

JULY 1984

A trickle of returning waders was just discernible during July, with Common Sandpipers most common of the grounded species. The early part of the month saw 10 Common sandpipers at Conder Green to the 14th, 10 at Street Gravel Pits on the 7th, 6 at I.C.I. on the 12th, and 5 at Lane Ends on the 14th - these numbers were much reduced towards the month end as birds moved on to leave ones and twos at a few sites. The adult Little Stint at Conder Green on the 4th was an early bird, as was another of the same species by the Ribble at Freckleton on the 25th. The most exciting wader of the month was undoubtedly the adult White Rumped Sandpiper at Conder Green on the 14th and 15th - this bird, the 8th Fylde record, played hide and seek with watchers as it moved back and forth with the tides, being seen during low water in the mornings (if you were lucky), then moving elsewhere at high tide. The Mere attracted two other less common species, a Green Sandpiper on the 19th, and a juvenile Little Ringed Plover on the 27th.

The first returning Greenshank appeared at the confluence of the rivers Lune and Conder on the 7th, followed by two more at Conder Green on 14th, and a single at Lane Ends on the 29th - also on the 29th the first Whimbrels were at Lane Ends (15) and Cockersands (6). Sixty Golden Plovers at Pilling on the 14th constituted the first of the autumn return of that species.

A light westerly passage of waders was noted on several days at the Mere, with Oystercatchers, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Redshank, Ringed Plover, and a solitary Sanderling amongst those recorded.

The annual post breeding influx of Coot took place at about mid-month, when at least 60 were at the I.C.I. pool, and up to 210 at the Mere. Other returning wildfowl included up to 150 Mallard and 14 Pochard at I.C.I., and 4 Teal at the Mere.

Two pairs of Kestrels bred in the vicinity of the Mere, and on most days throughout the month, up to six could be seen in the air together hunting the open land between the Mere and the Zoo. At Carleton a pair of Kestrels raised at least two young on a pylon, and a pair in woodland next to Singleton By-pass managed to raise three young. (This must be one of the under recorded species in The Fylde).

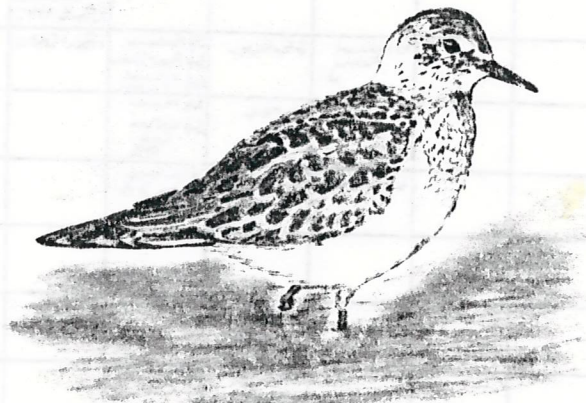
A male Sparrowhawk was at Cockersands on the 29th.

Conditions for seawatching during July were less than inspiring, but nevertheless a few interesting records were submitted - 16 Gannets, 40 Sandwich Terns, and 2 Arctic Terns off Rossall on the 8th, 5 Manx Shearwaters, 2 Little Terns, and an unidentified skua off Rossall on the 15th, and a single Little Gull and 2 Little Terns off South Prom on the 29th.

A sub adult Mediterranean Gull was found on Lytham Beach on the 6th, whilst on the 29th at Cockersands Point, a pair of Arctic Terns were feeding two young.

Just a few passerine migrants were encountered during July, these included single Yellow Wagtails at Lytham, The Mere, Cockersands, and Conder Green, - a Spotted Flycatcher in Lowther Gardens, a Wheatear at Pilling from the 14th to the month end, and a Cuckoo at the Mere on the 19th. A Willow Warbler in Watson Road Park on the 25th was almost certainly a southbound bird.

The Hooded Crow at Fleetwood Tip on the 12th, was certainly unexpected to say the least.



White-rumped Sandpiper

At least two of the Spotted Flycatchers were seen taking Small Tortoiseshell Butterflies (whoops - sorry. Ed.), the bird at South Station on the 27th took a butterfly from a nearby factory roof, whilst the one at Gt. Eccleston (from 26th to 28th) was thought to have taken at least 42 (of these nasty creepy crawlies) from a Budleia bush during its three day stay in one members garden. (Well thats 42 less to photograph).

Swifts appeared to depart fairly early this year, with no more 10 reported together. Local Swallow roosts at the Mere and Fleetwood, held maxima of 6000 and 10000 respectively late in the month. The roost at the Mere appeared to have dispersed by the 29th, but then reappeared in a field of sweetcorn behind Poulton Industrial Estate. A "white" Swallow frequented the Mere roost for several days at mid-month; the roost also attracted a Hobby, which stayed from the 13th to the 29th, and on several occasions was seen taking Swallows for its supper. The Hobby may have been the small falcon seen close to the Poulton Swallow roost on the 30th, unfortunately it wasn't confirmed as such.

Grey Wagtails moved through several sites towards the month-end, with 5 going north at Fairhaven on the 29th the largest count. Other sightings of interest were, a Stonechat at the Mere (9th), 2 Tree Sparrows at the Mere (10th), 3 Siskins at the Zoo (15th), 200 Linnets at the Mere (18th), and up to 30 Goldfinches at Ribby (21st).

A Kingfisher at the Mere on the 24th was of unknown origin - was it an immigrant or was it a local bird?. Dykes and drainage ditches east of the Mere are within easy commuting distance for a pair of breeding Kingfishers - it might provide someone with an interesting project for next summer.

Migrant "fresh" waders were recorded on every day during August, but in small numbers. Whimbrel provided the largest gatherings, with 12 and 15 at Pilling on the 6th and 27th respectively, whilst elsewhere, 4 were at Cockersands, 2 at Fairhaven, 2 at the Mere, and a single flying west at Singleton. Up to 5 Greenshanks were at Pilling and 8 at Freckleton towards the month-end, but prior to these, singles had been encountered at Freckleton, Cockersands, Poulton, Conder Green, Warton, and Rossall Point; up to 3 had been at I.C.I. Pool, The Mere, and Fairhaven. A Greenshank on Warton Marsh on the 17th was watched taking large green caterpillars (whoops - sorry again. Ed.) as food. Several Spotted Redshanks passed through the Mere, with one going west on the 5th, two flying west on the 14th, and two more on the 24th - at other sites, singles were at Conder Green, Fleetwood Power Station, and Pilling - but the largest group was that of 5 at Freckleton towards the month-end. The passage of Common Sandpipers occurred in two distinct periods - from the 1st to the 12th, when up to 8 were at the Mere, 4 at Pilling, and up to 4 by the Ribble. No records were received between the 13th and the 23rd, but between the 24th and 31st, up to 3 came to the Mere, 3 to Pilling, and 2 to Fairhaven. Single Green Sandpipers appeared at Pilling (5th), The Mere (12th and 19th), and Conder Green (14th and 26th) - two were at Conder Green on the 18th. Little Ringed Plover on return passage dropped in at Pilling on the 5th, and the Mere on the 10th and 18th.

Some early increase in "shore" waders occurred at the roost sites at Pilling, Preesall, and Fairhaven - 500 Dunlin at Fairhaven (2nd), 1300 Oystercatchers, 400 Sanderlings, and 240 Bar Tailed Godwits at Preesall (5th), and, 360 Curlew and 270 Redshank at Pilling (11th). Come the 31st, at least 3000 Oystercatchers and 120 Grey Plover were at Pilling.

A Short-eared Owl at the Mere on the 23rd was the first returning winter bird, a Merlin at L.S.A.N.R. on 5th and 12th and a Peregrine at Freckleton late in the month were the first birds of those species to return to winter quarters. A noticeable influx of Sparrow-hawks occurred in August, with records of singles from seven sites on fifteen days in the month.

At least ten young Barn Owls fledged from nests in The Fylde area. (Don't forget to record and report all Barn Owl sightings).

The Little Grebes at The Mere appeared to have a reasonably successful summer, with at least thirteen juveniles recorded during August - but, contrary to the statement in Newsletter No. 10, Great Crested Grebes were unsuccessful at the Mere this year, with sadly, no young seen. Occasionally Ruddy Ducks put in brief appearances at the Mere throughout the summer months, but hopes of breeding this year were unfulfilled - it should only be a matter of time before colonisation of local waters takes place.

Few significant wildfowl records were received, but amongst those submitted were,

250 Mallard on I.C.I. Pool and 350 Mallard at W.G.P.. The 304 Coot at the Mere late in the month indicated a local post breeding influx, whilst at W.G.P. up to 80 Canada Geese had 16 Greylags for company. Movements of Scoter included 25 off Rossall on the 31st, but more unusually, a single bird was seen on the Ribble off Warton Marsh on the 17th.

Seabird records were few during August, with only Gannets and Manx Shearwaters into double figures - 47 Gannets off Rossall on the 21st, 11 Manx Shearwaters off Rossall on the 29th, and 46 Gannets off Rossall on the 30th. Fulmars peaked at 6 and 8 on the 21st and 30th respectively (Both counts off Rossall - inevitably), also on the 30th the only Arctic Skua of the month was off Rossall. A Pomarine Skua off South Prom on the 11th was obviously lost and couldn't find Rossall - or had the watchers there fallen asleep as it passed. Little Gulls were represented by a single off South Prom on the 11th (immature), and 3 at Rossall on the 31st.

Passage of terns was unspectacular to say the least - no records of Sandwich Terns or "Commic" Terns came from coastal sites (not even Rossall), so one can only assume that seawatchers encountered very few birds. The only Common Terns reported were at "inland" sites, with 2 at Stanley Park Lake on the 7th, and 2 at the Mere on the 14th. Little Terns proved slightly more cooperative, 2 off South Prom (4th), another in the same area on the 5th, 2 off South Prom and 3 at Pilling on the 11th, a single on St. Annes Beach on the 12th, 2 off Rossall on the 28th, then 5 more at the same site on the 30th.

Black Terns turned up off South Prom from the 24th to the 27th, with 2 on the 24th, and singles on ensuing days (The same 2 birds may have been involved in all sightings).

Anticyclonic conditions predominated throughout August, as they had done since early in the year - but thankfully, towards the end of the month, rain was at last threatening to end one of the driest years on record.

Contributors; F.Bird. L.G.Blacow. R.Danson. P.Davies. F.Ellis. I.Gardner. P.Guy.
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** Correction to Newsletter No. 10 - Little Gull (Blackpool Zoo) should have read Little Owl.

Comment on BIRD NOTES in Newsletter No.10.

According to the "old" Handbook, Common Snipe and Jack Snipe are recorded as prey species for Short-eared Owls.

M.Jones.

NEST BOX SCHEMES in the Preesall/Pilling area.

Blue Tit - in fifteen boxes, 124 eggs were layed, 100 young hatched, and 67 fledged. This gave an average of 8.26 eggs per pair, and 4.4 young fledged per pair. The young fledged average was affected by children disturbing several of the boxes, this caused at least one desertion, and the young in two boxes to die.

Tree Sparrow - in twenty seven boxes, 319 eggs were layed, 229 eggs hatched, and 194 young fledged (125 were ringed). Sixteen pairs had 3 clutches, five pairs had 2 clutches, the remaining six pairs had single clutches. A maximum of 18 eggs was layed in one box, and from these 12 young fledged. One pair layed 11 eggs in three clutches, and fledged 11 young - this box was at Fluke Hall.

An average of 11.81 eggs per pair were layed, with approximately 7.3 young fledged per pair.

R.Danson.

WINTER SURVEYS in the Fylde area.

- 1.0 Area of coverage - The Fylde Bird Club Recording Area, taking the A6 as the eastern boundary.
Surveys to be carried out between November 1st and March 1st in each winter.
- 1.1 As can be seen from the size of the recording area, and from the number of K.squares and tetrads to be covered, such a survey would involve a great deal of manpower to obtain representative coverage, and would be far more ambitious than the coverage obtained for the B.T.O. Winter Atlas. There is a danger that "the necessity to cover" certain squares will become merely a "chore" rather than enjoyment.
I don't think we are capable or would want to undertake such a large scale exercise, therefore it would be better to select areas that members are capable and willing to cover thoroughly and regularly. Such a less ambitious survey could produce comparative data from year to year.

- 2.0 Counts at selected locations.
- 2.1 Useful records can be accumulated simply by regular counting of birds at different localities throughout the Fylde, e.g. The Mere, Preesall Flashes, Newton Marsh, Pilling etc.
- 3.0 Study Areas.
- 3.1 The literature suggests a workable area as being in the region of 200-300 acres (80-120 hectares). Such an area would be about 4x the size of the water area of Marton Mere. The actual size is best established by each observer, bearing in mind the amount of time one wishes to commit to regular coverage of such an area.
- 3.2 The study area should have clear boundaries so that it can be viewed as a self contained unit. It has been suggested that it is best to avoid thick woodland as it is very difficult to count in such a habitat. Open scrubland, pasture grassland, or damp areas are best.

- 4.0 Methods.
- 4.1 Two methods are particularly appropriate for the type of counts envisaged
 - a) A line transect - involves counting on a broad band using a route which dissects or abutts all the main habitats in a study area. The observer should keep on the move at a slow pace whilst carrying out this type of count.
 - b) A point count - involves a count for a given time at a prespecified point. Subsequent surveys should be made for exactly the same length of time in the same place. A variation of this method allows for a series of timed counts to be made at points close to each of the distinctive habitats within a study area. Counts for each spot should be recorded separately.
- 4.2 Whichever method is adopted, it is important for later comparability to do the count in the same way each time as this will diminish variability in results.
As you count you MUST resist the temptation to forsake your standard route or search area in order to obtain a full list on every visit. Remember you are building up long term data.
- 4.3 Weather notes should be made during each visit. Published weather records do not always reflect local variations operating at the time of the visit.

- 5.0 Conclusions.
- 5.1 In the opinion of D.I.M.Wallace, it takes about 3 years to understand how birds exploit a piece of mixed habitat, and about 7 years to observe all the regular fluctuations in a bird community caused by short term climatic changes, general population trends and other external factors.

References: H.Dobinson. "Bird Count" Penguin 1976.
D.I.M.Wallace. "Watching Birds" Usborne 1982.

David Jackson Aug 1984.

** Any members keen to carry out such a survey should contact Dave at Club meetings.

Request for information.

Richard Hall wants records of diurnal passage and seabird movements. Timed counts, and notes on weather conditions and tide conditions, and direction of movements - if possible broken down into half hour periods.

Richard also wants to organise a Gull Roost Survey from November to March - any members interested in either of these projects should contact Richard at Club meetings.

L.T.N.C. Appeal for Stamps.

The L.T.N.C. are appealing for used stamps, to be auctioned off at some time in the future. All stamps will be gratefully received and proceeds will be going to a very worthy cause. Stamps can be given to Maurice Jones at Club meetings.

BIRD NOTESSparrowhawk flying into window.

On 26.8.84, I was working in the front garden of my home at Gt. Eccleston, when a female Sparrowhawk flew past within a few feet of where I was standing, and crashed into the front window of my house before falling to the ground apparently dazed. On seeing me the bird attempted to fly off but this proved to be a premature action because it appeared not to have regained full control of its direction of flight, and circled uncontrollably above my head about five times before regaining its senses and flying away across nearby fields. Sparrowhawks are noted for such accidents, resulting from their impetuous habits when in pursuit of prey. This particular bird, although probably hunting, appeared not to be chasing anything at the time.

An interesting angle to this story is that inside the room where the window is situated, I have a collection of pot birds on the shelf of a wall unit, which, on subsequent investigation, proved to be in direct line with the Sparrowhawk's flight path. Could it be that this bird was actually attempting a "kill" on these pot birds, or was it pure coincidence??.

Maurice Wilby.

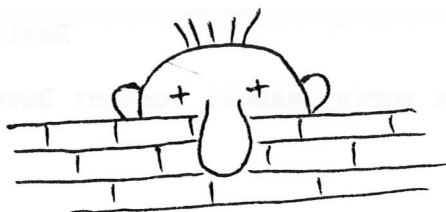
MARTON MERE

Along with so many other sites which have a high ornithological interest, the Mere is under constant threat from undesirable and often illegal activities. The close proximity of the caravan site inevitably leads to a lot of disturbance, but on top of this, other forms of disturbance such as egg thieves, motor-bikes, wind surfing - the list is endless - pose a threat to the breeding birds of the Mere. Indeed it was with much regret that this year we were not able to note a single breeding record for Great Crested Grebes, despite at least two pairs attempting to do so.

Although Marton Mere has been designated a S.S.S.I., this unfortunately does not carry enough weight, and it is my sincere hope that one day the Mere will become an official Nature Reserve with all the protection that it so richly deserves.

Until such a time arrives it is up to the diligence of people like ourselves to do as much as we can to curb the increasing disturbance, and hopefully allow Marton Mere to achieve its full potential.

Tony Myerscough.



WOT NO
CREEPY CRAWLIES?