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SOUTH-EAST CHESHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

1999 BIRD REPORT

Including Birds of Sandbach Flashes

SECOS Recorder:
Colin Lythgoe
11 Waterloo Road
Haslington
Crewe
CW1 5TF
Tel: 01270-582642

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the SECOS Annual Bird Report for 1999, the last of the 20th Century. All of the improvements that were made to the bird report last year have been maintained for this year.

There are the usual articles on Birdwatching Sites in the SECOS area, the Systematic List and Early and Late Dates, which have been updated for 1999. Andy Goodwin has written a site guide for Arclid Sand Quarry in his series on sites to watch, and I have included a contribution from the Cheshire Raptor Study Group on the 1999 Buzzard Survey. There are also specific notes on the occurrence of the Night Heron and Avocets.

Although Night Heron was the only addition to the SECOS list in the year, there were a number of other good birds. At Sandbach Flashes there was only the third record of Avocets, the ninth Pectoral Sandpiper and only the sixth Marsh Harrier, and finally a beautiful Waxwing gave brilliant views in the winter sunshine to the many birders who came to see it.

Away from the flashes and at the other extreme was another beautiful bird. A Hoopoe was seen in a Congleton garden but only by the house owners - non-birders! A redhead Smew with 32 Goosanders in Jan/Feb at Lawton Woods lake lit up this fairly drab site.

On the negative side there were no records of Grasshopper Warbler, which has been hanging on at Bagmere with one pair for several years, or Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler. These are marginal species in the SECOS area, usually recorded in the eastern hills.

The breach in the north bank of the River Wheelock at Elton Hall Flash resulted in extensive flooding of the salt pan. Despite much pressure and numerous promises of action, the Environment Agency and English Nature have still not managed to repair the breach. It is to be hoped that no permanent damage has been done to this area when the breach is finally repaired, and normal water levels restored. In the short term the high water levels resulted in many fewer waders, but more breeding water birds with Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe and Ruddy Duck breeding on the salt pan area.

Confusion still reigns concerning gull identification! Birds showing characteristics of the Baltic race (*L.f.fuscus*) of Lesser Black-backed Gull and characteristics of the Scandinavian race (*L.a.argentatus*) of Herring Gull were recorded along with numerous Yellow-legged Gulls.

A total of 164 species were recorded in the area during 1999, including 26 wader species, giving the same figures as for 1998.

During the course of the year SECOS members have been involved in a number of surveys, including the Buzzard Survey, Bird Recording on Sites of Biological Importance, regular ongoing BTO surveys as well as the BTO Winter Farmland Birds Survey. Additionally over 20 members are now regularly recording garden birds for the Society's Garden Bird Feeding Survey. We also continue to monitor the nestboxes in Quakers Coppice.

In January members erected a bird hide at Rode Pool, and this has given access to the site to SECOS members, who have enjoyed many visits during the year.

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 help in typing and collating this report, and to John Thompson for his assistance.

COLIN LYTHGOE
RECORDER.

The List of Contributors

A. Arrowsmith	S. Gibson	F. Malbon	W. Sheard
M. Bailey	A. Goodwin	D. Meakin	J. Smith
M. Ball	A. Goodwin	I. Mumford	J. Soper
J. Barber	A. Green	D. Norbury	R. Stonier
A.E. Battersby	L. Greenhough	P.J. Oddy	M. Stubbs
S.M. Benson	H. Griffiths	A.J. Perkins	N. Stubbs
M. Billington	T. Halliday	C.B. Perkins	S. Stubbs
A. Booth	A.W.P. Hearn	M. Powell	M.D. Sutton
D. Bromont	P. Hill	A. Pym	D. Swaby
R. Brown	C. Hull	J. Quinn	P. Swallow
D. Cookson	T. Jones	J. Roberts	E. Tweed
R. Crawford	P. Leigh <i>Lunt</i>	P. Roberts	J. Wakefield
M. Dale	W. Lowe	A.A. Robinson	P. Wilson
A. Firth	C. Lythgoe	T. Rowlands	T. Woolridge
Doddington Log Contributors		Rode Pool Log Contributors	

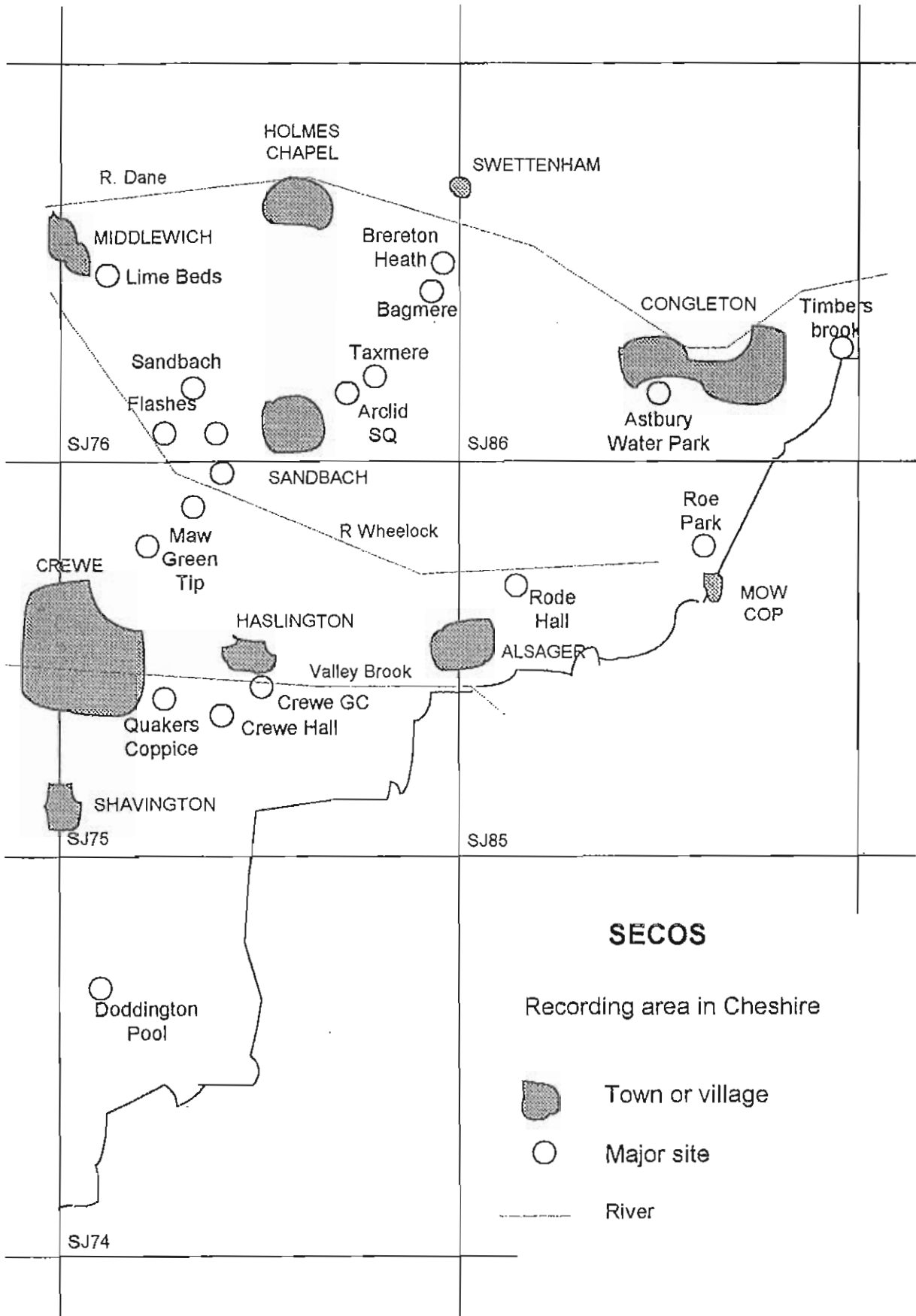
Abbreviations Used

CF	Crabmill Flash	juv	juvenile
EHF	Elton Hall Flash	1 st W	1 st Winter
FF	Foden's Flash	2 nd W	2 nd Winter
FFF	Fields Farm Flash	3 rd W	3 rd 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
TLF	Tetton Lane Flash	SQ	Sand Quarry
WF	Warmingham Flash		
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.



SECOS

Recording area in Cheshire

-  Town or village
-  Major site
-  River

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 SJ711653¹

The raised settling beds owned by British Salt.

Arclid Sand Quarry SJ778623³

Extensive area of water formed by the quarry workings.

Taxmere SJ780625¹

Area of farmland just north of Arclid Sand Quarry.

Bagmere SJ796643³

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

Brereton Heath SJ798651⁴

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

Swettenham SJ801675³

Farmland and mixed woodland by the River Dane.

Astbury Water Park SJ849624⁴

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.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded at SF in 1s and 2s in the first quarter of the year but Doddington continues to be the main site for this species with up to 9 in March.

Confirmed breeding here with at least 4 pairs and 8 juvs seen. Also bred as usual at GF where 2 juvs seen and exceptionally at EHF due to the increased depth of water. 6 juvs here in June and 2 small juvs in mid-Aug.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Common resident.

Flocks in the first winter period were at WLF 13, Arclid SQ II, Astbury Water Park 15 and Doddington 7.

Pairs were recorded breeding at 8 sites (13 in 1998). As usual most juvs were seen from late June through to mid-Aug. At SF pairs bred at FF, CF, WLF, EHF. At Arclid SQ 5 pairs with 7 broods of 13 juvs, Doddington also 5 pairs and at least 13 juvs, Rode Pool 3 pairs and 2 juvs seen, Winterley Pool 1 pair but no juvs seen.

Doddington was the main site for autumn/early winter flocks with 44 through Sept. Also 20 at Astbury Water Park in Dec.

Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Common winter visitor. Rare in summer.

In Feb at SF recorded at PHF 22, WLF 17 and CF 24 on different days. Presumably some movement between sites since the co-ordinated count of all flashes on 24 Jan only gave a total of 12. Also high numbers at Astbury Water Park where 34 on 2 Feb.

Seen in 1s and 2s through the summer at SF. Numbers were lower in the second winter period with PHF 13, Astbury Water Park 4, Doddington 18. Also at Rode Pool 11, Stowford 2, Swettenham 3, Winterley Pool 1.

Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Vagrant.

A 1st summer bird was seen to fly into EHF in the evening of 2 June. Last seen at dusk it could not be relocated the next day. See the notes at the end of this report for full details.

This is the first record for Sandbach Flashes and only the seventh for Cheshire & Wirral.

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Very rare visitor.

1 was reported from the River Dane Swettenham in late July and was probably present continuously from 24 July to 31 July. It was also seen on 13 Aug when it flew down and landed by 6 all white feral geese to which it seemed to be attracted. This is the sixth record for the SECOS area and the first away from SF.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Common resident

Generally recorded daily at SF throughout the year with up to 12 in total. 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 26 nests in use this year (28 in 1998; 26 in 1997).

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)

Fairly common resident.

Monthly max at the two main sites in the SECOS area (which are also the two main sites in Cheshire) :-

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Winterley Pool	104	74	59	51	63	64	43	49	57	64	70	88
Doddington	54	50	59	50	58	80	85	82	26	28	26	14

Once again it was possible to determine the total number of individual swans who had visited Winterley Pool in 1998 since all swans there are ringed. Although the highest monthly max was 104 there were 257 individual swans identified during the year.

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

Rare winter visitor.

The only record of a yellow-billed swan in 1999 was a single Whooper at Winterley Pool. Present 20 March it looked very sickly and was not seen after 25 March.

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser Brachyrhynchus*)

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant or feral.

Jan is generally the best month for skeins of geese flying overhead and this year was exceptional with 128 over EHF on 3rd, 120 over Congleton on 6th, 125 over EHF on 9th, 120 over Congleton on 21st, 500 over Astbury and 150 over Hassall on 29th and finally 50 over EHF on 31st.

At the end of the year 100 over Crewe on 18 Dec and 28 landed briefly at PHF on 20 Dec.

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

Is or 2s of feral birds with Canada Geese at EHF, WLF, Arclid SQ, Doddington Pool and Rode Pool.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Common resident.

Max numbers in the first winter period were SF 451, Arclid SQ 131, Doddington Pool 98, Winterley Pool 156. Bred at several sites with, for example, 21 juvs at Wybunbury SQ, 20 at SF, 14 at Arclid SQ, ? at Doddington and 8 at Rode Pool.

Some large numbers gathered in the post-breeding flocks in autumn with 426 (535 in 1998) at SF, 813 (578) at Arclid SQ, 144 (395) at Doddington and 234 (404) at Winterley Pool.

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Rare winter visitor or feral.

On 9th Jan 1 was seen in with a skein of Pink-footed Geese which flew over EHF.

Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*)

Presumed escapes.

An ad was seen at EHF on 9 Sept.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)

Rare visitor usually presumed to be escapes.

At EHF a bird was recorded on 1 Aug and then seen through to 8 Aug. It did not have any leg rings but did limp, with an injury to the right leg.

On 30 Aug another bird was seen there which was thought to be a different bird because it did not limp (or perhaps the injury had got better!). This was seen daily up to 26 Sept.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

In the first winter period regular at SF with 39 at EHF in Feb and occasional at Doddington with a max of 10 in May.

Breeding records from EHF where 2 pairs bred with broods of 8 and 4. Did not breed at Doddington this year but did breed at the nearby Wybunbury SQ where a pair was seen with 2 young.

In the second winter period numbers built up to 28 at EHF, but not recorded elsewhere.

Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*)

Scarce visitor.

Various records of singles. 1 m at Winterley Pool on 10 Jan, 1 f there on 9 June, 1 m at EHF on 14 Aug, 1 m + 1 f at Rode Pool on 10 Nov and 1 m at EHF on 27 Dec.

Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

A max count at SF of 429 (EHF 287, PHF 74, RF 46, WF 22) on 24 Jan. At Doddington generally less than 10 but there was an exceptional count of 148 on 16 Jan.

As usual at SF numbers gradually decreased during April. Not usually present during June and July but this year at least 3 birds summered here. Numbers started to build up from 29 Aug (26 Aug in 1998) and peaked at 466 at EHF in Dec.

Also recorded at Doddington (6), Arclid SQ (7) and Astbury Water Park (5).

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Again more records than usual with up to 4 at SF on 12 days in the first winter period (singles on 7 days in 1998). Then up to 4 at EHF throughout Aug with 1s or 2s in Dec. However, no records from other sites.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Common winter visitor. Scarce in summer.

Recorded in all months of the year at SF but no evidence of breeding. The co-ordinated count on 24 Jan gave a total of 269 (EHF 191, PHF 30, RF 36, TLF 12) with 283 in 1998 and 164 in 1997. In the second winter period a max of 370 at EHF in Oct.

Also at Doddington (38), Rode Pool (12) and Arclid SQ (6).

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Common resident. Abundant in winter.

Max numbers in the first quarter were SF (252 spread over 11 flashes), Arclid SQ (200) Doddington (118) Winterley Pool (47).

Breeds commonly on most waters and post-breeding flocks recorded were EHF (420), Arclid SQ (275) Doddington (298) Rode Pool (65). Numbers soon reduced to the normal winter levels. One high count was 92 at Rode Pool on 20 Dec when the Pool was 95% frozen.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

A max of 23 at EHF where present through to 24 March. (Up to 14 through to 27 March in 1998). The first birds in autumn were 2 at EHF on 23 Aug, and then regular through to the end of the year with a max of 15 in Dec.

The only record away from SF was 2 at Doddington on 29 Oct.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)

Scarce summer visitor. a single

1 m at RF on 16 May and 1 f at EHF on 20 May. Various records of (probably the same bird) at EHF from 14 Aug to 25 Sept.

Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded in all months at EHF but not breeding. Up to 16 in the first winter period, then up to 4 during the summer. In the second winter period numbers around a max of 19 but 32 on 29 Sept and 31 on 21 Oct.

Also occasional at Doddington Pool (max 7) Arclid SQ (2) Rode Pool (1).

Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)

Presumed escapes.

The pair present at Astbury Water Park from 6 Oct 1998 stayed through in to Jan. The m was last seen on 17 Jan and the f stayed until 21 March.

Also recorded at other sites with 1 f at Winterley Pool on 24 Jan and 1 m at EHF on 7 July.

Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)

Fairly common winter visitor.

In the first winter period average max numbers of SF (19), Astbury Water Park (80), Winterley Pool (39), but much lower at Doddington (47) (where 160 in 1998).

1 f at EHF on 21 June, otherwise no summer records. In the second winter period numbers continued low with max of SF (12), Astbury Water Park (58), Doddington Pool (63), Rode Pool (16), Winterley Pool (24).

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon in summer.

In the first winter period max numbers of SF (20), Astbury Water Park (50), Winterley Pool (26), Rode Pool (13) and Doddington (132), which continues to be the main site for this species, especially in the breeding season.

Probably 8 pairs bred here making it difficult to keep track of broods since many come and a lot go quickly! Also bred at Astbury Water Park for the first time here but all 5 juvs quickly disappeared, Wybunbury SQ where a pair had broods of 6 and 8, EHF where 2 broods of 7 in late July and Red Lane Flash where a f with 5 juvs on 6 July. Present at Arclid SQ but did not breed here.

Max numbers in the second winter period were SF (10), Astbury Water Park (50), Doddington (154), Winterley Pool (11).

Scaup (*Aythya marila*)

Rare winter visitor.

Singles were seen at Astbury Water Park on 17 Jan and 9 Feb.

Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

In the first winter period present continuously at Doddington Pool with a max of 19. A f lingered on here through to the end of June. Also at Astbury Water Park (max 9) and singles at Arclid SQ and WLF in Feb.

Lower numbers in Nov and Dec with 9 at Doddington Pool and 4 at Astbury Water Park. Also 1 f at RF on 24 Dec.

Smew (*Mergus albellus*)

Rare winter visitor.

A f was present at Lawton Woods lake from 17 Jan through to 25 Feb. A lovely sight to watch this dainty little duck along with the 32 Goosanders.

Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded at 7 sites in the winter months, as last year, but an exceptional number at Lawton Woods lake. 8 birds were present on 17 Jan and numbers built up to 32 on 3 Feb and then decreased to 11 on 25

Feb when last recorded.

Other notable records were Astbury Water Park (5), Congleton Park (2), Rode Pool (9), R. Dane Swettenham (3). There were 11 records at EHF during the year, including 4 where a bird flew in, circled round and flew off.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Uncommon resident.

Present in low numbers - up to 6 - at PHF, RF, Doddington Pool, Rode Pool and Arclid SQ in the first quarter of the year.

A pair bred at GF for the second successive year, with 6 juvs in June. The high water levels on the salt pan induced birds to breed here, and there was a pair + 5 juvs in July and a pair + 4 juvs in Aug. Also bred at Doddington with at least 3 juvs in Aug. Post breeding numbers were again high at Doddington where 29 on 28 Aug. Also 8 at Astbury Water Park in Dec and 2 at Rode Pool in Nov.

Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)

Very rare visitor.

On 2 June one was seen flying over the M6 motorway south of Jcn. 18 near to Holmes Chapel.

There were also unconfirmed reports of a bird being present in the Blakenhall/Betley area for a few months up to the end of Nov.

Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)

Very rare passage migrant.

A f/imm was seen at EHF on 23 Aug. It flew in from the south and then circled the salt pan for five minutes being mobbed by Lapwing. It then flew off south west over PHF.

This is the sixth record for SF. The previous record was also in autumn with an imm from 17 Aug to 7 Sept 1997. Previous records were 3 in April and 1 in May.

Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Rare visitor.

A f was seen briefly on 15 July flying from Crewe Hall towards Weston. On 10 Sept there was another sighting of a f in the same area when it flew over Weston Lane and Old Park Road.

1 was also reported from the Rode area on 2 Oct.

Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from 23 sites plus various flashes. The only confirmed breeding was at Wybunbury SQ where 3 juvs fledged and EHF where 2 juvs seen in Aug.

Other noteworthy records were of a f killing a Moorhen at EHF on 8 Feb, a m taking a Greenfinch from a Haslington garden bird feeder, and a f killed by a car along the Haslington by-pass.

Birds were recorded hunting at feeding stations in at least 5 out of 12 gardens in the SECOS area.

Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Uncommon resident.

This year the Cheshire Raptor Study Group organised a county wide survey of breeding Buzzards. There is an article on the survey in this report and full details are held by the SECOS recorder. There were an amazing 32 pairs of Buzzards breeding in the SECOS area and it is considered that there is still room for further expansion yet.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Rare migrant.

On 24 Oct a bird at Redesmere was seen to fly south in to SECOS air space at 12.30 before returning to Redesmere. This must be the briefest record of the year!

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Common resident.

Common throughout the area and recorded from at least 21 sites. Breeding proved at Wybunbury SQ where 2 juvs seen, Doddington where 1 juv in Aug, and Rode Pool.

One notable record occurred at EHF when a pipistrelle bat made a fatal life decision. It fluttered out of an old oak tree in full daylight, and flew erratically down the road for 100 yards when it was plucked out of the air by a male Kestrel that had been harassing a flock of finches nearby.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

Scarce migrant and winter visitor.

Singles at SF: at MGT on 31 Jan, PHF on 19 March, EHF 3 Oct, CF 10 Oct, EHF 16 Oct and finally 1 on 29 Nov zipped through the bird feeding station area.

Also 1 was seen over the Middlewich Road near Crewe on 13 Dec.

Care must be exercised when separating this species from small Sparrowhawks when only brief views are seen.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First recorded at EHF and WLF on 8 May.

In the Blakenhall/Checkley area 2 birds were resident from at least the beginning of July through to mid-Sept with 3 birds being seen occasionally. There is a strong possibility of a pair having bred in this area.

There were also unconfirmed reports of a pair present all summer on the Rode estate.

Also records of 1s or 2s at EHF (on 15 dates), Arclid SQ (3 dates), Bagnere (20/5), Crewe (3/6 and 9/7), Doddington (7/6 and 24/9), Haslington (5/9), Sandbach (18/7 and 31/7) and Wybunbury (26/7).

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Scarce autumn migrant and winter visitor.

At EHF records of singles in the first winter period. As in 1998 there were also records in the breeding season of April, May and June. A juv was seen on 3 July and there were at least 3 birds up to the year end.

Also recorded at Arclid SQ, Haslington and Sandbach. Prey seen to be taken included Teal and Wigeon.

Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)

Rare except where locally released.

Common in the Checkley/Blakenhall/Wybunbury area where many released for shooting. 53 at Bank Farm, Checkley, on a BTO survey, 50 in or around release pens at Blakenhall, 4 pairs bred at Wybunbury, all successfully.

Also 1 at WLF in Jan and 1 at EHF on 1 Aug.

Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

Scarce resident.

Records of 1s and 2s from Bradwall, Doddington, Mow Cop, Swettenham and Weston New golf course. Also at Blakenhall where at least 20 released for shooting.

Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*)

Rare summer visitor.

1 was heard calling at Wybunbury SQ on 24 April.

Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Scarce resident except where locally released.

Very common where released for shooting.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

The good numbers of late 1998 continued with EHF (2), FF (1), GF (1).

In the second winter period 2 at WLF and 2 at EHF, where one showed very well in the rushes in front of the viewpoint.

Also at Taxmere with 1 on 14 Feb and 1 on 17 Nov.

Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Common resident.

The co-ordinated count at SF on 24 Jan gave a total of 94 spread over 12 of the 14 flashes.

This is the usual distribution with small numbers on most waters, even field ponds.

Coot (*Fulica atra*)

Common resident and variable winter visitor.

The co-ordinated count at SF on 24 Jan gave a total of 268 spread over 12 flashes (172 in 1998).

Max counts at other sites in the first/second winter periods were Astbury SQ (151/67), Doddington (150/319 but 477 in Aug), Rode Pool (19/20), Winterley Pool (35/48), Arclid SQ (20/25).

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Scarce winter visitor and scarce summer visitor.

For the past few years the first record has been getting earlier and earlier. This year we have gone as early as possible with 1 at CF on 1 Jan! Records from the more usual date of mid-Feb with 1 at WLF on 14th, 1 at Arclid SQ on 7th and 1 at Doddington on 26th.

Up to 4 at EHF from April to July but no evidence of breeding. Also failed to breed at Doddington due to high water levels but probably bred at Arclid SQ, although no juvs seen. No records anywhere after 22 July.

Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)

Rare spring or autumn visitor.

2 birds seen at PHF on 1 May later moved to EHF and stayed there until 6 May. More details in the note later in this report.

This is only the third record for the flashes. The first was 1 on 9 Sept 1968. The second was 10 that arrived at WLF on 3 May 1974. They all stayed until 4 May, when 7 left leaving 3 imm who stayed until 7 May.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)

Scarce summer visitor. Uncommon spring/autumn migrant.

First bird of the year was 1 at EHF on 27 March. Only up to a low 4 on spring passage here.

1 pair bred at EHF with 2 juvs seen. Also bred successfully on the new quarry at Arclid SQ but failed on the old quarry. Did not breed at Doddington Pool this year.

Heavier than usual autumn passage at EHF with up to 17 birds in July. Last record on 13 Sept.

Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

Scarce passage migrant and winter visitor.

A very poor year this year compared to 1998, which was good. The first bird was 1 at EHF on 11 March. Then only recorded on 1 day in April, 10 in May, 2 in June, 3 in July and 2 in Aug.

1 winter record of a single at EHF on 31 Dec.

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

A max of 101 at EHF in the first quarter when occasionally present in the Lapwing flock. Much lower numbers in the last quarter with a max of only 4, and only recorded 13 times from Sept to Dec.

Also at Arclid SQ with 11 on 15 Dec and Wybunbury SQ with 7 on 17 Dec.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Scarce irregular visitor.

On 13 June at EHF there was an unusual record of a bird in summer plumage but rather brown plumage overall. Possibly a 1st S non-breeding bird moving north very late.

Also singles at EHF on 3 Oct and 9 Oct.

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

Max counts in the first winter period were EHF (800), Arclid SQ (500).

Breeding pairs recorded at EHF, RF, Arclid SQ, Astbury, Bagmere, Doddington, Haslington, Hough, Stowford, Weston, Wybunbury.

More large flocks recorded in the second winter period with max of EHF (800), Arclid SQ (600), Brereton Heath (250), Doddington (514).

Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

Rare visitor.

All records from EHF with 1 on 13 Nov, 2 on 7 Dec, 1 on 10 Dec and 1 on 15 Dec.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Scarce passage migrant.

Recorded on 5 dates in May and on 2 June with all singles except for 2 on 28 May.

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)

Scarce passage migrant.

After a run of good years for this species, there was only one record of 1 bird in 1999 with a single at EHF on 19 Sept.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*)

Very rare visitor.

1 at EHF on 20 Aug was first seen feeding on the salt pan behind the grass embankment at 13.00. It stayed here until 19.00 when it flew towards PHF. It could not be relocated the next day.

This is the ninth record for SF :-

8th was 1 at EHF from 4 Aug to 6 Aug 1995

7th was 1 at EHF from 27 Dec 1988 to 11 April 1989

6th was 1 at EHF from 16 Aug to 24 Aug 1988

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)

Scarce passage migrant.

As with Little Stint, this species was much scarcer this year than in the past few years.

On spring passage only 1 bird which was at EHF from 26 May to 28 May.

On return passage 1 at EHF from 28 July to 1 Aug and 1 at EHF for one day on 21 Sept.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

The now normal numbers of 1 or 2 at EHF in Jan, Feb and March. Spring passage from 6 April to 2 June when numbers varied from 1 to 14. On five dates flocks of up to 10 birds circled round EHF but did not land.

Return passage from 5 July through to mid-Oct with peaks in July and Oct when up to 10 birds present.

Finally in Nov and Dec numbers returned to the usual 1 or 2.

Also recorded at Arclid SQ with 2 on 12 July and 4 on 22 July.

Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Resident in Jan, Feb and March with a max. of 20.

1 on 31 May was in summer plumage and 2 were at EHF on 16 June.

Return passage started on 7 July when 2 birds still in summer plumage were at EHF. This passage merged into winter residents as birds were recorded almost daily after that.

Monthly max. were: July 9, Aug 6, Sept 14, Oct 11, Nov 12, Dec 15.

Also recorded at Arclid SQ with 5 on 24 Oct and Wybunbury SQ with 6 on 17 Dec.

Jack Snipe (*Lymnocyptes minimus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

Maw Green Tip is currently the best site for this species with at least 1 in the first winter period and 4 in the second winter period. At SF also 1 at EHF on 14 March and 1 at RF on 15 Nov.

Also at Middlewich Lime Beds - another regular site - with 5 on 21 Feb and 1 on 8 Nov. Finally 1 at Doddington on 28 Dec.

Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Uncommon winter visitor and migrant.

Recorded in the first winter period at EHF, OF, RF, with a max of 45 at any one site. Also regular at Maw Green Tip (15), Arclid SQ (10) and Middlewich Lime Beds (10).

Recorded continuously at SF from 1 July to the end of the year with a max of c100 at EHF. In the second winter period also at Maw Green Tip (7) Arclid SQ (5) Middlewich Lime Beds (20) and several sites with 1s and 2s.

The difficulties of counting Snipe were highlighted by a visit to OF on 9 Jan, when 0 birds were counted until somebody nearby discharged a shotgun and 42 Snipe appeared!

Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*)

Rare resident. Scarce winter visitor.

Jan birds recorded at FF, Quakers Coppice and Lawton Woods. Feb birds at Taxmere, Crewe GC and Stowford.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

Scarce migrant.

Spring passage from 13 March, when 2 at EHF, through to early June with a max of 22, except for 9 May when a flock of 50-60 circled EHF but did not land.

Return passage from 2 July through to mid-Sept with a max of 18. Finally 3 birds were at EHF from 16th to 22nd Oct.

Recorded on 69 days (with 61 in 1998 and 18 in 1997).

Also 2 at Arclid SQ on 7 July.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Scarce passage migrant.

At EHF 2 on 5 May and 3 on 6 May. Then 11 records of singles from 17 July to 22 Sept and 3 on 27 July.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Uncommon resident and fairly common winter visitor.

A max of around 50 in the usual evening roost at EHF in the first quarter, except for 100+ on 25 Feb.

Few records from mid-March to mid-July as birds dispersed to their breeding sites. In the SECOS area they probably bred at Mow Cop and Stowford, two traditional sites.

Birds began to return to EHF from mid-July and numbers soon settled to the usual numbers of 40 to 50.

Also recorded at Doddington with 2 on 16 April and Arclid SQ with 2 on 14 April and 1 on 5 Aug.

Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)

Rare passage migrant.

None in spring but 1 at EHF from 23 Aug to 14 Sept. 3 more flew in for one day on 25 Aug giving a total of 4 on that day.

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Uncommon visitor and migrant.

Present in all months at EHF with the following data :-

max count on any day/number of days in the month recorded											
Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
13/12	12/14	9/17	3/16	2/12	3/18	6/14	4/9	1/2	5/20	5/12	7/11

On 17 April an exceptional record of 56 birds were present first thing in the morning and they gradually moved off during the day.

On 29 March one bird was seen with a damaged leg and it became known as 'Limpy'. It was last recorded on 27 June when it moved off (or stopped limping!).

Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

On spring passage 8 records of 1s or 2s at EHF from 10 April to 22 May.

On return passage 18 scattered records of 1s or 2s at EHF from 13 July to 31 Oct.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

Scarce winter visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

Overwintering birds recorded at WLF, Doddington and Middlewich Lime Beds.

Spring passage was light as usual with records from EHF (4) and WLF (5) in May.

Then as usual a long extended return passage when recorded continuously at EHF from 26 June to 15 Sept with a max of 6. Also recorded on passage at Doddington, Rode Pool and Swettenham.

The only wintering birds in the last winter period were at Haslington and Stowford.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)

Scarce passage migrant.

1 or 2 at EHF on 4/5/6 May, 1 on 27 May, 1 on 14 June and 1 on 25 June.

Then in autumn 1 present at EHF from 22 Aug to 3 Sept.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

Spring passage at EHF from 10 April to 16 May with a max of 3. Also in spring at Arclid SQ from 22 April to 7 May with a max of 6, and at Doddington with a max of 4 on 7 May.

Return passage at EHF from 5 July through to 26 Sept with a max of 4. Also at Arclid SQ from 1 July to 5 Sept with a max of 3 and Doddington from 5 July to 1 Sept with a max of 2.

Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*)

Scarce visitor.

Probably 3 separate birds in the year. An ad in summer plumage was at EHF on 11 March and probably the same bird at EHF and Maw Green Tip on 20 March.

A 1st S bird was at PHF on 7 Aug and stayed in the area until 29 Aug and was moulting into 2nd W plumage.

An ad in winter plumage was at EHF on 14 Nov.

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*)

Rare visitor.

As last year 2 records from SF with 1 imm at EHF on 15 June and 1 ad winter on 6 Nov.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)

Abundant autumn and winter visitor.

In winter up to 3500 regularly feeding on Maw Green Tip and loafing in that area.

Post-breeding flock numbers built up to c800 at EHF and c250 at Arclid SQ.

The usual winter roost at Doddington Pool held c11,000 birds with further roosts at Astbury Water Park (c2000) and Arclid SQ (c600).

Common Gull (*Larus canus*)

Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.

Recorded in all months except June at EHF, usually less than 10 but 28 in Feb, 32 in April and 25 in Nov.

At Doddington up to 400 in the gull roost.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

Recorded in all months at Maw Green Tip/RF/EHF. Variable numbers but a max of 4,000 in Oct.

At Doddington up to 2,200 in the winter roost and at least 100 regular at Astbury Water Park.

Gulls showing characteristics of the Baltic race *L.f.fuscus* were seen on 26 April, 25 Sept, 29 Sept and 21 Oct.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

Fairly common winter visitor. Uncommon summer visitor.

In winter at Maw Green Tip/RF/EHF variable numbers with a max of c2000 in Nov.

There are always very few Herring Gulls in the winter roost at Doddington and this year only 4 were seen.

Gulls showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race *L.a. argentatus* were recorded on 15 dates from 12 Sept to 28 Sept with usually 1 but up to 4 birds seen. Included in these 15 records were 5 where birds had yellowish legs instead of pink, indicating that these birds were from the Eastern Baltic area.

The Yellow-legged Gull has still not been split and confirmed as a full species by the B.O.U. Unofficially the Yellow-legged Gull itself has been split into Western (or Mediterranean) Yellow-Legged Gull *Larus (argentatus) michahellis* and Caspian Gull (or Pontic Yellow-legged Gull) *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans*. Records of Caspian Gull are very rare and dealt with by BBRC. Records of Western Yellow-legged Gull are scarce and dealt with by CAWOS and are summarised here.

Recorded at EHF/PHF/RF on 40 days from 26 April to 16 Nov with from 1 to 5 birds on any day.

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides*)

Scarce winter visitor.

1 ad at RF on 11 Feb, 1 ad at EHF on 7 March, 1 ad at RF on 20 March and one 1st W at PHF on 31 March.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Scarce winter visitor.

All records refer to one 1st W bird at Maw Green Tip/RF so it is not possible to determine how many birds were present. First recorded on 20 Jan and regular thereafter to 10 April.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Regular on Maw Green Tip/RF/EHF and recorded in every month with a max of c100 in Jan and 176 in Dec.

Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)

Rare visitor.

More records than usual with 1 ad at Astbury Water Park on 7 Feb, 1 ad at EHF on 28 Feb and 7 April, 1 ad at Arclid SQ on 10 April, and finally one 1st W at WLF on 1 Dec.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

The only spring passage birds were singles at Doddington on 23 April, 2 May and 7 May.

A good series of records at EHF from 2 June through to 14 Aug. Usually up to 4 but 13 dropped in briefly on 27 June.

On 24 Aug immediately after heavy rain stopped, 66 terns flew south in a compact flock at around 500 feet in misty conditions. These were probably Common Terns but could not be specifically identified.

Feral Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common resident.

Regular flocks in most town centres with, for example, 220 in Crewe town centre and 150 along Nantwich Road. Also up to 50 regular at Arclid SQ and exceptionally up to 90 there.

Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*)

Uncommon resident.

A flock of c50 recorded around EHF in the first winter period was the only flock in double figures. At Quakers Coppice there was some recovery after the disastrous year in 1998 when a predator killed all young birds and 6 adults. This year probably 8 pairs bred with 19 clutches and 36 eggs laid, 23 hatched and 15 young fledged. 2 pairs at Taxmere and up to 20 in Nov.

Woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*)

Common resident.

The only large flocks recorded were 1,000 at Blakenhall in Dec, 450 at Haslington in Nov and 200 roosting at Rode Pool in Dec.

Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Common resident.

Common and widespread but most observers do not bother to record it. At Pool Farm, Winterley, on 23 Nov there were an incredible 106 lined up by a disused barn containing some grain. Two weeks later the barn (and Collared Doves) had gone!

Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*)

Rare summer visitor.

A single bird made a brief visit to Blakenhall on 30 May. It landed in an oak tree where it showed well for several minutes before it flew off towards Betley.

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Uncommon summer visitor and migrant.

The first record was a singing m at Swettenham on 23 April, followed by one at FFF on 25 April. Recorded at EHF, MGP, WLF, Bagmere, Doddington, Rode Pool, Sandbach, Stowford, Swettenham and Weston. As usual the birds are silent before the end of May, as they get on with the stealthy business of breeding. Most unusually there were five records of juvs this year with singles at EHF, Arclid SQ, Doddington, Sandbach (on the grass in front of Elworth School) and at Stowford where our Chairman was lucky enough to watch one on fence posts by the railway line being fed by a Dunnock.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Scarce resident.

As last year only one proved breeding pair with the pair at Blakenhall fledging 2 juvs. However, there is the possibility of more pairs with a number of records from Rode Hall, Stowford and Weston New golf course. Unfortunately work has just started on the golf course construction here, and this site will probably be lost soon.

One bird was found dead by Jcn.18 of the M6 on 14 Sept.

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Common resident.

Common in open farmland with records from 22 sites. Probably breeds at all sites but only proved at Timbersbrook and Swettenham where 2 juvs were seen to leave a nest hole and hop on to a branch.

Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

Common resident.

Common in more wooded areas but only recorded from 8 sites. At Quakers Coppice a pair laid eggs in a nest box in Jan but these failed, although a downy juv was seen here on 26 May.

Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*)

Rare visitor.

1 was heard calling in a wood at Wybunbury in the evening of 16 Aug.

Swift (*Apus apus*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

Later than usual with no April records. First birds were seen over Crewe on 1 May and 2 May and at WLF on 2 May. There were 400 feeding at Doddington on 28 May after heavy rain. As usual they had gone by the end of August except for one seen flying south with a party of House Martins on 21 Sept.

Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 15 sites this year (18 in 1998) and only proved breeding at Rode Pool and Arclid SQ.

Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)

Very rare visitor.

On 1 June one was seen in a garden at Buglawton, near Congleton. The bird was present from 13.00 to 16.40 and spent most of the time feeding by probing in the grass.

This is the third record for the SECOS area and the first away from Sandbach Flashes.

Previous records:- 1 at EHF from 30 to 31 May 1971
1 at EHF from 15 to 16 October 1985

Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 14 sites (14 in 1998). Although most records were in winter they probably represent breeding pairs.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)

Common resident.

By far the commonest woodpecker with records from many sites. Regular at the feeding station at EHF and also seen on peanut feeders in gardens at Alsager, Swettenham and Haslington.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Uncommon resident.

The usual sprinkling of records of this uncommon and elusive species, with records from 9 sites. At EHF on 14 April a m was seen squabbling with Tree Sparrows on the peanut feeder, then heard drumming a few minutes later.

Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)

Fairly common.

Similar numbers to 1998 with 25 singing males recorded at 13 different sites. Some evidence of passage over EHF from mid-Sept to mid-Oct.

At Haslington Hall there was a regular flock of 22 birds in Dec, the highest number recorded for several years.

Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

The first bird was 1 at WLF on 21 March. A new colony was found at Wybunbury SQ where 240 holes were in a new face and 89 in an old face. In total possibly 250 holes were in use.

At Arclid SQ only 14 nest holes in the old quarry but 120 in the new quarry.

Also bred at Swettenham where 15 nest holes in a bank of the River Dane.

The last birds were 10 at Doddington on 24 Sept.

Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)

Common summer visitor.

The first bird was at EHF on 19 March and recorded daily from 27 March. Breeds commonly throughout the area.

No records of regular autumn roosts but much evidence of southerly migration at the end of Sept with 500 south on 24th at Doddington, 100 south on 27th at EHF, and 100 south on 28th at Rode Pool.

The last record was 1 over EHF on 22 Oct.

House Martin (*Delichon urbica*)

Common summer visitor.

First record was 2 at WLF on 7 April and regular thereafter. Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, 7 nesting pairs on a Swettenham house, 3 of which had second broods.

The last records were on 5 Oct from EHF and Mow Cop.

Pechora Pipit (*Anthus gustavi*)

1998 update : -

The record of a pipit, possibly of this species, at EHF on 13/4/98 was submitted to BBRC but has not been accepted.

Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)

Scarce passage migrant and possible summer visitor.

At Arclid SQ 2 birds were seen on the old spoil mound on 16 Aug and again on 21 Sept.

Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)

Uncommon resident and passage migrant.

The only record in the first quarter of the year was a flock of around 50 at Arclid SQ. Probably bred at Mow Cop where 5 pairs were recorded on 5 April and through May and June. In the last quarter of the year a flock of 35 built up at MGT. Also 23 in a BTO survey at Bank Farm, Checkley, and 18 at Alsager South.

Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus*)

Very rare winter visitor.

1 was seen at RF on 15 Nov. Initially located by the first pool, it flew to the marshy area at the second pool. It could not be relocated the next day.

Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

The first record was of 1 at EHF on 7 April with the next one being at Doddington on 16 April. Max of 4 on passage at SF. More breeding season records than usual, being recorded at 11 sites.

The last record was from EHF on 11 Sept.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

Scarce summer visitor and scarce winter visitor.

Recorded at 13 sites in the first winter period and 13 (mainly different) in the second winter period. The long-standing roost at Arclid SQ held up to 8 birds in Jan and possibly up to 12 in Nov.

Breeding was proved at 3 sites, Timbersbrook, R. Dane Swettenham (pair + 2 juvs) and Swettenham Brook (pair + 2 juvs).

Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba yarrellii*)

Fairly common resident.

Very few records of this under-recorded species. Only two proved breeding records with a pair + 4 juvs at EHF, and 2 pairs, possibly 3, at Arclid SQ.

Up to 75 were at Doddington in Oct, and between 10 and 25 at Arclid SQ in the last quarter of the year.

The continental White Wagtail *M.a.alba* was seen much less frequently than usual, with only two records, 2 at EHF on 18 April and a group of 18 at EHF on 17 Oct.

Waxwing (*Bombicilla garrulus*)

Very rare winter visitor.

1 was at EHF on 17 Nov. First seen at 13.25 with a flock of 150 Fieldfare and 80 Redwing. It fed on hawthorn bushes just a few yards from the road and gave brilliant views in the winter sunshine. Also present on 18 Nov it was last seen at 15.40 when it flew off to the north west.

Although there have been several records in the SECOS area during previous invasions this is the first record for Sandbach Flashes.

Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Scarce resident.

Seen in the usual locations in the east with regular sightings along the River Dane, Congleton and at Bathvale, Congleton, where a pair was seen feeding a juv on 7 May.

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Abundant resident.

An additional benefit of the bird hide at Rode Pool became apparent when a Wren's nest was found balanced on a beam underneath it.

Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)

Abundant resident.

13 birds were found during a BTO survey at Bank Farm, Checkley on 19 Dec.

Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)

Abundant resident.

Breeds widely in all habitats.

Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

Scarce migrant and summer visitor.

1 m was seen at Mow Cop on 18 April and 1 imm at PHF on 9 July.

Whinchat (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Scarce migrant and summer visitor.

2 records from EHF on 15 Aug and 28 Aug were possibly of the same bird.

Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)

Rare winter visitor.

2 were seen together at Mow Cop on 5 Oct.

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Uncommon passage migrant.

A disastrous year for this species at Sandbach Flashes with only 4 records in spring and a max of 2 birds (17 records of up to 6 birds in 1998). 1 on 1 April, 1 on 29 April, 2 on 3 May and 1 on 15 May, all at EHF.

Also singles at Doddington on 26 March and 23 April.

Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

Abundant resident and winter visitor.

See the notes at the end for details of a Blackbird at Crewe Business Park that developed a special song.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*)

Common winter visitor.

In the first winter period flocks of up to 300 were recorded around SF. There was a big flock of 700 near Haslington, 500 at Arclid SQ and 200 at Swettenham.

The first birds in the second winter period were on 5 Oct at EHF and 6 Oct at Haslington. The largest flocks were then 200 at EHF, 120 at Haslington, 100 at Swettenham and 100 at Arclid SQ.

Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)

Fairly common resident.

A few more records than usual received with breeding records from Alsager, Congleton Bathvale (probably 3 pairs), Stowford and Arclid SQ (probably 6 pairs).

Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*)

Common winter visitor.

Generally much lower numbers than for Fieldfare with a max flock size of only 70 in the first winter period. The first birds in autumn were at Wybunbury SQ on 2 Oct and Sandbach on 5 Oct.

A flock of 300 was near Astbury on 23 Dec.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Fairly common resident.

Breeds throughout the area, although few breeding records received. Flocks of 10+ were 52 at Crewe Business Park on 28 Aug, 28 at EHF on 17 July and 12 at Bank Farm, Checkley, on 17 Oct.

Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Scarce summer visitor.

For the first time for many years there was no record for this species in the SECOS area.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record was of 1 at WLF on 4 April. Breeding season records from WLF, EHF, PHF, RF and Rode Pool but no accurate counts made anywhere.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

The first record was of 1 at WLF on 24 April. Breeding season records from WLF (3 prs) EHF (2 prs) PHF (1 pr) GF (2 prs) and Rode Pool (not counted).

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

First recorded on 29 April at WLF and Groby Road, Crewe, and then recorded in May at PHF, CF, WLF, EHF, FF and Arclid SQ.

The last record was a late one at EHF on 12 Sept.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*)

Common summer visitor.

First recorded on 23 April with a single at Arclid SQ and then commonly throughout the area with, for example, 10 singing males along the length of the railway embankment at Sandbach Flashes on 3 May, and 5 singing males at Mow Cop on 6 June.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Fairly common summer visitor.

This is either becoming scarcer or being recorded less, since there were records from only 6 sites throughout the SECOS area. At Arclid SQ there were 2 proven and 3-4 possible breeding pairs.

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

Common summer visitor. Scarce winter visitor.

The first record was of an early bird at FF on 2 April. Breeds commonly throughout the area with, for example, 7 singing males along the Salt Line at Alsager, and 9-11 pairs at Arclid SQ.

However, wintering Blackcaps have become very scarce with only two records, one in Queen's Park, Crewe on 11 Oct and one providing a present for our Chairman when it appeared in his garden at Christmas.

Wood Warbler (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

Rare summer visitor.

The only record was of a passage bird heard singing along Park Road, Sandbach early in the morning of 30 April.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Common summer visitor, very rare winter visitor.

As usual our earliest, and easiest to hear and identify, summer visitor. First at Arclid SQ on 14 March, then at Rode Pool on 16 March, FF on 17 March, and many other sites in the next week.

Breeds commonly, although no numbers recorded except for Arclid SQ where 6-7 breeding pairs. 2 at EHF on 12 Oct were considered to be lingering summer visitors.

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

Common summer visitor.

The first record was from Arclid SQ on 30 March and birds were widespread by mid-April.

This is our commonest warbler with, for example, probably 15 breeding pairs at Arclid SQ and 6 singing males at Bagmere.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Mainly winter records from 15 sites of usually less than 5 birds although 12 at FF in Dec, and 30 near Crewe Hall in Nov.

Aug records from an Alsager garden and Queen's Park, Crewe, suggest local breeding.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)

Uncommon summer visitor.

For the second year on the run there has been an increase in records. Are they actually increasing or are we more observant? Breeding records from EHF, Arclid SQ, Crewe (where a male was regularly singing from the T.V. aerial on the roof of Addscan), Crewe Cemetery (2 pairs), St. Michael's Churchyard (1 pair), Haslington (1 pair bred in a garden), Park Lane, Sandbach (1 pair) and Swettenham Church (1 pair). They do seem to show a preference for churchyards/cemeteries.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Common resident.

Numbers continue to be high with many flocks seen in winter. Those recorded with 20+ were FF 20; Queen's Park, Crewe, 22; Doddington 45; Swettenham 20.

Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*)

Rare visitor

1998 addition:

1 bird was recorded at FF on 1/1/98.

Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*)

Uncommon resident.

1s or 2s only, in winter from FF, Arclid SQ, Congleton, Lawton Woods and Wheelock Salt Line. One singing bird in spring at Taxmere.

Coal Tit (*Parus ater*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded in winter from 9 sites, including 4 gardens where up to 5 regular.

Blue Tit (*Parus caeruleus*)

Abundant visitor.

Site	pairs	eggs laid	hatched	juvs fledged
Doddington	8	85	?	42-51
Quakers Coppice	8	77	52	40
Rode Pool	2	?	?	?

A very poor year for fledging success, presumably due to the very cold and wet weather in the second half of April.

Great Tit (*Parus major*)

Common resident.

Site	pairs	eggs laid	hatched	juvs fledged
Doddington	8	61	?	19-38
Quakers Coppice	8	77	52	40

mis-copied?
yes ?

A very poor year, as for Blue Tit.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)

Common resident.

Recorded at 13 sites with proved breeding at 5 of these. At Quakers Coppice 2 pairs used nest boxes, laying 16 eggs and fledging 12 young.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*)

Common resident.

Recorded at 11 sites and proved breeding at 5 of these, but much more common than this.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Uncommon resident.

Greatly under-recorded although noted at 10 sites, mainly in winter. The only breeding record was from Arclid SQ where probably 2 pairs bred.

Magpie (*Pica pica*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly. The only record of 10+ was from Arclid SQ where up to 23 in the first winter period.

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)

Common resident and winter visitor.

A common and increasing breeder with, for example, c35 pairs around Doddington Hall.

The roost at Crewe Hall held c2500 in winter.

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Common resident.

The total of nests at regularly counted sites was :-

Site	1999	1998	1997	1996
Crewe/Alsager (10 sites)	524	469	420	460
Foden's Flash Sandbach	119	93	101	102
Arclid SQ	52	57	67	81

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*)

Common resident.

Breeds commonly throughout the area, although no records were received.

Raven (*Corvus corax*)

Rare visitor.

Another increase in records this year with 10 fly overs, 9 Jan MGT, 10 Jan Crewe and PHF, 25 March Timbersbrook, 24 May EHF, 4 Oct Rode Pool, 20 Oct Stowford, 28 Oct EHF, 14 Nov EHF, 19 Dec Stowford.

Also 1 at Doddington for at least a week in mid-Nov.

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Common resident and abundant winter visitor.

Several winter roosts noted, again all in Leylandii trees or hedges with, for example, 1000 at Alsager MMU and 250 in Sydney, Crewe.

Winter feeding flocks were recorded at MGT with a very high total of c5000 in Nov and Arclid SQ where 750 in March.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Common resident.

Some regular late autumn flocks were recorded in gardens with flocks of 33; 36; 27; 24 in Crewe and 45 in Haslington. Also 45 by Lakemore Country Park and 25 near Winterley Pool.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)

Fairly common resident.

Recorded at 15 sites in winter. Breeding records from MGT, RF, CF, Basford, Swettenham and Timbersbrook. An autumn flock of 70 at EHF in late July. Up to 33 regular in a Swettenham garden and 22 at MGT in winter. 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 50, Checkley 34, Haslington Hall 50, Winterley Pool 25.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Scarce winter visitor.

First winter period records of 1s and 2s at EHF, WLF, Rode Pool and Park Lane, Sandbach.

Second winter period records of singles at EHF, WLF, Winterley Pool and Congleton, Bathvale.

At EHF the bird was seen occasionally feeding from the seed tray at the feeding station. Also seen on the feeders at Rode Pool.

Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*)

Common resident.

The only large flocks reported were from the Haslington area with 150 feeding in a weed covered potato field on 25 Aug and 80 feeding in a weedy flax field in Nov.

Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)

Fairly common resident.

Flocks of around 10 birds recorded at up to 14 sites in winter. Larger flocks of 50 at Wybunbury SQ, 35 at EHF and 25 at Crewe Business Park roosting in bushes. Feeding regularly on niger seeds in two gardens with 20 at Haslington and 16 at Alsager.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

Uncommon winter visitor.

Recorded from 9 sites in the first winter period and 9 sites in the second winter period. Flocks of 30+ were 60 Rode Pool, 60 Swettenham, 45 Crewe GC, 30 Congleton Bathvale, 30 Haslington Hall.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*)

Fairly common resident.

At EHF in the first winter period the field adjacent to the salt pan had turnips as a fodder root crop, grazed by cattle. It became an excellent feeding area for small birds with, for example, 150 Linnets there on 27 Jan. Also 70 at Haslington on a set-aside field and 52 on a BTO survey at Checkley.

Breeding season records from 6 sites.

Fewer large flocks in winter with only 80 at Doddington and 40 at Wybunbury SQ.

Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)

Uncommon resident and winter visitor.

Recorded at 7 sites in the first winter period and 8 in the second winter period. Usually 1, 2 or 3 birds but 20 at Arclid SQ in March and 14 at Congleton Biddulph Valley Way in Feb.

1 at FF on 2 May was seen collecting nest material.

Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Very rare visitor.

1 was seen briefly at EHF on 1 Sept as it flew over, calling.

Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

Uncommon resident.

Recorded from 16 sites across the area (22 in 1998) all of which are probably breeding pairs for this sedentary species. At Congleton one observer was lucky enough to have a pair feeding on a neighbour's bird table.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Uncommon resident.

This species seems to be continuing a slow decline with only one flock of 10+ this year (2 in 1998) with 15 roosting at Weston on 2 March.

Up to 6 recorded from 16 sites (15 in 1998), 10 of these in the breeding season.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

Uncommon resident.

Once again an increase in records for this threatened species. In the first winter period up to 14 at MGT and 15 at Haslington. Also at 6 other sites.

Breeding records from Arclid SQ (8 pairs), Astbury (2), Bagmere (4), Coppenhall Moss (6), Mow Cop (5), Rode Pool (?), Stowford (2), EHF (2), PHF (1), WLF (3).

In Dec, 2 were feeding regularly in an observer's garden in Crewe.

Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)

Uncommon resident.

Another poor year with breeding season records from only 6 sites - Brereton Heath, Basford Crewe, Haslington, Holmes Chapel, Winterley Pool and Wybunbury - involving 10 birds in total.

Escapes and Releases

Cockatiel sp.

1 was seen at EHF on 1 Sept and 4 Sept.

Butterflies

Although not required for an ornithological society, a number of butterfly records have been entered in the log book at Sandbach Flashes. They only relate to Elton Hall Flash area and are not necessarily a complete record. I do not intend to keep records of these species but have recorded these here as a matter of interest:-

small skipper
large white
common blue
comma
red admiral
peacock
wall brown
speckled wood
gatekeeper
grayling

SPECIFIC NOTES ON RARITIES

AVOCETS AT SANDBACH FLASHES: 1ST MAY 1999

After a very ordinary couple of hours at Foden's Flash and Watch Lane Flash, I moved round to Elton Hall Flash. The only birds of note here were two Common Sandpipers and a summer-plumaged Dunlin. I then walked down the road to Pump House Flash and, after a brief scan over the water, all I noticed was a Cormorant. I carried on down the road to view the extreme right hand corner of Pump House Flash. The first thing I put my binoculars on to my amazement were two Avocets. It was now about 10.30 am. They appeared quite settled on the mud and after a short period they began displaying and copulating.

I had seen no other birders today due to a North Wales' twitch by the locals, so I only managed to contact Dave Norbury who arrived posthaste. By about 11.45 am the news was on Birdnet which then brought a steady flow of birders. These birds then stayed until 6th May. The last Avocets at Sandbach Flashes were May 1974, which I was lucky enough to see as well.

IAN MUMFORD.

This is the third record for Sandbach Flashes. In 1974 10 Avocets arrived at Watch Lane Flash on 3rd May and stayed until 4th May when 7 left, leaving 3 who stayed until 7th May. The only other record was of 1 on 9th Sept. 1968.

NIGHT HERON AT SANDBACH FLASHES: 2ND JUNE 1999

A trip to Elton Hall Flash this evening seemed worthwhile after the earlier heavy rain. Along with Dave Norbury we had found a few waders including Ringed and Little Ringed Plover and six Black-tailed Godwits. At about 7.10 pm two Black-headed Gulls were calling loudly towards the railway line, and it was apparent they were mobbing a much larger heron-like bird. As they came nearer we could see this bird was pale grey on the upper parts and buffish on the underparts. More features became clear as the bird circled, a dark grey crown and trailing yellow-cream legs and a stout black bill. Also noted was some white spotting on the wing coverts. I realised immediately that this bird was a Night Heron. The Night Heron flew on very stiff wings and was very agile. After some 15 laps of Elton Hall Flash the bird landed in the willow scrub with the gulls still in pursuit. With the lack of a black crown and back I aged this bird as a 1st summer.

After the bird landed it could not be re-located, so I went to the 'phone and alerted as many people as possible. Arriving back at Elton Hall Dave had found the Night Heron near the top of the willows. A few people saw the bird before it moved into deeper cover. After around thirty minutes, with the number of birders increasing, the Night Heron flew out into the open on the edge of the river. Everyone who made the trip had good views of the bird until at 9.30 pm it flew further back towards the railway line and was not re-located in the now fading light.

IAN MUMFORD.

Despite the site being watched from 04.30 the next morning the bird was not seen again. This is the first record for Sandbach Flashes and the seventh for Cheshire and Wirral. The sixth was an immature in waterside willows at Budworth Mere on 16th May 1992, and the fifth was an adult at Woolston on 26th May 1987.

BUZZARDS IN CHESHIRE

Most birders will be aware that Buzzards have become much commoner in Cheshire, particularly during the last five years. The Cheshire and Wirral Raptor Study Group carried out a breeding survey in 1994 with the intention of repeating it five years later, ie in 1999. This note summarises the key results of the survey, with a full account to be presented in the 1999 Cheshire Bird Report.

How was the study carried out? The 1994 survey had indicated about 18 probable breeding pairs of Buzzard in Cheshire. This was a marked increase over the Atlas survey of 1978 to 1984 where breeding was confirmed in just two 2 km by 2 km tetrads. Before deciding the methodology for the 1999 survey, the Group invited Robin Prytherch from Bristol to talk to the Group. Robin has intensively studied Buzzards around his home area for the last 20 years. His input proved absolutely invaluable - apart from providing a fascinating and stimulating afternoon for those attending. His key point was that breeding pairs of Buzzards are highly territorial, staying in the territory throughout the year and defending it against interlopers. It was decided, therefore, that the prime objective of the study should be to determine the number of pairs of birds holding territory, with a subsidiary one to determine breeding success where time allowed. The County was divided into nine areas with a co-ordinator for each.

So what were the results? The bottom line is that a minimum of 157 territory holding pairs was found. This is probably an under-estimate as the distribution of pairs is patchy, probably reflecting the intensity of coverage as well as suitability of habitat. The stronghold is in the south west of the County where 35 pairs were recorded, with other significant hotspots in Burton/Shotwick, Frodsham/Delamere, Tatton/Macclesfield, and along the south east border with Staffordshire/Shropshire. This wasn't too surprising as Robin Prytherch had found that birds tended to infill all territories in an area before populating new areas. Only in the south west did breeding density approach the level at which he had shown that the number of fledged birds significantly declined, ie the natural population limit. This means that we can expect considerable further increase in breeding Buzzards both within most existing hotspots and in new areas.

What about breeding success? In the south west 14 of the 35 territories were looked at in detail to assess breeding success. Breeding was confirmed in 12 with virtually every pair fledging two young. Similar results were found in other areas which further underlines the view that we can expect considerable expansion in future years!

What next? Buzzards have spread so widely in Cheshire for many reasons. Obviously there must be plenty of food (mainly rabbits): there must be sufficient nest sites (plenty of mature trees) and there must be freedom from persecution. Provided we can eliminate persecution (which must in the past have slowed the spread of Buzzards) we can expect most raptors to flourish in the County. Therefore we can be optimistic that Buzzards will spread further. Similarly other raptors should be monitored. We can expect Red Kite to colonise: Hobbies are now breeding in the County and Ravens (an honorary raptor) continue to expand.

Thanks: The survey wouldn't have been possible without the help of so many people in providing records: in particular the area co-ordinators - Richard Hargreaves, Colin Wells, Steve Barber, Brian Martin, Colin Lythgoe, Charles Hull, Roy Leigh, Neil Friswell and Bernard Wright. Many thanks also to Robin Prytherch and to CAWOS for funding his visit.

CHESHIRE RAPTOR STUDY GROUP.

The SECOS area was comprehensively covered during the fieldwork for this survey and resulted in 32 pairs of Buzzards being recorded! Many thanks to all those people who put in much time and effort and passed their records on to me.

COLIN LYTHGOE.

BIRDING AT ARCLID SAND QUARRY AND TAXMERE

This easily worked locality is well worth two or three hours birding at anytime of the year. Access to the site lies 200 yds. east of J17 of the M6. If approaching from Sandbach cross over the M6, and after 100 yds. pass the left turn to Holmes Chapel (A5022), slow down and after 80 yds. pull over on the left by a track. Park by the stile, not blocking the track. There is just enough room here for one car parked off the road, although the ground is uneven. Alternatively park on the right on the grass verge but not in the bus-stop layby.

Walk down the track, after 100 yds. go through a gate or stile alongside. The hedgerow often holds singing Lesser Whitethroat in spring. After 40 yds. and 80 yds. gaps in this hedge allow views over part of the sand quarry. Use your telescope to check any ducks and gulls. The sand spits at the eastern end often have Lapwings on them in winter and Little Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher in spring. Common Sandpipers are usually around and very occasionally other waders. The banks of this pool are being landscaped, and in spring and autumn especially are good for Meadow Pipits, Linnets, Wagtails and occasionally Wheatears. Carry on walking slowly down the track, I have seen Bullfinches many times in this hedge. After 250 yds. the track ends at an open gateway and stile. After 20 yds. another stile and then another after 40 yds. Just before this last stile look for a track on the left leading through shrubbery. This area is good for common woodland birds and after 100 yds. leads to a footbridge over a ditch. Before the footbridge look for a narrow footpath on the right leading through more woodland, before coming out on to grassland by a gorse bush. After another 20 yds. is a dog's grave and a T-junction of the paths. Turn sharp left down a steep bank and over a stile. Bear right, this area of woodland and scrub surrounding Taxmere is full of warblers in spring, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Garden Warbler should all be recorded in late April, early May. After 75 yds. views of Taxmere on your left may reveal a few ducks and is a good spot to reach for the Thermos flask. While drinking your coffee listen for the area's speciality, Willow Tit.

Further on the path leads on to a field, bears left and follows the field edge. After 75 yds. a marsh on your left holds breeding Reed Bunting with Whitethroat around the edges. Careful searching in winter might produce a flushed Woodcock or even Water Rail may be heard.

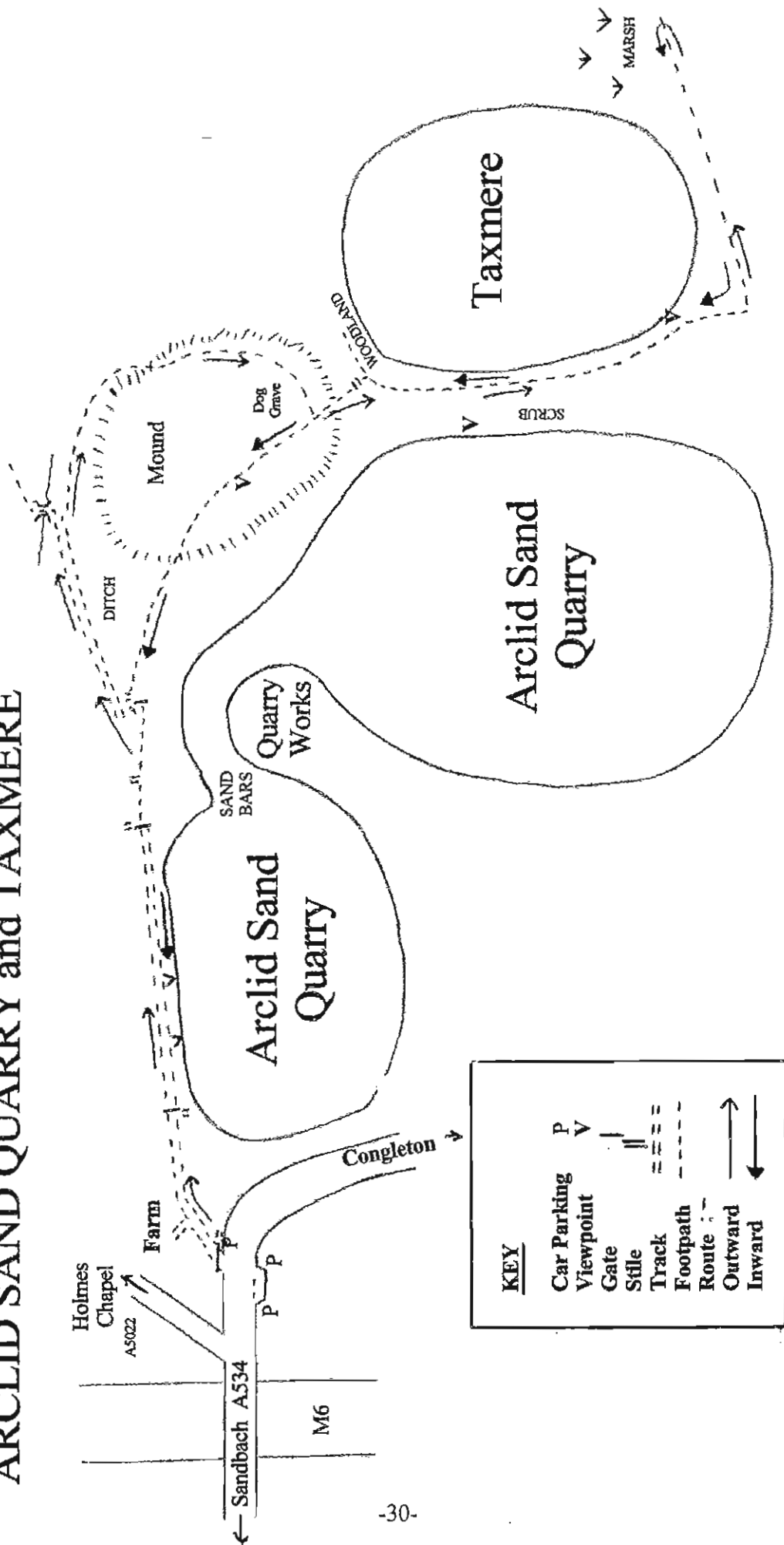
Retrace your steps back up to the dog's grave. Scan the tops of the alders around Taxmere, in winter Siskin and Redpoll are often about. Go straight on up to the top of the mound. Using a telescope, check any ducks and grebes on the main pool. In spring Great Crested Grebes can be watched displaying. This is also a good place for a picnic whilst scanning for raptors. We have seen Kestrel and Buzzard regularly here, and Hobby occasionally hunting the hirundines over the sand quarry. Sand Martins formerly bred here in good numbers and still breed nearby. This mound also acts as a good vantage point for witnessing diurnal migration in spring and autumn with species such as hirundines, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Redwings, Fieldfares and Starlings moving through.

We often combine a visit here with several other sites to produce a good selection of birds. In winter we try Astbury Water Park at dawn to avoid disturbance, then call in at this site on our way to Sandbach Flashes. In spring and autumn we try Mow Cop at dawn followed by the Flashes and then an evening stint at this site.

As an added incentive for you to visit this site, a well known local birder has covered this area for many years and a few of the mouth-watering local rarities he has seen include Nightingale, Ospreys and Long-eared Owls! Good hunting and don't forget to enter your sightings in the SECOS logbook at Sandbach Flashes.

ANDREW & ANGELA GOODWIN.

ARCLID SAND QUARRY and TAXMERE



RODE POOL BIRD HIDE

During the 98/99 winter a new bird hide was erected for the use of SECOS members at Rode Pool, with the permission of the Rode Estate. Together with a raised boardwalk which gives dry access through the often very wet marsh, the hide was completed in February 1999 and has been in regular use since then.

It was known from previous observations and records that Rode Pool does not host a large number of waterbirds. However, together with the surrounding woods and parkland, and the large heronry, it was anticipated that there should be enough of interest to justify the expenditure. This has well and truly proved to be the case, with a total of 71 species being recorded, 25 of them associated with water, and 46 other species. At least 23 members have visited the hide and entered records in the log book.

The area seems to have a charm and attraction all of its own, even on a winter's day with the frosted trees and reeds surrounding the lake reflecting well in the Pool. Often the easiest way to identify the whereabouts of the resident Kingfisher is to look for an electric blue or rust-red reflection in the Pool. Even the commonest records can lead to pleasant memories, such as watching the flocks of small birds on the feeders just a few feet from the hide. Here the Coal Tits quickly learned to slip inside the peanut feeders instead of pecking through the mesh; surprisingly the Nuthatches copied and also squeezed through the narrow opening. Also remembered was the amusement caused when a party of Long-tailed Tits clambered over the fat balls, tails sticking out at all angles. On the water it was gratifying to see a pair of Little Grebes diving in a shallow bay created in the reeds in front of the hide, and the surprise appearance of a pair of Mandarin Ducks. The hide also overlooks several nests in the heronry and gives an opportunity to watch these long-legged birds where they look totally out of place in the tops of trees.

No doubt with more observations in the future the species list - and the pleasant memories - will increase.

It must be noted that access to the estate and to the bird hide is padlocked and is only available to SECOS members.

COLIN LYTHGOE.

THE 'REVERSING LORRY' BLACKBIRD

A Blackbird in Crewe Business Park became something of a celebrity this year when it learnt to copy the warning alarm from nearby lorries.

When first heard it caused some confusion since the warning notes indicated a reversing lorry, which seemed to be located on one of the open areas of the Business Park instead of in the adjacent Transfield Depot. Confusion turned to amazement when the 'lorry' was finally located on the top of an oak tree!

I have never heard Blackbirds mimic non-bird sounds before, although after consulting 'The Birds of the Western Palearctic' (BWP) it would seem that this may just be an extreme example of a Blackbird's natural abilities being applied to non-bird sounds. According to BWP the song is 'extremely complex, due to individual inventiveness and pronounced capacity for learning. Each male has a large repertoire of song phrases exhibiting great individual variation - despite reciprocal learning between neighbouring territory holders resulting in long-term local dialects'. In plain English it seems that although male Blackbirds have good songs of their own they also copy off their neighbours.

This case would seem to be an extreme example of 'reciprocal learning' since it copied the warbling warning note of the lorries to perfection. Presumably it considered lorries to be rival males holding territory nearby and singing very loudly!

As its fame spread a lot of people went to listen to it, and finally it achieved the distinction of being featured on the nature programme of Radio Stoke (and is now recorded for posterity in this SECOS Annual Report).

Early in the breeding season the Blackbird repeated the warning notes continuously for long periods, but as the season progressed it included more and more of a normal song pattern, possibly learnt from 'normal' adjacent territory holders. Conversely during June, at least one other male Blackbird was heard to occasionally sing the 'reversing lorry' song.

Assuming that these males paired with females and that they successfully reared young, we wait with anticipation for next year to discover what the territorial song of the local Blackbirds will sound like!

COLIN LYTHGOE.

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. 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 1999.

Second date is the average of the first records for the past 10 years, excluding the current year, i.e. 1989 to 1998.

Third date is the earliest date ever recorded.

Fourth date is the last record in 1999.

Fifth date is the average of the last records for the past 10 years, excluding the current year, i.e. 1989 to 1998.

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 1999 only one date was changed, with a late Blackcap at EHF in mid-September which was last seen on 25th. Hopefully this was a late summer visitor! The most disappointing fact from these dates is that there was no record of Grasshopper Warbler in the SECOS area in 1999. It has been hanging on at Bagmere with one or two pairs for several years and hopefully will return in 2000.

Species	Arrivals			Departures		
	Date in 1999	10 Year average	Earliest ever	Date in 1999	10 Year average	Latest ever
Hobby	20/5	4/5	27/3/94	24/9	20/9	7/10/92
Little Ringed Plover	27/3	20/3	6/3/77	13/9	4/9	16/10/85
Cuckoo	23/4	21/4	5/4/82	22/8	22/8	1/10/86
Swift	1/5	25/4	16/4/96	21/9	8/9	3/11/78
Sand Martin	21/3	22/3	12/3/89	24/9	19/9	24/11/72
Swallow	19/3	28/3	22/3/97	22/10	20/10	30/11/74
House Martin	7/4	7/4	25/3/95	5/10	14/10	5/11/77
Yellow Wagtail	7/4	13/4	29/3/81	11/9	16/9	2/10/87
Grasshopper Warbler	NR	8/5	25/4/93	NR	NR	30/8/??
Sedge Warbler	4/4	24/4	16/4/80	5/9	29/8	1/10/78
Reed Warbler	24/4	17/4	12/4/97	7/9	18/9	4/10/98
Lesser Whitethroat	29/4	28/4	21/4/88	12/9	9/9	1/10/98
Whitethroat	24/4	19/4	15/4/93	5/9	11/9	21/9/93
Garden Warbler	30/4	27/4	20/4/96	NR	3/8	9/9/83
Blackcap	2/4	7/4	18/3/97	25/9	12/9	25/9/99
Chiffchaff	16/3	14/3	8/3/89	12/10	9/10	15/10/87
Willow Warbler	30/3	3/4	29/3/81	30/8	12/9	26/9/98