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***BIRD NEWS***  
***Vol. 24 No. 1 Spring 2013***

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## Club news and announcements

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### Outings

Rockcliffe Marsh - Sunday 2nd June 10:00 am. A fine walk, a classic Cumbrian site and always the chance of something out of the ordinary. Please contact Mike Carrier [m.carrier131@btinternet.com](mailto:m.carrier131@btinternet.com) 016974 72218 to book your place as there will be restrictions on numbers.

### Rookery Survey

We still need more volunteers to help with the Rookery survey as detailed in the last newsletter . Please help by taking on a 10km square or a half/quarter 10km square from the vacant squares below to help us with a complete count of all Cumbrian Rookeries between April 6th and 21st.

NY31 (Thirlmere), NY32 (Blencathra), NY40 (Kentmere), NY41(Haweswater), NY42 (Ullswater)

Contact: Dave Piercy [daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk) 017687 77246

NY02 (Branthwaite area), SD28 (North Furness) and SD29 (Torver area)

Contact:Robin Sellers [sellers@craghouse7.freemove.co.uk](mailto:sellers@craghouse7.freemove.co.uk) 019467 25453

NY74 Alston (two rookeries?),NY64 Hartside (only one rookery?),

NY63 Melmerby/Skirwith (over half is moorland so not much to cover)

Contact: Steve Westerberg [swesterberg@btinternet.com](mailto:swesterberg@btinternet.com) 016977 42652

NY70 (Kirkby Stephen)

Contact: Malcolm Priestly [mmphavera@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mmphavera@hotmail.co.uk)

NY24 (Wigton) SW quarter and SE quarter

Contact: Dave Blackledge [blackledge68@btinternet.com](mailto:blackledge68@btinternet.com) 07753 776393

### CBC Website

The “Where to watch birds in Cumbria” section of the Cumbria Bird Club web site should be a useful tool to visitors and residents alike. It should be full of detail on access, when to go, what to see and when and if possible a few photos. At present there is very little useful information on our web site so if you would like to write up your favourite Cumbrian site please have a go.

### BTO Woodcock survey

BTO is running a repeat of the 2003 breeding Woodcock survey. This will involve making three point counts of 75 mins around dusk in your allocated square in May and June. For full details and to choose a square <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey> . If you don't have access to a computer please contact Dave Piercy for further details, paper forms etc. A good survey for beginners as well as the more experienced as recordings are available of calls and song.

**BTO Breeding bird survey (BBS)** <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs>

This is the main scheme for monitoring the population changes of the UK's common breeding birds and, provided there is a good take up of squares available, can also be used to monitor common Cumbrian species as published in "Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria". The survey involves two early-morning spring visits to a local 1-km square, to count all the birds you see or hear while walking two 1-km lines across the square. We need you to be able to commit to this survey for a number of years. Experienced BBS surveyors just love visiting their own square year after year.

The following 1km BBS squares are currently available though please enquire if there are none near you:

NY6402 Langdale, near Tebay: valley and upland square

SD6696 Bram Rigg Top, Howgill Fells: upland plateau

SD6490 Abbott Holme/Holme Fell, Sedbergh: valley and adjoining hill

Contact: Clive Hartley [clive.hartley304@btinternet.com](mailto:clive.hartley304@btinternet.com) tel. 015395 36824

NY2421(Swinside by Derwent Water), NY2832 and NY2931(both Back of Skiddaw not for the faint hearted). To see exactly where they are plug in the reference as per eg: [www.geograph.org.uk/gridref/NY2421](http://www.geograph.org.uk/gridref/NY2421)

Contact: Dave Piercy [daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk) 017687 77246

**Waterways breeding bird survey** [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/wbbs](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/wbbs)

WBBS results supplement BBS with additional data on the birds and mammals of waterside habitats. The scheme covers all bird species but is especially valuable for monitoring the population trends of specialist birds of linear waters, such as Goosander, Common Sandpiper, Kingfisher and Dipper.

Some current vacancies in the north-east of the county are: River Belah south of Brough, Swindale Beck north of Brough, Hilton Beck near Appleby, Briggie Beck near Lanwathby.

Contact: [Stephen.Westerberg@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Stephen.Westerberg@rspb.org.uk) tel. 016977 42652

**BTO Heronry Census** [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/heronries](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/heronries)

There are a lot sites that need a surveying so I can find a site for just about anybody in Cumbria. All that is required is two visits, March to count the nests (if any) before leaves grow and then in April to check how successful the birds were. Also a simple habitat survey, plant ID skills required are minimal. Reporting is by card supplied by myself. The card is then returned to me or directly to the BTO on completion of the census. The census records all Heron species (e.g. Little Egret) and Cormorants where present at a Heronry site. Nil Returns are very important.

Peter Hearn 01229 889976, 07789 483601, [biarmicus@live.co.uk](mailto:biarmicus@live.co.uk)

## 2012/13 Census of Cormorants wintering in Cumbria Preliminary results

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The past half century has seen a substantial increase in the number of Cormorants in Cumbria. Breeding numbers in the county are monitored annually and population numbers and trends are well characterised, but winter numbers *etc* are less well known. Some information on trends is available from WeBS and other incidental counts summarised in the Bird Report, but these are almost entirely based on daytime counts, and are not suitable for deriving reliable estimates of the total numbers present.

With this in mind two coordinated counts of Cormorants at all the nocturnal roosts in the county were carried out by members of the Bird Club this winter. All the information collected has now been returned and we present here some feedback on the results. Preliminary work had identified 25 roosts in the county but in the event only 22 of these were in use at the time of the surveys.

The first survey, carried out over the weekend of 8th/9th December 2012, found a total 1,428 birds of which 18% were at inland roosts. The second survey carried out over the weekend of 2nd/3rd February 2013 found 1,775 birds of which 19% were inland – in short little change from the first survey. These results establish for the first time just how many Cormorants winter in Cumbria and where they are. We are now in the process of preparing a more detailed account of the results which we hope to include in the next issue of *Birds & Wildlife in Cumbria*.

Our thanks to all who helped carry out the fieldwork.

*Robin Sellers and Dave Shackleton*

### **Did you know?**

As a rough rule of thumb birds need to eat about 15% of their body weight each day in order to sustain themselves (the precise percentage varies somewhat according to the type of food eaten). So Blue Tits, which weigh in at about 11 g, must eat 1.6 g of food a day or about four peanuts. Cormorants (weight about 3 kg), must catch around 450 g of fish a day to keep themselves in reasonable condition, which is equivalent to a single 1 lb Trout.

DYK

## Cumbria Bird Club winter bird race 2013

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*Short-eared Owl, Mawbray, Craig Shaw*

A total of 10 teams took part in yet another enjoyable and successful CBC Winter Bird Race on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> January. Despite the mild, calm weather, conditions proved quite challenging with thick fog in places and no high tide during daylight hours. Nevertheless, an impressive 133 species were recorded on the day, with some good birds amongst them including Greenland White-fronted Goose, Green-winged Teal, Smew, Great Northern

Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Bittern and Short-eared Owl.

As ever, one of the undoubted highlights came when the teams converged at the finishing venue – this year it was the Ratty Arms in Ravenglass - for pie and chips (a strong contender for Best Ever Bird Race Pie, no horse meat here!) and a few pints whilst the results were revealed and the day's events discussed. As, for the first time in the history of the event, the Walney Wanderers failed to field a team, having withdrawn at the very last minute, the contest was wide open and victory went to the Solway Searchers thus ensuring a new name appeared on the winner's shield.

Below are some impressions of the day from the competing teams.

**Bandicoots. (66 species).** I have joined the bird race 4 times before and as the other members of my team were unavailable I did it with my wife this year. This was Susan's first ever bird race. We heard Tawny Owl from our home in Ireby and then set off for Port Carlisle. Highlights here were Little Egret and Red-breasted Merganser. Around lunch time the mist was quite thick in the Anthorn area so it was slow work picking up Shelduck, Pink-footed Goose etc. We then headed for Bassenthwaite Lake picking up Siskin, Greenfinch and Goldfinch on some bird feeders on the way and Bullfinch in a hedgerow. The field full of Fieldfares the day before was completely empty and the noisy Green Woodpecker was silent. Our final area was around Workington, where Med Gull, Purple Sandpiper and Rock Pipit were added to the list. We were very pleased with our final total of 66 and would like to thank Colin Gay for organising the race again. *Lionel Bidwell.*

**Deaf, Dumb and Blind Squad (81 species).** Probably our worst ever total. We could not really blame things on the timing of the tide as we did find a good selection of waders although we did miss out on Purple Sand at Workington and Golden Plover at Anthorn. Highlights were geese - a flock of about 1500 Barnies flying in over our heads from across the Solway and approx 4k PF Geese crammed into a single field. We did see a Bittern at Siddick at 7am and our other highlight was a pair of Dippers indulging in some courtship as our last species for the day. Misses too many to mention, but sad to report no Willow Tit at Bowness-on-Solway.

**Duddon Dippers (92 species).** Our day started late after the early fog. We diverted to the coast fearing the fog would engulf the sea watch that produced a surprise of 9 Scaup and a G N Diver, after that a lucky 12 Whoopers going north. Struggled to find L Egret then found 3 on the estuary but didn't see any Pintail due to poor viz. Then went looking for woodland birds but this was a bit too late in the morning and we had missed breakfast movement and hence missed most of the finches, we even doubled back over Corney to have a look in Duddon wood but to no avail. A frustrating day but made up for by a good meal in excellent company.

**Gouldfinches (101 species).** Last pick-up was 6am and an Oyc immediately got us underway, into the Lyth valley produced Tawny Owl, but sadly not the Barn Owl sighted the previous morning. Kents Bank produced for the 2nd year a Shortie but no Water Rail. Back into Kendal a male Brambling was a good find along with Sparrowhawk and Dipper. On to Staveley area with Woodcock, Fieldfare and male Yellowhammer going into the book. Moving towards the coast, 30+ Pinks and 10+ Tree Sparrows were added near Levens Bridge, Little Egret graced at Greenodd. Rampsid did us well with Brents, a sighted Water Rail, Grey Plover, Merlin and 2 Guillemot. A walk onto Tummerhill Marsh produced Common & Jack Snipes and a calling Rock Pipit. After adding RT Diver, Sanderling and Peregrine, amongst a few others we left Walney and ventured round the Duddon to Hodbarrow, where Green winged Teal and the wintering Slav Grebe fed happily, a winter Spotted Red was a nice surprise in the small harbour. Silecroft finished us off with Common Scoter and Scaup, before an excellent meal at The Ratty Arms, Ravenglass. The absence of the now fabled Walney Wanderers boded for a new winner, but we were denied by 1 as we finished on 101. Well there's always next year!!!

**Kendal FBs (66 species).** We started as per usual at 7.00am and after hearing an early Blackbird spent the next hour and a quarter touring the minor roads around Kendal, Burneside and Staveley hoping to see or hear an

owl or two - back to the drawing board – not a single hoot. Remarkably (for us) our second bird was a Dipper. We added quite a few species in the next hour or two but were hampered by poor visibility. At Hodbarrow we failed to locate the Green-winged Teal but did find the Slavonian Grebe, our best bird was probably a Spotted Redshank from the hide. Perhaps our most glaring omission was a Goldfinch. Not calling at Silecroft was a bad mistake – we had called a day or two earlier and presumed that the tide would be too far out and consequently missed out on four or five possible species. Instead we decided to concentrate on Eskmeals and Newbiggin which didn't yield many more. Nevertheless we all enjoyed the day and the pie & chips were excellent. We finished as per usual in the bottom three.

**Kendal Mafia (94 species).** A decent woodland section that included such potentially tricky species as Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Siskin and Brambling combined with early success with both Goosander and Dipper saw us off to a pretty good start and boosted team morale. Sadly this was short-lived as we entered Furness, grim at the best of times, to find ourselves enveloped in thick fog to the extent that we could hear Brent Geese but couldn't see them - or anything else for that matter. Spirits lifted again as visibility improved with Cavendish Dock and Borwick Rails both fruitful venues while Hodbarrow provided further additions to the list, including both Green-winged Teal and Slavonian Grebe. A useful seawatch was followed by a final flourish that included the day's highlight, eight Greenland White-fronts accompanying a flock of 20 Whoopers. As always, several species failed to make it onto the list by not showing themselves to the necessary three team members; this year it was Little Owl and Razorbill, almost joined by Raven (two of us heard one at first light but it was late afternoon before a more obliging individual was encountered). Glaring omissions included Kestrel, Skylark and Bullfinch though we felt a final total of 94 was respectable in the circumstances.

**Oldsquaws (66 species).** Our first attempt at the bird race – and what a good day out we had! Our total was only 66 species, which put us nearly last – but we learnt a lot for next year. We made a somewhat general plan, rather than detailed tactics, and that is perhaps what we can improve on. For a first run, the plan was o.k. 'ish! Chance seems to play a big part - there's the species you assume you'll get but don't - like Greenfinch and Goldfinch, then there's the ones that you know where they are but you just can't turn them up - like Bittern, Purple Sandpiper, Rock Pipit, Pintail, Shoveler, Short-eared Owl and then there's ones like Great Spotted Woodpecker which just won't show because a Sparrowhawk has paid a couple of visits! We went to Siddick Pond early, for Bittern, and never saw it. People before and after us did. We should have set the scopes up, rather than just wandering and hoping. We hit the



Solway a bit late, with the tide way out and the waders out of reach. We had the luxury of an hour's lunch break in the hide at Campfield, and got nothing for it – had hoped for Pintail and Shoveler. And then there're ones like Meadow Pipit and Redpoll which only one team member thinks they might have seen! Our best



*Greenland White-fronted Goose, Anthorn, Darren Robson*

species unfortunately didn't count – we had a great view of an Otter at Longlands Lake (Egremont). It occurred to us that much of it could have been done by bike and canoe. What about a new category for non motorised teams?

**Solway Searchers (102 species).** A 4.15am start - still, all in a good cause! Tawny Owl obliged on cue at our start point, followed shortly by Little Owl. We were pleasantly surprised by the number of birds awake this early on a cold and misty January morning so had quite an impressive total by the time it became light. In contrast to some teams further south, passerines didn't prove to be a problem. Bonus birds were a single Scaup, Little Stint with a group of mixed waders and also Little Egret. A tip off from a rival team (thank you Steve) provided us with Black Grouse. Biggest dips of the day were Sparrowhawk (always unpredictable), Grey Plover, Common Sandpiper and Red-breasted Merganser at Port Carlisle (if only we'd gone that bit further round the corner) and Smew (hiding in the bay) at Talkin Tarn.

Towards the end of the afternoon it suddenly dawned that the elusive 100 was within our grasp! Workington pier proved an excellent choice with 'Stumpy' the Med Gull posing for photographers as we arrived! A quick flurry of species took us to the magic 100 but when we kept on going to 101 spirits were positively soaring! Time was running out but still, lurking at the back of everyone's mind was that easy Pochard at Soddy Gap and as we approached Keith uttered the immortal words, "We could get that Pochard in 5 minutes if we ran!" So... we ran....and got the bird in rapidly fading light. Worth the effort though as that proved to be the winning bird!! A very happy team enjoyed the hospitality of the Ratty Arms. However, it's always the ones that got away that prove to be the topic of conversation. Another 4 easy birds were there to be ticked.....if only!!!

**The Stringy Mergs (82 species).** “64 and stuck” by Lenny Street. Keen to improve my birding skills I was delighted to accept Steve Westerberg’s kind invitation to accompany him and Tina on the 2013 Cumbria Bird Race. The three of us, plus Tina’s dog, mascot and sandwich thief, set off around 7.15 on the last knockings of darkness. Rumbling along the stony track we pulled over and hopped out listening intently through the cold still air to several species including Lapwing with Pink-feet flying over. As the dawn light began to transform the clear night sky into a dazzling collection of artistic tones straight off an artist pallet we headed down the Geltsdale Valley proper and our brush with reality! Here we bumped into Phil’s team, they had been out since way before dawn and rattled off a whole host of species they had already collected, among them Woodcock.

Taking this information in his stride Steve trundled a few yards down the road, casually pointing his scope towards the fell and locating a group of Black Grouse. Being the gentleman he is he passed this information on and we continued on our way. We parked up at a Talkin Tarn in search of a Smew which Tina quickly had in her scope. Being a bit of a Star Wars fan I quickly remarked that its appearance reminded me of a Storm trooper. We headed for the Solway and on 64 species, we got stuck, literally in the mud!

Now when things like this happen reactions range from amusement to anger, we tried the basics. Get out and push, no joy, gather your breath and push harder, still no joy, flag a few people down and ask for their assistance with pushing; that did not work either. There was only one solution an Iron horse, luckily the farmer concerned was a real gentleman but this delay cost us well over an hour. Our day finished like it had started listening for bird calls in the fading light of which we detected a Tawny Owl at 82 and our last species. All in all it was an excellent days entertainment and a great well priced pub dinner. Many thanks to Colin and his team for organising the event.

**The Tower Hill Mob (77 species).** Using the Solway as our start point, the highlight was probably the male Merlin that flew in front of the hide at Campfield first thing in the morning. We also found an overwintering Common Sandpiper at Port Carlisle, and had great views of a Bittern at Siddick. Our biggest misses were Rock Pipit at Parton, where we see them every day and Greenfinch, that disease they have had seems to have decimated the local populations.

Once again, thanks are due to Colin Gay for organising the day’s event, which continues to be popular and well-supported though more teams are always welcome. Have a go next year, it really is good fun, however seriously, or otherwise, you take it!

*Ian Kinley*

## Siberian Lesser Whitethroat in a Kirkbride garden ?

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*Frank Mawby, Kirkbride, January 2013*

I first came across the bird on Friday 18th January when I nearly stood on it whilst I went to fill my feeders early in the afternoon. Thankfully it only flew up into a bush in the garden and I was able to observe it from inside the house as it appeared to be feeding off the floor on spilt grain/seed from under the feeders. The white patch on it's throat stood out and the overall colour appeared grey. It visited several times the next day but I didn't then see it again until the following Saturday and Sunday when it continued to show well, appearing alert and in good condition. The bird reappeared on Sat 2nd February and showed well, allowing time for Frank to come round to see it, before flying off.

The birds I feed are mostly sparrows...I recognise that nationally that it is important to keep doing this, but I did hanker for something a little more unusual to appear. I suppose this was my reward....

*Mick Worthington*

[A bird blog](#) has a set of excellent photos of an individual seemingly positively identified as the race *Blythi* and Mick's bird was a dead ringer as it were.

Description: Fine black bill, black legs. size about Redpoll and if I had it in the hand I would estimate the weight at between 10 and 15 grams. The bird was basically grey and grey brown on top and white to dull white below, with the whitest bit on the throat. The white just started to form the base of a neck collar. The head and back of the head down to the mantle was what you might call a battleship grey (need a BS standard colour chart!). However it graded very slightly into a brownish grey which extended to the tail and the primaries. I did not see any white on the outer tail feathers but did not see it spread its tail enough. There was no obvious supercilium but I thought at one view I detected a slight eye ring. Really no comparison with the Lesser Whitethroats that come here to breed. A neat little bird and pleased that Mike gave me chance to get a good look at it. Pity my pictures are not that good.

*Frank Mawby*

## **WANTED: Marine protection for the only breeding Black Guillemots in England**

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Walking along the Cumbrian coast at this time of year, the cliffs with their sheer drops can look wild and inhospitable; it is easy to think that nothing could exist here. But come spring 8 million seabirds will make the long trip home to their breeding grounds around the UK's coast; soon the cliffs will be alive with squabbling guillemots, groaning puffins and graceful fulmars.

At St Bees Head in Cumbria an additional treat is in store for wildlife watchers as these cliffs are home to the only breeding Black Guillemot population in England; if you are lucky, you might just catch them descending into their burrows with sandeels and butterfish in bills ready to feed their chicks.

St Bees is a fantastic example of how faithful seabirds are to the sites they use; some seabirds return back to the exact same nests every year. Thankfully the colony here is a nationally designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which means that seabird nest sites are protected from damaging human activities; however the areas that these birds use at sea are not.

It's a sad truth that this story is the same all around the UK - seabirds are currently protected when on land, but as soon as they leave the shore to hunt for food for themselves and their chicks, they face threats such as net entanglement and disturbance from offshore developments in unprotected waters.

I'd like to thank everyone who Stepped Up for Nature and signed the RSPB's Marine Pledge throughout 2011-12. At the moment less than 0.1% of the UK's waters are protected from all damaging activities and there is an urgent need for the development of an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas. In November 2011, thanks to your support, we were able to hand-in over 50,000 signatures to Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon and show the UK Government that people out there like you care about the marine environment including the fate of our seabirds.

## *WANTED: Marine protection for the only breeding Black Guillemots in England*

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### **But we must ask you now to take further action.**

We were thrilled that in September 2011 it was agreed that Black Guillemot should be a species for protection within the recommended Cumbria Coast Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). This MCZ would form part of a collection of 127 sites around English waters, for consultation in 2013.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) launched their public consultation on the designation of English MCZs in December 2012. We now know that Defra only intend to take up to 31 of the 127 sites forward for designation in 2013. What's more, Black Guillemot has not been taken forward as a species within the Cumbria Coast MCZ which means that they will continue to have no protection at their key feeding and loafing areas close to their nesting grounds. We are bitterly disappointed by these unambitious proposals.

### **What you can do to help:**

Please let Defra know that that they need to reinstate Black Guillemot as a species for protection within the Cumbria Coast MCZ for designation in 2013. Furthermore, that they need to implement a well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas, including MCZs, which offers full protection for all our marine wildlife, including seabirds, without further delay. You can do this and encourage others to do the same by responding to Defra's English Marine Conservation Zones consultation.

You can submit your letter email to [MCZ@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:MCZ@defra.gsi.gov.uk) or by writing to the address below:

MCZ Team  
C/O Post Room  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

### **The consultation closes on 31 March 2013.**

Why not also add a personal flavour to your letter by describing why the Cumbrian coast is so special to you and why our marine environment needs protecting.

### **Thank you for your support**

*Clare Reed, RSPB Marine Conservation Officer (North West England)*  
*Clare.reed@rspb.org.uk; 07702 891480*

## Terns at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve

### A summary of recent events and management

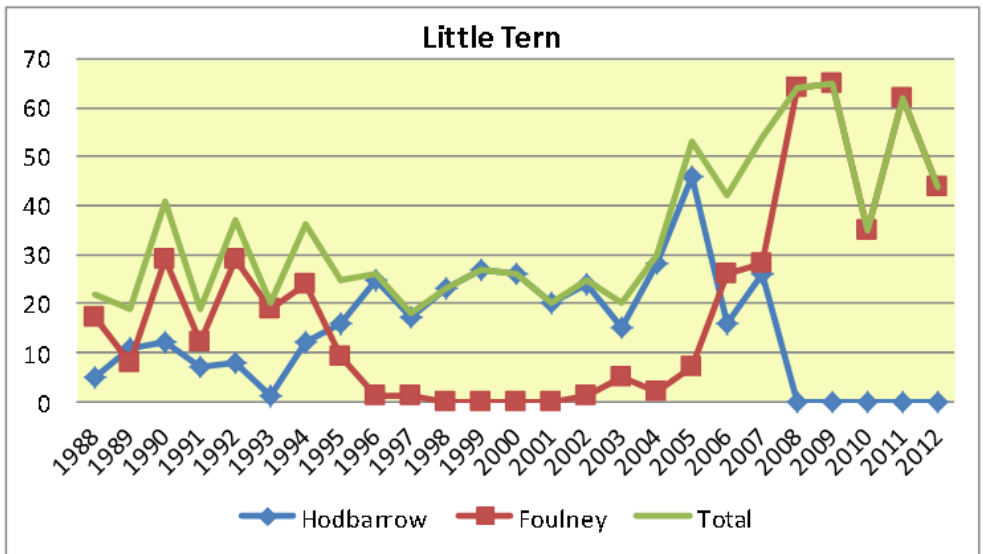


Hodbarrow RSPB reserve covers 105 hectares of land and lagoon to the south of Millom on the site of the former iron mines.

In its heyday, the mine was one of the most productive in the world, employing over 1000 men and extracting over half a million tons of ore a year. On closure in 1968, the pumps were turned off allowing a large lagoon to form behind the outer sea wall. A large area of

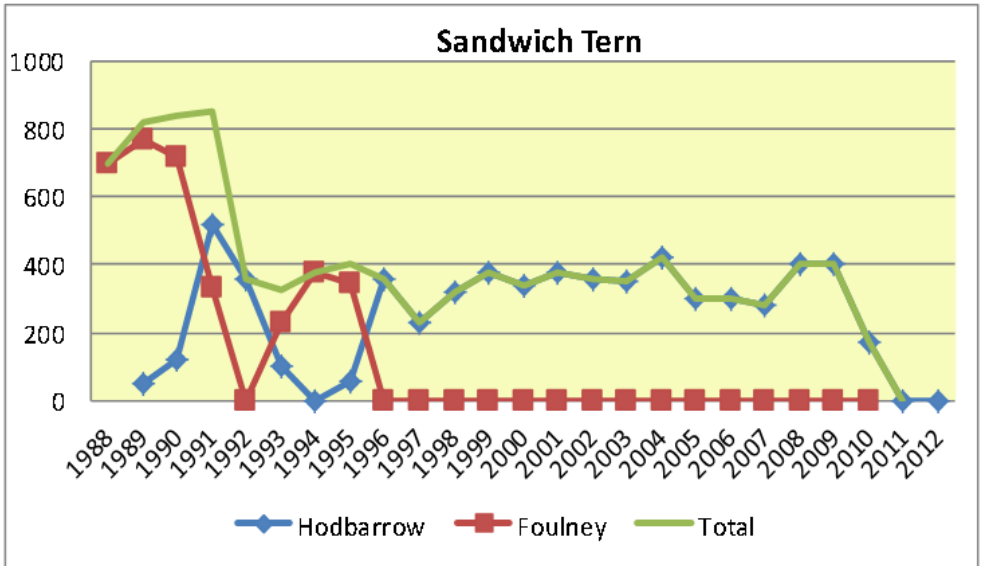
*Figure 1. Tern breeding island and slag substrate inside the sea wall, Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve*

limestone slag, returned from the adjacent iron works, provided a suitable nesting substrate for terns and since the mine closure, Little, Common and Sandwich Terns have all bred with varying success over the years.



*Figure 2. Number of breeding pairs of Little Terns at Hodbarrow and Foulney Island 1988 to 2012. Recent populations are some of the highest ever in Cumbria.*

*Terns at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve*  
*A summary of recent events and management*



*Figure 3. Number of breeding pairs of Sandwich Terns at Hodbarrow and Foulney Island 1988 to 2012. After a long period of stability, there has been a recent crash in numbers at Hodbarrow, with Sandwich Terns failing to relocate to Foulney Island.*

During this time there has been much interchange of breeding terns with Foulney Island, 15km to the south-west. For both Little and Sandwich Terns, the entire south Cumbria population has in some years nested at Foulney, in others at Hodbarrow and sometimes split between the two.

### **The problem**

After a period of relative stability through the late 1990's and early 2000's, the populations of Little and Sandwich Terns underwent marked changes at Hodbarrow. In 2006 after initially returning to the site, half the Little Tern colony re-located to Foulney Island early in the season. At this time, Lesser Black-backed Gulls increased to 20 (2006) and 42 pairs (2007) on the island.

The reason for the increase in Lesser Black-backs was due mainly to relocation of birds from the nearby colony at HMP Haverigg, where scaring techniques, including the flying of Harris Hawks, were employed to deter gulls from nesting on the roof. It transpires that gulls were waiting on the roofs for prisoners to cross the yard between canteen and cell block with their food trays, then swooping to take food and deliver the odd peck to the head. A meeting was held between prison staff, RSPB and Natural England to look for other solutions, and it is believed that gulls are not currently being



## *Terns at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve*

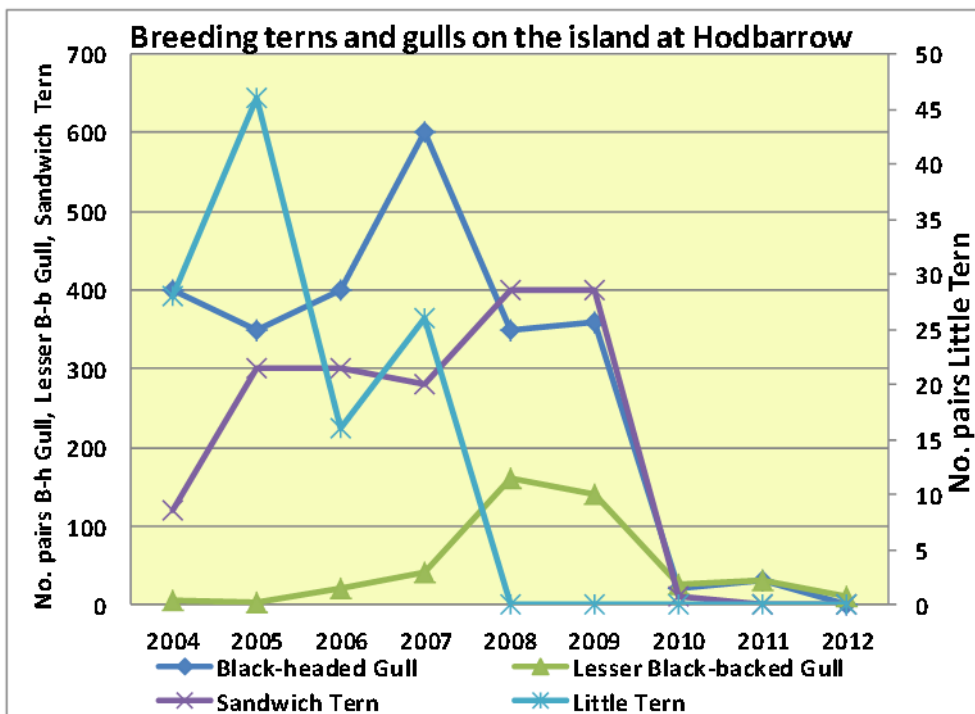
### *A summary of recent events and management*

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deterred from nesting here.

Black-headed Gulls and Sandwich Terns nested in a closely packed colony together and were perhaps less susceptible to disturbance from large gulls than Little Terns. Any predation that did occur would be of young inexperienced pairs on the edge of the colony, with the more productive nesters safely positioned in the centre.

Little Terns however nested in a much looser aggregation, spread across the breeding island. The spread of large gulls may have increased competition for nest space with Little Terns, which would find it difficult to position and defend a nest away from any Lesser-black Backs. The fact that Little Terns moved in 2006 before breeding was attempted also suggests space is a limiting factor, rather than direct predation by large gulls which would take effect after the birds had settled.



*Figure 4. Little Terns (right hand axis) declined as Lesser Black-backed Gull numbers rose. Two years later, Lesser Black-back, Black-headed Gull and Sandwich Tern numbers all crashed together*



## *Terns at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve*

### *A summary of recent events and management*

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In 2008 all the Little Terns nested at Foulney and Lesser Black-back Gull numbers peaked on the island at Hodbarrow at 160 pairs. Numbers of nesting Sandwich Terns and Black-headed Gulls remained high with good productivity in 2008, though predation/starvation of chicks in 2009 saw zero productivity. A sudden desertion with many predated eggs suggested mammalian predation was the main factor here.

In 2010 numbers of Black-headed Gulls and Sandwich Terns crashed along with numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The gulls themselves failed to produce young and camera monitoring in 2012 confirmed regular presence of foxes on the island (even the cubs were present on the island during the season).

In conclusion, it is thought that increased numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls caused the re-location of Little Terns. Sandwich Terns and Black-headed Gulls were unaffected, and only crashed (along with the Lessers) when foxes began to regularly access the island. Although reduced numbers of Sandwich Terns and Black-headed Gulls were present through the 2011 and 2012 breeding seasons, very few nesting attempts were made.

Clearly, the failure of the Sandwich Tern colony to settle over the last couple of years is a cause of great concern which needs to be addressed. Good numbers of Little Terns have relocated to Foulney under the protection of Cumbria Wildlife Trust, but as one of only two recent sites to hold large numbers of Little Terns, it is imperative that suitable conditions are maintained at Hodbarrow for future use.

Washing out of nests at high tide is a common feature of Little Tern colonies throughout the UK and Foulney has seen its fair share of productivity failure. In 2012, 44 pairs failed to produce any young through a mixture of high tides and predation. The Hodbarrow site has one great advantage being on the landward side of the seawall in a tide free freshwater lagoon. If sea level rise occurs to predicted levels due to climate change, the problem of flooding of nests on tidal beaches will only become worse, and the importance of Hodbarrow as a Little Tern nesting location may become even greater.

#### **Addressing the problem**

Without the problem of tides to worry about, it leaves three areas to deal with to produce prime tern breeding habitat at Hodbarrow

- Reduction/prevention of mammalian predation
- Reduction of competition for nesting space/predation by Lesser Black-backed Gulls
- Maintenance of suitable breeding habitat

## *Terns at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve*

### *A summary of recent events and management*

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*Dave Blackledge with the first section of floating fence*

The approach we have taken is to attempt to increase the habitat complexity by creation of several smaller islands, protect some of these islands by creating a floating fence to deter fox access and mechanically remove vegetation and re-profile the main island to increase the area of bare slag.

The new islands are a mixture of permanent limestone slag islands and artificial floating platforms. There seems to be no instances of artificial islands built specifically for Little Terns, presumably because the majority of colonies occur on beaches facing the sea. There seems no reason why the freshwater island nesting colony at Hodbarrow should not place nests on an artificial island providing that the substrate is suitable, the islands are of a sufficient size and there is adequate protection from predators. Six 13m<sup>2</sup> islands will be floated out with a 10mm gravel substrate for the 2013 season.

Due to logistical problems with maintenance and potential vandalism, a traditional electric anti-predator fence is not a feasible option for Hodbarrow, so we have designed an apparently novel floating fence. Welded wire mesh and rail fence sections are floated using 25 litre plastic kegs allowing sufficient height and depth to deter swimming foxes from climbing over or diving under the mesh. As the fox meets the barrier while in the water, it is hoped this design will prevent jumping of the fence. Surveillance cameras will be positioned to monitor the effectiveness of the fence during the 2013 season.

In order to entice the Little Terns onto the better protected islands, a combination of decoys and tape lures will be used during the prospecting period this May. This method has been used to great effect in the USA where colonies of



*Island building at Hodbarrow*

## *Terns at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve*

### *A summary of recent events and management*

Least Terns have been successfully moved during mitigation measures for port development. Following guidelines from previous success of this method, around 40 Little Tern decoys will be deployed on the islands this spring and an mp3 attached to a loudhailer will broadcast breeding calls at intervals throughout the day.

We eagerly await the new season to assess the impact of the recent management work on breeding terns. It may be a case of simply maintaining suitable habitat for a number of years until the terns decide to relocate to Hodbarrow, but the increase in nesting substrate should have immediate effects on the number of Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher nesting there too.

*Dave Blackledge, RSPB Warden, Cumbria Coast Reserves*  
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## Recent reports

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The period covered is December 2012 to February 2013. 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**

**Whooper Swans** included an exceptional 681 at Blackdyke near Silloth in December and 254 near Kirkbride in January. Numbers elsewhere included 86 at Longtown and 61 at Hodbarrow.



*Todd's Canada Goose, Whitrigg, Darren Robson*

At least 4000 **Pink-footed Geese** were around the Inner Solway

in December; numbers increased to at least 8200 in the area in January and at least 12000 in February. Two **Bean Geese** consorted with Barnacle Geese at Newton Marsh on 7th December, a return to normality after last winter's extraordinary influx. Fields near the Esk Estuary south of Ravenglass hosted eight **Greenland White-fronted Geese** on 6th January and they were followed by a first-winter bird at Anthorn on 6th February. The adult **Red-breasted Goose** continued to associate with Barnacle Geese at Cardurnock until 2nd December. Away from the Solway, **Barnacle Geese** included a flock of 63 (four of them Svalbard-ringed individuals) that commuted between the Flookburgh area and Walney.



*Black Brant or hybrid, Rampside, Tony Phizacklea*

The **Todd's Canada Goose**, last seen in October 2012, reappeared among the Barnacle Geese at Whitrigg and Newton Marsh from 26th to 28th February. **Brent Geese** in the Walney/Rampside area peaked at 176 pale-bellied and 59 dark-bellied birds; joined from 27th December onwards by a putative juvenile/first-winter **Black Brant**(or hybrid) – the jury is still out on this one. Elsewhere, a single dark-bellied bird was near Lowther.

A female **Mandarin** visited Whinfell Tarn while a drake was at Culgaith. The drake **Green-winged Teal** lingered at Hodbarrow to at least 18th February. **Scaup** included 12 at Walney, nine off Silecroft and seven at Hodbarrow. The only **Long-tailed Duck** in the period turned up near Dalston at Cardew Mires Lakes on 5th January while Silecroft



*Smew at Talkin Tarn on 9th January, Roger Ridley*

produced up to four **Velvet Scoters** in December. **Smew** were restricted to the north of the county as a drake that commuted between Talkin Tarn and Tindale Tarn from 4th January to at least 12th February was briefly joined by a second drake on 1st February. Meanwhile, a redhead at Old Sandsfield on 13th January was followed by two, a drake and a redhead, on Derwent Water on 26th January, the drake remaining to at least 15th February and the redhead being relocated nearby on Bassenthwaite Lake also on 15th February. Other wildfowl counts in the period included 44 **Gadwall** on Longtown Ponds; 575 **Common Scoters** at Walney; 5300 **Eider** in the Foulney area; 100 **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Walney and 180 **Goosanders** at Soddy Gap.

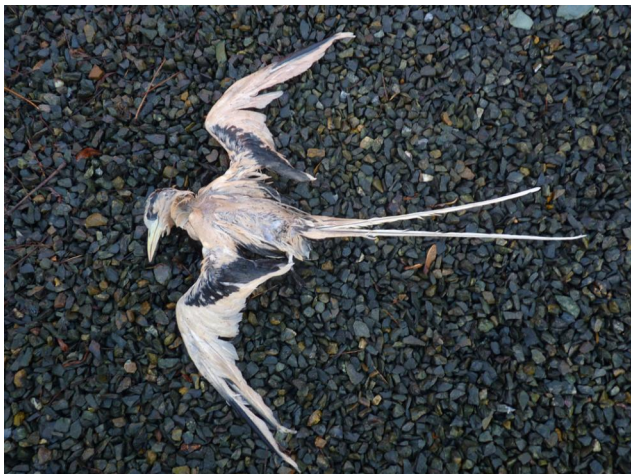
### **Divers to grebes**

**Red-throated Diver** totals at coastal locations included 44 at Walney in December followed by 60 at Walney and 47 at Workington in January and an exceptional 122 off Drigg Point, 25 at Walney and 20 at Workington in February. A decent showing of **Great Northern Divers** began with a single at Silecroft on 30th December that was then seen intermittently into March followed by a juvenile that graced Ramsden Dock, Barrow-in-Furness



*Great Northern Divers, Ramsden Dock, Peter Heather*





*White-tailed Tropicbird, Mawbray Banks, Steve Hewitt*

from at least 6th January, joined there by a second bird from 6th to 12th February, and singles off Walney and Nethertown on 15th January. Early **Fulmars** were logged at Walney on 27th and 31st January and Workington on 1st February while late **Gannets** were noted off Silecroft and Walney in mid-December, the latter site then recording an out of season

individual on 14th February. **Shags** at Walney peaked at nine in January and four in February while, elsewhere, one was at Cavendish Dock in December.

The corpse of a **White-tailed Tropicbird** was picked up on the beach at Mawbray Banks on 6th January; a remarkable occurrence and a first for Britain if accepted.

At least two **Bitterns** were to be found at Siddick Pond while, more unusually, one was seen at Tindale Tarn in December. **Little Egrets** included site maxima of 22 on Walney Island, 17 on the Kent Estuary, seven in the Lyth Valley, at least three on the Duddon Estuary, two on the Esk Estuary near Ravenglass, two on the Inner Solway and singles at several other locations. The **Great White Egret** was last reported around Campfield Marsh on 1st December. The wintering **Slavonian Grebe** remained in residence at Hodbarrow throughout, though AWOL at times while Foulney Island produced two on 15th December and one on 27th February with a single off Walney also on 15th December. Walney produced the only **Red-necked Grebe**, a single on 25th February.

### ***Raptors to waders***

**Red Kites** from the Grizedale release scheme were regularly reported. As was the case last winter and reflecting overwintering at nearby Leighton Moss, a female **Marsh Harrier** hunted near Arnside on occasions in January while both male and female were seen there in February. More expectedly, **Hen Harriers** were reported from a number of widespread locations across the county.

An unseasonable **Little Stint** frequented Port Carlisle in January. Peak **Purple Sandpiper** counts at their favoured locations comprised at least 66 at Workington and 20 at Walney. Single **Ruff** were observed at Port Carlisle and Grune Point in January and both Anthorn and Abbeytown in February. **Jack Snipe**, traditionally under-recorded, comprised up to six at Kents Bank and singles at Walney and Watchtree N.R. **Black-tailed Godwit** numbers were unexceptional with no double figure counts in the period. Overwintering **Common Sandpipers** were seen intermittently at Port Carlisle and on the Irt Estuary. **Green Sandpipers** seemed less widespread than usual. Presumed wintering **Spotted Redshanks** were seen on the Leven Estuary at Old Park and at Hodbarrow. **Greenshank** were, as usual, largely restricted to Walney where monthly maxima comprised 12 in December, eight in January and seven in February. Elsewhere single wintering birds were noted on the Esk Estuary near Ravenglass and at Cavendish Dock.

### ***Skuas to auks***



*Glaucous Gull, Cockermouth, Craig Shaw*

An unseasonable **Arctic Skua** was seen off Nethertown on 15th January. **Kittiwakes** included site maxima of 200 at Bowness-on-Solway and 80 at both Walney and Workington. **Little Gulls** were limited to a single at Walney on 3rd December until a mini influx in January produced a total of 11 at Walney and one at Parton followed by an adult at Workington on 1st February. **Mediterranean Gulls** were relatively scarce and consisted of two adults (including 'Stumpy') at Workington, an

adult and a second-winter at Parton, second-winters near Dearham and at Walney and single adults at Flimby, Mawbray, Kirkbride airfield, Bowness-on-Solway and Blackdyke near Silloth. A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** was attracted to a sheep carcass near Cockermouth on 18th and 19th January, the only white-winged gull of the winter. An adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Sellafield on 11th December followed by another or possibly the



*Yellow-legged Gull, Whitehaven, Derek McAlone*

same adult at Whitehaven from 23rd to 30th January.

**Guillemot** totals included 200 at Workington in January while **Razorbills** peaked at 58 at Walney, also in January. The only **Black Guillemot** reports involved singles off Silecroft on 19th December and Walney on 23rd February. More unusually, a single **Little Auk** passed Walney on 14th February.

### **Owls to buntings**

**Short-eared Owls** were fairly widespread with at least three hunting the Inner Solway saltmarshes, three in the Mawbray area and singles on Walney, at Foulney Island, Kents Bank and Sellafield. In contrast, the sole **Long-eared Owl** was seen near Silloth on 27th February.



*Short-eared Owl, Mawbray, Darren Robson*

A **Great Grey Shrike** photographed at Culgaith near Penrith on 9th December was unfortunately never relocated. **Hooded Crows** were limited to long-staying singles at Walney and near Burneside. A **Siberian Chiffchaff** was reported from an Ulverston garden on 3rd December while a **Lesser Whitethroat**, perhaps of the Siberian race, frequented a Kirkbride garden during February.



*Waxwing, Kingstown Trading Estate, Roger Ridley*

**Waxwings** generally became less widespread in December though some spectacular flocks were still to be found with peak counts of 350 on Arnside Knott; 100 at Derwent Water; 50 at Keswick; 40 at Scotby; 20 near Beckermest; 19 in Carlisle; 18 in Kendal; 17 at Wetheral Pasture; 14 in Dalston and single figures at a number of other locations.



Numbers declined further in January with flocks limited to 40 in Penrith, 32 near Morland, 30 at Rosthwaite, 14 in Kendal, 13 in Milnthorpe, 10 at Cliburn and a handful of single figure flocks and then became even less widespread in February with reports largely restricted to Penrith (max. 86) and Kendal (max. 45) plus 20 at Bowston Bridge and singles in Thurstonfield and Anthorn.

A **Black Redstart** at Grange-over-Sands from 10th to 20th January was presumably the bird seen there in late November. High tides pushed some 47 **Rock Pipits** from the Walney saltmarshes in January while 14 was the peak count at nearby Roa Island Causeway.

**Brambling** were relatively scarce but included a flock of 50 at Thacka Beck N.R. and 20 in a garden at Hallbankgate while **Twite** flocks included 200 in the Cardunock area and 180 at Walney.



*Twite, Mawbray, Craig Shaw*

Few **Common Crossbills** were reported, five at Whitbarrow in January being the most.

**Hawfinches** included five at Sizergh Castle, two at Fell Foot, Windermere and

one at Bowness-on-Windermere. **Snow Buntings** comprised 25 on Loadpot Hill at the north end of High Street, up to 15 on Helvellyn, four on Helton Fell near Penrith, two on Brown Fell, Geltsdale and a single on Scafell Pike.

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

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

## 30 years on.....

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Each autumn large numbers of birds leave Scandinavia and Northern Russia to migrate south and south-west. The majority of this vast movement goes down through central Europe to spend the winter in more equitable climes where food is more readily available.

However, many come to Britain resulting in large numbers of Fieldfare and Redwing arriving here, but also species we regard as "ours" - Blackbird, Robin, Chaffinch and Song Thrush. These birds are migrants and as such will normally return to the north the following spring. Whilst much depends on the weather, it is possible to witness this mass arrival to our shores with a visit to the east coast during the autumn.

In 1971 I was privileged to join a group of Dumfriesshire birdwatchers on an October visit to the bird observatory on the Isle of May. The island, one mile by  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile stands at the entrance to the Firth of Forth and had long since been renowned as a splendid place to be during a fall of migratory birds.

Quite unknown to me then was the fact that we subsequently went to 'the May' for over thirty years. On some of our visits the weather was fine and clear and we saw few birds. That didn't matter - the company was good and there were seals, rabbits and butterflies to photograph and good fresh air to keep us going.

Then came October 1982 when we were present on the island during one of the biggest falls of birds on record. I subsequently wrote an article documenting the events of that remarkable week and it is with great pleasure that those of us who were fortunate enough to be there can still look back and recall some of the highlights.

The weather played a great part in what was to happen. For much of the previous week there had been an easterly drift across the North Sea as high pressure became established over Scandinavia. At the same time, low pressure to the south pushed active weather fronts into eastern Scotland and for much of the time we were on the island there was heavy rain and gale force easterly winds in the Forth area. Migrating birds that had left the north in good conditions were then caught up in this dreadful weather as they flew south.

When we arrived on the island on 10th October there were already large numbers of birds present and seeking shelter. Among them was a Bluethroat so exhausted it could be picked up and subsequently spent the night in the relative warmth of the observatory.

During the next few days enormous numbers of birds arrived but it was the Goldcrest that turned out to be the largest representative of this fall. Goldcrests covered a large part of the island feeding voraciously on any available item of food. As the days progressed new arrivals showed increasing signs of poor condition and many arrived exhausted and soaking wet. In an attempt to put a figure on the number of birds, sample areas were assessed and these turned into a realistic estimate of the whole. It was considered that on the afternoon of 11th October at least 15,000 Goldcrests were present on the island.

Some idea of the density of birds came from a relatively small patch of thistles near the observatory in which at least 200 were present. Many were found huddled together in nooks and crannies in the rocks and in rabbit holes. On a water tank ledge, 50 were sheltering in an attempt to escape the wind and the rain. Many failed to survive the night!

Also on the island during the early part of our stay were big numbers of other species including 4000 Robins, 600 Blackcap, 5 Snow Bunting, 3 Great Grey Shrike and at least 4 Pallas Leaf Warbler.

Visible migration continued for the remainder of the week and we were witness to some further quite remarkable falls of birds. Other highlights included 2000 Blackbird, 4000 Fieldfare, 7000 Redwing, 30 Reed Bunting, 10 Barred Warbler, a single Rough-legged Buzzard and a Shore Lark. Of great interest was the arrival of 20 Long-eared and Short-eared Owls. Some of these were observed coming in off the sea and making their way to the plateau where they took shelter. Later in the day, eleven owls were seen in the air together and judging by prey remains, Redwing were considered their main food item.

A Finnish ringed Robin and a Danish ringed Blackbird gave identity to the origins of this large migration.

Whilst there was no way of knowing at the time, it was subsequently established that what we had witnessed on 'the May' was part of an even larger fall of birds that occurred over the northern part of the east coast of Britain. It would be impossible to assess the scale of mortality that happened during the week, but on a positive note we were there, and witnessed and documented an event that will remain firmly in our memories for all time.

*Mike Carrier*

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## Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is June 1st 2013

**If you have a computer:** please send contributions to Dave Piercy  
as e-mail attachments to [daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk)

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

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