

# June 2012 Newsletter



**Fylde  
Bird Club**

**LANCASHIRE**

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*Goldfinch by  
Jackie Moreton*

Summer has now arrived along with the Swallows, House Martins and Swifts; always a lovely time of year to be out and about birding before going to work or in the evenings. In this issue we have news from the last three months on Marton Mere by Ellen Pemberton. We have no dates as yet for our conservation work at the Mere. Ellen's father found an old book on birds found in the Blackpool area. It is interesting to note that some of those birds are no longer seen and some have changed their names.

David & Jackie Moreton have written a detailed account of how they capture such excellent photographs.

Earlier this year Paul Slade, along with Paul Ellis, went to Southern Ireland for a few days birding; by all accounts lots of gulls and plenty of Guinness

Peter and his lovely wife Sue spent a damp week in Suffolk, but were rewarded with some great birds, including Bittern and Wryneck.

A quick update from Len Blacow on the Coastguard station is also included in this newsletter.

We have a quarterly update from Stuart Piner taking us through February, March and April on birds seen during the month.

We also have the first article from Stephen Dunstan on "a Seawatching Year part 1"; he even manages in his lunch hour to spend a little time birding on the promenade.

The Committee had planned to add more gravel to the wave breakers on Preston Dock to help nesting common Terns. Unfortunately, no boat was available but 27 pairs are nesting anyway and more are displaying.

Congratulations to the winners of the photo competition; they will have their photos in the 2013 Fylde Bird Club Calendar.

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## **Volunteers needed for Text Alerts**

I am looking for a volunteer to help out with the text alert service if I am away (which would only be once or twice a year).

Ideally, you would require a mobile phone tariff with free or unlimited text messaging.

You would need to enter the names and numbers of all the subscribers into your phone and put them into groups of a maximum of 20.

I would be able to help with setting this up on your own phone if it seems a little daunting.

Once set up it would only involve sending about 5 messages once or twice a year.

If interested please email Paul Slade at [sladey67@yahoo.com](mailto:sladey67@yahoo.com) or telephone: 07970 986904.

**Thanks  
Paul Slade**



## Fylde Coast Boat Trips

I have arranged a couple of boat trips again for later in the year.  
Bank Holiday Monday **27th August**, pick up 15.10, return 20.10, cost £26. Space is available.  
Tuesday **11th September**, pick up 15.10 return 20.10, cost £26. One space remaining  
Both picking up from the beach by the RNLI shop at Fleetwood.  
Access to the boat is directly off the beach by steep ladder or plank.  
Contact Paul Slade for Booking and payment.  
If either trip has to be cancelled for any reason payment will be refunded.  
Email sladey67@yahoo.com or telephone: 07970 986904.

**Paul Slade**

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## Marton Mere – January-March 2012

2012 got off to a good start at Marton Mere; the Iceland Gull which arrived just before Christmas continued to visit. At the time of writing, it was last seen on 30th March. There were also several sightings of Fox during January and early February. On 1st January, there were seven Goldeneye and a Mediterranean Gull, as well as five Stock Doves in the east field. The following day a Stoat was seen, with a Little Gull on the 5th and an Otter on the 8th. Both a Barn Owl and a Little Owl were seen on the 9th and on the 12th there was a Kittiwake on the scrape.

Friday January 13th was far from unlucky, as a redhead Smew visited the reserve. Pintails were also present during the winter, with two over the weekend of 21st-22nd January, 11 on 8th February and 18 on 15th February. Although the Long-eared Owls often proved elusive, four were seen on 28th January. On the same day, a Brambling was at the feeding station.

On 3rd February, the fields around the reserve had seven Stock Doves, a Little Owl and five Roe Deer. Water Rail numbers peaked early this month, with six present on the 5th. A Ruff visited briefly on the 7th and a new bird was added to the list on the 10th, in the form of a Great White Egret. Gadwall numbers peaked on 17th February, with 23 recorded. A Skylark was present on the 18th, followed by a Weasel at the feeding station on the 19th.

Bitterns were few and far between over the winter; the first sighting of the year was on 4th March. Also on this day, at the feeding station, there was a female Brambling and a male Siskin. The latter was monopolising the feeders. They lingered into mid-March, with six Siskins seen on the 11th. Other sightings for March included Peregrine on the 7th, 10th and 31st, a Goshawk causing much panic among the ducks on the 10th, four Redpolls flying over on the 27th, a Little Owl and three Curlews on the 28th and a Black-tailed Godwit on the 31st. The summer visitors also began to return, with the first Sand Martins on the 12th, followed by Chiffchaff on the 21st and last, but not least, an Osprey flew over on the 31st.

**Ellen Pemberton**

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## Photographic Competition winners 2012

The competition was well supported with 61 entries in total, all of an amazing standard. I really enjoyed the opportunity I had to look at them time and time again as I arranged them for presentation. Thank you to all entrants for getting the photographs to me before the night, it made it so much less stressful for me (I am a born worrier!). Can I also say how good it is for people to enter, not just to win, and to share their favourite photos of the previous year. The winners were:

Fylde	Paul Ellis	Slavonian Grebe
UK	David Moreton	Dartford Warbler
World	Stuart Piner	Stone Curlew

**Peter Rhind**



## Strange Old Bird Names

Ellen Pemberton's father found an old book with a section on birds in the Blackpool area whilst in Fleetwood Library. The names of some birds have changed; do you know what a Goatsucker and a Land Rail are? When did we last see a Blue Gull, a Norway Spinks or a Royston Crow?

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Woodbine, pretty piped	Wheat
Water Cress, amphibious	Wakerobin
Wintered-green, pear-leaved	Wolfsbane, yellow
Watercress, common	Yarrow

THE SEA FOWL common to the coast and fields about Blackpool, are the wild Goose, Seal, Mallard, Shell Duck, Goosander, Water Hen, Didopper, Heron, Redshank, Plover, Snipe, Connorant, and the following with the dates of their appearance and disappearance, &c. :—

<i>Names.</i>	<i>First Seen.</i>	<i>Last Seen.</i>	<i>Where Bred.</i>
Grey Gull,	Aug. 4.	April 10.	Beach.
Blue Gull,	Aug. 4.	April 10.	Ditto.
Common Sea Mew	all the year,		On the salt marsh.
Black Cap Ditto.	Sept. 3.	Dec. 4.	On rocks.
Red legged Ditto.	March 4.	Aug. 12.	On the beach.
King Fisher,	all the year,		with us.
Royston Crow,	Oct. 3.	Mar. 22,	Norway.
Norway Spinks,	Dec. 18.	Jan. 20.	Ditto.
Larks.	all the year.		with us.
Marsh Linnets,	do.	do.	do.
Buzzard Hawk,	do.	do.	do.
Common Hawk,	do.	do.	do.
Grey Owl,	do.	do.	do.
Barn Owl,	do.	do.	do.
Rooks,	do.	do.	do.
Crow,	do.	do.	do.
Jack Daw,	do.	do.	do.
Raven,	do.	do.	do.
Pigeon, wood,	do.	do.	do.
Ditto. blue,	do.	do.	do.
Ring Dove,	do.	do.	do.
Starling,	do.	do.	do.
Fieldfare,	Nov. 10.	Feb. 6.	do.
Thrush,	all the year,		do.
Swallow,	April 18.	Oct. 31.	do.
Marten,	May 4.	Oct. 16.	do.
Sand Marten,	May 29.	Sept. 6.	do.
Swift,	May 29.	Sept. 3.	do.
Goatsucker,	Sept. 7.	Sept. 27.	do.
Wryneck,	April 26.	Sept. 10.	do.
Cuckoo,	May 1.	July 10.	do.
Nightingale	April 25.	Sept. 20.	do.
White-throat	April 22.	Sept. 26.	do.
Wheatear,	May 4.	Sept. 26.	do.
Whinchat,	June 1.	Sept. 21.	do.
Willow Wren,	April 23.	Sept. 24.	do.
Land-rail,	Sept. 1.	Oct. 20.	do.
Woodcock,	Oct. 20.	April 1.	do.
Quail,	Aug. 20.	Oct. 7.	do.



## Our Photographic Journey

Our photographic journey started some 12 years ago at the Crook of Lune when we saw what we thought was a Bittern out in the open, a very unusual sight, so the idea of having a camera was born. We bought an Olympus Camedia compact with a 10x zoom, and then shortly after Jackie bought me a teleconverter to go with it.

A couple of years later, a Nikon D70 DSLR with a 70-300mm came along, and that was replaced with a Nikon 300mm af-s lens (which I would recommend without reservation). We also got 1.4 and x2 nikon teleconverters to go with this lens.

The D70 was replaced with the D200, and then we got the D300s which are the cameras we use at the moment. We also have a 70-300mm zoom with VR (jury still out on this one) and some smaller lenses for flora and fauna.

As any bird photographer knows, you always need a longer lens, but because of the cost of the 500mm af-s lens, (some £6000) I went for the Nikon 500mm manual focus. This lens is sharper than the 300mm but is very hard on the eyes after a while, so although I would recommend it, it would be with some reservation. I bought the D300s to use with the 500mm, the live view facility can be used to help focusing, but this hasn't been a success because Jackie is now "into" photography and she picks up the D300s with the 300mm lens and that is the last I see of it.... new camera on the horizon I think.

We have had some great experiences while photographing birds, but one of our most memorable ones, must be the RBA trip to Sula Sgeir in May 2007 for the Black-browed Albatross, and being directed one on one, onto that special bird by Dick Filby, while it flew around the boat has got to be a birding highlight, £600 for the trip and worth every penny.

Another memory that springs to mind is that of the low flying Osprey at Leighton Moss, it was so low that in the photo we took the bird's ring could be clearly read "YV". This bird is the first confirmed returning bird to have fledged at Bassenthwaite, and they were absolutely delighted to receive pictures of it.

When the Grey Phalarope was at Fairhaven in September 2011, I could only just manage to be there for the last 15mins or so of the fading evening light. With some help from Paul Slade and Geoff Gradwell I managed to get on the bird quickly and had some shots of the bird with silver/grey reflections of the lake using the 500mm. The bird then moved much closer to the group of photographers, into the peach reflections of the setting sun, inside the minimum focus distance of the big lens. Fortunately for me I had brought the 300mm which will focus to some 5 feet, so I managed to get a "peach" of a shot that is still one of my favourites.



*Black-browed Albatross*



The juvenile Cuckoo at Cocker's Dyke of August 2010 will always be a special bird for me, I often called in there after work and feel sure the bird accepted me as part of the scenery. One day while the bird was eating caterpillars on a fence post, I was as close as I thought I could be, then the bird flew even closer with a caterpillar. I tried for the shot of the bird tossing the caterpillar to the back of its throat but my lack of experience showed, the shutter speed was far too slow and all I had was a blur..what might have been!

A word or two on technique. We have the two main lenses, the Nikon 500mm and the 300mm, and both are unusual as they have very good performance wide open (most lenses are better stopped down to a smaller f stop); because of this we do tend to use them wide open. The plus side is a faster shutter speed, but the downside is less depth of field. This is not always a bad thing as shallow depth of field can isolate the subject and can give good bokeh (creamy blurred background) but sometimes the depth of field is so shallow, that the subject cannot be covered by the focused area, all we can do then, is focus on the eye, or go against our principles and stop down. The "peach" Grey Phalarope I mentioned earlier should really have been stopped down but the light level was very low, so as is often the case a compromise has to be made. We use matrix metering, and dial in our own compensation as required. We prefer "shade" for white balance, as it gives a warmer picture. We shoot in RAW and use the lowest ISO (200 and fingers crossed) that we can get away with. We use Adobe photoshop 7 for image processing, that is Jackie's job, and she also keeps the website up to date. We also have a Flickr page each, please see links on Fylde Bird Club website.

A word of thanks to the two Pauls and Mick for advice freely given over the years, and to Chris Batty who told us years ago "Take as many pictures as you can because it is usually the last ones that are the best". I would add to that, "Then go back and take some more"!

**Regards**  
**David Moreton**

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### **Ireland with two Northerners and a Southerner**

#### **Galway and Clare in February 2012**

Usually in January I start thinking about going back to the West coast of Ireland for a bit of winter birding and the occasional pint of Guinness. I managed to persuade Paul Ellis and Andrew Tweed (a London based birding friend) to join me. We arranged to meet at Shannon airport on Saturday morning 25th February where Tweedy would be waiting with a 'suitable' hire car. We should have known better as we wondered how we were going to fit all our gear in to the tiny hatchback he had booked.

After squeezing everything in we headed west to the small village of Quilty in County Clare, just over an hours drive away. We arrived to a nice bright morning and started scanning the sea. We had probably been out of the car for less than a minute when Paul shouted 'get on these scoter'; he had found two Surf Scoter including a stunning male, not a bad start to the day. Viewing Mutton Island distantly offshore we could just about make out a flock of about 150 Barnacle Geese and a passing Peregrine.

With Tweedy moaning about his lack of food we drove round in to the village and found a shop with the usual Irish deli counter and coffee machine. We enjoyed our late breakfast looking through the birds on the rocky shore below us and picked out at least nine Purple Sandpipers and 32 Pale Bellied Brent Geese.

Our next stop was the village of Lahinch where a quick look on the sea produced about 10 Great Northern and three Red Throated Divers, 50 Common Scoter, 20 Razorbill and two Ravens overhead. Heading North again we called in at Liscannor where two Greenshank were feeding just outside the little harbour and about 20 Fulmar were resting offshore.

As we drove towards Black Head on the South West corner of Galway Bay we had two immature Iceland Gulls fly by which convinced us to stop and have a look at a distant feeding flock of gulls out at sea in which there were at least another four Icelands.

Our next stop is one of my favourite spots in Ireland, Gleninagh Castle which can be excellent for close views of divers. It didn't disappoint as we counted 41 Black Throats in several small groups, 17 Great Northerns, a Red Throat, a Black Guillemot, 100+ Common Scoter and four presumably 'proper' Rock Doves.





*Gleninagh Castle*



*The Quays in Galway City*

Just East of Gleninagh Castle lies the picturesque village of Ballyvaughan where we logged 31 Red Breasted Mergansers and several more divers.

Arriving at Nimmo's Pier in Galway City it was strangely devoid of gulls so we decided to seek out our regular B&B, Marless House ([www.marlesshouse.com](http://www.marlesshouse.com)) which I can thoroughly recommend, nice people and a great breakfast, which we sometimes need after a night in 'The Quays' ([www.galwaycitypubguide.com/all-pubs/the-quays.html](http://www.galwaycitypubguide.com/all-pubs/the-quays.html)) on the Guinness.

Sunday morning saw an early visit to Nimmo's Pier before breakfast where we rattled off our first photo's of Iceland Gulls. Seven were present including three juvs and four second winters. Unusually, an adult Ring Billed Gull failed to come close enough for photos.



*Iceland Gulls (juv, 2<sup>nd</sup> winter, juv)*



*Juv Iceland Gull*

After breakfast we headed West out of the city towards Rossaveal which can home thousands of gulls around the harbour and fish processing factories. Arriving in steady rain and strong wind we had a good look around but only found one 2nd winter Iceland Gull. Five Black Guillemots out in the bay were nice, varying from full winter to full summer plumage.

Heading back towards Galway and away from the rain we stopped at Spiddall where a few gulls appeared to be milling around. It turned out to be an excellent stop as we found two juvenile Glaucous and twelve Iceland Gulls. At least 24 Pale Bellied Brent Geese were feeding on the same beach amongst the gulls.

Nearing Galway, Rusheen Bay is always worth a look. By now it was very windy so the bay was filled with windsurfers rather than birds but we still managed two more Iceland Gulls and several close Hooded Crows were nice close to the car park.

For the last few hours of the day we headed out to Lough Corrib where a Pallid Harrier was spending the winter. We failed to see it in the now pretty miserable cold, wet windy conditions but we did manage to see six hen harriers and a flock of 40 Greenland White-fronted Geese. After standing freezing we headed back to the B & B for a quick change, then went out for a curry, a few pints and talked rubbish.





*Hooded Crow*



*The Burren*

Saying our goodbyes to Mary at Marless House we decided to head to the south side of Galway Bay and look for the regular wintering Forsters Tern which had spent the previous few months anywhere between Kinvarra and Doorus Pier. Arriving at Doorus Pier we could see birds roosting on seaweed covered island just offshore. Paul soon picked up a few Sandwich Terns hiding out of the wind; with them appeared to be a slightly smaller silvery looking bird. As we were wondering if it could be the Forsters it popped its head up and confirmed our suspicions before having several fly rounds and heading miles out to sea. Heading inland we drove through the Burren National Park which looks a very bleak place on a cold winters day but I can imagine is quite transformed in the summer (<http://www.burrennationalpark.ie>). Our last stop of the trip was at Ballyallia Lake where a short walk through copse like habitat produced a couple of Chiffchaff, Treecreeper, Goldcrest and a few Lesser Redpolls Arriving at Shannon Airport with a couple of hours to spare we had a look out on the shore of the mighty Shannon River but the highlight turned out to be a very obliging Irish Hare in the car park. I have said in several articles before how much I enjoy winter birding in Ireland, good company, good beer and a good B&B always helps, just don't let a Southerner book your hire car !



*Irish Hare*

**Paul Slade**

*Pictures by Paul Slade except Irish Hare and Gleninagh Castle by Paul Ellis*

### **Rossall Point Observatory**

The construction phase of the new Rossall Point Observatory is due to be completed by the end of July, the interior will be fitted immediately afterwards, and the building will be formally opened in late summer/early autumn. Fylde Bird Club (FBC) members will have access to the bird watching room and the rooftops of both buildings and the FBC will be consulted about access arrangements.



FBC have been major partners with Wyre Council throughout the project and without the support of members the building would have been located adjacent to the Marine Hall. Apart from the obvious advantage of the birdwatching facilities, FBC will have space within the building to promote their meetings and events and there will be opportunities to arrange guided walks and events to further publicise the Club.

**Len Blacow**



## A Holiday in Suffolk

Despite a terrible weather forecast, we left to spend a week close to Minsmere. We arrived on Sunday and it poured the forecast was correct. Monday morning we awoke to a beautiful morning and the sound of a bittern booming in competition with a cuckoo calling. A good start.

On to Minsmere and the delights it offered. Garden warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Cettis warbler singing in the open, summer Black Tern on the scrape and a male Redstart at the sluice.

On to Westleton Common to Wood Lark and prolonged views of a male Dartford Warbler singing on a wispy branch very close to where we saw it four years ago. Back through Minsmere and great views of Green Woodpeckers, Bearded Tits and a close flypast of a Bittern to complete a perfect day.

The rest of the week was just as good. A newly arrived Wryneck, my first good view of such a bird, Black Redstart and Common Redstart in the same tree and a migratory Jim and Val from Fylde Bird Club appeared next day.

At Dunwich Heath we found two pairs of Dartford Warblers, one of whom was carrying nesting material.

More Bitterns, Marsh Harriers, and a perfect Ring Ouzel were added to the list. On the Scrape amongst the melee of Black Headed Gulls, all fighting for nesting materials, were a pair of Gargany, and stunning summer plumaged Knot and Curlew Sandpiper.

A really wonderful week. Bird of the week has to be the Wryneck, or the singing Nightingale or or or all of them, 108 in total.



*Wryneck*



*Ring Ouzel*

**Peter & Sue Rhind**

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### FBC Speakers for July, August and September 2012

<b>July 24th</b>	Business update and members photographs
<b>August 28th</b>	Alan Davies and Ruth Miller (from the Biggest Twitch) are returning to give a talk on bird watching in North Wales. Alan was the Warden at the RSPB reserve at Conway and Ruth also worked for the RSPB; they have a good local knowledge of the area.
<b>September 25th</b>	John Gardner, a professional photographer, will show his photographs of birds on his European travels. His humorous and friendly style will provide us with a taste of factual and stimulating entertainment.





## February through April Monthly Round Up

### February 2012

The adult drake Ring-necked Duck returned to Thornton ICI Reservoir on 1st February. The bird remained until 6th, before it relocated to Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park on 21st, where it lingered until the month end. Having initially been found by Ian Gardner on 29th December 2009, the same bird has returned to the Fylde in each of the following winter periods since then, but it remains the only Ring-necked Duck to have been discovered on the Fylde to date.

Ashley Baines located a Great White Egret at Marton Mere on 10th, the first site record. A Great White Egret was also logged on Warton Marsh again on 26th.

A Hooded Crow lingered in Singleton throughout the month and the long-staying Black Redstart continued to frequent the building site in Knott End, whilst Black Redstarts were also seen at Clifton Marsh and Cockersand. Iceland Gulls were once again logged at Marton Mere and Cocker's Dyke, a Purple Sandpiper continued to winter at Blackpool North Shore and a Water Pipit was seen on Warton Marsh. Velvet Scoters were observed off North Pier (3) and Starr Gate (2), up to eight Scaup were noted offshore at the latter site and a female Long-tailed Duck was recorded there on two dates during February.



Scarce geese were once again well represented; Tundra Bean Geese were identified at Mythop (6), Sand Villa (4), Pilling Lane Ends (2), Eagland Hill (2) and Nateby; Eurasian White-fronted Geese were logged at several locations, including flocks of 15 on Warton Marsh, 15 at Eagland Hill, ten at Pilling Lane Ends, ten in Pilling and six at Thurnham; up to five Brent Geese were at Pilling Lane Ends.

### March 2012

Andrew Cornall discovered a Smew at Preesall Flashes on 20th March. This was presumably the same Smew that had visited the Fylde earlier in the year; following its visit to Marton Mere and the Wyre and Lune Estuaries on 13th-15th January 2012, the Smew departed the Fylde and returned to Leighton Moss, via Pine Lake, where it remained until 27th January. The following day the bird revisited the Lune Estuary at Glasson, before again returning to Leighton Moss on 31st January. On 8th-10th February the Smew reappeared at Pine Lake before once again returning to Leighton Moss on 16th February. It then relocated to Aldcliffe Marsh on 18th February before returning to Leighton Moss on 20th-29th February, then back to Aldcliffe Marsh 11th-19th March, before relocating to Preesall Flashes on 20th March. The bird returned to Aldcliffe Marsh 25th-28th March but was not reported subsequently.

A Great White Egret continued to be seen on Warton Marsh throughout March, with presumably the same bird also visiting a flood in Lytham. March also produced an impressive count of nine Velvet Scoters off Starr Gate; The Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside (White et al., 2008) states that 'The largest groups [of Velvet Scoter] have been four males and four females off Blackpool in February 1992 and eleven males there on 1st March' so a count of nine is particularly notable. Snow Buntings were located at Cockersand and Rossall Point, Red Kites over Barton, Wrea Green and Fairhaven, Ospreys over Bispham and Marton Mere, Ring Ouzels at Fairhaven, Rossall Point and Great Plumpton and Avocets at Cockersand and Warton Bank were also reported during March. Up to three Bitterns were at Marton Mere, the Black Redstart remained in Knott End, a Hooded Crow was still in Singleton, Iceland Gulls were seen at Marton Mere and Fairhaven, a Purple Sandpiper lingered at Blackpool North Shore and the Ring-necked Duck continued to frequent Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park. A Scaup visited Conder Pool, whilst two were logged off Starr Gate and Water Pipits were identified at Warton Bank (4), The Heads (3+) and Barnaby's Sands.

Tundra Bean Geese were located at Pilling Lane Ends (2), Copthorne, Agglebys Pit, Fluke Hall Lane, Sand Villa and Barnaby's Sands whilst up to ten Eurasian White-fronted Goose lingered at Pilling Lane Ends.



## April 2012

April's highlights included a couple of Great White Egrets at Warton Bank, Iceland Gull at Marton Mere, Curlew Sandpiper at Lytham, Egyptian Goose in Preston, up to three Water Pipits at Conder Pool and a lone Water Pipit on Warton Marsh. Ospreys flew over Bispham, Broughton, Fairhaven, Garstang, Glasson, Herons' Reach, Marton, Mereside and Thornton whilst Avocets were logged at Newton Marsh (4), Freckleton Naze Pool (2), Warton Bank (2) and Conder Estuary (2). Grounded passerines were represented by a Pied Flycatcher at Bispham, Redstarts at Marton Mere and Blackpool South Shore, Snow Buntings at Rossall Point and Starr Gate and Yellow Wagtails at Cockersand (3) and Newton Marsh.

Seawatching records included a Black-throated Diver and a couple of Velvet Scoters logged past Starr Gate, Long-tailed Ducks off Starr Gate and Rossall Point, Little Terns past Rossall Point (4) and Starr Gate and Great Skuas past Starr Gate, Rossall Point and Fleetwood.

The best of the rest included Scaup and White-fronted Goose at Newton Marsh, Yellow-legged Gull at Skippool Creek and Brent Geese off Knott End (2), Starr Gate (2), South Promenade (3) and Fleetwood 3.

Stuart Piner

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### Hen Harrier Hotline

**Posted on: 15 May 2012 - Bird Watch**

**[http://www.birdwatch.co.uk/channel/newsitem.asp?c=11&cate=\\_\\_12133](http://www.birdwatch.co.uk/channel/newsitem.asp?c=11&cate=__12133)**

The future for England's most threatened bird of prey – Hen Harrier – is looking bleak, as the species teeters on the brink of extinction as a breeding bird. Early reports indicate that only one pair of the species is showing signs of nesting in England. If this continues it will be the worst year for Hen Harrier since it recolonised England, following extinction in the late 19th century. Worryingly, there are currently no birds attempting to nest in the Bowland Fells, Lancashire, the bird's only stronghold in England in recent decades. Martin Harper, RSPB Conservation Director, said: "Hen Harrier is noted for its wonderful rollercoaster display flight, but the bird's population in England is on a rollercoaster ride itself. After recolonising England, the bird is now perilously close to being wiped out again as a result of decades of persecution."

Andrew Gouldstone, a conservation manager with the RSPB in Lancashire, said: "The sight of Hen Harriers is one of the joys of spending time in the hills of Bowland. The RSPB has been working with its partners for over three decades to safeguard Hen Harrier nests here. Bowland is still a safe place for the bird but protecting them away from their breeding grounds is very difficult, and we may be about to lose them as a result."

Government-commissioned, independent research has shown that the English uplands could support more than 300 pairs of Hen Harrier. The authors conclude that persecution associated with the practice of driven grouse shooting, is to blame for the harrier's plight. Natural England has previously concluded that very few harrier nesting attempts are successful on grouse moors, there is compelling evidence that persecution continues, both during and following the breeding season, and persecution continues to limit Hen Harrier recovery in England.

The Government has, via the England Biodiversity Strategy, committed to prevent human-induced extinctions of threatened species by 2020. The extinction of Hen Harrier as a breeding species for a second time looks unavoidable, unless an emergency recovery programme is put in place and there is a rapid and sustained reduction in persecution of these birds. Martin Harper added: "DEFRA ministers have one chance to avoid breaking a promise. We're doing everything we can, but the government and its conservation and enforcement agencies need to step up to the challenge of securing the future of Hen Harrier in England. The problem of illegal killing is well understood – we now need Government to bring solutions to the table."

The situation has become so dire that the RSPB has relaunched its Hen Harrier hotline, to enable the public to report any sighting of these birds during the breeding season in England. The Harrier Hotline number is 0845 4600121 (calls charged at local rate). Reports can also be e-mailed to [henharriers@rspb.org.uk](mailto:henharriers@rspb.org.uk). Reports of sightings should include the date and location of sighting, with a six-figure grid reference where possible.



## Great White Egret – Marton Mere (10th February 2012)

On the 10th of February I made my way to my one day a week work placement. It was a very cold morning and I had no motivation of any sort to do anything. I got to the office and was told we had a school group in the morning so off we went to Bispham Marsh to meet the group. We arrived to find that the group had cancelled due to the weather so we did a few general jobs whilst on the site. With that done we had the afternoon free; I decided that we should go to the mere and look for the otters.

As we arrived at the site we went and stood near the south west end of the mere. After being stood there for 5–10 minutes we had a phone call from one of the volunteers saying they were coming up to the mere for a chat and a catch up and that they would meet us in the Fylde bird club hide.

We sat in the hide chatting away, then I noticed a large white bird heading straight for us. I raised my binoculars to find that it was a Great White Egret. It had landed on the ice. I phoned Maurice Jones who informed me that this was the first record for Marton Mere. As I was ending the phone call the bird took off and flew out of sight. Maurice advised me to check the outflow. As I made my way around I gave Frank Bird a quick ring as he was just coming into the reserve. I eventually got there to find the egret fishing in the dyke. It started to move down the dyke and, as a few others arrived and saw it, the bird flew and was re-found by Frank Bird later in the day. A great end to a usually normal day.

Ashley Baines

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## A Seawatching Year – Part 1

Last summer and early autumn I did quite a lot of calm weather seawatching from Blackpool Promenade. It isn't a particularly popular pursuit compared with storm conditions seawatching, because you don't get a crippling view of Leach's Petrels, Sabine's Gulls and Long-tailed Skuas. At the time I explained to Chris Batty that the thought process was potential scarce scoter, Balearic Shearwaters, Roseate Terns and non-birding delights like porpoises, dolphins and Basking Sharks. Balearic Shearwaters, Roseate Terns were all seen, but by other people. I had to make do with the scoter flock and a few porpoises, but don't get me wrong I always feel privileged to see porpoises on the Fylde coast.

A change in jobs sees me now working in the heart of Blackpool town centre. This seemed a bit of a backward step in birding terms, and there didn't seem to be anywhere I could go to do birding in a lunch break. There is a small pocket of bushes by the Metropole Hotel, round a disused crazy golf course, but this takes the term 'grotspot' to a new level and although I have seen Goldcrests and Willow Warblers in there it would be a real achievement to find a good bird there. So my thoughts turned to North Pier, and going back to my calm weather seawatching project. One of the advantages of the long straight Fylde coastline is that seawatching can be worthwhile anywhere from Starr Gate in the south to Rossall Point in the north. As my surveying with Marinelife in 2012 includes several trips across the Irish Sea and one across Biscay the thought of doing a 'seawatching big year', for want of a better phrase, crystallised. Even planned holidays in Shetland and Madeira will include sea crossings where seabirds and cetaceans might be seen.

There are a number of attractions to seawatching. If you live near a suitable venue it is environmentally friendly, as there is no driving involved. In these current austere times that also makes it financially attractive. Along with visible passerine migration it is one of the few forms of birding where you can more or less guarantee that you are not in any way disturbing the birds you have turned up to watch. And, as alluded to above, the non bird wildlife can be pretty spectacular if you get lucky, as anyone who saw the picture on Dave McGrath's blog of the fishermen at Bispham watching the Bottle-nosed Dolphins would testify.

There are of course a number of drawbacks to seawatching compared with other birding activities, which is why it is often a minority pursuit much of the time. I will cover these in a future instalment. Over the next few newsletters I will cover how that goes. At the time of writing it has been very successful. I do promise that if there are lean spells I will be concise or brush over them completely.



## January

The start of the year is normally quiet in Fylde seawatching terms. Gales have been known to deliver notable county birds including Blue Fulmars, but generally it is about looking for scoter, divers and grebes and if there is a bit of wind perhaps some Little Gulls.

My first watch in earnest in 2012 was at Starr Gate on the 8th. Surprisingly, wildfowl were much in evidence, with a notable 45 Teal heading south and a high seawatch count of 16 Shelduck. An adult Little Gull heading south was nice to see but seabirds were generally unremarkable.

Some good birds were being seen offshore around this time. Dave McGrath had Great Northern Diver, Velvet Scoter and Long-tailed Duck in one pre-work watch from South Promenade and a Slavonian Grebe was also seen at Bispham. I started to explore going on North Pier, and though it wasn't open to the public the staff and fisherman had no objections. My first watch of any duration was over a calm sunny lunchtime on the 13th when c2500 scoter were on the sea; these were however eclipsed by a family group of five Whoopers on the sea. As we will come on to discuss, they turn up in the spring but winter records in this context are unusual.

Saturday the 14th was a calm if nippy day and I went from North Shore to South Shore scanning as I went. At South Promenade I watched the incoming tide and 2350 Common Scoter headed south, a distant Velvet among these was very welcome. The next day I watched for an hour and three quarters at Starr Gate in the afternoon and tripled my Velvet tally for the year with a drake and duck south quite close.

Work got in the way during the week so I was keen to resume the following weekend and was out at Starr Gate at first light on Saturday the 22nd. It was fairly quiet so I was rather taken aback by the large bird that headed south close inshore. Regaining my composure I realised it was an unseasonable first winter Gannet. There are few January records in the Fylde, and they are generally adults, so this was a bonus.

The following week I was able to give both Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th decent coverage. The 28th was spent around North Shore including North Pier, the 2000 or so scoter were too distant to check properly but six Red-throated Divers were seen. The last major effort of the month was at Starr Gate the next day, and it was the best of January. Two more Velvet Scoter were seen passing, and landing off Starr Hills. A straggling group of charming Little Gulls also passed north close inside, with all winter plumages (first year, second year and adult) on view.

## February

Sometimes you can leave home thinking the conditions are fine, and reach the sea and find they aren't. So it proved on the 5th where I peered through the gloom at a few scoters and missed a female Scaup that Paul Slade found 100 yards up the Promenade. Frank Bird subsequently found a group of eight Scaup. I was keen to catch up with these as Scaup are among my favourite birds and I did see them on a couple of occasions. On the 7th I saw my first marine mammal of the year, a Grey Seal at North Pier. The 11th produced another drake Velvet Scoter off Starr Gate as well as the Scaup.

Between the 18th and 20th of February I had an away fixture in the Bay of Biscay, surveying for cetaceans and seabirds on the Brittany Ferries freight ferry Cotentin between Poole and Santander. This was the third time I had covered this route for Marinelife, and the first time in winter. Weirdly the best seabirds of the trip would not have been out of place at Starr Gate – a Little Gull and eight Common Scoter which were both new for me in Biscay. Having said that the presumed Fin Whale which breached breathtakingly close in front of the ferry would certainly have looked out of place passing North Pier! We also saw more than 30 dolphins, less than in late summer but always a special sight.



Whilst I was away a couple of Velvets were seen off Starr Gate and I was keen to add to my tally, whilst several reports of Surf Scoters off North Wales gave faint hope of an even better prize. On the 26th several thousand scoter were strung out off North Pier. On the water they were largely unidentifiable but when they were spooked by a boat three Velvet Scoter could be seen among the throng that headed south. The movements of scoter off the Fylde coast are varied, but there is no doubt that when birds are off North Pier there is no doubt that the closer views than elsewhere could be helpful in picking out scarce or even rare birds among the throng.

## **March**

March began with another Velvet, a presumed drake, south through yet more gloom at Starr Gate on the 3rd. Another try in choppy conditions on the 4th yielded only c550 Common Scoter heading north through the sea spray. A midweek sortie to Starr Gate before work in promising calm conditions on the 6th was again largely thwarted by mist.

On the 8th and 9th I was surveying for Marinelife again, this time on the Seatruck route from Heysham to Warrenpoint on Carlingford Lough. Departure times meant that light failed before the end of both outward and return journey, but we (Nick Grounds and I) did well for seabirds. It was striking how many Gannets, Kittiwakes and Fulmars there were given hardly any were being seen from the Lancashire coast. The bird highlights though were 24 Little Gulls in the Lune Deeps, a Puffin near the Isle of Man on the return journey and three Great Northern Divers on the Irish side. We also saw a couple of Harbour Porpoises and a couple of Grey Seals.

Back in the saddle on the Fylde an estimated 5000 Common Scoter were off North Pier on the 11th as numbers began to get seriously impressive. The next day however there seemed to be double this, a string of black dots as far south as the eye could resolve. Better still from a personal perspective my first Harbour Porpoise of the year on the Fylde stuck out like a sore thumb in a millpond of a sea.

On the 17th another good watch was enjoyed at Starr Gate. A couple of Velvets added to an already good year, but having seen a few of these I was if anything more taken by the Fulmar which motored north very close in despite the calm conditions. Sadly Fulmars are increasingly notable on the Fylde, hard to believe the best day counts used to comprise several hundred birds. The first adult Gannet offshore for me was also noted.

And then there was the 21st, which will go down as one of my favourite days birding on the Fylde even though I was only in the field before work. Initially it wasn't at all promising, I had been hoping for some of the large scale Whooper Swan movements of calm March days but initially it was dead. Then the Whoopers obliged, with groups of 42 and 18 heading north west. I have seen up to just shy of 200 leaving together like this, and others have seen even bigger groups than that migrating over the sea off Blackpool.

Then the scoters started moving. And carried on. A stream of Common Scoter close enough to have a fighting chance of picking out any strangers in the pack. And ultimately this southward movement included a minimum of nine Velvet Scoters, four singles followed by two and three together, the most I have ever seen on the Fylde in over a decade of regular seawatching. The Common Scoter movement was over 5800 birds in total. A great morning.

The first of the spring auk passage manifested itself with Razorbills off North Pier late in the month. I thought I was going to fail to connect with Sandwich Tern before March was out, but then they arrived en masse on the 31st with 16 seen off Starr Gate. There were also three more Velvet Scoter seen over two watches, a fitting end to an exciting quarter of seawatching and ferry surveying

**Stephen Dunstan**



## **Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and Special Appeal for Volunteers**

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is the scheme which monitors non-breeding waterbirds in the UK. The principal aims of WeBS are to identify population sizes, determine trends in numbers and distribution and to identify important sites for waterbirds. Monthly co-ordinated counts are made, mostly by volunteers.

WeBS is jointly run by the British Trust for Ornithology, The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Monthly WeBS counts are undertaken in Morecambe Bay between Rossall Point and the Conder Estuary, and on the Ribble Estuary between St Annes Beach and Newton Marsh. Help with WeBS Counts is gratefully received as there is often a shortfall of counters. If you would like to help with counts in Morecambe Bay please contact Jean Roberts (JeanRbrts6@aol.com).

### **Special Request**

Volunteers are needed to take over the WeBS count on the beach between Lytham and St Annes. Peter and Maureen Shakeshaft, who have counted this section for 40 years, will be retiring from the WeBS counts after August. Peter and Maureen have kindly offered to accompany any volunteers on counts between now and August to pass on the techniques they have developed to count the birds, by moving from watchpoint to watchpoint as the tide rises. This is great opportunity to learn from experts and to take part in a very important study on one of the richest intertidal sites in the whole of the UK. Please contact Peter and Maureen on 01253 720 852 or peter.shakeshaft@btinternet.com if you are interested.

Co-ordinated counts will be made on the dates below this year.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Tide height at Heysham (metres)</b>	<b>Time of high water at Heysham (GMT)</b>	<b>Approx time of sunset</b>
24/06/2012	8.7	15.11	
22/07/2012	9.3	14.12	
19/08/2012	9.7	13.11	
16/09/2012	9.8	12.07	
14/10/2012	9.5	10.59	18.15
18/11/2012	9.6	14.09	16.10
16/12/2012	10.2	13.06	15.50

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Check out the Fylde Bird Club website:

<http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/>

