

MARCH 1986

The bitter cold of February spilled over into March, the overnight temperature on the 3rd was down to -12°C locally, but thankfully by the 4th it became somewhat more mild and rain fell allday. During the ensuing few days a mild SW airstream became established, and on the 19th and 20th the fresh winds became gale force. A sudden return to wintry conditions on the 23rd saw heavy snowfalls overnight driven by strong to gale force winds. Thankfully these wintry conditions did not linger but the strong winds did and the 27th saw huge seas breaking over the Fylde Coast at high tides. The rest of the month remained unsettled.

On the 2nd the Mere was described as being 90% frozen over, but nevertheless thirteen species of wildfowl were present on the remaining 10% of open water. On the same day a Ruddy Duck was amongst the birds on Stanley Park Lake. A count of the Wigeon on Newton Marsh early in the month produced at least 400 birds, whilst wildfowl movements at mid-month brought 17 Wigeon, 13 Pintail and 2 Gadwall to Wesham Marsh, 145 Pochard to the Mere, and up to 16 Goldeneye to the I.C.I. Pool. Twenty Goosander were on Barnacre Reservoir at mid-month.

During the first few days of March, sea ducks, divers and grebes were fairly plentiful at Rossall. Fourteen Scaup were regulars off the Point, and on the 2nd these were joined by at least 200 Eiders, 30 Mergansers, and 40 Scoters. Up to 32 Great Crested Grebes and 23 Red Throated Divers were counted at the Point, along with 4 Slavonian Grebes - it was probably one of the latter which was found dead on the beach on the 27th.

The Squires Gate Mediterranean Gull was last seen on the 15th, but Glaucous Gulls were still about until the month end when 2 were at Rossall. The strong winds towards the month end brought seabirds close inshore - up to 80 Little Gulls were seen flying south past Rossall, as were 36 Gannets, whilst further down the coast up to 3 Fulmars appeared off Central Prom. Unexpectedly early was the first Sandwich Tern of the year which appeared off Rossall School on the 19th.

The severe cold of February and early March forced a few Golden Plovers into seeking food at some unusual sites - on the 1st, 2 were seen on the Solarium putting green at South Shore, another was on the lawn of the Old Folks Home on Clifton Drive, whilst on the 3rd a bird was on the lawn of a house on the Larkholme Estate at Rossall. (Has anyone any other information on Golden Plover feeding in unusual circumstances during the cold spell in February and March). On the 27th of March 2 "long dead" Golden Plover were found on Knowle School playing fields at South Shore.

Eleven Short Eared Owls on Clifton Marsh on the 4th had been there since January according to the farmer, but by the month end only 4 remained. A Little Owl seen at a nest box at Ribby early in the month raised hopes of possible breeding there.

A pair of Golden Pheasants were in the grounds of Clifton Hall on the 15th.

Some interesting passerine records came from the days which followed the cold spell at the start of March. Up to 45 Twite were on Fleetwood Golf Course, a male and a female Snow Bunting were at Rossall on the 8th and a male was in flight over Clifton Marsh on the 9th, a Treecreeper was at Burglars Alley on the 5th, and 16 Long Tailed Tits at Mess Edge on the 8th. A Goldcrest at Hardhorn on the 8th made many trips to a garden bird table on several days to the 19th; 2 male Siskins and a female came to a Knox Grove (Blackpool) garden on the 9th, and a female was on a bag of nuts in a Highfurlong (Blackpool) garden on the 23rd. On the 15th a flock of about 100 Bramblings was feeding on stubble at Barnacre, and on the 30th a flock of 50 was at Newton.

The first Wheatears appeared on the 14th, when 2 were found at Rossall. Four Wheatears were on Fleetwood Golf Course on the 17th, then odd birds were found elsewhere until the 28th when 3 appeared at the Mere and 5 at Fleetwood Power Station. More evidence of spring passage came on the 28th when at least 200 Meadow Pipits, 46 Pied Wagtails and a couple of Grey Wagtails flew north at Rossall, and as if to confirm this, 2 White Wagtails were at the Power Station on the 30th. The

following day a Chiff Chaff was at Bourne Hill, a Willow Warbler at Freckleton Naze, and a solitary Sand Martin appeared during the evening at the Mere.

APRIL 1986

April was extremely cold, with winds from N to NE for the most part, setting the season somewhat back. One member commented that "this has been the most backward spring since 1952". In spite of the lateness of the season several species of our summer visitors arrived "on time", but the majority of arrivals came after the 20th when overnight temperatures increased to about 8°C.

As the first of the early migrants were arriving during late March, so the winter wildfowl were departing for northern breeding grounds. The last report of Pinkfeet was one of 54 at Eagland Hill on the 1st, whilst the last Whooper Swans were the 4 on Warton Marsh from the 4th until the 9th. Amongst the sea ducks and diver records from Rossall were 30 Red Breasted Mergansers on the 12th, and 9 Red Throated Divers, 11 Eiders, and 223 Scoters, all on the 19th.

Wader records were few for April, but included 2 Purple Sandpipers at Rossall throughout the month, up to 800 Black Tailed Godwits at Fairhaven, 130 on Newton Marsh and 70 at the Mere, 2 Ruffs on Newton Marsh, and 1200 Sanderlings at Rossall.

Seabird records were even more scarce than those of waders, the only ones of note being a Kittiwake at the Mere on the 21st, and a Great Skua off Central Prom on the 30th.

The last sighting of the wintering female Hen Harrier at Lytham Marsh was on the 2nd, but Merlins, Peregrines, and Short Eared Owls delayed their departures to moorland breeding haunts until the milder weather arrived at the month end. Single Short Eared Owls were noted at several sites, but one unfortunate individual was found dead and hanging from a wire fence on Clifton Marsh - probably one of the eleven seen there during March. A Peregrine at Carleton on the 13th was seen to strike a Wood Pigeon then followed it to the ground to feed.

The latest sightings of Redwing and Fieldfares were those of singles of each at Rossall on the 23rd - a few days earlier, flocks of up to 100 Fieldfares had been at Bourne Hill and Carleton, and flocks of about 50 Redwings at Bourne Hill and Singleton. The last Brambling flock was one of about 60 birds at Eagland Hill on the 6th, but Siskins stayed a little later, with 2 in a Highfurlong garden on the 13th, and 2 more in a Layten garden on the 15th. The 15th also saw 5 Redpolls move through the Power Station site at Fleetwood. A Great Spotted Woodpecker found in a North Shore garden on the 11th was suffering from some form of poisoning, and unfortunately died whilst in R.S.P.C.A. care a couple of days later. A more fortunate woodpecker was a female Lesser Spotted which was found in the railway bushes along the old line near Fleetwood Tip on the 18th - in such an unusual habitat, one can only assume that this bird was a migrant.

Despite the unpleasant cold conditions early in the month a few migrants did manage to filter through to keep observers on their toes. A small "fall" of migrants came during the first few days when 20 Wheatears were at Rossall, 12 at the Power Station and 14 at Eagland Hill; single Ring Ousels were at Rossall and L.S.A.N.R. on the 2nd; and the first Swallow was a single over Witchwood at Lytham on the 5th. Following these early arrivals there was something of a lull from the 7th to the 19th when few new arrivals appeared - however, on the 15th a female Garganey was a new arrival at the Power Station and a drake was a new arrival at the Mere on the 18th.

The overnight temperature on the 19th/20th went up dramatically to about 8°C, this coupled with overnight rain brought the second "fall" of migrants to the Fylde. The morning of the 20th dawned warm with heavy rain, and with it came a variety of species. Sites at Fleetwood saw the largest numbers of migrants. Up to 50 Wheatears were on Fleetwood Golf Course and at least 40 at the Power Station, whilst at least 200 Willow Warblers were also reported from the Fleetwood area. The 20th also saw the first arrivals of several species - Whinchat, Yellow Wagtail, Redstart, and

Tree Pipit at the Power Station; 2 Whinchat, 1 Redstart and 1 Whitethroat, at Bourne Hill; 4 Redstart and a Tree Pipit in Fleetwood Cemetery; 2 Common Terns and a Whimbrel at Rossall. The first House Martin was reported from Wilkinsons Gravel Pits on the 23rd, and the same day 17 Sand Martins were at Preesall Flashes - a high count compared with numbers from the past couple of years. More double figure counts of Sand Martins were made at Wilkinsons G.P., Preesall Flashes, and Bispham Marsh before the month end - hopefully this is a reflection of an improvement in the fortunes of this species following several years of downward trends. The 24th saw the arrival of the first Cuckoo and Common Sandpiper, at Elswick and Preesall Flashes respectively.

Overnight fog on 25th/26th pushed more migrants down - 2 Ring Ousels at Rossall, 150 Swallows at Wilkinsons G.P. (the only large gathering reported), up to 20 Willow Warblers and 4 Chiff Chaffs at Bispham Marsh, 4 Tree Pipits at Bourne Hill, 3 Common Sandpipers at Conder Green and 4 at I.C.I. Pool, and 13 Whimbrel at Nateby. Blackcaps put in their first appearances on the 27th, when singles were at Bispham Marsh and Bourne Hill, and the first Sedge Warbler reported came on the very late date of the 29th, some ten days later than on average.

Considering the lateness of the season, it was encouraging to see several species of migrants arriving on time, and to see the apparent improvement in the fortunes of the Sand Martin. A disappointment was once again the almost complete absence of Yellow Wagtails, and from records submitted it was also apparent that very few Swallows had arrived by the end of the month. One can only hope that once temperatures begin to rise in May then the Swallows will appear in strength.

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SPRING MIGRANTS - average arrival dates.

	<u>1980/84</u>	<u>1976/79</u>		<u>1980/84</u>	<u>1976/79</u>
Garganey	21st April		Garden Warbler	4th May	7th May
Whimbrel	20th April		Blackcap	29th April	6th May
Com. Sand	11th April	14th April	Wood Warbler	3rd May	3rd May
Sand. Tern	2nd April	11th April	Chiff Chaff	31st March	25th March
Com. Tern	12th April	8th April	Willow Warbler	6th April	6th April
Lit. Tern	26th April	5th May	Spotted Flycr.	2nd May	10th May
Cuckoo	30th April	9th May	Pied Flycatcher	27th April	
Swift	30th April	5th May			
Sand Martin	2nd April	31st March			
Swallow	9th April	9th April			
House Martin	17th April	15th April			
Tree Pipit	22nd April				
Yellow Wag.	12th April	11th April			
White Wag.	31st March	6th April			
Redstart	30th April	9th May			
Whinchat	25th April	4th May			
Wheatear	21st March	24th March			
Ring Ousel	4th April	12th April			
Grasshopper W.	30th April				
Sedge Warbler	19th April	19th April			
Reed Warbler	8th May				
Less. Wh/thrt.	28th April	7th May			
Whitethroat	24th April	24th April			

I think most species showing earlier arrivals, Redstart, Lesser White-throat etc. are due to increased observer coverage rather than a change in migratory patterns. Note Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler dates - regularly seen at traditional sites which have been watched for the whole period.

Len Blacow.

BIRDS OF ESTUARIES

13th April 1986

	RIBBE RICKLETON	L. THOM FARHAVEN	ST. ANNES BEACH	ROSSALL POINT	LANE ENDS	LOCKERSHAY POINT	CONDEL GREEN	GLASSBORO IN ARSH.
Little Grebe				1		3		
Gt. Cr. Grebe				20	2	3		
Cormorant	13	8						
Grey Heron								
Shelduck	85				66	9	32	
Wigeon	15				78			
Teal	6				33			
Mallard	17				13			12
Pintail								
Shoveler								
Pochard								
Tufted Duck								
Scaup								
Eider				2				
Com. Scoter								
Goldeneye	4						2	
Merganser				30			2	
Oystercatcher	15	1	73	98	137	122		2
Ringed Plover		80		36	9	5		
Golden Plover	375				35			
Grey Plover		285	4	4	200	11		
Lapwing	50				137			14
Knot		10850	530	726	5500	60		
Sanderling		2	400	312	20			
Purple Sandp.				3				
Dunlin		1800	350	125	2500	270		
Snipe					1			
Blk. T. Godwit	100							
Bar. T. Godwit		12	1	47	91	2		
Curlew	14	1			58	2		
Redshank	12	150	16	43	161	6		9
Turnstone		6		662	20	17		
Mute Swan								
Coot	20							
Moorhen	2							
Spotted Redsh.								

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NO SWANS, GEESE etc. (Don't know about auks).

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