COPY

SUPPLEMENT TO NORTHUMBERLAND'S BIRDS 1978-1984

The compilers, Bryan Galloway and Eric Meek, have provided the following supplement detailing the significant changes and main additional records from the date of publication of the original volumes to the end of 1984. The supplement has been published as a contribution to the ornithological records of the region by the Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*
One at Whittle Dene in November 1984 was only the ninth noted inland.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*
A further reservoir occurrence was one at Derwent in December 1984.

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
One was found dead at Boulmer on 4 March 1979 and one was in Holy Island harbour on 25 November 1981. One in Druridge Bay on 17 June 1979 was considered valid by the *County Records Committee* but was not accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*
The number of successful breeding pairs continues to increase with nine pairs in 1983, including three pairs which raised second broods.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*
The severe weather of early 1979 resulted in a 'wreck', the scale of which had not been seen in the county since at least 1922. Between 21 January and late April over 20 corpses were found and monthly records at the coast of birds mainly in poor condition amounted to 30 in February, 40 in March and 17 in April. Further birds were noted at some ten waters away from the coast as far inland as Hartburn and Cornhill. Additional inland records involved singles at Grindon in 1981, Whittle Dene in 1983 and at Hallington in 1984.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*
At the locality referred to in 1976 breeding success continued as follows:

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Breeding pairs	2	4	4	4	5	9	10
Young fledged	no data	9	3+	5+	17	33	44

A few pairs are now rearing second broods.

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*
The breeding population continues to increase with, for example, 172 pairs on the Farne Islands in 1984.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*
Three flew N. at Hauxley on 24 September 1983 and in 1984 singles were noted at St. Mary's Island on 25 July, Seaton Sluice on 2 August and the Farne Islands on 24 August.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*
Two were off Birling Carrs on 23 July 1983 and one off Holy Island on 4 September 1984.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*
Very heavy passage occurred off Seaton Sluice on 1 July 1979 when 1,198 flew N., again on 18 July 1981 when 924 flew N. and 4 August 1984 as 1,345 passed N. A Balearic Shearwater, *P.p. maurentanicus*, flew N. off the Farne Islands on 1 August 1983.

Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*
Ten individuals were noted in 1978, in June and August, and five in 1983, all in November. On the latter occasion three of the five arrived in Seahouses Harbour on a fishing boat.

Leach's Petrel *Oceanodroma leuchorhoa*
The first records since 1954 involved three individuals in 1980. One was found dead on Holy Island on 21 June, one arrived at North Shields on a fishing boat on 26 September and one was found exhausted at Stannington on 6 November.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
A steady increase in the Farne Islands breeding population resulted in 341 pairs in 1982, including 140 pairs on the East Wideopens where they first nested in 1981. Sightings of birds showing characteristics of the Continental race, *P.c. sinensis*, appear to be increasing and in 1984 24 were seen between 12 February and 6 May including one inland at Seaton Burn.

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*
The steady increase in the Farne Islands breeding population has resulted in annual counts as follows:

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Pairs	443	462	495	624	615	775	814

A winter count of 5,174 around the Farnes on 4 December 1984 was remarkable.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
The immature seen at Warkworth late in 1977 remained until 28 February 1978.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*
One at Blagdon on 24 June 1979 was only the second record.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
One flew over Holywell on 6 May 1978 and another was at Cresswell Pond on 15 June 1980. These constitute the third and fourth records.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
One at Newton Pool on 22 September 1980 was only the third record.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*
One was at Tarset between 9-14 May 1978 with perhaps the same individual near Otterburn on 16 May. Another was at Lynemouth on 13 April 1980.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*
One was at Cresswell Pond between 2-12 April 1979 and another was on the Coquet Estuary on 12-14 May 1980. In 1981 records of one at Newton Pool on 28 May, Lindisfarne on 31 May and near Ellingham on 1 June probably referred to the same individual.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*
Breeding census in 1978 and 1983 revealed 29-30 pairs and 40 pairs respectively nesting or attempting to do so. The Tweed Estuary herd continues to increase with as many as 767 in August 1983.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*
440 on Lindisfarne N.N.R. in December 1980 and 203 at Holywell Pond in December 1983 were record counts for the respective areas. Sightings of colour-marked birds in 1980, 1981 and 1984 indicated that the origin of some, if not all, of our wintering birds is the Icelandic breeding population.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*
1,200 in the Tweed Valley in October 1979 was the largest flock to be seen since 1951 but 8,000 near Hoselaw Loch in October 1984 was far in excess of the flocks of up to 4,000 noted by Bolam (1932).

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*
In December 1984 60 N. over Bamburgh and 26 at Druridge Pool were probably the largest parties ever seen in the county. Further sightings of Greenland birds, *A.a. flavirostris*, involved eight at Budle and two at Druridge early in 1978 with 15 S. at Cresswell in November that year. Another was at both Holywell and Druridge in May 1980.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*
Two adults in the Budle Bay area from 15 January until 2 February 1978 was only the second county record.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*
5,000 in the Tweed Valley in December 1979, 6,000 at Lindisfarne N.N.R. in January 1982 and 1,000 at Hallington in December 1983 reflects the continued increase in winter populations. Between 1978-1984 one-two broods were reared at Holywell Pond and in 1984 broods were also reared at Caistron and Cragside.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*
Further records of up to 14 birds together in several localities in most years are assumed to be associated with escapees from captivity.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*
A belated large skein of 500 passed N. over Lindisfarne on 5 May 1978 whilst an adult shot at Cresswell in October 1970 had been ringed in Greenland in 1961.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*
A colour-ringed pale-bellied bird at Holy Island late in 1984 had been marked in Denmark during May 1979.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*
Two were at Druridge in August 1978, one was at Whittle Dene in January 1980 and two were at Seaton Sluice in July 1982.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
During a severe gale on 3 November 1984, 501 passed N. at Hauxley.

Mandarin *Aix glaericulata*
Two drakes were on a pool at Chevington between 10-17 April 1982.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*
The numbers wintering at Lindisfarne N.N.R. continued to increase reaching a peak of 40,000 in October 1982 but by 1984 the maximum counts did not exceed 10,000. Heavy N. passage along the coast on 12 September 1983 and 3 November 1984 numbered in excess of 4,000 on each occasion. Between 1978-1984 two-three pairs nested annually at a locality in the S.W.

Teal *Anas crecca*
A drake showing characteristics of Green-winged Teal, *A.c. carolinensis*, was at Holywell Pond on 6 March 1983, and is only the second time the sub-species has been recorded.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*
1981 was a remarkable year in that there were two February records. Two pairs were on Holy Island on 21 February and three drakes were at Whittle Dene on 25 February. Breeding was confirmed at one locality in 1983.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*
Recorded in five years between 1978-1984 involving about 11 individuals on waters in the S.E. of the county, although a drake was at Grindon in September 1981.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*
Since 1978 breeding has occurred at Holywell Pond, Cresswell, Newton Pool and Seaton Burn with as many as eight broods at Holywell in 1980. 617 at Hallington on 17 November 1984 exceeds the previous highest concentration.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*
A drake at Newton Pool on 28 May 1978 was probably only the second record and it is possible that one at the same location from 30 May until 2 June 1978 and again between 14 May and 4 July 1980 might have involved the same individual. There is even a possibility that every sighting between February 1977 and July 1980 referred to the same bird.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
A further three records can be added. One was at Holywell from 22 April until 5 May 1982 with another there between 29 March – 24 May 1984. The third was at Seaton Burn between 19-21 October 1983.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*
A breeding census in 1978 revealed 47 broods at 24 localities including 13 broods at Holywell. Similar numbers were noted in 1984 including two family groups on the R. Coquet at Holystone. 620 at Whittle Dene in January 1979 was the largest ever gathering.

Scaup *Aythya marila*
A large, cold weather influx from Europe early in 1979 brought many to the coast. 250 flew N. at Hauxley on 2 January and by early February some 600 were distributed along the coastline. Many perished and dissection of some specimens showed minimal fat deposits beneath the skin.

Eider *Somateria mollissima*
A progressive increase in breeding pairs on the Farne Islands resulted in a maximum in 1983 of 1,952 nests. 8,000 congregated around Lindisfarne N.N.R. in September 1982 is without precedent.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*
An immature drake off Amble on 19 May 1983 was only the fifth record.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*
The severe weather early in 1979 drove several into harbours and one was picked up exhausted at Morpeth on 16 February.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*
The Tweedmouth gathering was at a peak in December 1981 when 462 were present.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*
Two broods at Lindisfarne in July 1980 constituted only the third breeding record. Inland records continue to increase, particularly during the period January to April. It was thus of little surprise when a female was escorting a brood of three at an inland site in August 1984.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*
An unusually heavy N. movement took place off Hauxley on 3 November 1984 when 143 were counted during a N.E. gale.
Continued ringing recoveries from Northern Scandinavia plus sightings of colour-marked males in summer on the Tana Fjord in Lapland are providing added information that some individuals undergo a moult migration to those Northerly latitudes.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*
Additional records involved one at Holywell in November 1980, one at Grindon in May 1983 with one-three at Holywell from 11 August until 17 October and one at Berwick in November of that year. In 1984 one at Holywell and Seaton Burn on various dates between 16 April and 15 July was considered to be the same individual.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*
In May 1981 singles were at Newton Pool on 5th and at West Monkseaton on 7th. Another was at Scremerston on 23 August 1984.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
The extreme winter of 1979 brought an influx from Europe with some 20 individuals being reported mainly in coastal areas in January and February One found dead at Cramlington during this period had been ringed as a nestling in the Netherlands in June 1977.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*
In 1978 one flew over Woolsington on 4 March, one was at Holywell on 9 December and presumably the same bird overwintered in the Gosforth Park area between 17 December and 17 February 1979.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*
Sightings continue to increase particularly in the Border forests.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
A pair was reported to have bred successfully in the S.W. of the region in 1984.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*
Coincident with the period of extreme cold early in 1979, singles were seen at each of Bamburgh and Holywell in January and February. In 1982 one was over Holy Island on 6 July and between 11 October and 28 November four more individuals were reported.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
The only March occurrence since at least 1932 was one at Kielder Reservoir on 25th in 1984.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
One at Alwinton on 17-18 May 1980 was an immature female and one found dead at Bamburgh on 15 June 1980 was a young male. This brings the number of records to eight.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*
The study of the breeding population continues and some additional observations have included the first successful breeding of a pair in an artificial tree nest in 1984 when five young fledged. Also in 1984, bigamy was observed at one site as a male paired with two females. The nest scrapes were only 150 yards apart and clutches of four eggs and one egg were laid. Only the large clutch was incubated and four young fledged.
The first foreign recoveries of Northumberland-ringed Merlins involved two birds moving to S. W. France during the cold winters of 1977 and 1979.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*
Sightings are becoming more regular with, for example, at least nine records during each of 1980 and 1984. Two of the 1980 occurrences were in October.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*
Recolonisation of breeding sites continues despite heavy persecution by egg collectors and falconers but success is limited. 1984 was the best year since the early 1950s as eight pairs attempted to breed and eight young fledged from four nests that were well wardened. The remaining nests were robbed of either eggs or young.

Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*
One at Ross Links on 27 May was unusual being well away from normal habitat.

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*
One that remained at Newton Pool from 6-19 October 1984 was the first record since 1976.

Coot *Fulica atra*
650 were at Seaton Burn during December 1983 and 469 were in the Tweed Estuary in December 1981.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
There were nine records involving 13 individuals between 1980-1984, including seven birds in late March 1984.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*
One at Beadnell on 15 May 1983 was only the second occurrence.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
A pair attempted to breed at Backworth in 1981 and might have been successful. In 1982 a pair lost a clutch at Corbridge during heavy rain in June but in 1984 a pair fledged one young from the same area.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
As part of a national census the numbers of breeding pairs were counted in 1984. 106 were located including 38 at Lindisfarne, 15 on the Farnes and 28 elsewhere on the coast. The remaining 25 were found inland including nine in Coquetdale and seven at Coldrife Lake.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
One at Holy Island on 11 May 1983 was only the fourth record.

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*
Between 1980-1984 parties of 12-15 were noted in May at Berwick Hill, Woodhorn and Bamburgh. One near the summit of Cheviot on 30 August 1983 was only the fourth autumn record.

Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*
Although one seen amongst Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*, at Coatenhill, Allenheads, on 3 April 1982 was accepted by the *County Records Committee* it has still to be accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*. This is the first record.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
An exceptionally large gathering of 1,160 was on the Lindisfarne N.N.R. in August 1980.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
A particularly large gathering of 17,000 was noted on the Lindisfarne N.N.R. during August 1980.

Knot *Calidris canutus*
During the storms from the N.E. early in November 1984 some 8,000 passed N. at Seaton Sluice on 3rd.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*
The National Winter Shorebird Count of 29 December 1984 revealed a total of 471 along the coastline of the county.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*
It has been noted annually since 1980 with eight individuals in May, five in July and two in October. Fenwick Pit Pond, near Backworth, has been the most favoured locality but in addition it has occurred near Beadnell and at Hauxley.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
Singles at Hauxley on 12 September 1981 and on 21 July 1984 and at Wallsend Swallow on 7 August 1984 brought the number of records to five. The 1984 Hauxley bird has still to be accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*, whilst one at Druridge on 19 September 1981 was considered to be the same individual as that seen at Hauxley seven days earlier.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*
Five individuals have been recorded between 1980 and 1984. One in Allendale on 16 May 1982 was the first spring occurrence whilst the remainder were all at or near the coast between 7 September and 2 October.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*
The species continues to increase with a mainland shore count of 877 between Tynemouth and Budle Point in December 1983 and some 700 on the Farne Islands at the end of 1982.
That some originate from Greenland, as well as Norway, was highlighted by the recovery of a bird ringed at St. Mary's Island in March 1981 in a breeding area near Nanortalik on 9 June 1982.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
Since 1981 there has been a marked reduction of birds wintering on the Lindisfarne N.N.R. with respective maxima of 23,000 in 1982, 12,000 in 1983 and only 7,000 in 1984.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*
One that remained on the beach at Hauxley between 17 September and 4 October 1982 was only the seventh occurrence.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*
Clarification of the remark made in Volume II is required. Both individuals were in fact identified as being Long-billed, *L. scolopaceus.*

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*
An unprecedented influx was witnessed on 15 November 1984 when at least 50 passed over the Farne Islands and 600 were in the Holy Island and Ross Links area.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
August 1981 brought a very heavy passage as a total of 734 passed S. over the region including 466 over Seaton Sluice on 8th.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Wintering numbers on the Lindisfarne N.N.R. approached approximately 3,000 early in 1981 and late in 1982.
One ringed in Devon in November 1979 was found at Hexham in June 1982 and provides evidence that at least some of our breeding birds probably winter in the S.W. of the country.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
The Lindisfarne N.N.R. attracted up to 46 in the autumn of 1981 and 32 were also there on 12 August 1984.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
One in Budle Bay on 12 July 1981 was only the third record.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Twenty at Gosforth Park on 8 August 1981, a day when wader migration was particularly noticeable (see Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus)*, was an unusually large concentration.

Common Sandpiper *Actitus hypoleucos*
A concentration of 40 at Gosforth Park on 7 August 1981 was unusual and coincided with a marked passage of other wader species. Flocks of up to 25 are now a more regular feature of autumn migration. That some migrants may be continental birds was indicated by the finding of one at St. Mary's Island in May 1981 which had been ringed at Ottenby, Sweden, in August 1980.
Since 1979 several have been colour-ringed as part of a study in a breeding area in the South Cheviots. A return to the same breeding area is not uncommon with, for example, nine adults returning in 1983 to the area they nested in during 1982. Away from the area individuals have been recognised on Bardsey Island and at Reading, both in July, while one found dead in the Algarve, Portugal, in July 1983 had been ringed as an adult near Alwinton in May 1982.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
1,000 on the Farne Islands on 16 August 1980 was an unprecedented concentration.

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*
One at Newton Pool from 12-16 September 1983 was the fourth record.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*
One at Coldrife Lake, near Hadston, on 5-6 October 1981 was only the twelfth to be identified.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*
Ten individuals were noted between 1980-1984 including four during autumn of 1983.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*
A further 15 individuals were reported between 1980-1984 including a party of three adults and five immatures S. at Hauxley on 12 August 1983.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus malanocephalus*
In recent years there have been in excess of ten occurrences per annum with at least 15 individuals during 1984. It seems that the status should now be changed to an uncommon visitor, although the presence of adults amongst Black-headed Gulls, *Larus ridibundus*, in mid-summer also raises the question of breeding.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*
An immature at North Shields on 11-12 February 1984 was considered to be the same bird located at Blaydon on 22 January. It remained on Tyneside for the rest of the year being a resident for long periods at Newcastle General Hospital and appearing on two occasions, in April and May, at Seaton Burn.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*
It continues to be well-reported. Particularly noteworthy was a freshly fledged juvenile at Holywell Pond on 25 June 1980 and a total of 141 N. off Seaton Sluice during July 1981.

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*
One in 1980, one in 1981, two in 1983 and eight in 1984 brings the total number of records to 33.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Noteable counts at breeding colonies were 4,000 pairs at Linshields Lake in 1980 and 2,000 pairs on Coquet Island in 1981. Regular censusing of roosts revealed in excess of 10,000 at Derwent Reservoir during October 1982.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
The colony in the S.W. of the county contained 35 pairs in 1981 when they were also found at two other inland sites. By 1984, however, only five pairs bred but eight pairs nested on rooftops in Newcastle city centre. An individual nesting on the Farne Islands in 1984 was at least 22 years old.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Between 1980-1984 the mixed colony of Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *L.f. graellsii*, on the Farne Islands fluctuated between 912 and 1,243 pairs.
Individuals showing characteristics of hybrid *L.argentatus/L. hyperboreus* were noted at North Shields in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1984 with another at Seahouses in 1984.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*
With some 15 or more noted per annum in recent years the status has changed to that of an uncommon visitor.

An individual at Seaton Sluice in July 1981 was the first county record for the month of July. In 1984 the Derwent Reservoir gull roost attracted two in February and one in December.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*
Details of what was believed to be *L. hyperboreus*/*L. argentatus* are given under Herring Gull.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*
Breeding numbers continue to increase with 4,415 pairs nesting on the Farne Islands in 1982 whilst in 1984 740 nests were at Dunstanburgh with 55 pairs at a new colony at Cullernose Point.
Inland sightings away from the lower reaches of the R. Tyne are rare, hence two at the Black-headed Gull colony near Haltwhistle in May 1982 is noteworthy. Others have occurred at Derwent Reservoir, Grindon Lough, Sweethope Lough, Kielder, Otterburn and Seaton Burn in 1983-1984.
Nestlings ringed on the Farne Islands continue to break records. One found dead on Coquet Island in 1982 was 23 years old whilst a 16-year-old bird was in Massachusetts in October 1984, the first recovery in the U.S.A. of a British-ringed Kittiwake.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*
An extremely rare visitor. One on the Farne Islands between 4th-13th August 1984 was the first record.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*
The Farne Islands colony attracted a record 4,085 pairs in 1982.
One at Hauxley on 18 March 1981 was the earliest ever record.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*
During 1980-1984 the breeding population fluctuated between 31 and 51 pairs.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
The breeding population has declined alarmingly since 1979. In 1981 over 1,500 pairs nested but two years later there were only 1,150. In 1984 the annual census revealed only 677 pairs.
In 1983 one Common or Arctic Tern, given the term "Commic," was seen at Seahouses as late as 18 December.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*
During 1980-1984 the breeding population has fluctuated between 3,900 and 5,300 pairs with a peak in 1983 when 4,470 nests were counted on the Farne Islands, 800 on Coquet Island and approximately 50 on the mainland.
Ringing recoveries continue to shed light on their movements. One found in Melbourne, Australia, during October 1982 had been ringed on the Farne Islands in June. This is the second recovery from Australia of a Northumberland Arctic Tern.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*
The breeding population has stabilised at approximately 20 pairs. Extreme dates were extended in 1984 to 20 April and 27 October.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*
Autumn passage was particularly noticeable during August of both 1980 and 1981 with respective daily maxima of 50 off Hauxley on 17th and 71 off Seaton Sluice on 16th.

Guillemot *Uria aalge*
The Farne Islands breeding population continues to increase from 5,686 pairs in 1980 to 10,912 in 1984.
A survey of bridled birds was made in the colony in 1982 and the resultant 4.9% of the population is to be compared with Bolam's estimate of 5% and Witherby's calculation of 4.1%.
835 corpses were washed ashore in February 1983 following prolonged severe storms in the North Atlantic. Starvation was the prime cause of death.

Razorbill *Alca torda*
The Farne Islands population reached a maximum of 43 pairs in 1984.
The 'wreck' following prolonged storms in the North Atlantic in February 1983 brought 1,453 corpses ashore. Post-mortem examinations on a large sample revealed starvation as being the cause of death. Two victims had been ringed on Handa and on the Shiant Islands in Scotland.

Little Auk *Alle alle*
A spectacular N. movement was witnessed in early February 1983 during a period of prolonged storms in the North Atlantic. 103 were seen in 1½ hours on 8th at Whitley Bay but this was eclipsed by a count on 11th of 1,700 off Seahouses in two hours and 710 off Druridge Bay also in two hours. Inevitably corpses came ashore as birds could not feed in the mountainous seas and 115 were collected along the coastline.

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*
The Farne Islands population continues to increase with 20,732 pairs breeding in 1984 when 3,000 pairs nested on Coquet Island.
104 corpses were found in the 'wreck' referred to under Guillemot and Razorbill in February 1983.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*
Exceptionally late records involved a single bird on the Farne Islands on 31 October 1980 and another at Hauxley on 8 November 1982.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
Further examples of the rufous "hepatic" phase have occurred in May 1981 when one was at Hauxley and in July 1982 when one was at Tynemouth.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*
The mixed fortunes of this species are well illustrated in the contrasting years of 1983 and 1984. In the former only 12 pairs nested in a study area in the Border Forests with very poor fledging success, whilst during the latter 51 pairs fledged 160 young.
A 15-year-old bird was found dead near Kielder in May 1983 only yards from where it had been ringed as a nestling.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*
One ringed as a nestling in Coquetdale in the summer of 1979 was found dead at the nest of a Rough-legged Buzzard, *Buteo lagopus*, in Sweden in July 1984.
The winter of 1978-1979 saw a large influx of North European birds into the British Isles and it is possible that the above bird had been reared by one or two Scandinavian parents that did not return to the north in the spring of 1979 because of the protracted winter.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*
The national census of breeding birds in the summer of 1981 revealed eight or nine singing males at six localities and two nests were found. Migrants were noted on the Farne Islands in May 1981 and June 1983.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*
One at Hauxley on 27 September 1980 was only the fifth record.

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*
Single birds at Earsdon on 6 June 1980 and at Bamburgh on 22 May 1983 brought the number of records to three.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Additional records of this rare visitor involved one in 1981, two in 1983 and one in 1984. All were seen during autumn.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*
It continues to be seen occasionally in the usual areas, particularly between Wylam and Stocksfield, but one at Spindlestone in July 1983 and others at Bothal and Bolam in February and March 1984 suggest that the spread is continuing.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
A bird at Holy Island on 14 October 1984 showed the white rump of a House Martin, *Delichon urbica*, but otherwise the characters of a Sand Martin, and was considered to be a hybrid.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*
Refer to the comment under Sand Martin.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*
One at Seaton Burn between 7-11 May 1984 was the ninth occurrence.

Rock Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
One trapped at Hauxley on 27 October 1983 was identified as a Water Pipit, *A. s. spinoletta.*

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima*
On 4 June 1984 a Grey-headed Wagtail, *M. f. thunbergi*, was seen on the Farne Islands bringing the total number of records for this sub-species to 13.
On 22 May 1983 a bird seen near Bondicarr showed characteristics of the race *M. f. cinereocapilla*, or Ashy-headed Wagtail. It was the first time this sub-species had been identified in Northumberland.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*
One at Bamburgh on 22 May 1983 was only the fifth record. It was trapped and ringed.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
One was on the Farne Islands on 20 May 1983 and another was at Hauxley on 17-18 November 1984. The latter was trapped and ringed.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*
1984 was a particularly good year with 14 individuals noted in May and two very late birds in the autumn, at Tynemouth and Holy Island on 3-4 November.

Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*
An extremely rare visitor.
One trapped and ringed at Tynemouth on 13 November 1984 was the first record.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*
Further spring sightings involved singles at Hauxley on 29 May 1983 and on the Farne Islands on 2-3 June 1983 and 22 May 1984.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*
One at Tynemouth on 20 May 1983 and further single birds during 1984, at Newton Pool on 7 May, Hauxley from 5-19 November and Whitley Bay on 16 November brings the number of records to seven. Both the Tynemouth and Hauxley birds were trapped and ringed.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*
During November 1984 three examples of the Siberian race, *S. c. blythii*, were identified, one at Tynemouth on 4th and two at Whitley Bay on 17th-18th.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
One at Tynemouth between 26-29 August 1984 was trapped and ringed. This was the 11th record and the species now assumes the status of a rare visitor.

Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*
One at Whitley Bay on 8 October 1983 was the 19th record.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*
Some 19 individuals were reported in 1984, between 18 September and 20 November, comparing favourably with the years of 1975 and 1981 when similar numbers occurred.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*
The B.T.O. national breeding survey of 1984 revealed 125 singing males in Northumberland, most being found in areas of Oak woodland.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*
Unusual numbers were seen in 1983 with a total of eight between 10-18 April, one in September and one in November. All were at the usual coastal watch points.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*
Four very late birds were seen in November 1984 between 4th and 10th at Holy Island, Berwick and Whitley Bay.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*
Fifteen were recorded over the two years 1983-1984. Eleven were noted in 1984 including a spring bird on the Farne Islands on 29 May.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
They were unusually plentiful in coastal districts during 1983 with, for example, 50 at each of Bamburgh and Hauxley and 14 on the Farne Islands during the last 11 days of October.

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*
An extremely rare visitor.
An individual that appeared at Hauxley on 24 August 1984 was the first record. It remained throughout September.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*
One on the Farnes between 5-22 October 1983 was the first record for the Islands.
Particularly noteworthy were three spring coastal records at Tynemouth, St. Mary's Island and Hauxley between 15 March and 3 April 1984 bringing the total of such to only four.
One ringed at Bamburgh in September 1983 was recovered at Ladywell, Lothian, in February 1984.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
It continues to spread as a breeding species with successful nesting being reported in 1983-1984 at Bellingham and Brinkburn Priory. One-two pairs regularly now use nest boxes in the Dilston-Dipton area.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*
There were two coastal sightings between 18-20 May 1983 but one at Alwinton on 23 June 1983 was particularly unusual.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*
One near Havannah Pond between 16-18 July 1984 was only the sixth occurrence.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*
One at St. Cuthbert's Cave on 24 May 1984 was a particularly late record.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
During the autumn of 1983 large numbers wandered Britain following the failure of their main food source in Europe. As a consequence they were reported in small numbers at the coast and in unusual numbers inland.
The first was noted at Bamburgh on 25 September followed by another at Tynemouth on 5 October. The peak seemed to be between 28-31 October but small flocks were scattered throughout the region during the whole of November and into early December.

Magpie *Pica pica*
The increase continues. Roosts of up to 138 are now regular near Stocksfield with some 50-70 at Newburn and Gosforth Park. A few were even seen in coastal districts in 1983-1984 including the Farne Islands and Holy Island.

Redpoll *Carduelis flammea cabaret*
An influx of Mealy Redpolls, *C. c. flammea*, took place from 3 November 1984 and was subsequently noted to be the largest since 1975. As many as 37 were seen on Holy Island and single figure flocks were widespread, particularly in coastal districts. Several very pale birds were noted and probably referred to the form '*pallescens*."

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*
One trapped at Hauxley on 3 November 1984 and another at Beal seven days later were only the fourth and fifth records. Both are still under consideration by the *British Birds Rarities Committee* who may decide to review all British records to date in view of the recent opinions surrounding the status of this as a separate species.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*
One at Hauxley on 24 March 1984 was only the seventh spring occurrence at the coast.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*
One on the Farne Islands from 24 May to 2 June was a particularly late spring migrant.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*
One was on the Farne Islands on 26 September 1984.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*
A female or immature on the Farne Islands on 1 September 1983 brings the number of records to five.

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Northumberland's Birds

THE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF NORTHUMBRIA

Northumberland's Birds

compiled by

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FOREWORD

It is over 140 years since the first authoritative list of the birds of the two northern counties appeared; this was P J Selby's 'A catalogue of the birds hitherto met with in the counties of Northumberland and Durham' which, in 1831, formed part of volume I of the *Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne*. During the next forty years not only were some fifty species added to the systematic list, but also much information was obtained about the birds of the district. Accordingly, John Hancock decided to draw up an entirely new catalogue and in 1874 this came out as volume VI of *Natural History Transactions of Northumberland and Durham* under the title 'A catalogue of the birds of Northumberland and Durham'. Since then there have been two other books, both by George Bolam, the first *The birds of Northumberland and the eastern borders* being published in 1912. Twenty years later came his 'A catalogue of the birds of Northumberland'; this, like the earlier catalogues, appeared in the Society's *Transactions*.

Today, Bolam's books (in particular his catalogue) are virtually unobtainable and the need for a new and up-to-date work on the birds of Northumberland has long been recognised. During the last twenty-five years bird watching has become a popular hobby, with many first class books being written on the subject and, perhaps most significant, the appearance of well-illustrated field guides which made accurate identification possible for a much greater number of people. As a result, there has been a phenomenal increase in the knowledge of the numbers, distribution and habits of birds. Several new species have been added to the systematic list for Northumberland, some of which probably occurred in the past, but, because of the comparative shortage of observers, were overlooked. In the same way, birds that were once thought of as merely occasional visitors are now recorded each year.

All this has led not only to a much clearer picture of the bird life of the county, but also to the urgent need to put this picture into print. Much of the credit for this book belongs to C M Adamson, who was the first person actually to attempt to produce a modern book on Northumbrian birds. Although his preparatory work was invaluable, it was early realised that no one person could deal adequately with the various problems involved, so members of the Tyneside Bird Club, and of the ornithological section of the Natural History Society of Northumbria, decided on a co-operative venture.

A joint committee was set up, under the chairmanship of I H Armstrong and G Hickling, consisting of C M Adamson, J Alder, M Bell, J C Coulson, C C E Douglas, P R Evans, B Galloway, F G Grey, B Little, L G Macfarlane, J D Parrack, I M Telfer and P Yeoman. A G Lunn and E R Meek were co-opted later, while some of the original committee resigned before the project was completed. Members were allocated groups of species for which they had a special expertise and, in order to ensure uniformity both in content and style, clear rules on the approach to be adopted for each species were laid down. The various contributions were submitted to the

committee for scrutiny, but the final up-dating and welding together into a single unit was undertaken by B Galloway and E R Meek, while the introduction was prepared by A G Lunn, E R Meek, B Galloway and G Hickling.

All this has taken a great deal longer than was originally envisaged when the first meeting was held in April 1968, but in spite of the delay, or perhaps because of it, the book provides a completely up-to-date picture of every species known to occur in Northumberland. In this respect Northumberland has been taken as the county which existed prior to the local government boundary changes of 1974 and, therefore, includes that part of the Metropolitan County of Tyne and Wear north of the river Tyne.

Of necessity, this book is to some extent a compromise. Had unlimited money been available, we might perhaps have produced a long and comprehensive volume which would have included most (if not all) of the early records given by Hancock and Bolam, as well as those between 1932 and 1977. Instead, we have summarised early information and have put the main emphasis on the position today.

We have tried to strike a balance between the more serious ornithologist who wishes to have full details of status and the less serious bird watcher who, while anxious to learn about his local birds, also wants to derive some pleasure from reading about them. We have also omitted repeated references to the effects of increased bird watching; these are clearly recognised and repetition is, therefore, unnecessary. The appearance of the book is enhanced by the very fine illustrations produced by James Alder.

Escalating costs of paper and printing during the preparation of the book have forced us to produce it in three parts, of which this paper covering divers (Gaviiformes) to birds of prey (Falconiformes), is the first. The remaining parts will be paginated consecutively and together will form volume 44 of the *Transactions*. A list of references, title page, contents sheet and index will appear in part three.

Certain place names occur frequently throughout the text and in some cases it has been decided to use shortened forms. Among these are the reservoirs, Catcleugh, Hallington, Colt Crag, Fontburn and Whittle Dene, which are normally referred to simply as 'Catcleugh' etc. Similarly, the words 'nature reserve' are omitted in reference to Gosforth Park Nature Reserve while Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve is abbreviated to 'Lindisfarne NNR'. The Northumbrian loughs, which include among others Broomlee and Grindon Loughs, are either described collectively or as 'Broomlee Lough', 'Grindon Lough' and so on.

No attempt has been made to convert ringing recovery localities into post 1974 counties; by virtue of its participation in the European ringing scheme, the British Trust for Ornithology still uses old county names and this precedent has been followed.

Ian H Armstrong
Bryan Galloway
Grace Hickling
Eric R Meek

INTRODUCTION

Northumberland (as defined on page 2) has an area of 5230 sq km and lies mainly between latitudes 55° and 56°N; this is far enough north to ensure that cool temperatures prevail even in the lowlands, while the further fall in temperature and increase in rainfall as the ground rises westwards cause an environment there of acid, infertile soils with much peat bog. The county, therefore, divides into an upland west – an area of moorland and forest, with improved farmland in the dales – and a more or less intensively farmed lowland east. In addition, in the southeast is the coalfield, dominated by industry and by the Tyneside conurbation. The coastline is some 97km long (excluding Holy Island, the Farne Islands and Coquet Island) and is washed by a nutrient-rich sea which is biologically very productive.

Geology. Northumberland consists almost entirely of igneous rocks of Devonian, and sedimentary rocks of Carboniferous age. The former comprise the Cheviot Hills, where a thick sequence of volcanic lavas (mainly andesites), ashes and agglomerates is intruded by a central mass of granite which makes the highest ground including The Cheviot itself.

Surrounding the Cheviots, Carboniferous sedimentary strata dip outwards, to the east, southeast and south, such that they each outcrop in more or less concentric half-circles around the Cheviots. An effect of the dip of the strata, and of the characteristic alternation of strong and weak beds, is that the strong beds, being more resistant to erosion, make asymmetrical ridges – known as cuestas – with steep scarps towards the Cheviots and gentler dip slopes facing in the opposite direction. The Carboniferous strata are grouped and named according to important rock types within each sub-division. Outcropping nearest to the Cheviots is the Cementstone Group, and its weak shales form the low ground occurring, for example, in the Milfield and Whittingham areas. Then comes the Fell Sandstone Group, whose strong sandstones make the prominent cuestas behind Chillingham, at Simonside and elsewhere. Further east and south are, successively, the Scremerston Coal Group and the Lower and Middle Limestone Groups; these consist of sequences of limestones, shales, sandstones and thin coals and it is resistant beds, mainly sandstones (together with the whin sill), in these groups that make the spectacular cuesta topography about the Roman Wall in the west, and at the Wannies. Furthest south and southeast are the Millstone Grit and the Coal Measures; the latter outcrop in the coalfield triangle southeast of a line from Amble to Stocksfield, and mining of the thick coal seams has caused numerous subsidence ponds.

South of the Tyne Gap, in the north Pennines, the strata of the limestone groups and Millstone Grit are more nearly horizontal and so produce extensive sandstone-capped plateaux, while strong beds make benches on the dale sides. This area is mineralized, with lead and zinc ores, fluorspar and barytes, and former mining has profoundly affected the landscape.

The sedimentary rocks are intruded by the Great Whin Sill, a sheet of very resistant igneous rock, quartz-dolerite, which like the strong sediments, makes a prominent cuesta where it outcrops. Hadrian's Wall was built on

such a formation west of the North Tyne, and the whin sill forms the coastline from Cullernose to Dunstanburgh and at Bamburgh, while the Farne Islands are its eastern outcrop, with landward-facing cliffs and northeast-facing dip slopes.

The shape of the coastline depends on the varying resistance, this time to wave attack, of the rocks along it. Thick sandstones and the whin sill form headlands, while thinner sandstones and limestones run out to sea as reefs. The weak shales and glacial deposits have been worn back into bays, whose sandy beaches are the source material of the dunes which are so characteristic of much of the coast.

The detailed shape of the terrain in Northumberland, and the nature of the soils, owe much to glaciation during the Pleistocene period. At the maximum of the latest extensive glaciation (dated at approximately 26000 to 14000 years ago) the entire county was probably buried beneath an ice sheet originating chiefly in Scotland and the Lake District, although the Cheviots and the Cross Fell area supported local ice caps confluent with the ice from the north and west.

Glacial erosion predominated in the uplands. In the Roman Wall area east-flowing ice scoured out numerous hollows in the east-west slacks between the cuestas; the hollows became shallow meres, but most of these are now infilled with peat and are the sites of bogs. The larger meres, however, have survived at Crag, Greenlee, Broomlee and Grindon loughs, although these, too, are reduced in area where reedswamp and carr have developed at their margins. Glacier ice also steepened and emphasised many cuesta crags, both of whin and sandstone. There are, however, few crags in the granite and lava country of the Cheviots; the main exceptions are in the Hen Hole and the Bizzle, where the normally crumbling lavas were hardened through baking by the intrusive granite and where small valley glaciers (before and after the main ice sheet) eroded deeply to leave crag-girt basins. Glacial erosion was locally effective in lowland areas, too, probably separating Holy Island from the mainland and also producing Budle Bay, so providing some of the most important bird habitat in the county in the form of the wide expanses of sand and mudflat and saltmarsh of Lindisfarne N N R.

In the lowlands, glacial deposition was more important. Extensive and thick sheets of boulder clay were laid down, on which modern soils – often heavy and stony – have developed; boulder clay is also widespread on the lower slopes of the hills. In the east, some sandstone knolls protrude through it and are the sites of villages. In certain places, such as the lower Tweed valley, the boulder clay was moulded into drumlins, oval hills up to fifteen metres high and a few hundred metres long.

The melting of the ice also had important effects. Copious meltwater locally deposited sand and gravel in, on and against the decaying ice, the final melting of which left these deposits as irregular, hummocky spreads, where enclosed depressions, known as kettle holes, contain ponds or wet ground. Extensive tracts of such hummocky sand and gravel occur south-east of Wooler and east of Cornhill. Where meltwater streams flowed in tunnels at the base of the ice sheet they locally eroded deep channels, many of them in present watershed areas and quite dry and unrelated to the modern drainage. Others, however, have been taken over by existing rivers and burns, and incised rock valleys like those of the Blyth, Wansbeck, lower Coquet and many others, were probably cut by powerful subglacial meltwater streams; the steep valley sides, where wooded, provide breeding habitat for a wide variety of birds.

Black necked Grebe

Climate and soils. The climate in the immediate vicinity of the coast is moderated by the North Sea, but in comparison with western Britain winters even there are decidedly more severe. The attraction of the milder west probably prevents larger numbers of winter visitors such as Snipe and Redwing from remaining in the area. The severity of the climate increases markedly with altitude, so that the uplands experience colder, wetter, windier and cloudier conditions, and have shorter growing seasons and longer snow lie. Such climatic differences between lowlands and uplands act both directly on the flora and fauna – in that many lowland species cannot survive or reproduce in the hills – and indirectly through the effects of climate on soils.

While more productive soils do occur locally in the hills, upland soils are generally poor. Where they are sandy and light, as on the Fell Sandstone cuestas, relatively high rainfall results in leaching leading to acid, nutrient-deficient soils: podzols; heavy clays, on the other hand, occurring on shales and boulder clays, become waterlogged and deficient in oxygen: the soils are gleys. In both cases a surface layer of acid peaty humus tends to form.

On gently-sloping plateaux with very high rainfall, and in situations where groundwater runoff stagnates in depressions and on shelves, permanent waterlogging results in deeper deposits of peat carrying bog vegetation. Blanket bogs are extensive on the highest moorlands, while bogs are more localised on lower moorlands; they are particularly numerous, however, north of the Roman Wall where some, as already mentioned, occupy former mere sites.

These widespread upland podzols, gleys and peats are uneconomic to reclaim, support undemanding plants of low nutritive value, and can, therefore, sustain only extensive grazing by hill sheep and cattle. The boundary between such poor moorland and the more intensively farmed lowland with fertile soils is the 'moorland edge', and in much of Northumberland it lies at between 200 and 250m above sea level. However, in the north Pennines former mining activity, by introducing a population of smallholder-miners, resulted in the reclamation of moorland to exceptionally high altitudes, in places to 500m. The moorland edge is a very significant ornithological boundary, as the moors support a distinctive selection of species, particularly those adapted to ground nesting.

Land-use history. Prior to man's intervention the natural vegetation of much of the county, including the uplands, was cool temperate deciduous forest. Oak was widespread in the lowlands and on lower valley slopes, and birch occupied higher ground. Wych elm occurred on the richer lowland and valley soils, and alder on the wetter ones. Sandy upland soils may have carried Scots pine. Free of forest were peat bogs, crags, the shingle beds of the larger rivers, and a range of coastal habitats including dune, saltmarsh, sea cliff and island.

Forest clearance and other modifications of the natural environment began in the Neolithic, with particularly rapid deforestation following the Anglo-Saxon settlements and continuing through to the thirteenth century. Thereafter, more than 300 years of warfare and raiding in the borders caused economic recession, particularly in agriculture, and it is likely that some reversion to secondary woodland occurred in the uplands; it is also likely that for the same reason primary woodland and wetland survived at least until the period of renewed agricultural improvement which began late in the seventeenth century. Part of this legacy of relict, natural habitat has

survived until the present time – a welcome outcome of former political conditions on the border.

The eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a remodelling of the environment in the course of continued agricultural improvement promoted by the owners of what was a county primarily of large landed estates. Enclosure, mainly by hawthorn hedges in the lowlands, was completed; plantations, both hardwood and softwood, established; new farm houses and steadings constructed; country houses built and surrounded by landscaped parks, shrubberies and arboreta. Numerous artificial lakes and ponds were impounded, mainly in the vicinity of the large houses, for amenity and fishing.

Freshwater habitat was also created in mill ponds and, as time went by, through the flooding of disused quarries, claypits and sand and gravel workings; coal-mining subsidence added hundreds of other ponds and marshes in the southeast. Large reservoirs began with those at Whittle Dene, work on which commenced in 1845, followed by Hallington, Colt Crag and Catcleugh.

The nineteenth, and early twentieth century, was the era of the gamekeeper as estates developed their shooting interests. Predators of all types suffered greatly both in the lowlands and on upland grouse moors, although there was some respite during the two world wars when few keepers were employed. The period between the late 1870s and the Second World War was one of agricultural depression resulting, in many areas, in a run-down countryside characterized by unkempt hedges, blocked field drains, neglected or cut-over plantations and a profusion of weeds. This, then, was the Northumberland which Bolam knew when, in 1932, he wrote his catalogue.

Environmental changes since 1932. The main change has undoubtedly been the blanket afforestation with conifers of almost 50000 hectares of moorland by the Forestry Commission. Planting began in 1926, in the North Tyne valley, was increased in scale there from 1933, and was greatly expanded after 1945 both in the North Tyne area and in Redesdale, Coquetdale and elsewhere. Sitka spruce is the most abundant species, the other widely used trees being Norway spruce, Scots and lodgepole pines, and Japanese and hybrid larches. The new forests lie between the former moorland edge and an upper limit at about 500m. Such a change of habitat has meant the decline of moorland birds like the Golden Plover, while the Merlin, being mainly dependent for its food on small moorland birds, has probably also been affected. The virtual extinction of the Raven as a breeding species is thought to be due, at least in part, to the lack of sheep carrion after the planting of former sheepwalks (Marquiss, Newton and Ratcliffe, 1978). On the credit side, however, the forests provide breeding and feeding habitat for several woodland species.

In addition, many private plantations on lowland estates have had their character altered by restocking, usually with conifers. Throughout the county, therefore, there has been a decrease in the quantity of old deciduous woodland and a corresponding decline in the quality of the area as bird habitat.

Further loss of habitat has resulted, as is the case in other parts of Britain, from the intensification of lowland farming. Hedges have been cut back, although not removed to the same extent as in more arable counties, and hedgerow trees reduced in number. Ponds have been infilled or drained, and field drainage renovated and improved. Old permanent grassland has been

brought into arable-grass ley rotations in the lowlands and ploughed up and reseeded elsewhere; much grass is now cut as silage with up to three crops a season, while meadow hay is mown earlier both in the lowlands and dales, a change helping to bring about the near-extinction of the Corncrake (mentioned by Bolam as beginning about 1917). Waste corners have been reclaimed.

Widespread opencast coal operations in the southeast have involved the wholesale loss of hedges and other habitats, which have not been replaced on restoration to agricultural land. Residential suburbs have spread since 1932, particularly to the north and west of Newcastle; these occupy former farmland, but provide garden habitat in its place.

Finally there are new reservoirs. Derwent was completed in 1967, and still under construction is Kielder, which will be one of the largest man-made lakes in Britain. Old deciduous woodland and other habitats along an 11km stretch of the North Tyne valley between Kielder and Falstone will be destroyed and the habitat gains will probably be few because, as with other large upland reservoirs, the water will be nutrient-deficient and draw-down will inhibit the establishment of littoral vegetation.

Summary of Northumberland habitats. Taking into account these main changes since the 1930s the habitats available to birds in Northumberland can be summarised as follows:

(a) **Moorland** habitats may be divided into three broad types (Lunn, 1976). First are those with relatively fertile soils carrying *Agrostis – Festuca* grassland or bracken, found mainly on the drier fringes of the hills and in the Cheviots, in the latter case on the steep slopes of valleys cut into the andesite lavas. Second are those associated with the podzols and peaty gleys of higher rainfall areas or poorer soil parent materials; such soils carry either acid grassland or heather heath. The acid grasslands are unproductive and many are dominated either by purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea* – especially in west Northumberland – or moor mat grass *Nardus stricta*. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* is widely dominant on podzols on the sandstone cuestas, and on many estates is maintained by rotational burning and supports substantial populations of Red Grouse. Third are the various types of peat bog; most extensive are the blanket bogs which cover large areas above about 450m and whose vegetation consists of cotton-grasses *Eriophorum vaginatum* and *E. angustifolium*, deer-sedge *Tricophorum cespitosum*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and heather. Where water tables are locally high, both in the blanket bogs and in some of the bogs between cuestas in the Roman Wall area, *Sphagnum* moss is dominant. Characteristic moorland birds include Merlin, Red Grouse, Golden Plover, Curlew, Meadow Pipit and Carrion Crow.

(b) **The upland crags** are mainly sandstone and whin cuesta scarps, although the lava crags in the Bizzle and Hen Hole are important exceptions. Plant growth on the crags is usually heather and bilberry, with rowans often rooted in crevices. The crags are the characteristic breeding sites of Kestrels and, at one time, of Peregrines and Ravens, while their blocky screes hold Wheatears and Ring Ouzels.

(c) **Coniferous forest and woodland** includes the Forestry Commission's vast plantations on moorland formerly carrying purple moor grass, heather or blanket bog. During establishment the exclusion of sheep and the growth of rank vegetation usually results in an increase in short-tailed voles *Micro-*

tus agrestis and the subsequent appearance of Kestrels and Short-eared Owls, while a little later there is excellent habitat for Black Grouse. After about ten years the trees are colonised by Goldcrests and Coal Tits and, as they mature, by a wider range of species including Sparrowhawks, Siskins, Crossbills and Bullfinches.

(d) **Deciduous woodland** occurs as fragments of ancient woods in some hill valleys, and is dominated variously by oak, ash, alder, birch or wych elm. It is uncertain whether all of these are relict natural woodlands as against very old plantations, but they form a rich habitat for species such as Redstart and Willow Warbler. Ancient, again possibly in part relict, woodlands also occur in some of the steep-sided valleys of the lowlands, for example at Dipton, Allen Banks and in the valleys of the Wansbeck and its tributaries where Wood Warblers, Pied Flycatchers and Marsh Tits are characteristic. A few old plantations, often near country houses and farms or used as the basis of shooting cover, have not been replaced by conifers and some estates are still planting deciduous or mixed woods. Most other deciduous woodland is scrub, originating either as spontaneous regrowth after felling or by the colonisation of abandoned industrial sites including quarries, pit heaps and railways; such scrub provides ideal surroundings for Grasshopper Warblers, Whitethroats and Yellowhammers.

(e) **Lowland farmland** is particularly intensively cultivated, with consequent shortage of bird habitat, in the coastal lowlands, on Tweedside, in Glendale and in the main Tyne valley. Elsewhere, especially towards the moorland edge, patches of rough grass, scrub and undrained ponds and marshes can support Snipe, Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings.

(f) **Mires** or peatlands include the acid bogs described under 'Moorland' and more nutrient-rich peats with fen vegetation ranging from reedswamp to carrs of alder, willow or birch. The reedswamp at Gosforth Park Lake, consisting of the common reed *Phragmites communis*, is one of the most extensive *Phragmites* stands in Northumberland and is the only regular breeding site of the Reed Warbler, while a pair of Bitterns nested there in the 1950s; this lake results from a combination of subsidence and impoundment.

(g) **Freshwater ponds and lakes** occur in extraordinary abundance in the coalfield area owing to subsidence. These provide important stop-over points for migrant ducks and waders and, in common with other stretches of freshwater, form breeding habitat for species such as Little Grebe, Mute Swan, Moorhen and Coot.

(h) **Rivers and streams,** particularly in their upper and middle reaches, contain some of the most characteristic birds of the county. Common Sandpipers, Grey Wagtails and Dippers are common, while Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers breed on the extensive bare shingle banks, and Lapwings, Snipe and Redshanks on the flood plains, especially of the Coquet and South Tyne. Goosanders bring their broods onto the rivers soon after the young have hatched, while many of the Sand Martin colonies are found in their sandy banks. River pollution only becomes an important limiting factor in the lower reaches of the coalfield rivers.

(i) **The coastline,** with the exception of the section from Lynemouth southwards, is largely free from urban and industrial development. There are several component habitats. Cliffs are present at intervals along the entire length, the most important being at Tynemouth, Cullernose, Dunstanburgh, the Farne Islands and Holy Island. All provide breeding sites for Fulmars,

while a large Kittiwake colony exists at Dunstanburgh. The Farne Islands support a wealth of bird life, with Kittiwakes, Shags, Guillemots and Razorbills on the cliffs and large numbers of Eiders, terns and Puffins on the vegetated dip slopes. There are no cliffs on Coquet Island, but the tern colonies rival those on the Farnes and there are also Eiders and Puffins.

Rock platforms, reefs and island 'carrs' project out to sea at frequent intervals and at low tide provide habitat for wintering and passage waders such as Knot, Purple Sandpipers and Turnstones. Between the headlands are sand dunes; these 'links' are the main home of Stonechats.

Lindisfarne NNR contains the only important expanses of sand and mudflat and saltmarsh, these being located between Holy Island and the mainland and in Budle Bay; the beds of eel grass *Zostera* provide the staple diet of Whooper Swans, Brent Geese, and Wigeon. Saltmarsh – vegetated tidal ground – does not occupy large areas although slivers do exist at Lindisfarne and also in the mouths of the Aln and Coquet.

(j) **Suburban gardens** provide good bird habitat, especially in the wealthier suburbs north and west of Newcastle where gardens have a diversity of trees and shrubs. Typical are Gosforth, Ponteland and the villages of the Tyne valley as far west as Corbridge, while similar development on a smaller scale has taken place on the outskirts of the market towns. Although the Collared Dove is now virtually the type species, there is a good variety of passerines.

(k) **Industrial sites and urban areas** are being utilised by an increasing number of species – for example by Starlings for roosting and by Kestrels and gulls for breeding. Even the polluted mouths of the Lyne and Tyne provide good habitat, the former for a wide selection of passage waders and the latter for large parties of wintering gulls.

Development of protection. Measures proposed by St Cuthbert to safeguard the nesting Eiders on the Inner Farne were the first example of bird protection, not only in the county, but also in the British Isles. Accordingly, it was appropriate that the next attempt at protection should also be made on the Farne Islands where, some 1200 years later, the Venerable Archdeacon Charles Thorp employed (at his own expense) watchers to safeguard the nesting seabirds and so ensured the survival, as breeding species, of such birds as Roseate Terns.

The first official 'bird sanctuary' was established in 1925 when the Farne Islands were purchased by public subscription and handed over to the National Trust in order that 'the feathered inhabitants can continue to breed in safety and security'. Three other National Trust properties are of ornithological importance. The first, Dunstanburgh, is known not only for for its ruined castle, but also for its Kittiwakes and Shags. Newton Pool, within easy reach of both the Farne Islands and Dunstanburgh, has a large Black-headed Gull colony and, in winter, numerous immigrant wildfowl. The last, Allen Banks, at Plankey Mill, near Haydon Bridge, although less well-known, is noted for Wood Warblers and Pied Flycatchers.

In 1918, W E Beck, one of the officers of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle upon Tyne, pointed out the potentialities of Gosforth Park lake, and its surroundings, as a possible bird sanctuary and some five years later he himself acquired the shooting rights of the area from the High Gosforth Park Company, and so established his

sanctuary. In 1929, he made over the shooting rights to the Society and this arrangement continues to operate on a yearly basis. The reserve, which is only about 5 km from the centre of Newcastle, is now one of the most important in the county and in winter the lake holds a varied population of ducks.

Both private and public landowners have initiated schemes to help birds, an example being the nest boxes put up by the Forestry Commission in the Kielder Forest, but the most important event of recent years was the declaration, in 1964, of Lindisfarne NNR. From time immemorial, the mudflats near Holy Island have been the winter home of many thousands of ducks and geese and, associated with these, there has been a long tradition of wildfowling. Perhaps not unnaturally, many naturalists tend to regard shooting as an activity to be deplored and the fact that both they, and the wildfowlers, recognised the need to conserve wildfowl and so achieved Lindisfarne, was a true exercise in co-operation. Today, shooting on the reserve is controlled by the Wildfowl Panel, on which both wildfowlers and naturalists are represented, and the designation of Budle Bay as a sanctuary area has provided a valuable winter refuge for wildfowl and waders.

Part of Holy Island is included in the reserve and, although this is mainly of botanical interest, there is a small, but important group of nesting waders, terns and Eiders.

Another major bird reserve is Coquet Island, approximately 2.5 km east of Amble; it is owned by the Duke of Northumberland although the land surrounding the lighthouse is leased to Trinity House. In the late 1920s, after a lapse of many years, Eiders again started to nest here and their numbers have increased markedly; terns, too, settled on the island and by 1961 there were 400-500 pairs. At this time, would-be visitors had to obtain permission to land either from the Alnwick Castle Estate Office, or from the Society, but it soon became obvious that, because of developing tourism on the nearby mainland and the more general use of small boats, additional protective measures were necessary. Accordingly, in 1968 negotiations with various conservation bodies were started and these culminated in 1971 when the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was granted a lease, at a nominal rent, of the whole island (less the area already controlled by Trinity House). A warden lives here throughout the summer, but the reserve is not open to the public.

The Northumberland Wildlife Trust, which was set up in 1962, now manages twenty-three reserves, but only a few are of purely ornithological interest. Most important are Holywell Ponds, Wallsend Swallow Pond and Big Waters (at Seaton Burn), all formed by flooded coal field workings; they are mentioned frequently in the systematic list that follows this chapter. The Arnold Reserve at Craster consists of scrub woodland on old sandstone and whinstone quarries and is a staging point for migrants. Inland, Grindon Lough is noteworthy for its wintering and passage wildfowl.

Bird reports and bird observers. The first county bird report was that for 1933; it was simply a cyclostyled sheet prepared by H Tully, then chairman of the Society's ornithological section, and the 1934 report had a similar format. For twenty-one years from 1935-56 the annual reports were compiled by G W Temperley: the first four were printed in *Vasculum* while those for 1939-51 appeared in the *Naturalist*. In 1953, publication was transferred to the Society's *Transactions* and reports for the years 1952-69 appeared in this journal, among the compilers being F G Grey, J C Coulson, D G Bell and J D Parrack.

In 1946, the Farne Islands Committee of the National Trust issued the first report dealing exclusively with the birdlife of the Farne Islands; initially this was put together by T R Goddard and on his death G Hickling undertook the task. The present annual report *Birds on the Farne Islands* is compiled by P Hawkey, the Trust's warden-naturalist, with the assistance of G Hickling.

For some twenty-five years after the publication of Bolam's catalogue, the Natural History Society remained the central body for local ornithology, but with the formation in 1958 of the Tyneside Bird Club there was a marked change. A major objective of the Club was to keep a detailed record of all reports and to summarise the results in a monthly bulletin and annual report. So successful was this method of recording and communicating information that in 1961 it extended its area of interest to the whole of Northumberland. In 1970 the first annual report *Birds in Northumbria* was published: this covered Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne and that part of Durham county lying to the north of the Wear. At the same time, the Society decided not to publish an annual bird report, but, instead, to send all relevant records to the Club. Following the changes in local government boundaries it was felt that Durham county should be excluded, but with this exception, the report has continued unaltered to the present day, the compilers being B Galloway and E R Meek.

The Club has also produced reports on local breeding surveys covering a variety of species and the intensive observations made from a watch tower at Seaton Sluice have greatly enhanced knowledge of local seabird movements.

Bird watching in the county received a major fillip in 1951 when E A R Ennion opened a residential bird observatory at Monk's House, near Seahouses. His students came from all over the world and the techniques he introduced were revolutionary: an account of this enterprise (which ended in 1962) is given in his *The house on the shore*.

The Farne Islands Study Centre, established in 1953 in Prior Castell's Tower on Inner Farne, was to some extent Ennion's brain child. Although run jointly by the Society and the Farne Islands Committee, Ennion not only gave expert advice on initial equipment and furnishings, but also introduced many of the early visitors (they included such well-known ornithologists as Professor N Tinbergen, Dr D W Snow and D Goodwin). The maintenance of a log book by the students provided information about many species previously unrecorded on the islands and, following the closing of the centre in 1970, the Trust's wardens have continued this recording.

Among other observers who have in the past added greatly to the knowledge of north Northumbrian birds were W G Watson (whose collection of skins of Holy Island migrants is housed in the Hancock Museum), W B Alexander, H F Witherby and R Perry – in 1946 the latter included his own and other people's observations in *A naturalist on Lindisfarne*. Another notable bird observer was H Tully and his diaries, dealing mainly with the areas near Alnmouth and Newton Hall, Stocksfield, have been lent by the British Trust for Ornithology to the Society. Several organisations, among them the Border Naturalists and the Alnwick and District Natural History Society, regularly provide records that contribute to the knowledge of the county's ornithology.

Bird ringing. Some of the earliest attempts at bird ringing were made between 1891 and 1908 when, in order to study their movements, young

Woodcock were marked on the Duke of Northumberland's estate in Alnwick park while, as long ago as 1914, Miss Pease (later Mrs Seton Gordon) carried out an extensive ringing programme on the Farne Islands. The actual operation was largely undertaken by Edward Miller, then chief warden on the outer islands, and, as a result, 50 Cormorants, 1000 Lesser Black-backed Gulls and 460 Puffins were ringed. During the succeeding years other private individuals made sporadic attempts to ring birds on the Farne Islands, the most notable being Mrs Hodgkin whose ringing of terns in the late 1930s provided some very valuable post-war recoveries.

In 1949, the Farne Islands Committee decided that only members of the Society should be allowed to ring on the islands and this ruling still applies although, in practice, the wardens carry out a great part of the actual work.

Farne ringing was virtually confined to seabirds, the majority of them pulli, and it was E A R Ennion who pioneered the trapping and ringing of migrants on a large scale. He built the first Heligoland trap in the county at Monk's House and also introduced mist nets; he subsequently constructed another Heligoland trap on Inner Farne, but, unfortunately, this was not very successful and was later dismantled. After his departure, his trapping work was continued by B Little, one of his pupils, who not only initiated several local ornithologists into the art, but also provided the necessary training and inspiration. As a result, private coastal ringing stations were founded at Low Hauxley in 1962, at Bamburgh in 1964 and at Tynemouth in 1968. All these stations continue to be manned enthusiastically during spring and autumn by members of the Northumbria and Tynesiders Ringing Groups.

Ringing has proved invaluable in the study of individual species of birds. During the summer, members of the two groups have carried out breeding studies on both rare and common birds, specially notable being the work on Merlins, Goosanders, Pied Flycatchers and Wheatears. An early exponent of this technique was J Alder, whose investigation into the life history of Dippers has won country-wide acclaim. J C Coulson, and his students from Durham University, have undertaken important research into breeding seabirds on the Farne Islands, Coquet Island and at North Shields and ringing was an essential part of this. In the 1960s P R Evans, another of Ennion's pupils and a lecturer at Durham University, specialised in ringing studies of waders and migrants and today his own students are engaged in similar work at Lindisfarne N N R. He also carried out important radar investigations of bird movements over the Northumberland coast, using the facilities at RAF Boulmer.

An analysis of ringing recoveries has appeared annually in *Birds in Northumbria*, the compilers since 1970 having been P Yeoman, E R Meek and M S Hodgson.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Status Key

The key below has been devised to provide an easy method of indicating the status of the various species recorded in the county: it is used throughout the systematic list which follows the order and nomenclature of Professor K H Voous' 'List of recent Holarctic species'.

Term	*Nos of breeding pairs per year*	*Nos of non-breeding individuals per year*
Rare	1-10	1-10
Uncommon	11-100	11-100
Well-represented	101-1000	101-1000
Common	1001-10000	1001-10000
Abundant	10000+	10000+
Extremely rare	up to 10 records in total	up to 10 records in total

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

A common passage and winter visitor although there are records for every month.

Bolam (1912) stated that it was 'a common autumn to spring visitant, often abundant along the coast' and in recent years the most favoured stretches of coastline have been the Holy Island-Bamburgh area, Alnmouth Bay and Druridge Bay with respective maxima of ninety, one hundred and 300 within the last decade.

Passage is frequently recorded offshore, especially between January and April. The most spectacular movement was 300 flying north off Cresswell in only ten minutes on 15 February 1972, but there are many other instances of up to a hundred a day being seen. A prolonged period of activity was witnessed between 28 December 1973 and 27 January 1974 when 205 flew north, and 794 south, off Seaton Sluice–St Mary's Island. This coincided with a spell of continuous southwesterly gales and an abundance of Herrings *Clupea harengus* and Sprats *Sprattus sprattus* in the North Sea.

In the last ten years about twenty have been noted on lakes and rivers as far inland as Catcleugh and Hallington, usually as a result of severe weather or oiling incidents.

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor although there are records for every month.

Bolam (1932) considered it 'a winter visitant, not rare, but more numerous in some years than in others' and cited the winter of 1890 as one in which it was unusually abundant.

Today, it is probably the least numerous of the divers, although in some years there are more sightings than for *G. immer*. The most important area is offshore between Holy Island and Bamburgh where the maximum count

in recent years is seven, the peak usually occurring in late March or early April. Eight off Holy Island on 27 January 1952 was apparently the result of an oiling incident. Autumn passage is rarely conspicuous, but in spring, birds are regularly recorded moving offshore in early April, presumably *en route* to north European breeding grounds. In a recent example of such a passage eight were noted off St Mary's Island between 6 and 12 April 1970. Exceptional numbers occurred from 3-10 January 1974 when, in conditions already described under *G. stellata*, thirty-six flew south off Seaton Sluice–St Mary's Island.

Inland, it has been recorded only on some eight occasions. One at Broomlee Lough on 3 November 1947 was the farthest from the sea, but other localities include Belsay, Colt Crag, Whittle Dene and Gosforth Park.

Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor although there are records for every month.

Bolam (1932) considered it 'not uncommon along the coast. . . usually seen singly, in pairs, or in small companies' and this is still true today. It occurs regularly in the Holy Island–Bamburgh and Druridge Bay areas where up to eight may be seen, especially after northerly gales. Twenty were in the vicinity of Holy Island on 27 January 1952, but many were badly oiled.

Passage is inconspicuous, but on 11 November 1957 thirty flew south off Bamburgh in thirty minutes, while between 3 and 27 January 1974 twenty-six flew south off Seaton Sluice (also see *G. stellata* and *G. arctica*).

Inland records are few. Birds have ventured up the Tweed as far as Coldstream and in March 1954 one was found dead on the North Tyne above Chollerford. Other examples are winter individuals at Whittle Dene and Catcleugh in 1938-39, at Colt Crag in 1945 and at Hallington in 1968; they are also occasionally encountered on Cresswell Ponds.

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

An extremely rare visitor.

In a review of all the British records Burn and Mather (1974) found four of those from Northumberland acceptable. An adult shot on a bog near Embleton in December 1829 was the first recorded in Britain. Bolam (1912) mentions an adult in breeding plumage, shot by his grandfather in Holy Island harbour sometime between 1830 and 1832, and, although overlooked by all other reviewers, Burn and Mather consider this record valid.

No more occurred until 1966 when two were found dead, the first at Budle Bay on 24 April and the second at Sweethope Lough on 26 April. A sight record of one at Seaton Sluice on 20 March 1960 was considered 'insufficiently substantiated' while a diver shot by Abel Chapman at Holy Island in January 1879 was subsequently identified as *G. immer*.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Hancock (1874) could only say that it 'occasionally breeds', but Bolam (1912) was able to report a considerable increase 'within the last thirty years' although it had been established in some well-protected places, such as Pallinsburn, for some time. There is little information about its breeding

status between 1932, when Bolam again reported it as a common breeding species, and the 1960s, when records suggested a definite increase with the colonisation of several lowland waters, especially those caused by mining subsidence. Today, it is found on the majority of reservoirs, lakes and ponds and a survey conducted in 1976 revealed a total of seventy pairs.

Birds usually return to the breeding waters from mid-March and the season is often prolonged. Bolam found the first eggs in late April, but had seen small young on 11 September, while other records also indicate that two broods are occasionally reared. There is a substantial build-up in numbers on many waters between August and October – for example, on 28 October 1934 forty-one were at Killingworth while in early September 1971 twenty-seven were at Holywell Ponds and thirty-six on the Northumbrian loughs – and, while many of these were probably locally bred birds, some passage through the area is clearly suggested.

Breeding waters are usually deserted in November. Bolam said that in winter it was 'frequently to be seen along the coast, especially off estuaries'. He recorded flocks of twenty to thirty around Holy Island, adding that 'odd examples' had occurred as far out as the Farne Islands. Such numbers are no longer seen anywhere on the coast. Birds usually desert breeding waters in November and one or two are often noted in such places as Budle Bay and the estuaries of the Long Nanny, Aln and Coquet. Rivers further inland are also frequented in winter; for example, up to six are often found on the Tyne at Hexham and small numbers may also be seen on the Tweed.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor and a rare breeding species.

Bolam (1912) stated that it was 'an annual winter visitor. . . by no means uncommon on the coast. . . with an increasing tendency to appear on inland waters'. He was hopeful that it would become a resident and was able to record the first proved breeding in the county (at Hallington in 1911).

There was no other confirmed breeding until 1929 when a pair reared young at Capheaton Lake. From then until 1960, one to three pairs tried to nest at inland reservoirs and lakes although in some years, for example 1945-50, no attempts were recorded, probably as a result of low water levels. Since 1961 the population has increased slightly and several new waters, mainly in the southeast of the county, have been colonised. In 1967, four pairs reared a total of thirteen young, while in 1972 five pairs were definitely, and a further three pairs possibly, successful. Seven pairs were successful in 1975 and one or two adults were present at five other sites during the spring.

There was an unusually large inland concentration in 1975 when, between 1 July and 11 September, up to twenty were seen at Colt Crag. Outside the nesting season a few may remain on the breeding waters, but the most favoured haunts are Skate Road and Alnmouth Bay where as many as ten may congregate, especially in February and March. The origin of these birds is not known, but they probably include continental immigrants and their numbers have changed little since Bolam's time.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor although there are records for every month except June.

Bolam (1912) recorded its status as 'an irregular winter visitant. . . usually only appearing in hard weather, when. . . it sometimes arrives in considerable numbers', adding that it frequently does not come 'till after the New Year'. He quoted the early months of 1891, 1897, 1899 and 1922 as winters in which it had been especially numerous, many having been washed up dead at Holy Island in the latter year.

The Holy Island–Bamburgh area remains the favourite haunt, up to fifteen occurring between January and early April. Occasionally there are larger gatherings: twenty-seven were present on 8 February 1964 and forty-three on 28 January 1968, while Perry (1946) states that, sometime between 1936 and 1943, he once saw a hundred in mid-November. Elsewhere records are few and, apart from six off Alnmouth on 27 September 1955, always refer to either one or two birds.

Severe gales sometimes result in small numbers being driven inland. Such 'wrecks' were noted in February 1937 when five were at Whittle Dene and one at Capheaton, and again in March 1969 when a total of seven was found on ponds near the coast. Apart from such incidents it is rare inland. Individuals are known to have wandered up the Tweed, but otherwise there are only eight documented occurrences since 1926.

Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

Its past status seems to have been little different for Bolam (1932) stated that it was 'common along the coast in moderate numbers, appearing from October onwards, but usually most numerous after the New Year'. Today, it is the most numerous of the wintering grebes and Skate Road attracts the largest numbers; up to forty appear regularly, especially in March and early April, although occasionally much larger numbers are recorded, at least a hundred on 24 February 1963, and seventy-eight on 24 March 1968, being the maxima in recent years. Elsewhere offshore, birds usually occur singly or in pairs while on passage, but on 19 April 1940 forty were seen at Beadnell and on 9 October 1949 fourteen were in the Coquet estuary.

Freshwater records are relatively scarce – there have been only twenty-six since 1937. Almost half of these were in two years: in 1937, following a severe storm, five appeared between February and April and in 1972, six were noted in January and February, a 'wreck' apparently inexplicable in terms of weather conditions. In mid-summer 1967, a bird in full breeding plumage spent a month on Hartburn Lake.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

A rare passage and winter visitor and a rare casual breeding species.

Bolam (1932) confirmed his view of 1912 that it was an irregular 'winter visitant' to the coast, but went on to say that it was beginning to show an increasing tendency to tarry on inland waters 'into summer'.

Although it has bred, it remains the rarest of the grebes. On 8 May 1935, two in full breeding plumage were seen on Hallington, but it was nearly thirty years before nesting was proved. Between 1963 and 1966, birds bred at three different waters, a total of five broods being reared while one pair was unsuccessful. In 1976, one was noted at a suitable locality on 6 May, but no evidence of breeding could be obtained until 1977 when a pair with two young was seen in June.

The Holy Island–Bamburgh area is the favourite wintering haunt, but numbers never exceed seven. The peak usually occurs in March, the birds being often found in the channels of Fenham Flats at low water. Elsewhere, it has been recorded either singly or in pairs, although five were seen off Alnmouth in January 1954. Ponds near the coast, such as Cresswell and Holywell, attract occasional passage birds, mainly in autumn.

Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*

An extremely rare visitor.

A record of one flying north off Hauxley on 19 September 1965, and another which flew north off Seaton Sluice on 13 November 1973, were accepted by the *County Records Committee*, but not by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*. There are also records of albatrosses, not specifically identified, off Goswick on 22 February 1895, off Holy Island in 1914, and off St Mary's Island on 7 May 1970.

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

An abundant passage visitor and a well-represented breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a rare casual visitant' and in 1912 Bolam classed it as 'a not infrequent, though only casual visitant'. He added that fishermen occasionally saw numbers at a considerable distance from land, but, except under stress of weather, it seldom approached the shore. He had noticed a marked increase from about 1890 and by 1932 could chart its colonisation of the county which began when 'a pair or two' summered on the Inner Farne in 1919. There was no evidence of breeding and, indeed, it was not until 1935 that this was forthcoming. However, in 1928 eggs were laid at the Coves on Holy Island, at Cullernose Point, at Dunstanburgh and 'perhaps elsewhere along that part of the coast'. Most of these eggs were taken, but 'at least one or two young were reared'.

Since then it has increased and spread to other sites. After three years of prospecting, one egg – which eventually disappeared – was laid on the cliff at Bamburgh Castle in 1934. By 1952 there were ten pairs on the Farne Islands, but only one was successful. Fulmars took over the lime kilns on Holy Island in 1937, but during the next six years some, or all, of these eggs were taken; despite this it was estimated that by 1939 some sixty pairs were breeding on this island. It was not until 1951 that breeding was recorded at Hartley and Tynemouth, with one young at each site.

There is no doubt that it continues to increase. In 1972, ledges were occupied in at least ten coastal localities, the greatest concentration being at Cullernose Point where seventy-seven sites were tenanted. Ninety-two pairs (the maximum recorded) attempted to breed on the Farne Islands in 1974, while in 1975 over 200 birds were present at the Cullernose colony.

Not all nest sites are on cliffs. It is probable that, but for human disturbance, the grassy slopes of Budle Bay would be colonised, while there is an increasing tendency for birds to nest on relatively flat ground near sea level. In 1971, fourteen pairs on the Farne Islands, and four at Coquet Island, used such situations. Accordingly, it is not lack of coastal accommodation that makes it nest on inland crags and this was certainly true in April 1931 when Bolam saw several pairs frequenting crags between Bamburgh and Spindlestone. It also nests along the escarpment of the Kyloe Hills and the Belford moors (about 10 km from the sea), there are ten pairs at another inland colony near Ford, and birds sometimes breed at crags and quarries as far south as Alnwick. Nevertheless, records of such a typically maritime bird flying over the Simonside Hills, or The Cheviot, still strike an incongruous note.

Even as early as 1932 Bolam reported that birds sometimes returned before the end of December, although usually a month or six weeks later. The present situation is exemplified by 1970: none was seen between mid-September and 31 October when a few were back at the Farne Islands, but by mid-November they were common at most sites.

There is a considerable amount of passage. Fulmars flying north in the early part of the year are presumably on their way to colonies in high latitudes as, for example, on 31 January 1971 when one hundred per hour were recorded. Most spring passage, however, takes place much later and in 1972 it was not noticeable until late March and throughout the following month northerly movements of up to 170 per hour were noted. Indeed, April seems to be the peak month in spring although north-bound birds were seen as late as 29 June 1963.

The great majority of autumn passage movements are also northerly and are concentrated in late August and early September. Thus, in 1976, several large movements occurred, with a peak of up to 600 per hour on 2 September. There are occasional southerly movements – for example, 330 per hour on 11 September 1969.

The blue or dark-phase Fulmar is seen occasionally. One off Seaton Sluice on 1 May 1959 was only the third recorded in the county, but since 1969 there have been some nineteen records.

Birds ringed on the Farne Islands have been recovered locally as far south as the Yorkshire coast, but one marked on 18 July 1959 was found in Denmark on 4 April 1971, while a juvenile, ringed in August 1958, crossed the Atlantic to be recovered in Newfoundland in July 1960. Recoveries of birds ringed in Shetland, Orkney and Aberdeenshire show that Fulmars dispersing from other British colonies may reach the county.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

An extremely rare passage visitor.

One flying north off Holy Island on 11 September 1962 was the first county record and another was identified flying south off Hauxley on 31 July 1967. In August and September 1965, 1976 and 1977, during periods of heavy northerly seabird movements, several large shearwaters that were too far out to sea for identification were thought to be probably Cory's. Four were positively identified in 1976; all were flying north – three off Seaton Sluice on 28 August and one off the Farne Islands on 9 September.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1912, 1932) could only say that it probably occurred. He mentioned one in the Old (now Hancock) Museum collection, presented about 1830, and another obtained off Boulmer in about 1875 which, he believed, had been identified correctly.

The first definite record was in 1936 when one was off Holy Island on 30 October and subsequently there have been some forty confirmed sightings. None was seen between 1936 and 1954 when single birds were recorded off the Farne Islands on 2 May and off Seahouses on 16 October. Since then it has been noted in ten of the years 1955-76, all between July and mid-September. Usually not more than five have been recorded in any one year, but in 1955 a total of sixteen was counted off Seaton Sluice between 25 and 31 July.

More recently, during heavy passages of *P. griseus* in the autumns of 1976 and 1977, there were several sightings of large shearwaters thought to be of this species. However, single birds flying north off Seaton Sluice on 12 September, and off the Farne Islands on 16 September, are the only two definite records.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

A well-represented passage visitor which has occurred in increasing numbers in recent years.

Bolam (1912) could mention only four confirmed occurrences although he said that fishermen often described birds which must be of this species. In 1932, he referred to it as a bird 'of which we have latterly had little news' although it 'has generally appeared in August and September'. Perry (1946) thought that it was 'probably regular in small numbers' around Holy Island, but it was not until the 1950s that the development of sea-watching revealed its status as that of a rare, but annual visitor.

Today, the majority are seen between July and early October with a few into November. There are only single records for December, January and February, while none has been recorded between March and June. Between 1951 and 1967 up to fifteen were noted each autumn, most of them birds moving north offshore, but in 1968 there was a sudden increase in the numbers of sightings with a total of sixty-two. Since then the annual figures have been: 1969, 66; 1970, 35; 1971, about 350; 1972, about 430; 1973, at least 250; 1974, at least 300; 1975, about 120. In 1976, an unprecedented northerly movement on 11 September involved a total of 808 in twelve hours off Seaton Sluice during a severe northerly gale and torrential rain, while 855 (also moving north) were counted from the same point on 16-17 September 1977.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

A common passage visitor.

Bolam (1912) stated that 'till within recent years this species was always regarded as a very rare casual visitant. . . but of late. . . a few would seem to remain every year, about the Farne Islands throughout the summer'. In 1932, he thought it still 'an erratic visitant. . . most frequently seen at the periods of migration, but has very nearly as often been met with. . . in the middle of summer'. He also mentions that in July 1921 a bird was flushed from a rock-hole on the Farne Islands, but, apart from this single incident, breeding has never been suspected.

Intensive sea-watching in recent years has revealed that it is much commoner than Bolam believed and that it occurs in every month. Large movements, mainly in a northerly direction, can take place in any month between April and September, and passage of over one hundred per hour has been recorded in late June and July, when the birds involved are presumably non-breeders. The heaviest movements on record were both off Seaton Sluice – 824 on 31 July 1976 and again on 11 June 1977. Only on rare occasions is the predominantly northerly trend of passage reversed, but on 29 August 1959, 206 flew south off Holy Island in an hour.

Inland records are extremely rare; one was flushed from a field at Swarland in autumn 1874, while in 1970, after westerly gales, two were picked up alive in the Stocksfield-Corbridge area on 9 September.

The Balearic Shearwater *P. p. mauretanicus* was first recorded in September 1860 off Cullercoats. Another was off Bamburgh in September 1921, but there were no further records until 1955 when, between 25 July and 15 September, four were seen. Since then there have been only thirteen confirmed occurrences: one in June 1960, five in August-September 1962, one in July 1968, one in August 1975, two in August-September 1976 and three in August 1977.

Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*

An extremely rare visitor.

One flew north off Alnmouth on 15 September 1946 and another, also flying north, was off St Mary's Island on 15 August 1961. Both these records are open to some doubt; the first is substantiated merely by a brief description in the annual ornithological report, while the second was only considered 'probable' by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.

Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1912, 1932) stated that along the coast it was a 'casual and uncertain visitant' although 'not very rare some miles out to sea'. He quoted unusual records of several off Cullercoats in late June 1836, and a total of twenty-seven flying north off St Mary's Island in mid-June 1915, but knew it more as a bird of the autumn. Perry (1946) was of much the same opinion although he, too, could cite a June record as well as one in March, off Holy Island. Since 1948 only about sixteen have been identified and half of these were found dead or dying, mainly between mid-September and mid-November. Outside this period, one was at Fenham Flats during August 1956, one was trapped at Beadnell on 27 July 1959, one was found dead on the Farne Islands in April 1972 and one was seen off Beadnell on 19 June 1977.

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

A rare visitor.

It was first noted in November 1828 (Selby, 1831) when one was shot at Benwell in west Newcastle and the twenty-four or more subsequent sightings have usually been made between October and April; most have involved storm-blown birds in an exhausted condition and often well inland. The largest influx was at the end of October 1952 when, following a period of severe southwesterly gales eleven (most of which died) were found.

There have been no records since 1954 although unidentified petrels are seen occasionally.

Gannet *Sula bassana*

An abundant passage visitor.

Hancock (1874) knew it as 'a resident on our coast' and Bolam (1932) referred to it as 'a summer visitant', the nearest nesting station being the Bass Rock. Today, it is most plentiful from April to October although it occurs in every month of the year.

One of the spectacles of sea-watching in spring is the sight of adult gannets returning north to their breeding colonies, but it is during late summer and early autumn that the largest numbers are observed, presumably a result of feeding movements to and from the Bass Rock. In recent years it can best be seen in numbers, certainly in the southern part of the county, during the

first two hours after dawn when over 1000 per hour, both adults and immatures, may be moving north, although southerly passage is not uncommon.

The few individuals recorded inland are presumed to be either storm-driven or sick, among recent examples being one found at Ponteland in April 1968 and another fishing at Catcleugh in April 1973.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

A well-represented winter visitor and breeding species.

Both Hancock and Bolam referred to it as 'a common resident' on the coast with an established breeding colony on the Farne Islands, and Watt (1951) highlighted the steady increase on the Megstone, from forty to fifty pairs in 1885 to about 300 pairs by 1949. In the 1970s, the breeding population has remained virtually constant at some 250-300 pairs, but the colony on the Megstone has progressively decreased in favour of that on the North Wamses. Between 1974 and 1977 no nests were found on the Megstone.

Apart from references in Bolam (1912) to Cormorants breeding on cliffs at the mouth of the Tyne in the mid-16th century, and on Coquet Island in Wallis' time, there are no other known nesting sites. Away from the Farne Islands, the largest concentrations are usually encountered on Ross Links where, in September, up to 250 may be seen resting on the sands. Amble harbour also attracts the species, but the usual maximum is only about thirty.

Outside the breeding season it is not unusual to find it straying inland, especially up the Tyne and Tweed to fish in the middle reaches; it is also found on the reservoirs and larger ponds and lakes – for example, as many as fifteen may congregate at Hallington and up to ten at Wallsend Swallow Pond.

Ringing of nestlings on the Farne Islands has indicated an extensive dispersal of young birds for recoveries have been made in almost every coastal county of eastern and southern Britain. Many have also been found on the west side of the country, including five in Ireland, while among inland recovery localities are Perthshire, Clackmannanshire, Stirlingshire, Cardiganshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Norfolk. Dispersal is mainly to the north in the first winter, and to the south in the first summer, and there have been twenty recoveries in France, two in Spain and one as far south as the Algarve, Portugal. Nestlings ringed at other British colonies – for example, in Wigtownshire, Anglesey, the Isle of Man, northwest Scotland and Orkney – have been recovered in the county, but there is a strong tendency for birds to return to their natal colony to breed (Coulson, 1961; Coulson and Brazendale, 1968).

Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

A well-represented winter visitor and breeding species.

During the 18th and 19th centuries it was frequently confused with the Cormorant and breeding records based on clutches of eggs are always suspect. In 1912, Bolam stated that, in his experience, it had 'never been anything but a scarce species' and twenty years later he considered it to be 'a resident in small numbers, a pair or two having bred at the Farne Islands and Dunstanburgh, time out of mind'.

It still breeds only at these two stations although the Dunstanburgh colony has never exceeded three or four pairs. Watt (1951) summarised its past status on the Farne Islands and it is apparent that one or two pairs bred

there during the 19th century in some, but not all, years. No nesting occurred from 1902 to 1927, but regular breeding started in 1931 and since then numbers have increased progressively, reaching 367 pairs in 1965. This corresponds to an annual rate of increase of twelve per cent, a rate similar to that which has also taken place in the Firth of Forth colonies.

In 1968, the county's population suffered an extensive mortality. In two weeks from 15 May, some eighty per cent of the birds breeding on the Farne Islands died as the result of an exceptionally severe outbreak of 'red-tide' caused by a vast increase in the small marine dinoflagellate *Gonyaulax* which produces an extremely toxic nerve poison (Coulson, Potts, Deans and Fraser, 1968). Only seven pairs continued nesting and the great majority of eggs and young were deserted and left to die, or to be taken by gulls. As a result of this catastrophe, the number of pairs breeding on the Farne Islands was reduced to the level of the early 1950s. A remarkable recovery took place, however, and there were 183 pairs in 1971, 278 in 1973 and 368 in 1974. In 1975, yet another setback reduced the numbers breeding to 192 pairs; it was feared that paralytic shellfish poisoning was again responsible, but, fortunately, there was little lasting effect and 1976 saw a welcome return to 359 pairs. The 1977 total – 430 pairs – was the highest yet recorded.

In the early part of this century large numbers of Shags began to winter off the coast of north Northumberland; this habit has continued so that 300-400 may now be seen off Holy Island. Extensive ringing studies have shown that many of these birds arrive in September and, in addition to adults, include an appreciable proportion of the immature population from the Firth of Forth colonies. Passage to the south is often noted and probably includes birds from the Farne Islands.

Ringing returns indicate an extensive dispersal to the whole of the east coast of Britain from the Farne Islands, while recoveries have also been reported from many south and west coast localities. The southerly part of this dispersal occasionally results in birds reaching the Channel coast of France while, unlike the Cormorant, they sometimes cross the North Sea to Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. In certain years dispersing Shags suffer high mortality and are often driven inland; such 'wrecks' are usually associated with heavy rain and persistent easterly winds. These inland occurrences are, however, rare in the county and although Bolam refers to it being seen from time to time at Catcleugh and other reservoirs, there have been only four inland records since 1970.

Although many birds return to their natal colony to breed, there is some interchange and several Shags reared on the Bass Rock, and the Isle of May, have been found nesting on the Farne Islands. The reverse movement is less marked, but after the 1968 disaster birds which had formerly nested on the Farne Islands were found at St Abbs Head, Berwickshire, on the Isle of May and at Craigleith, while others have bred on The Lamb and the Bass Rock. Retrapping of marked breeding birds has shown that the oldest was sixteen or seventeen while there were several aged between twelve and fourteen years.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

A rare visitor, which formerly bred.

Wallis (1769) was able to say 'the bittern or bittour is frequent about mosses' many of which then held at least one breeding pair. This situation changed rapidly, largely due to extensive drainage operations, and it is doubtful if

regular breeding occurred after about 1820. It became, and remains, a rare visitor, principally in winter, and the comment of Bolam (1912) that a year seldom passes without one or more being recorded is equally true today.

Several of the more recent records are from Gosforth Park where a pair successfully reared young in 1956. Birds had been seen, and 'booming' heard prior to this, and also in subsequent years, but no further breeding was proved. Other records have involved individuals both inland and at the coast, but perhaps the most interesting sighting was of one in a snow-covered hen-run at Alnwick on 13 February during the severe winter of 1947.

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

One reported in the Blagdon area in January 1964 was never confirmed and its authenticity must remain in doubt.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

An extremely rare visitor.

Bolam (1912) wrote that 'for Northumberland, we have six captures. . .'. The first, shot at Blagdon on 12 May 1810, was figured by Bewick (1826); one was killed at Denton Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne, in April 1859 and other individuals were shot near Woolsington on 31 May 1866, at Hawkshill, Alnwick, in May 1871 and at Howick on 18 May 1886. The sixth 'capture' was, in fact, at Sheriff Hill, Gateshead, and not in Northumberland (see Temperley (1951)). The Howick bird was a male in breeding condition and was thought to have a mate, but breeding was never proved.

The only record for the present century is of one found dead at Etal on 13 October 1962.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

An extremely rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) lists five records. Four individuals were shot: near Lilburn Tower 'many years ago'; near Alnwick on 24 November 1870, after it had been present for three weeks; at Howick Hall on 15 May 1890; near Warkworth (where it had been seen for about a fortnight) in February 1913. The fifth bird was caught alive in a ditch at Goswick on 5 December 1872.

There have been only three subsequent records. One remained on the Coquet near Warkworth for almost seven months between March and September 1953 and in the same locality an immature was present during late November and December 1977. Another immature was at Holywell Ponds between 10-23 August 1977.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

An extremely rare visitor.

One shot at Howick Hall on 28 May 1874 in mistake for an owl (Bolam, 1912) remains the only record.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

An extremely rare visitor.

An adult spent at least a week at Catcleugh towards the end of May 1956 while in 1970 one, first seen in Budle Bay on 3 May, remained in Lindisfarne N N R until 10 May.

Great White Egret *Egretta alba*

An extremely rare visitor.

One at Cresswell Ponds on 29 April 1977 is the only record.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a common resident, but less abundant than in former times' and, in 1932, while Bolam classed it as 'still a common resident', he went on to say that tree-felling was destroying some of the ancient heronries. In fact, it was probably not as numerous as Bolam implied because only about sixty nests in ten heronries (the largest holding only fourteen pairs) were counted in a census organised by the British Trust for Ornithology in 1928.

In keeping with the general trend affecting the whole of the east coast of England, numbers gradually declined as felling increased, especially during the Second World War. The lowest ebb was reached following the severe winter of 1962-63 when the total breeding population may have fallen to less than ten pairs. Fortunately, recovery was rapid, and in the early 1970s over fifty pairs were breeding, the majority in two main colonies.

Hancock mentioned heronries at Chillingham, Harbottle, on the South Tyne at Unthank and on Redewater – and the first three were still in existence nearly forty years later when the Chillingham colony contained sixty to a hundred nests (Bolam, 1912). Indeed, this heronry continued, although latterly with much reduced numbers, until about 1960 when another well-established colony at Styford, near Riding Mill, was also deserted because the nesting trees were felled. Ten years later yet another large and thriving colony at Shawdon Hall, near Chillingham, was destroyed, again by felling, although in this case it was re-established a short distance away.

Despite persecution and disturbance it is now flourishing in smaller colonies. This satisfactory state of affairs is largely attributable to a succession of mild winters between 1970 and 1975, for any prolonged spell of severe weather invariably brings about a reduction in numbers.

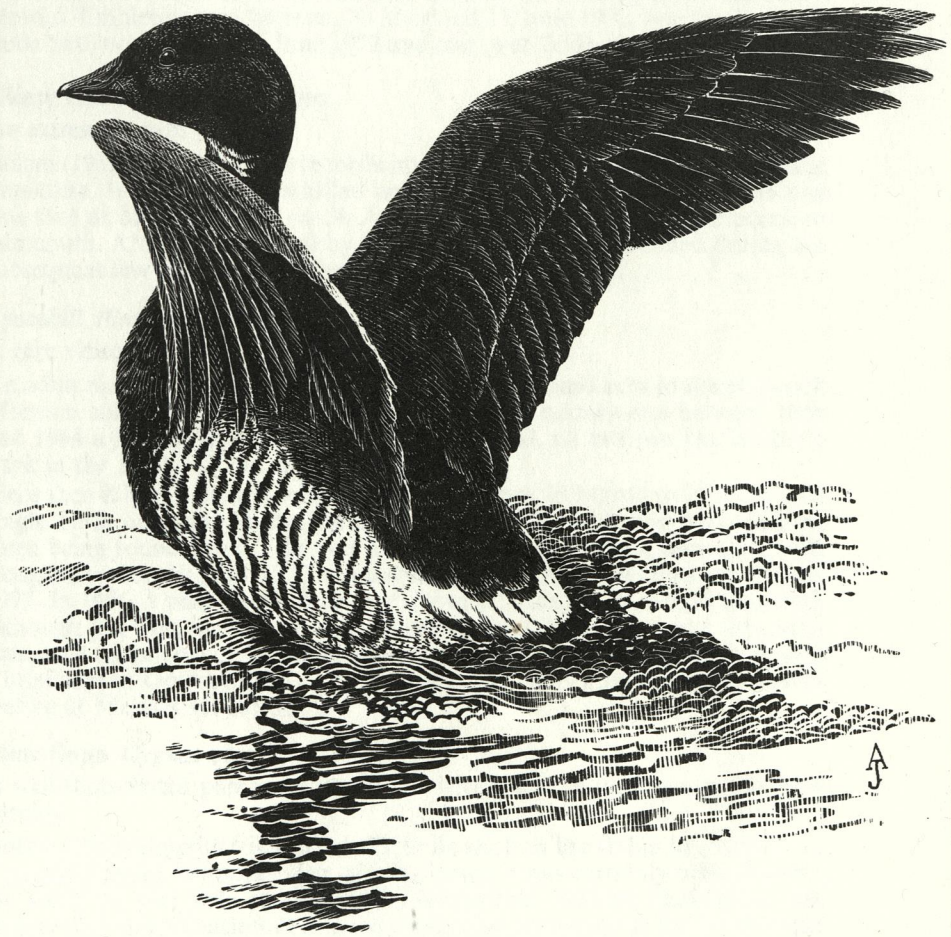
During late summer, and throughout the autumn, small gatherings occur on the lowland ponds and in intertidal areas. However, twenty-three were at Derwent Reservoir in September 1970, the largest concentration recorded outside the breeding season.

Scandinavian Herons swell the wintering population as evidenced by the recoveries of two nestlings ringed in Norway and one ringed in Sweden. Immigration may begin as early as June and at this time there are regular sightings of birds arriving from the east. Dispersal from other parts of Britain further increases numbers, and two birds ringed in Suffolk were recorded in the county. Many locally-bred birds remain to winter, but a proportion disperses, recoveries coming from as far apart as Ayrshire, Glamorganshire, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. Some return to their natal colony to breed as indicated by the retrapping at Harbottle in April 1918 of one ringed there as a pullus in April 1913.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

An extremely rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) indicated that there were no good Northumberland records. Thus one at Cresswell Ponds on 24-25 April 1963, and one on the Farne Islands from 11-16 April 1977, are the only acceptable occurrences.



Pale-bellied Brent

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

An extremely rare visitor.

One seen in a field at Cullernose on 10 May 1959 is the only record.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

An extremely rare visitor.

Wallis (1769) states that one was killed near Chollerford at the beginning of 1766 and there have been nine subsequent records. One was shot at Newton-by-the-Sea in March 1843, Hancock saw one at Prestwick Carr in May 1866, one was killed at Scremerston on 10 January 1874, three were seen flying together off Bamburgh on 31 August 1921, one flew over Belford on 10 May 1922 and in late September of that year an immature was shot at Embleton.

More recent records involved one near Ingram on 16 May 1952, one in the Howick-Embleton area between 26 May and 11 June 1972, one (perhaps the same bird) near Ford on 6 June 1972 and one over Wideopen on 6 June 1976.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

An extremely rare visitor.

Bolam (1912) refers to three records involving seven individuals, all of them immature. In 1820 one was killed near Rothbury, on 25 August 1885 one was shot at Mindrum and on 30 August 1908 five arrived on the beach at Alnmouth. After being stoned by small boys, four were obtained during the subsequent few days, but the fate of the fifth is unknown.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

A rare visitor.

An adult male shot on Fenham Flats in May 1857, and now in the Hancock Museum collections, was the first record for the county and between then and 1964 a further ten individuals were reported, all but two (at Gosforth Park in the 1870s) in the north of the county.

Since then it has appeared more frequently. From 16 March to 16 May 1969 single birds occurred at five localities between Howick and Holy Island, three being found dead. One was at Beal on 24 June 1970, one visited the Long Nanny on 19 May 1972 and another was seen at Sleekburn on 18 July 1973. In 1976, a party of six was at Holywell Ponds on 24 and 26 May and, although five flew southwest over Washington, Co Durham, on the latter date, one remained at Wallsend Swallow Pond until 2 June when it paid a brief visit to Gosforth Park. A few days later, on 11 June, two were seen resting at Monk's House pool.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Bolam (1912) stated it 'used formerly to be shot on the slakes at Fenham, as frequently as the Whooper, but of latter years it has certainly been scarcer'. By 1932, he was able to record a considerable increase throughout the county and this situation continued, wintering numbers in the Lindisfarne area reaching some 650 in January-February 1958 and again in October 1965. Since then, however, numbers have fallen dramatically, maximum counts in the winters of 1971-72 and 1972-73 being respectively eighty and twenty.

The flock in the Tweed estuary has shown no corresponding decline. These non-breeders summer in this locality, as many as 435 being present in July-August 1958 with over 400 in four other years. Although numbers usually fall in winter, the estuary held up to 200 in November 1971 and 1972. The only other area to attract significant numbers is the Coquet estuary where the flock usually totals less than forty birds.

Only about twenty-five pairs attempt to breed annually so the Tweed and Lindisfarne birds are not reared locally; the sole clue to their origin was provided by the control at Tweedmouth in November 1971 of a bird which had been ringed in Peterborough, Northamptonshire, in April 1961. Other recoveries involve one ringed at Haydon Bridge in July 1965 and found at Annan, Dumfriesshire, in March 1968, and one ringed at Hartlepool, Co Durham, in October 1961, and controlled at Cresswell in March 1963 and April 1967.

Some form of moult migration is perhaps suggested by a bird ringed at Hartlepool in September 1962, controlled at Kinross in August 1967 and finally recovered at Wooler in November 1968. Another marked at Haggerston in May 1963 was also found near Kinross (at Loch Leven) in August 1966, while one ringed in Midlothian in July 1961, and controlled two months later at Amble, was found dead in Durham in July 1963.

Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

It was first recognised as a distinct species by Wingate (1829) when he examined a specimen shot near Haydon Bridge on 7 February 1829 and now in the Hancock Museum collections. Hancock (1874) described it as 'quite as common as the Whooper', but Bolam considered it much the rarer of the two species and this is certainly true today. Recently, however, there have been more frequent reports and it is now seen in small numbers every winter.

The majority occur during the first three months of the year, parties rarely exceeding ten, except in Lindisfarne N N R where, since the early 1960s, most have been recorded (the maximum count was twenty-two in early 1966). The only other localities attracting double figures in the past twenty years have been the Northumberland loughs (up to twenty-three in February-March 1964), Longhirst (ten in February 1968), Hartburn and Cresswell (respectively eighteen and sixteen in November 1968) and Holywell Ponds (fifteen in February 1971 and twenty-nine in December 1977).

A colour-ringed bird seen at Monk's House pool in the winter of 1975-76 had been marked as an immature at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, on 23 December 1974.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

It appears to be more numerous now than when Selby (1831) described it as 'an occasional winter visitant', or when Bolam (1912) said that it was 'a pretty regular winter visitant, in limited numbers'.

Today, its principal haunt is Fenham Flats, which supports the largest wintering flock in England. Maximum counts in recent years have been 403 on 6 December 1971 and 394 on 23 December 1974, although in some seasons numbers do not reach 300. It also occurs on, or grazing near, many other waters, the most favoured being Holywell Ponds, where numbers

have increased annually to a peak of 178 in November 1975. The Tweed valley, especially between Carham and Cornhill, has attracted up to 160 in recent winters, but the degree of interchange with the Lindisfarne flock is not known. Other localities which sometimes have parties of more than a hundred are the Northumbrian loughs, and the Ashington–Ellington area, while up to fifty can occur in the vicinity of Hartburn and Capheaton, and occasionally elsewhere.

Some arrive as early as the second half of September, but the main immigration commences six weeks later. A peak in late November is often followed by a reduction, suggesting an outward movement, although there is evidence of local dispersal into smaller parties as the winter progresses. A second, but much smaller peak may occur prior to emigration in March and April. Stragglers occasionally linger into May and there is an exceptional record of eight on the Tweed from 26 June to 3 July 1960. However, the majority of summer records refer to injured birds, unable to fly – for example, two were resident at Wallsend Swallow Pond from 1966 to 1976 when one was killed.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

Selby (1831) described it as being a 'periodical winter visitant, very numerous' and this remained the case until at least 1932 when Bolam wrote that 'next after the Pink-footed it is our commonest grey goose'. Numbers have declined markedly since that time, parties only rarely exceeding twenty, although eighty were at Grindon Lough in February 1961 and thirty-nine at the same locality in early March 1970.

Grindon, together with Lindisfarne N N R, is now its main haunt and very few are seen away from these two areas. It has been suggested that the birds which occur at Grindon are part, or on occasions the whole, of the flock that normally winters around Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire. In Bolam's time the large flocks arrived in September and lingered into April, but the few which now come are mainly in the period December to March.

An indication of the origin of these birds is provided by the recovery of one, ringed as a pullus on 20 June 1953 at Fjalpfjallet, Sweden, at Ellington on 16 January 1954.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor, although less numerous than in the past.

Bolam (1932) was able to describe it as a 'common winter visitant, the most abundant' of the grey geese visiting the county. He mentions flocks of between 3000 and 4000 which appeared on Ross Links in December 1925 and again in April 1931. Since then, large flocks have occasionally been seen in Lindisfarne N N R, as in November 1948 and January 1951 when they numbered 1500 and 2000 respectively. These are exceptional, however, and in the last twenty years numbers have never exceeded 200.

It is now more often seen as migrating skeins, usually passing south over coastal areas, or west through the Tyne valley, in autumn: for example, a total of 190 flew south over Bolam on 12 November 1967 and 200 flew west over Kielder and Gilsland on 7 November 1972. Flocks are less common in spring, although 500 passed northwest over Haltwhistle on 9 March 1957,

while in 1953 there were some most unusual June records, over seventy being seen at Otterburn on 5 June with thirty over Howick, and one at Newton Pool, on 9 June.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

This has always been one of the rarest of the geese regularly visiting the county. Hancock (1874) described it merely as 'an autumn and winter visitant' without mentioning numbers and Bolam knew it as 'an irregular winter visitant', usually singly or in small parties, and rarely penetrating very far inland. In more recent times it has been recorded almost annually, but still in small numbers, usually in Lindisfarne N N R. Sightings are generally between November and January although in 1965, one of the best years on record, most occurred in October with parties of six, seven and twenty-two over the reserve on 29 October and nine flying west over Whittle Dene on 30 October.

The majority of those subspecifically identified belong to the nominate Eurasian race, but the Greenland form *A. a. flavirostris* is occasionally seen. One remained at Grindon Lough from 12 February to 20 April 1968 and there were five at Lindisfarne on 31 January 1971, one at Holywell Ponds on 13 November 1971 and three at Lindisfarne on 30-31 January 1972.

A female shot on Holy Island on 14 December 1968 had been ringed as an adult at Gaastmeer, Friesland, Netherlands, on 14 December 1963.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*

An extremely rare visitor.

An immature bird shot on Fenham Flats on 16 September 1886 was the first authenticated specimen obtained in the British Isles and remains the only county record.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

A common passage and winter visitor which has bred.

Less than fifty years ago it was only an irregular visitor to the coast. Chapman (1924) referred to it as a straggler and Bolam (1932) wrote that it is 'only rarely well-identified here'. He added, however, that 'the visits of the Greylag to the Solway estuary have shown considerable increase during the last two decades, and a similar tendency may be taking place on our coast'. He was to be proved right, for almost immediately afterwards numbers began to increase and by 1946 some 300 were wintering in the Lindisfarne area. A flock has spent the winter in the north of the county ever since, and this has increased considerably in recent years. The Tweed valley holds the largest gatherings, a peak normally being reached in late October and November – for example, 4000 were recorded at Carham on 22 November 1977. The majority of these birds roost either on Holburn Moss or just over the Scottish border on Hoselaw Loch.

Two parties winter regularly in central Northumberland, one in the vicinity of Hallington and Whittle Dene, and the other in the Hartburn-Fontburn area, and each may number 400 in good seasons such as 1970. Every year smaller flocks are recorded from various parts of the county.

The first birds may arrive in September, but the majority do not reach the county until October. Dispersal begins in March and large flocks are often seen well into April; for example, on 14 April 1977, almost 1500 assembled near Budle Bay. By the end of the month, however, almost all have gone and sightings between May and August are rare. The appearance of a flock of sixty at Lindisfarne N N R on 20 June 1970 was exceptional. Nevertheless, every summer between 1949 and 1958, and occasionally since, a party of up to twenty has passed the flightless period of their moult on the Farne Islands.

A pair successfully reared four young at Sweethope Lough in 1974 and thirteen young, accompanied by two adults, were seen there in 1976.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

A rare visitor although recent records may perhaps refer to birds that have escaped from captivity.

The earliest record is of a flock of about twenty between Goswick and Holy Island on 2 January 1891, some of which remained in the vicinity for several weeks (Bolam, 1912). There were no further confirmed occurrences until 5 October 1948 when one was on Fenham Flats. Recent reports have been more frequent, but the increasing possibility of escape from collections has confused the situation. Up to three were seen in various localities in the north of the county in March-April 1965 while, in late December of that year, fifteen were in the Swinhoe-Detchant area. In 1969, single birds, or the same individual, visited the Farne Islands on 3-5 May, 12 July, 18 August and 22 October, while in 1970 one flew north off Seaton Sluice on 28 May and another was on Lindisfarne N N R from 18-20 October. 1971 saw two adults at Lindisfarne from late June to early September and an immature on Holy Island between 13 and 19 July. A single blue-phase bird was observed at Newton, and on the Farne Islands, on several occasions between 31 May and 26 July 1975 and in 1976 one frequented the Farne Islands from 13 August to 13 September. Between 29 April and 3 May 1977 eight to eleven adults were at Holy Island Lough.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

A well-represented passage visitor, but a rare breeding species.

Bolam (1912) gives several instances of birds seen, and frequently shot, in the north of the county and says that although these are 'generally regarded as only birds which have escaped from the semi-confinement in which they are bred. . . it is not deemed advisable to exclude all notice of them'. However, by 1932, he had changed his opinion and, as with the Egyptian Goose, not only gave no further records, but also rejected its claim for inclusion in his catalogue.

The upsurge of records in the last twenty years is mainly the result of the introduction of fifty free-flying birds to Sweethope Lough. A few pairs have bred in the Sweethope–Colt Crag–Hallington area, where non-breeders are also seen during the summer, since at least the mid-1960s, while a pair successfully reared young at Capheaton Lake in 1976. The largest gatherings also occur at these localities. Numbers have increased in recent years so that in 1975 peaks of 150 were noted at Colt Crag on 2 September, and at Sweethope on 27 October.

Elsewhere, birds are most often recorded in mid-summer as they pass through on moult migration from breeding areas in Yorkshire and the midlands to the Beauly Firth. In 1972, for example, a total of seventy-nine was

noted from eight localities between 30 May and 18 June. Return movements are possibly responsible for swelling the autumn numbers at Sweethope–Colt Crag–Hallington.

An adult ringed at Stapleford, Leicestershire, in June 1953 was shot at Dinnington in November 1961 and a pullus ringed at Harewood, Yorkshire, in July 1972 was found at Belford in October 1974.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

A well-represented passage visitor, chiefly in autumn.

Bolam (1912) commented that its status had changed little since Selby (1831) had described it as 'very numerous upon the western coast of Britain, but rare upon the eastern'. By 1932, however, he was able to state that it was showing 'a marked tendency towards increase' and that, in recent years, it had been seen almost annually at Holy Island. Today, the majority of sightings are still in Lindisfarne N N R, especially during September and October. Up to 300 have occurred in a day, usually passing south, but occasionally remaining for a few days. Records of flocks moving south offshore at this time of year are also fairly frequent from well-watched points such as Annstead, Hauxley and Seaton Sluice.

Occasionally, small parties are recorded flying west through the Tyne gap in autumn while on 10 January 1967 a flock of 2000 was seen passing over Haltwhistle. These sightings, and probably most others in the county, are believed to involve birds originating in Spitzbergen and wintering on the Solway Firth. Single birds are sometimes recorded in winter, usually with other geese, while spring passage, which is inconspicuous, is concentrated in April when small parties are noted moving north, mainly over coastal areas.

Summer sightings are rare, but two were on the Farne Islands in June 1939, one on Holy Island in May 1959 and one at Newton Pool in May 1975. Another spent the summers of 1969-71 with the Canada Geese in the Colt Crag–Sweethope area.

A bird ringed as an adult on Spitzbergen in July 1962 and controlled at Caerlaverock, Dumfriesshire, in February 1963 was subsequently shot at Carham in December 1966, while others, also ringed on Spitzbergen in July 1962, were recovered on Coquet Island in September 1962 and at Elwick in October 1970. A white individual was noted among a flock of sixteen passing north over Lindisfarne on 10 October 1977; it was seen next day on Budle sandbar.

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

A well-represented winter visitor to Lindisfarne N N R, but rare elsewhere.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a common autumn and winter visitant', adding that 'great numbers of it are occasionally shot at Fenham Flats'. In 1912, Bolam also remarked on the sport afforded to punt-gunners by the many thousands which came to Holy Island in the early months of the year. Writing between 1889 and 1924, Chapman noted that 12000 were present in each of the winters 1878-79 and 1880-81, while on 3 March 1886 there were at least 30000, the largest flock ever recorded in Britain. The average figure, however, was about 6000 and at this time the great majority were of the dark-bellied race *B. b. bernicla*.

Between 1931 and 1953 comparatively few visited the area, the maximum being 500, except in the hard winters of 1941-42 and 1946-47, when there were respectively 2000 and 5000. Average numbers have since increased,

but, apart from 3500 in 1954, have never exceeded 2500 and are usually less than 1500. In recent years, the flock has been composed almost entirely of the pale-bellied race *B. b. hrota*. Most of these birds, which are believed to originate in Spitzbergen and Franz Josef Land, winter in Denmark so that the numbers occurring at Lindisfarne N N R, their only regular wintering ground in Britain, are probably dependent on weather conditions in the Baltic and, to a lesser extent, on the abundance of *Zostera*, their main food plant.

The first pale-bellied birds usually arrive in late October and numbers may either build up rapidly, as in 1971 when 800 were present by the end of November, or, more usually, increase to a peak in either January or February. In some years there is a dramatic increase which lasts only for a few days, as in March 1970, when the total rose sharply from 800 to 1500, and in January 1971 when there was an increase from 650 to 1000. The speed of dispersal also varies, the 1973 flock virtually disappearing overnight on 5 February. However, in most years there is a gradual reduction until all have left by the end of March, or the beginning of April.

Although very few *B. b. bernicla* are now recorded, they are usually the first to arrive in autumn, often appearing in late September. This is invariably the race found elsewhere in the county – for example, at Cresswell about eleven were present between 15 and 26 March 1969 with up to eight from December 1976 to late February 1977.

Small skeins are occasionally noted moving offshore as on 2 October 1974 when a total of thirty-nine flew north off Seaton Sluice. A most unusual date for such a sighting was 7 June 1975 when one flew south off Berwick.

A *B. b. hrota*, wearing a numbered neck collar and seen at Lindisfarne in October 1975, had been marked at Bathurst Island, arctic Canada, on 30 July 1975. The Canadian breeding population was originally believed to winter solely on the western side of the Atlantic, but this recovery, together with others from Ireland, indicates some trans-Atlantic movement. A yellow-dyed *B. b. bernicla*, noted in January 1973, suggests that there is some interchange with the main British wintering flock of this race in Essex.

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*

An extremely rare visitor.

One shot on Fenham Flats in 1818 remains the only county record.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

A rare visitor, occurrences in recent years being undoubtedly attributable to the wanderings of feral breeding birds, probably from East Anglia.

Bolam (1912) stated that 'at Goswick, and Fenham Slakes, the species used formerly to be looked upon as an annual visitor', but went on to say that he had not heard of any there for the last thirty years. He also mentioned five other records of single birds and small parties, mainly in the north of the county, between 1830 and 1886. These birds are believed to have originated from the full-winged colony which existed at Gosford, Lothian (Sharrock, 1976).

In 1932, Bolam gave no further records and rejected its claim for inclusion in his catalogue on the grounds of its semi-domestication. There is no reference to it in the county ornithological reports until 1974 when two, which appeared at Hallington on 1 November, remained until February 1975; one

or two were also present between August 1975 and January 1976. Unfortunately, there is no doubt that occurrences between 1886 and 1974 have gone unrecorded as a result of this goose being viewed as a feral species.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

An extremely rare visitor, but there is always the possibility that birds may have escaped from captivity.

It was first noted in the county sometime prior to 1875 when one was killed at Boulmer (Bolam, 1912). A bird shot on Holy Island in the early 1900s may have been either a Ruddy Shelduck or an Egyptian Goose (Perry, 1946) so the one seen at Alnmouth on 7 and 19 May 1945 is the only other confirmed record.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Although it was nesting in the county in Hancock's time, it was 'not by any means common'. There followed a period of slow, but steady increase until, by 1932, Bolam was able to describe it as 'breeding numerously'.

It appears to have been most abundant about 1947 when over a hundred pairs were nesting on, or near, Holy Island. Since then there has been a considerable decline, initially blamed on foxes, and now only about thirty pairs breed in the county. The majority are in the northern coastal links, but some go inland, occasionally as far as Belford. A few pairs nest near Cresswell, which is their southern limit, and also on the offshore islands.

Most adults leave in July for the Heligoland Bight where they pass the flightless period of the moult – for example, 500 were seen to leave Budle Bay on 14 July 1959, flying out to sea in parties of twenty to fifty. There is ample evidence that birds from the west coast cross Northumberland on moult migration, using the Tyne gap as their route across the Pennines, and small flocks, usually containing from twenty to fifty birds, are regularly seen heading east in July. Returning migrants begin to appear in October, but the movement is gradual and spread over several months. Offshore movements also begin in October and continue through the winter and probably comprise birds drifting back from the moulting grounds. A peak seems to occur in December, but there is less evidence of the return passage overland. It is assumed that the small parties, or single birds occasionally seen flying west or appearing on the loughs and reservoirs in winter, are also on return moult migration.

Between January and March up to 700 are again in Lindisfarne N N R, usually concentrated in Budle Bay. Numbers fluctuate from year to year and as many as 1000 were there on 2 January 1963. From late March there is a decline, but small parties of non-breeding birds remain throughout the summer.

Two pulli ringed at Goswick in the early 1930s were recovered in their natal area when each was two years old, while a third, marked in Budle Bay, was found two years later in Fife. Another pullus, ringed in Budle Bay in July 1949, was recovered at Southport, Lancashire, in November 1949.

Mandarin *Aix galericulata*

An extremely rare visitor, but there is always the possibility that birds may have escaped from captivity.

Two were reared in a waterfowl collection at Ekeberg, Oslo, Norway, in the summer of 1962. Free-winged, they left at noon on 8 November when frightened by an explosion nearby and had the misfortune to be shot at Seaton Burn at 1700 on the following day; they had flown 901 km in no more than twenty-nine hours. The only other records are of single males at Holburn Moss on 17 October 1971 and at Monk's House pool on 24-25 March 1973.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

An abundant passage and winter visitor that has bred.

According to Hancock (1874) it was 'a plentiful autumn and winter visitant' although 'it never breeds in the district', but Bolam (1912) stated that it was 'gradually assuming the position of a resident'. He suspected breeding on Holy Island, and about the Northumbrian loughs, and in 1932 mentions that proof was obtained in 1913 when a brood of young was seen at Hallington; another brood was discovered there in 1915. In fact, breeding took place in 1912 for Chapman (1924) referring to that year wrote '25 June.– Sprang a wigeon-duck from her brood of eight near Broomlee Loch'. He also gives a detailed account of attempted nesting near the moorland loughs; because of serious predation by otters *Lutra lutra*, this had ended in failure. Nests with eggs were found near 'Sewingshields' Lough (in reality either Halleypike or Grindon) in 1921, and at Broomlee Lough in 1925 and 1926, but since then breeding has been recorded only once – at Embleton in 1949 – although summering birds are seen almost annually.

The Fenham Flats and Budle Bay areas have always attracted the largest numbers of passage and wintering birds, especially since the establishment of Lindisfarne N N R in 1964. Since the winter of 1969-70, more that 15000 have been present during the peak period of October-December and 31000 were noted in November 1975 although, even before the reserve was established, 20000 were counted in November 1948. At the turn of each year there is always a rapid decline and February numbers seldom exceed 5000; only a few hundred remain in March.

Elsewhere it is widely, but thinly spread, the inland haunts at Derwent Reservoir and Grindon Lough being especially favoured. At each locality some 450 may congregate, but up to 150 may be seen at places such as Whittle Dene, Gosforth Park and Holywell Ponds. There is a regular offshore movement, mainly northerly, between August and December with a marked peak in late September and early October; for example, on 4-5 October 1973 1675 passed north off Seaton Sluice and Hauxley in flocks of up to 250.

Ringing recoveries indicate that immigrants originate from both Iceland and Scandinavia.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

An extremely rare visitor.

An adult male shot on Fenham Flats on 8 November 1951 was the first record for the county. Another male remained at Holywell Ponds for almost a month from 24 February 1962 and was occasionally seen roosting on the sea off Hartley; it was last observed on 25 March. In 1968, a male was in Budle Bay, but this record does not appear to have been accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

An uncommon visitor and a casual breeding species.

Hancock (1874) could list 'only two examples of this casual visitant' while in 1932 Bolam described it as 'a rare winter and spring visitant, which has not yet been proved to nest here'. He knew of only twelve occurrences, not all of them being fully authenticated. Since then it has increased steadily, probably due to introductions, small locally, but more substantial elsewhere.

It is seen in all months of the year, recent records involving twenty to thirty birds per annum, either singly or in parties rarely exceeding five. The majority of reports are from the coastal plain, Gosforth Park being the most favoured water, although it often occurs at Grindon Lough.

The first breeding record was in 1965 when six young were reared at Havannah Pond and the only other instance was in 1970 when a pair nested successfully at Derwent Reservoir.

Teal *Anas crecca*

A common passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

According to Bolam it was 'a common resident, breeding in limited numbers' and today the small breeding population is almost entirely confined to moorland mosses and the higher river valleys, much as it was in Bolam's time.

In winter, large numbers congregate on the shallow ponds and flood waters of the coastal plain. Flocks of up to 500 occur regularly at Gosforth Park while 700 were there in February 1971; similarly over 1000 were at Holywell Ponds in February 1959 and November 1966. The largest coastal concentrations are in Budle Bay where as many as 700 may be present in winter, although diurnal roosting flocks numbering up to 250 birds may be seen on the sea off Cresswell and St Mary's Island. Ringing recoveries show that most of these winter immigrants come from Scandinavia and the Baltic states, but that some originate elsewhere is confirmed by the recovery, in December 1928, of a bird ringed as a pullus in Iceland four months earlier. Several birds ringed in winter at Orielton decoy, Pembrokeshire, have been recovered in the county and there is an interesting record of an adult female ringed in the Rhone estuary, France, in December 1957 and recovered near Wooler in December 1959. A pullus ringed in upper Coquetdale in 1975 was recovered in Aberdeenshire in September 1976.

Between August and October regular movements occur offshore, principally in a northerly direction – for example, in autumn 1975 some 2000 were logged moving north off Seaton Sluice.

The only record of the Green-winged Teal *A. c. carolinensis* is of a drake which remained for several days in April 1952 at Monk's House pool.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

An abundant passage and winter visitor, and a well-represented breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident' whose numbers increased greatly during the winter. It is still the commonest breeding duck – there has been no noticeable change in status in the past fifteen years – and it is found throughout the county, among the nesting sites being lakes, ponds, peat bogs, pit heaps and woodland. Locally bred Mallard are probably mainly

resident, although some occasionally pair with winter immigrants and migrate to continental breeding grounds, a phenomenon known as abmigration. This has resulted in pulli ringed at Wallsend Swallow Pond and Seaton Delaval being recovered respectively in the U S S R and the Netherlands.

Coastal movements are most conspicuous in autumn, especially during periods of strong easterly or northeasterly winds: most birds are moving north and up to 500 a day may be counted. Ringing recoveries indicate that the winter immigrant population is of northern Eurasian origin. These visitors begin to arrive in August, but mainly in October and November, and they remain until March or April; numbers reach a maximum in November and December. Holywell Ponds, Whittle Dene, Hallington and Colt Crag reservoirs are examples of inland waters on which up to 500 or more birds regularly congregate and Gosforth Park has been a daytime refuge for approximately a thousand since at least the 1940s – for example, 1224 were counted there on 16 December 1945.

Lindisfarne N N R probably attracts the largest numbers and peak counts of about 1000 are not uncommon. However, in 1945 some 3000 were seen to the north of Holy Island. Diurnal roosting flocks can be encountered on the sea off Bamburgh, Longhoughton, Cresswell and St Mary's Island, usually involving 300-500 individuals at each location.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and a former casual breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a rare resident' and nearly fifty years later Bolam used the same description, adding that it was a 'fairly regular autumn and winter visitant to the Northumberland coast, in small numbers'. In recent years there has been a slow, but steady increase, and it is now recorded in every month, although less frequently in June and July. Most records come from places within ten miles of the coast and principally from Lindisfarne N N R and Holburn Moss, where flocks of twenty or more are not infrequent. Seventy were counted in Budle Bay in 1970 and what is probably the largest concentration ever to have been seen in the county occurred on 17 October 1971 when eighty-two were at Holburn Moss. Small parties are regularly reported from Gosforth Park, Holywell Ponds, Cresswell Ponds and the Northumbrian loughs, and also offshore as they move north, usually with *A. penelope*, in September and October.

Hancock had little doubt that it occasionally bred at Prestwick Carr about the middle of last century and in 1912, Bolam, after reviewing the evidence, concluded that it might still nest in the county. Chapman (1924) mentioned that one or two pairs had bred on the Northumbrian loughs in 1916 and 1917, while in 1932 Bolam expressed the belief that it would soon become established as a regular breeding species. In fact, breeding has been confirmed on only one other occasion when, on 25 May 1945, a duck with four small young was seen on a Northumbrian lough.

A bird ringed in the Netherlands in September 1970, and recovered at Newton-by-the-Sea in November 1971, indicates the origin of some of the visitors.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

An uncommon passage visitor and a rare breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a rare, casual visitant' and in 1912 Bolam gave it the same status. There has been little change since then, for although

it is now recorded annually between March and October, it is most often seen in pairs or small groups. Almost all reports come from the coastal plain, examples being Gosforth Park, Holywell Ponds, Cresswell Ponds, Newton Pool, Holy Island Lough and the subsidence ponds around Ashington.

Hancock suspected that it bred at Prestwick Carr about 1850 and Bolam (1932) thought that it would not be long before the actual finding of a nest was recorded. In fact, breeding was not proved until 1965 when a pair reared eight young at Cresswell. In the following year there were three young, and since then successful nesting has often been suspected in the area, while young have been reared at two other localities.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are three records, all of adult males. In 1948, one was at Holywell Ponds on 17 April, and in 1970, one at Cresswell on 4 June was probably the individual identified at Newton Pool on 30 May; a third was shot at Lindisfarne N N R on 6 September 1971.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

A well-represented passage and summer visitor, but less plentiful in winter; an uncommon breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as breeding regularly at Prestwick Carr and occasionally elsewhere, and Bolam (1912) remarked that it had 'increased so much as to be now not uncommon in many parts of the district'. However, in 1932 he had to report a decline and it is probable that there has been little real change in status since Hancock's time. The small numbers now nesting are mainly confined to the coastal plain and especially to the southeast corner of the county.

During the spring passage, which begins in March and continues into May, small parties are widespread and groups of twenty or more are not uncommon. Autumn passage is apparent by mid-August when small parties can again be seen on many of the lowland ponds; a striking feature is the accumulation of birds at Gosforth Park, fifty or sixty being present throughout September and October. These numbers are occasionally exceeded, as in September 1974 when up to 162 were present. In mild winters, many may remain until early December, but by the end of the year only small parties are in evidence. It is noted offshore annually, but always in very small numbers, usually associating with roosting flocks of *A. platyrhynchos* and *A. penelope*.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

An extremely rare visitor, but there is always the possibility that birds may have escaped from captivity.

An adult female shot on Fenham Flats on 17 March 1857 was the first record for the county. Single birds have been noted in Gosforth Park on three occasions – on 11 February 1950, from 27 April to 17 May 1973, and on 28 April 1976. At Holywell Ponds, three were present on 9 August 1970 and a pair on 6 August 1974. The only other record was of two at Seaton Burn between 8 and 13 July 1961.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A common passage and winter visitor, but a rare breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a not uncommon winter visitant' and he suspected, but could not prove, that it nested occasionally at Capheaton and Gosforth Park. By 1912 Bolam was able to report that it bred 'in a considerable number of places' although it had 'only become thoroughly established as a nesting species within the last twenty years'.

By the early 1940s only a few breeding pairs remained, and after 1945 no breeding was proved for about twenty years until a pair nested at Pallinsburn, and two pairs reared young on Gosforth Park lake in the 1960s. Since then one or two pairs have bred annually at both of these localities.

Visitors begin to arrive in September; for example, by 18 September 1976 there were 151 on the Northumbrian loughs, and fifty at Gosforth Park, as well as smaller flocks elsewhere. Numbers continue to increase and reach their peak between November and March, when parties of a hundred or more are seen regularly at Gosforth Park (252 were there on 6 November 1976). Large flocks, often well over a hundred, are also found, though somewhat irregularly, on many other waters notably at Seaton Burn, Grindon Lough, Hartburn Lake, Holywell Ponds, and Derwent and Whittle Dene reservoirs. Seaton Burn attracted 330 on 26 February 1961, but the largest recorded concentration was 565 at Derwent Reservoir on 12 December 1976. Most of the visitors have departed by late April, but, in addition to the nesting pairs, a few non-breeding birds remain throughout the summer. A few may be seen offshore, mainly as small groups during times of passage.

Three recoveries of birds ringed in eastern Europe, one in Russia and two in Latvia, indicate the origin of some of the visitors.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

An extremely rare visitor.

All records almost certainly refer to the same individual. On 13 February 1977 a drake was located at Derwent Reservoir where it remained until 26 March. It was at Gosforth Park between 3-25 April and on 12 May. In May, it also appeared at Wallsend Swallow Pond (from 9-11), Holywell Ponds (from 14-22) and at Capheaton Lake (on 29). It stayed at the last locality until 14 June and was not seen again until late August when it reappeared at Derwent Reservoir.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

An extremely rare visitor, but there is always the possibility that birds may have escaped from captivity.

An adult male killed near Hexham prior to 1827 and figured by Selby (1833) was the first recorded in the county. No more were reported until 1960 when two were at Gosforth Park on 13 February. The only other record was of one at Holywell Ponds on 18 October 1970.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

A common passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Breeding was first proved in 1858 when Hancock himself confirmed that young were reared at Wallington. Within a few years it had become established as a breeding species and Bolam (1912) was able to report that it was nesting, or had nested, at several places including Wallington, Bolam, Capheaton and Colt Crag. By 1932, it was breeding at most of the loughs, reservoirs and smaller ponds, but as there are now probably only about fifty pairs nesting in the county, there must have been a subsequent reduction in the breeding population. Recent observations suggest that it may, once again, be on the increase, especially at Holywell Ponds.

Most waters hold non-breeding birds in summer, occasionally in some numbers as at Colt Crag where there were a hundred on 1 July 1975. Numbers begin to increase in late summer, the first arrivals showing a preference for Colt Crag, Whittle Dene and Hallington reservoirs, where as many as 200 may have gathered by late August, A peak is reached in early January, or February, and Whittle Dene often attracts the largest flocks – for example 420 were there on 16 February 1969, 389 on 10 January 1970 and 454 on 4 December 1976. Large gatherings, often well over a hundred, occur on other waters, notably Holywell Ponds, Gosforth Park and the Northumbrian loughs, at this time. Smaller numbers are found on almost every lake and pond, but it is rarely seen on the rivers. The winter flocks are slow to disperse and parties of more than fifty are of regular occurrence in late April and early May. A record of 500 on the Tyne at Scotswood, during severe weather, on 15 February 1942 is unique in that neither before, nor since, that date have they been seen on this heavily polluted part of the river. They are only occasionally seen on the sea although they sometimes appear on offshore passage.

An adult female ringed in Vassa, Finland, on 5 July 1965 was found dead at Birtley, North Tyne, twenty-six days later, thus providing an indication of the origin of some of the county's visitors. Several pulli ringed at Alnwick between 1913-15 were recovered within the county and two were found in Cumberland; another, ringed in August 1915, provided an example of abmigration when it was reported from Kuusamo, Finland, in June 1917.

Scaup *Aythya marila*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'abundant, in severe winters' and Bolam (1932) confirmed this, adding that it was 'one of the most numerous ducks upon the coast'.

However, within a few years it had become relatively scarce and until recently, with a single exception, no large assemblies were reported. Parties continued to arrive every winter, but they rarely exceeded ten and were widely scattered. The exception was in 1956 when, after the freezing of the Baltic, large numbers reached the county, appearing in flocks of various sizes all along the coast. On 16-17 February many thousands flew over Holy Island, passing between the Snook and Beal. In the last few years larger flocks have appeared from time to time, although none remained for long. More than 350 were off Lindisfarne N N R in November 1969 and 150 were there on 29 January 1973; 110 were at Tweedmouth on 22 February 1970.

Passage occurs in autumn, birds moving mainly north, possibly to join the large flocks wintering in the Firth of Forth. In some years it is quite marked, as on 18 November 1962 when over 850 passed St Mary's Island in six hours. Birds are not uncommon in summer, usually in ones or twos and at a variety of locations. From time to time a few are seen on inland waters, and there is an exceptional record of forty-four at Holywell Ponds on 17 March 1956.

Eider *Somateria mollissima*

A common breeding resident.

Historically, this is perhaps the county's most famous bird. It is first mentioned as long ago as the 7th century in connection with St Cuthbert, who lived for several years as a hermit on the Farne Islands, and who laid down rules for its protection during the nesting season. By the 13th century the ducks were being exploited for their eggs and down by the resident monks

and persecution over the centuries probably resulted in a considerable decline for Hancock (1874) described it as 'not by any means abundant'. Bolam (1912) says that it was only the protection granted in the late 1880s that allowed 150 pairs to breed on the Farne Islands in 1896 and he mentions that although, in Selby's time, small numbers used to breed on Coquet Island, they ceased to do so regularly about 1840. Happily, by 1932 he was able to write that it has 'greatly increased within recent years and is again establishing itself on Coquet Island'.

The increase continued, but a decline during the Second World War was probably a result of excessive egg collecting while adults were also used as targets for machine gun practice. The subsequent thirty years has seen a steady increase, but, because of a shortage of safe nesting sites, the population is now probably at saturation level. In 1976, 1568 nests were found on the Farne Islands, and 498 on Coquet Island, and with some fifty pairs nesting on the mainland to the north of Foxton, the total of about 2100 pairs is the largest breeding count ever made in the county.

Recoveries show that dispersal from the colonies ranges as far north as Aberdeenshire, and as far south as Hartlepool, Co Durham, and there is proof of ducks crossing the North Sea to and from Denmark, and to the Netherlands, but the majority appear to be sedentary. They apparently live to a considerable age, the oldest marked Farne Island bird being at least twenty years old. In late summer, large gatherings of adults and young can be seen between Berwick and Amble, but especially in Lindisfarne N N R where 3000 may be present between July and September. Large concentrations of moulting drakes can also be seen at Lindisfarne from late May onwards. Counts outside the breeding season show that some 4000 are spread along the whole coastline, although numbers are rather small to the south of Hauxley.

It is extremely rare inland, having been noted on only about six occasions since 1769. In recent years, two were at Catcleugh in 1953 following an easterly gale and one was at Whittle Dene in November 1968.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*

A rare visitor.

Between 1861 and 1889 ten were reported, all males and all in the vicinity of Holy Island and the Farne Islands. Over eighty years passed before another appeared and again it was a male. It was first seen near Coquet Island on 1 May 1972 and remained in the area until mid-September, often in, or very near, Amble harbour. On 11 January 1974 an immature female was found dead on Fenham Flats.

Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri*

An extremely rare visitor.

From 19 October to 27 November 1941 one to three diving ducks were observed in Beadnell Bay. They were never seen at close quarters, but, from their size, plumage and habits, were described as resembling immature Steller's Eiders.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

An extremely rare visitor.

Three immatures (two identified as males) that appeared off the Farne Islands on 2 December 1886 were all shot within a few days (Bolam, 1912). There are no other records.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a winter visitant. Not uncommon on the coast'. Today, however, although it is seen regularly off the coast between October and April, it is questionable whether the description of 'another common passage migrant and winter visitant', accorded it by Bolam (1932), still applies. Apart from passage, it only occurs in numbers between Bamburgh and Holy Island. Restless behaviour makes accurate counting difficult, but more than 300 were in that area on 4 April 1968, and the peak counts have been of this same order in every winter since 1973. About 500 were present on 18 October 1960, 9 December 1974 and 6 December 1976.

Only small parties occur elsewhere on the coast, but during October and November up to fifty per day may be observed moving north with other ducks at, for example, Hauxley and Seaton Sluice. Occasional birds may linger during the summer. Bolam (1932) described its habit of following 'our larger streams a long way inland' and today it may be encountered on lakes and reservoirs in groups of one to three, but it is rarely seen on rivers. Cresswell Ponds have attracted up to six individuals in recent years.

A most unusual record was of an immature female that spent from 9-28 October 1975 on the lake in Tynemouth Park. It became very tame despite being often harassed by radio-controlled model boats!

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

A common passage and winter visitor.

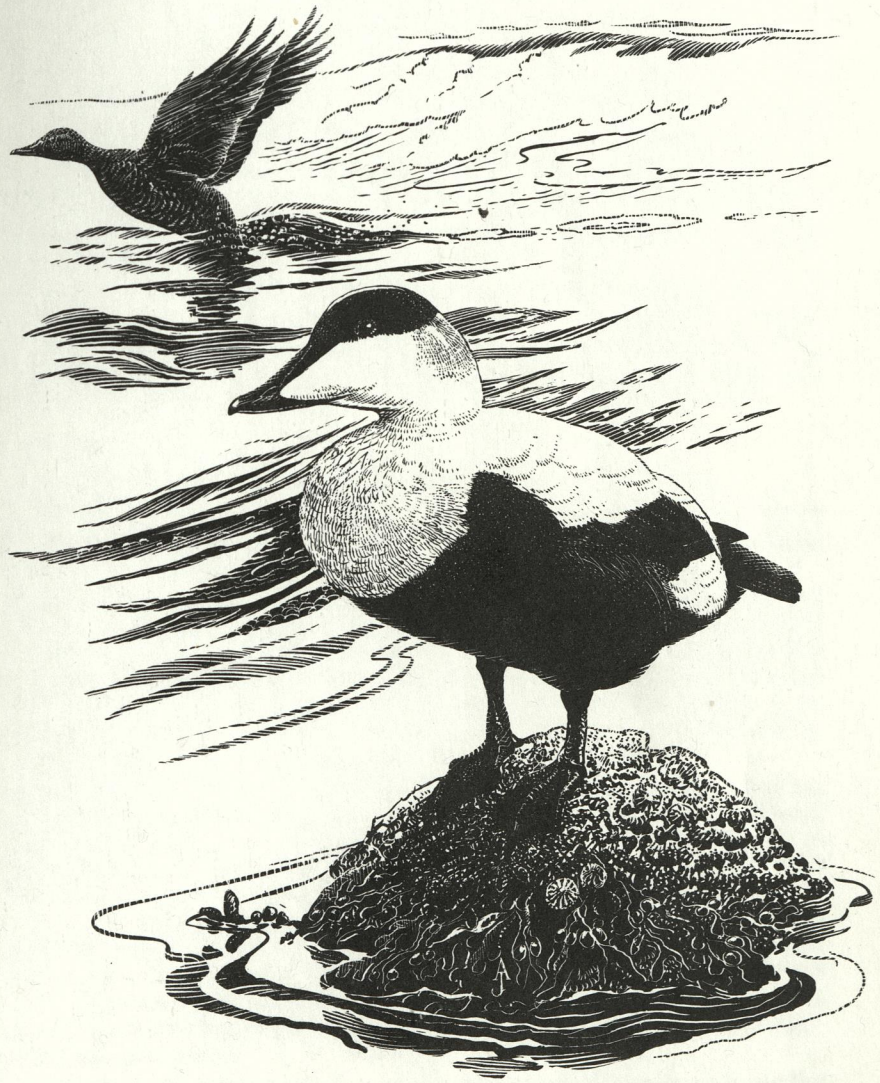
Hancock (1874) knew it as 'a winter visitant. Not uncommon' and Bolam described it as 'a regular winter visitant and passage migrant on the coast, often in very large flocks', adding that 'considerable flocks (chiefly of immature birds) are also frequent offshore during summer'.

This held true for many years, and as recently as the early 1960s the numbers wintering off Lindisfarne N N R and Bamburgh were regularly in excess of 1000. There was then a steady decline and in 1970 and 1971 the maximum counts fell to as little as 200. 1968 was an exceptional year and the flock of 2500 present in the Lindisfarne area in January is the largest on record.

However, in 1973 the numbers again increased, reaching 1340 in January 1974, a maximum for recent years. Small parties winter elsewhere along the coast, but these, too, showed a corresponding decline. Until about 1960 a flock of up to 250 appeared every winter off Seaton Sluice, but it gradually diminished; since 1973, however, there have been indications that it may again be increasing.

Throughout the summer, but more particularly from June onward, small gatherings may appear anywhere along the coast. Sometimes numbers are large, as in late July 1968, when 650 were in Druridge Bay, and on 15 July 1972, when there were about 700 off Cresswell. There is considerable movement, principally in a northerly direction, throughout the autumn, and in most years it begins as early as June. For example, in thirty hours of watching off Seaton Sluice at the end of July 1968, 1420 were counted, all heading north, while from the same intensively-watched station 5852 were logged moving north, and 632 south, in the autumn of 1974.

It is only occasionally seen inland, and then usually singly, so the record of four males and eight females at Hallington on 29 April 1961 is of particular interest.



Eider

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are four records, all of adult males. Between 8 and 11 December 1946 one was off Cheswick, and from 25 October 1973 until 16 February 1974 one remained offshore between Bamburgh and Ross; both were in the company of flocks of *M. nigra* and *M. fusca*. On 5 October 1974 one flew north past Coquet Island, and during late October 1977 one was occasionally seen off Holy Island.

Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Hancock (1874) and Bolam both described it as a 'winter visitant', though not so common as *M. nigra*, and this still holds good, for its status has changed very little, if at all, in the last hundred years.

Although sightings may occur at any time, they are most frequent between August and January, often with a peak in October and November, and are usually of single birds or very small parties. Some may be overlooked among the distant flocks of *M. nigra*, but the total number present at any one time rarely exceeds fifty and these are widely scattered. The largest gathering to be reported in recent years was of about a hundred off Bamburgh and Ross in the winter of 1973-74.

Passage movements along the coast, with other sea ducks, can be seen between July and November, but again the numbers involved are small. However, 160 were logged off Seaton Sluice, moving mainly north, during October 1974. Only very rarely are individuals recorded away from the sea, the most recent being one at Monk's House pool on 22 October 1975.

Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Hancock (1874) knew it as 'a common winter visitant' and Bolam (1932) described it as 'common along the coast, as well as on most of our inland waters'.

It remains a winter visitor, well distributed all along the coast from October to March, usually in small parties. It shows a preference for Tweedmouth where 200 can regularly be seen and where, in January 1973, as many as 300 were present. Big flocks occur occasionally elsewhere, but only in exceptional conditions, as on 22-23 October 1972, when 400 sought shelter from northeasterly gales at the North Low on Holy Island, and on 9 November 1975, when 200 rested in Druridge Bay on their way north.

It is seen regularly inland, often being found on quite small ponds and on rivers. On the larger expanses of water, such as Derwent, Whittle Dene, Colt Crag and Hallington reservoirs and Capheaton Lake, gatherings of thirty or forty are usual. Fifty-three were at Colt Crag on 7 November 1970 and fifty at Carham in December 1973. The first visitors arrive in September, but the main influx is not until October. It figures conspicuously, often associating with Scaup, in the northerly movements that take place offshore each autumn – for example, 627 were counted off Seaton Sluice between 6 and 13 November 1971 and 464 on 26 October 1974. By early April most have left, but a few linger into May and records of immature birds in summer are not infrequent.

Two recoveries of birds ringed as young in Sweden and Norway indicate the origin of some of these visitors.

Smew *Mergus albellus*

A rare passage and winter visitor.

Selby (1831) described it as 'very rare in the adult state' and Bolam listed about thirty occurrences up to 1932.

In recent times it has been recorded almost annually, usually during hard weather in January and February, but rarely are more than two seen together. Noteworthy years were 1947, when seven or eight were at Whittle Dene during January, and 1976, when at least fourteen individuals were seen in the county. Although Whittle Dene is apparently most favoured, it has appeared on most of the larger inland waters and there are a few instances of it on saltwater at Holy Island, Seahouses, Newton, Craster, Warkworth and Seaton Sluice.

Adult males are heavily outnumbered by brownheaded birds, most of them probably immatures.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor which has bred on two occasions.

Successful nesting occurred in the north of the county in 1975 and 1977, but apart from this its status has changed little in the sixty-five years since Bolam (1912) described it as 'a winter visitant, common everywhere upon the coast, but much less frequently seen inland than the Goosander'. The most favoured area is Skate Road where, in most years, parties begin to assemble in late summer. About fifty were there on 22 August 1964, thirty-five on 27 July 1969 and as many as 166 on 28 August 1973. On 4 August 1974 a party of thirty was seen to be flightless, perhaps indicating that these gatherings involve moulting birds.

The Lindisfarne N N R–Bamburgh area now regularly holds up to a hundred in winter and they may not disperse until well into May. Elsewhere, smaller groups are often seen offshore, especially at Alnmouth, but south of Druridge Bay it is less common.

Coastal movements are recorded annually, mainly in autumn, when most birds are seen passing north. They are most marked in October and November, as in October 1974 when ninety-five flew north off Seaton Sluice. Occasionally such movements occur at other times – for example, in mid-July 1968 when this, and other duck species, were involved in a remarkable out-of-season northerly passage.

It is rare on freshwater in the county, but in recent years it has been seen at Hallington and Derwent reservoirs, Grindon and Greenlee loughs, Gosforth Park, and on the Tweed at Carham.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

In Hancock's time (1874) it was no more than 'an occasional winter visitant', but numbers gradually increased and, according to Bolam, by 1912 it had become 'a regular winter visitant'. Twenty years later he remarked that, in recent years a few were lingering on into the summer and in 1941 a nest was found in upper Coquetdale.

This was the first record of breeding south of the Scottish border and, although the nest was robbed and no young were reared, success was achieved two years later. Breeding continued in upper Coquetdale, spread within a

few years to north Tynedale and by the late 1950s into south Tynedale. It is now firmly established in all three valleys, with small numbers breeding in the upper and middle reaches of most other river systems. Despite persecution by gamekeepers, about 150 pairs probably attempt to nest in the county.

Numbers are at their lowest in September, possibly because the breeding birds leave before the winter visitors arrive. Flocks assemble from October onward, when parties of up to forty can be seen on most of the larger loughs and reservoirs; if these freeze, birds move readily to the rivers. Larger gatherings occur from time to time as on 19 January 1969 when seventy-three were on Greenlee Lough. A census taken in February 1970 revealed that at least 275 were in the southwest of the county, where the loughs and reservoirs are concentrated, and of these 106 were on Whittle Dene. In recent years, Hallington has attracted almost a hundred. The only other place where sizeable flocks may be seen is on the Tweed where up to fifty occur regularly, while 120 were noted at Coldstream in January 1972. Records from coastal areas are increasing and single birds, or small parties, now appear regularly on the lowland ponds. It is still rather unusual, however, to see them on saltwater, although there have recently been minor offshore movements in October and November.

Ringing and wing-tagging of pulli has demonstrated that the birds disperse widely, but may return to their natal areas from their second summer onward (Meek and Little, 1977). Recoveries have come from many areas of Scotland, some from the extreme north, and as far south as Yorkshire, while an adult female was found dead in North Wales during the breeding season, three years after it had been ringed while escorting its young on the North Tyne. Abmigration and moult migration have been suggested as reasons for four recoveries in Fennoscandia, of birds ringed as pulli, but more data are needed before this is confirmed.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

An extremely rare visitor.

After being introduced from America, it now breeds in several areas of the midlands and southwest England. One was at Annstead from 2-17 August 1964, while in 1974, one, first seen at Holywell Ponds on 30 May, remained in the Gosforth Park and Holywell area until 23 November. One was seen in the same locality between 13 April and 1 July 1975 while another was in Gosforth Park from 23-31 August 1977.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

A rare passage visitor which has bred.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a spring-and-autumn migrant', adding that he knew of twenty-five specimens taken in Northumberland and Durham between 1831 and 1868. Bolam (1912) stated that it was a 'regular' migrant, occurring 'at an average rate of about one or two each year', but in 1932 he could cite only two further records.

There have been only ten subsequent records; five of these were between 30 May and 3 July and the remaining five between 14 September and 4 November, although one of the latter birds, which appeared at Kyloe on 3 November 1957, remained until the end of that year.

It has nested only once – at Newbiggin, near Hexham, in 1841. However, a female shot at Gosforth in June 1905 was thought to be a breeding bird while nesting was suspected on a number of other occasions, Bolam mentioning 'Kyloe, and Detchant Woods, Chillingham, and Alnwick parks, and perhaps Howick Hall' as likely localities.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are only three records. An adult male trapped in the deer park at Alnwick a few days before 11 May 1866 was the first British occurrence, while on 14 May 1947 an immature male was shot at West Kyloe, Beal, having been in the area for several days. On 30 April 1971 two were seen soaring over Ford; this record was accepted by the *County Records Committee*, but not by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

An extremely rare visitor which formerly bred.

Wallis (1769) remarked that it bred 'in the alpine, and some of the vale, woods' and that it was 'in the greatest numbers in the west and north-west parts, where many of them usually join company, and in towering undulating flights look out for young poultry . . .' By 1831, however, Selby described it as rare and it probably ceased to breed about that time. Bolam (1912) could list only four precise records, the last being about 1863, but in 1932 he added a further record – one trapped at Featherstone Castle in, or about, 1869, which 'was probably the last Northumbrian kite'.

In fact, it was not until 29 March 1944, when one was trapped and killed on Little Tosson moor, near Rothbury, that another was recorded. Since then there have been four further sightings of single birds: on Holy Island on 15 May 1947, at Duddo on 22 September 1955, near Belford on 20 April 1962 and at St Mary's Island on 26 October 1974.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaetus albicilla*

A rare visitor not recorded in the county for over fifty years.

There are some sixteen well-authenticated records between about 1819 and 2 December 1923, when one was shot near Blyth, although a number of unidentified eagles reported during this period were more likely to be this species rather than *Aquila chrysaetos*. All the dated records were between November and March, seven of them being from coastal localities. However, no fewer than five have been seen at Chillingham where one was shot in about 1819, and two more in the following year, while two spent several weeks in the park from January 1921.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A rare passage visitor which formerly bred.

Past authorities such as Wallis (1769), Selby (1831) and Canon Tristram (in Bolam, 1912) all asserted that it nested annually on many of the Northumbrian mosses, among breeding sites being Coldmartin Lough, Kimmer Lough, Alnwick Moor, Newham Lough and Greenlee Lough. In 1841, Selby noted it was 'now rare' and by 1874 Hancock had to state that, although it had been common a few years before, it had 'almost disappeared under the policy of the game-preserver' while the last breeding records that Bolam could trace appear to have been in the early 1880s.

It was some sixty years before it was again recorded in the county, one being trapped near Thropton on 15 October 1942. Between 1952 and 1977 there were thirty-six records all, apart from two at Cresswell on 18 August 1962 and a pair which summered in the south of the county in 1976, referring to single birds. It has been noted in every month except February and

December, with a marked peak of nineteen sightings in May; the most frequented localities are Lindisfarne N N R and Holywell Ponds with eight and seven records respectively.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor and a rare breeding species.

Selby (1831) described it as 'not uncommon' and it apparently bred regularly on many of the Northumberland moors. However, by 1874, Hancock, relating that it formerly bred on the Newcastle Town Moor, was only able to class it as 'a casual visitant', Bolam (1912) blaming its virtual disappearance on 'the advent of the gamekeeper, with his traps and guns'. The last confirmed breeding record listed by Bolam was in about 1873, near Wooler, although a pair of harriers, probably of this species, nested unsuccessfully at Prestwick Carr in 1897.

It was to be sixty years before breeding was again attempted. In 1957, a male spent the latter part of April in the border forests, and in the following year at least one young was reared. The breeding population increased to a maximum of about eight pairs in the mid-1960s and paired birds were also seen in other areas such as Alnwick Moor. The 1970s have once more seen a decline, and breeding has not been confirmed since 1972. This decline remains unexplained as the species is expanding elsewhere in Britain and Ireland.

Bolam (1932) could list only nine occurrences of wandering or migrant birds in the preceding twenty years and the next twenty brought a similar number of records. However, from the 1950s onwards, there was an upsurge in the number of sightings with about fifty between 1952 and 1971. The majority were in moorland areas, especially the Northumbrian loughs, or at the coast, particularly in Lindisfarne N N R. The increase has continued during the last five years, the winter of 1973-74, for example, producing a total of about fifteen. The proportion of continental birds is unknown, but some immigration undoubtedly occurs.

A pullus ringed in the Kielder Forest in June 1965 was recovered in Ayrshire in January 1969, while a wing-tagged bird seen at Cresswell early in 1977 had been marked as a pullus in Orkney in 1976.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

An extremely rare summer visitor which has bred.

Selby (1831, 1841) described it as 'very rare' and an 'occasional visitor' although in 1833 he remarked that he had 'taken it in Northumberland, where it breeds upon moors or open lands'. By 1874, Hancock thought that it was 'probably only a casual visitant' and, with the exception of 1905 when evidence strongly suggests that a pair tried to nest on the Coquetdale moors, there were no records until 1935 when one was seen on Holy Island on 19 April. It was not recorded again until 1952 when a pair bred in southwest Northumberland.

Birds were again seen in the southwest in 1953 and 1954, while in 1955 a pair frequented upper Coquetdale. It was, however, the young conifer plantations of the North Tyne valley that were to provide the most attractive habitat. As early as 1952, occasional birds were noted in that area, but it was not until 1959 that a pair was proved to have reared young. Except in 1963 when none was seen, breeding was confirmed annually until 1966, when there were two pairs. In 1967, males were seen in two different areas, but

neither was thought to be associated with a nest. In 1968, the only record was of a male near Bellingham on 9 August. This was the last confirmed sighting in the county.

During its occupation of the North Tyne area, it was always associated with *C. cyaneus*, often nesting on the same hillside. This was, in fact, the first time this century that the two species have been known to nest in such close proximity in Britain.

A pullus ringed in the North Tyne valley on 8 July 1961 was recovered near Paris, France, on 19 August 1961.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

A rare visitor and breeding species.

Both Hancock and Bolam described it as 'a rare casual visitant' and could only list some fourteen definite records, all between 1831 and 1897. There were no further sightings until 1952 when one was at Bamburgh on 16 May, but in the winter of 1957-58 two were accidentally killed during pigeon shoots at Blagdon and Stamfordham. In 1969, one was seen near Rothbury on 4 October and another at Blagdon on 2 December, while in the early 1970s there was a remarkable increase in records. It has bred in the county since 1972, although rarely successfully.

With the continental population of Goshawks at a low ebb, it is extremely unlikely that this attempted colonisation has been natural and it is believed that deliberate releases by falconers account for most, if not all, of the individuals concerned.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

Hancock (1874) could describe it as 'a common resident' although he noted that it was 'not nearly so plentiful as formerly'. This was doubtless the result of increasing gamekeeping activity, Bolam (1912) confirming that it would be 'much commoner . . . were it not for the numbers that are destroyed every year'.

This situation remained virtually unchanged until the mid-1950s when, for example, as many as five pairs were attempting to nest in Gosforth Park. Thereafter, the population underwent a dramatic decline, since attributed to the increased use of organo-chlorine pesticides. In several years during the early 1960s there was no confirmed breeding in the county and, in fact, very few birds were seen. When, eventually, restrictions were placed on the use of such pesticides, the numbers of breeding Sparrowhawks began to increase so that by 1973 twenty-five pairs were nesting in a study area of some 91 sq kms in the southwest of the county. A return to breeding populations approaching those of the pre-pesticide era was also indicated by figures for study areas in the border forests and in agricultural south-central Northumberland. Ringing of nestlings has indicated an apparently random post-juvenile dispersal of up to 105 km and, during the autumn, birds may often be seen over such unexpected habitat as open moorland.

Sparrowhawks of continental origin undoubtedly occur, as evidenced by a number of coastal records in April–May and August–October, involving some birds migrating high over the sea.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

An uncommon visitor and a rare casual breeding species.

Selby (1831) wrote that 'in the northern counties of England the Buzzard cannot be considered as a common species. I have occasionally met with it during summer in the neighbourhood of the Cheviots'. Hancock (1874) said that although it had bred in the district, the increase in gamekeeping had reduced its status to that of 'a rare casual visitant' and this was confirmed by Bolam in 1912. In 1932, Bolam noted that during the 1914-18 war, when most gamekeepers were withdrawn from their usual occupation, a few successful nesting attempts were made, but it now again had 'a price upon its head'.

Since then it has been recorded more often, but, even today, the average annual number of sightings is only about fifteen and, although records of summering birds are quite frequent, breeding has only been confirmed in 1967, 1971 (two pairs) and 1972. Although gamekeeping activities must be partially responsible, the reasons for the lack of a regular breeding population remain unknown, especially when the abundance of the species in the Lake District and southwest Scotland is considered. Doubtless wandering birds from these populations provide many of the county records, but the usual months for sightings are March–April and August–October and this, together with occasional records of birds over the sea or found dead on the shore, suggests that some are of continental origin.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

A rare passage and winter visitor.

Hancock (1874) could list only one county record, a bird taken at Walbottle in October 1831. Bolam (1912), however, knew of fifty-three occurrences since 1875 and mentions the years 1875-77, 1888 and 1903 as being those in which it was most frequently recorded; in 1932 he was able to add the winter of 1915-16 to this list.

Since 1932 it has been definitely identified in only nine years with a maximum of four in any one year. Despite large influxes elsewhere on the east coast in the autumns of 1966, 1973 and 1974, records in the county for these periods, and the succeeding springs, totalled only six. The majority of sightings are in winter in moorland areas where the Short-tailed Vole population is exploited. Nevertheless, there are occasional records of immigrants in autumn and one of a returning bird over Coquet Island in May 1974.

Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*

An extremely rare visitor.

There is a single record of an immature, shot at Cresswell on 31 October 1885, and now in the Hancock Museum collections.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

A rare visitor.

The only evidence that it has bred in the county is the statement of Wallis (1769) that 'on the highest and steepest part of Cheviot . . . the eagle sometimes has its airy' although Bolam (1912) mentions a tradition among Cheviot shepherds that it formerly nested above Langlee, on the Wooler Water. He was able to list about a dozen records of vagrant eagles up to 1912, but several of these were not specifically identified. He could add no further records in 1932 and, in fact, none was seen until 1950 when one was present from February to May around Christianbury Crags, on the Northumberland–Cumberland border, and it, or another, was seen occasionally

in the Cheviots. Single birds were also seen in April 1951 and May 1957 and one wintered in the Cheviots in 1961-62.

Since 1968 its status has changed. Single immatures, or on occasions two together, have been seen almost every winter, and sometimes also in summer, in the Cheviots, the Simonside Hills and the Kielder area.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A rare passage visitor which sometimes remains during the summer.

Hancock (1874) stated that it occurred 'not unfrequently', although prior to the drainage of Prestwick Carr 'it was almost an annual migrant'. Bolam (1912) described it as a 'casual visitant in autumn and spring, occasionally appearing both in summer and winter', noting, in 1932, that it had been 'so often seen or killed . . . as to make it unnecessary to recapitulate individual occurrences'.

Since 1932 there have been at least seventy-seven records, all except two between 10 April and 16 October. The exceptions were one at Tarset on 22 November 1957 and another which remained in upper Coquetdale from about 11 October to 3 November 1961. Forty-seven of the records involved birds first sighted in the months of April to June, although several of them stayed for a considerable time, especially on the North Tyne and in Coquetdale. Twelve sightings have been made in September.

It has been recorded each year since 1965 although numbers vary considerably. For example, only single birds were noted in 1973 and 1974, but in 1975 there were seven and in 1976 no fewer than fourteen.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

An extremely rare visitor.

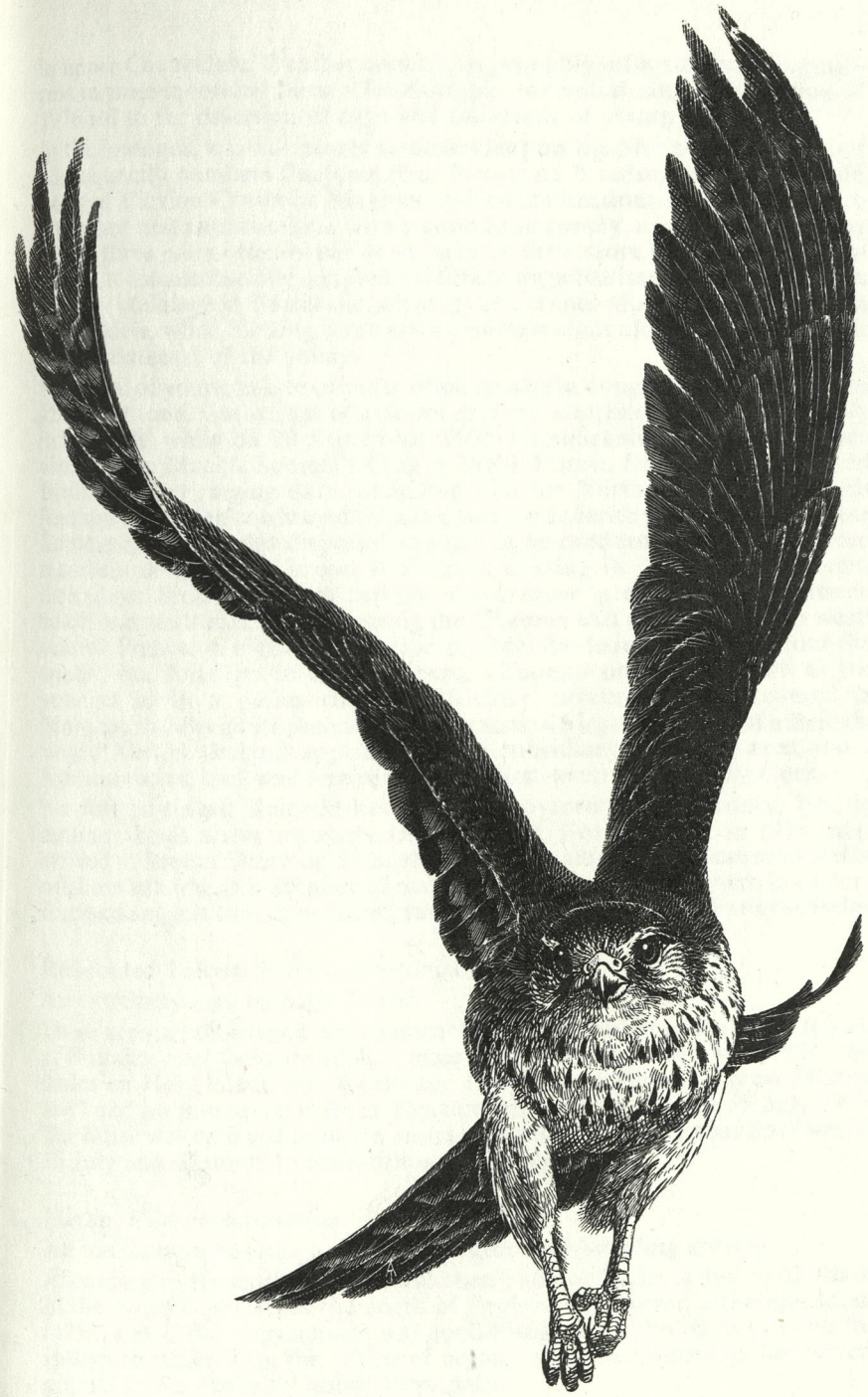
One seen at Hauxley on 19 October 1963 was accepted by the *County Records Committee*, but not by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

A well-represented passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident' whose numbers in autumn are 'augmented by arrivals from abroad' and today the situation remains very much the same.

Numbers breeding in moorland areas depend to a large extent on the Short-tailed Vole. These mammals experience violent population fluctuations or 'plagues' and when their numbers are high, as often happens in young coniferous plantations, Kestrels move in to exploit the food source. Plagues in the borders in 1875-77 and 1890-93 resulted in the appearance of large numbers of Kestrels which, Bolam said, 'remained to nest in almost every available spot' although they never resulted in any permanent increase. The most recent plague reached a peak in 1972 when, for example, at least nine pairs bred in the Alwin valley: in 1973, however, there were only four pairs. Certain traditional crag sites are used every year, almost without exception, but during a vole plague other less suitable, and often more accessible sites are occupied. Bolam knew of cases of colonial breeding on some of the moors, quoting as an example seven nests within a distance of some thirty-seven metres at Crag Lough. Such behaviour has not been recorded recently although in 1975 two pairs nested within thirty-seven metres on a crag in Kielder Forest and in 1977 three pairs reared twelve young in a small wood



Merlin

in upper Coquetdale. Weather conditions probably influence breeding success in these moorland birds – for example, torrential rain in the spring of 1976 led to the desertion of eggs and the death of young in the nest.

In the lowlands, it is not nearly so dependent on the Short-tailed Vole and consequently numbers fluctuate less. Favourite breeding sites are the old nests of Carrion Crows or Magpies and concentrations may occur where abundant nest sites combine with a good food supply, as at Prestwick Carr where three pairs often breed in an area of little more than a square kilometre. It has successfully adapted to increasing urbanisation and pairs often nest on buildings in Newcastle, on shipyard cranes along the Tyne and on gas holders, while hunting birds are a common sight along the major roads in the southeast of the county.

Dispersal of young in late summer often results in congregations in areas of abundant food. Gatherings of a dozen or more are quite frequent, especially in the hills, while on 20 September 1975 a remarkable total of fifty was visible from Muckle Samuel's Crag in Wark Forest. Snow (1968) analysed British Kestrel ringing data, including that for Northumberland, and his findings have been confirmed by subsequent recoveries (Mead, 1973). These findings show that this dispersal appears to be random up to 150 km, even members of the same brood sometimes moving in completely different directions. Birds travelling further afield move predominantly between south and southeast, some crossing the Channel and passing through west-central France. A higher proportion of older birds remain throughout the winter, but some go to the continent, although not as far south as the younger birds; a pullus ringed in Kielder, however, was recovered in Morocco in May of its second year, the first African recovery of a British-ringed Kestrel. Ireland appears to be a subsidiary wintering area and a Northumbrian bird was recovered in its first winter in County Cork.

No foreign-ringed Kestrels have been recovered in the county, but, in autumn, birds arrive regularly from the east. For example, in 1974 three arrived at Seaton Sluice on 14 September while single birds were seen on the offshore islands on a number of occasions. Recoveries elsewhere in eastern England suggest that these immigrants probably come from Fennoscandia.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

An extremely rare passage visitor.

There are six records: an immature near Morpeth in August 1858, a female at Hauxley on 9 October 1868, a male near Corbridge on 1 May 1921, two males on Holy Island on 16 October 1949, one at Tynemouth on 28 June 1967 and an immature male at Lynemouth from 14 June to 18 July 1973. The latter was believed to be the same bird which was seen near Earsdon on 15 July and again at Lynemouth on 21 September.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

According to Hancock (1874) it was then 'rapidly disappearing, by the hand of the gamekeeper, from the north of England'. However, although Bolam (1932) stated that persecution was continuing, and although it was another species to suffer from the effects of organo-chlorine poisoning, the current population is probably about forty pairs.

The breeding population has been the subject of research since the early 1960s, coverage being intensified during the 1970s (Newton, Meek and Little, 1978). The number of nests found in the seasons 1974-76 varied only

from thirty to thirty-three, such consistency occurring even though some were in different territories. It is very faithful to traditional nesting places; out of thirty-seven territories known to have been used between 1880-1940 (data from egg collections and the literature) twenty-five were still occupied in 1971-76.

Large-scale afforestation is probably detrimental. At least five traditional nesting territories are known to have been destroyed by tree growth, but probably more serious is the loss of feeding habitat caused by planting, since eighty-three per cent of the five hundred or so prey items found at sites during April–July consisted of 'open-country' species, forty-eight per cent being Meadow Pipits. The importance of access to open land was further emphasised by the fact that none was found nesting more than 1 km in from the edge of an afforested area. Breeding success is significantly higher in grassy sheepwalks than in heather moors or young plantations. This is closely associated with the fact that, in sheepwalks, it uses the old nests of Carrion Crows rather than nesting on the ground and is, therefore, much less vulnerable to natural predation.

Clutches were made up of three to five eggs, once six, and broods consisted of one to five young, mostly three or four. A significant improvement in the proportion of nests which produced young, and in the proportion of broods containing more than three young, occurred between the periods 1961-70, 1971-73 and 1974-76. This coincided with a reduction in the use of organo-chlorine pesticide compounds in Britain as a whole, but, nevertheless, substantial levels of DDE and PCB are still recorded in unhatched eggs and are thought to have reduced breeding success.

It generally returns to its moorland haunts from late February onwards, coincident with the return of Meadow Pipits. There are occasional records, however, of birds in, or close to nesting territories during the winter months. Of 394 nestlings ringed between 1961 and 1976 twenty-three (six per cent) had been recovered by the end of 1976; nineteen were found between August and November, two in March, one in May and one in June. All were in north Britain, eighteen of them within 100 km of their birthplaces, but in various directions, and with the exception of the May bird, were on farmland or sea coast, at lower elevations than their breeding areas. The earliest autumn recovery on low ground was on 8 August, but there are four others in August, indicating that Merlins leave the moors before the Meadow Pipits. In all, sixteen birds were recovered in their first year, two in their second, one in its third, two in their fourth, one in its fifth and one in its ninth. This last is the oldest Merlin recovered under the national ringing scheme and was also the most distant (280 km) of the Northumberland birds.

It is not uncommon on the coast during autumn and winter, Lindisfarne NNR being the most popular area. Up to nine have been recorded there, the abundant small waders providing an admirable food supply. Recoveries at Hexham, Corbridge and Spittal of birds ringed as pulli in Yorkshire and Cumberland, indicate that Merlins from elsewhere in Britain visit the county. It is also suspected that there is some immigration from northern Europe in autumn and winter.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

A rare passage visitor which has bred once.

Hancock (1874) listed three records and Bolam could add only three more. Since 1950, however, there have been twenty records, all of single birds except for two over Whitley Bay on 4 September 1974. All have occurred between 8 May and 28 September, apart from a very late bird at Radcliffe on

10 November 1970. Only two have been seen well away from the coast – near Slaley on 2 July 1971 and near Chillingham on 30 July 1974.

In 1966 a nest containing two almost-fledged young was found near Blagdon after adults had been sighted in the area on several occasions.

Gyrfalcon *Falco rusticolus*

An extremely rare visitor.

An immature male shot at Bellingham on 20 January 1845, and now in the Hancock Museum collections, is the only definite record although a female (also in the museum) was referred to by Selby (1831) as having been shot in Northumberland.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor and a rare breeding species.

Bolam (1912) could describe it as 'a resident, which used once to have many breeding places all over the borders, both inland and upon the coast' and which still maintained 'a more or less precarious footing in several of them'. He attributed the decline mainly to the activities of gamekeepers, but also to egg-collectors and falconers. However, he concluded, the 'blackest days' had 'probably been passed, and at the present time the tendency is rather towards increase than otherwise'.

Unfortunately, he was to be proved wrong, for although he could write in 1932 that 'some half-dozen breeding places are more or less regularly occupied', continuing pressure from gamekeepers and collectors, together with the removal of protection during the Second World War in the interests of RAF carrier pigeons, and eventually the insidious effects of organo-chlorine poisoning, all combined further to reduce the population.

Nesting was reported in twenty-one of the years 1933-76, usually involving only one pair, and with a high rate of failure. As many as three pairs bred in 1951, 1952 and 1957, but since the latter date nesting has been attempted on only seven occasions. Single birds often occur at, or near, old sites during the summer months and, with the increase in numbers in the Lake District and southwest Scotland, there may be some recolonisation.

Small numbers are seen each year on passage, especially at the coast in autumn, while occasional birds winter in Lindisfarne NNR.

Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*

A common breeding resident.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a well-known resident, more or less plentiful on all our moors, of any extent, on which heather grows'. Today, it is still numerous on heather moorland, especially in those areas protected by gamekeeping activities. Even in such regions, however, breeding success varies considerably from year to year, depending upon weather conditions and the incidence of disease; 1944 and 1951, for example, were particularly poor seasons. Total numbers have undoubtedly declined during the last fifty years, as a result of habitat loss brought about by afforestation.

There are few records away from the moorland areas, the only recent ones being at Whittle Dene on 8 September 1969 and, more surprisingly, over the sea at Boulmer on 19 October 1979.

Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Hancock (1874) considered it as 'plentiful in the wild tracts..., especially

where the birch abounds, and in damp situations', adding that its great strongholds appear to be near Kielder and in the Cheviots, while in 1912 Bolam referred to it as 'a well-known resident in most of the wilder parts...', a status which still obtained twenty years later.

According to Tegner (1954) large numbers were killed between 1918 and 1939 in an attempt to reduce the damage it was allegedly causing in the new forestry plantations. The annual ornithological reports for 1946-48 indicate that it was then distinctly scarce although the hard winters of this period may have played a greater role than earlier culling. From 1953, the reports give evidence of an increasing population, twelve leks being found in the Kielder area, for example, in 1957. Today, it occurs in two main habitats, young coniferous plantations and moorland dominated by *Molinia caerulea* (page 7), although it is recorded from nearly all the major moorland areas.

Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*

Extinct.

Although Bolam considered that in the fourteenth century it was almost certain to have inhabited the Cheviot area, the only definite records refer to young birds liberated at Eslington Hall between about 1872 and 1875. They did not become established and the last was shot at Trickley Wood, Lilburn, some time after 1876.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

An uncommon, introduced breeding resident.

It was introduced into the Scottish border counties towards the end of the 19th century and Bolam (1912) records,that, as a result, a few appeared occasionally in the Berwick upon Tweed area between 1889 and 1891. Single birds near Newcastle upon Tyne in 1897, and at Elsdon in 1904, undoubtedly had a similar origin. In 1932, Bolam stated that it had 'as yet scarcely maintained a footing' and although subsequent introductions have resulted in sightings from a number of widespread localities, especially in the northeast and southeast (for example, at Elwick and Blagdon), it still does not seem to be firmly established. Some of the birds released in the Elwick area in 1975 included Chukars *A. chukar*.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

A common breeding resident.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a well-known resident, universally common, but much less numerous now than it was a few years ago, largely due to the decline in agriculture'. This decline probably began in the late 1920s and was mainly the result of a drop in cereal acreage.

Improved methods of cereal husbandry, and a decrease in grass leys during the 1950s and 1960s, led to an overall reduction in the farmland insects on which partridge chicks feed, thus making the species more sensitive to low spring temperatures and high summer rainfall. The contraction of numbers continued during this period (Potts, 1970) – between spring 1961 and spring 1969, for example, these fell from about seventy pairs to twenty pairs per 405 hectares. More recently, however, it appears to have fared better, the early 1970s in particular producing a noticeable increase.

These comments refer to the major part of the county's population which occurs in arable farmland. A smaller, but apparently stable, population inhabits moorland areas dominated by *Molinia caerulea* (page 7), moving to the lower land in hard weather. It is regularly found, too, in coastal sand dunes while, like *Phasianus colchicus*, it is sometimes seen feeding along the

shoreline in Lindisfarne N N R. There are two unusual coastal records: on 29 September 1962 one apparently arrived over the sea at Tynemouth and on 6 May 1967 one was on Inner Farne.

The plumage variety known as *montana* has been reported on a number of occasions. Bolam (1912) mentions some forty occurrences, the last in 1891; Ash (1966) records others near Morpeth in 1911 and near Eshott in 1919, while more recently a pair was shot near Branxton in the late 1950s (Perry, 1975).

Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

A rare summer visitor which occasionally breeds.

Selby (1831) stated it was 'now... of rather rare occurrence... and few bevies are now seen, even... where formerly they used to be abundant', while Hancock (1874) described it as a 'spring-and-autumn migrant, not by any means common,... but occasionally breeding'. Bolam (1912) considered that it was 'seldom numerous, but breeds sparingly' and mentioned eight occurrences during the winter months. By 1932, he thought it had become 'very much less frequent in its visits' although it had recently nested at Stocksfield.

It has been noted in thirty-one of the forty-seven subsequent years although in most of these only one or two birds were involved. Occasionally, however, 'Quail-years' occur, an example being 1893 when, according to Bolam, it was unusually numerous and was heard calling in many places. More recently, and on a much smaller scale, 1947 and 1964 each provided records of proved or suspected breeding in seven localities.

It is rarely seen on passage, the only recent occurrences being one on the Farne Islands on 15 June 1964 and one on Holy Island on 9 October 1976.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

An abundant breeding resident.

Bolam (1932)) described it as a 'well-known resident' and this carefully preserved gamebird, many of which are hand-reared, remains common today. Figures provided by G R Potts (personal communication) indicate that between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s the average bag per 405 hectares doubled from sixty to 120, the proportion hand-reared rising from seventeen to thirty-seven per cent in the same period. Between 1956 and 1965 the wild stock increased by fifty per cent, but the hand rearing needed to achieve this rose by some four hundred per cent.

As well as in the more typical lowland agricultural areas, it is now quite common in the border forests, again mainly as the result of hand rearing and release.

Birds in Lindisfarne N N R appear to have developed an unusual habit, for on several occasions in 1974 and 1975 they were seen feeding along the shoreline.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor and a rare breeding species.

Both Hancock (1874) and Bolam (1912) considered that it was most numerous in winter and the former knew of only one nest (at Grindon Lough in 1867). No others were found until 1893 when Bolam discovered three at Canno Mill Bog, near Kirknewton; in 1897 he saw five nests in this bog and he considered that subsequently there had been a continuing growth in numbers here. By 1932, he was able to report a considerable

increase and that it was 'now known to nest in many places in different parts of the county'.

This increase has, however, not been maintained and apart from Gosforth Park, where one or two pairs nest regularly, the only places where breeding has been confirmed since 1932 are Stamfordham (1945), Holywell Ponds (1952) and South Linton Pond (1973) although it has been suspected in at least seven other localities.

Immigrants, probably of continental origin, arrive in small numbers, mainly in October and early November, although a few have been seen in coastal areas as early as August. Such immigration results in winter gatherings at certain favoured localities, birds becoming more conspicuous during periods of hard weather when they are forced into the open to forage for food. In recent years, the largest concentrations have been at Gosforth Park (where there were thirty in January 1962 and seventeen in February 1969), Prestwick Carr (twenty-seven in January 1968) and Bamburgh (fifteen in December 1962).

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

A rare visitor which has bred.

Selby (1833) stated that 'in the autumn, just previous to their departure' he had 'sometimes flushed as many as six in a large morass [probably Newham Lough] in my neighbourhood, the majority of which were generally young birds of the year'. In 1874, Hancock described it as 'a resident, and to some extent migratory'; adding that 'it occasionally breeds', he mentions that two nests had been taken at Prestwick Carr, although he does not give specific dates. Bolam (1912) knew of no other confirmed breeding records, but in 1932 was able to say that it was 'slowly increasing in numbers as a summer visitor, and now nesting in some quite unsuspected places'.

Since then, however, there has been no evidence of breeding and, in fact, it has only been recorded on fourteen occasions. Five have been at Gosforth Park – in October 1947, July and December 1949, December 1963 and March 1964 – while others were reported inland at Hexham in November 1954 and near Ponteland in August 1963. On the coast, it has occurred at Beal in May 1958, on the Farne Islands in July 1962 and September 1976, at Tynemouth in November 1966, at Alnmouth in July 1967, on Coquet Island in August 1973 and at Hauxley in October 1976.

Little Crake *Porzana parva*

An extremely rare visitor.

An adult female at Fenwick on 29–30 September 1956 is the only confirmed record. There have been other records of unidentified small crakes and these are detailed under *P. pusilla*.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*

An extremely rare visitor.

According to Perry (1946), Dr J S Ash saw one at Beadnell on 20–21 June 1942. However, this record does not appear in the annual ornithological report although in recent correspondence the observer confirms his belief that it was indeed this species.

Bolam (1932) mentioned one shot at Netherwitton in 1890: its identification was never verified and it may have been *P. parva*. Other unidentified small crakes were heard calling in Gosforth Park from April to June 1953 and again between late March and early April 1954.

Corncrake *Crex crex*

A rare passage visitor and breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'common throughout the district' and Bolam (1912) considered it to be 'a common summer visitor... more abundant in some seasons than in others'. By 1932, however, he commented that it was 'very much decreased in numbers... especially since 1917'.

Since then its story has been one of continued decline despite a period during the early 1950s when higher numbers were noted in several seasons. Recently it has been recorded from no more than two or three localities in any one year, and these are mainly in the west and southwest of the county where the later hay harvests still allow a few to breed successfully.

It is occasionally reported on passage in coastal areas, particularly in spring and on the Farne Islands where one on 7 April 1953 was the earliest seen in recent years. Individuals appeared as late as 5 October 1966 at Shilvington and at Fenham-le-Moor on 2 October 1974.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and common breeding resident.

Hancock (1874) described it as being 'common everywhere in ponds and streams that abound with aquatic plants' and Bolam (1912) knew it as 'a common resident in all the lowland parts of the district', an opinion that remained unaltered in 1932.

Today, although much more abundant in the lowlands, it is also found by moorland burns and loughs and it has even bred on ponds newly created by the Forestry Commission in areas such as Paddaburn and Kielderhead. In addition, a pair bred on the Farne Islands in 1948.

Winter concentrations of up to eighty are not uncommon at favoured haunts such as Cresswell Ponds, Wallsend Swallow Pond and Holywell Ponds, while the last locality has on two occasions, in November 1968 and February 1976, attracted gatherings of a hundred. Although there is no direct evidence, some of these wintering birds may be immigrants; however, a few do occur on the offshore islands, especially in April and May, and these may be returning to continental breeding grounds.

The only ringing recoveries involve an adult marked at Burnley, Lancashire, in September 1949 and found at Longframlington in January 1950, another adult marked at Edinburgh in January 1953 and reported from Cornhill in February 1956, and one recovered locally within the county when nine years old.

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*

An extremely rare visitor that had probably escaped from captivity.

Hancock (1874) records one caught near Ponteland in August 1873 which was still living in confinement. Bolam, however, does not mention this bird, presumably because he considered it to be an escape. The species has not been admitted to the British and Irish lists.

Coot *Fulica atra*

A common passage and winter visitor and well-represented breeding resident.

It was described by Hancock (1874) as 'though common, is not so generally distributed as the Water Hen' while Bolam (1912) stated that it nested

'numerously on most of our larger sheets of water' and that it had 'increased considerably within the last twenty years'. In 1932, he referred to it as a 'common resident', adding that it was more restricted than *Gallinula chloropus* in its distribution because 'it prefers a considerable extent of open water for nesting purposes'.

It remains a well-known occupant of all the larger expanses of water, while quite small ponds may also attract a few pairs, the only major decrease being in 1947 following the preceeding very hard winter. Breeding numbers are difficult to estimate and the large autumn gatherings at favoured localities such as Seaton Burn, Holywell Ponds, Capheaton Lake and Broomlee Lough probably include a considerable proportion of immigrants. Seaton Burn and Broomlee Lough regularly attract upwards of 500 in October and November, maximum counts in recent years being 620 at the former on 20 November 1974 and 610 at the latter on 30 October 1971.

Coots tend to avoid running water, but 200 on the Tweed at Coldstream in December 1973 show that in winter they may occur in such a habitat. Bolam's remark (1912) that it appeared 'occasionally on salt water during winter' remains true, small numbers being noted each year in such places as Fenham Flats, Budle Bay and the estuary of the Coquet, while up to 180 have been counted in Berwick harbour.

An adult ringed at Abberton, Essex, on 19 December 1957 was recovered at Seghill on 23 January 1958.

Crane *Grus grus*

A rare visitor.

Although a bird seen near Lucker by several people in 1901 was believed to be a crane, Bolam (1932) states that the only definite record was of one flying over Greyside Fell, near Settlingstones, on 20 October 1908.

Since then others have occurred at Hadston between 29 April and 5 May 1958, at Bamburgh on 5 May 1968, at Alnmouth between 9 and 23 January 1971, on Holy Island on 24 April 1971 and flying south over Monkseaton on 16 May 1975. In 1977, two arrived at Elwick on 4 May; they were present in the area until 3 June and one remained until 9 July. Individuals seen flying north over Bamburgh on 6 May, and on Holy Island on 22 May, may perhaps have been the Elwick birds. During 1978, one was at Ross on 14 May and another at Budle Bay from 9–24 October, while a *Grus* sp. flew over the Long Nanny estuary on 27 May. One at Chipchase, Wark, from 1–12 April is the only 1979 record.

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are five records: one was taken at Prestwick Carr in 1820, one was shot near Warkworth in the autumn of 1821, one was killed near Twizell House on 1 February 1823 and one was shot at Amble in November 1906. In addition, the description of 'a strange bird', present at Craster for fourteen days in November 1937 (Craster, 1938), has now been reviewed and accepted by the *County Records Committee* as *T. tetrax*.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

An extremely rare visitor.

Some four centuries ago it was to be found breeding on the lowlands of southeast Scotland and it may perhaps also have nested in Northumberland, although the sole supporting evidence is the tradition, mentioned by Bolam

(1912), that it formerly bred in the neighbourhood of Chillingham. There are only two definite records. Two arrived on Fenham Flats on 2 January 1871 where one (a female) was shot; the other remained in the neighbourhood for about ten days while sometime during the winter 1870–71 one (perhaps the survivor from Fenham Flats) was caught in a rabbit trap on Hepburn Moor, Chillingham.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

A common passage and winter visitor and a well-represented breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a resident in the district,... abundant by our sea shore, breeding on the Farne Islands, and on the beach of the adjacent main land... rarely seen far from the coast'. Bolam (1912) concurred, adding that 'it never seems to have been numerous as a breeding species'. It was, however, not until twenty years later that he mentioned that inland breeding had lately taken place on the 'Tyne, Rede, Coquet and Tweed'.

Macfarlane (1978) has summarised the development of this inland breeding; he also gives details of a survey carried out by the Tyneside Bird Club in 1977. Nesting on the South Tyne apparently began in 1928, colonisation coming from the west (Buxton, 1961). By 1967–68, some fifty-three pairs were breeding on the river, and its tributaries, and in 1977 sixty pairs were located. On the North Tyne, breeding was not proved until 1937, but today there are at least twenty-three pairs. There are a few on rivers such as the Irthing, the Aln and the Till, but the main stronghold is the Coquet. Pairs were certainly nesting there by 1932 and Tyer (1954) reports a steady increase in the intervening years. At least twenty pairs were noted in 1967–68 while the 1977 survey revealed seventy. The total inland population in 1977 was 185 pairs, some thirty-nine per cent being on agricultural land adjacent to the rivers, rather than on the more typical shingle beds.

On the coast it has remained an uncommon breeding species. The Farne Islands have always been the main stronghold with a maximum of about thirty-eight pairs in 1952, and thirty-two in 1977. Coquet Island has increased in importance, particularly since the late 1960s, with a maximum of forty-five pairs in 1973 and twenty-seven pairs in 1977. Ten pairs at Lindisfarne N N R, and six between Dunstanburgh and Newton, brought the 1977 coastal total to seventy-five pairs and the county total to 260 pairs.

Oystercatchers usually return to their inland breeding sites from late February although they have been recorded as early as 9 January. The bulk of the population arrives in March, often collecting in small flocks at certain favoured localities such as the Bardon Mill–Melkridge area, Caistron and Powburn (where there were sixty-one in 1977). Ringing recoveries from Morecambe Bay indicate that these birds are probably returning from their west coast wintering grounds. Some Oystercatchers moving inland through the county in spring are probably not local, but are *en route* to more distant breeding grounds such as Scotland and Scandinavia; these may well be the birds that gather on the coast in early autumn. Many doubtless pass on to the west (Evans, 1966), but large numbers remain to winter and there are recoveries of birds ringed as pulli in Aberdeenshire in June 1947, and at Alesund, Norway, in June 1969, respectively at Newbiggin in November 1947, and on Holy Island in February 1971. Wintering numbers in Lindisfarne N N R in recent years have regularly exceeded 2000 with as many as 2785 in the winter of 1978–79; there are rarely more than 250 at other coastal localities, such as St Mary's Island. Counts are larger during periods of passage which, in autumn, may begin in July, when new arrivals augment

the flock of some 200 non-breeding birds that summers at Lindisfarne. Immigration apparently continues, in some years, into early November, and fluctuating counts from the reserve show clearly that the area is a staging post for many thousands of passage birds.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

An extremely rare visitor.

One at Wallsend Swallow Pond on 4 September 1954 is the only record.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A rare irregular visitor.

Although Bolam (1932) could list only two – at Hartley 'not long previous to 1831' and near St Mary's Island in autumn 1907 – there have since been twenty-two reports involving some twenty-nine birds.

It has usually been seen in ones or twos, although three flew south off Seaton Sluice on 19 July 1974. Eighteen of the records have been between late March and July, but with single individuals in August and September and winter sightings in the Lindisfarne area from 15 February to 1 May 1958, on 31 January 1966 and on 31 December 1976, and at Beadnell on 25 February 1940. All, except one at Whittle Dene on 17 July 1974, have been in coastal areas.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are eight records. One was shot on the Farne Islands sometime prior to 1883; one of a pair was shot at Backworth on the unusual date of 1 January 1897; two were seen near Darden Lough in August or September 1904; Chapman watched three fly past beneath Coe Crag on 15 April 1915 (Chapman himself did not claim this record, but Bolam considered it valid); one was on the Whitfield moors on 18 August 1927; one was killed against the Longstone lighthouse on 23–24 March 1950; single birds were at Seaton Sluice on 16 September 1962 and at Cresswell on 18 August 1968.

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records: single birds were shot at Cheswick on 9 November 1846 and at nearby Goswick in early November 1870.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

An extremely rare visitor.

One, with clearly visible chestnut underwings, present at Holywell Ponds from 2 to 6 July 1966, is the only record.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

A rare passage visitor and an extremely rare breeding species.

It was first recorded in 1968 – at Cresswell on 28 April and 19 May and at Seaton Burn where a pair reared young. From then until 1973, it bred irregularly at Druridge, Derwent Reservoir, Seaton Burn and on the Tyne at Corbridge, but nesting has not been proved since.

Small numbers (maximum ten in 1976) now occur almost annually on passage. The majority are at, or near, the coast, but there are reports from Whittle Dene in May 1973 and July 1977, from Grindon Lough in May 1974 and from Hallington in August 1976 and July 1979. Extreme dates are 18

April 1970 (one at Seaton Burn) and 28 September 1974 (one at Cresswell) and, while most are seen singly or in pairs, in 1976 four were at East Linton on 5 and 7 May and three at Wallsend Swallow Pond on 15 August.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

While Hancock (1874) described it as a 'common resident', he knew it only as a coastal breeder, although he had occasionally seen it on the Coquet. Bolam (1912) also considered it a 'common resident' and was able to document its colonisation of inland breeding sites. He first saw a pair on the Breamish in 1886, adding that by 1902 it was present here in greater numbers than *Actitis hypoleucos*. The first nest on the Coquet was found in 1887 and it was subsequently 'noticed in considerable numbers from Thropton to Holystone...'. Breeding was also recorded during the late 1890s from both Sweethope and Broomlee loughs. In 1932, Bolam confirmed that 'ever increasing numbers' were to be found at inland breeding sites.

A survey conducted by the Tyneside Bird Club in 1973 revealed a total of at least 120 breeding pairs. Of these, eighty-five pairs were at the coast, including thirty-three at the traditional stronghold of Lindisfarne N N R. The figure for the reserve was, in fact, considerably lower than in the previous year when as many as sixty-two pairs had attempted to nest; there was a further drop to only seventeen pairs in 1974, but in 1975 and 1976 there were respectively forty-eight and forty-three pairs. The 1973 census revealed thirty-five pairs at inland sites, the Coquet, upstream of Thropton being, as in the past, the most favoured area with at least sixteen pairs. Since 1933, this stretch of river has figured frequently in the annual ornithological reports, the maximum count being of twenty-two pairs on a four-mile (6.4km) reach in 1952. No more than four pairs were found on any other river system in 1973.

Sightings in the county of birds colour-ringed at Lindisfarne up to six years earlier confirm the belief that most local birds probably remain close to their nesting areas throughout the year. However, the recoveries of a pullus, ringed at Holy Island in June 1922, in Dunbartonshire three months later, and of another, marked at Earsdon in May 1977, at Barrow, Lancashire, in August 1978, show that a few cover considerable distances. They are augmented in late August and early September by passage flocks, mostly juveniles. These probably originate in Greenland and Iceland (Evans, 1966) and in 1973, for example, early autumn counts included up to 625 in Lindisfarne N N R, 215 at the Long Nanny estuary and ninety in the Amble-Alnmouth area. These northwestern birds winter in West Africa and return north *via* western France: there are three recoveries of Northumbrian-ringed birds in north and west France in late April and early May. During late May birds, apparently from this population, pass through Northumberland as was shown in 1972 when 350 were at Beal and 118 at Boulmer.

Recent counts have revealed a total wintering population of about 900, up to half of which may be on Lindisfarne N N R; among them are both local birds and immigrants from northern Europe. This is illustrated by the fact that a juvenile, ringed in Norway (62° N) on 30 August 1970, was controlled three weeks later at Hauxley, while a first year bird, marked at Seahouses in January 1962, was found in Sweden (56° N) in May 1964.

Bolam (1932) mentioned that some very small Ringed Plovers had been obtained on the coast and suggested that they probably belonged to the race *C. h. tundrae* from northern Russia and Siberia. A few showing similar characteristics have been noted in recent years.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
An extremely rare visitor.

There are three records: two at Budle Bay on 23 August 1918, one at Spittal on 21 September 1945 and one at Cresswell Ponds on 14 May 1978.

Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*
A rare irregular passage visitor which has bred.

As a passage visitor, Selby (1831) commented that it was 'annually met with... during the month of May', mentioning Scremerston as a favourite locality. Hancock (1874) wrote that it 'visits this district every year during its spring and autumn migrations'; Newcastle Town Moor was apparently a regular resting place and he refers to a flock of twenty which was seen on the wing in 1873, two being killed by contact with telegraph wires. Bolam (1912) knew it as 'a summer visitant and passage migrant' and he describes how Chapman found 'trips of fives, sevens, etc., not in pairs' on Cheviot at the end of May 1911, but, a fortnight later, could discover none. In 1932, he confirmed its much scarcer status, blaming its decrease on 'the insensate cupidity and ignorance of fly-fishermen and others' – its feathers had been in great demand for fly-tying !

In 1912, Bolam wrote that it had 'never been known to nest anywhere nearer than the mountains of Cumberland', but in 1932 he noted that it 'formerly nested on our hills and yet continues to do so, *longo intervallo*'. The only definite information about breeding is given by Nethersole-Thompson (1973) who states that a nest with three eggs was found in the Cheviots in May 1911, adding that another nest was in this area in 1912. There was also a verbal report that it bred on Bloodybush, north of Alwinton, in 1944.

There have been only fifteen subsequent records, involving a total of some fifty-seven birds. The majority appeared in spring, particularly in May, although two were at Ross on 11 April 1952. Holy Island has been the most favoured locality and small parties (maximum nine) were seen in 1937, 1952, 1973 and 1974. The largest gathering noted in recent years was of about twelve on Cheviot on 25 May 1971, while there were more reports in 1974 than in any other year: apart from up to five on Holy Island, four were seen at Redesmouth and five at Ingoe. There have been only three autumn occurrences: one flew south over Holy Island on 29 September 1967, four were at Hadston from 14–16 September 1975 and one was on the Farne Islands between 19 and 27 August 1977.

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*
An abundant passage and winter visitor and a well-represented breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a resident. Common in both counties, breeding on the upland fells' adding that 'in autumn, it congregates in large flocks'. Bolam (1912) concurred, stating that it was 'widely, if somewhat sparingly, distributed over all our higher moors and fells in the nesting season'. In 1932, he distinguished between the two races, the southern *P. a. apricaria* and the northern *P. a. altifrons*, recognising the former both as the local breeding race and as an abundant passage migrant, while the latter was 'a winter visitant and passage migrant forming... a large portion of the flocks... which winter here'.

Since 1932, afforestation of the uplands has destroyed vast areas of former breeding habitat, bringing with it a corresponding decline in the species. Although it nests at low densities on all moorlands, the strongholds are still the relatively unforested districts of the southwest where, in addition, a base

rich substrate provides an abundant invertebrate fauna. The breeding population usually returns to the moors in March although small parties may remain on the high moorland throughout the year.

Local birds leave the nesting grounds in July and early August, often congregating in the dales and, presumably, forming at least part of the flocks noted near the coast at this time. Their relatively sedentary nature is illustrated by the only two recoveries of Northumbrian ringed pulli – one from Elsdon had moved to Blagdon and the other from Allenheads had travelled to Wakefield, Yorkshire.

Evans (1966) recognised two other periods of passage. From mid-August to early October flocks, including adult *apricaria*, arrive, while further visitors, among them adult *altifrons*, appear from early October to early November; Evans believed that most of these immigrants came from northern Europe. Recent observations have confirmed this pattern, for in 1976 flocks of 1000–3000 were present between mid-August and late September at Lindisfarne NNR, the Long Nanny estuary, Embleton, Hadston, Druridge and inland at Whittle Dene. In the same year, another influx in October increased numbers at Lindisfarne from 1800 to 4700, at Druridge from 1000 to 2000 and at Whittle Dene from 1000 to 3000. The restored opencast mining site immediately west of Druridge Bay seems particularly attractive and on 16 November 1976 a remarkable gathering, estimated at perhaps 50000, was seen there.

Like *Vanellus vanellus* (page 62), Golden Plovers often undertake hard-weather movements and these probably accounted for a marked influx in late December 1974–early January 1975 which brought 10000 to Druridge, 'a few thousand' to Whittle Dene and 3000 to Lindisfarne. Hard weather also means that large numbers may leave the county, as was apparent in early January 1977 when a British Trust for Ornithology survey revealed an overall total of only 6589, many of the birds having departed a few days earlier. Further counts on 26–27 November and 31 December of that year indicated a much more realistic wintering population figure of some 12000.

In spring, most of the large flocks have dispersed by late March as *apricaria* birds return to their British and continental breeding grounds. However, each year a later passage of *altifrons* is recorded both inland and at the coast – in 1975, for example, between 23 March and 20 April up to 2000 were at Longframlington with flocks of 100–800 at eight other localities. In many years these birds linger into early May as in 1976 when 250 were at Embleton on 1 May.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Selby (1831) described it as 'a winter visitant ... not uncommon upon the slakes and ooze which separates Holy Island from the mainland'. This situation changed little during the ensuing century and in 1932 Bolam wrote that it was a 'regular winter visitant and passage migrant along the coast, usually in small parties but sometimes of a score or two'.

As in Selby's time, its stronghold is Lindisfarne NNR, but numbers have increased considerably in recent years. Incoming visitors begin to arrive in July and in 1977, for example, counts reached 460 in both August and September, falling to 400 in October as birds moved on, presumably to wintering grounds elsewhere, before a fresh influx raised the total to a record 600 in November. Many of these arrivals also passed on, so that the maximum figure for December was 405. Spring passage through the reserve can be recognised by the changing pattern of the monthly counts; this was

clearly shown in 1977 when numbers fluctuated from 193 (February) up to 300 (March) and down to 90 (April) before 408 arrived in a typical late wave of migrants in May. As many as fifty now summer regularly in the area.

Elsewhere on the coast gatherings rarely exceed ten: a count of thirty-four between Budle Point and Cresswell in mid-December 1977 is probably typical. In autumn 1976, however, a maximum of fifty was on the restored opencast mining area at Hauxley during September and October, when from twelve to twenty were also found at the Long Nanny estuary, Boulmer and Cresswell Ponds. In February 1971, 150 were on the Farne Islands, but these had probably come from Lindisfarne.

Bolam saw five immatures at Hallington in September 1919: this was the only inland record known to him. Such occurences are still rare, but have become more regular during the 1970s. Most are single birds which appear between August and October at ponds relatively close to the coast such as Holywell and Wallsend Swallow. Nevertheless, there are several records of one or two at Whittle Dene and these, together with one at Derwent Reservoir in September 1972, and a party of six at Hallington in September 1976, suggests that there is some passage through the Tyne gap.

Sociable Plover *Chettusia gregaria*

An extremely rare visitor.

One which was present on Ouston airfield from 6–12 July 1971 is the only record.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

An abundant passage and winter visitor and common breeding species.

According to Hancock (1874) it was 'common everywhere, but... most plentiful in uncultivated districts' while Bolam (1912) knew it as an 'abundant and well-known resident... to a large extent also migratory': he mentioned that it deserted the area during hard winters. In 1932, he was still able to describe it as a 'well-known resident', but noted that a very marked decrease had occurred after the winter of 1916 and that, by the time he wrote, the population had still not fully recovered.

Both Hancock and Bolam indicate that it was only during the present century that lower-lying cultivated land was colonised, the hill pastures being abandoned as drainage operations progressed. This change of habitat has meant that many nests, particularly early ones, are destroyed by farming operations. Heavy losses are also inflicted by severe winters and, in addition to 1916, those of 1946–47 and 1962–63 caused marked decreases in the breeding population. Despite this, there is no good evidence that there has been any further permanent decline in numbers in recent years. A comprehensive survey of the Blagdon estate in 1953 revealed 102 pairs nesting on 1631 hectares of farmland; the only indication of recent densities came from a Common Bird Census plot at Brenkley where in 1976 and 1977 eight pairs bred on seventy-seven hectares.

From mid-June onwards, local birds and their offspring begin to collect, mainly in lowland areas, but also on some of the lower moorlands, gatherings of several hundred being not infrequent. Some continental birds may arrive in late June and flock numbers increase considerably during August and September; between 16 and 25 August 1973, for example, up to 2000 were at Whittle Dene and 3000 at Blyth. The main immigration, however, does not occur until late October and early November; 5000 were at Druridge on 11 November 1973 while, in 1977, 4000 on Lindisfarne N N R on 31 October had increased to 10000 by 21 November and to 12000 by 5

December. The origin of these birds is indicated by sightings of flocks coming in from the east (an estimated 20000 arrived over St Mary's Island during a three hour watch on 28 October 1956 !) and by the recovery of several ringed as pulli in southern Scandinavia. Most of these immigrants leave in March and April – on 1 April 1958 a total of 1610 was seen moving east over Hartley in parties of up to 200 – while large flocks often gather near the coast.

In severe weather, both birds reared in the county, and winter visitors, may be forced to undertake hard-weather movements and locally ringed pulli have been found in Eire, in France as far south as the Mediterranean coast and the Pyrenees, and in northern Spain. These movements are frequently very conspicuous; between 9 and 11 January 1955 several thousands, in flocks of 500–600, were seen passing west through the Tyne gap ahead of snowstorms while, between late December 1974 and early January 1975, 12000 gathered at Seahouses, 6000 at both Lindisfarne N N R and Druridge, and 'several thousands' at Whittle Dene.

There are several ringing recoveries which show that local birds often return to their natal areas to breed, but three Northumbrian pulli have been recovered in Norway (58°N), Sweden (59°N) and Karelia, USSR (62°N), the first two in their third, and the last in its fifth summer. Evans (1966) suggests that these recoveries may indicate that it is northern British birds which are, in part, responsible for the recent extension of the species' range in northern Europe. On the other hand, it may simply be 'that British birds occasionally get caught up with returning flocks of Scandinavian birds', a situation analagous with the phenomenon of abmigration in wildfowl.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

An abundant passage and winter visitor.

Bolam described it as 'a common winter resident on the coast, exceedingly abundant on Fenham Flats'; 'huge flocks' often arrived in October and November while considerable numbers were sometimes met with on return passage in April, and even as late as 12 May. He added that a few occasionally summered on the Farne Islands.

Its status is still much the same, although spring passage seems less conspicuous. Adults in summer plumage (presumably either failed breeders, or non-breeding birds) arrive in late July and they are followed from late August onwards, by juveniles and adults in winter plumage; as in Bolam's time, the main influxes are in October and November. Winter maxima at Lindisfarne N N R have risen steadily from 3000–5000 in the late 1940s and early 1950s, to a normal 8000–10000 and, in 1974, to 14500. The other important wintering area is Seaton Sluice–St Mary's Island where, for the first time, some 200 were noted in 1948; upwards of 1000 are now present in most years with as many as 2000 in early 1973. In stormy weather, or when fishermen invade the rocky feeding areas, this party may occasionally be encountered, feeding or roosting, in the fields between Hartley and Earsdon.

Elsewhere on the coast parties are smaller and more scattered, but in February 1977 they totalled as many as 1000, while there may be up to 500 at places such as the Stag Rocks at Bamburgh, Coquet Island and the Coquet estuary. Numbers generally decline steadily from February although exceptionally (as in 1976 and 1977) the decrease may start in December. The large wintering population makes it difficult to detect spring passage at Lindisfarne, but in April 1973 a flock of 600 rested briefly at Alnmouth before moving off north and two flocks of 300 were seen flying north over Holy Island. In 1953, seventy summered on the Islestone rocks near

Bamburgh and, in recent years, this habit has spread to Lindisfarne, as many as 300 being present in 1972.

Inland records are scarce, but during migration it appears from time to time at ponds within a few miles of the coast, especially in the southeast of the county. In addition, reports from Hallington, Grindon Lough and, in particular, Whittle Dene (where there were seven on 24 August 1968) indicate a degree of overland passage.

A Knot ringed in southern Norway in August 1948 was recovered in Budle Bay in September 1949 and another, marked in the same area in August 1971, was found at Amble in March 1972. This does not, however, necessarily indicate that birds reaching the county originate in Eurasia, for some Greenland *C. canutus* pass through Norway *en route* to the British Isles.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Bolam (1932) summarised its status as 'chiefly a passage migrant, occurring regularly along the coast, in small parties, from July till the beginning of October, and in larger flocks in May; but a few always remain with us throughout the winter and, very exceptionally, a non-breeding individual may be found in summer'. In 1912, he had noted that, in autumn, it was usually seen in 'twos and threes' although there were sometimes occasional parties of thirty or so: it was much more numerous in mid-May and he had seen a flock of at least 200 on Goswick sands on 20 May 1884 with several smaller parties scattered about in other places.

Wintering numbers now seem to be greater than in Bolam's day and some 350 have been counted on the coast, the majority in Lindisfarne N N R where 500 on 29 February 1948 was probably the result of the very cold winter. Seaton Sluice–St Mary's Island is the other favourite area.

A count of 250 at Cresswell on 10 March 1963 indicates that spring movement starts in early March. Such high figures, however, occur more regularly from late March onwards and there is often a peak in late May as, for example, in 1951 and 1953 when 200–300 were at Lindisfarne. At times, a few linger into early June and, in 1972, a party of seven summered on the reserve. Returning migrants usually appear in mid-July, the latter part of this month frequently bringing up to 150 to Lindisfarne and the Seaton Sluice area, and smaller numbers to places such as Druridge Bay. Passage continues throughout the autumn, not infrequently reaching its height from late October to early November; 300 were at Lindisfarne at this time in 1972 while, in 1976, over 450 were counted along the entire coastline. It was particularly protracted in 1971 with a maximum of 400 at Lindisfarne in December.

Inland records are rare and there have been only six since 1932 – at Hallington (one on 29–30 July 1938), Whittle Dene (two on 28 August 1953, one on 28 May 1972 and 26–27 August 1973), Derwent Reservoir (one on 15 February 1976) and Wallsend Swallow Pond (one on 29 July 1976).

The majority of Northumbrian Sanderlings are believed to originate from Greenland and the recovery on Holy Island, in March 1975, of one ringed on passage in Iceland on 2 June 1974, tends to support this idea. Nevertheless, the spectacular recovery of one ringed on Holy Island on 2 September 1957 and found, just a month later, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, probably refers to a bird of Siberian origin (Mead, 1974). There is a second recovery on Holy Island – one ringed on the Dee estuary, Cheshire, in August 1969 and found in late October 1972.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

An uncommon passage visitor.

Hancock (1874) considered it to be 'an autumn visitant, arriving ... in September', although he could give only a handful of occurrences. However, Bolam (1912) was able to state that it had appeared almost every year since 1881 and that it was thus 'an annual visitor to the coasts of Northumberland, ... often appearing in considerable numbers'. September was the main passage month, but over thirty were at Goswick on 30 August 1889 while it had occurred twice in October. Even by 1932, he knew of none in spring and of only one inland – at Prestwick Carr on 12 September 1843.

It is now a regular autumn migrant in fluctuating numbers. Early individuals, perhaps failed breeders, are occasionally seen in the first week of July, but late August and September are usually the main passage periods. Marked influxes occur in certain years as in 1960 when as many as 130 invaded the Lindisfarne area between 15 and 21 September, while the fifty-eight reported between late August and mid-September 1975 (some twenty-seven at Cresswell Ponds, fourteen in the Coquet estuary and seventeen at Lindisfarne) coincided with a similar influx of *C. ferruginea* (page 66). In September 1978, maxima of twenty-eight and twenty-five were recorded from Hauxley and Holy Island respectively. A few are seen as late as 28 October and there are three February records – single birds at St Mary's Island (1950), Holy Island and Chevington Burn (1977). It is now seen much more frequently inland in autumn, and reports from Derwent Reservoir, Whittle Dene and Grindon Lough perhaps suggest some overland movement. Spring sightings, too, are not infrequent and have been made in twelve of the years since 1933. They have usually involved single birds at coastal ponds between April and early June, but up to seven were at Cresswell Ponds in May 1961 with three on 20 May 1971.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

A rare visitor.

There are seven records, all but one of single birds, between 1832 and 1898; with the exception of one in late May, and another in mid-June, all occurred in September, mainly in the vicinity of Newcastle upon Tyne (on the Town Moor, at Prestwick Carr and Berwick Hill). No others were reported until 1954 when one was at Annstead from 21 August to about 4 September. In 1970, one was at Whittle Dene on 2 and 4 September and one at Newton-by-the-Sea on 29 September, with two at Cresswell on 6 June 1974, one at Whittle Dene from 31 August to 14 September 1974, one at Fenwick Pit from 31 July to 6 September 1975, one at Monk's House pool from 14–16 August 1975 and in 1979, one on the outer Farne Islands on 29 May and one near Seahouses on 31 May.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records: one was at Whittle Dene on 29 and 30 September 1963 and one remained at Lynemouth from 14 to 18 September 1977. The latter, because of slight damage to the upper mandible, was recognised as the individual that spent from 28 August to 2 September in Norfolk.

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

An extremely rare visitor.

One in Druridge Bay from 17 to 19 October 1967 is the only record.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

A rare visitor.

There are fifteen records, the majority of single birds. One was shot on Whitley Bay beach on 27 June 1853 and another was on Holy Island on 10 October 1921, but there were no further occurrences until one was trapped at East Chevington on 19 October 1969. Since then it has appeared in eight of the years 1970 to 1979; all reports have been at, or near, the coast and between early August and the end of October, but with one at Bamburgh on 7 November 1975. Two were at Monk's House pool on 8 August 1973 and at least one remained until 12 August.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

An uncommon passage visitor.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a regular visitant, in small numbers, in autumn, and, less commonly, in spring'. He noted that, like *C. minuta*, it had apparently increased since the mid-nineteenth century; it had occurred from late July to early October, but the main passage (in small flocks that seldom exceeded a dozen) took place in early September. He was able to list occasional records in November, January and February, but had seen it only once in spring – a party of at least six at Goswick on 16 March 1885.

It is still chiefly an autumn visitor, its numbers, like those of *C. minuta*, varying from year to year. The main passage is in late August and September with extreme dates of 19 July and 29 October. It usually occurs singly, or in small parties; gatherings of ten or more are uncommon although there was an influx in 1946, with up to sixteen at Alnmouth on 5 and 6 September, and forty at Fenham Flats on 16 September. Other concentrations included twenty-six at Monk's House on 27 August 1954, and some sixteen at Wallsend Swallow Pond during late August 1969. In recent years, influxes have coincided closely with those of *C. minuta* (page 65); in late August and September 1975, for example, there were maxima of twenty-one at Cresswell Ponds, twenty at the Coquet estuary and six at twelve other coastal localities, while in 1978 gatherings included twenty at Holy Island and fourteen at St Mary's Island.

Bolam mentions only two inland records and such occurrences are still most unusual. Away from coastal ponds, it has been reported from Whittle Dene (including about six in late August 1970), Derwent Reservoir and Hallington (where there were seven on 27 August 1977).

Spring sightings have increased and it has been recorded in eleven years since 1945, mainly in May, but with one on Holy Island on 5 and 6 April 1953 and others as late as mid-June. Since 1898, it has been seen only once in winter – a single bird on Holy Island in January 1973.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

Selby (1831) described it as 'common upon all our rocky shores. A winter visitant', but in 1833 he stated that a few stragglers remained on the Farne Islands throughout the summer 'breeding on the smaller islets'. He added that he had 'been unable to obtain the eggs', but had seen the young more than once in June. Both Hancock and Bolam thought that he had been mistaken, the latter stating, in 1912, that there was no evidence that it had ever bred in the British Isles. Bolam referred, however, to an egg taken on the Farne Islands and originally thought to be that of *Arenaria interpres* (page 79).

In 1932, Bolam considered that its status had remained virtually unchanged

for the past hundred years and this is still true today – for example, on 14–15 February 1976, 480 were counted on the coast from Berwick to Tynemouth. It concentrates on the rocky stretches, its favourite haunts being Stag Rocks, Bamburgh, and the Seaton Sluice–St Mary's Island area where there have been maximum counts of 200 and 250 respectively.

During passage, considerable numbers arrive on the Farne Islands and Coquet Island; recently, between 200 and 340 have occurred in both areas in April and early May. There is a rapid decrease in May, and although a few may linger through June, it is not until mid-July that return passage brings up to 300 to the Farne Islands and some 180 to Coquet Island, with a peak usually in early August.

An occasional individual has been seen on Cresswell Ponds, but the only other inland sightings were single birds at Holywell Ponds on 21 November 1971 and at Whittle Dene on 2 November 1972.

Evans (1966) suggested that sight records of two ringed birds at Bamburgh perhaps indicated that some returned to the same winter quarters in successive years, while one controlled at St Mary's Island on 12 October 1976, and ringed two weeks earlier at Revtangen, Norway (58°N), provided some indication of the route taken by incoming visitors.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

An abundant passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Both Hancock (1874) and Bolam (1912) considered it a common resident and, in 1932, Bolam described it is a 'resident, winter visitant and passage migrant'. Hancock mentions that it bred regularly at Prestwick Carr – he had found four nests there in 1855 – while Bolam refers to breeding on moors and round the shores of inland lakes and reservoirs; he thought, although he had never found a nest, that it occasionally bred at Goswick, Holy Island and other places on the coast.

Recent surveys by L G Macfarlane have revealed at least ninety pairs on the western moors while a single pair nested in the Lindisfarne area in 1953 and 1978.

Evans (1966) has dealt with its movements through the county and ringing recoveries have provided information about the origin and destination of these visitors. Adults appear at the coast from early July and juveniles follow later in the month; most are probably either Scottish or local birds. The influx of juveniles reaches a peak in mid-August, and there are further arrivals in September when fifty or more may be seen at coastal ponds such as Cresswell. One ringed in the county in August, and recorded in Iceland in June, supports the belief that these immigrants originate in this area, and perhaps Greenland, and two have later been found in Mauritania and the Spanish Sahara. Most of the September juveniles are thought to come from Scandinavia – birds marked in the county at that time have been found in late summer and early autumn at Archangel, USSR, and in Finland, north Germany and Sweden. Some of these September immigrants continue overland to the Irish Sea basin and they have been noticed *en route* at Whittle Dene, Hallington and Colt Crag. Nevertheless, many, in particular those arriving after mid-September, remain to winter. The most important locality is Lindisfarne N N R and, recently, numbers have built up to reach a record 31700 in December 1978. In most years, there are usually some 2000 on the coast between Budle Point and Tynemouth, but occasionally, as in 1976, there may be up to 4000; the favourite haunts are the beach at Boulmer, flooded fields in the Druridge area and the Coquet estuary.

The wintering population falls rapidly in March, but there is a noticeable passage in late April and May as Icelandic visitors return north; in early May 1971, for example, flocks of up to 600 were moving through Lindisfarne NNR. There is an increasing tendency for non-breeding birds to remain in the reserve in summer and in June 1977 as many as 2000 were still present.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

An extremely rare visitor.

One was at Seaton Burn from 13–14 August 1961. Although originally rejected by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*, it has been resubmitted. The description of one on Fenham Flats on 27 August 1945 was considered to be inconclusive.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are six records: two were at Cresswell on 18 September 1968, one at Seaton Sluice on 13 October 1968 and one on Holy Island on 9 October 1970 while in 1975, during an 'invasion' of over fifty into the British Isles, single birds were at Cresswell on 31 August, near Hauxley on 13 September and near St Mary's Island on 20 September.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

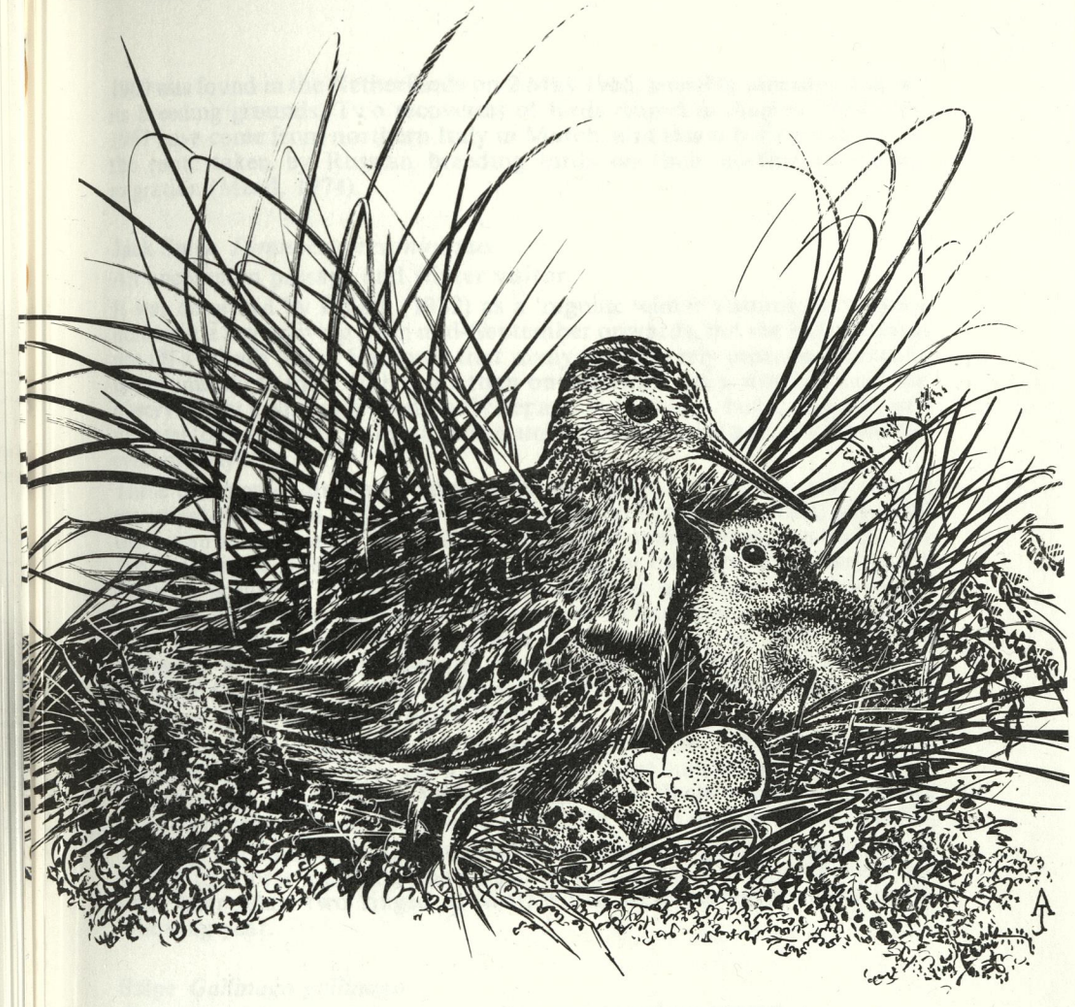
A well-represented passage visitor which sometimes remains during the winter.

Prior to the draining of Prestwick Carr in 1857, it bred there regularly, but by 1874 it was, according to Hancock, merely 'a rare spring-and-autumn migrant'. Bolam (1912) concurred, for he knew of only about forty, killed or seen in the vicinity of the coast, mainly between mid-August and mid-October. By 1932, its status seems to have improved for Bolam wrote that it 'occurs fairly regularly, in small numbers'.

This improvement has continued, considerable numbers now passing through coastal areas on autumn migration. Although birds may appear from late June, passage is usually at its height between mid-August and mid-September. Up to thirty are regularly recorded on Lindisfarne NNR, and at the coastal ponds, during this period, while in certain years counts may be much higher. In 1971, for example, an influx commencing on 14 August, brought eighty to Cresswell, seventy to Prestwick Carr, forty-one to Pegswood, forty to South Linton, thirty-five to Bamburgh and thirty-two to Wallsend Swallow Pond. A hundred at Monk's House pool in September 1974 was the largest concentration ever recorded in the county. In addition, smaller parties are often reported well inland at such places as Grindon Lough, Whittle Dene and Derwent Reservoir.

Numbers fall rapidly after mid-September, but a handful lingers into October and early November. Since 1971-72 a few have remained to winter, particularly in the Budle Bay–Monk's House pool area where there have been up to fourteen in the period November to February; unfortunately, the pool has now been drained. From March onward there is a small passage through the county, but there are seldom more than twenty individuals in any one year.

A Ruff ringed at Embleton in September 1960 was recovered in Hampshire in November 1962, presumably wintering there; the majority, however, winter in Africa, south of the Sahara. One marked at Bamburgh in August



Dunlin

1960 was found in the Netherlands on 2 May 1965, possibly already back on its breeding grounds. Two recoveries of birds ringed in August 1964 and 1967 have come from northern Italy in March, and this is believed to be on the route taken by Russian breeding birds on their northward spring migration (Mead, 1974).

Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

It was described by Bolam (1932) as a 'regular winter visitant, in varying numbers; a few arriving from mid-September onwards, but the bulk of them not till a month later'. He noted that many were merely passage visitors 'it being unusual to meet with more than one or two... in a winter's day'. He observed that in spring it 'commonly departs in March... but... it is not very unusual to find a Jack Snipe in Northumberland in April and, occasionally, even in May'.

These comments admirably summarise its status both in the past and in recent years. Arrival and departure times remain much the same, although there is an exceptionally early autumn record of one at Ashington on 29 July 1962 and single birds were noted in late August on a few occasions in the 1960s. It is rare to see more than four together and these are usually in localities at, or near, the coast as birds arrive in late autumn, or congregate prior to departure in March. There was, however, an unprecedented gathering of fifty at Holystone (presumably the area now known as Wallsend Swallow Pond) on 1 November 1952, while in November 1972 up to fifteen were found at Whittle Dene.

While there is no suggestion that breeding has ever been attempted, reports of one song-flighting over the Cumberland–Northumberland border near Christianbury Crags on 16 April 1967, and two flushed from a river near Holystone, upper Coquetdale, on 8 June 1975, are of interest in this context.

The only information so far obtained from ringing suggests some degree of fidelity to winter quarters; one ringed at Bamburgh was caught there two years later while two ringed at Warkworth were retrapped there in the following year.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

A common passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

In 1912, Bolam described it as 'a common resident, breeding in all the wilder parts of the district, wherever the land is wet enough, especially on the moor edges, and on boggy fields on many of the lowland farms'. He recognised two periods of the autumn when it was particularly numerous, namely mid-August, and mid-October to early November.

Its status today remains virtually unaltered. Breeding occurs in the same type of habitat, the stronghold being the lower moorlands of the west. The nesting season may be very protracted: display has been noted in early March (for example, at Slaley in 1977) while eggs have hatched as late as 12 August (Chapman, 1907).

The mid-August assemblies in lowland areas, and at the coast, are believed to consist mainly of local juveniles, but some immigration from the continent occurs at this time as is shown by sightings of birds arriving from the east, as well as by ringing recoveries. One ringed in the Netherlands on 9 August 1965 was recovered at Broomley two weeks later, while others marked in the county in late August, and early September, have been found in Finland, Latvia and the Belorussiya SSR (USSR), in subsequent years.

The August flocks usually number less than a hundred, but an exceptionally large concentration of 450 was at Cresswell on 21 August 1963.

Further immigration occurs in September, but the peak movement is from October to November. Examples of large counts in recent years include 380 at Holywell Ponds on 11 November 1962, 300 at Ellington on 12 October 1958, and 250 at Seaton Burn on 7 November 1976 and at Cresswell Ponds on 4 November 1978. Birds are often seen coming in from the east at this time and there are frequent records of small numbers on the offshore islands.

Winter concentrations tend to be smaller, large parties in recent years including 200 at Gosforth Park in January 1964, 150 at Cresswell in January 1972 and one hundred at Holywell Ponds in January 1969. That at least a proportion of the birds remaining to winter are immigrants is shown by the recovery of one, ringed at Bamburgh in January 1962, in Estonia in August 1966, while one from Helsinki, Finland, was shot at Milbourne in January 1969.

Many local birds are probably sedentary, but the recovery in western Eire in late October of one ringed at Wallsend in mid-July of the same year indicates that some obviously move. Several other birds have been recovered in Ireland, but the ringing dates leave their origin open to doubt. Both local birds, and immigrants, may be forced to quit the district during periods of severe weather. In December 1976, for example, there was a marked decline as most feeding areas froze, while two ringed in autumn 1962 were recovered in Devon (in January 1963) and in Morocco (in March 1963), a result, no doubt, of that exceptionally hard winter. Such weather conditions in northern Europe probably result in belated immigration into the county as happened in late December 1961 when 200 gathered at both Killingworth and Seaton Burn, and 180 were seen coming in from the northeast at St Mary's Island on 27 December.

Return passage in spring mainly takes place between late March and early April. It is rarely conspicuous, although 200 were at Wallsend Swallow Pond on 28 March 1953 and 150 at Gosforth Park on 3 April 1971.

Great Snipe *Gallinago media*

Formerly a rare, but recently an extremely rare visitor.

Hancock (1874) considered it to be 'a rare autumn or winter visitant' and Bolam (1912), too, believed it to be 'at all times decidedly rare' although almost 'an annual visitant ... in autumn.' He lists twenty-four authenticated records (involving twenty-five birds) between 1822 and 1901: with the exception of one, which is undated, all were between 31 August and 21 October. In 1932, he described it as 'a passage migrant, which, though always rare and generally found only singly, occurs almost annually in the county, in autumn, usually in September and October', However, he does not give any individual records and the only additional dated occurrence is of one on Holy Island from 10–12 October 1920 (Perry, 1946).

In recent years, it has been seen much less frequently, probably as the result of a marked reduction in numbers in the Scandinavian part of its breeding range. One was shot at Minsteracres on 8 September 1951; one is alleged to have been seen at Harbottle on 20 December 1953; one was shot, again at Ministeracres, on 16 September 1955; single birds were seen at Holy Island Lough on 9 September 1958 and at Holywell Ponds on 6 March 1959 and 20 February 1960, while one was shot on Shitlington Common on 2 October 1976. (The 1958 and 1959 records do not appear to have been submitted to the *British Birds Rarities Committee*.)

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

An extremely rare visitor.

A dowitcher which remained at Killingworth from 28 September to 22 November 1959 was initially not specifically identified, but is now known to have been *L. scolopaceus*. One at Cresswell Ponds from 27 October to 28 December 1964 is the only definite record.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

Selby (1831) knew of very few breeding records while Hancock (1874) remarked on the fact that, between 1868 and 1872, seven nests had been 'found on the banks of the Tyne, between Dilston and Prudhoe, in April and May'. Bolam (1912) was able to say that it was then 'breeding, in considerable numbers, in many parts of the district' while it was also 'a well-known visitant, much more plentiful in some winters than in others'; he mentions several 'bags' of between twenty and thirty in a day. By 1932, he could write that it was 'much more abundant now than used formerly to be the case, nesting in suitable places throughout the county'.

This improvement in status has been maintained, largely as the result of the great increase in habitat provided by the border forests. Its movements remain much the same as in Bolam's day. The autumn influx of birds from northern Europe is at a peak between mid-October and mid-November. Small numbers are seen in many coastal localities at this time, some in rather incongruous situations such as the main streets of villages. 1976 saw the largest arrival for many years when, on 25 October, seventy-three were counted on Lindisfarne N N R, up to seven seen at many other places and a total of eight found dead on the shore between Blyth and Whitley Bay. There was another notable gathering on 31 October 1970 when seventeen were watched feeding on exposed mud at Derwent Reservoir. Return passage in spring is much less conspicuous, but there are annual sightings of one or two birds at, or near, the coast between late March and early May.

Hard weather in winter often forces birds to coastal areas; for example, in December 1962 and January 1963 167 were killed in seven days shooting on the north Northumberland coast. In mild winters, however, it is not unusual to find occasional birds on high, exposed moorland.

As already mentioned (page 11), young Woodcock were ringed on the Duke of Northumberland's estates at Alnwick from 1891 and this, and subsequent ringing, has shown that a good many local birds move to Ireland to winter; there have also been recoveries in the Isle of Man, Cornwall and Brittany, France. Nevertheless, numerous others have been found locally, showing that part of the population is sedentary. Up to now, there have been no recoveries of continental birds in the county, but one, presumed to be of such origin, ringed at Hauxley in November 1963, was recovered at Tayport, Fife, in January 1966 thus indicating that immigrants do not always winter in the same area.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

An uncommon passage and occasional summer and winter visitor.

In the past it seems to have been distinctly scarcer than it is today. Selby (1831) knew of only one record, Hancock (1874) added a further four (one of which involved a party of four) and Bolam (1912, 1932) another nine: he also quoted Charlton (1861) as saying that it had been killed, inland, on the morasses of upper North Tynedale. Most of these reports were in autumn, between August and October, although the bird taken at Prestwick Carr on

an unspecified date in 1831 was in full summer plumage, while one was at Alnmouth in July 1847, and one at Goswick on 1 January 1890.

Sightings have increased considerably in recent years and some fifteen to twenty individuals are now seen annually, especially on passage – in spring during April and May, and in autumn between late June and October. Records usually involve single birds, or small parties of up to nine at ponds near the coast, such as Monk's House, Newton, Cresswell and Holywell, and on Lindisfarne N N R. Larger gatherings occur occasionally: for example, sixteen were present on Fenham Flats on 26 June 1970. Inland at Grindon Lough, twenty-eight from 22–25 April 1939, up to twenty-two from 26–28 April 1947, and smaller numbers in several other years, perhaps indicate a return passage through the Tyne gap of birds of the Icelandic race *L. l. islandica*; they were also heard calling at night as they moved west through the Tyne valley over Newburn in late April 1963 and early May 1964.

Ten were seen on Fenham Flats on 8 February 1948 and one probably wintered there in 1953–54. Since 1968 birds have over-wintered regularly, one or two occurring in Lindisfarne N N R in most years.

In 1972, more than usual were reported at Lindisfarne with up to five in May (when display was noted on several occasions) and as many as nine in July, while in 1973 from one to three were even present throughout June. Although it was hoped that breeding might be attempted, no evidence of this was obtained.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

A common passage and winter visitor.

Bolam (1932) stated that it was 'an abundant winter visitant and passage migrant to the slakes in the neighbourhood of Holy Island; but of more uncertain appearance elsewhere along the coast'. He noted that it arrived from August to mid-November and mainly departed in February and March, although passing flocks were occasionally seen in late May and a few non-breeders summered.

Unfortunately, Bolam does not give any exact figures for the wintering flocks, so it is impossible to detect changes in the overall numbers, but, apart from this, his survey of the species' status would suffice today. An unprecedented count of 20000 waders, 'most of them godwits', was made on Goswick Sand Rigg on 26 February 1956, but with this exception, up to the mid-1960s wintering numbers at Lindisfarne N N R seldom exceeded 1000. Counts of 2000 in January and December 1965 were considered 'exceptionally high', but 3000 were present during the winters of 1967–68 and 1968–69, while in November–December 1970 there were up to 8000. Only 2000 were recorded in 1971–72, but since then winter maxima have never been less than 4000 and were as high as 6700 in 1973–74. Elsewhere on the coast, as Bolam suggested, it is decidedly scarce and in recent winters overall totals have seldom exceeded seventy.

Although the first arrivals appear as early as late June and July, it is August before there is large scale immigration and this continues during September, October and November so that peak counts occur in late November and early December. Numbers start to decline in January, but most birds leave in March and April and, as Bolam noticed, flocks of up to several hundred pass through in May while a hundred or more summer in the area. Immigration, or passage, is rarely actually observed to any large extent; however, in July 1977, a total of 338 flew north, and 151 south, off Seaton

Sluice, while on 25–26 November 1978 a steady northerly movement was noted all along the coast.

It also winters on the west coast of Scotland, and on the Irish Sea coasts, so that many must overfly Northumberland each autumn (Evans, 1966). Observations of seven flying west over Beal on 26 September 1972, and eight west over Holywell on 11 October 1975, perhaps refer to birds *en route* to such localities. Bolam mentioned no inland records, but there have been nine, all of single birds, since 1963 and they, too, may be relevant in this context: they were at Holywell Ponds in July 1964, September 1972 and October 1973 and at Seaton Burn in September 1975, while the others have all been in the Tyne gap – at Whittle Dene in September 1970, July 1972 and September 1974 and returning birds at Grindon Lough in May 1974 and May 1976.

Bar-tailed Godwits ringed on passage in southern Norway in mid-September have been recovered nine days later at Alnmouth, and on Holy Island in the following January. One, marked at Beadnell in September 1957, was recovered on passage in Denmark in August 1961 while another, caught in Denmark in May 1960, was found on Holy Island in September 1964.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

A well-represented passage visitor.

It was erroneously described by Hancock (1874) as 'an autumn or winter visitant', but Bolam (1912) correctly stated that it is 'a spring and autumn migrant, common on the coast at these seasons, but much more numerous in autumn than in spring'. In 1932, the same author gave the passage periods as being 'in May, frequently appearing in the following month and becoming common upon the return journey from the middle of July till mid-September': he adds that extreme dates were 25 March and mid-October.

Its status is much the same today. 1977 was a typical year: between 9 April and 9 June about a hundred were noted, either singly or in small parties, chiefly at, or close to the coast, the largest concentrations being of eighteen at Cresswell on 1 May and twenty-one on Lindisfarne N N R on 16 May. The first autumn birds passed south over Whalton on 29 June and passage continued until 31 October. At Seaton Sluice, totals of sixty-four flying north, and forty-nine south, were recorded during July, and 212 south, and only two north, in August, the peak months. There was a characteristically heavy movement in September with seventy-nine on 5 September, eighty-one on 14 September and forty-three on 26 September. Elsewhere, the maximum count was of thirty-five at Lindisfarne N N R on 3 August, but it was reported from most other coastal localities, with small numbers as far inland as Slaley.

Spring passage occasionally begins in late March while, in recent years, one coming in off the sea on 26 February 1956, one at Hauxley on 8 March 1964 and four flying north off Seaton Sluice on 8 March 1975 were unusually early. Towards the end of the year, birds sometimes linger into November as is shown by two flying south off Seaton Sluice on 4 November 1972, one on the Farne Islands on 4 November 1975 and one on Holy Island on 19 November 1972.

Unprecedented numbers have also been noted on a few occasions. These include a party of a hundred which had gathered in a half-cleared turnip field at Wylam on 21 September 1947, 180 at Fenham Mill on 25 August 1956 and, the largest movement so far recorded, 192 passing Hartley on 21 August 1964.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

A common passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a resident, common on all marshy moorlands and grassy wastes' and, in 1932, Bolam confirmed that it was a summer visitor to the 'moorlands and grassy fields': he added that 'we have more breeding curlews... at the present day than there were fifty years ago, perhaps than ever before, and the number seems to be steadily increasing'.

Today its stronghold is the acid grassland type of moorland (page 7) although it is common, too, on the farmlands of the river valleys and widely distributed on the coastal plain. A census on the Blagdon estate in 1953 revealed twenty-two breeding pairs on 2023 hectares while, in 1977, another census at Brenkley showed four pairs to seventy-seven hectares.

In late June and July local adults move to the coast to moult. There may also be some immigration from northern Europe, for small parties are noticed travelling southwest overland, while northerly offshore passage probably involves continental birds. Inland observations in autumn, as well as the recovery, in winter, in Co Clare and Co Mayo, Eire, of two pulli ringed at Stannington, indicate that some locally bred juveniles, and perhaps adults, too, move to the west in winter.

Immigration from the continent increases markedly during August, and by early September there may be 2000 in Lindisfarne N N R with some 500 on the Longstone, Farne Islands, and 250 in the Long Nanny estuary. (Pulli ringed in western Finland and Norway, and recovered at Lindisfarne, indicate the origin of some of these immigrants.) Arrivals continue throughout September and October and there may be later peaks, as in 1975 when 2785 were counted at Lindisfarne on 4 November. Many, however, move on and, although some 2000 wintered in the reserve in 1976–77, there are now usually between 1000 and 1500. Some 250–500 winter elsewhere along the coast.

There is an interesting inland wintering flock at Holystone in upper Coquetdale. Small numbers were first noted on the haughs of the Coquet in February 1951 and by December 1953 there were 200. Birds congregate there, as on the coast, in early autumn – a maximum of 500 was present on 18 July 1976 – while wintering figures still reach about 200.

Local Curlews return to their breeding grounds in late February, or March, although even in winter there are occasional records from the moors. A pullus ringed at Stannington, and recovered only 4.8km away in its second summer, perhaps indicated fidelity to the natal area. Flocks of immigrants gradually decline in the early months of the year, while a west to east return passage through the Tyne gap is suggested by the presence, in March, of 200 at Grindon Lough and 100 at Derwent Reservoir.

Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*

An extremely rare visitor.

One shot at Longhoughton Low Stead on 21 November 1879 is the only record.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

An uncommon passage visitor which sometimes remains during the winter.

It was identified on only twelve occasions between 1830 and 1931 and Bolam (1932) described it as being of 'rare and irregular appearance in autumn, chiefly in August and September'.

Since then there has been a marked change in its status and it is now

regularly reported on autumn passage, especially from mid-August to mid-September. In some years considerable numbers occur – between 5 July and 25 October 1976, for example, some seventy-five were seen, mainly at coastal ponds and on Lindisfarne N N R (where there were concentrations of twenty-one and eighteen on 23 August and 20 September respectively) and also as far inland as Melkridge. Lindisfarne is now its favourite locality and in mid-September 1974 a record count of twenty-seven was made there; birds often linger well into October and, intermittently since the mid-1950s, and regularly since 1969–70, one or two have remained through the winter.

Spring passage is much lighter bringing a maximum of some ten individuals, mainly to the coast, between April and early June. Occasional reports in midsummer doubtless refer either to birds which have not gone north in spring, or to failed breeders returning south early: one such summered at Newton in 1973.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

A common passage and winter visitor and a well-represented breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident, always numerous on the coast in winter, and which, during the last fifty years, has been steadily increasing as a breeding species'. Earlier, Hancock had noted that 'it constantly bred at Prestwick Carr', but by Bolam's time, it was much more widespread and, in 1932, was breeding 'in almost every suitable spot throughout the county'. It had also increased greatly as a passage migrant and had begun 'to appear in vast winter flocks upon the coast'.

It remains a widespread breeding species with strongholds in the open river valleys and on the lower hill slopes. Little census work has been undertaken, but in 1977 sixteen pairs were found holding territory along the Coquet between Rothbury and Alwinton.

Evans (1966) has discussed its movements through the county. Local residents desert the inland breeding areas for the coast from early July; numbers build up steadily and, between August and October, they are augmented by migrants from further north. Some local birds winter in the county, but others move south – recoveries of birds ringed as pulli have come from northern France (a month after ringing), Portugal (September), western France (mid-October), Lincolnshire and Kent (November), the Isle of Wight (December) and the Netherlands (December, February and April). In addition, birds ringed on the Dee estuary, in Kent and Essex, outside the breeding season, have been found in the county in summer.

Evans considered that passage and winter visitors are of Icelandic origin and biometrical evidence from trapping supports this assertion, as do two recoveries – one ringed there in August 1962 was found at Morpeth in March 1963 while another ringed at Fenwick in September 1957 was recovered in Iceland in June 1958. Evans' statement that no Redshank from the continent had been known to reach Northumberland on passage, or to winter, has now been disproved, for one ringed in the Netherlands on 10 September 1964 was recovered at Hauxley on 3 May 1970. Moreover, Temperley (1954, 1957) states that samples trapped at Monks' House in 1953 and 1956 included several showing the characteristics of *T. t. totanus*. Whatever their origin, autumn flocks build up in August and September when there may be 1100 in Lindisfarne N N R and over 400 in the other favourite localities – the Aln and Coquet estuaries. Small parties – sometimes as many as a hundred – can also be found on all coastal ponds

and on beaches and damp fields. Numbers on Lindisfarne may reach a peak at any time between late September and early November, the maximum count being 2130 in early October 1977. Thereafter, the population tends to decline and stabilise, but up to 1600 now winter there while there are probably 500–700 on the remainder of the coast to the south.

One local recovery indicates that Redshanks return to the same wintering area in successive years, but hard weather may produce atypical movements as shown by two birds ringed in Lincolnshire in August 1960, and August 1961, and recovered in Northumberland in January and March 1963 respectively.

Reoccupation of the breeding grounds begins in March and flocking may occur in some places; as, for instance, in March 1972 when 150 were at Wooler. Numbers fluctuate at the coast during April and early May, presumably as the Icelandic *T. t. robusta* return northward; for example, a party of 2000 was on Fenham Flats on 7 April 1956, while on 20 April 1973, 600 were on the Aln and Coquet estuaries with a hundred at Cresswell.

A non-breeding flock often summers, with other waders, at Lindisfarne, as many as 300 being present there in 1975.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records: one was at Wallsend Swallow Pond from 20 to 29 August 1955 and another at Cresswell Ponds on 17–18 June 1978.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

A well-represented passage and a rare winter visitor.

According to Bolam (1912) it was 'a regular autumn visitant to the coasts of Northumberland... and a few always winter'. He knew it as 'not uncommon in August and September', usually appearing in twos or threes, but often in considerable flocks; he saw twenty or thirty at Goswick on 12 September 1879, an even larger flock there in 1880 and about twenty at the Long Nanny in 1882. The Lindisfarne area was then, as now, the favourite locality for the few which wintered, while, in spring, small numbers passed through between March and mid-May.

Its status remains virtually the same. Although occasional birds may appear at the end of June, passage really begins in late July, reaching a peak between mid-August and mid-September. Parties of up to six or seven are not uncommon at the coastal ponds during this period and in both August 1977, and August 1978, it was estimated that at least fifty individuals had been seen. Concentrations sometimes reach double figures, the largest known counts being of fifteen at Cresswell Ponds in August 1963 and early September 1978. It may also occur well inland at this time and valleys such as those of the North Tyne and the Irthing are regular haunts; five were found on a six-mile (9.7km) stretch of the latter on 25 August 1975. Lindisfarne NNR always attracts good numbers in autumn – sixteen were counted during September 1978 – and birds tend to linger there later than elsewhere: for example, about nine were present on 3 October 1971.

As in Bolam's day, a few still stay to winter, as many as three have been recorded at Lindisfarne with single birds at the Aln and Coquet estuaries and at Berwick.

Spring passage is much less pronounced and it is unusual for more than a dozen to be seen. However, in 1976 and 1977, totals of twenty and thirty respectively were reported, mainly during April and May.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records: one found at Wallsend Swallow Pond on 15 September 1977 remained in the area until 29 September, occasionally visiting the pond at Fenwick Pit, while another was at St Mary's Island on 12 September 1978.

Bolam gives details of a bird at Longhoughton Low Stead in October 1880 which was either this species or the Greater Yellowlegs *T. melanoleuca*.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

An uncommon passage and rare winter visitor.

Both Selby (1831) and Hancock (1874) considered it to be rare, but by 1912 Bolam was able to describe it as 'an annual visitant in small numbers' while in 1932 he stated that it was 'an erratic visitant, appearing most regularly in the autumn and spring migrations, but liable to be met with, singly or in small numbers, in every month of the year, sometimes even in the depths of our hardest winters, as well as in the middle of summer'.

Bolam's latter statement still holds good. It appears most frequently in autumn, particularly between late June and September, some forty to fifty individuals being involved in recent years. It is usually reported from ponds at, or near, the coast, but can occur well inland; single birds, or small parties, are the norm, although nine were near Blagdon on 23 July 1977. Spring passage records are far fewer and less regular, varying, in recent years, from none in 1971 to fifteen in 1974. Most occur in April and May, but one or two linger into early June and there is no clear break between these and what are assumed to be autumn migrants later in the same month. A pair at Prestwick Carr in early May 1954 are said to have 'aroused unfounded suspicions of breeding' (Temperley, 1955).

Although autumn movement has virtually ceased by late September, a few are recorded in October and, as in Bolam's time, small numbers overwinter: up to three have occurred at Whittle Dene, the most favoured locality, and one or two have been seen at other, mainly inland, sites.

One ringed at Bamburgh on 1 September 1958 was recovered in Portugal in February 1959 while, in 1963, another caught at Gosforth on 13 September, and found at Seaton Sluice on 21 December, had obviously attempted to winter.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

An uncommon passage visitor which formerly bred.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a rare spring-and-autumn migrant', but added that he took a nest and eggs, together with the male bird, at Prestwick Carr on 3 June 1853. This was the first and, until 1959, remained the only definite breeding record for the British Isles. It seems possible, however, that there had been earlier attempts, for Hancock mentions that a mature bird had been shot at the same place on 19 June 1845 and that 'there can be little doubt that this was also breeding there'. The draining of the carr, completed in 1857, meant the disappearance of suitable nesting habitat although Hancock and C M Adamson watched one displaying at Gosforth Park Lake on 10 May 1857 (Adamson, 1880–81).

The status was still unchanged when Bolam wrote in 1932, but today some twenty individuals are reported annually. It is scarcest in spring, usually not more than five being seen between late April and mid-June; in autumn it appears, either singly or in small parties, chiefly at ponds near the coast, but

occasionally as far inland as Grindon Lough, from late June until mid-September. There are a few October records with single birds as late as 31 October (at Cresswell in 1973 and at Prestwick Carr in 1976).

In certain years the passage is especially marked as in 1954 when as many as nine were at Wallsend Swallow Pond. 1963 was, however, the best year so far recorded for up to eight were at Ashington in late June and early July, while a further influx brought some thirty-two to Cresswell Ponds on 11 August, twenty-three remaining here for six days; in all, an estimated ninety birds were involved in the autumn movement.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

A common passage visitor and breeding species which sometimes remains during the winter.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a well-known... summer visitant to the banks of most of our rivers and burns, as well as to many of our loughs; arriving towards the middle of April... and departing... from early in July onwards'.

Its status remains virtually the same, riverside breeding being most successful in dry summers when there is no flooding of the shingle beds; density is indicated by a count, in 1971, of fifty-eight pairs on the South Tyne between Haydon Bridge and Haltwhistle. Occasional pairs may also be found nesting around the larger reservoirs and lakes such as Hallington and Sweethope.

The vanguard usually appears in mid-April, but a few have been seen in late March: there have been five such sightings between 1954 and 1973. Immigration continues well into May and small flocks, probably birds *en route* to more northerly latitudes, are often noted on, or near, the coast.

A handful returns to the coast in late June, but the main autumn passage takes place from early July to mid-August. There are seldom more than ten in a party, but as many as fifteen were at Wallsend Swallow Pond in early August 1967. A very unusual incident took place on 30 August 1976 when, during heavy rain, four landed on a road in Whitley Bay and then proceeded to perch on nearby garden walls! In most years an occasional straggler lingers into October and particularly late records of single birds were at Whittle Dene on 28 October 1938, Warden on 31 October 1970, Wylam on 7 November 1959 and Corbridge on 9 November 1976.

Individuals were first reported wintering in the Alnmouth–Warkworth area on 27 November 1938 and in 1944 one was present from 3 to 6 December before it was 'for special reasons... secured'! Single birds were there on 1 March 1952, 18 January 1964, and in every winter between 1974–75 and 1977–78 inclusive. On 2 January 1968 one was seen in Budle Bay.

Ringing recoveries indicate that birds frequently return to the same breeding areas in successive years and one was controlled at Langleeford seven years after first being marked there. Two birds caught at Chevington Burn on 4 August 1970 illustrate passage movement, for one was controlled on its probable nesting ground in Perthshire on 28 May 1974 while the other was found at Nador, Morocco, on 14 April 1976.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

A common passage and winter visitor.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common autumn and winter resident', noting that the 'first arrivals reach us in August, sometimes, perhaps, in July, though, as a few are always to be found upon the coast thoughout the summer, these seen earlier may be birds which have never left us'. He refers to an egg taken on the Farne Islands and thought by its possessor, J E

Harting, to be that of a Turnstone, adding that Howard Saunders, however, believed that it was more like a Purple Sandpiper's. He, himself, considered that there was 'no authentic record of the Turnstone ever having bred at the Farnes', although he went on to mention that H A Paynter, then honorary secretary of the Farne Islands Association, was 'strongly inclined to suspect' that a pair might have nested in 1900.

Small numbers continue to summer, especially on Holy Island, the Farne Islands and Coquet Island, but breeding has never been suspected. Passage seems to begin in late June and proceeds throughout July, August and early September. It includes birds, believed to originate in Greenland, which stay to winter, and others, among them some from Scandinavia, that are simply passing through *en route* to more southerly wintering grounds (Evans, 1966). This is borne out by ringing, for one marked at Boulmer on 4 September 1971 was recovered in Finland on 24 May 1973, while another, caught at Beadnell on 30 August 1955, was found in Gabon on 27 October of that year. Autumn numbers are greatest on the Farne Islands, with over 400 present in most recent years and as many as 550 counted on 12 August 1965. Similarly, there may be up to 400 on Coquet Island with flocks of 100–200 at other coastal localities.

As these passage visitors move on, a wintering population, usually numbering 1000–1200 (but which reached 1820 in mid-February 1976) remains: it includes up to 300 on St Mary's Island and some 200 on Lindisfarne N N R.

Numbers increase again in April with the northward movement – in 1972, for example, arrivals included some 400 on Coquet Island, 375 between Foxton and Howick, 170 on St Mary's Island and 150 on the Farne Islands. In many years this passage continues until mid-May, but, thereafter, there is a rapid decline.

Bolam recorded birds travelling inland over Berwick at night, during passage, and on 22 August 1903 he saw twenty flying high overhead. Similar observations can be made at the coast today as small parties arrive from the northwest at a considerable height, usually in anticyclonic conditions in early August. Bolam knew of only one truly inland occurrence – a bird shot at Whickhope, on the North Tyne, in May 1869. Inland sightings are now much more frequent; in addition to the regular high tide roosts at Cresswell Ponds, and immediately inland from St Mary's Island, there are numerous reports of from one to six at Holywell Ponds, Wallsend Swallow Pond, Seaton Burn, Killingworth, Whittle Dene, Hallington and near Rothbury: all were in May, or between July and September. A larger party (maximum twelve) remained at Whittle Dene from 15–24 August 1970. Such records tend to confirm that overland passage does occur.

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are three records: one at Holy Island Lough from 12 to 17 September 1964, one in Budle Bay on 2 November 1972 and one at Monk's House pool from 27 to 29 September 1977.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A rare visitor.

There are twelve records, all of single birds. Six occurred between 1828 and 1893 (at Berwick upon Tweed, Alnmouth, Prestwick Carr, St Mary's Island, Cullercoats and Tynemouth) while the others were at Holy Island in autumn 1928, near Howick from 11–21 November 1951, at Gosforth Park on 16

June 1964, at Cresswell Ponds from 27–29 July 1972, at Seahouses on 14 January 1973 (a most unusual date) and in Budle Bay on 8 August 1975.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

A rare autumn and winter visitor.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a casual visitant on migration', mentioning that it had occurred seventeen times in the period 1823 to 1897, all, with the exception of a small party on the Farne Islands, being single birds. Although there were two in early summer, most appeared in the months from October to December while five had been found inland – at Heddon-on-the-Wall, Capheaton Lake, Glanton Pyke and at two localities near Wooler.

In 1932, he commented that it had 'not been recorded of recent years so frequently as formerly, perhaps owing to lack of observers?'. This may well have been the case for, in addition to birds on Lindisfarne in November 1926 and November 1936 (Perry, 1946), there have been forty-two subsequent reports, the most recent in December 1979. The majority are still of single birds, and thirty-six have been between September and February, with seventeen of these in November and December. There are seldom more than two in any one year, but three were seen in 1965, four in 1954, 1970, 1971 and 1973, and six in 1979.

Most occur offshore or in the sheltered harbours of Seahouses, Amble and the mouth of the Tyne, but there have been occasional individuals on coastal ponds and inland at Ashington Ponds and near Ponteland, while on 24 July 1979 an adult in full plumage was at Harbottle Lough.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

An uncommon passage and rare winter visitor.

Hancock (1874) considered it 'a rare winter visitant', but Bolam (1912), while describing it as 'irregular', stated that it was 'not very rare upon the coast... sometimes appearing, in October, in considerable numbers'. He mentions 1879 as the year in which its status apparently changed: up to then it had been very rare, but pioneers of an eruption were noted at Holy Island on 9 October, when two were shot, and on 15 October flocks appeared at the mouth of the Tweed that were so 'fearless of human presence that the Spittal people had killed as many as they liked of them, one man having shot over a score to his own gun, and several other people nearly as many'. Subsequently, its appearances became much more frequent, a particularly strong northerly passage being witnessed from Holy Island on 14 October 1892, flocks up to thirty passing during a five or six hour period. Although October was obviously the peak time of passage, Bolam mentions several winter records: as for example, between 17 and 23 February 1881 when small flocks were noted off several coastal points. Nevertheless, although its status had certainly changed since Hancock's time, in 1932, Bolam could still only describe it as 'very irregular in its visits'.

It remained irregular, being recorded in only ten of the next twenty years; apart from one at Budle Bay on 12 June 1955, all were between 10 July and 7 November, with a maximum of thirteen flying north off Hartley on 7 November 1948. Since 1961, however, it has been seen annually, most still occurring in autumn, extreme dates being 17 June and 27 November. If heavy movements take place they are usually, as in Bolam's time, in October and they are inevitably in a northerly direction; examples include twenty-six off Hauxley on 2 October 1963, seventeen off St Mary's Island on 22 October 1970 and nineteen off Seaton Sluice on 4 October 1974 with a further eleven seven days later. In fact, 1974's total of seventy-eight records

was greater than in any other recent year. The only occurrences outside the autumn period were single birds off Bamburgh and Seaton Sluice on 20 and 26 January 1974 respectively, an adult and an immature found dead at Beadnell in April 1977, and five off Hauxley, and a few off Seaton Sluice, between 24 and 28 December 1978.

One killed at Prestwick Carr in about 1867 and one at Wark, on the Tweed, in 1894 are the only inland records.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

A common passage visitor.

Bolam (1932) summarised its status as 'a regular passage migrant, not uncommon along the coast, chiefly in August and September, sometimes even numerous; but much less frequently noticed in spring: rarely, it has been recorded in November and once in December' while twenty years earlier he had referred to 'considerable flocks' which 'at rare intervals', such as September 1885 and 1886, visit the area.

Today, the largest numbers are still seen in early autumn as they pass along the coast, harrying terns *en route*. 1976 was fairly typical of recent years and counts made at Seaton Sluice provide a good picture of the passage. This began in mid-June, with eighty-eight flying north during the remainder of that month, and built up in July when 462 flew north and 190 south; in August, always the peak month, 435 travelled north and 759 south, while the September movement totalled 132 north and fifty-two south. Thereafter, none was seen at Seaton Sluice, but seven were recorded during October and one (in Blyth Bay) as late as 14 November. In 1961, in an exceptionally late movement off Seaton Sluice, 238 flew north between 4 and 12 November.

Spring sightings have increased in recent years and, in 1977, eleven were seen between 21 March and late May: this is a fairly typical current total. Winter records, too, are now much more frequent; December, January and February always produce a few reports and in 1976 there were thirteen during these months. January 1974 was exceptional, for southwesterly gales, and an abundance of Herrings and Sprats offshore, combined to produce an aggregate of fifty-six, mainly moving south, between 1 and 26 January.

Bolam commented that 'now and again it strays considerably inland', mentioning that birds had been shot at Chirdon on the North Tyne, and at Allendale, and since then there have been these additional inland records: Glendale (one harrying gulls and *Corvus frugilegus* on 10 March 1944), Colt Crag (one on 22 October 1967), Kielder Forest (one or two heard calling on 28 May 1972), Hallington (one on 11 September 1976), Holywell Ponds (five on 13 July 1977 and two on 14 July 1978) and west Newcastle upon Tyne (one on 14 July 1978). These last records, together with recent sightings of small parties moving southwest over Chevington Burn and Fenwick Steads during late July and early August, perhaps suggests a degree of overland passage.

One ringed as a pullus on Fair Isle on 21 July 1975 was recovered at Embleton on 15 September 1975.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

A rare passage visitor.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'the rarest of the skuas, and a mere casual visitant', mentioning only three records – immature birds shot at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea on 1 September 1840 and at Blyth and Tynemouth on 30 September 1841. Bolam (1912) was able to detail a further six

occurrences: three of these were adults shot between Beadnell and Waren Mill in October 1879, at a time when large numbers of *S. pomarinus* also appeared (page 80). In addition, an adult was seen near the Farne Islands on 14 September 1885, while immatures were shot at Newton in the autumn of 1890 and at Whitley Bay on 24 September 1896. In 1932, he described it as 'a rare passage migrant, appearing irregularly and at long intervals on our coast, usually in October'. The only actual record he gives is, he says, 'an exception' having been seen off Holy Island on 10 May 1922.

On 2 September 1933 two flew south off Ross Back Sands, but no more were noted until the 1950s when there were seven reports (four in 1954), all between 31 July and 26 September. Five were identified during the 1960s, the earliest off Cresswell on 9 July 1969 and the latest off Seaton Sluice on 11 November 1961. Since 1971, it has been seen annually, twenty-seven (including seven in 1977) appearing between 1971 and 1979. With the exception of one flying north off Seaton Sluice on 29 May 1977, and an immature found dead on Holy Island on 4 November 1979, all occurred between 27 July and 27 September.

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

A well-represented passage visitor.

Its past scarcity is summed up by Bolam's (1932) description of it as 'a passage migrant of rare and uncertain appearance on the coast in autumn and winter', and his statement is supported by the fact that he knew of only sixteen Northumbrian occurrences prior to that date.

Its phenomenal expansion as a breeding species in the Shetland Isles, and particularly on Foula, undoubtedly explains the very marked growth in recent sightings in the county, although it was not until the mid-1950s that this became apparent. There were no more than five in any year prior to 1955; all but one (off Seaton Sluice on 24 January 1954) being between 11 July and 7 November. In 1955, there were nineteen and, thereafter, reports became increasingly frequent so that in 1968, for example, seventy-five were seen between 11 July and 3 November, with as many as eleven off Hauxley on 25 August, and fifteen off Cresswell on 1 November. The trend continued, and counts off Seaton Sluice from June to October 1976 produced a total of 243 flying north and sixty-one south, and 325 moving north and thirty south (with a record eighty-eight travelling north on 13 August) during the same months of 1977.

This general increase has also resulted in it appearing more often outside the period of autumn passage. In 1975, for example, one was off the Farne Islands on 5 April and, in May, a total of twenty-two was observed moving north off various coastal points. In 1976, one or two occurred off Seaton Sluice on five occasions in January, February and December and, in addition, nine flew north there on 24–25 January; a further six were noted between 7 March and 2 June.

The only two inland records involve one at Killingworth on 19 July 1972 and one at Lowick on 26 October 1959. This had been ringed as a pullus on Foula on 1 August 1959, while other pulli marked on this island were recovered on the Farne Islands in the second summer and at Tynemouth in the eighth summer.

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*

An extremely rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) includes, although in square brackets, a record of two large gulls, seen by J Atkinson on the Farne Islands on 20 July 1913, which from

the description he considered could only have been this species. However, an examination of the original description (Atkinson, 1913) by the *County Records Committee* has led to the conclusion that the record is unacceptable and could just as easily refer to *L. melanocephalus*.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

A rare visitor.

It was first recorded in 1955 when an adult, bearing a ring, was at North Shields fish quay from 20 to 27 March. An unringed adult was seen at the same locality between 12 November 1955 and 17 March 1956 and from then until 1969, birds were noted there, at Hartley, on the Farne Islands, at Beadnell and particularly on Holy Island, where there were two on 22 August 1969.

Since 1970, it has been reported in every month and annually. It is difficult to assess the number of individuals involved because birds may reappear in successive seasons, but there have now been some fifty-five occurrences with adults outnumbering immatures by about three to one.

Lindisfarne NNR and the Seaton Sluice – North Shields fish quay area are the favourite localities and, at the former, sightings have continued from 1966 to the present day; there have been single birds in every year except 1979, with two inland near Belford on 30 December 1971. At the latter, one was present in both 1971 and 1972, with two in 1975; between January and March 1976 there were at least seven and two remained until 19 June, while up to three were again seen there in the three subsequent winters. It has also occurred on the Farne Islands and at Cullernose Point, Longhoughton, Amble and Newton-by-the-Sea where, between 6 and 10 April 1976, one was watched displaying to a *L. ridibundus*. Inland sightings include another at Belford (in March 1971), one at Gosforth Park in February and March 1970, and at Holywell Ponds in April 1973 and October 1977.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*

An extremely rare visitor.

Two, in first year plumage, seen together on the beach at Low Hauxley on 30 August 1975, is the only record.

Little Gull *Larus minutus*

A well-represented passage visitor which sometimes remains during the summer.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'an autumn and winter visitant', saying that it was 'by no means so uncommon as was usually thought'. Bolam (1932) concurred, adding that immatures occasionally appeared in summer. However, he knew of only about two dozen individuals, all, apart from one near Wooler in October 1898, having occurred on the coast. Most had been single birds, but a party of seven was on the Tweed at Berwick on 2 January 1930.

Records continued to be intermittent until 1945, but since then it has been seen in every year except 1953. From the mid-1950s onwards, it began to increase so that by 1968 some twenty were reported, the majority on autumn passage. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a few immatures summered and moulted in the Cresswell area, a habit which has also been noted there subsequently, as well as at Newton Pool and Wallsend Swallow Pond. In 1972, an unprecedented northerly passage of twenty-four was reported at Seaton Sluice on 4 August and such offshore movements have become a feature of recent autumns; during July and August 1977, for example, a total

of ninety-eight flew north off Seaton Sluice, sixty-seven of them between 8 and 15 July. Although it is most often seen in autumn, both offshore and at ponds at, or near, the coast, small numbers occur on spring passage between March and May. Winter sightings are now few and form a much smaller proportion of the total than in Bolam's time.

Birds occasionally stray far inland and there are four records in May and June at Grindon Lough and two, both sub-adults, at the same time of year in upper Coquetdale.

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*

A rare visitor.

One seen in winter on Holy Island by James Lilburn during the 1920s (Perry, 1946) was the first recorded in the county and no others were reported until 17 September 1946 when a second was found on this island. Between 1955 and 1971, there were six more (including three at Seaton Sluice), all between 11 August and 14 November.

Since 1975 it has appeared more frequently; six occurred in that year with one in 1976, at least four in 1977–78, but none in 1979. Although most of these sightings were in October, one frequented the Seaton Sluice – Tynemouth area between 7 and 30 July 1975, while single birds were off Seaton Sluice in both February 1976 and 1977 and at least two individuals were present either here, or at nearby North Shields, between October 1977 and February 1978.

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*

An extremely rare visitor.

An adult watched off Seaton Sluice on 11 July 1955 is the only record.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

An abundant passage and winter visitor and a common breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'common' and added that it bred 'gregariously on the marshy borders of loughs and tarns'; he feared, though, that the activities of gamekeepers would eventually wipe it out. By 1912, however, Bolam could report that it had greatly increased in the past thirty years and that many new breeding places had been established. In 1932, he was still able to describe it as 'an abundant resident' although he suggested that some of the colonies were 'scarcely so populous as they were a few years ago'.

Lack of accurate counts makes it impossible to calculate the population in Hancock's and Bolam's time and the first attempt to assess the position was the report prepared by G W Temperley for the British Trust for Ornithology's survey in 1938 (Hollom, 1939–40). Gulls were nesting at fifteen localities and a further seven had been used prior to 1925, but were then deserted. Temperley commented that because of discrepancies between observers' estimates, and a large amount of egg collecting, he was unable to give definite figures, and could merely use such terms as 'few' and 'very many'; the last was applicable only to Blackaburn Lough and Settlingstones Dam.

It was not until 1973 that a full census of breeding birds was attempted; this revealed a total of between 6500 and 7500 pairs with the principal colonies at Linshiels Lough (2000 pairs), Coquet Island (1200 pairs) and Holborn Moss (probably at least 1000 pairs); four others had between one hundred and 400 pairs while at a further seventeen there were less than a hundred. Many

colonies vary greatly in size from year to year and, on occasions, no birds may be present, sometimes as a result of changing water levels, but usually for no apparent reason. As an example, Holborn Moss had perhaps as many as 3000 pairs in 1946, but was completely deserted in the late 1950s before returning to something like its old status in 1973; furthermore, over 2000 pairs bred at Linnheads Lake in the 1960s, but temporary drainage disturbed the colony. The nests on Coquet Island fell to just over 520 in 1974, rising again to 1015 in 1977; Holy Island Lough, too, has fluctuated, for although there were 400 pairs in 1968, it was completely abandoned by 1972, but was reoccupied on a small scale in 1975. Linshiels Lough is still the biggest colony with an estimated 3000 pairs in 1978.

The numerous resident breeding birds make passage difficult to detect. However, very considerable flocks pass through the county in March and April and parties can often be seen, with *L. canus*, in roadside fields – in 1973, for example, 2000 were at Grindon Lough on 8 April and 200 per hour were moving north off Hauxley on 18 April. By October, there are large concentrations of autumn arrivals. Lindisfarne N N R is a favourite roosting area and on 25 October 1956 an estimated 100000 were present, while mixed parties of *L. ridibundus* and *L. canus*, comprising thousands of birds, have been seen in December (see below). Away from Lindisfarne, counts in 1975–76 and 1976–77 suggested that some 4000 wintered along the rest of the coastline although there were occasional unusual gatherings, such as the 'many thousands' reported from St Mary's Island on 24 February 1976.

Large inland roosts sometimes occur; 4000 were on Derwent Reservoir on 2–3 October 1976 and 5000 on Sweethope Lough on 10 December 1977.

Intensive ringing of pulli from colonies at Newton Pool, Linshiels Lough, Linnheads Lake and Whitfield Lough suggests that they are particularly nomadic in their first year with recoveries from as far apart as Eire, the Netherlands, Spain and Morocco. A three-year old bird was found at Thurso, Caithness, a five-year old from Linnheads was breeding on Coquet Island (where it died six years later) and a nine-year old was found near Lisbon, Portugal. There are seven reports of birds ten to thirteen years old, five of which were noted either in Northumberland or Durham. Other ringing recoveries indicate that passage and wintering birds originate in Fennoscandia, the Baltic states and Russia, while one ringed on the Faeroe Islands in July 1971 was found dead at St Mary's Island in January 1979.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

An abundant passage and winter visitor and an extremely rare breeding species.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'an abundant winter visitant and passage migrant, and, as it is never absent from the coast and has bred upon the Farne Islands (1910 to 1914 inclusive, but not more than one or two pairs in each year) must also be included as a partial resident'.

It was noticed occasionally in colonies of *L. ridibundus*, but it was 1970 before a pair again nested – on a moor in the southwest of the county. Moorland breeding also occurred in 1971, 1972 and 1979 while a pair attempted to nest on the Farne Islands in 1974.

During the winter it is widely distributed in flocks of up to several hundred and these assemble at night in safe roosting areas. The largest concentration is usually in Lindisfarne N N R where, in December 1974, there was a mixed party of 40000 *L. canus* and *L. ridibundus*, with 53000 present in December 1975. On 21 January 1968 an estimated 35000 were roosting at Colt Crag, but inland gatherings do not usually exceed 5000.

Spring movements are sometimes apparent by late February, as in 1972 when 3000 were at both Druridge and Whitley Bay with 10000 at Colt Crag. However, March and April are the main passage months and large numbers can often be seen at this time on roadside fields throughout the county – between 1 and 8 April 1971, for example, 3000 were at Cresswell and 1000 at both Widdrington and Longhirst. Such movements also occur offshore as on 6 April 1968 when 650 per hour were passing north off Bamburgh, and in April 1972 when up to 900 per day were counted from the Farne Islands and Coquet Island. In some years this passage may continue until mid-May.

The first returning birds are usually seen in late June and early July when small parties may often be noted passing down the North Tyne valley; others come back to a favourite haunt – the open spaces and playing fields of the Newcastle area. Large numbers seldom appear until October: in 1976, for example, roosts of 8000 formed on Derwent Reservoir and 4000 on Sweethope Lough. There are occasional midwinter movements, possibly the result of weather conditions, when from 250 to 300 per hour have been seen flying offshore.

Pulli ringed in Norway, Sweden and Finland have been found in the county between October and January and these, together with the recovery in Norway (66°N) of an adult marked at Fenwick, indicate the origins of the winter visitors. A pullus ringed in Argyllshire was discovered at Seaton Sluice in the following September, but there is no evidence that Scottish birds remain to winter.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

A common passage visitor and breeding species, rare in winter.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a very common resident' which bred 'abundantly at the Farne Islands, and also inland in the uncultivated districts'. Bolam (1912) remarked that it was 'one of the most numerous birds on the Farne Islands', but his statement that 'inland, it still breeds annually' with scattered pairs 'on several of the floes, and mosses, westward of the Tyne and Rede' suggests a marked decline mainly as the result of game-preserving activities. At that time, the only sizeable inland colony was at Hindleysteel where Chapman had found one hundred pairs in 1906. Inland, the decline continued and by 1932 Bolam noted that it had been banished from most of these colonies, although it remained abundant on the Farne Islands.

Recently, the only inland breeding has been in the southwest of the county where a single pair was suspected of nesting in 1971; four pairs laid eggs in 1972 and a colony of twenty-three pairs was found in 1979. As with *L. argentatus*, numbers on the Farne Islands continued to increase and the current situation is dealt with under that species (page 87). Breeding was first recorded on Coquet Island in 1973 (seven pairs) and by 1976 there was a mixed colony of 350 pairs. Control measures, similar to those used on the Farne Islands, had reduced this to thirty-eight pairs in 1979.

A few overwinter and the first spring arrivals appear in early March. Passage intensifies later in the month, and during April, with birds moving north offshore and also overland – on 31 March 1973 there were fifty at Wooler while small groups passed over the Tweed valley throughout the day.

Autumn movement may begin in mid-June and in 1975 one hundred immatures had gathered at Fourstones by 14 June. However, there are seldom more than a few hundred in any concentration, the recent maximum being 340 at Whitley Bay on 21 August 1975. Although offshore passage is not usually conspicuous at this time, there was a constant southerly move-

ment off Seaton Sluice on 27 August 1973. Numbers normally decline steadily during late September and October, but there are occasional late gatherings, or movements, as on 23 November 1972 when, during a severe gale, 3000, together with 15000 *L. argentatus*, had gathered on the Farne Islands. Only a handful of wintering birds remains after late November.

Bolam (1932) recognised that two races occurred in the county. Breeding birds belonged to the British *L. f. graellsii* while the Scandinavian *L. f. fuscus* was 'a passage migrant or winter visitant'; he thought that most of the birds wintering on the coast were of this latter race. In recent years only a handful of *L. f. fuscus* has been reported, usually singly or in small parties at times of passage, although there was an exceptional movement on 15 November 1969 when 500 flew north off St Mary's Island. Moreover, it is possible that, in the past, some other late concentrations may have consisted of *L. f. fuscus*, but, although an occasional individual may be seen in winter (as at Seaton Sluice and Amble in January 1975), the majority of wintering birds are *L. f. graellsii*.

Many hundreds of nestlings have been ringed on the Farne Islands and recoveries have shown that the main wintering grounds are in Portugal, southern Spain and along the northwest coast of Africa and, occasionally, as far south as Sierra Leone. Recoveries from Sardinia, Sicily and Tunisia indicate that young birds, and at least one adult, may wander into the Mediterranean, while one travelled to southern Sweden in its first summer. Birds are not always faithful to their natal colony and fourteen from the Isle of May, and seven from Walney Island (the oldest aged fifteen), have been found nesting on the Farne Islands. Similarly, Farne birds have been identified in colonies on Coquet Island and near Tarnbrook, Lancashire, while an adult of breeding age was found on Barra, in the Outer Hebrides, in the summer of 1972. In 1979, nine *L. fuscus* and two *L. argentatus*, marked on the Farne Islands in 1961 (i.e. aged eighteen years) were recovered on the islands. A pullus ringed in Norway (59° N) was found dead at Berwick on 2 February 1974, the only recovery in the county of a bird originating within the range of *L. f. fuscus*.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

An abundant passage and winter visitor and a common breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'abundant... at all seasons', but mentioned that, as in Hancock's time, it was a scarce breeder, only about six pairs nesting on the Farne Islands; moreover, although often seen inland in summer, the two or three pairs found by Chapman at Hindleysteel in 1906 was the only proved breeding in such a locality. In 1932, he wrote that it had 'increased considerably as a breeding species on the Farne Islands during recent years', but that it had 'been driven away from its inland nesting station on Hindlee Steel'.

Numbers on the Farne Islands continued to increase and, despite control measures, a total of 5284 *L. argentatus* and *L. fuscus* nests was counted in 1974. This represented the peak and by 1976 the figure was 4253. During that year, more effective control was introduced with the result that there was a further drop to 2620 in 1977 and to 1762 in 1979. No attempt has ever been made to assess the numbers of the two species in the breeding population, but out of 3264 predatory gulls, ringed at random between 1961 and 1965, 2925 were *L. fuscus* and 339 *L. argentatus*, a proportion of roughly nine to one.

Breeding was first noted on Coquet Island in 1970 (three pairs), but following a marked increase (to 350 pairs in 1976), control measures were instigated (page 86). A pair nested at Dunstanburgh in 1944 and there have

been as many as four pairs in subsequent years, while at least one pair was at Cullernose Point in 1952. Away from the coast, breeding has been recorded at Holborn Moss (some three pairs in the 1950s and a single pair in 1972), at quarries inland from Embleton (up to twelve pairs since 1963) and at a moorland site in the southwest of the county in 1967 and 1968. Since 1967, a few have nested on buildings in North Shields while the Newcastle city centre was colonised in 1971.

Passage is often masked by the presence of large numbers of residents although observers have sometimes seen birds moving north offshore in spring and south in autumn. Similarly, there may be an easterly passage through the Tyne gap in early spring, as, for example, between 22 and 27 February 1977 when one hundred were at Fourstones and 150 at Newbrough. This movement is reversed in autumn, 406 being counted moving west during severe weather on 11 December 1976. On 23 November 1972 an unprecedented 15000 had gathered on the Farne Islands during a gale.

Wintering flocks number many thousands, especially on Lindisfarne NNR and on the opencast mining area near Druridge. Elsewhere on the coast it is common throughout the winter, particularly in sheltered harbours such as Seahouses, Amble and the mouth of the Tyne.

Between 1955 and 1977 eight individuals with yellow legs and, therefore, possibly belonging to the subspecies *L. a. omissus* or *L. a. michahellis* were recorded: they appeared near Coldstream, on Holy Island and at North Shields and Newcastle, the majority between January and late April. A bird showing the characteristics of a hybrid *L. argentatus* x *L. hyperboreus* was at Tynemouth on 17 February 1975 and it, or another, at North Shields fish quay on 7 April 1976.

Ringing recoveries show that there is a very considerable influx to the Farne colony from the Isle of May. A few 'aliens' have come from St Abb's Head and Embleton while a sixteen-year old bird was culled on Coquet Island in May 1979. Recoveries also indicate that the wintering flocks include birds from Scotland, and Norway as far north as Vardo (70°N). A pullus ringed on the Farne Islands was found at Bristol in November of its first winter while a bird, ringed in its first winter in Belgium in February 1970, was recovered on the Farne Islands on 28 May 1976.

Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides*

A rare visitor.

According to Selby, three or four specimens had been obtained in the county, all before 1833, and Hancock knew of no others. Bolam (1932) described it as 'a winter visitant, very much less frequent on our coast than the last species [the Glaucous Gull]'; he listed a further eight birds, all on, or near, the coast in winter, and mentioned that others had occurred. In 1932, he stated that it was a 'casual winter visitant'; most of these visitors were immatures and, as was shown by Chapman's sighting of one at Houxty on 27 January 1915, it occasionally strayed inland.

None occurred between 1932 and 1953, but since then it has appeared in twenty-three of the next twenty-seven years. The annual ornithological reports give details of about 113 birds and, in the case of seventy-seven whose age was known, fifty-six were immature and the remainder adult.

It is still chiefly a winter visitor, although many linger into April, and a few until May; there are three records in June, but none in July, while the earliest date for the autumn return is 19 August. As with *L. hyperboreus*, a favourite stretch of coast is that from Seaton Sluice to North Shields fish quay, up to

four frequenting this area early in 1976. However, it has been reported from most coastal localities northward to Berwick and it occasionally wanders inland as far as Newcastle quayside, the Tyne at Newburn, Holywell Ponds and Gosforth Park.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a winter visitant, irregular in appearance, sometimes present in moderate numbers, more usually seen only singly, immature birds being always largely in the majority'. In 1912, his comments had been almost identical, although he had added that it occasionally strayed inland in stormy weather; he had also mentioned a late October gathering of about a dozen at Goswick.

Today, its status remains much the same, but it is now recorded in greater numbers, and in every month, rather than only from October to March. With the exception of 1941, when up to twelve were seen at both Holy Island and Beadnell from late October, relatively few were reported until the mid-1960s when an increase became apparent. Between 1970 and 1977 the average annual total was forty-six with immatures outnumbering adults by about eight to one. Most have left by April, but some linger into May; a handful is seen between June and September, but there is usually a marked arrival in October. It has been recorded from all parts of the coast, usually singly, but occasionally in small parties, as many as seven frequenting the stretch from Seaton Sluice to North Shields fish quay, a favourite area, between January and April 1976. Individuals sometimes wander inland, especially to the ponds in the southeast of the county, but records from Hallington on 26 December 1946, Whittle Dene on 23 October 1971 and Derwent Reservoir on 15 February 1976 and 14 March 1976 (two birds) are exceptional.

Details of what were believed to be *L. hyperboreus* x *L. argentatus* and *L. hyperboreus* x *L. marinus* hybrids are given on pages 88 and 90.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

A common passage and winter visitor and a well-represented summer visitor which has bred twice.

Bolam (1912) gives several examples of pairs seen inland and at the coast in summer, and in 1932 he stated that a pair had bred on Carter Fell in 1923, rearing three young; they returned to the site in 1924, only to be destroyed by gamekeepers. Apart from this, he described it as 'a resident and passage migrant, common upon the coast in winter, and never wholly absent at any season', adding that it occurred throughout the year over the western hills in pairs, or small parties, especially in winter.

Although birds, including adults, are still seen both inland and at the coast during summer, there has been only one further attempt at breeding. A pair nested on the Farne Islands in 1975, but the two eggs were destroyed in the course of an operation to control predatory gulls.

Very considerable numbers arrive from early autumn onwards, flocks forming in some years in late June. Particularly large gatherings occur on Goswick Sand Rigg, where 5000 were present on 25 October 1966; on the reclaimed opencast mining site at Druridge Bay, where there were 4000 on 6 August 1971, and to the south of Blyth where 6000 adults were counted on 23 September 1973. Offshore passage is sometimes observed in autumn; 4000 per hour were moving north off Hauxley on 31 October 1968, while a late movement of 400–600 per hour was noted along the whole coastline on 9

and 10 December 1967. Single birds, and small parties, can be found on remote moorlands throughout the winter and they probably account for the roosting flocks which congregate on inland reservoirs – in 1973, for example, up to 400 were at Hallington and a hundred or so at Catcleugh during November and December.

A bird believed to be a *L. marinus* x *L. hyperboreus* hybrid was seen at North Shields fish quay during April 1975.

Recoveries in the county of birds ringed as pulli in Scotland (Ross-shire and North Rona), Norway (as far north as 70°N) and in the USSR (near Murmansk) give some indication of the origin of the wintering flocks.

Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are five records, all but one of single adults: one was found shot at Holywell Ponds on 30 April 1960, and the others were seen on Holy Island on 31 May 1970, at the mouth of the Tyne from 24 to 31 December 1970 and on the beach at Cresswell on 20 January 1979. In addition, a second year bird was at St Mary's Island from 9 to 15 December 1978.

Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

An abundant passage visitor and a common winter visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident, never absent from the coast, though usually keeping a good offing; large numbers breed on the Pinnacles and adjacent cliffs on the Farne Islands'. He knew of only one inland record – in upper Coquetdale some years prior to 1887.

As a breeding species, it has increased considerably during the present century and this has been clearly shown on the Farne Islands where the 1959 figure of 1752 pairs had risen to 3968 pairs in 1979. Moreover, several new colonies have been started. Nesting was first noticed at Dunstanburgh in 1943 and by 1975 there were 472 pairs. Five pairs were on the cliffs at Tynemouth in 1957, with eleven pairs in 1960; no further breeding was reported until 1977 when there was a single pair, with six pairs in 1978. There is an increasing tendency for it to nest on buildings. In 1949, five nests were found on Smith's Dock Company Ltd's Brewery Store at North Shields while between 1951 and 1953 birds also nested on two adjacent buildings. The store population reached a peak of 141 nests in 1970 with 101 in 1978. From 1965 to 1970, when the building was demolished, there was a small colony (maximum thirty pairs) on the CWS warehouse in Newcastle: the birds then moved to the south bank of the Tyne. Also in 1965, ten pairs attempted to breed on warehouses at the mouth of the Ouseburn, while in 1973–74 up to four pairs were on Newcastle quayside. Other artificial sites were at Berwick (one pair in 1969) and Cambois (five pairs in 1972).

Large flocks of non-breeding birds may be present in summer and over 7000 have been seen on the Farne Islands, with from 1000 to 5000 at Chevington Burn and Cresswell and in the Coquet estuary.

There are frequent offshore movements, but it is difficult to determine if these represent true passage or are simply journeys to and from roosting and feeding grounds. The strongest passage, which is invariably in a northerly direction, takes place during north or northeasterly winds and up to 1000 per hour are regularly recorded with, occasionally, as many as 3500 per hour; it occurs mainly in October and early November, but large parties may be seen from late July. There were particularly massive gatherings in August 1977. Following a northerly movement of 1200 per hour off Seaton Sluice

on 4 August, 3000 were counted there on 9 August; on 20 August an estimated 14000 were in Amble harbour and, four days later, at least 10000 passed south off Seaton Sluice, 30000 travelled north off Hauxley in only thirty minutes, while a huge raft of many thousands was in Druridge Bay.

Spring passage is less conspicuous although now and then up to 1200 per hour can be seen between late March and mid-May. At times, there are midwinter movements: these may be either north or south and as many as 1800 per hour may be involved.

Inland records, other than on the Tyne where it is often present as far upstream as Newburn, remain scarce. Most of the dozen sightings have been on ponds in the southeast of the county, but two were at Holborn Moss on 25 July 1968, one at Grindon Lough on 17 March 1973 and one (dead) at Dilston on 29 December 1978.

Many hundreds have been ringed in the county and the tendency of breeding adults to return to their colony was illustrated in 1955 when twenty-four out of twenty-eight marked at North Shields in 1954 were again found nesting, all but two occupying the same window ledge. An occasional bird may, however, settle in an alien site and pulli from the Farne Islands have been controlled at North Shields, the Isle of May, Dunstanburgh and Heligoland.

Coulson (1966) analysed the recoveries of Kittiwakes ringed in the British Isles and Farne records support his conclusions. There is certainly 'a restricted dispersal of young birds during July, August and September' for most are then found on the Northumberland coast, although a few move further afield and may even cross the North Sea. In October and November there is a 'more extensive movement' to, among other places, the Bay of Biscay, north Spain and western Sweden. Coulson suggests that there are two distinct groups of immatures; the first disperses across the Atlantic and the other remains near European coasts. Moreover, birds reach 'their maximum distance from the natal area when just over two years old'. Both groups are represented in the county, for very considerable numbers of Farne birds, the majority ringed as pulli, have crossed the Atlantic to Greenland, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Labrador and, most distant of all, Davis Strait (69° 10′N 58° 17′W). Their ages generally range from four or five months to two years six months, but include some older individuals, among them a thirteen year old caught in Newfoundland and a fourteen year old shot in Greenland. Birds of the second group have been found as far south as the Canary Islands while others have occasionally penetrated the Mediterranean, the most easterly being in Calabria, southern Italy; one reached Palermo in Sicily while another was caught at Motta Visconti, in Lombardy.

There is a handful of inland recoveries including one at Thropton in 1966. At least three were in Germany, one in France (near Strasbourg), and two in Czechoslovakia. These last are of particular interest for they were ringed within minutes of each other, on 29 June 1961, but while one was found dead in February 1962, sixteen years elapsed before the second was controlled in February 1978!

Of the five birds ringed abroad and recovered in the county, three have come from near Murmansk, USSR, one from Norway (70°N) and the fifth from Iceland.

Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are five records: an adult alleged to have been shot off the mouth of the Tyne some years prior to 1874 (Bolam (1912) casts some doubt on the

authenticity of this location), two adults seen by Chapman on Holy Island on 3 February 1887, an immature shot at Beadnell a year or two after 1897, an immature present in the mouth of the Tyne between 18 December 1970 and 23 February 1971 and another immature in Seahouses harbour from 23–25 December 1979.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

An extremely rare visitor.

The only records are of single birds at Goswick Sand Rigg on 3 July 1955, St Mary's Island on 14 August 1956, Hauxley on 15–16 July 1964 (with two on 1 August), 18 and 21 August and 10 September 1966, and at the Long Nanny estuary on 30 June 1973.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

An extremely rare visitor.

One seen on the Farne Islands on 6 June 1880 is the only record.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Selby (1831) states that it 'used to breed in great numbers at the Fern Islands, but within late years they have been driven from thence, and have now colonised Coquet Island'. Bolam (1912) reported a change in fortunes, describing it as 'a common summer visitant, breeding annually at the Farne Islands...' and adding that 'it formerly bred in large numbers on Coquet Island also... but had ceased to do so more than thirty years ago'. He noted both then, and in 1932, that a few attempted to breed annually at one or two localities in the Lindisfarne area.

The largest breeding colony is still on the Farne Islands although at the end of the Second World War the 1939 figure of 2000 pairs had fallen to only 120 pairs. By 1950, however, there were about 1000 pairs with over 2200 pairs in 1956. A peak of 3000 pairs was recorded on Inner Farne in 1973 (a further eighty-four pairs were on Brownsman), but since then the colony size has fluctuated between 1750 and 2500 pairs. A single pair bred on Coquet Island in 1945 and by 1973 there had been a massive increase to 1800 pairs. As on the Farnes, this has never been exceeded and recent counts vary between 797 and 1675 pairs. The numbers nesting on the mainland are negligible, with probably not more than ten pairs at the one site in regular use.

It is invariably the first tern to return in spring, frequently being seen in the last few days of March (earliest 20 March 1977). Northerly passage takes place all along the coast, usually reaching a climax in mid-April, but sometimes continuing until mid-May – there was a typical movement on 23 April 1970 when up to a hundred per hour were passing north off many coastal points. Breeding grounds begin to be deserted after mid-July and, from then on, southerly movements are often recorded as on 24 July 1971 when 300 per hour were passing off Hauxley. Such passage frequently results in flocks gathering in certain favourite localities – for example, in late August and early September 1974 up to 500 were present at Ross, 350 at Alnmouth and 200 at Cresswell Ponds. It does not normally linger as late into the autumn as *S. hirundo* and *S. paradisaea*, but a few are always reported in October, and during 1975–77 several occurred in early November (with a very late bird off Seaton Sluice on 22 November 1975).

Inland records are scanty: one flew east over Colt Crag on 14 July 1957, in 1965 ten flew east over Prestwick Carr on 23 May and two were over Seaton

Delaval on 5 June, while in 1977 one was at Gosforth Park on 29 May and up to twenty frequented the Tyne at Wallsend from 12 to 18 September.

Many Sandwich Terns have been ringed in the county and the numerous recoveries give a clear picture of autumn passage southward along the coasts of France, Iberia and northwest Africa to wintering grounds extending over a very large area from Portugal to South Africa – a few birds, indeed, have rounded the Cape of Good Hope to be found as far north as Morrumbene in Mozambique. Two pulli ringed in 1972 and 1973 were recovered most unusually in mid-February 1974 in Norfolk and East Lothian respectively – extremely early dates for returning birds – while a third, ringed in 1964, was found in Inverness in January 1975!

Sandwich Terns are very susceptible to disturbance and are liable to change both colony size and location for no apparent reason. This is clearly illustrated at the Farne Islands where, in most years between 1896 and 1926, virtually all were on Knoxes Reef, an island which has not been used for the past fifty years. Subsequently, Brownsman became the favourite site and it was probably only the fact that repairs to the cottage were still in progress when they arrived in May 1972 that caused them to desert this island and move to Inner Farne. Ringing recoveries clearly illustrate this trait and movements of individuals between colonies are quite regular. Farne marked birds have been identified at other British colonies (including the Sands of Forvie in Aberdeenshire, Fidra and Inchmickery in the Firth of Forth, Coquet Island, Ravenglass and Carlingford Lough, Co. Down) and also in Denmark, the Netherlands and East and West Germany. In contrast, foreign birds – from Schleswig-Holstein and the Kattegat – have been found on the Farne Islands. Recoveries show that these terns penetrate into the Mediterranean, but birds found in Italy in June 1963, Hungary in 1973 and Romania in June 1964 and 1974, and July 1976, may be examples of colony interchange; indeed, one of these latter was discovered in a colony in the Danube delta.

A particularly startling recovery was that of a six-year old bird which landed, exhausted, on a ship close to St Paul's Rocks in the equatorial Atlantic Ocean (1°00′N 28°00′W); this is an area closely adjacent to that frequented by the American population *S. s. acuflavida*.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

An uncommon passage visitor and breeding species.

Writing in 1833, Selby remarked that he had 'met with it plentifully for the last fifteen years' on the Farne Islands, adding that 'it had only been noticed for a year or two previous to that period'; by 1874, however, Hancock could merely say that 'a few pairs' bred annually on the islands. Adamson (1880–81) stated that 'many years ago' Coquet Island was 'covered with Arctic, Sandwich and Roseate Terns' eggs during the season', but in 1912 Bolam thought that no terns had nested there since at least the 1850s although, each year, there was a pair or two on the Farne Islands. He confirmed this situation in 1932, commenting that the seven pairs on the Farne Islands in 1914 were the most he had ever known there.

Breeding status improved considerably from the late 1940s and by 1953 there were some ninety-nine nests on the Farne Islands, ninety-three of them on the Longstone rocks. The Longstone has been deserted since 1958, while numbers on the other islands reached a maximum in 1961 with thirty-four clutches on Inner Farne and some sixty on Brownsman. Subsequently there has been a steady decline with fifty-two confirmed nests in 1970. Coquet Island, too, was recolonised. In 1965 there were eighty pairs, but numbers

increased rapidly, reaching a peak of about 150 pairs in 1968. For several years there had also been a small colony on the mainland and in 1970 there were just over 200 pairs in the county. As in other British colonies, the 1970s have seen a marked decrease although, fortunately, there was a slight improvement in 1979 when thirty-six pairs were on Coquet Island, twenty-seven to thirty-four on the Farne Islands and nine on the mainland: this compares with a total of fifty-three pairs in 1978 and only thirty-three in 1977.

In 1973, four mixed pairs of *S. dougallii* and *S. hirundo* were on Coquet Island and in two cases the *hirundo* was identified as the male; all the young reared showed characteristics of *hirundo*.

Birds generally return to the colonies from mid-May, the earliest date being 1 May 1973. Even during the period of high population, few were seen away from the breeding sites, although Druridge Bay could attract parties of ten or more. An unusual northerly passage was noted off St Mary's Island in 1968 when thirty were counted on 16 July, forty on 6 August and eighty-three on the following day. In 1972, an autumn gathering on the Farne Islands, which must have included passage birds, possibly from the Firth of Forth, reached a peak of 170 on 15 August. Most have left by mid-September, but a few have been reported in October, the latest on 30 October 1971.

Inland records are virtually unknown, but fourteen were watched travelling inland over Budle Bay on 27 September 1970 and a single bird was found, with a party of *S. hirundo*, on the North Tyne at Redesmouth on 25 May 1976.

Recoveries of birds ringed in the county show that the main wintering grounds are in west Africa between Senegal and Nigeria.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Although Selby (1831) considered it to be 'rare', Hancock (1874) stated that it bred 'abundantly at the Farne Islands' and also 'some time ago on Coquet Island'; he thought that it might, perhaps, have nested at Prestwick Carr. By 1932, Bolam could state that it was 'a common summer visitant, breeding in considerable numbers on the Farne Islands, Holy Island, and elsewhere along the coast, but always much outnumbered by both the Arctic and Sandwich Terns'. It sometimes nested on marshy fields near the coast and, occasionally, at inland lakes and reservoirs such as Broomlee Lough and Hallington.

Today, its stronghold is Coquet Island which was recolonised in 1958; the population reached a peak of 2000 pairs in 1971 and since then the figure has varied between 1030 and 1750 pairs. On the Farne Islands it is still less numerous than *S. sandvicensis* and *S. paradisaea* and the colonies fluctuate considerably in size. Some 230 pairs nested in 1973 and there are now from seventy-eight to 250 pairs. As in the past, there are small colonies on the mainland and the most important of these (in the north of the county) may consist of as many as a hundred pairs. Since 1932, however, the only inland breeding records have been of a pair or two in the South Tyne valley between 1962 and 1965. In 1973, four mixed pairs of *S. hirundo* and *S. dougallii* were on Coquet Island (see above).

Away from the breeding grounds separation from *paradisaea* is difficult. The earliest spring record of a 'Commic' tern is 4 April and of a *hirundo* 11 April. Passage is at its height in May with birds occasionally moving north along the coast at a rate of up to a hundred an hour. The main return is in

August and early September when some hundreds may gather at a favourite site such as Cresswell Ponds. Some of these movements involve vast numbers of birds as on 5 August 1962 when Druridge Bay was filled with 'many tens of thousands of mixed terns, making calculations almost impossible'. A few linger into October and single 'Commics' have been seen as late as 6 and 9 November. Bolam, indeed, saw two off Goswick on 1 January 1884 !

It occurs regularly on passage inland and records suggest a well-established route along the Tyne valley. Sightings are made in both spring and autumn and in May 1975, for example, birds were reported successively from Newcastle, Killingworth and Seaton Burn, Wark Forest, and Kielderhead Moor. In autumn, it is seen frequently at the coastal ponds and as far inland as Grindon Lough and Colt Crag.

Birds ringed in the county have been recovered on the wintering grounds in west Africa and also *en route* in Iberia. A pullus ringed in 1965, and recovered in a Belgian colony in June 1968, indicated a degree of interchange, while others marked in Estonia and the Netherlands, and recovered here in autumn, suggest that some passage birds may be of continental origin.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Selby (1831) described it as being 'very numerous during summer upon the Fern Islands' and Hancock (1874) concurred, adding that it also bred 'some years ago at Coquet Island'. In 1912, Bolam considered it to be 'much the most abundant of our terns' and suggested that on the Farne Islands it was then 'probably more numerous... than it has ever been previously'; in fact, in that year 1100 nests were counted on Brownsman and there were others on the Longstone rocks, West Wideopens and Knoxes Reef. Bolam added that it had begun to breed on Holy Island in 1900.

In common with other Farne birds, it suffered severely during the Second World War, but, fortunately, there was a rapid recovery and by 1949 there were 'very large colonies' on both Brownsman and Inner Farne with smaller numbers on five other islands. Despite a marked decrease on Brownsman, first noticed in the early 1960s, there are now usually some 2000 pairs. The Coquet Island colony was re-established in about 1962 and controls of ringed birds indicate that it has probably been built up at the expense of the Farne Islands; between 500 and 800 pairs nest there annually. One or two mainland sites are used; in 1955 seventy nests were found at one of these colonies, but during the 1970s the maximum count has been forty-two pairs.

Both spring and autumn passage take place in association with *S. hirundo*, (page 94), and extreme dates on which *paradisaea* have definitely been identified are 7 April and 9 October. There was an unusual movement, mainly involving *paradisaea*, when about 10000 'Commic' terns passed north off Hauxley between 3 and 5 September 1964, while ringing recoveries show that juveniles may move into Scotland before embarking on their southward journey. They have been found on the east coast as far north as Aberdeen and, on the west, have reached the Isle of Arran.

Inland records are exceptional. There were four in the period 1933 to 1969 – at Broomlee Lough (July 1948), Hallington (April 1961), Sweethope Lough (May 1962) and Kielder Forest (August 1962) – but during the 1970s at least one or two have been seen annually on passage at the coastal ponds, while in 1971 as many as seventy 'Commics', mainly *paradisaea*, gathered at Newcastle quayside on 19 August. Furthest from the sea were, one seen at

Grindon Lough on 6 May 1972, and a Danish-ringed bird found dead at Ridsdale in May 1978.

Many thousands have been ringed in the county, but not only have recoveries been proportionally fewer than in the case of *S. sandvicensis*, but more have been controlled on the breeding grounds. These retraps have shown that nesting birds often reach a considerable age – thirty-nine have been fifteen years and over – while one ringed as a pullus on 26 June 1938 and found nesting on 11 June 1965 was, at twenty-seven years, the 'oldest British ringed bird to date' (Hickling, 1966). Arctic Terns tend to return to their fledging area, although in addition to Coquet Island, in recent years a few Northumberland birds have been seen in colonies in Denmark, Germany and Scotland.

Several have been found in South Africa in winter: the majority have been in Cape Province, but there is evidence that some travel up the east coast into Natal and as far north as Richard's Bay in Zululand. There were two particularly spectacular recoveries. A pullus ringed on 22 July 1961 was discovered, five months later, aboard a Japanese whaling ship in the antarctic (56°20′S 39°30′E); it was only the fourth European tern to be recovered in that area and provided additional support to the belief that many *paradisaea* winter near the pack ice. Another pullus, marked on the Farne Islands in 1969, was found dead in New South Wales, Australia, on 15 September 1973, only the third British tern to be recovered on that continent. Also unusual were two pulli, marked on the Farnes in 1960 and 1963 respectively, and recovered in the Ural Mountains, USSR, in June 1962 and July 1965; it has been suggested that, instead of returning in the normal way to the western European breeding grounds, they had joined the north Russian or arctic nesting birds.

Estonian, German and Danish ringed birds have been recovered in their first autumn in the county, so indicating the origin of some of the passage visitors.

Aleutian Tern *Sterna aleutica*

An extremely rare visitor.

One was noticed among the terns on Inner Farne on 28 May 1979 and was still present next day. This is not only the first British record, but also the first time it has been seen outside the north Pacific Ocean.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*

An extremely rare visitor.

One, seen from Inner Farne on 20 June 1966, is the only record.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

An uncommon passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a summer visitant and passage migrant' and summarised its history within the county. A colony of about a dozen pairs had been on the Old Law, Ross Back Sands, in the 1830s, but this had ceased to exist by the early 1860s. For the next fifty years or so, it was represented 'by only occasional wanderers along the coast' although a pair probably nested at Cheswick in 1890. It became more numerous during the First World War and there was a nest on Holy Island in 1915, with as many as five in the Lindisfarne area in 1923 and two in 1926; some certainly bred there in 1928.

There is no reference to it in the annual ornithological reports until 1945 when it is recorded as having 'bred again on the Northumberland coast', and

in 1947 there were twenty-five pairs in one colony and five in another. Although published information is scanty, doubtless in an effort to prevent disturbance of the breeding sites, it is unlikely that the 1947 figures have ever been greatly exceeded. Up to four sites have been occupied in some years, as far south as the Long Nanny, but the 1977 count of thirty-five pairs is the most encouraging yet made. In some seasons very few young are reared, partly because of disturbance, but often as the result of adverse weather and high tides.

The first birds usually arrive in late April, the earliest date in recent years being 21 April 1966. Only occasionally are they seen on the coast away from the breeding sites and most have left by early September. However, individuals sometimes linger into October and in 1973 one was seen at North Shields as late as 20 October.

There is only one inland record: a party of three at Holywell Ponds on 4 August 1974.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are four records: one remained in Budle Bay from 18 June to 24 July 1938, an immature was at South Linton Pond on 4 and 5 September 1969, an adult, found at Ashington Ponds on 7 June 1970, was seen next day at Cresswell Ponds, and another adult was in Gosforth Park on 23 April 1977.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

An uncommon passage visitor.

According to Hancock (1874) it was merely 'a casual visitant'; he had three examples in his collection, including two adults which had been taken in November 1845. Bolam (1912) described it as 'an occasional visitant in spring and autumn' and commented that 'of late years it has... occurred with increasing frequency'. He listed fifteen records, five of the earliest (between about 1830 and 1852) being at Prestwick Carr, then an ideal 'staging post' for the species; in 1932, he added another four, the most recent in 1921.

Between 1935 and 1938 there were a further six reports, but after the Second World War it was noted with increasing regularity and since 1945 it has appeared annually. Initially most sightings were of single birds, or small parties, but, in two hours on the evening of 8 August 1955, forty were counted flying north off Seaton Sluice.

More recently, it has become a regular, but not numerous, spring and autumn visitor. In spring, numbers seldom reach double figures, but there are occasional parties of from seven to sixteen, while between 16 and 19 May 1974 thirty-six were seen, including twelve at Seaton Burn with others at Holywell Ponds, Cornhill, Gosforth Park, and off Seaton Sluice and Coquet Island. Autumn passage is generally more marked and from fifteen to thirty are now reported in most years, usually singly or in parties of less than ten. 1974 was, however, an exceptional year: three appeared in late August and then, in September, unprecedented numbers occurred – a total of seventy-eight (including forty-five on 8 September) moved south off Seaton Sluice; between 21 and 23 September eleven flew south off Hauxley and twenty off Holy Island; one or two were noticed at other coastal localities, while single birds were seen inland at Grindon Lough, Whittle Dene, Seaton Burn and Holywell Ponds with five at Hallington on 14 September. Birds are now observed quite regularly in early October, extreme dates for these passage visitors being 20 April and 27 October.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are five records: two adults watched 'hawking' over Gosforth Park lake in May, about 1897, an adult at Grindon Lough on 7 June 1969, an immature at Holywell Ponds from 9 to 12 August 1969, an adult at Wallsend Swallow Pond on 11 June 1977 and an adult at Newton Pool on 6 August 1978.

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

A common passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

Bolam described it as 'a resident, nesting abundantly on the Farnes and, perhaps, reinforced during winter by others bred farther north'.

The Farne Islands remain its only breeding site and counts there in recent years reveal a steady increase from about 1350 pairs in 1971 to some 3790 in 1979. Bolam thought that an estimated five per cent of the population were of the bridled form, but a later calculation (Witherby *et al.*, 1941) put the figure at 4.1 per cent. The breeding ledges, among them the much favoured Pinnacles, are usually deserted by mid-August and, thereafter, few are seen for about three months. Birds return in strength in late October or early November and, provided the weather is not too stormy, may remain in the vicinity throughout the winter; they make periodical, if brief, visits to the nesting areas.

Considerable numbers of non-breeding birds are present off the Farne Islands in summer while there may be up to 300 off Dunstanburgh and some 200 near Coquet Island; breeding has, however, never been recorded at these last localities.

Large numbers of auks are often seen moving offshore at distances too great for specific identification, but as the majority are probably *U. aalge*, details of these movements are given here.

Patterns are difficult to detect and passage is most likely to involve birds within the North Sea basin moving in response to weather conditions and food availability. Observed movements are usually in a northerly direction and take place especially during periods of north or northeasterly winds. As many as 2000 per hour were counted off Annstead on 16 February 1969, while up to 400 per hour have also been seen travelling south off Seaton Sluice early in the year. May is often a favoured month: in 1975, for example, 280 per hour travelled north off Seaton Sluice on 14 May, nearly all identified as *U. aalge*, and a total of 5000 was recorded from the same point on 24 and 25 May (the movement was also seen from Coquet Island where *U. aalge* outnumbered *Alca torda* in a ratio of four to one). Passage is sometimes noted throughout the summer, as in 1977 when some 8000 were counted from Seaton Sluice between 6 and 18 June and 1200 on 9 and 10 July. Such figures are, however, exceptional and it is usually from August onwards that large numbers are again on the move; in suitable weather conditions counts of some 700 per hour may be made until mid-November.

Bolam (1912) commented that during stormy weather in winter it 'is frequently driven far inland', but there are no recent inland records.

Oiling incidents are almost annual, being especially noticeable in winter after periods of strong easterly winds. The most serious appeared to be in January 1970 when 1160 *U. aalge* were found dead along the coastline although hundreds came ashore between January and March 1978.

There have been numerous winter recoveries of Guillemots ringed on the Farne Islands; all have been from the North Sea basin or the English

Channel, from southern Norway in the northeast to the Channel Islands in the southwest. Birds do not necessarily return to their natal colony to breed for two, ringed as pulli in 1964, have been found nesting on The Lamb, in the Firth of Forth, in June 1975 and 1977. The Farne Islands population is the southern form *U. a. albionis*, but recoveries in the county of four birds ringed in the Faeroes, and one ringed on Bornholm, Denmark, confirm observations that the northern race *U. a. aalge* occurs in winter.

Brunnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are four dated records. One was shot in the Fairway, between Seahouses and the Inner Farne, in winter 1883–84, another was seen at the Farne Islands in June 1908 and a third was picked up on the beach at Cullercoats on 29 November 1913 (Bolam, 1932). These records are not included in British Ornithologists' Union (1971), but there seems no reason to doubt Bolam's judgment on their validity. On 13 July 1977 one was seen off the Farne Islands: this has been accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee*, it being the first living specimen seen in Britain since the committee's formation in 1958.

In addition, Perry (1946) mentions an oiled bird at Holy Island and 'several at sea' quoting, as his authority, J Lilburn. However, no dates or confirmatory evidence are given.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

A well-represented passage visitor and an uncommon breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident, a few pairs breeding annually on the Farne Islands' where its status had remained virtually unaltered for at least eighty years. He added that it had usually bred, in association with *U. aalge*, on Staple Island and the Pinnacles, but recently three or four pairs had become established on the East Wideopens. By 1932, he thought that it was 'nesting, in small but apparently increasing numbers', but current figures show that the situation has changed little, counts during the 1970s varying between nine and eighteen pairs. Most are now on the Inner Farne, but after a long interval, the East Wideopens was recolonized in 1970 and in 1979 there were seven pairs here, the islands' total of twenty-nine pairs being the highest ever recorded.

In 1912, Bolam had noted that 'considerable parties of Razorbills may frequently be met with, at all seasons, off the mouth of the Tweed, and on other parts of the Northumbrian coast, some of the adults, in summer, being in full breeding plumage'. Such non-breeding birds still gather and a hundred or so may be seen around the Farne Islands, with up to forty off Dunstanburgh and some thirty near Coquet Island. Two unusual late summer concentrations have been recorded: 300 were seen off Alnmouth on 16 July 1948 and 235 auks, mainly *A. torda*, were counted from Cullernose Point on 7 August 1957.

The large passage of auks described on page 98 included some Razorbills, but the overall ratio is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, the oiling incident of late January 1970, when 149 were picked up dead on the Northumberland and Durham coast, indicates that large numbers must be present at sea in winter.

Bolam mentioned that during storms it was sometimes driven far up rivers and that individuals had been seen inland on the Tweed at Wark and Carham. An unusual date for such an incident was 21 May 1913 when one

was captured on Elsdon Moor. There have, however, been no recent inland records.

A pullus ringed on Fair Isle in July 1973 was found at Newton-by-the-Sea in June 1974, while another, ringed on the Isle of May at the same time, was found at Howick in March 1978. The recovery at Embleton, in March 1969, of one marked in July 1961 on the White Sea coast of the USSR (64°N), shows that the race *A. t. torda* occurs in winter.

Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*

Extinct.

Wallis (1769) reported that 'the Penguin, a curious and uncommon bird, was taken alive a few years ago in the island of Farn, and presented to the late John William Bacon, Esq, of Etherston, with whom it grew so tame and familiar, that it would follow him with its body erect to be fed' and both Hancock and Bolam considered that there was little doubt that this was really the Great Auk. Furthermore, the finding of its bones in old sea-caves at Whitburn Lizards (Howse, 1879) shows that it once lived in Co Durham, if not in Northumberland.

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*

A rare visitor.

Both Hancock and Bolam describe it as 'a winter visitant', Bolam commenting, in 1912, that it is 'rather uncertain in its appearances'. He mentions that, in addition to being seen near the Farne Islands in May in 1886, 1899 and 1902, one was shot off Staple Island on 15 June 1906, adding that, nevertheless, there had never been any suggestion of breeding. In 1932, he considered it to be 'not very uncommon at the periods of migration, but chary of too close an approach to the coast'.

Today, it is perhaps less common than in Bolam's time. There are never more than five or six in any year, usually singly or in pairs and generally in the vicinity of the Farne Islands. Exceptionally, small parties are reported – four were seen on 27 July 1933 and 6 November 1949 (the latter off Blyth) while three were in Skate Road on 23 October 1948. Recently it has been recorded, but with no apparent pattern, in every month of the year, and it seems that most must be wandering non-breeding, or wintering birds, attracted by the large concentrations of other auks round the Farne Islands.

A pullus ringed in Sweden (57° N) on 29 June 1978 was found, long dead, in Budle Bay on 1 February 1979.

Little Auk *Alle alle*

An uncommon, but occasionally well-represented, winter visitor.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'an irregular winter visitant, which sometimes comes to us in large numbers, and is then, perhaps, not seen again for a year or two'. He mentions 1841, 1876, 1878–79, 1882–83, 1884–85 and 1895 as years when it was unusually common adding that, at times, it is liable to be blown far inland. Extreme dates for its appearance were 20 October and 24 March, but one had been found dead at Alnwick on 7 May 1892 while Pennant saw one on the Farne Islands on 15 July 1769.

Its status remains much the same. Small numbers occur every winter, but in certain years there are considerable offshore movements, particularly in late autumn as northerly gales abate. It was especially numerous early in 1937, while in late January 1940 about 300 arrived in Beadnell Bay: many were subsequently washed up dead. There were marked northerly passages in

October 1955, November 1957 and late October 1959, but the only recent movement of comparable magnitude took place on 18 November 1975 when 110 flew north in one and a half hours.

Considerable numbers are frequently found dead on the shore after bad weather, and onshore winds, and Little Auks are often victims of oiling as in late January 1970 when forty were found on the coast of Northumberland and Durham. As in Bolam's day, storms may force a few individuals well inland to places such as Thirlwall, Sharperton and Chollerton.

There have been a few summer records: one was in Plessey Woods on 4 May 1943, seven off Hartley between 11 and 28 August 1959, one off the Farne Islands on 22 June 1960 and two off St Mary's Island on 17 July 1968.

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*

An uncommon winter visitor and an abundant breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a resident, frequent on the coast all the year'. He mentioned that it bred on the Farne Islands, although when he visited the islands in June 1831 it was present 'in no great numbers'. However, he reported that in 1870 other observers found 'a colony of considerable size' there. Bolam (1912) considered that it bred 'in large numbers', having increased markedly in the past twenty or thirty years. He thought that local birds moved south in winter and were replaced by others from further north; these last could be seen in considerable flocks off the mouth of the Tweed and, occasionally, elsewhere.

Censuses of the Farne colonies during the 1970s have shown that, in contrast to certain west coast sites, a steady increase is taking place. In 1971, 11336 pairs were counted and this had risen to an estimated 15000 pairs by 1979. In addition, a new colony has become established on Coquet Island; some fifty pairs were present in 1971, rising to about 900 pairs in 1978, but with a slight decline to under 800 in 1979. Birds begin to reassemble in early March (occasionally from late February) and vast rafts are seen on the sea; similar rafts form at the end of the season and departure is virtually completed by mid-August. Very few are noted in winter and during the major oiling incident in late January 1970 only eight were found dead on the shore.

Puffins are sometimes included in the large movements of auks described on page 98, especially in early spring when returning to the colonies. Bolam remarked that in stormy weather it was apt 'to turn up in unexpected places' (such as near the head of Coquetdale in 1894), but there have been no inland records in recent years.

Recoveries of birds from the Farne Islands suggest a dispersal within the North Sea basin outside the breeding season for they have been found on the continental coast from southern Norway to southwestern France. Harris (1976) dealt with inter-colony movements: he showed that by the end of 1975 seventy Farne birds, several of them known to be breeding, had been seen on the Isle of May while there was a smaller reverse movement. There has been further evidence of this interchange and, in addition, birds ringed as pulli on the Farne Islands have been identified in colonies on Inchkeith, Craigleith, Coquet Island and the Saltee Islands, Co Wexford. Until 1979, all the 'aliens' on the Farne Islands had come from the Isle of May, but on 3 August one marked on the Shiant Islands, Western Isles, in June 1973, was controlled on Inner Farne.

A pullus ringed on St Kilda in August 1973 was found at Blyth in March 1975 while two Farne birds, one ringed as an adult, were found dead on Benbecula and South Uist in February and March 1979 respectively. A second Farne adult, marked in 1956, was retrapped in 1977 and thus became

the 'oldest British Trust for Ornithology ringed Puffin' (Hawkey and Hickling, 1978).

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

A rare irregular visitor.

A central Asiatic species, it arrived in the British Isles as the result of eruptive movements in some eleven of the years 1859 to 1909, the greatest invasions taking place in 1863 and 1888. Bolam (1912) gives a detailed account of events in Northumberland. In 1863, a party of twelve or fourteen appeared at Thropton on 21 May and from then until the end of the year 'small flocks were seen in many other parts of Northumberland, chiefly on the coast'. At least fifty were killed and Bolam estimated that two or three times this number probably occurred. No more arrived until 1888 and the first intimation of this new influx was one seen on the Megstone (one of the Farne Islands) on 6 May; a flock of sixty appeared on Holy Island on the same day (Chapman, 1907) and by 19 May many had been killed and eaten on this island. The largest gathering was at Ross where thirty or forty were present from mid-May to late June, with from 150 to 200 in early August: all had moved on by the end of October. A few were also seen as far inland as Rothbury, Chillingham and Riding Mill. In all, Bolam estimated that on this occasion about a hundred were killed in the county, while several hundred must have been present at any one time. Stragglers remained into the spring of 1889; single birds were seen at Goswick and Ross in early March, while two on Holy Island in mid-May marked the end of the invasion. Ten years later, on about 12 May 1899, a solitary bird was seen, again on Holy Island, but none of the other irruptions affected Northumberland.

More than fifty years elapsed during which it was thought that it might never recur in Britain, but one was identified in Kent in December 1964 while in 1969 sixteen individuals were recorded in western Europe: two of these were in Northumberland – an adult male shot near Seahouses on 5 September and one seen, next day, at Elwick.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

A former breeding resident.

In the past, it certainly nested on sea cliffs and inland crags, but by the time ornithological recording began, it had already interbred with feral stock. Hancock (1874) commented, for example, that 'so like is this species to the common domestic pigeon, that it is difficult to say positively whether they are escaped birds or are really the wild form' although he considered that one killed at Newbiggin in December 1835 (and still in his collection) was a truly wild Rock Dove. Bolam (1912), however, thought that some of those he had 'occasionally seen at the Farne Islands and found breeding in one or two of the less frequented hill precipices' were genuine wild stock, a belief that adds weight to the inclusion in Perry (1946) of Geoffrey Watson's record of one on the Farne Islands on 13 May 1922.

Nevertheless, the situation is summed up by Bolam's statement, in 1932, that it 'cannot be included here except as an accidental visitant; for, though some of our rock-building pigeons are true enough to colour, and it may be impossible to distinguish them from wild birds, all suspicion of a taint of domestic origin can seldom be ruled out'.

As a result, even birds showing the complete plumage characters of Rock Doves are no longer included in the annual ornithological reports.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

A well-represented breeding resident.

It is a relatively recent addition to Northumberland's breeding birds. According to Bolam (1912) it was 'now a common resident all over the district, where little more than thirty years ago it was unknown, even as a visitor'. It was first noticed in the neighbourhood of Hexham in 1873, spreading from there to Bellingham and Elsdon (1876), Alnwick and the Wooler area, where a nest was found (1877), Lowlynn (1878) and Haggerston and Kyloe (1879), while from 1880 onwards colonisation was rapid. By 1932, Bolam could write that it was 'breeding in most places, often quite numerously'. He had earlier noted that 'cliffs, or very steep braes, are the most favoured nesting sites' and that 'many of our moorland scaurs have thus become inhabited'; railway cuttings, river and sea cliffs, buildings, holes in trees and even rabbit burrows in sand dunes, were also used.

It remains a widespread resident and Bolam's assessment of its status and favourite nest sites still holds good, although the practice of nesting in sand dunes, which he had noted on Holy Island in 1903 and 1904, is no longer followed. There is still a considerable population in moorland areas, while the lowland birds show a preference for holes in trees in both hedgerows and woods although they will readily use nest boxes. Breeding numbers appear to have been particularly high in 1977, when there were many reports from the hills and some fifteen pairs may have nested in Jesmond Dene.

Bolam believed that small parties of immigrants reached the county each autumn or winter, quoting, as an example, a flock of fifty 'evidently weary' found resting on Emmanuel Head, Holy Island, on 6 January 1891. Temperley (1951) apparently concurred, stating that it was 'unusually numerous in December [1950] with the immigrant Wood Pigeon flocks'. In recent years, however, there has been little evidence to suggest that Stock Doves arrive in autumn or winter in any quantity, although one found dead at Beadnell Bay on 8 October 1976 could well have been an immigrant. Flocking undoubtedly occurs outside the breeding season, but the largest recorded gatherings – fifty at Nafferton on 26 November 1973, fifty at Lesbury on 2 March 1976 and sixty at Whittle Dene on 21 August 1977 – are no greater than could easily be accounted for from local stock.

There are only two recoveries worth noting, both indicating the extent of post-fledging dispersal. A pullus ringed at Blagdon in July 1945 was found at Hartlepool, Co Durham, in December of that year while a juvenile, ringed at Guisborough, Yorkshire, on 9 August 1964 was discovered at North Shields seven days later.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

An abundant breeding resident.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a resident. Plentiful the whole year, breeding in every wood and plantation' and he considered that, since about 1860, it had 'greatly increased in numbers'. However, Bolam (1912) thought that it had been abundant even in the mid-eighteenth century and that there had been no appreciable change.

It is still extremely common, nesting wherever trees or bushes exist, and the planting of large areas of moorland (page 7) with quick growing conifers has made possible a major expansion of its range. It has a very protracted breeding season, for while fledglings have been seen as early as 12 March, unfledged young have been in the nest on 10 November. As many as three broods may be reared, a key to the species' striking success.

Bolam (1912) noted that Selby had considered it to be non-migratory, but he

himself believed that immigrants arrived each winter from abroad. He suggested that this immigration was perhaps a recent phenomenon, resulting from the cultivation, locally, of winter crops such as turnips and clover. He considered it impossible to estimate the number of birds involved, but stated that they were always most in evidence 'during the three winter months', the largest flights usually occurring in January. He added that on 30 November 1883 'a compact flock passed over Berwick, at dawn, quite half a mile in length and at least twenty yards in width', while between dawn and 0900 on 14 November 1884 he had witnessed, again at Berwick, 'an almost continuous succession of flocks, numbering hundreds each, ...coming up from the sea, and passing high overhead'.

Although very big gatherings still occur in winter, there is little evidence to suggest that many of these birds are immigrants from the continent. While large flocks have never been observed coming in from the sea in recent years, from time to time huge numbers may be seen coasting south at the onset of stormy weather in late autumn and winter. Single birds, and small parties, appear regularly on the offshore islands in autumn and again, presumably on return passage, in April and early May, while nineteen found dead on Whitley Bay beach on 30 October 1976 may have been migrants.

Parties of up to a thousand are seen regularly in winter, and 3000 were at Alnmouth on 30 December 1968 with 3500 at Nafferton on 26 November 1973, while on 29 December 1968 some 15000 passing over Heddon-on-the-Wall, and 'several thousands' moving south over Craster on 26 December 1974, were obviously hard weather movements.

Most recoveries of ringed birds have been within the county, but, in winter, some have travelled up to 125km southward, almost certainly as the result of the type of movement described above.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

A common breeding resident.

It first arrived, and bred, in Britain, in Norfolk in 1955 and three years later, in early June 1958, a pair was found at Ponteland, two young apparently being reared. In the following year, a pair nested at the same locality, but the young were destroyed by a cat. However, colonisation continued and by 1963 it was present at eight different localities along the coast north to Bamburgh. In January 1964, there was the first report of winter flocking when up to thirty were at Gosforth while approximately fifty-two were counted at Holywell in the following year.

A survey in 1967–68 (Macfarlane, n.d.) revealed that it had 'colonised much of the coastal area between the Tyne and Embleton and inland as far as Alnwick, Morpeth and Ponteland', but also concluded that it did 'not appear to be actively colonising other areas of the county...'. Such expansion has, however, since taken place – in 1975, for instance, three pairs nested as far northwest as Kielder village. Nevertheless, large gardens close to habitations remain the preferred habitat and it has not colonised woodland areas to any great extent.

As breeding birds have become more numerous, winter flocks have increased in size. For example, 300 were roosting at Monkseaton in November 1970 while late in 1974 flocks of 200 were recorded at Horton Grange, Whitley Bay quarry, Throckley Fell and Longhorsley.

Local breeding birds appear to be sedentary and so reports of small parties on the offshore islands, particularly during spring passage, presumably refer to individuals taking part in further range expansion. This is illustrated by the only two noteworthy recoveries: one ringed in West Flanders, Belgium,

in November 1965 was found at Alnmouth in September 1966, and another, marked in Manchester in April 1971, was recovered in Morpeth in June 1972.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

An uncommon passage visitor and a rare breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'only a visitor on migration' and, although he stated that it now occurred with increasing frequency, he could list only twenty-four records. Some of these, however, involved small flocks, the largest being a party of fourteen at Seaton Burn on 21 May 1888. He himself had seen one at Meldon on the very early date of 14 March 1902. In 1932, he was able to say that it had 'established itself as a more or less regular breeding species in several districts' mentioning that Longridge, Ford, Chillingham, Kyloe, Lowlynn and the Aln and Wansbeck valleys were definite, and upper Tynedale and Redesdale, Dipton Woods, Corbridge, Wylam, Eals on the South Tyne and Belford, probable nesting localities.

In recent years it has bred only sporadically, mainly in the northeast, especially around Bamburgh and Waren Mill, and in the southwest, in the Corbridge, Stocksfield, Dipton and Slaley areas. Only occasional nests are found, however, and it is unlikely that more than five to ten pairs have bred in any one year.

Small numbers are reported annually on passage; most occur in May and early June although in 1975 three were on the Farne Islands on 24 April. Seven at Longhirst on 27 May 1977 is the largest gathering noted in recent years. A few are seen, particularly in coastal districts, from July to September, while occasional birds linger into October. Bolam (1932) mentioned early November as an extremely late date, but since then the latest recorded was one at Hauxley on 14 October 1972.

Great-spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*

An extremely rare visitor.

One shot at Clintburn, in what is now Wark Forest, on 5 August 1870 had probably been present since June; it was given to the Society and is still in the Hancock Museum collections. This was the second record for Great Britain and it remains the only county record.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

A well-represented passage visitor and breeding species.

Selby (1831) stated that 'upon our moors the Cuckoo is much more plentiful than in the lower and inclosed grounds' adding that 'in the former situation it generally selects the nest of *Anthus pratensis* (Common Pipit) as the depository for its egg'. Bolam (1912) also commented that 'it is to our upland moors, and dells, that most of them are drawn' and the same is true today. Bell and Parrack (1968), for example, remarked that it is 'infrequently recorded in lowland areas: becoming much more typically a bird of the moorland valleys', adding that 'a small tributary of the South Tyne held seven breeding pairs'.

Bolam refers to one, which he was satisfied was authentic, at North Charlton on 4 February 1877, but he knew of no others earlier than 5 April, while the latest were an adult (seen and heard) near Cambo at the end of October 1923 and two immatures picked up near Alnwick in November 1876. In recent years none has been seen before 14 April, while late records have involved single birds at Wallsend on 1 October 1975 and at Alnwick on 24 October 1976.

Writing in 1912, Bolam mentions three examples of the rufous 'hepatic' phase and since then another three individuals have occurred – at Beadnell on 26 August 1951, Chevington Burn on 15 August 1971 and Briardene on 9 May 1979.

Two recoveries provide an indication of the route taken by the summer visitors, for an immature ringed on 28 June 1957 was found five weeks later at Limburg, Belgium, while a bird marked in the Camargue, France, on 26 July 1969, was controlled at Hauxley on 15 May 1971. In addition, an adult female, ringed at Bamburgh on 28 May 1969, was retrapped there exactly a year later.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

A well-represented breeding resident.

According to Hancock (1874) it was a 'common resident', but 'gradually diminishing in numbers like other birds of prey, and from the same cause'. Bolam (1912) said that it was 'formerly common throughout the district... but from most of its haunts it had been almost extirpated thirty or forty years ago'. He went on to suggest that it had by then 'partially recovered, owing to a measure of protection meted out to it in some quarters', but it was 'nowhere a common species'. Twenty years later he implied that recovery had continued and that it now nested 'here and there over a considerable area'.

The decline of gamekeeping during the Second World War resulted in a further increase, but it fares badly in severe winters and those of 1946–47, 1962–63 and 1978–79 took a heavy toll. This is clearly illustrated by the fate of eight pulli, ringed from two broods at the same nest site near Earsdon in 1978, for seven of these were found dead between 31 December 1978 and the end of March 1979, all within sixteen kilometres of the place of ringing. It is also a frequent road casualty and ever increasing traffic puts more birds at risk.

Those breeding in moorland areas are very dependent upon the Short-tailed Vole. Vole populations fluctuate widely on a three to five year cycle and, when densities are high, Barn Owl clutch sizes are large and breeding success good. As already explained (page 48) a vole 'plague' occurred in 1972 and an indication of prey availability in that summer was given by the accumulation of forty-three vole corpses around one Barn Owl's nest in Wark Forest. Numbers crashed in the early spring of 1973 and the owls experienced a very poor year. However, those nesting in lowland areas, and with a wider choice of prey, fared much better and, in general, they have a more stable annual breeding success.

Although barns, old buildings and hollow trees are the most favoured breeding sites, there are infrequent records of nests on crags as at Allenbanks in 1976. Very occasionally, pairs are double-brooded and young from such a second brood at Earsdon in 1977 were still in the nest as late as 31 October. An unusual record involved a pair which reared young in the same tree as a *Strix aluco* in Newcastle in 1964.

Hancock had mentioned a very dark specimen which had been taken in the district, and which is referable to the continental race *T. a. guttata*, and in 1912, Bolam stated that 'occasionally we are visited by considerable numbers of Barn Owls from abroad, as in the autumns of 1887, and 1888, and again just ten years later...'. In 1932, he noted that prior to its major decline, the majority were of a form with pure white underparts; however, when it again began to increase, most were darker individuals although not dark enough to be true *guttata*; the implication was that the local population

had been augmented by immigration, but this has not been proved. The only recent records of *T. a. guttata* are of one at Hauxley on 4 October 1963, and another found dead on Holy Island in May 1967, while, just as in Bolam's day, occasional pale-breasted birds occur in coastal situations.

Ringing recoveries confirm its sedentary nature, only two birds ringed in the county having travelled more than fifty kilometres; an adult ringed at Chathill in August 1954 was found in Perthshire in October 1956, while a pullus marked at Meldon in August 1974 was reported from Lincolnshire in November of that year. In addition, a pullus ringed in Dumfries in July 1971 was recovered at Belford in April 1972.

Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*

An extremely rare visitor, some doubt attaching to both records.

Hancock (1874) mentions one seen by James Sutton on the links near North Sunderland in October 1872 while Bolam (1912) gives details of an owl, believed to be of this species, observed by J Aitchison on Embleton beach in December 1859. In 1932, Bolam described both these records as sharing 'a like somewhat problematical history'.

Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are six records. In January 1823, two were killed during a severe snow storm, a female at Rothbury and a male a few days later near Elsdon (they were subsequently presented to the Hancock Museum collections); one was seen on Holy Island on 20 May 1922; a female or an immature was at Alnmouth on 16 May 1942; one was watched, being mobbed by a *T. alba* at Hauxley on 28 November 1965, while in 1973 one spent from 16 February to 16 March in the North Tyne valley between Bellingham and Lanehead.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

An uncommon breeding resident.

This continental species was introduced into Kent in 1874, and to Northamptonshire in 1888 (Lever, 1977), and by 1932 Bolam listed seven county records, the first at Whitley Bay in October 1911; it was not until 1935 that breeding was proved – at Corbridge and near Wall.

In the 1943 ornithological report it was said to be 'multiplying rapidly' and in the following year its status and distribution was summarised as 'thinly scattered over a wide area bounded on the south by the Tyne, on the west by the North Tyne as far up as Wall and from there by a line drawn approximately northeast to the mouth of the Coquet to include a wide area around Morpeth. Further north it extends along a fairly narrow coastal strip as far as Bamburgh, while odd birds have been reported from the Coquet beyond Rothbury and in the neighbourhood of Wooler'.

The southeastern part of the county remains its stronghold, but nowhere is it common. The favourite habitat appears to be farmland with trees, particularly ash, in the hedge boundaries. More recently, there has been some extension westwards; birds bred at Slaley, for example, in 1950 and, subsequently, at Bardon Mill in 1977, and near Housesteads in 1978.

Single birds have occurred on Holy Island in February 1938, in August, September and October 1943, in 1948, in September 1973, in April 1977 and in autumn 1979. Such records are almost certainly the result of local dispersal although the possibility of vagrancy from the continent cannot be ruled out.

A pullus ringed at Kirkley was recovered at Wardley, Co Durham, in April of its first summer, while another, ringed at Brasside, Co Durham, was found six weeks later in Newcastle upon Tyne. A much more striking and unusual movement involved a pullus ringed at Kirkley in May 1962 and reported from Musselburgh, Midlothian, in October of the same year.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Selby (1831) described it as being 'common in all wooded districts', a situation confirmed by Hancock (1874). Bolam (1912) stated that it was 'the most numerous of the family over a large portion of the lowland country, in some parts of which it seems to be supplanting the once commoner Long-eared Owl'. He also noted that 'amongst the hills, it is generally less numerous, though still well known'.

Its status was unchanged when Bolam wrote in 1932 and today it remains the commonest of the owls. As in Bolam's day, woodlands and farmland in the lowlands are still the most favoured areas although smaller numbers nest in the uplands, the maturing border forests providing additional habitat. Ground nesting occurs and crag ledges are also used. Breeding success varies markedly from year to year, apparently dependent upon availability of small mammals, which form the majority of the prey. 1972 was a very good year, several broods of three young being reported, but, in contrast, 1973 was very poor, few nests being successful; in the majority of these only one chick was reared. Similarly, an excellent year in 1976 was followed by a correspondingly bad one in 1977.

In 1912, Bolam wrote that 'in autumn we are occasionally visited by considerable numbers of Brown Owls from abroad, but these immigrants seem only to recur at distant and uncertain intervals' and he went on to give late October 1880 as a period when many were in evidence. He reiterated this theme in 1932, stating that 'in autumn, considerable numbers are sometimes met with on or near the coast'. Such influxes, if indeed this is what they were, have not occurred in recent years. Occasionally, single birds appear on Holy Island, there being two spring and two autumn records in the last twenty-five years and all, together with one at Whitley Bay cemetery (on 19 October 1975), have been grey-phase birds, suggesting a continental origin. This, however, is not conclusive as there are occasional grey-phase individuals among the local breeding population.

Ringing has shown that local Tawny Owls are very sedentary and that adults are faithful to breeding areas. The greatest distances travelled have involved a pullus ringed at Dipton in May 1974 and recovered at Guyzance in September of that year, and one ringed at Budle in May 1952 and recovered in Dumfriesshire in the following November. In addition, one ringed in Midlothian in May 1955 was found at North Broomhill in June 1956.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

It was described by Selby (1831) as 'a common species and very generally dispersed in all wooded districts' and Hancock (1874) concurred, adding that it was 'becoming less abundant every year, being stigmatised as "vermin!"'. Bolam (1912) stated that it was 'pretty common where large fir woods occur, also nesting in most of the strips and clumps of pines so frequent about the edges of our moors' and although he confirmed this statement in 1932, he noted that it had, in his time, been 'elbowed out of some of its ancient haunts by the Brown Owl'. Furthermore, 'it was nowhere

so common as it used to be', perhaps as the result of gamekeeping activities.

Although probably less common than in Bolam's time, its preferred habitat is still large coniferous woods in the lowlands and the small shelter-belts of the uplands, many of which have now been engulfed by the border forests. Up to three pairs have bred in both Gosforth Park and Prestwick Carr, while throughout the hills single pairs are often found in the small groups of old Scots pines; the presence and breeding success of these latter is very dependent on the density of the Short-tailed Vole, 1972 being, as described on page 48, a particularly good year. Similar habitat preferences, and lack of suitable old Carrion Crow nests, have twice led to reports of *A. otus* and *Falco tinnunculus* laying in the same nest – at Gosforth Park in 1961 and near Alwinton in 1973. In 1975, two broods were reared from the same nest near Kidlandlee, another noteworthy breeding record.

Bolam (1912) commented that it 'appears to visit us regularly on migration'; he had frequently seen a dozen or more driven out of a wood, particularly near the coast, usually in October, but also in mid-winter. This remains the case today, small numbers arriving from the continent, especially in October and November. It has been reported from the coast as early as late July, but although some may be of continental origin (as suggested by one seen coming in from the east at Seahouses on 26 August 1954), others may well be dispersing local birds. Communal winter roosts are a feature; about thirty were flushed from a young plantation at Blagdon on 27 December 1944, some fifteen have been seen together in Gosforth Park with up to twelve in a single tree at Prestwick Carr and ten in Ratcheugh quarry. In recent years, hawthorn bushes in the Backworth area have attracted two such roosts and in February–March 1979, during the coldest winter since 1963, one of these contained as many as twenty-one birds. Return passage in spring is less conspicuous, but occasional individuals are noted at the coast from mid-February with an apparent peak between late April and early May.

A pullus, ringed at Prestwick Carr in July 1976, and recovered at Cramlington in December 1977, suggests that local birds are relatively sedentary. However, an adult female, which was shot on its nest in upper Redesdale on 1 June 1979, had been ringed in Eskdalemuir, Dumfriesshire (where it was probably breeding) on 24 June 1977, and this is the first indication that *A. otus*, like *A. flammeus*, may move in response to food supply, i.e. to the abundance of voles. The origin of the autumn immigrants is indicated by three recoveries: an adult, ringed at Hauxley in November 1970, found in Sweden (61°N) in May 1971; a pullus, ringed in the Aland Islands, Finland (60°N), in October 1973, recovered at Beadnell in January 1975, and an adult, marked on Fair Isle in November 1976, identified at Widdrington in the following April.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Its status as a breeding species has undoubtedly improved for Selby (1831) could only say that he was 'inclined to think, that a few pairs occasionally breed upon the higher moors' while Hancock (1874) considered that 'it occasionally breeds'. Bolam recognised its relationship with the Short-tailed Vole, pointing out that in 'Vole-plague' years, such as 1893, a great increase takes place, not only in the numbers of breeding birds, but also in the numbers of eggs laid.

As already mentioned (page 7) in their early years the Forestry Commission's coniferous plantations provide ideal conditions for voles and,

consequently, for these owls, and in 1939 twenty-one pairs were found nesting in the border forests while many others were present. As the planting spread, so did the owls, Temperley (1954) stating that they were 'still extending their range' and 'spilling over into other moorland areas'. The most recent vole plague reached a peak in 1972 when there were 'unprecedented numbers' of owls in the Kielder–Wark–Redesdale area, sixteen pairs around Alwinton, and nests in nine other localities as far apart as Kyloe and Slaley. Many overwintered in the hills, but following the inevitable sharp decline in the vole population only three pairs bred in 1973.

Breeding also occurs sporadically near the coast – in 1967, there were as many as six pairs between Alnmouth and Holy Island – while in recent years nests have been found at Prestwick Carr and Wallsend Swallow Pond.

Autumn immigration may start in mid-August, but most continental visitors arrive during October. Exceptionally large numbers appeared in 1957, and 1978, and in the latter year forty-five were seen in October (including eleven arriving from the east on 14–15 October) with over sixty in November, twenty-two of them along a four-mile stretch of the Tyne.

A substantial population, which probably includes local birds, overwinters in coastal areas and recently the rough ground surrounding Wallsend Swallow Pond has been used as a communal roosting ground, a maximum of eighteen being present in late 1971. Spring emigration is much less conspicuous than autumn immigration, but occasional individuals have been noted on places such as the Farne Islands and Holy Island as late as the beginning of May, while one was on the Farne Islands on the unusual date of 7 June 1976.

A pullus ringed in the Kielder Forest on 6 July 1968, and reported from Liverpool in January 1971, indicated the extent of dispersal of local birds in winter. Another ringed in Ayrshire was recovered at Tarset in mid-May 1955 and perhaps shows the distance birds may wander in search of food before settling down to breed.

Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are six records: one killed at Widdrington in 1812, one shot at Rothbury in April 1849, one captured alive at Widdrington in 1861 or 1862, one caught at Embleton in March 1861 and another at Berwick on 4 February 1873 while one was 'reported to have been caught in Holywell Dene on 11 December 1911'.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

A rare passage visitor and breeding species.

Selby (1831) described it as being 'not uncommon in retired woody dells, moors, and commons, abounding in fern beds'. In 1912, however, Bolam wrote that it occurred 'sparingly throughout the district, being most common in the upland glens, and about the fringes of moors, and moorland woods', while in 1932 he made the somewhat ambiguous statement that it was 'common about the fringes of moorland woods and other suitable places, though not very numerous'.

Since then, breeding pairs have declined drastically although there were indications that significant numbers bred in the Kyloe Hills and in Dipton Woods in the 1950s. By the late 1960s, there were only about eight known nesting areas with the stronghold in Dipton Woods, where up to four pairs held territory annually. During the 1970s, proved, or suspected, breeding

Short-eared Owl

was reported from Kyloe, Ford, Holystone, Hulne Park, Dipton, Slaley and near Allendale, but never, of late, in more than one or two of these localities each year.

Both Selby and Bolam give mid-May as the usual time of arrival with departure up to late September and early October. Nightjars seem always to have been scarce on passage although Bolam mentions 'several' on Holy Island on and about 22 May 1898, and one on 3 June 1902, while Perry (1946) refers to one there in 1932. They have been seen on the Farne Islands on four occasions, the last in July 1954. In recent years such records have been very few: in 1960, one was at Fenwick on 14 May and another at St Mary's Island on 17 September; one was singing in Northumberland Park, North Shields, on 17–18 May 1970 and on 10 July 1972 a freshly dead female was carried onto the beach at Bamburgh by a *Corvus corone*.

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis*

An extremely rare visitor.

One shot at Killingworth on 5 October 1856, and purchased by Hancock the following day, is the only British record.

Swift *Apus apus*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a well-known summer visitant' mentioning that the earliest and latest dates for its arrival and departure were respectively 26 April (in 1878 and 1924) and 30 October 1929.

It is still a common summer visitor, the breeding strongholds being the suburbs of Tyneside and the market towns and larger villages of the county. Hancock remarked, in 1874, that it had 'nested, thirty or forty years ago, in the old houses in the Castle Garth, in the midst of Newcastle', but that it was now 'rarely seen' in the city. Bolam (1912) mentioned that it also nested in such unusual sites as Lindisfarne Priory, and Dunstanburgh and Edlingham castles. Today, it generally nests beneath the eaves of pre-1939 houses, although nesting places have included an old lime kiln near Alwinton, a bridge over the Coquet at Rothbury, a derelict farmhouse in a remote part of Wark Forest and the old iron foundry at Ridsdale.

In recent years, its earliest appearance in spring has been on 21 April (in both 1961 and 1962), but normally the first birds are not seen until late April or early May. The main body usually arrives in the second week of May when gatherings of a hundred or more are not uncommon over waters such as Holywell Ponds and Gosforth Park lake. Large-scale midsummer movements are sometimes observed, often in association with thunderstorms or passing fronts. On 25 July 1964, for example, several thousand flew south over Cresswell in parties of forty to eighty; 500 passed south at Embleton in only twenty minutes on 26 June 1971 and, in the course of five minutes on 25 August 1977, 300 came in from the east at Whitley Bay. These movements are believed to involve feeding flocks and considerable numbers of foraging birds are also often noted in midsummer over the highest parts of the Cheviots.

Departure from the breeding grounds is mainly during the second week of August and the majority have left by the end of the month. A few linger into September, or even October, while there are three November records, all of single birds – on 4 November (at Forest Hall in 1977) and on 6 November (at Newburn in 1964 and at Whitley Bay in 1974) – and one on 1 December 1979 (at Cocklawburn, near Berwick).

An adult ringed at Marston, Lincolnshire, in July 1965 was recovered at Dudley in August 1966 and another, marked at Holywell in May 1965, was found at Leeds, Yorkshire, in May 1967. Several birds ringed in the area have been recovered locally up to nine years afterwards.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are four records: one shot at Boulmer on 18 July 1882, two over Holy Island on 12 July 1930, one at Holywell Ponds on 31 May 1959 and one at the Farne Islands on 24 September 1972.

On 19 August 1882 'a very large swift, supposed to be a foreigner' seen by the Inner Farne lightkeepers, may have been *A. melba*, but was not specifically identified.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

An uncommon breeding resident.

In 1912, Bolam described it as 'resident throughout the district, and not uncommon on many of our Border streams. It breeds, occasionally at least, on most of those which are at all suited to its habits, from the lower reaches of the Tyne, and Tweed, to where, as mere hill burns, they leave the moors'. He believed that summer floods and hard winters were controlling factors although numbers had improved since the advent of protection; despite this, in 1932, it was still sometimes slaughtered 'at places where young *Salmonidae* are hatched or reared'.

Since 1932 the population has fluctuated a good deal. The hard winters of 1940–41, 1946–47, 1962–63 and 1978–79 all led to drastic decreases – after 1962–63, for example, only two single birds had been reported up to the end of 1966. Thereafter, numbers steadily increased as the result of a long run of mild winters and Galloway, Hodgson and Meek (1975) could state that, once more, it has spread 'to almost every river system in the county'. This high level was maintained until the winter of 1976–77 when some prolonged cold spells took their toll and, with the extremely severe winter of the following year, the species was once again at a very low ebb. Although such fluctuations are readily apparent, it would be surprising if the total number of breeding pairs, even during a peak period such as the mid-1970s, has ever exceeded about fifty.

Bolam noted that it occurred occasionally at the coast in autumn and winter and, when birds are plentiful, this is still the case today. In recent years, records have come from such localities as Lindisfarne NNR, the Long Nanny estuary, Hauxley, Cresswell Ponds, St Mary's Island, Tynemouth and even Newcastle quayside. As in Hancock's time, it can still be seen in Jesmond Dene and, indeed, breeding has been suspected there.

Only two recoveries need be mentioned; a pullus, ringed at Ponteland in July 1943, was found in Gateshead in early September of the same year while an adult female, marked at Kilnhurst, Yorkshire, in April 1962, was reported from Bamburgh four months later.

Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

An extremely rare visitor.

One seen at Haggerston on 29 April 1897 is the only record.

Roller *Coracias garrulus*

A rare visitor.

Both Hancock and Bolam describe it as 'a rare casual visitant' and in 1932

Faulty (unable)

Bolam stated that there had been 'at least thirteen occurrences' although the last had been one killed at Kirknewton in September 1901. He added that 'the majority . . . were in autumn, but several in May, and two during summer, both near the head of Redewater'. There have been three subsequent records: one picked up alive at Snabdaugh, near Bellingham, on 3 June 1935, one at Arcot Hall, Cramlington, on 14 October 1950 and one seen arriving from the east, mobbed by wagtails, at Bamburgh on 24 September 1958.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1912) knew of thirty-six records and, in 1932, was able to add a further seven while between 1933 and 1979 there have been another twenty-nine. Ten of these were in April, fifteen in May, two in June, four in August, sixteen in September, six in October and four in November, but the remaining fifteen were undated. The earliest was one at Bamburgh on 7 April 1969 while the latest was one seen in the Backworth-Holywell area between 6 October and 5 December 1976. Most reports have come from coastal areas although it has been seen as far inland as Rothbury and Carrshield.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

An uncommon passage visitor which has bred.

Although Selby (1831) noted that it was 'found in Northumberland, as far north as . . . the Wansbeck', and thus implied breeding, Hancock (1874) considered it to be merely 'a spring-and-autumn migrant'. Bolam held similar views, describing it as 'irregular' and 'rare'; so far as he knew it had never been found nesting in the county although he thought that this was not an impossibility.

There is only one definite breeding record. A male was heard singing at Matfen from 5–8 May 1975 and on 15 July a newly fledged juvenile was seen perched on a windowsill in the village. During the autumn passage birds are occasionally found well inland at such places as Kimmer Lough and Haydon Bridge, but some summer occurrences, as, for example, at Haltwhistle on 26 June 1955, Kielder Forest on 28 May 1972 and Dipton in June 1973, have aroused suspicions of breeding.

It was not seen at all from 1923 to 1951, but since 1963 it has occurred annually, although not always in both spring and autumn. The great majority are recorded on migration at the coast; they are continental birds and the numbers involved depend upon the prevalence of easterly winds during their passage periods in late April and early May, and again from late August to early September. In such conditions there is usually a scatter of sightings along the whole coastline, a typical year being 1974 when eight appeared between 29 April and 6 May and a further ten from 24–31 August. Large influxes sometimes occur, autumn and spring maxima being respectively twenty-seven between 20 and 31 August 1970 and thirty-two from 29 April to 10 May 1978; seven of these latter were found dead. Extreme dates for its appearance are 8 April and 13 October.

In September 1963 a white bird spent over a week in the Hauxley area.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Temperley (1951b) summarised its status in Northumberland and Durham, pointing out that this has 'changed considerably during recorded times'.

He mentioned Selby's (1831) comments that 'it is seldom seen in the northern parts of Northumberland' although he had 'met with it in the woods about Huln Abbey, near Alnwick, and upon the banks of the Wansbeck'. Temperley added that, by 1840, numbers were already falling off while Hancock (1874) regarded it as 'not by any means common'. According to Bolam (1912) it was 'a resident in very limited numbers in south Northumberland, but only of rare casual occurrence elsewhere'. However, by 1927 it had extended its range over much of Durham county and was reported more frequently in the Morpeth and Alnwick areas. From 1940 onwards the increase was rapid and in 1949 it was breeding in most of the county's deciduous woodlands. Subsequently, a further change apparently took place for Bell and Parrack (1968) remark that it is 'now more typically a breeding species of the northeast of the county'. There has undoubtedly been a decline in south Northumberland, perhaps because of the continuing loss of deciduous woodland and perhaps also as a result of the severe winter of 1962–63. Today, the strongholds appear to be Dipton Woods and the wooded valleys radiating from the Cheviots, although in 1972, for example, it was reported from nineteen localities during the breeding season.

Wandering birds, usually immatures, are sometimes seen away from the nesting areas in autumn and winter and Bolam (1912) thought that one killed at Whitley Bay early in 1887 was suggestive of immigration. In recent years, it is noted in most autumns in the vicinity of Bamburgh and Budle Bay while among a handful of other coastal records was one which flew in from the sea near Seahouses on 26 August 1954 and another flushed from rocks below high water mark at Craster on 7 November 1956. Nevertheless, these may simply have been local birds as Green Woodpeckers have sometimes strayed into places such as the Kielder and Redesdale forests and have even been seen in central Newcastle on two occasions.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Selby (1831) commented that it was more common than *Picus viridis* and Hancock (1874) endorsed this, although he could give only a single instance of breeding (at Swallowship, near Hexham, in June 1868); he added that it was 'usually an autumn or winter migrant'. Bolam (1912) described it as 'resident throughout the district, and, now, not uncommon in several localities, although it is only within recent years that it has become so'. He felt that the increase, which had taken place within his lifetime was, in fact, a reoccupation of previously held territory and suggested that in the early nineteenth century, and before, it had at least bred occasionally. He noted that the recolonisation dated from about 1868; it was well established in the mid-1880s so that by 1912 it was breeding 'pretty regularly, though in limited numbers, in various localities in south Northumberland'. In 1932, he could say that it was 'not uncommon, locally, over the greater part of the county'.

This last statement still holds good. It is found in areas of mixed and deciduous woodland throughout the county although nowhere at high densities; indeed the seven pairs which bred in Gosforth Park in 1949 probably represent the maximum concentration. In winter, it is often seen in suburban and, sometimes, even urban areas and in certain places it is a regular visitor to bird-tables.

Bolam recognised that birds of the northern race *D.m.major* were occasional winter visitants, 'sometimes in considerable numbers', but he suggested that the local breeding population *D.m.anglicus,* was also 'subject to at

least extensive local migratory movements' and, in autumn, was seen annually on Holy Island, and at other places on the coast. Today, small numbers appear on the coast in most years, arrivals being specially noticeable during the autumns of 1968 and 1972. In 1968, one arrived at Hauxley on 27 August: it was followed by at least twenty more (including up to ten on Holy Island and some five at North Shields) in September. In 1972, the first was seen at Whitley Bay on 15 September and, thereafter, as many as nine were on Holy Island with one or two at many other coastal localities, particularly in late September and October; an occasional bird was reported until the end of the year. Trapping has confirmed that these arrivals are *D.m.major* while small numbers of this race have been observed on the return passage in spring. In 1973, for example, single birds were seen at Cresswell on 17 February, and at three other places on the coast between 13 April and 4 May, while another, identified as *D.m.major,* was found dead at Morpeth on 7 April.

There are only two noteworthy recoveries: in the late 1930s and early 1940s an adult female, ringed at Stocksfield, returned to the same area to breed in eight successive years while an adult male *D.m.major,* marked at Bamburgh on 2 November 1968, was found at Haddington, East Lothian, fifteen days later.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

A rare visitor which may have bred.

Although, in 1912, Bolam gave four 'fully authenticated occurrences' – at Dilston Park (before 1769), Wallsend (sometime prior to 1831), Gosforth (1841) and Beadnell (1845) – by 1932 he had apparently rejected the bird shot at Dilston Park and could add no others. He had earlier mentioned other incidents, among them single birds shot respectively at Hesleyside, near Bellingham, in *ca.* 1830, Wooler Haugh Head in 1860 and at Otterburn before 1880, none of which could be confirmed.

It has appeared more regularly in recent years, but still remains a rare bird. Most reports have come from the Tyne valley and since 1949 it has been recorded at Birtley (1949, 1950), Hexham (1951), Wylam (1958–60), Bywell (1961–63, 1965–66), Stocksfield (1964), Falstone (1972), Heddon (1973), Redesmouth (1975) and Barrasford (1975). Several of these sightings were in spring, in suitable woodland, and may well have involved breeding birds although nesting has never been confirmed. It has also been seen several times in Gosforth Park – in October 1949, October 1964, March and September 1965 and during October and November 1972 – but the only other report was of a female on a telegraph post at Beal on 15 July 1956.

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cinerea*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records: one was on Holy Island from 10–17 October 1976 and another on the Farne Islands between 10–12 May 1981.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

An extremely rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) lists four records: single birds at Twizell on 24 November 1827, at Hartley Bates (now known as St Mary's Island) in 1876, at St Mary's Island in November 1877 and near Blanchland in September 1884.

Since then there have been a further three – one at Monk's House on

26 April 1953, a bird which was in full song at Wallsend between 2–13 May 1966 and another on the Farne Islands from 2–4 April 1980.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

A common passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

According to Bolam (1912) it was 'an abundant resident over all the district, nesting on the seaside links, on cultivated fields, and on the grassy slopes of our hills'. It still breeds preferentially on coastal links, sand dunes and rough pasture on the lower cultivated areas, but afforestation of grassy moorland has probably reduced the breeding population. However, the only quantitiative data on nesting density comes from the seventy-seven hectare census plot, mainly pasture, at Brenkley where between ten and nineteen pairs nested in the 1970s.

After a mild winter, spring passage, especially in coastal districts, can commence as early as mid-February, but it is not until mid-March that migration is really conspicuous. About this time, too, birds start to recolonise inland haunts. Passage can continue into early May, but by then most of the breeding pairs are well established.

Autumn return passage becomes apparent from mid-September and is often continued into late November. Thousands of birds may pass southward daily through coastal areas, as for example over Holy Island on 13–14 October 1973, and concentrations may occur at the coast in winter, especially during very cold weather. The links at Druridge attract particularly large flocks, mainly because of the seed shed from hay put out to feed cattle, 1000 being counted there on 29 December 1976 during an extremely cold spell. Such conditions initiate hard weather movements which can be seen both inland and at the coast as on 2 February 1980 when more than 5000 passed south along the coast.

Early ornithologists mention that variations in colour are not infrequent and this is still true for a leucistic bird was seen at Hauxley on 27 October 1979.

Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

In 1932, Bolam wrote that it was 'a winter visitant, confined to the coast and only seen as a rule during severe weather'; he added that with the exception of one in December 1931 'we seem to have had no records since 1912'.

Since then its status seems to have changed for in recent years it has appeared in numbers in most winters. It is certainly confined to the coast, occurring between mid-October and mid-May, in parties of up to twenty, although flocks of less than ten are more usual.

1976 was an exceptional autumn when twenty were on the Coquet estuary in October, while during November and December thirty-five frequented an area of opencast coal workings at Hauxley, twenty-one were on Ross Links and eleven at the mouth of the Long Nanny. Similar numbers were seen at seven other localities on the coast.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

In 1932, Bolam considered it with the House Martin and Swallow, saying that they were 'all such well-known summer visitants that space could be saved by grouping them together' and adding that they all passed the

coast 'in considerable numbers, as passage migrants'. His comments are still true, but each species has an individual story and as such must be treated separately.

The main arrival of Sand Martins takes place after mid-April although some may be seen by the middle of March. Breeding numbers declined during the 1970s, but prior to that it nested commonly throughout rural Northumberland wherever there were sand quarries, railway cuttings, soft river banks or sand dunes. There were colonies, too, on industrial spoil heaps such as those on the Allendales and the sulphate residue tips at Prudhoe. Bolam (1912) referred to nesting in the masonry of the old town walls at Berwick and in 1952 nests were found in drainage holes in a concrete wall on the Ouseburn in Newcastle.

Breeding birds begin to leave in late July and most have gone by early September when small numbers may be seen in the large *Hirundo rustica* roosts (see below) in the area. October sightings are rare and Bolam's 1886 record of two at Berwick on 12 November can only be matched in recent times by one at Fenham Flats on 1 November 1964.

Between 1961 and 1968 intensive ringing and retrapping on a national scale demonstrated that birds habitually return to the same breeding area and that autumn migration through England takes place between south and southeast. Further afield, Northumbrian Sand Martins have been recovered in the year of ringing in Belgium and France (September), in the following year in Denmark and Germany (July) and Spain (November), and in France on spring passage in early April.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

It arrives after mid-April, breeding freely throughout rural Northumberland wherever there are farmsteads or open buildings, and leaving again by early October. There are normally two broods, but three broods have twice been reported in a study area near Stocksfield. Suburban nests are less common while a site on cliffs near Berwick, noted by Bolam in 1877 and 1878, appears to have been unique, at least in the county.

Heavy diurnal migrations are recorded annually, particularly at the coast, during May and again in September and October. A few migrants may be seen during the last days of March, and as late as mid-November, but one at Berwick on 31 December 1954 was exceptional.

Between late July and mid-September roosts of up to 10000 birds, mainly juveniles, may be found on reed beds such as those at Chevington Burn, Holywell Ponds, Gosforth Park and Seaton Burn, but some 50000 at Seaton Burn in September 1980 was an unusually large gathering.

Bolam (1912) mentions that young Swallows of a white or creamy colour sometimes occur. More recently, an adult at Craster in 1955, and two youngsters out of a brood of five near Alwinton in July 1979, were 'white'.

Ringing has provided much valuable information. It has demonstrated that some adults return to the same nest site in successive summers while young birds, too, come back to their birthplace, although others have been found in northwest England. Even more important is the light thrown on movements. A recovery in Belgium in May could have been a bird drifted across the North Sea in bad weather during its northward migration, while a few birds marked at the autumn roosts, and controlled in subsequent weeks at similar concentration points in Hertfordshire and Lincolnshire, illustrate the route taken on the return passage.

Birds have been recovered in South Africa between mid-November and mid-February, and in North Africa in April and May, while one reported in Zaire in January 1973 had been ringed as a pullus at Milbourne, near Ponteland, in August 1963. Another, caught at Holywell on 9 May 1970, had been banded in Natal, South Africa, only twenty-seven days earlier.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*

An extremely rare visitor.

The only records were in 1977 when one was on Holy Island on 27 October while it, or another, was at Bamburgh on 29–30 October.

House Martin *Delichon urbica*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Most are seen between the end of April and the end of October and characteristically they may continue nesting until late in the season, often rearing two broods.

Spring passage tends to be more conspicuous than autumn, and large numbers may be seen over pools and lakes, particularly in coastal districts, during the last two weeks of May.

It breeds colonially, especially in selected areas of north and west Northumberland where up to 300 nests can be found under bridges and inside boathouses and barns although they are never far from water. There were 140 nests at the well known site on the sea cliffs at Cullernose in 1962 while in 1950 six pairs tried, unsuccessfully, to nest on the Farne Islands. It is less plentiful in the southeast where colonies are extremely local and rarely exceed twenty pairs: many of these are on relatively new housing estates. Young birds may be fed on the nest well into October and, occasionally, even in early November, while stragglers sometimes linger throughout November and into early December.

Ringing has demonstrated that adults and some juveniles return annually to the same colony for up to six years. Northumbrian birds have been controlled in Yorkshire, Sussex and Buckinghamshire on their spring and autumn migrations, but one marked at Whitley Bay on 17 May 1967, and recovered in Norway only thirteen days later, suggests that not all passage birds are British.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1912) refers to birds taken at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea on 1 December 1831, at Howick on 13 February 1832 and on Newcastle Town Moor on 10 October 1845. He adds that a large pipit seen by his brother at Goswick on 12 May 1899 was probably an *A.novaeseelandiae.*

No more occurred until 1957 when one was at Hartley on 20 September and since then there have been a further nine records – at St Mary's Island on 6 September 1958, at Bamburgh on 14 October 1969, at Holy Island on 22 October 1975, 26 September 1976 and 2 October 1979, at Cresswell on 5 October 1975, at Ross on 11 October 1975 and at Hauxley on 16 October 1977 and 1 October 1978.

In addition, there were brief sightings of pipits, almost certainly of this species, at Hauxley in September 1965 and November 1982.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

An extremely rare visitor.

The only definite records are of single birds on waste ground in Newcastle

on 4 November 1954 and at St Mary's Island on 8 October 1955. A pipit seen on Holy Island on 11 September 1969 was almost certainly an *A.campestris.*

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding species.

Its status has probably changed little since Selby (1831) wrote 'this is a migratory species; appears early in May, and inhabits the borders of woods and plantations'. Today it is most plentiful as a breeding species in the deciduous wooded valleys in the higher parts of the county although it also nests in such localities as Gosforth Park. The majority of breeding birds arrive from late April, and by late July most of the nesting areas have been deserted.

It is rarely conspicuous on migration, except during falls of continental migrants when parties of up to ten may be encountered at the coast in spring and autumn, usually at the beginning of both May and September. However, occasional individuals may be seen as early as mid-March and as late as the end of October.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

An abundant passage visitor and breeding species.

As in Bolam's time it is the commonest breeding bird of the open moors, but it also breeds freely among coastal dunes and lowland pasture. It nests occasionally on the Farne Islands and as recently as 1972 three pairs were on Inner Farne.

There is no evidence to support Bolam's assertion in 1932 that 'some of the visitors from the north remain here over the winter'. A large proportion, especially those that nest in the higher parts of the county, do, however, join 'the numerous bands of passage migrants which visit us in autumn on their way south'. In fact, southerly passage on a small scale may commence in July when pre-emigration flocks also begin to form in some breeding areas, but it is not until September and October that the heaviest movements are noted, often on a very broad front. There was an example of this on 8 September 1979 when up to 1000 per hour passed south over both Hauxley and the western outskirts of Newcastle.

Return northerly passage is not so spectacular, but again it is sometimes apparent on a wide front between mid-March and late April. In the course of a single day parties can be seen passing over such places as Kielder, the Simonside Hills and Holy Island, while flocks of up to 200 may remain in a suitable habitat for several days before moving on.

Nineteen on the Simonsides on 18 December 1977 shows that the moors are not entirely deserted in winter. Nevertheless extreme weather usually sends flocks fleeing from the cold and such movements were apparent on 31 December 1978 when a hundred passed south at Seaton Sluice, and again on 2–3 February 1980 when over forty moved down the coast in as many minutes.

Recoveries of birds ringed in the county have provided interesting and useful information. A pullus marked at Bamburgh in 1934 was recovered in Landes, France, in October of the same year while other pulli, or juveniles, have been found in France, Spain, Portugal and Morocco (two). Adults ringed at various points on the coast during September have subsequently been recovered in France (three), Portugal and Italy, all between July and February. Two individuals, marked in the Netherlands

in September, were both found near the Northumberland coast in early May, presumably when returning to more northerly breeding areas.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

An extremely rare visitor.

The first four records were all from Hauxley – one on 7 September 1963, two on both 9 May and 9–11 September 1964 and one on 6 September 1969. Since then single birds have been recorded on the Farne Islands from 2–6 May 1974, at Hauxley on 19 October 1975 and at Bamburgh on 4 June 1977, while one was found dead at Tynemouth on 10 October 1979.

Rock Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

A well-represented passage visitor, but an uncommon breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident on all the rocky portions of the coast, but strictly confined thereto, and rarely straying beyond a field's breath from the shore'. A survey conducted in 1971–72 revealed from sixty-seven to seventy nesting pairs on the coast between Berwick and Tynemouth, including a total of about thirty pairs on the Farne Islands and Coquet Island. Numbers on these offshore islands tend to fluctuate; in 1980, although forty-one pairs bred on the Farnes, none was on Coquet.

During spring and autumn, passage birds augment the population and gatherings of up to fifty are not uncommon, although eighty at St Mary's Island on 18 March 1972 was exceptional. In winter, too, small parties are frequently encountered along stretches of coast from which they are absent in summer. Pipits showing characteristics of the Scandinavian race *A.s.littoralis* may occasionally be seen among these gatherings, especially in spring when they are most conspicuous.

Some birds ringed at Monk's House were repeatedly retrapped in the same area for up to five years, but one marked as an adult at Seahouses in January 1962 was recovered north of the Faroe Islands on 9 May of the same year, presumably on its way to its northern breeding grounds. Another ringed on Fair Isle in August 1965 was found dead at Tynemouth in the following December.

The Water Pipit *A.s.spinoletta* is a rare winter visitor which was first identified in the county in 1956 when one spent from 30 March to 4 April on St Mary's Island. Since then sixteen individuals have been seen, ten occurring between 17 March and 12 May at coastal localities such as Annstead, Newton and Boulmer. The only autumn records were at Holy Island – two on 26 October 1971 and one on 8 October 1972. It has also been identified in winter and, as is characteristic of the species, on both occasions away from the shore: on 18 January 1976 one was at Cresswell Ponds, while between 29 December 1976 and 8 January 1977 two were at Whittle Dene.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding species.

Writing in 1932, Bolam described the characteristic fluctuations of this species which still occur today, illustrating his remarks by reference to the position in Selby's and Hancock's time and also to the period from 1874 to 1932.

The gradual disappearance of the 'pit swallows' during the last fifteen years has undoubtedly resulted in a decline in the breeding population in southeast Northumberland, but it is still conspicuous in most summers as

a nesting bird in such places as the Allendales, the North and South Tyne valleys and Coquetdale. Nests are usually made on the ground, in thick herbage, but in 1952 one which contained five eggs was found at a height of about half a metre in a thorn hedge near Haltwhistle. Unfortunately, it was destroyed, presumably by predators, and no young were raised.

The summer residents *M.f.flavissima* arrive after mid-April and disappear during August, but passage birds are sometimes identified at the coast in early April. Large post breeding flocks are not unusual and the ponds at Cresswell, Holywell and Wallsend Swallow, and even Grindon Lough, may attract up to 150 birds. Large roosts also sometimes occur, as happened near Haltwhistle in late August 1952 when more than sixty were in a willow tree overhanging a stream.

The Blue-headed Wagtail *M.f.flava* appears in most years and was first recorded on Ross Links in April 1880. In 1928 two pairs nested at Alston, within three kilometres of the Northumberland border, and more recently breeding birds have been found at Holywell, Cresswell and Wallsend Swallow ponds.

The Grey-headed Wagtail *M.f.thunbergi* is a rare visitor which was first identified in the county on Holy Island on 2 May 1923. Since then there have been eleven sightings, all in May, with four on Holy Island, three on the Farne Islands, two at Cresswell and two at Holywell.

The only ringing recovery is of a *M.f.flavissima* marked in Landes, France, on 4 September 1968 and found near Alston on 30 May 1971.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records: single birds on Holy Island on 28–30 September 1967 and 9–10 October 1982.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

An uncommon passage visitor and a well-represented breeding species.

Bolam's summary, in 1932, of its status as 'a common resident, in limited numbers throughout the county, our hill burns being seldom without the presence of a pair or two' applies equally well today.

After breeding, some birds disperse to the coast in July and in winter individuals may sometimes be found in the centre of Newcastle or exploring suburban backyards in South Gosforth and Heaton. Severe winters such as those of 1947, 1962–63 and 1978–79 lead to a marked reduction in numbers and subsequent recovery can be slow – for example, it was not until 1966 that the breeding population in the Kielder area had returned to normal after the great freeze of 1963.

Spring passage takes place from late February until May, but only a few birds are involved – indeed, eight over Bamburgh on 30 March 1969 was one of the largest movements recorded. Following the post breeding dispersal, autumn passage is most apparent in October when ones and twos may be seen coasting south, as in 1973 when, following a notably successful breeding season, more than usual were noticed moving south.

There is only one noteworthy recovery – an adult female, ringed at Fenwick in April 1961, and found at Honiton, Devon, in January 1962.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1912) referred to *M.a.yarrelli* as 'a common resident, though

most of those which pass the summer with us depart in the autumn'. Its status is much the same today and those that breed in the uplands are particularly liable to leave the area, a fact confirmed by *Winter atlas* census work carried out in 1981 and 1982. A combination of dry stone walls and running water provides ideal breeding habitat and it is especially numerous in the upper reaches of the county's rivers; nevertheless, breeding takes place throughout Northumberland and nests are occasionally found on the offshore islands as well as in urban localities. Birds sometimes choose quite unexpected sites – for example, inside a lorry at Westerhope, in a dumper truck used daily at Caistron, and on the engine of a drilling rig at the opencast mining works at West Chevington. Fortunately, despite the risk of human interference, the majority seem to raise their young. Incidentally, local birds follow the general practice and attempt to fledge two broods.

Spring passage is most obvious from mid-March until late April with flocks of as many as fifty often following the plough. The autumn return is more protracted and post fledging roosts of up to a hundred develop in scattered localities throughout the county. Gatherings of this kind have been observed at Bamburgh, Ryal, Whittle Dene, Seaton Burn and Gosforth Park. Departure is inconspicuous although small parties may be seen either coasting south or spending several days catching insects on the seashore.

In winter, it is most numerous in the lowlands, but it is unusual to see more than twenty together. However, there are a few roosts, which seldom exceed 150, on factory rooftops in the suburbs of Newcastle.

Birds ringed as pulli have been recovered in Hampshire in February, and in Spain in November, while ringed adults have been found in January and February in Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Sussex. In addition, two have been recovered in west France in February, and one, marked as a breeding adult in East Woodburn, in Morocco in November.

The White Wagtail, *M.a.alba* is an uncommon passage visitor, more often identified in spring than in autumn. Bolam (1912) referred to it as 'a casual visitant in spring' and suggested that there was every likelihood that it visited us 'more often than has been proved' and present day observations have shown him to be correct. Parties of up to ten may be seen, sometimes with migrating *M.a.yarrelli*, throughout the county although it is more often reported either singly, or in pairs, between March and May and again in August and September. A few stragglers sometimes linger into early November.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*

Usually a rare, but occasionally a common, irruptive winter visitor.

Bolam's comment in 1912 that it was 'a casual winter visitant' appearing 'in some winters in considerable flocks, in others only singly or in small parties' still applies today. In 1932, he referred to fourteen years between 1830 and 1931 during which large scale invasions were recorded and since then similar numbers have been seen in fifteen winters from 1936 to 1975.

On such occasions flocks of up to 500 are not unusual and during the autumn invasions the berries of whitebeam trees attract large parties to such places as Eldon Square and the Exhibition Park in Newcastle, and other similar parks and cemeteries throughout the region.

Most influxes tend to begin in late October and reach a peak before December, but there have been winters such as 1937 and 1957 when large

Waxwing

numbers have not appeared until mid-February. In these circumstances birds descend upon the remaining hawthorn and cotoneaster berries before moving on northward by early April.

Individual birds have been seen in early October while others may linger into May, but the few that have been recorded in summer are believed to have escaped from captivity.

Only a few have been ringed in the county, but there are two recoveries: one caught at Pegswood on 9 March 1957 was discovered near Oslo, Norway, on 15 December 1958 while another, marked at Hauxley in November 1965, was found dead in Doncaster, Yorkshire, only nineteen days later.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

A well-represented breeding resident.

In 1912, Bolam remarked that it was 'a constant resident' adding that 'few of our burns are without it', an assessment which is still true. It is restricted to the river systems, being most plentiful in the upper reaches, although it is occasionally seen around the edges of reservoirs such as Whittle Dene and Hallington, and on the shores of Greenlee Lough. Although fast flowing streams are preferred, it is not uncommon to find Dippers feeding along the banks of rivers and streams within sight of the sea at such places as Waren Mill, Alnmouth, Warkworth, Bedlington and Holywell Dene. On the Tyne, it occurs regularly as far downstream as Heddon Banks, especially in winter, and it has bred on the Ouseburn in Jesmond Dene.

In severe winters, as for example in 1947, the population will crash, but in an average year birds will be in song in November and December, and may be nest building in March. In fact, the earliest report of breeding was on 27 January 1938 when two nests each containing five eggs were found in Redesdale. In most years, two broods are reared and it has been suggested that a third is sometimes fledged.

Although various traditional natural nest sites are reported each year, it is probably its habit of building under rail, road and foot bridges that has resulted in higher population densities in some areas. This is shown clearly in upper Coquetdale where Ministry of Defence 'Bailey bridges' have provided perfect nest sites in several river valleys that lack natural ones.

Ringing has demonstrated that Dippers are largely sedentary with colour-marked birds being seen throughout the year, and in successive years, on territory where they were originally caught. A pullus marked at Hepple in May 1973 was found dead at the same place in January 1980, but an adult, caught at Bywell in 1956, had moved to Woolsington by the spring of 1957. The most distant recovery for the county was of an adult male, ringed at Rowley Burn, Hexhamshire, in May 1964, and found dead in January 1965 near Barnard Castle, in Durham county, a distance of thirty-nine kilometres.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

An uncommon passage visitor and a common breeding species.

Bolam's very comprehensive summary of its status (1912) applies equally well today. He stated that it was 'everywhere a common resident' adding that 'although most abundant in wooded places and bosky dells' it was 'content to take up its abode near any kind of shelter'. He remarked that

it was resident in many places including the Cheviots 'where its presence would scarcely be looked for', and it is still found on these hills in summer and during mild winters; it also occurs on the seashore, nesting on cliffs and in sand dunes. Some unusual nests have been found, including instances where Wrens have utilised nests built by other species, among them House Martins and Swallows.

Mortality can be very high during extremely cold winters such as those of 1895, 1947, 1963 and 1979, but by contrast figures obtained from a sixty-five hectare Common Bird Census plot near Hexham show that a series of mild winters can produce a steady increase in population. In this instance breeding pairs increased from seventeen in 1972 to thirty by 1975.

Another result of severe weather is its habit of roosting communally in buildings. Bolam had found as many as seven dead in one hole in a garden wall and more recently four died together in an old nest of a Willow Tit; in 1947 and 1963 there were several reports of small numbers being found dead in nest boxes put up for tits and flycatchers.

Open cattle sheds and other similar farm outbuildings provide food and shelter when the weather is bad and individuals may spend an entire winter in refuges of this kind, as well as in large greenhouses.

Bolam observed significant increases in the coastal populations in both spring and autumn, especially during the latter, and suggested that some might have crossed the North Sea. Similar observations are made today and large numbers are caught at the ringing stations at Bamburgh, Hauxley and Tynemouth, particularly during October. Individuals have subsequently been recovered in Yorkshire (three) and Lancashire (one) as they moved on through the country. However, there is as yet no continental recovery which would confirm Bolam's suspicions.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

An uncommon passage visitor and an abundant breeding species.

Bolam (1912) remarked that 'our birds are resident throughout the year, being never absent from their accustomed haunts, even during the severest weather, or in the remotest glens amongst the hills'. He also referred to 'extraordinary numbers' which occurred in some eastern counties in autumn, adding that he himself had only once seen a possible increase in numbers in Northumberland and, accordingly, he scarcely thought that these 'migratory bands' reached the county.

It is still a widespread breeding species and a census carried out between 1965 and 1969 over thirty-seven hectares of Gosforth Park revealed an annual population of up to twenty-one pairs. It tends to be particularly numerous in the suburbs while two broods of young are not uncommon. However, contrary to Bolam's observations, large numbers of passage visitors may be seen at the coast, especially in the autumn. For example, considerable numbers were noted at Monk's House between 26 September and 5 October 1951, on 8 October 1962 over 400 were reported between Tynemouth and Whitley Bay and on 10 October 1964 more than a hundred were at Hauxley. In September 1913, H F Witherby noticed what was possibly a bird of the continental race *P.m.modularis* on Holy Island (Perry, 1946), and by 1969 trapping of migrants at the coastal ringing stations showed that small numbers of this race appear regularly in both spring and autumn.

Although more than 1500 Dunnocks have been ringed in the county, there

are only three noteworthy recoveries: one marked at Bamburgh in September 1965 and recovered at St Abbs, Berwickshire, three months later, a second caught as a migrant at Hauxley in October 1979 and found on the Tartan oilfield, some 120km northeast of Fraserburgh in May 1980, and a third, also recovered in May 1980, at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, which had been ringed twenty-one days before at Hauxley.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

A common passage visitor and an abundant breeding species.

In 1912, Bolam remarked that it was 'a common resident throughout the district', and this is still true. It can be found throughout the county in suburban and rural gardens, around farmsteads, in parkland, along hedgerows and ditches and in wooded areas, no matter how small. Bolam suggested that the breeding population, the 'old residenters, so familiar about our dwellings, never wander far from their posts either in summer or winter', but experience has shown that in extreme winters some birds move towards lower ground, especially to the coast – on 2 February 1980, for example, sixteen were around St Mary's Island. Others appear to be migratory and a nestling, marked at Greenhaugh, near Bellingham, in the summer of 1975 was found a few weeks later (on 22 September) in southwest France while an adult from Swarland had subsequently moved to Walney Island.

Some indication of breeding density was obtained from a 200 hectare study area near Hexham where up to twenty-six pairs were present in the mid-1970s.

It was first recognised as a passage visitor in October 1862, when a Great Grey Shrike was seen feeding on a Robin on the Longstone (Embleton, 1862) and between 1881 and 1887 the Farne Islands lightkeepers often reported the arrival of Robins, sometimes as 'a great many' or in 'a heavy rush'. Spring passage usually starts in mid-March and often extends until the middle of May. Robins were very numerous along the whole coastline at the end of March 1958 while between 9–11 April 1966, during bad weather, 300 were held up on Holy Island and many more were at localities such as Bamburgh, Hauxley and Tynemouth.

Autumn movements can be quite spectacular when many hundreds are grounded by east winds and rain while travelling from northern to southwestern Europe. The peak occurs between late September and mid-October and some of the largest falls took place from 1–5 October 1951 (at least 500 on the Farne Islands), on 2 October 1965 (300 at both Hauxley and St Mary's Island), on 14–15 October 1966 (600 at Hauxley), on 2–3 October 1976 (hundreds all along the coast) and between 11–13 October 1982 (thousands on the coast and over 400 ringed at Hauxley). In 1976, eighty arrived on 14 November on Holy Island in a belated passage movement.

Individuals of the greyer continental form *E.r.rubecula* have been identified on passage between late March and early May.

Many migrants have been ringed and the number of recoveries is almost overwhelming. They show that most birds move between Scandinavia and southwest Europe; four have been found in Spain (December to April), two in France (December), one in the Channel Islands (February) and one in both Norway and Sweden (April). In addition, individuals from Finland and Denmark have been controlled on the coast during October, the former only fourteen days after being ringed, while another marked at

Heligoland in spring 1976 was at Seaton Delaval in the following October. A few caught on the coast during autumn have subsequently been found up to 400km further south in England in the same year, but individuals from Norway and Belgium, and recovered here in mid-winter, show that some remain in the county. Others ringed here moved to Durham county, Lancashire and Hampshire while one marked at Craster on 2 October 1965 had reached Belgium some seven weeks later, perhaps reorientating after having been drifted off course.

One ringed at Newton-by-the-Sea in October 1971 was presumed to be returning north, albeit displaced westward, when found dead at Dunoon, Argyllshire, in April 1973.

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are only four records. Single birds were trapped and ringed at Hauxley on 26–27 September and 2 October 1965: they were the first recorded for the British mainland. One was on Holy Island on 23 May 1971 and another was killed by traffic near Wallsend Swallow Pond on 28 August 1981.

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

A rare visitor.

In 1912, Bolam mentioned several possible records (the first at Blanchland in June 1878) which he had tried unsuccessfully to verify. He believed that there was only one definite identification, namely the bird which had been at Whittingham between 14 May and 13 June 1893, and which he himself had heard, and accordingly that the Nightingale was 'a rare accidental visitant to our district', adding 'that Northumberland has at any rate one good occurrence to its credit'.

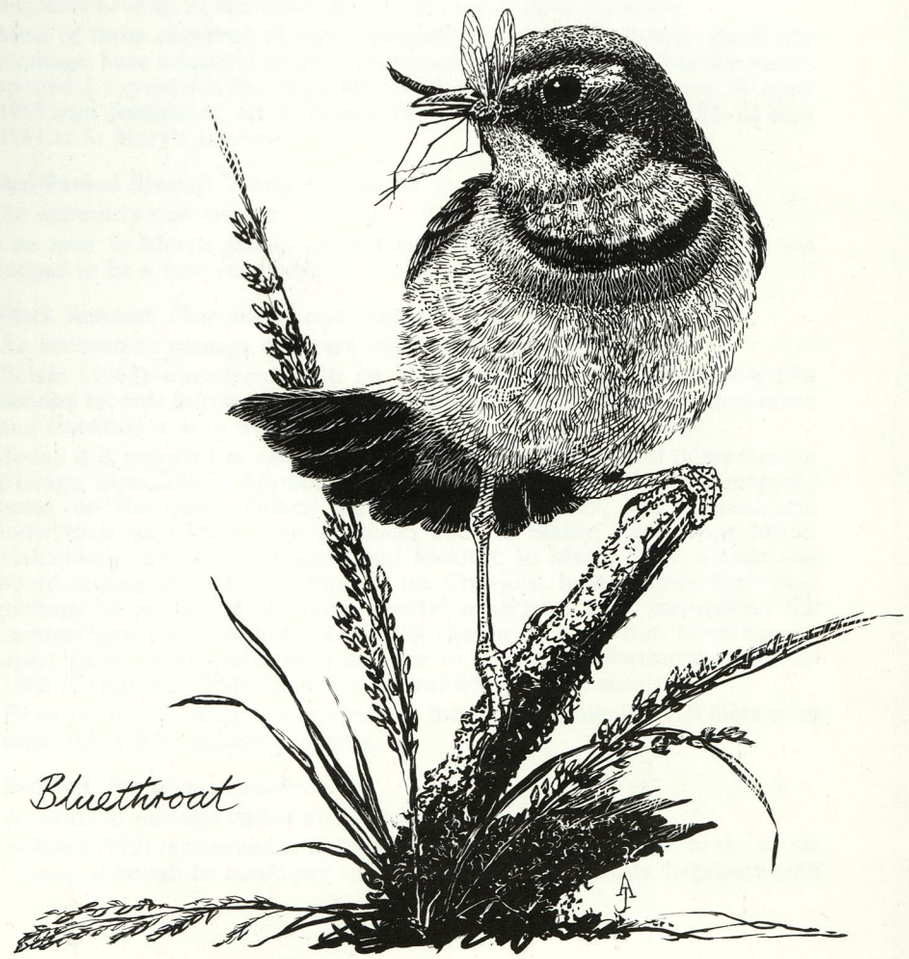
Twenty years later he mentions other occasions between 1899 and 1931 when a Nightingale was alleged to have been heard. He adds, however, that Father Kuyte of Crawcrook in County Durham had kept captive birds for some forty-five years. Two of these, both thought to be males, had escaped in the 1890s, while six pairs had been liberated at nearby Bradley Hall (only about two kilometres south of the Northumberland border) and in Alnwick Park between 1928 and 1931. He concluded that these former captives must have been responsible for at least some of the more recent records although there might also have been a few genuinely wild birds.

Since then, birds have been heard singing in Gosforth Park in 1966 and at Heddon in 1981, while a further ten have been seen at the coast. Seven have been on the Farne Islands, five in May, one in August and another in October, in the years 1954, 1974–76, 1978 and 1981–82, while two others were on Holy Island in the Septembers of 1961 and 1976, and one at Hauxley (where it was caught) in October 1969. In addition, a bird at Hauxley in September 1969 was only identified as *Luscinia* sp.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

A rare passage visitor.

A male shot on Newcastle Town Moor on 28 May 1826 and still in the Hancock Museum collections was the first British record (Hancock, 1874). In 1912, Bolam added a further four to the county list – a female shot at Cullercoats on 8 October 1879, another female killed on St Mary's Island



on 15 September 1883 and single birds at Bamburgh and Embleton in late September 1884. Six more individuals were identified between 1922 and 1930, five of them, including one in May, on Holy Island. The sixth, seen by Bolam at Lipwood, near Haydon Bridge, on 23 October 1925, was surprisingly far inland.

It was next reported in 1949 when one was on Holy Island on 17 May. Since 1952 it has occurred in most years, always at, or very close to the coast, with some seventy spring sightings between 6 April and 5 June and a noticeable concentration of records in late May. Indeed, sixty have been identified since 1970 including eight in 1970, ten in 1975, nine in 1977 and thirteen in 1981. One of the four present on Coquet Island in May 1973 was heard singing for a short time.

The majority of the sixty seen in autumn have been in September and October although they have appeared as early as 10 and 14 August. A very late bird was near St Mary's Island on 16 November 1977 and there have been only three subsequent autumn sightings including one that ran under the observer's parked car, while he was inside, at Hauxley on 18 October 1981. Bluethroats were particularly conspicuous in early September 1958 when at least ten were among large numbers of continental migrants held up at the coast during several days of thick fog.

Most of those observed closely, especially in spring when they are in full plumage, have belonged to the red-spotted form *L.s.svecica,* but the white-spotted *L.s.cyanecula* has been identified on three occasions – on 18 April 1953 near Seahouses, on 30 March 1958 at Bamburgh and on 15–22 May 1981 at St Mary's Island.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

An extremely rare visitor.

One near St Mary's Island on 16 October 1960 is the only record. It was judged to be a first year male.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

An uncommon passage and rare winter visitor.

Bolam (1912) considered it to be 'a casual visitor' and listed only five definite records between 1840 and 1903. In 1932, he added a further seven and classified it as 'a winter visitant'.

Today it is reported in every month of the year, but is most numerous on passage, especially in March, April, May and October when the majority occur on the coast. Inland sightings are, however, not unusual and individuals have been seen at places such as Slaley, Emblehope Moor, Haltwhistle, Blindburn, Hepple and Meldon. In March 1974, a male was heard singing at Threestoneburn in the Cheviots. Indeed, some birds may perhaps be present in the more remote moorland areas throughout the summer and the possibility of nesting cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, apart from an unconfirmed reference to 'a nest in Northumberland' in 1962 (Campbell, 1964), there are no known breeding records.

From twenty to thirty are reported in most years while in 1970 there were some thirty-five, mainly in spring.

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1912) recognised it as 'a well-known summer visitor' to the whole county although he could not understand why some birds 'begrimed with

soot out of all recognition' seemed often to choose the area round Newcastle and its 'neighbouring villages' rather than the more open country.

Today it prefers to breed in mature, and frequently decaying, deciduous or mixed woodland, usually on the edges of moorland, and is particularly plentiful in the upper reaches of the North Tyne between Reedsmouth and Kielder, the Wansbeck valley and Billsmoor Park near Elsdon. The main body usually arrives in the breeding areas in late April, but some males are seen at the end of the first week in April. It becomes less conspicuous when the young have fledged and most birds have left the breeding haunts by late August.

It is a hole nesting species so takes readily to nest boxes (including on one occasion a box at Kielder put up for Kestrels) while other unusual sites have including the radiator of an engine used daily at Slaley to drive a bench saw, the stirrer of a septic tank near Dipton, among fallen trees and bracken in Gosforth Park and in a hole in bare peat in Hulne Park.

In spring, despite the fact that the first bird may appear on the coast by 4 April, the main movement does not take place until early May and it is unusual to find more than ten in one locality. In autumn, the first passage visitors are sometimes seen in late July, and September often produces large falls when birds are either held up, or drifted off course by adverse weather conditions. Such exceptional numbers were reported in 1956, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1965, 1969 and 1976 as hundreds were grounded along the coast – in 1969, for example, over 750 were noted between 17 and 21 September. These movements occasionally extend into October and in 1976 it was estimated that over a hundred were present on 2–3 October. Inevitably, some individuals may linger, and one was at Beadnell on 26 November 1959 with another at Cullernose on 11 November 1967 while two very late birds were at St Mary's Island on 19 December 1937.

Many nestlings and migrants have been ringed and the subsequent recoveries have provided useful and interesting information. Birds have been found in the Channel Islands, France, Portugal and Spain in September and up to two years after ringing, while three, caught as coastal migrants in August or September, were in Algeria two months later. A 1971 pullus from Falstone was on the Calf of Man in mid-May 1972 while another pullus from Dipton, which was in Morocco on 27 April 1981, must have been on its return journey northward. An individual, marked at Tynemouth on 19 September 1969 when travelling south, was caught in Finland on 11 May 1972. Birds from further afield included a nestling from central Scotland found dead on the Farne Islands in late May of the following year and a migrant, ringed on the Frisian Islands in May 1950 and recovered on Holy Island on 11 May 1951, presumably on its way to a more northerly breeding area.

One which arrived on the Isle of May on 14 May 1981 and was controlled at Threestoneburn a few weeks later on 20 June indicates that spring migrants occasionally overshoot their intended destination. Retrapping of breeding pairs has shown that some birds return to the same areas in successive seasons; indeed, one nestling marked near Stocksfield in June 1936 was found nesting in the same place in 1940.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam's assessment of its status in 1912 was remarkably detailed and is comparable with that of the present day. He referred to it as 'a common

summer visitant' which was partial to uncultivated, grassy tracts, beds of bracken in the more sheltered valleys in the hills, railway embankments, young plantations where there was an abundance of ground cover and coastal sand dunes. Once vegetation had developed, coal tips in southeast Northumberland provided desirable breeding sites and since many of these mounds have now been planted with young fir trees, they still remain attractive. Nesting areas tend to be colonised early in May, but April records are not infrequent and one was seen at Blanchland on 4 April 1974 and another at Haltwhistle on 10 April 1953. Some idea of population density is given by a count, made in June 1978, which showed thirty breeding pairs along some five kilometres of the Alwin valley in upper Coquetdale.

It generally appears a little earlier at the coast, but single birds at Hauxley on 31 March 1968, and at Hartley on 30 March 1978, were exceptional. However, numbers are greatest during May when both passage and breeding birds are seen. The largest spring movement through the county took place between 8–11 May 1975 when seventy-five were on Holy Island, forty at Hauxley and many others on the coast.

Autumn dispersal begins in late July, and continues into August, and Whinchats feature prominently in the falls of continental migrants that sometimes occur during September. These were particularly noticeable in 1956, 1960, 1965 and 1966 when, during adverse weather, hundreds were present on the coast for a few days. Smaller numbers may still arrive in October, but it is seldom seen after the end of the third week and one at Hartley on 8 November 1948, and another at Newton Pool on 1 November 1959, are the only November reports. Witherby *et al.* (1938) state that on rare occasions the Whinchat winters in this country and Grey (1960) accepted that the bird seen on the cliffs at Hartley on 31 December 1959 was a female of this species. However, in view of the recent identification of the Siberian Stonechat (see page 130), the present authors have suggested that it may, in fact, have been either *S.t.stejnegeri* or *S.t.maura.*

Nestlings ringed in the county have been recovered in Spain (September), Morocco and Algeria (April) and France (May) while one found in Portugal on 20 November 1954 had been marked on passage at Monk's House on 27 August 1953.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

An uncommon passage visitor and breeding resident.

There is no doubt that its status has changed dramatically since 1912 when Bolam described it as 'a partial resident . . . widely distributed over the district, nesting . . . in most places where whin coverts, tufts of heather, or other rough ground, afford the kind of shelter it likes'. Twenty years later he commented that 'for the past two or three decades or longer, it seems to have been growing steadily and permanently scarcer, not having been seen at all, for years, at some of its ancient haunts'. Nevertheless some localities continued to attract significant numbers in the breeding season and until about 1945 it nested regularly at places as far apart as Haltwhistle, Hexham, Redesdale and Harbottle; indeed, it was said it was as common as the Wheatear on the hills near Haltwhistle. By 1950, it was rare to find a pair breeding inland while the coastal sand dunes had become its main refuge. For the next twenty years there were seldom more than fifteen breeding pairs in the county, most of them in places such as Bamburgh, Newton-by-the-Sea, Warkworth and Druridge Bay, but a series of very mild winters during the 1970s apparently led to a temporary increase in

numbers. In 1973, although there were reports from fifteen inland areas, only one pair was known to have nested. By 1975, the figure had risen to about twenty pairs, including six pairs on Kielderhead Moor. In 1976, there were some thirty-five pairs (seventeen of them in Wark Forest) nesting away from the coast, with a further thirty-two pairs on the coast. Thereafter, there has been a progressive decline and since the exceptionally cold winters of 1979 and 1982, the species has reverted to its post-1945 status.

During spring and autumn coastal residents are augmented by a few passage visitors, but it is unusual to find the 'small flocks – exceptionally numbering . . . as many as a couple of dozen or so' that Bolam mentioned in 1912. He suspected, however, that some of these migrants belonged to another race and in 1932 he refers to the so far unsuccessful attempts to verify these suspicions. In fact, it was not until 1974 that two seen on Holy Island on 12–13 October, and one at Tynemouth between 7–15 November, were identified as showing the characteristics of either *S.t.stejnegeri* or *S.t.maura.* Since then further individuals have occurred at Holy Island (18 October 1975 and 7 October 1979), Hauxley (1 October 1978 and 24–25 October 1981), near Blyth (19 October 1980) and in Druridge Bay (9 December 1981).

In autumn plumage both races, especially *S.t.stejnegeri,* resemble juvenile *S.rubetra,* and in view of the Druridge record it is possible that the Whinchat reported near Hartley during December 1959 and January 1960 (see page 129) may perhaps have been one of these Stonechats.

Only small numbers have been ringed, but a few have been retrapped at Hauxley up to two years after first being caught.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

An extremely rare visitor.

One on Bamburgh golf course from 16–20 September 1980 is the only record.

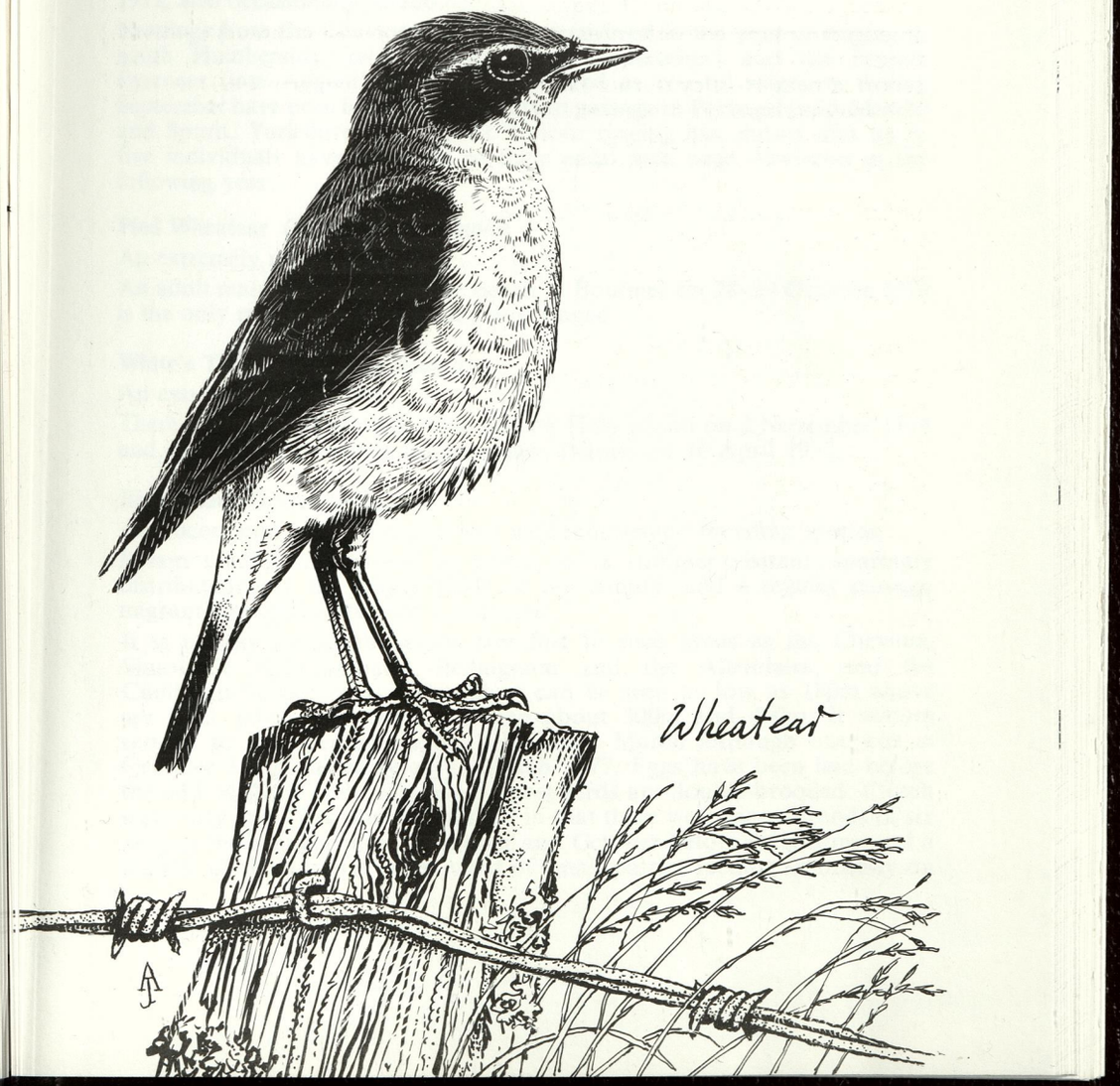
Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1912) referred to it as a 'common summer bird' being most addicted to the sandy links of the coast and wide stretches of open moorland on the lower hills'. This is still much the situation although the increase in sheep grazing over some moorland areas has helped to counteract the effect of encroaching forestry on the choice of nesting sites.

The main arrival takes place from late March, but earlier sightings are not uncommon although three in Wark Forest on 4 March 1981 was exceptional. Dispersal from the nesting areas occurs from early July.

Hancock (1874) stated that a few years earlier it nested frequently on the Newcastle Town Moor, in the turf dykes surrounding the intakes. More recently, it has been seen to enter nest holes in coal waste tips in southeast Northumberland. It is normally double-brooded and the results of a study of first broods, always the largest, in the Alwin valley give an indication of nesting success. In 1978, seventy-eight young were reared by fifteen pairs, while in 1979 twenty-six pairs fledged 117 young. In its breeding haunts it is frequently preyed upon by falcons, especially Merlins, but at Alwinton a Kestrel was so intent on capturing a Wheatear that it plunged, in pursuit, down a nest hole and so became lodged. The Kestrel was extracted from the hole and released, and the Wheatear was unharmed.



Passage is most apparent at the coast, the earliest being four seen flying over the Farne Islands on 19 February 1962. Mid-March reports are not unusual, and numbers increase steadily, reaching a peak between late April and the middle of May. Large concentrations, such as over a hundred at three localities between 6 and 9 May 1976 and about 200 on Holy Island on 8–11 May 1975 and 12–16 May 1979, are not uncommon, while ringing has demonstrated that almost fifty percent of the birds involved in these later movements belong to the Greenland race *O.o.leucorrhoa.* Autumn passage extends from mid-July to early November with a peak in September when in some years, such as 1956, 1958, 1960, 1963 and 1965, hundreds may be grounded, together with other continental migrants, during periods of strong east winds and low cloud and rain. With the exception of a bird which spent a few days on a farm at Howick at the end of January 1952, one at Longframlington on 17 November 1974, and two in Wark Forest on 24 November 1970, were the latest reported.

A Wheatear shot at Newbiggin in October 1895, and now in the Hancock Museum collections, was thought to be a Greenland bird and other examples of this race occur from time to time at the coast, especially in October, and, as was shown by one found dead in Ponteland on 1 October 1972, also occasionally inland.

Nestlings from the Cheviots have been recovered in the year of ringing in south Humberside (mid-August), Kent (September) and the French Pyrenees (late August) while birds marked as coastal migrants during September have been found on their return passage in Portugal (mid-March) and Spurn, Yorkshire (late April). Colour ringing has shown that up to five individuals have returned to their natal area near Alwinton in the following year.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

An extremely rare visitor.

An adult male which was on the beach at Boulmer on 28–29 October 1979 is the only record; it was trapped and ringed.

White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are only two records. One was on Holy Island on 2 November 1914 and two were together at Foulmartlaw, Belsay, on 26 April 1952.

Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

An uncommon passage visitor and well-represented breeding species.

Bolam (1932) summarised its status as 'a summer visitant, sparingly distributed over the higher parts of the county, and a regular passage migrant' and this statement is still true.

It is usually found above the tree line in such areas as the Cheviots, Simonside Hills, around Bellingham and the Allendales, and the Cumbrian border hills. Although it can be seen as low as 180m above sea level, most nests occur between about 300m and 460m. It seldom returns to its breeding haunts before late March although one was at Greenlee Lough as early as 13 March 1977. Eggs have been laid before the end of April and, as is usual, most birds are double-brooded. Clutch sizes vary and 1964 was exceptional in that there were many broods of six young. Birds linger into September and October before emigrating and a feature of the autumn is the sight of small parties feeding frantically on

berries, usually rowan, before leaving their breeding areas. This was clearly illustrated on 5 September 1979 when fourteen were together in a rowan tree at Langleeford.

Small numbers (maximum twenty-two on Holy Island on 24 April 1973) arrive regularly on the coast between late March and the end of May, but individuals may appear earlier, as on 6 March 1887 when one was on Inner Farne in fog. There have also been a few in June.

Dispersing juveniles probably account for early autumn records at the coast, such as the bird which was on Inner Farne on 18 July 1958, but it is late September, when the northern populations begin to move south with other Turdidae, before it arrives in any number. It is rarely numerous and the sight of several hundreds on the coast in early October 1965 was quite exceptional. November reports are not unusual, although one on Inner Farne on 30 November 1881 and another on 22 November 1974 were decidedly late. In 1912, Bolam listed several sightings of what he then considered to be wintering birds, but by 1932 he suggested that those 'encountered during the winter months are, probably, chiefly belated birds-of-passage, though now and then one or two would appear to elect to pass the winter here'. His early December records of single birds at Wooler in 1883, and at Mertoun on the Tweed in 1885, as well as a more recent sighting in the Cheviots in 1974, certainly fit the former category, but others at Berwick on 7 January 1895, and near Chillingham on 23 February 1975, can be considered true winter occurrences.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

An abundant passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

It is as widespread today as it was over a century ago when Hancock (1874) described it as 'a common resident' and is equally at home competing with Ring Ouzels for nest sites in the hills as in urban and suburban gardens. Like *T.philomelos* it even nests on offshore islands and between 1962 and 1974 there were one or two pairs on the Farne Islands.

Bolam (1912) mentioned that a nest containing four eggs had been found in Alnwick at the end of January 1882 and reports of nest building in January and February are not infrequent; the earliest was a nest with two eggs discovered at Guide Post on 12 January 1975 while young hatched at Shilbottle on 22 January 1980.

Several of these early nesters probably manage to fledge several broods – in 1973, for example, four broods were reared in a garden in Kenton, Newcastle upon Tyne. In 1952, a female laid six clutches of eggs at Biddlestone, in Coquetdale, but none hatched. Blackbirds nest in a variety of situations, including nest boxes, but one of the most unusual was when four eggs were laid on a concrete path amongst pea sticks in a Bothal garden in 1947. Needless to say, the eggs, disappeared! Nests can be completed very quickly and in 1944 one in a hut, which had been erected at Blagdon on 9 April, contained three eggs only six days later. A fledgling rescued from a cat in Newcastle on 12 October 1978 was the latest known record of breeding.

Regular censusing of breeding pairs has been carried out in several places for the last fifteen years and as many as seventy-five pairs have been counted in a 200 hectare area near Hexham.

Movements can be quite spectacular, especially in autumn, and migration is sometimes more obvious inland than at the coast.

Spring passage and emigration is at its height in late March and early April and it is not unusual to see large flocks around farmsteads in the higher valleys of the county. Emigration from the coast is best observed towards dusk during anticyclonic conditions, as small parties spiral progressively higher until almost out of sight before they head off towards the east.

Autumn passage of continental birds starts at the end of September, but does not usually reach a peak until late October and early November; it occasionally extends into early December. Ringing has demonstrated that many move on southwards, but some stay to winter in the county. Arrivals are often very impressive as thousands drift in from the east seeking temporary sanctuary in gardens, parks and cemeteries along the coast; their calls are sometimes heard at night as they pass, with *T.iliacus,* overhead.

Winter roosts are a feature and although they have been found among Scots pines near Haltwhistle, they are more usually located in rhododendrons, in areas such as Gosforth Park, Belsay and Bolam.

Many Blackbirds have been ringed in the county and it is difficult to analyse the numerous recoveries. Fifteen birds caught here in winter and found in breeding areas in Scandinavia, the Baltic states and West Germany in summer, and fourteen north European-marked birds subsequently recovered in the county, illustrate the movements of continental Blackbirds. There are five examples of an interchange with Heligoland, the most interesting being one caught at Hauxley on 3 April 1980, and controlled on Heligoland seven days later. The continued southward movement of these migrants is illustrated by the recovery in France between December and February of seven birds originally marked here in spring or autumn, while one ringed in December was in Santander, Spain, nearly a year later. Scottish birds, too, tend to move south and one from Stirling and another from Fair Isle were discovered wintering in the county. There seems to be a definite movement to Ireland; three passage visitors, and three which were almost certainly locally bred birds, were found in that country between November and January, while two others, recovered in Lancashire and the Isle of Man, were probably on their way there. A well-travelled visitor was one marked at Holywell in October 1962, found in County Down in January 1963 and in Rogaland, Norway, in mid-October 1964, presumably prior to further emigration. Perhaps the most surprising recovery was of one caught near Beal in January 1959, but which was still in Estonia in January 1963 at a time when most Blackbirds would normally have left the Baltic states. Incidentally, 1962–63 was a particularly severe winter both in Britain and on the continent.

Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*

An extremely rare visitor.

A male on Holy Island on 28 January 1979 is the only record.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

An abundant passage and winter visitor which may have bred.

In 1874, Hancock described it as 'an abundant winter visitant, arriving in October and not departing till late in spring' and this description has remained true for over a century.

It is not unusual to encounter small flocks in late August, but the main arrival takes place between mid-October and early November, quite often

in the teeth of a strong westerly gale. Immigration is most conspicuous during light easterly winds and tens of thousands may sometimes be seen both on the coast and inland. There are, however, occasional autumns such as 1947, 1948, 1949, 1956 and 1981 when few appear.

Bolam (1932) commented that a considerable number 'which visit us are no more than birds of passage on their way to and from more southern winter-retreats'. This is certainly the case in normal and extreme winters, but during a series of mild winters in the early 1970s many more than usual remained in the county. The onset of cold weather obviously stimulates restlessness and leads to hard weather movements towards the coast or southwards; examples of these movements occurred on 24 December 1976 when 5300 congregated in Lindisfarne NNR and on 30–31 December 1978 as thousands passed south so escaping the extreme cold of January 1979. At such times, too, a few may be attracted by rotting fruit to feed in suburban gardens.

In spring, birds tend to form pre-emigration gatherings and the subsequent passage can be very heavy. Flocks increase in size in March and April, particularly in the central part of the county, at places such as Grindon, Kirkwhelpington, Matfen and Bolam. Some ten thousand birds near Cambo on the evening of 26 April 1974 was one of the largest flocks ever reported, but five hundred to a thousand are more usual. Emigrating parties are sometimes caught by bad weather at the end of April and beginning of May, and it is in these circumstances that stragglers may be seen at the coast until late in May. A feature of this spring build-up is the formation of very large roosts in conifer plantations high up on the moors. The roost used most regularly is near Sweethope Lough and thousands of birds can be seen arriving from all directions, especially in April. Another is on the northern slopes of the Simonside Hills.

Although Bolam mentions that one or two had been observed in mid-summer, he never considered that there had been any attempt at breeding. Since 1946 there have been about twenty reports in June and July which might suggest possible nesting, but the evidence has been purely circumstantial. Among these were reports of a pair among scattered birch in upper Coquetdale on 26 June 1966, two near Elsdon in mid-June 1974, another pair displaying near Kielder between 8–11 May 1977 and two noticed carrying food near Threestoneburn in June 1978. During the 1970s there were also a number of instances when the remains of Fieldfares were found on the plucking posts of breeding Merlins.

Compared with other Turdidae very few have been ringed, but three caught in the county on autumn migration were subsequently found in Norway (in spring, summer and early autumn) while a Norwegian-ringed nestling was recovered in Whitley Bay in spring, presumably on its return journey northward. An interesting recovery was a bird marked at Stocksfield in February 1969 and found dead in Aberdeen seven years later – on 7 April 1976.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

In 1912, Bolam considered it to be 'a well-known resident' and 'at least a partial migrant'. He also referred to the large numbers that arrived from 'more northern latitudes' during the autumn, but suggested that the coastal gatherings characteristic of this season contained 'native-bred birds congregating here prior to their departure to other lands'. In 1932, he

added that some of the immigrants and passage visitors, with their slightly greyer plumage, were representative of the continental race *T.p.philomelos.*

Today it is one of only a few breeding species that have benefited from increased afforestation, particularly in the west of the county and, as a result, it is now widespread in its breeding range. Indeed, in 1978 two pairs, and in 1979 one pair, fledged young on Coquet Island. Census work has shown that in 1976, following a series of mild winters, there were twenty-eight pairs in a 200 hectare area near Hexham compared with the normal density of some fifteen pairs. Early and protracted nesting is a feature. In 1976, a nest with three eggs was found at Corbridge on 28 February while in 1968 newly-fledged young were seen at Embleton on both 29 March and 11 August. Most clutches contain four or five eggs and a nest with eight eggs, discovered at Ponteland on 24 July 1954, was decidedly unusual.

As migrants, Song Thrushes are often overlooked for they mix with other Turdidae, especially in the autumn. March, April, September and October are the peak migration months and very large numbers can be involved. In some autumns, such as those of 1965, 1966, 1976 and 1982, hundreds, and sometimes thousands, arrive from the east on favourable days, and at night their distinctive calls may be heard as they pass overhead, often in company with *T.iliacus.*

Many are handled at the coastal ringing stations and, as Bolam had observed, there are significant colour variations, especially on the upperparts. In fact, E A R Ennion suggested that some of those seen at Monk's House in the 1950s could be identified as the darker, Hebridean form *T.p.hebridensis,* and today, although much more caution is exercised in classifying different races, ringing recoveries have shown that the origins and destinations of these migrants vary greatly.

Although most passage visitors move on southward for the winter, significant numbers of Song Thrushes, probably mainly local breeding birds, remain. These are, however, often caught by a sudden change to extreme cold and it is in such conditions that they move down to feed on the shore. On 18 February 1978, for example, fourteen were on Alnmouth beach while in December 1981 a few were seen between Boulmer and Howick, and eight at Warkworth. By contrast, birds may respond to warmer spells by singing at the most unexpected time, as on 1 February 1981 when one was heard at midnight in North Shields.

Song Thrushes have been ringed in the county for at least sixty-five years and individuals marked (both in May) in 1915 and 1916 were subsequently found in the Isle of Man in October 1915 and near Stranraer in February 1917, so suggesting a westerly movement to Ireland. This was confirmed when, between 1943 and 1963, six Northumberland-marked birds were found in Ireland while others were in south Wales in 1954 and 1965. Between 1955 and 1964, three birds caught in Ireland in winter have been recovered here during early summer, while one at Simonburn in late May 1976 had been ringed on the Isle of Man in November 1974. Two Scottish breeding birds were recovered here in winter while two individuals caught at Seahouses in January 1955 were subsequently reported in Aberdeenshire in December 1955 and in Caithness in November 1956.

October migrants have later been found in Germany (one), France (four), Spain (two), Portugal (one) and Italy (one) between March and May while a March passage visitor was recovered in Norway in October of the following year. One ringed in Denmark on 19 September 1981 had reached Hauxley fourteen days later, but the most surprising movement was that of a

pullus, fledged at Killingworth in June 1964, and recovered in Belgium in early November 1968.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

An abundant passage and winter visitor that has bred.

There is nothing to suggest that its status has changed since 1912 when Bolam wrote that it was 'a common and regular winter visitant'. He stated then, and again in 1932, that there was no evidence of nesting although birds were seen in Alnwick Park on 29 May and 9 June 1911.

Such late reports continue to occur and a bird caught at Hauxley in May 1965 was retrapped there on a number of occasions from early August. It was, therefore, not surprising when a pair bred near Bamburgh in 1968 while in 1977, not only were young fledged from a nest at Kielder, but a second male was singing nearby. These are the only confirmed breeding records, but summer sightings continue, the most recent being at Earsdon on 8 June 1975 and at South Gosforth on 11 July 1979.

Redwings are most plentiful on autumn passage, especially in the first three weeks of October, but individuals may appear as early as 25 August and in 1971 one was on the Farne Islands on 31 July. Movements can be very spectacular as huge flocks arrive from the east; examples are numerous, but among those worth mentioning were 9 October 1975 when some 3000 landed on Inner Farne in the first hour after dawn, 9 October 1977 when thick fog grounded immense numbers along the coast and 11–14 October 1978 when many parties of up to 1000 birds arrived from the east and quickly moved on westward. Such immigration often takes place at night and contact calls can be heard from migrating groups heading west and southwest over the county. Passage on a reduced scale continues throughout November and into early December, but, despite such large arrivals, Redwings are often quite scarce by the end of the year. In mild winters, for example those from 1973 to 1976, larger numbers tend to remain in the area. At such times, winter roosts are often reported and rhododendron plantations seem particularly attractive as a nighttime refuge; among localities where roosts have been found are Bolam, Belsay, Blagdon, Cheeseburn Grange (near Stamfordham) and Gosforth Park. Redwings, however, often try to escape the cold, a habit that Bolam recognised when he remarked in 1912 that it 'seems to be more impatient of frost than even our common Thrush, and is always one of the first birds to succumb during hard weather'. Inability or reluctance to move usually proves fatal during prolonged spells of extreme cold as in the severe winters of 1947, 1963 and 1979. Hard weather movements to the south are a feature, even in short cold spells such as occurred in 1952, 1954, 1961 and 1977, and thousands may be seen passing overhead.

Emigration and spring passage can take place from late February, especially in mild winters. Movements are frequently most noticeable at night and, as in autumn, birds can be heard calling as they pass east; however, in daylight it is unusual to encounter parties of more than a few hundred, although many, including 3000 in Holywell Dene, were on the coast on 2 February 1980. Passage extends into April, but only a few linger into May.

Recoveries illustrate its present status and also throw light on its movements and subsequent destination. Two caught near Ponteland in December 1960 were in southwest France in December 1961 and March 1962 while one, marked on the Farne Islands in April 1963, was killed in France in the following February. Birds ringed at Gosforth in October 1964 and

February 1967 were respectively in Spain in March 1965 and Heligoland in March 1968. Another recovered in March – in Denmark in 1973 – had been ringed at the Belsay roost in November 1970 while a migrant trapped at Hauxley in October 1965 was in Georgia, USSR, on the eastern side of the Black Sea, in January 1967. Two birds from Finland, a pullus and an adult marked in mid-April, were both found in the county in December of the year in which they were ringed.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding resident.

Selby (1830) commented that 'this species within the last ten or fifteen years has become very common', but both Hancock (1874) and Bolam (1912) were rather doubtful about its early scarcity, the former remarking that he had 'known it nest in the district for upwards of forty years'. Indeed, in both 1912 and 1932 Bolam regarded it as 'a resident, common and well-known throughout the county'.

There is no doubt that it is equally at home in the centre of Newcastle, where it sometimes nests in the grounds of the Hancock Museum, or on the verge of the open moor, nesting in trees such as alder, rowan or birch, in stone walls and in abandoned farmsteads. As in Bolam's time, it uses a variety of sites and in the early 1970s a pair regularly fledged young in a Wallsend shipyard, while in the spring of 1981 a bird was found incubating eggs in an old Dipper's nest under a road bridge over the Coquet near Alwinton.

Recent census work suggests that the urban populations are relatively sedentary while the moorland areas are largely deserted in mid-winter although a pair or two may remain in the comparative shelter of an upland valley in all but the most extreme of winters. In fact, during the winter of 1946–47, it was reported to have suffered more than any other species and four or five years elapsed before it regained its former status. Large winter flocks are unusual and twenty-eight at Wallington on 15 February 1980 was one of the largest recorded. However, it is more gregarious in late summer as family parties group together, an example being ninety-one seen at Ponteland on 20 July 1980. During the 1950s, a roost of over a hundred near Haltwhistle was an annual occurrence in early autumn.

Although Bolam (1912) stated that 'any direct evidence of over-sea migration is rare, if not altogether wanting with us' the lightkeepers on the Longstone and Inner Farne reported it on several occasions between 1882 and 1886. Numbers varied from two to many, with the majority appearing between 30 October and 9 December and only one spring record – on 25 March 1885. With the exception of one or two on the Farne Islands, no others were recorded until 1959, but since then more regular observations have shown that it occurs annually on the coast, especially in autumn when flocks of up to sixty are often seen arriving from the northeast during September and October. Two hundred were at Budle Bay on 3 October 1980, and, while numbers decrease during October and November, one was still on the Farne Islands as late as 6 December 1978. Spring passage is less apparent, but sixty were on Holy Island on 8 March 1981.

A bird ringed as a pullus in Redesdale on 24 May 1953 and recovered in County Down, Northern Ireland, in December 1955, suggests that some local birds are migratory.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

An uncommon passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam's comment in 1932 that it was 'a summer visitant, generally distributed over the county, not uncommon, but very erratic in its occupation of many districts, colonising them intermittently and disappearing for longer or shorter periods of years' reflects the view of its status held by Selby nearly a century earlier. This erratic habit was clearly illustrated at Blagdon where, despite the fact that at least nine pairs bred in 1943, none was seen or heard in 1944.

Selby had observed that it was common in young plantations with an abundance of thick herbage, but deserted the locality as the trees matured and the undergrowth died out. Today its status is much the same and it can be found singing amongst newly planted fir trees up to about 425m above sea level, but only for as long as the secondary cover remains. It also nests among sand dunes, especially where the ground cover includes wild rose, thorn, willow and bramble, and it is usually in this type of habitat that it is first heard in spring.

Grasshopper Warblers are often recorded along the Tyne valley from west of Newburn and there is probably a very similar distribution along other rivers such as the Wansbeck and Coquet. They are also frequent around some lakes and reservoirs.

Single birds heard singing at Stocksfield on 13 April 1971, and on Holy Island on 15 April 1952, are the earliest recorded, but it is late April and early May before the majority are heard. Numbers decrease throughout May and it is assumed that some move on to more northerly breeding areas.

Autumn passage is much less obvious and only a few are seen, mainly at the coast, in August and September. There have been five October sightings, all between 2 and 13 October – three individuals at St Mary's Island, one on the Farne Islands and one at Hauxley.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

An extremely rare visitor.

One seen singing near Beal on 1 June 1977 was accepted by the *County Records Committee,* but not by the *British Birds Rarities Committee.*

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

An extremely rare visitor.

One at Holywell Ponds on 20–21 August 1958 is the only record.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

According to Bolam, it was 'a common summer visitor, nesting in most suitable places' and his description of it, written in 1912, is still largely true.

It arrives during late April and throughout May and returns south from mid-July until mid-September. It is particularly attracted to lowland reed beds, but can be found almost anywhere where there are overgrown hedgerows, ditches, copses and quarries, although not necessarily near water. It is the only warbler in the county that regularly rears two broods in one season and accordingly young are often still being fed in the nest well into August.

Spring migration is much more obvious than autumn passage and May

influxes are a frequent feature, particularly at the coast. In autumn, it does not figure prominently in the heavy arrivals of continental migrants, but pre-emigration concentrations have been noted, especially in the *Phragmites communis* reed bed at Chevington Burn. Up to 500 may collect there, reaching a peak in late July, while most have left by mid-August. Extreme dates for first and last sightings are 15 April 1961 and 21 October 1982, although October records are extremely rare.

Since 1964, over 1500 Sedge Warblers have been trapped and ringed in the county and recoveries have shown that birds marked in late July and early August reach southern counties such as Essex, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Sussex some five to eighteen days later. Further south they have been found in Jersey on 9 August; in France, at Ushant on 27 August and 4 September, and at Loire Atlantique on 18 August; and in Spain, at Bilbao, on 10 November. In addition, many individuals have been retrapped up to six years later at the place where they were originally ringed, so suggesting a tendency to return to the same breeding areas.

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*

An extremely rare visitor.

Single birds were at Hauxley on 12 October 1974 and at Priors Park, Tynemouth, on 27 September 1981: both were trapped and ringed.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

An extremely rare visitor.

One shot on Holy Island by H F Witherby on 25 September 1912 remains the only record.

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are only three records. Single birds were trapped and ringed at Hauxley on 3 September 1963 and 23 September 1980 and at Bamburgh on 27 May 1969.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

An uncommon passage and summer visitor and a rare breeding species.

Although Bolam (1912) considered that there was 'no satisfactory evidence' of its occurrence in the county, he was almost certain that a bird which he saw at Unthank on 13 May 1888 'belonged to this species'. The first positive identification was in 1955 when one was seen, and heard singing, in Gosforth Park on 31 May and 4 June. Three years later, and also in the reserve, a pair was observed carrying food and since then up to four pairs have bred there annually. The only other place where breeding has definitely been suspected is the *Phragmites communis* bed at Chevington Burn and one or two have been present here every summer between 1975 and 1981. It may perhaps also have taken place at Whittle Dene, where ten or twelve birds were seen in August 1971, and at Seaton Burn, where one was singing in May 1975.

Since 1952, it has been encountered with increasing regularity as a spring and autumn migrant at many points on the coast. Although most are reported as 'unstreaked *Acrocephalus* warblers, probably of this species', frequent trapping of Reed Warblers, albeit in small numbers, tends to confirm that the majority are, in fact, *A.scirpaceus.*

Spring migrants are noted in May and early June – indeed, one was still

on the Farne Islands as late as 13 June 1977 – but most are reported in autumn. Passage may extend from early August to early November, but the more usual period is from mid-August to mid-October. This movement was particularly conspicuous in 1976 when eight individuals were reported between 15 August and the end of September, while during the first three days of October a further eight were at Hauxley, three at Seaton Sluice and two at Tynemouth with another six elsewhere on the coast. One was still on Holy Island on 27 October.

The fact that, prior to migration, Reed Warblers are able to make rapid increases in their fat reserves was clearly demonstrated by an individual caught at Hauxley in 1978. When it arrived on 14 October, it weighed only 9.6gms, but by 22 October, when it was last seen, it had increased its weight by 65% to 15.8gms.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

An extremely rare visitor, some doubt attaching to the single record.

Its inclusion in this list is based on Bolam's statement in 1912 that 'on 18 June 1899 my brother, William James, saw a very large warbler . . . at the mouth of the Whitadder, which it seemed not unlikely might have been of this species'. As it could not be found again, he considered its identification to be uncertain, although twenty years later he commented that it 'could scarcely have been anything else than a Great Reed Warbler'.

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) considered it 'an occasional passage migrant', but it now occurs in most years although, unless a bird is trapped and ringed, it is usually identified as '*Hippolais* warbler, probably Icterine'.

One shot in Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, on 20 June 1889 and now in the Hancock Museum collections, was the first recorded and no others were definitely identified until September 1958 when one was at Monk's House. Since then there have been more than fifty records, all at the coast, while about fifteen have been trapped and ringed. Most occur in autumn from mid-August to early October although during the period 1970–1980 five were seen in spring, all between 10 and 26 May.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are three records, all of adult males. Single birds were present at Hauxley on 2–3 November 1963 and from 1–6 May 1976; both were trapped and ringed. A third was on the Farne Islands on 20 June 1977.

Williamson (1968) considered that the November individual belonged to the eastern race *S.c.albistriata.*

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a rare passage migrant' which is 'at least in some seasons, a fairly numerous visitor to the Northumbrian coast'. It was first recorded on Holy Island in 1913 when H F Witherby identified nine individuals between 2 and 25 September. Today there are up to ten occurrences in most autumns. 1965 was an exceptional year with thirty-three sightings between 16 August and 21 October although some twenty birds were noted in the autumns of both 1969 and 1975.

Extreme dates are 14 August and 6 November and, with the exception of an immature near Capheaton on 3 November 1982, all have been at, or very near, the coast. The majority were immature birds.

There are only two spring records: one near Seaton Delaval on 14 May 1970 and one on Coquet Island on 23 May 1971.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

An uncommon passage visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1912) thought it to be 'only a very partial summer visitor to south Northumberland, becoming much rarer as we advance northwards'. He mentioned that Hancock had found it breeding in Scotswood Dene in 1832 and on one or two subsequent occasions, but, although more recently nesting had been suspected in a few places, it had only been definitely confirmed at Chipchase in 1899 and 1900. However, by 1932 the position had changed and breeding was occurring in widespread localities.

It is still an extremely localised nesting species which has been found at places as far apart as Beal, Craster, Alnwick, Cresswell, Arcot Hall, Stocksfield, Tarset and upper Coquetdale. Bolam mentions a Lesser Whitethroat that frequented a clump of sloe bushes near Berwick and blackthorn remains a favourite habitat.

It is never numerous on passage, but is often included in the falls of continental migrants that sometimes occur on the coast. The main spring passage takes place in late April and early May (early dates 10 April 1971 and 12 April 1949) and there was a particularly large influx on 9–10 May 1970 when thirty to forty were on Holy Island with similar numbers at Bamburgh and Hauxley and many others along the coast. Other smaller influxes occurred at the beginning of May in 1972, 1973, 1976, 1978 and 1981.

The autumn movement is protracted and dispersing juveniles can be seen at the coast in late July and early August. More northerly birds pass through from late August and records regularly extend into late October. One of the largest autumn arrivals took place in early September 1963 when twenty-five were seen along the coast. A few linger into November, the latest sighting being 8 November 1981.

Since 1964, eleven of these October and November visitors have shown the characteristics of the Siberian race *S.c.blythii.*

There are only two ringing recoveries – a bird ringed at Stocksfield on 14 July 1974 was found injured in Lebanon on 29 March 1975 and another, marked at Hauxley on 9 May 1981, was shot in Syria on 11 April 1982. These birds were presumably on return spring passage and the recoveries are particularly interesting for they indicate the species' northwest to southeast orientation when on migration.

Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

A well-represented passage visitor and breeding species.

According to Bolam (1912) it was 'one of the commonest and most generally distributed of our summer visitants, frequenting hedges and thickets in all the lowland country'.

Although a progressive reduction in hedgerows in some areas undoubtedly lessened the amount of suitable nesting habitat, Bolam's statement probably remained true until 1968. In 1956, in fact, it was thought to be particularly

numerous, with unusual numbers of singing males at Druridge Bay, Coquetdale and on the moors near Blanchland.

In 1969, when the first bird was not seen until 10 May, Whitethroats were noticeably scarce and, indeed, were absent from many localities and it seemed probable that the population had been seriously reduced either in the wintering areas or on migration. It remained scarce for another five years and Galloway and Meek (1974) remarked that in 1973 'it is still struggling to achieve its pre-1969 status'. There was a marked improvement by 1975, but it was 1976 before birds were again heard singing in some places that had been deserted since 1968. Today, although it is still attracted to hedgerows and thickets, it also frequents overgrown gardens in rural areas, railway embankments where brambles and gorse grow in profusion, and heather and birch on the edges of moorland.

At the coast, it is more conspicuous in spring than in autumn, the earliest reported being one at Craster on 15 April 1952 and one at Holywell on 16 April 1980. Passage reaches a peak in mid-May, but there are seldom more than ten together. Dispersing juveniles appear from mid-July and in most years the autumn movement, although involving very small numbers, extends into October. There are two November records – single birds at Hauxley on 1 November 1969 and at Holywell Dene on 5 November 1979.

A bird trapped in Holywell Dene in August 1964 was thought to be a hybrid with *Sylvia borin.*

Ringing has shown that some adults return to the same breeding areas for up to five years after first being marked. Others have been recovered in France (one), Portugal (four), Spain (one) and Morocco (one) in either September or October as many as three years after ringing, while one marked as a pullus was found in Morocco in early May of the following year. A bird, ringed at Dover, Kent, in September 1972 was seen at Longhorsley in August 1974.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding species, but extremely rare in winter.

Its status is probably the same as in 1932 when Bolam described it as 'a summer visitant, common and well distributed over the county in moderate numbers'.

It is attracted to deciduous and mixed woodland wherever there is secondary cover in which to nest and a breeding census carried out in 1975 gave some idea of population density. This revealed six to seven pairs in a sixty-five hectare area near Hexham, with fifteen pairs along some six kilometres of the Tyne near Chollerford.

A few are noted from mid-April, the earliest report being on 10 April, but it is early May before the main passage, and arrival, takes place. Small numbers are regularly seen at the coast throughout May and up to mid-June.

Autumn passage is sometimes quite spectacular and the Garden Warbler is one of the most numerous species if there is a fall of continental migrants in late August or early September. The most memorable arrival took place between 1–3 September 1963 when 900, including 180 between Blyth and Whitley Bay and more than a hundred on Inner Farne, were estimated to be present along the coast. Similar influxes, but on a reduced scale, have been observed until early October in other years, an example being 1981

when over a hundred, among them fifty in the Bamburgh area, were counted between 2–5 October. The movement extends from late July until the end of October and the handful of November records, including one seen by Bolam at Middleton, near Wooler, on 18 November 1904, probably refer to late migrants rather than wintering individuals. There are, however, two unseasonable records: one caught at Belshill, near Belford, on 15 December 1893 and another seen at Morpeth on 8 February 1976.

Recoveries illustrate how weather may sometimes deflect southward-bound migrants from their normal route. Individuals ringed in Belgium in mid-August have been found at Alnwick and Bamburgh approximately one month later, and a third, caught in Belgium on 14 September 1973, was retrapped next day at Tynemouth. Another example of this rather unexpected northwest movement was one marked at Portland Bill, Dorset, on 31 August 1969 and retrapped, also at Tynemouth, thirteen days later.

A bird ringed at Hauxley on 23 August 1973 had reached Morocco within thirty-seven days, while an indication of the origin of some of these autumn visitors is given by an individual, marked at Bamburgh on 17 September 1965, and found in central Germany, in what was presumably a breeding area, on 27 June 1970.

An adult, caught at Swarland on 24 May 1969, was in Derbyshire on 6 May 1973, almost certainly returning northward to a Northumberland breeding site.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

A well-represented passage and uncommon winter visitor and a common breeding species.

Both Selby and Bolam regarded it as fairly common and well distributed although in 1932 the latter commented that it had decreased in certain districts.

Despite Bolam's concern, it continues to be well distributed throughout the county wherever there is deciduous and mixed woodland with good secondary cover. Jesmond Dene, close to Newcastle, is an example of this type of habitat and in 1980 at least ten singing males were present in early June. The nesting period can be protracted and an adult seen feeding a newly fledged juvenile in Gosforth Park on 14 August 1973 suggests that it is sometimes double-brooded.

Spring passage begins in early April with a peak, which is particularly noticeable at the coast, at the beginning of May. A few stragglers are encountered into June, but the largest numbers appear in late September and early October. Spectacular falls occurred in the autumns of 1973, 1976, 1977 and 1982, particularly between 23 September and 13 October when up to a hundred were at localities such as Holy Island, Bamburgh, Hauxley, Blyth, Whitley Bay and Tynemouth. At such times it is not unusual to find parties of up to a dozen seeking cover in isolated bushes among the sand dunes on Holy Island and Warkworth and on Druridge Links.

Passage on a smaller scale continues until late November, but significant numbers can occasionally be seen early in the month. For example, during 1976, which was a particularly good autumn for the species, forty-three were counted in Holywell Dene on 2 November with eight in Jesmond Dene on 10 November.

In 1912, Bolam remarked that 'individuals appear occasionally to winter in the district', but his only local example of a truly wintering bird was

one at Powburn on 15–17 March 1909. Twenty years later, he mentioned a male which spent late autumn and winter at Twizell House and was picked up dead there on 9 January 1921, but it was not until February 1943 that the next – a female which frequented a bird table in Hexham – was reported. Since 1948 Blackcaps have been seen in most years between December and February, and sometimes into March; they were particularly numerous from 1975 to 1980. Many of the birds reported have been feeding at bird tables in urban, and especially surburban areas, and in the early part of 1975 from one to four individuals were noted at some thirteen different localities. Occasionally, as in 1975 and 1976, one of these wintering males may be heard singing in February.

Migrants ringed at the coast have subsequently been recovered in the following autumn in France (July and November), Spain (November) and Italy (November and December) while a breeding adult from Gosforth was in Spain in mid-September two years after marking. A bird from Seaton Delaval, ringed in October, was found in Algeria in mid-January and returning spring migrants were in Algeria, France and the Lebanon in April, all some eighteen to twenty months after ringing. Williamson believed that the western European breeding population orientated northeast to southwest when on migration and that the more eastern populations moved in a northwest to southeast track. If he was correct, the Lebanon bird had obviously drifted off course to Northumberland from an eastern European breeding area before successfully returning to its more usual migration route.

Among other interesting recoveries was an adult ringed at West Sleekburn on 10 November 1968 and found in a breeding area in Bavaria on 22 May 1973 and one in Ponteland on 3 June 1974 which had been ringed on Heligoland on 31 May 1971.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are only ten records. The first three were at Bamburgh between 4–7 September 1965, from 30 August to 5 September 1966 and on 22 August 1970: they were all trapped and ringed. Single birds were at Tynemouth on 30 August 1974 and on 29–30 August 1976, at Hauxley on 1 September 1974 and 6 September 1982 and at St Mary's Island on 1 September 1978. Two were at Hauxley between 20–27 August 1977.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

A rare visitor.

A male was obtained by W G Watson on Holy Island on 27 September 1924 and there have been ten subsequent records, all of single birds – on Holy Island from 9–12 September 1951; at Hartley on 15 August 1962; at Hauxley on 15 August and 16 September 1965; at both Druridge and Hauxley between 28 and 31 August 1966; on the Farne Islands from 16–18 September 1973, on 4 September 1978 and on 23 May 1979; at Hauxley on 4 September 1981.

One seen on Holy Island on 16 May 1953 was never formally accepted and, accordingly, the Farne sighting in May 1979 is the only authentic spring record.

Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

A rare visitor.

One trapped and ringed at Monk's House on 13 October 1951 was only

the second British record. Since then single birds were recorded on Coquet Island between 3–6 October 1974, on Holy Island on 4 October 1974, on the Farne Islands on 19 October 1975, at Hauxley between 13–16 November 1975, at Bamburgh on 16 October 1976 and on 24 October 1981, and at Tynemouth on 23–24 October 1981.

A remarkable influx took place between 10–12 October 1982 when at least twelve were reported. They were at Holy Island (three), Bamburgh (three), the Farne Islands (two), Newton-by-the-Sea (one), St Mary's Island (one) and Hauxley (where the single bird remained until at least 15 October). In addition, one came on board a boat fishing off Amble; it flew off inland when the crew returned to harbour.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

A rare visitor.

One shot by Hancock on 26 September 1838 on sea banks near Hartley and now in the Hancock Museum collections remained for thirty years the only British record. No others were reported in the county until W G Watson obtained four birds on Holy Island in the autumns of 1922 and 1923. Two more were reported in September 1944, again on Holy Island, while a further thirteen years elapsed before the next sighting – a very late bird at Fenwick on 14–15 December 1957.

Since 1960 almost a hundred have been recorded, mainly between late September and the end of October, with from four to eight individuals in most years since 1967. There were particularly large influxes in both 1975 and 1981, when eighteen to twenty were present in each year.

The majority have been seen at, or near, the coast, the furthest inland being one found dead in Newcastle on 8 October 1979. There are no spring records.

Birds showing the characteristics of the race *P.i.humei* were noted at Hauxley on 7 November 1970 and on Holy Island on 11–12 October 1980.

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are four records: single birds were on Holy Island on 3 October 1976 and 4 October 1982 and at Hauxley on 4 October 1981 and 17 October 1982. Both the Hauxley birds, which were trapped and ringed, remained in the area for three days and during its stay the second individual increased in weight from 13.3gms to 15.8gms.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are two records, both in 1980. One was seen at Bamburgh on 18 August while the second was trapped and ringed near Beal on 12 October.

Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*

An extremely rare visitor.

One which was trapped and ringed at Hauxley on 4 November 1967 is the only record.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

A rare passage visitor and well-represented breeding species.

In 1912, Bolam wrote that 'it is somewhat local, evincing strong

predilections for certain woods, and shunning others, but is well distributed over the district, and numerous in many places, especially in upland glens fringed with natural woods of birch, alder, and oak, and in policies where beech and other hard-wood trees have reached maturity'. It still prefers mature deciduous woodland, although its status is best described as locally distributed, but never numerous.

It arrives between late April and early June, but after the song period is over is rarely recorded in the breeding haunts and, accordingly, the period of departure is not known. Its stronghold is in the southwest where steep sided, wooded valleys provide perfect habitat. In 1967, forty-eight singing males were heard near Allen Banks, while in 1975 fifteen were in song around Dipton. Other attractive areas are in the North Tyne, Wansbeck and Coquet valleys, and at Hulne Park, Alnwick.

Coastal migrants are rare, but in most years a few individuals are seen in both spring and autumn.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

A well-represented passage visitor and breeding species, but rare in winter.

In 1932, Bolam referred to it as 'a summer visitant, locally dispersed over the county but numerous in some places' and this is still largely true although it is nowhere recognised as 'numerous'. Favourite breeding haunts tend to be mature broad-leaved woodlands such as can be found in the valleys of the central and southwestern parts of the county.

It is not unusual to hear it in song before the end of March, but the majority arrive in late April and early May, by which time a few will, in most years, have passed through coastal areas.

The autumn return is most obvious at the coast and dispersing individuals are sometimes seen there before the end of July. However, the main passage begins in late September and reaches a peak in mid-October. Although never as numerous as *P.trochilus,* significant falls can occur in company with other north European migrants. Chiffchaffs were particularly conspicuous between 10–23 October 1966, when about 250 were noted along the coast, and again from 9–14 October 1982 when some 150 were counted. The movement usually continues at a much reduced scale until late November.

Winter sightings are rare, but regular. Bolam mentions one at Berwick in February 1898, and another which was shot at Cullercoats on 20 December 1905, and since then it has been seen, between mid-December and late February, at places as far apart as Hexham, Alnwick, Holy Island, Belsay and Killingworth; up to nine individuals were reported in the winter of 1980–81.

Some of these winter birds may belong either to the northern race *P.c.abietinus* or to the Siberian race *P.c.tristis* and this was illustrated by the fact that, while one of two birds caught at Fenwick in December 1957 was an *abietinus,* the other was a typical *collybita.*

A *P.c.tristis,* shot on Holy Island on 10 November 1923, was the first definitely recorded for England and it is still the rarer of the two races. Nevertheless, both occur at the coast in October and November, especially at the ringing stations where they can be handled and examined.

The only noteworthy ringing recoveries are of one controlled at Spurn, Yorkshire, on 23 June 1967 that had been ringed twenty-seven days earlier

at Bamburgh and another, marked at Sjaelland, Denmark, on 14 April 1981, and controlled at Hauxley on 3 October 1981.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A common passage visitor and abundant breeding species.

Bolam (1912) considered it 'by far the commonest of all our summer warblers' and that this is still true was illustrated by census work carried out on breeding pairs during the 1970s. This showed between twenty-five and thirty-five pairs in a sixty-five hectare area at Hexham, and from twenty-three to forty-four pairs along some six kilometres of the North Tyne valley below Chollerford.

It may sometimes be seen or heard in the last few days of March, but it is more usually the end of the first week of April before it appears. Arrival and passage extend into early June, but most breeding areas are occupied by late April. In early May, a movement of larger, more northerly birds often takes place, especially at the coast – for example, on 7 May 1976, 250 were on Holy Island and fifty at Hauxley.

Autumn dispersal begins in mid-July, when the first Willow Warbler may appear in suburban gardens, and passage usually continues until mid-September. Some indication of the numbers involved was shown by a ringing programme carried out at Swarland when, during the late summer of 1974, 374 were caught in a small area. However, movements are usually more obvious at the coast, especially in mid-August during periods of anticyclonic weather. Such conditions, accompanied by morning mist, prevailed on 19 August 1979 when 400–500 were held up at Holy Island with at least a hundred around Hauxley.

In 1912, Bolam believed that it normally lingered 'later with us in autumn' than the Chiffchaff, but by 1932 he had qualified this statement, which is certainly not true today. In most years, records at coastal ringing stations confirm that the first autumn Chiffchaffs usually appear soon after the last Willow Warblers have passed through. Individuals are occasionally seen in October, and exceptionally into November, one at Fenwick on 22 November 1958 being the latest recorded. Bolam referred to winter sightings of single birds in Newcastle on 27 January 1912 and at Catcleugh on 24 February 1922 – the latter was particularly remarkable in that the bird was in song!

Ringing has demonstrated that some juveniles and adults return to the same breeding areas in successive years – for example, a juvenile, ringed at Seaton Delaval in 1975, was retrapped there in the next three breeding seasons. One juvenile from the county had reached the Loire valley in France five weeks after marking, while two others were found in Morocco in October of the same year. There are a few other records that indicate the southward movement through Britain, including a juvenile which was at Fair Isle on 22 August 1968 and controlled five days later at Hauxley, and an adult, caught at Bamburgh on 6 May 1967 which had arrived in Portugal by 2 November.

The northward passage is illustrated by the recoveries of Northumberland ringed birds in Vienne, France (8 May), Suffolk (7 May) and Shropshire (15 April), while an adult, marked at Seahouses in spring, was found in Ross-shire on the following 20 August. By contrast, a breeding adult, marked in Aberdeenshire in June 1976, was controlled at Hauxley on 6 May 1978 during a fall of Willow Warblers.

In June 1943, a nest was found about four metres above the ground in a

yew tree, but the more usual site, on the ground in rough grass, is vulnerable to disturbance by predators. This was illustrated in June 1974 when an adder ate all seven young from a nest near the Grasslees burn.

The paler or browner northern form *P.t.acredula* occurs in small numbers in both spring and autumn in some years, and individuals showing these characteristics have also been seen in the breeding season at Blagdon in 1960, Seaton Burn in 1961 and Staward in 1966.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

A common passage visitor and abundant breeding resident.

In 1831, Selby wrote that it was 'common in all our plantations, particularly those abounding in larch and fir' and that 'vast numbers annually arrive upon our coast in the autumn'. These words have remained true for a hundred and fifty years although today it is probably even more common as a breeding species. This is because the development of the border forests has meant a vast expansion of suitable habitat and these forests are now the species' stronghold within the county. Severe winters, like those of 1945–46, 1962–63 and 1978–79, cause a massive fall in the population, but its powers of recovery are such that losses can normally be made up within two or three years.

Small numbers occur at the coast in late August and September and it is believed that the majority are British birds. However, the huge influxes which sometimes take place from early October onwards undoubtedly involve continental birds. In both 1965 and 1966, for example, thousands arrived during the first half of October while counts made on 7 and 8 October 1977 included 800 on Holy Island, hundreds at Bamburgh, 200 at Hauxley and 150 in the Blyth-Whitley Bay area. Confirmation of the origin of these influxes is provided by the recovery in Whitley Bay on 25 October 1976 of a bird which had been ringed in Finland a month previously. These huge coastal arrivals are often reflected in noticeable increases well inland – one such observation at Slaley on 10–11 October 1975 coincided with a count of 150 on Holy Island. The recovery in Essex in March 1966 of a Goldcrest ringed at Craster in October 1965 suggests that some of these immigrants continue southward, although the fact that one ringed at Swarland on the early date of 10 September 1974 was controlled in Kent late the following month indicates that British-bred birds may also undertake southerly movements. Another, trapped at Hauxley in September 1972, was found at Overijssel, Netherlands, in the following January, but, in this case, the ring was inside an owl pellet! It is uncertain whether it was the Goldcrest or the owl that undertook the movement!

Spring passage, usually involving much smaller numbers, takes place between mid-March and mid-May. In April 1966, however, there was an exceptional influx with over 100 at Hauxley on 8 April, and hundreds at Seaton Delaval the next day, part of a large arrival of continental drift migrants. One found at Blyth on 25 April 1973 had been ringed in Denmark eleven days earlier, while reorientation was illustrated by the recovery in Denmark on 10 May 1966 of a bird marked at Bamburgh nine days before. In 1974, two birds of unknown origin, ringed in Northumberland in late March, were found respectively on the Isle of May, Fife, on 11 April and at Gullane, East Lothian, on 21 May.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

A rare visitor.

Bolam (1932) listed six, all from Holy Island. One obtained on 4 October

1912 was the first for the county and there were four others in autumn – three in November 1923 and one on 10 October 1927 – and one in spring (on 25 May 1924).

No more were seen until the 1950s when, between 1950 and 1952, a few were noted among *R.regulus* in the spring and autumn passage movements at the Longstone, Farne Islands. On 11 October 1952 one was identified on Holy Island and since then a further fifty-one have been reported; recently they have occurred almost annually. Forty-four of these have been in autumn, mainly in October (extreme dates 19 September and 15 December) while the seven spring sightings fall between 7 April and 26 May. With the exception of one singing at Dipton on 10 June 1976, and another at Stocksfield on 15 November 1976, all have been at the coast. 1972 was an outstanding year, eleven individuals being recorded in autumn: they appeared in ones or twos and the only occasion when three were together was at Hauxley between 25–28 October 1979.

Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*

An extremely rare visitor that is not yet admitted to the British list.

One was watched, at very close range, by several experienced observers on Holy Island on 9 September 1956. This, and the few other British records of the species, are not currently accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee* because of the possibility of confusion with other similar Siberian flycatchers, notably the Sooty Flycatcher *M.sibirica*. However, careful consideration of the Holy Island sighting has left the *County Records Committee* in no doubt as to its authenticity.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

It was described by Bolam (1912) as a 'common summer visitant to the whole of the district, nowhere more abundant than in the neighbourhood of quiet country houses'. He added that it was 'one of the latest of our summer immigrants to arrive, not usually putting in an appearance round its nesting haunts until the last fortnight or so of May'.

These remarks are still true, for it is a bird of deciduous woodland, especially near houses. It is rarely seen before the beginning of May and the main body does not arrive until the last fortnight of the month, or even early June. In some years, however, a few appear in April and there is an exceptionally early record of one on Holy Island on 30 March 1959. Most have left their breeding haunts by the end of August, but some linger inland well into September and one was at Stocksfield on the late date of 9 November 1980. Two broods are occasionally reared, examples of this being at Stocksfield in 1941, Embleton in 1968 and Matfen in 1980.

It seldom occurs in large numbers as a migrant at the coast. In spring, a heavy passage was reported from Monk's House between 6–8 May 1958 and again at the end of the month, but, apart from this, the largest concentrations were thirty at Bamburgh on 15 May 1967 and 23 May 1970. In autumn, it is most numerous at coastal localities in late August and early September, but only occasionally does it figure prominently in the huge falls of drift migrants which can take place at this time. However, fifty were in the Blyth-Whitley Bay area in mid-September 1960, twenty on Holy Island and thirty at Berwick on 2–3 September 1963, while an exceptional influx on 30–31 August 1980 brought some 200 to Holy Island and forty to Hauxley. A few continue to pass through during early October,

the latest coastal sighting being of one at Whitley Bay cemetery on 24 October 1965.

An adult ringed at Seaton Delaval during the breeding season was recovered in Charente Maritime, France, in the following autumn and a first-year bird, marked at Craster in August 1961, was found in Portugal in September 1962, thus suggesting a southwesterly movement of the British population. More unusually, another breeding season adult, also ringed at Seaton Delaval, was reported from Portugal in the following January, considerably to the north of the normal wintering grounds in tropical Africa. In addition one, evidently drifted from well to the east within continental Europe, and ringed at Hauxley on 28 August 1966, was recovered on Corfu, Greece, on 15 September 1967.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Usually a rare, but occasionally an uncommon visitor.

One shot by Bolam in his Berwick garden on 5 October 1883 was the first recorded: at that time it was only the fourth specimen obtained in the British Isles. A further eight (including the first spring record) were noted between 1922 and 1937. Two were seen in 1949, one of which was inland at Humshaugh on 24–25 August, and two (one a spring bird at Craster on 8 June) in 1951.

Since 1956 it has occurred annually with a total of some 138 sightings. Only nine have been in spring, mainly in late May, with extreme dates of 7 May 1970 and 27 June 1957: the latter was at Palmersville, near Longbenton, and constitutes the only other occurrence that could be classed as inland.

Most of the autumn birds appear in late September and October, but reports range from 15 August (at Craster in 1961) to 9 November (Embleton in 1957). There were fourteen records in 1965, while at least twenty-five were seen in 1976: twelve of these were between 23 and 28 September with eight on 2–3 October. Most appeared singly, but four were at Newton-by-the-Sea on 3 September 1958, and at Hauxley on 2 October 1965, while as many as five were at Hartley during the influx of late September 1976.

Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*

A well-represented passage visitor and breeding species.

Selby (1831) considered it to be 'of rare occurrence' while Hancock (1874) knew it as 'a spring-and-autumn migrant, though very rarely observed breeding'. In 1912, Bolam noted that 'it was not until about 1884 that it began fairly to establish itself in our district, but since then it has steadily increased, till it can now be looked upon as a regular summer resident, in limited numbers, in certain localities'.

It was first believed to have nested in 1872 (at Middleton Hall near Belford and Weetwood Hall near Wooler) and thereafter it gradually increased and spread as a breeding species, a process which was still thought to be continuing in 1946 (Temperley, 1947). Today it is widely, if thinly, distributed in deciduous woodland, especially in the steep-sided valleys in the middle and upper reaches of the county's rivers.

During the past fifteen years the provision of nest boxes in its favourite habitat of oak woodland has meant a further increase in the breeding population, notably in the Dipton-Slaley area where it has bred since at least 1910. In all, some one hundred pairs regularly use nest boxes,

fifty to sixty being in the Dipton area and, as the result of ringing both adults and young, a great deal has been learnt about its breeding biology. The maximum age for a male is nine years and for a female eight years. Bigamy occurs frequently, affecting some seven per cent of the population; in one case a male had mated with three females. A brother and sister also mated, a phenomenon established in only a few bird species. Breeding adults return faithfully to the same district, sometimes to the identical nest box. Large numbers of young reared in the study area have also been controlled breeding there in subsequent years; others, however, have been found nesting in places such as the North Tyne and Wansbeck valleys while two were outside the county – in Perthshire and Flintshire. Most distant was a bird, ringed as a pullus at Dipton in June 1973, and controlled as a breeding male in the eastern Netherlands in June 1977.

In 1932, Bolam remarked that it sometimes visited the coast 'in considerable bands during May and September' and this is still true. Although it has been seen at Hauxley as early as 8 April 1966, the majority do not usually reach the breeding areas until the first week of May. Comparatively few arrive on the coast in spring, the largest recorded fall being between 8–11 May 1975 when twenty-eight were on Holy Island and up to five at other localities. In early autumn, though, it is one of the classic ingredients of a drift movement and numbers in late August and early September can be spectacular. This has been illustrated in several years including 1956 when, from 3–9 September, there were vast numbers (of which forty were trapped) at Monk's House, up to a hundred on Holy Island and forty on Inner Farne. Another example was in 1966, when several hundreds arrived and more than 150 were in Holy Island village on 28 August.

During the 1970s falls were noticeably smaller with no more than fifty being reported from any one place, but on 30–31 August 1980 150 were on Holy Island with twenty to forty at four other localities. A few may be seen in late October and September, but it is decidedly rare after mid-October although birds have been recorded at Hauxley and Prior's Park, Tynemouth, as late as 3 November.

Ringing has provided valuable information about the routes taken by Northumbrian birds on migration. One ringed as a pullus at Mitford in June 1980 was found on Merseyside six weeks later, while Dipton-ringed birds have been recovered in the same or subsequent autumn in Seine-Maritime, Morbihan and Gironde in France and in Beira Litoral, Portugal. In spring, birds appear to enter Britain on a broad front. One marked in June 1979 was controlled in Dorset on 1 May 1980 and was back in its Northumbrian birthplace by 22 May. Other recoveries from the west involve three-year old birds found at Manchester and Preston in early May. Recoveries indicate that it also uses an east coast route: one was found in Lincolnshire on 29 April 1953 while another, ringed in Kent on 3 May 1972, was breeding at Dipton in the following month. A 1979 pullus from Holystone, controlled on the Isle of May in June 1980, suggests that migrants occasionally overshoot, while a 1955 Thrunton pullus, found at Leiden in the Netherlands, in May 1956, had possibly been drifted across the North Sea on its northward journey.

Ringing has also indicated the origin of some of these migrants. A male marked at Hauxley in May 1970 was recovered at Sjaelland, Denmark, in May 1971, presumably then on its correct course, while a 1980 pullus from Orebro, Sweden, was controlled at Hauxley in May 1981. Migrants, probably from Scandinavia, ringed at the coast in autumn, have been recovered in western France (two), Portugal (three) and in southern Spain.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

An extremely rare visitor.

It was first recorded on 9 October 1965 when one was trapped at Bamburgh where it stayed for ten days: it was subsequently controlled at Hauxley on 26 December 1965. In the same autumn, a pair remained in Gosforth Park from 23 October to 21 November while up to four were in the reserve between 4 November 1972 and 27 February 1973. One was at Newton Pool from 9 December 1974 to 8 January 1975 and another at Holywell Ponds on 18 and 27 December 1977.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

A common breeding resident.

Writing in 1932, Bolam described it as 'a well-known resident, seldom numerous, but nesting in many places throughout the county, and found during the cold months in roving bands of a score or two together'.

Thirty years later Macfarlane [n.d.] confirmed that it was still found in small numbers over much of the county with the probable exception of the north. Numbers are greatly reduced during severe winters such as 1946–47, 1962–63 and 1978–79, and usually take two or three years to recover. By contrast, the run of mild winters in the early 1970s resulted in very high population levels.

This probably led to increased autumn wandering and accounts for the majority of the coastal records – at Hauxley, for example, up to fifty were present from 20–24 October 1973 with some twenty-four between 15 and 24 October 1975. There are only a few reports from the offshore islands: single birds were on Holy Island in October 1903 and December 1961, with small parties of six to twelve in October 1975, 1976 and 1978, while, despite Bolam's reference to its occurrence on the Farne Islands, one on 17 April 1965, and eight on 5 November 1974, are the only definite sightings. Bolam believed that these birds were immigrants, but there is no proof of this. However, he mentions that two specimens of the northern race *A.c.caudatus* are in the Hancock Museum. One had been picked up dead at Tynemouth in November 1852 while the other, which had been drawn by Bewick, formed part of the Old Museum collection and, unfortunately, lacked data.

Marsh Tit *Parus palustris*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Both Hancock and Bolam (1912) considered it as 'resident' and 'generally distributed', but the acceptance of two species, *P.palustris* and *P.montanus,* meant that Bolam's description of the former in 1932 as 'common enough but local' is probably more accurate. He commented that it was 'one of the least numerous of our familiar tits', adding that 'in some districts it is more prevalent than the Willow Tit, in others just the reverse'.

By the 1960s Macfarlane [n.d.] described it as 'a somewhat scarce and local breeding species but perhaps rather more widespread than the Willow Tit . . . virtually absent from the southeast, but elsewhere it was found in a variety of woodlands which were quite often in distinctly marshy or wet areas'.

Since then there has been little change. It remains mainly a bird of mature deciduous woodland and can be found wherever such habitat still exists, although with a preponderance of records near the Wansbeck valley; it is still distinctly scarce in the southeast of the county.

During the autumn dispersal period it is only rarely recorded at the coast or in other areas away from breeding sites; occasionally single birds are seen, but up to four were at Bamburgh in 1964 and 1965 and as many as twelve at Craster on 7 September 1975.

One caught at Bolam in November 1961, and retrapped there in December 1968, is the only noteworthy ringing recovery.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus*

A well-represented breeding resident.

So similar are they, that it was not until the twentieth century that the Willow and Marsh Tit were identified as separate species and in 1912 Bolam's initial reaction to this separation was that he 'did not think' that he had 'ever noticed it on the Borders'. However, he later modifies this, saying that a tit which he had shot near Allerdean Mill, in north Northumberland, on 8 January 1888, had been identified as a typical *P.montanus.* It had been one of a pair and he was convinced that among scattered breeding tits in the surrounding district, some were *P.montanus.* He concluded that both it and the Marsh Tit were widely distributed within the county; twenty years later he repeated this opinion, stating that it was 'common, though local and with a very similar distribution' to *P.palustris.*

As time passed observers became increasingly more familiar with its characteristics and by the 1960s Macfarlane [n.d.] could summarise its status as 'rather scarce and local . . . apparently not as widespread as the Marsh Tit, occurring principally in the southeast and coastal regions and in the southwest'. He added that the habitats of the two species did not differ materially although *P.montanus* 'showed a greater preference for decayed woodland'. Then, as now, Gosforth Park and Prestwick Carr were its strongholds. Most of the records are from the southeast; it is seen fairly often in the Tyne valley as far west as Haltwhistle and Whitfield, but is very scarce in the north of the county.

There is rarely any indication of passage, the occasional birds that have occurred – as for example, in the Hauxley-Chevington area in August – September and on Coquet Island on 8 July 1972 – probably being the result of local dispersal.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

A common breeding resident.

Selby (1831) stated that it was 'now a very common bird in Northumberland', a fact that he attributed to 'the extensive plantations, particularly of the fir tribe, which have been made within the last twenty or thirty years'. Bolam agreed with this, but in 1912 remarked that it was 'far less abundant, generally, than either the Great or Blue Tit'.

While the last comment remains true, it is now probably much more common than ever before as the expansion of the border forests has enabled it to colonise what were once remote moorland areas. Here it is one of the commonest breeding species although it suffers greatly during severe winters. In 1963, for example, flocks of up to a hundred were at Dipton, and forty at Blagdon, in January and February, but by the summer there had been a marked reduction in numbers.

Bolam noted that, in autumn, it occurred occasionally at the coast, including Holy Island and the Farne Islands, and he considered that at least one, seen at Newton on 5 October 1896, was of the continental race *P.a.ater.*

Although a few have been reported from Holy Island, there are no definite records for the Farne Islands, but coastal passage still takes place, mainly in late September and October, while there is one spring sighting – at Hauxley on 9 April 1978. There are usually only single birds or small parties (maximum six), but their origins remain obscure.

An adult ringed at Seaton Delaval in March 1974, and recovered at Mitford in the following August, is the only noteworthy recovery.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*

A common breeding resident.

It was described by Hancock (1874) as 'the most abundant of the genus' and 'a permanent resident' while Bolam (1912) added that it was 'one of the best-known birds on the Borders'. In 1932, however, he acknowledged that, although it was still the commonest tit in the county, it might be 'outnumbered by Coal or Great Tits in a few outlying districts'.

It remains common and widespread being most numerous in areas of deciduous woodland although numbers may fluctuate, mainly as the result of severe winters. In recent years, nest box schemes have provided an insight into such fluctuations and also into its breeding success. In the seventeen years during which it has been monitored, the summers of 1971, 1977 and 1981 were particularly successful, but the extreme winters of 1978–79 and 1981–82 had an adverse effect on breeding populations.

These studies have also revealed several examples of *P.caeruleus* and *P.major* laying in the same nest. Usually, the adults of only one species rear the resulting young, but in one instance all four adults visited the nest box to feed the young. In addition, in 1975 a *P.caeruleus* and a *Ficedula hypoleuca* were found to have laid in the same box: in this case the seven tits and the single flycatcher were reared by the adult tits.

Bolam (1912) remarked that it was 'generally believed' that it migrated 'to a considerable extent, specimens having been observed from time to time at the Farne Islands, both in autumn and spring'. He added that 'roving parties are common in the neighbourhood of the coast' although it was 'not easy to distinguish residents from strangers'. Bolam's remarks about the Farne Islands are misleading; according to Harvie Brown *et al.* (1882 and 1883), many Blue Tits occurred on the islands in the Octobers of both 1881 and 1882, but the only subsequent record was of one on the inner group from 24–27 September 1977. His other statement is still true and parties of up to fifty are regularly seen at coastal localities in autumn, especially in late September and October – on 27 September 1980, for example, as many as eighty were in the Bamburgh area.

There is no evidence to suggest that any of these birds is of foreign origin. Movements are most apparent either following a successful breeding season, probably representing post-juvenile dispersal of the abundant young, or immediately prior to severe winter weather. This was clearly shown in 1971 when a pullus ringed at Kielder was controlled at Hauxley in late August while others, from the Dipton area, were found at Hartlepool and Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, in early winter. Moreover, one marked at Hauxley in October 1981 was controlled at Carlisle, Cumbria (ninety-nine kilometres southwest), in January 1982, during some of the coldest conditions experienced this century. The longest known journey made by a bird ringed outside the county was ninety kilometres – it had travelled from Redcar, North Yorkshire, to Hauxley.

Winter flocking, in association with other tits, is a noticeable feature.

Flocks rarely exceed fifty, but up to 150 occurred at Seaton Delaval in January 1975.

Great Tit *Parus major*

A common breeding resident.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a resident; almost as common throughout the district as the Blue Tit'.

This statement is still true, its favourite habitat being areas of deciduous woodland. Like *P.caeruleus,* nest box studies have thrown light on the way in which the population fluctuates. 1980 and 1981 were particularly successful seasons and even in 1979 late nesting seemed to compensate for the effects of severe weather in the early part of the year. Unfortunately the birds suffered so severely in the extremely low temperatures of December 1981 and January 1982 that breeding success was the lowest in the seventeen years of monitoring.

Several examples of *P.major* and *P.caeruleus* successfully fledging young from the same nest box have been recorded (see page 154) and *Ficedula hypoleuca* have also sometimes tried to use a Great Tit's box. However, on several occasions this has resulted in the flycatchers being killed by the tits.

Like *P.caeruleus* it may occur at the coast at times of passage, especially in late September and October; a few are even seen on the offshore islands including, occasionally, the Farne Islands. The majority are doubtless the result of post-juvenile dispersal within the county and, like *P.caeruleus,* tend to be most apparent after a successful breeding season or prior to severe winter weather, although numbers at any one locality seldom exceed ten. Incidentally, recoveries of pulli ringed in the county have all been within sixty kilometres of their birthplace. Some of the coastal records undoubtedly refer to immigrants for several examples of the continental race *P.m.major* were collected on Holy Island between 1923 and 1930; all had occurred in the period 15 September to 25 October (Perry, 1946).

Winter flocking, with other tits, is often noted, but numbers tend to be smaller than with *P.caeruleus.* Nevertheless, seventy-five were at Belsay Hall in December 1979.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

An uncommon breeding resident.

Selby (1831) wrote that he had frequently seen it 'in the neighbourhood of Durham', but had been 'unable to trace it in the northern parts of Northumberland'. In fact, although one was said to have been shot at Beaufront Castle, near Hexham, some years previous to 1894, it was not definitely recorded in the county until December 1892 when one was found dead at Riding Mill (Bolam, 1912). Twenty years later, Bolam could describe it as 'a very local resident, almost confined to the Tyne watershed, in which, moreover, it is very partially distributed and nowhere numerous'. He noted that 'it still nests in a few protected areas', but that 'it does not seem to increase . . . but rather to be disappearing'.

Up to 1963, it occurred only sporadically and, despite Bolam's remarks, in the 1942 ornithological report it was stated that 'there is as yet no record of breeding'. Since 1963, however, it has been reported annually. One stronghold is the Tyne Valley, but there is another nucleus in the Bolam-Wallington area where at least fifteen were present in January and February 1980.

During the 1960s, and early 1970s, breeding probably took place in Hulne Park, Alnwick, while five pairs were reported from a locality near Warenford (Macfarlane, n.d.)

There are few sightings away from the breeding areas, but, occasionally, individuals wander, in winter, to localities such as Gosforth Park and Jesmond Dene, Newcastle upon Tyne. One was at Cresswell on 12 April 1980, but undoubtedly the most unusual record was the bird seen among migrants on the Farne Islands on 2 May 1952.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

A common breeding resident.

Bolam considered it to be a common resident 'though nowhere very abundant'. In 1932, he added that in winter it was 'a roving species, readily attaching itself to the . . . bands of titmice and similar birds that wander through the woods or from place to place'.

These comments are still true and Macfarlane [n.d.] summed up its present status as 'a widespread breeding species' which is 'nowhere numerous, but is found more often in woodlands in the lowlands and the coastal plain, and in the principal river valleys'. There are several records of pairs using nest boxes, for example at Thrunton and Kielder.

Reports from the coast are occasional in spring, and fairly frequent in autumn; many of these sightings are doubtless the result of local dispersal, especially in July and August, but several of those recorded in late autumn are probably the northern race *C.f.familiaris.*

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

A rare visitor which has bred.

Bolam gives details of one probable and three definite spring records, all between 1821 and 1898; no others were reported until 9 October 1937 when one was at Warkworth.

In 1968, a pair attempted to breed at Newbiggin, but the nest was destroyed by children; one was found dead in the same locality in May 1969. A male was present near Hartburn between 11 April and 20 July 1954, while five others have been seen inland in June and early July.

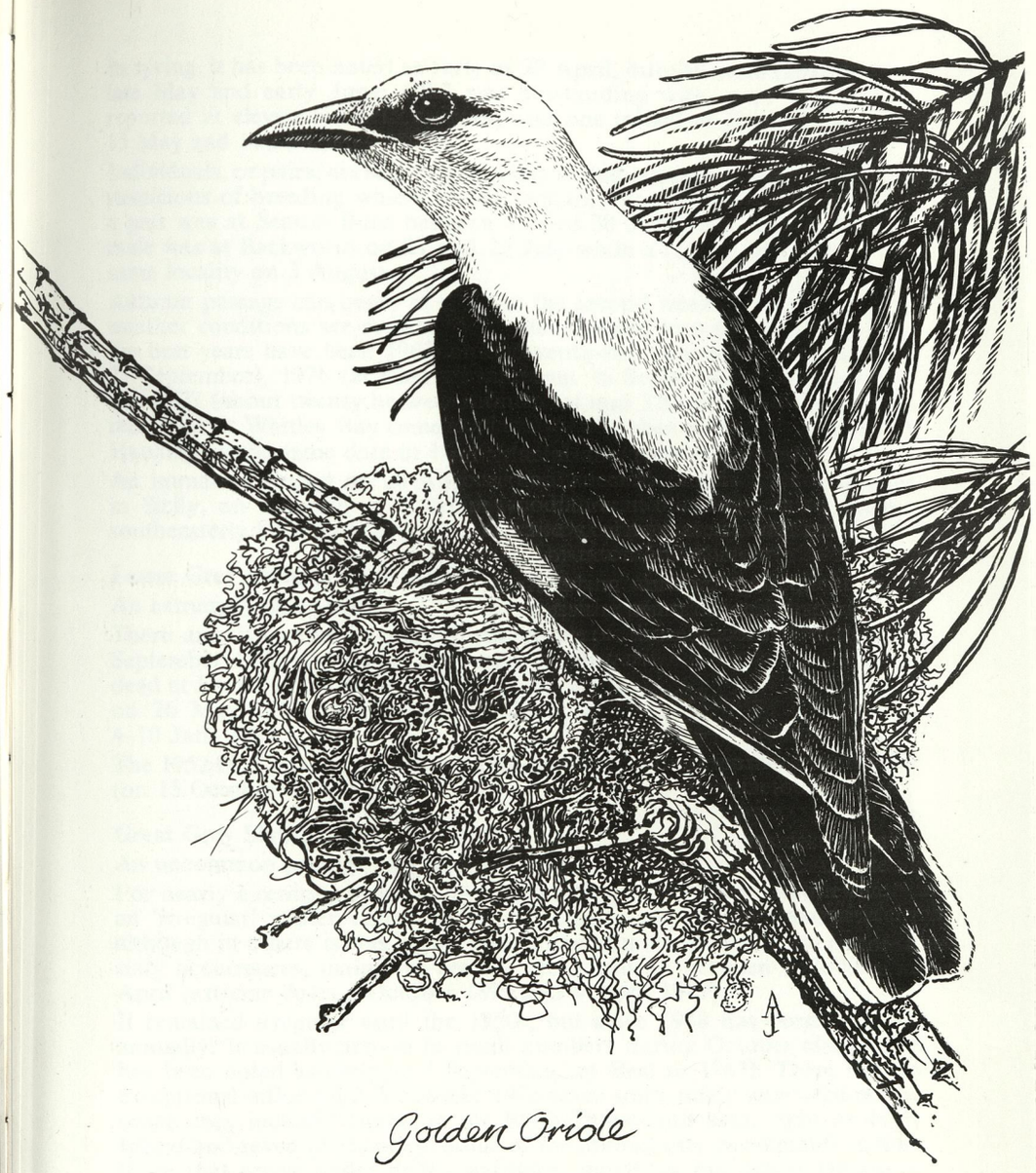
In addition, seven have been reported during May; with the exception of one at Gosforth Park in 1952 all, including four at Bamburgh from 20–28 May 1967, were at the coast. A further four coastal records occurred between 8 August and 24 September.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

An uncommon passage visitor which may have bred.

Both Hancock (1874) and Bolam (1912) considered it a rare casual visitant which, according to Bolam, had 'occasionally nested'. A pair was killed on the Newcastle Town Moor in the summer of 1829 while one was shot at Horsley in May 1834 and between then and 1912 there were three more records – two in August and September and one in June. Bolam refers to the shrike's nest found at Newmoor Hall (see page 158) commenting that if it was not *L.excubitor,* it 'certainly belonged' to *L.collurio* and adding that he had been told that a pair had nested at Belsay in 1901. During the next twenty years there were four reports, all in August and September, while Perry (1946) listed another for 1939.

Since the 1940s sightings have become much more regular and, although, as in 1967 and 1973, none may occur, up to ten are seen in most years.



Golden Oriole

In spring, it has been noted as early as 27 April, but the main passage is in late May and early June; 1977 was outstanding with some twenty-two reported at eleven coastal localities, and one inland at Dipton, between 15 May and 11 June.

Individuals, or pairs, are seen occasionally in mid-summer and have aroused suspicions of breeding which, as yet, remain unconfirmed. For example, a pair was at Seaton Burn between 17 and 30 July 1974 and, in 1977, a male was at Backworth on 27 and 29 July while a female was seen in the same locality on 3 August.

Autumn passage can begin as early as the second week of August and, if weather conditions are suitable, arrivals continue into October. To date, the best years have been 1963 (some twenty-two between 31 August and 21 September), 1976 (at least twenty from 16 September to 10 October) and 1977 (about twenty between 13 August and 3 September). One which remained at Whitley Bay cemetery until 16 October 1960, and another at Hauxley on the same date in 1977, are the latest records.

An immature ringed on 28 August 1954 was recovered four weeks later in Sicily, an example of a drift migrant reorientating onto its correct southeasterly heading.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are five records: single birds were at Monk's House from 13–28 September 1952 and again on 8 and 9 September 1953, one was found dead at Elwick on 20 September 1975, one was at Prior's Park, Tynemouth, on 26 May 1977 and another at Black Law, Lindisfarne NNR, from 4–10 June 1981.

The 1952 bird was trapped and ringed and was recovered a few weeks later (on 15 October) in Aberdeen.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

For nearly a century, from Selby (1831) to Bolam (1912) it was considered an 'irregular' winter visitor which, in some years, never appeared at all although in others is was by no means uncommon. Bolam knew of about sixty occurrences, mainly in coastal areas and all between October and April (extreme dates 3 October 1899 and 9 April 1889).

It remained irregular until the 1950s, but since 1958 has been reported annually. It usually arrives in small numbers during October although it has been noted as early as 7 September (at Beal in 1967). There was an exceptional influx on 2–3 October 1976 when some thirty were seen on the coast: they included twelve in the Blyth-Tynemouth area, eight on Holy Island and seven at Hauxley. Some of the immigrants, presumably mainly those that arrive under drift conditions, move on, but others remain to winter. Lowland areas with tall hawthorns are much favoured, while clear-felled areas within the border forests have been increasingly used during the 1970s. Certain wintering haunts may be used for several years in succession, but whether by the same individuals, or by different birds attracted to particularly suitable habitat, is not known. However, the reported wintering population seldom exceeds ten or a dozen birds.

A noticeable passage usually takes place in April as birds from further south and west move through the county to the coast – for example, twelve were noted between 5–18 April 1971 with nine from 9–25 April

1977. Only occasionally do they linger into early May although one was at Norham on 13 May 1973 and another was found dying at Monk's House on 4 June 1953.

Bolam (1912) gives details of a pair seen at Fowberry Park on 27 June 1872 'one having a captured insect in its mouth', and of a nest of a shrike, believed to be of this species, found at Newmoor Hall, Longframlington, in June 1890. He later comments that 'there is no certain evidence of its ever having nested here', a view taken by the British Ornithologists' Union (1971) who do not accord it breeding status in this country.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

A rare visitor.

There have been twelve records. The first, shot near Bamburgh on 29 April 1859, is the earliest of the seven spring occurrences, all the others falling between 17 May and 9 June. In autumn, one was shot on Holy Island in mid-September 1876 (wrongly recorded by Perry (1946) as 1893), three immatures have occurred in the period 31 August–27 September, and an adult was seen at Seaton Delaval on 24 October 1970. With the exception of one at Denton Burn, Newcastle upon Tyne, on 9 June 1957, all have been at, or near, the coast.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Although Wallis (1769) described it as 'common in our alpine woods', by Hancock's time it was 'nearly annihilated'. In 1912, Bolam traced the story of its decline; he considered that this was largely the result of persecution by gamekeepers, commenting that 'but for its wandering habits' it would 'doubtless have entirely disappeared'. Twenty years later he wrote that a remnant had always survived in 'Tynedale generally and to some extent in the vales of Wansbeck, Coquet and Aln', adding that an 'increase within the last ten or fifteen years' had 'been very perceptible'.

Despite the statement by Temperley in 1957 that it was 'becoming more and more numerous . . . particularly in the neighbourhood of towns and villages', its status has, apart from the colonisation of the forestry plantations during the 1960s, changed little; it is now occasionally recorded even in the very small trees in the far western parts of the Wark and Kielder forests. Fourteen in Gosforth Park in April 1977 was the largest gathering reported recently, while two on an open moorland area on 20 July 1978 were unusual.

Bolam mentions that from time to time, in particular during the autumns of 1897 and 1901 and the early spring of 1917, there had been quite considerable invasions of Jays in coastal districts. He believed that some of these might have been immigrants, but there have been no comparable incidents in recent years.

Magpie *Pica pica*

A common breeding resident.

According to Bolam (1912) it was 'a resident, almost exterminated in many places, but still fairly common in others' while in 1932 he considered that its numbers in any given area were 'dependent only upon exigencies of game-preserving'.

The decline in gamekeeping during the Second World War apparently led to the increases reported during the 1940s and this growth has continued

to the present day so that it is now probably more common than for some 150 years. It is found in a variety of habitats, and seems to be most numerous in agricultural areas with tall hedges and scattered woodland, while it is an increasingly frequent visitor to suburban gardens. So far the border forests have proved unattractive and only a few pairs have colonised the fringes of plantations.

The steady overall increase has led to a greater degree of flocking outside the breeding season, especially in the southwest, where forty were seen at Slaley in January 1976 and thirty at Derwent Reservoir in January 1980.

Bolam (1932) considered that there was 'occasional evidence of at least local movements on a considerable scale' and Perry (1946) mentions a single bird at Holy Island on 20 October 1939. Since then there have been few such occurrences, although in 1976 two were seen over the sea at Chevington Burn on 20 March and two flew south over Tynemouth on 7 April. In addition, what appeared to be a tired migrant was watched in open moorland in the Irthing valley on 23 March 1975.

A pullus ringed at Tranwell in April 1964 was recovered at Longwitton (twelve kilometres westnorthwest) in June 1965.

Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

An extremely rare visitor.

One was seen in Netherwitton wood in the autumn of 1819 (Selby, 1833), but no others were recorded until 13 September 1958 when one was watched at Fenham, Lindisfarne NNR. During the autumn of 1968 there was an enormous influx into the British Isles and in 1969 Parrack remarked that on 'several occasions in November, and again during December a bird answering the description of this unmistakeable species was seen by many people in and around Morpeth'; he did not, however, accept it as a definite record.

Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

An extremely rare visitor.

Although it formerly bred at St Abb's Head and Fast Castle, Bolam (1932) could list only one occurrence – a bird found dead on the shore at Scremerston in September 1884 which though he 'did not see it' he 'had no doubt was a Chough'.

One seen on the Farne Islands on 10 April 1976 is, therefore, the only definite record.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

A common breeding resident.

According to Bolam (1912) it was 'a common resident . . . which has increased greatly within living memory' and 'it frequents most of our cliffs in large colonies, and besides other ordinary building sites, makes it nest, in several localities, in rabbit holes, as on the Farne Islands . . .'

During the Second World War, numbers apparently increased considerably, possibly, it was thought, because the extension of ploughing meant that more food was available. In recent years, its status has changed little. Hancock had mentioned that up to 1867, numerous Jackdaws had nested in the tower of St Nicholas Cathedral, Newcastle upon Tyne, and it is still found around settlements of all sizes. It remains a characteristic bird of agricultural areas where hedgerow trees provide nest sites, while many

moorland crags, especially in the Kyloe Hills, near Wooler, along the whin sill and in the Irthing valley, still have large colonies. However, there is no recent report of nests in rabbit burrows.

Large winter roosts often form in association with *C.frugilegus.* Gatherings of a thousand or more have been noted at various places such as Prestwick Carr, Warenford and Whittingham. In 1932, Bolam had remarked that it was 'a considerable winter visitant, and to some extent a passage migrant on overseas or less extended movements.' Small numbers on the offshore islands in September and October, and again between late March and May, are probably on passage, but there is no evidence of the extensive immigration which would be needed to account for the large winter concentrations. Individuals showing the characteristics of the southern Scandinavian race *C.m.monedula,* are occasionally reported, as at Scremerston in May 1951, at Bamburgh, Holy Island and Hauxley in October 1977 and at Holy Island and Alnmouth in November 1979. However, Perrry (1946) noted that birds showing such characteristics were, in fact, breeding residents on Holy Island and, except in the case of the best-marked individuals, it is perhaps unwise to attempt racial identification.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

An abundant breeding resident.

In 1874, Hancock considered that there was 'scarcely anywhere a well wooded domain . . . without its rookery', adding that it seemed to be increasing 'since its natural check, the larger birds of prey, have been removed', while Bolam (1932) described it as 'an abundant resident'.

National surveys have suggested that it increased substantially between the 1930s and mid-1940s, but that there was a marked decline during the ensuing thirty years (Sage and Vernon, 1978). In 1975, the British Trust for Ornithology organised a survey of rookeries throughout Great Britain and in Northumberland this was coordinated by Macfarlane (1975). Virtually complete coverage of the county was achieved and 25884 (later amended to 27509) nests were counted with an average colony size of 51.5. The largest rookery (512 nests) was at Shotley Fell plantation: this contrasted with the largest recorded in the annual ornithological reports – 1174 nests at Grindon Rigg in 1950. The eastern part of the county contained 76% of all nests and 74% of all rookeries, a statistic clearly correlated with the species' preference for lower ground – 78% of nests occurred below 150m above sea level while only one rookery was at a height greater than 300m. 40.5% of nests were in pines, 24% in sycamores and 21% in beech.

Macfarlane commented that 'there have been few censuses made over specific areas which would enable the 1975 data to be compared with earlier results', although most observers felt that numbers had declined, 'in some cases dramatically'. In fact, only two such comparisons can be made. The first is near Berwick where an area of 251.23 sq km held *ca.* 7850 nests in 1950, 4429 in 1974 and only 1882 in 1975, a very marked decline.

By contrast, in 1932 there were 3101 nests (in thirty rookeries) within a sixteen kilometre radius of Newcastle Central Station, while in the same area in 1975 fifty rookeries contained 2715 nests, an insignificant decrease bearing in mind the spread of urban development during the thirty-three year period. This latter figure also illustrates a point emphasised by Macfarlane, namely the replacement in recent years of a few large colonies by many smaller ones.

In 1980, the Tyneside Bird club organised another survey and coverage was rather better than in 1975 (Macfarlane, 1981). 33600 nests were counted: this represents an overall increase of 22% and there were considerable gains at certain established colonies as well as the discovery of many new rookeries. However, the increase was not uniformly distributed: in the northwest (near the Till and Tweed) there was a 14% decline while in the valleys of the South Tyne, and the North Tyne below Bellingham, numbers had risen by 88%. The largest colony was at Stannington Children's Hospital where there were 557 nests compared with 209 in 1975. On the other hand, that at Shotley Fell now had fewer than 300 nests.

Some existing rookeries are of considerable age. Among colonies listed by Smail (1882–84) as 'old' in 1877, and which are still in existence today, are those at Aydon Castle (near Corbridge), Beadnell Hall, Belford Hall, Higham Dykes and Milbourne Grange (both near Ponteland), Matfen and Ponteland, while the rookeries at Nunwick and Walwick probably date back to the late 18th century. Both Hancock and Smail mention a colony in St Thomas' churchyard in Newcastle: this was persecuted out of existence by 1866, but was re-established in 1961 and now contains up to twenty-eight nests. It is also interesting that Smail refers to rookeries in upper Redesdale (for example at Catcleugh and Cottonshopeburnfoot) whereas none is now found higher up the valley than Otterburn.

Bolam (1912) believed that its ranks were 'swelled by large additions from abroad every autumn' adding that in October and November he had sometimes seen 'huge flocks coming up from the sea, and passing inland over Berwick'; indeed, he once saw 'at least several thousands' arrive during a single morning. However, there is no recent evidence of such large immigrations although small numbers are recorded in autumn, and again in spring, from the offshore islands and mainland beaches.

Some enormous roosts occur in winter and, while it is often difficult to estimate their size, gatherings which probably exceeded 5000 were reported from Woolsington in 1946, at Warenford and Shaftoe in 1970, at Powburn and Bamburgh in 1974 and near Whittingham in 1976, while on the evening of 9 December 1962 'several tens of thousands' were seen moving west over Riding Mill (Bell, 1963).

Very few Rooks have been ringed in the county, but a pullus marked in Cumberland in April 1926 was recovered at Lilburn in August 1929 and an immature ringed in Durham in February 1963 was found at Longframlington in October 1964.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

A well-represented breeding resident.

According to Hancock (1874) it was a resident that was 'rapidly disappearing under the persecution of the game-preservers' and in 1932 Bolam, while describing it as 'common', also refers to the efforts of gamekeepers to reduce its numbers.

The decline in keepering during the Second World War probably led to a build-up in numbers and in the 1949 ornithological report it was described as 'more plentiful than ever'. Today, it is well distributed throughout the county, especially on moorlands, and is at its highest density where over-stocking leads to an abundance of sheep carrion. In these areas, and occasionally elsewhere, many nests are still destroyed by shepherds. In Northumberland, it is primarily a tree-nester and in recent years very few nests have been found on crags. However, only the fringes of the

border forests have been colonised, plantations deep within the forests presumably being too remote from possible foraging habitat. Since the early 1900s it has apparently realised the advantage of nesting near towns – Bolam mentions a pair in a garden in Berwick in May 1904 and there was a similar incident in Heaton, Newcastle upon Tyne, in 1954. Other unusual breeding reports include a ground nest on Coquet Island in 1952, two on telegraph poles at Hauxley in 1977 and, from time to time, on the rocks and old buildings of the Farne Islands.

Communal winter roosts occur and appear to have reached a peak in the late 1940s and early 1950s when, in an attempt to control its increase, the Northumberland Agricultural Committee organised shoots at several of these sites. In the early part of 1950, for example, there were bags of 320 at Cockle Park, 200 at Bothal, 250 at Tranwell, 115 at Gosforth Park, eighty at Prestwick Carr and sixty at Mitford. Needless to say this effort appeared to have little effect on the population. Birds still gather in Gosforth Park, and up to sixty have been counted there in recent years. In February 1976, sixty were seen, feeding on a dead ewe, at Sewingshields while fifty-five (presumably failed or non-breeders) roosted at Slaley on the late date of 23 May 1977.

Bolam (1932) mentioned that 'rarely, an individual has been noticed arriving upon the coast in late autumn with other immigrants, as though it might be coming as a winter visitant to us'. This is still the case, small numbers being recorded on the offshore islands, particularly in October and again in April and May.

There have been a few ringing recoveries, but all involve birds marked as pulli and found within the county at distances of up to forty-four kilometres.

The Hooded Crow *C.c.cornix* is essentially an uncommon winter visitor, although numbers fluctuate and in certain winters it may be well-represented. Occasionally it remains to breed; Bolam knew of four such instances prior to 1912 and since then it has nested at Harbottle (1949), Rothbury (1963), Gosforth Park (1977) and Holywell (1979). However, in all cases where both parents were seen, only one was *C.c.cornix*. In addition, summer sightings of the species, and records of fledged hybrids, have aroused suspicions of local breeding.

The early writers considered it to be a common winter visitor and Bolam had seen flocks of up to a hundred or more arriving at Berwick in autumn. Then, as now, it occurred most frequently at the coast; today, though, the numbers of previous years can only occasionally be matched. In 1941, a flock of more than 150 arrived at Bamburgh in late autumn, eighty were counted at Budle Bay in November 1948, and on 21 and 22 October 1960, over twenty-five arrived at Embleton, and fifty to sixty in the Whitley Bay–Blyth area. Fifty to sixty had gathered at both Holy Island and Seaton Burn by the end of the year. Nevertheless, apart from these records, flocks rarely exceed ten and, latterly, there have seldom been more than thirty or forty in any one winter.

Raven *Corvus corax*

A rare breeding resident.

Bolam gives a full account of its decline. He states that towards the end of the eighteenth century it nested each year in the steeple of what is now the Cathedral in Newcastle upon Tyne, but by the 1870s it had virtually vanished from the lowlands, and no longer used trees, although a few pairs

still bred in the more remote areas. In 1912, he knew of only three sites in the Cheviots which were used annually while there were another three where birds occasionally attempted to rear young and twenty years later he commented that 'during the last twenty or thirty years the number of occupied eyries may sometimes have run to half a score'.

Since then, nests have been found in some thirty localities although, with the exception of 1967 when at least eleven pairs may have bred, not more than ten sites have been used in any one year. Recently the numbers have declined still further; only one or two pairs now nest and some years pass without any confirmation of breeding. Egg collecting and persecution of the adults have always been limiting factors, but increasing acreage of forestry plantations and better sheep husbandry, with the consequent decrease in carrion, is believed to be largely responsible for the present situation (Marquiss *et al.* 1978).

Bolam (1912) mentioned that birds once roosted communally, but that, due to the decrease in numbers, this was now unknown although he had sometimes seen up to seven together in winter. More recently, while one or two Ravens are often seen in moorland areas away from the breeding sites, flocking is rare. However, a party of twenty-four was at Uswayford on 3 August 1955 and three days later twelve were seen a few miles away. Another party – this time of eight birds – was at Kidlandlee on 31 March 1972.

Coastal records are very unusual, but in 1951 a pair haunted the cliffs between Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh from March until June, and single birds were on the shore at Fenham Flats on 14 September 1958, at Bamburgh on 9 November 1963, over the Farne Islands on 24 June 1972 and on Holy Island during exceptionally cold weather on 13 January 1979.

A nestling ringed near Belford in April 1954 was recovered at Nether Warden, Lanarkshire, in May 1956 while another from Kielder, marked in 1965, was near Rothbury in April 1968. A 1964 nestling from Peebleshire was found at Rothbury in October 1965.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

An abundant passage and winter visitor and breeding resident.

Today, it seems incredible to learn that Hancock often heard Thomas Bewick remark 'how delighted he should be if a Starling could be induced to come and build its nest in his house'. In fact, the position soon changed and by 1874 it was 'common everywhere', its rapid increase being, according to Hancock, 'undoubtedly owing to the destruction of the birds of prey . . .' Bolam (1912) stated that 'there is hardly a locality throughout the district in which it does not now nest in abundance . . .' and this situation still obtains. It nests commonly in urban and suburban districts, in lowland agricultural and woodland habitat and is even found on remote moorlands up to 600m above sea level where crags provide nest sites.

From late June onwards, gatherings and roosts of locally bred birds develop, often in the uplands. On 13 July 1947, for example, a flock of some 10000 was watched on a Cheviot hillside while on 14 July 1979 an estimated 20000 were observed at a pre-roost near the Twice Brewed (north of Bardon Mill). Coastal areas, too, can attract large numbers although the huge flock of some 500000 seen moving in over the Farne Islands to the mainland on 23 August 1977 was exceptional. Such flocks are, however, dwarfed by the sometimes staggering winter assemblages which result from the extensive late autumn immigration from the continent. Peak movements

may occur either in October, as in 1955 when flocks numbering up to many thousands were noted at the coast on 21, 22 and 24 October, or not until November, as in 1979 when 15000 were in the Beadnell area on 4 November with many thousands at Boulmer six days later. Redirection of recently arrived birds is occasionally noted as on 19 October 1969 when thousands were watched moving south along the coast, for example at Chevington. It is almost impossible to estimate accurately the numbers in the winter roosts, but in recent years three of the largest, each of which probably held between a million and a million and a half birds, were at Swan Hunter's shipyard, Wallsend, in 1947–48, Hartburn in 1963 and North Sunderland in March 1979. A particularly well-publicised roost is that which forms in Newcastle city centre; Potts (1967) estimated that between 10000 and 50000 birds were using the Newcastle-Wallsend-Gateshead area in 1965 while 16000 were counted in Newcastle alone in mid-October 1970. Considerable mid-winter movements may occur in response to severe weather and in 1972 large numbers were flying east over Denton Burn and Gosforth on 30 January while a similar phenomenon had been seen at Ashington on 6 January 1969.

Predictably, spring emigration is not so conspicuous as the autumn arrivals. However, large flocks are sometimes in evidence at the coast during March and April and they are occasionally seen moving out east over the sea: one such movement was at Newton on 18 April 1975. In mid-April 1977, considerable numbers of Starlings were recorded throughout the county in association with the pre-emigration gatherings of *Turdus pilaris*.

Numerous ringing recoveries have shown that the wintering population is drawn from a large part of northern Europe, and movements to, or from, the county have been recorded from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the western USSR. A more unusual recovery involves one ringed on the Faeroes in February 1969 which was found at North Shields in February 1973: this record undoubtedly involved a continental bird wintering in two different areas.

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*

A rare visitor.

According to Bolam (1912) it occurred on upwards of twenty occasions between 1818 and 1903; of the fourteen which were dated, nine were in July or August, one in spring, three in autumn and one in winter.

There were no further reports until 25 August 1947 when an immature was seen at Beal shore; since then adults have been recorded at Stocksfield on 26 June 1949, Tynemouth from 21–24 August 1962 and Beal shore on 25 July 1974.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

An abundant breeding resident.

Hancock (1874) stated that 'this very common resident is almost everywhere associated with the dwellings of man, but is rare in wild and elevated situations'. Bolam (1932) agreed with this, adding that it was 'abundant in all corn-growing districts'; he thought that the disappearance of horse-droppings from the roads had probably contributed to a decline in numbers.

It remains a very common breeding bird in settlements of all sizes although, as in Hancock's time, it is rare away from habitation.

In 1912, Bolam wrote that 'our home-bred stock is augmented by arrivals from abroad, in autumn'. He mentioned that he had occasionally seen large flocks on Holy Island in October and November; moreover it had occurred 'with other immigrants at the Farne Islands and other lighthouses' as well as 'far out on the hillsides amongst the Cheviots'. These comments still apply; light coasting movements are quite often observed in late September and October while corpses, some lacking fat deposits, have been found on beaches. Nothing is known of the origin of these migrants.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

A common passage and winter visitor and breeding resident.

Although when Selby wrote in 1831, it was seen frequently in parts of Durham, he had been unable to discover it in Northumberland. In 1912, Bolam traced its expansion northward. Up to 1884 it had been virtually confined, on the Borders, to the coast, but since then it had 'penetrated westwards' in a 'remarkable' manner. It was nesting at Tughall, near Beadnell, in 1836 and had reached North Sunderland by 1864 and Wooler in about 1874, while in 1877 considerable numbers were breeding at Berwick.

In 1932, Bolam described it as a 'local resident' and the ornithological reports of the 1940s were still listing colonies, implying that it remained relatively uncommon. Twenty years later it was found locally in most of the agricultural half of east Northumberland, while there were small numbers in the Tyne valley and along the South Tyne as far west as Featherstone. Nests are nearly always in a hole and the domed nests found in the open in hawthorn hedges at Beal in 1964 and 1965 were unusual; nest boxes, including those put up for tits, are occasionally used.

Bolam mentioned the small flocks which sometimes arrived as winter visitors from October onwards (some even as late as December) and which remained until the beginning of May. Today, a few flocks of a hundred or more, together with many smaller parties, are recorded each year, especially near the coast – for example, as many as 500 were present at Druridge during the winters of 1975–76 and 1976–77. Immigration has not been observed, but there are frequent coasting movements in October and these coincide with the build-up of coastal flocks. Small numbers on spring passage are often reported from the offshore islands in the latter half of April and during May.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

A common passage and winter visitor and abundant breeding resident.

More than a hundred years ago, Hancock described it as 'a resident and probably the most abundant bird in the distrct'. This is undoubtedly still the case and, indeed, its range has increased considerably with the expansion of the border forests. Some indication of breeding density came from a study area near Hexham where, between 1974 and 1976, some forty-three to fifty-four pairs bred on 200 hectares.

Bolam (1932) noted that 'it regularly appears in large flocks along our coast in October and November, and again in March and April'. Today, autumn arrivals are rarely conspicuous, but the build-up of large late autumn and winter flocks, and communal roosts, undoubtedly involves continental birds. A few gatherings of up to 300 are regularly recorded each year while, in hard weather, numbers may be even larger as, for example, between 28 and 31 December 1976 when 800 were present at Brinkburn. That immigrants remain throughout March is shown by a roost

at Belsay which still contained 150 birds at the end of March 1979; similarly, 1000 at Acklington on 16 April 1977 provided evidence of pre-emigration flocking.

Birds ringed in the county in autumn or winter have been recovered in March in subsequent years on the East and West Frisian Islands, and at sea seventy-two kilometres west of Esbjerg, Denmark, while one marked in January 1972 was recovered in the following July in Norway (63°N). In addition, one caught at Schiermonnikoog on the West Frisian Islands in October 1977 was controlled at Gosforth Park in January 1979.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

A common passage and winter visitor.

Bolam (1932) described it as 'a common winter visitant, reaching us in flocks about the middle of October (a few sometimes two or three weeks earlier), and departing in early spring, exceptionally as late as the end of April'.

October remains the main month for immigration although numbers vary a great deal from year to year. In 1977, on 7–8 October, 350 were on Holy Island while hundreds passed over Hauxley and St Mary's Island, arrivals continuing on a smaller scale until 9 November. By contrast, in 1974, no more than twelve were seen together during the whole autumn. A minority may arrive in the latter half of September, but single birds at Berwick on 19 August 1900, and on the Farne Islands from 8–17 August 1968, were exceptional.

The numbers remaining to winter are apparently dependent upon the availability of beech mast. In certain years, and in localities where this favourite food is abundant, large gatherings can occur. For example, in 1934, 500 were near Blanchland on 23 December; in 1967, 800 at Heddon in early March and 600 at Bolam on 2 December; there was again a large count (500) at Bolam in December 1976 while hundreds moved through the grounds of Hexham Abbey on 30 November 1980. However, flocks do not normally exceed 300. Communal roosts, especially in rhododendrons, are sometimes recorded, an example being at Belsay where 200 or more gathered regularly in the late 1960s.

Spring passage at the coast is typically light and usually takes place during April and early May; this was illustrated in 1974 when, between 25 April and 13 May some thirty were on the offshore islands with up to twelve on the mainland. In 1937, a male summered on Newcastle Town Moor, where it remained until 24 May 1938. Among other very late spring records was a male that stayed on the Farne Islands until early June 1965, a female at Newton on 3 June 1967 and another female on the Farne Islands on 11–12 June 1971.

An adult ringed at Dinnington in March 1962 was found in Zeeland, Netherlands, in February 1963 while another from the same locality, marked in January 1964, was at Liège, Belgium, in the following October. In addition, one caught at Seaton Delaval in April 1966 was recovered at Leigh, Lancashire, in January 1967.

Serin *Serinus serinus*

An extremely rare visitor.

The only records are of single birds on Holy Island on 24 September 1956, Inner Farne on 28 May 1969 and Coquet Island on 22 April 1971.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

A common passage visitor and breeding species.

Both Hancock and Bolam described it as 'a common resident' although in 1932 Bolam considered that it was 'becoming less numerous as the land goes out of cultivation'.

The pesticide era apparently took its toll and in 1961, for example, many were reported to have been found dead in treated fields near Haltwhistle. However, a new trend was already apparent and by the late 1960s it had become extremely common in the Tyneside area where it successfully colonised suburban gardens; this association with man was noticeable even in country towns and villages. Nevertheless, breeding density is nowhere as high as in *Fringilla coelebs,* the 1976 figure for a study area near Hexham being twelve breeding pairs on 200 hectares.

Bolam (1912) thought that, in autumn, its numbers might be augmented by arrivals from abroad as it had 'been met with at several of our lighthouses'. Small numbers still appear on the offshore islands in October and November, and again in April and early May, but their origin is unknown. Very large concentrations can occur occasionally in winter and it is unlikely that these are composed entirely of local birds. Some 8000 were roosting at Gosforth Park in February 1963 and 1000 were at Norham in December 1971, while there are numerous records of flocks of up to 800. The fact that over 700 were ringed at Monk's House during the winter of 1952–53 is an indication of its abundance at that season. Interesting and unusual behaviour was observed near Wallsend in late December 1961 when, during very cold weather, birds were seen excavating and occupying burrows in hop manure. Hard weather may also result in mid-winter movements as on 31 January 1972, when birds were moving south over Cullercoats throughout the day.

Greenfinches ringed in autumn and winter have been found as far afield as Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire, Cheshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk while birds marked in Berwickshire, Fife, Westmorland and Yorkshire have been recovered within the county.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding species.

It has increased steadily during the last century. Hancock (1874) described it as 'a casual visitant . . . being met with only occasionally in autumn and winter', adding that he had 'seen it only on two or three occasions'. In 1912, Bolam confirmed this, saying that two generations previously it had been 'comparatively common in many places', but that by the 1870s it was 'almost exterminated'. He commented that 'it could hardly claim to be more than a rare bird . . . although it is a resident and is apparently again upon the increase'. Twenty years later he wrote that it had 'continued to shown a satisfactory increase' and was then nesting 'more or less regularly' at various localities throughout the county.

The annual ornithological reports from the 1930s to the 1960s make frequent mention of a continued increase, and at the end of the period Macfarlane [n.d.] summed up the position as 'whilst being nowhere common, the Goldfinch is to be found over most of the county with the exception of the west' although there were seldom more than five pairs in any five kilometre square. Even during the 1970s, the expansion has continued and Galloway and Meek (1978) suggested that in 1977 it was not only more common than ever, but was spreading to the remoter western areas. An

interesting development has been the colonisation of suburban and urban areas such as Newcastle quayside, Byker and Benton station. Since 1978 there has been a slight decline, possibly the result of some severe spells of winter weather, but this is presumed to be merely a temporary setback.

Bolam (1932) noted that 'the appearance of individuals, or little assemblies, upon the coast, may indicate local movements or, possibly more extended migration' while Perry (1946) thought that single birds on Holy Island in November 1936 and February 1937 were probably of the continental race *C.c.carduelis*. A few still occur on the offshore islands in September and October at a time when coastal flocks are building up, but, strangely, it is spring passage which is most conspicuous. In 1976, for example, between 29 April and 10 May there were up to forty on Holy Island, and seven on the Farne Islands, while as many as forty per hour were moving north over Seaton Sluice and Tynemouth.

Winter flocks have grown in number and size as the breeding population has expanded. In 1937 and 1950, the largest recorded gatherings consisted of only seventeen birds, but in 1952 autumn flocks of about a hundred were reported and today fifty to a hundred are regularly seen together in winter. As many as 120 were at Ingram on 20 October 1974 while a communal roost in a holly bush at Matfen held 168 by the end of December 1979. There are occasional mid-winter hard weather movements, as on 31 January 1972 when Goldfinches were watched passing south throughout the day over Cullercoats.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor and breeding species.

Bolam (1932) stated that 'as a winter visitant [it] arrives on the coast fairly regularly, in small parties, about the beginning of October', adding that it usually disappears 'about March or April'. In addition, he said that 'we have no record of a nest being actually found in the county' although in both 1912 and 1932 he mentioned that on many occasions it had been seen at a time that suggested it might be breeding.

During the 1930s it was reported regularly only from upper Redesdale, but in 1942 a pair bred at Wooley Sanatorium. Between then and 1960, breeding and territory-holding birds were found at Dipton, Haltwhistle and Langleeford where a small colony appears to have become established during the 1950s. The slow process of colonisation continued throughout the 1960s and by the end of the decade it was nesting in the maturing border forests. This area is now its stronghold, breeding success being apparently very dependent on food availability. In 1976, for example, 'good numbers' bred and an abundant alder crop in 1976–77 allowed many to overwinter in the forest area. By March 1977 birds had moved onto spruce which carried a good cone crop, and many bred, young being seen by late May. A scanty alder crop in winter 1977–78, however, meant that there were very few records for the area. Away from the main forests, it is now nesting in many upland localities and by 1980 it was more common than in any previous year with considerable numbers in the woodlands in the southwest of the county, particularly around Slaley.

Immigrants arrive between mid-September and early November, but are seen at the coast in variable numbers. In 1971, for example, only one party of three was reported whereas, in 1979, twelve arrived on the Farne Islands on 9 September, with one at Seaton Sluice two days later and another at Hauxley on 30 September. These were followed by an early October influx

which brought 150 to Holy Island, twenty to Hauxley and eleven to Bamburgh.

Winter flocks undoubtedly contain a large proportion of immigrants and gatherings of fifty to a hundred are not uncommon. Flocks of as many as 200 were in Hulne Park on 3 November 1971 and at Bellingham on 22 September 1973. Spring coastal passage is irregular and only a few are noted, while birds moving south over Seaton Sluice on 30 January 1972 is the only hard weather movement recorded.

Its habit of feeding from peanut holders provided for tits was first noted in 1972 and has since become quite widespread.

A bird ringed at Monk's House in September 1953 was recovered two months later at Selkirk, while four other September ringed birds have been found in Belgium in the same or subsequent autumn or winter. Thus, some autumn immigrants are obviously drift migrants which are able to reorientate to their preferred continental wintering grounds.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

A common passage visitor and resident breeding species.

In 1831, Selby described it as 'common' and a century later Bolam confirmed this adding 'especially in the low country, and where whins are prevalent'. It remains a common breeding species throughout the lowland parts of the county and in upland valleys, especially where gorse predominates. Ennion (1960) gives an interesting example of the relationship between numbers and food supply. In 1952, twenty-seven pairs built a total of forty-two nests in an area of 130 hectares in the Breamish valley below Ingram. The birds were feeding on the seeds of low growing plants on nearby river gravels, but when the area was colonised by taller plants, the food supply declined and by 1954 there were only eighteen pairs and thirty-three nests.

Bolam (1932) believed that 'considerable flocks . . . reach us from overseas in September and October as winter visitants', but there is little evidence to support this contention. Large flocks, frequently of up to 500 and occasionally as many as 1000, occur in autumn and winter, especially near the coast, and often in association with *C.chloris*. Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that these flocks are anything other than British in origin. A good series of ringing recoveries shows that a considerable proportion of locally bred Linnets leave the area to winter in southwest France, and Spain, and some of the large autumn flocks are believed to be pre-emigration gatherings rather than the result of immigration. Those which remain to winter are occasionally involved in hard weather movements as on 30 January 1972 when Linnets were passing south over Seaton Sluice in company with other finches.

Spring passage is often quite conspicuous during April and early May. Parties can be seen coasting north, small numbers occur on the offshore islands, and the coastal flocks, most of which have declined markedly from their winter peaks, increase briefly in size as birds pass through. In 1976, for example, eighty were counted flying north over Newton on 28–29 April and at about the same time up to eighty were at Hauxley and several small parties on the Farne Islands.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor which formerly bred.

According to Hancock (1874) it was 'a resident, and . . . not uncommon,

breeding on the heather in the wild uncultivated parts' of the county. Bolam (1912) remarked that it bred 'sparingly on the Cheviot Moors, in several places; regularly in Coquetdale, especially near Cragside . . . and in the vales of both the Tynes, the Allen, and the Rede; on Elsdon and Raylees Commons; but less frequently elsewhere'. Twenty years later, however, he wrote that it was 'steadily disappearing as a breeding species' and that 'some of its ancient haunts amongst the hills appear to have become quite deserted'.

Until the late 1950s there were occasional reports of confirmed or possible breeding from moorland areas such as the Cheviots, North Tynedale and the Simonside Hills. Since then the only indications that it may have bred are the sighting of two near Sweethope Lough in early May 1970, two singing males at Little Swinburne quarry in the summer of 1972 and two on Cheviot on 9 June 1974, these last after a party of twenty had remained at nearby Langleeford throughout May; ten were again at Langleeford on 1 May 1976.

Bolam (1932) wrote that 'as a winter visitor, the Twite reaches the coast pretty regularly in September, often in large flocks, which commonly pentrate to the foothills of the Cheviots'. Between 1932 and the late 1960s only very small numbers were reported from anywhere in the county, by far the largest gathering being forty at Haltwhistle on 12 October 1960. During the 1970s, however, wintering flocks were reported much more regularly, the favourite areas being Lindisfarne NNR, the Coquet estuary, Hauxley (where the reclaimed opencast mining area provided an ideal food source) and Druridge. Respective maxima for these localities were sixty (in early 1971), ninety-seven (28 November 1971), 130 (24 December 1977) and up to eighty (between January and March 1977). Small numbers still occasionally penetrate inland in winter: for example, twelve were at Makendon in upper Coquetdale on 24 October 1976 and thirteen at Threestoneburn in February 1980.

The earliest immigrant recorded by Bolam was on 12 September 1884; large flocks usually arrived in October and November and the majority had left by early March. Today, the main period of influx remains the same, but there are several September records including one on the Farne Islands as early as 5 September 1973. The latest spring record – 23 May 1978 – was also on the Farne Islands, but there are two unusual coastal occurrences in July – one at Hartley on 30 July 1956 and two at Ross on 2 July 1973.

Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

A common passage visitor and breeding species and a well-represented winter visitor.

Bolam (1932) described the Lesser Redpoll *C.f.cabaret* as 'a resident, winter visitant and passage migrant. Tolerably common, breeding . . . throughout the county, but always most in evidence during the cold months when it gathers into considerable flocks'.

Breeding numbers have undoubtedly increased since Bolam's time mainly as a result of the colonisation of the border forests where it is now numerous. However, at least in recent years, it is largely absent from the county in winter and most of the breeding birds are summer visitors, usually returning to the forests during April. Nevertheless, passage, probably involving the Scottish population, can continue throughout May, both inland and at the coast. For example, in 1971, when coastal passage was noted between 21 April and late May, one was controlled at Bamburgh

on 15 May; it had been ringed in Loiret, France, three months earlier. In 1973, a substantial northerly movement was still in progress over Kielderhead Moor on 26 May.

Adults moult before migrating southwards in late September (Evans,1966b). Large flocks of moulting birds gather in August and September and can often number up to 300, especially at favourite localities such as Roughtinglinn, Craster, Arcot Hall and Langleeford, while some 1000 were present around Kielder in 1978. Many Redpolls ringed at this time have been recovered on the wintering grounds in Belgium, northern France and West Germany or, *en route,* in southern England. There is some evidence that birds are faithful to particular moulting areas such as Craster where individuals have been retrapped in several successive years. Evans considered that it migrated further in years of poor seed crops of birch. Alder is also a favourite food and a good crop in winter 1976–77 allowed many to overwinter in the Kielder area; the birds moved into spruce in early March and later experienced a very good breeding season. A poor alder crop in the winter of 1977–78 resulted in very few Redpolls being seen. Elsewhere, winter flocks are usually rather small, although as many as 200 were at Hepple on 8 February 1976. The origin of overwintering birds is questionable, Evans believing that they are mainly immigrants from further north.

The Mealy Redpoll *C.f.flammea* was described by Bolam (1932) as 'a winter visitant, and passage migrant, not rare, but very irregular in its appearance, sometimes coming in considerable flocks, in other years altogether absent or scarcely noticed'. Bolam thus recognised that this race was eruptive and, in fact, no more were reported until 1946. Numbers remained very small until 1972 when, between late September and the end of the year, a total of over forty was recorded, including parties of ten at Tynemouth and seventeen on the Farne Islands on 4 November. Another invasion in autumn 1975 brought a further eighty or more between October and the following May; they included parties of twenty at Stannington on 5 December and at Wylam on 25 January. A most unusual record involved one with a brood patch, trapped at Seaton Delaval on 19 June 1976. Bolam (1912) mentions several very pale birds; another was at St Mary's Island on 24 and 28 December 1961 while the two most recent influxes also included some very pale individuals, all probably referable to the form *'pallescens'* (Williamson, 1961).

A specimen obtained on Holy Island on 5 November 1923 was identified by Watson (1924) as *C.f.holboellii;* however, this race has been shown to be synonymous with *C.f.flammea.*

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*

An extremely rare visitor.

Two at St Mary's Island on 31 December 1961 and 1 January 1962, and one trapped at Bamburgh between 10 and 16 October 1965, were accepted by the *British Birds Rarities Committee.* In addition, two Redpolls seen at Hallington on 10 November 1945 may, from their size, have been *C.hornemanni.*

Bolam (1932) believed that two Redpolls which he saw at Berwick on 21 October 1885 were of this species while other possibles have been reported from Hartley on 3 September 1957, at Beadnell on 27 November 1961 and on Holy Island on 31 December 1961 and 1 January 1962. However, there is always the possibility that some of these records refer to the pale hybrid population known as *'pallescens'.*

Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera*

An extremely rare visitor.

An adult male which was trapped at Ashington Burn on 29 July 1972 was later released at Hauxley, where it remained for two days. Another adult male was caught at Hauxley on 13–14 August 1977.

These are the only *L.leucoptera* to have been ringed in Britain.

Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

An eruptive passage visitor and well-represented breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a resident', adding that 'occasionally a few pairs remain . . . during the summer to breed'; he mentions a nest at Hesleyside near Bellingham in 1838 and another between Riding Mill and Slaley in 1869. By 1932, Bolam considered it to be 'an irregular visitant, and an almost equally casual resident which had 'frequently been found breeding in Northumberland, especially in the southern half' while its appearance had 'been recurring with ever-increasing frequency'.

It remained a scarce breeding species until the mid-1950s, most records coming from the southwest, but occasionally from upper Redesdale. There was an exceptionally large invasion in July 1956 and, from then on, it became established in the border forests; these are now the strongholds of the breeding population. It is dependent upon food availability: in the winter of 1974–75, for example, as the result of a very good Sitka spruce crop, large numbers nested, over seventy pairs being located along the Kielder Burn alone during February 1975. A poor Sitka crop in 1975–76 meant no breeding records, but, following an excellent crop in autumn 1976, young were seen by early October and breeding continued throughout the winter. Although, as expected, there was only a scanty crop in autumn 1977, the Norway spruce bore many cones and this encouraged birds to breed during the winter 1977–78. It now nests regularly away from the forests – for example, at Kyloe, Harwood and in the Slaley area and, occasionally, in several other, mainly upland, localities.

Flocking, presumably mostly of local birds, but perhaps including some immigrants, takes place where food is available. A hundred were at Harwood on 5 March 1972, 150 at both Slaley and Harwood in late November–early December 1976 while several parties of a hundred were in the border forests in the summers of 1977 and 1978.

It sometimes arrives in very variable numbers and Bolam mentions 1888, 1897, 1903, 1905, 1909 and 1927 as invasion years. Although there was a major eruption into Britain in 1953, only relatively small numbers reached Northumberland, but in 1956 there was a large scale influx. Following one at Monk's House and five on the Farne Islands on 4 July, twenty appeared at Langleeford two days later and fifty-five at Kyloe on 5 August. The Kyloe flock built up to 500 by the end of 1956; forty were seen at Hexham on 22 August, thirty on Holy Island in early September, forty at Falstone and up to thirty-three at Haltwhistle on 1 November and they were very common at Kielder.

The recent increase in the breeding population has made it more difficult to recognise small-scale invasions as post fledging dispersal of locally bred birds may account for some coastal records. Small numbers now occur almost annually in autumn at such localities: arrivals were more marked in 1962, 1966 and 1972, but even then no flock greater than thirty was reported.

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

An extremely rare visitor.

An immature male killed by a car near Catcleugh on 16 September 1954 is the only confirmed record: it was in the company of three *Loxia* sp.

Scarlet Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

A rare visitor.

An immature female was shot on Holy Island on 30 August 1913 and another was seen there on 15–16 September of the same year. There were no further sightings until 1962 when an immature was at Holywell Ponds on 22–23 September. A further twenty individuals have since been recorded: eighteen females or immatures reported between 19 August and 8 October and two adult males – at Bamburgh on 9 May 1970 and on the Farne Islands on 29–30 May 1976.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*

An extremely rare visitor.

A male on Holy Island on 11–12 May 1975 is the only record.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A rare passage visitor and common breeding species.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a well-known resident . . . but nowhere very abundant. Few of our larger parks, or policies, are without it; while it nests far up in many of our mountain glens'. In 1932, he stated that it was 'a common resident in most of the wooded districts, though seldom numerous'.

Since the 1930s it appears to have increased considerably in the types of habitat mentioned by Bolam. Temperley (1945) commented that it had spread westwards up to the moorland fringe and the subsequent expansion of the border forests has enabled it to colonise otherwise inhospitable areas. The forests have, in fact, become its stronghold in the county.

The greater breeding numbers have led to an increase in winter flocking. As many as thirty have been noted on several occasions, usually in typical habitat, but, on 27 November 1965, a party (which was feeding on heather seeds) was on open moorland near Rothbury; 120 at Arcot Hall in January 1963 was by far the largest flock recorded.

Dispersal of local birds doubtless accounts for many of the autumn sightings at the coast; several trapped individuals have been assigned to the British race *P.p.pileata* while an immature ringed at Craster in September 1964 was recovered at Kelso, Roxburghshire, in September 1965. The northern subspecies *P.p.pyrrhula* has, however, been identified several times – single birds were on Holy Island on 15 April 1937, at Hauxley on 23 October 1974, and, in 1975, at Bamburgh on 25 October and at Seaton Delaval three days later. Furthermore, a bird found dead at Seahouses on 29 December 1977 (one of two which had earlier been seen arriving from the east) was also *P.p.pyrrhula.* There have probably been others which have remained unconfirmed – in particular, the origin of seventeen found on Holy Island on 26 October 1976 gives rise to speculation.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A rare passage visitor and uncommon breeding species.

Hancock (1874) described it as 'a rare casual visitant' which had not been known to breed, but by 1912 Bolam could say that it had 'extended its

range of late years to many parts of the country, and must now be ranked as a resident on the Borders, where . . . it is fast becoming not very uncommon'. In Northumberland, the first nest was found near Riding Mill in May 1884 although a pair had been killed in Ellingham Wood in May 1872. A family party was at Hulne Abbey in July 1891, several nests were in the Hexham area in 1896, eggs were taken near Lilburn Tower in 1898 and a nest was discovered at Chipchase Castle in 1901. Thereafter, records multiplied and in 1932 Bolam wrote that since 1912 it had 'bred with increasing frequency at many other places' among them Stocksfield, Heddon, Corbridge, Fourstones, Bardon Mill, Chipchase, Houxty, Catcleugh, Alnwick, Ford, Cornhill and Haggerston.

More recently it has been reported from many areas which provide the favoured deciduous or mixed woodland habitat; however, because of its secretive nature, breeding is only occasionally confirmed. During the 1970s, nesting has been proved, or suspected, in the Tyne valley (especially near Stocksfield and Riding Mill), Hartford-Plessey, Morpeth-Hepscott, Wallington, Felton, Hulne Park, Howick, Ford and Jesmond Dene, but there are probably never more than twenty pairs in any one year.

Outside the breeding season, birds wander to other districts and there is some flocking. Bolam (1912) reported 'a large flock' at Belsay Castle in the winter of 1900–01 and eighteen were seen at Plankey Mill on 31 August 1951 with up to fifteen at Wallington in January 1980.

Occasionally, migrants appear at the coast. There are six spring records between 10 April and 21 May; with the exception of a party of three at St Mary's Island on 19 April 1975 all were single birds. In addition, six individuals have occurred in autumn (between 29 September and 16 November). There is also a noteworthy report of one flying northwest over open moorland in Kielder Forest on 27 May 1979.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*

An uncommon passage and winter visitor.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a rare casual visitant' although he had found at least fifty at Ross in early January 1893, part of 'a great invasion of the eastern counties of England' which had taken place in the previous autumn. He mentions a few other occurrences in 1893, the last being one at Newton-by-the-Sea on 19 October, and there were no further records until 3 April 1920 when a flock of thirty was near Budle Bay.

Thereafter, none was positively identified until 1952, but since then it has occurred annually – almost certainly because more ornithologists have become familiar with the distinctive flight call. Although some appear as early as 1 September, birds usually arrive in October and November; they are seen singly, or in parties of up to a dozen, in coastal areas throughout the winter. Flocks of forty were reported in north Northumberland in the autumns of 1956 and 1957 while from thirty-eight to forty-three were present in the Hauxley-Druridge area during the winters of 1977–78, 1978–79 and 1979–80. Most have left by April, but there are occasional May records – one as late as 13 May.

Very few are seen away from the coast; three were near Chillingham on 18 September 1952, up to four at Killingworth in March and November 1962 and February 1963, with one at Nafferton in November and December 1973.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

A well-represented passage and winter visitor.

According to Bolam (1912) it was 'an abundant winter visitant over the whole district, usually arriving in flocks during October, and November, and remaining until the end of February, but frequently appearing, in small numbers, a month sooner, and delaying its departure till quite late in spring'. He also noted that 'during severe weather, flocks, literally of thousands . . . may sometimes be met with on the fields round Berwick'.

Today, it does not seem to be nearly as abundant. There was a very large influx in 1948 when 'phenomenal numbers, with single flocks containing several thousand birds' were on Holy Island in November and December (Temperley, 1949). Since then the only parties to exceed 300 have been at Tweedmouth (500 in late December 1957), Holy Island (1000 in December 1962), Newbiggin Hall, near Newcastle upon Tyne (700 in December 1967) and the Lindisfarne NNR-Seahouses area (up to 400 in January 1975). The main arrival is still in October and November although birds have been seen as early as 4 September. Most have left by mid-April, but a few linger into May – three were on Holy Island on 18 May 1958 while Harvie Brown *et al.* (1885) record one on the Farne Islands on 7 June 1884.

As in Bolam's day, although the majority occur at, or near, the coast, particularly in Lindisfarne NNR and the Druridge Bay area, they are frequent visitors to the higher moors. On 19 February 1972 300 were seen at Hedgehope with up to a hundred present there in February 1973; however, such inland flocks are now usually much smaller.

There are occasional hard weather movements as on 30 January 1972 when about 200 flew south over Seaton Sluice in company with other passerines. Several of the larger flocks noted in recent years have also been associated with periods of severe weather.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

A common breeding resident.

In 1912, Bolam described it as 'an abundant resident', but in 1932 he commented that it was 'showing some indications of growing scarcer since so much land went out of cultivation'.

It is still common in most agricultural areas although by the late 1960s it was, according to Marfarlane [n.d.] 'confined to the principal river valleys in higher areas' and 'absent over much of the afforested west and . . . rather scarce in South Tynedale'. This statement remains true, but it is interesting to find that in the seventy-seven hectares census plot at Brenkley, numbers fell from eight pairs in 1974 to none in 1978.

Both winter flocking and communal roosts take place, gatherings occasionally numbering up to 250. However, the occurrence in October, and again in April and early May, of small numbers on the offshore islands, and on the coast, suggest that these are not all local birds.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

In 1912, Bolam wrote that he 'was almost convinced that a pair of birds which he saw at Castle Heaton, on . . . the Till, on 1 January 1890, were of this species'. He could not identify them with absolute certainty and does not mention the sighting in 1932.

There is no definite record.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

A rare passage visitor.

It was first recorded in 1945 and since then thirty-eight individuals have occurred on the coast. Twenty-four were between 23 August and 17 November, with the majority in early September, while most of the fourteen spring records were in May, extreme dates being 8 April and 5 June. With the exception of four on Holy Island from 4–7 September 1956, and three there on 11–12 May 1975, all were single birds.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are records of five individuals: a female (captured alive) at Seaton Sluice in 1903, a male and female on Holy Island on 1 September 1966, another female on Holy Island on 7 May 1972 and one at Blyth cemetery on 15–16 October 1975.

In addition, Bolam considered that two small buntings which he saw near Berwick on 15 December 1887 were either this species or *E.pusilla.*

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

A rare passage visitor.

All the early reports relate to Holy Island. Bolam (1932) mentions single birds identified on 7 October 1920 and 11–12 September 1930, while another was seen on 22 September 1932. Perry (1946) described its status on the island as being regular on autumn passage (11 September–22 November) and scarce on spring passage. However, his description of four he watched on 8 October 1939 would be considered inadequate today and his statements, in particular that there were up to eight in a party, must be treated with some caution.

There were two further sightings – one in the vicinity of Beal on 27 October 1953 and two near St Mary's Island on 30 November 1957 – before the advent of the *British Birds Rarities Committee* meant that all subsequent reports were subjected to very careful scrutiny. Many of these have been rejected, but the following have been accepted: one trapped at Gosforth Park on 22 October 1962, two on Holy Island on 4–5 October 1964 with one at Ross four days later and three on Holy Island on 23–26 September 1975 with two on 26 October 1975. In addition, in 1977 one to two were on the Farne Islands from 17–23 September, one on Holy Island on 19 September and one at Hauxley on 15 and 21 October.

One at Hauxley on 12 May 1982 is the only definite spring sighting.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*

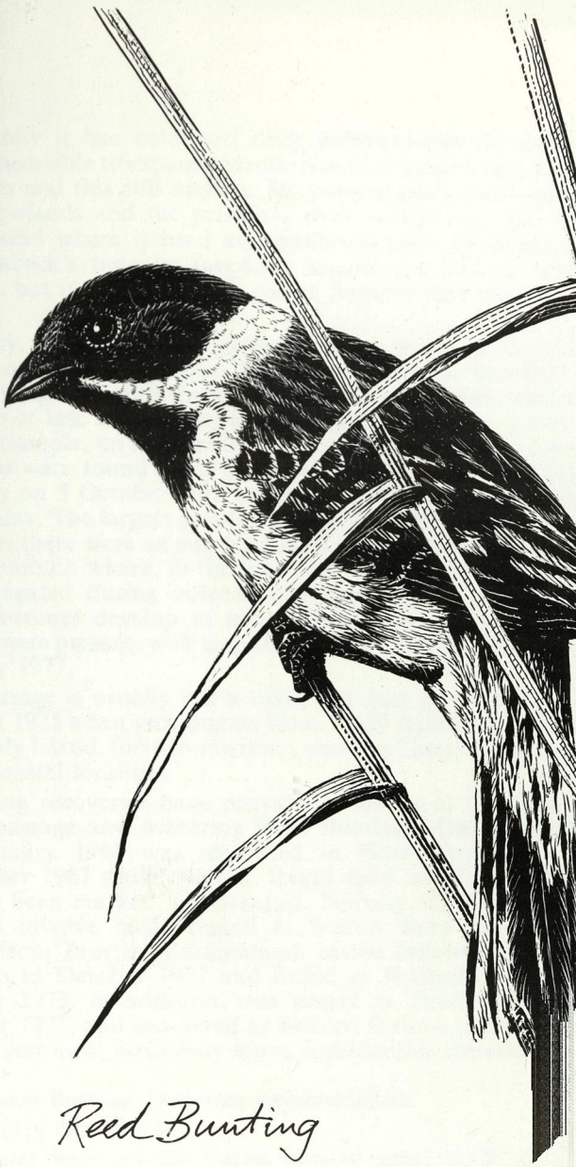
An extremely rare visitor.

There are four records, all of females or immatures. Single birds were on the Farne Islands from 17–19 September 1972, and on 23 August and 16 September 1976, with one at Hauxley on 29 September 1977. A record of another at Hauxley on 15 October 1977 was rejected by the *British Birds Rarities Committee.*

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding resident.

Both Hancock and Bolam described it as 'a common resident', Bolam adding, in 1912, that it bred 'in limited numbers, wherever suitable places occur'.



Reed Bunting

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

A rare passage visitor.

It was first recorded in 1945 and since then thirty-eight individuals have occurred on the coast. Twenty-four were between 23 August and 17 November, with the majority in early September, while most of the fourteen spring records were in May, extreme dates being 8 April and 5 June. With the exception of four on Holy Island from 4–7 September 1956, and three there on 11–12 May 1975, all were single birds.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are records of five individuals: a female (captured alive) at Seaton Sluice in 1903, a male and female on Holy Island on 1 September 1966, another female on Holy Island on 7 May 1972 and one at Blyth cemetery on 15–16 October 1975.

In addition, Bolam considered that two small buntings which he saw near Berwick on 15 December 1887 were either this species or *E.pusilla.*

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

A rare passage visitor.

All the early reports relate to Holy Island. Bolam (1932) mentions single birds identified on 7 October 1920 and 11–12 September 1930, while another was seen on 22 September 1932. Perry (1946) described its status on the island as being regular on autumn passage (11 September–22 November) and scarce on spring passage. However, his description of four he watched on 8 October 1939 would be considered inadequate today and his statements, in particular that there were up to eight in a party, must be treated with some caution.

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One at Hauxley on 12 May 1982 is the only definite spring sighting.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*

An extremely rare visitor.

There are four records, all of females or immatures. Single birds were on the Farne Islands from 17–19 September 1972, and on 23 August and 16 September 1976, with one at Hauxley on 29 September 1977. A record of another at Hauxley on 15 October 1977 was rejected by the *British Birds Rarities Committee.*

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

A well-represented passage visitor and common breeding resident.

Both Hancock and Bolam described it as 'a common resident', Bolam adding, in 1912, that it bred 'in limited numbers, wherever suitable places occur'.

More recently it has colonised drier habitats and the population has, therefore, been able to expand. Macfarlane [n.d.] gave a detailed description of its status and this still applies. He pointed out that it was widespread over the lowlands and the principal river valleys and was increasing on higher ground where it bred at heights of over 305m above sea level. As in Hancock's time its favourite haunts are still in 'scrubby damp situations', but it also occurs in young forestry plantations and on open moorland.

By late July, local birds have gathered into communal roosts in reed beds at places such as Chevington Burn where over a hundred are usually present. Passage of continental birds, chiefly in October, adds considerably to the size of late autumn flocks and roosts. Between 7 and 10 October 1977, for example, up to seventy were on Holy Island and fifty at Hauxley while three were found dead on Blyth beach. Again, in 1979 sixty were at Hauxley on 5 October with at least a hundred on Holy Island on the following day. The largest roosts recorded in recent years were at Gosforth Park where there were as many as 1000 during autumn in the early 1960s and at Alnmouth where, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a maximum of 500 congregated during autumn and early winter. Mid-winter feeding flocks sometimes develop in areas where food is particularly plentiful; up to 150 were present, with large numbers of other passerines, at Druridge in January 1977.

Spring passage is usually fairly light, but may be conspicuous in certain years as in 1975 when movements from 17–19 April and 8–11 May brought fifty to Holy Island, forty to Hauxley, many to Cresswell and small numbers to other coastal localities.

Two ringing recoveries have provided evidence of the continental origin of some passage and wintering Reed Buntings. One trapped at Hauxley on 9 January 1966 was identified in Nord Trondelag, Norway, on 5 September 1967 while another, found dead on Blyth beach on 30 April 1978, had been marked in Buskerud, Norway, on 7 October 1974. Other recoveries involve birds ringed at Seaton Burn in August 1961 and reported from Penrith, Cumberland, in the following December, and at Bamburgh in October 1972 and found at Retford, Nottinghamshire, in December 1973. In addition, one ringed at Thurleston, Devonshire, in November 1975, and recovered at Belford in the summer of 1976, perhaps indicates that local birds may move considerable distances to winter.

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*

An extremely rare visitor.

Single males were on the Farne Islands from 23–28 July 1971 and at Hauxley on 26 July 1977. In addition a bird, probably of this species, was seen by a number of people in Brierdene, Whitley Bay, during the summer of 1968.

There is always the possibility that some, or all, of these birds may have escaped from captivity.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*

A well-represented breeding resident.

Bolam (1912) described it as 'a common resident, most numerous, perhaps, along the coast, breeding in rough grass and corn-fields, to which it also resorts . . . to roost, in flocks, in winter'. In 1932, he considered that it had 'decreased in some places since so much land went out of cultivation'

although he acknowledged that it still maintained a footing in areas where no grain had been grown for many years.

Macfarlane [n.d.] summed up the situation in the late 1960s, stressing that it remained most numerous in a narrow coastal strip between Seahouses and Newbiggin where an appreciable proportion of the population was still found. North of Seahouses, it was less regular, but reasonable numbers were probably present. To the south, it was to some extent localised, although still more plentiful near the coast. However, during recent years, perhaps because of the destruction of habitat as the result of residential and industrial development, it had expanded westward, reaching inland as far as Ovington in the Tyne valley. Today, the position remains virtually unaltered although there has been some further westward expansion, and a Corn Bunting was even heard singing at Plashetts in June 1971. In 1978, there was a noticeable decline in several traditional localities in the south-east, but, next year, a marked recovery was apparent.

Flocks and communal roosts occur in winter. A traditional roost at Bamburgh often holds a hundred birds and as many as 150 were present in February 1974. Similarly, Chevington Burn attracted upwards of a hundred on several occasions during the 1960s and other large gatherings have included a hundred at Seaton Delaval in February 1974, 150 (in three groups) at Druridge Bay in December 1976 and, an exceptional count, 300 at Wallsend Swallow Ponds on 16 October 1965.

Bolam (1912) believed that in autumn the native stock was reinforced from abroad and Temperley (1942) describes the arrival of large numbers at Beadnell on 24 November 1941 with others coming into Seahouses three days later. Such immigration has not been noted in recent years although a handful on Holy Island and the Farne Islands in October and November, and especially in April-May, probably indicate some passage. A few are sometimes involved in coasting movements as on 27 October 1968 and 19 October 1969 when small numbers were passing south over Hauxley.

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N.B. It is regretted that PERRY (1975) (see page 53, line 8) cannot be traced.

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GAZETTEER

(Northumbrian place names only)

Prepared by D R Shannon

Place name	*Grid reference*
Acklington	NU 230019
Allen Banks	NY 799630
Allendale	NY 838568
Allenheads	NY 860453
Allerdean Mill	NT 983476
Alnmouth	NU 245105
Alnwick	NU 186132
Alwinton	NT 921063
Amble	NU 270046
Annstead	NU 225305
Ashington	NZ 275877
Backworth	NZ 300723
Bamburgh	NU 180348
Bardon Mill	NY 780646
Barrasford	NY 916734
Beadnell	NU 230293
Beal	NU 065426
Belford	NU 109340
Bellingham	NY 840833
Belsay	NZ 102786
Berwick upon Tweed	NT 998530
Berwick Hill	NZ 173756
Biddlestone	NT 960882
Birtley	NY 878781
Blagdon	NZ 215772
Blanchland	NY 966503
Blindburn	NT 830109
Blyth	NZ 315815
Bolam	NZ 092826
Bothal	NZ 240867
Boulmer	NU 266143
Branxton	NT 895376
Brenkley	NZ 218752
Brinkburn	NZ 116983
Broomhill	NU 246015
Budle Bay	NU 150360
Bywell	NZ 049615
Caistron	NT 996013
Cambo	NZ 026856
Cambois	NZ 305835
Capheaton	NZ 035804
Carham	NT 798383
Carr Shield	NY 803475
Chathill	NU 186270
Chatton	NU 056284
Cheswick	NU 032466
Chevington Burn	NZ 272981
Cheviot	NT 909206
Chillingham	NU 061259
Chipchase	NY 883758
Chirdon	NY 761832
Chollerford	NY 919706
Chollerton	NY 933721
Cockle Park	NZ 202913
Coe Crags	NU 074073
Coquet Island	NU 293046
Corbridge	NY 990643
Cornhill	NT 860395
Cottonshopeburn Foot	NT 780013
Cramlington	NZ 268769
Craster	NU 258199
Cresswell	NZ 294935
Cullercoats	NZ 364713
Cullernose Point	NU 260187
Detchant	NU 087365
Dilston	NY 975633
Dinnington	NZ 209733
Dipton Woods	NY 970610
Druridge	NZ 275960
Duddo	NT 937426
Dudley	NZ 260735
Dunstanburgh	NU 259220
Dunston	NZ 226624
Earsdon	NZ 323725
Edlingham	NU 112090
Ellingham	NU 170258
Ellington	NZ 275919
Elsdon	NY 937933
Elwick	NU 116369
Emblehope Moor	NY 740960
Embleton	NU 231225
Eshott	NZ 204977
Etal	NT 928394
Falstone	NY 723875
Farne Islands	NU 240380
Featherstone Castle	NY 674610
Felton	NU 184003
Fenham	NU 085408
Fenham Flats	NU 110400
Fenwick	NU 067401
Fenwick Pit	NZ 307722
Ford	NT 945374
Forest Hall	NZ 280695
Fourstones	NY 889679
Fowberry Park	NU 030273
Foxton	NU 253117
Gilsland	NY 635664
Glanton	NU 071145
Gosforth Park	NZ 258703
Goswick	NU 058452
Grasslees Burn	NY 952977
Guide Post	NZ 255850
Guyzance	NU 211039
Hadston	NU 274002
Haggerston	NU 040437
Haltwhistle	NY 708642
Harbottle	NT 935046
Hartley	NZ 342758
Harwood	NZ 001903
Hauxley	NU 286028
Haydon Bridge	NY 842644
Heddon-on-the-Wall	NZ 133670
Hedgehope	NT 944198
Hepple	NT 985007

Place name	*Grid reference*
Hepscott	NZ 233842
Hexham	NY 935640
Hindleysteel	NY 747726
Holburn Moss	NU 055365
Holy Island	NU 130430
Holystone	NT 955026
Holywell Dene	NZ 330748
Horsley	NZ 095660
Horton Grange	NZ 198755
Houxty	NY 856784
Howick	NU 257178
Hulne Park	NU 170150
Ingoe	NZ 039748
Ingram	NU 019163
Kidlandlee	NT 912099
Kielder	NY 626935
Kielderhead Moor	NT 670010
Killingworth	NZ 284709
Kirkley Hall	NZ 151772
Kirknewton	NT 914302
Kyloe Hills	NU 045392
Lakes	
Bolam	NZ 081818
Capheaton	NZ 030800
Gosforth Park	NZ 254702
Hartburn	NZ 070868
Linnheads	NY 688595
Lanehead	NY 792858
Langlee	NT 964233
Langleeford	NT 949220
Lesbury	NU 237117
Lilburn	NU 026243
Lindisfarne NNR	NU 090430
Little Swinburne	NY 949776
Little Tosson	NU 010010
Longbenton	NZ 265685
Longframlington	NU 131010
Longhirst	NZ 224891
Longhorsley	NZ 148947
Longhoughton	NU 243152
Long Nanny	NU 228273
Longridge	NT 959499
Longwitton	NZ 076888
Loughs	
Blackaburn	NY 762795
Broomlee	NY 790697
Coldmartin	NU 011277
Crag	NY 766680
Darden	NY 971957
Greenlee	NY 770696
Grindon	NY 805677
Halleypike	NY 808717
Harbottle	NT 918043
Kimmer	NU 120175
Linshiels	NT 893047
Newham	NU 168295
Sweethope	NY 940824
Lowick	NU 015397
Lowlynn	NU 042419
Lucker	NU 152303
Lynemouth	NZ 293910
Makendon	NT 803093
Matfen	NZ 031718
Meldon	NZ 119839
Melkridge	NY 739639
Milbourne	NZ 118753
Milfield	NT 934338
Mindrum	NT 842328
Minsteracres	NZ 024555
Mitford	NZ 173860
Monkseaton	NZ 340720
Monk's House	NU 204336
Morpeth	NZ 200860
Nafferton	NZ 065656
Netherwitton	NZ 090902
Newbiggin	NY 945607
Newbiggin-by-the-Sea	NZ 308875
Newbrough	NY 872678
Newburn	NZ 166653
Newcastle upon Tyne (includes Jesmond Dene and Scotswood)	NZ 250650
Newton	NZ 035645
Newton-by-the-Sea	NU 241245
Norham	NT 900473
North Charlton	NU 168229
North Shields	NZ 355683
North Sunderland	NU 212315
Nunwick	NY 879741
Otterburn	NY 886932
Ouston	NZ 073705
Ovington	NZ 067637
Paddaburn	NY 641777
Pallinsburn	NT 912382
Pegswood	NZ 227873
Plankey Mill	NY 794621
Plashetts	NY 665902
Plessey Woods	NZ 240795
Ponds and pools	
Ashington	NZ 270888
Big Waters	NZ 228734
Cresswell	NZ 283943
Havannah	NZ 210722
Holywell	NZ 319752
Monk's House	NU 204335
Newton	NU 242241
South Linton	NZ 270908
Wallsend Swallow	NZ 302692
Ponteland	NZ 166729
Powburn	NU 062163
Prestwick Carr	NZ 190735
Prudhoe	NZ 095630
Radcliffe	NU 268025
Ratcheugh	NU 231152
Raylees Common	NY 920900
Redesmouth	NY 865822
Reservoirs	
Catcleugh	NT 735034
Colt Crag	NY 935783
Derwent	NZ 010530
Fontburn	NZ 042934
Hallington	NY 060762
Whittle Dene	NZ 065682
Riding Mill	NZ 019615
Ridsdale	NY 909844
Rivers	
Aln	NU 243104
Alwin	NT 927065
Blyth	NZ 300827
Coquet	NU 263050
Irthing	NY 685750
Lyne	NZ 300910
Rede	NY 870838
Till	NT 875430
Tweed	NU 980530
Tyne	NZ 370685
Wansbeck	NZ 285856
Whitadder	NT 970520
Ross Links	NU 140375
Rothbury	NU 058016
Roughtinglinn	NT 978369
Rowley Burn	NY 900558
Ryal	NZ 015743
St Mary's Island	NZ 352754
Scremerston	NU 007492
Seahouses	NU 220320
Seaton Burn	NZ 239738
Seaton Delaval	NZ 304755
Seaton Sluice	NZ 335768
Seghill	NZ 288744
Settlingstones	NY 846682
Sewingshields	NY 810703
Shaftoe	NZ 059818
Shawdon Hall	NU 092144
Shilbottle	NU 196087
Shilvington	NZ 158810
Shitlington Common	NY 800820
Simonburn	NY 872736
Simonside Hills	NZ 026986
Skate Roads	NU 155375
Slaley	NY 976577
Spindlestone	NU 151332
Spittal	NU 005516
Stamfordham	NZ 080718
Stannington	NZ 213795
Stocksfield	NZ 053612
Styford	NZ 019622
Swarland	NU 163019
Swinhoe	NU 094355
Tarset	NY 793857
Thirlwall	NY 659662
Threestoneburn	NT 975205
Throckley	NZ 158668
Thropton	NU 032022
Thrunton	NU 090109
Tranwell	NZ 188836
Tweedmouth	NT 995523
Twizell	NU 127287
Tynemouth	NZ 370693
Unthank	NY 730630
Usway	NT 886145
Walbottle	NZ 170663
Wall	NY 917690
Wallington	NZ 029843
Wallsend	NZ 300663
Walwick	NY 903705
Warden	NY 915665
Warenford	NU 137286
Waren Mill	NU 146344
Wark	NY 860770
Wark (on Tweed)	NT 826386
Warkworth	NU 248060
Whalton	NZ 131814
Whickhope	NY 682862
Whitfield	NY 782574
Whitley Bay	NZ 360720
Whittingham	NU 070120
Wideopen	NZ 242726
Widdrington	NZ 255959
Wooler	NT 992280
Wooley Sanatorium	NY 967595
Woolsington	NZ 197698
Wylam	NZ 115647