

Fylde Bird Club



NEWSLETTER NO. 43

FROM THE CHAIR

'Estuaries' seems to be the current 'buzz' word in conservation, the R.S.P.B are about to launch a major fund raising appeal to support their campaign. Some of you will have already received details from the R.S.P.B and a cassette featuring Tony Soper and Joanna Lumley, it should be compulsory listening for planners and developers.

If any R.S.P.B appeal deserves our support this one surely does, living as we do between two of Britain's major estuaries, perhaps we should organise some fund raising of our own or at least donate the proceeds of this years 'Bird Race' to the appeal. If any of you have any comments or ideas please make them known to us.

Recently the 'Evening Gazette' dedicated a whole page to estuaries, quoting National and local conservation bodies and local authorities, almost everyone except ourselves. Mention was made of the 'Wyre Barrage' and the threat of Spartina to our estuaries, two issues we have tackled positively. Our low water survey of the Wyre is continuing and another Spartina dig on the Ribble is being arranged. A work session is being organised at Barnaby Sands in the Wyre Estuary on Sunday 18th March; I hope as many of you as possible will turn up to help.

One of our most important functions is partaking in the B.T.O Birds of Estuaries enquiry. After several years we managed to build up a regular team of Counters, covering six Wader roosts in Morecambe Bay. After two years of consistent coverage we will possibly be losing two of our regular counters. Can I ask for volunteers to join our team, all it needs is a commitment of a few hours each month. The rewards are a good days birdwatching and the knowledge that you are contributing to a vital ornithological survey and possibly helping to conserve some of our most important habitats.

LEN BLACOW

Mystery oil slick threatens Madeira islands



Oil spill threatens wildlife

Lisbon — An oil spill 12 miles long and one mile wide has covered the beaches of Porto Santo Island in Madeira, causing an ecological disaster (Nature de la Cal writer). Large numbers of turtles and seals are dying. The origin of the crude oil is not known. No spill had been reported since an accident involving the Spanish supertanker Aragon on January 2 near Porto Santo.

Oil menaces Madeira

Funchal (Reuters) — Portugal appealed to the European Community yesterday to help it prevent an ecological disaster on the Madeira Islands, threatened by a 13-mile oil slick. The Navy asked for tanks and booms from the EC's anti-pollution department to contain the spill, which has already polluted beaches and killed wildlife, officials said. The regional government fears the slick could ruin the tourism trade on the main islands, Madeira and Porto Santo, and devastate a sanctuary for rare seals and birds. Striches of Porto Santo's golden sands have been blackened by oily sludge and the slick has also washed ashore on the rocky northern coast of Madeira, one of Europe's favourite winter holiday spots.

Devil in birds blamed on farms

By Ruth Chadhill
Britain's farmers could be contributing to the rapid decline of some of the most popular bird species because of intensive farming methods, according to a report published in March. Some species have declined by half in under 10 years, according to *Population Trends in British Breeding Birds*.

The census that resulted in the report was commissioned from the British Trust for Ornithology by the Nature Conservancy Council in 1961 because of concern about the effect of farming methods on bird life. Every year since then, volunteers have visited sites throughout Britain and counted the numbers of birds. They discovered that the curlew and linnet have declined by half since 1981 and the skylark by 40 per cent since the late 1970s.

The shift from spring to autumn sowing, with the loss of winter stubble, has affected the mistle thrush and linnet. Herbicides and insecticides are implicated in the decline of the greenfinch and grey partridge.

Mr Chris Mead, of the British Trust for Ornithology, called for an agricultural policy to take account of conservation. Conservationists will this week decide whether to report Britain to the European Commission over a decision by Shell U.K. backed by the Government, to build a concrete runway on a part of the Scottish coast designated a site of special scientific interest.

Northon More, an area of sand dunes and salt marsh near Tain, Highland, is the only breeding site on the British mainland of the whimbrel, a rare wading bird.

A new series of *Fragrant* fig lacks off on Channel 4 1 Sunday with "Arctic Wonders," a chronicle of Greenpeace activists' exploratory mission to discover the exploitation of that continent in contravention of the Antarctic Treaty is leading widespread pollution and irreversible damage to wildlife issues tackled later on a include the greening of the and the fishing of Higha salmon fishings and the going fight to preserve a world's oldest, deepest largest freshwater lake, La Bialka in the Soviet Union. After a six-month

Gull deaths: renew pesticide concern

Scientists in Scotland have found high levels of the chemical Dieldrin, the main ingredient of a pesticide used in the fish farming industry, in 15 dead herring gulls (Kerry Gill writes). The gulls were found near fish cages in north-west Strathclyde and were said by an on-looker to be "drooping from the sly" after apparently consuming the pesticide Nuvan.

The gulls were found at a fish farm in Baddull Bay, close to the village of Scaur, operated by Mr Joseph Johnston and Co. of Montrose. The incident was reported and the dead gulls sent for analysis. Conservationists expressed deep concern over the incident for several years they have criticized the use of Nuvan against sea lice.

Mr Marshall Halliday, managing director of Joseph Johnston and chairman of the Scottish Salmon Growers' Association, said he was certain the chemical had come from another source. He denied any suggestion that the pollution had been deliberately laid around the cages. The birds were spotted by the farm manager who notified

Alert for giant eagle

Bird-watchers on the east coast were yesterday hoping for a sighting of a rare white-tailed eagle from Europe. The bird, with a wing span of about eight feet, was first seen on Wednesday flying over the sea off Scoll Head, near Blythburgh, on the north Norfolk coast. Mr Richard Millington, Bird Information Service spokesman, said it was later seen at Trichwell and off Hunstanton and was last reported heading towards the Lincolnshire coast.

naval officials believe that the slick may have come from the Spanish tanker Aragon which leaked 25,000 tonnes of crude oil Madeira two weeks ago. But Senator Edmarco Cruz, the deputy director of the Spanish Mercantile Marine, told the Portuguese news agency Lusa that it was virtually impossible that the Aragon was to blame. The spill was very thick for oil that had been in a choppy sea so long, he said. Officials have not ruled out that the oil could have drifted from a

large spill from an Iranian tanker off Morocco's Atlantic coast last month. But they say oil would normally have been broken up during the 400-mile journey to Madeira. Madeira's regional autonomous government was considering seeking the aid of France, Spain, Finland or The Netherlands to battle the slick. Scores of men using bulldozers and booms have scooped up several tonnes of oil on the island. Officials closed the island's desalination plant after finding oil in it.

Straw-burning

From *Mr Hugh B Lowe*
The minister of agriculture has announced the ban on straw-burning (report, December 4). The resulting total increases in organic heating and atmospheric carbon dioxide derived from the extra use of fossil fuel in straw incineration —¹ doing this in straw mists has, once again, put partly-informed public opinion

Over the question of birds, I hear from an organization that is offering \$41,500 to swap places with his hens for a week. To collect the money, says the Freer Battery Hen Association, the farmer will have to live in a simulated battery cage constructed to scale inside his own chicken shed. The cackles, I gather, are hardly falling over themselves to volunteer.

R sports from the shires speak of such a split of pressures this year that some boys to boys, the excess tag — a practice which even the British Field Sports Society views as wasteful and distasteful. I hear of one estate in north Cambridgeshire which allegedly burned 500 brace it could not even give away. Game dealers don't want them, as they already have more birds than they can handle. A hot dry summer has pushed up the native population, and Britain has lost its traditional pheasant export markets on the continent to cheap imports from Eastern Europe. (No, not Romania, a causeless proffered blushing at bears. The main source is Hungary.) The British sporting fraternity plans a meeting to drum up ways of persuading us to eat more home-reared pheasant. I shall go along with them if it can produce an unbleached variety.

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Giving anglers the bird!

A HERON that has lost its fear of humans is stalking up anglers fishing the Ribble.

They can get within three feet of the ace fish-er before it flies off and lands nearby. It tried to grab trout as they were brought in by a couple of Manninger anglers fishing the Prince Albert (Macclesfield) AS stretch near the Tiddled Trout at the weekend.

And it even attacked one of their nets several times.

The bird, which shows no obvious sign of injury, would appear to be hungry. It has been lurking round the same spot 100 yards upstream of the bridge for the last week and a half.

The heron is pictured hoping for a morsel from anglers fishing the Ribble near Hallpoony Bridge.

Most wildlife photographers only dream about shots like these and would be happy to get them with a long lens, never mind get one in close-up.

Shots of herons so close to humans are extremely rare, they are so people say.



■ Cardboard binoculars may not sound promising, but this pair deserves the highest praise. They fold flat for storage and give you 3x magnification of your subject be you train spotting, bird watching, or even in the back stalls at the theatre. At a mere £1.20 a pair (20p p & p), you might as well indulge in half a dozen! Order from Roopers Company, 20 Ridgewood Industrial Park, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5SX (tel: 0825-61744)

It's a birdie

Golfers at Whitsand Bay, Cornwall, are being plagued by a raven who has stolen more than 200 golf balls. 6/2

Why twitchers are Morocco-bound

This weekend, eight of the country's more experienced "twitchers" will fly to Morocco to sit by a lake south of Tangier and stare at a small, dowdy bird.

Twitchers are birdwatching's most obsessive exponents. Effectively on call around the clock, they will take time out from their professional lives, grab their binoculars and go anywhere — at no small expense — at the first hint of the avian world's more extraordinary and elusive prizes.

In February last year, an American Golden-Winged Warbler, blown by storms over the Atlantic, strayed to a parking lot behind Tesco's in Maidstone, Kent. Within three days more than 1,000 twitchers had tramped to the store to see it.

The Moroccan sands are, perhaps, no better known for such prizes. But for an original member of Britain's first rare bird "hot-line" and the landscape gardeners, accountants and business executives who make up the Moroccan party, they assume significance as the winter residence of one of the world's dying species, the Slender-Billed Curlew.

For decades, ornithologists identified the Slender-Billed Curlew, which looks virtually identical to its common European counterpart, as a migrant to Europe and North Africa from its summer breeding grounds in Eastern Siberia. As many tried and failed to locate

its Siberian home, excitement grew three years ago when enthusiasts found several pairs in a Moroccan lake. Leading twitchers from around the world flew in. The flock shrunk. This winter welcomed just three birds, one of which has since disappeared.

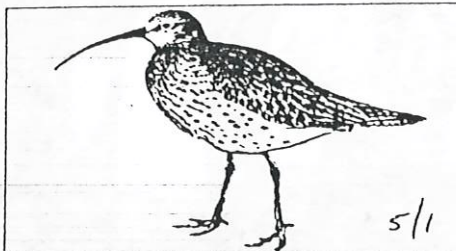
"Nobody really knows why the birds have declined or if there is an undiscovered population somewhere. They are pretty much an unknown species," explained Richard Millington, one of the founders of the hotline. For him and his companions, a glimpse of the elusive curlew will be the zenith of a year of furious activity.

"My emotions will be running high. The whole point of seeing a rare bird is the relief that you have actually seen it. The first reaction is to think 'Thank God, I've just flown all the way here and I've seen it'... quickly superceded by a feeling of elation."

The past 12 months have been good for him. The inspiring sense of relief has been pleasantly frequent. Having witnessed the Tesco sighting, the group managed to charter planes to Fair Isle, to the migrant-infested Scilly Isles ("never had any problem filling 'em"), and was one of thousands to be privy to the sighting of the Red-Breasted Nuthatch in Norfolk.

The British isles are suddenly abounding with rare birds. In 1988, no fewer than 10 newcomers were recorded. A particularly hardy Tris-

There is a rare breed of bird-watcher who will do anything, and go virtually anywhere, to see a rare breed of bird



Twitcher's target for this weekend: the Slender-Billed Curlew

tram's Storm Petrel even managed to reach Cornwall on an excursion from the South Pacific.

One explanation for the increase, put forward by Dr Tim Sharrock, managing-editor of *British Birds* magazine, is that bird populations and ranges have changed far more substantially and quickly than anyone previously imagined. Whether this is due to long-term food shortages after ecological disturbances at home or simply a series of freak weather conditions is unclear.

But members of ornithology's official home — the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds at Sandy, Bedfordshire — has offered additional theories. According to Adrian

Darby, chairman of the society's council, the increased number of sightings is in direct proportion to the increased number and sophistication of those watching — a phenomenon which has on occasion ruffled a few of the society's feathers.

In general we try to accommodate twitchers if we can," Darby says. "But I know wardens of our reserves think it a nuisance if a huge influx of them suddenly appears when a rare bird arrives. But then, they get pretty excited themselves."

Two years ago, the RSPB issued a statement warning that the scarce Cirl Bunting was likely to become scarcer as

the result of birdwatching "pressure" in the south-west of England.

Millington concedes his 24-hour "Birdline" may have helped trigger an explosion in birdwatching, but its technological revolution would still have continued apace. Connected by a system of Vodaphones, CB radios and personal invitations he and other diehards can now swoop on key arrivals with ease.

Millington claims that the group is self-policing. "If you don't behave the bird will either fly away or you won't be told about the next one."

The birds are often less reliable. Last year an Australian Great Knot landed in the Shetlands. Millington chartered a flight, called up a dozen or so acquaintances who arrived with telescopes extended, only to see the bird fly off — homewards — as they appeared.

The stakes have risen. Increasingly desperate for their sightings to be accepted by the all-powerful British Birds Rareities Committee, fanatics have resorted to a series of less-than-ingenious hoaxes.

In recent years, the elected committee of "10 rare men" has been forced to dismiss a photograph of a Siberian Thrush after the subject was found, stuffed, in a Gloucestershire field. An equally inanimate Night Heron fooled watchers for hours when it was stuck in a tree in Northumberland.

But away from the con-

trovery, at his home in Cley in Norfolk, situated by one of Britain's prime sites for weary and utterly lost foreign birds, Millington looks back with some satisfaction at his life as a twitcher. He was just 15 years old when he first "twitched".

It was 1969 and he had been a wide-eyed enthusiast for three years. "Somebody asked if I wanted a lift down to Fortland Bill to see a Desert Warbler and I just said yes."

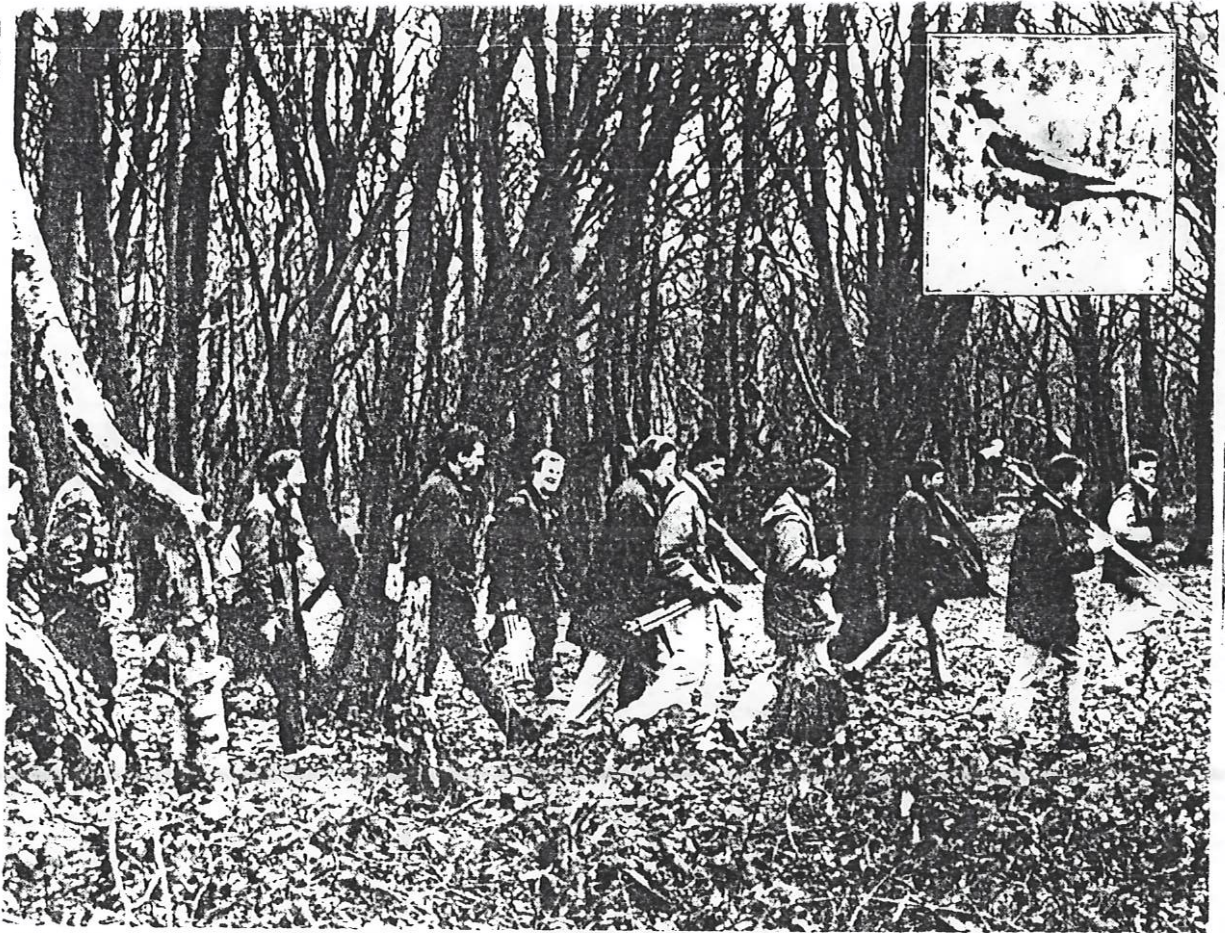
Since then he has seen 453 of the 550 or so species of bird known to have bred, landed or simply collapsed on the British isles (he points out that at least one, the Great Auk, has become extinct during his lifetime). But the target is moving. At the present rate of arrivals, Britain is likely to claim up to 600 species by the end of the century.

Although, domestically, he is a "top-lister": one of the few who have seen more than 400 species in Britain — internationally, he remains something of a fledgling. The legendary Stuart Stokes, an English businessman living in America, is the world's premier top-lister. The single-minded Stokes has taken it upon himself to see at least 7,000 of the planet's estimated 9,000 bird species.

Millington pauses in admiration. "After all," he muses philosophically, "it's only a small planet with a finite number of birds."

Tom Giles

I CAN'T SEE
 PETER SCHOLLES
 DR. DAVE ATMAN
 -PERHAPS THEY'RE
 BEHIND A TREE?



Birdwatchers trooping through Epping Forest yesterday in search of a Naumann's thrush from Siberia, sighted in Chingford, Essex, at the weekend. The bird (picture inset), never seen in Britain before, winters in the Far East but is thought to have been diverted by gales

WATCHING the birdie:
 In this case the first
 Little Bustard to be seen
 in Britain for 12 years.
 More than 1,000
 birdwatchers crammed a
 narrow country lane in
 a driving rain yesterday
 near Christchurch,
 Dorset, to look at this
 rare, long-necked, long-
 legged game bird. Little
 bustards have been
 appearing much less
 frequently in Britain
 because they are
 becoming scarcer in
 their breeding areas.

A big welcome back for the Little Bustard



JULIAN SIMS



PERHAPS ANY 4 FROM 6 TO GET THE FILME DOWN

BARN OWLS - PAST AND PRESENT

Monty Myerscough. Warden Lytham Hall

The number of Barn Owls in Britain has fallen dramatically over the past 20 years or so, and from an estimated 40,000 breeding pairs in the 50's the population now stands at less than 2,000. These figures are taken from census work done by the British Trust for Ornithology and other conservation organisations. Experts believe that at the present rate of decline the Barn Owl could be all but extinct as a breeding bird in Britain by the turn of the century with just one or two isolated populations hanging on where the habitat is suitable.

Many birds of prey and Owls suffered badly in the late 50's and early 60's from the use of D.O.T. based pesticides which got into the food chain. Peregrine Falcon, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk and Barn Owl were the main casualties but all except the Barn Owl have recovered and are now considered common, except the Goshawk which was never common in Britain.

There are many reasons why the Barn Owl is fairing badly; habitat destruction, intensification of farming and farming techniques, loss of traditional nest sites, motorways, climatic changes, etc. but probably the biggest factor affecting the fortunes of the Barn Owl is the change in recent years to Silage which has meant the loss of the traditional hay meadow rich in wild flowers, herbs and grasses, home of the short tailed field vole - staple diet of Barn Owls. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Fylde with every square yard of agricultural land under intensive farming, and ideal old farm buildings being converted into luxury homes and the barns and outbuildings void of rats and mice, an important source of food for Barn Owls in bad weather.

I have studied Barn Owls in the Fylde for at least 12 years, and been involved in the struggle to preserve the species from further decline, with mixed success. The provision of nest boxes in suitable farm buildings (at least 50 of my specially designed boxes are situated throughout the Central Fylde area) proved at first to be a great success. Many nest boxes were used as roost sites by single Barn Owls and at least 4 were used as nesting sites. One pair moved in to a nest box on a farm that previously had never even seen a Barn Owl. I thought that we had cracked the problem, we, being myself and my two brothers Tony and Andrew, and set about putting more nest boxes, in the hope that the offspring from the breeding pairs would move in and increase the population.

My optimism was short lived however and in the space of about four years all but 2 of the known breeding sites were empty and last year only one pair attempted to breed but weren't successful. What has happened to the 4 pairs of Barn Owls and at least another 2 pairs which were nesting in natural sites plus at least 30 young which I know to have fledged from

these birds. Killed on the roads, poisoned, died of starvation, shot by mindless idiots, driven out through loss of hunting habitat, probably a combination of all these things. Mortality in young Barn Owls is very high, but once they reach maturity they usually live relatively long lives (about 8 - 10 years) and seldom travel more than a few miles once they have established a territory.

The present population of Barn Owls in the Fylde stands at approximately 10 individuals and the future holds no great hope for this very beautiful and very useful bird. There are few more inspiring sights than a Barn Owl fluttering low over an unspoilt meadow on a bright summer evening doing what it does best, controlling the small rodent population. No bird is more well adapted to this form of hunting and its success rate leaves all others standing, given the right environment.

T.M. MYERSCOUGH

BEST DAYS WITH FYLDE BIRDS - A SHELTERED EXISTENCE

Since the publication of the book 'Best Days with British Birds' I'd been giving some thought to maybe writing my own article for the Newsletter. Len's request for such articles proved to be the catalyst, but what were my 'best' days with birds?

Invariably, after the first few ideas my mind would become a jumble; was it the Leach's day in September 87, was it sitting at Rossall on a bitterly cold February day as Divers flew out of the Bay on an ebbing tide or was it Balranald 87 when Pomarine and Long Tailed Skuas battled northwards into squalls and a North Westerly wind on a chilly May day?

One thing was for sure, it couldn't be Balranald as it had already appeared in print in the book and what's more the article had brilliantly captured the atmosphere of sitting on the exposed mound of rock as seabirds flew so close that you felt that you could almost touch them. So what was it to be?

The major problem after the idea had crystallised was my own sense of recall - I could see the bare outline but was there enough flesh to put on the skeleton - right, so that gets rid of the Rossall idea and though I could vividly recall Leach's day, something much closer in time seemed more appealing and seemed so much easier to write about. Alright then, Saturday October 28th 1989 it is, a disappointing day initially but turning out to be such a rewarding one, and with hindsight one of my most satisfying ones ever spent on the Fylde coast.

As you will all know September and October are traditionally National Leach's months on the Fylde, a few days of steady to strong South Westerly/Westerly winds almost guaranteed to produce sightings of these marvellous birds as they slip between the troughs and over the wave crests southwards past the assembled throng at the Starr Gate shelter.

Arriving at the Car Park, the limp flags surrounding the Crazy Golf by the Tram Stop told their own story; what wind there was came from a South Easterly direction. Desperately trying to visualise last nights weather map in my mind I quickly realised that the centre of the 'Low' must be lurking somewhere over the western horizon and depending on the speed it was travelling, southerlies going south westerly later in the day was the best that I could hope for. Despite this logical assessment of the situation I just didn't believe it, maybe the low would accelerate making things happen all that much more quickly. We could get South Westerlies by mid day couldn't we?

Sitting in the Shelter with all the papaphernalia of birding around me, looking out to sea in the half light, everything looked so steely grey, the sea and the sky merged, the horizon was indistinct. Though there was very little wind on land, out at sea white caps indicated fairly choppy conditions whilst inshore it seemed just like a millpond. A few gulls patrolled the tideline ; there seemed to be no other birdlife.

Scanning the sea from left to right I became aware of a party of small black dots flying towards me. These eventually materialised into a flock of Starlings and so for the want of anything better to do and thinking of the Wader Counters motto "If it moves count it" I duly counted them in and was soon counting them out again. Furthermore whilst engaged in this pursuit I became aware that more parties of Starlings were flying in all directions out at sea. If they were disorientated then so was I but rising to the challenge managed to isolate 72 Starlings in 4 groups.

At 0900 the wind miraculously shifted to the South West : actually it was to the South South West - I was just fooling myself! However this change produced immediate results as the Starlings all headed inshore and as if from nowhere a Wheatear landed on the wall immediately in front of the Shelter, made its way onto the grass and proceeded to poke around for food accompanied by a few delinquent Starlings.

Turning my attention back to the sea I noticed a party of duck about half way out flying north to south rapidly and low over the water - fifteen Wigeon closely followed by two more parties of eight. For good measure in the same scan I picked up two Great Crested Grebes on the Sea. Things were definitely looking up ; the change in the wind direction seemed to have done the trick. Moments later my optimistic outlook was severely threatened when it promptly shifted back again and started to blow with increased venom. The most obvious effect of this was to increase the contrast between the ultra calm inshore conditions and the half gale blowing out at sea.

Unhappily this last September and October's weather hadn't produced the goods, instead the East coast, hitherto a relative Leach's desert had been inundated with our birds blown haplessly around the North of Scotland or even worse along the South coast, up the Channel and onto the eastern coasts.

Listening to Thursday and Friday nights shipping forecast, watching Ian MaCaskill (or was it John Kettle:"He's a Weatherman and so is Michael Fish") and counting isobars to send me to sleep convinced me that Saturday the 28th had all the makings of a good day. A deep depression was going to track north eastwards across Scotland bringing strong south westerlies, turning westerly to the Fylde coast. Herein lies a warning :

a) Never trust a Weatherman. b) Never trust a Weather map because Weathermen draw them up; and c) always take the estimated speed of depressions with a pinch of salt especially when (a) and (b) indicate that strong South West winds, nay gale force winds are forecast for a Saturday and Sunday in our part of the country.

Over the years, cynicism about the forecasts has never been quite enough to convince me that the Weathermen can really be all that wrong despite numerous days sat at Starr Gate chatting to our Chairman, whilst gazing at a flat calm sea and remarking how much detail can be discerned on the Gas Rigs some 20 miles plus offshore - Graffiti in the shelter displayed the remarkable and thought provoking message "This is your own eternal - expletive deleted - pain" - how true, and the following line "You are nothing, nobody" will be indelibly etched on my memory. Anyway, enough of these ramblings, back to the Dawe household on the evening of the 27th.

Sandwiches were made (not by me, I have to add) and I can't remember what was in them - see what I mean about recall? The flask was filled with hot water to warm it up for the morning and so cut down the time between getting up and dashing to the car for the quick getaway.

Optimism and anticipation of a good days birding at the coast is always with me so invariably I have a troubled nights sleep, waking up several times before the alarm is due to go off and generally being wide awake when it does. My notebook shows that I arrived at the Shelter at 08.35 so I suppose I must have been up around 07.00. Messing about in the kitchen and I mean that literally, a dripping teabag and spilt coffee adorning what was previously a pristine Formica top I realised that something was wrong. Instinctively I knew what it was, after all it had happened so many times before - I couldn't hear any wind blowing. Cursing Bill Giles and Bernard Davey I hurried to the garage - after all it was just daylight you can't really rely on your senses can you? Anyway who knows what might be passing the shelter whilst I'm dawdling in the kitchen.

Peering out, more duck could be seen approaching just below the horizon - another party of eight Wigeon closely followed by another and yet another. Sometimes disappearing between the troughs they made rapid progress from right to left. Almost as soon as one party had disappeared other flocks came into view. Visibility, at the best of times problematical, had now deteriorated even further making identification of the more distant groups that much more difficult. So the progression of Wigeon continued throughout the morning, some parties numbering as many as twenty six, others just five or ten, often including a single Teal, Mallard or Pintail. Sometimes duck initially identified as Wigeon in the distance proved on closer examination to be Pintails. Whatever they were the action was non stop, barely enough time elapsing between making a note of one flock before the next one came into view.

For variety three Red Throated Divers sped South impelled by I don't know what - everything seemed to be happening at break neck speed. Hastily grabbing a cup of coffee I spilt the contents over my trousers - this was the Starr Gate effect, a bit like the Greenhouse effect but a lot warmer.

My eyes were riveted to the horizon as the conveyer belt produced party after party of duck, twenty Pintail, nineteen Wigeon, two Teal, one Goldeneye - blink, what was that? A mystery bird, a gull no less, in fact a real seabird, the first one of the day - a lonely adult Kittiwake shambling along in characteristic swooping mode, its pale secondaries standing out against the uniform grey of the sea and sky. Pulling my eyes back into closer focus more Starlings flashed by and smaller dots, this time Meadow Pipits moved South parallel with the shore.

Towards lunchtime things quietened down although the duck were still moving - four Wigeon, four Pintail, two Pintail, one Mallard - it was time for a sandwich, contents unknown but undoubtedly washed down with lukewarm coffee but this time bringing a glow to the stomach rather than one to the legs.

A solitary Lapwing flew in off the sea, a few Shelduck contrarily moved North whilst a black shape in the form of a dark bellied Brent Goose followed suit.

My notebook records that the highlight of the day occurred at 1314 hours precisely when three Swans were seen approaching from the North West. Flying high and powerfully towards the shore their identities were only confirmed when they changed direction parallel to the coast and revealed themselves as Bewicks. I can still see their whiteness standing out against the grey sky as they headed for the Ribble marshes and feel so privileged to have been there - there was just something about them hard to capture in words but they seemed so in harmony with the conditions, truly in their element - words fail me.

So, on into the afternoon duck still passed by but the gaps between the parties became more protracted. Already I'd counted in excess of two

hundred and fifty Wigeon and eighty Pintail but all was not yet over. Out of the grey eleven Redwings and two Fieldfares flew East over the Shelter and a grey Seal poked its head up and looked around from a safe distance offshore.

At 1550 an adult and two first Winter Little Gulls skipped and dipped over the surf. There had been no parties of duck for fifteen minutes and it seemed like a good time to call it a day.

All day long the conditions had been vaguely unreal, the Shelter an oasis of calm whilst the wind blew out at sea. As I left the Shelter I reflected upon the fact that I'd hardly seen any true Seabirds least of all Leach's Petrels. Still - conditions looked good for the Sunday, the depression was slow moving, South Westerlies for tomorrow.....?

ALAN DAWE

RECENT REPORTS

NOVEMBER

Summer visitors lingered into the first half of the month. Two Wheatears were at South Station on the 1st with three there the following day and the last, a single, on the 4th on which date four were present at Marton Mere.

On the 6th a Blackcap and a Lesser Whitethroat were in the trees alongside the platform at South Station. The latter record is the latest for Lancashire by a good 10 days. A Swallow flew over Lytham Hall on the 4th and a male Blackcap was seen at the same location on the 8th. One of the Northern races of Chiffchaff was seen near Blackpool Zoo on the 13th by Ed. Stirling. It was heard to emit a single call note quite unlike those made by our summer visitors. The same date produced a female Blackcap at the by now, famous bushes at Blackpool South Station - no prizes for guessing who keeps visiting this site.

Early on the 1st twenty Redwing flew over St. Annes but the flavour of Autumn was best captured at Fairhaven later that same morning when sixty Chaffinch flew South in half an hour plus four Siskin, a Brambling, seven Tree Sparrows and a lone Snow Bunting. Small parties of Starling were also on the move accompanied by a couple of Skylark and Reed Buntings. Later on at the same site a further three Brambling and seven Siskin were noted.

Early in the month a small influx of Stonechat occurred with a pair at L.S.A.N.R on the 1st and still present on the 5th. Four were at the Mere also on the 5th and the next day a single bird was seen at Fairhaven. Two remained at the Mere throughout the month.

On the 12th at L.S.A.N.R the pair of Stonechats were joined by a single male. Seventy Pinkfeet passed over and around one hundred and fifty Starlings moved South in small groups all day. At 1130 a Lapland Bunting flew low and Southwards over the Reserve. Unfortunately it didn't land much to Maurice's disappointment. Two Jack Snipe were at the wet slack on the

5th, two there on the 12th and three later in the month.

Redwings, mentioned previously, were scarce. Although they could be heard as they passed over at night there were very few sightings. Five were seen at Clifton Hall on the 4th but forty at Winmarleigh on the 26th was by far the highest count.

Several Woodcock were noted with singles at Skippool on the 12th, in a garden near South Station on the 14th with possibly the same bird being seen in the evening as it flew over a certain ironmongery shop in Vicarage Lane. One flew over South Shore on the 19th and another was seen at Lytham Hall on the 23rd.

Small parties of Long Tailed Tits were a feature of the month with six at Fleetwood Marine Lake (of all places) on the 4th, thirteen at Freckleton on the 5th, eight at the Nook and the Mere on the 6th. Similar numbers were at Ribby on the 22nd and ten at Lytham Hall on the 23rd.

A pre roost gathering of 233 Pied Wagtails was counted on the playing fields at Stanley School prior to moving off to the Preston New Road tree roost site on the 12th. Mention of Pied Wagtails reminds me that at a previous meeting mention was made of a colour ringed bird seen at South Shore. Phil Slade informs me that 400 were marked between August and November 1988. They were given BTO rings plus up to three colour combinations. Sightings should be reported to : Innes Sim, 25a Westburn Road, Aberdeen AB2 4QH.

Wildfowl were present in good numbers and great variety at the Mere on the 5th and included 3 Great Crested Grebes, one Little Grebe, 5 Cormorant, 250 Mallard, 84 Teal, a male Wigeon, a male Gadwall, 14 Shoveler, 24 Pochard, 8 Tufted, 6 Ruddy Duck and a female Goldeneye. For good measure 30 Goldfinch fed on the seed heads around the Mere. By the 18th Mallard numbers had increased to 310, Teal to 284, Goldeneye to 5 and two male Gadwall could be seen - the Goldfinch flock had also increased to 50! The sooner this site becomes a Local Nature Reserve, the better.

3 Spotted Redshank were together at Freckleton on the 5th. The Birds of Estuaries count took place on the 12th - 30 Red Breasted Mergansers were in the Lune Estuary and 50 Skylark and 42 Twite were discovered on Thurnham Marsh. At Lane Ends 1500 Pinkfeet, 5 Whoopers and 470 Shelduck could be seen. 4000 Lapwing, 440 Curlew and 340 Golden Plover were at Skippool earlier on the same date.

The St. Annes shore roost on the 12th held an impressive 3000 Bar Tailed Godwit, 3000 Knot, 900 Dunlin, 300 Sanderling, 36 Ringed Plover, 100 Grey Plover and 7 Turnstone.

Low water counts on the Wyre at Skippool on the 19th yielded 3000 Lapwing and 580 Golden Plover on the mud banks in the middle of the river. 731 Shelduck and 4 Dark Bellied Brent Geese were at Lane Ends on the same day. 170 Black Tailed Godwits were counted at Stanah on the 26th.

Raptor sightings included 3 Peregrines seen regularly in the Pilling area during the month and a female Merlin in the same vicinity. Sparrowhawks were reported from many sites throughout the Fylde.

At the coast 2 Red Throated Divers could be seen off South Promenade throughout the month. Up to 2 Guillemots were also seen and a Razorbill on the 24th. On the 4th and 5th 4 male and 6 female Eider flew past Starr Gate - a good number for this end of the coast. On the 4th, a day of strong westerlies, a lone Leach's Petrel moved south off Starr Gate, the last sighting in what has been a poor year for this species.

An immature Shag was attacked by Gulls as it floundered in the surf off South Promenade on the 4th. It was pursued by Gulls as it flew over the sea wall in front of the Shelter and was later seen still being attacked further down the coast. In a similar vein on the 18th a late Bonxie attacked and mantled a young Herring Gull before being chased off by 3 Carrion Crows. The Herring Gull couldn't fly and walked along the beach as the tide advanced.

Single Rock Pipits fed at Armhill and Lane Ends and though generally a bird of the coast, one was seen at the Mere on the 15th.

The month closed with Collared Doves apparently nest building in the ironwork at South Pier.

Possible Hard Luck Story of the Month. - comes from Ed. who on the 21st noticed a large bird in the distance over Watson Road Park. He didn't have his binoculars with him as the bird put up the Starlings. When he consulted his field guides Ed. considered the bird to be a Night Heron - coincidentally one was seen distantly at Walney on the same day by Tim Dean.

DECEMBER

The pair of Stonechat plus the single male were still present at L.S.A.N.R on the 3rd. On the same day Maurice Jones saw a Pheasant at the Mere, his first there in over 30 years! Across in the Woodland Garden also there were 10 Long Tailed Tits, 3 Goldcrest, a Treecreeper and a Redpoll. Continuing the Woodland theme a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was at Lytham Hall on the 23rd.

If Maurice was excited by his Pheasant then greater excitement was to come on the 10th. His day started well with Stonechats plus 29 Common and 3 Jack Snipe at L.S.A.N.R. Arriving at the Mere he had good flight views of a Bittern as it took up off the island, flew the whole length of the Mere before landing in the reeds at the western end where it promptly disappeared from view for the rest of the day. By way of consolation 2 Water Rails called from the same area. The Bittern was seen again on the 10th, 26th and 27th of the month.

There were frequent sightings of a Short Eared Owl at the Mere with others being seen in the Fleetwood area and at Armhill. On the 6th a Little Owl was seen at the Mere with odd sightings from over Wyre where they seem to have become more scarce in recent months.

The Pinkfeet over Wyre were equally elusive, on Goose Count day there were only 700 scattered about, no doubt as a result of the bad weather. During periods of settled weather good numbers were moving into the Fylde from the Ribble marshes and South Lancs. On the 26th 1500 and one lone Barnacle were at Head Dyke Lane, Pilling. 4 Whooper Swans flew south east and then headed west over Poulton on the same date and 2 Woodcock were discovered at Little Poulton.

At the coast 28 Pintail flew south off South Promenade on the 17th. At Pilling on the same day during the course of the Wader count a large scale movement of these birds were observed with nearly 200 passing Lane Ends in three hours. South westerly gales on the 24th and 25th saw 61 Pintail, 29 Teal and 15 Wigeon in small parties fly south past South Promenade.

The St. Annes shore roost on the 17th saw similar numbers to the November count although Sanderling had increased to 400.

At Fleetwood 9 Twite spent the period from the 3rd in and around the Golf course. On the 26th 3 Snow Buntings fed near the Marine Lake.

Offshore 31 Red Breasted Mergansers were at Rossall whilst the Eider flock which had peaked at 1300 in November increased to a massive 1880 on the 9th. On the 15th 40 Red Throated Divers were seen from Rossall Point along with a Slavonian Grebe. A single Velvet Scoter was sighted on the 17th.

An influx of 'white winged' gulls occurred at Fleetwood towards the end of the month. The first was a first winter Iceland Gull at the Marine Lake from the 17th until the 18th. On the 26th a different first winter and a 2nd Winter were seen at Rossall Point. 3 Glaucous Gulls were in the Fleetwood area during this period.

3 Purple Sandpipers consorted with the Turnstone at Rossall on the 17th with 2 remaining to the year end. A spotted Redshank fed at Newton Pool on the 25th.

3 Little Gulls were seen off Anchorsholme on the 23rd. On Christmas Day seawatching off South Promenade was productive when an adult Gannet headed south a quarter of a mile off shore. I'm not sure whether this constitutes a late record or an extremely early one! 3 adult Little Gulls flew north whilst 15, also adults, were at the sewage outfall off Central Promenade.

December proved to be a good month for Raptor sightings with Sparrowhawks almost commonplace judging by the number of sightings. A Peregrine was on St. Annes Moss on the 10th - a male and female continued to hunt the Saltmarshes on the Wyre and Pilling area. 2 different Merlins were regular in the Fleetwood area whilst single birds were sighted at Norcross on the 6th and 19th and Poulton on the 31st. At Warton a male Hen Harrier was seen on the 2nd and a male and female in the same area on the 26th.

A male Goshawk was seen to take a Teal at Medlar Marsh on the 27th and the same bird seen again on the 30th.

CONTRIBUTORS : L.G.Blacow, R.Brag, A.Dawe, B.Dyson, S.P.Eaves, J.L.Fletcher, I.Gardner, M.Jones, R.Leeming, S.M.Meredith, M.Myerscough, P.Scholes, Phil Slade, R.Stinger, E.Starling.

CHRISTMAS QUIZ ANSWERS

- 1) Polynesia 2) Elmley Marshes 3) Avocet 4) Cuckoo 5) Eagle
6) Osprey 7) Norway 8) Eclipse 9) Africa 10) Red
11) Tunnickliffe 12) House Sparrow 13) Tennyson 14) Owl
15) Australia 16) Long Tailed Tit 17) Lapwing 18) Mallard
19) Eider 20) Nutcracker

WADER COUNTS

The dates for the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry are set out below. Whether you are a regular counter or not do come along - counting can be fun! We generally meet three hours before high tide at Lane Ends Car Park.

B.O.E.E. WADER COUNT DATES 1990

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Ht(m)@ Time</u> | : | <u>Date</u> | <u>Ht(m)@ Time</u> |
|-------------|--------------------|---|-------------|--------------------|
| Jan 14 | 9.24 @ 1316 | : | Jly 22 | 9.06 @ 1109 |
| | | : | | |
| Feb 11 | 9.43 @ 1215 | : | Aug 19 | 8.69 @ 1013 |
| | | : | | |
| Mar 11 | 9.20 @ 1118 | : | Spt 23 | 8.82 @ 1321 |
| | | : | | |
| Apr 8 | 8.67 @ 1014 | : | Oct 21 | 9.08 @ 1221 |
| | | : | | |
| May 13 | 8.19 @ 1302 | : | Nov 18 | 8.99 @ 1129 |
| | | : | | |
| Jun 10 | 8.24 @ 1215 | : | Dec 16 | 8.61 @ 1040 |

GMT times throughout. Add 1hr. for BST
from 25th March to 28th October 1990

POSTSCRIPT

Please keep your recent sightings coming in and also, any articles for publication in the Newsletter will be gratefully received.

Finally, those members who stayed behind for a drink after the December meeting were witness to a sight which will go down in the annals of Fylde Bird Club folk lore - yes folks our revered Secretary was seen to leave the Bar prior to closing time. With a look of sorrow on his face he announced that he was still feeling under the weather after a recent illness. This brought forth expressions of great sympathy from everyone present : he must have been feeling really, really bad!