

AUGUST 1983

The weather during the first few days was very unsettled, with a cool NW wind bringing occasional showers. Come the fifth, a ridge of high pressure was building from the Atlantic promising warmer more settled conditions again. The warm settled period lasted until the sixteenth, when the high pressure moved away to the SE, allowing a frontal system to move in from the NW bringing heavy rain throughout the night and day of the sixteenth - this effectively stopped any migration for about three days. The weather settled again by the nineteenth, and migrants were once again noted moving through the area. A period of fairly settled, warm weather persisted to the month end, but by the 31st the weather was changing with ominous threats of depressions moving in from the Atlantic.

The first half of the month saw continuation of wader passage, which during the latter part of July had been dominated by the large numbers of Whimbrel in the Pilling area. Whimbrel were still about during August, but 6 at Cockerlands on the 5th was the largest group encountered. Sightings of Greenshanks, mainly of ones and twos, came from widespread locations, with larger groups at Freckleton (6), Pilling (6), and the mouth of the R. Conder (14). The build up of Black Tailed Godwits by the R. Ribble began with a flock of 80 on the 2nd increasing to 560 by 11th, then to 720 on 21st, culminating in a flock of at least 1500 at Lytham on the 25th - observations of this species at the Mere prompted one observer to comment, "Black-tail passage above average - continued into September". Surprisingly the Mere produced only one record of Common Sandpiper (25th), larger "gatherings" being at Coastal sites early in the month, with maxima of 7 at Warton Marsh (2nd), and 8 at Pilling (9th). Single Green Sandpipers appeared at Warton (6th) and Pilling (21st), then one passed south-west over the Mere on 25th, and the following day at the same site, one flew east (- just outside our area at Street Gravel Pits, Owen Roberts recorded 4 on the 6th and 6 on the 14th). Wood Sandpipers were much scarcer, with the only record that of a single in flight at the Pilling wader roost on the 14th. The months only Spotted Redshank records came from the Mere, with a single present for most of the 10th, and a bird going south on the 24th. Ruff records were in the main from the Ribble, with the largest group being the 22 at Newton Marsh on the 2nd. Coastal sites, as one would expect, saw steady increases in numbers of shore waders - maxima of 2,500 Dunlin at Preesall, 200 Ringed Plover at Fairhaven, 1900 Oystercatchers at Knott End, and 280 Grey Plover at Pilling - but interesting notes concerning shore waders included a roost of 162 Ringed Plover on Queen Mary's School playing field, and a Ringed Plover at Warton Marsh on 13th with a chick only a couple of days old (a second brood, or a late breeder?).

A female Red Crested Pochard frequented the ICI pool throughout the month - probably an escape, but nevertheless worth a visit to satisfy identification in the field rather than at a wildfowl collection. The Marton Mere Ruddy Duck also remained throughout the month - the successful colonisation by this species of the flashes in the Wigan/Leigh area, might provide birds for an expansion into The Fylde area in the next couple of years. Wigeon had returned to the area by 3rd, when 5 were on the ICI pool, also 10 Tufted Duck at the same site on the same day provided the largest group of that species during August. The ICI pool also held a sizeable flock of mallard throughout the month, 236 on 14th being the highest count. Two other sites also held large flocks of Mallard, Wilkinsons Gravel Pits had maximum of 220, and the Pilling roost held 390.

August saw a spectacular influx of Coot to the Mere, with up to 245 for most of the month, (Maurice Jones commented in his "Birds of the Fylde - a systematic list to December 1975"; that a build up to 74 in August/September 1969, was unprecedented), a similar large influx occurred in August 1979. The 26 Little Grebes at the Mere on the 30th might be regarded as a fairly low number when one considers that in August 1977, 53 were present, and in the August of 1978, 73.

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Occasional moments of inspiration came to those seawatchers prepared to sit out the warm, calm conditions - a Leachs Petrel and 2 Pomarine Skuas at Rossall Point on the 21st, 2 Arctic Skuas off St. Annes on the 4th, and a single at the same place on the 18th - all quality, but in no quantity. Quantity was however provided by some large gatherings of Terns, with up to 480 Common Terns at Pilling and a further 690 counted moving south off Fleetwood on the 15th. The largest group of Sandwich Terns was that of 60 at St. Annes on the 7th, whilst Little Terns peaked at 8 off South Prom. on 7th, and 12 at Pilling on the 14th. The brief spell of wind and rain on 15th-16th stirred some movement amongst Gannets and Fulmars off South Prom, when 51 and 14 respectively passed on the 15th. The only record of Manx Shearwaters was that of 9 passing off South Prom on the 12th.

The bulk of Swifts departed early this year, with the last large numbers at the Mere seen during the first few days of the month - towards the end of the month only occasional birds were encountered. The Swallow roost at the Mere increased from 200 at the start of the month to about 1200 by mid month, until eventually on 31st it was estimated that at least 10,000 birds had come into the roost. Passage of Sand Martins would appear to have been non-existent if the few records received are to be believed - the only records submitted came from the Mere (1 on 24th, 2 on 26th, 4 on 28th and 2 on 31st). House Martins fared even worse - not a single record submitted.

Wheatears in single figures were at several coastal sites to mid month, but following the wet weather at mid month an influx of birds occurred between the 20th-22nd when 10 were at the Airport, 9 at Pilling, and at least 34 at Rossall - as the weather settled again fewer birds were seen. The influx of Wheatears (20th-22nd) coincided with an increase in Whinchats - the Mere having 10 on 22nd.

A steady trickle of Yellow Wagtails moved through the Fylde during the month, but early morning watches at Fairhaven by Richard Hall indicated that the settled weather conditions were encouraging birds to move through early in the day before most observers were up and about. The same was true for Tree Pipits - occasional birds were recorded passing over during the month, but at the month end, Richards early morning forays at Fairhaven produced 18 going south on 27th, and a further 20 going south on 29th - these last two dates also produced the first Grey Wagtails of the Autumn, with 2 at South Shore and 4 at Fairhaven on 27th, then 4 more on 29th also at Fairhaven. Spotted Flycatchers, in ones and twos, were encountered at a few sites having tall trees and bushes, but the single at South Station on 21st would probably have moved on fairly quickly. A fem/imm. Pied Flycatcher at Watson Road Park was present from 19th-26th, and the same site produced the only Goldcrest of the month on the 30th. Warbler records were few, with a scattering of Willow Warblers and Whitethroats as the species predominating - a Blackcap at Fairhaven on the 23rd was the only record of that species submitted.

A Peregrine continued to hunt the Pilling roost, this may well have been the same bird as that at Knott End, and subsequently the bird seen going to roost at Fleetwood Power Station. The first autumn Merlin was at The Naze (Freckleton) on 27th. Harriers are never abundant in the Fylde, so a "ringtail" Hen Harrier at Lytham Moss on the 18th, and an immature Marsh Harrier at the Mere (4th record for the site) on 29th, were exciting encounters for the observers concerned. A short-eared Owl had returned to the Mere by the 31st.

Monty Myerscough submitted a very interesting observation concerning a pair of Barn Owls - at the end of August there was strong evidence that a pair of Barn Owls had a second clutch of eggs; they had already managed to raise 3 young from a first clutch earlier in the summer.

SEPTEMBER 1983

Seawatchers looked westwards in anticipation during the first two days of the month as a deep, fast moving depression out over the Atlantic appeared on the weather charts. This depression moved quickly eastwards crossing the country during the 2nd-3rd, but by the 4th was northwest of Scandinavia and filling rapidly, having blown itself out over the North Sea. The passing of the depression severely disrupted seabird movements down the west coast of Ireland, with huge numbers of birds blown into the western approaches, and to a lesser extent to the Fylde coast.

During the gales of the 3rd, record counts of Gannets (311) and Fulmars (68) were made from South Shore, along with 50 Manx Shearwaters, singles of Arctic Skua, Great Skua, and Black Tern, and two Pomarine Skuas. Common Terns were found taking refuge from the gales at sites just inland from the coast - 35 at the Mere, 7 at Stanley Park Lake, and 20 at Fleetwood Power Station (the terns at the Mere had Black Tern and Little Gull for company). The weather remained westerly following the passing of the gale and birds blown up into the Irish Sea started to move south again. On the 5th, 8 Leachs Petrels and 4 Storm Petrels were off South Shore, with one of each at Rossall. Gannets (58) and Fulmars (44) were still fairly plentiful off South Shore, but the only skuas were 3 Arctics. The Little Gull was still at the Mere on the 5th, but the 7 immatures at South Shore were new arrivals, as were 2 Black Terns on the Lune at Glasson and 2 more at the ICI pool at Fleetwood. A Sandwich Tern seen flying west at Thistleton was probably heading back to the sea after being blown inland by the gale. Seabird numbers dwindled from the 6th, but a few Leachs Petrels were still about, with 3 at South Shore, and a single at Pilling which was briefly chased by a Peregrine as it made its way back out to sea across the saltmarsh. At Pilling on the 9th, 4 juvenile Black Terns and 21 Little Terns were the largest gatherings reported. High pressure from the south had a settling effect on the weather to mid month, but the arrival of a large depression centred to the north of Scotland once again stirred activity amongst seabirds but not with as much effect as the depression at the start of the month. South Shore was once again the focal point for seawatchers - on the 18th, 9 Leachs Petrels, 15 Manx Shearwaters, 5 Fulmars, and 2 Arctic Skuas - on the 20th, 9 Leachs Petrels, 15 Manx Shearwaters, 3 Fulmars and 2 Pomarine Skuas - a Great Skua was seen regularly between the 16th-20th at points between St. Annes and South Shore. Other seabirds recorded during the month were, a Glaucous Gull at South Shore (9th), a Shag of South Shore (12th) and a 'second winter' Mediterranean Gull identified by Richard Hall at the Mere on the 30th.

The first skien of 'winter' Pinkfeet was that of 130 birds flying south over Normoss on the 21st, then birds were seen fairly regularly to the month end - all in flight and heading south. Pintail were recorded going south off shore on several days, the largest number on 20th when at least 42 passed off South shore. The Mere saw gradual increases towards the month end of Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Pochard as birds arrived from breeding haunts. The drake Ruddy Duck which summered at the Mere was joined by a female on the 17th - could this be the start of a breeding population for next year?. The largest flock of scoter seen during the month was one of at least 130 off South Shore on the 18th, and a female Eider off Rossall on the 27th might have been a Walney bird. A flock of 32 Mute Swans at Fleetwood Power Station pool were obviously immigrants, as such a high number was way in excess of the resident Fylde population.

The juvenile Red Necked Phalarope at Fairhaven Lake (13th-21st) attracted many visiting birders (the 3rd Fylde record, and first since 1974), but the arrival of a 'first winter' Grey Phalarope at the same site on the 9th, was very much an added bonus for those observers who made several trips to see the first bird. Both Phalaropes were extremely confiding, giving ample opportunities for many feet of film to be exposed, and so consequently will provide The Fylde Bird Club with "many hours of viewing" at winter meetings. The Grey Phalarope arrived on the 19th in a very exhausted state, having great difficulty in standing upright in the face of

a fairly strong west wind - after a couple of days feeding along the edge of the Lake the bird had regained its strength, and was extremely perky until its departure on the 26th. Up to 15 Little Stints were seen at Pilling (16th), but records of singles and small groups from scattered sites indicated a fairly widespread influx of the species, with the 3 feeding on the concrete surround at Fairhaven Lake the most unusual "away from usual habitat" record. Shore waders increased gradually at coastal sites, but "fresh" wader records were few. A Whimbrel flying SW over the Mere on the 2nd was the only record of that species, whilst single Curlew Sandpipers at Fairhaven (17th) and Freckleton (25th) were disappointingly the only records of that species. Common Sandpipers were about during the month, with records of singles at Clifton Marsh and Cockerham to the 11th. The presence of Greenshanks throughout the month produced maxima of 7 at Freckleton on the 11th and 7 at Pilling on the 24th - the 6 Spotted Redshank at the confluence of the Lune and Conder on the 1st was a maximum for that species, with singles at Pilling and Freckleton on the 16th being the last records for the month. The largest flock of Black Tailed Godwits was one of at least 1500 in Grannies Bay at Fairhaven on the 9th.

The Mere saw the last Swift of the summer on the 12th, but many of the summer species continued departing through to the month end - with small numbers of Whinchat, Wheatear, Yellow Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher and Sand Martin at several sites. Ed Stirling in Watson Road Park, once again proved how worthwhile the watching of this small site so close to the coast can be, - on the 10th, Garden Warbler, 3 Willow Warblers, Whitethroat, 3 Spotted Flycatchers and 4 Goldcrests - a Spotted Flycatcher was seen on several dates to the 26th, and a Pied Flycatcher on the 24th. The overlap of departing summer visitors and the arrival of winter species provides a fascinating study of bird movements - birds from Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia, and all points east, leapfrog over birds destined for the Mediterranean and the African continent. On the 23rd at 04.00, at least 2 Spotted Crakes were calling over Carleton as they headed south, and later in the day the first winter Redwings (8) passed south over Fairhaven. The 24th turned up two Lapland Buntings in the Pilling/Cockerham area (a male and immature), and the following day a Snow Bunting at Freckleton - on the 28th and 29th Siskins went south at L.S.A.N.R. The last few days of the month saw fairly heavy passage of Meadow Pipits over L.S.A.N.R. and Fairhaven, with one prolonged count over three hours (28th) producing at least 1620 birds going south - at the same sites Blue Tits, Chaffinches, Pied Wagtails and Grey Wagtails were also noted moving south. A Great Spotted Woodpecker at Fairhaven (22nd-30th) may also have been a migrant.

Sightings of Sparrowhawks increased as birds probably moved into the area, with widespread records of singles and a pair from the Mere, Wesham, Ribby Hall, and Cockerham, but the only Merlin record was that of a single at Poulton. Regular sightings of Peregrine in the Pilling/Fleetwood areas were supplemented by additional records from St. Annes beach, L.S.A.N.R., and Newton Marsh - but owl sightings were surprisingly few, with only five records submitted for the whole of the month - a Little Owl at the Mere, Short-eared Owl at the Mere (on two days), Barn Owl at the Mere, and a Tawny Owl at Salwick Hall - is this a reflection of a lack of coverage, or do local birds move out before winter birds arrive?

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NOTICES

- 1) Bob Danson wants all records of colour marked waders.
- 2) Tony Myerscough wants all records - past and present - of Little Owls.
- 3) Stuart Gibson wants all past and present records of Short Eared Owls
- information on roosts will be of particular interest.