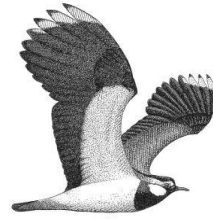


December Newsletter 2018

Charity Number. 1102961



**Fylde
Bird Club**
LANCASHIRE

Editor

Peter Rhind

Email: rhind1003@btinternet.com

Telephone: (01253) 812495

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and good birding for 2019



The year of 2018 draws to a close. What an amazing September though, all those wonderful birds whilst I was on the east coast watching a Yellow Wagtail !! Hope most people caught up with what this quarter had to offer.

Geese, Swans, Waders and Curlew are the in the sky and on the beach as winter closes in. I personally love a clear winters day, blue skies and the peacefulness of the sea wall and the sounds of the birds broken by the

mayhem as a Peregrine or Merlin passes over.

In this Newsletter Chris Batty outlines the Saga of the Semipalmated Sandpiper found originally by Frank Bird.

Ian Hartley writes about the juvenile Pallid Harrier that spent two days at Cockersand.

All further and exciting bird sightings are covered by Stephen Dunstan.

I will try to separate the three Diver species for those who, like me, still see distant birds and think now which one is that? I hope I don't add to the confusion.

Ric Holmes has written an update on work at Marton Mere.

We have an article from Maurice Jones entitled "My Patch", writing about his long relationship with Marton Mere. This is reproduced with the kind permission of "British Birds". If anyone would like to submit articles on their patch, I would be delighted.

If I can repeat a request to ask all members not to use the Sightings Page to report on the presence of hares on the Fylde or on the position of Peregrine roosts and nests. Not everyone respects these species as they should. These records should be e mailed to news@fyldebirdclub.org.

Editor – FBC Newsletter

I am standing down as Editor of the Newsletter after the December issue. I have loved doing it and found it very rewarding but we do now need a new Editor.

Job description. You will need to collect items for inclusion in the newsletter, which comes out in March, June, September and December. Some items are included on a regular basis such as sightings and Marton Mere news. For the regular items we already have a commitment from certain members who write these sections of the newsletter so all you would need to do is ensure they reach you in time. For other items, attendance at meetings is required to ask people if they would like to contribute. It is amazing how a personal contact helps. There are a number of items that may be interesting e.g. birding holidays and places visited etc.

You will also need to pick out 'Birds of the Month' and ask the finders to write an article.

You will need to be computer literate and able to use a word processing programme (e.g. WORD). Microsoft WORD is preferable to ensure that other members of the committee are able to add additional items of news. I have learnt on the job and, as many will testify, my skills leave much to be desired but I manage.

We do need a new editor. If anyone is interested or would like to find out more please ring or e-mail me or better still grab me at a meeting. I will help in any way I can.

Peter Rhind e-mail rhind1003@btinternet.com

Phone 01253812495 mob 07985167465

Recent Photographs

There seem to be fewer members' photographs on the Recent Photographs page and I am wondering if access to the page is confusing. I must admit I found it tricky at first so here is a guide to try and make it clearer!!

On the Bird Club's Website: Click on to **Galleries** then **Recent Photographs**:

www.flickr.com/photos/fyldebirdclub/

Log in as: **news@fyldebirdclub** with Password: **FBClapwing**

Click on the **upload icon** (looks like a cloud, to the right of the search box at the top of the screen)

Click on '**Choose photos and videos to upload**'

Navigate to the photos you wish to upload and rename using the format: species, location (e.g. Robin, Marton Mere). In the description field, type your name and the date taken and any other relevant information about the bird and sighting.

Then click on the **Upload** icon, top right.

Sounds complicated but trust me it does get easier as you get used to it.

RECENT SIGHTINGS SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER

A recurring theme in these articles since I took over writing them has been one of the Fylde not 'punching its weight' in Lancashire terms for rare and scarce birds. The period under review was thankfully one where that was turned on its head, and we had several excellent birds and an in depth supporting cast. Including possibles / probables the period was arguably the best ever in Fylde birding. But care needs to be exercised in this regard; two of the confirmed highlights were originally incorrectly identified but fortunately this was sorted before they departed.

Pallid Performs

Probably the highlight among a number of standout birds in the quarter was a first year Pallid Harrier at Cockersands on 16th to 18th September. An article appears elsewhere in the newsletter so discussion in this piece will be restricted, but suffice to say Ian Hartley's excellent find was enjoyed by good numbers of birders from the Fylde and further afield as it showed very well.

Most readers are probably well aware that this is the first record for the Fylde, and only the third confirmed for Lancashire though there have been several other claims. For anybody who missed this bird or wants to find their own though there are grounds for optimism, all three records in the county have been in the last three years and the national trend is definitely upwards.

Semi-p's Skippool Stint

Normally a Semipalmated Sandpiper would be a stonewall best bird in a Fylde quarterly review, but most people would probably suggest not on this occasion. A juvenile (?) was present at Skippool from 6th to 18th September and was widely appreciated. As with the Pallid Harrier there are further details elsewhere in the newsletter.

Also as with the Pallid Harrier this is the third Lancashire record, following birds at Brockholes Quarry and in the Fylde at Preesall Sands. Chris Batty has had a remarkable trio of involvement in these records, identifying the first from photographs, finding the second and basically identifying the third from photographs. A clear message here is that wherever possible it is worth getting images of any stint in autumn.

Vismig Vagrants

Chris Batty has been the most active participant locally in recording diurnal and nocturnal migrants, and obtained a remarkable return during the period from recording at his house in Knott End. Two Fylde firsts were sound recorded, highlighting just how much is presumably going undetected every spring and autumn. Chris was at home when both birds passed overhead but unfortunately didn't hear them and only picked them up when subsequently reviewing his recordings.

First up was a Red-throated Pipit speezing on 12th October. Just over a week later on 20th October the distinctive fluty calls of a Woodlark were noted as it went south. Although there are previous records of both species in Lancashire they are both very much vagrants in north west England and grounded records of either species would guarantee a popular twitch.

Tern Up at Marton Mere

When two juvenile Black Terns were seen at Marton Mere on 13th September it was a decent local record, but things began to get really interesting when observers realised one looked different. It transpired that it was a White-winged Black Tern, fortunately although the genuine Black Tern left the rarer bird remained until the 23rd giving most would be admirers chance to catch up with it.

The Fylde never seems to do as well for records of WWBTs at Leighton Moss to the north and Marshside and Martin Mere to the south, and it is several years since the last one at Glasson. This

was therefore a welcome Fylde tick for many newer birders and it could be a while before the next one.

Completing the Black Tern picture other singles passed Starr Gate on 13 and 19 September.

Fabulous Phalarope

It's usually one extreme or the other with Grey Phalaropes locally, either a brief and often distant bird passing on a seawatch or close range views of an exhausted or recuperating individual after storms. Fortunately this year's sole record was in the latter category, with a juvenile lingering at the front of Newton Marsh from 22nd to 26th September.

Migrating Marsh Tit

Probably the pick of the bunch of passerines which were actually seen by birders was a Marsh Tit at Fairhaven Dunes on 18 October, grounded but clearly on migration. This is a county description bird in Lancashire away from its remaining stronghold in Lancs and a rare bird these days in the Fylde.

Discussion of this species has featured in this column before, but in essence for any new members the species used to breed at Ellel in the north of the recording area but is now a rare vagrant into the recording area. Records have been most frequent on the north Ribble, but the reasons for this are unclear unless a relict population is being overlooked.

Intriguing Shearwater and Scoter

A probable Barolo Little Shearwater first reported off Heysham on 20th September was then noted at Rossall Point an hour later. Unfortunately no photographs were obtained and it is unlikely that the record will be firmed up to species. There are no previous accepted records for the Fylde, or indeed Lancashire.

In a similar vein a drake showing characteristics of Black Scoter was in the flock off Staff Gate on 5th October and possibly previously, but unfortunately was not seen again. Whilst seen well Black Scoter males are distinctive aberrant Common Scoter can still be an issue, as a bird at Morfa Bychan in North Wales showed a few years back. Hopefully the Blackpool bird will reappear at some point in the winter enabling images to be obtained. If confirmed it would be just the second for Lancashire following a moribund bird found on railway tracks at Silverdale.

Storm Seabirds

In addition to those already mentioned above this was headlined by Leach's Petrels on five dates in September, with peak counts of four on the 13th and six on the 14th at Starr Gate. In the same period a Great Northern Diver was off Knott End on the 13th whilst up to six Kittiwakes were recorded off Starr Gate and more unusually one was at Fluke Hall on the 16th.

All Arctic Skuas were seen during the September gales, a total of four singles. By contrast there was only one Great Skua at that time, but there were five widely scattered records in October.

Wesham Cattle Egret

We are in a strange phase with this species locally. There are generally some hanging round somewhere in the north west, but they are still quite a rare bird this far up the country. So you could see what just about anywhere at any time but they remain a good find. This is reflected in just one bird being seen in the period, at Wesham Marsh on 14 November.

Low Key Start To Goose Season

There were as usual good numbers of Pinkfeet in the area, both Over Wyre and at Fleetwood and at other sites to the south particularly Lytham Moss. In terms of waifs among them it was generally rather slim pickings but there was nevertheless some value to be had.

Pick of the bunch was probably the adult Greenland Whitefront, assuming just one bird was involved, at England Hill on 10 November and Lytham Moss on several dates that month. No Brents were seen in the goose flocks but two Pale-bellieds went north at Starr Gate on 5 October.

Likely wild Barnacle Goose were seen with Pinkfeet Over Wyre in all months under review including two early birds at Pilling Marsh on 23 and 28 September, whilst up to two were seen on several dates at Lytham Moss in the November.

Typical Yellow-browed Showing

Whilst we were spoilt in 2016 the total of four Yellow-browed Warblers in October was probably in line with what we should normally expect. The records occurred in a concentrated period in the middle of the month – at Warbreck Hall on 12th, Fleetwood on 13th, Fluke Hall on 14th and Lytham St Annes NR on 15th.

Unseasonal Garganey

An eclipse male Garganey was at Myerscough Quarry on 8-9 September, followed by records at Marton Mere on 22 October and Herons Reach Golf Course on the 27th. So far so relatively normal until one appeared at the atypical site of Stanley Park on 26 November. Perhaps it had been lurking somewhere in the park / Mere area since the month before.

Other Raptors / Owls

Continuing a proud tradition of untwitchable Red Kites in the recording area one flew over Glasson on 7 October. For an annual species the number which have lingered is remarkably low.

Marsh Harriers were widely distributed during post-breeding dispersal. The peak counts were on the Ribble, particularly at Warton Bank where up to five were seen in October. Hen Harriers were more evident than in most other recent autumns, a male and a ringtail were seen regularly on the North Ribble marshes whilst at least one ringtail was seen at several Over Wyre sites.

There was a scattering of reports of Short-eared Owls, all relating to single birds with sightings at Marton Mere, Pilling Marsh, Starr Hills and on several dates at Warton Marsh.

Other Passerines

A couple of Whinchats were at both Fairhaven Dunes and Lower Ballam on 4 September. A Spotted Flycatcher and a Garden Warbler were both at Staining Nook on 6 October. Crossbills were noted at both Naze Point and Fairhaven on 7 October, and also at the latter on 10th and 28th of the month.

A strong showing of Yellow Wagtails in early September brought two birds to each of four sites at either end of the recording area. From the same family a Water Pipit was on Warton Marsh in November. The Twite flock in the Knott End area reached circa 80 birds on occasions with splinter flocks occasionally elsewhere near the Wyre mouth.

Other Waders

There were just three or four juvenile Curlew Sandpipers seen during the autumn – one at Ramper Pot / Skippool for much of September was joined by a second on the 10th and there were others at

Cocker's Dyke on the 10th and Glasson on the 25th. It was perhaps not that surprising that there were no Little Stints in the period, once it was confirmed that the bird at Skippool was actually a Semi-p.

Wood Sandpipers were seen at Newton Marsh on 8 September and Myerscough Quarry the following day. Only single Purple Sandpipers were seen at Rossall and Blackpool North Shore in November, hopefully others are going to arrive later to winter as there are normally four or five individuals.

Best Of The Rest

At least one Yellow-legged Gull was seen in September, with adults in the roosts at Cocker's Dyke and Skippool on several dates but not definitely the same date. A Hooded Crow was photographed at Stanah on 18 November by visiting birders. Most records are on spring passage, usually from the Fleetwood area.

Up to two Bitterns were seen regularly at Marton Mere. On the theme or regular scarce wintering birds up to four Bewick's Swans were at Thurnham in November.

Great White Egrets were noted at Marton Mere on 1 September and The Heads on the 17th of that month, all other records came from the stronghold of the Ribble Marshes with a peak count of five on 22 October.

Up to five Ring-necked Parakeets were in the Stanley Park / Marton Mere area as the species consolidates in the area. On the exotica theme the only Mandarin reported was at Preesall Flashes on 29 September.

Stephen Dunstan

A Semipalmated Sandpiper on the Wyre Estuary



British Birds Rarities Committee

Rarity Form

Email to: secretary@bbrc.org.uk

This form has been designed to be used electronically. Your submission will be processed far more quickly and accurately if it is typed rather than handwritten.

To move to the next field simply press 'Tab' then 'End' and start typing.

Note: If attaching images please send them as separate files and not within this Word document.

Species: Semipalmated Sandpiper <i>Calidris pusilla</i>	
Date first seen: 06/09/2018	Date last seen: 18/09/2018
No. of Birds: 1	Age/Sex: 1CY juvenile
County: Lancashire	Location: Skippool Creek, Wyre Estuary

Please fill in your email address to ensure that you get an acknowledgement	
Finder: Frank Bird	Email: frank@fbird.plus.com
Identifier (<i>if different</i>): Chris G Batty	Email: chrisbatty400@hotmail.com
Submitter (<i>if different</i>):	Email:
Other observers: Christopher J Piner and many others	
Suggested credits 'C. G. Batty, F. Bird, C. J. Piner et al'	
Any who disagrees with identification?	
Optical aids: telescopes	
Distance from bird: various but never very close	
Have you enclosed photographs? Yes	Was the bird videoed? Yes
If photos are available on public websites (<i>BirdGuides & Surfbirds</i> etc) then please give www address:	
Have the photographs been published in magazines? If so, where: no/not yet	
Species present for comparison: Dunlin	
Which species were alongside the bird: Dunlin, Redshank, Ringed Plover	
Observer(s) experience of the species: several in Britain and Ireland, many in the USA	
Observer(s) experience of similar species on the same day or previously: familiar with Little Stint and aware of Western Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint	
Weather (<i>general description</i>): various	
Wind direction and Force: various	
Light conditions (<i>good, dull, etc & sun behind, side etc</i>): various	
Visibility (<i>distance</i>): various	
Rain, mist, etc: various	
Cloud cover: various	

Address of submitter: Chris Batty 69 Coniston Avenue Knott End-on-Sea Poulton-le-Fylde Lancashire FY6 0DR
Phone No: 01253 813070
And finally, is the record 100% certain? Yes

Please try to cover

1. Circumstances of finding the bird (if applicable) but keep it brief
2. Plumage, bare parts etc and call (if possible)
3. Jizz (that 'indefinable something' about the way it behaved)

Description:

On 6th September 2018 Frank Bird found what he believed to be a Little Stint on the Wyre Estuary near Skippool Creek and broadcast this news. Paul Slade saw the bird later that day and mentioned on an email to me that he thought it was an adult which was notable. On 8th September Jonathan Scragg saw the bird and tweeted:



Jonathan Scragg @scraggybirder · Sep 8

Twitched the adult Little Stint at Skippool Creek this afternoon, my 20th wader species at the site in 22 visits this autumn. Snipe (definite) and Spotshank (possible) the only realistic additions left, with Pec Sand and Lesser Yellowlegs my two rarity targets [#optimistic](#)



I only see twitter when I'm at work but I was forwarded this tweet to my phone by a friend (I think in surprise that Jonny was targeting Pec Sand there when he hadn't seen a Snipe all autumn!) on the evening of the 8th and I was smitten by the appearance of the stint - it looked to be a juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper and not an adult Little Stint! I contacted Stuart Piner and he agreed that it looked interesting and Frank, Paul and Jonny were all alerted to this. Jonny replied to say he was certain it was indeed an adult Little Stint and attached a further photo that was poor but did make it look less appealing for Semip. On 9th September Chris Piner visited the site as the tide began to drop in the mid afternoon and took photos that confirmed my suspicions that the bird was a Semipalmated Sandpiper.

The bird remained on site until 18th September when I watched it roosting in the same place. However, it was not seen during 10th-14th September although it was almost certainly present in the immediate vicinity. I saw it on both 15th and 18th.

On 9th September Paul Ellis took the photographs below:





A video of the bird taken by Pete Hines is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeHLUR3khEo> .

The bird was a juvenile based on all feathers being fresh without wear and of the same generation with an age-diagnostic pattern to the upperpart feathers with neat white pale tips.

Identification as Semipalmated Sandpiper was based on a very short primary projection beyond the tertials, cap neatly streaked without a split-supercilium, tertial fringes lacking rufous, presence of semi-palmation noted in photographs, warmth in scapulars matched by warmth in crown, diffuse streaking on grey-washed breast sides, anchor-like dark marking off the shaft on the lower scapulars, absence of orangey or white fringes to mantle feathers and darkish ear coverts.

It was not heard to call.

Chris Batty

Pallid Harrier at Cockersands and Bank End, 16th-18th September 2018

On 16th September 2018, I was birdwatching alone at lighthouse cottage car park, Cockersands. The weather had been difficult that morning, starting with heavy rain, but by midday it was starting to brighten up and was fine with a reducing wind. At 12:20 I was scanning inland fields through binoculars when I briefly picked up a distant Barn Owl around Clarkson's Farm, about 700m away. I switched to my scope but failed to see it again, however, a ringtail harrier flew low into my scoped view in the same area. It was a brief view of probably less than 10-15 seconds, but the bird banked a few times to show its upperparts - quite dark brown with a narrow white rump band and ginger carpel bars - and its underparts - plain orange-buff with a striking well defined head and neck collar pattern. It immediately struck me as a juvenile Pallid Harrier, but it was lost to view, and because of the trees and farm buildings I could not be sure whether it had gone north, south or was still in the area. I moved to a position a few hundred metres closer and contacted some local birders in the hope that they could see the bird and help relocate it. For the next 45 minutes I continued to search in the same area that I had originally seen it, meanwhile Stuart Piner checked a different vantage point along Moss Lane, and Paul Slade and Paul Ellis searched Bank End and Pilling marsh, in case the bird had headed south. At about 13:00 I received a phone call from Stuart to say that the bird was at Bank End so I moved and caught up with the bird which was, at that stage, being watched by a small group of happy local birders.

The bird continued to show well over the next few hours as it hunted over the fields to the north of Bank End and south of Thursland Hill. Paul Ellis took some excellent pictures of the bird, which proved to be very useful in supporting the description for the rarities committee. The bird continued to show until early evening and throughout the next two days. It favoured the same fields between the seawall at Bank End and Thursland Hill, but also ranged across to fields by Cockersands abbey. It was seen to catch several prey items on the first day, including a small mammal, and reportedly caught a Meadow Pipit on the second day.

Identification and ageing

A harrier with a white rump in the UK suggests one of four species - Hen, Northern, Montagu's or Pallid. There is also the possibility of a Hen x Pallid hybrid.

Hen and Northern Harriers can be excluded on the basis of several features, but mainly the wing shape and the lack of underpart streaking. The wing formula was generally visible in the field as a narrow, quite pointed wing shape. From photos it was clear that the wing point (longest primary, P) was P8 (P10 = outermost) with P9 and P7 similar lengths, a bit short of P8, and with P6 much shorter than P7/8/9. In an outstretched wing, tips of P10 and P5 were about equal distances from P8 tip. The pointed wing tip and the short P6 do not fit with Hen or Northern Harriers, which both have a rounder, broader wing. In the brown ringtail plumages of females and juveniles, the Hen and Northern Harriers are both streaky on the underparts, especially around the breast and flanks. This bird showed no such streaking. It was also a smaller, more slender bird overall compared to Hen Harrier.

Within Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, the unstreaked gingery-buff underparts and brown upperparts indicate a juvenile bird. The underwing pattern, wing formula and neck/head pattern separate the two species. The sharply distinct pale neck collar contrasting with a brown 'boa' are indicative of Pallid Harrier. In Montagu's the pale narrow collar is either absent, or at least less clearly defined, and the brown 'boa' is also less clear cut and does not extend around the front of the upper breast so far, or as sharply, as it does in Pallid. The underwing pattern also indicates the bird was a Pallid Harrier and is a consistent identification feature for identifying adult females as well as juveniles. The primaries on the underside were pale with black barring, without a black trailing edge, and with only short black tips to the outer primaries. On Montagu's the black tips on the underside of the outer four primaries typically extend along the full length of the emarginated sections of the feathers (i.e. the 'fingers'). Additionally, on the perched bird the wing tips were well short of the tail tip, whereas in Montagu's they typically reach the same point.

Identifying a Hen x Pallid Harrier hybrid is currently a topic of some debate. Currently, the view seems to be that the wing formula of hybrids will tend towards Hen Harrier characteristics (broader and rounder), specifically in having P6 longer and emarginated than it would otherwise be in a 'pure' Pallid. The short, unemarginated P6 can clearly be seen in one of Paul Ellis's photographs, however, which is consistent with the bird being a Pallid Harrier rather than a first generation hybrid.

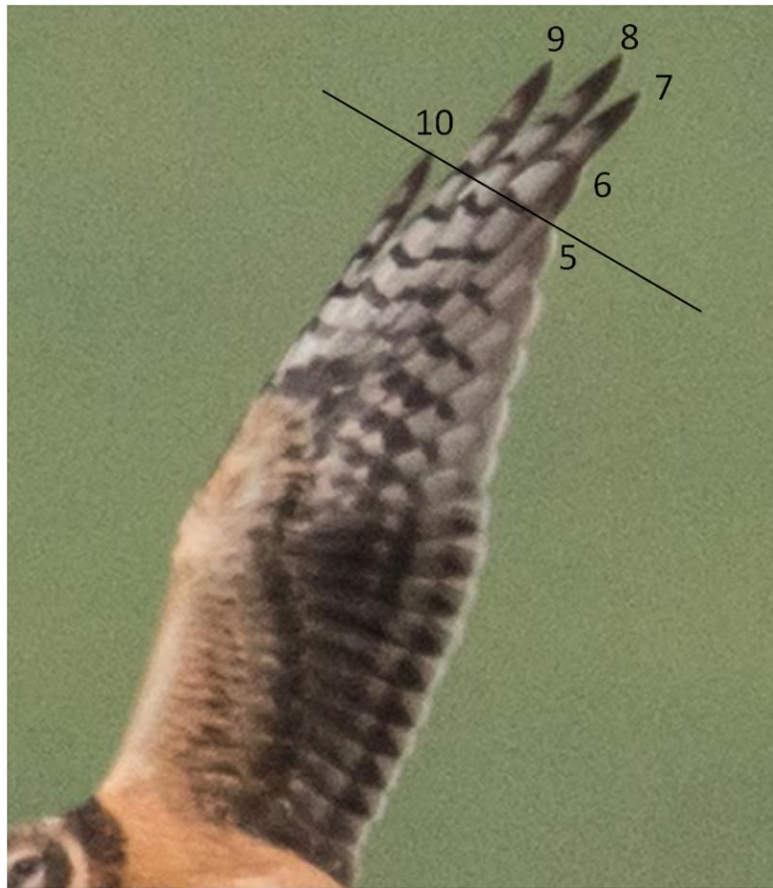
Pallid Harriers are sexually dimorphic for eye colour from fledging age, with males having a grey iris colour and females having dark brown. Images suggest a dark brown eye, so the bird was a female.

Pallid Harrier status

Globally, the Pallid Harrier is listed at 'Near Threatened' by the IUCN, mainly on the basis that population estimates are not available over much of its breeding range in central Asia and eastern Europe. Despite that, there are suggestions that the population is expanding its range westwards. There are now multiple annual breeding events reported from Fenno-Scandinavia and even as far west as The Netherlands, where a pair raised four young in 2017. Additionally, Pallid Harriers have been recorded more frequently in the UK over the past decade, with September being the month with most records.

There were several reports of Pallid Harriers in the UK in September 2018, including one relatively close in Cheshire. The Bank End bird was apparently a different individual to these, as they were either seen at their respective sites simultaneously or were sexed as males. The bird was last reported from Bank End on the evening of 18th September. If accepted by BBRC, this will be the first record of Pallid Harrier for the Fylde recording area and the third for Lancashire.

Figures - all original photos taken by Paul Ellis on 16th September 2018, Bank End, Lancashire.



Wing formula from underside, showing wing tip with three 'fingers' and $P_{10}=P_5$, consistent with Pallid Harrier. Also, note the contrast between the dark secondaries and pale primaries, the lack of black trailing edge on the inner primaries and the short black tips on the outer primaries.



Wing formula from upperside, showing wing tip with three 'fingers' and $P_{10}=P_5$, consistent with Pallid Harrier. Also note the lack of emargination on the short P6, which is consistent with Pallid, but not Hen x Pallid hybrid (Photo: Paul Ellis).

Ian Hartley

Confusion Species

The Divers or Loons (from the Norse Lomr or moaning bird)

The Red-throated Diver. Aka- Rain Goose (Shetland) or Spratoon (East Anglia)



The most common of the Divers seen in British waters, it can be encountered off any coast most commonly in winter. On rare occasions they have been found in flocks of over a thousand on the east coast. They are believed to be chasing concentrations of sprats hence the East Anglian nickname.

The Red-throated is the smallest and slightest of the three and as its name suggests it has a red throat in summer and when seen well is easy to identify unless backlighting makes the throat appear darker and almost black. Even in winter and in

plainer plumage it is very distinctly a Red-throated Diver.

To me the most characteristic feature is the way it carries its head, tilted up so it appears to be looking down its nose at the rest of the world. It has the appearance of a dark cap as the white throat continues towards the nape of the neck and high enough up on the face to leave the dark eye clear and isolated. The back is finely speckled and so does not appear as dark as the Black-throated or Great Northern. Sometimes people refer to it as not as beautiful as its fellow Divers, I can't agree, seen well it is a spangled beauty.



At a distance it can be confused with Cormorants or Shags as all three sit very low in the water. However Cormorants and Shags always dive or lurch underwater whereas the Diver elegantly slips under with real style. The almost non-existent tail is replaced by large feet in flight and the Red-throated has a habit of lifting its head as it flies as if checking the way ahead. I watched one doing just that as it flew across Seahouses harbour. It then ruined its elegance as it landed with an untidy belly flop in the water. In flight the wingbeats are

faster and fuller than the other Divers and it has a characteristic hunched silhouette. Its feet are perfect for swimming and diving but no good at all for walking so on land it appears untidy at best. The calls of the Divers are often used in films to create a feeling of desolation and a call of the wild.

The Red-throated call has been described as mournful and eerie like the extended cry of a person in pain.

Black-throated Diver

The rarest and some say the most beautiful of the divers. I have only knowingly seen one and that was in summer plumage at a great distance on a loch in Wester Ross. As it turned in



the sun even at that distance it was a stunning bird.

It is seen as the middle diver, larger than the Red-throated and slightly smaller than the Great Northern but judging size is always a guess at best. I don't recall a summer plumaged Black-throated on the Fylde but if one turns up the black throat, grey head, black and white stripes down the neck and a dark back should help. Even I could manage that.



The winter plumaged bird is the one most likely to turn up on the Fylde. It has a dagger like bill which it holds horizontally, pale throat which leaves a demarcation line up the side of the neck and the eye is not isolated as with the Red-throated. The overall appearance is different to the ghostly front leaning poise and tilted bill of the Red-throated. The back is darker and not spangled. Finally visible from a distance is the white patch like a back wheel at the rear of the bird.

The call is, I am told, quite memorable, a goose like clamour, a hens cackling, the croak of a Raven or the sound of a chattering crowd in the distance. Quite a songster.

Great Northern Diver aka immer/ember goose. More poetically in the Hebrides it is known by the Gaelic name, *Bun a Bhuachaille* or Herdsman of the tidal races.

This is the largest of the divers to be found on the Fylde. The winter plumaged is the normal visitor.



The summer bird is powerful with a thick neck, a strong blue black bill which it holds horizontally, and steeply rising forehead which gives the appearance of a bump. It has a black and white checker board back, a black and white striped semi necklace and the head and neck are bottle green. What a star!

However in winter the Great Northern Diver is a much more sober character usually turning up in gale force weather when it may seek shelter on coastal lakes. Still big and powerful with the characteristic bump on the forehead and a pale bone coloured

bill. Overall it is dark and low in the water with a scaly back, a pale front to the neck and a dark head. It somehow manages to look menacing as it glides effortlessly through the water. Like other Divers it submerges effortlessly leaving only small whirlpools left by the powerful



feet. No tail gives the distinctive shape of all the divers. More than the rest of the family it snorkels frequently submerging its head as it swims. It is a powerful swimmer and a diver often staying down for several minutes and emerging many hundreds of metres away.

In flight it is large and gooselike with powerful measured wing beats and trailing large feet.

This is the diver that has starred in many films, or at least the call has. The strident loud screaming or uncontrolled raucous laughter has been used to enhance an atmosphere of wildness and fear.

Finally a traveller reported that the deep fat on the Great Northern Diver was used by the locals to rub on the hips as a cure for sciatica. I am afraid to say I don't know if it works.

Peter Rhind

Forthcoming Meetings

- December 18th. Quiz and Christmas Social
- January 22nd : Swifts at Lytham Hall with Ian Walker & AGM
- February 26th : A Lancashire Lad on Fair Isle with Ciaran Hatsell

Conder Pool Blind



On Saturday 1st December the Fylde Bird Club installed a canopy on the blind at Conder Pool. The work was completed by volunteers Dave Hall, Paul Slade and Paul Ellis in non-stop rain! The Club funded the materials.

My patch – Marton Mere

I began visits to Marton Mere, Blackpool, as a 15-year-old in 1952. On only my second visit, on 15th March 1952, a friend and I had good views of six drake and three duck Garganeys *Spatula querquedula*. This is still Lancashire's biggest spring flock and at the time was also the earliest date for the species. I was hooked; and have now made 2–3 visits a week for 66 years, although with fewer during my National Service years from November 1959 to November 1961.

At that time, the Mere, which dates from the last glaciation, was a 14-acre (5.7-ha) lake surrounded by meadows and arable fields where Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix* and Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* bred. Up to 70 of the latter roosted in the reeds, together with up to 130 Corn Buntings *Emberiza calandra*: sadly, both species are now long gone. Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* were much more common than they are now and Jack Snipes were regularly disturbed from mud patches in the surrounding reeds.

A female Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* was found by my friend Derek McCullagh on 8th August 1956, and it stayed until the 12th. Very few Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* occurred in the early days, however, but in the 1970s the Mere itself was enlarged to 16 ha while surrounding areas were filled with household rubbish and grassed over. There is now a large caravan site on the south side of the mere, large areas of scrub and apple trees to the north and, forming over the passage of time, extensive reedbeds.

On the enlarged Mere, Bitterns are now regular winter visitors, normally 1–3 birds, but eight were in view in early 2003 and there are a few recent records between June and August. In 1997 I was fortunate enough to find my own Little Bittern, a male that stayed from 12th to 23rd June. Even more exciting, on 24th January 1991 Derek McCullagh saw a Bittern in flight, which he confidently claimed as an American Bittern *B. lentiginosus*. It was finally confirmed on 2nd February, stayed until 20th May, and was seen by an estimated 5,000 birders: not bad in the days before mobile phones and pagers!

The small muddy areas in the reedbed gave me my first Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* on 20th September 1953 and between then and 1968 as many as 14 were recorded along with a further eight up to the present time. The reduction in sightings is no doubt partly due to the lack of muddy areas in the reedbed.

At times in October and November, huge flocks of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* roost in the reeds; these were estimated at 200,000 in 2007 and 160,000 in 2011. Formerly there were spectacular roosts of Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* in late summer – the sky was full of them as the light faded. Peak counts were estimated to be around 18,000 in 1990, and up to 8,000 were seen regularly. This roost dispersed in the late 1990s and it is thought that the birds now roost in maize fields in other parts of the Fylde.

Nine species of warbler are resident by May while the species list for the Mere extends to 15. In October 1990, while I was on holiday in the Isles of Scilly, Harry Andrew heard a Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*; a couple of weeks later, back on my patch, I heard and saw one well on 4th November, the first sight record for Lancashire. In 2010 breeding was proved for the first time and now there are as many as eight singing males in the Mere area.

On 10th October 1965, I was fortunate to be on Formby Point, North Merseyside, when nine noisy Bearded Tits *Panurus biarmicus* appeared above me, circling in the dispersing mist.

They eventually flew high towards Southport. On 22nd October, my friend Raymond Wilson heard pinging calls from the Mere's reeds. Subsequently, up to nine spent the winter at Marton Mere; some of these were trapped and ringed and we found that one was carrying a Dutch ring. The species has been recorded several times subsequently over the years but sadly the birds have not (yet) stayed to breed.

Probably the best place in the northwest to see roosting Long-eared Owls *Asio otus* is in the scrub and trees on the north side of the Mere. Since 1990 up to ten have been present regularly in the winter. Sadly, as a result of a recent increase in human disturbance, none was seen in the winter of 2017/18.

Having found a Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* on Fair Isle in June 1976, I didn't expect to find another, but it was a real treat to find one at the Mere on 18th April 2004 (seen briefly again the following morning). Another highlight of 2004 came on 24th October, when I found the Mere's only Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*.

Entering one of the hides on 9th April 2006, I was amazed to see a Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*, decked out in full summer plumage, among the local Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*; the second for Lancashire, the Laughing Gull stayed until 16th. An even greater surprise came on 31st March 2008 when I identified a Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*, which stayed on the Mere for most of the day before being located nearby again at Fairhaven Lake, St Anne's, on 14th April, where it was seen by many observers until 14th May. Sadly, I picked it up dead at Fairhaven on 16th and the specimen is now in the Merseyside County Museum, Liverpool.

The rare birds which have occurred during the period of my visits to the Mere are too numerous to list separately, but the above are a few of my personal highlights. The rarities comprise about 25 out of a total of 238 bird species recorded, and include a White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* (which flew over and gave us good views from the Fylde Bird Club hide on 21st April 2011), Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* and a second Laughing Gull, Whiskered *Chlidonias hybrida* and White-winged Black Terns *C. leucopterus*, Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*, Dusky *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Great Reed *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* and Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides*.

I feel privileged to have called Marton Mere my local patch for so long, seeing it remain and develop into the superb birding spot it is today. The Mere became an SSSI in 1979 and was declared a local nature reserve in 1991. Just to think, this wonderful variety of birds has occurred within 3 km of Blackpool's famous promenade; why not pay it a visit!

Maurice Jones

Reproduced with the kind permission of *British Birds*. For more information and to subscribe to the magazine, go to www.britishbirds.co.uk/aut18

Birds of MARTON MERE *Second Edition*
is now available at the reduced, bargain price of just
£4 per copy.

Or

by post from the Treasurer for £5.50

Cheques payable to 'Fylde Bird Club'

Kinta Beaver, 22 Beach Road, Preesall, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire, FY6 0HQ

