



**Fylde  
Bird Club**

LANCASHIRE

Registered Charity  
No. 1102961

# MAY 2005 NEWSLETTER

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## Message from the Editor

Welcome to the Spring 2005 Newsletter, with apologies for the delay. I have been rather busy preparing for mine and Phil Tomkinson's wildlife photographic exhibition at the Pleasure Beach, and I have also suffered a computer malfunction causing various files to go into hiding!

Like many other Newsletters, this contains some very useful and informative articles kindly written by our members and to whom we owe a debt of thanks. I would also like to thank Stuart Piner for his in depth bird reports.

*Philip Kirkham*

## Fylde Bird Race 2005

Congratulations to those who took part in the annual Fylde Bird Race, a new record was set.

Once again this year's Bird Race served to raise funds for the Club's successful Farmland Bird Feeding and Nest Box Schemes.

Results from past Fylde Bird Races are shown below.

<b>Fylde Bird Race Results</b>	30 Apr 05	27 Apr 05	02 May 04	01 May 04	29 Apr 04	07 Jun 03	04 May 03	05 May 02	05 May 02	14 May 00	02 May 99	03 May 98	04 May 97	04 May 97	28 Apr 96	30 Apr 95	05 May 91
Species totals	119	124	119	123	118	93	113	114	113	100	114	112	111	92	106	100	105
Mute Swan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whooper Swan	X		X	X													
Pink fd Goose	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	X	X
White fr Goose	X	X		X	X												
Greylag Goose	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Canada Goose	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Brent Goose				X	X							X					
Shelduck	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wigeon	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Gadwall			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		
Teal	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mallard	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pintail		X	X				X		X				X				
Garganey													X	X	X		X
Shoveler	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Pochard			X	X	X					X	X	X				X	X
Tufted Duck	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scaup							X										X
Eider	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Common Scoter	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X
Goldeneye		X		X							X	X			X	X	X
Red b Merganser	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Goosander	X	X		X	X	X	X	X							X		
Ruddy Duck	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Red l Partridge	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X
Grey Partridge	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pheasant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Red th Diver	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X		

Great N Diver			X														
Little Grebe	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gt Crested Grebe	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gannet	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X	X		X		
Cormorant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Little Egret			X						X								
Grey Heron	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hen Harrier				X	X												
Sparrowhawk	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Buzzard	X	X	X	X				X									
Kestrel	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Merlin		X															
Peregrine	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X				X	X		
Water Rail		X			X		X										
Moorhen	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coot	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Oystercatcher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
L Ringed Plover	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Ringed Plover	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Golden Plover		X					X										
Grey Plover	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lapwing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Knot	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sanderling	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dunlin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ruff	X	X															
Snipe			X		X		X									X	X
Jack Snipe		X															
Black-t Godwit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bar-tailed Godwit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X				X	X		X	X
Whimbrel	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Curlew	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spotted Redshank		X	X		X								X				
Redshank	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Greenshank	X			X			X			X			X	X	X		X
Com Sandpiper	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Turnstone	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pomarine Skua												X					
Arctic Skua	X	X	X														X
Mediterranean Gull	X						X		X				X				
Little Gull		X			X				X								
Black hd Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Common Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lesser B B Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Herring Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Great B B Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kittiwake	X	X		X	X								X				
Sandwich Tern	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Common Tern	X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Arctic Tern	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Little Tern												X					
Black Tern													X	X			
Guillemot			X		X			X			X		X				
Razorbill		X		X	X					X		X					
Feral Pigeon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stock Dove	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X
Woodpigeon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collared Dove	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cuckoo		X			X		X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X
Barn Owl	X	X	X	X	X		X				X						
Little Owl	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Tawny Owl	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Long-eared Owl											X						
Short-eared Owl	X																
Swift	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kingfisher	X		X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X				
Gt S Woodpecker	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Skylark	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sand Martin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Swallow	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
House Martin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Tree Pipit	X		X	X				X							X		
Meadow Pipit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Yellow Wagtail				X			X	X				X		X	X	X	X
Citrine Wagtail													X	X			
Grey Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X
Pied Wagtail	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dipper		X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X	X		X		X
Wren	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dunnock	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Robin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whinchat	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Stonechat		X						X	X								
Wheatear	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Blackbird	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Song Thrush	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mistle Thrush	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Grasshopper Wblr	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sedge Warbler	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reed Warbler	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blackcap	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Garden Warbler	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lr Whitethroat	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Whitethroat	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chiffchaff	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Willow Warbler	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wood Warbler	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Goldcrest	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Spotd Flycatcher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pied Flycatcher	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Long-tailed Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Marsh Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coal Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Blue Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Great Tit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nuthatch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Treecreeper	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jay	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Magpie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jackdaw	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rook	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Carrion Crow	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Starling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
House Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tree Sparrow	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chaffinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Greenfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Goldfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Siskin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Linnet	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lesser Redpoll	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bullfinch	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Yellowhammer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reed Bunting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Corn Bunting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

So far records have been received from two teams who took part on different days. **Chris Batty, Stuart Piner and Stephen Dunstan** recorded **124** species on the 27th April 2005 and broke the record by one. On 30th April 2005 **Paul Ellis, Ian Gardner, Peter Scholes** recoded **119**.

There must be higher totals to come. This year 145 species were present in the Fylde during the week of the Bird Race and the new record did not include Sparrowhawk, Garden Warbler, Gadwall or Common Tern !

– **Secretary**

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## Announcements and Diary Dates

### Gift Aid

As Fylde Bird Club (FBC) is now a registered charity, all donations made to FBC qualify for Gift Aid. This means that FBC can claim repayment of tax (an extra 28p for every pound donated) on all donations. Donations include membership subscriptions and sponsorship money for events organised by FBC. All members of FBC have been sent Gift Aid forms. Up to 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2005 a total of 38 Gift Aid forms had been returned (38/80 = 48%). To qualify for Gift Aid you must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donations in the tax year. So, if you are a UK tax payer and have not completed a Gift Aid form, please consider doing so. The Gift Aid form can be downloaded from the FBC website ([www.fyldebirdclub.org](http://www.fyldebirdclub.org)) or please ask Paul Ellis for a copy of the Gift Aid form at FBC monthly meetings.

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### Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) monthly count dates:

DATE		TIME	HEIGHT
JUN	26	15:34	9.06m
JLY	24	14:30	9.66m
AUG	21	13:23	10.01m
SEP	18	12:17	10.02m
OCT	16	11:12	9.67m
NOV	6	13:45	8.91m
DEC	4	12:55	9.4m

Volunteers and helpers always needed. Contact Jean Roberts on 01524 770295 to arrange. Usually meet at Pilling Lane Ends Car Park, 2 hours before high tide.

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### Fylde Bird Club Meetings

Meet at 1945 hrs in the room above the bar at Blackpool Cricket Club, Stanley Park.

28th June: Business Meeting and members slides  
26th July: Birds of New Zealand with *Mike McGough*  
23rd August: Alaska with *Paul Ellis*  
27th September: The RSPB in Lancashire with *Andrew Gouldstone*  
25th October: Business Meeting and members slides  
22nd November: Update on Digiscoping with guest speaker *Paul Hackett*  
20th December: Buffet, quiz and Christmas Social

Wyre Borough Council Guided Walks led by the **Fylde Bird Club**.

Help with leading these walks is always welcome. Wyre Borough Council make a small charge for these walks but Bird Club Members who turn out to help lead them do not pay.

***Sunday 24 July 2005 at 7:30am - Waders***

Shard Bridge Inn - Meet in the car park outside the pub. This location is only available for this Guided Walk. Grid Reference: **SD 371412**

***Sunday 14 August 2005 at 7:30am - Waders***

Shard Bridge Inn - Meet in the car park outside the pub. This location is only available for this Guided Walk. Grid Reference: **SD 371412**

***Sunday 18 September 2005 at 9:00am - Geese, Ducks & Waders***

Lane Ends Picnic Area - Meet at the car park at Lane Ends 3/4 mile north east of Pilling just off the A588 adjacent to Morecambe Bay. Grid Reference: **SD 415495**

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For Sale

Binoculars: premium quality **Bauch & Lomb 8x42 Elite Mark 2**. Waterproof, nitrogen filled; closest focusing high quality binoculars available- unmatched for insect observation. Excellent condition with rainguard and case. They cost £600 new today. Bargain at **£299 o.n.o.** Contact Paul Ellis **01253 891 281** or **paul.ellis24@btopenworld.com**.

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New Local Reserve Opening

Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park officially opened on Friday 3rd June. This new Nature Reserve/public open space is on the site of the old Fleetwood Power Station. It has been landscaped and tidied up by Lancashire County Council. Most of the important bird habitats have been preserved. To access the site, drive down to the end of Jameson Road to the car park.

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Ethiopia – part 2

**21<sup>st</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November 2003**

...We were allocated our chalets, and after a shower and dinner I was ready for what was my first decent nights sleep since I left home. With no traffic or any other noise I fell into a deep sleep but having opted for a pre-breakfast walk was up at first light. Although warm in our rooms it was decidedly chilly outside and I was glad I had dressed accordingly as we waited for the early risers to assemble. We saw nothing that we did not see later in the day although the sight of 3 Half-collared Kingfishers together probably made it worthwhile and we also got to see the grounds in peace. A swimming pool fed by natural hot springs set in the beautiful woodland valley was inviting. Jacarandas, Roses and Bougainvillea added colour and fragrance.

We returned for breakfast which consisted of fruit juice, porridge or egg based meals and bread washed down by coffee or tea. After breakfast Merid took us on an uphill walk into the forest. Ibrahim our genial driver took us as far as he could in the bus, then we made our own way. The pace was fine, but birds were thin on the ground, just as well some were up in the trees then. Up to 20 endemic Black-headed Forest Orioles were recorded during the day and the same number of Silver-cheeked Hornbills with half of them in the grounds of the guest house. The enormous chiselled casque of the male hornbills was quite extraordinary but it was endearing to see male and female allopreening in the trees like a pair of Lovebirds. Not shy you could feel the draught of their fly past.

White-cheeked Turacos were nice to see again as was a Wryneck, Montane White-eye, Paradise Flycatcher and a line of Thick-billed Ravens. Alpine Swifts flew high above us and an Augur Buzzard showed its distinctive shape. Then some new species, Yellow Fronted Tinkerbird, how about that for a name, Double-toothed Barbet, Banded Wattle-eye, Grey Cuckoo Shrike, Lemon Dove and the tiny endemic Abyssinian Woodpecker hardly bigger than our own Lesser Spot. Perhaps equal pride of place for me were the 7 Spotted Creepers not altogether I might add. Bigger and more robust than our Treecreepers they were difficult to pick out against the back lit sky but well worth the effort, with special thanks going to Paul for lugging his Leica scope and back-breaking tripod combination along with him.

Another Paul who should also receive a mention is, Paul Donald formerly of the Fylde! With over 1,300 species on his Africa list he was more than proving his worth in adding to the species total. A most polite and helpful guy who mixed well. Having reached our turning point and seeing virtually nothing for about 20 minutes we headed back adding Northern Puffback, Black and White Mannikin and Tambourine Dove. Now and then a group of Vervet monkeys would crash through the woodland. The much larger barrel chested Olive Baboons were more pedestrian in their progress while the strictly arboreal Black and White Colobus monkeys with their long tails ending in a bushy white mass could be surprisingly difficult to see. Numerous butterflies of many species were all unknown to me. Small, large, drab, colourful, weak, powerful they added an extra interest to the forest walk. Steve Laycock who had brought a butterfly book with him had only identified the African Monarch but that no doubt was down to the quality of his field guide rather than his ID skills.

Returning to not far from where Ibrahim had dropped us off, we then took a short diversion. Before following I took a picture of a spiders web the size of a full size snooker table that held at least 9 large spiders of the same species. My worst nightmare, I followed into the pine woodland making sure that wherever I went some one had gone before me. One of Merid's local scouts had found a pair of Narina's Trogons which had been one of the highlights of our South Africa trip where they had performed at point blank range. Here, perhaps because of the size of the party they were less confiding, but still great to see. Just as good and another highlight for me was a skulking Abyssinian Ground Thrush that was well worth the effort when I finally connected with it. Just like the books depict it is a striking bird with brown upperparts, bright orange head and underparts with prominent white double wing bars and white eye ring. I didn't see it for nearly long enough and sadly I never saw another one. Definitely one to see again.

We made our way back to the guest house passing several Dusky Flycatchers, and Variable and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds. Yes the sunbirds are as good as their name but the Scarlet Chested were noisy and quarrelsome often seeing off other birds. They, like most of the Sunbirds were always seen near flower heads where they must take the nectar but they are also insectivorous as I watched one take what seemed like a small spider. Good for it, I thought.

We took lunch and then split up in the afternoon. Unfortunately Merid did not turn up for his scheduled afternoon walk and left about 8 of our party twiddling their thumbs until they realised he had let them down. Paul and I had decided to do our own thing but it was odd we heard no more about the matter. I wandered down to the swimming pool area and joined up with several of the party but we were soon besieged by kids whereupon I made my way back to the sanctuary of the guest house grounds. Paul had got the right idea, sat on the terrace roof, drinking and waiting for the birds to come to him. I eventually joined him after walking around the grounds photographing whatever I could with a 300mm lens.

It was a pleasant way to spend the rest of the daylight hours, winding down, and from up here armed with a telescope, as good as anywhere. The views looking down the valley to Lake Awassa were eye catching and it was easy to understand why the guest house had been situated there. The place I understand had been built by the Russians which probably explained why it was so un-african like. Like everywhere else though, maintenance was low on the agenda, although I did see someone slapping on a coat of paint in the main building.



As the night drew in a pair of Steppe Eagles chose to roost in nearby tree tops. Once again I forgot to stop-down the camera leaving me with yet another Black Eagle for my collection. I wish. A Bruce's Green Pigeon surely a contender for smartest pigeon on the planet perched on a fig tree while in another tree the endemic Banded Barbet and a Grey-headed Batis flitted about the canopy. It had been another good day with the weather staying warm and sunny with only a short shower. Other members of the party had seen other species such as Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Red-headed Weaver, Spotted Flycatcher and the endemic Yellow-fronted Parrot but as with all these trips it is impossible for everyone to see everything.

Dinner was followed by an early night or so I thought. A mozzy had other ideas. Is there anything worse than the buzzing in your ear sound of a blood seeking mozzy. You think it'll go away and it does, but only to return just as you're nodding off. Bastard I shouted. Paul denied it. No the bloody mozzy I meant. Paul then realised he had been bit as I searched in earnest for the bleeder, or it would be when I found it. It could be anywhere as I looked on the walls. It certainly wasn't flying. Eureka it was low down on the wall by the side of the bed. Amazingly I swotted it with my first attempt leaving a blood splattered wall, traces of insect and one happy bunny, me. Well perhaps two as Paul mumbled something before turning over.

The next day we were up early again to play catch-up on the Yellow-fronted Parrots known to frequent the large fruiting fig tree in the centre of the grounds. The tree was playing host to just about everything including a Sharpe's Starling. Merid heard the parrots fly in and called us back as we were making for breakfast. Even with 15 pairs of eyes looking it took some time to find them, but as the trip was billed as an Endemics trip we could hardly go without seeing them.

While we took breakfast Ibrahim loaded our luggage in readiness for the long journey to Goba in the Bale Mountains. We returned to the main road near Shashemene, filled up with diesel and set off on the 200+ kms gravel road. Paul by the open window exercised his left arm whenever a vehicle passed by. The dust was terrible but far more so for the pedestrians. We take tarmac roads for granted, the aim has to be the same over here asap. Food aid is necessary as things are now, but development aid is needed more than ever if Ethiopia is ever to stand on its own feet. Donor countries need to have assurances that development aid is ring fenced and used exclusively for the purpose it is intended for, even if it means they keep control of the expenditure. Too often in the past financial aid has been purloined by corrupt governments. Sealed roads, running water, electricity, education, healthcare, communications all need addressing in a country and continent that continues to lag behind the rest of the world.

The road was straight and flat for the first half of the journey with cereal fields stretching as far as the eye could see, no doubt teeming with Weavers and Queleas although we recorded none of the latter. Cape Rooks were common enough. Do they always look as if they have just eaten, as their crop always appears spiky and extended. It was a tiring journey with toilet stops doubling up for fag breaks. Hovering Isabelline Wheatears lined the roadside with equal numbers of Pied Wheatears. A roadside pool with muddy margins gave us another excuse to stop, if one was necessary. We piled out and scanned the edges. Single Ringed and Kittlitz's Plovers were with 'pairs' of Greenshank and Wood Sandpiper and I think it was here a Black Stork and distant but recognisable White-headed Vulture were seen.

I think we were all ready for lunch by the time we arrived at Dodola, gateway to the Bale Mountains National Park. We drove into the secure grounds of a restaurant and were ushered into a grassy area surrounded on all sides by a tall hedge. A few chairs were provided but most people stood around until the food arrived. Not a patch on yesterdays lunch, we were given doorstep sandwiches consisting of 3 slices of toast with 2 layers of cheese inside. You needed the movable hinged jaw of a snake to bite into it. Slices of pineapple soothed the tongue and bottles of mineral water quenched our thirst. It didn't take long to finish the meal, whereupon we were left with looking at a skulking Olive Thrush or a Phyllosc. There was nothing else to see hemmed in as we were. We grew impatient as the minutes then quarter hours passed by and was glad to see the bus finally return.

We commenced stage two of our dusty journey and before long reached the foothills before the long drag up. A broken down juggernaut lay stranded by the roadside. It would be a day or so before it was attended to. A brief stop gave us Grey-rumped Swallow, 4 Ortolans, and a score plus each of Yellow-crowned Canary and Yellow Bishop not forgetting a sprinkling of Stonechats. The hillsides hereabout looked strangely crumpled in shape.

On and on we climbed with Wheatears and Hill Chats all the way. Vultures and Augur Buzzards kept us company but it was the eagle species that most captivated us. Stop, stop shouted Malcolm as the bus came to a standstill. We all poured out and watched a magnificent Martial eagle come closer and closer only to land briefly before flying

over the ridge and out of sight. What a bird, what presence, what a feeling. Everybody was elated by the experience of a bird we were not to see again. But was it any better than the Verraux's we had seen at Debre Libanos and on today's journey, well each to his own but I couldn't separate the two in terms of magnificence and pleasure they had given me. Tawny, Steppe and Golden eagles were also seen on the way and they too could hardly be dismissed. Before moving on a party of Choughs kee-owed as they flew by before joining up with others in the valley below.

We checked in at the Bale Mountains National Park HQ, about 400kms from Addis. We were at 3200 metres, and with still a further 50kms to go before reaching our destination of Goba. We moved on, the scenery spectacular and ever changing. Another stop by a rocky overhang gave us two Cinnamon-bracken Warblers, about as spell-binding as watching paint dry, at least from distance. Also here were Tawny-flanked Prinia, loud squeaking Rock Hyraxes (the food preference of the larger eagles) an unobliging Rouget's Rail and a fly by Pallid Harrier. The weather had been sunny and warm when we set off, but here it was cloudy and much cooler.

Continuing on we passed children by the side of the road selling bundles of garlic bulbs, sadly of little use to us. Merid teased some of the children by handing out pens courtesy of the Yorkshire lads then demanding them back before giving them out again. Their faces showed delight followed by disappointment then unsureness. I was not amused.

Our more or less final stop was by a moorland tarn where the endemic Rouget's Rail were far more obliging with at least 6 seen well. Two-toned, brown above orangey below with characteristic white undertail coverts this was an attractive rail but very much a rail with its alternating slow then rapid movements. A Moorhen, 2 Red-knobbed Coot, 12 Blue-winged Geese, 2 Little Grebe and 7 Yellow-billed Ducks made up the water birds while a flock of 60 or so Black-headed Siskins were good to see at close quarters.

Here too were our first wild and alive quadrupeds. About 30 of the endemic Mountain Nyalas including one quite magnificent stag could be seen lazing about together with a single endemic Menelik's Bushbuck. 10 Bohor Bushbuck their ears patterned on the inside were also scattered about. The males have forward pointing horns at their tip, a good ID feature and something I had read up about previously. Fifteen or so wary Warthogs completed the scene. I like Warthogs, the way they strut about, their cartoon quality, their ugliness forgiven by their character, their braveness in defence of their young. Yes Warthogs rule OK by me.

By the time we reached the Goba Wabe Shabelle Hotel it was pitch black, and a small jackal like mammal was caught in our headlights as we pulled into the car park. We were handed our room keys before lugging our baggage there. Cool inside, it was to be the same in the main building where we took our meal. A quick wash and change of clothes etc had its moments. As I turned the tap on the whole unit swivelled round. The toilet seat was no better as it slid to one side, while operating the flushing device also took the cistern lid off with it. You just had to laugh.

I can't remember the food we had for dinner but the room was enormous for the number of place settings. Several other parties were staying here and from their dress all looked to be feeling the chill of the place. The height of the ceiling and size of the room must all contribute to heating inefficiencies. Also inefficient was the detailed hand written receipts for anything bought at the hotel. Heaven help them if there is ever a queue, it was bad enough being second in line for a bottle of water.

The next day we made an early start and after passing through Goba soon started our ascent through juniper woodland on what apparently is the highest road in Africa. My memory is a little hazy here and my notes somewhat lacking in detail. For instance there is a beautiful endemic tree species here with flowers deep pink, not unlike our Horse Chestnut flowers in shape but hanging down like bunches of grapes, rather than erect. The leaves were palmated and pointed. I know I wrote the name down but where is it? Anyway we stopped after about half an hour to listen for the endemic Abyssinian Catbird which we quickly got on to. A loud pleasant warbling trill increases in volume before tailing off and being repeated at regular intervals. No bigger than our Starling it had a white forehead merging into a grey crown. The rest of the bird was brownish grey except for the undertail coverts that were chestnut in colour. We saw up to 13 during the day, some paired up. Apparently they are common in large back gardens in the cities.

We also saw Slender-billed and Somali chestnut-winged Starlings here as well as more Tacazze Sunbirds, 2 White-cheeked Turacos and 2 Black-winged Lovebirds. We boarded the bus and continued climbing along the winding road passing St Johns Wort trees with their yellow flowers and many other trees festooned with lichens and

mosses. The tall junipers with their flimsy hanging branches were eventually left behind as we approached the high altitude plateau where the spikes of giant lobelias, up to 5 metres tall dotted the moorland, like Arizona cactus. As we reached a communications station at about 4,000 metres we baled out into the thin cool air to be faced with a rocky tundra like landscape dotted with shallow pools. It was not a place to dash about. It was a place to reflect and to see the special wildlife that inhabit the area.

Almost immediately someone spotted 2 enormous stately Wattled Cranes searching the wet terrain for food items. Simultaneously another star bird of the area the endemic Spot-breasted Plover appeared right on cue. We were to see up to 50 of these stylish plovers with their raucous calls. Considerably bigger than a Spur-winged they stood tall on their long yellow legs. They had a striking supercilia stretching to the back of the nape and contrasting against a black forehead and crown set off by yellow lores. The throat was black before extending into the eponymous named Spot-breast.

Try as I did I never managed a face on photograph. Let's hope Paul Ellis has one to show at the April Fylde Bird Club meeting for Paul had been there earlier in the year.

Yet again I was indifferent to the Francolin's that survive up here. Moorland and Scaly-throated did nothing for me, but they probably tasted good. The ever present raptors were no doubt on the look out for the Meadow and Giant Mole rats that were plentiful up here. It pays to be cautious if you're a giant mole rat and they had learnt that to reverse back into their burrow is much quicker and therefore much safer than turning round and heading back.

Tawny, Golden and Verreaux's were all seen here as were Lammergeier, Peregrine and Augur. Another top of the food chain predator we expected to see was the red coated Ethiopian Wolf and we were not disappointed with up to 7 being seen and photographed well. Mistaken for a fox or jackal in the past it has been proved to be closely related to wolves. We half heartedly followed one that had prey in its mouth. It maintained a discreet distance whenever we got too close. Using the bus as a hide, they were far more trusting as one loped across the track in front of us and another rested and yawned on the ground not 50 metres away.

We alighted for lunch in a cold and windy spot. The rocks were totally encrusted in lichens that found the unpolluted air much to their liking. Cushion forming plants mainly white in colour competed with the ericas for space. We didn't stay long as it started to drizzle. Later we gave our leftovers to a travelling 'family' dressed in traditional colourful clothing. I think there were two ladies and one young boy whose faces lit up at our offerings. I wondered what they were doing there, where they were going to, and how they got by. I shall never know.

A small pool held 2 edgy Ruddy Shelduck. Sure enough they flew away as we ground to a halt. 2 Greenshank and a Green Sandpiper were also seen here as were 10 Yellow-billed ducks surely as elegant a duck you are likely to find anywhere. Two Choughs flew by.

We returned the way we had come with the weather taking a turn for the worse. It didn't last long as we descended back into the juniper woodland where I asked to stop to photograph the pink flowered tree. Lucky I did, for it held an Abyssinian Woodpecker. As it began to brighten up steam rose from the ground and people appeared from their 'shelter'. We ambled slowly down-hill off the beaten track by a gorgeous wooded valley looking down to the lower plateau where Goba stood. The sun was warm and the landscape breathtakingly beautiful. Delicate patterned bindweeds adorned trees as they wrapped and spiralled their way up the trunks. Flowers of unknown genus, never mind species flummoxed me, but the feeling of joy held us all.

More Catbirds, and Abyssinian Slaty Flycatchers followed as well as the ubiquitous Streaky and Brown-rumped Seed-eaters. We boarded the bus expectant of more goodies elsewhere, however it became apparent that Merid was returning to the hotel at the early time of 15.25. Yet again I was not amused and neither was anybody else. With 3 hours of daylight left we persuaded him to return to the juniper woodland where we spent a further hour or so at our leisure enjoying some quality birding.

Yet more Catbirds and far more confiding this time around. Baglafaecht's Weavers, Hill Chats as tame as our garden Robins, 2 White-backed Black Tits, Blue-eared glossy Starlings, soaring Augur Buzzards, Olive Thrushes, Ruppells Robin Chat, a perched Lanner Falcon, 40+ Alpine Swifts and c100 Nyanza Swifts were just some of the birds we saw by returning there.

We heard the bus beeping for our return so made our way back to the road where 3 young children were shepherding a flock of goats. Dressed in layers of tattered clothes they looked a sorry sight. One had a pair of blue wellies on his feet but they were cracked in 4 different places. They had obviously been a job lot because

elsewhere on our travels we had seen other children wearing green and red ones. The other two wore shoes of sorts but at least one shoe had no sole to speak of. Sharon persuaded a young girl and what was probably her younger brother to pose for her while she took pictures. The young boy was frightened but eventually settled down if never quite losing that tearful look. I too took a picture. It could pass for a portrait from biblical times.

We stopped at Goba where Merid collected some pastries for us. Tradition I think he said. He advised us not to get out though there seemed no reason not to. Perhaps he didn't want us to hold him up any more than we already had! It was a busy village/town with a wide dirt track road through the centre. There was much activity with many pedestrians, pony trap taxis, and bicycles. Shoe-shiners, a sewing machinist and a coffee shop took my eye as did a minaret which towered over the town. Shoe shiners will have a job for life here, as long as dirt roads and pride in one's shoes continues. Clearly there must be some decent shoes about. Here as in Addis the fast growing Eucalyptus tree had been encouraged.

We got back to the hotel shortly after 17.00 hours and did our own thing. Paul and I took advantage of what light was left, photographing Fiscal Shrike, Speckled Pigeon and Rouget's Rail. Paul heard several Tree Pipits fly over and a Hoopoe came into the grounds to roost. By now it was almost dark so we reluctantly packed in and prepared for dinner.

The next day we made another early start for the long tiring journey back to the Rift valley. Thirty or so Somali Crows a recent split from Brown-necked raven were in the town of Robi near Goba. Not far from here a troop of shifty looking Olive Baboons crossed the road and nearby we saw 2 White-tailed Mongooses. We called at the Bale Mountains HQ to look for Bale Parisoma, a probable endemic split from Brown Parisoma ( Thanks Andy I wondered what we were looking for). Personally and I don't think I was alone in this I think our time would have been much better spent by arriving at Lake Awassa sooner. We spent about an hour here but did not see the bird. Close up views of Warthog and Mountain Nyala was some compensation but it was a lot of effort for little reward.

We continued on, stopping now and then to stretch our legs. A roadside kill saw an imm Steppe Eagle masquerading as an imm Spotted Eagle or was it the other way round. Much discussion took place and various field guides ( Forsman et al ) came into play before the final analysis favoured Steppe. Dick Forsman had been our leader in Finland, pity he wasn't with us now.

Wheatears, Thrushes, Chats and Fiscals lined the road and 5 Pallid Harriers were seen on the way back. Red-capped and Short-crested Larks get a first mention here but we had seen them previously. A party of 30 Black-winged Plovers are always worth a mention as are 100+ White-collared Pigeons. Back on the edge of the plain we stopped by a small river where 2 Abyssinian Woodpeckers were seen and a Black-headed Batis. I think it was here I missed 2 Palm Swifts. Sick as a parrot when I saw how good they looked in the field guide. Ah well.

We stopped for lunch at the same place we had stopped on the way out. This time however we were led to the 'restaurant' where we had a delicious hot soup followed by a spaghetti dish. What's more we didn't have to wait around this time as we set off in double quick time arriving back at the highway in Shashemene at 16.00 hours. From here it was 486 kms to Moyale on the Kenyan border but only a 30 minute drive to our hotel at Lake Awassa. On the roadside wires along the way we passed a single Grey-headed Woodpecker, 5 Lilac-breasted Rollers and 100+ Carmine Bee-eaters. It seemed criminal that we didn't stop but we soon found out why.

We arrived at our third Wabe Shabelle Hotel, a notch up on the previous two, took possession of the chalet keys, dumped our luggage and made to the meeting point. The hotel grounds were set amongst mature trees alongside the east side of Lake Awassa. We quickly clocked up Redstart, Double-toothed and Banded Barbets, Fork-tailed Drongo, Common Waxbill, Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling, White-rumped Babbler, Woodland Kingfisher and Northern Black Flycatcher before stepping 'outside' a guarded gate on to the perimeter path of the lake. It was a warm evening and the pathway was busy with people, walking, fishing, cycling, talking, bathing, loitering and us birdwatching. A long jetty stretched out into the lake where fish were being landed and birds such as Hammerkop, Spur-winged Plover, Pied Kingfisher and Little Egret could be found.

We set off slowly along the path with new birds and 'old friends' coming thick and fast, too fast really. A perched Banded Snake Eagle ignored us as we scoped it. Tiny Malachite Kingfishers criss-crossed the floating vegetation occasionally perching within feet of us. Lily trotters were estimated at 100+ and a single Lesser Jacana showed well. At home amongst the vegetation and sitting low in the water were 4 White-backed Ducks. Forty or so Pygmy Geese, my favourites, were sublime. I watched them pensively as the light began to fade, the breeze dropped and the lake calmed.

The distant hills provided a beautiful setting for this bountiful lake. I snapped out of my trance by the appearance of 3 Black Crakes tip-toeing over the vegetation close enough to photograph and turning out quite well in the process. Apart from their yellow bill, red eyes and legs they were just that, **black**. Rummaging amongst the vegetation while keeping a watchful eye they were full of character. It was a crime to leave them but with the sun soon to set it had to be done.

On the land side of the path in the set back trees were 2 African Fish Eagles surveying their hunting grounds. A trio of Ibis species included Glossy, Sacred and the noisy laughing Hadedas. In the forefront, marshy vegetation and muddy pools held 8 Hottentot Teal, 2 African Snipe, 7 Wood Sands, and 2 Lesser Swamp Warblers. Here too were Squacco Herons which together with those on the lake side must have numbered 50+. Two African Orange-bellied Parrots, 2 Blue-headed and 1 Senegal Coucals kept the frantic pace going but we were fast losing out to the twilight. Isabelline and Grey-backed Shrikes perched patiently while on the lake the 100+ W-W Black Terns were diminishing in number and the single Whiskered had long gone. There had been Osprey, Pin-tailed Whydah, African Spoonbill, Wire-tailed Swallows and goodness knows what else. I had not seen them all but I may have seen too many in deference to quality birding. Bring back the Crakes, bring back everything and give me more time. Tomorrow, our last full day was going to be no different; headless chickens come to mind.

We returned to the chalets in the dark with a White-tailed Mongoose scurrying across the path in front of us. Knackered but satiated we rested a while, had fun with the shower unit, does nothing work over here, and got ready for dinner. It was a good meal and along with the banter made for an enjoyable evening, that is until one of the staff likened me to George Bush. Where did he get that from!!!!

I slept well with the mosquito net over me. Paul wasn't bothered and as it happened there was no need. Not so two chalets away where Nev was kept awake all night fighting them off and without any electricity to see with.

The day started with a pre-breakfast walk at 06.00 seeing at a more leisurely pace some of the birds we had seen the previous evening. With far fewer people about and the soft morning light adding to the atmosphere of the place I got my quality birding time, but it wasn't to last.

Porridge etc etc made for a filling breakfast before returning to the chalet where our ever cheerful driver Ibrahim loaded our luggage. Vocal Black and White Colobus monkeys put on a good show as they moved about in the trees and clattered across the chalet roofs. Merid did a head count and off we went to the nearby fish market.

We parked up a little way past the market and the race was on. Silver-cheeked Hornbills showed first, but what was to be the star turn of the day for my money, was just around the corner. It was a bird I had long wanted to see after first clocking an illustration of it in Poyser's 'Birds of the Middle East and North Africa' back in 1988. High up in a fruiting fig tree a small party of Amethyst Starlings were foraging for food. Now there's not a lot you can say about the drab females and juv's, brown above streaked below, but the males stunned my senses. It is not difficult to see why it's also called Plumcoloured and Violet-backed because as with all starlings the iridescent plumage changes with the angle of the light so you see a range of subtle colours. It is one gorgeous bird that defies exact colour description but what colours. Set against the all white underparts save for the breast, and a striking yellow eye ring it was far and away the Starling of the trip and a strong contender for best bird, at least in my eyes. A knock-out species.

Which way to turn next. 2 Senegal Thicknees allowed close approach providing me with perhaps my best slides of the trip as I got to within 10 feet of them. Resting Sacred Ibis mingled with Long-tailed and the odd Great Cormorants as Wood Sandpipers made their way round them. A Nubian Woodpecker brought us all together but I managed to miss Gambaga Dusky Flycatcher. Knob-billed Duck, Banded Barbet, Redstart, Spectacled Weaver, Woodland Kingfisher, Willow and Sedge Warbler and 200+ Slender-Billed Starlings etc etc were seen before we made our way to the spectacle of the fish market.

There was so much activity going on by the lake shore that it was easy to forget the birds and just watch the busy scene centring on the small fishing boats. There were perhaps 200 people there but most seemed to be mingling around, although there was a lot of net maintenance going on by young boys, and of course selling of the catch. And where there's fish there are opportunists. Hammerkops, Marabous, Gull-billed and WWBlack Terns were all waiting around for their chance of an easy meal. By arriving late here I dipped again only this time on Goliath Heron.

It was time to move on to our next port of call passing 3 shrike species, Carmine-bee eaters and 2 Abyssinian Rollers on the way. We arrived at Dole ostrich enclosure, had our entrance fees paid and made our way through the dusty acacia woodland. New species outnumbered the rest. In no particular order 2 Greyish Eagle Owls hid while 2 Dark Chanting Goshawks were in full view. 2 Red-billed Hornbills superficially resembled 2 Von Der Decken's Hornbills both species seeking out the shade. A Nubian Woodpecker called for our attention, then a Cardinal Woodpecker and then 2 Bearded Woodpeckers the largest by far of the peckers. A party of 6 Crested Helmet Shrikes with their extraordinary yellow petalled eye rings must have been a wonderful sight. Thankfully I saw one. 2 Rufous-crowned Rollers, a Northern Brubru and White-headed Buffalo Weavers had our heads buzzing.

It was about now that something happened that I had never experienced before. Our mild mannered Paul finally lost his rag as he blurted out 'Will someone tell this ##### to slow down' as Merid trailblazed the way with little consideration for those behind. It was everyone for himself it seemed with none of the leadership skills we had come to expect on such trips. The pace may have slowed for a while but the birds continued to flow. A White-bellied Go-Away Bird an absolute stunner received scant attention but you could not ignore the tame 30 or so Superb Starlings with their gaudy plumage.

Still they kept coming with 2 Black-headed Orioles hardly distinguishable from the Forest Orioles at Wondo Guenet. A Striped Kingfisher was another 'fisher' that preferred woodland and the 2 Wahlbergs Honeyguides caught our attention with their jerky head movements. Ruppell's Weavers, Red-faced Crombecs, Yellow-bellied Eremolas and Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus made up the supporting cast. The sign by the entrance said 'Please kill nothing except your time'

Next stop Lake Langano for lunch and to drop off David Cornner who was staying there before linking up with the following weeks Naturetrek trip. We had half an hour to kill before lunch. Did I say kill. This place was almost on a par with where we had just come from. Some might say better. The same three woodpeckers were here as was Greyish Eagle Owl. White-browed Sparrow-Weavers and White-headed Buffalo-Weavers drank from the tiny stream passing through the surrounding woodland and were joined by more Superb Starlings. Namaqua and Laughing Doves finally showed well for me. 3 Black-billed Wood Hoopoes were a treat as were 2 each of Little Bee-eaters and Grey-headed Batis.

Lunch beckoned as we reluctantly stopped birding. I ordered soup and a fish dish both delicious but time consuming. Paul wisely ordered the Spag Bol and returned to birding well ahead of me.

Back to it and I was soon photographing Spur-winged Plovers on the lake shore. Then on to close-ups of Hooded Vulture and Yellow-billed Kites waiting their turn for the local dog to finish with its meal. Merid came looking for us as a Northern White-faced Scops Owl had been found by one of the locals. Perched right in the top of a leafy tree you could nevertheless see it well and everyone rewarded the finder with a tip. It was a fabulous Owl that we all got to see. Paul had been watching a pair of Mocking Cliff Chats another stunner I didn't catch up with. 5 Red-billed Oxpeckers, 2 Red-billed Buffalo Weavers, 2 Grey Flycatchers, Hemprich's Hornbill, Ruppell's Long-tailed Starlings, White-backed Black Tit, and 3 Red-fronted Barbets with one at the nest hole followed as we made our way to the bus.

By now we were falling behind schedule but just as we set off we stopped again. We had to, for on top of a telegraph pole was Africa's smallest raptor an African Pygmy Falcon. About the size of a Lesser Grey Shrike it stared intently for some time before flying away in an undulating fashion. As it prepared to land on another pole it braked hard by drawing back its wings in a V shape -- most impressive.

We set off once more to what would be our last site of the day. As we approached Lake Abyata a soda lake in the heart of the Rift Valley 2 melanistic Gabar Goshawks were hunting in the acacia woodland. The bus took us so far then we walked across the vast expanse of the white shoreline looking into the blurred heat haze enticing us on. To the right of us in better light we could see 22 Wattled Cranes parading like heads of state, while royalty was represented by 2 Black Crowned Cranes, their crown reminding me of the Christmas decorations I would soon be adorning the tree with.

We could make out the gangly shapes of 1000's of Flamingos with the Greats far outnumbering the Lessers. We kept edging nearer to the shallow calm surface of the lake, crumbling the crusty shore bed that not too long ago would have been under water. Ducks with upward of 500 Shoveler were all over the lake as were Swallows, Martins and Terns picking off insects. Waders included 30+ Kittlitz's, 10 Marsh Sands, 100+ Temminct's, 4 Curlew

Sands, 40 B W Stilts, 500+ Avocets and 1000+ Ruff. African Fish Eagles caused havoc when they flew over but things soon settled down. Five young children, poorly dressed, came over to see what we were doing. None wore footwear and one was still in his birthday suit. A small rodent appeared where upon one of them whacked it with a long thick cane. It was a game to them. They were playing, what could you say. Words of advice were given but you knew they would do it again. Behind them in the distance several whirlwinds could be seen, indeed you could see them all around.

Back at the lake 30+ Red-necked Phalaropes were swimming around, darting from side to side after insects. Cracking birds. Among the Lesser black-backed, Grey-headed and Black-headed Gulls were 2 Heuglin's Gulls and 5 Great Black-backed Gulls. It was a magnificent setting with birds on the lake as far as the eye could see. Once again we had just scratched the surface or on this occasion crumbled it. As I write this I can remember it well and thinking how great it would be to circumnavigate it and Lake Awassa too. Dream on Barry, dream on.

We returned to the bus, elated once again but with the long journey back to Addis ahead of us. Ibrahim put his foot down where safe to do so, for this was an accident prone road with three nasty smashes seen on the way back, one in particular where a cattle laden truck had ended up as a massacre.

That aside it was a fascinating journey full of interest with the roadsides in the townships and outskirts being one continuous market. Nearly everyone was flagging us down for a lift or to sell goods. Bags of spuds, cabbages, pizzas, fancy goods, you name it you could have it. There were other things to see. We passed one farm rickyard where barley grain was being trampled by oxen, then tossed into the air with spatula shaped tools 5 feet long. This winnowing separates the husks from the grain. Is it any wonder farmland birds continue to thrive here. Further along I noticed the use of cacti for hedges, and other 'fencing' was made by flattening out used oil drums or using corrugated iron sheeting. 'Needs must' rules the day here.

There were still birds to be seen as we made our way through the Rift Valley. A Long-crested Eagle was perched up as we whizzed by it. Crowned Plovers numbered 30 en route where 4 Pallid Harriers and 3 Black-shouldered Kites were also seen. But the light was against us and it went dark some time before we reached Addis. Addis was teeming with activity and I shall never forget the row of butchers shops we passed with their hanging carcasses on show. Health and Safety would have a field day.

Ibrahim drove on to the dual carriage ring road where traffic discipline was no different to elsewhere. Where else would you find vehicles parked up on a ring road and four 'escaped' oxen in your way? Ah well it made for an exciting journey. We got back to the Holiday Hotel only to find that 'double booking' happens here too. As it happened it turned out to be a bonus with Paul and I being uprated to a room twice as big as the one we had occupied previously and the four Yorkshire lads transferring to a superior hotel but dining with us in the evening. We said our goodbyes to Ibrahim and Merid neither of whom would be with us the following day.

Bill Glanz an American birder and Judy Rosser did not join us that evening. Something had obviously disagreed with them with Judy still feeling poorly the next morning. The evening went well with a few beers sunk and arrangements for the following morning made for some local birding before the flight home at 13.05.

Andreas picked us up at 08.30 and took us to a marshy area near the airport alongside the dual carriageway. It turned out to be a good move as we had our best views here of Abyssinian Longclaw. Perhaps a little unexpected were 5 Rouget's Rails whereas a Black-headed Heron was less so. A flock of African Citrils had some Yellow-crowned Canaries mixed in with them while 4 Winding (Ethiopian) Cisticolas were new for the trip. Andreas took us to the other side of the road where two more new species were added i.e. 12 Bronze Mannikin and 2 Brown Parisomas. Two Black-winged Lovebirds also showed well.

It was time to go. We upped sticks made our way to the airport, thanked Andreas for everything and checked in. Some souvenir buying followed. A rather fashionable handbag much admired by my wife's friends has earned me some valuable brownie points. The plane set off late at 13.55. On board was another look-alike, for the air steward was a dead ringer for Denzil Washington, so much so, I nearly asked him if he was researching the role but thought better of it.

We landed at Heathrow in the rain at about 21.00, bid our farewells, and made our way to Purple Parking along with Malcolm and Matthew who were returning to Nott's and Leic's respectively. I thought I was still on the plane as Paul 'Schumacher' Slade made it to my front door in under 3 hours.

It had been a wonderful trip with fascinating memories of a country I would gladly return to. 331 species were seen including 19 endemics and we had easily satisfied our goal of greater variety and plenty of 'lifers'. The group gelled well and only Merid had disappointed. It turned out that he had also disappointed the other two Naturetrek tour's participants that had run in November with the company 'deeply regretting the poor leadership and now working hard to ensure it will never happen again'. That aside I wouldn't hesitate to go back and use Naturetrek again.

Thanks to Andy Roadhouse for producing a systematic list of the trip which I have borrowed from and not forgetting Wilhelm Peter Eduard Simon Ruppell for a further 6 'lifers' named after him, to add to his warbler, or should that now be babbler.

**Barry Dyson**

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## House Sparrow Entering Tree Hole

In Britain the vast majority of House Sparrow nests are built in holes in buildings occupied by man or close to those occupied by man. When House Sparrow numbers were high, and they have probably been declining for quite rapidly for the past 25 years (R.F. Sanderson in E.M. Nicholson's Bird-Watching in London: a historical perspective, 1995), their large domed nests were frequently seen in bushes and trees. Both Mitchell and Oakes refer to extensive nesting in trees and in the Fylde and Southport areas. I remember such nests in large hawthorn bushes in Blackburn in the late 1940s. In Cyprus at the present day House Sparrows frequently make such nests in coniferous forest well away from human habitation, though the Spanish Sparrow is even more inclined to do this.

According to Summers-Smith (1963) 'natural tree holes are not commonly used in Britain, probably because the House Sparrow prefers to nest on or close to man's buildings and presumably suitably placed tree holes are not common, though the bird has been seen apparently attempting to make good this deficiency by excavating a hole in the end of a rotten branch.' House Sparrows which come into competition with Tree Sparrows for tree holes near buildings usually come off best, as might be expected from their greater size.

I had never seen a House Sparrow using a tree hole until the 8<sup>th</sup> April this year when a male House Sparrow was seen entering a natural hole about 5m up a beech tree at Little Eccleston Hall farm. Needless to say the tree was within 40m of farm buildings and the sparrow population was noticeably large. Although I did not have an opportunity to prove that nesting was occurring this is most likely. It would be interesting to hear from other members who have seen tree hole nesting or nesting in the open in recent years.

### **Reference:**

SUMMERS-SMITH, J.D. (1963) The House Sparrow. Collins New Naturalist Monograph No.19.

**Frank Walsh**

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## MAGPIES : love 'em or hate 'em you can't ignore 'em.

That Magpies have increased in numbers throughout urban and suburban areas of the UK in recent decades seems certain. However, there are few real data indicating just how many and just how damaging they can be. This is partly because the normal census methods, as used by the BTO in the now



defunct CBC system and in the current BBS system, do not give accurate information about Magpies, which are not territorial in the usual song-bird sense. In the Fylde Magpies were reported as breeding in all but eight full tetrads in the 1986-90 Fylde Atlas period, with a fairly similar result during the 1997-2000 county Atlas period. However, even atlasing at the tetrad level gives only minimal population information. That the Fylde might be especially well endowed with Magpies became apparent when the roost at Blackpool Zoo was estimated at 450 birds in hard weather in December 1995. Subsequently a team of 5 FBC members carefully counted the Magpies entering the roost on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1998 and arrived at a total of 354 birds. To put this in context Birkhead (1991), in his excellent monograph, mentions a **large roost of 150** in the Sheffield area, while the biggest roosts mentioned by BWP/VIII (1994) are up to 200 birds. The Blackpool Zoo roost is almost certainly the largest ever recorded and we really ought to repeat the counts at least every December or January. According to Birkhead (1991) the maximum distance flown into a roost by Magpies is 4km, though most roost flights are of less than 1km. Many of the birds in the Zoo roost spend the winter feeding in the animal pens of the Zoo and the others must all come from Stanley Park, Marton Mere and the caravan site, the two golf courses and the surrounding suburban housing estates.

In 2001 I carried out a breeding survey in the Ansdell/Fairhaven area. I intended to repeat the survey in subsequent years but haven't had the time. So I offer this snapshot of the status of this controversial species. I relied on detecting nests and proving that they were under construction, or otherwise occupied. Obviously the presence of a nest is not sufficient proof in itself, as some nests survive remarkably well from the previous breeding season and are not reused. An advantage of the study was that some nest building was already underway in early January when deciduous trees were bare and there wasn't a lot of other, more attractive, birdwatching to do. A disadvantage is that early season nest-building is a pretty slow tempo affair and at some nest sites it took a considerable amount of time to prove that nest building was actually going on, though, of course, marked development of the nest in the observer's absence is itself adequate proof.

I recorded building activity, and later nest visiting, till mid-April, with casual observations subsequently. First nest building was seen on 6<sup>th</sup> January and the last new nest was confirmed on 19<sup>th</sup> April. In two separate 1km<sup>2</sup> areas there were 17 and 18 active nests, with two other nests probably active. In addition one pair seemed territorial but I could not find a nest, nor record stick carrying or any other direct evidence. There were also two non-breeding flocks of six and at least eight birds. (These data included 5 nests in Fairhaven Lake Park and 13 or 14 nests on Royal Lytham Golf Course).

The Fairhaven figure of 18pr/km<sup>2</sup> gives an average breeding territory of 5.56ha, assuming no unoccupied areas and making no allowance for any area occupied solely by the non-breeding birds. This compares with 4.9ha in a rural area on the edge of Sheffield, 5.8ha in the Netherlands and 6.0ha in a rural area of Gloucestershire on the western edge of the Cotswolds (Birkhead 1991). In a large area of urban and suburban south Manchester breeding density was recorded as 7pr/km<sup>2</sup> in 1978, but the most heavily populated 1km<sup>2</sup> had 19 active nests (Tatner 1982). In the Sheffield example the centre of the study area, with adequate nest sites, and no ground unoccupied by breeding pairs, had the amazing density of 32pr/km<sup>2</sup>, (or territories of 3.12ha), whilst half a kilometre away on higher ground a different system prevailed. Here there were few trees and Magpie numbers may have been kept low because nest sites were limited. Magpies seemed to occupy the same size of territory but between territories there were large unoccupied areas. This pattern probably occurs on Lytham Moss.

Magpies have frequently been blamed for the decline in song-bird populations. A particularly vicious opponent of Magpies is Charlie Allan who writes the Farmer's Diary in the Glasgow Herald. This chap was at the Open at Royal Lytham GC in 2001, as a fencing contractor or some such. According to his

column in the Glasgow Herald the dawn chorus at Royal Lytham consisted entirely of the raucous cries of a thousand Magpies, not a Skylark or Linnet to be heard. He claimed never to have seen so many of the 'black-and-white marauders'. Furthermore, he claims that local sources stated that RLGC had only two song-birds, a lark on the 5<sup>th</sup> and a thrush on the 7<sup>th</sup> (June?). The facts about the admittedly large number of Magpies are as indicated above including the non-breeding flock of 8 birds, which was based on the golf course. The facts about other species are that over 20 species of birds were nesting on RLGC that season.

The differences in birds visiting a garden adjacent to RLGC in 1980-81 and at present is that House Sparrows and Song Thrushes, formerly regular and common, and Reed Bunting formerly an irregular winter visitor, have disappeared, while Starlings from being common have become uncommon and irregular visitors. In contrast Coal Tits and Great-spotted Woodpeckers have changed from being more or less absent to being regular visitors and Dunnocks Long-tailed Tits, Magpies and Greenfinches have become much more common, while Wrens, Robins, Blackbirds, Blue Tits and Great Tits, have remained more or less equally numerous. Not much evidence against Magpies there then.

Nationally Magpies increased threefold in the 25 years from 1965, but the increase is considered to have halted in the last 10-14 years. Research has failed to find a causative link between the demise of many small bird populations in urban areas and the increase in Magpies (Mead 2000). Tatner (1983) made detailed studies in south Manchester and found that nestlings and eggs are only a minor component of the diet of Magpies, while Gooch, et al. (1991) demonstrated that the increase in Magpie populations has not affected the breeding success of garden passerines. Nevertheless, that Magpies can have a severe local effect is shown by the activities of a family party which raided Swallow nests in farm buildings at Pilling in 1989, where they took 70 eggs and 35 pulli.

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*Frank Walsh*

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## RECENT BIRD REPORTS Dec 04 – end Mar 05

### December 2004

The Taiga Bean Goose continued to accompany the Pink-footed Geese Over Wyre during December, but remained elusive, only being seen on two occasions. Marton Mere continued to host up to five Long-eared Owls and two Bitterns.

A Waxwing at extreme east of our recording area in Forton got the month off to a good start on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, with another two being reported in Lytham. Whilst the rest of Britain continued to enjoy an impressive Waxwing invasion in early December, the large flocks typically avoided the Fylde. However, on the 21<sup>st</sup> a flock of 50 were in Preston city centre, an excellent total that would have been a popular local twitch had they hung around. The last record of the year came on the 29<sup>th</sup> when a single was briefly in Broughton. A wintering Black Redstart was located at Fleetwood Docks on the 4<sup>th</sup> and was seen again on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Also in Fleetwood, a popular attraction with photographers was

an obliging 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Pale-bellied Brent Goose, which had joined the feral Canada Geese and Mute Swans at the Marine Lake. The bird showed well between from the 6<sup>th</sup> into the New Year.

The 8<sup>th</sup> brought a Short-eared Owl to Marton Mere; other singles were noted at Cockerham Marsh, Fairhaven Lake and Cockersand and Lytham Moss held up to three. Three Long-tailed Ducks flew past Starr Gate on the 9<sup>th</sup> and a Barnacle Goose joined Pink-footed Geese at Winmarleigh Hall. Starr Gate scored again on the 15<sup>th</sup> when a Great Northern Diver was logged.

A female Scaup was at Myerscough Quarry 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> and was probably the same individual seen there in early November. A large influx of Tundra Bean Geese occurred throughout England in early December, so two with Pink-footed Geese at Eagland Hill on the 20<sup>th</sup> was not unexpected. A White-fronted Goose and Barnacle Goose were also noted there on the same day. The White-fronted Goose and Barnacle Goose were at Eagland Hill again on Boxing Day and a Great Northern Diver again flew south past Starr Gate.

Probably the same Barnacle Goose was at Cockerham Moss Edge on the 27<sup>th</sup> and three Snow Buntings were at St. Annes, where they remained into the New Year. The 29<sup>th</sup> brought a Little Egret to Freckleton Naze Pool and an adult Mediterranean Gull was at Knott End. New Years Eve saw a Bullfinch at Broughton.

### January 2005

2004 proved to be another truly memorable year in Fylde birding, and 2005 got off to a flying start. January was far from uneventful, with a pleasing selection of scarce winter birds and some exciting local winter seawatching on offer.

Remainders from 2005 included three Snow Buntings at Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve, the confiding 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Pale-bellied Brent Goose at Fleetwood Marine Lake, up to five Long-eared Owls and two Bitterns at Marton Mere and two Short-eared Owls at Lytham Moss.

The New Year period itself failed to provide any major shocks, with an adult Mediterranean Gull at Marton Mere being the only notable new bird. A minimum of ten Mediterranean Gulls were seen throughout the Fylde during January. A Little Egret on the Conder Estuary on the 3<sup>rd</sup> was the first of at least four individuals of this species seen.

Waxwings reappeared in Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston on 3<sup>rd</sup> when 20 were present. The flock peaked at 33 during the month. Others were at Cabus, Herons' Reach and Stanah, contributing to a fabulous showing by this species, ensuring the Fylde didn't miss out on this winter's nationwide extravaganza.

Rossall Point enjoyed a red-letter day on the 5<sup>th</sup> when a Little Auk briefly landed on beach pool, a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Shag flew past and an adult Yellow-legged Gull accompanied impressive numbers of gulls feeding on wrecked starfish on the beach, where it stayed till 13<sup>th</sup>. Another Little Auk was logged past Rossall Point on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Attention turned to geese on the 9<sup>th</sup> when a Tundra Bean Goose showed well with the Pink-footed Geese at Nateby, with an adult Greenland White-fronted Goose and Barnacle Goose as supporting cast at nearby Bradshaw Lane.

Rossall Point produced possibly the best winter seawatch ever in the Fylde on the 12<sup>th</sup>; an unprecedented four Black Guillemots flew west along with a Blue Fulmar, an adult Iceland Gull (which was present until the 16<sup>th</sup>), adult Shag and six Scaup (with another the following day). The same day also saw two Water Pipits at Warton Marsh and a ringtail Hen Harrier over Rawcliffe Moss.

An unseasonal Whimbrel was at Skippool Creek on 15<sup>th</sup> January, but more in keeping with the time of year was an adult Greenland White-fronted Goose with Pink-footed Geese in fields by Marton Mere. The geese remained here until the following day. The gull frenzy at Rossall produced a brief adult Ring-billed Gull on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Hot on the heels of the Rossall Point Blue Fulmar, another was logged on the 18<sup>th</sup>, this time past Starr Gate.

A Snow Bunting flew over Marton Mere on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Two Scaup graced Glasson Basin on the 21<sup>st</sup>, where they remained intermittently into February. An adult Yellow-legged Gull was on the beach at Blackpool on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. An adult White-fronted Goose was with Pink-footed Geese by Bone Hill Lane on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, as were two Barnacle Geese. Four Barnacle Geese at Pilling Lane Ends and a Scaup was off Starr Gate on the 30<sup>th</sup> brought the month to a close.

### February 2005

Impressive numbers of Pink-footed Geese arrived in the Fylde during February, bringing a pleasing selection of scarcities with them. Both Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese were found Over Wyre, along with a Greenland White-fronted Goose, with another at Mythop. At least six Barnacle Geese were noted and the 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Pale-bellied Brent Goose left Fleetwood Marine Lake early in the month, eventually joining the feral Canada Geese at Pilling Lane Ends. A second Pale-bellied Brent Goose, and a Dark-bellied Brent Goose graced Mythop and Over Wyre, a Eurasian White-fronted Goose was in fields east of Marton Mere and the adult hybrid Ross's Goose x Pink-footed Goose seen last winter was again found with Pink-footed Geese mid-month.

Five Long-eared Owls remained at Marton Mere, three Snow Buntings continued to be seen irregularly on St. Annes Beach and a pair of Scaup remained in the Glasson/Conder Green area.

A 2<sup>nd</sup>-winter Mediterranean Gull was at Cocker's Dyke on 2<sup>nd</sup>, with a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter there on 4<sup>th</sup>. An adult Mediterranean Gull was at Fairhaven Lake on 16<sup>th</sup>. A popular flock of 61 Waxwings took up residence in Preston at Lane Ends and showed well from 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>. On the 20<sup>th</sup> 30 Waxwings were relocated in Preston on Tom Benson Way. Up to eight wintering Water Pipits were noted at Warton Marsh on 11<sup>th</sup> with three Short-eared Owls there as a side attraction. Another Short-eared Owl was at Lytham Moss. A female/1<sup>st</sup>-winter Long-tailed Duck flew north past Starr Gate on 20<sup>th</sup> but far more unusual was a female Long-tailed Duck on the Lancaster Canal at Blackleach, which had apparently been present since the 15<sup>th</sup> January.

### March 2005

Spring migrants seem to arrive in the Fylde earlier every year. By late March spring was in full flow but the beginning of the month saw the area play host to more typical winter fare, with an exciting selection of geese lingering throughout.

The first few days of March failed to produce any major surprises, with long-stayers such as the Marton Mere Long-eared Owls (now numbering up to six), pair of Scaup on the Conder Pool and Pilling 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Pale-bellied Brent Goose providing the headlines. Two Ravens and two Mediterranean Gulls were noted at Freckleton Naze Point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Starr Gate held two Snow Buntings on the 5<sup>th</sup> (where they were also seen on 12<sup>th</sup>). Stanley Park attracted a confiding colour-ringed adult Mediterranean Gull on the 6<sup>th</sup>, where it posed for photographs until the 15<sup>th</sup>. Mediterranean Gulls flooded into the area during March with others being seen at Blackpool South Shore, Myerscough Quarry, Pilling Lane (3), Marton Mere (3), Knott End (2) and an impressive count of five at Ballam towards the month end.

Pilling continued to attract an impressive array of scarce geese with a Taiga Bean Goose still at large, along with several Tundra Bean Geese, two adult Greenland White-fronted Goose, a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter Eurasian White-fronted Goose and three Barnacle Geese, providing ample inspiration to search through the Pink-footed Geese.

Black-throated Divers were logged past both Starr Gate and Rossall Point during the month, a Purple Sandpiper was again at Fleetwood Marine Lake on 8<sup>th</sup>, then again on 13<sup>th</sup> and 12+ Water Pipits were counted at Warton Bank on 11<sup>th</sup>. A Firecrest was a surprise find at Pilling Lane Ends on 20<sup>th</sup> and a Snow Bunting flew over Rossall Point, with another over there the following day. Highlight of the month was an adult Ring-billed Gull which joined a field-feeding gull flock in Catforth on 21<sup>st</sup> before briefly being relocated a week later at nearby Myerscough Quarry. This bird is thought likely to be the same bird that visited this area in late April 2003.

A Black Redstart at Fluke Hall on 24<sup>th</sup> was almost expected after an impressive nationwide arrival of the species. Warton Marsh held 3 Little Egrets on 28<sup>th</sup>, but one was the long-staying, colour-ringed escaped bird. A female Green Woodpecker at Todderstaffe Hall was an exceptional find on 28<sup>th</sup>, with this Fylde 'mega' still present the following morning. The 29<sup>th</sup> produced a 1<sup>st</sup>-summer Glaucous Gull on the Wyre Estuary, then again on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

The first Sandwich Tern of the year was logged at Knott End on 17<sup>th</sup> with the first Sand Martins over Marton Mere on the same day. The 18<sup>th</sup> brought the first Wheatear to Pilling Marsh with a singing Chiffchaff at Herons' Reach on 19<sup>th</sup> was presumably a newly arrived migrant. Willow Warblers were singing at Marton Mere on 24<sup>th</sup>. On the final day of the month two Little Ringed Plovers were seen, at Blackleach, on Grace Mire.

Recent Sightings compiled by **Stuart Piner**

All records are from the Fylde Bird Club's website at [www.fyldebirdclub.org/sightings.htm](http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/sightings.htm)  
Please report your sightings to [news@fyldebirdclub.org](mailto:news@fyldebirdclub.org)

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