

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN MAY AND JUNE

For many birders, May is the most exciting month of the whole year, with spring migration in full swing.

It is the best month of the year to see passage waders, and in particular **SANDERLING**. As might be expected, sites to the east are good with places such as Orgreave Lakes and Rother Valley CP producing records most years, but, out west, Redmires and, in particular, Middleton Moor have a good track record with this species in its smart spring plumage, quite different from the black and white monochrome of birds on the east coast in winter.

Another “wader” which it is always a delight to see **DOTTEREL**. After all but disappearing from the local birding scene in the early years of this century, there has been a bit of a comeback recently, with one or two records most years. Typically these birds are found in upland areas, often in eroded or burnt areas of heather moorland, with sites such as Abney Moor and Stanage Edge visited more than once. However, there is always the chance of a “trip” of these birds in the wide open farmland areas in the east of the area, as shown by the group of seven birds at Carr Vale in 2013.

If you want to ensure your initials are in the annual bird report, then finding a **TURTLE DOVE** is a good way of doing it. The demise of this bird, both in the UK and internationally, is well known and, with no more than four records in the area each year since 2007, the local population mirrors that trend. May into June is the best time to find one of these birds “purring”, with sites to the east such as in the Thrybergh area, and the Rother Valley-Barlborough stretch most productive in recent years. Interestingly, however, one singing at Mickleden Beck in June 2010 was the first in the west of the area for many years.

South-easterly winds from the near continent in early May will send local birders to their nearest body of water looking for one particular long distance migrant, the **ARCTIC TERN**. Any area of water to the east could hold birds, with Rother Valley CP having a particularly good record, and birds also turning up at the “usual suspects” of Orgreave Lakes and Thrybergh CP, but also less well watched sites such as Treeton Dyke and Catcliffe Flash. Most years there are also sightings of one or two fly-throughs at upland sites such as Redmires and Middleton Moor but here, the birds rarely linger.

In some years, the same conditions bring **LITTLE GULL** and **BLACK TERN** to the area, and although recorded each year, these are more occasional visitors, rather than regular spring migrants. Little Gull is, nowadays, a bird almost exclusively of sites to the east, with Carr Vale NR and Rother Valley CP particularly productive, although Thrybergh CP and Orgreave Lakes are also likely sites. In the case of Black Tern, although the same sites are most likely, birds do turn up more regularly on the uplands, with Middleton Moor undoubtedly the best bet.

May is probably the best month to catch up with a couple of singing summer migrants which become hard to see later in the summer, with both **CUCKOO** and **WOOD WARBLER** at their most vocal. With Cuckoo, a few records each year come from well-watched sites to the east, but your best chance is probably on the moorland fringe at places such as Ramsley Moor/Big Moor, Lawrence Field/Longshaw, Blackamoor and Redmires. Birds are often seen in flight, pursued by small passerines mistaking them for small raptors. Sadly, numbers do seem to be in decline; from being a “given” on certain walks such as the annual Padley trip, now they are worth noting and, if seen/heard, it is often singly rather than multiple sightings.

Similarly, Wood Warbler is nowhere near as common as it was even ten years ago; sites which always had one have lost them, and strongholds such as Wyming Brook, Wharncliffe Wood and Padley Gorge hold reduced numbers. Interestingly, whilst records from the east are now restricted to lone males singing for a day or two in May, there have been more records from areas further north-west, such as the cloughs of the Derwentdale chain, perhaps where less human/dog disturbance allows this ground nester to hang on.

Finally, June is certainly the best month to see, or much more likely hear, two other summer migrants, **QUAIL** and **NIGHTJAR**. In a good “quail” year, records of the tri-syllabic song of this secretive species are received from both the east and west of the area, but in general you have the best chance in the west, with sites such as the Freebirch/Leash Fen area, Peat Pits and the limestone uplands being particularly good. If you can find a barley field in these areas, then a visit at dusk on a still June evening may be rewarded.

Nightjar is a bird of the moorland fringe, with sites from Hallam Moors northward through Strines, Agden and Broomhead Moors producing records most years. Get in position by 9.30 pm in mid-June, have plenty of insect repellent, chose a spot with an open background should the bird fly, and listen; hopefully you will hear the unmistakable churring of this weird bird, although locating it can be difficult, as the song rises and falls as the bird turns its head, as well as changing position when it flies.

It is possible that, as new areas of conifers are clear felled and regenerate, this bird is being under-recorded, so if you find such an area, it may be worth a visit.