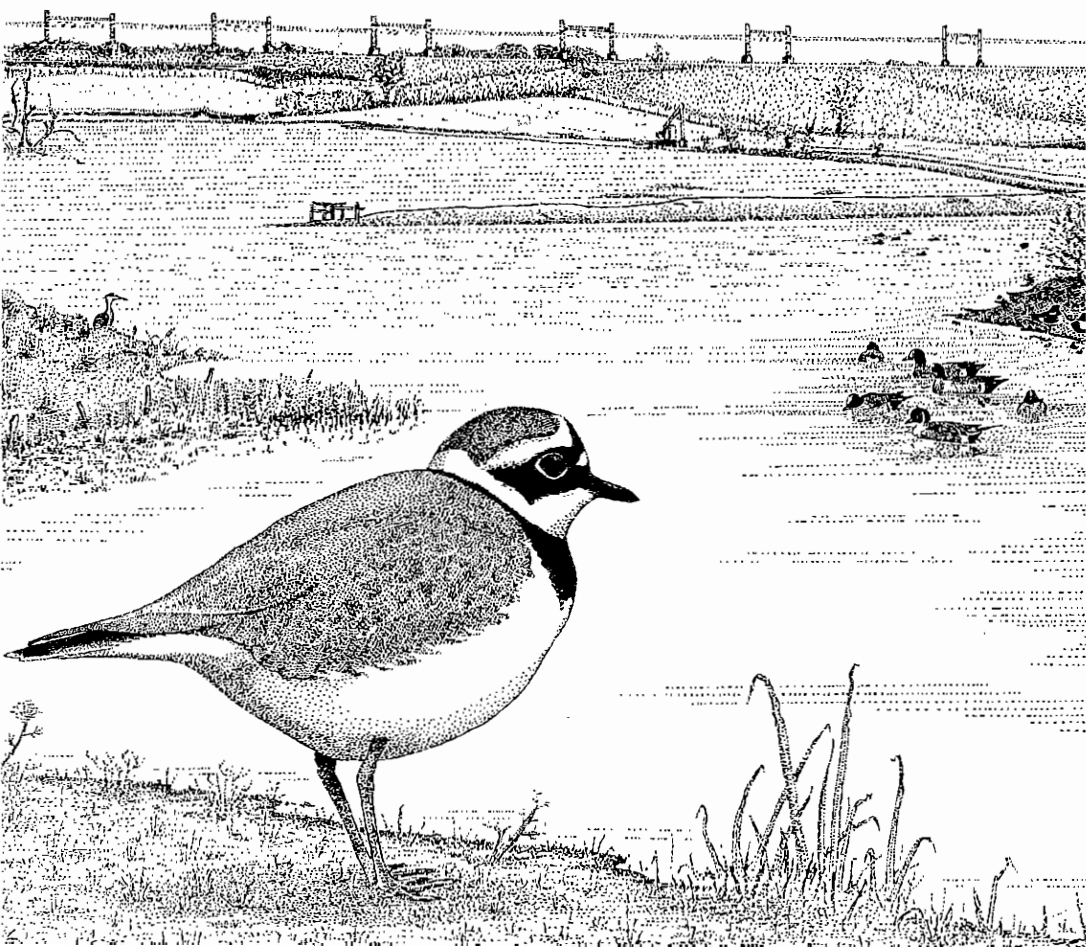
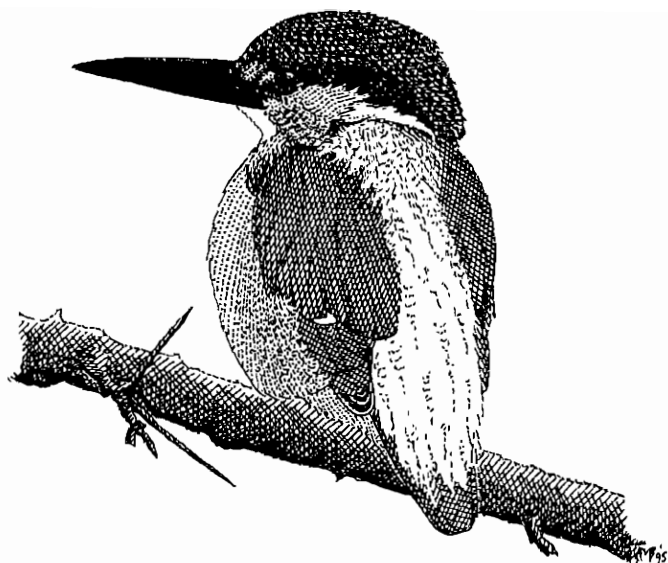


# THE BIRDS OF SANDBACH FLASHES

1935 TO 1999

*Andrew Goodwin & Colin Lythgoe*





*Front cover: Little Ringed Plover, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Grey Heron, Northern Lapwing, Peregrine Falcon from the Salt Pan viewpoint,*

*by A.M. Broome*

## **C O N T E N T S**

Introduction	3
The Authors	4
Geology	5
The Salt Industry	6
Bird Recording, Conservation and Management	8
Maps	11
A Site Guide to Birdwatching at the Flashes	15
Systematic List	22
Early and Late Dates	116
Checklist	118
Acknowledgements & Bibliography	127

## INTRODUCTION

For the past two or three years we had both been considering the possibility of updating Andrew's 1985 book on the birds of Sandbach Flashes. As the end of 1999 approached it seemed that the timing was now right, since we had slightly more free time for the hard work of research and writing. Additionally, it seemed appropriate to provide a record up to the end of the twentieth century since most of the flashes that go to make up Sandbach Flashes began their life at the beginning of the century. So we decided to go ahead.

Having made that initial decision we then decided to make it as comprehensive as possible. There would have been no birds of Sandbach Flashes without the flashes, no flashes without the subsidence, no subsidence without the salt deposits. So chapters have been included on all of these topics.

We have also included maps and physical details of all of the flashes, with the intention of encouraging more people to visit the flashes. Additionally, it is hoped that those who are currently regular at the main sites may be persuaded to also visit some of the less popular sites which can still be very productive.

The final chapter of the book is a checklist of all species recorded at Sandbach Flashes with columns for you to produce and keep your own personal life list.

At the end of 1999 the total for all species was 225, including 40 wader species. These are excellent totals for an inland site, reflecting the importance of Sandbach Flashes and the enthusiasm with which birds are recorded.

One possibly controversial decision was that we would follow the recommendations of British Birds in adopting the international common name for bird species. This was only taken after much discussion and initial disagreement. However, since it is anticipated that this will be the standard reference book for many years to come, it was felt that this was the correct decision. In the future maybe the new common names will be in more regular use - only time will tell!

It is hoped that the book will have two major benefits. Firstly, it should stimulate an interest in birdwatching at Sandbach Flashes by providing details of where to go and what to expect when you get there. Secondly, by recording details of the history of the site and its current status, together with a comprehensive summary of all bird records, it will provide a baseline for any future ornithological recording and should be an invaluable reference source for the future. It has already highlighted those areas where our knowledge is lacking.

Finally, a thank you to everybody who has provided assistance and encouragement during the production of this book. We hope that you enjoy reading it and that it provides a source of valuable information.

## THE AUTHORS

### ANDREW GOODWIN

Born in Sandbach in 1954, Andrew developed an interest in birdwatching from the age of seven. In 1962 he was given a copy of 'Birds of the World' by Austen and Singer for Christmas. This was to leave a lasting impression on him which later developed into a fascination for foreign travel and birding.

Initially Andrew's birding was confined to Sandbach Park and family holidays to Wales. It was not until 1970 that he made his first visit to the Flashes. He then became a keen twitcher from 1972 to 1979, and he once drove to Cley in Norfolk, only to have to return immediately when news broke of a Lesser Yellowlegs at Watch Lane Flash!

He travelled abroad extensively from 1978 to 1988 building up a World list which now stands at over 5,200 species. Well known for his birdwatching stories, his favourite being the two weeks he spent in Lima jail in Peru accused of being a spy!

Andrew co-wrote the previous 'Birds of the Sandbach Flashes' in 1985. A very keen local birder, he spends his spare time birding at the Flashes or other good sites in South East Cheshire. His Flashes' list is approximately 200 species and his South East Cheshire list around 210.

### COLIN LYTHGOE

A local man, Colin was born and raised in Crewe and now lives in Haslington. Although always interested in the countryside and wildlife in general, it was not until the age of thirty that he developed an interest in birdwatching.

He has never been a twitcher (the longest twitch undertaken was to Astbury Water Park for a Red-necked Grebe) but has always been interested in birds of the local area. As the BTO Regional Representative for ten years until 1996, he organised all BTO surveys in South Cheshire, and is still very active in participating in all such surveys in the area.

Colin has travelled extensively in Europe and North America, though frequently for general travel interest rather than for intensive birding. He does not keep accurate bird lists, but the Sandbach Flashes' list is probably 155, the SECOS area list 190 and the World list nearly 800.

A SECOS member since 1974, he has been the Society Recorder since 1985, and is responsible for publishing the SECOS Annual Bird Report. Colin has been a member of the Sandbach Flashes' Management Committee since 1988, representing the interests of the South East Cheshire Ornithological Society and other local birdwatchers.

## GEOLOGY

Common salt occurs abundantly in nature either as a solid (rock salt) or in solution (sea water and brine). Rock salt has been laid down in beds at various times and in many parts of the world. Brine is an aqueous solution which contains a higher percentage of dissolved salts than the average 3 to 4 per cent contained in sea water.

Beds of rock salt in the Cheshire/Shropshire Basin, and in other parts of Britain, were formed during the Triassic period (about 225-190 million years ago). These were formed by evaporation of the shallow bodies of sea water which existed at that time.

The rocks underlying the Cheshire Plain generally comprise soft reddish sandstone and hard pebbly sandstone, overlain by layers of marl. The marl contains two beds of rock salt at different levels. These are known as the Lower and Upper Saliferous Beds. The marl is then overlain by later deposits of sands, clays and peat.

Subsequent earth movements have caused folding and faulting of the beds, resulting in the various layers being at different levels within the area, and sometimes at an angle to the surface.

Where the Saliferous Beds are at the level of circulating groundwater the salt dissolves in the groundwater to form brine, which may flow away. This can lead to cavities being formed and, ultimately, the overlying rocks can collapse, causing subsidence. Where subsidence goes lower than the level of the local groundwater then flashes appear.

There are two types of subsidence. Crater subsidence is circular and is thought to occur due to underground subsidence, causing sands to funnel down into cavities along the wet rock head. This is the interface between the rock salt bed and the circulating groundwater, at which solution is taking place and brine is forming. Watch Lane Flash is thought to be caused by subsidence of this type. Linear subsidence usually occurs along the line of an underground brine run and is the commonest form of subsidence. Active subsidence often shows slip scars and these are visible on the banks of Warmingham Flash, a good example of linear subsidence.

Sandbach lies on the Cheshire Plain in an area of wet rock head where the Upper Saliferous Bed is about 90 metres thick. The flashes lie on sand, gravel or boulder clay deposits, with the exception of Foden's Flash which is in an area of peat. The flashes are thought to have been caused mainly by linear subsidence and the peat in which Foden's lies is probably a result of subsidence.

## THE SALT INDUSTRY

Natural brine springs have been known since ancient times. There is evidence that in Roman times they were producing salt by evaporation of natural brine. This was based in the Middlewich area, and to a lesser extent at Nantwich. By the time that written records were made in the 11<sup>th</sup> century there were three centres of salt making: Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich. Nantwich was the most important area from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. After that time its importance declined as rock salt was discovered at Northwich and better transport was needed, e.g. navigable rivers and canals, which did not exist at Nantwich.

The existence of the rock salt beds was discovered in 1670 near Northwich and many mines were established in that area. It was now possible to mine rock salt in a manner similar to coal mining, or to mix it with water to form brine and pump the brine from underground.

There are two methods of extracting brine. Natural or wild brine pumping involves drilling a bore-hole to reach the underground brine level. This is then pumped out, underground water replaces it, forming more brine to be pumped out, continuing this natural process. The disadvantage of this method is that there is no control over where the rock salt is dissolved, and no control over the consequent formation of cavities and possible subsidence. In 1892 a method of controlled pumping was devised. This involves drilling a bore-hole down into a layer of solid rock salt. Water is forced down the bore, dissolves the rock salt to form brine, which is forced back up to the surface. Before the consequent cavity reaches the size where it may ultimately lead to subsidence, pumping is stopped and the cavity left full of saturated brine.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century salt production had declined at Northwich but the chemical industry had been established there. This used large quantities of brine in its production processes. Winsford had taken over as the major salt making area.

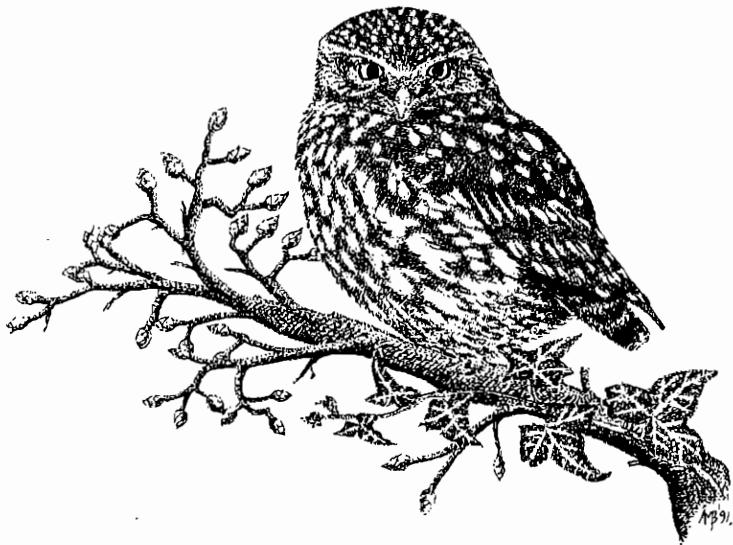
There are two methods of making salt from brine. The principle of the open pan process has been used from Roman times through to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This involves filling shallow open pans with brine and heating from underneath to evaporate the liquid, leaving the salt to be raked out. In the early 1900s a method was developed using a series of closed containers in which to boil the brine. The process is called a multi-effect vacuum evaporator. The only open pan works left in the country are at the Lion Works, Marston, kept open by volunteers as a working museum.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century salt production had declined at Winsford and the main centres had moved to Middlewich and Sandbach, where fine salt was produced. By the 1950s salt was being produced at works at Ettiley Heath (the site of the existing chemical works north of the salt pan), and at Elworth (now a housing estate) and brine was being supplied by the wild brine pumping method.

In 1969 the present site at Middlewich was opened, and the sites at Ettiley Heath and Elworth were closed (plus other sites in the country). Shortly after that wild brine pumping ceased and the present controlled pumping brine field

at Warmingham was opened. This solely supplies brine to Middlewich, the output of which supplies around half of the purified salt needed in the British market. Of this around 60% is used in the chemical industry and 40% in the food production industry.

The effects of subsidence have varied over the centuries, depending upon the type and scale of activity. Northwich was the first to suffer in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Cataclysmic upheavals led to the destruction of whole rows of buildings in the town. Then as Winsford became the main area for brine extraction it suffered the subsidence leading to the formation of large flashes, such as Winsford Top Flash and Winsford Bottom Flash. Finally Sandbach became the main area for brine extraction. Subsidence was first experienced in this area in the 1890s, probably caused by the wild brine pumping at the Wheelock salt and chemical works. As the production increased in the early 1900s, the amount of wild brine pumping increased and this led to the subsidence that we see in the Sandbach area today. In 1909 there was virtually no open water, but by the early 1920s standing water had appeared, and by the late 1920s most of today's flashes had developed. Wild brine pumping stopped in the early 1970s and consequently the level of subsidence has decreased, although there is still activity in some areas.





## BIRD RECORDING, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Although the permanent water of the Flashes did not start to appear until the early 1920s, by the 1930s they were already ornithologically important. The first person to watch and record the bird life of the area was R.B. Sibson. He made detailed observations from September 1935 to July 1939, when he emigrated to New Zealand. Fortunately his records were published in an article entitled 'Notes on the Birds of Sandbach, S.E. Cheshire' in 'The North Western Naturalist' in 1946. During the period from 1939 to 1945, further observations had been carried out by A.W. Boyd and F.J. Brown, and these were used to update Sibson's records when they were finally published in 1946.

Boyd, who lived at Antrobus, Northwich, and wrote a weekly nature article for the 'Manchester Guardian', visited infrequently, but Brown, a Crewe man, continued to visit the Flashes regularly into the early 1950s, when he was joined by A.W. Goodin, who moved into the area in 1952. During the 1950s the importance of the Flashes increased and several birdwatchers (or bird observers according to Boyd) from the Manchester area were regular visitors. P.D. Whalley became involved in the late 1950s, and together with A.W. Goodin was instrumental in formally establishing the importance of the Flashes as a birdwatching area.

The formation of the Cheshire Conservation Trust in 1962 led to discussions with the British Soda Co. about the possibility of managing the area as a nature reserve. British Soda were most helpful and a meeting was held in April 1963 to discuss the details. Subsequent meetings were held and developed into the Sandbach Flashes' Nature Reserve Management Committee. This was composed of representatives of the landowner (British Soda), the shooting syndicate, the angling societies, Nature Conservancy, Cheshire Conservation Trust and local ornithologists (A.W. Goodin and P.D. Whalley). The Nature Reserve initially comprised Railway Flash, Elton Flashes and Watch Lane Flash, all on land owned by British Soda. In October 1963 Fodens Ltd. agreed that the flash known as The Moat, which was on land owned by them, could be added to the Nature Reserve. From then on it became known as Foden's Flash.

In 1963 the Flashes were notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The reasons for notification included the extreme rarity of the inland saline habitats present in some of the flashes and their unusual associations of plants and animals, together with the importance of the site for breeding birds and migrant and winter residents.

In 1964 Goodin and Whalley were co-founders of the South East Cheshire Ornithological Society based at Elworth. The establishment of a local bird club meant that several new observers were now regularly watching birds at the Flashes. Also in 1964 Whalley published his 'Check List of Birds of the Sandbach Flashes', covering the period 1935 to 1963. In the checklist were details of 132 species including 27 wader species, a fine tally for an inland site. One of these waders, a Wilson's Phalarope which had been seen in September 1962 when it was still a great rarity for the country, had attracted

birders from all over the U.K., well and truly putting Sandbach Flashes on the birding map.

Although subsidence led to the formation of the Flashes, it was also a major source of problems for the transport infrastructure, with roads, the Crewe to Manchester railway line and the Trent and Mersey canal, all suffering. The original road between Elton Hall Flash and Pump House Flash (now the dead-end road up to the railway line) was continually flooding, and the railway bridge constantly needed repairing. From 1967 to 1969 a new road (the current one) and railway bridge were constructed, away from the main area of subsidence. Around this time tipping on the part of Pump House Flash between the old road and the new road stopped, and the area was grassed over.

In 1969 British Soda closed their works at Ettiley Heath (on the site of the existing chemical works) and consequently stopped pumping into the settling lagoon, which dried out by the end of 1970.

The eastern end of Watch Lane Flash (Little Moor) had been used for tipping during the 1960s. This ceased in 1971, and in 1973 the site was re-graded, covered in topsoil and grassed over. Also in 1973 British Rail did further strengthening work on the railway embankment at Elton Hall Flash, resulting in the formation of access tracks on either side of the embankment.

A new generation of birdwatchers was very active from the early 1970s. The provision of a logbook at Elton Hall Flash helped to promote interest and gather records. Soon the area had become the premier site for birdwatchers in South Cheshire, and by the end of 1985 when A. Goodwin and G. Talbot wrote their 'Birds of the Sandbach Flashes' the list stood at 200 species.

In 1985 Maw Green Landfill Site was officially opened and tipping started at the south end of the site.

As a result of the introduction of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 all existing SSSIs were re-surveyed. Consequently in 1986 Sandbach Flashes was re-notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest under the 1981 Act. From this time all the flashes with the exception of Fields Farm Flash and Plex Flash were included within the SSSI, although the land between the flashes was not included. So the Sandbach Flashes SSSI is a discontinuous area of separate flashes. This gave the Flashes some legal protection, but this was limited and inadequate, and the consultation requirements on the landowners were, and still are, sometimes ignored.

Also in 1986 Foden's Flash was sold and the new owners officially changed the name back to The Moat, its original name.

Following the change from wild brine pumping to controlled brine pumping in the 1970s, and the consequent lessening of subsidence, British Salt decided to sell their land holdings in this area. All land, including the Flashes, was bought by the existing tenant farmers.

In 1992 planning permission was granted for the northward extension of Maw Green Landfill Site, and the tipping area now surrounds the southern end of Groby Flash, and nearly touches Railway Flash.

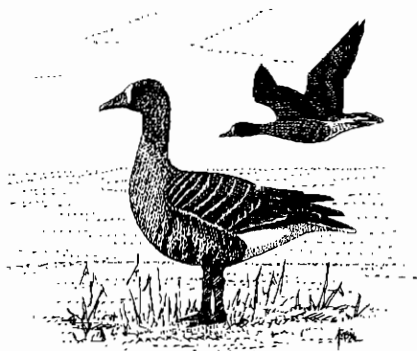
The nature reserve part of Sandbach Flashes only has a rather hazy, nominal existence. Formed in 1963 from sites owned by British Soda Co. and Fodens Ltd., it was never legally established. Instead, informal letters of agreement were exchanged between the two landowners and Cheshire Conservation Trust. The flashes included are Railway Flash, Pump House Flash, Elton Hall Flash, Fields Farm Flash, Watch Lane Flash and Foden's Flash. With the change of landowners and Cheshire Conservation Trust (now Cheshire Wildlife Trust) no longer being active in the management of the reserve, its existence is now only maintained through the Sandbach Flashes Management Committee.

This committee was set up in 1963 when the nature reserve was established and its constituent members have changed little over the years. Current members represent British Salt (who actively support the committee), local landowners, local angling societies, English Nature, local ornithologists (A.W. Goodin) and the local bird club (C. Lythgoe).

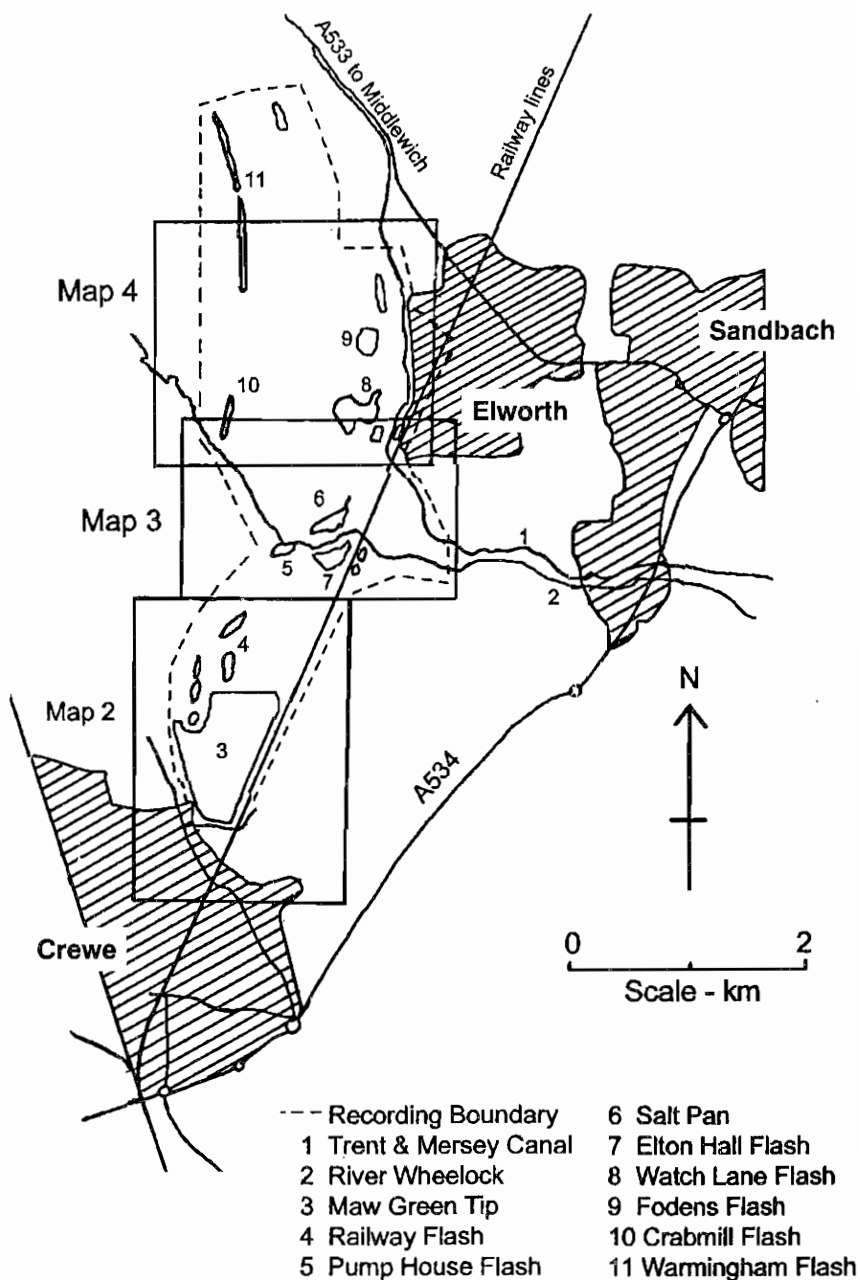
Since its inception the management committee has done some useful work in providing a forum for discussion, the dispensation of technical or specialist knowledge, monitoring of physical conditions, and arriving at a consensus for action between the diverse bodies and interests on the committee, who often have conflicting requirements and objectives, especially since British Salt ceased to be the landowner.

Throughout the existence of the Flashes there has been very little active management, and the policy generally has been one of allowing natural succession to take its course. The only real management has involved some fairly haphazard tinkering with the water levels on the salt pan. From the ornithological viewpoint this has been a major disappointment through the years.

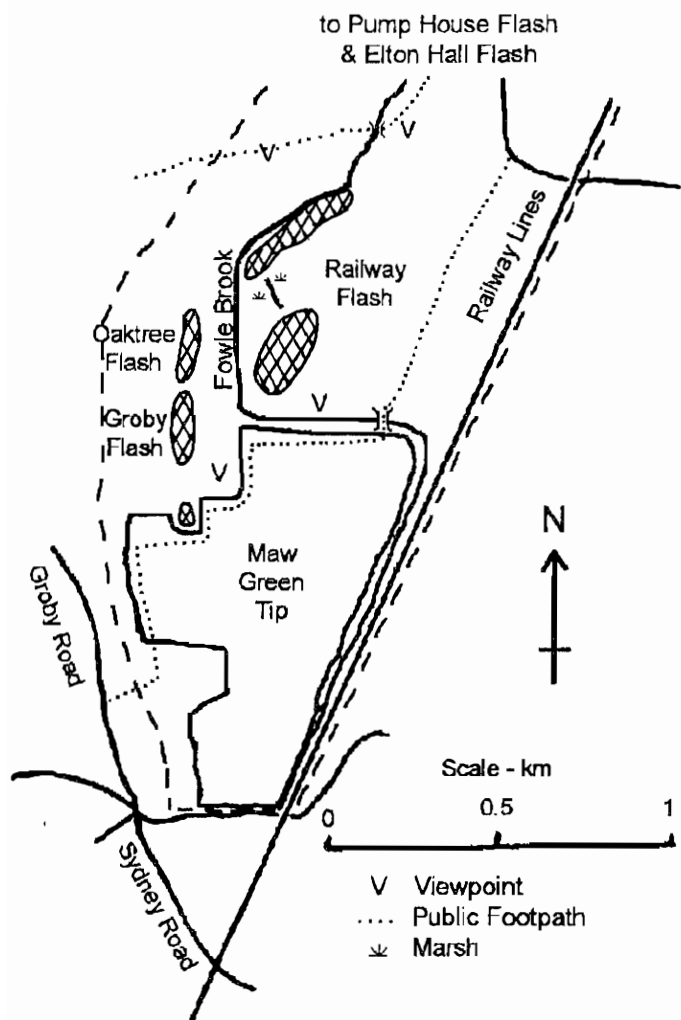
The Elton Hall Flash/salt pan site has the potential to be a major wetland habitat. It is disappointing that the Cheshire Wildlife Trust have shown no interest in attempting to purchase this area, particularly at the time when British Salt was disposing of their land holdings. It is felt that unless a controllable sluice is installed at the outflow of the salt pan, to ensure correct water levels at different seasons of the year, and suitable management work undertaken on Elton Hall Flash, then these areas and Pump House Flash will ultimately be lost as open water wetland habitats.



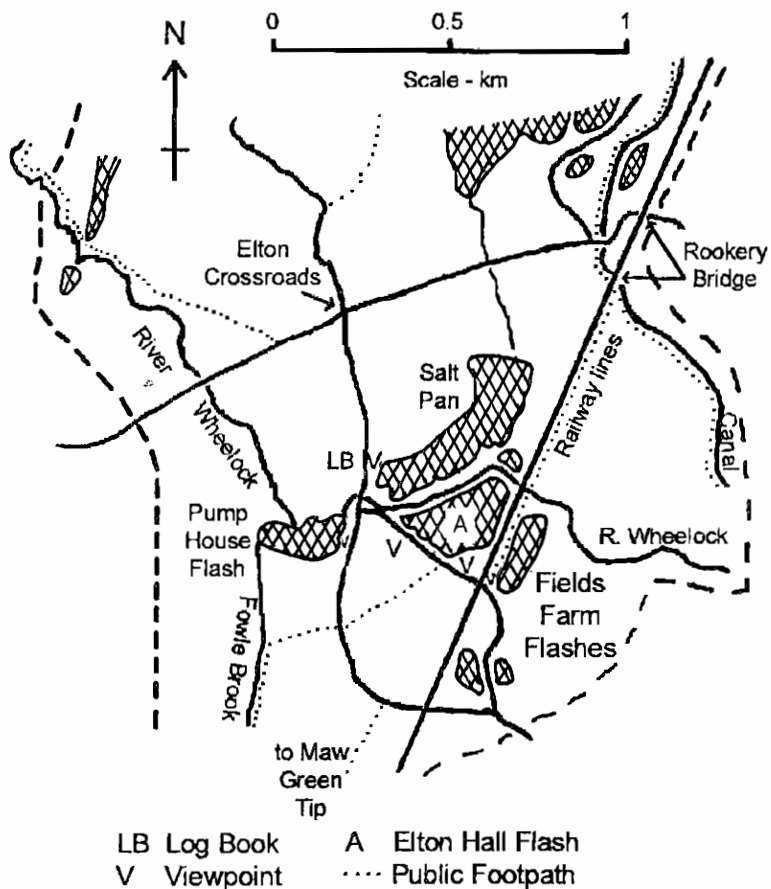
Map 1 - Sandbach Flashes



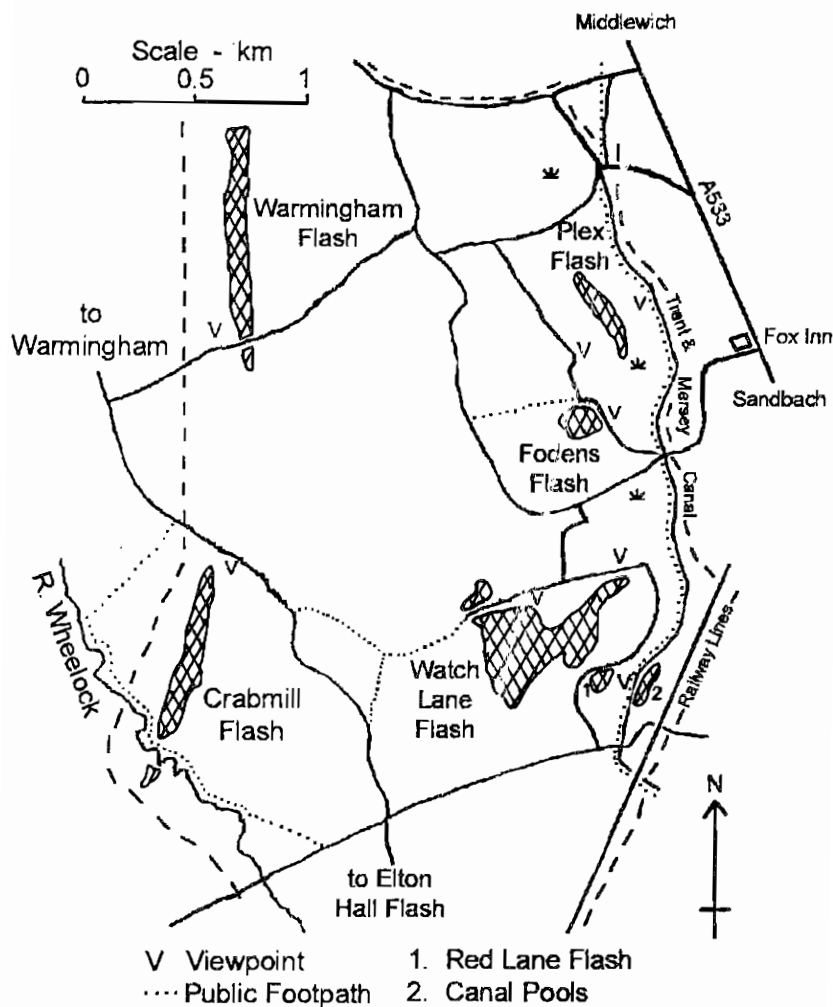
Map 2 - South Area  
 Railway Flash, Oaktree Flash, Groby Flash & Maw Green Tip



Map 3 - Central Area  
Elton Hall Flash, Salt Pan, Pump House Flash & Fields Farm Flashes



Map 4 - North Area  
 Watch Lane Flash, Fodens Flash, Plex Flash  
 Crabmill Flash & Warmingham Flash



## **A SITE GUIDE TO BIRDWATCHING AT THE FLASHES**

This chapter gives a brief summary of each flash, the habitats and how and where to look for birds.

### **Elton Hall Flash**

Although this flash and the Salt Pan are treated as one site for bird recording purposes, they are dealt with separately in this section since they have different origins and characteristics. Originally four flashes in this area were known as Elton Flashes or Elton Hall Flashes. They were named after Elton Hall Farm, now a private residence, on whose land the flashes were then located.

The River Wheelock flows under the railway and through the flash, and is joined by the outflow from the Salt Pan before flowing under Clay Lane and into Pump House Flash.

The river carries a considerable amount of silt and over the years a lot of this has been deposited on the flash. The process has changed the nature of this flash considerably over the years. In its early years the flash was open water but by the late 1950s it contained an extensive reed bed. Natural succession has continued until we have reached the current state of an attractive mixture of habitats with flowing water in the river, open wet areas, rush fringed pools, regularly flooded sandbanks, a small reed bed and an area of willow scrub. This variety of habitats, together with the open, muddy areas of the Salt Pan, make this the most important site in the area, and the majority of records of birds at the Flashes come from here. In the winter months dabbling ducks are much in evidence with Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon and Common Teal easily found. Common Snipe are also present in winter and during the spring and autumn passage periods other wader species are noted. Water Rails are present in winter and Common Kingfishers can occasionally be seen from the Clay Lane bridge. Sedge and Eurasian Reed Warblers breed as do Common Reed Buntings. Rarities recorded here over the years have included Wilson's Phalarope, Upland Sandpiper and Black-crowned Night Heron.

There is no public access to the Flash or the railway embankment but good views are possible from the main road, and especially from the old road that leads to the railway.

In recent years a feeding station has been established near the Clay Lane bridge and this is excellent for viewing tits, finches and especially Eurasian Tree Sparrows. It is maintained by the generosity of a very few local birdwatchers.

### **Salt Pan**

The area known locally as the Salt Pan was never in fact used for that purpose. However since it is so well known by that name it is proposed that this is continued.

It was actually used as a lime settling bed. When brine is pumped to the surface it contains mineral impurities. Lime is used to purify the brine and the



resultant lime, plus impurities, are pumped out as slurry. The Salt Pan is the area where the slurry from the Ettiley Heath salt works was pumped. The resultant dried waste products are not suitable for vegetation to grow and the site has remained free of vegetation, except where the river has been allowed to flow through and deposit silt.

The shallow water and mud have made this an excellent habitat for wading birds. During the winter Ruff, Common Redshank and Eurasian Curlew are present, and in the summer Little Ringed Plovers and Northern Lapwing breed. It is at its most exciting during migration times when waders drop in to rest and feed with Dunlin, Common Ringed Plover and Green Sandpiper regularly seen. Rarities recorded here have included White-rumped Sandpiper and Stilt Sandpiper.

The viewpoint has become a meeting place for local birdwatchers, and with its views over the Salt Pan and Elton Hall Flash has built up a reputation for producing good birds. Scanning for raptors from the viewpoint has produced eleven species in recent years.

The logbook is situated on the opposite side of the road from the viewpoint, please enter all records in the book. There is no public access to the flash.

### **Pump House Flash**

This is named after the building that housed one of the pumps used for brine extraction. The building was located on the island at the back of the flash, but is now reduced to a heap of rubble. In 1967/8 a new road was built across Pump House Flash with a new railway bridge 400 metres south of the old one. This is the existing road (Clay Lane). The original road is the dead-end road along the south edge of Elton Hall Flash leading to Brook Farm and the railway. The new road was necessary due to the poor condition of the railway bridge, caused by subsidence of the railway embankment, together with frequent flooding of the road. Prior to the construction of the new road Pump House Flash extended eastwards up to the old road. This area was filled in by tipping in the 1960s.

Fowle Brook flows into the south-west corner, the River Wheelock flows into the north-east corner, and out at the north-west corner. The river carries a lot of silt in it that is deposited in the flash. This ongoing siltation process has led to the flash becoming very shallow at the east side but continuing subsidence close to the road at the southern end has compensated.

This is a good site for ducks and geese and also waders, and the flash can be easily viewed at close range from Clay Lane. The large flat pasture field on the south-west side, and the fields behind, are worth a good look and are viewable from a public footpath which leads towards Railway Flash (see map).

For its size this flash has produced an amazing run of rarities including Common Crane, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover and Marsh Sandpiper.

### **Fields Farm Flashes**

These two small pools lie on the eastern side of the railway and can be reached by road (see map). Few ducks and waders occur on the pools, although they are always worth a quick look. A track continues along the

railway embankment and up to the canal. This is well worth walking as it is good for breeding Common Whitethroat, Common Linnet and Yellowhammer. In autumn scarce passerine migrants are sometimes found, such as Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Pipit, Whinchat and Common Stonechat, although Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat are more likely.

### **Railway Flash**

Sibson referred to this flash as Ruff Mere but Whalley called it Railway Farm Flash, since it is located on land owned by Railway Farm. At that time it was also known as Railway Flashes since the site always included two flashes as at present. However, the size, shape and formation of the two waters have changed considerably over the years.

The southern flash is very shallow and only fed by field drains, hence it can and does dry out completely in dry summers, especially when the outlet ditch is dredged by the landowner. The northern flash, by comparison, is quite deep and is fed by the Fowle Brook, which outflows to the north into Pump House Flash. There is a marshy area between the two flashes.

Not subject to disturbance, this has always been a good site for ducks and waders. Garganey is recorded here most years and Peregrine Falcon frequently perches on the electric power line pylons. Rarities recorded here have included Spotted Sandpiper, White-winged Black Tern and Little Bunting.

There is no public access to the Flash but good telescope views can be had from the public footpaths at the north end of Maw Green Tip, and from the footpath from Pump House Flash (see map).

### **Oaktree Flash**

Named after the nearby Oaktree Farm on whose land the flash is located. It lies immediately north of Groby Flash and was formed by the same longitudinal subsidence depression that formed Groby Flash.

Although the two flashes have a common origin, Oaktree Flash is not reed fringed and has a more open aspect with a few rushes at the southern end. At its best in winter when regularly visited by a small number of dabbling and diving ducks.

There is no public access to the flash but distant telescope views can be obtained from the public footpath at the north end of Maw Green Tip.

### **Groby Flash**

Named after the nearby Groby Farm on whose land the flash is located. It is also known as Micklewright's by local fishermen since that is the family name of the owners. Groby Flash also includes the small reedy pool just to the south that is now surrounded on three sides by the extension to Maw Green Tip.

It is extensively fringed by reeds and is good for Mute Swans, Great Crested Grebes and Ruddy Ducks; all three species usually breed. Eurasian Reed and Sedge Warblers are present in the reed beds in summer.

There is no public access to the flash but good telescope views can be had from the public footpath at the north end of Maw Green Tip.

### **Maw Green Tip**

Although not a flash now, prior to 1985 this area was a subsiding series of pools and wet meadows that was beginning to attract waders, ducks and passerine migrants. It was thus beginning to receive attention from a few local birdwatchers who knew it as Fowle Brook Meadows.

It was first used by Cheshire County Council as a landfill site in 1985. It was chosen because it was only low grade farmland. When completed the landfill site area will be returned to farmland.

In 1992 permission was granted for the huge northern extension of the landfill site, including the diversion of the course of the Fowle Brook. In this interim period whilst tipping is taking place the area is excellent for gulls, chiefly between October and May. Rarities recorded include Glaucous, Iceland and Ring-billed Gulls. The temporary movement of soil has also led to patches of rough ground that has proved attractive to larks, pipits, finches and buntings.

There is a public footpath across the site from Groby Road, Sydney to Clay Lane, Elton. This is over a completed portion of the landfill site and gives good views over Railway Flash, Groby Flash and, distantly, Oaktree Flash.

### **Watch Lane Flash**

This is named after Watch Lane which is the narrow road leading to the car park at the north end of the flash. Sibson referred to this flash as Killarney.

The first open water due to subsidence was recorded in 1925 and soon after there were two flashes in the area. These were known by local residents as Big Moor (the original flash to the west) and Little Moor (the flash to the east). Little Moor was slowly filled in with ashes and waste from the salt works initially. Then in the 1960s reject sanitary ware from a local manufacturer (Steventon's at Cledford) was tipped on the site. At the same time the flash was still subsiding and in the mid 1960s the remainder of Little Moor and Big Moor became one water. Tipping on the north-east side was finished and the area landscaped in 1973.

There is still a saline spring in the north-east corner. Additionally water flows into Watch Lane Flash from Red Lane Flash, a very small body of water fed by natural brine springs lying only 30 metres from the eastern end of Watch Lane Flash. These two are the only saline flashes in the area and are one of only two such inland saline marsh sites in the country. The pool to the north of Watch Lane is called Ilse Pool.

It was originally a part of the subsidence flash of Watch Lane Flash, but was developed and landscaped by Mr. Butterworth in the late 1970s. He named it after his wife, Ilse. In recent years two more small pools have been created by the local angling society.

Formerly the water level at Watch Lane Flash rose and fell depending on rainfall. Open mud habitat was a feature in dry weather, especially the bay at the south-eastern end and the marsh on the north-western side. Waders were frequently recorded in autumn, in fact, this was the premier site with Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Dunlin and Common Greenshank all regular and a

Lesser Yellowlegs in 1974 the rarest. The installing of a sluice in the outflow stream by the angling society now maintains a steady high water level, which has spoilt the habitat for waders. However, tree and reed planting have proved attractive to other species.

This flash and Warmingham Flash are the most heavily fished of the flashes and are zealously protected. Consequently there is a lot of disturbance throughout the year and the site does not achieve its full potential for birds. However, it is still a very good area and always worth checking. Great Crested Grebes and Eurasian Reed Warblers breed and in winter Water Rails can sometimes be heard and seen. It is the best of the flashes for terns and can still be relied on to produce a few waders. The best recent rarities have included European Honey-buzzard and Purple Heron.

There is no public access to the flash but good views can be had by walking around Red Lane, and from the car park at Watch Lane. From this car park a track continues to Crabmill Lane through nice overgrown hedgerows and a footpath leading off from this leads across fields to Elton crossroads. By using the sketch maps, circular walking routes can be made as most of the lanes in this area are not busy with traffic.

### **Canal Pools**

A line of very small shallow pools that follow the eastern bank of the Trent and Mersey Canal. First formed by subsidence starting in the late 1970s, they were later modified by excavations for a proposed marina project that failed before work was completed.

Not particularly noted for birds although Common Stonechats and Twite have been recorded in the past.

There is no public access but good views can be obtained by walking the canal towpath on the west bank. The towpath can be accessed from Rookery bridge, and included in a circular walking route.

### **Fodens Flash**

This water has always been known as The Moat by local residents. In 1963 the flash and the wood behind it were owned by Fodens Ltd., who offered to include this area in the recently formed Nature Reserve. The offer was accepted and the site became known as Fodens Flash. However following changes of ownership in 1986 it officially reverted to its original name of The Moat, although still being referred to as Fodens Flash by birdwatchers.

Now owned by a private fishing syndicate it is not heavily fished and disturbance is low. Few birds occur on the water but the wet woodland behind the flash is good for woodland birds. In winter Water Rail, Eurasian Woodcock, Eurasian Siskin and Common Redpoll are usually present. In spring and summer it is good for warblers and Willow Tit breeds. Rarities have included Firecrest, Common Nightingale and Long-eared Owl. The wood also contains our only rookery.

The flash can easily be seen at close range from Oakwood Lane and the wood from a public bridle-way which leads from Oakwood Lane through to Plant Lane.

### **Plex Flash**

Formerly known by birdwatchers as Market Garden Pool, we propose the name Plex Flash which is the name used by local residents and fishermen.

The water is fished although disturbance is not heavy. Few water birds occur although Great Crested Grebe and Ruddy Duck usually breed. To the east of the water was formerly a commercial market garden. This area is now mostly overgrown and boggy with a small area of coniferous trees close to the canal. This is a good area for Willow Warblers and Common Whitethroats, and formerly Common Grasshopper Warblers.

There is no public access to the site, the flash can partly be viewed at one site from Oakwood Lane (see map) and the waste ground can be viewed from the canal towpath.

### **Crabmill Flash**

Named after the nearby Crabmill Farm on whose land the flash is situated. This is a deep flash with reeds and rushes along one edge. There is an extension to this flash on the south side of the River Wheelock. Currently a fairly small area, it is still expanding and is well used by ducks and swans due to its secluded nature.

Disturbance from fishermen is now at a tolerable level and the number of birds using this flash has increased in recent years, with many grazing ducks, swans and coots on the adjacent field, plus diving ducks and grebes on the water.

There is no public access to the flash but views can be obtained from Crabmill Lane. There is also a public footpath from Crabmill Lane that goes down to the river and then turns south-east along the river bank towards Hall Lane and Elton crossroads. This gives excellent views of Crabmill Flash and the small pool across the river.

### **Warmingham Flash**

This is also known as Moston Flash or Moston Long Flash, presumably all names being derived from the locality of the flash. To geologists it is probably the most important flash in the area since it is such a good example of the long, elongated depressions formed by inter-stratal solution which are known as solution subsidence troughs. It is 1,800 metres long but only 40 metres wide, and reasonably deep with a rounded bottom. The pool first appeared around 1920 when the linear subsidence deepened enough to retain the water.

Although reed fringed in places it is very heavily fished with much disturbance. Consequently the few nesting birds, particularly Great Crested Grebes, have a poor breeding success rate.

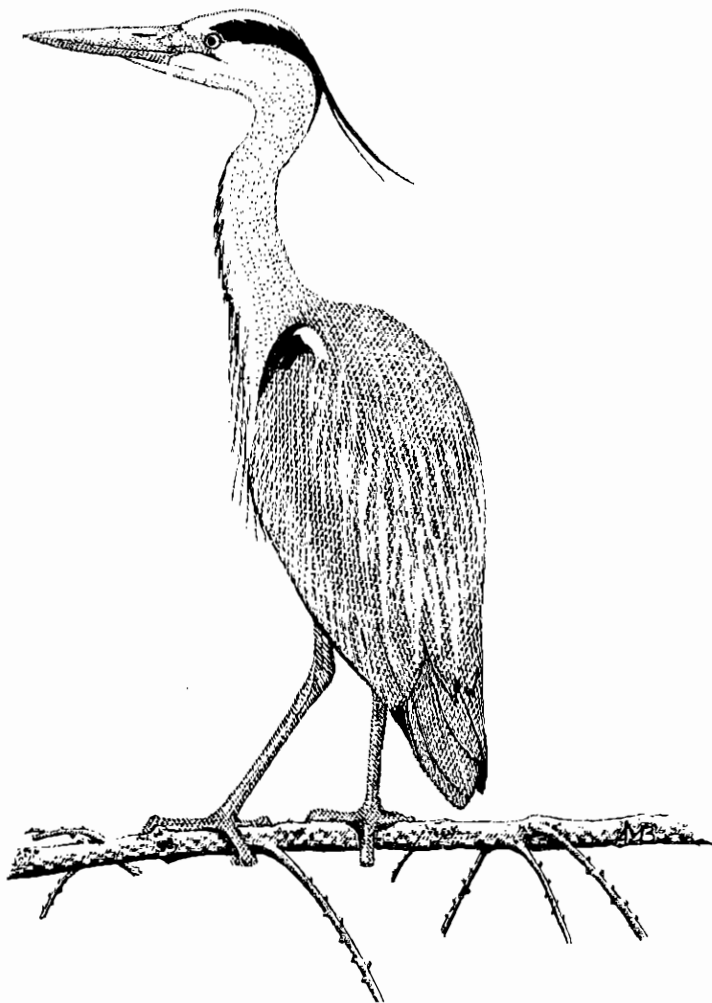
There is no public access along the full length of the flash but it can be viewed from Green Lane, Dragon's Lane and Tetton Lane, the three roads which cross it, and from a public footpath along the west side to Sparrowgrove.

### **Tetton Lane Flash**

This is a more recent flash lying just to the north-east of Warmingham Flash. It is being developed as a result of the same subsidence that led to the formation of Warmingham Flash. Being of more recent origin it is mainly marsh with some areas of open water. Because of this it is sometimes referred to as Tetton Lane Marsh. However, since it is developing as a flash and is located off Tetton Lane it is recommended that in future it is known only as Tetton Lane Flash.

It is not much disturbed except by occasional shoots and currently holds reasonable numbers of Common Snipe and Common Teal.

There is no public access and viewing is difficult but telescope views are possible from Tetton Lane.



## SYSTEMATIC LIST

The systematic list is a summary of the status of all wild bird species recorded at Sandbach Flashes.

**Recording area:** The term Sandbach Flashes is usually used to define the bodies of water known as subsidence flashes, created after brine-extraction. They lie to the west of Sandbach and north of Crewe. Most of these flashes are included within the Sandbach Flashes' Site of Special Scientific Interest, but the main flashes are Elton Hall, Pump House, Railway, Watch Lane and Foden's. It is from these that the vast majority of our species are recorded and most observations are from these flashes and their immediate surroundings. Birdwatchers have also recorded observations and species in the surrounding farmland with the result that the exact recording boundaries have been quite flexible. Also as continued subsidence in outlying areas has added new pools and associated habitats the recording area has expanded. We therefore propose the adoption of well defined boundaries for our recording area so that long term comparative population studies can be made. Our proposed recording area is one continuous area comprising all of the subsidence flashes and the surrounding farmland, with the addition of Maw Green Tip in the south. This area is shown on the maps.

**Period covered:** The systematic list includes all records, or a summary of the records, that we have been able to trace from September 1935 until the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1999. No records have come to light before 1935: we would be very interested in hearing from anyone with information prior to this date. R.B. Sibson was instrumental in putting the Flashes on the birding map in the period 1935-39, but was accused of being an industrial spy by the manager of British Soda Ltd.!

**English Bird Names:** A major headache while compiling this systematic list has been the choice of English bird names. Whilst birdwatchers in the field will no doubt still use the shortened common English names we have followed the recommendations of British Birds in adopting the international names. In most cases the change only involves the addition of a prefix to distinguish one species from others in its family. The Latin names, of course, remain the same and if a reader is unsure as to which species is involved these can be used to check. The changes relevant to us at the Flashes are:-

The prefix *Eurasian* has been added to: Spoonbill, Wigeon, Marsh Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Hobby, Oystercatcher, Woodcock, Curlew, Collared Dove, Hoopoe, Wryneck, Reed Warbler, Treecreeper, Golden Oriole, Jay, Jackdaw, Tree Sparrow, Siskin.

The prefix *Northern* has been added to: Gannet, Pintail, Shoveler, Goshawk, Lapwing, Wheatear.

The prefix *Greater* has been added to: White-fronted Goose, Scaup.

The prefix *European* has been added to: Golden Plover, Turtle Dove, Robin, Pied Flycatcher, Nuthatch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch.

The prefix *Great* has been added to: Cormorant, Bittern.

The prefix *Common* has been added to: Shelduck, Teal, Pochard, Eider, Goldeneye, Buzzard, Kestrel, Quail, Pheasant, Moorhen, Coot, Crane, Ringed Plover, Snipe, Redshank, Greenshank, Guillemot, Cuckoo, Swift, Kingfisher, Nightingale, Redstart, Stonechat, Blackbird, Grasshopper Warbler, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Magpie, Raven, Starling, Chaffinch, Linnet, Redpoll, Crossbill, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting.

Also the following major changes have been adopted, some of these have their old names in brackets in the systematic list to assist the reader:-

Old Name	New International Name
Slavonian Grebe	Horned Grebe
Leach's Petrel	Leach's Storm-petrel
Night Heron	Black-crowned Night Heron
Bewick's Swan	Tundra Swan
Common Scoter	Black Scoter
Mandarin	Mandarin Duck
Honey Buzzard	European Honey-buzzard
Peregrine	Peregrine Falcon
Corncrake	Corn Crake
Avocet	Pied Avocet
Knot	Red Knot
Turnstone	Ruddy Turnstone
Grey Phalarope	Red Phalarope
Common Gull	Mew Gull
Kittiwake	Black-legged Kittiwake
Woodpigeon	Common Wood Pigeon
Skylark	Common Sky Lark
Swallow	Barn Swallow
Waxwing	Bohemian Waxwing
Wren	Winter Wren
Dunnock/Hedge Sparrow	Hedge Accentor

**Status Definitions:** At the beginning of each species account we have given a one-line status statement. This covers the numbers, breeding and temporal status as appropriate. These statements have been determined from records obtained in the period 1986 to 1999, with the exception of vagrant, very rare, rare, former breeder and irregular breeder, which cover the period 1935 to 1999.



For **numbers of birds** the following definitions have been used:-

Vagrant:	Local or national rarity recorded once or twice at the Flashes.
Very rare:	Up to twenty records.
Rare:	Over twenty records but not seen annually.
Scarce:	Less than twenty records annually.
Uncommon:	Small numbers present in appropriate seasons.
Fairly common:	Moderate numbers present in appropriate seasons.
Common:	Good numbers present in appropriate seasons.
Very common:	Large numbers present in appropriate seasons.
Abundant:	High numbers present in appropriate seasons.

And for **breeding status** the following definitions have been used:-

Former breeder:	Bred regularly prior to 1986.
Irregular breeder:	Has bred more than once since 1935, but not annually.
Uncommon:	1 to 5 pairs breeding annually.
Common:	6 to 10 pairs breeding annually.
Very common:	More than 10 pairs breeding annually.

And for **temporal status** the following definitions have been used:-

Resident:	Birds are seen at all seasons.
Summer visitor:	Normally present in summer.
Winter visitor:	Normally present in winter.
Passage migrant:	Moves through the area on migration.
Visitor:	Occurs at any time of the year.

**Abbreviations:** Site abbreviations in the systematic list are as follows:-

EHF: Elton Hall Flash	WLF: Watch Lane Flash
PHF: Pump House Flash	FF: Foden's Flash (The Moat)
FFF: Fields Farm Flashes	PF: Plex Flash (Market Garden Pool)
RF: Railway Flash	CF: Crabmill Flash
OF: Oaktree Flash	WF: Warmingham Flash
GF: Groby Flash	TLF: Tetton Lane Flash
MGT: Maw Green Tip	

**Species accepted for inclusion in the Systematic List:** Only species on the British List in categories A, B and C are included; the more interesting of the feral and escaped species are included at the end of the list. Only national rarities accepted by the British Birds Rarities' Committee are included; local and county rarities have been judged by the compilers of this report and generally follow the decisions reached by the Cheshire Rarities' Panel.

**References:** Five main sources have been used:-

A. Goodwin & G. Talbot, *The Birds of Sandbach Flashes*, 1986.

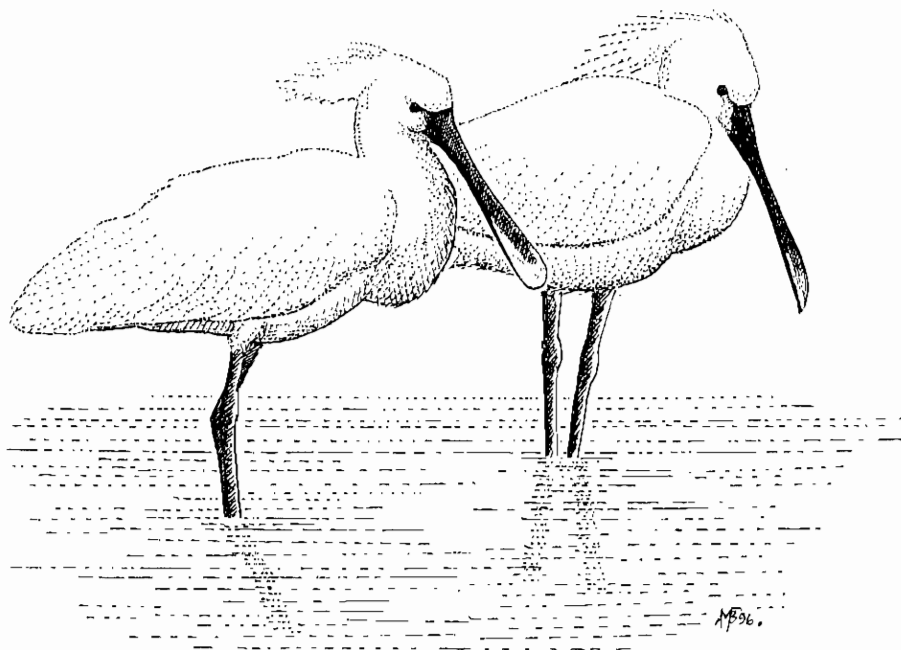
R.B. Sibson, M.A., *Notes on Birds of Sandbach, S.E. Cheshire*, 1946.

P.D. Whalley, *1935-1963 Check List of Birds of the Sandbach Flashes*, 1964.

*Cheshire & Wirral Ornithological Society Annual Bird Report*, 1962-1998

*South East Cheshire Ornithological Society Annual Bird Report*, 1986-1999

These make fascinating reading; copies can be borrowed from the South East Cheshire Ornithological Society.



**Red-throated Diver**  
Vagrant. One record.

*Gavia stellata*

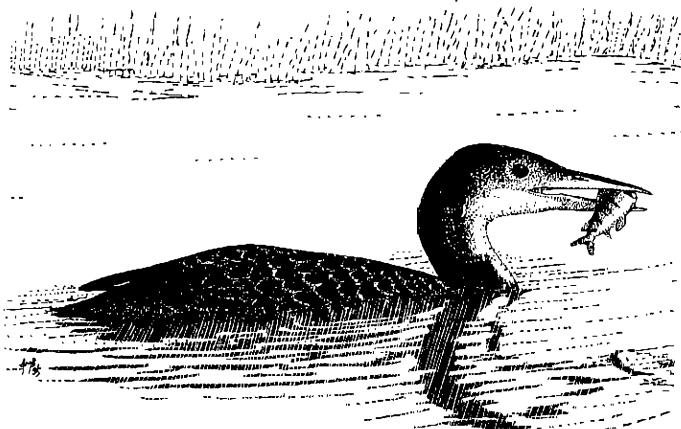
One 1<sup>st</sup> winter at WLF on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Dec 1995.

**Great Northern Diver**  
Vagrant. One record.

*Gavia immer*

One 1<sup>st</sup> winter at WLF between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> March 1995.

Much appreciated by the local birdwatchers, this superb individual gave close views during its long stay. The previous 60 years did not produce a single diver record and then 1995 attracted two species, both at WLF.



**Little Grebe**  
Uncommon breeding resident.

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Has increased as a breeding bird since 1935. Sibson in the 1930s stated that a few pairs bred annually, and between 1935 and 1963 known as a breeding bird at EHF. More breeding pairs were present in the 1970s with a count of 13 pairs in 1979 declining to a minimum of seven pairs in 1985 and five pairs in 1999. In recent years breeding has occurred on EHF, RF, GF, PHF and possibly PF.

Sibson between 1935 and 1939 noted 'flotillas' of up to 24 birds between September and February, and there were 14 at EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1954. Between 1970 and 1985 the winter flock was present mostly on RF and PHF.

Maximum day count for each month between 1970 and 1985

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
12	29	21	20	10	8

Since 1985 this wintering flock has declined or ceased altogether as the best count in the 1990s was only five at WLF in February 1994.

**Great Crested Grebe**  
Common breeding resident.

*Podiceps cristatus*

Between 1935 and 1939 bred with varying success on the newly submerging EHF, PHF, WLF, RF and WF:

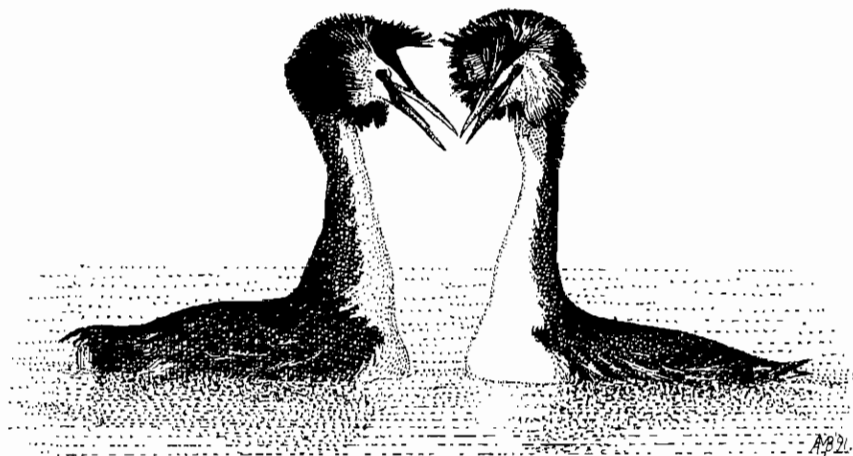
1936: One pair PHF, no young reared.

1937: Three pairs (EHF, PHF, WLF) breeding attempted WLF but failed.

1938: One pair WLF unsuccessful, one pair successful on WF.

1939: One pair successful WLF, one pair successful on WF.

Between 1939 and 1963 bred successfully most years at WF and also at WLF in 1948. Has increased since 1963, four pairs bred in 1976, 1977 and 1985, six pairs in 1994 and up to eight pairs in 1998. In recent years nesting has taken place on all the main flashes, but breeding success varies due to disturbance and fluctuating water levels in spring. Usually present in winter especially on WLF but also CF, WF and RF, though forced to leave during winter freezes. Numbers build up in late winter, for example, 15 at WLF in March 1980, 15 on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1983, 16 in March 1987 and March 1996. WLF at this time is the favoured locality and they are very conspicuous as they pair up and display. Some good counts during November in recent years with 19 in November 1996 and 39 on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1998.



**Red-necked Grebe**  
Very rare spring passage migrant.

*Podiceps grisegena*

Three records of four birds:

1952: Two at WLF on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

1968: One at WLF in partial breeding plumage on 1st-4th March.

1989: One at WLF in full breeding plumage on 25<sup>th</sup> April.

**Horned (Slavonian) Grebe***Podiceps auritus*

Vagrant. One record.

One adult in winter plumage was on WLF on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1987.

**Black-necked Grebe***Podiceps nigricollis*

Vagrant. One record.

One in winter plumage was on WLF on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1972.

**Leach's Storm-petrel***Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Very rare autumn visitor. Four records of at least three birds.

One at EHF on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1977 was present all day and well watched.

One at WLF on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1978. One at EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1978 and probably the same bird on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1978 flushed from a field near EHF.

All sightings have followed north-west gales when large numbers have occurred on the Wirral coast.

**Northern Gannet***Morus bassanus*

Vagrant. One record.

The only record is of one at WLF on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1970 which appeared after gales.

**Great Cormorant***Phalacrocorax carbo*

Fairly common visitor between August and May. Rare in June and July.

Prior to 1963 known mainly as a winter visitor in small numbers, highest count being five. Has been increasing since then; several counts of 13 were made in the winter months during the 1970s, but 21 were counted in February 1994 and a count on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1998 produced 25. This increase may have been caused by the easy fishing initially on WLF following the stocking of the water with fish by the local angling society. This increase caused friction, and Elworth Anglers applied for, and were granted, a license to use bird scaring devices and also to shoot small numbers.

Previously rare in the summer months, but recorded annually since 1997 in ones and twos. Fishes most waters especially CF, RF, OF and WLF; uses dead trees at PHF and RF for perching and roosting.

*P. c. sinensis*

Sightings of adult birds answering to the description of this, the continental race, have been made between February and April. All records are listed: two on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1975; two in March/April 1978; two on 22<sup>nd</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> March 1983; one on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1987 and 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1987; one at PHF on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1996; one on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1998. Some authors have expressed doubts as to whether this race can be safely distinguished from old males of the nominate race.

**Great Bittern***Botaurus stellaris*

Vagrant. One record.

One seen in flight on two occasions at RF on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1977.

**Black-crowned Night Heron***Nycticorax nycticorax*

Vagrant. One record.

One 1<sup>st</sup> summer at EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1999 flew in at 17.00 hrs and spent the rest of the day roosting in the willows and fishing at EHF. Seen by most of the local birders up to dusk but not present next day.

**Little Egret***Egretta garzetta*

Very rare visitor. Five records.

- 1982: One stayed briefly at EHF on the 16<sup>th</sup> May and was the first fully documented record for Cheshire. It occurred on the same day as three Eurasian Spoonbills.
- 1984: One at RF on 3<sup>rd</sup> May stayed for eight hours. Seen by over 30 birdwatchers, this bird was photographed before departing to the south.
- 1996: One flew over EHF on 31<sup>st</sup> March. Also one at PHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> June.
- 1998: One at RF on 16<sup>th</sup> July was perched in the dead tree on the first pool before leaving to the west.

**Grey Heron***Ardea cinerea*

Fairly common visitor. Has bred once.

The status of this species has changed little since 1935. Recorded daily with highest numbers during the summer months. Between 1935 and 1939 Sibson had a maximum count of 16 in June and July with most birds coming from the heronry at nearby Crewe Hall. A count of 13 at CF on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1946 and 12 at RF on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1949. More recently we have many counts of between 10 and 15 during the summer months. Our birds are now visiting us from the heronry at Rode Pool, this heronry has increased considerably during the period 1979-1999 and a flight line is apparent between the Flashes and Rode Pool.

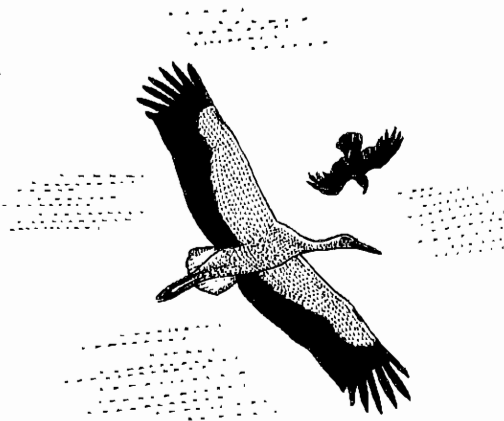
A pair attempted to breed in the dead tree on the EHF saltpan in 1977. They were incubating between 9<sup>th</sup> March and 10<sup>th</sup> April but the eggs were presumed infertile. No further breeding records.

### Purple Heron

*Ardea purpurea*

Vagrant. One record.

An adult was located at WLF on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1998 and was watched for five minutes before it flew off. It was re-located in the evening at PF and seen well by most of the local birders before flying back to WLF at dusk.



### White Stork

*Ciconia ciconia*

Vagrant. Two records of at least one bird.

One watched for thirteen minutes soaring over PHF before heading south-east towards Wheelock on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1998. Presumably the same bird was at EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1998 where it landed briefly; this bird was not ringed.

The origin of this bird is open to discussion, both records are in May, one of the peak months for true vagrancy, but another theory is that several free-flying escaped birds in Yorkshire have toured the north-west.

### Eurasian Spoonbill

*Platalea leucorodia*

Very rare visitor. Four records of six birds.

1972: One immature on EHF briefly on 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

1974: One at WLF on 19<sup>th</sup> March. Probably the same bird had been at Tatton Mere earlier the same day.

1982: Three adults stayed the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> May at RF.

An immature stayed 13 minutes at EHF on 6<sup>th</sup> November.

With no records since 1982 this is a long overdue species, especially when considering that other sites in Cheshire have had an increase in records and numbers of birds in the last decade.

## Mute Swan

*Cygnus olor*

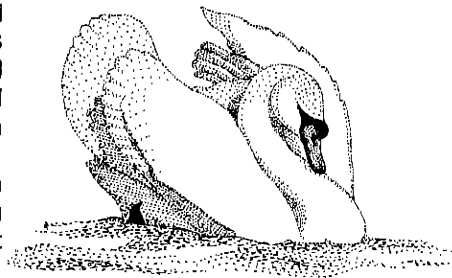
Uncommon breeding resident. Common visitor.

As a breeding species the history of this bird is confusing at the Flashes. Sibson between 1935 and 1939 failed to mention if it actually bred but Whalley in his report in 1963 regarded it as a common breeder. Since 1963 between two to five pairs have bred annually except between 1985 and 1987 when a collapse of the population resulted in none breeding in 1987. However, the breeding population soon recovered with two pairs breeding again in 1988. Nesting sites in recent years have been at EHF, FFF, WF, GF, RF and a small marsh near PF. Flocks of birds frequently form between May and December, a sample of the maximum counts recorded are :-

38 on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1958; 41 on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1967; 40 early August 1972; 43 on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1982. Highest flock count in the 1980s was 32 in 1989, reflecting the population crash. Back to former numbers in the 1990s with, for example, 43 in October 1995.

However, max counts of flock numbers are not a good indicator of the status of this species at the Flashes since the local population is quite mobile. At nearby Winterley Pool, where virtually all birds are ringed, the monthly maximum is usually around 60-100 birds but 257 individual birds were identified in 1999 and 1093 individual birds have been identified since 1989.

A few deaths a year are caused by flying swans colliding with the power lines over RF. Vandalism of nesting birds has been noted at GF and FFF.



## Tundra (Bewick's) Swan

*Cygnus columbianus*

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest autumn arrival 14<sup>th</sup> October, latest in spring 1<sup>st</sup> May.

This species was seen on only three occasions totalling seven birds prior to 1964, the first record for the Flashes being two on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1938. Since 1964 it has been recorded in most years but not all, hence its status definition as rare. Most recent sightings have been of small parties in winter, usually December and January, and some staying for long spells. We also have a pattern emerging of passage birds in late October and November, and also March, many of these records being fly-overs or short stayers. Spring passage, although rarely observed, can involve large herds or considerable movements, such as in 1976 when on the 14<sup>th</sup> March three flocks of 54; 43 and 4 moved over heading east.



Maximum day count for each month, some of which were fly-overs:

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
11	22	21	10	11	101	5

### **Whooper Swan**

*Cygnus cygnus*

Rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest autumn arrival 21<sup>st</sup> October, latest in spring 26<sup>th</sup> April.

This species was first recorded in 1951 when five were seen from 26<sup>th</sup> February through until 1<sup>st</sup> March. Since then there have been a further 21 records, mostly between December and April. Rare in October, when only one record of two on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1998 and November with two records of one on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1993 and two on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1998.

The largest herds seen were 18 on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1991, 50 flew over on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992 and 19 flew over on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1994. Some have stayed for long periods, including three from 14<sup>th</sup> January until 4<sup>th</sup> March 1979, these birds fed on winter wheat with up to 23 Greater White-fronted Geese around EHF.

Maximum day count for each month, some of which were fly-overs:

Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
2	2	50	6	18	18	19

### **Bean Goose**

*Anser fabalis*

Vagrant. Two records.

Birds answering to the description of the nominate form *A.f. fabalis* have been seen on two occasions. One from 12<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> December 1981 in the Wheelock Valley and EHF area was a wary bird which occurred during severe winter weather, and a large influx of 'grey' geese into the area. Another well-watched individual was at EHF from 15<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> December 1993 and was with two Greater White-fronted Geese and two Pink-footed Geese.

The origin of these two birds is open to debate, but in the view of the authors were wild birds.

### **Pink-footed Goose**

*Anser brachyrhynchus*

Scarce winter visitor. Feral population rare in summer months.

Earliest autumn arrival 5<sup>th</sup> October, latest in spring 12<sup>th</sup> February.

First recorded at the Flashes in February 1962 when a lone individual was at EHF. A steady increase in records and numbers since then and becoming annual in the 1990s. This increase locally matches the population increase in Lancashire, our nearest wintering area. We have traced a minimum of 29 records of over three birds. We have discounted records of three or less in an attempt to rule out confusion caused by feral birds. This also applies to early and late dates.

Most of our records are of skeins flying over, usually in the morning during cold and severe winter weather. All records of 50 and over are listed below:

70	over on	6/1/80	55	over on	14/11/93
320	over on	15/12/81	180	landed RF	3/1/95
112	over on	12/2/83	70	over on	25/1/97
220	over on	29/1/84	300	over on	14/12/97
70	over on	3/1/87	128	over on	3/1/99
140	over on	9/12/87	650	over on	9/1/99
50	over on	6/10/92	50	over on	31/1/99

We have many records of up to three birds occurring with the Canada Geese flocks, especially in autumn and winter. Many of these are feral birds although wild birds are just as likely between October and February. Summer records no doubt refer to feral birds.

### **Greater White-fronted Goose**

*Anser albifrons*

Very rare winter visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest in autumn 24<sup>th</sup> November, latest in spring 27<sup>th</sup> March.

All records where known refer to the nominate race *A. a. albifrons*.

The first record was in 1974 and we have traced a total of 13 records:

- 1974: 120 over to the south-west on 24<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1976: Four on 4<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1979: Up to 23 fed around EHF, CF and the Wheelock Valley from 25<sup>th</sup> January until 18<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1981: One on 6<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1982: 23 on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 15 on 5<sup>th</sup>, 11 on 26<sup>th</sup> December, one immature remaining through into 1983.
- 1983: The immature from 1982 stayed until 27<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1987: Three at RF on 11<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1993: Two at EHF from 15<sup>th</sup> until 19<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1995: Up to 17 at EHF from 30<sup>th</sup> November until 12<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1996: One at RF on 28<sup>th</sup> January; two at EHF and RF from 22<sup>nd</sup> December into 1997.
- 1997: The two birds from 1996 stayed until 12<sup>th</sup> March. Two flew over EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Greylag Goose**

*Anser anser*

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

Since the first record in April 1970 this species has been occurring with increased frequency and has now been annual since 1992. The majority of sightings are between October and May, and are of single birds in the Canada Goose flocks. A trend for pairs to occur in spring prior to 1985 has continued with a pair seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1997 and 5<sup>th</sup> May 1998. In 1978 a pair were in territory at GF in April and May but unfortunately did not breed. Highest

counts we can find were four at WLF on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1986, also 30 over EHF on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1986 heading north-north-west were also of interest as this is the only record of a skein flying over the Flashes. All records probably relate to the growing feral population of England and Wales, or locally escaped birds. We have no evidence of the migratory Iceland population, which winters mainly in Scotland, ever having reached us, although vagrancy is possible.

### **Canada Goose**

*Branta canadensis*

Uncommon breeding resident. Abundant between August and March.

This species has made a dramatic increase since our records began in 1935. Sibson in the 1930s recorded flocks of around 50 but then it was not recorded until after 1963. Still uncommon in 1972 when a flock of 30 in August was thought exceptional. In 1978 recorded between February and October but during the winter of 1979-1980 a small flock of 30 wintered. Since then peak counts have been 170 in October 1983, 302 in September 1984, 470 in October 1993 and 630 in October 1997. The flocks are very mobile visiting most of the Flashes as well as other waters in south-east Cheshire.

Breeding was attempted at the Flashes for the first time in 1972 at WLF and finally successful here in 1977 when a pair reared two young. Breeding has been regular here since and occasional at other flashes.

Two birds with white leg rings seen in January 1998 had been ringed at Pateley Bridge in Yorkshire on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

Two small dark individuals recorded with the main flock at WLF and EHF between 24<sup>th</sup> January and 28<sup>th</sup> February 1998 were considered to be of one of the smaller races and thus potential vagrants, although the likelihood of escape is high.

### **Barnacle Goose**

*Branta leucopsis*

Rare visitor.

Since the first record in 1978 this species has been seen on many occasions, usually singly but on three occasions two together. All records are listed:

- 1978: A pair on 6<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1982: One from 6<sup>th</sup> February until 14<sup>th</sup> March. One on 12<sup>th</sup> April. One on 29<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1983: One on 27<sup>th</sup> February. Two on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. One on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April. One from 22<sup>nd</sup> October into 1984.
- 1984: One seen at various times of the year.
- 1985: One on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> June. One on 28<sup>th</sup> July. One from 15<sup>th</sup> October until the year end.
- 1986: One on 11<sup>th</sup> January. Two on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, one on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. One on 17<sup>th</sup> November.

- 1991: One from 10<sup>th</sup> until 23<sup>rd</sup> February associated with Pink-footed Geese.
- 1993: One on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 16<sup>th</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup> September.
- 1994: One from 17<sup>th</sup> November until 11<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1995: One from 1<sup>st</sup> January until 19<sup>th</sup> February. One from 15<sup>th</sup> until 23<sup>rd</sup> July.
- 1997: One on 5<sup>th</sup> April. One in September and October. One on 16<sup>th</sup> November. One on 28<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1998: One on 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> January. One on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May. One on 4<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1999: One flew over with Pink-footed Geese on 9<sup>th</sup> January.

All records almost certainly of feral birds, the likelihood of true vagrancy seems very remote.

### **Brent Goose**

*Branta bernicla*

Very rare winter visitor. Four records of at least eight birds.

All records are listed:

- 1964: Three at RF from 15<sup>th</sup> until 18<sup>th</sup> March were of the dark-bellied race *B. b. bernicla*.
- 1983: One at EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> December, which arrived and departed with Eurasian Wigeon, was *B. b. bernicla*.
- 1992: Two at EHF on 8<sup>th</sup> November, were *B. b. bernicla*.
- 1997: At least two flew over EHF with a skein of 'Grey' Geese on 1<sup>st</sup> January. Not racially identified.

As yet only the dark-bellied race *B. b. bernicla* has been recorded.

### **Ruddy Shelduck**

*Tadorna ferruginea*

Very rare visitor. Five records of six birds.

- 1946: A pair at EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> August. Considered by many to be wild vagrants.
- 1996: One from 1<sup>st</sup> November until 2<sup>nd</sup> December. This individual was tame and thought most likely to have been a recent escapee.
- 1997: One was present between 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March and may have been the same individual recorded in 1996.
- 1999: One, probably a male, at EHF from 1<sup>st</sup> until 8<sup>th</sup> August, and a different individual, this time a female, from 30<sup>th</sup> August until 26<sup>th</sup> September. With a feral population established now on the Continent it is difficult to make a judgement concerning the origin of these individuals.

**Common Shelduck***Tadorna tadorna*

Uncommon breeding resident and common visitor.

Has increased markedly since our records began in 1935. Sibson had three records of four birds. Whalley reports that it occurred singly most years on passage, but in 1963 there were six on 5<sup>th</sup> September and five on 9<sup>th</sup> October. An exceptional flock of 30-40 were seen on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1969. With an increase in sightings from 1972, this species is recorded in all months with peaks in early spring, for example 29 in March 1989 and 40 in March 1995. Adults are usually absent during the post-breeding moult between early July and September, but a few immatures are normally present at this time.

The first sign of breeding was a pair displaying in 1976 and then two pairs bred, rearing 21 young in 1977. Up to three pairs have attempted to breed annually since then, usually at EHF, but up to 1991 also bred at RF. It has been suggested that breeding began with escaped birds from Maw Green Waterfowl Collection.

**Mandarin Duck***Aix galericulata*

Rare visitor. Many records of probably 21 birds.

All records are listed:

- 1978: A male at EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> November and a female at PHF on 30<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1979: A female on three occasions in January and February.
- 1980: A male at EHF and PHF from 30<sup>th</sup> October until 20<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1981: A male at EHF on 31<sup>st</sup> December.
- 1982: One at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> January.
- 1984: A pair at EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> January. A male at EHF between 28<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October and 3<sup>rd</sup> November.
- 1986: A female at EHF from 18<sup>th</sup> until 28<sup>th</sup> October, and a male on 19<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1987: A male at EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> November and a female between 18<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1988: A pair at FF on 9<sup>th</sup> June.
- 1991: A male on 22<sup>nd</sup> December.
- 1992: A male at EHF on 25<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1997: A male at EHF between 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1998: An eclipse male at EHF and PHF between 5<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1999: A male in eclipse on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> August at EHF. 1 male at EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> December.

With all except one record falling between August and February this supports the theory that these are wandering birds from our feral breeding population rather than recent escapes or releases. This species bred nearby at Crewe Hall between 1987-1989.

**Eurasian Wigeon***Anas penelope*

Abundant winter visitor, rare in summer.

Earliest autumn arrival 23<sup>rd</sup> July, latest in spring 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

Prior to 1963 regarded as a common winter visitor with highest counts of 100 on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1937 and 161 on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1955. Numbers increased between 1963 and December 1985 and are still increasing, particularly since the mid 1990s.

	Maximum day count in each month							
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
1963 to 1985	nc	nc	168	230	302	508	120	nc
1986 to 1999	106	230	400	619	650	620	540	26

The main feeding areas are EHF and PHF but groups fly out to feed around the other Flashes especially RF, OF and CF. The main autumn arrival is from the beginning of October, and in spring most have gone by April. Odd birds or pairs are occasionally seen in summer, and breeding was suspected but not proved in 1976 at RF. For the earliest and latest dates we have only used years when summering individuals have been absent.

**American Wigeon***Anas americana*

Vagrant. One record.

A well-watched female was present from 7<sup>th</sup> October until 6<sup>th</sup> December 1986. It arrived on EHF with a party of 17 Eurasian Wigeon and remained with the Wigeon flock throughout its stay. It spent most of its time on EHF and PHF but visited RF, OF and WF. Accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee as 'age and sex indeterminate'.

**Gadwall***Anas strepera*

Scarce winter visitor between August and May. Very rare in June and July.

The first record was one on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1942 and up until 1963 a further five records have been traced. Frequency of sightings since then have increased, and during the last 20 years it has been annual, except for 1991. Numbers recorded each year are small, usually less than eight birds, although it is increasing and they are staying for longer periods. It has been seen in every month, but a pattern is emerging with most records in autumn and winter. Maximum counts at this time are:- four on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1962; five in December 1996; five on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1997 and up to four from 24<sup>th</sup> September 1998 until January 1999. Pairs have been seen in spring: in 1976 a pair were inspecting reed beds between 22<sup>nd</sup> March and 24<sup>th</sup> April, and two pairs were on WLF on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1997.

## Common Teal

*Anas crecca*

Abundant winter visitor, uncommon during the summer.

Sibson recorded numbers ranging between 150-250 during winters in the second half of the 1930s. During the period up to 1963 regarded as the commonest wintering duck, some good counts were 130 in December 1959 at WLF and 150 on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1963 at EHF. A dramatic increase noted between 1963 and 1985.

	Maximum day count for each month							
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
1963 to 1985	250	465	532	706	971	830	484	227
1986 to 1999	195	450	449	460	865	800	464	348

The two sets of figures are comparable, but while preparing these tables a significant decline was noticeable from 1994 to 1999 with, for example, monthly maximum in this period of 407 on 22 November 1994, 316 on 4 December 1998, and 620 on 22 January 1995.

A few birds summer each year although breeding has never been proved. Some summering individuals are injured birds probably unable to migrate.

*A. c. carolinensis* (Green-winged Teal): This, the North American race of Common Teal, has been seen on at least four occasions. All have been males:

- 1978: One at WLF and EHF from 25<sup>th</sup> March until 17<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1982: One at EHF from 1<sup>st</sup> November until 20<sup>th</sup> March 1983.
- 1986: One at EHF from 30<sup>th</sup> March until 22<sup>nd</sup> April.
- 1998: One at EHF from 8<sup>th</sup> until 31<sup>st</sup> October.

## Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Very common breeding resident. Abundant visitor from July to February.

In the four years Sibson watched the Flashes between 1935-1939 he recorded flocks of up to 100 in July but noted that the numbers declined during the winter months. We have little information for the 1940s and Whalley recorded lower numbers than today with a maximum count of only 75 on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1963. Dramatic increase since 1970, especially in the moulting flock which assembles at EHF and PHF annually from late May to July. Numbers are usually between 200-400 birds but an exceptional count of 706 on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1997. They often fly out into neighbouring stubble fields to feed. During the winter the counts are quite variable, but are usually lower than the late summer totals, as noticed by Sibson. Normally around 200 are present but counts of 508 in December and 415 in January have been made.

Breeds at all flashes annually and this species is our commonest breeding duck with nine broods counted in 1974, and an estimated 14 to 20 broods in 1985. We have no recent counts.

**Northern Pintail***Anas acuta*

Uncommon winter visitor, very rare in the summer months.

Prior to 1964 this species was very rare with only five records and a best count of four on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1954. Irregular between 1964 and 1971 but with some high counts, for example, 33 on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1964 and 15 in February 1965 (date lost). A small group started to over winter during 1971/1972 and over the following few years the numbers rapidly increased. They became a familiar sight and one of the Flashes' major attractions during the winter months, although in recent winters numbers have been declining.

	Maximum day count for each month								
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
1971 to 1985	6	15	42	69	69	68	65	70	6
1986 to 1999	3	11	11	18	30	30	32	38	11

They are normally found on EHF and PHF but also visit the other Flashes, especially RF. Birds start appearing for the winter in August although these could be passage migrants; October is the main arrival period and most have gone by March.

The only records for the period May to July are:

- 1978: One on 11<sup>th</sup> July.
- 1979: A pair on 1<sup>st</sup> May.
- 1981: Two birds seen on two occasions in June and July.
- 1985: A pair throughout May and a male seen twice in July.
- 1988: A female summered.
- 1996: A male on 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May.

**Garganey***Anas querquedula*

Rare summer visitor and passage migrant. Has bred once.

Earliest in spring 3<sup>rd</sup> March, latest in autumn 17<sup>th</sup> November.

This species was seen on three occasions by Sibson in the second half of the 1930s. Whalley in his 'Checklist of the Sandbach Flashes' lists many records and stated it as an annual visitor in ones and twos. Today's status is the same and since 1985 it has been seen annually, except for 1991 and 1993, hence its classification as rare. It is only seen in very small numbers, usually less than five birds each year, although often birds stay for long spells, especially in autumn. The majority of records fall between the end of April and May, and between July to early October.

Pairs have been seen together in spring on several occasions, most recently on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1989. Breeding was suspected in 1969 with a pair present from 24<sup>th</sup> April until 3<sup>rd</sup> June, and then a group of nine were seen in



August. Definitely bred in 1975 when two males and a female were seen on 18<sup>th</sup> May, and a female flushed from eggs at RF on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, then eight were seen together in August, so presumably successful. In 1976 a pair summered but there was no evidence of breeding other than a group of five seen in August.

### **Northern Shoveler**

*Anas clypeata*

Uncommon visitor. Irregular breeder.

Sibson's highest count in the late 1930s was only eight. Little information after this until the 1960s when 23 were seen on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1962. An increase in numbers occurred between 1972 and 1978 with a peak count of 72 in September 1975. Since 1975 counts have again been smaller, for reasons unknown.

	Maximum day count for each month								
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
1972 to 1978	44	72	70	64	65	40	34	33	13
1979 to 1999	11	32	31	12	10	17	12	12	13

Some of the best counts since 1978 were in 1999 when the breaching of the embankment of the River Wheelock at EHF caused flooding of the saltpan.

Breeding has been proved on four occasions:

1939: A female with eight ducklings on the Fowle Brook at PHF.

1964: One pair reared two young.

1966: Two juveniles seen on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

1976: One female with recently hatched brood on 14<sup>th</sup> June.

There have been no recent breeding records but a few birds are present in most summers and display is often seen in spring, for example, two pairs displaying on PHF on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

### **Red-crested Pochard**

*Netta rufina*

Very rare visitor. Five records.

1974: A male in eclipse on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> October, a female on EHF from 30<sup>th</sup> November until 22<sup>nd</sup> December.

1980: A female on PHF and EHF from 25<sup>th</sup> until 31<sup>st</sup> August.

1986: A male at EHF and WLF on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

1999: One at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> July was an eclipse male.

The origins of our birds are open to debate, in the authors' views the feral likelihood is high.

**Common Pochard***Aythya ferina*

Uncommon winter visitor, rare in summer.

Sibson reported that this species was a regular winter visitor in small numbers of 12-16 birds between 1935-1939. It then increased as Whalley reports that it was a common winter visitor in the period up to 1963, with a maximum count of 80 at WLF in March 1954. A regular wintering flock became established roosting during the day at WLF, highest counts made during the 1960s were 111 on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1966, and an amazing 550 on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1968.

## Maximum day count for each month between 1970 and 1981

Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
14	45	190	105	209	108	75	20

This flock roosted during the day at WLF but often groups would fly out in the evening to feed on other waters. Due, we think to disturbance, the birds moved away from WLF to PHF and RF, suffering a decline in numbers in the process. Silting of PHF made it unsuitable for diving ducks with a subsequent decline in numbers.

## Maximum day count for each month since January 1986

Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
3	7	16	22	27	36	23	4

Very rare in mid-summer but an interesting series of records for June: one pair at PHF and RF in June 1987; three at EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and one on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1997; a male at EHF on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1998, and a female on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1999. Has not bred at the Flashes.

**Tufted Duck***Aythya fuligula*

Uncommon breeding resident, fairly common winter visitor.

The status of this species has changed little during the period covered by this report, they seem to have been able to cope with silting better than Common Pochard, and to be more at home on the smaller flashes like GF, OF and PF.

Sibson in the 1930s knew it as mainly a winter visitor with a maximum count of 75 on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1937.

## Maximum day count for each month during the 1970s

Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
45	65	84	59	61

Since then some decline is evident with small numbers spread over various flashes. Best combined counts have been 48 in February 1986 and 56 in early winter 1998. Probably an irregular breeder before 1975, now breeds annually with up to four pairs.

**Greater Scaup***Aythya marila*

Rare passage migrant and visitor.

We have traced a total of 25 records involving 32 birds.

All records, using the first date only											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
3	1	5	1	1	0	0	1	3	6	2	2

The March total is interesting and appears to indicate a spring passage. Most sightings are of singles but three were seen on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1960 and 11<sup>th</sup> September 1977. There have only been two records since 1985, which is a sharp drop compared with the 1970s, and perhaps a consequence of silting at PHF and EHF.

**Common Eider***Somateria mollissima*

Vagrant. One record.

A female was at WLF on 1st November 1993 and occurred during an unprecedented influx of birds inland to Cheshire and the Midlands.

**Long-tailed Duck***Clangula hyemalis*

Very rare visitor. Three records.

1966: A female or immature male at WLF between 13<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November.

1982: A female or immature male at WLF on 4<sup>th</sup> January.

1983: A summer plumage male at RF on 24<sup>th</sup> April.

**Black (Common) Scoter***Melanitta nigra*

Very rare visitor and passage migrant. 14 records of 28 birds.

The records fall neatly into two periods, May to July with six records and September to January with eight records. The two May records are probably spring migrants on overland passage, but the June and July records are presumably moult migrants with three out of the four records involving males.

**May to July**

One male on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1936  
 One male on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1978  
 One female on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1980  
 One male on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1981  
 One female on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1986  
 Two males on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1996

**September to January**

One juvenile on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1937  
 One on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1963  
 One male on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1969  
 One male on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1985  
 24 on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1991 (two males and 22 females)  
 One female on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1992  
 One female on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1993  
 One on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1994

12 out of the 14 records were singletons, also none of the 14 records stayed longer than one day.

### **Common Goldeneye**

*Bucephala clangula*

Scarce winter visitor. Very rare in the summer months.

Earliest arrival 18<sup>th</sup> October, latest in spring 24<sup>th</sup> April.

A surprisingly scarce bird at the Flashes, with usually less than three records a year, although individuals sometimes stay for long periods.

Very rare prior to 1963 with only five records totalling seven birds.

Became more frequent between 1963 and 1980 with an exceptional count of 30 on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1969. Since 1985 most sightings have been of singles, except four were present between 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November 1987 and three at WLF on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1998. Perhaps rarer of late with silting on PHF and EHF confining most sightings to RF and WLF.

The only summer records are a male at WLF and CF between May and October 1967 and an interesting record of three on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1984, perhaps best regarded as very early winter birds or moult migrants.

### **Smew**

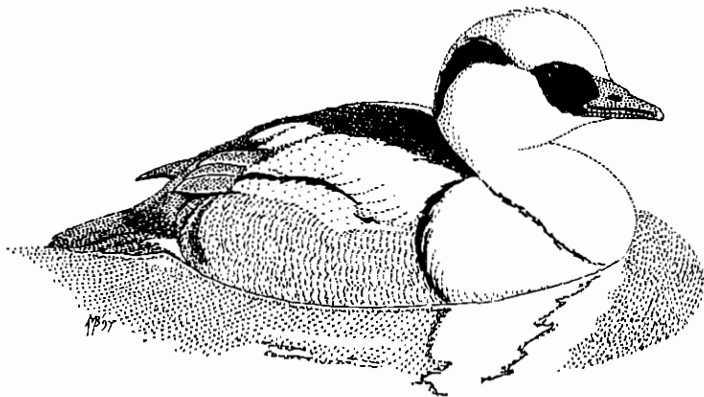
*Mergellus albellus*

Very rare winter visitor. Four records of at least three birds.

1976: A female at EHF on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December.

1977: A female on 23<sup>rd</sup> January and 27<sup>th</sup> March.

1979: A pair on EHF and PHF from 7<sup>th</sup> January until 1<sup>st</sup> March with the female remaining until 4<sup>th</sup> March.



**Red-breasted Merganser***Mergus serrator*

Very rare visitor. Four records of eight birds.

- 1976: A pair at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> April  
1978: Three males alighted for five minutes at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.  
1979: A pair over PF on 2<sup>nd</sup> June.  
1989: A female at WLF on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

**Goosander***Mergus merganser*

Scarce visitor between July and April.

Earliest autumn arrival 14<sup>th</sup> July, latest in spring 22<sup>nd</sup> April.

With only one record before 1964 this species has since increased, especially after 1974. It has been annual since 1988, normally less than five records a year, but eight records in 1999. The vast majority of sightings are of singles, many of which are fly-overs. However some good counts have been made such as a group of 11 present on three dates between 26<sup>th</sup> March and 7<sup>th</sup> April 1939. Also 10 were at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1979; six on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1988 and three on 25<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> January 1997. All records fall in the months July to April but with September to January the best period.

**Ruddy Duck***Oxyura jamaicensis*

Uncommon breeding summer visitor. Rare in winter.

The first record for the Flashes was a male at WLF on 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1972. In 1973 a male was at EHF between 9<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> June, and then a female on 11<sup>th</sup> August. Then there were no more sightings until 1976 when colonisation began in earnest with four males and a female arriving on 18<sup>th</sup> May, increasing to eight birds by 7<sup>th</sup> June. They preferred WLF at first but visited other flashes and bred unsuccessfully on PHF. The last record for the year was on 9<sup>th</sup> October.

1977 produced a similar pattern with a pair breeding successfully at WLF. Has bred or attempted to breed annually since then with favourite breeding localities being PF, RF, OF and GF. PHF is now unsuitable because of silting, but a pair bred on the flooded saltpan in 1999 after the breaching of the embankment by the River Wheelock. We estimate up to four pairs have attempted to breed each year in the 1990s, but proof is often lacking other than displaying and breeding success seems to be poor.

**European Honey-buzzard***Pernis apivorus*

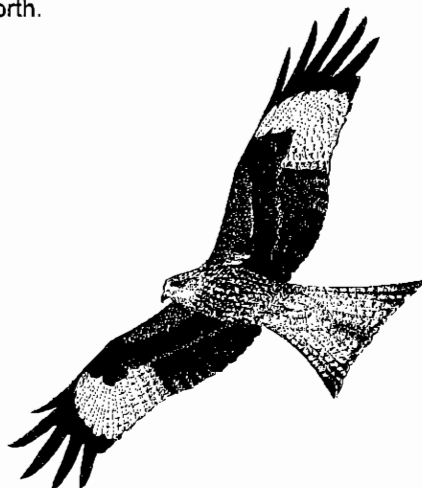
Vagrant. One record.

One seen in flight over EHF on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1995.

**Red Kite***Milvus milvus*

Vagrant. One record.

An adult on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1998 flew low over EHF being mobbed by corvids. It was then watched soaring over WLF and FF area whilst gaining height and slowly drifting north.

**Eurasian Marsh Harrier***Circus aeruginosus*

Very rare passage migrant. Six records.

- 1980: A female or immature male flew south-east over RF on 7<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1984: A female or immature male flew south-west over EHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> April.
- 1991: A female over WLF on 15<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1992: A female over WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1997: An immature at RF on 17<sup>th</sup> August was seen again on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1999: A female or immature through EHF and PHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

**Hen Harrier***Circus cyaneus*

Very rare autumn and winter visitor. Six records.

- 1980: An immature high over EHF heading south on 19<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1982: A female through EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. An adult male through EHF on 31<sup>st</sup> December.
- 1988: A female over EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1993: One over on 11<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1998: A first winter low over fields at EHF on 1<sup>st</sup> January flew off north-west.

**Northern Goshawk***Accipiter gentilis*

Vagrant. Two records.

1997: A male over EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> February.1998: A female over PHF being harried by corvids on 7<sup>th</sup> October.**Eurasian Sparrowhawk***Accipiter nisus*

Uncommon breeding resident, fairly common visitor.

Known by Sibson between 1935-1939 as a regular visitor to the Flashes and a breeding bird in the Sandbach area. He stated that it was 'Quite often seen about hedgerows at Elton, especially in autumn when Fieldfares and Redwings were common'. Its status presumably remained the same until the early 1950s, although details are lacking. The national catastrophic decline of this species has been well documented and was due to DDT pesticide poisoning. At the Flashes this decline resulted in no sightings after 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1954 (when one was at EHF) until at least 1966. It was still rare in 1972, and in 1973 up to three were around EHF between September and December. For the rest of the 1970s it was chiefly an autumn and winter visitor, seen almost daily, but an increase in summer sightings led to confirmed breeding at Rookery Bridge in 1984 and at FF in 1985. Since 1992 at least one pair has bred annually but two pairs bred in 1993. It is the commonest raptor at the Flashes, especially in winter, when almost daily sightings from EHF and PHF and regularly observed from WLF and RF. It is difficult to estimate the population in winter but three different individuals have been seen in a day at EHF.

**Common Buzzard***Buteo buteo*

Uncommon visitor and passage migrant.

This has been a difficult species to classify due to a rapid increase in sightings since 1993. The first record for the Flashes was as recently as 21<sup>st</sup> August 1972. Up to 1992 it was a very rare passage migrant with two spring records (15<sup>th</sup> April 1979 and 31<sup>st</sup> May 1992) and 11 autumn records in August and September. There were also two winter records on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1975 and 27<sup>th</sup> December 1988.

Since 1993 its increase has been dramatic:

- 1993: Eight records. Seen in January, March, August and November. Maximum count five over on 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1994: Three records. Seen in March, April and August.
- 1995: 10 records. Recorded April, May and August to November.
- 1996: 16 records. Seen in all months except January, May, July and August. Maximum count three over on 29<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1997: 15 records. Recorded March, April and between July and October.

- 1998: 43 records. Recorded all months except December. Maximum counts four over on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and five over on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- 1999: 51 records. Recorded in every month. Maximum counts: four on 12<sup>th</sup> June; four on 28<sup>th</sup> August; four on 1<sup>st</sup> September; nine on 12<sup>th</sup> September.

It has yet to breed at the Flashes, but has done so nearby at Bradwall, north of PF. There is some evidence to show that this pair were using the Flashes for hunting during the summer months in 1998 and 1999.

This local increase is part of a county-wide trend where 18 territory holding pairs in Cheshire in 1994 increased to 161 in 1999.

### **Osprey**

*Pandion haliaetus*

Very rare passage migrant. Many records of at least 10 birds.

All records listed:

- 1976: One over RF on 17<sup>th</sup> April. Perhaps the same bird on 20<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1978: One on 17<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1979: One at RF intermittently from 29<sup>th</sup> July until 25<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1981: One over EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> June.
- 1986: One flew south over RF on 8<sup>th</sup> September being mobbed by corvids.
- 1987: One caught a fish at FF on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1993: One over PHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. One over EHF 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- 1996: One over EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1998: One over EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> April.

This is still a very rare bird at the Flashes with only four records during the well-watched 1990s. Our small, shallow flashes are perhaps not suitable for this species and hence many of our records are fly-overs.

### **Common Kestrel**

*Falco tinnunculus*

Irregular breeding resident, uncommon visitor.

The status of this species appears to have altered little since 1935. Recorded regularly by Sibson in the 1930s and Whalley in his checklist up to 1963, although neither stated that it bred at the Flashes. In the early 1970s it bred in the glue factory chimney stack by Rookery Bridge, along with Barn Owl, until it was demolished. Since 1985 it has been recorded throughout the year annually, showing it to be resident, with three together on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1990, the highest count. Breeding has been proved in 1990 at PHF; 1993 near EHF; 1994 near EHF; 1998 near MGT. Has probably bred in the other years, except 1995 when there were very few summer records, but proof was lacking. We have very few records from the under-watched WF and TLF, fieldwork in this area could reveal more birds.



**Merlin***Falco columbarius*

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor. One summer record.

Earliest in autumn 20<sup>th</sup> August, latest in spring 6<sup>th</sup> May.

Not recorded at the Flashes until 1966 but intensive coverage since 1970 has shown this species to be almost annual. For example, in the 14 years since 1985 it was seen in 10 of these years.

All records showing their monthly occurrence are given in the table below. Duplication of records is a problem with this species, for example, a male seen on 13<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1996 is listed in the table as three separate records, although it is possible only one bird was involved:

All records, using the first date only											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
5	4	14	9	1	0	0	3	6	27	18	5

The table shows peaks at spring passage in March and April, and autumn passage in October and November, with occasional winter sightings. It invariably occurs singly, although two different individuals have been seen in one day. The number of records obscure the fact that this is a rare bird and difficult to see, as our year listers will testify. We have had only one summering individual (not shown in the above table) and that concerned a well-documented female which stayed at EHF from 23<sup>rd</sup> June until 11<sup>th</sup> August 1981.

The majority of sightings are from WLF, EHF, PHF and RF areas and usually involves birds flying through, but occasionally perched birds are seen. We have several recent records of birds hunting around the bird feeding station at EHF.

**Eurasian Hobby***Falco subbuteo*

Rare summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 24<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 7<sup>th</sup> October.

The first record for the Flashes was one at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1974. By the end of 1985 there had been a total of 12 records between May and September. Surprisingly none were seen in the three years between 1986 and 1988, hence its classification as rare.

Annual since 1989, a summary for each year is given below:

1989: A juvenile seen on 6<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> August.

1990: One on 20<sup>th</sup> July.

1991: One on 9<sup>th</sup> August.

1992: One on 7<sup>th</sup> October.

1993: One on 14<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August and 4<sup>th</sup> September.

1994: Nine records between 28<sup>th</sup> May and 10<sup>th</sup> September. An adult and juvenile together chasing Common Swifts at EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> August.

- 1995: 16 records between 14<sup>th</sup> May and 10<sup>th</sup> September. A juvenile seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.
- 1996: 14 records between 8<sup>th</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> September. A juvenile seen on 27<sup>th</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup> September.
- 1997: 13 records between 20<sup>th</sup> July and 28<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1998: 32 records between 24<sup>th</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1999: 17 records between 8<sup>th</sup> May and 18<sup>th</sup> September.

As far as we know, this species has not bred at the Flashes but may have bred nearby in most of the years since 1994. The only evidence for this, however, are regular summer sightings and the appearance of juveniles some years in autumn. Noteworthy were two adults, probably a pair, hunting together low over fields at RF on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1996.

This species is best looked for during late summer evenings at EHF when it often hunts hirundines, with August and early September being the best months.

### **Peregrine Falcon**

*Falco peregrinus*

Uncommon visitor.

R.B. Sibson was a great pioneering field observer. His 'Notes on Birds of Sandbach, S.E. Cheshire' 1935-39, is full of original field observations. (He later emigrated to New Zealand and wrote the 'Collins Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand'). Both he and P.D. Whalley, who wrote 'The Checklist of the Birds of the Sandbach Flashes' in 1963, failed to see this species at the Flashes. It was not until 1972 that at last this species was added to the list with a female present from 3<sup>rd</sup> until 14<sup>th</sup> October. More records followed up until 1985, but especially noteworthy was an adult male that began wintering on the pylons near RF during the winter of 1982-1983. It is thought that this was the same male that wintered here until at least the winter of 1988-1989, and was the forerunner to a regular pattern of birds wintering at the Flashes. A summary of records from 1986 is given:

- 1986: The usual wintering male was seen in January and then from 7<sup>th</sup> September until the year-end.
- 1987: The usual male from 1986 stayed until 8<sup>th</sup> April. Immature female and adult male back in August and September respectively.
- 1988: Three different individuals up to 3<sup>rd</sup> April. The first July records for the Flashes on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. One adult male from 16<sup>th</sup> August to year-end.
- 1989: The male was present until 7<sup>th</sup> April. One from 5<sup>th</sup> September to year-end.
- 1990: Only records from 12<sup>th</sup> August until year-end.
- 1991: Three sightings in February. Recorded every month from May to December with at least two different birds.
- 1992: One seen up to 3<sup>rd</sup> April and from 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

- 1993: One until 8<sup>th</sup> March. At least one adult and two immatures from 20<sup>th</sup> July until year-end.
- 1994: One until 17<sup>th</sup> March and up to two from 8<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1995: Recorded all months except April and June. Two birds at year-end.
- 1996: Recorded all months except June. Three were seen on 15<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1997: Recorded all months except May. One male and two females together over EHF on 25<sup>th</sup> January.
- 1998: Recorded every month. Two birds together on many occasions.
- 1999: Recorded every month. Three together on 12<sup>th</sup> September and three wintering until year-end.

This species is now a regular sight hunting over RF and EHF or perched on the pylons behind PHF. Hunting birds visit the other Flashes regularly especially WLF and MGT. It is possible that many of our sightings are of birds from the breeding site at Beeston, 13 miles to the west or Northwich 9 miles north-west.

### **Red-legged Partridge**

*Alectoris rufa*

Very rare visitor. Seven records (discounting the 1987 possible hybrid).

- 1985: One at WLF on 7<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1987: One at WLF on 4<sup>th</sup> February. This individual was possibly a *Alectoris rufa x chukar* hybrid.
- 1993: One at WLF on 3<sup>rd</sup> May.
- 1996: One at WLF on 2<sup>nd</sup> and at EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1999: One at WLF between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> January. One at WLF on 9<sup>th</sup> February. One at EHF on 1<sup>st</sup> August.

This species is reared and released by shooting syndicates at several sites in S.E. Cheshire. Our records are no doubt these birds, but at a local level we doubt whether the population is self-supporting. However, they do breed at nearby Bent Farm Sand Quarry and in the Doddington area.

### **Grey Partridge**

*Perdix perdix*

Very rare visitor. Irregular breeder.

Between 1935-1939 Sibson does not give any specific records for the Flashes but does report that it was thinly spread throughout the Sandbach area. Whalley in his report summarising all records up to 1963 says it was usually seen on farmland towards Warrington. Perhaps more regular during the 1970s when breeding was proved in 1973 and 1975. Sightings during this decade came regularly from PF, PHF, RF, EHF and FFF. Arable fields along the footpath between PHF and RF produced many sightings, including a covey of 20 on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1980.

A decrease in sightings noted by 1985 (only one record) and the only records since are:

- 1986: Five near PHF on 5<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1993: One near WLF calling on 24<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1996: A pair at PHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> March.
- 1998: Two at PF on 7<sup>th</sup> May were calling.

### **Common Quail**

*Coturnix coturnix*

Vagrant. Two records of three birds.

- 1977: A pair were in a hay field near FFF between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> June. The male was constantly calling and flushed on several occasions. There were no sightings after the field was mown on 14<sup>th</sup>.
- 1989: One calling in a barley field south of FFF in the Wheelock Valley on 28<sup>th</sup> June. It could be heard from the railway embankment by the pipes.

### **Common Pheasant**

*Phasianus colchicus*

Uncommon resident. Has bred, but current breeding status unclear.

Not specifically recorded at the Flashes by Sibson in the 1930s, and the only record quoted by Whalley was one at WLF on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1962. Goodwin and Talbot mention a resident population in the FF, PF and WLF areas which were originally introduced and still fed on a regular basis. This colony bred annually up to 1985 with a maximum count of 12 in November 1973. Since 1985 this species is under-recorded and mostly ignored by birders, so records are few. The only definite breeding record was in 1998 when three juveniles were seen at FF on 14<sup>th</sup> August. Counts of 14 (5 males and 9 females) on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1985; eight on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1990 and six at CF on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1991, but lower numbers since. Most records are still from the FF and WLF areas but an increased number of recent sightings from EHF, and even the MGT area. Another recent trend has been of up to three feeding around the feeding station at EHF.

### **Water Rail**

*Rallus aquaticus*

Uncommon winter visitor, very rare in summer. Has bred at least once.

Noted in the 1930s by Sibson although he does not give any dates or localities. Whalley, in his summary of all records up to 1963, gives a total of five records between August and January with the first record on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1942. Since 1963 it has been found to be a regular visitor between August and March. It usually arrives in October although odd birds are seen irregularly in August and September. In an average year up to seven may winter, but up to 40 were present in early December 1973, and still 15 present between January and March 1974. More recently a total of nine were scattered around the Flashes in October 1998. Seen most frequently at FF

and EHF, and more often heard at WLF, PHF, RF, GF and PF. It is often easier to see this secretive species after hard frosts when it is forced to feed in more open areas.

Although suspected of breeding at EHF and FF in 1966 and at FF in the 1970s, it was not finally proved until 1985 when a pair with a chick were seen at FF on 6<sup>th</sup> July. Immatures had also been seen here in August 1983 and 1984.

### **Spotted Crane**

*Porzana porzana*

Very rare autumn visitor. 10 records of at least seven birds.

All records listed:

- 1970: One at WLF from 19<sup>th</sup> September until 10<sup>th</sup> October. This was a well-watched but extremely secretive bird.
- 1973: One at RF on 30<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> August, and on PHF from 12<sup>th</sup> until 24<sup>th</sup> August. All records probably referring to the same individual.
- 1976: One at WLF from 18<sup>th</sup> until 23<sup>rd</sup> August and probably the same bird again from 29<sup>th</sup> August until 8<sup>th</sup> September. One at GF on 22<sup>nd</sup> August.
- 1986: One at WLF on 21<sup>st</sup> September.
- 1995: One well-watched individual at EHF from 5<sup>th</sup> August until 4<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1998: One from 9<sup>th</sup> until 15<sup>th</sup> September at EHF was another well-watched bird.

### **Corn Crane**

*Crex crex*

Former summer visitor.

In 1937 one heard calling between PHF and RF on 6<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> July. In 1938 one heard calling at Moston in an area that is now Foden's Flash, on 19<sup>th</sup> May. These are the only records.

### **Common Moorhen**

*Gallinula chloropus*

Very common breeding resident.

Sibson regarded this species as being common, and after cold weather he counted 60 at EHF. Whalley counted 45 at EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1962, and a breeding population of 30-35 pairs in the area. More recently co-ordinated counts of all Flashes have revealed counts of 152 on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1989 and 85 on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1998. We have no recent counts of breeding pairs but we think the population is stable, and we estimate a minimum of 30 pairs.

### Common Coot

*Fulica atra*

Very common breeding resident and visitor.

Regarded as common by both Sibson and Whalley with a good count of 186 at WLF on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1955. Goodwin and Talbot quoted the following maximum daily counts in each winter month for 1970 to 1985, and comparable figures for 1986 to 1999 have been prepared:

	All records, using the first date only							
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1970-1985	560	498	223	130	255	223	444	375
1986-1999	323	107	42	46	59	134	160	160

These figures show a marked decline especially notable during the 1990s. Co-ordinated counts of all Flashes produced 141 on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1989 and 172 on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1998. A large exodus is often noted in severe frosts, and at other times our resident population is swollen by immigrants. During the winter, flocks favour WLF, PHF and EHF where they graze on the adjacent fields.

Sibson estimated 25 pairs breeding at the Flashes between 1935-1939. Since then 34 pairs bred in 1977, 65 pairs in 1978 and 68 pairs in 1979. No recent counts. Breeds on all the main Flashes.

### Common Crane

*Grus grus*

Vagrant. One record.

An adult landed in a stubble field behind PHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1997 at 12.55 hrs., it was seen by many birders until it flew north at 15.45 hrs. It was back in the same field at between 12.30 and 14.00 hrs. on 8<sup>th</sup> November and from mid-morning to 13.00 hrs. on 9<sup>th</sup> November.

### Eurasian Oystercatcher

*Haematopus ostralegus*

Uncommon visitor between February and August. Rare at other times.

Very rare prior to 1964 with only three records of singles on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1937, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1939 and 21<sup>st</sup> September 1962. Recorded annually from 1970 to 1984, mostly in spring, with maximum count of four on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1983. From 1985 to 1999 a pattern is emerging of its status: they arrive in late winter, formerly March but earlier in recent years, with the earliest date 8<sup>th</sup> February. The highest count in spring was eight on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1988. Courtship and copulation was first seen in the spring of 1985 and has been seen regularly since then. A pair may have bred locally, although not inside the Flashes boundary, in 1985, 1986 and 1987, but it was not proven. By June and July most have left our area, presumably returning to the coast, and from August to January they are rarely seen and irregular.

**Black-winged Stilt***Himantopus himantopus*

Vagrant. One record of three birds.

- 1993: Three birds, a male, female and an immature, landed at PHF at 08.50 hrs. on 25<sup>th</sup> April. They were seen by four very lucky observers who managed to photograph them before they flew off at 10.00 hrs. These were the same birds which had been present on Anglesey from 10<sup>th</sup>, and at Inner Marsh Farm in Cheshire from the 22<sup>nd</sup>. After visiting the Flashes they then settled down to breed unsuccessfully at Frodsham Marsh.

**Pied Avocet***Recurvirostra avosetta*

Very rare visitor. Three records of 13 birds.

- 1968: One on 9<sup>th</sup> September.  
1974: 10 at WLF on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> May had declined to just three on 5<sup>th</sup>, and they stayed until the 7<sup>th</sup>. Display and copulation was observed. Seen by many birdwatchers during their stay, often at close range.  
1999: A pair was present at EHF and PHF from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> May. Seen by over a hundred admiring birdwatchers during their stay of six days. They were seen copulating on several occasions, and were also photographed.

**Little Ringed Plover***Charadrius dubius*

Uncommon breeding summer visitor. Fairly common passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 6<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 16<sup>th</sup> October.

Sibson's diaries record an unidentified plover seen on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1939 which in retrospect he considered may have been this species, which was still a rare bird in Britain at that time. The first confirmed record came in early autumn 1961, and breeding the next year with two pairs rearing six young. To our knowledge has bred annually since, with peaks of five pairs in 1973 and seven pairs in 1975 and 1977.

Since 1985 between one and three pairs have bred each year. Recent breeding sites have been EHF, PHF, RF, Canal Pool and Foden's test track. WLF has probably been lost as a breeding site due to disturbance and vegetation growth around the water's edge. The main spring arrival time is around the end of March. After breeding, congregations are noted in late summer on the saltpan, the highest daily counts in each month are:- June 27; July 22; August 25; September 9.

Numbers since 1985 have, however, been lower than this with maximum July counts of 17 in 1987 and 1999. Most have gone by early September with only stragglers recorded into October.

### **Common Ringed Plover**

*Charadrius hiaticula*

Fairly common passage migrant. Very rare in November and December.

Earliest arrival 5<sup>th</sup> February, latest in autumn 11<sup>th</sup> October.

Recorded by Sibson as a passage migrant in the 1930s, chiefly in May, with a count of five his maximum. Whalley gave its status up to 1963 as a regular passage migrant and he gave two good counts: 16 on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1962 and 18 on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1963. Since 1963 spring passage has been noted from early February, peaking from April to mid-June. Highest daily counts in each spring month prior to 1985 were: April 36; May 40; June 28. Since 1985 best counts have been 30 on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1995, 32 between 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> May 1998 and 27 on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1998. As with many of our passage wader species it is difficult to differentiate between spring and autumn migrants, and the many records from late June and early July fall into this category. Autumn passage is mainly from late July through to early October. Flock sizes are smaller but birds tend to linger around the Flashes for longer than they do in spring. Peak daily counts are July 15; August 15; September 24. Very rare in the winter months with a few records for November, only one record in December (one on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1999) and not yet recorded in January.

One pair held territory at EHF in June 1976 with display flight observed on 5<sup>th</sup> June and a breeding attempt was suspected, but not proved and certainly unsuccessful.

Most sightings are from the saltpan and EHF, also PHF, WLF and RF.

### **Kentish Plover**

*Charadrius alexandrinus*

Vagrant. One record.

The only record is of one with a Common Ringed Plover on the evening of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1937 on PHF. This was the rarest species recorded by Sibson, and he was familiar with Kentish Plovers, seeing them annually on his holidays on the Continent.



## European Golden Plover

*Pluvialis apricaria*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Earliest autumn arrival 13<sup>th</sup> July, latest departure 9<sup>th</sup> May.

Sibson, regarding its status in the 1930s wrote 'Single birds or very small parties, always in a hurry to be gone, were occasionally seen in February, March and July.'

Whalley gave a nice count of 60 on the ground at RF on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1959. In the 1970s flocks of 110 were seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1975 and 45 on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1976. Good numbers were recorded from 1985 until 1996. This coincided with a roost of up to 700 on nearby Cledford Lane Settlement Lagoons near Middlewich each winter (two miles north-west of WF). During the day these birds would fly out to feed on neighbouring farmland around Brereton, Holmes Chapel and Middlewich, and sometimes they would alight at the Flashes amongst the Northern Lapwings. This resulted in some good counts, for example: 190 on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1985; 438 on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1992; 338 on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1993 and up to 400 in January 1996. The demise of the wintering flock at Cledford Lane since late 1996 was due to work filling over the beds, resulting in a sharp drop of records at the Flashes. However, 200 flew over on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1998 and 101 were seen on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1999.

Most have departed by late March although birds in breeding plumage are regularly recorded up to the second week in April. Rare in May and has never been recorded in June. The first of the autumn are moulting adults in August, rarely in July, but not regularly recorded until October and November.

## Grey Plover

*Pluvialis squatarola*

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

We have traced 37 records involving 47 birds. The first record was one from 27<sup>th</sup> October until 6<sup>th</sup> November 1935.

All records, using the first date only

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
3	0	2	0	10	1	1	1	2	9	5	3

This species does not occur annually hence its status classification as rare. Since 1985 it has occurred in all but five years. The majority of sightings are of single birds, however, four were at EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1963 and five on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1995. Birds only rarely stay longer than a day. The table shows records peak in May and October when it occurs as passage migrants. In May most of the individuals are in summer plumage often occurring on the saltpan along with other passage waders, such as Dunlin and Sanderling.

### Northern Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*

Uncommon breeding resident, abundant in late summer and winter.

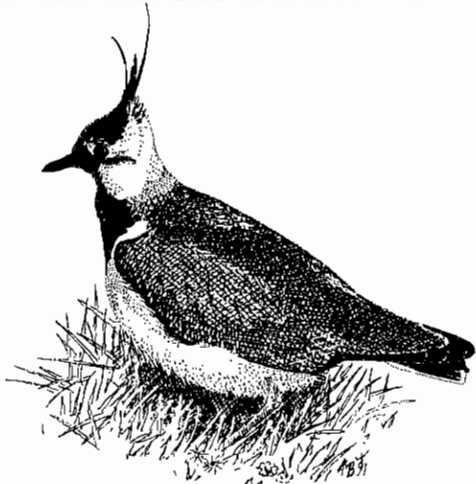
Between 1935-39 Sibson witnessed a similar distribution pattern as today. He said flocking began at the end of May and by mid-June 200 birds would be present. By the end of July this flock would number 1000 birds, and by winter many thousands, but would fluctuate according to the weather. Whalley mentions some sizeable flocks such as 2000 at RF in November 1954 and 2000 at WLF on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963. The 1970s produced very high counts with 5000 recorded for every month between September and March, with 7000 in September and November. Since 1985 numbers have been lower, the best counts we have traced are:

Maximum day count for each month between 1986 and 1999

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
4000	3000	1300	10	39	600	1500	1400	2000	1000	2000	2000

Hard weather movements are characteristic of this species with the majority departing to the south-west during frost and snow in winter. They quickly return with the onset of milder weather.

Sibson mentions that they bred throughout the district in the 1930s but fails to give us any counts. Five pairs were incubating at EHF in June 1963 all within 200 yards of each other. Has declined but still breeds annually in arable fields around the Flashes as well as on EHF marsh. Eight pairs bred in 1973 and four pairs in 1985, but since 1985 usually less than five pairs each year, except for 1998 when seven pairs bred. They can be seen displaying over fields in March and April but the breeding success rate is poor, being affected by modern farming practices and the large corvid population.



### Red Knot

*Calidris canutus*

Rare passage migrant, very rare in winter.

We have traced a total of 45 records of 78 birds.

All records, using the first date only

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	1	3	2	0	7	6	15	5	4	2

The table shows that they very rarely occur on spring passage between March and May, with only six records, the March record, however, involving our

largest flock of 20 on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1981. The April and May sightings are of birds usually in breeding plumage. More regularly encountered in autumn, although not annual, the highest counts have been four on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1956 and four on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1997. All recent records have been from EHF and PHF, but many of the pre-1985 records were from RF and WLF.

### **Sanderling**

*Calidris alba*

Rare passage migrant, one winter record.

F.J. Brown found the first for the Flashes on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1941. Only three further records up to 1963 but since then recorded in the majority of years. Not annual, however, hence the status definition as rare. Spring passage has been recorded from 4<sup>th</sup> April through until early June. Commonest in May with maximum counts of 14 on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1967, 12 on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1973 and 30 on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1994, and a good June count of 12 on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1975. These spring birds are usually in transitional or full breeding dress and often occur alongside Dunlin, Common Ringed Plover and sometimes Ruddy Turnstone, Little Stint or Curlew Sandpiper.

Witnessing a mixed bag of spring waders at EHF in May may be one of the year's highlights for our local birders. We have three end of June records but it is difficult to know whether these are spring or autumn passage birds. Autumn passage is from 18<sup>th</sup> July through to 20<sup>th</sup> October. Numbers are smaller than in spring and much more irregular, in fact only two autumn records have occurred since 1985 and both in July. Highest autumn count is three on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1946. The only winter record was one at EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1986. All recent records have come from EHF and PHF.

### **Little Stint**

*Calidris minuta*

Very rare spring and rare autumn passage migrant. Two winter records.

Rather surprisingly this species was not seen at the Flashes until 1959 when one was at WLF on 11<sup>th</sup> September. It has been regular since 1964 and we think that it has been seen every year except for 1989. For this reason we have had to classify it as rare although scarce would be a better description for its autumn status. It is very rare in spring, we have traced at least 12 records between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 19<sup>th</sup> June, with three on 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> June 1981 the maximum daily count. However, there is only one record since 1985, that of two at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1987. Spring birds often occur with other *Calidris* species, and are usually in summer plumage. Far more records in the autumn and recorded between 16<sup>th</sup> July through to 15<sup>th</sup> November. Some high counts over the years, for example, 27 on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1973, 12 on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1975, 22 on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1996 and 18 on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1998. The two winter records were both long staying individuals, one from 1<sup>st</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> February 1968, and one from late January to mid-February 1984.

All recent records have been from EHF and PHF but also turned up in the past on RF and WLF when conditions were suitable.

**Temminck's Stint**  
Rare passage migrant.

*Calidris temminckii*

All records are listed:

- 1968: One on 6<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August.
- 1970: Two on 11<sup>th</sup> July.
- 1971: One at RF on 30<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1972: One on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1973: An exceptional spring passage at WLF where two on 16<sup>th</sup> May had increased to five on 17<sup>th</sup>, six on 18<sup>th</sup> then declined to three on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. One between 18<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> September and two on 16<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1974: One from 28<sup>th</sup> until 30<sup>th</sup> May. One on many dates from 6<sup>th</sup> August through to 22<sup>nd</sup> September.
- 1975: One on 17<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1976: One from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> May. One on 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1977: One on 29<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1980: Two at WLF on 26<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1981: One in breeding plumage at EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1985: Two in breeding plumage on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> May, one remained until 18<sup>th</sup>.
- 1994: One on 15<sup>th</sup> May during a wader influx of 30 Sanderling, 30 Dunlin and 20 Common Ringed Plover.
- 1998: One elusive individual for the afternoon of 7<sup>th</sup> October.

With only two records during the 1990s this species has declined since the heady days of the 1970s.

**White-rumped Sandpiper**  
Vagrant. One record.

*Calidris fuscicollis*

One on EHF saltpan during the afternoon of 4<sup>th</sup> October 1980.

**Pectoral Sandpiper**

*Calidris melanotos*

Very rare autumn visitor, one winter record. Nine records.

- 1970: One at EHF between 19<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September, and a different individual on 2<sup>nd</sup> October.
- 1980: One at EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1983: One at WLF and EHF between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1985: One at EHF and PHF from 22<sup>nd</sup> September until 8<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1988: One at RF and EHF from 16<sup>th</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> August. An adult from 27<sup>th</sup> December into 1989.
- 1989: The bird from 1988 stayed until 11<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1995: One at EHF from 4<sup>th</sup> until 6<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1999: One at EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> August.

## Curlew Sandpiper

*Calidris ferruginea*

Very rare spring, rare autumn passage migrant.

In spring a total of 10 records all of single birds. These are:

- 1939: One on 2<sup>nd</sup> April and probably the same bird on 8<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1956: One on 16<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1966: One on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.
- 1970: One on 5<sup>th</sup> June.
- 1973: One from 4<sup>th</sup> until 6<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1980: One from 4<sup>th</sup> until 6<sup>th</sup> May and another on 29<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1998: One on 9<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1999: One from 26<sup>th</sup> until 28<sup>th</sup> May.

Most in spring have occurred in May and have been in summer plumage; the two sightings in April 1939 are extraordinary records and presumably of the same individual. Autumn passage is from 22<sup>nd</sup> July through to 22<sup>nd</sup> October, and although more regular than in spring they still do not occur every year. The largest count in autumn has been 15 at EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1985 and more recently eight between 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> September 1988, and up to five in September 1998.

Most spring and autumn birds occur on the saltpan at EHF or PHF but in the past they also occurred on RF and WLF when conditions were suitable.

## Dunlin

*Calidris alpina*

Fairly common passage migrant, uncommon at other times.

The status of this species has remained the same since our records began in 1935. Sibson knew it as a regular passage migrant with stragglers at other times. This basically remains the same today except the numbers involved from 1970 to 1985 have been higher, although since then they have reduced.

### Maximum day count for each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1970 to 1985	35	45	70	91	62	11	36	44	40	22	17	22
1986 to 1999	30	13	19	18	30+	18	10	20	10	13	11	17

During the winter months small numbers can be found feeding around EHF with the Northern Lapwing flocks. Some winters birds stay for long periods and, although numbers are usually below five birds, on occasions good counts have been made. For example, in January and February 1986 birds were resident at EHF and peaked at 30 on 12<sup>th</sup> January. One bird was heard giving its song on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1983 at EHF. Spring passage is prolonged and lasts from early March until early June. Most are in summer plumage at this time and birds answering to two races have been claimed, these are *C. a. alpina* and *C. a. schinzii*.

Some of the outstanding daily totals in spring were 70 in March 1976, 62 on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1979 and 91 on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1983, all these good counts have been from EHF saltpan. After the first week of June it is rarely recorded until early July when the return passage begins. Maximum day counts are generally lower than in spring, but the passage is prolonged and continues into the winter period.

### **Stilt Sandpiper**

*Micropalama himantopus*

Vagrant. One record.

The individual first found at Frodsham Marsh on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1984 flew into EHF at midday on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1984. It was seen intermittently until at least 25<sup>th</sup> September, sometimes staying several weeks before flying back to Frodsham. It was in summer plumage at first but moulted during July; it also suffered from a broken and twisted leg which hampered its feeding. On 15<sup>th</sup> September it was seen at Frodsham in the early morning but was watched flying off and by midday it had arrived at EHF. This is the rarest species to be seen at the Flashes.

### **Ruff**

*Philomachus pugnax*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Between 1935-39 Sibson knew this species as a spring and autumn migrant and went on to give five records. Between 1955-1958 it was regular in September in small numbers with a maximum count of seven at EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1958. Annual since at least 1962 and up to 1985 regarded as a spring and autumn migrant, and with small numbers occurring in winter from 1969.

Maximum day count for each month up to 1985

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
3	12	15	15	3	4	30	20	20	11	12	11

Since 1985 a regular wintering flock has become established and is now one of the Flashes' major attractions for visiting birdwatchers. There are few inland sites in England that can boast wintering Ruff, Common Redshank and Eurasian Curlew. This flock normally feed around EHF and PHF, especially in fields around the water's edge, but they also travel further afield to feed, and on one occasion were found in fields near Arclid Sand Quarry, 4 kms. to the north-east. Most months between November and March up to 20 are present, but they have peaked at 42 in the winter of 1992-93, and 37 in the winter of 1993-94. By mid-April the winter flock has left and only rarely are spring migrants recorded in May. Males in May, however, are in summer plumage and on several occasions display has been observed: a pair was seen displaying on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1963 and three pairs were displaying in April 1973.

Sibson wrote that two males he observed on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1936 were the first to be seen in Cheshire in breeding plumage since 1924. He also wrote 'The male of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1939 in its fine feathers was not popular with the local inhabitants. I saw it violently chased by a Lapwing; and a little later a Redshank with which it was sharing a muddy puddle gave it a peck; whereat its anger was roused and its ruff of white feathers rose threateningly.'

Rarely recorded in June, but by early July the first moulting males are back and these slowly build up during the autumn.

### Jack Snipe

*Lymnocyrtus minimus*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Earliest arrival 20<sup>th</sup> August, latest departure 20<sup>th</sup> April.

The date of the first 'Flashes' record is lost, all we know is that F.J. Brown saw one at 'Elton Flashes' sometime in the latter half of the 1930s. In Whalley's summary of records up to 1963 he states that it was usually present with Common Snipe in very small numbers; five had been ringed in autumn over a two-year spell and one of these had been recovered in Oxford four days after ringing. Since 1970 it has been an annual visitor between September and early April in very small numbers. Due to its extreme shyness it is rarely seen unless flushed.

#### Maximum day count for each month

Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
1	4	5	8	5	3	4	6	4

The records show that passage occurs in November and March. The site with the best track record for this species is RF where it has always been possible to flush birds out of the marsh in the winter months. WLF is good some years especially in autumn when dry weather lowers the water level creating mud in front of the marsh edge. EHF used to be a good area to see this species but a ban on access to the marsh has meant flushing birds is not now possible. In the last few years MGT and the canal pools near WLF have been the best sites but both sites may be prone to future development.

### Common Snipe

*Gallinago gallinago*

Common visitor between July and April; scarce May and June. Former breeder.

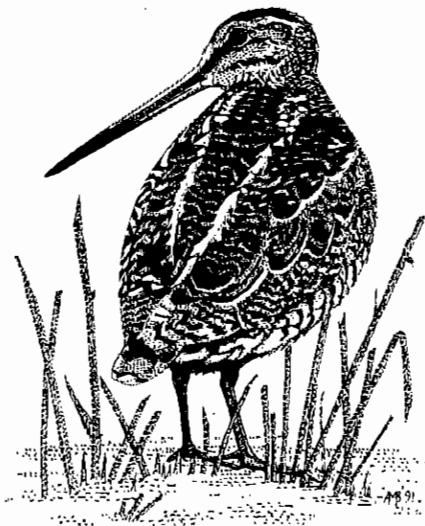
Very common in the latter half of the 1930s. During September and October Sibson regularly recorded wisps of between 40 to 100. He noted fewer in mid-winter and they became scarce in hard weather. By late January through to March they were back in good numbers, and he had a solid flock of 180 on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Whalley wrote in 1963 that autumn numbers exceed 100 and a typical count on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1963 was 80 at EHF and 50 at WLF. During the 1970s it had become abundant between September and March with some amazing counts, including 700 in November, 500 in December and January

and 300 in September, October, February and March. These counts coincided with the Flashes being at their peak for waders. WLF was especially good and regularly produced wisps of up to 200 in October and November. The installation of the sluice maintaining a high water level, planting of reeds, and extra disturbance, soon meant flocks of this size were an event of the past. RF likewise could also be counted on to provide good counts of 100+.

Maximum day count for each month since 1985									
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
25	65	75	140	100	152	149	180	180	28

Sibson in the 1930s said it bred throughout the area where the ground is marshy. Whalley in 1963 wrote that breeding records were less frequent in recent years. One pair bred in 1973 and at least three pairs in 1974, but sadly no proof of breeding since, although reported summering at TLF in at least one year during the 1980s. Rarely recorded in May and June nowadays.

There have been three recoveries of autumn ringed birds, all shot within three months of ringing, in Anglesey, Devon and Lincolnshire.



### **Eurasian Woodcock**

*Scolopax rusticola*

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest autumn arrival 19<sup>th</sup> October, latest in spring 13<sup>th</sup> March.

We have not been able to trace any records before 1973 when it was found at FF. Regular searching of the damp woodland at FF and PF has revealed it to be a regular winter visitor in very small numbers. Normally it is not seen until flushed, one or two birds are the norm but three birds have been flushed on many occasions, especially in January and February. Occasional records from the small patch of damp woodland between FF and WLF. The only other records away from the usual areas was one at WLF on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1997, which may have been a newly arrived passage migrant as may have been one at EHF on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1997.



### Black-tailed Godwit

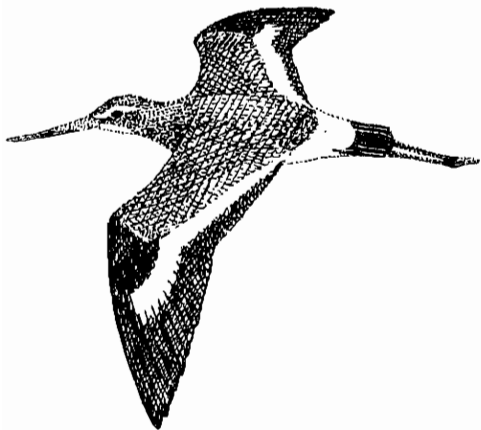
*Limosa limosa*

Uncommon passage migrant.

Formerly a very rare bird at the Flashes with only two old records when three were at EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1939 and one on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1945. Since 1967 this species has been increasing as a passage migrant at the Flashes. The first spring record was in 1970 and in recent years it has been annual, only missing four springs since 1985. The earliest arrival has been on 13<sup>th</sup> March with most records from late April and May. Peak counts have been seven on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1985; nine over on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1987; 10 between 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> May 1989; 24 on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1998; 26 on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1998, and a flock of between 50 and 60 birds circled overhead on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1999. We have traced four records for the second half of June and, as is the case for many waders, it is difficult to judge whether these are spring or autumn migrants. Autumn passage starts in early July and carries on through to October. Annual since the early 1970s, numbers have generally tended to be smaller than in spring, mostly ones and twos, but often staying for long spells. Some high counts are 11 on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1988, 20 on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1995 and an incredible 81 on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1996. The last few years have also produced some late autumn records, for example, two

from 13<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> November 1997, and one on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1997, but there are no sightings for January or February as yet.

The recent dramatic increase in records can be shown on the number of days recorded, which are 18 in 1997, 61 in 1998 and 69 in 1999. Most sightings of this species come from EHF and many birds in spring and late summer are in summer plumage. Also there are several reports of birds in May displaying and song being heard. One bird seen in November 1998 had been colour ringed on the Wash in Norfolk.



### Bar-tailed Godwit

*Limosa lapponica*

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

This rare species was not recorded at the Flashes until 30<sup>th</sup> August 1965 and since then a total of 26 records have fallen in the following months:

All records, using the first date only												
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
1	0	0	7	2	1	3	4	5	1	0	2	

The table shows that records peak as a passage migrant in April and September. It usually occurs singly but three birds have been seen on four occasions:- 30<sup>th</sup> April 1976; 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1978; 11<sup>th</sup> July 1980 and 12<sup>th</sup> January 1986. Passage birds usually stay no longer than a day but a winter record of one on 24<sup>th</sup> December 1976 stayed until 16<sup>th</sup> January 1977. All sightings come from EHF, WLF, PHF and RF.

### **Whimbrel**

*Numenius phaeopus*

Rare passage migrant.

Formerly a very rare passage migrant with only three records of five birds prior to 1964. Regular since 1969 but because none were seen in 1989 we have had to classify it as rare rather than the more appropriate scarce. It is seen most springs with sightings between 5<sup>th</sup> April and 18<sup>th</sup> June, there are usually less than five records each year. The best counts have been four on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1985 and eight on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1997. Annual in autumn since 1985 except for 1989 and 1997 with sightings between 4<sup>th</sup> July and 15<sup>th</sup> October. Normally seen more frequently than in the spring and the highest counts were six on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1972 and three on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1999. Autumn birds also have a tendency to linger at the Flashes, often associating with the Eurasian Curlew flock. For example, one stayed from 4<sup>th</sup> July 1986 until 3<sup>rd</sup> August. However, many records are of birds flying over calling or alighting on the saltpan briefly.

### **Eurasian Curlew**

*Numenius arquata*

Fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor. Has bred once.

Sibson remarked that in spite of them breeding abundantly in the Pennines a few miles to the east it was surprising how infrequently he saw them at the Flashes. He then went on to say he saw them in early spring and small parties in June and July flying over. In 1963 Whalley said that it was seen in small numbers and then went on to give some maximum counts of 10 on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1953 and 10 on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1962. During the 1970s still largely a spring and late summer passage migrant but also recorded in November and December, but generally absent in January and February. During 1984 and 1985 its status began changing: a wintering flock began using the Flashes between July and March. This wintering flock, which is now an exciting addition to the Flashes winter scene, uses the saltpan for roosting and as a daytime retreat, feeding in suitable fields nearby. Their daytime roamings often take them to fields near CF and occasionally down the Wheelock valley, but the extent of their movements is not known. This winter flock is very susceptible to severe weather, numbers plummeting in severe frost and snow.

Maximum day count in each month

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
89	146	132	50	7	18	49	75	56	70	115	84

The only breeding record was at RF in 1963. Song and display were also observed here between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> April 1988.

**Upland Sandpiper**  
Vagrant. One record.

*Bartramia longicauda*

A 1<sup>st</sup> year bird arrived from the south-west at midday on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1983, remaining in a pasture field at EHF until 11.30 hrs. on 7<sup>th</sup>, departing to the south-west. It gave excellent views to the many hundreds of birdwatchers who came to see it, and was the first Cheshire record and about the 37<sup>th</sup> record for the British List. It was photographed.

**Spotted Redshank**  
Rare passage migrant. Two winter records.

*Tringa erythropus*

This species is mostly recorded as a spring and autumn passage migrant. In spring it is rare, for example, only recorded in two springs since 1985. It often appears earlier in spring than many other passage waders with sightings from 3<sup>rd</sup> March through to 21<sup>st</sup> May, with the peak being in late April. The maximum day count is three on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1980.

We have traced three records for mid-June and as is usual for waders, it is difficult to judge whether these are spring or autumn passage birds. The records are of singles on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1970; 15<sup>th</sup> June 1978 and 19<sup>th</sup> June 1985.

Autumn passage is from early July through to 11<sup>th</sup> November. More frequently recorded than in spring, it is nevertheless a rare bird and has missed three autumns since 1985. Most sightings are of ones and twos and both adults and juveniles are seen at this time. We do have some excellent high counts such as: up to eight in August and September 1969; seven on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1975; 13 in late September 1978; seven on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> September 1982. More recently four on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1999.

We have two recent winter records both of singles on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1981 and 29<sup>th</sup> December 1996.

**Common Redshank**  
Uncommon visitor and passage migrant Former breeder current status unclear

*Tringa totanus*

The sad demise of this species, along with Common Snipe, as regular breeding birds has been a tragic loss for the Flashes. The extent of the decline can be seen by reading Sibson's 'Notes on the Birds of Sandbach S.E. Cheshire'. Between 1935-39 he said each Flash in the breeding season had two or three pairs. In 1939 he said about a dozen pairs bred along the River Wheelock between CF and Malkins Bank and in the vicinity of the Flashes. When Whalley wrote his Checklist in 1964 he still regarded it as a common summer resident. It still bred or attempted to breed up to 1985 with six pairs in 1977 and one or two pairs between 1980-85. After 1985 birds have summered regularly, and display and copulation have been seen most springs. Breeding may have been attempted some years but unsuccessfully. We feel that with some management work that includes careful water level control in spring and summer both this species and Common Snipe could be enticed to breed again.

Winters annually mainly around EHF and PHF and can often be found feeding on neighbouring fields with the wintering Ruff flock. This flock starts forming in October and by mid-winter up to 30 have been recorded, although in recent years counts have been below 20. Occurs as a spring passage migrant, for example, a flock of 50 at EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1940; 20 on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998 and 56 on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1999. By contrast autumn passage appears to involve very small numbers in July and August, and then is largely absent in September with the return of the wintering birds in October and November.

### **Marsh Sandpiper**

*Tringa stagnatilis*

Vagrant. One record.

An adult in summer plumage was on PHF and RF between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1990.

### **Common Greenshank**

*Tringa nebularia*

Rare spring and scarce autumn passage migrant. One winter record.

On spring passage this species occurs between 22<sup>nd</sup> March and early June. It is irregular and in the fourteen years since 1985 was only seen in eleven springs. On average there are less than three sightings each spring, with the best day count being five on 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> May 1998.

Very rarely seen in the second half of June and as is the case with many wader species we cannot tell if these are spring or autumn passage birds or perhaps failed breeders.

It is annual on autumn passage from early July through to 13<sup>th</sup> November with peak passage being in August.

Maximum day count for each month				
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
6	18	10	2	1

Its favourite areas are EHF, PHF and RF; WLF was good in the 1970s. The only winter record is of two on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1970.

### **Lesser Yellowlegs**

*Tringa flavipes*

Vagrant. One record.

An adult was present from 27<sup>th</sup> August until 18<sup>th</sup> September 1974. This tame individual fed mostly at WLF but also visited a small field pool near Rookery Bridge as well as EHF. When first found it was in breeding plumage but it moulted during its stay. This was a popular bird being seen by over a hundred birdwatchers from all over the country. This bird was the fourth for Cheshire and was photographed.

**Green Sandpiper***Tringa ochropus*

Scarce spring and uncommon autumn passage migrant. Scarce in winter.

The status of this bird has not changed since the 1930s. Spring passage occurs in March and April and usually involves less than 10 records a year. The highest day count was an exceptional six on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1983 and more recently three on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1999, but normally only singles are seen. It is not known whether these spring birds are long distance migrants or dispersing wintering birds. Very rarely seen in May with only a total of nine records.

Autumn passage begins in June with the earliest arrival on 7<sup>th</sup>. Numbers peak in July and August with a best day count of 21 on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1983 and more recently 17 on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1989 and 5<sup>th</sup> August 1990. The best areas for this species are RF, PHF and EHF with odd sightings from most of the other Flashes.

It is scarce in winter preferring the River Wheelock and its tributaries upstream and outside of the Flashes' boundary. Formerly occurred regularly in winter along the Fowle Brook near RF, but this site has been altered by the Maw Green Tip development, although still seen in this area on occasions.

Maximum day count for each month

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2	2	3	6	1	9	21	18	9	7	2	1

**Wood Sandpiper***Tringa glareola*

Rare passage migrant.

This is an irregularly occurring species, for example, since 1985 it has only been seen in 10 of the 14 years with the autumn passage period receiving the majority of the records.

The earliest date in spring is 30<sup>th</sup> April, but May is the peak month with at least 20 records; the maximum count is only two on several occasions. We have traced eight records scattered throughout the month of June and typically with waders it is hard to judge if these are spring or autumn passage birds or failed breeders.

July and especially August are the peak months for autumn migrants and they occur most years. The best counts are four from 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> August 1975 and three on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1991. The latest date it has been seen is 4<sup>th</sup> October 1998. The best site for this species in recent years has been EHF, but RF, when it was in its prime during the 1970s used to attract birds in autumn as did WLF.

**Common Sandpiper***Actitis hypoleucos*

Uncommon passage migrant. One winter record. Former breeder.

Earliest arrival 1<sup>st</sup> April, latest in autumn 30<sup>th</sup> October.

Between 1935-1939 Sibson noted one or two pairs breeding each year at EHF and PHF, and in 1939 he watched another pair at WLF which he judged

from their excited behaviour were breeding. One or two pairs bred annually until at least 1963, but since then the only information we have gathered was breeding attempted unsuccessfully in 1972 and 1973, and two pairs bred in 1974. Distraction display was observed from a pair at WLF in 1978 but no nest was found. Unfortunately no further breeding attempts since then.

Spring passage is normally from the second week in April and peaks at the end of the month. The highest day count was 15 on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1983. By mid-May most have moved through. Autumn passage is from late June with July and August being the peak months, and the best count was an exceptional 30 on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1974. Very rarely seen in October and the only winter record we have accepted was one on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1979.

### **Spotted Sandpiper**

*Actitis macularia*

Vagrant. One record.

An immature was at RF from 14<sup>th</sup> until 17<sup>th</sup> September 1980 when rising water levels may have forced it to leave. This was the first Cheshire record. A good series of photographs of this bird was taken.

### **Ruddy Turnstone**

*Arenaria interpres*

Rare passage migrant. One winter record.

This is an irregularly seen species and is far from annual in occurrence; since 1985 there have only been six records.

Spring passage is from 22<sup>nd</sup> April through to 4<sup>th</sup> June with the highest day count of three on three dates: 7<sup>th</sup> May 1972; 1<sup>st</sup> June 1973 and 7<sup>th</sup> May 1977.

Autumn passage has been recorded from 23<sup>rd</sup> July until 29<sup>th</sup> September, all records are of ones or twos except for six on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1987. The only winter record was one at EHF on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1985.

All records, using the first date only

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Dec
5	16	3	7	4	6	1

Most sightings in recent years have come from EHF but WLF used to be a favoured locality before the installation of the sluice raised the water level.

### **Wilson's Phalarope**

*Phalaropus tricolor*

Vagrant. Two records.

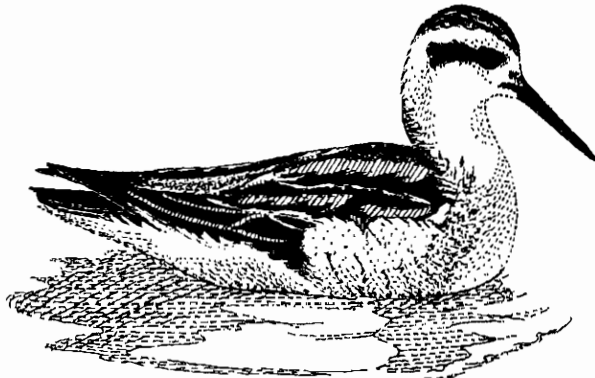
- 1962: One from 10<sup>th</sup> until 30<sup>th</sup> September was first located on EHF, but during its stay it also fed on RF. This was the first Cheshire record and caused much excitement being seen by birdwatchers from all over the country. Photographed.
- 1970: One from 6<sup>th</sup> until 12<sup>th</sup> September at EHF. This was another well-watched bird and seen by hundreds of birdwatchers.

### Red-necked Phalarope

*Phalaropus lobatus*

Very rare visitor. Three records of four birds.

- 1962: One at RF on 13<sup>th</sup> September was found by birdwatchers looking for the Wilson's Phalarope, which they also later saw!  
1973: Two at EHF for 30 minutes on 24<sup>th</sup> May.  
1984: An adult female in full breeding dress at WLF on 28<sup>th</sup> May gave excellent views down to twenty feet for a privileged few.



### Red (Grey) Phalarope

*Phalaropus fulicarius*

Vagrant. One record.

A moulting juvenile was found at EHF at 11.30 hrs. on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1997. It remained for the rest of the day and was well watched by over 30 local birdwatchers.

### Mediterranean Gull

*Larus melanocephalus*

Very rare visitor. At least 16 records of 14 birds.

All records are listed:

- 1973: One 1<sup>st</sup> summer at EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July.  
1974: One 1<sup>st</sup> summer at EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> July.  
1979: One adult on PHF for 30 minutes on 14<sup>th</sup> January.  
1987: One 2<sup>nd</sup> winter at MGT and RF on 5<sup>th</sup> December.  
1988: An adult at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> August was seen later in the day at Cledford Lane Settlement Lagoons, Middlewich.  
1992: An adult at EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> October.  
1995: One adult on 4<sup>th</sup> and two on 5<sup>th</sup> March at EHF. These birds were seen by many observers, occurring in the same weekend as the Great Northern Diver at WLF.  
1996: A 2<sup>nd</sup> summer on 31<sup>st</sup> July at PHF.  
1997: An adult at RF on 31<sup>st</sup> January.

- 1998: A 1<sup>st</sup> winter at EHF for two hours on 27<sup>th</sup> September.  
 1999 An adult in summer plumage at EHF on 11<sup>th</sup> March and perhaps the same bird at RF and MGT on 20<sup>th</sup> March.  
 A 1<sup>st</sup> summer moulting into 2<sup>nd</sup> winter seen on many dates between 7<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> August.  
 An adult at EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

This once great rarity has now been annual since 1996 and the last year of the century was the best ever, with three different individuals.



### Little Gull

*Larus minutus*

Rare visitor and passage migrant.

The only records prior to 1970 were an immature at WLF on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1948 and an adult at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1950. Numbers of sightings have increased since 1970, but this is still one of our rarest gulls with only 10 records of single birds since 1985.

All records, using the first date only

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	1	1	2	14	3	6	8	4	2	2	0

The best day counts were four on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1973 and 28<sup>th</sup> May 1974. It has only been seen on WLF, EHF, PHF and RF.

### Black-headed Gull

*Larus ridibundus*

Common visitor between April and June, abundant at other times.

Comparing the status of this species today with Sibson's account in the 1930s shows no difference in its monthly occurrence. Numbers in recent years have been higher, however, this is certainly because of the attractiveness of MGT for feeding.



Present daily all year at the Flashes. In the winter months up to 3500 feed on MGT and preen, bathe and roost on EHF. In March and April an overhead passage associated with Mew Gulls is occasionally noted. From May until mid-June only small numbers, mostly non-breeding 1<sup>st</sup> summer birds, are seen. The late summer build-up begins from mid-June with a few returning adults and accompanying juveniles (earliest arrival of juveniles is 16<sup>th</sup> June) and by late July hundreds may be present.

Maximum day count for each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Up to 1985	600	7000	700	327	80	110	750	4500	1800	500	525	1000
1986-1999	3000	3500	1000	50	50	152	949	800	1000	1100	3000	2400

Sibson wrote 'In June 1939 I suspected a pair of breeding at EHF. They were behaving as if they had a nest and the breeding cry "kek-kek" was often heard; but I was unable to prove that eggs were laid. They were very demonstrative between 9<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> June, but had gone on 27<sup>th</sup>'. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1988 adults were carrying nesting material on to a sand bar at EHF but then did not stay.

**Ring-billed Gull**

*Larus delawarensis*

Vagrant. One record.

A 2<sup>nd</sup> winter bird was between MGT and RF on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1995. This bird was in a field with Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. It was watched for twenty minutes before it flew over to the tip.

**Mew (Common) Gull**

*Larus canus*

Uncommon visitor and passage migrant.

This species has always been an uncommon and irregular bird at the Flashes. Sibson between 1935-1939 never saw more than seven together, and Whalley in his summary of records up to 1963 gave few records, and regarded it as an infrequent passage migrant. Better counts and more regular since the opening of MGT in the early 1980s. Nowadays any visit to the tip and the adjoining RF, GF and OF can produce counts of up to 30 between November and March. Spring passage, evident in March and April, usually involves ones and twos constantly moving over in a north-east direction on good days. Often they are high up but give their identity away by their calls. Sometimes they land at EHF and rarely some exceptional counts have been made, such as 150 on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1994; 180 on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1995; 205 on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998. Usually scarce in May and rare in June, and only small numbers noted until October and November.

## **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

*Larus fuscus*

Three races have been recorded:

### *L. f. graellsii*

Abundant visitor and passage migrant February-November. Common in December and January.

Nowadays this race is recorded in every month but in the late 1930s Sibson never saw one in December or January. In the 1970s and early 1980s the maximum day count in January was only 100, but since the opening of MGT this has risen to around 400. A large influx is noted in mid-February, the best count at this time being 2,500 on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1998. Spring passage continues into April when 2000 birds have been seen in a day. Numbers then fall and by June and July the best day counts are 450. August sees another sharp rise in numbers with birds feeding on MGT and assembling on EHF in the afternoon and evening before heading off north in the late evening. Counts have reached 1100 in August, 1500 in September and 4000 in October. Numbers then drop away again to the mid-winter lows.

Odd pairs occasionally set up territories in March and early April but breeding has never been attempted.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1996 of two colour ringed birds, one had been ringed in Bristol and the other in Holland.

### *L. f. intermedius*

Very rare passage migrant.

The status of this the Scandinavian race is confused due to the difficulty in identification. We have some old records from mid-winter, and an interesting count of 46 on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1979, which fits in nicely with the spring passage of *L. f. graellsii*. Probably regular in late summer and autumn amongst the large flocks of '*graellsii*' with a good run of records in 1998 of apparent *L. f. intermedius*, all singles, at EHF on 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> August, 5<sup>th</sup> September and 21<sup>st</sup> October.

### *L. f. fuscus*

Very rare passage migrant.

Adult birds answering to the description of this the Baltic nominate race have been claimed in 1999 on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> September and 21<sup>st</sup> October.

## Herring Gull

*Larus argentatus*

Three races have been recorded:

### *L. a. argenteus*

Abundant from November-March, scarce midsummer, common at other times.

Sibson wrote about the status of this species in the late 1930s 'In October there is an increase. Birds are found scavenging on rubbish tips or refuse trucks in railway sidings, notably at Rookery Bridge; or preening and washing in the Flashes, and in winter towards dusk long lines often running into hundreds of birds, pass over Sandbach, coming from the south and heading north....' A similar position prevailed during the 1970s; a refuse tip was operational near Alsager where in midwinter large numbers fed. In the late afternoons birds then overflowed the Flashes heading to a roost to the north, occasionally dropping in on to EHF and WLF to preen and bathe. The highest count at this time was 50 in December and 186 in January. With the opening of MGT in the early 1980s this species' status radically changed. The tip proved very attractive to this species and increases were noted in every month.

Maximum day count for each month between 1986 and 1999

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2000	2000	60	500	8	64	3	10	200	200	2000	2500

The table shows that numbers rise rapidly from November especially during the first very cold winter snap, and just as quickly tail off in mid-February. While researching this species it has also come to light that numbers have grown during the life of the tip: during the first few years (1985-88) counts of up to 500 were the norm, but at the end of the century we were regularly recording counts of 2000 in midwinter. The closing of the tip at Northwich may partly account for this.

On winter mornings the first of the gulls start arriving at the tip from about 10.00 hrs. usually in small parties. They arrive from the north and by midday their numbers peak with much frantic feeding activity with the arrival of refuse trucks. By 13.00 hrs. they start to loaf around the tip edge, or in neighbouring fields, and often fly in to bathe on RF and OF. By 15.00 hrs. they start leaving again, flying off to the north.

### *L. a. argentatus*

Rare autumn and winter visitor.

With the recent publications of identification papers of the various races of Herring Gull, local birders are showing greater confidence in claiming this Scandinavian race. One was on PHF on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1998 although two possibles were on MGT on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1997. In 1999 a 3<sup>rd</sup> year bird was at EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> July, and then many sightings followed from 12<sup>th</sup> September until the year end, both at EHF and MGT. Probably far commoner than the few records suggest.

*L. a. michahellis* (Yellow-legged Gull)  
Scarce visitor.

The first definite record was on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1984, although unspecified yellow-legged birds had been seen in late summer during 1980 and 1981. It has been annual since 1986 and slowly increasing both in number of records and counts. Sightings fall mostly between early June and the end of September with stragglers into October and November. There are also four records in February coinciding nicely with the Lesser Black-backed Gull passage, and a further two records in April and four in May. The highest counts are four on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1997, eight on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1998 and five on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1999. This race has been seen many times feeding on MGT and loafing on RF, and many of our late summer records are from EHF and PHF where they assemble with Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the afternoon and evening. It has been suggested that some of our records for this race have not been described well enough to eliminate Caspian Gull, *L.a. cachinnans*. We disagree: the short, thick, heavy bill of *L. a. michahellis* has always been a well known field mark amongst local birders.

#### **Iceland Gull**

*Larus glaucooides*

Rare winter and spring visitor.

Earliest arrival 29<sup>th</sup> November, latest 26<sup>th</sup> April.

The only record prior to the opening of MGT was a 2<sup>nd</sup> winter bird which bathed briefly in the river at EHF on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1970. The tip has proved attractive to this species since it opened, and it has become regular but with no records in 1986, 1990 and 1991 we have had to classify it as rare although since 1992 scarce is more appropriate.

All sightings are listed:

- 1984: One 2<sup>nd</sup> winter 28<sup>th</sup> January.
- 1987: One 1<sup>st</sup> winter 11<sup>th</sup> January.
- 1988: One 1<sup>st</sup> winter 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> January. One adult 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1989: One 2<sup>nd</sup> winter 24<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1992: One adult 31<sup>st</sup> December.
- 1993: Adults - 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> January, probably same bird as seen in 1992; another or same from 25<sup>th</sup> March to 10<sup>th</sup> April.  
2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 5<sup>th</sup> January.  
1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 8<sup>th</sup> February; one on 28<sup>th</sup> February; one from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 10<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1994: 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 23<sup>rd</sup> January; one unaged on 20<sup>th</sup> March; one 'immature' on 20<sup>th</sup> April; one on 29<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1995: Adults - one on 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> January; one on 5<sup>th</sup> March; one on 19<sup>th</sup> March.  
3<sup>rd</sup> winter - one on 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> April.  
2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 20<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> April.

- 1996: Adults - one on 10<sup>th</sup> March; one on 29<sup>th</sup> December.  
 3<sup>rd</sup> winter - one on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March.  
 2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 28<sup>th</sup> March.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 28<sup>th</sup> January; one on 5<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1997: Adults - one on 2<sup>nd</sup> January; one on 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January.  
 3<sup>rd</sup> winter - one on 14<sup>th</sup> January.  
 2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 8<sup>th</sup> January; one on 19<sup>th</sup> March.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1998: 3<sup>rd</sup> winter - one on 28<sup>th</sup> February.  
 2<sup>nd</sup> summer - one on 21<sup>st</sup> April.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter - Sightings on 10 days from 11<sup>th</sup> January until 13<sup>th</sup> April with two birds together on 15<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1999: Adults - one on 11<sup>th</sup> February; one on 7<sup>th</sup> March; one on 20<sup>th</sup> March.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 20<sup>th</sup> March; one on 31<sup>st</sup> March; one on 18<sup>th</sup> April.

All sightings are from MGT, RF, OF, PHF and EHF. It is difficult to judge how many birds have occurred because the same individual may visit the tip on many days during the winter period. For example, in 1999 the three sightings of an adult in February and March may well have been the same bird. However, with most visits to the tip by birdwatchers being at weekends, when ironically the gull numbers are at their lowest, records during the week of both 'white winged' gull species are certainly being missed.

Most records fall between the New Year and early April, and the best way to find our most beautiful gull is to carefully check, with the aid of a telescope, the ranks of commoner gulls feeding on the tip during this period.

### **Glaucous Gull**

*Larus hyperboreus*

Rare winter and spring visitor.

Earliest arrival 28<sup>th</sup> November, latest departure 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

There were three records prior to MGT opening, these were an immature on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1974; a first winter flying over on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1977, and an adult at EHF on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1979. As with Iceland Gull the opening of MGT in the early 1980s has led to an explosion of records:

- 1986: 3<sup>rd</sup> winter - one on 9<sup>th</sup> December
- 1988: 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 12<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1993: 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January; one on 29<sup>th</sup> January.
- 1995: 2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 8<sup>th</sup> January; one on 4<sup>th</sup> April; one on 30<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1996: Adult - one on 28<sup>th</sup> January.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 28<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1997: 2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 4<sup>th</sup> February; one on 6<sup>th</sup> April.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter - one on 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> January; one on 14<sup>th</sup> January; two on 19<sup>th</sup> March together.

- 1998: Adult - one on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November; one on 12<sup>th</sup> December.  
 4<sup>th</sup> winter - one on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> February.  
 3<sup>rd</sup> winter - one on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> April.  
 2<sup>nd</sup> winter - one on 24<sup>th</sup> February; one on 13<sup>th</sup> March; one on 6<sup>th</sup> April; one on 28<sup>th</sup> April.  
 1<sup>st</sup> winter/1st summer - at least one bird on 10 dates between 22<sup>nd</sup> February and 23<sup>rd</sup> May; one on 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1999: 1<sup>st</sup> winter - at least one bird on 10 dates between 24<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> April.

All sightings are from MGT, RF, OF, PHF and EHF. As with Iceland Gull it has been difficult to judge how many individuals have occurred due to the same birds visiting our area on more than one date, however, it has been rarer than Iceland Gull of late. It has also been occurring chiefly between late December and mid-April.

### **Great Black-backed Gull**

*Larus marinus*

Common winter visitor, scarce at other times.

Sibson never saw this species at the Flashes during his five years of watching the area in the 1930s. Whalley, writing in his Checklist, mentions it as being occasional with seldom more than four at any one time. Between 1964 and 1985 recorded in every month when highest counts were groups of nine seen in December and January, and three in February, but only ones and twos in the other months. With the opening of MGT this species has increased.

#### Maximum day count for each month

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
100	35	10	6	5	4	3	2	4	5	32	176

This pattern of occurrence is similar to Herring Gull with numbers rising rapidly during cold weather in December and quickly tailing off in February. Formerly rare in summer but records have been increasing and are usually immature birds. As with Herring Gull counts have been getting bigger during the life of the tip, for example, in January 1989 the best day count was only three but in January 1999 a day count of 100 was recorded. After feeding on the tip they like to bathe on RF, and small numbers are often on EHF with flocks of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. In the winter months they do not roost at the Flashes but fly off to the north-west with the other large gulls.

### **Black-legged Kittiwake**

*Rissa tridactyla*

Very rare visitor and spring passage migrant. 13 records of 15 birds.

- 1978: One at WLF on 16<sup>th</sup> April.  
 1983: An adult flying north-west over RF on 6<sup>th</sup> January.

- 1986: An adult and a 1<sup>st</sup> summer at EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1988: One on 10<sup>th</sup> February; one on 6<sup>th</sup> March; two on 8<sup>th</sup> March; one on 17<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1992: An adult at EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1996: An adult on 3<sup>rd</sup> March; an adult on 24<sup>th</sup> March.
- 1998: A 1<sup>st</sup> winter over EHF on 25<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1999: An adult at EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> February; an adult on 7<sup>th</sup> April; a 1<sup>st</sup> winter at WLF on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

The records are showing a small spring passage from February to April. Odd records at other times of the year are probably storm driven birds.

### **Sandwich Tern**

*Sterna sandvicensis*

Very rare passage migrant. Four records of six birds.

- 1971: Two on 26<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1974: One from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1980: One over FF on 7<sup>th</sup> May. Two at WLF on 21<sup>st</sup> September.

### **Common Tern**

*Sterna hirundo*

Uncommon passage migrant and summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 19<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

Recorded several times by Sibson between 1935 and 1939 and after this five were seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1940 and one on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1953. Became regular in the 1970s, especially in spring and autumn and it has been annual since 1983.

Maximum day count for each month						
Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
5	5	13	5	10	3	2

Of special note in recent years has been the appearance of adults with recently fledged young for periods in late summer. For example, in 1999 a family party of two adults and two juveniles were present from 1<sup>st</sup> August until 14<sup>th</sup>. The parents fished mostly at WLF and flew back to EHF to feed the juveniles.

The true status of this species and Arctic Tern may have been clouded by identification pitfalls especially of passage birds flying over. We have found many records of unspecified 'Commic Terns' including several large flocks, the largest and most recent being 66 over EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1999.

**Arctic Tern***Sterna paradisaea*

Rare passage migrant. Very rare midsummer.

Earliest arrival 11<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 4<sup>th</sup> November.

Spring passage falls between mid-April and the end of May; it is rare and irregular at this time and perhaps declining. The highest counts were 35 at WLF on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1983 and five on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1964. There has only been one record in spring during the 1990s when one was seen on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1993.

Autumn passage is between August and mid-October with the highest daily count of eight in August and six in September. During the 1990s we have had only three records: one 1<sup>st</sup> winter at WLF on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1994, which is the latest County record ever; another 1<sup>st</sup> winter was present on 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August 1997. Only three midsummer records ever and none recently; three were at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1963; six at EHF on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1965 and one on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1977.

**Little Tern***Sterna albifrons*

Very rare passage migrant. Nine records of 18 birds.

- 1935: One at EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1958: One at WLF on 7<sup>th</sup> July
- 1965: Three at EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1973: One at WLF on 19<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1976: Two adults roosted at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> July.
- 1977: Three at WLF on 11<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1978: One at WLF on 3<sup>rd</sup> May.
- 1985: Four over WLF on 30<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1995: Two at EHF on 5<sup>th</sup> May.

Six of the nine records have fallen between 30<sup>th</sup> April and the 19<sup>th</sup> May.**Black Tern***Chlidonias niger*

Rare passage migrant between April and October.

Earliest arrival 23<sup>rd</sup> April, latest departure 6<sup>th</sup> October.

Most sightings occur on spring passage in May and on autumn passage in August and September. June and July records are very rare. It is not seen annually and most sightings involve fewer than five. The highest spring count was 33 at WLF on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1990 during an exceptional nationwide passage, and in autumn 16 were at EHF on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1987. The majority of the records are from WLF, RF and EHF.

## Maximum day count for each month 1935 to 1999

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
2	33	2	9	14	16	2



All records, using the first date only 1964 to 1999

Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
2	16	1	3	7	11	3

### **White-winged Black Tern**

*Chlidonias leucopterus*

Vagrant. One record.

An adult in full breeding plumage appeared on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1974. It arrived at EHF after a thunderstorm at midday but flew west after five minutes. It was then relocated at RF where it spent the rest of the day, and was seen by over twenty birdwatchers and even photographed.

### **Common Guillemot**

*Uria aalge*

Vagrant. One record.

One on PHF on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1990. Present for a good part of the day, it was probably a weakened, storm driven bird that may have drowned as it was not seen to surface after diving.

### **Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)**

*Columba livia*

Former common breeding resident. Recent status unclear.

Native wild Rock Doves do not occur at the Flashes, our birds are captive descendants which have escaped and gone wild, and established self-supporting breeding colonies. One such colony used to breed in the old derelict buildings at Rookery Bridge where they were resident. We have no counts of breeding numbers and unfortunately the colony dispersed when the buildings were demolished in the mid-1970s. They still breed commonly nearby in Crewe Town Centre and in smaller numbers in Sandbach, and no doubt they visit the Flashes. However, it is difficult to distinguish these feral birds from captive 'Racing Pigeons' which are released for exercise and racing competitions, and which are commonly seen flying over the Flashes, or occasionally drop in to rest and feed on EHF.

### **Stock Dove**

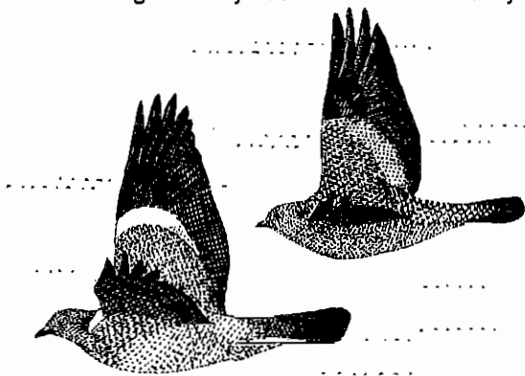
*Columba oenas*

Common breeding resident and winter visitor.

In the latter half of the 1930s Sibson knew this species as a breeding resident with small flocks in winter. It may have declined after this or become extinct locally as we can find no records from the middle of the century. Also Whalley has no mention of this species in his Checklist of the Sandbach Flashes, published in 1964. It began to be recorded again in the early 1970s, chiefly in winter with many counts of up to 20.

It has increased since then with 53 counted on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1983; 80 on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1988 and 50 on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1999. Presumably these late winter birds are local breeders flocking where there is suitable feeding before pairing off to breed.

Re-colonised as a breeding bird in 1981 when three pairs bred. Probably bred before this year but we have failed to find any records. Between three or four pairs bred from 1982 to 1985, and has probably increased since then with up to seven pairs breeding annually at the end of the century.



### **Common Wood Pigeon**

*Columba palumbus*

Very common breeding resident, and abundant passage migrant and winter visitor.

This is a common bird around the Flashes and as such is largely ignored by our local birdwatchers. We can find no counts or estimates of breeding pairs, but it breeds around all flashes, with at least 20 pairs estimated breeding annually.

Passage birds are noted moving through in early spring and especially in late autumn. These are thought to be continental migrants which winter with us, probably originating from Scandinavia. For example, 1000 flew over high to the south-west on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1976, and in 1999 over 450 flew over to the south-west during an early morning movement on 17<sup>th</sup> October.

During the winter months it is a common bird in the farmland around the Flashes, if feeding is good it can be abundant and flocks of up to 300 birds have been recorded on many occasions.

### **Eurasian Collared Dove**

*Streptopelia decaocto*

Very common breeding resident.

The first known documented sighting was on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1973; it may have occurred before this date as by 1973 it was already a well established breeding bird in Sandbach. During 1974 and 1975 it was a frequent visitor, recorded almost monthly. It was probably breeding in our area by 1976 and

during the early 1980s it became a common resident, breeding around the farms. Since 1985 it has consolidated its status but it is largely ignored by local birders with few counts or estimates of breeding pairs. A very common breeder in Moston village near PF and good numbers breed around the farms at EHF and WLF. We estimate a minimum of 25 pairs breeding annually in our area. It is also a frequent visitor to the bird feeding station at EHF with up to 12 on many occasions.

#### **European Turtle Dove**

*Streptopelia turtur*

Former uncommon breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 4<sup>th</sup> May, latest departure 9<sup>th</sup> September.

We are lacking information on the past status of this species. Between 1935-1939 Sibson knew it as a thinly distributed breeding summer visitor in the Sandbach area, and he mentions Brereton Heath as a site, but unfortunately does not stipulate whether it actually bred at the Flashes. Presumably it was a passage migrant until 1963 when a pair bred at FF. It summered most years between 1973 and 1981 with breeding suspected in 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1977 (three pairs present). In 1976 a pair reared two young at FF. An exceptional count of eight on wires at FF on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1977. Between 1981 and 1986 it became scarce with an average of only one sighting a year, and sadly since 1986 it has not been recorded at the Flashes. Although this species has suffered a national decline, it still maintains a toehold in Cheshire so all is not lost, and it should be looked for during spring and autumn passage periods.

#### **Common Cuckoo**

*Cuculus canorus*

Irregular breeding summer visitor. Uncommon spring and rare autumn passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 5<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 1<sup>st</sup> October.

This species may have declined since 1963 when Whalley described it as common in his Checklist of the Flashes. Small numbers occur on spring passage in April and May when it is noisy and conspicuous with one or two lingering annually in the WLF, FF and PF areas. These birds were suspected to be breeding, and breeding was finally proved in 1983 when a juvenile was observed being fed by a Hedge Accentor at FF. In recent years female Common Cuckoos have also been observed watching the small Reed Warbler colony at WLF. It is scarce, sometimes rare, in late summer and autumn when most sightings are from the well watched EHF area.

#### **Barn Owl**

*Tyto alba*

Very rare visitor. Irregular breeder.

Sibson in the late 1930s knew of four localities in the Sandbach area where this species was seen regularly but he did not say where these localities were.

It is possible one of these sites was at the Flashes, but Whalley in his Checklist of all records up to 1963 only quoted three records: One at EHF in March 1939; one at WLF on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1946, and one again at WLF on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1963. One was seen in 1967 but the locality and date are lost. In 1973 a pair were located in the derelict glue factory at Rookery Bridge and they reared three young. They bred again successfully in 1974 and 1975 at the same locality, but when the glue factory was demolished sightings became rarer, with only one sighting in 1977 on 27<sup>th</sup> February. In 1979 there were sightings on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September, and 19<sup>th</sup> December.

There have only been two recent records, one was hunting in daylight at FF on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1985 and one was seen at WLF hunting during the afternoon of 25<sup>th</sup> March 1998, but unfortunately was found dead the next day.

### **Little Owl**

*Athene noctua*

Common breeding resident.

This species is the commonest owl at the Flashes although it is more often heard than seen. It favours hedgerows with scattered old trees, and is also often around farm buildings. It has increased since the late 1930s when Sibson described it as thinly distributed. Nowadays it is locally common around PHF, EHF, RF, CF and WF, with a minimum of six pairs present. Breeding has been proved on many occasions with the sighting of recently fledged young. Dead birds have been found on the lanes a few times, victims of vehicle collisions.

### **Tawny Owl**

*Strix aluco*

Uncommon resident. Irregular breeder.

Before 1964 regarded as a common resident by Whalley in his 'Checklist of the Birds of the Sandbach Flashes'. Since then it has been seen mostly from FF, PF and WLF areas in winter with three roosting birds at FF the highest count. Also heard in the summer months from these areas and annual breeding is suspected. Breeding proved at FF in 1989 (when they fledged three young), 1993 and 1994. Two recent sightings have come from EHF where another pair may now be resident and nocturnal searchings around WF may well produce another pair as the habitat looks suitable.

### **Long-eared Owl**

*Asio otus*

Very rare visitor. Many records of at least six birds.

All records are listed:

- 1976: One was located in a hawthorn hedge at PHF between 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1977: One found roosting at FF on 14<sup>th</sup> February.

1979: One at FF on 31<sup>st</sup> March and 1<sup>st</sup> April and perhaps the same bird was reported on several days in June and July. One was found roosting on 1<sup>st</sup> November and it was joined by a second bird from 16<sup>th</sup>, and a third from 29<sup>th</sup> December. All three stayed until March 1980, and one bird through until 27<sup>th</sup> April. These three birds were easily watched from the road at FF and were seen by many birdwatchers during their stay, and even photographed.



### Short-eared Owl

*Asio flammeus*

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

This species was not recorded until 1971 when one flew over EHF in August. There have now been 24 records involving 25 birds.

All records, using the first date only											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	3	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	8	2	4

All records are of singles except when two were flushed from riverside hawthorns along the footpath over to RF on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1990. The majority of records are of birds seen on just one day, the only exceptions being one at WLF on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> April 1986, and another at Rookery Bridge on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> December 1993.

### Common Swift

*Apus apus*

Very common summer visitor and occasionally abundant passage migrant. Former breeder.

Earliest arrival 20<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 18<sup>th</sup> October.

This is a conspicuous passage migrant in May, also in late July and early August when movements are frequently noted high overhead. Large concentrations of probably local breeders assemble over WLF, EHF and RF

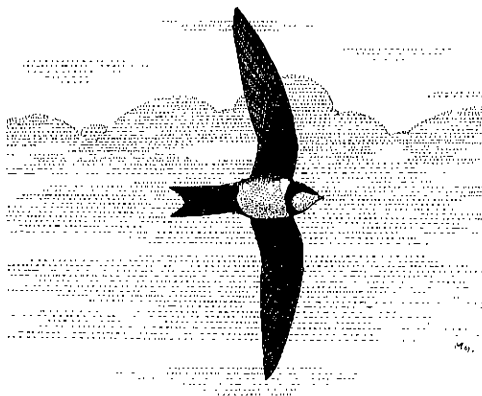
during cold wet spells in spring and summer, with some large counts of 200 on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1975; 100 on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1974 and 100 on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1994. It no longer breeds inside the Flashes boundary, but formerly bred in the soda works up to at least 1964, and possibly at the glue factory at Rookery Bridge until its demolition in the mid-1970s.

### **Alpine Swift**

*Apus melba*

Vagrant. One record.

One at EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1993 was hawking flying insects with Starlings and Black-headed Gulls for ten minutes at midday. This fantastic record was a just reward for the finders of this Cheshire rarity for the many hours spent watching their local patch.



### **Common Kingfisher**

*Alcedo atthis*

Uncommon visitor. Irregular breeder.

This species is seen most often between July and March usually in ones and twos, but three have been seen on many occasions, most recently on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1998 at EHF. It visits most of the Flashes at this time, especially EHF, PHF, RF, WLF and FF. It often gives good views from the bridge at EHF, or from the viewpoint at EHF perched below on fencing.

Some years largely absent between April and June, other years, presumably when breeding nearby, there are occasional records. Prior to 1964 known to breed regularly along the River Wheelock, probably outside our boundary, although Sibson and Whalley did not give any specific details. Breeding was proved in 1993 along the River Wheelock upstream from EHF, with an adult and juvenile seen together in mid-August. A juvenile was seen at EHF on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1974 and a pair were displaying at EHF on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1975.

### **Eurasian Hoopoe**

*Upupa epops*

Vagrant. Two records.

- 1971: One at EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May was an elusive individual and only seen briefly on two occasions.
- 1985: One flew in at midday on 15<sup>th</sup> October and landed at the back of the EHF saltpan. It fed here for the rest of the day, and all of the 16<sup>th</sup>, disappearing at dusk.

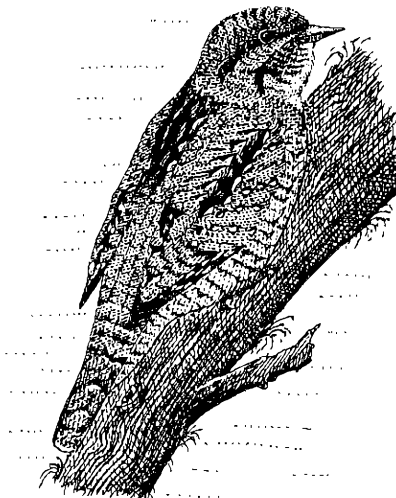


### **Eurasian Wryneck**

*Jynx torquilla*

Vagrant. Two records.

- 1996: One was located at 15.45 hrs. on 11<sup>th</sup> May on the causeway at WLF. It remained here for the rest of the day allowing excellent views for most of the local birdwatchers.
- 1997: One found at EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> June at 12.10 hrs. and seen occasionally until 13.30 hrs. Despite extensive searching it was not relocated. This bird was heard calling.



### **Green Woodpecker**

*Picus viridis*

Rare visitor.

A surprisingly rare species at the Flashes despite breeding at several sites in south-east Cheshire. Not recorded until 1973; all records are listed:-

- 1973: Probably the same individual seen on four dates in May. One on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.
- 1974: One at RF on 3<sup>rd</sup> April.
- 1975: One at RF on 14<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1985: One heard at EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> September.
- 1986: Several sightings from WLF in October.
- 1987: One around PHF and RF on 4<sup>th</sup> July.
- 1988: One around EHF and PHF on 11<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1990: One at WLF on 22<sup>nd</sup> April and another on 6<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1993: One at FF on 1<sup>st</sup> January.
- 1996: One on 8<sup>th</sup> December at PHF.
- 1998: One on 17<sup>th</sup> March. A juvenile at FF on 4<sup>th</sup> and EHF on 5<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1999: One at FF on 17<sup>th</sup> February. One at EHF and FFF on 10<sup>th</sup> April.

The records show it has been seen in all months except June. April has the most records with four, the next best months being September and October. Although we have over 20 records perhaps as few as 16 individuals have occurred at the Flashes.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos major*

Fairly common resident and autumn and winter visitor. Probably breeds annually.

This species is by far our commonest woodpecker and is present every month of the year. At least one pair is present at FF during the summer but in autumn and winter a small influx occurs. The best counts at this time being four (two each at FF and EHF) on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1995 and four at FF on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1997. It may be increasing perhaps due to the feeding station at EHF.

It probably breeds annually at FF and breeding has been confirmed in five out of the last 14 years. Normally only one pair but it is possible a second pair may be present, especially in the last few years. It was heard drumming at EHF on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1999 and breeding could be attempted at this locality soon, especially with the feeding station close to hand.

### **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos minor*

Scarce visitor. Has bred once.

This species was not recorded at the Flashes, as far as we are aware, until 1971 when one was at FF on 25<sup>th</sup> October. It was then seen most years until 1985 and annually since then. On average there are only two records a year, but it may be increasing or better coverage by our keen local birders is



showing it to be not so rare. Records have come from all months but there is a strong bias towards February to April, and September to December. It is rarely seen in summer. Most sightings are from FF, WLF, EHF and PHF; it has been seen at the feeding station at EHF on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1998 and 14<sup>th</sup> April 1999, on the last occasion it was squabbling with Tree Sparrows on the peanut feeders.

A pair bred successfully at PF in 1972 and this remains our only breeding record, although a pair were around WLF and FF during April 1977, and another pair were at FF on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1999.

### **Common Sky Lark**

*Alauda arvensis*

Uncommon breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor.

As a breeding bird it has declined alarmingly during the last 25 years. Regarded as a common resident prior to 1964, 14 pairs were present in May 1973, eight singing males were counted in April 1992, down to six in March 1993 and four in 1994. This decline has been witnessed nationally and attributed to intensive farming practices.

Occurs as a spring passage migrant in March and April in very small numbers. More prominently noted as an autumn migrant between mid-September and mid-November. At this time they occur as a diurnal migrant, usually in the mornings on calm days, with passage in a south-westerly direction, with birds at heights of up to 150 ft. They can usually be located by their calls and on peak days counts of up to 40 can be recorded as they fly over in small parties. The origin of these migrants is probably Scandinavia and Northern Scotland. As a migrant they do not appear to have declined so presumably their populations are in a healthier position than our resident breeders.

Wintering flocks are irregular in occurrence and dependent on suitable stubble fields for feeding. Some good counts have been made from RF, PHF and EHF, such as 60 in January 1964, 160 in December 1979, 100 in January 1980 and, more recently, 70 on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1988. Few counts of over 20 birds in the 1990s probably reflecting the rapid decline of our resident population.

### **Sand Martin**

*Riparia riparia*

Common passage migrant. Irregular breeding summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 12<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 27<sup>th</sup> September.

During spring this species is a common diurnal passage migrant from late March and through April. In cold, wet weather concentrations are sometimes noted along with other hirundines on WLF and CF, and to a lesser extent RF and EHF. The best counts we have traced are 200 on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1976 and 190 on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1977. On autumn passage moves through during the second half of August and September. A diurnal passage of an estimated 1000 moved over EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1976.

Breeding was first noted in 1977 in the banks of the River Wheelock, a little way upstream from the pipes at EHF. We now know that this site was in use before 1977. Seven pairs bred in 1977, five pairs in 1983 and three pairs in 1984 and 1985. Failed to breed in 1986 when a catastrophic population crash was noted nationally. Has bred here since but as the breeding area lies on private land it is rarely checked.

### **Barn Swallow**

*Hirundo rustica*

Very common to abundant passage migrant. Very common breeding summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 19<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 30<sup>th</sup> November.

Common to very common as a diurnal spring passage migrant in April and early May. During cold and wet weather at this time congregations of feeding birds occur on WLF, CF, RF and EHF, with sometimes up to 100 birds present on each flash. Very common, often abundant, as an autumn passage migrant from August to October. Late summer and autumn roosts sometimes form in the reeds at WLF, EHF and GF, often containing huge numbers of birds. For



example, 4000+ at WLF in late August 1995, and 2500 at GF and 1000 at EHF in August 1998. Most have gone by late October but there is a very late record of one near PHF on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1974.

Breeds commonly in our area chiefly around the farms. Surprisingly no census has ever been done, but as every farm has at least one pair, we estimate a minimum of 17 pairs inside our boundary.

### **House Martin**

*Delichon urbica*

Very common passage migrant. Common breeding summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 25<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 5<sup>th</sup> November.

Small numbers breed on houses at Elton crossroads and probably elsewhere in the Moston area.

A conspicuous diurnal passage migrant in spring; as with Sand Martin and Barn Swallow congregations noted over WLF, CF and RF during unsettled weather in spring. Counts of up to 120 at WLF have been made in May. Very common and occasionally abundant during autumn passage in September and early October. On calm sunny days in late autumn parties of birds move south high over EHF.

### **Tree Pipit**

*Anthus trivialis*

Very rare passage migrant.

Between 1935-1939 Sibson knew this species as a summer visitor to the Sandbach area. He did not stipulate whether it bred at the Flashes, however, this seems unlikely as we have no suitable habitat. He did record it breeding annually at Brereton Heath and Oakhanger. Whalley did not include it in his 'Checklist of the Birds of the Sandbach Flashes' published in 1964. This species was, therefore, overlooked until the first definite record in 1973.

We have traced only two spring records, with one at WLF sometime in May 1973, and one singing briefly at EHF on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1989. More frequent in autumn, although not seen annually, with 15 records totalling 22 birds between 14<sup>th</sup> July and 5<sup>th</sup> September. These birds are usually located on calm, sunny mornings flying over giving their characteristic calls. On very rare occasions birds have landed on rough ground at WLF or along the railway embankments at EHF.

### **Meadow Pipit**

*Anthus pratensis*

Common passage migrant. Uncommon winter visitor. Has bred once.

Spring passage occurs chiefly in March and April with birds often flying over in a northerly or easterly direction. Some maximum counts at this time are 170 on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1977, 150 on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1978 and 70 birds an hour estimated over EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1996. During cold snaps in April, especially north-easterly winds with snow showers, migration is temporarily halted and grounded flocks feed in our ploughed or manured fields. Migrants occasionally stop to sing briefly especially in the marsh at RF.

Autumn passage peaks in September and October with large numbers flying over in a south-westerly direction. On good days a constant movement can be witnessed in the mornings with the passage quickly tailing off at midday. Numbers are higher than in spring with, for example, 200 over during the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> September 1983. Birds also land and feed around EHF or in stubble fields and marshy areas around all flashes.

Between November and February small numbers are normally present in suitable habitat, some good counts are 56 on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1977, and more recently up to 40 on the banks of MGT during the winter months of 1993. The only breeding attempt was at WLF in 1975 when a pair bred but deserted. A pair were suspected of breeding at RF in 1984 but this was never proved.

### **Rock Pipit**

*Anthus petrosus*

Very rare passage migrant. Twelve records of at least eleven birds.

First recorded in 1973. All records listed.

March: One on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1973. One on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1977.  
April: One on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1974. One on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1975. One on 10<sup>th</sup>  
and 14<sup>th</sup> April 1976.

September: One on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1984.  
 October: Two on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1983 and two on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1983.  
 One on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1985.  
 November: One on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1984. One on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1999.

All records from WLF, EHF and RF area. The records in April 1976, and one of the two on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1983, answered to the description of the Scandinavian race *A. p. littoralis*.

There are also at least ten records of unidentified Rock or Water Pipit, these are mostly flying birds calling.

### **Water Pipit**

*Anthus spinoletta*

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

First recorded in 1972. All records we have been able to trace are listed.

February: One on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1979.  
 March: One from 7<sup>th</sup> March until 5<sup>th</sup> April 1974. One on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1979.  
 April: One on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1979.  
 May: One in summer plumage from 28<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> May 1974.  
 September: One from 30<sup>th</sup> September until 11<sup>th</sup> November 1972.  
 October: At least 12 birds have occurred, the most recent on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1986.  
 November: One on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1979. One between 11<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> November 1986.  
 December: One with Meadow Pipits at EHF all day on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1977.

### **Yellow Wagtail**

*Motacilla flava*

Uncommon passage migrant and breeding summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 29<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

*M. f. flavissima*: Occurs as a spring passage migrant mainly in April and early May. Sibson in the late 1930s mentions 'scores are often seen together'. On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1953 visible migration was noted at EHF and a spring roost of 100+ was seen on 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> April 1963. Serious decline since with 21 on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1982, 24 on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1983 and more recently seven on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1998 the best counts.

We have no counts of breeding numbers before 1964 but Sibson mentions the Elton area as being especially good, and Whalley said it was a common summer resident. Since the 1970s it has declined, with seven pairs in 1973, four pairs at least in 1985 and two pairs in 1995.

Sibson mentioned considerable flocks containing many juveniles in July in the 1930s. Whalley mentions autumn roosts at EHF most years, and still in the 1970s flocks of up to 78 were counted in August and 40 in September.

Best recent counts have been 12 on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1995 and 12 on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1996.

*M. f. flava*: This the nominate continental race has been seen on at least 14 occasions. The most recent sightings have been on 28<sup>th</sup> April and 7<sup>th</sup> May 1996.

*M. f. thunbergi*: A male was seen on 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> April 1974.

Sibson on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1938 saw a pair the male of which most resembled from his description *M.f. cinereocapilla*.

### **Grey Wagtail**

*Motacilla cinerea*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor. Rare midsummer.

This species is usually present daily between late July and March with the best localities being EHF and along the River Wheelock. Also seen regularly around the other flashes, the best winter count is four birds.

Rarely noted on spring passage but during October odd birds can be seen and heard moving over high up during the early mornings, with the best count being six on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1992.

It has not bred at the Flashes but has done so near Wheelock, a short distance east of EHF. However, odd birds do occur at the Flashes during the summer, although rarely.

### **White (Pied) Wagtail**

*Motacilla alba*

Common passage migrant and uncommon breeding resident.

Two races occur:

*M.a. yarrelli* (Pied Wagtail): This our resident race is an uncommon breeding resident, with an estimated population of up to five pairs annually. Diurnal passage occurs in spring and autumn with September being the peak month. Autumn congregations are annual at EHF with, for example, 68 on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1981 and 80 on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1987. MGT has been attractive to this species during the 1990s but we have no counts. A roost at Rookery Bridge held 90 on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1973, 200 on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1974 and 110 in November 1978.

*M. a. alba* (White Wagtail): This race is a rare spring passage migrant from late March to early May. The earliest record is the 18<sup>th</sup> March. It is seen most springs but not all, hence its status definition. Some years it occurs in good numbers on recently ploughed fields or around the water's edge at EHF and WLF. Eight were at WLF in May 1963; 10 on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1981 and up to 10 at EHF between 26<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May 1997. Presumably also passes through in the autumn but rarely identified.

**Bohemian Waxwing***Bombycilla garrulus*

Vagrant. One record.

One at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> November 1999. This individual arrived with a large influx of Redwings and Fieldfares with which it consorted during its two day stay. It fed on hawthorn berries around the EHF viewpoint and was fairly approachable, and also photographed. It was the last new addition to the Flashes' list of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and much admired by up to a hundred birders during its stay.

**Winter Wren***Troglodytes troglodytes*

Very common breeding resident.

One of our commonest breeding birds, although we have no counts of breeding pairs. Suffers heavily in severe winters, with only one pair found in 1963 after the previous winter's prolonged frosts. The highest concentration of breeding pairs is to be found at FF, PF and WLF areas, but also present around all the other flashes in hedgerows, scrub and woodland.

**Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)***Prunella modularis*

Very common breeding resident.

One of our commonest resident species with pairs breeding around all the flashes. No counts of the breeding population have been made but we estimate at least 25 pairs. The highest concentrations are at the well-wooded FF, PF and WLF areas, but also common in the hedgerows and railway embankment at EHF and FFF. A frequent visitor to the feeding station at EHF.

**European Robin***Erithacus rubecula*

Very common breeding resident.

This is one of our commonest resident passerines, perhaps outnumbered only by Winter Wren and Hedge Accentor. It can be found around all flashes but the highest concentrations are at FF, PF, WLF, EHF and the Moston area. No population survey has ever been done but we estimate a minimum of 25 pairs.

As with Song Thrush and Common Blackbird there is some evidence to show that immigrants are passing through the Flashes in October and perhaps even wintering. If this is so then presumably they are Scandinavian birds, with that population vacating their breeding ground during the winter. The only evidence we have is that there appears to be a sudden population increase overnight at WLF and EHF during October.

### **Common Nightingale**

*Luscinia megarhynchos*

Vagrant. One record.

One was singing at FF on 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> May 1980. It sang only occasionally and was seen briefly only once.

### **Black Redstart**

*Phoenicurus ochruros*

Vagrant. Two records.

1983: A female was on waste ground at Rookery Bridge on 18<sup>th</sup> May. It flew west at 19.00 hrs. by which time it had been seen by most of the local birdwatchers.

1993: A male was at Rookery Bridge on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> December 1993. Found by one of the authors trying to walk off the previous day's Christmas dinner!

### **Common Redstart**

*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Rare passage migrant.

Earliest spring arrival 9<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 6<sup>th</sup> October.

The first record for the Flashes was not until 1978 and we now have at least 41 records of 43 birds.

All records, using the first date only						
Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
9	6	0	8	10	7	1

The records show spring passage occurs in April and May, and a more protracted autumn passage between July and early October. All records are of singles except for two at RF on 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> September 1993. Most sightings have been from PHF and RF where they favour the old thorn hedges, but the MGT development unfortunately destroyed the best area of hedgerows with resulting fewer sightings since 1988.

### **Whinchat**

*Saxicola rubetra*

Rare passage migrant. Former uncommon breeding summer visitor, now irregular.

Earliest arrival 15<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 17<sup>th</sup> October.

Spring passage is from mid-April until the end of May. It is not seen annually and numbers are very small with a total of 7 in the spring of 1980 the best in recent years. It is possibly declining. Autumn passage is from 9<sup>th</sup> July and normally involves more records than the spring. Up to 40 were estimated to have moved through in August and September 1976, but more recently four records involving seven birds in 1989, and up to three in August 1990. Like the spring passage perhaps declining and the loss of the thistle covered fields at Fowle Brook Meadows near RF to the MGT development is possibly one reason.

Between 1935-1939 Sibson recorded it breeding regularly on the railway embankments at EHF and in 1938 at another locality at EHF. Whalley mentions it breeding until 1951, with nestlings ringed in 1947, 1949 and 1950. The only breeding record since then was a pair near RF in 1986 which fledged three young.

### **Common Stonechat**

*Saxicola torquata*

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

This species was not recorded until 1971 and since then rarely recorded as a passage migrant, chiefly in October and March. The only recent record being a female at WF on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1990. From 1974 it began to be recorded wintering on waste land at WLF, and more recently the MGT area; all records are listed of these wintering birds:

- 1974: One or two in the first winter period. Dates lost.
- 1975: Two present during both winter periods.
- 1977: Three birds in the early winter period. Two in the late winter period.
- 1978: Up to two until 14<sup>th</sup> January. Two from 23<sup>rd</sup> October into November.
- 1982: A female from October 29<sup>th</sup> was joined by a male from 7<sup>th</sup> November until the year end.
- 1983: The pair from 1982 remained to at least 4<sup>th</sup> March, the female to at least the 15<sup>th</sup>. A male from 22<sup>nd</sup> October until 21<sup>st</sup> December.
- 1984: Two females on 13<sup>th</sup> November. A pair from 8<sup>th</sup> December until the year end.
- 1985: The pair from 1984 stayed until March.
- 1989: A male at MGT from October until the year end.
- 1992: Two at RF on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1992.
- 1993: A female at MGT on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1993.

### **Northern Wheatear**

*Oenanthe oenanthe*

Uncommon spring and rare autumn passage migrant.

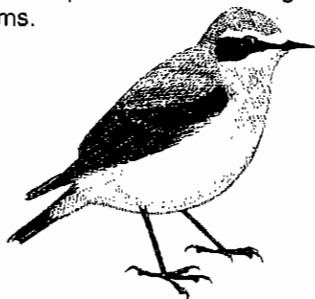
Earliest arrival 13<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 31<sup>st</sup> October.

On spring passage it is annual in small numbers from mid-March until early May. The best counts were an exceptional 36 on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1977, but the best counts since 1985 were eight at MGT on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1993, and six at EHF on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998 and a total of six at RF and EHF on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1998. Very rarely



recorded in June prior to 1985 and none since. Autumn passage involves fewer numbers than in spring and with no records in 1995 or 1998 we have had to classify it as rare in the status definition.

*O. o. leucorhoa*: Birds answering to the description of this the Greenland race have been recorded very rarely. Records have been claimed chiefly in May but also twice in late April and twice in August. Perhaps overlooked due to identification problems.



**Ring Ouzel**

Vagrant. One record.

*Turdus torquatus*

A male at EHF briefly in the early morning of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1988.

**Common Blackbird**

Very common breeding resident. October passage migrant and winter visitor.

*Turdus merula*

This is one of our commonest resident birds and can be found breeding around all the flashes. No breeding surveys have been done but we estimate at least 18 pairs breeding annually.

We are certain that passage migrants are arriving in October overnight. Numbers at EHF increase suddenly and birds have been seen perched on the tops of tall trees behind PHF at dawn and then flying at height to the south-west. Their arrival coincides with other wintering thrushes and Common Chaffinches, and they presumably are Scandinavian birds.

**Fieldfare**

Common occasionally abundant winter visitor and passage migrant.

*Turdus pilaris*

Earliest arrival 24<sup>th</sup> September, latest departure 6<sup>th</sup> May.

This species' main arrival period is from mid-October into November when flocks of birds can be seen flying over or feeding on hawthorn berries in the hedgerows. The best daily count in October we have is 2000 counted flying over. During the winter months flocks can be found with Redwings feeding on pasture or stubble fields with counts of 1200 in December and 1600 in February. Return passage noted in March and April with flocks flying over in a north-east direction, highest count we have traced was 1500 on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1988. Sub-song can sometimes be heard from flocks on mild days in March and April.

### Song Thrush

*Turdus philomelos*

Common breeding resident and winter visitor.

This species breeds around all flashes, except for RF and CF for which we have no information. We estimate a minimum of 10 pairs but have conservatively classified it as common, although a thorough survey may well show it to be better classified as very common breeding resident. A well documented national decline was also noted at the Flashes between 1990-1993 but it appears to have now recovered to near its former level. An influx of birds has been noted in October, these are assumed to be northern birds, perhaps from Scandinavia (*T. p. philomelos*) and arrive at the same time as Redwings and Fieldfares in small numbers. During the winter months Song Thrushes become quiet and inconspicuous with most around WLF and FF, but can also be found under the hedge near the EHF logbook, and especially along the railway embankments at EHF.

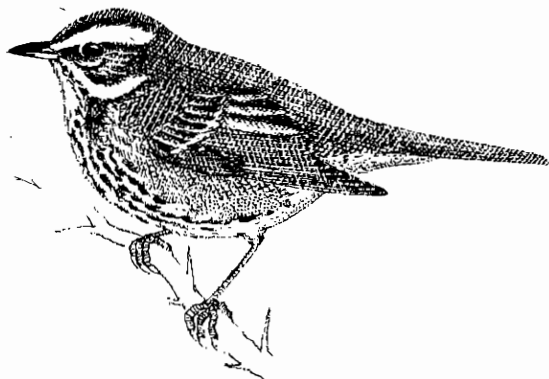
### Redwing

*Turdus iliacus*

Common, occasionally very common, winter visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 23<sup>rd</sup> September, latest departure 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

The main autumn arrival is in October and November when large flocks can be observed flying over often in the company of Fieldfares. Migration also occurs at night when birds can be heard calling overhead on clear nights in the evenings. They are a common sight in November stripping the berries from our hawthorn hedges, but during mid-winter they feed mostly on pasture and stubble fields along with Fieldfares.



Flock sizes are normally smaller than Fieldfare with 605 on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1977 the largest reported. A winter roost formerly at FF built up to 600 in January, but we have no recent information from this site. Spring migration commences in March and early April. Sub-song can regularly be heard on mild days.

### Mistle Thrush

*Turdus viscivorus*

Uncommon breeding resident.

We estimate a breeding population of three or four pairs at EHF, WLF, FF and PF. More pairs may be around WF, CF and RF areas. Rarely flocks but 23 were seen in communal display at WLF on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1945, and a flock of 20 on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1985 at EHF. More recently 10 were at WLF on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1993 and 28 together at WLF on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1999.

**Common Grasshopper Warbler***Locustella naevia*

Rare spring passage migrant. Formerly an uncommon and irregular breeding summer visitor.

Earliest arrival 26<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 10<sup>th</sup> August.

Very irregular in its occurrence at the Flashes. The first record was not until one was at WLF on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1956 and there were no further records until 1964. It was then recorded most years between 1964 and 1982 with the best years being two pairs in 1972, five singing birds in 1974, four singing in 1977 and five singing in 1980. Some of these singing birds were passage migrants but breeding was suspected in most of these years and proved on several occasions. All these sightings were from the FF, PF and WLF areas, and one record from RF. Very surprising is the complete lack of any sightings since 1982.

**Sedge Warbler***Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Common breeding summer visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 4<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 1<sup>st</sup> October.

In the late 1930s Sibson described it as common and Whalley writing in his Checklist in 1963 also knew it as common. Numbers have fluctuated since peaking in the early 1970s with 25+ pairs, and then decreasing to eight pairs in 1979, and probably only six pairs in 1985. Between four and eight pairs have bred annually since 1985 with some recent consolidating of breeding pairs on the new marsh habitats at PHF and EHF. In recent years pairs have bred at RF, GF, PHF, EHF, WLF and OF. Spring passage has been noted with, for example, 20 to 25 birds at WLF on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1948 but with only three remaining on 14<sup>th</sup>. Odd birds linger in the reed beds at WLF during September and occasionally also at PHF, EHF and RF.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler***Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Common breeding summer visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 12<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 4<sup>th</sup> October.

Due to a lack of habitat it did not breed at the Flashes in Sibson's time in the late 1930s although he had a passage migrant singing at WF.

By 1963 it was a common breeding bird in certain reed beds, especially FF. Counts of breeding pairs since then were 11 pairs in 1974, 10+ pairs in 1977, 6+ pairs in 1985, 14 pairs in 1993 and 8+ pairs in 1999. FF has been lost as a breeding site due to invasion by willow scrub. WLF has more than compensated with four pairs breeding annually in the newly planted phragmites beds. In the last few years two pairs have bred on the marsh at EHF. Elsewhere breeds on PHF, RF, OF, GF and, occasionally PF. At GF, OF and RF pairs do not arrive until mid-May, by which time the marsh vegetation has grown enough to provide cover. Odd birds linger through September, mainly at WLF, and these are probably passage migrants.

**Lesser Whitethroat***Sylvia curruca*

Uncommon breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 21<sup>st</sup> April, latest departure 1<sup>st</sup> October.

Sibson knew this species as a scarce and irregular summer visitor and Whalley described it as a passage migrant, although breeding was proven in 1949. It has been recorded annually since 1965, and it bred in 1965 and probably bred in 1972. Three pairs present in 1973, six pairs in 1974, nine singing males in June 1984 and between one and five pairs suspected of breeding since 1985.

This species is partial to overgrown hedgerows and its favourite area was destroyed at RF by the MGT development. Presently recorded from the EHF, PHF, WLF and FF areas, and probably under recorded from the CF and WF areas.

Frequently recorded from the well-watched EHF and PHF areas in late August and September.

**Common Whitethroat***Sylvia communis*

Very common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 15<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 21<sup>st</sup> September.

Regarded as common by Sibson in the late 1930s and Whalley says it was abundant in his Checklist published in 1964. Fluctuating numbers since with 12 pairs in 1973, 13 pairs in 1976, at least 18 pairs in 1978, seven pairs in 1985, and at least 10 pairs since 1985. Pairs breed on the waste land between FF and PF and along the canal at FF and WLF. There are many pairs along the railway embankments between Rookery Bridge and MGT, and in the last few years a conspicuous pair has taken up residence by the viewpoint at EHF.

Many family parties can be found in August along the railway embankment. 30+ at WLF on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1961 were thought to have been passage migrants. Hard to find after the first week of September, like Willow Warbler this species leaves early.

**Garden Warbler***Sylvia borin*

Uncommon and irregular breeding summer visitor. Uncommon passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 20<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 9<sup>th</sup> September.

Infrequently seen and not known to have bred before 1964. Singing males are now annual at FF and WLF in May, some of which are passage birds, but males in territory have been noted annually at FF with up to three in 1996. Breeding was proved at FF in 1972 and 1977 and possibly bred at WLF in 1985. More fieldwork is needed to prove breeding and survey outlying areas. Most records are from WLF, FF and PF, and in autumn often seen in the hedgerows and along the railway embankments at PHF and EHF where it has a liking for elderberries and blackberries.

**Blackcap***Sylvia atricapilla*

Common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant. Very rare in winter.

Earliest arrival 27<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 31<sup>st</sup> October.

Sibson reports this species as being rare, he only saw one bird in four years of watching but he does not say if this sighting was at the Flashes. By 1963 Whalley reports it as being common and up to seven pairs breed annually now. This means that certainly at a local level this species has increased dramatically. Breeds chiefly at FF, PF, WLF and perhaps also at FFF and GF. Recently a male has set up territory at EHF viewpoint in the spring and may breed here in the future.

Frequently reported from EHF and PHF in September with odd records into October. It has been difficult to judge late migrants from wintering individuals, so the late date of 31<sup>st</sup> October given above is only a tentative one. The only winter records are a female on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1974, a male on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1976 and one on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1995.

**Wood Warbler***Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Vagrant. Two records.

1976: One at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. An unusual date for this species.

1983: A singing male for an hour at WLF on 27<sup>th</sup> April.

**Common Chiffchaff***Phylloscopus collybita*

Common passage migrant. Summers annually. Has bred. Very rare winter visitor.

Common on spring passage from mid-March and through April, with often up to five birds singing at FF and WLF, and odd birds singing around the other flashes. This is the earliest of the warblers to arrive but it is not safe to give the earliest arrival date due to over wintering birds obscuring the situation.

Did not breed or summer in Sibson's time between 1935 and 1939. Whalley mentions it singing at FF in spring but not in summer. The first proof of summering we have traced were two pairs in 1977 and a singing bird at FF in April and May 1983. Since 1985 it has summered at FF annually and one or two pairs are thought to be breeding.

Breeding was proved for the first time here in 1988 when a juvenile was seen on 19<sup>th</sup> July. In recent years another male appears to be in territory at WLF during the summer. Further fieldwork is necessary to clarify the breeding situation.

Autumn passage peaks in September and October when it is the commonest warbler at the Flashes. It occurs around all the flashes in hedgerows and along the railway embankment, and also is often with the tit flocks at FF. Brief snatches of song can often be heard from these passage migrants.

All winter records are listed:

- 1974: One from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1975: One on 19<sup>th</sup> January.
- 1976: One from 12<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1978: One on 2<sup>nd</sup> January,
- 1982: Up to three in the late winter period and into 1983.
- 1994: One on 13<sup>th</sup> November. One from December stayed until February 1995.
- 1996: At least one in November and December.
- 1997: One from 22<sup>nd</sup> November until 12<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1998: One on 17<sup>th</sup> February.

Most winter records are from FF, PF, WLF and EHF.

### **Willow Warbler**

*Phylloscopus trochilus*

Very common breeding summer visitor and passage migrant.

Earliest arrival 29<sup>th</sup> March, latest departure 26<sup>th</sup> September.

Described by Whalley in 1963 as an abundant summer visitor. Perhaps some decline since then although still very common with an estimated minimum of 20 pairs breeding annually. This species appears to be arriving in spring earlier; up until 1964 the earliest spring arrival was 20<sup>th</sup> April (in 1963), but since then the earliest was 29<sup>th</sup> March (in 1981), with an average over the last 10 years of 3<sup>rd</sup> April. This is presumably a consequence of milder winters with southerly air flows in March. This trend can also be seen in other warbler species. The main breeding areas are FF, PF and WLF, and also along the railway embankments. 44 were ringed in one month at FF, some no doubt passage migrants. Most have departed by the first week of September after which it can be very hard to find.

### **Goldcrest**

*Regulus regulus*

Fairly common autumn passage migrant and winter visitor. Summer status unclear.

Commonest on autumn passage especially in October and early November when often heard and seen in hedgerows around most flashes, or in woodland at WLF and FF. Peak counts have been 11 in October and 15 in November.

Usually smaller numbers present in the winter months when they are easiest to find at FF and PF, often with the tit flocks. Song can occasionally be heard in March at FF and PF but it has never bred to our knowledge. Recent sightings of a singing bird at Pine Cottage at EHF could well be from a breeding pair and warrants further investigation.

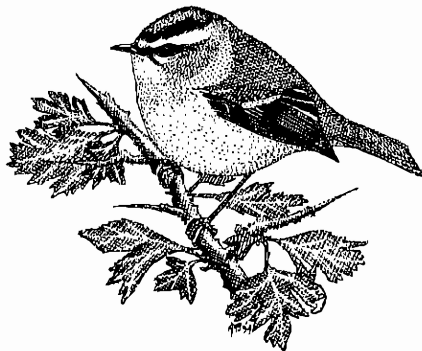
### Firecrest

*Regulus ignicapillus*

Vagrant. Two records.

1978: One at WLF on 13<sup>th</sup> October.

1997: A well-watched female at FF on 7<sup>th</sup> December was seen at close range from 13.30 hrs. - 14.25 hrs. and again at 15.55 hrs.



### Spotted Flycatcher

*Muscicapa striata*

Uncommon passage migrant. Irregular breeding summer visitor.

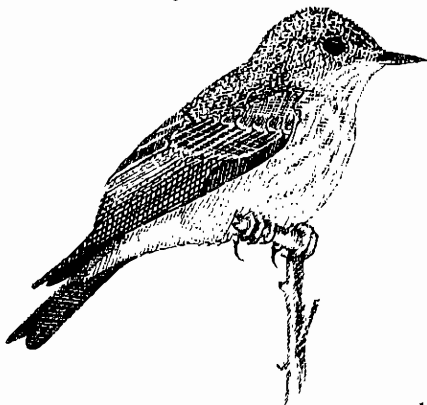
Earliest arrival 30<sup>th</sup> April, latest departure 25<sup>th</sup> September.

Described as a very local summer resident before 1964. Has bred occasionally since then with a maximum of three pairs in 1974. Since 1985 we have the following breeding records only:

1994: A pair bred at Flash Farm near EHF.

1996: Bred at WF where an adult and juvenile seen. Adult and juvenile seen on boundary of recording area in a copse at Dragons Lane and Tetton Lane junction.

1999: An adult and juvenile seen around Pine Cottage and adjacent farm at EHF. Bred again on our recording area boundary in a copse at Dragons Lane and Tetton Lane junction.



This is an easily overlooked species in the breeding season and a thorough search of the WF and Moston areas may prove it breeding regularly. Odd passage migrants are seen in August and early September from EHF and FFF areas and occasionally at WLF and FF. The best count in autumn was three at WLF on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1995.

**Pied Flycatcher***Ficedula hypoleuca*

Very rare passage migrant. Five records.

- 1977: A male at FF on 1<sup>st</sup> May.
- 1981: A male at WLF on 9<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1986: One at FFF on 15<sup>th</sup> August.
- 1997: A female at WLF on 12<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1998: An immature male at WLF on 22<sup>nd</sup> September.

**Long-tailed Tit***Aegithalos caudatus*

Common breeding resident.

This species has increased at the Flashes as before 1964 it was only known as a visitor in the winter months. It now breeds annually, and we estimate up to five pairs breeding each year. They prefer overgrown hedgerows and dense thickets at PF, FF and WLF where often found along the old road towards CF. At EHF and FFF they breed along the railway embankments. Between July and early March they form into roving feeding flocks along with other tit species and Goldcrests, and they can then be encountered just about anywhere in our recording area. Counts of up to 30 are annual but 40 at EHF on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1994 was noteworthy. They quickly learnt to utilise the feeding station at FF with up to six counted feeding together.

**Marsh Tit***Parus palustris*

Very rare visitor. 11 records of perhaps 10 birds.

- 1938: One at EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1975: Sightings of one bird on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> July, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 19<sup>th</sup> October and 4<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1981: One at WLF on 30<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1982: Single birds at FF on 18<sup>th</sup> October and 11<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1986: One at FF on 16<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1998: One at FF on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

This species has always been a great rarity at the Flashes where we have no suitable habitat. The paucity of recent records perhaps reflecting its probable demise as a breeding species in south-east Cheshire.

**Willow Tit***Parus montanus*

Uncommon breeding resident.

Up to three pairs resident at FF and PF although it has been suggested it may be declining with at most two pairs present in the 1990s. Recorded during the summer months annually but confirmed breeding often lacking, although proved in 1993 and 1997. When not breeding often joins the mixed feeding flocks of Long-tailed and other tit species at WLF, FF and PF, and even occasionally wandering to EHF, and rarely RF and CF. Maximum count in



winter is four. In 1998 and 1999 has been a regular visitor to the new feeding station at FF.

#### **Coal Tit**

*Parus ater*

Uncommon visitor.

Surprisingly uncommon at the Flashes despite breeding a short distance away in Sandbach. Has been recorded in most months but rare in midsummer. Most records are from August until March but especially late September and October, when influxes are noted, with maximum counts of eight on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and nine on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1985. Most records from FF, PF and WLF, but annual in September and October at EHF.

#### **Blue Tit**

*Parus caeruleus*

Very common breeding resident.

Breeds around all the flashes. We have no counts of breeding pairs but we estimate a minimum of 30 pairs annually. In 1998 seven pairs used nest boxes at FF and in 1999 eight pairs used nest boxes at EHF. Forms into mixed species flocks when not breeding with some counts being 20 at FF on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1973 and 25 on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1974 at WLF. Up to 25 regularly congregated around the feeding station at EHF in the 1990s.

#### **Great Tit**

*Parus major*

Very common breeding resident.

Breeds throughout our recording area but in a lower density than Blue Tit. We have no counts of breeding numbers but we estimate at least 18 pairs. They do not flock as much as other tit species in the winter months, and the only other counts we have are up to 15 regularly at the feeding station at EHF.

#### **European Nuthatch**

*Sitta europaea*

Very rare visitor. 14 records of at least 13 birds.

The first record was in 1981, all records are listed:

- 1981: One at WF on 17<sup>th</sup> October. One at FF on 1<sup>st</sup> December.
- 1994: One at EHF on 3<sup>rd</sup> July,
- 1996: One at the feeding station at EHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> June.
- 1998: One at EHF feeding station on 9<sup>th</sup> February. One at FF on 15<sup>th</sup> February. Two at FF on 25<sup>th</sup> September. One at PHF on 26<sup>th</sup> September. At FF in October one on 9<sup>th</sup>, two on 16<sup>th</sup>, one on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. The last three records were birds on the new feeding station at FF.

1999: One at FF on 3<sup>rd</sup> January. A juvenile at PHF on 24<sup>th</sup> July.

This species now breeds within two miles of the Flashes at Abbeyfields, so more records can be expected.

**Eurasian Treecreeper**

*Certhia familiaris*

Uncommon breeding resident.

Up to three pairs breed annually at FF and PF, however, four pairs bred at FF in 1994. A pair bred in 1983 behind the logbook box by the bridge at EHF. A thorough search may reveal other pairs but rarely recorded during the breeding season from WLF or EHF. Odd birds can be found in autumn and winter with the mixed tit flocks, and during these seasons can turn up just about anywhere, even RF and CF. The best count being six on several occasions at FF.

**Eurasian Golden Oriole**

*Oriolus oriolus*

Vagrant. One record.

Two males at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1967. This is an exceptional record and must have been a spectacular sight for the fortunate birder. Interestingly Rostherne Mere NNR's first record was a first summer male and an adult female on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1992, exactly 25 years after our record to the day!

**Northern Grey Shrike**

*Lanius excubitor*

Very rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

Twelve records of at least eight birds:

- 1964: One around WLF from 18<sup>th</sup> October to the year end.
- 1965: The individual from 1964 stayed until 27<sup>th</sup> March. One again at WLF in November.
- 1968: One on 7<sup>th</sup> April.
- 1972: One at WLF on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November.
- 1976: One at RF on 12<sup>th</sup> April was found by observers searching for the Little Bunting.
- 1980: One at PHF between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> May.
- 1982: One at RF and PHF on 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1983: One at EHF on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and then at RF from 22<sup>nd</sup> April until 13<sup>th</sup> May. All sightings in 1982 and 1983 may well refer to the same individual which was heard singing in May.
- 1988: One briefly at EHF on 31<sup>st</sup> December.

Surprisingly no records during the well-watched 1990s.



### **Eurasian Jay**

*Garrulus glandarius*

Uncommon breeding resident.

Breeds annually in the well-wooded FF, PF and WLF areas. This species, however, is under recorded with few confirmed breeding records, although three pairs are known to have bred in 1994. We estimate up to three pairs breeding annually. From late summer and through the winter occurs in open farmland with scattered trees and hedgerows around the other flashes, the largest group recorded being six.

### **Common Magpie**

*Pica pica*

Very common breeding resident.

Prior to 1964 regarded as a common resident but has increased since then. We have no counts of breeding numbers but we estimate 15+ pairs in recent years. Breeds around all flashes, often in tall thick hawthorns. During the winter months birds roost at FF and careful counting in the 1980-1981 winter produced counts of 165 in November, 203 in December, 196 in January, 472 in February and 61 in March. Since 1981 this roost has declined but there were 110 in December 1986. Other counts were 40 at MGT on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1987 and 27 at EHF in March 1989.

### **Eurasian Jackdaw**

*Corvus monedula*

Very common resident and winter visitor. Breeding status unclear.

No information prior to 1964. Between 1964 and 1985 it became an uncommon visitor, chiefly in winter with a maximum count of 27 on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1985. There has been a dramatic increase since 1985 almost certainly due to the attractiveness of MGT as a feeding area. Counts of up to 250 have regularly been recorded from RF and MGT in recent years, and present now in every month, although commonest in winter when numbers probably swollen by immigrants from the Continent. As far as we know it has

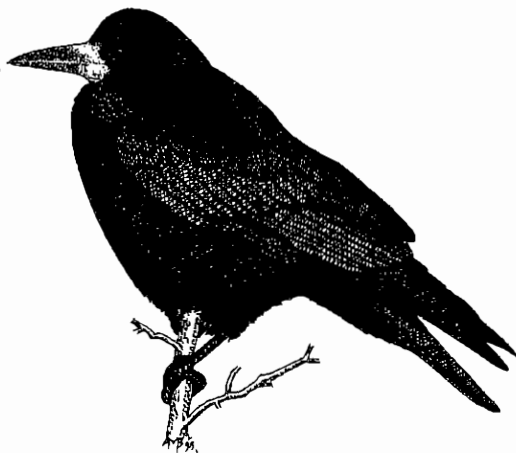
not bred but it breeds as close as Sandbach and Crewe Town centres. However, a single bird on a house chimney near WF in 1984 and a pair on chimneys at Watch Lane Farm in the spring of 1998 may well have been breeding.

### **Rook**

*Corvus frugilegus*

Very common breeding resident.

Regarded as a fairly common resident prior to 1964 but we cannot find any mention of rookeries in our recording area. As far as we are aware bred for the first time in 1992 when there were 14 nests in the willows at FF. This rookery increased rapidly to 102 nests in 1996 and 119 nests in 1999. Another new rookery at GF/OF held 14 nests in 1995. MGT acts as a magnet for feeding birds year round with frequent counts of over 100. They also feed in fields around RF and PHF with recently manured pasture and stubble fields favourite.



### **Carrion Crow**

*Corvus corone*

Very common breeding resident.

Breeds around all the flashes but, as is often the case with our common birds, we do not know exactly how many pairs we have. We estimate a minimum of 15 pairs. Bold and aggressive at EHF harrying gulls, ducks and Northern Lapwings looking for weak and injured individuals. Sick or injured gulls in summer are a frequent prey and often eaten alive. Before 1985 large flocks were seen mostly in spring and autumn with 140 on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1974 and 10<sup>th</sup> April 1976. With the opening of MGT numbers have increased with counts of up to 200 during the winter of 1995 and 400 in 1999.

*C.c. cornix* (Hooded Crow). This race is a very rare autumn and winter visitor. We have traced four old records of singles on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1938, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1941, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1972 and 11<sup>th</sup> October 1975.

### **Common Raven**

*Corvus corax*

Very rare visitor. 11 records of 17 birds.

First recorded in recent times in 1992. All records are listed.

1992: Three circled over EHF and drifted south-east on 31<sup>st</sup> August.

- 1997: One over FF on 26<sup>th</sup> January. Two over EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1998: One over EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> April. One over CF on 18<sup>th</sup> October. Two over WLF on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.
- 1999: One over MGT on 9<sup>th</sup> January and two on 10<sup>th</sup> over PHF. One over EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> May. One over EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> October. Two over EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

Our increase in sightings reflects this species' colonisation of Cheshire during the 1990s. All our sightings have so far been fly-overs, they do not appear to have overcome their shyness or learnt to feed at MGT.

### **Common Starling**

*Sturnus vulgaris*

Very common breeding resident. Abundant passage migrant and winter visitor.

Very common breeding bird, mostly around farm buildings but we have no counts of breeding pairs. In late summer small flocks of family groups often feed in pasture fields. Diurnal migration in autumn and spring can involve huge numbers with, for example, 15,000 at WLF on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1952, but in October on good days for movement a continuous passage of birds moves through. In spring 50,000 were feeding in fields at EHF on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1982, these were probably pre-migration birds. Wintering birds have numbered 5,000+ at RF on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1978, and more recently MGT has been attractive to wintering flocks with 1,500 in December 1993 and 1,000 on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1997.

### **House Sparrow**

*Passer domesticus*

Very common breeding resident.

Breeds around habitation especially farm buildings, and commonest at farms around EHF, and the Moston area near PF. We have no counts of breeding pairs but we estimate 30 pairs in our recording area. Even at the Flashes the feeling amongst local birdwatchers is that it has declined in numbers. Formerly large numbers bred in the glue factory at Rookery Bridge prior to its demolition.

### **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**

*Passer montanus*

Common breeding resident.

This species breeds in small numbers around the Flashes and for breeding favours old oak trees in open country. In recent years breeding pairs have occupied territories around RF and MGT, and hedgerow oaks along the footpath between PHF and RF and roadside oaks near CF. It is difficult to estimate the number of pairs because much suitable habitat is away from roads and footpaths so difficult to survey. We think that at least five pairs are present. Sibson in the 1930s regarded it as 'well distributed' and Whalley in 1963 as 'fairly common'. There has been some decline over recent years, reflecting the national decline of this species. This can be shown by counts of

flocks, 200 at FF on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1973, 270 WLF on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1975, 200 at EHF on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1979, 100 at EHF on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1989, 80 at MGT in 1994 but only 30 at RF in August 1997. This decline is thought to be due to lack of stubble seed in the winter, so it is encouraging to note that this species has learnt to use the feeding station at EHF where up to 20 birds can be seen at close range.

### **Common Chaffinch**

*Fringilla coelebs*

Very common breeding resident. Common passage migrant and winter visitor.

A well distributed breeding species in our recording area, we have no counts of numbers but we estimate at least 25 pairs breeding annually. It is difficult to judge any population change of our breeders but both Sibson in the late 1930s and Whalley regarded it as a common resident. Large flocks in autumn and winter are rather irregular, some high counts are 100 on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1974 and 200 on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1981, and more recently 80 at MGT during the winter of 1994. Diurnal migration is evident at passage times, especially during October when birds fly-over on calm mornings in ones and twos, 55 were counted on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1985 flying over heading south or south-west. These are probably Continental birds that winter in the UK, and the migration of Common Chaffinches in October over the Flashes involves other species accompanying them, probably from the Continent, such as Eurasian Siskin, Common Redpoll, Fieldfares and Redwings.

### **Brambling**

*Fringilla montifringilla*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Earliest arrival 4<sup>th</sup> October, latest departure 24<sup>th</sup> April.

Not recorded prior to 1964, the first record being 22 on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1964. Since 1964 it has been found to be an irregular spring and autumn passage migrant in very small numbers. Mostly seen and heard overhead in the second half of October with odd birds accompanying the diurnal passage of Common Chaffinches. Flocks in the winter months are very irregular, perhaps due to our lack of beech mast. However, 70 were counted at FF on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1973 and 53 on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1976. More recently 33 were attracted to the banks of MGT on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1986. A few recent records have come from the feeding station at EHF, let us hope this trend continues.

### **European Greenfinch**

*Carduelis chloris*

Common breeding resident.

Breeds around EHF, FFF, WLF, PF, FF and adjoining areas. No breeding information from WF but no doubt does breed there and also RF area. Also breeds in Moston village between PF and WF. We have no counts of breeding pairs so have classified it conservatively as common, but a proper survey may well find it to be very common (10+ pairs). Flocks form in winter in stubble fields, or more recently around the EHF feeding station, maximum counts of

120 have been made before 1985 and 120 were at CF in winter 1994, and 76 at EHF in November and December 1998. In winter, roosts in holly hedges at WLF and counts of 160 have been made in December and January prior to 1985, but more recently 80 roosted here in 1996.

### European Goldfinch

*Carduelis carduelis*

Common breeding resident.

Sibson regarded it as rare between 1935-1939 and he only saw a total of eight birds in winter and autumn. Still only recorded occasionally up to 1963. This is now a resident annually breeding species and along with Eurasian Collared Dove and Blackcap has undergone a dramatic increase in numbers since the 1930s. Up to 10 pairs breed annually and a proper survey may well prove this to be an underestimate. In the past also noted as a spring and autumn migrant, often with Common Linnets, but little evidence of this in the last few decades. Post breeding flocks in summer and autumn with counts of up to 70 many times, but an exceptional count of 150 on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1998 at EHF and PHF. Often lower numbers in winter and maximum count we have traced is 47 at FF on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993.

### Eurasian Siskin

*Carduelis spinus*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor.

Earliest arrival 27<sup>th</sup> August, latest departure 17<sup>th</sup> April.

Sibson tried hard to find this species in the 1930s but never did. The first record we have found was a party of six at FF on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1962. It has increased and is now annual and may still be increasing. Occurs as a spring and autumn passage migrant with October and March the main months. Birds can be heard flying over on calm mornings. During the winter months flocks are regular especially at FF, PF and WLF, with many counts of up to 40 birds, and a best count of 66 in November 1981. These winter flocks are normally feeding in alders, sometimes accompanied by Common Redpolls and European Goldfinches.



**Common Linnet***Carduelis cannabina*

Uncommon breeding resident. Fairly common passage migrant.

Prior to 1964 regarded as a common breeding species, it has declined since and although we have no breeding counts, we estimate up to five pairs only. It breeds mainly along the railway embankments at EHF and FFF, and perhaps elsewhere in hedgerows. Occurs as a spring migrant from mid-March to early May and in autumn from mid-August to mid-October. Some huge counts in the past, such as 450 on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1974. In winter large flocks form if suitable feeding can be found. 140 were around RF on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1983 and 150 at MGT during the winter in 1994. A winter roost in the holly hedges at WLF regularly held up to 120 between December and February in the early 1980s, and 200 were here on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1996, but such large flocks are now rarely recorded.

**Twite***Carduelis flavirostris*

Very rare visitor. Seven records of at least ten birds.

All records listed.

- 1966: One on 22<sup>nd</sup> October.
- 1973: One at the WLF roost on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.
- 1975: One at the WLF roost on 4<sup>th</sup> February.
- 1976: One on 23<sup>rd</sup> October.
- 1977: At the WLF roost one from 27<sup>th</sup> February until 7<sup>th</sup> March and two from 13<sup>th</sup> November until the year end.
- 1978: The two overwintering from 1977 had increased to four in February and they stayed until early April.
- 1996: One at EHF on 30<sup>th</sup> November.

Most of our records have come from the finch roost in holly hedges at WLF where the Twite would fly in with Common Linnets and European Greenfinches in the late afternoon, and perch in trees before descending into the holly bushes to roost. They could sometimes be located during the day feeding on waste land near the canal pool or in fields at Ettiley Heath. One of the four in April 1978 was heard singing.

**Common Redpoll***Carduelis flammea*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor. Rare in summer. Irregular breeder.

Sibson reported this species as being well distributed in the late 1930s, but there were no records for the 1950s and early 1960s. Began to be seen again in the late 1960s with some good counts in the 1970s, such as 30 on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1972, 40 on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1973 and an influx in October 1974 with a maximum of 40. Since 1985 known as a spring and autumn passage migrant when small numbers of diurnal migrants can be heard and seen flying over,



especially in September and October. Small flocks are sometimes present in the winter months chiefly at FF, PF and WLF, when they can be found feeding in alders; highest count being 30 at EHF on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1983.

Sibson knew it as breeding in the Sandbach area but does not stipulate whether it actually bred at the Flashes. The first proof of breeding was in 1973 when up to three pairs bred around WLF and FF. There were also summer sightings in 1974 and 1976 but it is not known to have bred since 1973, although song is occasionally heard from spring migrants at FF.

*C. f. flammea*: Mealy Redpoll, the nominate race from Scandinavia is a very rare visitor with five records:

- 1972: At least two in December at FF.
- 1973: Four from January until the 3<sup>rd</sup> March at FF and WLF coincided with a large influx into the country.
- 1975: One at FF on 26<sup>th</sup> October.
- 1996: Two were at EHF on 17<sup>th</sup> February and three at FF on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, these records again coinciding with a large influx into the country.

#### **Common Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

Very rare visitor. Three records of six birds.

- 1972: Four (two males, two females) flying over EHF on 21<sup>st</sup> September.
- 1997: One in flight at EHF on 7<sup>th</sup> August occurred during an irruption into the country.
- 1999: One high over EHF calling on 1<sup>st</sup> September.

#### **Common Bullfinch**

*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Uncommon breeding resident.

Between 1935-1939 Sibson regarded this species as rare occurring most often in winter. Whalley in his 'Checklist of the Birds of Sandbach Flashes' in 1964 said it was now common. Between 1970 and 1985 four to six pairs were thought to breed annually. Since 1985 we estimate two pairs to breed in the FF, PF and WLF areas. Other pairs may be present elsewhere such as in the Moston village area bordering PF, or along the railway embankment near FFF. At other times, wanders to the other flashes and the most seen together is five at FF on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1995.

#### **Lapland Bunting**

*Calcarius lapponicus*

Very rare visitor. Three records.

- 1976: One in flight calling over EHF on 9<sup>th</sup> October during a passage of Meadow Pipits.
- 1980: One feeding with finches and buntings near WLF on 12<sup>th</sup> October.

- 1992: A winter plumaged male on rough ground at MGT on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October. This individual allowed very close views for a fortunate few on 30<sup>th</sup>, but it was only seen briefly at dawn on 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Snow Bunting**

*Plectrophenax nivalis*

Very rare visitor. Three records.

- 1977: A female or immature at WLF on 13<sup>th</sup> November.  
1996: One over calling on 1<sup>st</sup> December.  
1998: One in flight around a stubble field at RF then over towards EHF on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

### **Yellowhammer**

*Emberiza citrinella*

Uncommon breeding resident.

Regarded as common up to 1963, this species has been undergoing a slow decline since at least 1975. Eight singing males were counted in May 1993 but we have classified its breeding status as uncommon (one-five pairs) as in 1999 we counted only four singing males in the FFF and Wheelock Valley areas. There could be further pairs elsewhere making our status definition an under estimate. As with many of our breeding passerines a thorough survey is needed. Flocks form in fields in autumn and winter, these have also shown a decline. Maximum counts have been 33 on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1976, 55 on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1980, 65 on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1983, but the highest recent count is only 25 at WLF in September 1995.

### **Little Bunting**

*Emberiza pusilla*

Vagrant. One record.

A female at RF from 11<sup>th</sup> April until 1<sup>st</sup> May 1976. This bird fed around the edge of the flash with a small group of Reed Buntings and was seen by over a hundred birdwatchers from all over the country. This species is the rarest passerine so far recorded at the Flashes.

### **Common Reed Bunting**

*Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common breeding resident.

Between 1935 and 1939 Sibson knew this species as a widely distributed breeding bird but absent from our area from late October to the beginning of February. However, by the 1960s Whalley knew it as a resident as is the case today. Between 1970 and 1985 a minimum of 11 pairs bred annually. 12 pairs bred in 1987, 13 pairs in 1982, but only seven pairs in 1997 and 1998. A thorough survey of all outlying flashes may reveal above 10 pairs. Small flocks can be found in winter where the feeding is good, some good counts are 17 on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1976, 20 in December 1973, 20 in the Wheelock Valley in 1994, and 12 at MGT during December 1998. During severe winter weather becomes hard to find with most moving away from the Flashes.

## Corn Bunting

*Miliaria calandra*

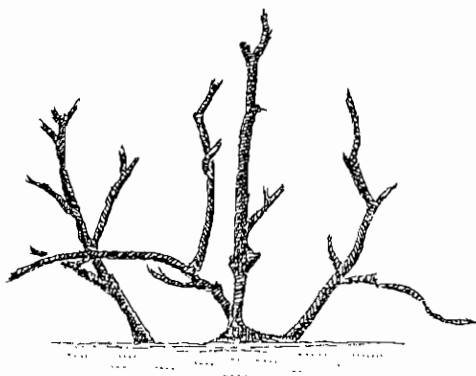
Rare visitor. Former irregular breeder.

This species has an interesting history at the Flashes. Not recorded by Sibson in the late 1930s anywhere in the Sandbach area. A male at EHF on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1946 was the first record but there were no other records up to 1963. Started to colonise the Flashes, probably in 1971 or 1972. By 1973 nine singing males were counted around EHF, WLF and FFF areas, and in 1974 there were six singing males and up to three singing birds between 1975 and 1983. Only single males were present in 1985 and 1986 at EHF. All records since 1986 are listed:

- 1987: Two at EHF on 1<sup>st</sup> August.
- 1989: One on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> April. One on 13<sup>th</sup> June and 16<sup>th</sup> July.
- 1990: One on 1<sup>st</sup> April. One on 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> July.
- 1991: A singing male on 25<sup>th</sup> May.

No records since 1991 despite still breeding in south-east Cheshire, although in reduced numbers.

A wintering flock first reported in 1973 with 15 counted on 4<sup>th</sup> November. Highest counts after this were: 11 on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1974; 14 on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1975; 35 in January 1977; 24 in April 1979; up to 36 between January and March 1980; 37 January to February 1981 and 21 on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1983. No further winter records after 1985 coinciding with the demise of our breeding birds. The wintering flock were mostly present around WLF and Rookery Bridge areas and contained a partial albino bird in 1980 and 1981.



## Escaped and Released Species

Species reliably recorded at Sandbach Flashes but judged by the authors to be escaped or released from captivity. Over twenty species have occurred, the more interesting ones are discussed below:-

### Dalmatian Pelican

*Pelecanus crispus*

One at EHF for thirty minutes on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1974.

### Sacred Ibis

*Threskiornis aethiopicus*

One at PHF and RF from 7<sup>th</sup> March until 18<sup>th</sup> May 1989.

### Lesser White-fronted Goose

*Anser erythropus*

An adult at RF on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1976. It is possible this bird was an escape from Maw Green Wildfowl Collection. See 1976 Cheshire Bird Report for discussion of this record.

### Bar-headed Goose

*Anser indicus*

Frequent records since 1986 of escaped birds.

### Snow Goose

*Anser caerulescens*

One at WLF on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1986. One at WLF from 23<sup>rd</sup> September until the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1987. One at PHF on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1988. Two at PHF and WLF on 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May 1996. All records judged to be of escaped birds.

### Egyptian Goose

*Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Sightings of a single bird in 1984. One at RF on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1986. One at CF and WLF from 23<sup>rd</sup> March until 6<sup>th</sup> April 1987. All records strongly suspected or known escapees, we have no evidence of the feral breeding population from East Anglia having reached us.

### Wood Duck

*Aix sponsa*

A drake at WF in 1992 (date lost).

### Purple Swamp-hen

*Porphyrio porphyrio*

An adult at FFF from 13<sup>th</sup> August until 26<sup>th</sup> September 1971. Birds were being offered for sale at ten pounds each at Phillips and Heath Aviaries near Whitchurch at this time.

### Rose-ringed Parakeet

*Psittacula krameri*

A few sightings since 1980 of recently escaped or released individuals. We have no evidence of the wild feral population of Southern England having reached the Flashes.

### Yellow-headed Blackbird

*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

A male at WLF on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1970.

## EARLY AND LATE DATES

The following tables have been prepared to give the early and late dates for those species that are visitors to the Flashes. There are separate tables for summer visitors and winter visitors.

In Table 2 we have only included those species that arrive in spring and may summer in the area. No passage migrants are included. Additionally it seemed wise to exclude Blackcap and Chiffchaff since these are also winter visitors, and it is not possible to allocate March/October records to summer or winter visitors.

Where the year is not given in the date we have been unable to trace it, although all such records were prior to 1985.

**Table 1 Winter Visitors**

Species	Earliest Date	Latest Date
Tundra (Bewick's) Swan	14 <sup>th</sup> October 1973	1 <sup>st</sup> May 1964
Whooper Swan	21 <sup>st</sup> October 1998	26 <sup>th</sup> April 1998
Greater White-fronted Goose	24 <sup>th</sup> November 1974	27 <sup>th</sup> March 1983
Goosander	14 <sup>th</sup> July 1999	22 <sup>nd</sup> April 1994
Merlin	20 <sup>th</sup> August 1966	6 <sup>th</sup> May 1998
Jack Snipe	20 <sup>th</sup> August 1980	20 <sup>th</sup> April 1994
Eurasian Woodcock	19 <sup>th</sup> October 1997	13 <sup>th</sup> March 1996
Iceland Gull	29 <sup>th</sup> November 1994	26 <sup>th</sup> April 1995
Glaucous Gull	28 <sup>th</sup> November 1998	23 <sup>rd</sup> May 1998
Fieldfare	24 <sup>th</sup> September 1975	6 <sup>th</sup> May
Redwing	23 <sup>rd</sup> September 1995	2 <sup>nd</sup> May
Brambling	4 <sup>th</sup> October 1998	24 <sup>th</sup> April 1999
Eurasian Siskin	27 <sup>th</sup> August 1997	17 <sup>th</sup> April

**Table 2 Summer Visitors**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Earliest Date</b>	<b>Latest Date</b>
Garganey	3 <sup>rd</sup> March 1949	17 <sup>th</sup> November 1974
Eurasian Hobby	24 <sup>th</sup> April 1998	7 <sup>th</sup> October 1992
Little Ringed Plover	6 <sup>th</sup> March 1977	16 <sup>th</sup> October 1985
Common Cuckoo	5 <sup>th</sup> April 1982	1 <sup>st</sup> October 1986
Common Swift	20 <sup>th</sup> April 1983	18 <sup>th</sup> October 1978
Sand Martin	12 <sup>th</sup> March 1989	27 <sup>th</sup> September
Barn Swallow	19 <sup>th</sup> March 1999	30 <sup>th</sup> November 1974
House Martin	25 <sup>th</sup> March 1995	5 <sup>th</sup> November 1977
Yellow Wagtail	29 <sup>th</sup> March 1981	2 <sup>nd</sup> October 1987
Common Redstart	9 <sup>th</sup> April 1981	6 <sup>th</sup> October 1991
Whinchat	15 <sup>th</sup> April	17 <sup>th</sup> October 1937
Northern Wheatear	13 <sup>th</sup> March 1983	31 <sup>st</sup> October
Common Grasshopper Warbler	26 <sup>th</sup> April 1980	10 <sup>th</sup> August
Sedge Warbler	4 <sup>th</sup> April 1999	1 <sup>st</sup> October 1978
Eurasian Reed Warbler	12 <sup>th</sup> April 1997	4 <sup>th</sup> October 1998
Lesser Whitethroat	21 <sup>st</sup> April 1988	1 <sup>st</sup> October 1998
Common Whitethroat	15 <sup>th</sup> April 1993	21 <sup>st</sup> September 1993
Garden Warbler	20 <sup>th</sup> April 1996	9 <sup>th</sup> September 1983
Willow Warbler	29 <sup>th</sup> March 1981	26 <sup>th</sup> September 1998
Spotted Flycatcher	30 <sup>th</sup> April	25 <sup>th</sup> September

# CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF SANDBACH FLASHES

Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Red-throated Diver						
Great Northern Diver						
Little Grebe						
Great Crested Grebe						
Red-necked Grebe						
Horned (Slavonian) Grebe						
Black-necked Grebe						
Leach's Storm-petrel						
Northern Gannet						
Great Cormorant						
Great Bittern						
Black-crowned Night Heron						
Little Egret						
Grey Heron						
Purple Heron						
White Stork						
Eurasian Spoonbill						
Mute Swan						
Tundra (Bewick's) Swan						
Whooper Swan						
Bean Goose						
Pink-footed Goose						
Greater White-fronted Goose						
Greylag Goose						
Canada Goose						

	<b>Life List</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>
Barnacle Goose						
Brent Goose						
Ruddy Shelduck						
Common Shelduck						
Mandarin Duck						
Eurasian Wigeon						
American Wigeon						
Gadwall						
Common Teal						
Mallard						
Northern Pintail						
Garganey						
Northern Shoveler						
Red-crested Pochard						
Common Pochard						
Tufted Duck						
Greater Scaup						
Common Eider						
Long-tailed Duck						
Black (Common) Scoter						
Common Goldeneye						
Smew						
Red-breasted Merganser						
Goosander						
Ruddy Duck						
European Honey-buzzard						



Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Red Kite						
Eurasian Marsh Harrier						
Hen Harrier						
Northern Goshawk						
Eurasian Sparrowhawk						
Common Buzzard						
Osprey						
Common Kestrel						
Merlin						
Eurasian Hobby						
Peregrine Falcon						
Red-legged Partridge						
Grey Partridge						
Common Quail						
Common Pheasant						
Water Rail						
Spotted Crake						
Corn Crake						
Common Moorhen						
Common Coot						
Common Crane						
Eurasian Oystercatcher						
Black-winged Stilt						
Pied Avocet						
Little Ringed Plover						
Common Ringed Plover						

<b>Species</b>	<b>Life List</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Year</b>
Kentish Plover						
European Golden Plover						
Grey Plover						
Northern Lapwing						
Red Knot						
Sanderling						
Little Stint						
Temminck's Stint						
White-rumped Sandpiper						
Pectoral Sandpiper						
Curlew Sandpiper						
Dunlin						
Stilt Sandpiper						
Ruff						
Jack Snipe						
Common Snipe						
Eurasian Woodcock						
Black-tailed Godwit						
Bar-tailed Godwit						
Whimbrel						
Eurasian Curlew						
Upland Sandpiper						
Spotted Redshank						
Common Redshank						
Marsh Sandpiper						
Common Greenshank						

Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Lesser Yellowlegs						
Green Sandpiper						
Wood Sandpiper						
Common Sandpiper						
Spotted Sandpiper						
Ruddy Turnstone						
Wilson's Phalarope						
Red-necked Phalarope						
Red (Grey) Phalarope						
Mediterranean Gull						
Little Gull						
Black-headed Gull						
Ring-billed Gull						
Mew (Common) Gull						
Lesser Black-backed Gull						
Herring Gull						
Iceland Gull						
Glaucous Gull						
Great Black-backed Gull						
Black-legged Kittiwake						
Sandwich Tern						
Common Tern						
Arctic Tern						
Little Tern						
Black Tern						
White-winged Black Tern						

Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Common Guillemot						
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)						
Stock Dove						
Common Wood Pigeon						
Eurasian Collared Dove						
European Turtle Dove						
Common Cuckoo						
Barn Owl						
Little Owl						
Tawny Owl						
Long-eared Owl						
Short-eared Owl						
Common Swift						
Alpine Swift						
Common Kingfisher						
Eurasian Hoopoe						
Eurasian Wryneck						
Green Woodpecker						
Great Spotted Woodpecker						
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker						
Common Sky Lark						
Sand Martin						
Barn Swallow						
House Martin						
Tree Pipit						
Meadow Pipit						

Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Rock Pipit						
Water Pipit						
Yellow Wagtail						
Grey Wagtail						
White (Pied) Wagtail						
Bohemian Waxwing						
Winter Wren						
Hedge Accentor (Dunnock)						
European Robin						
Common Nightingale						
Black Redstart						
Common Redstart						
Whinchat						
Common Stonechat						
Northern Wheatear						
Ring Ouzel						
Common Blackbird						
Fieldfare						
Song Thrush						
Redwing						
Mistle Thrush						
Common Grasshopper Warbler						
Sedge Warbler						
Eurasian Reed Warbler						
Lesser Whitethroat						
Common Whitethroat						

Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Garden Warbler						
Blackcap						
Wood Warbler						
Common Chiffchaff						
Willow Warbler						
Goldcrest						
Firecrest						
Spotted Flycatcher						
Pied Flycatcher						
Long-tailed Tit						
Marsh Tit						
Willow Tit						
Coal Tit						
Blue Tit						
Great Tit						
European Nuthatch						
Eurasian Treecreeper						
Eurasian Golden Oriole						
Northern Grey Shrike						
Eurasian Jay						
Common Magpie						
Eurasian Jackdaw						
Rook						
Carrion Crow						
Common Raven						
Common Starling						

Species	Life List	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
House Sparrow						
Eurasian Tree Sparrow						
Common Chaffinch						
Brambling						
European Greenfinch						
European Goldfinch						
Eurasian Siskin						
Common Linnet						
Twite						
Common Redpoll						
Common Crossbill						
Common Bullfinch						
Lapland Bunting						
Snow Bunting						
Yellowhammer						
Little Bunting						
Common Reed Bunting						
Corn Bunting						
<b>Total species recorded 225</b>						
<b>Additions and Sub-species</b>						

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