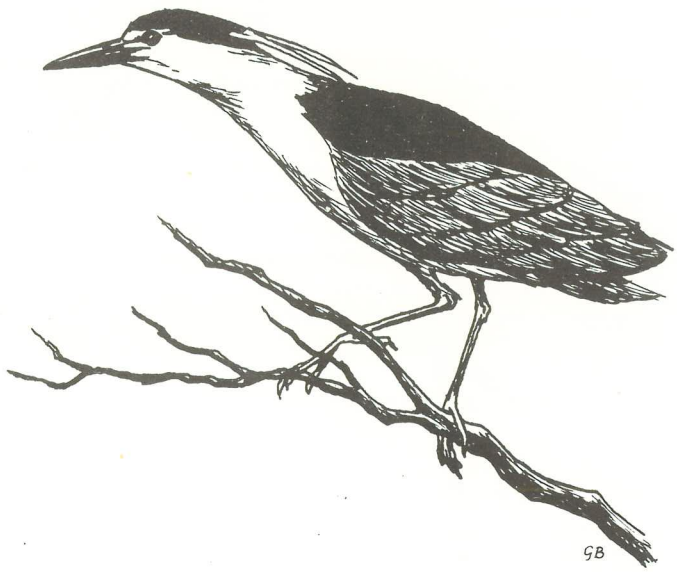
Breeding Great Crested Grebes were recorded from CVL, Emborough Pond and Highbridge but the season at CVL was far less successful than last year, partly due to the very late start to the fishing season and the resultant widespread disturbance when pairs already well established in territories with nests. A count of 39 young birds in 23 broods was made in July. Of the heronries counted in the area the greatest number of occupied nests was at Cleeve Wood where a count of 56 was made in May and a new site was on Denny Island, CVL, with four young being reared. Breeding duck at CVL included Gadwall (70 young), Shoveler (at least one brood), Pochard (one or two broods) and Tufted Duck (50 broods) while a brood of Pochard was also recorded at Durleigh. Sparrowhawks were well represented in May but only six records in June and two of breeding whilst there were six records of Buzzard in June from the Mendip area including one nest with three young. Hobbies in the same month were reported from seven localities in Somerset and one in Gloucestershire. Red-legged Partridges bred at Queen Charlton and Partridges were noted at eight localities May–July but Quail were only reported from the Marshfield area with a maximum of five, a different situation from last year when they were fairly widespread. A pair of Ringed Plover bred at Steart whilst other breeding waders included Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, Snipe and Woodcock which were present at Gare Hill in May and at Shapwick in June.

Turtle Doves were located in 15 areas May and June including 12 singing at Copley Woods the end of May, Barn Owls were present at five localities May to July and some three records of breeding Kingfishers were received. A Wryneck was sighted at Oldbury-on-Severn on 7 June and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were reported

May—July from nine localities. Sand Martins bred at the River Frome, Bristol and a pair of Marsh Warblers were seen and heard in the Gordano Valley. Whitethroats appear to have a long way to go before the breeding population is similar to its pre-crash level of 1968 and generally speaking it was not a particularly good breeding season for our summer visitors. Several members commented on large numbers of Goldcrests in April and on a national level there was a Goldcrest breeding explosion. Whinchats were well spread on the levels including some twenty families at Somerton Moor whilst singing Nightingales were noted at eight localities in May including up to twelve at Inglestone Common and five at Shapwick. Willow Tits were observed at three localities away from their traditional areas, rearing young successfully at one and two pairs of Treecreepers bred in specially constructed nestboxes, again one pair being successful (see *Brit. Birds* 65(1972) : 223). Corn Buntings were present at several areas and a survey in July of part of the Cotswolds revealed 118 singing birds south of a line from Hawkesbury to Dunkirk and Little Badminton whilst Cirl Buntings were located at five localities. There were few records of Redpolls in May and June but in other parts of the country greatest concentration of breeding birds have been in young forestry commission plantations and such places deserve thorough investigation. Four Ravens were reared at Brean Down and there was a pair with a fully grown juvenile on Steep Holm, the first breeding here for some years.

Some mid-summer observations

As a result of the sea-bird survey (see *Bristol Ornithology* 4(1971) : 143—171) observations of sea-birds off the Somerset coast, mainly Brean Down, are being made with regularity and during this period Fulmars were regular visitors with maximum numbers on the 12 June when 35 sightings were made during the watch with up to nine together. Manx Shearwaters were present in small parties, the maximum numbers being 202 on 19 June, 225 the next day, 194 on 1 August and 120 on the 6th. A Sooty Shearwater, the first record off the Somerset coast, was recorded on the 19 June. Gannets occurred in small numbers and about 100 were present on 25 July whilst up to five Common Scoter were sighted.



Night Heron

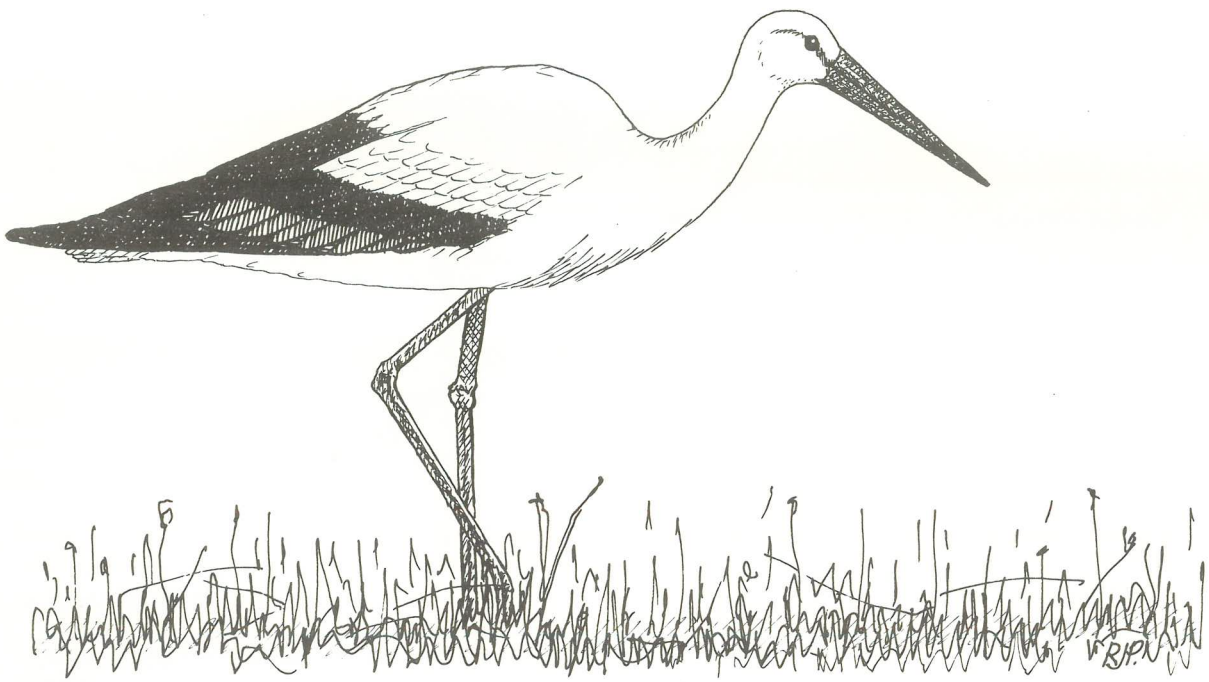
Another rarity for the area concerned an adult Night Heron that was present at the WT from 4 July to the 8th. Of the waders a Greenshank at Clevedon on 12 June and a Green Sandpiper at CVL on the 20th of that month were both fairly unusual. Skuas in the channel were some six Great and five Arctic with one appearing inland at CVL on 23 June. The occasional skua in the summer well up channel is probably not unusual as there possibly is a small summer population of non-breeding birds that wander about in the approaches to the English and Bristol

Channels and across to Ireland. A few terns were observed, also two or three Razorbills as well as some eight auks not specifically identified. A Golden Oriole was present at CVL on 12 June.

Autumn migration

July was mostly dry and sunny but changeable in the last two weeks with low pressure persisting to the south-west of the country from the 22nd to 26th. The first week of August was unsettled being followed by a very wet and windy period 9th—14th and another unsettled period 19th—25th. After the second week winds were mainly north-east veering to south-west from the 26th to the end of the month. There were some strong winds in the first few days of September but these soon died out and for the majority of the month it was dry and settled with temperatures and amounts of sunshine above average. Due to these conditions waders passed through quickly and numbers at the reservoirs were very low. On the 26th and 27th a depression moved eastwards from mid-Atlantic. October was predominantly sunny and dry with some unsettled weather 10th—23rd being wet and windy at times in this period.

A Black-necked Grebe was recorded at Blagdon on 3 October and Great Crested Grebe numbers at CVL had built up to 505 by the end of September (642 on 20th last year). Some six Fulmars occurred in the channel in August, only one Manx Shearwater after the 10th of that month and a further six Gannets in September and October. Shags were noted at Cheddar where there were two from 17 August through to September, one remaining to the end of the month and single birds were observed at Brean Down and Sand Point. One of the highlights of the autumn was the appearance of three immature White Storks at Downside on the 9 September. All three were ringed birds and one that fell down a large chimney was taken into captivity. The other two were later seen in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and some days later one was found in a poor condition in Madeira. All three were from the same nest at Frøstrup, North Jutland, where the pair that reared them have become famous. The female was found several years



White Stork

ago with a broken wing, an artificial nest site was provided and four years ago she was joined by a male and they have remained paired since. As the female cannot migrate, the male has remained also, both birds spending the winters in a barn; the male being occasionally liberated for exercise. When the young left the nest site in September it was reported that the direction they took was approximately 90° to the west of their normal heading which is usually south-east to the Bosphorus (see *Brit. Birds* 65 (1972) : 4–5). White-fronted Geese arrived at the New Grounds early in October. Gadwall were well represented at CVL with up to 245 at the end of August, after which time numbers declined here and there were up to 65 at Cheddar. A few Garganey occurred with up to 22 at CVL and at this locality there were two Red-crested Pochards on 27 August whilst one was present at Hawkridge on the 22nd. In view of the dates the origin of these must be suspect. There was a male Scaup at Barrow Gurney on 11 August and a few Scoter on the coast with single birds being noted at Cheddar and the New Grounds in September. Unusual raptors were an Osprey at CVL on 6 September and a Rough-legged Buzzard at Litton on the 17th of that month, this being an early date for our area. There were reports of Peregrines at four localities from the 22 August, Merlins from six areas from the same date and the last Hobby was sighted on the 16 October. Spotted Crakes occurred at CVL 11–15 September and 3 November.

Of the commoner passage waders Ringed Plover peaked at 2600 around the third week of August with a very large count of 1053 at Berrow on the 22nd. Turnstone at Chittening reached 400 at the end of October, only small numbers of Knot were seen with a maximum of 200 at Steart but Sanderling were well represented with up to 210 at Berrow the end of July. Following last years record count of Black-tailed Godwits at Steart this was again broken with 2000 being reported in September. As mentioned previously the anticyclonic weather helped rapid migration through the area and the scarcer passage waders were indeed scarce. There was only a minimum of 22 Little Stints compared with 66 last year and Curlew Sandpipers were rare also with only 10 (min. 82 last year) whilst Ruffs (min. 54) occurred mostly in October. Movement of Spotted Redshanks commenced at the end of June and a minimum of 60 passed through as opposed to 111 last year; Greenshanks (min. 73) were fairly well recorded; Green Sandpipers (min. 57) reached a peak in August and there were many late birds; of Wood Sandpipers one was recorded in July, two in August and September and at least one in October; there was a small return passage of Whimbrel and the first Jack Snipe was recorded on 30 August. Very few rare waders were noted with only three Little Ringed Plovers and a Pectoral Sandpiper at Cheddar 16–24 October, this being the years only Nearctic wader and has been reported annually in Somerset since 1967.

A few Arctic Skuas appeared in the channel but more noteable was an immature Long-tailed Skua at Brean Down on 27 September. Some ten Little Gulls were recorded with five at CVL and three at Blagdon and single Kittiwakes occurred at Brean Down and Cheddar. Passage of Black Terns commenced on 25 July and there was a minimum of 123 to 4 November with a peak in the third week of August whilst Common/Arctic Terns passed mainly in that month (40), with a minimum of 70 between 23 July and 13 November. One bird at Cheddar on 11 November was reported as being in 'portlandica' type plumage (see *Brit. Birds* 62 (1969) : 93–97 and 64 (1971) : 19–22). Sandwich Terns numbered about 16 all, except singles at Blagdon and CVL, at coastal localities from July to the middle of September and there were some 14 Little Terns including nine at Berrow in August. Sightings of rare terns concerned a White-winged Black Tern at Cheddar on 26 August and a Caspian Tern at Frampton on the 8th of that month. There was a Guillemot at Aust at the end of October.

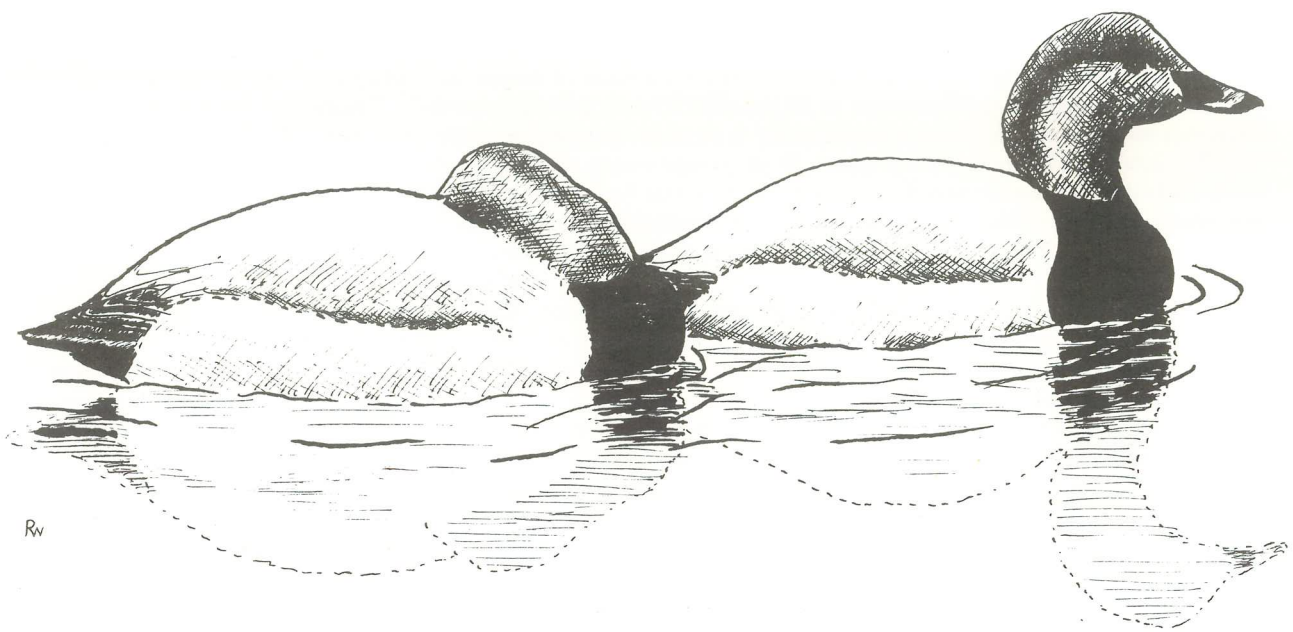
An early Short-eared Owl was at Whitchurch on 23 September and there were two further birds in October. Hoopoes appeared at Brean Down on 8 September and at Filton from the 6th to the 16th whilst at the first locality there was a Wryneck on the 14th and 18th. Three Woodlarks flew over Sand Point on the 8th of the same month and nearby a Great Grey Shrike was sighted on the 27 October. In the spartina in the bay an Aquatic Warbler was present 15–20 September with two on the 16th and at Steart on 22 August there was a 'fall' of warblers, amongst them being a *Hippolais* sp. thought to have been a Melodious Warbler. A Firecrest was seen at Brean Down on 24 October, four Pied Flycatchers occurred at various localities and a Black Redstart at Sand Point on 5 and 6 October was the only one reported to the end of the year. A Bluethroat was trapped and ringed at Blagdon at the end of August and another of the Red-spotted form was found dead on Blackdown on 6 October. There were up to three Ring Ouzels at Brean Down and Sand Point and the first Redwings were seen on the 24 September. An irruption of Bearded Tits took place in the country and one was recorded at CVL on 12 September with a few in the following two months. An immature Ortolan Bunting was seen at Brean Down on 18 August, a Lapland Bunting at Sand Point on 5 October and a Crossbill near Burnham on the 25th of that month.

The usual reports of a few late migrants were received: Wood Sandpiper on 21 October was noteworthy in view of the paucity of records for Palearctic waders; Swifts in September, with the last on the 21st, were numerous; Lesser Whitethroat on 6 October and Whinchat on 4 November. In common with other parts of the country it was a good autumn for irruptive movements of tits at coastal localities, these being mainly Coal Tits, but some Blue and Great Tits were also noted. Migration watches on the coast were fairly quiet but 4000 Chaffinches were counted moving south at Berrow on 24 October. Redpolls were present in small numbers and Siskins also, a prelude to larger numbers in the winter.

The second winter period

November was unsettled around the middle of the month but the weather generally was sunny with both temperatures and rainfall near normal. There were short cold spells during the second and third weeks with strong northerly winds on the 19th and it was cold again at the end of the month. December was mild and generally dry with rainfall below average and it was a dull month.

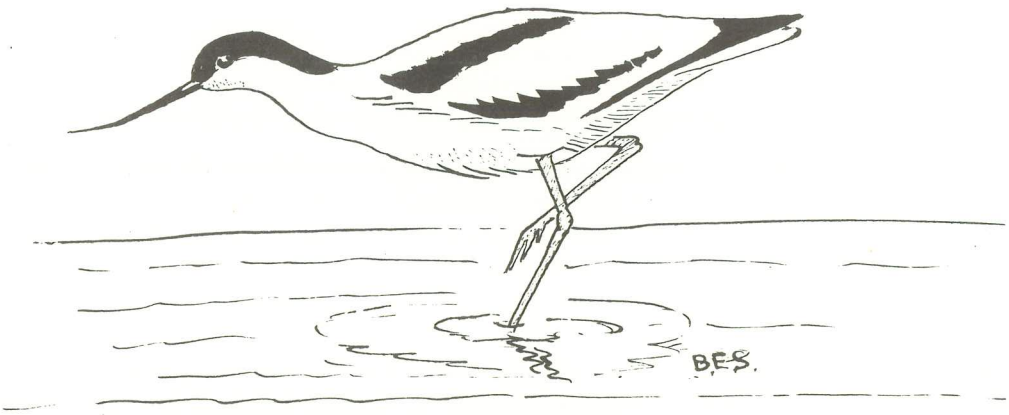
A Slavonian Grebe was present at Cheddar at the end of October to 7 November and at CVL on 11 December to the end of the year whilst counts of Great Crested Grebes here reached 276. Two Fulmars were off Sand Point on 21 November and there were one or two Gannets in the channel the same month. An immature Night Heron that was found at Severnside on the 19 November was released at CVL on the 28th, remaining to the 19 December whilst at the same locality a Bittern was present from the 12th of that month. There were only small numbers of White-fronted Geese at the New Grounds with 1267 in December and there were few gaggles elsewhere, mainly on the coast. Other geese at the New Grounds included a Bean Goose from early in October and a Brent Goose in December while there was one of this species at Chittening at the end of October and two at Aust at the end of the year. The first Bewick's Swans were sighted at the beginning of October and there was a count of 320 at the New Grounds in December, but it was not as plentiful on the reservoirs as the first winter period with a maximum of 32 at CVL whilst elsewhere there were up to 40 at Tealham Moor and a few coastal records. Two Whooper Swans were seen at the New Grounds the end of the year. The commoner duck wintering in our area were about average in number but Pochard, unlike the national picture, were scarce. Other duck reported included up to 51 Gadwall at



Pochard drakes

Cheddar and 40 at the WT, up to 31 and 100 Pintail at the same localities and large counts of Shoveler at CVL with a maximum of 615. Diving duck included a few Scaup on the reservoirs and eight at the Axe Estuary in November; unprecedented numbers of Eider at Sand Point, with two on 16 October rising to 19 by the end of the year; up to 11 Common Scoter at Brean Down; at least one Smew on the reservoirs; two Red-breasted Mergansers at Sand Point in October with one at CVL in November and finally, Goosanders also at CVL reached 24 in the following month with a few recorded elsewhere.

The only Hen Harrier reported in the period was a 'ring-tail' at Steart on 7 November while Peregrines were seen at four localities and Merlins at five. Of the waders there were 157 Turnstone at Huntspill in November – an unusual number for this locality; five Little Stints at Cheddar on 19 November, three at Sand Bay on 23rd and one at CVL from 12 December remained to the end of the year; up to five Purple Sandpipers at Severn Beach and three at Brean Down; a count of 7000 Dunlin was made at the Axe Estuary whilst inland there were up to 34 at the reservoirs and 105 at Kenn Moor; a Curlew Sandpiper was reported at Sand Bay on 23 November; some 19 Sanderling were noted and a few Ruffs at Cheddar and the New Grounds in November. Two Spotted Redshanks occurred in November, at least six Green Sandpipers the same month and another two in December while two Common Sandpipers wintered on the River Avon at Sea Mills. Apart from the coastal birds there was a large group of Black-tailed Godwits inland at Durleigh with 196 on 25 November. About seven Woodcock were seen, some nine Jack Snipe and one or two Avocets at Steart.



Avocet

A Great Skua was present at Sand Point on 22 November, there were one or two immature Little Gulls at Cheddar the same month, one remaining to the end of the year and a count of 500 Lesser Black-backed Gulls was made at CVL. A single Kittiwake was reported at Berrow on the 21 November and a Razorbill at Brean Down on 24 December. Compared with the previous winter Short-eared Owls were very scarce and only single birds were noted at the New Grounds and Sand Point. Water Pipits were first observed on the 10 October and were well recorded at the reservoirs with up to seventeen at CVL while other scarce visitors included a Waxwing in November with two in December, three Blackcaps, only one Chiffchaff, Firecrests at CVL and Slimbridge, up to ten Bearded Tits at Berrow, very few Snow Buntings with four at Sand Bay and singles at Brean Down and Cheddar, two Twite at the last locality on 3 November and six at Sand Point on the 10th. Up to 50 Brambling occurred at Compton Dando and Huntspill and Siskins were very well represented in the area.

MIGRATION ROUTES IN THE VICINITY OF BRIDGWATER BAY, SOMERSET

by J.V. Morley

Migration of birds along the south eastern shore of the Bristol Channel has previously been recorded by Holt (1950 and 1960). These studies were concerned mainly with autumn passage migrants in the vicinity of Burnham-on-Sea. The present notes are based on observations between 1960 and 1970 along the shores of Bridgwater Bay, (Fig. 1) and present the results made on species which are regularly seen on passage in the area both in spring and autumn. The paper is concerned with the direction of migration rather than with the number of birds involved.

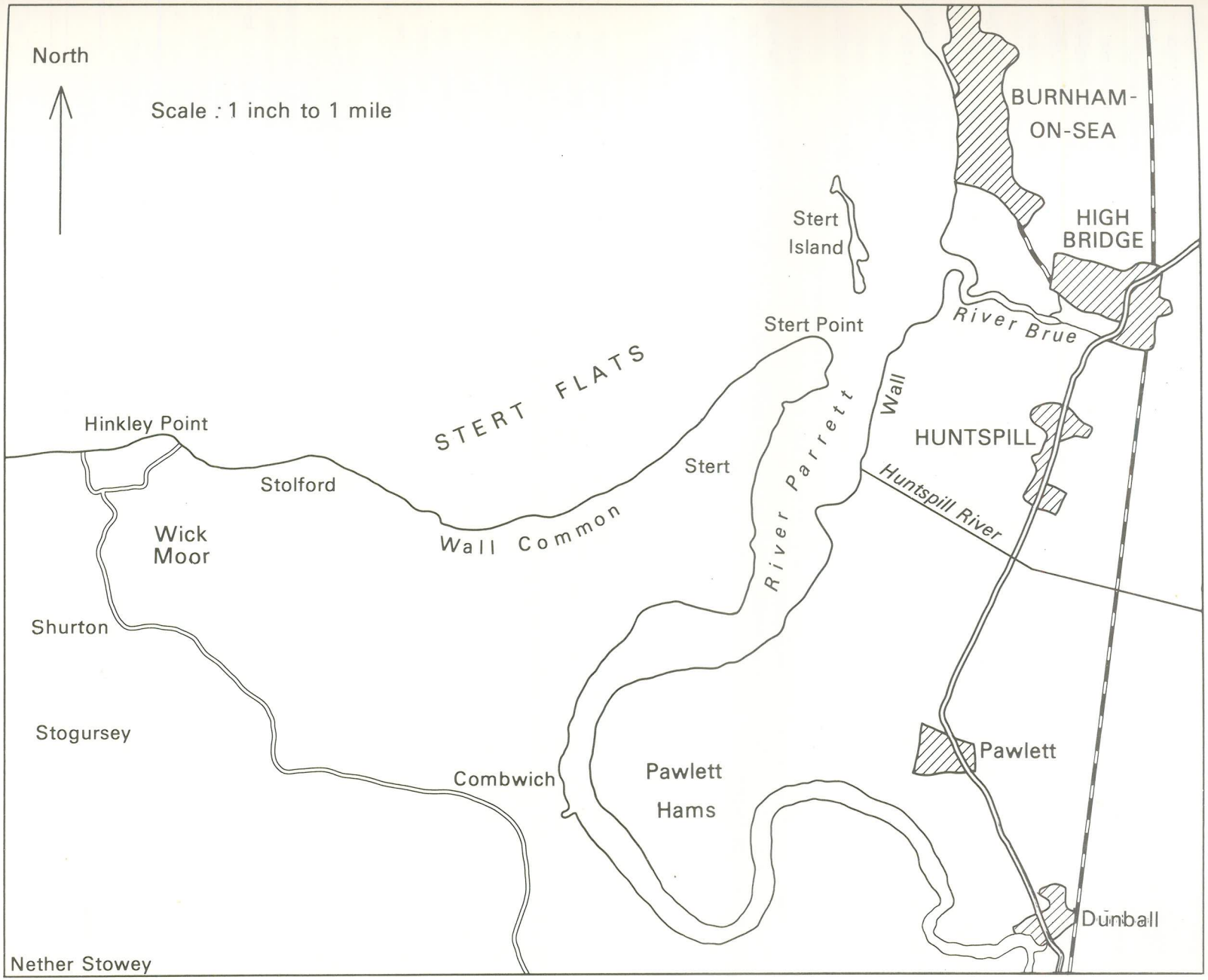
SWIFT *Apus apus*. The spring passage is generally in late April early May, and is very light. The coastal route is from the west towards Stert Point and Huntspill, and in this area it merges with the overland route which is down-river from the direction of Combwich. From Huntspill there is a northerly movement in the direction of Burnham-on-Sea. The autumn passage is much stronger and more obvious than the spring one and begins in mid-July extending into early August. In the autumn no coastal movement has been noted. The general direction from Burnham-on-Sea is over West Huntspill and Pawlett, and is sometimes concentrated into a narrow corridor. Flocks using this route were followed on one occasion to Durleigh Reservoir, where the birds gathered and stayed feeding for a short time before moving off over the Quantock Hills south of Nether Stowey into the Vale of Taunton. At this point gathering darkness prevented further observations. Whether the flock continued westward towards Exmoor or turned south is not known.

Observations made from the vicinity of Wellington Monument, two miles south of Wellington on 18 July 1968 revealed a passage of Swifts several thousands in number coming from the direction of the Quantock Hills, moving in a south-westerly direction towards Exeter. They were moving continually in large circles as they drifted south-west and appeared to be feeding. It is difficult with this species to say when the arrival period ends and the departure period begins because movements which have a migratory appearance may take place almost at any time while Swifts are in this country. Many of these are weather movements when the birds are seeking favourable feeding areas in river valleys, and large concentrations are sometimes seen over the reservoirs in north Somerset particularly during unfavourable weather conditions when the passage of a depression adversely affects their food supply. The movements of this species in the various localities referred to above are believed to be truly migratory. In support of this, observations along the Exe estuary and at Slapton Ley (Devon) show that there is a migration route along the western shores of Lyme Bay which may be an extension of the southward movement as observed from Wellington Monument.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*. The spring passage is most marked about the middle of April extending until mid-May. The coastal route is from the west towards Stert and the Huntspill Wall and the River Brue estuary. On numerous occasions passage has been recorded direct from Stert over Stert Island to Burnham-on-Sea. The overland route is down-river from the direction of Bridgwater crossing Pawlett Hams and along the Huntspill Wall towards Burnham-on-Sea. A great deal is known about the movement of Swallows in the West Country (Hendy, 1943) and it would appear that almost every river valley is used as a flyway both in spring and autumn. Though much of this migration follows the inland routes large numbers move along the coastlines of Cornwall and north Devon where at Hartland Point large numbers move northwards towards Wales via Lundy Island (Perry, 1939). It is not known what proportion of Swallows migrate directly northwards towards Wales as against those that continue to move along the coast eastwards and which are observed at Bridgwater Bay. It may be that the majority of Swallows seen here come along the coast, or have moved overland and on reaching the coast between Bridgwater Bay and north Devon turn eastwards.

Autumn passage extends from August to October but is most obvious in September. Contrary to expectations the autumn migration routes are not simply a reverse of those used in spring as it is exceptional rather than the

Figure 1. (opposite)
Map of Bridgwater Bay and adjacent inland areas showing main towns and place names mentioned in the text.


North
Scale : 1 inch to 1 mile
BURNHAM-
ON-SEA
HIGH
BRIDGE
Stert
Island
Stert Point
River Brue
STERT FLATS
Wall
Hinkley Point
HUNTSPILL
Stolford
Stert
River Parrett
Huntspill River
Wick
Moor
Wall Common
Shurton
Stogursey
Pawlett
Combwich
Pawlett
Hams
Dunball
Nether Stowey

rule to observe a coastal movement westwards from Stert at this time of the year. It is in fact a movement eastwards towards Stert and on reaching this area one of three routes is followed. The birds either turn up the River Parrett and proceed southwards; cross the river to the Huntspill Wall and turn south, or cross to the River Brue mouth and follow the river upstream for about half a mile and then turn south towards Huntspill. In this area they join the flocks which are moving south from the direction of Burnham-on-Sea including no doubt the Swallows which are regularly recorded crossing from Wales via Steep Holm into north Somerset. Evidently the migration route is overland towards the south coast, as large concentrations are seen in autumn over the disused clay-pits in the Bridgwater area and also in the vicinity of osier or 'withy' beds further south, and along the river valleys in south Devon.

A coastal movement westwards is sometimes seen in the autumn but is exceptional. Probably the changes in direction are related to the prevailing weather pattern and this would repay further study. It is thought that the weather influenced a concentrated passage of both Swallows and House Martins eastwards towards Stert and Burnham-on-Sea on 2nd and 3rd June 1963, dates when most British breeding birds would have already started nesting. During late May and early June of that year prolonged easterly winds were experienced, and it is possible that these birds were migrating to their breeding areas in Northern Europe and had drifted down wind to the west.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica.* These birds follow the same routes as the Swallows, and are quite often together with them in mixed flocks.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava flavissima.* The main spring passage is noted in April with small flocks moving east along Wall Common from Hinkley towards Stert and the Huntspill Wall. There is also a movement northwards along the River Parrett from Chilton Trinity, Pawlett Hams and Combwich. This joint stream moves north and large numbers, up to 70 birds, can be seen in the fields close to the River Brue at Highbridge and between Burnham-on-Sea and Brean. The autumn passage is strongest in August and follows a reverse direction to that taken in spring. The autumn movement is however not as strong as in the spring and feeding movements of locally bred birds can be confused with the true migrants.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe.* The spring passage occurs in April and early May with a coastal movement eastwards from Hinkley towards Stert and across the River Parrett to the Huntspill Wall. These birds are joined on the Wall by others which come down-river from the Combwich—Pawlett Ham area. A reverse movement takes place in the autumn and is most evident in August.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris,* and
REDWING *Turdus iliacus.* It is convenient to deal with these two species together as quite often they are in mixed flocks, and even when they are not mixed, their movements are generally the same. The spring passage is very weak and no coastal movements have been observed to the west of the River Parrett. The only concerted movement seen was between 25 February and 3 March 1967 when flocks moved northwards from Pawlett towards Burnham-on-Sea, Lympsham and Uphill.

Movements in the autumn are very confused and probably more connected with the prevailing weather than reflecting the true migratory pattern. Two instances will illustrate this point. On 10 November 1967, flocks were moving south all day at Burnham-on-Sea towards Pawlett Hams, whilst a week later between 17th and 20 November flocks were moving along the coast in large numbers from the direction of Shurton, Wick Moor and Stolford towards Stert and over the river to the Huntspill area. On 19—20 October a year later flocks were moving from Lympsham to Pawlett, and two weeks later, 7—13 November, very large numbers moved eastwards along the coast in the same manner as recorded the previous year. The main movement in either direction is concentrated in October and early November.

A movement has been noted between the coast and Highbridge, coming from the direction of Pawlett Hams and Combwich. In 1966 this line of passage from the west was confirmed by tracing back flocks to the west via Stogursey and Holford. On climbing the Quantock Hills towards Bicknoller Post flocks were continuously met with as they flew eastwards, ascending Weacombe Combe from the direction of Williton.

FINCHES *Fringillidae.* Finches are very often in mixed flocks, the majority being Chaffinches, the remainder made up of the following species: Linnet, Greenfinch, Brambling, Goldfinch, with other finches and buntings in smaller numbers.

Holt (1950 and 1960) records that most of these flocks follow the east side of the River Parrett to Pawlett before turning to cross the river to Combwich. Whilst I would generally agree with this, on some occasions however flocks do fly direct from the vicinity of the River Brue esturary to Stert Point and continue westwards where they have been followed to Lilstock and where they were observed still moving westwards. Holt did not record any return passage in the spring. It does occur but is very infrequent and it has been noted in mid-March on three occasions when the flocks coasted from Hinkley to Stert Point and then direct over the river to the Huntspill Wall.

These species have been studied in Somerset, as well as further west in north Devon (Allen 1944; Bannerman 1944, 1945; Holt 1950, 1960; Lack 1957; Wood 1950.) It would appear from these reports that the main direction taken by Chaffinches principally, but including other finches, is from the north direct over the sea from south west Wales to north Devon via Lundy Island. The route from south east Wales is via Steep Holm to north Somerset, from where the flocks coast southwards to the vicinity of the River Parrett where they then change direction towards north Devon. This stream is probably joined by migrants which have crossed southern England as noted by Lack (1949) or via the Trent Valley (Raines, 1950).

Further far reaching advances in the understanding of migration routes could be made by co-ordinated team work such as that now being undertaken by members of the Bristol Ornithological Club. Simultaneous observations at a number of different points are absolutely necessary to relate coastal movements, as detailed here, to determine how far it represents any important part of total migration that is going on over a wider area.

Acknowledgements

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VISIBLE MIGRATION ALONG THE SOUTH–EAST SHORES OF THE SEVERN ESTUARY

by M. Sainsbury

During the last six years the Bristol Ornithological Club has conducted Autumn migration watches at strategic points along the south-eastern shore of the Severn Esturary. Observation has normally centred upon Berrow, Brean Down, Clevedon, Portishead, Aust and New Passage, beginning at 0600 hr and continuing until about midday. Over 50 members of the club have participated in these vigils and over 60 different species of birds have been recognized.

The primary objectives of these excercises are (a) to discover the numbers and the identity of birds on passage and (b) to determine the direction of flight, but other pertinent questions such as the origin and destination of the migrants also beg answers.

Our technique of visual observation suffers from several serious disadvantages: firstly, since the club is only able to mount synchronized watches at the various vantage points on one or two days during peak migration time we are dependent upon the prevailing weather conditions and the observed pattern of migration could be atypical of that year. Secondly, the range of the observers is strictly limited, hence some birds may change direction as soon as they are out of sight or, else, they may fly too far overhead to be seen or heard. Clearly then any attempt to analyse the data which has been compiled must be conducted within the limitations of the approach. Numbers can thus only refer to minimum numbers of birds on passage and the observed direction of flight could be apparent.

From 1947 to 1949 E.G. Holt (1950) made observations along the east side of the Bristol Channel, mainly at Burnham-on-Sea, of diurnal autumn migration. He showed that the most abundant species of birds on passage were Starlings*, Chaffinches, Sky Larks and Meadow Pipits, in that order. Holt observed that the direction of flight was always southerly and recorded maximum hourly rates of 4000–6000 Chaffinches and 6000–7000 Starlings. Rates for Sky Larks and Meadow Pipits were very much lower. The peak time for Chaffinches occurred during the second and third weeks of October, with the Starlings reaching their maximum towards the end of the month. We find that Starlings and Chaffinches are still the most numerous visible migrants and comprise between them 84.9% of the total number of birds on passage, see Table 1. Skylarks, apparently, are not as numerous as formerly. Occasionally the rates we have observed are similar to those determined by Holt. Figure1, for example, illustrates the migration profile of finches and Starlings at Sand Bay on the morning of 22 October 1967 when a heavy passage was underway. Chaffinches and Starlings, beside being the most abundant birds on migration, behave typically and normally reflect the general pattern of movement for all species on a particular day, thus the results of our coastal watches can be summarized in terms of these two species, see, for example, figures 2 and 3. The direction of migration is, in general, to the south and west, but the extent is variable. Sometimes passage is very heavy and purposeful, on other days, however, the pattern is complex with many birds, especially the finches, settling to feed before moving on.

Holt originally commented that on calm days birds flew at 50–150 feet, but in haze or in a light north wind the altitude could increase to the point when evidence of migration was aural only. On the other hand, in the face of a strong head wind birds were often forced to fly at ground level. Once again our results, in general, support Holt's conclusions. For geographical reasons, however, each locality along the south bank of the Severn has its own typical pattern of migration. Thus at Sand Point the dominant movement is along the headland (N.E. to S.W.). Generally soon after dawn birds are heard at high altitude, but later in the morning movement is observed within a hundred feet of the ground; indeed, some flocks of thrushes travel very low even along the slope between groups of observers. 'Muddled' movement occurs mainly with hirundines, pipits and wagtails, much more rarely with other species which adhere to a fixed course.

At Berrow the direction of migration is usually to the south, while at Brean Down the predominant trend

* For Latin names see Table 1

Table 1. Numbers of visible migrants observed along the south-eastern shores of the Severn Estuary, 1966–71.

SPECIES	1966	1967	1968		1969		1970		1971	TOTALS	%
	22/10	22/10	6/10	19/10	4/10	19/10	18/10	1/11	24/10		
Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*	19	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	20	–
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*	–	–	–	50	–	–	–	–	–	50	–
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*	18	872	–	46	–	–	30	–	43	1,009	1.2
Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*	1	30	–	–	–	–	16	15	119	181	0.2
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaoto*	4	–	10	–	–	–	2	–	2	18	–
Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	–
Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*	247	110	195	108	41	40	54	30	363	1,188	1.4
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*	1	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	3	–
Swallow *Hirundo rustica*	2	8	51	75	203	–	6	1	7	353	0.4
House Martin *Delichon urbica*	5	3	14	1	18	–	–	–	1	42	–
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*	1	3	–	16	14	–	–	–	–	34	–
Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*	166	213	260	307	690	233	57	23	161	2,110	2.55
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*	–	–	5	3	1	–	–	–	–	9	–
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*	4	1	6	3	1	–	–	–	–	15	–
'Alba' Wagtail *Motacilla alba*	39	29	81	56	81	34	8	5	11	344	0.4
Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*	584	7	21	605	–	–	1	16	21	1,255	1.5
Blackbird *Turdus merula*	29	7	–	2	42	–	25	–	–	105	0.1
Redwing *Turdus iliacus*	103	52	54	421	–	114	–	60	132	936	1.1
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*	40	19	31	18	1	23	18	–	32	182	0.2
Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*	–	6	26	33	6	4	6	6	27	114	0.1
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*	10	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	7	17	–
Coal Tit *Parus alter*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	5	–
Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*	22	16	–	–	12	–	–	4	22	76	–
Great Tit *Parus major*	18	–	–	2	–	–	21	–	70	111	0.1
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*	–	7	16	10	8	4	3	10	8	66	–
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*	1368	4024	1388	14,536	266	397	3125	4024	4822	33,950	39.6
Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*	37	17	4	40	–	5	7	12	55	177	0.2
Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*	334	48	191	183	166	24	279	161	133	1,519	1.8
Siskin *Carduelis spinus*	6	5	1	3	3	6	15	10	35	84	0.1
Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*	125	71	57	57	60	16	27	32	128	573	0.7
Linnet *Acanthis cannabina*	196	210	42	213	263	68	205	99	377	1,673	2.0
Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*	12	2	5	–	6	4	8	58	14	109	0.1
Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*	35	–	–	11	–	–	–	–	51	97	0.1
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*	41	–	–	–	–	15	–	–	–	56	–
Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*	9	32	36	2	–	2	–	–	102	183	0.2
Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*	2229	6670	1857	19580	476	685	2575	2665	2068	38,805	45.25
Jay *Garrulus glandarius*	–	2	–	7	–	–	–	–	–	9	–
Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*	–	–	–	3	–	–	45	39	–	87	0.1
									Total no. of migrants	85,567	

Other species seen during the watches: Wigeon, Sparrow Hawk, Marsh Harrier, Merlin, Kestrel, Water Rail, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew, Snipe, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Stock Dove, Little Owl, Green Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Firecrest, Wheatear, Ring Ouzel, Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, Rook, Carrion Crow.

is to the west but commonly 'confusion' reigns and migrants are seen moving east! Analysis of the results obtained at Brean Down are further complicated by the topography; observers at the extremity of the headland frequently report different behaviour to that seen by their colleagues situated overlooking one of the 'saddles' halfway along the promontory.

Norman Lacy has been responsible for many migration watches at New Passage during the last few years, his comments on the situation at this locality are as follows:—

"At sun-rise the first migrants can be heard approaching overland from the north-east. Some may settle for a short time, notably wagtails and Chaffinches, but the majority continue on a south-west course crossing the shoreline on a very narrow front only a matter of a few hundred yards wide and then pass some distance off-shore towards the Somerset coast. The most common migrant is the Chaffinch which passes over in parties of between five and fifty and with them travel a few Bramblings. Other species regularly using the route are Linnets, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Redpolls, Siskins, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, 'alba' and Grey Wagtails, Blue, Coal and Great Tits, Tree Sparrows, Blackbirds, Song and Mistle Thrushes, Redwings and Fieldfares.

Figure 1. Migration watch at Sand Point, 22 October 1967.
Concentration of birds versus time (10 minute totals).

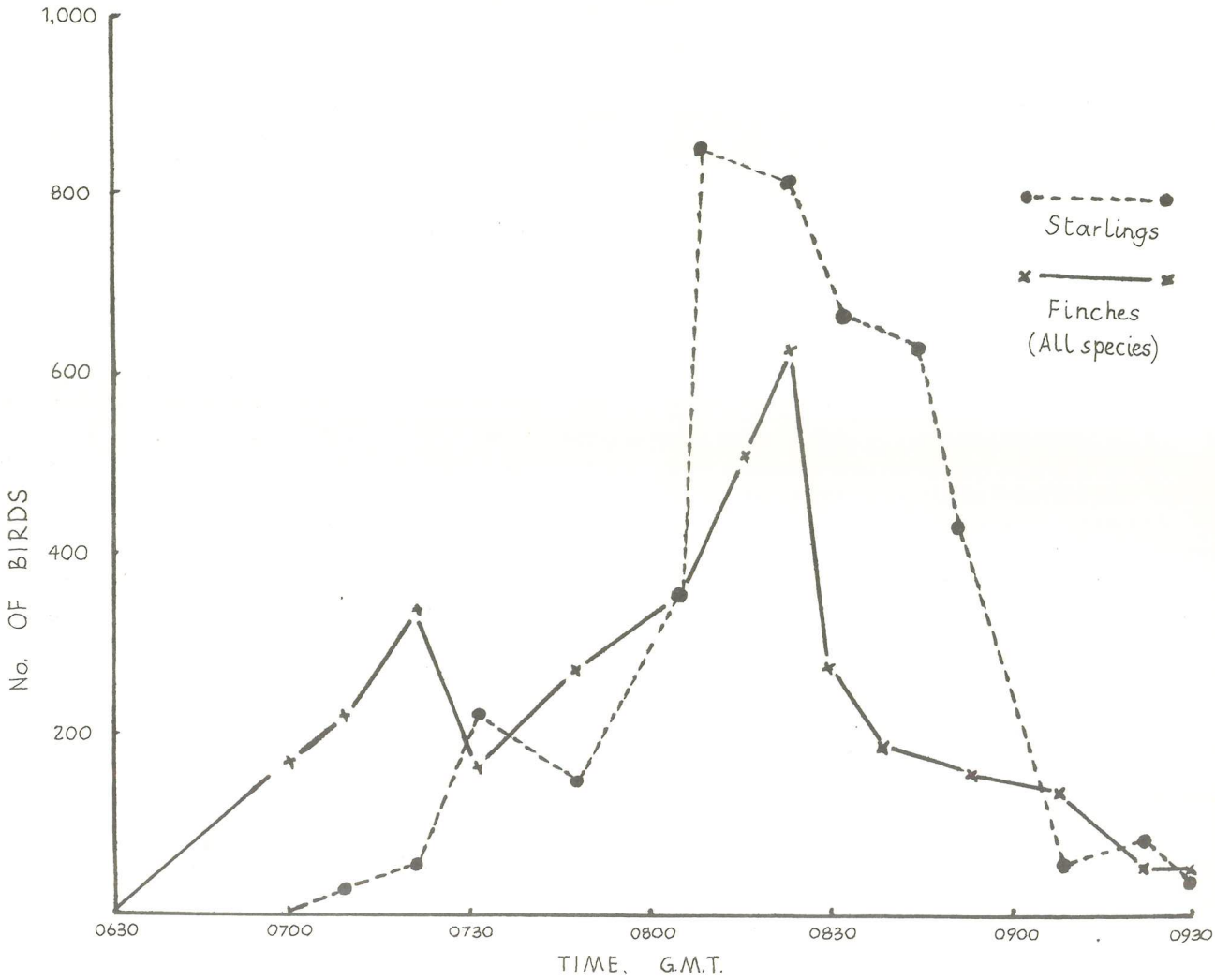


Plate 13. Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, male in characteristic pose, spring of 1972.

Plate 14. (Above) Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* perched on outpost of its breeding territory, summer of 1970.

All the accompanying photographs were taken by Robin Williams on Tealham and Tadham Moors, close to his home. These moors are part of an extensive area of such habitat in the district. Drainage has improved considerably since the mid-eighteenth century when there was a vast region of freshwater marshland, but flooding still occurs occasionally, mainly in the winter. All the birds depicted are typical of the area: Whinchats breed in local groups, Lapwing and Snipe also breed whilst both Bewick's Swans and Ruffs are mainly visitors to the floods. Other moorland birds include Golden Plover, thrushes and finches in the winter, Whimbrel on spring passage and Skylark, Yellow Wagtail, Redstart and Tree Sparrow all breed. Since moving into the district Robin Williams has obtained thousands of photographs and much of his work has been printed elsewhere in such publications as *Birds* and *Birds and Country.* These produced here pay tribute to his patience and perseverance.

Plate 15. A Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and four Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* at the floods, February 1970. The Ruff on the extreme left is in partially albino plumage.

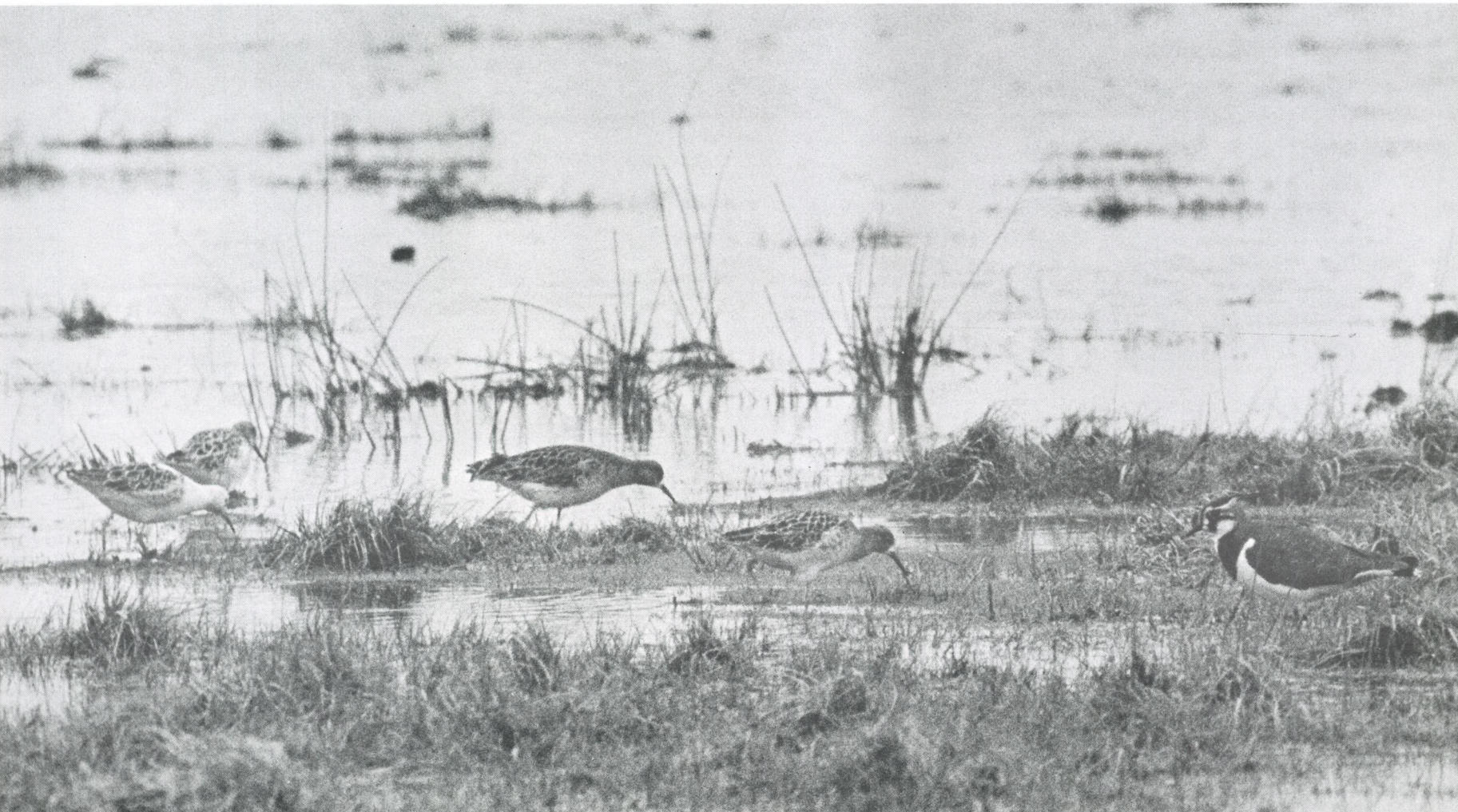


Plate 16. Bewick's Swans *Cygnus bewickii* flighting over the flooded moors, February 1972.

Figure 2. Direction and numbers of Chaffinches observed on migration between 0600 and 1100 hours on eight dates, 1967–71.

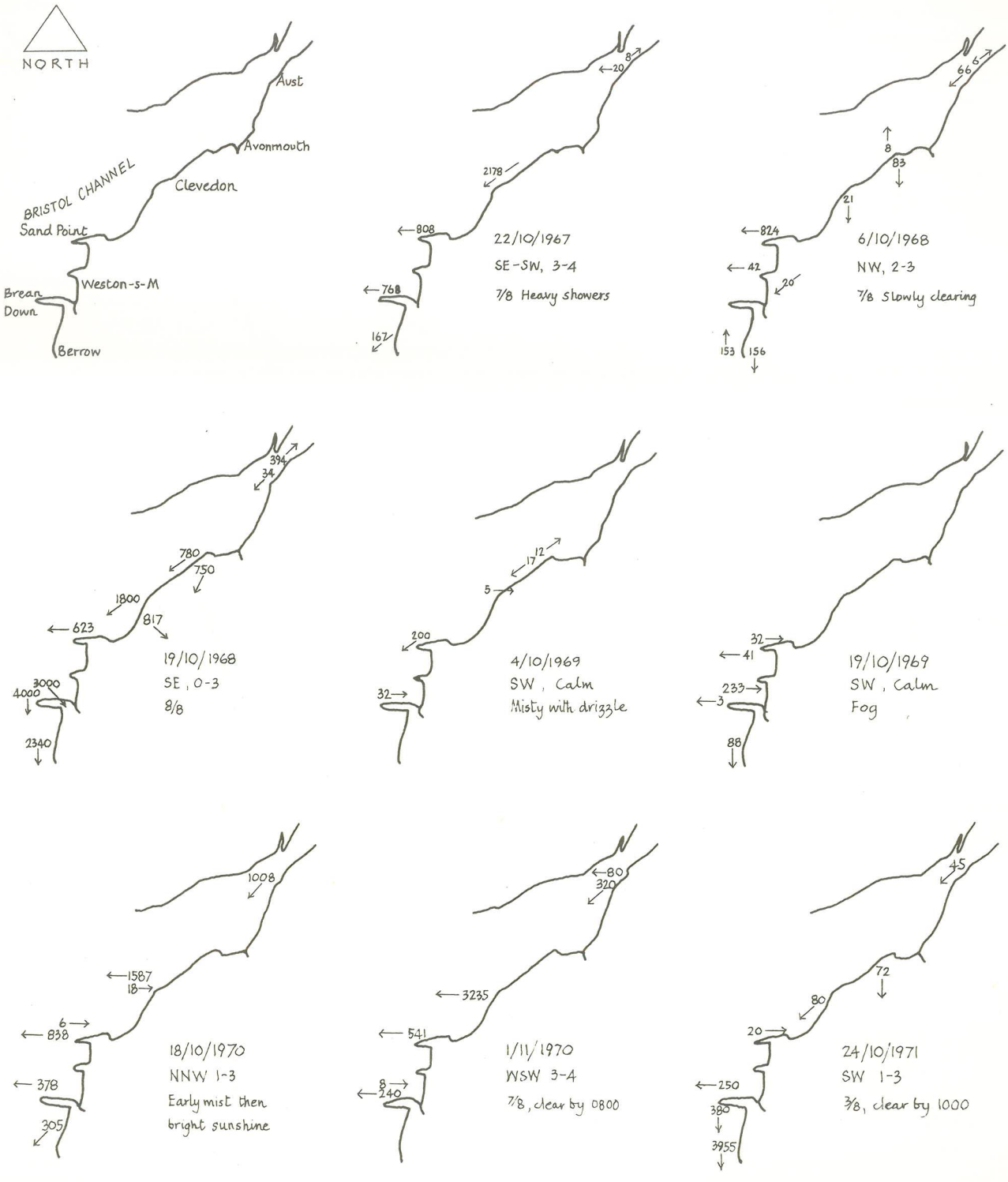
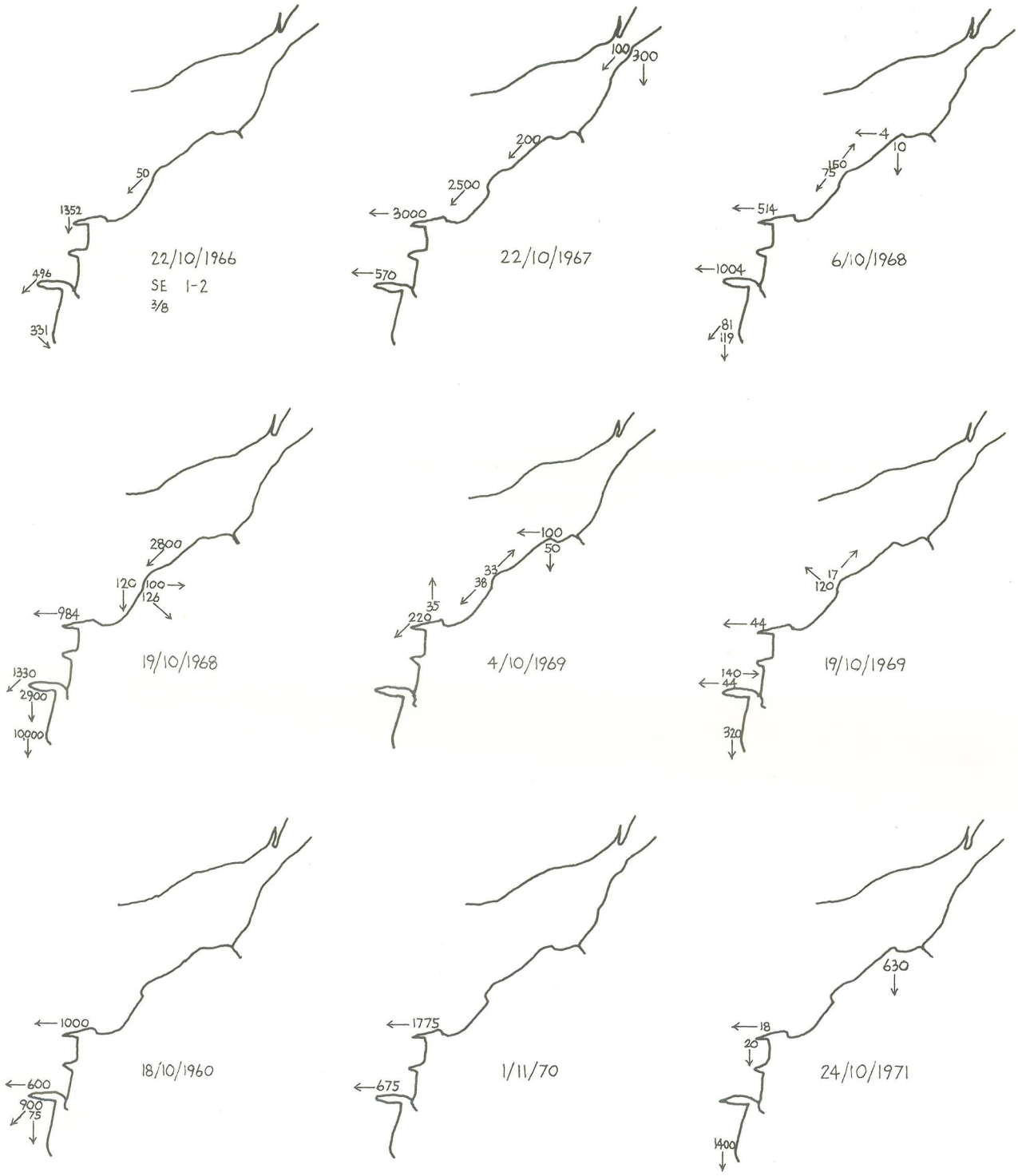


Figure 3. Direction and numbers of Starlings observed on migration between 0600 and 1100 hours on nine dates, 1966–71. For key to map and for weather conditions, see figure 2.



"On mornings when a strong wind is blowing from the north-east a reversed movement often takes place the birds involved being mostly Chaffinches. These arrive from the south-west having come in from a point off-shore, hug the coast for a few hundred yards and then turn inland in a north-east direction. I have seen Chaffinches involved in this type of movement in October passing at the rate of 1000 per hour. At other times with a light wind, movements take place in both directions at the same time the flocks passing through each other over New Passage. On such occasions when some begin to circle the situation becomes rather confusing!

"As far as I am aware these north-east movements are not noticed on either the Somerset or Monmouthshire coasts but considerable numbers have been seen moving north-east along the River Severn near Slimbridge. The origin and destination of these birds poses an interesting question. A theory put forward is that they have followed the west coast of Wales and to avoid going out to sea have continued around the south coast into the Severn Estuary and would eventually re-orientate. Alternatively they may have encountered poor weather further south and are returning north until conditions improve."

The existence of an overland route, often referred to as the Cotswold Corridor, linking the Wash and Humber with the Severn Estuary, has been suspected for many years and Norman Lacy's evidence suggests that it may be at New Passage that many of the birds using this route reach the Welsh coast. The Severn is, of course, relatively narrow at this point, however, in view of the comments of D. and E. Lack (1949) that when passage migrants reach the sea they do not usually attempt to cross but prefer to turn and fly along the coastline it is probable that at our vantage points lower down the estuary many of the birds we observe apparently moving West turn within a short distance from the shore and veer onto a more southerly course.

In summary then, the general pattern of autumnal migration has not changed greatly in the last two decades; after Starlings and Chaffinches the most common migrants are Meadow Pipits, Greenfinches, Linnets, Fieldfares, Skylarks and Redwings, although the numbers are quite small in comparison with those of the first two species. At the beginning of October hirundines are still in evidence, but by November these have virtually disappeared and proportionally more thrushes accompany the finches and Starlings.

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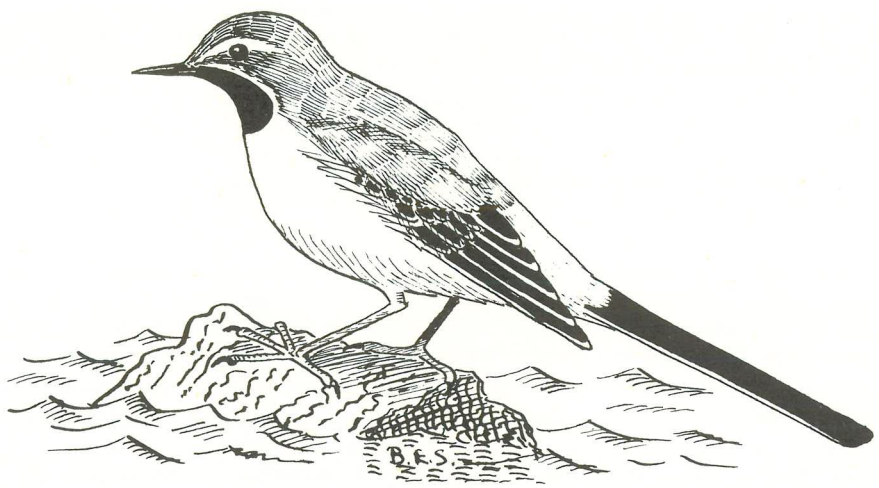


Grey Wagtail

RECENT CHANGES IN THE STATUS OF THE KITTIWAKE OFF THE SOMERSET COAST

by Brian Rabbitts

Last year saw the publication of the first results of the Club's survey of sea-birds in the Bristol Channel (see *Bristol Ornithology* 4 (1971) : 143–171). The status of the Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* appears to be changing and calls for further comment. As numbers are likely to be affected by the position and status of breeding colonies to the west a summary of these is included.

Breeding colonies

Coulson (1962) showed that the Kittiwake was probably increasing by about three per cent of the breeding population per year and in some areas much more than this. The main breeding stations to the west of Somerset are in the Scilly Isles and on the mainland of Cornwall, on Lundy, and in Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire.

In the Scilly Isles there are now several new stations in addition to the two recorded in 1959, when 173 nests were counted. A survey in 1967 showed 360 pairs at the breeding colonies. There has been an undoubted increase over the past twenty years of birds breeding on the coast of Cornwall (Phillips, 1967). In 1959 it was estimated that there were over 500 pairs or nests at colonies on the north coast. A survey in 1967 showed 1,142 nests at eight sites on this coast, with the main concentration of about 900 at St. Agnes.

Counts of the breeding population on Lundy have shown some variation due in part to the inaccessibility of some nest sites. Between 1949 and 1956 counts suggested that the breeding population was less than 2000 pairs, while in 1962 only 760 breeding pairs were located by an Oxford University Expedition. Since then, however, the population has increased with 1256 nests in 1967 and 1441 in 1969. Birds have occasionally been seen prospecting on the north coast of Devon and in 1971 twelve pairs with nests were found at one locality, but no eggs were laid.

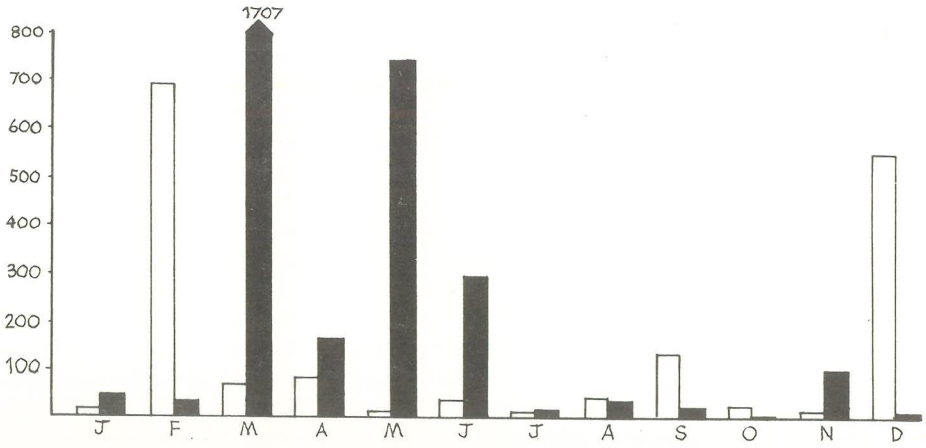
The growth of the breeding colony on the Gower coast, Glamorgan was initially thought to have been mainly responsible for the increase in spring observations off the Somerset coast. The figures for 1971, however, indicate a dramatic decrease in the colony and if these are genuine it would appear to dispose of this supposition. Although birds were often seen at Worms Head during the summer it was not until 1943 that breeding was proved when two pairs did so. A small number of adult birds were present during the following years until 1952 when positive evidence of breeding was again obtained. In 1955 about 50 adults were present and 17 nests were counted. Since then the following estimates have been obtained with some of the larger numbers being observed from boats, since it is very difficult to see much of the cliff from the actual Head itself: 50 nests in 1959; 100 pairs in 1965; the following year 150 pairs and 67 nests visible; a similar number of pairs in 1967; in 1969, 597 birds were counted and the following year 345 nests. However, in 1971 it was reported that there was a spectacular decrease with only 46 occupied nests; the reason for this being, as yet, unknown.

In 1959 there were 2111 nests at four stations on the Pembrokeshire coast and in 1971 some 1800 pairs on Skomer with a few small colonies elsewhere.

Past status

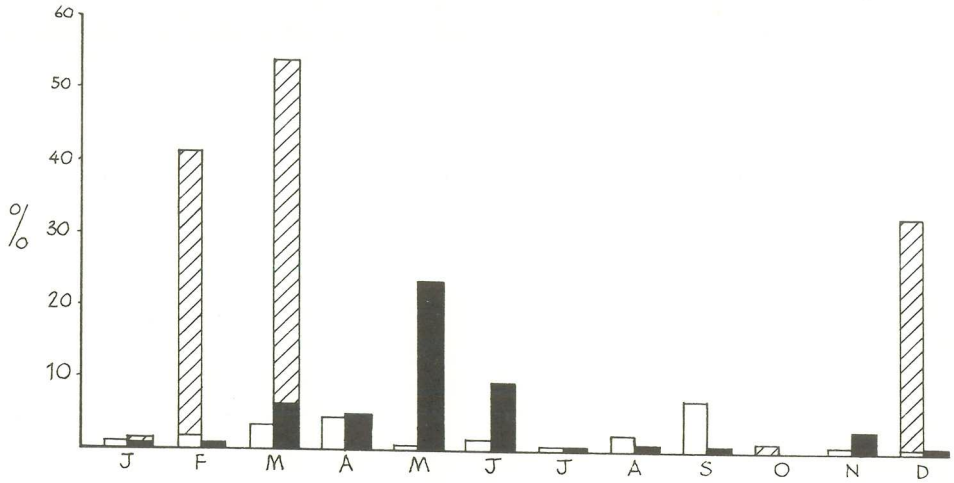
In February 1957 a 'wreck' of Kittiwakes in unprecedented numbers occurred in Somerset and was fully documented by Chadwick and Wright (1957). About 135 occurred with only 13 being seen alive. The records were analysed during the period from 1912 to 1956 and Chadwick and Wright showed that over a period of 45 years only about 140 were recorded in the County and that from this the status should be described as an occasional visitor, occurring infrequently in spring and autumn, and sometimes in larger numbers after severe weather in winter. Other previous 'wrecks' have been at least 32 (ten died), 28 November–25 December 1954 and at least 35 (nine died),

Figure 1. Kittiwakes in Somerset analysed by month. 1912–1967 (open columns); total 1,650 and an average of 26 per year. 1968 – June 1972 (closed columns); total 3,151 and an average of 700 per year.



1–27 February 1955 following south-west gales at the beginning of the month. After a sudden south-west gale during the night of 12/13 October 1958, 25 were seen passing west of Steep Holm. A marked weather movement took place off Minehead on the 13 February 1962 when 490 were recorded moving down channel (King and Perrett, 1962). This followed severe south-west gales during the night of 11/12 February which had moderated and veered north-west the following day. Another large movement was recorded at the same locality in December 1966 when 390 were counted moving down channel following moderation of strong north-west winds. In these two movements there were 834 adults and 46 immatures (a ratio of 18:1). Also in the same area were 36 on 23 December 1967 with 83 on the 25th, these being associated with strong winds in the west quarter. This then, summarizes the main 'wrecks' and weather movements and provides for 1226 of the total recorded during 1912–1967 (see fig. 1). During September 1963 there was a north-west movement at Dunster Beach with 85 on the 2nd and up to ten to the 13th. As is evident from all the information the vast majority observed were weather motivated with the largest numbers being a recovery after first being blown into the channel by strong winds. Apart from June 1966, when there were up to 26 at Minehead, very few were recorded during this month and the preceding one.

Figure 2. Percentages of totals of Kittiwakes plotted against months of the year. 1912–1967 (open columns); 1968 – June 1972 (closed columns). Weather movements and 'wrecks' are indicated by cross-hatching.



Present status

Since 1968 the Kittiwake has become a regular visitor being observed in large numbers, especially in the spring. On watches carried out from the decks of motor vessels of P & A Campbell's White Funnel Fleet between April and September a total of 286 have been observed in Somerset waters, the larger numbers being as follows: 17 May 1969, Ilfracombe to Barry, 29; 1 June 1969, Weston to Ilfracombe, 64 with one large group of 50 between Steep Holm and Flat Holm and on the return journey 74 with the largest group being 25. The birds on the outward trip were moving up channel whereas those on the return were moving in the reverse direction. 7 June 1970, off Portishead, a group of 20 moving up channel and 7 May 1972, on the outward journey to Ilfracombe, 51 in small parties in a similar direction.

Observations from the Somerset coast, mainly Brean Down and Sand Point, include the following larger numbers: Minehead/Porlock area, 25 May 1968, 38 and 90 on 3 November whilst on the 5 June the following year 25 were counted. 9 May 1968, 40 moving up channel off Sand Point; 31 March 1969, a similar number and direction off Brean Down; at Steep Holm the same year 30 were recorded flying north in the late afternoon on 6 May, at least 70 south-west in the evening on the 9th, 54 later in the evening on 31st and 20 on the water 14 June. Earlier that year 22 were present at the Parrett Estuary on 18 January during a westerly gale. Regular at Brean Down from 1970 with large groups in the spring with the occasional bird through to September. The sightings of these larger numbers in the spring concern mainly adult birds and where observations have been possible counts of adults to immatures suggest a ratio of 29:1. In 1970 a group of 40 on 28 April; 15 May, a total of 52 in groups of up to 20; 17 May, at least 70 in large parties; up to 12 through to the beginning of June. In 1971 the maximum was 115 on the 13 March in three groups moving quickly up channel with smaller numbers 18 April – 12 June and a maximum of 35. At Sand Point on the 25 March, 35 were present. In 1972 records concerned some 27 on 29 February with the maximum in May being 25 with a few in June. At the end of March there were exceptionally large movements during a period of strong to gale force west winds. At Sand Point on the 26th a total of 1029 were counted moving steadily up channel, at Brean Down the following day about 380 were present moving in a similar direction and some 90 on the 28th, the majority of these moving down channel with the wind veering more to the north-west. The present status of the Kittiwake could be described as an increasing visitor with large numbers in the spring, fewer in summer and autumn and sometimes larger numbers after severe weather in winter.

Past and present status elsewhere in the Bristol Channel

This short summary covers the status elsewhere in the channel, other than the breeding aspect. Further up the channel in the Severn Estuary there have been few listed and only four from 1962 to 1967. Yet in the period from 1968 there was a sudden increase with some 615 being observed. 540 of these appeared in large groups off the New Grounds, Gloucestershire from the middle of March to the middle of April in 1968 and 1969 whilst in 1972 there were 47 at the end of March and 22 at the end of the following month. Off the coast of Glamorgan it was recorded as irregular and infrequent. Apart from the breeding station at Worms Head they were stated to be not often seen elsewhere in Gower, though they may be on occasions, such as 105 at Blackpill in May 1966. There is an upward trend at this locality, with 125 May 1967, 284 June 1968, 500 June 1969, 352 May 1970 and 136 in June of that year. There was a total of 168 recorded from Lavernock Point during the four Junes 1964–1967, as this was the month when most sea-watching was done here during this period and exceptionally 52 on 19 May 1966. On a steamer trip in May 1969 some 100 were observed east of the Breaksea Lightship. Coupled with the increase in breeding birds at Worms Head the Kittiwake now is common in large numbers in May and June off the Glamorgan coast. There appears to be little change in the status off the north coast of Devon.

Discussion

Although the past and present status show that there has been a very drastic increase of birds now being observed, especially in the spring, it must be realised that the amount of watching now being carried out far exceeds the total during the 56 years from 1912 to 1967. Little or no sea-watching was attempted during the spring and summer of these years and it is therefore extremely difficult to get a fair comparison since 1968 and to draw any

firm conclusions from the status as it stands now. Nevertheless a few interesting comparisons can be drawn from this preliminary paper. There have been increases in the breeding colonies to the west of Somerset so it is only natural that larger numbers are appearing in the spring. Apart from the large movement at the end of March 1972, with the majority of the spring occurrances there appears to be little or no correlation with the weather. The birds sometimes occur in large compact groups and they call freely at times, these being of course characteristics at their breeding colonies. My first thought when these numbers first appeared was that they were feeding movements with the birds entering the channel in the morning and returning to their breeding colonies later in the day. This is no doubt the case for many of the birds, but at Brean Down in May 1971 and again to a lesser extent in May 1972 I noted a very small number moving up channel at dusk. Although improbable the fact that birds may migrate over-land through the Severn Estuary can not be ruled out.

Summary

The status of the Kittiwake off the Somerset coast appears to be changing, with larger numbers occurring in spring in recent years. The Kittiwake is increasing as a breeding bird and this increase has been seen in colonies to the west of Somerset which are most likely to influence these large numbers. The status in 1956 was described as an occasional visitor, occurring infrequently in spring and autumn, but sometimes in larger numbers after severe weather in winter. Although larger numbers were recorded up to 1967 the majority were in two weather movements during the winter months. From 1968, however, the position appears to have altered with most occurring in the spring and the present status can be described as an increasing visitor with large numbers in the spring, fewer in summer and autumn and sometimes larger numbers after severe weather in winter. Generally elsewhere in the channel the Kittiwake has increased in numbers in the spring. The amount of sea-watching now carried out since 1968 can not reasonably be compared with that previously and for this reason it is very difficult to compare the past and present status. Nevertheless a few interesting comparisons can be drawn from this paper.

Acknowledgements

I am greatful to W.E. Jones and D.E. Ladhams who read and criticised an earlier draft of this paper.

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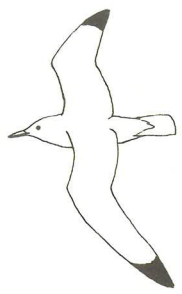

SPRING INFLUX OF SCANDINAVIAN LESSER BLACK–BACKED GULLS IN NORTH SOMERSET

by Bernard King

I purposely visited Chew Valley Lake, north Somerset, many times in March and April 1963 late in the day, primarily with the object, at first, of finding pre-dusk gatherings of Goldeneye, *Bucephala clangula:* a flocking behaviour for the species fairly recently discovered inland in England (King, 1961). However, my attention was diverted by the gatherings of gulls coming into the area in the evenings and mainly from mortherly directions. In winter much larger numbers stay in the area to roost; those in the spring mass in the late afternoon to bathe, preen and rest before the majority move off in the direction of Blagdon, where no doubt some temporarily stay on the lake, while the mass of gulls move further westward to the main roosting ground at Steep Holm in the Bristol Channel.

Towards the later periods of these spring visits I found I had exceptionally large numbers of what I thought at first were all Great Black-backed Gulls, *Larus marinus.* In order to obtain clearer views of these birds I moved to Nunnery Point, a promontory from which better observations could be made of the Goldeneye and the gulls. It was only then apparent that the adult dark backed gulls were not only Great Black-backed Gulls but also the Scandinavian form of the Lesser Black-backed Gull, *L. fuscus fuscus.* The British form, *graellsii,* have dark slate-grey mantles and there were many of the latter present. Unfortunately, this discovery was not made until the main movement of migratory gulls was falling off and so I decided to wait for the spring of 1964 before resuming a search for the Scandinavian birds.

In the spring periods of 1964, 1965 and 1966 and from the Nunnery Point at Chew Valley I continued my observations. Occasionally I was able to have the expert aid of R.M. Curber, D.E. Ladhams, R.H. Poulding, R.J. Prytherch and the late R.F. Thearle. The main counts of recognisable Scandinavian Lesser Black-backs were: 30–50 and 41 on 30 March and 8 April, 1964 respectively; between 80 and 100 on 5 April, 1965; 20 and 65 on 20th and 26 March and 18 on 2 April, 1966. These were counted whilst they were flying past Nunnery Point and in good light. There were occasions when weather conditions made it impossible adequately to distinguish the dark backed gulls, especially so in 1965. They were also sometimes too far from us to be certain of the race. Twos or threes or more at a time of the Scandinavian Lesser Black-backed Gulls could be seen in favourable weather in company with the British Lessers. Unfortunately, having to concentrate for short evening periods on looking for Scandinavian birds meant that less attention was paid to the British ones. However, it was estimated of the latter that 200 to 250 was a fair evening average. Referring to Great Black-backed Gull adults, no more than 25 were positively counted on one particular occasion. It is felt though that, if similar time had been spent on these, greater numbers would have been counted. In addition to the dark backed gulls there were, of course, Herring Gulls, *L. argentatus* and Black-headed Gulls, *L. ridibundus.* Herring Gulls were by far the commonest of the larger gulls species. Black-headed Gulls were quite evident, but the numbers were, of course, insignificent in comparison with the winter population. The Common Gull, *L. canus,* population had dwindled to a few.

In 1967 David Ballance was very interested when I told him of the above observations. He informed me *(in litt)* "Some years ago . . . I should say in 1956 or 1957 . . . I saw a small movement of Lesser Black-backed Gulls up-channel (Bristol Channel) off Glenthorne in March (about 25th). A north-west wind was driving them towards the shore, and I suppose I saw 30 in an afternoon. At the time I thought they were dark-backed birds, so much so that at first I took them to be Great Black-backed Gulls. It was bright sunshine, and had they been British the lighter backs would have showed up well".

The occurance of Scandinavian Lesser Black-backed Gulls in these numbers is apparently unprecedented elsewhere in England. The most recent statement of its status is as follows (B.O.U., 1971, p.133): "As well as birds of British origin, migrants at both seasons include birds from Scandinavia (nominate *fuscus*), which pass mainly through eastern England and are identified only rarely as far west as Ireland, and from Iceland and Faeroes *(L.f. graellsii)*, which probably pass mainly through western Britain and Ireland."

I think it would be helpful to those interested to give some comparative details gleaned during my pursuit of these adult dark backed gulls at Chew Valley Lake:

GREAT BLACK–BACKED GULL. It has often been mentioned that the dark portions of the upper parts are uniformly dark slate-black. In fact, in some lights, when birds are on the wing, there appear to be lighter areas near or on the primaries, in my opinion. *The Handbook* (Witherby, H.F., *et al,* 1938–41, 5:106) rather substantiates this. However, J.A.G. Barnes, an authority on Great and Lesser Black-backed Gulls informs me *(in litt.)*; "I don't think I would say that the primaries are lighter than the mantle, as you do. There is a difference in texture, so that the primaries tend to look glossy and the mantle dull matt. It is difficult to compare them simply in terms of light and dark".

BRITISH LESSER BLACK–BACKED GULL. Universally described as mantle, back, scapulars and wing coverts dark slate-grey. But, see also the information below regarding 'intermediates'.

SCANDINAVIAN LESSER BLACK–BACKED GULL. Again quoting *The Handbook* (Witherby, H.F. *et al,* 1938–41, 5:96) "Best test is that the Scandinavian form mantle appears to be as black as the primary tips". In my opinion in typical adult birds of this form I found them, in fact, uniformly darker on the upper parts than *marinus.* Even so it is a little more complicated than supposed. For instance, in 1945, I happened to spend many months in Norway during the closure of World War II in Europe. In southern Norway I saw very many Scandinavian Lessers of the typical dark backed birds, but also a noticeable few 'intermediates'. i.e. varying in intensity of shade of darkness of the upper parts. These could be taken for the British form, and if I had come across them say, at Chew Valley, I would undoubtedly have mistaken them for local breeding birds. This will convey how careful I feel one has to be lest one becomes enmeshed perhaps in dogmatic statements. As Barnes says "As the typical *L.f. fuscus* occurs regularly in Britain, it seems pretty certain that intermediates do also turn up". He also mentions this problem in his report (Barnes, 1953) of the extension of an enquiry into the status of the Lesser Black-backed Gull.

In consequence of the information under the above mentioned headings, I should like to include the main comments made by Barnes in a letter to me on 5th March 1967. "I was most interested to hear of your dark-backed Lesser Black-backs in spring. I should not think there is any doubt that they are of Scandinavian origin, but a movement on that scale in spring is something new to me . . . I have seen many thousands of breeding birds in north-west England over the years without finding a dark one among them. A large raft of migrants I saw in the middle of the Irish sea in April a few years ago also seemed to be all *graellsii* type. On the other hand, I have seen numbers of typical Scandinavians in Suffolk in autumn, but have not been there in spring to see if they follow the same route back. The British Trust for Ornithology's enquiry of many years ago suggested that there was a much heavier movement on the west side of England than the east in spring. It seems possible that a proportion of Scandinavians arrive in south west England with the returning natives and then cross to the North sea, perhaps by the Severn/Avon route. Th is is pure quesswork, of course, but I haven't heard of any *L.f. fuscus* in the west Midlands or north of England in spring, apart for odd individuals . . . . "

In conclusion, it must surely be felt that it would be advantageous if work on Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Chew Valley Lake, and elsewhere, could be continued and on a much larger scale than I had operated. It would appear that the migratory period is of only short duration. However, I have often wondered if some of the wintering Lessers in the county are not the Scandinavian form and on a greater scale than just the occasional odd birds which are reported.

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TAXONOMY OF MÊNÊTRIES' WARBLER

by P. Andrew, M.C. Harrison and R.B.H. Smith.

Following a request from the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, an ornithological expedition spent two weeks between 7th and 20 August 1971 at one of their excavation sites in the Murat Valley, at Asvan near Elazig in eastern Turkey (38°58′ E 38°54′ N). Regular netting of a tamarisk thicket resulted in the capture of 190 birds of 20 species including a number of Ménétries' Warblers *Sylvia mystacea* – a species previously unrecorded from this area. Since the site will eventually be flooded by a large reservoir at present under construction (Keban Dam), our observations could have further significance in relation to possible ecological changes in the future.

The taxonomic position of Ménétries' Warbler as a distinct species has sometimes been questioned, since it is very similar in both appearance and structure to the Sardinian Warbler *S. melanocephala.* Both species have extensive distributions, but the Sardinian Warbler is essentially a bird of the Mediterranean basin, while Ménétries' replaces it further east; its range extending from Syria and Iraq across the Iranian plateau into Soviet Central Asia. They could in fact be considered as geographical representatives of the same species. Moreover the eastern subspecies of the Sardinian Warbler *S.m.momus,* which occurs in the boundary zone in Syria, Israel and Jordan, could be considered as providing the link (Williamson 1964). However, in the absence of stronger contrary evidence he retains their separate identity as does Vaurie (1959–65), although Voous (1960) regards them as conspecific.

The crucial problem concerns the birds breeding in the boundary zone but here the evidence is both scanty and conflicting (Williamson 1964). Dementiev *et al.* (1954) show the breeding range of Ménétries' Warbler as extending to the coast in the eastern Mediterranean area, but the most recently published maps of the breeding ranges (Etchécopar and Hüe 1970) show the distributions as distinctly separate, adjoining on the boundary in Syria/Israel/Jordan but not overlapping. They indicate that in this region the Sardinian Warbler is confined to the coastal strip, whereas Menetries' replaces it further inland.

During our expedition 28 Ménétries' Warbler were caught and ringed, but unfortunately this work sheds no new light on the species problem. We had some difficulty in confirming the identification until an adult male was captured, by which time a sufficient number had been measured to enable the calculation of mean values of diagnostic characters (see Table 1.). Asvan is separated by approximately 150–200 km from the nearest known breeding ranges of either species, and it seems unlikely that they breed there, although the habitat (tamarisk thicket) would appear to be suitable. However, until this possibility has been checked in the breeding season, the question must remain open.

Comparison of our measurements with those from other sources might possibly provide some indication as to the geographical origin of our sample. For example, it is possible that birds from the northern part of their range are larger than those from more southerly populations. The comparison is open to critisism because firstly different methods of measurement were used and secondly Williamson's measurements cover the whole range of the species and not the particular population, but our values of mean wing-length and tail-length are both larger than those he obtained. This is still very slender evidence for the claim that our birds belonged to a northern population since it could also be attributed to shrinkage of skins from which Williamson's measurements were obtained.

On the other hand, records of migrant Ménétries' Warblers from other places in the Middle East are very sparse. For example Feeny *et al.* (1968) had only one record, at Mayan Kaleh, SE Caspian during the period 25 August to 19 September 1961 and similarly Beakes *et al.* (pers. comm.), who visited the same place in 1970, had only 4 records. Furthermore this area lies within the breeding range of the species: thus one might have expected more records, quite apart from migrants.

One may therefore conclude that the birds at Asvan were probably migrants and could belong to the Russian population. The most likely origin would be the area west of the Caspian in Azerbaijan and further north. Departure of migrants from the northern Caucasus area is said to begin in mid August, with the adults flying first

Table 1. Measurements of Mênêtries' Warbler *Syliva mystacea*

Measurement	Method	Source	Sex	n	Observed range	Mean (y)	S.D.	Theoretical range (y – 3x S.D.)
Wing (mm)	Flattened(2)?	D	M	8	57.0–62.0	59.9	–	– – –
	"	D	F	–	– – –	56.0	–	– – –
	" ?	W	MF	75	– –	58.07	1.67	53.0 – 63.0
	Max. chord(3)	A	MF	27	57.0–62.0	59.8	1.45	55.5 – 64.2
Tail (mm)	Max.length	D	M	8	55.0–60.0	58.3	–	– – –
	"	D	F	–	– – –	55.0	–	– – –
	" ?	W	MF	79	– –	55.35	2.41	48.0 – 63.0
	"	A	MF	28	48.0–60.0	56.0	2.60	48.2 – 63.8
Bill (mm)	to feathering	D	M	8	11.0–12.0	11.6	–	– – –
	"	D	F	–	– – –	12.0	–	– – –
	?	W	MF	66	– –	11.08	0.68	9.0 – 13.0
	to skull	A	MF	28	12.0–13.0	12.4	0.49	10.9 – 13.9
Tarsus (mm)	Tarso	D	M	8	18.0–19.0	18.4	–	– – –
	metatarsus	D	F	–	– – –	18.0	–	– – –
	"	W	MF	31	– –	19.23	0.71	17.0 – 21.5
	"	A	MF	28	18.0–20.0	18.9	0.70	16.8 – 21.0
Weight (g)		A	MF	27	7.0–11.0	9.7	0.84	7.2 – 12.2
Tail/Wing ratio (%)		W	MF	76	89–103			
		A	MF	27	84–100	93.8	4.0	81.8 – 105.8

M = Males. F = Females. MF = Males & females. S.D. = Standard Deviation

Sources: D = Dementiev et al. 1954; W = Williamson 1964; A = Asvan Expedition 1971.

(Boehme 1925 in Dementiev *et al.* 1954), but if our hypothesis is correct this statement may require modification. The appearance of thes birds at Asvan would thus represent an almost westerly route suggesting that they follow the Mural/Euphrates valley rather than overflying desert on a straight line course to the wintereing area in NE Africa. One still hopes for a recovery which would provide more evidence for these ideas, but failing this the work has at least improved our knowledge of the status of Mênêtries' Warbler in a part of Turkey for which it was previously unrecorded.

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P. Andrew, M.C. Harrison and R.B.H. Smith,
9 Grove Park Avenue, Brislington, Bristol BS4 4JG

The Night Heron at Chew Valley Lake, Somerset, in 1971

On 19 November 1971 an immature Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax,* was captured in the compressor house at the ICI Severnside Plant by BrOC member John Eley. The bird was in a distressed condition, probably aggravated by the high noise level in this building – approximately 120 decibels, painful to the human ear (ICI personnel working in this area wear ear-protectors). The heron had been present in the compressor house for about eight hours before an attempt was made to capture it and allowed itself to be picked up with a minimum of protest.

The bird was taken home by John Eley and kept in a darkened garage (18 ft x 10 ft) where it was held for a total of nine days. During the first two days of captivity it appeared to be very uneasy, however quickly became tolerant of occasional disturbance. Approximately 20 sprats plus a few mealworms and snails were consumed each day and the bird rapidly regained condition.

On 28 November the heron was ringed (AJ 88846), measured, photographed and released at Chew Valley Lake in the Nature Reserve at the southern end of the lake. It cursed the bystanders with a few raucous "Kwaaak's" (harsh and crow-like) before promptly diving into a reed-bed from whence it emerged five hours later to roost in a nearby Elm. It was thought that the bird stood a chance of surviving in this habitat, viz: exposed mud lake-shore; marshy areas with feeder streams; patches of *phragmites;* Alder and Willow/Sallow brakes up to 30 feet high. Its subsequent activity shows that it *was* able to find food in this area where it stayed for three weeks.

The Chew Night Heron

Whilst adopting its typical 'short-necked' heron posture, the bird stood about 14 inches high. Other measurements taken were:—

Left wing	268 mm)	primaries straightened
Right wing	270 mm)	
Bill to feathers	72.5 mm	
Tarsi, both	83.0 mm	
Tail	123.0 mm	
Middle toe (incl. claw)	78.5 mm	

(figures corrected to the nearest 0.5 mm)

In appearance, the bird was brown above (described variously by observers as 'natty' or 'nutty' !), spotted pale buff on mantle and wing coverts. Underparts were dirty buffish-white streaked light brown. Head was closely streaked brown and buff with a creamy white chin. Legs and feet, greenish-yellow; iris golden-yellow and the stout bill dark brown above and pale horn below.

The bird was seen in the field by many observers at ranges down to 30 feet. If approached openly it took flight from the daytime roost at a distance of 50–60 feet. Several roosts were used at first but the bird ultimately settled for a 30 foot Alder, roosting in the lower branches 6–8 feet from the ground. This tree overhung the margin of Herriotts Mill Pool and was only about 85 feet from the main A368 Bath-Weston road. The passage of traffic and curious onlookers troubled it not at all. It was clear that the heron must have fed regularly during its stay, presumably at night, since the roost was soon marked with increasing amounts of excreta.

The neck was extended only when the bird was handled, a hunched stance normally being adopted. In flight, the head tucked-in posture was again used – the bird appearing very stubby in comparison with Bittern or Grey Heron. The wing beats were also more rapid than either of these two species.

Although, through weakness, the bird allowed itself to be captured by hand it gave every appearance of being truly wild both before and after release. An 'escape' cannot be ruled out however since birds from Edinburgh Zoo now breed in feral conditions and this species is to be found in many uncaged bird collections. On the other hand, November is a 'good' month for Night Heron records and it must be presumed that many of these are wanderers from Europe. Also, the slight possibility of the American sub-species, *N.n. hoactli,* the Black-crowned Night Heron, cannot be ruled out since a vigorous depression with gale force W–SW winds passed by a few days before its discovery. These and all other thoughts must however remain on a speculative level.

Our bird disappeared on or shortly after 19 December, by all accounts in a healthy condition. At the time of going to press, hope is still held out for a spectacular ringing recovery . . . . . .

K. T. Standring,
7 Underwood End, Sandford, Bristol BS19 5RT

Inland waters sought as roosts by estuarine feeding Black-headed Gulls

I had assumed for many years that all the gulls in winter when feeding during the day in the estuarine places and within the confines of the City of Bristol either perhaps stayed in the same area or more likely moved to nearby coastal localities, such as Avonmouth and Portishead, to roost at night. This is only partly true, and the full realisation of the reverse of this was well illustrated many times during visits I made in late December 1966 and early January 1967 to the Barrow Gurney Reservoirs, some four miles in a direct line south-west of the city centre.

I had gone in search of a Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* reported in the district but although unsuccessful in finding it, staying there nevertheless proved rewarding. When standing on the rather elevated No. 3. reservoir I was surprised to find, an hour or so before dusk, that gulls, mostly Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus,* were

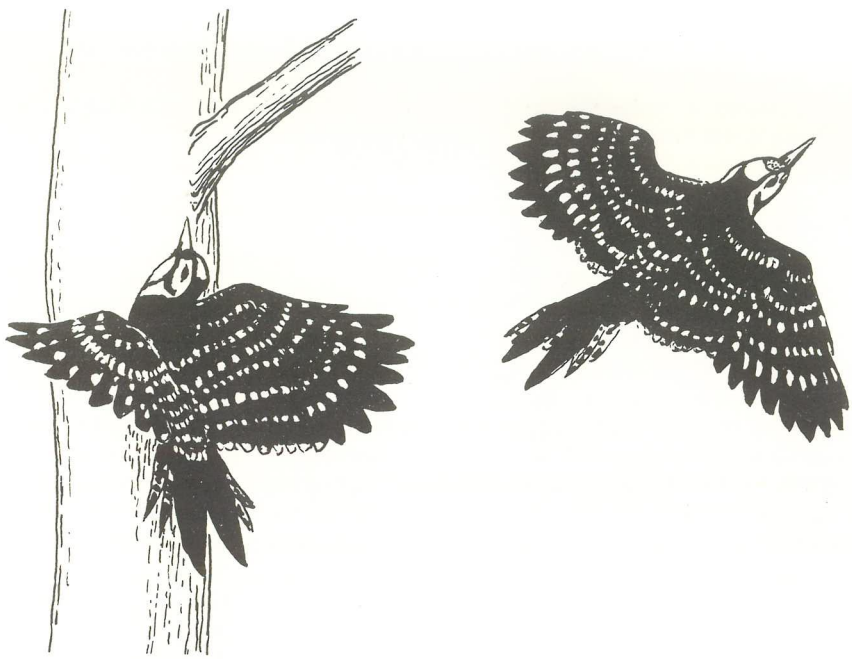
rising apparently from the River Avon or nearby ground in Bristol and then making towards Barrow Gurney. Others also it seemed from greater distances were flying across the city at higher altitudes my way. Up to and in fact well after dark hundreds of Black-headed Gulls, in groups of 50 to 100 or more, were observed overhead and obviously making for Blagdon and Chew Valley Lakes, and so well away from the coast. However, some of the gulls alighted on the reservoirs to bathe before also moving further inland. It seemed to me here was a phenomenon by birds seeking inland waters as roosts, having come from estuaries where easy access to the coast would have been preferable. Until then I had also thought most of the roosting gulls on inland waters were birds which had spent the day well away from the muddy Bristol banks and waters.

Finally, with regard to bathing by gulls, when possible I think they find it beneficial to bathe in fresh water more so than perhaps in saline waters. I have found that they are more inclined to bathe during damp and wet conditions, when so much more extraneous matter collects on the plumage, bills and legs, than when it is drier. They will bathe under severe weather conditions in fresh water if it is available. I have found the above also applicable to my Saltford garden birds over a period of 36 years, although on the rare occasions when intensely hot weather was experienced they would then 'thirst-bathe' all day if one had the patience to refill the bird bath frequently.

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

Some observations on Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers in the breeding season

For several days at the end of April 1970 I saw and heard Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *Denrocopus minor* drumming on the dead branches of a group of Black Poplars at Blagdon Lake, Somerset. This was followed in the early morning of the 29th, by seeing two females pursuing each other and displaying; shortly after a male joined in. The object of each of the three seemed to be to approach another by a gliding fluttering flight and display the dotted pattern of the outspread wings and tail by clinging to a branch vertically or even by hanging underneath a branch above the other bird's head. A few calls were heard but no bird actually attacked another. All the display took place 20—30 ft. above ground and lasted about fifteen minutes.



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Over the next few days drumming and calling continued, until early on 3 May I noticed a female crouching along a small branch over 40 ft. up; a male approached and mating took place. After preening the female few away and the male started excavating a hole only 12 ft. up the trunk of a small dead tree. In a short while the female started on a second hole near the first. Unfortunately Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* were already in residence about 18 ins. below these attempts; their interference upset the birds repeatedly. After four minutes the female called to her mate from the same high bough and copulation took place again. A further 12 minutes of excavating followed, then they mated a third time; the female in this instance called him by drumming. On each occasion the male approached with wide-spread wings and tail, gliding and fluttering like a butterfly.

Early the next day the pair took it in turns to excavate the original hole, each working for about three minutes at a time, but interruptions by the Starlings became more frequent so the female flew away, hissing, calling occasionally at a distance. The male only dared return for a few seconds at a time, finally rejoined its mate when a fight between three Starlings stopped the hole-making completely. The hole was not in fact used later.

Exactly two months later I saw a pair not far away feeding three youngsters, so perhaps the unfortunate couple were successful in the end.

D.E. Ladhams.
Willow Lodge, Breach Hill Lane, Chew Stoke, Bristol BS18 8YA.

CLUB ACTIVITIES, 1971

Field Meetings

As in each year since its formation, membership has steadily increased, and with it the attendance at indoor meetings and some field meetings. This state of affairs is, of course, healthy, but one can forsee that large numbers at a field meeting may present a problem and even defeat the objective of the meeting. Each field meeting is, however, organised for a specific purpose and some of these may attract only a relatively small number of members, but then, for many these meetings form one of the main attractions of Club activities. Yet another successful week-end excursion was held, to the Minsmere area, but the day trips to Portland Bill were not so popular. A new venture, the 24 hour Tally Hunt combined with a barbecue, proved to be a great success and was well attended in both parts. On other excursions, of a more serious nature, further valuable information from the Bristol Channel sea-watches and the B.T.O. Atlas Project continued to flow into the Club. All of the field meetings are fully reported in *Bird News.*

Indoor Meetings

Despite two changes in the programme at short notice an interesting and varied programme was arranged and the meetings were held, as before, at St. Mary Redcliffe & Temple School.

21 January	Safari to Ethiopia	Jeffery Boswall
18 February	Films	Michael Kendall
4 March	Members Evening	
25 March	Birdwatching in Turkey	Richard Porter
23 September	Films	
21 October	Pinkfeet v. Hydro Electric	Malcolm Ogilvie
18 November	Bird Art & Illustration	Robert Gillmor
16 December	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social	

Publications

Bird News continued with strength and the introduction of the recording slips speeded up the production

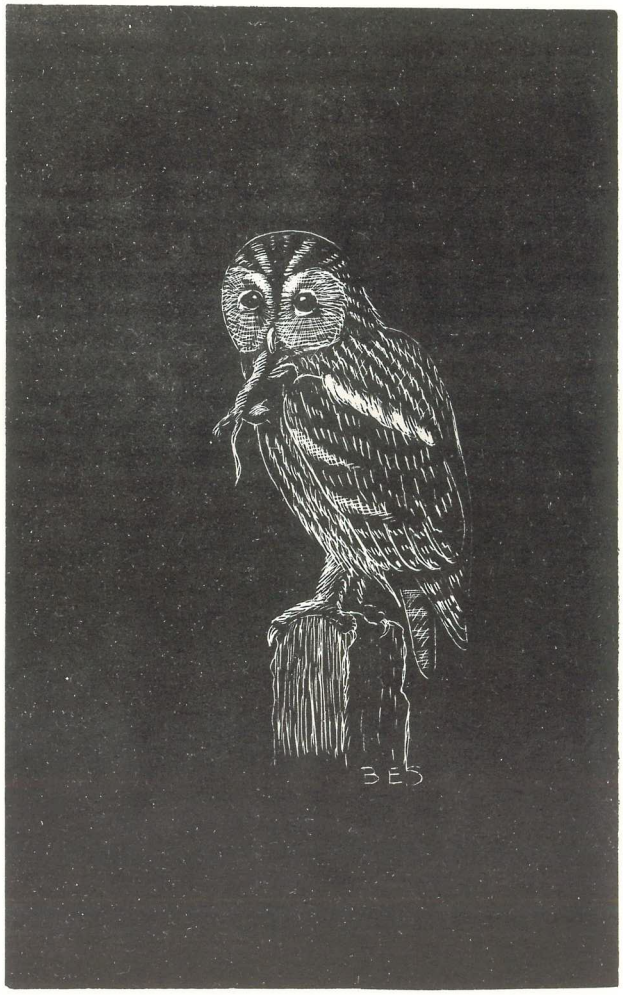
and publication by several days. Needless to say, we all have to thank several dedicated volunteers for the continued high standard of the newsletter.

D. E. Ladhams,
Honorary Secretary

BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY 4 – ERRATA

Despite checks and re-checks many small errors were contained in *Bristol Ornithology 4.* The majority were simple spelling mistakes (faulty typesetting) and will be obvious to readers. However, the following two errors should be noted.

1. The pagination was unfortunately carried through the plates. This is not normal practice and therefore pages 154 to 157 inclusive do not exist.
2. In Club Activities, p.179, the Indoor Meeting for 22 October should be deleted. No meeting took place on this date due to a strike.



BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR TO 30 NOVEMBER, 1970

INCOME		£	s	d	£	s	d
Balance brought forward from 1969					54	2	0
Subscriptions					228	7	0
Jumble Sale					30	10	10
Christmas Cards:	Sales–	46	8	0			
	less 1970 cards	18	15	0	27	13	0
Field Meeting – Poole					7	0	6
R.S.P.B./B.O.C. Film Shows:							
October 1969 –	Colston Hall						
	Receipts	170	7	11			
	Costs	65	5	0	105	2	11
April 1970 –	Redcliffe School						
	Receipts	56	16	6			
	Costs	27	1	0	29	15	6
October 1970 –	Colston Hall						
	Receipts	385	2	7			
	Costs	5	10	0	379	12	7
Donations						10	0
					862	14	4

EXPENDITURE							
Indoor Meetings							
Hire of Hall					22	1	0
Speakers					26	15	0	48	16	0
Production and Distribution of Bird News							
Postage		37	13	8			
Stencils, duplicating and name & address plates		53	2	6			
Stationary		32	5	8			
Addressing envelopes (1 mth)		1	5	0	124	6	10			
less sale of covers						15	0	123	11	10
Bristol Ornithology							
B.O.2 –	Costs				120	13	7			
	less sales (1 and 2)				12	7	6	108	6	1
B.O.3 –	Editors expenses							4	18	0
Field Meetings – September 18th–20th							
Receipts					93	3	0			
Costs					94	8	0	1	5	0
Chew Valley Ringing Station							
Donation for equipment, etc.								15	0	0
Misc. Expenses							
Officer's expenses:	Hon. Sec.				9	9	9			
	Membership Sec.				4	9	2			
Club Subscriptions:	Wildfowl Trust				1	1	0			
	B.N.S.				2	0	0			
Membership Cards					8	6	3			
400 programmes					10	15	0			
Membership leaflets					56	12	0			
Constitution and Rules					14	8	0			
Cheque Books						9	2			
Misc. expenses					11	7	0	118	17	4
								420	14	3
Cash in hand and at bank								442	0	1
								862	14	4

Rosemary Lovell
Honorary Treasurer

T.B. Silcocks
Honorary Auditor

BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR TO 30 NOVEMBER 1971

INCOME

			£ p	£ p	
Members' subscriptions				346.75	
Donations				56.00	
Sales of: *Bristol Ornithology*			23.47		
Other publications			48.27	71.74	
Indoor Meetings:	RSPB—April '71	60.94			
	LESS Costs	38.17	22.77		
	RSPB—Oct '71	496.15			
	LESS Costs	299.52	196.63	219.40	
Field Meetings:	Minsmere trip	158.66			
	LESS Costs	158.40	0.26		
	Barbeque	23.70			
	LESS Costs	21.55	2.15	2.41	696.30

EXPENDITURE

Donations and Subscriptions			19.30	
Production and distribution of *Bird News*			128.91	
" " " *Bristol Ornithology*			149.00	
Printing for re-sale (Christmas cards, etc.)			48.50	
Printing and Stationery			*90.45	
General Indoor Meetings		35.10		
LESS lecture fee received		2.00	33.10	
General Field Meetings		24.05		
LESS receipts		15.05	9.00	
Officers' expenses			7.39	
Kestrel Nestbox scheme			10.47	
Miscellaneous expenses			10.18	506.30
EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE				£190.00

Notes on the Accounts

(1) Cash in hand as at 30 November 1971 — Current a/c 591.35
Deposit a/c 100.00 691.35

(2) *The 'Printing & Stationery' above includes £57.55 for Observation Form Pads.

(3) Although we have a substantial balance in hand, there is approx. £300 due to the R.S.P.B. and £200 to be paid for the printing of *Bristol Ornithology.*

R.F. Thearle
Hon. Treasurer

T.B. Silcocks
Hon. Auditor