

FEBRUARY 1983

The month began with a severe NW/W gale that caused much structural damage along the Fylde Coast, but for those prepared to venture forth and brave the foul conditions the birds were there to be seen. A Little Auk was in the Wyre Estuary (only the fourth record for the area, and the first since February '75) 48 Little Gulls and 60 Kittiwakes were also in the Wyre Estuary, with about half these numbers of each in the wider Ribble Estuary. A casualty of these gales was an unfortunate Razorbill picked up dead on the tideline at Starr Hills.

A period of more settled but frosty weather from the 2nd to 13th preceded the establishment of an anticyclone to the north east of Britain which brought bitterly cold NE/E winds from Scandinavia and the Baltic, for the period the 14th to 24th.

February is usually the best month to complete winter wildfowl counts before birds start to move out during March to breed elsewhere. Marton Mere again held the greatest variety of species, with monthly maxima of 190 Mallard, 49 Teal, 2 Gadwall, 14 Wigeon, 65 Tufted Duck, 94 Pochard, 220 Coot, 7 Goldeneye and 87 Shoveler (the highest number recorded for the area). At Wesham Marsh, Kirkham on 23rd, 23 Pintail were in residence. Up to 5000 Pinkfeet were in the Pilling area to the month end, and for those observers prepared to examine flocks closely, 2 "Russian" Whitefronts and a Greylag were also present. Records of wildfowl on the sea were few, with no large flocks of Scoter reported from Squires Gate. However, varying numbers of Red Breasted Mergansers in the Fleetwood area provided a maximum of 18 on the 16th, and the sighting of 3 Mute Swans on the sea off central promenade was somewhat unusual. Two diver records were both of Red Throated, at Fleetwood on the 2nd, and at Squires Gate on the 20th.

At least one adult Glaucous Gull was still at Fleetwood throughout the month, and a yellow-legged Herring Gull was at the same place on the 6th. Probably the most unexpected gull record of the month was that of an oiled Kittiwake on the ice of Stanley Park Lake (the observer suggests that this might well be the first record of this species at this site).

Short-eared owls were plentiful during the month with up to 8 at Marton Mere, 8 at Preesall, 3 at Freckleton, one on Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve, and 3 at Inskip. Peregrines remained in their wintering haunts at coastal marshes in the north of the area, but at Freckleton on the 20th a bird was picked up with only one wing after appearing to have flown into a barbed wire fence. (This bird was an imm. female carrying a BTO ring No. GT 52176 - ringed as one of a brood of four near Haweswater, Cumbria) The bird was taken to Kendal and was last reported to be settled down and progressing satisfactorily. The records of single Merlins came from several scattered sites throughout the area. A female Hen Harrier was in flight over Newton Marsh on the 13th, and "in flight" Sparrowhawks were at Cogie Hill on 6th, Pilling on 13th and at Hardhorn on 24th.

Waders remained plentiful on the shore at Fairhaven, and on the banks off Preesall and Pilling, with 330 Sanderling and 5,000 Bartailed Godwits at Starr Dunes on 13th, and 2,000 Knot and 2,700 Oystercatchers at Knott End on 5th. Grey Plover reached a maximum of 86 at Pilling on 13th. On the 2nd at Newton Marsh, 500 Golden Plover and 300 Black-tailed Godwits were present for the day, but moved on by the 3rd as the cold frosty weather set in. A wintering Jack Snipe was seen on several days at the St. Annes Nature Reserve, but the impending spring was indicated by the build up of Curlew flocks in the Preesall area prior to moving to moorland sites and of the first inland Oystercatchers at Clifton Marsh.

Exactly how many Black Redstarts have wintered in the Blackpool area is difficult to ascertain. Regular sightings have come from the Nature Reserve area, with at least 2 there on 13th, another bird was seen at Blackpool Airport from the 12th to 27th, and another was seen frequenting the disused platforms at Blackpool North Station (the searching of the likely sites within Blackpool might well establish that a "substantial" number of birds have wintered in the area).

Fieldfare and Redwing flocks have remained much the same as those of January, (max. 213 Fieldfare and 185 Redwing), but there was a noticeable increase at the Pied Wagtail roost in Talbot Square, Blackpool, with 110 on the 2nd, and 116 on the 15th. The largest flocks of smaller passerines were found Over Wyre during the period of hard frosts, with 170 Corn Buntings at Pilling, 160 Skylarks at Preesall, 20 Yellowhammers and 40 Tree Sparrows at Cogie Hill. Elsewhere, 100 Linnets were on the tip at Clifton Marsh, 60 Greenfinches at Lytham Marsh, and 25 Reed Buntings at Marton Mere.

A pair of Stonechats appeared on St. Annes Nature Reserve as early as the 2nd, with the male in song on the 13th - a second male was also there by the 16th. At least 4 Goldcrests were in the Hardhorn area on 24th, and a Treecreeper at Marton Mere on 22nd may have been a bird from nearby Stanley Park. Female Blackcaps were found in gardens at Layton on 23rd (until month end) and at St. Annes on 27th.

A flamingo spent most of the month by the Ribble at Preston, providing a pleasant if somewhat exotic splash of colour during a very cold month.

Outside our area, a Little Auk was on the Ribble at Clitheroe on the 12th (some time after the gales of the 1st). A Water Pipit was at Crossens sewage works on 13th, and 10 Rock Pipits at the same place on the 20th - also on the 20th, 2 Snow Buntings were on the beach at Southport, and 2 Firecrests at Leighton Moss.

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The short-eared Owls which have been such a feature of the winter months were still about the area throughout the month, those at Marton Mere were reduced to 2, but the 5 at Arm Hill on 27th and 8 at the same site on the 31st, will probably be the last large gatherings of the winter. A Barn Owl on Marton Moss provided the only record of that species, whilst a pair of Little Owls at Preesall appeared to be settling in to breed.

Pinkfeet were still present in good numbers in Over Wyre, with flocks of 3,000 at Pilling, and 3,500 at Eagland Hill on the 3rd, but the largest single flock reported was that of 4,000 at Pilling on the 24th. On 27th-28th, a "blue" Snow Goose was amongst the Pinkfeet at Eagland Hill (the fourth Fylde record). Wildfowl numbers were much reduced at the Mere, only Tufted Duck maintaining their mid winter numbers with 50-60 present to mid month. A noticeable influx of Goldeneye took place at the Mere on the 9th when 17 were counted (this is the highest number on record for this site). The 300 Wigeon at Newton Marsh on 1st - 3rd moved out with the onset of colder weather at the beginning of the month, probably to swell the flock of 1,000 on the Ribble at Warton Bank on 20th - also on 20th, 24 Whooper Swans flew north over Saltcotes, whilst on the last day of the month 14 were at Freckleton Naze. Pairs of grebes were well established at The Mere by the 15th with 3 of Little Grebes and 2 of Great Crested Grebes.

Seabird records were scarce - the lack of strong W-SW winds the probable reason. On the 6th, 600 Common Gulls were at Knott End, at least 11 Kittiwakes were counted off Starr Gate and a Red Throated Diver was seen for the last time on Wilkinsons Gravel Pits (Preesall). The regular Glaucous Gulls were still at Fleetwood and St. Annes, the latter an immature bird seen to at least the 23rd. The only Gannet reported was an adult moving south during a sea watch at Blackpool North Pier on the 20th. It was during this sea watch that 9 small dark petrels were seen flying north together, too far out to identify with any confidence (another of those 'might have been records'). However, one petrel identified with confidence was a long dead Storm Petrel picked up on the south promenade by Ed. Stirling on the 12th - also at south prom., 10 Little Gulls appeared during a severe NW gale on 22nd.

The spring movements of waders started during the month, with small numbers of Dunlin and Curlew seen going eastwards over the Mere on 13th, and a single Reeve on flooded farmland at Inskip on 26th-27th. Arctic breeding waders were present on the coast in fairly large numbers with 2,000 Knots at Knott End on 5th, 1240 Sanderlings at Squires Gate on 13th, 6,000 Knot, 2500 Dunlin and 450 Grey Plover at Pilling on 28th. Of the over wintering waders the Green Sandpiper was still at Cockerham, and up to 3 Jack Snipe on the Lytham St. Annes Reserve.

Single Sparrowhawks were at Preesall, Fluke Hall, and Eagland Hill - single Merlins at Cogie Hill, Fluke Hall and Pilling, and 2 were at Blackpool Airport on 27th. Only 2 Peregrines were seen, one over the marshes at Pilling, the other flying north during a sea watch at Blackpool North Pier on 20th.

High pressure over France and the southern part of Britain allowed the temperature to rise somewhat and the winds to become more southerly from the 8th to 14th - with these warmer southerlies came the first spring migrants of the year. On the 13th, 2 male Wheatears and a Spotted Redshank (although this might have wintered) appeared at Pilling, and a pair of Garganey were seen to alight on the flash at Newton Marsh. By the 19th, Wheatears were fairly widespread, birds being seen at Fluke Hall, Marton Mere (4), and at Fairhaven. From the 19th, birds were seen almost daily to the 31st, with 6 at Fleetwood Power Station on the 23rd the highest number at any one site. The only other migrants reported during the month were 2 White Wagtails at Clifton Marsh on 23th.

At midnight on the 16th, Redwings were heard calling over Carleton as they flew eastwards (no records of daylight flocks received), and Fieldfares were still about Over Wyre in flocks of up to 150. Black Redstarts were still at wintering sites, one being seen regularly at the airport throughout the month, other singles at the St. Annes Nature Reserve, and Fluke Hall. Largish flocks of Corn Bunting were found in Over Wyre, with 130 at Preesall (14th), and 130 at Eagland Hill (27th) - 150 Tree Sparrows and 80 Reed Buntings were near Preesall on the 14th. A male Siskin was in a Blackpool garden at Layton on the 9th, and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen in a small wood near the marsh at Wesham.

The bird of the year (so far) must be the Richards Pipit found by Ed. Stirling on the 26th during a visit to Blackpool Airport to search for early migrants. This large, wagtail like pipit was at first located by its "sparrow-like" call, and then by flushing it onto a nearby fence where it was watched quite closely. (At first it was thought that the bird might be a Red Throated Pipit - but was later confirmed as a Richards.) A record of this particular species at this time of year is somewhat unusual. The bird at the airport has now been seen by many observers, and was still present up to the month end frequenting the same narrow strip of tussocky grassland at the eastern edge of the airfield (this is the 8th record of this Siberian pipit in the Fylde - the first since the influx in autumn of 1968).

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(Records for possible inclusion were submitted by:- F. Bird, L.G. Blacow, A. Cooke, R. Danson, P. Davies, B. Dyson, S. Eaves, M. Evans, S. Gibson, P. Guy, A.J. Hinchliffe, G. Hudson, M. Jones, R. Leeming, A. Myerscough, P. & P. Slade, E. Stirling, G.D. Wilby.)

GENERAL NOTICES

SITE SURVEYS: The following have agreed to monitor these site during the breeding season.

Barnaby Sands/Preesall Flashes	-	Bob Danson
Cockerham/Winmarleigh Mosses	-	Owen Roberts
Calder Valley Woods	-	Myerscough Brothers
Carr House Green Common	-	Malcolm Evans & George Hudson
Marton Mere	-	Len Blacow and P. & P. Slade
St. Annes Nature Reserve	-	Maurice Jones
Freckleton Marsh and Naze	-	Roy Leeming and Geoff Wilby
Wesham Marsh and Moss Wood	-	Myerscough Brothers

INFORMATION REQUIRED:

- a) David Jackson and Pete Hancock require any information, past or present, on Pied Wagtail roosts in The Fylde.

- b) Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler numbers - recent reports suggest that the Sahelian vegetation zone of West Africa was exceptionally dry during our 1982-83 winter. Most Whitethroats and many more Palaearctic passerines winter in that area.

Frank Walsh will be grateful to anyone who can provide comparative data for the coming season and any previous years as regards numbers of Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers passing through or breeding. Data on any other summer visitors is also welcome.

HELP REQUIRED:

A second visit to The Mere by the local R.S.P.B. group is planned for the 14th-15th May - will anyone prepared to help on these days please contact Len Blacow as soon as possible. His address is:-

L.G. Blacow
148 Cunliffe Road,
Blackpool Tel: 68956

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Records for inclusion in the Newsletter should be sent to:-

Peter Guy
11 Harewood Close
Carleton,
Poulton-le-Fylde Tel: 899135

All records should be sent in monthly, to reach me no later than the 7th of the following month. This will hopefully solve the problem of late records having to be left out, and will prevent any delay in getting the Newsletter circulated to all members.

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