



SOUTH-EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

1998 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the SECOS Annual Bird Report for 1998. It is now bigger and better than ever before with more articles and more details in the Systematic List. The list of birding sites has been updated and information added on the level of access for each site. There are specific notes giving details of the rarities seen this year and the table of Early and Late Dates for Summer Visitors has been included again and updated for 1998.

Additionally, Andy Goodwin has agreed to write a series of articles on good sites for birding in the area. The intention is to give full details for one site each year, and this year's site is Mow Cop, a site which is not frequently visited but which can produce some good birds on passage. Andy has also written an article on 'A Year's Birdwatching in South East Cheshire', and since this overlaps with my review of the year, I am not doing that for this year. Due to a large increase in printing costs it has been necessary to increase the price of the Bird Report by a modest 50p, up to £2.50. Hopefully there should be no further increase necessary now for several years!

1998 was another good year with a total of 164 species and 3 distinct sub-species recorded in the area. These included 26 wader species, all seen at Sandbach Flashes. An excellent record for an inland site.

Species recorded for the first time in the SECOS area are Purple Heron, White Stork, Red Kite and Pechora Pipit which, if accepted by the BBRC will be added to the SECOS list. Other highlights include Spotted Crake, Temminck's Stint and Snow Bunting, with Wood Warbler probably breeding.

Many thanks to all those contributors who submitted Rarity Reports promptly. It saves me time and ensures that records are considered for the County Bird Report. Don't forget that it is much easier to complete a Rarity Report whilst the bird is still fresh in your mind, rather than rely on your memory at the end of the year when I am chasing you!

During the course of the year SECOS members have been involved in a number of surveys, including Bird Recording on Sites of Biological Importance, regular ongoing BTO Surveys, as well as the Breeding Lapwing and Wintering Skylark BTO surveys. Additionally, over 20 members are now regularly recording garden birds for the Society's Garden Bird Feeding Survey.

Finally many thanks to all contributors, without whose records there would not be a bird report. Special thanks to Joan and Keith Tilbrook for their assistance in typing and collating this report in record time.

COLIN LYTHGOE
RECORDER.

The List of Contributors

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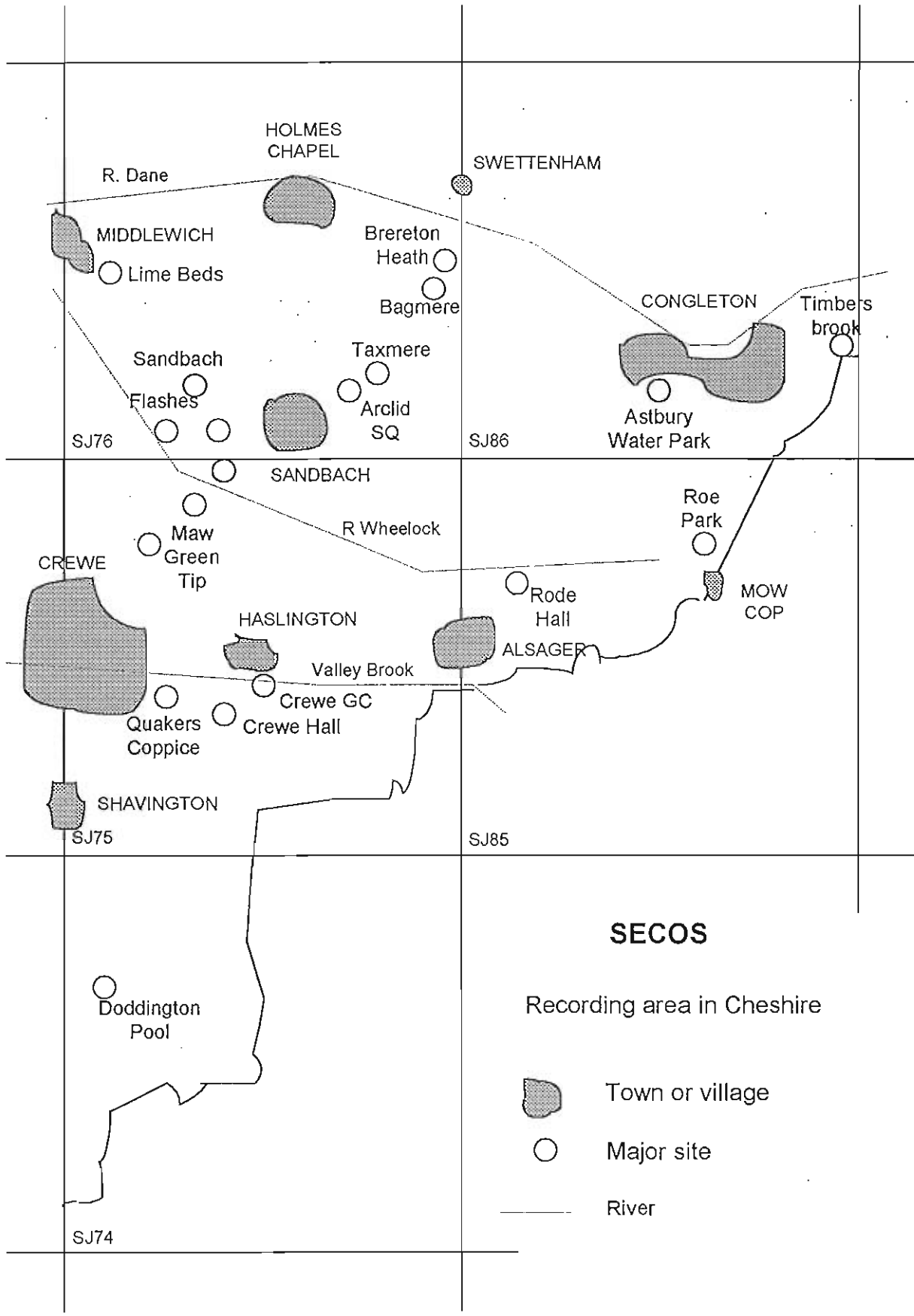
Abbreviations Used

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.

The level of access is denoted by the figure shown, in accordance with the following definitions :-

- ¹ No public access
- ² Access to SECOS members only
- ³ Some access or viewing from footpaths and roads
- ⁴ Public access

Doddington Pool SJ714464 ²

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

Quakers Coppice SJ724546 ⁴

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 ¹

A very extensive area of mixed woodland and farmland.

Crewe Golf Course SJ744546 ³

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

Rode Pool SJ815575 ²

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

Lawton Woods SJ825559 ³

Large area of woodland including a lake.

Mow Cop from SJ856573 TO SJ873593 ³

A sandstone ridge of moorland habitat giving extensive views over the Cheshire Plain and which forms the Cheshire/Staffordshire border.

Roe Park SJ858583 ³

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

Sandbach Flashes ³

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.

Maw 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 and Groby 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 and behind the flash.

Warmingham Flash SJ719619

Heavily disturbed by fishermen at weekends.

Middlewich Lime Beds SJ711653 ¹

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

Arclid Sand Quarry SJ778623 ³

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

Taxmere SJ780625 ¹

Area of farmland just north of Arclid Sand Quarry.

Bagmere SJ796643 ³

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

Brereton Heath SJ798651 ⁴

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

Swettenham SJ801675 ³

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

Astbury Water Park SJ849624 ⁴

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.

A YEAR'S BIRDWATCHING IN SOUTH EAST CHESHIRE

In 1998 I attempted to see as many species as possible in the South East Cheshire recording area. The year began well with three sightings of Barn Owl at Weston during the evening of the 17th January. February was good, with Green Woodpecker on the Salt Line at Hassall (5th), Woodcock on the Cloud (7th), the first Ringed Plover at EHF (15th). Maw Green Tip produced my first sightings of Iceland Gull (15th) and Glaucous (22nd), and Astbury Water Park had three male Goldeneyes on the 19th.

March had a pair of Greylags on the 8th at Rode Pool. Better were a total of 14 Crossbills at Mow Cop and the Cloud on the 29th. An adult Little Gull on RF for most of the day on the 30th was well watched, but a Red Kite over EHF unfortunately flew straight through, a good addition for the flashes' list and my bird of the year.

On April 16th the local grapevine was buzzing with news of a Purple Heron well found at EHF. A frantic evening search relocated this first for S.E. Cheshire at nearby MGP. On the 26th, 3 Whooper Swans at RF and a Whimbrel at EHF were good year ticks.

May, as hoped for, produced some goodies with singing ♂Pied Flycatcher at Timbersbrook, and two reeling Grasshopper Warblers at Bagmere. Meanwhile the Flashes produced a good run of waders with Turnstone, Grey Plover, Greenshank and Sanderling.

Two singing Corn Buntings at Brereton on June 10th were the only sightings for me in 1998 of this sadly declining species. July brought my first Hobby of the year at Arclid SQ (14th) and a long staying Garganey at RF from the 15th. A Wood Warbler at Timbersbrook on the 25th, where they may have bred.

August was poor with a Tree Pipit over Sandbach (22nd) and a Redstart at RF (29th). In September I saw my first Little Stints on the 5th and Curlew Sandpipers on the 8th, both at EHF where a small Rail/Crake from the 9th was confirmed as Spotted Crake on the 10th. Black Tern at WLF (12th) and Wood Sandpiper at EHF (13th). A Mediterranean Gull at EHF for two hours (27th) was well appreciated by the four birders who saw it, and a Spotted Redshank next day ended a superb month.

Easterly winds in early October produced a fly-over Brambling (4th) and a Temminck's Stint (7th) both at the Flashes. Green-winged Teal at EHF (8th) was long-staying, and the only American bird of the year, but a sub-species - how unlucky can you get!

A phone call from my Congleton contacts had me watching a ♀ Scaup at Astbury Water Park (11th) along with two tame Red Crested Pochards. A search for Dipper along the R. Dane and tributaries (18th) was successful. Merlin (22nd) and a Kittiwake (25th) after overnight gales was good.

Another phone call on November 3rd of a Common Scoter at Astbury Water Park had me dashing around Sandbach in search of a car. I commandeered my Mother's in order to see this superb ♂. A Snow Bunting over stubble fields at RF(29th) was only the 4th for S.E.Cheshire. December was very disappointing with no new birds for the year.

Many thanks to all the local birders who found good birds or telephoned. My list for S.E.Cheshire follows, species only seen away from Sandbach Flashes are marked with the symbol *. For categorisation and English names I have followed the BOU 'Official List of Birds of Great Britain'. At the end of the year my totals were 137 for Sandbach Flashes and exactly 150 for the SECOS area, with additionally 3 distinctive sub-species and 3 feral species.

ANDREW GOODWIN.

Little Grebe	Dunlin	Dunnock
Great Crested Grebe	Ruff	Robin
Cormorant	Jack Snipe	Redstart
Grey Heron	Snipe	Wheatear
Purple Heron	Woodcock	Blackbird
Mute Swan	Blacktailed Godwit	Fieldfare
Whooper Swan	Whimbrel	Song Thrush
Greylag Goose	Curlew	Redwing
Canada Goose	Spotted Redshank	Mistle Thrush
Shelduck	Redshank	*Grasshopper Warbler
Mandarin Duck	Greenshank	Sedge Warbler
Wigeon	Green Sandpiper	Reed Warbler
Gadwall	Wood Sandpiper	Lesser Whitethroat
Teal	Common Sandpiper	Whitethroat
Mallard	Turnstone	Garden Warbler
Pintail	Mediterranean Gull	Blackcap
Garganey	Little Gull	*Wood Warbler
Shoveler	Black-headed Gull	Chiffchaff
Pochard	Common Gull	Willow Warbler
Tufted Duck	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Goldcrest
*Scaup	Great Black-backed Gull	Spotted Flycatcher
*Common Scoter	Herring Gull	Pied Flycatcher
Goldeneye	Iceland Gull	Long-tailed Tit
*Goosander	Glaucous Gull	Willow Tit
Ruddy Duck	Kittiwake	Coal Tit
Red Kite	Common Tern	Blue Tit
Sparrowhawk	Black Tern	Great Tit
Buzzard	Feral Pigeon	Nuthatch
Kestrel	Stock Dove	Treecreeper
Merlin	Wood Pigeon	Jay
Hobby	Collared Dove	Magpie
Peregrine	Cuckoo	Jackdaw
*Red-legged Partridge	*Barn Owl	Rook
*Grey Partridge	Little Owl	Carrion Crow
Pheasant	*Tawny Owl	Starling
Water Rail	Swift	House Sparrow
Spotted Crake	Kingfisher	Tree Sparrow
Moorhen	Green Woodpecker	Chaffinch
Coot	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Brambling
Oystercatcher	Skylark	Greenfinch
Little Ringed Plover	Sand Martin	Goldfinch
Ringed Plover	Swallow	Siskin
Golden Plover	House Martin	Linnet
Grey Plover	*Tree Pipit	Redpoll
Lapwing	Meadow Pipit	*Crossbill
Knot	Yellow Wagtail	Bullfinch
Sanderling	Grey Wagtail	Snow Bunting
Little Stint	Pied Wagtail	Yellowhammer
Temminck's Stint	*Dipper	Reed Bunting
Curlew Sandpiper	Wren	*Corn Bunting

Distinctive Sub-species

Yellow-legged Gull (*L.a.michahellis*)
 White Wagtail (*M.a.alba*)
 Green-winged Teal (*A.c.carolinensis*)

Feral and Escapes

Pinkfooted Goose
 Barnacle Goose
 *Red-crested Pochard

*These species were seen in the SECOS area, though not at Sandbach Flashes.

SPECIES TOTALS :- SANDBACH FLASHES 137 S.E. CHESHIRE 150

SYSTEMATIC LIST 1998

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded in early winter at SF in 1s and 2s, but Doddington continues to be the main site for this species with up to 13 in March.

Confirmed breeding here with 5 pairs but only 7 juvs seen. Also bred at GF where 2 juvs in Aug, and possibly RF.

Some dispersal in late winter when singles were recorded at Alsager South, Astbury Water Park and R. Dane Swettenham, as well as Doddington and SF.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Common resident.

Early winter period flocks were recorded at WLF (14), Arclid SQ (14), Astbury Water Park (17), Doddington (7), Rode Pool (6).

Pairs recorded breeding at 13 sites although breeding success was low overall. Most juvs were recorded in July and August with presumably April and May nests being flooded out in the wet weather. At SF bred at FF, RF, CF, MGP, GF, WLF, WF and FFF. At Arclid SQ 4 pairs with broods of 1; 2; 2; 1. Doddington 6 pairs with 4 broods seen of 1; 2; 1; 2. Lawton Hall 1 pair, Rode Pool 3 pairs with only 1 brood of 1 seen, Winterley Pool 1 pair with a brood of 2.

Late winter period flocks built up in numbers similar to the early winter except for WLF where numbers built up to the thirties with 39 on 23 Nov.

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Very rare winter visitor.

1997 addition: 1 was at Astbury Water Park on 30 Jan. This is the 5th record for SECOS with the 4th being 1 at Astbury Water Park on 31/1/96.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Common winter visitor. Rare in summer.

Numbers generally up on last year. A co-ordinated count at SF on 18 Jan recorded 25 (CF13, PHF 11, WLF 1) with 14 at Doddington on 14 Feb.

1s and 2s recorded during the summer.

Max in late winter at regular sites was 22 at PHF in Dec; Arclid SQ 7, Doddington 11, R. Dane Swettenham 6.

Also at Alsager South 9, Astbury Water Park 5, Stowford 2, Rode Pool 1.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

On 16 July at 06.45, 1 adult was seen at Railway Flash by Ian Mumford. It was perched on a dead tree at the flash and then flew off to the west. This is the 5th record for SF.

Previous records are :- 22/6/96 PHF; 31/3/96 EHF; 3/5/84 RF; 16/5/82 EHF.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident.

Generally recorded daily at SF throughout the year, usually up to 5, but 13 in May. Also recorded regularly on many other waters showing its widespread distribution when feeding.

The only heronry in the SECOS area is at Rode Pool where there were a total of 28 nests this year (26 in 1997 and 34 in 1996).

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)

On 16 April an adult bird was located in the reed bed at Red Lane Flash by Mike Billington. See the notes at the end of this report for full details.

This is the first record for the SECOS area and the 8th for Cheshire and Wirral.

White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)

On 29 April 1 was seen by Reg Crawford flying low over Haslington. On 17 May frustration was relieved when Frank Melbon and Lee Greenough (and several other SF regulars) spotted an adult bird at PHF! This was seen again on 24 May.

See the notes at the end of the report for full details.

This is the first record for the SECOS area and the 9th for Cheshire and Wirral.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Fairly common resident.

Monthly max at the two main sites in the SECOS area:-

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Winterley Pool	120	109	96	73	76	60	68	76	78	78	89	99
Doddington Pool	79	0	2	2	63	93	67	61	32	32+	62	70

Due to the turnover of birds at Winterley Pool and the fact that all birds are ringed, it was possible to determine that although the max in any one month was 120 there were 391 individual swans identified during the year. This year saw another landmark passed when the total number of individual swans identified there since 1989 reached 1001.

Breeding pairs were recorded at GF (f on 6 eggs); EHF (3 juvs); Doddington 2 prs (f + 4 juvs and f + 7 juvs).

Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)

Rare winter visitor.

The only record for the year was of 2 flying east over the railway line at EHF on 29 Dec.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

4 birds were at EHF/GF/RF from 23 to 26 April. 3 birds (probably of these 4) were at Doddington during May. Whooper Swans usually migrate back north during March and April and even late stragglers have gone by early May. Due to the late dates recorded it is probable that these birds are the 4 juvs born in 1997 of a captive pair held in a private collection at Ravensmoor, Nantwich, which were allowed to become free flying.

Additionally there were 2 at EHF on 21 Oct and 2 at RF on 1 Nov.

Pinkfooted Goose (*Anser Brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

38 flying high over RF on 17 Feb could only be identified as grey geese.

At Doddington there were 7 birds present through Feb and up to mid-March which were very wary and stayed apart from the Canada Geese, so were presumed to be wild birds.

26 flew over EHF on 29 Nov and 27 on 8 Dec.

Other records were of feral birds with Canada Geese.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

All records refer to feral birds with Canada geese. 1s or 2s were recorded at EHF, WLF, Arclid SQ, Doddington, Rode Pool, mainly in the early winter period.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Common resident.

Max numbers in early winter were SF 396; Arclid SQ 112; Doddington 250; Winterley Pool 87. Bred at several sites with, for example, juvs recorded at Arclid 17, Rode Pool 17, Winterley Pool 30. Max numbers in late winter were SF 535; Arclid SQ 578; Doddington 395; Winterley Pool 404, although all flocks are very mobile and regularly commute between different sites.

The two Canada Geese with white leg rings seen at SF in Jan were ringed at Pateley Bridge, Yorkshire, on 4/7/97.

2 small birds recorded with the main Canada Goose flock at SF between 24 Jan and 28 Feb were considered to be of one of the smaller sub-species.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

A feral bird was with Canada Geese at Doddington on 3 Jan. Also 1 or 2 were with Canada Geese at various flashes at SF throughout the year.

Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla*)

Rare winter visitor or escape.

1 bird of the dark-bellied race was at Doddington on 28 Feb.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

In the early winter period regular at EHF/PHF with a max of 38 and at Doddington with a max of 12.

Breeding occurred at both these sites. 3 pairs at EHF (1 in 1997) had broods of 10; 10; 3 and 1 pair at Doddington (0 in 1997) had a brood of 9 on 24 June, which had been slowly reduced to 4 by 7 Aug.

Late winter numbers built up to a max of 29 in Dec at EHF/PHF but only 4 at Doddington.

Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)

Scarce visitor.

1 m in eclipse plumage was seen at PHF on 5 Aug. It stayed there or EHF until 30 Aug.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

A max of 501 in Jan at SF. As usual the numbers gradually reduced during April to single figures. The only record in May was of a m on 22nd. Also at Doddington in early winter but numbers very low with a max of only 3.

The first returning bird was at EHF on 26 Aug. Numbers then gradually built up each month to a max of 383 in Dec. Recorded at more sites in late winter with Arclid SQ 1; Astbury Water Park 6; Crewe Business Park 1; Doddington 40.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

More records than usual. Singles at EHF on 7 days in early winter, last on 20 April and 2 at Doddington on 3 Jan.

In the late winter up to 4 at EHF on 8 days from 24 Sept to the year end. Also at Astbury Water Park 3; Doddington 2.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.

Recorded in all months of the year at SF with some recovery from the abnormally low numbers of 1997, but no signs of breeding. The early winter max was 283 (164 in 1997 and 400 in 1996) and the late winter max was 316 (140 in 1997 and 226 in 1996).

Also at Arclid SQ max 6; and Doddington Pool max 12 in Nov.

Green-winged Teal (*Ac carolinensis*). A m of this North American sub-species was first seen at EHF on 8 Oct. It favoured the back pool by the railway and when first seen was in moult plumage. By the time it was last seen on 31 Oct it had finished moulting and was in pristine breeding plumage.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Common resident and breeder. Abundant in winter.

Max early winter numbers were: all SF 170; Arclid SQ 205; Doddington 210; Winterley Pool 84.

Breeds commonly on most waters and post-breeding flocks included SF 400 and

Doddington 568.

However these numbers soon reduced to late winter max of SF 210; Arclid SQ 266; Astbury Water Park 50; Doddington 360; Winterley Pool 32.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Max of 14 in early winter with the last record being 2 at EHF on 27 March. Also 10 at Doddington Pool on 22 March.

11 flew over EHF on 2 Sept without stopping. The first returning birds were 2 at EHF on 25 Sept. Numbers gradually increased to a max of 13 in late winter.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)

Scarce summer visitor.

1 f was first seen at RF on 15 July. It moved between RF and EHF during its stay which extended up to 31 Aug.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded in every month through the year at EHF/PHF but in low numbers. Early winter max of 12 at EHF and 10 at Doddington.

Higher numbers in late winter with max of 25 at EHF and 11 at Doddington. Also 5 at Arclid SQ in Nov.

Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)

Presumed escapes.

At Astbury Water Park 2 birds in moult plumage were first recorded on 6 Oct. During their long stay up to 18 Dec they moulted into breeding plumage and became 1 m and 1 f.

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

Fairly common winter visitor.

In the early winter period present in low numbers at SF with a max of 13 but the usual much higher numbers at Doddington Pool 160; Astbury Water Park 50; Winterley Pool 49.

1 record of a lone m at EHF in June otherwise no summer records.

Then in late winter only max of 6 at SF and a low 60 at Doddington. Possibly all the birds had gone to Astbury Water Park where numbers built up during Nov and Dec to a record high of 320 on 13 Dec.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.

Average numbers in the early winter period with max at SF of 56 usually split equally between CF and GF, Astbury Water Park 48, Winterley Pool 24 and Doddington 184 in March.

The number of breeding pairs was much lower with 2 pairs at SF, where 1 each at RF and GF (4 pairs in 1997) and 5 pairs at Doddington (8 in 1997). Also 1 pair on pools at Clay Lane Haslington. Max numbers in late winter were SF 11; Arclid SQ 7; Astbury Water Park 53; Doddington 45; Winterley Pool 8.

Scaup (*Aythya marila*)

Rare winter visitor.

A f was at Astbury Water Park from 8 to 20 Oct.

Also a m there briefly on 23 Nov.

Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

Rare visitor.

A f was at Astbury Water Park for one day only on 3 Nov.

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Regular all winter at Doddington and Astbury Water Park. Early winter max were Doddington a high 19 (5 m + 14 f) and Astbury 3. Also 1 at PHF on 16 Jan.

Late winter max were Doddington 8; Astbury 4 with also 4 at Arclid SQ on 1 Nov and 3 at WLF on the same date.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded at 7 sites during the winter months. PHF 1 f on 23 March; Alsager South 2; Arclid SQ 1; Doddington 2; Lawton Hall Pool 7; Rode Pool 13; R. Dane Swettenham 3.

An interesting record was of 5 f/juvs on the R. Dane Swettenham on 16 June.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded in all months at SF and Doddington. At SF only in low numbers (up to 3) but at several flashes. At Doddington a max of 22 in April.

Despite there being up to 9 all summer at Doddington the only successful breeding was at GF where a f was seen with 4 juvs in Aug.

In late winter there was a max of 33 at Doddington in Sept. Also 1s and 2s at PHF, RF, Arclid SQ, Astbury Water Park.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Vagrant.

On 30 March an adult was seen by Andy Goodwin flying low over the EHF salt pan being mobbed by corvids. It was watched soaring over WLF and FF as it slowly gained height and drifted off north.

See the notes at the end of this report for full details.

This is the first record for SF and the first proved record for the SECOS area.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

Very rare winter visitor.

A juv/1st winter bird was seen briefly by Noel Stubbs on 1 Jan as it flew across a field by EHF, and then flew off north west.

This is the 6th record for SF and the 7th for the SECOS area. Previous records have all been in winter with 2 in Oct, 2 in Nov, 1 in Dec and 1 in Jan, the last one being on 11 Nov 1993.

Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Rare visitor.

On 7th Oct Peter Lunt saw a f flying over PHF being harassed by crows before it flew off towards RF. This record is supported by a description which has been submitted to the County Rarities Panel for adjudication.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from at least 18 sites. The only sites with any proof of breeding were FF and Crewe Cemetery with juvs seen at both sites.

In Nov, 1 bird was hunting in the Starling roost at Hungerford Rd., Crewe, every evening.

Prey items seen to be taken included Great Tit and Starling.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Uncommon resident.

Continuing to become more common as shown by the records from SF with 43 flyover records involving 61 birds during the year (15 and 18 in 1997).

Recorded from 24 sites.

Breeding proved at Swettenham and near Great Moreton Hall where a pair fledged 2 or 3 young.

Possibly bred at Bradwall, Crewe Hall, Doddington, Checkley and Rode Pool.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Rare migrant.

1 was seen by Noel Stubbs and Mike Bailey on 14 April flying over EHF heading north.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from at least 17 sites. Breeding proved at 2 sites with a pair + 2 juvs around Maw Green Tip in Aug, and a nest with juvs heard calling in the broken-off top of a sweet chestnut tree in Quakers Coppice.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Uncommon migrant and winter visitor.

Recorded from SF with singles at FFF on 5 March; EHF 6 May; WLF 22 Oct; EHF 30 Oct; EHF 15, 20, 30 Nov. Also at Rode Pool on 3 dates in Feb; Checkley 13 Nov; Crewe 26 Nov.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first of the year was 1 over WLF on 24 April. Then 32 records of singles at EHF with the last being on 30 Sept. In late Aug/early Sept 1 was regularly attacking the Swallow roost at EHF.

Also recorded at Alsager South, Arclid SQ, Astbury Water Park, Crewe Cemetery, Doddington, Haslington, Hassall Green, Middlewich, Winterley Pool. The latest record was on 6 Oct at Arclid SQ.

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor.

A confusing series of records at SF where recorded in every month, usually from EHF or RF. Probably at least 2 birds present in the early winter period.

1 over-summered and probably 2 resident in the late winter period.

Also recorded at Congleton, east Cheshire, Sandbach and 1 over Crewe Town Centre on 15 July.

Prey seen to be taken included Lapwing and Black-headed Gull.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Rare except where locally released.

Up to 3 recorded during the year from Checkley, Doddington and Weston New Golf Course, all sites with shooting syndicates that release birds.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Scarce resident.

Breeding season records of 1, 2 or 3 birds from Alsager South (a regular breeding site), Checkley, Mow Cop, Swettenham and Weston. Also 2 at MGP in May.

A sad tale is the one of Russ Stonier who having searched unsuccessfully all year in the Congleton area for partridges finally saw one in Dec as it was flushed from long grass by a dog. Unfortunately the dog caught and mauled the partridge and it died in Russ's hands!

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Scarce resident except where locally released.

Very common where reared for shooting.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Singles at FF, WLF and EHF in the early winter period.

The first record in the late winter period was 1 at EHF on 25 Sept. Then from Oct onwards probably EHF 3, PHF 2, WLF 3, RF 1. A good total with the EHF birds showing particularly well with the high water levels.

Also in late winter at Arclid SQ and Rode Pool with an unusual record of 1 in the marshy area of Macon Meadows, Crewe, on 30 Nov.

Spotted Crake (*Porzana parva*)

Very rare autumn migrant.

In the evening of 9 Sept Andy Goodwin saw a crane in front of the EHF watchpoint. This was identified as a Spotted Crake on the next day. It stayed through to the 15 Sept and although elusive it was seen by most of the regulars.

This is the 7th record for the flashes. The 6th was in the same reedbed from 5 Aug to 4 Sept 1995. All records have been in autumn between 30 July and 10 Oct.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

The usual distribution of this species is of low numbers on most waters. This was the result of the co-ordinated count on 18 Jan which gave a total of 85 birds spread over 13 of the 14 flashes which comprise Sandbach Flashes.

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Common resident and variable winter visitor.

At SF a co-ordinated count of all flashes on 18 Jan gave a total of 172 spread over 12 flashes.

Although resident on most large waters the main site is Doddington where max numbers were 278 in Jan, 494 (including juvs) in Aug and 151 in Dec. Also resident at Astbury Water Park with a max of 148 in Nov.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Rare winter visitor and rare summer visitor.

As usual the first birds appeared in Feb with 1 over FF on 8th, 2 at Doddington on 14th and 1 at Arclid SQ on 19th. Passage birds at EHF and WLF through to 19 May.

Pairs bred at Arclid SQ and Doddington. The pair at Arclid fledged 3 juvs although 1 was taken by a fox in July. The pair at Doddington was unsuccessful. Although they laid 4 clutches of eggs, all were predated.

3 singles in winter at SF, 11 Nov, 13 Dec and 19 Dec.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.

First bird of the year was 1 at EHF on 22 March. A max of 10 on passage here in April.

Breeding pairs at 3 sites. At EHF probably 2 pairs bred and 5 juvs seen. At Arclid in the old quarry 1 pair bred unsuccessfully and in the new quarry 2 pairs bred, 1 unsuccessful and 1 fledged 4 juvs. At Doddington 1 pair bred unsuccessfully.

Autumn passage was light with a max of only 5 during Aug.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

A very early first bird at EHF on 5 Feb then regular on passage from 21 March to 14 June. Higher than usual numbers with up to 13 regular but 32 on 11 and 12 May, and 27 on 3 June. Also 2 at Middlewich Lime Beds on 5 April.

3 singles at EHF in July. Then regular from 7 Aug to 5 Oct with up to 4.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Varying numbers at EHF through Jan with a max of around 200.

In late winter from 1 Oct when 9 at EHF. Generally less than 10 but 60 on 11 Nov and 50 on 30 Dec. Also 8 at Wheelock on 21 Nov.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Scarce irregular visitor.

1 was seen at EHF on 9 May and 2 on 12 May.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

Max counts in the early winter period were EHF 382, Arclid SQ 325, Doddington 116, Stowford 250.

An increase in the number of records of breeding pairs may reflect an actual increase, or may be due to members' participation in a BTO breeding Lapwing survey. SF 7 pairs (where probably none in 1997), Crewe Hall 2 pairs, Doddington at least 7 pairs (where 3 in 1997), Haslington 1 pair, Haslington Hall 1 pair, Oakhanger 2 pairs.

Max counts in late winter were EHF 850, Arclid SQ 500, Doddington 60, Stowford 60.

Knot (*Calidris Canutus*)

Rare visitor.

The only record of this rare visitor is of 1 at EHF on 11 Sept.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Scarce passage migrant.

All records from EHF in May where 4 on 11th, 1 on 14th and 1 on 23rd.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Another good year similar to 1996. All records in autumn from EHF with singles on 4 and 5 Aug and 28 and 29 Aug. Then 1 on 4 Sept and present daily until 1 Oct, with numbers varying up to a max of 18. Then singles on 6 other days in Oct with the last being on 22nd.

Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*)

Very rare passage migrant.

Lee Greenough and Mark Stubbs found 1 on EHF saltpan on 7 Oct around 16.00. Seen by Andy Goodwin and a few others, it was missed by most when it flew off with a Dunlin around 17.30.

This is only the second record since 1985 with 1 at EHF on 15/5/94. Prior to 1985 the species was recorded almost annually.

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Only 1 spring passage record, when it is rare with 1 at EHF on 9 May.

Then either 2 or 5 recorded from 6 to 17 Sept.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Lower numbers than usual at EHF at both ends of the year but normal numbers on passage. Singles in Jan and Feb and up to 4 in March.

Spring passage seemed to end on 16 June, with a max of 18 in early June. Autumn passage started on 2 July with a max of 10 except for 20 on 1 Aug.

A max of 7 in late winter.

Also 2 at Middlewich Lime Beds on 15 March and 1 at Arclid SQ on 8 Nov.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Not recorded daily in early winter at EHF. A max of 12 in Jan and the last bird on 25 March.

The first returning birds in autumn were 2 at EHF on 19 Aug. Some evidence of passage with up to 22 birds in early Sept. Then settling down to around 11 in late winter.

Also from Arclid SQ where 1 on 21 Sept, 7 on 6 Oct and 2 on 16 Oct.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Few records as usual. 4 at EHF on 23 Jan and 1 on 29 Jan.

In late winter 1 at EHF on 8 Oct and 1 at the Canal Pools on 18 Oct.

Also 1 at Middlewich Lime Beds on 31 Oct and 13 Dec.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.

Recorded in early winter from RF, PHF, EHF, WLF, MGP with a max of 8 from any one site. Also Middlewich Lime Beds 2, Weston New G.C. 10.

The first bird in the latter part of the year was on 4 July at EHF. Recorded at similar sites as the early year but with a max of 110 at EHF on 25 Nov. Also at Arclid SQ 2, Blakenhall 10, Doddington 11, Middlewich Lime Beds 20.

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

Rare resident. Scarce winter visitor.

1 regular at FF in Jan and Feb. 1 on The Cloud, Congleton, on 7 Feb.

Then in late winter 2 at Arclid SQ in Nov and Dec and 1 in Dec in the usual site of FF.

Blacktailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

Scarce migrant.

A good series of records although with a strange distribution.

Recorded on 61 days (c.f. only 18 in 1997) at EHF between 27 April to 23 Aug, and 25 Oct to 1 Dec.

High numbers were 26 on 7 June and 18 on 16 Aug. In Nov 1 bird was seen to be colour ringed. This was apparently ringed on the Wash in Norfolk by the Wash Wader Study Group.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Singles at EHF on 21, 25, 26 April and 20, 26 May. Then on 21, 29 July and 18 Aug.

On 22 April at Arclid SQ 6 were seen to circle the quarry and then fly off south west.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Uncommon resident and fairly common winter visitor.

Max numbers in the evening roost at EHF reached 64 in Feb. Few records from late April to July as birds dispersed to their breeding sites.

Probably 1 pair bred at the traditional site at Stowford. A pair were seen displaying over Mow Cop during April and at Arclid SQ on 15 March. Birds began to return to EHF from mid-July and slowly built up to around 60 by Nov.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

Rare passage migrant.

1 was at EHF on 19 April and another at EHF from 28 Sept to 2 Oct.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Uncommon visitor and migrant.

It is difficult to determine the status of this species at EHF since it is recorded in all months, generally in low numbers of up to 5.

There were up to 10 in Jan and Dec. A single record of 20 on 11 April must have been spring migrants.

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

A good series of records, especially in spring when this species is rarely recorded. Up to 5 from 9 to 24 May and 1 from 2 to 4 June.

On autumn passage 1 at EHF from 16 to 18 July then 1 or 2 on most days from 30 July to 28 Sept.

Also 1 at Doddington on 10 Sept.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

The only early winter record was 1 at Doddington on 14 Feb.

Single records in spring from EHF, Arclid SQ, Doddington, Stowford.

A long extended period of return passage at EHF from 25 June to 1 Oct with a max of 10. Late winter records from EHF, Blakenhall, Bradwall, Doddington; Middlewich Lime Beds, Stowford.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

Scarce passage migrant.

All records from EHF with 1 from 27 to 30 May. Then singles on 15 days from 4 Sept to 4 Oct.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Spring passage at EHF and WLF from 11 April to 17 May with a max of 4. Also in spring at Arclid SQ with 8 on 24 April, Doddington with 2 in April, and Astbury Water Park with 3 on 22 April.

Return passage at EHF from 3 July to 2 Sept with a max of 4. Also at Arclid SQ 4 and Doddington 2.

Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

Scarce migrant.

2 were seen at EHF on 7 May.

Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

Rare visitor.

3 records in the year with 1 at Doddington on 10 Sept, 1 1st W at EHF on 27 Sept and 1 ad at Arclid SQ on 15 Oct.

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)

Rare visitor.

2 records in the year with 1 ad at RF on 30 March, which flew over to EHF in late afternoon and then back to RF at night, and 1 ad at PHF on 20 July, which disappeared off to the south west in mid-morning.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Abundant autumn and winter visitor.

In early winter up to 3000 were recorded feeding on Maw Green Tip and 2,400 roosting on EHF saltpan.

Post breeding flock numbers built up to around 600 at EHF with 500 at Arclid SQ.

The usual winter roost at Doddington had a max of around 12,000 birds, the roost at EHF had 1,000 and Arclid SQ had 250 which flew to EHF to roost.

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Recorded in every month of the year at EHF with usually less than 10. However, some evidence of passage in April when up to 200 on some days.

At Doddington up to 300 regular in the winter roost.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Recorded in all months at MGT/RF/EHF with a max of 2500 over the tip in Feb. Most of the larger gull species fly off to the north west to roost.

In late winter up to 1500 at MGT and 2500 in the roost at Doddington.

Gulls apparently of the race *L.f.intermedius* were seen at MGT on 12, 16 Aug, 5 Sept and 21 Oct.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

In the early winter a max of 2000 feeding on MGT. Most of the larger gulls fly off to the north west in the evening to roost.

In late winter up to a 1000 on MGT. There are always many fewer Herring than Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the roost at Doddington and a max of only 80 was recorded.

On 10 Oct at PHF a bird was seen showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus*.

The Yellow-legged Gull (a very scarce visitor) has still not been confirmed as a full species by the B.O.U. All records are assumed to be *L.a. michahellis*. It was recorded on 26 days at either PHF/EHF or RF/MGT from June to Dec. Usually 1 or 2 individuals but an exceptional 8 on 24 Aug. Also 1 2ndW at Astbury Water Park on 19 Feb.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Much searching of MGT for white winged gulls in winter gave a total of at least 3 individuals with 2 1stW and 1 3rdW birds, the last being seen on 21 April.

Despite a lot of effort, none were seen in the late winter period.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

The searching of MGT also gave at least 3 individuals of this species with 1 1stW, 1 2ndW, 1 3rdW birds early on, whilst the last was a bird in 1stS plumage on the very late date of 23 May.

In late winter there were at least 2 individuals with 1 1stW and 1 ad from 28 Nov.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Regular on MGT in winter (all months except June and July) with max of 35 in early winter and 48 in late winter.

Also present in the roost at Doddington with up to 6.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Rare visitor.

1 1stW bird was seen briefly over EHF at 09.05 on 25 Oct.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Difficult to separate spring and autumn passage birds at EHF. 1 on 23 May then regular through June and July until the last record of 1 on 9 Aug. On 5 Aug there was a total of 10 with 4 separate groups of 3; 4; 1; 2 during the day.

Also at Arclid SQ where 2 on 3 Aug, Doddington where 3 or 4 from 29 July to 1 Aug, and Astbury Water Park where 1 on 28 April and 1 on 6 July.

Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*)

Scarce passage migrant.

1 or 2 at WLF from 12 to 16 Sept and 1 juv here from 19 to 21 Sept.

Also 2 juvs at Doddington briefly on 10 Sept.

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common resident.

Regular flocks in most towns with, for example, up to 200 in Crewe Town centre and 100 along Nantwich Road. 60 regular at Arclid SQ all year.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

The only recorded flocks in double figures were 25 near Bradwall in Feb and 27 at EHF in Dec.

At Quakers Coppice 10 pairs laid 33 clutches of 62 eggs with 27 eggs hatched and 0 young fledged. A disastrous year with 6 ads and most juvs being killed in nest boxes by a predator, probably a member of the mustelid family.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

The only record of large flocks were c.500 at Arclid SQ, 345 at Basford, Crewe and 106 on MGT.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

Common and widespread but most observers do not bother to record it. The only double figure records were EHF 15, Haslington 18, Swettenham 14, Wheelock 21.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.

The first record was a singing m at FF and WLF on 20 April. Recorded at MGP, EHF, Arclid SQ, Bagmere, Haslington, Stowford and Swettenham. As usual by mid-May the birds are silent as they get on with the stealthy business of breeding and very few records after then.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

A decrease this year with only 1 proved breeding record, the pair at Blakenhall fledging 4 juvs, which were ringed before fledging.

The pair from Snape Farm, Weston, were not seen during the breeding season. There are other possible breeding pairs at Congleton; Marshfield, Crewe; near Crewe Hall; Great Moreton Hall.

There are random sightings from several other areas, with the possibility of breeding pairs there.

2 birds were found dead at the roadside, 1 on the A34 south of Congleton and 1 on the A500 south of Crewe.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

Common in open farmland with records from 20 sites. The only proved breeding was at Wistaston, Crewe, where a pair fledged 3 juvs.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

Common in more wooded areas. Recorded from 10 sites although breeding not proven anywhere.

Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*)

Rare visitor.

1997 addition: There was a report of 1 at Smallwood which was taken into care on 1 Aug, released back to the wild on 27 Aug, but unfortunately was killed in a road accident on 3 Sept. This is the first confirmed record in the SECOS area since 3 roosted regularly at WLF in early 1980.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

General influx from 23 April when 1 at WLF, 3 there and 2 at Doddington on 24th and 1 over Stowford on 27th.

c.1000 were feeding over Doddington on 24 May after a spell of heavy rain.

300 flew south over Arclid SQ on 2 Aug, presumably migrating. The last record was a very late bird over EHF on 30 Sept.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 18 sites this year (16 in 1997) mainly in winter. Proved breeding at Rode Pool, probable breeding at Arclid SQ and possible breeding along the R. Wheelock and at Crewe G.C.

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 14 sites (13 in 1997) throughout the year. A pair probably bred somewhere in the flashes area with 1 juv seen at FF on 4 Aug and at EHF on 5 Aug. Breeding season records also from Mow Cop and Swettenham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest woodpecker with records from many sites but still under-recorded. At EHF regular at the feeding station. Pairs bred at Arclid SQ, Quakers Coppice, Congleton Park and Swettenham.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Uncommon resident.

Continues to be scarce and elusive. Records from EHF (at the bird feeding station), FF, Arclid SQ (1 juv in July), Congleton, Crewe, Crewe Cemetery, Rode Pool, Wistaston (Joey the Swan).

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

Fieldwork for the B.T.O. Breeding Skylark survey probably led to an increase in sightings with 28 singing males recorded from 10 sites.

Some evidence of autumn passage at SF in late Sept to early Oct.

The only winter flocks were MGT 9, Haslington Hall 7, Middlewich Lime Beds 10.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First record of the year on 27 March with 1 at EHF and 3 at WLF.

The largest breeding site is at Arclid SQ with 33 occupied holes in the old quarry and 42 in the new quarry. On the R. Dane Swettenham up to 10 ads in April and May but no juvs seen. Possibly predated by mink which have been seen quite often along the river during the summer.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Abundant summer visitor.

Arrivals from early April with 3 at WLF on 2nd and 6 at Doddington on 3rd.

Breeds commonly throughout the area.

2 roosts built up at SF during Aug with up to 2,500 at GF in the reedbed by MGT, and 1000 at EHF in the reedbed by the railway embankment.

The last records from Doddington on 21 Oct and Alsager on 22 Oct.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

First record of the year from Doddington with 2 on 3 April, with Swallows.

Breeds commonly throughout the area although no large flocks were noted.

The last record was of 2 over Alsager on 22 Oct, again with Swallows.

Pechora Pipit (*Anthus gustavi*)

Vagrant.

A pipit possibly of this species was seen at EHF on 13 April. A rarity form and supporting details have been sent to the county recorder to pass on to the BBRC for adjudication. A decision is still awaited. If accepted this will be a first for Cheshire.

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Scarce passage migrant and possible summer visitor.

Only 2 records with 1 at Arclid SQ on 13 April and 1 over Sandbach GC on 22 Aug.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon resident and passage migrant.

Flocks of more than 10 in early winter included RF 20, Arclid SQ 45. On 29 March at Mow Cop a large movement of birds was noted flying over with many in song flight.

No proved breeding but probably bred at Mow Cop.

Autumn passage was noted at EHF from mid-Sept and through Oct.

Flocks in late winter included RF 40, Arclid SQ 38, Crewe Pymys Lane old tip 15.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

First record was of 1 at EHF on 9 April, then 2 at Doddington on 10 April. A max of 7 at EHF on spring passage.

Breeding season records from EHF (where 3 juvs seen), Doddington, Stowford, Weston.

The last record was of 1 at WLF on 13 Sept.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Scarce summer visitor and scarce winter visitor.

Early winter records from 10 sites.

Bred at 2 sites, Arclid SQ (where a pair raised 2 broods) and Wistaston (Joey the Swan).

Late winter records from 14 sites.

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly around the area but very much under-recorded.

Winter flocks of RF 40, Arclid SQ 50, Crewe GC 64, Stowford 40 and a large flock of 250 roosting in the Bisto Factory between Elworth and Middlewich.

Birds of the continental sub-species White Wagtail *M.a. alba* were recorded at EHF on 9, 23, 25, 27, 28 April and 4, 6 May.

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident.

Regular in winter along the R. Dane Congleton and at Bathvale Congleton.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

Duncock (*Prunella modularis*)

Abundant resident.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce summer visitor.

1 ad was seen near the canal by FF on 27 May and 1 imm at RF on 29 Aug.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant and summer visitor.

2 separate m seen on spring passage, 1 at EHF on 27 April and 1 at MGT on 7 May.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

All spring passage records from SF with the first bird at EHF on 4 April. Then recorded on 16 days up to 30 May with a max of 6.

Strangely no autumn passage records from SF but several records of singles from other sites: Arclid SQ, Haslington, Middlewich Lime Beds, Mow Cop and Stowford.

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)

Very scarce migrant and summer visitor.

1997 addition: At Mow Cop in mid-summer a f and 2 recently fledged juvs were seen.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

Early winter flocks of RF 200, Alsager South 130, Arclid SQ 500, Stowford 200 with the last on 26 April.

The first in the late winter period was on 18 Oct at PHF. Then recorded flocks were EHF 400 over, Stowford 200, Wheelock 220, near Winterley Pool 300.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

Few records received. Probably 6 pairs bred at Arclid SQ.

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor

Few records in early winter with Arclid SQ 40, Haslington 50.

The first record in the late winter period was of 30 flying over Sandbach on 5 Oct, then Crewe Cemetery and Haslington on 7th. Late winter flocks were EHF 100 over, Arclid SQ 80, Wheelock 240 in total along the canal.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeds throughout the area, although few breeding records received. The only record of 10+ birds was one of 15 at Stowford on 28 June.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Scarce summer visitor.

The traditional site at Bagmere had 2 m reeling on 8 May, starting in late evening as usual (only 1 pair in 1997).

Also a m was seen and heard reeling at Weston New Golf Course on the late dates of 17 and 18 July.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record was 1 at WLF on 26 April. Probably 5 pairs bred at SF with GF 3, RF 1 and WLF 1. The only other record was of 2 at Bagmere on 8 May.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record was 1 at WLF on 18 April.

Probably 4 pairs bred at WLF and 1 at GF. Also 3 pairs at Rode Pool, 1 at Weston New Golf Course and 1 at Bagmere.

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First record was on 28 April with singles at CF and FF. Then recorded from RF, WLF and Arclid SQ in the breeding season with Aug records from EHF.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Common summer visitor.

The first record was on 24 April with singles at FF and CF. Quite common as a breeding bird with, for example, probably 6 pairs at Arclid SQ and 2 pairs at Bathvale Congleton.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

First record was from Arclid SQ on 30 April. Only recorded from 7 sites. At Arclid SQ probably 6 pairs bred.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

Surprisingly only 1 winter record with a f at Crewe Business Park on 27 Feb. There were at least 11 in 1997. Have they stopped wintering or are we not recording them?

First record was from FF on 27 March.

A common breeder with, for example, 11 pairs at Arclid SQ.

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

Rare summer visitor.

As in 1997 the only records were from Timbersbrook where an ad was seen carrying food on 9 May. Although too early to be feeding young, according to BWP there is no courtship feeding recorded but the m may feed the f on the nest.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.

1 probable over-wintering bird was seen at FF on 17 Feb, and 1 was seen in a Congleton garden on 15 Jan.

The first visitors arrived from mid-March with singles at Arclid SQ on 13th, Congleton on 14th and WLF on 15th.

Breeds commonly with, for example, probably 10 pairs at Arclid SQ.

2 birds probably over-wintering with 1 on 18 Oct at FF and 1 at Astbury Water Park on 9 Dec.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Common summer visitor.

First record was from Arclid SQ on 29 March where probably 13 pairs bred, supporting the fact that this is the commonest warbler.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Mainly winter records with, for example, FF 5, WLF 8, Crewe Cemetery 5, Quakers Coppice 5, Arclid SQ 6. Recorded from 12 sites in winter.

1 summer record where a pair nested at Timbersbrook.

Firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*)

Rare winter visitor.

1997 addition: A f in a Hightown, Congleton, garden on 23 Nov reappeared there on 10 Dec.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

A good series of breeding records with Arclid SQ 1 pair, Barthomley 1 pair nested in the observer's garden, and 2 pairs by the White Lion, St. Michael's Churchyard and Crewe Cemetery 4 pairs, Hassall Green 1 pair, Blakenhall 1 pair. Also recorded at 3 other sites.

Pied Flycatcher (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

Scarce summer visitor.

At Timbersbrook 2 pairs used nest boxes. 1 pair had 4 juvs which were ringed, and the other pair were also successful although numbers of juvs not known.

Also 1 at WLF on 22 Sept.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Common resident.

Numbers continue to be high with many flocks seen in winter. Those recorded with 20+ were at FF 20; Crewe Cemetery 22; Crewe GC 20; Doddington 22; Quakers Coppice 25.

Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*)

Uncommon resident.

Present in winter at FF, Bathvale Congleton, Crewe GC and Lawton Woods.

Also at Arclid SQ where at least 1 pair bred.

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded in winter from 14 sites, usually in 1s or 2s but up to 5 in a Swettenham garden.

At Doddington 1 pair used a nest box, laid 10 eggs and fledged 7 juvs.

Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*)

Abundant resident.

At Doddington 11 pairs used nest boxes, laid 87 eggs and fledged 61 juvs. At Quakers Coppice 7 pairs used nest boxes, laid 65 eggs hatched 60 and fledged only 29.

A very poor year with the cold and wet weather in April taking its toll and also causing a mis-match in the timing for the supply of caterpillars.

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

Common resident.

At Doddington 6 pairs used nest boxes, laid 46 eggs and fledged 20 juvs. At Quakers Coppice 3 pairs used nest boxes, laid 21 eggs, hatched 18 and fledged 16. Poor productivity as for Blue Tit. The average first egg date for tits in boxes was 30 April in 1998 compared to the more normal date of 17 April in 1997.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)

Common resident.

At Quakers Coppice 2 pairs used nest boxes, laid 9 eggs, hatched 8 and fledged 8. Also bred at Arclid SQ where 1 pair seen with juvs in June and Wistaston (Joey the Swan) where 1 pair definitely nested and 1 possibly.

Regularly seen on the peanuts at the bird feeding stations at EHF and FF.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Common resident.

Fairly common breeding bird with records from 10 sites.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Uncommon resident.

Grossly under-recorded although recorded from 11 sites. The only breeding record was from Arclid SQ where probably 2 pairs bred.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly. The only records in winter were of 25 at Crewe Business Park and 12 at Stowford.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

Numbers seem to be increasing with, for example, breeding pairs at Oakhanger 40 in disused farm buildings; Doddington 30 around the Hall; Crewe Hall 20 in Lime trees along Weston Road.

The roost at Crewe Hall held c.2500 in late winter.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Common resident.

The total of nests at regularly counted rookeries were :-

	<u>1998</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1996</u>
Crewe/Alsager (10 sites)	485	420	460
Foden's Flash Sandbach	93	101	102
Arclid SQ	57	67	81

The roost at Crewe Hall held c.2000 in late winter and there were c.1000 feeding in fields at Stowford in Feb.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly throughout the area. No count of numbers at MGT this year.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Rare visitor.

Becoming more common with 6 records of flyovers this year. 2 over Haslington 14 March, 1 over EHF 14 April, 2 over Wybunbury 16 Aug, 1 over Arclid SQ 8 Oct, 1 over CF 18 Oct and 2 over WLF 3 Dec.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

Several roosts were recorded with Badger Avenue Crewe 2500; MMU Alsager 1000; Hungerford Road Crewe 900; Haslington 150. These roosts were all in tall Cupressus Leylandii trees and also were regularly predated by Sparrowhawks.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

Some recordable late autumn flocks this year with 55 in a Coppenhall Crewe garden; separate flocks of 55 and 32 along Clay Lane Haslington; 30 at Timbersbrook.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded from 13 sites with breeding at 3 sites: RF 2 pairs, MGT 2 pairs, Haslington Hall 2 pairs.

Winter flocks of 20+ at EHF 35, MGT 22, Swettenham 23 regular in observer's garden, Stowford 20. Also up to 20 regular at the bird feeding station at EHF.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

Breeds commonly throughout the area. Winter flocks recorded at EHF 40, Arclid SQ 50, Doddington 45, Haslington Hall 50, Sandbach 60.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

There were none recorded in late winter 1997, and so the only early winter 1998 record of 1 in the observer's garden at Swettenham in April was possibly a passage migrant.

Relatively much more common in late winter with up to 4 at WLF, EHF, Doddington, Swettenham, Timbersbrook.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

A flock at EHF in late Nov and Dec peaked at a max of 76.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

Early winter flocks at Crewe Cemetery 30, Doddington 30.

Breeding season records from only 2 sites. Late winter flocks only at EHF and MGT where usually around 50, but an exceptional 150 on 5 Sept.

Following the provision of niger seed in a Haslington garden numbers rapidly increased from an occasional 1 or 2 to a regular 20.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded from 7 sites in early winter and 9 in late winter. Flocks of 30+ were FF 60, Arclid SQ 70, Congleton 30, Bathvale Congleton 30, Crewe GC 30, Swettenham 50.

Linnet (*Acanthis cannabina*)

Common resident.

Early winter flocks at WLF 25, Alsager South 40, Doddington 104, Haslington 30.

The only breeding records from EHF, Arclid SQ and Mow Cop.

Late winter flocks of MGT 45, Arclid SQ 50, Haslington Hall 60.

Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Early winter records from FF 2, Alsager South 4, Crewe GC 3, Haslington 2, Lawton Woods 1.

Late winter records from FF 5, EHF 2, Arclid SQ 20, Haslington 9 feeding on peanuts in a garden.

Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Vagrant.

A good day on 29 March when 3 f + 1 m were at Mow Cop and 8 f + 2 m were at The Cloud, Congleton.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 22 sites across the area, usually 1s or 2s. All records can be taken to indicate breeding pairs for this sedentary species.

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

Very rare winter visitor.

On 29 Nov 1 was seen in flight and heard calling as it flew from RF toward EHF.

This is only the 3rd record for the flashes and the 4th for the SECOS area.

Previous records are :-

EHF	1/12/96
Middlewich Lime Beds	17/11/96
WLF	13/11/77

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

Rather worryingly there were only 2 flocks of 10+ recorded with 15 at Haslington Hall in Jan and 20 at Sandbach in Dec.

Up to 6 recorded from 15 sites and probable breeding records from FF, FFF, Arclid SQ, Mow Cop, Weston.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

More records than usual for this threatened species. In early winter at MGT 8, Weston New GC 8 and 6 other sites.

Breeding records from GF 3 pairs, RF 3 pairs, WLF 1 pair, Arclid SQ 9 pairs, Rode Pool 2 pairs.

Winter flocks into double figures with Sandbach 12, Haslington 11 in a mixed flock of 120 finches and buntings, and also recorded at 10 other sites.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

Uncommon resident.

A poor year for this threatened and declining species. The largest number recorded was 5 at Alsager South in Jan.

Breeding season records from Brereton, Haslington Hall, Weston, Winterley Pool involving 5 singing males. No report from the previous main area of Alsager south west.

ESCAPES AND RELEASES

Parakeet sp

1 flew over Congleton on 4 Sept calling loudly.

OTHER RECORDS

Terrapin

1 seen at EHF on 21 June and 16 July.

Mink

On 25 Sept at EHF 4 were seen, 2 by the main road bridge and 2 down the lane by the railway.

BIRDWATCHING AT MOW COP

The South East Cheshire recording area comprises mostly of the low lying Cheshire Plain. To see upland birds most local birders leave our recording area and travel to the East Cheshire Pennine hills or Staffordshire moorlands. However, on our doorstep we have our own site, where it is possible to see some upland species as well as witnessing diurnal migration. This site is Mow Cop, which rises to over a thousand feet in the south of our area on the border with Staffordshire. Although often appearing birdless, it can, with persistence and good coverage, produce nice records for S.E.Cheshire.

The best months for birding, we have found, are March to mid-May, and mid-August to early November. Mid-summer is quiet and winter bleak, although who knows what you might find.

In spring and autumn arrive at dawn, park in the castle car park. If the barrier is locked, park close by. Climb the steps leading up to the castle and birdwatch from the level ground at the top. Especially in September when conditions are right (calm or slight easterly wind) early morning diurnal migration is often visible with hirundines and pipits flying over. Sometimes Wheatears land on the heather or rocks, and occasionally in late August or early September a Tree Pipit will call as it flies over, or even lands in the heather. Explore the area around the castle in September, there may be warblers or an occasional Redstart, and in October Goldcrests may be present in the gardens. If you have parked on the road watch for the National Trust attendant to arrive and unlock the car park barrier.

Next follow the dirt track north-west for 100 yds. until it emerges on Wood Street. Turn right, then after 30 yds. turn left on to a dirt lane with 'South Cheshire Way' and 'Mow Cop Trail' footpath signs. After 50 yds. pass a duckpond on the left. Check the heather by the 'Old Man of Mow' on your right. Also check the large rough field on the left. Wheatears are often here in April and occasionally Ring Ouzel. After 130 yds. you will reach a crossroads of paths. In spring we often walk left across two fields checking for Wheatears, and watching Meadow Pipits and Skylarks in song flight. Soon the path enters woodland and descends steeply. Listen in April and early May for migrant Pied Flycatchers or Redstart singing, especially near old oak trees. They don't breed here but sometimes stop and sing on spring mornings. Lower down we have also seen Wood Warblers at the end of April. Garden Warbler, Blackcap and Chiffchaff are common in spring and summer.

Walk back up the way you have come, and back at the crossroads turn left up to the aerial mast. Scan the small fields and heather here for perhaps a Wheatear and then follow the path down, and after 350 yds. emerge on to a lane. Turn right and after 80 yds. emerge on to a road. Walk left along the road, and after 150 yds. turn left on a road leading to Cordawell Farm. After 50 yds. leave the drive on the right over a stile. Walk slowly along this ill-defined footpath, which crosses a bog on a slightly raised bank. Good walking boots or Wellington boots are necessary here. This bog has breeding Meadow Pipit and Reed Bunting. Snipe and Curlew are usually here between August and April, and Jack Snipe has been discovered wintering. On the slope between the bog and road we have seen Ring Ouzel in spring, and many migrants in the autumn, with pipits, wagtails, Wheatears and Linnets. Retrace your steps back on to the road and walk left along the road for 200 yds. On the left are four car park pull-in laybys. At the fourth set up your telescope. You will have a good view over the bog and the Cheshire Plain. In spring, time spent here may produce Linnets and, especially in March, Fieldfares, Redwings, Chaffinches and even Bramblings may fly over. In autumn diurnal migration is often evident, especially in September and October, with groups of Meadow Pipits and Skylarks arriving from the north-east and flying over. Follow the road for another 150 yds. and look down into the old quarry on your left. Wheatears, Ring Ouzels, or even Whinchat or Stonechat

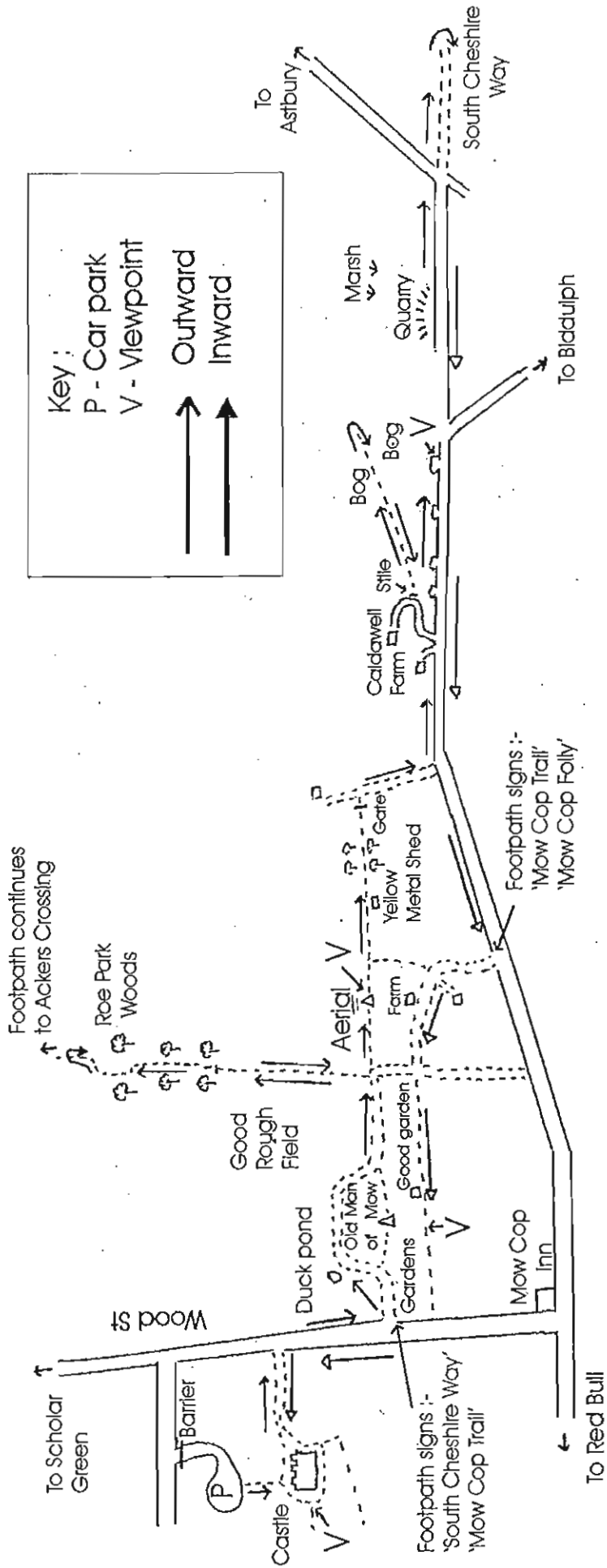
may be here. If you walk down the road for another 200 yds. from the quarry, you will see a broad, rocky path on your right. This is the Cheshire Way and continues along the County boundary for several miles. Time spent birding along here may be productive and if there are no birds about the views are good compensation.

Retrace your steps back up the road for $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, then turn right into a dirt road by a footpath sign saying 'Mow Cop Trail' and 'Mow Cop Folly'. This leads through small fields and past a farm on the right. After 250 yds. is a crossroads, go straight on. After 50 yds. a garden on the right looks good for migrants. Another 50 yds. brings you out on Wood Street. Turn right and then after 100 yds. left back to the castle.

This walk will best be done over a full morning, and is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length. Don't expect to see many birds, although what you see will probably be good, and you will be helping with the advancement of our local knowledge. Please enter all your sightings in the SECOS logbook at the Sandbach Flashes.

ANDREW & ANGELA GOODWIN.

Sketch Map of Mow Cop



SPECIFIC NOTES ON RARITIES

HEN HARRIER AT ELTON HALL FLASH: 1ST JANUARY 1998

I was at Elton Hall Flash on 1/1/98 when suddenly the Wigeon and Curlew, which were feeding on a field by the flash, became alarmed, with the Wigeon taking to the water and the Curlew flying off. I scanned the field and picked up a medium-sized Raptor (slightly smaller than Buzzard), quartering low over the field. It was dark brown in colour, and it glided 'Harrier-like' with upturned wings with the tips outstretched. As it flew left towards the road you could see it had a long tail (but unfortunately I couldn't see the rump). As it came over the hedgerow it banked, and you could see all its underparts which had a tinge of red which contrasted with darker parts of the bird. Due to the strong wind, it then turned and faced me and hung there for a second or two before continuing left, heading north-west mobbed by a single Crow. Despite running up the road to get a further look, I couldn't relocate the bird. Due to the short length of time I saw this bird, I couldn't give much of a description, but after reference I decided that this was in fact a Hen Harrier, possibly not moulted into full 1st winter plumage, due to some of the underparts still being tinged red.

NOEL STUBBS.

The sixth record for the flashes with the previous one being a ringtail over EHF on 11 Nov 1993.

RED KITE AT ELTON HALL FLASH: 30TH MARCH 1998

Standing at Elton Hall Flash watchpoint I became aware that a small group of corvids feeding in the stubble field at the back of the saltpan were calling excitedly. Watching with my eyes I could see corvids flying purposefully and fast to the right, and almost immediately a large bird appeared low over the hedge that runs down from the railway line to the saltpan. Raising my binoculars, I was stunned to see a large dark brown upper wing with a bright golden chestnut band across the medium coverts. The tail was noticeably long and slender, and against the background of the field it was a bright chestnut brown colour. With its bouyant flight it flapped low across the saltpan, and out of sight by the golf driving range being pursued by the crows.

I looked around for birders to shout to but the other locals were at Railway Flash watching a Little Gull. I ran 50 yds. up the road to the brow of the hill and quickly scanned for the kite, but I couldn't see it. I knew the whereabouts of the bird by the actions of the crows. After a few seconds it swung up into view near Watch Lane Flash and started soaring low over the south end. Using my scope I quickly got my first view of the tail fork on the long narrow chestnut tail. I saw the underside of the bird clearly. In the strong sunlight the head and throat looked yellowish white, and the breast and belly looked golden streaked chestnut. On the underwing the large pale patch on the inner primaries, and the blackish fingered primary tips, were clearly seen. As the bird gained height soaring, I occasionally got glimpses of the upperwing and the pale bar across the coverts. The crows had now left it, and the Red Kite didn't appear in any great hurry as it hung in the air high over the canal pool. It slowly moved north, drifting as it soared high, but due to the good visibility I was able to follow it easily in the scope. I kept looking around for other birders but unusual for the flashes it was deserted.

In retrospect it was a great day for raptors being sunny with a warm stiff breeze. An Osprey in April also followed this same flight line, perhaps following the Trent and Mersey Canal which loosely parallels the River Wheelock in a north/south direction.

I didn't see any wing tags but in the excitement I forgot to look, being more intent on eliminating Black Kite. However, as the views were good and visibility excellent, I think I would have noticed tags if present.

ANDY GOODWIN.

This is the first confirmed record for the SECOS area.

PURPLE HERON AT SANDBACH FLASHES: 16 APRIL 1998

The bird was seen at three locations during the day. The first sighting was by Mike Billington, the second by Colin Lythgoe, and the third by Dave Meakin.

I was walking along the canal from Foden's Flash towards Watch Lane Flash looking for new migrants. Approaching Watch Lane Flash I noticed a heron at the edge of the reed bed at the back of Red Lane Pool. From about 300 yards I looked down and watched the bird. I took a brief description and realised that the bird was a Purple Heron. After about 5 minutes it flew off towards Foden's Flash and I could not relocate it.

MIKE BILLINGTON.

I joined a few other local birders trying to relocate the bird in the evening, without any great expectation of success. I was searching on my own at Market Garden Pool, but there was no immediate sign of it. However, at 19.30, after about 10 minutes watching, a bird suddenly took off out of a small bed of Phragmites reeds on the opposite bank of the pool, about 30 metres away. It flew away from me and landed in a larger Phragmites reed bed at the south end of the pool about 100 metres away. I quickly rounded up the other birders who were searching at other sites and we watched the reed bed for some time. Finally around 20.00 the bird lifted off out of the reed bed and flew south away from us, but after several seconds it turned round and flew back past us and disappeared behind trees to the north.

From the two sightings the following description was taken:-

On the first sighting it was apparent that the size was slightly smaller than Grey Heron and that it was generally darker. As the bird flew away from me with the evening sun low in the sky behind me, the upperwing secondary coverts appeared to have a chestnut sheen to them. However, on the second sighting as the bird flew past with the sun at a different angle this was not seen. The underwing secondary coverts were always a dark chestnut colour and this extended up to the leading edge of the wing, showing chestnut instead of the usual white 'headlamps' of Grey Heron.

The mantle was dark grey and the primaries appeared to be even darker. The black crown and black stripe down the side of the neck against a background colour of buff/chestnut was clearly seen. In flight the neck appeared more 'pulled-in' than in Grey Heron. The legs were well stretched out behind the bird, and one of my lasting impressions was its toes being stretched out and obvious (I did not realise the significance of this until reading various field guides later).

Despite intensive searching the next day it could not be relocated.

COLIN LYTHGOE.

I arrived late at the Flashes and did not know that the bird had been relocated at Market Garden Pool. I was searching the Watch Lane Flash area, initially without success. As I was preparing to leave at 20.05 the bird suddenly appeared standing in one of the small fishing pools opposite the Watch Lane car park. It was still there when I left a few minutes later.

DAVE MEAKIN.

The first record of Purple Heron for Sandbach Flashes, and the 8th for Cheshire, the previous record being a 1st summer bird at Hurleston Reservoir on 1st May 1990.

WHITE STORK AT SANDBACH FLASHES: 17TH MAY 1998

On 17/5/98 I was standing at Elton Hall Flash, along with several other observers, when Frank Melbon spotted a large bird in amongst the several hundred large gulls which could be viewed distantly down the road past Pumphouse Flash. After a brief moment Lee Greenough identified it as a White Stork, which was confirmed as we had good but distant views as it soared and circled around. Its wingbeats were very slow like a large raptor, and when it was first viewed it was quite low, but over the next 13 minutes or so it seemed to gain height and glide off east towards the Wheelock area.

Description:- very large white bird with black flight feathers and trailing edge to wings. Its neck was very long and outstretched at all times. Didn't get bill or leg colour as it was too distant.

On 24/5/98 Lee Greenough and myself were again at Elton Hall Flash when at 10.25am the presumed same bird came over the railway line low. It circled the flash twice, being mobbed continuously by several Lapwings which were present. It then flew over the field to left of the flash and appeared to land. We ran 100 yds. or so up to the gate, from where we could view the field, and the stork was briefly on the deck but was mobbed by 100+ corvids which wouldn't let it settle. It then took off and came directly over our heads at a height of no more than 25 ft. where you could see clearly it had dull red legs but no rings. It then did a couple of circuits of Pumphouse Flash and the ploughed field at the back of it, but it was still being mobbed by several birds. Overall this lasted for about 20 minutes or so and it eventually flew off in the direction it had come from (east), which it had done on the previous occasion on 17/5/98.

MARK STUBBS.

A White Stork, probably the same bird, was seen at Haslington two weeks earlier on 29/4/98 by Reg Crawford. The bird appeared at around 100 ft. above the ground near Clapgates Farm in Waterloo Road. It thermalled above the farm for 10-15 minutes, gaining height up to around 1500 ft. It then flew off west.

This is the 9th record for Cheshire & Wirral. The 8th was one flying over Bulkeley Hill on 11th April 1995 and the 7th was one over Mobberley/Ashley on 10th April 1993.

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, once again this year, a summary of sightings for selected species. This gives an indication of the normal arrival and departure dates for general interest, and also gives 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 (except for Hobby). 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 1998.

Second date is the average of the first records for the past 10 years, excluding the current year, i.e. 1988 to 1997.

Third date is the earliest date ever recorded.

Fourth date is the last record in 1998.

Fifth date is the average of the last records for the past 10 years, excluding the current year, i.e. 1988 to 1997.

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.

In 1998 two earliest/latest ever dates were extended. The latest ever date for Reed Warbler was extended from 1/10 (in 1988) to 4/10, and that for Willow Warbler extended from 24/9 (in 1981) to 26/9.

A r r i v a l sD e p a r t u r e s

<u>Species</u>	<u>Date in 1998</u>	<u>Average of last 10 years</u>	<u>Earliest ever</u>	<u>Date in 1998</u>	<u>Average of last 10 years</u>	<u>Latest ever</u>
Hobby	24/4	2/5	27/3/94	6/10	17/9	7/10/92
Little Ringed Plover	22/3	20/3	6/3/77	27/8	5/9	16/10/85
Cuckoo	20/4	20/4	5/4/82	NR	NR	1/10/86
Swift	23/4	25/4	16/4/96	30/9	1/9	3/11/78
Sand Martin	27/3	22/3	12/3/89	20/9	17/9	24/11/72
Swallow	2/4	29/3	22/3/97	22/10	18/10	30/11/74
House Martin	3/4	11/4	25/3/95	22/10	15/10	5/11/77
Yellow Wagtail	9/4	12/4	29/3/81	13/9	20/9	2/10/87
Grasshopper Warbler	8/5	8/5	25/4/93	NR	NR	30/8/??
Sedge Warbler	26/4	25/4	16/4/80	9/8	12/9	1/10/78
Reed Warbler	18/4	20/4	12/4/97	4/10	22/9	4/10/98
Lesser Whitethroat	28/4	26/4	21/4/88	29/8	29/8	24/9/85
Whitethroat	24/4	21/4	15/4/93	6/9	18/9	21/9/93
Garden Warbler	3/5	27/4	20/4/96	3/8	NR	9/9/83
Blackcap	27/3	9/4	18/3/97	30/8	12/9	12/9/97
Chiffchaff	14/3	14/3	8/3/89	6/10	9/10	15/10/87
Willow Warbler	1/4	3/4	29/3/81	26/9	NR	26/9/98