



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2003

Welcome to my final newsletter as editor. All in this is, I think, my tenth newsletter editor as editor or acting editor. Now I think it is time to let someone else have a crack at it, but I must say it has been a real privilege to take the newsletter through the last couple of years. I hope that some of my innovations, particularly the more organised recent reports section, have been as well received as the feedback I have had suggests.

The idea of a seawatch special has had to be jettisoned as I received other material which it seemed churlish to ignore. Indeed for the first time since I took over the editor role there has been an excess of material for the 16 pages I work to, I hope this is a sign of a positive things to come for the incoming editor.

As many of you will know Maurice was rewarded for persistence with the Fylde's first Dusky Warbler in October. He has been kind enough to write an account of this for the newsletter, incorporating other observations from Fairhaven.

Monty Myerscough has written an account of the successes he has enjoyed with the Barn Owl nestboxes he has put up over the years. There are a number of very successful nest box schemes in rural Fylde and the originators rarely get the credit they deserve.

Stuart Piner has done a piece on the Bridges of Ross, the near mythical seawatch venue in County Clare. This may tempt you to give it a go, if you do the best of luck, though you probably won't need it.

Finally Barry Dyson has done a fascinating historical piece building on an article by Maurice which was published last summer. I always find these looks back into our local birding past very rewarding, I hope you do too.

It is fitting that some of the most active supporters of the newsletter over the last couple of years have contributed to this, my curtain call. I hope some new faces will also put 'pen to paper' for the new editor.

Good birding, Stephen.

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HAWFINCHES, A RARE WARBLER AND A SWIFT

FAIR HAVEN IS NO SPURN POINT. NEVERTHELESS WE KNOW FROM PAST EXPERIENCE THAT WHEN WINDS BLOW FROM AN EASTERLY DIRECTION A SMALL FRACTION OF THE SCARCE DRIFT MIGRANTS AND VAGRANTS WHICH MAKE LANDFALL DOWN THE EAST COAST CAN MAKE IT ACROSS TO OUR WEST COAST.

FRANK WALSH AND I HAVE BEEN MAKING DAILY VISITS TO THE OUTER EDGE OF FAIRHAVEN LAKE THROUGHOUT SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER TO COUNT DIURNAL MIGRANTS. HIGHLIGHTS HAVE BEEN THE 2,600 FIELDFARES AND 1,300 REDWING IN JUST TWO HOURS ON THE 13TH OF OCTOBER. NEXT DAY TWO OVERFLYING HAWFINCH WERE A MAJOR SURPRISE – MY LAST ONES IN THE FYLDE AREA HAD BEEN A PAIR IN GREEN DRIVE, LYTHAM IN MAY 1953!

ON THE 23RD OCTOBER THERE SEEMED TO BE LITTLE MOVING OVER, AND IN ANY CASE BARRY DWIRE WAS DUE TO PICK ME UP AT HOME AT 1030 FOR A DAY OUT. I JUST HAD TIME TO LOOK THROUGH SOME WILLOWS AND HAWTHORNS ON THE DUNES OPPOSITE KING EDWARD SCHOOL. HAVING CHECKED THE WHOLE LENGTH OF BUSHES I WAS ALMOST BACK AT THE CAR AT 10AM. IN THE LAST WILLOW WHICH WAS CATCHING THE MORNING SUN A CHIFFCHAFF SIZED WARBLER WAS FLITTING ABOUT.

THE LONG PROMINENT SUPERCILIUM DREW MY ATTENTION SO I CHECKED ITS LEG COLOUR – PINKISH BROWN SO THIS WAS NO CHIFFCHAFF. AS IT WENT INTO COVER IT BEGAN TO GIVE A QUIET LESSER WHITETHROAT LIKE 'TACK' – THIS COULD ONLY BE A DUSKY WARBLER. AFTER 6 OR 8 'MISSES' ON THE ISLES OF SCILLY I HAD AT LAST GOT TO GRIPS WITH 2 RADDE'S WARBLERS. ALTHOUGH CLAIMED TO RESEMBLE DUSKY WARBLER THEY ARE IN FACT STRUCTURALLY QUITE DIFFERENT AND HAVE SEVERAL PLUMAGE DIFFERENCES ALSO.

MOBILE PHONES ARE HANDY WHEN YOU FIND A RARITY – YOU DON'T HAVE TO LEAVE THE SITE. I RANG CHRIS BATTY AND THEN SEVERAL FRIENDS WHO HAVE NO PAGER. THE BIRD STAYED IN ONE SMALL AREA OF WILLOWS ALL THAT DAY AND THE 24TH, ENABLING PERHAPS 150 BIRDERS TO SEE IT. TRUE TO FORM IT DISAPPEARED BEFORE THE WEEKEND.

THIS IS THE SECOND RECORD OF DUSKY WARBLER FOR LANCASHIRE AND NORTH MERSEYSIDE. TOM WILMER CAUGHT ONE IN A MIST NET AT HEYSHAM NATURE RESERVE ON THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER 1994. THERE HAVE BEEN 247 RECORDS IN BRITAIN UP TO AND INCLUDING 2002. THE YEAR 2001 WAS THE BEST EVER WITH 24 RECORDS, WHILST 2002 HAD ONLY FOUR. VERY FEW OF THE RECORDS HAVE BEEN AROUND IRISH SEA COASTS.

THE AREA STILL HAD ANOTHER SURPRISE IN STORE FOR ME. HAVING LEFT FRANK WALSH AND ROBERT STINGER STILL COUNTING OVERFLYING PASSERINES I CALLED AT THE BUSHES ON THE DUNES. A CALL CAUSED ME TO LOOK UPWARDS AND FLYING SOUTH EAST INTO THE SUN WAS A SWIFT! THIS WAS ON THE 7TH OF NOVEMBER! FAIRLY STRONG SOUTHERLY WINDS TWO OR THREE DAYS PREVIOUSLY HAD PROBABLY CAUSED THIS BIRD TO 'BACK TRACK'.

THIS IS THE SECOND LATEST FYLDE SWIFT RECORD AFTER ONE AT ROSSALL ON THE 4TH OF DECEMBER 1963 SEEN BY ANDREW CADMAN AND A FRIEND (AND MISSED BY ME BY 5 MINUTES!).

MAURICE JONES

Bridges over Troubled Water

Every August a growing band of British birders make a pilgrimage to Western Ireland to sit on an inhospitable headland from dawn till dusk for days on end, and stare longingly at the Atlantic Ocean.

There are many well known seawatching locations situated along the western coast of Ireland, but the 'honey-pot' site has increasingly become Loop Head, in County Clare, and more specifically, the Bridges of Ross.

The promontory of Loop Head forms the south west boundary of the vast expanse of Galway Bay. 'Textbook' seawatching conditions for this site are thought of as westerly or north westerly winds and poor visibility. In these conditions as birds leave Galway Bay a 'bottleneck' effect occurs with birds being funnelled, often at extremely close range past the Bridges of Ross.

Whatever the weather a day at the Bridges of Ross should see a stream of passing Manx Shearwaters and even on a calm day one may expect to see at least a few Sooty Shearwaters accompanying them and often a Balearic Shearwater too may be picked out. Also in summer European Storm Petrels, Great, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas can also be expected alongside the more abundant seabirds.

For scarcer seabirds the Bridges of Ross arguably provides the British birder with a higher chance of connection than and comparable mainland British site. Cory's and Great Shearwater, Leach's Petrels Long-tailed Skua and Sabine's Gull are all regularly recorded but their numbers are highly influenced by the weather.

An even rarer species, indeed one which previously enjoyed near-mythical status in our waters is Wilson's Petrel but the Bridges of Ross has an enviable record for these too and whether by increasing observer coverage or some other factor at least six were seen in late summer last year alone!

What many see as the 'ultimate prize' however is Soft-plumaged Petrel (the birds concerned seem likely to have been Fea's Petrels) and it is the chance of encountering one of these that has arguably been the main factor in the increasing number of visitors to the Bridges. This species breed off Madeira and on the Cape Verde Islands and like Wilson's Petrel has seen an increase in records of late, with five records off Bridges of Ross in July/August.

Much of the excitement of seawatching lies in the capacity to potentially encounter the unknown. Already there have been four records of Little Shearwater (three in August and one in late September) at Bridges of Ross and one has to ponder whether any further, even rarer seabirds may be recorded in the future. With the British list containing such exciting species as White-faced, Bulwers, Madeiran, Black-capped and Swinhoe's Petrels, Red-billed Tropicbird and Magnificent Frigatebird, who would be against the Bridges of Ross to record an undisputable, multi-observed example of one of these sometime in the future. Stay away at your peril! ...and if you are there, make sure you get on 'it' when the elated shout echo's off the cliff faces of Loop Head.

Stuart Piner

Returning to the Rev Banister, he is frequently mentioned in Mitchells Birds of Lancashire (1884) revised and annotated in 1892 by Howard Saunders FLS,FZS with help from R J Howard MBOU of Blackburn. Below are a number of such references extracted as written. I know of no older records for our area which is why I repeat them here for your interest and thoughts:

Buzzard.The Rev J D Banister (hereafter referred to as JDB) writing between 1840 and 1850 says that it 'breeds in Wyresdale.'

Kite.and according to JDB and Mr John Weld it at one time was occasionally to be seen in Wyresdale and on the Bleasdale fells but is rarely met with now.

Hobby.and JDB writes that the Hobby has occurred in Wyresdale forest, but does not give any particulars.

Brent Goose. The late JDB use to be familiar with it at Pilling, and from this locality a specimen was received by H P Hornby on the 19/12/1882. (This is the Hugh Phipps Hornby who wrote 'The Birds of St Michaels' in 1924 and had a private museum in the village containing many stuffed birds. More of Mr Hornby later.)

Whooper Swan. JDB also wrote in his journal, under date of 3/2/1838, '8 Swans (white) were seen on Pilling sands..... A great many swans have been shot and taken alive in this neighbourhood, some were of a dusky gray,others gray head and neck but generally white. I have examined 2 specimens white excepting a portion of feathers on the forehead of a rusty colour. March 26, this day I sent a fine living swan by coach to the Earl of Derby... This bird was caught near Wyre water in the frost by a bay in February.

Long-tailed Duck. A rare winter visitor. Seen at Pilling (JDB, Mss.)

Smew. At Pilling it used to occur according to JDB.(Mss.)

Quail.The late JDB writing in his journal (which owing to the kindness of his son the Rev E D Banister I have had an opportunity of perusing) under date 9/12/1836 says, 'I saw a fine Quail on the edge of Pilling moss. Do they migrate? It is stated here by persons that formerly they were as numerous as larks, but were destroyed by a very severe frost about 60 to 70 years ago and were never plentiful since'.

Red Grouse. Although a few pairs remain to breed in these lowlands, the birds are commonest in November when a partial migration from the hills takes place; and the late JDB in his journal dated 11/9/1838 remarks on their propensity at this season for oats and clover seed.

Golden Plover. It used, indeed, according to the Mss of the late JDB to breed on Pilling moss, but these notes were written 40 years ago and it certainly does not do so now. (c1844)

Dotterel. The late JDB too writes (Mss) that he has never found a nest, but that on the highest of these hills (at the head of Wyresdale) he has known a female bird to be killed with eggs in her at maturity.

Dunlin. According to the Mss notes of the late JDB it bred on the hills at the head of Wyresdale some 30 years ago. (c1854)

Temminck's Stint. and the late Rev E D Banister, JDB's son presented a specimen to the Lancaster museum, which he shot at Pilling in 1873, but in what month he cannot remember.

Dunlin and even Red Grouse bred extensively. A few pairs still occupy certain districts where they annually breed. The Black backed and Black headed gulls have within the last 12 year succeeded the ancient colonists. The poor heath, in the vicinity of the breeding place, has been almost annihilated by excrement, and in its place has sprung up a rich and varied vegetation. No one who formerly knew the moss, and has witnessed the remarkable change, doubts for a moment that it has been entirely effected by the dung of these birds deposited on the moss during the breeding season.'

The only reference to numbers of Black headed Gulls on Pilling moss I have come across is in an article by Cuthbert Oxendale (1882) entitled 'A Lancashire gullery'. This is taken from the publication 'The Field Naturalist' in which he states 'The number of gulls has been estimated at 10,000 to 12,000. I think there must have been many times more than that; but it is impossible to form an approximate guess while the white seething cloud is so active'. This is a good read and should be read in conjunction with 'The Gull Moss' which is a chapter in a book by Thomas Newbigging entitled Lancashire Characters and Places (1891). Once again, these can be read at Fleetwood museum where Simon is always only too willing to oblige. If you have the time, ask also to see Mitchell's second edition of the Birds of Lancashire. It is plastered with old newspaper cuttings, correspondence, photographs and annotations by previous owners of the copy. I will say no more other than you will not want to put it down.

Leaving behind JDB I shall now move on to HPH or in full, Squire Hugh Phipps Hornby who in 1924 wrote 'Notes on the Birds of St Michaels'. HPH was born in 1849 and died in 1944 aged 95. He was largely responsible for setting up a museum in the 1890's at St Michaels. The museum housed a collection of objects donated by people from all over the area, illustrating the Natural History, Archaeology and day to day life of Lancashire. Stuffed birds were a particular feature of the museum which was housed in the old school at the SE of the churchyard. Sadly the museum closed down in 1949 and the contents were returned to the original owners or transferred to other museums, notably Grundy House in Blackpool. This in turn closed in 1984 causing a further dispersal of the St Michaels collection. It is thought the museum birds came into the possession of one Laurence Arderne. The Hornby family have connections with St Michael's-on-Wyre dating back to 1375. H P Hornby's grandfather, father, brother and nephew were all vicars there from 1789-1930 continuously. If only they had all been interested in birds what a wealth of information we would have today. But hey let's be glad with what their is. To whet your appetite I include a few references below:

Hawfinch.... The Hawfinch was unknown until 1888 after which it was common for many years but now is rarely seen.

Nightjar.... Saw two in Needless wood in May& June 1886 and another caught uninjured resting on a wall in our gardens in Sept 1917 but it is an uncommon summer visitor. (Needless cottage is half a km due south of St Michaels church. BD.)

Little Owl... has occurred only once to my ken in St Michaels viz in April 1924 when I had a good view of one only 3-4 yards off sitting on a low tree and could note the feathering of the feet to distinguish it from Tengmalms. (I hasten to add that there are no records of Tengmalms at St Michaels and can only assume that he had seen them on the continent. BD.)

Short-eared Owl... occasionally visited our rush beds & mosses 40 years ago, seven having been seen on Sowerby meadows in Oct& Dec 1879&1880.

Bittern... one was shot at Sowerby meadows in the winter of 1871.

RECENT REPORTS

The records in this summary are compiled from reports to the club's website news pages. Records cover the period 1 September – 30 November, they may exclude some records which were posted to the website late for which apologies.

All records of Fylde, Lancs and national rarities are subject to acceptance by the appropriate report editorial teams and rarities committees.

Divers, grebes

It was a very good period for the scarcer divers. **Great Northern Divers** were off Starr Gate on 24 Sep and Rossall on 8 Nov, with **Black-throated Divers** off Rossall on 5 Sep and 23 Nov and Starr Gate on 10 Sep. The largest counts of **Red-throated Diver** came from Starr Gate, where up to 20 were seen in September.

Little Grebe gatherings included up to 12 on Thornton ICI reservoir and 11 on Sand Villa pool. There were up to 23 **Great Crested Grebes** off Starr Gate and 19 from Pilling Lane Ends over high tides.

Seabirds

Perhaps just the one immature **Shag** was seen off Starr Gate on 21st and 24th September. The injured *sinensis* **Cormorant** remained on Glasson Basin, up to 112 *carbo* were noted at Rossall.

A **Leach's Petrel** was seen off Rossall in relatively unpromising conditions on 24th Sep, a much more significant 'blow' produced around 22 from the 6th to the 10th of October including 12 past Cleveleys on the 10th. The peak **Gannet** count in the period was 108 off Starr Gate in September, by contrast just a handful of Fulmar were noted.

Hérons

The first **Bittern** of the autumn came from the unlikely location of a ditch at Saltcotes on 23rd October; by the 25th this or another bird had reached Marton Mere and there were up to 3 in November before a further increase in December.

Little Egrets continued to be problematic with several known escapes at liberty. A known escape (ringed) was on the Ribble, and a probable escape (judged by foot colour) was seen over Watson Road railway bushes. Birds which were apparently wild or not seen well enough to be conclusive were reported as follows – up to two in North Fylde, one on the Wyre and one on the Ribble in Sep and one still at Glasson in Oct.

Swans

Whooper Swans were most frequent around Pilling and at Mythop, where the former Lytham Moss flock now winters; maxima were 97 at Pilling and 89 at Mythop. Several small **Bewick's Swan** flocks included up to six at Pilling and Little Singleton and five at Glasson. The largest **Mute Swan** gathering was also at Glasson, peaking at 135 birds.

Geese

Away from the Warton Marsh breeding site and the favoured wintering ground of Marton Mere **Water Rails** were recorded at Fluke Hall, Pilling Marsh and Sand Villa pool. Coveys of up to 20 **Grey Partridges** at St Annes Moss in September may reflect releases.

Waders

It was a toss up for best wader of the period – not many years ago the **Pectoral Sandpiper** on the ICI tanks on 12th October would have won hands down, but a **Grey Phalarope** off Rossall on 10th October was perhaps an equally strong contender on occurrence patterns these days.

Purple Sandpipers seem to be restricted to passage birds at present, this autumn brought one to Fairhaven on 28th Sep and two to Rossall on 29th Oct. A scattering of juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** included up to 5 at Skippool and 4 on the ICI tanks; **Little Stints** were more scarce with up to two on a few dates in the Fleetwood area only.

Spotted Redshanks included up to four on the Conder estuary, where at least one stayed to winter, and others at the Naze, Pilling and Skippool. **Greenshank** numbers were exceptional for the time of year and included up to 21 at Skippool, 14 at Glasson and 11 at Sand Villa. The only **Green Sandpipers** in the period were two at Greenhalgh on 25th Sep.

There were several widely scattered records of **Ruff**, but the peak appears to have been just three at Conder Green in October. An injured **Whimbrel** was at Pilling Lane Ends on 11th Oct, up to 1500 **Black-tailed Godwits** were on the Ribble estuary. **Jack Snipe** were seen in small numbers at Myerscough Quarry, Pilling Marsh, Sand Villa and on the Wyre estuary. **Woodcock** were seen at Fleetwood (Mount Park), Kirkham and Marton Mere.

Gulls

The regular **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Glasson to 17th September, presumably a different bird was on Pilling Sands on 12th September only. **Mediterranean Gulls** were widespread in September at sites including Glasson (four), Skippool (two), Cockersands (two), Myerscough Quarry (two), Marton Mere and Pilling Sands. In October and November the only reports came from Marton Mere.

Little Gulls were seen in small numbers from Starr Gate in September, there was then a big increase in reports in the October gales with a maximum of 94 off Rossall on the 29th. Up to 90 **Kittiwakes** were seen from Rossall in October.

Terns

An interesting record was of a **Black Tern** at Rossall in gales on 10 October, there was an American Black Tern off Bardsey around this time so the origins of this bird are open to question. Late **Sandwich Terns** consisted of two at Starr Gate on 18 Oct and one at Rossall on 26th. A **Little Tern** at Rossall on 21 Sep wrapped up a good year for this species by recent standards.

Skuas

Pride of place went to a juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** past Starr Gate on 20th October. During the October gales **Bonxies** passed Rossall (two) and Cleveleys on the 10th. **Arctic Skuas** included two past Rossall on Sep 1st, and one at Starr Gate on the 22nd.

Auks

Grey Wagtails are increasingly widespread, particularly in winter, nevertheless upwards of 49 over South Shore sites on 7 September was a notable count. The tail end of a reasonable showing of **Yellow Wagtails** in the current climate consisted of birds over Marton Mere on 1 Sep and Rossall on 5 Sep. **Alba wagtail** passage included up to 70 over Marton Mere on visible migration, up to 200 Pieds were roosting at Blackpool Victoria Hospital in November. **Rock Pipits** included perhaps as many as 10 on migration over Fairhaven, and a dozen on the Wyre off Burglar's Alley in November.

Thrushes, chats

A first winter male **Black Redstart** was present briefly at Starr Gate on the early morning of 7 November. Up to 5 **Wheatear** were seen at Rossall in September, few were reported elsewhere.

Stonechat passage began at Jameson Rd on 22 Sep, 1-2 were seen at eight sites in Oct but in Nov birds were only seen at Fairhaven, Pilling (Black Hill Farm) and Rossall.

Some very good counts of winter thrushes in October peaked on the 13th at Fairhaven, where 2344 **Fieldfare** and 1864 **Redwing** moved over. The peak counts of other thrushes were also made by Fairhaven vis mig recorders, with up to 37 **Mistle Thrushes** and 60 **Blackbirds** daily in Nov.

Warblers

Pride of place went to the Fylde's first **Dusky Warbler**, found in willows by the pumping station at Fairhaven on 23rd October and remaining the next day. Otherwise a bird showing plumage and call features of **abietinus Chiffchaff** was at Lytham St Annes NR on 2nd October. Wintering **Chiffchaffs** and **Blackcaps** were seen into November at several sites, including a notable five of the latter at Marton Mere.

A **Garden Warbler** was at Marton Mere on 22 September; up to two **Lesser Whitethroats** were still at the same site until 7 September. **Goldcrest** passage was marked at several coastal and near coastal sites, but was eclipsed by up to 15 presumably wintering birds in Stanley Park in November.

Flycatchers, Tits

There was a marked irruption of **Coal Tits** in Sep and Oct, peak counts overhead included 24 at Fairhaven on 14th Oct and 16 on the 16th; on the deck up to nine were at Watson Road Park and eight at St Annes Park.

Continuing the good run at the site a **Pied Flycatcher** was in Watson Road Park on 11 Oct.

Crows, Starling, Sparrows

Ravens were seen at Pilling in Sep, Burglar's Alley in Oct and Mythop in Nov, though increasingly regular they can still be difficult to catch up with in the Fylde. An irruption of **Jays** included up to 7 at Winmarleigh Moss and six at Marton Mere, with birds turning up at unusual locations including in the Watson Road railway bushes.

Up to 7000 **Starlings** roosted at Marton Mere in November; flocks of **Jackdaws** over Fairhaven peaked at 800. **Tree Sparrow** counts included 98 at Eagland Hill, 90 at Fluke Hall and 30 at Todderstaffe Hall; small numbers were also seen at Fairhaven and LSANR.