



# *Fylde Bird Club*

Chairman: Mr. L. BLACOW

NEWSLETTER No. 72

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## FROM THE CHAIR

The planned conversion of the Rossall Coast Guard Station to a bird watching centre presents us with some exciting opportunities. The partnership with the Lancashire Wildlife Trust will enable us to work closely with them, something we haven't done in the recent past. Our joint expertise and experience should be used to help conserve important sites in the Fylde.

Publicity will raise the profile of the area and help us get the message across, by manning the station our members will be able to inform the public about the importance of the site. Recent increases in disturbance to the wader roosts have led to a decrease in the number of birds using the site. A series of walks and events would probably reverse the situation.

Several years ago disturbance on the Dee Estuary caused the waders to abandon the roost sites, a similar campaign there worked and the birds quickly returned to the estuary. The Fylde Bird Club will also benefit from the publicity surrounding the opening of the centre and subsequent events. As you all know, the profits from this years Bird Race will be donated to the centre. Another opportunity for us all to work together, please try to support the Bird Race and raise some important money.

*L.G.B.*



## DIARY OF A FYLDE RINGER

Tuesday 20th April 1993

I picked Peter Barnes up at 6.30pm to meet Graham Mortimore at Brock Bottom at 7.00pm to ring some young Dippers.

For the past few years, at least, Dippers have bred on a Northwest Water Authority bridge which crosses the River Brock. The Dippers have traditionally built their nest on one of the steel girders that support the pipes.

We climbed on to the bridge, went straight to the old nest but it was empty! Funny because moments earlier we had seen the adults carrying food and we just assumed they would use the old nest as usual. It was obvious then that they had built another nest just to confuse us!

So we sat back on the bank and watched where the adults were going. We saw one parent bird carrying food up to a piece of reinforced banking just before the bridge.

The reinforced bank consisted of large stones packed behind large wire mesh. Just beyond this we found the nest constructed out in the open on top of a rock against the bank.

In the nest were four young Dippers. We ringed all four and carefully placed them back in the nest. We then retreated some distance and ensured they remained in the nest and watched until the adults were feeding them again.

Looking through my diary for 1993 the next entries relate to the week I spent on Bardsey Island with Graham Mortimore and Phil Slade. So before I let the story unfold an article on Bardsey is needed to set the scene.

### YNYS ENLLI

For the none Welsh speaking amongst you the title means Bardsey Island!

Bardsey sits just under 2 miles from the southern tip of the Llyn Peninsula in North Wales. It is nearly 2 miles long from north to south and just over half a mile at its widest. From the mainland Bardsey seems to appear as a barren lump of rock rising 500 feet out of the sea.

To the west of the mountain is a plateau of flat land that slopes to the south where the infamous Bardsey lighthouse stands. This part of the island accounts for over half of the islands area. The fields are divided by low stone and earth walls and are grazed by sheep. A stream runs from north to south through the centre of the island and runs into the sea

near Solfach. Along the length of the stream are the three withy beds. These are small areas of low lying willows. These are coppiced to provide mist net sites and are some of the best cover for migrants on the island.

The west side of the mountain has a gentle slope and is mainly covered in gorse and heather, with some areas of bracken.

The 'main road' on Bardsey ( a track ) runs from Nant in the north all the way to the lighthouse in the south. It is off this track that the eleven farmhouses are situated. The walled gardens of the houses provide more cover for migrants. The Observatory garden has a lot of thick cover with eight mist nets strategically placed and a Heligoland trap just outside the kitchen window so you can keep an eye on the trap whilst washing up!

At the north of the island is Nant. Here there is a withy bed and a Sitka Spruce plantation. The withy bed has two mist nets in it and the plantation has about six plus the Heligoland which was originally in Plas Withy. When I was last on the island in Spring 1993 the Heligoland had only just moved to Nant. It must now be catching a good number of birds.

Taking the main road south on Bardsey you pass the Narrows. Here the island is only 30 - 40 metres across and the only sandy beach on Bardsey is situated here. Heading further south you reach Bardsey's South End. This is a flat plateau of turf, with scattered gorse, surrounded by low cliffs. It is here that Bardsey's infamous lighthouse is situated.

The east side of the island is dominated by the mountain. Panoramic views can be had of the mainland from the top. Access around the east side of the mountain is now prohibited as the path is very dangerous. I thought it very dangerous when I took a walk round the east side of the mountain with Paul Slade five years ago! It scared me half to death! Of course this is the area of sea cliffs and where the large seabird colonies are situated.

Bardsey first started receiving interest from ornithologists at the turn of the twentieth century. As years went by it was realised more and more how unique the island was and in 1953 moves were made to set up a permanent bird observatory. Since 1954 to the present day there has been regular recording of all migrant and breeding birds, mostly within a season from March to November.

Bardsey Island is accessible by a short boat journey and accommodation is in the observatory 'Cristin'. I don't intend to go in to detail here about how to get there, costs etc but if any member is interested then please don't hesitate to

contact me.

All I can say is that you haven't lived until you have been to Bardsey. If you're interested in ringing, birding or rarities then give it a go. Why not go to Bardsey instead of the Scillies, Spurn or Norfolk this year. I can thoroughly recommend a week on Bardsey to anyone.

Just to wet your appetites I've drawn up a table of rare and scarce migrants seen on Bardsey over the past ten years, their frequency and what month they were recorded in. Also following this are two lists. The first a list of scarce or rare migrants recorded on Bardsey before 1984 only and secondly a list of more commoner migrants/breeding birds recorded regularly on Bardsey.

**Scarce and Rare Migrants on Bardsey Island 1984-93.**

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	TOT
Black-throated Diver	4	2					1	12		19
Great Northern Diver	4		2				6	18	2	32
Slavonian Grebe								1		1
Cory's Shearwater								2		2
Great Shearwater						1				1
Little Shearwater						1	1	2		4
Little Egret				1						1
Great White Egret								1		1
American Wigeon						1				1
Surf Scoter								1		1
Honey Buzzard					1	1	1			3
Red Kite		1			1			1		3
Montagu's Harrier			1							1
Goshawk	1	3								4
Osprey		1	1			1	2	2		7
Hobby			2	2		1	1			6
Quail		1	1				1			3
Baillon's Crake				1						1
Corncrake		1				1	1			3
Black-winged Stilt		2								2
Stone Curlew			2							2
Dotterel			1			4				5
Pectoral Sandpiper							1			1
Grey Phalarope		1					4	6		11
Mediterranean Gull								6	3	9
Sabine's Gull							3	3		6
Bonapart's Gull									2	2
Roseate Tern				1		2				3
Little Auk							1	24		25
Nightjar			1							1
Alpine Swift							1			1
Bee-eater					1					1
Hoopoe		3	3							6
Wryneck		2	2	1		1	2	4		12

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	TOT
Short-toed Lark		1	1							2
Woodlark		1								1
Shore Lark									3	3
Richard's Pipit							1	1		2
Red-throated Pipit								1		1
Water Pipit	1									1
Nightingale			4	1		1				6
Black-eared Wheatear			1							1
Lanceolated Warbler								1		1
Marsh Warbler				1				1		2
Great Reed Warbler			1							1
Icterine Warbler				1	1	3	4	1		10
Melodious Warbler				2		11	4			17
Subalpine Warbler			4	1	1	2				8
Barred Warbler						1	2	1		4
Greenish Warbler				1						1
Pallas's Warbler								2	1	3
Yellow-browed Warbler							12	33		45
Radde's Warbler								2		2
Dusky Warbler									1	1
Bonelli's Warbler						1				1
Firecrest	2	6	9		1		23	52	8	101
Red-breasted Flycatch.				3			2	7	1	13
Golden Oriole			7	1	1		1			10
Red-backed Shrike			1			1	1			3
Woodchat Shrike				1						1
Rose-coloured Starling							1			1
Red-eyed Vireo								1		1
Arctic Redpoll			1							1
Scarlet Rosefinch			7	10	1	1	5	2		26
Cirl Bunting	1									1
Ortolan Bunting			1				2			3
Little Bunting	1	1						2	1	5
Chestnut Bunting				1						1
Black-headed Bunting							2	1		3

Scarce or Rare Migrants on Bardsey Island Recorded Before 1984 Only.

	Number of records
Albatross sp.	1
American Bittern	1
Night Heron	1
Spoonbill	1
Snow Goose	1
Rough-legged Buzzard	2
Spotted Crane	1
Sora Rail	1
Killdeer	1
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	3
Lesser Yellowlegs	1

	Number of records
Long-tailed Skua	3
Crested Lark	1
Red-rumped Swallow	1
Tawny Pipit	1
Thrush Nightingale	1
Bluethroat	1
Grey-cheeked Thrush	3
Cetti's Warbler	1
Aquatic Warbler	1
Arctic Warbler	2
Collared Flycatcher	1
Penduline Tit	1
Great Grey Shrike	1
Yellow Warbler	8
Blackpoll Warbler	1
Summer Tanager	2
Song Sparrow	1
White-throated Sparrow	1
Slate-coloured Junco	1
Rock Bunting	1
Rustic Bunting	1
Yellow-breasted Bunting	1
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1

**Commoner migrant/breeding birds recorded regularly on Bardsey Island.**

Red-throated Diver  
 Sooty Shearwater  
 Manx Shearwater  
 Mediterranean Shearwater  
 Storm Petrel  
 Leach's Petrel  
 Shag  
 Velvet Scoter  
 Marsh Harrier  
 Hen Harrier  
 Buzzard  
 Merlin  
 Peregrine  
 Water Rail  
 Little Ringed Plover  
 Little Stint  
 Curlew Sandpiper  
 Purple Sandpiper  
 Ruff  
 Jack Snipe  
 Whimbrel  
 Spotted Redshank  
 Greenshank  
 Green Sandpiper  
 Wood Sandpiper

Pomarine Skua  
 Arctic Skua  
 Great Skua  
 Little Gull  
 Glaucous Gull  
 Little Tern  
 Black Tern  
 Guillemot  
 Razorbill  
 Black Guillemot  
 Puffin  
 Turtle Dove  
 Cuckoo  
 Little Owl  
 Long-eared Owl  
 Short-eared Owl  
 Rock Pipit  
 Black Redstart  
 Ring Ouzel  
 Twite  
 Crossbill  
 Lapland Bunting  
 Snow Bunting

Seumus Eaves  
 January 1995



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"Go West Young Man, Go West"

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For several years now, our main holidays have been taken in July, to coincide with the main flight period of British and European butterflies. Destinations have been the 'Central Massif' area of the Southern Alps, the French speaking 'Valais region' of Switzerland with its scenically splendid alpine meadows and villages, the wonderful haunts of the Victorian Lepidopterist around Finhaut, Le Marracotes and Verbier.

We have butterflied in alpine meadows below the awe inspiring Matterhorn and the Dom, Switzerland's highest peak and enjoyed the German speaking villages of Saas Fee and Zermatt, sun soaked and traffic free, both being stop-end high mountain valleys. The French Alps have found us photographing in the Haute Savoie region in alpine meadows of extreme beauty where every damp spot was crowded with orchids of many species. Temperatures in the high 80's had us puffing and wheezing, every step; in these high places an exertion for a fat unfit body festooned in cameras, rucksack, tripods, food, wet weather gear and all manner of a butterfly photographer's necessities!

The high Austrian Tyrol and nearer home the New Forest, have all been explored in my quest to put some of nature's finest insects on film.

Holidays specifically butterflies are probably of little interest to most members of F.B.C. Some of the birds encountered may be. Very close views of a wallcreeper sunning on rocks below a waterfall in the Trient Gorge, red and black kites, golden eagles, hobby, honey and common buzzards, goshawks and peregrines are all memorable. A pair of red-backed shrikes feeding a row of recently fledged young, breeding fieldfares and ring ouzels and golden orioles in stands of black poplar along French streams have all made the carrying of the extra weight of glasses so worthwhile, completing the jigsaw of this alround naturalist's mind.

This then has been a look at our natural history biased summer activities but I feel sure our spring holidays will be of much more interest to recount here.

May always finds us North of the Border, in fact Scotland has now become an erstwhile pilgrimage with Cairngorm, the Spey Valley, Findhorn and Orkney all equalling this naturalist's Mecca. The added attraction of sailing to islands and the excitement of 'new land' appearing on empty horizons all adds to the thrill of a quickening pulse. A long time 'want' to visit The Western Isles after being relegated by Texel became reality in May '94.

Spring trips occupy those dark evening times between Christmas and the first couple of months of each new year, a time of planning almost as enjoyable as the trip itself. Much depends on the weather and although May here in the Fylde is well into Spring, in '93 we were snowed off Cairngorm and two days later out of Aviemore itself as snow was driven horizontal by gale force winds.

Our ten day trip to the Western Isles was bathed in near tropical sunshine and only the lightest of winds, perfect conditions.

Ferry space from Uig on Skye to Loch Maddy, North Uist was booked with Fylde Travel, Poulton and accommodation was done with the aid of the Scottish Tourist Board who offer the best and most courteous service possible.

Equal time was booked on North and South Uist; two extra days were allowed for Skye and a first time visit. The ferry from Kyle of Lochalsh to Skye is every twenty minutes, costs £5 per car and you don't need to reserve space. All plans laid, it's just a case of packing the gear, food for the trip up (motorway services have robbed me for the last time) and pointing the car North.

I love the drive North, worry a little about Glasgow then head for Stirling. Turning North West, we have lunch at Callender at a cafe we used well over twenty years ago, remembering eagles over Loch Venigar. On to Fort William to arrive at Kyle of Lochalsh around tea-time, a long easy drive through some of the finest country in the British Isles.

We cross to Skye on the first ferry after arrival, find B & B a short drive from the jetty and enquire about eating out; find the place, enjoy a meal and watch a fine sunset, the red of the dying sun setting flame to the snow on the Cuillins, an emotive start to an Island Holiday.

One day on Skye is spent looking for otters at the F.C. Otter Haven hide but without luck. Lunch is taken at Portree and we spend the afternoon walking the Old Man of Storr with its fantastic views over much of Skye and the Cuillins. B & B is booked just outside Uig at a small farmhouse.

The day starts with a large Scottish breakfast and a morning's birding in the hills above Uig. Here hooded crows harrassed buzzards, wheatears had commenced breeding and from a vantage point above the harbour, we watched the ferry arrive from the Isle of Lewis, later to take us to Loch Maddy.

The crossing into an evening sun with flat calm conditions provided nothing better than a blue-phase fulmar, fair numbers of manx shearwaters and assorted auks.

I was completely unprepared for North Uist. I have over the years read much on Scotland, enjoying immensely the book "Curlew in the Foreground" written by the then warden of Balranald. I drove off the ramp, up the slipway, found a sign pointing me to 'Carnish' and set off across the low lying and watery North Uist.

The only cars we saw were also from the ferry and we passed no traffic at all travelling in the opposite direction. I slowed to watch a two-man team digging peat for fuel, took my first photographs and drove on. Carnish was a sprawling strip of housing, an odd mixture of traditional Scottish cottage, flat gabled and coated in stone harling amongst very modern bungalows all of which seemed to occupy a croft-sized piece of very rough ground.

Much in evidence was the litter of farm machinery long past

its usefulness. Old cars of ancient heritage seemed to stand like memorials to some lost mechanical age. It would be impossible to describe North Uist as pretty but the amount of manmade dereliction I found hard to comprehend.

However, our B & B was superb, a new bungalow on a crofting. Our bedroom looked west over a loch and onto the sea, while the dining room overlooked a moor giving views of red stags at first light. Buzzards and a hen harrier hunted over the croft and loch shore and starlings nested down rabbit burrows, all easy to watch from the bedroom. Nothing could compare with the fabulous sunsets that lit the room with deepening reds and golds almost into the small hours.

Our first full day on North Uist and I cant wait to get to Balranald. Here the Western Isles comprise the western seaboard of Europe and from Aird an Runair it's three thousand miles of Atlantic Ocean before landfall in Northern Canada. I find the tiny stone croft house, now an R.S.P.B. Centre at Balranald and read the sightings book. Twelve dotterel have been present for over a week, the last sighting logged at 4.30. the previous day.

Outside I can hear corncrakes rasping and what seems to be battalions of corn buntings sing from almost every fence post. I have never seen so many breeding redshank and lapwings with young seem to be on every patch of grass. We walk to the shore; the utter solace of the place is almost touchable and I am haunted by the ghost of Philip Coxon the late author of "A Curlew in the Foreground".

The beaches are of white shell sand running down to a deep, blue-green sea. Flocks of summer plumaged sanderlings have stopped off to rest before heading further north; they are superb gleaming white with tortoiseshell freckled backs. Ring Plovers run before us, often using distraction displays as we pass too near a nest amongst the pebbles. Many dunlin are nesting and while I photograph a splendid little male (sometimes he is too near to focus on), I realise how much difference there is between the sexes. My male has a pale grey face with a head and back of brightest chestnut while beak and belly are densest black. I lie five feet from him, the big lens gives me every feather in detail. Standing on a small tussock of coarse grass he displays singing wheezily, showing no concern until I rise to my knees then he runs to be lost amongst the grasses.

A boulder strewn pool is a bathing place for a colony of arctic terns that are nesting along the beach. We walk on looking for dotterels but find no trace and in their absence my mind riots. Where have they come from to be so far west or more importantly, where are they going? Could it be conceivable that here on some outlying island dotterels nest, undocumented, unknown of?

This is my kind of bird watching. I care nothing for ad hoc ringing or the twitch that reduces the beauty of every rare bird to a mere tick. For me it's all in the mind, that blast of life history that rocks the mind and vibrates the senses. It could be my first fieldfare of the winter; today it was the very absence of those twelve mountain plovers..

Late afternoon finds us on the military road at the north end of North Uist. The car is parked alongside an iris bed that borders a stream no more than a foot wide. Here a male corncrake has been calling just twenty yards from the car. After perhaps ten minutes he shows, just head and shoulders in the short new growth of iris, then he starts to walk towards us. Closer, I balance the big lens on the car window. Now he is in short grass giving great views, my first ever corncrake. I whisper to Joyce "When he clears the sheep netting, he's mine:.. I wait. On he comes, finger moves to shutter, he stops, looks, turns tail and runs back to the iris bed and although he calls for almost an hour we only get the odd glimpses in deep cover.

We explore much of North Uist, the weather remains perfect. Many small lochans hold pairs of breeding redthroated divers. A walk on the wet moor of Loch Scadavey looking for golden plover gave us a ringtail harrier; she burst from the heather keking loudly just a few yards in front. She swung round us twice before gaining height as we back-tracked out of her breeding territory.

Golden plover we did find, two pairs possibly with young. So plaintive were their calls even when I was some two hundred yards away persuaded us to just sit in the heather and watch them through the scope.

Our move to South Uist across Benbecula. gave us many summering mute swans but by far the best was yet to come.

John S Cross

**PART 2 OF JOHN'S ARTICLE WILL APPEAR IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER.**

## DIARY OF A FYLDE RINGER

Saturday 24th April 1993

Bed early last night, although I couldn't sleep because of too many thoughts of Bardsey Island today.

Phil picked me up at 2.30am, even earlier than some of our summer ringing sessions, and our journey to Bardsey Island began. We headed to Graham Mortimore's house in Preston and arrived there at about 3.00am. We left Phil's car in Graham's garage and loaded all the gear into Graham's car. By 3.15am we were on our way.

We had to be at Porth Meudwy (I'm not sure if that's how it's spelt) by 7.45am where Elwyn Evans would collect our gear and load it on to the boat.

The 184 miles to Bardsey only took about three hours with Graham's demon driving and we were there in plenty of time. With an hour and three quarters to spare we decided to walk down the valley and see what was about!

The valley down to Porth Meudwy reminds you of one of those Cornish valleys, thick with cover and a rarity in every bush!

Migrants were around with numbers of *Phylloscs.* abounding. Two Grasshopper Warblers were singing, one at the top of the valley and one at the bottom. Also seven Whitethroats were seen or heard.

Back at the top of the valley Elwyn arrived at 7.15am, picked our gear up and took it down to the boat. It wasn't long before we were on the boat and on our way to Bardsey.

As we rounded the Aberdaron Headland (it sounds like I'm retelling some old sea faring yarn!) the eastern mountain of Bardsey loomed in to view. As soon as I saw Bardsey it seemed as though I'd never been away from this idyllic island.

When you first see Bardsey from the boat you get the impression of a rugged barren island, but behind the shield of the mountain there lies a variety of habitats.

Passing close to the cliffs at the base of the mountain we were rewarded with close views of Guillemot, Razorbill and Fulmars glided past on stiff wings. Looking up to the high slopes of the mountain Chough could be seen displaying, diving down towards the sea then pulling up giving their haunting cry.

As we rounded the mountain we pulled into Henllwyn. Standing on the southern end of the island the infamous Bardsey Lighthouse could be seen, the bird killer of old.

The boat moored and our gear was unloaded and the leaving group's gear loaded on to the boat. We were greeted with the news that it had been a quiet week with only one good day!

We were introduced to the Warden, Richard Humpidge and the Assistant Warden Ian Rendell. They informed us that we were the only ones staying at the obs. that week. By 9.00am we were carrying our gear into Cristin. I'm back!

Everything looked the same except there was a big hole in the Cristin Heligoland and we were informed that the Plas Heligoland had migrated north to Nant with the help of Richard and Ian!

After one of our regular Bardsey cuppa's we decided to give Graham a tour of the island. A walk up the main road to Nant, down to the western fields, along the west coast, through the Gorse on to the Withy beds and back up the main road to Cristin.

Birds along the way were Chough, a Little Owl calling from the lane, two Blackcaps at Nant and plenty of Wheatears in the western fields.

By now it was time for lunch. After lunch we had a walk to Solfach and on up to the lighthouse.

At Solfach there were 8 Whimbrels roosting on the rocks and 18 White Wagtails feeding on the tidal wrack. Graham tried hard to get some pictures of the Wagtails but they were very jumpy. Just behind the hide at Solfach there was a male Yellow Wagtail and this was the first on the island for the spring.

A return to Cristin after our walk and we were greeted with a female Pied Flycatcher, a nice end to the day.

As darkness approached we retired to the study and browsed through the obs.' extensive library. Log was called at 9.00pm and after one or two nightcaps we retired to bed wondering what tomorrow might bring.

SEUMUS EAVES  
FEBRUARY 1995

## RECENT REPORTS

### December

The 1st of the month was a "bumper" day for Ed in his endless search for rarities. A Black Redstart was found hopping around on the seawall near the Pleasure Beach. Presumably the same bird was seen at Squires Gate Station on the 5th. Regular readers will no doubt be aware that this and the adjacent scrapyard are, what could be termed as, prime sites for this species and as such are included in Ed's daily itinerary.

Not to be content with that he moved down the coast and promptly came across a Snow Bunting at South Promenade, which stayed in the vicinity of the Go-Kart track and remained until the 3rd. Naturally the 3rd was a day when no one was seawatching from the Shelter! Heading inland to Stanley Park he then managed to locate a Great Spotted Woodpecker, by no means a common species in the Blackpool/Fleetwood area.

Greater things still awaited him on the 5th, when on one of his brief visits to the vicinity of the Shelter he observed a Sandwich Tern - the latest Lancashire record by 25 days - for those who can't subtract 25 days from the 5th December, he kindly advises that the answer is the 7th November. Too difficult for me, most of the time I don't even know what day it is.

Marton Mere also had its share of semi rarities. A Green Winged Teal which had been seen on the 28th November was still present on the 3rd along with 2 male and a female Pintail plus up to 5 Gadwall. Also seen was a male Goosander, a species which seems to be extending its winter range. For good measure a male Bearded Tit was seen and heard.

An unusual 14 Long Tailed Tits were at the Mere on the 9th whilst a Bearded Tit was heard but not seen. On the following day Maurice assures me that he saw 50 Shoveler on the water, definitely not 49 or 51. Having said this, I've looked at his wader count numbers for the month and there are a suspicious amount of noughts present.

Movement was still taking place on the passerine front - 18 Mistle Thrush were on LSNAR on the 4th and the same number on the 14th accompanied by a male Stonechat and 5 Song Thrushes. By the 20th the number of Mistle Thrushes was still 18 on the Reserve, reducing to 10 the following day but with a supporting cast of a pair of Stonechats and 11 Goldfinch.

It was all happening, as they say, in downtown LSNAR. The 20th must have been a traumatic one for Maurice when he obtained his first record of an Oystercatcher actually "feet down" on the Reserve. Remember, he's seen them flying over, on the Pontius Cafeteria roof, on the Golf Course, on the dunes on the other side of the road, but never in situ. Greater things were to follow for all you amphibian lovers. A LIVE FROG was found under 1/2 inch of ice in one of the slacks. Maurice's pen must have been red hot at this stage as he inserted two exclamation marks after the capitals. How did he know it was alive? Was it blowing bubbles, or just doing slow motion breast stroke?

As usual our merry band of Ringers were out and about in their usual haunts, with Clifton

Hall being especially favoured. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and a Nuthatch were seen on the 11th (G Dunlop). A Greater Spotted was seen on the 14th along with the Nuthatch.

Upto 124 Chaffinch were roosting at the Hall during the month with several "continental" birds ringed. Amongst the birds ringed on the 14th were Goldcrest and 2 Coal Tits which were retrapped. There was a definite increase in the numbers of birds with increased fat deposits. On the 17th a large tit flock was present, roaming through the area.

A pair of Sparrowhawks were noted on the 23rd and also, one Snipe which is only the second record for the site. Jay and Woodcock were also present. An even rarer visitor was present on the same day - none other than Peter Robinson, the RSPB's Chief Investigations Officer who was ringing with the team. An open invitation to the Ringers was extended to do some ringing on the Scillies and no doubt will be taken up sooner rather than later.

As relief from the stress of Ringing, Seumus went on a twitch to Fairhaven on the 24th and sadly dipped on the Shorelarks. There 3 birds were discovered in the dunes just north of Fairhaven by an unknown visitor. They were extremely confiding and kept together feeding on the tideline and venturing into the dune's in search of seeds. They were, I think, Lancashires first record for 13 years and looked marvellous in the sunlight.

After our Chairman's exhortation to count the duck at the Mere, Maurice (ranging ever wider into the Fylde) visited this site on the 2nd and counted 232 Teal, 48+ Pochard and managed to see an adult winter plumaged Little Gull; spotted by Dave McGrath, as it flew south west. By the 26th Teal numbers had increased to 341 and 229 Mallard were present. A Slavonian Glebe graced the Mere for several days at the end of the month but disappeared on the 31st and thus disappointing many 1995 "year listers"!

A female Hen Harrier was at Bank Lane Warton on the 18th. Peregrine and Merlin were seen throughout the month over Wyre, at Warton Marsh and from the Shelter. On the 4th St Annes shore roost included 530 Sanderling, 250 each of Dunlin, Oystercatchers and Grey Plovers, 350 Bar Tails, 2600 Knot and, to add some credibility to the figures, 23 Ringed Plover and 27 Redshanks.

Seawatching in the month was generally quiet with just the odd exception. The 3rd saw 2 adult and 2 immature Whooper Swans fly South East over the Promenade whilst small parties of Pintail and Wigeon accompanied by a lone Teal flew South.

The best day of the month was the 15th. In slightly overcast conditions, with a light southerly breeze, 96 Great Crests and 58 Red Throated flew south. The largest numbers of Common Scoter so far this winter were extremely easy to see and count (320). At 0840 a drake Velvet Scoter flew south which was celebrated by a cup of coffee, the contents however didn't reach my mouth but certainly warmed my leg.

A count off Starr Gate on Christmas Day produced just 2 Common Scoter! Things improved on the 27th with 4 adult Little Gulls and 10 Red Throats seen flying south vaguely heading in the direction of Colwyn Bay! On the same day 80 Eider were off Rossall Point, Fleetwood and 207 Mute Swans were on the Boating Lake. South Westerlies on the 29th brought 102 Kittiwakes and 16 Little Gull close inshore.



The last day of the year saw Ed counting 16 Little Gulls off Central Promenade (the sewage outlet) - the same ones?

## January

A combination of Force 6 north westerlies along with rain and hail was enough to bring 138 Kittiwakes past the Shelter and heading north. 15 Eiders headed north too, probably after being displaced by the strong winds, and rough sea of the previous night. 6 Adult and 2 1st winter Little Gulls were also seen.

The rest of the month so far as seawatching was concerned was very poor. Murky conditions and wild south westerlies aren't really the ideal conditions at this time of year, the 15th however, did see the arrival back of the Grey Seal, bobbing its nose up to see whether the shelter was still occupied. A male Pochard flew south on the 29th - the best bird of the month!

The Shorelarks were still feeding in the area north of the lake at Fairhaven, on the 1st although somewhat further up the beach than before. Alas, by the 2nd they had disappeared, possibly to Gronant in North Wales and so disappointing many local listers, already short of a Slavonian Glebe and the Kentish Plover which had arrived at Rossall in December for its 4th successive year but also magically disappeared on the 31st. 300 Golden Plover were on Blackpool Airport on the 5th and a flock of 900 on the fields at Moss Edge on the 7th. 14 Brent Geese including 2 of the pale bellied variety were on the salt marsh at Pilling Lane Ends on the 8th. Also over Wyre, 24 Whoopers were at Union Lane Stalmine on the 9th, Bob Dawson had seen 35 Whoopers and 70+ Bewick Swans at various sites during the month.

Pink Footed Geese were present in good numbers with birds once again frequenting the fields by Parr's Farm at Fleetwood. Between 5-700 could be seen, whilst over Wyre 1000 were in the fields between Moss Edge and Bond's Farm on the 14th. On the 28th a 1000 were again on Moss Edge with over 2000 on the saltmarsh between Lane Ends and Fluke Hall.

Rarity of the month was undoubtedly the Richards Pipit found by Tony Myerscough on the 8th, on the embankment next to the car park at Lane Ends. It favoured the short grass of the embankment and was still present at the end of the month, but elusive at times. Translated this means - when I've been there, I've not seen it.

Maurice's "interesting" record of the month occurred on the 11th of the former Blackburn and District Childrens Home (opposite LSANR). Previously the domain of a pair of Kestrels he observed a Sparrowhawk dropping down through a "missing slate tile hole". Unfortunately he doesn't state whether the bird reappeared or whether it came out with prey or went in to play. Maybe he'll tell us next month, so watch this space.

## Contributors

L G Blacow, A Dawe, S Eaves, M Jones, E Stirling.

## Postscript

Well, its been a less than scintillating start to the New Year down at the Shelter. Absolutely appalling conditions and very few birds. Despite this there have been a few brighter moments. Maurice has paid us a visit - once, to sell us the new Lancashire Bird Report and on the second occasion to actually birdwatch. Alas, on this visit all that was seen was a lone Fulmar (his first for the year). By way of compensation he was afforded crippling views of brown seas with brown, breaking waves.

This conveniently as we say in the trade, brings me onto my next subject: Sewage - with a capital S. The last time I visited Fleetwood there were several widnsurfers sporting "Surfers against Sewage" logos. As you will be aware North West Water are investing £50 million into cleaning up our seashore. Has anyone considered the birds or the birders? Where will Ed seawatch if Central Promenade outfall stops disgorging its twice daily feast of goodies for the birds? What will keep the gulls off Chatsworth Avenue, Fleetwood if the outfall is closed?

I think the time has come to demand at least one massive, close in, sewage pipe, just off Rossall Point to coincide with the eventual opening of the new visitors centre at the Coastguards Station. Not one emitting secondary treated waste 5 miles out into the depths of Morecambe Bay. Act now and join "Seawatchers for Sewage" - its not too late!

Seriously though, the quality of the water off the coast does seem to be improving, superficially at least. On at least two recent occasions blue sea has been spotted from the Shelter - a real rarity.

By the way, I hope you've all been to see "Starrgate" - the movie; an every cosmos tale of fantasy, wishful thinking and ultimate disappointment.

Still on a cosmic note, the Council worker who cleans the Prom from Starr Gate to Central Pier posed an interesting question the other day - "Why are all the Planets round?" This was far too difficult for me to answer at half eight in the morning, having seen just 3 Scoter and a Shelduck: So I passed on that one. He then said he was going to write to Desmond Lynam. on "How do they do That" to see if he could find out the answer. What I want to know is who is Des going to ask, the Man in the Moon?

So far as I know, Alan Hinchcliffe still has his complete, pristine, unread set of BWP'S for sale. As some of you will know there is a growing trend towards light weight birding equipment. Well, Alan has certainly entered into the spirit of things, disposing of his heavy 'scope (Kowa), heavy binoculars (Bausch & Lomb), heavy tripod (Manfrotto) and now his

heavy books. What next? A move to light weight beers - Miller Lite perhaps? Contact him now, everything's being reduced.

I'm sure that you've all completed your bird records for 1994 (I'm almost there). If you haven't, then send them into Paul Slade soon, so that he can get the Report out early this year. Don't forget copies for Maurice too.

Please keep your contributions to the Newsletter coming in. Special thanks to John and Seumus for their articles this month.

AD.

### Rare birds escape Bronx aviary to harsh freedom

**T**HE 19th century aviary at the Bronx Zoo — home to a colony of 100 South American sea birds — collapsed under a foot of snow in a storm, and dozens of rare gulls and terns escaped, zoo officials said.

No people were in the aviary when the cage of wire mesh crashed down on Saturday on the simulated coastal habitat. No birds were killed.

But at least 33 birds — 8 Grey gulls, 12 Andean gulls, one

Band-Tail gull and 12 Inca terns — escaped from the artificial realm where they were hatched into a world where they may have to compete with city sea gulls, crows and other tough birds. — New York Times.

## Scientists baffled by death of 20,000 penguins

FROM REUTER  
IN PORT STANLEY

THE mysterious death of about 20,000 rare King penguin chicks on the South Atlantic island of South Georgia has puzzled scientists.

"This represents an ornithological disaster which will have serious implications in relation to the worldwide number of King penguins," Tony Chater, a Falkland Islands naturalist, said yesterday.

The chicks belong to the species *Aptenodytes patagonicus patagonicus*, which breeds only on South Georgia, 800 miles southeast of the Falklands, and on two other islands off Cape Horn. Mr Chater added, Gordon Laddell, formerly of the British Antarctic Survey, which monitors birdlife in the area, said he suspected the chicks had died because parents had been unable to find food.

Patrick Lurcock, the South Georgia marine officer, said that unseasonably heavy snowfalls might have smothered the chicks. However, Marlin Gibbons, an Edinburgh Zoo assistant curator, said the deaths could simply be part of a natural phenomenon. "Seabird colonies do take these sort of crashes from time to time, due to all sorts of environmental factors," he said.

The British Antarctic Survey said it was contacting South Georgian sources for more information.

HEADLINE BOOKS



King penguin and chick: species is considered rare

## Siberian cranes forget their passage to India

John-Thor Dahlburg writes from Keoladeo National Park

FOR millions of years, one of nature's rituals has repeated itself with the majestic regularity of clockwork. Now, it seems, the clock has stopped.

That is what Asad Rahmani, a professor at the Alligarh Muslim University, concluded to his dismay when, a few days ago, he came to these marshlands 40 miles west of the Taj Mahal with both foreboding and hope in his heart.

For as long as people can recall, the largest and most conspicuous of cranes, the Siberian, has made the long flight southward from its breeding grounds in the Ob River basin to winter here in the warm, grassy wetlands of northern India.

Standing 54ins tall, scarlet-faced and clad in snow-white plumage, the birds must negotiate one of the most harrowing avian flight paths in the world: a 8,000-mile arc over seven countries, including war-devastated Afghanistan, where they may be shot for food, and Pakistan, where cranes are en-

snared to serve as winged watchdogs.

In the winter of 1964-65, 200 of the hardy visitors from Russia completed the two-month flight from the water-logged tundra around the northern reaches of the Ob to the temperate safety of Keoladeo National Park's 11 square miles, near the Rajasthan town of Bharatpur. By 1990-91, the number dropped to 10, and in 1992-93, to five.

Last winter, despite a unique US-Russian effort, no Siberians came. This winter, Indian bird fanciers, straining to hear the crane's soft, musical "koo-koo-koo," scanned the skies once more in vain.

There now appears to be about 3,000 "Sibes", as they are nicknamed, left in the wild. Three of them are at Keoladeo, not because they flew in under their own wing power, but because people brought them here in boxes.

The story of the three birds is one of a remarkable wildlife conservation effort by specialists from several countries, including the United States. It involves not only hi-tech gizmos such as satellite transmitters but also puppets and people dressed up as surrogate crane parents.

Unfortunately, the story of this campaign to revive the Sibes flocks does not have a happy ending.

At least not yet.

For many visitors to the park, a glimpse of the endangered visitors from Siberia, known scientifically as *Grus leucogeranus*, is the highlight. One afternoon this winter, our guide, Arun Bhatt, directed a party of three rickshaws down a path between two jheels, or shallow lakes.

About 100 yards away, gleaming in the afternoon sun, a pair of Siberian cranes elegantly picked their way through the cool waters, peering into the grasses for sedge tubers and other edibles.

The male, Bagle, and the female, Corby, were two of half a dozen birds hatched in captivity and brought here from the US and Russia in 1992 and 1993. The hope was that the juveniles would mingle with cranes from Russia and return home to breed with them. It did not happen.

George Archibald, director of the International Crane Foundation of Baraboo, Wisconsin, has witnessed the use of human foster parents to restore the population of another endangered species, the whooping crane, in the US. Chicks are raised by people in crane costumes, using hand puppets and taped crane calls.

In 1974 Mr Archibald met his Soviet counterpart about the status of the Sibes. Eggs were brought to the US and captive breeding of the Siberian cranes began in 1981.

At Baraboo, where 30 of the adult birds live, a few chicks are hatched each year and other fertilized eggs are sent to Russia for incubation. The problem, according to Mr Archibald, is not in breeding Sibes; it's in inserting eggs or young birds into the wild Sibes' life cycle.

Over three summers, starting in 1991, Sibes were brought from Baraboo to Siberia. The idea was that they would join the wild cranes in migrating to Keoladeo. But although some of the captivity-bred birds started the trip, none of them made it to India.

An alternative plan is to bring 15 to 20 youngsters from Wisconsin to stay in Keoladeo all year round. Because the birds can live for more than 80 years, introducing seven to eight Sibes a year would soon achieve a stable resident colony, Dr Rahmani said.

Even in the worst case, nature's ancient rite of Siberian cranes flying to and from India may not be gone for ever. Cranes learn their migration routes by flying with other birds. But even if the Sibes have stopped coming to Keoladeo, humans may some day be able to act as surrogate flight instructors.

Using a technique pioneered with Canada geese, an ultralight airplane will try next year to imprint migration routes on to the memories of sandhill cranes in the prairie provinces of Canada. One day it may be the turn of a community of Siberian cranes, the threatened survivors of a species that has inhabited Russia for an eternity, to return the flight path of its ancestors from a human pilot. — Los Angeles Times.

### Plastic prey

Heather Speakman, 29, spent two days organising the rescue of an eagle owl sitting on a pylon in Long Eaton, Notts, only to discover it was a plastic one put there to scare starlings.

## Soaring hawks raise a deadly brood

Whatever else happens on the wildlife front in 1995, I predict a showdown among rival conservation groups over the build-up in numbers of raptors, or birds of prey.

Our most spectacular hawk, the peregrine falcon, has reached a level never before recorded in Britain. When the species sank to its lowest ebb during the early Sixties - victim of toxic farm chemicals which rendered the eggs thin-shelled and infertile - a survey organised by the British Trust for Ornithology disclosed that only 400 traditional nesting sites were occupied in the United Kingdom.

As a result of that census, the most dangerous chemicals were banned, and follow-up surveys showed a steadily improving picture. The latest, conducted in 1991, revealed an amazing total of 1,050 occupied territories - well above the 850 recorded before the Second World War.

In the past three years the peregrine population has grown still greater. In part this is the result of legislation - the Protection of Birds Act (1954)

and the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), which made it illegal to kill hawks of any kind. But it is also a triumph for the control of poisonous chemicals, and for active conservation measures such as the guarding of nests. Besides, some peregrines seem to have adapted to living alongside humans.

Other species are enjoying a similar revival, not least the red kite, which was persecuted to extinction in England and Scotland towards the end of the 19th century, but hung on by a thread in Wales. Today, as a result of energetic conservation measures, the Welsh population is back to 100 breeding pairs, and birds brought in from Spain and Sweden have re-established the species elsewhere.

Yet this kind of success is starting to cause problems. That other large and handsome raptor, the goshawk, now causes considerable disruption in commercial woodland. Whenever the Forestry Commission finds a nest all normal operations are suspended within a 400-yard radius of the

### COUNTRY MATTERS



Duff Hart-Davis

tree, freezing an area of more than 100 acres for several months, and postponing the date on which thinning or felling can be started.

On grouse moors, owners and gamekeepers are increasingly concerned by the build-up of hen harriers - a highly volatile subject. That fiercest of grouse (among other prey) is not disputed; but bitter arguments rage about the numbers they consume.

In 1988, in an attempt to damp down animosity and to find out what is really happen-

ing, the Game Conservancy Trust and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology launched a joint raptor study, funded by a consortium of sporting and conservation interests. The survey is still in progress, and no detailed report will be published until it has been completed, probably 18 months hence. For the time being, furious accusations fly about keepers smashing harriers' nests or otherwise rendering their eggs infertile.

Yet no section of the community is more agitated than the racing pigeon fraternity, whose valuable birds are under attack both from peregrines, and, far more seriously, from that miniature replica of the peregrine, the sparrowhawk.

Officials of the Royal Pigeon Racing Association claim that there are now 90,000 sparrowhawks in Britain. If (as they claim) each one on average kills three small birds a day, they must be knocking out nearly 100 million victims a year. No wonder, say the pigeon fanciers, there are so few garden birds left.

Even worse, from their point of view, is the way sparrowhawks identify a pigeon loft and terrorise its inhabitants. "The hawk just sits in a tree and waits for me to let my birds out," said one expert. "To foil the raider, he has to leave a cat or dog out near the loft, hang about himself, play loud music - or not let the birds out at all. Pigeons can develop a dread of the lurking killer and become reluctant to fly home - thus making them no good for racing."

In the view of owners, all this is due to excessive protection. Over the past generation all but the most die-hard gamekeepers have given up persecuting raptors; but injured parties are muttering that the time has come to reintroduce some form of control.

Leading conservation organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to accept that view; and if an impasse develops, the danger is that those who are suffering will resort to illegal methods, such as deliberate poisoning.