

OCTOBER 1983

Stanley Park came in for much attention throughout the month as unusual migrants passed through. A Wryneck (the first since 1977) was found on the 2nd and remained in the park until the 10th, frequenting the area between the rose gardens and the bowling greens. The Wrynecks occasional absences from its favoured site stimulated much eager searching by observers, and on the 3rd other birds in the park included a Firecrest, Garden Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, up to 10 Goldcrests, 2 Marsh Tits, a Tree Creeper, and 3 Blackcaps - searching on the 4th turned up a Jay (1st record for the park?), the significance of this record became clear later in the month. The Wryneck wasn't seen after the 3rd, but an optimistic search on the 7th proved successful and the bird was relocated on a grassy bank by the bowling greens - the bird being extremely confiding, allowing approaches to within a couple of metres. The 7th also saw at least 30 Goldcrests in the park - this was the highest single count for the Fylde during October, but several observers submitted records from widespread sites throughout the month, indicating a steady passage through our area. The Wryneck was last seen on the 10th, and with its departure interest in the park waned. (A Wryneck was at Haigh Hall, Wigan on the 14th October.) However, the interest was re-kindled in startling fashion on the 22nd when a Red Necked Grebe was found on the park Lake. Once again with increased activity amongst observers, other species of note were located - on the 22nd 2 swallows, a Wheatear, at least 3 Jays, and a Blackcap (until 24th). The 23rd saw yet another Marsh Tit (until 30th), Woodcock, and a single Jay - on 24th a Garden Warbler - on 25th, the Garden Warbler and 4 Jays - and 29th, 5 Jays, Woodcock, and 2 Long Tailed Tits, all in all a very good month in the park.

The weather at the start of the month was the probable reason for the appearance of the birds in the park - birds leaving Scandinavia under the clear skies of a ridge of high pressure (stretching from the Faroes to Denmark), then being forced down by the frontal systems of a depression sitting over Britain.

The 2nd, being a Sunday, ensured many observers would be out and about, with not much passing unseen at the regularly watched sites. In the Pilling/Fluke Hall area, 15 Goldcrests and 4 Coal Tits, a Yellow Wagtail, 4 Wheatear, 15 Little Stints, Wood Sandpiper, 196 Shelduck and 115 Wigeon - at the Mere, Short eared Owl, Cormorant, 105 Snipe, 3 Whinchat, 10 Partridge, and at least 50 Skylarks heading south - at Freckleton, a Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, 2 Little Grebe, 2,000 Golden Plover, 200 Teal (on the Ribble), 100 Tree Sparrows and 21 Partridge. On the same day at other sites, the Wryneck was found in Stanley Park, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at Wesham, a Stonechat at South Station (until 6th), and at L.S.A.N.R. at least 96 Blue Tits were counted moving south (during this count, a flock of 33 was noted going N). On the 3rd Wryneck and Firecrest in the park were the "star turns", but a quick visit to Watson Road Park proved worthwhile with a Spotted Flycatcher (last of the year), a Stonechat, and a Redstart, but not to be outdone was a single Curlew Sandpiper at Fairhaven.

Following the flurry of activity during the first three days of the month records became fewer, but picked up again as the weekend of the 8th-9th arrived. The Mere, Pilling and Freckleton were once again well watched - at Pilling, 10 Little Stints and a Wheatear, the Mere, Ruddy Duck, 21 Great Black Backed Gulls, 4 Goldcrest, and a Carrion Crow carrying a small dead bird (thought to be a Goldcrest). Freckleton records included a Little Stint, 60 Redshank, Spotted Redshank, 2 Greenshank and Grey and White Wagtails. A Leach's Petrel was off South Shore on the 8th, but one picked up alive on the beach at Cleveleys unfortunately died later.

At the Mere on the 11th, the last Redstart of the month was present, also the months only Black Tern (a juvenile). The last House Martin seen was at Poulton on the 12th, and the latest Sand Martin was a single at Great Eccleston on the 14th. Swallows were recorded on fifteen days throughout the month, with the largest count that of at least 100 going south together during the afternoon of the 13th at Inskin - the latest were singles at St. Annes Pier and Fairhaven on 28th & 29th respectively.

The significance of the Jay in Stanley Park on the 4th became apparent at mid month. A single at Inskip on 13th and 6 at Ribby Hall on 15th were part of a huge movement nationally - on 22nd, 3 in Stanley Park, 4 going south at Fairhaven, and 3 at the Mere, coincided with huge numbers in Devon and Cornwall - 8 were at Ribby Hall on the 23rd, whilst those in Stanley Park had increased to 4 by the 25th, then 5 by 29th.

A deep depression moved quickly eastwards from the Atlantic on the 15th bringing strong SW winds. By midday on the 15th the depression was centred just to the NW of Scotland, with its associated troughs moving east across the country. This strong westerly airstream was maintained for the next five days, during which time a second depression moved in from the Atlantic causing seabirds to be blown in close to the Fylde coast. At South Shore on the 16th four imm. Little Gulls, 7 Pomarine Skuas, and 32 Kittiwakes - on 17th, 2 Great Skuas, 2 Arctic Skuas, 2 Pomarine Skuas, a Manx Shearwater, 6 Leachs Petrels and a solitary Storm Petrel. During the 18th at Fleetwood, a Shag appeared on the Marine Lake and an adult Glaucous Gull was in flight along the shore - the same day at Rossall, 11 Leachs Petrels and a Common Tern were recorded. Another Glaucous Gull (imm.) was at South Shore on the 18th, along with a Pomarine Skua and a Storm Petrel. The greatest variety of seabirds was recorded on the 19th at South Shore, when 12 Leachs Petrels, a Storm Petrel, 6 Gannets, 4 Kittiwakes, 2 Great Skuas, an Arctic Skua, one Sandwich Tern, 3 Arctic Terns, and an imm. Glaucous Gull passed by going south. The same day a Leachs Petrel was inland at Weeton Camp. The only birds of note at South Shore on the 20th were a Storm Petrel and a Rock Pipit.

The 20th saw an anticyclone establishing itself over Britain, which by the 21st extended well to the NE and into Scandinavia. This pressure then persisted to the month end, bringing with it the first frosts of the winter under clear over night skies.

The 21st, a day of gentle variable breezes, saw birds moving south again. At the Mere, 2 Whinchats would probably be the last of this year, and 12 Blue Tits at Lane Ends car park (Pilling) were obvious migrants. L.S.A.N.R. saw birds moving south - amongst these was a flock of 700 Jackdaws, 200 Rooks, 62 Chaffinch, a Brambling, 8 Swallows and a Merlin - whilst down on the reserve, a new species for the site was being recorded, a Coal Tit. The Red Necked Grebe appeared in Stanley Park on the 22nd along with a single Wheatear - the same day two flocks of Jackdaws came in from the sea at St. Annes, each flock estimated to contain at least 1,000 birds, 2 Stonechats were at Fleetwood Power Station, and 3 Jays at the Mere (new species for this site). A three hour count of migrants flying south at Fairhaven on the 22nd included 4 Jays, 140 Jackdaws, 45 Carrion Crows, a Sparrowhawk, 10 Pied Wagtails, 28 Reed Buntings, and 286 Chaffinches. The 23rd produced Sparrowhawk, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker and 8 Jays at Ribby Hall, a Wheatear at Starr Hills, 7 Long Tailed Tits going south through the dunes at St. Annes, plus a single south at L.S.A.N.R. The Reserve also held 3 Shorteared Owls, a Siskin, 2 Bramblings, and 2 Jack Snipe. Three Greenshank and a Spotted Redshank were at Freckleton.

The Fylde's second Red Breasted Flycatcher was found on the 23rd in a garden in Oregon Avenue, Layton. This bird, a juvenile, produced the dreaded "twitchers" disease amongst local birders, but many were to be disappointed. Apparently the bird disappeared at some time during the 23rd amongst much talk of 'gripping' and 'stringing', but one observer persisted and located the bird the following day in the same place. (This is the 2nd Fylde record - the first was on 26th October 1978, also in a Blackpool garden.)

Four Purple Sandpipers at Rossall on 24th were the first of the winter, but a Manx Shearwater off Central Prom on 25th would probably be the last of the autumn. The Ruddy Duck numbers at the Mere increased to 3 by the 25th (drake and 2 ducks), and a Great Spotted Woodpecker at the same site was an obvious migrant. A female Eider was off Knott End on the 27th.

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Long Tailed Tits continued their move south, with 10 at L.S.A.N.R. on the 28th and 2 in Stanley Park on the 29th.

Several observers commented on 'fairly heavy passage of Redwings for the nights of the 28th-29th', but on the ground the 300 at Ribby Hall, and 200 at Fluke Hall were the largest flocks recorded -- also at Fluke Hall were 6 Brambling, 40 Tree Sparrows, 80 Linnets, and a Sparrowhawk. A three hour migrant watch at Fairhaven on the 29th saw at least twenty species going south - these included many finches, corvids, Blue Tits, Skylarks, a Sparrowhawk, and the last Swallow of the year.

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The following article has been submitted by Phil Slade:--

"Friday, October 14th, was a fine clear evening, the merest breath of wind and a sky full of stars. At a halt along the Motorway, we discussed the possibility of those rare vagrants on Scilly continuing their Southerly migration -- Cliff Swallow, Solitary Sandpiper, Grosbeak etc., it was too horrific to contemplate. Spirits perked considerably as we travelled further South, but the early hours and crossing Bodmin Moor, the wind had sprung up to a Force 9 and the rain was lashing down -- those precious ticks might still be available.

Reaching Penzance before dawn had allowed some time to follow up reports of an American Redstart near St. Just. Despite the continuing gales and rain, this lovely bird, a first Autumn male, was a pure delight and well worth a soaking. We promised ourselves a further look on the return journey, should better weather conditions prevail.

Saturday did not improve, after a 3 hour delay at the Heliport, and continuing bad weather on St. Mary's, Scilly, our attempts at Cliff Swallow and Bobolink were badly frustrated by the elements. Wisely, The Fylde Bird Club members held an impromptu meeting in "The Bishop & Wolf" that evening.

Sunday dawned, slightly better but still strong Westerlies but with a promise of improving birding weather. Along the path to Holy Vale, there was some activity where the Cliff Swallow had been located feeding along a row of pines with Swallows. It more closely resembled our Martins, for it was brownish, with a slightly forked tail, buff rump, some white on the face, and short pointed wings giving a fast beat in between short glides and rapid changes in direction. Some minutes later, further down the path, a Merlin was seen to take a Swallow from this group, but we later learnt that this 'first' for Britian and Europe had been spared this gruesome fate.

Information on Scilly comes readily, with 400 to 500 birders around there is no excuse for not being in the know. For this reason we found ourselves on a northerly path towards Normandy, where there was Barred Warbler and the inevitable Rose Coloured Starling. Barred Warblers have a reputation for being rather secretive and difficult to observe for any length of time, but some of the more experienced of our group agreed, that this was the most obliging individual they had seen. After visiting the Rose Coloured Starling we retired to the adjacent cafe, only to be disturbed in our tea and chocolate cake by a birder bursting through the door to relay the news, that the rumoured Upland Sandpiper had been found in a field at Rocky Hill. Several people acted unconcerned, but there is no doubt, that the cafe was empty within three minutes. Undoubtedly the Upland Sandpiper was the bird of the trip for me -- an immaculate juvenile bird, small headed, with a thin neck, large eye, and long tail. It fed rather like a Heron, in a stalking manner, neck outstretched, suddenly stabbing at and taking large flies. Disappointingly, later in the week it was feeding from the hand, tamed by twitchers after crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

A trip to St. Annes, the most Westerly of the Isles, was planned for Monday and despite more strong winds we braved the boat journey for the prospect of a Rose-

Breasted Grosbeak. It proved worthwhile, an extremely attractive and well marked first year male - its already orangey breast reddened by blackberry stains. Another tame, or rather unfearing bird, it was later taken by one of the local cats in full view of a party of irate twitchers, but subsequently relocated apparently unharmed.

A feature of Scilly in the 3rd week of October is the lack of more common migrants, only a small scattering of Whinchat, Wheatear, Pied Flycatchers, Goldcrests and Willow/Chiffs at most times. Later in the week after a change to SE winds, a small influx did occur, this seemed to consist of numbers of Blackcap, Firecrest and Chiffchaffs plus a few extra Wheatears. Do not be fooled, no one goes to Scilly in late October to study migration, they go to study rarities and I can confirm that it is immensely enjoyable and exhilarating to do so.

Miraculously, whilst on St. Agnes, news came of a Swainsons Thrush back on St. Mary's, the return boat would leave us time to study this small North American thrush, which surprised me by perching on an open branch and flycatching in the manner of a Spotted Flycatcher. This was in complete contrast to the Grey-cheeked Thrush some 500 yds up the road, which chose the floor of a dense thicket as its feeding place and proved to be a headache to a lot of observers unable to get to grips with it. One person claimed to have spent 14 hours in vain attempts to get a clear view of the bird, until The Fylde Bird Club showed him the way - sit motionless in the bushes for two or three hours then the thrush could be very confiding, it was simply the thick habitat the bird chose which made it difficult to observe. It was separated from the Swainsons by its lack of an eye-ring, the slight grey wash on the cheeks, and the colder, less buff underparts, especially the throat.

Tresco is by general consent one of the most beautiful of the islands, any trip there is worthwhile. However, when the Solitary Sandpiper was relocated, an early morning boat was essential. It is strange how one is apprehensive about identifying a new bird, then when it is eventually encountered it becomes clear the difficulties are over exaggerated in field guides. The Solitary Sandpiper is such a bird, somewhat like a Wood or a Green, but "different", slightly smaller, an overall olive brown with many distinct, small, whitish spots on the coverts and tertials, fairly long greeny-yellow legs, a dark centered barred tail, and of course the conspicuous large pale eye-ring. Whilst on Tresco we were lucky enough to be amongst the first to see the Sora Rail, another North American migrant. What a nice feeling to be sat down, the bird safely under the belt, the sound of running feet, and three boat loads of eager, breathless twitchers enquiring, "Is it showing?"

There had been several sightings of Icterine Warblers, but it was to be midweek before we tracked one down in a thick hedgerow, a classic bird, with the pale wing panels, high forehead, pale bill, grey legs, and its rather clumsy progression along the hedge. A regular Scilly migrant worth spending time on, is the attractive Yellow-browed Warbler, the one at Lower Moors being particularly well marked showing both wing-bars and that seemingly unending supercilium.

The remaining days were somewhat quieter, but nevertheless some outstanding birds - Red-breasted Flycatcher, Black Redstart, a Great Northern Diver in the bay opposite our holiday flat, two Long-tailed Ducks, Richards Pipit, three superb Lapland Buntings (a much under rated bird, especially on Scilly), and a rather uninteresting juvenile Scarlet Rosefinch.

Saturday morning October 22nd, a moderate South Easterly, and as dawn broke, Redwings and Starlings were streaming in off the sea, and even at 8 a.m. a report of two Rose Coloured Starlings at Four Lane Ends, but we were booked on the 'chopper' at ten, so the best thing to do was to close eyes and ears, and concentrate on packing.

After the short flight to Penzance we returned to the American Redstart for a brief but enjoyable encounter, leaving enough time for a walk around Drift Reservoir for a juvenile Spotted Sandpiper, easily distinguished from Common by the shorter tail, barred coverts, bright yellow legs, that appear longer than Common, indeed the whole 'jizz' of Spotted is different. Kingfisher and Buzzard enlivened the walk back to the car, and in no time at all, we were back on the Motorway heading North to reality."