

## Tony Gough's Diary

We publish another extract from the diaries of Tony Gough, the much respected, long-time member of our Group, who died in 2015. Tony lived his formative years in South Yorkshire and these entries cover a weekend's birding on his local patch and concerned the arrival of Terns.

### Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 1957 Ings Woods and Hoyle Mills Dam, near Hemsworth

Mainly heavy overcast with heavy rainy periods, light SW wind, occasional brighter periods with some sun. Thunderstorm late afternoon.

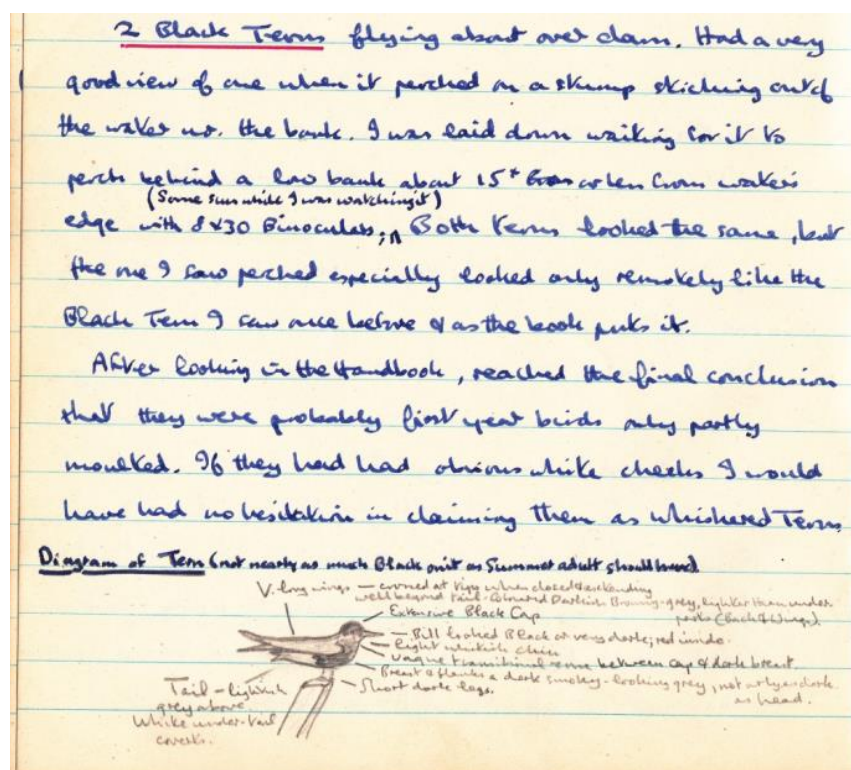
Went for a walk to the Ings Woods (Hemsworth) this morning. Saw a Snipe in a field at Ings – drumming and calling – alighted on a tree-top. Great Spotted Woodpecker there – drumming loudly some of the time. Garden Warbler returned – heard and saw one in Ings.

In a marshy tract of land at Kinsley and adjoining Ings – plenty of Snipe about, at least three almost constantly flying overhead and drumming. A Reed Bunting nest with five eggs there. Saw several Swallows flying above the Ings.

Found a Skylark's nest with four young in a field near Kinsley when I was moving across to Hagg Wood area.

Plenty of Sedge Warblers about now and heard another Garden Warbler at edge of Hagg Wood.

Two male Tufted, two male Pochard, two Coot, two Great Crested Grebes and four Mute Swans on Hoyle Mill Dam.



Two of the Mute Swans at a nest and I think Great Crested Grebes are nesting or going to try by the way that one in particular is hanging about the reeds.

Two Black Terns flying about over the dam. Had a very good view of one when it perched on a branch sticking out of the water near the bank. I was laid down behind a low bank about 15 feet or less from the water's edge with 8 x 30 binoculars waiting for it to perch (some sun while I was watching it). Both terns looked the same, but the one I saw perched especially looked only remotely like the Black Tern I saw once before and as the book puts it.

After looking in the Handbook, reached the final conclusion that they were probably first year birds only partly moulted. If they had had obvious white cheeks I would have had no hesitation in claiming them as Whiskered Terns

While watching the terns, the two swans which didn't own the nest were flying

about. One was very aggressive, kept chasing the other. Once it caught the other up in flight – flew over it and bit it in the middle of the back with its bill. Then they both alighted and began to fight – standing up with wings flailing and necks twined round one another – one got a firm grip on the upper fore-edge of the other's wing and held on though its head was being battered by the other's wing. Kept viciously pecking one another and trying to hold on – eventually one got on top of the other somehow and was pecking it near the base of its tail, while the victim, nearly submerged, had its head and neck stretched out beneath the other's tail-end, until it suddenly slipped out from underneath its assailant and half-flew, half-swam across the water.

One of the pair with the nest had been sailing round the fighters then chased the other swan away (an immature one). I don't know which one started the fight and couldn't tell which was which during the fray. After that the swans continued to chase one another, except for the isolated immature bird.

Two Swifts and one or two Swallows flying about above the dam.

Went back on an evening walk – now clearer and more sun, very calm.

Still two Great Crested Grebes, four Mute Swans and four Coot on Hoyle Mill Dam but only one male Tufted and one male Pochard (Dabchicks as well). Black Terns gone (been a thunderstorm not long before my walk).

Saw a Sparrowhawk (male I think) fly rapidly across dam and alight amongst trees on opposite side of dam – Starlings around there scattered as it landed. Later it flew again and dived at a small bird (a Whitethroat I think) which plunged in to a small bush close at hand – Sparrowhawk dived in after it, but lost it and flew back to a tree again – then flew away over fields keeping low.

A Hare seen feeding in a field near the dam; two Sand Martins seen near dam. A Report that MNR saw three Common Terns over Hoyle Mill Dam this afternoon – didn't stay long.



An Arctic Tern at Redcar Tarn, 11th May 2010  
photo: Ian Hargreaves



A Black Tern  
photo: Greg Lasley (see his website for more stunning images)

### **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May 1957 Hoyle Mills Dam, near Hemsworth**

Overcast, calm, some heavy rain in morning. Sunny intervals sometimes, and thundery. Light SW.

Four Mute Swans (two at nest), four Coot, five Dabchicks, pair Tufted, one male Pochard, two Great Crested Grebes on Hoyle Mill Dam this morning. At least half a dozen Swifts, one or two Sand Martins and several Swallows flying around dam.

Two Tawny Owls perched in an oak in Hagg Wood.

Late in morning an Arctic Tern arrived at the dam, only stayed about half an hour, readily perched on same stump as Black Tern did yesterday. Got a fairly good view of it – not perfectly certain it was Arctic, could have been a Common Tern, but its bill was blood-red, not an orange-red.

Rowan flowering – one particularly early bush has been in flower for a week or two.

Went for another walk in the evening – still overcast and rainy. Couldn't find the Lapwing's nest I found on Royd Moor several weeks since, though found some broken eggshells – not even any signs of Lapwings about – young probably hatched and fledged.

At dusk there were seven Pochard (six males) and three Tufted Ducks (two males) on Hoyle Mill Dam, as well as four Mute Swans and two Great Crested Grebes. Coming home across games fields on Holly Bank I noticed sudden movements on the ground at my feet – worn bare because of the football played there. Eventually I noticed that it was due to earthworms which were lying stretched out with one end anchored in their holes and were rapidly slithering back into their holes disturbed by my footsteps. Some didn't slip back until I touched them with my foot despite my stampings to urge them into movement. There seemed to be dozens of them lying about. The time was late dusk and it was raining slightly – perhaps the rain partly caused them to 'rise for air' so to speak.