

MAY 1984

Cool northerly and north easterly winds predominated throughout the month as areas of high pressure brought cool air down from the Arctic. This appeared to effectively block any northerly migration of several species which might have been expected in fair numbers under normal circumstances. Hirundines, Yellow and White Wagtails were almost none existant in observers records, in fact the only Yellow Wagtails reported were singles at Lane Ends on the 4th, and Fleetwood Power Station the 6th.

Migrant warblers were also fairly thin on the ground. The only Whitethroat records were of a single in the Railway Bushes by the Pleasure Beach on 3rd, 2 at the Power Station on 5th, a single at South Station on 24th, and a single in the Railway Bushes on 31st. No records of Whitethroat came from the Mere!. Lesser Whitethroats were only slightly better represented with singles at seven sites. The first Garden Warblers of the year turned up on the 2nd in Stanley Park and at the Railway Bushes, but 3 at Fluke Hall on the 20th was the largest group at one site. The only Chiff Chaff report was of a bird singing in the Woodland Gardens on the 31st. A Wood Warbler at the Mere on the 1st was a new species for the site, whilst records of a single at Fluke Hall on several days to the 20th probably refered to a single bird held up by the cold northerly airstream. A Wood Warbler singing at Nicky Nook was probably establishing its territory. Blackcaps were almost certainly the best represented species, with singles in Stanley Park (on several days), at the Mere, Poulton, Carleton, and Bispham Marsh; up to 2 at Singleton Hall and Lytham Cemetery; and at least 6 at Clifton Hall.

This years first Spotted Flycatchers appeared on the 4th when 2 were at Fluke Hall, singles were seen throughout the month at several sites, but 3 in Stanley Park on the 28th the most at any one site.

Another poorly represented species was the Wheatear, with 3 at the Power Station on the 5th, one at Bispham Marsh on 9th, one at the Mere on 19th, one at South Station on 24th, and 2 at the Power Station on 29th. Whinchats fared only slightly better, with birds in twos and threes at the Mere, the Power Station, and Bispham Marsh, throughout the month. A solitary cock Ring Ousel was on Pilling Sands on the 7th.

The outstanding passerine migrant of the month was the Ortolan Bunting found by Andrew Cadman at 06.30 on the 9th at Rossall School.

Whilst it appeared that some migrants had been held up by the cold wind from the north, some locally breeding birds, encouraged by the unusually warm April weather, were well on with their domestic duties - by the 28th at least one pair of Stonechats at the L.S.A.N.R. had two young on the wing, and another pair had young in the nest.

The Black necked Grebe which arrived at the Mere in April stayed until the 7th, whilst a Great Northern Diver (in full summer plumage), off Rossall on the 6th, might have been the winter bird ready to move north. The Long Tailed Duck finally ended its extended "winter holiday" on the I.C.I. pool, and was last seen on the 5th; the winter Eiders remained until at least the 27th when 2 were off Cockersands. During the month, 20 Eiders were off Rossall on the 12th, and possibly the same 20 off Cockersands on the 15th - 2 off Central Prom on the 25th were the only birds away from the north of the area. The largest Scoter count was one of 32 off Rossall on the 28th.

Yet another new species for the L.S.A.N.R. came on the 1st of May, when a Black Swan was seen flying north over the coastal dunes.

Following last months influx of Whimbrel, birds were still about until the 7th when 17 went north east over Warton and a single flew north at Rossall - the 73 seen flying north at Cockersands on the 5th was the highest count of the month. Common Sandpipers lingered longer than the Whimbrel, with at least one at the Mere on the 30th - the 5 at the Mere and a single in Stanley Park on the 18th probably indicated light passage at that time. A single Greenshank at Pilling on the 13th was the only record, whilst just outside the Fylde at Street Gravel Pits, a Little Ringed Plover on the 5th was the only one of that species reported.

Amongst the West Coast Wader Counts submitted the following were maxima for each species - 900 Ringed Plover at Pilling(13th) and 400 at Fairhaven(27th), 520 Sanderling at Rossall(12th), 1060 at Pilling and 2900 at St. Annes(13th), and 7600 Dunlin at Pilling(13th).

Thanks to staff at British Aerospace at Warton two members were granted permission to enter the airfield on the 20th to count pairs of breeding Ringed Plovers for the

B.T.O. Survey - at least seven pairs were located on a length of old disused runway. (Did anyone else do the survey at any other sites?).

The lack of onshore winds during May almost guaranteed poor seabird passage off the Fylde. Skuas were few, two Arctics and a Great going north off Rossall on the 5th, and a single Arctic at the same place on the 7th. The only Gannets seen were two off Rossall on the 6th and 5 there on the 12th. Fulmars were also few and far between, with one off Rossall and one off Central Prom on the 21st, and 4 off Rossall on the 29th. No records of Manx Shearwaters were submitted.

A Mediterranean Gull was at Lytham on the 13th, and a first summer Little Gull off Cockersands on the 15th. Two immature Little Gulls appeared at the Mere on the 23rd, and were still there at the month end.

Terns were offshore on most days throughout the month but never in large numbers. Little Terns however were unusually plentiful - 3 at Rossall(6th), 2 at Rossall(7th), 4 at Rossall and 2 at Cockersands(12th), one at Warton Bank and 4 at Rossall(13th), 2 off South Prom(15th), and 3 off South Prom on 26th - an unexpectedly high spring passage.

Following the four Black Terns at the Mere towards the end of April, eight more appeared there on the 1st of May, these were reduced to a single on 2nd and 3rd.

Andrew Cadmans mid month sighting of two Whiskered Terns off Rossall was unusual to say the least. One quickly recalls that it was only last year that the first record of this species came from the Mere (9th-10th June 1983), but on that occasion several observers were lucky enough to share that experience.

#### JUNE 1984

Summer migrants continued to be somewhat scarce during June, with only Swifts appearing in what might be called normal numbers. Between 100 and 200 Swifts were at the Mere and the I.C.I. pool on several dates, but by comparison Swallows and Sand Martins appeared almost completely absent, with House Martins faring only marginally better.

Up to 5 Reed Warblers were at Fleetwood Power Station, whilst at the Mere at least 2 singing males were established by the month end. Whitethroats appear to have met with some catastrophe again - only one singing male was found in the mid-Fylde area during work for the Corn Bunting Survey. Lesser Whitethroats appear to have been more successful than their near relatives, both in apparent numbers and breeding successes - birds were seen at several sites throughout the month, and by mid month young were being fed at the Mere and at Bispham Marsh (the pair at the Mere being a new breeding species for the site). A singing Chiff Chaff in the Woodland Gardens throughout the month raised hopes of possible breeding there, and at least two Grasshopper Warblers at the Mere was a probable indication of breeding at that site.

Late passage migrants encountered were two Wheatears at Cockerham on the 16th, a Whinchat at the Power Station on the 28th, and the unusual sighting of two Little Stints at Fleetwood Tip earlier in the month on the 12th.

Three unexpected seabird sightings came from the Mere and its immediate vicinity during the month. An immature Kittiwake appeared on the 2nd(4th record?), a juvenile Little Gull was in the grounds of Blackpool Zoo adjacent to the Woodland Gardens on 7th-8th, and a Fulmar over the Mere on the 10th was a new species for the site.

Seabird reports from the coast produced little of note, exceptions were 31 Sandwich Terns off Rossall on the 16th, 20 Gannets and 10 Fulmars at Rossall on the 23rd, and a solitary Manx Shearwater off Central Prom on the 27th. A gull, identified as a Glaucous/Herring hybrid, was on Lytham Beach from the 26th to the month end.

Amongst local breeding successes reported during the month were Sparrowhawks, Long eared Owl, Little Owl, Great spotted Woodpecker, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, and at least seven pairs of Curlew. Other species showing signs of possible breeding included Shoveler, Garganey, and Green Woodpecker.

The first indications of return autumn passage of waders came at mid month, when Redshank, Curlew, and Oystercatchers, were heard and seen in small numbers flying west

and south west over the Mere and Carleton. Further evidence of passage was a Whimbrel going west over the Mere on the 18th (or was it a late spring migrant?), two Common Sandpipers at Conder Green on the 23rd, a single at the Mere 28th-30th, and a single Green Sandpiper at Street Gravel Pits on the 30th.

Contributors; L.G.Blacow. P.Davies. B.Dyson. F.Ellis. I.Gardner. P.Guy.  
M.Jones. O.Roberts. P and P.Slade. E.Stirling. M.Wilby.

-o-o-o-o-

Correction to Newsletter No.9 - Page 2, 4th para., Ring Ousel on the 19th should read 20th.

-o-o-o-o-

Comments from Maurice Jones on Newsletter No.9 - (Bird Notes)

1. I can confirm that foot-paddling by Common gull is of not infrequent occurrence.
2. I can confirm the Hen Harrier/Merlin opportunistic feeding, having seen it on two or more occasions at Crossens. I haven't witnessed it concerning other predatory species.
3. I sent a note to B.B. a couple of years ago when E. Jackson and I observed a Kestrel hiding a rodent in a tussock of grass near Nateby
4. The small race of Canada Goose Over Wyre was not B.c.minima as stated, it was too large to be that race which is only the size of a Mallard. It was more likely a very dark specimen of the race B.c.taverneri, and had been seen in S.W.Lancs/Merseyside from the 13th Nov to 3rd Dec 1983.

From Barry Dyson

In response to Owen Roberts note on foot-paddling gulls, I would confirm that I first noted such behaviour in the winter of 72/73 on the wet playing fields at the D.H.S.S. at Norcross. Common Gull and Herring Gull were the species involved. I have seen the same behaviour on many occasions since, although rarely by Black-headed Gull.

-o-o-o-o-

BIRD NOTES

Peregrine failing to kill then abandoning prey.

On 21st April, 1984, whilst birding at Pilling, I became aware of considerable activity amongst groups of small waders, mostly Dunlin and Ringed Plover. I quickly located a Peregrine flying purposefully above the flocks. Ignoring the waders, the Peregrine seized in flight a Feral Pigeon, several of which frequent the area. Raptor and victim drifted to the ground, the Peregrine holding onto its prey with one foot. On reaching the sands the Peregrine transferred its hold to a more familiar one - the victim mantled and held to the ground by both feet, the falcon proceeding to pluck the unfortunate pigeon. After three or four minutes, when a considerable number of feathers were in the vicinity, the pigeon apparently gained consciousness and began to struggle, it had possibly only been stunned in the initial encounter. The pigeon succeeded in dislodging the Peregrine. The raptor allowed the pigeon to regain its feet.

At this point I could see the size difference more clearly. The two stood a few feet apart, the Peregrine was quite small and streaked on the breast - a juvenile male. The pigeon stood fairly tall, its bulk approaching at least three quarters that of the falcon.

After circling the pigeon twice, firstly walking and then low in flight, the falcon flew to a post about 75yds. away, where it continued to watch its intended meal. A further ten minutes elapsed before the falcon flew away south towards Knott End and out of sight.

Two hours later I returned to the shore, the pigeon was still in the same spot on the sands but there was no sign of the Peregrine. I can only presume that the Peregrine had by then found an easier and less troublesome target on the well populated shore.

Phil Slade.

Linnet obtaining nest material from dead rodent.

Whilst driving along Cropper Road, Marton Moss, on 17th June, 1984, I noticed in the road ahead of me, a small bird standing by what I took to be a dead bird - its mate I thought.

However when I stopped, I was surprised to see that instead of another bird, the corpse was that of a rodent, long dead, dried out and flattened. The bird, a Linnet, was in the act of tugging at the bits of loose fur, no doubt to be used as nest material.

Ed Stirling.

Swifts apparently avoiding heavy rain.

On the 3rd of June, 1984, I was watching about 200 Swifts feeding with 50 Swallows, 30 House Martins, and 4 Sand Martins, low over the surface of Marton Mere in steady rain.

In a particularly heavy downpour (09.35-09.40) I suddenly noticed the complete absence of Swifts, whilst the hirundines remained low as before. I could not see the Swifts higher in the sky, but within five minutes of the deluge passing they were all back - the rain by then being a steady heavy drizzle.

Had the Swifts mounted very high to get above the cloud layer?. It seems likely.

Maurice Jones.

Snipe falling victim to Short eared Owl?.

On the 29th March, 1984, I found a skull of a Snipe below a fence post amongst fresh Short eared Owl pellets.

Are Snipe a prey species of Short eared Owls, or was the bird more likely to have been the victim of some other raptor species, such as a Sparrowhawk?

Comments please.

Stuart Gibson.

-0-0-0-0-

Request for information.

Pete Marsh wants all records of sightings of wing-tagged Goosanders.

-0-0-0-0-

MARTON MERE

Members observing illegal activities at Marton Mere should ring Blackpool South Police Station. Telephone no. Blackpool 45581 - put it in your note-book.

-0-0-0-0-