

# Knutsford Ornithological Society.



REPORT 1974.

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## The Knutsford Ornithological Society.

### An Introduction.

29 March

The inaugural meeting of the Knutsford Ornithological Society took place in April 1974, after members of the Workers Education Association Ornithological Course that had been running for two years in Knutsford had expressed a desire for the formation of a club as a natural progression from these classes.

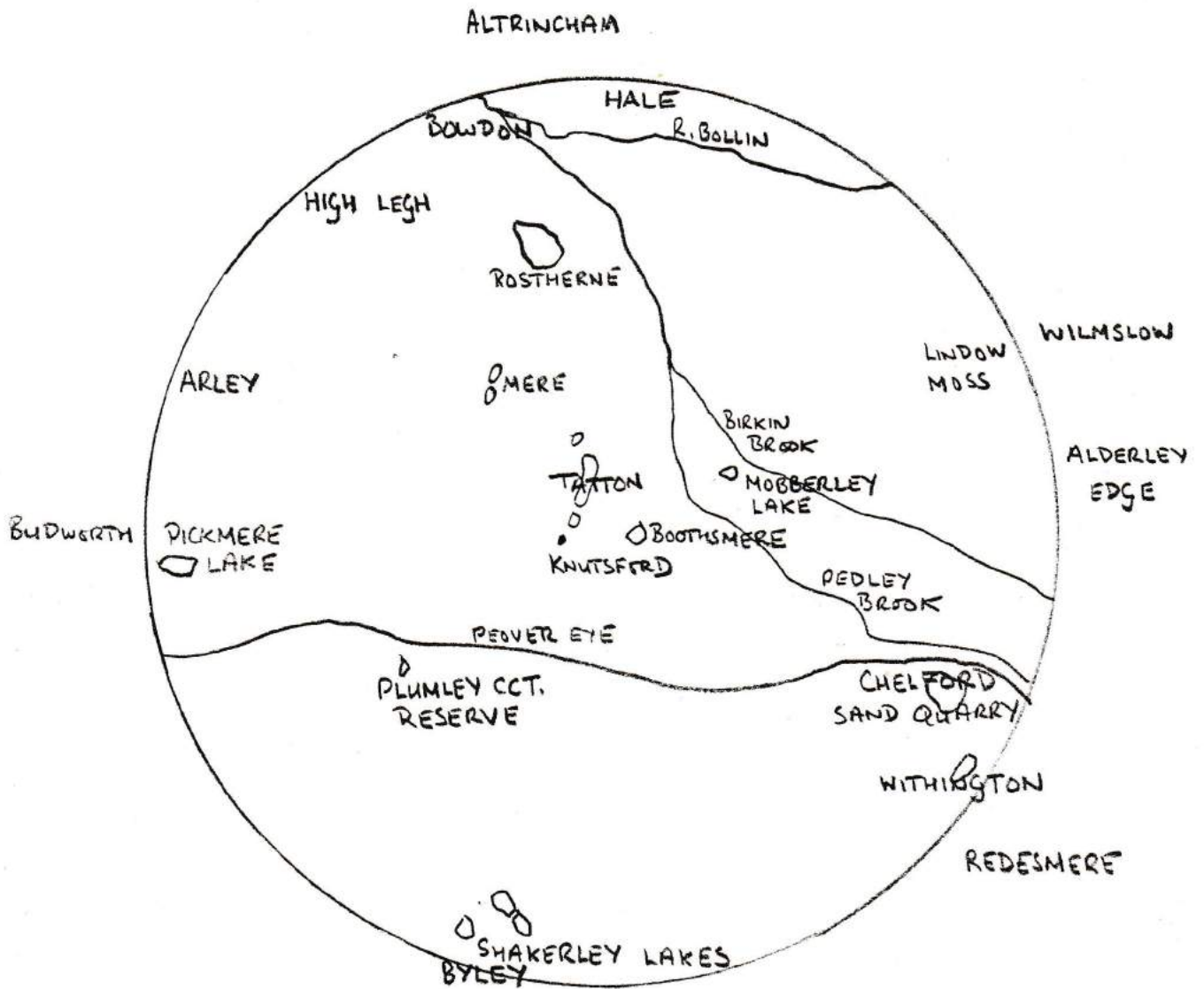
This first meeting, and all subsequent gatherings whether indoors or out was an unqualified success, due in no small way to the enthusiasm and organizational ability of our first Secretary Colin Istead and his successor Peter Perkins, who took over the job when Colin left the district. The Society now boasts a membership of over 170 and with an attractive programme of evening meetings (the fourth Friday of every month) and weeked trips it is hoped to boost this to 200 in the coming year.

### The Report.

Knutsford and its surrounding districts is already covered by three annual reports, the Cheshire, Manchester and Wilmslow Bird reports. All three are well established and authoritative publications, nevertheless it was felt that as they covered such large areas a Knutsford Bird Report covering a much smaller area would not be out of place. It would enable the Editor to concentrate on locations within easy reach of club members, not all of whom have their own transport. Also more emphasis could be placed on the status of the commoner species for the benefit of the many members of the Society who are newcomers to Ornithology.

This report then, covers that area enclosed by a circle of radius five miles centred on Knutsford Town centre. It consists mainly of typical Cheshire agricultural land but contains two places of great Ornithological interest, namely Rosthern and Tatton Meres, which, with their large areas of water and surrounding woodland can prove so rewarding for the bird watcher. Other places of interest include Tabley Mere and the Cheshire Conservation Trust Reserve at Plumley. The latter, together with a lake in Mobberley at the site of a disused sand quarry are unfortunately the only two places in the area covered by the report where one is likely to see waders regularly. Four other places of special interest are situated just inside the area, the lakes at Allstock, the sand quarries at Chelford and Lower Withington and Lindow Moss on the outskirts of Wilmslow.

THE AREA COVERED BY THIS REPORT





Great Crested Grebe. (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Pairs can be seen displaying from early February and nesting is attempted every year at Tatton, Rostherne, Tabley and Boothsmere. Early nests seem to meet with little success but a pair reared 1 chick at Boothsmere and at Rostherne 2 young were reared. Early spring sees a build up in numbers with 18 at Rostherne on 3rd March and 31 at Tatton 8th March.

Little Grebe. (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

The numbers at Tatton and Rostherne remain steady throughout the year with up to 6 on Rostherne and a maximum of 9 on Tatton. None bred at Rostherne but a pair reared 3 young at Tatton.

Cormorant. (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

The cormorant roost at Rostherne and reached a new high on 21st December when 49 were present. Most find their food at Rostherne but some disperse during the day to feed elsewhere and have been recorded on all local waters. The number at Tatton rarely exceeds 10 with a maximum of 12, considering the many other probabilities this number is hardly a threat to Tatton's fish stocks as some would have us believe. 1 adult and 2 immature birds summered at Rostherne.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

A common sight in the district due to the presence at Tabley of one of the largest heronries in England, estimated this year to contain over 90 breeding pairs.

Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)

1 over Tatton on 19th March was probably the bird seen later that day at Sandbach.

Mallard. (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

A young mallard found in Mobberley on 15th April was estimated to be a month old. The parent birds must have started laying in mid-February. The mild weather at the beginning of the year which enabled this to occur was also responsible for the low numbers on Rostherne with a maximum of 1,600 on 13th January and 2,000 on 28th December.

Teal. (*Anas crecca*)

1,180 on 15th January and 1550 on 28th December were the highest totals for some years at Rostherne.

Gadwall. (*Anas strepera*)

Reported periodically at Rostherne during the winter months, 2 male and 1 female was the maximum. A drake on the Bollin at Hale on 8th May was an unusual occurrence.

Widgeon. (*Anas Penelope*)

New Year's Day saw numbers at their greatest with 100 at Rostherne

Pintail. (*Anas acuta*)

Rarely seen elsewhere Pintail are regular visitors to Rostherne. A flock of 50 on 22nd December was an unusually high number.

Shoveler. (*Spatula clypeata*)

A pair were present at Mobberley Lake in mid-May, well into the breeding season. From their behaviour nesting could have been attempted, but this was not proved.

Scaup. (*Aythya marila*)

1 Scaup & Pochard hybrid, Tatton on 8th January and again 1st February.

Tufted Duck. (*Aythya fuligula*)

At least 6 families, each with 4 - 9 young were present on Tatton on 23rd July. Rostherne had no breeding record but a count of 281 on 3rd August was a new record.

Pochard. (*Aythya ferina*)

142 was the maximum recorded on Tatton on 19th September. Birds were present throughout the year with small counts even in mid-summer.

Goldeneye. (*Bucephala clangula*)

Flocks of Goldeneye are at their largest in early spring as they prepare to depart for their breeding grounds. Tatton and Shakerley are the most favoured winter quarters. 17th March saw 26 on Tatton 10 - 15 can be seen regularly on Shakerley. An unusual occurrence was a female that summered on Tatton.

Red-Crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)

6th October one drake in eclipse plumage spent the day at Rostherne.

Common Scoter. (*Melanitta nigra*)

5 records for the area. Mostly single drakes 14th April, 24th March, 18th May at Tatton. A drake and 2 ducks 7th October followed by a single drake 23rd November at Rostherne.

Ruddy Duck. (*Oxyura jamaciensis*)

Breeds just outside the area on Redesmere, 3 records all from Tatton 2 males 26th August, 1 male 24th September, 1 female 11-16th April

Red-breasted Merganser. (*Mergus serrator*)

3 records from 3 different waters. All refer to females, 3 on 1st November Rostherne, 1 on 30th November Tatton, 2 on 17th and 18th October, Mobberley Lake.

Goosander. (*Mergus merganser*)

Unusually high numbers of Goosander were present early in the year at Rostherne with 3 males and 20 females on 16th February. They returned



in December but in smaller numbers although 9 were reported on Melchette Mere.

Smew. (*Mergus albellus*)

A Tatton 'speciality' each winter sees at least one female present. A female remained until 30th April and one returned on 22nd November. A second female arrived in mid-December and one of this pair was presumably the bird recorded in December on Rostherne and Shakerley.

Shelduck. (*Tadorna tadorna*)

Small parties visited Rostherne during the year and a pair were on Tatton on 30th November.

Grey Lag Goose. (*Anser anser*)

6 Grey Lags that arrived on Rostherne on 2nd July were probably those artificially reared in Mobberley and released during the summer. They stayed until 10th August and were often seen after that on Tatton.

Pink-footed Goose. (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

36 flew over Knutsford on 18th November, 110 over Ringway on 2nd December and 1 on Rostherne 12th June.

Barnacle Goose. (*Branta leucopsis*)

A single bird was seen at Rostherne on 24th November.

Canada Goose. (*Branta canadensis*)

At least 60 young were fledged in the area and a massive flock of 638 was counted on 19th September at Tatton.

Mute Swan. (*cygnus olor*)

A pair nesting on Knutsford moor had their eggs taken and the nest was set alight by local hooligans.

Bewick Swan. (*cygnus bewickii*)

17 were counted on Tatton on 16th March. Autumn found a pair on Mobberley Lake from 5th to 13th November.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

An experienced observer reported one flying just north of Rostherne on 10th April.

Sparrowhawk. (*Accipiter nisus*)

Both male and female birds of this species were reported from Rostherne in every month of the year. Nevertheless breeding was not definitely confirmed. Records from Mobberley in Spring and Autumn point to a slow recovery from the drastic decline in numbers of this and other raptors during the 1960's due to poisoning by organo-chloride pesticides.

Buzzard. (*Buteo buteo*)

Seen in Spring and Autumn at Rostherne and Tatton. Reports of nesting in Tatton remain unsubstantiated.

Kestrel. (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Locally the most common raptor. Many pairs breed within the area and the species seems especially attracted by motorway embankments.

Merlin. (*Falco columbarius*)

A record of a female at Tatton on 8th January was followed by four sightings at Rostherne during November.

Peregrine. (*Falco peregrinus*)

A total of four records, 3 in April and 1 in September all at Rostherne.

Partridge. (*Perdix perdix*)

Declining in numbers but as yet not uncommon with pairs in Mobberley, Tatton, Rostherne, Tabley and the Mereheath Lane area. A covey of 12 was seen at Rostherne on 26th October.

Pheasant. (*Phasianus colchicus*).Water Rail. (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Present in very small numbers during the winter months at Rostherne and Tatton where 2 were seen regularly in the reeds at the Knutsford end of the Mere during January and February and again from 27th November.

Moorhen. (*Gallinula chloropus*)Coot. (*Fulica atra*)Oystercatcher. (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

A pair nested at Mere in 1973, but were not proved to have done so in 1974, although birds were reported from the same site. Breeding was also reported from the Bollin Valley. Elsewhere oystercatchers were seen at Tatton 11th April and four times at Rostherne with 6 on 30th July.

Lapwing. (*Vanellus vanellus*)

An early nester, birds were incubating on 7th April in Mobberley. 10th June saw the first flocks building up again with 150 at Warford.

Grey Plover. (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

1 heard but not confirmed over Rostherne 29th September.

Golden Plover. (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

A common winter visitor easily seen at Asnley, where 600 were present on 1st November, and Byley with 200 on 6th January.



Ringed Plover. (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

1 on 17th August was seen at the Chelford Sand Quarry.

Little Ringer Plover. (*Charadrius dubius*)

Until 1938 the Little Ringed Plover was only a scarce vagrant to this country. It nested for the first time in Hertfordshire in that year and has since spread to many parts of the country. Nevertheless the breeding population is probably no more than 400 pairs so we are fortunate that 4 pairs raised 8 young in two different locations within the area.

Whimbrel. (*Numenius phaeopus*)

1 at Rostherne on 3rd June.

Curlew. (*Numenius arguata*)

At least 9 pairs bred in Tatton and 1 at Rostherne.

Redshank. (*Tringa totanus*)

Single birds were seen at Rostherne, Tatton, Chelford, Plumley and Mobberley on passage in both Spring and Autumn.

Greenshank. (*Tringa Nebularia*)

The only bird seen during the spring passage was one at Mobberley Lake on 17th and 18th May. Autumn saw 3 on 19th August and 1 on 11th September at Rostherne with 1 at Withington on 28th September

Green Sandpiper. (*Tringa ochropus*)

The C.C.T. Reserve at Plumley is the place to see Green Sandpipers. They were present from 15th July until late September with a maximum of 7 on 26th July. Records of singles also came from Rostherne on 29th June and Lower Withington on 14th July.

Common Sandpiper. (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

Recorded frequently during passage. 2 pairs were in territory and a third pair were seen with 2 young on 20th June at Lower Withington.

Snipe. (*Gallinago gallinago*)

Breeds locally, but numbers increase rapidly in winter with the influx of wintering birds from the continent.

Jack Snipe. (*Lymnocyptes minima*)

Seen regularly round Melchette Mere during the winter months.

Woodcock. (*Scolopax rusticola*)

Several were watched 'roding' at Rostherne from 5th March. Woodcock breed in Rostherne and certain other localities offering the required boggy woodland.



Dunlin. (*calidris alpina*)

Records of birds presumably of this species came from Rostherne during the Autumn. Confirmed were Dunlin on Hobblerley Lake, 1 on 21st April, 2 on 14th October, and 6 on 17th October.

Common Gull. (*Larus Canus*)

At their peak in March when 2,000 were recorded on Rostherne. Small numbers can always be seen in Tatton perching on the old fencing partly submerged half way along the Mere.

Herring Gull. (*Larus Argentatus*)

Abundant during the winter months at Rostherne with several thousand present in December.

Lesser Black-backed Gull. (*Larus fuscus*)

1500 were roosting on Rostherne during October.

Great Black-backed Gull. (*Larus marinus*)

Small numbers seen daily during the winter months with a maximum of 8 on 27th January.

Iceland Gull. (*Larus glaucooides*)

With a roost of up to 20,000 gulls every year brings a sprinkling of records from Rostherne of the rarer gulls. 1974 was no exception Iceland Gulls were identified on 6 occasions, 2 in February, 3 in March and once in December.

Glaucous Gull. (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Another rare visitor, Glaucous Gulls were picked out in the first three months of the year several times.

Mediterranean Gull. (*Larus Melanocephalus*)

An immature bird was identified at Lower Withington on 16th July by one of the areas most reliable observers.

Black-headed Gull. (*Larus ridibundus*)

This species makes up the bulk of the massive Gull roost at Rostherne. An estimated 12,000 birds in February.

Little Gull. (*Larus minutus*)

A good year for Little Gulls at Rostherne with sightings in March, May and September.

Black Tern. (*Chlidonia niger*)

Seen on passage at both Tatton and Rostherne with maximum of 5 on 16th May at Tatton and 27 at Rostherne on 31st August.

Common Tern. (*Sterna hirundo*)

Rostherne, 1 on May 5th, Tatton 1 on 12th September, A juvenile bird spent a week from 5th - 12th September at Moberley Lake.

Arctic Tern. (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Positively identified once on Tatton, 11th April and 7 times during the spring passage at Rostherne.

Common/arctic Terns.

Many terns recorded at Rostherne were identified only as common or arctic. 30 on 26th April, 30 on 4th May and 22 on 5th May with singles on 6 other occasions.

Stock Dove. (*Columba oenas*)

Resident throughout the year, contributing good numbers to the winter pigeon flocks.

Woodpigeon. (*Columba palumbus*)

Abundant, 10,000 were estimated at Rostherne during November.

Turtle Dove. (*Streptopelia turtur*)

Approaching the edge of its range in Cheshire the Turtle Dove is an uncommon summer visitor. Pairs bred at Chelford and Plumley.

Collared Dove. (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Now to be seen regularly in the area.

Cuckoo. (*Cuculus canorus*)

First heard 22nd April in Toft.

Barn Owl. (*Tyto alba*)

Perhaps more common than imagined. A pair raised 4 young successfully at Rostherne. 3 birds were to be seen regularly near Moberley Station in November and December and pair nested at Tabley.

Little Owl. (*Athene noctua*)

Resident in good numbers with breeding in Tatton and Moberley.

Tawny Owl. (*Strix aluco*)

The most common of the owls. An early nest in Moberley contained 3 eggs on 19th March.

Short-eared Owl. (*Asio flammeus*)

Rarely seen in the area, one at Rostherne on 18th March was the first ever for the Reserve.



Swift. (*Apus apus*)

Amongst the last of the summer migrants to appear Swifts rarely arrive before 1st May. They were a little late this year being first recorded on 4th May, but as usual soon made their presence felt by their noisy high speed aerobatics around the town.

Kingfisher. (*Alcedo atthis*)

The Kingfisher has probably now recovered from the ravages of the 1962-63 winter and is a relatively common sight, Pairs nested at Chelford and on the Birkin Brook in Moberley. 2 juvenile and one adult male came to grief when they flew into windows opposite Moberley Lake.

Hoopoe. (*Upupa epops*)

A young member of the club was lucky enough to see a Hoopoe on 17th September in Moberley. Later that day another sighting was reported from Woodford, presumably the same bird.

Green Woodpecker. (*Picus viridis*)

Present throughout the year at Rostherne and Tatton where a family of 4 was seen on 24th July.

Great Spotted Woodpecker. (*Dendrocopos major*)

Bred at Withington, Tatton and Rostherne.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. (*Dendrocopos minor*)

Bred at Rostherne and Dog Wood Tatton.

Skylark. (*Alauda arvensis*)

An abundant resident. Large flocks build up in winter. 150 were counted in Moberley on 3rd December.

Sand Martin. (*Riparia riparia*)

An early record concerned 2 birds over Tatton on 24th March. Birds breed at Chelford, Withington and Shakerley with a total of 330 holes. This doesn't include 45 bulldozed in July during 'landscaping' at Chelford.

Swallow. (*Hirundo rustica*)

First arrived in 1974 on April 7th and the last record was very late on 10th November, both seen at Rostherne.

House Martin. (*Delichon Urbica*)

First record 12th April and the last 27th October. A flock of hirundines containing many house Martins and estimated to number 3,000 birds was seen going to roost on Knutsford Moor on August 6th.

Yellow Wagtail. (*Motacilla flava*)

Bred at Chelford and Withington. A female and 2 young were seen at Rostherne on 26th August and the first record for 1974 also came from Rostherne, a bird on 31st March.

Grey Wagtail. (*Motacilla cinerea*)

A bird normally associated with fast flowing mountain streams. Grey Wagtails do nest in low lying areas as a pair nesting in Tatton proved. Parties of up to 10 were observed in Tatton during December.

Pied Wagtail. (*Motacilla alba*)Tree Pipit. (*Anthus trivialis*)

Breeds just outside the area in Alderley Edge woods but has not been proved to nest within it. Single birds were reported from Mobberley on 30th September, Shakerley on 5th August and Rostherne on 17th August.

Meadow Pipit. (*Anthus pratensis*)Great Grey Shrike. (*Lanius excubitor*)

A single bird was rumoured to have been seen on Lindow Moss during January. One was positively identified on 13th January at Withington.

Waxwing. (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

Autumn witnessed a minor invasion with many waxwings being seen in various parts of Cheshire. A flock of 20 was seen in Tatton Park on 15th December.

Wren. (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)Dunnock. (*Prunella modularis*)

An abundant resident and another of the early nesting birds with a bird incubating 4 eggs on 24th March in Mobberley.

Robin. (*Meritacus rubecula*)Redstart. (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*)

A male bird was seen at Kell House Farm, Mobberley on 26th August.

Whinchat. (*Saxicola rubetra*)

Once a common breeding bird at Rostherne. it is now only an uncommon visitor on passage. A male stayed in Mobberley from 30th April to 14th May and a female was seen on 28th August at Rostherne.

Stonechat. (*Saxicola torquata*)

Two birds were recorded on passage, a female on 16th March at Rostherne and a male at Tatton on 3rd October.



Wheatear. (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

A female remained at Moberley Lake for 3 days during May and a juvenile was recorded on 11th July from the same location.

Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)

A Ring Ouzel at Rostherne on 4th April was an unusual sighting for the area.

Blackbird. (*Turdus merula*)Fieldfare. (*Turdus pilaris*)

Last record in the spring was 10th April at Rostherne. 12 on 4th September in Moberley was a very early date for returning birds.

Redwing. (*Turdus iliacus*)

Flocks seemed bigger than for some years especially in the Autumn. Birds returned on 28th September.

Song Thrush. (*Turdus philomelos*)Mistle Thrush. (*Turdus viscivorus*)

A nest was found on 25th February at Rostherne, early even for the Mistle Thrush.

Grasshopper Warbler. (*Locustella naevia*)

Knutsford Moor is a traditional nesting site for this species. Although birds were 'reeling' during the spring no breeding seems to have taken place in 1974.

Sedge Warbler. (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

As with the Grasshopper Warbler, Knutsford Moor is the favourite haunt of the Sedge Warbler.

Reed Warbler. (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

A common summer resident breeding in Plumley, Rostherne, Tabley and again on Knutsford Moor.

Garden Warbler. (*Sylvia borin*)

Several pairs bred at Rostherne and also in the C.C.T. Reserve at Plumley.

Blackcap. (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

As with most other summer visitors the Blackcap was a little later than usual arriving and it was not until 14th April that the first was heard singing in Tatton. This is possibly its local stronghold, the bird having a strong affinity for rhododendron. A bird that may well have been wintering was seen in Birkin Wood during November.

Whitethroat. (*Sylvia Communis*)

The decline in numbers of this attractive summer migrant is causing much concern in Ornithological circles. The reason is given as the drought which has held much of North Africa in its grip for so long. Nevertheless it is not uncommon, up to 5 males were in territory on rough ground near Shakerley. 15th April saw a pair in Moberley, they subsequently reared 5 young.

Lesser Whitethroat. (*Sylvia curruca*)

The value of being able to identify a species by its song was amply demonstrated when a local bird watcher heard a Lesser Whitethroat in song on 13th June in Moberley. Such is the elusiveness of the species that it was some days before the bird was positively identified by sight. A pair were present and are presumed to have nested. A search for the nest not being made to avoid any undue disturbance.

Willow Warbler. (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)

7th April found 6 males present at Plumley. These were an exception the main body of this abundant visitor did not arrive until much later in the month.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)

Less common during 1974 than in previous years, 2 birds at Rostherne on 26th March provided the first spring record.

Wood Warbler. (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*)

A pair feeding young in Tatton Park on 24th July and a single bird in Peover during June provide the only 2 records of this increasingly rare species.

Goldcrest. (*Regulus regulus*)

Very common with a marked increase in numbers during the past few years

Spotted Flycatcher. (*Muscicapa striata*)

Always one of the last summer migrants to appear the spotted Flycatcher was not recorded until 18th May at Rostherne and 19th May in Tatton.

Long-tailed Tit. (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Another species well known for its eagerness to begin nest building 7th March saw a pair putting final touches to a nest in Moberley. The succession of mild winters has seen Long-tailed Tit numbers rise rapidly.

Marsh Tit. (*Parus palustris*)

Rare at Rostherne the Marsh Tit is relatively common in Tatton, especially the woods at the Knutsford end.

Willow Tit. (*Parus montanus*)

More common than the Marsh Tit in Tatton where a pair were watched excavating a nest hole on 28th March.



Coal Tit. (*Parus ater*)

Great Tit. (*Parus major*)

Blue Tit. (*Parus caeruleus*)

Nuthatch. (*Sitta europaea*)

Seen frequently in Tatton and at Rostherne but rarely elsewhere.

Treecreeper. (*Certhia familiaris*)

Another species who's stronghold is the mature deciduous woodland of Tatton Park.

Corn Bunting. (*Emberiza calandra*)

A fairly common but scattered resident. 3 males were in song in Mobberley during the Spring and at least one pair bred on land adjoining Tatton Park.

Yellowhammer. (*Emberiza citrinella*)

Reed bunting. (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)

The most common bunting found in the area. Some individuals have taken to nesting at a distance from water in the case of a family in Mobberley, in Blackthorne.

Chaffinch. (*Fringilla coelebs*)

Not as abundant as in recent years the Chaffinch is still the most numerous of the finches.

Brambling. (*Fringilla montifrigilla*)

Although large flocks of Brambling were seen in the area during 1974 it was never a species to be seen regularly. 50 were resident at Rostherne from 23rd to 29th March and at the other end of the year 15 were present on 26th October, 30 were seen on 28th December at Withington.

Greenfinch. (*Carduelis cholris*)

Nesting commonly in tree-lined roads in the urban parts of the area.

Goldfinch (*carduelis carduelis*)

Another finch that takes full advantage of the cover available in suburban gardens in which to nest. Autumn finds the birds flocking with up to 20 feeding on thistles around Mobberley Lake on 21st October and 40 at Rostherne on 19th October.

Siskin. (*Carduelis spinus*)

Not uncommon during the winter months and regularly met with at Rostherne and Tatton in the Alder and Willow trees. Large counts were 40 on 17th March and 60 on 27th November in Dog Wood, Tatton.

Redpoll. (*Acanthis flammea*)

Common in the birch plantations of the C.C.T. Reserve at Plumley. Redpolls can be seen mixed in with the winter flocks of Siskins. A flock of 20 Redpolls on 8th January in Tatton contained one Mealy Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea flammea*) the continental sub-species of our own bird.

Twite. (*Acanthis flavirostris*)

One on 22nd April was a rare sighting in the area and a first ever record for Rostherne.

Linnet. (*Acanthis cannabina*)

Abundant in certain localities during the Spring where areas of gorse are available as nesting sites. Large numbers can be seen during October and November moving about with the large mixed finch flocks which build up at that time of the year.

Crossbill. (*Loxia curvirostra*)

2 female crossbills were seen in Tatton on 7th April.

Two-Barred Crossbill. (*Loxia leucoptera*)

The rarest bird seen in the area in 1974. 2 females of the species were reliably reported from Tatton the same day as their more common relatives mentioned previously, 7th April

Bullfinch. (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*)

A common species, shy and elusive during the Spring and Summer, but easily seen in autumn and winter feeding in roadside hedgerows.

House Sparrow. (*Passer montanus*)Tree Sparrow. (*Passer montanus*)

Possibly much overlooked, flocks of up to 30 were recorded during the winter months.

Starling. (*Sturnus vulgaris*)Jay. (*Garrulus glandarius*)Magpie. (*Pica Pica*)

Much persecuted by farmers at one time, magpie numbers have risen steeply since the arrival of the battery hen and the consequent reduction in the number of farmers keeping large numbers of hens for free-range eggs.

Jackdaw. (*Corvus monedula*)

Abundant around Knutsford nesting in older buildings or in the many old beech trees in Tatton Park.



Rook. ( *Corvus frugilegus* )Carrion Crow. *Corvus corone* )

Rooks and crows in Mobberley have developed the alarming habit of soaring with primary feathers splayed over the boiler house chimneys the the Ilford Ltd. Factory. This phenomena has not been seen before and it is not known why the birds do it. Many seem to have been overcome by fumes and have met particularly nasty deaths by ending up in the chimneys.

Escapers.

A number of species were seen during the year and are presumed to have escaped from captivity.

African Crown Crane.

2 were seen on 24th January at Rostherne and again on 8th November at High Leigh.

Bar-Headed Goose. (*Anser indicus*)

A welcome stranger amongst the flock of Canada Geese on Tatton was a Bar-Headed Goose which remained from 10th July until the end of the month.

Ringneck Parakeet. (*Psittacula krameri manillensis*)

A bird thought to be a Ring-necked Parakeet was seen in Mobberley on 8th April.

Egyptian Goose. (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*)

One was recorded on Chelford Sand Quarry early in August and another on Tatton on 19th September.

Rosy-Bill. (*Netta peposaca*)

A male appeared on 8th September and remained happily on Anutsford Moor until the end of the year.

Contributors.

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BIRDS OF ROSTHERNE MERE NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE 1974.

D.A.Rogers.

This account is a summary of monthly reports by R.Harrison which are compiled from the Observatory log and from Wardens' records.

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Both Little and Great Crested Grebes were present all year, but only the latter bred. The 5 nests built early in the season all failed, but a pair made a surprise appearance on 17th August with two chicks, bot of which were reared successfully. The Cormorant roost continued to increase, breaking the previous (1963) record with a count of 31 in January. This figure was itself put in the shade by a count of 49 in December, which appears to be a record for inland waters in Cheshire. At least 1 adult and 2 immature birds were present in June and July; summering was first recorded in 1973 when an immature bird stayed. Three pairs of Canada Geese bred but only one was successful. The usual flocks of 300/400 visited the reserve in August and September. Other goose records were; a Pink-foot on 12th June; 6 Grey Lags which stayed from 2nd July to 16th September and moulted on the mere; and a Barnacle Goose on 24th November. It was a poor year for Swans, with Mute Swans visiting in only four months and no records of other species. Only small parties of Shelduck were seen, mostly in the spring; a pair stayed from 9th to 17th May. Mild winters once more kept Mallard flocks at a low level, with peaks of 1600 in January and 2000 in late December. Broods of ducklings were seen from 20th April. Teal were on the increase after 15 years of poor records, reaching nearly 1200 in January and 1550 at the end of the year, with about 800 present from late November. There were a few records of Gadwall in the winter months at both ends of the year. Wigeon numbers were generally low, with maxima of 100 in January and 60 in December. There was a good crop of Pintail records both in early spring and from September onwards; the largest parties were 26 on 17th March and 50 on 22nd December. Shoveler failed to repeat the autumn influxes of the last two years (150 in 1972 and 300 in 1973). the highest count being 80 on 23rd September. A drake Red-crested Pochard in eclipse plumage paid a brief visit on 5th October. Tufted Duck as usual were at their peak in July and August and the count of 281 on 3rd August was a record for Rostherne. There was no evidence of breeding this year. Pochard continued their slow decline from the bumper 1968/69 winter; the peak winter count was 85 on 13th January, and there was also an unusual July/August increase reaching 85 on 3rd August. Goldeneye were seen regularly in the first four months, but double figures were not reached until April. There were isolated summer records on 3rd August and 15th September, and regular sightings from 12th October. The only record of Common Scoter was a drake and 2 ducks on 17th October. A 'Red-head' smew, presumably from Tatton, visited Rostherne on 22nd 26th December. Goosander were unusually numerous until mid-March, often numbering around 20. This influx appears to have coincided with a decline at Roddington. Unfortunately numbers remained below 5 in December, though sightings were regular from the 21st. Three female Red-breasted Mergansers seen on 1st November provided the third known record for Rostherne.



Both male and female Sparrowhawk were seen regularly but there was no evidence of breeding. kestrels nested near the Observatory; they ignored a nest box provided for them but were co-operative enough to use a hole on which the telescope could be trained. A Buzzard was seen frequently in the winter months at both ends of the year, and 2 birds were seen in January, but there was only a handful of summer records. There were 3 records of Peregrine in April, including 2 birds on the 28th, and one record in September. Merlins were recorded on 4 dates in November. An exotic note was struck when 2 Crowned Cranes were reported by a Rostherne farmer on 24th January. They had been seen earlier the same day at Rochdale and Altrincham and were reported again from Combermere. Surprisingly, one of them seems to have survived; it summered on a farm near Lymm and was reported near Great Budworth in November. Water Rails were present until March but there were no records at the end of the year. 140 Coot were counted in January but December numbers were only half that figure. Eggs were laid in 29 nests and about 20 clutches survived the incubation period; chick mortality was heavy as usual but breeding was certainly more successful than in 1973. Parties of Golden Plover were seen occasionally in the winter months. Waders on passage are always scarce at Rostherne. This year's visitors comprised Oystercatcher (30th March, 17th and 24th June and 6 on 30th July), Grey Plover (29th September) Green Sandpiper (29th June); Redshank (31st March and 15th October) Greenshank (19th August and 11th September) and Dunlin or 'Dunlin-type' small waders from August to October. Common Sandpipers were more regular, being seen on several occasions in April, May, July and September. Small parties of Curlew were seen in February, August and November, and a pair bred on the reserve. Breeding has been suspected before, but this time it was proved when a farmer found the nest on 19th May. A few Snipe were recorded in wet fields in the winter months. Woodcock were seen roding at dusk from 5th March to early June, often passing in front of the Observatory. The Gull roost was a regular feature until mid-April and from mid-August onwards. It was not counted systematically, but numbers often reached between 15,000 and 20,000 in the winter months. As usual the bulk of these were Black-headed Gulls with Herring Gulls running second. However the former were at their full strength for most of the roosting season, while the latter were already below 1000 in February and did not reach four figures again until November. In the autumn they were outnumbered by Lesser Black-backs which were over the thousand in September and October. Common Gulls were at their peak in March when an estimate of 2000 was made. A few Greater Black-backs were present in winter, as many as 8 in January. The more dedicated observers picked out a good crop of arctic gulls from the multitude; adult Glaucous Gulls on 13th and 15th February and 8th March, and first winter birds on 5th January and 10th and 20th March, adult Iceland Gulls on 9th and 16th February, 9th, 17th and 27th March and 1st December, and a first winter bird on 29th December. There was a remarkable run of Little Gull records in May, when up to 5 adult and sub-adult birds were seen daily from the 4th to the 8th, and an immature on the 9th. There were also 2 immatures on 17th March and an adult on 24th September. Flocks of up to 30 Common and/or Arctic Terns passed through between 26th April and 11th May, but there were few records for the autumn passage. Black Tern numbers were disappointing this year, with records only on 15th and 16th May (2 and 4 birds) 31st August (2 parties of 15 and 12) and 15 and 22nd September (4 and 2). The first Cuckoo record was on 29th April, and they seemed to be more common than usual. Barn Owls bred at a local farm, and Little and Tawny Owls were often seen or heard. A Short-eared Owl seen on 18th March was the first for the reserve. Large flocks of Swifts hunted



over the mere in late summer and the last record was on 6th September. Kingfishers were seen occasionally from May to July and frequently from August to October. Green Woodpeckers, a rarity at Rostherne until last year, were seen frequently until mid-May; there was then a gap with only isolated sightings of a juvenile in August and September until the adults returned in October and November. Great and Lesser spotted Woodpeckers were often seen from the Observatory.

The first Swallow was seen on 7th April and the last on 20th October. A pair reared two broods in the boathouse. House Martins appeared on 12th April and the last record was on 27th October. There were few records of Sand Martin. A family party of Marsh Tits in June was an interesting record, as this species is rare on the reserve and its breeding status is doubtful. Willow Tits were as usual common in the willow beds and round the mere edge. Fieldfares were last seen on 10th April and returned on 4th October. Redwings were gone by 5th April and were seen again on 23rd September; both were abundant in the winter months. A male King Ouzel was seen on 9th April, an unusual record for the area. Two Chats were seen on passage; a female Stonechat on 11th March, (the first for the reserve) and a female Linchat on 28th August. Reed Warblers had a successful breeding season and over 50 pullus were ringed in the nest. There was a late record of a ringed bird on 28th September. A Sedge Warbler was singing in May and a juvenile was seen in August. there were no other records, but this a hopeful sign, as this species has been missing for several years. Only one pair of Whitethroats took up territory, reflecting the national decline of this warbler. Spotted Flycatchers were seen frequently in the summer, including young birds. A Tree Pipit seen on 17th August was an unusual record. Both Grey and Yellow Wagtails were seen with young, and 11 of the latter were seen on 4th May in a thorn bush. an unusual concentration of about 80 Linnets was seen on 1st September. Giskins were often seen moving along the edge of the mere until 6th April and from 14th September. A Twite on 22nd April was another 'first' for the reserve. Bramblings were seen only in March and October. Corn Buntings again mystified observers by singing in April and May and then disappearing completely. Tree Sparrows bred in the nest boxes below the Observatory and also used them for winter roosting.