

BIRDWATCHING *Group*

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NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2020

TONIGHT'S MEETING (Friday 28th February)

Tonight we welcome Chris Goodie with a talk entitled "The Jewel Hunter".

The talk details the adventures involved in trying to see all of the world's 32 species of pitta in a single year. It includes the derring-do details of being chased by an Asian Sun Bear in Sumatra, narrowly avoiding being bitten by a Wagler's Pit Viper in Sulawesi, and running out of petrol on a small boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Along the way the Jewel Hunter encounters a stunning array of birds, (including the pittas, or 'Jewel-Thrushes'), animals, people and places during a year spent travelling to the most beautiful rainforests of south-east Asia, Australia, Uganda and Zambia.

Chris has been birding since he was twelve years old. A lifelong RSPB member, he originally hails from Manchester but now lives in London with his long-suffering wife and Jason the cat. After earning a living as a musician and subsequently as a sales director in the professional audio business, in 2009 he set fire to his career ladder and went to live the dream in the rainforests of Asia, before returning to write the story of his adventures. His book entitled 'The Jewel Hunter' was published in August 2010.

Please join me in welcoming Chris for what I am sure will be a very entertaining evening.

COACH TRIPS

Our next coach trip is on Sunday 15th March to the North Wales coast and RSPB Conway reserve, departing from the Guild at 7:30am.

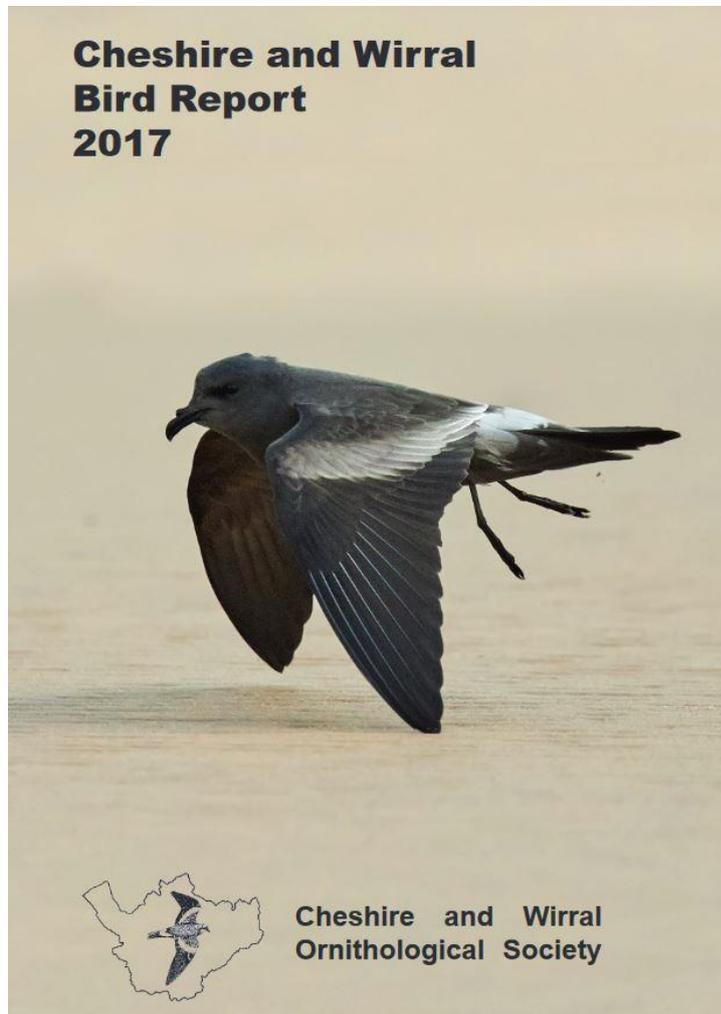
We should expect to see a variety of wildfowl, waders and raptors. RSPB members should bring their cards. There are toilet and café facilities at Conway reserve.

Book your seat at the desk tonight since this trip is before the March meeting.

Our April coach trip is to Fairburn Ings and St Aidans reserves in Yorkshire.

CHESHIRE AND WIRRAL BIRD REPORT 2017

We're delighted to say that the *Bird Report* for 2017 is now available - with many people working together to develop the content and get it printed. The *Report* is now produced in the larger B5 format with full colour printing. The front cover is graced by Leach's Petrel, the CAWOS logo, captured at close range against the sands of New Brighton.



Full colour has given the opportunity to include 80 great images of birds whatever their abundance or popularity and includes two-page spreads for raptors, gulls, corvids and Leach's Petrel.

The *Report* has 160 pages and draws on over 170,000 records from a wide range of sources – Birdtrack, BTO WeBS and Breeding Bird Survey, rECOrd, major site reports, website records, ringing reports and of course records from individual observers. An annual *Bird Report* is the one document that brings all these records together on a County basis.

In 2017 there were 241 species recorded in Cheshire and Wirral of which 35 were County or *BBRC* rarities. Pallid Harrier was new to the County List – having been accepted by *BBRC* on a second circulation. This is the subject of a short article describing the

sequence of events. Also included in the *Report* are articles on the successful breeding of Cattle Egrets at Burton Mere Wetlands, 'Early and Late Dates for Migrants' and Cheshire and Wirral in the BTO Online Ringing Report for 2017, which selectively focusses on recoveries chosen to illustrate movements and longevity.

The *Bird Report* is free to Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society members (ordinary membership costs £15), otherwise it costs £10 + £2 p&p and copies are available from:

David Cogger, 71 Parkgate, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 8HF
Tel: 01565 228503 Email: davidcogger@cawos.org

COACH TRIP TO THE FYLDE COAST – 26th JANUARY 2020

The Fylde coast comprises of the area above Liverpool and below the Lake District. From Fleetwood in the North, through Cleveleys to Lytham St. Anne's with the Irish Sea in the west and the Ribble estuary in the south. To the east lies the Bowland Hills. It is an area rich in diverse habitat. The complex of sand banks and mud flats associated with its several large estuaries provide overwintering and passage habitat for hundreds of thousands of wading birds. The inland waters and pools are also ideal quarters for wildfowl and the flat Lancashire moss lands hold huge numbers of overwintering flocks of Pink-footed Geese. Along with Blackpool, Cleveley and Fleetwood, this area was to be the destination for the twenty three of us who set out from Wilmslow on this January morning.

Newton Marsh near Freckleton village was our first stop. Waterlogged fields, large areas of standing water and water filled ditches and channels all provided sheltered sites for Wigeon, Shoveler, Little Egret and Black-tailed Godwit. Persistent rain was a problem but the coach itself proved to be an excellent "hide" for us; it was dry, warm and comfortable as well as providing an elevated vantage point over the tops of the farmland hedges. Despite the good viewpoint there was a great deal of speculation the length of the coach regarding the identification of a grey and white bird fluttering its wings in the shelter of a small ditch. Perhaps one of the, for me, confusing, plumage stages of an immature gull? No, I got it embarrassingly wrong.....it was a Tesco's plastic carrier bag.



Wigeon

Our next stop was Fairhaven Lake, Lytham St Ann's, a salt water lake, just over one meter deep and managed for recreational use with a café and RSPB visitor centre. Our visit coincided with a local run and so it was full of visitors. The site, adjacent to the shore, provides welcome shelter for overwintering birds in poor weather and at the time of our visit we saw Redshank, Cormorants and Mute Swans and in the distance we could hear Curlews calling. Access to the shoreline was restricted due to major engineering works taking place as part of the sea defence improvements.



Redshank

Driving further north we came to Starr Hills / Starr Gate where we walked along the adjacent sea shoreline. We found a group of busy Sanderlings following the ebb and flow of the sea along the sand whilst in the shelter of the sea defences there were Turnstones and Redshank resting from the gusting wind. The sea itself was quite choppy but with careful observation and the aid of a scope there were small numbers of Common Scoter riding out the peaks and troughs of the waves. It is a fairly bulky, uniformly black duck that overwinters in large numbers all around our coast.



Turnstone

Rossal Point Coast Guard Station was our next destination. The station itself is a tower that provides public access to an excellent viewing point on its uppermost storey from which there are superb views across Morecambe Bay, the Large Deep Channel and the approaches to Fleetwood. A good spot for a bit of sea watching, and yes, we were rewarded with sightings of Eider Ducks far offshore. Back inland, in the shelter of the dunes a solitary Stonechat was showing, perched on the top of scrubby bushes.



Goldeneye

Our last stop of the day was Marton Mere, a local nature reserve that was once one of Blackpool's rubbish tips. Long closed the tip has been transformed into a diverse range of maturing habitats including open water, reed beds, grassland with pockets of scrub and woodland. So successful has the transformation been that now the site has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its birdlife. Goldeneye ducks, Kestrel, Song Thrush, Fieldfares, Linnets, Pink-footed and Canada Geese

were all seen and even a Cetti's Warbler was heard calling. As the day drew to a close there was a Starling murmuration and, perhaps the star sighting of the day, seen by only three of the group who stayed out for the full allotted time till exactly 5.00pm..... two Woodcocks. I only wish I had been one of them; perhaps there is a key field craft lesson to learn from this:

You don't see many Woodcocks while sitting on a coach!!

Photos by Robert D

STUART M

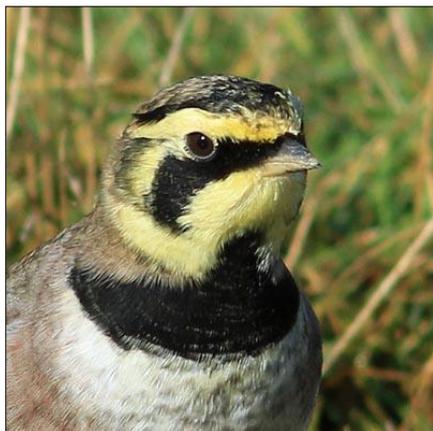
SEARCHING FOR SHORE LARKS

Last October some people had good views of shore larks on the trip to Spurn. Our search for shore larks in Lothian last February was not as easy! Our first location was Kilspindie Golf Course so we walked along one side of Aberlady Bay to the golf course. We were too late for most of the waders, but there was a lovely group of golden plover standing out in the sunshine. We noticed a lot of smoke rising on the far side of the bay where the Nature Reserve is. There were flames creeping up the dunes and spreading over the hillside behind. At times the flames flared up high.



Since there were a lot of people playing golf and walking dogs around the edge of the course with no sign of the shore larks, we used our telescopes to watch the fire. Some people were trying to beat out the flames. Then we heard fire engines and saw them make their way to the top of the hill. After some time assessing the situation, 2 groups of firemen with beaters made their way towards the fire. They looked more professional in their beating technique! Gradually we could see areas of the fire were being controlled. We had hoped that the shore larks might appear after the golfers went home, but no such luck. The fire appeared to be out by the time we got back to the car.

The next morning, we went out before breakfast to the John Muir Country Park. It was a lovely clear morning though quite windy. It is a very large area to search. We worked out our campaign and walked out to the beach and then circuited round across the salt marsh. A beautiful scene in the early morning sunshine. The air was filled with the sound of skylarks. There were so many of them – flying high in song, chasing around, flying low with a fluttering flight, posturing on rocks. It was fantastic, but still no shore larks!



So later in the day we bumped our way down an extremely rough track to some salt marsh at Alnmouth. Brian recognised some buildings from a video he had seen of the shore larks. Hopefully we were in the right area. Very soon he spotted 4 shore larks on the ground. Success! Just at this moment, the lady with a pram and 2 dogs, who we had followed down the bumpy track appeared and we stepped forward to allow her to pass. The shore larks immediately flew off over the dunes to our right! We followed her down the track looking on open areas to the side of the track. After a while 4 birds flew past us. I managed to see that they had gone back across to the first area, so we went back

slowly. This time we found them in longer grass, but we were able to watch them feeding and running through the grass for a good while. Good views through our telescopes! Our journey home was a happy one!

ALISON D

CAWOS INDOOR MEETINGS 2019 - 2020

All meetings are held in the hall at St Vincent's Roman Catholic Church, Tatton Street, Knutsford, WA16 6HR on the first Friday of the month, **unless otherwise stated - please check the programme**. There is a large and free car park off Tatton Street close to the hall.

An entrance fee of £2.00 to members and £4.00 for non-members will be charged at all meetings except the AGM when there will be free admission. A coffee break is taken halfway through the evening. The doors open at 7:30pm for a 7:45pm start.

Details of the next meeting are as follows –

6th March 2020

AGM followed by 'MERSEY ESTUARY'S BIRDS' by author Dermot Smith

The Mersey Estuary is the 10th best wetland in the UK for birds. It is the best place in Britain for overwintering Dunlin and moulting Shelduck. It is also one of the most inaccessible wetlands. However, bird counts have been taking place on the estuary since the 1950's and Dermot will reveal why this is such an important site and how bird populations have changed over the last 70 years and what threats it now faces. Although surrounded by urban development it is actually a truly wild, undisturbed place and undervalued, but really special, place.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS ON THE DEE & MERSEY

Tuesday 10th March, Wednesday 11th March and Thursday 12th March, Parkgate Tidewatch 10am-2pm

Join us at Parkgate Old Baths for the awe-inspiring spectacle of a high tide flooding the vast saltmarsh, potentially reaching the old sea wall. The marsh at Parkgate is one of the best wetland habitats in the northwest, and when flooded by an incoming tide, the wildlife which lives here is pushed closer, with chance of seeing the great range of ducks, geese, wading birds and egrets in big numbers as they are driven upstream by the rising tide.

A range of birds of prey take advantage of mice and voles flushed from the grasses; hen and marsh harriers, peregrines and merlins all spend the winter months on the estuary and this is one of the best places to watch them, plus short-eared owls if we're really lucky. So why not venture out to try witness all the drama. Low pressure and a westerly wind will help push the tide and wildlife in close.

There is free public parking at the Old Baths car park (CH64 6RN) at the north end of The Parade, and the Wirral Country Park car park on Station Road (CH64 6QJ). There are public toilets at Mostyn Square in the middle of The Parade, and a number of pubs and cafes.

Telephone 0151 353 2720 for further information.

Tide times: Tuesday 10 March 10.0m @ 11.32am, Wednesday 11 March 10.2m @ 12.15pm, Thursday 12 March 10.2m @ 12.58pm.

SHORT-EARED OWL

Most of us may have missed out on seeing short-eared owl on our Group visit to Lunt Meadows last year, but I more than made up for that when a friend and I visited Parkgate on the Dee Estuary last month. This was not a high tide visit so the Old Baths car park was pleasantly quiet. There were a few birders about and also many dog walkers and hikers.

We began by searching across the marsh from the car park. Before long we had a quite



close view of female marsh harrier and a more distant view of a female hen harrier. There was a large flock of pink-footed geese (probably 100+) quite close in giving very good views in the scope and a number of little egrets. In the field behind the car park was a large flock of redwings in the trees and several on the ground, while a goldcrest worked along the hedge.

We then decided to walk along the path on the sea wall towards Heswall. Towards the end of the path we got the first sighting of what we had really come here for - a short-eared owl. It was a bit distant over the

marsh and was performing aerial acrobatics in its attempt to escape from 2 carrion crows that were mobbing it. Eventually the crows gave up and the owl dropped into the marsh. We decided to stop for lunch here to keep an out for the owl should it reappear. Sadly it never did but we did get good views of a great egret in the scope.

Refreshed, we returned along the Wirral Way and were back in the Old Baths car park by mid-afternoon. Looking out over the marsh again it wasn't long before the action really kicked off. We first picked up distant views of an owl quartering the marsh in the Shotton direction. Before long it charged direction and started coming in directly towards the car park. I expected that it would turn back but no, it kept on coming and flew across in front of the car park quite close in. Even better it turned and came back and spent some time quartering the area right in front of the car park.



It was obviously actively hunting and would occasionally pivot round and drop to the ground. On one occasion it appeared to have caught something. However, as it sat on the ground a kestrel swooped in chasing the owl away and stealing the catch. I seem to remember seeing an item on Springwatch or such on the subject but that's the first time I've seen it actually happen.

The owl continued to hunt over the area of marsh in front of the car park interspersed by bouts of resting on the ground. On these occasions I was able to get the scope on it for really excellent views – its big yellow eyes were most striking! While watching this owl on the ground a second owl flew in from the Heswall direction. They met briefly in the air before flying off in opposite directions, one of them again coming in close to the car park. We had seen at least 2 short-eared owls, and possibly 3.



For more photos of the short-eared owl please visit Sandpiper's Page on the Group website at <http://www.wgbwcopy.wikidot.com/sandpiper-s-page>

ROBERT D

NEXT MONTH'S MEETING

Our next indoor meeting is on Friday 20th March when we welcome the return of Alan Davies & Ruth Miller with a talk entitled "Uganda – Pearl of Africa".

Hope to see you all then.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Still required – your articles for the newsletter. Tell us all about that birding holiday of a lifetime or that unusual visitor to your garden bird table.

Deadline is the Friday before the meeting.