

BIRD NEWS
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Twinned with Cumberland Bird Observers Club

New South Wales, Australia

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CBC Swift survey



Swift, Tindale, Adam Moan

It is the club's intention to continue the survey of Swifts in the county this year. The methodology will be exactly the same as last year. As well as aiming to cover new locations, surveyors who took part last year are to be encouraged to carry out repeat counts at the same locations and times as last year to allow direct comparisons.

Counts are welcome from any date when Swifts are present but we would be particularly interested in those made around the peak weeks of 27th May, 24th June and July 15th. Equally, counts can be made at any time of day with a preference for morning and evening.

As last year the object would be mainly to count birds above areas with suitable habitat (villages and towns etc), to record screaming parties of birds and estimate numbers in these parties. If possible the location of nest sites will be recorded. Additionally this year we would also welcome counts from regular feeding areas such as mosses.

The CBC Swift survey is really very easy to take part in. You can even do one on the spur of a moment. If you see a Swift anywhere near buildings just take five or ten minutes to stand and count them, note how many are screaming and note where you are standing. Just taking time to watch these magnificent birds will make your day.

If you are interested please contact Dave Piercy tel. 017687 73201; daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk for further information, methodology and forms. Surveyors who took part last year will be automatically e-mailed full updated details.

A Winter survey of non-WeBs inland still waters

The Wetland Bird Survey conducts monthly counts of wildfowl and other water birds at around 80 of the larger and better known lakes, tarns and reservoirs in Cumbria. However, many other waters in the county are not visited on a regular basis, including 130 sites which are listed as vacant WeBs locations for a variety of reasons. The CBC Council proposes to organise a survey of a selection of wetlands not regularly monitored with the objective of updating information on the significance of these lesser known waters as wildlife habitats during the 2019-2020 winter.



In the last 40 years there have been many changes in the status of Cumbria's abundant wetlands. A few reservoirs and shallow waters have been drained, whilst others have been subject to increasing recreational pressures and development. To some extent, these have been replaced by new lakes and ponds created by abandoned quarries, conservation, fishing and shooting projects. In addition, it is planned to include promising areas of winter floodwaters in the survey. These occur in several parts of Cumbria and provide valuable transient habitats for wildfowl, waders and other water birds.

The survey will request two visits to sites during early and late winter. Further details will be published in the next newsletter.

Malcolm Priestley

CBC Meeting programme 2019/2020

Friday Oct 4th (AGM): Penrith United Reformed Church 7.30pm

Talk to be arranged - a celebration of 30 years of CBC

Wednesday 22nd January 2020: Tullie House 7.15pm Joint with Carlisle NHS
'Twenty years of Pied Flycatchers in a Galloway wood' - *Brian Smith*

Monday 9th March 2020: Friends House, Stramongate, Kendal

The second Fred Gould Memorial Lecture joint with KNHS

Talk by Paul Colley, winner of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2018.

Walney Wanderers win again!

On 6th January 2019 Walney Bird Observatory again assembled a team to enter the CBC Winter Bird Race and calm conditions combined with overcast skies greeted Walney Wanderers as Tony Phizacklea, Chris Turner and Colin Raven set out into the darkest depths of Cumbria. Eventually, 10 hours later a list of exactly 100 species had been amassed after covering around 100 miles and visiting 35 locations.

A Tawny Owl calling close by at 0600hrs was fortunately heard well by two of the team to set the total running. Water Rail was then missed at several locations, although three trilling Little Grebes were added – the only record all day. Little Egret was amongst the species next to fall as we headed to Walney Island, still in the dark, but with a list already totalling 16 species.



Twite, Anthorn, Roger Ridley

Barn Owl and Little Owl were both missed before dawn eventually broke under leaden skies, however, the target species of Brent Goose, Scaup, Greenshank and Shoveler were amongst a good selection of wildfowl and waders along with Twite, Linnets and Raven. The sea then did us proud with Shag, Red-throated Diver, Kittiwake and Common Scoter all quickly added while raptors also scored heavily with Merlin, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and then Peregrine all seen before a Little Owl also eventually fell. Further waders then followed in the form of Knot, Grey Plover and Snipe, but not Jack Snipe, while single Pheasant and Stonechat were the only ones to be seen all day. Four Purple Sandpiper and a handful of Sanderling eventually succumbed and a feeding station on the island added Great Spotted Woodpecker, Bullfinch, Tree Sparrow and Coal Tit amongst others. As the tide rose Golden Plover and finally Jack Snipe brought the running total to 85 species as we left the island at 1115hrs.

The weather had slowly deteriorated through the morning with mist and drizzle settling in and this only got worse as the day progressed. Green Sandpiper was missed before a Pochard – the first seen by the team for five years and Coot was added, with Buzzard and Mistle Thrush the next to fall. The coast only yielded a Common Gull before the first woodland visit provided Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Jay, Long-tailed Tit and Redwing to leave the total on 95

Walney Wanderers win again!

at 1330hrs. Thereafter, the only new additions were Goosander, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Marsh Tit before we arrived on the outskirts of Kendal. The river produced a displaying pair of Dipper before a single observer Kingfisher failed to make the list. While trying to relocate this bird surprisingly a Common Sandpiper materialised out of the gloom, perhaps the highlight of the day, to leave the total on exactly 100 species as the light faded. A leisurely drive north to the finish remained, however, the chauffer had other ideas, and as the mist turned to dense fog, the scenic route was the preferred option. The Wanderers lived up



*Yellowhammer, Gowrie, Tommy Holden
Not seen by the Wanderers.*

to the name and headed southeast away from Kendal and more importantly Penrith before eventually turning back north to navigate the single track lanes along the Lune Valley to Sedbergh. This then left a frantic dash to the finish and an arrival with just seconds to spare for the second consecutive year.

While it was disappointing not to see Green Sandpiper, Kingfisher and Barn Owl, only Grey Wagtail and Fieldfare of the commoner target species were missed and with all other teams bemoaning the poor visibility and low totals this provided hopes of a good result. Finally, the lists were checked and the results were in and Walney Wanderers had won the day with a Kendal based team on a total of 92 species taking second place. Despite the weather, the day proved to be another enjoyable day out and hopefully Walney Wanderers will be back again next year to try and defend the trophy.

Colin Raven

Many thanks to Phil Evans and Christine Nuttall for organising the CBC bird race.

X	Red-throated Diver		Woodcock	X	Magpie
X	Great Crested Grebe	X	Bar-tailed Godwit	X	Jackdaw
X	Little Grebe		Black-tailed Godwit	X	Rook
X	Cormorant	X	Curlew	X	Carriion Crow
X	Grey Heron	X	Redshank	X	Raven
X	Mute Swan	X	Greenshank	X	Jay
	Whooper Swan	X	Turnstone	X	Starling
	Pink-footed Goose	X	Common Gull	X	House Sparrow
X	Greylag Goose	X	Black-headed Gull	X	Tree Sparrow
X	Canada Goose	X	Herring Gull	X	Chaffinch
X	Brent Goose	X	Lesser Black-backed Gull		Brambling
X	Shelduck		Glaucous Gull	X	Greenfinch
X	Wigeon	X	Great Black-backed Gull	X	Goldfinch
X	Pintail	X	Kittiwake		Siskin
X	Teal		Guillemot	X	Linnet
	Gadwall	X	Razorbill	X	Twite
X	Mallard	X	Feral Pigeon		Lesser Redpoll
X	Shoveler		Stock Dove		Crossbill
X	Pochard	X	Wood Pigeon	X	Bullfinch
X	Tufted Duck	X	Collared Dove		Hawfinch
X	Scaup		Barn Owl		Yellowhammer
X	Eider	X	Little Owl	X	Reed Bunting
	Long-tailed Duck		Short-eared Owl		
X	Common Scoter	X	Tawny Owl		
X	Goldeneye		Kingfisher		
X	Red-breasted Merganser		Green Woodpecker	X	Shag
X	Goosander	X	Great Spotted Woodpecker	X	Little Egret
	Ruddy Duck	X	Skylark	X	Common Sandpiper
X	Sparrowhawk	X	Meadow Pipit		
X	Buzzard	X	Rock Pipit		
X	Kestrel		Grey Wagtail		
X	Merlin	X	Pied Wagtail		
X	Peregrine	X	Dipper		
	Red Grouse	X	Wren		
	Grey Partridge	X	Dunnock		
X	Pheasant	X	Robin		
	Water Rail	X	Stonechat		
X	Moorhen	X	Blackbird		
X	Coot		Fieldfare		
X	Oystercatcher	X	Song Thrush		
X	Ringed Plover	X	Redwing		
X	Golden Plover	X	Mistle Thrush		100 species
X	Grey Plover	X	Goldcrest		
X	Lapwing	X	Long-tailed Tit		
X	Knot	X	Marsh Tit		
X	Sanderling	X	Coal Tit		
X	Purple Sandpiper	X	Blue Tit		
X	Dunlin	X	Great Tit		
X	Jack Snipe	X	Nuthatch		
X	Snipe	X	Treecreeper		

**WALNEY WANDERERS
2019
WINTER BIRD COUNT**

The first Fred Gould Memorial Lecture

Mustering at Cockermouth, Lyn and Mike Mills from Whitehaven, Barbara Nelson from near Egremont, Keith Hamilton from Maryport and the undersigned from Allonby, set off together travelling in anticipation to attend the joint CBC-Kendal Natural History Societies initiative of the first Memorial Lecture, given by Fred's two sons, Gary and Lindsey in his hometown of Kendal.

What a treat, we were not disappointed. Gary commentated on over 200 photographic slides, mostly birds, but also including all aspects of natural history and all telling Fred's story. Some were from foreign trips, but the core were Cumbrian, many with historic value, including the now 'lost' Corn Bunting feeding chicks at Halforth, flocks of Yellow Wagtails and the Ross's Gull that Fred found in Workington harbour in the 1980s.



These photos and many more, took my memory back to the mid 1980s, where in the Cock and Dolphin in early January, Fred organized his annual 'Slide Show'. At this time, Kendal was (and probably still is), the heartbeat of ornithology in the county, Fred's 'do' also attracted others from West Cumbria, Sedbergh, Carlisle and Furness.

It was here that the idea of a county bird club was raised, and even though our first inaugural meeting took place (for geographical logistic issues), in the Agricultural Hotel in Penrith, where about 125 people turned out, it was in Kendal that we were conceived. How fitting that about the same number were present for the first Memorial Lecture, including many from those first embryonic days. As we approach our 30th anniversary in October this year, it's a fine tribute to one of our founder members that many of us were present to honour his memory.

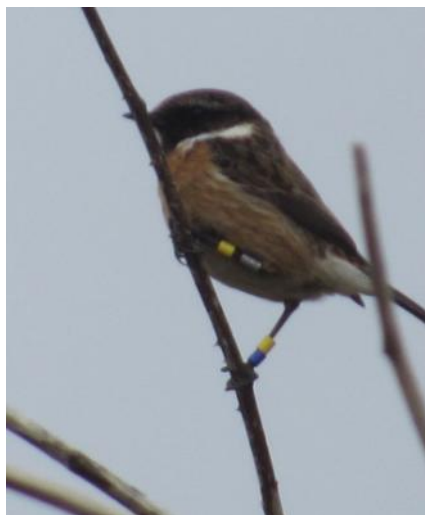
I did not know Fred as well as the Kendal 'gang', but I knew him well enough to know that as far as wildlife was concerned, he was a teacher, a student, and a friend; in life he was often a comedian, but, where wildlife conservation was threatened, he was a warrior!

John Callion

Colour-ringed Stonechat

The reclaimed mining coastline at Lowca Brows just north of Whitehaven is of significant botanical interest, providing food plants for a range of butterflies, including Common Blue, Small Blue, Ringlet and Large Skipper. The longer grasses and scattered low Gorse also offer nesting habitat for Stonechats.

On 13th April 2016, a pair of Stonechats were holding territory, of which the male was carrying three colour rings together with the standard British Trust for Ornithology metal numbered ring; (see photo). The female was un-ringed.



Now this bird must surely have been ringed by John Callion? True enough, John was later able to confirm that it had been ringed as one of a brood of three from a Gorse bush nest just inside the Lake District National Park boundary on the Ennerdale Bridge to Calderbridge, Cold Fell road on 7th May 2015. Of particular interest, is that this individual had travelled about ten miles to set up territory on the coast, at about 200 metres lower altitude, in a very different, post industrial habitat.

In both 2017 and 2018, this male was again seen holding the same territory, and on at least one occasion was giving alarm calls to suggest confirmed breeding and he was also with an un-ringed female. It was then a pleasure to bump into him again with his mate on their territory during a winter walk on 31st January 2019 at the start of his fourth breeding season. January and February sightings in 2019 and 2017 are indicative that this bird is successfully holding territory throughout the year.

Although the national longevity record for a Stonechat is 8.8 years, John confirms that this individual is his longest known surviving bird. We are accustomed to short lifespans with small passerines, but this bird continues to provide on-going interest to one of our local 'patches' near Whitehaven.

Note. John's long-term study, 'Breeding European Stonechats in Cumbria'; was published in *British Birds*: November 2015-vol.108 641-700.

Mike and Lyn Mills

Helping our Swifts

The decline in the UK Swift population has sadly continued, the latest calculations showing a 53% drop over 23 years, and with an annual 4% decline we could be in danger of losing these iconic birds altogether. So what can we do? There are two aspects for action: **preserving the existing nest sites**, and **creating more** by putting up **external boxes and internal nest bricks**.

Swifts, with very few exceptions, are entirely building-reliant for breeding, so preserving nest sites means we have to discover where they are – one aim of the Bird Club county-wide survey that was started last summer. This can require patience as they dart into eaves and crevices quick as a flash - but many of us can do this close to home, and strolling around looking for Swifts can be a most enjoyable way to spend some time on a summer's evening.

To preserve nest sites when houses, offices and other buildings are renovated we have to persuade the owners to leave entrance holes undisturbed when pointing, and to avoid putting up soffits. Because Swifts are so nest-site faithful, and not adaptable, it is tragic to see them repeatedly trying to enter a nest site if it has been blocked up. It is generally possible to point a property and leave the tiny holes, often beside rafters or purlins, intact and particularly so where there are overhanging eaves. Scaffolding can block access so work should not be done during the breeding season (May to mid-August). It is actually a criminal offence to interfere with *nesting* birds. Involving the law is not something any of us wishes to do, but last year, for example, one Swift group managed to save a colony by getting a housing association estate to stop work until later on. Being vigilant for applications for demolitions of properties with nesting Swifts, so that the planning authorities can be alerted, is another action we can do.

Creating affordable homes for Swifts is not difficult - by putting up external boxes, or even better, internal nest bricks. Although it may require patience, Swifts do take to boxes (sometimes it can take several years) and we've had much success ourselves, including the two boxes at Settlebeck School in Sedbergh with two breeding pairs in the first year, and at Lowgill we finally have two pairs in boxes that were put up four years ago. Any property of two storeys or more is suitable, with 3.5m being the minimum height, which means that gables of bungalows are sometimes sufficient. Boxes must be located at the highest point of a wall, tucked under eaves, and while aspect (N,S,E,W) does not matter, it is best to avoid driving rain. What is important is to have a clear fly in, no big trees right in front.

We usually recommend the **Stimpson** box (over 10,000 made by John in his garage) as it is robust and inexpensive (currently £17 including a nest cup).

Details can be found at the end. It has a PVC sloping roof to make it more suitable for eaves without a big overhang and to deter predators such as Starlings, Crows and Magpie. The white roof is designed to reflect sunlight but where the aesthetic appearance is important we have painted them grey. The RSPB has now produced a box based on this design. There are several other designs of box, as shown on the websites of **Swift Conservation** and **Action for Swifts (AfS)** - links at the end of this article. There are DIY plans for boxes on AfS as well.



Stimpson Model 30 box



Boxes fitted to sloping fascia



Boxes fitted to gable apex

AfS has many interesting examples of custom made boxes, to fit alongside sloping fascias or into the apex of gables.

Playing **attraction calls** is the nearest thing to a silver bullet for attracting Swifts to a new location. The best and most versatile system uses a small amplifier sited within the property, connected by a thin bell wire to a 'tweeter' fixed under the box. Calls are put on a memory stick or card, and by using a timer can then be played for selected times in morning and evenings. AfS has all the details. Components can be ordered over the internet, but we can sometimes supply them as a package.



Swift call amplifier

Helping our Swifts



Schwegler 1A during installation at Sedbergh People's Hall



Schwegler 25s installed in brick wall

Swifts definitely prefer **internal nest bricks**, essentially hollow nest units, which are easiest to install in new build or extensions. A typical example is the type 25 made by **Schwegler**, which we have in our home at Lowgill (all occupied!) and shown in the picture during installation in a new build. The type 1A is suitable for rendered walls – shown in the picture during construction in Sedbergh People's Hall – only the hole is visible when finished.

Other internal nest bricks include those made by **lbstock**, and **CJ Wildlife's** Vivaro Pro range has a system consistent with breeze block dimensions, called the **Cambridge system**. The **Manthorpe** nest brick, which conforms to standard brick dimensions, is made from a synthetic material.

A new idea is to use an **air brick (cavity) liner**, an inexpensive solution that is no trouble for a builder to install. The entrance pieces are available from CJ Wildlife, and we can sometimes supply the half brick size.

A nice idea that is relatively simple to install in a wall that backs on to a loft or attic uses a four inch drainpipe through the wall to connect an entrance hole to a box inside. It could easily have a camera fitted too. We have 12 of these at Lowgill and it is the system used at the famous Fulbourn colony in Cambridgeshire.



Air brick liner with entrance piece

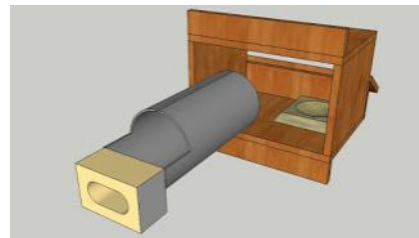


Diagram of pipe system

Yet another idea for old houses with rubble-filled walls is the **Derbyshire system**, where a space of suitable dimensions is hollowed out within the wall and just an entrance hole left visible on the outside. All of these ideas can be found in more detail on the Afs website.

A fundamental problem is that modern buildings, with smooth walls, lots of glass and no crevices, provide no nesting opportunities for Swifts. Yet affordable homes for Swifts would be so easy and cheap to provide by incorporating nest bricks when all the thousands of new estates are built. We need to get the planning system to take this on board and also make installing Swift bricks a condition in all new build properties. With this in mind the Bird Club has approached the planning authorities throughout the county to try and make some progress – it's an uphill task!

The bottom line is that we have to get everyone – architects, planners, builders, developers, ecology consultants - to **'THINK SWIFT'**. At the moment these wonderful birds are simply not on their radar.

Action for Swifts <http://actionforSwifts.blogspot.com/>

Swift Conservation www.Swift-conservation.org.uk

John Stimpson j.stimpson1@btopenworld.com tel: 01353 740451

Swift Internal brick information: tinyurl.com/swiftbricks

Tanya & Edmund Hoare: ta.hoare@btinternet.com

Barn Owl and Kestrel interaction

On the 30th December I watched a Barn Owl hunting over rushy fields near Southerfield, Abbeytown, for 10 to 15 minutes. As it was making its second pass over one particular field it dropped down into a clump of rushes as though to pick up prey. The owl remained there for a few seconds with its wings raised vertically and at this moment a male Kestrel crashed into the side of the rushes presumably to try and take any prey the owl might have.

After a second or two both birds flew off across a neighbouring field and out of sight. Neither bird appeared to be carrying prey. I had previously observed that these fields were a regular hunting area for the Kestrel.

Bill Angell



Barn Owl, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Star 'tern' – Cumbrian seabird spotted in South Africa



Sandwich Tern, Strand, South Africa, T.Kruger

A Sandwich Tern, hatched in Cumbria last year, has been photographed recently in South Africa. The sighting has delighted staff and volunteers from the RSPB, Natural England and Cumbria Wildlife Trust, who work in partnership with support from a team at Lancaster University, to conserve these special birds in the county.

The individual tern in question was ringed at the RSPB Hodbarrow nature reserve in Millom last year as part of a study into their movements. Several young terns at Hodbarrow and Cumbria Wildlife Trust's Foulney Island nature reserve were ringed last breeding season with coded, coloured rings. These birds spend the winter in Africa, returning to Europe to breed, so the rings provide important information about where they go.

Bart Donato, lead advisor for Natural England in Cumbria, who ringed some of the tern chicks said: "When I opened an email to find out that one of our Sandwich Terns, ring number C66, was in South Africa, 45km East of Cape Town, I was blown away. It is a stretch of coast more often associated with Right Whales, Great White Sharks and penguins! This bird was ringed right here in Cumbria on 28 June 2018 - it amazes me that the vulnerable little chicks we see at Hodbarrow go on to make these incredible journeys.

When we started this project two years ago we knew nothing about where the terns went. Now thanks to previous reports from North Wales and now South Africa we are starting to build an understanding of their lives.

Star 'tern' – Cumbrian seabird spotted in South Africa

Staff and volunteers from the partnership are now encouraging the public to keep an eye out for ringed terns returning to the UK in March and April and report any sightings. This year the first of the young-adult terns should return to this country from their adolescence in Africa, to start the next phase of their lives, but where they go to will only be known if sightings of them are reported.



Sandwich Tern roost, Strand, South Africa, T.Kruger

The Cumbrian Sandwich Terns have orange or dark blue rings with a three-character code that starts with a 'C' followed by two digits. If they are spotted, then the information about where and when, and the ring number should be sent to Bart.Donato@naturalengland.org.uk. All sightings are valuable.

Mhairi Maclauchlan, Warden at RSPB Hodbarrow said: “In 2018 we had a record-breaking number of 1,950 pairs of Sandwich Terns at Hodbarrow and they raised 525 chicks. To get information about where some of them head to is fantastic as it helps us to not only identify their movements, but work with others on their conservation around the world. Generally, tern populations like many seabirds, are sadly struggling. Their preference for nesting and resting on beaches means they often get disturbed by human recreation which reduces their chances of survival. And of course, their long migrations mean they are also susceptible to stormy weather and predation affecting them too, so any reports of them returning to the UK are very welcome.”

Annabel Rushton RSPB, edited from [press release](#)

Ring-necked Duck at Tindale Tarn

I was about to set off to take part in our regular Hen Harrier roost watch on 21st January when I had a phone call from Adam Moan to say that he was watching a male Ring-necked Duck on Tindale Tarn which is a very short drive from my house. But instead I headed north to search fruitlessly for Harriers.



Ring-necked Duck, Tindale Tarn, Adam Moan

Adam had been watching the tarn from the viewing screen along with Peter Wilson when Peter picked out the Ring-necked Duck among quite a large gathering of Tufted Ducks. The following morning I was at the tarn before the sun was up and the Ring-necked Duck was still present at the west end of the tarn associating with some Tufted Ducks. This constitutes the first record of the species since January 2017. The record prior to that takes us back over a decade to 2008.

It breeds in northern parts of North America and winters in ice-free areas in the south of North America. Its population saw a significant increase during the second half of the 20th century along with an eastern extension to its range. This resulted in an increased incidence of transatlantic vagrancy to Europe. The first British record came with a male at Slimbridge as recently as 1955. More records followed in subsequent years and these peaked at 50 in 2001 with birds occurring widely across Britain. Thereafter records have diminished and 2010 saw just 13 birds, although numbers now seem stable.

This same pattern of the rise and then fall in numbers of birds has been mirrored in Cumbria where the first was recorded in 1982 with a male at Sunbigin Tarn. Then more records came and the species became annual between 1992 and 1996 before again becoming more scarce. As is typical of the species, individuals often wandered between nearby sites but also tended to return to particular sites in subsequent years. Of the thirty or so records for the county it is thought that fewer than ten individuals are involved.

The Tindale Tarn bird's behaviour has been true to form. It was at Castle Carrock Reservoir three days later, returned to Tindale Tarn the following day and then relocated to Talkin Tarn a week after that. What is probably the same individual was seen at Coanwood Lough, just across the county border into Northumberland on 11th to 12th February but it was back at Tindale Tarn on 14th February and finally seen there on 24th February. On 26th February

what was probably the same individual was seen on Grindon Lough, Northumberland - just about fifteen miles away - and remained there until 4th March. Later in its stay it was seen with Pochards rather than its earlier cohorts, Tufted Ducks.

The question of provenance frequently arises with rare wildfowl – has the individual escaped from a captive collection? This is regarded as unlikely with this species which is rarely kept in captivity outside North America. It is also relatively highly priced and difficult to breed in captivity.

Chris Hind

Walby Flash

I had a fantastic time at Walby on Tuesday 26th February, the sun was shining and it was 17 degrees on the car dashboard. I sat there alone in the lane west of the birds, in the one parking space, for over an hour watching, in dreamland.



Pink-footed Geese, Walby, Roger Ridley

The light was perfect mid afternoon, a few cars drove past without stopping, on their way to important things.

3,000 Pink-feet, 105 Whoopers, 300 Greylags and 300 Lapwing, give or take one or two. Than as the light was starting to fade a little, a car drove up and stopped at the north end of the field and blasted his horn for a lo-o-o-ng time. The geese took flight all together in a great wall of wings, Lapwings as well, the driver moved off smirking when passing my spot. The geese circled and soon settled back down with the Whoopers who hadn't bothered to move.

The farmers drained the flash over the last couple of years and it looked like they had been successful but fortunately the water has returned. The swans still came to the field when there was little water but more on the north side of the road, now the flash has returned perhaps they will continue to use it.

In recent years White-fronts, Ruff and Green Sandpipers have visited. It seems a pity that such a natural draw for the birds so near to Carlisle is subject to the luck of the draw when there is very little easy birdwatching near the City.

Roger Ridley

A February dragonfly

On February 25th at around mid-day in exceptionally sunny, warm conditions when the temperature reached an unprecedented 19 degrees centigrade, I was in my usual position at Ulpha Meadows scanning the marsh hoping for early Sand Martins or Swallows which had been reported from various locations in the country over the previous days. For a second, my eyes were drawn to something flying through the foreground of my vision and when I managed to re-focus my binoculars on it, I was shocked to see a large dragonfly with down-curved body flying steadily roughly from south-west to north-east.

As the background was only sky and it was approximately 50 metres in front of me, the dragonfly was silhouetted and I was unable to discern any colours or patterns to aid specific identification. Even size was difficult to assess but I am used to seeing several species of dragonfly at this location at similar ranges during summer months and I would estimate its size to be at least as large as a Migrant Hawker. Within a few seconds I lost it when it passed in front of a dark background and I didn't see it again.

Single unidentified dragonflies were also reported locally at Leighton Moss and Heysham during this same freak warm spell and nationally, the country had experienced an influx of Vagrant Emperors which is a strongly migratory species originating from Africa and Asia which is known to be capable of reaching Northern Europe and is in fact the only dragonfly species ever recorded in Iceland. It seems unthinkable that one of our native species could have emerged so early in the year and it may well be that this dragonfly was a Vagrant Emperor but I guess we will never know, another one that got away!

Dave Thexton



Merlin, Duddon Estuary, Andrew Cockcroft

Merlin feeding on dragonfly

Monday, October 15th was a pleasant autumnal day at Foulshaw Moss reaching a temperature of 14 degrees with plenty of sunshine and fair numbers of Common Darters and Migrant Hawkers still on the wing.

On arriving at the hide at Ulpha Meadows, one of the first things to catch my eye was a small falcon perched on the same tree which had been the habitual perch of a couple of Hobbies throughout the summer of 2018. Almost as soon as I got my scope on the bird, it took off and proceeded to fly low over the Moss jinking from side to side and stretching out a foot to expertly catch a dragonfly in exactly the manner I had seen the Hobbies do throughout the summer. The bird then returned to its perch to eat its prey when I was able to get a prolonged scope view.

I fully expected to identify a Hobby which would have been my latest ever at this site but was astonished to see a juvenile Merlin consuming the dragonfly. The bird then repeated this feat several times not always successfully but nevertheless still catching dragonflies frequently enough to justify the effort.

I had never witnessed this behaviour personally or heard of it before but a little research revealed that dragonflies have occasionally been recorded as Merlin prey items particularly in North America. The only difference in hunting technique between the Merlin and the Hobbies which I could detect was that the Merlin invariably returned to the perch immediately to eat the dragonfly whenever it was successful whereas the Hobbies continued flying and ate their prey on the wing therefore staying airborne for significant periods of time compared to the relatively short forays of the Merlin.

I returned to the site on the 17th without seeing the Merlin again despite the weather being suitable for dragonflies and again on the 19th when it was again in the same tree and gave a repeat performance. After that, I didn't see it again despite several days being suitable for dragonflies to be on the wing and I presumed that the Merlin had moved on.

Dave Thexton

Free - but would need to be collected.
238 copies of the original RSPB 'Birds' magazine.
From Autumn 1966 (the very first one) to Autumn 2013
all in very good condition.
Steve Hill, Down Line, Clifton, Penrith, CA10 2EX
stephenhill100@yahoo.co.uk

Recent reports

The period covered is December 2018 to February 2019. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review.

Swans to Ducks



Whooper Swans, Siddick Pond, Tony Marsh

Whooper Swans continued to show a similar pattern to that in October throughout the period with herds in the Kirkbride area, Longtown and Walby. 208 were at Kirkbride on 26th December and 150 were at Angerton on 22nd January. Between 25 and 50 were regularly alongside the River Esk west of Longtown throughout. Numbers at Walby fluctuated (possibly because birds were often well back from the road in dead ground and only visible from the air) from 30 on 28th January, 90 on 6th February, 62 on 9th, and what were the same flock of 119 on the nearby River Eden on 11th. Away from these areas ten were on Derwent Water on 3rd December, 20 (with a **Black Swan**) were in the Lyth valley on 7th February, 53 at Kirkby Thore on 10th and 69 in two flocks near Thurstonfield on 18th. Unusual were 150 on the River Eden at Old Sandsfield on 28th. Northward movement was noted at Walney on 23rd with 20 birds moving through.

Pink-footed Geese were seen moving north as early as 31st December with 120 north over Skelwith Bridge on 31st December. Numbers on the Solway started to build in January with 1000 at Old Sandsfield on 9th, 4000 over Boustead Hill on 12th and 7000 on Border Marsh on 20th. Numbers reached an estimated 33000 on the whole Solway by 11th February including 14000 flying off Moricambe Bay. Northward movement was noted at Walney from 21st January (70) and then 880 on 10th February and 315 a day later. Away from the Solway 400 were in the mid-Eden Valley at Little Salkeld in mid-February with other flocks regular in the Longtown and Walby areas.

The mid-Eden flock held 300 **Greylag Geese** at Little Salkeld on 12th February. Ten **Greenland White-fronted Geese** (including one juvenile) were at Whale on 16th December with singles on the River Eden near Carlisle and Saltcoates earlier in the month. In mid-December 15 **Eurasian White-fronted Geese** were found at Winter Tarn, Shap. Thereafter a group of up to 12 were present at Soddy Gap from 24th December and were still present until 18th February at least. An apparent **Lesser White-fronted Goose** was reported/photographed with Pink-feet at Burgh by Sands on 9th January but not rediscovered after that. The **Todd's Canada Goose** present from late November continued to be reported on the south Solway until at least 25th January.

Barnacle Geese seemed to conform to the usual pattern with the Barnacle/Snow/Ross's hybrid being reported occasionally. 119 **Brent Geese** were on Foulney on 25th February; away from its regular range a single bird was at Crosscannonby on 19 January with same/another at Grune in February. A **Black Brant** was present throughout with Brent Goose flocks around Walney. These flocks included colour ringed birds from Northern Ireland, Iceland and Canada.



Barnacle Geese, Anthorn, Tony Marsh

Shelduck of note were 120 on a newly ploughed field at Kingside on 12th February. 163 **Mallard** were counted in the Longtown area on 20th January. Two pairs of **Gadwall** were at Holme in mid-January and there was a large count of 83 on Longtown Ponds on 20th. There were 12 at Hodbarrow on 2nd January and six on Martin Tarn, Oulton on 10th December both with fewer on the remaining monthly counts. In January 300 **Pintail** were between Askham Pier and Sandscale Haws on 2nd February and 108 a day later at Walney, 534 were noted from Burgh by Sands to Anthorn. Counts at Bowness on Solway were 200 on 9th February and 300 on 13th.

A pair of **Mandarin Duck** were on Derwent Water on 3rd December. The River Esk at Longtown held up to 444 **Wigeon** in mid-January. Thirty **Shoveler** were at Longtown Ponds on 20th January. Two hundred **Teal** were on Siddick Ponds on 8th January. 70 **Common Scoter** were off Parton on 1st, 30th and 31st January and 440 were off Walney at 3rd February.



Ring-necked Duck, Pochard & Goldeneye, Tindale Tarn, Adam Moan

107 **Tufted Ducks** were on Longtown Pits on 20th January and 140 were at Castle Carrock on 24th. An adult male **Greater Scaup** was at Hodbarrow on 28th January. A drake **Ring-necked Duck** was associating with Tufted Ducks on Tindale Tarn on 25th January and after that moving between Castle Carrock reservoir and Talkin Tarn through to the end of the month before moving to nearby sites in Northumberland at Coanwood and as far east as Grindon Lough – assuming there was just the one bird. The lower River Esk held at least 45 **Goldeneye** on 3rd January and on 20th there were 25 on Longtown Ponds, numbers on Derwent Water peaked at 131 in December. A “red head” **Smew** frequented Arthuret Pools throughout the period. 35 **Red-breasted Mergansers** were off Walney at the beginning of January and on 21st January 45 were in the Ravenglass main channel. The only **Long-tailed Duck** reported was a female on the River Esk near Metal Bridge on 13th December. Single **Pochard** were at Hodbarrow on 2nd January, and Soddy Gap throughout. Two were at Longtown Ponds and six on Derwent Water. The largest number were at Tindale Tarn - 16 (15 male and one female) on 22nd January.

Partridges to Grebes

Small numbers of **Grey Partridge** were regularly reported in the High Hesketth area but larger numbers were 15 at Allonby on 10th December and 17 by Siddick Shore and nine at Beaumont both on 9th January. **Great Northern Diver** frequented Silecroft, Hodbarrow Lagoon, Ravenglass and the Duddon Estuary throughout the period and another was recorded on Ullswater on 15th December. Two were recorded at Walney in early December. Counts of **Red-throated Divers** off Silecroft peaked at 20 on 27th February, six were off Bowness-on-Solway on 19th February and a single was in the Duddon estuary on 27th February. Small numbers were reported on several dates from Walney as well as a **Black-throated** on 20th January. There were two **Shags** at St. Bees on 25th February with others only reported at Walney including 37 on 28th December and 28 on 20th January. The first **Gannet** of 2019 at Walney was recorded on 12th January.

Great White Egret were reported only from the south of the county: from Foulshaw and Holme on three occasions, Brigsteer, Arnside, Flookburgh and Milnethorpe Marsh. **Little Egret** numbers were much reduced on the Solway during the period only six from Bowness to Anthorn on 15th December and a "nil count" on 2nd February on the same stretch. Eight were at Saltcoates on 21st December and five at RSPB Campfield on 24th February. The Foulshaw area recorded up to four as did Eskmeals. Of interest were inland records from Rose Castle, Dalston on 6th February, Edenhall on 10th February and perhaps most noticeable at Thirlspot by Thirlmere a day later. As far as roosts go 11 were in the Rusland Valley on 4th February, 197 in six roosts on Morecambe Bay/Duddon Estuary in January reducing to 178 by 25th February.

Great Crested Grebe in summer plumage were noted at Longtown on 8th January and a pair were on Killington Lake on 28th February. **Slavonian Grebe** were reported only from Coniston Water in mid-January.

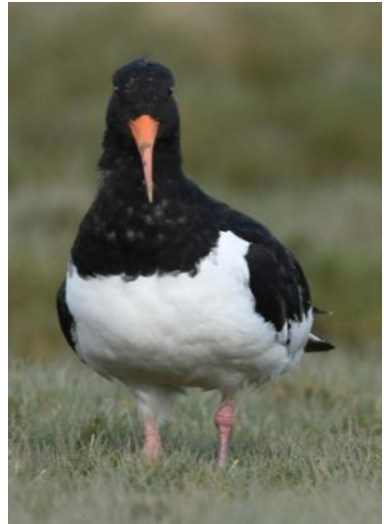
Raptors to Waders

Raptors were probably under-reported but they included **Red Kite** from the north of the county on three occasions in February and just once further south near at Grasmere. **Hen Harriers** were reported from the Solway Basin and the south of the county as were **Peregrine** and **Merlin**. **Peregrines, Merlin** and **Sparrowhawks** preyed on the large Starling Roost near Southwaite on several occasions in January and February. A ring-tail **Hen Harrier** over Torver High Common on January 23rd flushed at least 15 **Snipe**. Up to three **Marsh Harriers** were regularly noted in the south. A **Hooded Crow** was seen at Drigg on 10th December and rather more unexpected one was near Overwater at the end of February.



Sparrowhawk, Stanwix, Roger Ridley,

A **Raven** was present at Tarns Dub on 20th January, and one was at Brownrigg Marsh, Abbeytown on 5th February. **Water Rail**, regularly seen at Siddick Ponds, were also reported from Derwent Water, Longtown, Glasson Moss, Mirehouse Pond, Thacka Beck and Walney. A juvenile was seen feeding below a feeding station at Foulshaw in December and up to three birds were noted in this area. High counts of **Coot** were 73 at Longtown on 20th January and 30 in the same area on 31st. Numbers on Derwent Water peaked at 32 in January.



Oystercatcher, Walby, Roger Ridley

Away from the coasts **Oystercatchers** started to move inland at the end of January, Derwent Water's first on 24th. Of note being 155 in various roosts on the River Eden (maximum of 52 at Warcop) between Kirkoswald and Kirkby Stephen on 10th February. Coastally 400 at Foulney were of note and 4500 at Walney on 7th December. **Golden Plover**, away from the coast, were 110 on Helton Fell on 31st December and 35 at Kirkbampton on 2nd February. Foulney had 59 **Grey Plover** on 25th February. Few counts of **Lapwing** were reported but they included 200 at Anthorn on 5th January, 400 at Longtown on 20th and 300 at Walby on 26th. The **Ruff** flock continued to frequent RSPB Campfield throughout with 15 on many dates but up to 20 (including one Reeve) on 12th January and 17 (including a Reeve) a day later. What may well have been the same flock of 15 birds were on a field flood near Kirkbride Field on 27th January. The **Little Stint** continued at Port Carlisle with two there on 12th January.

Apart from a single bird near Leven's Bridge on 25th February **Green Sandpiper** seemed to be reported only from north of the county from the River Esk at Longtown (maximum of two), Sark Mouth Gretna, and the River Eden west from the M6 bridge (maximum of three) to New Sandsfield and onto Burgh Marsh and as far west as Saltcoates. A new site was a field flood next to Junction 42 of the M6 in late December close to the River Petteril. None were seen at the previous regular site at Walby but this may be because levels on the nearby River Eden were not high. There were nine **Greenshank** at Walney on 7th December and smaller numbers thereafter. Four were by the River Mite at Ravenglass on 1st January. Two were by the Irt on 10th December. Otherwise there were no more than two at any site – from the River Esk in Longtown, Port Carlisle and round to Anthorn throughout.

There were 40 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Hodbarrow on 19th December and 2nd January, 52 on 5th January and 58 on 27th February. A **Bar-tailed Godwit** was in full summer plumage at Beckfoot on 16th February. The first returning **Curlew** passed over RSPB Geltsdale on 14th February. One hundred **Common Snipe** were at Askam in Furness on 1st January and then 12 were at the site of the new school in Whitehaven on 13th February. Walney had 5000 **Knot** on 27th December and 2000 on 2nd February. Two **Jack Snipe** were on the River Esk at Longtown in both mid-January and February. **Woodcock** were reported from Cogra Moss, Dubwath, Glasson Moss, Thornhill Meadows and Arthuret Ponds, Longtown.

Gulls to Auks

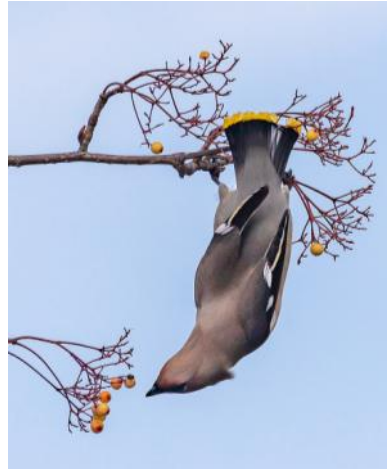
Mediterranean Gulls were reported from Siddick throughout including 17 on 26th January and six (five adults) on 14th February. There were no reports of “Stumpy” at Workington Docks - has all the white bread and sandwiches finally taken their toll? Flocks of **Black-headed Gulls** at Walby included 600 on 22nd December and 500 on 26th January. Two hundred were at Longtown on 20th January. **Little Gulls** were recorded only from Walney with four adults on 3rd December and another on 9th. **Common Gulls** were of course widespread and included 1100 washing in field flood by the River Irthing at Newby East on 26th January. Wintering **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** included a single at Port Carlisle on 14th December and 11 at Wyndehammere on 20th January by which time numbers were also starting to build on the Walney colony. **Kittiwake** movement through the Solway started in early February with 120 on 8th, 200 on 9th, 87 on 18th and 76 on 20th. A **Black Guillemot** was off Walney on 3rd December. St Bees’ ledges were crowded with **Guillemots** on 28th December - they often like to pay a winter visit to their breeding grounds. Thousands were also back on 25th February.

Pigeons to Buntings

The only significant number of **Stock Dove** reported were 80 at Whale on 28th February. Single **Short-eared Owls** were at Drigg dunes and RSPB Campfield in December and on Walton Moss and at Walney at the end of January. **Long-eared Owl** were reported from Watchtree NR on 23rd December and from Longtown in February. A **Barn Owl** was hunting in daylight on 8th December at Caldbeck but it wasn't until early January that more birds were widely reported – most were from north of the county from Maryport, into Solway basin and as far east as Carlisle Airport. Into “The Lakes” birds were at Derwent Water, Loweswater and “the central fells” and also at Penrith but no reports from the south. **Kingfisher** reports came only from the River Esk at Longtown, Wigton and Steveley. 200 **Skylark** were at Salta, Allonby on 3rd January, numbers were noted back at Torver by February 12th and

Recent reports

then 30 at Whale on 28th February. Birds had been singing at Allonby on 22nd. Of note was a **Shore Lark** photographed on Whitestones, Helvellyn on 1st January. **Rock Pipits** were regularly at Workington and further north as well as a bird on Glasson Point on 6th January - "very likely littoralis race". Single **Water Pipits** were at Saltcoates on 21st December and 17th January. **Waxwing** made an appearance in Penrith (15) on 3rd December and then in Keswick on 5th (16) and a maximum of 20 on 16th but still four on 23rd. Four were at Bowness on Solway on 27th but in January birds noted were only singles at Staveley and Arnside.



Waxwing, Keswick, Tony Marsh

A **Nuthatch** was present in Keld plantation, a first for this location. The only **Black Redstart** reported was at Oldside, Workington on 11th February. Two pairs of **Stonechat** were on the track to Skiddaw House on 30th December and birds were on Torver High Common on 21st February otherwise records were from the coast including a group of four on Walney on 11th February. **Redwing** were not at all widespread with only small numbers reported including 70 at High Hesket on 2nd January and 20 in the same area by early February. Similarly numbers of **Fieldfare** were not large with 100 at Armthwaite at the end of February being the largest reported. **Song Thrush** were widely reported as singing from 31st December through into February. Unexpected, but not without precedent, was a male **Ring Ouzel** above Glenridding on 10th January.

A huge **Starling** roost developed at Southwaite from the end of December and was present for the rest of the period – numbers were hard to judge but must have run well into five or possibly six figures. A small roost in a shrub against a house wall in Wetheral is used for eight months of the year and has been for about three years now and contains at least 100 birds.



Marsh Tit, Low Gelt, Adam Moan

A **Marsh Tit** at low Gelt woods on 1st January was "first there for some time". A colour ringed **Willow Tit** was at Glasson Moss on 19th February.

Single **Chiffchaffs** were at Portinscale on 24th February and Longtown water treatment works later in the month – all may have been wintering birds.

Tree Sparrows were regular at feeders including 80 at Watchtree NR on 18th February. **Brambling** were present throughout the period but of significance were 50 at Great Salkeld on 16th January, 200 at Glassonby (with 100 Chaffinch) on 25th and 250 at Renwick on 12th February – these flocks being associated with game cover crops. 100 **Chaffinch** were on a similar crop at Castle Carrock on 1st February. Twelve **Bullfinch** were at Jockey Shield on 23rd January.

68 **Linnets** were at the finch flock in Renwick on 12th February but few others were reported. **Twite** frequented the area round the Anthorn Masts in February with 25 there on 23rd. In January there had been 35 on Mossband Marsh, Rockcliffe on 3rd and 250 on Border Marsh on 20th; the day before there had been a report on Birdguides of c500 on Skinburness Marsh. In February 20 were at Humphrey Head on 14th. The Walney flock reached 59 on 24th December and still 55 on 20th January. There were 25 on South Walney on 4th December.

Siskin were more widespread in February but the largest number was a flock of 70 in Alders by the River Peterill near Junction 42 of the M6 on 23rd December. Significant numbers of **Yellowhammer** were 25 on Muncaster Fell on 2nd February, 39 at Waterside on 30th December, a similar number at Salta on 3rd January and 45 at Watchtree on 18th. **Reed Buntings** were on Torver Low Common by February 24th.



Reed Bunting, Gowrie, Tommy Holden

As ever, we are indebted to all the contributors, too numerous to list. Feel free to send records by e-mail to: rjgreenacres72@gmail.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 www.cumbriabirdclub.org.uk for details of how to do so.*

Bob Jones & Dave Piercy

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Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is June 1st 2019

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If you do not have a computer: please send in as clear a format as possible to Dave Piercy, 64 The Headlands, Keswick CA12 5EJ;

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