

## THE BIRDS OF BETLEY MERE AND SURROUNDING AREA.

Betley mere is situated close to the village of Betley in Staffordshire. The county boundary with Cheshire passed through the middle of the mere until some administrative tidying up of the County boundaries put the whole mere in Staffordshire during the mid 60's.

The mere is 14 hectares in area and is bounded on three sides by reed beds and on two sides by damp woodland consisting mainly of Willow and Alder. The mere is in a shallow sandy basin, of glacial origin, which shows the full range of stages leading from open water to a fen wood on peat.

The area around the mere includes wet peaty grazing land with drainage channels, some agricultural land and a small ornamental wood near Betley Village known as The Dingle. There was originally an additional smaller mere known as Little Mere but when the drainage system was diverted around this Mere in 1968 it dried out and is now a reed bed only.

The area studied by the Writers is approximately 70 hectares and a large part of the area, around 35 hectares, is an S.S.S.I.

The area has been visited by the writers on average every three weeks since October 1971 with more frequent visits each year in the Spring. On each visit every species seen was recorded and the same route was followed each time.

In the species notes that follow the following definitions have been used :-

- Common - At least one bird seen on  $\frac{1}{4}$  of visits.
- Regular - At least one bird seen on  $\frac{1}{2}$  of visits but less than  $\frac{3}{4}$ .
- Sporadic - At least one bird seen on less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of visits but seen annually.

In each case only the visits at the appropriate time of the year for the species are included e.g. whole year for Wren - April to September for Swallow. Also the definitions are not quantitative in any way. They apply equally to one bird as to one hundred.

B.C. means breeding confirmed at least once in the period

P.B. means probably bred at least once in the period.

These are based on categories 1 + 2 of the C.O.A. breeding survey.

Systematic list of Species recorded.

Little Grebe (Tachybaptus ruficollis) B.C.

Common. Seen or heard on most visits. Max 8 on 26. 9. 76.

Great Crested Grebe (Podiceps cristatus) B.C.

Common but usually missing in mid Winter. Max 6 on 29. 4. 77.  
One pair breeds annually.

18 on 17.3.85 - Down to 4 by 21/4/85.

Cormorant (Phalacrocorax~~arab.~~)

Single birds 8.10. 72 and 15. 2. 76 → 27.3.85 + 24/4/85.

Heron (Ardea Cinerea).

Sporadic visits by individuals feeding in the gutters. Seen at all times of year. 2 birds on two occasions in 1982 Summer otherwise all single birds.

Mute Swan (Cygnus olor) B.C.

Regular with max of 14 on 18. 2. 73 and 15. 2. 76. Bred 1974, 1979 and 1982 raising 3 young on each occasion. Pair present throughout breeding seasons of 1980 and 1981 but did not breed.

Did not breed 83 - No birds  
84 - nil

85 - 5 on 2/7  
3 on 18/8

White Fronted Goose (Anser Albifrons)

86 2 on 19/7

Free flying hybrid goose I. 4. 78 resembled this species.

Canada Goose (Branta canadensis)

Sporadic with max 30 23. 11. 75. All November - May except for 19 on 5. 9. 82.

40 on 23/1/83 38 on 16.7.84.

Shelduck (Tadorna tadorna)

8 on 31. 8. 75 which is of course an unusual time. 2. 15. 5. 88.

Moscovy Duck

I on 28. 3. 82.

Wigeon (Anas Penelope)

Eight records Nov - March. Max 60 on II. I. 76, 35 on 26. II. 75.  
Others 5 or less

Gadwall - 1 on 18/9/83.

Teal (Anas Crecca)

<sup>Sixteen</sup> Six records Sept - March. 2 - 4 birds on each occasion.  
except for 15 on 20.2.83

Mallard (Anas Platyrhynchos) B.C.

Common. Less than 35 birds except for 75 on 2. II. 75. So 18/8/83.

Shoveler (Anas Clypeata)

Sporadic. All records between 10th September and 4th May. Usually less than 10 but 20 on. II. I. 76, II on 22. 3. 81.

Pochard (Anythya Ferina) Bred in 1960's per another observer.

Sporadic. Usually less than 10 but a few up to 30 and 80 on II. I. 76 and 40 on 24. I. 76.

Tufted Duck (Anythya Fuligula) B. C.

Common. Usually 5 - 50 but 120 30. 9. 79, 90 24. 4. 74, 90 13. 4. 80, 70 31. 3. 74. Bred most years.

Goldeneye (Bucephola clangula)

Eight records of 1 - 3 birds between 23 Nov. and 18 Jan.

Snow (Merqus Albellus)

1 male 15. 2. 76.

Goosander (Merqus merganser)

2 on I. 12. 74, 3 15. 12. 74, 4 26. 12. 74

Ruddy Duck (Oxyura Jamaicensis) B.C.

Common. Recorded every month. In the earlier years birds arrived at the mere in March/April and left in November but in later years they stay longer and arrive back earlier. First January record in 1983. Usually 1 - 5 but 10 on 29. 4. 77 and 16. 4. 78. A female with very small duckling on the late date of I. 10. 78

16 on 16. 9. 84

12 15. 4. 84

13 6. 5. 84 - 4. -

12 - 4 ducklings 18. 8. 85

Sparrowhawk (Accipiter Nisus)

Single birds 15.12.74, 7. 3.76, 21.10.79 and 21.12.80.  
12.2.84

Buzzard (Buteo buteo)

Single birds 14.4.74, 5.5.74 and 28.3.76.

Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus)

Regular. Usually one bird but occasionally a pair seen.

Sporadic 84 and 89,

Red legged Partridges (Alectoris Rufa) B.C.

2 on 26.3.78, 1 10.6.79. Family of 8 29.7.79, 8 7.2.82.  
Large numbers turned down locally by shooting tenants.

Grey Partridge (Perdix perdix) P.S.

14.4.74 (2), 15.2.76 (2), 28.3.76 (2) and 4. 12.77 (5)

2 24.4.83 6.5.84(2) 17.3.85(2)

Pheasant (Phasianus cochicus)

Single birds on 3.10.71, 6.5.73, 29.4.79, 5.5.79, and 16.3.80.  
Probably released by shooting syndicate.

1 18.9.82

Water Rail (Rallus aquaticus)

Singles on 8.4.75, 15.11.81, 26.12.82 and two birds on 2.11.75, 23.11.75, 14.12.75, 14.1.79, 30.11.80, 26.12.81, 12.12.82. Apart from the 1st record in April all others November - January in 5 separate Winters indicating an influx of winter birds.

Moorhen (Gallinula chloropus) B.C.

Common.

Coot (Fulica atra) B.C.

Common. Usually around 50-100 birds but 2 only 26.12.81 when mere frozen.  
Max. 500 Oct 75 + 300 13.9.81.

Oystercatcher (Haematopus ostalegus)

One 28.2.82.

Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus)

Sporadic. Only the odd bird at the mere edge or an occasional small flock flying over.

Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticula)

Other observers have recorded this on passage.

Dunlin (Calidris alpina)

Single birds on spring passage 6.4.75, 4. 5. 80.

Woodcock 1 12.2.84

Snipe (Gallinago gallinago)

Bred in 60's per another observer.

Regular in earlier years with up to 30 birds present in the autumn in the wet fields. A sharp decline after 1978 with only 2 single birds in 1979, one in 1980, four in 1981 and none at all in 1982.

23.10.83 (1) 1.12.83 (5) 22.1.84 (4) 15.12.85 (1)

Curlew (Numenius arquata)

Spring records in 3 years 14. 4.74, 27.4.74, 9.6.74 (2), 17.4.76 (2), 29.4.77 6.5.84 (1) 5.5.85.

Green Sand 1 on 11.12.83 near guller.

Common Sandpiper (Actitis hypoleucos)

Single birds on spring passage in 1974, 1976, 1979 and 1980. On 4.5.80 2 birds on the same day and on 13. 9. 81 the only autumn passage bird.

2 on 24.4.83 1 on 15.4.84 1 on 20.4.86

Black headed gull (Larus ridibundus)

Common. Less in mid Summer.

Common Gull (Larus Canus)

Sporadic in Winter until December 1978. None since.

Lesser Black backed Gull (Larus Fuscus)

Regular July to April - Most records in autumn.

Herring Gull (Larus argentatus)

Regular until 1978 and sporadic afterwards.

Great Black-backed Gull (Larus marinus)

Five records in Winters 73/4, 74/5 and 75/6. None since.

Common Tern (Sterna Hirundo) )  
 )  
Arctic Tern (Sterna paradisaea) ) Recorded on passage by other  
 ) observers.  
Black Tern (Chlidonias niger) )  
 )

Stock Dove (Columba oenas)

Sporadic.

Wood Pigeon (Columba palumbus) B.C.

Common.

Feral Pigeon (Columba livia)

Common.

Turtle Dove (Streptopelia Turtur)

One record on 2I. 6. 81 but other observers have recorded this species more frequently on passage.

Collared Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) B.C.

Common. Usually 2-3 birds near Betley village.

Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus) P.B.

Common in earlier years with 1- 3 birds seen on visits at appropriate times of year. Only single birds since 1979 and in 1981 only one sighting. Earliest on 20.4. 74. The Reed Warblers are no doubt the attraction. *Singled in 84, 85, 86*

Little Owl (Athene noctua)

Single birds 17. 3. 74, 3I. 3. 74, 27. 4. 74, and 2I. 6. 81.

*12.2.84 15.12.85 11.10.86*

Tawny Owl (Strix Aluco) P.B.

Regular sightings near known roosts.

Swift. (Apus apus)

Common over mere in Summer. Earliest 4.5.73. No late records.

*5.5.85,*

Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) F.B.

Sporadic visitor to mere and gutters. Records throughout the year, but the majority in Winter. 2 birds seen on  $\beta$  occasions.

Green Woodpecker (Picus viridis)

4 records only. 10. 11. 74, 5. 1. 75 (2), 9. 2. 75 and 19. 10. 75.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (Dendrocopos major) B.C.

Regular until 1980 and since then only  $\beta$  records.

Lesser spotted Woodpecker (Dendrocopos minor) B.C.

Nest found in 1972 but only five records since 4. 5. 75, 15. 2. 76, 26. 12. 76, 29. 4. 77, 4. 5. 80.

Skylark (Alauda arvensis) P.B.

Common in Spring and Summer. A few winter records only.

*Subsequently a (at least 84 at sea)*

Sand Martin (Riparia riparia)

Sporadic over mere April to September.

Swallow (Hirundo rustica) B.C.

Common over mere. Earliest 13. 4. 80 and latest 27. 10. 74.

House Martin (Delichon urbica)

Common over mere. Earliest 20. 4. 74 and latest 17. 10. 75.

Tree Pipit (Anthus trivialis)

One record 20. 4. 74.

Meadow Pipit (Anthus pratensis)

Sporadic in Winter in wet meadows becoming more frequent, at end of period. Summer records 20. 4. 75 and 2. 5. 82. 24. 4. 83

Yellow Wagtail (Motacilla Flava) B.C.

3 records 6. 5. 73, 5. 5. 74, 10. 6. 79

21. 4. 83

5. 5. 85 (2)

Grey Wagtail (Motacilla cinerea) B.C.

Sporadic Spring and Winter records most years but bred 1978 and 1979.

Pied Wagtail (Motacilla alba yarrellii) P.B.

Sporadic throughout year. Birds seen most often at small sewage plant.

Wren (Troglodytes troglodytes) B.C.

Common.

Duncock (Prunella modularis) B.C.

Common.

Robin (Erithacus rubecula) B.C.

Common.

Whinchat (Saxicola rubetra)

I on 6.5.73 on passage.

Blackbird (Turdus merula) B.C.

Common.

Field Fare (Turdus pilaris)

Common. Earliest 19th October and latest 17th April.

*Redwing - Common, Earliest 6/11 1978 6/4*

Song Thrush (Turdus philomelos) B.C.

Common.

Mistle Thrush (Turdus viscivorus) B.C.

Common. Usually 1 - 2 birds in the Dingle Wood.

Grasshopper Warbler. (Locustella naeria)

2 records only on 9. 7. 72 and 12. 7. 81.

Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*) P.B.

Surprisingly uncommon in view of the suitable habitat.  
Regular 1971 to 1973 but only 4 since. 4. 5. 75, 28.5.78, 18.5.80,  
20. 7. 80. → 4/6/83.

Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) B.C.

Common in reed beds. Earliest 19. 4. and latest 15. 9. - 10 singing  
males in 1981. 16/5/81.  
Subjectively - how in 75, 74 then 73 5 singing (17.82) } 5. 6. 81  
nos. increasing 76/7 } not covered

Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*) P.B.

One on 21. 6. 81 in territory.

Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) P.B.

Sporadic. Usually one or two records only each year. None in 1972,  
1975, 1978 and 1982.

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*) P.B.

One 21. 6. 81 in territory.  
→ 4/6/83

Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*) P.B.

Regular. Earliest 20. 4. and latest 29. 7.

Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*) B.C.

Common. Earliest 27. 3 and latest 21. 9. (a singing bird)

Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) B.C.

Common. Earliest 11. 4. and latest 13. 9.

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) P.B.

Regular October to June and occasional Summer records.

Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) B.C.

Regular. Earliest 6th May and latest 15th September.

None since 1980

Pied Fly Catcher. (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

Recorded on passage by other watchers.

Long tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) B.C.

Regular. More common in Winter.

Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*) P.B.

Regular all years except 1975 when none seen, 1981 only one on 25. IO. and 1982 only one on 17.I. All Marsh/Willow Tits that were positively identified by call were Willow Tits. Some of the silent birds seen may have been Marsh Tits.

Coal Tits (*Parus ater*) P.B.

Sporadic only with none in 1977 or 1981. Most records in Winter.

Blue Tits (*Parus caeruleus*) B.C.

Common.

Great Tit (*Parus major*) B.C.

Common.

Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*) B.C.

Regular 1 - 2 birds.

Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) P.B.

Regular.

Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) P.B.

Regular.

Magpie (*Pica Pica*) B.C.

Common .

Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*) B.C.

Common.

Rook (*Corvus Frugilegus*) B.C.

In the earliest years there was a small Rookery in the dingle wood of 5 - 10 nests. These trees were felled and a rookery started in trees by Little Mere. This has steadily grown from 3 in 1975 to ~~4~~ 8 in 1982.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) B.C.

Common

Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) B.C.

Common. Large autumn roosts in mere woods. Never counted but upto 1000 birds approx.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) B.C.

Common near village. No records away from habitations.

Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) P.B.

Regular until 25. II. 79 and no records since.

4.6.83 5.5.85.

Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) B.C.

Common.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)

Large flocks of 100 approx in 75/6 winter. Small flock 2 - 5 in 78/9. Otherwise only 1 on 8.2.81 and 2 on 28.2.82.

Green Finch (*Carduelis chloris*) P.B.

Regular to end of 1980 but only 3 records since then, in November 1981, December 1981 and 2. 5. 82.

24.4.83 15.5.83 22.1.84

Gold Finch (*Carduelis carduelis*) P.B.

Sporadic. Between 1 and 4 records each year. 30 on 17. 10. 76.

Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)

7 winter records in 4 winters of 1 - 15 birds.

Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*) P.B.

Sporadic records mostly in Spring. None in 1982.

Redpoll (*Carduelis flamma*)

5 records only. 6.4.75, 20.4.75, 6 on 27.3.77, 15.4.79 and 5 on 16.3.80.

Bull Finch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) P.B.

Regular to 16. S. 81 apart from 1978 when no records. A pair on 26. 12. 82 were the first for 18 months.

Yellow hammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) P.B.

Regular.

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) B.C.

Regular.

### DISCUSSION.

In 11 years the writers have recorded 106 species in the area and other watchers have seen an additional 5 species making 111 in total. 40 species have been confirmed breeding and a further 22 probably bred in the area.

This is a good total of species for such a small area and reflects the wide range of varied habitats present. The area has already been altered by tree felling and drainage in the 60's and more tree felling in the 70s. Any further Farming "improvements" involving further improved drainage plans or more tree felling would markedly reduce the area's ornithological value.

The mere is also subject to disturbance which has a detrimental effect on the waterfowl. There is regular fishing from the mere edge by members of fishing clubs but the waterfowl tolerate this providing the fishermen do not utilise the whole circumference of the mere. Occasionally, however, fishing is carried out from boats and also occasionally there is some sailing. When this happens and when the fishermen are all round the mere edge the small size of the water leaves no refuge for wildfowl so the vast majority leave.

The whole study area is a classic example of a good ornithological site which could be irretrievably damaged by either a change in farming practice or an increase in leisure activities. It is to be hoped that the area's S.S.S.I. status will help to preserve its present value as an ornithological site .

### SUMMARY.

The results of an eleven year (1971 - 1982) continuing survey of the birds of Betley mere and the surrounding area are shown. Breeding species are identified in the text and the future prospects for the area are briefly discussed.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

Most of the area is accessible via public footpaths but the Dinglewood is a private wood and thanks are due to Professor Brown of Betley Court for allowing the writer's access to this wood.

Alan and Ken Booth.

January 1983.

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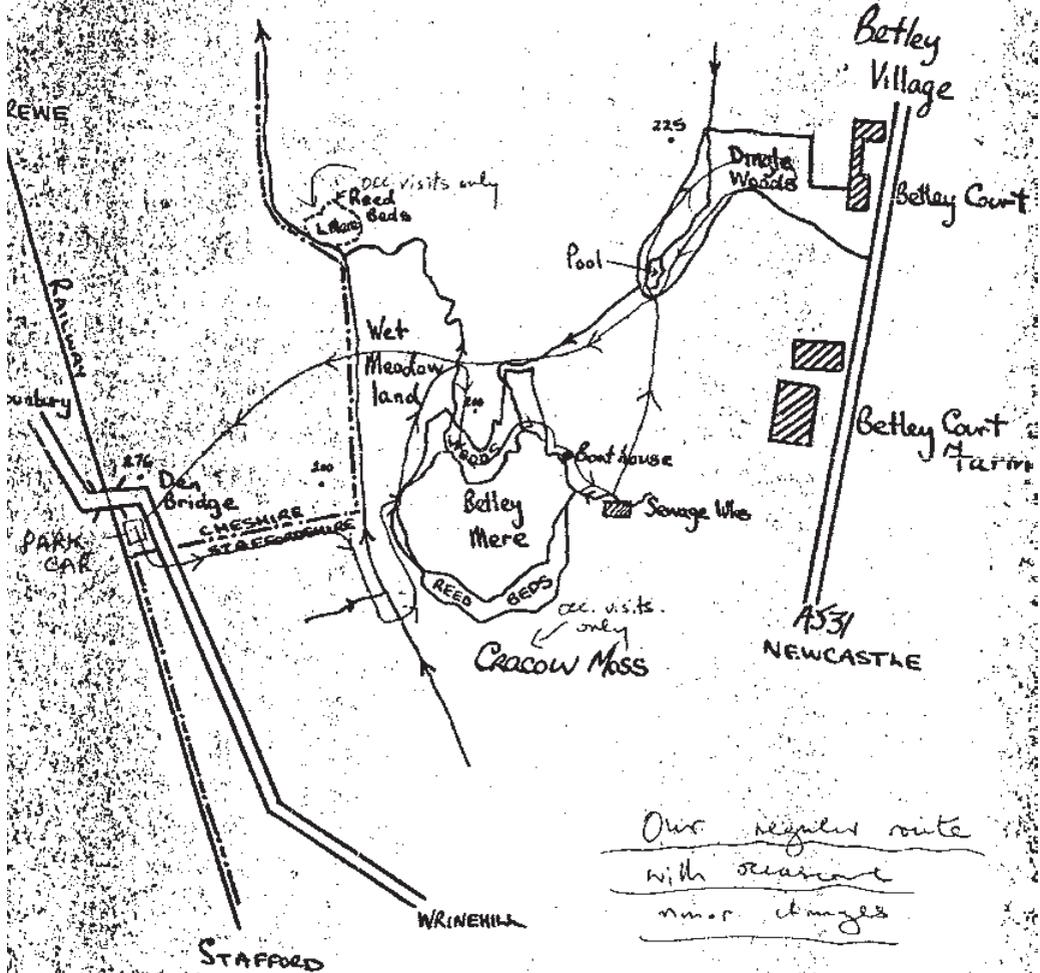
160 CAULSWORTH ROAD

MALDEN

2° 23' WEST

Route

A Booth



Our regular route  
with seasonal  
minor changes

BETLEY MERE & ENVIRONS

Scale

or HEIGHTS  
 at above sea level