



Fryde Bird Club

Chairman: Mr. L. BLACOW
Secretary: Mr. A.J. HINCHLIFFE

NEWSLETTER NO. 58

FROM THE CHAIR

The latest issue of 'Birdwatching magazine carried an editorial entitled 'How healthy is your Bird Club?'

For those of you who claim not to read the magazine we have taken the liberty of reproducing it in our own newsletter.

'How healthy is your bird club?'

Recent meetings have differed from the early days of heated discussions about Marton Mere. This doesn't mean we are losing our enthusiasm; we are still ready to tackle issues on your behalf.

Do you prefer the newer 'light weight' meetings? Are there any new features you would like to introduce? Are you getting all you should from your club? and more important are you putting all you can into your club?

I look forward to reading all your replies. Here's wishing you all an Autumn as good as this Spring.

L.G.B

BIRD WATCHING

magazine is a monthly magazine aimed to meet the practical needs of British birdwatchers.

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How healthy is your bird club?

Are Britain's independent bird clubs and RSPB member groups equipped to serve the needs of ordinary birdwatchers in the 1990s?

FOR some time now I have been keen to explore the state of health of British bird groups and was delighted when Ian Wallace took up the challenge of investigation on behalf of this magazine.

We circulated a questionnaire to all contributors to UK Bird Sightings as we felt their range of contacts would produce evidence of real value on a country-wide basis. So far only a few forms have trickled back to us, so I am now throwing open the debate to all our readers.

As we lack the resources to produce and analyse questionnaires on a large scale, we invite readers to comment on the issues of most concern to them, but offer the following suggestions to show the topics we are keen to illuminate:

- 1) What measures does your group make to recruit new members, and how successful has it been over the past five years?
- 2) What do people expect to receive as a result of joining a club?
- 3) How were you welcomed into your club? Were your needs as a birdwatcher assessed? Were you put off returning?
- 4) What is the greatest strength of your club, and its biggest



What drives people to join a birdwatching group? In your experience do novices get the help and guidance they go seeking?

weakness?

- 5) Is your group attractive to young people?
- 6) How important is a live-wire leader? Do the ordinary members of your club give enough support to the committee?
- 7) Do you think the distinction between a county bird club and an RSPB members group is clear to birdwatching newcomers? What do you think the differences are?
- 8) Do the RSPB regional offices apply too much pressure to member groups to keep raising money?
- 9) Has the RSPB begun to neglect its members' needs as birdwatchers?
- 10) Do you resist joining the British Trust for Ornithology because its 'just for experts'?

Your club may already have conducted its own investigation into members' needs, and we'd welcome hearing of the results. Our aim is to celebrate the successful clubs, and to disseminate the best ideas to other groups. Of course, we may uncover lots of problems, but if our hobby is to flourish in the future, perhaps now is the best time for identifying the difficult areas. We look forward to hearing your views as soon as possible.

DAVE CROMACK (Editor)

Contributors to this issue

■ **Andy Butler** is a member of Birdline North East and runs guided weekend birdwatching breaks from his guest house in West Yorkshire. Write for details to Evergreen, 162 Austhorpe Road, Cross-Gates, Leeds LS15 8EF. Tel. 0532 648381.

■ **Dominic Couzens** is a freelance teacher of birdwatching for adult education classes. He specialises in birdsong and also works for both the British Library of Wildlife Sounds and the RSPB film unit. Dominic organises and leads birdwatching weekends.

■ **Paul Doherty** is a top bird photographer, lecturer and writer with a special liking for birds of prey and unusual species. A regular contributor to *Bird Watching* and *Birds Illustrated*, he is keenly interested in problems of bird identification.

■ **Roy Hargreaves** was formerly an enthusiastic twitcher who has recently turned more to local area birding. He has a special interest in problems of bird identification.

■ **Simon Harrop** has travelled extensively in search of birds and is extremely knowledgeable about birdwatching sites. He is co-author of *Birdwatching in Britain: A Site by Site Guide* and compiler of the *Birdwatch* paneline.

■ **Chris Kightley** runs Limosa Holidays from his guesthouse in Norfolk and fully understands the identification problems experienced by birdwatchers. Formerly an RSPB warden he has built a solid reputation as a tour leader in Britain and Europe.

■ **Chris Mead** is the Head of Ringing at the British Trust for Ornithology and the longest serving member of staff. Recently he became the BTO's historian and is adding the history of The Nunnery to his apparently encyclopaedic knowledge of ornithology.

■ **Hamish Murray**, the originator of the Artist's Notebook feature in this magazine, is employed as a warden at Durlleston Country Park in Dorset.

■ **Dave Nurney** is a major force in the birding scene on the Isle of Wight where he lives. He is a freelance artist currently engaged in several projects. Graham Tucker is the Dispersed Species Officer for the International Council for Bird Preservation. His role is to develop a conservation strategy for birds in the wider environment and is concerned with species in need of protection outside protected areas.

■ **Ian Wallace** is a senior figure in birdwatching circles and a well-known artist. He is the author of *Birdwatching in the 70s* and a contributor to *Birds of the Western Palearctic*.

■ **John Wyatt** is a lecturer, natural history photographer and Executive Trustee of the Waxwing Trust which organises birdwatching holidays for disabled and elderly people. He is an expert on bird-song and a leader of holidays for *Bird Watching* magazine.

■ **Steve Whitehouse**, sponsored by Focus Optics, is also the organiser of the Foreign Birdwatching Reports And Information Service which supplies birdwatchers' trip reports, amateur site guides and other useful data at nominal charges. The FBRI's Catalogue can be obtained by sending £1 to 5 Stanway Close, Blackpole, Worcester. WR4 9XL or telephone 0905 54541 (9 am - 9pm daily).

BARRY'S LAST RETORT

Dear Spodger
Ruffled a few feathers did I.
Yours smugly

Dear H.E.Ron
From a labour voter that was a particularly vicious
sideways reference to dear old John Major.
Yours admiringly

Dear F.E.Zant
Now you mention it our dear old treasurer often looks
J.L.F. - Jet lagged Fletch.
Yours thoughtfully

Dear H.Gull
Please, please don't let your gerry-atric government
stop you.
Yours patriotically

Dear P.Geon
Billions of passenger pigeons can't be wrong.
Yours doomedly

Dear Mal.Lard
I always thought you were a right 'ANUS'.
Yours flushingly

Dear M.Ge-le-mot
Flattery will get you nowhere.
Yours well off without you

Dear Acro
There's no need to be a wobbler or are you turning into
a duck.
Yours concerned

Dear R.P.I.Pit
I should tread carefully when talking about our
secretary or you could find your initials changing to
R-I-P.Pit.
Yours threateningly

Dear C.G.Ooze
I think you should goose-step off with your H.Gull
friends.
Yours alienatingly

Dear L.T.Skewer
Looking forward to receiving your photo. Hope it
depicts you taking one of those bloody pipits.
Yours in anticipation

COMPETITIVE TENDERING FOR SURVEY WORK

Those of you who were present at the March meeting will recall the Chairman announcing that The Club had been invited, by the National Rivers Authority, to submit a quotation for carrying out Cormorant counting on the Ribble. Basically the specification was that the survey was to be carried out over five three-mile lengths of the Ribble between Clifton and Hurst Green by five counters. Two counts per month for ten months were required by the NRA and the counts were to be carried out in not more than three hours commencing 15 mins. after sunrise.

Having been at Brock Mill this morning for the Dawn Chorus, I realise that two virtually forced dawn starts per month can be very demanding in the Summer months. No wonder there was a considered silence when asked as to whether or not we should submit a quote for the work.

Somehow or other the invitation to quote finished up in my hands, and what started as an academic exercise finished up as a submission on behalf of the Fylde Bird Club.

As you will have read in the April Newsletter we submitted a tender. Our quoted price for the work was £9,150.00. The other two bids were £7,648.80 and £13,680.00. You can't win them all...Better luck next time... etc...

What made the exercise a more feasible option was that the NRA appreciated the logistic problem of only using five counters and were prepared to consider a tender based on ten counters, subject to the same two counters covering the same section of river.

There appeared to be a reasonable chance of making a good sum of money for The Club and it was decided to go for it.... Tenders were due in on 7th April and time was short, and during the preparation of the quotation a few procedural and constitutional questions arose. As an expediency these were dealt with on a "what was most likely to be acceptable to the membership" basis. Some of the questions that arose are listed below.

1. The decision to proceed was taken (due to time constraints) on the basis of a couple of phone calls and without the general approval of the membership.

Should another invitation to quote for work arrive,
SHOULD WE TENDER AND IF SO, WHAT INTERNAL CONTROLS/CONSTRAINTS, IF ANY, SHOULD APPLY?

2. The actual doing of a count would involve about 4 to 5 hours of your time, very early travel and probably ruin the rest of that day and possibly the preceding night. A fair recompense for any counts would produce a quicker acceptance rate and probably engender a more positive and professional attitude to the job. The offer was £500.00 (based on 10 counts plus 2 taxi runs to collect counters).

ON WHAT BASIS SHOULD COSTS/EXPENSES BE PAID?

3. The total cost involved in doing the work was to be c. £5,500. Most of this going to the counters. It seemed realistic that The Club would expect any profit to bear some relationship to this relatively high expenditure. It was decided that a profit of c. £3,500/4,000 would hopefully be acceptable to the membership.

An anticipated profit of c. £2,000 would probably have won us the Contract.
WHAT PROFIT LUMP SUM OR PERCENTAGE SHOULD WE AIM TO ACHIEVE?

4. The work was in the Preston area and there was a logical bias

(2)

towards Preston members to participate, wader counters also were approached as it seemed logical to combine the Cormorant Counts with BoEE wader counts, when possible, thereby allowing people to sacrifice only one Sunday per month.
WHO SHOULD BE APPROACHED FIRST TO ACCEPT/DECLINE CARRYING OUT SUCH WORK?
AND
WHO IS INTERESTED IN BIRDING UNDER CONTRACT?

5. The NRA specified that we carry Insurance to a minimum amount of £1,000,000 per occurrence (No. occurrences unlimited). No constitutional right, under the circumstances, could be seen for The Club to pay for such insurance should the quote be accepted. All the counters agreed to put the money "up front" themselves and expect a refund upon receipt of the first payment by NRA.
WHO SHOULD FUND SUCH INITIAL EXPENDITURES?

6. All counters signed in advance an indemnity accepting liability for all necessary travel expenses, motor and personal insurance and tax liabilities. The tax-man seems somewhat uncertain as to the Club's Corporation Tax position -
WOULD THE CLUB BE LIABLE FOR CORPORATION TAX ON ANY PROFITS?

I quite enjoyed setting the thing up. I also realise that a some things could have been done better. But the time scale didn't leave much time for in depth analysis until after the event. However we've learnt a bit - and if it is decided to have another attempt, if the opportunity arises, we'll be a bit better prepared.

What are your opinions and thoughts on the Club going into the field of commercial and contract work? If the consensus of opinion is in favour, should we let it be known that we are available to take on such work? It could provide the Club with a good but irregular source of income, but it could be a double-edged sword if any such work is looked upon as a means of funding one's bino or holiday fund. It would be bad news if in the Club's name members received total payments of, say, £4000 and the Club profited by only, say, £50 - or is £50 better than nothing?

Personally I think some general guidelines should be established - if you have any thoughts on the above please let the Committee know your views or why not circulate any opinions by publishing them in the Newsletter.

J.L. Fletcher.

RECENT REPORTS

MARCH

The bird of the month award goes without doubt to the Kentish Plover discovered at Rossall Point on the 8th by Millie Mottram on one of the Wyre Borough guided walks led by Fylde Bird Club. It gave excellent views to everyone and by late afternoon had started to attract Birders from relatively near and near, the far and widers presumably arriving in the evening of the beautiful springlike day. It was still present on the 22nd being pursued by photographers (see the last issue).

All in all the walk was a great success; apart from the finding of the Plover a Purple Sandpiper tried to hide itself amongst the Turnstones; 2 Snow Buntings were on the Golf Course, 200 Eider offshore and on the boating lake there were 2 Long Tailed Ducks and a female Goldeneye. There were the normal 'wall to wall' Mute Swans on the Lake which I didn't bother to count!

A pair of Stonechats were at Rossall Point on the 1st and 1 Snow Bunting was still to be seen in the area on the 10th. Simon Hayhow reports the first of the northerly movement of Meadow Pipits on the 16th when 1 was seen at Rossall Point. Unfortunately he didn't say how many more there were, the one which he referred to in his notes was taken by a female Merlin. I don't think ornithology has a term to describe a movement of this nature, undoubtedly it was a final movement for this Pipit anyway.

A Pink Footed Goose spent sometime on the Marine Lake from the 15th to the 19th. Obviously this one did survive to make a northerly movement.

Rossall was certainly the place to be in the early part of the month. Barry Dyson stumbled across an adult Mediterranean Gull on the 3rd - no doubt during one of his lengthy lunchtime perambulations.

Still by the seaside but this time at Starr Gate seawatching proved to be extremely fruitful. On the 1st there were 741 Common and 11 Velvet Scoter offshore plus 5 Great Crested Grebes and 11 Red Throated Divers. On the 8th 4 pairs of Eider flew North and another pair were noted on the sea. Approximately 100 Scoter were on the horizon i.e little black dots which could possibly contain Surf and Velvets - enough fantasising - but no doubt Maurice did.

An adult Little Gull was seen on the 15th whilst Ed had 6 off the Sewage outfall, Central Promenade on the 19th. Single Guillemots were also seen on the 6th and 22nd. 12 Gannets flew south off Rossall on the 21st.

The St. Annes shore roost held 283 Oystercatcher, 3 Turnstone, 800 Sanderling, 5000 Knot, 1500 Dunlin, 83 Bar Tailed Godwit, 300 Grey Plover and 1 Ringed Plover. At Stanah Black Tailed Godwit numbers were starting to increase with 370 there on the 28th.

The Mere wildfowl included 10 Wigeon, 29 Shoveler and 2 pairs of Goldeneye on the 8th. Later on the 22nd, 9 Goldeneye were present along with a "sinensis" type Cormorant which had previously been seen on the 15th.

Up to 6000 Pink Footed Geese were Over Wyre during the early part of the month accompanied by a lone Greylag and a Greenland Whitefront, definitely a poor goose winter so far as oddities were concerned. Having said that, 2 Brent Geese were still on Cockerham Marsh on the 22nd when a Green Winged Teal was seen along with other Wildfowl on the rising tide. At this point I have to mention that this bird was previously seen in December (assuming it was the same one) by Simon Hayhow. His report of this bird fell victim of the Bermuda triangle like the Dawe household filing system. Well Simon, it is only a sub species, not really tickable unless of course the B.O.U in conjunction with their American counterparts change the name to something really appropriate like Blue Tailed Gadabout. Enough of this cynicism.

March saw the first of the Spring migrants - a male Wheatear appeared on Maurice's reserve on the 15th and a female was seen on playing fields at Fleetwood on the 17th followed by another at South Shore on the 22nd. Another early arriver is the Chiffchaff, the first being seen at Queens Terrace Fleetwood on the 20th and staying until the 27th (is Simon becoming another Ed?) One was in song at Lytham Hall by the 25th.

Talking of Ed: he found a Black Redstart at Squires Gate Airport on the 28th which stayed until the 31st. This species has become decidedly rare in recent years so it was a good find. The day I went looking for it was dreadful, absolutely chucking it down with rain, to use the vernacular. Needless to say it didn't appear. With this amount of rain falling it was no surprise to discover that another of Ed's star finds were a pair of Mallard cavorting on the flooded Go-Kart track by the shelter at Starr Gate.

Despite the far from springlike weather 55 Meadow Pipits did moves north past Rossall Point on the 29th. On the following day a female Merlin was seen by Barry Dyson..... 54?

A Magpie was ringed at Lane Ends on the 8th, a new ringing species for the site.

Winter visitors were still with us. In the early part of the month there were 25 Twite at Lane Ends on the 8th and still 10 there on the 29th. At Ribby 6 Fieldfares were seen on the same day accompanied by 60 Tree Sparrow, 50 Linnet and 35 Meadow Pipits. 4 Treecreepers were seen at Stanley Park on the 30th and at Lytham Hall on the 31st a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was drumming and calling in the company of a solitary Willow Warbler.

Just to prove that summer really was on the way Dave Berry reported a Swallow flying east over Baines School Poulton on the 31st. Another harbinger of Spring was the Meadow Pipit heard in song at LSANR on the 15th.

Maurice didn't have a Mammal or Reptile of the month but did have an amphibian of the month; well 230 actually, all Toads. How he counted these

I'll never know, but it does look a bit suspicious, that nought at the end. He doesn't mention any squashed ones on Clifton Drive either.

APRIL

On the 1st a Blackcap was singing in a bush near Poulton Railway Station. The early part of the month saw a movement of Siskin through the area. One was seen on peanuts at Lytham Hall on the 6th and a female was ringed at Clifton Hall on the 9th.

Meadow Pipit passage was well underway with 80 plus over Highcross, Poulton, in 15 minutes on the 4th. Passage was even more spectacular at the coast with 7478 flying north over the sea at Starr Gate between 0830 and 1220 on the same day. These were, perhaps, birds which had been held up on migration because of inclement weather.

Winter visitors could still be seen with 10 Fieldfare flying north west at Pilling on the 5th and a Redwing in the trees at Poulton Railway station on the 9th (Is Dave Berry trying to take over Ed's mantle now?) 2 were at Ribby on the 11th and 12th.

A Jack Snipe was present at LSANR on the 5th when a Wheatear was also seen. On the same day a Heron was standing on it's nest at Stanley Park and across at the Mere 2 Chiffchaffs were present plus 1 Long Eared Owl.

Wheatears were passing through the area with up to 40 at Rossall Point on one day. The female Merlin? was seen chasing Wheatears on the Golf Course on the 21st; one escaped by entering the air raid shelter, squeezing between the brick wall and the locked wooden door. The Merlin was observed to hover frequently above the air raid shelter. All this was observed by Barry Dyson.... lunchtime again? One thought did occur to me, if the Wheatear had possessed the key to the wooden door it could have escaped a lot easier, couldn't it?

11 Sand Martins were at the Mere on the evening of the 8th and a House Martin was seen over the Mushroom farm on the 11th.

Also at the Mere during the month were Water Rail, Short Eared Owl, 2 Common Sandpipers on the 20th, 3 Swifts on the 23rd and a Black Tern on the 25th. Just for good measure 2 Ospreys passed over during the month. Wildfowl included 3 pairs of Goldeneye, 27 Shoveler, 4 Wigeon, but no Pochard; on the 5th.

A new variation on Maurice's shop list (Vicarage Lane: now for sale. This is a plug) occurred on the 8th when a male Blackcap was seen and heard in the Hawthorn, in the alley, across from the shop. But wait... this was no ordinary sighting. This was seen from behind the shop counter!

Meanwhile, back in Fleetwood Cemetery 2 male Redstart, 14 Siskin and 55 Collared Doves were seen on the 21st. On the previous day 4 Tree Pipit 22 Wheatear, 2 White Wagtail and 70 Meadow Pipits flew north at Rossall Point

300 Pinkfeet flew north past Fleetwood Museum on the 22nd. The 23rd saw a good passage of Meadow Pipit, Linnet (35) Goldfinch (18) past Rossall Point. A Yellow Wagtail. 2 White Wagtails, a Siskin, 2 Tree Pipit and 19

Swallow all flew north. A Merlin flew south and a Kestrel flew north over the sea. Later in the day 5 Siskin were at Singleton Hall and Simon had probably run out of ink by then anyway. Siskin continued to be seen until the month end. On the 28th a male Redstart was in Fleetwood cemetery, the new hot spot of the area!

Ed found 2 Whinchats at Harrowside on the 30th. A pair of Stonechat were at Armhill all month.

Wader numbers were building up nicely as the month progressed with 4000 Knot at Rossall on the 16th and 6000 on the 22nd.

11 Black Tailed Godwits were seen on the 10th at Lytham Hall. There was an exceptionally good passage of Whimbrel, 80 were at Eagland on the 25th and 94 were at Nateby on the 26th. Roost flights west along the Ribble at dusk included 220 on the 27th, 256 on the 28th, 360 on the 29th with the numbers declining into the 170's by the next day.

A Jacksnipe was still present at LSANR on the 29th.

2 male Great Spotted Woodpecker were drumming at Winmarleigh in mid month with another seen at Singleton Hall. A male and female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker were excavating a nest hole at Lytham Hall on the 8th.

The Ringers were at British Nuclear Fuels on the 25th when 1 male and 2 female Blackcaps and a Willow Warbler were ringed. A Cuckoo was calling and a pair of Kestrels were present in the area.

Seabirds were moving through the area throughout the month. On the 4th at Britain's premier seawatching site a Black Throated Diver flew north at 0840 and 59 Red Throats also moved north in small parties. 720 Scoter were offshore and 10 Kittiwake were seen moving north. The following day produced 90 Gannets, 8 Little Gulls, 18 Red Throats, 3 Razorbill, 500 Common and 3 Velvet Scoter, 2 Fulmar, a Merlin and surprisingly 4 Greylags, all flying north past the shelter.

On the 6th at North Shore John Poland reported 11 Eiders. On the 12th at Starr Gate in an increasing WNW wind Maurice had 16 Fulmars fly north and 4 fly south. In addition 106 Gannets flew north including 1 party of 16 close together and close inshore. A Velvet Scoter was still present.

Red Throated Divers were moving north all month, 7 were seen on the 20th on which date the first two Sandwich Terns of the year also moved slowly north. Later the same day a Red Throat was seen from Rossall and 6 Dark Bellied Brents also flew north east.

A Scaup flew south off Starr Gate on the 21st whilst 2 Little Gull, 4 Common and 2 Sandwich Terns flew north. 2 Little Terns were seen on the 25th. West south westerlies on the 26th produced excellent sea watching with 415 Gannet, 63 Fulmar, 58 Kittiwake, 19 Red Throats, 1 Bonxie, 24 Guillemots, 4 Razorbill, 20 Little Gull, 32 Arctic, 6 Common and 2 Sandwich Terns. Surprise bird of the day was a male Marsh Harrier flying north. One was also seen later that day off Bowness on Solway.

2 Greylag Geese were on Fleetwood Marine Lake on the 22nd. The last sighting of the Long Tailed Ducks were on the 25th with just one present on the 28th.

The award for the bird of the month has to go to the Common Crane discovered in a field at Cockerham on the evening of the 25th and giving very good views to all on the following day. The 12th Lancashire record according to Maurice.

Mammal of the month was an unchallengable Atlantic Grey Seal off Rossall on the 8th, seen by Barry... he doesn't say whether it came to sandwiches. A Peacock butterfly was seen at Lytham Hall on the 6th by Monty. Please let me have sightings of butterflies, Mammals, Reptiles etc. I'm sure that these would be of interest to most people who read this newsletter

CONTRIBUTORS

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M.Jones, M.Myerscough, J.Poland, E.Stirling.

POSTSCRIPT

With all the rarities which have been turning up recently there has been a real opportunity to observe the differing techniques of the Club's foremost photographer. I refer to none other than D.P himself, subject of the postscript in the last newsletter but meriting another in-depth analysis after his award winning Red Footed Falcon performance.

Arriving on the scene he quickly appraised the situation and seeing Paul Ellis fairly near to the bird he quickly dropped into an S.A.S crouch; ducked and weaved before finally arriving in the firing zone. A 'confab' took place and before you could shoot off a roll of film an amazing display commenced; vaguely reminiscent of Red Throated Divers or the English Synchronised Swimming team: both photographers moved in unison to a different part of the playing field in order to gain a different vantage point.

I was most impressed with the way they moved together and personally thought that Paul had a slightly better action, more fluid than Dave's. The on all fours scramble under the watchful eye of the bird should have been recorded on video as an example of fieldcraft as an art form. Degree of difficulty 2.6 - Artistic impression 2.8. I would have clapped but with my luck I'd have scared the bird.

Any predictions for the next 'mega' to visit our area? Let me have your guesses and we'll see who hits the jackpot. I'm pretty sure our Secretary will buy the winner a drink or a box of chocolates! If he won't then I will. Ideas on a piece of paper to me please for publication in the next Newsletter.

Some of you will have come into contact with Ivor (Scott) a member of the Club and an erswhile Wader counter. Since purchasing a boat on the Lancaster Canal he's not been doing much birding and he's been suitably

admonished by our Chairman. A recent letter from him, with cheque for subscription, has advised us that he is in fact carrying out an intensive and extensive Moorhen survey as his boat threads the placid waters of the Canal. Nevertheless he does have the following articles for sale:-

KOWA TSN 2 with 20 x 60 zoom plus case - £350

If anyone is interested please contact Ivor on 0253 - 864555

The Wyre Borough 'Dawn Chorus' at Brock Bottom attracted a full complement of Listeners despite the 0400 start. I was surprised how early dawn came - 0345 and you could make out shapes against the sky. It was a strange experience driving through Preston and seeing revellers threading their ways home from the nightclubs. The walk produced the expected woodland birds and exceptionally good views of Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Highlight for me were the 35 or 36 Long Tailed Tits which flew from one tree to another.

Once again, please let me have any contributions for the Newsletter whether it be articles, points of view or an ode to a Toad (Maurice?)

A.D.

Actions speak louder than words

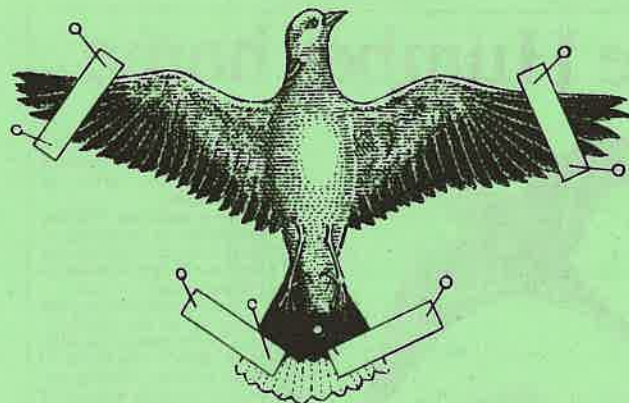
Feather report

We Brits love our birds. And we love our animals. Obviously, when it comes to conservation, we must be the best in Europe. Those foreigners across the water are not as civilised as us, not yet. It is up to us to give them the lead. Where foreigners shoot birds and develop their land willy-nilly, we Brits, with our natural national tendency to care for our wild creatures, with our great love for our countryside, set an example to the rest of Europe.

This is the national fantasy. Certainly, it reflects something of the national psyche — the RSPB, with its 850,000 members, is the largest wildlife conservation charity in Europe. The will to conservation in this country is very strong. But alas, this is not reflected in hard figures.

The British are strong on desire: the government that represents them is woefully weak when it comes to performance. Let us turn to a league table for conservation. Incredibly, the bird-loving Brits are ninth, perilously close to the relegation zone.

The table is based on the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). To call a site an SPA implies a formal government commitment to the protection of a site that is important for wildlife. Once



designated, any plan to develop it is subject to rigorous scrutiny. Developing an SPA is not permitted if it would breach European Community regulations. To designate an area an SPA, then, is a clear indication of intent: a demonstration of commitment to conservation.

The league table, reproduced here from an RSPB report issued this month (figures accurate to October 1990), shows that the British performance is poor, by any standards. The voluntary organisations — representing the national will to conserve — simply cannot afford to buy up all the wildlife sites in the country. It needs commitment from government: commitment that is not there.

The wheels turn at snail's pace. Government departments, such as transport and energy, seem opposed to conservation, committed to their own view of "progress" — ie, short-term gain at a cost of long-term destruction. The needs of industry and commerce are all that matter to them, it would seem.

The report also cites "the inertia and workload" of officials from the Department of the Environment, who admin-

ister the designation process. A standard government ploy from government is to demand extra information from conservation bodies. Conservation is faced with a machine that appears to see conservation as a force that must be resisted until further resistance becomes absurd.

Conservation is rapidly becoming one of those issues in which the government is out of touch with the national will. Conservation is not the marginal interest of a few nutters: it is a concern shared by much of the country. There is a great desire to conserve. It is time this was recognised in performance rather than platitude.

The country that is renowned across Europe for its love of birds is ninth in the league table when it comes to expressing that love. Clearly, something is wrong. The government is walking out of step with the British people.

Denmark, meanwhile, is going great guns. What a shame to report that something is rotten in the state of Britain.

SIMON BARNES

● What's about: *Birders* — look out for stock doves and wood pigeons displaying and turtle doves calling. *Twitchers* — spectacled warbler at Filey, North Yorkshire; greenish warbler in Felixstowe, Suffolk; Bee-eater in Flamborough Head, North Humberside. Details from *Birdline*, 0891 700222.

ACTION TABLE

Country	Percentage of state land designated as Special Protection Areas, and year due to be completed
Denmark	22.29 (1992)
Belgium	12.06 (1992)
Portugal	3.49 (1994)
Greece	1.45 (2021)
Spain	1.33 (2000)
Germany	1.10 (1997)
Italy	0.90 (2007)
France	0.77 (2027)
Britain	0.55 (2040)
Holland	0.24 (2053)
Luxembourg	0.12 (1991)
Ireland	0.05 (2037)

Homeless birds subject of numerous complaints

Roosting starlings 'a health hazard'

THOUSANDS of homeless starlings, rapidly running out of roosting space as the Central Pier grows shorter by the day, are swarming round other parts of the resort looking for a night's rest.

But it is claimed they are becoming a health hazard and now the city environmental health department are being urged to look into the problem.

Coun Mark Turner, Morecambe Bay Independent, told The Visitor it was particularly bad in the Alice Street area.

"As the sun goes down the sky is black round there," he explained. "I have had a number of complaints, not just about them being a nuisance, but because people are worried about the health aspect. One person told me so many starlings were perching on her television aerial that it was interfering with the reception."

Cull

He went on: "At times it looks like a scene from The Birds, with tens of thousands gathering in huge flocks. They don't appear to stay there overnight. They fly off and presumably roost elsewhere, only to return the following day."

He was asking environmental health officers to investigate, in the hope of getting the starlings moved on. He didn't want to see a living thing killed but thought that, if necessary, it might mean culling the starlings, although he would regard such action as a last resort."

The health of the residents was the key factor, he stressed.

Marsh harriers return to Moss

THE arrival of three marsh harriers at Leighton Moss, Silverdale, is raising hopes that the RSPB reserve will continue its relatively new role of being the harrier's only breeding place in the whole of the North of England.

One male and two females have been spotted and there are encouraging signs that two nests are being built.

The male harrier, which arrived on Wednesday, started building even before the first female arrived the following day. Another male also swooped on to

the reserve the same day but appears to have been chased away. At the weekend, excited observers noticed that a second female had arrived.

Mr John Wilson, senior warden, said he was delighted the harriers were back. They first began breeding at Leighton Moss in 1987 and had done so every year since.

It was quite possible two nests would be built and young reared in both, because male harriers were quite often polygamous. "The signs are certainly good," he added.



Barnacle goose: from a few hundred to 12,000

Geese eat into farmers' profits

BY KERRY GILL

FARMERS on a coast where the barnacle goose has been saved from extinction are demanding government compensation for the crops which they say the flocks are devouring. A triumph for conservationists has left farmers in southwest Scotland claiming up to £10,000 a year each for geese lost to the Svalbard geese.

The birds winter on the relatively mild banks of the Solway Firth before returning to their native Spitsbergen. During the 1950s there were only a few hundred in the area. Since a reserve was established by the Nature Conservancy Council 30 years ago, the population has grown to more than 12,000. The recovery has been so successful that Dumfries and Galloway regional council and the area tourist board have adopted the goose as their symbols.

Jim Brown, who farms near the reserve at Caerlaverock, is less impressed by the birds. "We spend an hour a day trying to chase them away and we can't shoot them. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust is erecting a huge tower inviting people to come and see the geese. They are raking in money while our pockets are being hit." Another farmer, Alistair Wyllie, said: "Sometimes I fire above the geese to scare them. The crops are badly affected and cattle don't like all the dung deposited by the birds." John Graham said that he was unwilling to apply for a shooting licence because of the antagonism of ornithologists. He was unable to winter sheep in the area because of the lack of grazing and silaging was usually two to three weeks late.

The farmers believe that conservationists should help to feed the geese. Jim Milby, area secretary of the National Farmers Union, which has taken the farmers' claim to the Scottish agriculture department, said that numbers had to be controlled. "Geese will strip a field to the bone very quickly. There are so many that they cannot cope with feeding them at the trust refuge.

The prospect of some geese being shot left John Doherty of the trust aghast. He said that any population of geese of less than 100,000 was under threat and the Svalbards numbered only 12,700. He was sympathetic to the farmers and felt that the government should pay them to grow some crops especially for the geese.

MALZANES VISITOR 15-14-92

Calling the Humber home

Feather report

THE Humber has been getting a bad press since the 17th century at least, and I bet it was a tired old joke then. Andrew Marvell contrasted the unbelievably exotic with the hilariously homely:

*"Thou by the Indian
Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find: I by
the tide
Of Humber would
complain."*

And they hadn't even invented Cleethorpes then. Grimsby and Hull sit on either side of the Humber: one of these names would be enough to de-glamorise it. The two together make the place ridiculous.

So there I was, standing at the foot of one of the many factories that face this 60-mile-long estuary. Factories and an everlasting expanse of mud: if ever anything captured the popular vision of the Humber, this was it.

You can perform a trick on a place like this. All you need to do is raise your binoculars to your eyes. It is rather like the vase and the two faces: a minute shift of vision changes the picture entirely.

The mud is heaving with life. See one dunlin, splendid in his new summer plumage, with a smart black waistcoat. See another, another: the more you look, the more there are. The Humber is heaving with life.

Numbers peak at 120,000 birds in the winter: knot, dunlin, curlew, shelduck. The Humber is where the Trent and the Ouse meet the sea: the Humber drains one fifth of England. Its glorious mud, its intertidal mud flats, teem with invertebrates: as long they teem, they will support colos-



Robin Jacques

Relying on estuaries for survival: the splendid dunlin

sal, internationally important numbers of birds.

It is hard to convince people that mud is glorious. It is hard to convince people that the birds are there at all. Love the Humber? It is difficult enough to get people to conserve such obviously splendid things as ancient woodland and ancestral heath. Mud and the Humber is probably the world's least sexy combination.

But estuaries like the Humber are crucial to the survival of many species: a wintering ground and a migration feeding station in spring and autumn. Britain has a wonderful collection of estuaries,

and therefore a special responsibility. Every estuary is significant: they are interdependent: the birds have evolved behaviour patterns of flitting from one to the other. To break the chain is to kill the birds.

This is recognised by the fact that there are seven Sites of Scientific Interest along the Humber — and one of them, hilariously, is Cleethorpes beach. Pomarine skuas fly over the kiss-me-quick hats: a major tern passage occurs a little beyond the donkey rides.

Conservation of such a place is important: but how to set about it? For the main problem is administration. There are seven district councils in-

involved, and more than 20 government departments, statutory bodies and agencies with different areas of responsibility.

It is a nightmare. Whether you prefer the conspiracy or the cock-up view of history, it is clear that the opportunities for either are simply colossal.

"It is not major schemes that worry us on the Humber," says Martin Davies, East Midlands officer for the RSPB. "It is the incessant nibbling process, the insidious background problems. A pipeline here. Dumping there. We have to be vigilant here, all the time."

An RSPB survey of 126 British estuaries reveals that 57 face threats of permanent damage. The figure was 43 in 1988. Marina development, land claim, pollution: the usual things. This is all made worse by the byzantine complexity of the organisations that look after estuaries.

The House of Commons environment committee has been investigating the question of coastal planning and protection. It has come up with recommendations for a national coastal unit, working on a "cascade effect" involving regional and local organisations. This would unify and simplify the whole business of administering estuaries.

It would be a great leap forward were the government to take these recommendations on. *I by the Humber's tide will dunlins find/Thou by the side of Ganges shouldst complain.*

SIMON BARNES

● What's about: *Twitchers* — influx of cattle egrets, including birds at Hornsea Mere, Humber-side and Messingham, Lincolnshire. Glossy ibis on Teesside. Birders — red and sedge warblers coming into wet places. Details from Birdline, 0498 700222.