



BIRD NEWS
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The red letter day this year happened in August. On the 8th I decided to take a walk up Red Screes, always a favourite for me. Over the years, I've had Snow Bunting on there and also flushed a Jack Snipe from one of the bog pools on the summit. It was a beautiful day, calm and sunny. I started from Kirkstone Pass and headed straight up. Ring Ouzels were calling in the corrie to the south, I never tire of hearing them. I pulled out onto the summit, and thought I'd leave the path and head across the moorland top, where there are a number of small pools. At the third pool, a small wader took flight, calling, which I was immediately able to tell was a Green Sandpiper, both new for my year list and patch list. This alone would have made the ascent worth while. It was too nice to head straight back down, so I decided to walk down to Middle Dodd, a small peak further north overlooking Brotherswater. Ravens were circling and calling overhead, another Ring Ouzel called out, and a Wheatear took flight from the path. Just after seeing the Wheatear, I noticed a raptor heading in from the east. I got my bins straight onto it and couldn't quite believe my eyes, a beautiful female Hen Harrier. Two new patch ticks in one day, wow that was a first for me. The harrier flew westwards, heading over Fairfield and was eventually lost to sight. That's what I love about birding, you never know what you might see.

I had to wait till November for the next new bird. The 21st had been a rather dull grey day and I'd spent most to it working at the computer. By 2.30pm I was ready for more fresh air, so did my local river walk for the second time in the day. Arriving at the head of the lake, I did my usual scan over Windermere, as much for spotting the local Otters as birds. In the far bay, over half a mile away I spotted something. Though far away I knew it was a diver and given the distance and the size of the bird I was pretty sure it was a Great Northern. It was 3pm with only an hour of light left. By the time I'd walked home and got my scope it would be nearly dark. I called my friend Pete Martin who came down with his telescope. It was diving frequently but we soon got onto the bird and confirmed it was indeed a Great Northern Diver.

Over the years, species have changed. I used to get Pochard on the lake every winter, I haven't seen one there for years now. Yellow Wagtails used to frequent the marsh at the head of the lake every summer, sadly not now seen for over twenty years. Other birds have increased, this year I had my first Red Kite on the patch and also Little Egret. Common enough around the coast now, but rare inland here. Ospreys seem to increase every year. I've seen at least eight birds flying over the patch, including a couple of birds circling over the head of the lake. I'm sure they were prospecting for a territory. So how long before they nest around the head of the lake.

What next, that's part of the joy, you never know, all I know is I will be out there looking.

Ashley Cooper

Cumbria Bird Club – New year bird list challenge 2021

The postponement of the Club's bird race, hopefully until later in the year, provided the opportunity for an alternative outing which could be undertaken within the pandemic regulations in force on the day.

The alternative would avoid vehicle travel and be limited to locations which could be reached by self powered means and hence offer a more localised activity. The bird list challenge could be undertaken by individuals of all ages and abilities, family groups/bubble or two socially distanced people. Clearly this format was going to offer a less competitive event but would still provide a challenge of reaching places where a greater range of species might be encountered, within the time and energy constraints of those taking part.

1st - 4th January 2021 turned out to be a cold weather snap, such that we haven't seen in recent years, with the going underfoot being decidedly icy. As a consequence it seemed unwise to promote the event further and encourage folk to venture out at risk and to leave it to those who made their own assessments on safety and who had a desire to get out in the crisp conditions. For those getting out, several plan Bs were hastily drawn up, cycle routes had become questionable and some locations abandoned due to the conditions.

Of those who rose to the challenge (nine lists submitted) there were two family groups, two couples and five individuals taking part. Geographically we were well spread around the county, tapping in to a wide range of species overall. In the north Adam Moan used the opportunity to start his patchwork challenge at Geltsdale and was able to include Brambling and Red Grouse in his list but unfortunately the Pochard was not evident on Tindale Tarn on the day. Peter Howard worked the River Esk and ponds at Longtown and was the only one of us to see Kingfisher and Ruff.

Peter along with Dave Piercy and Kathy Morris in Keswick were the only ones to see Greylags but Dave and Kathy's Greylag X Canada Goose couldn't count as an extra species! Keswick also produced one of two Water Rails recorded.

Of the family groups Simon Wainwright (age eight) put in the list on behalf of his family's visit to Campfield Marsh. The highlight of their day had been the Bullfinches which showed so well in the winter sunlight.



Bullfinch, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

At the other end of the county the Douglas family set off from Ulverston via Greenodd to Roudsea on a one way route picking up a good suite of waders and wildfowl along the way plus Marsh Tit, and culminating in a close encounter with a Barn Owl which, along with fun on the ice, made a memorable day for all the family. Meanwhile Barbara Nelson, who had planned a tour of West Cumbria by bike, couldn't get out from home on Cold Fell, Ennerdale, due to iced up roads but still put in a very credible walk round her local fells including a Tawny Owl and Green Woodpecker.



Barn Owl stretching, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Also in West Cumbria, Mike and Lyn Mills undertook a perilous bike ride to include Longlands Pond followed by Whitehaven Harbour, Parton and Lowca. Dipper and Grey Wagtail featured on the list and during a lunch stop on Parton Beach they realised that they were in the company of two Purple Sandpipers roosting over high tide on a nearby rock.



Purple Sandpiper, Workington, Tony Marsh

Highest scoring lists however came from Colin Raven and Chris Turner at Walney, thereby upholding Walney's reputation in these sort of events. Colin and Chris worked

independently with Colin covering the central area of Walney Island while Chris made use of the bike to cover both ends of the Island. Fascinating that both managed to produce lists of 80 species and with a combined score of 92 species proving just what a good location the island is. Colin included Whooper Swan, Jack Snipe, Razorbill, Sparrowhawk and Bar-tailed Godwit, unique to his list while Chris scored with Great Crested Grebe, Shag, Merlin and Greenshank on his. Needless to say both saw Eiders, Brent Geese and both found the only Twite of the day.

Overall, with just nine sets of observations, 111 species were seen around the county and Peter Howard's guess of 112 species was the closest. It has to be said that a bigger turn out might well have increased the total but we achieved a good range of sites around the county and it was good to get some involvement from families and young people.

Well done to all, hopefully the day proved worthwhile and worth repeating.

Mike and Lyn Mills.

Storm Petrels

Introduction

Holloway and Weir (Cumbria Bird Club News, Spring and Winter, 2006) reported on the history of attempting to tape lure Storm Petrels at night on the west Cumbrian coast. In Cumbria trapping had been started at St Bees Head in the early 1990s, but later, in the first decade of this century, they resurrected the idea, this time using the coastal headlands at Harrington and Lowca.

Most records of Storm Petrels in Cumbria are usually associated with coastal sightings in late summer, often accompanied by strong westerly offshore winds, rather than ringing data. Typical are multiple June sightings from 2012, when two and 12 were seen at Walney; eight at Selker, two at Parton, 39 at Workington plus others at later dates from most of the same sites. In some years, there are no records, in others many, depending on the weather conditions. A 'blank' year was reported in the 2016 county report, the first since 1987 (*Shackleton 2016*). The status of Storm Petrel in Cumbria is recorded as 'A fairly common offshore summer visitor and passage migrant' (*Shackleton 2016*).

What is less understood is the nocturnal activity of these enigmatic oceanic wanderers around Cumbria's coastline. This paper aims to shed some light on the movements of these birds.

Ecology

Storm Petrels are our smallest seabird, weighing approximately 26g, similar to a Greenfinch, with a tarsi diameter akin to a Great Tit. However, their wing length of around 123mm is typically 30mm longer than Greenfinch, as befits a long-distance travelling seabird that spends most of its life on the oceans. Surprisingly for a small bird they are unusually long-lived. Several birds older than 30 years have been recorded by the BTO ringing scheme, with the oldest ringed bird over 38 years old.

There are two subspecies, the nominate *Hydrobates pelagus* which breeds in the north east Atlantic with outlying sites in the Bay of Biscay in the south to Norway's Lofoten Islands in the north. *H. Meletensis* has been found to nest on some eastern Greek islands and it is likely that many breeding sites throughout their range will be overlooked due to the inaccessibility of some of the islands (Cramp et al 1977).

Breeding colonies are found on remote islands in western Britain and Ireland, from the Isles of Scilly in the south to Shetland in the north. In the Irish Sea, they nest on the Calf of Man and Copeland Island. It is estimated there are c.50000 pairs in the Atlantic and 16000 in the Mediterranean, mostly on the Balearics, Malta and Sicily. They breed very late, with most chicks fledging in September, but sometimes as late as November (Okill and Bolton 2005). Nest sites are all 'subterranean' and include scree slopes, boulder beaches and

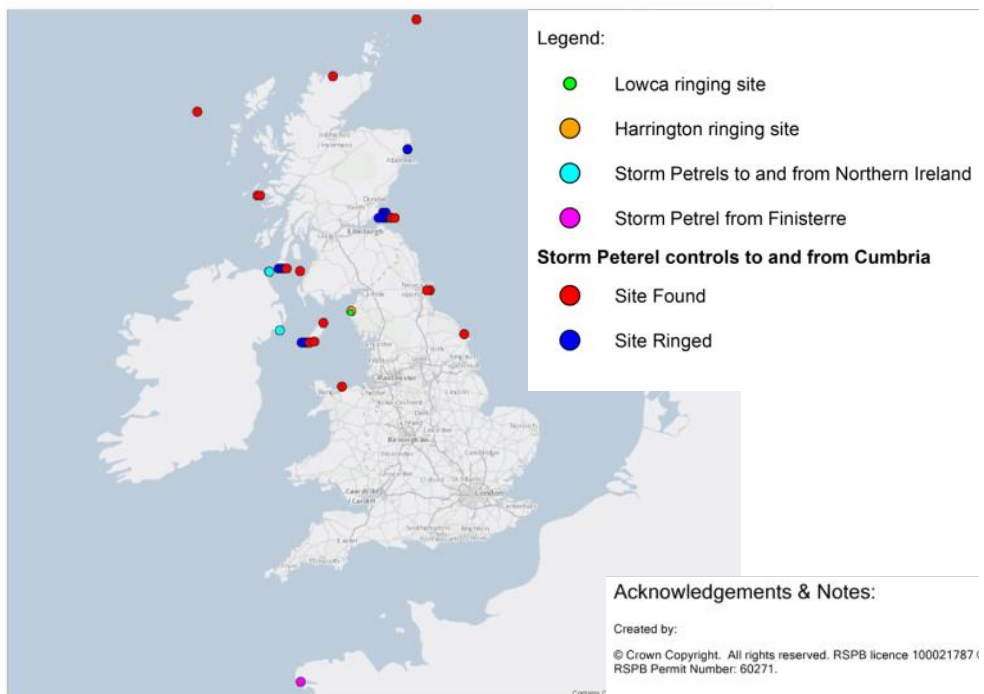
drystone walls. (Wernham et al 2002). After breeding, from September onwards, they orientate to the southern seas around South Africa and into the Indian Ocean (Wernham et al).

They don't achieve breeding maturity until they are four or five years old; it is thought that many of these sub-adults 'wander' around the coast of Great Britain and Ireland during this time of immaturity, forming a 'pre-breeding wanderer class' (Fowler and Hounscome 1998). It's believed that most British and Irish birds don't return north until their second or third year.

Trapping

Storm Petrels are traditionally caught in mist nets set along the coast at night, an acoustic lure is used to bring these birds to shore and into the nets. All attempts to catch birds were planned between 23:00 and 02:00 and were targeted on an incoming tide with little wind, in June, July, August and September. Thirty sessions were undertaken, four in June, 12 in July, ten in August and four in September; 16 of these sessions caught only one bird. More than 60% of birds caught were in July, with twelve captures on 22 July 2006 the highest number. There is one instance of a bird being retrapped at another Cumbrian site; a bird ringed at Harrington was re-caught at Lowca two weeks later.

Analysis of recoveries



Storm Petrels

In total just over 100 birds have been ringed from this study in West Cumbria; All of the birds caught in Cumbria were aged as adults, though none showed any a 'brood patch', indicative of actively breeding. This further suggests that the birds belonged to the 'wanderers'.

Holloway and Weir reported on nine recoveries of Cumbrian birds re-trapped or originally ringed elsewhere. These included three birds originally ringed on Sanda Island, Kintyre; two from the Isle of May (Fife) and one from the Calf of Man. Cumbrian ringed birds were caught on Copeland Island (Down, Ireland), Calf of Man and the Isle of May.

Now six more have been recovered elsewhere, from as diverse place as Finisterre on the Brittany coast of France; St Kilda in the north Atlantic, the Shetland Isles to Filey Brigg on the North Sea Yorkshire coast. We have also caught 19 that have been ringed in various locations around Britain and Ireland, meaning that more than 25% of all birds caught were either ringed, or were caught elsewhere!

A selection of interesting recoveries:

Ring no.	Date ringed	Location ringed	Date recaught	Location recaught	Distance	Dir.	Duration
2609654	05/07/2008	Harrington	08/08/2008	le Conquet, Finisterre, France	700km	S	0y 1m
2609615	22/07/2006	Lowca	25/07/2017	Fair Isle	564km	N	11y 0m
2609651	23/07/2007	Lowca	26/07/2008	St Kilda	474km	NW	1y 0m
2609646	19/06/2007	Harrington	04/08/2019	Swona, Orkney	461km	N	12y 1m
2504602	28/06/2005	Harrington	14/07/2006	Eilaan Nan Ron, Highland	442km	N	1y 0m
			31/07/2006	Eilaan Nan Ron, Highland	442km	N	1y 1m
2609650	21/07/2007	Harrington	02/08/2008	Sanda Island, Kintyre	149km	WNW	1y 0m
			19/07/2009	Eilaan Nan Ron, Highland	442km	N	2y 0m
2504604	11/07/2005	Harrington	01/07/2014	Lunga, Treshnish Isles	276km	NW	8y 11m
2487230	05/08/1998	Calf of Man	19/06/2007	Harrington	100km	NE	8y 10m

93% of the controls are of birds caught within four years of first capture. This fits with these tape-lured birds being non-breeders being attracted to singing Storm Petrels. In addition, 72% of the 11 within year movements were at sites to the south of first capture, including the longest, a bird moving south to Finisterre in France, another indication of a non-breeding bird. A Storm Petrel ringed on the Isle of May was recaught at Lowca six days later and one ringed at Harrington was caught on the Isle of May just over a month later.

This is an indication that birds are almost randomly traveling around the coast and it is interesting to speculate how these birds actually travelled between the east coast and west coast; round the north or south coasts, or across the country?

The birds with the longest time between ringing in Cumbria and recapture are all at breeding sites. Further evidence of this is provided from a bird each from Lowca and Harrington found breeding four and nine years after ringing among a colony of an estimated 10228 pairs (in 2018/19) the Treshnish Islands, (R. M. Ward, pers. comm.). These birds were not tape lured on Treshnish.

Summary

Being mostly nocturnal and pelagic, Storm Petrels are mysterious migrants around Cumbrian shores; most sightings are from coastal vantage points at times of strong westerly biased winds which can bring them very close to land. In some years they are not recorded at all.

Acoustic tape luring between the hours of 23:00-02:00 hours has revealed that many birds are close to our shores during late summer; these birds appear to belong to a pre-breeding group, known as wanderers.

John Callion; Maynall Weir

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Caspian Gull (*Larus Cachinnans*) - a county first



On 5th January 2021, I had to abandon my plans for a day's birding to the Solway, as it was the day after the government announced a third national lockdown, with the instruction to "stay local". So, instead I drove the short distance from Penrith to Pooley Bridge, and I went for a walk with my wife along the lakeshore towards Waterside House on the north-east shore of Ullswater.

After a short while, I noticed a small group of mixed gulls on a shingle spit. They all seemed to be adult Black-headed, Common and Herring plus a couple of immature Herring Gulls. One of the immature Herrings was a very dark and streaky 1st winter bird, but the other was strikingly different. It was much paler, with a pure white head and breast. This made it stand out among the other gulls, and I was curious enough to take a few photographs of it. On our return back to Pooley Bridge, all the gulls had left the shingle spit, but I was hoping my photos might reveal something interesting!

When I got home, I downloaded the nine photos of the gull, and wondered about the possibility of it being a Caspian Gull. I knew this would be a bold claim, as this species of gull had never been recorded in Cumbria. I shared the photos with some birder friends, but they could not commit themselves, as like me, were not confident in identifying a non-adult Caspian Gull.



I decided to send the photos to Chris Hind and Rare Bird Alert, while I searched the available literature on Caspian Gull identification. Chris Gibbins' identification paper on Caspian Gull was very useful, and from it, I realised that Caspian Gull is quite distinctive, but there is a lot of variation among individuals.

Caspian Gull (Larus Cachinnans) - a county first

I soon got a reply from Chris Hind, who thought it "looked good for a Caspian Gull", and a reply from Rare Bird Alert, said it "looked fine for Caspian". Chris also informed me, that the only pitfall would be a hybrid between Herring and Caspian, as they interbreed in



East Germany. Chris said he would send on my photos to a friend of his in London, who was an expert on these matters. It wasn't long before Chris forwarded the reply he got from his friend, who said it was "a bone fide Caspian Gull". I was elated that this odd, pale-headed Herring Gull is now a potential "First for Cumbria"!

My only nagging doubt that needed to be resolved, was the possibility of it being a hybrid. I emailed Rare Bird Alert to ask for pointers as to why it wasn't a hybrid. They kindly replied that there were several features including the pure white head (no streaking), pure white underparts (streaking only on sides of breast), shallow gonydeal angle on an all black bill, along with a scapular and tertial pattern being consistent with a PURE Caspian Gull! That evening, after seeking expert opinion and reading the relevant literature, I was now confident enough to report the sighting.

The Caspian Gull is a fairly recent 'split' from the Herring Gull complex. It breeds from the region north of the Black Sea and eastwards across central Asia. It also breeds in East Germany and Poland. Only in recent years, it has been discovered to regularly appear in the UK, mainly in SE England in winter.

Once acquainted with the distinctive shape, posture and plumage detail, an adult or 1st winter Caspian Gull is quite a distinctive and handsome gull.



I'd like to thank everyone who have helped me to identify this individual, and all the positive comments on social media and email. Finally, I'd like to thank the government for announcing the third national lockdown, enabling me to be in the right place and right time to find a county first!!

Roy Bottomley

CBC Swift survey 2020 - a brief summary

The CBC Swift survey was first carried out in the summer of 2018 and was then repeated in the summers of 2019 and 2020. Many thanks to all who took part.

Aims and scope

The main aim was to identify the presence of Swifts in suitable breeding habitat in Cumbria. Also to carry out timed counts giving details on the maximum number of Swifts seen and the maximum number of “screamers” seen at any one time.

Coverage

In 2018 121 locations were covered where a total of 536 counts were made. In 2019 there were 71 locations with 374 counts. In 2020 there were only 49 locations but with a record 556 counts. 2020 was obviously a year of restricted movement and surveying for most of the season had to be based at the surveyor's house. Many provided a good number of counts with 59 the most from one home in Ravenstonedale. Over the three years good coverage of the county has been achieved with surveys spread over 48 10km squares. There was a varied mix of built up habitat with a number of locations in and around Carlisle, a good selection of our towns and some smaller villages and hamlets. See the map overleaf for details.

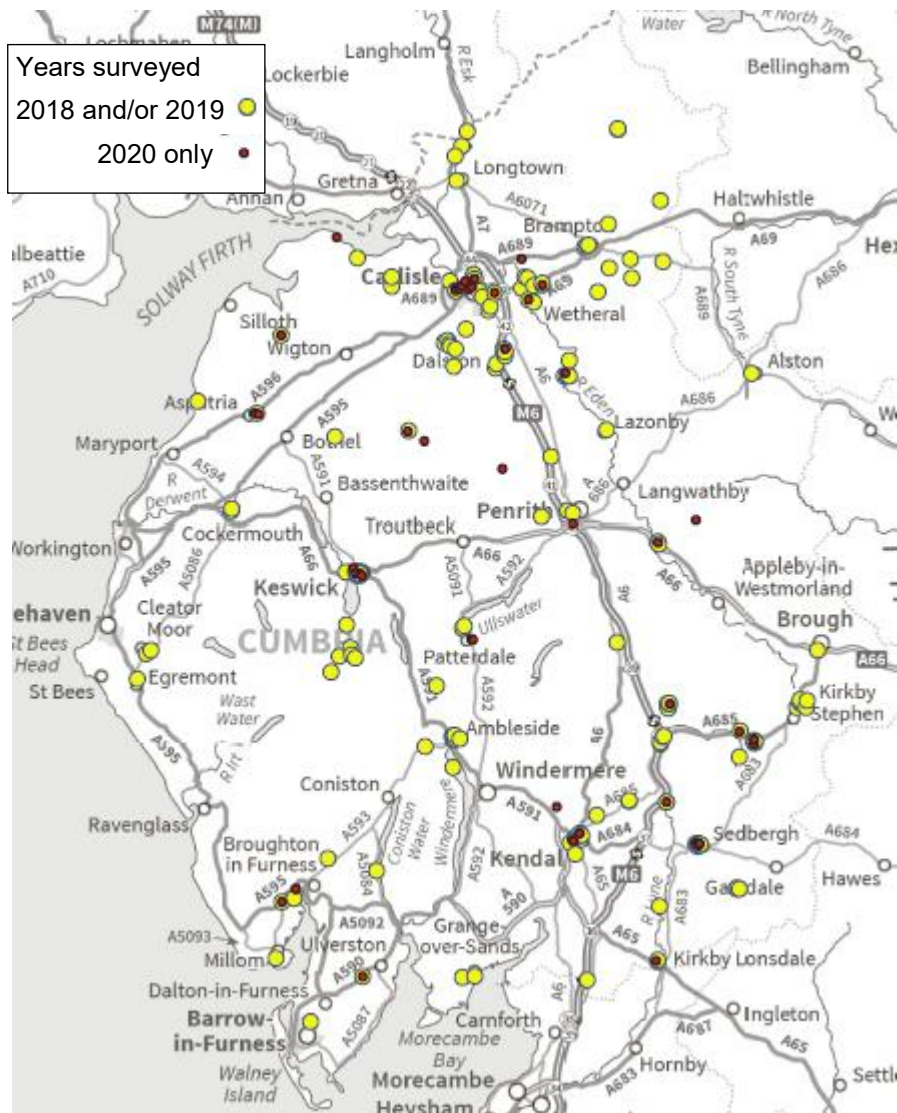
Results

2020 was by all accounts not a great year for Swifts. Waylaid by storms on their epic journey, they were at least welcomed with reasonable conditions on arrival. However the breeding season was fraught with gales and cold, wet conditions. The end of June saw huge numbers heading south along the east coast.

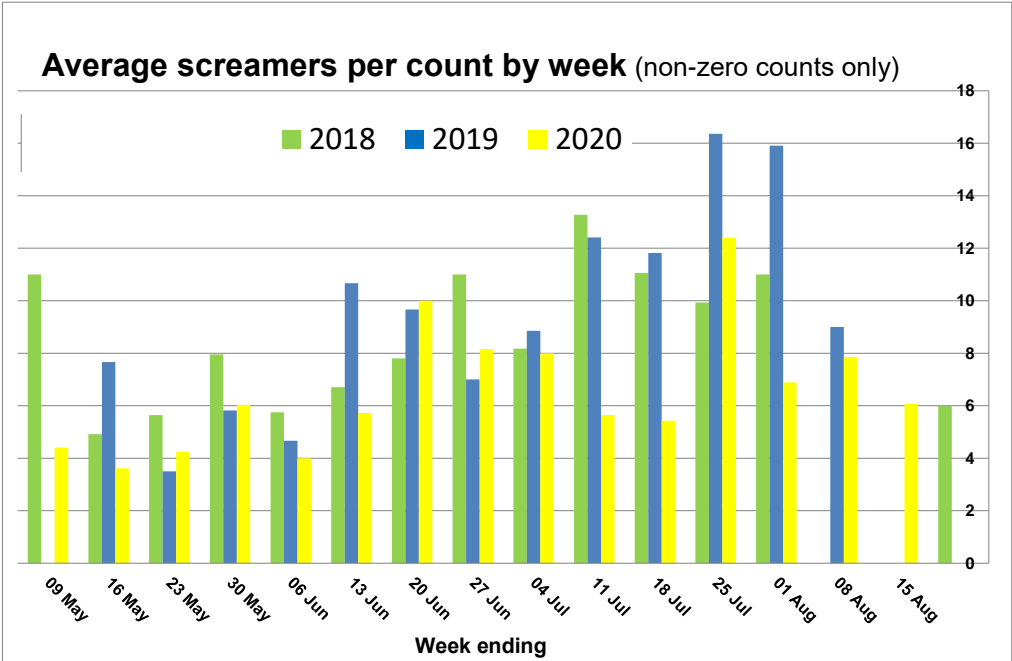
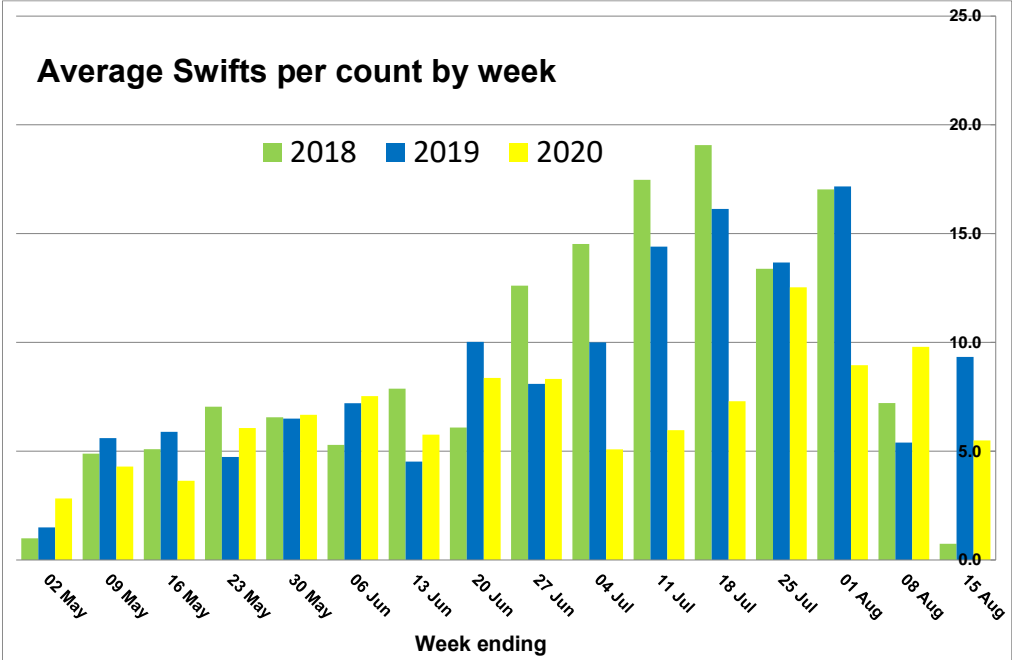
Surveyor's observations such as “The worst season I can recall” “No nests used and no screaming parties” gave a grim indication. The graphs overleaf of the average numbers of Swifts and the average number of “screamers” per count show figures consistently below the previous two years. Sadly both 2018 and 2019 were also seen as poor breeding years. The data from 2020 should be regarded with caution as the restrictions enforced by lockdown will have skewed results. In particular known hotspots for Swifts may have been rendered inaccessible.

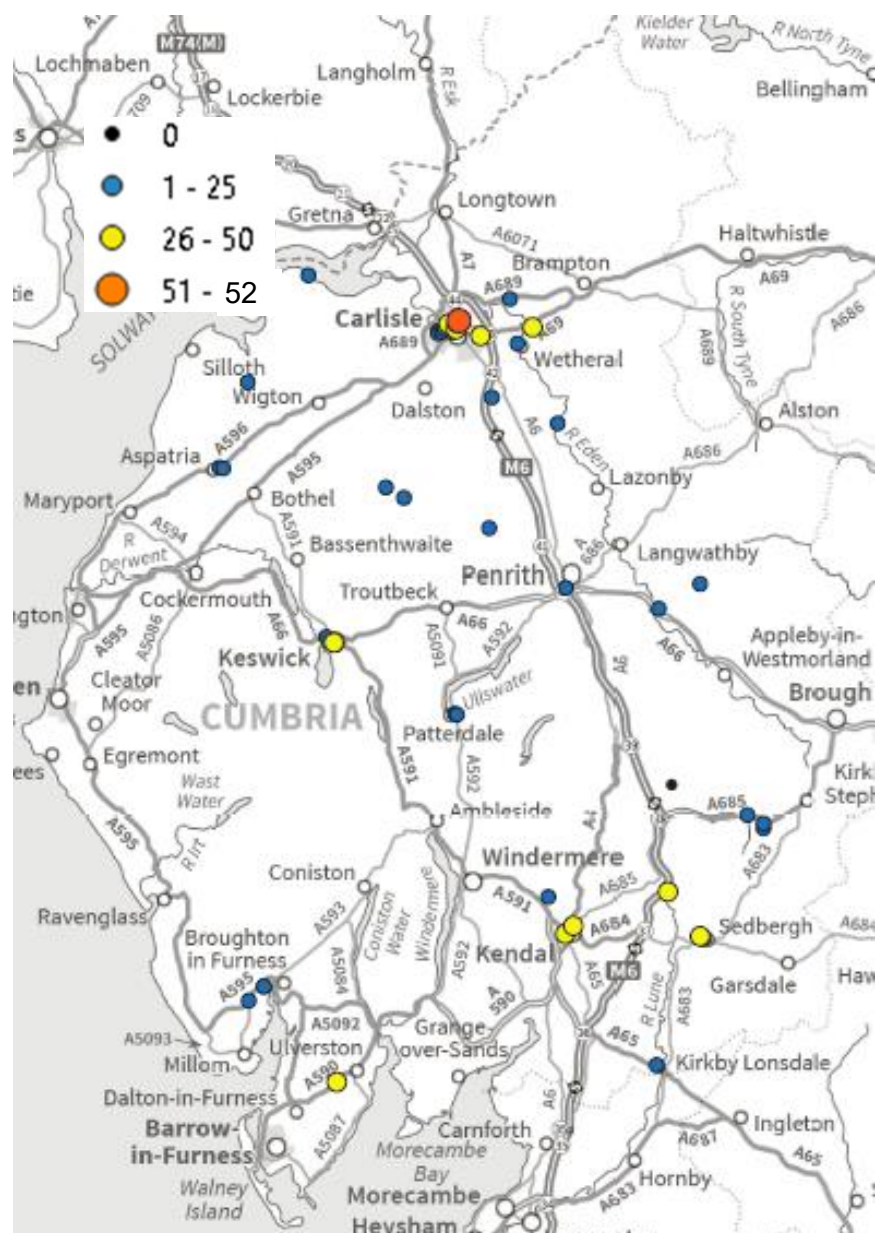
We envisage that this survey will be repeated in 2021. If you haven't taken part before please feel free to contact me. This is a very easy survey to take part in and who can deny the pleasure in taking time to admire this species. If you have taken part before I will contact you with up to date details. Here's hoping for a good year for Swifts.

Dave Piercy



Locations surveyed 2018 to 2020
(highlighting new locations surveyed in 2020 only)





Maximum Swifts counted at each location 2020

RSPB reserves in Cumbria - annual report

At the RSPB our reserves reporting year finishes in September. It is at this time we look back on the work done, data collected and report back on the year in our annual reports. This year has been a truly exceptional one particularly during the restrictions due to Covid-19. As with many reading this report, some staff on the Cumbria coast were furloughed from April and any work reduced to essential work including safety checks, legal obligations and stock welfare. Obviously, a necessary step in order to keep everyone safe it came at the worst time for us in terms of the bird breeding season. Our breeding surveys and work during this time has been minimal, however we feel we've managed to get a grasp of the main bird species for all three sites and are able to report on them with a degree of confidence. Our annual reports were certainly a little thinner than previous years.

Hodbarrow



Hodbarrow Tern Breeding Island – July 2020

The year started well at Hodbarrow with our seasonal warden in place and doing great work during March. The warden's initial period of work involves monitoring of early large gulls settling and using a laser to displace them from the main breeding island. Again, Covid19 restrictions hit Hodbarrow and we were only able to get on board one of the usual two wardens. This reduced the amount of time we were able to monitor the colony considerably.

Normally we can report on the first dates tern species were seen back onsite, however this was not possible this year due to staff furlough from April until the 11th May and we had to piece together the beginning of the season. We stopped working but the birds certainly didn't! When our warden returned on the 11th of May Sandwich, Little and Common Terns were present and had nests.

There were mixed fates for the breeding terns on the island. Little Terns peaked at 11 nests with zero productivity despite 12 chicks being observed. One possible theory for such a woeful breeding season seems to be the weather. Chicks and AONs (apparently occupied nests) were severely affected by strong winds with numbers dropping after storm events. Common Terns on our arrival back on the 11th of May had six nests but with a promising 36 individuals in the area. Our peak of 44 nests on the 2nd of June produced 18 fledgling giving us a higher productivity than last year. By the 11th of May there were 688 individual Sandwich Terns with 483 scrapes – they were well underway with the season. Sandwich Tern numbers continued to stay high with a peak of 911 birds and from those there were 638 nests. We always find that Sandwich Terns are such a difficult species to observe at Hodbarrow and this year was no exception. Having said that our estimated productivity was observed as being notably higher than last year.

Table 1- Hodbarrow tern breeding totals 2020

Species	Peak no. of adults	Peak no. of AONs	Peak no. of fledglings	Productivity
Sandwich Tern	911	638	171	0.27
Common Tern	80	44	18	0.41
Little Tern	30	11	0	0
Black-headed Gull	902	587	207	0.35

Campfield Marsh

Sounding like a broken record – Covid -19 restrictions meant we were unable to survey or indeed do much of the management we wanted during the spring and summer months. The dynamic water system and predator fence were finished and functioning in February 2020. However, we weren't able to fully test the system as the spring was extremely dry causing all units to dry out. This did allow us to tweak the sluices and manage all compartments ready for the end of summer/autumn when we were able to flood areas up fully. Along with reduced and flexible grazing, vegetation management, rush control and some additional digger work later in the year we have managed to attract in wader species such as Lapwing, Redshank, Ruff, Green Sandpiper and eventually the Long-billed Dowitcher, presumably the one that had been showing well at Anthorn.

Despite the dry spring and drier fields than we would have liked, we were able to do some late season monitoring of species on the wet grassland. Many of the figures were indicative numbers due to reduced capacity for surveying however the picture looked promising. Our Lapwing numbers seemed to be on par with previous years, but the more exciting news was that

productivity was much higher. Perhaps the most controversial of our improvements at Campfield has been the predator fence. From our point of view the fence worked perfectly and contributed to the rise in productivity allowing more nests to raise chicks to fledging without predation. Redshank also had an amazing year compared to previously - birds were breeding in all fields and still calling later in the season. They were even seen to call from the fence posts with chicks below. The new saltmarsh pools with additional seasonal electrical fence to remove grazing pressures from certain areas also yielded good results with three nests where we have previously had none. Including this chick, I rescued from a ditch at the side of the road alongside the marsh!



St Bees Head

Species	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Black Guillemot	4	2	2	5	3
Cormorant	202	99	164	156	167
Fulmar	44	49	19	51	40
Great Black-backed Gull	0	0	0	0	0
Guillemot	13061	12920	8740	12710	12250
Herring Gull	183	139	117	139	60
Kittiwake	716	534	895	635	730
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	1		1	0
Peregrine	2	0		0	0
Puffin	4	4	2	4	3
Raven				1	1
Razorbill	177	169	59	171	146

This year we were able to survey the cliffs at St Bees head via boat twice over the season and were able to get an accurate count of species. Sadly Herring Gull continue to decline with the lowest ever total of 60 nests. Many of the other species we record have also reduced in number except Kittiwakes which are showing signs that the decline of previous years has levelled off and productivity was also promising.

Mhairi Maclauchlan

A welcome visitor to your garden?

We are being visited by a hunter and a killer. A young male Sparrowhawk. He was relatively tame today. I approached slowly and got really very close to him. (Inside the 2m social distancing we inferiors are required to observe!)

The reason I think it is a young adult is due to eye colour (as they age the iris can change from yellow to orange or red). The reason I think it is a male is from the orange tips to his barring and cheeks. His back is not yet quite blue enough, so I think he is nearly one year old. He has a less distinctive white "eyebrow" - females usually have more distinct ones. He is also around the size of a Mistle Thrush and females can be much bigger.



Stephen's visitor

Not wanting him to catch any of the birds at my feeder, yet wanting a closer look at this fearsome predator, I compromised by whistling the "hue-weet" alarm notes used by many small birds as I approached him. He gave me a fixed stare. Blue Tits were churring an alarm, Blackbirds rocketed out of the hedge (clearly taking advantage of my presence) and the House and Tree Sparrows were churring quietly in an opposite hedge. Eventually he flew off at head height. He is welcome to our garden but it will be his purpose to hunt and to kill!

Stephen Mott

It really is a beautiful raptor that needs to be admired for its many attributes. However, whenever this bird is mentioned as a garden predator; quite a lot of people - including the RSPB come to its defence...

Bearing in mind that we are led to believe that they will not visit unless there are plenty of prey species - does this mean they can decimate bird populations and we should expect all to be well next season? For example (along with many other species), over the last few years, we have encouraged the breeding of Tree Sparrows - from two to usually about 16 to 20 birds.

I have lived in various places, and have spoken to other people about this and (personally) come to the conclusion that if wild birds are to be provided for in a garden, the feeders should be as close as possible to escape-cover, in the hope that the Sparrowhawk will give up and move on. Or stop feeding altogether; which in a harsh winter would be difficult to justify. I would welcome other members comments please.

Steve Hill

Recent reports

The period covered is December 2020 to February 2021. Some of these records are unauthenticated and may require review by the club records panel or the British Birds Rarities Committee. For obvious reasons Covid restrictions have severely restricted the number of records received particularly from Walney in 2021.

Wildfowl

The regular sites for **Whooper Swans** continued to hold birds with 170 near Kirkbride in January and 190 on 21st February. The flock at Longtown had 31 at the end of December and a similar number in January increasing to 60 by 22nd February. The flock at Walby was less often noted this winter but 50 were there

on 1st January with similar numbers still at the end of February. Away from these areas 50 were near Longburgh on 12th February and around a 100 a day later. Thirteen were at Heversham in mid-February, five at Murton in the Eden Valley on 27th and 15 on Thirlmere on 28th.



Whooper Swans, Walby, Roger Ridley



Barnacles, Solway, Tony Marsh

Eleven **Eurasian Whitefronts** were with a Greylag flock at Catterlen on 21st December and seven at Shap on 1st January; in the Eden Valley two were with Pinkfeet at Brunstock on 7th February and possibly the same birds were at Warwick Bridge a few days later again with a large Pinkfoot flock along with a few Barnacle Geese. The only **Greenland** birds were two in the Lyth Valley from 6th January and two at Brampton on 22nd January. The only **Bean Geese** reported were two Tundra birds at Skinburness at the end of February.

At the end of December at least 10000 **Pinkfeet** were on the Solway increasing to c28000 by the end of January as northward movements started; February numbers were slightly less. Away from that area about 1000 frequented the Millom area in mid-January/early February, possibly birds on the move north. In the new year a flock of about 1500 birds frequented the Longtown area and in February c3000 birds were feeding near Houghton and as far east as Carlisle Airport, a regular feature at this time of year. There were regular daily flights from the Solway into the Eden valley.

No regular counts of **Barnacle Geese** were made in light of lockdown but 3000 were at Anthorn on 22nd December; more unusual were seven with Greylag Geese at Warwick Bridge on 12th February. The **Greylag** flock moved around the Eden Valley; 600 were at Shap on 1st January and a similar number were at Langwathby on 15th; 350 were near Brampton on 22nd with a similar sized flock near Warwick Bridge/Wetheral on several dates.

Away from the regular wintering areas in the south of the county four **Brent Geese** were off Blue Dial, Allonby on 28th December and two at Grune Point the same day - the flock at Walney had 380 birds at the end of December. Two **Shelduck** were at Warcop on 21st December with other birds reported in the Eden Valley in February increasing to 21 at Langwathby on 14th. A **Ruddy Shelduck/Shelduck hybrid** was at Holme Island on 16th December.

On 14th December Tarns Dub WeBS count held 180 **Teal** and on 15th February 34 **Shoveler**. On Bassenthwaite **Pintail** peaked at ten and an unusually large gathering of 26 was at Moss Side Farm on 15th December. At Newbiggin (Furness) they were also unusual with 125 present on 12th December and similarly there were three pairs at Wintertarn, Shap on 26th February, one of seven species of duck present which also included two **Shoveler**, 70 **Tufted Duck**, 80 **Teal** and six **Goldeneye**. The mouth of the Ravenglass estuaries held 730 **Wigeon** on 31st December.



Teal, Chapel House , Adam Moan

Gadwall were regular at Hammonds Pond, Carlisle with three pairs present on 17th January. The **Eider** flock at Walney had 5750 birds on 7th December and Foulney had 2520 birds on 12th. Four **Long-tailed Ducks** were still at Longtown on 15th December with a single on the Leven Estuary on at least two dates in January. A single female **Smew** was still at Longtown in late February. Nineteen **Red-breasted Mergansers** were on the Leven Estuary on 19th January and 39 around Ravenglass on 5th February. There were 53 **Goosanders** on the River Derwent on 19th December.



Goosander, Hammond's Pond, Roger Ridley

Single **Mandarin Ducks** were reported from Talkin Tarn, Longtown and Bassenthwaite but Derwent Water had at least six pairs on 27th January – there was some suggestion of escapes from hotel waterfowl collections.

Grouse to Herons

The only **Grey Partridge** reported were the covey near Wreay which had reduced from 20 in the autumn to ten by 8th January and nine near Abbeystown on 6th January.

The **Great Northern Diver** that frequented Urswick Tarn in early December was still present on 21st, there having been another bird in Barrow Docks at the same time as well as birds at Walney on 18th and 24th of the month. Single birds were at Hodbarrow RSPB from 8th January and at the north end of Windermere on 26th February (there being a **Red-throated Diver** on the lake at the same time), and with a second the next day. There were 50 **Red-throated Diver** off Drigg on 30th December and around 30 off Silecroft on 9th December.



Red Grouse, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Three **Little Grebe** were regular at Hammond's Pond during the period but of particular note were 25 at Longlands Lake on 5th January. Eight **Great Crested Grebe** were sleeping off Lowca on 27th February. Of note were three late **Gannets** off Walney on 19th December and two at Tanyard Bay on 13th February. Apart from one off Bootle on 11th December, Walney also had the only records of **Shag** with about 30 present during December and into early January (and lockdown).

Few **Little Egrets** were on the Solway during the period but small numbers (mainly singles) were seen well inland in the Eden Valley and its tributaries – including three at Dalston on 4th January, and at Thaka Beck NR probably “a first there” in late January/early February. Even further inland and at greater elevation were three at Sunbiggin Tarn on 26th February. On the west coast of particular interest was a bird going north west past St Bees Head on 31st December and a flock of 11 going south past Allonby on 25th January. In the south of the county **Great White Egrets**, mainly singles, were reported on a regular basis; in the north singles seen on Border Marsh on 23rd December, Rockliffe on 27th January and Boustead Hill on 6th February, could well have been the same bird. A single bird was, for some time, on the River Eden around Great Salkeld, Edenhall and Langwathby being reported by several observers.

Raptors to Waders

During the period single **Red Kites** were reported from the Gelt Valley, Foulshaw, Crake Valley, Arnside, Killington and to the north of Penrith. Up to three **Marsh Harriers** were on southern mosses. **Hen Harrier** were regularly reported from the Solway and the south of the county and also several on the west coast and inland. **Peregrine** were reported in the Carlisle area including



Kestrel, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

being perched on Dixon's Chimney and catching a pigeon in the city centre and also along the Solway and the southern mosses. Inland one was over Catterlen at the end of December. There were many reports of **Merlin** from Longtown and on the Solway Plain as well as Foulshaw throughout. At the end of December there were reports from the south of the county and near Sunbiggin Tarn. **Water Rail** were reported from Walney in December and then on 7th January at Urswick Tarn and St Bees plus one at Whitbeck, Lorton on 18th. Regular counts from Foulshaw peaked at three in December.

Foulney had 657 **Oystercatchers** on 12th December and by mid-January birds started to appear in the mid Eden valley with two at Temple Sowerby, 26 at Little Salkeld on 18th February and 43 in the area on 21st. Four hundred **Golden Plovers** were near Cliburn on 7th December but numbers reported away from Moricambe Estuary were small apart from several hundred near Langwathby on 7th February. Eight were in the frost on Black Coombe on 30th December and 18 were on Binsey at the end of January.

December's WeBs at Holme Dub saw 830 **Lapwing** and the peak count from an area north of Arnside viaduct to Foulshaw was 1100 on 14th December. Rockliffe held 1250 birds on 18th December with other coastal birds being at Soddy Gap (100) on 14th January and 250 on the Leven Estuary on 19th. Birds possibly moving back to breeding areas included 100 east over Burnrigg on 3rd February and several hundred at Langwathby with Golden Plover on 7th February.



Lapwing, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Two hundred and fifty **Knot** were counted at Foulney on 12th December and 6000 at Walney on 14th and then 150 on Grune Point on 3rd January.

Recent reports

The only reports of **Dunlin** were of 850 at Foulney on 12th December and the peak winter count of 515 from Foulshaw Marsh two days later. A **Little Stint** was at Port Carlisle on 4th January. There were at least four **Common Sandpipers** by Muncaster throughout the period. The **Green Sandpiper** that had frequented RSPB Campfield for some weeks was still present on 7th December. Heavy rains giving high river levels meant birds moved to field floods that had been created. A flood at Rockliffe had between one and four birds on many dates in the period the last record being of a single bird on 22nd February. Longtown had birds both on the river and field floods with a maximum on a flood, of five birds on 26th February. Lowther had a single bird on two dates, Wreay on one date and Warcop on two dates. Five birds were on the River Eden near Carlisle on 29th December and two at Temple Sowerby on 15th January. A single was near Levens Park on 1st January and another was on a flooded field at Whasset. The regular wintering sites on the Ravenglass Esk held two birds throughout peaking at four on 29th January.

There were at least 13, maximum 14 **Greenshank** on the Ravenglass estuaries throughout. Walney had 11 there on 7th December. The Longtown area held mainly singles but two in early December and three on 12th February. A bird was on the tideline at Allonby on 8th and one flew over a Penrith garden at the end of the month. At Mawbray on 1st January the **Bar-tailed Godwit** flock held 271 birds including one in full breeding plumage.

Woodcock were reported from 14 sites, mainly in the north of the county with highest numbers being abundant in the Lorton area, four at Glasson Moss in December, five close together in a wood at Edenhall and five in the Upper Gelt woods in mid-February. In the south four were in Swede Bridge Wood in the first week of January and one in a garden in Ambleside a few days later. An Ennerdale roost held at least 35 **Common Snipe** on 8th December and 27 were recorded at Foulney on 12th December. Cold weather produced many along roadsides at Anthorn on 10th January. Eleven were at the head of Windermere on 8th February but the largest concentration reported were 80 in Thornhill Meadows on 21st February. **Jack Snipe**, mainly in ones and twos, were reported from similar sites with five flushed from rushes on the Irt estuary.

Ruff continued to be reported in December from Anthorn and Campfield but more noteworthy were 18 on a field flood at Rockliffe on 18th. One was noted on the February WeBs near Wolsty. The **Long-billed Dowitcher** was at Old Anthorn till 10th January at least.



Snipe, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Skuas to Auks

Two hundred **Black-headed Gulls** were on floods in Carlisle on 26th February whilst on the same day 90 at Hardendale Quarry, Shap may well have been returning breeders. The only **Mediterranean Gulls** reported were a single at Eskmeals on 9th December, two adults at Roosebeck on 7th January and a regular wintering bird at Allonby on 8th February which was “worming in new mole hills”. Two **Little Gulls** were reported from Walney on 15th December. A great find at Ullswater on 5th January was a first winter **Caspian Gull**. A juvenile **Iceland Gull** was present in the Rockliffe area from 11th December through till at least 10th January; thereafter there was a similar bird at Longtown from 16th February till the end of the month. The cliff ledges at St Bees were fully occupied by **Guillemots** on 24th January but with no **Razor-bills** present .

Pigeons to Buntings



Barn Owl, Thurstonfield, Nick Franklin

Fourteen **Stock Doves** were feeding on an Abbeytown lawn on 4th December and 14 at Boustead Hill were unusual on 2nd February. Three **Long-eared Owls** were found in a roost in the Longtown area. The only reports of **Short-eared** were a bird on Walney on 1st December, two on Hartside on 9th December and a bird at Embleton on 9th February. Single day flying **Barn Owls** were reported widely in north of the county.

Up to three **Kingfishers** were around Ravenglass throughout, two were at Longtown on 12th February otherwise single birds were at several sites. **Green Woodpeckers** were at Haweswater including at least two on 26th February. At least 100 **Skylarks** passed south at Allonby in small groups on the morning of 8th January whilst St Bees Head had good numbers with at least 400 (possibly as many as 600) feeding on snow free stubble the next day; there were still 60 there on 24th. Seventy were on a snow free area at Langwathby on 15th and a similar number over Cliburn Moss on 8th February. Song was heard from mid-February at Lowca on the coast on 18th and at Haweswater on 26th.

Recent reports

A late **Swallow** spent a few days at Hodbarrow in early December. Two **Water Pipits** were again on Walney on 17th December with another at Grange over Sands on 13th February. Twenty five **Rock Pipits** were at Walney on 11th December. **Dippers** were singing from early in January at a number of widespread sites. In the cold weather **Robins** seemed to congregate where food was plentiful - six or seven in many places – gardens, stables etc. A Male **Black Redstart** visited a garden at Kirkby Lonsdale in late January whilst a female type frequented the promenade at Grange over Sands on several dates in late January to at least 14th February. **Stonechats** apparently suffered in the cold weather with birds going missing from regular sites although prior to the cold weather 11 were on Walney in the first week of December.



*Siberian Lesser Whitethroat,
Linstock, Nick Franklin*



Firecrest, Crosscannonby, Nick Franklin

Song Thrush were singing widely in the third week of February. Eight **Mistle Thrushes** were at Castle Carrock and six at Wetheral (with a Redwing flock) in the third week of February. In early January ten male **Blackbirds** were feeding on apples in a Waterside garden, increasing to 14 and then 20 during the cold weather in mid-February. Twenty eight males were counted in a one km walk on 29th December at Cumrew. **Fieldfare** and **Redwings** were still present but not in large flocks. A **Cetti's Warbler** was present on Walney throughout December. A **Chiffchaff** was at Hodbarrow on 9th December. Two **Blackcaps** were reported from a Whitehaven garden from 17th December onwards and a single at an Egremont garden on 15th. Elsewhere during January single females were at three sites. A "putative" **Siberian Lesser Whitethroat** was at Linstock on 5th February.

A male **Firecrest** remained at Crosscannonby for some weeks in February. Two **Chough** were reported on two days at the end of December from the far north of the county as well as two passing Helsington Barrows on 30th. A **Hooded Crow** was at Drigg on 5th December and Parton on many dates.

A large **Common Starling** murmuration was established at Scotby in January and February. A first winter **Rose-coloured Starling** was photographed at Castlerigg Stone Circle on 17th December.



Greenfinch, Portinscale.



Hawfinch & Crossbill, Helsington Barrows, Tony Marsh



Very few **Brambling** were reported this winter. There seemed to be more **Greenfinch** about with the most interesting being a roost of about 150 birds at Carleton, Carlisle; other flocks of between 20 and 30 were widely spread from Wetheral, Allonby, Penrith and Foxfield. A male **Crossbill** in Miterdale on 6th December was the sole result of extensive searches by one observer. **Hawfinch** continued to be reported with the **Crossbills** at Helsington Barrows during December, three were at Halecat on 4th January, a single was at Wray Castle on 30th January and two were at Lanercost a day later.

Coastal **Snow Buntings** were three at Grune Point on 13th December and just two there on 3rd January, at Waney on 22nd December and at Sandscale Haws on 30th January. Inland, seven were on Nethermost Pike on 1st December, four were on Stybarrow Dodd on 14th, one on Helton Fell on 19th, two on Fairfield a day later and two on Orton Scar on 28th. In February one was at RSPB Geltsdale, 25 were on Helvellyn on 22nd and 20 were on Fairfield on 15th.



Snow Bunting, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

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 2021

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

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