



# ***Fylde Bird Club***

Lancashire

**June Newsletter 2014**

Editors

Charity No. 1102961

Peter Rhind

Email [rhind1003@btinternet.com](mailto:rhind1003@btinternet.com)

Telephone (01253) 812495

Jean Wagstaff

Email [jean.wagstaff@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jean.wagstaff@hotmail.co.uk)

Telephone (01253) 810889

Welcome to summer, only two weeks to the longest day. How was your Spring? My highlight was an April morning, sunshine with Goldfinches, Siskins and Redpolls whirling round the feeders.

Last March I asked where the owls Over Wyre had gone. In the last fortnight I have had a Barn Owl twice at the bottom of the garden and returning home one evening a Tawny Owl at the roadside and a Little Owl nearly on my bonnet. Brilliant.

In this newsletter we have the second instalment of "Now and Then " by Maurice Jones, a look at arrival dates (1983 and 2014) Ellen Pemberton's report on Marton Mere. Stuart Piner has an update on birds on the Fylde.

Chris Batty writes about the Semi Palmated Sandpiper, Ron and Sue Bedford share their love of the Coal Tit and Tony Ryan has a brief item on finding the Hoopoe. Darran Rickards has an item on his discovery of a Surf Scoter.



***Willow Warbler***

Stephen Dunstan has written an article on returning Waders and where might be the best place to see them. Stephen is willing to complete an article for each newsletter, helping newer birders to know what to look for and where they might best be found. He would appreciate feedback.

Also included is a list of not to be missed forthcoming events.

## **Marton Mere Report – January – March 2014.**

The beginning of 2014 will probably be remembered for the storms and flooding around the country. However it was not exceptionally cold and as a result, one species which is regular at the Mere in the winter was, you could say, conspicuous by its absence – the

Bittern. There was a peak of 6 Stock Doves on January 2nd, with a Woodcock seen the same day. On the 4th there was an Otter near the north-east hide at dusk, while a Chiffchaff was present on the 5th. A Siskin was at the feeding station on the 7th and a Peregrine was seen on the 9th. At the Nook Marsh on the 10th there was an impressive count of 40 Snipe, with Woodcocks seen on the 11th and 12th. A Jack Snipe was also present on the latter date. Barn Owls were present during this month, with 3 seen on 11th January. The Iceland Gull also visited the reserve on several dates between 11th January and 23rd March. Peregrines were seen again on 14th and 20th January, while Otters showed again on the 15th and 17th. On the latter date there were 2 Woodcock and 2 Barn Owls. 200 Wigeon were present on the 27th, whilst over 1000 Pink-footed Geese flew over Chain Lane fields on this date. On the 30th there were over 40 Redwings at Staining Nook. February began with 30+ Fieldfares on the 1st. Pintails visited the reserve during the first 2 months of the year, with a peak of 10 on 2nd February. A Fox and a Stoat were seen the same day. There were 250+ Common Gulls on the 7th and 2 Tree Sparrows at Mere View on the 9th. On the 10th there were 6 Skylarks and a Goldcrest, with another flock of 30 Fieldfares present on the 20th. A Peregrine was over Mythop fields on the 22nd, a Mediterranean Gull visited on the 24th and there was a pair of Stonechats present on the 25th. 2 Barn Owls were recorded on the 27th. A Mediterranean Gull graced the reserve on 2nd March, with another Otter sighting on the 3rd. This was followed on the 9th with another Barn Owl, while on the 19th there was a singing Chiffchaff and no less than 4 Cetti's Warblers. Migration was in evidence on the 28th, with 3 Wheatears and 14 Sand Martins recorded. 27 Whooper Swans flew over on the 29th, with an early Willow Warbler singing by the Bird Club Hide on the 30th. Spring has finally arrived!

***Ellen Pemberton***

## **Fylde Sightings - Spring**

### **February 2014**

The Glossy Ibis which arrived at Thurnham on 16<sup>th</sup> January lingered in the fields by Thurnham Hall until 18<sup>th</sup> February. A Great White Egret was logged at Warton Marsh on a couple of dates during the month.

The Fleetwood area produced records of Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull (2), Lapland Bunting, Long-tailed Duck, Purple Sandpiper (4), Scaup, Shag, Snow Bunting, Velvet Scoter and Water Pipit, whilst a moribund Puffin was taken into care at Rossall Point.

Elsewhere notable records included a pair of Avocets on Warton Marsh, Dark-bellied Brent Goose at Pilling Lane Ends, Iceland Gulls in the Marton area and at Pilling Lane Ends, Long-eared Owl at Marton Mere, Long-tailed Duck off Starr Gate, up to three Purple Sandpipers at Blackpool North Shore, two Shag off Starr Gate and counts of three Snow Buntings at Starr Hills and near Fluke Hall.

### **March 2014**

In Fleetwood a White Stork flew over on 26<sup>th</sup>, having previously been reported over Heysham earlier in the day. The Fleetwood area also produced reports of Black Redstart, Crossbill, Ring Ouzel, Scaup, Water Pipit, Osprey, Snow Bunting, Black-throated Diver, Hooded Crow, Long-tailed Duck and Slavonian Grebe during March.

Elsewhere records included up to 31 Avocets, Great White Egret, two Water Pipits and Dark-bellied Brent Goose on Warton Marsh, Iceland Gull in the Marton area, Long-eared Owl at Marton Mere, Ospreys over Carleton, Lytham, Parrox Hall and Normoss and two Purple Sandpipers at Blackpool North Shore.

## April 2014

Highlight of the month was the discovery of a Hoopoe in a Treales garden from 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>. On 20<sup>th</sup> Darran Rickards watched a male Surf Scoter fly north past Starr Gate.

Records from the Fleetwood area during April included Hobby, Hooded Crow, Lapland Bunting, Marsh Harrier, Mealy Redpoll, Osprey, Pied Flycatcher, Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Water Pipit, Barnacle Goose, Black Tern, Great Northern Diver, Little Tern, Long-tailed Duck, Scaup, Short-eared Owl and Velvet Scoter.

Elsewhere up to 24 Avocets remained on Warton Marsh (whilst another was at Cockersand), Black Terns were logged off Starr Gate and Knott End, Cuckoos were at Cocker's Dyke and Marton Mere, Garganey reports came from Marton Mere (2) and Winmarleigh, a pair of Glossy Ibises flew along the Lune Estuary on 29<sup>th</sup>, an exceptionally early Grasshopper Warbler was seen at Marton Mere on 3<sup>rd</sup>, two mobile Green Woodpeckers were recorded in the Galgate/Ellel Grange/Thurnham Hall area, a Long-eared Owl remained at Marton Mere, Ospreys flew over Blackpool North Shore, Cockersand, Glasson, Newton-with-Scales and Treales, Redstarts passed through Marton Mere, Staining and Thornton, Wood Warblers were at Marton Mere and Stanley Park and a Yellow-legged Gull visited Skippool Creek.

*Stuart Piner*

## Hoopoe

The Hoopoe was first spotted at 9am on 17<sup>th</sup> April. It was feeding on the ground at the bottom of the lawn. My wife and I thought it was a Woodpecker until we correctly identified it as a Hoopoe. The bird disappeared for the day then as I looked out on the lawn at 4.45pm later the same day it was there. I let a birdwatcher in the house to observe it. He was quite taken with it. I saw it again the following day when it was sat on the fence for about 20 mins. A few people were present at the time, it then flew off. The bird came back on the 19<sup>th</sup> April and was wandering all over the garden feeding on whatever was available, my friend was lucky enough to be here at the time and lay on the ground with his camera taking photos of it. The bird came within 10 yards of him and hung around for 1 hour or so.



*Photo - Simon Paul*

I didn't see the bird again but I do believe it was sighted further down Cross Lane in a Paddock. I hope it returns one day but I am told that will be unlikely.

*Tony Ryan*

## Semipalmated Sandpiper at Preesall Sands - a new Fylde bird

On 12th November 2013 I was at home in Knott End and, whilst engaged on a telephone call, I was using my telescope to scan through a mixed flock of Ringed Plovers and Dunlin feeding on Preesall Sands, when I noticed a stint. The most obvious species would be Little Stint, but even these are notable here, and the late autumn date made it doubly notable. I ended the telephone call abruptly, collected my telescope, tripod and camcorder and moved to the sea wall where I hunkered down out the wind. The stint was still with the

Ringed Plovers and I immediately started video-scoping in order to document the details needed to identify the bird, which was still at a considerable distance away. After a short while I removed the camcorder from my telescope and took a look myself. It certainly looked promising for it being a Semipalmated Sandpiper - which is what I had dared to hope it might be from the start - but the persistent wind meant that precise detail could not be discerned in the field, and would be most easily confirmed by checking freeze-frames of video on my computer.

I dashed home and reviewed the video. Taken at 200 times magnification, the necessary detail was all there and clear to see: the grey juvenile upper lower scapulars showed the distinctive pattern of dark running along the shaft streak then broadening at the tip, the juvenile tertials were dark with white fringes, the crown was heavily streaked and showed no hint of a spilt-supercilium, and the primary projection was formed by just two primary tips beyond the longest tertials. As I phoned Stuart Piner I simultaneously searched the video for a frame showing the semipalmations - which I soon found - and the news was broadcast, and birders soon began to arrive.

I had long believed that one autumn a Semipalmated Sandpiper would be found on the Fylde coast and although earlier in autumn 2013 eleven Semipalmated Sandpipers had been located around Britain between 30th August and 21st September, by late October I had given up on finding one for another year. By mid November the window of opportunity had long passed, and my thoughts had shifted to juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper, 12 of which had been found in Britain since 28th October, and as I scanned through the Dunlin that day this is what I had hoped to find.

There are certain rarities that can be predicted to arrive on the Fylde at some stage, and can be actively searched for. Some of these are species that habitually travel with a particular commoner species, American Wigeon with Wigeon for example, so to search for such a species simply requires flocks of the commoner species to be checked. Others, like rare passerines, are most likely to occur right on the coast, so this helps focus any search. As the Fylde lacks any suitable wader scrapes or lagoons, a Semipalmated Sandpiper here was always going to be on the coast, but I had wondered if I could be more specific than that. Vagrant juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers in Europe often favour sandy beaches as opposed to muddy estuaries, and with this in mind I have specifically visited St Annes North Beach to search for this species during recent Septembers, as this seemed a more likely location than either the Wyre Estuary or Lune Estuary. Preesall Sands appears suitable at times, but only for a short period in the tidal cycle, and the appearance of Dunlin, Sanderling and Ringed Plovers here can be erratic, partly due to disturbance.

And what new bird for the Fylde am I searching for next autumn? I think that late October and throughout November holds the real possibility of the arrival of one of several rare birds that are on the increase in Britain, such as Pallid Swift, Hume's Warbler and Red-flanked Bluetail, which I feel are all overdue an appearance here.

**Chris Batty**

## **Surf Scoter**

When the alarm sounded at 5.15am on Sunday April 20<sup>th</sup> I was still undecided as to whether to hit the beach with the camera or go to Starr Gate for a sea watch. A quick check out of the window revealed bright skies and a light NE breeze and with a falling tide meaning the prospect of a long walk out to the birds on the beach, I elected for the Starr Gate option. Now living in the bird-less desert that is the Midlands it had been sometime

since my last visit to the sea watching Mecca that is Starr Gate but I arrived at 5.45am to find little had changed. This included the presence of late night revellers on the prom for whom I had to take the obligatory team photo with the tower as the back drop. By 5.50am and with photography session over I was settled in my deck chair and was able to confirm that actually really nothing had changed at Starr Gate, there were still very few birds out there. The previous day there had been a few Arctic Terns passing through the Midlands reservoirs and I hoped that some sort of Tern passage up the coast might be on. The first hour saw the expected dribble of Sandwich Terns moving north and fuzzy groups of Common Scoter moving South along the horizon past all sorts of rigs and wind turbines, when did they appear? At 07.00 136 Arctic Terns went North and by 07.30 I had added a Kittiwake and a few Red Throats but failed to clinch a large high flying flock of birds moving south and to be honest the familiar Starr Gate malaise was setting in. I had a quick scan with the bins and picked up a pair of ducks coming low and hard from the South West. Nothing unusual about that except the one on the left looked like it had had a white head! To be honest I did immediately think Surf Scoter but then reminded myself that having spent all of the 90s watching off here without seeing a decent bird to fluke something good on a random visit was unlikely! I switched to my scope and had the usual worrying few seconds when I couldn't pick the birds up before there they were again, a brown duck and a black duck with a white head! I considered all the alternatives starting with Eider and finishing with Dodgy Mallard but once again came to the conclusion that it really was a drake Surf Scoter! By now the birds were closer and swung north about 500m offshore and as the light was bright I not only could I see the white on the head was on the neck and the forehead separated by black on the crown but I could also see a stonking big yellow orange bill. I was so delighted with what was flying past me I neglected to really concentrate on the accompanying duck, other than Scoter so I didn't get anymore features. I watched the pair disappear beyond South Pier then fired a report off to Birdguides in the hope that someone else might pick it up further up the coast which to the best of my knowledge never happened. I quickly jotted down some notes and resumed the watch finishing an hour or so later having added a Fulmar and a couple of Arctic Skuas along with some other bits and pieces. I returned to my parents on Clifton Drive North and sent my record to the Fylde Bird Club website and with guidance from Stuart Piner to Steve White as a formal record submission. With a number of wintering Surf Scoters off North Wales this year and the recent record off Starr Gate I guess a north bound bird in April was in hind sight not entirely unexpected. However with just a handful of Lancashire of Surf Scoter records and hundreds of Starr Gate hours under my belt with little to show for it my walk back across the prom that morning was a very happy one.

***Darran Rickards***

## **Championing the Coal Tit**

When Barry Dyson proposed the idea of species championing why did we choose the Coal Tit? Maybe it was something subconscious about the name, I am from Durham, the former land of coal pits and slag tips? Linguistic transliteration to blame, perhaps. Any way back then I'd never even heard of a Coal Tit let alone seen one.

Spring forward to 1970 when we, that is Sue and I took up birdwatching with a pair of cheap binoculars and 1964 observers book of birds. We identified a coal tit at Malin Head,

Northern Ireland. It took us a while to do it, the birds must have been moribund as (we now know) they are as slick as weasels. We were improving from a poor start in Scotland the previous year when we puzzled over an exotic red billed, black and white noisy bird at the seas edge and tentatively identified it as a toucan (escape from Edinburgh zoo clearly) as the years trundle by identifying did improve but until we got to Little Singleton we haven't seen a lot of coal tits anywhere and certainly not as often as Blues and Greats and in any case very small flitting birds in leafy trees still present difficulties for us.



So to 1997 when we joined the Fylde Bird Club. I've decided to do the BTO Garden Bird Watch as well as to send site sightings records to the club for the annual reports, at last a good post retirement excuse to sit all day gazing at rather than grazing the garden.

We selected certain species to record, one of which was Coal Tit because at that time its local status was, "localised breeding resident, autumn passage and winter visitor, under recorded" We were attracted to the chance of enhancing the coverage. We might even help to improve things.

What makes the life of this little bird?

Clearly habitat is fundamental, it is a Conifers specialist preferring above all the spruce. Where Conifers are lacking it'll make do with deciduous woodland. It forages for small food items such as insects and spiders ( seeds in autumn and winter.) Its small size, smaller than the Blue Tit, and fine bill enables it to penetrate confined spaces between pine needles as do Gold and Firecrests. It is a food storer, in clumps of lichen or in piles of Pineneedle ( and needless to say) in pine bark.

These requirements defined the birds distribution, (ref 1) in the western palearctic. They are present in Britain Ireland and mainland Europe except North Scandinavia and the central Balkans. There is a small population in Morocco, historically they seem to have spread from central and eastern Europe forested areas into Western Europe with fewer and less coniferous woods resulting in lower population densities. A major spread seems to have taken place in 1940s onwards, this is put down to post war aforrestation.

Current (1998) populations in the west are dominated by Germany with about 2.4 million pairs and secondly the France at 100,000 pairs, however Britain and Ireland fare well with Britain having 3 million territories and Ireland 1.1 million.

In 1892 (ref. 2) Lancashire was noting the Coal Tit as a local breeding resident and that it was more widespread during Autumn and Winter. The British Birds Survey (1994-2005) found a national population increase of 35%, This was probably replicated in Lancashire but no noted substantial range increase.



The Lancashire population is most densely concentrated in the Eastern two thirds of the county and absent only from the unwooded areas of the Fylde, the South West mosses and the highest moorlands.

Ref. 3 showed the Coal Tit as breeding in only 387 tetrads as compared to 856 tetrads for the Blue Tit.

In 2008 the Coal Tit on the Fylde is shown as a scarce breeder. It bred at Salwick, Lytham Hall and Stanley Park but the Breeding Birds Survey of Lancashire and North Merseyside (1997-2000) showed it as present in only 12 tetrads.

Coal Tits status in the F.B.C. annual reports has changed from “under reported” to scarce breeder and fairly common non breeding visitor. Is this caused by an increase in reporters? (70 in 2000 to 315 in 2014) Coal Tits reports have risen from 4 sites in 1989 to 44 sites by 2012.

Birds observed during periods of the year from 2003 to 2012 is as follows:

Early year	Rose from 4 max. to 10 max.
Autumn Passage	Rose from singles to 30 max.
Winter	Rose from 2 max. to 12 max.

More Coal Tits or more observers?

After 14 years of idle observation of our garden Coal Tits can we draw any sensible conclusions?

We have had Coal Tits present every month, present for 94% of the weeks and there on 58% of days. Doing the sums we have observed a 10% more Coal Tits over these 14 years. No increase in observers, just us , so good news for Coal Tits , if it is valid.

There we are then, lots of numbers for such a small bird. Not too surprising as The Champion Bird is a real whizzer who likes the food in the feeder but does not hang around stuffing itself like other Tits. It is out of the trees at high speed, on target, grab a seed and off again. A quick stash and back again, good anti sparrowhawk tactics. They are alleged to hover but I have not seen that, not seen a nest either.

As for nesting most literature seems to suggest they reject nest boxes. They could use Blue Tit boxes but! Any suggestions?

Finally writing this has given us an extra tick. We did not realize that our original Mallin Head bird must have been a Parus Ater Hibernicus. Something new every day.

References- 1. The birds of the Western Palearctic 1998.

2. The Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside 2008.

***Ron and Sue Bedford***

***Photo-Mike Foy & John Jenkins***

## **Then and Now – Changed Status of Some Lancashire Birds**

**Marsh Harrier.** The Marsh Harrier was reduced to a single pair at Minsmere in 1971 but due to a banning of pesticides and action to conserve them over 300 pairs now breed nationally. Only since about 1995 have records extended into the winter period at Leighton Moss, Martin Mere and on the Ribble. There were few, if any, males at Leighton Moss in my first 30 years of visits and the first pair bred there in 1987. They have bred each year since increasing to the several pairs which do so in recent years.



**Sparrowhawk.** Sparrowhawks accumulated large amounts of organochlorine pesticides causing a massive reduction, especially in the 1960's. I saw a few at Leighton Moss in the 1950's but very few on the Fylde and in several years just a single Fylde sighting in a whole year. After the banning of these pesticides numbers slowly increased from the mid-seventies so that now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century I was seeing as many as 70 sightings on the Fylde in one year.

**Buzzard.** All my Buzzard sightings from 1952 to 1959 were in the Lake District or around Leighton Moss. My first for the Fylde was in September 1959 at Lytham. I saw three over the Brock Valley in 1968-70 one or two were around Singleton Hall and probably breeding and in 1975 one was near Great Plumpton, It is only since the mid nineties that the big increase has occurred in Bowland and Fylde and by the turn of the century over one hundred pairs were probably breeding in Lancashire. Its former rarity was due to human persecution and its recovery delayed by Myxomatosis in the 1950's and pesticide use in the 1960's.

**Osprey.** By the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century osprey had been banished from their former Scottish haunts. A pair returned to Speyside in the 1950's and with protection about 200 pairs now breed with about 15 pairs in England and Wales. My early sightings were all at Leighton Moss in the 60's and 70's. I saw one over the Lytham St Annes N.R. In April 1977 and the first for Marton Mere was in 1985 (apart from one in the 1700's) With five pairs breeding in Cumbria in 2011 an encounter with a migrant Osprey is becoming much more likely.

**Hobby.** It took me thirty two years to see my first Fylde hobby at Marton Mere in 1985. To date I have seen only eight in Fylde but sightings in Lancashire have increased from about five per annum in the 1980's to ten times that number at present. A few pairs now breed in the county reflecting a large national increase and spread northwards from the mid 1980's. Climate change and the huge increase in gravel pits resulting in increased populations of dragon flies is helping with this increase.



**Peregrine.** Although I saw about one per year in Fylde from 1952 to 1960 a further 21 years passed until my next two in 1981. This reflects the national situation with only 68 pairs breeding by the late 1960's. This was as a result of DDT and other pesticides following persecution ( of all raptors) and egg collecting. Banning of these pesticides led to a long term increase with about 1500 pairs breeding in Britain and over 50 pairs in Lancashire. Now it is

possible to see Peregrines on almost any visit to Pilling and Warton Marshes outside the breeding season.

**Spotted Crake.** In the 1950 and 60's Marton Mere was much smaller than at present and set in agricultural land, the nearest buildings being on Paddock Drive and Preston New Road. The reed and reed mace swamp held several small and often muddy areas. From September 1953 I began to record Spotted Crake as well as the usual Water Rails in Autumn and once in Spring (April 1954) about 15 birds in total up to 1970. One was ringed in 1962 and two birds were seen in 1963, 1964 and 1966. The enlarged mere has been less productive with 6 records though opportunities to locate this species are less favourable,

**Corncrake.** Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century corncrakes reduced in numbers

due to destruction of nests by farm machinery and nowadays its favoured meadows are converted to silage fields and arable land. Oakes (1953. *The Birds of Lancashire* ) describing the 1920's stated, " 30 years ago the rasping call of the corncrake was as well known as the cuckoos familiar call." The fields where I heard 2 and saw 1 at Smithy Lane, St Annes in 1954 have been a bungalow estate these last 40 years or so. In 1955 one was calling in a hay meadow in June near Green Drive, a few were on fields at Stanah, Over Wyre in the 1960's and one was calling at Marton Mere in May 1965. Although numbers nationally have increased to about 1300 calling males (mostly in Scotland ) records in Lancashire have been running at about one per year 1980 to 2005.

**Avocet.** A visit to Havergate Island and Minsmere in Suffolk was essential to see breeding Avocets in the 1950's.

At that time they had been extinct as a breeding bird for over a century. Given protection numbers reached 800 pairs by 2000 and 1700 pairs by 2011. Nevertheless it was a description bird in Lancashire up to 2000 but a pair bred at Silverdale in 2001. Numbers increased with breeding at Marshside and Martin Mere and by 2011 over 80 pairs were breeding in the county. In Fylde they now breed at Warton Marsh.



**Little Ringed Plover.** Birds first bred in Britain as recently as 1938 at Tring, Hertfordshire prior to which there were only 13 U.K. records. The spread of gravel pits after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War helped the species spread from river shingles to over 1000 pairs.

My friend John Morgan recorded the first for Lancashire, a juvenile at Freckleton sewage works, on the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1958. Three pairs bred in Lancashire in 1970. They bred at what is Wyresdale Fisheries in 1971 and in 1972 on what is now Cleveley Bridge car park!! In 1986 Ed Stirling found a pair nesting on the old Gasworks site at Marton just east of the present Tesco.

**Lapwing.** Sixty years ago wintering and breeding numbers were much higher than at present including several pairs nesting round Marton Mere. A pair had 4 eggs between the



Mere and Stanley Park in 1957. In April 1959 21 birds were sitting on eggs at the West end of Leighton Moss. In the extreme cold of early 1963 I saw not a single bird in Lancashire until the mild weather returned in March. Three years later in February 1966 I estimated a flock of 15,000 at the end of Crimbles Lane, Cockerham. Major A.W. Boyd had recorded similar flocks in Cheshire coinciding with the full moon. In the 1970's and 1980's

flocks of about 10,000 were occasionally recorded on Newton Marsh in winter and today flocks mostly below 5,000 are found on our major estuaries.

**Little Stint.** With the modernisation of at the sewage works at Freckleton in the early 1970's Little Stint lost their main Fylde and Lancashire haunt. Some of our counts there, 38 on September 25<sup>th</sup> 1957, 60 on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1960, 23 on September 27<sup>th</sup> 1967, and 39 on September 26<sup>th</sup> 1973. There were 69 at Marshside on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1976. In recent years I have seen very few but favourable East winds in 1996 brought a record 130 to the Eric Morecambe pools at Leighton Moss.



**Curlew Sandpiper.** As with the Little Stint Freckleton sewage farm was the main county

site for this species in the 1950's and 1960's. I saw 23 on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1953. Double figure counts were regular for many years and then 54 between August 31<sup>st</sup> and early September 1969. A county record of 65 were at Conder Green on September 13<sup>th</sup> in

the same year. That record stood until September 26<sup>th</sup> 1998 when 93 were at Banks Marsh and on September 11<sup>th</sup> when 50 were at Bank end, Cockerham.

**Maurice Jones**

**Photos-Peter Rhind**

## **A Guide To Early Autumn Wader Watching On The Fylde**

### ***What to expect***

Regular breeding wader species including Curlew, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Redshank and Ringed Plover. Common Sandpipers are highly likely early in the autumn at most sites, Black-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover, Knot and Sanderling are generally also fairly conspicuous.

### ***What to hope for***

More scarce species which occur annually on estuaries and similar habitat in the Fylde include Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Ruff and Spotted Redshank. Whimbrel are less conspicuous than they are in spring, but can still be fairly widespread.

### ***If your luck is in***

The following species have all occurred on or very near to Fylde estuary sites in autumn:-

- Great Knot
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- American Golden Plover
- Pacific Golden Plover
- White-rumped Sandpiper
- Long-billed Dowitcher
- Lesser Yellowlegs

### ***When to look***

Return wader passage begins very early in the autumn, the first failed breeders can be on the way back from late June. Given incoming breeding birds can be passing through well into June it can be difficult to know in some cases if birds are coming or going. Autumn is a long season in shorebird terms, with migrants still moving through into October and November.

### ***Where to look***

There is no shortage of potential habitat to choose from, in broad terms:-

- The north Ribble marshes from Clifton Marsh / Newton Marsh all the way to St Annes North Beach where it meets Blackpool Promenade at Starr Gate
- The Wyre estuary from perhaps Rawcliffe Hall to Knott End / Fleetwood
- Morecambe Bay including Fluke Hall, Pilling Marsh, the Cocker Estuary / Cockersands and Conder Green / Glasson

## ***Fieldcraft / Approach***

The following are only suggestions:-

1. Let the birds approach you, rather than vice-versa. Shorebirds at several sites face disturbance from dog walkers etc, disturbance from birders does not help. With patience birds can approach closely if you keep still, particularly on incoming tides.
2. Avoid viewing into the sun, many species of wader are difficult enough without trying to work with silhouettes. For example on the Wyre sites on the western bank are less suitable in early morning sun than those on the east bank.
3. Choose sites depending upon the state of the tide. Where high tide roosts form getting there on the incoming tide and viewing the birds as they come in and roost is the best option. At sites where birds are feeding ebbing or low tides are better.
4. Don't just identify the species, keep an eye out for colour ringed birds. A wide range of waders are marked with rings that enable the individual to be identified, and if you submit your record the ringer will probably provide a life history. Black-tailed Godwit and Sanderling in particular are ringed in this fashion extensively and a number of recoveries are made each year in the Fylde.
5. As you become more experienced read up on the racial variation in more regular species and see if you can tentatively identify races in the field. Species this can apply to include Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover and Golden Plover.
6. Whilst calls are generally less important in wader identification they can still come into play, so learn the regular calls so unusual ones will attract your attention more. The 'chew-wit' notes of Spotted Redshanks can be the first clue to their presence in a group of Redshanks, for example.
7. Less common species often migrate with more regular species, so keeping an eye on the sightings page for gatherings of Dunlin, Golden Plover etc can be helpful in narrowing down where to look and equally when to look.
8. As in many other avenues of birding don't feel that you need to put a name to every bird. Some species are so similar that arguments can occur even with good close-up photographs. Ideally if you are doing a lot of wader watching try and have a digiscoping or DSLR set up so you can get record shots of any unusual birds you see.
9. Find your own 'estuary patch'. With Morecambe Bay and the Wyre in the north and the Ribble estuary in the south there is no shortage of suitable habitat. Other than for WeBS counts once a month many of these are seldom visited so your records will make a difference and your chances of finding your own birds increases.

10. If you get the bug for wader watching get involved in the monthly WeBS counts. Whilst you are still learning the ropes it is possible to shadow an experience counter, please contact Paul Ellis or Paul Slade if you would like to go on a count and see if it something you would like to get involved in on a regular basis.

### **Identification**

A newsletter article is not the place to go into the finer points of shorebird identification. The broad pointers below should be supplemented by reading some of the works listed in the 'Suggested Reading' section below.

1. the old maxim that 'it's a Dunlin until you can prove it isn't' is a useful starting point for smaller wader identification. Racial variation, progress with moult etc can mean that birds in a group of Dunlin are extremely variable. A common beginner's mistake is to identify larger race Dunlins with smaller birds as Curlew Sandpipers.
2. It is also possibly helpful to bear in mind that Ruffs are also extremely variable in plumage, leg colour etc. As Ruff numbers in the Fylde vary, but are generally quite low, it can take some time to build up field experience covering the standard variation.
3. Learn the key features of confusable pairs that are generally only seen well in flight (extent of white on rump, presence or absence of wing bars, colouring of the axillaries ('armpits')). Generally you should not be seeing birds in flight for very long so it helps to be able to home in on the key things to look for if you think you may have something out of the ordinary.
4. Remember that structure can be as important in identification as plumage. In different ways Pectoral Sandpipers and Buff-breasted Sandpipers can both resemble Ruffs, but neither has the gangly long-necked appearance of the latter.
5. The appearance of shorebirds generally varies with age. It can be important with some of the smaller species to know if the bird in front of you is an adult or a juvenile. This generally only comes through practice in the field or careful study of the field guides.

### **Suggested Reading**

The Collins Bird Guide (Svensson and Mullarney)

The Helm Guide to Bird Identification (Vinicombe, Harris and Tucker)

Shorebirds (Marchant and Prater)

Birds – ID Insights (Couzens and Nurney)

**Stephen Dunstan**

## Arrivals

Looking through the 1983 Fylde Bird Club newsletter I found a list of the arrival dates of some of our migratory birds. I thought it might be interesting to see how they differed from this years dates. Not very scientific I know, but I found it interesting. The dates are obviously of sightings and the presence of over wintering warblers will have an effect.

Species.	First reported	
	1983	2014
Chiff Chaff	April 7 <sup>th</sup>	March 9 <sup>th</sup>
Sand Martin	April 7 <sup>th</sup>	March 21 <sup>st</sup>
Swallow	April 12 <sup>th</sup>	March 29 <sup>th</sup>
Willow Warbler	April 12 <sup>th</sup>	March 30 <sup>th</sup>
Yellow Wagtail	April 14 <sup>th</sup>	April 15 <sup>th</sup>
Ring Ousel	April 15 <sup>th</sup>	April 1 <sup>st</sup>
Blackcap	April 16 <sup>th</sup>	March 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Common Sandpiper	April 17 <sup>th</sup>	April 17 <sup>th</sup>
Tree Pipit	April 17 <sup>th</sup>	April 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Redstart	April 18 <sup>th</sup>	April 13 <sup>th</sup>
House Martin	April 21 <sup>st</sup>	March 30 <sup>th</sup>
Whitethroat	April 22 <sup>nd</sup>	April 13 <sup>th</sup>
Whinchat	April 23 <sup>rd</sup>	April 21 <sup>st</sup>
Cuckoo	April 23 <sup>rd</sup>	April 21 <sup>st</sup>
Lesser Whitethroat	April 29 <sup>th</sup>	April 3 <sup>rd</sup>

**Peter Rhind**

## Your Newsletter Needs You!

We are constantly searching for contributors to the newsletters, it helps stop us wearing out the regular writers. Following are some suggestions.

1. A species article on a bird of your choice.
2. Your favourite birding spot, the Fylde or elsewhere.
3. A birding holiday, it may help me or others to plan our next one.
4. How or why did you start birding?
5. Separating confusion species.
6. Or finally, if you have questions to which you would like answers e-mail me and I will try to get the answers.

Any contributions gratefully received on the above or any other bird related matters.

[Rhind1003@btinternet.com](mailto:Rhind1003@btinternet.com)

**Peter Rhind**

## Fracking in the Fylde

You may have heard about this. It is a plan to use hydraulic fracturing of Bowland Shale Rock (about 6000ft below the Fylde) to produce gas for the National Grid.

The government support this as they hope to solve a perceived problem of future energy supplies. It may or may not solve their problems but it is certain that obtaining the gas will be environmentally costly for the Fylde – and will certainly not be carbon dioxide free.

Locally as the plan is presented there are 4 wells (2 already abandoned – one because of an earthquake; the other because of migrating birds) The other 2 are to be built at Roseacre and Little Plumpton. But these are exploration wells only, to establish the size of the shale seam and thus the economic value of the gas. If it can be demonstrated that the seam is viable then the production phase will be initiated.

Production wells differ from exploration wells. It requires up to 40 wells per site (or pad) Each pad covers about 4 hectares in area. It has been estimated that about 300 would be required. In detail it could mean 3500 wells in South Fylde between Blackpool and Preston. That gives 12000 wells including Over Wyre.

It is not 'just' the pads themselves but all the associated pipes and tanks and tanker traffic. It is industrialisation on a wide area.

Think of the effect on our bird life.

There are many other severe environmental impacts, use and cleansing of water, pollution and methane flaring.

This needs to be resisted.

Look at [www.stopfyldefracking.org.uk](http://www.stopfyldefracking.org.uk)  
[www.refraction.com](http://www.refraction.com)

**Ron Bedford**

## Forthcoming Events

FBC Meeting June 24<sup>th</sup> .....Conservation news update and a chance for members to share their photos.

FBC Meeting July 22<sup>nd</sup> .....Alan Davies and Ruth Miller, Birding in the land of the Midnight Sun, Finland and Norway. *Not to be missed.*

FBC Meeting Aug 26<sup>th</sup> .....A Fylde Birders Year by our one and only Paul Slade.

The F.B.C. Boat Trips.....Monday July 21<sup>st</sup> 3pm-8pm. 2 spare places.

Thursday September 4<sup>th</sup>. 2.30pm-7.30pm. 3 spare places.

Please contact Paul Slade to book a place or get more information.

[Sladey67@yahoo.com](mailto:Sladey67@yahoo.com)

Richard Crossley. Nov 4<sup>th</sup> ..... Field Guide author telling birding stories.

### **Note Change of Meeting Content in November**

FBC Meeting Nov 25<sup>th</sup> ..... A Boat Trip Around Svalbard by Paul Ellis

**Thanks to John Jenkins for all his help compiling this issue.**