

# Newsletter February 2006



## Fylde Bird Club

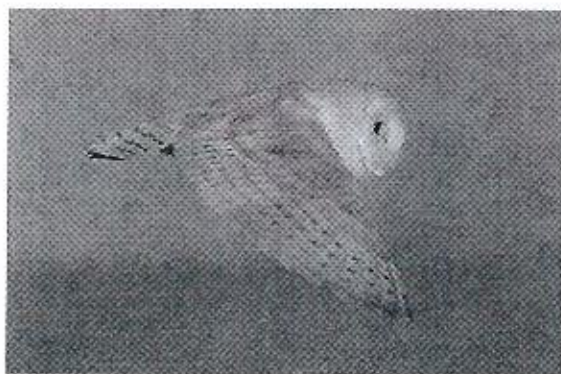
LANCASHIRE

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### Welcome by Kinta Beaver

Welcome to the FBC February 2006 newsletter. Since the last newsletter there have been two very enjoyable meetings at the River Wyre Hotel at Poulton Le Fylde. In December we enjoyed the annual Christmas Quiz (with questions devised by our Chairman, Paul Slade). The winner was Barry Dyson who managed to get almost all of the questions correct. In January we had an excellent turnout for the Annual General Meeting and photographic competition. All serving officers on the Committee (apart from the Honorary Auditor) were prepared to stand again and were voted in by the membership. We are sorry that Malcolm Evans is no longer able to audit our accounts but a very big thank you to Malcolm for providing this service to the club for many years. The

photographic competition was very well supported in all three categories (Fylde, UK and World). The quality and standard of photographs was superb and as a voter I certainly found it very difficult to choose what I considered to be the 'best of the best'. See page 7 for a more detailed review of the photographic competition. The winning photographs are on display on the FBC website—highly recommended.



Barn Owl By Paul Slade

The full programme of events for 2006 is now available and all members will have received their copy of the programme with the Xmas mailing.

Many of you may have seen the Evening Gazette article about FBC member Bob Danson on 18th February titled 'Why bird life is Bob's life'. The article states that last year Bob ringed 1,783 birds of 24 different species. In all he's ringed more than 45,000 birds of 95 species!

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## Business Round up by Paul Ellis

### Nest Boxes & Farmland bird Feeding Schemes

In January the Club bought a Tonne of seed for £260 and 10 plastic 40 gallon drums to store it in for £5 each. A sack truck had also been bought for £24 to allow the drums to be moved. Filled drums have been delivered to two feeding schemes Over Wyre and several will be used to support the Todderstaffe scheme.

9 new Tree Sparrow boxes have been erected at Todderstaffe. 6 at other sites and 30 more have been completed and are available. 100 more box kits are on order from Cardinal Allen School.

Carol Coupe from the RSPB has reported that they have put up 400 boxes in the North West, as part of Operation Tree Sparrow!

One box at Todderstaffe was modified by a Great spotted Woodpecker. It happened during a cold snap in December and it is presumed that the woodpecker wanted to get in out of

the cold! Bat boxes at Marton Mere have been subjected to the same treatment in the past.



### Membership Subscriptions

At the AGM it was agreed to introduce an optional 'Family' Subscription Rate'. Members living at the same address may pay a reduced joint subscription of £20 per annum but will only receive one copy of the Annual Bird Report and one set of newsletters per household.

New Members joining late in the year will be offered the reduced rate of £8, after the start of the October meeting each year.

### Coastal & Estuarine Disturbance

The Club is liaising with Tarn Farm Microlight flyers, to arrange a meeting between the Club and the aviators to discuss the issue of disturbance over Morecambe Bay by Aircraft. It is hoped that a voluntary code of conduct can be formulated. Currently only aviators from Tarn Farm are restricted in their flying operations over the bay, flights originating from all other sites are not subject to any special conditions whatsoever!

English Nature, Cumbria, are interested in assisting with the aim to reduce disturbance and have been provided with copies of the Club's Correspondence to and from MP's, MEP's and microlight operators.

## Birds of Lancashire & North Merseyside By Frank Walsh

The Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Society/Lancashire Bird Club will be publishing 'The Birds of Lancashire & North Merseyside' in summer 2006. The 2006 book, edited by Steve White & Maurice Jones will record 361 species, not including escapes.

Anyone interested in sponsoring one of the species accounts may do so for a donation of £10. Their name will appear at the foot of the appropriate account.

If you would like to sponsor a species account please contact Frank Walsh by e-mail at

[frank@walsh.me.uk](mailto:frank@walsh.me.uk) or phone 01253 737765.

A more detailed article on the number of bird species recorded in Lancashire & the Fylde is due to appear in the next newsletter.

## 'Blue' Fulmars - the first Fylde records

By Stephen Dunstan

In recent winters a number of dark phase northern (or 'Blue') Fulmars have been seen off the north west coast. The first for Lancashire was seen from Heysham on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2002. The first two for Cumbria were seen from Walney in early 2004. In this context it was perhaps to be expected that birds would be seen from the Fylde coast, where regular year round seawatching occurs, and so it proved.

There follow accounts of the first two 'Blue' Fulmars recorded in the Fylde, at Starr Gate on 13 January 2004 and Rossall Point on 12 January 2005. The Starr Gate record was accepted by the Lancashire Records Panel as the second for Lancashire, the Rossall Point bird will be considered in this year's review of records and would be the third for Lancashire. Another record from Starr Gate also this January would be the fourth for Lancashire if accepted. It is a small sample from which to generalise, but anybody keen to see a Blue Fulmar off Blackpool or Fleetwood could do worse than try gales in the first couple of months of the year.

### **Starr Gate 13 January 2004 - Stephen Dunstan**

During my lunch break from work at around midday I headed down to Starr Gate, as I usually do given it is a few hundred yards from my workplace. The wind was quite blustery onshore, northwesterly, and so I decided to seawatch rather than look for the 'ever present' Shorelarks and Snow Buntings. There has been 17 Little Gulls in 45 minutes in calmer conditions the previous day, so I was hopeful of similar or greater movements of this

charismatic species.

I had been watching for maybe 10-15 minutes when it became clear that the anticipated Little Gull movement was not to materialise, though I found the flock of 14 Scaup close in and passing scoters diverting enough to keep plugging away.

My attention was drawn to a medium sized dark seabird arcing into the wind. In this brief view the shear flight of the bird led me to fail to judge whether it was going north or south, and the bird promptly disappeared out of view. I didn't pick it up again immediately, and my heart sank a bit as it was clearly an interesting bird on a January seawatch whatever it would prove to be.

After a few seconds the bird reappeared arcing just to the north of where I had first seen it. It was quite close, certainly within 200 metres, and the stiff winged action and obvious white 'elbow' marks on the wings immediately made me think of a Fulmar. However something was not quite right, though it didn't click immediately, and I wondered if it could be something else.

The bird continued to arc extravagantly as it battled north against the wind, disappearing from view then reappearing as it gained height and appeared back out of the swell. The bird was clearly struggling to progress, as it would sometimes appear further south than where it had last been seen. Over the next couple of periods the bird was in view it was absolutely clear that the bird was a Fulmar, and the reason it looked strange was that the entire upperparts other than the patches at the base of the 'hand' were an ap-

parently a fairly uniform blue grey. Realisation dawned that the bird was a dark morph Fulmar, the first I had ever encountered anywhere.

My knowledge of Fulmar morphs / clines was rather limited, and I wasn't sure what else I could look for as the bird was essentially rather featureless on all I had seen so far. However after several sightings in which I only saw the bird's upperparts it finally turned sufficiently for me to get a good view of its underparts. Whilst the head, throat, wings and tail were all basically blue grey and similar to the upperparts an oval area on the belly was whitish, blending diffusely into the surrounding grey.

It was clear at this point that the bird could only be a grey morph Fulmar, and I considered immediately ringing Chris Batty to get such a good local record out onto the birding pagers. However I decided to savour the moment, and watched the bird continuing to arc north until it disappeared out of view behind the northern side of my seawatching shelter. Then I rang Chris.

#### *Description of bird:*

Size and shape – as 'light morph' Fulmar, roughly Common Gull sized but with distinctive thick necked jizz.

Plumage – upperparts including head and neck entirely blue-grey except for white primary patches which basically looked like those on a 'light morph' bird. Underparts – throat, vent, tail and underwings all appeared entirely greyish, the belly was diffusely but clearly paler off white.

Flight action – as 'light morph' Fulmar, arcing into the wind on a combination of prolonged glides and rapid stiff wingbeats.

## 'Blue' Fulmars - the first Fylde records continued

### Rossall Point 12 January 2005 – Chris Batty

Westerly gales in winter often result in starfish wrecks on the beaches of the Fylde. Early January 2005 saw such a wreck between Rossall Point and Fleetwood Pier with at least 3,000 Herring Gulls and 4,000 Black-headed Gulls attracted by the rich pickings. Exciting times for a birder with a keen interest in gulls, I had visited on 5th and 6th January and found an adult Yellow-legged Gull and at least seven Scandinavian Herring Gulls.

On 12th I returned to Rossall Point where I met Ian Gardner seawatching from the lee of the coastguard tower. The tide was coming in and a westward passage of ducks was notable, mainly Pintail and Teal but a flock of six Scaup were a bonus. Little Gulls featured prominently with several birds lingering just beyond the seawall.

I had been seawatching for little more than half an hour when Ian exclaimed "What's this? Black Guillemots!" Two superb Black Guillemots flying rapidly west over the beach, fantastic! A new Fylde bird for me and what great views!

Only fifteen minutes later, at 10:35, another birder called

"Fulmar", Ian soon gestured that he was on to the bird. I scanned left and as soon as I located the bird I realised, and exclaimed, it was of a Fulmar of dark phase, a 'Blue Fulmar'. We watched the bird on and off for several minutes as it slowly tacked east into Morecambe Bay before eventually heading off northeast.

Clearly a Fulmar, a heavy seabird with a thick neck and stiff wings and such a distinctive jizz that, to an experienced seawatcher, is unmistakable. It was the atypical head colouration that made me immediately realise that this was a Blue Fulmar, the head being wholly medium grey (as opposed to the startlingly white head of a standard Fulmar) and concolourous with the rest of the upperparts. The underwing appeared a uniform dark grey, appearing very dark when close to the sea and in the shade, and lacking the striking white underwing coverts and underprimaries of a typical Fulmar. The underparts were not uniform in colour saturation appearing somewhat blotchy with the upper breast and throat certainly darker than the belly.

Attempting to adopt a previously proposed four phase categorisation of colour saturation in Fulmars (where birds such as those emanating from the British breeding population are classi-

fied as 'double light', birds with coloured heads but little in the way of underpart colouration as 'light', birds with both a coloured head and breast as 'dark' and uniformly darkly coloured birds as 'double dark') I would struggle to pigeonhole the Rossall Point Blue Fulmar, it falling midway between a light phase and a dark phase. Whilst a light phase Blue Fulmar may seem something of a contradiction in terms (and a dubious claim!) all phases other than 'double light' are from northern breeding populations and are all classified as Blue Fulmars.

Throughout the rest of the day I recorded a further ten Fulmars off Rossall Point - a notable winter tally off the Fylde - and all were typically white-headed with striking white underwings.

I saw my first Blue Fulmars in Monterey Bay, California in August 1996 where several were strikingly dark birds. In the British Isles, many hours autumn seawatching in western Ireland has given me experience of at least fifteen Blue Fulmars with a further four, included a superb lilac-coloured 'double dark' individual, seen there on a winter seawatch in February 2002.

## Errata

by Kinta Beaver

After careful reading of the November 2005 Newsletter, Maurice Jones pointed out three errors, for which I apologise.

In the article about the sad loss of Derek Mc Cullagh I spelt Derek's surname incorrectly.

Maurice Jones pointed out that in the article about his trip to Bulgaria the picture of a pelican should have been labelled Dalmation Pelican and not White Pelican. In addition, I credited Maurice with having taken the photographs in the article when in fact they were taken by C Dodding.

Sorry.

## Recent Bird Sightings by Stuart Piner

### NOVEMBER

It would have been difficult for November to trump the previous month's haul of rarities, but autumn certainly continued throughout the first half of the month. The Fylde's first Lesser Scaup was last seen at Myerscough Quarry on 10<sup>th</sup>; a male Lesser Scaup found at Hornsea Mere in East Yorkshire three days later could well have been the same bird. The late Garganey also remained on Pilling Marsh until 1<sup>st</sup> and continuing the wildfowl theme, six Mandarins remained at Lightfoot Green and another was at Stanley Park. Marton Mere continued to host up to two Long-eared Owls and a Bittern.

A Scaup flew past Starr Gate on 1<sup>st</sup> and at least one Velvet Scoter flew south there on 3<sup>rd</sup>. The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a Red-throated Diver arrive at Fairhaven Lake, where it remained throughout the month, performing well for a steady stream of grateful photographers. Two adult Dark-bellied Brent Geese were on Pilling Marsh the same day. Down the coast, an adult male Hen Harrier flew past Knott End on 4<sup>th</sup>. A Yellow-browed Warbler inland at Haslam Park was an exceptional find on 5<sup>th</sup>, and was yet another reminder why every tit flock should be looked at wherever you are! The bird showed intermittently till at least 9<sup>th</sup>.

Two Snow Buntings at Knott End on 6<sup>th</sup> were more seasonal passerines and nearby a female Scaup graced Pilling Water. The prize for rarity of the month fell on the 8<sup>th</sup> when a jubilant

adult female Surf Scoter flew south past Starr Gate, which, if accepted, will be only the second Fylde record. The 8<sup>th</sup> also produced a Black Redstart in Thornton, which remained until the following day. Continuing the scoter theme, two more Velvets flew past Starr Gate on 11<sup>th</sup>. A Barnacle Goose was on Pilling Marsh 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, and two Snow Buntings were well received at Cockersand on 15<sup>th</sup>

*"The 2<sup>nd</sup> saw a Red-throated Diver arrive at Fairhaven Lake, where it remained throughout the month"*

and 16<sup>th</sup>, before they were joined by a third on 17<sup>th</sup>. Another was at Fleetwood Marine Lakes, before moving to Rossall Point where it remained till 20<sup>th</sup>, and even better, a Purple Sandpiper was at Fleetwood Marine Lakes. A juvenile Velvet Scoter was off Knott End on 18<sup>th</sup>.

Four Crossbills flew over Fairhaven Lake on 19<sup>th</sup>, continuing what has been a truly fantastic autumn for this species on the Fylde. A juvenile Shag was at Fleetwood Docks from 20<sup>th</sup> till the month end and a Short-eared Owl was at Barnaby's Sands on 22<sup>nd</sup>. A male Red-crested Pochard on Fairhaven Lake on 25<sup>th</sup> was perhaps the bird that had visited Stanley Park and Marton Mere in October and two Waxwings at Ashton-on-Ribble on 26<sup>th</sup> were the first of what shows all the signs of being another excellent

winter for this gem. By 28<sup>th</sup> eight birds were in Ashton-on-Ribble.

The sightings became far more 'wintery' towards the end of the month; the 27<sup>th</sup> produced a 1<sup>st</sup>-winter male Scaup on Thornton ICI Reservoir, Barnacle Goose at Cockerham Moss Edge and ring-tail Hen Harrier on Warton Marsh (till 28<sup>th</sup>). A Eurasian White-fronted Goose was, with Pink-footed Geese at Weeton on 28<sup>th</sup>, with three – and two Barnacle Geese – there following day and another Snow Bunting flew over Cockersand on 29<sup>th</sup>.

So as we enter the final stretch of 2005, is there one last rarity in the year? After the unprecedented influx of Laughing Gulls into Britain during late autumn, perhaps it's time to start scouring those gull flocks to see if any have filtered into the Fylde. What a Christmas present the Fylde's first Laughing Gull would be!

### DECEMBER

December failed to produce any major end of year surprises, but nevertheless there was still plenty to go at as 2005 faded away. Lingerers from November included the juvenile Shag at Fleetwood Docks until 5<sup>th</sup>, three Bitterns and three Long-eared Owls at Marton Mere and at least two Hen Harriers over Warton Marsh, including an adult male. Fairhaven Lake hosted an incredibly confiding Slavonian Grebe from 2<sup>nd</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, and in conjunction with Red-throated Diver, proved an irresistible draw to photographers. Little Egrets were widespread, with a peak count of four at Warton Marsh on Christmas Day.

## Recent bird sightings by Stuart Piner

### DECEMBER contd.

The Pink-footed Geese flocks were accompanied by the expected waifs, including two Barnacle Geese at New Ridge Farm on 1<sup>st</sup>, Cockerham Moss Edge on 2<sup>nd</sup> and Weeton on 4<sup>th</sup> and a single at Stake Pool on 18<sup>th</sup>. A Eurasian White-fronted Goose was by Pilling Lane on 27<sup>th</sup>.

Two Velvet Scoters flew west past Rossall Point on 3<sup>rd</sup>, with another three past Starr Gate on 12<sup>th</sup>. A Slavonian Grebe was off the latter site on 24<sup>th</sup>. The 3<sup>rd</sup> brought two Waxwings to Stocks Road, Ashton-on-Ribble, a site that seems to be becoming a fa-

*"Fairhaven Lake hosted an incredibly confiding Slavonian Grebe from 2<sup>nd</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>."*

voured haunt for this delightful species. A Curlew Sandpiper was a good December record at Pilling Lane Ends on 7<sup>th</sup> and a Snow Bunting was in Granny's Bay on 9<sup>th</sup>. What was presumably last winter's Willow Tit returned to Cottam Brickworks on 16<sup>th</sup>.

The second half of the month was quiet, with little of note apart from an adult Yellow-legged Gull at Bispham Marsh on 28<sup>th</sup>.

### JANUARY

New Years Day often produces a fine selection of birds, and 2006 was no exception; two Ravens and a female Scaup at Glasson, an adult male Hen Harrier at Warton Marsh, Bittern and two Long-eared Owls at Marton Mere, and at least six Little Egrets were noted. However, there can be fewer better ways to start a New Year than watching a flock of Waxwings, so up to 10 at Ashton-on-Ribble on 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> were welcomed with open-arms. Another Waxwing made a brief appearance in Broughton on 2<sup>nd</sup> and two Snow Buntings flew west over Fleetwood Marine Lakes.

Marton Mere hosted up to four roosting Long-eared Owls, but only a single Bittern was present throughout the month. Another Long-eared Owl at Burglar's Alley on 3<sup>rd</sup> was an excellent record away from Marton Mere. At least three Hen Harriers were at Warton Marsh during January (an adult male, an immature male and a ringtail), along with up to four Little Egrets and a Short-eared Owl. Glasson Basin continued to host the female Scaup throughout the month. Regular visits to Cocker's Dyke produced at least four adult Mediterranean Gulls.

A Velvet Scoter was logged past Starr Gate on 4<sup>th</sup>; the only other seaduck records in January were Long-tailed Ducks seen on three dates past Starr Gate. The 7<sup>th</sup> brought a Short-eared Owl to

Cockersand, another two were near England Hill and Black Hill Farm on 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>. A Snow Bunting was at St Annes North Beach on 14<sup>th</sup>, and a pair was at Starr Gate on 19<sup>th</sup>; on 25<sup>th</sup> the two joined to form a flock of three that remained at Starr Gate until the month end.

*"...there can be fewer better ways to start a New Year than watching a flock of Waxwings."*

Scarce geese have been just that this winter, so two White-fronted Geese at Pilling Lane Ends on 21<sup>st</sup> was a welcome sighting. An unseasonable Curlew Sandpiper at Cocker's Dyke on 29<sup>th</sup> was presumably the same bird seen at Pilling Lane Ends in early December. Another welcome wader record related to a Purple Sandpiper at Fleetwood Marine Lakes on 30<sup>th</sup>. The month ended with a Barnacle Goose being located at Bond's Farm amongst Pink-footed Geese.

All records are from 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)

## Annual FBC Photographic Competition by Kinta Beaver

The annual FBC photographic competition was held on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2006, following the Annual General Meeting. 38 members enjoyed a host of high quality photographs entered in three categories: Fylde, UK and World. Entrants must be members of FBC and can submit a maximum of three photographs in each category. All photographs must have been taken in the preceding year, in this case 2005. Some of the entries have been reproduced below but to really appreciate the photographs in all their glory, log onto the FBC website.

### FYLDE

The winning entry in the Fylde category was a Reed Bunting by Mike McGough. This excellent photograph was taken at Marton Mere (north east corner of the reserve) on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005 at 09.30. Mike used a Nikon D1 digital camera with a 50-500 sigma lens (at 500mm 1/640 at f7.1). The Fylde category was a closely fought contest and 2<sup>nd</sup> place went to Paul Slade with a superb Barn Owl shot. Paul reported that he had taken about 500 shots to get the perfectly sharp shot that he entered in the competition. Paul's new lens (similar in size to Jodrell Bank) certainly seems to be paying dividends.



Reed Bunting by Mike McGough

### UK

The overwhelming winner of the UK category was Chris Batty with his photograph of a Puffin in flight. The photograph was taken as the Puffin flew out from the colony on Inner Farne, Farne Islands, Northumberland. Chris commented 'I took Bryony to the Farne Islands as a birthday day out on 3rd July 2005. We only had little over an hour on Inner Farne and it was difficult deciding which species to spend time photographing! The island is overrun with Puffins and Arctic Terns as well Shags, Razorbills and Guillemots. I never seemed to stop firing off shots and by the time we were back in Seahouses I had taken over 700 photographs! The camera was a Canon 20D digital SLR camera and a Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM zoom lens. I believe the winning shot was something of a fluke, none of the other 699 came close to it! I think the bright yet overcast conditions helped prevent the white underparts from 'burning-out', I used aperture priority to achieve the fastest possible shutter speed in an attempt to 'freeze' the bird and to blur the background.'



Puffin by Chris Batty

### WORLD

It was a more closely fought battle in the World category but Chris Batty emerged the winner yet again with his photograph of a Red-billed Tropicbird. Chris

commented 'the Red-billed Tropicbird was taken as it returned to a breeding cliff on Raso, Cape Verde Islands on 26th February 2005. I sat on top of the cliffs watching the Brown Boobies and tropicbirds coming and going. I pulled the zoom back to about 300mm (I normally shoot fully-extended 400mm) and again used aperture priority to freeze the bird. Whilst I was pleased with the pose and the clarity of the photograph I was a little disappointed that, due to strong sunlight and incorrect exposure setting, the brilliant white tropicbird has burnt-out against the dark sea. Again I used a Canon 20D digital SLR camera and a Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM zoom lens.'



Red-billed Tropicbird by Chris Batty

### PRIZES

Bird books were awarded as prizes for each category winner. Books were kindly donated by Fylde Bird Club, Paul Slade and Stuart Meredith. Stuart Meredith specialises in selling Bird and Natural History Books and offers a **10% discount** to members of Fylde Bird Club. The discount can be taken from the cost of purchases or can be donated to one of the local bird feeding schemes. Contact Stuart at Limosa Bird Books & Natural History, 4 Sunnyside Avenue, Blackpool FY4 2HP. Tel 01253 407554. E-mail smrbt@tiscali.co.uk.

## A Bird Report: Little Singleton 2001-2005 by Ron & Sue Bedford

When we moved to Little Singleton in the middle of 1996 we had been birdwatching (in between working and general idleness) for 25 years or so. It was very much an 'accidental' hobby. That is, we looked for birds in fairly obvious places but without any particular knowledge – apart from what 'the books' told us. This easy going attitude slowly started to change (an incremental collapse as aircraft stressmen call it) when three things happened.

Firstly, retirement from British Aerospace ('free at last, free at last' Martin Luther King) for one of us and partial retirement from teaching for the other.

Secondly, stumbling by chance on the house we now live in – unaware from the Estate Agents brochure that the view from the kitchen covered a piece of parkland and, even better, a big stretch of tidal river. The first bird we saw in the chaos of moving was a Whooper Swan in July on the saltmarsh. Next Spring the 'parkland' had a Ring Ouzel!

Thirdly, we joined Fylde Bird Club in 1998. Thus, we gradually became absorbed by this place and its birds. It turns out that we have also virtually stopped taking ordinary sensible holidays and now seem to be on the carousel of bird watching sorties. Even limiting ourselves to the Western Palearctic is not much of a limit, as last years 'summer holiday' was in Spitzbergen. What have we done?

So, being of torpid mental alacrity it took until 2000 to realise that being in one place, Little Singleton, and noting the birds

that come to it might be interesting. At least it is different from rushing around chasing (and just missing) the odd rarity – but we still do that anyway. By the end of 2000 we felt we had learned enough about things which previously had not particularly bothered us; tides and wind direction for example. We had learned where certain species were most likely to be and when they were likely to occur, depending on tide cycle. The more we thought we knew the more we discovered we didn't know (sorry, this sounds a bit like Donald Rumsfeld). We also became very aware that what we saw was largely governed by chance. Plus or minus five minutes can make all the difference between seeing and not seeing; we can never know what we miss. That's one of the many intriguing things about birds and their ways. In spite of that, this report tells you what we have seen at Little Singleton over five years.

### RECORDING

So, not less than twice a day we go down to the riverside (Figure 1 shows the area we can view). At least that's the aim and, in fact, we have managed to do this on average for 300 days each year.

The chosen times are at low water (very different from low tide) and as the tide is rising to its full height. Only very bad light stops the count and maybe, sometimes, howling gales and horizontal rain can be an excuse to stay in. Birdwatching is not supposed to be a punishment is it?

Counting we do by counter (oddy enough) on static or

stable enough flocks. Mass transits (e.g Lapwings) are recorded by scientific calculation (colloquially known as guesswork) giving numbers such as 300+; always going for the lowest likely number. Overflights are not included. Thus, Pinkfeet counts (see Table 1) are for grounded geese. Using a standard counting methodology gives reasonably accurate numbers – at least relatively if not absolutely. It should all even out over the years; things usually do.

Aside from weather difficulties the site is attacked by shooting, jet and water ski-ing, helicopters and low flying aircraft – fortunately not all at the same time and not all throughout the year.

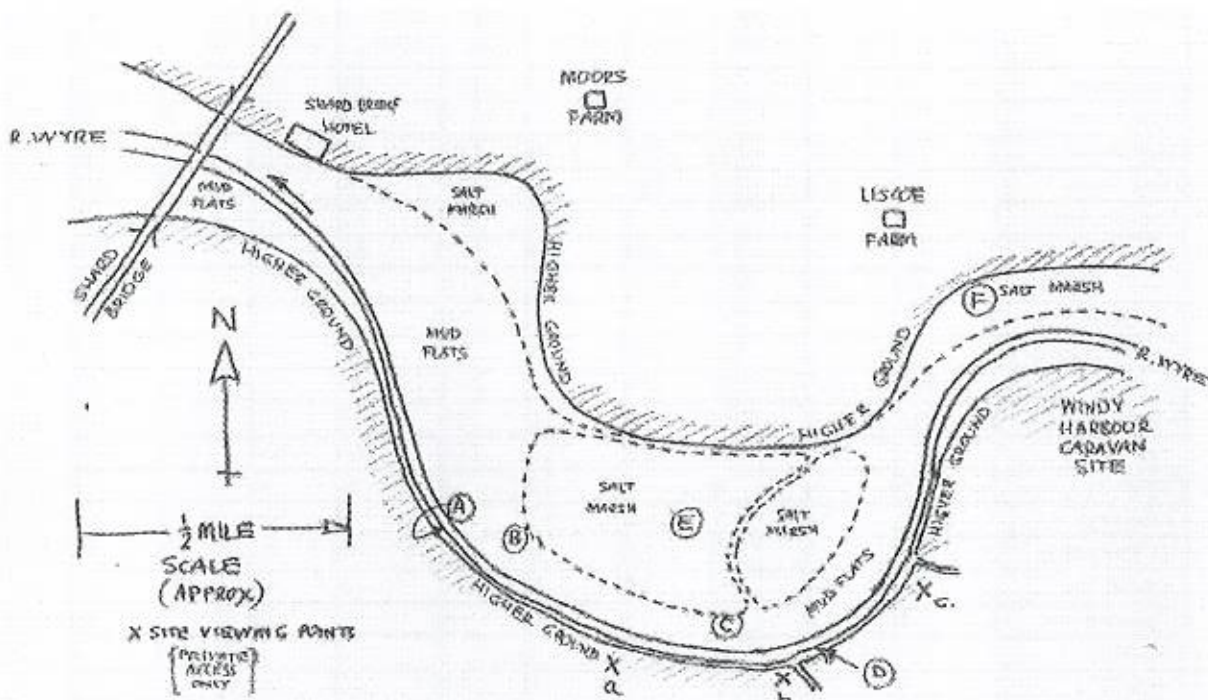
The garden bird records (Table 3) are under BTO rules. We have to be disciplined about what is counted as being in the garden. Counting goose overflights and Egrets on the 'parkland' would produce some oddities for a garden survey – so we don't do it.

### RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 show riverside data. We have chosen to show, annually, for each species the maximum number seen once during the year as well as the number of days during the year on which each species was seen. Table 3 contains garden data, which is counted on a weekly basis according to BTO rules.



Figure 1. Little Singleton Site Sketch



**Notes**

- Tidal conditions: high tide (local) is Fleetwood HT plus 30mins. Low water (local) is Fleetwood HT minus 1hr 40 mins
- Salt marshes start flooding when Fleetwood high tides are greater than 9.3m
- High tide levels are much increased by a combination of NW winds, low pressure, earlier rain.
- Low tide/water roosts affected by earlier rain on hills
- Wyre shows a bore\* occasionally, about 4in. high (!)
- Sketch shows course of R.Wyre indicatively only. Likely only at lowest tides/driest conditions

\* in addition to the author

**Sites**

- A. Stony/mud shore. Low water – waders, duck
- B. Flat mud. Low water – wader (esp. Lapwing)
- C. Flat mud. Pre & post high tide – waders (esp. Redshank, Lapwing)
- D. Stony/mud shore. Low water – waders. On river – heron, cormorant, diving ducks feeding
- E. Saltmarsh. Low water – Sparrowhawk, kestrel, skylark, linnet
- F. Saltmarsh. High water 'refuge' – swans, geese, waders, duck on river

Table 1. Riverside counts (Little Singleton)

Species	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Max count	Days seen	Max count	Days seen	Max count	Days seen	Max count	Days seen	Max count	Days seen
Cormorant	8	155	7	159	13	201	11	213	9	152
Little Egret	1	1	-	-	-	-	3	41	5	34
Grey Heron	9	227	11	226	10	250	13	252	9	212
Mute Swan	32	231	30	234	40	221	35	194	42	247
Bewicks Swan	14	5	9	2	17	16	12	10	4	6
Whooper	1	5	17	62	4	57	52	55	58	16
Pink foot Goose	40	9	541	24	332	17	729	11	1	2
Greylag Goose	11	22	10	135	5	21	8	8	7	17
Canada Goose	90	135	63	160	44	58	81	54	67	73
Shelduck	120	197	255	234	154	210	97	228	110	195
Wigeon	213	114	276	112	124	90	107	101	293	109
Teal	131	71	126	85	125	119	166	125	278	102
Pintail	11	6	4	1	20	4	6	1	7	7
Goldeneye	13	90	12	68	14	86	6	43	8	68
RB Merganser	-	-	4	23	6	21	4	24	3	15
Goosander	6	55	10	45	9	61	10	46	7	20
Sparrowhawk	1	25	1	12	1	18	1	24	1	30
Buzzard	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	1
Kestrel	1	9	2	16	8	44	4	22	1	3
Peregrine	1	10	-	-	1	4	1	11	1	2
Lapwing	1615	257	1884	230	1339	281	1425	269	1705	240
Oystercatcher	120	146	108	153	106	159	75	175	120	207
Ringed Plover	3	4	3	3	3	3	14	3	2	5
Golden Plover	60	11	92	20	108	24	190	17	120	15
Grey Plover	-	-	2	1	30	3	-	-	-	-
Knot	-	-	6	1	21	3	54	7	69	5
Curlew Sand.	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	11	14
Dunlin	120	39	250	31	250	42	800	69	250	60
Ruff	3	1	-	-	2	3	1	1	7	49
Black t Godwit	20	4	56	9	24	25	205	57	108	46
Bar t Godwit	36	7	2	4	3	7	4	2	7	6
Whimbrel	88	28	42	17	32	24	61	25	64	9
Curlew	720	280	540	269	379	308	455	273	423	261
Sp Redshank	3	7	2	4	-	-	1	4	1	3
Redshank	133	292	178	273	149	284	231	305	340	300
Greenshank	6	79	8	73	9	94	16	115	11	58
Common Sand	9	39	20	52	10	57	11	47	8	37
Common Gull	42	28	4	4	4	14	16	20	22	26
Kingfisher	1	14	-	-	1	5	2	4	1	5
Fieldfare	7	10	17	8	20	2	101	14	3	2
Redwing	3	5	9	2	8	6	20	11	79	5
Mistle Thrush	8	49	3	46	7	34	2	26	2	3
Linnet	50	14	60	11	60	21	-	-	20	3
Twite	-	-	-	-	24	1	-	-	5	3
Reed Bunting	1	3	1	1	3	2	1	1	-	-
Snipe	12	9	3	7	9	5	32	21	21	41
<b>Observing days</b>	<b>305</b>		<b>306</b>		<b>308</b>		<b>310</b>		<b>304</b>	

Table 2. Little Singleton Site: - single species counts  
- non counting records

Single Sightings		Sighted	
Little Grebe	2001/2005	Mallard	Local breeder
G.C. Grebe	2003/2005	Red-legged Partridge	
Slavonian Grebe	2004 (prob.)	Moorhen	Local breeder
Black Swan	2004	Black headed Gull	
Whitefront Goose	2003	Lesser black Back	
Mandarin	2001/2002	Herring Gull	
Shoveller	2003/2004	Greater Black Back	
Gadwall	2004	Swift	
Tufted Duck	2001	Skylark	Breeder on saltmarsh??
Eider	2001	Swallow	
Black Kite	2003 (not accepted)	House Martin	
Coot	2001	Starling	On saltmarsh with lapwing
Little Stint	2001		
Jack Snipe	2002		
Furnstone	2003		
Rock Pipit	2001		

## COMMENTS

What does it all mean – if anything? You will have your own opinions and if they are not too rude and/or humiliating please let us know. We suppose that, aside from just ticking, it is trends we are observing. Long term Fylde Bird Club recorders, with decades of dedication, will be better able to comment on validity in this context than we are. Clearly, many of the species recorded have low counts and therefore we may be uncertain of their statistical value. Anyway, with all this in mind, we have noted the following trends:

### *Downward trends*

Goldeneye. Reducing maximum numbers and fewer days observed  
 Goosander. Fewer days observed  
 Kestrel. Reducing maximum numbers and fewer days observed  
 Curlew. Reducing maximum numbers and fewer days observed. Average number of curlews seen on the observing days has dropped from 81 to 41 between 2001 and 2005.  
 Mistle Thrush. Reducing maximum numbers and fewer days observed  
 Tawny Owl. Fewer days observed

### *Upward trends*

Little Egret. Increasing maximum numbers and more days observed.  
 Whooper Swan. Increasing maximum numbers  
 Teal. Increasing maximum numbers  
 Oystercatcher. More days observed  
 Golden Plover. Increasing maximum numbers  
 Dunlin. More days observed  
 Ruff. Increasing maximum numbers and more days observed  
 Black-tailed Godwit. Increasing maximum numbers and more days observed  
 Redshank. Increasing maximum numbers. Average number of Redshank seen on observing days has risen from 22 to 36 between 2001 and 2005  
 Greenshank. Increasing maximum numbers  
 Snipe. Increasing maximum numbers  
 G. S Woodpecker. More days observed  
 Tree Sparrow. Increasing maximum numbers and more days observed

Table 3. Analysis of BTO garden bird survey records (Little Singleton)

		Observed weeks* (each species)				
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Grey Heron	1 in 2005	0	0	0	0	1w
Mallard	Annual garden nester	-	-	-	-	-
Sparrowhawk	Singles	5w	6w	9w	9w	6w
Kestrel	Singles	1w	1w	1w	0	0
Pheasant		0	0	0	0	11w
Moorhen	1 in 2002	0	1w	0	0	0
Herring Gull	1 in 2004	0	0	0	1w	0
Woodpigeon		44w	48w	46w	48w	47w
Tawny Owl	Max 2 (2003)	1w	2w	2w	0	1w
G.S. Woodpecker		3w	15w	13w	3w	29w
Grey Wagtail	Singles	0	3w	1w	1w	2w
Pied Wagtail	Singles	1w	3w	4w	2w	2w
Wren	Singles	36w	32w	36w	36w	38w
Dunnock	Max 3 (each year)	44w	47w	46w	48w	47w
Robin	Max 3 (each year)	44w	47w	46w	48w	47w
Blackbird	Max 9 (2004)	44w	47w	46w	48w	47w
Fieldfare	Small flock	1w	0	0	0	0
Song Thrush		14w	15w	13w	14w	13w
Redwing	Small flock	0	0	0	1w	1w
Mistle Thrush		6w	11w	6w	1w	2w
Blackcap	5 max (2001)	1w	0	0	0	0
Chiffchaff	Singles	3w	1w	0	1w	2w
Goldcrest		6w	5w	5w	2w	7w
Spotted Flycatcher	Single	0	0	1w	0	0
Long tailed Tit	Max 20	17w	5w	13w	12w	5w
Coal Tit	Max 5 (2003)	37w	44w	46w	47w	46w
Blue Tit	Max 8 (2004)	44w	48w	46w	48w	47w
Great Tit	Max 6 (2003)	44w	48w	46w	48w	47w
Nuthatch	Singles	0	0	0	0	5w
Treecreeper	Singles	1w	0	1w	1w	0
Jay	Singles	3w	0	14w	14w	0
Magpie		12w	16w	30w	36w	18w
Jackdaw		20w	20w	17w	16w	10w
Rook		3w	8w	10w	20w	4w
Carrion Crow		0	1w	0	4w	1w
Starling	Max 50 (2003)	28w	38w	34w	30w	34w
House Sparrow	Max 5 (2003/2005)	30w	31w	25w	23w	29w
Tree Sparrow	Max 6	0	0	0	4w	19w
Chaffinch	Max 17(2001)	44w	47w	46w	48w	47w
Brambling		0	0	1w	0	0
Greenfinch	Max 25 (2003)	44w	47w	46w	48w	47w
Siskin		29w	46w	36w	35w	45w
Twite	Flock in 2003	0	0	1w	0	0
Collared Dove		44w	48w	46w	48w	47w
Observing weeks (annual)		44w	48w	46w	48w	47w

\* species seen during 'x' weeks of the year

## Black-tailed Godwits: telling *limosa* from *islandica* From FBC Website

The Black-tailed Godwit has a discontinuous breeding distribution from Iceland to Siberia with three forms (distinct populations) being recognised of which two breed in Europe; the nominate form *limosa* and the form *islandica*. *Islandica* which, as its name suggests breeds principally in Iceland, is currently increasing and, as it is Black-tailed Godwits of this form that occur in some numbers on the Ribble Estuary and elsewhere in the British Isles as non-breeding visitors, this population rise has been reflected in higher counts here. Therefore, it might seem likely that the breeding Black-tailed Godwits at Newton Marsh are *islandica* which have chosen to remain to breed by the Ribble

Estuary, indeed as many as 200 *islandica* regularly visit Newton Marsh to feed late into the spring. However, the nominate form *limosa* is the only form which regularly breeds in the British Isles, primarily on RSPB reserves in Cambridgeshire.

Since Black-tailed Godwits were discovered breeding on Newton Marsh their form has remained unknown until 2005 when, after good views, they have been confirmed as being of the internationally declining form *limosa*. *Limosa* breeds in the Low Countries through to Russia and is a true long distance migrant wintering mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and India.

But does it really matter which form of Black-tailed Godwit breeds at Newton Marsh? Well it may prove to be crucial factor in determining the future of breeding Black-tailed Godwits at the site. It is most unlikely that *islandica* will ever breed so far south and so recruitment of breeding birds from the growing wintering population on the Ribble Estuary is therefore not likely to occur. Black-tailed Godwits are long-lived birds so the same adult birds are probably returning to nest at Newton Marsh each year. If breeding success remains low in future years and breeding godwits are ultimately lost from Newton Marsh it seems unlikely that they would ever return.

Telling *limosa* from *islandica* in the field is not easy but to the trained eye a combination of features often makes it possible. Log onto the FBC website at [fyldebirdclub.org](http://fyldebirdclub.org) to see pictures of *limosa* and *islandica* taken by Chris Batty at Newton Marsh (*limosa*) and Marshside, Merseyside (*islandica*).

	<i>limosa</i>	<i>islandica</i>
Size & shape	large & lanky	smaller & compact
Bill base colour in spring	orange-yellow	orange-pink
Bill length	longer	shorter
Forepart colouration	orange-brown reaching to mid-breast	orange-red reaching to lower-breast and belly
Tertials and inner greater coverts when breeding	plain grey (old, worn feathers)	bright with orange and black bars (newly moulted feathers)

### Black-tailed Godwit Nestwatch

The RSPB, in partnership with the Fylde Bird Club, organise the guarding of the Fylde Black-tailed Godwit nests around the clock throughout the incubation period to try and prevent against egg theft. The RSPB are always looking for volunteers to help with the Black-tailed Godwit Nestwatch, the wardening rota running from late April until June. Details of the Nestwatch for 2006 will be announced at a forthcoming FBC meeting or log on to the FBC website for information – giving a little of your time will have a big impact on the preservation of this species at Newton Marsh.

## Forthcoming FBC meetings

River Wyre Hotel, Poulton Le Fylde. 7.45pm

28th March: The Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group with Seumus Eaves  
 25th April: Business Update & members slides  
 23rd May: Birds of Cape Verde Islands with Chris Batty

*The full programme for 2006 is now available*

## Diary Dates

### Weekend Tide Times.

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

Volunteers and helpers for WeBS counts are always needed. Contact Paul Ellis (01253 891281) or Jean Roberts (01524 770295) to arrange. Members of FBC are very welcome to attend to enjoy the birding and assist if they wish to do so.

#### WeBS Core Count Priority Dates

To aid co-ordination, counts should be made on the priority dates listed, ideally during the morning or, at coastal sites, when tidal conditions are suitable. If you are unable to count at this time, please select the nearest suitable alternative date in that month.

Where tidal conditions at coastal sites are unfavourable on these dates, Local Organisers are encouraged to agree alternative dates. Ideally, these should be separated by at least three weeks from counts in the preceding and following months. Counts on different count units within complex sites should be co-ordinated to avoid the possibility of double counting.

#### Wyre Guided Walks (with Fylde Bird Club)

Sunday 19th March: Wheatears & Waders  
 10.30am–1.30pm. Meet at Rossall Picnic area

Sunday 30th April: Waders in Grannies Bay  
 10.00am–1.30pm. Meet at RSPB Ribble Discovery Centre, Fairhaven

#### Friends of Marton Mere

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May: Annual Spring Warbler Walk  
 Meet Stanley Park gates at 6.15am

Other meeting points:

- 6.45am Heronry, Stanley Park
- 7.15am Zoo car park
- 8.15am The Nook, Staining
- 8.45am NE corner of Marton Mere

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May: Moth & Bat Evening  
 Meet Information centre. 8.30pm till late.  
 Bring warm clothes and a torch.

For further information about the Friends of Marton Mere contact Mike McGough (01253 890404)/Sharon Tomkinson (01253 760436)

Date		Time	Height m
Mar	Wed 1	1201	10.4
	Thur 4	1202	10.4
	Sat 4	1203	9.7
	Sun 5	1204	9.0
	Sat 11	1205	7.9
	<b>Sun 12</b>	<b>1206</b>	<b>8.4</b>
	Sat 18	1207	9.1
	Sun 19	1208	8.9
	Sat 25	1209	7.5
	Sun 26	1210	8.2
	Wed 29	1056	10.2
	Thur 30	1137	10.4
	Fri 31	1219	10.3
Apr	Sat 1	1300	10.0
	Sun 2	1341	9.4
	Sat 8	0738	7.2
	<b>Sun 9</b>	<b>0834</b>	<b>7.8</b>
	Sat 15	1204	9.2
	Sun 16	1233	9.0
	Sat 22	1812	7.3
	Sun 23	1932	7.8
	Thur 27	1028	10.0
	Fri 28	1113	10.0
	Sat 29	1155	9.9
Sun 30	1238	9.5	
May	Sat 6	1814	7.1
	<b>Sun 7</b>	<b>0638</b>	<b>7.2</b>
	Sat 13	1102	9.0
	Sun 14	1137	8.9
	Sat 20	1634	7.7
	Sun 21	1748	7.8
	Sat 27	1052	9.4
	Sun 28	1137	9.2



## Good Birding

Visit the Fylde Bird Club website at [www.fyldebirdclub.org](http://www.fyldebirdclub.org) for all the latest news. Updated daily on bird sightings in the Fylde area. Or come to our monthly meetings held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month at 7.45 pm at The River Wyre Hotel, Breck Road, Poulton le Fylde; check out the website for the full programme.

**General enquiries:** Paul Ellis (Secretary) 18 Staining Rise, Staining, Blackpool. Lancashire. FY3 0BU.  
 Tel: 01253 891281. E-mail: [paul.ellis24@btopenworld.com](mailto:paul.ellis24@btopenworld.com)