



# ***Fylde Bird Club***

## ***Lancashire***

### **MAY 2010 NEWSLETTER**

Welcome to the May 2010 newsletter. Again there has been a delay in the production of the newsletter because of a lack of material, so apologies for this. To reiterate all submission from all members are very welcome. It can be notes on the birds of your garden, your local patch, a recent holiday you enjoyed; if it is about Fylde birds or you as a Fylde based birder it will be very welcome.

Birds which haven't been seen very often in the Fylde are regular features in the newsletter, last time we had details of autumn dowitchers and the first Fylde Ring-necked Duck in December. There were no contenders when the newsletter should have gone out in April. In late May the second Common Rosefinch for the Fylde was found at Lytham St Annes Nature Reserve and details of this record are included in this newsletter. The run of good north west passerines found on the Fylde continues. You don't need to be at Rossall Point or Fairhaven to potentially add to this haul, Ed Stirling's efforts have shown that any area of trees or bushes near the coast between St Annes and Fleetwood could deliver and even inland it is not out of the question.

In the last newsletter I indicated that I would give details of the slot I had cetacean (whales / dolphins / porpoises) and seabird recording on the Stena Leader run from Fleetwood to Larne. This is included in this newsletter. Shortly I will be doing the same from Poole to Santander where results may be better still. Is anybody taking a slot on the final season of the Portsmouth-Bilbao? Is so why don't you share your experiences with the club?

Finally I summarise the results of five visits to date to Out Skerries. I am there again in the autumn, I think it is a fantastic place. The purpose of including it here isn't to get you to go to Out Skerries, it is to highlight the benefits of developing your own patch 'home or away', you get to know the birds and even the people and it can add a lot to your birding over time.

Stephen Dunstan



## COMMON ROSEFINCH AT LYTHAM ST ANNES NATURE RESERVE

Since late 2001 I have worked in the Squires Gate area of Blackpool. In that time I have, whenever possible, tried to fit in some birding at twin local patches of Starr Gate (seabirds) and Lytham St Annes Nature Reserve / Starr Hills (migrant passerines). In terms of the latter my most notable success before this spring was a Hoopoe which lingered to be enjoyed by many in April 2002.

Due to work and family commitments I have given the 'patches' less attention in the first half of 2010 than the equivalent period in any other year. On 26<sup>th</sup> May I had a lot of work in and it had rained most of the morning so this looked set to continue. However the showers abated and when I checked the RBA website at lunchtime there was news of a Nightingale on Hilbre and a Bluethroat at Leasowe so I thought I would give LSANR a quick check in case anything had been forced down. On the way the sea looked flat calm, always good for porpoises, and I nearly changed plans but carried on.

I always cover the bushes and trees immediately behind Maurice's old hut, normally going 'inside' and trying to get views of birds not showing from outside. I did this and was soon on a Willow Warbler, presumably a migrant, then better still a Spotted Flycatcher which was a year tick and a definite migrant.

I gave it a little longer and picked up another bird not too far away from me which for a fraction of a second looked superficially like the Spotted Fly but the finch structure and distinctive beady black eye in a plain face set the pulse racing. Having found three Common Rosefinches in Britain before (all on Out Skerries) I needed a view of wing bars for confirmation. The bird obligingly shuffled on the branch it was on and two pale wing bars were present and correct.

I got out of the copse and rang Chris Batty saying I had a rosefinch at LSANR (it was somewhat more profane than that, but there you go). Chris asked if it was a red male or a singing first year male (which are usually all brown). I suspect the negative answer to both of these wasn't what he was hoping for but he kindly put the news out on RBA pagers and the bird club's text messaging system was invoked.

I didn't go back into the trees again as I didn't want to risk causing the bird to leave the immediate area prematurely. It was therefore something of a setback when a finch / bunting / sparrow build of bird left the general area where the rosefinch was last seen and headed purposefully north over the old Pontins and into the grey yonder. Another bird then shot over the main road towards the Thursby Nursing Home, but it was the first one that concerned me as it was conceivable the bird may have dropped in during the showers before heading off when it cleared. I texted Chris with the less than inspiring news.

After what seemed a long time, but probably wasn't, the first reinforcements arrived in the shape of Maurice Jones. I explained to Maurice where the bird had been, the unidentified bird that headed north etc. Maurice related that he had considered checking the reserve earlier and decided against it. I left Maurice and another four arrivals to it as I had to get back to work. Chris rang me en route to the bird with Stuart Piner and I



indicated that I was certain of the ID but the bird may have been the one that departed.

An hour or so later there was a message on the pager that there was no sign of the bird. Although I was sure of what I had seen this was becoming a nightmare, and there was nothing I could do about it but wait and hope. Fortunately I didn't have to wait too long as the bird was reported as still present but elusive. I now know that Stuart saw the bird at this point but everyone else present didn't. Chris was apparently the next to connect.

I was unable to get back to the site again during the day but from people who were there I understand the bird was very elusive, apparently spending much of its time in parts of the stand of bushes and trees which could not be viewed from outside or the limited internal viewing area. The bird was not seen at all after early evening, though it could have been present still given how difficult to observe it was. At no stage was the bird heard to sing so it is most likely it was a female, but this can probably not be proved. The elusive nature of the bird's behaviour led to no photographs being obtained.

This was the second Common Rosefinch for the Fylde, following a rather more obliging first summer male in Peter Rhind's garden at Pilling Lane on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2007. It is the sixth record for Lancashire following records at Heysham and Jenny Brown's Point in autumn 1992, a singing male at Oswaldtwistle in (June 2000?), the Pilling Lane bird and one of uncertain provenance in a Longridge garden on the unusual date of February 2008.

SD

### **Common Terns at Preston Dock**

On 30th April Paul Ellis and Paul Slade installed four gravel-filled rubber tyres on the platforms on Preston Dock to act as artificial nest sites for Common Terns. The Marina operators were very helpful and took the Chairman and Secretary out by boat to place the tyres and gravel. Preston City Council gave permission for 4 tyres to be placed on their 'wave breakers' in the dock.

Since then a pair have made a nest in one of the tyres and two more pairs are present at the dock. One of the nesting birds is a returning bird from last year and has a blue ring on one leg. A coot has moved into another of the tyres but we are hopeful that at least one more pair of terns may nest. If you have any updates on the progress of these Common Terns, then please let one of the Pauls know.



## OUT SKERRIES – MIGRANTS AND MORE

Several years ago, before many of you will have been members, there was a bird club meeting I will never forget. The speaker had pulled out at the last minute and Chris Batty arranged for Steve Dodgson to fill in. Steve did a double header on 'Out Skerries' and 'Florida'. In both cases there was plenty to interest the birder with an interest in British rarities. The Florida element included a focus on species that might be on the radar of Fylde birders, for example American Herring Gull and a number of Yankee shorebirds.

It was the Out Skerries element that particularly fascinated me though. It was about three weeks Steve had spent on these remote Shetland islands in 1998. I had only really heard of Skerries (for short) from some of Bill Oddie's books and the occasional pager report. But it was a fascinating description of somewhere that sounded harsh but with potential rewards – Steve's stint on the islands had produced not one but two Booted Warblers as well as an Arctic Redpoll. The idea of somewhere less crowded than Fair Isle with the chance to find your own birds really appealed, though it sounded a bit grim.

Fast forward to 2007 and Stuart Piner asked me if I was interested in a week on Out Skerries. To cut a long story short I agreed, we were rather disappointed to find out an Arctic Warbler was found whilst we were in transit, the wind went into the east and I found a Pechora Pipit before Stuart bailed out for the last three days to chase a Siberian Thrush on Foula and I covered the island on my own.

I have been back four times now, and will be going again in the autumn. Here are some personal thoughts about what I like and don't like about Skerries. As I said in the newsletter foreword this isn't to sell Skerries to you, better to find something that fits you.

### 1 – Do some research

If you go to Fair Isle and don't like heights it can be a bit of a culture shock to find that now they don't grow many crops a lot of the migrants (including rarities) are half way down sheer cliffs and you have to peer over the top. Similarly if you are after ever changing scenery Skerries is not for you, you can cover it comfortably in a day. That is an advantage though in terms of finding things like skulking locustella warblers as there is only so much cover to check and you tend to be more thorough.

### 2 – Make friends with the locals

There may be days when it isn't even fit to go out (mercifully this has never happened to me yet on Skerries, I came close once on Fair Isle). Even when there isn't there may be days when there isn't a lot happening and being able to get to know the locals certainly helps. In my last visit this Spring I was



able to get a free lift on a boat to the uninhabited island of Grunay through contacts I have made on the island over the last three years. Even better, they came back to get me when I asked!

### 3 – Know what you are looking for

Timing is everything in looking for your own rarities, but it isn't quite that simple. Go to Shetland in May and you are more likely to see some scarcities and perhaps a rarity, go in early June and you may see very little but the chance of something extra special increases. Similarly mid September to mid October are safer bets but late October could just be special (remember the Chestnut-eared Bunting and Rufous-tailed Robin in 2004).

### 4 – Be prepared for hard work

There is no easy way of saying it, trying to find your own rarities on Shetland or similar archipelago is generally hard work. On Skerries it isn't worth taking a car over to cover just over one mile of tarmaced road so you are basically walking everywhere. In peak conditions birds will continue to come in during the day so sites may need to be checked several times to avoid overlooking anything.

### 5 – Don't get dispirited

One of the nice things I like about Skerries is you are never far from base and a brew. But it is important to only recharge your batteries and get back out in all but the least promising conditions. You are never going to add to your list of good birds found by watching Homes Under the Hammer or Deal or No Deal.

### 5 – Bird the weather but don't be literal about it

Clearly when there are brisk winds birds will often go where there is shelter, so sheltered coves and areas of crops will be worth checking. It is easy to feel that birds will only turn up when winds are blowing in the right direction. But in recent years many of the very good birds that have turned up on the pre-eminent islands of Fair Isle and Foula have been in less than encouraging weather synopses. On Skerries the Siberian Stonechat I found in 2008 came in late on during a day of north westerlies where the only things turning up elsewhere on Shetland were Arctic Redpolls from Greenland.

### 6 – Take a camera

You won't be able to photograph every bird, but a good camera and half decent zoom lens will be enormously helpful in circumstances where you may have no other witnesses. Shortly after I left in October 2007 a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler was found which never stayed still long enough to be



identified in the field but was confirmed relatively easily from the photographs that were obtained.

### Finally

It may seem self evident post Icelandic ash cloud but if you go to far flung outposts for rare birds you need to plan for the possibility that you will not be able to return when you had hoped to. Fair Isle and Foula are particularly prone to being cut off from the outside world, but it has even happened to me on Lundy in the Bristol Channel.

Don't be afraid to look further afield than Britain if you are keen to find good Western Palearctic birds. There are offshore island in France, Ireland , Norway and even Italy where you have very decent prospects of finding something unusual. If you do give it a go all the very best of luck.

SD

### **Tree Sparrow Update from Todderstaffe Hall**

The nest box scheme at Todderstaffe is now into its 8<sup>th</sup> year. This year started well when the first box check on 3<sup>rd</sup> May found 15 active nests which had either eggs or chicks. Unfortunately the persistent cold northerly wind throughout May caused heavy losses and 10 of the first 15 broods failed. Tree Sparrows need insects to feed their newly hatched chicks and when its cold they can't find enough. However they usually try and try again and most relaid.

To date 32 chicks have been ringed up to the 4<sup>th</sup> June and at least another 9 nests are active, so if the weather stays mild it might still be a good breeding season.

PE



**Nestling Tree Sparrow Todderstaffe May 2010**



## A DAY ON THE FLEETWOOD – LARNE FERRY

In the last newsletter I indicated I would say how this went afterwards. On Saturday 29 May I arrived at the Stena terminal in Fleetwood bright and early and met my fellow surveyor Jane Petley-Jones. It was here third trip and my first.

It is quite demanding and tiring doing constant effort recording from the ferry. As well as recording everything you see every half hour a detailed set of readings on the speed and direction and travel of the boat, the weather conditions and the tidal conditions need to be taken. At the end of the say I was exhausted, though quite satisfied.

Having been allocated the May slot in the first half of the year and given the timing at the end of the month I hoped that perhaps I might get a late skua or two, or that a Basking Shark or two might be seen given that we skirted the north of the Isle of Man where there are still reasonable numbers. In the end we were able to achieve one of these objectives, which was pleasing.

Bird wise the trip started fairly quietly, although there were plenty of Oystercatchers and gulls on the sandbanks, a few Eider and 5 Sandwich Terns off Fleetwood. Thereafter it was fairly standard fair between the Fylde and the Isle of Man with Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Gannets, Manxies and Kittiwakes in small numbers. Things improved passing the Mull of Galloway, with first a couple of Puffins and then perhaps more surprisingly a couple of summer plumaged Great Northern Divers. In the Larne harbour area there were a couple of Black Guillemots and a handful of Shags which were new, as was a single Merganser.

In terms of marine life the undoubted highlight was a Basking Shark between the Isle of Man and Larne, it was so close to the boat that we were concerned for a while that we were going to hit it. There was also a brief view of a dolphin species, perhaps a Common Dolphin, and a couple of Grey Seals.

The results of the monthly surveys can be seen on Marinelife's website. Some of the highlights from other recent trips have included:

1 December – Bottlenose Dolphin, Harbour Porpoise, Pomarine Skua, 2 Little Gulls

21 December – 10 Fulmar

February – 8 Harbour Porpoises, 11 Puffin

4<sup>th</sup> March – Cory's Shearwater, 7 Harbour Porpoise

29<sup>th</sup> March – 3 Harbour Porpoises, 4 Black Guillemot

April – 2 Harbour Porpoises, Black Guillemot

SD



## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Forthcoming Club Meetings**

*7:45 pm River Wyre Hotel Upstairs Meeting Room*

*June 22<sup>nd</sup>*

*July 27<sup>th</sup>*

*August 24<sup>th</sup>*

*September 28<sup>th</sup>*

*October 26<sup>th</sup>*

*November 23<sup>rd</sup>*

*December 21<sup>st</sup>*

### **2010 WeBS Count Dates**

*June 13<sup>th</sup> high tide 8.9m at 12:30 pm*

*July 11<sup>th</sup> high tide 8.7m at 11:30 am*

*August 15<sup>th</sup> high tide 8.9m at 3:45 pm*

*September 12<sup>th</sup> high tide 9.5m at 2:30 pm*

*October 10<sup>th</sup> high tide 9.8m at 1:30 pm*

*November 7<sup>th</sup> high tide 9.7m at 11:30 am*

*December 5<sup>th</sup> high tide 9.3m at 10:30 am*

### **Pelagic Trips**

#### **Fylde Bird Club Pelagics**

For summer 2010 the Fylde Bird Club has arranged two evening pelagic boat trips out of Fleetwood.

The first pelagic will run on 22nd July - departing at 17.10 and returning around 22.15 - from which we particularly hope to see Manx Shearwater and Storm Petrel.

The second pelagic will run on 18th August – departing at 14:15 and returning around 19.15 - from which we particularly hope to see Sandwich and Common Tern, Manx Shearwater and Arctic Skua.

We will be deploying chum (chopped fish and fish oils emptied overboard) that will hopefully attract seabirds close to the boat.

If the pelagics are successful and well received the Fylde Bird Club intend to arrange future trips.

All spaces have been taken at present but any members particularly keen on participating should contact the Chairman to register their interest in case of cancellations.



## **Spring Birdrace 2010**

The birdrace wasn't much of a race this year, as only one team had a crack at this annual event. The record holding team, Messrs Batty, Dunstan and Piner, set out on their traditional favoured date of 27<sup>th</sup> April which this year fell on a Tuesday.

In the event despite any other competition the team did very creditably, with a total of 128 species on the day. This is the fourth highest bird race total for the Fylde, and the three higher marks were all set by teams including the above club members. The mark of 133 set in 2006 remains a tough challenge, though evidence from a Lancashire bird race in 2008 suggested it is beatable if all goes well.

This year's effort included two species never before recorded on a Fylde bird race. The more predictable of these was the Cetti's Warbler at Marton Mere, given they have overwintered successfully and several males had been singing this was always on the cards. Less predictable perhaps was that the Preston Willow Tit would still be around at Cottam, but it was and we managed to see it. Other species not recorded in many bird races were Raven, Ruff and Fieldfare.

As ever there are ones that get away on bird races. Some of these are clearly getting tougher, Ruddy Duck may be extinct as a breeding bird in the Fylde and perhaps cannot be relied on any more. Similarly Grey Partridges are probably going the way of Yellow Wagtail as once reliable but no longer so. Kingfisher was a reflection of a harsh winter and therefore no reliable site. Perhaps the biggest miss was Treecreeper, perhaps they too have had a hard winter or maybe we just messed up.

## **Ravens Breed in the Fylde**

This spring a pair of Ravens raised 5 young at a woodland site in the Fylde. This is certainly the first modern record of Ravens breeding in the Fylde and is perhaps the first ever recorded.

PE



## **RECENT REPORTS**

Apologies for the lack of reports for April, which will follow in the next newsletter.

### **February**

Bird of the month was an Egyptian Goose initially found by Eddy Bayton at Thurnham on 23<sup>rd</sup>, before it relocated to Cockerham Quarry, where it remained until the month end. Egyptian Goose last occurred on the Fylde in 2003, when a pair briefly visited Marton Mere, but before then the last record was as long ago as 1977.

The male American Wigeon discovered at Cockersand in late January reappeared at Glasson on 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> where it showed well by the River Conder mouth. The first-winter Willow Tit continued to visit a feeder at Cottam Brickworks throughout the month, a Green Woodpecker made several appearances at Lytham Crematorium, Water Pipit records comprised up to four at Warton Marsh and one at The Heads, Marton Mere continued to host four Long-eared Owls and three Cetti's Warbler, a Bittern visited Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park, two Hen Harriers were logged at Warton Marsh and a Black-throated Diver was noted off Rossall Point.

As is so often the case in February, searching for waifs and strays amongst flocks of Pink-footed Geese warranted plenty of attention. During the month a pair of Tundra Bean Geese were recorded at Pilling Marsh and Sand Villa, with singles at Cockerham and Thurnham, a Pale-bellied Brent Goose was noted at Preesall, Greenland White-fronted Geese visited Cockersand, Thurnham and Cockerham, Eurasian White-fronted Geese were located at Pilling Lane, Thurnham and Cockerham Moss Edge and Barnacle Geese were at Knott End (15), Stalmine (4), Pilling Marsh (3), Sand Villa, Thurnham and Cockerham Moss Edge. A Dark-bellied Brent Goose joined the Greylag Goose flock at Copthorne Fisheries.

### **March**

Having been awol during February the male Ring-necked Duck reappeared in March, when it visited Marton Mere, Thornton ICI Reservoir and Jameson Road Landfill Site during the month. Other lingering scarcities included Egyptian Goose at Cockerham Quarry and Willow Tit at Cottam Brickworks.

Green Woodpeckers were seen at Lytham Crematorium and Poulton New Cemetery, Red Kites flew over Ashton & Lea Golf Club and Lightfoot Green, whilst Rossall Point produced a Velvet Scoter, Shag, Iceland Gull and Snow Bunting. At least 10 Water Pipits were counted on Warton Marsh and two more were logged at The Heads. Marton Mere hosted three Long-eared Owls, three Cetti's Warblers and a Bittern and a Hen Harrier lingered at Warton Marsh.

Goose highlights comprised Tundra Bean Geese at Pilling Marsh, Sand Villa and Pilling, Pale-bellied Brent Goose at Stake Pool, a couple of Dark-bellied Brent Geese at Pilling Marsh (whilst the first-winter bird lingered at Copthorne Fisheries) and a flock of 20 Barnacle Geese were at Stalmine, with a lone bird on Pilling Marsh.

Summer migrants began to arrive on 18<sup>th</sup> when a Little Ringed Plover was at Myerscough Quarry, 20 Sand Martins passed through Marton Mere, two Wheatears made landfall at Rossall School and on 22<sup>nd</sup> a Sandwich Tern flew past Rossall Point.

*Compiled by Stuart Piner*

