

JANUARY 1986

A fairly heavy fall of snow on the 7th quickly cleared as warmer air came from the West during the next few days. A depression moved in from the Atlantic on the 13th, bringing strong to severe gales which caused some structural damage along the coast, and brought huge seas at high tides. The remainder of the month was reasonably settled and fairly mild, but by the 31st a bitterly cold Easterly wind was warning us of what was to come in February.

The gale at mid-month brought a 1st winter Sabine's Gull to Fairhaven, the bird arrived from the sea and was then watched for forty five minutes at Fairhaven Lake before it moved on. The strong winds also brought up to 60 Little Gulls to the sewage outfall off Central Prom, 32 to Rossall, and up to 20 on playing fields inland near South Station. The long staying Mediterranean Gull remained at or near Squires Gate for most of the month, and a 1st. winter bird was found at Fleetwood Power Station on the 11th. A 2nd winter Mediterranean Gull appeared at South Station on the 22nd, and it was suggested that this bird was in addition to the Squires Gate bird, if so, then there may have been at least three of this species in the Fylde during January. On the 3rd an adult Ring Billed Gull was identified amongst the gulls roosting near Fleetwood Tip.

Raptors remained at their regular haunts. The male and female Hen Harriers at Lytham continued to hunt the saltmarsh near the Land Registry, along with 3 Merlin and a Sparrowhawk. Away from regular haunts, a Merlin was seen hunting over houses at South Prom on the 12th, and another flew low over Poulton town centre on the 18th.

Four Bewick's Swans, 3 adults and an imm., flew West over the L.S.A.N.R. on the 5th, and 10 Whooper Swans, 6 adults and 4 imms. were on floodwater at Thurnham on the 12th. Up to 57 Mute Swans frequented Fleetwood Marine Lake for most of the month, then on the 31st a group of 14 was on a flooded field at Carleton. Pinkfeet numbers increased gradually on the fields of Over Wyre, until by the final week in January at least 5000 birds were present.

Early movements of wildfowl included a drake Gadwall, 18 Pintail, and 6 Wigeon at Wesham Marsh on the 24th, and an influx of Pochard to the Mere which raised numbers there to 105 on the 25th. The 25th also saw a count of some 20 Red Throated Divers, 6 Great Crested Grebes, and 30 Eiders off Rossall.

Local woodlands again proved attractive to Woodcocks, with up to 3 at Lytham Hall, 3 at Ribby, and singles at several other sites.

The Birds of Estuaries Count was carried out on the 12th, unfortunately the only complete count was that from the St. Annes area and was as follows :- 2500 Oyster-catchers, 16 Ringed Plovers, 11 Turnstones, 1200 Knot, 1600 Dunlin, 400 Sanderlings, and 1200 Bar Tailed Godwits.

Amongst other wader records of interest were those of 2 Grey Plovers with Golden Plovers inland at Lytham Moss on the 11th, a Ruff at Fluke Hall on the 19th, and 104 Redshank, 220 Dunlin, 32 Ringed Plover and a Water Rail on flooded fields at Anchors-holme Lane.

An influx of Siskins was noticeable early in the month, when 30 were seen in trees on a traffic island at Ribby, and up to 45 in woodland at Bourne Hill. The Siskins at Ribby had 8 Long Tailed Tits for company on the 4th. A cock Snow Bunting was on Lytham Beach on the 8th, whilst on most tides at least 5 Rock Pipits were regular visitors to the marsh at Lytham Jetty. The Greenfinch roost on the island at Fleetwood Marine Lake held at least 490 birds on the 25th. Skylarks were also noted flocking late in the month, with up to 200 on stubble at Cogie Hill and another 90 or so on fields by Garstang Road at Poulton.

The most interesting passerine record of the month was that of a Mealy Redpoll with 2 Redpolls at Scorton on the 19th - the bird was described as being noticeably larger and paler than the Redpolls, with two pale wing bars on each wing.

FEBRUARY 1986

February will be remembered as the coldest since 1947. We endured twenty three consecutive nights of frost, and the days didn't seem much warmer. The cold came on bitterly cold NE winds from the Arctic circulating around a persistent Scandinavian high which reached out SW towards Britain. Heavy snow fell in many parts of Britain but thankfully the Fylde missed out on this, even so the cold was extremely uncomfortable and must have contributed to the lack of records for the month.

By the middle of the month many local waters were completely frozen over, and most of the waterfowl, at least those with any sense, had moved on to warmer climes. However, up to 300 Coot remained and crowded onto a small area of open water at the Mere, and 100 Pochard and 70 Shoveler had joined the resident wildfowl and gulls on the lake in Stanley Park. Early in the month up to 100 Eiders had gathered off Rossall along with 2 Long Tailed Ducks and a Red Necked Grebe, and at the same site later in the month 19 Scaup, 76 Mergansers, a Slavonian Grebe, 23 Great Crested Grebes and a solitary Coot.

On the 23rd a single adult Gannet was seen flying South off Rossall, whilst closer inshore at the same site an adult and a 2nd winter Glaucous Gull could be seen along the beach on several days.

Up to 6500 Pinkfeet were on the goose fields of Over Wyre during the month, along with 3 Barnacle Geese, a Bean Goose, a "Russian" Whitefront, 10 Whooper Swans, and unusually, up to 4 Ruff.

A Green Sandpiper was flushed from a roadside ditch alongside the goosefields at Moss Edge.

The Lytham harriers continued to hunt the saltmarsh by the Land Registry, on one occasion the male was mobbed by a hen Merlin. A female Hen Harrier was at Scronkey late in the month, along with a couple of Barn Owls. Two Peregrines were at Rossall on the 22nd, one of the birds was seen to take a Knot, and one of three Kestrels hunting at Ribby on the 22nd was seen attempting to take a Blue Tit from a small bush.

The Siskins which arrived at Ribby last month had dwindled to just 4 by the 8th, probably moved on by the severe cold. Numbers of Twite at Fleetwood Marsh remained fairly constant at about 40. Five Twite were noted flying NE over Preston town centre on the 25th. The cold weather was the probable reason for a female Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Goldcrest appearing fairly regularly throughout the month at a Hardhorn bird table, also the reason for 4 Goldfinches regularly taking the seeds from long decayed crab apples on a tree in a Carleton garden. The Pied Wagtail roost on the Clifton Hotel in Talbot Square held up to 235 birds at mid-month. A Snow Bunting was on Fleetwood Golf Course on the 9th, and on the same day 2 cock Stonechats were at the Power Station. On the 4th, during a night match at Blackpool Football Ground, a Blackbird was flushed from inside the roof of the stand - was it the noise or the standard of the football which hastened its departure?.

On the 12th of January, several members of The Fylde Bird Club collected 12 sacks of litter and rubbish from around Marton Mere - thanks go to those members who turned out to help in this task.

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FYLDE BIRD RACE

Following the successful "bird race" last year, it has been suggested that a similar event should be organised this year. The event will be run under the same rules as last year, and will take place on either the 10th or the 11th of May.

The names of team members should be submitted to Paul Slade as soon as possible.

BIRDS OF ESTUARIES

9th FEBRUARY 1986

	RIBBLE FRESHWATER	LYTHAM FRESHWATER	ST. ANNE'S BEACH	ROSSALL POINT	LANE ENDS	COCKLE SAND POINT	CONSER GREEN GUASSON MARSH
Little Grebe							
Gt. Cr. Grebe				2	2	1	
Cormorant	89	12		36	3	3	
Grey Heron	1						
Shelduck	56	201			279	51	40
Wigeon	320				14	255	1
Teal	43				130		4
Mallard	51				800	45	19
Shoveler							
Pochard							
Tufted Duck							
Scaup							
Eider				54			
Com. Scoter				1			
Goldeneye		2		9			
Merganser				37	2	7	1
Oystercatcher		250	1250	1497	3000	1148	
Ringed Plover		5	5	42		7	
Golden Plover	1				4		
Grey Plover				16	1300	31	
Lapwing	16				2		
Knot		4000	1900	2017	1460	104	
Sanderling			600	49			
Purple Sand.				3			
Dunlin		2050	460	544	4000	697	
Snipe						6	1
Blk. T. Godwit		160					
Bar T. Godwit		650	1700	56	58	9	
Curlew	8	31		4	354	11	32
Redshank	11	340	15	331	32	23	25
Turnstone		36	1	50		96	
Pintail					2		
Pink F. Goose					4		

BIRD NOTESGt. Black Backed Gulls and Little Auks

On the 2nd February 1986, Alan Hinchliffe and I were birdwatching at Redcar, Cleveland. We had been watching a Little Auk for several minutes when it was seized by a Gt. Black Backed Gull. The auk probably escaped, it was seen to be dropped and on hitting the water dived immediately. We never saw the auk again, and the gull made no attempt to find it again. The tide was ebbing and the auk could have surfaced some distance away without our noticing it.

This incident prompted me to record the following.

On the 12th January 1984, I was seawatching at Rossall Point when I noted a Gt. Black Backed Gull dropping a dark object into the water. A look through my telescope showed the dark object to be a Little Auk, the auk was seized and dropped another three times before the gull settled on the water with its "prey". Both birds quickly drifted out of sight on the flowing tide and I can only presume that the gull killed and ate the auk.

Another observer has reported seeing Gt. Black Backed Gulls killing Little Auks at Spurn. There is no reference to Little Auk as prey of Gt. Black Backs in B.W.P. Vol.3., but The Handbook (Witherby) suggests that weak or injured Little Auks make up part of the diet of these voracious gulls.

Len Blacow

Colour Ringed Gulls

Talk of marked and colour ringed gulls at recent meetings prompted me to search local records from previous years.

The 1982 Lancs. Bird Report had four. An adult Lesser Black Backed Gull ringed near Worcester on 31st Jan. 1976 was found at Fleetwood on 25th Sept. 1981. An adult Herring Gull ringed near Stirling, Scotland, on 4th Aug. 1981 was found on St. Annes Beach ten days later. Another adult Herring Gull ringed at Consett, Co. Durham, on 21st Aug. 1981 was found at St. Annes on 7th Aug. 1982. The most interesting record was that of a nestling Black Headed Gull ringed at Parnu, Estonia, on 30th June 1978 which was unfortunately killed by a car near Stanley Park, Blackpool, on the 1st March 1981.

The last record comes from the 1984 Walney Bird Report. A Herring Gull colour marked near Leigh on 13th June 1982, and seen at Marton Mere on 22nd July 1982, was subsequently found dead on Walney Island on 29th Aug. 1984 when it was at least six years old.

Len Blacow

"Request for Assistance"

When members undertake the Fylde Breeding Bird Survey they will probably have to make contact with farmers and landowners previously unknown to them. This will provide opportunities to broach the subject of large nestboxes in suitable locations.

A small stand of mature trees, gable ends of barns, and edges of mature woodland, these situations and others offer readily exploitable sites for owls and Kestrels etc. Obviously sites must be secure, away from roads, ideally approached along a private track, and unlikely to be visited by potential predators. A large nestbox, visible to all, will attract unwanted attention to the detriment of the birds, therefore the security of the site must be the most important consideration.

Members prepared to provide and erect large nestboxes are - Bob Danson, Phil and Paul Slade, Tony, Monty and Andrew Myerscough (are there any others?).

Phil Slade