

NOVEMBER 1984

November was memorable for the number of late summer migrants lingering after the long hot summer. Most numerous were Blackcaps, which wasn't surprising when one recalls the influx in late October. Single Blackcaps were at widespread sites to at least the 21st, with birds in the Railway Bushes, Revoc Park(Blackpool), Stanley Park, Clifton Hall, Hackensall Wood, Lytham Station, and Fairhaven Dunes, but five together in Stanley Park Rose Gardens on the 6th was the largest group recorded. Chiff Chaffs were second most abundant, with up to two at W.G.P. and the Railway Bushes, and singles in Watson Road Park and at the Airport. A Garden Warbler was in Stanley Park on the 1st, and two Whinchats at the Mere on the 12th. Late Swallows appeared as a single at Clifton Hall on the 4th, and a single at Wesham Marsh and two at Fluke Hall on the 10th - the two at Fluke Hall were seen to come in from the North across Morecambe Bay at 16.00. Perhaps the most unusual late summer visitor was a Swift reported flying over the Promenade not far from North Pier on the 14th - a Swift seen in flight over the Talbot Road/Devonshire Road area on the 15th was probably the same bird.

A small influx of Black Redstarts came with two at Rossall School on the 10th, then a single to the month end, and singles at cockersands(15th), the Airport(18th), and the NorthProm clifftop gardens(20th). A Snow Bunting was seen on St.Annes Beach on the 11th, and five Twite at Rossall and ten more at Preesall on the same date.

Amongst flocks of winter finches recorded during the month the largest of each species were, 22 Siskins and 175 Chaffinches going south at L.S.A.N.R. on the 1st, 120 Greenfinches at Preesall on the 4th and 150 at Cockersands on the 25th, and 31 Goldfinches at Preesall on the 11th.

Other passerines of interest included two Stonechats at Fleetwood Tip and two more at the Mere, a single at Rossall School, and up to four at L.S.A.N.R.. Eight Long tailed Tits at Clifton Hall on the 21st was the only record of that species, whilst the Pied Wagtail roost at the Clifton Hotel grew from about 90 at the start of the month to about 120 at the month end.

Amongst wintering raptors, Sparrowhawks were the most plentiful with singles at eleven widespread sites. Merlins were at the usual coastal sites north and south of the Wyre, and one of these was seen to take a Redshank at Pilling on the 10th. A "ring tailed" Hen Harrier was seen fairly regularly to the 10th in the Fleetwood area, with observers reporting the bird over both sides of the Wyre Estuary.

Up to five Short Eared Owls and two Little Owls were at the Mere.

Numbers of the smaller wildfowl species remained very much as last month, but a few sightings of "wild" swans added a little variety. Wild swans are never plentiful in our recording area, so the three Whooper Swans at Cockersands, the two at Nateby, the single at Eagland Hill, and eight Bewicks near Fleetwood and three on Newton Marsh, were pleasant additions to the list of wintering wildfowl. Up to 42 Mute Swans were regulars at Fleetwood Marine Lake late in the month.

The winter wader counts at coastal sites continued during November, but unfortunately only one count was submitted. The roost at St.Annes on the 11th was made up of 9 Ringed Plover, 655 Oystercatchers, 3000 Bar Tailed Godwits, 2600 Knot, 2000 Dunlin, 250 Sanderling, 263 Grey Plover, and a solitary Turnstone.

Two Green Sandpipers were by a farm pool at Thurnham on the 11th, a Spotted Redshank by the River Wyre near Fleetwood on the 18th, and up to six Ruffs at Winmarleigh to mid month. A Woodcock was an unusual visitor to the Marton area when a bird was seen in flight over Vicarage Lane at 13.00 on the 6th.

Black Tailed Godwits appear to be forsaking their regular haunts, and are turning up at unexpected sites. During the month, 26 were at Out Rawcliffe on the 4th, and 36 at Pilling on the 18th - but 60 on Newton Marsh on the 18th were at one of their regular sites.

Seabirds were almost non existant, or so the seawatchers might have us believe. However, a count at the Wyre Estuary gull roost on the 4th produced 64 Great Black Backs, 350 Herring Gulls, 392 Common Gulls, 10250 Black Headed Gulls, and 17 Lesser Black Backs.

DECEMBER 1984

The December weather was fairly typical, being mild but changeable and without any prolonged cold spell. The predominantly south west to westerly airflow keeping severe frosts at bay.

At this time of year observers might normally expect to be counting the winter passerine flocks, and counting the days to next years first Swallow. So it was somewhat unusual for a Swallow to be encountered at Clifton Hall on the 8th, the bird being flushed from a small Starling roost by the ringers working the Hall grounds. A few days later, on the 13th, a Swallow was seen at Salwick, this may have been the same bird seen at Clifton Hall as the two sites are not too far apart.

Single Blackcaps were at Ansdell Station on the 2nd and at Normoss on the 22nd, and a Chiff Chaff in Stanley Park on the 30th. Undoubtedly the bird of the month was the Yellow Browed Warbler found by Malcolm Evans at Carr House Green Common (Inskip) on the 15th. Incredibly, this tiny visitor from Asia was the second in the Fylde this year, and only the third Fylde record. The Yellow Browed Warbler was still at the same site at the year end - what a way to end the year. It makes one wonder if others went unseen following the influx of birds during September and October.

The November influx of Black Redstarts left several birds at sites up and down the Fylde coast. The Black Redstart at the clifftop gardens at Bispham on the 17th November was still present at the beginning of December, whilst elsewhere, singles were found at Fleetwood Promenade, Rossall School, Lytham, and Squires Gate Industrial Estate. A flock of up to 50 Twite was regularly encountered in the Rossall/Fleetwood area throughout the month, and a Stonechat was at Rossall School from the 8th to the 16th. Two Stonechats were on L.S.A.N.R. on the 5th, and a Siskin flew south there on the 16th. Five Snow Buntings, 2m & 1f, appeared at Fairhaven on the 9th, a single at Lane Ends on the 23rd, then three at Fleetwood Marine Lake from the 28th to the month end. Amongst Song Thrushes at the Mere on the 26th were at least six birds described by one observer as "small grey coloured birds" - possibly of Continental origin.

The Greenfinch roost at Fleetwood Marine Lake held at least 400 birds on the 16th, and up to 180 Pied Wagtails were at the Clifton Hotel roost early in the month.

A "twitch" to Belfast on the 22nd by three members for a White Throated Sparrow, rewarded one of them with what he described as his "best Christmas present".

Black Tailed Godwits continued to turn up at unexpected sites, with 40 at Rossall School on the 27th, and then 130 there on the 30th - also at the same site on the 30th were at least 150 Redshanks and 40 Dunlin. Bar Tailed Godwits at coastal roosts included counts of 2800 on St. Annes Beach and 900 at Lane Ends. Up to 96 Ruff and 240 Dunlin appeared on Newton Marsh, and 10 Ruff at Wesham Marsh.

A Bewicks Swan at Fleetwood, and 4 at Wesham Marsh early in the month were the only "wild" swans reported, and a Barnacle Goose at Pilling on the 9th was the only other species reported with the Pinkfeet during December.

A cold weather influx of wildfowl to the Mere on the 27th brought 67 Teal, 105 Shoveler, 8 Goldeneye, 67 Pochard, 65 Tufted, 153 Mallard, and 265 Coot. At other sites Teal had been fairly plentiful, with maximum counts of 70 at Pars Farm (Fleetwood), 140 at Newton Marsh, 140 at Lane Ends, and 60 at Bispham Marsh. A high count of Goldeneye came from the I.C.I. Pool on the 2nd when 21 were present, and two drake Pochard on the flash at Newton Marsh on the 5th were uncommon visitors to that water.

A Slavonian Grebe was at the C.E.G.B. Pool at Fleetwood from the 6th to the 14th, whilst small marshy pools in the Fleetwood area held at least three Water Rails throughout the month. Single Water Rails were at Bispham Marsh on the 23rd and at Lytham on the 25th.

Up to 7 Short Eared Owls were at the Mere during December, and Merlins could be expected anywhere, prompting one observer to comment, "I get the impression that increased numbers of Merlin are about this winter - it is however difficult to sex or age birds owing to only brief sightings".

At least two adult Glaucous Gulls were at Fleetwood on the 2nd, one a small neat bird similar in size to a Herring Gull, and the other a very large bird. A Mediterranean

Gull off Central Prom on the 9th was Ed Stirling's 97th species from the South Shore Telephone Exchange.

A Great Northern Diver on the sea and a Great Skua close inshore off Rossall Point on the 26th added a little spice to some quiet end of year seawatching.

Good luck to you all for 1985.

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#### BIRD NOTES.

##### Skylark leg dangling.

On the 13th July 1983, Maurice Jones and myself whilst visiting the L.S.A.N.R., repeatedly observed Skylarks (and on one occasion a Stonechat), flying with their legs held out beneath them in a manner reminiscent of Corn Buntings. In view of the very hot weather conditions prevalent at the time, it seems highly likely that this "leg dangling" was a means adopted by the birds to increase heat loss from their bodies. Indeed Norman Elkins in his book "Weather and Bird Behaviour" states that "blood circulation to the legs may be increased to enhance heat loss", and he goes on to stress the importance of the feet in many species as a source of heat loss "both by cooling in flight and in water". Thus it seems almost certain that the Skylarks were thermoregulating using one or other of these methods.

Richard Hall

##### Kestrel feeding on Flying Ants.

On the afternoon of the 18th August 1984, I observed a Kestrel apparently feeding on Flying Ants, in the company of Black Headed Gulls over the land to the west of Marton Mere. The Kestrel adopted a stiff wided attitude and soared around in a shallow spiral, showing movements of its head which strongly suggested it was feeding upon the ants. The Kestrel was watched for about five minutes, during which time it attained quite a considerable height. The day was warm and sunny, so it appears highly likely that this bird was "riding a thermal" in the manner described by Bob Danson in Newsletter No.9. The only reference to Flying Ants as prey of Kestrels in B.W.P. says that "they are sometimes taken in Southern Europe".

It appears that the Kestrel in question was indulging in some opportunistic feeding by taking a locally abundant easily obtainable food source.

Richard Hall

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The following short article was submitted by Barry Dyson.

#### SOUND EQUIPMENT.

I wonder why we make it so difficult for ourselves to record detailed descriptions of birds by relying on memory alone, when we have at our disposal small tape recorders.

Such a useful tool appears to be tailor made for birders. Instant record taking whilst watching a bird should make memorising almost obsolete. Expressing your thoughts simultaneously whilst observing a birds topography, jizz, behaviour and movements has got to be a vast improvement on waiting for the bird to move out of sight/range before putting pen to paper. Then if the bird should happen to show again, one has no alternative but to stop writing and concentrate once more on watching. I think you will agree therefore that this would be a most useful accessory particularly when visiting migration sites such as the Scillies.

It seems strange then that no one appears to be using what is after all a relatively

inexpensive item, the cheapest I have priced is £14.99 from Dixons. Far more sophisticated and expensive equipment is used to record bird song, yet I haven't seen tape recorders put to the use I am now advocating. Has anyone else? I would be interested to know. Perhaps it is something we might pioneer, together with CB which I would like to briefly touch upon.

Bobby Tulloch, in an article in April's issue of BB, mentioned how helpful CB and radar had been, in locating a White Billed Diver. I have on a number of occasions over the last few winters commented to Bob Danson about the potential for such a device, in for instance, monitoring the Over Wyre goose flocks. CB would also be of considerable value when seawatching. For example, last winter (83/84), I remember Tony Myerscough reporting 700 plus Kittiwakes off Bispham, yet further up the coast at Anchorholme, Phil Slade hardly saw any. If they had been able to communicate with each other, we might have been able to discover the reason why. CB would also be useful for locating, and for letting others know of interesting sightings - the ultimate grapevine locally, and a must for all you twitchers.

The only problem as I see it is adopting a suitable "handle" - I can't see much of a rush for "Great Tit", "Shag", "Coot", or "Dipper". The dialogue could be interesting though. For example - "Calling Great Tit, Calling Great Tit. This is the Dipper, This is the Dipper. I almost had a couple of Phalacrocorax aristotelises with a Turdus merula, out about where you are". (Think about it).

Barry Dyson.

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The following short article was submitted by Monty Myerscough.

#### Kestrel with Jesses.

On Monday the 27th August 1984, whilst on one of my walks around Ribby and the "old camp" adjacent to Ribby, I happened upon a strange bird which appeared to have long tail streamers. On close inspection the bird turned out to be a female Kestrel sporting jesses.

The Kestrel was very tame, and I could approach to within a few yards without the bird being bothered in the slightest. So, after taking a few photos I decided to try to coax the bird onto my hand using a few choice words of encouragement, such as "Come on Kes" and "Whose a pretty bird then". This very nearly worked, and after swooping down a couple of times from its perch, the bird hovered over my outstretched hand. Seeing no meat in my hand, the bird decided against alighting (very intelligent bird this).

It was obvious that the bird had to be retrieved, it was so tame, and consequently easy prey for the few small gangs of vandals who, on many occasions, I have moved on from the area, also the jesses had to be removed.

After going home and phoning Andrew and Tony for assistance, we returned armed with a leather glove and a lure, the lure consisting of a dead Blackbird tied to a length of nylon. We located the Kestrel again not far from where I had last seen it, so I approached cautiously and started swinging the lure and calling gently to the bird. It didn't work as I had hoped, and the bird just flew away to the next fence post. So, I tried dragging the lure along the ground. That worked almost immediately, and the Kestrel swooped onto the lure and attempted to fly away with it. You've heard of flying a kite, well this was a kite with a difference. When I made my way slowly towards the bird it let go of the lure and flew back to the fence post (foiled). My next attempt was more successful, instead of the Kestrel flying off with the lure it mantled it on the ground, and it was then that I managed to grab the bird. The entire process had taken about ten minutes. With the Kestrel now secure and perched on my gloved hand, I gave it a freshly dead mole which had been lying nearby. The Kestrel tucked in with great gusto.

I now had the problem of what to do with the bird, having no suitably secure place in which to allow it to be hacked back to the wild. Luckily I remembered someone in Southport who runs a bird of prey "hospital", and who had experience in hacking back healthy birds to the wild. He was only too happy to take the bird for rehabilitation.

So, if any Club members need to know the whereabouts of someone who cares for injured birds of prey, then contact me and rest assured that the bird will be well cared for.

Monty Myerscough (Falconer extraordinaire).