

BIRD NEWS
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Twinned with Cumberland Bird Observers Club

New South Wales, Australia

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Officers of the Society

Council

Chairman: Malcolm Priestley, Havera Bank, Howgill Lane, Sedbergh, LA10 5HB
tel. 015396 20104; mmphavera@hotmail.co.uk

Vice-chairmen: Mike Carrier, Peter Howard, Nick Franklin

Secretary: David Piercy, 64 The Headlands, Keswick, CA12 5EJ; tel. 017687
73201; daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk

Treasurer: Treasurer: David Cooke, Mill Craggs, Bampton, CA10 2RQ
tel. 01931 713392; cooke856@btinternet.com

Field trips organiser: Vacant

Talks organiser: Vacant

Members: Colin Auld
Jake Manson
Adam Moan
Dave Shackleton

Recorders

County: Chris Hind, 2 Old School House, Hallbankgate, Brampton, CA8 2NW
chris.m.hind@gmail.com tel. 016977 46379

Barrow/South Lakeland: Ronnie Irving, 24 Birchwood Close, Kendal LA9 5BJ
ronnieirving2017@gmail.com tel. 01539 727523

Carlisle & Eden: Chris Hind, 2 Old School House, Hallbankgate, Brampton, CA8 2NW
chris.m.hind@gmail.com tel. 016977 46379

Allerdale & Copeland: Nick Franklin, 19 Eden Street, Carlisle CA3 9LS
nickbirder66@gmail.com tel. 01228 810413

C.B.C. Bird News

Editor: Dave Piercy

B.T.O. Representatives

Cumbria: Colin Gay, 8 Victoria Street, Millom LA18 5AS
colinathodbarrow@btinternet.com tel. 01229 773820
Assistant rep: Dave Piercy

Club news and announcements

AGM report

At the AGM of October 6th 2017 Chris Hind was elected as County Bird Recorder, Nick Franklin was elected to Vice Chair, and Adam Moan was elected as a member of council. Full minutes are available on request from the secretary.

Subscriptions

The Cumbria Bird Club 2017/2018 subscription were due on 1st October. If you receive a subscription form with this mailing then according to my records we have not yet received your payment. Please let me know if this is not the case. Please pay overdue subscriptions as soon as possible. Thanks

CBC meeting programme winter 2017/2018

Wednesday 10th January 2018: Tullie House 7.15pm

Joint with Carlisle NHS 'Our Disappearing Swifts – what we can do' - *Tanya & Edmund Hoare*

Tanya and Edmund Hoare are Swift enthusiasts and part of the national and international Swift network. They have a colony of Swifts nesting in the eaves of their cottage and the talk will include video clips of many aspects of Swift behaviour from cameras in the nest spaces. The latest research on their remarkable migration, using geolocators, will also be presented. Sadly



these iconic birds are in serious decline and the reasons for this, and what can be done to help, will be discussed.

Thursday 18th January: St John's meeting room, Kendal 7.15pm

Joint with South Lakeland RSPB

'Life of Birds: Isle of May & Eden Valley' - *Mike Carrier*

The annual Cumbria Bird Club bird race will be held on Sunday the 7th of January 2018, and finishes at 5.30pm at the Agricultural Hotel, Castlegate Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 7JE. New teams are always welcome, so why not give it a go! It's fun and exciting. See the next two pages. Good luck to all.

Cumbria Bird Club Winter Bird Race

Sunday 7th of January 2018

Finishes 5.30pm at the Agricultural Hotel, Castlegate Penrith, CA11 7JE

Object of the race

To gain the greatest number of species of wild birds within the borders of Cumbria County between early morning and 5.30pm on January 7th 2018.

Rule 1 Three out of four or two out of three or both if only two in a team, must hear or see each species claimed.
If you want to do the race solo, then that's OK too.

Rule 2 Start time is from when your team is fully assembled on the day.

Rule 3 For late arrivals at the finish a penalty of one species per five minutes of lateness will be deducted.

Rule 4 Only true wild birds count! (no budgies or dodgy wildfowl)

Food and Social

Steak and ale pie, chips and veg or veggie options of cannelloni, vegetarian lasagne or veggie burger. Served around 6pm in the restaurant.
Cost £8.95 per person.

Closing date for entries, Monday 3rd of January 2018.

See the entry form for further details overleaf.

2017 Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria **Submitting records for all species**

Please submit all your records for 2017 to your regional recorder (contact details on inside cover) as soon as possible. You can submit written records on cards (available from recorders) or electronically on a downloaded spreadsheet available at www.cumbriabirdclub.org.uk/reporting/guidelines which also has guidelines on submitting records (guidelines also available in the 2015 Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria).

Editor

Cumbria Bird Club

Winter Bird Race Sunday January 7th 2018

Entry Form

Name of Team

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Name of the Team Members

**Please indicate how many members of your team will want steak and ale pie, chips and veg or the Veggie option
£8.95 per person**

Steak pie, chips and veg	
Veggie option, please state which	

Entry forms to be returned before the 3rd of January please.

Via email to: philevans64rbp@gmail.com

**Or phone Phil Evans (new mobile number – 07377653342) with your details.
Thank you**

Club news and announcements

Wood Warbler survey

Over 400 woods have been surveyed to date, an impressive achievement. Malcolm Priestly is currently analysing the mountain of data recorded. Council have agreed to extend the survey into 2018 mainly to target woods with historical records that have not yet been surveyed. An interim report will be published in the Spring newsletter as will details of further survey work. It is hoped that a full report will be available for the 2017 Birds & Wildlife publication. We also intend to contact landowners to inform them where birds are breeding to help direct any future conservation plans.

Pied Wagtail roost survey

There was very little response to the appeal for surveyors to seek out and count Pied Wagtail roosts. Even if you don't wish to count them it would still be useful to know of the location of any roosts or details of any movements likely to be towards roosts. Please send any details to Dave Shackleton d.shackleton@btinternet.com 01931 713693

Swift survey

Following good work done by Mr & Mrs Hoare over many years, the Bird Club will be looking at Swift numbers in Cumbria in 2018. Club members will be given every opportunity to help with this survey. Details will be in the next newsletter.

Website

The website has just had a revamp so that it displays properly on smart phones and tablets. The content is largely the same except for some tweaking to make it perform better. Any other content for the website would be nice as well! Send to chris@phdcc.com.

Thirlmere zip wire proposal

CBC members might like to give their views - the deadline is 2nd January: A planning application has been submitted by Tree Top Trek comprising of eight zip wires along two routes spanning Thirlmere lake. Friends of the Lake District provide information in this link [FoLDZip](#) Details for this application can be viewed on the LDNPA web site [Zipplan](#). Once you click to accept the terms then use planning reference 7/2017/2298.

Club news and announcements

We'd like to introduce new council member Adam Moan. Adam has been providing many fine photographs for our publications and we are very pleased he has volunteered to become a council member.



Moving from Carlisle to Castle Carrock in 1970, Geltsdale became my back garden and my passion for the local wildlife began. From Castle Carrock I went to White House School in Brampton, and then on to Carlisle Art College before leaving Cumbria in 1982 for Ravensbourne in Kent, to study Industrial Design.

After 30 years of living and working as a furniture designer in London I became sick of the Rat Race and in 2013 the idea of a quieter life brought me back to the area. I have now settled in Hallbankgate and spend as much time as possible walking the fells around Tindale and Geltsdale.

With the Geltsdale RSPB Nature Reserve on my doorstep I have become involved as a volunteer. Combining my interest in the local wildlife and photography means that I never leave the house without my binoculars and camera – ready to photograph anything that catches my eye!



Long-tailed Tit, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Being a non-driver means that I have to walk long distances, also I am not good at sitting patiently for hours waiting for the wildlife, so I am constantly walking, with camera on my shoulder, not in a camera bag, switched on and with the lens cap off at all times. I always use a lightweight bridge camera, with the latest being a Nikon Coolpix P900 and none of the images are subject to the use of any special effects.

Adam Moan

Whinchats at Geltsdale 2017

The Whinchat Retrap Adult Survival (RAS) project at RSPB Geltsdale completed its seventh year in 2017.

An RAS project aims to gather information for year to year survival rates of adult birds for species that are not normally caught on other ringing projects.

Return rates for adults have varied from 21% to 49% and there appears to be a link with nesting success and increased likelihood of return.

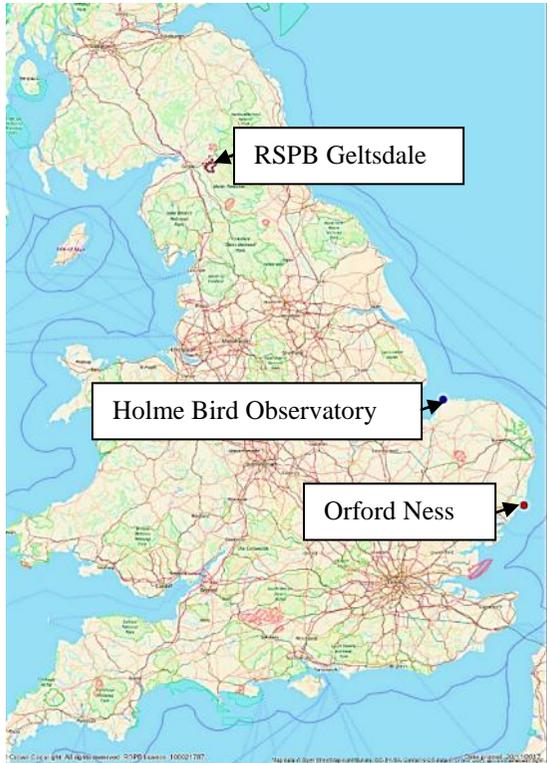
This may be down to stress or birds changing breeding site after a failed attempt.

More work is required on the existing data to confirm this.

The return rates of nestlings can be as high as 30%, here there is a link with the weather in the summer the birds hatch and young birds being in good condition for their first migration.

Since 2011 over 1000 Whinchats have been colour-ringed at Geltsdale, but only one has been seen away ('controlled') from Geltsdale. This low rate of controls is not unusual for Whinchats. In the 1990s, John Callion colour-ringed over a hundred Whinchat nestlings, mostly in Mosedale in Skiddaw Forest and Ling Fell at Wythop. He had no long-distance recoveries from these birds, but, exceptionally, he had a male that returned to the same territory for four consecutive years; less than a kilometre from where it fledged.

The control Whinchat from Geltsdale was ringed as a nestling in June 2016 and was seen at Holme Bird Observatory (BO) on the north Norfolk coast in the first week of September (see photo). This bird had not been seen at Geltsdale after fledging, but three of its siblings had. One was 2km south of



the nest at the end of July and the other two were seen in a moulting flock until mid-August.

In good years with high juvenile survival rates, this pattern of dispersal of a brood appears to be typical for Whinchats at Geltsdale. 2016 was a good year with 85% of nests found being successful and 55% of the nestlings being seen after fledging.

The Holme BO bird turned out to be a male and came back to breed at Geltsdale (see photo) in 2017 and nested about 1km from its natal nest.



*Geltsdale Whinchat at Holme BO Sep 2016,
Peter Bangs*



*Geltsdale Whinchat that was at Holme BO Sep 2016, back at
Geltdale June 2017*

Also of note in 2017 was the presence of a male Whinchat with a metal ring, which caused some excitement as all our ringed Whinchats are also colour-ringed. It was caught and the details of the ring number sent to the BTO. This



Sibling of Holme BO bird 15th Aug 2016

bird had been ringed as a juvenile on passage in October 2016, at Orford Ness in Suffolk. It would seem likely this would have been one of the unringed nestlings from Geltsdale in 2016, but we cant be certain.

With very little information for wintering Whinchats (there is only one ringing recovery of a Whinchat from the UK in West Africa ever!) and very little information about our Whinchats migrating from Geltsdale, we decided to fit geolocators to 19 Whinchats at Geltsdale in 2016 (BTO also fitted 20 geolocators to Whinchats on Salisbury Plain in 2016). These devices weigh less than half a gram and record time and light, with this data sunrise and sunset times can be calculated and a very rough global position calculated.

As they are very small they can not transmit data, the bird has to be caught again and the device removed. This is difficult to do, however two geolocators were retrieved from Whinchats at Geltsdale in 2017. The full set of data has yet to be analysed, but we know that one Geltsdale bird wintered in Burkina Faso and the other in Mali. The latter bird was still in Mali on the 28th May and arrived back in the UK two weeks later! More birds have been fitted with geolocators this year and when the data is retrieved and analysed we should be able to build up a better picture of the migration of this species, its wintering areas and stopover sites on migration.

Stephen Westerberg

Persistent site use by a wall-nesting Nuthatch

In 1997 I recorded in this journal (Vol 8: 12-13) how in 1995, a pair of Nuthatches nested successfully in a hole in the wall of our house in Windermere - an unusual site - but that a hoped-for return in the following year did not materialise. However, after seven years without use, in 2003 Nuthatches reoccupied the same hole, an event that was to be repeated in ten consecutive years, after which we left Windermere. However Mrs Beatrice Wilson kindly watched in 2013 and recorded the 11th consecutive year of occupation and 10th consecutive year of successful breeding in the same hole. Such site fidelity, especially in an unusual site, merits placing on record, as do certain features of this persistent usage.



Nuthatch, Ashness, Tony Marsh

The thick west-facing wall concerned is composed of irregular sized blocks of local Silurian slate, the irregular gaps between individual stones being filled with mortar that does not extend to the exposed surface. Deeper within the wall, spaces are probably frequent, and beyond the mud-plastered entrance hole there was ample space for the nest, which was about 3.7metres above the ground. A few centimetres below the entrance hole, which lies in a vertical gap between two stones, a narrow shelf of slate protrudes and serves to deflect rain from a window below it. At times this shelf - easily seen from a bedroom window - provided evidence of old nest material, as reported below.

During the last few days of March 2003 a pair of noisy Nuthatches investigated the 1995 nest site, one bird being seen several times to enter the hole while its mate was settled on the house roof or in an adjacent tree. On April 1st, as I sat at a table in the room below the nest hole, I noticed through the window a succession of small items falling to the ground. Examination showed these to be flakes of bark, of which there was a considerable accumulation on the shelf below the nest hole. These were being ejected from the old nest chamber of 1995. On April 2nd in particular, by which time many individual items had been ejected, one bird entered the hole and threw out several flakes of bark. To do so it simply put out its head, with a flake in its beak, and dropped it.

Persistent site use by a wall-nesting Nuthatch

During the next few days birds were seen to visit the house wall, but not to enter the hole. However, on April 7th the presumed female did so and, as earlier, protruded its head and dropped from its beak a flake of bark, repeating the process several times, but soon left and flew to a tree opposite the nest hole. It soon returned and made nine trips in quick succession, each time clearing out material. On at least seven of these when it left the hole it carried what appeared to be a relatively large item which it dropped, shortly after departing. The impression was that the handling of a relatively large item was the stimulus not to drop it but to carry it for a short distance before doing so. After dropping it, on each occasion it flew to a tree opposite the hole, called vigorously, then, after probably no more than a minute in the tree returned to the hole.

On April 10th one of the pair entered and left the hole several times in quick succession and shortly thereafter the presumed same individual again began to drop material that fell onto the ledge below. Its mate then arrived, settled briefly on the ledge, and began to peck and poke the stones at the entrance, almost as if pecking wood in a tree, then both birds entered the nest cavity where they remained for well over a minute before both left.

Birds were present at the nest hole every day from April 12th to 16th, and were in its vicinity on the 19th but, notwithstanding the undoubted occupancy of the site and the large amount of material removed from the cavity, were not seen to take in items to replace it. Activity then ceased, and the expected users disappeared. Thus, although the site was certainly occupied and much work was done in removing old nest material that had been there for nine years there is no evidence that eggs were laid in 2003. While not proven, it seems probable that one of these birds, and perhaps both, returned to the site in 2004, when events were different from those of 2003.

Nuthatches had been very noisy for a few days prior to March 22nd 2004 when one was first seen to enter the hole. Visits continued on subsequent days, and on March 30th one called repeatedly from a tree opposite the nest site while its mate entered the nest hole and spent some time there. Whether it applied any mud to the entrance could not be ascertained. On April 2nd a bird was at the nest, and later in the day was seen to be taking into it what were probably flakes of bark, while its mate, perched in a nearby tree, called repeatedly. This was in striking contrast to the previous year when only the *removal* of material was seen. On April 3rd the same pattern, one bird taking material to the nest while the other called vigorously, was repeated. From subsequent behaviour it was deduced, but not proven, that the worker was the female. More material was taken in on April 4th and 6th; and when the bird entered the hole on April 8th the presumed male 'whistled'. One item

Persistent site use by a wall-nesting Nuthatch

was a narrow sliver, probably of bark, estimated by comparison with its collector to be about 7 or 8cm long. This had to be taken in one end first. After perhaps a minute it was brought out, probably being too long, and carried to a tree, where its collector pecked it, apparently in an attempt to break it, which it failed to do. It was eventually dropped and not recovered. On April 12th the presumed male was seen to feed its mate.

Clutch size was not ascertained, but egg-laying probably began on April 15th. Feeding of young began on May 6th, and on May 7th both birds brought food to the nest in quick succession. Young were still being fed on May 27th and 28th, and while the unseen departure of some young had taken place, one adult fed a nestling at the entrance to the nest on May 29th, then entered the hole and removed a faecal sac. On May 30th all had flown. This outcome was the first of ten consecutive years in which I recorded the rearing of young in this site: a sequence that thanks to Beatrice Wilson, we know continued for at least one more year and, perhaps for at least two further years, but this is unproven. As the nest site is adjacent to a public footpath to Orrest Head it has been noticed by others, and has been mentioned at least once in the local press. Perhaps someone has information that adds at least to the duration of this site?

As a footnote it might be noted that the EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds (1997) suggests that large scale habitat loss and fragmentation constitute the most serious threat to the Nuthatch, and that “when mature trees disappear, Nuthatches have to vacate the area”. If the use of sites such as that described here becomes more widespread - this could mitigate the loss of woodland sites, provided some source of food is available !



Nuthatch, Carlisle, Roger Ridley

An intriguing aspect of this sequence is that, from what is known of the longevity of the Nuthatch, it is extremely unlikely that both, or even one, member of a single pair survived throughout the entire period involved.

That almost certain mate changes, involving both sexes, took place during the course of events raises problems that are impossible to resolve unless the exact identity of both individuals is known throughout.

Geoffrey Fryer

Wintering Merlins in inland North Cumbria

(Some thoughts and observations)

For the purposes of this article, 'winter' is defined as the period from October to February inclusive, and 'inland' refers to any site more than 3km from the coast)

Overview

According to The Migration Atlas (Wernham et al., 2002), most British breeding Merlins remain within Britain during the winter months. The median distance between nest sites and winter ringing recovery sites is 99km, with a predominant movement southwards and to lower ground.

In addition, the bulk of Icelandic breeding Merlins (ssp. *subaesalon*) winter in either Ireland or the west of Britain. Although this subspecies is slightly larger, longer-winged and darker than the British *aesalon* race, they are now not regarded as safely separable in the field, especially given that northern British birds from Shetland, Orkney and North Scotland have been shown to fall within the Icelandic size range.



Merlin, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Time-period and locations

My Merlin observations come from the past 12 winters, i.e. from 2006/07 onwards. The majority of my sightings have been made while monitoring Hen Harrier roosts, and all come from within a radius of c.20km of the RSPB Geltsdale Reserve.

Age/sex of birds

Because female and first winter male birds are not usually distinguishable in the field (unless seen at very close quarters or near together for size comparison), I simply categorise birds as either blue (adult male) or brown (all others). Over the period in question, just 12.5% of my observations have been of definite adult male (blue) birds. This figure tallies quite well with the total proportion of blue birds recorded in inland Cumbria during 2013, 2014 and 2015 (Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria), which was some 16.6% (no breakdown of age/sex is available before this date).

It is interesting to note that in a study of wintering Merlins in Northumberland, it was found that as many as 38% of inland sightings were of blue males, whilst the proportion was only 12.3% on the coast (Kerr, 1989). It is suggested that this accords well with the theory that male Merlins prefer to stay as close as possible to potential breeding grounds during the winter months, so that they may be quick to claim prime nesting territories as soon as conditions allow.

On the face of it, my data from inland Cumbria does not really seem to support this idea. However, it is highly likely that the situation here is much complicated by the arrival of Icelandic race birds into the county – which is attested by ringing recoveries - many of which may be first winter birds. In contrast, there have been no recoveries of *subaeson* Merlins in Northumberland.

Hunting and food

During the period of this study, Merlins have been observed foraging on a number of occasions. Birds have usually been seen in either swift (and often prolonged), contour-hugging chases, or else in short, darting forays from low perches such as walls, fence posts and small bushes. Much less frequently observed have been higher-level stooping hunts, e.g. in the targeting of pre-roost starling assemblies.

The following prey items (either caught or pursued) have been noted: Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Fieldfare, Redwing, Song Thrush, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Starling, Snipe and Kingfisher.

The Greenfinches were being closely watched and 'shadowed' by a young Merlin whilst they were gathering in a pre-roost flock around my garden, though no attack was witnessed. The Kingfisher incident took place during a WeBS count on the lower River Eden, below Beaumont, and is the only time I have actually seen a Merlin in this area. On an icy February morning, the Kingfisher was relentlessly pursued for three or four minutes up and down the river, until a successful kill was finally executed over the water!



Merlin, Anthorn, Roger Ridley



Buzzard and Kestrel, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Associations with other birds of prey

In my experience, winter Merlins are usually quite tolerant of (or apparently indifferent to) other raptors hunting or roosting nearby, showing little obvious aggression. In fact I have only twice observed a Merlin mobbing another bird.

On one occasion a Buzzard sitting on a post very close to the Merlin's roosting area was briefly dive-bombed (rather half-heartedly it must be said). The other instance was when there was some mutual chasing between two first winter Merlins and a resident Kestrel. I have also watched a Merlin tracking a hunting Hen Harrier, presumably in the hope of 'hoovering up' a flushed bird (no kill was seen). Although such behaviour is often mentioned in the literature, I have witnessed this just once, despite having observed Harriers and Merlins in close proximity on numerous occasions.

Pre-roosting behaviour

In the last hour or so before sunset, Merlins have been regularly seen to pre-roost before finally settling into their night-time haunts. Behaviour at this time can be quite varied, but often a bird will perch on a fence post or a low Hawthorn bush for anything from a few minutes to over an hour prior to roosting. During this period birds can often be seen to undertake extensive preening sessions.

Roosting

All the Merlins I have observed roosting in Cumbria have done so on the ground, in wet areas of rush (juncus beds). This is hardly surprising, since this is the kind of habitat I regularly watch for roosting Hen Harriers. Elsewhere in England, Merlins have been seen to settle in reeds, grasses/sedges, heather and bracken (R.Clarke, 1993). I have watched Merlins settle in areas as close as 50m to roosting Harriers, though never in fact in the same expanse of rushes. I have only once observed more than one Merlin roosting at a site - an adult male and a female settling at least 0.5km and 30 minutes apart.

The actual roost times I have noted for Merlins range from 24 minutes before, to 25 minutes after sunset, with 70% in the period prior to sunset.

One thing I have not been able to find in the literature is any description of settling behaviour. I was really quite surprised when I saw my first roosting Merlin to note the speed with which it dropped into its roost. In fact the bird simply appeared to crash into the ground in a low-angled dive. I initially thought that the bird was still hunting, and had actually stooped at some hapless target on or near the deck. But that bird never emerged before dark, and so I eventually concluded that this was indeed where it had decided to settle for the night. All subsequent observations have followed a very similar pattern, with quick, low and direct flights into roost. There's certainly no messing about with such unnecessary preliminaries as deceleration, circling or stalling for this spirited little falcon.

Pete Howard (p.howard691@btinternet.com)

(I would be most interested to hear from anyone who has experience of winter Merlins roosting or hunting, either in Cumbria or indeed elsewhere in Britain)



Merlin, Duddon, Andrew Cockroft

News from Watchtree and nearby

Been a quiet autumn with nothing significantly out of the ordinary at Watchtree. We seemed to have a Starling roost earlier this month but as yet it has not come to much. Our best breeding record was of a Gadwall that fledged two juveniles, a new breeding record for us. We have a lot of Tree Sparrows as usual, just today there was well over 120 at our two feeding stations. Interestingly a few House Sparrows are now joining them. We have a small covey of Grey Partridge, which is nice.

As usual any birder with a good eye should be able to see between 20 and 30 species when visiting us. We had a flock of at least 250 Goldfinch when the Thistle and Knapweed seed ripened. We have lots of berries on our Hawthorn at last and some days there are a few Redwing and Fieldfare on them.

The most interesting records are from this weekend. I had 127 Whoopers on the Wedholme Roost but my son Chris had 449 on Moricambe Bay, still have to find out where they are feeding somewhere in the Calvo area. There is a flock of around 6000 Barnacles on the Moricambe Bay marshes. The Twite did not let me down on Sunday and we had a flock of at least 250 on Calvo Marsh. Also on Sunday I reckon there was at least 1000 Pintail on what I call the Newton Marsh spit, a large finger of new marsh forming off the NW corner of the marsh.

Had the juvenile male Marsh Harrier two or three time on Wedholme Flow in October and on 2nd November one was harassing the Teal on the water formed where the old railway line was dammed on Bowness Common, must have been at least 400 Teal there.

In my garden on most days up to mid-October we had up to 120 House Sparrows feeding. Since then numbers have been quite low and we think it is partly due to the regular presence of a couple of Sparrowhawks. It might also be that neighbours are feeding again or they have found one of the unharvested crops in the area. I am sure you will have picked up on the Dotterel that is with the Golden Plover at Anthorn/Cardurnock. However, the Golden Plover flock is only around 3500 birds, much lower than a few years ago when the flock was often 6000 or more, but still time for them to build.

It seems to have taken a while for some of the North European birds to come over. For example I have yet to see a large flock of Lapwing. Wood Pigeon numbers are building but again the largest number I have seen so far is around 300. It could be that they are still on the continent. Another remarkable autumn feature has been the number of Redshank, in October I

reckon there were over 2000 at Port Carlisle, still good numbers but they seem to be spreading out a bit now.

The Swallow nests I look after at the farm I visit near Bowness on Solway had a very good season, one of the best in the ten years I have been going there, there was a maximum of 20 nests, they were early and four went onto have third broods, which all fledged mid to late September. Our House Martins also did well and we were back up to 12 nests with at least six going onto second broods. You may well have picked up that Barn Owls had a good breeding season too.

Frank Mawby, e-mail 20th November 2017

Leach's Petrel on the Bowness Solway 17th October 2017

John Miles and myself sat out the high tide at the bus shelter one day after the "big blow". John counted five Leachs' through the scope. Locking on to them with a 500mm lens proved tricky both in locating them in the frame and the auto focus tending to lock on to wave crests. I managed it, sort of, on one out of the five.

Guy Broome



Recent reports

The period covered is September to November 2017. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or British Birds Rarities Committee.

Swans to Ducks

Numbers of **Mute Swans** of note were 30 at Port Carlisle on 6th October and 58 at Siddick Pond two days later.

The first **Whooper Swan** was at Wedholme Flow on 10th September thereafter two were at Heversham Moss in south of the county on 3rd October with numbers building up with 68 at Blackdyke, Silloth on 28th



Whooper Swans, Walby, Roger Ridley

October and 127 at Wedholme at dawn and another 449 on Border Marsh on 19th November. The regular flock appeared at Walby on the same date. Where detailed counts were made there appeared to be a higher percentage of young birds compared to recent years. The first passage birds at Walney were seven on 5th October and at the end of the month 104 passed through on 29th with a further 49 on 2nd November. Nine were seen flying south by Black Coombe on 27th October.

The first **Pink-footed Geese** were six at South Walney on 2nd September, then birds were heard overhead at 21.30 at Micklethwaite on 6th September but it wasn't until 14th and 15th when skeins were reported moving south from Binsey in the north-west to Haweswater in the east and Whitbarrow and South Walney in the south of the county. The next surge was on 3rd October and a comment to effect that in North Cumbria birds were "coming through in droves", probably straight from Iceland due to near perfect tail winds all the way. 600 were seen at Flookburgh that day a high number for that site. Other records were birds high over Skiddaw on 9th October. 3600 were in Moricambe Bay on 19th November and 2000 moved north in ten skeins at Lowca on the same day.

An unexpected **Greenland White-fronted Goose** drifted in on the tide at Bowness on Solway on 17th October and four arrived at Walney on 30th. 200 **Greylag Geese** were at Soddy Gap on 1st September and from 28th September Siddick Pond held between 200 and 300 birds. 600 were at Wedholme Flow on 10th September and 700 were at Overwater on 9th October. A **Bar-headed Goose** was seen with Greylags at Wedholme,

Siddick and Soddy Gap. The first **Barnacle Geese** were on Rockcliffe Marsh by 18th September; a passage from the east occurred on 8th October with birds being seen approaching the Solway from Wetheral, Geltsdale and Wigton. A **Richardson's Cackling Goose** was with Barnacles on the north shore of Rockcliffe on 10th November and may have been the bird previously recorded in Northumberland – again with Barnacles. The first **Brent Geese** at Walney were 12 pale-bellied on 22nd September. Numbers increased to 94 by 3rd October, 158 by 21st October and 248 by mid-November.

The first **Wigeon** of autumn at South Walney was on 1st September. A drake **American Wigeon** was present from 26th September at Walney. There were six **Gadwall** in the Foulshaw area on 1st September then up to five on various dates in October. Hodbarrow held two on 9th October and six on 3rd November. The WeBS survey of Tarns Dub on 26th November found four along with 26 **Shoveler** and 26 **Goosander** (24 males). Two hundred **Teal** were on Wedholme on 10th September and 400 at Heversham Moss on 14th October. Good numbers of **Pintail** were reported with 150 at Bowness on 2nd October, 250 at Holme Dub at the end of the month and 1000 at Newton Marsh on 19th November. The only **Pochard** reported were on Derwent Water – a drake 29th September and 13 on 13th November. Away from Walney a pair of **Eider** were at Workington on 8th October. 55 **Goldeneye** were on the River Eden in the Rockcliffe area on 19th November. The only **Long-tailed Duck** noted was a male at Walney on 30th October.

Partridges to Herons

Two **Red Grouse** were at Honister Tramway on 15th October and more to be expected 270 at Geltsdale crossing from Croglin. Ten **Grey Partridge** were at Langrigg on 2nd September and three at Carlisle Airport a day later. There were 12 at Siddick on 5th and 18th October.

Regular counts of **Red-throated Divers** from Maryport showed 134 drifting out with the tide on 18th October and 475 on 2nd November, there were six off Silecroft on 9th October and three there on 3rd November. A **Great Northern Diver** was on Loweswater on 29th October and a bird was in the Walney area from 22nd October until at least 20th November.



Black Grouse, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Gale force winds in September saw a **Wilson's Petrel** and six **Leach's Petrels** pass South Walney on 10th September, ten **Leach's** passed on 12th and finally two more on 13th. North-westerly winds on 17th October brought more **Leach's Petrels** to the west coast – three from Hodbarrow Seawall, five at Walney, two off Workington, at least two in the Solway at Bowness and more unusually one at the head of the estuary off the north shore of Rockcliffe Marsh although that may duplicate one of the Bowness birds.

24 **Shag** were counted at Walney on 28th October. **Bittern** were reported from Sunbiggin Tarn on 24th September and at Siddick pond thereafter. **Little Egret** continued to feature on the south Solway with 19 at Bowness on 4th September, 21 at Port Carlisle on 28th and 23 at RSPB Campfield in mid-October. One at Wedholme Flow on 10th September was the first the observer had seen there. 52 Little Egrets were counted at Walney on 30th September increasing to 80 by 10th October. Regular counts from Foulshaw peaked at eight on 13th November.



Little Grebe, Siddick, Tony Marsh

Whilst seen regularly in south of the county the only record of **Great White Egret** in the north was at RSPB Campfield on 16th October which may have been a bird reported from Rockcliffe earlier in the autumn. A bird was also at Tarn Moor Sunbiggin on 24th November. Two **Western Cattle Egret** frequented the county border near Arnside at the end of October into early November. A **Slavonian Grebe** was on the River Leven estuary on 21st October and 14 **Little Grebe** were reported from the River Eden east of Rockcliffe on 19th November.

Raptors to Waders

Red Kite were reported only from the south of the county in late October and early November. **Marsh Harrier** reports were received of birds on the south Solway around RSPB Campfield and on Wedholme Flow; most reports were of juvenile/females but one on Wedholme was regarded to be a 2nd year male. A bird with green wing tags was on Foulshaw Moss on 29th September (a similar bird at Leighton Moss the previous day) was possibly from the Hawk and Owl Trust programme in Norfolk. A **Hen Harrier** drifted south over Carlisle Airport on 14th September and another was reported from Torver on 23rd. Fifteen **Common Buzzard** were seen from Wetheral on 28th September across the north end of the Eden valley, 11 were in the Gelt valley on 27th October and at least 14 were hunting over Threlkeld Common on

30th November. Two **Ospreys** were reported on 5th September – one well offshore at Workington before coming inland and soaring for some minutes before proceeding south. The other was at RSPB Campfield using fence posts on the sands and was present until at least 10th September. The last sighting from Foulshaw was a resident male on 12th September.

A **Goshawk** was seen hunting Rooks in the south of the county on 4th September. **Kestrel** numbers of note were 11 at Haweswater/Wet Sleddale in groups of five, two and four. Single **Merlin** were seen often on the south Solway and up to two were regular in the Foulshaw area. **Water Rail** were often reported from Siddick Pond and Foulshaw Moss. Up to six were counted on South Walney in October.

Four **Avocets** were still in the Bowness area from 24th to 28th September. 1000 **Golden Plover** were seen at Langwathby on 15th October and there were at least 1500 at Anthorn at the same time. Three were by the summit of Black Coombe on 27th October. A juvenile **Dotterel** was found amongst the plover flock at Anthorn on 29th October and it was still present at the end of November. **Grey Plover** were present along the south Solway in smaller numbers throughout the period but 52 were on Newton Marsh on 19th November and 190 were at Walney on 7th October.



Avocet, Bowness, Roger Ridley

In September a flock of **Lapwing** at Carlisle Airport varied in number usually between 200 and 300 but peaking at 450 on 29th September; 250 at Brampton in early October may have been part of that flock. 250 were at Plumpton on the 9th. Perhaps 1600 birds were usually to be found between Old Sandsfield and Drumburgh on the south Solway. **Turnstone** frequented



Dotterel with Golden Plover, Anthorn, Nick Franklin

Walney with 570 there on 7th October. 58 **Black-tailed Godwits** were at Port Carlisle on 1st September with smaller numbers at Wedholme Flow, RSPB Campfield and Hodbarrow. In early October 60 **Bar-tailed Godwit** were at Bowness on Solway. Two

Recent reports

Ruffs were with the Lapwing flock at Carlisle Airport on 1st September increasing to seven by 3rd October. There were three at Holme Dub on 11th September. There were significant numbers in the south-east of the county with 11 at Heversham Moss on 19th September, 22 at Halforth on 3rd October and 20 juveniles at Foulshaw Marsh on 3rd and 12 birds at Mosside Farm on 5th. In the north of the county five were at Port Carlisle on 3rd October, 11 (5m and 6f) at Whitrigg on 12th and two at Holme Dub on 29th. In the south-west a juvenile was present at Haverigg in mid-October.

A single **Curlew Sandpiper** was present at Port Carlisle on 4th and 24th September and two juveniles were at Hodbarrow on 9th October. Although no detailed counts were reported very large numbers of **Dunlin** frequented Port Carlisle throughout. The regular flock of **Purple Sandpipers** built up at Workington Harbour. A maximum of two **Little Stints** were at Port Carlisle throughout and three were at Sandside on 12th November, three at Foulshaw on 13th and a single at Heversham earlier in the month. The only **Pectoral Sandpiper** reported was at Wedholme Flow on 5th September. Single **Common Sandpipers** were reported in early October but the regular wintering area on the Ravenglass Esk had six birds present on 9th and still three on 6th November.

Two **Green Sandpipers** were on the regular site on the Ravenglass Esk on 9th October and then four on a field flood at Waterside on 22nd; birds remained in the area until at least 23rd November with up to three birds being present. A single bird was on the same flood at Wetheral which was used by birds last winter with one on 29th October and the two birds on three dates up to 16th November. In mid-November six birds were at Scotby Holmes on the River Eden, a regular wintering stretch. Two were lower down the Eden on 19th November at Kirkandrews. Two birds present at Cardewlees on 8th November had been there for some time. A single was on the River Waver at Abbeytown on 14th and on 19th a single bird was on a road side pool at Boustead Hill.

A good count of **Redshank** was 2450 at Walney on 7th October. The River Mite at Ravenglass held the most significant numbers of **Greenshank** away from South Walney, with 19 on 9th September (with a further four on the nearby Esk) 11 on



Redshank, Port Carlisle, Adam Moan

24th and 13 on 8th October. At South Walney numbers were in excess of 20 throughout September and October but by 10th November only 13 were present there. In the north two were on Wedholme Flow on 1st September, five at Grune Point on 24th September and four at Glasson Point on 25th October. 1470 **Curlew** were recorded at South Walney on 9th September and 815 on 7th October. The only reports of **Woodcock** were from Carlisle Airport on 30th September and Clints Quarry on 26th November. **Jack Snipe** (2) were with nine **Common Snipe** by the River Eden at Rockcliffe on 19th November, with three more **Jack Snipe** at Walney on 24th. Otherwise Common Snipe were at Siddick, Wedholme and RSPB Campfield. A **Grey Phalarope** arrived at Walney on 13th September.



Mediterranean Gull, Workington, Tony Marsh

Skuas to auks

An **Arctic Skua** passed Eskmeals on 9th September and at least four flew west at Bowness a day later. Single birds were recorded on several dates at South Walney. Three **Pomarine Skuas** passed Walney on 9/10th September. The only **Great Skua** was off Walney on 10th October. A juvenile **Long-tailed Skua** passed South Walney on 7th September and a “probable” passed Bowness a month later. In

mid-October **Guillemot** corpses were washed up - “50 in recent weeks” on the Outer Solway. 275 **Black-headed Gulls** at Siddick Pond on 19th October was considered a high count for the site. There were still 47 **Mediterranean Gulls** at Workington on 3rd September with varying smaller numbers through the month but 46 again on 28th. In October the maximum count there was ten (including the regular “Stumpie”). The highest count of October was 22 on 17th at Siddick and the last six on 19th. The only **Little Gull** reported was off Walney on 4th October.

Cuckoos to Buntings

Two **Barn Owls** were at Carlisle Airfield on 30th September. Two **Short-eared Owls** were in the Naddle Valley on 11th September and one was in the Gelt Valley at the end of October. **Kingfisher** were regularly reported from Siddick Ponds. A **Green Woodpecker** was in Powter Howe on 27th October.



Guillemot, Port Carlisle, Roger Ridley

A **Willow Tit** was at Glasson Moss on 9th November. Twelve **Skylark** passed Binsey on 26th September, 60 were at RSPB Campfield on 16th October and two days later there was a continuous southerly passage at Allonby involving “several hundred per hour”. This latter passage was also noted at Walney when 560 birds passed. **House**



Kingfisher, River Sark, Roger Ridley

Martins were reported up to 5th October with 100 at Portinscale on 7th September of note. **Swallows** were reported in number up to 18th October with late birds at Walney (three on 3rd November and one the next day) and at Bowness on 15th November. High counts were 150 at Carlisle Airport on 3rd September and 100 there on 16th. A 100 “hirundines” fed between Wetheral and Warwick Bridge on 12th.

A **Water Pipit** was present on Walney from 23rd November until the end of the month at least. 80 **Pied Wagtails** were at Carlisle Airport during September and in November roosts built up at Southwaite and Penrith. Six **White Wagtails** were at South Walney on 8th September, 14 on 1st October and 22 on 15th October. **Wheatear** were widespread in the north and west of the county in September and first half of October. Of note was a late **Whinchat** at Foulshaw Marsh on 29th October. The expected coastal records of **Stonechat** were received but of note were 30 in a 2km stretch between Allonby and Blue Dial on 18th October. Fifty **Robins** were counted at South Walney on 1st October. Two **Black Redstarts** were at Walney on 27th October.

The first **Redwings** were three over Binsey on 26th September with widespread passage thereafter until the end of the month. Forty **Mistle Thrushes** were in Swindale on 11th September. A single **Fieldfare** was on Torver Common on 9th October and there were at least 50 here on 22nd. In the main they didn't arrive in any numbers until November with flocks of between 200 and 300 being widely noted from Boustead Hill, Tarn Hows, and Walton and Forest Head. A single **Ring Ouzel** was at Haweswater on 26th September, Walney on 1st October and another was at Mardale Head on 6th October, later in the month four (and possibly six) were with a Fieldfare flock at Great Asby Scar. A fall of thrush species took place at Walney on 23rd October.

The only report of **Blackcap** was from Brampton on 11th October. **Chiffchaff** were widespread during September but a bird at Jockey Shield on 28th October was “the first for weeks” there and one was in full song at Ravenglass on 31st October. Whilst there was a large passage in the UK the only **Yellow-browed Warblers** were a bird at South Walney on 26th September, a “probable” seen briefly near Wigton on 5th October whilst two days later one paid a brief visit to a garden in Brampton. Two **Spotted Flycatchers** were near Wigton on 1st September and another on 16th.



Ring Ouzel, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Jackdaws passed through Walney on several dates in October with 1400 on 18th being the highest but then 700 on 27th and 450 on 29th. Four **Raven** passed south past Allonby on 18th October. Reports of **Brambling** were few but 20 were at Ainstable and ten were with a large (200) flock on stubble at Lazonby on 18th November with a similar sized flock at Langwathby on 24th. 250 **Twite** were on Calvo Marsh on 19th November and 60 inland at Langwathby on 24th. At Walney numbers built up to 80 by 20th November. Reports of **Siskin** were few but three at Waterside were the first of the winter there. As part of a large influx of **Hawfinch** into the UK a bird was seen at RSPB Campfield on 25th October and a day later three flew over Keswick; a bird was with Fieldfare near Hawkshead on 6th November. Four birds at Arnside may well have been local birds as were birds regularly at Sizergh. September saw the **Goldfinch** “charm” at Walney increase from 100 on 1st to 400 by 25th and 440 on 1st October. A **Snow Bunting** passed through Walney on 19th November. A **Crossbill** was by Dent Fell, Egremont on 29th November.

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 March 1st 2018

If you have a computer: please send contributions to Dave Piercy
daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk

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; tel 017687 73201

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Contributions for the website to: daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk