

Frylde Bird Club

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

NEWSLETTER NO.69

FROM THE CHAIR

When I began to read Dave McGrath's contribution to the last edition of our Newsletter I expected to learn about some positive developments at the Mere.

Those of us who have fought long and hard for the Mere don't really care about mis-identified or possible rarities. We want the Mere to receive some of the tender loving care it deserves.

We want to see litter and eyesores quickly removed, we want to see properly recruited and trained assistant Wardens helping people to enjoy the Mere. We want to hear some good news for a change. We want to see something good in the press; we want to hear that others share our concern for the Mere and it's future. We want to hear that others are fighting the good fight.

One last thought, any goose seen on the Mere must be of dubious origin and with only a 5 in 25,000 chance anyway; why opt for a Bean Goose?

L.G.B

Honey Buzzards in North Yorkshire

Honey Buzzards have been present in Wykeham Forest, North Yorkshire for at least the past nine years. Initially, for obvious reasons, the site was kept a closely guarded secret. However, in 1993 special viewing arrangements were made and the public were able to come and watch these magnificent birds. Again in 1994 the birds are at the site and once again access has been arranged.

Directions

From the A170 Pickering to Scarborough road take the minor road heading northwards from the village of Wykeham, signposted North Moor. Stay on this road for around 4 miles, continuing a short way past the public viewpoint car park before reaching the Raptor Watchpoint car park (signposted). Follow the track northwards from the car park to reach the watchpoint itself, set on the edge of a clearing offering superb panoramic views over the area. The watchpoint is situated at SE940890 (OS map 101). The watchpoint seems the ideal point from which to look for Honey Buzzards, and several benches are provided to make prolonged viewing comfortable. Please stay only at the watchpoint or on the path: entering into forest will not help the success of the other breeding birds present. Besides, all the key species are just as likely to be seen from the watchpoint.

Timing

The Honey Buzzards (at least three different individuals were present there in 1993) return to the forest in late May. Indeed, the first recorded sighting this year was of a single on the 28th May.

When I visited the site on the 30th May this year a male displayed over the woods for nearly half an hour from 13:00. This strikingly pale individual is apparently the regular male at Wykeham.

The Honeys are perhaps best looked for from when they first appear and then throughout June as the male/s will then be indulging in their aerial display flights, involving 'shaking' the wings above the back in rapid succession, a spectacular sight. The birds should remain in the area till the end of August or beginning of September and then may be accompanied by fledged juveniles. At this later time of the year they may perhaps become a little more difficult to see.

The weather conditions can govern the success of the visit - ideal conditions are clear, warm, sunny days when the birds will use the warm air currents to soar and display. Honey Buzzards - as with most large birds of prey - are not early risers, usually only flying from around 10:00 till mid afternoon. If the weather conditions are as I have detailed above then the birds should show at least some time each day during the peak time of the day.

Honey Buzzards are a notoriously elusive species, maybe flying only once a day in seemingly perfect conditions, so a good deal of both patience and luck may be required. However, this rare, beautiful and charismatic raptor is well worth the wait.

Other species at Wykeham

Goshawks are also present in Wykeham Forest and can occasionally be seen from the watchpoint. These birds are perhaps best looked for from the beginning of March through to the end of April when they indulge in their spectacular aerial display over the forest. However they are still quite likely to be seen through the summer at this site. Indeed there were four sightings, including a displaying pair and a female directly above the watchpoint, on the 30th May when I was present at the site.

Several parties of Crossbill flew over the watchpoint on the day that I was present and this appears to be a regular phenomenon - according to local birders they are relatively abundant in the forest.

As with the Honey Buzzards please do not enter the forests in search of these birds: they are just as likely to be seen from the watchpoint as they cross the clearing.

Several pairs of Nightjar breed in the clearings in the forest and can be heard and sometimes seen at dusk. The birds are perhaps best looked for in the tracts of open forest, suitable Nightjar habitat perhaps from the minor road between the watchpoint and North Moor.

Hobbies are occasionally seen during the summer months, though they are thought not to breed in the forest.

Other British sites for Honey Buzzard

Wykeham is the third official Honey Buzzard watchpoint to be opened to the public in Britain. The other two sites are well known in comparison to Wykeham and your chances of seeing Honey Buzzard are probably similar at each. The other two sites are Great Haldon Forest, south west of Exeter, Devon (OS map 192: SX881853) and in Norfolk at Swanton Great Wood, seven miles west of Holt (OS map 133 TG011303).

Fortunately all three sites are under twenty four hour surveillance.

This short article is not intended to be an authoritative reference but merely to make more birders aware of this superb site. This account is based on a single visit, the below references and from talking to several Yorkshire birders. I apologise if any factual errors occur in this article and I wish to make clear that they are all my own.

References

Birding World Vol. 6 No. 5
Yorkshire Birding Vol. 2 No. 2
Rare Birds in Britain 1991 Lee Evans
Rare Birds in Britain 1992 Lee Evans
Flight Identification of European Raptors Porter et al

Chris Batty
1 Salt Marsh Close
Hambleton
Poulton-le-Fylde
FY6 9EN
0253 700149

DIARY OF A FYLDE RINGER/BIRDER

Saturday 13th March 1993

Besides Clifton and Singleton Hall we have a third roost site over Wyre which unfortunately doesn't get the coverage it deserves. This site is Winmarleigh Hall near Garstang and comes under the wing of Myerscough (not the famous birding brothers!) Agricultural College. Unlike Clifton and Singleton Hall it is also a good all year round study site.

Our main study area is the grounds immediately surrounding the Hall itself. There are other woods on the estate but we don't have the time nor the manpower to cover these. Within the study area there are two focal points at which we concentrate our ringing.

The first is a large pond which holds breeding Mallard and Moorhen, and in the winter months it is frequented by Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail. The pond is surrounded by a variety of habitats. On the south side it is fairly open with scattered mature trees closely resembling parkland and on the other sides there is scrub consisting of Rhododendron, Willow, Alder, Sycamore, Scots Pine and Bramble. Just recently the college unwittingly improved this area for us by cutting through the vegetation and laying down woodchip paths - ideal for siting mist nets!

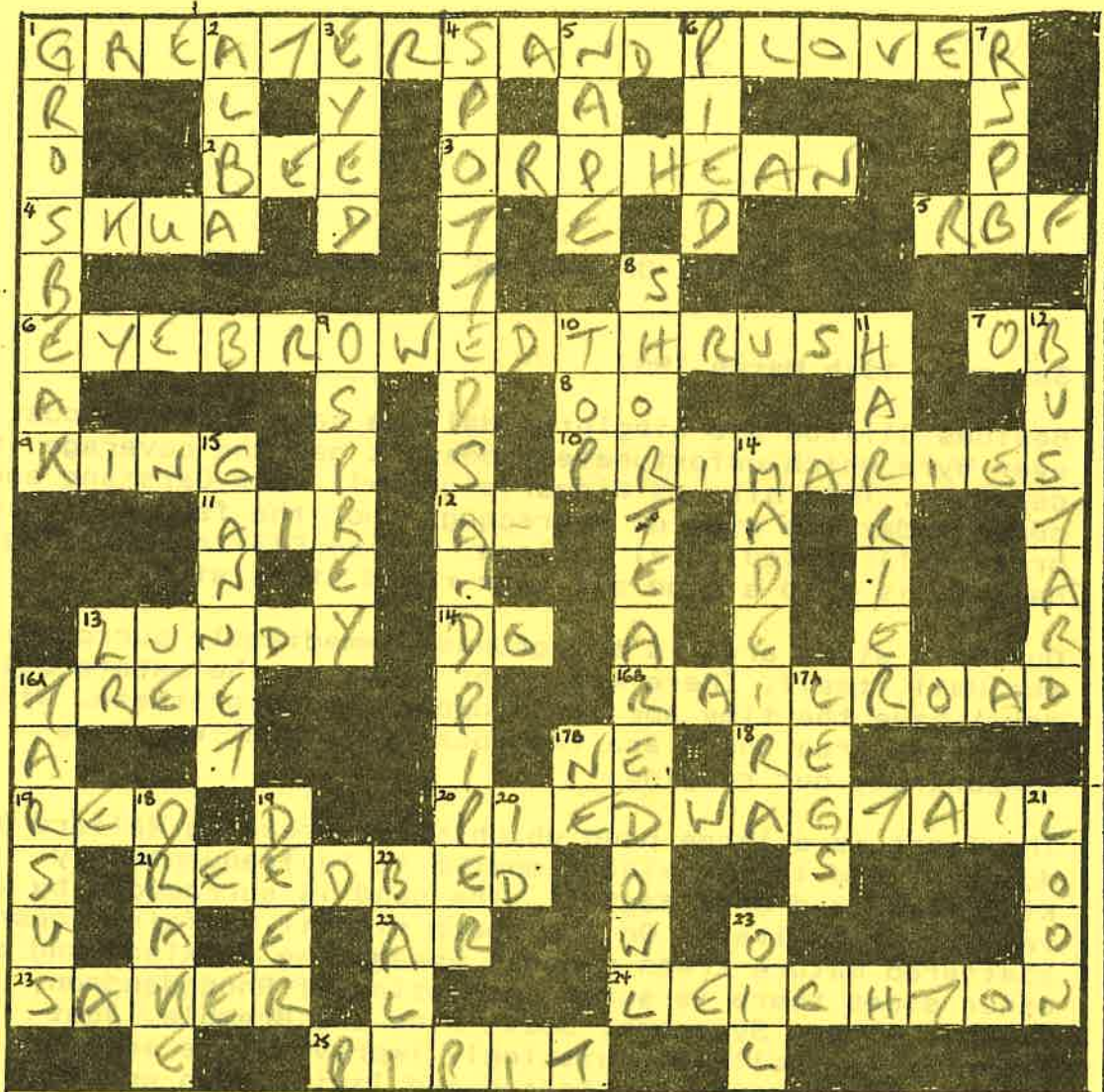
The other area that we concentrate on is a fairly open area which we have named the 'plantation'. Again this area is surrounded by mature parkland, but the 'plantation' consists of fir trees and Alder.

This morning we had planned to go to Lane Ends and try to tape lure some migrating Pipits but the wind was too strong. So we thought we'd try Winmarleigh Hall and maybe, if we were lucky, we would be able to ring the first Chiffchaffs of the year.

When Graham Mortimore, Stuart Gibson, Peter Barnes and myself arrived we were greeted by two singing Chiffchaffs. Nets were erected quickly and we put on a Chiffchaff tape. Cheating some of you might say but it is the only way to lure these woodland gems from the tree tops down to net height.

No new Chiffchaffs were ringed but we did retrap a bird from a previous year giving us vital information on survival rates.

After a fairly slow morning we decided to pack up and go birding at Lane Ends. The 13th March is just about as early a date as I have had Wheatear in previous years at Lane Ends, so hopefully since there were Chiffchaffs at Winmarleigh



ACROSS

- 1) WITNEY RALLY FROM 1988 (7,4,6)
- 2) INSECT HALF OF A SCARCE VISITOR FROM WARNER SOUTHERN GAMES (3)
- 3) MUCH SASSIER AFTER SYLVIA WARBLER (7)
- 4) JAEGER (4)
- 5) INITIALLY A REGULAR BUT SCARCE EAST COAST AUTUMN MIGRANT (1,1,1)
- 6) TICKET BY MANY AND SCALLY LAST (AUTUMN) (3,6,6)
- 7) INITIALLY A PIPIT THAT HAD A GOOD YEAR IN BRITAIN IN 1993 (1,1)
- 8) ORIOLE WHO COLLECTS EGGS (2)
- 9) FACAL DRAKE WHOSE DREAM MAY KEEP YOU WARM IN BED AT NIGHT (4)
- 10) LARGEST OF THE REMIGES (9)
- 11) WHAT BIRDS BREATHE (3)
- 12) INITIALLY A PUFFIN FROM THE NORTH POLE (1,1,1)
- 13) WHERE YOU COULD HAVE FOUND AN ANCIEST MURRELET (3)
- 14) HALF AN EXTINCT BIRD (2)
- 16A) SWAN OR SPARROW (4)
- 16B) FIRST HALF COULD BE CLAPPER, SECOND HALF IS A RUNNER (8)
- 17B) HALF A HAWAIIAN GOOSE (2)
- 18) INITIALLY BRITAIN'S COMMONEST VIREO (1,1)
- 19) COLOR OF A DIVER'S THROAT (3)
- 20) ROOSTS IN TARBOT SQUARE (4,7)
- 21) HOME OF BITTERNS AND BEARDED TIT (7)
- 22) INITIALLY A PALE FINCH FROM THE NORTH (1,1)
- 23) FALCON THAT IS ON CATEGORY D ON THE BRITISH LIST (5)
- 24) MOSS OF THE RSPB (3)
- 25) FOUND IN WATER, TREES OR MEADOWS? (5)

DOWN

- 1) ROSE BRESTED OR PINE (8)
- 2) WHAT BARN AND ANY PIGEON WOULD LIKE IN COMMON (4)
- 3) COMES BETWEEN RED AND VIREO (4)
- 4) ITS LIKE A COMMON BUT ITS GOT YELLOW LEGS (8,7,9)
- 5) BEHIND THE CROWN (4)
- 6) NOT RED BRESTED, CROWNED OR SPOTTED (4)
- 7) EUROPE'S LARGEST CONSERVATION ORGANISATION (1,1,1,1)
- 8) DIVER'S HUNTER OF MOORLAND AND MIRE (5,5,3)
- 9) SUMMER VISITING FISH EATER (6)
- 10) PART OF PONDLE HILL THAT ATTRACTS BOTTLE (3)
- 11) A PULLY WOULD BE NICE (7)
- 12) A LITTLE ONE WAS A NEW YEARS DAY TICK FOR SOME PEOPLE IN 1988 (7)
- 13) INITIALLY A SUMMER VISITING PLUCKER (1,1)
- 14) BREEDING PLACE OF THE FREIRA (7)
- 15) SWAN GOOSE (6)
- 16) PART OF A BIRD'S LEG (6)
- 17A) THEY'RE YELLOW, GREATER OR LESSER AND YOU MAY HAVE SEEN THEM AT THE MERE (4)
- 17B) THE OTHER HALF OF 17A DOWN (2)
- 18) USUALLY MORE HANDSOME - WHEN NOT IN ECLIPSE (5)
- 19) HALF A YANK WIPPER NAMED AFTER ITS CALL (4)
- 20) YOU'LL HAVE TO DO THIS WITH A BIRD BEFORE YOU CAN NAME IT (1,1)
- 21) YANK DIVER (4)
- 22) MAINLY WHITE STALKING FOUND IN MANY ZOOS (4)
- 23) LUBRICANT THATS BIRD NEWS FOR GORMYGS (3)

there would be Wheatears or Wheatear at Lane Ends.

Sure enough amongst the Meadow Pipits perching on the fence along the tidal embankment was a female Wheatear. In fact it was a pity it was too windy for catching Pipits as there were plenty around.

Seumus Eaves
May 1994

EU concern for wildlife delays Cardiff barrage

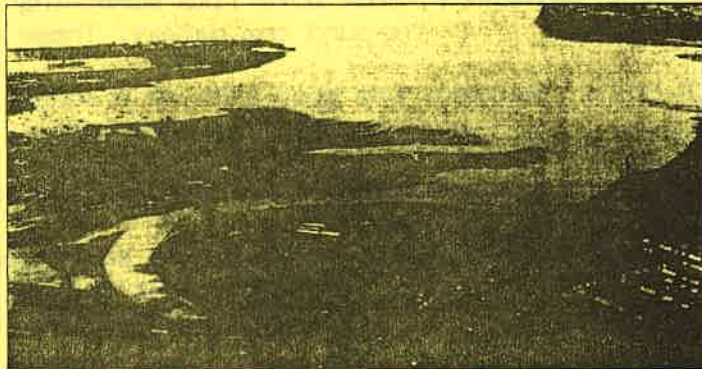
By Eugene Silke

Pressure from Brussels is delaying construction of the Cardiff Bay Barrage and could block development along the Severn and 26 other estuaries.

The European Commission is pressing the Government to designate estuaries that are important for two species of wading bird as 'special protection areas'. This would be an obstacle to new bridges, roads, waste disposal sites and other developments, and could lead to existing planning permissions being revoked - depending on the outcome of an inter-departmental row, according to Friends of the Earth.

Work on the barrage - to be built by Balfour Beatty and Costain - has been delayed at least until the summer following a letter from the Commission to the Government, leaked to FoE. In it Environment Commissioner Yannis Paleokrassas states that the barrage is illegal under the 1979 Birds Directive. The Commissioner insists that the whole estuary must be designated as a SPA with a conservation management plan.

But he is also pressing the



Special protection for Cardiff Bay puts development on hold.

Government to designate all other estuaries important for Dunlin and Redshank as SPAs. Only seven have been fully designated and four partially. The remaining 15 include some of the most controversial sites where developments are planned, says FoE.

EU intervention comes as the Government is set to announce how it will implement the Habitats Directive. Two Whitehall departments are resisting pressure to ensure designation overrides existing planning permission. This could involve large sums in compensation and is opposed by the DoT and DTI, while the DoE is taking legal advice, according to the

environmentalists.

Extending the Severn Estuary's SPA - now being prepared - would scupper plans for an international airport on the Gwent Levels and threaten the M4 relief road south of Newport and its Usk Barrage, now before a public inquiry, says FoE.

●Estuaries due for SPA status are: Duddon; Morecambe Bay; Mersey; Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast; Stour and Orwell; Deben; Thames Estuary and Marshes; Portsmouth Harbour; Southampton Water and Solent Marshes; Poole Harbour; Firth of Forth; Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary; Montrose Basin; Ythan; Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch; Inner Clyde Estuary.

BIRDING HINTS - No 37

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This months topic is FOOTWEAR. Whilst it is possible to go birding in almost anything, the wrong choice of footwear can totally ruin a good days birding and give a whole new meaning to the term - "crippling views".

Sturdy comfortable shoes/boots are recommended: the following footwear is definitely not recommended.

1. HIGH HEELS : Raquel Welch went birding, with AJH, in the 1960's wearing high heels - she hasn't had a good twitch since.
2. PLATFORM SHOES : In the 1970's these crippled more birders in the field than Leeds United did on it.
3. WELLIES : Good field craft in Wellies is damn near impossible and they chafe the back of your legs too.
4. SANDALS : Jesus could walk on water but he had neither Sinai Rosefinch nor Dead Sea Sparrow on his list.
5. DESIGNER TRAINERS : Look more like something that the Mekon uses for zooming around the galaxy. These are for posing in, not birding.
6. SLIP-ONS : Useless. One good kick at a cowpat or a dandelion head and they will out fly any bird on the day.
7. KINKY BOOTS : Distract male birders and invite too much interference.
8. PUMPS/DAPS/PLIMBOLLS/ETC.: OK in the short term but soon become impregnated with sweat and begin to smell. Can be good for attracting crows, gulls, and vultures.

Next week the subject will be Night Club Birding. ←

JLF.

MUTE SWANS AT FLEETWOOD MARINE LAKE

Between the 2nd January and 15th April 1994 153 darvic ringed Mute Swans have been logged at Fleetwood Marine Lake. During that time my highest Swan count was 91 on 10th January. A maximum of 57 darvic ringed birds was logged on 15th March. Between 50 and 70% of the swans are darvic ringed, so somewhere between 220 and 300 Mute Swans have used the lake so far this year. Only about a dozen appear to have been ever present, most being immature birds.

Numbers appear to have been lower than in the last two years, but until 1st April were usually above 70. Perhaps of greater interest is that the percentage of immature birds has steadily risen from 19% on 10th January to 70% on 15th April.

Details of ringed Mute Swans, especially breeding birds, will be most gratefully received.

Having read the article by D,McGrath in the last Newsletter I confess I have to ask what it was supposed to be all about. A less fair minded Editor would have been tempted to toss it into the dustbin. If D.McGrath is suggesting that genuine Birders are doubting the validity of claims of rare birds by himself and colleagues with whom he has surrounded himself at the Mere, then he has hit the nail on the head.

Almost all the claims of rare birds seen by these people have not been seen by anyone with any degree of credibility. The claims have been made by novice birdwatchers with no experience of the species claimed, some on fleeting views of a few seconds which would test the skills of the most experienced.

Many experienced birdwatchers have been covering the Mere and surrounding area for 20 years and have never found a rare bird during this time. Others have found the odd one, yet we are asked to believe that newcomers are falling over rarities with amazing regularity. Furthermore these dubious claims are damaging the credibility of the records which are legitimate whilst making real birders in the Fylde a laughing stock.

In his article D.McGrath states that another birder saw the Bluethroat but we are not given the benefit of a name and the 'Gray Catbird' was again supposedly seen by an anonymous birder.

It is evident to the genuine birdwatchers in the area that the people responsible for all these fanciful records knew nothing about birds when they first appeared on the scene and have learned nothing over the last two or three years. I suggest they all enroll themselves in one of Dave Pitman's beginners classes, listen and learn, and do not claim rarities with the same sort of gay abandon in the future. Perhaps then we can get some common sense back into recording in the Fylde.

A.J.HINCHLIFFE

It's that time of year again "the Nesting season"!! Although you could be forgiven for thinking it was late Autumn, with strong even gale force winds mostly from the North and West and showers that seem to go on forever. Can anyone tell me the true definition of a shower, and at what point does a shower become a downpour? Answers please on a postcard in not more than 20 words and complete the following:-

I love Spring because _ _ _ _ _

Seriously though 1994 has reached new depths on the weather front, excuse the pun, and must go down as one of the wettest, windiest and generally the most miserable yet. As I write I am looking out of my office window after a hard morning's work and yes, you've guessed it, it's absolutely pouring down. I should be out doing my rounds of the woods recording spring migrants and monitoring some of the early nesters.

At least 5 pairs of Long Tailed Tits are already on eggs but one pair at least gave up the idea when heavy rain and strong winds flattened the nest.

The migrants are arriving in dribs and drabs, 4 Chiffchaff, 2 Willow Warblers, 3 Blackcaps - Oh yes and a very early Wood Warbler, early for Lytham Hall anyway. That turned up on 22nd April.

Another extremely early arrival was a Red Admiral on 11th April but I very much doubt if that was a migrant. Nobody is going to convince me that a butterfly could reach the west coast of England from Southern Europe without at least a light southerly and we haven't had any of those in the last few months.

Although everything seems to be setting later and later, you always get one that doesn't follow the general trend. This year it's a Chiffchaff that I found on 13th April with a nest almost complete. It is now 26th and she's sat on 5 eggs while her mate sings close by.

A dawn patrol a couple of days ago failed to turn up anything exciting, not even a Wheatear on the golf course. What I did see though more than made up for it - 2 male Sparrowhawks in aerial combat over the main wood having a right ding dong. They seemed to be completely unaware of my presence as they performed the most spectacular aerial manoeuvres I've ever seen, twisting, turning and darting through the trees as if they weren't there. When one perched for a breather the other was on it in a flash and at one stage after gaining height they locked talons and fell from the sky like a bundle of rags, only to break off at the last second just a few feet from ground. This continued for a full five minutes until eventually I saw one of them disappear over the farm. A few minutes later a female appeared from in the wood and I could hear the victorious male calling somewhere behind me. The only regret I have is that I didn't have my Camcorder with me on that occasion. Even by my amateurish standard it would have made fascinating viewing.

As most of you know, Barn Owls are my favourite bird and over the last 12 years or so I have put up nest boxes in suitable barns up and down the Fylde. I have also watched them at many nest sites and hunting, whenever the opportunity arises and in suitable habitat they are one of the most efficient hunters of small Mammals you could wish to see. Sadly, suitable Barn Owl habitat i.e. rough grassland, is a rare commodity these days and Barn Owls have been having a rough time of it.

Having said that, 1993 was quite a good year for Barn Owls locally with a few more sites occupied, probably with young birds from last year. Whether or not they become breeding sites, only time will tell. If the Barn Owl is going to make a comeback they need all the help they can get. At one site where they bred last year the owners of the barn put out food on a ledge in the barn in the form of dead day old chicks to help the birds through the winter months and encourage them to stay in the area. The Barn Owls in

question are wild birds and not introduced from captive stock which is something I am not involved in. Hopefully, with the new regulations concerning the release of captive bred Barn Owls, irresponsible releases might be stopped.

If anyone has any information about Barn Owls in the Fylde i.e. breeding sites, roosting sites, regular hunting areas etc. could you please let me know.

All such information will be in the strictest confidence. Thank you.

MONTY MYERSCOUGH

RECENT REPORTS

APRIL

Mediterranean Gulls were definitely the flavour of the month with, maybe 6-8 individuals seen at Marton Mere and other sightings coming from the coast. On the first Ed saw a pair at St. Annes, whilst Adults; 1st and 2nd Summers' and a 1st Winter were seen during watches at the Mere.

Spurred by his success on the 1st, Ed quickly moved to full Gull watching mode with an "immature" Iceland Gull at South Promenade on the 4th and an adult Glaucous Gull on the following day. A leucistic Black Headed Gull was at South Shore Cricket Ground on the 4th, probably trying to emulate a Silver Gull it had seen on TV at Melbourne Cricket Ground.

A scattering of Little Gulls were seen during the month with no great numbers involved - singles at the Mere and Knowle School playing fields. 17 at Starr Gate on the 16th in light north easterlies was the highest count and up to 7 were feeding offshore during most of April.

Spring migrants began to appear in small numbers with Chiffchaffs and Wheatears seen at various locations in the Fylde. Simon Hayhow reported a Chiffchaff from Fleetwood Museum on the 11th (not stuffed) which was an unusual site for this species. 5 Wheatears were at LSANR on the 3rd and 11 on the 10th were in the company of a male Stonechat.

A Swallow was seen at the Mere on the 3rd and Sand Martins moved through in small numbers - As the month progressed numbers improved with 25 Swallow, 50 Sand Martins seen on the 20th. Willow Warblers were also present in small numbers.

A regular early Summer migrant is the Garganey and predictably a male was seen at the Mere on the 4th. Away from the Mere a male and female Ruddy Duck, a female Goldeneye, Great Crested and Little Grebe frequented the CEGB pool at Fleetwood. On the 24th a female Whinchat was seen in the area. A Grasshopper Warbler was heard on St. Annes Moss on the same day.

3 Siskin moved north at Vicarage Lane at 0915 on the 14th. This sighting was no doubt a particularly poignant one for Maurice and almost certainly the last sighting in this area now he has relinquished the shop.

At Shard Bridge on the 2nd 1 Water, 2 Rock and 8 Meadow Pipits were seen on the 2nd.

Over Wyre, 684 Pinkfeet were still present on the Saltmarsh at Pilling on the 10th accompanied by 2 Brents. Merlin and Peregrine were also present at the coast and sightings of Sparrowhawks seemed to be more commonplace than those of Kestrels.

Frank Walsh had several interesting sightings throughout the month. A pair of StockDove were nesting at Green Drive Lytham and a pair of Jays were also seen there on the 12th. Mute Swans were incubating at Fairhaven Lake and on the 19th a pair of Collared Doves were incubating on a nest previously used to rear 2 young earlier this year. 2 pairs of Tree Sparrow were on Lytham Moss on the same day.

Waders, many of which had donned summer plumage built up in number. On the 1st 1250 Black Tailed Godwits were at Newton Marsh and 591 of this species were at Staynall on the 18th. At the St. Annes shore roost there was the familiar mix of Waders including 75 Ringed Plovers, 300 Knot and 250 Dunlin. A female Ruff was seen at Lytham and Fairhaven at the end of May.

Seawatching picked up during April with 3 sightings of Arctic Skuas and one of a single Bonxie at Starr Gate.

Red Throated Divers moved north with 23 seen on the 16th, 60 on the following day, 30 on the 23rd and 41 on the 24th.

There was a good supporting cast of Auks, Gannets, Fulmars, Sandwich, Common, Little and Arctic Terns, Scoters (including 2 Velvets at North Pier on the 29th). Perhaps the most unusual sightings were a movement of 206 Arctic Terns flying north on the 23rd, a day of grey hazy conditions and a moderate south south east wind. Accompanying them were 3 Black Terns. Interestingly there was a reverse movement the following day involving 43 Arctic Terns and, once again, 3 Black Terns.

A Hooded Crow flew south out at sea off Starr Gate on the 16th. Towards the end of the month Whimbrel appeared in large numbers on the Ribble and on the Wyre. Small parties passed through at the coast during the second half of the month. Hopefully, details of the numbers of birds involved will be published in a later Newsletter.

MAY

The first day of the month produced a Lesser Whitethroat at Marton Moss. At Stanley Park 1 or 2 Wood Warblers and a Spotted Flycatcher were present. 3 Grasshopper Warblers were at the Mere on the 8th and a Blackcap at Ballam on the same day. The following day a Whinchat was hopping around in the Railway bushes at South Shore whilst Wheatears were seen in the Greyhound Stadium and Revoe Park on the 10th. No prizes for guessing who found these. A 'first' for Ed appeared on the following day - not the Sedge Warbler in the railway bushes, but a Whinchat at Fishers Field! Where is Fishers Field?

Elsewhere, a Spotted Flycatcher and a Whinchat were at CEGB Pool on the 10th. Wheatears continue to be seen throughout the month. Garden Warblers were present at Revoc Park on the 14th, Fairhaven on the 16th, and in the Railway bushes on the 25th.

A pair of Whitethroats were seen to be nest building at Squires Gate station on the 23rd. Talking of nest building; a pair of Kestrel were once again breeding at the Odeon at Blackpool.

Whimbrel were present in large numbers early in the month. On the 11th a Little Ringed Plover flew over Fairhaven Lake and on the 16th a Curlew Sandpiper was seen by Ed on Lytham Beach.

Good numbers of Ringed Plover, Grey Plover and Dunlin could be seen in Granny's Bay in mid month. 1200 Sanderling and 500 Knot were on St. Annes Beach on the 25th. Maurice's last Wheatear of Spring was seen on the Reserve on the same day.

On the River Wyre at Larbreck a male Goosander and a Mute Swan with 6 young were present on the 30th. A Barn Owl was at Eagland Hill on the same day.

Meanwhile, back at Starr Gate; on the 1st 2 Black Terns flew in from the north whilst small parties of Sandwich and Common Terns flew north. 2 Little Terns and 43 Red Throats also flew north on the following day. One of the best things about seawatching at passage times is the sheer variety of birds that can be seen, not just sea birds but Passerines, Swallows, Martins and Ducks. Great Crested Grebes were still out on the sea and Waders moved to and fro between Morecambe Bay and the Ribble.

On the 21st a lone Puffin flew south followed later in the morning by a single Manx Shearwater. Perhaps the best bird seen during the month was an adult Pomerine Skua. This was observed by Ed as he scanned the outfall off Central Promenade on the evening of the 22nd. To Quote, "it just flew into my 'scope".

On the 28th a dark phase Arctic Skua flew north. 6 Red Throats were also seen flying north. Excitement reached fever pitch later in the morning however when 2 Canada Geese also headed north - a Starr Gate tick!

Common Scoter could still be seen in reasonable numbers, generally miles out to sea.

3 Great Crested Grebes were on Preston Dock at the end of May and included a displaying pair. 9 Eiders at Barnaby Sands on the 15th once again gave rise to thoughts of breeding at this site. 48 Pinkfeet were still on the Saltmarsh at Pilling.

Raptor of the month occurred on the 11th when an Osprey flew over the Mere and was seen by 3 lucky observers.

As the month progressed it became apparent that this was a Lesser Whitethroat year with several pairs present throughout the area, probably brought in by the virtually constant winds from the east throughout May.

JUNE

North westerly winds early in the month brought 81 Gannets and 36 Fulmars close inshore on the 4th. Similar numbers were seen on the following day plus an Arctic Skua and 2 Red Throated Divers flying inevitably north. Guillemots and Razorbills were present in unusually high numbers for this time of the year with 51 of the former seen on the 11th and 24 on the 15th.

3 Storm Petrels appeared fleetingly on the 19th during Force 5 south westerlies. They didn't quite make it to the Shelter but cut out to sea after being seen in the wave troughs to the north.

Westerly winds on the 22nd saw 102 Gannets, 83 Fulmar, 1 Arctic Skua and 340 Manx Shearwater fly south. For good measure 690 Knot most of which were in beautiful brick red plumage passed the Shelter. 75 Manxies, some close in, were seen on the 26th. Star bird of the day had to be a summer plumaged Black Guillemot which flew south, approximately 100 yards out from the Shelter. It was scared by an overflying helicopter, retraced it's tracks and flew by the Shelter once again! This was a Lancashire tick for Maurice.

A Little Tern was an unusual sighting at Preston Dock on the 6th of the month.

At Marton Mere there were a minimum of 11 singing Reed Warblers, 2 pairs of Mute Swans each raised 6 young.

Maurice's Wader count on the 12th was less than spectacular as could be expected for this time of the year. However it was unusual insofar as his Sanderling figure didn't end in a nought but reached a dizzy 15. How did he manage to count them?

CONTRIBUTORS : C.G.Batty, L.G.Blacow, A.Dawe, B.Dyson,
S.Dunston, J.L.Fletcher, S.J.Hayhow,
M.Jones, D.J.McGrath, S.M.Meredith,
R.Stinger, F.Stirling, J.F.Walsh.

POSTSCRIPT

First of all a Starr Gate update. Since the last Newsletter the Shelter has been repainted in turquoise and cream and so far remains remarkably free from graffiti. If you're thinking of buying a new flask from Boots avoid the turquoise one as they are an exact colour match - look away and your flask disappears into the surroundings as quick as a flash.

Since Maurice left 'the shop' we're seeing more of him at the shelter and at an earlier time too. He's not quite cracked the 0700 barrier yet but he's working on it. Already he's got a Lancashire tick under his belt with the Black Guillemot of a few weeks ago, so expect more rarities to follow.

Talking of rarities we saw two fishermen catch fish from in front of the Shelter - two Bass, which were apparently undersized and quickly returned to the sea. I must admit they looked pan size to me.

The news about the Coastguard station at Fleetwood was especially good news for birdwatchers. It's been virtually impossible to watch from Rossall Point in winds over Force 3. You either get sandblasted or soaked, sometimes

both; the extra height and shelter should prove to be a big advantage and no doubt a lot more will be seen from there in future.

Certainly the number of Birders watching from the Point has declined in recent years and it is to be hoped that the provision of 'luxury' facilities will lead to increased coverage of what is now a relatively underwatched part of the Lancashire coastline. Even the regular Fleetwood watchers will no doubt welcome the chance to dry off in inclement weather.

Congratulations to Wyre Borough Council for their positive commitment to 'nature' and their far sighted approach (no pun intended) to the provision of facilities for both locals and visitors. Already, the Guided Walk programme for 1995 is being planned, no doubt we'll be hearing more of that from Len in the future.

Highlight of the Wyre Borough walks so far must be the Nicky Nook walk in May, blessed with perfect weather and Monty and Andrew Myerscough. Both Monty and Andrew using fieldcraft imitated Cuckoo and Green Woodpecker calls respectively. They succeeded in bringing both species within easy viewing for everyone on the walk. We were all impressed, maybe they could practise Tree Pipit for next year - the one omission from the list of expected birds on a walk which produced 'crippling views' of nearly everything.

Where have the Tree Pipits got to this year? Two further visits to the same area produced 'nil returns' too. On the plus side Red Flycatchers seem to be present in very good numbers at Waddecar.

Once again thank you to all Contributors to the Newsletter. Please keep the articles and sightings coming.

A.D.

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TELEPHONE 24153.

July 1994

Sand, sea, sun and Baywatch comes to town but forget the girls birds!

By NIKKI RADFORD

BAYWATCH is coming to the Fylde Coast.

As usual there is plenty of sand, sea and sun to take in, but forget about the swimsuit-clad beauties. The only birds you are likely to see at Granny's Bay in Fairhaven are the feathered variety!

Baywatch is a new scheme organised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to teach children about the habitat of wildlife in the Ribble estuary. Until the end of July, there will be an outdoor classroom at Fairhaven where schools from all over Lancashire can spend the day studying nature at first hand.

Granny's Bay attracts thousands of birds each winter which migrate from all over the world or just use the site as a stop-off on their journey between the Arctic and Africa.

Barrie Cooper, RSPB education adviser, feels the scheme is an ideal way of making youngsters more aware of their environment.

He explained: "The Ribble estuary is one of the richest wildlife areas in the country, although few people realise just how important it is."

"By teaching Lancashire's schoolchildren about the ecology of the bay, we hope they will grow to appreciate and respect the importance of this vital estuary."

"It is a wonderful outdoor classroom because schools can cover parts of the national curriculum in an exciting and enjoyable way."



Mayfield pupils Elizabeth Swires and Leon Hudson with Coun. Eileen Hall, Fylde Mayor Jean Wilding, R.S.P.B. teacher Stuart Meredith and Mayor's Consort Eddie Walsh

Cheating colonel knocks stuffing out of bird world

By ROBIN YOUNG

COLONEL Richard Meinertzhagen, big-game hunter, spy and war hero, beat his groom to death with a mallet, faced courts of inquiry over the death of an African witch-doctor and is said to have helped to rescue Grand Duchess Tatiana after the Russian Revolution.

His desert exploits helped General Allenby to wrest Palestine from the Turks and he claimed to have led a commando raid on a secret Bolshevik headquarters in Spain in 1930.

The latest controversy surrounding him concerns none of these adventures. Instead, it is alleged that he lied about where he shot redpolls - little brown birds closely related to linnets.

For Meinertzhagen, scion of the banking family, model for John Buchan's fictional hero Sandy Arbuthnot and colleague of T. E. Lawrence, was not only a military adventurer but a keen bird collector. He is now alleged to have been a cheat, and as a result the official list of birds sighted in the wild in Britain has been shortened by three.

The scientific worth of his collections of 20,000 stuffed birds and 587,610 specimens of bird lice, flies and mites at the Natural History Museum in Tring, Hertfordshire, previously thought extremely valuable, have also been cast into doubt.

As a result of his exposure, Meinertzhagen's Warbler, which the colonel claimed to have discovered in Morocco in 1938, could be denied its very existence.

Experts now believe that

the colonel, who died in 1967, stole some of his specimens from museum collections and relabelled others with fictitious data. Meinertzhagen's Warbler, it is feared, may have been an unusual example of an existing species that had never been near Morocco.

Allegations about ornithological sharp practice have emerged from research by Alan Knox of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU), an expert in bird taxonomy. Investigating the taxonomy of redpolls, he discovered that specimens which Meinertzhagen claimed to have shot at the same time had been stuffed using totally different techniques.

Mr Knox said yesterday: "Taxidermists, like painters, each have their own personal style which one gets to recognise."

"Eventually I was able to show that some of Meinertzhagen's skins came from other collections. He had relabelled them with new places of origin and utterly fictitious dates."

Redpolls shot in Middlesex in the 1880s appeared in Meinertzhagen's collection as coming from Argyll half a century later.

The BOU has now deleted three American sub-species from the British list. They are a merlin, a shore (or horned) lark and a snipe, all of which Meinertzhagen claimed to have shot in the Outer Hebrides. No one else has ever seen these sub-species in the British Isles.

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Weekend, page 11

Rare birds are being driven out of county

By DAVID SMITH

TWO of the North West's rarest and most beautiful birds of prey are being driven to the brink of extinction in the county, the RSPB warned today.

Despairing bird protection chiefs say this year's nesting season for hen harriers and peregrine falcons has got off to a disastrous start.

Even in the most closely-guarded sanctuaries in the Forest of Bowland, persecution from rogue gamekeepers and egg-stealers has destroyed many nests.

One gamekeeper has been interviewed by police after a nest was disturbed, and a report has been submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Hen harriers are among the rarest birds in Britain, and the Forest of Bowland is their last major haunt in England.

Only a handful of pairs nest there each year, and the number is being driven relentlessly downwards.

Collectors

Both harriers and peregrines are persecuted by egg-collectors, pigeon fanciers and some gamekeepers who blame the birds for killing red grouse.

Ironically, the moorland habitats in the Forest of Bowland created for grouse are also the favoured nesting sites for harriers and falcons.

Nine pairs of harriers and five pairs of falcons arrived in the area this spring, now only one nest of each species survives.

RSPB regional officer John Armitage said: "If the situation does not improve, we could lose the hen harrier as a Lancashire breeding bird."

"The hen harrier is afforded the highest protection under English law. However, year after year they have disastrous breeding seasons and human interference undoubtedly contributes to this."

"Further evidence of human interference was the discovery of a professionally made decoy hen harrier, which was found on high moorland



Hen harrier... under threat



A 'hen harrier' decoy

close to an area where birds had been displaying this spring."

RSPB public affairs officer Dr Tim Melling said attempts to protect the nests had been thwarted.

He said: "Several pairs of hen harrier simply vanished from their territories and two pairs were displaced by late heather burning."

"Three pairs eventually settled down to nest but eggs have been taken from one of these, and chicks from another."

"The situation with peregrine falcons is equally bad. Two pairs were disturbed early in the season and deserted their nests."

"Eggs were taken from another pair of peregrines and when they laid, the clutch was stolen yet again."

A FAKE IN THE HAND

An adventuring ornithologist falls foul of posterity

The accusations levelled by the British Ornithology Union this week at the late Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen CBE DSO, may seem a heavy-handed response to an alleged scientific deception 25 years after the offender's death. Yet to bird-watchers the charge that this great adventurer of the imperial age made false claims for his collection of 25,000 birds could scarcely be more serious. By stealing stuffed birds, misleading fellow enthusiasts and forging labels, Meinertzhagen seems to have broken the most sacred rules of ornithology.

Science has long had to cope with fraudulence of this kind. Ever since the 16th century, when parts of animals were stitched together to resemble mermaids, deft taxidermy has helped the hoaxer. In the 19th century, fossils were sometimes displayed as the skeletal remains of mythical creatures: a supposed sea serpent was displayed in New York in 1845. Just as Marco Polo claimed to have seen an enormous bird known as the Roc or Rukh on the Island of "Magaster", so Meinertzhagen is thought to have been a fantasist in his approach to nomenclature. The Meinertzhagen Warbler, which he claimed to have found in Morocco during the 1930s, is now believed to have been a wrongly presented bird of an already known species.

Yet it is wrong to assume that all frauds, forgeries and hoaxes are morally equivalent.

Some, such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, are supremely malicious; a greater number, like the Piltdown Man hoax of 1911-15, are meant to defraud the public for personal gain. But the art of deception does not always deserve disapproval.

Deception can be noble as well as dishonourable. In Meinertzhagen's case, it seems likely that ornithological fraud was a by-product of his career as a spy and professional dissembler. He was responsible for the famous "Gaza haversack ruse" during the First World War, in which a blood-stained bag containing misleading information about British plans in the Middle East was left in Turkish-occupied territory. The ploy was later said by Allenby to be "largely responsible for my success in Palestine".

The kind of ingenuity that inspires such brilliant ideas is doubtless deeply ingrained in the human psyche. As a result, Meinertzhagen's approach to his beloved hobby seems to have been curiously two-edged. He was sufficiently obsessed to collect more than half a million species of bird lice, mites and flies. But he could not resist the temptation to practise deception even in this part of his life. Posterity may not be kind to this Old Harrovian. But his strange case should be seen as a study in the complexity of human personality as well as a catalogue of petty deceit.