



## FYLDE BIRD CLUB MARCH 2004 NEWSLETTER

It is an encore from the outgoing editor this time round, as I agreed to cover whilst a new editor was found. Phil Kirkham has agreed to run the show from next month. Some articles have already been passed to him so this edition is slightly shorter than normal.

It has been a great period of birding on the Fylde since the last newsletter. Although some of the best birds (e.g. Blue Fulmar, Green Winged Teal and the six Bean Geese) were short stayers there has been quality available to everyone. Long staying Shorelarks, Snow Buntings and Long-eared Owls drawing in visitors from further afield, wintering Water Pipits and a good variety of less common species in with the Pinkfeet were available to all. Let's hope the spring is just as productive.

It must be a dream come true for a newsletter editor to bounce an idea of someone else to find they have already done it and forgot to send it to you. This is what happened when I suggested a piece on potential new birds for the Fylde to Chris Batty, the piece he already had 'on the shelf' follows and very good it is too.

Colin Bushell has been a good supporter of the newsletter during my tenure, and has provided some thoughts on his favourite Brazilian birding destinations. This article is also available on the website with pictures. Also included this time are a piece on the status of Stonechats in Lancashire by Pete Woodruff and some thoughts on Scottish skua watching from Len Blacow.

Please support Phil with articles and words of encouragement as he takes the newsletter forward. Thanks again those of you who did the same for me.

Stephen.

## **Stonechats in Lancashire**

It is always nice to hear a good news story about a bird species, and Stonechats in Lancashire is certainly that. The reason behind the upturn in the fortunes of the Stonechat is not least because of the run of very mild winters we have had, which, with the exception of a little frost and snow, continues this winter into 2004.

Though the title of this article refers to the county of Lancashire it is always a little frustrating when you travel just a few miles outside it with the intention of finding wintering birds as I did recently at Clapham, North Yorks, and found six on a very cold mid winter day.

Take a look at any Lancaster and District Annual Report in the 90s to 2000 and it is soon apparent what has taken place regarding this delightful chat. If we go back to the start of the 90s, the first three reports actually show no records of breeding in this area. Add to this records in some years of atrocious and even non-existent passage, plus no wintering records, the picture soon becomes apparent of how the Stonechat was regarded at best to be a scarce passage bird just a few years ago. Nothing changed very much during the 90s until 1999, and no breeding birds can be found in the reports, except one pair found on Catlow Fell in 1994.

There are many reports that the Stonechat has made a dramatic change in status. In 2003 there was c.40 pairs on Unite Utilities land in the Trough, and a possibility of as many as 80 pairs within the Forest of Bowland AONB. Compare this to an estimated 60 pairs in the entire county of Lancashire during the period 1997-2000 and nothing more need be said about the change this species has made since the beginning of 2000.

As far as keeping strictly to records in our areas in Lancashire. There are good records to illustrate the changing fortunes in these last four years, two good examples being breeding and wintering have taken place at two locations in the Lancaster area, the Birk Bank/Clougha area, and Harrisend Fell, both on the fringe of the Trough of Bowland. At the former, breeding took place in 2000 for the first time in c.20 years. At the latter, an amazing 19 birds were seen in thirty minutes from a one mile stretch of road (foot and mouth disease forbade otherwise) on 30 September in the same year, and was clear evidence of the change taking place.

My personal records show that the Stonechat can now be seen within Lancashire all year round, with records in Lancaster area in every month for four years, something unheard of just a few years ago. It is worth noting global warming may well swing this species to more sedentary behaviour than is the case today. The migration pattern of the Stonechat is a fascinating aspect of this species. One British bred Stonechat may take off to winter as far afield as Iberia or North Africa, whilst another may move little-if-any from its natal site.

Long live mild winters and global warming if you are a Stonechat. Thank goodness nature has given a chance of success to my favourite passerine.

Pete Woodruff, 2 January 2004

## Fylde next?

(Ed note – this article was prepared some months ago – see editorial)

A few years ago I spent a short while considering which species had not, to my knowledge, been recorded in the Fylde, and after musing over several candidate species I came to the conclusion that American Wigeon was by far the most glaring omission: surely the large passage and wintering Wigeon flocks must have been accompanied by an unseen American Wigeon? I like to target species in my birding and so, whenever possible, I would carefully search through any Wigeon flock I came across in the Fylde. To my own surprise in September 1999 I realised my belief that American Wigeon does occur when I found an adult male at Pilling Marsh. I went on to realise my belief that they occur with some regularity with a further adult male (or was it the same one?) at Barnaby's Sands in December 2002.

So what next? Well I wouldn't have predicted some of the latest additions to the Fylde list, the Dusky Warbler at Fairhaven in October or the Great Reed Warbler at Marton Mere in May this year. Below I have detailed my personal top-ten predictions for future additions to the Fylde list:

### **Great White Egret**

This was a new bird for Lancashire in October 2001 when one at Banks Marsh was actually visible from the Fylde (but was not known to have crossed the River Ribble). The first was quickly followed by a second at Martin Mere in January 2003, and then a third at Leighton Moss in July 2003. With a total of over 225 records spread over pretty much the whole of the British Isles, this alone would make this highly visible species seem likely to occur here. However, a closer look at the statistics reveal over half the records in Britain and Ireland have occurred in the last six years alone, doubtless due to the recent colonisation of the Netherlands and the west coast of France. Several recent records from Cheshire have been on the Dee Estuary, favouring the large salt marshes there. Similar habitat exists at Warton Marsh and I suggest this as the most likely location for our first record, probably in July or August. As it took some time between my having the original idea for this article and writing it I was expecting this species to have been found before I made print!

### **Balearic Shearwater**

Since its recent split (from Yelkouan Shearwater) Balearic Shearwater has become a severely threatened species. In global terms this is the rarest and most endangered species on my predicted list: indeed it has been suggested that it seems to be heading towards extinction. As the name suggests, this species breeds solely on the Balearic Islands where there was considered to be fewer than 2,000 pairs in 2002 and with food shortage, predation by cats and oil spills to contend with, it is little wonder the species is struggling. However, it remains a regular visitor to British waters with Portland Bill, Dorset, the Devon and Cornish coasts and south Wales being favoured. It has been recorded in most coastal regions and in the Irish Sea is regularly encountered by seawatchers off Anglesey, Co. Down and Ayrshire. Closer to the Fylde it has been recorded off Seaforth, Formby Point, Heysham and

Walney Island. Clearly seawatching anywhere between Starr Gate and Rossall Point would put you in pole position to record this species but the under-watched Blackpool piers probably offer the best chance during a mid-summer blow and consequent passage of Manx Shearwaters.

### **Red-rumped Swallow**

In the British Isles this is an annual, frequent and increasing spring overshoot from continental Europe with over 400 records in total. The bias towards the south and east of England is frequently bucked with records as close to the Fylde as Barrow-in-Furness, Ainsdale and Liverpool. Although occasionally occurring late into the autumn, when small groups are not unknown, a late April or May record at Marton Mere seems the most likely date and location combination for this species.

### **Lesser Scaup**

This was new to the Western Palearctic in 1986 and new to the British Isles in 1987 - a mega rarity? Lesser Scaup? No more, amassing over 60 records since the first (in Staffordshire). Following the sole Lancashire record at Carnforth in 1994/1995, Frodsham Marsh and Redes Mere, Cheshire, Pennington Flash, Manchester and several north Cumbrian waters have hosted this North American species. Initially causing identification headaches, an improved understanding of the salient identification criteria has led to even females being located at several sites. Scanning through Tufted Duck and Pochard flocks seems the best tactic for those searching for Lesser Scaup, and this is not such a daunting prospect in the Fylde. Marton Mere and Fairhaven Lake must both be in with a chance but I'd plump for Thornton ICI Reservoir in April.

### **Ring-necked Duck**

Like Lesser Scaup, a North American diving duck, Ring-necked Duck has proved to a regular visitor to Europe for many years. Indeed both north and east Lancashire have hosted several individuals, the closest to the Fylde being a brief male in May 1994 just over a mile from our boundary at Foxhouses Lake, Scorton. Although perhaps traditionally thought of as a winter vagrant, as with many North American ducks (and gulls), spring is often the best time to search for them as they seem to migrate north on the 'wrong' side of the Atlantic passing through the British Isles. As such I would envisage the first Fylde Ring-necked Duck to be found in April or May, and given the Scorton record, perhaps Myerscough Quarry might take the honour?

### **Red-breasted Goose**

Intermittently since November 1995 a Red-breasted Goose (and latterly Red-breasted Geese) have been present amongst wintering Pink-footed Geese in Scotland and Norfolk and from September 2003 in Lancashire at Martin Mere. The origin of this bird has come into question: the species being common in captivity, the possibility of it being an escape cannot be discounted. However, whilst the breeding and wintering ranges of Red-breasted Geese and those of Pink-footed Geese are not proximal, if you accept the principle of vagrancy occurring within the Arctic circle and then subsequent abmigration with a 'foster' goose flock, there is no reason why a genuine vagrant Red-breasted

Goose could not arrive here with Pink-footed Geese. Either way a Red-breasted Goose accompanying Pink-footed Geese here will be accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee, unless it bears a ring. Eagland Hill in February is where I'd look for this one.

### **Black-headed Bunting**

A rare bird anywhere in the British Isles but one with a strong bias in occurrence to north and west coasts, particularly Highland, Gwynedd and Pembrokeshire. Historically accused of being nothing more than escaped cage birds, this delightful species now usually receives the respect it deserves. A strong case can be argued for genuine vagrancy by this species when the past occurrence dates are analysed revealing relatively small 'windows' of peak arrival in late May-June and September-early October, indicating spring overshoots and reverse migration respectively. The recent first for Lancashire and North Merseyside (in a Southport garden) was not made available for wide appreciation but hopefully the first Fylde record is not too far away. Any coastal or near-coastal garden feeding station in summer could pull in this species but if not how about the fields adjoining the seawall between Fluke Hall and Pilling Lane in early June?

### **Short-toed Lark**

Although no longer an official British rarity, Short-toed Lark remains a prize find anywhere in the British Isles, with the Scilly Isles and Shetland Isles receiving the lion's share of records. Closer to home, and of more relevance to this article, the species has been found on the North Wales coast and the Wirral on several occasions in spring and so should be within our reach. Fleetwood Golf Club would be the place I'd look during a warm spell in early May, but a dawn visit might be essential before the bird is flushed.

### **Dartford Warbler**

A southern speciality normally associated with deepest Dorset and Hampshire, the Dartford Warbler is on the increase. This essentially sedentary species is gradually expanding its range northwards moving into new areas of suitable habitat. A winter record on the Wirral and a spring record on Walney Island hint at what could be. This species often associates closely with Stonechats and I'd imagine our first at Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve in under-watched winter.

### **Marsh Warbler**

I felt I ought to include this British breeding species (if only just) in my predicted top ten as opposed to selecting from a selection of official British Birds rarities that could conceivably turn up. Why? Well, records from Heysham shows they reach the west coast and they do occur with some regularity all the way along the east coast in favourable weather conditions in late spring. A non-singing bird would be hard to locate and possibly even harder to prove so: excepting a trapped bird, we would have to hope for a singing male in late spring. There are various areas of seemingly suitable 'rough' habitat around Fleetwood that might hold a Marsh Warbler for a morning or so, but keeping close to the coast, I'd opt for the rough ground north of Rossall School and west of Broadway in early June.

## **Birding in the Atlantic Forests of Brazil Itatiaia National Park**

Itatiaia NP preserves some excellent montane Atlantic Forest within easy reach (3-4 hours) by car of Rio or Sao Paulo. The Atlantic Forests are perhaps one of South America's most threatened habitats. Years of forest clearance fuelling the Brazilian's insatiable desire of timber and hunger for beef have led to a rather uninspiring and denuded landscape near to the metropolis zones. For the birds that once found their refuge in the forested coastal mountains of eastern Brazil, Itatiaia offers a haven for them as well as visiting birders.

I have visited many wonderful localities in search of birds in Latin America: Manu and Tambopata in Peru, Iguazu and Patagonia in Argentina, the Llanos of Venezuela and the Darien of Panama are all magic places. But for me it is Itatiaia that has almost everything a birder could desire: good trails, endemic birds (some very common) and excellent accommodations. I usually stay at the comfortable Hotel Ype nowadays in the depths of the park and easily reached by road. Apart from the quaint Swiss-style cabins, there is the advantage of superb location, easy access to the trails and an excellent array of bird feeders and feeding stations.

The friendly staff will willingly arrange an early breakfast but departing pre-dawn will mean missing out on the display of feeding Atlantic Forest birds on the balcony. Saffron Toucanets, Yellow-fronted Woodpeckers, Green-headed Tanagers, Olive-green Tanagers and Dusky-legged Guans are attracted to the copious amounts of fruit on offer outside. The hummingbird feeders are emptied each night to keep the bats at bay but come the morning "hummers" such as Brazilian Ruby, Black Jacobin and Violet-capped Woodnymph will be on show. A stroll around the hotel grounds early in the morning will often produce Rufous-capped Motmot while at dusk it is not unusual to see Short-tailed Nighthawks low over the poolside balcony as Spot-winged Wood-Quails and Slaty-breasted Wood-Rails duet in the distant forested hillsides.

Away from the hotel there are a number of trails to walk. The trail below the Ype can be walked in little more than an hour and ends at the Hotel Simon. I have seen many Atlantic Forest endemics here: Star-throated Antwren, White-bibbed Antbird, Rufous Gnatcatcher, Yellow-browed Woodpecker, Such's Antthrush, Swallow-tailed Manakin, Greenish Schiffornis, Surucua Trogon, Spot-billed Toucanet and Pale-browed Treehunter to name a few. As darkness falls Tawny-browed Owls and even Long-trained Nightjars can be found. On one special occasion we were fortunate enough to see a pair of Black-legged Dacnis in the flowering trees bordering the parking lot of the Simon – a rare sighting indeed. The once famous "Jeep Trail" mentioned by Forrester has recently been reopened, much to my delight on my last visit.

Ascending through bamboo stands the Black-billed Scythebill can be found and the suitably named Drab-breasted Bamboo-Tyrant can be located by its

rather staccato call. But the best birds (in my opinion) are higher on the trail. Walking higher the forest opens a little and bromeliad-festooned trunks purvey the stereotypic cloud-forest scene. Here the whining call of the Black & Gold Cotinga can be heard but these strange frugivores can be frustratingly difficult to find as they sit unobtrusively just below the canopy. Any bird flock here is worthy of inspection though as a thorough look will often reveal the sprightly Black-capped Piprites.

Another trail – the Tres Picos – is the one favoured by most Brazilians on their weekend breaks. It is well worth timing your trip to fall in the week and well clear of any national holidays (there are quite a few!) to see the park at its best. The Tres Picos begins near the Hotel Simon and a good variety of Atlantic Forest birds can be seen here. The lower elevations are a regular spot for Large-headed Flatbill, a rather non-descript tyrant flycatcher whose vocalisations sound slightly different to its relatives in the Amazon (to me at least). After a few switchbacks with Ochre-rumped Antbirds, Mouse-coloured Tapaculos and Slaty-bristlefounts to tease you as they skulk in the undergrowth, the forest opens and at certain times of the year the “clanging” of a Bare-throated Bellbird can be heard.

Between September and November I’ve encountered Giant Antshrike on this trail and on one memorable occasion we saw Tufted and Large-tailed Antshrike only ten minutes after a Giant came out on the path! Mythical stuff indeed. Impressive mixed-species feeding flocks here often include the Brown Tanager – a pseudo foliage-gleaner if ever I saw one!

Another, lesser-known, trail from the Hotel Simon passes through perhaps the best accessible bamboo stands in the park. It ends at the hotel Donati and this is the only place in the park I have seen the attractive White-bearded Antshrike. Its rather quiet song best locates this rather furtive bamboo dweller, but once again I have found it vocalising in September/October but silent in June and July. Nearer the Donati, Lesser and Scaled Woodcreepers can be found and I have seen the Fork-tailed Bamboo-Tyrant on many occasions in the bamboo here as well.

Once at the hotel take time to scan the horizon for bellbirds, Red-breasted Toucans or a Sharpbill before taking to the roads (not before sampling the excellent coffee at the hotel though). The roads here are good for birding as there is little traffic except at weekends. Maroon-bellied Parakeets feed (easier to see here than anywhere in my experience) and one of my birding friends was fortunate enough to locate Elegant Mourner here some years ago. This is a bird that is still reluctant to make its way on to my list despite dozens of visits to the Neotropics.

My favourite day though has to be the visit to Agulhas Negras. The west end of the park lies near three state borders; Minas Gerais, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and a journey out of the park is necessary to reach the Agulhas Negras road. The road to the “Black Needles” overlooks the forested hillsides

of the park and climbs into patches of Araucaria forest (with Araucaria Tit-Spinetail) and above the tree line. The bird diversity at the top is low but it is very good for Great Pampa-Finch and Itatiaia Thistletail. The latter is an endemic to Brazil and can be found a little lower on the road just before the Araucaria patch at the famous bog haunted by Slaty-breasted Wood-Rails and Diademed Tanager in the elfin Forest.

I usually spend most of my time on the road bordered by montane forest below this point though. Black & Gold Cotinga can be seen just below the canopy of trees on not too distant ridges and the ornate Black-capped Piprites is more readily found up here than elsewhere in my experience. In four or five visits I've seen some marvellous birds on this road and there always seems to be something different up here. Sometimes Swallow-tailed Cotingas can be seen while scanning the tree tops, Grey-bellied Spinetail can be found in the forest edge with White-rimmed Warblers; the latter belting out its typical *Basileuterus* warbler song from time-to-time.

Other specialities up here include Large-tailed Antshrike, Rufous-tailed Antbird, Serra do Mar Tyrannulet, Red-ruffed Fruitcrow and Bay-chested and Red-rumped Warbling-Finches. All these birds can be found in the kilometre stretch just before the paved road that descends back down to the BR116 highway and eventually the town of Itatiaia. With patience some of the more "cryptic" species can be found such as the recently described Serra do Mar Tyrant-Manakin, Greenish Tyrannulet and Brown-breasted Bamboo-Tyrant.

Itatiaia is worthy of three days at least but however long you go for, and whenever you go you'll have a great time. Maybe I'll get that Elegant Mourner on my next trip.....maybe?

**Colin Bushell**  
**Preston. Feb 2004.**

References.

Forrester, Bruce C. Birding Brazil. A Check-list and Site Guide. Privately published.



## SEA WATCHING OFF THE WESTERN ISLES

Hebrides five to seven, showers, poor to moderate, the ideal shipping forecast for mid May sea watching off the Western Isles. Could be right for a change, all eyes looking out over the sunlit machair, we walk outside look northwestward and yes the breeze is in our faces.

Nothing we can do but go out for a couple of hours typical Hebridean birding, searching freshwater lochans for garganey, curlew sandpiper or maybe a red necked phalarope. The pools at Balranald yield a whooper swan, a few wigeon and teal plus two black tailed godwits. Three corncrake call from a tiny iris bed pretending we can't see them.

Back to base where our garden corncrake is cranking up for another night shift. Check the weather again is it freshening is it cloudy. Make a brew, an early night lying awake listening for the wind, up before the lark but cant here the wind, not surprising the walls of this croft are three feet thick. Look outside yes its northwesterly and raining, wake the team, kettle on, hurry breakfast, make flask and sandwiches. Set off for Balranald or to be more accurate Aird an Runair. It is almost light when we arrive, park behind the dunes and find a sheltered spot. No mighty headland this, we will be watching just a few feet above sea level. Set up, agree landmarks looking southwest across the sound to The Monarchs, ten o'clock pointed rocks, sandy cliffs, open water, beach, small rocks, open water, sandy cliffs at twelve o'clock.

Just scanning left of the pointed rock and skuas, a loose flock of thirty long tails pass right and then lift as they head for the sound of Harris and the Minch. Within a few minutes another group then two more, over 100 long tails in fifteen minutes. Poms left, the experienced Aird watcher knows to swing left as pomarine skuas take a different line often passing much closer.

As they come head on you see the dark cap, butter yellow cheeks, dark breast band and deep powerful wing beats. When they round the Aird some turn to look at you, note the browner upperparts and those strange twisted tail feathers. Eyeballing pomarine skuas now that is something, 80 birds in this group, the powerful wingbeats lifting the birds on the downstroke. Pomarine skuas are big birds I saw one fighting with a great skua on a pelagic trip off Cornwall.

A couple of heavy showers impede watching, the appropriately named skua case afforded extra protection by a Tesco carrier bag. Showers over, a quick wipe of the lenses, passage continues, long tails 170 of them half way out, all wings and tails hugging the waves occasionally lifting into view then down a trough before heading for the Minch.

Variety is added by several tight packs of arctic terns, a few great skuas and a little gull, unusual here. Five hours later the sky clears as the front passes and skua passage slows to a trickle. Time for a brew and count up the totals in a soggy notebook. Nearly 800 pomarines, 1500 long tails, 300 arctic terns 35 great norther divers plus a few whimbrel and brent geese.

Without the skuas, the daily movements of gannets from St. Kilda thousands per hour, hundreds of auks, huge rafts of manx shearwater, dozens of black guillemot make for a good days birdwatching for a Fylde birder.

Beware, just like the Fylde wrong conditions and no skuas, get lucky and wow it is as I described above, be careful, sea watching can be addictive, guess who was sea watching off Eilat when normal people were drooling over sandplover. Got pom and arctic skua so it was worth it.

**Len Blacow**

## Divers and grebes

A **Slavonian Grebe** was seen twice from Starr Gate on 4<sup>th</sup> December. Diver highlights comprised a **Great Northern Diver** south past Starr Gate on 9<sup>th</sup> December and a **Black-throated Diver** from the same site on 9<sup>th</sup> February.

In terms of more common species there were up to 53 **Red-throated Divers** and 89 **Great Crested Grebes** seen from Starr Gate. Up to 9 **Little Grebes** were on Thornton ICI reservoir.

## Seabirds

The clear seabird highlight was a **Blue Fulmar** off Starr Gate on 13 January, subject to Lancs rarity committee acceptance this would be just the second county record of this northern plumage morph.

The first **Gannets** of the year were three off Starr Gate on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. **Sinensis Cormornants** were seen at Stanley Park (up to four), Marton Mere and at Glasson marina (the injured bird).

## Hérons

A real surprise was a first winter **Spoonbill** in the Freckleton area from 29 December to the end of February, this bird had previously been at Brockholes Quarry in Preston.

Up to 7 **Bitterns** were seen at Marton Mere during the period. The **Little Egrets** reported included a definite escape at Warton Bank (colour ringed) and a probable escape at Stanley Park, but there may also have been a wild bird wintering on the Ribble.

## Swans

A good spread of **Whooper Swans** included up to 200 at Freckleton Naze, 102 at Ream Hills (Mythop) and 86 at sites in the Pilling area. **Bewick's Swans** were, typically these days, rather thin on the ground with peaks of 28 at Lytham Moss, 24 at Warton Bank, 22 in the Pilling area and 16 at Freckleton Naze. Up to 200 **Mute Swans** fed in fields at Thurnham, presumably a high overlap with the moult flock on the Conder estuary through the summer.

## Geese

The highlight was six **Bean Geese** at Todderstaffe Hall on 31<sup>st</sup> December; they provoked a local twitch though those who turned out had differing opinions on what race (species?) they were. A couple of **Greenland Whitefronts** were seen, a first winter in the Todderstaffe – Mythop area and an adult Over Wyre. Up to 7 **European Whitefronts** were seen Over Wyre.

There were up to four **Dark-bellied Brents** at Warton Bank in December, with a single **Pale-bellied Brent** with Pinkfeet Over Wyre in February. Also in with the Pinkfeet were single **Barnacle Geese** Over Wyre and at Fleetwood, and a possibly wild **Greylag** Over Wyre.

### Ducks

The duck highlight in the period was a drake **Green Winged Teal** at Marton Mere on 7<sup>th</sup> January, unfortunately it turned up mid week and only stayed a day.

Other dabbling duck counts included up to 450 **Pintail** inland on a flood on Winmarleigh Moss, 154 **Shoveler** at Marton Mere and 12 **Gadwall** at the latter site. **Goosander** peaks included up to 17 at Haslam Park (Preston) and 10 each on the Wyre at Cartford Bridge and the Ribble at Avenham Park. Up to 100 **Goldeneye** were seen on the Lune estuary off Glasson.

Sea ducks were also rewarding during the period. There were three single **Velvet Scoters** seen off Starr Gate in December and one in February. **Long-tailed Ducks** peaked at an excellent eight off Starr Gate in early January, with up to three regular. There were up to 38 **Scaup** from the same site with scattered singles elsewhere. A large flock of **Common Scoter** also off Starr Gate was estimated at c5000 birds, there were several records of one to two birds of this species at freshwater sites in January.

### Raptors

Up to two ringtail **Hen Harriers** were seen at Warton Bank, the only regular site for this species in the Fylde. Following recent expansion **Buzzards** were present at two breeding sites plus half a dozen other locations.

### Waders

Single **Greenshanks** were apparently wintering on both the Ribble and Wyre estuaries. Another unusual wintering bird was a **Common Sandpiper** at Little

Singleton on 22 January. **Green Sandpipers** were at Carr House Green Common on 16<sup>th</sup> January, Great Eccleston on 25<sup>th</sup> February and Freckleton Naze on 26<sup>th</sup> February.

Otherwise up to two **Spotted Redshanks** were seen at Conder Green, with one briefly visiting Marton Mere. Wintering **Ruff** included up to 3 at Newton Marsh, 2 in the Pilling Lane Ends – Damside area and one on the Conder estuary. Up to nine **Jack Snipe** were at Myerscough Quarry with scattered singles elsewhere, **Woodcock** reports included up to two at Marton Mere.

### Gulls

A first winter **Glaucous Gull** at several sites in the Fleetwood area on 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> December was the only large white winged gull of the period.

**Mediterranean Gulls** were seen at seven sites, including up to three adults at Fairhaven in January.

The best of a few **Little Gull** reports was 50 at the traditionally favoured site of Rossall on 11<sup>th</sup> January. Up to three **argentatus Herring Gulls** were seen at Fleetwood and one on Blackpool beach.

### **Auks**

It was a rather unremarkable period for auks, with only very small numbers of **Guillemots** and **Razorbills** reported.

### **Pigeons and Doves**

Although 2003 was a good year for **Turtle Dove** sightings by recent standards, a first winter at Whyndyke Farm in early December was still remarkable. Up to 93 **Collared Doves** at Eagland Hill included an aberrant chestnut bird; there were also a maximum of 82 **Stock Doves** at the same site.

### **Owls**

The **Long-eared Owls** at Marton Mere continued to draw admirers from near and far, with up to eight birds roosting in the scrub. Another roosted in a roadside bush at Staynall for several days. **Short-eared Owls** were rather more difficult to catch up with up to two at Warton Marsh and singles at Pilling Moss, Newton Marsh and Cockersands.

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### **Kingfishers, Waxwing**

The only **Kingfisher** reports related to several singles at Conder Green. A **Waxwing** came in off the sea at Starr on 10<sup>th</sup> December.  
Waxwing 10 Dec SG

### **Larks, Pipits**

There were two **Shorelarks** on St Annes beach between the Thursby nursing home and Star Gate from 10 December to the end of February. Opinion was divided as to whether they were the two previously seen at Fairhaven.

Up to 3 **Water Pipits** Warton Bank were seen at Warton Bank, though it is still something of a mystery how many birds actually winter there on the marsh.

### **Chats**

**Stonechats** were reported from 8 sites, including two each at Fairhaven, St Annes and Mythop.

### Warblers, Nuthatch

Up to 4 **Chiffchaffs** at Marton Mere in December was the highlight of several scattered records of this species and **Blackcap**. The largest **Nuthatch** count reported was up to 3 at Avenham Park.

### Crows

**Ravens** were seen at Cabus (two), Pilling Marsh and Conder Green; although clearly increasing in the area the species remains difficult to catch up with. Away from normal haunts up to three **Jays** were noted at both Marton Mere and Cleveleys.

### Finches

**Brambling** were seen in good numbers, with up to 12 at Rawcliffe Moss. Otherwise peak counts included up to 300 **Greenfinches** and 250 **Linnet** at Eagland Hill. Up to 30 **Twite** were at Cockersands and the largest counts of both **Siskins** and **Lesser Redpolls** were of eight birds at Marton Mere.

### Buntings and Sparrows

**Tree Sparrow** counts included up to 112 at Eagland Hill, 40 at Rawcliffe Moss and 12 at Todderstaffe Hall. Counts of other chiefly Over Wyre specialities included an impressive 294 **Corn Buntings** at Eagland Hill in Jan, with up to 33 **Yellowhammers** there.

A **Lapland Bunting** was reported from Burglar's Alley on 19<sup>th</sup> December. **Snow Bunting** counts included up to 16 between Starr Gate and the Thursby nursing home, seven at Rossall Point and one at Anchorsholme.

### Escapes

Wildfowl ... . **Black Swans** were seen at Weeton, Pilling, Out Rawcliffe and Lytham Moss. The **Lesser White-fronted Goose** was seen at, of all places, Lytham Crematorium. A hybrid **Ross's x Pinkfoot** was seen Over Wyre, anybody who objects to the inclusion of this in escapes will be pleased the newsletter editor is changing.

### Other wildlife

Marine mammals seen from Starr Gate during the period included **Harbour Porpoises, Grey Seal and Common Seal**.

There were four **Roe Deer** at Eagland Hill on 30th Dec.