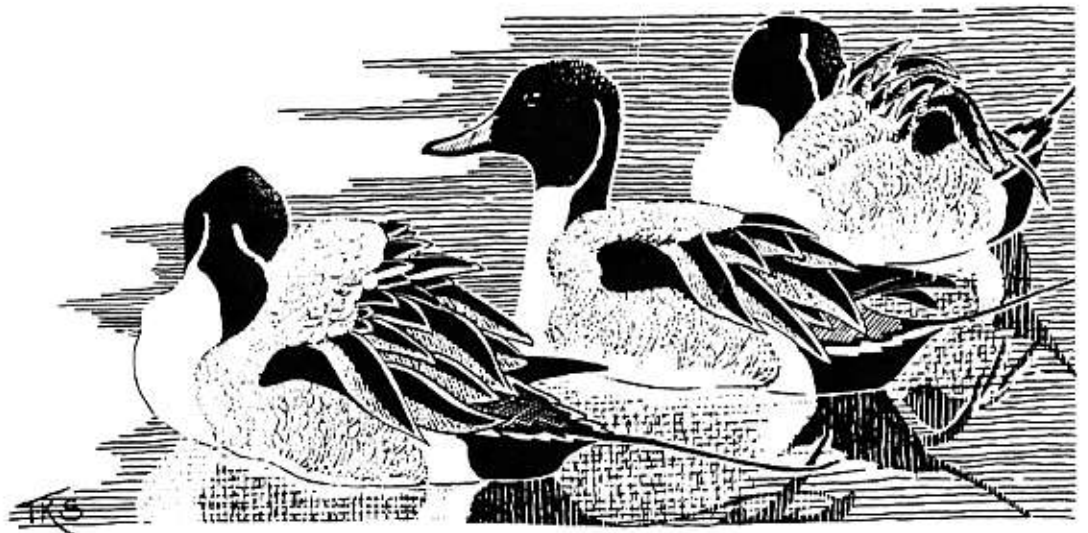


**DEESIDE NATURALISTS
SOCIETY**

**BIRDS OF THE
CONNAHS QUAY CEEB RESERVE
and OAKENHOLT MARSH**



**A Report
on the Birds
recorded during 1989**

BIRDS OF THE CONNAH'S QUAY CEGB RESERVE AND OAKENHOLT MARSH 1989

Five new species for the reserve were recorded this year bringing the total up to 198, including "escapes". The Little Egret is still officially a "rarity" but presented no identification problems for the large numbers of reserve visitors who saw it on the marsh. The Pacific Golden Plover in July has also been submitted to the National Rarities Committee. Purple Sandpiper, Pomarine Skua and Chiloe Wigeon were also recorded for the first time. Three other species, shag, manx shearwater and woodcock were recorded again after a long absence.

Wildfowl numbers have increased almost across the board, mainly a result of low tide roosting on the recently-increased expanse of Flint Sands. There were record counts of Pintail (10,000), Teal (7,000), Mallard (2020), Shelduck (600) and Bewick's Swan (33). The Blacktailed Godwit flock also increased again to 1500 birds, maintaining its international importance.

Kingfishers were frequently recorded from the bunded pool again after several poor years. Moorhens bred successfully for the second year running and little grebe attempted to breed for the first time.

The right-hand section of the bunded pool was re-excavated during the summer and much of the spoil was used to create a new embankment, screening the main pool from the road to the field study centre more effectively. This part of the pool was particularly attractive to greenshank and ringed plover during the autumn, but would benefit greatly if the resources were available both to build another hide and to start a feeding programme similar to that carried out on the main pool. Vandals, deterred from the Study Centre by the new steel shutters, turned their attention to the hides, with regular break-ins at the West hide and the East hide destroyed by fire early in 1990 (with the loss of nearly all the December records for the bunded pool). Following fairytale principles, there are plans to reconstruct the hide in brick during the coming year and a number of generous donations from members have already been gratefully received.

The combined power of the Dee and the tides had two important consequences; they necessitated repairs to both sluices on the bunded pool to prevent breaches and they resulted in continued accretion of sandflats which now provide important wader feeding areas conveniently close to the West hide.

COMPARISON OF MAXIMUM NUMBERS OF WINTER (OCT-MAR) WILDFOWL AND WADERS ON THE RESERVE WITH COUNTS FROM THE WHOLE DEE ESTUARY.

Note: Dee Estuary counts are made as part of the B.O.E.E. Wildfowl and Wader Count and are taken from the Wildfowl Trust Report for the 88/89 winter. Reserve counts are the highest for each winter and not necessarily made on the same day.

	1988/89	
	<u>Dee</u>	<u>Reserve</u>
Blacktailed Godwit	552	880 (100%)
Spotted Redshank	20	20 (100%)
Lapwing	?	4000 (>50%)
Redshank	8035	1500 (19%)
Knot	13132	2500 (19%)
Dunlin	16772	2500 (15%)
Curlew	2474	126 (5.1%)
Oystercatcher	27397	800 (2.9%)
Pintail	8435	5000 (59%)
Teal	4670	2000 (43%)
Mallard	4105	740 (18%)
Shelduck	4896	400 (8%)
Wigeon	?	240 (<10%)

As the Table shows, the Reserve continues to be especially important for Blacktailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Teal, Redshank and Lapwing, while Knot and Dunlin have this year become a significant feature for the first time in recent years. (Dunlin numbers, however, were usually much lower than the maximum figure).

Wildfowl numbers were regularly 50-100% of the maximum figures given in the Table, with the exception of Pintail which was only a very occasional visitor, as usual, in the 88/89 winter.

G.E. Morris, March 1990.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRDS

Birds recorded for the first time during 1989 are enclosed by asterisks.

The GRAPHS are a new feature which show how numbers vary through the year. They can be used by visitors to see what is likely to be on the reserve in any particular week of the year. Each month is divided into three 10-day periods (1st-10th, 11th-20th and 21st-end) and the highest count in each period is shown (except for a few species which are "total" numbers in that period). The "white columns" are counts from the West hide; for some species, counts on the bunded pool are superimposed as "black columns". The amount of black illustrates the relative importance on the bunded pool at that time of year.

REDTHROATED DIVER (*Gavia stellata*)

First recorded only a couple of years ago, but now seen occasionally every winter, part of an increase in sea-birds generally. This may be partly, but not entirely, due to the changing habits of birdwatchers. This year there were records on Jan 7th (NJH), Feb 5th (CB) and Dec 29th (JCW).

BLACKTHROATED DIVER (*Gavia artica*)

One record on Nov 5th (CB):

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

A pair attempted to breed on the reserve for the first time this year, but abandoned the nest in early June. Otherwise, it was an occasional visitor outside the breeding season as usual.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*)

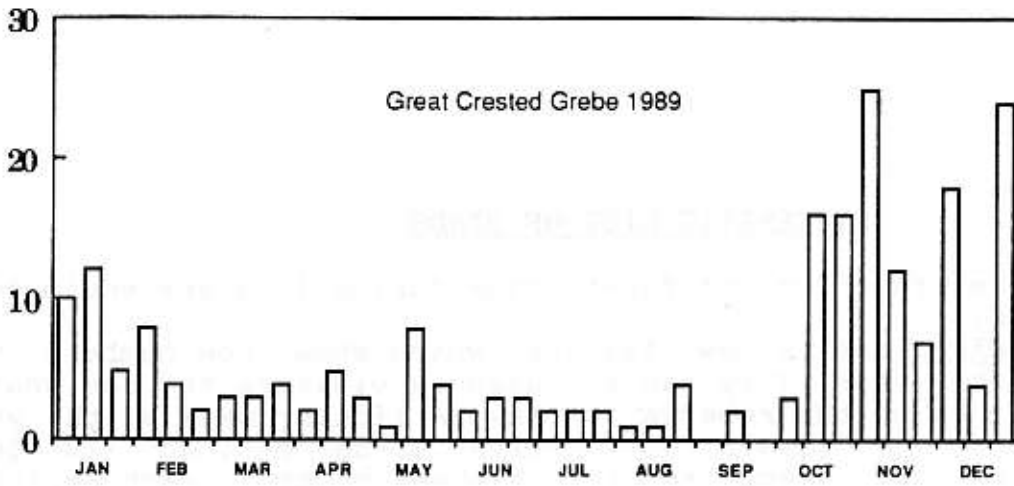
Wintering in the mouth of the estuary, this species is brought upstream by the tide, often in good numbers. Though a little less frequent in early winter this year, the maximum of 25 on the high-tide of Nov 4th (CB) was nearly as high as 1988. It was also seen throughout the summer for the second year running (see GRAPH 1).

SLAVONIAN GREBE. (*Podiceps auritus*)

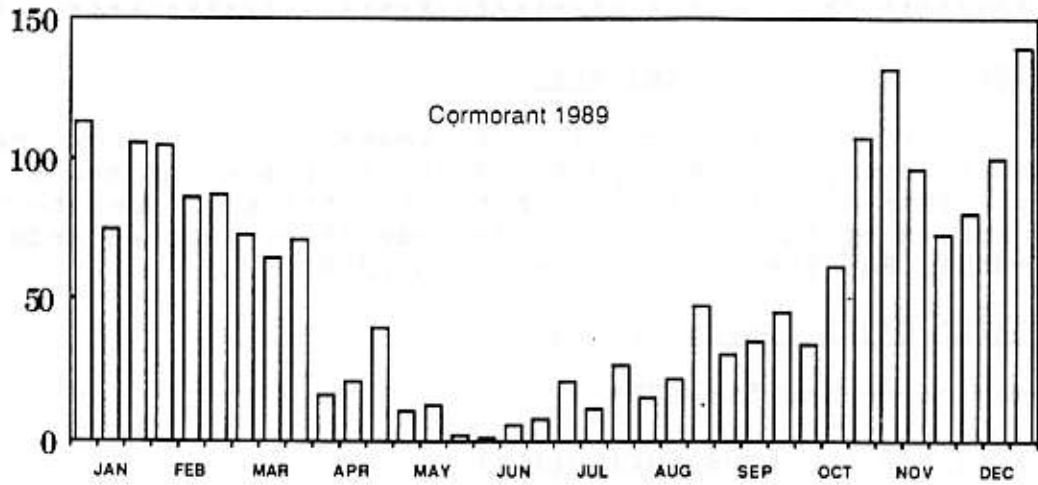
Two were seen moving up river with the tide on Dec 29th (DJS, CB).

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*)

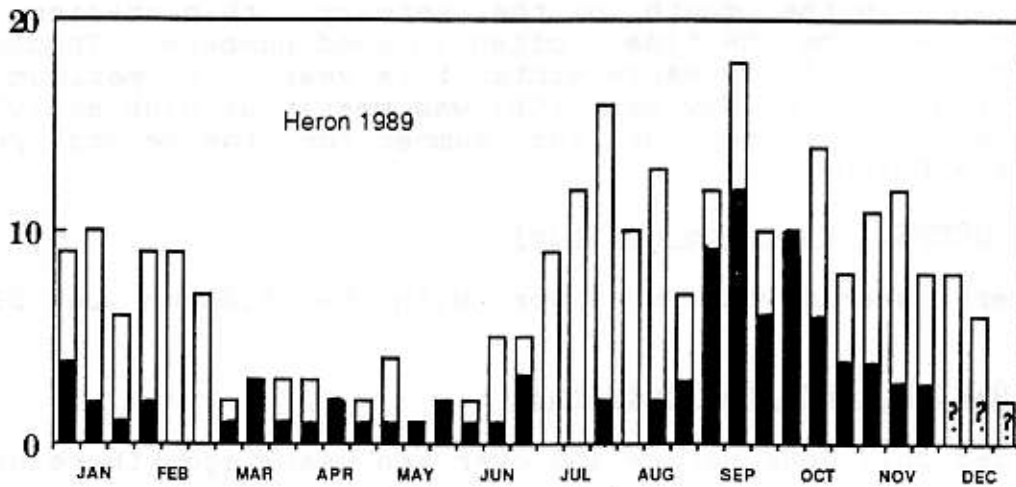
Recorded only once before and over ten years ago, there were



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two records this year on Sep 27th (MJR) and Oct 7th (CB), when winds were not particularly strong.

LEACH'S PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*)

One on Christmas Eve was the first reserve record outside the peak period of Sep/Oct (CB,GW). There were no autumn NW gales this year and no autumn records.

GANNET (*Sula bassana*)

An adult was seen on July 9th (CB).

CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

A second good year with the high count of 140 on Dec 30th being close to the reserve record of 150, though counts were above average throughout the year (see GRAPH 2).

SHAG (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)

Often confused with cormorant, acceptable records are rare indeed. This year, an immature was seen with a cormorant on June 21st (NJH), the first record since 1980.

GREY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*)

This species can be found throughout the year, though only in small numbers during the breeding season (March-May) (see GRAPH 3). Post-breeding numbers were average again (max. 18 on Sep 16th) after three years in which they were unusually high. In early September the bunded pool and nearby river attracted 9-12 birds daily for a brief period. (see GRAPH 3).

*LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*)*

Many visitors had the opportunity to see this exotic addition to the reserve list when an adult spent 12 days on the marsh between Sep 14th and 25th. It spent most of its time feeding in the gutters, on the far scrape or in the tide-pools along the marsh edge.

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*)

Another increase this year with 86 birds recorded altogether and the same maximum as last year, 12 birds in May. They are most often seen as pairs or small family groups on the fly ash lagoon, but rarely stay more than a few days.

BEWICK'S SWAN (*Cygnus columbianus bewicki*)

The party of 8, with 3 immatures, from late 1988 was seen

again frequently in January and early February. The flock of 25 (9 immatures) on the bunded pool early one Sunday morning (Nov 26th) must have been a breathtaking sight (RAR), but was exceeded by a new reserve record of 33 birds on Dec 17th (NJH). There were 3 further records of 1-6 birds during Nov/Dec.

PINKFOOTED GOOSE (Anser brachyrhyncus).

Two birds on Mar 21st was the only record (NJH).

WHITEFRONTED GOOSE (Anser albifrons)

A flock of 9 (2 immatures) which wintered in the area was recorded once on the reserve on March 5th (CB). This is only the second reserve record, the previous one being in 1984.

GREYLAG GOOSE (Anser anser).

Three singles were recorded on Jan 22nd, Sep 23rd and Oct 15th.

CANADA GOOSE (Branta canadensis)

There were eight records of 2-17 birds, mostly in spring, but larger numbers were present on Jan 22nd (57), Jan 29th (45) and the weekend of Sep 23/24th (140), the latter being an unusually high count for the Dec.

BRENT GOOSE (Branta bernicla)

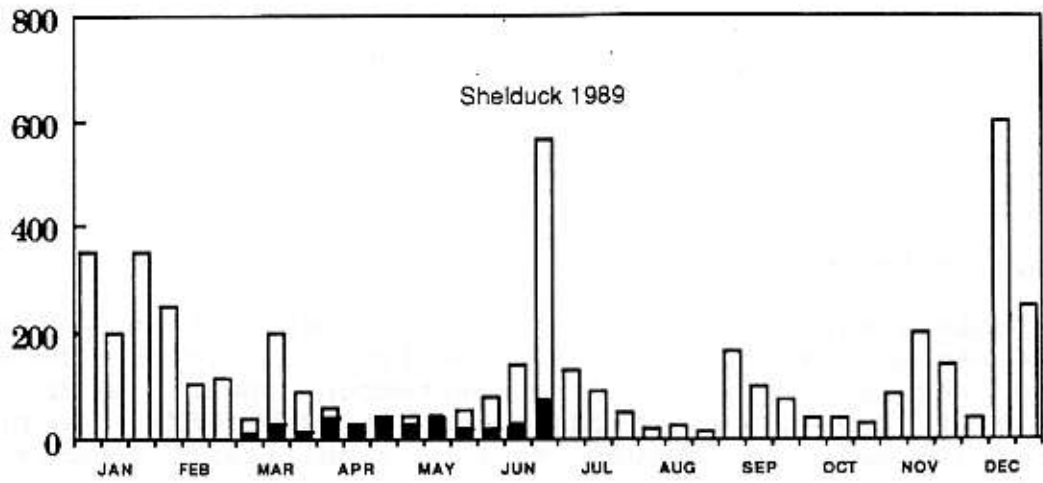
An individual feeding on the marsh from Nov 15th-17th was later reported shot at Flint. The species (dark-bellied) is now seen every winter.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE (Alopochen aegyptiacus)

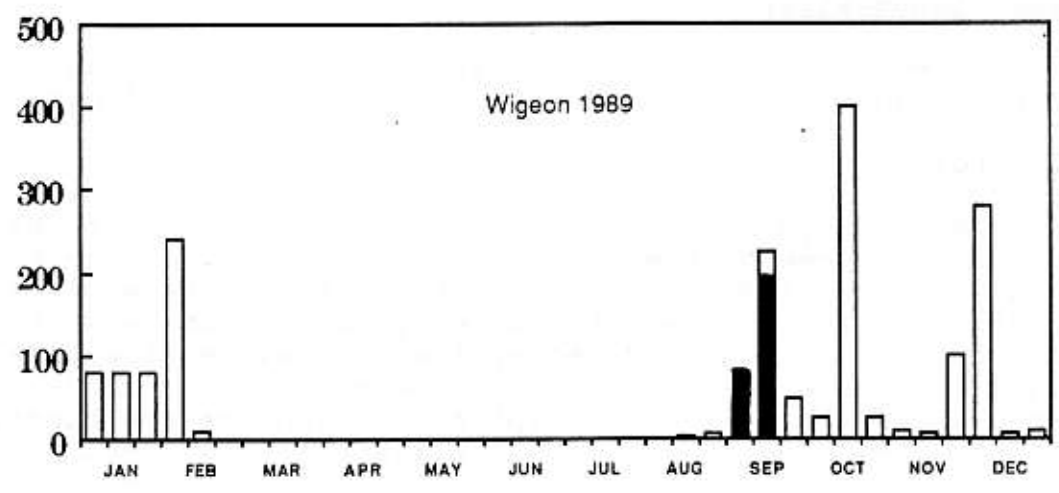
The third record for the reserve was of a bird with a damaged leg on the bunded pool on May 8th.

SHELDUCK (Tadorna tadorna)

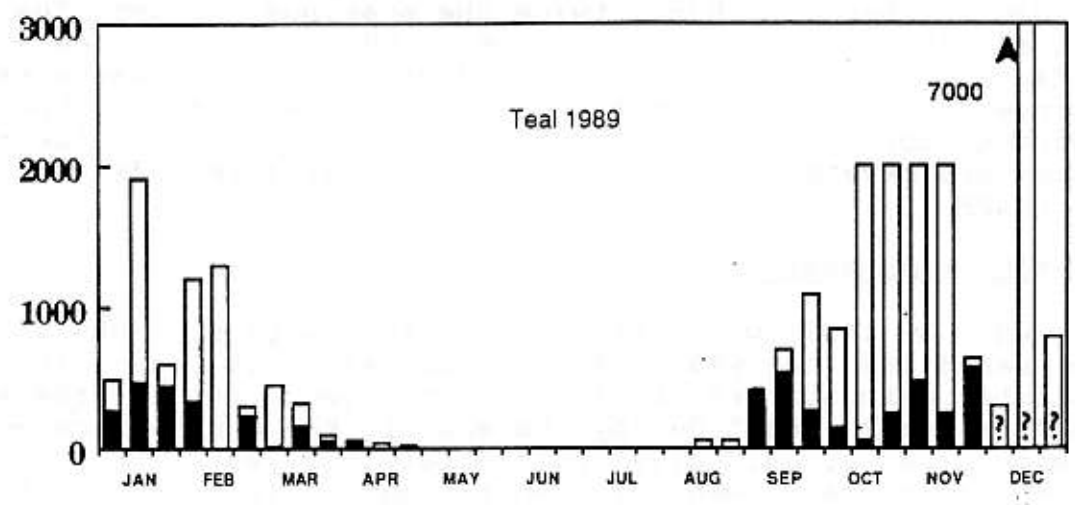
Although the count of 600 on Dec 15th was something of a record (GR,HB), winter numbers seem to be fairly stable at a somewhat erratic 300-400. In contrast, the summer flock is certainly growing as the area of Flint Sands increases, with 565 roosting there on June 30th (GEM). A pair with 2-3 young was seen from June 17th onwards and there were later records of up to 14 well-grown juveniles. GRAPH 4 illustrates the strong preference of Shelduck for the bunded pool area during the breeding season, though there is no evidence of their having bred successfully there.



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WIGEON (Anas penelope)

Numbers early in the year were no better than average but there was an early arrival for the 1989/90 winter, the species being regularly present from September onwards with several counts of 200-400, the highest on Oct 12th (GEM). In previous years, it has been unusual to find significant numbers before December. See GRAPH 5.

CHILOE WIGEON (Anas sibilatrix)

An escaped bird of this Argentinian species was recorded for the first time on the reserve on Sep 29th (JCW).

GADWALL (Anas strepera)

A good year for this irregular species with 5 records: 2 birds on Sep 2nd and singles on Sep 6th, 9th, Oct 16th and Dec 30th.

TEAL (Anas crecca)

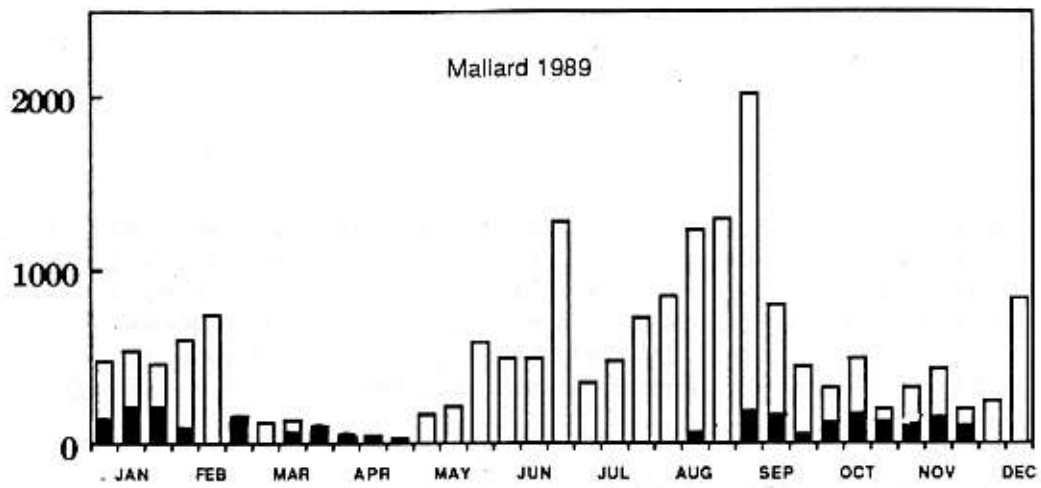
For a few days in mid-December, 7,000 teal were roosting on Flint Sands close to the marsh, more than double the previous record and more than are normally present on the whole estuary (GR, HB, CB). Apart from this brief influx, numbers were rather higher than last year and better than any since the peak years of 1983-85. There were also a few summer records of 2-3 birds. GRAPH 6 shows that a significant proportion use the bunded pool at times. The qualifying level for international importance has been revised to 4,000, so the Connah's Quay share of the Dee flock is now only of National importance.

MALLARD (Anas platyrhynchos)

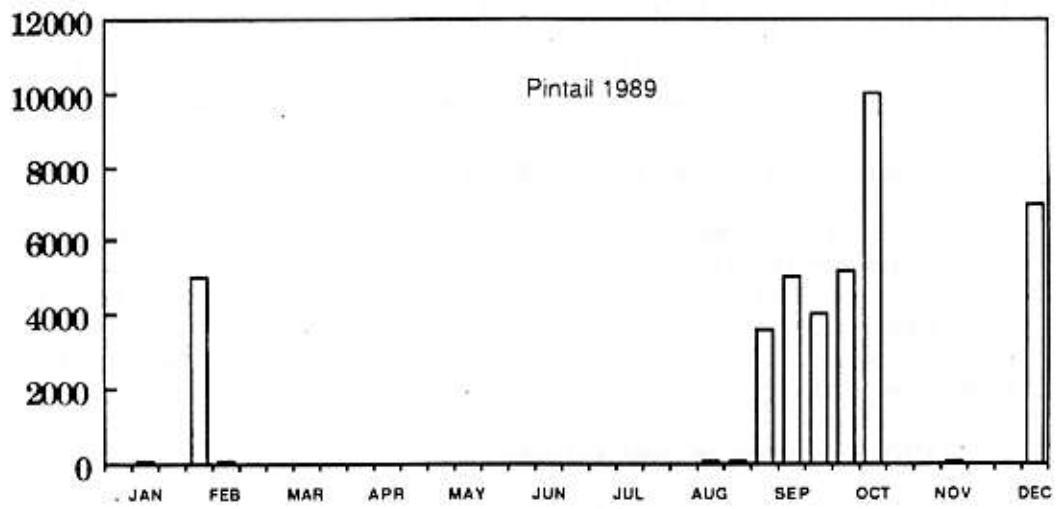
Although winter numbers were about average, there was an unusually large influx in Aug/Sep which produced a record count of 2020 on Sep 8th (NJH), twice the previous record. There had been a continuous summer presence of 500 or more since the end of May and the count of 1287 on June 24th (NJH) was already a reserve record. They were roosting at low tide on the large sandbanks opposite Flint which have developed since the repair of the Dee revetment. There were no breeding records this year. See GRAPH 7.

PINTAIL (Anas acuta)

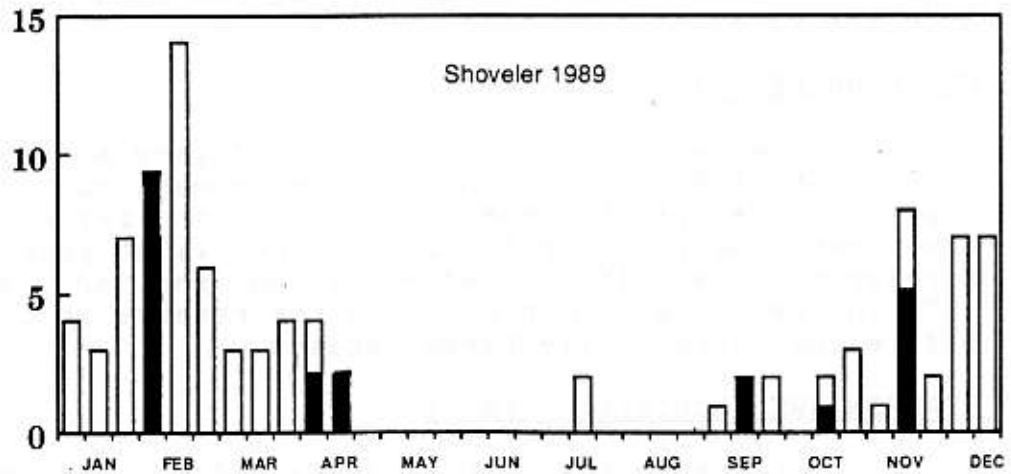
Just as 1987 was the year of the wigeon, 1989 will be remembered as the year of the pintail. It began in early September with numbers building up to over 3,000 by the end of the first week and 5,000 by the end of the month. Such numbers have occurred occasionally before but this year the birds were present every day, many of them flying in from the north-west.



7



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as the high tides receded, to roost on the sandflats. But even this left us unprepared for mid-October when numbers increased again from 6,500 on the 12th to over 10,000 by the 15th, the day of the BOEE wildfowl count. Numbers on the Mersey were unusually low on that day. By October 19th they were gone, but returned again in mid-December with another count of 7,000 birds. See GRAPH 8.

SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

An excellent year for this relatively uncommon duck with records almost every week from January to mid-April and then from September onwards. The highest count was 14 at the West hide on Feb 12th (NJH). See GRAPH 9.

TUFTED DUCK (*Aythya fuligula*)

A male on Sep 3rd was the only record and there were no Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) or Scaup (*Aythya marila*) records at all.

GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*)

Although there were records of 5 (Nov. 15th) and 8 (Dec 9th) from the West hide, it was a very poor year on the bunded pool with 3 in late October but then only an occasional single. In the previous winter, Jan-Mar records were also of singles only, so the signs are of a further decrease rather than any recovery towards the numbers in the early 1980s.

GOOSANDER (*Merqus merganser*)

A female on Oct 28th was the only record (CB).

REDBREASTED MERGANSER (*Merqus serrator*)

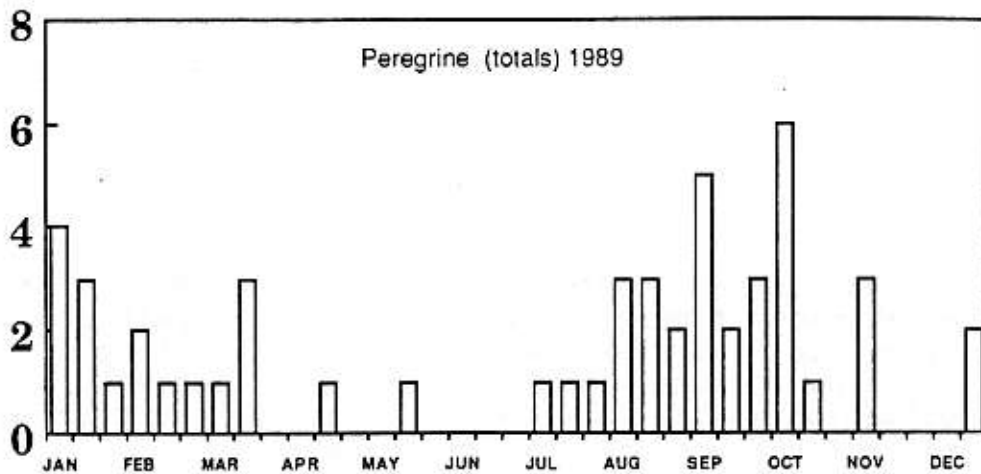
Typical of recent years with only a dozen records of 1-2 birds in winter and a maximum of 3 on Jan 22nd (NJH), nearly all from the river at high tide.

HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

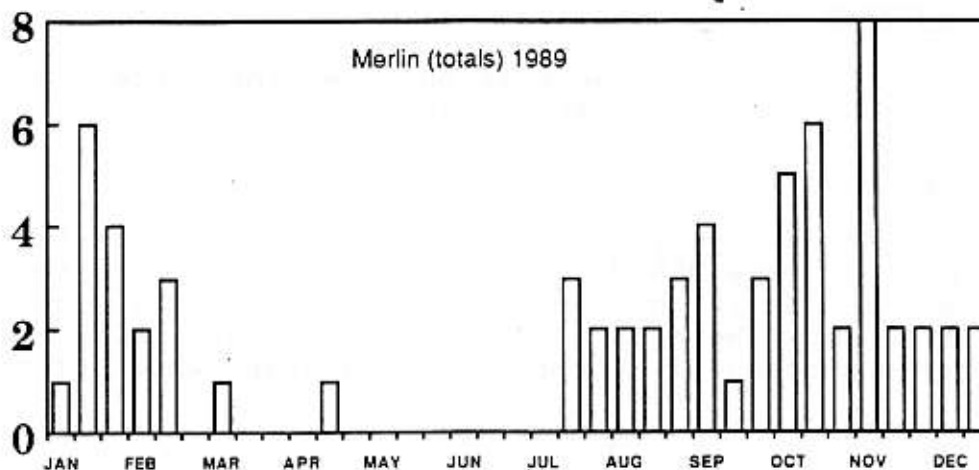
The only record was of a ringtail flying along the revetment on Nov 5th (CB). Since the river revetment must be considered the very edge of the reserve, it is worth reflecting that 1989 came perilously close to being the first year without hen harrier records. It started wintering regularly on the Dee in 1970 and became a common sight on the reserve in the early 1980s before the current relentless decline.

SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*)

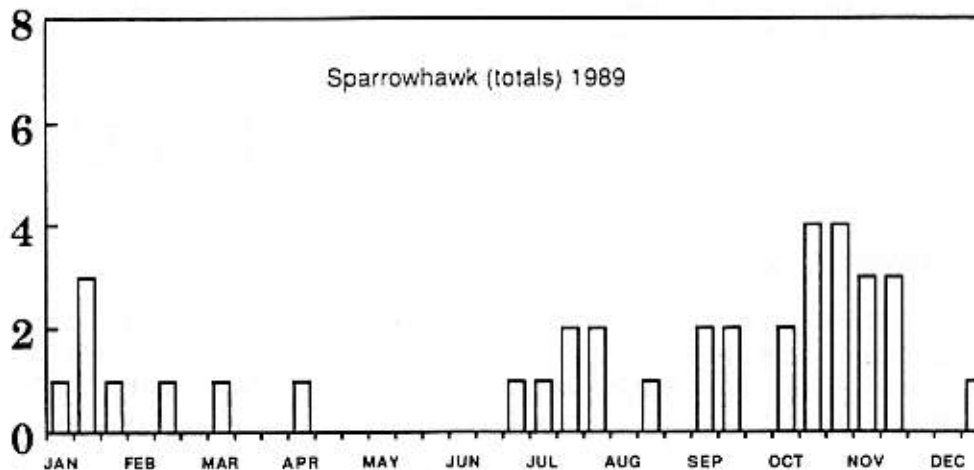
The decline in the number of records since the 1987 peak of



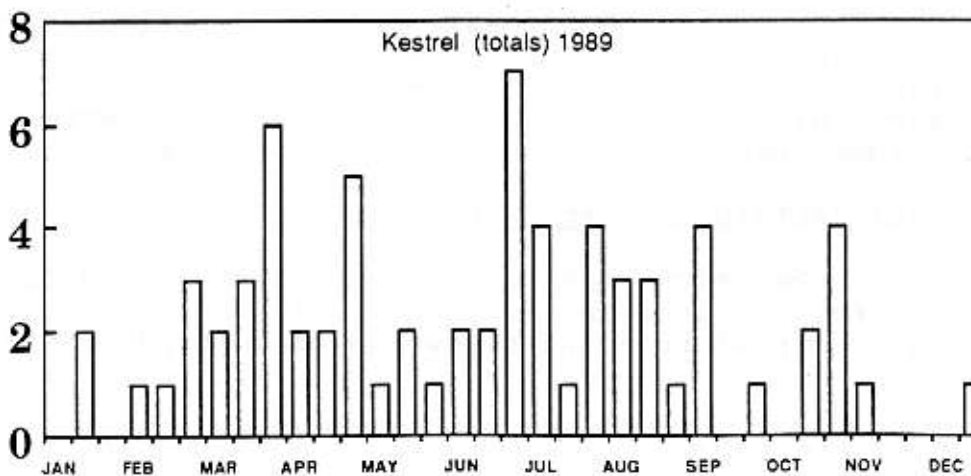
10



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70 records has continued with 36 records, the same as 1986 and an average figure for recent years. A pair probably bred very close to the reserve in 1987, accounting for the frequent sightings; otherwise the figures suggest a fairly stable situation in the late 1980s. Redshank and starling (twice) were recorded as prey items. See GRAPH 12.

BUZZARD (Buteo buteo)

Three were seen soaring over the bunded pool on Sep 17th (CB, NJH, HB), the 4th reserve record.

KESTREL (Falco tinnunculus)

An average year with 71 records, most of them in the summer months (see GRAPH 13). The presence of 3 together on power station buildings on July 4th is the only suggestion of local breeding. There is one record of a vole being taken and one of an unsuccessful attempt to rob a sparrowhawk of its prey.

MERLIN (Falco columbarius)

The best year so far with 69 records compared with an average of 52 over the past 3 years. One male on Sep 19th was carrying on its right leg a long blue-green ring of a type normally used by falconers (GEM). This a reminder, perhaps, not to make too many assumptions about the origin of winter raptors on the Dee. Adults and immatures of both sexes were recorded. See GRAPH 11.

[HOBBY (Falco subbuteo)]

There is only a tentative record of a dark falcon on the nature trail on May 21st (JCW) which may well have been this species, an elusive but regular visitor to the estuary on passage.

PEREGRINE (Falco peregrinus)

There were 55 records, an average figure for recent years and more than last year's 46. There were several records of 2 birds together and one of a bird resting on the marsh near the West hide for 90 minutes. GRAPH 10 illustrates the distinct autumn "passage", often remarked for this species.

GREY PARTRIDGE (Perdix perdix)

Three pairs may have attempted to breed but the degree of success is unclear. No chicks were recorded in summer and the maximum post-breeding covey was of 10 birds in late October.

PHEASANT (Phasianus colchicus)

One record of a female on Oct 31st and one of a male on Nov 10th.

MOORHEN (Gallinula chloropus)

Two pairs (though finally only 3 adults apparently) raised broods of at least 6 and 3 young. There are no records for the winter months. The rapidity with which nesting sites were occupied as suitable habitat developed clearly suggests that nesting site availability is limiting the local population.

COOT (Fulica atra)

An adult was present on the fly ash lagoon from June 6th to the 19th, with 2 present on the 11th. There was a further single on Aug 23rd.

OYSTERCATCHER (Haematopus ostralegus)

A few pairs nested again without evidence of success. Apart from a good count of 3200 in mid-November, the regular and prolonged peak presence was once again in spring/early summer with 2,000 in late April and over 1,000 remaining until early June. See GRAPH 14.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (Charadrius dubius)

An adult was seen on the bunded pool on June 11th and 16th and two adults were present near the West hide on July 7th and 8th. An immature was on the fly ash lagoon on July 17th.

RINGED PLOVER (Charadrius hiaticula)

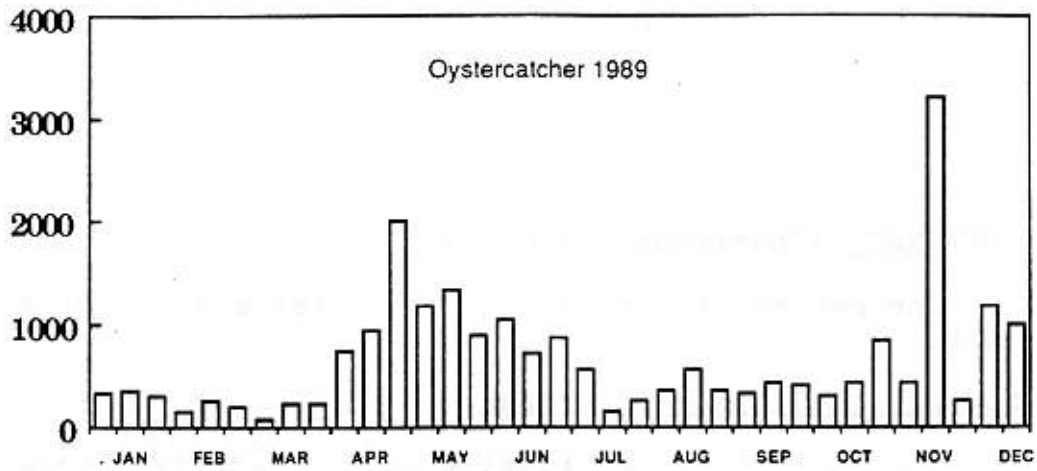
A second good autumn in a row with many late July/August records and a maximum of 27 on Aug 13th. Records included 9-11 birds on the bunded pool during this period. See GRAPH 26.

[*PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER (Pluvialis fulva)*]

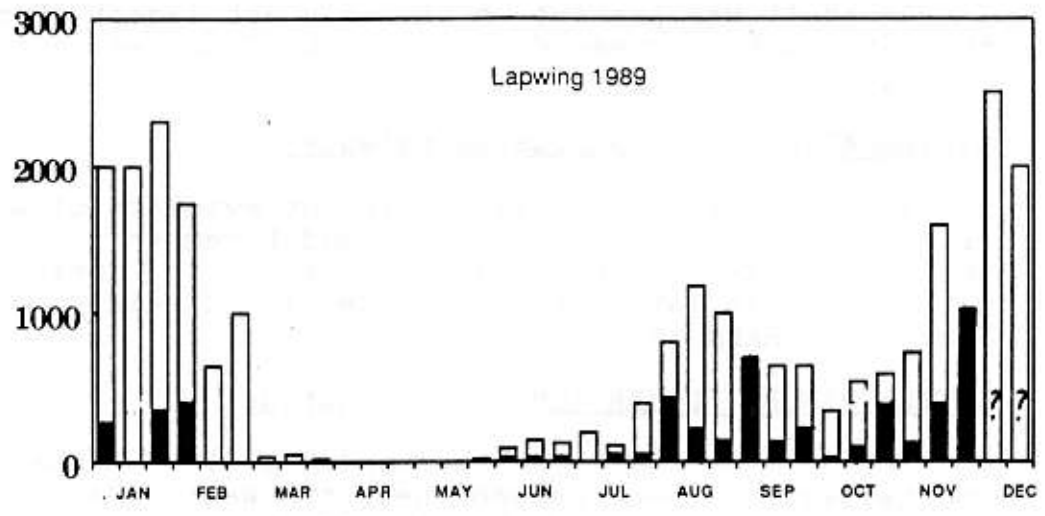
A record of a bird with a European golden plover on the near scrape in front of the West hide for 40 minutes on July 23rd (NJH,CB) has been submitted to the Rarities Committee, but their decision is not yet known. Until recently this was treated as conspecific with the American golden plover (P. dominica)

GOLDEN PLOVER (Pluvialis apricaria)

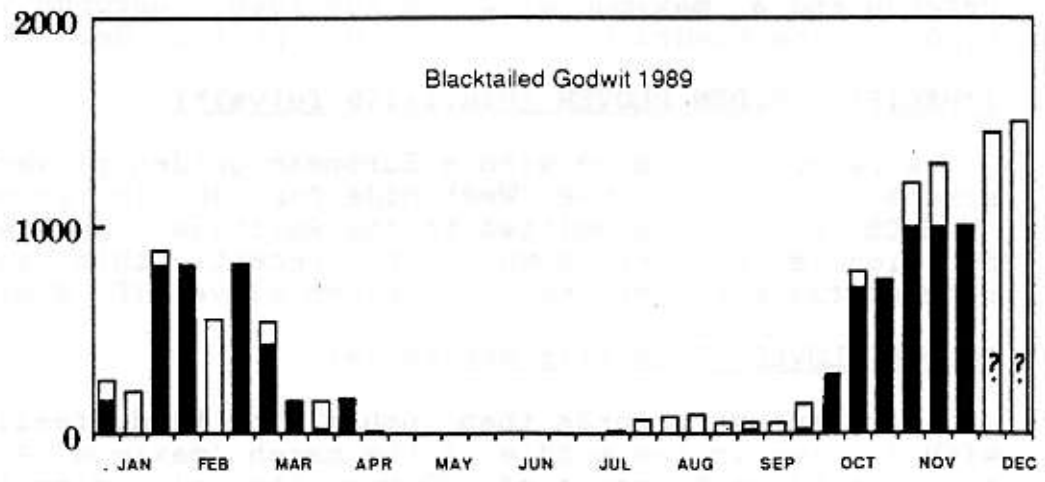
More autumn records than usual with birds feeding regularly with lapwing in the middle of the marsh (maximum 14 on Sep 18th) but the highest count of 70 was the only significant winter



14



15



16

record on Nov 18th (NJH).

GREY PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Occasional records of 1-5 birds in winter, but a passage on Sep 29th produced the highest count of 11 (CB).

LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*)

There was a good winter presence, frequently 2,000-2,500, and 1-2 birds remained during the breeding season. One or two pale birds were regularly present as usual. This species returns very early after the breeding season with numbers building up from late May onwards. See GRAPH 15.

KNOT (*Calidris canutus*)

The count of 2,500 on Mar 9th (GEM) was a new reserve record and similar numbers have returned for the 1989/90 winter. GRAPH 17 shows that a significant proportion regularly use the bunded pool. They usually associate with Blacktailed Godwit.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

Two adults in summer plumage were seen on Aug 27th and 30th (MJR,CB). There were no records of little stint (*Calidris minuta*) or curlew sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) this year.

*PURPLE SANDPIPER (*Calidris maritima*)*

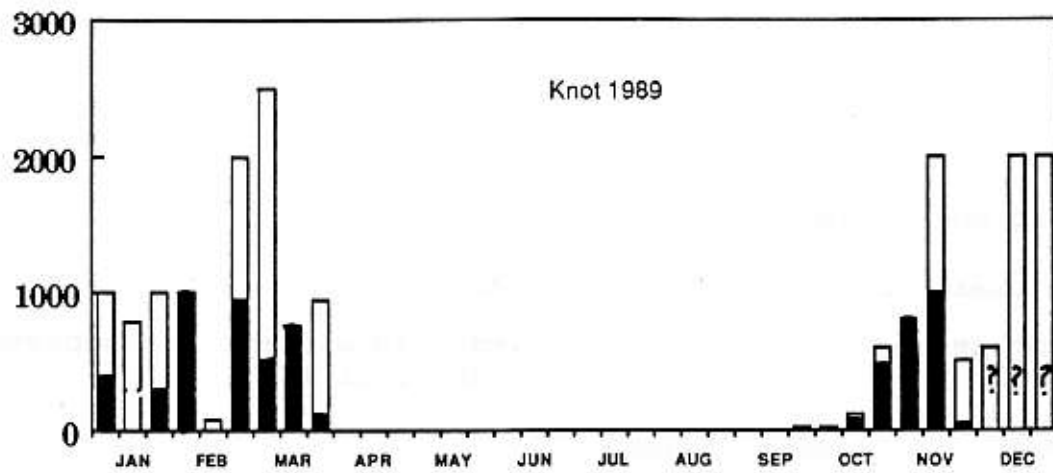
This new species for the reserve was recorded 4 times; three times roosting at high tide with the spotted redshank (Oct 15th, CB,HB; Oct 25th, CB, GEM; Nov 11th,CB) and once feeding on the mud at low tide (Nov 23rd,DC).

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

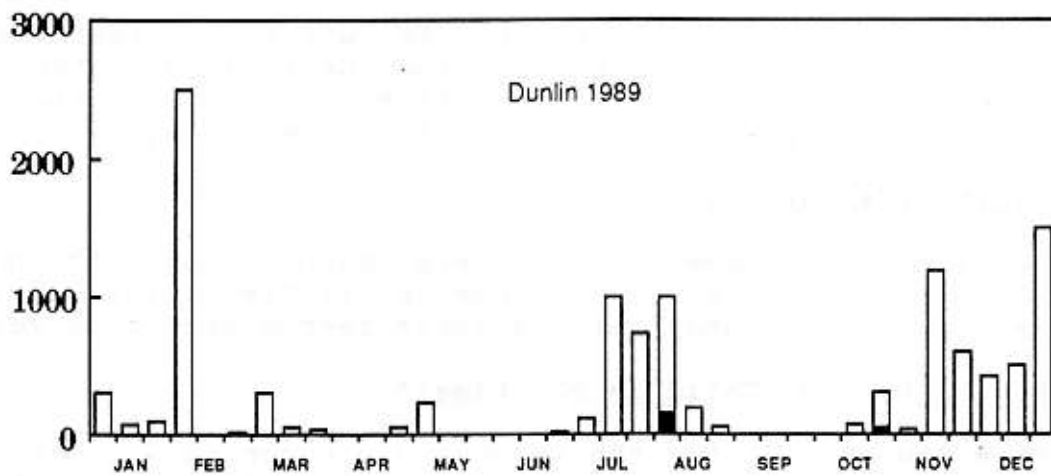
Passage numbers were rather low with 230 in early May and 1,000 in July/August, but the trend towards higher and more regular winter numbers continued. The counts of 2,500 in February and 1500 in December are the highest winter counts ever, though greater numbers than this have occurred on passage in the past. See GRAPH 18.

RUFF (*Philomachus pugnax*)

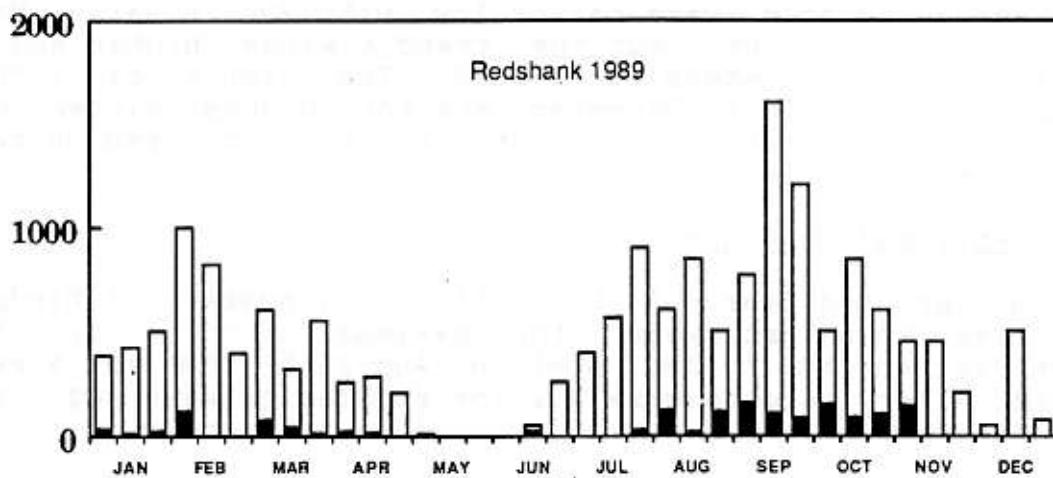
Another good year. Although the total number of birds (28) was less than last year, the maximum count of 19, mostly juveniles, on the bunded pool on Aug 25th (CB) is a reserve record. Other records were all of singles between Aug 3rd and Nov 11th.



17



18



19

WOODCOCK

One flew in from mid-estuary on Nov. 15th, landing on the near scrape in front of the West hide to feed in the grass for 90 minutes (GR, HB, GEM).

SNIPE (Gallinago gallinago)

Numbers were lower this year, particularly on autumn passage, with a maximum of 5 on Nov 12th and a total of only 36.

BLACKTAILED GODWIT (Limosa limosa)

NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY IMPORTANT.

Recent increases in the Iceland breeding population have led to a revision of the qualifying level for international importance from 400 to 700, but the Connah's Quay flock has easily kept pace with this increase. The high counts of 800-1000 in late 1988 continued into the second half of the 1988/89 winter and there was a further surge for the 1989/90 winter with 1000-1500 birds regularly present from November onwards. Once again the bunded pool was used regularly in winter. There was no distinct spring passage this year but up to 84 birds were present in late July/August. See GRAPH 16.

BARTAILED GODWIT (Limosa lapponica)

There was a light spring passage of up to 32 birds in May when all of the Blacktails had left, but no significant autumn passage this year. This has always been an erratic species on the reserve. Unusually, 1-2 birds overwintered and occasional singles were recorded in both winters. See GRAPH 20.

WHIMBREL (Numenius phaeopus)

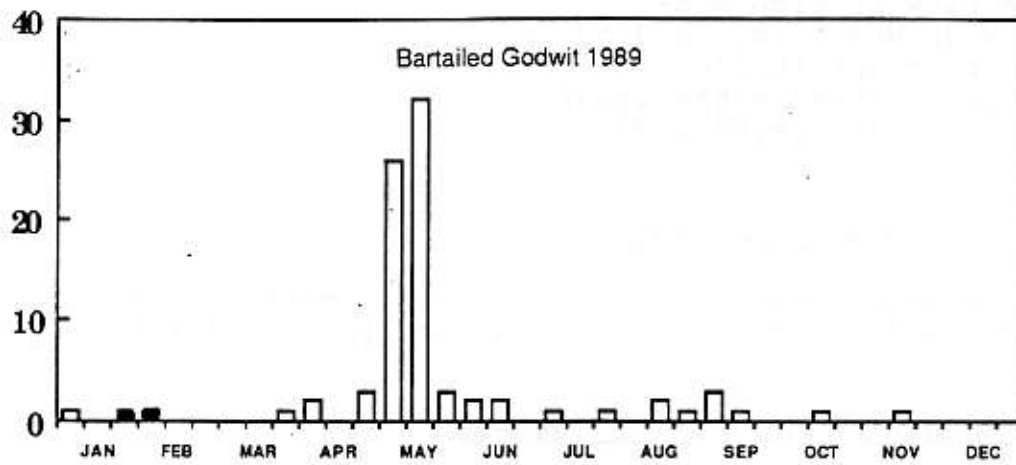
Present in small numbers on both passages; maximum counts of 7-8 in April/May and 6 in July/August. GRAPH 21 shows that this species is the archetypal passage migrant, with similar numbers at each of the two passage periods this year.

CURLEW (Numenius arquata)

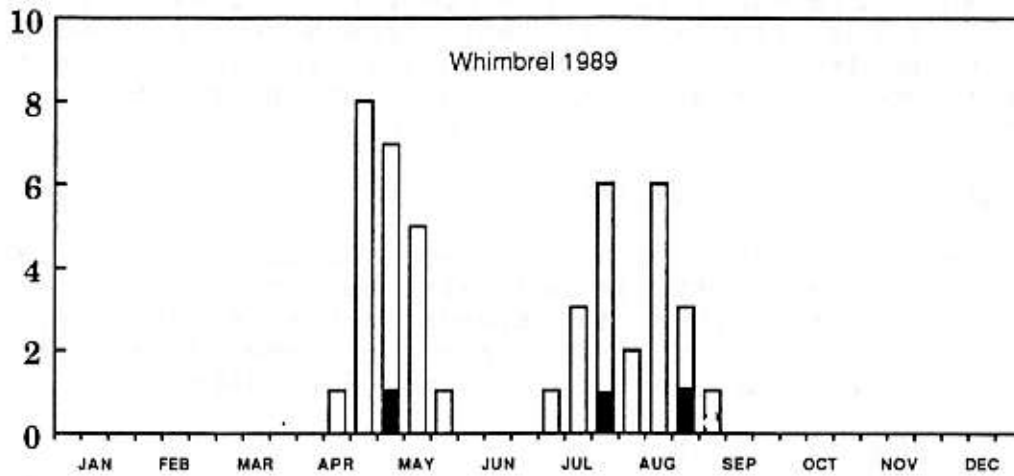
Present throughout the year with record counts of 250 on April 21st (CB) and 240 on June 10th (NJH). Numbers using the grazing fields near the field study centre were also higher with late October counts of over 100. See GRAPH 22.

SPOTTED REDSHANK (Tringa erythropus)

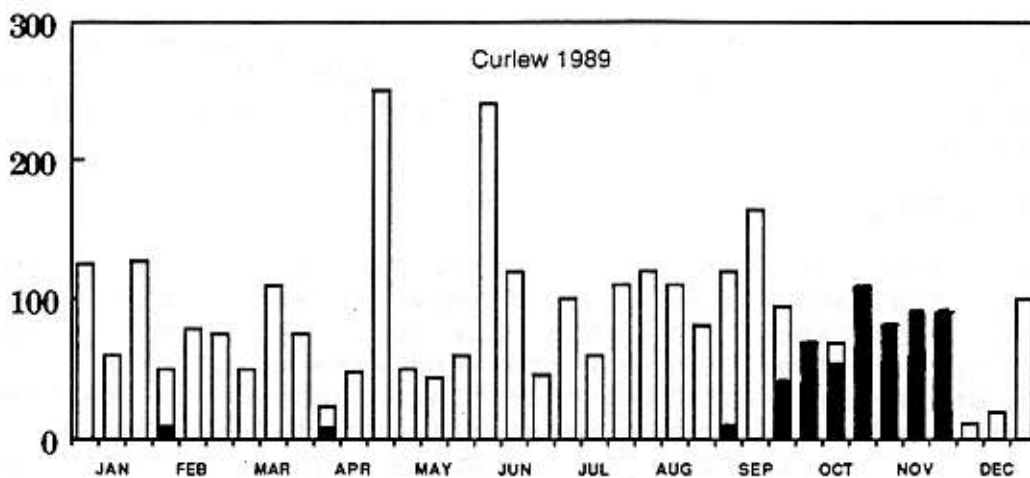
Two counts of 20 birds in early January, one of them on a BOEE Wildfowl and Wader day, firmly establish the reserve's regional importance for this species. Ten birds regularly overwintered in the 1989/90 winter and were being seen regularly on almost every suitable tide. They appear to be feeding invisibly under the marsh banks at low tide. Numbers on the prolonged autumn passage are usually higher but this year's



20



21



22

highest count of 28 on Sep 6th (NJH) was not particularly impressive. The spectacle of the regular reappearance of this species in full summer plumage in the first few days of July is an event which opens the autumn passage with a flourish. This year they were a day early with 4 completely-black birds on June 30th. See GRAPH 23.

REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*)

Breeding was not proven this year and winter numbers continued to be a little below average. Autumn passage numbers were higher than in winter with a maximum count of 1600 on Sep 17th (NJH), a respectable figure though overall autumn numbers averaged only a quarter of last year's extraordinary levels. The redshank is no longer the commonest wader on the reserve. See GRAPH 19.

GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*)

Autumn passage was back to "normal" this year with good numbers on the bunded pool throughout September and maximum counts of 16 on the 9th and 15th (CB). Two were seen on spring passage in May and one was still present in the winter months (Nov 4th, 11th and Dec 15th). See GRAPH 24.

GREEN SANDPIPER (*Tringa ochropus*)

A good year with 26 records and a maximum of 3 on Aug. 28th (CB), most records coming from the fly ash lagoon as usual.

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*)

The first record since 1985; a bird was heard near the West hide on Sep 22nd and 24th (CB) and was seen on the bunded pool later on the 22nd (MJR).

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

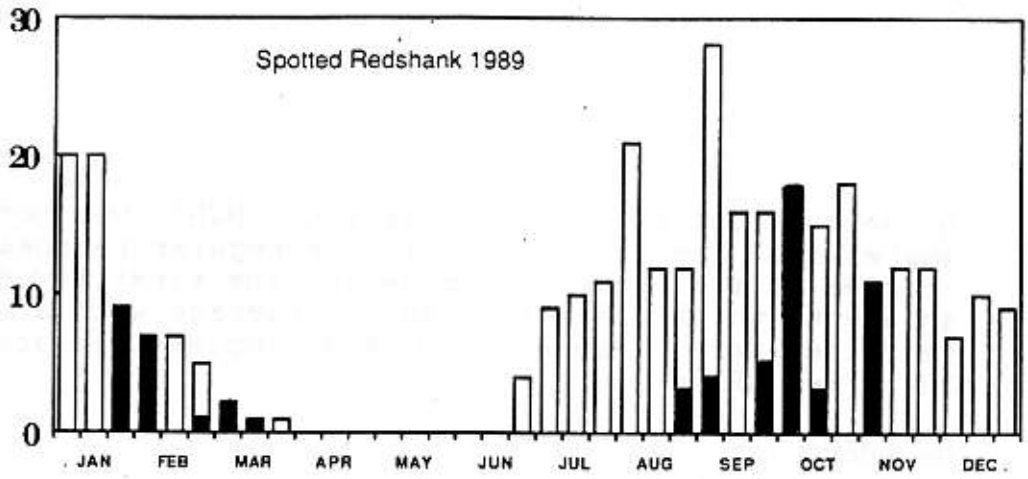
Apart from 1-2 spring birds in late April/early May, this species arrived on June 29th and was present until early October with a maximum count of 12 on July 25th (NJH), an improvement over recent years. See GRAPH 25.

TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

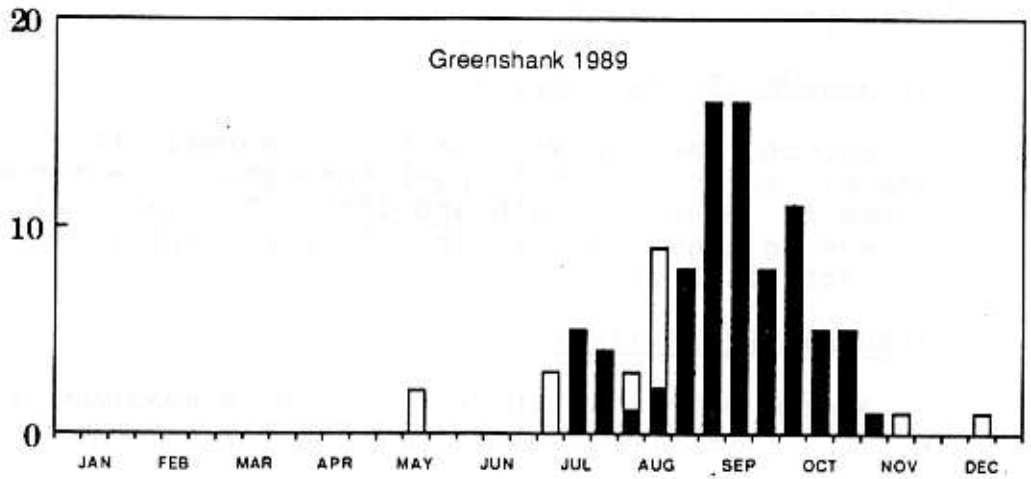
Now a fairly regular autumn visitor present from mid-July to mid-September with a maximum count of 7 on Sep 16th (CB). There were also 3 singles in winter (Oct/Nov).

*POMARINE SKUA (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)*

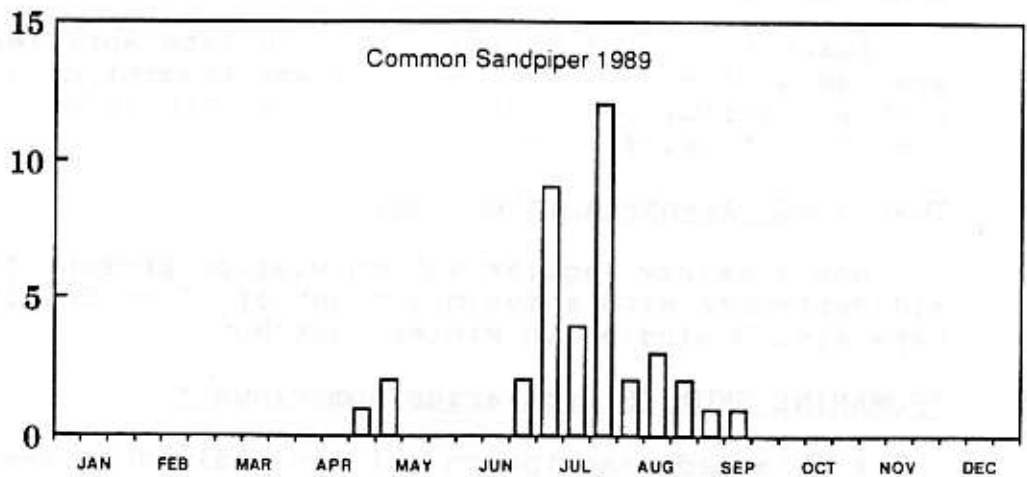
A detailed description of an individual seen with 2 arctic



23



24



25

skuas on July 30th (JCW,CB) was the first reserve record though there was a further record of 2 birds together on Oct 6th (CB).

ARCTIC SKUA (Stercorarius parasiticus)

Two light-phase adults were seen on July 30th (JCW,CB). There were no Great Skua (S. skua) records.

LITTLE GULL (Larus minutus)

An immature was present in the bunded pool area for much of the day on May 5th (GEM,JCW).

BLACKHEADED GULL (Larus ridibundus)

COMMON GULL (Larus canus)

LESSER BLACKBACKED GULL (Larus fuscus)

HERRING GULL (Larus argentatus)

GREAT BLACKBACKED GULL (Larus marinus)

Little attention is paid to the "common" gulls and no comprehensive counts were made. This is unfortunate since subjectively there appear to be significant changes taking place, with the Lesser Blackbacked becoming less common and the Great Blackbacked and Herring more numerous, at least during the daytime. Numbers vary with time of day, Common and Lesser Blackbacked figuring prominently in evening flights from the hills. Needless to say, the Blackheaded remains easily the commonest species. Significant counts were 480 Common on March 13th and 2 counts of over 100 Great Blackbacked on Nov 5th and Dec 30th.

KITTIWAKE (Rissa tridactyla)

An adult with an immature on Mar 23rd was the first record since 1984 (CB).

SANDWICH TERN (Sterna sandvicensis)

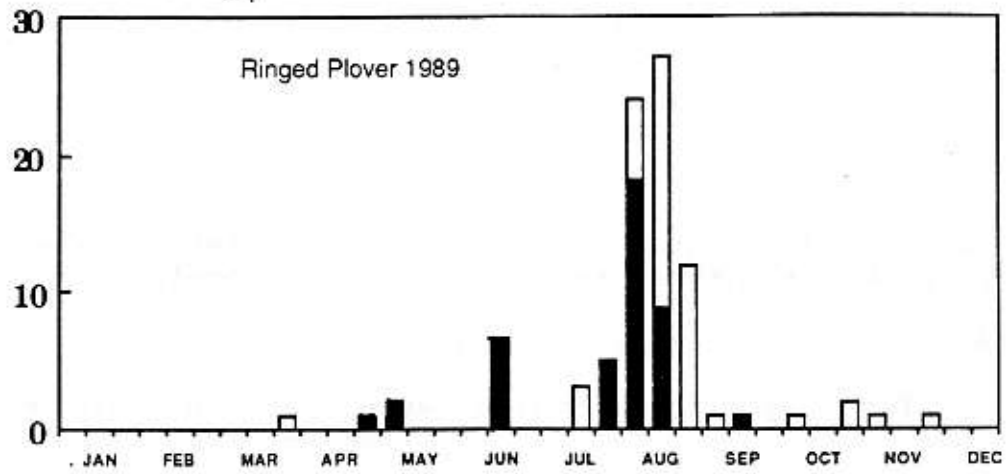
The only record is of 6 birds on Aug 28th (CB).

COMMON TERN (Sterna hirundo)

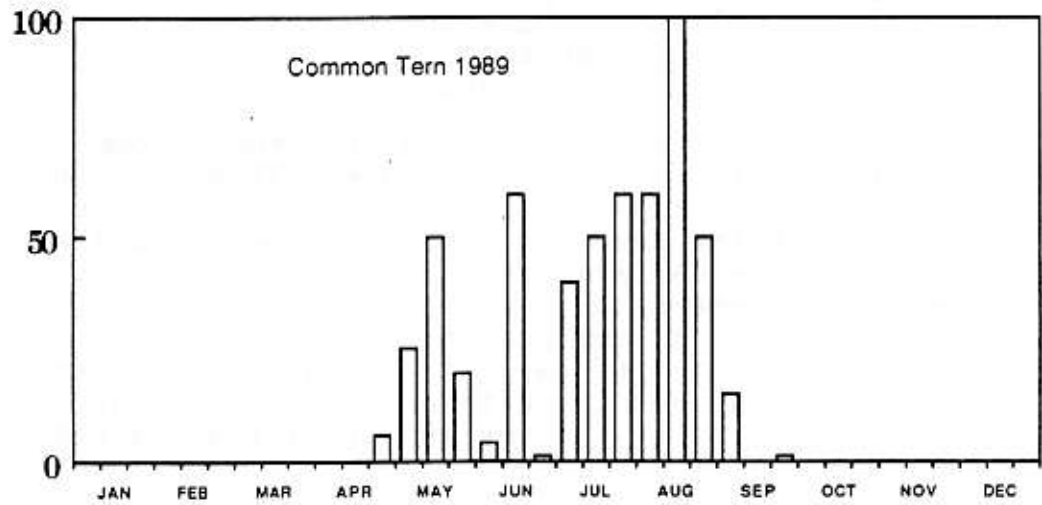
Present throughout the summer from mid-April to Aug/Sep with a maximum count of 100 in mid-August. These birds from the Shotton colony come to fish in greatest numbers as the tide rises and recedes. Once again there was a late passage bird on Oct 14th (GR). There were no records of arctic tern (S. paradisaea) this year. See GRAPH 27.

LITTLE TERN (Sterna albifrons)

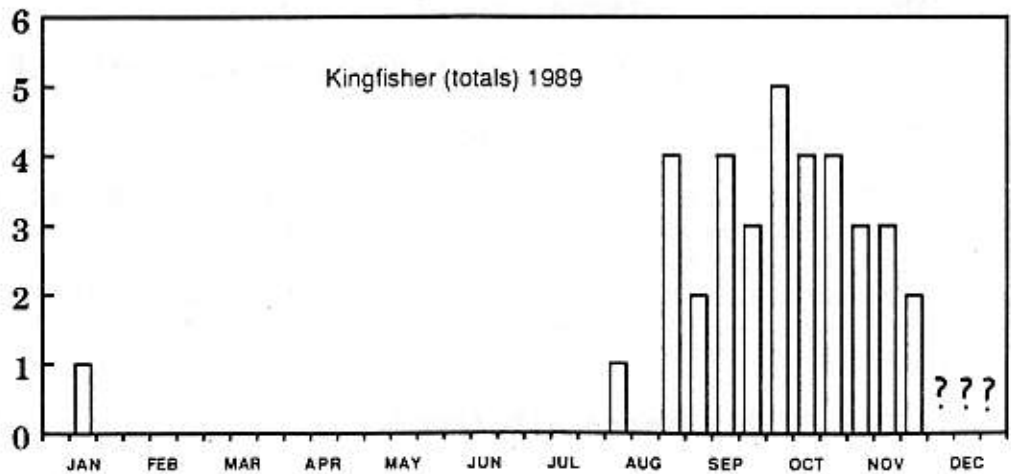
An excellent year with about 30 birds feeding in a flock at



26



27



28

the marsh edge daily between Aug 11th and 18th and 3 records of 12-30 birds between Aug 27th and 30th. There was also a single spring bird on May 5th.

BLACK TERN (Chlidonias niger)

This species is now being seen regularly on both passages though in very small numbers. This year there were 2 birds on May 5th (GR) and a single on July 30th (CB).

GUILLEMOT (Uria aalge)

Much more frequent this year with 4 singles and 2 records of 2 birds together from Oct 15th to the end of the year. There was also an early immature on Aug 16th (GEM). All records from the river. There were no razorbills (A. torde) this year.

DOMESTIC/FERAL PIGEON (Columba livia)

Occasional records. Mar-Oct.

STOCK DOVE (Columba oenas)

This has now become a winter visitor (maximum count of 50 on Jan 26th). though up to 5 birds were present throughout the summer (Jun-Sep).

WOODPIGEON (Columba palumbus)

Maximum count of 22 on Mar 31st. Small numbers at Rockcliffe throughout the year.

COLLARED DOVE (Streptopelia decaocto)

A pair on May 23rd and 2 records of singles on June 12th and Aug 15th.

CUCKOO (Cuculus canorus)

The best year on record with 17 birds in total, including 2 records of 2 separate birds. and all over an extended period (April 23rd to July 24th)

LITTLE OWL (Athene noctua)

There were 4 records of a single bird between Sep 25th and Oct 11th, all from near the East hide.

[SHORTEARED OWL (Asio flammeus)]

One seen over Burton marsh on Feb 26th is outside the reserve limits but worth a mention since this species hasn't

been seen on the reserve for three years in a row.

SWIFT (*Apus apus*)

An early arrival this year on April 27th

KINGFISHER (*Alcedo atthis*)

Back to normal after 4 miserable years. There were 36 records altogether, nearly all (34) from the end of August to December and nearly all (31) from the bunded pool. See GRAPH 28.

GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*)

A bird near the field study centre on Aug 28th was only the 3rd individual to be recorded on the reserve.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopus major*)

A good year again with 12 records, but over a briefer period than usual, most being between Oct 14th and Nov 19th (including 2 birds together on Oct 27th). Nearly all were in the East hide willow screen.

SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*)

There were 40-80 birds on the marsh from mid-Oct to mid-Nov. It is also a common, underrecorded, breeding resident.

SAND MARTIN (*Riparia riparia*)

Like the swallow, it was seen very early this year with 5 on Mar 27th and was also late to leave (Sep 17th), but numbers were low on both passages.

SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Present from Mar 26th to Oct 20th with a maximum of 100 in mid-August.

HOUSE MARTIN (*Delichon urbica*)

No records until May 4th and then only small numbers until the September passage with a maximum of 50 of the 15th. The last record was on Oct 4th.

MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*)

There was a passage of 30 in early April and a return passage of 15-20 in September. A bird was singing on Oakenholt marsh on May 24th and a pair was present near the field study

centre on June 9th.

WATER PIPIT (Anthus spinoletta spinosus)

One record on Feb 23rd (NJH). No records of Rock Pipit (A.s. petrosus).

YELLOW WAGTAIL (Motacilla flava)

No spring passage at all this year and records of 2 (July 20th) and 3 (Sep 8th) in the autumn.

GREY WAGTAIL (Motacilla cinerea)

One January record and then 8 records of 11 birds in total between Aug 7th and Nov 19th. The maximum was once again 3 in early August.

WHITE WAGTAIL (Motacilla alba alba)

There were 3 spring records (Mar 3rd and 23rd, April 5th) and another on Oct 14th, all except the first being of 2 birds.

PIED WAGTAIL (Motacilla alba yarrelli)

The highest count was of 15 birds in mid-April and young first appeared on the fly ash lagoon on June 1st, fed by their parents.

WREN (Troglodytes troglodytes)

A common resident breeding bird.

DUNNOCK (Prunella modularis)

A common resident breeding bird. Count of 6 on Nov 19th.

ROBIN (Erithacus rubecula)

A common resident breeding bird. Count of 5 on Nov 1st.

REDSTART (Phoenicurus phoenicurus)

An immature was seen in the willow screen on July 15th (GM.JCP).

WHINCHAT (Saxicola rubetra)

There were 6 spring records between April 29th and June 11th. 4 singles and two of 2 birds.

STONECHAT (Saxicola torquata)

There were three records of 2 males on Feb 25th, 26th and Mar 7th.

WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe)

The first record on Mar 21st was a fairly typical arrival date, but there were several very late records; 3 of an immature between Oct 27th and 30th and 3 of a different female between Nov 6th and 13th. Maximum counts of 13 on Apr 29th and 10 birds in late August.

BLACKBIRD (Turdus merula)

First seen carrying food to the nest on April 27th.

FIELDFARE (Turdus pilaris)

Records of 20 on Jan 18th and April 2nd, a single on Mar 15th, 6 on Nov 12th and 14 on Dec 9th.

SONG THRUSH (Turdus philomelos)

A bird appeared to be overwintering near the East hide in November.

REDWING (Turdus iliacus)

Only 2 singles on Nov 12th and 29th (JCW); a poor year for winter thrushes.

MISTLE THRUSH (Turdus viscivorus)

Maximum of 6 on July 4th. Two were seen carrying food to a likely second brood on July 20th.

SEDGE WARBLER (Acrocephalus schoenobaenus)

A male in song in the nature trail on May 17th (TKS/JD).

LESSER WHITETHROAT (Sylvia curruca)

Singing birds were reported in 4 different parts of the reserve during the first week in May, but there was no evidence of breeding.

WHITETHROAT (Sylvia communis)

Back in strength after an uncertain year in 1988. In addition to a pair at Rockcliffe, there were 4 males holding territory on May 14th and 3 still singing on June 11th in the

nature trail. The first record was on Apr 23rd and the first young were out of the nest on May 31st.

GARDEN WARBLER (Sylvia borin)

The second record for the reserve was of a singing male at Rockcliffe on May 7th (JCW,GEM)

BLACKCAP (Sylvia atricapilla)

There were two records at Rockcliffe on May 10th and 16th.

CHIFFCHAFF (Phylloscopus collybita)

An early arrival on March 15th. Birds were also singing on July 25th and Sep 16th. Breeding not confirmed and no overwintering records.

WILLOW WARBLER (Phylloscopus trochilus)

Males in song were recorded from April 9th to June 22nd, including 3 individuals on the nature trail on May 2nd and 17th, but still no proof of breeding.

GOLDCREST (Regulus regulus)

Singles on Mar 12th and Nov 11th, 2 on Oct 29th and 4 together on Nov 24th. A further individual stunned itself on the gatehouse window in October; it regained consciousness when taken inside and flew off later.

LONGTAILED TIT (Aegithalus caudatus)

There were 6 records between Sep 12th and Nov 29th, the maximum being of 13 on Nov 21st.

COAL TIT (Parus ater)

Two records of 2 birds at Rockcliffe on Nov 19th and 24th (JCW).

BLUE TIT (Parus caeruleus)

Maximum count of 11 on Nov 24th. Young birds were first seen on June 22nd.

GREAT TIT (Parus major)

An adult was seen feeding at least 3 young in the willow screen on Jun 12th.

TREECREEPER (Certhis familiaris)

Singles at Rockcliffe on Nov 24th (JCW) and Dec 8th (GEM).

JAY (Garrulus glandarius)

Only 5 singles , the smallest number since 1982. Birds may have moved to feeding or nesting areas a little farther from the reserve.

MAGPIE (Pica pica)

Maximum count of 21 on Jun 29th. Three young were out of the nest on Jun 14th.

JACKDAW (Corvus monedula)

There were 16 feeding in the fields on Apr 8th as usual, but the highest count was of 38 in flight on Nov 12th.

ROOK (Corvus frugilegus)

Two singles in Oct and Dec.

CARRION CROW (Corvus corone)

The maximum count was of 24 on Nov 26th and the first young were seen on Jun 5th. One killed an apparently-injured skylark in flight on Dec 31st (CB).

RAVEN (Corvus corax)

There were 3 records of a pair in Jan/Feb and then 4 singles until early April. There were no further records until 2 young birds were seen in mid-June (NJH). Three were seen together on July 20th and Aug 6th and there were 6 further records of singles or pairs from mid-October to the end of the year.

STARLING (Sturnus vulgaris)

Maximum count of 700 on Nov 12th.

HOUSE SPARROW (Passer domesticus)

Eight entries of up to 5 birds, all between April 27th and June 14th.

TREE SPARROW (Passer montanus)

There was one at Rockcliffe on Oct 27th (GEM) and 14 on Nov 29th (JCW).

CHAFFINCH (Fringilla coelebs)

Numbers built up during November from 16 on the 1st to 350 on the 28th and they were also recorded in December, mostly wandering between the nature trail, the bunded pool and Rockcliffe.

BRAMBLING (Fringilla montifringilla)

Two were present in the chaffinch flock throughout November and there were records of 10-20 birds in December.

GREENFINCH (Carduelis chloris)

A male was in song near the railway line on July 4th. The highest count was of 12 on Sep 3rd and there were 4 other records of 1-6 birds.

GOLDFINCH (Carduelis carduelis)

Very few records and no large flocks as in previous years.

LINNET (Carduelis cannabina)

A small winter flock of 30-60 was present from Oct 29th onwards. No twite (C. flavirostris) or redpoll (C. flammea) records this year.

BULLFINCH (Pyrrhula pyrrhula)

A pair on June 3rd and one on Nov 1st are the only records.

REED BUNTING (Emberiza schoeniclus)

There were 4 November records of 1-2 birds and 2 on Feb 29th, but the only summer record was a female on Jun 17th.

LOGBOOK CONTRIBUTORS

It would be impossible to list everyone who has recorded birds in the logbooks. The following list is for identification of observers from their initials in the main text.

C Bennett	H Birch	D Collins	J Davidson
NJ Holton	G Morgan	GE Morris	MJ Ratcliffe
RA Roberts	G Robinson	TK Sykes	JC Weldrick

A BRIEF GUIDE TO MAMMALS ON THE RESERVE.

The following notes are based on casual logbook entries during 1985-1989 since no systematic studies of mammals on the reserve have been carried out. The rabbit is by far the most easily seen wild mammal on the reserve, followed by fox and weasel, quite some distance behind. Mice and voles, though probably abundant, are rarely seen unless found dead or having fallen prey to weasel or kestrel.

RABBIT *Oryctolagus cuniculus*.

Rabbits are abundant all over the reserve, particularly alongside the marsh. The population tends to reach very high levels in some summers, only to be decimated by myxomatosis in the autumn. This occurred in both 1986 and 1988. The best way to see large numbers is to approach the bunded pool area slowly BY CAR on a quiet summer evening.

FOX *Vulpes vulpes*

Foxes tend to be seen more often in the summer months as the following logbook totals over 5 years show:

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2	0	0	4	7	7	4	2	7	3	2	3

They certainly bred on the reserve in 1985 and may have bred in 1986 and 1988, but in 1987 and 1989 there were no summer records. Annual totals reveal no recent changes in abundance.

1985:9 1986: 10 1987: 5 1988: 14 1989:3

POLECAT/FERRET *Mustela putorius/furo*

Although there is a remote possibility of a wild polecat being seen on the reserve, sightings are much more likely to be of escaped ferrets, some of these being almost as dark as the wild animal, though their fur is often light-based. Escaped ferrets are often extremely tame. There were October/November records in 1985, 1986 and 1988.

WEASEL *Mustela nivalis*

This tiny and very energetic predator is often seen on the reserve roads, diving into the long grass verges or carrying a victim in its teeth.

Early autumn appears to be the best time of year:

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	
	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	5	3	4	2	1	
1985:	5		1986:	6		1987:	1		1988:	9		1989:	5

STOAT Mustela erminea

Only 4 records over the 5 years: April, 1985; September, 1986; July, 1988 and October, 1989. Though sometimes confused with weasels, there is no doubt that stoats can be found on the reserve. Stoats always have a longer, black-tipped tail.

BADGER Meles meles.

Seen on very few occasions; there are no breeding records.

GREY SQUIRREL Sciurus carolinensis.

Two records from the Rockcliffe woodland in December, 1985 and April 1986.

HEDGEHOG Erinaceus europaeus.

It is not surprising that this nocturnal mammal is very rarely seen. The lack of fast motor traffic on the reserve roads means that its presence is never revealed by the usual mechanism. The only record is of a baby animal found dead in August 1987.

FIELD VOLE Microtus agrestis.

One was identified specifically as this species, as opposed to the bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*), from a skull in a kestrel pellet in September 1987 and this is likely to be the commonest vole species on the reserve. Voles were recorded as weasel prey in March 1985 and November 1986 and as kestrel prey in April, 1989.

WATER VOLE Arvicola terrestris.

One record only on Mar. 8th, 1989 (TKS/JD)

MOUSE SPP

There are 2 records from the Rockcliffe area: September 1986 and June 1987, both found dead.

BROWN RAT Rattus norvegicus.

The only record is of a rat chased across the marsh by 15 redshank and a curlew on Feb. 23rd, 1989 (NJH). Though not

specifically identified, this is said to be by far the commonest rat species on the estuary.

COMMON SHREW *Sorex araneus*.

One was found dead in the Nature Trail area in June 1986.

BATS

Pipistrelles were seen during the moth-trapping evening in August 1988 and larger species were recorded in April and August 1985, October 1987 and April 1988.

GREY SEAL *Halichoerus grypus*.

Outside the breeding season, seals sometimes come up the estuary on the high tides and can be best seen from the upper floor of the West hide. A grey seal was once seen with a very large fish in its mouth (we won't say what species!). The Dee estuary seals were recently affected by a virus infection which could reduce their numbers. One was found dead on the sandflats opposite West hide in Sep 1988 and there were no 1989 records.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	3	3

COMMON TOAD *Bufo bufo*.

An honorary mammal for the purposes of this report, it is the only amphibian (or reptile) ever recorded on the reserve, in spite of the frequent dumping of frog spawn (*Rana temporaria*) in the fly ash lagoon. It was seen at Rockcliffe on June 26th, 1985 (GEM).

DOMESTIC AND FARM ANIMALS.

Sheep have an even greater impact on the reserve than rabbits; wading birds prefer heavily-grazed marshes, though flora are reduced. They graze the whole reserve area, except at the eastern end where there are a few cattle (and some less sympathetic, CEGB mowing machines). Cattle grazed the western end also until 1985. Cats are rarely seen but dogs are a constant problem, not to mention their "sporting" owners in pursuit of "game", such as rabbits, sheep and the nature reserve buildings. Three real, and much more charming, donkeys have been resident in the western grazing fields in recent years.

G.E. Morris March 1990