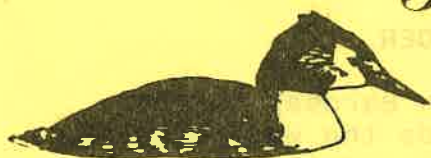


Fryde Bird Club



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

NEWSLETTER NO.68

FROM THE CHAIR

In the April edition of Birdwatch magazine the 'Club Call' column urged Bird Clubs to become more involved in local conservation. After reading the list of suggestions I thought the writer had been to one of our meetings.

There are still a couple of areas where your help is required; we are still short of Wader Counters. If you can spare a half day per month please come along and help with this important survey. We also need some help with the Wyre Borough Guided Walks, as one of our Sponsors we should support them.

There are two walks arranged in May, on Sunday 8th we are at Nicky Nook with a 7.0am start and on Sunday 22nd we are leading the annual dawn chorus at Brock, 4.0am start followed by a hearty breakfast at 8.0am. Why not join us and spread the word?

I hope the weather has 'turned the corner' by the time you read this. It is 15th April as I write and I have yet to see a Swallow or hear a Willow Warbler. So here's to a good May and I hope to see you on one of the guided walks at the Wader Count.

L.G.B.

DIARY OF A FYLDE RINGER/BIRDER

I was sat at the front of the observatory on Bardsey Island in Spring '93 looking down the island towards the west coast and keeping one eye out for diurnal migrants and the other on the garden Heligoland trap, when I had a thought (and I don't get too many of them!) . Every bird we ring is recorded on a fieldsheet, transferred to the B - Ring computer system at home and a schedule of the birds ringed are forwarded to the British Trust for Ornithology. Every bird I see and write in my notebook is transferred to my 'bird recorder' programme on my personal computer when I get home. So every aspect of my interest in birds is recorded, but what about the human side of birding? What about the laughs we have when we're out, events that happen and how we came to be a particular site, are they recorded? - no, not by me anyway.

Inspired by this I decided that from 1993 onwards I would keep a personal diary of all my ringing and birding activities that will not only be a list of birds seen and numbers recorded but a memory of every trip. What I hoped to gain is what I wrote at the start of my 1994 diary, which said "I hope that these pages will be full of good humour, companionship and most of all good birds."

As I said before I don't get too many thoughts and when I do they can be dangerous! I mentioned to Alan Dawe that I was keeping a diary and would he be interested in a few entries for the newsletter. I think I hoped that he wouldn't be interested and I would feel pleased with myself for at least volunteering something for the newsletter, but he said YES. So here it is in all it's glory my "diary of a Fylde ringer/birder."

Saturday 27th February 1993

One of the main none avian tasks in ringing is the enormous annual management tasks which have to be carried out at a good number of our study sites. From cutting back invading Willow scrub at Dimples Lane to cutting net rides through six feet high nettles at Carr House Green Common, it all has to be done if we want to continue with our projects.

Today we were at Lane Ends to carry out some management work there. When I say we I am referring to David Sowter, Graham Mortimore, Peter Barnes and myself.

The main tasks were to extend a 60 foot ride to 110 feet, remove the invading White Poplar (particularly where it was choking Oak and Alder saplings) and coppice Willows in the other net rides. All the tasks were carried out successfully but more management will be required before the Autumn.

We when then went on to Rawcliffe Lodge to do some ringing. Rawcliffe Lodge is a large private house situated on the north bank of the River Wyre in it's own grounds near Out Rawcliffe. The habitat is miniature parkland and is very similar to Clifton and Singleton Hall but on a smaller scale. We put out about 15 large peanut feeders which attract a variety of species, but it is the large numbers of Greenfinch that come here to feed that we are most interested in. Hopefully after a few more years of research here we will be in a position to say something about the winter movements of Greenfinch in the northwest. But today was a day when luck wasn't on our side and we only managed to ring 19 Greenfinch and retrap a superb male Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Seumus Eaves
March 1994.

COLOUR RINGED MUTE SWANS

In recent years a big effort has been made by the North West Swan Survey to colour ring Mute Swans. An especially large number of these birds can be seen in winter at Fleetwood Marine Lake (maximum counts have exceeded 100 from November to February in recent years - according to the 'Winter Atlas' this is unusual), but ringed birds are scattered all over the north west. The rings which are used are blue Darvic rings with 3 white letters/numbers, repeated once. Most birds are ringed with a BTO metal ring on the right leg and a Darvic ring on the left leg, but a few are the other way round, this (I think) has no significance. Some birds carry only a BTO ring.

There seems to have been some difficulty in getting feed back when ring numbers are reported. I hope I am in the process of cracking this. In the meantime I am making my own data set. Therefore, I shall be most grateful for details of ringed birds from any sites in the north west, and especially reports of breeding birds. I may not be able to give details of the birds' history, at first, but in the long term should be able to do so. At present, thanks to the good offices of Charles Findlay (CF) of Layton, I have a list of over 350 ring numbers, and of these I have full details of first ringing for 173. CF informs me that birds with a code number beginning with 6 were mostly ringed north of the Fylde area, most in Cumbria, those beginning with 2 are mostly from South Lancs and Cheshire.

The male of a pair which wintered on Fairhaven ML 1993/94, and perhaps bred there in 1993, was originally ringed at Westport Lake, Stoke in February 1991. Four birds at Fleetwood ML on 3 March 1994 had not been seen during 15 previous checks by CF and JFW, this winter, but had been seen there in March 1993 by CF. Three of these birds were originally ringed in Cumbria in August and September, 2 in 1991 and 1 in 1992, and the other at Southport ML in November 1992. This seems to suggest migration through Fleetwood each spring. CF also informs me that there have been reports of Manx ringed birds in the north west, so there is plenty of potential interest in checking out these birds.

FRANK WALSH

Last year I wrote to the Club expressing my concern over some people's interpretation of the Stanley Park Bluethroat and subsequent graffiti on my cabin door. Somehow that letter got lost. This note covers the main points of that letter and brings the Club up to date on more recent developments at the Mere.

Concerning the Bluethroat, I have since learned from Maurice that the bird was seen independently by a Chorley Birder behind the Cafe. Robert and myself saw the bird disappear into that area after being flushed by bush-bashers from Manchester (I totally deplore the activities of 'bush-bashers! : remember the code "The welfare of the bird(s) must come first"). Robert and I looked but couldn't find the bird behind the Cafe, but it did reappear later in the original spot and was seen briefly but well! I sincerely hope that remarks scratched on my cabin door were not made by fellow members of this Club.

As for the Wryneck, some new evidence suggests it may have been a misidentification (I certainly hope not). However, according to Ted Abrahams 1993 report one was seen in Wigan the following day so perhaps the bird was genuine after all. I can only apologise profusely about the Bean Pink Footed Goose error. Had the bird left overnight it may well have gone on record as Bean Goose, an unacceptable error.

The Bonelli's Warbler I saw near the feeding station in early November was not accepted by BBRC on insufficient evidence. My apologies to Maurice for going to a higher authority. Another bird not reported, a little later was a Gray Catbird (?) found in the 'office' by a birder familiar with the species in N.America. I don't even know if there are any Mainland records of this bird. He tried to find me on site but unfortunately was unable to do so and as he was pushed for time soon left. I only found out about the bird several weeks later and when I asked if he would submit the record he said not as he thought no-one would believe him. The birder in question is not known to flights of fancy!!

D.J.McGrath.

During the Summer of 1993 the RSPB, in connection with Fylde Borough Council ran an Education Scheme at Grannys Bay and Fairhaven Lake. On 21st April 1993 the RSPB embarked on a 'Save our Shorebirds' campaign and the scheme linked into some of the objectives of the campaign. The scheme was to illustrate to schools through Field Teaching the importance of the Ribble Estuary as a site of international ornithological importance. All subjects covered in the scheme were relevant to the school's studies of Geography and Science in the National curriculum.

The Education scheme was a result of meetings between Barrie Cooper, the RSPB Regional Education Advisor and Fred Moor, Director of Tourism and Leisure at Fylde Borough Council and after being interviewed for the post

of Teacher/Naturalist I was fortunate to be employed by the RSPB for the duration of the scheme.

Two programmes were devised - one for primary and one for secondary schools and both were broken down into eight sections as follows:-

INTRODUCTION - Short discussion involving the children in a question and answer session. Typical questions would be - "Who are the RSPB? What do they do? Why do we need to conserve birds?"

ADAPTATION - Why and how different species of birds are adapted to their surroundings. This was done with wooden kits and showed Grey Heron, Mallard, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Snipe and Kestrel. Children were able to understand why the Mallard has webbed feet and the Greenfinch hasn't or why the Heron has long legs for wading in water but the Blackbird hasn't. This was of particular use with younger children.

SLIDES - Showed the Estuary - How it is formed and what it is made of; the wildlife found on an Estuary and in particular the Birdlife and the reason for the huge amounts of birds found on estuaries - huge amounts of food - also showed the threats to estuaries.

BIRD OBSERVATION OF THE LAKE - Looked at adaptations of Swans, Geese and Ducks also Sparrows, Starlings and Pigeons.

BIRD OBSERVATION OF THE MUDEFLATS - Looked at adaptations of the Wader Species and involved the children in identification of the easier species such as Oystercatcher and other birds such as Gulls and Shelduck.

MUD SAMPLING - Took samples of the mud in Grannys Bay to discover the huge numbers of animals in the estuary which makes them such important places for birds.

ENVIRONMENTAL GAMES - These involved games illustrating such diverse subjects as Wader Migration and it's hazards (including Arctic Foxes, Oil spills, Bad weather, Barrages, Shooters and Peregrines) Food Chains, Predator/Prey relationships, Wader Beak Race (where children could become a Dunlin, Knot, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Godwit or an Oystercatcher and try and adapt to feed on certain items of food hidden in the Estuary mud) and an Energy Race Game where children could see how energy was passed down a food chain on an estuary (sunlight- Algae- Corophium- Dunlin- Peregrine). The feedback received by the schools was very encouraging and as a result of the success of 1993 a similar scheme will operate in 1994 along the same lines with maybe a more structured scientifically based programme for GCSE classes.

As a result of RSPB/Fylde Borough Council Education scheme at Grannys Bay around 1000 Lancashire schoolchildren and their Teachers are now aware of the Ribble Estuary and it's International importance for birds. Hopefully as the scheme develops and grows many more thousands will follow them.

A full report of the scheme is available from myself and has been made available to the Fylde Bird Club committee. If you feel you would like to help or support the scheme you can do so by either donating or lending items such as used binoculars, Scopes, Field Guides etc. to the RSPB either through me or the Education Office whose address is below.

If your children or grandchildren come home one day and inform you that one square metre of Estuarine mud may hold the energy equivalent of 15 Mars bars or that there could be as many as 40,000 Corophium (Redshank food) snails in a square metre of mud you'll know they have visited the RSPB at Grannys Bay!

S.M.Meredith

Contact:- Barrie Cooper
RSPB Regional Education Advisor
North West Office
Wakefield Road
Denby Dale
Huddersfield HD8 8 QD
Tel: 0484 86148

RECENT REPORTS

FEBRUARY

February and early March are the months to see Geese over Wyre and often provide superb views, especially if they are in accesible places like Moss Edge. This year was no exception; up to 15000 Pinkfeet were present along with several 'oddities'. These included a minimum of 3 Bean Geese, 7 Russian Whitefronts, 4 Barnacle Geese and 1 Pale Bellied Brent. After the Wader count of the 13th I was amazed to find that virtually the first goose I looked at on Moss Edge was a Bean, right at the front of the flock. Normally you're looking through a throng of bodies for a glimpse of orange legs. For good measure 16 Dark Bellied Brent Geese were on the Saltmarsh at Pilling whilst inland at Eagland Hill up to 36 Bewick and 4 Whooper Swans gave exceptional views from by the telephone box (see "where to watch birds from Tramstops and Telephone Boxes around the world" - coming shortly).

In the same area Barn Owl, near the Fylde Museum, Tawny and Little Owls could be seen. Following Barry Dyson's lead from the previous month Stewart Meredith counted 2 Stock Dove, 230 Wood Pigeon, 400 Jackdaw and 100 Rooks. Yes, I know the counts nearly all end in noughts and no he wasn't birding with Maurice! A mixed flock of Passerines at Bradshaw Lane, Pilling included at least 101 Tree Sparrows. Not to be outdone Barry Dyson managed a count of 1200+ Skylarks and 109 Corn Buntings on the 10th and 17th respectively. A group of 1000 Golden Plover on Moss Edge included 2 leucistic birds.

Raptors were reasonably prolific too, with Merlin, Peregrine and Sparrowhawks present both on the mosslands and at the coast.

The other Fylde hotspot (relax, it's not Starr Gate) was Jameson Road, Fleetwood. The Little Bunting, although elusive at times did give very good views to patient observers as did the Lapland Buntings. It was difficult to estimate their true numbers with the frequent comings and goings between the Tip and the enclosure. Frank Bird and Tony Myerscough saw 12 together on one occasion and it was by no means far fetched to think that there were at least 15 in the area. By the way, Reed Buntings were still giving absolutely "crippling views" at the same site.

Snow on the 23rd and 24th saw hard weather movements over LSANR and St. Annes. 290 Redwing and 182 Fieldfare flew south over the Reserve on the 23rd and over Premium Bonds on the 24th. This latter site is a first for the Newsletter.

Still on the passerine front Chris Batty discovered a Water Pipit on the salt Marsh at Hambleton, flushed from the marsh by the high tides. Despite intensive searching by our Leeds FC/Premium Bonds correspondent he unfortunately dipped. "Did he not like that", what's more, it would have been a 'tick'. On this latter point readers, you are sworn to secrecy.

2 Grey Wagtail and 2 pairs of Stonechat were seen at Rossall Point by Barry Dyson on the 28th. I've not looked to see what day the 28th was but I suspect they might just have been seen on an extended lunchtime watch.

Highlights from Seumus Eaves and the Ringers - not a rock group - included 1100 Chaffinch flying to roost at Singleton Hall on the 13th, 140 Redwing roosting and 6 Woodcock flushed from west wood at Clifton Hall on the 26th. An increase in the numbers of Blue Tits and Wrens ringed indicated a return of these birds to their breeding areas.

2 possibly 3 Green Sandpipers were seen along a dyke leading into the River Wyre at Larbreck on the 10th. In the same area 13 Goosanders were on the Wyre on the 17th. An unusual sighting was of a Water Rail at the CEGB pool at Fleetwood on the 25th.

At the Mere wildfowl numbers were healthy with a maximum of 76 Wigeon, 62 Shoveler, 128 Pochard, 68 Tufted Duck, 22 Goldeneye, 41 Moorhen and 168 Coot. 2 Bearded Tits were seen on several occasions and a Bittern was seen briefly in mid month.

At the coast 8 Purple Sandpipers were wintering on North Pier. They were best looked for on the jetty at low tide when there was no disturbance from fishermen. At high tide the birds dispersed from the jetty and were difficult to locate.

Having just written this item I think it can best be included in the new publication "Where I should have watched birds, retrospectively". Maybe, they'll still be there in 1995.

A first Winter Iceland Gull was seen at Fleetwood Marine Lake early in the month and one, presumably the same at Starr Gate on the 27th. There were few highlights from Starr Gate during the month although a male Velvet

Scoter supplemented the average 2-300 Common Scoter on the 6th when 39 Red Throats moved offshore. Most unusual sight was of two Great Crested Grebes displaying to one another at sea. Just a point, but they didn't offer each other pieces of seaweed.

At the end of the month 4 Purple Sandpipers remained at North Pier the others having flown earlier after seeing a pair of Collared Doves nest building under the Pier decking.

MARCH

After a quiet morning at Starr Gate (highlights - 6 Gannets, 2 Fulmar and 3 Kittiwakes) our friendly and regular visitor from Worcester announced that he was off to Fleetwood to look for the Little Bunting and have a walk along the 'prom' to Rossall Point. His parting words were "I've always been very lucky on my visits to Fleetwood eg Kentish Plover, Snow Buntings etc." It still came as a shock when I found out that he'd found an adult Ross's Gull on his perambulations. Why couldn't he have found it at Starr Gate? The bird stayed in the area from Saturday the 12th until the following Thursday. Predictably it attracted hundreds of visitors who combined this with another 'peek' at the Little Bunting. It could be argued that the Fylde was the spot to be during March. The first Winter Iceland Gull was seen at LSANR on the same day whilst on the 6th a first Winter Glaucous and adult Iceland Gull were present at Starr Gate amongst 10,000 other gulls on the beach; attracted by countless numbers of razorshells brought in by the tide and deposited on the beach.

An adult Glaucous Gull was seen by Ed at Knowle High School coming to bread with the Black Headed Gulls. This was a new record for this site and seemed to rekindle Ed's interest in birdwatching. From thereon he went from strength to strength, finding a pair of Mediterranean Gulls at St. Annes Moss on the 29th, a leucistic Black Headed Gull on the 30th and a first Winter Iceland Gull at Fairhaven Lake on the following day. Probably a first for the site speculates Ed. Earlier in the month an adult Mediterranean Gull had been present at the Mere on the 13th and 14th.

At the back of Blackpool Zoo 2 Barn Owls, 2 Short Eared Owls and 2 Little Owls were seen regularly. 1 Short Eared was later found dead after hitting a window at the new hotel.

During the month there was an exceptionally good passage of Stonechat with sightings from Fleetwood, Staining, the Mere, LSANR, Barnaby Sands and Fluke Hall. The first Wheatear of the year was seen by Tony Hope on a perambulation of LSANR. Unfortunately, for Maurice that is, there was no sign on the following day. Not surprising I suppose when the following day proved to be a westerly gale. Things improved for Maurice on the 15th when a male was present at the reserve. A Chiffchaff was reported singing in the Barnaby Sands area on the 14th.

The geese Over Wyre were still accommodating, with a 'fabalis' Bean, 1 Light Bellied and 2 Dark Bellied Brent and 2 Russian Whitefronts

at Fluke Hall on the 13th. A Greenland Whitefront was at Bonds Farm on the same day.

Raptor of the month award goes to the Ringtail Hen Harrier seen from the Stanah hide as it quartered Burrows Marsh on the 5th. Peregrines were seen over Cleveleys at Starr Gate and over Wyre during the month.

A Purple Sandpiper was seen on the island in the Marine Lake at Fleetwood on the 13th amongst the roosting Turnstones.

Seawatching at Starr Gate improved as the month progressed. 62 Gannet flew north on the 20th with a small passage of Cormorant, including a not just 'white headed' but a 'sinensis' type bird. On the same day 140 Meadow Pipits moved north over the sea.

The 27th was notable for its variety which included 2 Long Tailed Duck, a male Scaup, 243 Scoter, 24 Red Throats, Eider, Kittiwake, Gannets, Great Crests and Wigeon. The first Wheatears for the seawall appeared and just as quickly disappeared after being flushed by dog walkers.

There were no mammal sightings this month apart from Hares indulging in mad March antics. An object off Starr Gate on the 27th initially thought to be a Grey Seal with it's nose above the water was later re-identified as a pop bottle on closer inspection.

A.D

CONTRIBUTORS: L.G.Blacow, A.Dawe, B.Dyson, S.Faves, P.Ellis,
M.Jones, D.J.McGrath, S.M.Meredith, R.Stringer.F.Stirling.

FOR SALE

- 1) B.W.P Volume 3 in good condition. Offers in the region of £40 with proceeds going to charity. Please contact Steve Palmer on 0253-852392 during work hours.
 - 2) Large selection of bird and natural history magazines including many BBC Wildlife, Green magazines etc. Also included are a complete set of 20 years BTO magazines and the last 3 or 4 years issues of Birders World (American magazine).
Contact Stewart Meredith at the Club for details.
-

POSTSCRIPT

In Barry Dyson's records for this Newsletter he posed two questions - Where do Dabchicks go in Winter? and can he still count Corvids over Wyre even if he doesn't split them into separate species? Answer to the first question is "search me" and to the second "I suppose so". But, seriously folks I'm grateful for details of any counts no matter how many of them end in noughts. I can't say I've ever seen a Little Grebe on the sea or in a sheltered bay; the only place I have seen them is on the River Darwen in

Walton-le-Dale in hard weather, so I suspect they may be present at other seemingly unsuitable sites too. Anyway, answers to me for the next Newsletter please - people with the BTO Wintering Atlas would be particularly welcome to write!

I spent some time at Starr Gate over the Easter period and what absolutely atrocious weather it was too - winds from no other direction than north-west; not a hint of a 'backing south westerly'. Predictably birds were few and far between; this however did have it's advantages as it gave every opportunity to examine the few close birds in minute detail and very slowly write - Common Scoter 1 → 5. Secondly, one could only admire the newly painted shelter to the north, in pale blue and cream paint and not the normal double decker green and cream livery. If there weren't many birds, at least I had a tick when Ed brought his Brother along to see a full Summer plumaged Mediterranean Gull. I have seen a Mediterranean Gull before but not Ed's Brother. He duly viewed the bird and what's more looked at it through my 'scope. This reminds me that my other recent personality tick was Maurice's Brother at Fleetwood in late 1993. I think I ought to start a 'famous personality' list which should keep me occupied during the quieter hours at the Shelter. Details of other people's 'famous persons' seen whilst birding would be welcome; start racking your brains now. Sightings of AJH do not count - only if seen on a Birds of Fstuary count and accompanied by a full description with the record.

Thanks to the many contributors to the Newsletter; it was especially welcome to receive so many articles for inclusion. As the saying goes - for reasons of space some have been held over until the next issue. Keep them coming.

A.D.

APRIL 1994.

Isle of Man Basking Shark Project

The basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) is the second largest fish in the sea, exceeded in size only by the whale shark.

Basking sharks have been reported from all the oceans in the world.

They belong to the group Lamnidae, their closest relative is the renowned "man eater" the great white shark. *Cetorhinus* is a harmless planktonivore with 4 - 7 rows of teeth each approx. 1/4 inch long.

Sharks of 35 ft. are not uncommon in Manx waters (a 56 ft. specimen was reported in 1992), however the average is approx. 20ft. They are ovoviparous, giving birth to live young rather than laying eggs like some other sharks.

A 35 ft. specimen weighs approx. 6 tons, his dorsal fin approaches 6 ft., approximately the same length as each of his pectorals. He swims with his 3 ft. 6 inch wide mouth at 2-3 knots filtering approximately 320,000 gallons of water per hour through gill rakers on his 5 enormous pairs of gill arches.

Very little is known about this fascinating creature.

They arrive in Manx waters in May/June - where do they come from ?

Why do they congregate in such large numbers off our west coast ?

Where do they go when they leave the Island in September/October ?

How many are there ?

Where do they mate ?

Where do they give birth ?

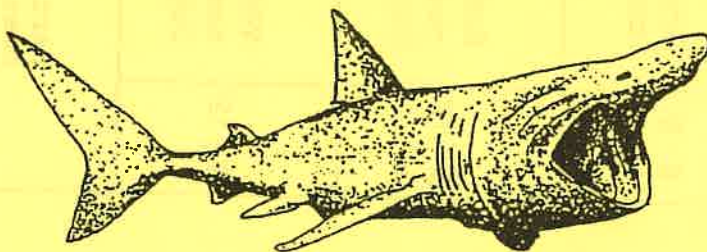
Do they hibernate ?

The Basking shark is still hunted for its liver (approx. one third to one half the body weight) which contains the oil squalene, used for high altitude lubrication and cosmetics. The fins are sold to the Far East for Sharks Fin soup.

In some areas they have been hunted to extinction.

The first visual tagging programme will help us to identify their migration and assist with population estimations.

The second tagging programme, using satellite tags, will provide exact information on the shark's movements over a year.



For further information, or to report any basking shark sighting, please contact:

Ken Watterson

The Isle of Man Basking Shark Project





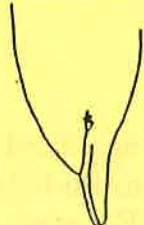
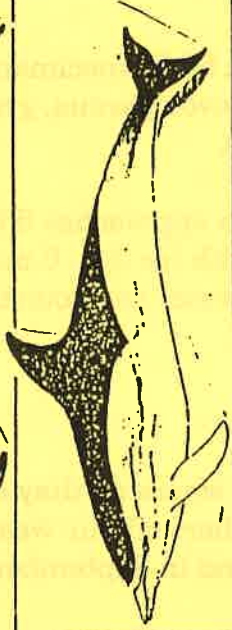





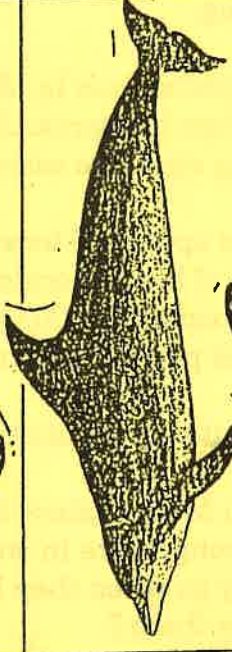



Cronk Moar

Curragh Road






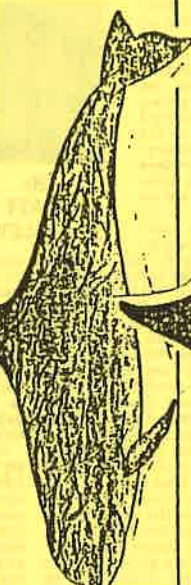





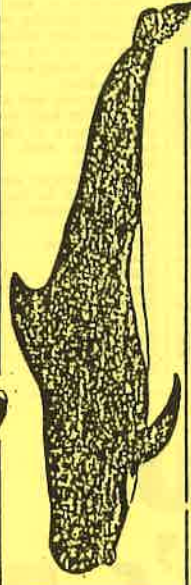




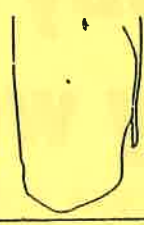







St. Johns

Tel.: (0624) 801207

ISLE OF MAN BASKING SHARK, WHALE & DOLPHIN WATCH

ADULT SIZE	NAME	FIN Ratio to length	FIN Posn	HEAD	SKETCH	NOTES
UNDER 6'	Harbour Porpoise	 1:15	Central			White or grey area mainly on lower sides only. Dorsal surface is dark. Small triangular fin, rounded head with no beak.
6' - 9'	Common Dolphin	 1:14	Central			White hourglass pattern on flanks extending forward to head and upwards, but not as far as dorsal surface. Brown back, slender curved fin, long beak.
6' - 9'	Striped Dolphin	 1:13	Central			Three distinct dark lines from the eye to the flipper, to just behind the flipper and towards the tail. White blaze up sides behind dorsal fin. Brown back, slender curved fin, medium beak.
9' - 12'	Bottle-nosed Dolphin	 1:10	Central			No obvious flank markings. Dark brown or grey on back and upper sides, pale grey or white on lower sides. Robust body, relatively broad dorsal fin, medium beak.
9' - 12'	White-beaked Dolphin	 1:8	Central			White on flanks and over the back. Otherwise very dark, almost black back, robust body, relatively broad dorsal fin, short beak.

Further information together with sighting cards, details of the coastal watch scheme and how you may assist can be obtained from Ken Watkinson - Telephone 801207.

9' - 12'	White - sided Dolphin	 1:10	Central			Long white area on sides scarcely extending forward of dorsal fin or upwards towards dorsal surface. Yellow or ochre flank patch above and behind white area, otherwise very dark almost black back, relatively broad dorsal fin, short beak.
9' - 12'	Risso's Dolphin	 1:10	Central			General grey or white area on side. Often very pale in colour with scars and pencil markings, particularly in older individuals. Robust body, tall curved dorsal fin, rounded head with no beak.
18' - 30'	Killer Whale	 1:5	Central			Small white patches behind eye and dorsal fin. Distinct white or yellow patches on lower side extending upwards. Very tall upright dorsal fin in male; smaller more falcate shape in female. Rounded head with no beak.
18' - 30'	Pilot Whale	 1:16	Central			Uniform dark above but with white underside and anchor-shaped chin stripe. Long low flag shaped dorsal fin in centre of back. Rounded head with indistinct beak.
18' - 30'	Minke Whale	 1:26	1/3 From Back			Black or dark grey back, white below. White patch on outer surface of flipper. Occasionally jumps clear of the water. Hooked dorsal fin two-thirds a long back. Triangular head.
30' - 60'	Sperm Whale	 1:24	1/3 From Back			Forward blow may be 1.5m high. Colouration dark or brownish grey. Relatively large notched tail flukes, often thrown into the air as it dives. Ridges along back with distinct triangular or rounded hump but no dorsal fin. Large square head.
60' - 80'	Fin Whale	 1:40	1/3 From Back			Colour uniform dark grey or brown on back and flanks, white beneath and extending over the mouth on the right side. Small, slightly hooked dorsal fin two thirds along back. Blow 4-6 metres high, an inverted cone.
5' - 35'	Basking Shark	 1:5	1/3 From Front			Colour varies from mottled grey to black. Swims with tall dorsal and tail fins and occasionally snout out of water. Pointed snout on young fish.

Birds threaten to sink barrage plan

By Charles Clover
Environment Editor

THE European Commission has told the Government that the Cardiff Bay barrage, on which work was expected to begin within months, is illegal as it will destroy the protected mudflats habitat of the dunlin and redshank.

In a letter leaked to Friends of the Earth, the commission said that the £150 million barrage may become acceptable when a new law comes in this summer but only on the condition that Britain agrees to protect an estimated further 19 estuaries frequented by the wading birds.

The letter, from Mr Ioannis Paleokrassas, the Greek-born Environment Commissioner, to Mr John Gummer, the Environment Secretary, looks certain to trigger another row over commission interference as did the attempt by an earlier commissioner, Signor Carlo Ripa di Meana, to stop the M3 through Twyford Down.

The Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, which permits the construction of a 500-acre freshwater lake with eight miles of new development around it, creating 30,000 jobs in the process, was finally passed by Parliament last autumn after a six-year passage, the longest by any Bill.

Mr Paleokrassas says that the barrage is "unacceptable" under the Birds Directive now in force. However, it may become legal under the Habitats Directive in June, but only if full compensatory measures determined by the commission are taken.

He calls for Mr Gummer to give assurances that a full

ESTUARIES WITH DUNLIN AND REDSHANK WHICH EC WANTS PROTECTED



"national plan" to protect mudflats frequented by the redshank and dunlin will be carried out before work starts on the barrage.

The estuaries where development will be severely restricted under the proposed "national plan" to protect the dunlin and redshank are likely to include the Thames, Severn, Clyde, Stour and Orwell, Deben, Firth of Forth, Firth of Tay

and Eden estuary, Duddon estuary and Morecombe Bay. Mr Tony Juniper of Friends of the Earth said: "In the light of Britain's foot-dragging, it is not surprising that the commissioner has finally lost patience. His position is wholly justified."

"If Cardiff Bay had been designated a special protection area earlier, as it should have been, there would never have been a barrage."

Starlings and sparrows down by half

By Robert Bedlow

THE numbers of starlings and house sparrows have declined by 50 per cent in 15 years, according to a survey by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The fall was recorded in winter by the annual Big Garden Birdwatch count in 20,000 gardens by members of the RSPB Young Ornithologists Club.

"The sheer number of gardens monitored produced findings that cannot be ignored, and they add to the growing concern about the decline of common songbirds," said Mr Mark Avery, RSPB head of research.

"More work is needed to find the causes and reverse these losses. The house sparrow is the latest in a long line of seed-eating birds fast disappearing — not just from the back garden but from the countryside."

Farm methods and garden pesticides are believed to be important factors in the decline.

"Because we see the sparrow and starling every day, and think they will always be with us, is no reason to become complacent," Mr Avery added.

The survey had a grain of comfort for bird lovers with the numbers of chaffinches, coal tits and magpies increasing.

The average number of birds found in the gardens, with 1979 results in brackets:

Starling	4.28 (8.1)
House sparrow	3.25 (8.8)
Chaffinch	2.32 (2.4)
Blue tit	2.28 (2.44)
Blackbird	1.76 (2.38)
Robin	1.12 (1.0)
Great tit	1.03 (0.9)
Greenfinch	0.98 (1.0)
Corvid crow	0.59 (—)
Magpie	0.5 (0.4)

A moral tale of passion in the hedgerow

A LITTLE knowledge can be a curse. Recently, while driving somewhere, I found myself listening to Radio 4's adaptation of Walter Scott's Waverley novels. The scene was somewhere in Scotland in 1745. Amid the usual "ochs" and "ayes", my attention was suddenly caught by a sound in the background: the unmistakable call of a bee-eater. I listened more closely. In every scene set in the fresh air there was the almost continuous sound of bee-eaters calling. Bee-eaters, birds of the Mediterranean summer, do not live within a thousand miles of Scotland.

A knowledge of bird song can be distracting at the movies. Expensive productions that take great pains to get the minutest details of contemporary dress right, or carefully exclude double-yellow lines from *Middlemarch*, sometimes make

great errors with bird song. Curlews sing on the moors in November. Crowing pheasants pierce the Transylvanian night. Collared doves coo in the 18th century. Willow warblers warble in winter. I am not so po-faced as to think this matters; it would be

depressing if film directors were obliged to study the use of bird song. But it is part of a disappointing distance that is developing between natural history and the creative professions. At a time when naturalists are discovering ever more intriguing things, it is a minor shame that so few writers and directors are aware of such matters.

Take the humble hedge sparrow, or dunnoek, as an example. Shakespeare, who knew how to use an analogy drawn from the behaviour of almost any animal or bird, was well aware that dunnoeks are the principal hosts and victims of cuckoos. In *Lear*, the fool warns the king against indulging his daughters too much: "The hedge sparrow fed the cuckoo so long that it's had it head bitten off by it young [*sic*]."

If Shakespeare were alive today, how much richer would he find the dunnoek as a source of analogies. The dunnoek is superficially nondescript, which is why a Victorian vicar recommended his parishioners to copy it:

"Unobtrusive, quiet and retiring without being shy, humble and homely in its deportment and habits, sober and un-pretending in its dress, while still neat and graceful, the dunnoek exhibits a pattern which many of a higher grade might imitate."

Until just a decade ago, despite the attention of generations of birdwatchers, the dunnoek remained such a paragon. Then Dr Nick Davies, one of zoology's most perceptive and careful detectives, turned his attention to the bird. The result is an astonishing tale of bigamy, sexual excess and deception. As Dr Davies puts it in his enthralling book *Dunnoek Behaviour and Social Evolution*: "Had [the vicar's] congregation followed suit, there would have been chaos in the parish." To put it delicately, a female dunnoek does her best to ensure that her family is of

mixed paternity. In Dr Davies's study, in the Cambridge botanical garden, he found 108 monogamous pairs of dunnoeks, 75 polyandrous combinations (one female with more than one male), 11 polygynous (the reverse) and 60 cases of dunnoeks living in

sexual communes: two or three males with two or three females. He found extraordinary details of sexual behaviour: male dunnoeks were more likely to feed chicks if they had had sex with the mother just before an egg had appeared in her nest — as if they knew when they had a chance of being the father.

And: "I can still remember my intense excitement when I first noticed a droplet being ejected [from the female's rear end before sex] and suddenly realised that the function of the display might be concerned with a battle between males for paternity and the droplets might be sperm from previous matings. I immediately began to search for the droplets... I rushed back to the laboratory and was thrilled to see, through a microscope, that the droplets indeed contained masses of sperm."

Yet, if you wrote a television play about infidelity and filled it with references to dunnoeks, the audience would be baffled. How sad.



By MATT RIDLEY

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FAMILY FOCUS

A hobby that's a family way of life

TWITCHING is a family business for the Pitman family in Warton. Their holidays, weekends and some evenings are devoted to the subject of birds.

Dad Dave Pitman started the family hobby. He has been birdwatching for more than 20 years. He lectures on the subject, leads two birdwatching classes and takes trips of twitchers abroad.

And sons Stephen, nine, Simon, aged five — as well as wife Sandra — quickly caught bird spotting fever.

"You cannot get away from it really," said Sandra. "I'm not as good at bird-spotting as the rest of the family and with work commitments I cannot go out spotting every weekend, but I enjoy being part of it and like the large, colourful birds best."

But the boys are often out and about each weekend, visiting Rossall Point, Marton Mere and other bird haunts.

"For his age, Stephen is very good at spotting," said Sandra.

"Simon enjoys it, but when he sees a bird he often decides he's seen it again sometime during the week!"

The family, from Westfield Drive, Warton, are keen followers of wildlife TV pro-

ANDREA ROBINSON talks to a Warton family for whom the hobby of birdwatching has become a way of life.



Warton birdwatchers Dave Pitman with sons Stephen and Simon — complete with books and binoculars.

grammes — and their holidays are usually bird-orientated. They even went to Australia for a month's bird-watching last year. "It's usually quite chaotic

in our house!" said Sandra. "It's very unpredictable because you never know what's going to fly in. We will suddenly get a telephone call about a bird that's appeared

and off they charge! You are never sure when they will come back."

"But it's an interesting hobby and it's a good way of socialising as well."

THEY said it!

"General Franco, the leader of the insurgent Nationalist Party, was helped to escape from the island of Tenerife to raise the standard at Tetuan in Spanish Morocco, by a party of English fox-hunters, who took out a plane for him: so fox-hunting ought to receive sympathetic consideration in the liberated provinces of Spain."

Country Life October 31st 1936.

"Yes, thrushes are legally shot as a quarry species in France and all other Mediterranean countries (but also in Sweden and, until recently, in Belgium), but these birds provide excellent sport. They are also very good to eat..."

Two Loons, Shooting Times October 14th-20th 1963.