



BIRD NEWS
Vol. 28 No. 1 Spring 2017

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Twinned with Cumberland Bird Observers Club

New South Wales, Australia

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

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please contact the Secretary who holds some.



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Club news and announcements

Subscriptions

The Cumbria Bird Club 2016/2017 subscriptions were due on 1st October. If you receive a subscription form with this mailing then according to my records we have not yet received your payment. Please let me know if this is not the case. Please pay overdue subs as soon as possible. Thanks

CBC meeting programme winter 2017/2018

Thurs 6th April: Marchesi Centre, Windermere 7.30pm

Joint with RSPB South Lakeland.

'Raptor migration in southern Spain and Gibraltar' – *Denis Atherton*

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

'Wood Warblers' – *John Mallord*

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

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

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



Dippers, Peter Mawby

An introduction to the new Chairman - Malcolm Priestley

I came to live in Cumbria in 1976 having talked my way into a job at Sedbergh School teaching geography and economics and running caving and mountaineering clubs. I anticipated a stay of three to four years after a footloose decade at various universities, motivated by long vacations climbing in the Alps and Pyrenees, where close encounters with vultures and other raptors, choughs and Snow Finches inspired an enduring interest in birds. My final academic destination was Oxford - no caves or cliffs - where I bought a half decent pair of binoculars and set off to find a hundred different birds in the county. Not quite successfully. I still live in Sedbergh forty years later. I married a local girl and we brought up three lovely daughters in this wonderful environment.

A public school was quite alien to me. However, I soon discovered that my new institution had a remarkable natural history society (the Sedgwick Society) which included a small museum (collections of eggs, mounted birds, butterflies, moths, rocks and rare books) and a fascinating archive of local bird records dating back to the nineteenth century. Distinguished ornithologists from Max Nicholson (co-founder of the BTO, first director of the Nature Conservancy Council and instigator of the WWF) to Mark Smith (wildlife cameraman) are among several others nurtured by the society. It took little persuasion for me to take charge of the Sedgwick Society.

In times before computers and mobile phones and with few televisions available on campus, it was never difficult to fill a minibus for regular Sunday trips to the many birding hot spots across the north of England and the Scottish Borders. Summer and Easter holidays allowed time for longer expeditions to the Scottish Highlands, usually to the school's permanent base on the Kinrara Estate near Aviemore. Here there were two pairs of nesting Osprey, Black Grouse, Crested Tits and Scottish Crossbills within the grounds and many other Speyside specialities within easy reach. I thoroughly enjoyed this line of 'work' and, as expertise developed, local fieldwork contributing to various surveys became an important feature of each term's programme. I remain a little jealous that two of the best young birders found a Spotted Sandpiper at Walney, a record which was accepted by the British Bird Records Committee.

In 1985, the Sedgwick Society's activities diversified into habitat creation projects. The first scheme was made possible by the availability of a substantial labour force, particularly Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates, generous funding from the Yorkshire Dales National Park for diggers and fencing and a suitable site in the school grounds. Bruce Loch is now well established and it is the most significant wetland in the Rawthey Valley with over 100 bird species recorded in the last three decades. Several further wetland, woodland and riparian habitats have been created subsequently, both on the extensive school estate and private land between Sedbergh and Ravenstonedale. The larger nature reserves now appear on recent Ordnance Survey maps. The rewards have included a few new breeding and wintering birds in tetrads around Sedbergh and even a tour of selected sites by the Duke of Edinburgh himself!

Meanwhile, beyond my work place, I had met Colin Armistead, Sedbergh's most prominent ornithologist. He introduced me to the pleasures of bird surveys. Soon I was checking Buzzard and Peregrine nesting sites, conducting monthly wildfowl counts on a dozen local tarns, censusing

breeding waders and Wood Warblers and tramping across frozen fell tops in search of Snow Buntings for the first winter atlas. Trips to Killington Reservoir brought me into contact with the dedicated and enthusiastic Kendal birders. Together with Ronnie Irving, Fred Gould, Ian Kinley and others we formed the Killington Wildlife Group, initially to oppose the introduction of speed boats and to negotiate a zoning agreement with the sailing club. Later, the group became involved with nest box schemes, habitat improvements, guarding probably the first breeding pair of Little Ringed Plovers in the county and obtaining a licence to prick Canada Goose eggs to appease the growing concerns of local farmers who had more drastic options in mind. More recently, we played a significant part in the eventual rejection of a wind farm planning application to build turbines only a hundred metres from the county's largest Black-headed Gull colony.

In the 1980s I became the BTO regional representative for North West Yorkshire, which in those days included the fells and dales of my corner of Cumbria plus most of the rest of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The highlight of my tenure was organising the survey for the 1988-91 Breeding Birds Atlas. Like many parts of Cumbria, this cross-border Pennine region was particularly challenging and enjoyable with lots of remote territory, superb habitats and a sparse population of bird watchers. Nevertheless, our relatively small team managed to cover every tetrad from Swaledale to the Aire Valley.

In 1989 the Cumbria Bird Club came into existence and I was fortunate enough to serve on the council laying the foundations of the club with the expert guidance of chairman John Callion, Bob Spencer, Tim Dean and others. My main contribution was to organise the first of many CBC surveys. Wintering Goosanders proved to be a popular subject and involved over one hundred members. Twenty years later, now retired, I had the opportunity to repeat this project and now find myself serving a term as chairman of this still thriving organisation.

An interest in birds has been the source of many adventures and has always complemented other activities whether sailing and mountaineering, exploring deserts and jungles, camping or touring in my caravan. I make frequent visits to the highlands and islands of both Scotland and Ireland and my travels abroad have been extensive over the years. However, my best decision has been to live in Cumbria for four decades to enjoy its varied landscapes, diverse bird life and ever erratic climate.

Malcolm Priestley

The CBC Wood Warbler survey 2017



In the last week of April Wood Warblers will begin to arrive from their winter quarters in West and Central Africa. By early May, birds are establishing territories in predominantly oak and beech woodlands with limited undergrowth, a relatively common habitat in the Lake District, Pennines and other upland areas. Most easily located by their distinctive and resonant song (a fast, dribbling trill often preceded by clear, piping pew, pew, pew notes), visual contact becomes difficult later in the season when dense foliage obscures their favourite haunts in the canopy of mature trees. The species is red-listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern in response to an apparent steep decline in numbers throughout its range in the western uplands of Britain.

A successful pilot survey in 2016 covered 132 woods in 90 tetrads in all parts of the country, finding birds in nearly half the sites visited. Fieldwork experience has resulted in minor changes to recording forms and more detailed notes on objectives, survey instructions and guidelines. A comprehensive list of tetrads or individual woods with records of Wood Warbler occupancy since the 1980s in all relevant 10 kilometre squares in the county has been finalised, although priority will be given to surveys of sites with more recent reports of confirmed or probable breeding birds.

The aims of the full survey in 2017 are ambitious and we hope to recruit as many observers as possible during the next few weeks. There are woods to investigate within a few miles of any place in Cumbria with the majority of sites in the south and central Lake District. Volunteers are asked to make an early visit to each wood (May to early June) identifying territorial birds and recording a few habitat details and a late visit (June to early July) to establish breeding status. A second visit will not be necessary if the habitat is clearly unsuitable for Wood Warblers. Anyone who would like to become more familiar with this summer visitor and its habitat is welcome to join a weekend visit to productive woodlands in early May (contact details overleaf).

If you are interested in taking part in the Wood Warbler survey please contact

North Cumbria: John Callion, Bank Cottage, Allonby, Silloth CA15 6QH

Email: jccallion@sky.com Tel: 01900 881167

South Cumbria: Malcolm Priestley, Havera Bank East, Howgill Lane,

Sedbergh LA10 5HB Email: mmphavera@hotmail.co.uk Tel: 015396 20104

Songs and calls of Wood Warbler

A Wood Warbler singing is one of the finest sights and sounds of Cumbria.



Wood Warbler, Ashness Woods, Tony Marsh

Very distinctive and easy to learn. Just click on the links below to listen.

Song - male only, a dual part song, consisting of a 'shivering trill', followed by a clear piping pew pew pew. Often sung one after the other, however, once the female is incubating, the frequency and intensity diminishes and the pew pew pew is generally omitted. If the dual song persists during the season, this indicates a un-paired male.

Both songs are here www.xeno-canto.org/301143

Alarm Call - both adults, distinct from Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff - a loud, clear mournful pew. This is confirmation of breeding; the alarm starts at egg stage and intensifies as the chicks grow older.

www.xeno-canto.org/310600

Mike Carrier, John Callion, Jake Manson, Dave Piercy, Malcolm Priestley

CBC winter bird race

The Cumbria Bird Club winter bird race, a long-standing event in the CBC fixtures calendar, was held this year on 8th January. Again Walney Bird Observatory entered a team and they managed to see a total of 101 species which was good enough to retain the trophy. There was a tie for second place on 96 species.

Although their captain, Colin Raven, was unavailable due to illness shortly before the race the “Walney Wanderers” team comprising of Tony Phizacklea, Chris Turner and Roy McGregor still aimed to break the 100 species barrier. The forecasted mist and fog failed to materialise on the Furness peninsula and Walney Island giving the team an advantage over teams working in some other parts of Cumbria.



*Mistle Thrush, Keswick,
Tony Marsh*

The team started the race at 06:15 with a Barn Owl turning to face us in the torch-light and the calls of Tawny Owl. Another seven species including Tufted Duck were added pre-dawn before heading off to Walney Island to find waders with high tide being at first light. Most targeted waders were logged but Purple Sandpiper once again eluded us. Bar-tailed Godwit was difficult with only one bird found on the island. Following this a sea watch added Shag, Razorbill, Red-throated Diver and Common Scoter to the list.



*Treecreeper, Arnside,
Michael Redman*

Although Barnacle Goose and Greater Canada Goose were logged in the places expected the other target White-fronted Goose, present for several weeks previous, could not be found. The return journey heading off Walney produced Merlin, Peregrine, Twite, Rock Pipit, Skylark and a difficult Stonechat. On leaving Walney at 10:50 the team had amassed 64 species.

A brief visit to a car park in Barrow where a number Waxwings had been feeding two days previously was a disappointment for the team but they continued further along the Furness peninsula to find an unexpected Yellowhammer at Newbiggin.

Two noisy skeins of Pink-footed Geese flew over the peninsula. A visit around the peninsula tarns produced Little Grebe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jack Snipe, Redwing and Tree Sparrow.



Kestrel, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Around lunch time a decision to wait a bit longer at Mere Tarn paid off. While drinks and sandwiches were being consumed an unexpected ringtail Hen Harrier appeared and began to circle the tarn scattering many species from the reeds.

Furness woodland added to the tally with Buzzard, Stock Dove, Jay, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Mistle Thrush and Bullfinch. Species the team expected to have by this stage were Scaup, Sparrowhawk, Water Rail, Guillemot, Kingfisher and Raven but they were not to be found all day. Unusually Lesser Black-backed Gull had initially proved difficult but eventually one was located on the Furness fields. The team had 96 species by 13:30 and had exhausted the Furness peninsula so it was time to head further afield.

Mid-afternoon mist and fog slowly began to descend as the team struggled over the next three hours only ticking off five more species. These were Goosander, Goldcrest, Marsh Tit, Siskin and finally a Dipper sang from a rock in the failing light at Levens. The drive to Penrith was through thick patchy mist and fog arriving at the finish line at 17:10 for a 17:30 finish.



Buzzard, Foulshaw, Michael Redman

Pre-race reconnaissance suggested the team knew the whereabouts of 105 species but the unexpected Hen Harrier and Yellowhammer increased this to 107 available species on the day. The Walney Wanderers didn't manage to record six of these giving a total of 101 species and retaining the CBC winter bird race shield for Walney Bird Observatory in 2017.

Roy McGregor

Winter Greenfinches in a pre-roost assembly



Background

I first became aware of a large pre-roost gathering of Greenfinches at New Mills, Brampton in the winter of 2011-12. Since then it has been a welcome feature of every subsequent winter period. Greenfinches start to assemble in the tree tops of my garden from about two hours before sunset, and have usually gone by around half an hour before sunset. Small parties of between two and a dozen birds regularly join the tree-top assembly during this period. The whole flock then intermittently takes off and flies in large, high circuits beyond the periphery of the garden, where they also pick up other groups before returning to the same favoured few trees. This pattern continues until the group finally disappears from view. I have only twice actually seen the birds roosting – in Leylandii along the track – despite searching for the roost site on a number of other occasions. The amassed flock are often last seen heading off towards the adjoining woodland (which has no general access).

Sometimes the pre-roosting Greenfinches are joined by a few other finches – with up to a dozen or so Goldfinches, a handful of Chaffinches and very rarely a group of Bramblings or Siskins. I think it unlikely that these other species actually roost together with the Greenfinches, as the numbers of these birds always seem to decline as sunset approaches.

Numbers

Numbers of Greenfinches usually begin to build up from late November, and the gatherings have generally finished by the end of March. Peak numbers seen at the pre-roost assembly are summarised overleaf.

Winter Period	Peak count	Date of peak count
2011-12	155	12/02/2012
2012-13	41	16/12/2012
2013-14	170+	20/02/2014
2014-15	200+	06/02/2015
2015-16	37	14/01/2016
2016-17	140+	11/03/2017

As can be seen, the peaks are generally noted between February and mid-March. The two exceptions are in the 'poor' winters of 2012-13 and 2015-16, when the highest counts were made between mid-December and mid-January. I obviously cannot be sure if these counts represent the actual peak numbers of roosting birds, since it is possible (and indeed quite likely) that more birds join the gathering after they have left my garden. I am also not able to watch this event on a daily basis throughout the whole winter period.

Discussion

My observations seem to suggest that numbers of Greenfinches vary quite markedly from winter to winter, and do so in an apparently cyclical pattern (though I accept that the data set does cover a relatively short period). Why might this be? Well, I suppose it may simply be a result of the fact that in some years the roost and/or the final pre-roost area is in a slightly different location - and not visible from my house. However, the Greenfinches do always seem to use the same two or three trees in my garden as some sort of assembly point. So I actually think it quite likely that the numbers I see reflect a genuine fluctuation between years.

According to the Migration Atlas (Wernham et al.,2002, Poyser) Greenfinches are partial migrants, so during the winter north Cumbria may host a mixture of locally breeding birds plus incomers from Scotland and even Scandinavia (particularly Norway). There will clearly be a complex interaction of factors, including food availability and weather conditions across migration routes between Scotland, Norway and north Cumbria, which may all affect the number of Greenfinches wintering near Brampton. I do not know, for example, whether numbers of wintering Greenfinches elsewhere in Britain were also lower during the winters of 2012-13 and 2015-16? And, if so, whether this was perhaps caused by a lower than average influx from the

north or the east? Perhaps local breeding productivity and survival rates are more important factors? And what about any recent effects of Trichomonosis? Questions, questions...Does anyone perhaps have any thoughts on possible answers? Or has anyone observed any other Greenfinch roosts/pre-roosts in the county in recent years?

Pete Howard (p.howard691@btinternet.com)

Stonechat recovery



Above is a photo of a colour-ringed female Stonechat, photographed near Dover in late February, a early returning migrant I think! It was ringed as one of a brood of four at Knockmurton, Ennerdale on 14th April 2014.

My studies have shown that, as a partial migrant, Stonechats that migrate, do so for life. This recovery is in line with several other Cumbrian Stonechats during migration periods, namely, one in Spain, four along the west coast of France, and several others, either exiting or entering England via Portland Bill or the Straits of Dover.

John Callion

The Whitehaven Black Guillemot

A Black Guillemot was reported as being present in the harbour at Whitehaven on 16th January 2017. On 26th January the report on BirdGuides noted that this bird was being mooted as belonging to the race *mandtii*. There seemed to be no photographs in the public domain showing the open wing – this would be necessary to see the diagnostic features of this race.



The form *mandtii* came to light in 1822 when the type specimen was acquired in Spitsbergen. It was regarded as a distinct species rather than a race by the American Ornithologists' Union and appeared in the 3rd edition of the AOU check-list in 1910 as Mandt's Guillemot. But when the AOU's 4th edition of the check-list appeared in 1931 it was lumped with Black Guillemot and became a subspecies of that.

Five subspecies of Black Guillemot are recognised in the Western Palearctic – *arcticus* (U.K., Norway, SW Sweden, Denmark, White Sea), *islandicus* (Iceland), *faeroeensis* (Faeroes), *grylle* (Baltic), *mandtii* (Arctic East N.America as far South as Newfoundland, West and East Greenland, Jan Mayen, Svalbard and through to East Siberia & North Alaska).

There has been little in the mainstream literature about racial identification other than separating *mandtii* from the other taxa. It has been only in very recent years that the diagnostic features necessary to identify *mandtii* have been defined. There was a certain amount of confusion around a Black Guillemot that was present at Talkin Tarn in December 2013. This bird had a very white appearance and was assessed to be a possible *mandtii*. In due course the British Birds Rarity Committee thought otherwise. Some plumage features such as white tongues in the primaries are no longer considered to be diagnostic. Then in 2015 with further research carried out by Angus Wilson, Dan Brown and Bruce Mactavish the two unequivocal diagnostic features emerged:

- On the open upperwing the white patch extends to the primary coverts.
- The secondaries have white tips.

The Whitehaven Black Guillemot



So with these features in mind I went to see the Whitehaven bird on 3rd February. I knew it would be necessary to photograph the open wing to assess these features. I envisaged seeing the bird flap its wings. As soon as I located the bird it was clear that anything as exuberant as a wing flap was very unlikely. It swam slowly with the use of only one leg and looked very unwell. I wandered off for a while to look around the harbour and returned to find the bird looking much more lively.

Over the next five minutes or so it dived three times in typical auk fashion, opening its wings with a flick to submerge itself. I got the images which revealed solid black primary coverts and solid black primaries – no white in those areas. It was not a *mandtii* and was presumably an *arcticus*.

It was sadly but unsurprisingly found dead shortly afterwards. The dark bars across the white area on the upper wing indicate that this is a first winter bird.

Individuals of the form *mandtii* have been recorded in Norway, Iceland, New York USA and this first summer bird appeared in the southern Netherlands on 27th June 2015.



Chris Hind

WeBs, WBBS and BBS vacancies

Volunteers are needed for these BTO surveys - all vital to the monitoring of birds in Cumbria.

Wetlands bird survey (WeBs) - Coniston Water contact Dave Shackleton for full details 01931 713693 d.shackleton@btinternet.com

Breeding birds survey (BBS) - just two visits a year walking two 1km transects. This survey takes little time and effort. There are many squares available (see below) including NY3250 which has been surveyed by Keith Temple for over 20 years and now needs a new surveyor. To see where NY3250 is click on this link:

<http://www.geograph.org.uk/showmap.php?gridref=NY0948>

Square NY 3250

I have surveyed this square since the start of BBS in 1994, it has a good mix of habitats. Some arable, cropped and grazed grassland with good boundary hedges and a small but productive area of deciduous woodland. Plus also urban fringe, playing fields, village green and leafy lanes surrounded by older dwellings with mature gardens. There is a wealth of common birds in the urban development with a colony of Swift at the church, the agricultural areas always have Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Skylark, Buzzard and Linnet with usual Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Curlew, common warblers and passage Wheatear, often Roe Deer and Fox. Perhaps the best bird I had was a calling Quail

Keith Temple

Other BBS squares vacant - just change the grid ref in the link above to see where they are:

NY0948 NY1148 NY1151 NY2832 NY1243 NY3215 NY3417 NY3456
Contact: Dave Piercy daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk 017687 73201

NY4215 NY4835 NY5076 NY5087 NY5573 NY5643 NY5713 NY640 NY6510
NY6527 NY6617 NY6711 NY6726 NY7239 NY7737
Contact: Stephen Westerberg Stephen.Westerberg@rspb.org.uk 07818806991

NY7800 NY7807 NY5503 SD1888 SD2484 SD2675 SD4910 SD7090
SD7193 SD7194
Contact: Colin Gay colinathodbarrow@btinternet.com 01229 773820

Waterways Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS) - just two visits a year along a river
NY6078 NY8016 NY7020 NY5464 NY8012 Contact Stephen.
NY5006 Contact Colin

Isabelline Shrike - a new bird for Cumbria



Isabelline Shrike, Walney, Alan Mackay

While the autumn of 2016 had been dominated by a seemingly endless series of moderate to fresh easterly winds on 28th October the day had dawned tranquilly with cloudy skies and just a light northerly wind. I arrived at Walney Island at first light and a few grounded migrant thrushes and Goldcrest were in evidence so I quietly erected several mist-nets in the observatory garden. However, after a couple of mist-net rounds had only produced six Goldcrest I had time to check the scrub around the car park on the periphery of the observatory garden.

Almost immediately a movement caught my eye and revealed a bird that had been sitting quietly in a small Hawthorn bush. The immediate impression was of a relatively large but very pale looking bird with a fiery orange/red tail and a hooked bill – Isabelline Shrike! I retreated a few metres and the bird remained, seemingly content, in the bush although while watching the bird it was clear that it had attracted the attention of the local House Sparrow and Blue Tit population.

The exciting news was duly broadcast and the bird continued to be viewed at a respectable distance, with some record shots taken, between mist-net rounds and it was seen to catch and kill an over inquisitive Blue Tit that got too close. The bird impaled the Blue Tit on a Hawthorn spike in typical shrike fashion and proceeded to devour its prey.

As the first local observers began to arrive, unfortunately so did the builders to erect scaffolding around the outbuilding adjacent to its favoured bush. However, despite the noise the bird proved remarkably confiding, only finally being disturbed when the last few pieces were being put into place. Only moving a short distance, the bird finally moved into the observatory garden and promptly caught itself in one of the previously erected mist nets. The bird was duly processed, ringed and photographed and due to the departure of the builders returned back to its favoured bush where it was seen to quickly settle down and return feed on the Blue Tit it had previously caught.

Thereafter, although eventually becoming more mobile, the bird remained in the vicinity of the observatory garden throughout the day and a steady trickle of birders arrived through the course of the day allowing 35-40 observers to view the bird as it showed well to all comers until dusk when it was seen to go to roost. However, despite the next day dawning to mist and low cloud and an influx of winter thrushes there was no sign of the bird which was presumed to have moved on in the suitable migration conditions earlier the previous night.

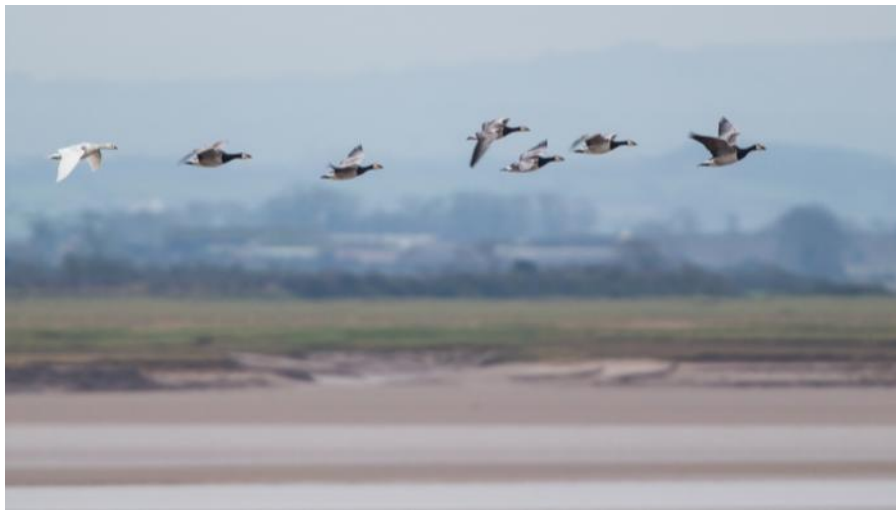
The Isabelline Shrike breeds in south-central Asia from Iran through northern China to Mongolia and winters mainly from southern Arabia to eastern and central Africa. An autumn influx into Britain during 2016 produced perhaps eight different individuals, the Walney bird was however the only sighting on the west coast, although there were a further three sightings in Ireland. While a first for Walney Island and Cumbria, the bird would also appear to be only the second for the north west of England, and the first for 20 years, following an inland bird that lingered at Stocks Reservoir, Lancashire from 5th to 11th November 1996.

Colin Raven

Recent reports

The period covered is December 2016 to February 2017. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or British Birds Rarities Committee. Species order and nomenclature follow that used in *Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria*.

Wildfowl



Barnacle Geese with Leucistic bird, Anthorn, Tony Marsh

The pattern established in November as far as **Whooper Swans** were concerned continued into the current period with 253 at Kirkbride on 1st December and 232 there on 15th February. Elsewhere 76 were on Scotby Holmes, formerly a regular wintering site and 43 at Walby/Longpark on 19th January, 66 at Kirkby Thore on 20th and 60 at New Sandsfield on 29th. **Barnacle Geese** continued to be seen in good numbers throughout the period from Rockliffe Marsh to Grune Point. 632 **Brent Geese** were on Walney on 14th January.

Pink-footed geese were present in small numbers in December and at beginning of January there were 400 between Bowness and Kirkbride. Return movements started in early January with 500 over both Blencathra and Foulshaw Moss on 8th, 100 at High Hesket on 9th, 350 over Waterside Wigton on 12th, 2000 passed Workington Harbour on 16th and 500 passed Allonby the next day. Further inland 550 were at Tewet Tarn (having come over Dunmail Raise?) on 17th there were also 400 at Eycott Hill the same day and 180 at Armathwaite on 20th. 2500 passed north over Skiddaw on 19th with 150 over Micklethwaite the same day. 325 passed north at Walney on



Long-tailed Duck, Grune Point, Roger Ridley

21st. Thereafter numbers built up on the Solway with 4000 at Whitrigg on 11th February, 2000 at Easton on 14th. 140 at Watersmeet, Langwathby was a large flock this far up the valley.

The only **Tundra Bean Goose** reported was at Walby on 15th Feb with 2000 Pinkfeet. 300 **Greylags** with the Pinkfeet at Watersmeet may well have been of Icelandic origin.

The two **Greenland White-fronted Geese** remained at Walney with further records of 11 at Brampton on 2nd January, five at Kents Bank on 8th January two at Soddy Gap on 31st January; two birds in the Lyth valley were not specified as to race. Birds of **Eurasian race** appeared in north of the county in February – presumably moving with Pinkfeet, with three at Easton on 14th February, six at the same site on 21st and five on 24th and seven at Oulton on 23rd and 24th.

1130 **Pintail** were of note on Duddon estuary on 30th January. On the coast 20 **Scaup** were at Hodbarrow RSPB on 19th January and there were three at South Walney on 9th February. Inland, a drake was on Ullswater on 8/9th January, nine on Castle Carrock reservoir on 13th February (including three drakes). 120 **Common Teal** at Wedholme Flow on 27th February also included a drake **Green-winged Teal**. Five pairs of **Gadwall** were at Sunbiggin Tarn on 27th December and 18 birds were at Hodbarrow on 19th January. A female **Ring-necked Duck** was on Siddick Pond on 21st and 22nd January.

The **Long-tailed Ducks** continued to be seen at Grune Point up to 7th February when two were reported there. A single bird frequented Whitehaven Harbour from early December to mid January. Another was at



Redhead Smew, Siddick, Nigel Voaden



Smew, Derwent Water, Tony Marsh

Whinfell Tarn on 14th December. Birds were seen on several dates at locations on Windermere with two on 11th December, two off Bowness on 21st January, and one on 28th with two at Ambleside on 7th February and two again at Bowness on 11th. Six were at Foulney on 16th January. A drake and a redhead **Smew** were on Derwent Water on 5th January and were present for some time with the drake present through to March. A redhead arrived at Siddick Ponds on 18th January and was seen up to the end of February. There was also a redhead at Soddy Gap on 12th February and a drake in Kendal on 8th.

Grouse to Herons

Red Grouse were on Helton Fell on 24th February and there were ten **Black Grouse** at Jockey Shield on 4th December. **Great Northern Divers** were at Walney on 24th December and 26th February. A **Black-throated Diver** was off Parton on 18th January. There were 25 **Red-throated Divers** off Silecroft on 25th January. **Little Egret** were recorded regularly coastally in small numbers apart from at Walney where up to 60 birds were recorded in December and 43 in January and February. One of the birds in December was colour ringed in North Wales. Of interest were birds moving inland such as at Ennerdale on 3rd December, Dalston on 29th December, Cotehill on 19th January, Aldoth on 29th, Tarn Moor on 13th February and Soulby, Appleby on 21st.

Great White Egret were reported flying over Foulshaw on 2nd December, from Humphrey Head on 28th December and 30th January and over Holme and at Arnside on the 9th February. A **Red-necked Grebe** spent several days on Ullswater from 2nd December and a **Slavonian Grebe** was seen off Walney on 15th and 16th January. There were 13 **Little Grebes** at the south end of Bassenthwaite Lake on 1st December and 14 at Longlands on 13th January.

Raptors to waders



Hen Harrier, Campfield, JA Rogers

Red Kites were reported from New Hutton on 1st January, RSPB Geltsdale on 25th and Corby Hill on 25th January and Foulshaw on 21st February.

As well as being present on the south Solway, **Hen Harriers** were reported regularly in the south with a “ring tail” present on Walney from mid December to 8th January at least.

A **White-tailed Eagle** was reported moving west at Forest Head on 20th January. **Merlin** and **Peregrine** were reported from the south Solway coast, and from Walney. A maximum of four Peregrine were seen in aerial combat over Foulshaw on 11th January with lesser numbers on many other dates.

Three **Water Rail** were at Walney on 10th December and up to four were a regular feature at Siddick Pond. Birds were also seen at Watchtree NR in December and two at Sunbigging Tarn in January and Derwent Water in February. Up to two were around Foulshaw and Ulpha Meadows with three seen from Grange promenade in a patch of reeds on 28th February.

Two **Common Sandpipers** were on the Ravenglass Esk throughout the period as were two **Green Sandpipers**. Elsewhere single Green Sandpipers were at Rockliffe, Burgh Marsh and Walby between 20th and 29th December, singles were again at Rockliffe and Burgh Marsh in January with three at Rockliffe on 30th, a



Sparrowhawk, Staveley, Ian Tallon,



Ruff, Walby, Roger Ridley

single was at Waberthwaite on the same day. Two were on the River Esk at Longtown on 3rd January. In February the same sites were involved with one at Burgh Marsh on two dates, two at Walby on two dates, and one on the River Esk on one date. In addition up to six birds were on a field flood at Wetheral for four days from 21st with a single bird there on 28th and birds being present into March.

Ruff were present at Walby Flash throughout December - eight initially (associating with Lapwing flock) but with a maximum of ten at the end of the month and still ten there on 1st January 2017 – these were the last, although two were at nearby Carlisle Airport on 9th January. Transect counts found 21 **Common Snipe** at Tarn Moor on 27th December along with two **Jack Snipe**. Common Snipe were also reported throughout January with significant numbers being 57 at Eycott Hill on 17th and 18 at Askham Fell on 23rd. Significant numbers of **Jack Snipe** were five on the River Esk at Longtown, eight at Eycott Hill CWT on 17th, seven on Askham Fell on 23rd and six at Tewet Tarn on 17th. In February five were on Askham Fell on 8th, and four near Cliburn on 16th. Single **Greenshank** were at Eskmeals, Hodbarrow and Walney in January and were on the south Solway on several dates. Six on the River Mite Estuary were at a regular wintering site.

The first **Woodcock** of the winter for the site was at Cliburn on 19th December with four in same area 16th February and an impressive 21 were counted at Stanley Bank on 20th February. Birds were seen high on Binsey in January and four were seen at Watchtree NR on 20th January and at Waterside, Wigton the next day.



Purple Sandpiper, Workington, Tony Marsh

A large flock of **Lapwing** frequented Walby Flash in December with perhaps 300 birds present; 230 were at Sunbiggin Tarn on 10th December. 400 were at Walby on 1st January and on 9th there were 153 at Carlisle Airport and 300 on ex flood damaged land between Warwick Bridge and Wetheral and finally 3-400 at Hackthorpe. Birds were clearly on the move

with 600 at RSPB Geltsdale on 1st February – a record for the site.

The largest flocks of **Knot** were at Walney with 3650 in December, 2500 in January and building up to 11,000 at the end of February, the Foulney Webs count on 11th February was 8500. 3370 **Dunlin** were at Walney on 17th December. The regular **Golden Plover** flock built up at Cardurnock and 800 were at Walney on 15th December. Inland 80 were at Ralfland Forest on 12th January, 700 by the A66 at Appleby – a regular site – on 22nd and 27 on Askham Fell on 23rd. In February the Anthorn flock was in excess of 4000 and probably significantly more. Thirty were on Helton Fell on 24th.

There were 40 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Hodbarrow on 19th January. **Little Stint** was recorded at Port Carlisle in January and February. Towards the end of February increased roosts of **Oystercatchers** started to build up in the Eden Valley with 47 at the confluence of the River Eden and Irthing on 27th and 460 birds in 11 roosts between Kirkoswald and Kirkby Stephen (where there was a roost of 75) on 20th. By then birds were already back in Penrith town centre.



Grey Plovers, J A Rogers

Skuas to Auks



Glaucous Gull, Workington, Roger Ridley

Mediterranean Gull continued to be present in the north west of the county with four at Siddick Pond on 3rd December, birds were reported regularly from Workington in January with five on 19th and 18 on 21st. There were still nine there on 9th February and there was an adult at Allonby on the same day. 500 **Black-headed Gulls** were at Walby Flash on 27th February.

A juvenile **Glaucous Gull** was present at Workington Harbour from 19th January to 6th February and another was present at the north end of Windermere on 8th of January. A juvenile **Iceland Gull** was at Workington on 16th January and from the same date another frequented the Bowness on Windermere lakefront and was still present at the end of February. Of interest was a **Herring Gull** apparently of “argentatus” race photographed at Workington by J Green – being almost as large as the Greater Black-backed with it and dwarfing other Herring Gulls and the Glaucous Gull. The first wave of returning **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** to Walney was noted on 17th February.

Unexpected were c3000 **Common Guillemot** on the St. Bees Head cliffs on 3rd December. A **Black Guillemot** frequented Whitehaven Harbour from 16th January alas it was found dead on 7th February .



Icelandic Gull, Bowness, Nigel Voaden

Pigeons to Buntings



*Great Spotted Woodpecker,
The How, Tony Marsh*

A **Tawny Owl** was at Stanwix Carlisle on 21st January and birds were heard in many locations subsequently. **Short-eared Owl** were seen at Walney on 10th December. Then at Walton Moss NNR on 5th January and Foulney on 18th and 29th December and 5th and 16th January. **Kingfisher** were at Mockerkinn Tarn on 4th December, and in January on the River Lowther, Port Carlisle, Rockliffe, Siddick Pond and the River Esk at Longtown and a single at Rigmaden Bridge on February 1st. Two overwintered at Ravenglass and another two at Workington on the Derwent.

Green Woodpeckers were in Kershope Forest in early December, Buttermere on 29th January and then at Dent on 5th February. **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**

started drumming widely in January. Between 400 and 600 **Skylark** were on St Bees Head on stubble.

Most unexpected was a **Shore Lark** photographed on Helvellyn Summit on 4th December with another report from Nethermost Pike – part of the Helvellyn Range - on 20th January – eight **Snow Buntings** were in the same area at the time . A single **Water Pipit** frequented Walney from the end of January – with 31 **Rock Pipits** on 29th.



Shore Lark, Helvellyn, S Reekie

Waxwings continued to be seen into December from Carlisle in the north to Ulverston in the south with significant numbers being 111 in Kendal on 2nd December, 150 in Dalston 11th December, 200 in Penrith and 230 in Staveley. Fewer birds were reported in January and in smaller flocks. This pattern continued in February with 18 at Milnthorpe being the largest number.

The male **Black Redstart** continued to be seen around Whitehaven Harbour throughout the period.



Redwing, Penrith, Adam Moan

Single **Stonechat** were at Carlisle Airport on 12th January and at Askham Fell on 23rd. A pair were on Helton Fell on two dates in February.

Early December saw a large movement of thrushes with 1000 **Fieldfare** in Geltsdale on 4th and 100 **Redwing** in the same area and 100 at Walton Moss NNR on 15th January. 200 **Redwings**

frequented the Low Hesketh area in January with another 100 at Rockcliffe on 20th. In early February numbers started to increase again with 200 in Melkintorpe Woods on 2nd, 100 at Waterside on 10th but only 50 at Low Hesketh on 17th then around 360 near Great Strickland on 22nd.

A **Song Thrush** was singing in Keswick on 19th December. A **Firecrest** was found at Maryport on the CBC Bird Race on 8th January with another later in the day at Siddick Ponds. A week later another was reported in Cockermouth. A male **Blackcap** was in a Whitehaven garden from 19th January to 12th March and a female was at Stanwix on 9th February. An interesting **Shrike species** appeared briefly (and was photographed) in a garden at Hallbankgate on 4th December – see previous newsletter for details. The **Great Grey Shrike** at Soddy Gap, Great Broughton spent the whole period there.

The only site producing significant numbers of **Brambling** was the regular site at Talkin Tarn with 200 there on 9th January and still 100 there on 16th with around 30 in a mixed flock near Great Strickland on 20th February.



Blackcap, Stanwix, Roger Ridley



Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows, Red Hall Farm, Tony Marsh

120 **Twite** were at Grange over Sands on 29th December otherwise about 30 birds at Walney were regular throughout. **Siskin** started to appear in January with flocks of 35 at Longtown on 9th and 25 at Whale on 18th, otherwise in small numbers. **Hawfinch** were reported from the regular site at Sizergh Castle and a few other sites in south of the county including Windermere town. **Crossbill** frequented Whinlatter Forest with ten there on 28th December.

There were some significant flocks of **Reed Bunting** in January with 40 at Sunbiggin Tarn on 4th, 80 there on 21st and between 80 and 100 at nearby Tarn Moor on 23rd. There were 30 on St Bees Head on 25th. Eight **Snow Buntings** were on Helvellyn on 20th January. 50 **Yellowhammers** were at Little Salkeld on 9th January but the largest congregation were 200 at Red Hall, Wigton on 15th January and 150 were there on 19th with 20 at Waterside on 6th February and 50 at Micklethwaite on 10th.

As ever, we are indebted to all the contributors, too numerous to list. Feel free to send records by e-mail to: rjgreenacres72@gmail.com

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

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Information for contributors

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

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

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