

Fylde Bird Club



NEWSLETTER No. 29

JULY 1987

The Little Egret, first seen at Pilling in May, was still in the Freckleton area throughout the first week in July, and it was during this early part of the month that wader passage picked up apace.

During the first week Common Sandpipers were the most plentiful, with 12 at Conder Green on the 3rd, 3 at Freckleton Pools on the 4th, and 9 at Cockerham on the 5th. On the 6th the first Ruffs appeared, with 3 on Newton Marsh and a single on Warton Marsh. Warton Marsh also held 4 Spotted Redshanks and 50 Black Tailed Godwits on the 11th. The second Broad Billed Sandpiper in two years turned up at the I.C.I. Pool on the 12th, and was still there the following day. The I.C.I. Pool attracted a Green Sandpiper on the 14th, whilst on the 17th a Wood Sandpiper, a Greenshank, 2 Whimbrel and 4 Little Ringed Plovers, were also at the Pool. The beach at Fairhaven provided the first large count of Dunlin for Autumn, when 3300 were gathered on the 21st.

Very few records of breeding birds were submitted for inclusion in the monthly summary, so very little can be gleaned to provide any kind of picture of breeding successes in the Fylde. However, individual successes included Little Ringed and Ringed Plovers at I.C.I., a pair of Ruddy Ducks with 4 young at the Mere, and at least four pairs of Mute Swans with young at three sites.

Returning wildfowl, from breeding sites outside our area, included up to 30 Tufted Duck at the Mere by mid month, and an incredibly early female Goldeneye at the same site on the 24th. A small influx of drake Scaups came on the 19th - 4 off South Prom and a single at the Lane Ends Amenity Area (til 21st), and a single at the Mere on the 20th. The 19th also saw 20 Scoters off South Prom.

Seawatching proved fruitful for a few members. During what is usually a quiet month for seabirds locally, observers reported plenty of activity amongst terns, which could be seen daily in varying numbers all along the coast. A Sandwich Tern appeared at I.C.I. Pool on the 28th, and single Common and Arctic Terns were at the Mere on the 29th. On the 19th 6 Little Terns were off South Prom, and on the 23rd 12 more flew south at the same site. A pair of Arctic Terns with a juvenile were on St. Annes Beach on the 29th. Gannets were offshore on several days, including 120 off Cleveleys on the 8th, and 40 at Rossall and 30 at Central Prom on the 11th. Fifteen Gannets were seen diving for fish off South Prom on the 12th. A Great Skua was at Rossall on the 11th, and the following day a juvenile Arctic Skua was seen at Cockersands. A single adult Arctic Skua was off South Prom on the 19th. The first of

Autumn's Little Gulls were 2 at Fairhaven on the 18th, whilst adult and 1st summer Mediterranean Gulls were reported from I.C.I.Pool. The only Manx Shearwaters noted were the 9 birds flying south off Anchorsholme on the last day of the month.

July is traditionally the month when most birds are coming towards the end of their breeding cycles, it is also a time when many young birds are making their first flights. The ringers, hoping to capitalise on this glut of birdlife and increased activity, extended their activities to the Nook at Staining. Amongst the birds trapped on the 4th were 11 Whitethroats, 3 Lesser Whitethroats, 1 Blackcap, 3 Sedge Warblers and 11 Willow Warblers.

The most unexpected passerine of the month was probably the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at Carr House Green Common on the 25th, whilst the earliest of the smaller migrants to appear were the 20 Sand Martins seen flying west at the Mere on the 5th.

AUGUST 1987

Passage waders were reasonably plentiful at several sites throughout the month, with a total of twenty four species recorded. Amongst shore waders, 4000 Dunlin were at Fairhaven and 1000 Sanderlings on St. Annes Beach early in the month, whilst at Lane Ends over 6000 Oystercatchers and 2000 Dunlin were at the high tide roost on the 9th. Two very early Curlew Sandpipers were on St. Annes Beach on the 11th.

Fresh waders appeared at several sites, with some species in unexpectedly large groups. Up to 15 Common Sandpipers were between Lane Ends and the Cocker on the 1st, and 9 at Cockerham on the 18th - 10 Greenshanks at Cockerham on the 9th and 12 at Freckleton on the 29th - and at least 8 Green Sandpipers at Cockerham on the 23rd. Spotted Redshanks were present throughout the month at a few sites, with maxima of 3 at Cockerham, 2 at Freckleton and 2 at I.C.I.. The I.C.I.Pool provided the only Little Stint of the month when a single was there on the 27th. August is usually the best month for turning up a few Wood Sandpipers, but we had to wait until the last three days of August for singles to appear at Freckleton Sewage Works, Lane Ends and Cockerham. Amongst all the coming and going of the passage waders it seemed strange to see a pair of Ringed Plovers with two recently hatched chicks running about the I.C.I.Pool during the first week in the month.

The long stay Little Egret remained at Freckleton Pools throughout August, except for one occasion when the bird wandered down to the foreshore at Fairhaven(21st).

Wildfowl continued their steady arrivals at local waters, but as yet not in any significant numbers. Amongst the arrivals at the Mere on the 18th was a drake Garganey in eclipse plumage, whilst on the 17th the first Great Crested Grebes appeared on the sea at Anchorsholme and Central Prom.

Single Sparrowhawks were at seven sites throughout the month, and the first Merlin and Peregrine returned to Cockerham on the 9th and 31st respectively. A female Marsh Harrier was noted flying west at Lane Ends on the 31st.

During a three hour seawatch off South Prom on the morning of the 1st, 53 Fulmars were seen flying north and 30 going south, along with 6 Manx Shearwaters, 3 Arctic Skuas, one Little Gull and 6 Little Terns. On several days Common Terns were noted flying south in good numbers - the 9th saw at least 500 off South Prom and 220 on St. Annes Beach, and as one might expect, when terns are plentiful then skuas can be expected. Up to 5 Arctic Skuas were regularly seen off the Promenade during August, and a single Great Skua was at Anchorsholme on the 27th.

A juvenile Kittiwake arrived at the I.C.I. Pool on the 5th, and 2 juvenile Little Gulls at the Mere on the 23rd.

The exodus of warblers passed almost unnoticed by many observers, with very few being reported during the month. Fairhaven Lake did however produce small numbers of Willow Warblers, with up to 7 seen on a few days. The only Garden Warbler reported was a bird at South Station on the 24th. At Carr House Green common on the 8th, a Pied Flycatcher and a Redstart provided the only records of those species, and an immature male Stonechat at L.S.A.N.R. on the 13th was the first at that site since March. The earliest of the returning Wheatears were 3 at Fleetwood Power Station and 2 at the Mere on the 13th.

The passage of smaller migrants became more noticeable as the month progressed. Wagtails were prominent, with up to 74 Pied Wagtails and 14 Yellow Wagtails at Cockerham, and the first Grey Wagtails flying south at a few sites. The Swallow roost at the Mere had grown from about 300 birds early in the month, to at least 4000 on the 31st. Wheatear numbers also picked up, with at least 20 at the Mere on the 23rd, and lesser numbers at several coastal locations. The first Whinchat was a bird at Fairhaven Lake on the 27th, and the first Tree Pipit was heard in flight going south over Watson Road Park on the 31st.

The most exciting passerine migrants of the month both turned up during the Bank Holiday weekend, and both were found by Ed Stirling. The first was a superb and very confident juvenile Woodchat Shrike, found by Ed behind the coastal dunes at Fairhaven on the 29th. The shrike, the 2nd for the Fylde, and also the second for Lancashire, stayed around until at least the 31st taking its toll of juicy caterpillars and other insect life from the dune vegetation. The second rarity, also found by Ed, was a Wryneck located in the Railway Bushes behind the Pleasure Beach. It was amazing to see such a splendid bird in such strange surroundings, feeding by the railway line, occasionally flushed by passing trains, with a backdrop of the hustle and bustle of the adjacent Pleasure Beach on a very busy Bank Holiday. Where would we be without Ed and his "local patches"?

Contributors :- C. Band F. Bird L. Blacow S. Eaves F. Ellis I. Gardner S. Gibson
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BIRDS OF ESTUARIES COUNTS

July 12th 1987

Lane Ends

Gt. Crest. Grebe 1, Shelduck 70, Mallard 115, Oystercatcher 200, Lapwing 200, Golden Plover 28, Curlew 100, Whimbrel, Redshank 100, Dunlin 600, Common Sand. 7

Thurnham/Glasson

Shelduck 12, Mallard 23, Lapwing 229, Grey Plover 1, Curlew 37, Whimbrel 1, Redshank 6, Dunlin 4, Common Sandpiper 4, Turnstone 8.

August 9th 1987

Lane Ends

Gt. Crest. Grebe 1, Shelduck 100, Mallard 89, Oystercatcher 6060, Lapwing 16, Grey Plover 21, Golden Plover 10, Ringed Plover 4, Curlew 51, Whimbrel 1, Bar Tailed Godwit 77, Redshank 164, Knot 11, Dunlin 2304, Sanderling 54.

Cockersands Point

Gt. Crest. Grebe 2, Oystercatcher 4, Ringed Plover 20, Whimbrel 12, Dunlin 12, Turnstone 13.

Thurnham/Glasson

Mallard 10, Oystercatcher 15, Lapwing 12, Grey Plover 39, Curlew 93, Whimbrel 1, Bar Tailed Godwit 9, Redshank 237, Dunlin 18, Common Sand. 1, Turnstone 23.

Seawatching Spectacular

At 6.30pm on Sunday 30th August, myself and four other members of the Fylde Bird Club, Len Blacow, Paul Morgan, Paul Slade and Peter Scholes, boarded the M.V. Chalice at Newlyn for one of Peter Harrison's pelagic birding trips. The object, to see the "rare" Wilson's Petrel and other ocean going seabirds at close quarters. Prior to the commencement of these trips some two years ago, there were only ten records of Wilson's Petrel on the British List. However this is rapidly changing, with most of the trips recording a few of this former "megatick".

Hopes were therefore high as we nosed out of Newlyn Harbour on a relatively calm sea. Our host, Peter Harrison, explained that he did not expect to see large numbers of birds as the previous week's storms had cleared a lot of birds from the area for which we were heading. There was also an easterly wind blowing which tends to push birds further out into the Atlantic. He did say that if conditions remained the same we should see the odd Wilson's Petrel. He also pointed out that the key to the success of the trip would be the fleet of fishing boats operating in the area -- the area being some 110 miles W.S.W. of Lands End, known as the Wilson's Triangle, and a full 15 hours steaming away. The M.V. Chalice was equipped with radar and the idea was to tag onto the fleet of fishing boats, which for obvious reasons is where the birds are to be found. Occasionally, up to two thousand birds can be found around each boat when conditions are favourable.

During the $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours of light on our first evening nothing much was seen except for a few Fulmars and Kittiwakes following the boat, a few Gannets, and a single Arctic Skua, so at 9.00pm we returned to the cabin to discuss the next days' prospects.

At 6.30 the following morning, we emerged to find the boat pitching and rolling considerably. Fulmars, Kittiwakes and about 20 Storm Petrels were working across the wake of the boat. Shortly afterwards the first trawler was sighted and Peter Harrison put the first of the days "chum" over the stern of the boat. "Chum" is a mixture of vegetable oil, lard, chopped fish etc., which has been tried and tested to attract birds to the boat. The oily slick spread out and the boat slowly circled, whilst we eagerly scanned the feeding petrels. A couple of Bonxies homed in from nowhere, but the much sought Wilson's Petrel failed to appear.

At 8.30am it was back to the cabin for breakfast, the number of birders much reduced by seasickness. This did not deter the Fylde group, who eagerly tucked into their own and any spare breakfasts, plus mountains of toast.

Breakfast finished we made our way back to our birdwatching as the Chalice homed in on another trawler. Whilst we were still some distance from this trawler the calm was broken by Peter Harrison's excited cry of "there's a Wilson's in there amongst the Storm Petrels". There was a dash for the appropriate side of the boat, with one of our group falling headlong over the dinghy rope in his excitement, but nobody else picked up the bird. More "chum" was poured over the side, and once again we circled the oily slick. Peter Harrison again picked up the bird, and this time most people managed to get excellent views, this included the sick and dying who were brought up specially from down below. The Wilson's was larger and more round winged than a Storm Petrel, with a pale crescent on the upperwing and a plain underwing. The bird's incredibly long legs were noticeable as it skipped and danced on the surface of the water, the legs extending well beyond the tail in flight. Before long another Wilson's was located, and then another. We were now getting our "eye in" and could pick out the Wilsons amongst the Storm Petrels more readily.

After some time we set off to find another fishing boat which had been located on the radar. En route, Manx Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas were ticked off, along with more Bonxies (these were the most plentiful of the skua species seen). Another Wilson's Petrel was picked up in the wake of our boat, and soon after lunch we approached the next trawler. Some distance away, Peter Harrison identified a juvenile Long Tailed Skua, which flew over and around the boat, giving close views of its' barred underparts. The small size of the skua and the paleness of its' plumage were also noticeable. As we got closer to the trawler, a cry of "Great Shearwater on the starboard side" went up, and magnificent views were had of this superb bird as it sat on the sea amongst the gulls and then in flight as it circled the boat. The shearwater's large size, blackish cap, white collar, and distinctive underwing pattern and white tail coverts were all noted in great detail. We also got our best views of Wilson's Petrel - a bird performing almost alongside the boat. A most unusual sighting here was a Black Tern, Peter Harrison naming it the rarity of the day.

Then it was back again to one of the trawlers we visited earlier. On the way another Great Shearwater flew behind the boat, and as we approached the trawler yet another Great Shearwater gave us superb views as it flew in front of and alongside the Chalice. More Storm Petrels (there had been about 250 to 300 behind each trawler) were noted, and it was here that the only Wilson's Petrel, not seen first by Peter Harrison, was picked out by one of our group, bringing the day's total of Wilsons to an incredible thirteen.

The evening meal was served to an even more depleted number of birders - very few remaining fit to appear. It was excellent fare, highlighted by one person in the Fylde group eating 24 roast potatoes, much to the cook's amazement. We rapidly became human Gannets in the cook's eyes. Then it was out once again for the last couple of hours birdwatching, with the promise of a force 5/6 SE wind building up a big sea.

Fifteen hours of solid seawatching had produced some memorable moments, and as we docked in Newlyn at 6.30 the following morning most of our group vowed to return next year. The general feeling was that only such a trip could have provided crippling views of these superb, rare seabirds.

Seawatching at Starr Gate will never be the same again.

Alan Hinchliffe.

WADER COUNTS

October 25th 1987 09.27

November 22nd 1987 08.29

Times quoted are 3 hours before high water.

*December 20th 1987 07.30

*Priority Count

Anyone able to help should meet at the Lane Ends Car Park at the given time.

FUTURE EVENTS - CLUB EVENING MEETINGS

18th November 1987 - Derek Bunn, co-author of "The Barn Owl", will be providing us with an insight to this declining species.