

APRIL 1983

April is usually regarded as a month of change by birdwatchers - the last of the winter flocks of wildfowl and thrushes have more or less moved out by mid-month, leaving a few stragglers to add variety to the many summer visitors and passage migrants arriving from the south.

The last of the winter Pinkfeet were seen in flight over Newton Marsh and Pilling on the 2nd - the Pilling birds flew out over Morecambe Bay and away to the north. A flock of 'northern' Golden Plovers (500) was at Lytham Marsh on 23rd, whilst at Elswick Leys on the 18th, a flock of 100 of these magnificent birds was all that remained of that area's large wintering flock. The 67 Fieldfare at Marton Mere on the 15th was the largest group seen, and 8 Redwings at the same site on the 4th was the only record of that species during the month. The lack of any records of Black Redstarts during the month indicates that the Blackpool wintering population probably moved out at the end of March. Short eared Owls were present at a couple of sites throughout the month, and the last of the Merlin sightings was that of a single at Cockerham on 24th. The pair of Peregrines seen on one of the derelict cooling towers at Fleetwood power station on 23rd will probably be the last of the winter.

Following the early arrival last month of Wheatear, Garganey and White Wagtail, the expected movements of other early summer migrants did not materialise. Observers had to wait until the 5th for the next early arrivals when 7 Sandwich Terns appeared at the Wyre Light, then on to the 7th when Sand Martin and Chiff-Chaff were seen at Preesall Flashes. The following list indicates first recorded sightings during the month:-

- 12th Swallow (Wilkinsons G.P.) Willow Warbler (Fluke Hall)
- 14th Yellow Wagtail (Newton Marsh)
- 15th Ring Ousel (Marton Mere)
- 16th Common Sandpiper (Marton Mere) Whimbrel (Winmarleigh)
- Blackcap (Marton Mere)
- 17th Sedge Warbler (Marton Mere) Tree Pipit (Wilkinsons G.P.)
- 18th Redstart (Wilkinsons G.P.)
- 21st House Martin (Preesall Flashes)
- 22nd Whitethroat (Marton Mere)
- 23rd Whinchat (Fairhaven) Pied Flycatcher (Stanley Park)
- Cuckoo (Warton Marsh) Swift (Marton Mere)
- 24th Little Tern (Squires Gate)
- 25th Wood Warbler (Forton)
- 26th Lesser Whitethroat (Marton Moss)
- 27th Spotted Flycatcher (Marton Moss)
- 29th Grasshopper Warbler (Fleetwood Power Station)
- 30th Garden Warbler (Salwick)

Willow Warblers and Swallows were fairly widespread by the 16th but records of other migrants were scarce. A count of 29 Wheatears at Blackpool Airport on 15th indicated that that species was moving through in some numbers, and several observers commented on a noticeable movement of Goldcrests through the area. At Fleetwood Power Station on the 26th, 2 Blue Headed Wagtails were found amongst Yellow Wagtails, and a Wood Warbler was in the wood opposite the Nautical College. The pair of Garganey seen on Newton Marsh during March were present during April - a second pair turned up at Marton Mere and a noisy drake was at Fleetwood Power Station on 26th.

At coastal sites, fluctuating wader flocks indicated movements of birds into and out of the area, with Dunlin peaking at 5,000 on 3rd at Pilling, 900 Sanderling at St. Annes on 17th, and 500 at Rossall on 24th, 15,000 Knot in the Knott End /Preesall area on 21st, 300 Turnstone at Rossall on 24th, 400 Grey Plover at Pilling on 2nd, and 380 Redshank in the Preesall area on the 3rd. The passage of Ringed Plover and Dunlin is always a feature of spring at Clifton Marsh when numbers of both can be seen to change from day to day - maxima of 150 Ringed Plover and 200 Dunlin on the 29th had a Curlew Sandpiper (just going into summer plumage) and 7 Turnstones for company. A Green Sandpiper at Kirkham on 21-22nd was almost certainly a passage bird, whereas the bird being seen at Cockerham was probably the over-wintering bird. The group of 7 Purple Sandpipers at Rossall Point on 24th was a further indication that birds were moving through on their way north, as was the flock of 65 Ruff on the football field at Freckleton sewage works on the 3rd (these had gone by the following day). The first Whimbrel (1) and Common Sandpiper (3) appeared on the 16th, at Winmarleigh and the Mere respectively - but it was the latter site that provided the largest numbers of each species, both on 21st, when 10 Whimbrel flew north and 6 Common Sandpipers were down feeding. The least expected of the wader records was that of a single Avocet found feeding by a pool as the tide came in at Pilling on Good Friday - or could it have had something to do with the date on that day?

Seabird passage appeared almost non-existent from the very few records received - 7 Gannets off Squires Gate, 15 Little Gulls, and 40 Sandwich Terns at St. Annes were the highest numbers of individual species reported, whilst the largest number of species reported during sea watches occurred on the 24th when southerly winds stirred some movement. (Rossall Point - 2 Goldeneye, 1 Fulmar, 9 Common Scoter, pair of Eider, 1 Guillemot, 6 Sandwich Terns, 10 Common Terns, 2 Great Crested Grebes, 3 Red Breasted Mergansers, 1 Skua, 3 Divers, 4 Mallard, with 2 Little Terns, 2 Arctic Terns and 10 Little Gulls at Squires Gate).

The movement out of the area of wintering Merlin and Peregrines was evidenced by few records of both, but a movement into the area of Sparrowhawks may have been the reason behind more sightings this month than in the earlier months of the year - one bird on the 6th at Preesall was seen in close proximity to flocks of up to 230 Tree Sparrows and 300 Corn Buntings, a plentiful food supply.

Several resident species appeared to be well on with breeding by the month end, with a Ringed Plover on eggs (C.4) at Rossall, Lapwings on eggs at many sites, Barn Owl in nest box at Inskip, two pairs of Tawny Owls in boxes at Weeton, Coots on eggs at Newton Marsh, and a Dipper nesting at Scorton. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was located at last year's nest site at Salwick, and two pairs of Little Grebes had established territories at Fleetwood Power Station. A Kingfisher at Wesham Marsh on 6th was an unusual record for the area.

At Salwick on the 29th a bird was found by Monty Myerscough that eclipsed the Richards Pipit as "Bird of the Year" - a Pallas's Warbler. This diminutive visitor from Siberia, normally a visitor to East Coast sites in late Autumn, was located at the edge of a woodland near the B.N.F.L. works, and was seen twice during the day. This is a "first" for our area and we can only speculate as to its origin. It would seem that following the "invasion" of late autumn last year, when unprecedented numbers appeared in Britain, that this might have been an over-wintering bird, or a bird attempting the long journey back from whence it came.

MAY 1983

Short-eared Owls were still in the area during the first week of the month, when a single was at the Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve, two at the Mere on 3rd, and a bird on the 7th (the last record) was in flight moving North high over Carleton late in the evening. Other birds delaying their departures during the month, were Goldeneye at the Mere and a very late Peregrine at Fluke Hall on the 24th.

Waders remained plentiful on the Preesall-Pilling sands, with up to 2,000 Sanderlings and 800 Ringed Plover between the 15th-30th, 4,500 Dunlin and 200 Grey Plover on the 2nd. At Rossall Point, Purple Sandpipers were present up to the 9th, with a maximum of 14 on the 3rd; whilst their constant companions the Turnstones remained until later, with a maximum of 480 early in the month. The largest flock of Knot reported was that of 1800 at Preesall on the 20th. Passage of fresh waders provided observers with very few records, only Whimbrel and Common Sandpipers being seen on more than any two days - the 10 Whimbrel at Arm Hill were by far the largest group of either species. A Reeve was at Cockerham from 6th-8th, whilst another was at the Mere with 2 Ruffs on the 20th. Single Little Ringed Plovers appeared briefly at Fleetwood fly ash tip and the Mere, whilst a Curlew Sandpiper in full Summer plumage (at Freckleton) and a Little Stint (at Pilling), both turned up on the 30th.

Nine species of warbler appeared in the area, but it was the number of Lesser Whitethroats seen which proved of most interest - observers encountered the species at ten widespread localities, with pairs present at three of these. Whitethroats, in comparison, were reported from fewer sites but in larger numbers (a maximum of 9 at the Mere on 8th). Sedge Warblers had arrived in numbers by the 2nd, when at least 33 were in song at the Preesall Flashes, but single birds, obviously still moving through the area, turned up in some odd places - like the bird singing from a council house garden at the corner of Marton Drive and St. Annes Drive, another in a copse on Queensway, and two different birds found in bushes by the railway lines at the Pleasure Beach. The 3 Wood Warblers in song in Stanley Park on the 4th were by far the largest "gathering" of that species, but singles were in song at Carleton on 1st, Fairhaven on the 4th, and again in Stanley Park on the 15th. Fluke Hall provided 2 Garden Warblers on 6th, 2 Blackcaps on 6th and 8th, and a lingering Chiff Chaff on the 22nd. At the Preesall Flashes on the 23rd, the first reported Reed Warbler of the year was in song (2 by the 28th). No reports of Grasshopper Warblers were received.

Always a pleasant feature of migration during May, is the passage of "Greenland" Wheatears - 8 at the Mere on 3rd, 12 at the Airport on 6th, 7 at the Mere on 7th, 18 at Fleetwood Power Station on 8th, 18 on Lytham Moss on 14th, then no further records until late birds at the Mere (1) on 27th and (2) on 31st.

Watson Road Park in Blackpool is one of Ed. Stirlings well watched areas, and during the month he proved how well worth while it is to observe such an area for passage migrants - he recorded Tree Sparrows, Blackcap, Ring Ousel, Cuckoo, Whitethroat, Chiff Chaff, Spotted Flycatcher, and Redstart - whilst at another of his sites, the railway bushes at the Pleasure Beach, appeared Chiff Chaff, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Spotted Flycatcher and a Turtle Dove.

At the Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve on 11th, two less common migrants passed through - an immature Marsh Harrier was seen flying south, and a male Firecrest (first since 1964) was found, and later heard singing, in the sea buckthorn. Other less common migrants recorded in the area included a male Pied Flycatcher in Stanley Park, a Blue Headed Wagtail on Warton Marsh, and a second Turtle Dove, this one at Pilling on the 28th.

May is not usually associated with wildfowl, but the appearances of at least sixteen species of birds made recording the facts worthwhile. At coastal sites Red Breasted Mergansers were off Rossall, Cleveleys and Arm Hill, a drake Eider was displaying to its mate at Arm Hill on the 16th, and 15 Common Scoter were seen moving north off Starr Gate. Marton Mere played host to a pair of Garganey to mid month, a drake Scaup on 17th (Len Blacow has records of this species on similar dates in the past), 22 Tufted Duck on 31st, a drake Pochard on 17th, and a Ruddy Duck which arrived on the 11th was still present on 31st. Breeding wildfowl have met with mixed success locally - Canada Geese continue their increase.

of these pairs had produced 26 young by the 30th). Unfortunately Mute Swans have proved less successful, the pair at Wilkinsons deserted their nest, but thankfully the pair at Preesall Flashes remained in residence.

Only one observer provided any details of sea watching - a little surprising when one considers that the whole of the western edge of our recording area overlooks the sea. During an hour long sea watch off Cleveleys on the 9th, 35 Gannets, a single Fulmar, and at least 2 Little Terns were amongst the few birds recorded. Records of terns were very few, the only ones of interest were probably the 3 Little Terns and 3 Arctic Terns on 24th at Cockersands - a very poor month for seabirds.

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Contributions for inclusion came from:-

F. Bird, L.G. Blacow, A. Cooke, R. Danson, P. Davies, B. Dyson, S. Eaves, P. Guy, R.A. Hall, S. Gibson, A.J. Hinchliffe, G. Hudson, M. Jones, R. Leeming, A. Myerscough, M. Myerscough, P. and P. Slade, E. Stirling, F. Walsh, G. Wilby, M. Wilby.

Information Required:-

1. Jim Clift wants all records of Nuthatch in the Fulwood area of Preston.
2. Ed. Stirling wants all records of Little Tern.
3. Peter Guy wants all 'winter' records of Merlin - and if at all possible from the past three years (please!).

General Notice

1. N.B. Please read past Newsletters for requests for information by other members (these are still ongoing).
2. Dates of future meetings:- 17th August, 21st September, 19th October, 16th November, 21st December (i.e. the third Wednesday in each month)

Can all those members who provide records for the newsletter please have them ready for the above dates - this gives at least two weeks to prepare them for submission (and saves having to post them).