



THE OBSERVER

SECOS Newsletter

Promoting and fostering an interest in ornithology by observation, research and record-keeping

February 2026

"The Canary Islands"

Mark Woodhead

Friday 13th February

via Zoom



Situated in the Atlantic Ocean off the west coast of Africa and just north of the Tropic of Cancer, the Canary Islands offer a fascinating mix of location, isolation, vegetation and climate. These factors have shaped an ever-evolving birdlife, from Berthelot's pipit to the striking blue chaffinch. In this presentation, Mark will showcase many of the islands' unique endemics and the habitats they call home. If you haven't yet visited the Canary

Field Trip

North Wales Coast - Sunday 22nd February

The North Wales coast offers excellent birding, with visits to Llanfairfechan, The Spinnies, and RSPB Conwy, where varied habitats attract a wealth of species. If time allows, we'll also stop at Llanddulas and Kinmel Dunes. It promises to be a rewarding and enjoyable day out.



Welcome to New Members!

We are delighted to welcome the following new members to SECOS this month:

Paul Whittaker, Graham Taylor, Colin Mair

January Highlights (first reports this month)

1st Barn Owl, Black-tailed Godwit, Fieldfare, Goosander, Little Gull, Redwing, Snipe, Starling; 2nd Cetti's Warbler, Little Grebe; 3rd Common Gull, Curlew, Redpoll; 4th Blackcap, Great White Egret, Little Egret, Pochard, Raven, Water Rail; 5th Tawny Owl; 6th White Wagtail (alba); 7th Pintail, White-fronted Goose; 8th Barnacle Goose, Pink-footed Goose; 9th Kingfisher; 10th Egyptian Goose; 11th Mandarin Duck; 12th Green-winged Teal; 13th Dunlin; 15th Jack Snipe, Siskin, Yellowhammer; 16th Goldeneye, Green Sandpiper, Red Kite, **Shore Lark**; 17th Ruddy Shelduck, Woodcock; 18th Willow Tit; 19th Caspian Gull; 29th Oystercatcher; 31st Ruff

Shore Lark at Mow Cop

An exceptional inland record

Shore lark is a scarce winter visitor to the UK, with an estimated 100 individuals wintering here in most years. As the name suggests, this attractive species is closely associated with coastal habitats in Britain, particularly along the east coast of England and parts of south-east Scotland. In winter, it favours open, windswept environments such as sandy beaches, dunes and shingle, where sparse vegetation mirrors its Arctic breeding grounds.

Inland Britain offers very little habitat that matches these conditions, meaning shore larks rarely venture away from the coast once they arrive in Britain. In Cheshire, shore lark is a genuine rarity. The most recent BTO BirdTrack county records come from Hilbre Island, with a single bird in 2017 and two birds in 2011.



Shore Lark - Steve Seal

continued >>

CF = Crabmill Flash

EHF = Elton Hall Flash

FF = Fodens Flash

FFF = Fields Farm Flash

GF = Groby Flash

MGT = Maw Green Tip

OTF = Oak Tree Flash

PHF = Pump House Flash

RF = Railway Flash

TLF = Tetton Lane Flash

WF = Warmingham Flash

WLF = Watch Lane Flash

Blue text indicates place first seen.

Underline indicates high flock count (see Feb 2020 Newsletter, page 8).

Shore Lark (continued)



Against this background, the discovery of a shore lark at Mow Cop was quite extraordinary. From 16-31 January 2026 (and later), a single bird frequented a rough pasture field between the Old Man O'Mow (an impressive 65-foot-high rock structure) and the nearby telecommunications mast, on the Cheshire side of the Cheshire-Staffordshire border.

Shore larks favour open, exposed ground with short or sparse vegetation, and while

inland sites rarely offer this, the rough pasture at Mow Cop, 335 metres above sea level, provides an unusual combination of short turf, bare patches and minimal disturbance, along with elevated, windswept conditions. These factors may have resembled coastal habitat closely enough to encourage the bird to linger.



Interestingly, a single shore lark was also reported at West Kirby Marine Lake on 16 January. Whether this was the same bird remains an intriguing question.

Despite cold winds and frequent mist, many observers made the effort to visit the site and were rewarded with excellent views. The bird was quite mobile, moving frequently around the field as it fed, and appeared to be finding plenty of food. It showed exceptionally well, often coming to within 20 metres of the pathway viewing point.



Sincere thanks to everyone who shared the news so promptly and continued to report the bird on the WhatsApp groups, and to those who provided the excellent photographs featured in this newsletter. Records like this remind us just how surprising and rewarding birding in Cheshire can be.

Sightings EHF/PHF/MGT/RF - Jan

Wildfowl	Count
Shelduck	regular, max 106
Wigeon	regular, max c1260
Gadwall	max 6, 4 th
Teal	regular, max c240
Green-winged Teal	1, 12 th
Mallard	regular, max 40+
Pochard	1, 16 th
Shoveler	regular, max 6
Tufted Duck	regular, max 17
Pintail	1, 7 th
Mandarin Duck	1, 11 th
Goosander	1, 1 st
Greylag Goose	max 10, 20 th
Canada Goose	regular, max c210
Pink-footed Goose	1, 8 th
White-fronted Goose	regular, max 2
Egyptian Goose	max 3, 17 th
G C Grebe	1, 1 st , 20 th
Little Grebe	1, 2 nd , 4 th
Coot	regular, max 50
Moorhen	regular, max 15
Mute Swan	max 2, 29 th



Gulls & Terns	Count
Black-headed Gull	regular max c100
Lesser Black-b Gull	regular, max 5
Great Black-b Gull	2, 4 th
Herring Gull	regular, max 5
Common Gull	max 5, 4 th
Caspian Gull	1, 19 th , 21 st

Raptors & Owls	Count
Sparrowhawk	1, 2 nd , 4 th
Buzzard	regular, max 2
Peregrine	max 2, 2 nd

Herons & Egrets	Count
Grey Heron	regular, max 1
Little Egret	1, 4 th
Great White Egret	max 4, 29 th



Sightings EHF/PHF/MGT/RF - Jan

Waders	Count
Water Rail	1, 4 th
Oystercatcher	1, 29 th , 31 st
Lapwing	regular, max 21+
Ruff	1, 31 st
Dunlin	1, 13 th
Curlew	max 41, 20 th
Black-tailed Godwit	regular, max 2
Snipe	max 9, 4 th
Green Sandpiper	1, 16 th



Slimbridge WWT - 25th January



At 7.30 am, fourteen members (plus three ex-Malbank Coaches friends) boarded the Bostock's coach in Crewe and then set off to pick up another fourteen members at Sandbach Commons for the day trip down to the Slimbridge WWT reserve in Gloucestershire. Four other members made their own way to Slimbridge by car, totalling thirty-two members on the trip. The weather was damp with drizzle driving down the motorway, but the traffic was light and we made good time, arriving at about 10.30 am after a brief comfort stop at Strensham Services.

On arriving at Slimbridge, Lydia organised group entry rates for non-WWT members. After a brief introduction to the reserve by a WWT volunteer who gave us a potted history and where we might find the key birds we were looking for, the coach party set off in all directions, most heading for the Estuary Tower. The Slimbridge reserve backs onto the River Severn, where the tide was up pushing the wildfowl, geese and waders onto the reserve. Birds were present in great numbers showing their beautiful plumage.



Starting in the Peng Observatory, there were already around 20 Bewick's swans present, albeit a little early for the 4 pm swan feed, as well as other notable wildfowl in good numbers - tufted duck, pintail, pochard and shelduck. Making our way to the Estuary Tower, we visited in turn all the hides overlooking the Tack Piece - The Martin Smith Hide, the Willow Hide and the Robbie Garnet Hide, where huge numbers of waders were to be found across the flooded meadows including c1,730 golden plover, c355

dunlin, c3,850 lapwing, curlew, c30 black-tailed godwits, c40 redshank and c17 ruff (numbers from Slimbridge daily counts). In addition, good numbers of teal, wigeon, shoveler and mallard were present. Some keen-eyed observers managed to find snipe and the little stint which was feeding amongst the flooded grassy area.

Slimbridge WWT (continued)

From the Estuary Tower, 15 tundra bean geese, a rare sight, were seen out on the Dumbles together with 8 common cranes. A peregrine enjoyed a teal for lunch whilst a marsh harrier watched from a safe distance with a common buzzard on a fencepost. In addition, around 20 (but the reserve reported 100) Russian white-fronted geese were seen from the windows to the left of the Estuary Tower. In amongst the barnacle goose flock were a Ross's goose of unknown origin, and snow x bar-headed goose and Canada x barnacle goose hybrids; sadly, none were eligible for the SECOS list. Walking back from the Tower Hide, just past the Willow Hide, a goldcrest and firecrest were seen darting amongst the ivy. It needed patience and luck to see these two tiny birds. The feeders at the Willow Hide attracted good numbers of blue and great tits, together with a few chaffinches and dunnocks. No water rails were skulking around the edge of the reedbed, probably because the water level was too high.

After taking lunch in the Slimbridge restaurant we headed in the direction of the Kingfisher Hide. Walking through the collection gave the chance for one member to see the differences between greater scaup and tufted duck plus a close-up view of a male and female smew. Passing through the gated predator fence to the Kingfisher Hide, we explored the area where Peter had earlier seen three water rails, but alas for us there was no success, only three feeding moorhens. Moving on to the Kingfisher Hide, the feeders attracted long-tailed tits together with more sightings of chaffinch, blue and great tits. However, the walk back was more rewarding as we watched a single water rail feeding amongst the stalks of the reed bed at the Dragonfly Pond, one sighting is all you need for the list especially as it was a lifer for one member! A cormorant was seen flying through, and a great egret was spotted in the pools outside the Van Bovenkamp Hide together with a gadwall.

From the South Lake Discovery Hide, a goldeneye and 67 avocets were seen.

We gave the firecrest another chance, without success, but as the time approached 4.15 pm we set off for the coach. Others heard about cattle egrets at South Lake and so made a final dash with one member just making it back for the departure time of 4.30 pm.

The coach journey home was smooth. Although it was raining and the traffic was busy, we didn't experience any serious holdups and arrived back in Sandbach around 7 pm with the coach dropping off in Crewe a little later.

Ian & Lydia Taylor

Editor's comment: This was an excellent trip, enjoyed by all. A BIG thank-you to Jean, Ian and Lydia for organising and leading the trip, and to everyone who contributed sightings.

Slimbridge WWT (continued)

Bird species recorded: Canada goose, barnacle goose, greylag goose, pink-footed goose, tundra bean goose, white-fronted goose, mute swan, Bewick's swan, shelduck, shoveler, gadwall, wigeon, mallard, pintail, teal, pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye, pheasant, woodpigeon, collared dove, water rail, moorhen, coot, common crane, little grebe, oystercatcher, avocet, golden plover, lapwing, curlew, black-tailed godwit, snipe, redshank, ruff, dunlin, little stint, black-headed gull, common gull, herring gull, great black-backed gull, cormorant, little egret, great white egret, cattle egret, grey heron, marsh harrier, buzzard, peregrine, magpie, jackdaw, rook, carrion crow, coal tit, blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit, blackcap, firecrest, goldcrest, wren, starling, song thrush, mistle thrush, redwing, blackbird, fieldfare, robin, house sparrow, dunnock, chaffinch, greenfinch, redpoll, goldfinch

Trip Count = 74 species

2026 SECOS Field Trips Total = 74

Sightings Elsewhere - Jan

Sandbach Flashes:

EHF/PHF/MGT/RF: Raven, Cetti's Warbler, Mistle Thrush, Redwing, Fieldfare

CF: Green Sandpiper, Great White Egret

FF: Woodcock, Tawny Owl

FFF: Goosander, Jack Snipe, Kingfisher, Blackcap, Redwing, Fieldfare, Siskin, Yellowhammer

TLF: Pink-footed Goose, White-fronted Goose, Water Rail, Snipe, Tawny Owl, Mistle Thrush

WLF: Water Rail, Woodcock, Great White Egret, Kingfisher

Alsager: Blackcap

Alsager - Borrow Pit Meadows: Goosander, Snipe, Redwing, Fieldfare, Siskin

Astbury - Astbury Mere CP: Pochard, Goosander, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Little Gull, Redwing, Siskin

Barthomley, SE of Crewe: Little Egret

Brereton Heath - Bagmere: Starling murmuration of probably 100,000+ birds on the 1st

Brereton Heath - Brereton Heath LNR: Redwing, Fieldfare



Fieldfare - Dennis Swaby

This is a small selection of species seen in the SECOS Recording Area.

A full listing is on the website:

<https://www.secos.org.uk/sightings/>

Sightings Elsewhere - Jan



Mistle Thrush - Dennis Swaby

Church Lawton - Lawton Gate Treatment Works: Grey Wagtail

Church Lawton - Lawton Hall: Goosander, Great Crested Grebe

Congleton - Bent Farm Quarry: Pochard, Goosander

Congleton - Mossley: Jack Snipe, **Red Kite**, Redwing, Fieldfare

Congleton - River Dane: Goosander, **Kingfisher**, Redwing

Crewe: **Tawny Owl**

Doddington - Doddington Pool: Pink-footed Goose, Egyptian Goose, Pochard, **Goldeneye**, Little Grebe, Curlew, Snipe, Common Gull, Raven, Redwing, Fieldfare

Gawsworth - Gawsworth Hall: Goosander

Holmes Chapel: **Barnacle Goose**, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Gull, Grey Wagtail

Holmes Chapel - Treatment Works and environs: Raven, Grey Wagtail

Hough, Crewe: **Barn Owl**

Kinderton, SE of Middlewich: White-fronted Goose

Middlewich: **White Wagtail (alba)**, **Redpoll**

Mow Cop: Jack Snipe, **Woodcock**, Snipe, Barn Owl, **Willow Tit**, **Shore Lark**, Redwing

Mow Cop: Jack Snipe, **Woodcock**, Snipe, Barn Owl, **Willow Tit**, **Shore Lark**, Redwing

Rode Heath: **Ruddy Shelduck**

Rode Heath - Rode Pool: Egyptian Goose, Mandarin Duck, Goosander, Little Egret, Great White Egret

Scholar Green: **Egyptian Goose**, Goosander, Little Egret, Redwing

Twemlow Green: Mistle Thrush

Wheelock: **Little Egret**

Wheelock - Forge Fields: Blackcap

Winterley Pool, SW of Sandbach:

Goosander, Little Egret, Great White Egret



Goldcrest - Dennis Swaby

Sightings Elsewhere - Jan



Andrew Brockbank kindly waived the fee for his talk, "*Curlews in the Landscape*", on 9th January. In appreciation, SECOS has donated £100 to **Curlew Country**, a curlew recovery project based in Shropshire and the Welsh Marches. Curlew Country works with land managers, volunteers, and the wider community to deliver landscape-scale conservation. <https://curlewcountry.org/>

Diary Dates



3rd Feb 10.00 am

Tuesday Field Trip

Northwich Woodlands

Leader: Tom Graham

13th Feb 7.30 pm

Zoom Meeting

"The Canary Islands"

Speaker: Mark Woodhead

22nd Feb 10.00 am

Sunday Field Trip

North Wales Coast

Leader: Tom Graham

 SECOS Website: <https://www.secos.org.uk>

 SECOS Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/SECOS1964>

 Sandbach Flashes: This medium does not do justice to the images that Dennis Swaby captures at Sandbach Flashes. Some of the images have been uploaded to <https://sandbachflashes.co.uk/>