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***BIRD NEWS***  
***Vol. 28 No. 3 Autumn 2017***

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## Club news and announcements

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### AGM

The AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 6th October 2017 at 7.30pm. The business of the AGM is intended to be as brief as possible and will be followed by a talk by John Mallord on Wood Warblers.



*Wood Warbler, Ashness, Tony Marsh*

### The CBC Wood Warbler Survey

A magnificent total of 274 woods were visited during this year's Wood Warbler survey. In combination with the 2016 pilot fieldwork results, a minimum of 405 woods in 294 tetrads have now been covered throughout Cumbria. Recording forms are still trickling in and there may be an opportunity to identify and investigate any remaining potential Wood Warbler sites next spring. It is planned to publish a full report on the project in the 2017 edition of Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria preceded by a preliminary review of results in a forthcoming CBC newsletter.

At this time it is too early to draw detailed conclusions about the current status of Wood Warblers in the county as the results from some significant areas are still incomplete. The CBC survey has recorded very few birds outside of the prime habitats of the Lake District valleys with their range retreating further since the 2008–12 Cumbria bird atlas, especially the far north of the county. Small numbers have been found in the North Pennines and Lune Valley – however the overall rate of decline appears to have slowed since 2012 with relatively stable tetrad occupancy between Eskdale and Windermere, and also Borrowdale and Haweswater. The highest densities of territorial birds were recorded in Grizedale and Borrowdale. Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the survey. In particular to those of you who have persevered in marginal and sometimes difficult habitats without the satisfaction of any contact with Wood Warblers!

The quality of written returns and notes has been outstanding, generating a huge database on the habitat preferences of the species. Most appropriately, at the AGM on October 6th we shall welcome Dr John Mallord, leader of the RSPB team researching reasons for the dramatic decline of Wood Warblers with studies in both the UK and the African wintering grounds.

Finally, any remaining recording forms or casual records will be gratefully received. Malcolm Priestley (Havera Bank East, Howgill Lane, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA105HB [mmphavra@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mmphavra@hotmail.co.uk))

## **CBC indoor meeting programme winter 2017/2018**

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### **Friday 6th Oct (AGM): Penrith United Reformed Church 7.30pm**

'Investigating the declines of Wood Warblers across the African-Eurasian flyway' - Dr John Mallord.

Growing up in London and spending my formative birding years on the outskirts of the capital and in East Anglia, Wood Warblers were an unfamiliar sight (and sound) to me. However, this has become increasingly true for more people across the country, as the population of this species declined dramatically over the last two decades. But as a result of this dire situation, Wood Warblers have become a constant companion, as since 2009 I have led research for the RSPB studying their ecology and trying to understand what has driven the alarming declines, and how we might go about reversing them. I will tell you about work we have been conducting both in the UK and Africa, the landscapes they like, what they eat and what eats them, and other wildlife they share their homes with, from foxes and squirrels to elephants and baboons. Finally, linking the two continents, we have fitted tracking devices to birds to learn, for the first time, where 'our' birds go for the winter, and hopefully we may have just analysed the results.....

*Dr John Mallord, Senior Conservation Scientist, RSPB*

### **Monday 9th October: Friend's Meeting House Stramongate 7.30pm**

Joint with Kendal NHS 'The distance between' - *Peter Mawby*

I describe my own involvement in the study of territory in birds and consider the significance of living spaces to those involved in the conservation of endangered species.

### **Wednesday 10th January 2018: Tullie House 7.15pm**

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

Tanya & Edmund Hoare are Swift enthusiasts and part of the national and international Swift network. They have a colony of Swifts nesting in the eaves of their cottage and the talk will include video clips of many aspects of Swift behaviour from cameras in the nest spaces. The latest research on their remarkable migration, using geolocators, will also be presented. Sadly these iconic birds are in serious decline and the reasons for this, and what can be done to help, will be discussed.

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

Joint with South Lakeland RSPB

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

## Pied Wagtail winter roost survey

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*Pied Wagtail, Port Carlisle, Roger Ridley*

In the course of collecting data for the avifauna species accounts it has become apparent that there is very little on record about Pied Wagtail roosts in Cumbria. We know there are some regular roosts in urban locations, but there may be others that we don't know about. In addition we have even less information on numbers or the regularity of their use.

With this in mind the club would like to encourage members to search out and count roosts they either already know about or suspect may exist this winter.

Roosts are often in trees in or near town centres. These could be individual trees in paved areas or in a park with several trees. Birds can be vocal before entering a roost and often perch on building roofs before flying in. Locating roosts would therefore be a question of wandering around in suitable areas of town looking for this sort of activity at dusk. Counting is problematic. Counting birds as they fly in is one method, but they often fly out again before they finally settle! An estimate of the size of the roost once settled in a tree is probably best, but this is only possible when the leaves have fallen from November onwards.

If you are interested in taking part in such a survey contact Dave Shackleton to discuss methodology and to ensure co-ordination of survey effort. [d.shackleton@btinternet.com](mailto:d.shackleton@btinternet.com) or 01931 713693.

We would also be interested in any past records or information on roosts in the county both for the Avifauna and to help target survey effort. Again contact Dave.

*Dave Shackleton*

## Blyth's Reed Warbler - Siddick Pond 14th-15th June 2017

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On the early evening of 14th June 2017 Carl Thompson heard an unusual song from the reed bed at his local patch, Siddick Pond, Workington. Initially the complex warbler song was thought most likely to be coming from a male Marsh Warbler, the default rare warbler singing from a reed bed. However, it lacked the streaming mimicry of a Marsh Warbler and instead was a structured song, but very different from a Reed Warbler. Once views were obtained and comparisons sought, it became obvious that it was almost certainly a Blyth's Reed Warbler, a considerably rarer bird and a first for the county. News was put out quickly and regularly throughout the evening and this allowed a fair number of local birders to see the bird on that first evening.

Fortunately for me and the wider circle of Cumbrian birders, the bird was still present the following morning, and with Carl doing an excellent job of getting the news out early I was able to arrange a late start to work and, after the school run, I was on my way to Siddick.

On my arrival it was a typical Cumbrian scene, only a single birder present and the bird wasn't showing, but was



singing its heart out from deep in the base of a Hawthorn bush. After only a few minutes it moved into the base of the reed bed and then climbed a reed stem to put on an amazing ten minute show of singing from the top of the reeds. It repeated this pattern over the next hour and a half, with regular good views alternating with singing from deep cover low down in the Hawthorn when it was totally out of sight.

At this point, well satisfied, and with some unexpectedly decent photos, I had to leave for work. I understand that some time after this the bird became much more skulking and hardly showed at all between 3 and 8pm, when it finally showed reasonably well allowing the afternoon crowd to get half decent views. Despite some extensive searching for much of the following morning it could not be re-located and had clearly departed overnight on the 15th June.



The bird was obviously not a Reed Warbler with a totally different song, but Marsh Warbler is always much harder to rule out. However, good views, photographs and videos obtained allowed detailed analysis of the bird, and the identification conclusion was Blyth's Reed Warbler, though adjudication of the Cumbria Bird Club Rarities Committee is still required. This was based on the song, the short primary projections, the supercilium extending behind the eye, and its behaviour - skulking and singing from low in a Hawthorn. If it is confirmed as Blyth's Reed it will be a first for the county and an excellent find by Carl to whom much credit must go for the initial recognition that this was something different, and his regular releasing of information, allowing other birders to connect with it.

*Nick Franklin*

## Breeding Dotterel in Cumbria in 2016

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*This article was first published in Lakeland Naturalist, Vol: 5(1) 13-16, Spring 2017.*

I well remember the 7th May 1989. Out walking the western fells, I neared the summit of my first hill of the day. It was a fine spring day, a little high cloud and no wind; I was anticipating a brew at the summit cairn and a chance to have a breather and enjoy the view, when my attention was caught by three birds running around on the ground in front of me. They were of course Dotterels; instantly recognisable, and the first I had ever seen. For those who have an interest in both fell walking and birds, to see anything other than a Meadow Pipit or maybe a Wheatear on our sheep dominated tops always sets the heart racing. A week later, under similar circumstances, I stumbled quite by chance upon another individual on a fell some distance away, and with that, I was hooked. Now I eagerly await late April to early May every year, and rarely miss the opportunity to head out in search of Dotterel. Over the years since then I have amassed quite a few sightings of passage trips in spring, and a single bird, possibly on return passage, another chance encounter on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

At one time the Dotterel was a rare but regular breeding bird in Cumbria, its English stronghold in recent years, but it has not been proven to breed in the county since 1994 and on the Lakes fells since 1989. There has also been a decrease in breeding throughout the UK (which in effect means in the Scottish Highlands) of 57% between 1987/88 and 2011, from 980 to 423 breeding males, along with a contraction in the species' geographical range and declining numbers at core sites (Hayhow et al 2015). Against this background, I had long since abandoned any ambitions of ever finding breeding birds in Cumbria. Given an absence of over twenty years, the Dotterel was, as far I was concerned, effectively extinct as a breeding bird in the Lakes.

On 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016, I stood on the summit of the same fell as where I had my first encounter on that May day twenty-seven years earlier, and watched a trip of eight birds wheel around high in the sky, then drop down, and fly past me, barely three feet above the ground. I was thrilled with this sighting as I had never witnessed them actually arriving and always assumed they would come from a southerly direction. But these didn't, they came high and from the north. Ten minutes later it was snowing hard, and I had to retreat, unable to find them in the white-out. Two days later, I returned to find four on the ground there, running around and feeding between the fast melting snow patches. Presumably they were part of that group, but it is also possible that they were new birds as the site is a regularly used one. I was unable to get



out on to the fells in May, so with that, I assumed I had finished my search for Dotterel for the year.

In early July I made my annual pilgrimage to one of the traditional historic breeding sites. I set off under leaden skies, up to a cold and misty plateau with little expectation of much more than a routine fell walk. Ten minutes of walking in swirling mist only served to confirm this. Then, to my astonishment and delight I saw a plover, upright and alert. I had to eliminate Golden Plover, but I knew, even before I lifted my binoculars to see the white supercilium, that the pot-bellied bird in front of me could only be one thing; it was a Dotterel. From a brief inspection, it was a male, and what's more from its stance, it was alert, it was looking-out for something. The passage Dotterel I am used to seeing are busy feeding and don't usually do this; it was new behaviour to me, and within a few seconds, I saw what it was looking out for; a fluffy, miniature Dotterel running around on the dewy moss, much closer to me, then another, slightly larger, but still very obviously a Dotterel chick. I couldn't believe it; confirmed breeding of Dotterel in Cumbria after all these years! To say I was excited is an understatement. As I left the fell, feeling rather pleased with myself, I realised that the information would have to be shared but also required the utmost sensitivity; not a comfortable feeling. A fellow Dotterel enthusiast visited the same fell a week later, and found the birds on the point of fledging. Another week after this, I returned myself, but after an extensive search of the whole fell top, I failed to locate them. This of course does not mean they weren't there or nearby, but my assumption is that they had fledged successfully and moved on.

From the state of development of the chicks, it seems likely that the eggs were laid at the end of May, which is normal for this species. Unusually though, the two chicks appeared to be at different stages of development, and the events that could have led to this can only be guessed at, but are likely to be the result of slightly impaired development; however, the smaller chick did not bear any apparent weakness. Even a week later the two chicks still showed this apparent age differential, though were perfectly healthy and at the point of fledging. How this came to be remains unexplained, as does the fact of their breeding in the Lakes in 2016 after such a long apparent absence.

With a bird as scarce and enigmatic as the Dotterel, speculation is inevitable, as we do not really know where trips are bound for after they visit the Cumbrian fells in spring; it is quite possibly Scandinavia as well as Scotland. No spring migrant Dotterel has ever been ringed in Cumbria, nor have any birds ringed elsewhere ever been reported in Cumbria. That the Cumbrian

## Breeding Dotterel in Cumbria in 2016

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fells provide a break in their migration is established but its significance is unknown, and they are surely under-reported.

The whereabouts of this year's female once she left the male to incubate her eggs remains a mystery; where the male went with the two young once they had fledged can only be guessed at; and the same can be said about whether and where they will return to next year. In fact we still know very little about the Dotterel; why it is declining in Britain and the importance of Cumbria in providing a break in their migration. Possible reasons for the overall decline in the UK have been suggested (Hayhow et al 2015), including habitat changes, nitrogen deposition and climate change, but these relate to the breeding population, not to birds on passage. If future developments in satellite tracking can be extended to the Dotterel (at the time of writing, the devices are too heavy for the bird to carry), then like the now famous BTO Cuckoos, a lot would be learnt about their movements and this could help us identify the causes of their decline, and what might be done to redress it.

The Dotterel has certainly brought me and my fellow enthusiasts great pleasure over the years, and our Cumbrian fells would be very much poorer without the annual appearance these delightful birds. I am indebted to John Callion and John Strowger for providing help and guidance in producing this article.

### Reference

Daniel B Hayhow, Steven R Ewing, Alistair Baxter, Andy Douse, Andrew Stanbury, D Philip Whitfield, and Mark A Eaton. (2015) Changes in the abundance and distribution of a montane specialist bird, the Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*, in the UK over 25 years. *Bird Study* **62**: 443-456.



*Dotterel, Dave Piercy*

## Behaviour of Guillemots and Razorbills to an unaccompanied auk chick at St Bees Head

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On the morning of 26th June myself and Pete Ullrich were monitoring Kittiwake nests at the middle viewpoint at St Bees Head when we joined by a group from Keswick U3A. Tony Marsh from the group



*Guillemots with auk chick, St Bees , Tony Marsh*

soon noticed an auk chick on the water which was remarkable because it is normally mid-July before auk chicks begin to jump from the ledges at St Bees and not normally in the middle of the day. The chick was not accompanied by an adult and may have been prematurely flushed from one of the lower ledges by passing canoeists earlier in the morning.

Tony's attention had been drawn to it because it was being incessantly pursued by a group of guillemots on the water. They would peck at its body aggressively and seemed obsessed by it. As one group would lose interest, other birds would swim towards it, forming another group of pursuers. The aggression was never great enough to submerge or apparently injure it, but it called persistently.

Occasionally when it was left alone it would swim towards one of the much lesser number of Razorbills on the sea. However, though not in a group, each Razorbill it latched on to would also show aggression, but differently by pecking specifically at its bill and head, but less aggressively than the Guillemots. These interactions with both species went on repeatedly for about 20 minutes before we lost sight of the chick as it slowly headed north pursued by Guillemots below the cliffs.

Pete and myself continued monitoring Kittiwake nests for about another hour before moving to the northern viewpoint, where we again located the chick. With fewer Guillemots on the sea here, it spent its time apparently searching for Razorbills, but again got the same sort of treatment as before. It did not appear injured and indeed occasionally would have a "quiet" moment and would preen. It was last seen heading slowly back towards the main viewpoint.

Because of its apparent attachment to Razorbills we assumed it was probably a Razorbill chick. On the assumption that Razorbill chicks fledge at roughly the same time as Guillemot chicks at St Bees (we have no information on this), and that it therefore fledged prematurely and without an accompanying parent, then presumably it would have no chance of survival.

*Dave Shackleton, Tony Marsh and Pete Ullrich*

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## Hen Harrier Weekend 2017

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Three years ago in August 2014 the first Hen Harrier Day events took place. One of these events was on the Lambley Viaduct over the River South Tyne close to the Cumbria Northumberland border. A BBC TV crew turned up and we were shown on the BBC's Look North programme.



*Hen Harrier Day at Boat of Garten 2017*

My involvement with Hen Harriers began in the winter of early 2007 when I took part in a co-ordinated roost watch: we saw no Hen Harriers but it was exciting watching Fieldfares dropping into the heather to roost. Such has been my experience of roost watches over the past decade when Hen Harriers may or may not appear but there has usually been some notable bird activity, often involving owls but might also include visible migration or some striking raptor such as a Goshawk or a Rough-legged Buzzard.

As winter morphed into the spring of 2007 I was out on the Geltsdale fells along with the other Hen Harrier workers as we searched for birds. Those were different times from today and some Hen Harriers carried radio transmitters so that we had a very direct experience of tracking birds as we walked around with cumbersome aerials and radio receivers tuned to certain frequencies. The satellite transmitters that came into use shortly after that time provide much better data but leave the field worker with a more remote experience.

Over this last decade I have watched roosts each winter in various parts of Cumbria as part of co-ordinated watches and each spring I have been part of organised searches for birds that might settle on breeding territories. Then through the breeding season many a day has been spent sitting among the heather or perhaps in a small tent watching over an active nest – will those hill walkers just carry on by ? – no please don't picnic there ! – oh just ignore that Hen Harrier that's frustratingly alarming right above your head ! Along with the elation and satisfaction in a successful breeding year of seeing juvenile Hen Harriers leave the nest - comes the sobering thought that these birds can no longer be watched over as they roam far and wide. Hopefully they will forage in some safe area but many head for the grouse moors of Yorkshire or Scotland where they are at serious risk of being illegally shot, poisoned or trapped.

During this time of my involvement the Geltsdale Reserve has not been a happy place for Hen Harriers. The reason for this is that the reserve is bounded on the south and east sides by aggressively managed grouse shooting estates. During that spring of 2007 there were Hen Harriers present on the moors of the reserve and as I monitored the birds from a hut there would be a gamekeeper part-hidden in a dugout just over the boundary fence on the shooting estate, only his head and the barrel of his gun protruding. Some years later there was an active nest on the reserve with an incubating female. The male which performs an essential role at this breeding stage in feeding the sitting female, just disappeared, resulting in a failed breeding attempt. During that same breeding season a further three male Hen Harriers 'disappeared' from active nests in the north of England and resulted in their failure. There was clearly a new strategy being employed by the persecutors of raptors : a well guarded nest is difficult to destroy but a roaming foraging male is a much easier target. The summer of 2016 saw a late breeding attempt at Geltsdale resulting in a single fledged young. This bird was fitted with a satellite transmitter and survived on a nearby grouse moor until transmissions suddenly ceased in mid-winter – a search of the area failed to find either the transmitter or the body of the bird. This is highly suggestive of the illegal killing of that bird. Many other juvenile Hen Harriers from nests that I have been involved with protecting have suffered a very similar fate. In the SSSI of which Geltsdale is part there have been seven documented cases of illegal persecution of Hen Harriers in recent decades: three shootings, three nest destructions and one poisoning. This must be just the tip of the iceberg of systematic raptor persecution because of the difficulty of confirming these crimes in such remote and difficult to monitor areas.

And so it is in the light of this ongoing level of illegal persecution of Hen Harriers that I have been motivated to do what I can to bring these outrages to greater public awareness. One of those things has been going to Hen Harrier Day events : the Goyt Valley in 2015 and Edale in 2016, both of which were great fun to attend and both of which provided great inspiration resulting from impassioned speeches by Chris Packham, Mark Avery, Natalie Bennett, Alan Davies and others.

This year I attended an event at Loch Leven on the Saturday and Boat of Garten the following day. A few parts of those days were particularly notable although almost all the speakers were strongly committed to the message 'Stop Killing Hen Harriers' and the work of RSPB investigations highlighted by Ian Thomson and Guy Shorrocks is impressive – would that the mobilisation of the massive RSPB membership to speak out strongly against raptor persecution were equally impressive. Particularly heart warming was hearing

## Hen Harrier Weekend 2017

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that the Scottish Parliament has instigated a system of Species Champions – these are MSPs who take on the role of speaking up for the interests of threatened species in Scotland. There is one MSP for White-tailed Eagle, one for Brown Hare and one for Hen Harrier. The Hen Harrier Species Champion is Mairi Gougeon, MSP who spoke well at the Loch Leven Hen Harrier Day.



*Mairi Gougeon MSP at Loch Leven Hen Harrier Day*

Holyrood is streets ahead of Westminster on these matters. We saw the deplorable spectacle of the Westminster Hall debate that had been triggered by Mark Avery's e-petition to Ban Driven Grouse Shooting. This debate was conducted with massive bias towards the shooting lobby - from the opening remarks of the chairman to the closing statement by the inept environment minister.

Ruth Tingay spoke at both events. Her message was around Wilful Blindness. This is where unacceptable actions are ignored by people through fear, refusal to acknowledge a problem, reluctance to upset or simply through apathy. It is happening with the illegal killing of raptors. Ruth Tingay writes on the Raptor Persecution UK website, one of the most important bodies that inform us about and speak out against these crimes.

One of the things that disturbs me most is when people protest about what they see as 'politics' in wildlife publications and discussions. When Mark Avery, the 'Political Birder' of Birdwatch magazine is criticised for that political ingredient. When they say that they want to read only of wildlife and not of politics. My view is that if we care about that wildlife at all, if we are concerned about the ever diminishing numbers of birds in our landscapes then we need to speak out. So well done BAWC, well done OneKind, well done Mark Avery, Chris Packham, Ruth Tingay, Finlay Wilde and all those others whose voices we hear. It is up to us all.



*Ruth Tingay speaks at Boat of Garten*

*Chris Hind*

## Finding Little Stint on the Cumbria Coastal Way

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I suppose a few birdwatchers have a list of annual pilgrimages, whereby they visit a certain area at a certain time of year to catch up on a particular species or two.



*Little Stint, Port Carlisle, Darren Robson*

Every August and September I make a beeline for the lesser visited Cumbria Coastal Way between High Foulshaw and Low Foulshaw, to see if a Little Stint has turned up again. It involves military precision. Make sure you get to Mid Foulshaw at least an hour before high tide having checked the tide is over 9.5m, preferably 10m, and settle down on the flood defence bank. It is adjacent to the obvious raised sandbank, now slightly showing signs of growing vegetation, with Mid Foulshaw farm behind you. Then it's a case of just waiting. The first hopeful indication there may be a Little Stint around is the arrival of a few Ringed Plover and a handful of Dunlin. If they do make an appearance, then it's game on.

Sometimes they settle on the sandbank for 30 minutes or so, other times it may be just for a few minutes, before the high tide completely covers it.

For the past few years, I've been fortunate, not only finding a Little Stint but the odd Curlew Sandpiper, Golden Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, and Ruff, none of which are common round here. I might go several times each August and September, and only catch a momentary glimpse of a Little Stint, and on only one occasion, but there are always other birds to see at this time of year. Amongst other species I've recorded are several Northern Wheatear, Marsh Harrier, the odd passing Whinchat, scores of Meadow Pipit and Pied Wagtail, and on one memorable September morning, I discovered 13 Glossy Ibis, the most ever seen in Cumbria - but that's another story!

In all the years I've been going I've only seen two other birdwatchers there, so it's definitely under watched and under appreciated by the birdwatching community. Give it a whirl and if you see a bod, sat down wearing a green hat looking out for birds, then stop by and say hello!

I might bore you with the tale about those Glossy Ibis I once found.

*Mark Graham*



## Ring Ouzel breeding and prey items - North Pennines 2017

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Ring Ouzels are one of our shyest breeding birds and highly prone to disturbance at nesting time. I was lucky enough to find a pair who regularly use a nesting site immediately adjacent



to a public bridleway. They have become humanised to the extent of not alarm calling or being inhibited to bringing food items into the nest. The landowners are also very much pro optimising the species breeding success on their land. Prey items brought into the nest were seen to be 80% earthworms, 10% leatherjackets (beetle larvae) and 10% adult flying insects Tipulidae (Crane Flies).

The birds appeared to really struggle to find subterranean prey in hard-baked ground during the unusual period of drought in April and May but were saved by heavy rain when the chicks were thought to be medium sized. They fledged at least three chicks. I was not able to return later in the season to see if they raised a second brood.

If there was a repeat of drought in the future at this critical time, it would be possible to ferry up jerry cans of water to pour onto the grazed pasture that was their favourite hunting site. I assume that the fisherman's technique of using washing up liquid to bring up worms would poison the chicks !

From personal experience, I would recommend that this type of close observation/recording should only be used with extreme caution and is unlikely to be acceptable at more typical nest sites where the birds are not humanised.

*Guy Broome*





## Migrating birds of Scout Scar

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West of Kendal a limestone escarpment, Scout Scar, divides the Auld Grey Town from the eastern edge of the Lake District National Park. On the southern edge lies Helsington Barrow a National Trust woodland.

In latter years it has deteriorated as a breeding location for many bird species. Reasons include, habitat degradation such as diseased Hawthorn and Juniper, human pressures because of increased leisure use, and the decline in numbers of migratory birds generally.



*Spotted Flycatcher, Long Park,  
Roger Ridley*

Despite this it still holds its own as a stopping off point for migrating birds heading south in late August/early September. The two most notable species are Common Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher. In 2016 I recorded 51 individual Common Redstart in 12 visits. This was a fairly typical figure over the years. Eleven were seen on 18th August, the most seen on any visit. Eight were recorded on 24th August. The last seen were three on 8th September. Although they might be seen anywhere on the route the place they favoured most was the diseased Hawthorn area to the north of the central path up Scout Scar.

Twenty-six Spotted Flycatcher were recorded over the 12 days. It was not unusual that numbers reached a crescendo of 13 on 17th August in Helsington Barrow. Most years I would record double figures on at least one visit here. The last recorded was one bird on 15th September.

It isn't all Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart though. Other common passage birds are Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Whinchat, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail and flocks of Linnet, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Redpoll, Goldcrest, Mistle Thrush and Goldfinch. The most unusual migrant was a grounded Yellow Wagtail with some Pied Wagtail on the racecourse to the east of Scout Scar, a couple of years ago.

I used to live a few minutes away so I would spend many a happy hour logging these passage birds but sadly I've moved house, so if anyone would like to take over recording duties, then be my guest. It is a bit of a slog but the reward is fresh air, exercise and a decent number of birds to be seen along the way.

*Mark Graham*

## A territorial spat at Campfield Marsh

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Recent rush cutting on the reserve's wet meadows had exposed good hunting areas for a range of birds who were all taking advantage of it - not least of all were the birds of prey. The resident Buzzard probably felt it had territorial rights over this new feature and was not happy when a Marsh Harrier (female or juvenile) having recently arrived, showed some interest too.



*Buzzard hunting over one of the arable fields a few minutes earlier.*



*Marsh Harrier quartering the wet meadow in front of the hide*



*Dropping in on prey*

On 14th September, the Buzzard had been seen patrolling round the reserve generally. However, the Marsh Harrier was also hunting the same habitat and favouring a rushy area between the hide and a wood - being particularly attentive now that some of the rushes had been cut down. The Buzzard obviously saw this as a territorial intrusion and made its feeling known. A rather vigorous and vicious aerial combat ensued which, rather strangely, ended up with the Marsh Harrier, although being smaller of the two birds, appearing to have the upper hand and, unperturbed by this episode, continued to hunt the same area as previously.



## *A territorial spat at Campfield Marsh*



John & Judith Rogers  
Read and see more at [Campfield MH v BZ](#)

## Recent reports

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The period covered is June to August 2017. 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**



*Black Grouse chick, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

26 **Mute Swans** were at Port Carlisle on 24th August and a pair with ten cygnets had been at Abbots Moss on 19th. At least 300 **Greylag Geese** were on Wedholme Flow on 25th August accompanied by a **Bar-headed Goose**. **Shelduck** pairs with families were on the west coast in June, one with six young at Crosscanonby on 20th, there having been another with ten young at Wolsty a few days earlier.

**Gadwall** numbers around Foulshaw peaked at ten in late August. The first **Pintail** of the autumn was at Walney on 31st August. A male **Scaup** at Bowness on Solway on 7th June was unexpected and a single female/eclipse was at Hodbarrow on 31st August.

Wildfowl reports were few during the period – single **Common Scoter** were on Coniston Water and Windermere on 23rd and 29th August respectively and two juvenile **Eider** were off Whitehaven on 27th. Twenty-seven **Goosander** (plus broods of three and five) were at Old Sandsfield on 27th June.

### **Partridge to Herons**

**Quail** were reported from Tarn Moor, Sunbiggin on 4th June, Red Hall Farm, Wigton on 17th to 18th June, the flanks of Buckbarrow at 300m a.s.l. on 3rd July and West Newton on 6th July.



*Little Egrets, Port Carlisle, Dave Shackleton*

There were a minimum of 300 **Red Grouse** on Shap Fell on 24th August. Ten **Grey Partridge** were seen at Langrigg, Aspatria.

A **Red-throated Diver** was off Silecroft on 31st August. There were 50 **Manx Shearwaters** at Workington on 7th June, around 45 off Selker on 20th June and 400 were off Walney on 24th. A **Shag** was at Silecroft on 31st August.

A **Great White Egret** was present on Rockliffe Marsh on 7th June, and still present at the end of August. **Little Egret** numbers are still increasing with, six at Port Carlisle on 27th June but being presumably post breeding, numbers were up to 26 between Port Carlisle and RSPB Campfield on 13th August but the highest count was 32 in the high tide roost on Port Island on 22nd. These figures may or may not include birds from the Scottish side of the estuary. Numbers at Walney were 27 at the end of July. A single **Spoonbill** visited Walney briefly on 14th June.



*Sparrowhawk, Glasson Moss, Tony Marsh*

### ***Raptors to Waders***

The only **Red Kite** reported in the north of the county was at Spadeadam in June with other birds being seen at Shap and in the south Lakes. There were regular reports of **Marsh Harriers** in the south of the county but in the north birds were reported on seven days in July and August from Carlisle Airport, Wedholme Flow, RSPB Geltsdale, Bowness on Solway, Bellwater Moss and Thacka Beck CWT reserve at Penrith – in addition a bird was at Sunbigin Tarn. All were reported as female/juvenile apart from the male on Wedholme Flow. Reports were received of a male **Pallid Harrier** displaying intermittently in the Cumbrian part of Yorkshire Dales National Park.

**Osprey** were reported regularly throughout the period in areas with breeding pairs – in south of the county, the south Lakes and at Bassenthwaite. On the Solway birds were seen at Port Carlisle in July and August (two), at Rockliffe on 17th June and on the same day one was over Dalston. There were other reports of birds in the lower Eden and Esk valleys. A bird at Haverthwaite ringed (blue MU) was a female ringed on 22nd July 2010 at Monymusk, Aberdeenshire.



Up to two **Water Rail** were present at Foulshaw throughout the period with a pair successfully breeding by Derwent Water.

Four **Avocet** were reported at the extreme north east end of the Solway on 23rd August and a single bird was at RSPB Campfield on 24th but five (two adults and three juveniles) were at Port Carlisle at the end of August raising interesting questions about their status in the area.



*Curlew, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

At the beginning of June there were 3000 **Oystercatchers** at Walney but reduced thereafter and it wasn't until the end of July that numbers started to build (1500 at RSPB Campfield on 28th and by end of August in excess of 10,000 on the Inner Solway mainly round RSPB Campfield. **Lapwing** numbers also built from the beginning of July with 1000 near Anthorn on 25th August (including many young birds).

Large numbers of **Ringed Plover** frequented Bowness/Port Carlisle. Small numbers of **Whimbrel** were reported between Port Carlisle and RSPB Campfield with a maximum of four at Port Carlisle on 3rd July and at Bowness on 13th August, at Walney the maximum was 46 on 23rd July. Two were at Flimby on 29th July with a single there on 22nd August.



*Dunlin & Ringed Plover, Bowness, Tony Marsh*

There were small numbers of **Black-tailed Godwit** present on the Solway from early July but highest numbers were at Port Carlisle with 54 on 30th August and 17 a day later. A juvenile was on the Kent estuary on 16th August and six were at Hodbarrow on 31st. In early June 755 **Knot** were at Walney and returning birds included 40 in the roost at Campfield on 28th July.

Two **Ruff** were on Wedholme Flow on 25th August and singles were at Port Carlisle on several dates. Three juveniles were at Moss-side Farm in the Kent estuary on 30th August. Numbers of **Dunlin** at Port Carlisle ran into several thousand but no accurate counts were reported. Single **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Little Stint** appeared among the Dunlin from time to time in August. 330 **Sanderling** were counted at Walney in early June and a few were with Dunlin at Port Carlisle in July and August.

The **Spotted Sandpiper** reported previously was still present at Buttermere certainly up to 21st June. There was a marked passage of **Common Sandpiper** in July with for example 13 at Port Carlisle on 8th and ten at Sandsfield (River Eden) on the same date; on 10th numbers at Port Carlisle were described as “dozens” and there were 20 on 20th and still 12 on 25th. Similar large numbers were recorded on the north side of the Solway during this period.

In July single **Green Sandpiper** were seen on the River Eden at Wetheral on 9th, at Melkinthorpe on 25th – the first at this site and by the River Bela at Milnethorpe on 10th and 29th August. One was new in at Walney on 24th August and there was still one by 30th. Two were on the River Esk at Longtown on 19th July. A single **Spotted Redshank** was at Campfield Marsh on 22nd August. The regular site on the Mite Estuary held 13 **Greenshank** on 6th August, there were three at Old Sandsfield on 22nd, three on Wedholme Flow on 25th and single birds at Siddick on 28th and at Port Carlisle on 30th. Twenty-six were at Walney on 19th August and still 17 on 22nd. A **Wood Sandpiper** frequented Heversham at the end of June being last seen on 1st July - another being at Wedholme Flow on that date. Very large numbers of **Common Redshank** built up at Port Carlisle with minima of 1000 on 24th August and 2000 on 26th – but numbers were hard to count.



*Redshank & Little Egret, Port Carlisle, Roger Ridley*

### **Skuas to Auks**

On 11th June two **Arctic Skuas** were at Bowness on Solway with others being seen at Walney; at the latter site single **Great Skuas** and also a **Pomarine** – in strong westerly winds. A single **Great Skua** was heading south off Siddick shore on 29th July. Five **Arctic Skuas** were in the Duddon Estuary on 6th August.

On 22nd July **Black-headed Gulls** were found breeding on the island in Wastwater, the first time for several years. There were around 15 pairs with 19 juveniles. The colony was deserted on 31st July - reasons unknown. Large numbers of **Black-headed Gulls** (but few juveniles) - possibly 2000 birds, were at RSPB Campfield on 24th August.



The numbers of **Mediterranean Gulls** continued the upward trend apparent for many years with ten between Siddick and Flimby on 26th June, three (including the returning Stumpie) being at Workington on 12th July, increasing to nine there on 25th plus 18 at nearby St Helens. By 15th August, 16 were at Workington and 41 at St Helens; by the end of August there were 72 at Workington Harbour including three ringed birds (from Ireland and Belgium). Away from this part of the coast there was a single bird at Bowness on Solway on 30th July and three at Whitrigg in the River Wampool roost on 12th August. **Little Gull** were reported on four dates in June from Drumburgh Marsh (two) round to Anthorn with also two first summer birds at Bowness on 7th June.

All tern species did well. **Little Tern** had a good breeding season with 33 pairs at RSPB Hodbarrow (15 chicks raised) and 26 pairs at CWT Foulney Island (at least 21 chicks raised). At the latter site 59 pairs of **Arctic Tern** raised 52 chicks the best since 1992. At RSPB Hodbarrow 550 pairs of **Sandwich Tern** (up from 100 in 2016) had raised 368 chicks by early July with expectation of another 300 by the end of that month. There were also significant numbers in roosts on the west coast in late July with a total of 2500 between Hodbarrow (1800 there) and Siddick and still 1220 between



Hodbarrow and Wolsty in mid August. A bird was inland at Mockerkinn Tarn on 28th July. A single **Roseate Tern** spent some time in the tern colony at RSPB Hodbarrow. A **Puffin** was at Walney on 4th June

### **Cuckoos to Buntings**

The only report in the period of **Cuckoo** were from Dentdale in late June. The only owls reported were from the Shap area with a calling young **Long-eared** from a commercial forestry plantation on 24th August and three **Short-eared** on the same date, in the same area. A pair of **Little Owl** bred on Walney.

**Common Swift** were reported in small numbers right to the end of August but between 150 and 200 at High Pike on 7th July and 50 in Wigton on 25th are worthy of note. A **Kingfisher** was on the River Esk at Longtown in mid July and singles were at Foulshaw on 18th June and 21st August.



*Cuckoo & Meadow Pipit, Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*

A fresh juvenile **Merlin** was at Foulshaw on 20th July and a male was by Anthorn on 22nd August. A **Hobby** passed west at Brampton on 3rd August. Of note were a **Peregrine** on Dixon's Chimney, Carlisle in early July and four on Milnethorpe Sands at the end of August. Three adults were above Crummock Water on 10th August with the resident pair seeing off the individual before attending to nearby calling young.



*Short-eared Owl juvenile, Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*

200 **Hirundines** were at Portinscale on 16th August with other smaller numbers being widespread.



*Sand Martin, Colby ,  
Tony Marsh*

One of the most unexpected birds of the period was a singing **Blyth's Reed Warbler** present at Siddick Pond from 14th to 16th June. **Grasshopper Warblers** were reported from regular sites at Derwent Water, Bowness and Foulshaw but a bird at Melkinthorpe was only the second there – the first being earlier in 2017. A **Treecreeper** on 24th July was unexpected at Walney.



*Sedge Warbler chicks, Siddick, Alan Frost*

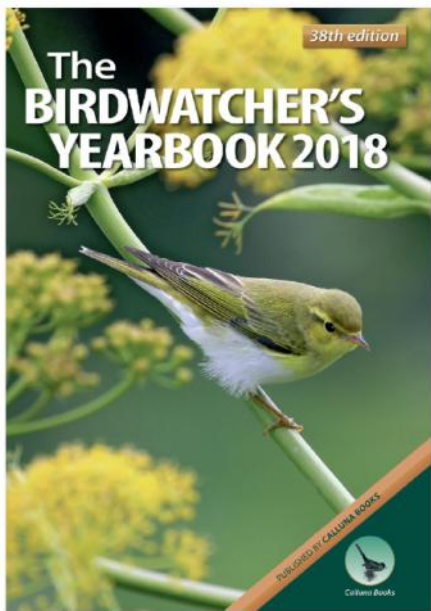
**Spotted Flycatcher** were still at Waterside on 29th August, there had been three juveniles hawking for insects in Manesty Woods on 26th. Three **Whinchats** were noted at Walney with two on 16th August and three on 29th. **Northern Wheatear** were at Halforth on 10th August, two on Wedholme Flow on 25th August, two were with wagtails and pipits on a recently sown field at Wetheral on 26th and on 31st 12 were at Walney.

A flock of 200 **Tree Sparrows** built up at Wetheral Shield in mid August. The only **Yellow Wagtail** reported was a juvenile at the River Esk, Longtown on 19th July. In late August **Pied Wagtail** numbers increased presumably by passage birds with 28 at the mouth of the River Bela, Milnethorpe on 6th August and 32 there on 10th. Twenty were on a recently sown field at Wetheral on 26th August with 40 **Meadow Pipits**. A **White Wagtail** was at Milnethorpe on 8th August and 30 were on Walney on 22nd. There were 42 **Greenfinches** feeding on forage rape at Red Hall Farm on 30th August. A flock of 350 **Linnet** were at Walney on 6th August and at the same site there were 240 **Goldfinches** on 29th. **Crossbills** were on Irton Pike on 9th July, and Dent (West Cumbria) on 20th August. **Hawfinch** reports as usual all came from south of the county two at Arnside on 2nd June, one at Haverthwaite on 8th and four at Sizergh Castle on 19th. A male **Snow Bunting** was recorded on Black Combe on 2nd June. Sixteen **Reed Buntings** were on Red Hall Farm, Wigton on 7th June.

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

*Bob Jones & Dave Piercy*



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### **Guidance for Contributors**

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

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

*Editor*

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## Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is December 1st 2017

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## Cumbria Bird Club Website

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

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