

# BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY



6

# BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGY

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

No. 6 | DECEMBER 1973

## CONTENTS

2	Preface
3	A review of 1972 <i>Brian Rabbitts</i>
12	The Ornithological Atlas for Somerset <i>D.E. Ladhams</i>
25	The incidence of albinism and melanism in grebes <i>Bernard King</i>
29	Colour, albinism and melanism in birds <i>Malcolm Sainsbury</i>
30	The birds of Berrow marsh, sand dunes and shore <i>B.E. Slade</i>
	NOTES
36	Another Black-headed Gull enigma <i>Bernard King</i>
37	Feeding behaviour of a Northern Waterthrush in the Isles of Scilly <i>Bernard King</i>
37	Food-hiding by Scrub Jay and other Corvidae <i>J.B. and S. Bottomley</i>
38	Great Black-backed Gull attacking a sleeping man <i>Bernard King</i>
38	Hobbies feeding <i>D.E. Ladhams</i>
38	Whimbrel roost on Steart Island, Somerset <i>B.E. Slade</i>
	REPORT
39	<i>Club Activities, 1972</i>



## PREFACE

The previous two numbers of *Bristol Ornithology* have contained papers on major field activities of the Club. This number continues this trend with two more important papers. The Ornithological Atlas was, of course, a national survey organised by the British Trust for Ornithology but many Club members took an active part, and outings to search for breeding birds were a feature of our fieldwork programme. The results given here emphasise the local aspects of the work, and similar papers are being presented in other parts of the country. All of these will be included in the national atlas which is being prepared for publication in the near future by the B.T.O. The paper on the birds of Berrow Marsh is Brian Slade's report of his bird-watching on his local 'patch'. Such reports are valuable historical documents and the Editors of *Bristol Ornithology* will welcome any similar contributions to the journal. Apart from reports on the ornithology within our area we also welcome, for consideration by the Editors, any other papers by Club members. A single observation by Bernard King has resulted in his gathering together all the known sightings of albinism and melanism in grebes in the World. This in turn has given Malcolm Sainsbury the opportunity to describe these phenomena in birds in simple terms. Smaller contributions in the form of notes, drawings or photographs are always welcome and are no less valuable.

The Club Activities report has been reduced over the years as these are more than adequately reported in *Bird News*. Copies of the bulletin are preserved for the Club archives, therefore these accounts are always available. The report in *Bristol Ornithology* presents the activities in a useful summary form. Any papers, articles or illustrations for the journal should be addressed to me.

Robin Prytherch, *Chairman*

### CHAIRMAN

R.J. Prytherch

### HON. SECRETARY

Miss W. Dickson

### HON. TREASURER

D.G. Haddy

### MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Mrs. J.F. Copeland

other members of the General Committee:—

A.H. Davis  
P. Dening  
N.T. Lacy  
D.E. Ladhams

A.D. Lucas  
B. Rabbitts  
M. Sainsbury  
K.T. Standing



*Bristol Ornithology* 6 Editorial Committee:—

A.H. Davis  
D.E. Ladhams  
R.J. Prytherch

B. Rabbitts  
M. Sainsbury

Line drawings by Don Ladhams, Robin Prytherch and Brian Slade.  
Layout by Robin Prytherch and Brian Rabbitts.  
Printed by Electroprint, 5 Kingsdown Parade, Bristol BS6 5UD. Tel. 292375.

## A REVIEW OF 1972

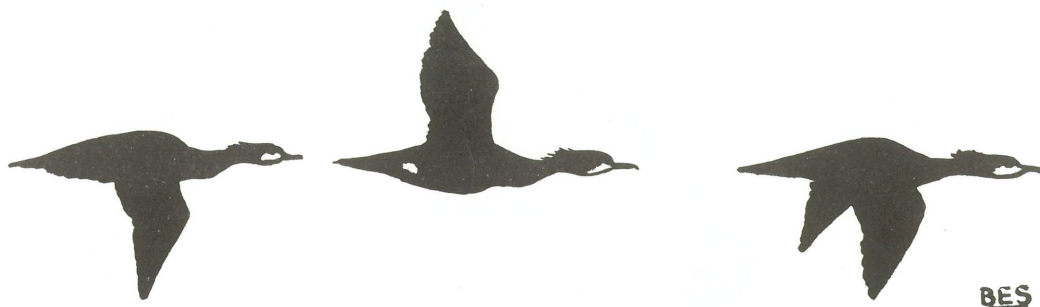
by Brian Rabbitts

This report is merely a résumé of all the interesting records and numbers of birds in our area during the year. For more details of most of the information quoted in the review consult our monthly reports *Bird News*. A systematic list is published by both Gloucestershire and Somerset Natural History Societies to which members, if they so desire, should also submit their records. We are not confined to any laid down boundaries, observations being restricted to roughly 30 miles from Bristol in Gloucestershire (this side of the River Severn) and Somerset. Reservoirs if mentioned collectively indicates those at Barrow Gurney, Blagdon, Cheddar, Chew Valley Lake (CVL) and Durleigh.

### The first winter period

January was a fairly mild and wet month with the only really significant weather feature being a freezing spell of north-easterlies with some heavy snow during the last few days. February was dull and unsettled but was mainly mild and there were some strong winds during the 15th and 16th. March commenced on a wintry note but it was warm and sunny after the 13th until the 24th and some summer visitors arrived during this period. This was not to last however and the last few days saw strong to gale force west winds with some heavy, squally showers.

No divers were sighted on the reservoirs but at Brean Down, two not specifically identified, were offshore on the 12 January. A Slavonian Grebe was present at CVL to the 14 February while numbers of Great Crested Grebes here reached 157 at the beginning of January but with only very low numbers during the following two months and



Cormorant

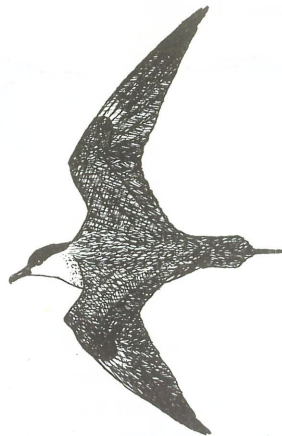
a maximum of 49. Up to 60 occurred at Cheddar during January. Numbers of Cormorants at CVL reached 47 and an adult and immature Shag were off Brean Down on the 16 February. A Bittern was sighted at CVL in January with two the following month and one 'booming' in the middle of March, but there were no later reports of an extension of the birds' breeding areas. Numbers of White-fronted Geese at the New Grounds reached only 3350 in mid-February (8½% juveniles) and this number had fallen to just over 1000 in the first week of March. 11 flew over Sand Bay in January and 17 (probably this species) were present at Chittening in February but otherwise very few were reported. Other geese at the New Grounds were single Barnacle and Brent, an adult Lesser White-front from the 22 January to the 19 February and a first winter bird on the 14th of that month, two Bean from the end of January into February and up to 13 Pink-feet. There were four Brent reported at Clevedon and a Grey Lag at Sand Bay, both records coming



in January. Counts of Bewick's Swans that month included 42 at Durleigh and 32 on Tatham Moor and in February 128 at Muchelney and 72 at Wet Moor. Three Whooper Swans flew over CVL at the beginning of the year.

Counts of the commoner duck wintering in our area indicated a fairly normal season but again Pochard numbers seem low compared with several years ago. This however probably just indicates a redistribution of birds throughout the country. Other duck included small numbers of Gadwall, including 12 off Brean Down, up to 236 Pintail at the New Grounds and the Wildfowl Trust in March with high numbers of Shoveler at CVL in January and a maximum of 592 on the 23rd. Several Scaup were seen on the reservoirs and at Frampton, the unusual number of Eider off Sand Point from the previous year reached 20 in January and there were still 15 present in March. Small numbers of Common Scoter appeared in the channel with 39 and 20 being the maximum noted off Brean Down in February. At CVL counts of Goldeneye reached 33, there were up to four Smew here, (later one or two at Blagdon with one remaining to the 21 April — a very late date), four Red-breasted Mergansers in January, up to 32 Goosanders the same month with the last on the 16 April, (also two coastal observations) and a count of 43 Ruddy Ducks was made in February.

Peregrines were reported from several areas on the coast fairly regularly and there was one at CVL in March whilst Merlins were noted at five localities. The concentration of Coot at Cheddar reached 2100 at the beginning of the year but most had dispersed by February. Counts of waders in our estuaries during 1970/71 (organised by the British Trust for Ornithology) showed that the Severn was the sixth most important with a peak total of 49116. Numbers of Ringed Plover included up to 80 in the Chittening area with another 150 at other localities in February. Main concentrations of Golden Plover occurred on Tealham and Tatham Moors (500) and at the Axe Estuary (350). 41 Grey Plover were present at Steart at the beginning of February. Cold weather movements of Lapwings took place at the end of January with thousands moving south or south-west and numbers on Tealham and Tatham Moors reached 8000 in February. A count of 4000 Dunlin was made at Sand Bay in January with estimates of 3000 at several other localities and a maximum of 100 on the levels. Small numbers of Knot were present, mainly from Sand Bay to Steart, with most at the Axe Estuary including 1700 and 1800 in February and there were up to 21 Bar-tailed Godwits also at this locality. Of the scarcer waders these included Little Stints at CVL and the New Grounds with three at Sand Bay; up to five Purple Sandpipers at Chittening and two at Brean Down; only a few Sanderling; nine Ruff at the New Grounds in January with a few elsewhere in the following month, but no counts were received from Long Load which apparently is one of the few places inland where flocks of over ten are found regularly in mid-winter; a Spotted Redshank at Steart in February; wintering Green Sandpipers showed a small increase with seven in January and four in both the following months; Common Sandpipers wintered at Sea Mills and there was one at Clevedon; nine Black-tailed Godwits were seen; some 20 Jack Snipe and just a single Avocet.



Arctic Skua R/P

A very early Arctic Skua was present at Sand Bay on the 15 February and there was an immature Little Gull at Cheddar for the first two weeks of the year. Counts of gulls included 350 Lesser Black-backed roosting at CVL on the 13 February with about 500 at the beginning of March including two of the Scandinavian race (see *Bristol*

*Ornithology* 5 (1972): 205–206). By the time this report is published our own gull survey will be well underway and we should know more about their populations in our area and attendant problems such as the fouling of our reservoirs. There was an adult Kittiwake at Cheddar in mid-February whilst at the end of that month 27 flew up channel off Brean Down. On the 26 January a Little Auk was found at Hanham, it was slightly oiled and died the next day. Barn Owls are beginning to show a welcome return to our area and were noted at 13 localities and only one Short-eared Owl was observed, at the New Grounds in mid-March. There were some high counts of Water Pipits at CVL with maxima of 15 in January and 21 at the end of March whilst one was recorded at Portbury Wharf in January and the last was noted on the 14 April. A Rock Pipit was inland at Cheddar Reservoir in February, the occasional bird here being not unusual. A Waxwing was present at Hunstrete on the 2 January, some five Blackcaps were seen, about seven Chiffchaffs, a Firecrest at Brean Down on the 17 March, five Black Redstarts and, apart from a large number of Fieldfares at Berrow, numbers of this species and of Redwing were not exceptional. Three Bearded Tits at Berrow to the 20 March remained from the small irruption of this species in 1971. Two Willow Tits at Muchelney in mid-February were the only records received during this period and must have been under-recorded and only three Snow Buntings were seen. There were considerably larger numbers of Brambling than last year with the very high count of 1500 at Steart the beginning of February and other reports of 50–100 from five other localities. Siskins were well represented with numbers between 100 and 140 from Compton Pauncefoot and Frampton Pools in mid-January and mid-February respectively and groups of 30–40 in six other areas. Redpolls were far less numerous and apart from 35 at Westhay Moor parties did not exceed 20. Three Twite occurred near Brean in February, two remaining to mid-March and Hawfinches were as usual reported from a few local areas with a maximum of six at Clifton Down.

### Spring migration

The weather during April was mainly cool, windy and unsettled, being dominated by deep depressions during the first week and by a very large anticyclone to the west of the British Isles from the 12th to the 28th. The last few days saw a slow moving shallow depression coincide with an increase in some summer migrants and there were noticeable small 'falls' during the first few days of May. This month was remarkable for its outstandingly bad weather with a complex area of low pressure persisting from the 7th with mainly south-west winds, strong at times. Between the 13th and 16th the weather became anticyclonic but the pattern soon reverted back to mainly south-west winds and a series of depressions crossing the Atlantic to give gale force winds particularly in the period 26th–30th. The bad weather continued for much of June with another series of Atlantic depressions which brought cold, cloudy conditions with high winds at times.

A diver not specifically identified flew down channel off Brean Down on the 2 April. There was an interesting number of grebes on the reservoirs with a Black-necked at CVL at the end of March and this or another to the 9 April, a Slavonian at Barrow Gurney 24/25 March, and a Red-necked in full summer plumage at CVL on the 28 March. A grebe thought to have been a Slavonian was off Brean Down on the 6 May. The first Fulmar here was on the 8 March and they were very regular from the end of the month, Manx Shearwaters appeared on the early date of 27 March and there was one Gannet at the end of March and another at the beginning of April but similarly to the shearwaters many more appeared later. An egret, no doubt a Little Egret, flew across channel at Brean Down on the 17 May and one or two Herons were off here also. Counts of Gadwall at CVL reached a maximum of 124 in April, the last two Wigeon here stayed well into May and the first Garganey reported in our area were five at Frampton on the 14 March and there was a count of thirteen drakes and seven ducks on the Somerset levels at the end of that month. The drake Ring-necked Duck appeared for the second spring in succession at Blagdon on the 26 March and was seen throughout April. Other diving duck in April and May included a large influx of Tufted at CVL on the 23 April when 730 were counted, up to four Scaup, a maximum of 13 Eider off Sand Point most later moving to Brean Down, up to seven Scoter in the channel with three at Blagdon on the 7 May and two Long-tailed Ducks at Durleigh on the 30 April.

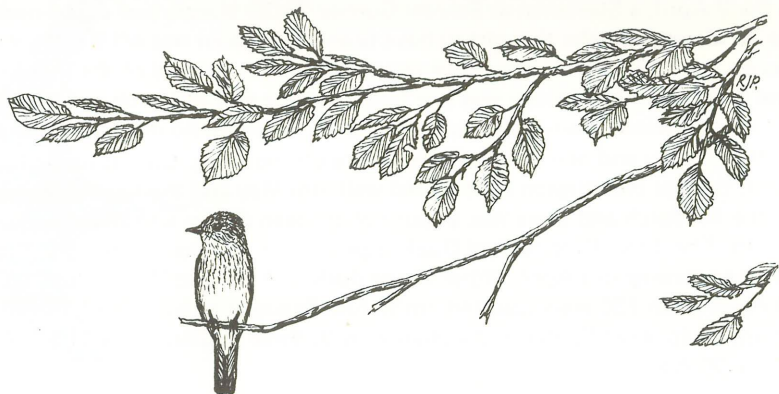
There was a count of 200 Ringed Plover at Steart at the end of April and principal numbers occurred around the 14 May when 640 were counted at four localities with most (377) at Berrow and on the 1 June with 700 at Steart. 20 Sanderling were here in April but the main numbers were during the following months with 70 at this locality on the 1 June and 96 at the New Grounds on the 21 May. Whimbrels started moving through from the 10 April with an



influx at the end of the month including 160 at five localities in Somerset with more in May including 155 on Tealham Moor. Information on the large roost on Steart Island, mentioned in the last review, has been scarce but almost 1500 were counted in May (see page 38) with maximum numbers no doubt exceeding this remarkable figure. Other waders included three Little Ringed Plover at Cheddar and single birds at CVL in April and the New Grounds in June (some birds do not take up territory until this month); Turnstones at Chittening reached 400 at the beginning of May; three Little Stints at the New Grounds 25 April; a most unusual record of two Temminck's Stints at King's Moor on the 23 March; the last Purple Sandpiper at Brean Down on the 14 May; two Curlew Sandpipers at Steart 6 May; two Ruffs; one or two Spotted Redshanks; two Greenshanks at the end of April and several in May; four Green Sandpipers; the first Common Sandpiper on the 30 March; a high count of 158 Black-tailed Godwits on Wet Moor on the 28 March whilst a group of 120 moved north-east at Sand Bay on the 26 April and lastly only two Jack Snipe were recorded.

Skuas in the channel included two single Great in April and one Arctic at the end of March with two in April and three to mid-May. Several Little Gulls were seen with up to five at Cheddar at the end of March and this is a bird that has increased in recent years in our area. A large weather movement of Kittiwakes took place in the channel with over 1000 at Sand Point on the 26 March, movement being up channel and at Brean Down the following day some 380 were recorded. There were small numbers during the next two months with maxima at Brean on any one day being 24 in April and 25 in May (see *Bristol Ornithology* 5 (1972): 201–204). Compared to the last two springs the usual passage of terns was very poor with the first, a Common, being picked up dead at CVL on the early date of 31 March. There were small movements of these or Arctic in the Channel at the end of April including 10 at Brean Down on the 25th with 49 at the New Grounds the same day with larger numbers here in May including 89 on the 3rd and 22 on the 7th whilst the same day on a steamer trip 54 were counted moving up channel. There was only one Black Tern in April and some 30 on the coast in May including 18 moving north at Berrow on the 6th. Some 12 Sandwich Terns were noted and about 14 Little Terns. Razorbills were sighted regularly at Brean Down with at least 13 in April as well as several Guillemots and about 40 of these two species not specifically identified and a single Puffin was off Sand Point on 8 April.

Early summer visitors included a Turtle Dove at the Wildfowl Trust on the 1 April; Sand Martin on 19 March with 40 at CVL the end of the month; Tree Pipit 9 April; Grasshopper Warbler the same date; Willow Warbler at Sand Point on 9 March; Chiffchaffs from the 15th of that month and a Wheatear on the 8th. Other passerine species reported included a Hoopoe at Frome Valley (Hambrook) 31 May; Crested Lark at Steart 8 April — this being the first of this mainly sedentary species to be identified in this country since 1965; one or two Yellow Wagtails showing characteristics of the blue-headed race were identified; a minimum of 40 White Wagtails from the 5 March; Red-backed Shrike at Sand Point 9 May; seven Pied Flycatchers; Spotted Flycatchers seemed fairly scarce and there was only one record in April; one Black Redstart the same month; eight Ring Ouzels at Crook Peak at the end of



Spotted Flycatcher



March; up to 50 Siskins reported in April and small movements of Redpolls at coastal areas in May including a maximum of 36 at Sand Point.

### Breeding species (selected)

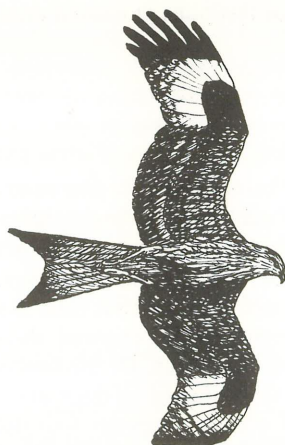
With the dismal weather during the season with May being cold, wet and windy and these conditions persisting for most of June initially it would appear that most of our breeding birds, especially the summer visitors, had a very poor year. However this may not have been the case, only the almost complete absence of song in these conditions making one believe that it were so. Great Crested Grebes at CVL had a disastrous season with no young being seen which, apart from 1965 when low water level was the cause, is the first time that breeding has not occurred here and several birds were found dead. Fulmars, although very regular in the channel, showed no signs of extending their range and possibly the muddiness of the water is a bar to them doing so. Of the heronries counted in our area there were 20 nests at Newton-St.-Loe and 30 young at Tatham Moor. Breeding duck at CVL included about 40 broods of Mallard involving some 267 young, 21 broods of Gadwall (131 young), Shoveler four broods (18 young), Pochard seven broods (33 young), Tufted 50 broods (246 young) and one or two broods of Ruddy Ducks. Shelduck bred here also and at Durligh but no accurate assessment is possible concerning the numbers that bred on the coast. Teal bred on the levels and pairs of Garganey were present in our area whilst Tufted Ducks also bred at Barrow Gurney (one brood) and Blagdon (four broods). Buzzards on the Mendips were reported from several areas and Hobbies were sighted at eleven localities in May and June. Red-legged Partridges were reported from three areas, breeding successfully at Hunstrete, whilst Partridges were noted at ten places during June and July. Up to six Quail were located in the Marshfield area with one or two birds elsewhere, a juvenile Water Rail was present at CVL in the middle of July and Corncrakes were noted at one or two localities. Ringed Plover bred at Steart and 'roding' Woodcock were reported at Shapwick. Several reports of Herring Gulls nesting on buildings in Bristol were received and also one pair of Lesser Black-backs.

Turtle Doves were well distributed in May and June being reported from 23 areas and Barn Owls indicated a very welcome increase being noted at 13 localities May to July. Nightjars were only reported regularly from Shapwick and in recent years has become one of our threatened breeding birds. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were sighted at six localities and Sand Martins bred at several places in Bristol and one or two areas elsewhere. Tree Pipits in May and June were noted in 16 places, two observers commented that Yellow Wagtails were scarce during the season, while White-throats continue to increase slowly after their drastic decline in 1969 and Lesser Whitethroats appear to be well represented being reported from 32 areas during the season. There was a doubtful record of breeding Firecrests outside our area in Somerset, but they may have bred elsewhere, apparently favouring mature Norway Spruce plantations over 25 feet (see *Brit. Birds* 59 (1966): 240-246 and 64 (1971): 473-475). 22 pairs of Whinchats were located on the Somerset levels with decreases being recorded from Tatham and Somerton Moors and there were similar numbers of Redstarts as last year. Main areas for Nightingales were Copley Woods, Inglestone Common and Shapwick with several at other localities. Of Corn Buntings there was a count of 93 singing birds in early June in the Marshfield area and in Somerset there were up to five near Priddy, two above Deer Leap and six on Somerton Moor whilst Cirl Buntings were noted at four areas. Ravens at Brean Down reared three young successfully.

### Some summer observations

As a result of the bad weather there were many records of sea birds and I have included most of these in this section rather than under the heading of spring migration. Main numbers of Manx Shearwaters appeared off Brean Down with maxima being 415 on 30 May, 1015 on 19 June and 466 on the 28th while at Sand Point on the 2 July 106 were counted and there were smaller groups during all these three months. There were several Storm Petrels well up channel including two off Brean Down and five at Sand Point the end of May. Gannets were recorded with maximum numbers including up to 18 off Brean Down and 11 off Sand Point with inland birds being recorded from Almondsbury, Bristol and CVL. A Shag was present at Sand Point on the 27 May. A Wigeon was present at CVL throughout June and the Ring-necked Duck was seen here on the 29 May, later returning to Blagdon where it was present to the 23 August and was seen to be paired to a Tufted Duck. In view of the exceptional dates an escape is most likely. Up to 12 Eiders summered off Brean Down there being no previous observations of this occurring off the Somerset coast, a few Scoter were present in the channel with seven at CVL on 7 July and there was a Red-





Red Kite R/P

breasted Merganser here on the 28 June. A Red Kite flew over Heath House at the end of July, possibly a wanderer from the small population in mid-Wales. A Purple Sandpiper at Sand Point on the 9th and 12 July was in summer plumage and there was a party of 21 Redshanks at CVL on the 28 June. Skuas in the channel included five Great, a similar number of Arctic and a probable Pomarine. A Yellow Wagtail showing plumage characteristics of *Motacilla flava beema* ('Sykes Wagtail') was present at CVL on 11 June.

### Autumn migration

The cool changeable weather of June continued until the second week of July but then pressure rose to give sunny and warm conditions but temperatures for the month were below normal. August started unsettled with rain and mainly south-west winds but after the second week it became generally fine and dry with high pressure areas from the Azores moving north-east. Winds were mainly from this direction. September was unusually settled, being dominated by a single anticyclone and winds were mainly light. It was cool and fairly dry. October, like the previous month, started with a similar pattern — dominated by high pressure systems over central Europe and over the Atlantic sea-board. The last week or so of the month saw a series of depressions bring unsettled wet and windy weather.

A Red-necked Grebe was reported off Berrow on the 8 October. Numbers of Great Crested Grebes at CVL were drastically cut with a maximum of 205 at the end of September (the first count over 200 for the year) and this compares with 505 at the same time last year. A few Fulmars occurred in the channel, a Manx Shearwater off Steart Point on the 13 September was the last for the year and several small parties of Gannets appeared, mainly in August, with counts at Brean Down including 13 on 15th, 17 on 24th and 14 on the 28th whilst a storm driven adult was at CVL on the 9/10th of that month. The White Stork at Rode was released on 23 August (see *Bristol Ornithology* 5 (1971): 187–188) and five days later was seen on Penarth Flats (Glamorgan) and may well account for the sightings of one flying south over Keynsham on the 24 September and at Huntworth the following day. Ten Pink-footed Geese flew south-east at the New Grounds on the 12th of that month. Numbers of Gadwall at CVL were low with a maximum of 115 at the beginning of August from which date numbers increased at Cheddar to a maximum of 70 in September. There was a good passage of Garganey with up to eighteen at CVL and eight at Blagdon with several elsewhere. A Red-crested Pochard was at Cheddar, a Pochard off Steep Holm on the 30 July was unusual and large numbers of Tufted gathered to moult at Blagdon with a record reservoir count of 835 on the 16 August. No doubt the same Ring-necked Duck that summered here was located at Cheddar coming out of eclipse plumage on the 22 September and remained to the 16 December. There were three records of Scaup in August with the first, an eclipse male, at Blagdon on the 2nd, the group of Eider remained off Brean Down with a maximum count of 13 and only three Common Scoter were reported. Unusual raptors included an Osprey at Durleigh on the 3 September, single Harriers were sighted at Steart on the 13 August and Steep Holm on the 8 October while two at Lympham Wharf on the 14 July were thought to have been Montagu's. Peregrines were



sighted at three localities from the 27 July, Hobbies were recorded throughout September including a family party in one area and there were three Merlins in September and four the following month, mainly during the latter half. One or two Spotted Crakes were observed.

Generally speaking numbers of waders were fairly scarce during the fine weather of the autumn. Of the commoner passage waders Ringed Plover peaked at 2057 around the 28 August with counts of 1000 coming from Berrow and Chittening the same month. Numbers of Turnstone at Chittening reached 500 after the first week of September obtaining their peak well over a month earlier than last year. Only small numbers of Knot were observed with a maximum of 78 in Sand Bay and two or three inland at CVL, while most Sanderling passed through at the end of July and beginning of August with counts of up to 134 at Berrow and 80 at Chittening and the maximum count of Black-tailed Godwits received from Steart was 675 at the end of July. Numbers of the scarcer passage waders indicated below are all minimum numbers. 58 Little Stints passed through from the end of July to the end of October; Curlew Sandpipers (78) included a group of 22 at Berrow in August; Ruffs (55) were mainly in September and October; Spotted Redshanks (77) passed through from end of June and 52 of these occurred at the New Grounds; Greenshanks (100) were well recorded; Green Sandpipers (76) were mainly in July and August; of Wood Sandpipers there were seven in July but only three in the following two months and Whimbrel (131) passed mainly in August. Other waders included some sixteen Little Ringed Plover (only three last year), a Kentish Plover at Chittening 7th–10 August with another at CVL 3 September, a Temminck's Stint here 12th–19 September and a Purple Sandpiper at Sand Point on the 9 September was unusually early.

Two Arctic Skuas occurred in the channel and two skuas not specifically identified but the settled weather brought few other sea birds to this end of the channel. There were several Little Gulls in August and some eight in September with two or three the following month. 14 Kittiwakes were off Sand Point on the 8 August whilst inland single immatures were noted at Cheddar and Durleigh. Movement of Black Terns commenced from the 17 July with a minimum of 16 during the month and the vast majority occurred on the 12th and 13 August with a large influx of 111 at CVL on the first date, most moving off by the next day when some 60 were observed on a steamer trip in the channel. Only about nine occurred in the following month. Common/Arctic Terns were scarce with a minimum of 100 between the 17 July and 24 September with most (82) in August including 41 at Blagdon on the 12th. Sandwich Terns numbered six in July and August, a similar number of Little Terns were seen and there was a White-winged Black Tern at Cheddar on the 28 August, this species having been recorded annually in Somerset since 1966. Single Razorbill and Guillemot were recorded in July.

There was an early Short-eared Owl on 20 August on West Sedge Moor whilst one occurred in September and five in October. Small west to east movements of Swifts, involving a few hundred birds, were noted in July at Brean Down and Sand Point while at CVL counts made during the same month in cloudy or bad weather included 6000 and 7500. A Wryneck was present at Combe Down, Bath during 4th–7 September and three Woodlarks flew over St. Thomas' Head on 19 July these being followed by further birds on the 26 September at CVL and at Berrow and New Passage, both on the 15 October. Days of particularly heavy passage of Swallows at CVL were the 10th and 19 September and there were small movements noted at Brean Down, the birds moving east and then following the line of the Axe inland whilst the same month several large concentrations of House Martins were recorded including 2500 over Long Ashton. A Tawny Pipit was observed at Woodspring Bay on the 29 July and the usual migrant Tree Pipits were noted at coastal areas including a count of thirteen at Sand Point the end of August. Single Blue-headed Wagtails were identified at CVL at the end of July and again in September and a few White Wagtails were recorded. Migrant Great Grey Shrikes were seen near Long Ashton on the 19 October and at Steart on the 22nd. There was an influx of Aquatic Warblers into the country and in our area birds were observed at Berrow on the 13 August and at CVL on the 20th (trapped) and also here on the 20th and 21 September was a *Hippolais* warbler thought to have been an Icterine. A late Garden Warbler was trapped on Steep Holm on the 8 October and a Firecrest had been trapped the previous day while another interesting observation from the island concerned three newly arrived Willow Warblers on the 30 July, these coinciding with a 'fall' of some 120 on Lundy Island, Devon. Lesser Whitethroats passed through at CVL from the 10 July and numbers up to 40 were recorded in the following month. Some eleven Ring Ouzels occurred at Brean Down from September through to the beginning of November and there was an irruption of Bearded Tits with the first in our area at Berrow and Steart on the 8 October, these being followed by a party of ten on the 15th at Sand Point and up to five at CVL. Six Siskins on the 6 September were early, movements of Redpolls were very much in evidence for September and October with up to 22 at coastal localities and an irruption of Crossbills on the continent brought good numbers into the country. The first were recorded at Blagdon at the end



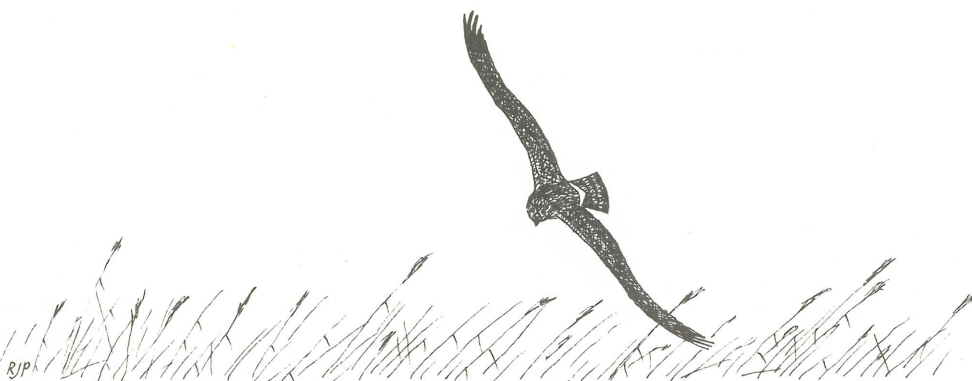
of June to be followed by several small parties (up to 16) in July with the main numbers at the end of this month at Stock Hill where 100–150 were reported as being present with 50 still here during the following month.

### The second winter period

The weather in November saw a return to the more normal type for this time of the year, being wet and windy interspersed with cold spells and hard frosts. Winds were mainly in the west quarter and gales occurred on the 12/13th as a vigorous depression moved east across the centre of the country. The first two weeks of December were unsettled as a broad belt of low pressure extended across the North Atlantic to the Norwegian Sea. There was some heavy rain at times and the south-west winds reached gale force on occasions. The remainder of the month was then generally quiet with some fog.

Numbers of Great Crested Grebes at CVL continued to be dramatically down on last year. Two early Fulmars were at Sand Point on the 21 November with another on the 7 December, and also several Gannets at this locality with two on the 11 November, four on the 21st (one found dead the following day) and one on the 5 December. A Shag was here on the 14 December and a Bittern was present at CVL on the 5 November and 28 December. White-fronted Geese were early in our area with two flying east at Sand Bay on the 19 October and two groups of about 40 (no doubt this species) at Axbridge and Sandford on the 20th and 21 November whilst at the New Grounds 2000 were reported during the second half of December. Other geese here included a Bean from the end of November and single Barnacle, Brent and Pink-foot during the following month and there also was a record of a Brent at Berrow on the 25 November. The first Bewick's Swans arrived on the 19 October when there were six at Blagdon and two at Cheddar and the following month there were small numbers on the reservoirs (maximum 22 at Cheddar) and on the levels (maximum 26 on Tealham Moor), with counts in December including 180 at the Wildfowl Trust and 182 on Wet Moor following extensive flooding. Reported numbers of the commoner wildfowl wintering in our area showed few abnormalities, but according to the counts organised by the Wildfowl Trust, Mallard had a poor season. Pochard at Cheddar built up to 1000 at the end of November (rather more than in previous years) but this number soon dropped to about half by the middle of December. Other duck reported included up to 50 Gadwall at Cheddar, CVL and the Wildfowl Trust, 33 Pintail at Cheddar in November and 50 at the Wildfowl Trust during the following month and a maximum of 250 Shoveler at CVL. Diving duck included two Red-crested Pochard at Cheddar, up to eight Scaup here, a maximum of twelve Eiders off Brean Down with seven Common Scoters present on the 7 November. An adult male Velvet Scoter was at Cheddar on the 5 December with two immatures on the 22nd indicating a small number at our end of the channel. Two Long-tailed Ducks were present at CVL on the 10 December and later two at Barrow Gurney 20–22nd, one remaining to the end of the year. The first Goldeneye arrived on the 24 September and later there were up to 14 at Cheddar and CVL and seven on Wet Moor whilst three single Red-breasted Mergansers were seen and the first Goosander occurred on the 19 November with up to six at CVL at the end of the year, numbers being rather lower than recently.

Hen Harrier

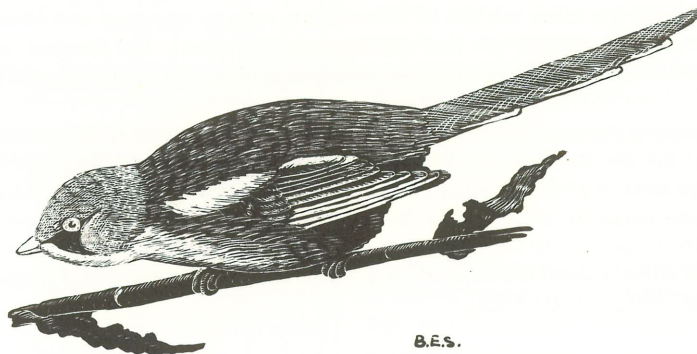


The only Hen Harrier reported during this period was one at Sand Point on the 4 November. Peregrines were noted regularly at Brean Down and the New Grounds and Merlins were observed at seven localities. Numbers of

Coot at Cheddar remained at about 2000 from the middle of September. A count of 160 Ringed Plover at Sand Bay at the end of November was a fairly high number for the time of the year. Up to 600 Golden Plover were recorded from both the Axe Estuary and Tealham and Tatham Moors while Lapwings here were estimated at 10000 in December and maximum numbers of Grey Plover occurred at Sand Bay with 52. Smaller numbers of Turnstone than usual were present at Chittening (only a maximum of 50) while Dunlin numbers indicated up to 20000 during the last week of November with numbers probably in excess of this during December and inland up to 83 at Cheddar and 200 at CVL with smaller numbers on the levels. Only low numbers of Knot (up to 120) recorded, some 67 Sanderling (56 at Sand Bay with 38 on the 23 November) and a count of 67 Black-tailed Godwits at the Axe Estuary. Of the scarcer waders there were some five Little Stints in November and also December including up to three at Sand Bay; one or two Purple Sandpipers at Brean Down and Severn Beach; four Curlew Sandpipers at Sand Bay on the 23 November — same date as one here last year; some 14 Ruffs scattered between the New Grounds, levels and the reservoirs; Spotted Redshanks on two days in November at Sand Bay and in December at Steart; a few Greenshanks lingered longer than usual; at least 14 Green Sandpipers; the usual wintering Common Sandpipers at Sea Mills were reported in both months and records also came from Barrow Gurney and CVL; one or two Bar-tailed Godwits inland; only three Woodcock; seven Jack Snipe and finally four Avocets at Berrow at the end of October with surprisingly a similar number inland at CVL on the 20 November.

A Grey Phalarope was present at CVL 10th–15 December. At Cheddar there were two Little Gulls, an adult Kittiwake on the 5 December and a very active Little Auk on the 12 November. 11 Kittiwakes were also off Sand Point at the end of that month. Three single Short-eared Owls were present at Sand Bay, Sand Point and Steart. The first Water Pipits came in during the last few days of October and then they were regularly reported both at Cheddar and CVL with up to 18 at the last mentioned locality. There was one Blackcap in November with another three in the following month and at least five Chiffchaffs including two at CVL at the end of December.

A probable Firecrest was heard at Berrow on the 9 December, the only Black Redstart reported was at Chittening in December, they appear to have become scarcer in our area of late, and some high numbers of Fieldfares



Bearded Tit

and Redwings were present early in the winter but most appeared to move on. Following the irruption of Bearded Tits in the autumn there were still a number in our area with up to fifteen at Berrow, eight at CVL and one or two at the New Grounds and Steart. Snow Buntings were scarce with the only records coming from Sand Bay where there were up to three. There was a large concentration of Brambling at Claverton Down with numbers reaching 300 in both months and Siskins were well represented with groups of 70–80 being seen at Litton, Vassall's Park and Wrington Vale. A few Crossbills were still around following their irruption with one to three birds at Brean Down, Brandon Hill (Bristol) and Sandford with up to 20 at Stock Hill. Lastly Hawfinches were reported from their usual local areas at Leigh Woods and Monkton Combe.



## THE ORNITHOLOGICAL ATLAS FOR SOMERSET

by D.E. Ladhams, Atlas Organiser for Somerset

The Ornithological Atlas being compiled for the British Trust for Ornithology shows the distribution of different species breeding or suspected of breeding in the British Isles. It covered the five seasons from 1968 to 1972 and was based on the ten kilometre square grid as used on modern Ordnance Survey maps. Each species was recorded under one of three main "Categories of Certainty" (basically, proven, probable or possible) and the aim of the observers was to note the presence of a species and to improve its category over the period of the project, i.e., from possible to probable to proven breeding. It should be noted that the actual numbers of breeding birds were not considered as it was not a population study.

Somerset, excluding greater Bristol, comprises 42 ten kilometre squares, each of which was investigated to determine the number of breeding species. The responsibility for the squares on the edge of Somerset where they overlap with Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon was settled by agreement with the other counties' organisers. One square for which Somerset accepted the responsibility, contains parts of two other counties. It can also be seen that some squares comprise more water than land, and (usually) correspondingly fewer nesting species. The only land showing in square 26 for instance, is Steep Holm and Flat Holm (the latter being officially part of Monmouthshire).

The first two years were spent in recording the commoner species — Starling, Robin, Blackbird and so on, with the help of regular bird-watchers many of whom, incidentally, then took on the responsibility for individual squares. During this initial period we also contacted other interested observers, schools and private estate owners as potential helpers in the less accessible areas. In the middle years many rumours and reports of 'possibles' and 'probables' were followed up and expeditions arranged by myself with the help of the Bristol Ornithological Club to particular squares and small areas which had been inadequately covered. In some cases the original observers could not, for various reasons, continue to contribute, and therefore had to be replaced. In the final year, 1972, the project was pursued to its limits and a drive was made on species which were thought likely to be breeders but not so far recorded. Of course, towards the close the law of diminishing returns operated and few fresh species were logged. The exact location of nesting by rarer or unusual species was kept secret. The greatest care was taken not to disturb any nests and indeed, it was often possible to prove breeding success without even seeing the nest.

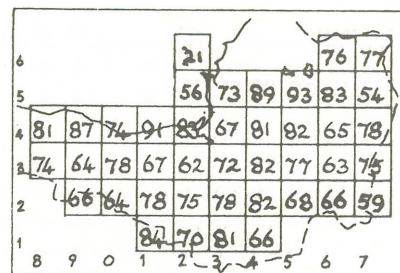
During the survey all the winters were mild so several species were increasing their numbers after the decimation of the severe 1962/3 winter and consequently widened their breeding habitats. As to rarer species which might or could have bred in Somerset, Corncrake, Woodlark, Crossbill and Common Sandpiper were certainly present but gave no proof of breeding. A report was received of Firecrest breeding in the Exmoor area, but this appeared to the Organiser to be of doubtful authenticity and has therefore been rejected. This is unfortunate since the record has already been mentioned by L.A. Batten in his paper on 'The colonization of England by the Firecrest' (*Brit. Birds* 66 (1973): 159–166).

From the records a map for each species has been compiled to show the breeding distribution in Somerset. In the maps, pages 13–24 the *proved* breeding by a species is represented by a large dot, and the *probability*, e.g. through the presence of a pair holding a territory or nest building, is represented by a smaller dot. Any less certain records have not been included. In all, 125 species were shown to have bred in the 42 squares. Square 55 had the highest number, 93 (see map), and this is not surprising in view of the diversity of habitats there: from Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes to the high Mendip plateau. Square 14 with the next highest, 91 species, is perhaps more surprising since it comprises mainly sea!

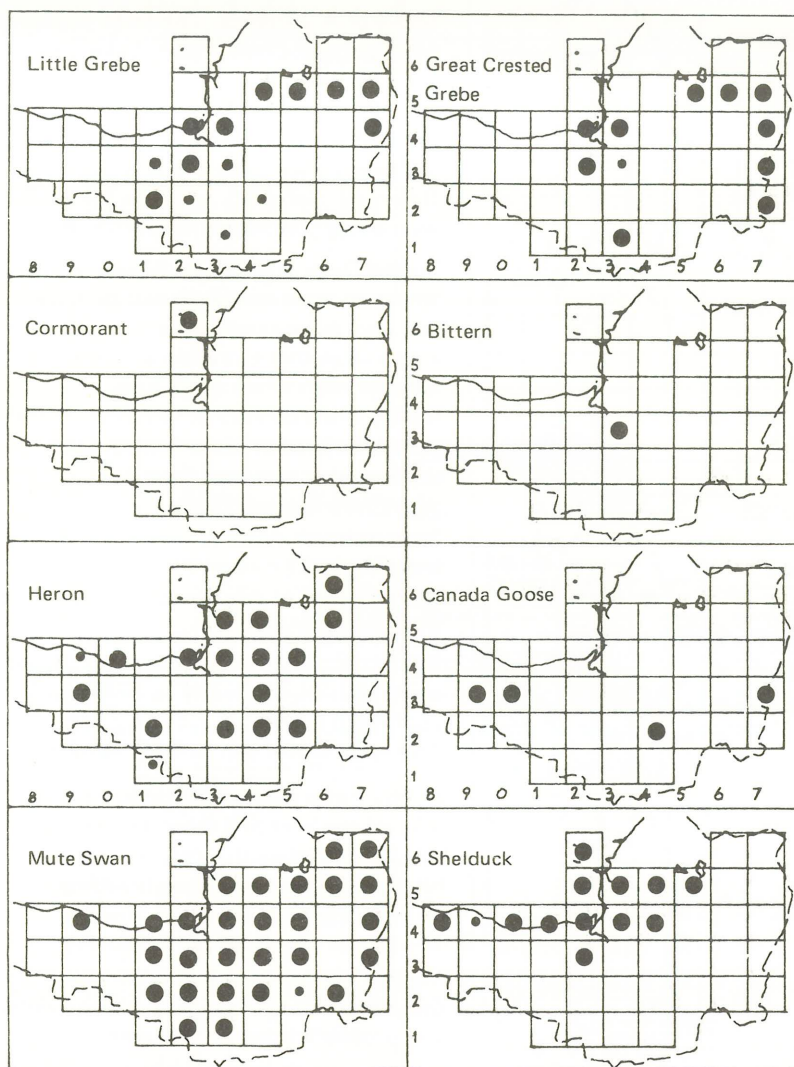
Not the least interesting result of taking part in the project was the occasional unusual incident, sometimes exciting, sometimes amusing. They included an Osprey flushed from a disused railway embankment near Catcott in midsummer (it had probably been hunting over the adjacent wide drains); two young Badgers taking a midday walk in a field; a pair of Hobbies who tried to 'see off' the visitors in their territory and Foxes and Badgers sharing the same sett in a wood strictly reserved for game!

This map shows the number of species proved to breed in each square in Somerset. The numbers along the base and on the left hand side of the map refer to the first number of the north-south and east-west lines that fall at the bottom left hand corner of each ten kilometre square of the National Grid. The prefix for this area, ST, has been omitted in the text.

(All maps prepared by the author).



Some hundreds of record cards were sent in by a large number of observers, ranging from expert naturalists and students to farmers' wives and school children, too numerous to mention by name but to whom the warmest thanks are due. I am also grateful to J.T.R. Sharrock, the National Organiser, for his permission to publish these records. He is at present collating the results for the whole of Britain and preparing these for publication in the near future.



Little Grebe *Podiceps ruficollis* and Great Crested Grebe *P. cristatus*. Restricted mainly to the low lying lakes and reservoirs where they breed in fair numbers, particularly at Chew Valley Lake, except when water level very low. Absent from higher ground (Mendip and Exmoor) and surprisingly much of the low lying moorland drains. Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Steep Holm was only breeding locality in the course of this survey. Tree roosting and some spring display has been seen at Blagdon Lake and Chew Valley Lake.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*. Most areas of marsh and *Phragmites* in the area are either too small or over disturbed otherwise more pairs may breed.

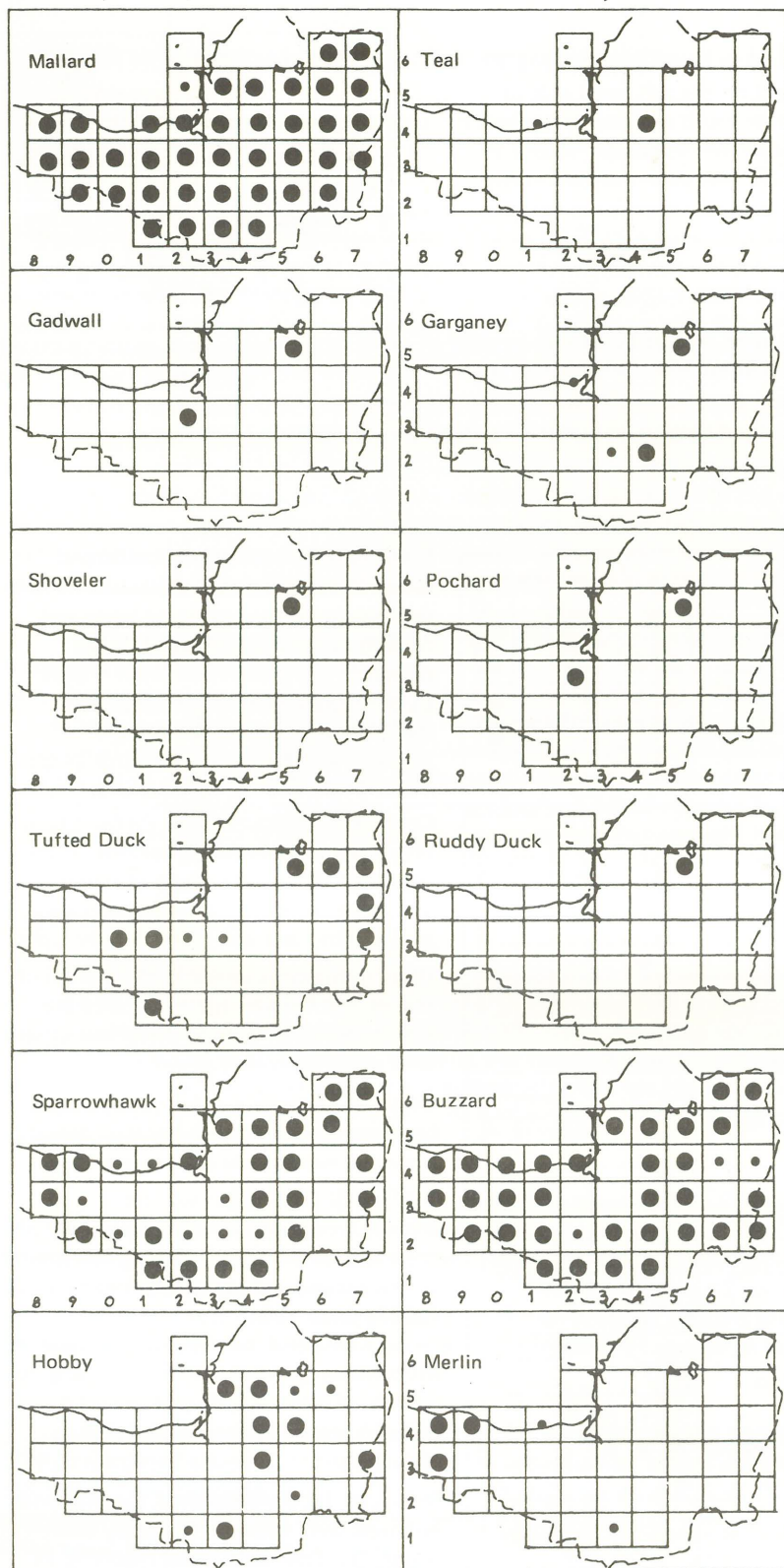
Heron *Ardea cinerea*. An established breeding species in well known colonies. Sporadic nesting has occurred away from these colonies.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*. All of these records were new during the period of the survey with only one other record (1957) since 1901.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*. Present in a variety of wet habitats and absent from only 13 squares, most of these being high ground.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*. Coastal birds will nest well inland often away from water, but does also breed regularly at Chew Valley Lake.





Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Recorded in all but three squares and thinly spread over many others but common particularly where preserved by shooting interests.

Teal *A. crecca*. The only confirmed breeding is from the low lying peat moors where a few pairs breed regularly.

Gadwall *A. strepera*. The breeding concentration at Chew Valley Lake has built up since the late 1950's (soon after it was opened), the other square representing a more isolated record, but may reflect an increasing local population.

Garganey *A. querquedula*. Only a few pairs but Somerset is on edge of European range.

Shoveler *A. clypeata*. The small breeding population at Chew Valley Lake is isolated from the main British breeding areas to the east and north.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*. A few pairs breed at Chew Valley Lake and Durleigh Reservoir. Generally scarce in the south-west being commoner in south-east England.

Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*. Breeds intermittently on most reservoirs and park-lakes and very occasionally on some rivers with a very large concentration at Chew Valley Lake in years when water high.

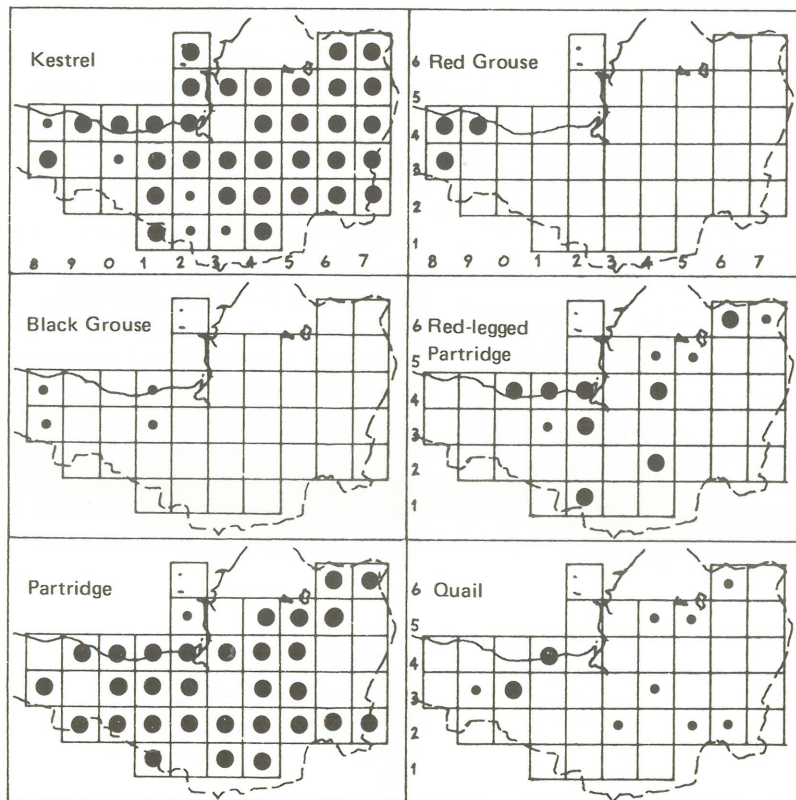
Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*. A few pairs have bred at Chew Valley Lake since escapes occurred from exotic collections around 1960.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*. Confirmed breeding in 23 squares and only absent from 11 (out of 42). Always more common than sightings suggest.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*. Only absent from seven squares, but many squares with confirmed breeding have few pairs. This large raptor can be very inconspicuous.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. Somerset is on limit of the breeding range but may be spreading westwards. Very elusive but bred in seven squares. One breeding pair detected 10 years ago, possibly 10–15 pairs revealed by this survey.

Merlin *F. columbarius*. Bred in three squares covering the high Exmoor heaths and probably in two other areas.



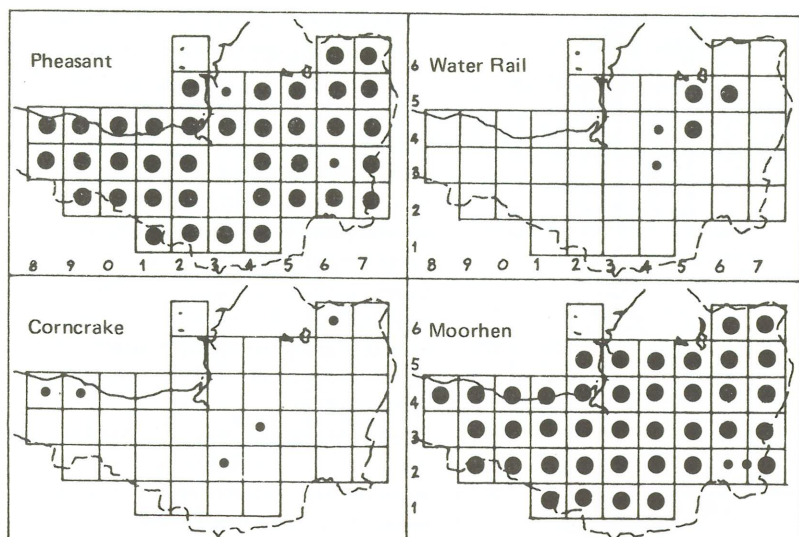
Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*. A numerous species but widely spaced apart in some squares (most birds of prey require a fairly large territory). Surprisingly absent from four squares. Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*. (Introduced last century). Distribution is restricted to suitable habitat on Exmoor.

Black Grouse *Lyrurus tetrix*. Present on Exmoor and Quantocks where they probably breed. Numbers have been decreasing over many years.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*. Strangely discontinuous distribution. Somerset is on western limit of British range.

Partridge *Perdix perdix*. As well as apparently not breeding in 11 squares was very widely spaced out over all the remaining areas. A declining species.

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. Almost certainly bred in many squares where heard calling. Somerset is one of the few counties in southern Britain where these elusive birds breed fairly regularly.



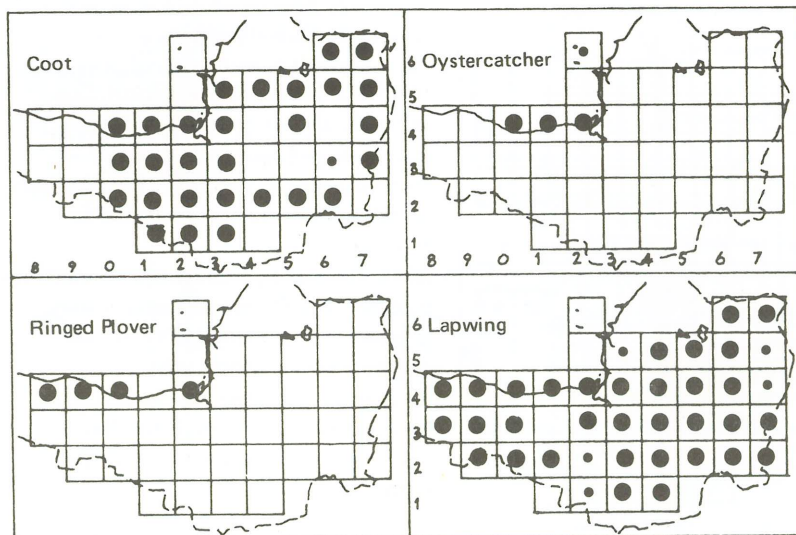
Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*. Well distributed with absences from only three squares. Plentiful in some areas where reared as a game bird.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*. Proven breeding in three squares and probably in two others but possibly often overlooked.

Corncrake *Crex crex*. Recorded in five squares during the survey but not proved to breed. This once common visitor has now become very rare. Mechanical cutting of mowing grass gives little chance to eggs or young.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*. Absent from only two squares and common over the whole area breeding at every suitable small area of water.



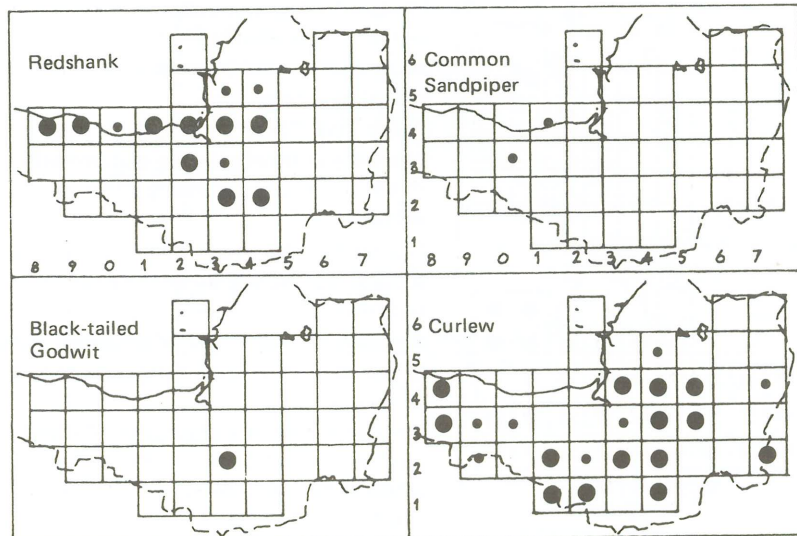
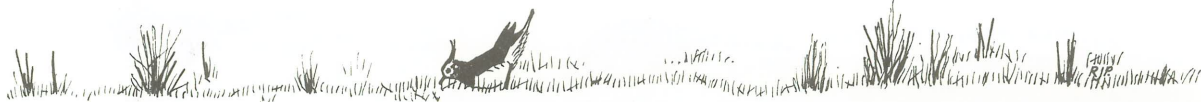


Coot *Fulica atra*. Bred in 28 squares and fairly well distributed on various pieces of water both large and small. Absent mainly from high ground.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*. Always a local breeding bird as far as Somerset is concerned. A few pairs were confined to a small length of coast line.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. Like the Oystercatcher this bird probably suffers from increased disturbance but nevertheless was located in four coastal squares during the survey.

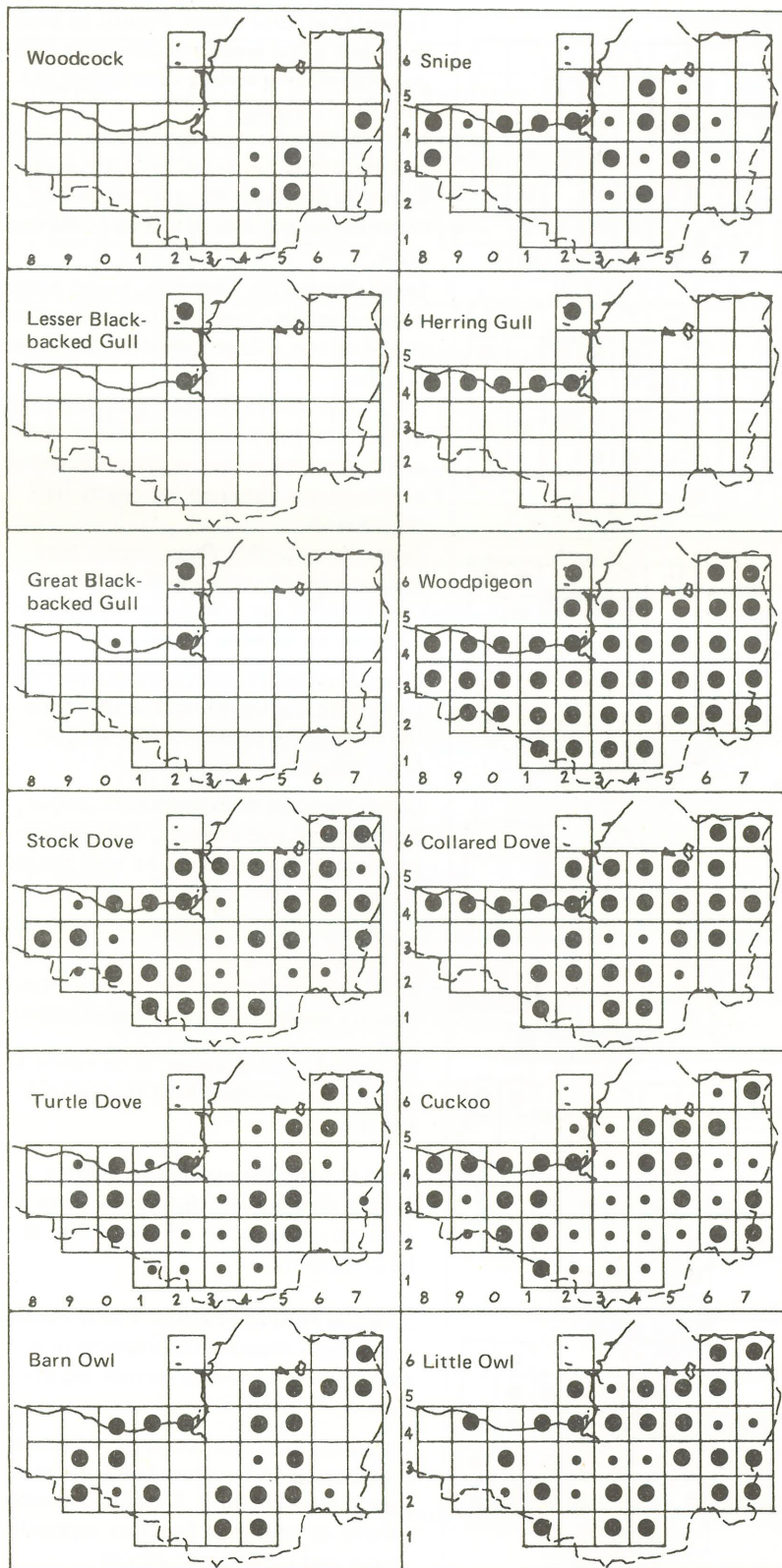
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. Absent from four squares and well distributed in some areas. A general decrease in southern Britain and this has been apparent in several places throughout the county.



Redshank *Tringa totanus*. A relatively new breeding species (since about 1900) and not yet freely nesting in much of the south-west. Proved to breed in nine squares near the coast or on the levels. Common Sandpiper *T. hypoleucos*. Last positive breeding in Somerset 1931 but several pairs were recorded during the survey in suitable habitats.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*. A few pairs of this rare British breeding bird probably breed most years. The continued success will depend on strict conservation.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*. Bred successfully in 14 squares during the survey both on high ground and on the levels where first bred regularly only since the 1920's.



Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*. Local in south-west England. The three squares where breeding was proved are all well-wooded.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. Locally distributed and in spite of drainage schemes proved to breed in 11 squares mainly on the levels but also on Exmoor.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* and Herring Gull *L. argentatus*. Herring by far the commonest breeding gull. Main colonies on the Holms and Steart Island. Lesser Black-backed is a partial migrant which is 'crowded out' by Herring who absorb the most favourable nest sites early in season.

Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*. Small breeding population attendant on the other gull colonies but far less numerous.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*. Very abundant with breeding records from every square.

Stock Dove *C. oenas*. Fairly well distributed with positive breeding evidence from 25 widely scattered squares and probable in a further nine.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*. Since the first appeared in the county in 1962 has increased steadily and has reached pest proportions in some parts. Absent in a few areas mainly on high ground.

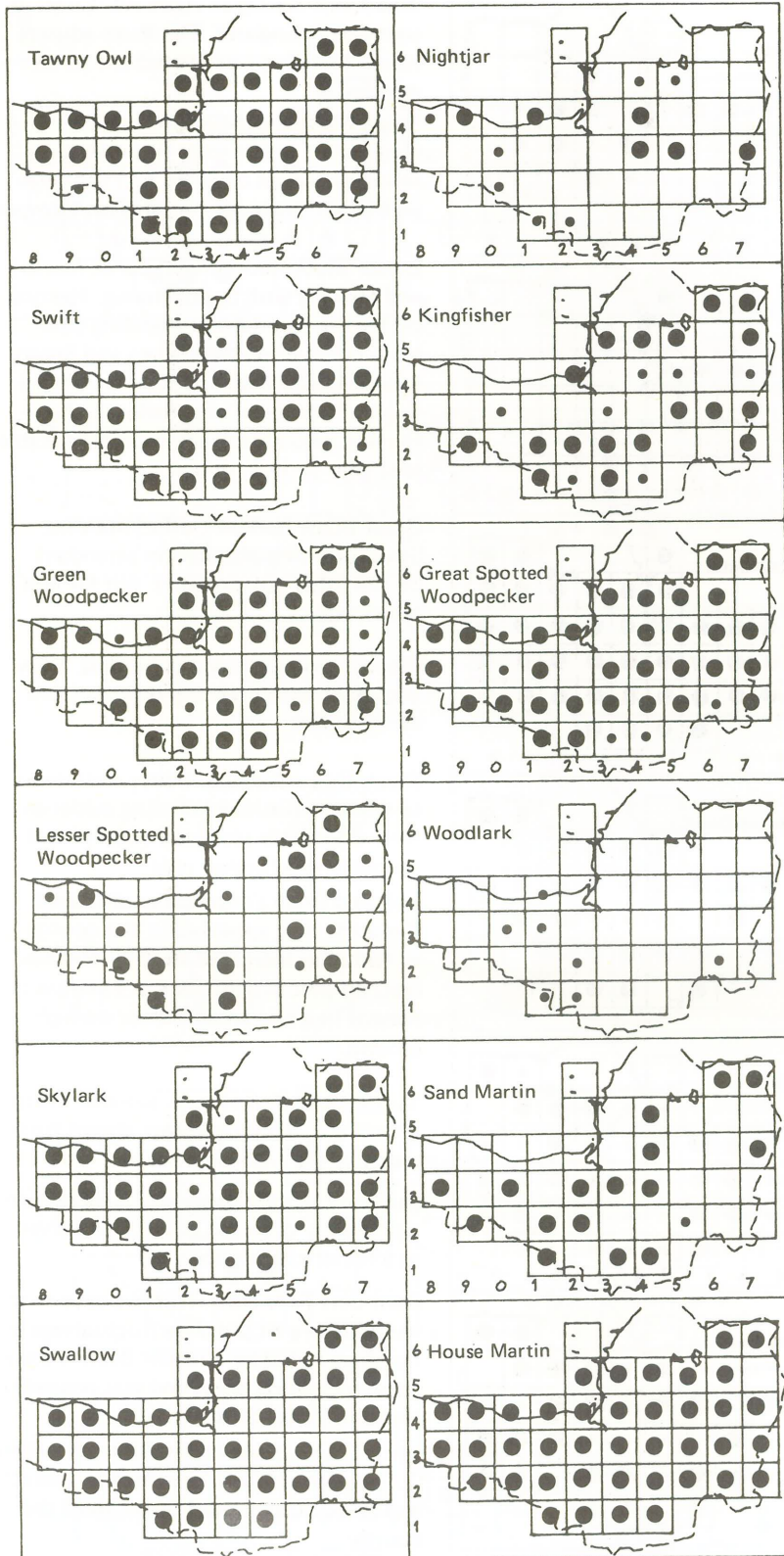
Turtle Dove *S. turtur*. A summer visitor breeding in 15 squares but absent from much of the highest ground.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. Fairly numerous and mainly detected during the survey as a fostered fledgling.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. This is a species that has a history of previous fluctuations in numbers but after a recent decline seems to be increasing again and was proved to breed in 20 squares.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*. Since reaching Somerset in 1907 is now locally common and is well distributed throughout the county.





Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*. Proved to breed in all but a few areas and generally common elsewhere being widely distributed in a variety of habitats.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. A difficult bird to prove breeding and has shown a general decrease. Possibly caused by disturbance and loss of habitat on a local scale.

Swift *Apus apus*. Common, being noted in most squares breeding not only widely in towns and villages but also in isolated houses.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*. Breeding status of this bird has probably changed little and during the survey positive breeding evidence was obtained for nearly half the squares.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*. Not scarce being relatively well distributed over most of the area surveyed. No signs of breeding in three squares only.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*. Similar breeding distribution to the Green Woodpecker but in rather fewer squares.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *D. minor*. Rather local and a patchy distribution with most records from the well timbered areas in the east of the county.

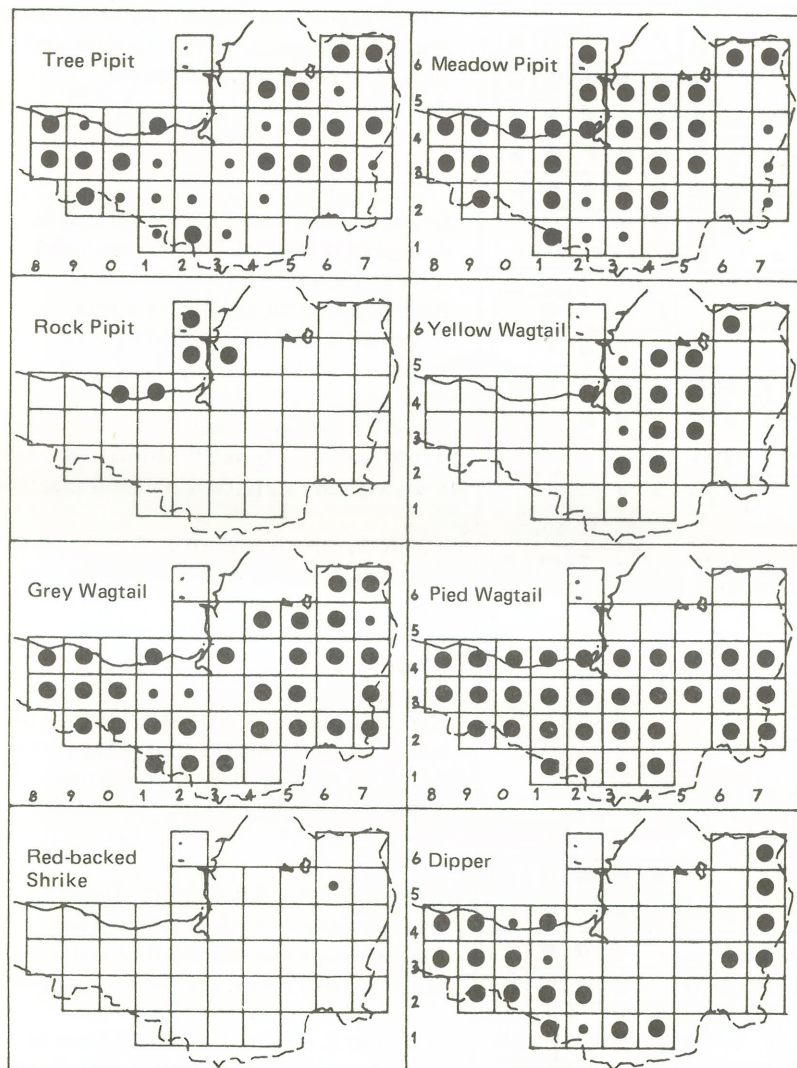
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*. Since decrease in 1963 has generally become very scarce in its limited distribution. Present but no positive evidence of breeding obtained.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*. A common and widespread breeding bird throughout the county.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*. Rather a patchy distribution but where there are suitable nest sites all colonies seem to be prospering.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Fairly common and widely distributed breeding in every square except the one containing the Holms.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*. Similar distribution to Swallow being a widespread breeding bird. Nests in a greater variety of sites than Swallow especially towns and other urban places.



Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*. Seems to be absent for much of mid-Somerset and locally distributed in wooded areas to the west and east of the county.

Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis*. Surprisingly unrecorded in 10 squares and bred in a variety of habitats. Possibly is decreasing.

Rock Pipit *A. spinoletta*. Confined to the coast and only in five squares. Surprisingly absent from the west coast squares.

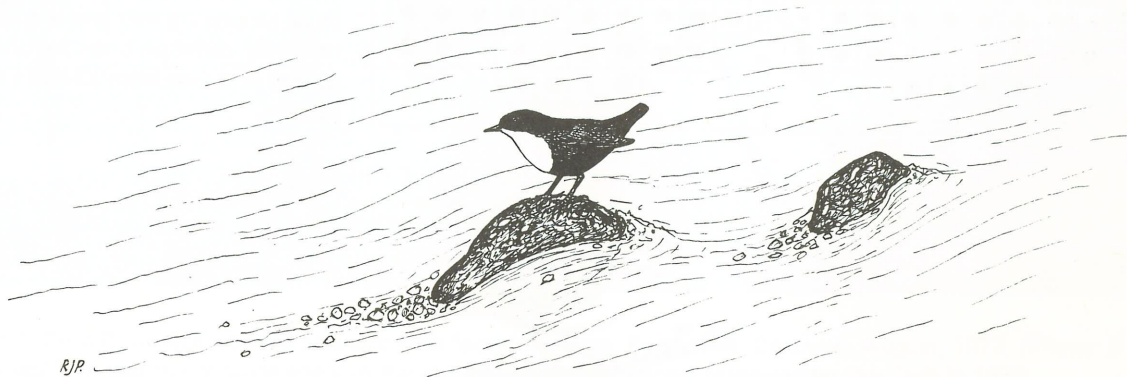
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*. Is on the edge of its breeding range in the British Isles and most observations come from mid-Somerset. Recently thought to be decreasing.

Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*. Fairly well distributed and present in most squares where there is any suitable water.

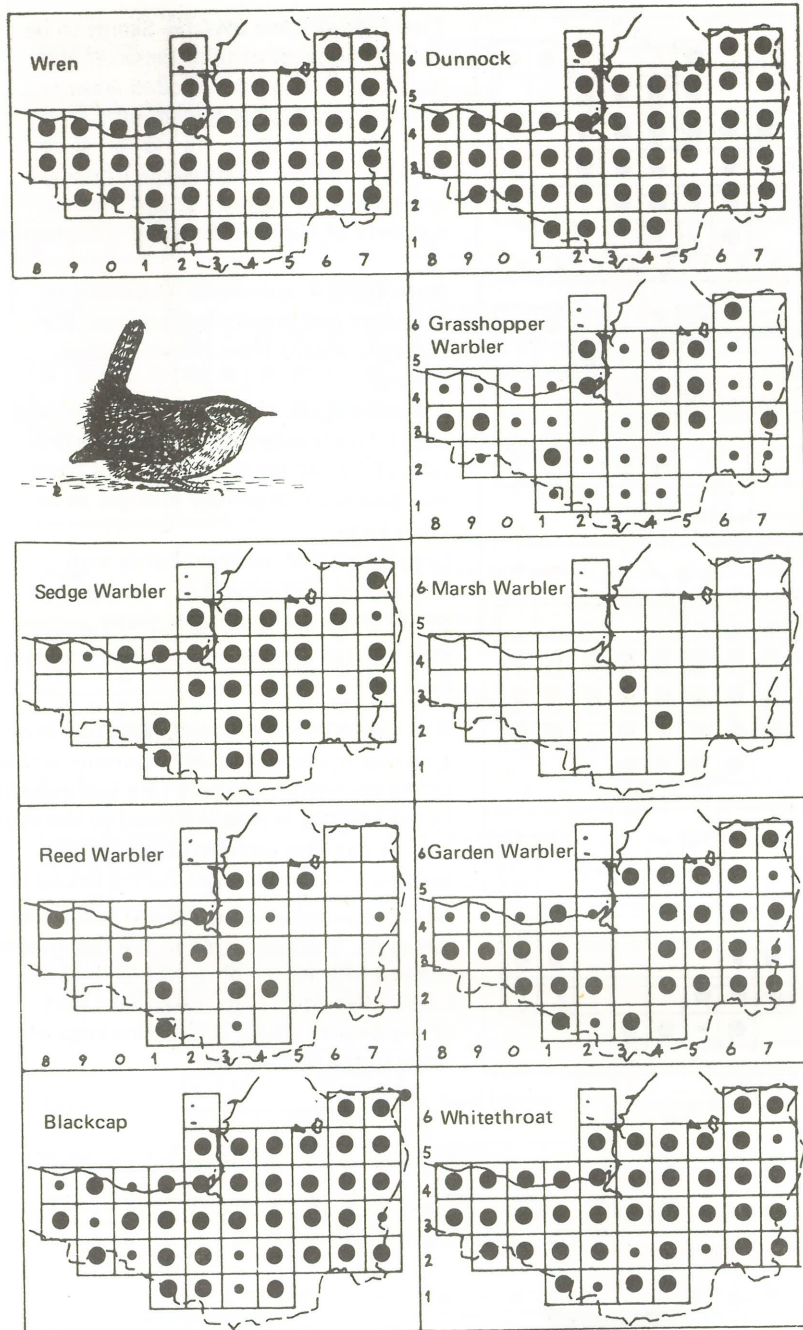
Pied Wagtail *M. alba*. A common breeding bird.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*. Once a comparatively widespread summer visitor to the county is now very rare and elsewhere in the country is now confined to the south-east. A pair was seen occasionally in a suitable breeding habitat during the survey.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*. Absent from mid-Somerset. Most occurred in the fast running streams of Exmoor. Proved breeding in a further five squares in the eastern part of the county where it is on the edge of range in the British Isles.







Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and Dunnock *Prunella modularis*. Very abundant and proved to breed in every square.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*. Proved to breed in 13 widely scattered squares and probably in a further 21. Both together no doubt give a true reflection of the birds breeding distribution.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Fairly well distributed breeding well where there was any suitable marshland vegetation.

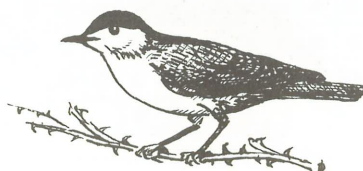
Marsh Warbler *A. palustris*. A very scarce and local breeding bird in some parts of southern Britain and it has always been local and rare as far as Somerset is concerned.

Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus*. Not as widespread as Sedge Warbler but fairly common where its primary habitat of tall reeds found. Somerset is on edge of British range.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*. Slightly more limited in its distribution than Blackcap but well represented with only a few squares where breeding not proved.

Blackcap *S. atricapilla*. Absent from only one square, more widespread than Garden Warbler.

Whitethroat *S. communis*. Despite the crash in its numbers during 1969 seems to be recovering well and is another relatively common breeding bird with proved breeding from all but a few squares.

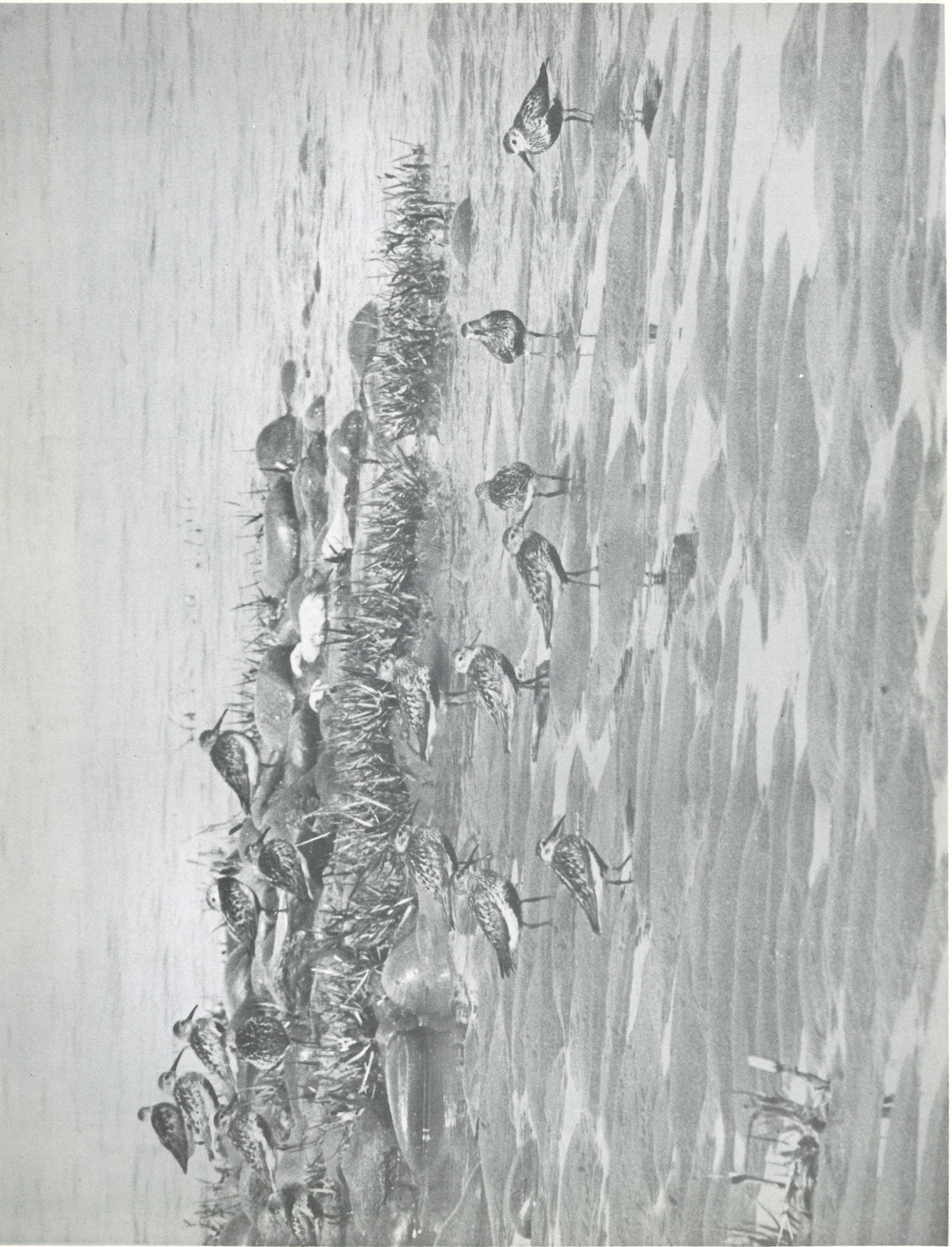






**Plate 1.** Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* with food for young, Porthmere, Cornwall, August, 1972. (Photo: B.W. Thomas) This was the winning entry in the photographic competition organised by the Club in 1972.







Plates 2 and 3. Above, Dunlin *Calidris alpina* at high tide, Steart, Somerset, July 1971. Below, Dunlin and Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Constantine Bay, Cornwall, August 1971. (Photos: B.W. Thomas)

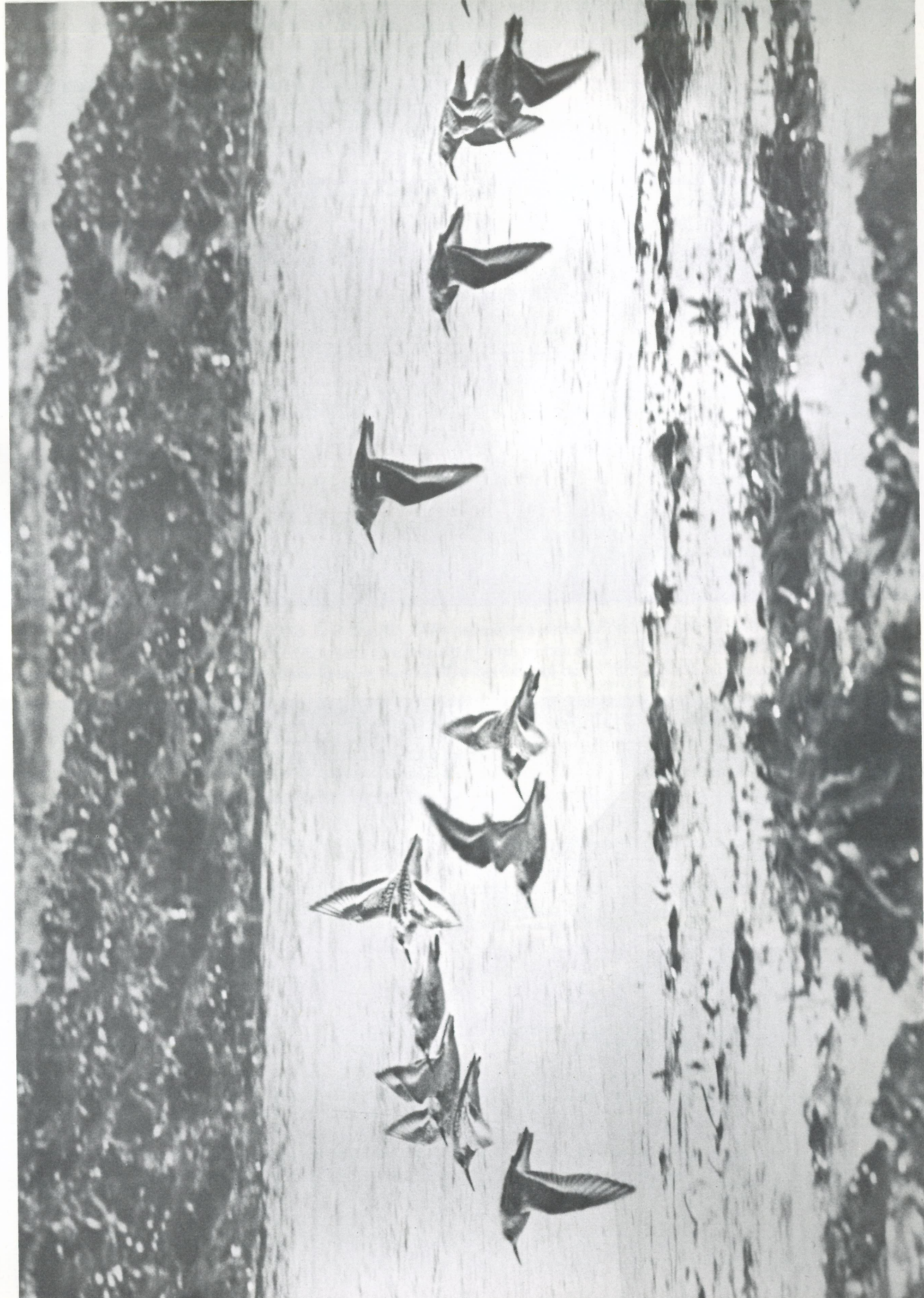


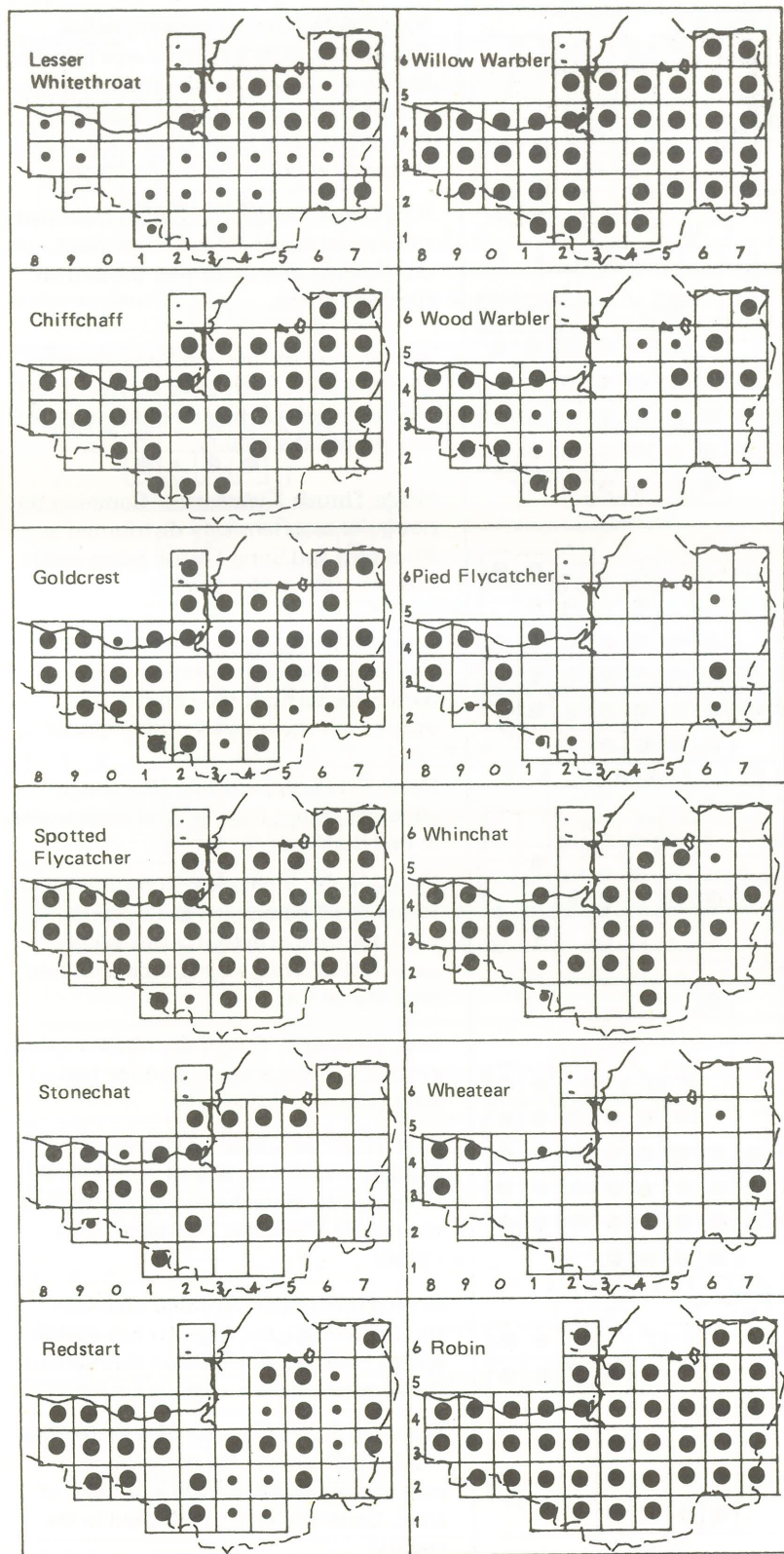




Plate 4. Above, Berrow Marsh, looking north, November 1973. (Photo: B.E. Slade) The mud flats and sea are to the left and part of the extensive sand dunes can be seen in the distance (pages 30–35). Below, Scrub Jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens* covering a pea-nut that it had just buried with a small piece of earth (page 37). (Photo: J.B. & S. Bottomley)







Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca*. Considered fairly common but breeding only proved in 12 squares mainly in northern half of county. Distribution of thick bushy hedgerows probably a factor. Main breeding area is south-east England. Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Very abundant but surprisingly absent from two squares in mid-Somerset.

Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. Perhaps not as common as Willow Warbler but still bred extensively in the majority of the squares.

Wood Warbler *P. sibilatrix*. Main breeding area in the west (Exmoor) and another small population in the south-east. More dependant on deciduous woodlands than either Chiffchaff or Willow Warbler.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*. Widely distributed particularly among conifer plantations breeding in almost every square.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*. Mainly dependant on habitat of open woodland especially where oaks are dominant and these conditions exist around Exmoor.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*. Fairly numerous with positive breeding records from all but two squares.

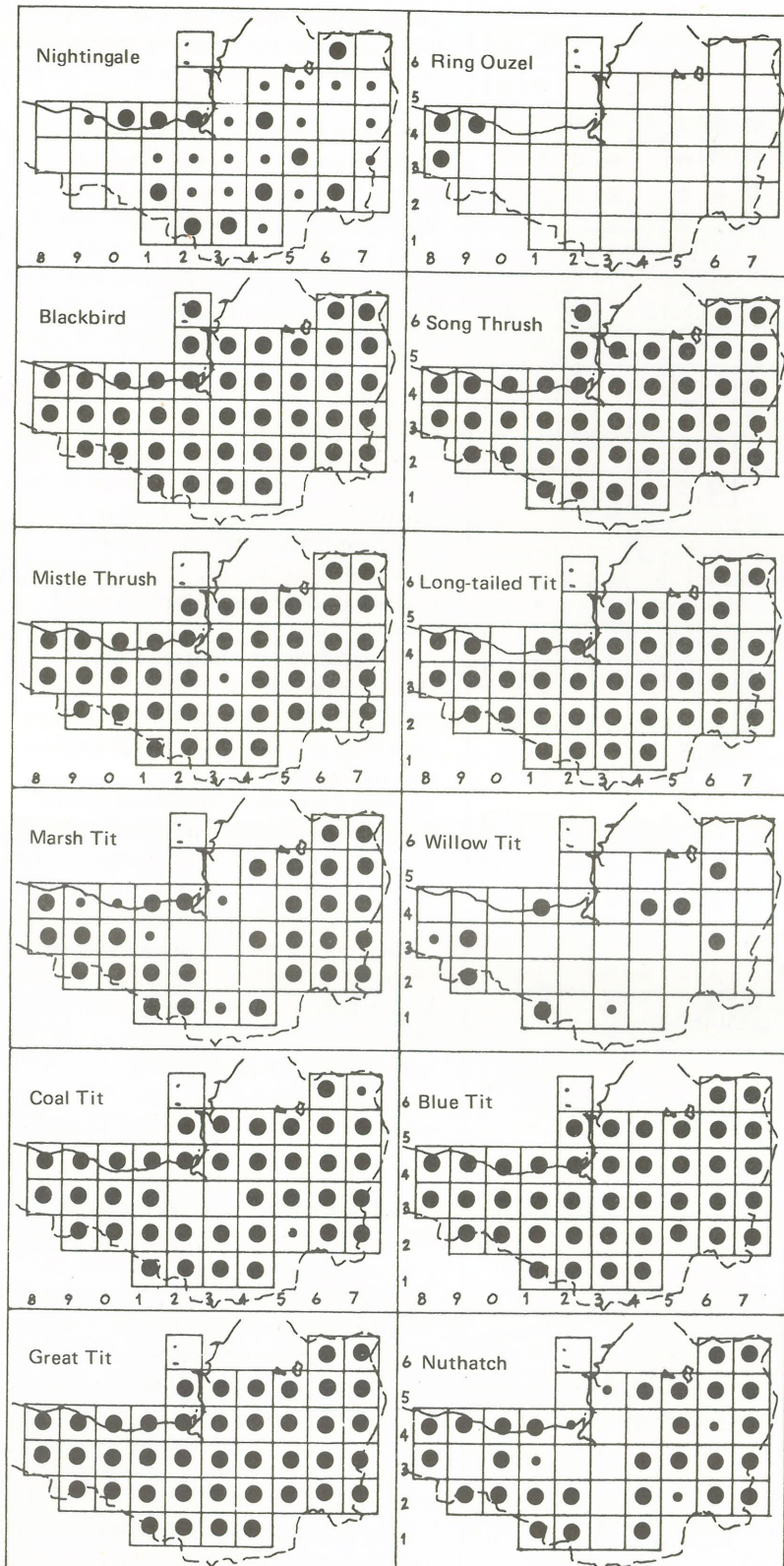
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*. Numbers have perhaps declined but breeding proved in over half the squares. Main breeding numbers of this species in the British Isles occur on high ground to the north of Somerset.

Stonechat *S. torquata*. More confined to coastal areas than Whinchat and far less numerous. Proved to breed in 15 squares.

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. A local breeding bird in Somerset for some time its main breeding areas being in highland Britain. Three squares in the west used and surprisingly two others well away from this traditional area. Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Scattered distribution throughout the county and in a variety of habitats both on high ground and on the levels. Maybe decreasing on levels due to cutting of old timber.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. An abundant breeding bird nesting in every square.





Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*. Considered to be a fairly scarce breeding bird in the West Country and notably absent from much of west Somerset. Proved breeding in 11 widely scattered squares and probably in 17 others.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*. Confined to Exmoor region where a few pairs breed. Main distribution in the British Isles well north.

Blackbird *T. merula* and Song Thrush *T. philomelos*. Both birds very common with an extensive breeding distribution throughout the county.

Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus*. Common but not quite as extensively distributed as Blackbird and Song Thrush being rather scarce on some high ground.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*. This bird is another with a widespread distribution throughout the county, few squares not showing records of breeding.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*. Not scarce although absent from several areas mainly in mid-Somerset.

Willow Tit *P. montanus*. Since the survey found to be commoner than previously with breeding proved in eight widely scattered squares. May still be confused with Marsh Tit.

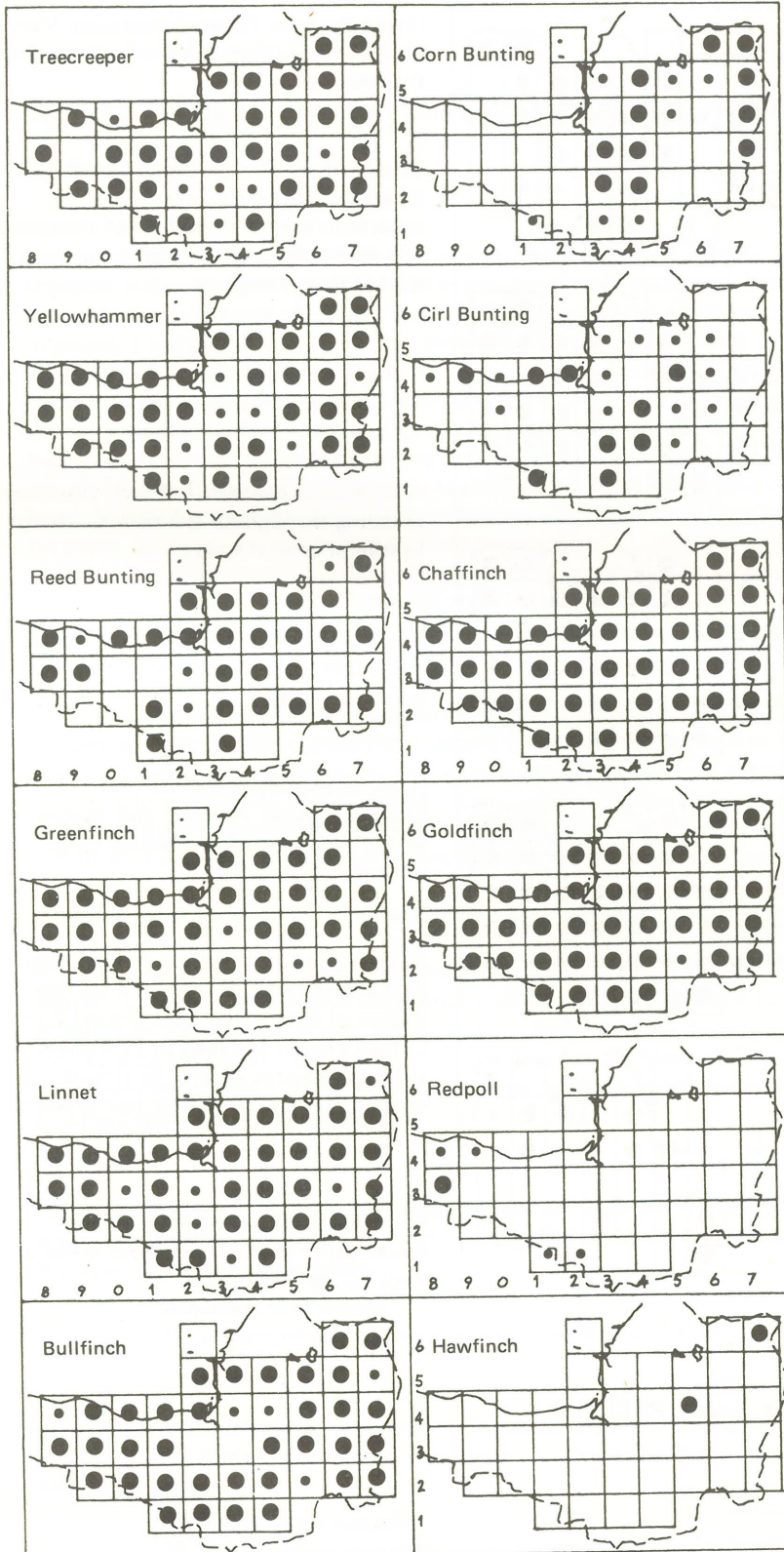
Coal Tit *P. ater*. A well distributed species present in most areas except for two squares in mid-Somerset.

Blue Tit *P. caeruleus*. Very common being found in a variety of habitats. Absent only from the square containing the Holms where has previously bred (1956).

Great Tit *P. major*. Another common species and like the Blue Tit has a widespread breeding distribution throughout the county.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*. Mainly requires old deciduous trees for nesting and this may explain absence from a number of areas. Generally well distributed in the county.





Tree Creeper *Certhia familiaris*. Slightly better distributed than Nuthatch and bred where there was suitable timber. May have been overlooked.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*. Main breeding areas in the British Isles are all down the east side. Breeding confirmed in 11 squares and noticeably absent from west Somerset.

Yellowhammer *E. citrinella*. Located in all but two squares and generally well distributed.

Cirl Bunting *E. cirlus*. A scarce breeding bird in the British Isles being on the edge of its range and now restricted to southern England. Breeding proved in nine squares.

Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus*. In recent years has increasingly occupied drier habitats to nest and this is evident from the map where only 10 widely scattered squares gave no record of breeding.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*. Very abundant and widespread.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris* and Goldfinch *C. carduelis*. Both showing a similar distribution breeding widely throughout the county. Surprisingly Goldfinch were proved to breed in more squares.

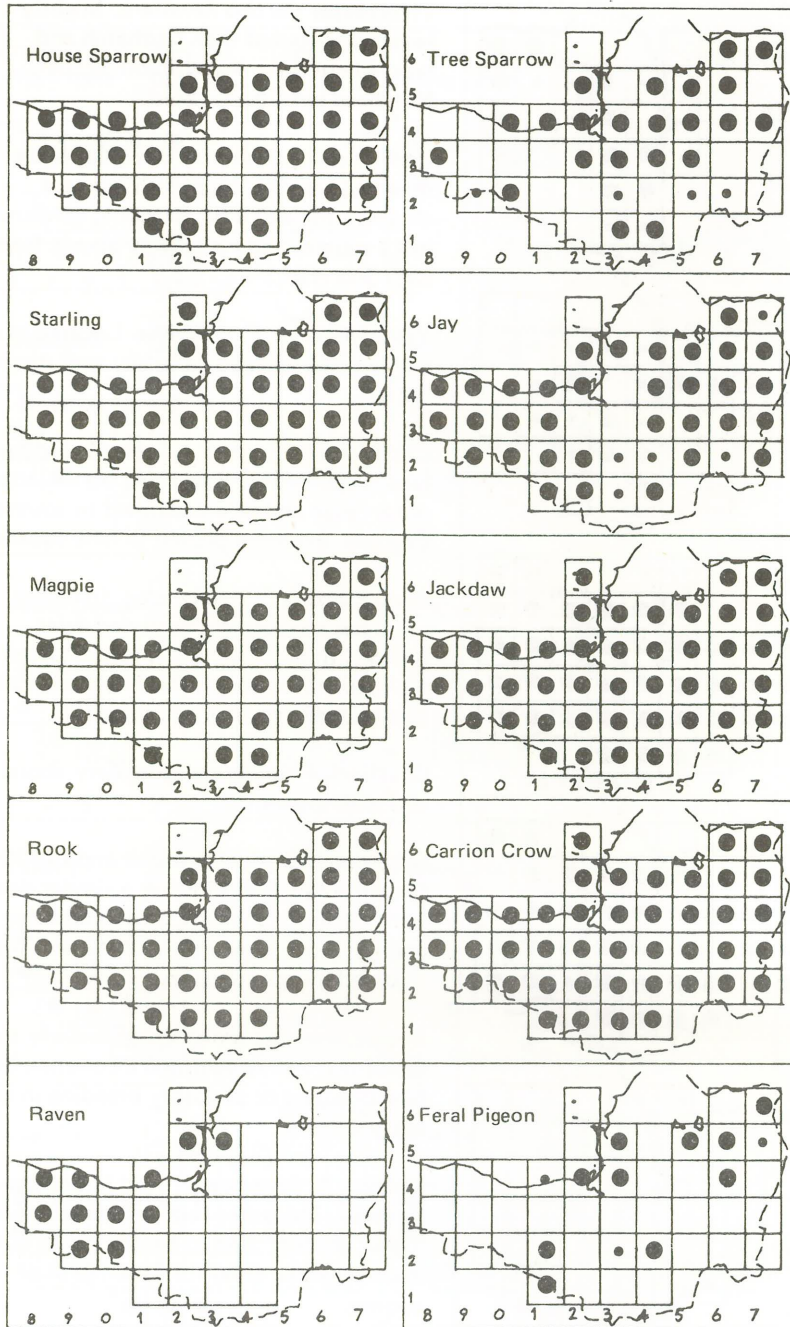
Linnet *Acanthis cannabina*. Similarly to the Goldfinch and Greenfinch a common breeding bird breeding or probably breeding in almost every square.

Redpoll *A. flammea*. Proved in one square on Exmoor. The other four probables are all on higher ground. Said to be increasing but the main breeding areas still well north of the county.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Well distributed in the county breeding fairly commonly.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. A local breeding bird over most of England and is extremely secretive during the breeding season. Proved to breed in two squares only.





House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Very abundant breeding universally throughout the county.

Tree Sparrow *P. montanus*. Locally distributed with breeding proved in most squares in the northern half of the county and noticeably absent from large areas in the south and west.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. Extremely abundant breeding in every square.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*. Fairly numerous breeding throughout the county except in several central squares.

Magpie *Pica pica* and Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*. Both species common and bred extensively.

Rook *C. frugilegus* and Carrion Crow *C. corone*. Another two species with a very extensive breeding range throughout the county.

Raven *C. corax*. A typical bird of highland and remoter areas with a concentration of sites in the west around Exmoor. Overall proved to breed in 12 squares although squares 25 and 35 almost certainly refer to the same pair breeding at different ends of Brean Down!

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*. These descendants of the Rock Dove breed at most villages and towns

## THE INCIDENCE OF ALBINISM AND MELANISM IN GREBES

by Bernard King

On 11 January, 1971, at Durleigh Reservoir in Somerset, I observed a Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* with a completely white head except for a small dark mark behind the eye. As it was the first grebe I had ever seen with aberrant plumage I was stimulated to look at the literature on the incidence of albinism and melanism in grebes. I consulted the well-known paper by Bryan L. Sage (1962) in which he describes this phenomena in British birds. He shows that albinism in grebes has rarely been recorded in this country; in fact up to 1962, only on six occasions, and melanism not at all. The species involved were Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*\* and Red-necked Grebe *P. griseigena*. Even allowing for the fact that many species of grebe normally have white areas in their plumages, especially in winter, it seems surprising that the one I came across was the first Great Crested Grebe recorded for the British Isles with truly albinistic features although a probable leucistic one had been recorded earlier (see list below). I cannot help but feel that many such grebes are overlooked and Sage is apparently of the same opinion. I quote from his paper (although he is referring to birds in general): '.....The study of heterochrosis or colour variations in the plumages of birds is a subject the majority of field ornithologists either ignore entirely or regard with only mild curiosity.....'. This was rather born out at Durleigh because the bird in question was performing a long sequence of food-seeking dives which kept it below the surface for periods of about eighteen seconds or less. In consequence it was seen only sporadically by some observers and the character I have referred to was missed by most of them.

Sometime after my visit to the Somerset reservoir I forwarded the details to Bryan Sage for his comments. Consequently he readily agreed that I should prepare this paper and so he kindly sent all the known reports at his disposal of albinism and melanism in grebes, including those from abroad. A number of these records have appeared individually in scattered literature and Weller (1959) mentions fifteen of them but only in summary form. So, to stimulate interest, I venture to bring these together for the first time to form not only an historical reference to be consulted, but also to be used as a guide in the event of unusually plumaged grebes being discovered in the future.

Of the eighteen or so species of grebe at present in the World six are on the British List (British Ornithologists' Union, 1971). They are: Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*, Little Grebe, Black-necked Grebe *P. nigricollis*, Slavonian Grebe *P. auritus*, Red-necked Grebe and Great Crested Grebe. These six and one other, the Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis* are the only species that have been recorded throughout the World with albinistic or melanistic features, totalling 27 or 28 birds in all. The summarized World distributions for the British species were extracted from the B.O.U. List. That for the Western Grebe was summarized from Pearson (1917). I have not attempted to make any distinction between birds described as "albino" or "white" but have merely used the original descriptions where possible.

**PIED-BILLED GREBE.** Breeds throughout most of the New World south to Argentina. Inland population in North America is migratory. Vagrant to England involving seven records but probably concerning only three individuals. No other European occurrences.

**Albinism:** one record

(1) A pure white bird seen on Barr Lakes, near Denver, Colorado, U.S.A., 6 July 1907 (Rockwell, 1910).

**LITTLE GREBE.** Breeds across much of Europe and southern Asia, including British Isles, Sweden, Russia, Manchuria, Japan, south to Malaysia and India. Also most of Africa and Phillipines, Indonesia to New Guinea and Solomons. Winters within the range.

**Albinism:** three records

(1) A pure white bird with bright lemon legs and pale brown irides shot at Blakeney Channel, Norfolk, 23 October 1907 (Gurney, 1908).

\* *Tachybaptus ruficollis* = *Podiceps ruficollis*



(2) An albino with bright orange bill and legs, Hollowell Reservoir, Northampton, September 1952 (letter from B.R. Spence, 26 April 1957).

(3) An all white bird that was hatched at Woodall Park, Hertfordshire, in the spring of 1956 was still present during the winter of 1956/57 (card from A. and N. Gonzalez, 6 March 1957).

**BLACK-NECKED (or EARED) GREBE.** Breeds erratically southern and central Europe, through Asia Minor to central Asia. Also north-west, eastern and southern Africa and in western North America. Winters mainly within the range.

**Albinism:** four records.

(1) A male with the black parts of head and neck speckled with white and with upper parts white, shot, Lake of Velence, Hungary, 4 April 1902 (Chernel de Chernelháza, 1907).

(2) A male in breeding plumage but showing albinistic feathers, Marshall Lake, Coconino County, Arizona, U.S.A., 2 July 1915. Now No. 241480 in the United States National Museum. (Letter from Herbert Friedmann dated 15 March 1960.)

(3) An almost pure white bird with normal (rosy) coloured eyes, Dumbarton Bridge, California, U.S.A., from 29 July 1939 and on nine other dates to 10 February 1940 (Allen, 1940).

(4) An albino on Mono Lake, Mono County, California, U.S.A., 24 August 1947 (Stott, 1948).

**SLAVONIAN (or HORNED) GREBE.** Breeds Iceland, Scotland, Scandinavia, Baltic States to Siberia, Kamchatka and Amurland. Also Alaska, Canada and northern United States. Winters mostly south of breeding range to Mediterranean, southern United States.

**Albinism:** four records.

(1) A pure white bird, believed to be this species, was in company with a normal male (which was shot), Loch Slyn, Rossshire, April 1859 (Booth, 1911 and Gurney, 1887).

(2) One mentioned by Petit (1909) with dorsal surface dull white, 1909, no location given.

(3) A male with wings normal and with some dusky scapular feathers, otherwise pure white, Barr Lakes, near Denver, Colorado, U.S.A., 18 June 1931. Now in Denver Museum of Natural History. (Letter from Denver Museum of Natural History dated 16 May 1960.)

(4) A pure white bird streaked on back and sides with buff, Jones Beach, Nassau County, Long Island, New York, U.S.A., February 1965 and February 1966 (letter from B. Trimble dated 18 December 1966).

**RED-NECKED GREBE.** Breeds Sweden, Finland, north Russia to Germany, Balkans, Ukraine, Alaska, Canada and northern United States. Winters south to the Mediterranean, south-east China and southern United States.

**Albinism:** six records.

(1) A completely white bird said to have been taken near Beachy Head, Sussex, in 1879 (Gurney, 1879).

(2) One all white except for sandy tinge, killed somewhere in eastern counties, England, April 1887 (Gurney, 1887).

(3) An all white bird with bill and legs orange coloured, irides lead-grey, shot, Lake of Velence, Hungary, 19 August 1898 (Chernel de Chernelháza, 1907).

(4) A pure white bird with creamy tinge on mantle. Five days after it was shot its feet were pale yellow with bill yellow at base and yellowish-horn at the tip. Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire, 29 December 1927 (Witherby, 1928). (A bird in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, which fits this description, was collected in the same locality and on the same date but is labelled as *Podiceps cristatus* (letter from D.W. Snow dated 14 January 1974). The records must refer to the same individual and its true identity is being pursued and will be published later. A quick inspection of the specimen did not reveal any readily distinguishing features! Even the colour of the soft parts could be misleading in an albino. Eds.)

(5) Two albino juveniles (one collected 15 July 1954 had pure white plumage, brown irides and yellow bill and feet), Delta Marsh, Manitoba, Canada, July 1954 (Weller, 1959).

(6) An almost pure white bird, with many white feathers on its back, but with black head stripes, Ruine Strahlegg, Switzerland, 4 October 1955 (Walkmeister, 1956, includes photograph).

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE.** Breeds locally most of Old World east to Tibet and China. North, eastern and southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Sedentary and migratory. Some northern hemisphere birds winter south to Mediterranean, north India and south-east to China.

**Albinism:** five records.

(1) One almost entirely white but tips of ear tufts pale yellowish-brown, tippets with black and yellow-brown tips, wings partly normal, bill dull yellow-red and eyes normal, Potsdam, Germany, 6 November 1853 (Gloger, 1866).

(2) Gurney (1887) mentions a sandy-coloured specimen in the collection of J.G. Barclay, of Leyton, that was obtained in Leadenhall Market, London (no date given).

(3) A partially albino male which also showed some signs of erythrism (reddishness) had white wings but with dark brownish-grey quills, light rusty and brownish-grey on some wing coverts; forehead, crown and crest chestnut, somewhat tipped with brownish-grey with the feathers of the back and lower neck lighter than usual. Shot, Lake of Velence, Hungary, 29 March 1892 (Chernel de Chernelháza, 1907).

(4) A young bird (fully grown) had entirely albino plumage, but soft parts had some yellowish and brownish pigment, killed at Bytyń Lake, in the district of Szamotuły, Poland, August 1915 (Grochmalicki, 1925, includes photograph of mounted specimen).

(5) A pure white bird at Ulmenhorst, Germany, 29 September 1930 and another, almost certainly the same bird, was seen at Uckersee, near Prenzlau, Germany, from 15 October to 5 November 1930 (Schüz, 1931).

(6) A white-headed bird but with small dark mark behind eye, Durleigh Reservoir, Somerset, 11 January 1971 (personal observation).

**Albinism and melanism:** one record.

(1) A remarkable occurrence of one (a male) completely melanistic but with crest albinistic, shot on Lake of Velence, Hungary, 14 April 1905 (Chernel de Chernelháza, 1907, who gives a full description). This is the only known occurrence of melanism in grebes.

**WESTERN GREBE.** A New World species. Breeds Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, south to South Dakota, Utah and California. Winters on Pacific coast and adjacent inland waters from British Columbia to Mexico.

**Albinism:** one record.

(1) One pure white with pink eyes and very pale cream-yellow bill and feet, obtained in Manitoba (exact locality unknown), Canada, October 1955. Now in Manitoba Museum. (Letter from Manitoba Museum dated 31 May 1960).

In conclusion there are a number of points arising from this list.

Of the 27 or 28 grebes I have listed (including two young seen together) it is extraordinary that four originated from one locality — the Lake of Velence in Hungary. These were shot between 1892 and 1905 and comprised of two Great Crested, one Red-necked and one Black-necked Grebe. They were obtained in a period of much predation by man on animal life in Britain, Europe and elsewhere. The grebes were unusually plumaged and so probably conspicuous (with one of these intriguingly revealing both albinism and melanism) and it is likely that they were only part of a large number of water birds obtained, and not solely to satisfy wildfowling principles. Museums of repute acquired considerable numbers of birds of which albinos were much sought after to enhance their zoological sections. It was also then popular for individuals to collect and house birds in glass cases of varying kinds. (Some of these are now costly to obtain. In England they were known simply as "stuffed birds"). In addition,



not the least of popular trends was the insatiable demand for plumes and exotic feathers for use in the adornment of women's clothes. This, incidentally, was the major factor in bringing Great Crested Grebes to near extinction in Britain about 1860 (Harrisson and Hollom, 1932). Bearing these factors in mind and considering the conspicuousness and wide distribution of most grebe species today it is perhaps surprising that more aberrantly plumaged birds have not been recorded. It can be seen from the list that of the seven Great Crested Grebes reported five were from central Europe and two from England. This is a relatively small part of their World distribution. Similar comments could also be said for Little Grebe.

The species most susceptible to aberrant plumage were Red-necked Grebe and Great Crested Grebe. However, at this elementary stage and from the mostly old and scattered records it cannot be said with any degree of certainty whether one species is more likely to show this than another. Surely there is an opportunity for a great deal of careful research in the future for those really interested in the subject.

## References

All letters and card referred to are with B.L. Sage.

- Allen, A.S. 1940. An albino Eared Grebe. *Condor* 42: 127.
- Booth, E.T. 1911. *Catalogue of the Birds in Brighton Museum*. Brighton.
- British Ornithologists' Union. 1971. *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*. Oxford.
- Chernel de Chernelháza, S. 1907. On variations in the colouring of *Colymbus cristatus*, *C. griseigena* and *C. nigricollis*, observed at the Lake of Velence, in Hungary. *Ornis*, London, 14: 524–527.
- Gloger, Dr. 1866. Der grosse gehäubte Steissfuss, (*Colymbus cristatus*), in Weiss ausgeartet. *J. für Orn.* 14: 285–286.
- Grochmalicki, J. 1925. Bielactwo u perkoza dwuczubnego. (*Podiceps cristatus* L.) *Kosmos*, Lemberg, 50: 892–894. [Polish with French summary.]
- Gurney, J.H. 1879. Ornithological Notes from St. Leonards. *Zoologist* 3 (third series): 376–378.
- . 1887. Ornithological Notes from North Norfolk. *Zoologist* 11 (third series): 140–142.
- . 1908. Ornithological Report for Norfolk. *Zoologist* 12 (fourth series): 135.
- Harrisson, T.H. and Hollom, P.A.D. 1932. The Great Crested Grebe Enquiry, 1931. *Brit. Birds* 26: 102–131.
- Pearson, T. Gilbert. 1917. *Birds of America*. New York.
- Petit, L. 1909. Cas d'albinisme et variétés de coloration chez des écureuils et différents oiseaux. *Bull. Zool. Soc. France* 34: 32–35.
- Rockwell, R.B. 1910. Nesting Notes on the American Eared Grebe and Pied-billed Grebe. *Condor* 12: 188–193.
- Sage, B.L. 1962. Albinism and melanism in birds. *Brit. Birds* 55: 201–225.
- Schuz, E. 1931. Achtet auf Albino von Haubentaucher, *Podiceps cristatus* L. *der Vogelzug* 2: 40–41.
- Stott, Jr., K. 1948. An Albino Eared Grebe at Mono Lake. *Condor* 50: 46.
- Walkmeister, A. 1956. Albinotischer Rothalstanher im Prätigau (Gr.). *Ornithologische Beobachter* 53: 47–48.
- Weller, Milton W. 1959. Albinism in *Podiceps griseigena* and other grebes. *Auk* 76: 520–521.
- Witherby, H.F. 1928. Albino Red-necked Grebe in Lincolnshire and other albinistic birds. *Brit. Birds* 21: 264.

Bernard King

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



## COLOUR, ALBINISM AND MELANISM IN BIRDS

by Malcolm Sainsbury

When reviewing the preceding paper by Bernard King the editorial committee felt that many readers might like a reminder of the factors which give rise to albinism and melanism. Firstly, however, it is necessary to consider the origins of colour itself. Sunlight is comprised of a complex mixture of radiations ranging from very short wavelength (high energy) cosmic rays to long wavelength (low energy) radiowaves. The human eye is responsive only to a narrow band of medium energy light which constitutes the visible spectrum and comprises the colours: violet, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. To us, colour is apparent when the object in view absorbs, deflects or scatters certain wavelengths of the visible spectrum so that only the remaining colours are reflected back to the observer. An object is white when all the colours are reflected and black when none of the incident beam is returned to the eye.

In the plumage of birds yellow, orange and some red colours are due to the presence of carotenoid pigments which absorb all colours except yellow, orange or red. Carotenoids are not synthesized by birds, but are vegetable in origin and are taken in during feeding. If absent from the diet, a normally yellow bird, such as a Canary, frequently becomes white. Similarly flamingoes lose their pink colour if they are prevented from eating fish and crustaceans which have already consumed carotenoids.

Most other avian colours are produced by complex organic substances collectively known as melanins. Unlike the carotenoids, melanins are formed within the bodies of birds and other animals. They are not required in the diet and give rise to colour, not only by absorbing radiation as pigments, but also by selectively scattering the incident light. Frequently, in the latter case, the angle at which the light strikes the surface of the feather determines the colour observed. The iridescent colours of the Peacock's tail or the gloss of the Starling are classic examples of this type of effect. (For a more detailed description of the phenomenon of colour in animals see *The Nature of Animal Colours* (1960) by H. Munro Fox and Gwynne Vevers.)

When either through hereditary factors, injury, disease or age the production of melanin is retarded or terminated the bird loses its normal colour and, should no other pigments be present, an albino specimen results. In a complete albino the true colour of the eye is lost and appears pink since now the blood in the capillaries of the retina may be seen. Individuals in which the normal pattern and colour of the feathers are still discernible but very pale are described as leucistic.

Melanism is the exact opposite of albinism and is due to the excessive production of melanins; in the extreme the plumage becomes totally black.

Albino birds are obviously more conspicuous than their normal counterparts and are sometimes mobbed by other birds. Clearly then, albinism is of no evolutionary advantage, but on the other hand partly melanistic birds are easily overlooked and there is some evidence to suggest that in heavily industrialized areas "dark" House Sparrows have evolved. Presumably this allows them to blend more naturally into their chosen environment. In many groups of birds of prey dark phase individuals are relatively common; such birds appear to live normal lives and suffer no disadvantage as a result of their unusual plumage.

Dr. M. Sainsbury,  
34 Torridge Road, Keynsham, Bristol

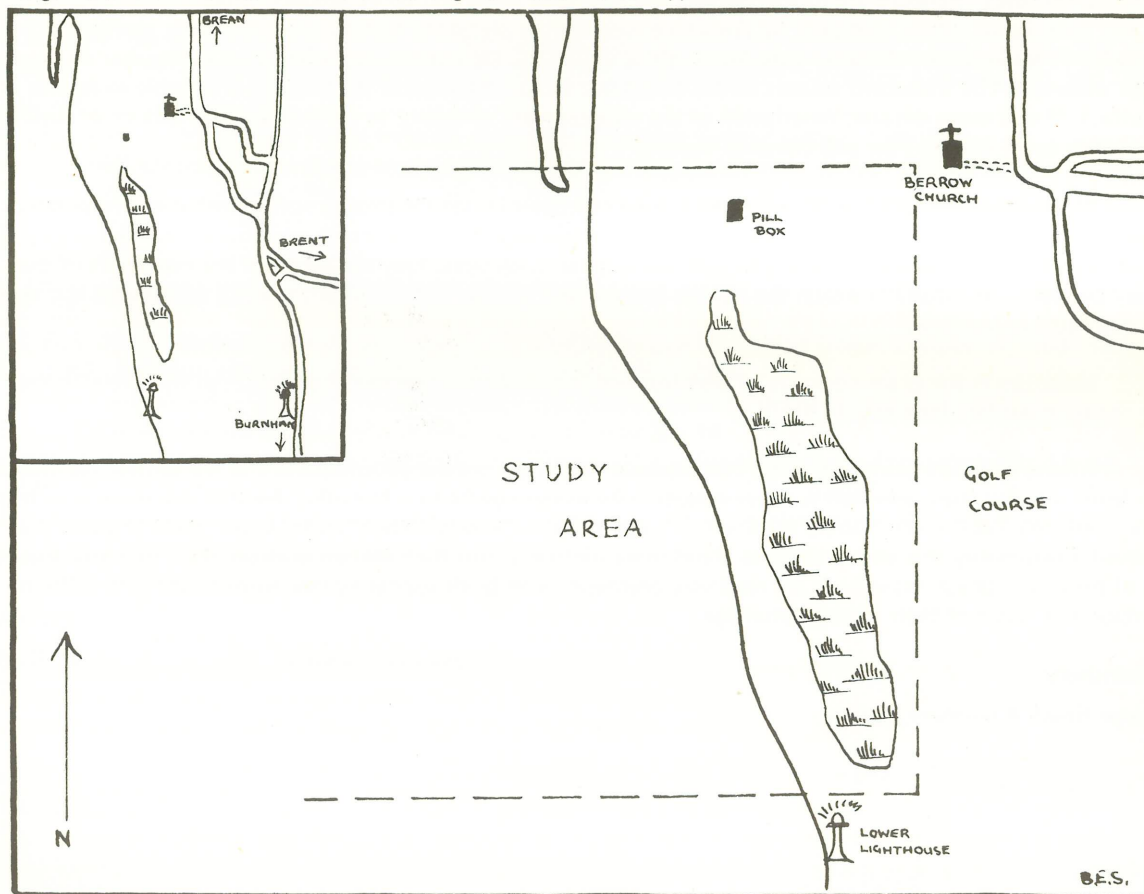


## THE BIRDS OF BERROW MARSH, SAND DUNES AND SHORE

by B.E. Slade

It may not be well known that the salt-marsh at Berrow has been in danger from various reclamation schemes. These have included a rubbish tip, eventually to be grassed over, but fortunately this and most other schemes have so far been successfully opposed. Burnham-on-Sea Golf Club have recently made encroachments all along the east side in order to extend the golf course and this has absorbed several acres of wet ground. Doubtless the pressure will remain despite the fact that much of the area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There is a brief general account of the natural history of the area (Smith (1971)) which is sold mainly to interested casual visitors.

The area (see sketch) consists of about 25 acres of wet marsh bordered by a thin strip of sand dunes on the shore side and higher and more extensive sand dunes, with a covering of shrubs and small trees on the landward sides. Marram Grass *Ammophila arenaria* has been planted in an attempt to immobilize the shifting outer sands even though these already freely support such stabilizers as Sea Couch Grass *Agropyron pungens* and sedges *Carex* sp. Reeds *Phragmites communis* grow particularly densely at the southern end of the marsh with Sea Club-rush *Scirpus maritimus* and, to a lesser extent, Common Cord-grass (or Rice-grass) *Spartina townsendii* covering much of the remaining wet area. The higher more extensive dunes are covered by a dense growth of Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus*, Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* and this provides more than ample cover and food for large numbers of birds. The shore near high tide mark is sandy, but at low tide vast areas of mud are exposed, the

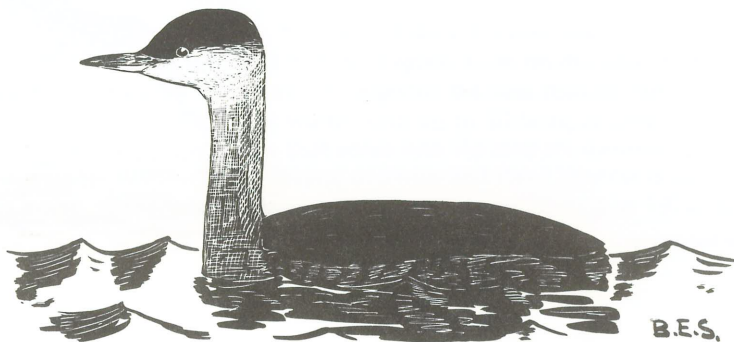


B.E.S.



low water mark being, on average, some 2500 metres 'out'. The sand is formed in several ridges, the main one of which is increasing in height so that only very high tides now cover it. Conversely, some of the dunes near the shore are being wind-blown inland, so the whole area is slowly and steadily changing under natural forces.

I commenced my study of the bird life of the area in October 1968 and have visited it regularly (at least once a fortnight) since then up to the time of writing (May, 1973). In the following account the order of species is similar to that in the Annual Reviews of *Bristol Ornithology*. A complete list of species that have occurred in the area during this time is given in Appendix A.



Red-necked Grebe

The only grebe record is of a single Red-necked Grebe\* seen on the 8 October 1970. Sea birds consist mainly of small parties of Cormorant flying to and from the colony on Steep Holm. The true oceanic birds are rarely seen. Gannet is the most frequent species but this may only be because it is large and conspicuous. Herons are seen regularly flying over the area but they rarely settle. White-fronted Geese are occasionally seen in the winter and on 28 January 1970 a party of thirteen was accompanied by three Grey Lag Geese. One or two Mute Swans can be seen at any time of the year, but only two Bewick's Swans have been seen (flying south-west on 27 December 1969), despite their commonness on the nearby Somerset levels in winter. The duck of the area is the Shelduck, present all year with flocks of up to 500 frequent between August and November, with a maximum count of 604 on 16 January 1972. Bridgwater Bay, including the Berrow mud flats is an important moulting ground for this species (Eltringham and Boyd, 1963). They also occur on the dunes in the breeding season but no young have been seen. Mallard can be seen regularly in small numbers (usually up to 40 but 98 on 4 October 1969 and 121 on 22 October 1972) but Teal, Wigeon, Pintail, Pochard, Common Scoter, Goldeneye and Goosander have only occurred rarely, mainly in autumn and winter.

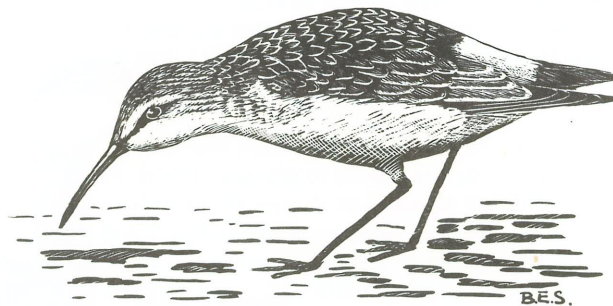
Sparrowhawks are seen quite frequently and average ten sightings per year, (with a maximum of thirteen sightings in 1970). A Buzzard was present on 2 May 1969, and a 'ring tail' Hen Harrier frequented the area in January/February 1970. On 5 October 1969 an immature Peregrine was watched as it stooped at a Snipe, unsuccessfully, before flying off north. Single Merlins have been noted in October twice, on 18th in 1970 and 22nd in 1972. As would be expected Kestrels are frequently seen, with up to seventeen sightings in a year, but averaging just over ten per year. (Only fractionally more than Sparrowhawk!) A female Pheasant with small chicks was seen in the marsh in 1970. Water Rails are regular winter visitors to the marsh with about six present in most seasons although there are probably more than meet the eyes, or ears. A Spotted Crake was flushed on 26 October 1969 and my *only* Moorhen occurred on 20 May 1973.

All of the waders (except Snipe and Jack Snipe) are found on the shore. Oystercatchers are recorded in every month of the year with counts averaging about 120. (Peak counts — spring, 94; autumn, 250–300.) Ringed Plover have been recorded between 29 March and 1 November, with the spring count generally being around 50

\* For Latin names see Appendix A.



(although there was an exceptional count of 1000 on 20 May 1973) and the autumn numbers usually about 300 (exceptional maximum of 1050). A Little Ringed Plover stayed for several days at the end of March 1970. Golden and Grey Plovers although common at nearby Steart in the winter are only occasionally seen but Lapwing are commoner and can be seen in flocks of up to 40 and much larger numbers fly over to the south-west during very cold weather. Turnstones are frequently to be found in small numbers feeding on the tide wrack. Little Stints can be seen with great regularity between August and November (usually five to eight but up to 50 on rare occasions) and



Curlew Sandpiper

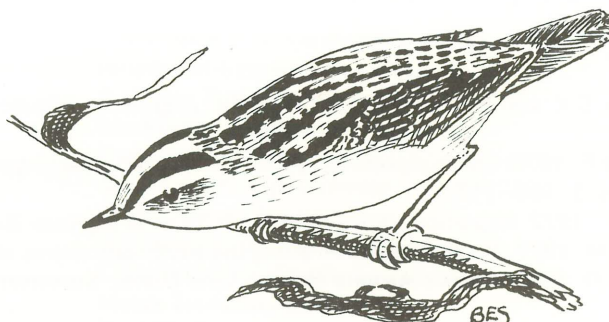
there is one record for May. Dunlin are seen in all months, reaching a maximum of 5000 during the winter. Curlew Sandpipers are quite rare with only three records (three on 8 August 1971 and in 1972 22 on 27 August and one, an adult bird, on 24 September). Knot are only seen in small numbers, but are more common at Steart. Berrow is without doubt the Somerset stronghold for Sanderling. The main passage months are May (peak count of 125) and August (peak 118) and they have been found in every month between April and November. The average flock size is about 50. Redshank and Greenshank are only seen in small numbers. The former are surprisingly scarce when one considers the high numbers which occur at Steart and Brean (about 700 and 400 respectively). Both godwits have been recorded commonly: Black-tailed in flocks of up to 350, mainly in August, September and October; Bar-tailed more regularly, (occurring in all months except March and June and mainly in October and November) but in much smaller numbers, rarely more than 20. Curlew are seen in all months, generally about 30 but occasionally up to 150; the larger flocks occurring in August. Whimbrel are sometimes seen in quite large numbers during May (maximum of 172 on 11 May 1972) but only rarely in other months. No doubt these are associated with the large roost on Steart Island (see page ). The only waders recorded in the marsh are Snipe and Jack Snipe. The former is frequently seen in autumn, winter and spring and the latter is also regularly seen in winter, occurring consistently in the shorter vegetation or on the pathways through the marsh. Avocets are frequently seen with the Oystercatchers during the winter period, usually one or two with a maximum of four on 29 October 1972. A Grey Phalarope was filmed in October 1968.

My only sighting of a skua was of an Arctic Skua which I saw on 8 August 1971. Between August 1971 and April 1973 I made regular (monthly) counts of gulls. Black-headed Gull numbers are highest in July, August and September (usually 50–100 with a maximum of 650) with the lowest counts in April, May and June (occasionally absent). Lesser Black-backed Gulls are present from March to September (maximum of 11) with single birds in November 1971 and January/February 1973. Both Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls breed in a large colony on nearby Steart Island (Holley, 1970). The latter are more common and this is reflected at Berrow where between 20 and 30 can usually be seen at any time of the year. Great Black-backed Gulls are only recorded in small numbers (up to six) but with great regularity. Common Gulls are recorded in most months, reaching a peak in August (maximum 93 birds) and least common in June, otherwise a flock of about 30 can usually be seen. Kittiwakes are rare and the five seen so far have all been immatures. Records of terns are also rather sparse. Sandwich Terns have occurred twice, both records being in 1969. Eight flew north on 3 July, and a singleton was present on 8 August. Common/Arctic Terns are seen in most years in small numbers (mostly in the autumn). Little Terns were only recorded in

1971: nine spent several hours fishing and resting on 8 August and a single one flew north on 22nd. The only auk that I have seen in the area was a Razorbill on 12 September 1970.

Wood pigeons are common and present at all times of the year. Stock Doves, however, are only rarely seen, a record of six feeding on the shore in February 1972 being notable. Collared Doves are seen regularly and Cuckoos are a familiar sight and sound of summer. During the winters of most years Short-eared Owls were present with up to three in a day. A single on 29 April 1973 was considered as being late for this area. Both Little and Tawny Owls breed in the surrounding districts. Swifts are present in good numbers in late summer and on passage, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers are only seen occasionally. Skylarks occur as migrants as well as being a local breeding species. On 15 October 1972 a Woodlark flew south (the only record), Sand Martin, Swallow and House Martin are present in good numbers in late summer and on passage, but Sand Martins are less numerous than the other two by far.

Meadow Pipits breed in good numbers. Of the wagtails, Yellow and Grey are seen mainly as passage migrants in small numbers, but in some autumns a roost of up to 50 Yellow Wagtails form on the edge of the marsh. White Wagtails are regularly seen in spring and Pied are seen commonly throughout the year (but do not breed within the study area). Wren are common as a breeding bird and also in the winter with up to 30 being counted regularly. Dunnocks, present all year, breed in good numbers. All the warblers that come into the area are summer visitors and/or passage migrants. A few pairs of Grasshopper Warblers with several of Sedge and Reed Warbler breed mainly along the northern and eastern edges of the marsh. A vagrant Aquatic Warbler was seen on 13 August 1972. Blackcap,



Aquatic Warbler

Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff all breed in the surrounding area (and Blackcap have also occurred twice in the winter). There are two records of Lesser Whitethroat on spring passage. Goldcrest are regular on passage in spring and autumn with small numbers sometimes associating with wandering winter flocks of Blue and Great Tit.

Whinchat are seen on passage in both spring and autumn but Stonechat are resident and usually three pairs have bred in every year within my study area. Wheatear are also seen regularly on spring and autumn passage and one female was present in mid-summer one year. Robins do breed in the area but are not very conspicuous. Three Nightingales were noted in 1972 (song on 7 May and two on 3 August). A Bluethroat (a rare species in Somerset) was flushed in the marsh on 12 September 1970. Blackbird and Song Thrush breed in good numbers in the area and this population is augmented later in the year when small numbers of these and Fieldfare, Redwing, Mistle Thrush and many finches and Starlings pass over and into the area (see also Sainsbury, 1972 and Morley, 1972). These thrushes and Starlings, all gather in larger concentrations (up to 3000 with more at roosts outside my area) later on in the winter when the Sea Buckthorn berries are a great attraction. The winters of 1971-72 and 1972-73 saw a small influx of Bearded Tits to the marsh, reaching a maximum of fifteen on 5 November 1972. Each year a ringed male was present. Long-tailed Tits breed and later on they flock together into parties of up to



30. Marsh Tits are only rarely seen and Coal Tits are not much commoner. Blue and Great Tits are commonly seen in wandering winter flocks.

Reed Buntings breed in the marsh (usually about five pairs) and in winter the birds are found in flocks of about 30. An immature Snow Bunting was watched (on the tide wrack) at close range on 3 February 1970. Chaffinches (although common as a breeding species in nearby sub-urban areas) have not as yet been proven to breed in the study area and they do occur regularly in winter in flocks of up to 100. However, it is in the autumn that they can be seen in large numbers, with occasionally more than 3000 passing over the area on a mornings watch. They do so in the company of other finches, thrushes and Starlings. Greenfinch, Linnet and Bullfinch all breed in good numbers in the study area but Goldfinch, although frequently seen in the area do not breed in it but nearby in the adjacent sub-urban areas. The last four species together with Brambling, Siskin and Redpoll occur in small numbers in the autumn and winter. At these times small flocks of House Sparrows can also be seen. Tree Sparrows are seen during most winters, the usual maximum being six, but on 24 October 1971, 135 flew south in less than three hours. The number of Starlings seen on migration in the autumn can vary greatly between 100's and 1000's but they are always present in strength. As I have mentioned earlier they are also present in the winter in good numbers when they compete with the thrushes for the crop of Sea Buckthorn berries. As well as pigeons some of the corvids, namely Magpie, Jackdaw and Carrion Crow, are attracted to this plentiful food supply. Only one Jay has been seen here by me and that was flying south on 27 April 1973. Magpies are also a conspicuous bird of the dunes whereas Jackdaws can often be seen on the shore with a few Rooks. During most winter periods there is a large flock of up to 200 Carrion Crows and they spend a good deal of time feeding on the shore.

In the past this rich area has been grossly underwatched by ornithologists. I hope these notes will encourage others to visit the area, therefore adding to and improving my coverage. Furthermore I hope it will show that by regular and diligent coverage of a relatively small area an ornithological picture can soon be built up.

#### References

- Eltringham, S.K. and Boyd, H. 1963. The moult migration of Shelduck to Bridgwater Bay, Somerset. *Brit. Birds* 56: 433-444.  
 Holley, A.J.F. 1970. Some aspects of rearing the young in *Larus* gulls at Stert Island — An interim report. *Bristol Ornithology* 3: 100-117.  
 Morley, J.V. 1972. Migration routes in the vicinity of Bridgwater Bay, Somerset. *Bristol Ornithology* 5: 191-194.  
 Sainsbury, M. 1972. Visible migration along the south-east shores of the Severn estuary. *Bristol Ornithology* 5: 195-200.  
 Smith, C.E.D. 1971. *On and Around Berrow Sand Dunes*. Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation.

B.E. Slade,  
 'Strathspey', 40 Church House Road, Berrow, Somerset.

#### APPENDIX A

A list of the birds recorded on Berrow Marsh, sand dunes and shore between October 1968 and May 1973.

Red-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps griseigena</i>	Teal <i>A. crecca</i>
Gannet <i>Sula bassana</i>	Wigeon <i>A. penelope</i>
Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>
Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>
Grey Lag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>	Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i>
White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons</i>	Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>
Bewick's Swan <i>C. bewickii</i>	Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*  
 Merlin *F. columbarius*  
 Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*  
 Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*  
 Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*  
 Spotted Crane *Porzana porzana*  
 Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*  
 Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*  
 Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*  
 Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius*  
 Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*  
 Grey Plover *P. squatarola*  
 Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*  
 Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*  
 Little Stint *Calidris minuta*  
 Dunlin *C. alpina*  
 Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*  
 Knot *C. canutus*  
 Sanderling *C. alba*  
 Redshank *Tringa totanus*  
 Greenshank *T. nebularia*  
 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*  
 Bar-tailed Godwit *L. lapponica*  
 Curlew *Numenius arquata*  
 Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*  
 Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*  
 Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minima*  
 Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*  
 Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*  
 Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*  
 Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*  
 Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*  
 Herring Gull *L. argentatus*  
 Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*  
 Common Gull *L. canus*  
 Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*  
 Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*  
 Common/Arctic Tern *S. hirundo/paradisea*  
 Little Tern *S. albifrons*  
 Razorbill *Alca torda*  
 Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*  
 Stock Dove *C. oenas*  
 Feral Pigeon *C. livia*  
 Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*  
 Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*  
 Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*  
 Little Owl *Athene noctua*  
 Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*  
 Swift *Apus apus*  
 Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*  
 Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*  
 Woodlark *Lullula arborea*  
 Skylark *Alauda arvensis*  
 Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
 House Martin *Delichon urbica*  
 Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*  
 Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*  
 Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea*  
 White Wagtail *M. alba alba*  
 Pied Wagtail *M. a. yarrellii*  
 Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*  
 Dunnock *Prunella modularis*  
 Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*  
 Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*  
 Sedge Warbler *A. schoenobaenus*  
 Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus*  
 Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*  
 Whitethroat *S. communis*  
 Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca*  
 Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*  
 Chiffchaff *P. collybita*  
 Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*  
 Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*  
 Stonechat *S. torquata*  
 Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*  
 Robin *Erithacus rubecula*  
 Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*  
 Bluethroat *Cyanosylvia svecica*  
 Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*  
 Blackbird *T. merula*  
 Redwing *T. iliacus*  
 Song Thrush *T. philomelos*  
 Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus*  
 Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*  
 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*  
 Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*  
 Coal Tit *P. ater*  
 Blue Tit *P. caeruleus*  
 Great Tit *P. major*  
 Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*  
 Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*  
 Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*  
 Brambling *F. montifringilla*  
 Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*  
 Siskin *C. spinus*  
 Goldfinch *C. carduelis*  
 Linnet *Acanthis cannabina*  
 Redpoll *A. flammea*  
 Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*  
 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
 Tree Sparrow *P. montanus*  
 Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*  
 Jay *Garrulus glandarius*  
 Magpie *Pica pica*  
 Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*  
 Rook *C. frugilegus*  
 Carrion Crow *C. corone*



## NOTES

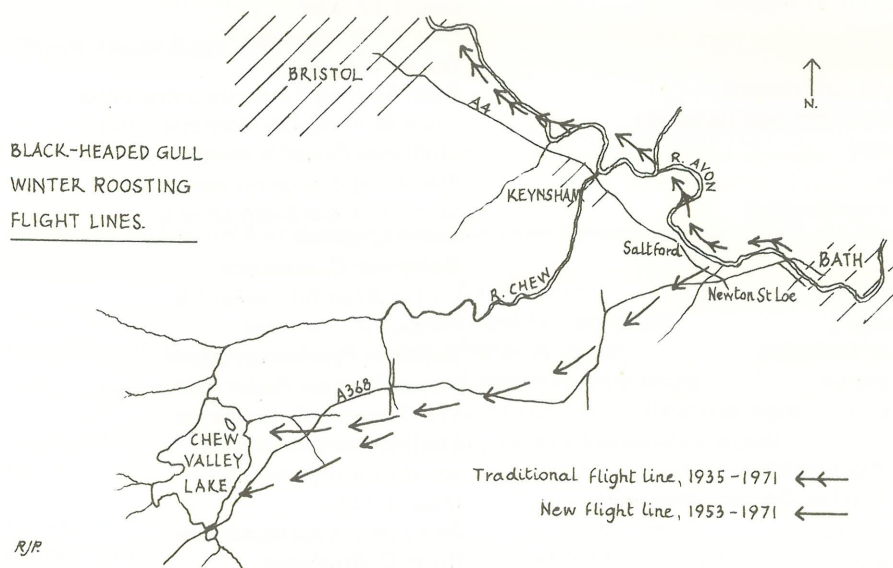
### Another Black-headed Gull enigma

I have recently referred to a little known behaviour by some of the estuarine feeding Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* within the Bristol city boundaries seeking inland places to roost at dusk instead of the more accessible coastal regions very near their daily feeding areas (*Bristol Ornithology* 5 (1972):210–211). It was also thought at first that roosting gulls on these inland waters came only from localities well away from Bristol. Bearing this note in mind it seems desirable therefore that yet another Black-headed Gull enigma be mentioned which brings to light still further the complexities concerning the winter gull populations in North Somerset and Bristol, so much of which has yet to be unravelled.

The following, therefore is the story: from 1935 to 1953 I witnessed hundreds of times from my elevated garden at Saltford and elsewhere, the winter evening departures of Black-headed Gulls from Bath and Saltford and other localities. Daily they were to be seen in long straggling flight lines following the Avon valley past Saltford and Keynsham and so into Bristol. Any deviations from this only occurred in stormy weather during which the gulls were scattered widely over the district. The same flight lines were used at dawn when they came inland. Counts were made from time to time with peaks from about 800 to 1000 in a count.

However on the initial flooding of the Chew Valley Lake in 1953, the evening flight patterns underwent a marked change. Now an additional flight route commenced, the attraction being the large expanse of water at Chew Valley. The Black-headed Gulls leaving the Bath area would on reaching Newton-St.-Loe and where the River Avon turned noticeably north-west in the direction of Saltford, either detached themselves from some of their companions and continued on over the high ground towards and on past Marksbury to Chew Valley Lake, or kept to the traditional flight path in the direction of Bristol, (see sketch). To check this I spent many long and daylight hours watching these flight lines and found there was no doubling back one way or the other. Why then should gulls of the same species decide to leave one another at dusk and go to divergent roosting places?

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



## Feeding Behaviour of a Northern Waterthrush in the Isles of Scilly

D.I.M. Wallace has recently and ably recorded his finding the second only British occurrence of a Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis* on Tresco, Isles of Scilly on the 3 October 1968 (*Brit. Birds* 65 (1972):484–485). Four of us were also fortunate in seeing this North American breeding species early the next morning, and in consequence some feeding behaviour and food items were noted and these I venture to set forth.

The Northern Waterthrush is a small thrush-like bird about the size of a Robin *Erithacus rubecula* but in no way related to Old World species. This rather dumpy long legged marsh loving bird had dull brown uniform upperparts, wings and tail. (Wallace however has mentioned an olivaceous tinge on all the upperparts). The superciliary was noticeably whitish-buff from the base of the upper mandible to well behind the eye. Sides of face were dull brown with whitish-buff patches. Underparts whitish with throat, upper and much of lower breast together with the flanks showing elongated blackish-brown streaks. The undertail-coverts showed dull dirty white. Its bill was well pointed, dull brown; legs pinkish and iris dark.

Realising the bird was secretive and had found ideal marsh areas similar to those it probably haunted in its native habitat we decided to install ourselves well before dawn behind cover overlooking the area where the bird could be seen. At 07.25 hours the Northern Waterthrush suddenly appeared from boggy ground not more than nine metres from where we lay concealed, announcing its arrival with a repetition of thin squeaking-like notes. Immediately and in a curious manner it commenced to feed along the path nearby. During the ten minutes it stayed in view it kept its head close to the ground and bobbed its tail with undertail-coverts held at an upward angle, and its long legs somewhat bent, thus maintaining a curious 'toppling-over' stance. In this attitude it walked or ran with rapidity and anxiously turned over dead leaves and other vegetation with quick side to side movements of its bill. Then, whenever small worms, grubs or grounded Diptera were discovered it astonishingly halted its extreme activeness and (rather in the manner of a Bittern taking its food) slowly thrust its head even further forward and very slowly picked up and swallowed its prey. However, while this fascinating behaviour was in progress an agitated Robin tried to interrupt the vagrants activities and we thought it succeeded because for no apparent other reason the Northern Waterthrush returned to the marsh and so was lost to view. It was apparently only seen fleetingly later in the day. In conclusion, I have noticed on previous occasions when unusual birds turn up that they are often chivied by resident species. The aggressive Robin on the pool path made no attempt to dominate House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* or a pair of Hedge Sparrows *Prunella modularis* which at times were only a few feet from the Northern Waterthrush.

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

## Food-Hiding by Scrub Jay and other Corvidae

The note by Bernard King in which he describes food-hiding by an escaped Scrub Jay *Aphelocoma coerulescens* (*Bristol Ornithology* 4 (1971):173–174) prompts us to record two additional points of behaviour which we noted while watching this same bird at Kelynack, Cornwall on 3 February, 1965. Firstly, we observed also the hiding of peanuts exactly as described by Mr. King; but, in addition, we watched the jay, on a number of occasions, instead of 'sealing' the hole containing the nut by turning in the immediately surrounding soil with its bill, pick up an entirely separate piece of dried soil (or a leaf) and then use this to cover the hole, as with a lid (see plate 4b).

Secondly, we saw that at least one Great Tit *Parus major* was in frequent attendance on the Scrub Jay during these food-hiding operations, and that the tit retrieved, at a rough guess, about half the hidden peanuts for itself. More than once, when the tit was in particularly close attendance on the jay, the latter removed the just-hidden nut and transferred it to a new place two or three metres away, as if aware of the danger that the nut would be found by the tit. However, this precaution never succeeded while we were watching and the Great Tit invariably found the peanut in its new hiding-place.

J.B. and S. Bottomley  
Hellesveor Place, St. Ives, Cornwall



## Great Black-backed Gull attacking a sleeping man

During a visit to Marazion beach, Cornwall on the 19 September, 1959, I noticed a rather tame adult Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* which was unusually bold in seeking food from visitors. After some while when the beach had become rather empty the gull discovered a sleeping man, who lay curled up in the more isolated area of the beach. The latter, in order to gain some protection from a cool breeze which had sprung up, had covered his head and shoulders with a thin black plastic mackintosh. It was this which presumably attracted the gulls attention. First of all it walked around the apparently inert form and then commenced to tug at the material from various directions. This aggressive behaviour was temporarily halted when the man stirred slightly and sleepily extended an arm. He then resumed sleeping but some five minutes later the gull attacked in earnest. In order to obtain greater leverage on the plastic mackintosh it jumped on the man's chest and ferociously tugged at the material. What at first had rather amused a number of us now turned to alarm and as we ran to drive off the predator so the man suddenly awoke to realise what had happened. The Great Black-backed Gull was last seen flying well out of the area.

Later, having made a number of inquiries from experienced residents familiar with the behaviour of the Marazion gulls and from the R.S.P.C.A. bird hospital at Mousehole it was suggested that the gull, at some previous period, may have been kept in captivity and so had lost its fear of humans. On the other hand as the black mackintosh had shrouded much of the victim the gull may not have realised what was contained therein!

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

## Hobbies feeding

In bright sunlight at midday, 4 September 1972, I was watching about 200 duck resting on the mud at Blagdon Lake, Somerset. With them were a dozen Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* whilst overhead were about 50 Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* pursuing various flying insects down to ground level and also a Little Gull *L. minutus*. Three Hobbies, *Falco subbuteo*, two juveniles and an adult, joined in, catching mainly dragonflies and consuming them on the wing by transferring the prey from foot to bill without slackening speed. The gulls and the falcons took no notice of each other, but some of the Lapwings attacked the Hobbies furiously trying presumably to drive them away. Meanwhile the two juveniles occasionally pestered the adult for food whilst all three weaved in and out among the gulls and harassing Lapwings quite unperturbed. This commensal hunting lasted about half-an-hour.

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

## Whimbrel roost on Steart Island, Somerset

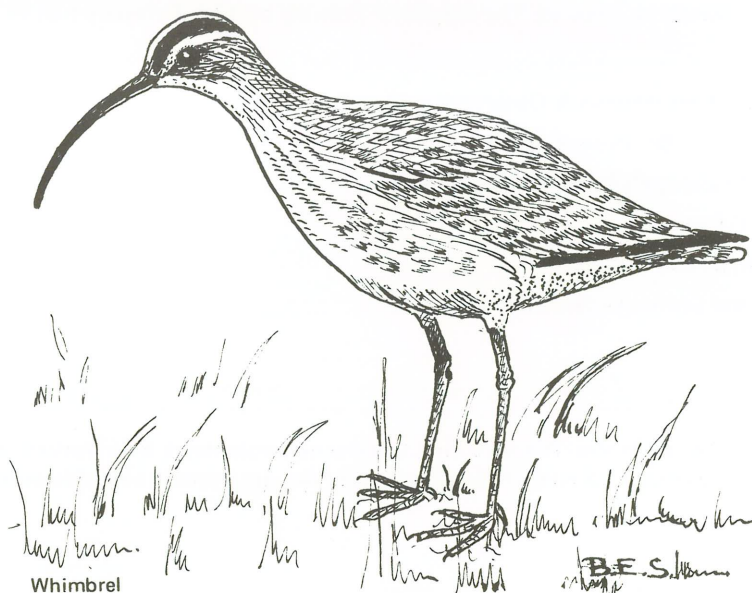
It was recently brought to my notice that a very large number of Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* were being observed going to roost on Steart Island between mid April and late May with up to 2000 birds being involved at peak periods. I was not able to witness this astonishing event for myself until 1972 when the following observation was made.

On the 6 May at 19.20 hours I stationed myself at the southern end of Burnham-on-Sea overlooking the River Brue estuary and out towards Steart Island. The weather was dull with rain at times, a light south-westerly wind and moderate visibility. Between the time of my arrival and 19.45 hours I saw only a single Whimbrel fly west. However, at this time 11 flew west out to the island and these were soon followed by several more small parties. Gradually the flocks increased not only in frequency but also in size, one flock numbering 170 another 150 and several between 40 and 100. I completed my watch at 20.50 hours and by then a total of 1415 Whimbrel had passed west to roost on Steart Island. In addition six flew due north.

The vast majority of the birds appeared to have followed the line of the River Brue although some were noted arriving from the Huntspill Sea Wall area. They came in fairly low over the water and were generally uttering their song, a bubbling trill, very like Curlews' with the more typical tittering note of passage-birds rarely heard. It may be worthy of note that the six which flew north used the normal call which was also louder than the ones used by the roosting birds. All the Whimbrel landed at the southern end of the island. As far as I am aware there is no comparable roost of this species in the British Isles.

B.E. Slade

*Strathspey, 40 Church House Road, Berrow, Somerset*



Whimbrel

## CLUB ACTIVITIES 1972

The year saw several changes and innovations within the Club. Don Ladham's relinquished the Secretaryship after four years in the job, for which we owe him much appreciation. We were also saddened by the sudden death of our Treasurer, Roy Thearle, in February, but David Haddy ably took over the task of looking after the Club's finances. The Chairman returned in April after six months in Argentina.



Notable 'firsts' for the Club were the trip to Majorca, a Photographic Competition, and a Wine and Cheese Party. We also shared a stand with the RSPB at the Bristol Flower Show, which attracted some new members.

### *Field Meetings*

With membership still well on the increase, it became necessary to have joint leaders at some meetings, all of which were well subscribed. Two weekend excursions took place — to the Exe Estuary in March and to Cornwall in October. The 24-hour Tally Hunt and Barbecue in July were both highly successful, as was the Christmas Tally Hunt. Other meetings included an all-night excursion to Exmoor, a trip to Poole Harbour and Studland, and one the other side of the river — Monmouthshire Severnside. Atlas walks were held regularly and several members took advantage of the White Funnel Steamer Trips in the Bristol Channel.

### *Indoor Meetings*

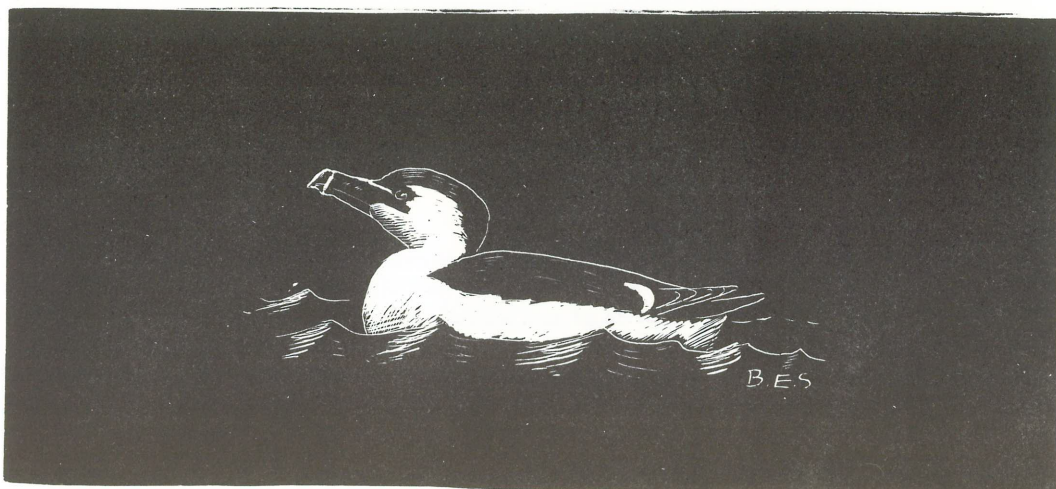
These continued to be held at St. Mary Redcliffe School and attendance rose steadily throughout the year to nearly 150 at the November meeting. The Members' Evening on 17th February had to be cancelled due to power cuts.

- 6. 1.72 — Dungeness Bird Reserve & Observatory, Bob Scott
- 16. 3.72 — Finding Nests, Dr. Bruce Campbell
- 21. 9.72 — Threats to Europe's Birds, Stanley Cramp
- 19.10.72 — Members' Evening
- 9.11.72 — Shetland, Bobby Tulloch
- 14.12.72 — A.G.M. and Christmas Social

### *Publications*

*Bird News* continued to grow in size, thanks to the few stalwart volunteers who worked so hard to get it out promptly. *Bristol Ornithology 4* was much delayed at the printers and did not become available until the following spring.

Miss W. Dickson  
Honorary Secretary



Razorbill

