

BIRD NEWS
Vol. 23 No. 3 Autumn 2012

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Club news and announcements

Subscriptions

The Cumbria Bird Club 2012/2013 subscription becomes due on 1st October. You will receive a subscription form with this mailing unless you pay by banker's order. To prevent unnecessary costs, such as postage for reminder letters, please can you ensure that this is paid as soon as possible. Why not pay at the AGM!

Annual general meeting Friday 5th October 2012

The AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 5th October 2012 at 7.30pm. The business of the AGM is intended to be as brief as possible and will be followed by a talk by Steve Christmas entitled 'Black magic - secrets of north-west Coot migration.'

Election of council officers and members

At the AGM on 5th October the positions of secretary, treasurer, county bird recorder and two vice-chairmen will be vacant as the present incumbents will come to the end of their periods of office. Our current secretary Dave Piercy, treasurer David Cooke and vice-chairs Robin Sellers and Mike Carrier have agreed to stand for re-election in the absence of any other nominations and will be proposed by council at the AGM.

Steve Westerberg has offered to be nominated as county bird recorder and both the council and records panel feel he is a suitable candidate. Therefore Steve will be nominated by council at the AGM. Steve is RSPB site manager at Geltsdale. He was heavily involved with the Durham Bird Club and its recording processes before coming to Cumbria a decade ago and has been involved as a regional organiser for the current BTO/CBC Atlas project and is a species account writer for the bird report. He is also an active ringer, currently interested in whinchats and is a WeBS counter.

Council would like to express its thanks and appreciation to Colin Raven who has served in the role for the last 12 years. The elected role of county bird recorder was created with the formation of the Bird Club in 1990 and Colin has been only the third recorder and is the longest serving. In addition he has been on the records panel since its inception also in 1990 and council recognises his major contribution to the reporting and validation of records in that time.

In addition there will be four vacancies for ordinary members. Council will propose Pete Howard, and Keith Hamilton as new members at the AGM. Council welcomes alternative nominations from the membership for any of the vacant positions above. Nominations for the election of officers and ordi-

nary council members may be made in writing (including email) to the secretary at least seven days before the AGM. Such nominations must be accompanied by the written consent of the nominee.

In addition to the above vacancies, the roles of newsletter editor and events organiser are also currently vacant. These are not officer roles requiring membership of the council but are equally important and council would welcome expressions of interest!

Geoff Naylor

It is sad to report the news that Geoff Naylor died unexpectedly of a heart attack on 20th August at the age of 73.

Geoff was a remarkable all round naturalist and made significant contributions to several fields of Cumbrian natural history. His expertise ranged across botany, mycology, conchology and entomology, as well as ornithology. A life-long birder he was a founder member of CBC and single-handedly computer data-based all the 70,000 records from which the maps were generated for *The Breeding Birds of Cumbria* atlas published by the club in 2002. Geoff was also one of the longest serving WeBS surveyors in the country having begun in his home county of Yorkshire in 1958 and continued at Talkin and Tindale Tarns after his arrival in Cumbria in 1968. He was also the county butterfly recorder, writing the annual report of that group for the Cumbria Naturalists' Union *Birds & Wildlife in Cumbria* publication.

Geoff was a regular volunteer at Tullie House museum for over 20 years, becoming a key member of the natural sciences team there. In that time he did an immense amount of invaluable work on the records of the collections and in particular the Cumbria wildlife records database now operated by Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre. He was also most helpful with natural history events and activities, where his experience as a former teacher was a great asset. Always helpful, direct and full of dry humour Geoff will be sadly missed. Geoff was last in the museum only a day or two before his death. Apparently he was found sat at his desk at home where he had been working on his natural history records when he died.

Stephen Hewitt

CBC indoor meeting programme winter 2012/2013

**Friday 5th October (AGM):
Penrith UR Church 7.30pm**

'Black magic - secrets
of north-west Coot migration.'

Steve Christmas



Friday November 2nd: Cockermouth United Reformed Church 7.30pm.

'Arctic Norway - A new and pioneering festival of
birds' - *Tristan Reid*



Based in Vardø well within the Arctic circle in Northern Norway. Starting with a dog sled trek into the Taiga forest to see the specialities of that area. Then the amazing spectacle of the Hornøya seabird cliffs and an exciting pelagic into the Barent Sea. Exploration of the Fjord coastline and Snowmobile Trek to see more taiga specialities (including a few surprises). Finishing off with a trip through the taiga along the Tana Valley and up into the epic Tundra!

December

No meeting as we have two in February.

Wednesday 9th January : with Carlisle NHS at Tullie House 7.15pm

'From Oban to Spitzbergen an Arctic journey' - Angus Hogg

Friday 1st February: Penrith UR Church 7.30pm

'Birds in the marine environment' - *Paul Walton*

Mon 11th Feb: with Kendal NHS Friend's House Stramongate 7.30pm

'Dippers' - Peter Mawby - an updated reprise of one of the best single species talks we have had.

Winter Bird Race – January 2013

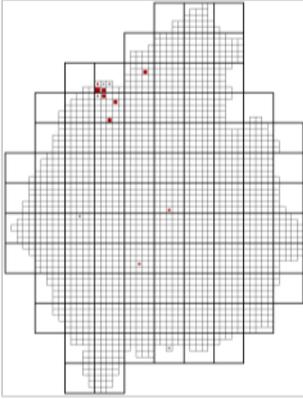
Venue and date in January to be announced. A fun event for all abilities.

More teams needed. If you fancy a go give Colin Gay a ring on 01229

773820 or e-mail colinathodbarrow@btinternet.com before 18th December

2012. Pie and chips (veggie available) at the end – numbers needed please.

The Cumbria atlas/avifauna project



Willow Tit breeding data mapped by BTO using unchecked data.



Willow Tit, Bowness CWT, Roger Ridley

It is now seven years since planning first started for this ambitious project, the last five years of which have seen hundreds of volunteers devote considerable time and effort to the fieldwork which underpins the entire project. We have now reached a position where virtually every tetrad in Cumbria has received timed tetrad visits in both summer and winter: a massive effort for which everyone concerned is to be congratulated. In addition, we are in receipt of hundreds of thousands of casual records that help supplement the information gained through timed tetrad visits. The role of the BTO in facilitating this project has been crucial and we are indebted to them for all the help and encouragement received over the last seven years.

Currently we are still receiving some casual records. These are particularly useful in helping to upgrade the breeding status of some late nesting species. We are proposing that the BTO's on-line system will continue to be in place for receipt of Cumbria records until 30th September 2012. After this date we will be closing the system down, carrying out a final validation of all outstanding records and then producing a master database that will be available to us for the purposes of the proposed county atlas/avifauna. If you still have records for Cumbria that you wish to input into the system it is, therefore, important that you go online at www.birdatlas.net as soon as possible or, alternatively, you submit them on paper to me so that I can do the necessary inputting.

The next stage of the county atlas/avifauna will start as soon as the master database is available from the BTO. This is likely to occur towards the end of this year. Meantime, we will be drawing up proposals for the types of working maps and other supporting information that species authors will need in order to write their individual accounts. It is proposed that this should take the form of species packs which will be available to species authors in spring 2013.

We will also be working on the production of a few model accounts which will provide guidance on the likely contents of a typical species account.

Several Cumbria Bird Club members have already offered to help write species accounts, but more volunteers are still needed. If you consider that you are capable of contributing in this way then please get in touch with me as soon as possible. Alternatively, if you are in a position to provide photographs (both birds and habitats) or line drawings or help with fund raising then please contact me.

My own experience and that of other bird clubs who have gone through this process strongly suggests that a timetable for production is essential if we are to deliver the new atlas/avifauna within a reasonable timescale. Three years is probably about right as a working target, but we will only achieve this by drawing on as many hands as possible, so if in doubt please do volunteer - your continued help is vital.

Clive Hartley

CBC wintering Cormorant survey 2012/13 – last call for help



Cormorant roost, Silloth, Dave Shackleton

As announced in the spring issue of Bird News the club is proposing to carry out a census of Cormorants in Cumbria this coming winter. The most efficient way of doing this is to count the birds at their night-time roosts, of which there are about twenty in the county.

It is proposed to undertake two counts, the first over the weekend of 8th/9th December and the second the weekend of 2nd/3rd February 2013. We are still looking for counters to help with the surveys.

Counting Cormorants is not particularly difficult, and this survey is eminently suitable for anyone who has not done this sort of thing before but would like to have a go and gain some experience. A pair of binoculars is more or less essential, and a telescope helpful at certain roosts; other than that it is primarily about stationing oneself at a suitable vantage point for about an hour before dusk, and making the count.

This is the last call for help – if you would like to be involved please make yourself known by contacting Dave Shackleton, either by telephone (01931-713693) or by e-mail (d.shackleton@btinternet.com).

Robin Sellers

Mid-August at Coker House



Head height House Martin nest, Coker House, Bailey

We have a total of nine House Martin nests this year, on all sides of the house, with all first broods now out for flying-training. At least four of the nests have second clutches. The lowest nest is at head-height on my kitchen window. Up to 40 fledglings rest daily on our electricity wires, together with about 20 young Swallows. Daughter Emma has seen fledglings from the earliest

family apparently helping the parents to repair and extend the nest prior to the second clutch.

The most interesting development this year concerns Swallows. A pair returned in May to a nest built in 2011 on top of a CCTV camera in our porch [extra warmth?]. After the first fledglings left we expected the adults to start a second family. They have, but in a completely new, and much larger nest built over the course of six days a few feet away from the first. Again, we have seen the first brood birds helping to build this second nest.



CCTV Swallows, Coker House, Bailey

For the past few weeks, when I've been giving our ducks their morning feed, I've been surprised to discover a Sparrowhawk in the covered pen, ducks eyeing it curiously. Given that the pen is supposed to be raptor-proof, it has all been a bit of a mystery. Anyway, on the last few occasions the hawk has managed to find a way out before I could grab my camera.

Today, I saw the bird chasing a chaffinch around the pen, before - in the Sparrowhawk's usual tunnel vision pursuit mode - crashing behind its quarry into the enclosure through a Chaffinch-sized hole! I ran to find my camera, returning a few minutes later to find the hawk, apparently calm, but performing an excellent impersonation of a bat on the underside of the netting roof. It

stayed in this position for several minutes, but was very clearly not entangled in the net. After enjoying its photo opportunity, the Sparrowhawk dropped from the roof and flew out through the pen door.

Also an excellent season for House Sparrows here with roughly 60 adults and fledglings in the Nursery [Bailey Alpines] ; they thrive on the whole wheat we put out for our ducks.

August 14th-27th e-mail correspondence with Jeannette of Coker House, Bailey



Sparrowhawk, Coker House, Bailey



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The Armathwaite Tree Sparrow project 2011/12

The Tree Sparrow project in the Armathwaite area is now in its eighth season.



Whilst the 2011/12 winter was fairly normal in terms of birds using the feeding station and surrounding area, the breeding season was extremely poor. This is almost certainly due to the very cold April/May and the subsequent wet and miserable summer.

Winter feeding

The arrangements for feeding Tree Sparrows in the 2011/12 winter were very similar to preceding seasons. The feeding station is close to Aiketgate and food, in the form of millet, was available to the birds in suspended feeders from early November until early April.

From conversations, some residents in Aiketgate were also putting out wild bird seed to feed birds in their gardens. Inevitably this was attracting Tree Sparrows, so numbers at the feeding station itself were lower as a result. Nevertheless, up to 60 birds were recorded in November rising to 75 by the year end. A cold spell in the early part of 2012 saw numbers increase still further to a maximum of 130 in late January. Thereafter numbers declined as birds moved away onto breeding territories.

The Breeding season 2012

In 2012 there were 128 nest boxes in the study area aimed specifically at Tree Sparrows. During the fine warm spell in March, birds were busy building and things looked set for another good season. As it turned out this was not to be, and the cold and wet clearly took a toll.

The first obvious signs were the number of nests built into which no eggs were laid. Through the subsequent season, brood sizes were much lower than previously, and for the first time there were no third broods.

a) First brood

Of the 128 nest boxes examined during this period:

- 48 were occupied by Tree Sparrows successfully
- 23 nests only built
- 19 were empty
- 22 were occupied by other species
- 16 eggs laid and deserted or dead young.

This latter figure was disturbing and on a scale not previously witnessed.

A comparison with the 2011 season:

	2011	2012
Successful broods	99	48
Young fledged	445	153
Average brood size	4.5	3.2

b) Second brood

There were just 32 successful second broods, and 14 cases of eggs being laid and subsequently deserted. In three boxes the young perished when quite well grown.

A comparison with the 2011 season:

	2011	2012
Successful broods	62	32
Young fledged	260	116
Average brood size	4.2	3.6

c) Third brood

For the first time in the history of the project there were no third broods!

Ringling

A total of 269 young Tree Sparrows were ringed with the appropriate metal ring always on the right leg. The total compares unfavourably with the 638 young ringed in 2011.

Discussion

- a) As previously, the number of ringed Tree Sparrows observed at the feeding station was small (less than 5%). Also it was of interest that when examining eight incubating great tits in an adjacent woodland six were already ringed. (From a similar study of great tits ringed in the area over many years). This is an indication perhaps of the site faithfulness and relative longevity of the species. By the same token, of the five adult Tree Sparrows caught and examined in nest boxes in the study area, none were ringed! Dispersal and movements of Tree Sparrows in and from the study area is as yet unexplained.
- b) The average brood size in 2012 was much lower than previously the case. A larger number of clutches of eggs were laid and subsequently abandoned. There were a number of broods of young found dead in the nest.
- c) There were two cases in 2012 where the young were trapped in the nest by entanglement with plastic. On one of the occasions, all four well-grown young were caught around the neck and carpal joints and it took some time and care to cut them free and release them. Interestingly they were all being fed as normal. Tree Sparrows construct a large domed 'weaver-type' nest which fills the nest box with material. Plastic twine is frequently brought in during the construction of the nest with potentially fatal results.
- d) Another species which readily takes to nest boxes and constructs a similar nest is the House Sparrow. When ringing the young it is important to differentiate between the two. The young House Sparrow has yellow bill flanges. The Tree Sparrow also has yellow flanges but at the basal (head) end this is white on the upper mandible.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to pay tribute to the late Tony Kendal with whom I have worked so harmoniously over many years on the Tree Sparrow project. Thanks to all concerned for their valued help and support. In particular to Andrew and Lesley Turney and Alan Daltry for their help and enthusiasm in the winter feeding. To Cumbria Bird Club and RSPB Carlisle for appreciated financial help. To Jenny Campbell for help during the ringling. To landowners for their kindness in allowing access and their support for the scheme.

Mike Carrier, August 2012

Birds of the National Trust's Sizergh estate - Part 2

When most people think of Sizergh, it is probably for the castle and gardens; whilst for birders we're now associated with the brilliant views of the feeding Hawfinches (see Spring 2012 newsletter) in the car park in late winter and early spring. But the National Trust estate at Sizergh is 1600 acres in size, and with a huge variety of semi-natural habitats including coppiced woodland, limestone grassland, wet grassland in the Lyth Valley and a long and very dramatic stretch of the River Kent. Here are a few of my top tips and highlights (102 on my list) from five years working (and bird-watching!) as a ranger on the Sizergh Estate...

Castle area – Gardens, castle grounds, car park

The garden really comes into its own in spring with the arrival of the first Swallows around the out buildings and the Blackcaps in song from the shrubs in the borders. Swifts breed on the castle: the last few years have had a stable three pairs screaming through the tight areas of the castle walls.

In September 2011 I installed a bird feeding area into what was a dog toilet next to the car park. This is now in full swing with up to 30 birds at a time feeding within the fenced off enclosure. Piles of wood/brush and the planting of Hazel, Holly, Guelder Rose and a couple of Rowans will ensure there is plenty of cover and extra wild food for the visiting birds.



Bullfinch, Shaun Donockley

Up to four Nuthatches, a couple of Marsh Tit, Treecreepers and the 'usual' garden species are frequent visitors. Bullfinches can often be seen in and around the car park area favouring the field opposite reception. Recently I have seen up to eight pairs feeding in the field. At least two pairs of Spotted Flycatcher breed in the garden, with the arrival usually around the first week in May. A good place for these is in the rock garden and around the bottom pond.

There are two ponds in the garden which also attract a few good birds: a formal pond in front of the castle which is the same depth all over and has an



Great Spotted Woodpecker, Stanwix, Roger Ridley

island on it, and a wildlife pond on the track down to the left through the visitor reception. Firstly, the formal pond and its grassy surround offers a good loafing and feeding area for Cormorant, Grey Heron, two or three Mute Swans, Mallard, Tufted Duck and Kingfisher in winter. A pair of Little Grebe have bred for the past few years with success.

This always surprises me given the visits from the local Herons

and the occasional Otter, and the amount of people that pass by in the open season. For its size and proximity to the castle it is surprising what it attracts really, I often pop down to see what is going on. The top pond is less formal and has breeding pairs of Coot and Moorhen. Teal and Mallard use the willow surround as cover. A couple of years ago I installed some Kingfisher posts which were used straight away. However, the recent cold winters have not provided as frequent sightings.

Open land/farmland

The farmland outside the garden walls offers good feeding for several Buzzards with early March being best and there can be up to a dozen catching the thermals, two to three pairs of Kestrel and a Barn Owl which in recent years has roosted in an old ash tree along Ashbank Lane (lane going west from reception). A few Stock Doves can be picked out in the Wood Pigeon feeding frenzy after the barley/wheat crop has been cut. The hedgerows offer valuable feeding for winter thrushes with the best examples being, again, along Ashbank Lane and surrounding farmland. Brambling, Reed Bunting and Tree Sparrow can be seen in cold weather around the bottom of Brigsteer Wood and in the hedgerows on the Lyth flats.

Since their entry into a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and the creation of a new ditch system, the wetter fields on the flood plain of the Lyth Valley now hold breeding Redshank, Curlew and Oystercatcher. This farmland is not accessible to the public, but there are good views and aerial displays to be had on May and June evenings from the Lord's Plain Causeway just north-west of Levens village. Snipe use the juncus areas west of Brigsteer Wood to breed and winter in, and can be seen in winter from the western edge of the wood. Just to the south of Brigsteer Wood, below Cinderbarrow Farm, there is a

small reed-bed where a pair of Sedge Warblers usually breed.

Woodland

The Sizergh estate has hundreds of acres of ancient woodland, notably at Low Park Wood (the one next to the River Kent with the caravan site in it), Brigsteer Wood, Backsprings Wood and Flashbank (to the east of Parkend Lane, opposite Brigsteer), and Holeslack (the one on the fell that can be seen from reception).

Look out for the boggle-eyed Woodcock in winter flying through the woodland rides and especially at the bottom of Flashbank. Tawny Owl, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Marsh Tit and Treecreeper are all present in all the woodlands of the estate. Siskin and Crossbill are not so common within the woodland but can sometimes be seen in larch/pine plantings within the deciduous areas, especially in Low Park Wood.

River Kent

The National Trust owns the section of river from Force Bridge up to the top of Low Park Wood. Once you have walked through the caravan park, the path north along the river is a spectacular stretch full of limestone gorges, rapids and chutes. Downstream, around the "swing" bridge (the pedestrian suspension bridge linking Sizergh with Sedgwick) are slower sections with shingle beaches: look out for Common Sandpiper breeding on the shingle areas.



Red-breasted Merganser, R. Esk, Roger Ridley

The fields along the river edge offer good feeding and in March are one of the first places on the estate to see returning Sand Martins. I saw a single Wigeon from the swing bridge in 2010 and Red-breasted Merganser occasionally get up this far too.

Dippers are common along the river. It seems that every time I go down there I see four different birds. Late winter/early spring can often be the best time to see them displaying on the rocks in the river and young birds can be seen well as they use the water for the first time. Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher are also frequently seen with the latter best sighted along the short calmer sections.

Limestone grassland – Helsington Barrows, Sizergh Fell

I recommend the area of Sizergh Fell above the Strickland Arms as best for Green Woodpecker. Family parties use the flat section at the top of the fell for feeding on the ant hills. Mornings are best for these and a bit of a stealthy approach is required as they are very good at spotting you before you spot them. Sometimes the only view you get is as they undulate off under the skyline. You can also get here along the public footpath leaving the southern end of the Sizergh car park.

Meanwhile, Helsington Barrows at the northern end of the estate, beyond Helsington Church and up towards Scout Scar is good for migrating winter thrushes in October. Flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare can be seen arriving from the east and filtering over in their hundreds in search of food. Skylarks and Meadow Pipits breed in the area too. There are usually a couple of pairs of Redstart in the oak woodland on the eastern side of the hill. The mixed scrub and bracken areas offer good breeding areas for Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff. Helsington Barrows is also good for Tree Pipit, Wheatear, White-throat and Spotted Flycatcher. Ravens croak overhead.

Flyover possibilities – species which perhaps may only be seen flying over the estate, they all count!.

On my list I also include flyover species that fly over the castle and estate. These include; Little Egret (Lyth Valley), Whooper Swan, Pink-footed Goose and Peregrine. I have also seen a Hobby which was being harassed by the local Swallows near to the castle. In 2007 I saw a Chough (presumably the Lancashire/Warnton bird taking a wander) fly over the car park following Jackdaws to feeding fields. In the Waxwing year of 2010 around 50 were seen flying over or feeding on Rowan in the gardens.



Whooper Swans, Walby, Roger Ridley

Rob Pocklington, Ranger

Partial albino Oystercatcher on the Cumbrian coast



The partial albino Oystercatcher above was photographed at Wolsty, south of Silloth on the Solway coast on 5th August. It is a distinctive bird and what may have been the same individual was seen on 18th January 2010 at Sellafield. Oystercatchers can be very long lived birds – the current record for a British ringed bird is 40 years, one month and two days so this individual may have been frequenting the Cumbrian coast for some time. I would be interested to hear from anyone who has seen a similar looking bird in Cumbria in the last 41 years!

Dave Shackleton



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The work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel

RBBP: a 40 year history

The spring and summer of 2011 saw the final year of the third national breeding bird atlas project. Some readers may have been active in the very first such atlas, which surveyed all the 10km squares of Britain and Ireland in the five years 1968-72. It was out of this first atlas that the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) was born.



Hawfinch, Sizergh, Craig Shaw

As it was the first time the whole country had been surveyed, records of many rare breeding birds surfaced and understandably there was concern about revealing hitherto secret sites to the mass public. Great care over the maps and text of that first atlas was required and taken, but nevertheless some records were not made available. Ornithologists at the time agreed that an independent archive should be created to store all breeding records of the most sensitive breeding species. The Rare Breeding Birds Panel thus came into being, with representatives from RSPB, the then Nature Conservancy Council, BTO and *British Birds* journal, plus a secretary to administer the archive and produce an annual report to be published in *British Birds*. Since the creation of the panel in 1972, reports have been published for every year since 1973 (*Brit. Birds* 68:489-506) with the most recent report covering 2009 being published in September 2011 (*Brit. Birds* 104:476-537). There have been only four Secretaries in post: Tim Sharrock, Bob Spencer, Malcolm Ogilvie and, since 2006, Mark Holling.

The first report, published in 1975, stated the aims of the Panel were to collect in one place all information on rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom, so that changes in status – both increases and decreases – could be monitored and so that essential information would not be lost (as had happened in the past) through the deaths of individuals keeping such records secret, or other misfortunes. Although it was acknowledged that the first report was incomplete, since then coverage of species and of counties across the UK has improved so that now it is believed only a very small proportion of records is withheld, making the published reports the best annual review of the popula-

tion and status of rare breeding birds in the UK. The aims have not really changed, but the RBBP archive is now widely acknowledged as a safe, secure place to lodge confidential information and that it is an increasingly useful resource tracking the changing populations of these special species. The recording area of Cumbria has been a regular and consistent contributor to the panel and its archives, and the panel would like to thank the Cumbria Bird Club and the various county recorders for supporting the work of RBBP in this way.

Panel membership

Currently there are six members of the panel plus the secretary. All members serve in a personal capacity but in addition three members are able to represent organisations they work for: Mark Eaton (RSPB), Simon Gillings (BTO) and David Stroud (JNCC, on behalf of the four country conservation agencies including Natural England). There are three independent members: Ian Francis (based in North-east Scotland), Andrew King (Breconshire) and David Norman (Cheshire). David Stroud is the chairman of the panel. The secretary, Mark Holling, lives in North Berwick in East Lothian, south-east Scotland. Mark is a former president of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, a member of the Lothian & Borders raptor study group and of the BTO atlas working group. He is one of the local organisers of the south-east Scotland tetrad atlas and was also co-organiser and co-author of the previous tetrad atlas of the area. In the past he has had an involvement with bird clubs and surveys in North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire.

What is a rare breeding bird?

The list of species covered by RBBP has grown as the advantages of an annual status check for rarer species have been increasingly recognised. The number has ranged from just 42 very rare species in 1973 to almost 200 now, although only 76 are currently classified as "regular" breeders, i.e. those for which there is at least one breeding attempt in most recent years. The criteria for inclusion have



Little Ringed Plover, Soddy Gap, Craig Shaw

The work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel



Brambling, Solway, Darren Robson

been detailed in the panel's most recent report, but broadly speaking, any species with fewer than 1,500 breeding pairs in the UK is classified as a rare breeding bird.

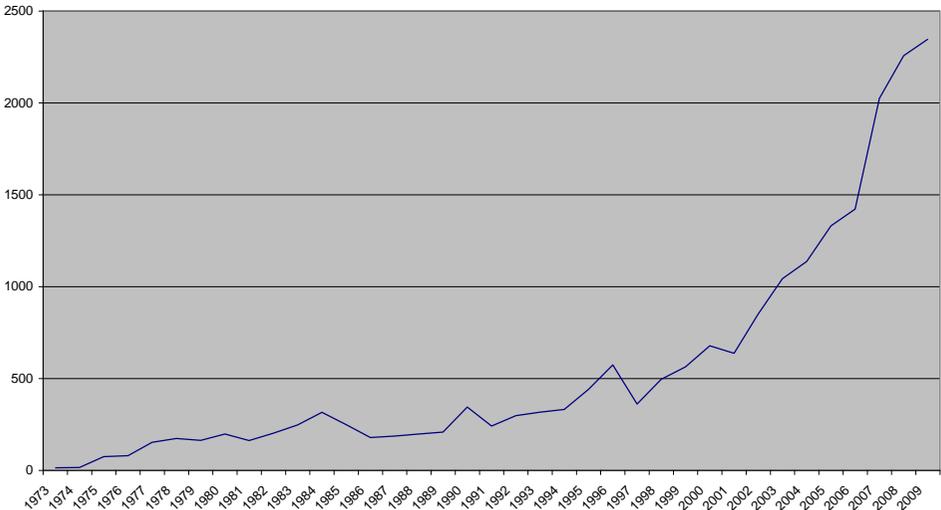
Turning to the rare breeding birds of Cumbria, although the first report did not include any records from the county, both Pintail and Black-tailed Godwit did nest in Cumbria in 1973 and the records were documented in the 1974 report, when both species were again proved to breed. There have, however, been no confirmed breeding records of these two species since the late 1990s.

The range of species included in the panel's reports has expanded over the years, and the most recent (2009) report included records of 18 species recorded in Cumbria, as follows: Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Garganey, Shoveler, Common Goldeneye, Common Quail, Honey-Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Golden Eagle, Osprey, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Water Rail, Little Ringed Plover, Little Tern, Redwing and Hawfinch. Emperor Goose, Barnacle Goose and Eagle Owl also breed in some years – all of these species nest in the UK only because individuals have escaped and formed a naturalised population – these species are documented within the separate RBBP report on rare non-native species breeding in the UK (the last published in March 2011 covered 2006-08 *Brit. Birds* 104:114-138).

Some of the species listed were of course breeding in Cumbria in 1973, but not included in the list of species reported at the time by RBBP. And others, such as Little Egret, did not even nest in Britain until 1996, but may possibly breed in Cumbria in the near future. Another species expanding north and westwards is Cetti's Warbler, which first bred in Britain only in 1973, yet by 2009 the UK population was at least 2,347 singing males. This number is of course well above the RBBP cut-off for a rare breeding bird, but it was decided to keep reporting the species until the impact of the two recent cold winters has been assessed. In the past, the numbers of Cetti's Warbler were reduced by colder than normal winters in the 1980s, but the population base then was much lower so perhaps more vulnerable. If the populations of

Cetti's Warblers are sustained above 1,500 pairs, then it is likely that it will be removed from the list of species considered by RBBP, and will go down in ornithological history as a successful colonist. But perhaps it will colonise Cumbria before it is removed from the RBBP list!

Cetti's Warbler 1973-2009: number of singing males/territories from RBBP data



Cetti's Warbler may have increased in numbers, but of course many breeding bird populations are in decline and from time to time new species are added to the RBBP list. Thus, from 2010, RBBP will report on five new species, because it is believed that their populations are below 1,500 pairs. These are Arctic Skua, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit of which all but the first named breed in Cumbria. All are scarce and localised breeders and any records of both species in the breeding season will be gratefully received by the County Recorder to allow him to assess the county populations. It is not essential to prove breeding by finding a nest. Behaviour indicative of breeding, such as drumming woodpeckers or territorial singing of Willow Tits, is just as important to assess the population. Regular sightings of these species at a location are also important as it points to the likelihood of breeding in the area.

Contributing to the RBBP archive

So how can members of the Cumbria Bird Club contribute to the work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel? The most important source of records RBBP re-

The work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel



Fieldfare, Carlisle, Shaun Donockley

ceives is the annual submission made by each of the 80-odd county bird recorders across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These recorders use the contributions they receive through the year from birdwatchers resident in or visitors to the county. Thus, the recorder for Cumbria, Colin Raven, will be most grateful for any records in the breeding season of the species listed in the table below, plus of course any other, rarer, species which might appear one year and set up. RBBP have laid out their recording standards on

their website at www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-recording-standards; a leaflet describing the standards is downloadable from this web page.

Equally, if you visit other parts of the country, perhaps on holiday, and find a rare breeding species in suitable habitat, please make sure you report it to the relevant county recorder – for they too will use these records in preparing their annual return to the panel secretary. A list of recorders can be found on the *British Birds* website at www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/county-recorders-2. A full list of species reported by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel is included on the RBBP website at www.rbbp.org.uk – more on this website later.

Other records received by the panel secretary come from schedule 1 returns submitted by licensed ringers and nest recorders, and from other nest records submitted to BTO; also from RSPB reserves, recently the BTO atlas, and from a whole host of species studies. Some are annual surveys, often coordinated by RSPB, covering species such as Bittern, Slavonian Grebe and White-tailed Eagle.

Then there are the periodic national surveys of species such as Marsh and Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Woodlark, Dartford Warbler and Cirl Bunting, and annual studies such as those of the Golden Oriole Group. Various raptor study groups are important contributors, especially in the north of England and in Scotland. Indeed the long-running records of Peregrines in Cumbria form a substantial part of RBBP's Cumbria archive.

The work of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel

Black Swan *	Hen Harrier	Mediterranean Gull
Emperor Goose *	Northern Goshawk	Little Tern
Barnacle Goose *	Golden Eagle	Eagle Owl *
Eurasian Wigeon	Osprey	Long-eared Owl
Pintail	Merlin	Short-eared Owl
Garganey	Hobby	Wryneck
Shoveler	Peregrine Falcon	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Common Pochard	Water Rail	Golden Oriole
Common Goldeneye	Corn Crake	Fieldfare
Common Quail	Common Crane	Redwing
Little Egret	Little Ringed Plover	Willow Tit
Eurasian Spoonbill	Dotterel	Brambling
Honey-buzzard	Ruff	Common Rosefinch
Marsh Harrier	Black-tailed Godwit	Hawfinch

The table above lists species which, according to records held by RBBP, have bred, attempted to breed, or showed signs of potential breeding in Cumbria in the last 20 years and for which RBBP is seeking data for the 2011 breeding season and for subsequent years. Species marked with * are non-native species in the UK but these species are also reported periodically by RBBP to give a regular update on their status.

The RBBP website

Lastly, I would like to draw your attention to the online presence of RBBP. At present, the panel's website holds key information about how to submit records to RBBP, the list of species covered, and species specific guidelines to help with record submission. A major resource on the website is the inclusion of all of the panel's reports (except for the most recent one) for download as PDF documents. We are working towards ways of providing more statistics from our archive as well, so that the website can be a definitive resource for information on the UK's rare breeding birds. Explore for yourself: www.rbbp.org.uk.

Mark Holling, Secretary, Rare Breeding Birds Panel secretary@rbbp.org.uk

Recent reports

The period covered is June to August 2012. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or British Birds Rarities Committee. Species order and nomenclature follow that used in *Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria*.

Wildfowl

Whinfell Tarn hosted a female **Mandarin** in August. A **Scaup** at Hodbarrow on 29th June was part of an influx of *aythya* ducks. **Common Scoters** at coastal sites included 440 at Walney and 300 off Nethertown while a drake inland at Killington on 12th July was followed by another four birds at the same site plus singles at Longtown, Tarn House Tarn and Sunbiggin Tarn.



Little Egret, Port Carlisle, Craig Shaw

Divers to grebes

The first **Red-throated Diver** reappeared at Walney on 28th June. **Fulmars** peaked at 60 at Workington and 26 at Walney in June. A **Sooty Shearwater** passed Biggar Bank, Walney Island on 9th June. **Manx Shearwaters** totals included a massive 2400 at Workington, 1000 at Walney and up to 150 at Selker in June while one actively feeding on the lagoon at Hodbarrow on 29th June was an extraordinary sighting. **Storm Petrels** appeared at the usual clutch of favoured sites in June though, as has been the case in the last year or two they were neither particularly numerous nor predictable, with a total of 12 logged at Walney and site maxima of 38 at Workington, eight at Selker and one at Parton followed in July by just four at Workington. **Gannets** included counts of 205 at Walney in June.

Little Egrets consisted of two on the Inner Solway in June, followed by 11 on the Kent Estuary, two on the Inner Solway and singles at Walney, Rampside and on the Esk near Ravenglass in July then 23 on the Kent Estuary, eight at Flookburgh, five at Walney, two on the Inner Solway and singles on the Esk near Ravenglass and at Borwick Rails, Haverigg and Beckfoot in August. A **Spoonbill** was a brief visitor to Soddy Gap on 10th June. A rather unseasonable **Slavonian Grebe** appeared on the lagoon at Hodbarrow on 30th August.

Raptors to waders

Away from the vicinity of Grizedale Forest where the final batch of 30 young birds was released in August, **Red Kites** were seen at Holme Dub, Watchtree N.R. and Thacka, Penrith. An unseasonable male **Hen Harrier** on the Inner Solway on 26th June was followed by a ringtail near Beckermot on 31st July. At least two different **Marsh Harriers** were seen regularly near Arnside throughout the period while passage birds consisted of up to three at Campfield Marsh and singles at Beckfoot, Walney and Aldingham. The Bassenthwaite **Osprey** pair successfully reared a single youngster. Elsewhere, up to three were seen around the Kent Estuary with single birds noted at Anthorn, Dalston, Walney, Killington, Fisher Tarn, Whins Pond near Penrith and Thacka, Penrith. A **Honey Buzzard** flew over Heversham Moss on 9th June. The first **Merlin** was back in residence from 14th August.



Osprey, Anthorn, Craig Shaw

Two **Avocets** were on the Kent Estuary at Arnside on 1st June. Away from known or possible breeding sites, a **Little Ringed Plover** was at Port Carlisle on 26th August. A **Dotterel** on Kirk Fell, Wasdale on 20th August was a notable autumn record. Adult **Little Stints** at Walney on 2nd June and Anthorn on 5th August were followed by the first juvenile at Port Carlisle from 24th August. A **Curlew Sandpiper** at Walney on 7th June was followed by further adults at Port Carlisle from 29th to 31st July and Anthorn on 5th August then up to two juveniles at Port Carlisle from 26th August. A **Ruff** was at Walney on 4th June then numbers peaked at 16 at Abbeytown in August. A **Pectoral**



Curlew Sandpiper, Port Carlisle, Darren Robson

Sandpiper was found at Snab Point, Walney Island on 5th June. **Black-tailed Godwits** included 42 at Walney in June, 15 at Bowness Railings and 10 at both Walney and Eskmeals in July and then 28 at Abbeytown, 27 at Fingland and 14 at Walney in August. **Whimbrel** included 28 at Walney and seven at Foulney Island. **Spotted**

Redshanks were limited to a single adult at Port Carlisle in August. **Green-shank** were, as usual most numerous at Walney where monthly maxima comprised two in June, 11 in July and six in August. Elsewhere, the best counts consisted of five at both Hodbarrow and Abbeytown while one appeared well inland at Thacka, Penrith in June. **Wood Sandpipers** were restricted to singles at Walney on 4th June and Abbeytown on 8th August.

Skuas to auks

A few **Pomarine Skuas** appeared in June with two past Sellafield on 16th then a single at Bowness-on-Solway on 17th followed by six more at the same site on 23rd. July brought a single off Nethertown on 17th while in August one was off Sellafield on 3rd. **Arctic Skuas** included five at Workington on 30th June; totals at Walney of four in June, three in July and six in August; up to three off Nethertown in June and July. **Great Skuas** consisted of a total of five at Walney in June and four at Bowness-on-Solway on 23rd June followed by singles at Walney and Workington in July and August.



Kittiwakes included site maxima of 400 at Workington and 52 at Walney In June. *Bonxie, Bowness-on-Solway, Darren Robson*

Little Gulls comprised two first-summerers at Hodbarrow in June, two past St Bees Head on 9th July and a single at Beckfoot in August. **Mediterranean Gulls** began to turn up in July with at least five, three adults, a second-summer and a first-summer, at Rampside, two, an adult and a second-summer at Anthorn, two adults (including the regularly returning 'Stumpy') at Workington, first-summerers at Ulverston and in the Lyth Valley and single adults on the Kent Estuary and at Bowness Railings. August brought an increase in numbers with a total of 11 birds counted between Workington and St Helens; at least six, four adults, a second-summer and a juvenile, along the Furness coast between Bardsea and Rampside; a second-summer at Grune Point; a second-winter in the Lyth Valley and an adult on the Kent Estuary. A third-summer **Yellow-legged Gull** was a good find at Allonby on 15th July and was followed by an adult on the Esk near Ravenglass on 26th August.

A **Common Tern** appeared inland at Sunbiggin Tarn on 25th August. What was presumably the same **Roseate Tern** was observed on Foulney Island on 23rd June and then at Walney on 30th June though even more unusual was

a juvenile that briefly visited Sellafield on 29th August. August produced a minor influx of **Black Terns** with two off Workington on 26th and singles at Walney on 28th and near Fingland on 31st. Away from St Bees Head, **Puffins** consisted of three at Workington and singles at Walney in June and July while single **Black Guillemots** were seen at Workington, Nethertown and Walney.



Yellow-legged Gull, Allonby, Craig Shaw

Owls to buntings

Short-eared Owls continued to be recorded with individuals apparently summering at Walney (where a migrant joined the summering bird from 14th August), Mawbray and near Abbeytown while Thacka Beck N.R., Penrith hosted its first and one was also seen on Foulney Island in August. **Hooded Crows** consisted of singles at Walney, Silecroft, Eskmeals, the Irt Estuary, Drigg Dunes and Whitehaven though how many different individuals were involved is anyone's guess.

The county's fifth **Greenish Warbler** and the fourth for Walney was trapped and ringed at the Bird Observatory on 4th June while a **Melodious Warbler** found at Snab Point, Walney Island on 19th August was the first in the county since 2003. Migration began to build at Walney in the second half of August and, though the first few **Goldcrests** appeared from 21st, warbler numbers were in general low with **Willow Warblers** (max. 50 on 19th), **Sedge Warblers** and **Whitethroats** all well below average. A **Black Redstart** was at Walney on the unusual date of 3rd June. **Common Crossbills** included 33 at Finglandrigg Wood, 20 at Dodd Wood and seven heading south over the top of Wastwater Screes. At least ten **Hawfinches** continued to visit a garden in Grange-over-Sands in June.

As ever, I'm indebted to all the contributors, too numerous to list individually. Feel free to send records by e-mail to ian.kinley@btinternet.com

NB *It is important that observers also submit records to the appropriate Regional Recorder at the end of the year. Please see either the latest edition of *Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria* or the Cumbria Bird Club website <http://www.cumbriabirdclub.org.uk> for details of how to do so.*

Ian Kinley

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Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is December 1st 2012

If you have a computer: please send contributions to Dave Piercy

- on disk (your disk will be returned if requested); or
- as e-mail attachments to daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk

If you do not have a computer: please send in as clear a format as possible to Dave Piercy,

Derwentwater Youth Hostel, Borrowdale, Keswick CA12 5UR; tel 017687 77246

Opinions expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of Cumbria Bird Club, its Editor, nor any of its Officers.

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Cumbria Bird Club Website

<http://www.cumbriabirdclub.org.uk>

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