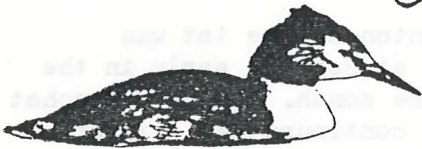


Fylde Bird Club



NEWSLETTER No.26

JANUARY 1987

The New Year came in with heavy rain and strong W.SW winds, but by the 8th and 9th we were getting a foretaste of the severe winter weather which was to come. High pressure over Scandinavia combined with low pressure over the rest of Europe brought bitterly cold air from Russia. Temperatures in Scandinavia were as low as -36°C , but thankfully, over here the temperature only dropped down to -15°C . Heavy snow fell in eastern counties and Scotland, but strangely here in the Fylde we missed the snow. Conditions became more mild by the 20th, then cold again by the month end.

A Chiff Chaff in a Thornton garden on the 1st provided one observer with an unexpected start to his year, but the bird would have been hard put to survive the bitter cold which was soon to grip Britain.

The most significant changes noted by most observers during the cold spell were those amongst waders and wildfowl. The Arctic conditions which had frozen the ground solid had also driven Lapwings and Golden Plovers out of the area to find milder conditions in Ireland. The freeze had also caused an influx of Teal and geese to local sites. Significant numbers of Teal had arrived at the Mere by the 19th when a record count of 520 was made. In Over Wyre, Pinkfeet increased from about 6000 to 12800 by the 18th. This influx of geese came from outside the county, evidenced by the presence of a Greater Snow Goose which hadn't been seen prior to the influx. With the Pinkfeet and the Snow Goose came 2 Brent Geese and 2 Barnacles. Twelve Whooper Swans appeared by the River Wyre at Out Rawcliffe on the 18th, and were still in the same area at the month end. During the cold spell at mid month 3 Bewick's Swans turned up briefly at the Mere, and a few days later a single bird was at the same site. Earlier in the month, on the 3rd, 9 Bewick's were seen in flight over the River Ribble at Clifton Marsh.

With most waters inland frozen, there was a noticeable increase in wildfowl numbers at coastal sites. Up to 500 Mallard were at Lane Ends, 660 Wigeon and 25 Great Crested Grebes in the Lune Estuary, 25 Pintail at Rossall, and 16 Goldeneye off Central Prom. Six Mute Swans were on the sea at Central Prom on the 16th.

A very early Mallard duckling was at Guardian Royal Exchange, Lytham, on the 19th, unfortunately it wasn't reported subsequently so may not have survived.

During the month a few Red Throated Divers were seen off Rossall, along with considerable numbers of Eiders which peaked at 210 on the 25th. The Fleetwood Glaucous Gulls remained at their regular haunts throughout the month, whilst a "stray" was seen over Watson Road, Blackpool, on the 11th. The only report of Mediterranean Gull was that of the Squires Gate bird on the 7th, whilst a report of 35 Little Gulls off Rossall on the 31st was the only record of that species. Sadly, the Razorbill, which was released on Fleetwood Marine Lake last month, was found dead on the car park on the 3rd.

During the first week of the month up to 4000 Lapwings and 400 Golden Plover were on Newton Marsh, but when the cold weather arrived all moved on to milder climes in Ireland. The severe weather brought an influx of Woodcocks, with singles at several sites and up to 2 at others. Unexpected waders in January were a Curlew Sandpiper at the Mere on the 4th, and single Green Sandpipers at Carr House Green Common on the 28th and Newton Marsh on 30th and 31st.

Sparrowhawks were at several sites during the month including one in a Cleveleys garden on the 8th, whilst a male Hen Harrier was in the vicinity of Cogie Hill to the month end.

Up to 5 Short Eared Owls were on Clifton Marsh throughout the month, and 4 more at Barnaby's Sands on the 31st. A Barn Owl provided regular sightings for observers in the Scronkey area, and at nearby Cogie Hill up to 3 Little Owls also put in regular appearances. Two Tawny Owls were amongst the birds caught by the ringers at

Winmarleigh Hall on the 11th, whilst another turned up in the same Cleveleys garden as the Sparrowhawk, on the 13th.

Amongst the wintering passerines, the Chiff Chaff at Thornton on the 1st was probably of most note, followed closely by the Black Redstart at Rossall early in the month and the few Snow Buntings at coastal sites throughout the month. A cock Stonechat was on L.S.A.N.R. on the 7th, and the Singleton Hall Nuthatch continued its' winter stay at that site.

Up to 1400 Wood Pigeons were found roosting in a conifer plantation at Singleton at mid month, and a similar number were located feeding on fields at Out Rawcliffe during the same period.

Whilst many birds were doing their best to survive the incredible cold of January, others were showing signs that it might not last too long and that Spring couldn't be too far away - a pair of Mistle Thrushes were found nest building in Stanley Park on the 25th.

FEBRUARY 1987

Many of the geese involved in the January influx remained about Over Wyre during February, and on the 22nd at least nine species of geese were present. Up to 9000 Pinkfeet moved between a few regular sites in the Eagland Hill area, accompanied by 2 Bean Geese, 2 Whitefronts, 6 Brents, 8 Barnacles, 3 Greylags, a Canada Goose, the Greater Snow Goose, and a newly arrived "blue phase" Snow Goose. Six Whooper Swans remained near the River Wyre at Cartford Bridge for most of the month, and 3 were on Stalmine Moss on the 22nd.

Early movements of wildfowl to inland sites included 2 Pintail and 6 Shelducks at Wesham Marsh on the 8th, whilst a "red headed" Smew at the Mere from the 13th to the month end was part of a widespread influx to Britain from the frozen Baltic. A female Ruddy Shelduck at Lane Ends on the 8th was of unknown origin. Ninety two Pochard at the Mere on the 22nd was the highest count of that species for some time, but 34 Tufted at the same site was a normal count for the time of year.

Those members who spent time in Over Wyre chasing the geese flocks were rewarded with sightings of several other interesting species. The male Hen Harrier was still in the Eagland Hill area as were Merlin, Peregrine, and Sparrowhawk, whilst over at Cogie Hill up to 3 Little Owls were regulars. Elsewhere, up to 70 Corn Buntings were at Pilling, 10 Yellowhammers near Scronkey, 40 Stock Doves at Out Rawcliffe, and late in the month up to 300 Curlew on fields at Crimbles.

The Green Sandpipers at Newton Marsh and Carr House Green Common in January were still at both sites to mid month, and the flooded fields by Anchorsholme Lane attracted a Water Rail, 32 Black Tailed Godwits and 130 Dunlin. Counts of waders at coastal roosts were few, but one site which received extra coverage was Fleetwood Marine Lake. The annual draining of the lake provided feeding grounds for the waders at Fleetwood, and also a roosting site for up to 30 Ringed Plovers, 100 Redshanks and 50 Turnstones.

The influx of Little Gulls, noticeable at the end of January, continued into February when 43 were seen over the sewage outfall off Manchester Square, Central Prom. No sightings of Mediterranean Gulls were reported for the month, and the only Glaucous Gull recorded was the Fleetwood Marine Hall bird. The first Fulmar record for a couple of months was a single off Rossall on the last day of the month.

Snow Buntings lingered on Fleetwood Beach throughout the month, with up to 4 to be found anywhere between Rossall and the Marine Hall. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was an unexpected visitor to the Mere, staying for at least two weeks early in the month. A Green Woodpecker at Lytham Hall on the 20th was a record of a species being seen more regularly in our recording area. A Stonechat appeared at the I.C.I. Pool on the 21st, and a Black Redstart on rooftops in Central Drive, Blackpool, on the last day of the month saw the month out with the warmest February day for many years.

Contributors:- C.Band L.Blacow J.Cross B.Dyson F.Ellis P.Guy M.Jones
B.Lawrenson D.McCullough Monty Myerscough D.Richardson
Paul Slade Phil Slade G.Smith E.Stirling M.Wilby

The following item has been submitted by John Cross.

What a starter, a warbler for New Years Day. Twelve thirty amidst a rain shower, a small green bird landed in the birch tree to join several sparrows plundering the peanuts. Immediately the bird percolated down through the branches and rested up in a small conifer.

Small, green and quick of movement, my first thoughts were of a Siskin. March of last year produced up to five (including one male with a leg ring) for a period of a week, on the garden nuts. Through the glasses, at about thirty feet, it became obvious that the bird was in fact a warbler. Warblers at best, to me, are a confusing group; a bird out of season and very wet - help.

Dark legs and size would for me add up to Chiff Chaff, and at the right season its' song would have confirmed this. The bird had by now taken shelter in the privet hedge, the wet conditions and extremely poor light making a definite identification difficult. I know that Chiff Chaffs over winter, but I thought these were southern records. Eric Simms, in his "British Warblers", gives records for north east Scotland and mentions some six races, all with varying plumage - confusing to say the least. Nevertheless, I had by now decided our warbler was a Chiff Chaff.

We had six minutes of reasonable views, but the poor conditions didn't help. One prominent feature was good yellow colouring on the chin and throat, another was the extremely dark olive colour of the back, but that may have been a result of rain sodden plumage. Most of the time the warbler was in view it preened and fanned its' tail, this was probably an attempt to dry itself rather than the tail wagging mentioned by Simms.

A phone call to Phil Slade confirmed that Chiff Chaffs have been recorded during winter in the Fylde. Our New Years Day warbler was therefore labelled - Chiff Chaff. It's funny how one wants it to be something more exotic - a Green Warbler, or Melodious, or an Icterine - but I think we got this one right.

I have often wondered why we have never had a warbler in our garden, they filter through northwards in spring and south again in autumn, but this was our first. For those like me who are prisoners of suburbia, and don't have the much envied half acre of orchard butting up to some ancient woodland, the occasional unexpected record can be very satisfying. Our very small garden has over the years produced a few such interesting birds. Siskins in 1986, a Marsh Tit for a few days in the cold winter of 1985 which roosted in a small coconut shell before being ousted by the resident Wren. Linnet, Goldfinch, Pied Wagtail, Kestrel and Tawny Owls, have been other interesting visitors. Hard winters have produced Redwings and Fieldfare. Years ago we had box nesting Great Tits and Song Thrushes, but sightings of these two species are now red letter days. In really hard weather we have seen Song Thrushes that are far darker and smaller than those we see in summer, I feel sure that these birds, like the Redwings, are winter visitors from the Continent.

Our list of birds, seen from or near the house, is better than that of birds recorded actually in the garden. The list includes waders in profusion, including Lapwings, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Golden Plover and Curlew. Gulls and terns, ducks and geese. Good raptors that include Sparrowhawk and more than one Buzzard. On one occasion a pair of Buzzards was watched riding thermals and gradually moving north from the comfort of our own lounge.

Once again I stress that our garden is no better than most small, town gardens. We have made it more private and sheltered by planting evergreen hedges, provided a tiny pool, and planted small trees and shrubs to provide berries in autumn. There is also a birdtable.

The summer of 1986 was somewhat indifferent but we did log another first in the garden, a Small Copper Butterfly came to Marigolds in a window box. Grey Dagger moth caterpillars also appeared on the Marigolds. Our garden is overlooked by street lights so gets plenty of the larger moths which are attracted to the Clematis and Pyracantha blossom. We hope that the new Honeysuckle will help further, and who knows, perhaps we might get an Elephant Hawk moth.

No matter how unlikely or how small a garden may be I think it is easy to help a little, and of course being observant helps.

Record of Ringing Totals for 1986 - George Bowden and Bob Danson.

<u>Species</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Pulli</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Pulli</u>	<u>Total</u>
Mallard		2	2	Dipper		4	4
Shelduck	1		1	Mistle Thrush	3	4	7
Kestrel		6	6	Song Thrush	40	15	55
Oystercatcher		1	1	Redwing	3		3
Lapwing		56	56	Blackbird	154	34	188
Woodcock	1		1	Wheatear	1		1
Redshank		5	5	Redstart	1		1
Stock Dove		3	3	Robin	66	9	75
Wood Pigeon		9	9	Sedge Warbler	4		4
Collared Dove	2	5	7	Blackcap	4		4
Little Owl		3	3	Whitethroat	1		1
Tawny Owl		1	1	Less. Whthrt.	1		1
Swift	3		3	Willow Warbler	22		22
Kingfisher	1		1	Spot. Flycr.	1		1
Gt. Sp. Wpckr	3		3	Pied Flycr.	1		1
Swallow	13	59	72	Dunnock	54	1	55
House Martin	1		1	Pied Wagtail	1		1
Carrion Crow		17	17	Starling	417	51	468
Jackdaw	1	18	19	Greenfinch	194		194
Magpie	4	11	15	Siskin	2		2
Great Tit	95	24	119	Linnet	2		2
Blue Tit	375	144	519	Chaffinch	74		74
Coal Tit	8		8	Brambling	13		13
Nuthatch	1		1	Reed Bunting	4		4
Tree Creeper	1		1	Yellow Hammer	1		1
Wren	17		17	Tree Sparrow	14	411	425
				<u>TOTALS</u>	1605	893	2498

Request for Equipment

If anyone has a pair of good quality binoculars (Zeiss or Leitz, or similar) and a good quality telescope for sale, could they please contact S.M.Meredith at Bird Club meetings, or on Blackpool 696245.