



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2003

There are no fewer than three contributions by members this quarter, a big thank you to Barry Dyson, Chris Batty and Colin Bushell for helping with what should be a varied and interesting read this time.

Barry gives us one of his witty travelogues, this time from a visit for owls in 2002. As you will see from the account there are pros and cons to visiting Finland, the cost of living being quite expensive for instance, but there is no doubt there are some magic birds to be seen there.

Chris has written an account of his Fylde year listing effort in 2002. Year listing, like bird racing, isn't everyone's cup of tea. But like bird racing year listing encourages you to get to parts of the Fylde you don't often visit. If you are having a go at a Fylde year list I am sure other members would like to hear how you get on.

Colin has provided some thoughts on covering his 'patch' of Warton Bank since he moved up from the 'Deep South'. For winter birding the high tide watches at Warton Bank can provide some of the most memorable times in the Fylde. It isn't bad at other seasons as well, with regular Little Egrets and the only Water Rail nesting site in the Fylde. Colin's account sums up well some of the magic of the place.

Finally I have written a short piece on some later migrants which you might see on the Fylde in ploughed fields - Greenland Wheatear, Whimbrel and (if you are lucky or very persistent) Dotterel. If you do give it a go in late April or early May don't forget to pass on your sightings to Chris for the website.

SD

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MY FYLDE YEAR 2002

In October 2001 I moved back to the Fylde having spent over five years away. To my knowledge no-one had ever attempted a 'Fylde Yearlist' and I was intrigued as to how many species one could see in a single year. During December 2001 I drew up a list of likely species I could expect to see and made an assessment of the likelihood of encountering each of these. Following this exercise I thought it realistically possible to reach a tally of about 188 during a year. So how did I fare?

January

Obviously the first few days of January brought me 'year-ticks' every time my binoculars were raised, but I tried to focus my efforts on those species which could potentially prove most difficult later in the year. The returning Ferruginous Duck at Fairhaven Lake presented no problems on 2nd but a brief Iceland Gull there frustrated my efforts. Smew initially gave me the run around with birds at both Marton Mere and the Lune Estuary disappearing on the 2nd but luckily the Mere bird showed again from the 3rd and was safely logged along with Bittern. My first visit of the year to Jameson Road, Fleetwood produced the goods on the 4th with the hoped for Glaucous Gull. The rest of January yielded few surprises, White-fronted Goose at Preesall on the 7th being the best of the rest. The month ended on 107.

February

Maybe it's just my imagination, but the Fylde seems to experience purple patches when rare birds turn up back to back. February 2002 was purple. Bob Danson, Jim Clift and Colin Bushell set the ball rolling by simultaneously finding a Snow Goose at Eagland Hill on 5th and Barry Dyson quickly followed with a family party of three Bean Geese at Pilling Lane on 6th. With unprecedented movements of Leach's Petrels being reported from Wales and the southwest throughout the 6th, a late afternoon seawatch resulted in a Leach's battling against the storm past Rossall Point coastguard tower. Persistence paid off at Jameson Road Landfill Site with an Iceland Gull there on the 7th beginning a run of white-winged gulls climaxing with the undoubted bird of the year, the Ivory Gull at Fairhaven on 14th - certainly not on my prediction list for the year. The month ended on 118.

March

A relatively quiet month began with Jack Snipe close to home at Hambleton Marsh on 3rd before spring sprung on the 21st when Stuart Piner's regular visits to Myerscough Quarry revealed a fine pair of Garganey. As the month drew to a close stunning Water Pipits were educational at Warton Bank on 29th. The month ended on 129.

April

For many years Bullfinch had eluded me in the Fylde, despite many visits to both Greyfriars and Ingol. I had made so many visits in fact that disappointment had become routine, but not so on the 14th when a delightful pair showed: at long last the wait was over! Bird of the spring appeared on the 21st when Stephen Dunstan found a superb Hoopoe at Lytham St. Anne's Nature Reserve. The joy of the Hoopoe was followed by great frustration when news broke just after dark of a Green-winged Teal at Preesall Flashes, just a five-minute drive from home. Dawn the next morning revealed no sign of the bird and a search of other likely sites proved fruitless. The month ended on 143.

from my year. Red-crested Pochards, like White Storks, are dismissed by many as nothing more than roaming escapes, but I do not believe all are such and I elected to count the individual present briefly at Fairhaven Lake on 19th. Stuart Piner struck the jackpot on the 25th with a Wryneck at Carr House Green Common. Excellent views that evening were much appreciated as the bird had gone by the morning. The month ended on 176.

October

The Fylde paralleled the national rarity scene during October with few rarities meaning slow progress. An Arctic Skua past Rossall Point on the 10th was a later addition than I would have liked but was much appreciated nonetheless. Ian Gardner's persistence around Fleetwood came to fruition on the 13th with a delightful Grey Phalarope on the pools at the back of Jameson Road Landfill Site. The month ended on 178.

November

Stephen Dunstan's early morning and lunchtime vigils at Starr Gate were producing dividends with regular Long-tailed Ducks and after a couple of failed visits I managed to catch up with this often tricky species on 13th. The Long-tailed Ducks seemed to prompt a flurry of activity with Snow Bunting at Fairhaven on 15th, Guillemot off Rossall and Hen Harrier at Warton Bank on 16th, Brent Goose past Rossall on 17th and finally a Little Auk whirring north past Starr Gate on 19th. The final action of the month was, once again following in Stephen Dunstan's footsteps, on 23rd with a pair of Velvet Scoters off Starr Gate - a much appreciated Fylde tick. The month ended on 185.

December

After my bumper November, December was in the main a let down. The only yeartick was an American Wigeon at Barnaby's Sands on 9th, only the second Fylde record. So after 12 months had I recorded as many species in the Fylde in the year as I had anticipated possible? Well 186 was just two short of my theoretical prediction of 188. I presume that I set a record by default, as to my knowledge no one else has ever tried before!

To my knowledge a further 28 species were reported in the Fylde during the year, with my most notable omissions being Purple Sandpiper, Long-eared Owl, Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Marsh Tit, Raven and Lapland Bunting.

Given the relatively small size of the Fylde and the correspondingly limited avifauna, undertaking a yearlist isn't particularly taxing in terms of time or money - the longest possible journey being Glasson to St. Annes! So why not have a go at a Fylde yearlist, my 'record' is a record waiting to be beaten.

I should particularly like to thank all the Fylde birders who promptly released news of their sightings during 2002, be it to myself, the pagers, birdlines or websites: in particular Maurice Jones, Stephen Dunstan, Stuart Piner, Frank Walsh, Barry Dyson, Ian Gardner, Bob Danson, Pete Marsh and Paul Slade. Without up-to-the-minute information the chance of catching up with many of the scarcer species diminishes considerably.

Chris Batty
Hambleton, January 2003

Don't ask me where we went to, you could have been blindfolded and had just as good an idea. We were met by Pecker who told us it was perched on a Ural Owl's nest box begging for food whenever the male returned with some. Unbelievable but true. I regret to say the edge was taken off it for me, as one affectionately named Gracie is kept by an acquaintance of mine, not far from where I live. I had been there a few weeks before and had shot off a roll of film on her. Such a softie but with penetrating eyes and full of character. This one just sat there watching us watching it, shuffled about a bit and was probably glad to see us go after we had had our fill. Although undeniably big they lack bulk and weigh less than half of that of a Snowy Owl. We didn't see the Ural Owl but heard it once or twice. Pecker is involved in a nest box scheme for Ural Owls in which he said there were 300 pairs in nest boxes in an area of 4000 square kilometres. In square miles this represents an area of approx 40 miles by 40 miles or one pair for each five and a third square miles.

We returned to our digs elated but hungrier than ever. We needn't have worried for we were in for a gastronomic delight with a wonderful buffet which included, fresh salmon, whitebait, herring mops, sardines, pork, rice, cheese and onion potato bake, onion pie, mushroom salad, beetroot, cranberry, lettuces, fresh breads, desserts, beers and wine and goodness knows what else. We retired bulging at the waist and ready for sleep.

The chalet in which we stayed was in excellent condition, but as usual on these trips, was little used other than for sleeping. The following morning many Fieldfares were in the grounds where we were staying and two pairs of Pied Flycatchers were active around the nest boxes that had been put there for them. Willow Warblers could be heard and two female Bullfinches showed well. In the distance flying over a lake were two Little Gulls, a Baltic gull and an Osprey.

We breakfasted, our digestive systems obviously in good working order considering what we had consumed the night before. It didn't take long before we were on our way, and saw our first Elk a front heavy animal looking like a hybrid deer/horse with a flattened head and a blunt nose. Nonetheless they have a certain endearing quality about them, or is it pity.

Moving on we eventually came to an area where we made our first scheduled stop. Hearing water coming to the boil meant there were Black Grouse about even if we couldn't see them. There was definitely a cock Capercaillie for it came looking for us on hearing us draw up. This was another, up for it, cocky Capercaillie like most are. Fearless, foolhardy, thick, it would not be ignored as it made its way toward us. 'Pecker' showed it who was boss by confronting it head on in a way I suspect he had done countless times before. Respect but only for Pecker. Everyone else had to toe the line although some tried and ended up worse for it. John Harriman defending himself with his tripod found himself 'pinned' to the jeep, making a wonderful picture that would have sparked great interest in a competition for best caption. Also seen here were 2 or 3 Grey-headed Woodpeckers.

We did a good deal of stopping and starting in this maze land. At one stop Pecker or was it Dick called in a Three-toed Woodpecker. Stood in a clearing we waited expectantly and were not to be disappointed. After one or two flybys a male settled in trees behind us and we feasted our eyes on it. A black and white woodpecker about the size of a 'Great Spot' but with a bright yellow forehead and no red to be seen, they are unmistakable. It was a 'lifer' for most of us. Also here a female Black Grouse flew by along with Siskins and a White Wagtail. Two distant B.T. Divers the size of specks also flew by. Thanks for them Dick, another species to add to my speck list.

A short drive took us to the mammal species of the trip. Pecker led us to a tree with a large column nest box attached to it. The inhabitant was not for disturbing until unceremoniously done so by Pecker. Clinging to the tree and only moving when encouraged to do so was one of Europe's rarest, the nocturnal Flying Squirrel. Its goggle sized eyes, which I likened to puppies, evoked feelings of ahhh. It was small and two toned grey in colour with a floppy furry membrane used for gliding, something we did not see as it was anxious to get back to its parenting duties. We didn't stay long not wanting to cause distress, but I would love to have seen it flying.

We returned to our chalet after what was probably the best day of the trip and feasted once again. But it was not all over yet although perhaps it might as well have been. Pecker took us to an Eagle Owl site in a quarry not far away. Unfortunately despite his repeated efforts to provoke one it became clear the site was not in use. We did however see roding Woodcock and several Redwing.

The following morning saw us packing for our long onward journey to Oulo but not before devouring a breakfast consisting of cereals, porridge, sausages, scrambled eggs, salad, fresh bread, croissants, home made strawberry and apricot jams, washed down with fruit juice, coffee and various teas.

We thanked our hosts for our excellent stay there and bid them farewell. Pecker however was still with us as he had yet to find a Black Woodpecker. Sure enough he met us at a site, one of the few left he had not tried, and there waiting for us was a pair of them. At last I was finally to see a bird that I had missed in so many countries, but boy was it worth the wait. Standing in the centre of their breeding territory they put on a great show flying from tree to tree with their jay like flight. This was some woodpecker, by far the biggest in Europe, and unlike owls exceedingly easy to describe. They were the size of a crow, black all over except for a red crown restricted to the nape on the female. What more do you need to know. All right they had a white eye ring and the bill was ivory coloured but there is not a lot more you can usefully add unless you're picky. When alighting against a tree they stood back at approx a 60 degree angle, when at times their neck appeared scrawny. They were great to see but we had to go, for it was a long way to Oulo, about 500 kms. Pecker after all was pukka and we thanked him for all he had done. A little shy, you could nevertheless see he was glad, using present day parlance, to have delivered the goods as we shook hands.

We made our way north with little change in landscape. Dicks driving was exemplary sticking to the speed limits and exercising due care and attention, but Dave was tearing his hair out following him in the 'pits' mobile, if you will forgive the pun. Dick, although somewhat older, had lived in the same street as Mika Hakkinen and Mika Salo when they were children. His driving had clearly not influenced them. On a lake 2 Slavonian Grebes held company with 2 Great Crests. Wigeon, Coot, Pochard, Tufted Duck and a Whooper Swan were also present as were a pair of Marsh Harriers. The dams and lodge of a Beaver were seen, as well as Muskrat and Raccoon dog. Not everybody saw everything as people succumbed to the curse of 'motorway' travel - snoozing. This brought about cries of 'snooze and you lose' a phrase new to me but one I was about to become familiar with as it was oft repeated. Yawn.

It was fascinating to see the numerous lakes in varying degrees of frozenness, but even those just opening up held a pair or two of prospective wildfowl no doubt staking their claim to ownership of territorial rights. After the breeding season, the lakes are very popular in autumn for ice skating, until the snows arrive. Most buildings we passed were of wood construction with sombre colouring, but the atmosphere was one of serene tranquillity and solitude.

Coltsfoot lined the motorway verges where occasionally a Brimstone butterfly would also help brighten up the scene. Arable fields are planted with wheat, barley, oats, oil seed rape and sugar beet but I cannot remember what crops were there when we were. Lean birch trees like matchsticks fingered there way to the sky, and the pines looked like primitive horsetails. Norway spruce was abundant and our 'own' Scots pine looked odd as it grew straight-up and possessed a bright rusty coloured bark.

We stopped for a coffee break before continuing on with people switching round and changing vehicles to reduce the sameness of it all. Mike and Dave recounted their lavatorial humour and regaled us with their past and most recent experiences. I can honestly say I don't need to visit the Philippines as I have this vivid picture of it through their constant references to it. In fact I probably know more about the Philippines and Paul Ellis's sleeping pattern (he had been there with them) than I do about Finland, such was their enthusiasm for the place.

We made good time and arrived at Oulu at 16.00 hours. We stayed at the hotel Vihiluoto in a suburb to the S.W. of Oulu. The hotel backed on to a large bay whose name escapes me. We didn't hang around. After unloading and depositing our luggage in our rooms, we set off to visit the WWF wetland reserve at Liminka, about half an hour away.

Snow lay in the dikes, and the fields were sodden. Redwings called as they passed over and the trumpeting of Whooper Swans could be heard in the distance. The air was still, save for the varying levels of wind trumpeting in reply, from the over fed party of the 'Pitman experience' reminding me of daybreak at the campsite in Kazakhstan. But even this could not detract from the evenings sunset. The reddening sky changing to orange, then yellow and finally electric blue. In the distance was a ramshackle shed with varying lengths of plank covering the roof and with gaps everywhere. Had it been built like that or had time taken its toll. Whichever, it did not look out of place as the mist rose from the ground, enveloping it. People stood around motionless, listening intently, hands in pockets, as the temperature dropped towards freezing and the light faded to darkness. The Great grey Owl did not show but it had been a worthwhile experience.

The next day we made our way back to Oulu via the forested fells and hills of the Kuusomö region. We were far too early in the year for the likes of Red-flanked Bluetail, Arctic Warbler, Greenish Warbler and Little Bunting. Equally we were too soon for the orchids, Lady's Slipper and Calypso seen here in June-July.

This was however the day **some** of us missed Willow Grouse from the dip mobile so perhaps the less said about that the better, although one was later picked up dead but in great condition, although hardly tickable. Never mind eh Paul. We saw 3 Sibe Jays, Yellowhammers, Bramblings, Sparrowhawk, Merlin, and Common Cranes before alighting and walking up hill listening for early migrants. It was a fresh sunny day making for a pleasant stroll. In the adjacent trees were 5 Waxwings, Bramblings, Tree Pipits, Siskins and Chaffinches while 4 majestic Golden Eagles put on a great show directly above us. Several of the party heard 3 early Rustic Buntings in flight but they were to be the only new arrivals.

We next made our way to Hirvisuo bog which is about 30kms north east of Oulo. We parked up and walked along the nature trail to an impressive watch-tower where we had panoramic views of the bog landscape. I like bogs, but we were far too early in the year to see it at its best. Birds were thin on the ground, ground that up to recently would have been frozen solid and was only now starting to come to life. Nevertheless our visit was not entirely unproductive as we added Wood Sandpiper to the trip list and saw only our second Hen Harrier a female on the edge of the reserve, a long way away. Nearer were two pairs of Bean Geese and a pair of Whoopers, no doubt both breeders on the bog. 2 Curlews, 2 Goldeneyes, 2 Teals, 2 Cranes and 2 Greenshanks made up further twosomes, one of the Greenshank surveying its territory from the branch of a tree. A distant Golden Eagle and a cruising Peregrine made up the site list for the visit, oh, and not forgetting a Meadow Pipit.

We continued on back to Oulo to stay overnight at the same hotel we had stayed in previously. Perfectly adequate, but with few facilities we ate and retired to the bar for a night-cap.

The next day we returned to the wetland reserve at Liminka only this time making for the observation tower. The return visit was memorable for the well behaved school parties visiting the reserve, most of the children sporting binoculars and taking a genuine interest in their day out. A young French man was also enjoying his touring of the country, but perhaps understandably by himself, had seen few of the desirable species we had seen. I regret I couldn't help him, as for the life of me, there was no way I could direct him to any of the sites we had been taken to. A fly over Yellow Wagtail, and a past its sell by date Camberwell Beauty in the car park, were new species for the trip. A booming Bittern was also heard.

The time had come to face the long trip back to Helsinki, not recommended, best to fly. Dick showing his leadership qualities remained cheerful. Dave too with his easy going style did his best to allay our thoughts of the dull journey ahead of us. As it happened the day passed by reasonably quickly. A stop or two for refreshments and a roadside stop for a superb male Hen Harrier helped break the day up. The Harrier was quartering a dyke before resting in a field, then disappearing into some birch woodland. I was not surprised when the harrier featured in some peoples birds of the trip nominations, for when seen well they take a lot of beating.

We arrived at our hotel in Helsinki in good time to be able to visit a nearby urban nature reserve, which I think was called something like Espoo pit and had been funded by the neighbouring power station. It comprised of open water areas with islands and good stands of phragmites. An embankment afforded good views at one end and the remainder was tree-lined on a very good perimeter path. The weather was sunny and mild and there were many walkers making use of the path. There were also quite a few Finnish birders there. I walked all the way round and got some incredibly close views of Slavonian Grebes of which there were about a dozen. Also here was the rare Moorhen, well rare in Finland, hundreds of Black-headed Gulls, Coots, Swallows, Sand Martins and a variety of duck. Chiffchaffs, Willow and Sedge Warblers were all singing and although it may all have seemed a bit tame, it was enjoyable and a welcome stretch of the legs after the 650kms drive from Oulo.

High Tide Birding on the Ribble Marshes.

Having lived in a land-locked county in the south-east of England for most of my birding life, I welcomed the thought of moving to Lancashire. Anticipation of some decent birding grew as we moved into our new house but my work takes me abroad for lengthy periods and it was some time before I could "get my teeth into" some serious local birding. I had read about watching birds on the Ribble estuary on a rising tide from Warton Bank and the first "good" tide saw me there, sheltered from the rain in my car. The first of these "watches" was truly memorable: Short-eared Owls, Brent Goose, Jack Snipe, Little Egret, Merlin and Peregrine as well as the spectacle of huge numbers of wildfowl in the estuary.

Ever since that first vigil I have tried to get to Warton at every ten metre tide whenever possible. The latest high tides were particularly good for me, inspired by the hope of my first Fylde Hen Harrier (one had been seen the previous day well after high-tide time). Arriving early on a calm November day I had enough time to walk eastwards from the end of Bank Lane and have a look around the bushes. Redwings and Fieldfares were present in good numbers and Water Rails squealed from the higher vegetation in the salt marsh. Probably the most interesting sighting of the day on a local perspective, was not at all influenced by the rising waters. The soft call of a Bullfinch came from a nearby clump of bushes and before to long a male appeared amongst a flock of Reed Buntings. Apparently this species is rare west of Preston on the Fylde.....I had not realised the significance of the birds I saw near my house just after moving in nearly a year ago!

Back at the car I settled in to watch the birds (hopefully) displaced by the tide. It was not long before Short-eared Owls were on the wing, five in all, presumably disturbed from their daytime roost or even preying on some of the small mammals fleeing from the flooded saltings. This was the highest number of these magnificent birds that I had seen here, little did I know that the numbers would increase the next day (are there more around this year?). Suddenly the harrier appeared, a ringtail and all too briefly before disappearing behind the bank of bushes east of our viewpoint. Luckily the bird made a few passes over the salt marsh before heading off harassed by a couple of the owls.....marvellous stuff!

One of the highlights that I had read about was the congregation of pipits, namely Water and Rock Pipits. These are best viewed from the end of Bank Lane in my limited experience at this site, as they are stranded on what damp grassy "islands" are left exposed close to the seawall. With the aid of a 'scope decent views can be obtained, close enough for scrutiny of outer-tail feather, wing-covert tips and supercilium colour if the light is good. The birds present on this day were not the fine summer plumage birds of the previous March with their pink-flushed breasts, but it was good to see some winter plumaged birds all the same. I realised now that we took our Water Pipits for granted on the watercress beds in the river valleys near to London: the separation of this species and Scandinavian Rock Pipit can prove tricky. Warton is however is fine place to study these birds if conditions are right, with some individuals conveniently perching up on wire fences or posts.

I have rarely left Warton without seeing something noteworthy after a good tide and this day was no exception. The following day was less eventful perhaps, but 7 owls up together and a fine adult Mediterranean Gull is hardly a poor return.

Colin Bushell Jan 2003

A very reasonable showing of **Barnacle Geese** included up to five Over Wyre in Dec and Feb, there appeared to be turnover of birds as few were seen in Jan. Singles were seen at Fleetwood and Mythop. Three **Light-bellied Brents** were at Cockersands in late Dec, another which appeared with Pinkfeet at Mythop in early Jan was still with Pinkies Over Wyre at the end of Feb. **Dark-bellied Brents** consisted of one on the Wyre on 28 Dec and another with the light-bellied bird among Pinkfeet at Pilling in late Feb.

One or two **Greylags** of 'possibly wild' status were seen throughout the period, though the presence of six in the flock at Eagland Hill on Feb 4 rather muddied already very murky waters! In terms of the **Pinkfeet** themselves numbers Over Wyre peaked in late Feb at an estimated 20000, and at least 3000 were seen at Mythop where they now seem to be firmly established visitors.

Ducks

Probably the best bird of the period was the Fylde's second **American Wigeon**, found by Chris Batty off Burglar's Alley on 9th Dec and remaining until at least 8th Feb. On several occasions this bird was seen to be aggressive to Eurasian Wigeon is associated with.

Seaduck continued to provide a lot of interest. **Long-tailed Ducks** at Starr Gate peaked at an excellent five on 1st Jan, a single female or immature was at Rossall on 29 Jan and 14 Feb. Female **Velvet Scoters** were recorded off Starr Gate on 5 Dec and 7 Feb (see also other wildlife news). Up to 3000 **Common Scoter** were off Starr Gate in Dec, unusual records of this species in Jan came from the Mere, Jameson Road pools, Fleetwood Marine Lake and on St Annes beach. Substantial **Scaup** flocks are always unusual in the Fylde these days, so up to 65 off Starr Gate in early Jan was particularly notable. Other Scaup reports included six on the Wyre in late Feb and singles on the ICI reservoir and more briefly on Fairhaven Lake.

The ICI pool at Stanah held unusually high numbers of **Pochard**, with up to 102 present; there were also up to 157 at the relatively recently favoured Fairhaven Lake. Up to six **Gadwall** were also seen at the ICI reservoir, and there were up to six birds of this species at Marton Mere. **Shoveler** counts included up to 70 on Stanley Park and 20 on the Wyre estuary; the former site has high enough wintering numbers to extend the BHS designation beyond the island heronry.

The Lune off Glasson continues to be the best place in the Fylde to see **Goldeneye**, up to 100 were present here during the period with other maxima up to 30 on the ICI reservoir and 24 off Starr Gate. Sawbill counts included up to 11 **Goosander** at Myerscough Quarry and 10 on the Ribble, and 17 **Red-breasted Merganser** on the Wyre estuary.

Other wildfowl peaks included 2500 **Wigeon** off Naze Point and an excellent inland count of 352 at Myerscough Quarry. At least 530 **Pintail** were seen off Lytham. **Eider** counts were generally very low as the Walney population continues to suffer from fox predation, the peak reported was just 35 at Rossall in December.

Raptors

A ringtail **Hen Harrier** was seen on the Wyre estuary on two dates in Dec, another was seen irregularly throughout the period on the North Ribble marshes. Presumably the **Marsh Harrier** which had been at Warton Bank in Nov was again there on Dec 8th.

Buzzards continued to be reported at or near breeding areas, with up to four at Mythop and singles near Kirkham and at Todderstaffe and Elswick. It will be interesting to see how far this species can establish itself in the relatively treeless Fylde.

Typically there were up to three **Merlin** at both Warton Bank and Pilling Lane Ends. Inland birds were noted at Cumming Carr, Eagland Hill and St Annes Moss.

Guillemots and **Razorbills** were seen in ones and twos off the coast in Dec and Jan; in late Feb there was something of an influx with up to 30 birds in total and double figures of each species at coastal sites.

Owls etc

It continued to be an excellent winter for **Short-eared Owls**. In Dec one was over the Mere mobbed by crows on the 12th, and one was seen twice over Starr Gate on the 31st. Jan reports included one at Scronkey and birds were on the Wyre and Ribble estuaries in Feb. However the most reliable site was St Annes Moss in the area of Easterleigh animal sanctuary, where up to four birds were widely appreciated.

Long-eared Owls were seen in a roost at Marton Mere in mid Feb, but did not linger in public view for very long. **Barn Owls** are frequently under reported, but up to two birds at Marton Mere and St Annes Moss and another day flying bird on Bradshaw Lane attracted quite a bit of interest.

Kingfishers were reported from typical Fylde winter sites, namely the Brock, Conder Green and Myerscough Quarry. The only evidence of larger **Woodpigeon** movements elsewhere in northern England was 300 south over Myerscough Quarry on 7 Dec. Up to 85 **Stock Dove** were seen at Over Wyre sites, with 14 at the other less major stronghold of Mythop.

Up to 103 **Collared Doves** were at Fluke Hall, and a leucistic bird was at Bradshaw Lane. Some gatherings of **Skylarks** were noted Over Wyre, including 250 at Eagland Hill, 200 at Scronkey and 125 east of Pilling Lane Ends.

Pipits and Wagtails, Waxwing

The Fylde does not generally do very well in **Waxwing** invasion years; early 2003 was an exception with birds at Glasson on 7 Jan, two at Thornton 31 Jan - 3 Feb, two at Myerscough College on 5th Feb and reports of birds from Fulwood in mid Feb.

Grey Wagtails continued to be reported in ones and twos throughout the period, including several in urban Blackpool. **Rock Pipits** were seen in reasonable numbers, particularly on the Wyre where a very good count of 20 birds was made in late Feb. A well marked bird at Skippool in late Dec was filmed, and those who have seen the images generally agree it was a well marked (for mid winter) **Scandinavian Rock Pipit**.

Thrushes etc

A female **Black Redstart** was in an Ashton on Ribble garden on 14 Feb, reports of this species have been very thin on the ground in the Fylde of late. A very early **Wheatear** was reported from Pilling Lane Ends on 26 Feb.

Stonechats were seen at Rossall Point and Stanah in Dec. They were much more widespread in Jan and Feb, with evidence of return passage at the end of the latter month. Reports from new sites came from Mythop/Ream Hills (up to two), Fleetwood Tip, Fleetwood Fields, LSANR, Moor Park and St Annes Moss. Several Over Wyre in late Feb included up to seven reported in the Lane Ends area.

Up to 400 **Fieldfare** were recorded at Eagland Hill. A couple of **Dipper** were seen on the River Brock near Brock itself, reports outside of the bird race period are unusual though they are doubtless always in the area.

Warblers, tits, nuthatch/treecreeper

Two **Firecrests** were in the Herons Reach - Marton Mere area in late Dec and early Jan, they showed very well on occasions but could also be frustratingly elusive. Perhaps more interesting in a

2003 PROGRAMME

28th Jan AGM &
Photographic Competition

22nd Jul Wardening Little Terns
with Roger Wilson

25th Feb Antarctica
with Rick Swales

26th Aug Birds of Eastern Australia
with Mick Turton

25th Mar Winter Birding in Ireland
with Chris Batty

23rd Sep Club Business and
Members Slides

22nd Apr Club Business and
Members Slides

28th Oct Bird Photography with
Phil Tomkinson

27th May Birds of Western North America
with Paul Ellis

25th Nov Texas in Spring with
Mike McGough

24th Jun Birds of New Zealand
with Dave Pitman

23rd Dec Christmas Social,
Quiz, & Buffet