

SEPTEMBER 1984

Following the long dry spring and summer the rain came with a vengeance during September with just over seven inches of rain falling locally. The last time such an amount of rain fell in September was 1976 - the year of our last long summer drought.

Overall, September's weather was very unsettled with low pressure dominating the brief periods when weak ridges of high pressure built up from the south. Low pressure and the resultant depressions in from the Atlantic brought gales locally, encouraging seawatchers from their summer lethargy, and providing some interesting seabird records.

The two or three large Swallow roosts encountered at the end of August appeared to have merged into one huge roost at the Fleetwood reed bed at the beginning of the month. During the first week, estimated numbers of birds at the roost included 16000 on the 4th, 25000 on the 6th, and 15000 on the 8th, after this date numbers dropped quickly until the last large count on the 12th when it was estimated that 4500 birds came to the roost. Throughout the month Swallows appeared at several other sites but numbers were down in double figures. A Hobby seen at the Fleetwood roost on the 4th was probably the bird seen at the Mere during August.

The last Swift of the month (and probably the year) was a single at Fleetwood on the 18th, but prior to this, 3 had been at the Mere, and singles at Carleton, The Mere, and at Fairhaven.

Warblers were very thin on the ground to mid-month, and even more so from the 18th to the month end, during which period no records were received.

A Pied Flycatcher was in Watson Road Park from the 7th to 12th, and 3 Spotted Flycatcher at the same place, also on the 12th. Five Spotted Flycatchers were at Warton Marsh on the 15th, a single at South Station on the same date, and a single in Watson Road Park from the 25th to the 27th.

Redstarts are never plentiful at local sites so any records are always of interest - singles at Fleetwood and Watson Road Park on the 12th, singles at Watson Road Park and South Station on the 15th, and a single at Bispham Marsh on the 20th. The passage of Wheatears was almost non-existent, with 6 at Lane Ends on the 8th, and singles at Lytham and the Mere on the 12th, the only birds reported. Whinchats fared only slightly better, with up to 2 at Bispham Marsh, 4 at Fleetwood, up to 3 at L.S.A.N.R., and singles at the Mere.

Whilst the gentle trickle of departing summer visitors was taking place, post breeding flocks of passerines started to consolidate their numbers as birds moved into local sites from elsewhere. A flock of 70 Goldfinches at the Mere on the 15th was by far the largest count of that species, whilst at the same site on the same date a flock of 160 Linnets fell some way short of the 300 at Conder Green on the 23rd.

Passage waders were almost as scarce as their passerine counterparts. Up to 5 Spotted Redshanks at Freckleton and up to 4 at Lane Ends were present to mid month, whilst up to 8 Greenshanks at Freckleton and 7 at Lane Ends were present throughout the month. The only Whimbrel record was that of 2 going south at Fleetwood on the 4th, and single Green Sandpipers at the Mere on the 4th and 15th, were the only sightings of that species. Three Curlew Sandpipers at Conder Green on the 22nd did little to increase wader numbers, but did help to add a little variety to a disappointing month's wader watching.

Winter waders increased at coastal sites, and the first of this winter's Jack Snipe was a single at the Mere on the 29th.

Wildfowl numbers were reasonable for the time of year, with the Mere and the I.C.I. pool providing the largest counts. The Mere held up to 31 Little Grebes, 306 Coot, 4 Ruddy Ducks, and 85 Tufted Duck, whilst the I.C.I. pool had 166 Coot, 4 Pintail, 72 Wigeon, 35 Tufted Duck, 92 Pochard, 32 Mute Swans, and a single Scaup.

The Mere appeared to have more than its fair share of owls during September, with sightings of up to 4 Barn Owls, 2 Little Owls, a Tawny Owl, and 2 Short Eared Owls, throughout the month.

At least 2 Sparrowhawks were at Clifton Hall early in the month, but elsewhere singles appeared at the Mere, Bispham Marsh, Poulton, Lane Ends car park, Ribby, and Conder Green. Up to 2 Peregrines were in residence at Lane Ends at mid month, and singles at South Prom, Fairhaven, and Conder Green. The Peregrine seen at South Prom on the 13th was feeding on a Sanderling, whilst the bird at Lane Ends on the 22nd was seen to take a Dunlin.

Gale force north westerlies and westerlies which accompanied a very active depression in from the Atlantic between the 8th and 11th, provided some good seawatching off Rossall and South Shore - and to a lesser extent on the 19th when strong north westerlies from a depression centred to the north of Britain, brought more birds to coastal sites. (See list below).

SEPTEMBER 1984.	RED THROATED DIVER	LEACHS PETREL	MANX SHEARWATER	FULMAR	GANNET	KITTIWAKE	LITTLE GULL	GREAT SKUA	AMARINE SKUA	ARCTIC SKUA	LITTLE TERN
8th		3 S. PROM.		62 S. PROM.	12 S. PROM.					2 ROSSALL	4 ROSSALL
9th		6 S. PROM. 3 ROSSALL	6 S. PROM.	80 S. PROM. 13 ROSSALL	25 S. PROM. 140 ROSSALL	30 S. PROM. 5 ROSSALL	1 ROSSALL	3 ROSSALL	1 ROSSALL	7 ROSSALL 2 S. PROM.	
10th											
11th		3 CENT. PROM. 15 ROSSALL 4 ROSSALL 4 HOSPITAL	1 ROSSALL	1 CENT. PROM.							
12th			1 R. BIBLE- PREDATOR								
13th											
14th											
15th											
16th						1 LANE EGGS		1 LANE EGGS WATERLANDS			
17th											
18th											
19th	1 ROSSALL		28 ROSSALL	11 ROSSALL	53 ROSSALL			1 ROSSALL		3 ROSSALL	
20th		15 S. PROM.	15 S. PROM.			2 S. PROM.					

There were few Black Terns recorded in September, these being a single at the Mere from the 4th to the 9th, then 2 more there on the 11th and 12th.

The first winter Redwings came to the Fylde on the 24th, when in the darkness of late evening birds were heard calling as they flew south over Carleton.

OCTOBER 1984

October is regarded by many birdwatchers as the best month for encountering the unexpected, and Ed Stirling went some way to proving this whilst working his patch around South Shore. On the 1st, Ed flushed a Jack Snipe in Watson Road Park, and next day he found a Red Breasted Flycatcher at the same site. The flycatcher allowed several observers brief glimpses before its departure on the 4th (This was the third Fylde record, following birds on 26.10.78. and 26.10.83.). A late Yellow Wagtail was in Watson Road Park in the company of Pied Wagtails from the 10th to the 15th. Ed didn't give up there, he persevered, and on the 15th again came across the unexpected, a small "Phylloscopus" warbler with a prominent superciliary stripe and double wing bars, was in the Railway Bushes near the Pleasure Beach. Ed had found the Fylde's second Yellow Browed Warbler (The first had been at St. Annes in October 1957). He went back to the Bushes the following day (16th), but was unable to relocate the warbler. However, Ed's visit had not gone unnoticed, and a strange twist in the tale quickly followed. The owner of No. 3 Watson Road, called Ed over to tell him that a bird had got into his house, and could he (Ed) help him catch it. To Ed's amazement the bird inside the living room of No. 3 was the Yellow Browed Warbler. Between them they managed to catch the warbler in a shoebox, and after photographing the bird at home, Ed took the bird to Watson Road Park where it was released. The end to Ed's very special October came on the very last day of the month when he found yet another Red Breasted Flycatcher,

this time in the Railway Bushes (the fourth Fylde record).

Sightings of late summer visitors in the early part of the month were few, but included the Red Breasted Flycatcher in Watson Road Park, a Wheatear at South Station(2nd), up to 2 Redstarts at the Mere(until the 5th), a Spotted Flycatcher at Lytham Station(7th), and a Chiff Chaff in Stanley Park(2nd). The months latest House Martins were 3 at Ribby on the 7th and the latest Swallow was a bird flying low over the M55 at Catforth on the 21st. In the latter half of the month a small movement of migrants brought a Wheatear to Rossall on the 26th, two more to Conder Green on the 27th, a Black Redstart to a Vicarage Lane garden on the 27th, a Chiff Chaff in Hackensall Wood on the 28th, the Red Breasted Flycatcher in the Railway Bushes, and a local "fall" of Blackcaps north and south of the Wyre. The Blackcap arrival was recorded as follows, a male at the Mere on the 27th, a male at Preesall Flashes, 2 males and a female in Curwen Hill Wood, 6 males and 3 females in Hackensall Wood, a male and female at Poulton, and one in Watson Road Park, all on the 28th.

Early in the month a Great Spotted Woodpecker seen at Fleetwood Tip was almost certainly a migrant bird.

Winter visitors from the north included the first Fieldfares on the 6th when 5 appeared at Bispham Marsh and a flock of 55 was on fields by Cropper Road, Marton. A solitary female Snow Bunting was at Lane Ends on the 25th.

The lack of gales during October resulted in few seabird records at coastal sites, but a brief spell of strong W.SW winds just after mid month did produce a few sightings of local interest. On the 20th, 4 Little Gulls, a Manx Shearwater, a Fulmar, and a Gannet, were off Rossall, and next day, a Common Tern and a Mediterranean Gull were seen flying south at South Shore. Back at Rossall on the 26th, single Arctic and Pomarine Skuas provided the only skua records of the month. A Guillemot at Lane Ends on the 27th was probably the most unusual seabird record of the month. Great Black Backed Gulls do not normally feature in observers records, so it may have been somewhat unexpected to come across 174 of these large gulls at Fleetwood Docks on the 5th.

One or two Greenshanks and Spotted Redshanks lingered at Lane Ends to the month end, by which time the winter wader roosts were well and truly established at St. Annes, Pilling, and Preesall. Counts in the Preesall area on the 7th produced 21 Ringed Plover, 2400 Oystercatchers, 3500 Knot, 1200 Dunlin, and 375 Bar Tailed Godwits. Later in the month the roost at Lane Ends(Pilling) held 4300 Oystercatchers, 465 Grey Plovers, 8470 Knot, 2950 Dunlin, 820 Curlew, and 290 Redshanks.

Less common waders were represented by 3 Curlew Sandpipers at Conder Green on the 14th, a Grey Phalarope which spent about an hour at the Mere on the 28th(The first for the site), and 3 Purple Sandpipers at Rossall on the 30th.

Three duck Goosanders called in for a flying visit to the Mere on the 14th, in fact it was such a fleeting visit that a couple of visiting birdwatchers missed them altogether. However, the rest of the wildfowl at the Mere were somewhat difficult to miss, with up to 30 Shoveler, 3 Pintail, 3 Ruddy Duck, 185 Tufted Duck, 44 Pochard, 264 Coot, and 17 Little Grebes. Elsewhere, 600 Mallard gathered at Lane Ends and 150 at W.G.P., 192 Wigeon at Fleetwood and 240 at Pilling, 100 Teal on Newton Marsh, 3 Gadwall and 2 Scaup at I.C.I. pool, and 60 Scoter off Rossall. The first Goldeneye of the winter were 3 at I.C.I. pool on the 20th, but by the 27th at least four more had arrived at the Mere.

Over Wyre, small flocks of geese were fairly active but never in any large numbers. A flock of Pinkfeet at Lane Ends on the 11th had a Barnacle Goose for company, whilst at W.G.P. up to 71 Canada Geese were resident throughout the month. A skien of Canada Geese flying south over Poulton on the 31st had been joined by a Snow Goose (a Snow Goose had been seen a few weeks earlier in Scotland accompanying Pinkfeet).

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Records of interest submitted too late for inclusion in the September summary included :

- 1st. 4 Great Skuas, 2 Arctic Skuas, and 393 Common Terns off South Shore.
- 2nd. A light phase Arctic Skua, 274 Common Terns, and a Black Tern at South Shore.
- 3rd. 212 Common Terns, a juvenile Long Tailed Skua, going south at South Shore (a day of strong westerlies).
- 6th. First Pinkfeet heard over Blackpool at 00.30hrs.
- 21st. 1 Leach's Petrel, 1 Great Skua, 5 Arctic Terns, and 1 Black Tern at Rossall.
- 25th. A Sparrowhawk and 1000 Black Tailed Godwits near Warton Hall, and 17 Greylags at W.G.P

BIRD NOTES

Gulls Foot Paddling

I would like to point out that I have frequently observed Black Headed Gulls foot paddling at the edges of shallow pools on Blackpool and St. Annes beaches. In B.W.P. it states that "Footpaddling (by Black Headed Gulls) occurs on wet sand or mud, and in pools, but apparently rarely on land, unlike Common and Herring Gulls". This might explain why Barry Dyson (see Newsletter No.10) did not observe this behaviour by Black Headed Gulls on wet fields at Norcross.

Richard Hall.

Sparrowhawk Foot Cleaning

On the 10th of September, 1984, I watched a hen Sparrowhawk catch and then eat a small passerine. After feeding, the Sparrowhawk appeared to be cleaning its feet by placing one foot on top of the other and then drawing out the bottom one to remove feathers left from its prey. The hawk also shuffled its feet around on the branch of the tree in which it was perched, and on occasion turned completely around still shuffling its feet.

Bob Danson.

Peregrine Mobbing Great Skua

Whilst seawatching at South Shore on the 18th September, 1983, I and several other observers witnessed an unusual occurrence. A Great Skua was flying south about 100yds offshore, when suddenly a fem/imm. Peregrine came into view and headed for the skua as if to attack. At the approach of the Peregrine, the skua merely deviated from its course leaving the Peregrine to turn away and fly off along the shore.

Richard Hall.

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REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

1) Feeding Habits of Wintering Geese

Last winter many complaints were received by the Duchy of Lancaster Estate agent from tenant farmers in the Eagland Hill/Winmarleigh area about the taking of, and damage to, winter grain crops by geese.

The L.T.N.C. has asked if Club members will monitor the situation this winter to provide information on the impact of the wintering geese on farmland. A team of Club members already provides "Over Wyre" goose counts for the Wildfowl Trust, also information on their feeding habits, which is not always easy to establish.

This request therefore is for details of date, numbers, locations, and particularly, the feeding substrata of the geese in the Over Wyre area for this winter only. Information from any locality will be welcome, but particularly from the Eagland Hill/Winmarleigh area.

Details should be given to Len Blacow at Club meetings, preferably in writing.

Barry Dyson.

2) Mute Swan Sightings

Stuart Gibson wants all sightings of Mute Swans - he also wants any information on past breeding in the Club recording area.

3) Possible Ringing Sites

Paul Slade and his ringing colleagues want to know of any local roosts of finches or other passerines which might be workable. Paul can be contacted at Club meetings.

4) General requests from the Secretary for sightings of :

Wing tagged Eiders.

Wing tagged Black Headed Gulls and Common Gulls.

Whooper Swans with yellow plastic neck rings.

Colour ringed Guillemots (a bit optimistic don't you think ??).

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Birds of Watson Road Park

Although only 8.71 acres, Watson Road Park in South Shore is I should think, Blackpool second largest park after Stanley Park, and whilst lacking a lake, is rapidly acquiring a reputation as a local bird haunt worthy of regular attention. The parks place in the annals of Lancashire bird recording was assured at 09.15 on 30.9.82 when an immature Roller spent a nervous five minutes in the treetops.

My association with the park spans my lifetime, from being wheeled around there in a pram in 1939, making a record score of 39 on the putting green in 1964, to dawn visits searching for migrants in the 80's.

Today the park is but a shadow of its former days, having suffered massive defoliation under the regime of Fred Matthews, the Director of Parks, carrying out his "improvements" and producing his "attractive landscapes".

I began birding in the year 1970, but it was as recently as 1978 that I first realised the potential of the Park, and began to make frequent visits. A Willow Warbler in 1972, then a Goldcrest and a Blackcap in 1973 astounded me at the time but didn't inspire me enough to start regular visits. A juvenile Cuckoo which stayed for two weeks, and a Spotted Flycatcher in August 1978 convinced me of the value of the place.

It must be said that "good" birds can really only be expected during migration periods i.e. April - May, and mid August - October. At other times little else but Sparrows and Starlings are the order of the day, plus a resident pair of Magpies, a Crow, Blackbirds, and Collared Doves.

The clearing of about 99% of the Park's bushes has virtually wiped habitats for breeding birds such as Thrushes and Dunnocks, but occasionally Blue Tits, and I suspect Great Tits, have been successful recently.

I have come to realise that sites in the Fylde such as Lowther Gardens and Fairhaven Lake Bushes, which one would think were more suitable for migrants, fail to produce the variety that Watson Road Park attracts, located as it is nearly a mile inland from the coast. The fact that a large school playing field plus the railway land of the old South Station comprise one huge green area could be a possible reason. (The old South Station area is an excellent site in its own right).

When it comes to the bird list for the Park, I can name at least sixty species recorded there, plus a further ten or so seen in flight overhead (The latter group including terns, Herons, and once a Short Eared Owl). Two records of Sparrowhawks included in the 1982 Fylde Bird Report, were incorrectly attributed to the Park, they were actually seen in the Waterloo Road area.

Amongst the more surprising records is that of a Moorhen, which I saw some two years ago feeding on the putting green. Noteworthy to are the Autumn occurrences of Pied Flycatchers (always a good bird in the Fylde), a very early Fieldfare on 11.9.82, and the Fyldes latest ever Spotted Flycatcher on 11.10.81.

The Spring of '84 has produced little of note, so I'll be relying on a good Autumn passage. Lets hope that if another Roller shows up it might have the decency to "hang around" for a while. One of these days there may be unprecedented scenes in the Park, when tripod toting twitchers descend in numbers on some unsuspecting bird that does have the decency to "hang around".

(These were very prophetic words to say the least - Ed found a Red Breasted Flycatcher in the Park on 2.10.84, and this bird did stay for several days, giving many observers the opportunity to see it, if they were quick enough).

Sightings of interest in Watson Road Park.

- 5 - 10 occurrences Grey Wagtail, Redstart, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiff Chaff, Redpoll
- 3 - 5 occurrences Cuckoo, Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear, Secge Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Reed Bunting, Wood Pigeon, Whitethroat.
- 2 occurrences Coal Tit, Ring Ousel, Brambling, Little Owl, Tree Sparrow.
- once only Woodcock(2)8.11.81, Tawny Owl 15.10.81., Tree Creeper 6.9.81., Gt, Spotted Woodpecker 5.4.82., Moorhen 11.5.82., Roller 30.9.82., Jay 22.10.83., Whinchat 27.4.84., Red Breasted Flycatcher 2-4.10.84
- *Introduced sp. Yellow Browed Warbler 16.10.84. (see October summary in this Newsletter).

ELEONORA'S FALCONS AND BEE EATERS

Sunday 6th May 1984 - Formentor, Mallorca.

Sunny and warm.

I had given up on Eleonora's Falcon. I had after all had a good day, having found a Roller at Casas Veyas in the morning, and a Bonelli's Warbler foraging amongst pines below Formentor Lighthouse in the afternoon.

It was by now 6.00p.m. and we were returning to Casas Veyas in search of Rufous Bush Chat when I suggested we stop at one of the miradors overlooking the coastal cliffs, on the pretext of taking some scenic photography. Ellen knew that wasn't the reason at all, but didn't let on. We had after all stopped at the same place going, as it was a favoured spot for Marmora's Warbler and Eleonora's. However I was out of luck again, so we got back into our "death wish machine", our Seat Panda.

We were about to drive on when Steven, my son, pointed to a speck in the sky. I could not see what he was looking at because it was almost in line with the sun. Expecting a Swift I scanned the sky with my binoculars. I eventually got onto a dark silhouette but couldn't make out what it was because of the distance. Fortunately the bird descended and was joined by another. By now I could see it was not a Swift but a large falcon. I knew that Peregrines had been seen here, but these were not Peregrines. They had to be Eleonora's Falcons, and they were. Two light phase birds soon to be joined by a third. At that time I couldn't imagine what was to come.

Eleonora's Falcons displaying are a fantastic sight, scything through the air, twisting and turning, stooping at tremendous speed, and with wings doubled back level with the tips of their tails taking on a heart shaped appearance. There is no mention in BWP, that during some manoeuvres the tail feathers split apart rather like a tuning fork, and I cannot recall all the occasions when this happened, but when the birds pulled up from a stoop it was very noticeable.

It is never easy to remember everything when one is enjoying the excitement, spectacle and sheer pleasure of observing a new bird for the first time, especially when that bird is a falcon displaying. All one wants to do is drool and watch. The analysis comes later when you realise how much or how little has actually registered in your mind. Did it or didn't it, - had it or hadn't it, - streaked, speckled, or spotted, - brown or brownish, - supercilia or eyestripe, these are the questions you always ask yourself.

I drooled and marvelled at the elaborate display the birds performed, not only above me, but at eye level and below. Some talon contact took place between what I assumed to be rival males, but these were only token gestures. As we took our leave the falcons disappeared from view, but little did we know that our next and last port of call would excel this feast of aerial activity, but in a very different way.

"Quilp Quilp, Quilp Quilp Quilp", a call I had not heard before came from somewhere about me, moving fast and away. The birds had gone by when I counted sixteen of them heading across the Albufereta Marsh and out to sea.

It was five days later when I was to hear that same distinctive call (once heard never forgotten) of the most fabulous bird I have ever seen, the Bee-eater. This bird has to be seen at close quarters to fully appreciate its "presence".

I could only see the birds from the road at first after picking up their calls. The birds were distant, perched in and flying around a Corsican Pine feeding, during one of the calmest evenings one could imagine. I decided to approach more closely, a decision that for once was the right one. I got to within 50 to 100yds. You don't need to be any closer to witness the most fantastic flying display you are ever likely to see. The birds would alight and then glide down, looking like multi-coloured diamonds and floating rainbows, taking insects on the wing, then returning to their perches. If an insect had not been completely consumed by a bird in flight, the bird would perch and juggle the insect into the swallowing position. Fascinating stuff.

It was difficult, no it was criminal, to take ones eyes off the birds, even though they were almost popping out of my head after a full days birdwatching. The time was now 8.15p.m. and without warning the Bee-eaters moved on, all fifteen of them. I had at times watched six birds together in a single bush, but now they have become only vivid memories which I shall treasure and reminisce about for many years to come.