

**NEWSLETTER**  
**SEPTEMBER 2000**



**Fylde  
Bird Club**  
LANCASHIRE

**SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

**AN EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL  
MEETING HAS BEEN CALLED ON  
WEDNESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2000**

**THE MEETING WILL BE HELD AT 19:45 AT BLACKPOOL  
CRICKET CLUB AND WILL PRECEDE THE BUSINESS  
MEETING SCHEDULED FOR THAT NIGHT.**

THIS MEETING HAS BEEN CALLED TO DISCUSS PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION. THE PRINCIPAL PROPOSED CHANGES ARE TO MOVE THE MEETING NIGHT TO THE FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH COMMENCING IN FEBRUARY 2001 AND TO MOVE THE A.G.M. FROM DECEMBER TO JANUARY WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT. OUR CURRENT CONSTITUTION NEEDS TO BE ALTERED TO PERMIT MOVING THE A.G.M.

On behalf of the membership, Paul Ellis, Secretary.

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**ROSSALL POINT OBSERVATION TOWER**

The Club have been informed by Wyre Borough Council that the Tower is now available for Club members to use!

The keys are held at the Wyre Ecology Centre at Stanah. The access arrangements are as follows: if you wish to use the tower you must collect the keys from Stanah and sign for them. They must be returned later that day or first thing the next morning. The Stanah opening times are from 09:30 to 17:00 hrs. It is recommended that you phone first to ensure that the keys are available, tel. 01253 857890.

Chairman: Mr. Paul Slade . Secretary: Mr. Paul Ellis, 18 Staining Rise, Staining, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY3 0BU  
Tel.01253 891 281 Eves. 01772 852973 Day  
E-mail : paul.ellis2@baesystems.com Or : kinta.beaver@man.ac.uk



## EVENTS

- September 21<sup>st</sup> Marton Mere Friends Group: Meeting Cricket Club 8pm
- September 23<sup>rd</sup> Marton Mere Friends Group: Dragonfly walk at the Mere 10:30am
- October 18<sup>th</sup> **Fylde Bird Club** : E.G.M. and Business Meeting + talk on Geese
- October Marton Mere: 'Migration Walk' - *date to be announced.*
- October 27<sup>th</sup> Marton Mere: After dark walk 18:30 hrs
- November 15<sup>th</sup> **Fylde Bird Club** : Birds of New Zealand with Mick Turton
- November 16<sup>th</sup> Marton Mere Friends Group: Meeting Cricket Club 8pm
- December 20<sup>th</sup> **Fylde Bird Club** : AGM or Social evening (to be decided 18-10-00)
- December 31<sup>st</sup> Marton Mere: Christmas Bird Count: Post count meeting at 2pm

### For Sale

KOWA TELESCOPE TS612 27X lens, in good condition £150 ono.

Contact Paul Slade Tel 01253 885120

### Wanted

500 mm Mirror lens to fit PENTAX 'K' mount.

Contact Paul Slade Tel 01253 885120

## Recent Sightings

### May

The first part of the month saw high pressure and a cool north – easterly air stream but later a series of Atlantic depressions brought heavy rain with south – westerlies.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> an adult Little Grebe was on the Mere. Next day 5 Fulmars, 3 Manx Shearwaters and 80 Gannets were noted off south prom. The 19<sup>th</sup> saw the appearance of 2 Spoonbills on the Naze pool. Together with Little Egret, this species, once uncommon, is now annual in the Fylde. Early in the month a female Garganey was on Newton Marsh whilst on the 13<sup>th</sup> a pair of Gadwall were on the Mere. The same day a Sparrowhawk was on a nest at Lytham Hall. Next day a Peregrine was seen attacking the Swallows at dusk at the Mere.

A Quail was calling at Eagland Hill on the 21<sup>st</sup> with 1 seen briefly in flight at Copthorne on the 30<sup>th</sup>. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> the Black – tailed Godwit nest was trampled by cattle at Newton Marsh but by the 7<sup>th</sup> a second nest was located. At the same site there were 2 Little – ringed Plovers on the 10<sup>th</sup>. The Longton Whimbrel roost reached 533 birds on the 1<sup>st</sup> whilst good numbers were seen at Little Singleton on various dates early in the month. On the 7<sup>th</sup> there were 1900 Sanderling on St Annes beach whilst the 13<sup>th</sup> saw 3 Common Sandpipers at Marton Mere.

4 Black Terns at the Mere on the 7<sup>th</sup> were followed by 4 at the CEGB pool Fleetwood on the 12<sup>th</sup> with 4 Arctic Terns at Rossall Point 2 days later. 2 Stock Doves were present at Lytham Hall on the 13<sup>th</sup> together with at least 7 Golden Pheasants. A Cuckoo was calling at Staining on the 2<sup>nd</sup> when there were 2 at Jameson Road Fleetwood. A Short – eared Owl on Lytham Moss, near the radar station on the 19<sup>th</sup> was a good record, whilst on the 14<sup>th</sup> a Little Owl was on Newton Marsh. 2 Swifts were at Staining on the 6<sup>th</sup>. Next day there was a Yellow Wagtail (uncommon in the Fylde in recent years) and 2 Tree Pipits at Fluke Hall.

By the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month there were 85 singing Warblers at Marton Mere and on the 14<sup>th</sup> 2 singing Grasshopper Warblers. On the 7<sup>th</sup> there were 2 Lesser Whitethroats in song at Newton Marsh whilst next day 7 Whinchats were at the Mere. On the 14<sup>th</sup> there was a Spotted Flycatcher at Mount Park Fleetwood and a Garden Warbler at Thurnham, with Nuthatch noted at Salwick and Greyfriars. 9 Redpolls were at Stanley Park on the 1<sup>st</sup> with 2 Siskins at Fluke Hall on the 7<sup>th</sup>. On the 13<sup>th</sup> there were 2 pairs of Jays at Lytham Hall.

### June

The month was generally unsettled with strong winds mid month followed by a period of high pressure and high temperatures which unfortunately lasted only briefly.

2 summer plumaged Black – necked Grebes visited the Mere on the 9<sup>th</sup>, but did not stay, being possibly seen by only 1 observer. Strong winds mid month were no doubt welcomed by the sea watchers with 92 Manx Shearwaters, 72 Fulmars, 53 Gannets and 1 Little Tern recorded off south prom on the 11<sup>th</sup>. Next day 68 Manx Shearwaters were noted in 1 ½ hours, whilst on the 13<sup>th</sup> in 2 ¾ hours, 90 Manx

Shearwaters, 18 Gannets, 6 Kittiwakes and 1 Arctic Skua was the total. Later in the month on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 130 Manx Shearwaters were recorded off north prom, Blackpool. Little Egrets were noted at Grannies Bay on the 5<sup>th</sup> and Little Singleton on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The 2 Spoonbills continued to frequent the Naze Pool and the Ribble nearby and on the 18<sup>th</sup> there were 71 Mute Swans there also. Peregrines were noted on a pylon at Staining on the 9<sup>th</sup> and at Weeton on the 18<sup>th</sup>, whilst an Osprey flew east over Fleetwood Power Station on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

On the 7<sup>th</sup>, 4 Black – tailed Godwits hatched on Newton Marsh, probably in no small means due to the work put in by club members. A Little – ringed Plover was present at the same site next day. The 18<sup>th</sup> saw a Greenshank on the Naze pool and on the 25<sup>th</sup> there was a Little – ringed Plover at the Mere. A Cuckoo was mobbed by Meadow Pipits and Swallows at LSANR on the 15<sup>th</sup> and there was a juvenile Cuckoo at the Mere on the 19<sup>th</sup>. On the last day of the month 100 Swifts were counted at the Mere. A Barn Owl was hunting off Smithy Lane, Staining on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Thurnham Hall is often worth a visit in spring and on the 4<sup>th</sup> there was a singing Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch and Treecreepers feeding young there.

## July

The month was again generally unsettled with a mainly northerly airstream. Temperatures were below the seasonal average but rainfall was not excessive.

Little Egrets were again seen on various dates, at Warton Bank on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Shard Bridge on the 7<sup>th</sup> and at the confluence of the river Douglas and the Ribble at Freckleton on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The Spoonbills also appeared to have taken up residence in the Naze area. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5 Wigeon were on the Mere together with a Ruddy Duck with 4 young. On the 10<sup>th</sup> this or another was seen with 6 young. An unusual record for this time of year was a Long – tailed Duck at Jameson Road ICI pool from the 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>.

A Peregrine was reported as having bred on a roof in Blackpool town centre and there were at least 2 records of Kestrels having done the same. A Peregrine was over houses on Preston New Road on the 9<sup>th</sup> – is this species becoming more urbanised like Sparrowhawk? On the 14<sup>th</sup> 4 young Kestrels were also noted in a Staining Barn. Wader passage began in earnest and there were 2 Common Sandpipers at the Mere on the 8<sup>th</sup> with 34 at Shard Bridge on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Greenshank were much in evidence with up to 6 being seen most days at Little Singleton. 7 were at the Naze on the 24<sup>th</sup> with a Spotted Redshank on the pool there on the 29<sup>th</sup>. 350 Curlew were at Little Singleton on the 14<sup>th</sup> with the same number of Sanderling on St Annes beach on the 30<sup>th</sup>. The Wyre at Little Singleton also held a Spotted Redshank on the 30<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup>. Up to 6 Little – ringed Plovers were on the scrape inside Jameson Road tip regularly during the month. On the 14<sup>th</sup> there were 17 Black – tailed Godwits on the scrape at the Mere. On the 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> there was a Green Sandpiper at Newton Marsh pool and on the 16<sup>th</sup> 1 was present on a flood north of Cottam.

75 Sand Martins were noted resting on the beach at St Annes on the 30<sup>th</sup> whilst at least 1000 were at the Mere next day. On the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> there was a Cuckoo on LSANR. The 15<sup>th</sup> saw 2 Common Terns fly over the Mere without landing and on the 29<sup>th</sup> a remarkable 325 Sandwich Terns were counted roosting on the beach at St Annes / Squires Gate. A Barn Owl was seen at Mythop Road on the 13<sup>th</sup> whilst 3 roosting together in a hanger at BAE Warton on the 27<sup>th</sup> had bred. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> Willow Warbler of the Autumn was noted at LSANR.



# Fylde Bird Club

LANCASHIRE

## FYLDE BIRD CLUB COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT 8:04 PM ON WEDNESDAY THE 14th OF JUNE AT THE SHOVELS AT MARTON

#### Present

Chairman; Secretary; Treasurer; Mike McGough; Alan Hinchliffe; Len Blacow (President); Stephen Dunstan and Dave Pitman.

#### Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 27th of March were agreed to be correct.

#### Matters Arising

##### 1) 1980's Breeding Birds Survey

The Secretary had produced a front cover incorporating the Club logo and an example of the finished work had been shown to the members. Paul Slade offered to procure a supply of paper to allow copies to be made. Mike McGough offered to make arrangements to produce some copies.

**Action: Chairman and Mike McGough**

##### 2) Newsletter

It was reported that Barry Dyson was preparing an article on a recent trip to Kazakhstan and Stephen Dunstan offered to write an article on a Goose Survey. The President stated that the article, which he was writing on Important Local Sites, was not yet completed.

**Actions continuing: All, to provide copy and assist.**

##### 3) 1999 Bird Report

It was noted that the task of entering the records onto computer had been transferred to the Chairman, Mike McGough and the Secretary. This change had necessitated the task being restarted from scratch which had contributed to the project falling behind schedule. However, the Secretary stated that the input of records was well over 50% complete.

**Action: Chairman, Secretary and Mike McGough to complete data input.**

The President (Report Chief Editor) was asked how other tasks and arrangements were progressing towards the Report's production. The President replied that no progress had been made but that he would contact all last year's advertisers with a view to securing repeat orders. He also stated that he would contact sub editors to ensure work could begin once the records were collated. The Secretary reported that Peter Bainbridge had informed him, that he would be unable to contribute to editing this year. It was noted that a typist was still required and that no artwork had been procured. It was recalled that a Nightjar had been photographed in Marton and that the photographer could be approached to request use of the image.

**Various Actions: President (Chief Editor)**

Dave Pitman announced that In Focus had requested a full page advert and the Secretary reported that Rare Bird Alert also required a full page.

The Secretary announced that Kinta Beaver had prepared a Lottery Bid under the Awards for All Scheme for Local Groups requesting funds to cover printing the 1999 and 2000 Reports. The Secretary noted that Tony Baker of the RSPB had kindly agreed to sign the application as Referee. The Secretary also announced that he had written to BAE Systems requesting corporate sponsorship for the Report. A letter of acknowledgement had been received from BAE.

Alan Hinchliffe reported that he had written the review of the year but that it required typing.

4) Important Unprotected Bird Sites

The President reported that the newsletter article, which he was preparing on this subject, was in fact not quite finished, (contrary to previous minutes). It was noted from the previous minutes that the Treasurer had offered to type up the copy.

**Action: President and Treasurer**

5) County Biological Site Proposals

The Secretary reported that he had written to the Lancashire Wildlife Trust supplying annual data on the Stanley Park heronry, County Biological Heritage Site.

Action: completed

6) Goose Watching Site Guide

It was noted that, as the contributors were now both engaged on the Bird Report, this action should be suspended until workload allowed its completion.

Action suspended

7) Club Meeting Dates and Venue

It was noted that an enquiry to the Cricket Club, to change the meeting night to Tuesday, had yet to be made. It was agreed to do this at the next Club Meeting.

**Action: Chairman and Secretary**

8) Godwit Protection at Newton Marsh

Following the letter from the Club to the RSPB (which requested greater efforts on their behalf) the Secretary reported that had received a reply. A letter had been received from Laurence Rose, the Manager of the North West RSPB Office and he had met informally with the Secretary. The Secretary reported that Mr Rose had suggested a meeting with the Birds Club's Committee and the RSPB, in order to formulate a plan for the future. It was agreed that the Secretary should proceed with arranging this meeting. A letter had been received from Mike Shaw, relaying data on Godwit nest 'cages' which prevent trampling by cattle. It was agreed to raise this proposal with the RSPB at the forthcoming meeting.

**Action: Secretary**

9) Rossall Coast Guards Tower

The Secretary reported, that as actioned at the Club Meeting, he had written again to Wyre Borough Council asking for written confirmation of their intentions with regard to the Tower.

10) Membership Renewal Reminders

The Treasurer stated that 48 members had paid up so far but that a number of regulars had yet to pay. It was agreed that a reminder should be included in the next newsletter. Stephen Dunstan suggested that payment by automated Direct Debit could be offered to the members. He noted that once it set up, the system required little work to maintain it.

**Action: Treasurer**

11) Bird Race 2000

The Secretary reported he had written to RSPB Fairhaven and the Lancashire Bird Club, informing them of the Club's decision to make the Lancashire Breeding Bird Survey the sole beneficiary of the Bird Race. It was noted that the sum raised was not known yet, as monies were still being collected, however it was estimated to be in excess of £400.

12) Marton Mere Management

The Secretary reported, that as actioned at the Club Meeting, he had written to the Zoo Manager raising the concerns of the Club's Members with regard to the Mere LNR. The letter was sent on the 28<sup>th</sup> April but as yet no reply or acknowledgement had been received. The Committee felt that the failure to respond by now was unacceptable. The Secretary was actioned to wait for no more than one week before writing to the elected Councillors requesting a response.

**Action: Secretary**

Correspondence (where not covered elsewhere)

- 1) The Secretary reported he had written to the Land Registry requesting clarification over the ownership of Jameson Road. This was following the erection of signs by Wyre Waste Management threatening to remove parked cars with a bulldozer. Telephone enquires with Wyre Council and Lancs. County had failed to resolve the question. The Secretary was then

actioned by the Committee to write to Lancs. County Council requesting access through the locked gate for Bird Club Members.

**Action Secretary**

**Agenda (where not covered above)**

1) Bird Fair at Stanah

The Secretary stated that he would be unable to attend and man a stand at the forthcoming Bird Fair owing to a prior engagement. The President offered to man the Bird Club's stand as he and others were planning to attend in any case, to represent the Friends of Marton Mere. It was agreed that the large stock of past Bird Reports could be offered free of charge with a request for donations towards future production costs.

**Action: President**

2) Constitution

The Secretary reminded the Committee that a revision of the Club's constitution was required to include the new position of President. It was also noted that the Special Projects Fund did not figure in the current issue of the constitution and its operation had been added as an addendum. A redefinition of the nature of this fund had been proposed which should be incorporated into the new constitution. It had also been proposed that the AGM should be moved to January but that the current constitution states it must be in December. It was recognised that an E.G.M. would be required to discuss and agree any changes to the constitution. It was agreed to include a notification of an EGM in a newsletter before the December meeting to allow changes to be considered before the currently programmed December AGM.

Stephen Dunstan offered to produce a draft of the revised constitution.

**Action: Stephen Dunstan**

3) Lytham Hall Breeding Birds Survey

Stephen Dunstan reported that he had not received any data from other observers on this site. It appeared that no one had conducted a formal survey, however a reasonable number of casual records should be available. It was agreed that there would be enough for Stephen to produce a report if the records were forwarded to him. Mike McGough offered to provide his records to the Secretary on Bird Recorder which could be amalgamated with the Secretary's records. The Secretary agreed to print off these results. The President stated that there should be some historical data available from the times when Monty Myerscough and Geoff Whitely worked at the site.

**Action continuing: Stephen Dunstan**

The concept of a winter bird count at the Hall on the 31-12-00 was discussed. It was envisaged that the event would be open to the public. It was agreed that this should be proposed to the Town Trust if volunteers could be found to lead the proposed walk.

**A.O.B.**

1) Magazine Article

Stephen Dunstan reported that Birdwatching Magazine was running an article on birdwatching walks on the South Ribble marshes written by Pete Marsh. He proposed that an article featuring the North Ribble Marshes, including Freckleton and Warton, would provide an opportunity to publicise the Club. Stephen stated that he had agreed to prepare an article for the magazine. All agreed that this was a good opportunity.

**Action: Stephen Dunstan**

2) Bird Club Display at Fairhaven

Alan Hinchliffe asked the President what had become of the proposal to set up a display promoting the Bird Club in the Ribble Discovery Centre. The President reported that the requisite display boards were not available and therefore he had been unable to mount the display. He added that the display boards would cost £300 for the two required! It was agreed to ask the members if anyone had knew of any second hand boards, which might be available.

***There being no further business the meeting closed at 22:47 hrs.***



# **Fylde Bird Club**

**LANCASHIRE**

## **FYLDE BIRD CLUB** **BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT 19:50 ON WEDNESDAY** **THE 19TH OF JULY AT BLACKPOOL CRICKET CLUB**

#### **Present**

Chairman, Secretary, and 14 members. Apologies were received from Alan Hinchliffe.

#### **Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last business meeting on 19th April were agreed to be a true and fair record.

#### **Matters arising**

##### **1) *Black-tailed Godwit Wardening***

The Secretary reported that he had written to the RSPB requesting additional resources be allocated to this project. This was followed by a written reply and a meeting between representatives of the Bird Club and the RSPB on the 10th July. Frank Walsh had also attended representing the Lancashire Bird Club. The RSPB had been represented by Laurence Rose (Manager North West Office), Tim Melling, Tony Baker and Sam Jackson. The Chairman reported that the meeting had been positive and constructive. It had been agreed that future efforts would be led by the RSPB with support from the Club. The RSPB had agreed to produce a plan of action, which would be agreed with the Club and would be followed up with a further meeting later in the year. The Chairman and Secretary agreed to keep the membership informed of developments.

**Action: Chairman and Secretary**

Don Rusling proposed a vote of thanks to those volunteers who had contributed to the wardening effort. This was unanimously agreed.

As a by-product of the meeting, the Committee had been introduced to Sam Jackson who is the new Manager of the RSPB's Ribble Discovery Centre at Fairhaven.

##### **2) *Marton Mere L.N.R.***

The Secretary reported that, as actioned, he had written to the Zoo Manager raising the concerns of the members regarding the management of the reserve. After making some follow up enquires a meeting had been arranged with the Zoo Manager and the Bird Club's Chairman and Secretary, for the 25<sup>th</sup> of July. Ron and Sue Bedford reported that they had written independently and had received a written reply. This reply, dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> May stated that sealant would be applied to the new hide when conditions were dry and that there was a policy to control mink. However Maurice Jones had also written and he had not received any



reply. Maurice reported that at a site in Sussex mink had been trapped over a number of years with an initial rate of capture of 10 to 12 per year which had now fallen to 4 or 5 per year. Hen's eggs had been used as bait. This action had resulted in the breeding water rail population increasing to 30 to 60 pairs and water voles had become common.

Members reported that the Perspex front of the display board at the west entrance to the reserve had been broken. Vandals had used stones left over from footpath works on the reserve as ammunition. It was noted that the display had not been repaired but a piece of plywood had been nailed over it and after several weeks it remained in this condition.

Barry Dyson noted that the visitor centre was rarely open and that no opening times or times when the Warden would be present, were displayed.

Mike McGough reported that only relatively few Mere Information Leaflets were distributed from the visitor centre and in fact many more were distributed by Fairhaven RSPB! Mike also stated that the volunteer wardens had not been contacted by the warden for over 12 months and he anticipated that it might be October before contact was made again!

The Chairman and Secretary agreed to relay the above points to the Zoo Manager, when they met with him, in addition to the points raised in the Bird Club's letter.

**Action: Chairman and Secretary**

### **3) Coastguard station**

The Secretary reported that, as actioned by the Committee, he had written again to Wyre Borough Council requesting written confirmation of the Council's intentions with regard to the future of the building. He added that he had now received a written reply confirming that the facility would reopen and that Jo Beaman of the Ranger Service would contact the Club to arrange access.

Action: complete

### **4) Breeding Bird Atlas**

It was confirmed that copies would be available in the near future. The Secretary explained that Committee members were making the necessary arrangements to produce copies at minimum cost. The members were reminded to make themselves know if they required a copy.

Action continuing: Committee

### **5) Bird Race 2000**

It was reported that several teams had taken part in the Bird Race but the sum raised was not yet known. The Chairman predicted that it would exceed £400. The Secretary reported that he had written to RSPB Fairhaven and the Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Society, informing them of the Club's decision on the beneficiary of the Bird Race.

### **Correspondence (where not covered elsewhere)**

- 1) The Secretary reported that he had received a letter from BAE SYSTEMS declining our request for sponsorship towards the 1999 Bird Report. He reminded the members that so far we had no sponsor and requested members to attempt to identify sponsors and advertisers.

- 2) A letter had been received from Frank Walsh informing the Club that the new South Lancashire representative for the BTO was a Mr. Shearwood. His address is available from the Secretary on request. His region apparently extends to just north of Blackpool.

**Agenda** (where not covered above)

- 1) The Chairman reported that it would be possible to switch the Club's meeting night to the first Tuesday of the month. It was proposed that if agreed and still available, that this change should be effective from February 2001. The members present agreed with the proposal and it was recalled that at the last AGM there was a clear wish to move to a Tuesday. It was also agreed that the December meeting should be changed to an informal social event where member's slides and videos could be shown on an informal basis to those interested. The January meeting would then become the AGM on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup>. It was noted that such changes would require an EGM to change the constitution, which was in need of revision in any case. The Chairman and Secretary agreed to arrange an EGM and give notice in the next Newsletter.

**Action: Chairman and Secretary**

**A.O.B.**

- 1) Mike Sutcliffe reported that Club member Richard Dale had received a BA (Hons) Design, Scientific and Natural History Illustration. It was proposed that the Secretary should write a letter of congratulation to Richard on behalf of the Club. This was agreed.

**Action: Secretary**

- 2) Mary Barritt asked if the Club had responded to the request from Colin Bradbury Ltd for data to assist with a Countryside Stewardship Application. The Secretary replied that he had prepared and despatched a letter, which reviewed the species present at each site and the likely effects of the proposed management changes. Although the letter was supportive of almost all the measures proposed, the grower had declined to make a contribution to the Bird Report, even though he could have claimed any payment back from the scheme.

**Announcements**

- 1) The Treasurer reminded those present that subscriptions were still outstanding from some members.
- 2) The Secretary relayed a request from the RSPB to report any colour dyed Black tailed Godwits, which might be seen. They have apparently been marked in Iceland.
- 3) Maurice Jones announced a guided walk on the sand dunes and beach opposite Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve on 30<sup>th</sup> July. Meeting at 09:30. Charge £1.
- 4) Alan Hinchliffe appealed for copy for the Club's Newsletter.
- 5) Maurice Jones announced that a new quarterly publication by Owen Roberts called North West Birding was available at a cost of £10 per year. Subscription forms were available from Maurice.

***There being no further business the meeting closed at approx. 21:15hrs***

*Stanley Park*

48 Greylags (46 adults, one brood of two young)  
44 Canadas  
1 *minima* race Canada  
2 Canada x Greylag  
1 Barnacle x Emperor (?) 'blue Snow Goose' type  
1 Swan Goose  
62 'Domestic Greylag'

**Ribble estuary**

*River Ribble, Frenchwood, Preston (by A6 bridge)*

1 Canada x Greylag  
7 'Domestic Greylag'  
1 'Domestic x Greylag'

*Ribble estuary, Clifton / Lea marshes (outside estuary count boundary)*

2 Greylags  
1 Pink-foot  
1 Swan Goose  
8 'Domestic Greylags'

*Fairhaven Lake*

4 Greylags  
161 Canadas (101 adults, 42 unaged, broods of six, five, three (two) and one)  
2 Pink-feet  
7 'Domestic Greylags (5 adults, one brood of two young)

*Southport Marine Lake (for info given movement to and from Fairhaven)*

183 Greylags  
140 Canadas  
1 Bar-headed Goose

**Notes**

On plumage differences the two presumed Barnacle x Emperor records involved different birds. The *minima* Canada Goose has been present in the Fylde for some time, moving between Stanley Park and Preesall; it has red colour rings on each leg which have now faded to pink.

If anybody has further feral geese records from the Fylde this summer, particularly Breeding records, then please let me have details and I will forward them to Slimbridge.

**Stephen Dunstan**

## NATURALISED GOOSE SURVEY IN THE FYLDE

This summer the WWT conducted a survey of naturalised geese, chiefly Canada and Greylag but covering all species. To ensure reasonable coverage of the Fylde, which has no WeBS counts away from the estuaries and Marton Mere, I visited sites where geese were likely or possible in summer.

The results of the survey are set out below, grouped into three broad geographical areas. Several sites were visited which held no geese, these are excluded. Any birds on the seaward ends of the Wyre and Ribble would be picked up by the estuary counts, and there are some freshwater sites in the very north of the recording area picked up by the Lancaster WeBS structure.

### **Wyre estuary / Over Wyre**

#### *Aggleby's Pools, Preesall*

4 Greylags  
13 Canadas (6 ads, one brood of seven young)

#### *Wilkinson's GP, Preesall*

36 Greylags (10 ads, creche of 16 young, brood of 10 young)  
6 Canadas  
1 Barnacle x Emperor (?) 'blue Snow Goose' type

#### *Copthorne fishery*

Up to 25 Greylags and 1 Canada Goose were seen from the Eagland Hill road.

#### *Upper Wyre estuary*

Survey visits did not produce any geese on the Wyre from Out Rawcliffe to Skippool. However a pair of Canadas with six young were seen on a casual visit to Skippool.

### **Marton Mere / Stanley Park**

#### *Marton Mere*

12 Canadas (3 adults, broods of seven and two young)  
c40 Barnacles in at dusk (zoo population c50 birds at present)  
1 Pink-foot

disappointment but you can't win them all. A Swallowtail butterfly obligingly settled to be photographed. A Camel spider ran past me and I, just about able to stand money spiders, followed it. Had I flipped my lid as this was some serious spider, able I was told to run at speeds of 20mph and to give a hospitalising bite swelling limbs to twice their normal size. It truly was a revolting tarantula size brown spider ugly in the extreme. I 'snapped' it twice and then returned to my senses making my way back to camp.

We packed up, thanked our hosts accordingly, and belatedly made our way to Sorbulak Lake our final birdwatching site. This large lake takes all the sewage from Almaty. We were told not to enter it, as if. Along the muddy edges were Little ringed Plovers, single Wood and Green Sandpipers and a party of 12 Terek Sandpipers a new species for me having dipped in Britain. They fed somewhat like Avocets, moving their bills from side to side and seemed rather erratic and hurried in their feeding mode. I have to say I liked them and look forward to seeing one again. Great crested Grebes bobbed up and down on the lake and flights of 60 Red crested Pochard and 150 Great Cormorants flew by. On the far bank, heat hazed almost out of recognition, roosted 120+ Dalmatian Pelicans. 4 imm Great black headed Gulls wandered about and 6 enormous billed Caspian Gulls were also seen here. Away from the lake were trip ticks of Marsh Harrier and not before time Corn Buntings. Rose coloured Starlings nest in their 1000's here and were constantly coming and going. Unfortunately our visit was curtailed by the increasing strength of the wind and we made our way to Almaty to do some souvenir shopping at a large department store not far from our hotel.

With bottles of Vodka ranging in price from 50p to £ 10, we were finding it difficult to use up all our tenge but the purchase of a watch helped me personally. Prices here were far cheaper than the goods on display in the hotel where a book on Kazakhstan priced at £25 was on sale here for £10. Spent up except for our final tips to our Kazakhstani leaders (which they were very reluctant to accept) we made our way back for our final dinner in a chic restaurant close to the hotel.

We left our hotel in the early hours of the morning and began our long journey home. Uneventful it wasn't. First to board the plane I got pulled because my boarding pass was not in order - you know like it was my fault. At Istanbul airport Paul and I both had to empty our tightly packed hand luggage at the X-ray machine. At Heathrow Paul had gone ahead and I again got pulled at Customs. I must have looked a likely candidate for something but after some straightforward questioning was allowed to go on my way. The carousel went round and round but where was my luggage - yes it was the last one off. The rest of the party had got theirs straightaway. At the car park Paul turned the ignition on, the engine burst into life but the car would not move. The drivers side back wheel was seriously stuck and despite repeated attempts to release it we finally had to call on the AA to get us going. Hand brake on and plenty of wet weather had combined to seize the brakes fast. Surely nothing else would delay us, but our return journey to Poulton coincided with a bank holiday weekend and it took over 7 hours to travel home.

Would I do it again - Is Dave Pitman a twitcher---Is Alan Dawe a seawatcher---Does Joan Hopkinson snort ( not cocaine that is )---Does Don Rusling like a drink.

B.Dyson  
25/7/00.

Dawn was decidedly chilly, but the larks were all singing and a Hoopoe was giving off its guttural Hoop Hoop call from which it gets its name. We all made for the vantage point overlooking the artesian well and waited. Several parties of Black Bellies flew by without landing. Feeding in the muddy edges were 3 Temminck's Stints and amongst the artemesia ground cover were pairs of Ruddy Shelduck. Stretching our vision we eventually saw 3 Houbara Bustards in the distance. These birds are good at turning themselves 'inside out' and they duly obliged. The black and white crest and the drooping black and grey frill distinguish them from other bustards. We searched in vain for reported Caspian Plovers. Up to 5 Desert Foxes were seen and a Sand Boa.

After an *al fresco* breakfast we made our way north east to the fringes of the Ili Delta and the regions Turanga forest. On the way we saw Camels, Sousliks, Hares, Tortoises, Demoiselle Cranes, Rose coloured Starlings, Lapwings, a Montague's Harrier, Black Kites, Jackdaws, R H Buntings, Isabelline and Lesser Grey Shrikes, Black Bellies and Larks galore. A stop at one of a number of roadside reed fringed pools was very productive. Here was a breeding colony of Black Terns, a single Ferruginous Duck, Gadwalls, Mallards, Ruddy Shelducks, Coots, Tufted Ducks, Black winged Stilts, Grey Herons, 3 flying Dalmatian Pelicans, Great Crested Grebes, Great White Herons, and 2 Common Terns.

Arriving at the ancient Turanga forest I was glad of the shade but pestered by insects. The trees were fairly spaced out and had distinctive gnarled barks not unlike Black Poplar or Ash. Our attention was immediately drawn by the alarm calls of a White winged Woodpecker. Through binoculars it became apparent why. A Whip snake was intent on finding the peckers nest but our intrusion had probably saved the day. The camouflage at distance was remarkable as it slithered between and over the crevices of the bark and was of the same colour.

Cuckoos, Rollers, Hoopoes, Lesser Kestrels, Jackdaws, Myna's, Azure Tit and a Golden Oriole were all birds we had seen previously but Turkestan Tit, very similar to the grey race of Great Tit, was new. So too was Eversmann's Stock Dove a smart bird but not as good as his Redstart. This bird is also known as Yellow-eyed Stock Dove. Maurice Jones may also remember Eversmann's Warbler now known as Arctic Warbler. Before my time I think.

Shikra a superb *accipter* was also new. But this was the place where a Saker falcon put on a super show as it flew by at speed several times. Considering this is a very large falcon with the wingspan of a Buzzard it was some sight. When you see one of these birds starting to soar, look out for the broad rounded wings which turn up at the end giving it a very characteristic shape. This particular bird was sandy brown in colour but they range through various shades of brown from red to grey. In complete contrast was a shade seeking sandy grey Saxaul Sparrow. Sporting a black crown and nape, large black bib and long ochre supercilium this was a very attractive sparrow and no doubt named after the Saxaul tree which is abundant in the Kazakhstan deserts.

Returning to camp we stopped once again at the same roadside pool we had spent time at in the morning. We added Little Grebe and Bittern. It was here I tested my umbrella, parasol fashion, against the boiling hot sun like a 19th century safari hunter. I might have looked a wally but felt 'pretty cool'. As we boarded the bus a Shikra was seen in a nearby tree and Paul took some film of it.

The following morning, our last day, saw us split up to maximise our chances of Caspian plover. We saw the Houbaras again and all the larks except Oriental. One by one we returned for a much needed breakfast and were not disappointed. A large bowl of porridge came with raisins, dried apricots, walnuts and cheese circles. This was followed by ham and cheese slices, bread and jam and washed down with a tankard of tea. We were ready for anything now which was just as well with what was to come.

Paul had seen 3 unidentified plovers pass over, as did John Randall a very competent birder from Plymouth. We had still not been joined by 3 members of the party including our leader. We could just make them out on the horizon and concluded they must be looking at the Caspians. We trudged out optimistically, our spirits waning temporarily as the missing three members headed our way. Leader Peter confirmed that they had been watching 3 Caspians and gave us directions offering to return with us. We could see he was knackered and sympathetically declined his offer. Big mistake, as we were unable to locate them. 200 Black Bellies and 3 Greater Sandplovers could not conceal our

else. Breakfast summoned, then we headed off down the Big Almaty valley but not before bidding our farewells to the friendly Observatory staff and unloading some more tenge.

Making our way down the Almaty valley we stopped briefly at the reservoir to exchange information and pleasantries with another group of birders led by the ever smiling (or is that just the way he looks) Algirdas Knystautas. They had just arrived on an internal flight from seeing 3 Relict Gulls. What they neglected to add at the time, as we were to learn later, was their campsite had been completely washed away in a flashflood and they had had to kip down on their bus.

We continued a little further before stopping beside the valleys burgeoning watercourse. Here we saw a vivid Blue Whistling Thrush, Grey Wagtail, Tree Pipits, Blue-capped Redstart and White breasted Dipper a race of Eurasian Dipper with white underparts from bill base to tail looking very smart indeed. Further on we saw Brown Dippers feeding young, and further still as we walked part way down the valley, tiny tinkling Red-fronted Serins flew across our path. We stopped once more, this time to wait for a Three-toed Woodpecker to appear in response to Victoria's drumming display on the side of a decaying tree stump. It didn't work; perhaps the bird had finally got wise to this invisible intruder. A Nutcracker eased the disappointment and Greenish Warblers were everywhere together with a sprinkling of Humes Yellow-browed Warblers.

Changing back to our coach we left Almaty to begin the north western leg of the trip. Travelling west we passed a continuous rookery in the low roadside trees which seemed to stretch for miles. There were thousands of them. We left the main road after about 100kms and headed north soon stopping for lunch near the village of Kopa. It was here, in a thicket of bushes and trees, that we saw our only Spotted Flycatchers; somebody counted 15. Also here were our first Calandra Larks with their lonnng pointed broad based wings, black underneath with a white trailing edge. When singing high above the black underparts on outstretched wings show up well, and their deep wingbeats in display are very distinctive. Common Rosefinch, Red-headed Bunting, Eastern Reed Warbler, more Greenish Warblers and a Griffon were also seen here.

Moving on through endless grassy steppe we stopped by the roadside overlooking a reedbed. 6 Garganey flew in joining Coot, Waterhen and Gadwall. The reeds held several grating Great Reed Warblers and Little Bitterns showed well clinging to the tops of the reed stems and making you realise just how light these birds are. 2 Monty's quartered the land behind. We continued along the endless straight road looking at desert landscape that seemed lifeless, until that is, you stepped into it. Larks were ten a penny and amongst them were Oriental Skylarks with buff trailing edges to their wings. Time was flashing by and we moved on. A shallow river had 12 nesting Black-winged Stilts and several Redshank, not forgetting Black headed Yellow Wagtails and 6 Ruddy Shelduck. Two parties of Demoiselle Cranes totalling 27 in number flew by.

Further north we visited the area known as Tamgaly Tas a famous site of interesting rock engravings dating from the early bronze age. People, animals, symbols and events were all chiselled out of the rock surface inviting your mind to wonder at the fascination of it all. But there were birds to be seen in this hilly area, and after photographing various artefacts we soon saw our target species the large noisy Eastern Rock Nuthatch, feeding equally large grown young. Chukars called and I forget what else. Back at the coach Bimaculated and Short toed Larks showed well at close range.

Off we set again and near the crossroads village of Konshengel the coach left the road on tracks across the steppe, passing some bactrian camels on the way. These we found out are farmed for their milk and wool. Our camp was all set up when we arrived shortly before dusk. Quick thinking Paul held back until he saw which tent bigggg Bill went into. We took the furthest away in view of our previous experience. (Should you ever read this bigggg Bill I have since changed my name.)

The facilities and food were remarkably good and I slept well. Waking to a chorus of the 'Blazing saddles' fireside camp scene I speedily opened the sealed tent and made my way to the ablutions (solitary tap) for a refreshing splash of cool water. Aaaaah. The toilet tents were what you would expect but the provision of an odour destroyer airspray was, I thought, a nice touch.

We returned for breakfast. Breakfast never tasted so good, but we were hungry for more birds. We set off in the 'troop carrier' climbing slowly to 10,930 ft to the rundown buildings of the Space Energy Research Station. We stopped several times, once for two Snowcocks that landed on the track 100 yards in front of us. Predictably they soon flew away, but with the aid of Steve Rookes Questar we saw them where they landed. Alpine Choughs circled over us and Hodgson's Mountain Finches flew by. Several Water Pipits showed well. By the time we reached the top the light snowfall was 3 inches deep and we were met by Red-billed Choughs. We spent 2 to 3 hours there and saw all our target species including a pair of stunning Guldenstadt's Redstarts - at least the male was. A cracking Altai (Himalayan) Accentor was beautifully feathered with flanks reminiscent of Rustic Bunting. Brown Accentor was less so but was still a smart bird if not quite as smart as Black throated Accentor which was the commonest accentor we saw. A Northern Wheatear made me realise just how large a breeding range this species has.

As the rising drifting clouds started to spill over the lower slopes we made our way back down the mountain side to visit another site near to the observatory. We walked to a Juniper covered valley through alpine flower meadows carpeted with Birds-eye Primroses and supported by Louseworts, Pansies and Wild onion. We passed several serenading Rubythroats before reaching our vantage point. Here we waited for birds to appear and were well rewarded. Unmistakeable White-winged Grosbeaks feeding on their staple diet of Juniper berries, 6 Red mantled Rosefinches, Red-fronted Serins, Mistle Thrushes, Oriental Turtle Doves, Hume's Yellow-browed and Sulphur-bellied Warblers and the delightful, nay fabulous Severtzov's Tit-Warblers which Steve Rooke drew in closer with a voice recording. Naughty perhaps but ambivalence made me glad he did. I don't know how to describe these birds. The field guide artist must have had an off day. Small, mouselike and ferreting in behaviour, their plumage was breathtaking. Multicoloured feathers shaded into one another creating a sparkling gem of a bird. The expression on our faces said it all. We were entranced. Ask Paul, he'll tell you.

Like breakfast, lunch never tasted so good and plenty of it too. But we were soon off to visit Bolshoy Almaty Lake. We arrived in pessimistic conditions the lake hardly visible in now you see me now you don't conditions. We set off along the dam wall and stopped by an area of Spruce woodland. Here we saw an Eversmann's Redstart yet another stunner and also Blue-capped Redstart. Goldcrests were calling all around and the cosmopolitan Goldfinch was also here. We were less lucky with Songar Tit, heard but not seen.

We continued along the muddy edges of the lake (reservoir) for some distance before making to the shingly shores of the feeder river. The cloud was still swirling about and I remained pessimistic about seeing our 'quarry'. We looked in vain at shades of grey. Grey cloud, grey shingle, grey melt water, grey sky, grey faces. Only the grey birds were missing. At this point our leader Victoria continued alone upstream, then just as the cloud lifted we could see her in the distance waving frantically. She had found the birds and the pair were now heading our way following the rivercourse. Ibisbills as seen on the BBC production 'Realms of the Russian Bear', the video of which I have just received for Father's day, (aaah I can hear you say) were now heading our way. One fell short of reaching us but the other circled around, preening in flight, and close enough to see barring on the tail feathers. It then did an encore, piping loudly, before joining up with its partner. Grey they may be but nothing can quite prepare you for the adrenaline surge such an enigmatic bird gives. This mountain wader with its curlew shaped dark red bill, black face, forehead and upper throat, long red legs and black chestband camouflaged well against the gravelly river edge. They started head bobbing and we watched them for some time, reluctant to leave, but 'glad' when the mist descended once more so we could leave without feelings of guilt.

Believe it or not dinner had never tasted so good (except yours my love). I took a shower, the plumbing having been 'fixed' by the resident pair of dishevelled maintenance men who had stayed on after the collapse of communism. Both refreshed and tired, I went to bed soon after the day's log. Bigggg Bill took his second sauna here but still remained Bigggg Bill.

Morning broke, rather like my back after a second night on that bed. We decided on a return to the Severtzov's site but were unlucky although they were seen by other members of the group elsewhere. Compensation came in close views of Eversmann's Redstart and repeat sightings of almost everything



in particular the primaries, and not forgetting the orangey coloured head. They fly at great speed with swept back wings and trailing tail streamers and are wonderful birds to watch as are all the Sandgrouse. Unfortunately they are declining in numbers and we only saw three. The supporting cast wasn't bad either for coming in to drink at the water hole were up to 10 Desert Finches, several Crested Larks and Rose coloured Starlings while in the surrounding scrub were Humes lesser Whitethroats and up to 10 Booted Warblers.

From here we returned the way we had come, but not before making one final stop to look for what I would say was the second prize of the day. Although I have seen them elsewhere Rufous Bushchats are one of those birds you can't have enough of. We saw 4 that appeared to be engaging in some sort of territorial dispute. They were of a race I had not seen before, the rufous colouring confined to the rump and tail contrasting well with the greyish brown upperparts. The long rufous fan shape tail is conspicuously tipped black and white and frequently spread and jerked up and down. Resembling a Giant Wren in posture, with that incredibly cocked up tail, they showed very well and were chasing about all over, not at all shylike, which has been my previous experience with the western race. Complete with long legs and a striking supercilia they are some bird. Also here were Desert Warblers and Isabelline Shrikes.

We continued to Almaty and on the outskirts were flagged down by a traffic cop waving his rainbow coloured baton. Our driver got out, crossed the road and produced his documents. I watched through binoculars and got the impression from the smirk across his face that the cop had had nothing better to do. We carried on passing ramshackle buildings, no two alike, and many with asbestos corrugated roofing. Street sellers lined the roadsides peddling their wares some with perhaps only a few bottles of pop to sell. They were of all ages selling anything they had. I was told some had never handled money and that bartering was still very much a way of life here. People were tilling their garden allotments and kids were playing with catapults. Horses were commonplace and it was sad to see one with its legs tethered together, severely restricting its movement. Others were being ridden, one quite wildly, wild west style, by a surly looking character showing off by being a prat. Nearer the city centre cans of oil were widely sold by the roadside, an indication no doubt of the state of the cars engines, many of which looked ready for the scrapyard as indeed did the buses. Mechanics here must need a degree in Heath Robinson techniques to get by.

We finally arrived at our transport changeover stop, switching to what looked like a windowed troop carrier. A short stop to buy beer supplies and away we went. Driving towards the Tien Shan Mountains it soon became apparent where the well to do people chose to live as we passed through a suburb that was clearly a cut above the rest. Good housing and status cars were prevalent here. After about twenty minutes on good roads uphill, we reached the rough, and I do mean rough track up to the Astronomical Observatory at 8860 ft which was to be our base for the next two nights. Hairpins, 45 degree slopes, the real threat of a landslide at any time made the journey an exhilarating one as we were tossed about from side to side. Even bigggg Bill was in danger of 'flooring' and Doris a game elderly lady from Carnoustie moved to a window seat to be hemmed in by someone. Steep hill signs on the way up were about as necessary as a freezer in Antarctica.

A late evening local rekky was aborted when it started to rain heavy but it did bring glimpses of the gems to come. We took dinner, contributed to the day's log, tried to have a shower but was plagued by plumbing problems, then retired to bed. It was to be the worst night's sleep I had. Altitude sleeplessness together with the creakiest bed I have ever laid on made sure of that.

Morning couldn't come quick enough. We were all out at the agreed time met by a light snowfall and a glorious blue sky. By now our co-leader was sporting a baseball cap, had several days facial hair and looked far removed from his Heathrow debut. We set off along the valley and soon came across our first Himalayan Rubythroat. Believe me they look as good as their name. I was drooling. But soon I was to hear a sound unlike anything I had ever heard before. You could tell it was distant; its voice carried as if hanging in the air. It had the wailing cry of a Diver but oh such quality, and you knew it belonged here. The calls were repeated for some time and we finally found the bird silhouetted against the skyline. It carried on calling and was joined in chorus with another - dreamlike. It was a Himalayan Snowcock and it was all ours.

We eventually reached the Red Canyon a spectacular geological feature close to the Chinese border where our target species was Mongolian trumpeter Finch. It was red hot and birds were thin on the ground. A circling Black Stork obviously nested in the canyon as no doubt did the several Ravens we saw. A Black Kite could be seen low down and six MTF's flew past us never to be seen again although another did show briefly but the views were poor. Despite spending some time there they did not show again and we made our way back to the coach for lunch.

We returned the way we had come but soon made a stop to see a breeding pair of Grey headed Buntings which despite their name were a dapper species well worth seeing. Shorelarks were also present here as was the ubiquitous Isabelline Wheatear a pair of which were feeding fledged young, some of which returned to their nest holes as I approached them. Moving on we passed several Long legged Buzzards before making a further stop to see Desert Warbler. Once again we hit upon a pair feeding fledgelings and rightly or wrongly I could not resist taking some photo's at close quarters. Shorelarks again showed well.

Our last stop was at a roadside 'tavern' - if you could only see it - where we had a beer or two and also took some back with us to Ash Grove. This turned out to be a fortuitous stop as a Short toed Eagle flew right over us.

Another filling meal ensured we did not go hungry and after listening for and hearing Scop's Owl we retired to bed. After another good night's sleep I was again woken by the grunting noises or should that be nose of bigggg Bob. I quickly had a wash, got dressed and went birding. Paul heard a Locustella Warbler which we took to be a Grasshopper Warbler. Our leader thought it may well have been a Lanceolated Warbler on voice recognition, but they are very alike, and the bird did not give itself up for critical plumage analysis. ID remained inconclusive.

We returned for breakfast and were served with two fried eggs on bread with sardines, gherkins and peas. This was followed by chocolate bars and what seemed like ice cream wafers but without the ice cream, more bread and the most delicious blackcurrant jam I have ever tasted. Coffee or tea finished off the most bizarre breakfast I can ever remember having had. However the cheerfulness and hospitality of the owners did not go unnoticed and we gladly chipped in for a whip-round, before saying our farewells. After all, how else were we going to unload all that tenge with nothing to spend it on.

Back on the bus we returned to Almaty but not without making several stops on the way. Our first came within a few miles, where a pair of Desert Wheatears showed well by the roadside. A quick scan also produced Tawny Pipit, Lesser short toed Lark and 4 Desert Warblers. Moving on we passed several pairs of Black bellied Sandgrouse sitting by the edge of the road and numerous desert mammals. Common Sandpipers were present along the rippling river of a gorge where a Steppe Eagle passed serenely by. Further on Lesser grey Shrikes were obvious perched on the telephone wires; there were 7 within the space of a few hundred yards. The abundant insect life particularly beetles were clearly prime targets for shrike meat. Most of those I observed simply 'dropped' on to their prey but occasionally hovering was noted.

We passed through a small town and took a right turn back into thinly populated farmland/desert. A male Montague's Harrier drew our attention and a Short toed Eagle passed overhead. We took this opportunity to stop awhile as other birds came into view. A Lapwing, our first of the trip, was probably at one of its most south easterly locations. Three Pied Wagtails and a Little ringed Plover made me feel I was back home until someone shouted Greater Sandplover. At this point we all alighted from the coach and scoped them for there turned out to be 4. Time was at a premium and we were urged by our leader to return to the coach in order to allow enough time to see our chief 'target' of the day.

We soon arrived at a classic Sandgrouse site with the obligatory running water pump. Several Black bellied Sandgrouse dropped in but were wary of our presence and did not hang around. We did not have to wait much longer for our star bird. A superb Pallas's Sandgrouse flew in but did not land. It circled round us at close range and detail such as the spotted axillaries could be picked out easily. They are the sleekest of Sandgrouse, far less bulky than Black bellied and with very pale underwings,

But enough of that. Once out of the suburbs the birding started to pick up as we made our way to the Charyn river yellow canyon. A twenty minute stop by tree-lined farmland next to a canal gave us our first real taste of what was to come. The unmistakable song of a Cetti's, incessantly singing Nightingales, the murmured song of a Blyth's reed warbler, new to me, but which Paul had wavelonged on to from previous experience of the species. A stunning male Golden Oriole showed well for everyone to see and with Leica, Kowa and Swarovski scopes to look through the views were riveting. Tree Sparrows, Penduline Tit, Red headed Buntings, Cuckoos, Bee-eaters, Hoopoe, Lesser grey and Isabelline Shrikes all soon followed.

Back on the bus we started to pick out Isabelline Wheatears a species we saw every day except in the high mountains. A very distinctive upright gait and overall sandy colouring combined with a black loreal stripe that continued seamlessly into the bill, made this species instantly recognisable. In display they would fan their tail and drop their legs while giving a song that included many clear whistles. A Quail was flushed by the bus and gave some good flight views. A Sand Martin colony of about 40 birds of the race *diluta* was just set back from the roadside and a Long legged Buzzard patrolled nearby. Rose coloured Starlings were also beginning to show including a flock of 50.

We stopped for lunch in the Kokpek valley and I for one was pleasantly surprised by the packed lunch. It consisted of unleavened and pitta bread with slices of cheese and beef garnished with gherkins — very filling. Also a large juicy tomato, a new boiled potato and a hard boiled egg followed by various yoghurts. Large bottles of gassy or plain water were there for our consumption as was a limited supply of Coca Cola. If I had known I would not have taken my one litre stainless steel flask weighing 1kilogram with me, and Paul would not have bought two water bottles specially for the trip.

After lunch we did some birding in the valley. However the first wildlife I noticed were hundreds of Black-veined White butterflies and a single Large Copper butterfly. Sadly both these creatures are extinct in Great Britain despite repeated attempts to reintroduce them. Several Red headed Buntings were singing and I thought I was back in Lesbos for they sound just like Black headed Buntings. Pied Wheatears began to show and Chukars could be heard calling. In the sky a Golden Eagle appeared and was mobbed persistently by a Saker Falcon. Gripping stuff if a bit distant. We were however to get much closer views of a Saker later in the week. Two Griffons floated effortlessly by. Rock Bunting and White capped Bunting were also seen here as was a Blue rock Thrush. Thunder and lightning persuaded us to return to the coach and we made our way to Ash Grove guest house by the Charyn river where we were to stay for two nights.

Outside the guest house a lagoon had been created and harboured a thriving frog population which the following morning provided breakfast for a visiting Black Stork. Nightingales were numerous and Greenish and Blyth's reed warblers were also present. A Kingfisher was busy catching food for its nestlings and a Hobby sat 'waiting' in a tree. A hearty dinner ended the day before everyone collapsed into bed.

I slept well and awoke at 06.00am to the snoring of Bob Edwards a bigggg Brummie who we had to share with for two nights together with Mike Inskip his companion. A third midlander Graham Mant was in single accommodation and was a good laugh. An avid twitcher with nearly 500 on his British list, his claim to fame together with Mike Inskip was to find the Needle-tailed Swift at Blithefield reservoir. An early morning walk gave us some of the previous night's birds, plus among others Tawny Pipit, Golden Oriole, Turtle Dove, Whitethroat and Eastern Whitethroat a bird we had earlier mistook for Humes Lesser Whitethroat because of its striking similiarity.

After breakfast we made our way to the Charyn Red Canyon a distance of about 60 kilometres. On the way it was impossible to miss the abundant Great Gerbils and many Sousliks as they moved between burrows, safe havens from the Long legged Buzzards and occasional Steppe Eagle. A Goitred Gazelle far out on the steppes was the only one we were to see. A Steppe grey Shrike and pairs of Black bellied Sandgrouse were by the roadside and Isabelline Wheatears were everywhere. A brief stop allowed us to watch Lesser Kestrels at close quarters where two Shorelarks also showed well and a distant Desert Fox roamed about. A dark phase Booted eagle put in an appearance.

## KAZAKHSTAN 18 - 26 MAY 2000.

It was touch and go whether or not I would be going alone or Paul Slade would be going with me. We were to travel down to Heathrow on Wednesday night 17 May 2000 and Paul had still not received his visa by the 15th. It finally came late morning on the 16th much to our relief.

We set off early in case of mishap and arrived at Heathrow's terminal 3 at about 03.00am having stopped en route for a break. The presence of Millwall fans, who had just been beaten by Wigan in the 2nd division play-offs, had hastened our departure from the motorway service station. A heavy police presence suggested that there had already been some trouble. However I don't know which would have been worse, an altercation with the Millwall fans or having to spend 4 hours at the terminal. What a dump. Two and a half hours later we were met by our co-leader Peter Clement who turned out to be a good birder but mathematically challenged when it came to count them. Peter worked for English Nature and is a member of the BBRC. He had been recruited by 'Naturetrek' at short notice to be our co-leader.

There were no absentees and the ten of us, including the leader, left on time. We flew Turkish Airlines to Istanbul where we had to endure a further four and a half hours wait before joining our connecting flight to Almaty the capital of Kazakhstan which is approximately 1,100 miles due north of Delhi. Both flights were almost full but standards were good and the leg room was surprisingly generous. Unfortunately I find it difficult to sleep on flights whereas Paul could sleep for England. That by the way is not all he could do for England! The total distance from London via Istanbul was 6,470 km's or 4,043 miles.

We arrived at Almaty at 02.40am on the 19th May there being a six hour time difference. We quickly got our luggage but then came the customs formalities. If Kazakhstan is to promote tourism then improving their act here is something they need to work on. Passport control was like something out of the dark ages. Everyone had to go one at a time and stand in front of a booth that was reminiscent of a Punch and Judy stand. On the other side, low down almost out of sight, was an expressionless woman official who said nothing from start to finish but stared at you several times presumably trying to confirm your identity from the passport photo. Now I ask you, would you own up to being that person in the mugshot if she were to challenge it. It was all I could do to stop myself bursting out laughing. Next came a customs official wanting to know what currency we had and at the same time exchanging small talk with what looked like a hanger-on. He needed sorting but all I could do was grin and bear it. After passing the taxi touts and the odd beggar we finally got on the bus and made our way to our overnight stay.

Unfortunately our overnight stay lasted just two and a half hours before breakfast was served at 07.00am. Knackered doesn't begin to describe how I felt but it is surprising how the prospect of seeing new birds kickstarts you back into life. After exchanging our American dollars for Kazakhstani tenge we were ready for the road. We were met by Dr Victoria Kovshar our local tour leader and ornithologist, a very confident leader whose itinerary we were to follow. After buying maps of the area we were to visit, we boarded our comfortable 30 seat air conditioned Mercedes coach which was to be our transport for all but the ascent up the Tien Shan Mountains. It proved to be an excellent vehicle for birding, complete with fridge, and a very good driver and believe me he needed to be when the state of the roads became apparent.

There were more potholes in the roads than holes in a sieve. Roadworks consisted of filling in the potholes. Apart from a baby steamroller and some pneumatic drills everything else was done by elbow grease. Overtaking was an experience. Not only had the driver to watch out for the vehicle he was passing but also make sure he missed the big, in some cases very big potholes, not forgetting the odd stubborn horse that may be resting in the centre of the road. Overtaking was done on the inside or outside depending where the potholes were. This tour would have been a great test for image stabiliser binoculars.