

BIRD NEWS
Vol. 25 No. 3 Autumn 2014

[Club news and announcements](#)
[The 2013/14 wintering sawbill survey](#)
[CBC winter talks programme](#)
[Migration through a Kendal garden](#)
[Blackcaps in a Kendal garden 2013](#)
[Some observations on the vole plague of 2014](#)
[A railway Kingfisher](#)
[Sizergh Hawfinch project 2014](#)
[Unusual call of Whinchat](#)
[Recent reports](#)

[Contents - see back page](#)

Twinned with Cumberland Bird Observers Club

New South Wales, Australia

<http://www.cboc.org.au>

If you want to borrow CBOC publications
please contact the Secretary who holds some.



Officers of the Society

Council

Chairman: Dave Shackleton, 8 Burnbanks, Bampton, Penrith CA10 2RW
tel. 01931 713693; d.shackleton@btinternet.com

Vice-chairmen: Mike Carrier, Clive Hartley

Secretary: David Piercy, Derwentwater Independent Hostel, Borrowdale, Keswick
CA12 5UR; tel. 017687 77246; 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: Peter Ullrich
Rob Pickett
Keith Hamilton
Chris Hind
Peter Howard
Malcolm Priestley

Recorders

County: Steve Westerberg, 8 Becksides Gardens, Brampton, CA8 1US
Stephen.Westerberg@rspb.org.uk tel. 016977 42652

Barrow/South Lakeland: Ronnie Irving, 24 Birchwood Close, Kendal LA9 5BJ
ronnie@fenella.fslife.co.uk 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: Derek McAlone, 88 Whinlatter Road, Mirehouse,
Whitehaven CA28 8DQ derekmcalone@hotmail.co.uk
tel. 01946 691370

C.B.C. Bird News

Editor: Dave Piercy

B.T.O. Representatives

Cumbria: Colin Gay colinathodbarrow@btinternet.com tel. 01229 773820
Assistant reps: Dave Piercy & Steve Westerberg

Club news and announcements

The AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 3rd October 2014 at 7.30pm. The business of the AGM is intended to be as brief as possible and will be followed by a talk by Stephen Westerberg on Whinchats.

Vacancies on Council: Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, up to three vice-chairmen and two ordinary members.

We would welcome any members willing to help in the running of the club. We are currently struggling to keep the club moving forward. There is so much we can achieve but we need more help. Please volunteer.

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 26th September).

Talks, events and outings

The club desperately needs one or more organisers. Please offer help if you can.

Subscriptions

The Cumbria Bird Club 2014/2015 subscription becomes due on 1st October. You will receive a subscription form with this mailing unless you pay by banker's order. To prevent unnecessary costs, such as postage for reminder letters, please can you ensure that this is paid as soon as possible. Why not pay at the AGM!

Rookery survey

Apologies for the delay in analysing the results of the rookery survey. Unfortunately not all areas were covered in 2013 entailing further counts in 2014.

It is hoped that a full account of the Rookery survey will be produced in the next volume of "Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria".



Hartsop Rookery 2013, Dave Piercy

The 2013/14 wintering sawbill survey: a preliminary report

This preliminary report is a summary of records received from the 90 volunteers who walked over 600 kilometres of river banks and the WeBS counters who covered most of the coastline and inland still waters. We have achieved a strong correlation between the fieldwork completed for the 1990/91 survey and last winter's repeat of the original project. Many thanks to you all!

Goosanders

The tables below show the number of Goosanders recorded on inland waters in 11 major drainage basins and counts on coastal waters during fieldwork periods in November, January and March. The results from last winter's survey are compared with the figures from the 1990/91 survey.



Goosander, Derwent count

C.B.C wintering Goosander surveys: 2013/14 and 1990/91 Summary of results: rivers and lakes

Drainage basins	2013/14			1990/91		
	Nov	Jan	Mar	Nov	Jan	Mar
Esk & Lyne	77	32	37	32	27	51
Caldew & Petteril	8	16	52	26	32	35
Lower Eden, Irthing & Eamont	88	124	100	146	143	184
Upper Eden & Lowther	41	43	57	30	36	72
Lune & Rawthey	32	22	33	49	36	111
Kent	58	71	70	82	97	124
Leven & Crake	38	54	57	27	14	17
Duddon	2	4	4	10	0	0
Ehen, Irt & Esk	18	14	33	53	32	23
Derwent	166	527	154	67	79	109
Wampool, Waver & Ellen	56	57	52	17	10	9
Cumbria Total	584	964	649	539	506	735

Coastal counts

Areas	2013/14			1990/91		
	Nov	Jan	Mar	Nov	Jan	Mar
Kent Estuary to Foulney	9	26	8	4	16	14
Walney to St Bees	9	3	1	6	0	0
St Bees to Grune Point	173	123	14	0	0	0
Grune Point to Rockcliffe	14	20	1	11	14	20
Cumbria total	205	172	24	21	30	34

Several significant changes in the distribution and total population of Goosanders in Cumbria are apparent. Inland numbers found in the Lower Eden, Lune, Kent and Ehen, Irt and Esk catchment area have decreased by more than 30%. Conversely, at opposite ends of the county the Esk and Lyne and Leven and Crake drainage basins recorded increases of 29% and 157% respectively – the latter due mainly to more birds wintering on four of the larger lakes.

The most intriguing change has occurred in north-west Cumbria. The 1990/91 survey found only a few Goosanders using tidal waters on the upper reaches of the Kent Estuary and Solway Firth. However, during the last decade a maritime wintering population has appeared on the Outer Solway, feeding at sea and commuting to roost on sheltered waters inland from the coast. The principal roosting sites are at Siddick Pond, Soddy Gap and Wedholme Flow which offer few, if any, feeding opportunities. Numbers peak at several hundred birds in mid-winter and account for most of the substantially increased records from Derwent, Wampool and Waver drainage basins. By March, most maritime Goosanders have dispersed to destinations unknown. Further investigations into this recent phenomenon are planned in the months ahead.

The total number of Goosanders recorded from both inland and coastal waters in Cumbria during the 2013/14 survey with percentage changes from 1990/91 are listed below:

November: 789 (+41%)
January: 1136 (+111%)
March: 672 (-13%)



Red-breasted Mergansers, Derwent Water, Dave Piercy

Red-breasted Mergansers

C.B.C wintering Red-breasted Mergansers surveys: 2013/14 and 1990/91

Summary of results: all areas

Areas	2013/14			1990/91		
	Nov	Jan	Mar	Nov	Jan	Mar
Kent Estuary to Foulney	42	18	30	20	11	15
Walney to St Bees	145	107	114	222	123	87
St Bees to Grune Point	0	0	2	0	0	0
Grune Point to Rockcliffe	19	10	14	1	9	6
Inland Waters	27	28	13	10	9	18
Cumbria total	233	163	173	253	152	126

Unlike Goosanders, Red-breasted Merganser numbers are closely monitored by the annual WeBS counts on the Cumbrian coast and larger inland waters. Walney Island, Hodbarrow and the Duddon Estuary held the majority of birds in November and March, whilst a peak of 62 Mergansers on the Ravenglass estuaries was the largest concentration in that month. Derwent Water and Windermere accounted for the majority of inland records.

A comparison with the wintering population recorded in the 1990/91 survey suggests a modest increase in the county population of Red-breasted Mergansers in the last 23 years.

Malcolm Priestley

CBC winter talks programme

Friday 3rd October (AGM): Penrith UR Church 7.30pm

'Whinchats at Geltsdale RSPB'- *Stephen Westerberg*



Whinchat is a species that has declined in the UK, but has maintained a good population at the Geltsdale reserve.

With the help of Amanda Proud and Martin Ketcher from Hertfordshire and inspired by John Callion, we have been looking in detail at Whinchat on the reserve.

As well as colour-ringing about 500 Whinchats, habitat data has been gathered from around nests. The talk will present some of the information from this work.

Friday 7th November: Cockermouth UR Church 7.30pm

'Campfield Marsh' - *Dave Blackledge*

An update on developments at Campfield Marsh.

Wednesday 7th January 2015: with Carlisle NHS, Tullie House 7.15pm

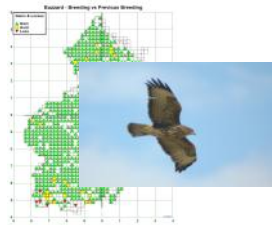
'Through the Lens' - *Keith Kirk*

A look at wildlife through an ever improving photographic technology

Friday 6th Feb 2015: Penrith UR Church 7.30pm

'Northumbrian County Atlas 2007 - 2011' - *Tim Dean*

A fascinating preview of the results of Northumbrian Atlas fieldwork. Comparisons with previous Atlases and breeding and wintering abundance will no doubt illuminate both marked contrasts as well as echoes of the Cumbrian experience.



Monday 9th March 2015: with Kendal NHS Friend's Meeting House Stramongate 7.30pm

'Our disappearing Swifts' - *Tanya and Edmund Hoare*

The talk will include video clips of many aspects of behaviour of common Swifts within nest spaces in the eaves of their cottage. Also to be presented will be the latest research on migration obtained from Swifts harnessed with tiny geolocators. Reasons for their decline, and national and international efforts to halt this will be discussed.

Don't forget that all our talks are free to non-members so please help to boost attendance by spreading the word.

Migration through the garden of 43 Sandgate, Kendal



Chiffchaff, Siddick, Steve Dutton

Perhaps I am getting old, or just lazy, but I now find that spending hours studying the birds in our garden is much less demanding than going on the occasional twitch or spending four or more hours getting frozen and/or saturated whilst gazing out over a sometimes empty sea.

I don't know if our garden is typical but I have found that a surprising number of birds have been ringed. This may in fact be normal and come as no surprise to ringers with their mist nets, but how many birdwatchers bother to look at the legs of birds visiting their garden?

Over the years eleven species of ringed birds have visited our garden; sometimes they are in and out in a very short time but others have stayed around for several weeks. Only a tiny proportion are seen during the summer months.

To give 2013 as an example, ringed birds were seen on 115 days with a maximum count of seven ringed birds of four species on both 24th February and 15th March. Eight species of ringed birds were noted during the year and the number of 'ringed-bird days' was 234.

Now comes the real challenge. To put it mildly the reading of the rings requires patience, luck and the realisation that the success rate is going to be very low. I have a Swarovski 80 x scope and have had most success with a 30 x lens, though I do also use a 45 x.

In just over the last three years I have managed to read completely only fourteen rings, the most gratifying being Chaffinches ringed in Holland and Norway and Starlings ringed in Holland and Finland.

Considering the large number of rings read only partially or not at all one can only wonder what I have missed. I know from the partial reading of some rings that they originated abroad.

If anyone is tempted to have a go at reading rings I suggest having a variety of feeders to reduce competition at any one of them as you certainly need the bird to stay still! Sunflower hearts are far and away the most effective but half apples skewered into bushes are also worthwhile in winter, as are half coconuts, fat-balls and peanuts.

The positioning of feeders is important as you need to consider the distance from your scope and also light conditions.

Among possible pitfalls are:

- a) More than one ringed bird of the same species being in the garden at the same time.
- b) Sparrowhawks!!
- c) Having trouble reading upside down characters.
- d) A wife who fails to realise that what she thinks of as a kitchen is in fact an observatory for scientific investigations.

If you do manage to read your first full ring and get return details from the BTO it is likely that, as with me, you will be hooked.

Tom Wheeler

Blackcaps in the garden of 43 Sandgate, Kendal in 2013

Do the over-wintering birds have different feeding habits to spring arrivals?

Summary of all Blackcaps at 43 Sandgate, Kendal in 2013

January : Recorded every day
1 male on two days
1 male, 1 female on 27 days
2 males, 1 female on two days

February: Recorded every day
1 male on five days
1 male, 1 female on 19 days
2 males on one day
2 males, 1 female on three days

March: Recorded every day
1 male on two days
1 male, 1 female on 20 days
2 males, 1 female on seven days
3 males, 1 female on two days

April: Recorded on 21 days (1st to 6th; 9th; 16th to 22nd; 24th to 30th)
1 male on two days
1 female on two days
1 male, 1 female on three days
2 males on two days
2 females on one day
1 male, 2 females on four days
2 males, 1 female on five days
3 males, 1 female on two days

May: Recorded on seven days (1st to 5th; 8th and 15th)
1 male on three days
1 female on one day
1 male, 1 female on one day
2 males on one day
2 males, 1 female on one day

October: 1 male on 20th

December: Recorded on three days (4th; 11th and 28th)
1 male on two days
1 female on one day



Blackcap, Stanwix, Roger Ridley

Blackcaps in the garden of 43 Sandgate, Kendal in 2013
Do the over-wintering birds have different feeding habits to spring arrivals?

The Winter/Spring overlap period

March

24th 2 males, 1 female
25th 1 male, 1 female
26th 1 male, 1 female
27th 1 male, 1 female
28th 1 male, 1 female
29th 1 male, 1 female
30th 3 males, 1 female
31st 3 males, 1 female

Fed on sunflower-hearts and apples as other birds throughout the winter. After this no specific notes were made on feeding habits until 9th April as it was not until then that I was alerted to the idea that there may be differences.

Some spring arrivals?

April

1st 3 males, 1 female
2nd 3 males, 1 female
3rd 2 males
4th 2 males, 1 female
5th 1 male
6th 2 males, 1 female
9th 1 female
16th 1 female
17th 1 male, 1 female
18th 1 male, 1 female
19th 2 males, 1 female

This bird fed on sunflower hearts and half apples in the same way as birds throughout the winter - a late departure?

These birds fed mainly on apples but also on fatballs. Did not go near the sunflower-heart feeders.

Numbers in March/April 2014 were comparatively low so I could not test the theory of different feeding habits.

To be continued next year.

Tom Wheeler



Blackcap, Stanwix, Roger Ridley

Some observations on the vole plague of 2014



Short-eared Owl chick, Geltsdale, Peter Howard

In many areas of the U.K., populations of Field Voles *Microtus agrestis* show multi-annual cycles with a three to four/five year periodicity. Very occasionally, however, populations may expand to reach plague proportions, having a marked effect on both their food supply and the wide range of species that predate them. Such a phenomenon was witnessed in 2014 on the RSPB Geltsdale reserve, and also more widely across the Pennines and Southern Uplands of Scotland.

Vole populations

Massive vole plagues appear to be rather rare events. Over the border in Dumfries and Galloway famous plagues occurred during the years 1874-6 and again in 1892-3, both resulting in extraordinary breeding densities of Short-eared Owls. Many owls laid very large clutches of 10-12 eggs, and often had second broods (an uncommon occurrence in this species). In *A Border Naturalist*, Ritson Graham notes that 1932 saw the only significant vole plague in the border upland region of North-east Cumbria during the whole period of 1930-1966. Minor, more localised, plagues have been associated with areas of newly-planted conifer forestry, such as in the Carron valley of Stirlingshire in 1952-53. All such events seem to be linked with a

sudden reduction in grazing pressure and/or very mild winters, leading to an increased abundance and quality of grasses (the main food source for voles) and improved winter rodent survival.

Voles breed mostly between April and September. Young females become sexually mature at about 28 days, and so can breed in the year of their birth. In years of plentiful food supply the breeding season may be extended even into early winter, and individuals can produce as many as seven litters of 4-6 young per annum. Males are much more active in the spring (when seeking out females to mate), making them particularly vulnerable to predators at this time.

The vole plague of 2014 is relatively unusual in that it appears to be a particularly wide-ranging event, with exceptionally high vole numbers being reported from areas as far apart as the Langholm Moors in the Borders and the Bowland Fells in Lancashire. It is therefore clear that local grazing regimes cannot be the key causal factor.

Weather statistics from the Met Office show that in northern England and southern Scotland the winter of 2013-14 was one of the mildest since 1910. The overall mean temperature in north-west England was more than two degrees Centigrade above average. Even more significantly, this region experienced only nine days of air frost during the winter months, which is some 26.5 days less than the norm.

Frost-free conditions appear to have significant positive impact on winter vole survival. So if a very mild winter follows a particularly productive and extended vole breeding and grass-growing season, then the vole population may expand extremely rapidly. This would appear to be the case across the region in question.



Short-eared Owl, Mawbray, Steve Dutton

Some predator responses

a) Birds

Pellet analysis has found that Field Voles typically constitute around two thirds of the diet of **Short-eared Owls**, and studies have shown that numbers of breeding Short-eared Owls are indeed positively correlated with vole numbers (Village, 1987).

Some observations on the vole plague of 2014

At Geltsdale this summer a record 22 occupied territories were located, which is in fact double the previous high since monitoring began in 1975 (when the RSPB became involved on the site). In addition, a number of second broods were also noted, a very rare occurrence here. Short-eared Owls also enjoyed a very good year at Bowland, and there is an unsubstantiated claim that there were as many as 40 breeding pairs at Langholm. Given that Geltsdale has c.4,200 hectares of moorland and the Langholm and Newcastleton Hills SSSI/SPA is around 7,600 hectares, this seems not altogether implausible.

Although the diet of **Long-eared Owls** usually has a more varied rodent intake, it regularly contains about 40-45% Field Voles. However, in vole plague years the proportion of vole prey will evidently be higher. This year at Geltsdale eight occupied territories were found, either on or within a couple of kilometres of the reserve. At least three of these sites are known to have produced young, including a rare crag-nesting pair. Certainly during the last decade or so three territories is the most known to have been located within this same area (and, indeed, I can find no historical evidence of there ever having been such a concentration of Long-eared Owl territories here).



Barn Owl, Siddick, Steve Dutton

The **Barn Owl** diet also typically contains around 40-45% Field Voles. Geltsdale had four occupied territories this summer, easily the highest number since before the 'arctic' winter of 2009-10. Three of the pairs successfully produced broods of between four and six, the one failure probably involving an immature female.

Barn Owls are far more sedentary than Short-eared Owls, and have a higher site-fidelity than Long-eared Owls, with a median distance for breeding dispersal of just three kilometres. Studies in south-west Scotland have indicated that, because of this, after a vole high there is often a one year lag in the peak number of occupied territories. So, other things being equal, we can perhaps hope for an even better year for Barn Owls next year.

Hen Harriers have enjoyed an incredible breeding season up at Langholm, with 10 successful nests producing a total of 47 young! Research has shown that vole numbers are 'correlated strongly with harrier breeding density and clutch size.' (Redpath, Thirgood, Clarke, 2002).



Merlin, Anthorn, Roger Ridley

A previous study has also highlighted a positive correlation between harrier densities and the relative abundance of Meadow Pipits (Redpath, Thirgood, 1999). This year there were nine occupied Merlin territories at Geltsdale (the most since 1997), strongly indicative of high numbers of Meadow Pipits. Given this and the super-abundance of voles it is especially troubling and lamentable that no Hen Harriers settled (or were allowed to settle) to breed in the area.

b) Mammals

The diet of the **Weasel** commonly contains c. 24-30% Field Voles (with birds usually accounting for only 6-14%). Populations are known to be highly volatile, with large-scale post-breeding dispersal leading to frequent local extinctions and re-colonisations. Productivity, density and mobility vary strongly with food supply. During peak food supply episodes such as vole plagues, Weasels may produce second litters in July/August – mostly the offspring of early-born young.

The **Stoat** has a diet with typically about 8-10% Field Voles, with birds constituting up to 30% of the intake. Stoats are well known for delayed implantation and the fact that females become sexually mature within 2-3 weeks of birth. The highest reproductive success is in years with high prey availability. Dispersal and spring-ranging movements of up to 24km in a week have been recorded (with individuals regularly crossing over watersheds). They are opportunist foragers, and the impact of Stoats on avian prey populations is actually greatest when rodent populations are high (due to the numerical response of Stoats to the increased food supply).

Some observations on the vole plague of 2014

At Geltsdale both these mustelids were much more visible on the ground this summer, suggesting a higher than usual density. Mustelid predation of ground-nesting birds was also noted at a much higher frequency than normal. Predation of the closely monitored Whinchat nests on the reserve was easily the highest noted during the four years of an on-going colour-ringing project. All clear signs indicated mustelid culprits.

Voles can account for anything between zero and 100% of the diet of that generalist predator, the **Fox**, depending on vole density and availability. They, in turn, can have some considerable impact on ground-nesting birds such as grouse, waders and birds of prey. In south-west Scotland during the vole plague year of 1893, eight adult and 68 young Short-eared Owls were allegedly discovered in a Fox earth (*Birds of Moor and Mountain*, D.Watson). Fox control is carried out on the RSPB Geltsdale reserve, and there appears to have been little evidence of any increased Fox impact on ground-nesting bird productivity this year.

Longer-term effects

How long is this current vole plague likely to last? The major nineteenth century Scottish events appear to have persisted over a couple of seasons. This would obviously be dependent upon a continuation of bountiful food supply, good breeding success, relatively low mortality, and high winter survival rates. It is now commonly agreed that the size of predator populations is largely controlled by the number of prey, and not vice versa. Thus the mechanisms leading to a vole crash are likely to be either weather-related or due directly to overcrowding in the vole population itself. This latter situation could lead to self-depletion/exhaustion of the food supply, an increase in pathogen/disease load, or changes in social behaviour leading to breeding failure.

Even if the number of voles does plummet before next spring, there could still be knock-on effects into the next breeding season. As already mentioned, Barn Owl productivity may lag a year behind the vole peak, which, given a relatively clement winter, should be good news for 2015. But what of the mustelids? Despite their well-attested, relatively long-range dispersal and mobility, it seems likely that there may be some intrinsic inertia in boom populations, which could result in a delayed response to a crash in the vole population. If that is indeed the case then, with fewer voles to eat, the impact on ground-nesting birds could be even higher next year. But I've now veered off into the realms of speculation. It will be very interesting and instructive to see how events actually unfold...

Peter Howard

A railway Kingfisher



Kingfisher, The Derwent at Workington, Steve Dutton

In July a railwayman friend of mine was working on the line on the Citadel Station side of St. Nicholas railway bridge in Carlisle. To his amazement he saw a Kingfisher flying south along the main railway towards. and then past Upperby sidings. It was lost from view, but clearly heading for the River Petteril close to Gillford Park.

Equally astonishing was the fact that later the bird was observed flying along the Newcastle line from Petteril Bridge (at the back of B&Q) heading towards the River Caldew at Rome Street.

So the bird went south along the main railway line and returned via the Newcastle line. It was subsequently seen by other railwaymen doing exactly the same thing.

Whether it flew through the railway tunnel at London Road or crossed over the road at the old tram sheds is unknown, but that doesn't detract from the fact that the bird was obviously using the railway on its journeys from Caldew to Petteril and back, a distance of some 4km!

Wonders will never cease.

Mike Carrier

Sizergh Hawfinch project 2014

I am sure by now people are aware of Hawfinches on the Sizergh estate. It is a discrete woodland species whose ecology and needs are poorly understood. This very secretive of species has very little known about it in the breeding season as it nests high up and is not as easy to see in the foliage as in the winter bare branches. It also appears to have undergone a recent rapid population decline.

The Trust was approached by Natural England and Morecambe Bay NIA project about the possibility of catching Hawfinch and fitting them with radio transmitters and then tracking them around the countryside to see what they get up to and where they breed. Recent surveys suggest that its breeding population is now restricted to about six core areas including South Cumbria (Forest of Dean in Wales and Scone Palace in Scotland an example of other areas). Although some work is being carried out to better understand Hawfinch ecology in some of these core areas this is not currently the case in South Cumbria.

South Cumbria / Arnside and Silverdale AONB

In this area there is known to be a population of breeding Hawfinches with young birds seen at feeding stations frequented by adults in winter. It is assumed that the birds seen at feeding stations in winter are local although more individuals are seen during winter than during summer. At least four sites are known where Hawfinches are regular in winter:



- Witherslack
- Grange-over-Sands
- Woodwell
- Sizergh

At three of these sites birds are regular visitors during the late winter period to feeding stations; this behaviour offers the opportunity to capture birds for ringing and study.

Three of these sites are in back gardens and the fourth is Sizergh Castle. It is assumed that there is no interchange of individuals between feeding stations but there is no data to support this. Once away from the feeding stations birds are very discreet and rarely recorded.

Over the past seven years with the Trust I have become quite attached to these birds and have put lots of time into watching them and finding breeding habitat. If there's a Hawfinch around I'll see it! Understanding the needs of Hawfinches locally needs some basic understanding of their local ecology and data on how they use the local landscape. This has proved impossible to date as once away from the feeding stations the birds have been impossible to follow, however, the advent of small radio transmitters that can be attached to birds offers the opportunity to follow individual birds for a period of time.



By capturing birds at late-winter feeding sites in late-March and early-April, and then following them over the spring period it should be possible to gain a better understanding of where the birds spend their time away from feeding stations, locate roost sites and locate nesting sites.

So at the end of May the trap was set and our first bird (a male) was caught!! Get in!! Wing measurements were then taken and he was weighed, fitted with a standard BTO silver ring and a plastic red ring with white letters on and fitted with a transmitter and released. It sat in a tree for the following half hour or so before heading off. A team of dedicated individuals then tracked this bird for the next six weeks (battery life on transmitter is six weeks) and put in a good few miles around the back roads of south Cumbria! He was found 8km away from Sizergh a week later and not seen since! (This is all useful info, and not finding the birds is also as useful, unless it's inside a cat that is!). Catching male birds is ok but it's the female birds we are targeting as this would offer the opportunity to find birds on the nest. The catching technique was fairly simple, fire a net over a baited area and wait for the birds to drop onto the seed, pull a string and net fires over the target species.

During May, June and July 2013 five birds were caught (three males, two females). One of the female birds has been spending a lot of time around Sizergh estate, especially around ranger's base and Strickland Arms beer garden (a bird with clear taste!). a male bird was tracked down a week later 10km away, wow, we wouldn't of known this if it wasn't for the receiver.

If you would like more information on the project then please contact Rob the ranger, robert.pocklington@nationaltrust.org.uk to discuss. Also if anybody sees colour ringed birds then please let me know.

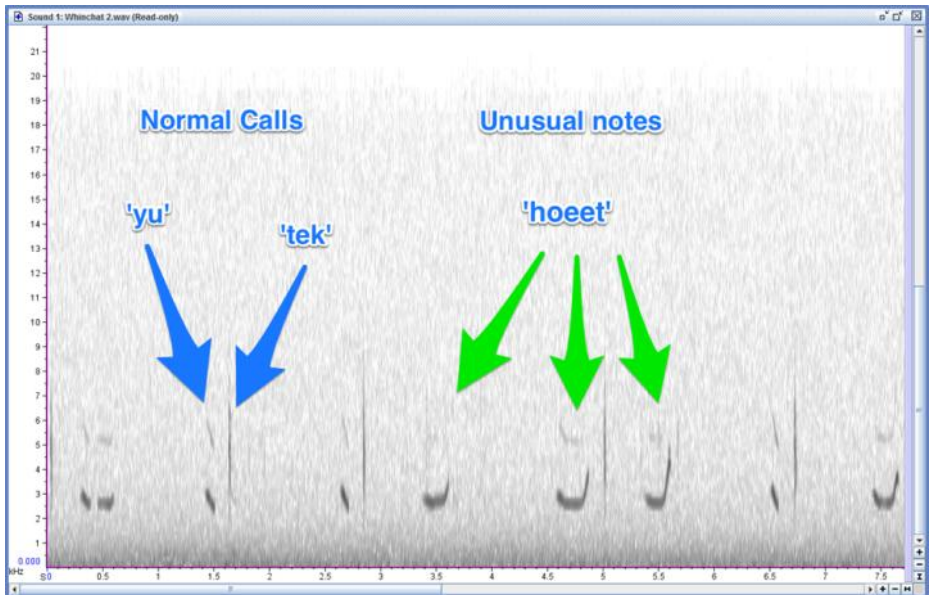
Robert Pocklington

Unusual call of Whinchat

The Geltsdale RSPB reserve is an excellent place to see Whinchats. An intensive study of this species is being carried out there which involves colour ringing the birds in order to determine their subsequent movements. It was for this reason that I was watching Whinchats in the Bruthwaite (East) part of the reserve, between the Stagsike reserve centre and the hamlet of Howgill. I was noting the colour sequence and recording the position of each one I saw.

In June the adult birds are fairly vocal, giving the typical 'yu – tek' alarm call as you pass through the breeding territories. On June 25th I heard a call which was different from the others. This male bird was perched on the top of a small alder and was interjecting the normal call with some Willow Warbler-like notes. So it sounded 'yu-tek, yu-tek, hoeet, hoeet-tek, hoeet, yu-tek' and so on.

It sounded almost as if some nearby Willow Warbler was joining in. But no, I could see the bill movements with each note. It continued in this way for some time and I made a sound recording. The sound clip can be played by clicking [Unusual Whinchat call](#) and pressing play.



The sonogram shows the form of each element.

Discussion

There is no mention of any alarm calls other than the typical one in BWP. Whinchats are of course well known for using mimicry in their song and this is extensively discussed in BWP.

I have downloaded the recording on xeno-canto and blog-posted on BirdingFrontiers to try to elicit comments. (I normally hear from one of our friends in Holland or Finland that what I've just found is commonplace in their experience!) But nobody responded.

I also contacted John Callion and others who work with Whinchats but nobody had experienced any atypical calls.

(If you are reading the paper version the sound file can be accessed at www.xeno-canto.org search 'Whinchat' and look on page 3.)

Chris Hind

Photos

I am struggling to find photos for the newsletter and have even had to resort to some of my own poor efforts. Please e-mail me your six (or more) finest photos, common species very welcome, to daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk Click now and attach them.



Spotted Flycatchers, Bassenthwaite, Tony Marsh

Recent reports

The period covered is June to August 2014. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or British Birds Rarities Committee. Species order and nomenclature follow that used in *Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria*.

Wildfowl

A summering **Whooper Swan** remained near Rockcliffe. A female **Mandarin** was on Whinfell Tarn in June while a female **Garganey** was found alongside the Kent Estuary at Ulpha Meadows on 30th June. **Common Scoters** at coastal sites included site maxima of 965 at Walney and 120 at Nethertown while inland birds consisted of a remarkable 250 at Haweswater Reservoir on 2nd August and a rather less remarkable single on Sunbiggin Tarn.

Divers to grebes

A late **Red-throated Diver** was off Walney on 9th June while returning birds were observed there from 8th July onwards. Selker produced the only **Storm Petrels** of a disappointing summer with singles on 6th and 25th June. **Manx Shearwater** totals included 589 off Walney and 500 off Selker and, more unusually, a **Sooty Shearwater** was reported off Parton on 11th August. **Gannets** included a peak day count of 135 at Walney. The sole **Shag** record involved a single at Walney in August.

A **Great White Egret** flew down the Kent Estuary past New Barns Bay on 21st July while, in August, one seen briefly at Longtown on 3rd was followed by another that visited several sites around the Kent Estuary between 22nd and 26th.



Little Egret, Milnthorpe, Darren Robson

Little Egrets peaked at 31 on the Kent Estuary, 12 on Walney Island, eight on the Inner Solway

and two on the Esk Estuary near Ravenglass. Elsewhere, in July, three flew over Ennerdale Water, a new site record, and one on the River Ellen at Maryport was considered unusual. A first-summer **Glossy Ibis** took up residence on the River Bela just south of Milnthorpe from 17th June to 3rd August, relocating briefly over the Kent Estuary to Ulpha Meadows on a couple of occasions.

Raptors to waders

Red Kites were reported to have bred for the first time as a result of the Grizedale Forest release scheme and individuals, some of them untagged, were also noted from several widely scattered locations.

Passage Marsh Harriers

were notable by their absence though there were regular sightings around the Kent estuary of birds

wandering across the county boundary from Leighton Moss. The Bassenthwaite Lake **Ospreys** lost one of their chicks to illness and a second had to be taken into care being too weak to fly but successfully reared the remaining one while the Foulshaw Moss pair fledged three young. Meanwhile, passage or wandering birds were observed at Fisher Tarn, Wetheral and Longtown.



Glossy Ibis, Milnthorpe, Darren Robson



Hobby, Tony Marsh

The first **Merlin** reappeared at Walney on 26th August. A handful of **Hobby** reports came from suitable breeding habitat but one seen at Ralfland Forest near Shap on 19th June was considered a passage bird.

Quail were heard to 'wet their lips' alongside the Irt Estuary, near Abbeytown, between Maryport and Dearham, near Longtown, Cliburn and Renwick and from a wheat field at Blackdyke near Silloth.

Up to 13 **Avocets** frequented the Kent Estuary at Arnside Marsh on occasions in June and July, the largest flock ever seen in Cumbria. **Little Ringed Plovers** included six on the Kent Estuary at Arnside and a juvenile at Walney in July and August. Passage **Whimbrel** peaked at 27 at Walney and 12 at Port Carlisle while **Black-tailed Godwit** numbers were mostly unimpressive but did include 94 near Arnside and 21 at Walney in July followed by 30 on the River Esk at Longtown, 13 near Arnside, 11 at Walney and 10 at Port Carlisle in August.

Recent reports

Ruff were decidedly scarce with no more than three at any one site.

The first of the autumn's juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** appeared from 22nd August but were limited to two at Bowness Railings/Port Carlisle while a juvenile **Little Stint** on the



Greenshank, Port Carlisle, Darren Robson

Kent Estuary at Arnside on 27th August was the only one in the period. A **Wood Sandpiper** at Walney on 28th June was followed by another at Ulpha Meadows on 28th July. Six **Green Sandpipers** together in the Rusland Valley in August was by far the highest count in the period.

Greenshank were, as usual, largely restricted to Walney where monthly maxima comprised one in June, 21 in July and 30 in August. Elsewhere, the highest counts were of five birds at Rockcliffe and four on the Esk Estuary south of Ravensglass.



Spotted Redshank, Port Carlisle, Darren Robson

The only **Spotted Redshank**, an adult, appeared at Port Carlisle from 20th July onwards.

Skuas to gulls

In August, single **Pomarine Skuas** were seen off Nethertown on 11th and 25th and Silecroft on 26th. A scattering of **Arctic Skuas** included three off Walney in June and singles at Walney, Nethertown and Bowness-on-Solway in July followed by two off Nethertown and singles off Workington and Walney in August. **Great Skuas** consisted of a single at Bowness-on-Solway in July and two at the same site and one at Walney in August. More unusually, an immature **Long-tailed Skua** was noted at Bowness-on-Solway on 11th August.

Away from St Bees, five **Puffins** were noted off Walney in June, including four on 20th, while **Black Guillemots** were limited to a single at Selker on 25th June. **Guillemots** peaked at 45 at Walney in June. A **Sandwich Tern** at Whinfell Tarn on 12th August was an unusual inland record; less unexpected was an **Arctic Tern** at Talkin Tarn on 29th August.

Mediterranean Gull sightings increased noticeably in July especially on the Outer Solway where nine birds were seen at Siddick shore. at least five adults at Workington included 'Stumpy' returning for the sixth successive year and a further three were off Crosscanonby while an adult was also seen on the Kent Estuary. August produced at least eight, including 'Stumpy', in the Workington/Siddick Pond area, two, an adult and a juvenile, at Walney, and a single adult at Silloth. The River Esk at Longtown still hosted up to seven first-summer **Little Gulls** early in June while records elsewhere were limited to a first-summer on the Esk Estuary south of Ravenglass on 23rd July. An adult



Iceland Gull, Mockerkin Tarn, Derek McAlone

Yellow-legged Gull was on the Duddon estuary at Haverigg on 5th August while, much more unexpectedly, an unaged **Iceland Gull** at Parton on 28th July was presumably the same bird as the highly unseasonable adult at Mockerkin Tarn on 22nd August.

Corvids to warblers

The only **Hooded Crow** was the long-staying bird in the Eskmeals area. A female **Black Redstart** from 25th to 27th was the pick of the passerines in June at Walney which also included a **Treecreeper** and the first southbound **Blackcap**, **Willow Warbler** and **Chiffchaff**. Although good numbers of **Sedge Warblers** were logged, obvious evidence of southbound movement at



Sedge Warbler, Siddick, Steve Dutton

Walney in July was otherwise limited to a **Cuckoo** and a single **Chiffchaff** amongst a light **Willow Warbler** passage and a few **Wheatears** while passerine activity in August remained generally light with what was perhaps the worst **Willow Warbler** passage ever witnessed.

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

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

Ian Kinley



Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

**Butterfly
Conservation**

**From £1.25 a
month**

HALF PRICE MEMBERSHIP OFFER

Join Butterfly Conservation today and get one year for half price

Butterflies and moths are among the most threatened groups of wildlife in the UK.

Without your support we cannot continue our vital work to protect them

By becoming a member you will:

- ✦ Save endangered species of butterflies and moths from extinction
- ✦ Help restore natural habitats and create safe-havens for butterflies and moths
- ✦ Enjoy access to our butterfly nature reserves across the UK
- ✦ Get involved in the world's largest butterfly & moth recording and monitoring programmes
- ✦ Be part of an organisation that really makes a difference
- ✦ Help create a world rich in butterflies and moths for future generations to enjoy

You'll receive:

- ✓ A welcome pack with membership card, set of collectable postcards and useful information
- ✓ *Butterfly* magazine three times a year, packed with fascinating features and stunning photos
- ✓ Essential advice on gardening for butterflies and moths
- ✓ Regular e-newsletters with the latest news, info and offers
- ✓ Membership of your local branch, with regular newsletters
- ✓ Invitations to local guided walks, talks, conservation action days and social events



Elephant Hawk-moth – Robert Thompson

To take advantage of this offer visit www.butterfly-conservation.org/join and enter the code BIRD50 or complete the form overleaf and return to us at:

Butterfly Conservation, FREEPOST NATW242, Wareham, BH20 5BR.

Membership categories and subscription rates:

Category	Standard Annual Subscription	Half Price Annual Subscription	Half Price Monthly Subscription
Single	£30	£15	£1.25
Joint	£34	£17	£1.41
Family	£40	£20	£1.66
Young Person/Student	£22	£11	£0.91

For more information or how you can support us at a higher level call 01929 400015 or visit www.butterfly-conservation.org

This offer is available until 31 October 2014 for new members, only when signing up by Direct Debit.

Please allow up to 21 days to receive your new member pack.

giftaid it

Gift Aid increases the value of your subscription and donations.

We can reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 you give, at no extra cost to you.

To qualify for Gift Aid you must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April one year to 5 April the next) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that Butterfly Conservation will reclaim on your gifts for that tax year.

If you are a UK taxpayer please tick the relevant Gift Aid declaration box overleaf.

Please notify us if you wish to cancel your declaration; change your name or home address; no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/capital gains.

Contents

Club news and announcements	59
The 2013/14 wintering sawbill survey: a preliminary report	
<i>Malcolm Priestley</i>	60
CBC winter talks programme	63
Migration through the garden of 43 Sandgate, Kendal	
<i>Tom Wheeler</i> ...	64
Blackcaps in the garden of 43 Sandgate, Kendal in 2013	
<i>Tom Wheeler</i>	66
Some observations on the vole plague of 2014 <i>Peter Howard</i>	68
A railway Kingfisher <i>Mike Carrier</i>	73
Sizergh Hawfinch project 2014 <i>Robert Pocklington</i>	74
Unusual call of Whinchat <i>Chris Hind</i>	76
Recent reports <i>Ian Kinley</i>	78

Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is December 1st 2014

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

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

If you do not have a computer: please send in as clear a format as possible to Dave Piercy, Derwentwater Independent Hostel, Borrowdale, Keswick CA12 5UR; tel 017687 77246

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

© Cumbria Bird Club, September 2014

'Cumbria Bird Club' is a Registered Charity, number 1001459

Cumbria Bird Club Website

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

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