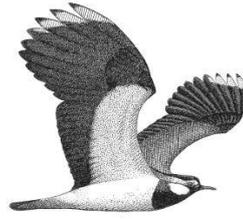


# September Newsletter 2016

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**Fylde  
Bird Club**  
LANCASHIRE

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Summer fades into memory and Autumn is now with us. I hope the last few months have been good and the autumn to come brings exciting birding. In this issue Ellen Pemberton updates the Marton Mere sightings. I will look at Curlews and Whimbrels, and how they differ, in the series on confusion species. Glen Jackson has an article on the joys of birding the Outer Hebrides. Certainly eventful !! Chris Batty writes about the two Red Kites that turned up over Knott End. He kindly shared the sightings with me

and they are now on my garden bird list, thanks Chris. There is also an update on the Terns of Preston Dock. Monty Myerscough is retiring from the amazing work he has done supporting the Barn Owls on the Fylde and is looking for a volunteer or volunteers to continue his work. Finally, there is a business update on the work of the Fylde Bird Club.

## Marton Mere Report

### April-June 2016

Spring had well and truly arrived when over 120 Sand Martins were recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. Also present on this date were 9 Stock Doves, 2 Shelduck and 12 Chiffchaffs. Stock Dove numbers peaked at 11 on the 4<sup>th</sup> and the first 2 Willow Warblers of the year arrived on the 6<sup>th</sup>. A Blackcap and 2 Skylarks were seen on the 11<sup>th</sup> and summer migrants continued to arrive, with a male Ring Ouzel, a Reed Warbler and 200 Sand Martins on the 12<sup>th</sup>, a Grasshopper Warbler on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 2 Sedge Warblers on the 14<sup>th</sup>. There was a count of 9 Cetti's Warblers on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 2 Little Gulls graced the reserve from April 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>. On the 18<sup>th</sup> a Skylark was singing in the east fields and a Whimbrel flew north. On the 19<sup>th</sup> both Whitethroats made their first appearances of the year, with 2 Common and 1 Lesser recorded. The first Swift was seen on the 21<sup>st</sup>. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2 Common Sandpipers were on the reserve, whilst a Whinchat and a Wheatear put in an appearance at Lawson's Wetland. The Common Sandpipers were joined by 2 Green Sandpipers on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. A Weasel and a Jay were also seen on this date. A male Redstart was present on the 28<sup>th</sup>, while a Peregrine was seen on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

95 Pink-footed Geese flew north over the reserve on 4<sup>th</sup> May, whilst on the 5<sup>th</sup> there were 3 Shelduck and 11 Stock Doves. A Wheatear was also at Lawson Marsh on this date. On the

6<sup>th</sup> a Cuckoo visited the reserve and a Little Egret flew north. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, there was a count of 18 Reed Warblers and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> a Skylark flew over the east field. 2 Sand Martins were present on the 25<sup>th</sup> and a Lesser Whitethroat was recorded on the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the 31<sup>st</sup> there were 13 Common Blue butterflies seen.

There were further butterfly and moth sightings in June, including a Painted Lady on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2 Large Skippers on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 2 Burnet Moths on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Tree Sparrows were also seen, a single bird on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2 on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 3 on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Otherwise, June was a quiet month. However, there were 5 Sand Martins to the north of the mere on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 8 Gadwall on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

*Ellen Pemberton*

### **Red Kites over Knott End and Pilling Lane**

On 19<sup>th</sup> July I had booked the morning off work so I could attend my son's school sports day at Pilling Lane. As I sat watching the races (there was no 'dads' race' this year, thankfully!) the weather was very hot and humid with a noticeable south-easterly breeze. I mused that these conditions felt perfect for an unusual bird to fly along the coast here, drifted to our coast with the warm wind, although at this time of year I struggled to think of many likely species, perhaps a Bee-eater? That seemed a long-shot. With the races over I headed home to Knott End and within minutes my wife had taken advantage of the weather and was sunbathing in our back garden. Only a minute had passed before Bryony



called to me, "there's a big bird of prey over the garden!", I dashed out - mindful that Bryony's not a birdwatcher, and had claimed three storks together over the garden when I was away twitching in May - but, sure enough, there was a Red Kite right overhead! My instant reaction was to make for a camera, but by the time I was back outside the Red Kite was nowhere to be seen. Bryony indicated that it had come from the west, so I reasoned

that the best approach would be to drive east and attempt to catch up with it. Before I reached the eastern end of Knott End I could see the kite ahead through the windscreen, as it continued slowly drifting east, following the sea wall. Although the bird was now distant, I fired off a few photographs, only to then lower the camera from my eye and notice that there was a second Red Kite trailing the first, two Red Kites together; the first multiple occurrence of this species on the Fylde. Although I had come out without my mobile phone, I knew Peter Rhind would be interested in these birds heading towards his home so I drove to Pilling Lane, collected Peter, and together we walked out towards the sea wall in a bid to 'head-off' the kites. However, the kites had a different plan, and had drifted inland, as evidenced by the frantic mobbing of all the local corvids at Hy-Fly Game Hatcheries. Then, fortuitously, one of the Red Kites turned and drifted back over Beach Road, affording Peter and myself good views.

Even without optics both Red Kites were clearly newly fledged juveniles, with their relatively short tails and immaculate wing feathers showing no sign of moult, and, when closest, the presence of white tips to the under greater coverts. Since the reintroduction of Red Kites to both England and Scotland commenced in 1989 the species has gone from strength to strength in Britain, with the national population now over 1,300 breeding pairs.



Although the closest release site to the Fylde is Grizedale Forest, Cumbria, this will not necessarily be the source of Red Kites seen on the Fylde. These were not bearing wing-tags, and young Red Kites are prone to wandering long distances, particularly during periods of high pressure, including a now annual migration through Devon to Cornwall each spring culminating in a movement of over 200 birds near Land's End in June 2015, with marked birds there emanating from Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Shropshire in England, Powys in Wales and Highland, Scotland.

As a footnote, perhaps Bryony did see three White Storks here on the 15<sup>th</sup> May?!

**Chris Batty**

### **Confusion species – Curlew and Whimbrel**

Both species are common around the Fylde, the Whimbrel on passage in spring and autumn and the Curlew all year round though the best time to see large flocks is in winter. Both are usually identified by their call before they are seen.

**Curlew.** ( aka – Whap/Whaup. )

The haunting bubbling call of the Curlew is the sound of Winter for me. Large flocks fly over in the morning and evening on their way to their feeding grounds on Morecambe Bay and their evocative trembling call is one I love.



They are our largest wader with a wingspan of around a metre (three feet to me!) Anthony McGeehan describes them as having the air of old gentlemen as they stride sedately over the ground. The long, curved bill and long legs immediately means the only confusion could be with the Whimbrel. The female has a slightly longer bill than the male. A uniformly grey brown streaked bird whose beauty is revealed when seen well. A pale eye ring completes the outfit. In flight the Curlew shows a pointed white rump and finely barred tail with darker primaries

standing out against the paler, mealy upper parts. Landing is fun as it uses its wings to slow down and then runs a few strides like a well organised parachutist. Its flight is slow and gull like.

In the Middle Ages and before it was a sought after bird for the table as the old proverb says “ A curlew lean, or a curlew fat, carries 12 pence on her back “ The taste has been described as similar to Woodcock or Snipe. It is to be hoped we can simply enjoy the sight and beautiful shimmering call of the Curlew and leave menus to history.

**Whimbrel.** (aka- May Bird, Peedie Whaup or Seven Whistler.)



This is the slightly smaller and darker version of the Curlew but as we all know these attributes depend on light and distance as much as anything else.

The simplest way of separating the two species is by call. They pass through on migration in April/May and in July/August. The Whimbrel call is a stuttering yodel of 6 or 7 whistling notes. It is also sometimes described as a rapid, rippling 7 note whistle which lacks the pulsating rhythm of the Curlew. Either way it is usually the first sign that Whimbrels are around.

Although at first sight it is very similar to the Curlew there are subtle differences. The bill is shorter and has a discernible kink or crook unlike the smooth curve of the Curlew, the bill is even in width whereas the Curlews tapers to a point. The Whimbrel has a pale median head stripe and a dark eye stripe giving it a dark capped appearance. The rump and tail are as the Curlew. It is overall a darker more compact bird.



When a Whimbrel is snuggled down in a flock of Curlew on a beach with its head tucked underneath its wing dozing peacefully then look for the darker back and paler belly and good luck. It is rewarding when you pick one out.

The legend of the Seven Whistlers, originating in Wales and the Western Counties is often linked to the 7 note call of the Whimbrel. Six unidentified birds were said to call constantly searching for their seventh missing companion. It was an augury of disaster and finding the seventh would foretell the end of the world. I'm not sure I believe the legend!!

Finally the call is all when separating the species but if you find a Whimbrel without a white rump get excited, as you may have just discovered a Mega-rarity from America, a Hudsonian Whimbrel.

*Photos – Peter Rhind and Paul Slade*

*Peter Rhind*

## Wet, Wet, Uists 2016

Rather than spend half my holiday time in security queues at the airport, once again a left turn was made at the end of the M55 to head for The Hebrides. This was my 4<sup>th</sup> time to the Outer Hebrides, and again by a different route – choosing the Mallaig/Armadale ferry then flashing across Skye to Uig and into Lochmaddy. At £12.50 and £36.20 these Calmac ships have to be great value, subsidised as they are by us British taxpayers. Setting off from home at midnight, the journey of 426 miles gives plenty of time to catch the 14.00 ferry from Uig, this time with a stop off at Portree for views of both Sea and Golden eagles from the harbour (no need to pay £20 for a boat trip!) Just two problems encountered; the rain arrived to spoil observations from the ferry (and we lost an engine for an hour), and a slight problem when colliding with a deer at 04.00 that decided to commit suicide near Craigellachie!

Accommodation on the Uists is hard to come by during “the season” of mid to late May, but my regular stay at Borge Guest House at £60 B & B is as good as it gets. This is an excellent base for Benbecula and South Uist, and the annual meeting with Ron Jackson who warden the Marshside/Ainsdale area south of the Ribble. He put me onto the local view of a Common Crane on the nearby machair – a “lifer” for me after just an hour on the island. We all know the birders adage that if things start well – they will undoubtedly get worse, and so it proved with the weather for the next four days. My first 3 hours after settling in until dusk totalled 46 different birds, over halfway to my target this year.

On Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May South Uist was traversed, with South Glendale the destination, as many of the website sightings record rarities turning up there. It is also near to the famous “Whisky Galore” shipwreck and the pub “Am Politician” is strongly recommended for a leisurely lunch break. The total mileage of 100 miles for the day, visiting the long sea lochs as well as large areas of machair, yielded another 28 varieties with another “lifer” for me (a mealy/common redpoll). The list also included 5 Cuckoos, Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier(s) Short Eared Owl(s) and Red-necked Phalarope(s). Thursday was base shifting day to North Uist. The weather started as atrocious and only got worse! “Dreech” does not begin to describe it, but if that's what the natural environment of North Uist is like – and the birds can manage to put up with it, then I ought to be able to in the comfort of my car. Another 100 mile day listed just 6 species, with the odd Sea Eagle and a few Corncrakes (one in my B & B garden) to report. If I mention that I stayed near Bayhead for RSPB Balranald it gives a clue to my tale of woe that I have to report later. Aird an Rhunair is a place we birders all know well, with its great views out to sea from its high vantage point, and all four types of Skuas usually on show – except that this year the poms and long tailed were missing! After last year's 4,750 long tails in a 3 week passage, a mere 26 were recorded this year due to the winds being too light and in the wrong direction. Nothing for it but to just sit and admire the sunset!

On Friday, my last full day, I went to the “Aird” at first light (05.00) and spent 3 hours there until the organised groups in their mini-buses arrived. I heard about another “lifer” for me to find near the RSPB office at Balranald, and to my surprise and joy a Glaucous Gull came within 10 feet of my car to have a look at me. That sort of thing makes the trip worthwhile,

because by now I was reduced to recording Robin, Dunnock and Whitethroat to add to my trip list. Anything would have been welcome from the shelter of my car. A dawn departure from my digs at 05.15 for the 07.30 ferry meant a lovely drive through spectacular isolated scenery, past Bayhead (just a mile from where I stayed this year), and along the road I had used at least 4 times every day. Unbeknown to me, lurking in the roadside hedgerow had been a Black-billed Cuckoo, only declared that day as I left the island! I am sure I caught a glimpse of it, just like the Gyr Falcon that had been on the land where I had been staying, and also the Subalpine Warbler in the garden of my usual digs; all missed! I can sometimes understand how some birders might succumb to the great temptation to add such near miss rarities to their list, but, like golf, it is easy to get a bad reputation, and a lifetime to shed the stigma. My conscience is clear. My trip back involved an overnight stay at Grantown on Spey, and thence via the most spectacular of drives in the early morning through huge valleys down to Balmoral (she wasn't at home when I called). Intriguingly, there were many (about 15) dead mountain hares on the roadside in about 10 miles, with no carrion observed feeding on them – suspicion of bad gamekeeper activity aimed at our threatened hawks and harriers?

This year's summary shows a total of 1302 miles driven (350 on the Uists), with a list of 89 (including 3 lifers), and a trip total in Scotland of 113. The only Magpie seen was just one mile south of the border near Gretna! My costs for this 5 night trip for fuel, accommodation, ferry fares and eating well was £560. The deer damage repair was an additional £589 – but then the poor thing gave so much more, and made a good contribution to the environment in the form of "road kill".

**Glen Jackson**  
*(Birding assistant to Maurice Jones!)*

## **The Terns of Preston Dock**



Common terns have been trying to nest at the Docks since one pair appeared in 2009 but originally struggled before a joint effort between the Fylde Bird Club and Preston City Council to improve the artificial nests on the site led to a steadily increasing number of pairs settling. Over the last three years, Fylde Bird Club has been working with pupils and staff at Saint Aidan's Church of England Technology College, Preesall, to create purpose-built Tern nest boxes. These provide Tern eggs and chicks with shelter and protection from predators.

This year, Fylde Bird Club and St Aidan's School, together with help from St George's School in Marton, made an additional 205 nest trays. Club members then assisted Preston City Council staff in setting out the trays along with a tonne of gravel, which Common Terns use to nest. The RSPB ran a special Tern-watching event during the summer for keen-eyed birdspotters.

Jon Carter from RSPB in the North West said: "Common Terns are fascinating birds to see in action. Also known as sea swallows, they're incredibly graceful, agile birds and an absolute joy to watch. Contrary to what their name might suggest, Common Terns have been in long-term decline and are classed as a species of conservation concern so to see so many in one place is a real treat."



This year the Fylde Bird Club have recorded 138 pairs of Common Terns with 64 chicks seen which appears to be a low fledging rate and 2 pairs of Arctic Terns nested without success. 39 rings were read on the birds, which brings up a total of 61 read over the years. The Terns have now all left and the site is peaceful until they return next Spring. As well as Common and Arctic Terns, Black Terns and Roseate Terns have also made passing visits over the last 2 years which make the site even more exciting.

### **Barn Owls on the Fylde**

I have been operating a Barn Owl nest box scheme in South Fylde for about the last 28 years and in that time the Barn Owl population has risen from 2-3 known breeding pairs to 36 pairs in 2014. Every one of those pairs are in my nest boxes which means that the Barn Owls in this area, and probably everywhere else in the British Isles, are totally dependent on artificial nest sites of one sort or another. This takes a great deal of time and effort but is well worth it.

I'm finally hanging up the ladders, ropes and pulleys for the last time and would like to hand over to anyone who is prepared to put in some of their time and effort for a very worthwhile cause. I've always believed that you only get out of something what you are prepared to put in and I would hate to think that Barn Owls could once again become a very rare sight in what is



one of its strongholds here in the Fylde. I hope there's at least one or two of you who are prepared to give it a go. I won't lie and say that the job is a doddle, but it is very rewarding, especially when the box you put up just a few weeks ago has a pair of breeding Barn Owls not known to have bred there before.

I've probably made and sited over 130 Barn Owl boxes over the years, but there's only about 70 or 80 of those left. The main reasons are because barns

are taken down or, in rare cases, they are severely damaged in storms. During change of use, when barns are converted into houses or just demolished, the Barn Owl boxes go too, sometimes with young Barn Owls still in the box. Modern farm buildings are totally useless for just about anything that at one time used to nest in them, not just Barn Owls but other birds like Swallows, Blackbirds, Robins, Wrens and Jackdaws. There is hardly anywhere for them to perch, never mind breed.

If any of you would consider taking on this incredibly important and very rewarding project, I'll help in any way I can so that you are well equipped to take on the role. The role involves a number of key steps. First, a suitable site has to be located e.g. a barn with plenty of access and not too much disturbance. Permission will then be needed from the owner. The box will need to be made; one sheet of plywood will make about one and a half boxes. So, you will need to have somewhere to make the box, some joiners tools, and knowledge of wood working skills. To locate the box you will need a long extending ladder and a car with a roof rack. All you need to do then is to get the box to the top of the barn without killing yourself. Ah yes, a good head for heights is essential !

I think I screech for all the Fylde Barn Owls when I say we're looking forward to meeting you. Hissss-sssss-ss.

**Monty Myerscough**

**Tel: 07837 647498**

**Please note**

A licence from the BTO is required to look in active Barn Owl nests for monitoring. This is because the Barn Owl is on Schedule 1 and Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) and it is an offence to intentionally disturb Barn Owls at an active nest site without a licence.

You don't need a licence to provide nest boxes.

Apply at <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/schedule-1-first-application>



*Photos- Paul Noblet and Peter Rhind*

## **Club Business News Update**

- A grant application submitted by Fylde Bird Club to the Orchard End Community Benefit Fund has been successful and a grant of £3375 has been awarded. The grant will cover seed for winter farmland birds of Eagland Hill and create two seed strips in the fields adjacent to the feeding stations.
- Data has been sold for £3000 for large areas of Fylde and Wyre Boroughs. The data will be used by Borough Councils to inform planning decisions.
- There are plans to do more digging at Condor Pool to improve islands.
- Marton Mere - no news/progress. The promised Steering Group Meeting has been scheduled for late August.
- Carr House Green Common. Habitat Management Proposals have been prepared by Malcolm Evans in response to a request for involvement. However, the prospects for grant funding have recently diminished.

### **Next Meeting**

September 27<sup>th</sup>. The Living Seas Project and Marine Conservation in the North West. The Cumbria Wildlife Trust.