



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2003

Welcome to the September newsletter. The birding locally has certainly been entertaining since the last one, notably including White-rumped Sandpiper and White-winged Black Tern.

I am very pleased that Stuart Piner has been able to pen a piece on eastern Fylde sites before he takes up his place at University in East Anglia. Nobody is better qualified than Stuart to comment on sites in this area than Stuart, particularly Myerscough Quarry where his dedicated commitment over the last few years has been rewarded this year with excellent local birds including Osprey, four Black Necked Grebes and best of all a Ring-billed Gull.

Pete Woodruff is a welcome new contributor to our newsletter. He has kindly produced both a short note on the White Winged Black Tern he found at Conder Green, and a site guide to that area. Most Fylde birders would be aware that Conder Green is in our recording area without knowing the typical birding fare there, Pete's article will I am sure put that right. Many thanks to Pete for taking the trouble to do all this, even producing a sketch map of the Conder Green area.

The next newsletter is planned to be a seawatching special. If you have any specifically seawatching related stories or information you would like to share I would love to hear from you. Current planned content includes the Bridges of Ross, the Portsmouth-Bilbao minicruise and cetacean watching of our very own Fylde coast. Other contributions very welcome.

not to be expected all on the same day, but in birding, who knows.....oh, and don't forget LITTLE EGRET, how long before we have a breeding record in our area of this species? All the way along this coastal path there are good views over the marsh and estuary where COMMON and ARCTIC TERNS can be seen fishing the River Lune in the summer months.

If so wished, you could continue to Glasson Dock where good views are afforded over the estuary, and the canal basin here is always worth a look over, LONG TAILED DUCK is one good find in the past here. But for the purpose of this guide to Conder Green we will turn left on a gravel path towards the B5290, where we turn left again to walk the road to Conder Pool, which we can view just after a sharp left bend in the road. A quiet approach is necessary to the viewing fence so as not to flush the birds.

After we have checked the pool, continue on towards the B588 checking the channel all the time we walk as this area is very good for COMMON SANDPIPER in autumn. We turn left to go over the humped bridge and take the right turn on to the Galgate road. Along this short section between the bridge and the house (Bush House) is probably the best and most secluded place to see the KINGFISHER up or downstream, also close scrutiny of the muddy and stoned edges may reveal GREY WAGTAIL, and in autumn GREEN SANDPIPER on migration. On one occasion I've recorded WOOD SANDPIPER here. Also during migration periods STONECHAT and WHINCHAT can be seen in this area, and in the summer REED and SEDGE WARBLER can be heard if not seen.

Beyond Bush House the river winds out of sight into the great unknown to benefit the birds that need some areas untouched by man, and left to wilderness. From here we retrace our steps back to the B588 to turn right towards the Stork Hotel watching the river again on our left and checking the channel all the time we walk. Turn left at the hotel to get back to the car park.

This circular walk takes me on average a leisurely one and a half – two hours. Conder Green is a small area, but if you can achieve anything like the enjoyment I do from the place and it's birds, and you take advantage of this guide, even on an average visit you should be rewarded in some way or other. Whether it is an average or superb visit for you here, I think you should, and will return. Remember....Not what you will see, but rather what you might, the element of surprise never fails to delight.

Pete Woodruff. 18 August 2003.

(Ed note – map at back of newsletter)

prediction. The northern section of the Common is begging for an over-wintering Great Grey Shrike and sooner or later a Firecrest must be found in the thicket at the south of the site.

Myerscough Quarry (SD505385)

Myerscough Quarry is a series of open pools created by the extraction of sand in the 1980s and 1990s. The extraction ceased around four years ago and since then the area has developed into an excellent area for birds and wildlife in general. To access, travel north along the A6 until taking a left just before Guys eating establishment, signposted Myerscough College. Drive west for ½ mile before taking the next left. Continue south for ¼ mile before parking carefully on the sharp right-hand bend. Walk over the stile and the canal bridge to access the quarry.

Myerscough provides interest in all seasons but visiting in spring and autumn obviously holds the best chance of finding a good bird. In winter gulls provide the most interest. Large flocks of Black-headed and Common Gulls often gather on the largest pit and in recent years the Myerscough area has become one of the best places in the Fylde to catch up with the ever-increasing, yet extremely charismatic Mediterranean Gull. Bonaparte's Gull is a major omission on the Fylde list and due to the close views that can be gained at Myerscough, an individual in a Black-headed Gull flock should be clinchable. At other times of the year the surrounding fields are worth checking for gull flocks following the plough or feeding on muck-spread. In spring this year a stunning adult Ring-billed Gull was located nearby.

Wintering duck species are also noteworthy. Myerscough Quarry is one of the best sites in the Fylde to catch up with Goosander, the peak count at the site currently standing at 15. Scaup and Common Scoter have also been recorded. It is only a matter of time before Ring-necked Duck makes its way onto the Fylde list and Myerscough seems as good a place as any to do the honours. Even better would be a Lesser Scaup and considering the current dramatic increase in national records of this species, it would be no real surprise to see it be added to the Fylde list before its fellow American. American Wigeon has also got to be an option and with the close views obtainable even a female should be nailed within a large group of Eurasian Wigeon.

Summer is a notoriously dull period at the site but breeding Sand Martins and until recently Little Ringed Plover provide some attraction. Lesser Whitethroat has bred and Reed Bunting, Willow Warbler, Goldfinch, Tree Sparrow and Linnet breed annually. There is also some interest for those able to identify Dragonflies, with up to 12 Black-tailed Skimmers being noted this summer amongst commoner species.

If watched regularly patches such as Myerscough are always exciting in spring and autumn. Fylde scarcities such as Black-necked Grebe, Garganey, Wood Sandpiper and Osprey have been recorded in spring and usually coastal waders such as Turnstone, Grey Plover and Knot have all put in an appearance. Myerscough is also a good site for catching up with Green Sandpiper and Jack Snipe. Due to the intense coverage by dogs and their walkers, many passage waders probably move through undetected, but a Pectoral Sandpiper or such like is definitely due! There are also a

Cuddy Hill and surrounding farmland (SD493372)

This area of farmland could be classed as a 'poor man's' over-Wyre. Tree Sparrows, Corn Buntings and Yellowhammer can all be seen, but in smaller numbers. Tree Sparrows often feed at the garden feeding station at SD493372 and a fence post at SD488372 is a regular singing spot for a male Yellowhammer. Corn Buntings occur, with a flock of 27 seen this year, but these have proven less easy to pin down.

Woodland

Small pockets of woodland at Bartle Hall (SD485333), HMS Inskip (SD455364), Myerscough College (SD497401) and Hollowforth Hall (SD502364) are all very much under-watched. Nuthatches breed at Myerscough College and the site briefly held Waxwings in 2003 but there is much potential for discovering breeding species at all the named sites. There is no reason why a remnant population of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker could not be located.

Other Species

Buzzard: Seen irregularly over Catforth and Inskip.

Lesser Whitethroat: Singing males can be heard at numerous sites during spring and early summer.

Jay: Jays are never easy to pin down but regular sightings come from Bartle Hall, School Lane (Catforth), Danson Hill (SD491367) and the Priory Hospital in Bartle (SD484340).

There is no doubt that the east of our recording area has a great diversity of breeding and wintering birds and there is great potential for finding a county vagrant. The sites mentioned in this article are only the 'tip of the iceberg' and many potentially better areas are surely ready to be discovered, so why not try a little pioneering coverage? Who knows what may turn up?!

Stuart Piner
August 2003

Correction to 2001 Fylde Bird Report

The 2001 report includes reference to a 'dark rumped, square tailed petrel' seen at Heysham and South Shore on 13th September of that year. One of the observers credited against the record was Pete Marsh.

Pete has asked that we point out that he had no involvement in claims of any birds matching this description. We are happy to make that clear through the newsletter and the next bird report, and are sorry for any embarrassment or confusion this may have caused.

traffic noise and because birds often take the line of the sea wall before then heading out across the estuary.

Lytham St Annes NR

Lytham St Annes NR undoubtedly picks up some of the birds which have cut the corner of south west Fylde and are en route to Fairhaven. However simultaneous counts at both sites last autumn showed some significant differences in the species recorded with more pipits at LSANR and more finches at Fairhaven. This appeared tentatively to be because the pipits were more likely to take a more direct route over the estuary than finches were, but this may not always be the case.

At LSANR it is generally advisable to view from somewhere near the railway fence to minimize background noise.

Pilling Lane Ends

Lane Ends seems to do quite well for passerines, it is more or less due south of Heysham which records good visible migration so perhaps this shouldn't be too surprising. Like Rossall the panoramic views make it possible to pick up and identify birds moving on a broad front.

Other sites with some recent track record for visible migration include Marton Mere and Myerscough Quarry, though these both probably reflect the fact that observer coverage at the right times of year will produce evident visible migration through sites throughout the Fylde if weather conditions are suitable.

General pointers

- Calm sunny days are generally best for observing visible migration movement, particularly when they follow days of 'blocking' weather conditions which have held movement up
- Generally there is no great need to get up desperately early to observe visible migration as things tend to start slowly and pick up as it gets warm; it is however advisable to be out before mid morning as things tend to slack off again after this
- It is useful to familiarize yourself with calls of the more regular species, bird song CDs are often a useful way to do this
- If you are hoping to see certain birds time your visit accordingly; early in the visible migration season (Aug-Sep) pipits and wagtails dominate but by the time this newsletter is published (late Sep-Oct) finches will be reaching their peak numbers
- Check out what is going on elsewhere to know what to look for; there is a visible migration e-mail group on Yahoo and Mavis Smith posts regular updates on Darwen Moor totals on the East Lancs birding website

RECENT REPORTS

The records in this summary are compiled from reports to the club's website news pages. Records cover the period 1 June- 31 August, they may exclude some records which were posted to the website for which apologies.

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

Divers, grebes

No divers were seen on the coast, though **Great Crested Grebes** had begun to appear on the sea in August; a pair of this species bred successfully on Stanley Park.

Seabirds

Some notable **Manx Shearwater** movements included 250 at Rossall Point on 9th August and 180 at Starr Gate on 30th July. The largest **Gannet** counts were all from Starr Gate, including 103 on 11th July and 128 on 25th August.

Reflecting recent very low numbers the peak **Fulmar** count received was just four at Starr Gate on 19th August. The injured **sinensis Cormorant** remained on Glasson Basin, up to 61 *carbo* were seen at Rossall.

Hérons

Although the zoo escapes clouded the picture **Little Egrets** were reported as follows - over Thornton on 12th June, late July Warton Marsh, early Aug Wyre estuary, Cockersands 25th August, one over Rossall and one Lane Ends on 30th August, two at Glasson 31st August. Several of the later birds were seen well enough to rule out escapes.

A Grey Heron was seen to come in off the sea at Rossall on 20th July.

Swans, Geese

The moult flock of **Mute Swans** on the Lune estuary at Conder Green peaked at 136 birds in August. An estimated 420 **Canada Geese** at Fairhaven on 15th June was perhaps an unwanted development given control measures have been considered at this site. At least six **Pink-footed Geese** summered on Pilling Marsh, and they were able to fly at the end of the period at least.

Ducks

An eclipse drake **Garganey** was at Marton Mere on 31st August, autumn looks like being much less fruitful for this species than the excellent spring. An **aytha hybrid** which appeared to have some Scaup / Lesser Scaup parentage was at Marton Mere on 25th August.

Perhaps the first breeding record of **Gadwall** for the Fylde concerned a female with six young at Warton Bank in July. As well as up to six adults at this site lesser numbers were noted at Marton Mere, Freckleton Naze and Skippool. Also on the breeding theme a female **Shoveler** with two young was at the Naze Pool on 12th July; up to 29 Shoveler were at Marton Mere in August.

A female **Red-breasted Merganser** with a wing feather ailment summered on Fairhaven Lake, one moved south off Starr Gate on 10th July also. On the Starr Gate theme **Common Scoter** counts there included up to 440 in July; a female at Skippool on 24th August was more unusual.

included up to 700 **Bar-tailed Godwits** and 1000 Knot. Into August particularly notable concentrations included up to 1700 **Black-tailed Godwits** and 6500 **Dunlin** at Fairhaven.

Gulls

The regular adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was in the Glasson area from late July through August; another adult was at Marton Mere on 10th Aug with perhaps the same at Hambleton Marsh on the 17th. The only **Little Gulls** reported in the period were a first summer off Starr Gate on 24th July and two adults there on 21st August.

Kittiwake counts were generally very low with maxima of 17 in June and 11 in July both off Starr Gate, less typical were one at Marton Mere on 12th June and a juvenile on Preesall Sands on 6th August. The German ringed **Black-headed Gull** (yellow AAJ1) was back at Skippool again, having returned to its natal area in the breeding season. **Mediterranean Gulls** included four at Skippool (adult, second summer ringed and unringed juveniles), four at Preesall Sands (adult, first summer, second winter and juvenile); two at Marton Mere (second summer and the ringed juv also at Skippool); two at Conder Green (both adults) and Fairhaven (adult).

Terns

One of the highlights of the period was a moulting adult **White-winged Black Tern** lingering on the Lune estuary in the Conder Green-Glasson area from 14th to 24th August (see separate article).

There was a strong showing of **Little Terns**, with 14 bird days at Starr Gate in the period, six bird days at Rossall and two at Fairhaven. The maxima for all other tern species came from Starr Gate, with up to 107 **Sandwich Terns** in August; 83 **Common Terns** also in August and 21 **Arctic Terns** in June.

Skuas

A **Pomarine Skua** was at Starr Gate on 26th July. This was part of a very reasonable showing of skuas. There were six **Bonxies** off coastal sites from 28th June, including two off Starr Gate on 11th July. **Arctic Skuas** appeared from 9 June, fifteen birds noted included five off Starr Gate, also on 11th July.

Auks

A juvenile **Black Guillemot** was at Rossall Point on at least 9th and 15th August. **Razorbills** were typically scarce given the time of year, one at Starr Gate on 21st June being the only report. Relatively good numbers of **Guillemot** by recent standards included six on 7th June at Starr Gate, with singles into July but none in August.

Doves, Kingfisher etc

A **Turtle Dove** at Todderstaffe Hall was notable and intriguing, the latest in a series of records from this part of the Fylde suggesting the species may hang on by a thread as a breeding bird here.

Kingfishers bred at Ellel Grange, and presumably sites on the Lancaster Canal. Reports away from the east in the period came from Conder Green and Glasson, Pilling Lane Ends, Preesall Flashes and Skippool.

Pipits, wagtails

records of this species are often from this area and perhaps there are some long lived fugitives out there. A **Yellow-fronted Canary** was at Whyndyke on 21st June.

Other wildlife

There were a number of interesting reports during the period. On 9th July Starr Gate was the place to be for cetaceans, with a distant unidentified **whale sp** breaching, and two separate pods of **Harbour Porposies** in view at the same time. A **Basking Shark** came right in to the surf feeding at Cleveleys in July. **Grey Seals** were seen at Rossall and Starr Gate.

The dragonfly highlight was undoubtedly a **Beautiful Demoiselle** reported from St Annes in July. **Ruddy Darters** were noted at Marton Mere / Herons Reach, Westby and Bispham. Up to 12 **Black-tailed Skimmers** were at Myerscough Quarry, smaller numbers being seen at Marton Mere and Whitehills pond. **Emperors** were seen at Marton Mere / Herons Reach, Whitehills pond, Rossall Point and Warton Bank. **Banded Demoiselles** were seen in the east at Cuddy Hill, and **Southern Hawkets** at a regular site at Warton Bank. **Migrant Hawkets** appeared from the end of July, and included up to seven on Herons Reach golf course.

Lepidoptera interest included **White-letter Hairstreaks** in an Ansdell garden and also a north Blackpool park. A **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** visited a Thornton garden on 23rd August.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* on the Lune Estuary.

If I was to be really honest, my birding had become a little 'flat' of late. Only last Monday I had given the Wyre 3 hours of intense searching for a White-rumped Sandpiper without success. The following day had been spent over the same period of time in the Eric M'cbe Hide in search of a Pectoral Sandpiper, again no success. I have visited Aldcliffe four times in as many days with the hope of a glimpse of one of John Carter's Green / Wood Sandpipers, yet again with no luck. And at Conder Green even the Kingfisher that I have seen here for the past twelve years has evaded me this summer. But...all this was about to change.

At about 4.00 p.m. on the afternoon of 14 August 2003 from the old railway bridge at Conder Green whilst taking a bike ride for the exercise and maybe see few birds as a bonus, armed with just a pair of binoculars, and looking directly into the blazing sun. I glimpsed a 'tern' which was distant and seemed intent on doing a disappearing act. Things didn't improve over the next few minutes, and the bird was in fact lost to view, but by now I knew I had seen a Black Tern, but was already beginning to feel a White-winged Black Tern was a distinct possibility.

I'm not expected to explain why, but I had to leave Conder Green now. Whether I liked it or not, there are times and things in life that are more important than birding and I was now on my way back to Lancaster, worried by the thought I had left 'something good' behind. I had no intention to alert anyone at this point, until the ID was safe. Motto.... keep your mouth shut until the needle points to 100%.

Unable to return to Conder Green again until 6.00 p.m. I had to sweat it out, but return I did. It was my lucky day and the bird soon put in another appearance. This time I was armed with a telescope. The first plumage detail I noted was the white rump and tail, I was soon able to get good views of the black under-wing coverts and white on upper-wing coverts, also a white mottled head was clearly obvious. I had a superb moulting adult White-winged Black Tern in my sights on the Lune Estuary.

I made a few phone calls, one of which I knew would guarantee a mass alert, and a 'twitch' was now in place. I had become the happiest and best pleased birder in the land, and my passion for birding had taken yet another giant leap forward.

Pete Woodruff. 15 August 2003.