

June 2004 Newsletter



**Fylde
Bird Club**

LANCASHIRE

Charity No. 1102961

Message from the Editor

It is with some trepidation that I have prepared this, my first newsletter. No doubt many of you will be asking Phil who? How long has he been a member? Well the answer is not long, but somebody had to do the job, and with a great deal of help from my friends the June newsletter has slowly taken shape. Our thanks must go to Stephen Dunstan for all the hard work he has put into preparing the many and interesting newsletters prior to this.

I know how fortunate I am in living in the countryside and waking each day surrounded by many varied and interesting species of wild birds and mammals. It is only fairly recently, however, that I have taken a more in depth look at this subject, both with binoculars and a camera, and it was because of this that I joined Fylde Bird Club. This has been one of my better decisions, and I have met some extremely knowledgeable and friendly people at the club meetings and on birding expeditions. Many thanks for your help and advice.

One of my first jobs in a morning is to switch on the computer to check email (now that post doesn't arrive till mid morning!). After the email click the second is to open the Fylde Bird Club web site to check recent sightings. I think Chris Batty and Stuart Piner make an absolutely amazing job of keeping the site up to date and informative and we should never underestimate what a formidable task it is. Our thanks must go to you both.

Finally, while I'm handing out the thanks, I must mention all those who have sent, AND ARE ABOUT TO SEND, articles for inclusion in the newsletters, because without them there would be no newsletter. As you will read later on there are two most interesting and informative articles by Barry Dyson and Maurice Jones in this newsletter.

The bird race on 1st May showed amazing results, with 5 people recording 123 species between 4.30am and 10pm. Many congratulations to all those taking part.

Phil Kirkham

Charitable status

As many of you will be aware, we are now a registered charity and have been issued with our number. This is great news for the club, and our thanks must go to Kinta Beaver and other members of the committee for the many long hours they have spent in obtaining the status for us.

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Dates for Your Diaries

Meetings – at Blackpool Cricket Club – Stanley Park

- 24th August African Storks with Frank Walsh
- 28th September Wildlife photography with Phil Tomkinson
- 26th October Business Meeting

Wyre Council Guided Walks

- 19th September Geese, Waders & Raptors 1000hrs-1300hrs. Meet at Pilling Lane Ends £1.80

Information Required

Bob Danson is colour ringing the Tree Sparrow this year: red over metal on right leg, site colour on left leg. He would be very pleased to receive any sightings to via email to BobE@redanson3722.freemove.co.uk

2004 Annual General Meeting – Draft Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held at 8.02pm on Tuesday 24th February at Blackpool Cricket Club

Present: President, Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and 14 members.
Apologies were received from Chris Batty, Ron Bedford, Pauline McGough and Frank Walsh.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 2002 AGM, held on 28th January 2003 at Blackpool Cricket Club, were read. Only one correction was offered. It was noted that the minutes showed that the meeting had closed at 2002 hours when in fact it closed at 2203 hours. The Secretary agreed to make this correction.

Mike Mc Gough proposed acceptance of the minutes with the above correction and John Barker seconded the proposal. A vote was taken which was in favour.

Chairman's Review of the Year

The Chairman made the following address summarising the Bird Club's year:

"Firstly I would like to thank everyone for their continued support during 2003, making the effort to attend meetings and parting with your subscriptions, especially as Paul and myself were missing for several evenings during the past year.

As usual I would like to thank a few people. All the committee; Len Blacow, Chris Batty, Ron Bedford, Dave Pitman, John Barker and Paul Ellis. A special thanks to John for extracting your hard earned cash and maintaining the accounts.

Thanks to Dave Pitman for putting together yet another excellent and varied programme of speakers. Talks included Antarctica, North America, New Zealand and Australia, most of which I think Dave has visited in the last few months! Closer to home we heard about wardening Little Terns, winter birding in Ireland with Chris Batty and digital photography with Phil Tomkinson.

Thanks to Chris Batty the website continues to get better and better. Chris has done a superb job, near daily updates of local bird news and always with new photographs, as we now get to see at the monthly meetings. Stephen Dunstan has produced an excellent newsletter throughout the year, but has unfortunately decided to step down as Editor. A huge thanks to Steve and hopefully one of you will now be thinking 'I wouldn't mind taking that over '-PLEASE !

The 2002 Bird Report report will be out shortly. As usual it continues to be a mammoth job every year, and would not be possible without the help of several people: data input by Paul Ellis, Mick McGough, Mike Shaw, Chris Batty and Stephen Dunstan. A big thanks to Chris and Steve for editing and a bigger thanks to all of you who send in your records either at the year end, monthly meetings or via the website.

I think we all deserve a pat on the back for making the meetings much more enjoyable, light hearted events in 2003, perhaps in contrast to the more serious even confrontational meetings in the past. I am sure this has helped us achieve record membership at the year end of over 70 members, lets hope this year continues as well or even better than last year.

As for financial matters, we invested in a digital projector early in the year, and some of us have even worked out how to use it! The projector has helped us bring the website to the meetings, enabling those of you without internet access to see just how good it has become.

We continue to support Bob Danson's feeding programmes Over Wyre for Tree Sparrows, Corn Buntings and Yellowhammers. We also continued with our own feeding and nestbox scheme at Todderstaffe for Tree Sparrows. A big thanks to Mike Sutcliffe, Barry Dyson and Chris Batty for helping out with putting down seed when Paul and I are away. During 2003 the club paid for £310 worth of seed, equivalent to nearly 800kg of wild bird seed.

We again, in partnership with the RSPB, were involved with the Black-tailed Godwit wardening scheme at Newton Marsh, although success rates were again hard to prove. Hopefully 2004 will be a good year. Please all consider helping out this year.

As for matters away from monthly meetings, we continue to be represented at meetings of several groups and committees: The Marton Mere Management Committee met again in March after a nineteen month gap, and have met several times since. Paul and Mick McGough represented the Club at the Blackpool Borough Council BEAT meetings and Mike Sutcliffe attended meetings and put a huge amount of work into finding out where many of the County Biological Sites were situated. He then re-surveyed them, resulting in the Council reviewing their views on some of the areas. The Club also reviewed and commented on the Blackpool Borough Council local plan, resulting in some positive changes being made. Ron and Len attended meetings about continued disturbance on the Wyre Estuary, and we provided opposition information regarding the estuary to several environmental consultants, resulting in several hundred pounds being added to Club funds, and our Club name and views being noted by more outside groups.

We also provided opposition letters on the proposed wind farm development at Shell Flat, backing up the Lancashire Wildlife Trusts opposition. A wintering flock of around 18,000 Common Scoter could potentially be devastated if the development was allowed to go ahead.

We again led guided walks for Wyre Borough Council and will continue to support the walks during 2004, including several of our own ideas on new walks.

A big surprise in the autumn was the Club being presented with an award from Blackpool Borough Council in recognition of our continued efforts in the area. Thanks to Mick for accepting the award on behalf of the Club.

Special thanks must go to Kinta who has probably been the main reason for the membership success with her role as membership secretary that has involved:

Ensuring all 2003 members have received a copy of the 2001 bird report. 2001 and back copies of old reports have been promptly posted out in response to individual requests and payment for such passed on to John.

She has assisted in completing and forwarding an application for Charity status to the Charity Commission. She also sent out Christmas cards to all members in her very own designer 'Robin' envelopes. She finalised, printed and distributed a 2004 Meetings Programme to all 2003 members. She has prepared adverts for meetings to send to the Evening Gazette's Social Page in time for publication a week before the meetings. In conjunction with John, Kinta has also kept the membership list fully up to date and sent out membership cards as we all pay our subs. Most importantly of all Kinta has also sent all new members a welcome pack including a welcome letter, a copy of the constitution, the most recent bird report, 2 or 3 of the most recent newsletters a car sticker and a programme of events for the coming year. Big thanks again to Kinta!

As usual my biggest thanks of the night has to go to Paul Ellis who without a doubt is the backbone of the Club. He does an amazing amount of work on behalf of the Club, much of the time behind the scenes. He manages to represent the club at every opportunity, be it meetings, guided walks, the Bird Race and the feeding scheme at Todderstaffe. He even manages to do a bit of birding and find the odd good bird occasionally.

I hope you will all join me in thanking everyone I have mentioned and also anyone I may have forgotten, if I have it certainly was not intentional.

Finally, at last years AGM I said I intended to step down as Chairman. Nobody volunteered so I said I would stay on for another year. I'm glad I did as 2003 was a pleasure to be Chairman of such a successful Club, with so many friendly welcoming members.

Thanks a lot."

Treasurer's Review of the Year

The Treasurer first offered thanks to Kinta Beaver for assisting by taking on a number of administrative tasks.

He then presented the accounts for the previous year, which had been audited by Malcolm Evans. Copies had been posted to all members in advance of the meeting.

The Treasurer noted that income £53.5 from the sale of Bird Reports was low, owing to delays in supplying invoices to retailers. He added that since the accounts were compiled a further £190 had already been collected.

The Treasurer highlighted the Club's purchase of a digital projector had been a very large exceptional item at a cost of £1470. He noted that without this item the Club's account would have shown a small net gain during the year. The Chairman noted that the expenditure on seed for farmland bird feeding schemes had been held down by lower purchase costs and that last year the Club had bought more seed than the previous year but paid less for it. 8 tonnes used!

The Treasurer again noted that income from the annual sponsored Bird Race had been very disappointing. He urged members to consider taking part and added that if everyone raised only £5 or £10 each, it would more than pay for the seed used at the feeding stations.

The Treasurer concluded that the Club's finances were still in a healthy position and he recommended that no increase should be made to the Club's membership subscription charges.

The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for his report and also offered thanks to Malcolm Evans for kindly auditing the accounts.

Mike McGough asked if the Club had been charged for the use of the meeting room. The Treasurer replied that the Club had not been charged for several years and assumed that the Cricket Club were satisfied with the takings at the bar. However, he added that the Auditor had recommended the Treasurer to make provision to pay the room fee in subsequent accounts. The official cost was believed to be £12.5 per meeting.

Len Blacow proposed acceptance of the 2003 account record. Dave Pitman seconded this proposal.

A vote was taken which was unanimously in favour.

Election of Officers

Chairman: **Paul Slade** offered to stand again and was proposed by Dave Pitman and seconded by John Barker. *The vote was unanimously in favour.*

Secretary: **Paul Ellis** offered to stand again and was proposed by Paul Slade and seconded by Dave Pitman. *The vote was unanimously in favour.*

Treasurer: **John Barker** offered to stand again and was proposed by Paul Slade and seconded by Paul Ellis. *The vote was in favour.*

Auditor: Dave Pitman stated that **Malcolm Evans** would be prepared to act as Auditor for the coming year. He was proposed by Len Blacow and seconded by Maurice Jones. *The vote was unanimously in favour.*

Committee: The Secretary reported that **Chris Batty** had agreed to stand again. He was proposed by Paul Slade and seconded by John Barker. *The vote was in favour.*

The Chairman reported that **Ron Bedford** had agreed to stand again. He was proposed by Paul Ellis and seconded by Barry Dyson. *The vote was in favour.*

Len Blacow offered to stand again and was proposed by John Barker and seconded by Paul Slade. *The vote was in favour.*

Dave Pitman also offered to stand again and was proposed by John Barker and seconded by Paul Slade. *The vote was in favour.*

The Chairman asked the floor if there were any other nominations. John Barker asked if Kinta Beaver would consider standing for the Committee in view of the work that she had undertaken. Kinta replied that she would prefer not to take a seat on the Committee on this occasion. There were no further nominations.

Subscriptions to Outside Bodies

The Treasurer read out the names and subscription costs of the bodies to which the Club had belonged to last year; they were:-

<i>British Trust for Ornithology</i>	<i>£0 (Bird Club Partnership)</i>
<i>Lancashire Wildlife Trust</i>	<i>£50</i>
<i>Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Society</i>	<i>£10</i>

The Treasurer highlighted the increase in the LWT subscription, which had risen from £33 last year. He added that the cost of individual subscriptions to the LWT had not increased. The other subscription chares were unchanged.

No proposals were made for membership of any other bodies or for withdrawal from the existing bodies.

Renewed membership of the all three bodies was proposed by the Secretary and seconded by Len Blacow. *The vote was in favour.*

Amendments to the Club's Constitution

The Chairman explained that Paul Ellis and Kinta Beaver had been making enquiries regarding the possibility of the Club attaining Charity status.

Paul Ellis had written to the Charity Commission enquiring if the Club could attain Charity Status. A positive response had been received, provided that the Club was prepared to make a number of changes to its Constitution. Kinta summarised the necessary changes by saying that they would not affect the Club's aims or the way in which the Club conducted its business. She noted that benefits to the Club were principally related to the right to reclaim tax on monies paid to the Club in subscriptions and in some cases on purchases made by the Club, although other benefits were listed in documentation supplied by the Charity Commission if members were interested in reading this material.

She then presented a detailed description of all the alterations requested and suggested by the Commission. At the end, she suggested that the Club should make provision to agree to change the word 'Charity' in the new constitution, back to 'Club', should the application be rejected. This would avoid having to call an EGM to correct the Constitution.

Kinta Beaver proposed making the amendments to the constitution, as presented. Mike McGough seconded the proposal. *The vote was unanimously in favour.*

Len Blacow proposed that thanks should be offered to Kinta, on behalf of the Club, for the work she had put in to get the Charity application to its current position. All agreed with Len's proposal.

A.O.B.

1) *Fylde Bird Club Annual Bird Report*

Mike McGough suggested that the Club should consider ceasing production of the Annual Bird Report owing to its ongoing inability to produce a report within 12 months of the year ending. He proposed that the Club should still collect and collate records and pass then on the Lancashire Bird Report. Any savings from not producing the Fylde Bird Report could be used to pay to provide copies of the Lancashire Report for our members.

The Chairman noted that in the absence of Chris Batty, the Bird Report's current editor, it would inappropriate to make a decision. The Secretary noted that a considerable amount of work had already been expended in gathering and collating records for 2003 and that to abandon the work at this stage would be unfair to those involved.

The Chairman added that he had recently discussed the situation with Chris, who had explained that his work commitments had been far greater than he had anticipated. This, combined with the fact that the task of

producing the report had proven to be far larger than he had predicted, had resulted in the delay in publication. However, the 2002 Report was now ready to go for printing and almost all of the records from the 2003 Website (Recent Reports) had already been entered into the database. Chris was therefore confident that two reports would be published in 2004.

The Chairman suggested that work should be permitted to continue on the 2003 Report but that the situation should be reviewed at the next AGM when the Bird Report would be an agenda item.

The Secretary proposed accepting the Chairman's suggestion and Dave Pitman seconded the proposal. *The vote was in favour.*

2) *Shellfish Fishery in Morecambe Bay*

Philip Kirkham asked if the Club should write, expressing concern regarding the harvesting of shellfish in Morecambe Bay. The Secretary replied that he would be unable to construct a case without some evidence that the fishery was causing a decline in stocks. Len Blacow added that counts showed bird numbers in the Bay were generally stable, particularly of those species exploiting larger shellfish.

3) *Proposal for Gas Storage under the River Wyre*

Maurice Jones announced that he had written a letter of objection to the planning application and received a 'standard reply'. A copy of the reply from Lancashire County Council was passed to the Secretary. The Secretary noted that the Club had provided bird count data in connection with this proposal to a number of bodies.

4) *Godwit Caravan*

A question was asked about what had become of the proposal for the Club to purchase an old caravan for use during the Black tailed Godwit wardening at Newton Marsh. The Chairman replied that the idea had been investigated but was found to be impracticable. The proposal had been to donate a caravan to the RSPB. The RSPB believed that wardening was best achieved by highly visible observers, stationed in the main road's lay-by. It was strongly believed that a caravan parked in the lay-by would attract vandals and would probably be vulnerable to arson. Issues of insurance, roadworthiness and obstruction were also considered obstacles. Len Blacow noted that the RSPB had appointed Carol Cope to manage the wardening campaign in 2004.

5) *Newsletter Editor*

Maurice Jones asked if the post of Newsletter editor had been filled. The Chairman replied that it had not and appealed to those present to consider if anyone amongst them would be prepared to take it on. The Secretary reminded members that Kinta Beaver had already agreed to distribute the copies.

After a 10 minute recess, Philip Kirkham kindly offered to take on the job. All present offered their thanks. Philip Kirkham was proposed by Dave Pitman and seconded by John Barker. *A vote was taken which was in favour.* All present offered their thanks to Philip.

There being no further AGM business; the meeting closed at 22:03 hours.

Ethiopia 21st-30th November 2003

Barry Dyson

Finland had been good but species low in number and new birds fewer than double figures. We decided that our next overseas trip must have plenty of variety and a good number of new birds. Naturetrek were still offering their bargain basement, value for money trips, at the same price they had been 10 years previously. We decided to take advantage before an inevitable price increase came along, which it duly did soon after we booked.

We chose Ethiopia for no particular reason other than we knew there were plenty of new birds to see there. Africa also has the advantage of no jet lag with it lying largely due south. We further decided on the Endemics tour as opposed to Awash National Park, both tours also taking in the Rift Valley lakes. As it happened the Awash tour had to be hastily re-arranged owing to feuding tribes in the area being involved in minor skirmishes, deemed serious enough by the Foreign Office to advise against travelling there.

Naturetreks office staff provide excellent customer service, but they are unable without the customers' comments to know what is happening on the tour, something which I will return to later. As with all these tours the price quoted always includes flights, accommodation, food, guides and transport with just the occasional exception. However the pre-departure incidental expenses do mount up i.e. Visa including postage £50.81, Insurance £28.44 with Norwich Union but £59.00 had I taken Naturetreks insurance, Yellow Fever vaccination certificate £40.00 but valid for 10 years should I need to use it again, Malaria tablets £46.00 but much cheaper had I chosen another brand, UK airport tax £28.40 and US\$20 in Ethiopia, fuel £20.00 and parking expenses £35.00, altogether totalling an extra £261.00 but in the event well worth it in terms of enjoyment I received from the trip regardless of the leaders shortcomings.

It is always a bind travelling down to Heathrow, but Paul's enquiries found it was still far cheaper to travel down by car than by any other means. Paul picked me up at 10.30 giving us plenty of time to get there should we fall foul of severe hold ups. A delay of 1 hour 15 minutes at Thelwall viaduct made little difference as we arrived at 'Purple Parking' at 16.15 whereupon we were taken to terminal 3 arriving there at 16.45. We had travelled down on the M6, M5, and M40. By joining the M25 from the M40 you are only on the M25 for 1 junction.

Check-in time was at 18.00, three hours before departure. We took a meal and people watched. Security was tight with armed police officers much in evidence, owing to the latest Al Qaeda threat. I couldn't help noticing that opposite us a fast food outlet was selling Haddock, chips and peas + soft drink for £8.75. Victor Meldrew's famous phrase 'I don't believe it' came to mind.

We were to see to our own check-in arrangements, so our fellow participants remained largely unknown to us until our arrival at Addis Ababa. We left bang on time at 21.00 hours though thankfully without the bang. We had been allocated the front seats where leg room is spacious. Great, until we were joined by a young Ethiopian mother with teething baby. She was returning to Addis to visit her parents and show them their grandchild. I grinned and bared it and made polite conversation, while all the time wishing for peace and quiet. Fortunately in time my wish was granted. Ethiopian airlines travel via Rome. Ethiopia was occupied by the Italians between 1936 and 1941 and the Italian influence is still to be seen around the country where there are many Italian business connections, hence the link. Many passengers got off at Rome but were replaced by only a few. Rows of seats were left unoccupied and so a caring stewardess arranged for the mother and baby to transfer to one where the baby could lie down. Result, everybody happy.

We had arrived at Rome at 23.05 and left at 00.10. As usual I dozed but hardly slept. What I would give to sleep like Tony Myerscough. There again I would have missed twilight followed by one of the most vivid sunrises of all time as we flew over the deserts of Sudan. But sunrises are ephemeral as they make way for daylight and you begin to make out the lay of the land. It didn't seem long before we were in Ethiopian territory and could make out the vast Lake Tana, source of the Blue Nile which joins the White Nile at Khartoum before continuing on as the Nile emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. Enormous gorges riddled the land below and then without warning the land became a mosaic of arable fields and terraced hillsides contrasting to the image the outside world has of Ethiopia, if remarks such as 'you're going where' meant what I thought they meant. We were looking down on the plateau lands where Addis Ababa the capital is situated. At some 2,400 metres the climate is temperate, but away from there 'hot spots' really are hot spots and not places of desire.

We landed at 08.30 Ethiopian time which is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, so all told the flight time was 7 hours 25 minutes. Just 10 other sizeable aircraft were present. The airport was upgraded in January 2003 and was smart and functional but small when compared to European airports. Passport control weren't ready for us with only 2 officers present, and it must have been a good 10 minutes before 3 or 4 other booths were manned to speed up the formalities.

We were met by Andreas, a smiling representative of the ground agents used by Naturetrek, who marshalled us together, showed us where to exchange our money for the local currency birr and directed us to the waiting minibus. A little birding was had around the airport, where Lada taxis abounded and 'helpers' and beggars were a plenty. From there a 10 minute ride saw us arrive at the Holiday Hotel where we rested up for a couple of hours.

Perhaps we should have eaten here, for nothing was forthcoming in the afternoon. Anyway off we went on a one hour drive to Gefersa reservoir with Andreas providing commentary on some of the sights we saw en route. Andreas was standing in for Merid our Ethiopian birding guide, and as a communicator was streets ahead of him if somewhat lacking in birding skills. The journey to the reservoir was an eye opener as indeed all the travelling was. Too many scenes to remember, but some that come to mind include crazy scaffolding, crazy driving, crazy people, well dressed people, dishevelled people, beautiful people, carriers of all description and ingenuity, livestock running wild, taxis crammed to capacity, traffic traffic and more traffic, continuous horn papping, swerving and braking, rusty dented beat-up vehicles, urination in full view reminiscent of Blackpool promenade on Friday and Saturday nights, runners, bare feet, shoe shiners, umbrellas, table football, and much, much more.

Gefersa reservoir was essentially an introduction to birding in Ethiopia with nothing there that we didn't see elsewhere, although it wasn't until the last day that we saw Rattling Cisticola again. Endemics here were Wattled Ibis, Blue-winged Goose, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher, Black-headed Siskin with White-collared Pigeon perhaps being the pick of the bunch. Never thought I'd say that about a pigeon. Another endemic, Thick-billed Raven was seen en route of which more about later.

Also of interest there was a male Pallid Harrier, how blasé is that, African Fish Eagle, Augur Buzzard, Yellow billed Kites (only a handful of the nominate migrant Black Kites were seen the entire trip), White-winged Black Tern, Red-billed Oxpecker, Red-breasted Wheatear, the all black and white Ethiopian race of the Common Stonechat, Olive Thrush, the shy Ruppell's Robin Chat sporting underparts the colour of an orange, and striking long white eye stripe set within black plumage - stunning. Red-throated Pipits flew over and Groundscraper Thrushes stood to attention, reminiscent of the posture of Isabelline Wheatear but even more erect. Mountain and White Wagtails, wintering Green and Common Sandpipers, Pintail, Common Teal, Shoveler, Red knobbed Coot, Egrets, Herons and a single Great White Pelican were some of the other birds present. All told not a bad start, and with the weather sunny and windy, not unlike a summer's day back home but turning cool as sunset approached.

We made our way back to Addis, arriving in the dark, one of the disadvantages of countries close to the equator where day and night are roughly equal in length. Starving we opted for dinner ASAP and came down stomachs rumbling. At the foot of the stairs in the dining room was much to our surprise John Wilson and his wife (ex- Leighton Moss warden) who were on their last day of Naturetreks previous tour. This was the one that should have visited Awash but instead had been south to Yabello where they had not been disappointed.

I can't remember what was for dinner except it wasn't enough and with very little choice. The plus side was there were no after effects. This was the first time we had all been together and some introductions were still to be made. As on all these trips you quickly feel you have met some of these people before, perhaps partly down to some dead-ringers. Three soon came to mind. There was Alan (Charlie Sheen) Cawthrow, Andy (Ally McCoist) Roadhouse and David (Lionel Jefferies) Cornner plus another who will remain nameless because I daren't say. Andy had been elected log-meister and kept things ticking along nicely considering the list ran to 553 species and was further extended by 12 add-ons by the end of the trip. However we would all have to be on our guard with digital photographer whiz Malcolm Mulvey correcting an ID with the benefit of his close-up photography.

A dreadful night's sleep owing to traffic and people noise was followed by breakfast. The bread was as I had expected dry and just about edible. However, outside Addis at all the other places we stayed, it was far better. The omelette was fine but the tea aaagh. This was one holiday where I would not be putting on weight.

Merid our leader for the trip introduced himself and we were soon off travelling north over the Soluta plains to Debre Libanos a 13th century monastery set amidst indigenous woodland. The journey, as it would be wherever we went, was full of interest. Goats, donkeys and cattle were everywhere, as were beggars and vagrants. Like everywhere in Africa it was the women doing the donkey work, in some cases carrying more than the donkeys and from a distance looked like walking haystacks. One looked to be carrying firewood no doubt used for cooking and heating with the larger pieces maybe used for fencing or building. Young children some perhaps no older than five would usually be shepherding the livestock. We stopped at a greengrocers for want of a better word and stocked up with bananas and bottled water. The two young men were delighted

at so much custom as we exchanged our greasy smelly currency for equally greasy smelly currency. Yuck - How does it get like that, on second thoughts I don't want to know.

We continued on before stopping at a flooded area that held western palearctic wildfowl and waders such as 70 Blackwits, 11 Avocets, 10 B W Stilts, Ruff, Marsh Sandpiper and others. 24 Common Cranes trumpeted as they flew over. Moving on we stopped not far from the monastery grounds to see a troop of the endemic Gelada Baboons only to be quickly accosted by a platoon of inquisitive children as had happened the day before at Gefersa. At first it is a novelty but can soon become a source of irritation when all you want to do is bird watch. Shouts of 'You, You,' or 'Change' or 'You buy one' or '1 Euro' are repeatedly used. Then you sort of get adopted with one child staying with you all the time, not unlike Charles Bronson in 'The Magnificent Seven'. Eventually you either ignore them altogether, retire to the coach for sanctuary or fall under their spell. I did all three during the course of the trip. Some of the children were so appealing that you could not turn them away. I wished I had brought out a supply of pens like Nev Parton one of the Yorkshire lads had, but it was too late. Sweets or small change had to do.

The monastery grounds beckoned and we arrived there in hot sunshine. A veritable cornucopia of new birds awaited us here. Merid paid the entrance fees and inside the grounds we were away from most of the sellers etc and birding was hassle free and in the shade. Birds came thick and fast along with gorgeous colourful butterflies and the odd dragonfly. White-cheeked Turacos camouflaged well in the canopy but drew attention to themselves when they thrashed through the branches. Scruffy brown Speckled Mousebirds with their long tails and crest were more obvious as were the 'tame' glorious Variable Sunbirds. Less showy were Tacazze Sunbirds, Brown Woodland Warbler and the ubiquitous Brown-rumped Seed-eater. But what can you say about the African Paradise Flycatcher when the name says it all. Wow. Montane White-eyes (think of Polo mints) and White-backed Black Tits were little gems while single Chiffchaff and Blackcap reminded you of home. Tropical Boubou, Common Bulbul, the endemic Banded Barbet and a distant Hemprichs Hornbill quickly brought you back to the reality.

From here we made our way back a short distance to the edge of a 700 metre gorge where we took lunch. What a setting, what views, what birds. Vultures generally get a bad press and are photographed gorging into the entrails of some unfortunate beast but here we had 5 very different species all drifting by on outstretched wings. A single Egyptian which from a distance I have seen mistaken for a pale phase Booted Eagle, the slightly larger 5 or 6 Hoodeds with their blood red face and throat, the 5 or so Ruppell's with their distinctive underwing pattern, the White-backed and the Lammergeier with its white face, narrow long wings and distinctive tail shape. The Lammergeier took pride of place, probably everybodys must see bird and they didn't disappoint. 2 were seen with at least one taking an encore before focusing on an area about 400yards away where it swirled around before vanishing out of sight.

If the Lammergeier was the best Vulture then the 3 Verreaux's Eagles were by far, for my money, the best eagles. Awesome, but later in the week equalled by another magnificent species thanks to Malcolm Goodman. With Tawny, Steppe and Imperial to compare with, the Verreaux's won hands down. Any eagle that is unmistakable has got something going for it. When it is as huge as this and all black with contrasting white 'bits' it cannot fail. The supporting cast of Augur Buzzards and Yellow-billed Kites brought together an amphitheatre of delights as we chomped on our doorstep sandwiches. I threw part of mine away and watched as 12 kites fought for the scraps. The vultures were much more wary, always the case with the bigger birds.

But there were other birds to be seen here too. A very distant Erckel's Francolin was not one of them. Am I alone in my indifference to Francolins? On the other hand the endemic White-winged Cliff Chats and Ruppell's Black Chats were more than worthy of death defying looks over the cliff edge for better views. Yet another endemic, 10 White-billed Starlings flew below us reminding me of the Tristrams Grackles I had seen at En Gedi with their orange wing panels. Fan-tailed Ravens another Israeli species were also present and could be heard purring like doves as they passed by. Most odd. Red-rumped Swallows and African Rock Martins were the only hirundines I recall here, but I do remember missing the Blue Rock Thrush.

How do you leave a place like this, well you just have to, for there is so much more to see. We returned the way we had come over the Soluta plains. By the side of the road a dead Spotted Hyena was providing food for 2 Thick-Billed Ravens. Armed with a bill that could probably crush coconuts they would make short work of hyena flesh. In flight they looked prehistoric with their pterodactyl shape. We saw many more, or should I say watched as you could not take your eyes off them.

A little further on we stopped by the side of the road at a likely spot for Abyssinian Longclaw a bird superficially resembling American Meadowlark. We got out and headed over to some wet fields where Cattle Egrets, Sacred Ibis and 40+ Wattled Ibis were head down hunting for food. We spent some time here and before long had gathered an audience watching, selling, offering to carry but mainly curious at our birdwatching antics. I couldn't help but notice 3 colourfully dressed young women arrive on the scene. They

were carrying large ceramic jugs strapped over their shoulder. Running water is something we take for granted but here it is collected from wells which was what they proceeded to do. They had travelled some distance to this spot so the water would be used sparingly or they would soon be back for more. I didn't envy them but they seemed happy enough.

I saw Oortolan Bunting here and 3 Yellow Bishops but the Longclaws eluded me. I dipped and it wasn't until the last day that I finally caught up with this species. The moral is, better to dip early on than late in the trip but having said that there were at least 30 other species out of the total trip list I did not see, but hey it didn't matter I was having a great time.

Walking back to the coach I took several scenery shots. The light was perfect, the landscape sublime, the result as I remember it.

The next day we left Addis and headed south east. I wasn't sorry to leave behind this ramshackle city, full of choking vehicles, farting motor scooters and people hanging around with little to do but be streetwise, even if it did make for an interesting time.

We passed alongside the only railway line in the country with its 2 trains a day from Addis to the Red Sea port of Djibouti. The infrastructure in Ethiopia is sadly lacking but Andreas had told me that discounted loans from the IMF were helping. Foreign aid from Japan, China and USA was also helping with road building, essential if trade between regions is to grow. Another problem is that Ethiopia is not short of fresh water, just the means to get it to where it is needed. Not unlike Britain, where water shortages are becoming more frequent but would never be a problem if there was a national grid linked to Kielder water. The water from Lake Tana needs to be harnessed similarly but of course such a vision is light years away as the cost would be astronomical.

Anyway enough of this, our first port of call was Lake Chelekleka where on the approach 3 Black-billed Wood-Hoopoes could be seen flying away looking not unlike Magpies but for their bill. If you still didn't know you were in Africa then the appearance of about 400 grotesque Marabous with their long hanging air filled sacs, ugh, told you you were. Scavengers (a word made for them as it even sounds right) describes them well; having said that they looked magnificent in flight. Here too were a mixture of species. Someone picked out the bizarre Knob-billed Duck on the far shore, was I glad we had much better views later at Lake Awash. Marsh Harrier, B W Stilt, Spur-winged Plover, Booted Eagle, Spotted Eagle and Chestnut-backed Finch Lark made up a varied bunch amongst what else was there.

Next stop was the crater shaped Lake Hora with surrounding woodland, another don't want to leave spot. We scratched the surface, a slow walk around and who knows what we would have seen. Anyway good numbers of Little Grebe and Pink-backed Pelican and small numbers of wildfowl were on the lake but it was the woodland and lake edge that held the joys. Malachite, Pied and Pygmy Kingfishers, Wryneck, Beautiful Sunbird, African Silverbill, an estimated 100 Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, African Fish-Eagle, Grey-backed Camaroptera squeaking away, Black-billed Barbet, Village Indigo-Bird, Red-cheeked Cordon-Bleu, Red-billed Firefinch, Green-backed Honeybird, Blue-eared Glossy Starlings, are all the damned birds hyphenated over here, well not quite but the long names can certainly cause confusion when trying to sort out from my scribbled note book entries particularly when abbreviated to initials. This wasn't however the problem Sharon England had. No, Sharon was for making her own names up, Von Der Lickens Hornbill new to science, down to Sharon. There were others, even funnier if only I could remember.

Lunch was our next stop, but the roadside journey as ever was full of interest. I had never seen wheelbarrows with metal wheels before, but here they were commonplace, and of all size and description. Other carrying / hauling contraptions showed ingenuity of design borne of necessity. Oxen were ploughing the fields and haystacks competed in size with giant termite mounds. Womenfolk were doing their laundry in the rivers and laying it out to dry on the embankments. Kids were splashing about in the river as kids do. Other kids were working, shepherding kids. Buses as always were crammed with folk like the proverbial sardines in a tin. In all the villages we passed through, there were table football games in use. Table tennis tables were rarer and it was nice to see children still getting enjoyment out of a hoop and stick. The blue and white taxis of Addis were replaced here by pony and traps, becoming commoner the further we left Addis behind. Oh and we also saw 2 White-crowned Shrikes + Village and Little Weaver.

We pulled off the main road at Ziway and into a restaurant car park set amongst some woodland where shade seeking birds provided more mouth watering birding. A small ornamental concrete bird bath, at least I think that's what it was, had 2 Hammerkops drinking there with a further 2 in the mid storey of the trees where they had built their untidy enormous nest. I always think their head shape must have been the inspiration for Darth Vader's helmet. They were very tame unlike the 2 Hemprich's Hornbills that were far more wary but eventually came down to drink. 2 Red-faced Crombecks, Buff-bellied Warbler, Tawny-flanked Prinia and a stunning Masked Shrike were all seen before we retired for lunch. This was by far the best meal

I had had to date. A delicious lentil soup with some decent bread was followed by a fish dish (Tilapia?) with salad all in good measure. A choice of fresh fruit and a decent beer followed.

Suitably refreshed we returned to birding in the gardens where arguably even better birds were waiting there for us on a plate so to speak. An African Harrier Hawk (*Gymnogene*) was perched up ready for detailed inspection, and a well named Woodland Kingfisher was staring at the bird bath! A Grey-headed Woodpecker vied for our attention against a striking tiny Black-headed Batis, whilst silhouetted not far away a Fork-tailed Drongo waited patiently for a passing insect. Could things possibly get any better, well yes.

We boarded the bus and set off on the short ride to nearby Lake Ziway seeing White-browed Sparrow-Weaver and Dark Chanting Goshawk on the way. The lake is 26 kms long and 18 kms wide. We went no further than a broad track that extended a short way into the lake, probably purpose made. It was a place where people came to bathe and perhaps a little fishing. For us it was eye popping birding hindered only by too big an audience.

Where to begin, well how about 300+ Collared Pratincoles flying together in escape of some unseen predator. A 'hedgerow' jutting out into the marshy fringes held 2 Carmine Bee-eaters – bliss. Alongside them, Long-tailed Cormorants perched overlooking the swampy vegetation where Water Hyacinth grew. An African Darter poked about while waders busily fed. Numbers aside there were Ruff, African Snipe, Blackwits, Ringed and Little-ringed Plovers, Three-banded Plover, Kittlitz's Plover, Little and Temminct's Stints, Marsh, Common and Wood Sandpipers. Gulls were represented by Black-headed and Grey-headed and Terns by Gull-billed and White-winged. Ugly Marabous were joined by Cattle, Great White and Intermediate Egrets. African Spoonbills mixed with Glossy and Sacred Ibis's and Squacco Herons stared and waited for movement.

Employing a different hunting technique was a Yellow-billed Stork also waiting patiently but with bill ajar in the water ready to snap at any unsuspecting prey. And different again was that most famous of all herons (per Attenborough et al) the Black with its umbrella feeding technique, blocking out the sunlight in order to gain an advantage. Less patient, they never held this posture very long before moving on and trying again. But lets not forget the wildfowl for here was one of the trip highlights for me. At the end of the track among the seriously large Great White Pelicans were three seriously small African Pygmy Geese. Were they real for they looked doll-like, bobbing about on the rippling water. A good deal smaller than Common Teal, dinky size even, but what plumage. Orange, white, green, black with a yellow bill and intricate face pattern that looked enamel in its intensity. The equally tiny Hottentot Teal weren't half bad either. African Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Garganey, and the long necked Fulvous and White-faced Whistling ducks so quintessentially African, complete the ducks.

That only leaves Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, at least 7 African Fish eagles with 6 in view at one time, Hooded Vultures, Yellow-billed Kites and last but far from least that other unmistakable African speciality the almost walking on water, African Jacana or Lily trotter. With toes the length of clowns feet, it wouldn't surprise me if they could.

Time was by now moving on and we had to too. Yet again we reluctantly boarded the bus, for we had some distance to travel if we were to make Wondo Guenet Forest by nightfall. Just beyond the town of Shashemene we left the main road and started climbing up a valley, for about 14kms, arriving at our guest house as it was getting dark. According to Naturetreks notes it was once the favourite hillside retreat of Haile Selassie's daughter. The next day we were to find out why, but surely nothing could exceed the mind blowing experience of today with a total species count of 159...

To be continued – the second instalment of Barry's enthralling adventure will appear in the next newsletter

A Blast from the Past

by Maurice Jones

The television weather forecaster's predictions of snow, biting cold winds and frost for late January this year got me wondering what the Big Freeze of 1962-63 winter did for my bird watching.

I only had Sundays and Thursday afternoons to get out in those days so watching was limited in winter. Having browsed through Field Notebook number 9 I came across quite a lot of records that would be considered surprising in 2000. The notebook covers 11th February 1962 to 11th September 1963. January to March 1963 was consistently below freezing. However, I will start with the previous February...

1962

11th February 40 Scaup off Morecambe and a redhead Smew at Heysham (the site of the present power station).

18th February Great Grey Shrike at Silverdale.

19th-20th February drumming Snipe at Winmarleigh and Hardhorn.

4th March Willow Tit in plantation at Winmarleigh.

10th April 66 Corn Buntings in willows at Marton Mere (pre-roost).

Mid-April Lesser Redpolls singing in Stanley Park.

25th April nest of Willow Tit at Winmarleigh in rotten elder stump within pine plantation. A Nuthatch was seen in this period at Lytham Parish Church Wood.

26th May female Nightjar at Trowbarrow Quarry near Leighton Moss RSPB.

15th July 5+ Turtle Doves at Ainsdale Dunes

2nd September 8 Spotted Redshanks at Cocker Meadows

26th September 10 Jack Snipe at Marton Mere, 10 Jack Snipe.

30th September 13 Spotted Redshanks at Cocker Meadows and Shore. Also dead Natterjack Toad on coast road.

13th-28th October Spotted Crake at Marton Mere. Caught and ringed.

21st October 2 Jack Snipe ringed on 14th.

17th October Great Grey Shrike at Marton Mere

23rd October Great Grey Shrike at Lytham Moss (Arthur Watson).

28th November Marton Mere, 12 Jack Swipe.

2nd December 3 Bullfinches (2 males & female) at Cockerham Moss. Also 11 Snow Buntings at Rossall

25th December Purple Sandpiper Lytham at Fairlawn Road.

30th December Hest Bank, 4 Song Thrush at Hest Bank feeding at tides edge in cold weather.

1963

6th January 4 Black Grouse (3 males & female) at Stocks Reservoir feeding in birches at Bottoms Beck area. Also 137 Goosander.

9th January wintering Curlew Sandpiper at Lytham. Also 30 Brambling.

13th January Bullfinch at Cockerham.

20th January 30 Tree Sparrows and 30 Bramblings at Marton Mere. Also dead Redwing

23rd January dead Water Rail at Marton Mere. Also Fieldfare. *During this period the Mere was frozen solid to a depth of at least 18 inches. All 5 Thrushes were feeding in my parents garden in Marton – a distinct 'pecking order' noted.*

27th January Morecambe Stone Jetty: very cold with huge ice flows moving out to sea on the ebbing tide. All inland waters were frozen at this time and freshwater ducks had moved onto salt water. About 100 each of Scaup, Tufted Duck and Goldeneye. 20 Pochard, 13 Goosander, 50 Mallard, single Eider and Velvet Scoter. Best of all 4 male and 3 redhead Smew.

13th February 21 Scaup at Rossall Point also 17 Tufted Duck on sea, 12 Snow Bunting.

17th February redhead Smew at Halton on Lune. 106 wild Greylags at Nether Kellet, en-route to the Lune Meadows. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at Silverdale near Brackenthwaite Cave (Ken Smith)

24th February 30 Snow Buntings on Ingleton to Ribblehead road

3rd March 18 Eurasian White-fronted Geese at Cockerham. Also 7 Short-eared Owls

13th March first Lapwings since December 1962 at Lytham Moss. Also dead Mute Swan. Woodpigeon, Shelduck and Skylark on tide-line.

20th March Wigeon and Redshank at Lytham Moss

Marion Mere had only singles of Great Crested Grebe, Tufted Duck Pochard and 2 Teal (a stark contrast to 2004!)

17th March 38 White-fronted Geese on Cockerham Moss

24th March at Leighton Moss, watched a Bittern Booming in area of burnt phragmites (my one and only time)

31st March my first Collared Dove in Lancashire at Formby. 27 Collared Doves at Southport in roost at Hesketh Park Southport

23rd April Pied Flycatcher and 6 Yellow Wagtails at Marion Mere

28th April summer-plumage Slavonian Grebe flew off from Fairhaven Lake at 7.30am

18th May 2 Collared Doves at Marion Mere (first for the site)

19th June Turtle Dove at Marion Mere, 1 Turtle Dove.

23rd June Cockerham Marsh: 2 pairs and 1 nest (2 eggs, 1 chick) of Common Tern.

14th-21st July 2 Spoonbills at Leighton Moss RSPB

4th August 20 Greenshank on Cocker Estuary; 21 on 11th.

13th August 20 Yellow Wagtails Marion Mere

28th August 30-50 Yellow Wagtails at Marion Mere

We also had Wood Sandpiper at Freckleton in August plus Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stint and Ruffs

1st September 2 Spotted Crakes at Marion Mere also Swift present.

Recent sightings March-June 2004

March

March began where February left off with lingering winter birds stealing the limelight. The 2 Shorelarks remained on St. Annes North Beach until 15th, and these were accompanied by up to 12 Snow Buntings until the 4th, a good total compared to recent winters. Marton Mere continued to hold roosting Long-eared Owls with a peak of 5 being recorded during the period. Bitterns continued to pull in the crowds at this site, with up to 2 being seen regularly. Away from Marton Mere a ringtail Hen Harrier was seen regularly at Warton Marsh, where Little Egrets were seen throughout, and a Spotted Redshank again wintered on the Conder Estuary. Up to 10 Brambling frequented Rawcliffe Moss.

On 1st March an adult Pale-bellied Brent Goose accompanied Pink-footed Geese at Pilling Lane Ends and remained until the 3rd and a Little Egret was at Freckleton Naze Pool. On 3rd 2 adult Eurasian White-fronted Geese and a Barnacle Goose joined the Pink-footed Geese in the Pilling area. The 4th produced a 1st-winter Spoonbill at Freckleton Naze Pool, along with a Little Egret; the Spoonbill was seen intermittently in the area until the 8th April. 2 Ravens flew over Jeremy Lane, Glasson on 4th and 2 adult Mediterranean Gulls were displaying at Marton Mere. 7 Eurasian White-fronted Geese were at Wrampool on the 5th and a Taiga Bean Goose was reported on Cockerham Moss the following day.

Geese continued to make the headlines on the 8th when 2 1st-winter Greenland White-fronted Geese were found Over Wyre, which went on to remain with Pink-footed Geese until 3rd May. At least one Water Pipit was seen over the high tide at Warton Bank on the 9th. A flock of 40 Twite flew over Pilling Lane Ends with 50 there the following day. The 10th also brought at least 12 Eurasian White-fronted Geese to Cockerham Moss and a Long-tailed Duck flew south past Starr Gate, with another past there on the 11th along with 2 Scaup.

The first Wheatear of the spring was at Rossall Point on 16th with a Black-throated Diver off there on the 18th. 9 Jack Snipe at Myerscough Quarry and 120+ Twite at Fluke Hall were both excellent totals, as was a count of 12+ Water Pipits on Warton Marsh on the 19th. The 20th produced a Raven on Pilling Marsh with a Spotted Redshank there the following day. A 2nd-summer Mediterranean Gull was at Bradshaw Lane Head on the 23rd and another Raven was seen over Singleton on the 27th.

3 Garganey at Myerscough Quarry on 28th continued the run of early records of this species in recent years. The birds stayed faithful to the site into April and as always proved a popular attraction. A Jack Snipe was at Whyndyke Farm on the same day but this was surpassed on the 30th when an Osprey flew north. Possibly the same Osprey flew over Marton Mere and a Green Sandpiper was at the River Wyre/Woodplumpton Brook confluence. On the final day of March the Black-throated Diver reappeared off Rossall Point.

April

April began in style when 2 Avocets flew east past Granny's Bay, Lytham; although the species' colonisation of Lancashire continues to go from strength to strength it remains a rare bird in the Fylde, and had these 2 hung around they would have undoubtedly proved popular. The following day also didn't disappoint when a 2nd-summer Iceland Gull was briefly on Warton Marsh. 2 Velvet Scoters flew south past Starr Gate. On the 3rd those failing to locate the Iceland Gull on Warton Marsh had to make do with 2 adult Mediterranean Gulls and an adult Little Gull; the ringtail Hen Harrier continued to put in regular appearances here as did Little Egrets. The following day a 1st-summer Mediterranean Gull was seen at Warton Marsh. On the 5th attention moved away from the Ribble when a Pomarine Skua and a Black-throated Diver were seen off Rossall Point. On the 6th a Bean Goose was found on Cockerham Moss; as is often the case, the identification of the bird to form bird proved controversial throughout its four-day stay.

Probably the same 2 Avocets seen a week earlier flew west past Freckleton Naze Point on the 7th with a Water Pipit nearby at Warton Bank on the same day. 2 Snow Buntings flew north over Starr Gate. On the 9th a male Marsh Harrier was seen over Marton Mere and Mythop and the former site held 2 adult Mediterranean Gulls on the 10th. On the same day a Spotted Redshank was found at Bartle Pools, surely the same bird which frequented the same site last spring; the bird again made a prolonged stay being seen last on the 9th May. A male Marsh Harrier and 2nd-summer Mediterranean Gull were seen from Freckleton Naze Point on the 11th and the first Little Ringed Plover of the spring was at Myerscough Quarry on the 12th with a Green Sandpiper there on the same day; 2 Garganey remained here until the 19th. A Black-throated Diver was again off Rossall Point on the 13th and a female Marsh Harrier was over Gypsy Hole Wood on the 14th. 4 Velvet Scoters flew north past Starr Gate, also on the 14th.

A male Redstart brightened-up Marton Moss Side, Blackpool on the 15th and a Ring Ouzel in Pilling was equally significant on the 16th. On the 17th another Ring Ouzel was seen, this time in the more unlikely setting of Fulwood. Nearby 2 Tree Pipits were on an old brickworks site in Cottam.

Undoubtedly bird of the year (so far!) was found on 18th when a Red-rumped Swallow was located at Marton Mere. The bird showed briefly mid morning and then at dusk and was seen for the final time the following morning. This was a long over-due first for the Fylde and the sensible money was always on Marton Mere to take the honours. More standard fare on the 18th was provided by a Great Skua past Starr Gate, a Redstart in Fleetwood, a Marsh Harrier in Medlar and an Arctic Skua past Rossall Point. Another Redstart at Myerscough Quarry on 19th was a first for the site and a Little Tern was off Rossall Point.

The 22nd produced an Osprey over Marton Mere and a singing Grasshopper Warbler at Whyndyke Farm. An excellent movement of spring migrants occurred on the 23rd, with a Blue-headed Wagtail on Fleetwood Golf Course stealing the limelight, with a *flavissima* Yellow Wagtail also recorded over Rossall along with 3 Tree Pipits. 3 Wood Warblers were singing at Fluke Hall and the excellent run of Redstart records continued with a female in Mount Park. An Osprey flew over St. Annes and a Tree Pipit was at Pilling Lane Ends. On the 24th an unexpected record came in the form of a Goshawk over Whyndyke Farm and 2 Wood Warblers were in Hackensall Wood, with other individuals in Fleetwood Memorial Park and Stanley Park, where a Grasshopper Warbler was also singing. Singing Grasshopper Warblers were also noted at Marton Mere (5), Fleetwood Golf Course (2) and a single in Fairhaven Dunes. 2 Mediterranean Gulls were again on Warton Marsh.

On the 25th the Goshawk again flew over Whyndyke Farm and Yellow Wagtails were recorded at Pilling Lane Ends and Rossall Point, where 4 Tree Pipits also flew over. A Whinchat was by the Conder Estuary on the 26th and a Little Egret flew over Sand Villa Pool on the following day. 3 Arctic Skuas flew past Starr Gate on the 28th and a Little Egret was by Shard Bridge. On the penultimate day on the month 2 adult Dark-bellied Brent Geese were at Lytham and 2 Tree Pipits flew over Rossall Point. A Cuckoo at Hale Nook was one of only a few heard during another poor spring for this species. On the 30th a Wood Warbler was singing at Marton Mere and an adult Mediterranean Gull flew over Fulwood.

Two unconfirmed reports of White Storks were received in April, from both Warton and Hambleton.

May

The excellent run of Wood Warblers continued into May with singles singing at Ellet Grange, Heron's Reach Golf Course and Woodland Garden on 1st. All other notable records came from the Ribble, with a Whinchat at Fairhaven, the 2 Dark-bellied Brent Geese still at Lytham and the Hen Harrier and 2 Mediterranean Gulls being seen at Warton Marsh. On the 2nd a male Pied Flycatcher was seen in Mount Park and nearby a Great Northern Diver and Arctic Skua flew past Rossall Point. Yet another Wood Warbler was seen, this time at Greyfriars, an adult Mediterranean Gull was at Freckleton and a late Jack Snipe was in Blackpool by Collegiate High School. A Little Tern was off Rossall Point on the 4th.

Mythop Grange Flood hit the headlines on the 5th when 2 Pectoral Sandpipers were found in the evening, an outstanding spring record. The birds stayed till the following day and a Yellow Wagtail was also recorded at this site during the 'Pecs' stay. Another Whinchat was at Pilling Lane on the 6th and a Wood Warbler was at Trashy Hill. Garden Warblers were scarce this spring but one was at Marton Mere on the 7th with a Spotted Flycatcher there the following day. On the 10th a female Black Redstart in Carleton was a good record. Mythop Grange Flood scored again on 11th when a Wood Sandpiper was located; always a rare bird in the Fylde. Another Wood Sandpiper was at Marton Mere with the Mythop bird remaining and a Marsh Harrier flew south here. A Wood Sandpiper at Jameson Road Landfill on 13th completed an excellent 3-day period for this species.

On the 14th the 2nd Pomarine Skua of the spring was recorded, this time past Starr Gate and on 15th a Little Egret was at Jameson Road Landfill Site. On the 16th the 4th Wood Sandpiper of the spring was found at Newton Marsh, a Spotted Flycatcher was in Stanley Park and 2 Whinchats were at Marton Mere. Another Whinchat was at Pilling Lane and a Cuckoo was singing on Winmarleigh Moss.

Arctic and Great Skuas continued to be seen regularly off Starr Gate and a Yellow Wagtail was at Freckleton Naze on the 19th with a Cuckoo there the following day. 2 Cuckoos were at Arm Hill on the 23rd and a Pied Flycatcher at Bourne Hill on the 26th and a Little Tern past Starr Gate on the 27th were the highlights of what proved to be a disappointingly quiet end of May. The month ended with a Garden Warbler singing in Cottam and 4 Little Ringed Plovers at Lightfoot Green Quarry.

June

June started with a bang when a male American Wigeon, the 3rd record for the Fylde was found at Marton Mere. The bird showed exceptionally well until the 5th and was paired to a female wigeon which left opinions divided as to its identity. Although the sum of its characters probably fails to meet the necessary requirements for an acceptable female American Wigeon on this side of the Atlantic. Also on the 1st an excellent total of 3 Spoonbills flew southwest over Pilling Marsh early afternoon.

On 5th an Arctic Skua flew past Fairhaven and on 6th an adult Mediterranean Gull was at Marton Mere. The 13th produced a Long-tailed Duck past Starr Gate along with an Arctic Skua. 2 Little Terns moved past here on the 15th and by mid month Manx Shearwater passage had begun. On the 16th a 2nd-summer Yellow-legged Gull was located at Skippool Creek.

On the 23rd a summer plumage Spotted Redshank was at Skippool Creek and strong westerly winds the following day pushed 2 Storm Petrels past Starr Gate along with 3 Arctic Skuas; chances to see Storm Petrels off the Fylde coast have been few and far between of late. A Green Sandpiper was at Whyndyke Farm on the 25th. An intriguing record came on the 27th when a Hobby was seen by a Sand Martin colony at Lightfoot Green Common. Hobbies are less than annual in the Fylde but surely as the species' continues to colonize Lancashire records are likely to increase; how long will it be before Hobbies are found to nest within our recording area? Also on the 27th, 2 Bullfinches were on Ingol Golf Course. On the 28th a Green Sandpiper was at Myerscough Quarry and the 29th produced 2 Little Terns past Starr Gate.

'Recent Sightings' by Stuart Piner (July 2004)

All records from www.fyldebirdclub.org/sightings.htm

Please report your sightings to: news@fyldebirdclub.org