



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

FEBRUARY 2007 MEMBERS NEWSLETTER

Welcome to this quarter's newsletter. I hope you find something of interest in it.

Following a request in the last newsletter several members have responded with their 2006 birding highlights. Thanks to all who took the time to do this, I think the enthusiasm shines through in the short accounts.

As well as doing the thankless task of monthly news summaries Stuart Piner has provided accounts of his involvement in the last two Fylde bird races. The 2007 renewal is now only a couple of months away and it would be good to see a new team or two take part in the friendly rivalry.

Barry Dyson has kindly provided an article on his work censusing a local farm's birdlife. It is always good to read about patchworking like this, and Barry's notes also highlight the other wildlife interest that can be enjoyed whilst out birding in the Fylde.

Our Club Secretary is the willing guinea pig for our second member profile, Paul has also provided some information for a piece I have done on winter birding in Ireland. This reflects the latest instalments in a long tradition of Fylde birders on the emerald isle in winter.

Good birding,

Stephen.



RECENT SIGHTINGS

Recent reports are collated from submissions to the club website and meetings by Stuart Piner. Thanks to Stuart for continuing to undertake this task.

November 2006

It was by no means a vintage month, but there were several long-stayers to brighten up a quiet day. The majority of observer attention was focussed on the Fluke Hall area, where the Glossy Ibis remained on show throughout the month and a Snow Bunting was present up to the 7th. Another Snow Bunting was briefly on Pilling Marsh on 26th.

Scarce geese were thin on the ground, but two Eurasian White-fronted Geese, two Greenland White-fronted Geese and up to six Barnacle Geese joined Pink-footed Geese in the Pilling area early in the month.

The Marton Mere 'winter show' featured up to four Long-eared Owls and a Bittern, as well as the continued presence of the frustratingly elusive Cetti's Warbler. A sleepy juvenile Scaup resided at Fairhaven Lake throughout the month.

A fantastic 18 Little Egrets roosted at Freckleton Naze Pool on 19th, a new Fylde record count. Raptor watches at nearby Warton Marsh produced up to two Marsh Harriers and a ringtail Hen Harrier. An influx of Shag into the county brought two to Wyre Light and the month ended with a male Velvet Scoter flying south past Starr Gate on 30th.

December 2006

Strong south-westerly winds in early December caused a huge 'wreck' of Leach's Petrels in Britain and Ireland, and luckily the Fylde was not left out of the action. At least 46 were recorded off coastal watchpoints between 3rd-12th, with peak counts of seven coming from Rossall Point on both 11th and 12th. However, at least six off Fairhaven on 4th was perhaps more notable. Other seabirds associated with the extreme weather included a juvenile Pomarine Skua past Rossall Point on 11th; a Black Guillemot past Blackpool on 4th; Great Skuas flew over Cocker's Dyke and past Rossall Point (5) and Shags were at Fleetwood Marine Lakes (2), Fleetwood Docks, Granny's Bay and past Starr Gate.

Away from the coast, the long-staying immature Glossy Ibis continued to attract plenty of attention early in the month, but it was not seen after 15th. Marton Mere continued to host an extremely elusive Cetti's Warbler throughout the month, whilst five Long-eared Owls and two Bitterns were usually more obliging. The first-winter female Scaup remained on Fairhaven Lake until 24th and a Green Woodpecker at Medlar would have been popular had it hung around.

Other bits and pieces included Barnacle Geese located amongst Pink-footed Geese flocks at Pilling Marsh (2), Nateby (2), Todderstaffe Hall and Fleetwood Farm, whilst a first-winter Eurasian White-fronted Goose was at Weeton on 17th. A Great Northern Diver flew past Starr Gate on 21st and two adult Shags were noted off Rossall Point on 30th. Ravens were at Fleetwood Farm (2), Newton Marsh (2) and Clifton Marsh during the last few weeks of the year.



January 2007

The discovery of a few local scarcities injected some excitement into the traditionally quiet month of January. The highlight for many (well, for those who managed to connect with it) was a Firecrest that intermittently frequented a Catforth garden from 7th-15th. The bird was both beautiful and frustrating in equal measures, as it made only fleeting visits to its chosen garden before again disappearing into thin air.

At St Michael's-on-Wyre, an adult Ring-billed Gull briefly in a stubble field on 22nd was presumably an old friend. This 'Fylde field-roamer' was first located at Myerscough Quarry in April 2003, and has been seen on only a handful of occasions since – get those gull flocks checked!

Another Fylde-favourite was the Willow Tit, which returned to Cottam Brickworks on 21st. A fine adult Tundra Bean Goose was located amongst a few hundred Pink-footed Geese on Rawcliffe Moss on 15th and towards the end of the month the Fleetwood area produced two top-draw birds; a Black Redstart at Fleetwood Docks from 30th and an adult Iceland Gull at Jameson Road landfill site on 27th (having initially been located in the gull roost off Knott End in rapidly fading light during the previous evening).

Strong westerly gales on 18th encouraged those brave enough to face the elements to partake in a little seawatching, and the just reward came in the form of a Blue Fulmar, the fourth Fylde record of this northern phase. Interestingly, all four records have occurred between 13th-18th January.

Marton Mere hosted up to six Long-eared Owls throughout the month, along with at least one Cetti's Warbler and a single Bittern. Ravens were seen at Bispham Marsh (2), Warton Marsh (2) and Hambleton and Glasson Basin held up to three Scaup. Barnacle Geese were seen in a number of Pink-footed Geese flocks, but the highest count was six on Pilling Marsh and a Dark-bellied Brent Goose visited there on 16th. Three Mandarins added a splash of colour to Bispham Marsh on 13th, whilst a Purple Sandpiper once again joined Turnstones at Fleetwood Marine Lakes on 20th and two Water Pipits were at Warton Marsh early in the month. A Short-eared Owl was at Cockersand on 26th and last but not least was an adult Yellow-legged Gull at Starr Gate on 29th, where Shags were a regular feature throughout the month, being seen on five days.



2006 BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS

Following the request in the last newsletter below are the submissions received from members on their 2006 memories. Thanks to everyone who has participated, hopefully the enthusiasm that comes through will encourage others to share their experiences in the future.

Chris Batty

Whilst for me the most memorable moments of any year on the Fylde are always the arrival of a rarity (and this year Laughing Gull and Broad-billed Sandpiper stand out - thanks for both Maurice!) it was my discovering a beautiful Roseate Tern at my adopted home of Knott End on 29th July which brought me the most pleasure in 2006.

The Fylde Birdrace is always great fun and 2006 was no exception. With Stephen Dunstan and Stuart Piner, we smashed our own record score of 124 (set last year) when we recorded 133 species on 27th April.

Further a field, seeing the first Long-billed Murrelet for Britain and the first Canada Warbler for Ireland will take some beating, and ticking my 700th species in the Western Palearctic (a stunning Crab Plover in Egypt in July) saw another ambition fulfilled.

Norman Dewhurst

I've been surprised by the birds attacking the suet slabs on the feeder.

As well as the expected Blue Tits, Great Tits, Coal Tits and Long Tailed Tits, I get Magpies hanging on and flapping like mad, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Robins, Dunnocks, Chaffinches and Nuthatches.

UK highlights have been non existent this year but I did finally find a Bluethroat on the Algarve after several visits both there and Austria (Neusiedler See) plus great views of a Hoopoe which nested in the base of a raised flowerbed on the patio of one of the places we stayed.

Stephen Dunstan

The highlights for me were three days all involving Yellow-browed Warblers:

- 1) In February finding one on Fuerteventura (a Spanish national rarity) the same day as seeing Houbara Bustards at Costa Calma.
- 2) Seeing my first Roller at Beal and then seeing YBW, RB Fly and Barred Warbler on Holy Island in a classic east coast autumn day.
- 3) Finding the first one I had ever seen in the Fylde at Fleetwood Crem in October and others successfully twitching it.

Barry Dyson

My birding highlights of 2006 were 3 local patch 'firsts'. A totally unexpected Tree Pipit inside Knowle wood at Singleton on 5/5 made my day and certainly put a 'spring' in my step. The second and third were amazingly on the same day 29/9 when a Hobby was watched for about 25 minutes terrorising everything it could while a Nuthatch was heard calling from inside Knowle wood. Fylde ticks also included the Hobby, plus Roseate



Tern, Black Guillemot and Laughing Gull. What a year.

Maurice Jones

I had long wanted to see Laughing Gull in the UK but with only 98 records up to the end of 2004 it wasn't going to be easy. Hurricane Wilma, the most intense ever recorded, increased the chances dramatically with 53 records in 2005 alone. In November I went to Portmadog to see my first only to see it struck in mid air by a Herring Gull, rendering it flightless. Thankfully it recovered and stayed there until at least the 4th April.

On the 9th April at 15.50 hrs I entered the hide on the South side of Marton Mere with Mike and Pauline McGough. Scanning the water I soon picked out a dark mantled small gull, a full plumaged adult Laughing Gull. When it stayed at the Mere until the 16th this became the first twitchable bird in Lancashire. The first had been seen by just one observer at Brockholes Quarry in May 1999. It is interesting to speculate if the Portmadog and Marton Mere birds were the same individual. If so, that aggressive Herring Gull may well have robbed us of an exciting local bird!

The weather on the 15th May was not promising but Pauline McGough had agreed to a days birding with Mike unfortunately at work. We had a good day despite the rain with Redstart, Pied Flycatchers, Garden Warbler, Tawny Owl, Dipper and the long staying Red Necked Grebe at Barnacre reservoir. At 15.00 we arrived at Cockersands - still raining - but Dunlins and Ringed Plovers were active on the exposed mud with receding tide. I remember saying to Pauline that these were the species to search through in May with Easterly winds in the hope of finding Broad Billed Sandpiper. About 15 minutes later, much to my surprise, there was one 50 metres from the car. Several people were able to see the bird that day but at 16.30 an Osprey flushed all the waders and the bird wasn't seen again until the next day. It stayed until 17th. With only 8 previous records and the last 18 years to the day previously, we had quite a good days birding by any standards.

Stuart Piner

I spent half of 2006 away from home, but there are still several highlights that spring to mind. 'Gripping back' Glossy Ibis for my Fylde list was incredibly satisfying, as was smashing the Fylde Birdrace record with Chris and Stephen. Rossall Point on birdrace morning was so exciting – Hoopoe, followed by Blue-headed Wagtail, loads of seabirds – amazing! The stunning adult Laughing Gull at Marton Mere was also a joy to see. However, as with most aspects of birding, the high points were counteracted by some low moments; being stuck in Norwich in the middle of my university exams, whilst everybody enjoyed Maurice's Broad-billed Sandpiper was painful, to say the least.



Fylde Birdrace Accounts – 2005 and 2006

2005

As the clock struck midnight on 27th April, we sat in the car at Burglar's Alley, looking out as rain drops battered the windscreen; Chris Batty was devouring greasy fast food (at the outrageous speed only he can); I was already falling asleep as I'd only arrived home from university late last night; and Stephen Dunstan...well...Stephen was already moaning, saying the whole day was doomed...but he had a point; this wasn't exactly the ideal start to our annual Fylde Birdrace.

This was the fourth consecutive year our team had competed, and we've always got off to a good start; this year was no exception. By 04:00 the rain had stopped and we'd racked up all the nocturnal specials. Chris showed the value of preparation; when he whistled in the dark at Staynall, a European Golden Plover whistled back!

As light began to penetrate the moody sky, Stephen managed to persuade the Police that I wasn't homeless or drunk as I wandered across Fairhaven Dunes to add Stonechat. We made a rapid exit, and our attention turned to the sea. After flirting with Starr Gate, we moved to Rossall Point. Stephen had to leave at 08:00 but before this he put his razor-sharp ears to use and pulled out some quality fly-overs - Siskin and Lesser Redpoll. The best the sea could produce was an Arctic Skua and several Little Gulls, but as we left the site at 08:30 the list was looking promising. The rest of the morning passed quickly with a Wood Warbler singing in Stanley Park the highlight.

If marathon runners call it hitting the wall; birdracers could call it hitting midday. The intensity of seeing as much as possible in the morning, and then the ticking off of various staked-out species mid morning is over. It's time to start grinding, just when the lack of sleep is starting to hit you and trying even harder to stay awake is the last thing you want to do...so, this year, our midday wall was Marton Mere...and was incredibly difficult to get over! After initially ticking Goldeneye, we managed to miss Little Grebe, Whooper Swan, Long-eared Owl and Gadwall. We were demoralised that our good work earlier in the day was going to be wasted by our midday blues.

It was 14:00 before we shook off the blues, giving up on south Fylde and headed for Pilling Marsh where Barry Dyson and Millie Mottram kindly showed us a Jack Snipe out in the open along with White-fronted Goose, Ruff and Spotted Redshank. Ellet Grange produced the woodland species, Glasson revealed Goosander, Winmarleigh Moss a Buzzard and our luck was in with Dipper and Grey Wagtail on the River Brock.

19:30 and things were looking up. The rush in the north had us on 121 - three more for the record. We headed for Lightfoot Green, where Steve Jones was watching Little Ringed Plover. As we ran back to the car, racing the sun, it was clear how



important this was – earlier in the month Chris hadn't run this fast for a Belted Kingfisher!

We arrived at Warton Bank, frantically scanning the marsh, desperately hoping for something new. Chris found a Merlin - we had equalled the record! As the minutes passed, and the sun began to set, one more species was all we needed. Then it came, over my head, a Peregrine with a perfect sense of timing. We'd done it...124 a new Fylde Birdrace record. And next year? it's all about 130!

2006

It's time to accept the bare fact that we never really 'grow up'. As much as we try to mask our inner youth with the mundane, tedious routine of adult life, our childish ways still lurk within us, waiting for an excuse to burst out with a vengeance.

As children, we obviously enjoyed doing things we liked. And generally, we liked to do these things to excess. Whether that was eating as much chocolate as possible at Easter or playing marathon football matches in the park with your friends. Nothing felt better than escaping the watchful eye of your parents or other figure of authority for a few precious moments of joyous freedom.

This desire never really leaves us. Take our birdrace team for instance. At midnight on 27th April, Chris Batty, Stephen Dunstan and I sneaked out for a precious day away from the watchful eyes of our girlfriends. We aimed to do what we liked to do best – see a ridiculous number of birds – and we were going to drive around the Fylde over and over again, leaving no stone unturned in our quest to beat our existing Fylde day-list record of 124 species. By the end of it all we would flake out, all energy drained after over-doing it. But that's how all the best childhood adventures ended. This one was certainly epic.

As usual, to free up the precious light hours, we spent the period leading up to dawn searching for night birds. We scored Barn, Tawny and Little Owls with relative ease, a Grasshopper Warbler reeled at Marton Mere and we enjoyed the beginnings of the dawn chorus at Hackensall Hall. However, we missed Cuckoo - perhaps a worrying reflection of this species' current status on the Fylde. Nevertheless, by the time we reached Rossall Point soon after dawn, we had heard over thirty species; we decided it was probably time to start bird-watching.

In previous years we had made the mistake of rushing away from Rossall Point before we had logged the vital birds. This is the one site that has the potential to make a good total into a great total. The sea was alive, and amongst others seven Little Terns, Arctic Skua, Kittiwake, Fulmar, Little Gull and Manx Shearwater were all noted. Bob Stinger and Len Blacow arrived and in no time at all Bob began elatedly shouting that he was watching a Hoopoe on the golf course – what a bonus! Chris later located a stunning male Blue-headed Wagtail on the golf course; Rossall Point felt like Portland Bill! The species kept coming but by mid morning, we decided to tear ourselves away from Rossall, by this stage on 88 species. Things were looking very promising.



After calling in at a few migrant hot spots in Fleetwood (where we recorded a Sparrowhawk at Bourne Hill, a species that had surprisingly eluded in previous years), the hard grind of ticking off the remaining 'sitters' then commenced. A long-staying pair of Garganey were luckily still at Mythop and Buzzards showed from Todderstaffe Hall. After the mandatory stop-off at Pudding House for the 'Cream of the Fylde', Wallings ice cream, we began our assault on northern Fylde. A pair of Pintail at Cockersand were a pleasant surprise, the long staying female Scaup was still on the Conder Pool, a Spotted Redshank was on the Conder Estuary and a pair of Bullfinches were a bonus at Thurnham Hall. The River Brock once again did us proud by holding both Dipper and Grey Wagtail.

By the time we had finished at Ellel Grange we had done it. With the addition of Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Coal Tit, we had reached 125 species. It was late afternoon and there were still plenty of hours left and species to try for. Jay at Greyfriars, Goosander at Frenchwood, Little Egret at Warton Marsh, Grey Plover, Knot and Swift at Lytham and a Fieldfare at Pilling Lane Ends all followed. We finished with a major bonus, a Raven at Winmarleigh Moss, the first to ever be recorded on a Fylde Birdrace. 133 – what a total! What a day!

Although we missed several species one may expect, most notably Common Tern, Kingfisher, Whinchat, Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat, The combination of several lingering winter visitors, an exciting seawatch, a decent selection of summer migrants and a couple of vagrants thrown in may not occur again for a long, long time. We may never again reach the dizzy heights of the 130s, but at least we can look back, like looking back at those fond childhood memories, on the day we saw 133 species in the Fylde.



RSPB Volunteer & Farmer Alliance Project - Barry Dyson

I registered my willingness to participate in this scheme on the 2/12/99. It had been piloted in Central England that year with a view to extending it to the whole of England in the following year 2000. Limited resources however meant that they were only able to extend the service in 2000 to farmers within and south of middle England. I renewed my interest for the year 2001 and suffered yet another setback when the 'Foot and mouth outbreak' occurred and the surveys were cancelled for most of the UK that year.

Finally in 2002 I was matched to a farm on the Lancashire/Cumbria border at Arkholme which I have to say took me slightly aback, more so when I subsequently found out that another volunteer from Lancaster had been allocated a farm at Pilling. I made my thoughts known on learning about this and since then I have undertaken a further 3 surveys all within the Fylde.

So what made me want to volunteer for such a scheme. Well, over many years of visiting Over Wyre farms with Bob Danson, monitoring and ringing 'his' pulli, an affinity with farmland birds gradually grew on me. Many anecdotes of their former abundance made me want to help in some way, however small, to halt their continuing decline. The Volunteer & Farmer Alliance project seemed to fit the bill. It is part of the RSPB's farmland recovery programme, which aims to reverse the substantial decline of many farmland bird species.

The project enthuses farmers about their birds and encourages them to seek advice about practical action they might take to help. Farmers can receive grants for many of these actions through agri-environment schemes available across the UK. It has been a resounding success in helping to build relationships with the farming community, so much so that the scheme has been successfully exported to Sweden.

So what do I do and how do I do it. Well before you do anything a training session is undertaken, mine was at Leighton Moss and on completion you are given a training manual to take away. Any additional support you require is only a telephone call away. You then carry out a survey at your allocated farm of all the birds encountered (except corvids, pigeons and pheasants) including those that you only hear. You record their exact location on the provided field survey map along with what the bird was doing, using the BTO codes.

Briefly a timetable of events would be along the following lines;

1. Carol Coupe the Farmland Bird Officer would write to you in March matching you to a farm and enclosing blank survey maps, volunteer slips for car dashboard, updates to training manual etc, etc.
2. Prepare for the survey by reading afresh various relevant articles provided by the RSPB.
3. Contact the farmer to arrange a preliminary visit in March/early April.



4. With the farmer go through the health and safety checklist, agree the survey area and access points, find out crop codes for each survey field and enter them on a survey map, and set a date and time for the first survey visit.
5. Return the health and safety checklist and map showing crop codes to the project staff and notify any changes to the survey boundary.
6. Carry out three or four early morning survey visits at two-three week intervals between the beginning of April and the end of June avoiding particularly cold, wet or windy days.

The surveys are of course the 'meat' of the exercise and one I particularly enjoy. I wouldn't do it otherwise, although this year fighting my way through a sodden oil seed rape field very nearly changed my mind. But the whole experience is one to savour and look back on with fond memories. I am not at liberty to divulge specifics but it is always pleasing to be able to report back to the farmer finds of red listed farmland species such as Corn, Reed, and Yellow buntings, Skylark, Linnet, Grey Partridge, Tree and House Sparrows.

On a personal note it is rewarding to gain a greater understanding of bird behaviour on farmland and satisfying to correctly anticipate the species to be found by experience of the crops grown and the habitats on the farm. There are also non-avian highlights, treasured moments such as watching Roe Deer approach to within a few feet, 27 hares seen in one morning's visit, discovering the largest colony of Green Hairstreak butterflies I have ever seen and forming a lasting friendship with one of the farmers.

Perhaps the funniest moment was when I was looking at a copy of the finished map sent to one of the farmers. I had inadvertently used the wrong BTO code. Instead of 4 Mistle Thrushes (M) seen flying across a field I had used the code (MT) denoting 4 Marsh Tits. Easy done but oh so wrong.

If after reading this article any of you should be interested in carrying out such a survey and would like further information then simply contact Carol Coupe the Farmland Bird Officer at: RSPB, Rural Business Centre, Myerscough College, Bilsborrow, Preston, Lancashire. PR3 ORY. Telephone number 01995 642251, Mobile 07739 659643 or E-mail carol.coupe@rspb.org.uk



MEMBER PROFILE - PAUL ELLIS

Thanks to our Secretary who has kindly completed the profile for this newsletter. Submissions from any member are welcome for future profiles.

Favourite Fylde bird:
Lapwing

Favourite world bird:
Tough one - Wallcreeper is hard to better but there are so many megas

Favourite Fylde birding site:
Skippool

Favourite world birding site:
Bharatpur India

Optics used:
Swaro 8.5x42, Zeiss 85 Diascope with zoom

Best self find:
Cackling Goose Over Wyre or Black headed Bunting on Scilly

Greatest other birding achievement:
Surviving the tsunami in Sri Lanka (Swaro 8.5x42 are tidal wave proof)
Counting over 300 coots at the Mere!
Putting an end to the Slender billed Gull mistake at L. Moss.
Helping establish a Tree Sparrow colony at Todderstaffe.

Birding influences:
Richard Richardson
(met him daily on the East Bank at Cley for 2 weeks in the summer of '76 when I was 15).

Best day's birding:
7th Oct 1999 on Gugh, the Scillies: when a Short toed Eagle flew over, while I was watching a male Siberian Thrush.

Best Fylde day's birding:
Any Fylde Bird Race

Other interests:
Running, Motorcycles, Aircraft

Favourite birding website:
Fylde Bird Club's

Favourite bird book:
Collins Guide

Pet birding hate:
Birders who bring big dogs to twitches for shy birds.
Overly noisy birders who yap at 100dB for hours without leaving, once they've seen the bird and not looked at it for over an hour.

What I like best about birding:
Unpredictability.



IRELAND TRIP REPORTS – FEBRUARY 2006

When I was given a chance to join Chris Batty and Stuart Piner in some Irish white winged gull watching I jumped at the chance. There aren't that many Glaucous and Iceland Gulls in the Fylde in a typical winter, and the chance to see good numbers and explore new areas of Northern Ireland and the adjoining Republic was too good to miss. There was also the outside chance of something special, like an American Herring Gull or just possibly a Thayer's Gull.

Working to a tight timetable of two half days and one full day it was a bit of a blow when the flight out of Liverpool to Derry was an hour late. This was a cause of mild frustration, but this was greatly exacerbated when we were warned that the plane would have to circle over Derry due to fog. It seemed increasingly likely that day 1 would be a complete washout, but fortunately the fog lifted and we were able to land with only a slight increase in the overall delay. The pilot seemed to be making up for lost time as we appeared to be going too fast and landed with an almighty bump. We got our hire car and headed to Culmore Dump determined to make up for lost time, but still mindful of the poor viewing conditions. We needn't have worried, as although it was still gloomy we racked up six Iceland Gulls (two adults, one second winter and three first winters), one Glaucous Gull (first winter) and a Mediterranean Gull (second winter).

Reasonably happy we called a halt in the prematurely fading light and headed for Killybegs. On arrival we soon booked in at the Ritz, which whilst not quite living up to the name was decent hostel type accommodation for a very reasonable price. We enjoyed fish and chips and a couple of jars before retiring to bed in anticipation of another good day's birding ahead.

Shortly after first light we were out in Killybegs. For about the only time in the trip I was first off the mark with a first winter Iceland Gull in the fish dock. We moved next to the animal feeds plant where another first winter Iceland Gull was seen, but the main interest was provided by a large dark mantled apparent hybrid gull. Crossing the river we saw several Iceland Gulls and a couple of Glaucous Gulls, this was very satisfying but the area we were viewing from was out of the sun and bitterly cold so we decided to move on.

A brief check of the harbour area produced several Black Guillemots and some Kittiwakes but it was clear that the number of gulls wasn't increasing and we decided to try some other sites. Chris new of a place to the west called Teelin which often held a few gulls so we gave it a go. The scenery on the road there was fantastic, the best of our short trip. When we got there a modest gull roost was indeed present on the estuary, and Stuart soon picked out two first winter Iceland Gulls. Despite a good number of Common Gulls we couldn't pick out a Ring-billed.

Moving on we tried another gull site which was disappointing then moved on to Murvagh where there is often a scoter flock. The only scoter we saw were rather distant, but good numbers of Great Northern Divers provided compensation. Next stop was the centre of Sligo where a couple of Ring-billed Gulls had been reported. We were not to be disappointed as one was right in front of the car when we parked in front of the Harp Tavern. Chris and Stuart took some pictures and scanning the area produced a Med Gull and a Greenshank.

Our last target sites of the day were the twin Barnacle Goose locations of Raghley and Lissadell where we hoped for a vagrant Canada Goose. There were Barnies at both sites, but unfortunately we couldn't get anywhere near the ones at Raghley and only had a few Brents for compensation. At Lissadell we were more fortunate and I alerted Chris and Stuart to a head and neck of a Canada Goose otherwise obscured in the group, unfortunately when it could be seen properly the attached body proved to be a fairly standard Barnacle Goose and it was clearly a 'carbuncle' hybrid.



We drove north and found accommodation in a splendid bed and breakfast a few miles from Culmore which hadn't even opened yet. This would enable us to get to the dump soon after first light the following day. Conditions were bitterly cold when we did arrive there due to a horrid wind chill, Chris and Stuart said it had been milder when they had been in Finland recently! The gulls were offering some compensation though, with around seven Iceland Gulls (five first years, two adults), two Glaucous (both first winters), two probable Yellow-legged Gulls, a probable Herring x Glaucous hybrid and an all white Herring Gull.

When we reached the airport some flights had been cancelled due to the weather in the UK. Fortunately the Liverpool flight was unaffected, though when we landed snow was falling and it was a fairly demanding drive home.

Only a couple of days after we returned other club members were also birding in Ireland. Paul Slade, Paul Ellis and Tweedy from London paid a three day visit. Paul Ellis has kindly provided a summary of their trip, landing further south than ours, at Galway. On Day one (10th Feb) they saw a female Ring-necked Duck at Lough Inchiquin then moved on to Lough Atedaun to successfully twitch the female Bufflehead there. As if that wasn't enough for one day they moved on to Ballyvaughan and saw circa 15 Bottle-nosed Dolphins and three species of diver. Still not finished they had a drake Green-winged Teal at Bell Harbour (County Claire).

And still they hadn't finished. For those readers who know the name Nimmo's Pier you can probably guess what is coming next. The long-staying Yanks (Forster's Tern and American Herring Gull) were both in residence along with 8 Iceland, 1 Glaucous and a Ring-billed Gull.

The following day saw the team still at Nimmo's Pier first thing where they increased their Iceland Gull tally to 20 and Ring-billed Gull total to no fewer than four with med Gull and Sandwich Tern for good measure. A Little Egret was at Rossaveal. A quiet third day saw produced a mere eleven Iceland Gulls at Nimmo's Pier!!



1st winter Iceland Gull Rossaveal Co Galway 11th February 2007 - Paul Ellis

I think it is fair to say that Paul got his revenge for the bird race with this mouth watering list of birds. But hopefully both trip lists give a flavour of how good winter birding in Ireland can be. Cheap air fares may not last much longer so why not give it a go if you can. Don't go to Culmore though, it will have closed by this spring.

SD





Adult Ring billed Gull Rossaveal, Co Galway 11th February 2007 - Paul Ellis

Bird Club Business News

AGM

At the AGM on the 23rd January, The Chairman (Paul Slade), Secretary (Paul Ellis), Treasurer (John Barker) and all the Committee Members (Ron Bedford, Chris Batty, Len Blacow and Dave Pitman) were re elected. There were no other nominations.

The members voted to increase subscriptions by a flat £2 across all membership categories, effective from the end of 2007. Subscriptions to other bodies remain unchanged (BTO, Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Society).

If you haven't paid your 2007 subs yet, please forward them to the Treasurer: (John Barker, Quail House, Quail Holme Rd, Knott End, Lancs. FY6 0BT .
(please make cheques payable to Fylde Bird Club).

Are You On Line? -- Printing and Postage Costs

In an effort to keep administration costs down, we are intending to e-mail as many future newsletters as possible. If you have received this by post but have an e-mail account, please forward your e mail address to paul.ellis24@btopenworld.com.

PE

