



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

www.fyldebirdclub.freeuk.com

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2001

Welcome to my first (and possibly last) edition as caretaker editor of the club newsletter. I hope there is something of interest to all members inside.

I have tried to get some fresh contributors and pieces which are a mix of local information and members' travels. I would particularly like to thank:

- Ron and Sue Bedford for their entertaining and informative piece on Fair Isle
- Chris Bradshaw for allowing use of his Biscay trip report, and Maurice Jones for providing this account
- Jenny Earle at WWT Slimbridge for providing updates to Whooper life stories to make the Darvic ringing article more informative
- Paul Ellis for maintaining the website and collating recent reports at club meetings which underpin the Recent Sightings

Recently I have been made aware of a couple of criticisms of articles in newsletters. The first of these is that those who have tried to fill newsletter with articles have been acting as though they are experts on areas which other members may know more about. There are always new members who are eager to learn about what some of us take for granted, so I hope that those making this criticism will bite the bullet and have a go at writing some stuff on local birds themselves.

The second thread of criticism is that some articles state opinions with which the reader has disagreed. This is a forum for the opinions of members, so if there is something you don't agree with why not put pen to paper and have a good natured discussion of the issues involved.

Every member of the club can bring something to the newsletter. Those whose birding is largely abroad can write trip reports. Out and out twitchers can write about their best and worst experiences. Newer members can describe their local patches. I hope everyone feels able to get involved.

Stephen Dunstan

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LOOKING BACK....

RECENT REPORTS

This review covers the months of October and November. Some of the earlier sightings featured in the last newsletter. All records are subject to verification before publication in the Fylde and Lancashire Bird Reports.

Seabirds

In the absence of records from diehard seawatchers the only diver noted was a Red-throat at Rossall on 28th October. The last Gannets reported were 10 at Rossall Point on 31st October.

The only Leach's Petrel after the September gales was at North Shore on 8th October.

Heron

Two Little Egrets at Warton Bank on 16th November provides further evidence of wintering on the North Ribble marshes. Elsewhere one flew over Poulton industrial estate on 10th October, with it or another at Fluke Hall on the 19th. At least one Bittern was at Marton Mere in November.

Swans

The first Whooper was over Mythop on 6th October. Up to 92 were feeding with 10 Bewick's at Fluke Hall or Hy-Fly, Preesall by the end of November. A group feeding on fields at Peel, Ballam peaked at 54 Whoopers and 12 Bewick's in mid November with smaller numbers of both species earlier at nearby Ballam. Up to 300 Whoopers on Longton Marsh could be seen from the Naze, but few were reported on the Fylde side of the Ribble.

Geese

Weekly roost counts on Pilling Sands showed a steady flock of 6-7000 Pink-feet during October, this dropped below 5000 birds in early November but was up to almost 9000 by the end of that month. It would be interesting to know how much of the increase was due to birds returning from Norfolk or whether Scottish birds coming south was responsible. Birds were again seen feeding in the Weeton area in small numbers.

At least two Dark-bellied and one Pale-bellied Brent were seen in Morecambe Bay and at Barnaby's Sands. Up to four Barnacle Geese were seen in the Pink-foot roost, and were also recorded at several Over Wyre sites and the Fleetwood goose fields. Two Greenland White-fronts were at Fleetwood on November 4th, with a European bird Over Wyre at the end of the month.

Ducks

Presumably last year's returning Green-winged Teal was at Cockersands on at least 8th November. Up to 1500 Pintails were in one flock off Fairlawn Road, Lytham in mid-November. Three Gadwall at the Mere were the only ones recorded in the period.

The Ferruginous Duck unexpectedly decamped from Leighton Moss to Fairhaven on 20th October, thereafter it moved between Fairhaven and Marton Mere throughout the period.

The small female Scaup lingered on the large pond at Pilling Lane Ends at the beginning of October, with a drake here on Nov 5th and a different female was on the small pond here at the end of that month. A good run of females and immatures at Fairhaven peaked at five (three female and two first winter males) on November 5th, with two still at the end of the month. Capping a very good autumn for this species a female was at the Mere on 27th October with two females on the sea off Rossall the next day.

The information concerns of spouses of women with breast cancer: patients' and spouses' perspectives

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The information concerns of spouses of women with breast cancer: patients' and spouses' perspectives

A user-centred study employing focus group methodology was conducted in the United Kingdom in order to establish the key information concerns of spouses of women with breast cancer from both patients' and spouses' perspectives. Four unstructured focus group discussions were convened, three with women with breast cancer ($n = 11$, $n = 7$ and $n = 12$) and one with spouses ($n = 9$). The discussions were audio-taped and transcribed in full. All transcripts were analysed manually using theme analysis and considered patterns common to the data. Themes were established and corresponding quotations used to support all themes. Emergent themes were grouped into the following categories: information needs of spouses; sources of information for spouses; and family information. Several important points emerged within each of these categories and these are discussed. Validity was established by participant evaluation of the findings. Findings clearly indicate the key information concerns of spouses from patients' and spouses' perspectives. These findings are of value to health care professionals and have a number of nursing implications. The study also highlights particular areas where further research and development are needed.

Keywords: breast cancer, information, spouse, health care professional

INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among women in the United Kingdom (Forrest 1986, Austoker 1990, 1994). Nearly 30 000 cases are diagnosed each year

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Two Long-tailed Ducks were off Rossall on 27th October and 5th November, with a popular first winter drake on the large pond at Pilling Lane Ends from at least 11th. Up to 13 Goldeneyes were on the Lane Ends ponds with the Long-tailed Duck and Scaup. There were seven Red-breasted Mergansers on the ICI reservoir in late October, the only Goosander reported was at Little Singleton on 10th October.

Raptors

There were some interesting late reports of summer visiting raptors early in the period. A Hobby was seen at Preesall Flashes on the remarkable date of 29th October. Also an immature Marsh Harrier was still at Warton Bank on 7th October.

A Peregrine was roosting on a central Blackpool church in mid October, and one roosted regularly on pylons at Staining with up to three birds on the coast at Lane Ends. Two Buzzards were at Todderstaffe Hall on 11th November, there remains no evidence of nesting in this area but birds are increasingly regular outside the summer months.

The only Hen Harrier reported was a ringtail which passed through Marton Mere on 22nd October. Merlin were noted from Warton Bank (two), Lane Ends, Blackpool Airport, Skippool and Staining.

Rails, crakes, gamebirds

Up to 11 Water Rail were recorded at Marton Mere, with at least four still at or near the breeding site at Warton Bank.

Waders

Although it was not a vintage year for Curlew Sandpipers small passage continued deep into October. Three were at Naze Point on the 12th, five juveniles at Warton Bank, singles at Skippool on the 14th and Lane Ends on the 19th, two at Naze Point on 20th and finally two at Clifton Marsh on the 21st.. Little Stints were extremely thin on the ground, the only reports received to date being juveniles at Warton Bank on 14th October and Clifton Marsh on the 21st.

Greenshank lingered in larger than normal numbers for late autumn. November birds were at Bank End and Cockersands and there were several reports of up to three birds at a number of sites in October, and five at Little Singleton. Spotted Redshanks were recorded in the period at Bank End, Cockersands, Lane Ends and Little Singleton. A few Ruff were lingering, most notably 12 at Warton Bank on 14th October and four still at Bond's Farm, Pilling at the end of November.

Woodcock were reported from Lytham St Annes NR and, more unusually, Anchorsholme primary school. Two Jack Snipe were at Marton Mere on 21st October and also at Lytham St Annes NR on 1st November, at the former site one was also seen going south on a visible migration watch on 6th October. The only Whimbrel reported was a high autumn count of 21, at Little Singleton on 1st October.

Gulls and Skuas

Up to four Med Gulls (three adults and a first winter) were reported in the Cockersands area, though not at the same time. Up to four (two adults and two second winters) were also noted at the Mere. Elsewhere singles were recorded at Clifton Marsh, Eagland Hill, Naze Point and Skippool. There were 1600 Common Gulls at the Mere on 16th November.

An adult Glaucous Gull was reported from Fleetwood Tip at the end of October. A very good total of 85 Little Gulls flew south west out of Morecambe Bay after onshore winds on 31st October. The end of a good run of Great Skua records were singles at Blackpool Prom in early October and at Rossall Point on 3rd November.

Terns

and it is estimated that out of every 12 women, one will develop breast cancer at some time in her life (Austoker 1994). Information has been found to be a necessary prerequisite to informed decision-making for women with breast cancer (Luker *et al.* 1995, Bilodeau & Degner 1996). It has also been found to aid coping in those with breast cancer (Harrison-Woermke & Graydon 1993). Information has also been found to lower anxiety and distress in those referred to a breast clinic (Michie *et al.* 1996). Breast cancer, however, does not only effect the psychological status of patients. According to family systems theory (Minuchin 1974, Steinglass 1987) healthy members of a family are affected by the illnesses of other family members. Cancer therefore not only impacts on the individual but also impacts on family members. Lewis (1990) suggested that both spouses and children experience the demands of the disease in a manner equal to that experienced by the patients. Consequently, it has been argued that the spouses of individuals with cancer have substantial information needs (Meissner *et al.* 1990).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The information needs of women with breast cancer are well established (Harrison-Woermke & Graydon 1993, Luker *et al.* 1995, 1996, Bilodeau & Degner 1996). Prior to diagnosis women want to know whether they have cancer (Shaw *et al.* 1994) and also want procedural information regarding diagnostic tests (Kelly & Winslow 1996). Around the time of diagnosis, women want information about the likelihood of cure, information about treatment options and information about the stage of their disease (Luker *et al.* 1995, Bilodeau & Degner 1996). As women embark upon therapeutic regimens their highest area of need is treatment information (Harrison-Woermke & Graydon 1993). At 21 months post-diagnosis women still want information about the likelihood of cure but also now want information about risks to other family members (Luker *et al.* 1996). The information needs of women with breast cancer therefore are not static but change with time.

Spouses have been found to play a crucial role in the individual's ability to respond to and cope with the stress of living with breast cancer (Northouse 1981, Bloom 1982, Borwell 1996). Lichtman *et al.* (1987) found that positive relationships existed between spousal support and reduced psychological distress among women with breast cancer. Moreover, the psychological reactions of the spouses of women with breast cancer have been found to be similar to the reactions of the individuals themselves (Baider & Kaplan De-Nour 1984, Northouse & Swain 1987). Northouse & Swain (1987) found that there were no significant differences on measures of mood disturbances and distress levels between 50 women with breast cancer and their partners 3 days after surgery and 1 month later. Baider & Kaplan De-Nour (1984) found that the

levels of adjustment of 20 women with breast cancer were similar to their spouses' levels of adjustment and total distress levels.

Several researchers have found that family members of individuals with cancer (Wright & Dyck 1984, Derdarian 1989, Hull 1989, Kalayjian 1989, Meissner *et al.* 1990, Northouse & Peters-Golden 1993, Kristjanson & Ashcroft 1994) and breast cancer (Northouse 1989, Hilton 1993) do need information. Hull (1989) argued that the families of individuals with cancer regarded information about their relatives' conditions as most supportive and Kalayjian (1989) found that the wives of male individuals with cancer considered providing useful information to be an effective nursing intervention.

Derdarian (1989) found that male individuals with cancer and their wives needed similar types and similar amounts of information in four categories: disease, personal, family and social categories. Northouse & Peters-Golden (1993) conducted a review of the literature and suggested that the spouses of individuals with cancer need information about the type of cancer, the treatment options and the side-effects of treatments. Kristjanson & Ashcroft (1994 p. 11) also conducted an extensive literature review and argued that the families of individuals with cancer want information about the individual's 'diagnosis, prognosis, treatment options and expected course of recovery'.

Northouse (1989) found that the spouses of women with breast cancer indicated that information helped them cope with the breast cancer experience. Hilton (1993) found that most of the 35 families in her study wanted to be informed about breast cancer. More specifically, they wanted to know what to expect in hospital and wanted to know the patient's prognosis and how they could prevent recurrence.

Bilodeau & Degner (1996) found that women newly diagnosed with breast cancer preferred verbal, interpersonal sources of information to written sources of information. The authors also found that the most preferred source of information was verbal information from physicians and nurses. Lewis (1990) argued that the families of individuals with cancer also need verbal information from health care professionals and need opportunities to ask health care professionals questions. Nevertheless, several researchers have argued that the information needs of family members of individuals with cancer (Stedeford 1981, Bond 1982a, 1982b, Kalayjian 1989, Meissner *et al.* 1990) are frequently overlooked by the health care professionals.

Several researchers have assessed the way in which information flows between women with breast cancer and their family members (Northouse 1981, Issel *et al.* 1990, Hilton 1993, 1994, 1996, Chalmers *et al.* 1996). Hilton (1993 p. 96) looked at the ways in which families coped with breast cancer and argued that 'talking was a prime way

Tern passage continued into October. There were 13 Sandwich Terns at North Shore on the 7 and three on the 8th. On the latter date our share of a national Black Tern influx was eight past Rossall and one on Preston Dock.

Owls

Barn Owls were reported from Division Lane and Lytham Moss radar station. A Long-eared Owl seen from Burglar's Alley on 20th October was a good find away from Marton Mere.

Passerines

A Kingfisher was reported on the Wyre at Little Singleton on several dates, perhaps the same bird was noted downriver at Burglar's Alley. A Hoopoe was reported showing well at Walker Lane, Fulwood on 8th November but was unfortunately not seen again.

No November Swallow reports were received, the last being on 27th October.

A probable Water Pipit was seen twice on the ditches behind Lane Ends seawall on two dates in mid-November, but was typically elusive. A late first winter Yellow Wagtail was at Clifton Marsh on 21st October, it was not of one of the eastern races.

Stonechat reports consisted of three at Cockersands on 28th October and a pair at Blackpool Airport on the 5th of that month. More unusual was a female Black Redstart on the sea wall west of Fluke Hall on 26th November. The last Wheatears reported were at Rossall Point on 20th October and Bank End on 24th. A late Whinchat was at Rossall School on 20th October.

Thrush movements were less substantial than those recorded elsewhere in the county. Fieldfare movement included 65 south in one flock over Warton Bank on 15th, three at Warton Bank on 20th. Most Redwing passage recorded was heard at night.

Ed Stirling's remarkable run of passerines in deepest Blackpool continued with a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Watson Rd railway bushes on 2nd October. A Pied Flycatcher lingering at Watson Road Park to 2nd November became the latest ever in Lancashire.

In mid October some very large Jay movements were noted, particularly in the south of the recording area. Eight moved west over St Annes on the 11th, four were at Naze Point on the 12th, a remarkable 40 moved west over Warton Bank on the 13th and nine moved west over Wesham and three over Fairhaven on the 14th. Five birds presumably off passage were in bushes on the boundary of Warton aerodrome on the 14th. In late November Jays were still at unusual sites including Marton Mere and Stalmine Moss.

A Hooded Crow on Newhouses Lane, Lytham Moss on 9th November was presumably the bird seen earlier on several dates at Fairhaven. There were 1300 Jackdaw at Mythop on 2nd November en route to a roost beyond Presse Hall. A Nuthatch was seen in Woodland Gardens throughout the period. There were four Goldcrests at Marton Mere on 6th October, with singles at a couple of sites in November.

Five Crossbills over Rossall Point on the morning of 1st November were notable. Nine Siskins were at Fairhaven on the 25th, with smaller numbers at several other sites. Twite were generally thin on the ground, but were reported at Cockersands (up to nine), Fluke Hall, and Rossall where there were 30 briefly on 28th October. A Bullfinch at Marton Mere on 21st October was unusual so far west in the Fylde. Brambling were recorded at Fluke Hall (up to ten), Warton Bank (three) and Lane Ends (a couple of migrants). Up to 200 Chaffinches were at Warton Bank in November. The only Redpoll reported was at Marton Mere on 6th October.

A Lapland Bunting was in the Cockersands stubble fields on 10th October. The only Snow Bunting reported was also at Cockersands, on 28th October.

of informing others and supporting others'. Maguire (1981) also argued that women who were able to communicate with and confide in their spouses and older children coped much better than those who could not confide in their families. Nevertheless, Hilton (1996) found that some families talked little about the cancer in order to protect themselves and other family members. Northouse (1981) also found that in a sample of 30 women with breast cancer 19% said they could not discuss their concerns with their family members because they wanted to protect their families from additional worry. Hilton (1993) argued that families, however, experience difficulties with this lack of communication. Chalmers *et al.* (1996) also argued that women with breast cancer acted as the 'gatekeepers' to information for their daughters. The authors argued that these women with breast cancer were the most important, potential source of information for daughters.

Summary of literature reviewed

Cancer impacts on all family members (Lewis 1990) and consequently spouses have similar information needs to individuals with cancer (Meissner *et al.* 1990). The literature suggests that the families of individuals with cancer receive little information from health care professionals. Moreover, it indicates that although the individual herself is the most important potential source of information for the family (Chalmers *et al.* 1996), there may be poor communication among members in order to protect themselves and each other (Hilton 1996).

Although extensive literature exists concerning the information needs of women with breast cancer, few studies have especially concentrated on the key information concerns of their spouses. We were unable to identify any studies that focused specifically on the information concerns of spouses from both patients' and spouses' perspectives. Much of the 'family' literature concerning spouses has concentrated on the role they play in the breast cancer experience and the impact that breast cancer has on them. Most of the studies that have resulted in findings related to information have been conducted with diverse samples with a range of different cancer-sites and were therefore not specific to breast cancer. Consequently, there are some interesting gaps in the literature.

Study aims

The aims of the study were:

- 1 To explore the key information concerns of spouses of women with breast cancer from the patients' perspectives.
- 2 To explore the key information concerns of spouses of women with breast cancer from the spouses' perspectives.
- 3 To generate research hypotheses for future testing.

METHOD

Design

A qualitative approach was employed in order to study in depth, the experiences and views of both women with breast cancer and their spouses. Focus group methodology (Vaughn *et al.* 1996) was adopted for several reasons. Firstly, focus groups are extremely useful for conducting exploratory research (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990, Vaughn *et al.* 1996). Secondly, the group interaction within focus group discussions produces data and insights not otherwise obtainable (Morgan 1988). Finally, the interaction between participants replaces the interaction between participant and interviewer. The focus group method therefore enables participants to set their own agenda for discussion and is thus user-centred.

Krueger (1994 p. 78) argues that 'it is unwise to mix gender in focus groups, particularly if the topic of discussion is experienced differently by each sex'. Four single-sex focus group discussions were therefore convened, three with women who had experienced breast cancer and one with the spouses of women who had experienced breast cancer. The three female groups were age-stratified in order to achieve relatively homogeneous groups.

Sampling and recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to recruit subjects. Participants were selected on the basis of predetermined characteristics relevant to the study. The selection criteria were that participants either (a) had experienced breast cancer within the previous 10 years or (b) had a wife who had experienced breast cancer within the previous 10 years. Potential subjects were identified from a Sheffield-based support group for women with breast cancer. Permission was granted by the support group chairperson to contact potential subjects. All members were contacted by letters inviting them and/or their spouses to participate in the focus group discussions.

Materials

Consent and anonymity form

All participants were asked to sign a consent form. This form required participants to grant the moderator (CR) permission to audio-tape the discussion. Participants were required to sign an anonymity clause, which stated that each participant would refrain from discussing the comments of other group members outside the discussion arena. The form was also signed by the moderator and assistant moderator and offered the participants guarantees of discretion and anonymity.

THE MONTH AHEAD...

SNOW BUNTINGS

There are some memorable 'feature birds' of Fylde winters. Bitterns at Marton Mere, Hen Harriers on the North Ribble marshes and of course the wild geese. Less dramatic but equally attractive are the Snow Buntings which winter on our beaches and coastal marshes. This article is intended to help newer birders in the club become familiar with the best sites for this species in our area.

Numbers of Snow Buntings in the Fylde vary from year to year. Last winter was unfortunately one of the worst in recent memory for this species, with only a handful of passage birds reported. Very occasionally large influxes are noted, as in 1984 when a spectacular flock at Rossall peaked at 73 birds and there were even 13 inland at Marton Mere. A typical year will bring at least a couple of single figure flocks in temporary residence on our coast.

Probably the most regular site is Rossall Point. Parking at the car park opposite the Sea Cadets Hall and walking the sea wall round the length of the golf course can be productive, but birds also favour the grassy area inland of the sea wall south of the golf course adjacent to Chatsworth Avenue. This area down to Rossall School has also had wintering Black Redstart on occasion in recent years. The level of disturbance in this area means birds can range very widely so persistence can be beneficial.

The sandy beaches between Fairhaven Lake and St Annes has also been a reliable site in the past, there is ample car parking at either end of this stretch of beach. Although Shorelarks are much less regular than Snow Buntings in the Fylde this stretch of beach is also the best chance to find one of these attractive larks. However in recent winters the Snow Buntings appear to have become less reliable on this stretch of beach, perhaps because of the high disturbance from dog walkers but possibly also because excavators have been used to regularly clean the beach. An alternative on this stretch of coast is Lytham beach between the lifeboat station and Fairlawn Road, where large quantities of seaweed get washed up on the beach and this attracts insects which the buntings feed on.

The south shore of Morecambe Bay from Cockersands round to Fluke Hall can be very productive for Snow Buntings, particularly Cockersands and the sea wall at Pilling Lane Ends although access to other stretches is less straightforward.

There are no great secrets to watching Snow Buntings. Walking along the tideline keeping a close eye on the stretch ahead is likely to bring success where birds are present. If time in the field is at a premium check out the club website to see if there are any birds using an accessible but relatively undisturbed site (e.g. the beach opposite Lowther Gardens) where they can often remain in situ for several days at a time.

If you are lucky enough to find some Snow Buntings this winter please pass on your records at club meetings. If possible age and sex any flock you see if you can, as it helps give an indication of turnover of birds. Juvenile males and females may require very good views, but adult males should always be readily apparent.

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TRAVEL

THE BAY OF BISCAY AND THE PICOS DE EUROPA

Maurice recently went on a Birdwatching Breaks recce, and kindly forwarded the trip report for inclusion in the newsletter. This account is published with the full blessing of Chris Bradshaw, the author and recce leader. Thanks to Chris for permission to use the piece.

Bay of Biscay and the Picos de Europa 1st-7th September 2001

Chris G Bradshaw

This trip report details a short trip to Biscay and the Picos de Europa using the Pride of Bilbao cruise ferry. As this was a recce for a future Birdwatching Breaks trip, some areas received less thorough treatment than they would merit. As a result some target species were not located.

Saturday

Martin, Dave, Maurice and I met at Portsmouth in good time to board the ship and enjoy England's fine second half performance against Germany in the World Cup Qualifier.

Sunday

A slow start with overcast skies and drizzle at times and relatively few birds. Early sightings included a steady trickle of Gannets and the occasional Manx Shearwater, Great Skua and Storm Petrel. Later on in the morning skies brightened and the activity increased. A few pods of Common Dolphins performed well close to the vessel while a few Striped Dolphins were also noted. An early Great Shearwater and Sooty Shearwater were welcome interest and an adult Sabine's Gull flew close by the ship and a further individual was seen later in the afternoon.

Our first large whales were a group of 4 Fin Whales and then shortly afterwards we saw 2 close Sei Whales behind the ship. We continued to obtain wonderful views of these magnificent creatures as they were often seen close to the ship. A few Pilot Whales added interest whilst the highlight of the day was a Sperm Whale logging and blowing for an extended period alongside at a range of 1km or so from the ferry.

A Reed Warbler was discovered sheltering amongst the life rafts, whilst offshore the larger shearwaters began to increase in numbers and maybe 80 Greats and 60 Cory's were logged. As we moved into the late afternoon and evening we continued to observe good numbers of Common Dolphins and a few Fin Whales bringing the personal total to around 30 animals, but with a likely figure of around 50 having been seen by all observers on the ship. This period also saw the first shouts of Little Shearwater and eventually we all obtained reasonable views of this often difficult species. After a long and tiring but very satisfying day we retired to the lower decks for a meal and a few beers in the bar.

Monday

We arrived on schedule in Bilbao. After a slight delay collecting the hire car (the agent in the UK had not passed on our request to bring the vehicle to the port) we eventually got on the road by 10.00am. Progress was reasonably quick, although a detour into Santander resulted in a wasted 30mins. Very few birds were noted en-route, but stops did produce Crag Martin at

several locations, at least 10 Griffon Vultures and commoner species such as Osprey, Common Buzzard, House Martin and Chough.

Later the weather began to deteriorate and we found ourselves driving in mist and rain. A visit to the glacial lakes near Covadonga provided us with views of Water Pipit, Black Redstart and Coot, but the poor weather conditions meant that we decided to take a break, check in to our hotel, The Peregrino Hospederia. A jaunt down towards the coast resulted in a couple of Common Sandpipers along the river at Ribadesella. Whilst in the hills just inland from the coast a short stop produced Golden Eagle, Raven, Hobby and Chough. We explored a minor road to Cazo that produced increasingly inclement weather, but also several Pied and Spotted Flycatcher, Short-toed Treecreeper, Firecrest and a group of calling Crested Tit that unfortunately remained unseen. A couple of Serins enlightened the gloom and a passing flock contained Willow Warbler, Coal & Long-tailed Tit and a further Firecrest. The evening was spent in our Hospederia in Covadonga.

Tuesday

A pre-dawn start was necessary in order to drive to Fuente De. We made a short stop along the La Hermida Gorge where Crag Martin and a singing but unseen Iberian Chiffchaff were logged. A bit further down the road we enjoyed a small tit flock with Great & Blue along with Willow Warbler and Blackcap. Rather more interesting was a flock of 20 Rock Sparrows and fine male Cirl Bunting sat on telegraph wires and power lines. A singing Cetti's Warbler uttered it's song from down in the river valley.

We eventually arrived at Fuente De around 9.45am having stopped en-route for lunch provisions. The short cable car journey brought us into a typical alpine habitat and soon we were enjoying Northern Wheatear, Black Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush and Water Pipit. A superb Alpine Accentor performed at point blank range, offering superb photographic opportunities and extended views. We were to see a further 4 or 5 individuals in this area. Small groups of Linnets zipped about and later we enjoyed a mixed flock of Red-billed & Yellow-billed Choughs, with at least 30 of the latter being present. Small numbers of Griffon Vultures drifted through the ever increasing cloud, whilst a stop on some grassy slopes afforded us with great views of Rock Thrush. A group of 3 Chamois were seen on one of the scree slopes, but large numbers of tourists and increasingly poor weather prompted us to head down the mountain.

After a short meal break we drove slowly towards Lebena, noting 3 Short-toed Eagles, a Kestrel, good numbers of Griffon Vultures and an Egyptian Vulture en-route. At Lebena we found more vultures and in the small fields surrounded by hedges small numbers of Blackcap, Cirl Bunting and a calling but unseen Short-toed Treecreeper were noted. The drive back to Covadonga was largely uneventful, but the day had produced some excellent birds and we had enjoyed some superb scenery.

Wednesday

A slightly later start at around 7.30am saw us driving to Arenas de Cabrales. From here we drove south into the heart of the Picos, and we made frequent stops along the narrow road through Poncebos and Sotres. Unfortunately the quiet splendour of the area was spoilt by the activities of road workers, but we did enjoy some excellent birding. Highlights of the morning included Short-toed Treecreeper, Pied Flycatcher, good numbers of migrant Willow Warblers and Blackcaps, whilst a Garden Warbler and Iberian Chiffchaff performed extremely well. A flock of at least 20 Serins delighted us with close views, whilst several Black Redstarts and our

first Rock Buntings were most enjoyable. Overhead raptors began to rise up and Common Buzzard, Griffon and Egyptian Vulture, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel were all in evidence.

During the afternoon we returned to the glacial lakes near Covadonga. Here Martin, David and Maurice found Little Grebe, Water Rail, many Water Pipits and Black Redstarts. However the area was thronged by many Spanish tourists and we elected to head down to Cangas de Onis for a bit of shopping and an ice cream.

Thursday

A 6.00am start was required in order to ensure we would reach Bilbao in good time to drop off the hire car. Progress was swift and by 8.00am we were within 30minutes of Bilbao, so we paused for some birding around the estuary at Santona. Only a brief search of the estuary was possible, but in just over half an hour we found good numbers of waders such as Curlew, Whimbrel, Common Sandpiper and Redshank. Black-necked Grebe and a few Mediterranean Gulls were also noted., whilst a quarry held a single Peregrine. With time pressing we had to leave the estuary, but it will surely be worthy of a more thorough exploration on a future visit.

After dropping off the hire car we headed for the port of Bilbao. Soon after checking into our cabin we were up on deck waiting expectantly for our departure for the UK. Whilst in the harbour we saw a few Sandwich Terns and several flocks of Spoonbills totalled around 60 birds. Griffon Vultures could be seen circling the nearby hills.

As we sailed north from Bilbao, it became apparent that bird activity was relatively low. An odd Arctic Skua and a flock of Bar-tailed Godwits and Grey Plover were all we had to show for the first couple of hours. However, the cetaceans soon started putting on a show and during the afternoon we were treated to superb views of Cuvier's Beaked Whales on several occasions with at least 13 animals being seen during the afternoon. Frequent blows from Fin Whales and several Pilot Whales were also noted along with groups of Striped and Common Dolphins.

Seabirds remained few and far between, but highlights of the afternoon included 39 Sabine's Gulls (including flocks of 17 and 20). However, the superb views of whales more than made up for this lack of seabirds.

Friday

As is usual the day spent travelling up the channel produces relatively few birds. However, we were treated to at least 80 Storm Petrels cutting across the front of the boat, a single juvenile Long-tailed Skua, Arctic & Great Skua, several Fulmars and a steady flow of Gannets. Much of the afternoon was spent relaxing on lower decks and we arrived back in Portsmouth on time at around 16.15hrs.

Acknowledgements

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This trip was a recce on behalf of Birdwatching Breaks. Chris Bradshaw will be running this tour for BirdWatching Breaks in September 2002. For further details of this and other Birdwatching Breaks tours contact Birdwatching Breaks, 26 School Lane, Herne, Kent, CT7 7AL. Tel: 01227-740799.

<http://www.birdwatchingbreaks.com> .

definites. It is interesting to watch the pros watching each other at the meetings, especially at the counts. Someone will tentatively offer, say, 2 Ring Ousels, then another may say five, eventually it builds up as the Deputy Wardens will join in. Finally the warden will quietly say 'well I saw 15 on Vaaasetter', and the tour leaders look suitably abashed (usually).

When it comes to rarities its all action. As soon as there's a report back to FIBO Holly grabs a red flag, fixes it to the van and roars off up and down the road. Since the road can be seen from most parts of the island people are warned of the twitch and can run (or more usually splodge) down to be told what's afoot, and possibly cram into the van to be whisked off to the nearest access to the alleged bird.

Meanwhile back on the first day after the lunchtime bloat-in we did have time at last to try out the island, with a walk to North Haven (the harbour) and the plantation (similar massive afforestation feature as at Sumburgh). Seven species seen included Short-toed Lark, but only two new to us - Dusky Warbler and Rustic Bunting.

The next day set the pattern for the whole remaining time, whatever the weather we walked south in the morning, back for lunch to FIBO then north in the afternoon. And on most days we went several times to the harbour area. On that first day though in spite of the wind and rain we got up early and went with the warden on the trap round. There wasn't much in and it gave us pause for thought about ringing (having never bothered about it before). We're aware of the scientific value of it but are not so sure about stressing birds which are already in some difficulty with migration. On top of that during the ringing a surrounding crowd of gawkers can't help. Anyway we resolved not to count trapped birds on our list. That day we recorded 16 species including Slavonian Grebe, Little Stint and (new to us) Richard's Pipit and Storm Petrel. In number terms things were dominated by Redwing and a good number of Bonxies.

All the following days had excitements and a mixture of foul and sometimes brilliant weather (at its best hot and still). On one day weary en route back to FIBO lunch there was the van with red flag-a-flutter. A reported (and disputed, apparently) Pallid Swift up north about half an hour (on foot) from the lighthouse. A decision required - lunch or Pallid Swift? Fortunately for us the van was already full of salivating twitchers and wouldn't be back to collect us for some time. As it happens it was all a bit of a wild Swift chase as only a doubtful fleeting glimpse was recorded by the salivators.

That night at the list meeting there was, you might say, a bit of a discussion. It was eventually ruled as valid. It just so happened that next day after a heavy (i.e. normal) lunch and in spite of the rain we decided to trog off to the harbour when on the way a small flight of Bonxies struggled above. But no, one was a Pomarine. So it was a dash (within the limits of a pensioners dashability) back up to FIBO to alert the lame and lazy. The sight, through the steamed up windows, of a sweating mouthing wrinkly was alarming enough to some to rush out. By which time the bird had flown - except that one man had seen it and confirmed it at the list session in spite of scepticism (especially by our tour leader with whom we were by now less than impressed).

Next day just after breakfast there was a red flag incident outside FIBO. The shout 'Pechora's' caused a mad dash with mobs running about (including us) up hill and across beach with the usual shouts of 'its just flown' as we puffed up to set up scopes. Eventually it put us out of our misery and settled, showing well, on the road outside FIBO! It was promptly surrounded by a struggling mass of scopes, photographers, videoers and idlers. It was difficult to see it for flying elbows. Anyway we pulled back and looked at the beach, where there were

a beautiful pair of Long-tailed Ducks (yesterday's star attractions - being ignored: sic transit etc).

There was another information exchange - at the shop. In the greenhouse at the back you could make coffee among the plants and put as much money as you thought fit in the tin. It turns out that most of the birding population turned up there about 11 o'clock. It was handy as it was about half-way between the southern tip and FIBO. All the helpful birders (and there were some who didn't want to share) directed - or took - you to the site for the sight. Good stuff.

During the rest of the week the geese started to transit in numbers - Pinkfeet, Barnacle and Greylag together with some Whoopers and, of course, the masses of Redwing and increasingly Fieldfare. The only new to us were Yellow-browed Warbler and (after a long struggle) Jack Snipe and Western Stonechat. All the others we enjoyed anyway - especially seeing Snow Bunting feeding while a lone House Martin battered its way south. All told we saw 68 species on Fair Isle - of which seven were new. We didn't see the Mealy Redpoll or the Little Crake (well we did, but it was in the ringing room).

By the time it got to Friday we started taking a closer look at the weather - for flying reasons not wet feet. Guess what? It looked dire, in fact a repeat of the last Saturday. The possibility of having to stay on wasn't too distasteful but since the island had nearly run out of food earlier (until they managed to get the boat off and on) the prospect of untastefulness didn't appeal.

We could get a rough idea of the real weather overnight as the met. system in our room showed. The rain beating in the roof if it was severe enough woke us; as did either of the two windows blowing open or shut (demonstrating wind strength and direction. Next morning it was force 'n' and a cloudbase of just above the roof. There was no news of our 1100h flight as Loganair weren't talking to anyone. At 1145h, as we sat gloomily unpacking Holly rushed in shouting 'you've got three minutes to get to the airstrip - on the van NOW'. The clouds and the gloom had lifted there and then. We made it and all the luggage was crammed aboard by the shopkeeper (second job). The flight back to Shetland was faster and lower - all down to a following wind and lowering clouds. At least this time we were faster than the Gannets.

.....and so we waved farewell to Fair Isle - but we're sure not for the last time.

Ron and Sue Bedford
1 November 2001