

In a remarkable parallel with the big political event of this summer, the year 1975 will also be remembered for the moment that the great British public decided on our future participation in Europe. Whilst it may now seem somewhat ironic that the 'Yes' campaign included the likes of Margaret Thatcher (complete with multi-coloured EEC jumper), the vast majority of our leading industrialists (a term that now seems to have suffered a 'headcount realignment' of its own), and most of our beloved newspaper barons (still UK-domiciled in those days), it was the bitter recriminations which followed within the defeated 'No' campaign that perhaps had most impact, laying the foundations for the future split in Harold Wilson's Labour government. Whilst Wilson may have found himself on the wrong side of history in terms of popularity (devaluing the pound tends to annoy people for some reason), one wonders if any of the current crop of largely vacuous career-politicians could hold a torch to any of the ground-breaking achievements presided over by Huddersfield's most famous son. This included the Equal Pay and Race Relations Acts, the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the Open University, and ending theatre censorship to name but a few – all achieved whilst sticking the proverbial two fingers up to US foreign policy and preventing Britain's full-scale involvement in the ideological mire that was Vietnam. Over to you Boris....

In the world of bird watching, there was no decision to make regarding mass arrivals from continental Europe – they were still welcomed with open arms along any coastline, although it must be said that 1975 will long be remembered by rarity hunters as the gift that kept on giving. The year began with a prolonged mild spell, which saw some remarkable records of over-wintering migrants, beginning with a summer-plumaged Black Tern in Kent. This was followed by a Turtle Dove in Suffolk, Whinchats in Kent, Berkshire and Devon, Garden Warbler and Whitethroat in Durham and Hertfordshire respectively, flocks of up to 15 Swallows along the south coast, and arguably best of all, a Spotted Flycatcher in Devon on 10th February: an early pioneer of the 5:2 diet perhaps?

Spring was once again dominated by an early cold spell, which delayed those migrants that had actually bothered to move south the previous autumn. What followed was one of the most confusing rarity overlaps in history, with April bringing Britain's first spring Pechora Pipit at Spurn, followed by Dark-eyed Juncos in Glamorgan and Gwynedd, a Pallas's Sandgrouse on the Isle of May and a Pine Grosbeak on Holy Island during May, rounded off by Britain's first record of Hermit Thrush on Fair Isle in early June, a series of records that would have tied even Norman Elkins up in isobars.

The breeding season again saw mixed fortunes, with record numbers of Fulmar, Great and Arctic Skuas in the far north, a poor year for Black-necked Grebe and Corncrake, but a welcome revival in resident species such as Wren, Goldcrest and Meadow Pipit. Amongst the summer migrants, Swallows and Tree Pipits appeared to have bounced back from previous lows, but Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher continued to fall into their post-Sahel troughs. This period also saw Britain's first White-tailed Plover in Warwickshire, two Pectoral Sandpipers summering in north-west Scotland, whilst a pair of Spotted Sandpipers actually laid four eggs on the Isle of Skye, but sadly they didn't hatch – the first Nearctic waders to breed in the Western Palearctic.

In an autumn that still burnishes long in the memory for those that witnessed some of the treats on offer, it's easy to see why Ian Wallace called it the 'most magical ever experienced'. After a strong passage of Garganey in August which saw up to 200 gathered in Kent alone, a total of 25 Aquatic Warblers were recorded across England, whilst Black-winged Pratincole and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were seen in Leicestershire and Berkshire respectively. Waders continued to arrive throughout September, with Curlew Sandpipers particularly evident until an influx of Buff-breasted and Pectoral Sandpipers stole the headlines later in the month, when south-westerly gales also provided the one of the most diverse arrivals of Nearctic land birds ever seen. After a Black-billed Cuckoo in Cleveland, it was the Isles of Scilly which fully cemented its reputation in the psyche of British birders with the unbelievable occurrence of Britain's first Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, accompanied by only the second-

ever Black-and-white Warbler and a Scarlet Tanager. Not to be outdone, Fair Isle waded in with its own first for Britain with not one, but two Tennessee Warblers, whilst other 'yanks' included Red-eyed Vireo, Blackpoll Warbler and two Bobolinks. The great birds kept coming: a Crested Lark at Dungeness was then usurped by an even more incredible Bimaculated Lark, again on Scilly. A White's Thrush in Shetland and a Black-throated Thrush in Norfolk continued the eastern theme, before the most mythical prize of all arrived on Fair Isle: Britain's first Siberian Rubythroat, not forgetting the Red-flanked Bluetail and eastern race Redstart also in the vicinity! Along the east coast, things were also hotting up nicely, with a Desert Warbler at Spurn, multiple arrivals of Radde's and Dusky Warblers amongst a then-record influx of both Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warblers, followed by an Olive-backed and two Pechora Pipits. There was also a strong showing of Fenno-Scandian species in late October, which included a noticeable arrival of Parrot Crossbills and a plethora of rare buntings to the tune of 20 Ortolan, 13 Little, eight Rustic and two Yellow-breasted Buntings. Whilst November was typically quieter, this most famous of autumns ended with a Little Crake in Dorset, a Killdeer in Leicestershire, the fifth record of Ring-billed Gull in Glamorgan and a remarkable late Alpine Swift in London – a memorable few months indeed!

Whilst the Sheffield area was never going to be able to compete with a cast list of that magnitude, the annual report of that year was arguably the best produced by the Sheffield Bird Study Group so far. A glossy, laminated cover produced by Higham Press depicting a male Black Redstart included a first of a different kind: the artistic talents of a certain Paul Leonard. The Chief Officers of Marcus Moore (Chairman), Keith Tayles (Secretary), Harold Holland (Treasurer) and David Herringshaw (Recorder), along with Betty Moore and John Linton Smith, continued their good work, although the expanding involvement of others was also now evident, with sub-committees well-established for Records, Surveys and Conservation. The Secretary's Report commented on another successful year, with membership now reaching the heady heights of 151 and indoor meetings included eight illustrated lectures during the year on diverse themes such as 'Some Scottish Birds', 'Ringing' and 'A Year in a Wood', complemented by more local topics, such as 'Blackbrook Wood' by Harold Smith, 'The Ewden Valley' by Keith Clarkson and 'Harthill Reservoir' by Harold Holland. Regional expertise was also welcomed in the form of 'Recording in South Yorkshire' by the YNU's John Dale and 'A Personal View of the South Yorkshire Environment' by R. Mitchell, author of the classic book 'Pennine Birds'.

In their Foreword, David Herringshaw and David Gosney reported on a significant rise in printing costs which had sadly curtailed the number of articles and short notes included. However, the mooted of a second SBSG publication to provide a home to both this and the results of many of the other detailed studies being carried out by members was also mentioned for the first time – the ornithological journal *The Magpie* was born. With local ornithology seemingly going from strength to strength, there was still a warning to guard against complacency, but the cause for optimism is palpable and ended with a reference to the start of the Tetrads Atlas launched that same year: the 1975-80 breeding bird survey was up and running!

In terms of recording, a total of 183 species were documented during the year, with three new species for the area. This included the remarkable discovery of a sub-adult Spoonbill on the bottom reservoir at Rivelin Dams on 6th–7th June, which sadly not everyone was made aware of during its brief stay. This contrasted with the now famous Buff-breasted Sandpiper found by Terry Hobson at Redmires Res on 10th September, which attracted visitors from far and wide until 26th – the first local record of a Nearctic species and only the third record for Yorkshire at the time. Those that missed it were given a second bite of the cherry between 11th and 14th October, although given the numbers of this delightful wader within the country at the time, was Keith Clarkson's discovery another bird? And if not, where did it disappear to for 14 days?! Much easier to explain was the long-overdue Smew at Langsett Res on 7th December, although an interesting footnote to this occurrence is that it remains the only upland record all these years later!

In terms of the systematic list, a skim through the pages again provides a wealth of information and a reminder how some things have changed beyond all recognition, whilst other things have not, both in

terms of the birds and the birders recording them. The year began with an impressive count of 460 Mallard at Broomhead Res on 4th January – fairly typical in those days and a stark reminder of how this species' decline has largely gone unnoticed over recent decades. The recent run of Gannet records continued, with the first seen over Wadsley on 5th February, whilst an exhausted individual picked up later in the year near Crosspool on 2nd October was released three days later in Brighton of all places. The early months also saw a number of Waxwing records on account of the previous autumn's influx, including a peak count of 22 on Chesterfield Road, whilst a remarkable number of Great Grey Shrikes continued to winter in the area: recorded at a whopping 28 localities during the year, it is interesting to note that in addition to traditional sites we still check today, records were also received from places such as the Porter Valley, Calver, Baslow, Monsal Dale, Killamarsh and Thrybergh Tip.

The spring got off to a good start with an Osprey, which flew north up the upper Derwent Valley on 9th April. It's easy to forget just how rare this species was at the time and this individual was the first modern record since the formation of the Group, with the previous report at nearby Ladybower Res during 1971. After a fine Dotterel was discovered amongst the Golden Plover flock at High Bradfield on 17th May, it was the turn of another scarce raptor to grace the uplands, with a Marsh Harrier on the Midhope-Langsett moors, which remained into early June – only the third local record. On the lowlands, the importance at sites along the Rother Valley was also starting to be realised, thanks to a young Pete Wragg, who was treated to a party of three Little Terns at Treeton Dyke on 16th May.

A look at the breeding season once again illustrates the fluctuating fortunes of our local birdlife over the past four decades. The abundance of some species provides a stark contrast with the current situation: for example, a record of six Cuckoo north over Redmires Res on 11th May and four singing Turtle Dove in the Moss Valley would certainly attract some attention these days. Passage records of the latter species were also prominent that year, with parties of seven south over Hollow Meadows and five east over East Moor during June, followed by four September records, including one at Redmires Res on 11th and an exhausted juvenile at Clowne on 28th, all indicative of better times.

On the uplands, Wood Warbler were particularly abundant, with 32 singing males at 20 localities, five pairs of Pied Flycatcher fledged a total of 21 young, primarily at Padley Gorge, where a pair of Hawfinch also fed three juveniles in the nest on 3rd June, one of nine sites utilised by this species. In contrast, Siskin were only just starting to expand their distribution, with several summer records but no confirmed breeding pairs, while three pairs of Stonechat (that raised five broods) was considered a 'good year'. The breeding Nightjar population was also undergoing a decline at this time and one of the two pairs present in north Derbyshire provided an interesting ringing return, with a juvenile killed by a car in Widnes just seven days later.

Elsewhere, a single successful pair of Grey Heron was the first confirmed breeding record since 1967, whilst in the Peak District, five males and two female Black Grouse at a traditional lek (and a juvenile subsequently shot later in the season) confirmed this species' presence for the time being. A Corncrake was again present during the summer, which saw six confirmed pairs of Short-eared Owl and a similar number of lowland breeding Little Ringed Plovers. Also on the lowlands, a pair of Black Redstart reared two broods within the city boundary, whilst the general abundance of commoner species was demonstrated by flocks of 1,000 Greenfinch at Thrybergh Wood, 450 House Sparrow at Wentworth, 210 Tree Sparrow in the Moss Valley, 140 Corn Bunting at Bolsover and finally 150 Yellowhammer at Bradfield.

The autumn was particularly memorable for waders, which at that time seemed to frequent sites for days on end due to being largely undisturbed – imagine that now! Apart from the aforementioned Buff-breasted Sandpiper, the benefits of regular observation at Redmires Res by the likes of John Atter, Keith Clarkson, Ken Knowles and others saw this now much-maligned locality reach its zenith. Starting with an incredible 2,000 Lapwing on 31st August, a day which saw only the third-ever Black-tailed Godwit for the area, the exposed shorelines subsequently hosted multiple records of Grey Plover,

Knot, Sanderling, Ruff, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper, along with gatherings of up to 70 Dunlin and 94 Snipe – glory days indeed! Wader records weren't just the preserve of Redmires, however, as Barbrook and Ramsley Res were still working reservoirs capable of pulling in the birds and Tinsley SF was also starting to build up a reputation thanks to the efforts of Clive McKay. Of the two records of Wood Sandpiper during the year, one was at Ramsley Res in August, whilst the October record at Tinsley SF was one of the latest ever Yorkshire records at the time. Other goodies during the early autumn included a Red Kite watched moving east over Walkley by Ian Francis and later seen over Wincobank on 1st August, a scarce bird anywhere away from its Welsh strongholds in those days and only the second ever record for the area, with either it or another seen over Elmton by Roy Frost later in the month. A Firecrest discovered in Wyming Brook by Paul Leonard was one of five reports during a bumper year for this species. On reflection, this record was perhaps more significant than was realised at the time, and must surely have been of local origin? A Black-necked Grebe at Barbrook Res on 3rd August was an excellent upland record, even in those days, and was followed by several parties of Black Tern, including a maximum of seven at Redmires Res on 14th. A Little Tern at Ulley Res on 2nd September was also of note, as were an impressive five Garganey at Redmires Res on 12th September – still the largest gathering ever recorded in the area.

The other noticeable feature of this autumn from an annual report perspective was the first documented records of visible migration through the area. Although Keith Clarkson may have stumbled on this phenomenon in the beginning due to long, often birdless hours sitting at Redmires, his enquiring mind and enthusiasm soon started to bear fruit. Although the 1975 records are limited to several thousand Meadow Pipits counted moving south on 28th September and a thrush movement involving 750 Fieldfare and 425 Redwing on 26th October, little did Keith realise what impact this addictive and valuable form of birding would have on Sheffield ornithology's development over the following decades. During the same month of October, it was the turn of Midhope Res to host a star bird in the form of a Woodlark on 18th and 26th October. This represented the first record in the area since one at Padley Gorge in 1958, and in those days it was still a scarce migrant away from the restricted breeding population in the both the Dukeries and the Brecks of East Anglia.

The final months of the year were marked by a noticeable influx of Hooded Crows, which – unlike nowadays – were still a regular passage migrant along the east coast. In all, there were seven reports, with records from Bleaklow, Hathersage, Thrybergh and Tinsley between 11th-13th October as well as Burbage and Ramsley during November. Elsewhere, an immature Long-tailed Duck was present at Crowhole Res on 22nd November, up to 12 roosting Long-eared Owls congregated in north Derbyshire, eight Waxwings were in Hillsborough Park on 28th November and there were several sightings of Rough-legged Buzzard on the western moors.

The year closed with a Starling roost of 100,000 at Wentworth Woodhouse during December, several reports of Bewick's Swan, including herds of nine at Renishaw Park and six at Thrybergh Res, up to five Snow Buntings on the western moors and last but not least a stunned Rock Pipit was picked up alive in the city centre on 20th December.

Towards the back of the report, it was apparent that the number of escaped species was also on the rise, presumably on the back of the increased observer coverage. An honourable mention was made of the long-staying Golden Pheasant present in Wyming Brook from the previous year. Sadly, it was never seen again and instead of creating a legacy on the same lines as the famous Wolferton Triangle in Norfolk, rumours still abound that it ended up shot, stuffed and put inside a glass case in The Sportsman pub at Lodge Moor!

Finally, the growing popularity of the Group was well-illustrated by the list of observers that year, which had now reached an impressive 116 individuals. Amongst the familiar names already mentioned was a certain Roy Twigg; whatever happened to him I wonder?!