

BIRD NEWS
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please contact the Secretary who holds some.



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Club news and announcements

Swift Issue

This issue of CBC Bird news is mainly about Swifts. Whilst helping to organise the Swift survey, I have been amazed at the amount of interest there already was in this species in many local communities. I was also impressed by the amount of valuable data already collected by local Swift groups and their determination to protect and increase nest sites. I hope you find the articles I have commissioned from some of these groups as inspiring as I have.

Swift survey

The CBC pilot Swift survey is really very easy to take part in. You can even do one on the spur of a moment. In other words 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 and methodology.

Friday Oct 5th (AGM): Penrith United Reformed Church 7.30pm

'Eight years of colour-ringing Whinchats at RSPB Geltsdale' - *Stephen Westerberg*

AGM

The AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 5th October 2018 at 7.30pm. The business of the AGM is intended to be as brief as possible and will be followed by the talk above by Stephen Westerberg.



Five year old Whinchat, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Vacancies on Council: Secretary, Treasurer, and two ordinary members.

According to the terms of the constitution the above posts will become vacant at the AGM though there is a proviso that the current incumbents may remain another year if there are no other suitable candidates. This note is to seek nominations from members to fill these posts. According to the terms of the constitution, nominations should be submitted to the secretary not later than seven days before the AGM (i.e. by 29th September).

Talks, events and outings The club desperately needs one or more organisers. Please offer help.

Celebrating our Swifts

*They've made it again
Which means the globe's still working, ⁱ*

But 2018 has been a most unusual year, with far fewer Swifts seen in the first three weeks of May. This situation was mirrored throughout the country, according to the forlorn messages received from other Swift groups around the UK on the Swift Local Network (SLN) a nation-wide email forum for fellow enthusiasts. Yet, on the weekend of May 19th, we suddenly had a mass influx of Swifts in Sedbergh and again this appeared to happen in many places around the country.



Swift, Nick Upton

European Swifts on the spring migration linger over Liberia for around ten days, coinciding with the eruption of termite nests. It is possible that drought and late rains could have affected this, delaying the final leg of their journey. Fortunately we then had several weeks of fine weather and we have witnessed some of the most exciting and exuberant screaming parties that we can remember.

We think of Swifts as urban birds because, with very few exceptions, such as inland and sea cliffs in Northern Ireland, and Hunstanton in Norfolk, they nest almost exclusively in the eaves and crevices of buildings. The first Swifts to arrive back are the breeders, followed a few weeks later by those that are not yet old enough, from one to four years of age. On warm summer evenings it is delightful to watch their aerial acrobatics high in the sky, when they are busy feeding, and from June onwards these Swifts are a combination of both breeding and non-breeding birds.

The non-breeders rise up to over 1,000m for the night, coming down again at dawn: these daily ascents and descents have been demonstrated by both radar and data logger studies. However the breeding adults always go into their nest sites at night, which is why we often look for nest sites in the hour or so before nightfall. They dart in so quickly that blink and you miss them, making the finding of nest sites somewhat difficult and time consuming. It is the screaming parties of Swifts that hurtle around the rooftops that are so exhilarating to watch, and are especially important to us as they are an indication that Swifts are breeding nearby.

This year we have also seen some amazing ‘banging’ activity, when Swifts zoom up to likely nesting places, even clinging on to the walls for a few seconds before flying off again. They are called bangers because they do indeed make a noise when they hit the woodwork, such as gables and fascia boards. They are juveniles prospecting for nest sites for future years, practising their technique for entering holes. Often they follow a breeding Swift to its hole, and the occupants and Swifts breeding nearby then scream back at them, indicating that those sites are taken. By late June at our colony at Lowgill we had waves of Swifts screaming and banging, not just at holes, but hurling themselves at the apex and purlins of the gable. The cacophony was quite spectacular.

The bird world has its share of amazing migratory feats, and now the Common Swift has entered the record books for continuous uninterrupted flight. Last year, following earlier studies on the larger Alpine Swift with geolocators incorporating accelerometers, and with further advances in miniaturising technology, Swedish researchers showed that the Common Swift also could remain in the air continuously during migration and the winter period in Africa, finally evidence that Swifts do indeed eat, drink and sleep in the air and land only to breed. Studies have extended to Common Swifts in Beijing ⁱⁱ (the eastern extremity of the summer range): they migrate north of the Tian Shan mountains in Central Asia, across Arabia, to spend the winter in Namibia. Truly amazing.

There is still much we do not know. We have almost no information as to what happens to fledglings when they return the following year. Ringing of chicks over many years in the Oxford Tower ⁱⁱⁱ found that only a tiny number of the thousands ringed there came back to the tower. Do they return to a different part of Oxford, a different part of Britain, or do they end up in Europe? We just don't know.

Another little known area is how far breeding birds will travel to feed. Although it's been shown that Swifts can go great distances, even hundreds of miles, to feed, particularly when weather is bad, recent studies from N. Ireland showed this is may not be the norm. Swifts breeding in three different locations near Lough Neagh, where insects are certainly plentiful, were fitted with tiny GPS loggers and were each found to forage in the parts of the lake closest to their nesting places. However it could be very different for juveniles that spend all their time in the air and need only fend for themselves. They may range over much wider areas, avoiding adverse weather and seeking out the best feeding areas, in the process building up an idea of the land over which they travel, eventually settling at a particular location where they find a nest site that they remain faithful to for the rest of their life.

Celebrating our Swifts

Sadly, the latest data from the BBS shows there has been a further alarming decline in the UK Swift population: a drop of 51% in the last 20 years. This rate of decline is greater than the 50% in 25 years that is a criterion for red-listing, and it is only the lack of data for 25 years for Swift that keeps them on the amber list – for now.

We strongly believe that it is the loss of nesting habitat, as old buildings are demolished or renovated and pointed, blocking up the entrance holes, that is responsible for the decline. Modern buildings, with smooth walls and lots of glass, offer no nesting opportunities and, bizarrely, eco-homes are the worst. Swifts are one of the most nest site faithful of birds but unfortunately are not very adaptable so can be seen repeatedly trying to get into their former site, without success and potential loss of another pair. The west of Ireland, where there is certainly no shortage of insects, similarly reports this decline in Swifts, citing the Celtic Tiger with its rush of building renovation and demolition, as the culprit.



Settlebeck adult and chick 3 days

So what can we do? Unlike many other threatened species, the future of Swifts is in OUR hands. Unless we act, at the current 4% annual rate of decline we are in danger of losing these charismatic birds forever. While Swift groups urge people to put up nest boxes, and our group - Sedbergh Community Swifts - has put up over 130 in our area, the answer has also to come from raising awareness among developers, builders and architects and getting them to incorporate internal nest bricks in new buildings. Swifts prefer them to external boxes and during construction the cost is minimal and straightforward. When we consider all the thousands of houses and industrial developments being built, getting the planners on board is crucial.

We can demonstrate that such initiatives work by our successful Swift projects in Sedbergh. The four nest bricks we installed in the People's Hall have all been occupied since the first year and this year we have again confirmed that they have breeding pairs. At Settlebeck school two pairs have bred in the boxes since the first year they were put up, with one pair this year laying three eggs (two is the norm). In both cases Swift attraction calls ^{iv} were

played and in a study of over 1,000 boxes, by Dick Newell of Action for Swifts, it was found that this was the single most important factor for attracting Swifts to a new site. At Settlebeck we have installed webcams in the boxes, with a live feed to a screen in the school reception, and activity streamed via the internet for anyone to log on. Details are on the school website.



Two adults and two young on eaves nest

Raising awareness about Swifts so that nest sites are preserved when renovations are done has to be a priority too, as often house owners may be unaware that they have breeding Swifts. But this means we need to know more about where the breeding sites are. So a survey by CBC is underway this year throughout Cumbria, with the aim of initially identifying which towns and villages in the county have Swifts, with nest sites an added bonus. This scoping study is a starting point for more detailed surveys in later years.

There is still much to learn about Swifts, and perhaps increasing knowledge and experience will help reverse the downward trend in their numbers. In the meantime however in the long summer evenings we should perhaps simply just relax and enjoy over a cool glass of wine the spectacle of these exhilarating masters of the air swirling and swooping around our rooftops.

Tanya and Edmund Hoare

- i) From 'Swifts' by Ted Hughes
- ii) *Apus apus pekinensis*
- iii) The second edition of "Swifts in a Tower" by David Lack with an added chapter by his son Andrew Lack is Published in June 2018
- iv) Attraction call system details are on the Action for Swifts website <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk>. This site has a wealth of practical information about Swifts.

Swift conservation in Cumbria

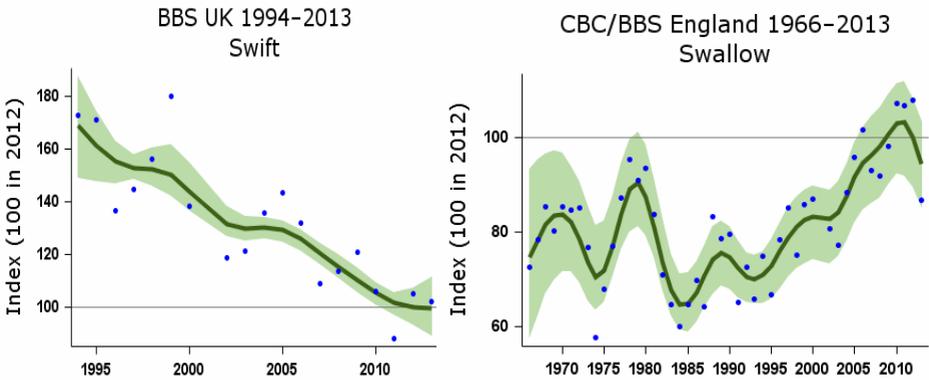
The Swift is one of the iconic birds of the British summer. For many, particularly those lucky enough to live in the vicinity of where Swifts are nesting, their arrival is eagerly anticipated and as Ted Hughes wrote in his poem about them, represent living proof that the world is still working. Like many of our migrant birds their numbers have diminished in recent years, by somewhere in the region of 40% in less than a 30 years. They are amber listed and their overall rate of decline would indicate they should be red listed, the number of monitoring years not meeting the appropriate criteria for red listing being the main reason why they aren't.



Swift, Tim Lindroos

Why this should be so is still not totally understood but we have a hunch we know the reason why. Swallow numbers have not followed the same pattern and in fact have shown more of an increase over a similar time period. Whilst having behavioral distinctions there are probably more similarities than differences between the two birds. Moreover Swifts are long lived and have several adaptations which help them breed successfully in our fickle climate. Their capacity to fly continuously for hours on end and cover vast distances enables them to forage for food over a wide area and perhaps avoid bad weather. They can store flies in a pouch in their throat, forming a bolus containing up to 500 insects, alleviating the need to constantly make return visits to their nest site. The young also have the ability to control their body temperature and adopt a semi-comatose state when parent birds are absent for significant lengths of time.

Their Achilles Heel lies in their inability to perch and therefore construct a nest in a conventional way. From using cracks in cliffs and trees, as man's dwellings became more sophisticated they adapted to the new opportunities these provided and now virtually all Swifts are dependent on manmade buildings. In order to achieve this exploitation they need access, either to a crack in a wall or more often the top of the building wall on which the wall plate sits under the eaves. But a few decades ago building regulations changed. Now new constructions are impenetrable and are no longer suitable for Swifts or in fact for any other wild life such as bats which also rely on manmade constructions. Older buildings which are suitable are often modernized, destroyed to make way for other development or developed and their old use changed. So the main suspect in the Swifts' decline is their loss of suitable nest sites.



This leaves the question what should be done to ensure we don't lose this precious visitor. Swifts choose their nest sites when they are 2-3 years old returning in June after the breeding population has arrived and settled down. They investigate suitable nest sites, usually where other Swifts are already nesting, and once a site is chosen will return to that site each year. The dynamics of this and how this relates to a chosen mate are complex and nowhere fully understood, but there is a strong bond with their chosen partner and the site, which persists even if one of the pair eventually does not return, as nest locations i.e. same position, same property seem to be used year on year.

Given this complex behavior protecting existing sites seems to be an obvious first line of approach and this is the objective primarily taken by the Swifts in the Community project which has been running in S.Cumbria/N.Lancs for the past five years (<http://www.Swiftsinthecommunity-cumbria.org.uk/>). To achieve this, detailed knowledge of the property sites and nest locations is a prerequisite, as is contact and communication with the property owners. The resource required to complete this level of surveying, year on year, is not inconsiderable but it does provide an additional benefit in the form of detailed knowledge year on year of a particular population, which in the case of Swifts is a difficult objective to achieve. This aspect of Swift conservation provides a much more accurate picture of how a particular population is fairing, an aspect I believe is not achieved using the conventional population monitoring methods. It also provides detailed knowledge which can be passed to planners such as local authorities which can then be used in assessing planning applications.

Surveying alone clearly does not guarantee Swift nest site survival, the biggest threats being inappropriate development and property maintenance, particularly during the breeding season. But knowledge of the site location and interaction with the property owners usually ensures that problems are avoided or

Swift conservation in Cumbria

mitigated, and existing nest sites preserved. The approach of interacting with the property owners has been questioned by some in the Swift conservation world, but our experience has been a positive one with very little negative reaction and a significant amount of cooperation.

Whilst this approach does require considerable resource the problem can be tackled by local groups concentrating on their home patch. This is the strategy behind the Swifts in the Community project, hence the inclusion of Community in the title, where small groups of volunteers work within their local village or town. With a reasonable number of volunteers, depending on the size of the location and the overall number of properties in which Swifts are nesting, individual commitment need not be huge. What it does require however, is a local coordinator prepared to do the leg work of organizing and leading the group.

In addition to the above approach a complimentary activity and, in some cases the main activity adopted by some Swift conservation groups, is to focus on increasing the number of available nest sites. This can be done in a number of ways. Nest boxes externally mounted are now used extensively and there are a number of in structure solutions which can be incorporated into new build or in some cases retro-fitted into an existing building.



Externally mounted Swift box

These solutions can be extremely successful and can also attract Swifts in a surprisingly short time, particularly if an audio system is also used to play Swift calls in the vicinity of the boxes. The colonial nature of Swifts, their predilection to being attracted to where Swifts are already nesting, can result in quite a large group evolving if sufficient nest boxes are installed. The Kendal group of the Swifts in the Community project, led by Ros Taylor, have been very active in promoting and supplying nest boxes and calling systems which has resulted in over 40 boxes being installed in the Kendal area. Tanya and Edmund Hoare of the Sedbergh Swift group have also achieved similar success.

In the long term the most guaranteed long term solution is for the provision for Swift nests to be incorporated as a matter of course into new builds. These could be individual dwelling houses or commercial premises, but this

will only happen if local authorities, their planning documents and their planning departments, make provision for this level of urban biodiversity. Across the country progress on this front is both patchy and inconsistent, with some local authorities, particularly those still employing environmental officers, leading the way.



Swift bricks incorporated into a new structure

In South Cumbria the Swifts in the Community project have had some success in shaping the new Development Planning Documents which have been revised for both SLDC and the Arnside and Silverdale AONB. Provision for urban biodiversity has been included in the planning documents and it is hoped that in the years to come this will result in new developments being granted planning permission with a proviso to include Swift bricks in new structures.

The future of many of our British birds and in particular those which are summer migrants is causing a lot of concern, with an understanding of what is causing the changes which are now being observed still an illusive goal. Still more difficult to grasp is a solution to the problem. With the Swift however, I believe we have a good understanding of what is the main cause of their decline and unlike the potential problems affecting other birds, a solution to their future is more directly in our hands, if we have the will to do something about it. The Swift as I have tried to convey is a superbly adapted bird capable of riding the challenges in a rapidly changing environment, but it does need a helping hand from us.

The 2018 Cumbrian Swift Survey launched by CBC is a welcome initiative which will shed light on the status of the Swift in our county. If after participating in this project there is an interest in doing something more substantial to help our Swifts, the Swifts in the Community project is happy to assist anyone enthusiastic enough to start their own Swift conservation project.

Pete Moreton

Pied Flycatcher brooding prey items

In 2017, good numbers of Pied Flycatchers arrived in the far north Pennines but breeding success was poor, possibly due poor insect abundance from Climate Change.

Green moth larvae are generally regarded as more proteinaceous for bird chick brooding compared to adult day flying insects e.g. Diptera. In recent years, Spring flight times of abundant Noctuid and Geometrid moths have varied considerably.

There was general concern that “The Beast from the East” in March 2018 might have caused even worse insect depletion than in 2017.



Typical nest visit catch 2017 - “scarcely enough to feed even one chick “

I photographed prey items brought into single Pied Flycatcher nest boxes with mature chicks in 2017 and 2018. The box for 2018 was 300m away from the 2017 box as the latter was occupied by Blue Tits. Although the camera was well tolerated the visits were brief being of 20 minutes, four prey carrying visits were recorded in 2017 and eight in 2018. Both adults had equal visits both years.

The proportion of green moth larvae was three times greater in 2018 compared to 2017 and the size/maturity of the larvae greater for 2018. Liz Still from Cumbria Moth Group kindly ID'd one of the larvae as Clouded Drab, Noctuidae. Adult insects in 2017 were predominantly Diptera (Gnats and Tipulids) compared to Ephemeroptera (Mayflies) and large Hoverflies in 2018. I would guess that the protein content of the prey brought in for 2018 was vastly greater compared to 2017.



Typical adult flying insect catch 2018



Typical larval catch 2018

I do not have the arrival and ringing data but am guessing that 2018 will be a much better breeding year for Pied Flycatchers than 2017.

Cumbria Moth Group have been recording a sudden burst of adult moth abundance during late May 2018 and despite the terrible weather in March there was pretty good abundance of early Spring moths in late February. These are the adults that will produce the late May larvae that Pied Flycatchers depend on.

Linking county moth and bird recording may prove dividends for migratory insectivorous birds in the future, particularly in view of unstable Spring climate change. More extensive and robust data could be gathered by using a trail camera rather than a remote long lens camera.

Guy Broome

Arnside Ravens and Shelducks

On 3rd June 2018 I saw, what for me was an amazing sight. The local Ravens all popped down to Arnside pier for a while. I've seen Ravens which occasionally nest in the tall trees at the end of the prom, but the adults brought three chicks this time.



I got to within five yards of one young bird. I parked up, wound down the window, took photos, then I got out of the car and the bird stayed put. No alarm calls from the adults which were at the end of the pier. The Raven is set to become a regular within towns and villages in the next few years. See picture above of one of the young birds.

I also saw two Shelducks walk three chicks, only about four inches high all the way from Arnside viaduct towards Grange. The birds disappeared into the heat haze after, I would guess of the order of a mile without stopping. No attacks from the local corvids or gulls either. The chicks legs were going like fury the whole of the time.

Quite a few Curlew feeding on the Kent, a dozen or so. Curlews can be heard calling at Meathop Moss. Swifts now screaming over Arnside prom and House Martins doing well. They are enjoying using mud from the foreshore.

Mike Redman

The Grange over Sands Swift survey in 2014

Following an inspirational talk given by Tanya and Edward Hoare to our natural history society a small group of our members monitored the town's Swifts in 2014. We received advice and literature from Peter Moreton who had organised a "Swifts in the Community" project in the Arnside and Silverdale AONB.

I allocated areas of the town to each of the five Swift enthusiasts. Sometimes we paired up but generally we loitered alone around street corners in the evenings and early mornings. One tends to look rather conspicuous and suspicious monitoring birds that nest above peoples



Swift, Tindale, Adam Moan

upper windows, so binoculars and cameras were definitely out! On the rare occasions that I received quizzical looks I would point at screaming Swifts and be dismissed as a harmless lunatic. Muttering vaguely about Neighbourhood Watch was another possibility if challenged.

Screaming parties, whilst a useful indicator of favoured buildings, I found not to be a good indicator of the nesting population. Fifty nests were confidently pinpointed in Grange and Kent's Bank and yet I never saw more than fifteen birds in an excited screaming flock. Many of the large Edwardian buildings of Grange are structurally ideal for Swifts. The four buildings that we found to have multiple nests were three storeys high and usually in elevated positions enabling an easy approach for breeding birds. But I was surprised to detect some nest sites in two storey terraced houses. The majority of the nest sites were as one would expect under the eaves, yet some were in holes or cracks in stone walls, often a metre or two lower than the roof line. It was wonderful to see Swifts approach these walls at high speed and apparently fly straight in to them, hardly seeming to put on the brakes before hurtling into the nest.

Without doubt the top "des. res." is the Cumbria Grand Hotel where ten nest sites were located around the south tower. Tony Saunders, the honorary reserve manager of adjacent Brown Robin CWT reserve works at the hotel and was able to spend more time locating the exact nest sites. Some of our other nest sites were included in the results on the basis of a single observation of a bird entering a space and not immediately reappearing.

The Grange over Sands Swift survey in 2014

By the beginning of August we had located fifty nest sites in twenty four different properties in Grange and Kent's Bank. I am sure that we missed some as towards the end of July Swifts sometimes circled buildings where I had not previously seen them. Longer periods of observation may have revealed a nest entrance. Or perhaps they were non-breeders prospecting for the next summer. Watching Swifts on a summer evening is a pleasant way to pass the time and even more gratifying if one can gather useful information and make more people aware of these fascinating birds.

As well as sending results to the "Swifts in the Community" project I put details of each property on the RSPB's Swift web site. It is difficult to assess breeding success without more prolonged observation of individual nest sites and noting dates of departure. We were unable to follow up with a repeat survey in 2015 but in early May I distributed leaflets to all home owners that we thought had nesting Swifts. This literature described the magic of Swifts, their decline and how we can help them. I also left my contact details and asked for an update of Swift activity around their house and their neighbours property in 2015. Sadly I got very little feedback, dashing my hopes of developing an informal group of Swift watchers.

The Berners site of the old swimming pool was about to be developed for housing and as it was close to properties attractive to Swifts I saw the opportunity for some "affordable homes" for Swifts being included. Grange Town Council was sympathetic and put pressure on the housing association to incorporate mitigation measures for hole nesting birds. I tried to encourage the builders to incorporate Swift nest bricks but they stated that the design of the

buildings with the eaves details would provide a natural haven for the birds. A couple of wall-mounted Swift boxes appeared. I have yet to see any Swifts showing any interest in them.



Since this survey I feel that Swift numbers in Grange have decreased so this summer I will "loiter with intent" at just a few of the centrally located buildings and compare occupancy rates in the two years.

Martin Chadwick

Swifts, Farlam, Adam Moan

West Cumbria Swift group

Who? Good question – read on.

Last spring, an R.S.P.B. talk by Tanya and Edmund Hoare, on their work with Swift conservation in Sedburgh, fired my imagination. Here was a special bird and a chance to do something positive to help its survival. Rather than sending money to a project, I could do something concrete in my community, as Tanya and Edmund had in theirs.

A small advert in the local paper put me in touch with several people who had been monitoring Swifts for many years, for their own interest. Friends were enthused or persuaded to take part, too. A group of people was developing which was named West Cumbria Swift Group.

Our initial aim was to survey for Swift nest sites last spring, inform the owners of the nest site properties that they had Swifts and promote the conservation of these existing sites. We were also keen to offer new nest sites in the form of Swift bricks or nest boxes. Spreading the word about Swifts was very important and we had an open house last October, as the stall we organised for Wasdale Show was a wash out. We displayed boxes, call systems, nest box cameras and leaflets, books and activities connected to Swifts.

By the end of September, all our efforts had resulted in 54 confirmed nest sites, mainly along the coast between Bootle and Whitehaven, and over 200 Swifts observed in screaming parties. Two members of the group - Dave Brown at Sleathwaite and Anthony Millard in Gosforth - had already put up nest boxes on their own homes, with call systems, and were having interest from young Swifts.

Over the winter, with the Swifts away for nine months, a major project took place in Seascale. In the recent past, fascias had been put onto the Sports Hall blocking off several Swift nest sites. Only two remained. Ken Mawson, a local councillor, encouraged the Parish Council to back a project to put six Swift nest boxes on the Hall in the hope of getting more Swifts back into the building. A Parish Council grant paid for the boxes and group members, along with a friend who had scaffolding, erected the boxes on May 3rd just before the expected return of the Swifts. The boxes chosen were ordered from John Stimpson via the www.Swift-conservation.org website at a cost of £15 each.

They are made from exterior plywood with a plastic waterproof roof. Nest forms were also purchased and fixed in the corners furthest from the entry holes.



Right angle brackets were fixed to the back of the boxes after being bent to enable them to be hooked over a 2 cm thick plank. A further bracket was screwed to the underneath of the box. This would fix the box to the plank. This preparation meant that the work to be done on the scaffolding was made easier. Only two holes were drilled into the sandstone wall and plugged. The wooden plank was fixed leaving a gap sufficient to allow the boxes to be hooked over. Finally, a screw was put in place to fix the bottom bracket and keep the box in position.



Future removal of the boxes would be easier and only two holes were drilled into the wall. It proved to be a good method, if anyone reading this is contemplating a terrace of their own.



The ideal conclusion would be to attach a call system of Swifts on the nest, as this is shown to improve the take-up of new nest sites. The calls can be downloaded onto a memory stick from www.Swift-conservation.org and used with an amplifier, tweeter speakers and timer to attract young prospecting Swifts.

As this was not possible here, we are hoping that the presence of the last two established nests further along the building will be sufficient encouragement.

West Cumbria Swift group

Further projects this winter included:-

The erection of home-made nest boxes and a call system in Low Seaton to replace nest sites lost when a property wall had to be re-built.

A 'Filcris' re-cycled plastic nest box and call system onto a house in Frizington where there is a large screaming party.

Nest boxes under the eaves of a house in Cleator Moor where neighbours did not want their Swifts and intended to put up fascias. (N.B. blocking nest sites is only illegal in the nesting season when the birds are in evidence. Perhaps room for change in the law here, I think?)

A barn/garage in Gosforth has been re-roofed over the winter with all the nest entrances left intact by an enthusiastic owner.

Last year's survey results have been submitted to the CBC, RSPB and Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre in Carlisle and we are now attempting to re-survey the 54 nest sites and monitor the activity at the new nest boxes.

We can be proud of what we have achieved in one year, I think, and hope that spreading the word about what can be done simply and cheaply will encourage even more people to have a go to help these unique birds.

Lesley Anne Archer-Shirley



Swift and Starling nest dispute

Over the past two years that we have lived here a pair of Swifts have nested on our house in Skelton, near Penrith. They nest in a hole under the apex of our roof but a pair of Starlings also breed here and in the past I assume the Swifts wait for the Starling chicks to fledge before they breed themselves.

This year however, probably because of the warm weather, the Swifts started showing an interest in the site while the Starlings had young in the nest. On May 11th I witnessed the first of several attempts by one of the Swifts to claim their nest site back, resulting in a fight which ended up on the ground below the house, this time the Swift managed to fly away but the second time I witnessed a fight on the lawn the Starling was fiercely pecking at the Swift on the ground.



Swifts, Farlam, Adam Moan

I disturbed the birds and was alarmed to find that the Swift seemed injured. After picking it up and seeing that the bird seemed more dazed than injured I carried it upstairs and released it out of the window, it flew away but as it left the Starling attacked it and grounded it again, so I rushed to the rescue and secured the Swift before it got injured. This time I placed the bird onto the outside wall and as it was getting late the bird stayed there and roosted.

Over the next few days the Starlings remained very vigilant especially in the evenings when the Swifts seemed more active at the house, and regularly chased them away if they came too close. On May 18th however after hearing a commotion very early in the morning at the nest we realised the Starling nest attempt had failed. The location of the nest makes us believe that predation would be highly unlikely and that possibly the Swifts managed to gain access to the hole and turfed out the chicks. However there were no chicks dead below the nest in the morning so this remains unknown. After a few days the Swifts moved in and at the moment are incubating eggs. The persistence showed by the Swifts was very interesting even in the face of extreme aggression by the Starlings.

Spike Webb and Susie Lane

Recent reports

The period covered is March 2018 to May 2018. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or British Birds Rarities Committee. The cold spell in March was in part reported in the last newsletter and birds reported in that article are not included.

Swans to ducks

The **Whooper Swan** flocks that had been present all winter were still present with 110 at Kirkbride on 15th March and 196 on 18th. Longtown had a flock of 77 on 17th and 60 on 29th although the Walby flock seemed to have moved on. Evidence of northerly movement were five at Allonby on 5th, two over Thirlmere on 14th, 28 north at Skelwith Bridge on 25th and 1230 through Walney on the same date, and finally 60 north over Warwick Bridge on 30th. Single **Black Swans** were at Kirkbride on 16th March, Longtown on 29th March and Haverigg on 5th May.

A single **Greenland White-fronted Goose** was at Raby Cote on 18th March. 200 **Pink-footed Geese** passed north up Bassenthwaite on the last day of February and numbers built up during March with c4000 in the Kirkbride/ Arlosh/ Longcroft areas. 3000 were also at Crosby Moor to the east of Carlisle on 9th March. Birds were still moving north in April with 730 north at Walney on 19th April and 250 north over Allonby on the same date. The regular build up of **Barnacle Geese** took place on Rockliffe Marsh and it wasn't till early May that birds were reported departing north-east over Longtown overnight on 8th. Persistent easterly winds meant large numbers stayed on Rockliffe through mid-May but very few were left by end of the third week of the month. A single **Black Brant** continued to be present in the Walney/Foulney area being last reported on 4th April at the latter site. 80 **Pale-bellied** and 40 **Dark-bellied Brents** were reported from the same areas. On 20th March 237 Pale and 40 Dark-breasted birds were counted at Walney; a single Dark-bellied bird was at Bowness on Solway on 12th May.

25 **Shelduck** were on the Leven in early March; a pair with ten young were at Soddy Gap on 18th May. An inland build up saw seven on 13th May, 20 two days later and 28 there on 17th at a site which has breeding birds near Cliburn, Penrith.

Three males and one female **Mandarin Duck** were regular at Bowness on Windermere in March and April, and on Derwent Water in March to May. Away from these areas there was as a



Mandarin display, Derwent Water



Wigeon family, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

single in lower Dentdale on 5th May. **Gadwall** were reported from regular sites at Foulshaw, Sunbiggin Tarn and Hodbarrow. 40 **Pin-tail** were on the River Leven in early March with three pairs at Ravensbarrow Ponds at about the same time. 29 **Shoveler** were on Longtown Ponds on 17th March. Two **Pochard** were last seen at Hodbarrow and Derwent Water in March. **Scaup** records of note were up to nine (six males) at Longtown Ponds in mid-March. 4500 **Eider** were at Walney on 25th March and 250 were on the Leven Estuary on 28th; 140 at Hodbarrow on 2nd April and a similar number on 19th at Hodbarrow and on the adjoining Duddon Estuary.

Whilst **Common Scoter** are regular in the Solway in April up to 700 present on 16th were exceptional probably drifting further in on the tide at a time of heavy rain/mist but only 100 were present the next day. 4400 were off Walney on 27th and still 4000 on 12th May. The only **Velvet Scoter** reported were two off Walney on 28th April. Three **Long-tailed Duck** continued to be seen on Windermere till the end of March. The drake **Smew** continued to be present on Derwent Water till the end of March. The largest numbers of **Red-breasted Mergansers** were in the Hodbarrow/Duddon area with 49 at the end of April.



Shoveler, Siddick Pond, Tommy Holden

Partridge to herons

Red Grouse were present on the Coledale Horseshoe on 17th March. Twenty adult **Moorhens** were on small pool at Talkin Village on 22nd March. A **Great Northern Diver** was at Hodbarrow on 9th March. Only small numbers of **Red-throated Divers** were noted at passage time at Bowness on Solway although observer activity was reduced in view of weather conditions at the time. There were at least ten off Silecroft on 9th March and at least 15 on 11th April. The first **Manx Shearwater** and **Fulmar** of the year at Walney were on 23rd March. Four **Manx Shearwater** were off Selker on 1st May. A **Gannet** headed north over Foulshaw on 20th March. Small numbers of **Little Egret** were reported on the south Solway with three on Burgh Marsh being typical there. A **White Stork** of unknown origin was at Dalston in Furness on 15th May. A **Shag** was reported from Selker on 1st May.



Sparrowhawk, Stanwix, Roger Ridley

Raptors to waders

Osprey started to return by end of March with one north at Dalston on 20th; with other reports from Longtown in April and one at Southwaite on 4th May and others during May from Kirkbride and Castle Carrock. There were several reports of **Red Kite** in the county including birds on the Solway, in the northern fells and east of Carlisle. A **Black Kite** drifted over Whitehaven on 19th May.

Away from the southern mosses **Marsh Harrier** were reported from south Solway with another observed from Bowness moving west on the Scottish side of the estuary. **Hobby** were reported from the south of the county and one moving north at Allonby on 29th May at the same time as hirundines.

840 **Oystercatchers** were on the Duddon Estuary on 16th April. 60 **Golden Plover** were already inland on Shap summit on 14th March but coastal counts were of 360 at Hodbarrow on 15th and 240 there on 19th April, as well as 100 on Burgh Marsh a day earlier. **Grey Plover** were present at RSPB Campfield in March and April. In May **Dotterel** were reported from the North Pennines and in the Lake District, birds were reported from the Helvellyn range including three there on 16th May and five a few days later. The only **Lapwing** reported were 36 at Askam (Lowther) on 28th February and 40 at Waterside, Wigton on 9th March.

Little Ringed Plover were in regular areas in the north of the county as well as a single bird in the mid-Eden valley.



Golden Plover, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Three **Green Sandpipers** were by the River Eden at Scotby on 11th and 16th March, two were on the River Kent on 28th March with single birds at Walby and Longtown during March and early April.



Common Sandpiper, Mockerkin, Steve Lewer

Common Sandpiper's arrival was spread out this year with an early or wintering bird at Waberthwaite Church on 9th March and one at Rockcliffe on 4th April with first birds being reported through to 6th May – six on the River Esk at Longtown was the highest number reported. Up to two **Greenshank** were at Eskmeals and Hodbarrow in March and early April while singles continued to be seen at Longtown and at Glasson Point. **Woodcock** were widely reported with birds in Stanwix and roding in Rickerby Park, Carlisle of note. Walney had its first bird of the year on 13th March. **Whimbrel** passage was noted at Walney (14th April) where there were 103 on 28th and in the north-west of the county eight at Allonby, and on 27th a total of 130 at several sites between Maryport and Silloth, 15 on Wedholme on the same date, 40 in Bowness on Solway on 25th and 30 at Drumburgh on 30th. There were still 19 on Walney on 13th May.

54 **Black-tailed Godwit** were at Hodbarrow on 20th March and 60 mid-April with 61 at Eskmeals on 26th March. A **Jack Snipe** was on the Irt estuary on 17th March and also Foulshaw two days later. 12 **Common Snipe** were at Askham (Lowther) on 28th February and two at a regular site at Carlisle Airport on 17th March. Approx 500 **Common Redshank** were at Hodbarrow on 19th April. Two **Ruff** frequented Scotby Holmes from 11th to 16th March.



Sanderling, Maryport, Tommy Holden

Single **Little Stints** were at Port Carlisle and on the River Leven in March.

3000 **Knot** were at Walney on 20th March with 230 **Turnstones** on 17th April and 3000 **Dunlin** still at Walney on 18th May along with 2040 **Sanderling** and 566 **Ringed Plover**.

Skuas to Auks

Weather conditions prevalent in April and May were not suitable to drift the skua passage eastwards from the normal route west of Ireland so presence of birds in Cumbria was sporadic. The first **Great Skua** were reported on 17th April with eight birds passing Bowness and thereafter four on 2nd May and other ones and twos up to 10th



Kittiwake with nest mat., St. Bees, Tony Marsh

May. The first **Pomarine** was also on 17th April with the largest number (19) being recorded on 3rd May with six the following day and a similar number on 8th thereafter numbers were very small. The first **Arctic Skua** was on 16th April but thereafter numbers were very low but birds were still present at the end of May at Bowness – possibly following Kittiwake flocks.

226 **Black-headed Gulls** were at Kirkbride on 18th March (also 116 **Common Gulls** there) and 520 at Hodbarrow on 16th April, 30 pairs were nesting on Wastwater. **Mediterranean Gulls** were still present in March - “Stumpy” at Workington on 12th, one adult and two second winter birds at Kirkbride on 18th and a summer plumage adult at Allonby on 21st. In April an adult was at Hodbarrow and in May there were two two calendar year birds. Two adult **Little Gulls** were at Walney on 7th April and two more on the River Esk at Longtown on 19th May. 49 **Lesser Black-backed gulls** were at Kirkbride on 18th March. **Kittiwakes** passed Bowness on Solway throughout the period with the following of note – 150 on 28th March, 700 on 5th April in a 30 minute period after high tide with smaller numbers thereafter. A **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Arnside on 26th April. An **Iceland Gull** was still present on Windermere through till 5th April with one at Barrow in Furness on 16th March and a bird on the River Eden near Rockcliffe on 3rd and 18th April. An adult **Sabine’s Gull** was photographed at Bowness on Solway on 26th April.

Over 60 **Sandwich Tern** were back at Hodbarrow on 2nd April and a record 1900 pairs nested. 74 were on Sid-dick shore on 25th April. A flock of 40 **Arctic Tern** were off Bowness on 31st May.



Black Guillemot, St. Bees, Tony Marsh

Up to four **Black Guillemots** were reported from St Bees on several occasions. Up to seven **Puffins** were off Walney in May.

Pigeons to Buntings

Stock Dove were reported in March with 75 at Whale on 5th, four at Carlisle Airport on 17th and 24 at Kirkbride a day later. **Cuckoos** arrived in mid-April and were recorded widely and birds were still singing at the end of May. A **Short-eared Owl** was disturbed from the edge of Silloth golf course on 27th April. After the mortality in the cold at the beginning of March **Barn Owls** were seen at Kirkbride, Great Salkeld and High Hesket later in the month.

Common Swift arrived widely but in small numbers in the last week of April - ten days earlier than the normal arrival date at one site.

Green Woodpeckers were regularly reported in the Bassenthwaite area as well as at Haweswater. A **Greater Spotted** was drumming on a metal post – a regular occurrence at the site in recent years.

Sand Martins started to arrive in the snow of 17th March at Longlands with over 100 there in more snow on 4th April. A **Swallow** was at Cumrew on 13th March but more generally they started to arrive in small numbers in first week in April and were still moving north along the coast at Allonby in easterly winds at the end of May. **House Martins** were a few days later arriving but were similarly still coasting north at the end of May.



Green Woodpecker, Ashness Woods, Tony Marsh

46 **Meadow Pipits** at Kirkbride on 18th March were presumably migrants. **Tree Pipits** were late arriving though one was singing on 10th April in Wasdale then one at Meathop on 12th. 18 male **Pied Wagtails** were at Haverigg in mid-April with six **White Wagtail** males there on 19th. Other reports of “Whites” came from Walney, Hodbarrow, Milnethorpe, Allonby and around 25 at Foulshaw on 4th May. **Yellow Wagtails** were reported from regular sites in north of the county.

Common Redstart started to arrive from 10th April in Wasdale. A **Black Redstart** spent some time on RSPB Geltsdale Reserve on 6th April. **Wheat-ear** were widely seen from 14th March – peak number at Walney being 27 on 28th April. Birds continued through Walney in May with 19 on 8th and 25 on 13th. The first returning **Whinchat** was at Torver on 21st April then RSPB Geltsdale on 27th April. Five pairs of **Stonechat** were near Allonby in early March but nest building in April was probably two weeks later than usual.

Recent reports

Ten **Redwing** were still at Tilberthwaite on 22nd March. The first report of **Ring Ouzels** was at Castle Carrock on 19th March, then up to three were at a new possible breeding site of Bannishead Quarry, Torver from 30th March onwards, there were reports from the northern fells on 5th April (the day Walney had its first of the year) with a bird at Acorn Bank the next day being unexpected.

Blackcap returned widely by first week of April with highest number being eight (five males) in Holker. **Garden Warblers** were later, arriving from 25th. **Lesser Whitethroat** were recorded from 19th April on the coast at Allonby and on the south Solway mosses. **Common Whitethroats** started to appear from 20th April onwards. **Grasshopper Warblers** started to be heard in 3rd week of April from regular sites. **Willow Warblers** started to sing by 4th April but **Wood Warblers** had not returned until 20th. **Chiffchaff** had started to arrive from 9th March (at Walney). A singing **Icterine Warbler** was reported from Arnside Knott on 30th May.

Spotted Flycatchers arrived in early May whereas **Pied Flycatchers** had been back from 18th April. A **Great Grey Shrike** was photographed at Bowness Moss on 5th April. 40 **Tree Sparrows** were counted at Sandale on 1st March as well as 25 coming to a garden near Wigton up to 6th April. **Hawfinch** continued to be reported from south of the county. Three **Snow Buntings** were on Seatallan, Wasdale on 3rd March and a single was on Scafell Pike on 25th and some were on Helvellyn on 6th April. Two male **Parrot Crossbills** were reported from Whinfell Forest on 8th March and a **Crossbill** was in song on Dent fell, Egremont on 18th March. The **Twite** flock at Walney had 60 birds at the end of March.



Tree Sparrows & Yellowhammers, Aspatia, 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



Swallow, The How, Tony Marsh

Guidance for Contributors

My aim is to produce an “inclusive” magazine that has something for everybody. All contributions, from a two-line anecdote (a “Champagne Moment”) to a six-page semi-scientific article, will be considered. Priority is always given to items of Cumbrian relevance. All photos, artwork etc are most welcome.

I am always happy to advise or assist in preparing a submission. How to submit your offering is indicated on the back cover.

Editor

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Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is September 1st 2018

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

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

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