



BIRD NEWS
Vol. 31 No. 3 Autumn 2020

Club news and announcements

CBC Swift survey - nest sites

Watchtree Nature Reserve – birds, summer 2020

Lockdown garden birds

Redstart - a summer visitor

Blyth's Reed Warbler

Long-billed Dowitcher

Solitary Sand Martin nest

Barn Owl success

Pied Flycatchers in nest boxes in South Cumbria

Recent reports

A Swift summer

Contents - see back page

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Club news and announcements

AGM

The AGM is postponed until further notice.

Subscriptions

You will receive a subscription form or a reminder with this mailing if your membership is due for renewal on October 1st and you pay annually by cash, cheque or bank transfer.

To pay by bank transfer:

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To prevent unnecessary costs, such as postage for reminder letters, please can you ensure that this is paid as soon as possible.

CBC winter wetland survey

A full account of this survey is being prepared for publication in "Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria 2020".

CBC Swift survey 2020

Please send your completed forms/spreadsheets to Dave Piercy. It is not too late !

CBC Meeting programme 2020/2021 (subject to changes - check the website)

Date to be arranged (AGM): Penrith United Reformed Church 7.30pm
Members slide show by Mike Carrier, Jake Manson & Adam Moan

Wednesday 6th January 2021: Cancelled

Monday 8th March 2021: Friends House, Stramongate, Kendal 7.30pm

The third Fred Gould Memorial Lecture joint with KNHS

Gary Gould - 'Nature through the lens'. A selection of slides by Fred Gould, showing a variety of flora and fauna.

CBC Swift survey - nest sites

The CBC Swift survey carried out in 2018 and 2019 had as the last of the objectives: “To record the details of any nests found“. Surveyors were not asked to particularly seek out nest sites as this was regarded as too onerous and time consuming. However, they were asked to note any nests they came across in the course of surveying or at any other time. It was pointed out that Swift nests are difficult to find as they dart in and out quickly.

As well as CBC surveyors, details were also forwarded from several local Swift groups. Remarkably, details of 345 nest sites containing 855 nest holes were submitted. Of these, 253 nest sites came from local Swift groups.

Distribution

The tetrad map overleaf highlights in particular the towns and villages covered by the local Swift groups with their areas around West Cumbria, Arnside, Kendal, Ambleside and Sedbergh featuring strongly. Tetrads with the highest density of nest holes were in Kendal and Sedbergh followed by Arnside.

In general the nest sites are in the more built up areas of Cumbria avoiding high fells and moorland. Nests were found in a few isolated areas where there was a suitable building such as the remote St Cuthbert's Church in Bewcastle. Were Swifts hurtling around the impressive Bewcastle Saxon Cross back in the 7th Century?

Nest holes

Of those for which data was submitted 74% were in the eaves, 24% in a wall and 2% in the roof. Presumably these figures will be down to availability rather than preference, though it would be interesting to know if there is any differential in success. Do eaves generally give a greater protection?

Only 50 artificial nest holes were logged but this is an underestimate.

The table below gives the aspect of nests where given:

N	S	E	W	Other
22%	27%	20%	18%	13%

A slight preference for a south facing home? More likely down to availability?

Nest sites

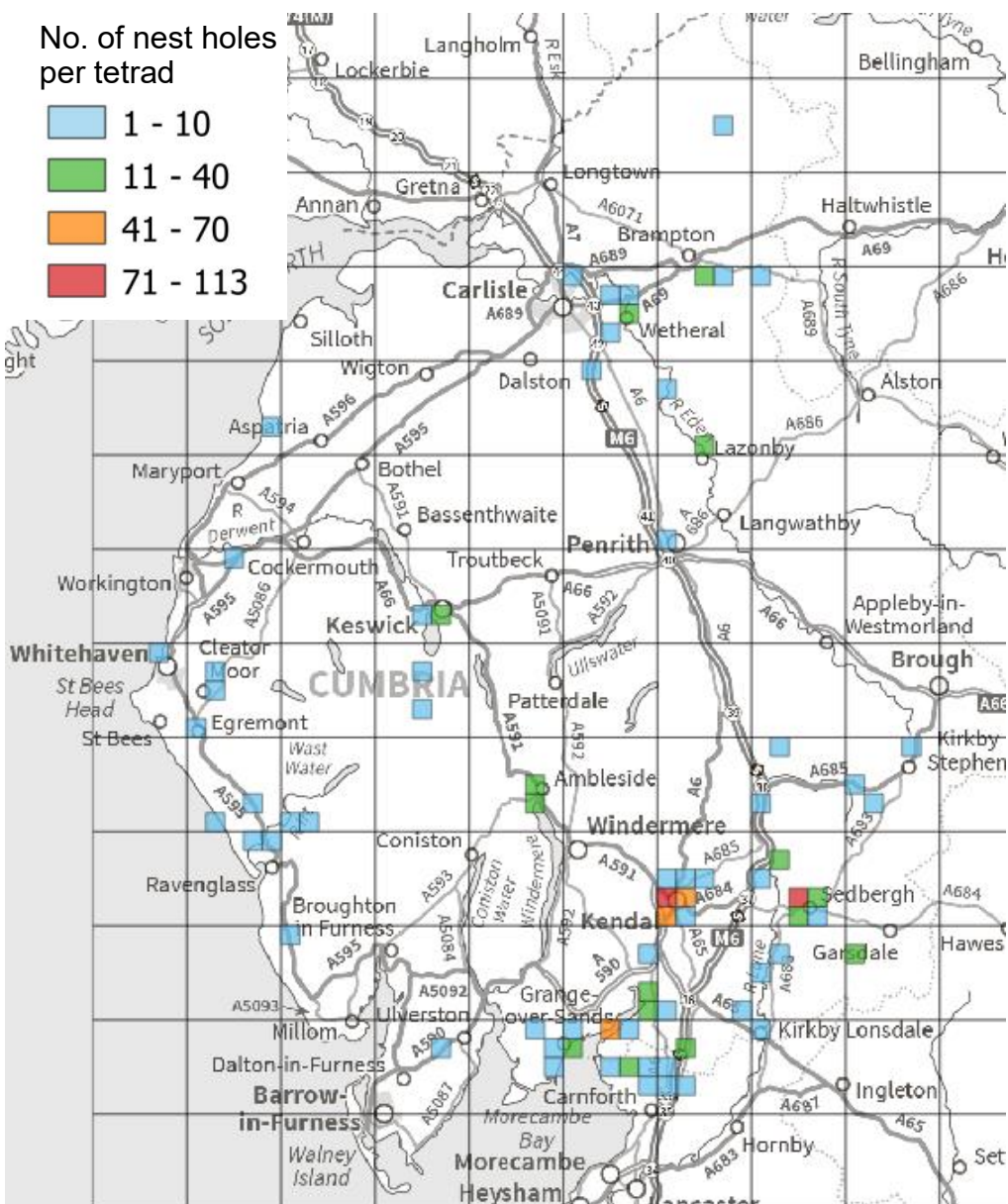
Type of building where given:

168 houses, 10 barns, 13 Schools, 12 Churches, 15 other commercial

Age of building if given:

Post war - 8, 1901-45 - 11, Victorian - 54, pre-Victorian – 7

1 - 10
 11 - 40
 41 - 70
 71 - 113



CBC Swift Survey 2018 and 2019
Location of Swift nest sites by tetrad

CBC Swift survey - nest sites

RSPB SwiftMapper

Another source of details of Swift nest sites in Cumbria is the recently introduced SwiftMapper app from the RSPB. It is simple to use and mainly involves clicking on a map where you have found nest sites or screaming Swifts. Crucially it is also easy to download all the records from Cumbria.

While not directly comparable with the CBC survey results it is worth taking a brief look at the data held by SwiftMapper to the end of 2019.

The map overleaf shows the distribution of the 142 nest sites held by the RSPB. The records are slightly more widespread than the CBC's in particular in the Eden valley and around Carlisle and Barrow. The concentration and density of nest holes showing around the Swift Groups' areas is lacking in the RSPB map. Note there is an overlap with some sites on both systems.

SwiftMapper splits nest sites into artificial or natural. Of the 142 nest sites, 129 are natural with a total of 314 nest holes and 13 are artificial with a total of 27 nest boxes or bricks. A few sites are registered in both categories.

Type of building:

98 houses, 3 flats, 2 schools, 4 churches, 8 commercial and 27 other

Age of building:

Post 2000 - 10, Post 1945 - 20, Pre 1945 - 95, Unknown - 27

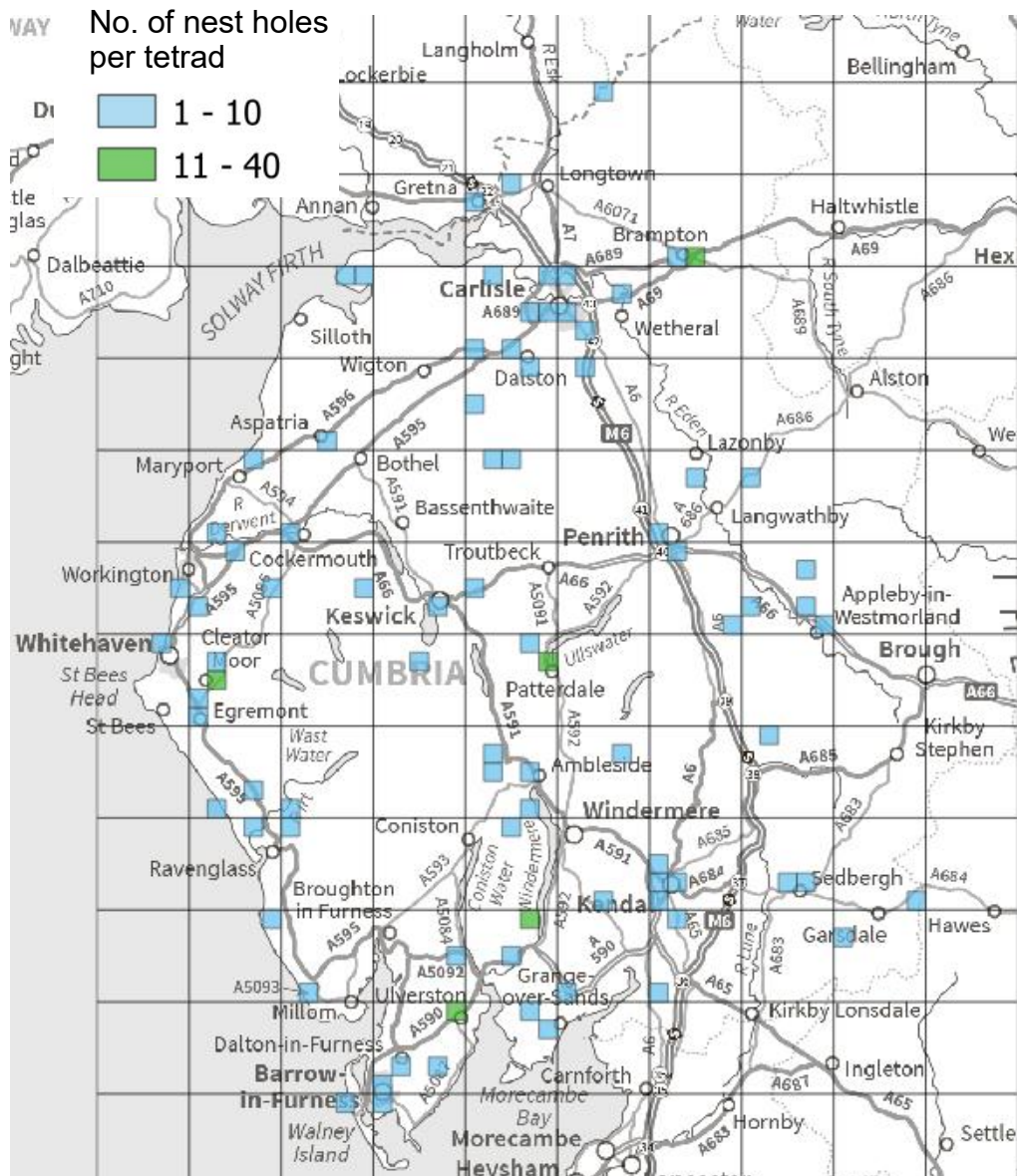
Despite the differences in input, broadly speaking the two surveys are producing similar outputs. It could be posited from both that nesting in "natural" holes in the eaves of a pre-war house is most suitable for Swifts. In all probability this is all there is available to the majority of Swifts and not in sufficient quantity. Modern housing needs to change to allow them a chance.

Protecting Swift nest sites

One of the main aims of both surveys is to collect information on Swifts in order to help protect their nest sites in the future. This poses the question - should we be using SwiftMapper to hold all our records so that all Swift nesting details are held in one database, easily accessible to planners? Also the RSPB may hold greater sway with developers and others impacting on Swift nesting sites though, as the Swift groups have proved, organised local action can be most effective.

The Swift survey is currently in its 3rd season and council will be discussing whether or not to continue with further annual surveys and if so in what format. Any thoughts on the future from members or local Swift groups are welcome.

Dave Piercy



RSPB SwiftMapper to 2019
 Location of Swift nest sites by tetrad

Watchtree Nature Reserve – birds, summer 2020

The covid 19 situation severely limited visiting in March through to early June. Territorial Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Blackcap were present in good numbers. To date we have ringed 142 Willow Warblers and recaptured 24 birds ringed in previous years. I ringed a single juvenile doing my garden constant effort site for the first time and remarkably, another ringer recaptured it in Suffolk in mid-August. Chiffchaff seem to have bred well again and we have ringed 61 of which nine were adults (birds more than a year old) and 52 were juveniles. We have ringed 28 Blackcap of which eight were adults and 20 juvenile. By comparison, Garden Warbler numbers were low with one new adult and one recapture and only two juveniles ringed. However, this may be a consequence of Covid since we were unable to ring at one of our net sites at the key time.

Sedge Warblers have had a good year with eight new and three recapture adults and 22 new juveniles. We think there were two territorial male Reed Warblers and we have had one adult male recapture. He was first ringed as a juvenile at Watchtree in August 2014 and has been back every year since, in addition we have ringed three new juveniles. I was most disappointed that the Cetti's Warblers captured last autumn did not stay to breed, next year maybe.



*Sedge Warbler,
Longlands, Roger Ridley*

At least two territorial Lesser Whitethroat were present but breeding success was not established. We ringed two adults but no juveniles were seen or ringed. A pair bred for the first time last year. We were delighted when the Spotted Flycatchers returned to breed in the nest box they used last year and fledged four chicks on 12th July.

Great Tits had a very good year with 67 fledged young from nine boxes. However, the total may have been double had not a Stoat or Weasel raided seven broods at egg stage in Pond Wood and the Treecreeper, which nested successfully in the Treecreeper style woodcrete box last year. The Blue Tits also seem to have had a good year, we have ringed a remarkable total of 112 of which 16 were adults, 21 nestlings and 75 new juveniles.



Tree Sparrow, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

Tree Sparrows had a poor season with only 41 juveniles from the first broods.

The five second broods failed, most at egg stage. I wonder if this was an effect of the very dry weather or the very wet weather from early-June onwards. A pair of Greylag Geese hatched four goslings but it seems they were probably taken by a fox soon after hatching. A pair of Canada Geese appeared with two goslings, a new breeding species for the reserve. One of the adults and a juvenile went missing and a corpse was found. I wonder if this too was the work of a fox.

We ringed three Tree Pipits in August presumably migrating through, remarkable because we have only ringed two or three in the past 15 years. Swallow numbers were down and only three broods were reared, one pair rearing two broods and a single brood, whilst the third nest was predated.

We have two pair of Mute Swans but the long-term pair were unsuccessful again. They failed with infertile eggs in 2018 and 2019 and gave up this year soon after building a new nest. The new pair built a nest in the lake reeds, hatched three young but lost one and later moved over to the wetlands where they usurped the territory of the older pair. The male of the new pair is ringed and it transpires he was ringed as a first year male at Killingworth in Tyne and Wear during January 2017. This is quite a long distance movement.



*Bullfinch, Geltsdale,
Adam Moan*

My Barn Owl boxes this year have produced 35 young. They were very early and many should have fledged by late July, I hope the very wet weather has not dealt them a hard time. I had one late box that had five newly hatched chicks in mid-July. When I went to ring them four weeks later only one half-grown owlet remained and the remains of another. Both adults were nearby. This suggests the voles crashed in the persistently wet weather.

With its diversity of habitats, Watchtree continues to support over 40 species of breeding birds. In early September a roost of 6000 plus Starlings was using the reed beds round the lake and a flock of over 150 Goldfinches were feeding on flower seed heads, notably Knapweed. The new woodland is maturing and already there are obvious changes to the breeding bird population with the scrub species moving out to the woodland fringes and areas of now managed scrub. There has been a notable decrease in breeding Bullfinch numbers. Unable to go onto site during March and April we were unable to locate the Curlews. It is possible that the usual three pairs were present on or around the site fringes but there was no evidence of chicks in June.

Frank Mawby

Lockdown garden birds

Well there has been one thing we have learnt from the lockdown and In my opinion it is the value of our gardens and the wildlife they contain and which we have over the years overlooked. I have spent many happy hours over the last three months sitting in my conservatory watching the antics of all the birds coming to the feeders and bathing in the pond and hopefully unaware of my presence behind the glass.

I have always had feeders up and am amazed at the various breed of birds that come to them. The Jackdaws are comical to watch as they try and work out how to get the fat balls and peanuts out of the cages. I had a pair of Rooks that beat me because every time I put fat balls in the feeders one would come in and tip the container upside down whilst its mate tried to take the lid off. They were successful nearly every time even after I had attempted to secure the lid they would find a way to dislodge it and fly off with a complete fat ball.

The smaller birds were, Chaffinch, Blue, Coal and Great Tits, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Tree and House Sparrows, Great Spotted Woodpeckers both adults and young who sat and demanded to be fed.

Collared Doves, Stock Doves and Wood Pigeon were regular attenders and it was interesting to see the doves see off the pigeons. Starlings, Blackbirds, Robins and Dunnocks were daily visitors cleaning up under the feeders after the tits who seemed to throw out anything they didn't want. A Wren made an appearance on my rockery and was quite open in its hunting of small insects among the rocks and flowers.



*Great Spotted Woodpecker
with nictating membrane,
Portinscale, Tony Marsh*



Greenfinch, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

I have several nest boxes up in the garden and unusually only two have been occupied this year by a pair of Tree Sparrows and a family of Starlings. I missed the fledging of the Sparrows but did see the Starlings leave and how the parents enticed them to leave by sitting in a nearby tree with wriggling grubs in their beaks and calling to them.

I have two Berberis bushes in the garden with evil thorns and the smaller birds use them as a shelter when they have a visitor in the form of a Sparrowhawk and it is amazing to watch the hawk do its best to dislodge them but cannot get in itself. It will then go and sit on a nearby post and wait, hoping one small bird will pop out but they very rarely do.



Starling, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

Other wild life using my garden are frogs and newts in the pond, but never any young, various beetles in the water and occasionally a small mouse appears and runs around. Butterflies have been scarce this year even though I have two Buddleia bushes and to date have only had Small White, Large White, Peacock and occasionally an Orange Tip. Hopefully I will get others.

Fly overs have included Barnacle, Pinkfeet and Greylag Geese, Mute and Whooper Swans, various gulls, Fieldfare and Redwing and I was very lucky the other day to see an Osprey on the estuary from my house. It is great to hear Curlew, Lapwing and Golden Plover calling from the estuary during the day and night.

I hope that everyone has enjoyed their garden as much as I have.

Peter Birkett

Redstart - a summer visitor

Thought you may be interested in the visitor to my conservatory last weekend, entered either through the open door or window.



Flew off happily un-phased by the experience although it did leave it's mark on the seat (needs house training !)

Strangely, although we have a great variety of birds using the garden for feeding and nesting (including Spotted Flycatcher currently in residence) we have never seen a Redstart

Terry Hughes

Blyth's Reed Warbler, Longlands Lake, 27th June - 7th July



Early in the morning of the 27th June 2020 Chris Mason heard an unusual call while out birding at Longlands Lake, Egremont. After spending some time listening and recording it he concluded it was probably a Blyth's Reed warbler and this was quickly confirmed by Rare Bird Alert amongst others. This was only the second record for Cumbria and like the first, in 2017 at Siddick Pond, was a singing male. Unlike the skulky and elusive Siddick Pond bird, which only remained for two days, this male was present in a small area of scrub adjacent to the lake for well over a week and was last seen on the 7th July. It performed well, singing in all weathers and with a fine repertoire of mimicry. It would regularly sing a very wide variety of mimicry in a short space of time and calls that could be identified were Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Common Rosefinch, Willow Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Greenfinch and Great Tit, amongst many others.

The bird seemed to have a favoured Hawthorn to sing from when I visited but it also came down into the reed bed very close to us and showed very well at times. I understand from other observers that it could be elusive at times and at other times seemed to sing from deep cover. This could well have been a result of wind direction and weather conditions, but I think most people got excellent views with a bit of patience.



Blyth's Reed warbler have become increasingly common in the last decade in the UK and are now no longer considered by the British Birds Rarities panel but are still very scarce on the west side of the UK. Give the research that went into considering the first County record as recently as 2017 the County Record panel had no trouble in confirming this as the second for Cumbria.

Nick Franklin

Long-billed Dowitcher, Port Carlisle, 10th July -



On the 10th July there was a feeling that wader flocks were starting to build up on the Inner Solway and so I was out waiting for high tide at one of my regular, and favourite birding spots, Port Carlisle. About an hour before high tide I came across what I was fairly convinced was a summer plumage Dowitcher about half a mile east of the harbour amongst Redshank.

I had only watched the bird for about 30 seconds when the group of birds it was with flew west towards the harbour, presumably to roost as the tide was well in by now. I felt I had seen enough of the bird even at distance to rule out a Godwit on size alone but was left frustrated by the short length of time I'd been able to consider it. After a short while I headed back to the car and drove up to the harbour. The tide was now fully in so I was resigned to waiting until it fell before trying to relocate the bird. Additionally my camera was away for repair so I had no photographs to back up the sighting.

At the harbour I birded for a while but most of the waders were roosting firmly out of sight. I did manage to relocate the Spotted Redshank that had been in the area in recent days but nothing that looked like a Dowitcher. About an hour later as the tide began to drop I was fortunate enough to meet Roger Ridley who told me he had met someone who had seen a Dowitcher in flight earlier, this turned out to be Mike Porter. I subsequently found out that Colin Barrett had photographed the Dowitcher with Redshank on the island sandbank in the harbour that the waders regularly roost on shortly before full tide.

While Roger and I were discussing the possible Dowitcher I picked out what I thought could be the bird but it was a half mile away down by the caravan park layby where I had originally seen it. As Roger was armed with a camera I was keen to get nearer the bird and so we gradually walked down to where it was feeding with a large number of other mixed waders. As we did this Roger took photos and I studied the bird, which was now obviously a fine summer plumage Dowitcher. Once close enough, and with the help of Colin Auld who had also now arrived, we were able to rule out Short-billed Dowitcher on the basis of the flanks below the wing being mainly black barring on a rusty, beige background, with only a little white, rather than on a white background.

Additionally the side of the neck held barred marking instead of spotting and the belly and upper flanks showed no sign of white, while the bill had only a gentle downcurve beginning close to the end of the bill, rather than from c1/3 of the way from the end as in Short-billed dowitcher.

We watched the bird for a good hour or two and were joined by several other birders, some of whom assumed we were watching the Spotted Redshank, until they came to join us and we were able to show them a fine summer plumage Dowitcher instead.

One of the question that was subsequently raised was is this the bird that had spent last winter in Cumbria about three miles west of Port Carlisle in the Campfield Marsh area. As that bird had only been seen in winter plumage and this bird was in full summer plumage any comparisons based on the feather detail of the bird were not going to help answer that question either way. Initially I thought it was quite likely the bird was the same one but having considered the bill length this new bird seemed to have a shorter bill. In the end I measured the bill to head ratio of both birds from photos on the computer screen. Although this seemed a fairly unreliable method as no two photos show exactly the same angle, by using a number of photos I hoped to reduce the unreliability.

In conclusion the bird from last winter seemed to show a longer bill with the bill approximately 1.95 times longer than its head, firmly in the Long-billed Dowitcher range, while the new bird seemed to show a ratio of 1.75 bill to head length. This was in the range of ratio that can be shown by both Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitcher but does not cast doubt on the identification of the bird as a Long-billed Dowitcher. It is known that male Long-billed Dowitcher show a shorter bill than females and this may be the case here.



Guy Broome

My confidence in the above paragraph has been shaken in recent weeks, however, as this summer's bird has settled in to stay and is still present at the time of writing in late September. It would seem too much of a coincidence to have two long staying Long-billed Dowitchers in subsequent years within such a close geographical area and I now suspect they are the same bird, and possibly plumage affects the visual area of the bill base, though we may never know for certain.

Nick Franklin

Solitary Sand Martin nest



On 26th August close to the stone circle on the Ennerdale Cold Fell Road we noticed a Sand Martin feeding young in a boulder clay beck side (See photo). The nest had utilised, and presumably excavated, the hole where a small boulder had fallen out (see photo).

We hadn't realised that Sand Martins will sometimes nest singly where there is a food source to exploit. This nest at 225 m above sea level is just 2km away from a significant colony along the River Ehen but maybe the 145m height difference made it all worthwhile. We tended to view this pioneering pair in a different light to the social hub of the colony down the valley.

Mike & Lyn Mills

Barn Owl success



Barn Owls successfully fledged two youngsters with some supplementary feeding from us as they became a single parent family. Attached is a photo of Mum (we think) with the two young when they first ventured out.

Hazel Atherton

Pied Flycatchers in nest boxes in South Cumbria

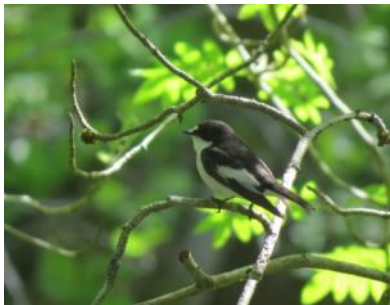


I've been visiting the Lake District for many years fell walking and, as a keen birder, to enjoy the fantastic variety of wildlife in the area. After holidaying in 2012 near the village of Finsthwaite south Cumbria, I bought a caravan in the area on a quiet farm site as I only live little more than an hour away. This offered easy access to fantastic habitat with much of the area comprising

of grazed fell, acid bog and damp woodland, largely consisting of Oak, Ash, Birch and Hazel where a wonderful variety of birds can be seen.

Through regular visits, I've found the local woodland and its surroundings remain a stronghold for many nationally declining species such as Wood Warbler and Cuckoo. For example, in a nearby wood I have counted up to six singing Wood Warblers and as many Cuckoos around the open areas. Redstarts and Green Woodpecker breed locally but surprisingly, up until and including 2017, I hadn't seen Pied Flycatcher, even though the habitat was perfect and I suspected they must at least pass through.

I decided therefore in early spring of 2018 to erect a few suitable nest boxes along the edge of a very quiet and secluded section of Oak woodland next to my caravan. As an ex BTO ringer, I have been involved in nest box schemes in the past and have always enjoyed making them using a simple design easily made from a suitable rough sawn plank. The entrance hole is 27mm (1 and 1/8 inches) in diameter. I always sand the entrance hole very smooth as they visit the box when feeding chicks hundreds of times and the slightest bit of rough wood can really damage feathers. I decided that three boxes would be a good start, approximately twelve metres apart and one and a half metres off the ground for easy access for maintenance and cleaning out old nests which gets rid of fleas and other pests.



Without any great expectation, I visited the boxes in late April 2018 and was delighted to find a male Pied Flycatcher singing and holding territory, the first I'd actually seen in the vicinity. After waiting a short time, a female appeared and entered a box and I was able, for the rest of the spring and into June, to watch this pair as they successfully raised a brood of chicks. The other boxes were used by Great Tits and Blue Tits.

Pied Flycatchers in nest boxes in South Cumbria

Being chuffed all round and spurred on by this, in March 2019 I erected another three boxes, (now a total of six) one nearby the original three and two approximately 150 metres away.

At the end of April, 2019 the original box was again occupied as well as another pair in one of the two boxes set away from the first three; so now two pairs! Again I was able throughout May and early June to witness both pairs successfully rear a brood each. Of the remaining four boxes, Great Tits, Blue Tits and a pair of Marsh Tits took over three of them.

In early March 2020 I visited my caravan for walks and to clean out the six boxes, all of which were still in good order and so I was full of anticipation for the new season ahead. Then of course the Corona virus struck and lockdown occurred and so was unable to visit during the crucial period. However, after the slight easing of the lockdown in the first week of June but not being unable to stay over, I came for the day and checked out the boxes for the third year hoping to catch them still occupied. To my amazement there were now four pairs. The male in what was the first box used in 2018 had two females in adjacent boxes and would himself feed both broods as well as the individual females. Polygamy is well known in Pied Flycatchers so no great surprise there but still fascinating to witness. A nearby box had a pair as well as the distant box from the year before. So, from zero to four pairs in three years! This had exceeded all expectation. The two other boxes had a Great Tit and a Blue Tit.

The general decline in many long distance migrants can of course be put down to any number of contributing factors: loss and fragmentation of habitat, human activity such as hunting or just general disturbance as well as pollution and climate to name just a few. It does seem clear however across a range of species that these issues can to some extent be mitigated relatively simply by providing suitable nest sites in favourable habitat which has been shown here in some small way.



If anyone in the area has access to an area of woodland they can visit regularly, it's well worth the effort of a few boxes and the rewards are priceless for the observer as well as a possible lifeline for our birds.

Dave Hardaker

Recent reports

The period covered is June to August 2020. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or the British Birds Rarities Committee.

Wildfowl

A summering **Whooper Swan** was seen on the Eden at Grinsdale on 17th June and 11th July. Wildfowl records are necessarily few in this period and it wasn't in the main till the end of August that numbers started to build up with 450 **Greylags** on Cartmel Sands on 26th and 100 at Anthorn four days later; with the Cartmel birds were 200 **Canada Geese**. Something of an anomaly was a **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** at Foulney on 16th August and still there on 23rd. Post breeding flocks of **Shelduck** on the south Solway amounted to 740 birds on 1st July accompanied by two **Ruddy Shelduck**.



Common Scoter, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Teal started to return by the end of August with 40 at RSPB Campfield on 26th with numbers rapidly increasing thereafter. **Gadwall** peaked at 17 in the Foulshaw area. A drake **Garganey** was at Walney on 1st June and then two frequented field floods on the Kent Estuary on 26th August. On 27th June there was an **Eider** creche consisting of 160 chicks and by 23rd August numbers at Foulney had reached 3840. In the north west a single bird was off Siddick on 23rd July. **Common Scoter** numbers off Walney had built to 600 by 22nd August. Unusual was a **Long-tailed Duck** on the River Eden at Rockliffe on 6th July. In July three **Greater Scaup** were off Workington on 15th with two at Walney two days later. **Mandarin Duck** were recorded regularly on Windermere and on 23rd August at least four (and possibly six) were on Derwent Water including at least three juveniles.



Goosander, Bassenthwaite, Tony Marsh

Partridges to Herons

First reports of **Quail** came from Cliburn on 2nd June with a bird at Bothel on 8th, Arnside on 14th, in the north east on 20th and then in the south at Alinthwaite on 23rd with another bird reported on 14th July at Cliburn. One was picked up at a multi-storey car park on 12th August and taken into care! **Red Grouse**, away from the Pennines, were heard on Binsey on 18th July. The only record of **Corncrake** was a bird seen at Edenhall on 20th June.

Manx Shearwaters were reported on 5th July from the inner Solway and Lowca on the west coast. At Walney 165 passed on 29th June with numbers increasing to 1000 on 26th July – numbers obviously being affected by weather conditions. **Sooty Shearwaters** were reported only from Walney. Two **Storm Petrels** followed a fishing boat off Workington on 16th July, a single bird having been seen there on 29th June, a day when there was another single in the Inner Solway. A storm blown **Fulmar** was found on the ground in Longtown on 7th August.



*Heron,
Bassenthwaite,
Tony Marsh*

The only reported **Bittern** was in the south of the county on 30th August. A **Night Heron** fed on the River Kent near Natland on 12th July. The first **Great White Egret** reported was over Foulshaw Moss on 12th July then no reports until one on Ulpha Meadows on 14th to 16th August and then up to five at Black Dyke Moss from 16th to 19th. A single bird at Rockcliffe on 21st and 22nd had probably been displaced from the marsh by exceptional tides. A single bird was back at Black Dyke Moss from 27th to the month end. **Little Egret** numbers on the Leven Estuary increased from 31 on 7th July to 55 on 26th August. On the west coast there were 13 on the Irt/Esk complex on 8th July and six on Grune Point on 9th August. On the Solway the highest number reported were 23 on 6th August at Port Carlisle. Inland birds were singles at Bassenthwaite, Dalston and Wigton. **Black Storks** were reported at Cartmel on 14th June and at Grange over Sands on 22nd. A **Spoonbill** frequented Hodbarrow RSPB on 18th and 19th July.

Raptors to Waders

Away from breeding sites in June **Osprey** were noted at Frizington, where “rare”, Coniston and Ulverston. In July a bird was over Thaka Beck NR Penrith on 10th and others were at Anthorn on 28th with other sightings there into August, also on 28th a bird drifted south over Armathwaite. During August up to three birds frequented the Solway off RSPB Campfield – this is becoming a regular thing at this time. Less usual were a juvenile at a fishing lake near Warcop on 15th August, one at Helton on 20th and two that drifted south at Wetsleddale on 23rd. Other sightings at the month end came from the Leven Estuary on 26th, a satellite tagged bird at Greenod on 29th and at Walney one on 16th August and two on 28th.



*Marsh Harrier, Geltsdale,
Adam Moan*

In mid June a number of reports of **Red Kite** appeared of what may have been the same bird in West Cumbria west of Cockermouth otherwise singles were at Blencarn on 25th June and then at Tirril on 6th August and Great Dun Fell on 8th. The unusual sighting of **Red Kite**, **Buzzard** and **Sparrowhawk** all above the fell at 600m on the Helvellyn side of Thirlmere on 21st July.

Most **Marsh Harrier** records came from the southern mosses but from the last week of July birds were reported in other areas – north lakes on 22nd and 28th, Wedholme Flow on 9th August, on Binsey the next day and Burgh Marsh on 30th. In the North Pennines a female was at High Midgeholme on 10th. Unexpected was a ring-tailed **Hen Harrier** over Red Screes, Ambleside on 8th August. The only report of **Honey Buzzard** was of a bird moving north over Kendal and a southern moss.

Hobby were reported on many dates from the southern mosses from 13th June; in the north of the county one was pursuing hirundines at Thaka Beck NR on 21st. In July a bird was at Burgh by Sands on 17th and on 12th August one passed Carlisle Airport with birds being seen a little further south in the Eden Valley from 10th to 24th; on the latter date one was also over Wedholme Flow. Whilst at Walney the first returning bird was on 30th July. A small number of reports of **Merlin** included a juvenile at Saltcoates on 6th August, a male harassing a **Goshawk** in the far north of the county on 10th and a bird present at the Starling roost at Watchtree NR on 30th.

Peregrine were regularly reported from Foulshaw and the south Solway and on 22nd July a bird was on Dixon's Chimney, Carlisle and on 31st August three birds were on the Leven Estuary.

Oystercatcher numbers started to build in July with 2200 at the Mawbray roost on 25th and in August 1500 on the Leven Estuary. Taking advantage of low water levels were a pair of **Little Ringed Plover** on Ullswater on 28th June and were still present some weeks later but there was no sign of young birds. A pair also frequented a pool near Bolton (Appleby). Significant numbers of **Ringed Plover** included 488 at Foulney on 23rd August. The only **Dotterel** was a single bird in the North Pennines on 12th August,



Juvenile Goshawk, Adam Moan



Juvenile Kestrel, Adam Moan

Twenty **Golden Plover** were on Great Dun Fell on 8th August and 64 at Walney on 20th with 90 **Grey Plover**. Post breeding flocks of **Lapwing** included 325 near Lazonby on 21st July, 200 at Southwaite on 19th August, 86 at Carlisle Airport on 24th, c600 at RSPB Campfield on 26th and 150 near Thaka NR on 31st.



Juvenile Grey Plover, Tommy Holden

Twelve hundred **Knot** were on the roost at Mawbray on 25th July as were 1800 **Sanderling**. **Turnstone** numbers of note were 220 at Walney on 29th July. Numbers of **Knot** at Walney in June saw 10000 early in the month, still 8000 in mid month but down to 1550 on 17th. A hundred adult **Dunlin** (and one juvenile) were at Port Carlisle on 16th July. In early August 1300 were on Skinburness Marsh. Six juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** were on Walney on 31st August, part of a large influx into the country. A **Wood Sandpiper** was on Wedholme Flow on 16th June and then no reports until two were on a field flood by the River Bela at Hang Bridge for two days from 11th August and one was at Walney on 17th.



Dunlin, Tommy Holden

One **Green Sandpiper** was in the Foulshaw area on 19th July and they were recorded on two dates in late July at Bolton (Appleby), two were on the Ravenglass Esk on 21st, more unexpected was one flushed from a pool on the summit of Red Screes, Ambleside and then two birds on a flooded road at Saltcoates and at the very end of August one was at Longtown again on a field flood and finally one on the new flooded grassland at RSPB Campfield.



Spotted Redshank, Port Carlisle, Roger Ridley

Passage **Common Sandpipers** included 12 on the Ravensglass Esk on 8th July and 11 at Port Carlisle on 18th. A summer plumage **Spotted Redshank** was present at Port Carlisle from 9th July for at least three days with other birds at Grune on 9th August, Anthorn on 20th and Arnside Marsh on two days from 21st. Whilst single **Greenshank** were reported in July it wasn't until the end of August that numbers increased on the south Solway with six at Port Carlisle and Glasson Point on 26th and a similar number at Anthorn two days later. On Walney the first bird reappeared on 16th June with 21 by 24th July but still 19 on 6th August. There was a count of 270 **Sanderling** at Walney in early June with returning birds increased to 500 on 16th August.



Sanderling, Dunlin & Ringed Plover, Flimby, Tony Marsh

There were around 200 **Black-tailed Godwit** on Fell End Nature Reserve on 5th June and were recorded at Bowness on Solway on several dates in July with 55 on 1st and still 60 at the end of the month. Inland one was at a pool at Bolton (Appleby). Significant numbers of **Curlew** were 350 at the Mawbray roost on 25th July, 150 at Siddick on 2nd August and 1150 at Foulney on 23rd. At Walney 780 were present on 4th August. July saw five **Whimbrel** at Port Carlisle on 3rd, also five at Hodbarrow on 24th and 14 at the Mawbray roost on 25th, other than that numbers were small but there was still a bird at

Bowness Railings on 27th August. At Walney the first returning bird was on 8th July with varying numbers thereafter but a maximum of 24 on 5th August.

Small numbers of **Ruff** (including a moulting male at Anthorn and Campfield on 30th July) were reported throughout and in August included three using the new wet fields at RSPB Campfield, two juveniles on the Kent Estuary on 8th, four on flood water in the Lyth Valley on 10th, and four with a Lapwing flock near Thaka NR Penrith for over a week from 29th the same day as two reeves on Walney.



*Long-billed Dowitcher,
Port Carlisle, Adam Moan*

A summer plumage **Long-billed Dowitcher** appeared with the Redshank flock at Port Carlisle on 10th July and was still present in the area at the end of August by which time it was in almost total winter plumage. It moved with the Redshanks and was seen also at Old Anthorn.

Skuas to Auks

Away from Walney few skuas were reported. A **Pomarine** was seen moving east at Bowness on 5th July. From Walney two birds passed on 26th July. **Arctic Skuas** were seen off Walney on several days with three on 21st August and on 25th July a bird passed by St Bees Head.

Mediterranean Gulls were returning by end of June with one at Workington and four (three adults) at Maryport. Following the usual pattern numbers increased during July (14 on 2nd) and August with 80 at Siddick/Flimby on 2nd and 112 by 22nd. This flock consisted of mainly adults a few second years and 14 juveniles. An adult reappeared at Allonby Green on 10th August – the 10th consecutive year that this has occurred with the bird usually going on to spend the winter there. A **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Sandside on 30th July and again on 16th and 27th August. Of note was an adult **Little Gull** in the Lyth Valley floodwater on 10th August. Stormy conditions saw an adult **Sabine's Gull** moving south off Workington on 22nd August.



*Sandwich Terns,
Flimby, Tony Marsh*

Thirty **Little Terns** were feeding off Walney on 18th July and then away from breeding areas in the

south of the county three were off Dubmill Point on 9th August. July and August saw **Sandwich Tern** numbers at Siddick/St Helens/Flimby increase from 45 (30% juveniles) on 9th July to 125 on 23rd and 185 on 2nd August. Unexpected were two birds, an adult and a juvenile, feeding in Gale Bay, Ullswater for 90 minutes on 25th August. On 21st August seven “very noisy **terns**” very over the south car park at Gretna Gateway Centre at the head of the Solway Estuary. **Puffin**, away from St Bees were seen on several occasions passing Walney with a maximum of ten on 17th June. Two storm blown **Gannets** were on the sands at Anthorn on 25th August whilst another had joined the wildfowl on Bowness on Windermere pier on 6th July and another at Longlands Lake, Egremont on the same day. Walney saw 135 on 17th July and then in late August 400 on both 20th and 22nd.

Pigeons to Buntings

Two **Turtle Doves** passed through Walney on 8th June followed by two reported from Rockliffe Marsh on 22nd August. **Cuckoos** were still moving with one at Walney on 23rd and 26th August; a juvenile was at Foulshaw on 20th and another was photographed at Howtown, Ullswater on 31st. It has been a good vole year so **Barn** and **Short-eared Owls** have done well with the latter at possibly record levels at RSPB Geltsdale. Shorties were also reported from Walla Crag, Birkbeck Common, Tindale and Wet Sleddale in June and Binsey in mid July and Walney on 31st August. On the 8th June a family party of **Long-eared Owls** was reported from the north of the county. Records of **Little Owl** came from Ravenstonedale in the south east and Seascale on the west coast.

The CBC survey on **Common Swift** will no doubt shed light on this year although it is suspected numbers were down – of note 80 were over Frizington probably feeding on emerging insects on 9th August: 80 birds passed through Walney on 26th June and a similar number on 31st July. A bird was roosting on the outside of a house in Carlisle on 17th August and a similar one on 26th August elsewhere in the city. The last birds reported were two over Spadeadam and a single at Arlecdon on 29th.



Long-eared Owl, Adam Moan



Short-eared Owl, Adam Moan

Kingfisher were reported from Smardale and Wetheral in mid-August and the Leven Estuary in late August and a bird at RSPB Geltsdale, the first for nine years. A **Hoopoe** was on Walney on 16th and 17th June. The largest numbers of **Swallows** reported were 50 at both Frizington and Whale in August whilst 30 on the shingle at Grune were presumably looking for insects. Passage at Walney had 200 on 9th August. At least 80 **House Martins** were feeding at Kirkbride on 8th August.



Kingfisher, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

Yellow Wagtails were reported at Langwathby in June and Carlisle Airport and Port Carlisle in August. **Common Redstarts** include five (three male and two female) at Longtown on 27th August and another on 31st. Significant numbers of **Wheatear** included between 55 and 65 in the Bootle/Selker area on 9th August and included eight on a six metre strand of wire. On 30th at least 30 were on Roa Island causeway; numbers at Walney saw 35 on 24th August and 22 on 30th. **Whinchat** were on Shap Fells in June and then two on Longlands Flash, Kendal on 17th August. There were also birds on Binsey and Walton Moss on 24th August. Six **Stonechat** were on Great Dun Fell on 8th August and a max of 15 at Walney in August.

Reports of post breeding flocks of **Mistle Thrush** were of 20 near Lazonby on 21st July and 73 moving west near Aitketgate over a morning in early August. **Ring Ouzel** were reported in early June from Birkdale (two), the Howgills and Ennerdale (two males and a female). Good numbers including young were found at at least ten locations around the fells accessible from Borrowdale and Glenridding Common.

A day of fog at Walney on 8th August produced a fall of 42 **Willow**, 22 **Sedge**, 11 **Whitethroats**, three **Garden Warblers** as well as six **Whinchat**, and four **Wheatear**. Seven **Common** and three **Lesser Whitethroats** were at Longtown on 27th August and were presumably migrants. **Reed Warbler** were reported as breeding on the Ravenglass Esk on 8th July and a very obliging **Blyth's Reed Warbler** sang at Longlands Lake, Egremont for several days from 27th June giving excellent views and sound recording opportunities. A **Grasshopper Warbler** was singing from vegetation on the overgrown golf course at The Swifts, Carlisle.

In the second half of August **Spotted Flycatchers** were reported from most areas of the county. There was a post breeding flock of 28 **Long-tailed Tits** at Kingmoor NR, Carlisle on 15th June. A **Nuthatch** at Frizington on 24th June was described as being scarce there. By the end of August a **Starling** murmuration had started to build at Watchtree NR. A **Rose-coloured Starling** frequented Walney NR from 10th to 25th June with another at Shap on 16th and one elsewhere in the Lake District from 17th to 19th at least, all part of a national influx. The highest number of **Tree Sparrows** reported was 60 at Walney on 14th August. A **Hawfinch** was seen feeding a juvenile in Ambleside on 9th June and two flew over Barkbooth Lot NR on 31st August. Four **Crossbill** were by Foulshaw on 19th June. At least 120 **Linnets** were at Braystones on 18th August.

As ever, we are indebted to all the contributors, too numerous to list. Feel free to send records by e-mail to: rigreenacres72@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

A Swift summer

A year of extraordinarily varied weather considerably affected Swift sightings. April and May were exceptionally hot and dry, followed by two months of largely cold and wet conditions in June and July which is not good news for Swifts.

The poor weather and extreme gales at the end of June led to some incredible reports of huge numbers of Swifts moving south down the east coast. In Filey on 27th June a passage of over 16k Swifts was observed. At Gibraltar Point Bird Observatory on 28th June regular 15-minute samples of 650-700 Swifts were made, reaching a total of almost 20,000. And on 29th June Lincolnshire Birders reported the astonishing passage of over 45,000 Swifts, which is believed to be the largest ever Swift movement in the UK. This must have been spectacular to watch, and their website has a video and photograph capturing this. One explanation was that because of poor weather this was an early migration of non-breeders to Europe. However, since good numbers of Swifts were later seen in August in many areas it could be that they had re-orientated inland. At Lowgill we had excellent sightings of large numbers of Swifts and screaming parties in the first ten days of August.

Our first Swift returned to its nest at Lowgill on May 3rd, our earliest record, followed by its mate four days later. A pair doesn't migrate together nor win-

A Swift summer

ter together so it is always exciting, and a relief, to see them reunited – and even after 20 years of studying Swifts we never cease to be amazed at how they return to the exact same nest site year after year. This was an experienced pair, laying three eggs as in previous years, all of which had fledged by July 24th. Nest site faithfulness was discovered during decades of research by David Lack at the Oxford Museum of Natural History, and his book 'Swifts in the Tower' remains a classic today.



Three fully grown chicks in a nest site within the eaves. One chick sits on the nest while the other two peer out of the entrance hole preparing for their maiden flight.

In one of the boxes at Settlebeck school in Sedbergh, we had another early record: both birds came back on May 4th within an hour of each other, had laid eggs by 12th May, and chicks fledged on 16th July. By contrast, we had a new pair at Lowgill that had not formed until 17th June, laying a single egg on 30th June. These were probably young birds of 3-4 years that were about to breed for the first time. So we ended up with some Swifts still incubating eggs overlapping with the first chicks about to fledge.

During the awful weather of June and July many people, including our colleagues around the UK, were reporting that fewer Swifts were seen. Yet during a sudden few days of hot sunshine between June 20th - 26th there were many reports of great Swift activity and screaming parties. So clearly Swifts are around – somewhere – but just not visibly swooping around. The non-breeding Swifts, with only themselves to consider, could fly perhaps many hundreds of miles away to find better conditions.

When our Swifts returned this year in that glorious spring weather we had hoped for a season with lots of exhilarating sightings. But with the prolonged bad weather of June and July many of our colleagues around the UK reported poor breeding results. Our overall success rate of chicks per pair was only 1.6 this year, whereas in a good year it is 2.2. In our case this low rate was due to eggs being knocked out of the nest, which looks accidental as the Swifts turn around on the nest, so perhaps could not be attributed to a lack of insects. Common Swifts have only one brood per year so with this low rate of reproduction it is not difficult to see how vulnerable they are. We just have to hope for less clumsy Swifts next year.

Tanya & Edmund Hoare

Contents

Club news and announcements	59
CBC Swift survey - nest sites <i>Dave Piercy</i>	60
Watchtree Nature Reserve - birds, summer 2020 <i>Frank Mawby</i>	64
Lockdown garden birds <i>Peter Birkett</i>	66
Redstart - a summer visitor <i>Terry Hughes</i>	67
Blyth's Reed Warbler, Longlands Lake, June 27th - July 7th <i>Nick Franklin</i>	68
Long-billed Dowitcher, Port Carlisle, 10th July - Nick Franklin	69
Solitary Sand Martin nest <i>Mike & Lyn Mills</i>	71
Barn Owl success <i>Hazel Atherton</i>	71
Pied Flycatchers in nest boxes in South Cumbria <i>Dave Hardaker</i> ...	72
Recent reports <i>Bob Jones & Dave Piercy</i>	74
A Swift summer <i>Tanya & Edmund Hoare</i>	82

Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is December 1st 2020

Please send contributions to Dave Piercy (see inside cover)

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Cumbria Bird Club Website

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

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