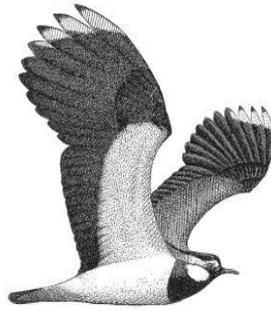


Fylde Bird Club

LANCASHIRE



Registered Charity
Number: 1102961

Editors.

Jean.wagstaff@hotmail.co.uk

rhind1003@btinternet.com

Telephone.

Pete Rhind 01253 812495

Jean Wagstaff 01253 810889

September 2012 Newsletter



Willow Warbler- Pete Rhind

Wheatears and swallows gathering on the sea wall and another wonderful summer draws to a close!! The excitement of Autumn migration awaits us. This morning Snipe and a returning Ruff and what else is to follow. In this issue David Moreton shares the skills of bird photography, Stephen Dunstan the latest news on sea watching, Mike Foy reports on a great trip to Pembrokeshire with Jim Wacey. Ellen and Stuart report on sightings at Marton Mere and around the Fylde. Geoff Gradwell has an article on the Terns at Preston Dock and there is an update on the coastguard station at Rossall.

No doubt most of you have now encountered the new system on the sightings page. It seems to me to be much more user friendly and makes extracting information much easier, hope you all agree.

We are having another work party blitz at Marton Mere, on Sunday September 23rd and all help would be appreciated. Anyone who has got a petrol driven strimmer or chain saw with the time to help would be wonderful. Don't forget wellies and gardening gloves and starting time is 10am, meet at the Ranger's Office on Marton Mere Caravan Park or find us near the Fylde Bird Club Hide after then. All help is welcome from an hour to all day.

If anyone has contact with a school, which may be interested in building nest boxes please contact Paul Ellis for more information.

The Bird Club membership now stands at 149, a new record.

Don't forget, any suggestions for improvements or additions, please contact either Jean or Pete.

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Marton Mere Report – April – June 2012

Highlights of the second quarter of 2012 began with a Blackcap singing near the Southwest Planting Hide on 1st April, followed by the first Willow Warbler of the year on the 11th. Also on the 11th, 44 Pink-footed Geese flew north. The first Swallow and House Martin appeared on the 12th and the Iceland Gull continued to visit until this date. More warblers arrived in the second half of April, with the first Reed Warbler on the 20th and the first Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat on the 21st. A male Redstart was also present in the north-west corner of the reserve on this date.

On 22nd April, a Lesser Whitethroat was singing near the Container Hide and 4 Grasshopper Warblers were singing at the east end of the reserve. Wheatears were also present, 4 on the 22nd, 2 on the 23rd, 5 on the 24th and 4 on 2nd May. There were 2 sightings of Common Sandpiper, 2 on 23rd April and 1 on 2nd May. On 28th April the first 2 Swifts arrived and a Curlew and Whimbrel flew north, the latter calling.

On 1st May another Whimbrel flew over, this time going south. 2 Whinchats and a Grasshopper Warbler were in the grassland to the west of the reserve on 2nd May. Many Sand Martins passed through during May, with a peak of 15 on the 15th. This month a Blackbird attempted to nest in the Fylde Bird Club Hide.

A Barn Owl was seen on 1st and 27th June, with a Yellowhammer singing at Heron's Reach on the former date. An Osprey flew over on 10th June and another Grasshopper Warbler was heard on the 23rd. At the time of writing, a pair of Great Crested Grebes have a nest and the Mute Swans have 6 young. The big news for June, however, is that Cetti's Warblers have been seen from the Southwest Planting Hide, carrying food and faecal sacs – proof that they are breeding again.

Ellen Pemberton

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Bird Report

May 2012

Phil Slade photographed an adult male Montagu's Harrier as it flew northwest over Pilling Marsh at Pilling Water early afternoon on 21st May 2012. This was the fourth Fylde record and the first since 1995. What was presumably the same adult male Montagu's Harrier had visited Martin Mere and Hesketh Out Marsh, south Lancashire, on 19th and 20th May 2012. After its brief visit to the Fylde the Montagu's Harrier reappeared in south Lancashire near Great Altcar on 5th June, where it remained until 18th June, before it again relocated to Champion Moor in East Lancashire from 11th-16th July.

Frank Bird discovered a pair of Temminck's Stints on a flood near Weeton on 27th May; the same flood also hosted a Little Stint and a Wood Sandpiper. A Wood Sandpiper also visited Saltcoates. Other May highlights included a Black Guillemot off Rossall Point on 2nd and Black-throated Divers were logged off the latter site on 2nd and 4th. At least eleven Pomarine Skuas flew past Rossall Point on 2nd, with another past there on 6th, whilst two flew past Starr Gate on 13th and four were logged past Bispham and Rossall School on 2nd.

The best of the rest included two Avocets in Weeton, Barnacle Geese past Rossall Point, Black Terns off Rossall Point (including a count of 53 east on 27th) and Starr Gate, Dark-bellied Brent Geese at Cockersand and Rossall Point, Garganey at Marton Mere, Great Northern Diver past Starr Gate and

Rossall Point, a Hen Harrier at Carr House Green Common, Hobbies at Blackpool Airport and Fleetwood, Little Terns off Rossall Point and Starr Gate, Long-tailed Duck off The Gynn, Marsh Harrier and Osprey over Rossall Point, Pied Flycatcher at Watson Road Park, Red Kite sightings at Nateby, Cabus, Lytham and Warton Aerodrome, Ring Ouzel and Curlew Sandpiper in Fleetwood, Scaup at Newton Marsh and Wood Warblers in Fleetwood, Stanley Park and Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

June 2012

Storm Petrels were logged off Rossall Point (at least 13), Blackpool South Shore (2) and Starr Gate (2) on 23rd June. Elsewhere June highlights included Hobbies over Weeton Camp and Winmarleigh, a Green Woodpecker was seen on Fairhaven Golf Course, a Great Skua flew past Blackpool South Shore, an Osprey flew over Marton Mere, a Garganey visited Newton Marsh and a Little Stint was logged in Fleetwood.

July 2012

Spoonbills were discovered at Warton Marsh on 5th July, Cockersand (2) on 7th and Glasson from 23rd until the month end. A Black Guillemot flew past Blackpool North Shore, Great Skuas were logged off Starr Gate and Rossall Point, a Garganey arrived at a flood north of Todderstaffe Hall, Hobbies flew over Staining and Fleetwood, Little Terns flew past Starr Gate, Rossall Point and St Annes Beach and a Velvet Scoter flew past Starr Gate. Yellow-legged Gulls were identified at Glasson, Fleetwood and Skipool Creek, Crossbills flew over Rawcliffe Moss and Fleetwood (2) and a Red Kite and three Scaup were also logged in Fleetwood.

Stuart Piner

--&O&R--

Weeton Temmincks

I usually watch the pools south west of Weeton in the winter months, when you can normally see Whooper, the odd Bewick, and geese. In March there were quite a few dry hot days, which resulted in the water level dropping, which exposed mud and stoney areas. Red Shank and Green Sandpiper started appearing, so I started watching regularly, seeing that the Mythop pools had a lot of rushes round and very little mud. The first notable birds of spring were 2 Little Ringed Plover (some days as many as 4) then 2 Avocets, on later days 3 Dunlin, 5 Ringed Plover, 2 Common Sandpiper a male yellow Wagtail and the odd White Wagtail. On the 27th. May I saw a small wader I thought was a Temmincks Stint, but the distance from which I was viewing was not close enough to be absolutely certain. I walked closer to the pool and saw not one but two Temmincks. While watching through my telescope a Wood Sandpiper walked past. Later that afternoon a Little Stint also dropped in. When the habitat is right the birds will appear. You just need to be there to see them. The same applies to Mythop floods, when the water level has been right over the last few years birds such as Garganey (5 just recently), Little ringed plover, Little Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper, Curlew Sand, Ruff, Whimbrel, Spotted Red Shank, Green Shank, Green and Wood Sand, Grey Phalarope, Black Tern and many more .

So lets hope conditions somewhere are just right next Spring and this Autumn.

Frank Bird

--&O&R--

Montagu's Harrier

I was busy setting a couple of tent traps to catch Wheatears when distracted by the sound of waders giving "stick" to something. When I looked up and around the Montagu's H. was flying out and west towards the tide. Luckily my camera was to hand to grab two quick and not very good shots.



Phil Slade

--808--

My perfect flight shot: (a light-hearted missive regarding in-flight bird photography) A fantasy by David Moreton

The first requirement, luck by the bucketful. You may have all the best gear... have bad luck - and you have a bad day.

Given that we are going to have all the luck in the world, let's move on to equipment. At present I use a Nikon D300s and a 300mm af-s f/4 lens. I do feel that perhaps, for Swifts, at Fleetwood Marsh for example a fast 200mm lens may be worth a try. I did once use a 50mm f/1.8 lens there and got a couple of shots I was pleased with, however, the bird has to be within 5 or 6 feet and boy do those things move when they are so close.

We need light and loads of it, not the harsh stuff from a bright midday sun; the softer light from a morning or evening sun, low in the sky, to light up the underside of the birds. Have the low sun behind you, look where your shadow falls and then following the line of your shadow adopt the position; this is where you will take your best shots. You might notice there is a dark cloud or a group of trees in the distance, this will make a nice background.

Let's set up the camera:

- Frame rate to continuous high. Control dial on the top of the camera, on the left.
- A/F on c (continuous servo) with nine sensors engaged, more sensors take longer to acquire focus though do appear to hold it better (there is very little to choose). Continuous servo switch

on front left of camera; sensor options under Custom Menu - Auto focus - a3

- AF-Area Mode Dynamic-area, Matrix Metering with +.3 or .7 (test with your first couple of shots). AF area mode switch to the bottom right of the Monitor; Metering control, above the right of the Monitor.
- 300mm lens at f/4 or the f/ 2.8 down a stop or two.
- Set the ISO so as to leave you with about 1600th of a second or faster, anything slower than this and you reduce your chance of a sharp image.

We have been watching the birds and the flight paths that they take and a rough pattern has been noted, considering the direction of light we move to the best position to intercept the birds. If the birds alter their behaviour, back off and do not chase them. After 20 minutes they will ignore you and (particularly swifts), fly to within a couple of feet of you.

So here we go - Let's use Fleetwood Marsh as an example. From about halfway across the water pick a bird that you feel will fly towards you, frame the bird so as to have it flying into the picture (its tail at the back edge with room for the bird to fly into the shot). Here is where it gets tense, cross your fingers, pray to God, sell your soul to the Devil*; do what you must but keep on it as it twists and turns and moves ever faster relative to you. You will have both eyes open (a technique many of you will be familiar with when seawatching, and also used in clay pigeon shooting**) to help you follow the bird when it goes out of frame (and it will). At some point the bird will start to move through the viewfinder faster than you can move the camera, just before that happens (nobody said this was easy), hope that the bird has a half second of level flight or even a little glide. If you can, focus on the eye, and rattle off 3 or 4 shots. At this point you may hear words of encouragement from a companion... I don't! All I get is "I don't believe it, how could you miss it, it was right in front of you?!" That's when you too see the bird that you should have followed as it flies off, having been motionless in the air in front of you for a whole second-and-a-half. Quickly looking on the monitor to confirm that the tip of a wing is missing or some other fault we hear, "get this one coming in low from the left, it's a beauty." And we are off again.....

I'm still looking forward to my perfectly focused and exposed frame filling shot of a beautifully illuminated Bee-eater with defocused background caught catching a bee, and I'm in no hurry to get it.

* Regarding selling your soul: We met a photographer at Mere Sands Wood who insists he has done this, he suggested 'passing' on the 'eternal youth', 'wealth' and 'power' options and writing 'Avian' in the 'Knowledge Only' option on the application form. If you then ask for the form to be sent to Desmond (who is a seriously high lister) you should, with a little luck, avoid Eternal Damnation. However, I'm not really sure it is such a good idea. There is still the weather to contend with (the Ark was the ultimate twitch, but as Desmond pointed out it was chucking it down). There is also very little cash to be made. True, under the Trade Descriptions Act the soul must still actually be bought, but one denarius is still the going rate (around the £65 mark) but you have to factor-in the cost of the mandatory £37 CRB check just to use a camera nowadays and a 'Moving and Handling' course, as our friend uses a 500mm Canon lens, (and he only just avoided a day at Chorley on the Police Speed Awareness course because they thought he was a twitcher). So is it really worth it? Even then the only bird that they have any real influence over is the Swift.

** If you require help with this technique, might I be so bold to suggest spending £30 at Claycoach.com, Tarnacre House Farm, St. Michaels, (01995 679212) for basic clay pigeon shooting tuition. A great experience if you have not done it before, I have 'smoked' a few clays in my time and would recommend having a try. It is easier to learn the technique following clays over the barrel of a shotgun than through the constraints of a viewfinder.
Best of luck.

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A Seawatching Year – Part II

Last time I said that I would at some point run through some of the drawbacks with seawatching. One of these is the number of occasions where visibility is poor. This might be obvious when there are squally showers, though ironically these can be quite good for bringing seabirds closer in shore. It is the occasions where the forecast looks fine but the visibility is in fact severely limited that can be taxing, and early in the spring this happened quite a lot. Mist can linger over the sea for hours until the sun burns it off some mornings, on rare occasions the fog can last all day. At least the weather forecast sometimes (though not always) predicts this. What never seems to be clear is when the difference between sea and land temperatures produces what is generally known as a 'heat haze', though it can happen even on cold days. You turn up full of expectation and all but the closest birds are shimmering and apparition like, anything smaller than a Gannet often being unidentifiable.

April

There was quite a bit of interest early in the month in the Velvet Scoters that were still being seen from Starr Gate. I had two south on the 2nd, and two north on the 6th also seen by Maurice at the next shelter up. This capped an exceptional first winter period for me, a combination of effort, luck and some long stayers I think. As April goes on the attentions of the seawatcher begin to switch from scoters to the first returning spring migrants, and some species that peak on passage at this time. You may recall the Sandwich Terns were back at the very end of March, but numbers continued to climb with 52 on the 1st, 61 on the 2nd, and 161 on the 13th (with larger numbers at Rossall) before they started to drop back.

One of the classic April seabirds on the Fylde is Black-throated Diver, they are most often seen well at Rossall but Starr Gate has a reasonable track record as well. I was pleased to see one on 22nd April, a winter plumaged bird which circled in a wide arc before eventually heading towards Walney. Later in the spring Frank Bird and I saw another probable but unfortunately it never came close enough to clinch. In the same vein Shag are fairly regular passage birds through the area, particularly during stormy weather, but they are normally buff first year birds so it was a surprise to see an adult heading north close in on the 16th.

Everybody has bogey birds that they haven't seen and should have, or it takes far longer than it should to see them. In the context of Starr Gate my standout bogey bird was until this spring Brent Goose. Birds are seen annually passing the coastal watchpoints of the Fylde, but never past me. It was good to get a couple of dark-bellied birds early morning of the 24th, part of a small movement through the area at the time. Other less standard fare included a Snow Bunting that flew over north calling on the 15th, which was presumably the same one also seen shortly after at Rossall. An even more striking example of tracking was provided by an exceptional northward movement for the season of five Little Egrets early on the morning of the 30th, these had been seen earlier

passing Ainsdale, and were subsequently recorded passing Rossall and then Heysham before heading towards Grange-over-Sands so they were basically observed the length of the county's coastline.

At the end of the month I was engaged on a Marinelife survey in the Irish Sea from the Stena Mersey on the Birkenhead to Belfast route with well known and well respected birder Graham Ekins. We expected a few Little Gulls as they are regular on the Mersey at this time, and were rewarded with views of no fewer than 83. Other highlights included five Puffins, eight Black Guillemots, a couple of Little Terns and an Arctic Skua with a Common Seal hauled out on a sandbank with five more expected Greys. Unfortunately we didn't see any dolphins or porpoises on the survey, and they were generally thin on the ground off the Fylde but fortunately things were about to improve on that front.

May

Having a local patch can be a bit like supporting a lower league football club, you know the object of your attentions isn't the best but sometimes the lack of quality is more stark than others. So it was in early May at Starr Gate as Rossall Point came into its own, due to a combination of dedicated coverage and a prime position for observing birds moving into Morecambe Bay. Quality seabirds there in early May included a Black Guillemot, which is arguably down to coverage, and an exceptional run of Pomarine Skua records which are partly about coverage but also reflect the fact that the Point is better for Poms than the Gate.

A particularly good day at Rossall on the 2nd was a virtual wipeout at Starr Gate because of very localised mist and fog. I soon gave up and looked for passerines, finding a singing Gropper in the Solaris garden and even better a singing Wood Warbler in the grounds of the Pleasure Beach.

Persistence did eventually produce rewards though, including some of the species that were being enjoyed up the road. Two Black Terns put on a good show on 7th, lingering with Arctic Terns and a Little Gull; these were to be my only definite ones of the spring whereas a most impressive 53 were to pass Rossall in one morning alone. A first summer Great Northern Diver headed north close inshore on the 12th, it wasn't picked up at Rossall but what must have been the same bird was there the next day. On the 13th I finally had a couple of Pomarine Skuas on an early morning watch, which was a relief as I thought my chance had probably gone. Sometimes when time was pressing of an evening I would go to Gynn rather than Starr Gate, and christening a new 50x lens on my scope there on the 17th I had a Long-tailed Duck moving north with Common Scoter.

It isn't just about the scarcities of course, movements of more regular species are always fascinating. During the month these included 415 Arctic Terns past Starr Gate on the 5th, c390 Common Scoter on the 6th, c135 Guillemots and a very decent 276 Gannets on the 12th. Even on the difficult day of the 2nd a late movement of Pinkfeet headed north west and were visible above the gloom, with over 600 birds involved on a day where winter and spring visitors were clearly both on the move.

June

I spent the first half of June on Shetland. More specifically I was on the islands of Out Skerries, which is not particularly renowned for seawatching as it is on the east coast, and the main seawatching action in Shetland takes place off the west coast, particularly Wats Ness.

Having said that Skerries is not a seawatching location this needs a pretty significant caveat. The islands host nesting seabirds include Arctic and Little Terns, Shags, Fulmars and Black Guillemots whilst Great Skuas regularly patrol the moorland. Above all though there are Puffins, and they

were evident in good numbers from the ferry journey out to Skerries and up to 70 were sat offshore waiting to enter nest burrows on occasions.

So on any given day in the summer whilst there are no true passage seabirds of note there are hundreds of local birds streaming past, including all the species above and plenty of fairly local Gannets. One morning though my luck was in though as I found a 'seabird' first for Out Skerries – a female Common Scoter close inshore associating with Eiders. The irony was not lost on me that this was a species I see every month of the year off Blackpool, sometimes in five figure flocks. The same day a summer plumaged Great Northern Diver was close inshore, always a great bird to see, on Fetlar just to the north there was a White Billed Diver whilst I was up north, but I wasn't that fortunate.

Back to reality on the Fylde coast June is normally the quietest month of the year for seawatching, after the skuas and terns have gone north and before the best shearwater and petrel passage in onshore late summer and autumn gales. A typical watch will involved Sandwich Terns, Gannets and Common Scoters and anything else is a bonus. This year was a little more lively than that for me, and rather more exciting for others. I had a decent watch on the 17th with 89 Gannets, 17 Manxies and the first Great Crested Grebe of the autumn. The following day there was a decent gathering for the time of year of 330 Common Scoter off Gynn Square, these were distant but easily picked out on flat calm seas which also enabled me to pick out four porpoises and three Grey Seals in the evening sunshine.

The 22nd June was probably one of the best days for close inshore Storm Petrel passage we have ever had. If you recall the Olympic torch relay being diverted off Blackpool Prom and an open air concert being cancelled that was the day. Unfortunately it was so foul with incessant driving rain that it was just too awful to seawatch in. The 23rd was a pussycat by comparison, but still with enough fetch in the wind to suggest Storm Petrels might be passing in range still. It was my youngest daughter's birthday so I was limited to a couple of hours at Starr Gate. I had barely sat down when a Stormie passed by at close range, another hour passed and another fluttered by at even closer range. There were much better counts from sustained observations at Rossall but I was delighted to catch up with a couple of these delightful birds. Otherwise the main feature of the late June period for me was skuas. I had a probable Arctic from Starr Gate on the 23rd and two birds definitely this species on the 24th and a dark morph on the 30th. The highlight though was an early morning watch on the 17th at Starr Gate when an immature (probably a second year) a dark morph and a light morph headed south one after the other, offering an ID masterclass rarely available off our coastline.

Special mention must be given to the six Bottle-nosed Dolphins seen by Dave McGrath off Starr Gate on the 8th. I have seen a couple off the Fylde but a large group like this is on my 'Fylde must see' list, Dave has been fortunate enough to be given prompt notice of one school and find his own in recent years and although I have seen larger pods in Biscay I remain envious of Dave being able to see such delights off our own coast and am working on finding my own.

So half way through the year and I hope some of the attraction of seawatching is clear even if some of you are still thinking twice about it. Whilst we don't have the headlands that deliver the goods elsewhere the Fylde is an excellent seawatching location. Next time I will cover the July and August period which is nationally the peak period for seabirds, and will at the very least involve Manx Shearwater movements on some dates and larger tern counts as the adults and hopefully their new offspring gather on our coastlines and to and fro along our inshore waters.

Stephen Dunstan

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The Pembrokeshire Experience

Well yet again Jean Wagstaff persuaded me to write an article for the Newsletter and once again I feel embarrassed to put pen to paper as my knowledge is still very limited, especially to such a distinguished audience as the Fylde Bird Club members. Anyway, here goes.

Last year I spent a few days at St Brides Castle in Pembrokeshire with some friends who are members of the Property Bond, but not very interested in birds and so not wishing to spoil the holiday, I decided the area was so rich in bird life that I would return.

So move on one year and in May of this year saw Jim Wacey and I pack our birding gear and fishing tackle to spend five days in Pembrokeshire.

We chose Broad Haven as our base and this proved to be very central to the activities we had planned. The trip was punctuated with a stop at Gigrin Farm, which as many of you will know is a RED KITE rehabilitation centre at Rhayader near Bwlth Wells in Powys and about 35 miles from Aberystwyth.

We had arrived at 1.30pm and spent time setting up the cameras and checking out the terrain.

The admission fee was £4.50 but only £3.50 to us old critters. Feeding time was at 3pm and we quickly realised that a better view would be from one of the specialised hides and so we paid the extra £6.50 each and set up "shop" in what is called the Gateway Hide. The birds were already gathering which included the RED KITES as well as CROWS, RAVENS and BUZZARDS. It was at this point that I realised my new 500mm lens was too big for the close proximity of the many birds now circling and so I alternated between a 70-300mm lens on one camera and the 500mm on the other.



I know the purist might question the un-natural feeding of these beautiful birds, but all I can say is that they totally captivated Jim and I for the best part of 4 hours. Apart from some excellent pictures we were also very amused to see how the ground feeding BUZZARDS were blinking and ducking in one movement as they were dive bombed by the KITES who were trying to steal from them.

As we still had a journey of some 3 hours to reach Broad Haven, we reluctantly dragged ourselves away. We had pre-booked at "The Anchor Guest House" on a bed and breakfast basis and this was excellent. The

dining area overlooks the beach and at breakfast time we were able to watch GANNETS fishing, which made a really good start to our days. The en-suite accommodation with excellent breakfast, optional packed lunches and an evening meal at very reasonable price at £35 per head would come as a very strong recommend to you. Most evenings would see Jim and I sat in swivel / rocking chairs, sipping "Guest Ales"

Day Two and we headed to Martins Haven which is the sailing point to visit SKOMER ISLAND. Unfortunately the island was out of bounds for landing as a GULL count was taking place, we did however get the details for the boat trips taking place (Weather permitting) during the week. We decided to walk the headland that overlooks SKOMER and were delighted at the number of WHEATEARS, STONECHATS, and LINNETS that greeted us. From the safety of some grassy slopes on the cliffs we were able to watch GANNETS cruising, looking for their next meal and even more impressively five CHOUGHS doing their aerial manoeuvres. What a lovely spectacle. A pathway near to Marloes (very local) took us past a bird hide which overlooked some marshland and meadow. I asked an obviously local birdwatcher if he had seen Anything of interest? He told me that further down the pathway and by a metal gate, we would see in the distance four GLOSSY IBIS (1 adult and 3 juveniles) and that two days earlier they had been seen in Southern Ireland. Good information and correct, but in truth they were just "little smudges" in the distance! We did take some pictures but purely as record shots. Later that week some other guests at the

guesthouse who we had told about the IBIS asked Jim if he would e-mail them one of our pictures. Surely they did not want one of our distant “ smudgy “ pictures ? They had visited the location as we described but had not taken a camera! Would you believe it, the GLOSSY IBIS were only a few metres from the gate and in full view !!!

Day Three and we took the one hour trip around Skomer Island. Not easy taking photographs with a boat bobbing up and down and about 40 others on board but even so a wonderful experience.



Plenty of PUFFINS, RAZORBILLS and GUILLEMOTS scooting across the sea surface. The FULMARS and KITTIWAKES were in plenty of evidence on the rocky cliff sides. Grey seals were sunning themselves on many of the little rocky outcrops that surround the island, as were SHAGS drying out their wings. Strangely though we did not see any GANNETS on this particular trip. Later that day we ate our packed lunch sat on the beach at Nolton Haven and watched HOUSE MARTINS gathering building material from a freshwater stream and heading off to the eaves of the local cottages. FULMARS were also arguing on the cliff faces which enclose the Haven. At

St Davids (smallest cathedral city) we booked for a landing on Ramsay Island for tomorrow.

Day Four and we set sail for Ramsay which only takes 10 minutes and passes a very sharp ragged/needle pointed rocks known as the “Bitches“ which are known to have wrecked a minimum of 60+ ships in this narrow but treacherous sea channel. Safely on the island we were greeted by a resident RSPB member of staff who outlined the pathways and features that we might see. Now a feature of the island is a steep hill/rocky outcrop that you cannot avoid! Carrying heavy lenses, cameras, tripods, telescope, binoculars and a packed lunch on a warm day is not to be recommended! The species list did however include MEADOW and ROCK PIPPITS, WHEATEARS, STONECHATS, LINNETS, PEREGRINE FALCON, BUZZARDS, RED KITE, RAZORBILLS, GUILLEMOTS and LAPWINGS. Also present are LITTLE OWLS and SHORT EARED OWLS but unfortunately we did not see them. Grey Seals were dotted around the coast and a herd of Red Deer were grazing around the previously described “mountain“. MANX SHEARWATER burrows were being monitored. Plenty of rabbits are on the island and it is worth mentioning that there is a severe sensitivity to any possibility of introducing rats and even asking you to check your picnic baskets !!! On our way back to the accommodation we were told of a CUCKOO in the vicinity, but after over 1 hour we gave up the hunt having neither seen or heard the bird. How ironic that on my return home to Hambleton my neighbour told me that she had “a CUCKOO in her garden whilst I had been away. Grrrrrrrrr ! Anyway I digress.

Day Five and we bid farewell to Janet our host and her super cat “Max“ You need to ask Jim who is not a cat lover about the assistance he had in working on the computer provided, and who drank all of his beer ? !!! We made our way via the coastal road and called off at the Welsh Wildlife Centre at Cardigan. Not much to report as it was wet and very windy. We visited the many hides, lakes and woodlands and spent much of the time trying to photograph CHIFFCHAFFS which were evident from their song but not their bodies. We were not very successful. Four hours later we continued our journey home.

I appreciate that many of you will no doubt have visited this area in pursuit of your birding interest but if you have not, I would give it a resounding thumbs up. If you had to choose between Skomer or Ramsay Islands I would undertake the former. The RED KITE feeding station was very enjoyable but may not suit the true naturalist. Be prepared to do a lot of walking on some stunning coastal pathways! Finally, “ What about the fishing tackle we took, I hear you ask ?” Well it never left our rooms as we were far too busy Bird Spotting and taking pictures. Many thanks to Jim who did all of the driving.

Mike Foy

--SQR--

Common Terns at Preston Dock

Many of you may have heard, (and heard is the correct word as they are very noisy) about the Common Terns at Preston Dock using the artificial concrete faced and pebble-dashed pontoons (wave-breakers) as a nesting colony. The Common Terns use the pontoons on both sides of the dock but the best place to view is on the south side.

The colony appears to have grown since 2009 and Fylde Bird Club's Paul Slade and Paul Ellis wangled a boat from someone (the dock company I think) and added some painted car tyres and stones to the pontoons in 2010 and 2011 – and the birds have made good use of them.

My first trip to Preston Docks this year (2012) was on 8 May but I know the birds had been seen prior to that date, perhaps a week earlier. The birds take up residence on the 14 floating pontoons primarily on the south side of the dock furthest away from the car park, MacDonalds and the bread-chuckers etc that attracts all the gulls.

When the birds first arrive, establishing territory seems to be the first quest and I guess the dominant birds take the best sites. On my earliest visit in early May the first count only produced 13 birds but counting is inherently difficult because they take to the air so readily and don't always return to the same pontoons and of course other birds are out of sight fishing. The River Ribble appears to be their primary fishing grounds and birds have been seen fishing from Avenham Park near the Continental Public House out to the west at Lytham and inland on the Lancaster Canal and Newton Marsh – but quite how far they travel will no doubt be down to food source, the tides and weather. I have however seen them returning with their capture that includes both sea and freshwater fish.

Returning from a fishing trip, which is again probably primarily by the males they return to the calls of those birds remaining on the pontoons. Appearing overhead with fish in their mouths the pontoon birds call with great gusto and often rather than a direct landing the fishing birds will do a circuit or two. In the early days things are relatively controlled but as time gathers apace black-headed and the larger gulls may attempt an interception and try to gain a free meal by harassing the returning birds with fish in their beaks. Some amazing aerial aerobatics on show. Upon landing a certain excitement erupts and a great deal of posturing takes place.

While the birds are territorial it is possible that two or three pairs will set up home and nest on the one pontoon – indeed it is unusual for there to be only one pair, as long as they are a suitable distance away from each other. The concrete faced and pebble-dashed pontoons make an obvious comparison to a naturalised pebbly-beach and it must retain and radiate considerable heat during our sunnier days.

So a returning bird with fish attracts the attention of the females and it may be more than one, as they attempt to gain a free meal from wherever, they don't appear too fussy. The noise erupts as the birds posturing on small feet, not made for landfall, manoeuvre around until somehow they identify each other and the male gives up his prize. This courtship routine may last for one or two weeks and a nest site is established and mating takes place during this period. As part of the courtship routine the returning fisherman becomes less inclined to give up his catch and tussle with the females before she receives the free meal apparently part of their bonding relationship.



Over time you begin to identify the characters and individuals, the better fishermen and at what stage their relationship is, romancing, mating, nesting, brooding etc. In May there was a dominant pair happily sitting on their nest and comfortable in their relationship, close by another pair known to have at least two eggs, usually three and the remaining birds going about similar business.

However there has been a slight change recently, as birds have paired up they are becoming more territorial and protective and small disagreements break out from time to time... often as a result of landing on the wrong pontoon. As the young appear, poor father will be worn out running his constant fishing trips for the mother and kids. The Common Terns will also happily turn on ANY gull that passes too close and quite happily see off Great Black-Backed Gulls and or any predator that gets too close, especially when eggs and young are apparent.

Over 100 birds were counted on an evening roost in July but more often smaller numbers in the 20 and 30's are visible while others will be out fishing.

There have been a number of nests that have failed for various reasons, probably from immature adults, eggs rolled out of nests, chicks lost but around 12 juveniles successfully reared although it will take me some time to collate all my information and perhaps report in at the end of the year. At present (August 2012) there are still at least three chicks growing feathers and waiting to fledge.

Geoff Gradwell

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P.S. The 2013 Fylde Bird Club Calendar will be available in November.

Reminder: Marton Mere Work Party, Sunday September 23rd, meet 10am at the Ranger's Office on Marton Mere Caravan Park or find us near the Fylde Bird Club Hide after then.