



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

September Newsletter 2014

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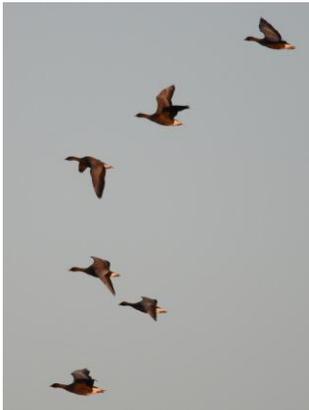
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Another summer is slowly melting into autumn with all the promises of wonderful birding; I am an eternal optimist. The chattering of the Pink Footed Geese and the whooping of the wild geese are my sounds of autumn and what will they bring with them?

Jean Wagstaff has not been well over the last year so has retired as joint editor so I am now on my own with John Jenkins as the man who helps to assemble the newsletter. Thanks Jean, I have really enjoyed working with you and I am sure everyone appreciates the work and time you have put in.

In this newsletter, as well as Marton Mere sightings by Ellen Pemberton and Fylde sightings by Stuart Piner, we have the next instalment of "The Fylde, Then and Now" by Maurice Jones.

There is an experimental article entitled "Confusion Species", feedback please and Stephen Dunstan writes about what to look for in autumn storms. Paul Ellis and Chris Batty have provided an overview to this excellent item.

In bird of the month Stuart Piner talks about finding and identifying the Buff Bellied Pipit and John Wright about the Roseate Terns at Preston Dock.

Ellen's article on a visit to Fair Isle just makes me jealous.

Frank Walsh has written a very informative piece on the Dragonflies on the Fylde.

Finally, Monty Myerscough has an update on Owls on the Fylde, Paul Slade writes about the pelagic and there is a reminder about what to look forward to over the next three months.

Marton Mere Report

April – June 2014

Spring migration was in full swing at the beginning of April with 70 Sand Martins and a Swallow on the 2nd, followed by 200 more Sand Martins, a Grasshopper Warbler, a Meadow Pipit and 2 more Swallows on the 3rd. Winter visitors were still lingering, as 30 Redwings were present on the 4th; the same day there were 2 Kittiwakes and a Little Egret, with 7 Cetti's Warblers reported. Both Common and Lesser Whitethroat made their first appearance of the year on the 14th. There was an Orange Tip butterfly seen on the 18th and a Weasel on the 20th. Migrants continued to arrive, with 5 Grasshopper Warblers on the 22nd, a Wood Warbler and a drake Garganey on the 24th and the first Swift of the year on the 25th. On the 27th a pair of Garganey were seen on the scrape, remaining at the site into early May. (There were 2 males and a female on 5th May.) Last but not least for April, on the 29th, a Cuckoo was singing and the reserve got a new bird in the form of an Avocet on the scrape.

On 6th May a female Whinchat was at Lawson Marsh, whilst on the 7th, a Little Tern, Little Egret and a drake Garganey were on the reserve. A female Garganey was seen on the 8th. A Little Tern and an Arctic Tern were present on the 9th, with another female Whinchat seen on the 16th. A Fox was present on the 18th. During May and June a Barn Owl was using the island box and on 1st June it was seen flying in daylight. June was a quiet month for sightings, however there was a Common Gull on the 15th, 2 Grasshopper Warblers on the 20th and a Stock Dove on the 22nd. A pair of Great Crested Grebes also hatched 3 young during this month. Who knows what the autumn will bring...?

Ellen Pemberton

Sightings

May 2014

Highlight of the month was the discovery of Lancashire's first American Buff-bellied Pipit, present for just one evening at Cockersand (see article on page 3).

Elsewhere highlights included Little Tern at Marton Mere, Black Tern at Preston Dock, up to three Garganey at Marton Mere, a Glossy Ibis at Conder Green on 4th-5th, Hobbies at Warton and Warbreck Hill, Redstart at Conder Green, Quail at Bradshaw Lane Head and Wood Sandpiper at Newton Marsh. A Turtle Dove, Hobby, two Garganey, Redstart, Glaucous Gull, Wood Sandpiper, Wood Warbler, Blue-headed Wagtail and Great White Egret were all reported in the Fleetwood area. Seawatching at Blackpool produced Puffin, Pomarine Skua, Black Tern and three Little Terns, whilst watches off Rossall Point produced four Black Terns, Pale-bellied Brent Goose, Great Northern Diver and Little Tern.

June 2014

A Pomarine Skua off Blackpool North Shore on 4th and Little Tern on 3rd, Hobby over Preesall Flashes on 26th and Red Kite over Kirkham on 16th were June's highlights. A ringed Great Skua was present at Preston Dock on 14th-15th, before it was taken into care. The bird was ringed as a pullus at Herøy, Norway on 3rd August 2013. This represented only the second record of a Norwegian-ringed Great Skua in the UK.

July 2014

A pair of Roseate Terns visited the Common Tern colony at Preston Dock on 30th (see article on page 4).

Elsewhere a Garganey was on a flood at Cleveleys, a Black Tern was off Knott End, a Little Tern flew past Blackpool North Shore, an Avocet was logged at Arm Hill and Hobbies were seen in Staining and Thornton. The Fleetwood area produced both Little Stint and Little Tern during July.

Stuart Piner

American Buff-bellied Pipit at Cockersand – a new Fylde bird

Following a month of almost non-stop work, which had cumulated in a weekend-long paperwork session on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th May, I was approaching madness with genuine speed. By 6pm on Sunday, enough was enough, so my partner Josephine and I decided to take a walk at Cockersand. Whilst walking along Slack Lane I noticed a passerine hop out of the grass bordering the field by the road and land in the tilled earth. I immediately identified the bird as a Water Pipit and began to photograph the stunning pipit in summer plumage. Delighted with finding a Water Pipit in such an unusual location so late in the spring, I showed Josephine the bird and after taking a few more photographs, at 7.09pm we left the pipit still feeding in the field and retired to a local pub for dinner. Whilst at the pub I 'Googled' 'Buff-bellied Pipit May' on my Blackberry telephone, but failing to find any photos of summer-plumaged birds in a brief internet search, I dismissed the possibility. Just before returning home, Lancaster birder Dan Haywood telephoned to tell me about his day birding, and I joked that I was just on my way home to check that I hadn't 'goofed' a Buff-bellied Pipit! Whilst I clearly had the possibility of the bird being a Buff-bellied Pipit on my mind, I wasn't giving the option serious consideration, or else I would have raised the alarm, and I wouldn't have spent the remaining daylight sat in a pub. We arrived home just as darkness was falling, and I immediately loaded my photographs of the pipit onto my computer. Suddenly, when the context of a coastal field in Lancashire had been removed (clearly, a coastal field in May should have been a massive clue that the bird was not a Water Pipit), everything became clear, and after a few minutes of playing spot the difference with photos of summer plumage Buff-bellied Pipits and checking features in field guides, I realised that my 'Water Pipit' was in fact a Buff-bellied Pipit. I telephoned Chris Batty and asked him to urgently turn his computer on, and knowing of my earlier Water Pipit claim, he responded 'why, you've not just found a Buff-bellied Pipit have you?' After viewing my photographs he agreed with my (belated) identification and the news was broadcast on Rare Bird Alert. Unfortunately, there was no sign of the bird at dawn the following morning. Given I try my best to make sure that other birders see the rare and scarce birds that I encounter, it was disappointing and embarrassing that my initial mis-identification cost people the opportunity of seeing such a great bird. Ten years ago American Buff-bellied Pipit was a mega rarity in Britain; prior to 2007 there had been just five records, but by the end of 2012 a total of 37 had been identified in Britain (with a further 18 in Ireland by the end of 2011). Consequently, whilst a spring bird was evidently not on my radar (in fact my bird was the first to have occurred in spring plumage in Britain or Ireland) an autumn bird at Cockersand was certainly on my hit list. Having cost everyone the spring bird, I'll just have to try even harder to find one in autumn.

Stuart Piner

Roseate Terns – Preston Docks – 30th July 2014

Working at an office close to the Preston Docks on Wednesday 30th July I decided to call in to see the tern colony. There was a lot of activity with many juvenile Common Terns being fed by their parents. Their raucous calls filled the air and amongst them I heard an unfamiliar disyllabic call.

A quick search with my scope revealed a pair of **Roseate Terns** on one of the jetties!



I had hoped the colony would attract Roseates but had wondered if it was too far up the estuary. I noticed that the birds were ringed on both legs but unfortunately I did not have my zoom lens so could not read any details. I managed to get some record photographs but the birds were very restless and kept being moved on by the Commons terns.

In flight they were really graceful courtesy of their long tail streamers and one of the birds had a beautiful pink flush on its underparts.

They flew around the docks briefly bathing and fishing before returning to the jetties. At this point a juvenile Lesser Black Backed Gull made the mistake of landing in the middle of one of the colony jetties. Virtually all the adult terns began to mob the gull and the Roseates joined the throng, easily picked out by their whitish upperparts.

Their distinctive calls rang out again and the birds did another circuit of the docks. This time I managed to get some flight photos. I thought they may be moving on but they again returned to jetties and I had to leave to get to work.

I rang Chris Batty with the news and hoped they would stay around as I knew they would attract a lot of interest. Unfortunately by the time other observers arrived they had already moved on.

Description

Both birds were very pale grey above appearing white in marked contrast to the darker grey of the Common Terns.

One of birds had a marked pink flush on its white underparts which was more subtle on its partner.

Both birds had complete black caps and long dark bills with red bases.

The red legs appeared longer than on the Common Terns.

At rest the white inner primaries showed a sharp demarcation with the black outer primaries. In flight this was also obvious with the upperwing appearing white and contrasting sharply with the dark wedge on the outer primaries. The underwings were equally distinct lacking the dark surround to the 'hand' shown by Artic & Common terns.

The long white tail streamers protruded well beyond the wing tips at rest.

Assuming the birds were adults then it is interesting to speculate whether they had come on an overland journey from the North East or from the Irish Sea. A number of birds have had their rings read at Seaforth and these have been rung in Ireland.

Whatever their origins it was a delight to see these beautiful birds and it will be interesting to see if further records occur with the thriving tern colony at the docks.

John Wright

Then and Now – Changed Status of some Lancashire Birds

Ruffs.

Ruffs were regular at Freckleton sewage works in the 1950's occasionally up to 30 were present and increased in the 1960's even into the winter months, the latter being almost all males. I counted 45 on a sludge bed on Lea Marsh in late August 1964 and peaks at Freckleton in the 1970's reached over 100 in spring and autumn. In 1979 I did a survey of birds breeding on Warton Marsh and with Jeff Wilby found a Reeve with 2 small chicks. Martin Mere and Marshside-Crossens have become the 2 major Lancashire haunts since the 1970's but numbers have fluctuated greatly.



Whimbrel.

Whimbrel are much more common in spring than in Autumn passage through Lancashire, with flocks feeding on favoured mossland sites near the coast. The discovery of large evening roosts in late April-early May from about 1990 has shown the great importance of Lancashire as a stop-over site.



Graham Hulme found the first at Banracre Reservoir, Scorton in 1989 and numbers peaked at 945 in 1994: The Preston Natural History Society found a roost flight down the Ribble in 1992 to a site on Longton marsh-peak of 761 in 1996.

A roost at Windy Harbour, Wyre peaked at 455 in 1996. One at Brockholes peaked at 400 in 2003 coinciding with declines at other sites.

Black Tailed Godwit.

It is hard to realise that a count of 140 at Lytham in September 1948 was a county record. Numbers increased from the 1950's and I saw 200 at Fairhaven and 234 on floods at Saltcotes Rd, Lytham in late September 1954 and 500 at Lytham in 1960. Numbers were very few North of the Ribble in this period but by the 1980's numbers began to increase on the Wyre and in Morecambe Bay so that counts into the thousands are the norm in recent years reflecting increased breeding birds in Iceland.



Jack Snipe.

Marton Mere was half its' present size until 1976 and with muddy patches within the reedbed and unlimited access Jack Snipe could be flushed on many autumn to spring visits. My maxima was 15 on the 12th of March 1954 and one to ten was the norm. Late spring birds were 3 on 29th of April 1954 and 1 on the 3rd of May 1958.



Lack of mud patches and restricted access make the species much rarer than in recent decades. During my wardening of the Lytham St Annes nature reserve, 1982- 2002, Jack Snipe were frequent at the big slack most years with as many as 11 in late November. Recently the best sites have been on the saltmarshes.

Common Snipe.

Counts of 150 were made at Marton Mere in January 1972 and November 1974 with up to 100 not uncommon. There were 250 at the Naze pool in early September 1954 and 200 at Clifton marsh in September 1978. Such counts now would be remarkable.



In 1952 I found a nest near Garstang and an egg in a half cut hay field at the Marton end of Lytham moss. In 1970 Arthur Watson, then warden, had an adult with fledged young at the slack on the Lytham St Annes reserve, and I had an injury seeming bird in the dune slacks at Birkdale.. Nowadays one must travel to the edges of Bowland to have any hope of Snipe on their breeding grounds.

Mediterranean Gull.

An adult I saw in a Black Headed Gull colony on Havergate Island, Suffolk in May of 1955 and 1956 was only about the tenth record for the U.K. The first for Lancashire was at Formby, April to November 1968. On the 2nd of August that year (with Peter Barnes) I found an adult on St Annes beach. In the 1970's I saw several on the beaches at Formby-Freshfield.



Since that period numbers in Lancashire reflect the national picture and birds are now commonly seen. Successful breeding took place at Silverdale in 1977 and birds now nest on the Ribble, at Stocks Reservoir and at Belmont Reservoir. (15 successful pairs in 2012)

Little Gull.

The Little Gull was formerly a very rare bird in Lancashire with just 15 individuals prior to the 1950's in 80 years. I saw just 8 birds between 1952 and 1964 so when Harry Sharrock and I saw 8 at Crossens Sluice in July 1965 it was viewed as remarkable. Just 3 years later in February 1968 friends saw 137 at Formby Point.

The creation of the Seaforth dock pools and marina in the 1970's led to a huge increase, especially in April with maximum day counts approaching 700 birds. There have been fewer in recent years but good numbers are often off our coast in gale conditions in winter, especially here off North Fylde.

Little Tern.

In the 19th century Little Terns bred at Lytham and between there and Blackpool. There was a colony at Rossall in the 1920's until about 1940, looked after by a staff member at the school. A colony was established around 1928 at Barnaby Sands-Arm Hill on the Wyre estuary. It grew to 20 pairs in 1942 but high tides and egg theft and later shingle removal reduced numbers to 9 pairs in breeding in 1949. I saw a nest and eggs on my first visit in 1953 when 8 were seen and fish offering observed. I saw 1 nest with eggs every summer until 1957 when a nest with 2 eggs was seen on May 19th. Sadly this turned out to be the last nest ever to be seen in Lancashire. I saw 18 there in August 1956 and 23 were on Squires Gate shore in early August 1954.

The Lune estuary had post breeding flocks of up to 145 in the 1960's and similar numbers were off Formby-Hightown in the early 1990's.

Maurice Jones

Photos-Peter Rhind

A Guide To Autumn Storm Seawatching On The Fylde

What to expect

If conditions really are favourable then see 'what to hope for' below. However, realistically the guaranteed or almost guaranteed species in an autumn gale are probably:-

- Gannet
- Common Scoter
- Eider
- Regular tern species (generally Sandwich and Common, Arctic less regular in autumn) and Kittiwakes.
- Manx Shearwaters still turn up in small numbers, but by September they are getting quite scarce.
- Red-throated Divers will have returned in small numbers by the autumn, but in storm conditions they are difficult to observe as they generally sit tight on the sea until better weather conditions develop.
- Arctic Skuas and Great Skuas are reasonably regular in autumn gales, the former more so than the latter but less so as time goes by as the UK breeding populations is fast diminishing.
- Fulmars are much less frequent than they used to be, but are still reasonably reliable in autumn gales, and the highest counts of the year are generally at this time.
- Guillemots and Razorbills

What to hope for

The obvious target species in September and October gales is Leach's Petrel. In the right conditions good numbers can be seen passing off our coasts, whereas there are only a handful of records at other times of year.

Other species that can be hoped for in good autumn seawatching conditions are:-

Shag

Grey Phalarope

Sabine's Gull

Black Tern

Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas

Storm Petrels have occurred at this time, but appear earlier in the autumn normally. Little Gull also appear in the autumn but better numbers can generally be seen in winter gales.

If your luck is in

County rarities that have been recorded in the Fylde on autumn seawatches include the following (note – not all records have been submitted / accepted by the county rarities committee):-

Cory's Shearwater

Sooty Shearwater

Balearic Shearwater

Little Shearwater

Wilson's Petrel

When to look

If you are hoping to see some of the less regular species then ideally a combination of very strong wind speeds and the right wind direction is necessary. In practice these conditions do not occur every year, and it may be a case of taking what is available.

Leach's Petrels and other species occurring at the same time (particularly Sabine's Gulls and Long-tailed Skuas) generally only appear after sustained onshore winds of gale force or severe gale force lasting a day or ideally longer. Whilst any winds with a westerly component will push these birds into the Irish Sea north westerly winds are generally not productive off the Fylde, in crude terms because birds blown past Walney are then funnelled into the Mersey rather than Morecambe Bay. Westerly winds can be good, but south westerly winds are best.

If you have access to bird news look for evidence of birds turning up at sites like Walney and New Brighton. This will indicate that there are birds offshore that the correct wind direction will push our way,

Where to look

Most seabird reports have traditionally come from Rossall Point and Starr Gate, at either end of the Fylde coast. In certain conditions these sites will deliver better seawatching than other intermediate locations, e.g. in south westerlies Leach's Petrels and other scarcities may be blown into Morecambe Bay and give prolonged views as they battle out against the wind. Normally however any point along the coast can give results, and in

recent years seawatchers have also used the Middle Walk area between Gynn Square and the Hilton Hotel at North Shore during major blows.

If you have limited time during a day of suitable conditions and cannot get to the true coast all is not necessarily lost. In severe gales birds may be seen at estuarine sites, and very occasionally inland at freshwater sites. As far 'inland' as Pilling Lane Ends / Cockersands in Morecambe Bay and Fairhaven on the Ribble you could still have a chance of results.

Different sites offer different advantages. At Starr Gate for example you are low down and get a wide field of view, but in severe gales the spray coming over the sea wall can be prohibitive. Watching from the piers gives some elevation which may be helpful in picking out petrels, though watching from these sites has generally fallen out of favour these days. The greatest height gain can be obtained by watching from the 'cliffs' at Bispham.

Other factors to consider are ease of access in what will often be fairly challenging weather conditions. At some sites including Anchorsholme – Cleveleys it is possible to view from the car. There is a reasonable amount of free parking adjacent to all other main sites including Rossall, North Shore and Starr Gate. Rossall Coastguard Tower has definite advantages as a seawatch vantage point, but opening hours are limited so it is worth checking these before you set out.

Fieldcraft / Approach

The following are only suggestions:-

- 1) Whilst it is not everyone's idea of fun consider doing some seawatching in calmer conditions to gain experience of some of the more regular species. If you put an hour in you should see some Gannets and Common Scoter any day and these are both useful benchmark species to be familiar with.
- 2) Take a telescope if you have one, whilst petrels may sometimes be 'wrecked' and show at very close range they are generally some way out and are about the size of a sparrow! Some records of Sabine's Gulls and Long-tailed Skuas have been clinched at several miles range; binoculars aren't up to the task.
- 3) Whilst it may sound obvious if you haven't done it before it can be underestimated how cold sitting in one place in unsuitable conditions is. Wrap up with several layers, take a flask of hot drink if it helps. Viewing from a car gives the option of having some heat, though it can be difficult to view a wide area.
- 4) Bear in mind that whilst squally showers can help by pushing birds closer to land if there is sustained heavy rain coming in off the sea viewing may be so difficult that it is not worth persisting in. The day in 2011 the Olympic torch came to Blackpool was probably monster for Storm Petrels, but too bad to watch in.
- 5) Ideally go where there are other seawatchers if you can find out in advance. As well as being able to benefit from their expertise several pairs of eyes will always be better than one in picking out the birds. If only one Sabine's Gull or Long-tailed Skua goes past whilst you are there you will want to see it.
- 6) Put your sightings on the webpage but if you can include the timings of the whole watch, and ideally the times at which all scarce seabirds pass if you are fortunate enough to see one. This helps records committees and report writers identify how many birds have actually been seen during a major blow.
- 7) Check what is being seen elsewhere in North West England. If there are no Leach's Petrels being seen anywhere in the region then even if the conditions

appear promising they aren't coming close to land. It can take several days of onshore winds before birds appear.

Identification

- i) Whilst on the face of it Gannets are generally easy to identify with good views, care is still required. The variety of plumages from all dark first years to largely white adults means Gannets can be mistaken for a variety of other species. If you can only seawatch rarely take five minutes the night before to remind yourself of the range of plumages.
- ii) Flight action is often key to identifying a species. If it looks like a gull but flies like a Manx Shearwater on rigid wings then chances are it is a Fulmar. Even similar looking species in the same family can look very different; the bouncy and graceful flight of a Kittiwake can be an easy pointer to why it isn't a Common Gull.
- iii) Bear in mind that juvenile Kittiwakes can be superficially similar to adult Sabine's Gulls, particularly in the brief snatches of views that may be all you see as a bird moves between wave troughs. Size assessment is important, though can be difficult.
- iv) Be aware that identification of immature skuas is tricky even in ideal viewing conditions, this is magnified several fold with often distant birds in difficult weather conditions.
- v) Whilst scoters will be the default seaduck passing during storms, in the autumn other species are on the move in the autumn, particularly Pintail, Teal and Wigeon and they can often be almost silhouetted in overcast conditions and even more scoter like.
- vi) Above all remember the maxim that you are not going to be able to identify each and every bird in a seawatch. There is no shame in accepting some passing birds are unidentifiable. The club sightings website gives either / or identifications for a number of seabirds including auks and skuas, don't be afraid to use them.

Taking it further

Marinelife operate ferry based surveys for seabirds and sea mammals all year round from Heysham harbour, to both Belfast and Warrenpoint. If this is something you are potentially interested in please contact Stephen who has done this for several years.

Suggested Reading

The best reference is probably 'Flight Identification of European Seabirds' by Anders Blomdahl et al is the best starting point, focusing as it does entirely on flight views which are generally the norm in storm conditions.

'The Helm Guide to Bird Identification' by Keith Vinicombe et al also covers a number of the key species involved including petrels, auks and a nice selection of skua images.

If you are also planning to go further afield, or get really passionate about seawatching, then Flood and Fishers series of several multimedia book and DVD combos is worth considering.

Stephen Dunstan

Fair Isle – May 2014

The most remote inhabited island in the UK is famous for 2 things, knitwear and rare birds. I booked a week at the island's bird observatory to try and boost my life list. To get to Fair Isle from the British mainland it is necessary to travel to Mainland, the largest of the Shetland Islands and either catch the Good Shepherd ferry from Grutness or fly from Tingwall or Sumburgh airports. I flew from Manchester to Sumburgh, stayed overnight at the Sumburgh Hotel and then flew to Fair Isle the next day. Those of you who read my account of my trip to Spitsbergen in 2009 will know that I'm not the best sea traveller. I travelled to Sumburgh on the 16th of May in the fields around the hotel there were Swallows, Wheatears, Lesser Redpoll, Meadow Pipits and a female Bullfinch. Arctic Terns, Great Skuas and Fulmars could be seen flying over the sea. I even saw a Fulmar fly past the dining room window at breakfast time the following morning. On the 17th of May I left Sumburgh and caught the plane to Fair Isle (run by Direct Flight; I suspect they are quite difficult to look up on search engines!). The literature from Fair Isle Bird Observatory said there was a 15kg luggage limit on this flight; on boarding the plane I could understand why – there was room for 7 people including the pilot! We landed on Fair Isle about 1:15 pm and I arrived at the "Obs" just in time for lunch. That afternoon I saw my first lifer of the trip, a female Western Subalpine Warbler, in the Obs garden! This comprised a small area of bushes enclosed by a fence, with some feeders, which could be seen from the lounge. After unpacking I went to the southern end of the island to look for the Caspian Stonechat which had arrived at the end of April. Classed as a subspecies, this bird has more white on the rump and much less orange on the breast than the European Stonechat. Having seen it I made my way back to the Obs (I heard a Snipe drumming on the way back) where I had another check of the garden before dinner. A Sedge Warbler was keeping the Subalpine company and a male Siskin was on the feeders. One of the events at the Observatory is the morning trap round; guests can accompany the wardens around the Heligoland traps which are set up near the Obs and witness them ringing and weighing the birds which have been caught. On the morning of 18th May, the round was cancelled due to inclement weather. After breakfast I braved the drizzle and walked down to the harbour, where I saw a Black Guillemot, a Rock Pipit and a few Puffins. In the afternoon the rain cleared and I walked up to the North Lighthouse (which took about an hour). There were many pairs of Great and Arctic Skuas on the rugged terrain leading up to the lighthouse; thankfully none of them dive-bombed me! Other sightings included 5 House Martins, about 40 Puffins, a Sparrowhawk and a Cuckoo. The latter was sheltering in a quarry. On the 19th I was once again up bright and early for the trap round, where we caught a Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and a Sedge Warbler. For anyone who is not familiar with Heligoland traps, they are best described as being like a cage made of wood and wire mesh, open at one end, with a wooden box at the other. The box has a window at one end and can be pulled open/shut by means of a rope. Traps are set up around facilities which birds are likely to use, such as dry stone walls and bushes. Today I took advantage of the sunshine and walked down to the South Lighthouse (90 minutes each way). There were 6 Ringed Plovers on the shore and on my way back I saw a Sparrowhawk. That afternoon I had an unsuccessful search for a male Subalpine Warbler which had been seen near the museum. The sunshine didn't last long and on the 20th, fog covered the island. The sole product of the morning trap round was a Garden Warbler. One of the wardens explained to the group that the bird's distinguishing feature was that it hadn't really got any – a classic "little brown job"! He added, "The bird's Latin name is *Sylvia borin* – I think that's a bit

harsh!" Later on I walked down to the south end of the island and saw a female Blackcap in the cemetery and a Rock Pipit and a Whimbrel in the harbour. On my return journey I caught up with the Caspian Stonechat and saw a male Kestrel. The rain and fog continued into the 21st; on the trap round a Lesser Whitethroat and a Spotted Flycatcher were caught. A couple of other guests had seen a young male Common Rosefinch in the Obs garden first thing in the morning. After breakfast it was still raining and I decided to birdwatch in comfort in the lounge! This turned out to be a wise choice as the Rosefinch re-appeared in the garden (it later flew towards the harbour). My second lifer! In the afternoon I got kitted out in waterproofs and had a short walk but gave it up as a bad job; when I returned to the Obs another guest asked me if I knew about the Bluethroat?! I should mention at this point that the Observatory runs a similar system to the Bird Club's text alert service, whereby if there are any rarities found, one of the staff will send a text out. I replied that I hadn't been able to get a signal on my mobile since arriving on the island (I'd rung home a couple of times from the payphone in the Observatory!!). "There's a female Bluethroat at Shirva – it's the house with the phone box!" Luckily one of the staff gave a few of us a lift to the spot. The bird showed very well – lifer No. 3! In the evening I was back birding in comfort, seeing a Black Redstart and a Siskin (both females) in the garden. On the 22nd the mist had cleared (with the help of a north-westerly wind). The Black Redstart and Subalpine Warbler were still present in the garden. After breakfast I had a tour of the South Lighthouse; this was the last Scottish lighthouse to be automated in 1998. I was a little uneasy climbing up the many ladders and little steps but the views from the top were breathtaking. Afterwards I saw a Red-throated Diver in the harbour and on the way back I had the Caspian Stonechat again as well as a Spotted Flycatcher. I saw another Obs guest looking into a field, then 2 of the wardens came running up the road, in the same direction as I was walking. "There's a Calandra Lark at Ward Hill!" Ward Hill is, at 217 metres, the highest point on Fair Isle. We had to walk to the airport (a small hut) and cross the airfield. An aircraft was taking off just as we arrived (no, we didn't want that flight, but the scene from U2's "Beautiful Day" video, whereby an aircraft flies straight over Bono, flashed through my mind! On leaving the airfield we followed a tortuous (and quite frankly torturous!) path up the hill to reach the bird. There was also a Golden Plover and a female Bluethroat at the site. The Calandra Lark is slightly larger than a Skylark; its distinguishing features are a thick finch-like bill, a black patch on the side of its neck and blackish underwings. In the UK it is classed as a mega, or a 3-star rarity, as follows -

- * annual vagrant in some numbers
- ** only one or a few records a year, or in most years
- *** turns up less often than Shane McGowan visits the dentist

I made the last classification up but I hope this gives some indication of its rarity! This also marked an important milestone for me – not only was it my 4th (and final) lifer of the trip, but the 300th bird on my British Isles list! Back at the Obs that afternoon, I rang home and left a message for my parents to buy some "falling down water" for my return!! The northerly wind lingered into the morning of the 23rd. I decided to attend the craft fair in the hall and treated myself to some notecards featuring drawings and paintings done by the local schoolchildren. I also bought 3 pairs of fingerless Fair Isle mittens, one pair each for myself and my parents. In the afternoon I went to Shirva again; the female Bluethroat was still there, as were 3 Mealy Redpolls, a first summer male Common Rosefinch and a male Siskin. That evening, fog returned to the island. I was due to leave on the 24th, stay over again at Sumburgh and return home on the 25th – but it wasn't to be!! The flight was

scheduled to leave at 11.30 am; whilst waiting in the Obs lounge I saw the Subalpine Warbler again and 2 Lesser Redpolls, while the Common Rosefinch decided to sing! There were 2 other guests booked on the morning flight; at 2.20 pm we were finally told that there would be no plane till Monday! We were allowed to use the phone in the office to re-arrange flights etc. I rang the Sumburgh Hotel to cancel that night's booking; I began by telling the receptionist that I had a room booked for the evening, but wouldn't be able to make it. "Are you stuck on Fair Isle?" came the response!! Luckily I was able to transfer my booking to the Monday night. There was glorious sunshine on the 25th with a light easterly wind. The trap round produced a female Blackcap and a Whitethroat, while the "Subalp" and the Rosefinch were lingering in the garden. That morning I walked up to the North Lighthouse again and saw about 10 Rock Pipits and a Grey Seal. There were also 100s of Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots and Fulmars on and around the cliffs. In the afternoon I walked south to Shirva again, where a couple had seen a Red-backed Shrike. I failed to connect with it, though. The sunshine didn't last long and on the 26th it was wet and overcast again. After an unsuccessful search for an Icterine Warbler, which had been found in a small plantation that morning, I collected my luggage and boarded the Observatory minibus to go to the airstrip. Fair Isle Airport doesn't as yet have the rigmarole of security that larger airports have nowadays! We made it off the island to Sumburgh safely and I checked into the Sumburgh Hotel that afternoon. The following day, however, my (re-scheduled) flight to Edinburgh was delayed. I was due back in Blackpool about 6.00 pm but didn't arrive till about 10.00 pm. I went straight to bed as I was due in work at 9.15 the next morning. When I came home from work, my mum had baked a cake with the number 300 on it and my dad had bought the obligatory "falling down water". I would definitely go again!

Ellen Pemberton

South Fylde Barn Owl Fest

The Fylde Barn Owls are having their best breeding season for many years, and if you'd told me that a couple of months ago I definitely wouldn't have believed it. Especially after the wet and windy start to the year. Many of the breeding pairs are having much larger clutch sizes than in recent years, no doubt due to a super abundance of prey species thanks to the favourable weather conditions starting in early spring. Five, six and even seven are being reared by many pairs. I have just returned from watching a pair with six young and in the space of half an hour eight items of prey were brought by the adults and all of them were field voles and all in broad daylight, Magic!



Photo - Jim Wacey

Thirty two nest boxes are occupied by Barn Owls and two more currently have a family of Kestrels and Tawny Owls breeding in them. There are one or two boxes still to be checked so the total could be even higher.

The downside is that every box with breeding Barn Owls will have to be cleaned out at the end of the season. The debris builds up after a couple of Barn Owl families have bred in them; at least it's not the

same stuff that's left behind by Stock Doves which sometimes breed in Barn Owl boxes.

Having just checked the last remaining Barn Owl boxes one had a family of at least four very large young, I couldn't check it thoroughly because of fear of them erupting so there might have been more hiding behind the others.

Monty Myerscough

And Just as Many Over Wyre

Bob Danson reports that he is monitoring another 32 pairs of Barn Owls, which have produced 151 chicks so far this year.

Confusion Species

In 1996 when I moved to Over Wyre I promised to restart the birding I had lost to children and work. Looking out over Morecambe Bay I realised it was going to be a steep learning curve. We were a bit short of waders in Halifax!!

This item is an attempt to help new birders to separate similar species, (my apology to the experts)

Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint

When attempting to identify small waders, the best starting point is often to establish the age of the bird, which will help narrow down the list of options. Ageing criteria differ between species, but as a general rule autumn juveniles have fresh, neatly patterned plumage, unlike the worn, scruffy plumage of adults. In winter the differences between juveniles and adults are much slighter and of less use for identification, as most young birds moult into an adult-like winter plumage.

Dunlin.

The archetypal wader against which all others are judged. You see them as a whirling mass of small birds moving like quicksilver and changing from black to white as they turn. On the ground they are slightly smaller than a Song Thrush and in summer are



Dunlin. Spring, Jim Wacey



Dunlin. Juvenile, Paul Ellis

unmistakable with jet black bellies. In autumn and winter they are dumpy looking waders with a fairly long very slightly down curved bill. Dunlin are a variable species, particularly in autumn, but most juveniles have gingery brown upperparts with neat, pale fringes around all the wing feathers and show a variable amount of black spotting or streaking on the underparts, thus lacking the clear, unmarked white underparts of the two scarce waders featured below. In flight they show a wide black bar through the rump and tail, bordered by white on both sides.

Curlew Sandpiper.

The wader most commonly confused with the Dunlin. It is very slightly larger but size difference is exaggerated by the longer neck and erect stance. In summer plumage there is no problem as the Curlew Sandpiper is bright red underneath.

The confusion arises with juvenile and winter plumaged birds as they migrate through in autumn. A longer, more pronounced down curved bill, a longer neck and longer legs give a much more elegant appearance. The scaly back and often peach wash around the neck and upper breast of juveniles, along with a prominent supercilium make it a very attractive autumn find. The belly is a crisp white colour and unmarked. When flying away Curlew Sandpipers have a square white rump, lacking the dividing black bar shown by Dunlin, Knot can cause confusion in flight due to their contrasting pale grey rump.



↔*Curlew Sandpiper. Juvenile, Paul Ellis*



Curlew Sandpiper. Summer, Peter Rhind ↔

Little Stint.

A tiny wader about the same size as a Greenfinch or 2 thirds the size of a Dunlin. Even at a distance the size difference is evident. It appears as a passage migrant mainly in autumn and is often found with Dunlin flocks. It has a short, straight bill, mottled grey back and a pale belly and black legs. It feeds and moves faster than the dunlin and this as much as its size makes it stand out; Little Stints are hyperactive! At a distance Sanderling can cause confusion, but the large size compared to Little Stint and the former species' black and silver spangled upperpart pattern in juvenile plumage should offer identification clues, in conjunction with the Sanderlings' unique running style, like a "clockwork toy". In flight Sanderlings show a broad white wing bar offset against blackish wings, unlike the narrow wing bar of Little Stint.



Little Stint. Juvenile, Paul Ellis



Little Stint. Peter Rhind

This is not meant as a complete guide to these species but simply an introduction to trying to separate them. Thanks to Stuart Piner for his help and advice. Any failings are mine and all mine!! Feedback welcome, is it worthwhile continuing with this type of item?

For more detail the following books are invaluable:

Collins Bird Guide. Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterstrom.

Bird Identification. Alan Harris, Laurel Tucker and Keith Vinicombe.

The above Bird I.D. by Mcmillan has just been updated and republished by Helm.

Peter Rhind

On the Dragonflies and Damselflies of the Fylde

During the last 25 years dragonflies have gained a reputation as 'the birders insects'. This has probably arisen because binoculars have improved greatly with many having considerable depth of field and remarkably close focusing. Also there are now several excellent field guides meaning that all species, at least those so far recorded in northern Britain, can be readily identified without the need to net them in flight or capture the aquatic stages. Perhaps more importantly, in our area the number of species to be seen has risen markedly

These insects belong to the order ODONATA and I will refer to all of them as dragonflies, except when drawing attention to differences between the two subgroups. Damselflies (Zygoptera) are small delicate looking insects with 2 pairs of similar shaped wings, which at rest are usually held closed over the abdomen. Flight is relatively weak and fluttering. The head is rectangular with a large eye on each side. The other Sub-Order, which are commonly called Dragonflies in English are the Anisoptera. These are generally larger insect than the damselflies and always more robust. The front wings are narrower than the back wings and at rest both pairs are held wide open. The head is spherical, and largely taken up by the eyes. They are strong fliers and many species are considerable migrants.

There are about 5,300 species in the world, with roughly equal numbers in the two subgroups. However, as with most insect groups, the majority of species inhabit the tropics. In the UK only just over 40 species have bred in the last 25 years, handy for those of us with poor memories. In Lancashire 24 or 25 species have been recorded, while in the Fylde only 20 species have been recorded to date. In the Atlas of Dragonflies (Merritt et al 1996) which covered the period 1975-1990, only 13 species were listed for the Fylde.

Dragonflies recorded in the Fylde

Beautiful Demoiselle

This species does not breed in Lancashire, but can be seen in South Cumbria and Cheshire. It has occurred as a vagrant in an Ansdell garden where it was closely observed by P & M Shakeshaft on 16 July 2003 and on Warton Marsh on 1st June 2009.

Banded Demoiselle

Occurs in slow moving waters This species has spread rapidly in the last 20 years possibly related to improved water quality in our rivers. Originally it appears to have been confined to the River Lostock and Cuerden Valley Park. It spread into the eastern Fylde in the late 1990s reaching the River Wyre at Churchtown by 1998. It is now well established in the

rivers Wyre and Brock and along the Lancaster Canal. Casual records have occurred near Blackpool. Flight period first half May to August.

Emerald Damselfly

Strictly in still waters with emergent vegetation, often acidic boggy pools. Probably confined to Cockerham and Winmarleigh mosses until early 2000s. First recorded at Heron's Reach pools in 2000 and more widely near Blackpool in 2003, with sightings at Westby Brick Pits and St Annes Crematorium pond. Flight period July-September.

Large Red Damselfly

Prefers acidic conditions and hence rare in the Fylde, breeding only in the Cockerham, Winmarleigh moss area and Myerscough Quarry. Casual records near Blackpool. Flight period – the earliest of our species to emerge, peaking in the first half June and continuing to mid-August.

Azure Damselfly

Common throughout our area in still and slow moving well vegetated waters. Occurs in the Ribble and Wyre rivers, ponds, lakes, etc. and also in well established garden ponds. Flight period late April to August peaking May.

Common Blue Damselfly

Common and widespread, with counts of over 100 at Fleetwood Nature Park. It is frequently the most abundant species. Apparently it can breed in brackish waters, though I have no personal experience of this. Flight period mid-May to mid-September.

Blue-tailed Damselfly

The most widely distributed species in our area, found in every type of pond and probably occurring in every Fylde tetrad. Flight period early May to August with most in June-July.

Common Hawker

More or less confined to acid wetlands, so fairly rare in our area as a breeding species occurring at Cockerham-Winmarleigh and Myerscough Quarry. Casual records are widespread. Flight period July-September.

Migrant Hawker

Not recorded in the Atlas of 1996 (covering 1975-1990), though apparently seen at Mere Sands Wood in 1988, where it first bred in 1996. First recorded north of the Ribble in 1997 when four were seen at Marton Mere. It avoids acidic and cold waters so is well suited to the Fylde, especially in the west. By 1999 it was well established in our area becoming the most common of the larger dragonflies at Marton Mere. Flight period late July into November at Marton Mere.

Southern Hawker

Prefers small ponds in shaded conditions. Occurs Cockerham, Winmarleigh area and was commonly seen at Westby Brick Pits before tipping began. Notable as a species flying in the evening. Probably somewhat under recorded in the Fylde. Flight period July-September.

Brown Hawker

The most widespread large dragonfly, with a catholic choice of habitat. It seems frequently seen well away from water. Flight period mid-June to late September.

Emperor Dragonfly

Our largest species. First reported at Marton Mere in 1977 but only became established

there from 1994. It is now widespread at farm ponds in the Fylde. Will colonise almost any still water site. Flight period June to mid-September.

Four-spotted Chaser

Widespread in the Fylde especially in the south-west. Flight period May-July.

Broad-bodied Chaser

First appeared on the Fylde in 2004 at Myerscough College and Quarry and seen at Warton Bank in 2005, becoming widespread thereafter. Open still waters preferred and thus particularly attracted to newly dug ponds. Flight period late May into August.

Black-tailed Skimmer

First recorded at Whitehills Road pond and Myerscough College in 1999, spreading rapidly thereafter. Favours large open waters with bare shore lines, so very attracted to new gravel diggings. Original centre of colonization in the Blackpool area was the Whitehills Road pond which subsequently was heavily stocked with fish, thus becoming unsuitable for dragonflies. Occurs at the new Westby Brick Pits ponds, St Annes Old Links and Heron's Reach.

Common Darter

Widespread and common species, often the first to colonize new garden ponds. Very notable as resting on the gravel paths surrounding Marton Mere. Extended flight period from late June to mid-October, peaking early August.

Ruddy Darter

Inhabits still waters but is a rare breeder in Lancashire which has been recorded at Westby Brick Pits and at Heron's Reach ponds. It may be under recorded in the Fylde. Especially on the coastal strip. Flight period late July.

Black Darter

Prefers acidic shallow pools mainly in the hill country, so rare as a Fylde breeder, probably confined to the Cockerham-Winmarleigh area. Casual records from Heron's Reach ponds and Westby Brick Pits. Flight period mainly August.

Yellow-winged Darter

This is an occasional migrant to Britain. The only record from the Fylde area relates to Lytham St Annes NR when 6 males and an ovipositing female were seen on 5 August 1995, three were still present there until last seen on 7 September.

Red-veined Darter

A migrant to Britain becoming regular in the late 1980s. There was a major influx in 2006 when up to 9 were seen at Fleetwood Nature Park on 5 July with 10 males and 4 ovipositing females there on 20th July, with 2 remaining until at least 28th. Unfortunately this colonization attempt seems to have failed. However, two further males were seen at the same pool on 20th July 2009.

General Remarks

Dragonflies are still rapidly expanding their range into and within Britain, almost certainly the result of rising temperatures and climate alteration (See Cham 2014 for up to date comments). We can expect additions to the Lancashire and Fylde list in the next decade. In the Fylde the outstanding places to seek dragonflies are the Heron's Reach ponds-Marton Mere complex, Myerscough Quarry ponds and the Cockerham-Winmarleigh mosses. However, almost any unpolluted pond, particularly if not stocked with fish, may

prove of interest. There is no doubt that the Fylde, especially the east, is still under-recorded.

The Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Society is preparing an illustrated book on The Dragonflies of Lancashire and North Merseyside and this will probably be printed in late 2014. It should provide an ideal basis on which to take up the study of these spectacular insects. In addition the outstanding field guide (Cham and Brooks 2014), illustrated by Richard Lewington, has been substantially revised and will be published this autumn.

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Frank Walsh

Fleetwood Pelagic

Monday 21st July dawned hot and sunny yet again, a near perfect day for a few hours at sea off Fleetwood.

Last year's boat trips were cancelled due to weeks of poor weather, this year could not have been a bigger contrast. As in the past Andy and his boat 'Blue Mink' picked us up directly off the beach by the RNLI shop at Fleetwood, bang on 3 PM as promised, which must take some pretty good timing having been out at sea for the previous five hours with a boat full of keen fishermen (or fisher-persons if you are strictly PC !) they all seemed pretty happy looking forward to consuming the mackerel they had been catching. As we headed out of the estuary I started throwing bread out to attract some gulls hoping they would attract something scarcer. About an hour and a quarter out of Fleetwood we stopped and put out our chum bag and oily slick comprising cod liver oil, mackerel heads, popcorn, rice crispies and mixed rotting fish parts, not too pleasant if you suffer from seasickness !



Unfortunately nothing other than gulls came in but several birds passed or could be seen in the distance including gannets, kittiwake, guillemots and several sandwich terns, some distant harbour porpoise could have been more co-operative. After about an hour and a half we headed slightly south and



chummed again, this time a cracking juvenile mediterranean gull came in giving excellent close views.



Common Scoter

As in previous years there appeared to be plenty of common scoter nearer inshore, about 1350 were logged including a single flock of about 750, always a fantastic sight especially as they could be heard calling.

Not a great tally of birds but there is always next time..... **Paul Slade**

Preston Terns

So far this year we have recorded 140+ pairs of breeding Common Terns and two pairs of breeding Arctic Terns at the Dock. 104+ Common Tern chicks and two Arctic Tern chicks have been counted on the same date. Following that count a further 54 Common Tern chicks hatched. This compares with 120 pairs of Common Terns (73+ chicks) and one (unsuccessful) pair of Arctic Terns last year. So clearly the colony is on the up.



Arctic Tern - Paul Slade

Another dimension to the story is that this year we have been quite successful in reading rings on a number of birds. Most are from Shotton and are at least 5 and up to 11 years old. However we've also read a South African ring that was fitted in 2011 in Namibia ! Another has a Museum Paris ring and was ringed in Senegal in 2000.

The BTO have just run this Blog piece with our help:

<http://btoringing.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/namibian-common-and-spanish-roseate.html>

There is also a lot of public interest in the colony, which is apparent on every visit when passers-by stop to ask about the birds.

Given the above the RSPB held a number of days in August at the site when, in association with the Fylde Bird Club, the chance was taken to publicise the colony again and to show people the birds.

Support from Preston City Council has again been fantastic and we want to do everything we can to encourage the Council to maintain their support (given that they own and maintain the site).



Common Tern - Peter Rhind

The bird spectacle at the dock is truly outstanding in a local and national context and worthy of serious attention.

Forthcoming Club Meetings and Events

September 23	Panama, Birding in the Rain. Ian Newton. (Club meeting)
October 28	The Fall and Rise of the River Mersey. Bill Morton, sounds intriguing. (Club meeting)
November 25	A boat Trip Round Svarlbard. Paul Ellis. Should be a stunning array of photographs and well worth it for armchair birders like me. (Club meeting)
November 4	Richard Crossley – A talk on birding tales. (Special meeting, for more details contact Paul Slade 07970 986904)

Coastal and Estuarine Disturbance

The Club is requesting help with a campaign to reduce the disturbance to birds on our shoreline, including the estuaries.

We would like everyone to submit records to the Club of all incidents of disturbance to roosts and feeding congregations of shorebirds and wildfowl at coastal locations in the Fylde recording area.

Records should include the following:

- Location
- Date
- Time
- Cause of disturbance (e.g. dogs, microlights, jet ski, etc but not natural causes e.g. Peregrine, Great black backed gull, etc).
- Species disturbed
- Number of birds disturbed (estimate will be adequate)
- Whether the birds left the area or not
- Anything else relevant

These records can be very brief.

The Club has long campaigned to reduce man made disturbance on our coast and, with the help of others, has had some success: Motor vehicles are now banned from Pressall Sands, microlight operators have been reminded to obey flying guidelines and jet skis on the River Wyre are restricted to certain parts of the river.

However the situation is not satisfactory and disturbance is still unacceptably high. Therefore we intend to re-invigorate our campaign and join with others to make things better. The Morecambe Bay Partnership is funding a study to record disturbance to high tide roosts in the northern part of Morecambe Bay and the hope is that high tide refuges can be established there. The RSPB and Natural England are involved.

We need to press hard for high tide refuges on the Wyre Borough and Fylde Borough coasts. Beach zoning has long been proposed by the Club at Rossall Point but no effective action has yet been taken by Wyre Council. The idea is allocate a small part of the beach as a refuge at high tide and ask people to respect it. Yes I know that's hard but it CAN be done.

Other seriously disturbed sites include the beaches at Lytham, Fairhaven and St Annes. Small refuges at these locations could be established and make a huge difference.

These locations are within the Morecambe Bay and Ribble protected areas. The areas are designated as SPAs (Special Protection Areas under EU law), SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and Ramsar Sites (wetland of international importance). The EU Birds Directive states that "Member States of the European Union (EU) have a duty to safeguard the habitats of migratory birds".

In this regard the authorities are obliged to protect these areas from damaging disturbance and our aim will be to press them to do so.

In order to support the campaign to provision high tide refuges, we need as many records of disturbance as we can log. We already have a significant number of records on file but really do need a lot more, particularly of the continuous effect of dogs on roosts that generally goes unreported.

Please help by submitting any disturbance records either by entering the record on the Fylde Bird Club's website sightings page; by e mail to the Secretary at the e mail address above or in writing to the Secretary (18 Staining Rise, Staining, FY3 0BU).

We know that we are tilting at windmills and do not expect quick results but we feel that we must not turn a blind eye to the matter and that in time the message will get through and action will result.

Thanks, Paul Ellis, **Secretary, Fylde Bird Club**

Marton Mere Work Party

A big thank you to everyone who turned out and helped with the habitat management work at the Mere on Sunday 31st August. The day was a great success and a dramatic difference has been made.

For Sale

Nikon 300mm f4 AFS lens - Excellent condition, with original box, case, lens caps.
£695

&

Kenko Pro 300 DGX 1.4x Teleconverter for Nikon
Excellent condition, with original box, case, lens caps.
£95

For both contact **Paul Slade** on 07970 986904