



Fylde Bird Club

Lancashire

JANUARY 2010 NEWSLETTER

Well it has certainly been a memorable period for Fylde birders. An autumn with two dowitchers and a Great White Egret has been followed by the mid winter producing Ring-Necked Duck and Caspian Gull. Let's hope the spring is just as exciting.

In this newsletter there is a mixture of contributions. Jim Clift has kindly provided memories of the sludge bed at Clifton Marsh. I am sure that nostalgic pieces like this are enthralling both to members who can remember the locations and events involved, and also for newer and younger members as a glimpse into what they have missed.

Stuart Piner has provided an account of his find of the Cockersands Long-billed Dowitcher. It is always a pleasure to share in the good fortune of finders, even if the bird that makes your day is patch tick rather than a Fylde 'mega' please feel free to put pen to paper (or more likely fingers to keyboard these days).

The details of the Fylde's first Ring-Necked Duck also feature, as well as a range of announcements and snippets including the chance to get involved in some survey work on the Fylde and nearby.

As I write this our local birds are facing some extreme weather. In the last week species I wouldn't normally see in my garden have arrived, particularly Reed Buntings. A Bittern has been on a ditch in Lytham Moss. If you see anything extraordinary during this extraordinary weather then please do feel free to let other members know about it through the newsletter.

Good birding,

Stephen



The New Sludge Bed, Clifton Marsh.

Viewed on your computer from Space, Google Earth shows us a white rectangular scar on the riverbank, near the Savick Brook the Millennium Ribble Navigation outlet to the river, on Clifton Marsh.

In its hey day, as a result in some small part due to maintenance activity by the Port of Preston Authority, a fantastic birding habitat was created on the north bank of the River Ribble.

Historically, it was the Lancashire Cotton Industry which provided the impetus to create or extend a port in Preston. Successive Ribble Navigation Companies developed the Port and particularly its access, by straightening, a once meandering River, with a retaining wall.

To keep pace with the development of new larger vessels being built, the dock had to cope with a wider variety of cargoes as well as ships. This caused problems and difficulties maintaining a navigable channel, requiring constant dredging.

In 1975 -76 the continued dredging of the River to keep pace with shipping trade and keep a navigable channel clear of accumulating river sediments and deposits absorbed much of the profits.

Despite efforts made by the Dredger, the Hoveringham V, a combination of escalating costs and loss of trade, the Port of Preston was closed, on the grounds of economic viability, at the end of October 1981.

The Dredger, the Hoveringham V left the Dock on the 22nd October 1981 having left as part of its heritage, the New Sludge Bed, on Clifton marsh.

The Hoveringham V was a Trailing Suction Hopper Dredger. It trails its suction pipe, when working, and the silt and sediments are loaded in hoppers within the vessel. When the hoppers are full the THSD moves to a disposal area where it deposits its load, through pipes into reservoirs built specially on the riverbank. The 'slurry of dredging' and water pumped into these lagoons is called 'Slurry Dewatering' and preferential to simply releasing it onto farmland, probably due to its salinity.

Prof. Popham's Paper: "The Littoral Fauna of the Ribble Estuary", informs us that mudflats are teeming with invertebrate life, but traces of freshwater and mud limit the spread of 47 named species of invertebrates. Also it is regarded that the salinity of the River, east of Freckleton rarely exceeds 50%.

So, this type of dredging can create some considerable disturbance to aquatic ecosystems of the river bottom and a quarter of a million birds regularly winter on the mudflats of the Ribble estuary and salt marsh, consuming many of these invertebrates.

During the Autumn Migration, flocks of waders arrive in Britain from their tundra breeding grounds and need to refuel. They can be found on any stretch of open water, reservoirs, river banks and estuaries from July onwards. In 1976, the year of the "Drought Summer", these lagoons on the river bank began to evaporate, increasing salinity and exposing islands of mud rich in invertebrate life.

It didn't take the migrating birds long to find this newly created oasis and feeding up station. Wherever the "Birding" is good, then the Birders soon follow.

I believe that "Bird watching access" to the site had to be negotiated and provided that cars were



parked off the site, there was a long straight road, lined with hedges you needed to walk to the riverbank.

As the drought continued to hit hard, more of the mud became exposed, through August and September and the Dredger did not seem to be replenishing these lagoons. The birds were now flocking to this site including 23 Grey Herons feeding in the deeper water and the wading birds paddling around the islands.

The problem with the site involved viewing it from the bank. As soon as a head broke the skyline all the birds would flush. So, Dave Pye and I decided to build a hide on the 25th August 1976. All the materials we used had to be found on the High Tide mark of the riverbank.

The front was made of railway sleepers with a ladder, with no wooden rungs only wire, placed horizontally for the window. It had a roof and sides made of planks roughly fastened together. For a seat we fashioned a plank on two metal barrels. It worked brilliantly to conceal an approach, but the wildfowlers took the roof off to get an overhead shot. Its main fault, was that it put in the wrong place, in the middle of the bank. The water receded from either side exposing the mud there first.

On the 16th October 1976 I went with my father to the Sludge bed and met up with Dave Tucker, who was already there. We flushed a bird, a bit smaller than a Snipe, and shorter billed with a "Tse-eeep" call I had never heard before. I alerted everyone and on the Monday night, after 'The Preston Society' meeting I arranged for some bird calls to be played. The bird we heard corresponded to a tape played of an American Pectoral Sandpiper. Fortunately, the bird was seen again by my former Biology Teacher Mr. P. Carah and confirmed as a Pectoral Sandpiper, on the 20th October 1976. It had been flushed by a Kestrel about fifteen minutes before I arrived.

My last visit was on the 23rd October 1976.

Jim Clift.

ANNOUNCEMENTS and NEWS

A SHAGGY TALE

In late November the Evening Gazette carried an article about 'Colin the Cormorant', who had been rescued in a weakened state 100 feet up by contractors working on Blackpool Tower. It was taken into care in Cheshire for rehabilitation.

Full marks to our sharp eyed Secretary who spotted from the picture of 'Colin' that 'he' was in fact a Shag. Paul suggested 'Sheila the Shag' was more appropriate than 'Colin' but it is not known how he sexes Shags!

This was one of several Shag records in the last quarter, including two juveniles on Fairhaven Lake one of which sadly succumbed. Normally long staying Shag records in North Lancashire are predominantly from Heysham, but this year they have been much more widely distributed on marine lakes.



CETACEAN AND SEABIRD SURVEYING IN THE IRISH SEA

On 12th December a number of club members were at the Solaris centre on Blackpool South Promenade for a workshop by the charity Marinelife. The purpose of the afternoon was to inform interested local wildlife observers of the plans to have cetacean and seabird observers on the Fleetwood – Larne ferry crossing on a monthly basis going forward.

Most of the afternoon's proceedings were conducted by John Arnott, who is Marinelife's Research Team Manager. There were also testimonies from current volunteers, including one who had been on the preliminary recording voyage for Fleetwood – Larne. The charity has vast experience of monthly surveys on other routes, notably Portsmouth to Bilbao, Poole to Santander, Plymouth to Roscoff and Felixstowe to Vlaardingen (Holland).

After informative sessions about the recording work, and in particular the Portsmouth-Bilbao route which is the bedrock of the charity's activity, attendees were kept on their toes with a cetacean and seabird quiz. This also included a shark to keep people on their toes. Showing that these things are never straightforward the birders in the audience were split down the middle over the identity of an Iceland / Glaucous Gull.

Hopefully some club members will be selected to go on the trips in the near future and will be able to give an insight into what is involved and what wildlife is to be seen. The route clearly lacks the obvious cetacean interest of the likes of the Portsmouth and Poole routes, but dolphin and porpoise sightings will presumably still be regular and it may give an insight into seabird movements above and beyond what we already have.

[Addendum – the Newsletter Editor has been allocated a slot on the May trip so expect an account of this in the newsletter after next]

ATLAS LISTING UPDATE AND APPEAL FOR HELP WITH ATLAS VISITS

Regular readers will remember that I periodically update on the number of different species I have seen within the Fylde during two hour timed tetrad visits to squares.

At the end of the summer this had reached 120 species, excluding the more questionable ones such as Peacock, Helemeted Guineafowl and Black Swan. Over the Christmas period I finally added two more – a long overdue Treecreeper at Lytham Green Drive and more unexpectedly a Black Redstart near Bispham Marsh.

All Fylde tetrads have been provisionally allocated, though anybody wanting to get a feel for what is involved with a view to getting involved in the future is welcome to contact the newsletter editor to arrange attending a TTV. There are however still a number of unallocated tetrads in East Lancashire where all offers of help would be greatly appreciated. If you are willing to get involved please let me know and I will put you in touch with Tony Cooper, the BTO Rep for East Lancashire.

Christmas Bird Hunt

Between Christmas and New Year 132 species were recorded during the Christmas Bird Hunt, equaling our previous highest Christmas Bird Hunt total set in 2007. Bean Goose, Ring-necked Duck, Common Sandpiper, Black Redstart, Cetti's Warbler and Willow Tit were all recorded on a Christmas Bird Hunt for the first time, but 'expected' species such as Ring-necked Parakeet, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Raven and Siskin were all missed.

A table of results from 2009 and previous years can be viewed at <http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/christmasbirdhunt.htm>.



Yearlist Challenge

The Fylde Yearlist Challenge 2009 was won by Maurice Jones with a total of 194 species. Maurice managed to record an impressive 93% of the 209 species recorded by yearlist competitors. Bob Stinger came a close second with 192 species, followed by Frank Bird with 191 species. A full list of results can be viewed at <http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/FyldeYearlistChallenge2009.htm>.

Following the success of last year's competition the Fylde Yearlist Challenge will run again in 2010. The competition is open to all Fylde Bird Club members - please join in, it doesn't matter whether your aim is to reach 100 species or compete for the No.1 spot, all entries will be gratefully received. A list of rules and information on how to enter can be found at <http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/YearlistChallenge2010.htm>.

Good luck !

International Bewick and Whooper Swan Survey 16-17 January

The weekend of 16th-17th January 2010 is the international Bewick's and Whooper Swan census.

To save time and effort the WWT will automatically use counts from the WeBS core counts which take place on that day.

However, if you would like or are willing to do one or more of the following in addition:

- a) send more detail in about ages of swans you see on the WeBS count and the habitat they are in
- b) do a count of swans at dawn or dusk roost count
- c) count a non-WeBS site that you know holds Bewick's and Whooper Swans
- d) try to read darvics/ring numbers

then please forward any results to the Local Organisers, Graham Clarkson (Ribble) or Jean Roberts (North Fylde) or to the newsletter editor who will forward them on.

Newton Marsh Godwit Nest Site

An electrified anti-predator fence is being installed at the Black-tailed Godwit nest site on Newton Marsh. It is hoped that this will be in place well in time for the next breeding season.

Wyre Borough Guided Walks

The Club is leading two guided walks for Wyre Borough Council in 2010, both at Arm Hill. Members may attend to help lead or to be guided. In the latter case a small fee is charged by Wyre Borough. These walks are combined with the WeBS counts. Meet at The Heads.

February 14th meet at 08:15

and

September 12th meet at 11.15.



Upcoming WeBS Count Dates

Monthly WeBS counts are undertaken in Morecambe Bay between Rossall Point and the Conder Estuary, and on the Ribble Estuary between St Annes Beach and Newton Marsh. Help with WeBS Counts is gratefully received as there is often a shortfall of counters. Please contact Jean Roberts e mail: JeanRbrts6@aol.com (Morecambe Bay) or Ken Abram (Ribble Estuary) to get involved.



Jan 17th
Feb 14th
Mar 14th
April 18th
May 16th
June 13th
July 11th
August 15th
September 12th
October 10th
Nov 7th
Dec 5th

Members are also welcome to join Paul Slade and Paul Ellis for the Arm Hill count. Meet at The Heads two hours before high tide, except February and September when see Guided Walks above.

Next Club Meeting 26th January.

Annual General Meeting, followed by photographic competition.
Please bring photographs for the competition on memory stick or CD or e-mail to paul.ellis24@btopenworld before the meeting.
There are 3 competition classes Fylde, UK and World.
Entrants can enter up to 3 images in each class.
A prize will be presented to the winner of the Fylde category only.
All photographs must be taken during the twelve months prior to the competition
No photographs taken at the nest
No photographs of captive or trapped birds
Hard copies/prints will not be accepted; please submit only digital photographs and/or slides
All entries will be considered for inclusion in the Fylde Bird Club Calendar.
See <http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/meetings.htm> for full rules and past winning photographs.



RING-NECKED DUCK – A NEW FYLDE BIRD



Ring necked Duck Fleetwood Marine Lakes – Paul Ellis

Although still very scarce nationally the Ring-necked Duck has been a sufficiently regular visitor from America to have been dropped from the list of BBRC species for many years. Given the number of sites on the Fylde with a track record of holding diving ducks, particularly but not exclusively Marton Mere, it was predicted in this newsletter some time ago by Chris Batty as a potential addition to the Fylde list. In that article he foresaw Lesser Scaup at the ICI reservoir and Ring-necked Duck at Myerscough Quarry. How close he proved to be, with the species and locations correct but the wrong way round.

On the early afternoon of 29th December Ian Gardner made the Christmas of all keen Fylde listers when he found a cracking drake with a handful of other diving ducks on the ICI reservoir. With several hours of daylight left the bird predictably attracted a steady stream of admirers and showed very well on the unfrozen water at the far side of the expanse. Although it roosted for much of the late afternoon period most visitors had more than satisfactory views, but given the location it was always a possibility it would move on overnight and frustrate any keen local listers who had been unavoidably detained that afternoon.

So it proved, but fortunately some detective work by Maurice Jones led to rediscovery of the bird at Preesall Flashes. It lingered here a couple of days before moving to Fleetwood Marine Lakes on New Year's Day, where it was relocated by Ian Gardner. On the 3rd it then perhaps a little surprisingly, moved to Marton Mere, where it was refound by Zac Hinchcliffe and Chris Piner. Since that date to the time of writing it has commuted between Fleetwood and the Mere, being particularly photogenic at the former site and offering part of a varied selection of good birds including Bitterns, Cetti's Warblers and Long-eared Owls at the latter.



THE COCKERSANDS LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER

Tuesday 13th October was shaping up into just another frustrating day in what had been a frustrating year. I had spent most of the morning at Fluke Hall, where I stared longingly at every single leaf, hoping that a Siberian gem would choose that moment in time to flitter from behind its green shield. It didn't, and the desperate wait for 'my' Yellow-browed Warbler at Fluke Hall continued. The Red-flanked Bluetail in a sunny glade, the Olive-backed Pipit poking around the leaf-litter and the Radde's Warbler skulking in an impenetrable hedgerow also remained figments of my imagination, and by early afternoon I had departed the area, heading north.

With a few hours of daylight still to play with, I headed for Glasson, where a Curlew Sandpiper instantly took pole position as bird of the day. Moving onto Cockersand I located what I presumed to be the same Curlew Sand on the mud below Crook Farm, before a second then appeared, to throw a spanner in the works of my theory. The mud between Plover Scar and Crook Farm was alive with a frenzy of feeding waders, with Redshanks and Dunlin weaving in and out of the motionless Golden Plovers on their food-finding missions. Birds were constantly coming and going, so I repeatedly scanned from left to right, then right to left and back again, trying to eke 'something that wasn't a Dunlin' out of the swarm of busy waders. Reinforcements joined the Golden Plover flock, so I switched to 'American Golden Plover-mode'.

I scanned quickly, hoping the next bird would be smaller and greyer than the Golden Plover before it. Suddenly my panning hand stopped dead – my eyes had locked onto a distinctive shape amongst the Golden Plovers – wow, a dowitcher! I was stood by Lighthouse Cottage, so I quickly scurried along the road towards Crook Farm to get a closer view. Whilst 'phoning out the news of my discovery, I checked the tertials and inner greater-coverts for tell-tale tiger stripes, so as to not 'throw-away' the Holy Grail, a Short-billed Dowitcher. The tertials were plain so I settled on my identification as a Long-billed and set about trying to get some photographs. I managed to click the camera shutter twice before the inevitable happened – the waders flew, scattering to all directions around my compass. An uneasy sense of déjà -vu devoured my temporary joy – this is exactly what happened with last year's American Golden Plover – I alone had seen the bird and my photographs were nothing short of shocking.

Cockersand patch-worker Pete Woodruff soon arrived to be greeted with the news that the bird had disappeared. The minutes passed and scan after scan failed to trace the dowitcher. Then, amongst the mournful whistles of Golden Plovers and chitter-chatter of feeding Dunlin I heard a couple of distant notes that made me prick-up my ears. "There it is" I shouted, pointing at nowhere in particular, having not really worked out where the sound had originated. But that soon became irrelevant when Pete announced he had the dowitcher in his scope. The bird showed until dusk.

As I wandered back along the the coastal footpath towards my car, I began to wonder what will be the next wader to grace this magic coastline – Baird's Sandpiper? Pacific Golden Plover? Semipalmated Sandpiper even? I'll have one of everything on the menu, please!

Autumn 2009 proved to be an exceptional period for Long-billed Dowitchers in Northwest England, with at least five individuals logged between Cockersand and Inner Marsh Farm RSPB, Cheshire. The Cockersand bird was the fifth recorded on the Fylde, the last occurring as recently as September 2009 (at Jameson Road Landfill Site). The 2009 birds are the first to have been found on the Fylde since a bird visited Marton Mere in September 1989.



RECENT SIGHTINGS
Compiled by Stuart Piner

September



Long billed Dowitcher Jameson Road Landfill Site – Paul Ellis

On 19th September Fleetwood produced a pair of top class Fylde rarities in the form of Long-billed Dowitcher and Yellow-browed Warbler. David and Jackie Moreton found the latter in their Rossall Beach garden and kindly allowed birders onto their property to see the little gem. The following day possibly the same Yellow-browed Warbler was recorded nearby in a garden just northeast of Rossall School. Ian Gardner hit the jackpot late in the afternoon on 19th when he discovered the Fylde's fourth Long-billed Dowitcher at Jameson Road Landfill Site, where it remained into the evening.



Yellow browed Warbler Rossall - David Moreton

Great White Egret finally found its way onto most Fylde listers lists when a bird that had been spending its days south of the River Ribble, roosted on the island at Freckleton Naze Pool on the evenings of 17th and 18th.



Excellent seawatching weather early in the month produced three Black Terns and two Great Skuas past Knott End and two Black Terns, two Great Skuas and a Little Tern past Rossall Point on 3rd, whilst the 4th produced a Little Tern off Knott End and two each of Little Tern and Great Skua past Rossall Point. Rossall Point seawatches also logged two further Great Skuas, Grey Phalarope, Leach's Petrel, Pomarine Skua and Scaup during September. Elsewhere seawatching records comprised Velvet Scoter, Leach's Petrel, Black Tern and Ruddy Shelduck at Starr Gate and Velvet Scoter at Bispham.

Curlew Sandpiper reports included eleven at Knott End, up to four at Skippool Creek and singles at Lytham, Rossall, Braides, Cocker's Dyke and Cockersand. At Conder Green the Wood Sandpiper lingered from August (until 4th) and a Little Stint frequented Cocker's Dyke from 17th-20th. In Poulton-le-Fylde the first-winter female Green Woodpecker lingered in Garstang Road Cemetery and another was recorded in St Annes.

Ospreys flew over Conder Green, Warton Bank, Mereside and Fluke Hall and a Red Kite was observed over Poulton-le-Fylde. Two Garganey were at Mythop, a Little Tern visited Fairhaven Lake, a Brent Goose flew past Cocker's Dyke and a couple of Scaup were logged off Cockersand. Scarce passerines included Tree Pipits at Blackpool North Shore and Fleetwood Marsh Nature Park, Yellow Wagtail at Warton Bank, Whinchat at Marton Mere and Redstart at Fleetwood Cemetery.

October

Hot on the heels of last month's Long-billed Dowitcher in Fleetwood, another was found at Cockersand on 13th. The Cockersand bird, a shorter-billed individual than the Fleetwood dowitcher, lingered on the mudflats with Redshanks until 21st.

Leach's Petrels were recorded in excellent numbers on 3rd; at least 36 at Knott End, 33 at Rossall Point, three at Cleveleys and two at Cockersand. A Black Tern and seven Great Skuas at Rossall Point and nine Great Skuas past Knott End were also recorded on 3rd. The following day Great Skuas were recorded at Pilling Marsh and Blackpool North Shore.



Leaches Petrel at Knott End – Chris Batty

The almost annual autumn flyover Richard's Pipit was recorded at Rossall Point on 21st. An adult Ring-billed Gull at Skippool Creek on 5th was presumably a bird that has been seen on and off



on the River Wyre for several years. A flock of at least 27 Snow Geese flew over Marton Mere then Conder Green on 11th, before later being seen over Brockholes Quarry, to the southeast of our recording area. The romantic notion that these birds could have been a flock of lost vagrants is of course a possibility, but the viewpoint that the sightings relate to a wandering flock of feral birds is perhaps more realistic.

Elsewhere scarce geese included four Pale-bellied Brent Geese and a Barnacle Goose at Knott End on 1st, Dark-bellied Brent Goose at Cockersands on 4th, two Barnacle Geese at Knott End on 5th, two Pale-bellied Brent Geese there on 5th and at Cockersands on 7th, four Pale-bellied Brent Geese visited Granny's Bay on 18th, whilst up to fourteen Barnacle Geese lingered in the Pilling area.

At least three different Garganey remained in the Marton Mere/Mythop area, and the Green Woodpecker lingered in Poulton-le-Fylde, whilst another was at Fairhaven Golf Course on 14th. Marton Mere hosted two Cetti's Warblers, a Bittern and up to three Long-eared Owls. A Yellow Wagtail was at Ridge Farm on 1st and Curlew Sandpipers were logged at Glasson and Cockersands, where a Scaup also lingered. A Shag was a popular attraction at Fairhaven Lake from 26th and a Black Redstart visited at Freckleton garden on 29th.

November

Scarce passerines were represented by Black Redstarts at Cockersands and Ridge Farm, up to four Cetti's Warblers at Marton Mere (where three Long-eared Owls and a Bittern remained), Snow Buntings at Ridge Farm, St Annes, Rossall Point and Fleetwood Marine Lakes and a first-winter Willow Tit at Cottam Brickworks. Perhaps a population of Willow Tits exists near Cottam Brickworks as this is at least the second individual to have visited the site in the last few years..

The showy Shag at Fairhaven Lake was joined by a second individual, and a Shag was also taken into care having been found exhausted on Blackpool Tower. An Avocet lingered at Cockersand, a Hen Harrier was observed at Warton Marsh and Great Northern Divers were logged past Starr Gate and Cleveleys. Rossall Point recorded Glaucous Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Purple Sand, two Great Skuas and Velvet Scoter during the month. A Pale-bellied Brent Goose visited Knott End, a Dark-bellied Brent Goose was seen at Cockersand, two Barnacle Geese frequented Pilling Marsh, two Scaup arrived at Fairhaven Lake and a Garganey lingered at Mythop.





Shag at Fairhaven Lake – Paul Ellis

December

Ian Gardner located the long-awaited first Ring-necked Duck for the Fylde on 29th, at Thornton ICI Reservoir. This smart adult male relocated to Preesall Flashes the following day, where it remained into the New Year.

The Willow Tit at Cottam Brickworks continued to attract admirers throughout December; a strategically erected feeding station made the bird significantly easier to connect with than it had been previously. Sadly, one of the juvenile Shags at Fairhaven Lake was found dead. Two Scaup also remained at Fairhaven Lake, Marton Mere continued to host up to four Cetti's Warblers, four Long-eared Owls and a Bittern and an Avocet lingered at Cockersand. Snow Buntings were recorded at the latter site and Starr Gate, where a Great Northern Diver was also observed.

Seawatching at Rossall Point produced a Little Auk, a Black Redstart was seen near Preston Bus Station and Hen Harriers were reported from Thornton ICI Reservoir, Warton Marsh, Lytham, Marton Mere and Blackpool North Shore. A Great Skua and a Pale-bellied Brent Goose were logged at Knott End (the latter also visited Barnaby's Sands) and elsewhere scarce geese included a couple of Tundra Bean Geese and a Eurasian White-fronted Goose in Fleetwood, Greenland White-fronted Goose on Lytham Moss and Barnacle Geese at Mythop, Todderstaffe (2), Lytham Moss (2) and Pilling Marsh (up to 8).

