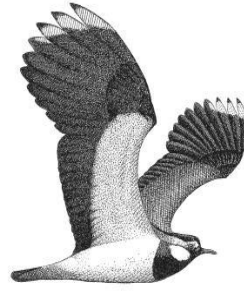




## December Newsletter 2017

Charity Number. 1102961



**Fylde  
Bird Club**  
LANCASHIRE

### Editor

Peter Rhind

Email: rhind1003@btinternet.com

Telephone: (01253) 812495



Welcome to the Christmas Edition. Doesn't time fly? All the best for a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year.

How has 2017 been for you? My memories include watching a flock of Pink Feet early in the year and seeing Barnacle, White Fronts and finally a Red Breasted Goose in the same flock. In May walking down the inlet at Wells in Norfolk, just after sun rise and hearing a Cuckoo calling and then out flew 2 Cuckoos pursued by a Jackdaw. It's hard enough seeing one Cuckoo these days.

And finally my highlight of the year has to be in the September gales. Paul Ellis rang to say that Leach's Petrels were on the move at Knott End. Chris Batty also let me know the same thing so snuggled down by the Bourne Arms pub (outside!!) I joined a small group of birders and watched as 2 Leach's Petrels battled the wind and a hunting Peregrine to finally pass us 20 yards away. Life doesn't get better or does it, someone called out a Sabines Gull was on the way. Finally I saw it and again it passed us 20 yards away. My first Sabines, a brilliant afternoons birding. Thanks Paul and Chris.

Feel free to share your birding experiences with me and the Newsletter.

In this Newsletter Stephen Dunstan writes about the highlights of birding on the Fylde during the last 3 months. Geoff Gradwell has an interesting article on the Willow Tit which seems to have set up home in his garden. I have looked at the swans who grace us with their presence over winter and how to separate the Mute, Whooper and Bewick's.

I share my problems trying to identify Bean Geese.

Jonny Scragg has looked at a 2004 prediction from Chris Batty on new birds on the Fylde, very interesting reading. He also has an item on the Hawfinch "invasion".

**The rules for the 2018 Photographic Competition will come out with the Christmas mail. Please note the new rules and the new format for the competition evening. We hope these will attract more members to the evening. Please share your thoughts with the committee.**

## RECENT SIGHTINGS SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

How you view the quarter under review probably depends on whether you are a glass half full or glass half empty kind of person. Or maybe to some extent it depends on the kind of birding you enjoy and what bird 'watching' means to you. Or whether you can drop everything and go for it when conditions allow. I guess I had better explain.

The glass half full / half empty bit. Maybe I have unrealistic expectations, though if I do I am not alone, in that there is generally an expectation of a couple of national rarities on the Fylde every year. With only December to go all we have is the Red-breasted Goose in January, a gorgeous bird but with a question mark over origin and largely expected after it had been in Norfolk and SW Lancs. Coming at it more positively there was some excellent seawatching early in the period, and a small piece of the action in the wider national Hawfinch irruption.

Now the points about what kind of birding you enjoy and how footloose you are. Being out in foul weather isn't for everyone. But even if it is something you enjoy or can tolerate for the rewards, it can also be the case that the best days are midweek so if you have a job you may struggle to join in the fun whereas waders or geese flocks for example are still available for weekend birders. And with regard to Hawfinches increasingly scarce passerines are being identified from call recordings where the bird isn't seen, or even actually heard at the time by the 'observer'. It's probably more scientific and accurate than a lot of birding, but it's a very different beast...

I don't want to rain on anyone's parade with the above paragraphs, so without any further ado let's go through the autumn's highlights.

### *Hawfinches - A One Off Opportunity?*

If you have been following the national birding season during October and November you will be well aware a remarkable irruption of Hawfinches of Continental origin into Britain. Social media was full of 'booms' and such like as keen patch workers saw birds in unexpected locations. Initially there wasn't much sign of this influx in Lancashire, and even when it did reach Lancashire the Fylde was relatively less favoured. But relatively is the key word here as the numbers were still unprecedented.

Thanks to the recording techniques described above the first was one sound-recorded flying over Knott End in the small hours of 18 October. It seemed inevitable that there would be more, and there were, but it took a lot of hours of effort. Good numbers of birders at Fairhaven on apparently promising days didn't score, but by the end of the month three more had been noted. One flew west over Marton Mere on 24 October, apparently landing to the north. On 27 October one flew south east over Cockersand, whilst another sound recorded bird went over Knott End on 29 October.

Into November one flew out of the Fylde part of Galgate on the 4<sup>th</sup>, having apparently come from cover somewhere nearby. Confirming that birds were using habitat in this area two were seen perched up briefly at Ellel Grange on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and one was photographed here by the same observer on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

So an exceptional half a dozen or so reports to date, but will there be more? It remains to be seen how many of the birds in this irruption linger into the winter in Britain; some birds have already

reached the Canary Islands and Kuwait! At the time of writing none of the Fylde birds have been truly twitchable, so a bird which stays even a couple of hours would be well received.

### *Super Seawatching*

Mid-September in particular produced some excellent seawatching on the Fylde. A second set of big blows from remnants of Atlantic hurricanes and storms produced another wave of seabirds in October. Some of the highlights follow in rough order of rarity.

### *Star Skua*

Perhaps the pick of the bunch was a juvenile Long-tailed Skua south at Starr Gate on 13 September. This is the only one of the four skuas that occur on the Fylde that doesn't get recorded in calm weather spring seawatches, and basically unless your luck is really in you need autumn gales to push inexperienced juveniles close to shore. There are exceptions, an apparently poorly adult spent a couple of days on the marsh off Pilling Lane Ends one autumn and another adult was off Starr Gate more recently but still a few years back. As one lingering on a north east golf course this autumn showed they can surprise, but if you missed this year's bird and still need one for the Fylde you may have to put the hours in.

### *Several Sabs*

Much of the commentary above applied equally to Sabine's Gulls on the Fylde until this year. They were generally difficult needing seawatches in autumn, with very few others but those including birds at Freckleton and St Michaels. This year all that changed with an exceptional series of records of this graceful pelagic gull.

A juvenile south at Starr Gate on 6<sup>th</sup> September before the winds really picked up would in many years have been one of the autumn highlights. On the 11<sup>th</sup> however at least two juveniles were seen at sites from Cockersand down the coast. Similarly on the 13<sup>th</sup> there were at least two juveniles at sites from Knott End to South Pier, and again perhaps more in total. Observers from as far afield as East Lancashire came to enjoy these birds, but those with day jobs were left frustrated.

### *Phalarope trio*

Grey Phalaropes are perhaps a little more reliable in autumn gales than the previous two species, and have lingered on marine lakes in the past, but they remain very scarce visitors to the Fylde. At first it looked like they weren't going to appear in the peak storms, but then it transpired one had been photographed leaving the Wyre estuary at Fleetwood Promenade on the 11<sup>th</sup> without the observer initially realizing. A second individual was seen in the further gales on the 13<sup>th</sup>, this bird landed briefly on the beach at Starr Gate before flying north. Less expected was a first winter briefly on saltmarsh off Knott End on 6<sup>th</sup> October.

### *Loads of Leach's*

The talisman species of a Fylde seawatch autumn didn't disappoint this year. A four day run 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September produced totals including 10 at Knott End on 10<sup>th</sup>, 15 at Knott End and 14 at North Shore on 11<sup>th</sup>, 10 at Starr Gate on 12<sup>th</sup> and 8 at Starr Gate and 7 at Knott End on 13<sup>th</sup>. Occurrences were much more spread out in October; on 4<sup>th</sup> a peak of six were at Starr Gate, on 7<sup>th</sup> just one was noted also at Starr Gate, on 17<sup>th</sup> the peak was three at Fleetwood whilst on 22<sup>nd</sup> just one was seen at Rossall Point. It is easy to forget that Leach's can pass very late into the autumn, and this year proved that point well with one past Knott End in storms on 23 November.

### *Other seabirds*

In context the Manx Shearwater on Preston Dock on 9 September was probably the best of the rest, although it was often sat on the water it did stretch its wings and take to the air on occasion so may have moved on rather than expired. There was a good show of Fulmar by recent standards in the September gales, with several multiple counts. Perhaps ten or so Great Skuas was a good showing, Arctic Skuas peaked at four on 8 September. Completing the skua set two Pomarines were seen from Fleetwood Promenade on 17 October.

### *Fools Gold*

In terms of absolute Fylde rarity terms Golden Pheasant is right up there, and one skulking round the rhododendrons might at least have looked the part. Unfortunately a female in a Thornton garden on 18 October had rather dubious credentials, if Pheasants can ever have good credentials.

### *Passerines Pleasures*

A few other decent passerines were seen during the period in addition to the Hawfinches. Arguably the best of these was the Great Grey Shrike at Preesall Flashes on 2-3 November. A case could be made for this being a returning bird after one was at Pilling last winter, but there is no real way of knowing either way.

Willow Tits continue to cling on in the Preston area, and one was seen for much of the period visiting a garden adjacent to Savick Park. Not that long ago it looked like Marsh and Willow Tit had disappeared from the Fylde so it is heartening we are still getting records of both.

A Green Woodpecker was at Singleton on 26 September. Whilst there doesn't seem to be that much rhyme or reason to where this species turns up in the Fylde the Poulton-Singleton-Todderstaffe area does seem to do better than most for the species.

After early Yellow-browed Warblers at Blackpool North Shore, Broadwater (Fleetwood) and Knott End (sound recorded) in September the floodgates never opened in a poor autumn nationally for eastern passerines and that was that. In scarce warbler terms there was also a Firecrest at Fleetwood in November.

The visible migration highlight was two Crossbills over Fairhaven on 15 October. 'Invisible' migration highlights sound recorded over Knott End not already mentioned included a Lapland Bunting on 25 September, a Ring Ousel on 18 October and a Snow Bunting on 2 November.

More predictable but nevertheless welcome fare comprised a Black Redstart at Knott End in October, with it or another there in November and one at Stanley Park, and Snow Buntings at Knott End and Fleetwood.

### *Waders*

Although we were outshone by birds as close as Longridge (Wilson's Phalarope) and even the other side of the Ribble Estuary (two Long-billed Dowitchers and an American Golden Plover) there were some shorebirds of note. A Wood Sandpiper was at Marton Mere on 25 September, with one recorded over Knott End the following day. Curlew Sandpiper passage peaked at nine juveniles at Cocker's Dyke at the end of September, whilst there were also up to two Little Stints at the same site at the same time.

Only one Purple Sandpiper was noted at the coastal wintering sites, at North Shore in September and November. Given the paucity of records one at Cockersand in November was very notable.

### *Wildfowl*

A juvenile Greenland Whitefront was among Pinkfeet east of Marton Mere on 18 October, whilst an adult Russian White-front was seen with Pinkfeet at Lytham Moss and Todderstaffe Hall. A couple of Dark-bellied Brents were seen at Rossall and Starr Gate respectively, there was symmetry with the only Pale-bellied Brents of the period being singles at Starr Gate and Knott End. The only Velvet Scoter in the period were at Starr Gate on 13 September, 2 October and 6 November.

Unusually four juvenile Scaup lingered at the end of the period in the Stanley Park – Marton Mere area, occasionally joined by a fifth bird. In a poor autumn for the species a Garganey was at Mythop Grange on 1-4 October.

#### *Others*

The lingering Bittern was joined by a second bird towards the end of the period. At least two Great White Egrets ranged on the Ribble Estuary, whilst there was at least one mobile bird between Bank End and Fleetwood Promenade 30th September-10th October. A Black Tern was at Conder Pool on 2 October. A few Marsh Harriers were seen, but the only Hen Harrier was at Carleton on 25 October. At least one Bewick's Swan was with the Whoopers at Cockersand in November, when there was also a Water Pipit on the Wyre Estuary.

#### **Stephen Dunstan**

### **Fylde Next – Revisited**

Back in January 2004 Chris Batty penned an article for the bird club newsletter titled 'Fylde Next', his attempt at predicting ten likely future additions to the Fylde bird list. Of his initial predictions seven have since been sighted in the Fylde:

- **Red-breasted Goose** – A 1<sup>st</sup> winter with Pink-footed Geese at Fluke Hall Lane on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2010 (Bob Danson), and subsequently at various sites in January 2011, became the first accepted Fylde record with a second bird following in January 2017.
- **Ring-necked Duck** – An adult male was found with Tufted Ducks on Thornton ICI Reservoir on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 2009 (Ian Gardner), spending the next 3 winters touring water bodies around the north Fylde till its final sighting back at the ICI Reservoir on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
- **Lesser Scaup** – A male Scaup at Myerscough Quarry on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 2005 was expertly re-identified as the Fylde's first Lesser Scaup on the 16<sup>th</sup> of that month (Chris Batty), staying put till the 10<sup>th</sup> November.
- **Balearic Shearwater** – The first Fylde record flew past Starr Gate on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2010 (Stephen Dunstan), and with a further 2 records following hot on its heels in August and September 2011 it is perhaps a surprise that none have been recorded since.
- **Great White Egret** – It seems remarkable to think that this now almost omnipresent species was first recorded in the Fylde just 10 years ago, at Warton Marsh on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2007 (Nick Patel).
- **Short-toed Lark** – The first for both the Fylde and Lancashire as a whole graced Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April 2011 (Ian Gardner), part of a remarkable run of southern European species in the Fylde that included Iberian Chiffchaff, White Stork and Kentish Plover.

- **Red-rumped Swallow** – The quickest of Chris’s predictions to come to fruition, one was found amongst a gathering of hirundines at Marton Mere on the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2004 (Maurice Jones) during a large influx of the species into the UK.

The three species from the original ten that have so far failed to be found in the Fylde are Dartford Warbler, Marsh Warbler and Black-headed Bunting. Beyond Chris’s predictions there have been several additional ‘firsts’ for the Fylde since the article was published. Some such as Common Rosefinch (2007), Cattle Egret (2008), Alpine Swift (2009) and Semipalmated Sandpiper (2013) were semi-expected to appear locally at some point, whereas both the Great Knot (2004) and Solitary Sandpiper (2011) were completely out of the blue megas.

So looking ahead what new species could local birders realistically (or optimistically) hope to find in the not too distant future? The Fylde list now stands at an impressive 323 species but with three years having elapsed since the last addition, the Buff-bellied Pipit from Cockersand in May 2014, it is getting harder to predict what could be next. Nevertheless I have attempted to repeat Chris’s efforts and below are detailed my personal 10 predictions of future Fylde species. Note the list is in taxonomic order not the likelihood of appearance.

### **Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii*

The Canada Goose complex can cause a bit of a taxonomic headache with at least 12 distinct subspecies now split into two recognised species, Greater Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) and Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*). Whilst most records of Cackling Goose in the UK come from the large Barnacle Goose flocks in western Scotland, the first accepted British record was of an adult with Pink-feet on Plex Moss, Lancashire in November 1976, placing the species well within the realms of possibility for Fylde birders. No particular site stands out as the likeliest to host this species locally; Lytham Moss and the farmland around Pilling draw in the largest flocks of Pink-footed Geese during the winter but any large congregation across the Fylde is always worth a look in.

### **Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana*

No longer the mega rarity it was 20 years ago, Black Scoters are now recorded almost annually in the British Isles, not least due to the presence of at least one returning drake off the Northumberland and Aberdeenshire coasts. The popular wintering drake off of North Wales between 1999 and 2006 proved that this species can reach the Irish Sea, with Lancashire claiming its first record in the most bizarre circumstances back in 2007 when an adult drake was found exhausted on the railway line near Leighton Moss! With thousands of Common Scoter wintering off the Fylde coast it is entirely plausible that this American species could be out there amongst them. Starr Gate seems the obvious choice for the first Fylde record, although a day when the Scoter flocks are closer to shore is essential.

### **Wilson's Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*

Wilson’s Petrel can present a tricky little identification challenge but it is certainly within the ability of the experienced Fylde seawatchers out there. The species is a sporadic visitor to British waters in the late summer months; some years draw almost a complete blank whilst others such as 2017 see double figure counts off the

Scillies and smaller numbers reported from the Cornish headlands. A similar influx year back in 2009 produced the sole Lancashire record, a bird observed in the River Mersey mouth from Seaforth on the 5<sup>th</sup> September amongst a good passage of other scarce seabirds – Sabine’s Gulls, Long-tailed Skua, Leach’s Petrels and the like. It would be during one of these late summer/early autumn blows that I would expect our first to occur, with perhaps the extra height afforded by the Rossall watch-tower providing ID-clinching views.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

A relatively abundant species on the continent, the breeding population in France for example is estimated to be around 25000 pairs. Over-shooting migrant Black Kites frequently appear in the British Isles in the spring and summer months, with several Lancashire records including two separate individuals in the north of the county in May 2008. However this species rarely lingers on the deck, with fly-overs unsupported by photographic evidence representing the majority of reported sightings, causing a headache for committees when assessing records. The first Fylde record could in theory occur almost anywhere, though a photographed individual would be very welcome.

**Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*

One of the most spectacular species on the British list, the number of Pallid Harriers reaching Western Europe has increased markedly in recent years, with the first breeding record for the region occurring in the summer of 2017 when a pair successfully fledged four chicks in Groningen, The Netherlands. Closer to home the stunning male that set up territory in the Forest of Bowland earlier this year delighted hundreds of viewers, that bird following hot on the heels of a juvenile that passed through Brockholes on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2016, the first for Lancashire. Despite these two spring records I would bank on a late-autumn juvenile to become the first Fylde record, with the Ribble marshes around Warton Bank and Lytham Quays holding the most suitable habitat.

*Both Pallid Harrier and Spotted Sandpiper have turned up just outside the Fylde at Brockholes Quarry in the past 6 years (photos by finder Bill Aspin)*



### **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*

A regularly occurring vagrant from America with a propensity to turn up on reservoirs and other freshwater bodies, Lancashire has a good track record of inland Spotted Sandpipers - the last being a delightfully spotty summer-plumaged bird at Brockholes in May 2011. The Fylde however is not graced with a multitude of inland water bodies and for that reason I think our first record is likely to come in a more estuarine setting. The River Wyre may attract good numbers of the similar Common Sandpiper in late summer but I think the rockier shoreline of the Lune estuary between Cockersand and Conder might be more suited to a Spotted, perhaps a bird in winter plumage to test the ID skills of the lucky finder.

### **Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

A sprightly Phylloscopus warbler from the east, albeit one that breeds much further west than the more regularly encountered Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers. This species most commonly arrives on the east coast of the UK in August and September, although this was not the case for the last Lancashire record which involved a singing male on a golf course near Bolton in June 2013. I would predict that a Fylde bird would follow the pattern of its Yellow-browed cousins and be found somewhere sheltered along the coast in the early autumn, perhaps in the bushes surrounding Fairhaven Lake cf. the 2003 Dusky Warbler.

### **Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*

The only British breeder (if irregularly) on my list of predictions; like Chis I feel this species must turn up in the Fylde at some point due to the regularity of records on the east coast. A late autumn migrant presents a tricky identification challenge, especially when not caught and ringed, so I think the more realistic option for a Fylde record is a singing male in the early summer months. Unlike Reed Warblers this species does not require extensive reed beds for breeding, preferring wet scrubby habitat closer to that favoured by Sedge Warbler, thus I think the habitat around Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park holds the most promise locally.

### **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*

There can only really be one choice of location when trying to predict the occurrence of this species in the Fylde, the reed beds of Marton Mere. On a still winters day it is easy to picture one pulling the reed-mace out of bulrush heads in their characteristic fashion. Unsurprisingly both of the Lancashire records come from Leighton Moss, in the winters of 2004 and 2011/12, and it is certainly in the winter months that I would predict our first to turn up, perhaps not just one but two together as they are regularly found in pairs in the UK.

### **Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus*

Finally a species that in the past held an almost mythical status within the UK birding scene, Red-flanked Bluetail is now an annual autumn staple in the northern isles and to a lesser extent on the east coast too. In recent years an average of 10-15 individuals have been recorded each autumn (although 2010 saw a particularly large influx with over 30 recorded across the country); the sole north-west record came in 2011 when a 1<sup>st</sup> winter was found on Hilbre Island off the Wirral on the 16<sup>th</sup> October. A dream find for any Fylde birder, I think the pockets of woodland along



the northern coast such as around Pilling Lane Ends and Fluke Hall may be where our first is located.

There are of course many species not included in this article that have vagrancy potential to the Fylde; extralimital records of British breeders such as Woodlark and Dartford Warbler, scarce autumn visitors more commonly found on the east coast like Radde's and Hume's Warblers, or seabird possibilities including Great Shearwater and King Eider. Many of you will disagree with the above and will have your own thoughts, predictions and dream finds; I am sure there will be many birding surprises unearthed within the Fylde in the next few years.

**Jonny Scragg**

## **UK Hawfinch invasion and the resulting Fylde records**

This autumn has witnessed an unprecedented influx of continental Hawfinches into the UK as part of a wider movement of the species through southern Europe. There have been several speculative reasons put forward to explain the origin of this sudden mass eruptive behaviour, most of which focus on widespread crop failures of the Hawfinch's favoured beech mast and other food trees across central Europe, causing the birds to move south and west in search of better feeding opportunities.

The first pulse of sightings in the UK began in early October, consisting of large numbers of Hawfinches being observed over inland visible migration spots across the southern half of England; one site in Buckinghamshire for example recorded 115 birds flying over in a single day! Latterly into November the birds appear to be settling and joining together in feeding flocks which has created some massive groups of over 50 individuals around hornbeam stands in the home counties.



*A map of Hawfinch sightings from Rare Bird Alert 8<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> November, illustrating the large concentration of records in the southern counties of England, contrasting with the relative sparseness of sightings up the east coast.*

Thankfully this nationwide influx hasn't just been confined to southern England; the north-west has also received its fair share of Hawfinch visitors. Like those further south the largest numbers were recorded over the inland vis-mig site of Winter Hill on the Lancashire/Greater Manchester border, where 37 heading north on the 30<sup>th</sup> October was the highest count.

Unfortunately for most locals the Fylde has so far missed out on the majority of birds in this influx; however at the time of writing there have been 7 reports of Hawfinches to the Fylde Bird Club website:

18th October	Knott End	1	Sound recorded overhead at 01:28	Chris Batty
24th October	Marton Mere	1	Flew west over north scrub at 11:30	Jonny Scragg and Len Blacow
27th October	Cockersand	1	Flew east up Lune Estuary	Dan Haywood
29th October	Knott End	1	Sound recorded overhead at 08:13	Chris Batty
4th November	Galgate	1	Flew NNW over Salford Road at 09:50	Stuart Piner
11th November	Ellel Grange	2	In yew and pine trees by car park	Chris Batty
15th November	Ellel Grange	1	In tall trees by canal bridge	Chris Batty

*The only Fylde record in this influx so far to be photographed - Ellel Grange, 15<sup>th</sup> November (Chris Batty)*



It is interesting to note that despite many observers putting in countless hours of vis-mig at Fairhaven throughout the autumn there were no Hawfinches recorded overhead there, reflecting the wider trend of inland sites holding the best chances of connecting with this species in the Fylde. There is also potential optimism to be gleaned from the fact that both of

the latest sightings have involved feeding birds at Ellel Grange, hopefully indicating that birds are hanging around in the general area and may do so into the winter. Any site with trees still in seed is worth checking in the coming weeks as birds continue to move around in search of feeding; my personal suggestions would include Myerscough College, Thurnham Hall, Lytham Crematorium and green spaces around Preston such as Haslam and Avenham Parks. With luck all will manage to see this charismatic species within the Fylde soon.

***Jonny Scragg***

## **Willow Tit**

### **Savick Park**

This is the name given by Preston City Council Planning in their documents to the area north and south of the Ribble Link in Preston. The Ribble Link is a 'canalisation' of the Savick Brook that rises on Longridge Fell and runs down through Preston and into the River Ribble, west of Preston. It is the site of an ancient flood plain. The Ribble Link, 'owned' by a minority (boating) group (led by PCC Cllr Ken Hudson) has led to neglect of the surrounding areas – there have been some detrimental effects, local flooding, bank erosion (Kingfisher nest sites) but also in time this neglect appears to have been beneficial to wildlife, with overgrowth unintentionally creating undisturbed habitats and lack of human disturbance. There are neglected remnants of the Savick Brook that act as overflows to the Ribble Link. These areas are neglected but create undisturbed habitat including many Willow Trees along the bankside.

I moved to the area and live adjacent to the park because of the wildlife on my doorstep. I have been feeding birds in the garden for many years. Recently the garden has been re-designed for the birds (as opposed to family requirements) with plenty of hedging, mixed and overgrown vegetation (and neglect!) to provide the necessary cover.

Around 2007 a pair of bullfinch appeared, unusual for the Fylde. These birds bred in the park and over the years number have increased and several broods have been raised – in 2014 I identified 19 bullfinch on 01 October (via hundreds of photographs on the one day and subsequent comparison of plumage -see FBC Flickr site <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fyldebirdclub/>). Nowadays the average garden count is around 8. The bullfinch tend to squabble and fight over one feeding point, so this has grown to at least five dedicated bullfinch feeders (to prevent squabbling) and then there are another six feeding points of various kinds for all the other garden birds that visit (including the occasional Sparrowhawk)... and on 24 November 2017 included two Ringed-necked Parakeets!

### **Willow Tit or Marsh Tit**

As a consequence of location and numerous feeding points, there are normally at least half a dozen tits, Blue, Great and Coal in the garden. Then, at certain times of the day, Long-tailed Tits will appear and the numbers increase of all the species... perhaps as many as 25 or more tits diving onto feeders before dashing off into the undergrowth; they have been and gone in less time than you reading these 12 words... keeping track of them

is nigh on impossible. One simply has to focus on one bird at a time, while scanning the overall action.

It was this very scenario, hordes of tits on feeders and flitting as they do, that I was sure I saw an 'odd looking coal tit' but the light wasn't good (hasn't been since May!), I wasn't paying attention, busy elsewhere and didn't think too much of it. Then on Sunday, stood at the kitchen sink I looked out and saw the flash of this 'odd coal tit' again, but again a fleeting glimpse. By Monday having slept, it had finally sunk in that my ageing eyes were probably not deceiving me and that this was probably something 'unusual'... and I had my own ideas of what it might be – but in the garden? So having the day to myself (for a change) I sat myself down with the camera and sat for three hours looking out of the back window. BANG in and out like a flash – the 'odd looking coal tit', I hadn't been mistaken. And then it appeared again, but in and out like a flash, hardly time to focus the camera. Eventually my patience was rewarded and I was hard pressed to realise, or at least think, I had a Willow or Marsh Tit visiting the garden! The three hours were spent, trying to get an image, photographed through double glazing (I wanted no risk of spooking the bird) that could positively id the bird without doubt. The ISO was very high and speeds too low, everything was out of focus and grainy. Fortunately the bird kept returning. Eventually I managed a sufficiently reasonable record image that would positively id the bird to everyone's satisfaction. The bird was clearly coming from the park and collecting food before dashing back to the park and Savick Brook about 50mtrs away. The Willow Tit had been seen in the Willow Trees by the brook in the park near the wooden bridge.

I was well aware that Marsh Tit and Willow Tit are difficult to separate and identify. A 'google search' soon confirmed my initial thoughts. Diagnostics are not easy. Before I went any further and declared the identification, I considered the habitat – the area of 'scrub' around the remnants of the Savick Brook which certainly contained plenty of Willow Trees, Alder and Birch... but there is also plenty of mixed wooded areas, enough for Marsh Tit? I wasn't convinced. It is more than 'damp' in places. So habitat wasn't conclusive and could suit either species although I favoured Willow Tit over Marsh Tit, just not enough woodland for a Marsh Tit for me.

Once I had a reasonable 'record shot/photograph' I tried to identify any diagnostics... which seem inconclusive, both species having similar features. Marsh Tit have a 'white spot' close to the head on the upper bill. Marsh Tit cheeks while 'white' are less extensive than the Willow Tit, on a Marsh Tit they end at the ear coverts while on a Willow Tit they extend far back almost to the end of the black cap. A 'white' or pale panel on the closed wing of the Willow Tit is created by the pale edges on the tertials and inner secondaries. Apparently Marsh Tits call with an explosive 'sneeze', 'pichou' while the Willow Tit is more 'chick-a-dee'; not a lot of help to me as I had not heard it call. (Paul Slade heard it calling on a visit and this led him to the bird – a Willow Tit).

I was relatively convinced I had a Willow Tit but my lack of experience ensured I was still doubtful and was hoping for third party confirmation. In the end, I am indebted and grateful to Chris Batty who put me in direct touch with Dr Richard Broughton, to whom I am even also grateful and indebted, author of the *Separation of Willow Tit and Marsh Tit in Britain: A review*; I sent him photographic reference;

*"On such a good shot, a Marsh Tit would be expected to show a white mark at the base of the upper mandible, which is lacking here. Also, note the clean whitish cheek all the way from the bill to the shoulder/wing. On a Marsh Tit, there would be a change from clean white face to a grey/brown wash on the side of the neck, behind the ear covert, which would blend into the back/shoulder. So, all in all, a pretty classic Willow Tit head! No need to even see the wing or tail (which would give other supporting clues) as the bill & cheek together are fairly cast iron." – Dr Richard Broughton*



The Willow Tit continued to visit my garden from the park periodically (until the end of October). There are more Coal Tits than usual this year, a last four if not more and they are not only aggressive towards each other but also to the Willow Tit. I did wonder if the Coal Tits aggression and dominance impacted on the Willow Tit in the wild. I have spent hours waiting and taking photographs, the light has been appallingly poor, often ISO 3200 and

have hundreds (if not thousands) of record shots, most poor quality and 'grainy'... but just to cheer you up, on 25 October, I was stood by the open kitchen window and it came and landed four feet away, looked at me (and I at it) before flying off again. Magical moment.

Unfortunately since penning the draft of this piece, the Willow Tit has not been seen for sometime... it appears to have moved on. A sparrowhawk has been regularly attending the garden and I do wonder if this has 'spooked' the Willow Tit.

**Geoff Gradwell**

## Confusion Species

### Mute, Whooper and Bewick Swans

#### Mute Swan



The most familiar and archytype swan known to all, birders and non-birders alike.

It is one of the largest flying birds in the world weighing in at up to 17kgs. Flight is a balance between weight and the power needed to enable flight to take place. In fact the Mute or "Tame" Swan needs a take off runway of around 50yds and can really struggle in a more confined space.

Although it is The Mute Swan, and in flight the only sound is usually the heavy *whump* of its wings, the bird is far from quiet on the ground. When disturbed or threatened it will hiss loudly and angrily and raise its wings in an arch creating an even more impressive picture. Whilst this is the classic picture of grace the position is actually a threat known as “busking”. The swans also communicate with each other through a series of sneeze like snuffles.

Adults are pure white with orange bills and a large black knob on top creating a very distinctive outline. It normally swims with its neck arched in a graceful S shape and the tail conspicuously longer than the wings. In winter they can be found on land grazing the fields where their waddling gait will again separate them from the walking Whoopers. Juvenile Mutes are grey birds or “ugly ducklings” and do not turn into beautiful Swans till the second year. Even without the Knob on the bill the head shape is still distinctively different from the Whoopers and Bewick’s.

Mating for life and normally loyal to their partner and the royal claim to ownership of all swans are part of the mystique surrounding these birds. They were much prized as food and an expensive addition to any table in the middle ages, 20 lbs of meat from one bird may have been one of the attractions!!

Pub names are testament to the popularity and esteem the Mute Swan is held in.

### **Whooper Swan**

This is one of the two wild swans who migrate here from the northern wilderness to spend the winter here in the balmy warmth of the Fylde. Their arrival is one of the sounds and sights of winter and wild lonely places. Whilst the Mute Swan is largely silent in the air with heavy thumping wing beats the Whooper has silent wing beats and constant haunting bugling calls. A flying Whooper is relatively easy to separate from the Mute.

On the ground where Whoopers are usually found in feeding herds the very distinctive head is obvious. The Whoopers beak is black and buttercup yellow. The yellow extends down the bill to a point leaving a black tip. The lines are clean with no lumps and bumps and a characteristic wedge shape sometimes described as a roman nose. Whoopers waddle along with the head upright on a straight neck a little like a periscope. The eye on the Whooper is isolated from the bill colour and so gives an open friendly appearance. Even when upended feeding they are different, Mute long tailed, Whooper short tailed barely



beyond the wing tips.

Most of the British Whoopers are from Iceland and they make the 700 mile trip in one go. In exceptional weather they have been tracked flying at over 8000 metres, a height at which they have to handle the thin air and temperatures below 50 degrees C. Quite amazing. However they normally migrate nearer sea level.

Along with many other birds the hunting community see Whoopers as legitimate targets. They were protected for a long time by the belief that Swans were close to the angels and to kill one would bring bad luck. Unfortunately this belief has been abandoned as not true!!!

### **Bewick's Swan**



The Bewick's is the third of the swans seen on the Fylde and the one more difficult to separate from the Whooper. They are much more uncommon, Whoopers counts are regularly over 300 whereas Bewicks rarely number more than 20.

They are best separated by size. The Bewick's is lighter and has a wing span and body length 20% smaller than the Whooper. It has a shorter thicker neck and so the general appearance can be closer to a goose than a swan. The final

clinch is the bill. The Whoopers yellow extends to a point, the Bewick's extends to a blunt curve meaning the bill is mainly black with a butter pat of yellow.

Famously Sir Peter Scott studied the distribution of the colours on the bills of Bewick's Swans and found that they showed subtle differences enabling him to identify individual swans as they returned year after year to Slimbridge. There has been no extensive research yet to see if the same claim can be made in identifying individual Whooper swans. Swans are very loyal partners and will bond for life though of course there are always exceptions.

The bugling call of a Bewick's Swan is lighter than the Whoopers, the shorter neck produces a higher note. Interestingly when a Whooper Swan dies its last breath is supposed to give out a long flute like sound. "A Swan Song".

Folk lore sees swans as forecasting cold weather but are never the less seen as bringers of good luck and the presence of them over winter is a familiar part of the passage of the seasons.

***Peter Rhind***

### **The Bean Goose**

This is an unusual but annual visitor to the Fylde. I must be honest, it is a bird I struggle to identify in the field. Confronted by a field of Pink Footed Geese I have cast a cursory glance through the flock with my scope and then muttering "Life's too short" I have passed on to something easier. Not the behaviour of good birder so this year I am going to change.

Having talked to some of the Fylde's finest I have a checklist of what to look for. First of all you need to be able to see the legs. Scan the flock I am told and look for bright orange legs, that should eliminate all the Pink Feet (except for the occasional Pink Feet with orange legs!) Remember that Greenland Whitefronts also have orange legs but they have

white face shields and black markings on the belly (except for juvenile Whitefronts with no white shield or black belly lines! ) It doesn't seem to get any easier but I must persevere.

Next look at the bill. Pink Feet have a black bill with a pink band of varying sizes. The bill is small and dainty. Bean geese have black and orange bills and the bill is a strong wedge shape. They have been described as "fat faced" with a lumpy black bill base. Again the amount of orange varies.

Finally the overall colouring. Bean Geese are earthy with rich dark brown upperparts,



flanks, underwings, neck and head. The chest is pale brown. The Pink-Footed goose has upperparts that have a blue/grey tinge. Two more subtle field markings are the light edged tertials of the Bean Goose visible from distance, and the terminal white band on the tail which is much broader on the Pink-Footed than the narrow band on a Bean Goose.

So if I see amongst the flock of Pink-Footed

***Photo of Bean Geese and Pink-Footed Goose – Paul Slade***

Geese a goose with orange legs, an orange and black wedge shaped bill, dark brown plumage, a very narrow terminal band on the tail then I will start to get excited.

The main problems are patience, having good light, short grass and geese with clean! legs. Sounds easy.

I am not even attempting to separate Tundra and Taiga yet. Tundra Geese are from Siberia and are smaller whilst Taiga Geese are larger and longer necked. I would need them side by side to compare, a very unlikely event.

Wish me luck.

***Peter Rhind***

**Attached is a letter from Mark Farrer which should be of interest to all**

Please could you flag, share, support and give this petition some publicity on social media from Fylde Bird Club.

Members have expressed interest in signing the petition.

Please could you email members and urge them to sign.

The aim is to get 10,000 signatures then I can submit the petition to DEFRA.

I was hoping the petition would gain 10,000 signatures by the new year before next years breeding season.



Click on the link below  
petition link direct Care2 website

<https://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/takeaction/880/711/119/>

Petition link on twitter!

[https://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/880/711/119/wildlife-and-countryside-act-2017/?taf\\_id=42533032&cid=twitter](https://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/880/711/119/wildlife-and-countryside-act-2017/?taf_id=42533032&cid=twitter)

Petition Facebook link

[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1789025354450383&id=100000288085340](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1789025354450383&id=100000288085340)

I am hoping the RSPB will come on board and together look at getting the Laws added to the Hen Harrier Action Plan from next year.

What I would like is if a satellite tagged gps Hen Harrier disappears over a grouse moor estate. DEFRA Natural England and RSPB to volunteer information of the location of the disappearance so then the state owner can be charged prosecuted and have the license for grouse shooting taken off them anything from 3-5 years.

If we can get these Laws in England and Wales and have them added to the Hen Harrier Action Plan 2018 together with revising the WCA 1984 then I think it will be a solid foundation in which to build on towards stamping out persecution of raptors in the UK.

This is a different petition to Mark Avery's.

If you know of any other local groups with members and supporters that would also be interested in signing then I would be very grateful.

I am not doing this for any financial gain, only for the love of birds and raptors.

I want to see a stop to this ongoing never ending persecution of raptors in the UK.

It's appalling!

I keep the faith! Best regards

Mark Farrar

The World Wildlife Trust, Monitoring Unit are carrying out research as follows. If you would like to be involved please follow the links attached.

## **Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP)**

### **Can you help?**

#### **Help needed with age assessments**

We're looking for help aging Dark-bellied Brent Geese and Whooper Swans.

The GSMP network does a great job covering many of the key areas, but inevitably, gaps in coverage appear from time to time. Therefore, in order for this important work to continue, we would like to expand the counter network. In particular we are looking for help monitoring Dark-bellied Brent Geese at estuaries in southern and eastern England and Whooper Swans in Scotland and northern England.

If you're interested in taking part please [contact us](#).

Find out more about [age assessments](#).