



# **Fylde Bird Club**

**Lancashire**

## **FYLDE BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER MAY 2007**

Welcome to the spring newsletter of the Club. As ever, I hope there is something of interest for everyone.

Pete Woodruff has kindly provided an article on the life histories of a couple of Bewick's Swans that were seen in the area some years ago, and their movements subsequently. As somebody who saw these birds as both Marton Mere and Freckleton Naze when they were here I certainly found this fascinating.

It has been a really good spring on the Fylde. As well as the headline birds, particularly the Preesall Stone Curlew, there has been the best showing in recent years for several migrant passerine species. Redstarts, Ring Ousels, Tree Pipits and Yellow Wagtails have all turned up in good numbers. As I write this in early May things are still busy with Garganey, Wood Sands etc. As ever Stuart Piner has kindly provided a summary of the highlights of the last three months, remember the club website is updated most days for more up to date info.

The Stone Curlew in particular, and perhaps also the Richard's Pipit at Lytham Moss, were welcome additions to the Fylde lists of a number of club members. I have pulled together a piece on other species that have not been available to the masses in the recent years and some thoughts on how they might be best looked for in the future.

There is also a short account of the 2007 bird race. It was a typically eventful affair, with both team's stopped by Her Majesty's Constabulary!

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## FYLDE BLOCKERS – AND WHERE TO TRY FOR THEM

I thought it might be interesting for newer members to do a short piece on some species that haven't been recorded in the area for a year or two, or 'blockers' as they are known in birding / twitching parlance. The tack I have taken is to include species that occur regularly in Lancashire, or are becoming more frequent in the county, and also give some indications on where and when they could turn up again in the Fylde. In a couple of cases there have been relatively recent records, but these were not twitchable.

### Smew

In recent years the Smew has been a North Lancashire specialist in the county, partly due to a drake that returned to the Carnforth gravel pits for several years with others in tow. Presumably that drake has died and the species is currently a little difficult to catch up with anywhere in Lancashire.

The last records of this delightful sawbill in the Fylde were in the winter of 2001/2. One was at Marton Mere from Christmas Day 2001 into early March, and perhaps just the one bird was on the Lune at Cockersands on 14 November 2001 and 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> February 2002.

It doesn't take a terrific amount of imagination to recognize that the last occurrences of Smew in the Fylde are a strong pointer to where any future records may be found. The most likely carrier species for a Smew is Goldeneye, and the large winter Goldeneye flocks on the Lune off Glasson and Cockersands would be a good place to start if they continue to gather there in future. Similarly the Mere is the best freshwater site for Goldeneye in the recording area, and has the advantage over some freshwater sites that there is usually an area of open water in which diving ducks can continue to feed.

Having said that an outside bet could be Myerscough Quarry, a site which has holds a good variety of ducks in winter. Pit 1, which would be most likely to hold a Smew, can be viewed from the bridge over canal without having to enter the fields.

### Red Necked Grebe

There have been 20 records of Red Necked Grebe in the Fylde, of which four have been in the last 20 years. The last couple were one at Preston Dock on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1996 and one on the sea at Rossall Promenade in hard weather on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2000.

Last year in Lancashire there was a Red Necked Grebe off Formby in late summer and a bird touring reservoirs in East Lancashire. This reflects the fact that they are equally at home on saltwater or freshwater in winter, but a tentative suggestion is to keep seawatching during the winter after the Leach's have stopped passing through. If you do get one try and get the news out quickly if you can.



## Crane

Whilst still a rare bird in Lancashire the Crane is on the increase and would seem a reasonable bet to occur again on the Fylde fairly soon. There have been eight records so far, most recently two at Pilling and one over Marton Mere in April 2002. The species was last twitchable in the recording area in April 2000, a long staying first summer that adorned the cover of that year's bird report.

Passage birds could turn up just about anywhere, but the best bet would probably be to check out the Over Wyre mosslands in Spring. If you do see and hear birds on the move getting the news out quick could enable other birders in the Fylde or further afield to get on them.

## Dotterel

Despite turning up with regularity on the mosslands of south west Lancashire Dotterels remained stubbornly scarce in the Fylde. The last spring 'trip' (as Dotterel flocks are known) was of no fewer than seven birds at Eagland Hill on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2000, prior to that the last has been two in May 1988. There have been a small number of autumn records from around Morecambe Bay, the last of these was on the Cocker estuary on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1997.

There seems to be no shortage of potentially suitable lowland habitat for a passage Dotterel flock on the Fylde as suitable as that used on Plex Moss. The records at Eagland Hill reflect the suitability of Over Wyre farmland, Lytham Moss would also look suitable. However the spring passage through lowland Lancs has dwindled away to nothing in recent years and it may well be worth gambling on scanning Golden Plover flocks in the autumn when there are other potential rewards (American and Pacific Golden Plover) to be enjoyed also by persistent and fortunate observers.

## Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

The species formerly bred in the Fylde, and probably did so as recently as 1991. However there has been a sharp decline in their fortunes as their numbers dwindle more generally in northern England. There has not been a recent record in the Fylde seen by anyone other than the finders.

The last records were in autumn 2002 at Medlar, Ellel Grange on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2003 and Lightfoot Green on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2005. Perhaps more indicative of where to look was one at Bilsborrow on January 2001, as there was a population just over the A6 towards Brock around that time. Any quiet area of woodland could be worth a look but don't get your hopes up.



## Bearded Tit

Over the years Marton Mere has held a number of Bearded Tits, including on occasion groups of several birds. The last records were however as long ago as 1999.

The origin of the Bearded Tits at Marton Mere is in some cases known from ringing recoveries, including Leighton Moss and the Netherlands. It seems likely though that birds irrupt into the Fylde from different areas in different years. At present the Leighton Moss breeding population is still recovering from a crash several winters ago, and this may be a factor in the lack of recent reports at the Mere.

Anybody hoping to find a Bearded Tit would clearly be well advised to spend time at Marton Mere in the autumn and winter, preferably with an ear open for the distinctive pinging calls of this species. Elsewhere the most suitable site in the Fylde is Preesall Flashes, which is unfortunately private but can be partly viewed from public footpaths. The reedbed at Fleetwood Nature Park could also be worth a look, as similar sites in the north west (small reedbeds around pools) have held Bearded Tits in recent years.

## Great Grey Shrike

Great Grey Shrikes are just about annual in Lancashire. The Fylde offers less suitable habitat than the east of the county, but has still turned up about 20 records. The last of these widely available were presumably just the one popular bird in Bispham and then at Marton Mere in January – February 1998 and a multi-observed spring migrant at Jameson Road, Fleetwood on 16 April 1999. One was seen only by the finder at Fluke Hall on 16th October 2005.

Marton Mere has a reasonable strike rate for this species so it would always be worth keeping an eye on the scrub here in winter, though of course this area is well watched at this time of year when owls are in residence. A sporting bet could be Winmarleigh Moss if anybody is willing to give it a go when shrikes are reported further east.

## Hawfinch

A former breeder in the Fylde, there have been nine records in the area since 1960 but four of these have been since 2000 which offers a lot of hope.

The last four records have been of overflying birds – Marton Mere in October 2001 and a total of five over Fairhaven, Marton Mere and St Annes on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2003. It could therefore pay dividends to learn the calls and spend a lot of time on early morning vigils at Rossall or Fairhaven in particular. If you turned a grounded bird up you would undoubtedly be very popular if it hung around to be admired.



## **Bewick's Swans in the Fylde.**

On 5 January 2002 I was on the coastal path from Fluke Hall to Knott End opposite the Hy Fly Hatcheries on Pilling Lane from where two Bewick's Swans were flying and heading out to Pilling Sands. I was both fortunate and excited about this sighting not least because they were both marked with blue neck collars. Subsequent enquiries showed they were marked as 807P and 809P on 12 August 1996 in Sedui Nos, Korovinskaya Bay, Russia. From information I received at the time and more recently, an interesting picture has been drawn up about the birds.

From the date of being marked it is interesting to note, for over three years these two swans were never reported as being seen together until 21 November 1999 when they were recorded at Welney WWT in Norfolk. Meanwhile the wanderings of 807P over the three years apart are briefly noted with nine sightings at the following locations:

Netherlands (two locations) Ribble Estuary / Martin Mere / Marton Mere / Ludham, Norfolk, and Freckleton.

Whilst the wanderings from three sightings of 809P were:

Skipsea, N Yorks / North Slobs, Co Wexford / Nene Washes, Cambs.

When the birds were then seen together at Welney WWT on 21 November 1996 they were subsequently recorded thirteen times over a three-year period at the following locations:

Martin Mere WWT / Marton Mere / Oude Bildtdijk, Netherlands / Mistertor Carrs Nott's / Saltcotes, Lytham / Preesall Sands / Hy Fly / Fluke Hall / Smallwood Hey.

Following this last sighting above at Smallwood Hey in Pilling on 29 November 2002 the bird marked 807P has never been reported since. Having taken more than three years to join up with 809P following their capture and marking in 1996 in Russia and then seen together for three years at seven different locations in the UK and one in the Netherlands. Meanwhile to bring 809P up to date, this bird has been reported seventeen times since 2002 at the following locations:

Wroot, Lincs / Gringley Carr, Notts / Nocton Fen, Lincs / Mistertor Carrs, Notts Pilling Marsh / Crooks Farm, Ribble / Clayworth Common, Notts.

At 7 January 2007 Bewick's Swan 809P was back at Wroot in Lincolnshire. This leaves us to marvel and to be amazed at the thought of how many miles this bird will have flown throughout its ten and a half year life since being marked in 1996.

I owe my thanks to Jenny Earle at WWT Slimbridge, and also to Bob Danson. Both have provided me with the data necessary to draw up this brief outline of the interesting history of these two fascinating creatures.



Pete Woodruff. March 2007.



## THE 2007 FYLDE BIRD RACE – AN OVERVIEW BY THE EDITOR

Two teams took part this year. Due to work commitments the teams raced on different days. Chris Batty, Stephen Dunstan and Stuart Piner made their attempt on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> April, with Paul Ellis, Ian Gardner, Dave Hall and Pete Scholes out on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April.

The two teams were no strangers to each other in this competition, having raced against each other for the last five years with the previous score being 3-2 to the team of the Secretary. This year saw the scores levelled at 3-3, with the Friday team scoring 129 (or with hindsight 128 – see footnote) and the Sunday team scoring 123.

As usual there were some very good birds seen during the two days. Birds not previously recorded on bird races for which records are held were Glossy Ibis (unsurprisingly) by the Sunday team and two gulls – Ring-billed Gull by the Friday team and Glaucous Gull by the Sunday team. The Ring-billed Gull added to the list of good birds actually found on bird race day, which has included the Fylde's only Citrine Wagtail in the past. Perhaps more surprising was that two Redstarts seen on the Sunday were the only ones in the 21 Fylde bird races for which records are held.

The record for the bird race thus remains the 133 set by CGB, SGP and SD in 2006. It was however a creditable effort by both teams, posting the second and fifth highest totals respectively. As usual there were some hard luck stories. The Friday team failed to see Shoveler and Common Tern and only managed Great Spotted Woodpecker very late in the day, the Sunday team missed Snipe (despite having one 'staked out') and Nuthatch and Little Egret which is increasingly expected on races these days.

Speaking personally the race day was a typical mix of great birding, good crack and occasional frustrations when there were trips to sites for specific species that had either moved on or weren't showing. The following list highlights some of the experiences of a bird race team:

Late the night before – no sign of agreed transport half an hour after estimated departure time, eventually arrives saying he is never on time.

Very early morning – stopped by the police in Lytham for looking suspicious. Case not helped by driver having elected to wear a 'hoodie' for the bird race. Three checks against the police computer later we are allowed on our way with good wished for our attempt.<sup>2</sup>

Early morning – an attempt by one member of the team to scale a fence ends in near catastrophe as the fence collapses. Fellow team members entirely unsympathetic and uncontrolled laughter breaks out.

Mid afternoon – traditional stop for home made ice creams at Cockerham. Timings subsequently go out of the window as we spend longer than we could really afford clinching a distant and uncooperative Ring-billed Gull.

Mid evening – a helpful call from Paul Ellis puts onto a real bonus in the form of a Whooper Swan that has turned up at the Mere.<sup>1</sup> A brief stop at the park for GS Woodpecker before we return to Preston for Goosander missed earlier in the day.

Finally – try for Green Sands in virtual gloom, fail and finish tired but happy.

<sup>1</sup> the Whooper Swan sadly died next day and should be discounted from the total as a sick bird.

<sup>2</sup> the other team were also stopped by police on Lytham Moss for looking suspicious!



## MEMBER PROFILE – PAUL SLADE

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



Favourite Fylde bird:	Mediterranean Gull
Favourite world bird:	Swallow tailed Kite
Favourite Fylde birding site:	Skipool area
Favourite world birding site:	Isles of Scilly
Optics used:	Zeiss FL 8 x 32 Bins, Leica 77 APO Televid Scope
Best self find:	White rumped sandpiper 3 times in the Fylde



Greatest other birding achievement: Tree sparrows nesting in our boxes at Toderstaffe

Birding influences: Maurice Jones's rarity finding in the Fylde

Best day's birding: Watching Siberian Thrush on Scilly when Britains 1<sup>st</sup> Short Toed Eagle flew overhead !

Best Fylde day's birding: Chris's Great Knot at Skippool (still not forgiven you Chris ! )

Other interests: Photography

Favourite birding website: Fylde Bird Club & surfbirds

Favourite bird book: The Collins Guide

Pet birding hate: Bickering Birders who cant get on

What I like best about birding: The great outdoors and never knowing what you might see next

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## **RECENT SIGHTINGS**

### **February 2007**

The highlight of the month was the reappearance of last year's immature Glossy Ibis, this time at Ballam. Having departed the Fluke Hall area in mid December, the ungainly creature was rediscovered at Birks Farm on 15<sup>th</sup>, where it frequented floodwater until the 28<sup>th</sup>. Where on earth had it been since its December disappearance?!

Bill Aspin dragged himself away from his usual East Lancashire haunts on 28<sup>th</sup> and located an adult intermediate morph Lesser Snow Goose amongst the Pink-footed Geese at Eagland Hill. Two adult Lesser Snow Geese (an intermediate morph and white morph) had accompanied the Pink-footed Geese in Norfolk all winter, so Fylde birders were licking their lips in anticipation of the northward-bound Pink-footed Geese bringing these Nearctic strays with them. We narrowly missed out on the white morph, as it initially pitched down on the south Lancashire mosslands, before later being seen in Dumfries and Galloway. Luckily however, the intermediate morph chose to grace Fylde turf.



The rest of February's records were somewhat overshadowed by the two star birds, but there was still plenty of quality in the mix. The 1<sup>st</sup> produced a Long-tailed Duck past Starr Gate and the adult Iceland Gull (initially found in late January) made another brief appearance in Fleetwood on 3<sup>rd</sup>. January's Black Redstart remained in Fleetwood Docks until 25<sup>th</sup>, whilst another was in Fairhaven Dunes on 5<sup>th</sup>. On 10<sup>th</sup> an adult Yellow-legged Gull was at Fleetwood Docks and two Brent Geese were discovered; a Pale-bellied individual flew east past Rossall Point and a Dark-bellied bird was at The Heads. A Water Pipit was seen at Birks Farm, Ballam on 19<sup>th</sup> whilst seven were at Warton Marsh the following day, along with four Short-eared Owls. A ringtail Hen Harrier flew over Scronkey.

On 21<sup>st</sup> a first-winter Waxwing was discovered at the now traditional location of Ashton-on-Ribble, where it stayed until 26<sup>th</sup>. Three Dark-bellied Brent Geese were on Pilling Marsh on 23<sup>rd</sup>, a male Scaup visited Fairhaven Lake from 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> and a Marsh Harrier was at Warton Marsh. Marton Mere produced four Long-eared Owls, a Bittern and the long-staying Cetti's Warbler. Glasson Basin held up to three Scaup throughout the month and the maximum count of Barnacle Geese with Pink-footed Geese came to six.

### **March 2007**

February's two star attractions (the Glossy Ibis and Lesser Snow Goose) both lingered into March; the goose accompanied Pink-footed Geese on Pilling Marsh and other Over Wyre hot-spots intermittently until 12<sup>th</sup> and the ibis was present at Ballam on and off until 16<sup>th</sup>, before it was relocated on Warton Marsh on 22<sup>nd</sup>, where it stayed into April.

The intensified grilling of the Pink-footed Geese during the Snow Goose's visit produced a couple of Taiga Bean Geese, at least one Tundra Bean Goose and up to six Barnacle Geese – not a bad haul. In the north, the three Scaup remained in the Glasson/Conder area throughout the month and at Marton Mere the last wintering Long-eared Owl and Bittern were observed on 13<sup>th</sup>. The long-staying, elusive Cetti's Warbler finally gave itself up to those who were keen to see this Fylde rarity, showing relatively well from the Container Hide at Marton Mere for a few days during the middle of the month.

In the Pilling area, a ringtail Hen Harrier was watched at Eagland Hill and Jarvis Carr on 3<sup>rd</sup>, whilst a Raven was at Lightfoot Green on the same day. Three Avocets on Pilling Marsh on 5<sup>th</sup> was an excellent local record.



The traditional Water Pipit vigil at Warton Marsh produced a peak count of 12, and more thorough coverage during the Glossy Ibises stay proved that Water Pipits can be observed at most times, not just on the highest tides. On the Wyre, a peak count of at least 8 Water Pipits was made at The Heads.

The Preston area produced a couple of almost mythical Fylde birds on 21<sup>st</sup>, a Green Woodpecker and Willow Tit – the former was probably just a winter-wanderer, but given the semi-regular Cottam sightings of Willow Tit, could there be a small population surviving in the under-watched south-eastern extremities of the Fylde?

Warton Marsh produced an early Marsh Harrier on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> and a Raven was at nearby Clifton Marsh. A pair of Velvet Scoters were noted off Rossall Point on 27<sup>th</sup> and on 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> the adult Ring-billed Gull once again appeared at Myerscough Quarry – where does it go in the rest of the time?!

Summer migrants typically began to arrive from mid-month, with the first Sand Martins at Marton Mere on 11<sup>th</sup>; Wheatear at Fluke Hall on 12<sup>th</sup>; Little Ringed Plovers at Lightfoot Green on 20<sup>th</sup> and Sandwich Terns off Rossall and Swallows at Marton Mere and Glasson on 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **April 2007**

Highlight of the month was undoubtedly the finding of the Fylde's third Stone Curlew at Coat Walls Farm in Preesall. Preesall farmer Pete Taylor discovered this local mega in his ploughed field on 14<sup>th</sup>, and alerted Bob Danson, who quickly confirmed the identification. Being a Saturday, locals soon arrived on the site, but unfortunately there was no further sign of the bird all afternoon. Many gave up on the chance of seeing this bird, but luckily Bob and Jan Stinger kept the faith, and at 6:34pm they watched the bird reappear from underneath a hedge in the original fields. The news was quickly spread, and the rest of us raced back to the site and connected with the Stone Curlew. With the two previous Stone Curlews occurring as long ago as 1975 and 1990, this really wouldn't have been a good bird to miss!

There was, however, a final twist in the Stone Curlew tale; after spending the following day at Coat Walls Farm, Bob Danson amazingly relocated the bird as it flew west in front of his vehicle at Bradshaw Lane Head on 16<sup>th</sup>. He then headed in a westerly direction, and found



it stood in a ploughed field on Pilling Moss. When one considers the number of suitable fields Over Wyre, never mind in the whole of the Fylde, this really is a truly remarkable relocation! On the 17<sup>th</sup> the bird was again seen in flight at Bradshaw Lane Head.

April's support acts were also of an impressively high standard. Frank Bird located a first-winter Richard's Pipit in a ploughed field on Lytham Moss on 24<sup>th</sup>. The field was simply alive with birds; as well as the Richard's Pipit, at least 138 White Wagtails, a Yellow Wagtail, 45 Wheatears and two Whinchats were counted – quite a scene.

Two quality gulls were also found. A juvenile Glaucous Gull was at Fleetwood Docks on 23<sup>rd</sup> (remaining in the Wyre Estuary area until the 29<sup>th</sup>) and a second-summer Ring-billed Gull was discovered at Glasson by a birdrace team on 27<sup>th</sup>.

On 1<sup>st</sup> a Red Kite was seen over the M55 at Wharles and then later at Peel – surely this Fylde mega will 'fall' soon. The long-staying immature Glossy Ibis also frequented Warton Marsh throughout the month; with the invasion of Glossy Ibises into southern Britain during April, perhaps this lone immature may eventually find some friends. At Marton Mere the Cetti's Warbler was last seen on 13<sup>th</sup>.

Marsh Harriers were seen on several dates at the start of the month, and Ospreys flew over Marton Mere, Forton and Greenhalgh. Fleetwood enjoyed a fantastic period from mid month onwards, which included the discovery of at least six Ring Ouzels, 10 Redstarts and six Yellow Wagtails. Other Ring Ouzels were noted at Weeton and Rawliffe Moss, whilst Redstarts were seen at Warton Bank, Little Poulton, Stanley Park (2), Cleveleys, Fluke Hall Lane (2) and Poulton-le-Fylde. Yellow Wagtails added a splash of colour to Mythop and Lytham Moss and a pair of Garganey were briefly at Thornton ICI Reservoir on 21<sup>st</sup>.

Seawatching highlights included a Black Guillemot past Starr Gate on 18<sup>th</sup>, a Little Tern past Rossall Point on 23<sup>rd</sup> and a Great Northern Diver past Rossall Point on 25<sup>th</sup>. On 28<sup>th</sup> an excellent seawatch off Rossall produced both Puffin and Great Northern Diver.

An Avocet was at Cockersands on evening of 26<sup>th</sup>, and two Barnacle Geese remained with Pink-footed Geese on Pilling Marsh to the end of the month. A Short-eared Owl flew over Marton on 29<sup>th</sup>, and the final day of the month brought a pair of Garganey to Marton Mere.



## **Bird Club Business News**

### **Next Fylde Bird Club Meeting**

26<sup>th</sup> June at 7:45pm upstairs in the River Wyre Hotel, Breck Road, Poulton.  
Business Update and Members slides.  
Please bring transparency slides or digital images to show at the meeting.

### **Membership Subs**

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

### **Are You On Line? -- Printing and Postage Costs**

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

### **Next WeBS Count**

Sunday June 17th, high tide at 13:47, height 9.17m.

Please contact Jean Roberts (on 01524 770295) if you wish to offer to assist or join the counters. Count sites range from Rossall Point to Glasson.  
Expect to meet about 2 hours before high tide.

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