

MARCH 1984

A severe N.NW gale at the start of the month blew itself out very quickly by the 4th as an anticyclone became established over Britain. This high pressure remained until the 12th when low pressure over France and the Bay of Biscay brought steady easterly winds for a period of about eight days. It was at the end of the period of easterlies that the first summer migrants appeared - a cock Ring Ousel near ICI on the 20th, and a Wheatear at Fleetwood Golf Course on the 22nd. Low pressure dominated from the 22nd to the 28th, but by the 29th another ridge of high pressure was building from the SW to bring more light easterlies from the Continent.

The gale at the start of the month appeared to have little effect on seabirds, except for 10 Guillemots off Rossall Point on the 3rd, and 50 Kittiwakes on the sea at Cokersands on the 7th. Later in the month birds were showing signs of northerly movement, as 40 Kittiwakes moved north at Rossall on the 24th, and at the same site 36 Little Gulls on the 31st. An adult Glaucous Gull at Fleetwood appeared to be the regular wintering bird, being seen regularly throughout the month. Fleetwood Tip had both adult and immature Glaucous Gulls, (the adult was seen by several observers who commented on its smaller size when compared with the larger bird at Fleetwood). Iceland Gulls are less frequent on the Fylde than their larger relatives the Glaucous Gulls, so a bird identified as a "first winter going into first summer" on the beach at Rossall on the 4th caused some excitement amongst the lucky observers. The first of this years returning Sandwich Terns appeared at the month end, a single off Anchorholme on 29th, a single at Cleveleys on 30th, then 2 at Rossall and 2 at Cleveleys on the 31st.

Following last months influx of Red Throated Divers off Rossall, up to 8 were still about during March, along with the Black Throated Diver and the Great Northern Diver.

The wintering geese Over Wyre once again produced one or two surprises for those prepared to examine flocks closely. As one might expect the Pinkfeet dominated with up to 5,000 early in the month, but the interest came in the form of a "Western" Bean Goose, and a small Canada Goose which was thought to be *B.c.minima*. Five Mute Swans on the sea off Rossall on the 18th were unusual, but might have been birds put off the marine lake by windsurfers - the 33 Bewick Swans on Pilling/Cockerham Marsh on 23rd and 24th, were almost certainly part of the Ribble herd on their way back to Siberia.

Three pairs of Great Crested Grebes re-established themselves at the Mere, with their smaller cousins the Little Grebes well represented by at least seven pairs towards the month end. A Slavonian Grebe going into summer plumage was off Rossall on 24th and 25th.

The female Long Tailed Duck continued to reside at the ICI pool, along with the female Scaup, whilst Rossall's Eiders came and went with the tides right through the month. A drake Scaup on one of the borrow pit lakes at the Lane Ends Amenity Area on 4th might have been a wind blown bird during the early gale. The re-appearance of a drake Ruddy Duck at the Mere rekindled hopes of possible breeding this year. Probably the most exciting wildfowl record of the month concerned a pair of Goosanders on the R. Wyre at Garstang apparently searching for a possible nesting site.

Single Water Rails were at Fleetwood Marsh and the Mere on the 8th and 16th respectively, and a cock Pheasant at Norbreck on the 27th must have surprised the observer concerned.

The March wader count at Pilling on the 18th indicated an increase on the January and February counts as birds began their gradual move north - 900 Oystercatchers, 658 Grey Plover, 9,600 Knot, 4,800 Dunlin, 730 Bar tailed Godwit, 720 Curlew, 142 Redshanks, and 123 Turnstones. Two Ruff spent most of the month at Wesham Marsh, and up to 2 Spotted Redshank were regulars at Pilling. Single Jack Snipe and Purple Sandpipers remained at their usual winter haunts throughout the month, but it was

Woodcocks once again providing the interesting "away from normal habitat" sightings - a bird flushed from the Pandoro vehicle park at Fleetwood on the 17th, and a bird seen going north off Rossall Point on the 21st.

During the month single Sparrowhawks were seen at six sites, these included a bird at Singleton hunting a Redwing roost, another by the R. Cocker hunting Starlings, as was a bird at Bispham Marsh, and a bird at the Mere on the 25th eating a cock Reed Bunting. On the 3rd at Lytham, a Merlin had taken a small wader for its next meal but was forced to abandon this by a marauding male Hen Harrier - the male harrier had been seen with two females earlier in the day. Merlins were at winter sites to mid-month, but signs of spring movement came on the 31st when a bird came in off the sea at Clevelleys. The dramatic reduction in Peregrine records from the Fleetwood area coincided with the demolition of the regular roost at the power station - the cooling towers were demolished on the 4th thus forcing the regular pair to find another roost, hopefully not too far away. Interesting sightings of Kestrels were of single birds reported as being "a long way out over the sea" off Rossall Point on 25th and 31st.

Overwintering passerines were still fairly plentiful, with at least 250 Bramblings at Warton Bank to mid month, 50 Twite at Fleetwood Marsh, and 11 Snow Buntings at Rossall until the 15th. Redwings were recorded in small numbers to mid month, with a roost of 300 at Singleton on the 15th the largest group - Fieldfares were recorded from widespread sites to the 24th when a flock of about 90 was at Thurnham. Seven Jays were still regulars at Ribby Hall, 2 more were at Salwick and a single at Singleton.

Passerines moving through the area in small numbers, but giving enough sightings to indicate migration were Coal Tits, Grey Wagtails, Pied Wagtails and Goldcrests; whilst towards the month end substantial numbers of Meadow Pipits appeared at Preesall Flashes, Rossall and Fairhaven.

True summer migrants were the first Ring Ousel on 19th, and Wheatear on 22nd - with Wheatears arriving in moderate numbers by the 30th and 31st when 4 were at Arm Hill and 6 at Blackpool Airport.

Kingfishers always add a touch of colourful excitement to a days birdwatching, and so it was when a bird spent a brief twenty minutes at the Lane Ends Amenity Area on the 11th prior to moving on to breed. Who knows, the bird at Lane Ends might have been one of a pair seen prospecting for a nest site by the R. Wyre close to Garstang town centre on the 27th - doubtful though!

The most exciting bird of the month came on the 31st in the form of a White Stork which for some reason best known to itself, decided to land not far from three Club members at Preesall Flashes - twitchers fever was back again!

APRIL 1984

This month will go down as one of the driest Aprils on record, a result of high pressure dominating the weather throughout the month. High pressure to the N. of Britain during the first few days of the month brought a cool N.NE airstream under reasonably clear skies. Cloud cover came on the 8th but didn't last long, and by the 10th clear skies were back, bringing warm daytime temperatures but cold overnight temperatures. Slightly higher overnight temperatures (5° - 6°C) on the 14th and 15th encouraged spring migrants to move in some numbers, bringing the first real influxes to the Fylde.

Heavily overcast conditions with occasional heavy showers of drizzle on the 18th-19th grounded fair numbers of migrants at some local sites, with Willow Warblers in the majority. This rain didn't last, and by the 20th high pressure was well established over W. Europe and Britain assuring one of the hottest Easter breaks on record. Of more interest to birdwatchers were the fairly strong E.SE winds generated by the anti-cyclone, which would inevitably drift migrants to some parts.

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On the 1st, the Over Wyre White Stork was playing hide and seek around Preesall and Pilling with the many watchers who came to see it, but by 13.30 the bird must have cried enough, and was last seen going east over Garstang pursued by a flock of small birds.

The West Coast Wader Survey began in earnest during the month, with several members counting the regular roosts around our coast. The counts received for the month were too numerous to list in this newsletter, but if all results can be collected then a small article may be presented at a later date. Amongst the counts submitted the following were of interest - 2 Spotted Redshanks at Lane Ends throughout the month, up to 15 Purple Sandpipers at Rossall, 450 Sanderling at Pilling, 600 Oystercatchers at Fleetwood Power Station, 4,000 Dunlin at Pilling, up to 400 Turnstones at Rossall, 10,000 Knot at Pilling, and 340 Redshank at Preesall Sands.

Amongst overwintering waders, a Jack Snipe was still at L.S.A.N.R. until at least the 23rd, and a flock of 1,000 "northern" Golden Plovers was at Elswick on the 22nd.

The first "spring" Common Sandpiper was at Lane Ends A.A. on the 12th, and by the 15th two more were at Newton Marsh, and a single at the Mere - birds were at widespread sites in ones, twos and threes by the 23rd. The highest single count was 5 at the Mere on the 25th. A Wood Sandpiper at the Mere on the 27th was unexpected, the species being more often recorded locally as an autumn visitor. A Greenshank at Fleetwood Marsh on the 23rd was the only record for that species.

Spectacular numbers of Whimbrel arrived in the area towards the month end, but the first birds were seen on the 20th when one flew north over Bispham Marsh and 10 were at Arm Hill. Birds were noted moving on the 22nd when at least 11 went north over Singleton, and 19 were at Winmarleigh - 11 were located at Cockersands the following day. On fields near Garstang on the 28th, two notable flocks of 38 and 62 had gathered - the following day an unprecedented flock of 122 was at Eagland Hill.

The last Pinkfeet of the winter were seen on the 14th when a flock of 75 flew north over Pilling, but the "wintering" Long Tailed Duck and Scaup at the ICI pool were still there at the end of the month. Goldeneye showed signs of a northerly passage with a gathering of 29 off Cockersands on the 8th, but the Eiders off Rossall showed no signs of wanting to leave, with up to 11 regularly throughout the month.

At the Mere the winter wildfowl numbers were much reduced as Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, Pochard and Tufted Duck moved out, but on the 15th the quantity was replaced by quality when a pair of Garganey arrived from the south. A drake Ruddy Duck once again raised hopes of breeding this year, but only if it can get out of the habit of displaying to young Mallards!

Sixteen Little Grebes were counted at the Mere on the 10th, but regular counts identified 5 or 6 resident pairs - 2 birds at Bispham Marsh indicated the possibility of breeding at that site. The Fleetwood Slavonian Grebe was last seen on the 14th, but the arrival of a Black necked Grebe at the Mere on the 24th more than made up for the Slavonians departure.

The great Northern Diver off Rossall was last seen on the 1st, but a bird in almost full summer plumage in the mouth of the Lune on the 23rd, may have been the same bird.

Sandwich Terns were off Rossall at the end of last month, and throughout April birds were regularly seen moving north - the highest count was one of 45 off Rossall on the 27th. Common Terns and Little Terns appeared on the 15th, with 9 and 2 respectively off Rossall. The first definite Arctic Tern appeared somewhat later on the 27th, again at Rossall. Four Black Terns in full summer plumage arrived at the Mere on the 25th, obvious drift migrants during the steady easterly winds (these were part of a fairly large influx to North West waters on the same day).

Small numbers of Little Gulls passed through during the month, with up to 10 off Central Prom and 13 at Rossall, whilst at the Mere, 3 were brief visitors on the 28th.

A movement of Fieldfares was obvious on the 8th when at least 800 were at HMS Inskip, 120 at Pilling, 26 at Newton, and a single at South Station - occasional birds were seen after this date, with the last being 2 at Fluke Hall on the 29th. The almost complete absence of Redwing sightings might indicate an earlier departure from local haunts.

Small flocks of winter passerines were still about during April - the most numerous being the remnants of Twite and Brambling flocks at Fleetwood and Warton. A female Snow Bunting at Rossall on the 8th was a late bird from the large winter influx of that species, and 2 Siskins going north at Bispham Marsh on the 21st would almost certainly be the last encounter with that species until next winter. North bound Goldcrests appeared to be fairly plentiful at several local sites throughout the month - the "heaviest" movement occurring between the 14th and 23rd when small flocks were noted at Hackensall, Ribby, Bispham Marsh, Fleetwood Fishmeal Factory, Lytham Cemetery, Fairhaven, the Mere and South Station. Redpolls were also noted in small groups from the 14th to the month end, with birds at Lytham Cemetery, Preesall Flashes, the Fishmeal Factory, Watson Road Park and Freckleton Naze.

One doesn't normally associate Green Woodpeckers with spring migration, but sightings of single birds at Little Eccleston (8th), Great Eccleston (18th), and at Bispham Marsh (20th), might indicate some kind of movement to sites east or north of our area - or do we have birds breeding which may have been overlooked in the past?

The first Willow Warbler and Chiff Chaff appeared on the 8th, with singles of each at Medlar Woods and Preesall respectively. On the same day a very early Tree Pipit flew north over Wharles. Following the first Willow Warbler sighting, the species appeared to consolidate its arrival fairly quickly, with birds at many sites by the 14th. On the 20th an influx of Willow Warblers occurred locally, with at least 100 at Bispham Marsh, 21 at the Mere, and 38 at Preesall Flashes - the majority of the birds at Bispham Marsh departed overnight, with only about 20 present the following morning.

The anticyclonic conditions over the Easter weekend brought arrivals of many of the summer migrants, to add to those which had arrived during the previous week - most noteworthy were the Redstarts, Ring Ousels, and Pied Flycatchers, which provided fairly high numbers for a local spring passage. The alarming lack of records for Sand Martins, Yellow Wagtails and Whitethroats appears ominous, indicating the possibility of a disastrous dry winter south of the Sahara.

Dates of earliest arrivals:-

<u>March</u>	20th	Ring Ousel			
	22nd	Wheatear			
	29th	Sandwich Tern			
<u>April</u>	4th	Sand Martin	<u>April</u>	21st	Grasshopper Warbler,
	8th	Willow Warbler,			Whitethroat, Blackcap
		Chiff Chaff, Tree Pipit		22nd	Pied Flycatcher
	12th	Swallow, Common Sandpiper		23rd	Greenshank
	13th	White Wagtail		24th	Cuckoo
	14th	Yellow Wagtail,		25th	Black Tern
		Common Tern, Little Tern		26th	Lesser Whitethroat
	15th	House Martin, Garganey		27th	Wood Sandpiper, Arctic Tern
	18th	Redstart		28th	Swift
	20th	Whinchat, Sedge Warbler,			
		Whimbrel			

(no Garden Warblers or Wood Warblers reported during April) /...

The easterly winds towards the month end brought the bird of the month to Scorton on the 23rd. Maurice Wilby, on one of his trips to Grizedale, found a Hoopoe on a field between the M6 and Nicky Nook - as one might expect the bird generated much interest amongst birders, but apparently not enough for Seaumus Eaves, he wouldn't go to see it because it would have ruined his holiday in Majorca the following week (who was he kidding?).

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REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

I wish to collect bird records from the recently completed Lane Ends Amenity Area (next to the sea wall at Pilling).

In the past two years the area has attracted about forty species of birds, these include Little Grebe, Scaup, Tufted, Pochard, Goldeneye, Red Breasted Merganser, Sparrowhawk, Merlin, Little Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Little Stint, Kingfisher, Stonechat, Twite and Snow Bunting.

The area was planted in 1984 with about a dozen species of shrubs and trees. Birds we are expecting to appear as plants start to mature are common species like Blackbird, Robin, Wren and Dunnock.

The survey area from which records are required is bounded by the gates/fence on the sea wall, including all the planted areas, and both borrow-pit lakes.

All records from future visits will be gratefully received, as will records from the past two years.

Paul Slade.

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FOR SALE - LUMEX 14- 45 x 50 Telescope and Tripod. £45. Contact Paul Slade.

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BIRD NOTES

Foot-paddling by Common Gull

On the 9th February 1984, in pasture by the River Wyre at Garstang, I watched two separate Common Gulls foot-paddling. The day was sunny and mild for the time of year. Bernard King (in "British Birds" Vol.70, No.12) draws attention to this behaviour in the Black-headed Gull. Evidently though frequently observed on the Continent it is rarely witnessed (or overlooked?) in this country. The Common Gull is mentioned briefly in the same context, but two foot-paddling in a matter of minutes suggests the method is frequently employed to bring invertebrate food to the surface in pasture here as well as abroad. Are other members able to confirm this is so?

Owen Roberts.

Opportunistic feeding by Merlin

In Vol. 77, No.2 of "British Birds" there is an account by J. Jack of a female Hen Harrier and a female Merlin hunting together. Jack says "the latter (referring to the Merlin) was clearly taking advantage of the confusion and alarm among scattered mixed flocks of finches...". I have witnessed this behaviour often during the winter months on the South Ribble marshes, and as recently as the 7th January of this year I have recorded (on Crossens Marsh) "an adult male Hen Harrier leisurely quartering the

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marsh. In contrast to the harriers progress was that of an immature Merlin which zoomed in on and around it, doubtless trying to take advantage of the many birds the Harrier was putting up from the ground".

It would be interesting to know if other members have witnessed the behaviour described, and whether such behaviour has ever been observed involving other predatory species (Marsh Harrier for example).

Owen Roberts.

Removal of Collared Dove from perch by Starling

In early April 1984, when standing at the window of my South Shore home, I observed a Collared Dove perched on the TV aerial of a nearby house. The next moment a Starling appeared on the scene, completely landing on the Dove's back.

After a momentary flurry of wings, the unfortunate Dove quickly vacated the perch leaving it to the Starling which after a further 5 seconds or so itself departed.

Ed. Stirling.

Kestrel Hiding Prey

On 23rd April, 1984, a female Kestrel was seen hovering over a grass field at Preesall. After stooping it was seen to carry off a small rodent, but only as far as a post in the middle of the field. After about a minute it flew to the foot of another post and pushed the prey down into a tuft of grass. It then flew onto overhead wire and after about 3 minutes it commenced hunting over the next field. On inspection the prey turned out to be a common shrew.

Bob Danson.

Kestrel Riding Thermal

On 22nd April, 1984, a Kestrel was seen to fly from a bush on Winmarleigh Moss then to circle on stiff wings gliding higher and higher until it was just a small speck (Jack Benson in the Evening Gazette wrote of seeing a similar event.) It was a very warm day and the bird was apparently riding a thermal.

Bob Danson.