

BIRD NEWS
Vol. 26 No. 3 Autumn 2015

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Robert Ian Kinley, 1954 – 2015



Robert Ian Kinley, known to many as “Sam”, died peacefully at home on 28th June 2015 following short illness and with his death, the Cumbria birding scene lost one of its shining lights.

Sam was born on 8th June 1954 and lived all his life at the family home on Underley Hill, Kendal attending St Thomas’s primary school and then Kendal Grammar School. I first met him in primary school in about 1960 by which time he had already picked up the nickname of “Sam” and even then nobody knew its origin but the name stuck and stayed with him throughout the rest of his life. Early childhood memories revolve mainly around playing football together on Kendal Green where he belied his small stature with a robust and uncompromising style of play which today’s commentators might describe as “combative”.

As we both lived on the northern edge of Kendal within a stone’s throw of wonderful countryside, bird nesting was also included in our syllabus and Ratherheath, a 15 minute cycle ride away, became our stamping ground. At the end of spring 1968, with the long summer holidays ahead of us and the bird nesting season coming to an end, we decided to continue to watch the birds whose nests we had found in the spring and, with our parents’ binoculars to hand, our fledgling birding careers began. In one of our early trips, I can clearly remember we flushed a wader from the edge of the tarn which flew off calling, giving a brief but clear view of an unmarked white rump and very dark wings. With all the confidence of youth, “Sandpiper” was our

instant identification (to be fair, we thought there was only one species of sandpiper at that time). We did redeem ourselves however when we got home and consulted the font of all birding knowledge at the time – “The Observers Book of Birds” and correctly identified it as a Green Sandpiper. Shortly after this episode, we flushed a Nightjar and that was it, we were hooked and a life-time of birding together was underway.

From then on progress was rapid and our cycle rides took us to the head of the Kentmere and Longsleddale valleys where we immersed ourselves in the world of Peregrines, Ravens and Ring Ouzels. Bus journeys opened up the delights of the Kent Estuary and Leighton Moss and I can clearly remember us wading bare foot, with trouser rolled up to the knee, through the icy cold water of the flooded causeway to reach the public hide at the Moss just to tick Goldeneye!

It would be around this time that health problems began to crop up for Sam and he developed arthritic problems in his knees and he missed a year of school whilst in and out of orthopaedic hospitals trying to resolve the problem. Unfortunately, the problem was not resolved and became progressively worse throughout the rest of his life, a burden which he famously bore with incredible stoicism despite the fact that his mobility became increasingly restricted as the years progressed. At first however, the restriction was minor because he was able to take part in several birding holidays which required Falklands-style yomps across rough country most notably on the Hebridean island of Rhum where he was still able to climb up to the top of the mountain screes to spend a night in the midst of the Manx Shearwater colony.

Despite missing a year of schooling, Sam achieved stellar A-level grades and on leaving school, he joined Provincial Insurance in Kendal but his career there was brief and was cut-short when he had to take premature retirement due to his increasing health issues. Provincial's loss was very much ornithology's gain and when not out in the field he threw himself wholeheartedly into the administrative side of birding. John Callion has paid tribute to this aspect of his birding career describing in full his immense contribution to the Cumbria Bird Club, the BTO and the various Atlas projects carried out during his lifetime so I will restrict my comments on this aspect of his career to stating that his hard work, wise counsel and commonsense approach are one of the bedrocks on which the our Bird Club is built.

During the seventies, Sam temporarily embraced twitching and I seem to recall he became a founder member of something called “The Kendal Tick Team” along with Gary Agar, Terry and Pete Robinson and Guy and Roy Bottomley. The Scillies became a regular destination as well as frequent long-distance overnight car journeys to all corners of the country. It would also be around this time that Sam, Gary, Roy and Steve Dodgson entered the Country Life National

County Bird Race and, thanks to meticulous preparation, the boys went on to win the competition for Cumbria and were presented with the trophy and the grand prizes of T Shirts and Golf umbrellas at Rutland Water by Bill Oddie no less! Their winning total was 138 species seen in 24 hours in Cumbria – can it be beaten today? There's a challenge for somebody!

With the new County of Cumbria still in its infancy, twitching evolved into County listing and Sam's birding found a new focus with his Cumbria list becoming all important. Sam was very successful at this and he is still ranked second in the pantheon of Cumbrian county listers despite the fact that Kendal is not strategically located for rare birds and his lack of mobility frequently made it very difficult for him to get to "the bird". Somehow however, he usually managed to get the job done and see that rare bird and I can vividly remember Alan Cremin, Ronnie Irving, Gary Agar and myself carrying him across a saltmarsh at Drigg to help him get a long-range view of the only twitchable Stone Curlew in Cumbria in our lifetime. Since that day I always wince when I hear the old Hollies number "He Ain't Heavy"! On another occasion, in the absence of willing "porters", sheer determination saw him dragging himself along Grune Point in the last light of the day to bag a Terek Sandpiper almost in the dark, another species never to be seen in Cumbria again but it made it onto Sam's list.

Yet another improvised method of transport, kindly arranged by Alan Cremin, saw him perched on the back of a local farmer's quad bike, displacing the usually obligatory sheepdog, to get him out into the depths of Rockcliffe Marsh to see a Buff-breasted Sandpiper whilst everybody else trudged out on foot. I think Alan's painful memory of that Stone Curlew twitch prompted some out of the box thinking to come up with this unique and imaginative mode of transport! With this background, it was therefore very appropriate that the expertise and experience in bird identification developed initially in this period, combined with administrative diligence and excellence, were later put to good use when Sam served for many years on the CBC Records Panel as secretary.

Having travelled widely up and down the length of the country both on twitches and holidays, Sam then turned his attention on Europe and a road trip to the Camargue in a hired Volkswagen Caravanette in 1977 was the first of many trips to the Continent. All of these trips were as independent travellers, never using birding tour companies or guides and in the early days especially, there was a significant element of adventure about them. The Bosphorus, the Coto Donana and the Pyrenees were all visited in the pioneering days of bird trips and, with little advance information available in those days, it was very much a case of find your own birds. Some of these

trips made significant contributions to the knowledge-base of the countries visited such as when a Western Reef Heron, found in the Coto in the early eighties, proved to be one of the first records for Spain and also the discovery for the first time of breeding Audouin's Gulls in Portugal. On virtually all of these trips, Sam went on to write a detailed trip report designed to help other birders and posted them on the "Birdtours" internet site. It was very nice on several subsequent occasions then to meet fellow birders who were basing their holiday on Sam's detailed trip reports and it seems that his reports have been extensively used and benefitted many others.

As the years rolled by, Sam's health problems multiplied and he had two knee replacement operations which made little or no difference to his mobility and developed several other acute conditions which impacted on his life including the loss of sight in one eye. Thankfully his good eye allowed him to continue birding though his ability to pick out flying birds was quite limited. You would never know when he wasn't feeling too well because he never ever complained but those of us who birded with him regularly came to know that extended periods of silence were not a good sign and they became more and more frequent in recent years. It became increasingly apparent that he was gradually retreating from many of the things he had always enjoyed – he stopped going to watch cricket at Netherfield Cricket Club, stayed by the car when Ronnie Irving and I walked to the hide at Hodbarrow, stayed in the shelter at Bowness-on-Solway when better views of passing skuas were to be had at the bottom of the steps. In the end the problems became just too much and within three weeks of being diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer, he died peacefully without pain on June 28th in the home where he had lived all his life.

I have already described our first find, that Green Sandpiper way back in 1968. Sam's final find was an Iceland Gull at Silecroft on April 9th 2015. Typically Sam had stayed by the car scanning out to sea while I had wandered off to check the scrub in vain for newly arrived migrants. This time the Observers Book of Birds was not called on, Sam had the identification all sorted before I got back to him. This is how I will always remember him, in his characteristic pose, leaning on the end of the car, bins or scope raised, doing the thing he loved above all else. He was much more than a great birder, more than a dedicated administrator and organiser, more than an assiduous writer of trip reports, he was above all a loyal and valued mate and he will be greatly missed by all those lucky enough to have known him well.

Dave Thexton

Derek McAlone tribute:

There are many people who have known Sam longer than me but I would like to mark his passing with a few memories of my own. Though I've been a birder all my life, it wasn't until the Bird Club was formed in the late 1980s that I became aware of other birders in the county. It was over the next few years that I came to know Sam in his various official Bird Club capacities. He would have been most amused to know that, at that time, I was perhaps a little in awe of this serious, quiet pillar of Cumbrian birding.

In the late 1990s a few of us, including Sam, started birding Europe and it was over the next fifteen years of travel that I came to know Sam as a friend. In the early days we roughed it a little, living out of a car-boot and sometimes not knowing where our next bed would be. In those circumstances there was no hiding place and you came to know your fellow travellers very, very well!

Though he was a man of few words it was always a pleasure to spend a few weeks birding with Sam when, from the back of the car, a wry, apposite comment or even a burst of song would occasionally be heard. His taciturn nature belied an enthusiasm that, despite a catalogue of infirmities, once saw him tackle a steep, rutted track through a Greek forest that I'd taken one look at and elected to 'stay and guard the car'. In later years Sam's sight deteriorated but this only brought into sharper focus his hearing and expertise in song identification. On many occasions, he would hear some distant, barely audible call and deliver a laconic "Spotshank" long before the bird came into view.

So the next time I hear a Nightingale deep in some Bulgarian thicket or see squadrons of Pelicans over Kosmos marsh I'll raise a glass to Sam...I'll miss you mate, you 'got away...aye'.

Derek McAlone

Ronnie Irving tribute:

Ian and I went back a long way and when I came to calculate just how long it really was I was surprised, almost thirty years. In all that time I don't think that we ever had a cross word, he was always there with a friendly word, willing to advise when advice was needed and he also knew when to keep his own counsel, a wise man indeed.

From the outset we got on well together, although he did have some strange habits - I had been informed that he was a 'twitcher' and naively I thought it was a medical condition, like some sort of nervous tic. Anyway it was alien to me, but I must admit it was an enjoyable experience into which I joined with great enthusiasm. Henceforth we had many twitches together for some really great birds. I remember Ian twitching Osprey for Cumbria at Seathwaite near

Keswick in 1991. The directions were 'at a fish farm' and we hunted high and low for one, scoured the latest OS map of the area but could we find a fish farm? No. It took us many hours before the penny finally dropped just like an osprey, the so called fish farm consisted of four or five water tanks each one about fifteen feet square and these had some species of trout in them, oh....how we laughed, well we did eventually!

We also went further afield, American Bittern at Marton Mere, Alpine Swift at Balgray Reservoir near Glasgow, breeding Black-winged Stilts at Frodsham, Great Spotted Cuckoo at the well named Long Drag, Greatham Creek and a White-tailed Eagle at Burton Constable in Yorkshire, to name but a few. Ian was very proud of his Cumbrian List indeed he was the leading Cumbrian lister for many years before his infirmities curtailed his 'twitching' and he then threw himself into the recording aspect of county birding, he was an active member and secretary of the bird club Records Panel from 1990 until he fell ill this year.

For many years we had birded together at least once a week but due to ill health Ian had to give up driving, so over the past six years, once I had fully retired, this increased to three to four times a week interrupted only by sickness and separate holidays. I enjoyed his company on our thrice weekly visits around our local patch on the Kent Estuary with occasional forays to the Solway or the West Coast and the annual (almost) CBC Bird Race.

In our early days abroad, usually with four of us in the party, we developed a taste for coffee. The first Spanish phrase I learned was "*Cuatro cafe con leche, por favor*". Inevitably when this arrived it was always accompanied with the obligatory sachets of sugar. The ever resourceful Ian noticed that we didn't use up all the sugar so he would pocket the leftovers for later use, in his words "It'll come in handy back at the gaff!" This became a running joke because from then, on every holiday and at every cafe stop, as we stood up to leave we would shower him with our unused sugar sachets despite his protestations, but it was always done in good humour on both sides, 'Well Ian could I please have my sugar back because this is a bitter pill to swallow, I miss your company'.

Ronnie Irving

John Callion Tribute:

I met Ian for the first time, in the mid 1970's, when Dave Thexton, who was working for K Shoes at Lillyhall near Workington, brought him to Workington to do some birdwatching around Siddick Pond, with Norman White and myself. I remember that Norman and I were able to show him a roosting Long-eared Owl at the Pond, and an adult Glaucous Gull in Workington Harbour, both, I think, new birds for him at the time.

About this time, the 'new' county of Cumbria had recently been established, and we debated then, the possibility of a Cumbria Bird Club that would embrace the new county and negate the parochialism that existed then in some areas. We would need to wait another ten years before that was realized, though I believe our meeting was at least partially instrumental. Among the burning issues for all, but especially the birding 'hot bed' of Kendal, was that those people who submitted the records, had no influence on how they were presented or whether or not they were viable!

In fact the Cumbria Bird Club was conceived at Fred Gould's January Slide Show and Quiz in the now defunct Cock and Dolphin in Kendal where birders from Carlisle, Barrow, the west coast and all compass points in-between met.

In the early 1980's Ian became BTO Rep for Westmorland, and I for Cumberland. On a number of occasions, I picked him up in Kendal, and we travelled together to Swanwick for the annual BTO Conference; needless to say, we were scheming how we might make Cumbria more ornithologically organized, and finally decided to push through our vision for the future. This was made easier when, for the BTO National Breeding Atlas of 1988-91, Cumbria was the only county to achieve 100% coverage, when all c1800 tetrads received coverage, and was used as an example in the Atlas.

In the middle of this, we had realized our objective, when an open meeting at the Agricultural Arms in Penrith attracted well over a hundred people in support of a fully democratic Cumbria Bird Club.

Soon after, we started our fieldwork surveys, with the ultimate aim of organizing our own Breeding Atlas. Ian, with his organizational skills and measured thinking became a key part in this, and also one of the Editors, in fact, he has had a continuous role since our Club was founded in 1989, either on Council where he served for two spells, as Secretary of the Rarities Panel, writing his review of the year in the Annual Report, or Recent Reports in the Club Newsletter.

For certain the Cumbria Bird Club would not have been as successful without Ian Kinley, he didn't make a lot of noise, but, when he spoke, people listened! His leaving us, will leave a big space in our organization, and those of us who knew him from the beginning were the lucky ones. There are many in Cumbria who in recent times have made a significant contribution to our counties ornithology, though non have contributed more, or did it better.

John Callion

Club news and announcements

The AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 2nd October 2015 at 7.30pm. The business of the AGM is intended to be as brief as possible and will be followed by a talk by Lee Schofield on 'Farming for Wildlife at Haweswater'.

Vacancies on Council: Secretary, Treasurer, up to three vice-chairs 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.

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. Nominations should be submitted to the secretary not later than seven days before the AGM (i.e. by 25th September).

Talks, events and outings

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

Friday 2nd Oct (AGM): Penrith UR Church 7.30pm

'Farming for wildlife at RSPB Haweswater' - *Lee Schofield*

Fri 6th Nov: Marchesi Centre, Windermere 7.30pm

Joint with RSPB S. Lakeland group

'The Birds of the Gambia'

Dennis Atherton

Wednesday 6th Jan 2016:

Tullie House 7.15pm

Joint with Carlisle NHS

'Ethiopia - Disappearing Paradise'

Angus Hogg

Monday 25th Jan 2016:

Friend's Meeting House Stramongate 7.30pm

Joint with Kendal NHS,

'Hen Harriers'

James Bray of the RSPB



Red throated Bee-eater , Dennis Atherton

Club news and announcements

Bird race Sunday 10th January 2016

Object of the race.

To gain the greatest number of species of wild birds within the borders of Cumbria county between early morning and 5pm.

Rules

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 that's ok too.
2. Start time can be whenever your team is fully assembled on the day - finish time is 5pm at a venue in the south of the county to be arranged. Pie, Chips & Peas (Veggie option available) will be available at the finish. Please let the organiser know the requirements for your team (cost to be confirmed).
3. For late arrivals at the finish a penalty of one species per 5 minutes.
4. Only true wild birds count (no budgies or dodgy wildfowl).
This race is now a well established annual Bird Club event. We still need more teams; you don't need to be front runner to compete. The race is just for fun after all, and it gets you to areas you would normally not visit.
If you fancy having a go just give Phil Evans a ring on tel 07837 769359 or email philevans64rbp@gmail.com

I will send your team a species list.

Please can I have numbers for the food asap.

COME ON ALL YOU MEMBERS HAVE A GO you will enjoy it!!

Subscriptions

The Cumbria Bird Club 2015/2016 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!

Back copies of Bird Study; Ringing and Migration ; British Birds and Birding world magazines. Many go as far back as late 80s - anyone interested ?

Contact Pete Davies peted.caldbeck@googlemail.com tel 01697 371249
07780 728203

Our *Not-So-Common* Swifts



Young Swift of 31 days, Lowgill

On moving to our old railway cottage at Lowgill in the Lune Valley, we were overjoyed to find that it was home to a colony of Swifts. A few years ago we had to re-roof. Having watched the Swifts disappearing under our eaves for many years, we were determined not to jeopardise the colony. We seized the opportunity to install cameras in some of the nest sites, and these have provided a fascinating insight into the lives of these mysterious birds. We also created many more nest spaces and holes, without any detriment to the insulation or the structure of the building.

This year our colony had 15 nests, and two of the pairs on camera successfully raised three chicks (the norm is two to three eggs). The chicks spend about 40 days in the nest, but once they make that momentous maiden flight, they do not return to it, are completely independent of their parents, and shortly afterwards undertake their first long migration to Africa. After the chicks have fledged the parents return to the nest at night for variable lengths of time. This may only be for one or two nights, but this year one of our pairs roosted for 14 nights.

One of the most extraordinary facts about Swifts is that they only land during the three months in which they are nesting, and that after fledging the young birds will remain entirely airborne for two to four years until they themselves breed. This continual flight has recently been demonstrated in the Alpine Swift, which is large enough to carry a special type of geolocator which incorporates an accelerometer.

This year our Longbill Swifts departed on August 6th, a remarkably similar date most years, although we had three pairs with chicks after this - possibly due to the late return of some Swifts because of the cold May and early June. One has to wonder at the fate of chicks that fledge into the skies when all the other Swifts have gone.

One of the most interesting behaviours that our cameras have revealed are the press-ups that young Swifts perform in the nests to strengthen their wings. The press-ups are extremely energetic and it is amazing that they must be able to do this in often very cramped nest spaces. It is also fascinating to watch an adult come in with a bulging pouch of insects (up to 1,500 a time have been recorded) and disgorge it into the tiny chicks in almost total darkness (cameras are infra-red).

The most dramatic event we have witnessed was a 9-hour episode of fighting on 4th June 2011 when an intruder entered a nest where a pair had laid two eggs. Swift

fighting is vicious, and potentially even fatal if the magnificent long wings of a Swift are damaged. In the end the intruder ejected the eggs. A new clutch was then laid with the result that the chicks did not fledge until 16th August. Fighting episodes can be one reason for late broods of Swifts.



Nest camera - young Swift doing pressups to strengthen wings before fledging

Our Not-So-Common Swifts



*Two chicks peering out of a hollow Schwegler nest brick.
They do this for the final week or so before fledging.*

Where young Swifts go to when they come back from Africa is a mystery. Ringing studies from the tower of the Oxford Natural History Museum, where much of the pioneering research on Swifts was done, show that virtually none return to their nest colony. Do Cumbrian Swifts return to Cumbria, or do they end up breeding in other parts of the UK, or even further afield? We simply do not know.

It would also be interesting to have more detail about Swift foraging behaviour. Although Swifts can fly several hundred miles a day, and over 2,000m high, in search of insects or to escape bad weather, it would make more sense for them to forage closer.

Watching Swifts closely throws up many questions about their lives, and we became involved with the international Common Swift group and helped set up the national Swift local network in the UK. At the Berlin conference in 2012 the first geolocator studies of migration patterns of Swedish Swifts reported where they spend the winter, and for the first time showed what routes they follow. Until then our knowledge was based only on about 30 recoveries of

ringed Swifts south of the Sahara. European Swifts spend from mid-August to December in the Congo, and some then move further east and south towards Malawi and south-east Africa. In mid-April they fly across the Gulf of Guinea to Liberia where they linger for about ten days, coinciding with the emergence of termites. The final migration to Europe is fast, one tagged bird from Cambridge taking only six days to cover the journey of well over 5,000km.

Since then, geolocators on a pair of Swifts from Belgium found they do not migrate together, spending the winter separately, yet amazingly both returning to the same nest hole year after year to breed.

Swifts are too small to carry the satellite tags that record in real time, like those carried by Cuckoos and Ospreys. Geolocators have to be removed from the adult Swifts the following year, so this system only works for birds that are faithful to their nest site. Researchers have recently deployed geolocators on Swifts at the eastern and western extremities of their summer range - Beijing and Ireland – and it will be interesting to compare the findings. The BTO has approached us to tag our Swifts, and we may do this next year.

UK Swifts are almost entirely building-reliant for breeding places, apart from a few using pines in Abernethy Forest or cliffs in County Fermanagh and Malham Cove in Yorkshire (in Lapland where buildings are scarce, trees remain the norm). Therein lies the problem - the major reason for the serious decline (over 40% in the last 20 years) is believed to be the blocking up of nest entrance holes in the eaves and crevices of old buildings when they are repaired and renovated. Once they have bred, Swifts are faithful to the nest site, but are not adaptable to change, and if their entrance hole is blocked they can be seen repeatedly trying to get in, before giving up. Modern building practices, with smooth walls, PVC fascias and soffits have had a devastating effect on Swifts, offering no opportunities for them to nest. Ironically, hermetically sealed eco-houses are the worst.

To promote an interest in Swifts locally and to raise awareness about the threats they face, we set up a group called Sedbergh Community Swifts (SCS), supported by the YDNP Sustainable Development Fund. Our aim is to map the nesting places in the area, promote the putting up of Swift boxes and nest bricks, and encourage people not to block up nest holes when renovating.

There are plenty of Swift nest box designs available to suit both old and modern buildings. Even better is to incorporate special hollow Swift 'nest bricks' into the tops of walls - most straightforward in renovations and new-

Our Not-So-Common Swifts

builds, but it's also possible to retro-fit them into existing buildings. In addition, the playing of Swift attraction calls from 'tweeters' (MP3 files are available) is thought to be the closest thing we have to a silver bullet for establishing new colonies. Masses of information can be found from Swift Conservation Swift-conservation.org and Action for Swifts actionforSwifts.blogspot.co.uk.



Two adult Swifts on a nest in the eaves

This year SCS organised the incorporation of Swift bricks and a Swift call system into the new extension to Sedbergh People's Hall. We also hope to tempt Swifts to nest in the church tower by installing boxes behind the louvres.

Only by the creation of places for Swifts in our houses, offices, churches and other public buildings will we be able to offer these remarkable birds a future. In eastern USA, purple martins have become entirely dependent on nest boxes for breeding and thousands of people put up boxes for them. We should be doing the same for our Swifts.

The decline of Swifts is a wholly avoidable tragedy. If we are not to lose our Swifts forever we have to make a concerted effort to get developers, architects and planners to make housing and industrial developments Swift-friendly. The YDNPA has included such measures in their recent Local Plan, and Exeter Council has become a model for the future in adopting policies to help Swifts.

What can you do? We would urge everyone to look out for our Swifts, record where they nest, look for building opportunities, encourage other interested birders and even set up local groups – there are lots of enthusiasts around the country. Please get in touch with us for any further information, help or advice: ta.hoare@btinternet.com.

Tanya & Edmund Hoare

Fulmar taking a stroll in Parton

Last Saturday I was surprised to see a young Fulmar taking a stroll in Parton. Well, hardly a stroll as its legs are not really built for walking. However, it must have travelled some 200 meters from where I presume it took a short flight from its rock shelf in the cliffs and crash landed on the Wagon Road.



Fulmar in towel, Parton, Jim Hewitson

Knowing of Fulmars' defence tactics I made sure I stayed behind it while with the aid of a large landing net and a towel I got hold of it. This is the second Fulmar I have rescued from the Parton colony. The first, a couple of years ago, was an adult that had got itself grounded and entangled in brambles. Keeping behind this one too, I avoided any chance of being sprayed with foul-smelling oil, picked it up and placed it on the railway wall. It was clearly exhausted but from that height of about 10 metres it was able to get lift and it flew off.



Fulmar on garden wall, Parton, Jim Hewitson

Back to the chick. I put it on top of my garden wall – again several metres high – it launched itself off but didn't fly. Unsure of what to do next – being a Saturday the RSPB help line was closed – I phoned David Piercy. It did occur to me that someone in the club might want to come and ring it. It must be quite a rare opportunity.

RSPB advice for chicks out of the nest is to put them somewhere safe and leave them alone. Well anyway, David's suggestion, something that hadn't occurred to me, was to put it in the sea.

After a little struggle, wings outstretched, to get through a few small breakers, it folded its wings and paddled off with legs and webbed feet more suitable for that than walking. I didn't see it again.

Jim Hewitson , 15 September 2015

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* breeding in Cumbria



Bee-eater, Low Gelt, Nick Franklin

In Summer 2015 Bee-eaters successfully bred at Low Gelt sand quarry near Brampton. This is only the fourth successful nesting attempt in Britain, and is also the most northerly.

History

There have been six documented breeding attempts by Bee-eaters in Britain, the first being at Musselburgh, Lothian in 1920. The three previous successful attempts were in East Sussex in 1955 (in a sand quarry), County Durham in 2002 (in a limestone quarry) and on the Isle of Wight in 2014 (in a sandy scarp on pasture land). In Cumbria, there had been just 13 Bee-eater records up to 2013 ('Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria 2013'). The largest group was four in the Rusland Valley for three days in 2002.

Arrival

2015 witnessed a major influx of Bee-eaters into Britain. These 'spring overshoots' were logged across the length and breadth of the country, with the first bird noted on 11 April in Cleveland and late birds still in Shetland, Suffolk and Dorset at the end of August (per *Birdguides*). Groups of up to 12 birds were noted not just in the south of the country, but also from as far afield as Northumberland, Caithness, the Northern and Western Isles, Northern Ireland, Ayrshire, North Wales, Lancashire and the Midlands. In view of this, it is perhaps surprising that the only other breeding behaviour we are aware of was at Minsmere in Suffolk, where courtship feeding and copulation was observed.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* breeding in Cumbria



Pair of Bee-eaters, Low Gelt, Nick Franklin

On 12 June quarrymen working for Hansons at Low Gelt sand quarry, Brampton noticed up to six Bee-eaters on site. These birds were later found to comprise two pairs plus two associated young 'helper' males. The RSPB were informed, and a round-the clock watch was set up to safeguard the birds and their eggs from human disturbance and the threat of predation (especially foxes *Canis*

vulpes). Two full-time wardens and a dedicated team of local volunteers monitored the site for as long as the birds were present.

Breeding

Two pairs of Bee-eaters excavated nest holes in the quarry sand face, some 250m apart. The two helper males were observed to courtship feed both females, and the females also visited each other's nest holes (suggestive of the group being a 'clan'). Unfortunately the nest in the lower quarry failed at the incubation stage. At the top nest, the first indication of hatching was on 31 July, when a Painted lady *Vanessa cardui* was taken into the nest hole. On 4 September a single male chick successfully fledged, and was observed in the company of its parents for a further five days. The final sighting of Bee-eaters in the vicinity was on 9 September.

Weather

According to C.H.Fry (The Bee-eaters, Poyser, London, 1984), northern breeding limits closely coincide with the 21 degree Centigrade July isotherm. In July 2015 the average daily temperature for Brampton was 12.6 degrees Centigrade. In addition, the local area experienced 290% of the average July rainfall.



Juvenile Bee-eater, Low Gelt, Adam Moan



Bee-eater approaching nest with prey, Low Gelt, Ruth Rowlands

Food

Of observable prey items, *Hymenoptera* (especially *Bombus* sp.) appeared to form a substantial part of the Bee-eater's diet. Three honey bee hives were kindly donated as a supplementary food source by local bee-keepers. *Odonata* and *Lepidoptera* were also observed to be regular food items, especially when feeding the young. Pellet samples were collected and are awaiting analysis.

Public viewing

In cooperation with the land owner and Hansons, the site was opened up to the public for managed viewing of the birds as soon as hatching had occurred. During a period of five weeks at least 5,200 people came to witness and enjoy the Cumbrian Bee-eaters.

Peter Howard

Recent reports

The period covered is June 2015 to August 2015. 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 single adult **Whooper Swan** on the River Eden at Burgh Marsh Point on 29th July was probably a bird that has summered in previous years. Five **Pink-footed Geese** on Foulshaw Moss on 30th August may well have been very early autumn arrivals. Two **Egyptian Goose** were at Dallam Tower on 27th July with a flock of Greylag. An early **Pintail** was logged on Walney on 27th June. A female **Garganey** was on Walney on 3rd July and 14th August, also in August three were on Siddick Ponds on 20th, singles were at Ulpha Meadows on 19th, 21st, 24th & 27th and at Hodbarrow on 25th.

A flock of 300 **Common Scoter** were in the Solway Estuary off Biglands, Bowness on 2nd June but nearly all flew back west as the tide ebbed. Numbers off Walney peaked at 1400 on 12th July. There were also 16 at Bowness on 17th August and most surprisingly 60 were observed from “the Bee-eater site“ at Low Gelt, Brampton moving west also in August. Other inland sightings came from Haweswater where there were eight on 21st July and 62 on 1st August and Derwent Water with 33 on 1st August and 25 on 6th August. Thirteen were in the Ulverston channel on 24th August. The first two **Shoveler** returned to Walney on 12th August. A raft of 4800 **Eider** were in the mouth of the bay at low tide on Walney on 2nd August.

Divers to grebes

The little sea watching that was reported produced two **Fulmar** at Workington on 2nd June, and two at Bowness-on-Solway on 18th July. Two **Red-throated Divers** were off Selker on 9th June. 131 **Manx Shearwaters** went south past Workington on 2nd June and at least a 100 were seen heading north in two hours off Selker on 14th July.. Numbers off Walney peaked at 1350 on 27th June. A **Cory's Shearwater** showed well moving south past Walney on 29th August. Only two **Storm Petrels** were recorded – moving south off Parton on 6th August. A **Shag** was seen from Selker on 18th August.

In July notable numbers of **Little Egret** were 14 feeding together in the River Kent at Arnside, at least 15 on Walney on 14th August and an exceptional (for North Cumbria) 19 at Port Carlisle on 29th August – numbers on the Solway seem almost to double year on year. Single **Great White Egret** were reported on many dates in August in Ulpha Meadows/Foulshaw Moss area and two were at Arnside on 25th & 26th – with probably some duplication. A single bird was also at Humphrey Head on 30th August.



Hobby, Thacka Beck Nature Reserve, John France

Raptors to waders

A **Red Kite** was in the Rusland Valley on 8th June, one was at Hosket Hill and one at Baycliff on 1st July, a single at Ulpha meadows on 10th July and a juvenile also here on 7th August. **Marsh Harriers** were seen at Finglandrigg Wood on 10th August, by Anthorn Masts on 16th, at Allonby on 20th August and on two occasions from the “Bee-eater site” at Low Gelt. In the south a female was at Ulpha Meadows on 3rd and 30th June and 10th July and also two juveniles were here on 30th August. Another juvenile was at Park End Moss on 25th July.

Osprey were successful at Thistlethwaite and Foulshaw Moss with sightings in the Arnside area on at least four dates in August, with other sightings from “the Bee-eater site” and on the Solway where one was at Drumburgh village on 24th July, one fishing in the estuary was mobbed by two skua species briefly on 16th August and three near Campfield Roadside pool on 24th – part of the usual pattern seen in recent years on both sides of the estuary. There were three in the Rusland Valley on 23rd June with singles on four other dates.

Hobby were recorded in north of the county at Kirkbride airfield on 27th July and on several occasions from “the Bee-eater site” as well as at Ulpha

Recent reports

Meadows and Foulshaw Moss in the south, one was present at Thacka Beck Nature Reserve for a couple of minutes on the 16th August and one was at Talkin Tarn on 27th August. A **Merlin** was stalking a Linnet flock on Walney on 12th August and two were present on the island on 30th August, a single was recorded at Ravenglass on 25th August.

The almost continual daylight coverage at the “Bee-eater site” at low Gelt also produced sightings of a maximum of 13 **Common Buzzard** together, **Sparrowhawk**, **Goshawk**, **Kestrel** and **Peregrine** in addition to the above species.

Quail were widely spread with birds heard at Thurstonfield on 30th June, Levens on 3rd & 8th July, Abbeytown on 19th July, and Low Hesket on 8th August. Shap Fell held 27 **Red Grouse** on 27th August.

Three **Avocets** briefly alighted on the sands of Newbiggin on 25th July. Post breeding flocks of **Lapwing** were at Plumpton (100), Low Plains (65) and Carlisle Airport all on 20th July and a flock of c400 was visible from “the Bee-eater site” on occasions. In August 200 were on Wedholme Flow. Few waders were reported in breeding season apart from **Little Ringed Plover** on the River Esk at Longtown, there was also a female on Campfield Marsh on 29th July. **Whimbrel** were also at Bowness Railings on six dates from 11th July through to 25th August with a maximum of four on 18th July. Elsewhere there were five at Hodbarrow on 14th July, four at Eskmeals on 23rd July with a single here also on 18th August. Walney logged regular sightings with ten on 7th August. **Black-tailed Godwit** included 16 at Campfield Marsh on 11th June and also around 50 here on 19th July, 42 on Walney on 4th July, 56 at Bowness Railings on 21st July, a juvenile at Ulpha Meadows on 17th August and 14 at Hodbarrow on 25th August.

Single **Ruff** were at Ulpha Meadows on 24th July and 10th August as well as two juveniles on 27th August. Elsewhere the first back on Walney was 5th August where there were four on 30th August, a juvenile was at Anthorn on 12th August, six birds were unusual on a field flood at Walton on 23rd August, with two at Bowness Railings on 25th August. An early **Little Stint** was at Ulpha Meadows on 13th August.

A **Green Sandpiper** was on North Plain Farm on 19th July where there were also two on 18th August, one was on Walney on 7th and 31st August and a single was by Mere Tarn on 17th August. On 3rd September four birds were also at Muncaster in same location as a wintering bird over the past two winters, is this a returning family group, will more than one winter this year?

A **Spotted Redshank** was at Arnside from 18th August to the end of the month and singles were at Port Carlisle on 12th August and Walney on 17th August. Single **Greenshank** were at Ulpha Meadows on 12th July, Old Sandsfield on 12th August and Hodbarrow on 25th August. There were three at Anthorn on 22nd July and eight were present on the Mite Estuary from 31st July until 27th August. Regularly logged on Walney with 22 there on 29th August. **Wood Sandpiper** were present on Walney on 18th, 30th and 31st August and a juvenile was seen at Ulpha Meadows on 19th, 21st and 24th August.

Skuas to auks

The last of the spring skua passage were two **Long-tailed Skuas** moving west on 1st June at Bowness-on-Solway. There was a single **Arctic Skua** off Nethertown on 22nd June then two on 26th August and one in the Solway on 18th July. Walney logged a dark phased individual on 2nd June and 18th August and another single bird on 17th June. A **Great Skua** was off Walney on 2nd June and three on 18th July. Two **skua species** briefly harassed an Osprey at Bowness on 16th August.

A single **Black Guillemot** was off Selker on 23rd June. **Little Gulls** were present on the River Esk at Longtown in early June - including two on 3rd and a second summer bird on 9th. **Mediterranean Gull** returned by 14th June with three at Bardsea on 1st July, four (three adults and a first summer) at Workington where single birds (including "Stumpy") were seen on 11th July and on 10th August. A juvenile was at Hodbarrow on 14th July and there were also 14 near Flimby and six at Maryport on 16th July and a single bird at Silloth on 18th July. A hybrid gull – **Herring X Lesser Black-backed** – was at Whitehaven in early August

On 18th July 17 **Arctic**, eight **Common** and a single **Little Tern** were at Bowness-on-Solway. There were 330 **Sandwich Terns** in high tide roosts between Grune Point and Haverigg between 19th to 21st July increasing to 1508 on 30th July - 2nd August remaining stable at 1593 on 17th-18th August before declining to 655 on 29th-30th August.

Owls to buntings

A late calling **Cuckoo** was heard in Ennerdale on 3rd July and a juvenile was at Drigg on 7th July. Significant feeding flocks of **Common Swift** were 400 at Carlisle Sewage Farm on 6th June, and 300 at both Keswick and Micklethwaite on 21st July. Latest reported was leaving a nest on 20th August at Cleator Moor. **Bee-eater** bred at Low Gelt quarry - see separate report. A **Woodlark** flew east, calling at Swarthmoor on 25th August. The **Sand Martin** colony at Low Gelt quarry included a very pale leucistic bird with only slightly



Spotted Flycatcher, Drumburgh Moss, Tony Marsh

darker under wing coverts and dark eyes. **Yellow Wagtails** were by the River Esk (maximum of three birds reported) and also in Eden Valley south east of Penrith where there were three birds including a “Channel” type male, a single on Walney on 2nd August and two were at Thacka Beck reserve from 26th August. A juvenile **Citrine Wagtail** put in a disappointingly brief appearance on Walney on 22nd August. The second **Bluethroat** of the year in the county was seen at Soddy Gap. A **Pied Flycatcher** was at Gleaston on 31st August when four birds were also passing through Walney. Five **Common Redstart** were at Scout Crag, Helsington Barrows on 22nd August and a single at Gleaston on 31st August. **Whinchat** were reported from Willdale, Haweswater on 29th June, Walney on 16th, 28th and 31st August and Mere Tarn on 25th August. There were two reports of **Ring Ouzel** in Central Lakes – on Dow Crag on 24th June and on Coniston Old Man on 31st July. **Grasshopper Warbler** were heard at Tarraby, Carlisle on 9th July – a new site. A **Reed Warbler** was at Mere Tarn on 30th August. A **Woodchat Shrike** was present between St. Bees Head and Sandwith village on 19th June. Single **Hooded Crow** included a long-staying bird on Walney, one at Nethertown from 25th June to 19th July, St Bees Head on 10th July, one with a hybrid at Eskmeals on 23rd July and one at the Irt Estuary on 29th July.

There were 47 **Twite** at Seat quarry, Caldbeck on 14th July. **Hawfinch** continued to be seen at Sizergh with a maximum of nine birds over on 12th July. **Crossbill** were seen at two sites on 5th July – 15 at Cliburn Moss and two over Stanwix Carlisle with other small groups being seen from the “Bee-eater site“. A **Common Rosefinch** spent two days in Ambleside from 13th June.

As ever, we are indebted to all the contributors, too numerous to list individually. 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

Errata - apologies to Tony Marsh whose fine Woodcock photo in Recent reports Summer 2015 was incorrectly attributed to Tony Martin.

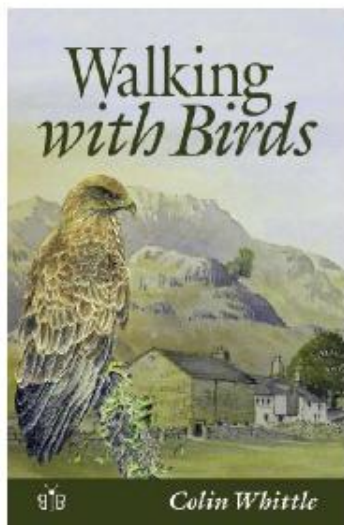


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Colin Whittle originally studied English Literature. In his youth he developed an interest in the outdoors and natural history. After working for a few years in forestry he became a free-lance lecturer in natural history studies in the West Midlands, as well as throughout Cumbria for the Extra-Mural Studies departments of both Liverpool and Newcastle Universities. Later, with his wife Audrey, he opened an art gallery in Elterwater, Cumbria, specialising in wildlife, landscapes and flowers. He also writes poetry, short articles and an almost daily journal exploring wildlife around his home. This journal, maintained for over 50 years, forms the basis of 'Walking with Birds'.

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Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is December 1st 2015

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

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