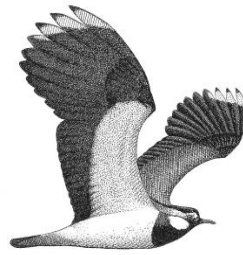


# September Newsletter 2018

Charity Number. 1102961



**Fylde  
Bird Club**  
LANCASHIRE

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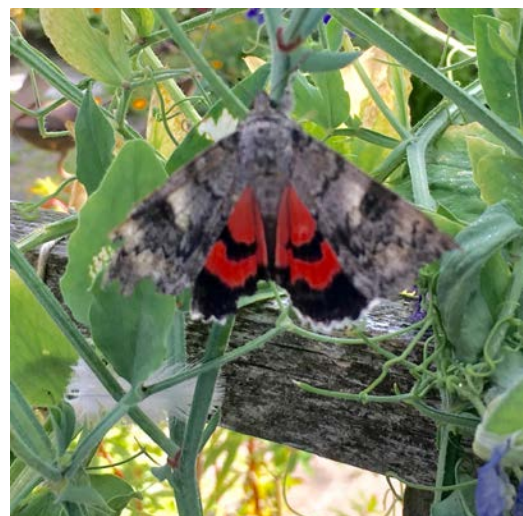
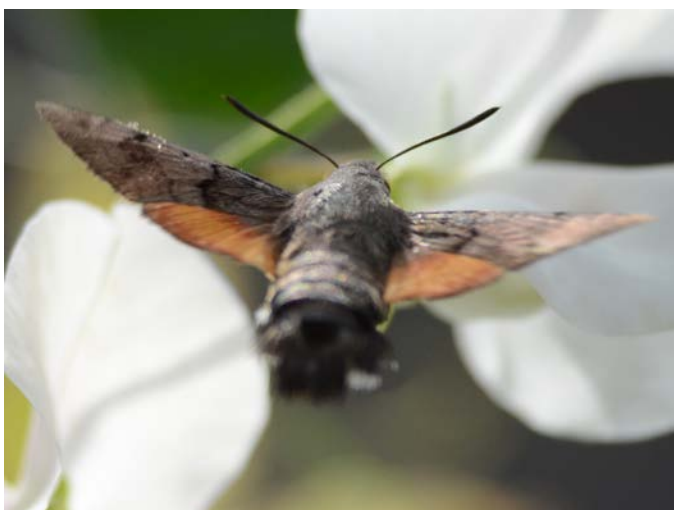
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Another summer has passed by and what a summer, as hot as I can tolerate but a quiet one for birds and rain. Late news as a Cuckoo at Cocker's Dyke made my August.

An amazing late summer for butterflies though. We have had quite a collection around the Buddleia, Alliums and Valerian. Apart from the Peacocks, Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals and the dreaded Cabbage Whites we had Painted Ladies and the first

Blue butterflies for many years. They were joined by a Humming bird Hawk Moth and what I am reliably informed is a Red Underwing.



Early morning when I let the Girls (chickens) out I am festooned in spiders' webs, not something I normally get till well into autumn so is an early autumn on its way. What effect,

if any, will this have on migration? It might herald an early or exciting time.

In this issue Stephen Dunstan has a roundup of any bird activity on the Fylde.

I have attempted to separate the Barred Warbler from the Garden Warbler in the Confusion Species item. I hope I have not added to the confusion!!

Shaun Ankers, the lucky / very skilled birder has written about the Roseate Tern he found at Preston Dock. I am still looking for one.

Ric Holmes has an update on Marton Mere and the effect of the drought.

Len Blacow has an article on the joys of seawatching. What he said about his bird watching beginnings chimed with me. Mine was reading a book in which the call of the Curlew appeared. I was hooked and we finally decided on our present house after a flock of Curlew landed in the field next door. How mad is that!

I am still eagerly looking for items for the newsletter. Any contributions welcome. It will take the pressure off the regular contributors.

Thank you.

***Peter Rhind***

## **RECENT SIGHTINGS**

This summary covers the period June to August. All records of county and national description species are subject to acceptance by the appropriate rarities committee.

There was no rarity which gave itself up to the masses during the period, but other than the normal mid-June lull there were plenty of sightings including the results of prolonged seawatching stints in particular.

### *Tasty Terns*

A Roseate Tern at Preston Dock on 8 July, and briefly the next day. On the 8<sup>th</sup> it was photographed at close range among the nesting terns on the pontoons, and was seen to be sporting 'Roseate rings'. Another went past Starr Gate on 28 July.

This is probably repetitive for regular readers, but this remains a difficult species to catch up with on the Fylde. Like a couple of bird of prey species to be discussed further below there has yet to be a short cut to spending hours in the field looking. There have now been two records among the Preston Dock tern colony, but neither was really twitchable. They probably also pass close inshore every summer, but unlike say Leach's Petrel or Long-tailed Skua there aren't obvious weather conditions to narrow down the search.

In terms of terns there was also a welcome smattering of Black Terns during the period. One was at Preston Dock on the relatively unusual date of 28 July. At the end of August six went south at Starr Gate on 26<sup>th</sup>, the same day and 27<sup>th</sup> a juvenile lingered at Marton Mere and on the 29<sup>th</sup> one was in the mouth of the Ribble estuary.

Little Terns can be expected on the coast in small numbers at this time of year, and there were four records from Starr Gate with a peak of three on 5 August. Much more unusual

though was a first summer at Preston Dock on 8 July, immediately before the Roseate Tern and the start of a tern hat trick there during the month.

### *Briefly Rosy At The Mere*

A Rosy Starling was seen in flight at Marton Mere on 5 June heading towards Staining Nook. Unfortunately it could not be relocated. If submitted to and accepted by the Lancashire Rarities Committee this would be only the fourth Fylde record.

### *Hatful Of Hobbies*

Ok, hatful is poetic licence but there were several reports. One flew east at Newton Marsh on 4 June, in July one went over Herons Reach Golf Course whilst a trio of sightings in August were at Myerscough Quarry on 8<sup>th</sup>, Bank End on 18<sup>th</sup> and Newton Marsh on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

There was some discussion on Twitter between club members about how rare Hobby actually is in the Fylde, with differing views. They are clearly a difficult bird to target in birding locally, which probably leads to scepticism about some claims and the odd misidentification of a briefly seen raptor may well slip through. However given the numbers of the species elsewhere in Lancs, including just over the Ribble and on the eastern outskirts of Preston we presumably do get several every summer. Whether they nest on the Fylde can only be a matter of conjecture.

### *Kite Flying*

Perhaps just one roaming Red Kite was involved in June sightings at Todderstaffe Hall on 1<sup>st</sup>, St Annes Old Links golf course on 16<sup>th</sup>, Cuddy Hill on 23<sup>rd</sup> and Lightfoot Green the next day. One was also seen at Warton Bank in August but was across the Ribble and therefore outside the recording area. Readers may be able to correct me but I can only recall one properly twitchable bird on the Fylde, at Singleton now several years ago.

### *Scarce Auks*

High levels of coverage at Starr Gate throughout the period under review led to all four likely auk species being seen, including a Puffin on 19 July and Black Guillemots on 14 and 21 August. I know Puffin is actually a county rarity, but this is only because the majority of records are not submitted. In terms of their larger cousins peak counts were ten Guillemot on 21 August and five Razorbill on 22 June.

### *Not A Quail Year*

With a hot summer it might have been expected that there would be several Quail heard locally. In fact not many appeared to make it into the country, and in that context we were fortunate to get even the one singing bird which was head 'wetting its lips' at Cockersand on 4 June.

### *Summer Skuas*

Pomarine Skuas are normally only spring or autumn migrants off our coast, so one at Starr Gate on 6 July was unusual.

In terms of the two more regular species Arctic were more numerous despite their national decline, including two birds at Knott End on 14 June and on three August dates at Starr Gate. Great Skua reports were restricted to singles at Starr Gate on 18 June, 23 June and 24 August with another or the same off Norbreck on the latter date.

### *The Wader Autumn Begins*

A Wood Sandpiper joined a trio of Green Sands at Myerscough Quarry on 5-6 August. An adult Curlew Sandpiper was reported flying past Rossall Point on 15 August, whilst a week later another spent a couple of days at Skippool.

A fly by Little Stint was reported from Starr Gate on 22 August. Five Ruff reports came from Naze Pool (two birds), Skippool (two dates), Marton Mere and Glasson. There was a good showing of Greenshank including up to 16 at Conder Green and 14 at Wardleys, by contrast in the absence of the long staying Conder Green bird and reflecting general decline there were no Spotted Redshank reported.

### *Hérons and Allies*

Three Spoonbills were at Pilling Lane Ends on 21 August. They were flighty and may tie in with up to four seen at Leighton Moss and in Cheshire shortly afterwards.

A Bittern again returned to Marton Mere on an early date, being seen from 9 August.

The only Great White Egret reported in the period was off Lytham Jetty on 1 July, though ironically there were two sightings the day after the period ended.

### *Other Seabirds*

Up to two Shags were seen at Starr Gate in June. An out of season Red-throated Diver was seen at Starr Gate on 6 June.

Several Kittiwake reports came from Starr Gate, with a peak of 27 on 27<sup>th</sup> August whilst one roosting at Skippool on the 18<sup>th</sup> of that month was unusual. Fulmar were seen at Starr Gate on seventeen dates with peaks of six on 14 June and five on 27 August.

### *Other Raptors*

There were a couple of very early Short-eared Owl records, at Cleveleys on 10 July and at Fairhaven on 12 August. The only Osprey of the period went over Medlar on 31 August. Merlin were seen at Warton Bank on 12<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

Marsh Harriers were fairly widespread in August as juveniles began to disperse, though the only site with more than one bird was Warton Bank with two on both 12<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### *Unseasonable Wildfowl*

A Whooper Swan was at Warton Bank on 2 June, and it or another was at Freckleton Naze Pool on 12 August. Whilst summering Whoopers are basically an annual occurrence the same can't be said for the Dark-bellied Brent at Arm Hill on 17 June.

### *Cuckoo's Clocked*

The good year for Cuckoo sightings by recent standards continued with birds at Marton Mere on 14 June, Wesham Marsh on 18-20 June, Ridge Farm on 15-16 July and nearby at Cocker's Dyke on 9 August.

### *Other Passerines*

In terms of scarce breeding species Spotted Flycatcher nested at Salwick, with presumed migrants at Myerscough Quarry on 2 June, Whitmore Fisheries on 25 July and four sites in August. A Garden Warbler seen singing and carrying food at Myerscough College on 6 June presumably related to successful breeding, whilst others more likely migrants were at Carr House Green Common on 7 August and Marton Mere on the 21<sup>st</sup> of the month.

A Crossbill flew north over Galgate on 7 June. A Black Redstart was in the Pilling Lane / Cocker's Dyke area on 15-16 July. Return Yellow Wagtail passage got underway on 22 August and there were five scatted singles by the end of the month. The peak diurnal Tree Pipit count was three over Fairhaven on 30 August, though higher numbers were noted on nocturnal recordings from Knott End.

### *Med Masses*

Whilst gatherings were nowhere near the size of those at Heysham Med Gulls began to be seen regularly in estuarine roosts. Peak counts were five at both Glasson and Skippool in August. Darvic rings showed there was quite a lot of turnover of birds.

### *Exotica*

A Ruddy Shelduck of unknown but highly questionable origin was on Fairhaven Lake on 12-14 June.

Ring-necked Parakeets are now firmly established in the Stanley Park area, and whilst reports generally relate to a pair, six were seen at allotments on nearby Lawson Road.

## Roseate Tern

"On Sunday, 8th July, I took my train obsessed 6 year old son, Thomas, for a ride on the Ribble Steam Railway at Preston Docks. Afterwards we visited the dock tern colony, as I frequently do. While watching the antics of the Common Terns and the odd Arctic Tern, I noticed a tern with a black bill resting on one of the tyres between the dock wall and the first pontoon on the south side of the docks. A closer look through my bins made me realise that I was looking at something out of the ordinary. I'd been to Coquet Island to see Roseate Terns in early June and I was fairly sure that I was looking at a Rosy Tern. After making sure that Thomas had also seen it, I went back to my car and looked it up in my Collins to reassure myself that I was correct. I then went home to Penwortham to get my camera in the hope that it would still be there when I returned. When I got back to the docks I couldn't find it at first but after 10 minutes I found it and it posed well for photos on the tyres between the pontoons on the south side of the dock. By this time it was 16.10. I'd first seen the bird at 15.20. I then went home and uploaded photos to the "Ribble Estuary"



Facebook page and other birders quickly confirmed that it was indeed a Rosy Tern. Unfortunately by the time other birders arrived it had left the docks. I went down in the evening of the 8th, to try and see it again, but it didn't appear. Ian Walker did briefly see the Rosy Tern a couple of days later at the docks. Unfortunately my photos didn't allow the well worn leg rings to be read. The thinking is that it may be a bird from the Rockabill

colony near Dublin. As those birds have rings on both legs but so do the Rosy Terns from Coquet Island. It's a new Fylde tick for me and apparently only the second at Preston Docks with the last ones being a pair seen briefly in July 2014. But it likely to be my last new Fylde tick for a while since I no longer work in St Annes so I won't be birding the Fylde as much as I've done over the last several years."

**Shaun Ankers**

## Confusion Species

### Garden Warbler and Barred warbler

#### Garden warbler – aka –Pettychap.

A Spanish field guide describes the Garden Warbler as a bird whose “ distinctive characteristic is that it has no distinctive characteristics.” A little unfair on such a shy little warbler but essentially true. The same guide also describes it as like a Blackcap only rounder or plumper and without a beret.



Its name is misleading as it is found in thick shrubbery and woodland or very large wilder gardens. When seen well (not easy as it is a skulker ) it is a grey/brown warbler with a round head, an almost invisible white eye ring and a dark eye. This gives it a kind and gentle appearance unlike the slightly bad tempered look of the rest of its family. Its' beak is fairly short and thick and the legs grey. The body is plain brown above and

pale grey underneath. When seen very well it is wearing a fine soft scarf on both sides of its neck! Like all warblers it is insectivorous but becomes a fruit eater in late summer and in southern Europe it has a taste for figs hence its nickname of Beccafico or fig-pecker, in Italy and Fig Warbler in Portugal.

On the Fylde it is described as a rare breeder and uncommon migrant.

The song of the Garden Warbler is definitive and as it sings from deep cover usually the sound is all you get to separate it from the very similar Blackcap. Anthony McGeehan has referred to it as Irelands Nightingale so beautiful and varied is its song. The song is a bubbling of clear notes but without the high fluting notes of the Blackcap. It seems more hurried and is more sustained, some would say it goes on a bit! but that would be unfair for such a beautiful singer. I first definitely heard one sing in Southern France where birds sing not from cover but perched on the top of bushes. The rise and fall made me think of a Blackcap with a welsh accent.

**Photograph - Paul Slade**

#### Barred Warbler

This is definitely rare find for the Fylde. An adult has never been seen on the Fylde far as I know (feel free to correct me if I am wrong) and again as a passing migrant only eight times. I have included a photo of an adult for that moment when you pull the curtains back and see one in the tree outside your window !!



This really is unmistakable with a bright yellow eye, a dark looking bulky body and a darkly barred front. The wing tips have white tips. Even I could identify that but will I ever have the chance, maybe not but I can dream.

Enough of that. The one most likely to be seen, if you are very lucky, is a juvenile migrant passing through in August / September. How common is that? It is mainly an east coast migrant but eight have been reported on the Fylde but maybe more have passed through unseen, unidentified and so unreported.

The Barred Warbler is variously described as a large, hefty, clumsy and lethargic warbler. It is also usually hard to get much more than a fleeting glimpse of a typically shy bird though the two I have seen were at the opposite ends of the spectrum. The first I saw with Maurice Jones and was just a flash of grey, I



thought bird, Maurice said Barred Warbler. You can't beat experience. My second was feeding on blackberries and spent fully 10 minutes in the open slowly and methodically feeding. At first sight it is a grey and white warbler and may be confused with the Garden Warbler. The eye is dark unlike the adult. This gives the Barred

Warbler a tougher look than the gentle faced Garden Warbler. Sandy grey back, white front and white outer tail feathers give the general colouration of the bird. The pale grey

upperparts are highlighted by pale wing bars and to me striking pale edges to the tertiaries

and primaries. These contrasts are much stronger than those of the Garden Warbler. The bill is heavier looking and finally the head is more unruly and scruffy and the neck sides lack the soft grey scarf of the Garden Warbler. The under tail usually shows faint dark markings. All these identifying markings depend on a good view, hard to get on these notoriously shy retiring birds



Overall it is a large pale long tailed grey warbler with pale wing markings contrasting with the sandy grey back.

**Peter Rhind    Photographs - Adult Paul Slade. Juveniles Peter Rhind & Phil Tomkinson**



## Seawatching at Starr Gate

When Peter asked me to produce a piece on seawatching it gave me the opportunity to answer a couple of questions that some of you have asked or would like to ask.

Why Starr Gate and why seawatching?

The first one is easy; it's only a few minutes' drive from home.

Why seawatching? Growing up on the coast with an interest in all things natural, particularly on the seashore I soon became interested in the birds along the seashore.

After reading a book about seabirds I wanted to see a Manx Shearwater assuming as any 10 year old would that Manx Shearwaters came from the Isle of Man! After all a shop in Fleetwood sold Manx kippers and boats sailed to the Isle of Man from Fleetwood. Had I known then that Manxies did not breed there then a pair of binoculars would have been useful and I could have spent my hard earned money at Blackpool Pleasure Beach!

A few years later I cut my seawatching teeth at Starr Gate eventually seeing Manxies before visiting better known seawatching sites in Britain and then overseas to some of the best seawatching areas in the world.

Since retiring 5 years ago I decided to return to my roots and began watching at Starr Gate regularly.

Visiting any site regularly brings its own rewards particularly when your expectations are met by an early morning passage of Artic Terns or a cold snap brings Divers and Grebes close inshore. More often than not, what appears to be a favourable forecast doesn't have the desired effect as the slightest shift in wind speed or direction thwarts your plans.

Most seawatches are fairly routine counting the various species but the occasional unexpected bird will liven up your day. Recent surprises have included a Puffin on July 19<sup>th</sup>, Roseate Tern on July 28<sup>th</sup> and Black Guillemot on August 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. Seawatching requires patience, don't worry if you can't identify all the birds you see. The best conditions occur in the worst of weathers, good spring watches need light south easterlies that produce hazy viewing and the autumn gales produce wild seas with deep troughs that can hide Gannets.

If you decide to give seawatching a try then give it a real go, don't give up after a couple of sessions, learn something every time you go out. Seawatching makes you really look at birds, you only get one chance as birds seldom turn round and come back giving you another go.

Pick a site close to home, get up early and spend a couple hours watching, you never know! If you don't go out you won't see anything.

***Len Blacow***

Ed. And try and stand next to someone like Len and learn from them!

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### **Forthcoming Club Meetings**

25<sup>th</sup> September – Fungi with Irene Ridge

23<sup>rd</sup> October – Columbia with Malcolm Evans

27<sup>th</sup> October – Brazil's Pantanal with Mike Watson

## The View from the Mere – Summer 2018



Since my last update we've had a great sizzler of a summer with something of a drought. This has revealed previously water covered areas of the mere enabling us to survey the state of the channels, in addition to affording us access to some of the floating islands of reed bed that broke off last winter and floated into the scrape and island pool area. Previously these areas have been too deep to use waders to access but with a massive team effort we've managed to deal with a lot more than we thought.

Below is a brief summary of some of the activity on the reserve over the summer that may be of interest to FBC members.

Due to the extremely low rainfall the spillway stopped running for about a month for the first time in years. The volunteer team worked to clear vegetation impeding the flow into main dyke as well as surveying the marginal aquatic vegetation. The exposed muddy areas revealed some interesting prints which look like otter as you'll see from the photo.



of vegetation regrowth. This area was cleared as part of our late winter/early spring work but requires a huge effort to keep the Typha and Phragmites clear. I'm pleased to say on our recent site visit of this area which Malcolm

As agreed by the Stakeholder Group at our spring meeting the volunteers worked to keep the scrape and island pool clear



Evans kindly joined us on, the shallow muddy pool areas are looking much better and the viewing opportunities from the FBC hide increased, we've had some excellent Snipe numbers in this area recently. A before and after shot taken from FBC part way through our work is below.



The viewing channels we cleared through the reeds in front of the FBC hide this winter have also been kept clear by the volunteers. The work we did in physically pulling the Typha out in the channels has paid dividends in limiting regrowth.

Work on improving the Woodland Watch Hide to incorporate an education area has moved on well over the summer with refurbished bird feeders, new viewing screen, new gated access, new pond, wood chipped paths, two new big hotels and a story telling stump seating area.



Our regular events have continued to be successful with the regular monthly discovery walks well attended. The pond dipping event was a great success with lots of families discovering many species, the results of which are displayed in the Visitor Centre. The bird ringing demonstration was well attended and extremely informative thanks to Andy Dixon and Phil Slade.

Ringed on the day: Reed Warbler 3 ad & 2 juv, Whitethroat 4 juv, Cetti's 2 ad, Sedge 1 ad, Blackcap 1 juv.



One of our volunteers Alison Hall who is also an FBC member has been working hard to accurately document species records for the reserve in a format we can display to visitors. Paul Ellis has kindly shared an extract from the FBC sightings database which has enabled Alison to produce spreadsheets displaying the sightings records throughout the years which are displayed in the visitor centre. We also now have accurate records of all dragonfly, butterflies and moths, flowering plants, insects, mammals, fungi and aquatic life. Why not pop in to see Alison in the visitor centre on a Tues or Thurs between 1200-1500 and check out the records and we'd be delighted to have any additional historic records you may have [Alison.hall@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:Alison.hall@blackpool.gov.uk) . We've also been working with the New Langdale Community Volunteers learning disabilities group who have a regular wildlife group out photographing and recording their sightings. The group now pass their sightings to our volunteers who arrange for them to be added to the FBC sightings page.

The Marton Mere Archive is now complete thanks to a superb effort by Jan Bramhall and can be viewed in the visitor centre. Thank you to all those FBC members who have contributed records, photographs and news clippings for the archive, in particular Maurice who's records and personal recollections have been invaluable in accurately recording the history of the Mere.

Our Interns have been busy with additional survey work completing fixed point photography vegetation surveys, invasive species surveys and mapping and a carbon storage survey of Salisbury Woodland Garden.

After our recent stakeholder site meeting with representatives from FBC we'll shortly be starting our agreed autumn and winter habitat management work. Some of our priorities will be willow removal from the island/reed bed, grassland cutting and clearing, pond vegetation clearance, reed cutting to maintain viewing and selective scrub clearance. During this work we will of course keep in constant dialogue with our stakeholders to address seasonal issues like potential disturbance of Long Eared Owls, if we're lucky enough to have them return this year!

If you'd like to get involved and help with practical conservation work, surveys or staffing the visitor centre I'd love to hear from you, my contact details are below.

Lots more information and updates can be found on our Marton Mere Local Nature Reserve Facebook page as well as our Twitter feed @MartonMereLNR .

On a final note to entice you into a walk round the Mere, the Bittern is back and regular sightings have been had recently. In particular you might like to try out the new Bittern Viewpoint at the south west corner just west of the bench on the grassland, look for a small path cut through a bramble patch. This area was recommended as a view point by our Stakeholder Group and offers great views up both the north and south reed bed.

Ric Holmes                      [Richard.holmes@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.holmes@blackpool.gov.uk)

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