



**Fylde
Bird Club**

LANCASHIRE

Chairman: Mr.L.G.Blacow

Secretary: Mr.P.Ellis
18 Staining Rise
Staining
Blackpool
Lancashire
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FROM THE CHAIR

Filling the gaps

I have just read through our latest Bird Report, as usual the occurrences of the unusual and rare birds are well documented. On closer reading, the gaps in our knowledge of common birds become glaringly obvious. Whilst rarities provide excitement it is often the commonplace that are important in conservation terms.

Our own estuaries are recognised as internationally important because they support huge population of "common" waders. Is Marton Mere more important for American Bittern or Common Whitethroat?

We can all help fill these gaps by noting the commonplace when out birdwatching. A few questions sprang to mind when reading the report. How many Shelduck and Mallard are there in our area? Counts of inland Lapwing, Golden Plover and Curlew would be useful. Do Snipe still use Bispham Marsh?

Many of our common species require surveys, pick one and record it when seen, a few suggestions include Collared Dove, Tawny Owl, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Pied Wagtail, Thrushes, Finches, Buntings and even House Sparrow.

Breeding information about any of our birds will be useful, during 1997-99 we can all help by contributing our records to the County wide breeding bird survey, don't forget, information in the atlas may be used to secure the future of your local patch!

Please read our Bird Report, find a gap and decide to fill it. It will prove interesting and who knows what you may find, a lot of rarer birds have been spotted during the Wader Counts.

Good luck and good birding.

LGB

FROM THE EDITOR

As you will no doubt be aware, this is the first newsletter edited by myself - I hope you will find it interesting reading. I do not intend to make many alterations from when Alan Dawe produced it as I always found the contents informative and extremely readable. At this point I would like to thank Alan for continuing to get the copy typed and photocopied. I have no access to these facilities and without this assistance would not have been able to take on the job of editor.

It has been pointed out many times in the past that the newsletter can only be a success if you the members provide the necessary information and articles, so I hope you will do your best to support it - it is your newsletter.

At the risk of appearing controversial I would like to comment on the growing number of unsubstantiated and "doubtful" claims of semi-rare or rare birds. This has been a problem in the past and lately seems to be becoming so again. Nearly all these claims appear to come from birdwatchers new to the scene who have little or no experience of the species claimed. Whether they feel the need to prove something I do not know - what I do know is that they are making a rod for their own back for the future.

Experienced birdwatchers know that rarities or semi-rarities are not found nearly every time you go out in the field - indeed I know plenty of birdwatchers of at least 20 years standing who have only claimed the odd semi-rarity or two during all this time. The doubtful nature of many of the sightings claimed is also compounded by the fact that in 95% of the cases they are one observers records, unsubstantiated by others with the necessary experience.

You may ask where is all this leading? Well in my opinion it is essential that all records recorded in the Bird Reports are genuine otherwise the report is devalued and looked on with suspicion by other birdwatchers and bodies. Also all bird^{ers} on the Fylde tend to be tarred with the same brush by outsiders and the records thought of as "stringy". Indeed I have myself heard this said on many a twitch by birders from other localities.

The moral of all this therefore is for newcomers to be extremely careful before claiming a rarity. Remember that if you have any doubts about the identity of a bird it is 99% certain that it will be a common species. If you are on your own and are not sure FORGET IT - do not feel you have to claim it as a rarity and then go home and write a description from a field guide. Having said all this it is of course always possible for a newcomer to find a genuine rarity - but always try to contact an experienced observer to verify your find, take detailed notes at the time and if possible a photograph. Finally always bear in mind that you are much more likely to be believed if you are not making spurious claims every other week.

AJH

RECENT REPORTS

December

The month commenced with strong westerly winds but from the 5th it was cold and cloudy with light or no winds to the 13th. A mild spell with rain and gales followed before it turned cold with frost early and late from the 20th to the month end.

On the 8th there were 8 Red Throated Divers and 13 Great Crests off Starr Gate in murky conditions. A Black Throated Diver was off Rossall on the 11th. 84 Great Crest were drifting with the tide off Starr Gate on the 12th in calm conditions. Maurice Jones had a Slovenian Grebe off South Promenade on the 25th.

Common Scoter have been generally scarce in our area this winter, but 150 were off Starr Gate on the 15th together with 2 Scaup. On the same day 600 Eider were off Knott End. Prior to Christmas, 180 Wild Swans (140 Bewicks) were reported at the Naze. On the 17th 30 Whoopers were over Wyre and 6000 Pink Feet with 1 Bean and 1 Barnacle at Fleetwood. A long Tailed Duck was seen off Rossall on the 11th but the bird of the month was the Black Brant found by Chris Batty on the 17th which remained at Lane Ends with up to 7 Brents until the month end.

Occasional Scaup were seen off South Promenade peaking with 15 moving south on the 22nd. 12 Pochard flew South off Starr Gate on the same date and a female Goosander moving north was unusual. A female Goosander was also present on Marton Mere on the 24th and up to 28 Bewick Swans were present towards month end. 40 Bewicks were reported at Eagland Hill on the 26th.

Peregrines were reported at College Farm, Rossall on the 16th, Fleetwood Marine Hall on the 22nd and Warton Marsh on the 15th. An immature male Merlin was seen near the Pink Feet at Fleetwood on the 15th and 4 were recorded at Warton and Lytham marsh from the 15th to month end. Not unexpectedly all the sightings of Hen Harrier were from the same area with 1 male and 2 females being seen on the 17th and 2 females on the 31st.

The Kentish Plover continued to be seen throughout the month either at Knott End or Rossall Point and 2 Purple Sandpipers were at Rossall on the 11th. 200 Golden Plover were in the river at Stanah on the 17th and 2 Black Tailed Godwits were on the island at Marton Mere on the 24th.

Ed Stirling refound the Med Gull at Hope St, St Annes on the 12th and an adult was on the Mere on the 15th. Chris Batty had an adult Glaucous Gull at Knott End on the 20th but up to now it has been a poor winter for white-winged gulls locally.

Up to 6 Short Eared Owls were seen at Marton Mere with 3 together on the 15th. Barn Owls were noted regularly at Fleetwood golf course and Thistleton Lodge.

Paul Slade saw 700 Skylark behind Cooksons Bakery at Lytham at month end and Alan Stamford had a Grey Wagtail in his back garden on the 10th and 16th.

Ed Stirling struck again on the 17th finding a Black Redstart at the Pleasure Beach and another was reported at Pilling on the 22nd. A small passage of Redwing and Fieldfare (100 of each) was noted at Stanah on the 17th and male Stonechats were at Lytham Moss on the 1st and Cooksons Bakery at Lytham on the 7th and 16th. At Marton Mere there were 3 Chiffchaffs on the 15th.

A large flock of Chaffinch consisting of up to 500 birds was at Bank Lane, Warton on the 31st with 50 Linnets and up to 28 Brambling. The best flock of Snow Buntings for a few years was found at Fairhaven when 16 were seen on the 1st, peaking with 22 on the 16th. In addition, 5 frequented the area near Rossall Hospital.

40 Twite are opposite the Miners Home at Bispham on the 15th with a small flock reported at Pilling on the same day. On the 15th also, 3 Long Tailed Tits at Marton Mere were note worthy. Jays are becoming more common in the Fylde and birds were reported at Green Drive, Lytham on the 8th, Ansdell on the 6th, Witch Wood, Lytham on the 15th, Freckleton on the 15th with 7 at Nateby also on the 15th.

January

The month commenced with very cold weather and bitter easterly winds, although there was only the odd snow shower. By the 11th the weather had turned milder with the wind westerly. The rest of the month was fairly mild with little or no wind and hardly any rain.

On the 5th, 137 Red Throated Divers and 72 Great Crests were off South Promenade, Blackpool together with 179 Common Scoter. A Slovenian Grebe frequented the Rossall area from the 5th to the 15th.

On the 1st, 16 Scaup were off Starr Gate whilst 5 male and 3 female Goosander were seen at Stanah. 2 Bean Geese were reported at Lane Ends on the 9th with 6000 Pink Feet and 3 Barnacles at Pilling the following day. A remarkable total of 43 Goldeneye were on Fleetwood Marine Lake on the 11th whilst 10000 Pink Feet were reported Over Wyre on the 12th. A small Canada Goose was reported at Bradshaw Lane, Pilling on the 19th. 5 Razorbill were off Starr Gate on the same date with 3 Goldeneye moving south there also. At Marton Mere, the Bittern showed on and off during the month and Bewick Swans peaked at 53. Tony Myerscough found a Bittern at Bispham Marsh on the 18th but unfortunately it had disappeared the next day. A Redhead Snew was on Marton Mere on the 27th. The Black Brant at Lane Ends was present all month showing well on occasions.

The Kentish Plover continued to be seen regularly at Knott End and Rossall whilst at the Mere, Water Rails and Woodcock showed well. 2 Woodcock were at the Nook on the 6th with 1 at Hardhorn. On the 7th, Paul Ellis had a Snipe in his garden at Staining. Also on the 7th, 3 Purple Sandpipers were at Rossall Point and the 5 Snow Buntings were at Rossall School.

Few records of the scarcer gulls were received with an adult Little Gull off the South Promenade on the 1st, a 1st winter Ring-billed Gull at Fleetwood Marine Lake on the 1st and an adult Glaucous flying past Knott End towards Pilling on 3rd being the only ones reported.

Up to 3 Short-eared Owls continued to show well at Marton Mere with a Little Owl there also on the 2nd. Barn Owls were reported from Mythop Road, Lytham on the 6th and Lytham Moss and the end of the M55 motorway on the 24th.

Two records of wintering warblers were received - a Chiffchaff at the Mere on the 2nd whilst Barry Dyson had a Blackcap in his garden on the 7th. Just outside our area, Waxwings were noted on the 18th with 9 near the Black Bull Pub in Preston and 3 at Garstang. On the 29th a Black Redstart was opposite the nature reserve at St Annes.

Snow Buntings continued to be seen during the month with 5 at Rossall and up to 22 at Fairhaven. On the 6th Mick and Pauline Gough had a flock of 60+ Twite at Cockersands and 15 were seen at Bispham again on the 10th. The same day Len Blacow recorded 100 Tree Sparrows at Eagland Hill. On the 12th, 100 Linnets were at Jameson Road, Fleetwood with just 1 Twite whilst a long staying Stonechat was behind the Land Registry at Lytham.

AJH

Many thanks to all who have contributed records - keep them coming please!

Gimme Shelter '96 (with apologies to the Stones)

It had been a wonderful holiday in the Western Isles; lots of birds, good weather but definitely not ideal seawatching conditions. I was sorry to return home; still, there was Starr Gate to look forward to on the August Bank Holiday Monday. Not quite the serenity of Tiumpan Head or the Butt of Lewis perhaps, but the prospect of lots of birds heading south past the shelter.

I vividly remember the phone call on the Sunday evening - "Hi Alan, just ringing to give you essential site directions to the Shelter". "Yer what?" was my cultured response; after all it can't be too often that site directions are needed for your local patch. Yes, in the three weeks that I'd been away the Shelter and its counterpart by Abercorn Place had been demolished, the car park turned into a construction site and the area fenced off to seawatchers, fishermen and dog walkers alike.

Thinking back there had been some ominous signs; why had the tiles been removed from the roof in July? - Vandals? Surely it would be only a matter of time before they were replaced by Blackpool Borough Council. Then again, thinking further back, there had been plans mooted to raise the seawall to prevent flooding on South Promenade. It seemed that our worst fears had been realised, money had been found, work had started and was expected to continue for two years. Disaster!

This new Shelter and temporary base is a rectangular concrete construction, totally unprepossessing, some 250 yards northwards from the previous site. It lacks the grace of the roof tiled circular building, helpfully split into quadrants so that even in the worst (or best) of winds and roughest of seas, shelter was afforded to the few who visited. The new one lacks ambience and has a restricted view largely as a result of the four pillars in front of the linear bench seating, which seriously hampers a pan from left to right or even right to left. Things are made even worse by the inconveniently placed lifebuoy and the huge litter bin, both attached to metal posts securely anchored in concrete. To be truthful you've got to have an extremely low view point to include the litter bin in your scope, and to be fair to the local vandals they have set fire to it twice and in the process left a nasty stain on the promenade as a memento of what might have bin (sorry about that).

The lifebuoy is more problematical; for its three foot size it has the peculiar ability to block out roughly 400 yards of sea. One minute you can see a bird disappear behind the lifebuoy, yet very rarely do you see it reappear. All is not well.

Seawatchers are not just keen observers of birds, we're people watchers too. Well, to be perfectly frank, the new shelter being closer to "civilisation" as we know it, i.e. the Pleasure Beach and seafront hotels; inevitably attract a greater number of holidaymakers asking more of the same type of questions - What are you looking at? Is that a camera? Are those oil rigs out there?

Sadly its closer to the Discos and Night Clubs too. This tends to attract the more unsavoury elements in the hours of darkness leaving daylight to reveal the detritus of

bottles, more bottles, dubious other items and a generally unpleasant odour wafting around. It was so bad in early September that we had to resort to sitting in chairs on the promenade as the Shelter was uninhabitable on most mornings. The tramps didn't help either.

In previous articles in the Newsletter, I've alluded to the seasonal invasion when birders have congregated "en masse" in pursuit of the Holy Grail a.k.a. Leach's Petrel. In the last two years the sound of pagers, beep, beeping has been very prominent - well, now we've got our own in the form of a pedestrian crossing with a very loud beep which heralds the arrival of tourists and further questioning.

We had a particularly tough time in early September when a Tornado jet unhelpfully ditched in the sea near to the South Pier. With hindsight a prepared handout by British Aerospace would have been extremely useful in explaining to people what was happening on the beach, what the grey bits of metal were and why a recovery rig had been erected some two hundred yards offshore.

On the birding front (which is what really counts), Autumn was a huge disappointment, seemingly suitable winds failing to produce the expected plethora of Leach's and Skuas leaving lots of people extremely disappointed.

So what about the future? Its certainly not ORANGE, in fact its looking increasingly grey. Already, large sections of the new seawall have been erected raising the height to approximately five feet. Unless the inner section of the Promenade is raised, allowing a view over the wall, the next generation of seawatchers will need to be seven feet tall. Early indications are that Fylde coast seawatchers are a dying species anyway and facing almost certain extinction. Watch this space.

AD



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FYLDE BIRD CLUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT 8:30 PM ON WEDNESDAY THE 27TH OF NOVEMBER AT THE PLOUGH AT STAINING

Present

Chairman; Secretary; Treasurer; Alan Hinchliffe; Paul Slade; Alan Dawe and Dave Pitman. Apologies were received from Andrew Cadman.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 7th November were read and approved.

Matters Arising

1) Breeding Birds Survey

The Secretary reported that Andrew Cadman had stated that he had produced some sample pages of the proposed publication. This seemed to represent a large step forward however it was unclear how much work remained to be done. It was agreed that the Committee should wait until Andrew was available to report on progress in more detail and present the sample pages for comment.

Action continuing : Andrew Cadman.

2) Rossall Coast Guards Tower

The Chairman reported that the RSPB and North West Water were taking an interest in the project and that this may lead to a way forward the plan to open the tower as a birdwatching facility.

Action: Chairman to keep the Committee informed of developments.

3) Marton Mere

The Secretary reported that he had telephoned John Hicklin at English Nature to discuss the issue of the eroded south bank. Mr Hicklin confirmed that he had received the letter sent by the Secretary to him on this issue, however he had taken no action as he assumed that Blackpool Borough Council would have repaired the bank by now. As BBC were not intending to repair the bank, Mr Hicklin agreed to contact them on the matter.

Action on the Secretary complete.

Progress with getting the hide enhancement materials delivered to the Mere seemed stalled for no apparent reason. The Chairman offered to contact Geoff Wilby of Warings in an attempt to get things moving.

Action: Chairman to contact Geoff Wilby

4) Fylde Bird Report

The 15 copies of the '94 Report held by Paul Slade had not yet been handed over to the Chairman to allow them to go on sale at Stannah.

Action: Chairman/ Paul Slade to transfer the reports.

Paul Slade reported that he had made enquiries regarding bird reports sold at the RSPB outlet at Fairhaven. 5 copies of the '93 report had been sold and the Club had been paid for these. Some copies of the '94 report had been sold and some remained unsold, however Stuart Meredith was unsure how many had been sold. No payment had yet been made to the Club for these sales.

It was agreed that if Stuart thought he could sell off old reports then he should retain them, if, however he felt this was unlikely, then they should be returned to the Club.

Action: Paul Slade to accept payment from the RSPB for sales of '94 Reports and return of unsold old reports.

The Secretary reported that he had contacted Lambert's in Lancaster and offered advertising space in the '95 report but that the offer had been declined. He also reported that he was awaiting a reply to a similar offer made to Focus Optics.

Action: continuing Secretary

The Secretary reported that he had written again to Wyre Borough Council to offer advertising space but that it was too early to expect a reply yet.

Action complete.....post meeting note : offer accepted!

Alan Dawe announced that Internal Energy Systems would like to place a full page ad. in the '95 Report. The Treasurer reported that Internal Energy Systems still owed the Club for their 'advert in the 94 Report. Alan Dawe offered to resolve this issue.

Action Alan Dawe to secure payment for '94 ad.

The Secretary reported that he had contacted Birdnett and reminded them that they had not yet submitted artwork for their '95 Report ad. and they had agreed to send it to him.

Action complete Secretary/ Paul Slade.

It was reported that Leighton Moss appeared to have sold all the '94 Reports supplied to them. Martin Mere also had none on display and it assumed they had also sold all the copies delivered to them.

5) 1997 Meeting Programme

Dave Pitman reported that the draft was progressing well and that it should be ready to be typed up by the Secretary, within a week. The draft was discussed and all were agreeable with its content.

Action: continuing Dave Pitman/ Secretary

6) New Club Logo

The Chairman announced that he had begun making enquiries with printers about a Car Sticker featuring the new logo. He expected to receive two quotations next week.

Action: continuing Chairman

The Secretary requested that the Chairman supply him with a photocopy of the logo in order that he might produce some temporary headed note paper incorporating the new logo and use it on the 1997 Programme.

Action: Chairman/ Secretary

7) Newsletter

The Treasurer had arranged for the duplication of the last newsletter which was available at the last meeting.

Action complete Treasurer

Alan Hinchliffe offered to take on the task of Newsletter Editor supported by Alan Dawe who offered to continue the task of printing the copies. All welcomed these offers which were gratefully accepted.

It was agreed that 50 copies of each issue would be produced and that at least initially, it should be produced quarterly. The next issue would be due out at the February meeting followed by issues at the May; August and November meetings.

Action: Alan Hinchliffe/ Alan Dawe

It was accepted that the Club's members and in particular the Committee members would need to support Alan with the provision of copy. Alan Dawe offered to provide an article for the next issue and Paul Slade agreed to supply the recent reports. It was agreed that the recently compiled site guides should be included.

8) AGM Agenda

The Treasurer had produced the AGM Agenda and Balance Sheet and these had been distributed to the members at the last meeting.

Action complete Treasurer

The Secretary had obtained a price of approx. £3.50 each for a buffet at the AGM and this had been offered to the members at the last meeting. A check list of members requiring a buffet at the AGM was being kept by the Secretary.

The Chairman and Secretary were in the process of distributing AGM Agenda and newsletters to members not present at the last meeting. Included in this mail-drop was a letter requesting members to inform the Secretary if they wanted a buffet.

The Chairman agreed to order the buffet from the Cricket Club when numbers were known.

Action: Chairman/ Secretary

9) Moss Edge Land Offer

The Chairman reported that the land owner was out of the country at the moment and so no progress had been made since the last meeting.

Action: Chairman to maintain contact.

Paul Slade reported that he had attempted to contact his friend who was a solicitor, (with a view to asking him for advice), but that he had received no reply as yet.

Action complete.

A.O.B.

1) Procedure for Announcements at Club Meetings

At the last meeting when a Guest Speaker was delayed from beginning by lengthy unexpected announcements from the floor. A number of members had expressed their concern over the disruption which this had caused.

It was agreed that in future all announcements should come through the Chair to ensure the smooth running of meetings.

2) Fylde Bird Club Rarities Committee

Dave Pitman asked if the Committee still believed that a Club Rarities Committee should operate to judge records for the Bird Report. It was agreed that if possible it should. Paul Slade expressed concern over the very low numbers of descriptions received. Others opined that because the Rarities Committee had not been operating, this may have discouraged the supply of descriptions.

It was decided to include Rarity Description Form blanks in the forthcoming newsletters along with an article about rarity recording by Dave Pitman.

Action: Dave Pitman rarities recording article.

It was agreed that Dave Pitman as chairman of the rarities committee should convene a meeting a s a p to consider records for the '95 Report. Dave set a provisional date for Thursday next week and agreed to confirm this.

Action: Dave Pitman Rarities Committee Meeting

There was a question mark over whether descriptions received by the Lancs Report editors were being copied to the Fylde editor.

Action Dave Pitman /Paul Slade to resolve.

Paul Slade agreed to produce a list of all the '95 records for which no description had been received. The relatively well watched Night Heron at Marton Mere was given as one such example.

Dave Pitman reported that the Lancs Report editors did not wish to re-consider any records which the Fylde Committee had rejected.

3) Lancashire Breeding Birds Survey 1997 to 1999

It was reported that the 'Lancs Forum' were organising a sponsored new year bird race to raise money to fund the Lancs Bird Report. All agreed that the Club should not promote this event as it would compete with our own bird race plans.

4) Fylde Bird Club Bird Race

Paul Slade proposed that the planned January Bird Race should be conducted for fun only and that a spring bird race could take place as usual with sponsorship. All agreed with the proposal. It was noted that their was very little time left to promote a sponsored event in early January anyway.

It was agreed that the Club needed to identify a worthy cause to allocate sponsorship funds to, in advance of the next sponsored event. It was also agreed that the Club should be seen to be spending some money on worthwhile causes.

The 19th ~~of~~ was agreed as the date for the January Bird Race and this would be announced at the AGM.

5) Proposed Bird Reserve at Newton Marsh

The Secretary proposed that the Club should launch a campaign for the establishment of a bird reserve at Newton Marsh. The site was not only important for rare breeding birds but its potential as a birdwatching site was tremendous. The Secretary stated that he recognised the paramount aim should be to afford protection to rare breeding birds but stated that he believed that the site could accommodate both birdwatchers and birds. He went on to state that he believed the aim to be very ambitious but that the potential prize was worthwhile and that really the site was so good that the Club would be remiss if it didn't make the attempt.

It was agreed that the idea should be pursued. It was noted that the RSPB were aware of the site and its value and it was agreed that the first step should be to write to them stating our vision and enquiring what were their aims with regard to the site.

Action: Secretary to write to Tim Melling of the RSPB

6) Proposed Wildfowl Reserve Over Wyre

The Secretary proposed that the Club should launch a campaign for the establishment of a wildfowl reserve Over Wyre. He stated that he recognised this was probably an even more challenging project than the Newton Marsh proposal and that the Club could probably only act as a catalyst to getting the RSPB or the WWT interested in pursuing the concept.

It was agreed that it was worthwhile investigating the idea further, however the Newton Marsh proposal should be the top priority. The Secretary was actioned to write to the RSPB and the WWT as a first step.

Action: Secretary to write to the RSPB and the WWT.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 10:20 pm.

BIRDWATCHING SITE GUIDES No 1

COCKERSANDS

Situated on the south bank of the Lune estuary between Cockerham and Glasson Dock.

Access

Direct from the A588 opposite Thurnham Hall, parking is available on the river bank near the old lighthouse, there is a public footpath along the shore.

Birds

A Wader roost forms on Plover Scar at Cockersands Light. Tides higher than 9 meters can cover the roost and the birds often resort to the fields around the Abbey.

Winter:- Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover and Turnstone. Wildfowl seen include a Wigeon roost between the Lighthouse and Bank End, small parties of Goldeneye and Red Breasted Merganser are frequently seen with occasional Elder and Scaup. Rarities have included Great Northern Diver, Red Necked Grebe and Smew.

Spring/:- Large roosts of Dunlin and Sanderling are joined by a few Whimbrel
Autumn Greenshank and Spotted Redshank. In some recent Autumns, a roost of Little Terns has been recorded.

The saltmarshes attract passerines including Finches, Rock Pipit, Twite and Snow Buntings, Raptors are seen frequently, mainly Peregrine, Merlin and Sparrowhawk but Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl have been recorded.

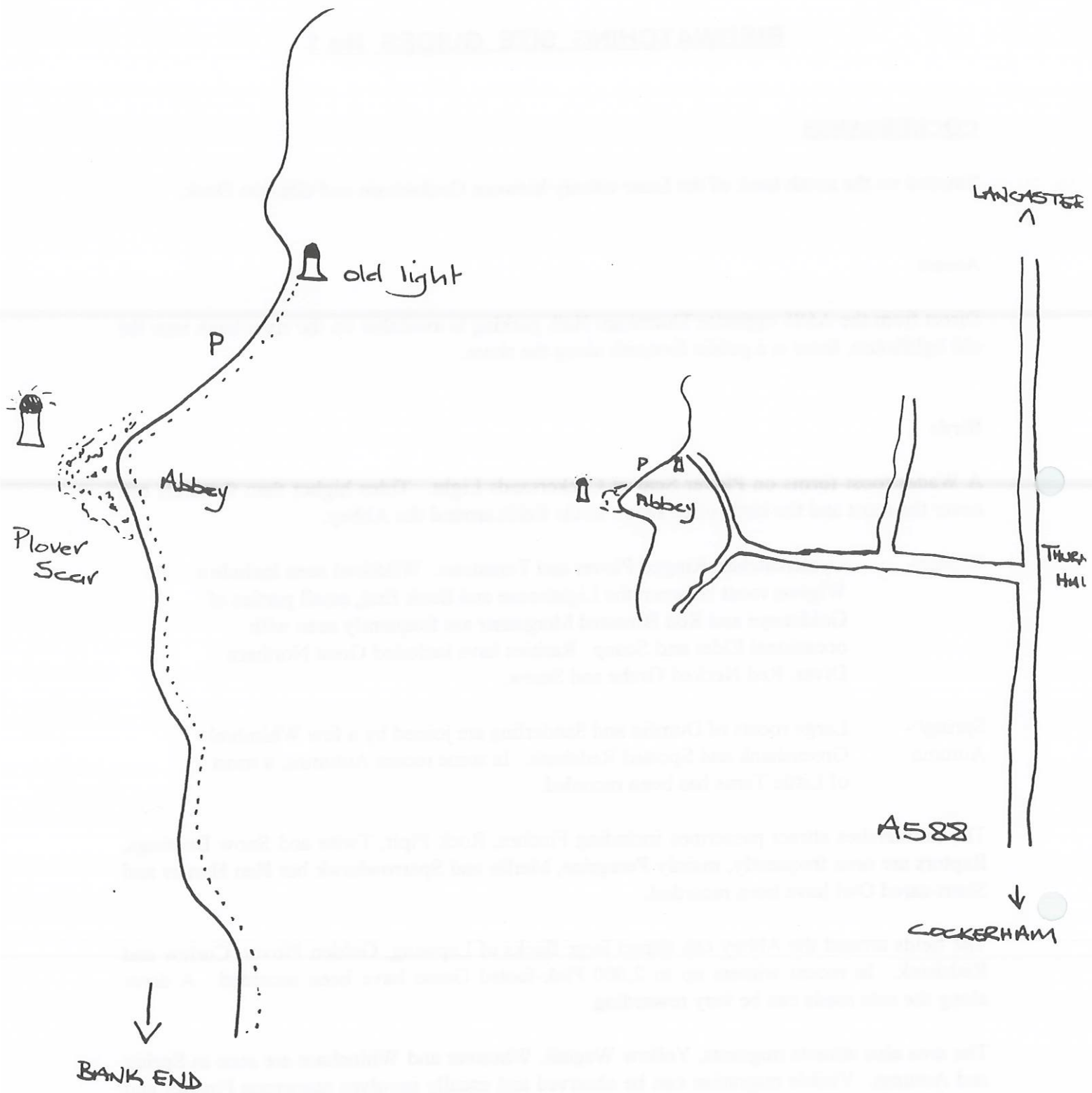
The fields around the Abbey can attract large flocks of Lapwing, Golden Plover, Curlew and Redshank. In recent winters up to 2,000 Pink-footed Geese have been recorded. A drive along the side roads can be very rewarding.

The area also attracts migrants, Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear and Whinchant are seen in Spring and Autumn. Visible migration can be observed and usually involves numerous Finches and Pipits. Autumn gales push sea birds into the estuary and Leach's Petrel, Great and Arctic Skua, Kittiwake, Terns and Auks are seen. Rarities have included Long-tailed Skua and Sabine's Gull.

Records of migrants and counts of commoner Waders and Wildfowl would be welcomed by our recorder.

See over for map

COCKERSANDS



BIRDWATCHING SITE GUIDE

ROSSALL - FLEETWOOD

Rossall Point forms the southern boundary of Morecambe Bay, and the whole area provides year round interest for the birdwatcher.

Access :

Watch from the Promenade or follow the footpath along the edge of Fleetwood Golf Course. Note - please do not stray onto the Golf Course. Ample parking is available at car parks, opposite Rossall Hospital, north end of Fleetwood Golf Course, and Marine Hall, Fleetwood.

Birds :

A high tide wader roost forms near the Coast Guard Station, the birds can be disturbed by people and they often resort to the island on the nearby boating lake. A large flock of Eider, often exceeding 1,000 birds can be seen offshore.

Winter :

Small numbers of Red-throated Diver, Great Crested Grebe, Eider, Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser can be seen offshore.

The wader roost will include varying numbers of Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Dunlin, Redshank and Turnstone.

In most winters, a few Twite or Snow Bunting can be seen on Fleetwood Beach.

The boating lakes are an important winter site for Mute Swan, and small numbers of Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser also visit the lakes.

Spring and Autumn :

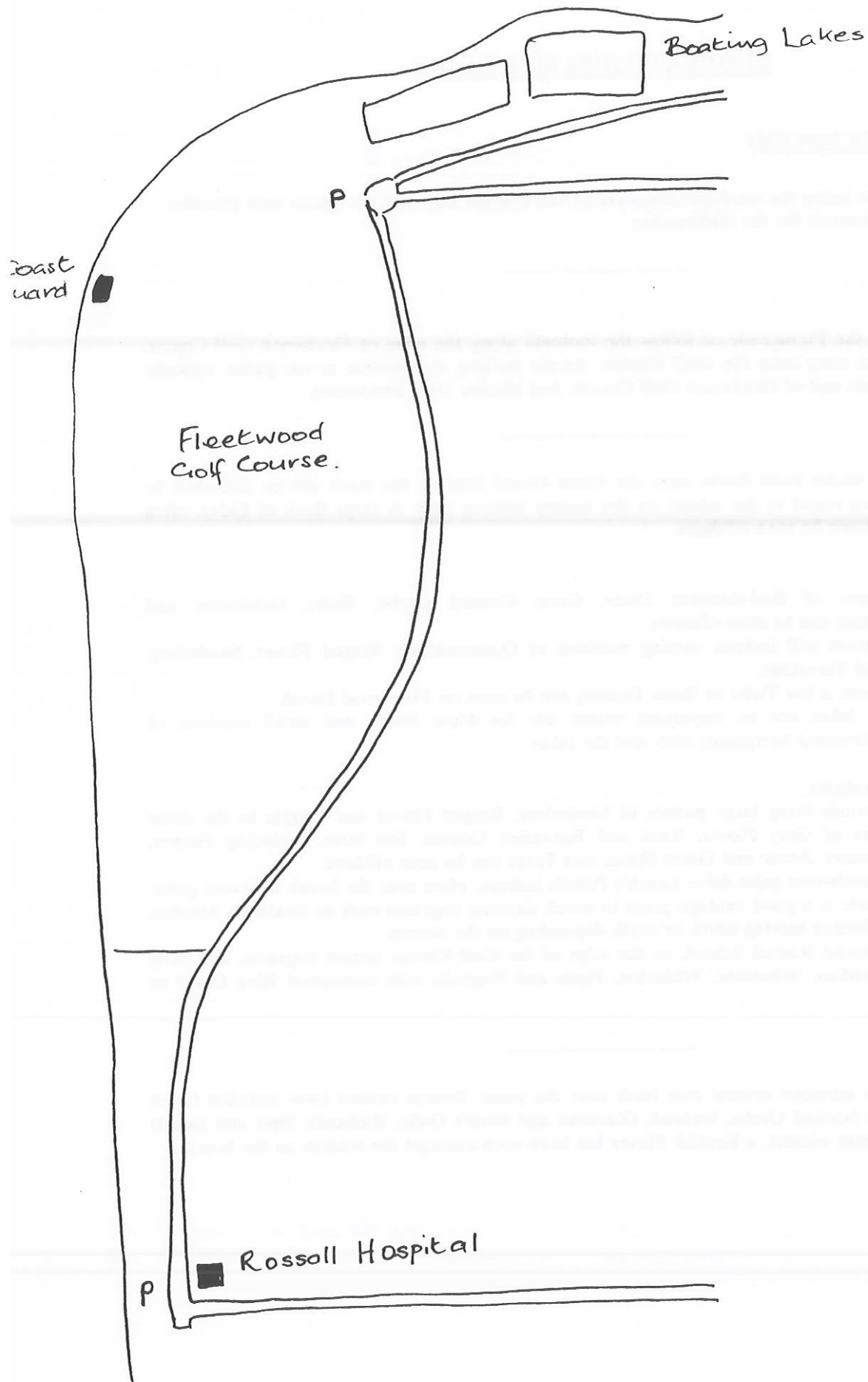
Migration periods bring large parties of Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Dunlin to the shore with smaller numbers of Grey Plover, Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit. Sea birds, including Fulmar, Gannet, Manx Shearwater, Arctic and Great Skuas, and Terns can be seen offshore.

In autumn, south-west gales drive Leach's Petrels inshore, often over the beach in severe gales.

The Promenade is a good vantage point to watch daytime migrants such as Swallows, Martins, Pipits, Wagtails and finches moving north or south depending on the season.

The fields around Rossall School, or the edge of the Golf Course attract migrants, and early morning visits can produce Wheatear, Whinchat, Pipits and Wagtails with occasional Ring Ouzel or Black Redstart.

The area has attracted several rare birds over the years. Recent rarities have included Great Northern Diver, Red Necked Grebe, Iceland, Glaucous and Ross's Gulls, Richard's Pipit and Desert Wheatear. During recent winters, a Kentish Plover has been seen amongst the waders on the beach.



Site Guide To The Ribble Marshes

1. NEWTON MARSH

An area of grazed freshwater marsh with pools. Viewable from the minor road off the main A584 from Preston to Freckleton at SD 456292. Turn down the road at the traffic lights near to the petrol station. Park on the grass between the white bollards and the fence. Stay in the car to avoid flushing the birds and scan the pools and surrounding fields. Wintering wildfowl include Wigeon grazing on the fields, Teal, Mallard, Shelduck, rarely Shoveller & Pintail, Mute Swan, occasionally Whooper and Bewick's Swan. Lapwing & Golden Plover in impressively large mixed flocks, Curlew, Snipe, Redshank, occasionally Ruff. Peregrines can sometimes be seen sitting on the electricity pylons. In Spring good numbers of Black-tailed Godwits on passage, Yellow Wagtails can be seen most years. Little Grebes have bred here as well as good numbers of Lapwing and Redshank out on the marsh. Other rarer birds seen here include Spoonbill, Garganey, Green Sandpiper, Marsh Harrier, Temminck's Stint & Long Billed Dowitcher.

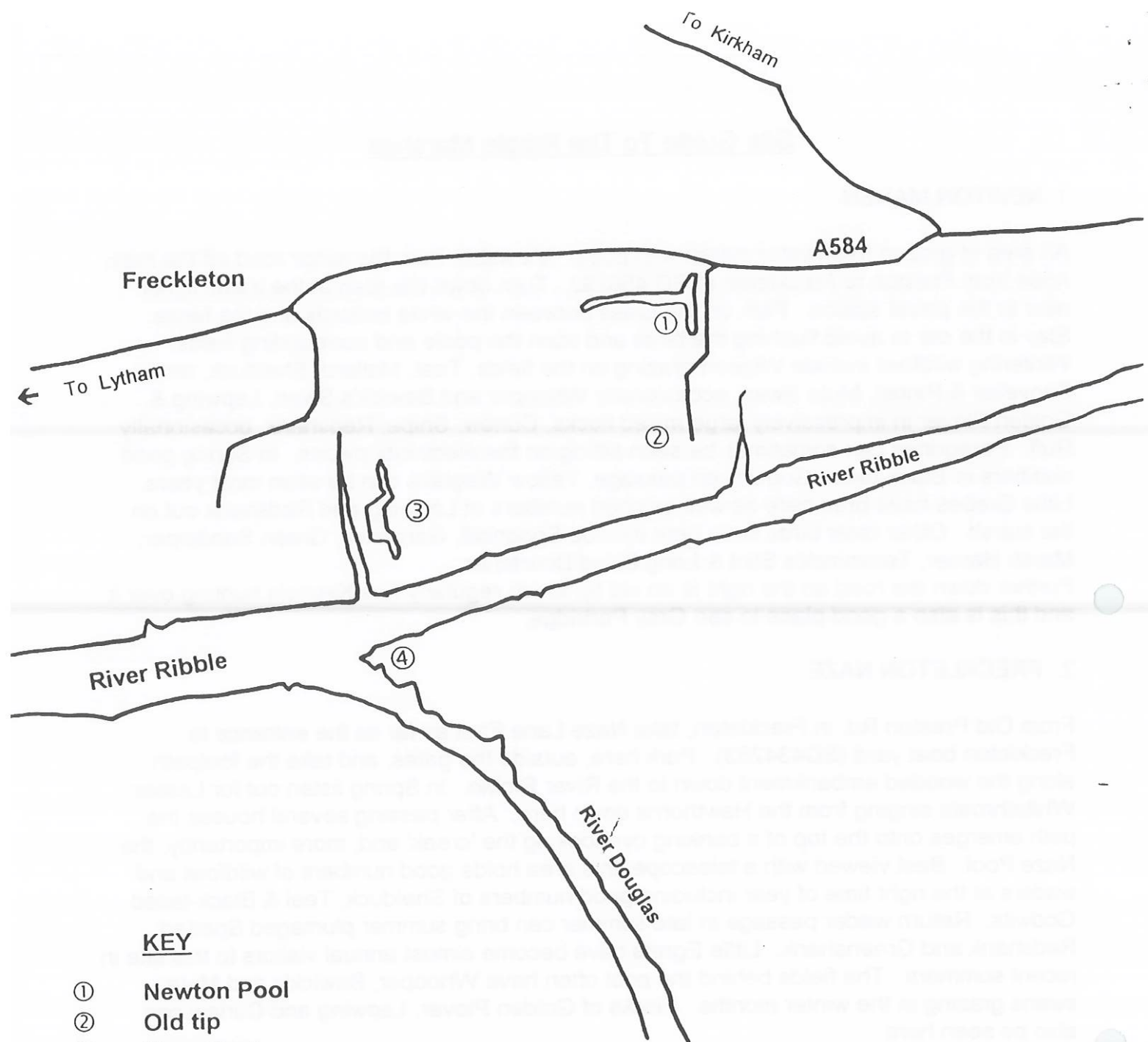
Further down the road on the right is an old tip which regularly has Kestrels hunting over it and this is also a good place to see Grey Partridge.

2. FRECKLETON NAZE

From Old Preston Rd. in Freckleton, take Naze Lane East as far as the entrance to Freckleton boat yard (SD434283). Park here, outside the gates, and take the footpath along the wooded embankment down to the River Ribble. In Spring listen out for Lesser Whitethroats singing from the Hawthorns down here. After passing several houses the path emerges onto the top of a banking overlooking the 'creek' and, more importantly, the Naze Pool. Best viewed with a telescope, this area holds good numbers of wildfowl and waders at the right time of year including good numbers of Shelduck, Teal & Black-tailed Godwits. Return wader passage in late summer can bring summer plumaged Spotted Redshank and Græns Shank. Little Egrets have become almost annual visitors to this site in recent summers. The fields behind the pool often have Whooper, Bewick's and Mute swans grazing in the winter months. Flocks of Golden Plover, Lapwing and Curlew can also be seen here.

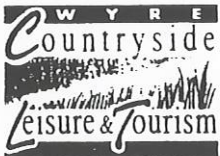
Carry on from this point further downstream and view the pool from a second vantage point at a break in the bushes, this second perspective can often reveal birds not seen from the first point.

Shortly after this point the path leaves the edge of the wood to negotiate a large house. Small flocks of Tree Sparrows can be seen along the fence and surrounding bushes here. Follow the path across a field down a hedge side, then drop down the banking to reach the banks of the River Ribble. The state of the tide will determine what you can see from here. Low tide reveals the training wall and areas of mud which are good for feeding waders on passage (Ringed Plover, Dunlin) and dabbling Shelduck. High tides in summer allow good views of terns (Common & a few Arctic) fishing in the river and up Freckleton creek. There is also a large roost of Cormorants on the confluence of the rivers Douglas & Ribble. In winter it is worth checking the large trees washed onto the marsh opposite for roosting Peregrines.



KEY

- ① Newton Pool
- ② Old tip
- ③ Naze Pool
- ④ Ribble / Douglas confluence





HAWKWATCH

WHAT has the *Daily Telegraph* got against the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds? Until recently, the paper's attitude to the RSPB — the biggest conservation charity in Britain — was sympathetic or at least neutral. But in the past four months it has suddenly launched a blitzkrieg of hostile coverage.

The trouble began in September when police, assisted by RSPB inspectors, raided several Welsh shooting estates looking for evidence to link gamekeepers with the illegal trapping and poisoning of birds of prey on the Berwyn moors in Clwyd. One of the estates, Llanarmon, is owned by "squire" Robert McAlpine, former chairman of the construction company Alfred McAlpine.

After the raid — which netted several suspicious traps but no hard evidence — the *Telegraph's* fogeyish environment editor, Charles Clover, effectively gave "Bobby" McAlpine a free hand to attack the RSPB, in an article on 30 September, and backed this up with an editorial condemning the society for its over zealous behaviour. "It is perfectly true we dislike falcons intensely because they kill enormous numbers of grouse," spluttered McAlpine. "The point is that there is no proof whatsoever that anyone is killing falcons." He also accused society investigators of terrifying women and children in the raids (presumably while the police in charge looked on impassively).

In fact, there is strong evidence pointing to persecution of birds of prey on the McAlpine estate. Earlier last year one of Britain's rarest breeding birds, a red kite, was found poisoned with alpha-chloralose (a toxin so dangerous that mere possession is an offence). This was the third confirmed alpha-chloralose incident in seven years on Llanarmon alone. There is also circumstantial evidence suggesting other forms of persecution — such as a total failure by the moor's indigenous hen harriers and peregrines to rear any young since at least 1985.

Following its highly-coloured reporting of the McAlpine raid, the *Telegraph* decided to declare open season on the RSPB. On 8 October, the Petebore column claimed that the society's chief executive, Barbara Young, was urging her colleagues to keep quiet on Labour's green record for fear of harming Tony Blair's election prospects (a story vigorously denied by Young). On the same

day, a less than flattering letter from a gamekeeper's wife was published. Since then, the paper has repeatedly declined to print letters defending the RSPB while happily finding space for critical missives.

After a slight lull in November, the campaign resumed in earnest this month. A generally balanced piece in the *Sunday Telegraph* by Greg Neale on 8 December included an incongruous couple of paragraphs accusing the society of keeping illegal computer records and of orchestrating ill-founded raids. Six days later, the *Telegraph's* Saturday magazine carried a five-page hatchet-job by Fiametta Rocco, accusing the society of being dominated by whingeing townies who know nothing about the realities of country life.

Rocco is usually a serious and thorough hackette, so it is hard to believe that the article was all her own work — not least because of the amazing number of elementary errors it contained. She claimed that the RSPB has 20 bird reserves (it has 140), that it was founded in 1904 (1889, actually) and that 1,000 people work at its Bedfordshire HQ (the true figure is 450).

"One Yorkshire landowner," she reported, "says his grouse numbers have been halved since three pairs of breeding kites were introduced to the area [by the RSPB] in 1993." This is rather puzzling, since there are no kites in Yorkshire, let alone an RSPB release scheme.

Stranger still is Rocco's claim that, thanks to the society's efforts, "kestrels, which were virtually unknown [in Britain] in the sixties, have now topped 51,500". Has she never seen the film *Kes*? In fact, kestrels have always been this country's commonest bird of prey. Her further suggestion that sparrowhawks, buzzards and kestrels threaten pheasants is just plain wrong. So is her allegation that capercaillie breed in the Upper Cairngorms: in fact, they have never been seen in the region — unsurprisingly, since conditions are so bleak that even arctic ptarmigan find life difficult up there.

Was Fiametta Rocco really responsible for all these howlers, or was her piece "tickled up" by other hands at the *Torygraph*? Certainly the paper's editor, Charles Moore, is a great enthusiast for field sports, and Charles Clover is said to have warned Barbara Young recently that "we're not finished with you yet". (Oddly enough, the society is one of the sponsors of the BEMA environmental journalism awards, which have twice been won by Clover.)

So what is going on? Surely this tiff could not be connected with the fact that the prospective Tory candidate for Clwyd South, the constituency which just happens to include McAlpine's Llanarmon fiefdom, is none other than *Torygraph* pundit Boris Johnson?

W e B s COUNT DATES - 1997

MEET AT LANE ENDS
CAR PARK, OVER WYRE
MAP REF. SD 413 495

Jan 12 10.0m	at 1324GMT	meet 1030	Jul 20 9.4m	at 1207BST	meet 1000
Feb 9 10.3	at 1223GMT	meet 0930	Aug 24 8.6m	at 1628BST	meet 1430
Mar 9 10.2m	at 1120GMT	meet 0830	Spt 21 9.2m	at 1511BST	meet 1315
Apl 6 9.7m	at 1112BST	meet 0830	Oct 19 9.7m	at 1405BST	meet 1130
May 11 8.6m	at 1506BST	meet 1245	Nov 16 9.3m	at 1204GMT	meet 0930
Jun 22 9.4m	at 1308BST	meet 1100	Dec 14 9.5m	at 1106GMT	meet 0845