



# **SOUTH-EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

## **1997 BIRD REPORT**

**Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the annual report of birds in the SECOS area, including the birds of Sandbach Flashes. It is as full a report as possible from the records submitted and considers all species in the area in 1997.

This year I have introduced a number of new articles with the intention of providing additional information whilst at the same time making the report more readable. It is anticipated that these will become a regular feature in future years.

The use of a new location for the log book at Sandbach Flashes, together with the provision of a hardback book, has resulted in many more records for outside the SF area, but within the SECOS area. This is very encouraging, but please remember that I also need regular counts of common species at SF to be able to present a complete record of all birds in the area.

For those readers of this report who are not familiar with the whole of the SECOS area, I have included a map and brief notes on the major sites.

Many thanks to all contributors, without whose records there would not be a bird report. Thanks also to Joan and Keith Tilbrook for their assistance in typing and collating this report.

Colin Lythgoe.

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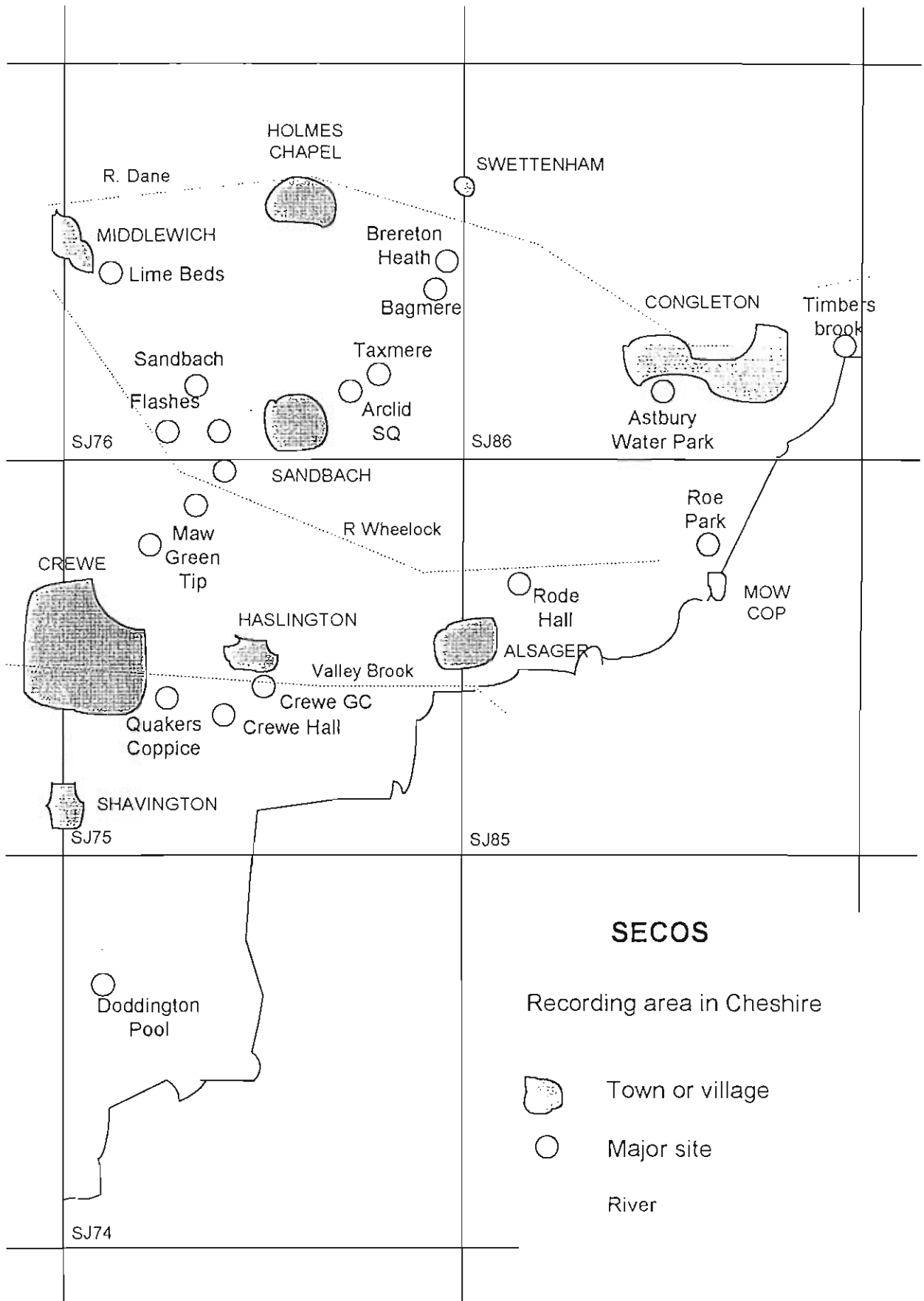
## Abbreviations Used

CF	Crabmill Flash	juv	juvenile
EHF	Elton Hall Flash	1stW	1st Winter
FF	Foden's Flash	2ndW	2nd Winter
FFF	Fields Farm Flash	3rdW	3rd Winter
GF	Groby Flash	imm	immature
MGP	Market Garden Pool	ad	adult
OF	Oak Tree Flash	m	male
PHF	Pump House Flash	f	female
RF	Railway Flash	c	approximately
SF	Sandbach Flashes	max	maximum
WF	Warmingham Flash	SQ	Sand Quarry
WLF	Watch Lane Flash		

## Status Definitions

The status of species within the area is given in a one-line entry after the species heading. These have been defined as follows :-

Abundant	Occurs in large numbers in suitable habitats and seasons.
Common	Occurs regularly or widely distributed in suitable habitats.
Fairly common	Occurs in moderate numbers in suitable habitats.
Uncommon	Occurs in small numbers.
Scarce	One or two records in each year, or restricted to specific habitats.
Rare	Occurs less than annually.
Very rare	Less than 10 records in the last 20 years.
Vagrant	Less than 2 records in the last 20 years.



## BIRDING SITES

I have listed below some of the more major sites for birding in the SECOS area, including a brief summary of the site and a grid reference of its approximate centre.

### Doddington Pool SJ714464

Includes the large lake, woodland, the Hall and neglected grounds.

### Quakers Coppice SJ724546

A wood of six hectares on the south side of Crewe. Owned by Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and operated as a Local Nature Reserve.

### Crewe Hall SJ735544

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

### Crewe Golf Course SJ744546

Situated at Haslington. It also includes the Valley Brook and surrounding woods.

### Rode Pool SJ815575

A 1300 metre-long lake with islands and extensive reed beds, surrounded by woods.

### Lawton Woods SJ825559

Large area of woodland including a lake.

### Roe Park SJ858583

Large area of mixed woodland on side of Mow Cop, like Welsh hill valley habitat.

### Sandbach Flashes

An all-embracing term used to describe the various flashes in the area to the west and south of Sandbach, and north of Crewe. These started forming in the 1930s after land subsidence following brine extraction. All flashes are now privately owned and there is no public access. However, most are watchable from public roads and tracks. Most of the flashes' area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are currently around fourteen flashes, but the most important are :-

#### Elton Hall Flash SJ727596

In two parts, with the River Wheelock flowing through the well-vegetated part, and very little vegetation on the saltpan.

#### Pump House Flash SJ723595

The site of the old brine pumping mechanism. Now silting up rapidly.

#### Railway Flash SJ718585

Currently is two separate flashes with a marshy area between.

#### Mow Green Tip SJ717577

Not strictly in the flashes' area but inextricably linked for gulls and corvids. It is being greatly expanded and now butts right up to Railway Flash. Just north of Crewe.

Watch Lane Flash SJ727606

Heavily disturbed by fishermen but with two small reed beds.

Foden's Flash SJ730613

Includes a large bed of bulrushes and the wood around the flash.

Warmingham Flash SJ719619

Heavily disturbed by fishermen at weekends.

Middlewich Lime Beds SJ711653

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

Arclid Sand Quarry SJ778623

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

Taxmere SJ780625

Area of farmland just north of Arclid Sand Quarry.

Bagmere SJ796643

An overgrown old mere still with some water and reed beds.

Brereton Heath SJ798651

A Cheshire County Council Country Park comprising a water-filled quarry and surrounding mixed woodland.

Swettenham SJ801675

A small mixed woodland with Swettenham Brook flowing through it. A Cheshire Wildlife Trust Local Nature Reserve.

Astbury Water Park SJ849624

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings, now used for water sports and angling.

When out in the countryside, either general birdwatching or carrying out specific fieldwork, then observe the birdwatcher's code of conduct :-

1. The welfare of birds must come first.
2. Habitat must be protected.
3. Keep disturbance to birds and their habitat to a minimum.
4. When you find a rare bird think carefully about who you should tell.
5. Do not harass rare migrants.
6. Abide by the bird protection laws at all times.
7. Respect the rights of landowners.
8. Respect the rights of other people in the countryside.
9. Make your records available to the local bird recorder.

## REVIEW OF THE YEAR

**JANUARY** The year started as it left 1996 - in the middle of a cold spell with sub-zero temperatures, made worse by a cold east wind. This caused most meres and lakes to freeze over. By the 11th, the temperatures had risen slowly to around the monthly average and waters had unfrozen. Clearer weather at the end of the month led to sunny days and freezing nights. Overall this was the driest January this century.

The birds also carried on from 1996, with the 15 White-fronted Geese present at Saxon Cross Motel from 12 December, staying in the same field until 4 January and 2 other White-fronted Geese first seen at Sandbach on 22 December being seen on various Flashes through to 12 March.

Other cold weather records included a flock of 120 unidentified grey geese, with at least 2 Brent Geese, which circled Elton Hall Flash on 1st, but did not land. A Scaup was at Astbury on the 2nd, with Goosanders on 1st and 10th. As the grip of the cold weather relaxed, yellow billed swans appeared with a Bewick's and a Whooper at Doddington on 11th, with the Whooper staying until 9 February, and a Whooper briefly at Sandbach on 19th.

On 31st an adult Mediterranean Gull was seen briefly at Railway Flash before it flew back to Maw Green Tip.

**FEBRUARY** A quiet month for weather, being generally mild and damp throughout. White winged gulls were recorded at Maw Green Tip in January, and continued into February. These included at least 3 Iceland Gulls and 3 Glaucous Gulls. The regular gull counts here were around 1500 Black-headed, 500 Lesser Black-backed, 1000 Herring and 75 Great Black-backed.

**MARCH** Generally mild with day and night temperatures a few degrees higher than normal. An unexceptional month with no extremes, although drier than average. One of the most exciting things in the sky was the Hale-Bopp comet which showed very well on clear evenings throughout March and into April.

Some unusual colour was added to the birdwatching scene with a Ruddy Shelduck moving around the Flashes with the Canada Geese from 27th to 30th, and a Red Breasted Merganser which took up residence in Congleton Park from 26th through to 10 May. A taste of things to come next month was given by the arrival of the first spring migrants, with Chiffchaff on the 9th, Sand Martin on 17th, Blackcap on 18th and Swallow on 22nd. I had reports of a Red Kite seen in the south of our area around Blakenhall during this month, but these were unconfirmed. If anybody has any details then please get in touch.

**APRIL** started warm and dry, and by the second week became very hot and dry with temperatures in the 70's. There was no rain at all until 26th.

This is the main month for arrival of spring migrants and the following dates were the first records: 5th House Martin, 6th Wheatear and Ring Ouzel, 8th Willow Warbler, 12th Reed Warbler and Pied Flycatcher, 15th Whitethroat, 18th Sedge Warbler, 20th Cuckoo, 24th Redstart, 26th Swift and 29th Garden Warbler.

A Sanderling was at Sandbach on 25th, and a Chiloe Wigeon first seen on 29th moved around the Flashes, usually with Wigeon.

**MAY** A very variable month with a heatwave for the first two days, followed by periods of heavy rain and cold northerly winds. From 17th to 21st there was a period of thunder and lightning storms with torrential rain. The month finished as it started with hot and dry weather.

There was still plenty of movement of summer visitors and passage migrants, with Hobby at Doddington on 7th, Whinchat on 12th, Sanderling at Doddington on 13th, Grasshopper Warbler on 15th and 2 Turnstones from 17th to 21st.

From Rode Pool an Osprey was reported from 27th which stayed there until 4 June.

**JUNE** started dry but became progressively wetter. By mid-month a series of slow-moving depressions led to long periods of continuous heavy rain and cold northerly winds, which persisted through to the end of the month. This led to the wettest June for six years, and the second wettest this century.

The best bird of the month was undoubtedly the Wryneck which put in a brief appearance at Elton Hall Flash on the 15th. Although it was present for around 1½ hours it was in view for less than 15 minutes. The second record for the Flashes, which is amazing considering the first record was only on 11 May last year. The first Quail of the year was calling at Doddington on 19th. Broods of Little Ringed Plovers were seen at Elton Hall Flash and Doddington Pool, where they bred for the first time. Wood Warblers carrying food at Timbersbrook indicated successful breeding there.

**JULY** was a variable month with reasonable amounts of sun and rain, and the temperatures were quite warm.

At Doddington the pair of Oystercatchers finally got two juvs to be fully fledged with the second brood of the year. Pied Flycatchers bred successfully in a nest box at Timbersbrook, with the young being ringed. The first Hobby record in the Sandbach Flashes area was not until 20th, leading to the assumption that this year they have not nested somewhere in this area. Return wader passage started to build up at the Flashes with up to 5 Green Sandpipers and 6 Common Sandpipers daily. 2 Black-tailed Godwits on the 8th showed well in full summer plumage. The numbers of Curlew which had returned from the breeding areas built up to 23 by the end of the month.

**AUGUST** was very hot and sunny throughout the month until the 24th, with temperatures up to the low 80's and frequent hot and muggy conditions. From the 24th a series of cold fronts from the west brought rain and much cooler conditions.

Wader passage generally continued to be quite strong, with Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Ruff and Greenshank being present at Sandbach on most days. The notable exceptions which were recorded only once were Little Stint, 2 on the 13th, and Curlew Sandpiper, 1 on the 9th. On the 7th a Crossbill was seen to fly past the usual watchpoint at Sandbach, only the second record for the Flashes. There was a national influx of Crossbills from the continent during June/July and it is possible that this was one of these continental birds. A Marsh Harrier which was first seen on the 17th was seen several times thereafter until the 7th September. The fifth record for the Flashes, and the first in Autumn. Towards the end of the month Snape Lane, Weston, became a much visited site as the actual tree the local Barn Owls were nesting in was finally pinpointed, giving observers a guaranteed view of these elusive birds. On 26th a Chiloe Wigeon in eclipse plumage was located, raising the possibility that it had over-summered. By the end of the month the post-breeding flock of Canada Geese at Arclid Sand Quarry had risen to a record 702.



SEPTEMBER started with sun and showers, but then strong westerly winds from 5th to 15th. These gave way to a period of high pressure with warm, sunny weather to the end of the month with temperatures approaching 70°. This led to the driest September for 11 years.

The best bird of this month was the juv. Grey Phalarope which was seen feeding on the saltpan on 3rd. Although present at dusk it could not be relocated next day. This is a first for the Flashes and occurred at a time when six other Grey Phalaropes were in the North West, although they were at coastal locations, as is more usual for this pelagic species. A rare Knot was at Sandbach on 11th and a Redstart was located at Astbury on 27th. The first returning winter thrushes were seen with 8 Fieldfare at Alsager South on 20th, the earliest recorded date for the SECOS area.

OCTOBER was very variable. It started with mixed sun and rain, then on the 18th/19th temperatures near 70 were recorded on the SECOS field trip to Leighton Moss. These dropped to around 50 on the following days with a cold east wind. 22nd saw the first widespread overnight frost. These sunny days and frosty nights continued through to near the end of the month.

Canada Goose numbers built up to a high of 630 at Watch Lane Flash on 3rd. There was a widespread arrival of Redwings on the 12th and the next few days. On the 21st a Jack Snipe was recorded on the Canal Pools. A Short-eared Owl was seen to cross the road by PHF on 26th. Last dates for summer visitors were recorded with Swallow on 26th and House Martin on 28th.

NOVEMBER A mixed bag of weather throughout the month, with short periods of warm/cold, wet/dry, wind/no wind in varying combinations, finishing with 2 days of continuous heavy rain.

A Common Crane, my best bird of the year, was seen to fly in to Pump House Flash on 3rd November at 12.55. Although it flew off at 15.45 it did appear again on the 8th and the 9th, giving most of the Sandbach regulars a chance to see it.

A Knot put in a brief appearance at Elton Hall Flash on 2nd, and there were 2 Black-tailed Godwit here from 13th to 17th. On the 8th at Doddington a Common Scoter was discovered amongst the Coot, whose numbers peaked at 610.

Wigeon numbers were slow to build up at Sandbach and reached a max of only 253.

Wintering Chiffchaffs are rare in the area and it was a strange coincidence that 2 were independently located on the 22nd, with 1 at Watch Lane Flash and 1 at Crewe Business Park.

DECEMBER came in with overnight frosts until the 5th and most waters were lightly frozen over. Then it was varied, with no extremes except for 2 days of icy cold easterly winds on the 17th and 18th, and very strong gales on Christmas Eve, which caused much damage to trees and property.

On the 14th another Black-tailed Godwit put in an appearance at Elton Hall Flash. Lapwing numbers had built up to 1500. 2 Green Sandpipers were noted wintering in the Stowford area. On the 29th 4 Bewick's Swans were seen at Sandbach and a skein of c160 Pink-footed Geese was seen flying over Haslington, and a few minutes later over Crewe. A Grey Plover on the 21st was the 25th wader species at SF.

By the end of the year a grand total of 167 species had been recorded in the SECOS area.

SYSTEMATIC LIST 1997

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Recorded throughout the year at SF in 1s or 2s. Pairs bred at GF, an annual site, and at RF where 4 juvs were seen in Aug.

The main site continues to be Doddington Pool, which is one of the most important sites in Cheshire for this species. 5 pairs bred here. The number of broods is not known, although 13 ads and 9 juvs were seen on 24 Aug.

Also recorded at Astbury Water Park and on the R. Dane at Swettenham, the first recorded sighting on this part of the Dane.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

*Common resident.*

The usual wintering site of WLF held 10 in April, down on last year's 16 in early winter. Max. of 16 wintered at Doddington Pool, 16 at Arclid SQ, and 9 at Astbury Water Park.

Breeding success was poorly recorded at SF, but pairs probably bred at RF, GF, WF, CF. The only juv recorded was at RF.

At Doddington probably 7 broods and at least 10 juvs were seen. 5 pairs attempted breeding at Rode Pool but no juvs were seen here at all. 6 prs fledged 7 juvs at Arclid SQ. Also bred at Winterley Pool where 1 pair had 2 broods with 5 juvs. The post-breeding flock at Doddington Pool peaked at 25 in Aug, and at Arclid SQ 26 in Sept. There was a max of 14 in Nov at WLF, 6 in Dec at Arclid SQ, and present in 1s and 2s at other flashes.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

*Common winter visitor. Rare in summer.*

Max of 11 in Jan at PHF, 11 at Doddington Pool and 8 at Arclid SQ. Recorded in all months at PHF/EHF with singles here in May, June, July.

Max in late winter was 14 at PHF in Dec and only 8 at Doddington Pool in Nov. Normal numbers at SF, continuing to decrease at Doddington Pool (max 22 in 1996), but recorded for the first time at a pond in Alsager South West.

Also 5 on the R. Dane at Swettenham in winter.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

*Common resident.*

Generally recorded daily at SF with up to 4 at most of the flashes.

The only breeding colony in the area, at Rode Pool, held 26 active nests spread around the Pool. It is likely that juv survival was poor due to the heavy rain and cold northerly winds in mid-May.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

*Fairly common resident.*

At Winterley Pool the year started with a then record count of 119 on 1st Jan and ended with a new record count of 120 on 31 Dec.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Winterley Pool	119	87	66	47+	74	64	51	70	n.c.	72	71	120
Doddington Pool	72	45	7	7	28	73	79	75	52	69	86	66

A reasonable year for breeding success with young seen at GF, Doddington Pool, Astbury Water Park, and Winterley Pool.

Since most of the Mute Swans in Cheshire are now colour ringed with darvic rings, it is possible to individually identify every swan. This has given us the capability to assess the turnover of swans at Winterley Pool. Although the highest count on any one day was 120, there has been a grand total of 337 birds seen there during 1997.

As a point of interest the Cheshire Swan Study Group has now stopped using blue

darvic rings and has changed to green darvic inscribed with the letter C and three numbers. Any sightings to Colin Lythgoe please.

#### Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

A relatively large flock of 20 were at Doddington Pool on 1 Jan where one of the birds was seen to be carrying a blue neck collar. Although most moved quickly on, one bird stayed until 12 Jan.

On 29 Dec 4 were seen briefly at EHF when they flew over to RF.

#### Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

A good sprinkling of records with 1 at EHF and then WLF on 19 Jan; 1 at Doddington Pool on 11 Jan stayed through to 9 Feb; 2 at Arclid SQ on 5 Feb and finally 4 at Doddington Pool on 29 Nov.

#### Pinkfooted Goose (*Anser Brachyrhynchus*)

*Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.*

All records refer to skeins of geese flying high over and so will be wild birds. In the early winter 40 over WLF on 1 Jan; c140 over Congleton on 5 Jan; 70 over FF on 25 Jan, 62 over Arclid SQ on 29 Jan.

Late winter records were c300 over EHF on 14 Dec going west, and 75 over Astbury Water Park going south east on the same date. Finally c160 were seen going over Haslington and a few minutes later over Crewe on 29 Dec.

#### White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

The 15 birds (originally 16) which were present in a field by the Saxon Cross Motel, Sandbach, from 12 Dec 1996 were last seen there on 5 Jan. The 2 birds present at PHF from 22 Dec 1996 stayed at various flashes through to the 12 March.

All these birds were considered to be of the European race (*A.a.albifrons*) which generally winters in Central and Southern England from Dec to March.

In late winter 2 flew over and round EHF on 30 Nov but did not land.

#### Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

1s or 2s at PHF, EHF, WLF, Arclid SQ and Doddington Pool during the year were all with Canada Geese and assumed to be feral birds.

#### Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

*Common resident.*

Max numbers in Jan were a low 100 at EHF, 190 at Doddington Pool, 140 at Winterley Pool, but a high 368 at Arclid SQ.

Breeding occurs throughout the area at most sites, from large flashes/lakes to small field ponds.

Max late winter numbers were recorded in Oct from all sites - 630 at WLF, 350 at Doddington Pool, 250 at Winterley Pool. The peak number at Arclid SQ was earlier with an unprecedented 702 on 30 Aug.

A hybrid bird appeared on the scene in the late winter whose parentage caused some discussion. It was finally agreed that it was probably Canada x Lesser Snow Goose (blue phase). There were also a few smaller Canada Geese around but the actual race and authenticity could not be determined.

#### Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

*Rare winter visitor or feral.*

1 or 2 at SF and 1 at Doddington Pool all on various dates were with Canada Geese and presumed to be feral birds.

Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

On 1 Jan at EHF a flock of c120 grey geese were considered to contain at least 2 Brent Geese. They circled around but did not land.

Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)

*Feral birds.*

1 at WLF on 3 and 4 Oct with the Canada Geese flock.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

*Feral birds.*

1 at FFF from 27 to 30 March moved around the flashes with the Canada Geese flock. This is possibly the same bird which wandered round the area in Nov and Dec 1996.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

*Uncommon resident and winter visitor.*

A max of 23 at EHF in March together with 2 at PHF and 2 at RF. A high number at Doddington Pool with 30 in March. Also 2 at Astbury Water Park on 29 March, and 2 at Arclid SQ on 7 April.

The only breeding success was at EHF where a pair were seen with 9 juvs in June. Despite the high numbers at Doddington there was no breeding attempt recorded (4 pairs bred here in 1996).

By the year end the numbers at EHF had risen to 19 although there were only 6 at Doddington Pool.

Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)

*Scarce visitor.*

1 m was at EHF from 9 to 13 Oct and a m appeared at Haslington Hall on 24 Oct and stayed through to the year end.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

A high max of 650 at EHF/PHF in Jan. As usual numbers reduced rapidly from end of March and the last record was 23 May. Usually under 10 at Doddington Pool but c80 there on 25 Jan. Amazingly similar to 1996 when the usual under 10 became c80 on 20 Jan.

The first returning bird was at RF on 23 July and numbers slowly built up from end of Sept to give 253 by Nov. Also 5 at Rode Pool on 26 Oct.

Chiloe Wigeon (*Anas sibilatrix*)

*Feral birds.*

A m was first seen on 29 April at EHF. It moved around the flashes, usually associating with the Wigeon, through to May. It was seen again on 26 Aug still in eclipse plumage, but not recorded after that date.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

2 or 3 at EHF/RF in Jan and Feb. Up to 8 at Doddington Pool in Feb. 2 prs flushed off WLF on 20 April.

5 at RF on 24 Aug and 2 at Doddington Pool in Dec.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

*Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.*

Although recorded in all months at EHF/PHF the numbers were well down for the second consecutive year. The early winter max was 164 (400 in 1996 and 620 in 1995) and the late winter max was 140 (226 in 1996 and 320 in 1995).

Also recorded at Doddington Pool with 20 in Jan and 7 in Dec, and at Arclid SQ where a high of 51 on 12 Jan was due to the icy weather.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

*Common resident and breeder. Abundant in winter.*

Max early winter numbers were EHF 100, Doddington Pool 270, Astbury Water Park 120, Winterley Pool 110, Arclid SQ 193.

Breeding as usual at many sites and post breeding flock numbers were around 350 at EHF/PHF, although an exceptional 706 were recorded on 23 July. However, these reduced to a low max of 110 by Nov.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Max of 17 in early winter at EHF, with the last record being 4 on 6 April. Also 2 at Doddington Pool on 31 March.

First recorded in late winter with 2 at EHF on 26 Sept. Slowly increased to 9 in Dec.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)

*Scarce summer visitor.*

1 m was at RF on 2 May and a f was here on 24 June. 1 in eclipse plumage was on EHF on 3 Aug.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Recorded in most months at SF but only in low numbers, with max of 7 in Feb at RF. The usual low numbers also at Doddington Pool with max of 11 in March.

2 birds summered on EHF but no breeding attempt was noted. Not present elsewhere in summer.

Max of only 5 in Dec at EHF but at Doddington Pool there were 56 on 22 Nov and 31 on 11 Dec.

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

*Fairly common winter visitor.*

The usual low numbers and sporadic records from SF with max of 15 in Jan and 13 in Dec, both at WLF. In the early winter the only site with a high number was Doddington Pool with 156 on 25 Jan.

None summered and late winter max were Astbury Water Park 88, Doddington Pool 110, Winterley Pool 21, Arclid SQ 6.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) -

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.*

In early winter, around 25 birds at SF which spread around the flashes as the breeding season approached. Numbers increased impressively at Doddington Pool:

Jan 86, Feb 108, March 200, April 264, May 67. Also 40 at Astbury Water Park.

As in 1996 pairs bred at SF with juvs seen at FFF, GF, RF and EHF. However, Doddington Pool continues to be the main site in Cheshire where there were around 8 broods. Also bred at Bent Farm SQ where a pair with 7 juvs in July, and near Arclid SQ where a pair with 6 juvs.

In late winter max of 16 at WLF, 105 at Doddington Pool, 32 at Winterley Pool, 19 at Astbury Water Park.

Scaup (*Aythya marila*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

A m was seen at Astbury Water Park on 2 Jan. The first record in the area since a f at Doddington Pool on 8 Jan 1993.

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

*Rare visitor.*

The only record was 1 at Doddington Pool on 8 Nov.

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Regular all winter at Astbury Water Park, max 13 in Jan, and Doddington Pool, max 7 in March.

The first late winter record at each site was 3 on 30 Nov at Astbury and 2 on 25 Oct at Doddington.

1 f was at WLF on 24 Nov and FFF on 30 Nov.

Redbreasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*)

*Very rare visitor.*

A f was first sighted in Congleton Park on 26 March which stayed through to the second week in May.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Continuing the trend of the last four years there was a further increase in records, with several records from most sites. Max of 4 at Astbury Water Park on 11 Jan, 2 on the R. Dane at Congleton on 5 Jan, 3 at Arclid SQ on 26 Jan, 26 at Doddington Pool on 31 Jan, 3 at FF on 25 Jan were at WLF on 26 Jan, 3 at Alsager on 8 Feb, 11 on Lawton Woods Pool on 6 March, 4 on the R. Dane at Swettenham on 27 March.

As usual fewer records in the late winter period, but 1 at Doddington Pool, 5 at Rode Pool and 4 on the R. Dane at Swettenham.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

*Uncommon resident.*

In early winter a max of 3 at SF but 27 at Doddington Pool in Jan.

This year breeding was confirmed at both sites with a pair breeding at RF, 3 juvs seen in Sept, and Doddington, where 5 juvs in late Aug. These records confirm the Ruddy Duck as the latest duck to breed during the summer.

Only 1 winter record at SF with 1 at PHF on 14 Dec, but continuing resident at Doddington Pool although max of only 4.

[Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)]

No confirmed records.

I have a first hand report of a birder using a telescope in the Blakenhall area in early spring. When asked he said that he was watching a Red Kite.

Can anybody please confirm this record, or supply any further information?

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

*Rare migrant.*

An imm was seen at RF on 17 Aug, and then several times thereafter at RF, PHF and EHF until 7 Sept. This is the fifth record for SF and the first in autumn. Previously 3 in April and 1 in May, the last on 17/4/92.

Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

*Rare visitor.*

On 2 Feb a male was seen briefly as it flew over EHF. This record is supported by a full description submitted to the County Rarities Panel for adjudication.

Unconfirmed reports also of a Goshawk in the Rode Pool area in March.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

*Common resident.*

Recorded regularly throughout the area although the only breeding record was of a pair near FF.

Prey seen to be taken included Starlings at EHF, and Blue Tits and Great Tits taken regularly from a Swettenham garden.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Continuing to become more common. Recorded from 25 separate sites during the year. Breeding proved at Bradwall, Crewe Hall and Swettenham. Displaying pairs seen at

Checkley, Rode Pool and Weston.

At SF there were 15 flyover records involving 18 birds. One bird was found dead by the railway line just south of Crewe, hit by a train.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

*Rare migrant.*

1 was at Rode Pool from 27 May through to 4 June.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

*Common resident.*

Recorded widely throughout the area but breeding only confirmed at two sites: Doddington Pool where a pair were feeding 3 large juvs at the entrance to a nest in an oak tree along the drive, and at Rode Pool where a pair also nested in an oak tree along the main drive.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

*Uncommon migrant and winter visitor.*

Only recorded at SF with records of singles on 28 Feb, 2 March then 8, 24, 25 Sept, 10, 19, 22 Oct, and finally 1 on 22 Nov where it was seen attacking Blue Tits on the bird feeding station at EHF.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

The first record of the year at SF was not until 20 July. Thereafter only 13 records through to the last on 28 Sept when one was seen to take a Greenfinch. Far fewer, and later records than last year when recorded regularly from May onwards and presumed to breed, so presumably not bred in the area this year.

Also recorded at Bagmere, Brereton Heath, Doddington Pool (2) the first of the year on 7 May, Middlewich Lime Beds, Weston.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

*Scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor.*

At least 3 birds at SF in the early winter, with 3 in the air together at EHF on 25 Jan. Only one record in April/May/June. Some evidence of post breeding dispersal in autumn and then probably 2 birds at RF/EHF in late winter.

Also recorded at Alsager, Astbury Water Park.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

*Rare except where locally released.*

Records of low numbers from Arclid SQ, Bent Farm SQ, Blakenhall, Bridgemere, Checkley, Doddington and Weston. The latter three sites are definitely supported by releases for shooting and the other sites probably are.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

*Scarce resident.*

Recorded at Alsager South (a regular site where they usually breed), Bradwall, Checkley, Weston and Weston New G.C. Birds are definitely released by shooting syndicates in the Checkley and Weston areas. This species continues to be very scarce as a 'natural' breeder.

Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)

*Scarce summer visitor.*

The only records were of birds heard calling at Congleton, Tidnock Lane, on 22 June and Doddington on 19 and 22 June.

None were found in the usual area in Alsager South despite intensive searching during a national influx around the end of May.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

*Scarce resident except where locally released.*

Very common where reared for shooting.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Singles recorded at FF in Jan and March. Then usually singles at the latter end of the year in Oct/Nov/Dec. However on 21 Dec there were 1 or possibly 2 at EHF, 2 at WLF and 1 at FF which probably gives a more accurate idea of the numbers usually present in winter.

Also 1 at Doddington Pool on 7 Nov, the first record for this site, and at Arclid SQ where regular in early winter and through to July, although no evidence of breeding.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

*Common resident.*

The only records were of around 25 resident at EHF/PHF, usually around 20 at Doddington Pool but post-breeding numbers on 20 July were c50. Astbury Water Park 6, Rode Pool c10

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

*Common resident and variable winter visitor.*

Max numbers recorded at SF during the year were 100 EHF, 94 PHF, 72 RF, 32 WLF.

Although recorded at most of the other large waters in the area the main site is Doddington Pool where 299 in Feb and 610 in Nov.

Also 147 at Astbury Water Park in Dec.

Common Crane (*Grus grus*)

*Vagrant.*

1 bird was seen at PHF on 3 Nov and re-appeared there briefly on 8 and 9 Nov. This is a first for SF and the SECOS area.

See specific notes for more details.

Probably the same bird was seen at Inner Marsh Farm and Burton Marsh on 1 Nov and seen flying over Northwich on the morning of 3 Nov before it landed at SF.

This is only the eighth record for Cheshire, with a flyover at Frodsham on 15 July 1996 and the next previous record being in 1986.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

*Rare winter visitor and rare summer visitor.*

One at EHF on 23 Feb was an early arrival; also 1 at Arclid SQ on the same date. Recorded at SF almost daily from 1 March to 31 May on various flashes with a max of 7, 2 near Congleton on 15 May.

First at Doddington on 28 Feb when present continuously through to Sept. A pair bred on the island in the New Pool here. They hatched 3 chicks in May and these managed to swim over to the mainland after a few days but quickly disappeared.

The pair relaid and this time 2 juvs were fledged to the free-flying stage.

Only 1 autumn record at SF with 2 at EHF on 5 Aug.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

*Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.*

One at EHF on the early date of 11 March, then recorded daily from 31 March with a max of 7.

First at Doddington Pool on 16 April when 3 were present.

Varied breeding success with only 1 confirmed pair at SF but confirmed breeding at Doddington Pool for the first time, and 3 pairs at Middlewich Lime Beds; a pair failed at Arclid SQ but another pair was successful nearby.

A max of 11 birds on autumn passage at EHF with the last record on 30 Aug.

Also 2 at Bent Farm SQ on 13 July.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

*Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.*

An early record of 2 at EHF on 23 Feb. Then regular spring passage from 17 March to 23 May with a max of 10. 2 at Middlewich Lime Beds on 9 March and 1 on 16 March.



Return passage at SF only, from 13 Aug to 28 Sept with a max of 6 and 2 late birds at EHF on 11 Oct.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

The numbers in the wintering flock at EHF continue to decline with early and late winter max this year of 21 and 72, compared to 400 and 80 in 1996 and 200 and 280 in 1995.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

*Scarce irregular visitor.*

One was seen feeding on EHF early morning on 21 Dec when it was disturbed and flew off.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

The usual wintering flock at EHF held around 750 in Feb, and a max of 500 at Arclid SQ.

Pairs bred at Bent Farm SQ (1), Doddington (3) and probably at Stowford (2), but no proved breeding at EHF.

In late winter up to 1,500 at EHF and 750 at Arclid SQ. 750 were seen flying over Holmes Chapel going south on 14 Dec.

Knot (*Calidris Canutus*)

*Rare visitor.*

4 were at EHF on 11 Sept and 1 was here on 2 Nov. This is in line with previous records which have usually been in the autumn.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

1 at EHF on 25 April and 1 at Doddington on 13 May.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Only 3 records, all from EHF with 2 on 13 Aug, and 1 on 29 and 30 Sept. A poor show after last year's max of 22.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

Only 3 records, all from EHF with 1 on 9 Aug, 6 on 8 Sept and 1 on 13 Sept. Again a poor show after last year's good series of records in Sept.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

At SF the numbers recovered slightly from the very low numbers of 1996. Present all winter at EHF with a max of 10 in March. Also at Astbury Water Park where 1 or 2 on 3 dates in early Jan.

Spring passage finished on 28 May with 2 at EHF. There were up to 5 at Doddington Pool from 18 April to 2 May.

The first autumn passage record was of 2 at PHF on 5 July and then regular through to the year end with a max of 11 in Nov.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

The pattern of records is very similar to Dunlin, although numbers are slightly down on last year. Present all winter at EHF with a max of 10 in Feb, the last record being 2 on 19 April. Also at Doddington Pool with a f on 2, 3 and 4 May.

The first bird on return passage was 1 at EHF on 5 July and then regular through to the year end with a max of 11 in Nov and Dec.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

The early winter records were from Middlewich Lime Beds with 2 on 1 Jan, 1 on 26 Jan and 2 on 2 March. Also 1 at Arclid SQ on 15 March and 4 at Mow Cop on 23 March.

Late winter records were from SF with 1 on the Canal Pool on 21 Oct and 1 at PHF on 1 and 2 Nov.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.*

Recorded during the winter periods in low numbers (less than 10) from 7 sites outside SF, except for Middlewich Lime Beds where 38 in Jan.

The difficulties in accurately counting this secretive species were highlighted at EHF in Feb. Normal counts were of c15 birds but a Sparrowhawk flew over and flushed up 46.

The max number recorded in Sept was 44 with c100 in Nov.

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

*Rare resident. Scarce winter visitor.*

1 regular at FF in Jan, 1 at Doddington Pool on 8 Feb and 1 regular at Arclid SQ.

In late winter 1 at WLF on 19 Oct, 1 at Arclid SQ on 29 Oct, 1 at EHF on 1 Nov and again 1 regular at FF in Dec.

Blacktailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

*Scarce migrant.*

At EHF 2 on 23 March; 1 on 3 May; 33 on 10 May (the second highest count after last year's 81 on 24 Aug); 2 in summer plumage on 8 July; 2 on 18 July; 1 on 3 Aug; 4 on 24 Aug; 1 from 17 to 20 Sept; 1 on 3 Oct; 2 from 13 to 17 Nov and finally 1 on 14 Dec. The first records of birds on the ground at Arclid SQ with 1 on 31 July and 3 on 4 Aug.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

1 at EHF on 5 April, 1 at Doddington Pool on 2 May, 1 at EHF on 6 May, and 8 at EHF on 13 May.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

*Uncommon resident and fairly common winter visitor.*

Max numbers in the evening roost at EHF reached 63 in March. Few records in April, May and June as birds dispersed to their breeding sites.

Probably 2 pairs bred at Stowford, a traditional site, and a m was singing in May at Doddington Pool and in June over Weston New G.C.

Birds began to return to EHF at the end of July and reached 75 in Aug but settled to c50 in the winter.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

*Uncommon visitor and migrant.*

Recorded in all months except May at EHF where winter visitors, migrants and summer visitors all overlap. Max of 7 in Feb. 1s or 2s in June, July and Aug when numbers slowly built up to 8 by Dec. 3 at Arclid SQ on 9 Aug.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

1 at PHF on 2 June. Then singles on 6 dates in July. Then present daily from 11 Aug to 27 Aug with a max of 4 and finally 3 singles in Sept.

Also 1 at Doddington Pool in Sept.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

*Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.*

Wintering records of 1 at PHF on 5 Jan, 1 at Stowford in Jan, 1 at Middlewich

Lime Beds in Jan, and 1 at WF in Feb.

Only 2 spring passage records of singles at WLF in April.

Return passage started on 30 June with 2 at EHF and then recorded daily until 2 Oct with a max of 7. The last record was 2 at EHF on 11 Oct. Passage birds were also recorded during July at Bent Farm SQ, Doddington Pool and Middlewich Lime Beds.

The only wintering birds in late winter were at Stowford with 1 in Oct and Dec and 2 in Nov.

#### Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

All records from EHF with 1 from 17 to 19 May, 2 from 2 to 4 July, 1 on 15 and 16 July and 1 from 22 to 25 Aug.

#### Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Spring passage recorded from EHF and WLF with up to 3 birds on most days from 16 April to 19 May. Also at Arclid SQ 1 on 8 May, Doddington Pool 2 on several days in May.

As usual with this species and Green Sandpiper, the autumn passage is much longer and with more birds. Recorded daily at EHF/RF from 3 July to 29 Sept with a max of 8. Also 1s and 2s at Arclid SQ, Bent Farm SQ, Doddington Pool and Swettenham. A poor year at Arclid SQ where a max of only 4 in autumn.

#### Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

*Scarce migrant.*

1 at EHF on 27 April. 1 at Doddington Pool on 4 May was coming into summer plumage. 2 at EHF on 17 May stayed through to 22 May which is unusual for this scarce visitor which usually puts in only very brief appearances.

#### Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicaria*)

*Vagrant.*

An imm bird of this species was seen feeding on the mud at the edge of the saltpan at EHF at 11.30 on 3 Sept. It was watched there continuously for the rest of that day but was not recorded on the next day.

See specific records for more details.

#### Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

*Rare visitor.*

An ad was seen bathing at RF on 31 Jan. After a few minutes it flew back to Maw Green Tip and was not relocated.

The 8th record for SF.

#### Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

*Abundant autumn and winter visitor.*

1500 recorded feeding on Maw Green Tip during Jan. Between 9,000 and 10,000 at Doddington Pool in the roost from Jan through to March.

No breeding records locally.

In summer a few hundred non-breeders were still on the tip but numbers built up in autumn to 2,000 by Dec.

The late winter roost at Doddington averaged 8-9,000 and an accurate count of the night time roost on EHF saltpan on 29 Dec gave 2,400. Most of these birds come over from Maw Green Tip.

#### Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.*

A sprinkling of records throughout the year at SF except for April and May. Max recorded in winter was 20 at Maw Green Tip.

Max numbers in the Doddington Pool roost was 150 in early winter and 70 in late winter.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

Recorded in all months at Maw Green Tip/RF/PHF with a max of 400 in early winter and 1500 in late winter. Most of these fly off somewhere to the north west to roost at night.

At Doddington Pool only 200 recorded in early winter but 2,200 in late winter in the roost there.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

*Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.*

A max of 800 in early winter at Maw Green Tip/RF/PHF. Very few records in summer. A max of 2000 recorded on the Tip/RF on 31 Dec.

There are always many fewer Herring than Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the roost at Doddington Pool and a max of only 30 was recorded.

Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus argentatus cachinnans*)

*Scarce visitor.*

Recorded on 25 days from 9 May to 2 Nov, with a max of 4 on any one day and totalling 36 bird-days, this sequence of records conforms with its Cheshire status "a very scarce visitor in summer and autumn, otherwise rare". Only 5 records last year.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

At least 3 birds were at Maw Green Tip in early winter with various records of 2ndW, 3rdW and ad birds through to 19 March. Also 1 at Doddington Pool on 12 Jan, the first "white-winged" gull recorded here despite there being a winter roost of around 12,000 gulls every night.

In late winter only 1 bird, a 1stW from 27 Dec to the year end.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

At least 2 birds were at Maw Green Tip in early winter with various records of 1stW and 2ndW birds through to 6 April.

No records in late winter.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Only recorded in the winter roost at Maw Green Tip with a max of 72 recorded in Jan and 140 in Dec. As with all the large gulls they fly off somewhere to the north west at dusk to roost.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

*Uncommon passage migrant.*

Difficult to separate spring passage from autumn passage with 2 records in May, 2 in June, 10 in July, 2 in Aug and 1 in Sept. Recorded from WLF, EHF and PHF with a max of 5.

One good spring record from Doddington with 8 on 25 April. Return passage birds noted almost daily here from 2 July to 7 Aug.

Also 2 at Astbury Water Park on 31 Aug, 1 at Bent Farm SQ on 13 July, and 1 at Arclid SQ on 17, 18, 26 July.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

*Rare passage migrant.*

1 juv/1stW bird was at EHF on 29 and 31 Aug.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

*Scarce passage migrant.*

1 was at Doddington Pool on 3 May.

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

*Common resident.*

Flocks of up to 200 in most town centres.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

*Uncommon resident.*

The only flock into double figures was 22 at Alsager South on 20 Jan.

At Quakers Coppice probably 11 pairs laid 30 clutches with 57 eggs laid. 33 hatched and at most only 14 fledged. A very poor year for fledging success due to poor weather and a high level of chick predation in the nest.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

*Common resident.*

c600 feeding in a field of kale on 25 Jan at Weston New G.C.

Breeds widely throughout the area.

The only late winter flocks recorded were 400 over Crewe Business Park on 5 Nov and 280 at Haslington Hall on 30 Dec.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

*Common resident.*

Common and widespread but most observers do not bother to record it. 10 on the bird feeding station at EHF on 4 Jan, 12 at Swettenham in March, 18 at Haslington in Oct. 29 at EHF on 6 Dec.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

*Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.*

The first record was 1 at WLF on 20 April then 1 at Rode Pool on 29 April and FF on 30 April. Also recorded from RF, Alsager South, Haslington Hall, Arclid SQ.

Usually only the first one heard is recorded and so there is no idea of breeding density. Also as usual there is no record of late birds. This species is so obvious when it first arrives but is very unobtrusive when actually breeding.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

*Scarce resident.*

Increased observer effort together with enthusiasm of the South East Barn Owl Group is the probable explanation for the large increase in records this year. 2 proved breeding sites were located, Blakenhall and the well-watched Snape Lane at Weston, also one probable site near Crewe Hall.

There were records from 8 other sites and sadly 2 birds were found dead on the roadside at 2 other sites. One of these carcasses was sent to the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology for analysis.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

*Common resident.*

Common in open farmland areas with, for example, 5 separate birds calling at dusk near Haslington Hall on 15 Aug. Recorded from 12 sites although no breeding was confirmed.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

*Common resident.*

Common in more wooded areas. Only recorded from 6 sites and breeding confirmed at Brereton Heath and Arclid SQ.

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

1 was seen briefly at EHF on 26 Oct.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

Recorded at WLF on 26 April and Doddington Pool on 27 April with a more general influx from the first week of May. 400 were feeding over Doddington Pool on 4

May after a spell of heavy rain.

Breeding sites as normal with the colony in the west end of Crewe confirmed as the largest in Cheshire with 450 birds counted flying over the rooftops in June. The latest birds were 2 at WLF on 14 Sept, 10 over Wistaston and 2 over Crewe on 15 Sept with the last 2 being over Wistaston on 16 Sept.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Recorded from 16 sites this year compared with 9 last year. However, only 1 breeding site, Valley Brook near Haslington, was recorded and the majority of records were from early autumn or winter. This conspicuous species seems to disappear when breeding!

Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)

*Very rare visitor.*

First seen at 12.10 on 15 June at EHF, it was seen twice more until it disappeared around 13.30 and could not be relocated.

This is only the second record for SF with, amazingly, the first ever record being only last year, on 11 May.

See the specific note for more detail.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

*Uncommon resident.*

More records than usual. Recorded at various times of the year from 13 sites with 8 in the breeding season. Proved breeding at 2 sites, Doddington Pool with a juv seen on 15 Aug and Rode Pool where a pair nested in a Sweet Chestnut.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

*Common resident.*

By far the commonest woodpecker although few records received. A pair bred near a Swettenham garden and a juv was found dead in the garden under a window in the autumn. Birds of this species are regular visitors to the peanuts at the feeding station at EHF.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

*Uncommon resident.*

An average number of sightings with records from EHF, FF, PHF, Alsager South, Bradwall, Congleton Bathvale, Lawton Woods, Quakers Coppice, Swettenham.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

*Fairly common*

A flock of 20 at Alsager South in Jan.

Singing birds in the breeding season at EHF, Doddington Pool, Haslington Hall, Middlewich Lime Beds, Stowford, Weston New G.C.

A slow trickle of passage birds over Haslington on 18 Oct with 25 over in 2 hours.

14 at FFF on 4 Oct.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

First records were 1 at WLF on 17 March and then 6 at WLF on 23 March. 50 at Doddington Pool in April and 60 at WLF in May.

At Arelid SQ 16 prs nested in the old quarry but all were predated by foxes. 75 nest holes appeared in a large pile of unwashed sand but most, if not all, failed due to sand falls. 21 nest holes were found in the new quarry nearby. Although 7 on the R. Dane at Swettenham where they usually breed, no nest holes could be found.

The last record was 3 at EHF on 21 Sept.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

*Abundant summer visitor.*

An early bird was at Astbury Water Park on 22 March. Next arrivals were not

until 3 April and then common after that. On 7 May there were c1500 feeding just above the water surface at Doddington Pool during heavy rain showers with a cold northerly wind.

Breeds commonly throughout the area.

The only pre-migration roost noted was 400 in a maize field near Haslington at the end of Sept. The last record was 1 over EHF on 26 Oct.

#### House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

*Common summer visitor.*

First recorded at WLF on 5 April and then 20 at WLF on 17 April.

On 7 May there were c1000 with the c1500 Swallows at Doddington Pool.

Breeds commonly throughout the area.

The last record was a late bird over Alsager on 28 Oct.

#### Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

*Scarce passage migrant and possible summer visitor.*

Only 2 records, 1 over PHF on 17 Aug and 1 over EHF on 25 Aug.

#### Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

*Uncommon resident and passage migrant.*

Up to 22 at Middlewich Lime Beds in early winter and 10 at Maw Green Tip. Spring passage noted in late March/early April at SF, Mow Cop and Arclid SQ.

The only proved breeding was at Middlewich Lime Beds, where 2 pairs bred and 1 juv was seen, although a m was singing at EHF in June.

Autumn passage was noted over SF and Arclid SQ in mid-Sept. Late winter flocks were 30 at Middlewich Lime Beds, 15 at FFF, 15 at Arclid SQ and 7 at Wheelock.

#### Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

*Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.*

1 at EHF on 12 April and max of only 3 on spring passage. However, it was a good breeding season with proved breeding at EHF (1), Doddington Pool (2), Haslington Hall (2), Weston New G.C. (2) and breeding season records from Stowford and Weston.

Up to 7 on autumn passage at SF with the last being on 14 Sept when 1 at EHF and 2 at RF.

#### Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

*Scarce summer visitor and scarce winter visitor.*

Breeding season records from Crewe GC (where 2 juvs seen), Doddington Pool, Valley Brook Haslington.

The numbers were lower in the usual winter roost at Arclid SQ with a max of only 7.

Also recorded in autumn/winter from CF, EHF, FFF, PHF, WLF, Alsager South, Crewe, Crewe Cemetery, Middlewich Lime Beds, Stowford, Wheelock.

#### Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

*Common resident.*

Breeds commonly around the area but very much under recorded.

10 at EHF in Aug. 35 on a freshly manured field at Swettenham in Dec and 100 in a similar field at Arclid SQ in Dec.

No record of any large winter roosts.

A bird of the continental sub-species White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba alba*) was at WLF on 30 March, and there were up to 10 at EHF from 26 April to 1 May. Singles also at Arclid SQ on 7, 12 and 15 April.

#### Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

*Scarce resident.*

2 were recorded at Congleton Bathvale during Jan. A pair were seen on the R. Dane at Congleton on 22 April carrying nesting material.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)  
*Abundant resident.*

Dunnoek (*Prunella modularis*)  
*Abundant resident.*

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)  
*Abundant resident.*

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)  
*Scarce summer visitor.*

A m was seen briefly on Red Lane Tip at WLF on 24 April and a f was at Astbury Water Park on 27 Sept.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)  
*Scarce migrant and summer visitor.*

3 separate singles seen at EHF on 12 May, EHF on 9 July and Maw Green Tip on 31 Aug.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)  
*Uncommon passage migrant.*

The first arrivals were 2 near Crewe on 23 March and 1 at Mow Cop on 25 March, but the more general passage was not until late April when a max of 6 at EHF. Recorded from 6 sites.

As usual fewer records in autumn, most in Sept with only 2 at EHF on 6th, 1 at Middlewich on 7th and 1 at EHF on 21st, and 1 at Arclid SQ on 2 Oct.

2 birds at EHF on 26 April were reported as being of the Greenland race *O.o.leucorrhoea*.

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)  
*Scarce passage migrant.*

Only one record this year with a m and a f at Mow Cop on 6 April, quite a poor year for this traditional site.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)  
*Abundant resident and winter visitor.*

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)  
*Common winter visitor.*

Early winter flocks recorded were of c400 near Wall Hill Congleton on 26 Jan, 250 over EHF on 22 March, and 200 at Stowford on 9 April. The last record was 30 April.

8 at Alsager South on 20 Sept is the earliest recorded date for the SECOS area. 300 at Maw Green Tip on 26 Oct and 200 at Swettenham in Dec.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)  
*Fairly common resident.*

Very few records received. Probably 7 prs at Arclid SQ, the best year so far recorded.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)  
*Common winter visitor*

Low numbers in early winter with the highest max being only 78 in Crewe Cemetery on 6 March.

There must have been a large scale arrival from 12 Oct when 1 at FF and 16 at Middlewich Lime Beds, followed by 2 at FF on 13th, 100 over EHF, 20 over Haslington and 1 at Alsager on 14th.

A flock of 80 was in Crewe Business Park on 5 Nov.



Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

*Fairly common resident.*

Breeds throughout the area, although few breeding records were received, and the only 10+ number was 16 at Haslington Hall on 24 Oct.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

*Scarce summer visitor.*

As usual the same bush at Bagmere provided the only site for the reeling male of what is presumably the only pair in the area.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

The first record was 1 at WLF on 18 April. Possibly 5 pairs bred at SF although no accurate census was made. The only other records were from Arclid SQ, Doddington Pool and Weston New G.C.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

First seen at WLF on 12 April, birds were singing there on the 13th.

Again although no accurate census was made at SF there were probably 4 pairs at WLF and at least 2 pairs at GF.

Numbers were reduced down to 2 pairs at Rode Pool following dredging operations which removed a lot of phragmites and typha.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

First records from RF with 1 on 30 April and 1 on 3 May. Then recorded only from RF, PHF, EHF, WLF, FFF and Arclid SQ.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

*Common summer visitor.*

First recorded on 15 April at Haslington, then 20th at WLF and 21st at Alsager South.

Quite common with, for example, singing males at Weston New G.C. (5) and Arclid SQ (6-8).

The last record was 1 at WLF on 14 Sept.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

*Fairly common summer visitor.*

First recorded on 29 April at Haslington. Then singles at Arclid SQ and WLF on 3 May and 3 at WLF on 5 May.

7 singing birds and 2 proved breeding at Arclid SQ.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

*Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.*

Apart from SF I have received more records of wintering birds than breeding birds! 1 m in a Wistaston garden from 1 Jan to 17 Feb.

1 m Astbury Water Park on 8 Jan, 1 f Alsager South on 13 Jan, 1 f Crewe 18 Jan was seen to be taking bread from a bird table in the observer's garden.

The problem of separating late winter visitors from early summer visitors is typified with the record of a singing m on 18 March at Weston.

The first at SF was 1 at WLF on 30 March.

This continues to be probably the second most common warbler after Willow Warbler. Probably 8 breeding territories at Arclid SQ.

In late winter 1 m + 2 f at FF on 19 Oct, 2 m + 1 f at Congleton Bathvale on 30 Nov, 1 m at Alsager South also on 30 Nov and 1 f in an Alsager garden on 18 Dec.

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

*Rare summer visitor.*

At Timbersbrook at the end of June and on 3 July an ad was seen carrying food for young. The first proved breeding for this species which is rare in the SECCOS area.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

*Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.*

A general arrival from the 10 March when the first was seen at Congleton Bathvale. At FF and Barthomley on the 11th and Astbury Water Park, Arclid SQ, Crewe Business Park and Doddington by the 16th.

Breeds commonly throughout the area. 6 m singing at Arclid SQ in May.

1 singing in Crewe Cemetery on 9 Oct may have been a passage migrant or an early winter visitor.

There were two definite records of winter visitors with 1 at Crewe Business Park on 22 Nov and 1 at WLF on the same day which was seen up to the 12 Dec.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

*Common summer visitor.*

1 at Arclid SQ on 4 April and then widespread arrivals across the area from 8 April with singles at EHF, Crewe Cemetery and Mow Cop on that day and 1 or 2 at FF, WLF, Congleton Bathvale and Crewe on the 9th.

Breeds commonly throughout the area. 16 territories at Arclid SQ in May.

Last recorded on 21 Aug at EHF.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

The only early winter records were up to 3 regular at FF.

No breeding season records.

Late winter records from EHF, WLF, FF, Alsager South, Congleton Bathvale, Crewe Cemetery, Doddington Pool and Arclid SQ.

Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*)

*Rare winter visitor.*

On 7 Dec 1 was seen at FF from 13.30 to 14.25 and then briefly again at 15.55. Despite intensive searching the next day it could not be relocated.

Previous records are 1 at WLF on 13 Oct 1978, 1 at Haslington on 21 March 1988, 1 at Mow Cop on 6 Nov 1994, 3 in Quakers Coppice from 24 Feb to 15 March 1995.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

*Uncommon summer visitor.*

Crewe cemetery and the adjacent St. Michael's Churchyard continue to be the best site for this species with 4 pairs breeding this year. Also bred at Timbersbrook where ad carrying food for young in June, and Arclid SQ where a pair + 3 juvs.

Other records from Arclid SQ, Brereton Heath, Congleton, Congleton Bathvale, Crewe, Haslington, EHF.

Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

*Scarce summer visitor.*

At Timbersbrook a pair bred in a nest box on the side of a cottage, hatched 7 and fledged 5. This is the first recorded breeding in the SECOS area.

The only other record was of 1 briefly at WLF on 12 April.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

*Common resident.*

Few breeding season records but presumably the breeding success is being maintained since numbers continue to be high, helped no doubt by mild winters.

Flocks of 20 or more from FF, 30 on 12 Jan; Swettenham 30 in late summer; WLF, 20 on 15 Nov, FF, 22 on 13 Dec.

Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Always present at FF in winter but this year it was nice to prove breeding here as well, with a pair + juvs on 31 May. Also in the breeding season at Congleton Bathvale, Crewe Business Park and Arclid SQ.

Winter records from these sites and Swettenham.

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Singing males at Crewe Golf Course, Doddington Pool and Quakers Coppice in March and April.

1 pair bred at Arclid SQ.

Winter records from WLF, EHF, FF, Crewe Cemetery, Swettenham.

Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*)

*Abundant resident.*

At Quakers Coppice 8 pairs used nest boxes, laid 73 eggs, hatched 67 and fledged 67. This was a good performance but subsequent chick loss was probably high in the cold and wet June.

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

*Common resident.*

At Quakers Coppice 3 pairs used nest boxes, laid 27 eggs, hatched 25 and fledged 25.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)

*Common resident.*

At Quakers Coppice 2 pairs used nest boxes, laid 14 eggs, hatched 8 and fledged 8.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

*Common resident.*

Fairly common breeding bird with, for example, 2 pairs at Crewe GC, 2 pairs at Quakers Coppice.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Grossly under-recorded but 2 were at the bird feeding station at EHF on 29 March and 6 at FF on 30 March. Probably 2 pairs bred at Arclid SQ.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

*Common resident.*

Breeds commonly. No winter flocks recorded.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

*Common resident and winter visitor.*

On 26 Jan at Crewe Hall 2500 were counted in a roost in trees on the bed of the old lake (together with 2000 Rooks).

Regular at Maw Green Tip in winter with, for example, 250 on 31 Dec.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

*Common resident.*

On 26 Jan at Crewe Hall 2000 were counted in a roost in trees on the bed of the old lake (together with 2500 Jackdaws).

A count at 10 rookeries in the Crewe/Alsager area totalled 521 nests (562 in 1996). The rookery in Arclid Hollow held 67-68 nests, a significant reduction from the 81-84 in 1996.

There were at least 50 Rooks amongst c500 corvids on Maw Green Tip on 31 Dec.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

*Common resident.*

Breeds commonly throughout the area. There were c150 with other corvids on Maw Green Tip on 31 Dec.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

*Rare visitor.*

4 records, all flyovers, with 1 over FF on 26 Jan, 2 over EHF on 9 Feb, 1 over Crewe Cemetery on 20 March, 2 over Gawsforth on 30 March.

All previous records are of flyovers with 2 in 1996, 1 in 1995 and 0 in 1994.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

*Common resident and abundant winter visitor.*

c1000 were counted with 500 corvids at Maw Green Tip on 31 Dec.

During Dec at least 2000 were roosting at night in trees behind houses in Badger Avenue Crewe. These were regularly predated by Sparrowhawks.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

*Abundant resident.*

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

*Fairly common resident.*

A flock of c40 at Alsager South in Jan, 22 at Swettenham in March. Breeding season records from Alsager South, Congleton, Haslington Hall, Swettenham and Weston.

Post-breeding flocks of 30 at RF, 25 at Maw Green Tip in Aug. Winter records of 15 at Haslington Hall, up to 13 at Arclid SQ in Dec. 6 at Swettenham where regular in the observer's garden.

Also regular at the bird feeding station at EHF, with up to 20 all winter, demonstrating the value of regular feeding at this site.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

*Abundant resident and winter visitor.*

As last year the largest winter flock size recorded was around 60 with c60 at Haslington in March, 30 at WLF in Oct, 60 at Haslington Hall in Dec.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

*Scarce winter visitor.*

Scarce in the early winter and almost non-existent in late winter! 1 at Congleton in Jan, 2 at Swettenham in Feb, 4 at FF in March, 6 at Weston in April.

Then 1 at WLF on 19 Oct and 1 seen on the bird feeding station at EHF in late Nov.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

*Common resident.*

The only records were of c25 in a pre-roost gathering near the entrance of Quakers Coppice in Feb, a pair with 3 juvs in an Alsager garden in early May and 21 at EHF on 13 Oct.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

*Fairly common resident.*

The only early winter flock recorded was 45 at Crewe Cemetery in March.

Breeding season records from 5 sites and several juvs seen. Post-breeding flocks appeared from mid-July with c40, including many juvs, at Maw Green Tip on 13 July. By Sept two exceptional flocks had been noted with 100 at PIF and 80 at Alsager South, both on 8 Sept.

Winter flocks of 20 at Swettenham, 12 at WLF, 10 at Crewe Business Park.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Recorded from 9 sites in early winter and 11 in late winter. A good sprinkling of records with the two records of note being the flock of 80 feeding in the observer's garden at Congleton in Sept, and the single bird seen at Timbersbrook on 3 July - still in the breeding season and too early for a passage migrant. Flocks of 25 or over at Astbury Water Park (25), Congleton (80), Doddington (60), Haslington (30), Quakers Coppice (30), FF (40), WLF (52).

Linnct (*Acanthis cannabina*)

*Common resident.*

Lower than usual numbers with 15 at EHF in Jan, c40 at Haslington Hall in April. Breeding season records from EHF, RF, Alsager South, Haslington Hall and Arclid SQ.

Late winter flocks of 50 at FFF, 60 at Middlewich Lime Beds, 26 at Haslington Hall and 30 at Arclid SQ.

Twite (*Acanthis flavirostris*)

*Very rare visitor.*

1 at Mow Cop on 23 March, the usual site for the few records of this rare bird in the SECOS area.

Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

*Uncommon winter visitor.*

Recorded in early winter at FF (1), EHF (6), Astbury Water Park (19), Mow Cop (1), Quakers Coppice (2).

Late winter records from EHF (3), FF (2), Crewe GC (3), Middlewich Lime Beds (1).

Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

*Vagrant.*

At EHF on 7 Aug; 1 flew in front of the saltpan watchpoint heading towards the farm down the lane, calling continuously. Although seen down to 20 yards range it was against the sun and so no plumage details could be picked out to age and sex it.

This is the second record for the flashes. The first was 2 m and 2 f which flew over EHF on 21 Sept 1972.

1997 was a Crossbill irruption year, when thousands of birds invaded Britain from the Continent during July. This bird was probably one of these, still looking for suitable feeding habitat.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Recorded, usually in 1s or 2s from 11 sites across the area, but it is considered to be much under-recorded.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

*Uncommon resident.*

More records than usual of this threatened species. Two flocks of 40 each in nearby fields at Alsager South were an exceptional number. Also 35 at Congleton, 17 at Brereton Heath, 16 at Astbury Water Park, plus a few at other sites, in early winter.

Breeding pairs at EHF, FFF, Haslington Hall, Weston, Arclid SQ.

The only late winter flock was 20 at Haslington Hall in Dec.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

*Uncommon resident.*

Recorded in low numbers, up to 5, at 7 sites in early winter. Breeding season records at RF (3 prs), EHF (1 pr), WLF (3 prs), Rode Pool (2 prs), Weston New GC (2 prs), Stowford (1 pr). 6-8 breeding territories at Arclid SQ where 8-9 in 1996.

Recorded from 3 sites in late winter.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

*Uncommon resident.*

The only winter flock was 11 at Congleton Wall Hill on 30 Jan.

This much threatened species continues to decline as a breeding bird. The number of singing males recorded was Alsager South (1), Alsager South West (2), Haslington Hall (1), Winterley (2), giving a total for the year of only 6.

The previous year totals for singing males are 1996 - 7, 1995 - 13, 1994 - 14, 1993 - 23.

Not all sites are recorded in each year so the actual totals are higher than those recorded. However, the continuing decline of this species as shown by the year totals is considered to be correct.

This is supported by records from regularly counted sites, e.g. Alsager South West with 2 in 1997 but 6 previously; Doddington with 0 in 1997 but 3 previously.

## SPECIFIC NOTES ON RARITIES

### WRYNECK AT ELTON HALL FLASH, SANDBACH, 15TH JUNE 1997

I arrived at Elton Hall Flash at 12.10 p.m. and almost immediately my attention was drawn to a bird jumping up from long grass at the righthand side of the water on the salt pan (opposite the reedbed where the Spotted Crake was located in 1995). What first surprised me was its long tail (giving it an impression of a bunting), but what was more apparent was its unusual head shape, which I could just make out in the long grass (in between jumps). It kept on launching itself in the air (as if it was flycatching), and at this point I could make out the colour of the bird, which was tawny/brown like a Nightjar, also along with its distinctive head shape I knew it was a Wryneck. I shouted to the four other people present who all had good views of the bird for a couple of minutes as it perched on a rock (which I had seen the bird in 1996 do). Then it disappeared into a small hawthorn bush, and after about a quarter of an hour at 12.30 p.m. it called (very similar to a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker). At this point myself and another observer went to notify other people by phone and arrived back at 1.00 p.m. when there still hadn't been any sightings. Shortly afterwards, half a dozen other birdwatchers arrived hoping to get a sighting. At 1.50 p.m. it was seen to fly into another hawthorn bush which was just behind the bush it was originally in. After a short time it showed in the top lefthand side of the bush for 4-5 minutes, at this point it showed bulky chat like shape and you could see its barred chest very clearly. It also gave the lucky birders, which included Colin Lythgoe, Ian Mumford and Dave Bromont chance to see the bird. It then flew into a third bush nearby where it was seen very briefly before being seen flying right in the direction of some willow trees by the river, down the side road. This was at 2.00 p.m. Despite intensive searching by a lot of birdwatchers who unfortunately arrived after, it wasn't seen again. Searching continued up until dusk.

Mark Stubbs.

This is the second record for Sandbach Flashes, with the first being only last year when a bird was at Watch Lane Flash during the late afternoon and evening of 11th May 1996.

Colin Lythgoe.

### MARSH HARRIER AT SANDBACH FLASHES AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 1997

On an early morning walk on 17th August over to Railway Farm Flash with my wife and Mark Sutton, we were astonished to see a Marsh Harrier hunting the small reed bed between the two flashes. The first view lasted about a minute during which I saw a large rich brown raptor with broad wings and a long, rounded tail, flying low over the reeds, its slow measured wing beats alternated with glides on V-shaped wings with dangling legs. It quickly disappeared behind the willow trees. We waited for a short while and it flew back into view again, quartering the far bank of the first pool. We got better views this time and we concentrated on the head pattern. The forehead and crown were golden yellow with a small patch of brown feathers in the centre. There was a small yellow patch on the chin and upper throat, rather hard to see. The stripe through the eye was dark chocolate. The rest of the body, tail and wings were dark uniform brown. The legs and feet were yellow. Leaving my wife and Mark Sutton to keep track of the bird, I went back to Elton Hall Flash to inform the local Sunday birders, most of whom managed to see the bird during the morning. It was last seen at 11 o'clock flying over PHF and EHF and was widely presumed to have left the area.

At mid-day on 22nd August a Marsh Harrier was seen over the flashes leaving high to the west (signed entry in log book). On the 30th August a similar plumaged Marsh Harrier was seen at EHF and was last seen landing in the maize field behind PHF. On the 2nd Sept. it was seen again, this time quartering EHF.

On the 7th September my wife and I returned to Railway Flash and within a short time soon found the Harrier quartering the same flash and Maw Green Tip. It drifted off high to the East but on the walk back to EHF we saw it again quartering the maize field behind PHF, giving protracted views for 20 minutes.

Our two sightings on the 17th August and the 7th September were of the same individual, but I cannot speak for the other observations, although as the habits on all four dates were similar it seems safe to assume the same individual accounted for all sightings.

The bird was sexed as an imm m by M.D. Sutton and Mark Stubbs on account of the lack of a pale breast band shown on young f.

This record was especially interesting for the flashes as it was the first individual which hunted and lingered at the flashes, the previous four records all being flyovers.

A.G. Goodwin.

### GREY PHALAROPE AT ELTON HALL FLASH, 3RD SEPTEMBER 1997

Whilst looking over the birds from the usual roadside watchpoint, I noticed a small grey and white wader feeding with Common Sandpiper on the muddy edges of Elton Hall 'saltpan'. The time was 11.30 a.m. and weather conditions poor, with low cloud and drizzle. First thoughts were of Sanderling, but the distinctive long-bodied shape had me looking for other clues to its identity. After a period of at least five minutes, I realised that it was indeed a phalarope species, all my previous records had been of birds feeding whilst swimming. Which of the three species was I looking at? A short flight when disturbed by a Lapwing revealed wing bars, which ruled out Wilson's Phalarope. This left me with rednecked and grey. The light by now was improving slightly and I began to compare it with the nearby Common Sandpiper. Bodily it was slightly larger but decidedly of a different shape, being longer in the body and 'pot-bellied', its feeding action was brisk but ungainly. I was now able to note the thin grey/black eye patch and stripe from forehead over the crown of the head. The mantle was silver grey with no visible streaking, the bill was similar in length to that of the Common Sandpiper and not long and 'needle-like' as the Rednecked Phalarope. The neck and underparts were snow white, the breast was very slightly tinged buff, primaries and tail darker than the wing coverts, probably brown. Bill and leg colour unable to discern, but they appeared dark brown.

It was noticeable that the bird preferred a small area of the muddy edges and only flew on to the water when flushed by the Lapwings; it did not stay long, preferring to return to feed on the mud. I was joined by Andy Goodwin who confirmed my diagnosis of Grey Phalarope Juvenile moulting to 1st winter.

Ron Harrison.

This is the first Grey Phalarope record for the Flashes, although Rednecked and Wilson's have been recorded previously. Amazingly Ron Harrison saw both of those in September 1962 and so has seen all three phalarope species at Sandbach.

The previous records are :-

Wilson's Phalarope	10th-30th September 1962 6th-12th September 1970
Rednecked Phalarope	13th September 1962 * 24th May 1973 28th May 1984

\* this was found by observers looking for the Wilson's Phalarope!



Colin Lythgoe.

### GREY PHALAROPE AT ELTON HALL FLASH, 3RD SEPTEMBER 1997

Arriving by bus at the flashes I decided to walk down the railway line at Rookery Bridge to give my dog a run. After jumping over the fence, I did a long range scan of the flashes with my bins. The saltpan pool had risen with the unsettled weather. On the edge of the pool amongst a large group of Lapwings, I noticed a pale bird that looked long-bodied and short-legged. It was smaller than the Lapwings. I decided to close the gap between me and the bird by a 100 yds. Being possibly 450 yds. from it, I knew there was no chance of me flushing it. The 100 yds. was done in a world record time during which I had whipped my scope out of its case and extended the legs on my tripod. Gasping for breath and at approx. 350 yds. I found the bird in my scope and confirmed my suspicions that the bird was Sandbach Flashes' first Grey Phalarope. I came to this conclusion by the black eye patch, pale grey back: I judged its size to be too large for Red-necked.

I needed to get closer in order to get a full description but I was afraid of flushing the bird. I recognised Ron Harrison's car in the distance. I decided to run around to Ron in case he hadn't seen it. I needn't have worried as he had been watching it since 11.30 a.m. (or earlier). We settled down together, and took the following description of the bird. We were hampered by blustery conditions, long range and the same telescope with maximum magnification of only  $\times 20$ .

"Mantle silvery grey, white neck washed with buff, thin blackish eyestripe. Crown brownish streaked darker. Face and supercilium buffish. Forehead white. Closed primaries, brownish grey contrasting with mantle. Wings very long. Underparts white, washed buffy on lower throat and upper breast. Bill short, colour not clinched. Legs short. Narrow white wing bar". Later observations through good scopes showed the legs to be blackish grey and the bill to be short, broad and black.

The bird was feeding in the bay on the S.W. corner of the main pool where it looked very settled with much hectic feeding. On several occasions it swam out on to the pool in front of the dead tree. We saw it in flight on one occasion - strong flight, gained height effortlessly, glided back down, landed on water, swam back to usual bit of shore.

Ron was thrilled at having found a cracker for the flashes. I borrowed his mobile to alert the local lads and by nightfall a crowd of happy birders were witnessing the 3rd species of Phalarope for the flashes.

A.G. Goodwin.

### COMMON CRANE (GRUS GRUS) AT PUMP HOUSE FLASH IN NOVEMBER 1997

On Monday, 3rd November, I had gone to Sandbach Flashes to refill the bird feeders at the feeding station opposite Elton Hall Flash. After filling the feeders I sat in my car watching the birds on them, as well as Redwings and Fieldfares in the field behind. At 12.55 I noticed that most of the gulls had taken to the air over Pump House Flash. Looking through my binoculars I had a quick look round and spotted the crane just landing behind the hedge at the rear of Pump House Flash. I quickly drove down the road to PHF, but could not see the bird, so drove back to the feeding station and relocated the bird. After a short time I had to leave to go to work but managed to pass the details on to a few local birders.

Dave Bromont.

I arrived at PHF around 14.30, and the bird was showing well in a maize stubble field at the back of the flash. After a few minutes it walked behind a hedge, and became obscured or partly obscured until around 15.10 when it again gave good views. At

around 15.20 it lifted off and flew away to the south. Around 15.45 other observers saw the bird again when it was seen to collide with overhead power lines. Although it tumbled out of control briefly and lost a few feathers, it recovered and flew off strongly to the north. All the time when on the ground it walked slowly and steadily round the maize stubble field, occasionally pecking and probing at the ground.

The following description was taken:-

"A very tall, slim bird, being noticeably taller, slimmer and longer legged than Grey Heron. The sides of the head from behind the eye were very pale off-white, sweeping back and downwards to the sides and rear of the neck. The crown and nape were black with a red patch at the rear of the crown. Chin, throat and foreneck were black which ended sharply towards the base of the neck. Body colour was generally pale grey. The bill was yellow, long and pointed. Legs were black. This confirmed the identity as an adult Common Crane, which is the first record for Sandbach Flashes."

Colin Lythgoe.

The bird was seen again on 8th November from 12.30 to 14.00 when it flew off north. It was also seen on 9th November from mid-morning to 13.00 when it flew off east and was not seen again.

During each of its three recorded visits it was remarkably consistent in its behaviour, spending all its time feeding by pecking and probing in the ground, whilst walking slowly and sedately around the same maize stubble field behind Pump House Flash.

A Common Crane, probably the same bird, was seen briefly at Inner Marsh Farm and Burton Marsh on 1st November and flew over Moulton, near Northwich, on the morning of 3rd November.

There have been seven previous records in Cheshire, the last two being in July 1996 and in 1986.

Colin Lythgoe.

#### FIRECREST AT FODEN'S FLASH, SANDBACH, ON 7TH DECEMBER 1997

Noel Stubbs, Mike Bailey and myself were at Foden's Flash on 7th December 1997 looking for Water Rails, when at 1.30 p.m. I had a small bird directly above us. At first I thought it was a Goldcrest, but then I noticed it had a broad white supercilium and a bronze tinge to its shoulders. I immediately shouted 'Firecrest' but unfortunately it flew before the other two present could see it. Ten minutes later at 1.40 p.m. it appeared again, and it showed along with a single Goldcrest and Blue Tit. All the time it was calling; and then amazingly it stopped and preened itself for 30 seconds or so directly in front of us. We could see clearly that it had along with its supercilium and bronze shoulder (which were very bright) a dark eye stripe and bright orange crown stripe. Due to the colour of the crown stripe and how brightly coloured it was we decided that it was in fact a male Firecrest. It then seemed to disappear into the wood, but then reappeared briefly for a few minutes at 2.10 p.m. and 2.25 p.m. It favoured some trees with ivy covering on them, and at times seemed to disappear into it. It didn't show between 2.25 p.m. and 3.15 p.m. when I left, although during this period at least two Goldcrest showed which caused some brief excitement. On arriving back at home I received a phone call from Paul Hill who saw the bird in the same area briefly at 3.55p.m.

Despite intensive searching in the following days, it was not seen again.

Mark Stubbs.

## EARLY AND LATE DATES FOR SUMMER VISITORS

Whilst talking to various people about the first dates and the last dates for summer visitors, it became obvious that there is a lot of interest in this subject. Most observers are keen to sight the first Swallow and the first Cuckoo, as being indications that spring is arriving, and better weather is ahead. However, amongst the more dedicated observers there is keen competition to see who actually gets the first and last sightings in each year.

So I have provided a summary of sightings for selected species. This should provide an indication of the normal arrival and departure dates for general interest, and also give the extreme dates as a target to be extended!

I have selected 17 species in total, these being summer visitors which nest in the SECOS area every year. I have deliberately not chosen the spring and autumn passage migrants, since these times quite often overlap, and it is not possible to separate the end of spring passage from the start of autumn passage. Also some passage migrants are only seen on one passage but not both.

For each species six dates are given:

First date is the first record in 1997.

Second date is the average of the first records for the past 10 years, excluding the current year, i.e. 1987 to 1996.

Third date is the earliest date ever recorded.

Fourth date is the last record in 1997.

Fifth date is the average of the last records for the past 10 years, excluding the current year, i.e. 1987 to 1996.

Sixth date is the latest date ever recorded.

NR indicates that there are No Records for that species for that particular category.

It should be noted that there is some uncertainty over the dates for Blackcap and Chiffchaff. Both of these species overwinter regularly and have been recorded in every month of the year. It is currently accepted that the wintering population is made up of birds which move here from the continent, whilst our summering birds migrate south. Therefore these two species do fit my criteria for inclusion. However it does mean that there is the possibility of confusing a late staying winter visitor for an early arriving summer visitor! I have used my judgement to give only those records which I think relate to summer visitors.

ArrivalsDepartures

<u>Species</u>	<u>Date in</u> <u>1997</u>	<u>Average of</u> <u>last 10 years</u>	<u>Earliest</u> <u>ever</u>	<u>Date in</u> <u>1997</u>	<u>Average of</u> <u>last 10 years</u>	<u>Latest</u> <u>ever</u>
Hobby	7/5	27/4	27/3/94	28/9	12/9	7/10/92
Little Ringed Plover	11/3	22/3	6/3/77	30/8	11/9	16/10/85
Cuckoo	20/4	19/4	5/4/82	NR	NR	1/10/86
Swift	26/4	26/4	16/4/96	16/9	31/8	3/11/78
Sand Martin	17/3	23/3	12/3/89	21/9	17/9	24/11/72
Swallow	22/3	31/3	22/3/97	26/10	10/10	30/11/74
House Martin	5/4	13/4	25/3/95	28/10	10/10	5/11/77
Yellow Wagtail	12/4	12/4	29/3/81	14/9	20/9	2/10/87
Grasshopper Warbler	15/5	6/5	25/4/93	NR	NR	10/8/??
Sedge Warbler	18/4	25/4	16/4/80	12/9	NR	1/10/78
Reed Warbler	12/4	23/4	12/4/97	14/9	29/9	1/10/88
Lesser Whitethroat	30/4	25/4	21/4/88	19/8	11/9	24/9/85
Whitethroat	15/4	21/4	15/4/93	14/9	21/9	21/9/93
Garden Warbler	29/4	27/4	20/4/96	NR	NR	9/9/83
Blackcap	18/3	12/4	18/3/97	12/9	NR	12/9/97
Chiffchaff	9/3	17/3	8/3/89	9/10	8/10	15/10/87
Willow Warbler	8/4	4/4	29/3/81	NR	NR	24/9/81