



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2001

fyldebirdclub.freeuk.com



Ad Little Grebe Pilling Lane Ends Car Park Pond 8-9-01 (Paul Ellis)

Announcements

Next F.B.Club meeting on Thurs 8th Nov, Birds of South Africa with Paul Slade & Alan Minchiffie.

December Meeting on Thurs 13th : Local Birding Site Guides' Quiz & Social Night.

Fylde Bird Club/ Wyre Borough Guided Walk at Pilling Lanes Ends, Sun 9th Dec, meet in Car Park 1pm.

Chairman: Mr. Paul Slade .

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October 2001
The Fylde Bird Club Newsletter for October 2001 is now available on the website. It contains details of the club's activities, including the recent visit to the Rufford Old Rectory and the forthcoming Christmas Dinner. It also features a report on the bird counts carried out in the club's study areas.

Chairman: Mrs. J. H. ...
Secretary: Mrs. J. H. ...
Treasurer: Mrs. J. H. ...
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Western Cape, South Africa - 22/8/01 to 2/9/01

We decided on visiting South Africa soon after returning from Kazakhstan and had intended to travel with Naturetrek again on one of their £990 specials. However my annual visit to the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water changed all that when I met Richard Grant of Birdwatch Cape at one of the stands there. There was no hardsell but I was taken by what was on offer and because there was four of us this time I was able to negotiate a 10% reduction on the brochure price.

I returned from the Fair and suggested to Paul that we tailor make an itinerary to suit all our requirements and E-mail Richard accordingly. We would still have to make our own flight arrangements but the overall cost including an extra two days would be cheaper than Naturetrek when taking into account their price excluded airport taxes, all meals, the cost of the pelagic and guides tips.

After agreeing the tour with Alan Hinchliffe and Frank Bird who were travelling with us this time, Paul got the ball rolling. A couple of E-mails later we had agreed an itinerary, the cost, and sent off our 10% deposit, the balance to be paid not later than 7 days before tour departure which I considered to be more than reasonable.

We flew with KLM via Amsterdam and thankfully experienced no problems despite the adverse publicity they had recently received with luggage going missing or tampered with at Schiphol airport, Amsterdam. We left Manchester at 16.50 and arrived at Amsterdam about an hour later. We gained an hour flying east and as South Africa is in the same time zone as Amsterdam no further time adjustments were necessary until we arrived back at Manchester. With three terminals merged together this was some serious sized airport. Facilities were excellent and time passed by quickly people watching. What sights you see fashion wise. Trainers with Rhino horns front and back was the most bizarre thing I saw, but my attention was also drawn to the number of people talking to themselves. In my parent's time you would have been taken away in a white van, but hands-free telecommunications is the in thing for travelling executives and consultants these days.

We left Schipool at 21.15 arriving at Johannesburg 7.30 the following day. It was a beautiful clear day as we started our final leg to Cape Town at 8.35. Most of the passengers had ended their journey at Jo'burg so we had the plane almost to ourselves as South African Airways do not allow other airlines arriving in South Africa to take on passengers while in transit. We flew over endless patch-worked shaped cropfields and could see that the numerous 'supporting' lakes were drying out, taking on a salt pan like appearance. Twisting snakelike rivers meandered through the plains which subtly changed colour the further west we travelled. The parched landscape turned russet colour and mountain ranges appeared in the distance. Below us moon crater shapes pockmarked the landscape and nipple shaped hills dotted the land. As we approached the mountains, clouds were bubbling up, and by the time we reached Cape Town thick widespread cloud covered the whole area.

Cape Town airport came as a surprise as I had it in my mind that it would have been larger. I could only see seven other aircraft, then reflected that we were at the very bottom of the continent with no southerly destinations to fly to. The terminal was modern and very well maintained. We passed swiftly through immigration and were met by Richard who greeted us warmly and led us to his waiting vehicle. It was an eight seater Volkswagen 2.3 litre people carrier and it was exclusively ours for the duration of the trip. Even Alan (Mr Grumpy) was impressed. We made our way through the townships and suburbs to our accommodation for the next four nights, the Breakwater Lodge Hotel set in the vicinity of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Harbour complex. The 20 km ride on good roads including the city by and over pass was fast and relatively traffic free, though we were outside the rush hour. We deposited our luggage in a safe room, extracted our optics and set off for Kommetje.

A strong North Westerly was blowing as we made our way past familiar sounding signposts directing you to Llandudno and Scarborough. I didn't ask. Finally we reached Kommetje a small coastal resort village and our first birding spot which was the start of a list that gave me 175 new species out of a total of 236 we were to see or hear. Not bad when I tell you that during our stay the Western Cape was declared a national disaster area owing to unprecedented rainfall.

After little or no sleep we quickly got into gear though initially struggled with the 4 Cormorants on offer. Well they're a bit like pigeons aren't they. You either love them or loathe them. I think the latter may have been nearer the mark. However the closely related African Darter, not expected here, was, as Alan and Frank frequently said, 'Good Value'.

Good value or rather excellent value, certainly for me, was my first Pied Kingfisher fishing in the quieter waters of the bay. Roosting from the wind were 50+ Swift Terns, 2 Antarctic Terns, 20+ Hartlaub's Gulls, Kelp Gulls, 2 African Black Oystercatchers, a Sandwich Tern and a delightful White-fronted Plover. Other birds seen here included the ubiquitous Cape Wagtail, 'our' Starlings, White-necked Raven, Cape Gannets, 2 Hadedda Ibis and a stunning Blacksmith Plover which as we say about our Lapwings we would travel a long way to see if we had to, if they were not so common.

From here we crossed the Cape Peninsula to Simonstown and Boulders where there is a nature reserve for the resident colony of the Southern African endemic, Jackass Penguin. Touristy I admit, but it has to be done regardless of the stench. Totally unphased by the continuous stream of visitors they completely ignored us making no attempt at contact. Boulders gets its name from the giant rocks that shelter the small beach and is a lovely setting for these small penguins that just get on with their own business. Also here we saw Southern Bou Bou, a shrike, in the thickets where the penguins had their nests. We only ever saw one more but heard others sounding off boo-boo and similar sounding calls. Cape Robin was also present, a stunner in its own right. Just see the fieldguide and get down there.

Moving on before darkness set in, it gets dark at 6.30, we set off for Strandfontein one of the Cape Flats wetlands which in places is just a stones throw from the shores of False Bay. British birds included Moorhen, Little Grebe and 200+ Black-necked Grebes. Europeans were represented by 250+ Greater Flamingoes, Cattle Egrets, White Pelican, B.W. Stilts, Red-knobbed Coot, Purple Gallinule (Richards emblem), and Little Swifts. African species included Maccoa Duck, Cape Shoveller, Yellow-billed Duck, Southern Pochard, Cape Reed Warbler, Southern Masked Weaver, Levillant's Cisticola and African Black Swifts. Not a bad start for the trip we thought as we made our way back to the hotel.

After freshening up we made our way down to the waterfront where numerous eating establishments of all types and standards were waiting to be tried. In the event we returned to the same one every night, despite my protestations that we should experience a variety. Having said that I have to say that ALDO'S was exceptionally good with some of the finest and largest steaks I have had anywhere. Richard gave us some rands

for our evening meals while in Cape Town which we supplemented to suit our tastes. Two rounds of alcohol, 4 starters, 4 main meals and a tip averaged £32.00 a night all in. Great value for money.

As we made our way back to the hotel, it started to rain and the ridicule Alan had subjected Frank and I to on the way to Aldo's was repaid as we raised our umbrellas in the air. It got better later in the week when torrential rain on a forest walk had Alan striding out while Frank and I were able to get stunning views of a pair of Olive Bush Shrikes and Black headed Orioles under the protection of our beloved, hee-hee, umbrellas. YES.

After a good nights rest we set off for our first full days birding. We sped quickly out of Cape town, along the N2, passing once again the townships made from the land equivalent of flotsam and jetsam. However there were encouraging signs in the sight of a huge housing development that was building starter homes for about £1,600. Though not much to look at they were a vast improvement on their present living standards. Superior starter homes priced at about £4,000 were far more desirable. It will take a generation to improve the lot of these people. I wish them well.

We turned off the main road on to a feeder road that was busy with commuters making there way to work. We stopped almost immediately as the fields by the side of the road were flooded and birds were everywhere. Skyward, swifts of all sizes were swerving and wheeling through the overcast skies. Alpine, Little, White rumped, Black African and Horus Swifts, not forgetting Greater Striped Swallows defied us to follow their flight and ID them. With time we all got on to them but with only 2 White rumpeds it took some time. Nearby in a small reedbed Cape and Masked Weavers were busy nest building. Joining them were Red Bishops with their gaudy knockout plumage. The problem with seeing so many new birds is that you haven't the time to do them justice. Thankfully there were many repeat sightings.

On the deck a male Cape Sparrow superficially resembled our own Lapland Bunting, while on the floods were inter alia; Red-billed Teal, Spur-winged Geese, Yellow-billed Duck and Sacred Ibis. Lines of Sacred Ibis also flew above us flapping and gliding with necks outstretched as they made their way to their feeding grounds from their overnight roost sites. We travelled a little further but soon stopped as we saw a Black shouldered Kite chasing a Pied Crow. We were now in the Cape Wheatlands with birds coming thick and fast. Metalled roads had been replaced by dirt roads on which we were to travel frequently and over long distances. Although dirt roads they were still maintained to a good standard and were comfortable to travel on. Stonechat, House Sparrow and Peregrine were familiar to us, as were to a lesser degree Common Waxbill, Zitting Cisticola and Purple Heron.

Stopping frequently we added to our list ; Yellowrumped Widow, Orange Throated Longclaw (shades of Meadowlark), Thick-billed and Red-capped Larks, Fiscal Shrike, Karoo and Cape Robins, Grassveld Pipit, Karoo Prinia, Cape Turtle and Laughing Doves, Cape Canary, Pied Starling and Greywing Francolin. Two Spotted Dikkops just away from the road became anxious as we stopped to photograph them, unlike the Water Dikkops we were to photo at point blank range later that day. Far from close were two Blue Cranes feeding in the distance. With their plume length black secondaries almost touching the ground and their overall delicate grey colouring except for the white crown, these birds were elegance personified. Reach for the fieldguide if you have one and see for yourself as words cannot do them justice.

Also in the distance in the rolling countryside were 10 Rhebok. Now I have to declare that our own wild deer do little for me, but I found myself drawn to these antelopes and the several other species we were to see. Paul Ellis's talk on Uganda reinforced that feeling when he showed Oribi, Bushbuck and Impala. There is so much more to these animals when you actually see them for yourself in their own environment, but that emotion comes from within and is very much a personal thing.

As we continued our stop, start journey, we saw 2 Three banded Plovers on a muddy yard close to the road while stunning Capped Wheatears lined the roadside. If I were to describe all these birds I would quickly run out of superlatives, so bear with me if I appear to dismiss some out of hand - it is not intentional. A late late breakfast so my stomach told me, saw us alongside a rushy field looking unsuccessfully for African Snipe. A Black-headed Heron flew by, one of 4 we were to see that day and an immature Jackal Buzzard put in an appearance.

Moving on, our next scheduled stop was Paarl Mountain Nature Reserve. The car park was reached after a long winding drive through woodland, opening out into the Fynbos covered slopes where beautiful Proteas were just coming into flower. It is here we saw our first nectar sipping Sunbirds. The name itself conjures up something special and we were not to be disappointed. Malachite, Orange-breasted and Lesser Double-collared sunbirds vied for our attention. They were all equally stunning (yes that word again) in their own right as our senses were struck by their beauty. Here also were Cape Sugarbirds with their ridiculously long tails and Fiscal Flycatchers reminding you of Fiscal Shrikes.

Above the mountain summit we could see White necked Raven and Peregrine doing battle while a Booted Eagle soared and drifted by. Back to earth 2 terrestrial Ground Woodpeckers made a fleeting appearance and a party of Cape White-eyes flew all around us. A Grassbird showed briefly once or twice and Black Saw-wing Swallows flew between the trees near the carpark; just one of the birds I should have given more time to. A calling Bar-throated Apalis tantalised us as it was one of those must see birds. Fortunately Richard was prepared and he drew it in with his tape recorder to reveal a little gem of a bird . Once again Alan was heard to say Good Value and so it was. Whatever you may think about recordings, they come into their own where time is at a premium and I for one would not liked to have missed this bird.

The scenery around here was beautiful even if the weather could have been better. However it was time to go and after lunching in Paarl we moved on to our last site of the day Paarl Bird Sanctuary a wetland which provided more magic moments. After checking in we stayed in the vehicle and moved slowly around the reserve only getting out to visit a hide. New birds came thick and fast. Cape Teal, White-faced Duck, Grey-headed Gull, African Spoonbill, Grey and Night Herons, Water Dikkops, W.W.B.Terns, Common Sandpipers, Malachite Kingfisher and a magnificent Fish Eagle which sadly chose not to come our way as it disappeared behind tree cover. Repeats included good numbers of Grebes, Black-winged Stilts, Cattle Egrets, Cape Wagtail, Cape Reed Warblers and 'Cormorants' .

As the light began to fade we made our way back to the entrance, but were stopped in our tracks by several Water Dikkops relying on their camouflage plumage to avoid detection and which were just asking to be photographed. Richard positioned the van 'on top of them' and Paul, Alan and I reeled some film off. A Blacksmith Plover came alongside me shepherding its young and Frank fell about laughing as I struggled to take a picture. You know the problems as I muttered out loud, too near, too far, too fast, still on manual, not enough light, etc etc. I've got a very

good picture of its backside. Thinking that was it for the day we were over the moon when some of the 20+ Kittlitz's Plovers moved and betrayed their presence. More film was shuttered off as we delighted in watching these little beauties. What a day.

As we made our way back to Cape Town Richard confirmed that the pelagic, which had been in danger of being cancelled was to go ahead, the winds having died down considerably since our arrival. Tomorrow couldn't come quick enough.

Richard arrived at the hotel with his wife Ria at 6:00 and we made our way to Simonstown, home of the South African Navy. On arrival at the harbour Ria got breakfast going while we signed our lives away on an undertaking that no responsibility would rest with the boat owners should anything tragic happen, or something along those lines. Scarey, but what the heck, nothing was going to stop us going.

I think there were 11 of us, plus 3 crew and 3 guides. Alvin Cope one of the guides, outlined the day ahead including safety procedures, and extra waterproofs were offered to those who looked like they might need them. We set off at 7:00 passing Boulders beach where the Jackass penguins could be seen and continued alongside the Cape peninsula passing more 'Cormorants'. A rainbow over the peninsula added atmosphere to the scene. We were still inside the protection of False Bay when we started to see our first White-chinned Petrels, Sooty Shearwaters and a couple of Shy Albatrosses. A single Southern Right Whale also showed as did a distant 'blowing' Brydes Whale. Magic.

As we passed the Cape of Good Hope the warm Agulhas current joined the cool Benguela current and the sea state took a turn for the worse. On the upperdeck of our 40ft craft the handrails became essential. A harness wouldn't have been out of place I thought. In the distance a flurry of activity was apparent as we headed straight for it. 50+ Common Dolphins were corralling schools of fish and had attracted good numbers of seabirds. Cape Gannets, Sooties, White chinned Petrels and a few Black browed Albatrosses and Subantarctic Skuas. This however was just a taster of what was to come.

Looking further out, we could see a long-liner and set course directly for its wake. An Antarctic Prion, one of 5 we saw, flew by but did not hang around for close inspection. As we drew nearer to the trawler we could see growing numbers of seabirds. Rather than describe the emerging scene let me take you right into it. Wherever you looked were seabirds flying, diving, marauding, squabbling, feeding, resting but all never far behind the trawler, like gulls following a plough. A single Northern Royal Albatross probably took pride of place and was top of the pecking order, hardly surprising with a conk that big. There must have been over 300 Black-broweds, while Shy Albatrosses probably numbered 40+ and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses about 10. Pintado (Cape) Petrels exceeded 1,000 as did Cape Gannets. The Pintados were one of my target species ever since I saw them on one of David Attenborough's programmes and they didn't disappoint; then seabirds - real seabirds never do. Their patchy, skewbald patterning was as if they couldn't decide whether to be brown or white so instead they ended up with this unique plumage, that sets them apart from their congeners. I could have watched them all day but with so much going on you didn't have time to. Lucky Frank, all he had to do was watch them.

With birds passing by at eye level and reaching out distance, and the boat rocking from side to side, photography was largely down to luck. Paul made sure he had some by reeling off 6 rolls of film. Marauding Subantarctic Skuas were dwarfed in the presence of Albatrosses and it would have been a very brave skua to go for a Southern Giant Petrel. These sea vultures are truly evil looking and on a par with Marabou Stork in the beauty stakes. We saw about 15, more than enough thankyou, even if it was a real seabird. Dainty Wilsons petrels with their stiff winged appearance and fast flight added an extra dimension to the scene. And always around were White-chinneds and my revered Sooties, the only shearwaters present save for a single Manxie seen on the way out.

It was just great to see so many Albatrosses as they instinctively exploited the gusts of wind that are deflected upwards by the waves and to watch them effortlessly fly on shallow arched wings. How I wish I was there now. Mention should also be made of the excellent commentary given out by Alvin and the information imparted by his fellow guides Bruce Dyer and Phil Whittington. If only I could remember it all but when clutching the handrails and trying to take in the jaw dropping views of this 'Hollywood Blockbuster' your mind is elsewhere. What a good excuse to go back if indeed an excuse was needed.

I could continue to wax lyrical about this scene but I am sure you will have got the picture and for those of you attending Novembers meeting you will see the pictures. Very reluctantly, not that we could do anything about it, the skipper made his way back to port passing Cape Fur Seals with their flippers pointing skyward. Don't ask me why, it's just another thing I can't remember. We arrived back early at 14.30 and Richard collected us at the arranged time. We had had another day to remember and we declined Richard's offer of some additional land birding in favour of an early, much needed shower, and a leisurely break before dining at Aldos on ostrich, sirloin and fillet steaks with a kingklip fish dish for me.

As an aside I just have to mention that Paul was relating the days events on the phone to his wife Sarah, when he inexplicably burst into laughter. When asked what he was laughing about, he said Sarah had asked him 'How Dads army were coping'. Bloody cheek. When mentioning this later to Alan and Frank we immediately christened Paul 'Captain Mainwaring' while Frank became known as Godfrey, Alan as 'Wer'e all doomed' Fraser, and myself as Sgt Wilson-charming. I still think Alans more suited to his other alias, Victor Meldrew.

The next morning we set off early to a site to see (altogether now Ha Ha) Knysna Warbler. Instead we should have had an extra hour in bed. This was one serious skulker. Needle in a haystack comes to mind, except finding the needle would have been easier. This bird was not even a now you see me, now you don't. You just never saw it. We could have been listening to a tape recorder responding to our tape for all we knew. If you would like to write a whole day off then this is the bird for you. Nightingales are a doddle after this. Its one redeeming feature was its Wood Warbler like song but after an hour or so even this starts to wear a bit thin. It started to rain, thankfully, and we left the invisible warbler to frustrate whoever came along next. It just happened to be a birder who had been on the pelagic with us and who Fraser had taken a dislike to. Strange. I could hear Fraser chucking to himself all the way back to the carrier. His delight however was short-lived as the fool had left something hanging from his cars door handle and Richard went back to tell him. He drove off after thanking us. Grrrr thought Fraser or at least that was what I thought he thought. The site was called De Hel. Nuff said.

We made our way to our next port of call passing roadside sellers of stacks of wood. Clearance of Eucalyptus and other exotics from the Cape peninsula is a long term project and the workers in addition to their wages are also allowed to sell what they fell. We reached Rooi Els mid morning in cold windy conditions. Well wrapped up we set off in search of Cape Rockjumper a superb endemic which is well named. We saw it

well, male and female, and also ticked off Grey-backed Cisticola, Cape Siskin, and, Familiar Chat. Once again it started to rain as we made our way back to the vehicle from where we ticked off Neddicky a Dunnock look-alike from the fieldguide, but looking far dapper in real life. Also from our moving hide we saw Cape Rock Thrush, Cape Bunting and a roving party of Speckled Mousebird.

From here we retraced our route to visit Sir Lowry's pass but en route we stopped to ID a distant raptor which was another Jackal buzzard. We also saw Bully Canary here but best of all, right below us a family party of 3 Southern Right Whales. They couldn't have been more than 50 yards from the shore but we were a long way up as we photographed them. However through the scopes they were terrific and all the salient features were noted including the patchy white belly. They seemed to be enjoying themselves waving their broad flippers about and bonding with each other. At least I think that was what they were doing. You could make out the strongly arched mouthline that was encrusted with callouses from beginning to end. It was criminal having to leave them but time waits for no one and we resumed our next leg passing many whale watchers on this Sunday morning.

We arrived at Sir Lowry's pass which gave spectacular views over False bay, the Cape peninsula and Cape flats. We set off on a 2 km walk for our target species Victorin's warbler. It was cold and very windy as we trudged our way along a well defined track. I think we all thought that if we see this bird in these conditions it will be a miracle, but you have to try. A fire had devastated much of the Fynbos but there was still enough to hide our quarry in despite Richards attempts. We didn't see them even though we could hear two very well. The walk back with Richard and Mainwaring side by side was akin to a funeral march. Whether Richard was thinking that he had let us down twice in one day I don't know. No one spoke for some time but the ice was broken when we made light of it and he could see that it didn't really matter. I think that was the defining moment when Richard realised that although we were keen to see everything we were too experienced for an occasional dip to mar our enjoyment on what was after all a holiday.

We continued to Helderberg nature reserve for lunch, and a walk around part of the reserve which has an impressive bird list, but once again we were rained off. Apart from some close up views of Cape sugarbirds and the impressive Bontebok we saw little else. The reserve however was set in beautiful surroundings and the Fynbos was particularly good for Proteas. I should like to return there on a better day.

This was our last night in Cape Town and we made the most of it at Aldo's. This was also the night Fraser (I'm not happy unless I'm complaining) failed to live up to his reputation. As our delicious meals arrived the waiter spilt red wine all over Fraser's trousers. A great chance for him to go ballistic and he damp squibbed it. I don't believe it, I thought. Perhaps he's really a pussycat inside. 'Oh it will be all right' he said and some other cringing words. Pathetic.

We finished our meal and although you probably don't want to know this I paid a visit to the toilet. It was here where I came across a novel bit of advertising. As I looked down, as you do, the toilet pot had written inside it 'Got your attention, didn't I' then proceeded with an advert for Home insurance/protection. Clever stuff eh, well I thought so. After shopping for presents in the excellent shopping centre we visited a 'pub' where surprise surprise they had got Boddies on draught. Mainwaring was in his element.

The next day saw us joined by Ria who was coming along for the rest of the trip as gopher, (Go for this, go for that) said Richard - only kidding, they made a great team. After loading the luggage on board we set off north to a site for White-backed Duck. We saw one eventually as it popped its head out of the floating vegetation then submerged again before doing the same time and time again. Perhaps Swamp Duck would have been a more apt name. Moving on Richard soon stopped again at a car park so we could photograph Table Mountain. This was the first time we had seen it since we arrived and it signalled the start of the 2 best days weather we had.

Motoring on we arrived mid morning at the West Coast National Park where we checked in and ventured forth. The park is run on a partnership basis, being private property managed by the SA National Parks. It really is in a gem of a setting. Coastal fynbos surrounds the lagoon with rocky outcrops at the entrance. Dunes, scrub, saltmarshes, reedbeds and several off shore islands make up the rest of this 30,000 hectare wetland reserve. The spring flowers coloured yellow, orange and purple were just coming into flower making me forget the birds as I admired their beauty.

You are asked to stay in your vehicle within the park but of course the hides overlooking Langebaan lagoon are a different matter. We soon began to see new birds; Karoo Lark, Ostrich with young, Long-billed Crombec, Yellow Canary. Also here were Steenbok a small brown elegant grazer. The lagoon is a wintering site for 50,000+ Palearctic waders but we were too early for such numbers. As we arrived at the lagoon an African Hoopoe broke cover and a splendid Grassbird was singing away. Making our way to the hide along excellent boardwalks we soon began to see B W Stilts, Greenshanks, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Whimbrels, Curlews and Kittlitz's Plovers not forgetting Three-banded Plovers. Inside the hide we scanned the distant reedbed where African Marsh Harriers were hunting. Swift Terns and Caspian Terns were also feeding here as were several groups of Greater Flamingoes. Several Reed Cormorants were perched prominently nearby about the size of the european Pygmy Cormorant. Best of all were 2 Black Harriers which luck would have it came our way with one flying right above our heads. We were to see 8 more during the remainder of our trip.

Near the visitor centre were Pied and Wattled Starlings, Weavers and Laughing Doves. We returned to the car, breakfasted and continued around the park. Stopping frequently Mainwaring arguably found the bird of the day, a striking Southern Black Korhaan, a bustard like bird that everyone wants to see. Red, white, black, yellow, gold made up the colours of this unmistakable, unmissable bird. More new birds followed with White throated Canary, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, White-backed and Red-faced Mousebirds, Steppe Buzzard and Yellow-billed Kite. A Black-shouldered Kite dropped down in typical raised wing fashion but was unsuccessful in catching its prey.

Leaving the National Park we moved on to Vreedenberg where we left Ria to shop for goodies and beer supplies while we travelled on through to the arable outskirts. Here we saw Red-capped, Thick-billed and Cape Long-billed Larks, plus Sickle-winged Chat and a Meerkat. After picking Ria up we continued on to Veldrif Saltworks situated alongside the Great Berg river. Avocets, Little Stilts, Ruff, Curlew Sandpipers, Ringed Plover and 4 delightful Chestnut banded Plovers were busy feeding. By the river 200+ immature Common Terns and one or two Antarctic terns were roosting.

We had lunch in Veldruff at a picnic sight by the river. Ria laid the table, table cloth and all while we looked out on to African Shelduck, swishing African Spoonbills, Grey and Intermediate Herons, Anhinga, White-throated Swallows, waders and Pied Kingfishers. We filled our fresh barmcakes with Biltong and salad and munched away. Biltong is dried meat and comes in blackened strips and looks somewhat inedible. It wasn't and I enjoyed it but can't speak for all of us. You know who I mean. Lemon poppy seeded buns and Apricot and Walnut buns followed, the whole lot went, washed down with tea and coffee. We then carried on to our overnight stay in timber cabins high in the Kapteins Kloof mountains.

This private mountain reserve affords panoramic views of the plains below with St Helena Bay and Elands Bay in the distance and the adjacent mountain ranges behind us. As the sun dropped below the horizon you wouldn't have wished to have been anywhere else on this still evening with a star filled sky. Still as silence. I took a walk without a care in the world. If only life could always be this good - for everyone.

After freshening up we all met at Ria and Richards cabin where we chatted on the verandah, and downed cans of lager. Far away were the twinkling night lights of Vreedenburg and sleepy villages on the plains below. Ria came up trumps with a super meal washed down with white and red wine and for me followed by a gullet warming liquer by the name of Amurula a litre bottle of which I later bought at Cape Town duty free. We slept well that night.

The following morning we were out at first light. The cool evening had resulted in swirling mist patches on the plains below which gradually dissipated as the sun gained height and the shadows shortened. It wasn't long before we caught up with our target species the Protea Canary. Here too were 30+ Cape Siskins, Cape Sugarbirds, Malachite Sunbirds, Cape Robin, Rock Kestrel, Red-breasted Sparrowhawk, Booted Eagle and Black Harrier. Sadly we missed out on Black Eagle which had been seen the night before and is a resident breeding bird in these mountains.

Time was moving on and we too had to move but not before devouring a filling breakfast that included Pigs in blankets! We had a lot of ground to cover today as we made our way down the mountain and on to the Karoo. Superb scenery was with us all day. We passed Apricot, Peach and Orange groves growing in secluded plateau valleys, chatted with Ria about living in South Africa and inevitably nodded off now and then. I suppose the sight of Pale Chanting Goshawk announced our arrival into the Karoo. Up to then we had seen Rock Kestrel, Little Swifts, Jackal Buzzard and African Fish Eagle that I had recorded, which was far from comprehensive. Dropping down another mountain side towards the wide plains below Richard pulled up. We got out while Ria continued down to a picnic site where we would meet up later.

We scrambled down the rocky terrain complete with Cinnamon-breasted Warbler tape but it or they were not having any of it. Ah well, we thought. But as always there was recompense as we chanced upon a Ground Woodpecker complete with nest hole. It gave crippling views as Fraser and Godfrey finally unblocked it from the trip list. Titbabbler and Pirit Batis quickly followed as did Fairy Flycatcher which eluded me for the rest of the trip, but I didn't let it bother me did I chaps; much. As we approached our lunch stop, a Pied Barbet flew over and landed on a tree. We waited, and waited for it to show, only to realise as we approached closer and closer that here was another nest hole. We stepped back and watched from a discrete distance. It came out like a bullet but luckily it flew on to a nearby tree giving good views.

We enjoyed our lunch as Ria gripped me off with views of singing Fairy Flycatcher on the tree under which I was now sitting. Thanks for that Ria, I thought. To be fair everyone tried their best for me but they failed. We still had some distance to travel as we made our way out of the mountain range and on to the far reaching plains covered with mauve coloured succulents. It was a fabulous landscape with flat topped hills in the background that had sphinx shaped paws for bases. Here we saw Trictrac Chat (a good tongue twister), Spikeheeled Lark and more 'Redcaps'. Karoo Korhaans were spotted by eagle eye Godfrey and Kestrels flew by at regular intervals. But the bird of the day for me had to be Greater Kestrel. We could see this Kestrel coming towards us but its long winged appearance and powerful progression suggested this was something bigger than those we had been seeing. Sure enough as it drew level with us, its size, grey barred tail and lack of dark primaries clinched the ID which Richard had confirmed as it approached. It was some bird and one of the highlights for me as it powered by.

Carrying on we saw 2 Bat eared Foxes which as we slowed down scarpored like bats out of hell, to quote Meatloaf. An Eland the largest of all the antelope made an appearance as did several Springbok. Dusk was upon us as we finally made our way to our overnight stop at Fort Tierkloof. I can't recall seeing another moving vehicle all afternoon which gives you some idea of the emptiness of the area. Fort Tierkloof was a white washed stone building constructed in the shape of a fort complete with flagpole and I think flying the flag of the nation of the people who happened to be staying there; in our case the Union Jack. A nice touch I thought. Inside were 3 bedrooms, a kitchen and large bathroom, and a large dining area that opened out on to the forecourt. Once again Ria prepared our evening meal with wines while we regaled each other of birding trips gone by.

Fraser and Godfrey noticed a large Gecko drop behind a wall painting next to their bedroom and Richard with a twinkle in his eye said it was by far the largest he had ever seen. Richard had gradually been joining in the banter ever since our double dip but this was the best yet. The horror that crossed their faces was heightened when they carefully checked it out only to find there were 3 there. I don't know which one of them stood guard that night, perhaps they took turns.

Up at first light we opened the door to be faced with wind and rain. A walk in the hills was out of the question, so we set off in the vehicle. Returning about 90 minutes later we had added no new species when we arrived back for breakfast. However on stepping out of the carrier we incredibly added 3 new species in as many minutes - Mountain Chat, Anteating Chat and Rufous eared Warbler. Very nice too. It was still raining as we had breakfast in a cool 9 degrees centigrade inside. Bacon and egg spaceships and warm mushrooms and onions followed by pancakes and syrup. Great. We loaded the carrier up and I regret I could not summon up anything to write in the visitors book, down to the foul weather that had marred our time there.

We left but not before leaving what was considered to be a very generous tip to the caretakers, black grandparents looking after grandchildren while the parents were seeking work in the cities. They were on 100 rands a week.

We made our way to Lainsburg almost without stopping. This small town is situated on the main road from Cape Town to Jo'burg along which we travelled for some time. It is perhaps indicative of the economy when I tell you that in a 10 km stretch we overtook 1 vehicle, we ourselves

were not overtaken and in the opposite direction only 5 cars and 5 lorries passed us. I sincerely hope their fortunes change soon for it is a wonderful country.

Richard checked into the Grand hotel there, then we proceeded to do a circular of the area on dirt tracks that seemed to go on for ages. It had stopped raining but was still overcast as we travelled parallel to a river that gave us Pearl-breasted Swallow. A little further on, another stop turned up repeats of LDC and Dusky Sunbirds, Pied Barbet, Chesnut-vented Titbabbler and our only Karoo Long-billed Lark making great use of its bill by poking in the soil for grubs. Further stops turned up 12 Pale-winged Starlings, 6 Larklike Buntings and a flying Ludwigs Bustard. 2 Crowned Plover, 3 Pirit Batis and 1 Long-billed Crombec made up the best of the rest of the days birds. However the sight of Red Hot Pokers growing alongside infant rivers fired my insides, took Richard and Ria by surprise, and left the rest full of indifference. Heathens.

We ate at the hotel that night and were not disappointed. The staff were all very nice as indeed was the proprietor a lovely lady who went out of her way to be helpful. A steaming bath, it was that deep you could float in it, was bliss. There was no shower. I slept well in a room with a ceiling that must have been over 12 feet high. Just thought you'd like to know.

We left at 6.30 hoping to reach Wilderness National Park on the famous Garden Route by about 10.30. We were making good time when we stopped to view a nesting bird. It was just as well we did as the front tyre was rapidly going down. We could not get the carrier up high enough to remove the wheel and in trying to do so the thread on the jack stripped rendering it useless. We flagged down a passing motorist who promised to return but in the meantime Ria had walked to a nearby dwelling and the owner came out and raised the carrier using an axle jack. We tried to contact the other motorist after giving a description of him and his 4 by 4. We were to late as his son arrived in his place. Not in the least concerned about his wasted journey, he smiled and returned whence he had come. Such camaraderie was touching but no doubt essential in such a sparsely populated area. We thanked our good samaritans and went on our way.

We travelled through the Seweweekspoort pass following the twisting course of its namesake river, and enthralled by its precipitous sides. I would loved to have walked through it. We passed through Calitzdorp, Oudtshoorn the 'Ostrich farming capital' and then on to George before finally arriving at Wilderness a little later than scheduled.

Richard gave Ria her instructions e.g. buy a new jack etc etc while we went on to do some forest birding. What would we have done without Ria.

As we stepped out of the carrier, birding began instantly. 'Cormorants', Little Grebe and Little Egret were down river on a shingle bed while in front of us were 6 tiny Sweet Waxbills foraging for food. They were little gems. Richard heard a Giant Kingfisher and sure enough one eventually showed as it flew past us and landed on the nearby railway bridge. Giant was right, for it was about the size of a Peregrine. Then Mainwaring screamed out Black Crake, Black Crake as though we hadn't heard him the first time. Some people do get excited I thought, as we spent another 25 minutes trying to see it. Then Godfrey shouted out its there, its there. It must be moving I thought. Finally we all got great views through the captains scope as it made its way along the river embankment moving between the reed stems. It was probably a bird we all wanted to see and it was worth the wait. With its totally black plumage, red eyes and legs, and yellow bill (looking greenish amongst the vegetation) it was a bird to remember. Richard nonchalantly threw in 'there's a Spotted Eagle Owl over there'. Where, we said simultaneously. Sure enough in a tree immediately behind us was this cracking grey owl being mobbed by the 'residents'.

What next we thought. Well, confiding Hadedda Ibis were there for the taking, film wise and several Dusky Flycatchers were equally approachable as were Fork-tailed Drongos. Greater Double Collared Sunbirds were feeding from flower heads that matched the shape of their bills. Sombre Bulbul, Forest Canary and Yellow-throated Warbler were further trip ticks while a repeat Bar throated Apalis was more than welcome, and we hadn't yet reached the start of the trail.

When we did, Richard reminded us this was another site for Knysna Warbler. Thoughts on the lines of 'Thanks for that Richard and can we leave now' went through my mind. Cap't Mainwaring undaunted led from the front complete with Leica scope and tripod (really useful for Knysna Warbler). The riverside trail seemed never ending as we made our way up and down through dense woodland. Even though the route had been laid out with handrails in places and dodgy footboards it was a sweat inducing walk eased only by the sighting of a Bluemantled Flycatcher.

We eventually made it to the clearing where we predictably dipped on you know what. There was one, but it responded to our tape by moving away. We tried again later but this 'hide and seek' bird won yet again. Much easier was the Knysna Lourie as it crashed its way through the canopy. A large, loud, long tailed, crested bird with broad wings, it flew floppily from tree to tree. It had mainly bright green plumage but on flying revealed large crimson patches on its primaries. Less gripping was Terrestrial Bulbul but two Olive Thrushes and a Southern Bou Bou made up for it.

It had been a great afternoons birding and all within a stones throw of our accommodation at the Ebb&Flow Lodge site. Ria laid on an equally great evening meal with a delicious Butternut soup, followed by fillet steaks of a size you never see back home and vegetables that had retained all their flavour. We finished off with Treacle sponge and custard (Yum Yum) washed down with whatever you wanted. The evening went by in a flash as the conversation flowed freely. On the way back to our cabins we could hear a Fiery necked Nightjar calling and a Spotted Eagle Owl flew by in front of us. Could tomorrow be as good I wondered.

An early start beckoned for our last full days birding. We travelled east passing the namesake of that dreaded warbler Knysna and on to Plettenberg Bay golf course. It was grim when we arrived, with steady drizzle. It could only get better, but it didn't. Umbrellas at the ready Godfrey and I were prepared and becoming quite skilled with the combination of umbrella and binoculars. A feeding party of Sweet Waxbills were on the fairway and a pair of Olive Woodpeckers teased us as they disappeared behind branches and trunks. Bedraggled Drongos and Knysna Louries showed well but we had to make do with almost silhouette views of a distant Black bellied Starling. A Puffback was much more obliging but the weather took a turn for the worse so we headed back to the carrier and breakfast where a Black-headed Oriole did its best not to be seen.

With rain continuing to fall we visited the nearby Eitui river and birded from 'inside'. A good selection of species were seen including, Ruff, Avocet, Wood Sandpiper, Kittlitz's and Three-banded Plovers, African Spoonbill, Cape Shelduck, Little Egret, Gt Flamingo, African Marsh Harrier, Jackal and Steppe Buzzards.

The rain was still with us as we returned westward and stopped at a camp site for some more forest birding. A break in the clouds spurred us on. An Olive Bush Shrike was seen by all but me. Greenbacked Bleating Warblers or should I say Bleeding Warblers were uncharacteristically shy on the day. I must have heard 7 or 8 and saw none. I wasn't doing as well as the rest but even I couldn't miss 30+ Black Bellied Starlings as they descended on a berry bearing bush giving excellent views. A Black Sunbird, our sixth species of Sunbird flew over and perched for our pleasure. Its dazzling purple gorget and green forehead left a lasting impression. Cape White-eyes buzzed about and Olive Thrushes showed far better than yesterday. A black and orange coloured Chorister Robin was in dark shade scattering leaf litter about before coming out in to the open to reveal its gaudy plumage. Also in the site grounds were Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Knysna Lourie, Yellow-throated Warbler and the glorious Cape Batis showing better here than anywhere we had been.

Leaving the campsite behind we set off for the forest trail. We crossed over a bridge with the river in full flow. On either side were majestic indigenous trees such as Yellowwoods and Ironwoods all of which were decorated with hanging, cobweb shaped lichens giving a clue to the quality of the air. The trail was much easier than the day before, more of a track. Richard heard a Scalythroated Honeyguide and although we heard it several more times we were to be unlucky. It was frustrating hearing birdsong and not being able to see the bird. Fraser and Godfrey called us back but we missed the Grey Cuckooshrike they had been watching by the skin of our teeth. My luck had to change soon and it did as we all saw the next bird.

Richard held out his arm and pointed in front. There on the ground in anting posture was a Narina Trogon a bird he had not seen for 3 or 4 years. We watched it spellbound as it remained motionless. All of a sudden it darted into the air. We thought it had gone, but as we reached where it had been there it was above us perched in a tree totally unconcerned about our presence. It had its back to us, and we watched it turn its head owl-like, but at sloth like speed. I have never seen anything quite so deliberate, then quick as a flash it would strike out and take a passing insect before returning to perch. Incredibly it was joined by another male and a token territorial dispute ensued. We watched them for some time as Fraser and I tried to take pictures in poor light. They moved further away. It was about the size of a Jackdaw and had a long broad tail. Its upperparts, head and upper chest were green while its belly and lower chest were of crimson red. It had black primaries and a yellow bill. It was also sporting breeding tufts below and to the side of its bill. It was another highlight of this marvellous trip.

As the others left, I stood around in the hope that the Trogons hadn't gone far and might return. I began to hear loud heavy breathing noises and thought I had been joined by a mammal, perhaps a monkey of some sort. I have to say it was a little disconcerting until I realised it was coming from one of the Trogons. I took more pictures but the autofocus was playing up as I switched to manual. What I thought would be my best photograph wasn't. It was out of focus, because the autofocus had not settled directly on the bird. Swear words abounded when I looked through my little viewfinder back home.

As the Trogon disappeared once more, I continued along the trail only to be met by the remainder of Dads Army and Richard coming back. The break in the clouds was filling in fast as it started to spit. Spitting changed to steady rain which in turn became a downpour. Once again Godfrey and I raised our trusty umbrellas as we ambled back to base, and the phrase 'drowned rats' came to mind. On the way back I caught up with Olive Bush Shrike, as both male and female chased one another through the trees alongside the track. 2 Black-headed Orioles also showed well.

Cap't Mainwaring and Fraser were drying out when we returned to the camp ablutions, where cooking facilities were also available. It wasn't long before Ria arrived and rustled us up some hot dogs etc; just what the doctor ordered. We left the site, once again elated with the afternoons birding, and travelled back to Wilderness. On the way we took in a wetland at Sedgfield and added to our list Brown Hooded Kingfisher with young, along with House Martin which has bred in the Western Cape.

That evening we dined in Wilderness with Richard and Ria as our guests. We presented Richard with a field guide on South African butterflies and thanked him for a wonderful time, not that it was all over just yet, as you will see.

The last day arrived and we had to be at Cape Town by 13.30 to catch the 15.30 KLM flight to Amsterdam. We had 400kms to cover from leaving Wilderness at 6.30. By 8.30 we were at a 'Wimpy' in Riversdale tucking into breakfast. The roads were almost traffic free as we continued on to Bontebok National Park. As we turned off the main road on to a dirt track a Black-shouldered Kite was close by, but I was unsuccessful in my efforts to photograph it. It was while looking back that I connected with a very distant, thermal rising, raptor. I didn't know what it was as I suggested it might be a Vulture. I could see it was big, broad winged and looking saucer shape head on, or was it tail on. It had long legs with feathering extending behind the wings. We stopped and Richard pronounced it was a Secretarybird. What a start. We watched it for some time but as always time was at a premium and we had to get moving.

We made a quick stop at the visitor centre for souvenirs then kept to the tracks heading for the camp site by the River Breede. We were looking for Streaky-headed Canary but were out of luck. We did see White-throated and Greater-striped Swallows, Crowned Plover, Malachite Sunbird, Pied Barbet and Yellowrumped Widow. As we moved out in to the park proper we began to see antelope in the form of Bontebok, Red Hartebeeste and Grey Rhebok. Also here were family groups of Cape Mountain Zebra and lots of Termite mounds. A Clapper Lark, our only one, climbed high into the sky and then our target species was spotted. Not one but 3 Stanley's Bustards. The nearest, a male, had inflated its white throat feathers to bursting point. It looked preposterous but isn't this just an example of what draws us to the world of birds, and takes us on our travels to search them out. This was to be our last new species and a fitting end to our trip list.

We returned to the main road the N2. As we passed Swellendam I could not take my eyes off the majestic Langeberg mountain range that towered over it and from whereabouts the Secretarybird had taken flight. Slow moving clouds draped the craggy tops. They reminded me of Arthur Wainwright's description of the Howgills - 'Sleeping Elephants'- but not in this case because of their rounded backs, but for their trunk like slopes merging into Elephant feet buttresses. Ginormous gorges of canyon size cut into the range and I could only imagine the grandeur which drew me towards them. Perhaps one day.

We continued through the Overberg passing endless wheatfields and sheep pasture enriched by the presence of elegant Blue Cranes, all told numbering in excess of 120. Booted Eagle, Yellow-billed and more Black shouldered Kites enlivened the journey and always the glorious countryside. A stationary double header steam train belched out thick black smoke. How I wished I was travelling on it, instead of making our way back to the airport, but all good things must come to an end sooner or later.

We pulled into Cape Town airport spot on time at 13.30. Even Fraser, a stickler for punctuality was impressed. Farewells are always difficult occasions. Part of you wants to stay, while part of you wants to see home again. This time was no different, except this time I felt sure I would like to return. We shook hands with Richard and hugged Ria, it seemed the right way round to do it. Waving goodbye we entered the airport, went through the usual formalities, did some duty free shopping and boarded the plane on time for our 15.30 departure. Including over a 2 hour stop at Jo'burg for refuelling and taking on passengers, we were on that plane for 14 hours, not to be recommended.

After changing at Amsterdam we arrived back at Manchester at 7.30 and I was home by 8.55. It had been a memorable trip and a wonderful introduction to the variety of South Africa's birds. We had seen 20 endemics to South Africa plus a further 26 to Southern Africa. From Albatrosses to Sunbirds, from Secretarybird to Trogon, from Southern Black Korhaan to Black Crane and from Kingfishers to Bar-throated Apalis. A veritable spectrum of the bird life on offer. But we had also experienced much more. Magnificent scenery and wildlife, glorious flowers, good food and wines, an insight to what is happening there now, warm hospitality, helpfulness, comradeship, our own company and Richards relaxed style/manner and skills, and not forgetting Ria's which went into making this such an unforgettable trip.

If you ever get the chance, you should go there. Like anywhere else it is never quite how you picture it and I felt safer there than I would have done in any of our cities. Take my word for it.

B.Dyson
30/9/01.

MORE ON INTERESTING AYTHYAS

On 8th September I was checking the large pool at Pilling Lane Ends when I saw what looked on first impression to be a female Tufted Duck. Given that a pair nested on here this year this was hardly a great surprise. However the more I looked at the bird the less happy with the initial identification, in features and structures the bird looked intermediate between Tufted Duck and Scaup. The size and head shape did not fit with Scaup, but on the other hand the white blaze around the bill was extensive and more significantly there was a hint of a white face patch. The bird was rather elusive, but eventually I had decent views of the bill and the restriction of the black to the nail showed it was certainly not a Tuftie.

At this point, with a very limited knowledge of female Lesser Scaup, I decided I needed some assistance. I rang Paul Ellis, who very sportingly agreed to come out from for what was still very much a mystery bird. Pending Paul's arrival I continued to scrutinise the bird to ensure I had not messed up, but it continued to look interesting.

When Paul arrived he agreed the bird looked odd, and fetched copies of the Collins and Madge / Beaman guides from his car. These made Lesser Scaup look rather less likely, as the bird has contrasting back and flanks when these are apparently concolorous on a female Lesser. Paul was able after some considerable effort to get reasonable footage of the bird, including a close-up of the head and bill. Whilst we were viewing the footage of this two local birders turned up independently and asked what we were looking at. They both seemed rather disappointed to find out it was the 'Tuftie which has been here for a week', but when they looked at the close-up shots on the video camera they went rather quiet.

It was decided to get further assistance, and Paul rang Pete Marsh on his mobile. Pete was watching a Leach's Petrel off Cockersands at the time but nevertheless agreed to come down. Although the bird was stubbornly refusing to flap its wings when Pete arrived he agreed it was an interesting bird, not a 'classic' Greater Scaup but with a bill too big for a Lesser Scaup and all wrong for Tufted. Pete did point out that with the head feathers likely to be in moult, head shape could not be misleading and the odd shape did not rule out a small Scaup.

Eventually whilst attempts were made to bring the bird back into view (it disappeared too often) it took wing, and showed the extensive white on the wing of a Greater Scaup. Given the combination of bill pattern and wing pattern it had to be a Greater Scaup, although clearly an atypical one.

It was certainly easy to see why the bird had been passed off as a Tuftie for a week. Normally it is the other way round, people see a female Tuftie with a lot of white around the bill and mistake it for a Scaup. This is the first time I have seen this problem the other way round, except in cases where the bill showed a hybrid was involved. Obviously it would have been easier if there had been other birds for comparison, but lone birds are often ones worth paying some attention so as far as aythyas go it clearly pays to keep an open mind.

Recent Reports August & Sept 2001

[LATE NEWS : Ad Rose Coloured Starling reported in a St Annes garden for 1hr only on 6-7-01]

4-9-01

1 Little Egret & Peregrine Warton Bank, behind airfield.
1st w Yellow legged Gull between Stanah & Skippool Creek
5 to 7 Buzzards up together over Singleton BD

2-9-01

Marsh Harrier through Marton Mere

1-9-01

1 Wood Sandpiper Pilling Lane Ends Pond
Skipool Creek: 1 Kingfisher, 210 Golden Plover, 2 Greenshank,
31 Black tailed Godwits 2 Grey Wagtails.
Pilling Lane Ends: 1 imm male Merlin, 5 Greenshank
1 Spotted Redshank & 50 Teal Tyre Pool: 15 Wigeon, on GEGB
Pool, Jameson Rd, Fleetwood.
1 Pintail & 1 m Gadwall Marton Mere.
3: Little Egrets Warton Bank early pm,

31-8-01

2 Marsh Harriers, Peregrine & Greenshank at Warton Bank.
1 Spotted Redshank, Black tailed Godwit & 1 Snipe Tyre Pool,
Jameson Rd Fleetwood.
1 Kingfisher, 2 Peregrines Marton Mere & 2 Buzzards nearby over
Gypsy Hole Wood to east.
1 Spotted Redshank Little Singleton on Wyre.

30-8-01

1 Marsh Harrier at Warton Bank.
1 Whimbrel Little Singleton on Wyre.
1 Spotted Redshank Little Singleton on Wyre.

29-8-01

2 Little Stint 1 Whimbrel Little Singleton on Wyre.

27-8-01

2 Marsh Harriers, & 2 Ravens at Warton Bank. 3 Little Egret, 4
Green Sandpipers & 7 Gadwall Naze Pool.
1 Yellow legged Gull, sinensis Cormorant & Kingfisher Conder
Green.

26-8-01

**1 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in South Shore Garden (Mike
O'Brien)**
1 Whimbrel Little Singleton on Wyre.

25-8-01

Imm Marsh Harrier, Tree Pipit, Wheatear & juv Water Rail at
Warton Bank. 1 Little Egret Naze Pool.
1 Green Sandpiper Tyre Pool, Jameson Rd Fleetwood. 5 Wheatear
& Whimbrel Rossall Pt.
1 Kingfisher Little Singleton on Wyre.

24-8-01

Imm Marsh Harrier & Little Egret Warton Bank. 1 fem/imm
Garganey Reams Hill pond, Mythop.
Spotted Flycatcher, 3 ad Lesser Whitethroats, 3 Blackcaps, 5
Gadwall Marton Mere.

23-8-01

400 Pinkfeet Wyre Estuary, 2 Green Sandpipers Tyre Pool and 1
Wheatear Fleetwood Tip.

22-8-01

Fem Marsh Harrier Fluke Hall hunting over reclaimed marsh

21-8-01

1 Little Egret Warton Bank behind airfield high tide
1 Green Sandpiper Tyre Pool Jameson Rd Fleetwood.

20-8-01

1 Green Sandpiper Tyre Pool and 1 Spotted Flycatcher
Jameson Rd Fleetwood.
1 Buzzard Marton Mere

19-8-01

Juv/1st w Yellow legged Gull Marton Mere

18-8-01

3 Little Egrets Warton Bank behind airfield.
1 Kingfisher Little Singleton on Wyre.RB

17-8-01

1 Little Egret & Marsh Harrier Warton Bank
2 Spotted Redshank Little Singleton on Wyre. RB
1 L R Plover Newton Marsh

16-8-01

3 Spotted Redshank Little Singleton on Wyre.RB

15-8-01

3 Spotted Redshank Little Singleton on Wyre.RB

14-8-01

1 Little Egret Out Rawcliffe LGB
16 Whimbrel Little Singleton on Wyre.RB

12-8-01

Ad w /1st summer Sabine's Gull off Rossall Prom 1730hrs.

11-8-01

1 Black Tern off Rossall Prom (ad largely still in sum. plum.).

10-8-01

1 Spotted Redshank Cockersands & 1 at Conder Green
2 Water Rail & Peregrine Warton Bank.

9-8-01

1 Little Stint Little Singleton on Wyre.RB

8-8-01

Ad Yellow Legged Gull Glasson Dock (regular here on roof
tops) & Continental Cormorant on the basin.

7-8-01

1 Ruff at the 'Tyre Pool' Jameson Road, Fleetwood.

6-8-01

1 juv. Wood Sandpiper again 'Tyre Pool' Jameson Road

5-8-01

1 juv. Wood Sandpiper, 1 Green Sandpiper, 1 juv Stonechat &
2 Snipe all at the 'Tyre Pool' Jameson Road, Fleetwood.
1 Little Egret off Pilling Lane Ends.
1 juv. L.R.Plover Fleetwood Tip.
2 L.R.Plover, 2 Whimbrel, 3 Greenshank at Conder Green.
1 Tree Pipit heard calling but not seen at Hambleton Marsh

3-8-01

1 Little Egret at Skippool

Recent Reports August & Sept 2001

2/10/2001

1 Red breasted Flycatcher Watson Rd railway bushes

1 fem Scaup Pilling LE pond at CPark. & 1 fem Fairhaven Lake.

28/09/2001

Dead Sei Whale on beach well off Pilling Lane Ends.

2 Spotted Redshanks & 2 Ruff @ Ramper Pot

3 Juv Curlew Sands & 3 Greenshank Skippool

1 Spotted Fly Mount Pk Fleetwood (SMM)

27/09/2001

1 juv Curlew Sandpiper StAnnes beach (SMM)

26/09/2001

1 Richard's Pipit over Rossall Pt calling at 1100 hrs (IG)

1 first w. male Ring Ouzel Fluke Hall (pager)

25/09/2001

1 Buzzard N low over M55 just E of J3 & 1 over Fluke Hall

1 Ferruginous Duck on Fairhaven Lake (Unconfirmed report. If anyone has details please forward them).

24/09/2001

1 Yellow browed Warbler Mount Park Fleetwood P.Sc.

23/09/2001

1 Pied Flycatcher nr Glasson Lighthouse Cottage (pager)

1 1st w fem Scaup Fairhaven & 1 1st w male Scaup Naze Pool

21/09/2001

Lane Ends Pilling 1 Great Skua, 1 Pink-footed Goose, 200 on sea.

2 juv Curlew Sand and 30-35 Blackwit Bank End

20-9-01

1 Bonxie Blackpool over Imperial Hotel at 1745hrs

2 (1ad, 1juv) Spotted Flycatchers Heron's Reach G.C

2 Curlew Sandpipers and Greenshank at Bank End

Conder Green; juv Curlew Sandpiper and Greenshank

18-9-01

2 redhead Goosander Conder Green (pager)

At least 5 & possibly 7 juv Curlew Sandpipers at Bank End plus

1 Spot Red, Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit 2 juv Ruff

Bonxie again off the Lane Ends-Lune Estuary

17-9-01

4 Greenshank and 1 Jay Naze Point Freckleton

Cockersands / Bank End (mid am - incoming tide) 145,

2 Spotted Redshank, 1 juv. Curlew Sandpiper

16-9-01

1 Bonxie on tide line 10am Pilling Lane Ends on FBC Guided Walk: also 1 Ruff, 1 Greenshank, 5 Wheatears, 2 Grey Wagtails & Peregrine chasing Teal.

1 Curlew Sandpiper Lytham.

1 juv Spotted Flycatcher L.S.A.N.Reserve, (MJ)

2 juv Curlew Sandpipers at Cockersands & 1st winter Med Gull

15-9-01

1 Leach's Petrel south past Rossall Point am (obs SE)

1 Green Sandpiper ICI pools Jameson Rd

Ad Yellow legged Gull Glasson Dock

14-9-01

1 first w Mediterranean Gull following plough 1m SE Glasson

1 juv Curlew Sand, 1 Greenshank, 5 Black t Godwit Bank End

13-9-01

57 Leach's Petrels, & 1 Black Tern past South Pier, Blackpool by 1530hrs. (pager)

3 Leach's Petrels, 9 Fulmar, 21 Gannets past Rossall in 2 hrs.

46 Leach's Petrels past Cleveleys (19 from 0700-1030 hrs) +

(27 from 1140 -1440hrs). 3 sat on sea for 10 mins. Also 8

Manx Shearwaters 46 Gannets, 12 Pinkfeet, 1 Bonxie, 1

Arctic Skua, 1 Fulmar, 2 Skua spp, 5 Auk spp.

12-9-01

1 Sooty Shearwater & 72 Common Scoter, 30 Gannets, N past South Shore, Blackpool 0745 - 1045hrs. (SD)

1 Swift Marton Mere RJS.

11-9-01

21 Ruff on stubble just to east of Naze Pool Freckleton (PE)

2 Little Stints Plover Scar.

1 Curlew Sandpiper Cocker Sands

Marton Mere: Pied Flycatcher, Spotted Flycatcher, Garden

Warbler, fem Garganey, 96 Black t. Godwits 1 Bar t Godwit

(on scrape). RJS

10-9-01

3 Curlew Sandpipers Fairhaven

1 Ruff & 1 Ringed Plover Tyre Pool, Jameson Rd; Fleetwood.

1 Spotted Flycatcher Mount Park.

1 Swift Marton Mere

Update: the 'Nightjar' taken into care in Blackpool 30th July turned out to be a juv Cuckoo !

9-9-01

3+ juv Curlew Sandpipers at Bank End

1 Ruff & 3 juv Ringed Plovers Tyre Pool Jameson Rd

1 fem Merlin Rossall Point.

8-9-01

1 Wood Sandpiper & 3 Ruff Tyre Pool Jameson Rd Fleetw'd

1 Whinchat Anchorsholme Park, Blackpool

1 Kingfisher Skippool Creek

1 fem Scaup (interesting small bird) Pilling Lane Ends Car

Park pond (for past week) & 6 Little Grebes

1 Leach's Petrel off Cocker Sands Light.

15+ Curlew Sandpipers & Peregrine at Bank End

2 Fulmar, 2 Gannets & 1 Eider off Cleveleys 1630 - 1800 hrs.

3 Long tailed Ducks (1m 2f), 1 Red Th Diver, 2 Eider, 1

Sandwich Tern, 1 Gannet & 1 Wheatear Rossall School

7-9-01

1 Sooty Shearwater 'close in' 30 Manx Shearwaters, 6

Leach's Petrels, 1 Arctic Skua, 3 Fulmar, 1 Gannet, 3

Sandwich Terns, 60 Common Scoter, South Shore,

3 Ruff Tyre Pool Jameson Rd Fleetwood.

4 Swifts & 99 Teal Marton Mere.

6-9-01

1 Swift Staining Nook Marsh nr Blackpool.

1 Wood Sandpiper Tyre Pool Jameson Rd Fleetwood

1 ad Yellow legged Gull visible from Glasson Dock + sinensis

Cormorant on 'basin' (darvic ring no. 43)

Bank End Cockerham: 5 -7 Curlew Sandpipers, 1 Spotted Redshank, 1 Ruff, & Greenshank.

1 ad White Wagtail Cocker Sands.

4 Buzzards up together over Singleton BD

1 Curlew Sandpiper Lytham SMM



Fylde Bird Club

LANCASHIRE

FYLDE BIRD CLUB **BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT 19:50 ON THURSDAY **THE 17TH OF JULY AT BLACKPOOL CRICKET CLUB**

Present

Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and 14 members. Apologies were received from Stephen Dunstan, Kinta Beaver, Alan Stamford and Don Rusling.

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last business meeting on 10th May were agreed to be a true and fair record.

Matters arising

1) *Black-tailed Godwit Wardening*

The Secretary reported that following the hatching of the second pair's eggs letters of thanks had been received from the Police and the RSPB. All agreed that the project had been worthwhile and successful.

2) *Marion Mere L.N.R.*

Mike Mc.Gough reported that had attended a meeting with Blackpool Borough Council and the Lancs Wildlife Trust to discuss the concept of the Lancs Wildlife Trust taking over the management of the reserve on the basis of a trust. He stated that the outcome was that LWT had accepted an action to prepare a detailed proposal for consideration by the Council. Mike added that the Council made it clear that they were looking for the best value for money arrangement and that no extra funds would be available from them.

The Secretary reported that responsibility for the LNR had moved from the Zoo to the Department of Environmental Health. However neither the Club or members of the Marion Mere Management Committee had been notified of this change. It was understood that the Warden was now part of the LA21 Unit within the Department of Environmental Health. The Secretary offered to contact Blackpool Borough Council in order to recommend a formal meeting of the Management Committee with the appropriate BBC managers in attendance. He noted that such a meeting had not taken place since January 2000!

Action: Secretary to propose meeting of Management Committee

3) *2001 Bird Race*

The President announced that on the 20th July, with a few exceptions, footpaths closed due to Foot and Mouth would be reopened west of the M6. However he suggested that the Club should conduct a Christmas Bird Count instead of the annual Bird Race this year. It was agreed that the Committee should discuss the matter at their next meeting.

4) *Bird Report*

The Secretary requested help with securing some outstanding records.

6) *Fleetwood Power Station Site*

The Secretary reported that he had received copies of the drawings showing the plans to turn the site into a 'Nature Park'. The drawings were provided to the members for inspection

at the meeting. These plans had been submitted by Lancashire County Council as the basis for a formal planning application.

It was noted that the proposal tried to accommodate all interests and retained the model flying club on the site. However it was agreed that on balance the proposal was positive and that the Club should not object. It was hoped that in the future the management of the site might be 'guided' more towards nature conservation.

Correspondence (where not covered above)

1) Fylde Coast Outfall

A letter had been received from an environmental consultant requesting comment on the affect on birds of a proposal off Rossall Point. The proposal was to dump tons on rock on the seabed to bury the end of the Long Sea Outfall Pipe. Apparently the pipe is made from polyethylene and it is becoming exposed (whereas it must be buried in the seabed). The Secretary reported that the letter had arrived while he was on holiday and requested a very quick response. He had therefore sent a reply without being able to consult widely on the matter. The reply stated that we had insufficient data to be able to assess the proposal, however species which could potentially be affected were Common Scotor and Eider. These birds which feed on mussels and might be affected if the dumping of rock were to adversely affect the mussel population. However it was stated in the response that this was speculation and that knowledge of the shellfish population in the affected area was required. Those present concurred that it was not possible to say what the effects would be but that it seemed unlikely that it would be damaging to the birds in the area.

2) St. Anne's Sand Dunes

An E mail had been received inviting the Club to join a new local pressure group. This group's aim was to fight any proposed development on the site of the old Blackburn home opposite Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve. The Secretary reported that he had replied stating that the ornithological interest of the site was unremarkable and therefore the Club would be unable to offer any useful data to oppose development. However he had added that the cause was worthy and suggested that the Lancs Wildlife Trust would be a good ally and that they should contact Maurice Jones for data on the plants at the site.

A.O.B.

- 1) Harry Andrews reported that he had heard of worrying proposals to build more pathways and remove a number of trees in Woodland Gardens (Blackpool). The plan had been reported in the Gazette, which stated that six new paths were to be created between Stanley Park and Marton Mere and that the path through Woodland Gardens would be upgraded to allow wheelchair access. He added that the new path around the northern edge of Stanley Park Lake had been detrimental to the birds in that area.

The Secretary suggested that the Club should again attempt to gain a seat at Blackpool Borough Council's LA 21 Unit, Blackpool Environmental Action Team (BEAT) Nature watch Group. He stated that this group had a stated aim to involve local bodies and the community and that he had already tried several times to make contact without success. It was believed that through this forum, the Club could voice its concerns and suggestions relating to actions which affect wildlife on Council managed land in Blackpool.

Action: Secretary to seek involvement in BEAT

- 2) Barry Dyson reported that the key for the Rossall Point Coast Guards Tower was now available from the Marine Hall from 8am to midnight. It was reported that so far there had been no vandalism. Mike McGough stated that he had yet to arrange a meeting with Wyre Borough Council to discuss the future operation of the facility.

Action: Mike McGough to arrange meeting with W.B.Council

There being no further business the meeting closed at approx. 2100 hrs.



Fylde Bird Club

LANCASHIRE

FYLDE BIRD CLUB COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT 8:00 PM ON THURSDAY THE 24TH OF JULY AT THE PLOUGH IN STAINING

Present

Chairman; Secretary; Treasurer; Ian Chandler, Len Blacow and Mike McGough. Apologies were received from Alan Hinchliffe, Stephen Dunstan (letter raising issues provided), & Dave Pitman.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 22nd of March, were agreed to be correct.

Matters Arising

1) Godwit Protection at Newton Marsh

The Secretary relayed a request from Dave Pitman. He asked the Committee to consider raising the issue of the attempt to ring a godwit chick with the RSPB. The Chairman reported that the ringers involved (who were present at the invitation of the RSPB), would not become involved in any future godwit ringing attempts. It was noted that the final outcome of the watch appeared very positive and that the Club should first thank the RSPB for their efforts. However it was agreed to make an informal approach to the RSPB strongly recommending that no ringing attempts should be conducted next year. The Secretary was also actioned to discuss the provision of a log book and storage facility at the watch site to improve recording and inform volunteers of progress, events and presence of other birds.

Action: Secretary

2) Rossall Coast Guards Tower

It was noted that the Tower was open, there had been no vandalism and that the keys were available from the Marine Hall between 8 am and midnight.

Mike McGough & Len Blacow agreed to arrange to meet with W.B. Council to discuss its future operation. At the previous Committee meeting Len and Mike had also agreed to remind the Council of their commitment to provide interpretative material, in or close to the tower.

Continuing Action: Mike McGough & Len Blacow

3) Marton Mere

It was noted that as reported at the last Club meeting Mike McGough had attended a meeting with the Council Officers who were now responsible for the running of the LNR and Lancs Wildlife Trust. As there had been no further communication on the issue of Trust status, the Secretary was actioned to contact Tim Mitcham of the LWT to enquire after progress.

Action: Secretary

The Secretary reported that after several attempts, he had managed to contact Mr Duncan Broadbent of Blackpool Borough Council who held the position of Agenda 21 Development Officer. The LA 21 Unit is the office which is currently responsible for the running of the LNR. He had suggested to Mr Broadbent that a formal meeting of the LNR's Management Committee was long overdue and Mr Broadbent had been agreeable to arranging such a meeting.

4) Lytham Hall Breeding Birds Survey & Guided Walks

The compilation of a breeding bird summary for Lytham Hall was believed to be in progress by Stephen Dunstan. (From the minutes of the last meeting there is an outstanding action for the Secretary accompany the provision of the report with an enquiry on the country park report, with an expression of the Club's willingness to become involved in the production of a management plan for the site).

Action continuing: Stephen Dunstan/Secretary

5) Promotion of the Club

The Chairman reported that it was hit and miss when attempting to get the Gazette to include the Club's meetings, in its what's on section, with a less than 50% success rate. However he agreed to try again by sending the dates in writing.

Action: Chairman

Len Blacow reported that Bill Oddie would be presenting an event night at Lowther Pavilion in November and that there may be a further event hosted by Chris Packam at a later date. He suggested if the Club was invited, we should again and man a stand. All agreed that this had been worthwhile at the last talk at Lytham.

The Secretary suggested that wall mounted Perspex holders for the Club's promotional leaflets would be a useful asset if placed in sites such as the Ribble Discovery Centre. All agreed but noted that they were expensive for what they were. The Chairman offered to investigate the cost of holders and purchase some if the cost was within reason.

Action: Chairman

Mike McGough asked if the Club should attend the Martin Mere Bird Fair on the 17/18th, November. Len Blacow questioned if it would justify the cost. Mike suggested that if they were amenable it may be possible to share a stand with Lancashire Bird Club and share the manning workload. All agreed that this was a reasonable proposal and Mike offered to approach the Lancs Society to discuss the idea.

Action: Mike McGough

In his letter to the Secretary, Stephen Dunstan stated that more active birders should be sending sightings in to be published on the Club's Web Site. He noted that the Lancaster Society's site was extremely well supported and a good source of local information. All agreed and the Chairman added that communications had become very poor, with news of some good local sightings emerging very slowly. It was noted that there were now a number of ways to communicate news and there was a tendency for people to assume everyone would somehow get to know. With two rival pager systems in use, some members on e-mail, some with mobile phones and some relying on landline phone calls it was apparent that there was no single means of spreading news.

Mike McGough offered to e-mail sightings to the Secretary for publishing on the Web Site. It was also agreed to canvass the membership again, asking members who wished to share the information, to supply their e-mail addresses and mobile/home phone numbers. A list giving these details would then be published amongst the membership.

Action: All

Mike McGough proposed that the Club should turn one of its meetings into an 'open night' for the benefit of recently joined and potential new members. He stated that many new members were attracted to the Club as a source of information on where to go birding locally and that the Club could exploit this fact. The theme would be Where to Watch Birds and the event would take the form of illustrated talks about local sites, the birds found there and the time of year to visit. The event would be widely publicised, with the intention of attracting non members who may later join the Club. All agreed with the concept and it was agreed to hold the event at the December meeting, incorporating the Quiz which was programmed. It was decided to target the first four months of the year with short talks on where to find Geese, Sea watching, Spring tides, Early Migration & the Bird Race. Advertising in the local papers, libraries, Web site and other forums would be required. It was noted that this event would take some work to prepare and all agreed to assist. Len Blacow offered to prepare and present the talk on where to find Geese.

Action: All

6) Wyre Borough Council Guided Walks

Len Blacow stated that following the lifting of the foot & mouth restriction in our area, the programmed Bird Club walk in October should now take place.

7) Pink footed Goose and Swan Monitoring