



BIRD NEWS
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The CBC winter wetlands survey
CBC Swift survey
Winter birds and water treatment works
Audio Moth
An unusual year for Swifts
Blackcap nest recording and migration
Recent reports

Contents - see back page

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The CBC winter wetlands survey 2019-20

The main aim of this winter's CBC wetland survey has been to update information on the wintering bird population at water bodies throughout Cumbria which are not regularly included in the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBs). Additional objectives included an investigation of the current activities on or functions of the wetlands surveyed, to look at changes in bird populations at sites where historical records are available and to identify new waters developed in recent decades.



Teal, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this winter's survey. A remarkable total of 260 recording forms have already been received for standing waters all around the county with more results anticipated before the end of the month. Most wetlands were visited at least twice early and later in the season. Single visits were explained by lack of access, water bodies completely overgrown or drained and the difficulty of reaching remote tarns in inclement weather. Also, many flood waters were only discovered when significant areas of Cumbria became submerged in late winter.

This winter's stormy weather limited the number of ideal days for conducting wetland bird counts. However, only a brief period of frosty nights in late November and the first days of December caused problems with ice covered surfaces. February's record rainfall levels were particularly beneficial, creating extensive flood water habitats with impressive congregations of wildfowl, waders and gulls in unexpected places.

With results still pending, it is too early to offer a detailed account of the weighty quantity of data collected so far. The large number of wetlands surveyed were diverse in size and characteristics. The majority of permanent



Kingfisher, Longtown, Adam Moan

water bodies in predominantly low-land Cumbria are man-made rather than natural in origin. These include reservoirs, quarry pools, mining subsistence flashes, mill ponds, fishing lakes, shooting ponds and an encouraging number of conservation schemes. Many of these minor waters are relatively recent developments that do not feature on earlier editions of the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps.

Eight percent of sites visited disappointed observers with no birds recorded. However, a good number of permanent tarns and pools were much more productive with a variety of wildfowl species reaching between 50 and 250 birds. Maximum counts of Greylag Geese, Wigeon, Teal and Mallard exceeded 100 at the most favoured habitats, the latter undoubtedly boosted by birds reared and released for shooting purposes. Counts of waders and gulls were relatively low early in the winter but records increased steadily in the second period. Scarcer birds detected included a Great White Egret at Greystone Pools, two Mediterranean Gulls in the far west of the county, a couple of Water Rails and just one Pochard on a northern pool.



*Cormorant, Siddick,
Adam Moan*

During the late winter period flood waters expanded rapidly, especially over the flood plains of the Kent, Lyth, Rusland and Eden Valleys plus parts of the Solway Plain, Beckermeth area and sites in Furness. Records received at this stage include cumulative counts of several thousand birds in February alone. The most numerous species attracted by these transient habitats included: Mute and Whooper Swans; Greylag, Canada and Pink-footed Geese; Wigeon and Teal; Lapwing, Curlew and Golden Plover; Black-headed, Common and Herring Gulls.

A full report will be available later in the year.

Malcolm Priestley

CBC winter bird race

Many thanks to Phil Evans and Christine Nuttall for organising another successful CBC bird race. Ten teams (27 birders) enjoyed a good day out with Walney Wanderers coming home in first place.

A cumulative total of 120 different species were seen on a winter's day within Cumbria.

CBC Swift survey

The CBC Swift survey was first carried out in the summer of 2018 and was then repeated in the summer of 2019. Thank you to all who took part.

Aims and scope

There were two strands to the survey. The main aim was to carry out timed counts in suitable habitats. A subsidiary aim was to detail any nests found. We therefore now have details of hundreds of nest sites around the county. As last year the data for all these nests will take some time to process and is therefore not considered for this preliminary report.

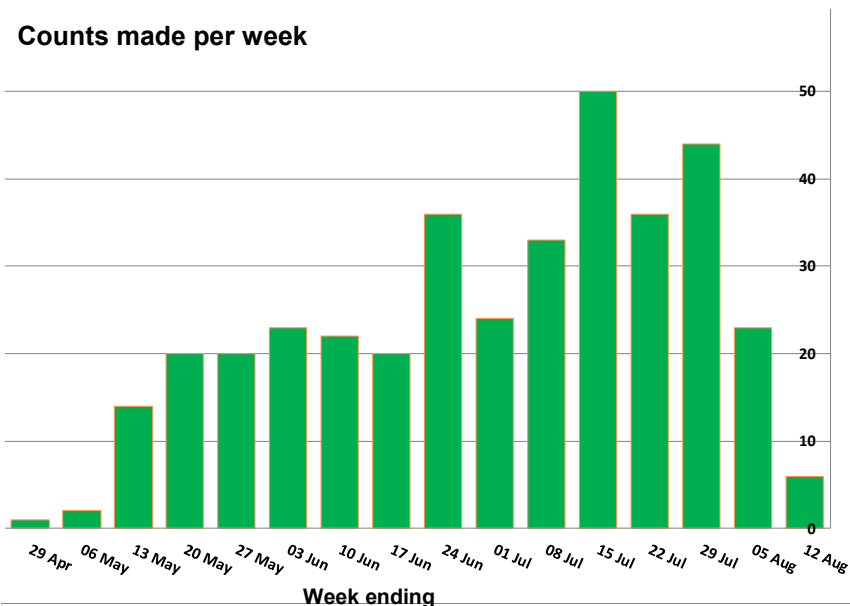
Coverage

In 2018 121 locations were covered where a total of 536 counts were made. In 2019 there were 71 locations with 374 counts. Over the two years good coverage of the county was achieved with surveys spread over 46 10km squares. There was a good mix of built up habitat with a number of points selected around Carlisle, a sprinkling of our major towns and some smaller villages and hamlets. See the map overleaf for details.

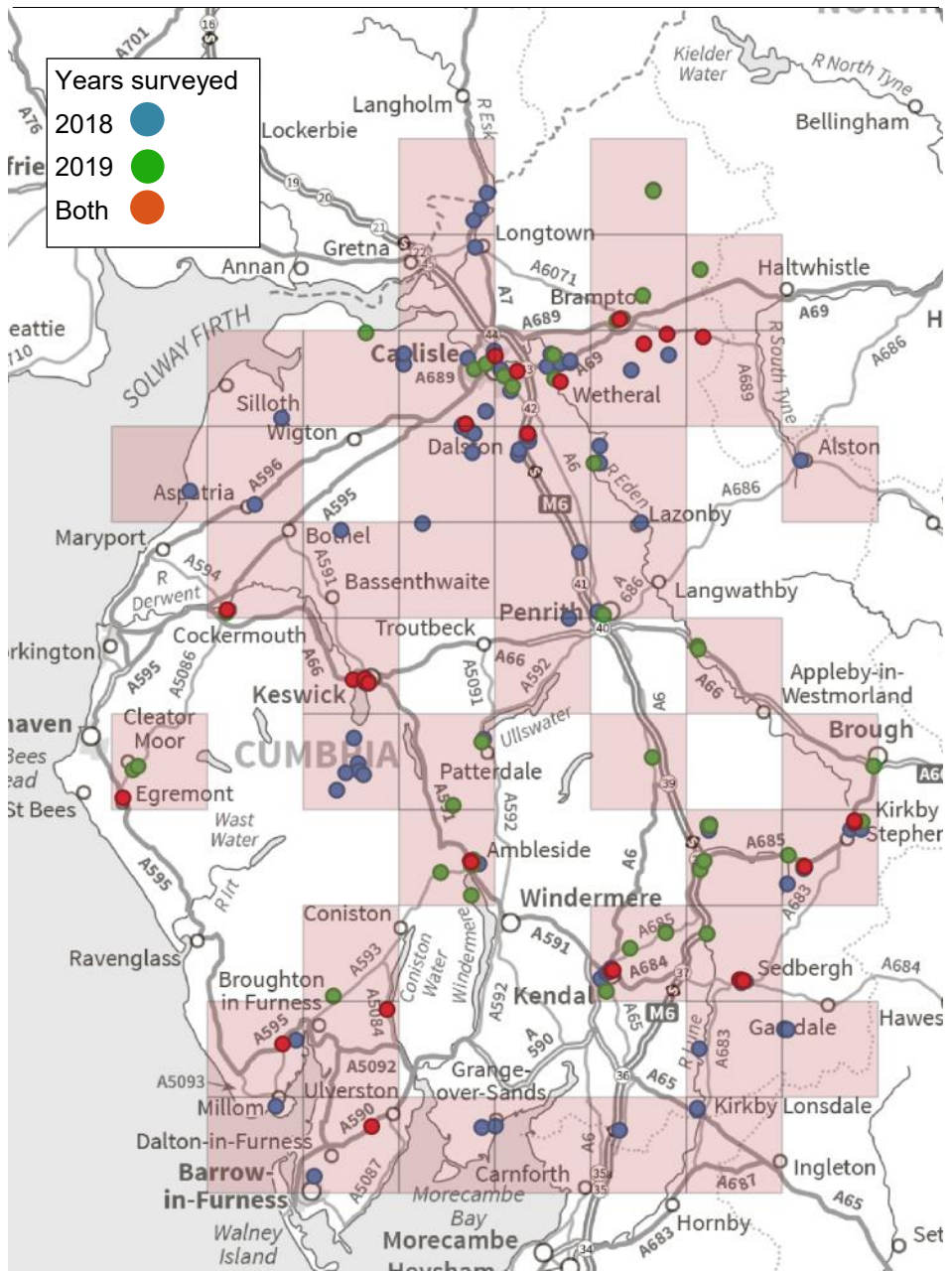
Counts

Counts were carried out between 29th April and 12th August. The recommended survey period was from mid-May to the end of July and this is reflected in the chart below. The peak number of counts made was 50 in the week ending 15th July.

Counts made per week



CBC Swift survey



Locations surveyed with 10km squares

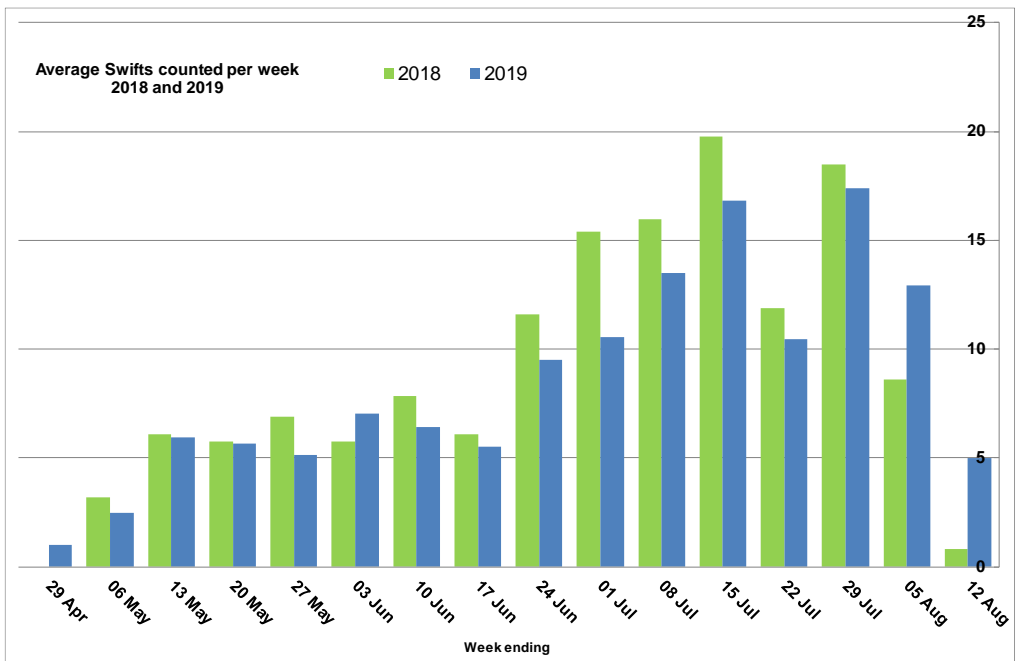
Maximum counts at each location

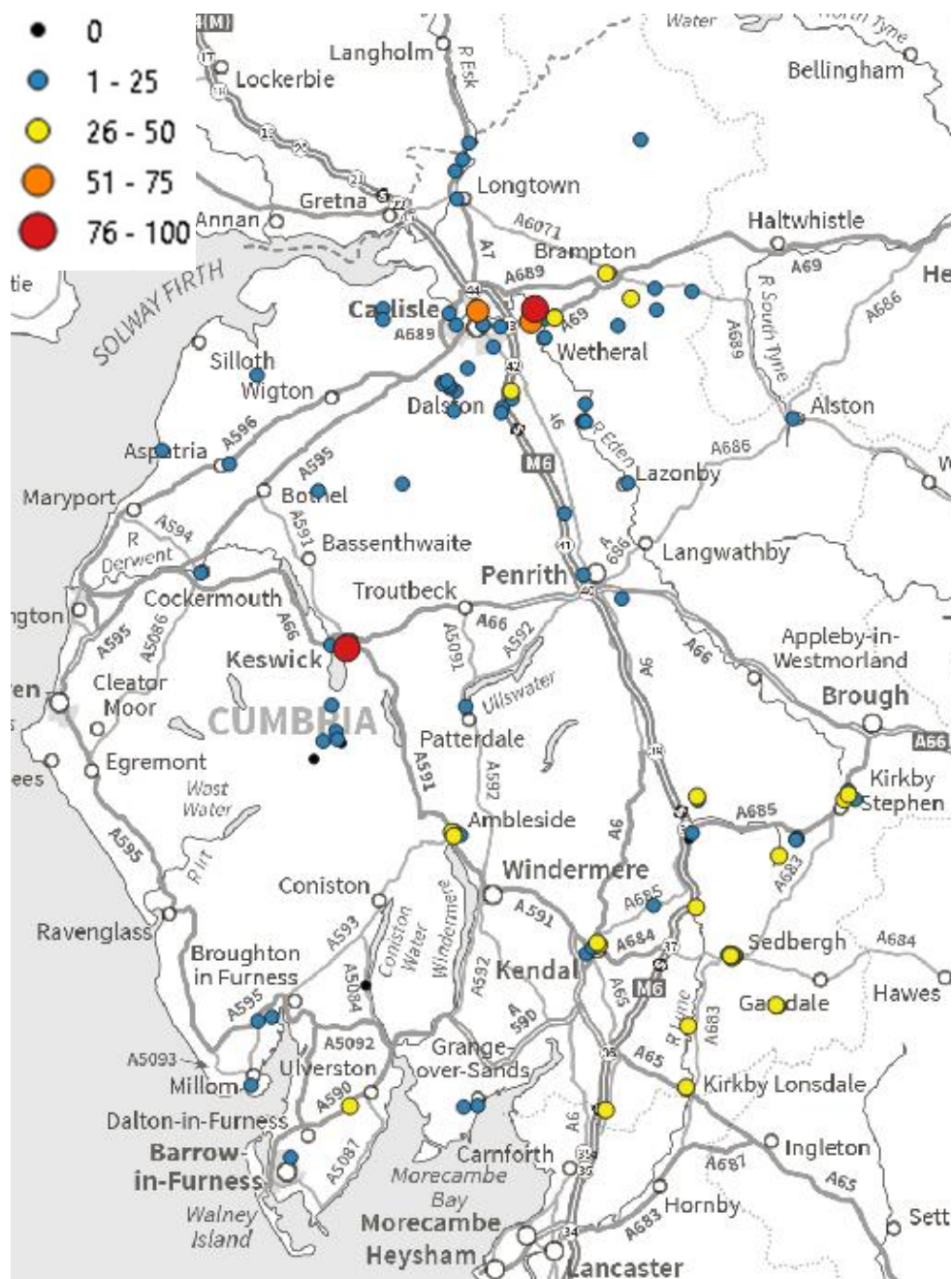
The maps for 2018 and 2019 overleaf show the highest count at each location within a range for each year. The highest counts of 100 in 2018 and 120 in 2019, came from feeding parties over rapeseed fields near Aglionby.

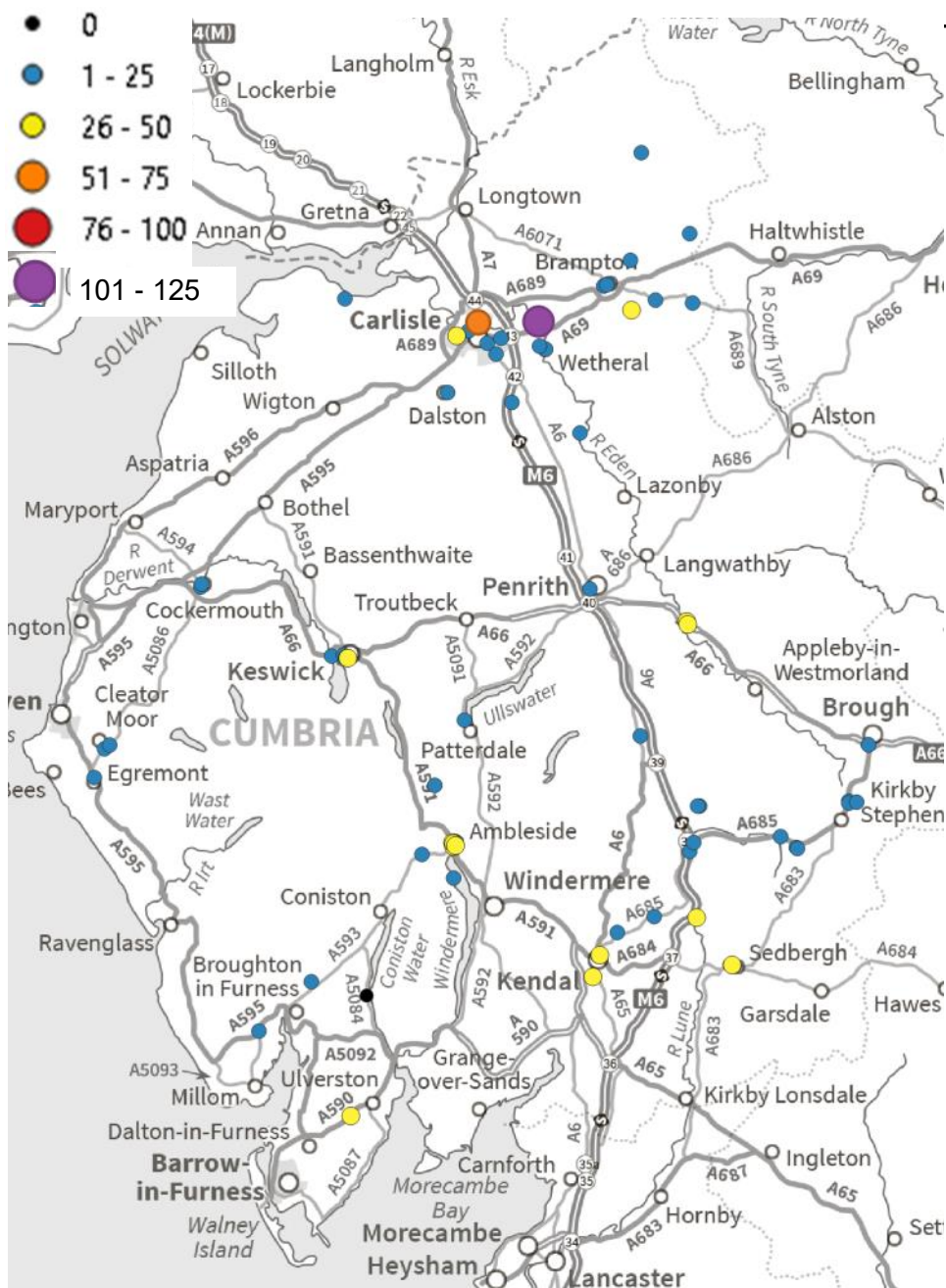
In 2018 there were also counts of around a 100 in Keswick and two further counts of 70 around Carlisle and many more of 40 or greater. 2019 was a poorer year with the next highest counts of 55 coming from Stanwix then 50s at Aglionby and Farlam ,45 at Ambleside followed by 40 at Keswick, Lowgill, Kendal and Sedbergh.

Comparing the figures from just the 40 locations surveyed in both years. Twenty-two locations had higher maximum counts in 2018, three were the same and 15 were higher in 2019.

Another indicator of comparative numbers between years is the average number of Swifts per count made. This was over 13 in 2018, down to 11 in 2019. The graph below indicates that the peak numbers were reached later in 2019 than 2018. Overall the graph ties in with the general impression that many Swifts arrived later than usual. This is mainly presumed to be due to poor weather on migration. Consequently for them it was a later breeding season than usual and a number of birds were present later than the previous year. The figures show a later breeding season in general than 2018 with the likely losses on migration leading to smaller numbers overall.





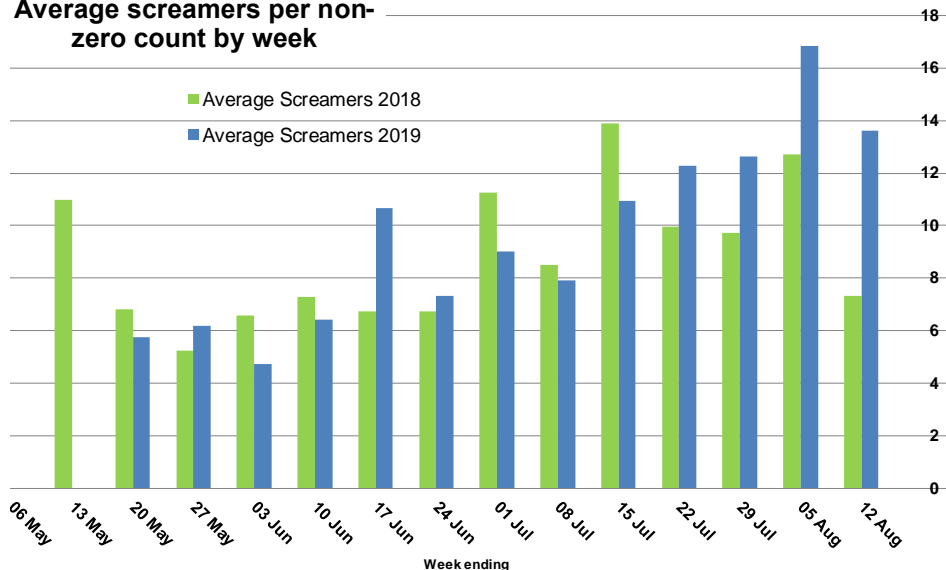


Maximum Swifts counted at each location 2019

'Screamers'

An important part of the survey was to count the numbers in screaming parties that usually occur around roof-top level. These are believed to indicate the presence of nests nearby. The graph below shows the average number of screamers heard throughout the two seasons by week. The later arrival of 2019 breeders at the start of the season can be clearly seen. Then, as expected there is generally a gradual increase as the non-breeders supplement numbers. Screaming birds also peaked later in the season in 2019. Does this imply that non-breeders also stayed later thereby dovetailing their migration timing with breeders? In 2018 the numbers of screamers peaked earlier around mid July with 14 the highest average count. The highest number of screamers counted in a week in 2019 was 522 in 31 counts the week ending 29th July compared to 486 in 51 counts on the week ending 9th July 2018.

Average screamers per non-zero count by week



Swift migration season 2019 (from RSPB)

Swifts would normally begin their journeys north from Africa in April. Their epic 6,000 mile journey is often fraught with hazards but weather conditions in 2019 may have made migration especially difficult.

When the birds arrived in Europe, they were faced with serious climatic challenges. In 2019 there were some distressing stories from Italy and Spain showing that Swifts, some of which may have been on their way to UK nest

sites, had been killed by storms and cold wet weather. Doomed to die of starvation and hypothermia, they were trying to survive overnight by clinging to each other on walls to avoid the wind and rain.

Swift expert Edward Mayer, who runs the Swift Conservation website and advice service, said of 2019 “There has been some really appalling spring weather this year in Italy, France, Spain and the Balkans. Temperatures should have been in the 30s but were in the low teens, and much lower at night, with prolonged rain storms making things even worse. This suppresses the Swifts’ flying insect food, soaks and chills them – and can kill them”.

The unseasonably low temperatures in southern Europe would have made life even harder for these small birds desperately needing to refuel for the final leg of their journey. The predominantly northerly winds would have made flying north even harder.

Swift survey 2020

CBC council is keen that this survey continues for another year. As this survey can be carried out from your own home or garden it is still feasible under the current restrictions. With many other surveys cancelled this is an easy survey that everyone can safely take part in but at present only from your own homes and gardens. If you would like further details/forms etc. please contact Dave Piercy.

Dave Piercy 017687 73201; daveandkathypiercy@btinternet.com



What is it ? Swift quiz !

This picture was taken through the camera in one of Tanya and Edmund’s Swift nest boxes at night in winter when the Swifts have long gone.

Answer on page 17

Winter birds and water treatment works



Firecrest, Longtown, Sam Northwood

I visited Longtown on 4th January with the hope of finding a Green Sandpiper or Greenshank along the Esk, both of which wintered on this stretch of the river in 2019. After a blank search I wandered south of the bridge to a water treatment works where there had been a report of a Chiffchaff a few weeks earlier, hoping that it might be a Siberian '*tristis*' type.

I saw nothing and headed on towards Arthuret Ponds but doubled back after a minute or so. It was a miserable day and warmth and coffee seemed a better option. Stopping again at the entrance gates to the works I scanned again whilst musing that birding in Cumbria was so often a fruitless task. A bird appeared close to the gates which appeared Chiffchaff like in shape but on lifting binoculars I was greeted by a fine male Firecrest about 5 metres away. Not what I'd expected!

Water treatment works seem to have an amazing magnet like attraction to wintering warblers and crests, attracted to an abundance of invertebrates with such locations in the South-west of the UK regularly being home to wintering Chiffchaffs, Firecrests and occasional Yellow-browed Warblers.

The winter distribution for Firecrest is concentrated into southern Britain and associated with coastal or lowland inland locations. It is classed as 'a scarce passage migrant' according to '*Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria*'.

Winter birds and water treatment works

In the years between 2007-17 a total of 17 have been recorded: -

2007	2	Armathwaite and Barrow in Furness
2008	5	Walney 3rd April, Barrow March, St Bees October, Cavendish Dock October, Ulverston December
2009	1	Millom October
2011	2	Walney March, Calder Bridge March
2013	1	North Walney October
2015	2	Walney November, Ulpha Meadows December
2016	3	Dalton Jan-Feb for four days, Haweswater September, South Walney October
2017	1	Siddick Pond, Workington January



Chiffchaff and Siberian Chiffchaff, Longtown, Christine Nuttall

Hence, most records have been in the far south and west of the county on single days only and the presence of one in the north of the county for a prolonged period is of interest and most welcome. It was regularly reported up to the 2nd March.

Roy Atkins then had the fortune to come across a Chiffchaff on the 8th January, which showed characteristics of '*tristis*'. Nick Franklin and I saw this bird again on the 10th – it was noticeably pallid showing cold greyish-brown upperparts and striking white underparts, with greenish fringes to its secondary feathers, lacking the typically richer brown and olive tones of a *collybita*. It transpired that there were indeed two Chiffchaffs – one *collybita* and one *tristis* type and the contrast between them was very apparent. Christine Nuttall later confirmed that there were two *tristis* and one *collybita* present.



Two Siberian Chiffchaff, Longtown, Nick Franklin

The debate about the sub-species of wintering Chiffchaffs in the UK and their identification features has raged for many years with an abundance of literature in the birding press.

This bird seems identical to one at Pilling water treatment works in Lancashire in winter 2020 [FyldeBCPilling](#) and also identical to Chiffchaffs which have wintered at Dalston Water Treatment Works in 2006 and 2014.

Recent DNA studies of wintering Chiffchaffs in the Netherlands, Cornwall and Scotland have yielded interesting results. Somewhat surprisingly, Scandinavian *abietinus* seems to be the much rarer of the two subspecies occurring in winter in Europe. <https://britishbirds.co.uk/article/619315/>

Siberian Chiffchaff breeds from the Urals East to North-east Siberia and south to North Mongolia. They are primarily autumn migrants with the main passage occurring through the northern isles in mid-October to mid-November, a proportion of which overwinter, predominantly in the south-west.

Ideally, to clinch the identification either DNA analysis is required, or a recording or a good description of the call. Nick was lucky to hear it call a couple of times:- *'a weak, sad peep rather flat in tone and nothing like the classic Chiffchaff call'*. On 29th February I recorded one of the *'tristis'* birds calling using my mobile phone and Chris Hind was able to produce a sonogram. He comments *'Comparing it with the sonogram in Sound Approach the pitch is identical as is the duration of the call and the shape of the trace'*.

<https://soundapproach.co.uk/chapter-16-drab/>



Siberian Chiffchaff, Longtown, Sam Northwood

There is a lack of consistency between County Records Panels about how such birds are assessed with some counties accepting non-calling birds, some lumping birds as *abietinus/tristis*, and others only accepting birds which have been trapped or confirmed by DNA analysis. There are a few accepted records in Cumbria, although it is not clear what criteria were used to assess these records.

Between 2008-16 it was recorded in 61 counties although none were recorded or accepted from Cumbria. I suspect that this interesting sub-species is under-recorded. Any wintering Chiffchaffs are worthy of further attention and ideally a series of photographs or sound recordings may help to ascertain it's true status in the county in coming years.

References

White, S. & Kehoe, C. (2018) Report on Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain in 2016. *British Birds*, Vol 111: 491-550.
Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B., Swann, B., Downie, I. & Fuller, R. (2013) *Bird Atlas 2007-11: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland*. Tring: BTO.

Colin Auld

Audio Moth

The Long-eared Owl survey last year threw up a result from the south of the county when Mike Douglas used an acoustic recorder, left out to record overnight.

The device used was an Audio Moth and provides an audio recording in a similar way that camera traps have been set to provide visual records of passing wildlife.



After assessing the Audio Moth four recorders have been purchased by the Cumbria Bird Club, fitted out for use and are already producing some fascinating results – Crossbills, Goshawk, Long-eared Owl, Tawny Owl, Goldcrest and the usual range of songbirds to be heard at this time of year. We are now in what could be referred to as the 'field trials' stage, before considering any further purchases.

There are acoustic recorders, in similar form to camera traps – rugged and weather proof, but they come in at several hundred pounds apiece. The Audio Moth is an altogether smaller, basic bit of kit, developed for conservation purposes by a team from Southampton and Oxford Universities. (<https://www.openacousticdevices.info>)

On first impressions these devices look as if they will only produce basic results. In practice they prove to be impressive pieces of equipment – programmable to record continually or for set sampling periods during any given time span.

So, for example, if targeting a species like Tawny Owl you could set the device to record five minutes on, five minutes off, for a two hour period after dusk then leave it out in the field and collect it the following day, or a week later. As with a camera trap you would then need to review what has been recorded so the memory card has to be downloaded to computer and with the aid of a free App ('Audacity') recordings can be reviewed. With the example quoted there would be six recordings made per hour over the two hours resulting in twelve recordings and a total of one hour recording for each night.

Audacity allows a spectrogram of each recording to be viewed and with practice it is possible to home in on interesting sounds to listen to rather than listening to the whole recording – which speeds up the process if looking for a particular call.

Recording of nocturnal migration (nocmig see www.nocmig.com) has opened up a field of expertise on recording which we have tapped into. Audio Moths are currently costing around £95, fitted out and ready to deploy. There is something of a supply and demand issue as these recorders are being used in an amazing range of conservation and research projects around the world but at the current price they could become yet another piece of kit to go onto the Christmas list.

Last year's Long-eared Owl survey hit a low point in the vole population so could be rerun in 2021 and the safety issue of lone visits to remote areas could see the Audio Moth come in to its own. If owls make a good target species then surely Nightjar, Woodcock and Goshawk might also produce results at other points in the season. Indeed why stop there, the possibilities are endless.

Bird Club Council will be considering how to move this project forward. In the mean time (only when life has returned to normal) if any club members would like to familiarise themselves with the Audio Moth, try one out, use it in a place, situation or for a particular species then they would be welcome to have use of one of the four devices by getting in touch with either Mike Mills stablemates5152@gmail.com or Peter Howard p.howard691@btinternet.com who can arrange an introductory session and a trial.

Warning – use of these devices can be great fun and addictive.

Mike Mills



Swift Quiz answer: A Great Tit roosts every night in various of our Cambridge system nest boxes. It has been roosting since last autumn and chooses only certain of the nest sites, coming in at around 5pm and leaving at dawn.

An unusual year for Swifts

This is perhaps an unusual time to be reading about a summary of last year's Swift breeding activity – but 2019 was indeed an unusual year for Swifts. Many people around the country reported that Swifts were late in coming back – often not until the end of May – and that breeding pairs were down in numbers. At Lowgill however arrival times were variable with some returning to their nest sites on time, while others did not come back until mid-May. But the very best news of all is that we had five new pairs, so our colony has now risen to 28 pairs.

In addition we had one pair that roosted overnight. Roosting is classic behaviour for Swifts that have formed a new partnership but are not yet ready to breed, but will do so the following year.

Our success in increasing the size of our colony, by providing additional Swift accommodation, adds weight to the strong belief that it is loss of nest sites that is the reason for the serious decline in the Swift population. Our new pairs are breeding in boxes under the eaves and also in the internal nest sites that we installed in a gable (the “Cambridge system” – an entrance hole with a 4” pipe through the wall to a nest box in the loft.). We incorporated 12 of these and five are now occupied, so we are keeping fingers crossed for further additions this year.



The most unusual feature of 2019, for us and elsewhere in the country, was the proportion of late breeding Swifts. Swifts have only one brood: in general the eggs hatch in mid-June and chicks fledge after 40 days at the end of July or early August. But last year, for the first time ever, we had four pairs still around at the end of August and even into September. The last chick to fledge was on 1st September and one of the parents continued coming back into its nest each night until the 6th.

Why was this? In most cases late breeding was due to the late return of one or both of the pair. Where an original mate had failed to come back, it was only after a few weeks of waiting that the singleton managed to attract a new partner. So the laying and fledging dates would be later than normal. One of our new pairs did not even enter the nest site until 2nd and 7th June, almost a month later than normal, and we suspect that they were three or four year olds that were only just ready to breed.

Another reason for late breeding was due to eggs being knocked out of the nest, or deliberately ejected, and a second clutch laid, with consequently late fledging. Through our cameras when we watch the recordings of eggs getting knocked out, it looks accidental as the Swift turns around - but are they just

clumsy or can they sense something is wrong? We have clear footage of a Swift deliberately ejecting its eggs, grasping eggs in its beak and throwing them out of the hole. Why this should happen we do not know. Can they recognise infertile or sub standard eggs? Egg ejection does sometimes happen after an intruder comes in and fighting ensues, but on this occasion this did not appear to happen.

The other difference last year was the low breeding success rate. Swifts usually lay two or sometimes three eggs, which together with having only one brood, demonstrates how this low rate of reproduction renders them so vulnerable. In previous years several of our pairs have had clutches of three eggs, with an overall success rate of chicks fledging of 2.3. This year three pairs laid three eggs. We have rarely had nests where one of the eggs does not hatch at all but last year this happened in four nests. It might be argued that eggs laid during or soon after bad wet weather might be less fertile than eggs laid in good weather. However, although the weather in the first three weeks of June was cold and wet, we have no evidence that this was responsible. There was no difference in hatching success between the eggs that had been laid in May when the weather had been good, and those laid in late June when the Swifts may have had to put in more effort to feed in the poor weather. Overall, the final breeding success rate was down to 1.6.

On a different note, for the last few years we have been pioneering a new way of looking after Swift chicks that have fallen out of a nest site – FOSTERING! Every year we get phone calls asking for help from people who have found such a chick on the ground. It is very difficult to hand-rear Swifts and there are not many specialised rehabilitators in the country. If we have a nest with chicks of a similar age we put the fallen chick in – and as birds cannot count, the parents accept the newcomer and carry on feeding their increased brood without any problems!

This technique has worked very well. The picture shows a (crowded!) nest at night with five Swifts: two adults and three fully grown chicks, one of which is a fostered.



An unusual year for Swifts

Finally, if you or anyone you know has the opportunity to provide new accommodation for Swifts - a great new design of internal brick has been designed: the S-brick. It is light-weight, fully compliant with UK building regulations, inexpensive and easy to install. Although originally designed to be of standard UK brick dimensions, it can be made in other sizes and with any facing, such as stone. Details can be found on Action for Swifts website and <https://actionforSwifts.blogspot.com/p/afs-products.html>.



For any help or advice about Swifts, do please get in touch ta.hoare@btinternet.com

Tanya & Edmund Hoare

Blackcap nest recording and migration

A wise man once said to me “Nest recording and pulli ringing is the best form of data available to the ringer, as you know that bird’s exact age and birth-place”. At the end of April last year guidance from that same wise man led to my finding a nest of tiny naked and blind chicks on a local fellside – Stonechats! I was hooked.

Fast forward to the 10th May; I don’t recall if I was out running or actually looking for nesting birds on this day but what I do know is that I heard a male Blackcap belting out its enchanting song in some vegetation on Brundholme Road on the slopes of wooded Latrigg.

Optimism is the essential tool of the successful nester and I spent a few minutes looking inside nearby vegetation, mostly bramble and nettle. I found a few strands of grass just beneath the canopy of one of these bushes – too ‘arranged’ to have fallen there by chance, and I knew that male Blackcaps would build flimsy ‘cock’s nest’ that the female may choose to complete. I wonder...

Over the next week I had another couple of looks whilst passing and was finally convinced that the nest was definitely being completed, before finally, on the 24th, there was the jackpot – five eggs. Now to employ the ‘10 day rule’ – a practice used by some members of my ringing group to reduce disturbance to nesting birds in order to keep visits to an absolute minimum whilst collecting the desired data. So, 11 days later I returned and discovered naked and blind pulli, plus one unhatched egg. It was likely they’d hatched that very morning.



Blackcap, Stanwix, Roger Ridley

Time to inform the boss. Five days later, I returned with my trainer John Callion and another member of our group in tow. The pulli were the perfect age – large enough to ring safely whilst young enough not to “explode” out of the nest prematurely (eyes open and wing feathers in pin). Blackcap chicks fledge circa 11 days after hatching so timing is very much of the essence! The final visit came a few days after I'd expect fledging. The nest was empty, undisturbed. A probably fledging. But can you ever be totally certain without seeing the fledglings?

Over three months later, John emails me. We have a recovery - on the 25th September, 536 kilometres away, at Nanjizal, Land's End, one of our fledgling Blackcaps was caught by another ringer en route to the continent for winter! 102 days after we'd attached the small metal ring to her leg (yes, we now know it was a female!) she had been recorded undertaking her maiden migration.

A perfect nest recording experience from start to finish? I was fortunate enough to find a good variety of species nests last year, some much more “sexy” species than the humble Blackcap with its scruffbag nest, but it's fair to say that this recovery will live long in my memory.

All I'm left with my now is one minor problem – I can't go past a bramble bush in spring without sticking my head in it.

Rhys Findlay-Robinson

Recent reports

The period covered is December 2019 to February 2020. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the Club Records Panel or the British Birds Rarities Committee.

Wildfowl

Whooper Swans continued to show a similar pattern to November – with the main flock near Kirkbride - 168 in mid December, 245 at the end of the month and 264 at the end of February.

The regular flock at Walby/Crosby on Eden (up to 45) was more elusive this winter. Possibly birds were frequenting an area slightly to the north. Longtown also had its regular flock (48 on 23rd February).

Unexpected were four adults on Thirlmere on 8th December. At Walney five flew north on 25th January followed by four on 5th February whilst on 10th 15 were grounded in poor weather.



Whooper Swans, Glasson, Adam Moan

Whilst small numbers were recorded in December **Pinkfeet** included 150 east over Penrith on 17th December and 500 east over Stanwix on 26th were presumably Solway birds moving to feeding areas. The first major northerly movement at Walney saw 20 birds on 10th January, but by 19th January 15000 were on the south Solway and a day later 5000 went north over Allonby. In early February 1200 frequented the Eden valley between Langwathby and Little Salkeld. In mid February about 3000 birds started using an area just west of Carlisle Airport – and were still about at the end of the month - this is a regular area at this time of year.

Two **Eurasian White-fronted Geese** were with Pinkfeet near Rockliffe on 9th December and on 2nd February two were with Pinkfeet near Langwathby for several weeks, with three there from 19th onwards. A **Todd's Canada Goose** frequented the Cardurnock area on and off during the period. The **Brent Goose** flock on Walney held record numbers on 3rd December (382 Pale and 94 Dark-bellied) and still high numbers (369) on 10th February; the flock this winter included birds ringed in Canada, Iceland and Holland. A **Black Brant** was also present on 22nd February.

A male **Mallard/Wigeon** hybrid was seen on St Bees beach on 25th February. Two drake and one duck **Mandarin Ducks** frequented Talkin Tarn from 26th February. On 12th January 93 **Pintail** were feeding on stubble at Les-



Shelduck, Walney Island, Tony Marsh

sonhall. On 10th January 15 **Shelduck** were by Oulton Gravel Pits and 23 **Shoveler** were off Bowness at high tide. One hundred and forty **Wigeon** were on Castle Carrock Reservoir on 15th January. **Common Scoter** counts at Walney included 100 on 25th December and 380 in mid January with the **Eider** flock having reached 5000 at the same time.

Partridges to Fulmars

The only reports of **Grey Partridge** were of three regular birds at Lowca, six at Fletchertown on 24th December and three at Thornhill Meadows on 21st January. There were 14 **Red-legged Partridge** at Clifton on 7th January. Seventy-six **Red-throated Divers** drifted south past Walney in 90 minutes on 22nd December. A **Great Northern Diver** was reported on several dates at Walney and included records from the pools on the island. A **Great White Egret** continued to be present in the South-east of the county at Holme in January and February and at Greystone Ponds on 13th February. In the north a bird was with a Grey Heron on one of the ponds on Eden Golf Course Carlisle on 27th and 28th of December.

Little Egret were widely reported – mainly coastal but 12 were on Hale Moss on 19th December, a single again at Langwathby on 20th February but exceptional were 20 among cattle near Rockcliffe village on 11th February and to the month end. Also on 11th January 61 birds were on Walney. Other less expected were a single in a stream next to the A69 at Warwick Bridge and another (or possibly Great White) flew along the River Petteril and crossed the main road near Brunton Park, Carlisle on 15th February. Twenty **Little Grebe** were on Longlands Lake on 9th February.

A **Slavonian** and 52 **Great Crested Grebes** were off Walney on 2nd December. Single **Gannet** were off Walney on 5th and 22nd December and the first of 2020 was on 8th February; a **Fulmar** there on 1st February was regarded as “early”.

Raptors to waders

Hen Harriers were reported from the south Solway and on the mosses in the south of the county – **Marsh Harrier** also at the latter and at Walney – a male in mid February. In December there were reports of **Merlin** and **Peregrine** from the north of the county. Six **Common Buzzard** were at the north end of the Eden Valley on 4th February – the first clear sunny day for some time - and included some display.



Water Rail were reported from Crosscanonby in December, Thacka Beck NR and Walney in January and at Siddick Pond throughout the period.

An Oystercatcher at Tarn House Tarn on 18th January was the first inland bird of the year. The **Oystercatcher** flock at Walney numbered 7,500 in mid February (with 16,000 **Knot** at the same time). The 17th February counts at Walney showed 1,000 **Dunlin**, 120 **Sanderling** and 11 **Greenshank**. At least 2000 **Golden Plover** were at the regular coastal site at Cardurnock at the beginning of December and at the end of the month around 30 were on the top of Cold Fell in mist on Christmas Day; one flew south over Thacka Beck NR Penrith on 1st January and 115 were with **Lapwing** near Watchtree NR on 11th February.

Wintering Lapwing (750) were at RSPB Campfield on 13th December, there were 125 with Golden Plover near Watchtree on 11th February, 70 were near Rosgill on 17th February and approximately 350 were in grazed fields near the River Eden at Temple Sowerby on 27th February.



Knot, Campsfield, Adam Moan



Ringed Plover, Walney, Tony Marsh



Oystercatchers, Skinburness, Adam Moan

Eleven **Ruff** were at RSPB Campfield on 13th December. Three **Common** and two **Green Sandpipers** were seen on their regular wintering patch on 30th December and 13th February. Other Green Sandpiper sightings came from the River Lyvennet, Thacka Beck NR on 24th January and the River Eden at Longtown at the end of February. **Greenshank** were also reported from Walney (5) and the Longtown area in February; one was also at Glasson Point at the end of December. A single **Jack Snipe** was by the Ravenglass Esk on 30th December and then they were widely reported in January and February including Cliburn Moss, Great Mell Fell, Borwick Rails, Longtown and Walney but the largest number were 12 disturbed by farm work at Thornhill Meadows on 8th February. Two hundred and forty-four **Curlew** were counted at Arnside on 16th January.

The **Long-billed Dowitcher** was present at RSPB Campfield from 3rd December through to at least 6th February associating with the Redshank flock. The regular **Purple Sandpiper** flock at Workington was perhaps smaller than usual but held 18 birds on 25th January. Whitehaven Harbour also held up to five on various dates

Gulls to auks

Around 900 **Black-headed Gulls** were on a flooded field near Clifton on 30th December. **Mediterranean Gulls** were reported from the North-west of the county with five adults at Siddick Pond on 17th January and three at the same site in early February. An adult spent the winter at Allonby gradually attaining breeding plumage. A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was at Siddick Ponds at the beginning of February- a similar date to when they first started to return to Walney. By the middle of the month six were at Walney with 2,500 **Herring Gulls** and a **Yellow-legged Gull**.



Snipe, Chapel House, Adam Moan

The only skua reported was a **Bonxie** off Walney on 7th December.

Pigeons to buntings

In mid February **Barn Owl** were recorded on the Solway plain and on southern mosses as well as on Walney. A **Tawny Owl** was found in a building at Kirkbride on 12th December. A **Short-eared Owl** flew north over Carlisle Airport on 4th February.

A regular **Starling** roost in a Clifton garden held approximately 350 birds on 14th December - all crammed into two Laurel bushes. **Kingfisher** were regularly reported from Longtown and on the coast at Flimby and Siddick Ponds in late January/early February. At least 300 **Skylarks** were on St Bees Head on 31st December and 46 were at Redhall Farm, Abbeytown on 19th January with the first singing bird at Watchtree NR being heard on 4th February. Three late **Swallows** were videoed at Allonby on 27th November. The only report of **Rock Pipit** away from Workington were two at Flimby on 21st January and wintering birds at Walney. More than 100 **Pied Wagtails** roosted in a Birch tree at Great Dockray on 7th January.



*Barn Owl,
Geltsdale, Adam Moan*



Waxwing, Keswick, Tony Marsh

Small numbers of **Waxwing** put in appearances at regular sites from 4th December at Dalston to Carlisle on 10th January when there were six. After that there were six in Kendal on 22nd February and ones and twos at several sites (including Walney on 16th February), with probably the most regular being birds at Keswick car park.

There was only one record of **Black Redstart** that being a female type at Foulney car park from 14th December to at least 19th. Away from regular sites on the coast – Allonby to Flimby, **Stonechats** were inland at Walton Moss and at Butterburn Flow on 29th November and then Thornhill Meadows on 19th January and Carlisle Airport (a pair) a month later.

A **Blackcap** was coming to feeders at Brampton in mid December, a male was in a Whitehaven garden from 27th January for the rest of this period and beyond and another was recorded from Walney on 8th February. Few details were supplied of **Redwing** flocks but of interest were birds “in communal song” near Wigton on 14th January. **Fieldfare** were still plentiful during January and February with a maximum of c 1,000 in three flocks at Foulshaw on 16th February.

Two **Chiffchaff** were at Cardewlees on 14th December and then three birds were long stayers at Longtown Sewage farm including two Siberian race: regularly associating with the Chiffchaff was a **Firecrest** present from early January through to end of February although it could be hard to find at times.

A **Hooded Crow hybrid** was on St. Bees Head on 1st December. **Tree Sparrows** in the North-west of the county included 15 at Fletchertown on 24th December, 40 regularly coming to feeders near Wigton in early January and 56 in mid January near Kirkbride. Fletchertown had a total of 135 **House Sparrows** in three flocks on 24th December. A **Twite** flock estimated at 250 frequented the Border/Calvo marshes in mid January. Fifteen were at Cardurnock - a regular site - on 9th December. At least 120 **Linnets** were on St. Bees Head.

An estimated 2,000 **Chaffinch** were in the South-east roosting at Dalton Craggs with 300 at Old Hut-ton also of note. **Brambling** were well spread including 25 at Threlkeld on 17th January, 40 at Hallbankgate on 18th, perhaps 70 at Tarn Hows on 7th February and 80 in several flocks in Kershope Forest on 17th. No **Snow Buntings** were reported from the coast but a single bird was on Great Dun Fell on 1st December, then nine on Bowscale Fell on 16th and four on the Durham Border south of Alston. Up to 40 **Yellowhammers** were near Wigton on 11th December.



*Brambling, Geltsdale,
Adam Moan*



Crossbill, Spadeadam, Adam Moan

A **Hawfinch** was reported in a garden at Wreay on 23rd February – well away from expected range in the county. Approximately 60 **Lesser Redpolls** were in trees on the fellside above Fisherground Farm in Eskdale on 8th January.

Small numbers of **Crossbill** were reported from Cliburn Moss, Tarn Hows, Dodd Wood, Latrigg and Butterburn.

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

Contents

The CBC winter wetlands survey <i>Malcolm Priestley</i>	3
CBC Swift survey <i>Dave Piercy</i>	5
Winter birds and water treatment works <i>Colin Auld</i>	12
Audio Moth <i>Mike Mills</i>	16
An unusual year for Swifts <i>Tanya and Edmund Hoare</i>	18
Blackcap nest recording and migration <i>Rhys Findlay-Robinson</i>	20
Recent reports <i>Bob Jones and Dave Piercy</i>	22

Information for contributors

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

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

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