



BIRD NEWS
Vol. 23 No. 2 Summer 2012

Club news & announcements

Black Grouse return to South-east Cumbria

A first for Cumbria & other highlights.

Champagne moments

Thacka Beck - a new nature reserve near Penrith

Bird ringing news – some strange movements

Short notes

Cantabric Yellow-legged Gull - a Cumbrian visitor?

The winter goose influx - a finders account

Spring migrant arrivals 2012

Recent reports

Contents - see back page

Twinned with Cumberland Bird Observers Club

New South Wales, Australia

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

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Club news and announcements

Annual General Meeting Friday 5th October 2012

The AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 5th October 2012 at 7.30pm. The business of the AGM is intended to be as brief as possible and will be followed by a talk by Steve Christmas entitled 'Black magic - secrets of North-west coot migration.'

Vacancies on Council: Secretary, county bird recorder, two vice-chairmen and two ordinary members.

According to the terms of the constitution the above posts will become vacant at the AGM though there is a proviso that the current incumbents may remain another year if there are no other suitable candidates.

This note is to seek nominations from members to fill these posts. According to the terms of the constitution, nominations should be submitted to the secretary not later than seven days before the AGM (i.e. by 28th September). Please contact Dave Piercy (address on inside front cover) for a proposal form and further details on what is involved.

Newsletter editor, outings and talks organisers.

Would anyone interested on taking on one of the above please contact the secretary. All vital roles in helping to run the club. Volunteers please.

Ivor Davies

Sadly we have heard that Ivor passed away recently. Ivor volunteered to set up the Bird Club's first web site and he acted as our webmaster for many years. He was always keen to keep the site up to date and help us in anyway he could. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.

Photographs

Please submit your photos for inclusion in future newsletters and the web site. Common species are always welcome. For example I would have liked photos of Starling, Sand Martin and Greenfinch for this issue. Click and send now daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk More contributors please.

Comments - please debate/comment on any articles in the newsletter. So easy to click and send an e-mail - I promise time to withdraw if sent in haste and repented.

Birds & Wildlife in Cumbria

Photographs, articles and short notes are to be submitted to the Editor electronically or on disk no later than 31 July 2012.

For Sale: British Birds unbound from 1990 to 2010. Donation to CBC.

David Cooke, tel. 01931 713392; cooke856@btinternet.com

CBC Indoor meeting programme winter 2012/2013

Friday 5th October (AGM): Penrith UR Church 7.30pm 'Black magic - secrets of North-west Coot migration.' - *Steve Christmas*



Coot, Andy Harmer

Friday November 2nd: Cockermouth United Reformed Church 7.30pm.

'Arctic Norway - A new and pioneering festival of birds' - *Tristan Reid*

Based in Vardø well within the Arctic circle in Northern Norway. The purpose of this festival is to realise the potential of this amazing location for its breeding/wintering birds and for the potential of extreme WP vagrants. This is not only for the benefit of birders, but also for the local people to realise the valuable eco-resource they have on their doorstep. Starting with a dog sled trek into the Taiga forest to see the specialities of that area. Then the amazing spectacle of the Hornøya seabird cliffs and an exciting pelagic into the Barent Sea. Exploration of the Fjord coastline and Snowmobile Trek to see more taiga specialities (including a few surprises). Finishing off with a trip through the taiga along the Tana Valley and up into the epic Tundra!

December - no meeting as we have two in February instead.



Hawk Owl, Tana Valley, Tristan Reid

Wednesday 9th January : with Carlisle NHS at Tullie House 7.15pm

'From Oban to Spitzbergen an Arctic journey' - Angus Hogg

Friday 1st February: Penrith UR Church 7.30pm

'Birds in the Marine Environment' - *Paul Walton*

Paul has worked in bird conservation and research in the Himalayas, South-east Asia, Middle East and Amazonia, followed by seven years based at Glasgow University studying the feeding ecology and diving behaviour of seabirds in Shetland and Orkney, and the ecological impacts of the Braer oil spill.

His PhD looked at the feeding and breeding ecology of black guillemots. He is now Head of Habitats and Species for RSPB Scotland, coordinating the RSPB's work on some key species such as corncrake, and key habitats such as machair. The job also involves linking ecological science to conservation programmes and taking a policy lead in keenly debated issues, such as geese and agriculture, predation, and the impact of non-native species. He sits on the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group.

Friday 11th Feb: with Kendal NHS Friend's House Stramongate 7.30pm

'Dippers' - Peter Mawby - an updated reprise of one of the best single species talks we have had.

A final call for Atlas records.

As all of you are all probably aware, the BTO kindly incorporated a facility into their online Bird Atlas system to allow casual records to be entered for Cumbria for a further year. This was to enable us to draw on as comprehensive a coverage of the county as possible when preparing the proposed County Avifauna.

Casual records can still be entered covering both the winter (Nov 2011-Feb 2012) and breeding season (Apr 2012-Jul 2012). For those of you with a BTO username, this can be done by logging on to the Bird Atlas homepage and clicking on "Local-Atlas Roving Record sightings from 1 Nov 2011". This same page enables you to obtain a summary of the species recorded so far in each tetrad and 10km square within the county, including the maximum recorded breeding status for each species.

It would be of enormous value if you would take the time to view this data for your local area and then enter any records which you possess for species that have been missed or for which you have evidence of breeding.

Thanks in anticipation.

Avifauna Management Group

Black Grouse return to South-east Cumbria



Greyhens, December 2011, Graham Dunn

Historical decline

Dentdale, Garsdale and the area around Sedbergh, although within Cumbria, were historically part of the West Riding of Yorkshire and still are within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Naturalists have been slow to abandon the traditional county boundaries, and as late as 1986, *Mather (The Birds of Yorkshire)* was still sticking to the historical county.

So, to get an idea of the past status of the Black Grouse in this area we need to acknowledge the changing county boundaries and then look at the relevant literature: on the birds of Yorkshire rather than those of the Lakes. In 1907, *Nelson (The Birds of Yorkshire)* writes that Black Grouse are found “In the extreme north-west corner of the county near Sedbergh, a few, probably wanderers from Westmorland, occasionally nest in Garsdale.” In 1952, *Chislett (Yorkshire Birds)* records them for Lunedale and Dentdale, and notes that they are found “especially from about the daleheads.” Finally, in 1986, *Mather (The Birds of Yorkshire)* has a distribution map indicating Black Grouse to be in the area, otherwise he just quotes *Chislett* concerning their occurrence in Lunedale and Dentdale.

Leaving the Yorkshire avifauna for a more recent discussion, *Ingram Cleasby* in his 1999 *Birds and Boys at Sedbergh* writes that they were reported to be common on Bough Fell and Firbank Fell in the early 1920s but had appar-



Blackcock, March 2010, Graham Dunn

ently disappeared from the Sedbergh area by 1926. He also states that “post-war plantings of conifers in upper Dentdale and Garsdale,..., saw a welcome return of a number of pairs.” “Inevitably the trees have now reached the height where conditions do not appear to suit Black Grouse, and they have virtually disappeared from the entire district, except Uldale and Hellgill, Mallerstang where sightings are becoming

more frequent.” As an appendix to Ingram Cleasby’s book, *Malcolm Priestley* provides a summary of the status of the birds in the area as of 1999. Referring to the Black Grouse, it is “An uncommon resident with small populations surviving in Uldale and Mallerstang. Several traditional sites including Lambrigg Fell, Lily Mere, Burns Beck Moss and Upper Dentdale appear to have been deserted since 1990.” The changes are reflected in the two national atlases (1975 and 1993) and in the more-recent and locally more detailed Cumbrian Atlas (2002). *Warren & Baines*¹ provide a detailed description of the recent status of Black Grouse in northern England.

The return

There had been rumours for a year or two. In August 2009 a neighbour saw a Blackcock on the fell – the first he’d seen in fifteen years. On a foggy October day my wife saw from the car what she assumed to be a Blackcock sitting on a dry stone wall at the side of the road. In January 2010, while out walking the dogs in a snow storm, I saw about half a dozen



Blackcock, December 2010, Graham Dunn

grouse flying between trees on the fellsides not far from the road – but too far away to see any detail. At the time I’d assumed they were Red Grouse, driven

Black Grouse return to South-east Cumbria

off the moor by the heavy snow, but with hindsight I think they may have been Blackcock. Then, finally, in March of 2010 I saw and managed to photograph five Black Grouse (four cocks and a hen) sitting in the top of an old hawthorn. Now they were now much more than just a rumour!



Greyhen, December 2010, Graham Dunn

After receiving my photograph, Clive Hartley put me in touch with Phil Warren of the Black Grouse Recovery Project (funded by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the RSPB and others) who told us of the project to capture young wild males in the core of their range and then release them within 24 hours at carefully selected sites on its southern edge, with the aim for them to set up leks and attract females (see Mc Ewan et al.²). Over the last 4-5 years 24 had been released at a Yorkshire site to the north of us and one of these radio-tagged Blackcock was known to have a lek in our vicinity.

There were one or two isolated Blackcock displaying in the spring of 2010, presumably followed by a successful breeding season, and by November 2010 there was a pack of up to thirteen Blackcock in the vicinity of the county boundary (see Phil Warren's press release at http://www.gwct.org.uk/about_us/news/2763.asp).

Occasionally, they were accompanied by one or two greyhens and there were three hens in the vicinity of one of the conifer woods – but the hens, of course, are much more difficult to locate and count.

Most of the pack appeared to survive the grim winter. In the following spring there were at least six, perhaps eight individual Blackcock lekking on the sides of the fells (because of their movements it was difficult to rule out double counting) – but no sign of a traditional lek containing several displaying males. The current winter started with a pack of at least nine Blackcock (and there were at least three greyhens) but this year they appear to be less inclined to move around as a pack. The largest group I've seen recently contained five birds.

The future?

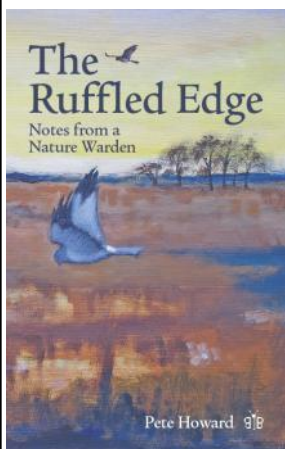
Like all small populations on the edge of their range, the population of Black Grouse in South-east Cumbria is very vulnerable to chance fluctuations in the weather and habitat. Encouragingly, they seem to have done well in the last two winters (which have been pretty severe), and there are changes to the management of the fells that promise to improve their chances of survival. Broad-leaved trees are being planted in some of the larger gills. Several of the conifer woods at the heads of the dales are being partially clear-felled and as they are being re-planted there are considerable numbers of broad-leaves being planted at the side of the beck within these woods. One of the conifer woods has been completely replaced by broad-leaves at its lower levels and left to revert to heather moorland above.

The local grouse moor is now being more intensively managed and the number of sheep grazing on these fell sides in the winter has been reduced considerably. There also appear to be more of the hardy breeds of cattle (Belted Galloways, for instance) grazing on the slopes frequented by the Black Grouse – a feature thought to improve their chances of successful breeding.

¹ **Mc Ewan, K., Warren, P. & Baines, D.** (2009) Preliminary results from a translocation trial to stimulate black grouse *Tetrao tetrix* range expansion in northern England. *Folia Zoologica* **58**, 190-194.

² **Warren, P. & Baines, D.** (2008). Current status and recent trends in numbers and distribution of Black grouse *Tetrao tetrix* in northern England. *Bird Study* **55**, 94-99.

Graham Dunn 26th February, 2012



CBC member Pete Howard has written a collection of birding tales from around Britain (with a good proportion of the book set in Cumbria and Northumberland). He has worked at the RSPB Geltsdale reserve since 2005, and is currently Monitoring Warden there. He has also worked for the RSPB in Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Northumberland. From moor to shore, from woodland to wetland, these memoirs recount many exhilarating and intimate encounters with the wildlife of some of our most precious habitats. The book contains 16 original colour illustrations by local artists Barry Robson and Ian Ryding.

'The Ruffled Edge: notes from a Nature Warden' is available at the RSPB Geltsdale Visitor Centre, other RSPB Reserve shops, local bookshops or at www.bramblebybooks.co.uk or Amazon (£9.99).

A first for Cumbria & other highlights. Champagne moments.

A first for Cumbria

Sometimes meetings can be worthwhile.....

While driving down to Millom Network Centre (for a meeting with RSPB colleagues to discuss and plan a work programme to help deliver our exciting new "It's your turn" project at Hodbarrow) I was bemoaning the fact that it was another glorious sunny day and I would be spending most of it indoors. On the positive side, I'd also arranged to meet two of our research staff in the hide at Hodbarrow in the afternoon so hopefully I would be able to do a bit of birding later.

I eventually got to the hide at about 2.30pm to be greeted by Sarah and Liz saying "We think there's a black-winged stilt on the far side of the island, it's behind that tall vegetation". After the longest five mins of my life I eventually saw it as it moved along the shoreline feeding and after a few more minutes it took off and then glided down again to land about 50 metres further to the right. We continued to get brief views over the next hour during which we were joined by Mhairi and Jacqui (RSPB colleagues) and the five of us last saw the bird at about 3.30 pm as it flew off heading northwards and out of sight from where we were watching.

So I will always remember this when trying to get out of going to meetings in the future.

*Norman Holton
Senior Sites Manager, RSPB Cumbria Coast Reserves*

Atlas highlights

Not exactly an atlas highlight but we have had tawny owls use our barn owl box and therefore 2 very cute fluffy tawny owl chicks sitting in the tree for the last 6 weeks, some good views of the proud mum too. Also have swifts using the swift box for the 1st time, young tree sparrows visiting our feeders with their parents and barn owls must have chicks in the neighbour's barn again, they've been busy hunting early evening. We must be doing something right!

Hazel Wainwright

Flocks of Ospreys?

Spike Webb had four together over Keswick flying SW towards Derwent Water on 12 May at about 4 pm. Also on 30 May he had two together flying the opposite direction flying NE from Derwent Water. Dave Piercy saw three in apparent V formation flying low over Derwentwater Youth Hostel on 22nd May.

Dave Piercy

Haythwaite Highlights (NY34S)

Both adult Nuthatches feeding young in nest in probable old woodpecker hole in ash tree. Springwatch seemed to think only one parent fed the young.

Amazing numbers of Swifts and House Martins in the same area of the River Caldew, with at least 200 of each species, the Atlas roving records seemed highly suspicious of these but my numbers were conservative, the sky was just full of each, but mostly

separated from each other by a few hundred yards. There seems to be a great drop in the number of Sand Martins in all my areas this year, with my biggest colony site from last year all but deserted.

I would welcome any news of Swifts and House Martins from other areas, but we have never seen them in anything like these numbers before, even at the end of the breeding season.

Jim Callow

Champagne Moment

Sunday 3rd June 2012. We'd just joined the M6 at Preston, heading north for home, when a single Swift flew alongside the car for a while. I fell to thinking how good it was to see a Swift at close quarters – like you do when you haven't seen one for a good while. Now I know that they are in trouble but could I sort out the difference between fewer Swifts for us to see and us just not being out and about enough in the right places to see the Swifts? It's just difficult to weigh things and be objective but the conversation centred on just that and concluded that there were definitely fewer Swifts about.

Soon after 7p.m we were back on the A66, heading west out of Keswick, past Braithwaite. We approached Bass Lake shoreline and there were the Swifts – not just one or two more but hundreds swirling and towering above the lake all the way round the Thornthwaite shore. Swifts so thick that avoiding collision must have been a challenge in itself. Literally hundreds and hundreds stacked up taking their numbers closer to the thousand in response to a Mayfly hatch, perhaps.

The sight was exhilarating and memorable but what does that do for our objective assessment of the state of our Swift population?

Mike & Lyn Mills



*Tree Sparrow , Roger Ridley, 4th Dec 2011
Watchtree N. R. part of flock of approx 40-50*

Thacka Beck - a new nature reserve near Penrith



Thacka Beck, January 2012, Lee Schofield

Cumbria Wildlife Trust has recently taken on the management of the new Thacka Beck Nature Reserve, situated on the northern edge of Penrith (centre of site grid ref - NY 5074 3067). The nature reserve was developed during the winter of 2010/11, creating a flood storage basin with additional wildlife habitats, including a series of ponds and scrapes, a re-meandered beck and areas of dry and wet pasture.

Part of a Europe wide initiative called ALFA (Alternative Land use for Flood Alleviation), led in Cumbria by Eden Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency, Thacka Beck is an exemplar of how flood storage, conservation and recreation can go hand-in-hand.

The flood wall that runs through the reserve gives great views over the ponds, beck and wet grassland and the species they support. During the summer the ponds and scrapes were swarming with hirundines, indicating that good numbers of aquatic invertebrates have rapidly colonised. Three pairs of Lapwing managed to produce young, and a pair of Little Ringed Plover were present, taking advantage of the bare conditions following land forming. Kingfishers are regularly seen zipping down the revitalised Thacka Beck and a Hobby was observed on more than one occasion. An over-mature, fruit rich hedge has helped out many winter thrushes, and a good range of warblers, finches, flycatchers and other passerines are regularly seen making use of it.

Prior to the site's development, the site was already known to members of the Cumbria Bird Club, mainly due to its proximity to a flooded field just to the north, known locally as 'the flash', which regularly supported large numbers of breeding lapwing. The reedy attenuation pond, seasonally flooded pasture and hedges that were present before the reserves creation have always attracted a range of breeding and over-wintering birds. Local CBC members have recorded almost 100 species in the area that the reserve now occupies, including a few rarities; it will be fascinating to see how this bird list develops as the site matures.



Willow Warbler, Bowness CWT, Roger Ridley

Since taking on the site in April 2011, Cumbria Wildlife Trust has been focusing on protecting areas that might attract breeding birds from dogs, surveying, installing new signage and carrying out boundary and meadow management works. Fields have been made stock proof to allow grazing with Longhorn Cattle, a hardy ancient breed, very well adapted to conservation grazing systems. A varied sward will be maintained in the flood storage basin and other wet meadow areas, to create conditions suitable for breeding waders, hopefully offering a partial replacement for 'the flash', which sadly has recently been drained. The drier meadow areas will be managed as species-rich hay meadows, with an annual hay cut and aftermath grazing. Areas of tall herb and reed will be maintained, to benefit reed bunting and grasshopper warbler. An area between the mature hedge and the railway line will be allowed to naturally develop, providing more scrub, and eventually woodland.

Although Thacka Beck Nature Reserve is not huge, it is very accessible, being only a short walk from Penrith town centre, and it offers some rewarding birding with minimal effort. It is proving very popular with local people, and monthly volunteer work parties have been very well attended. If you would like more information about Thacka Beck Nature Reserve, or would like to help out with surveying or work parties, please contact Lee Schofield, Northern Reserve Officer, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, 01228 829574

Lee Schofield

Bird ringing news – some strange movements

The publication of the BTO's *Migration Atlas* in 2002 marked a very significant milestone in the history of British ornithology, and a fitting tribute to a century of dedicated work by Britain's ringers. So authoritative is it that it has led to the view in some quarters that there is nothing left to discover about the movements of Britain's birds. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I hope the following examples will demonstrate.

The first concerns a Starling ringed in the north of Scotland, details as follows:

Starling	18 Feb 1994	Wick Caithness (ringed as first-year female)
	24 Apr 1994	Haverigg, Cumbria (found dead) (472 km S)

but just look at those dates – this bird wintered in the north of Scotland and then moved *south* to Cumbria where it was presumably breeding (or about to breed) when it died. It is not unique – I am aware of at least fifty such movements and strongly suspect that there are many others. Such odd movements are sometimes referred to as 'abmigrations' and in the case of the Starling were first discovered by ringers in Aberdeen and were later found by another group of ringers in the Highlands. They are not peculiar to Scotland, however; here is one from Cumbria, wintering in Flimby and apparently breeding in the West Midlands.

Starling	3 Feb 1980	Flimby, Cumbria (ringed as full-grown bird)
	19 Jun 1980	Warley, West Midlands (taken by cat) (262 km)

Here is another movement between Caithness and Cumbria, strangely similar to the Starling quoted above:

Greenfinch	22 Oct 2007	Wick, Caithness (ringed as first-year male)
	7 Jul 2010	Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria (freshly dead) (441 km)

That Greenfinches undertake quite long distance movements within Britain is no surprise, but they are usually orientated to the south or south-west (as one would expect for a bird seeking a milder climate for its winter quarters) and involve 'out-and-back' type movements, that is, the birds return to their natal area to breed. Perhaps it was simply doing what Starlings do – but I cannot emphasise too much how unprecedented this movement is.

Robin Sellers

Short notes

Immature Merlin following Hen Harrier to exploit flushed prey

On 3rd October 2011 at Haweswater I watched a male Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* quartering a large area of rough grassland for about five minutes. For most of this time it was followed by an immature Merlin *Falco columbarius* which had taken up residence in this particular area for several weeks. At first the Merlin's behaviour suggested mobbing of the harrier as it sped towards it several times but I soon realised it was speeding past and below the harrier as if chasing small birds the harrier was flushing. It did this on numerous occasions and was seen to actively chase a Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* that the harrier had flushed although unsuccessfully. After each attempt the Merlin would swing around behind the harrier and 'wait on' so to speak.

This hunting association has been recorded from Cyprus (Bourne 1960), Galloway (Watson 1977, Dickson 1984, 1993, 1998), Gironde, Southwest France (Jack 1984) and Spurn, Humberside (Cudworth & Massingham 1986), but to the best of my knowledge has not been noted in Cumbria before.

Bourne, W.R.P. 1960. A hunting partnership between two birds of prey. *Ibis* 102: 136
Cudworth, J. & Massingham, C. 1986. Hen Harrier and Merlin hunting together. *British Birds* 79: 430.

Dickson, R.C. 1984. Falcons hunting close to harriers. *British Birds* 77: 481-482.

Dickson, R.C. 1993. Hunting association between Merlins and Hen Harriers in winter. *Scottish Birds* 17: 58-59.

Dickson, R.C. 1998. Hunting association between Merlins and Hen Harriers. *Scottish Birds* 19: 245.

Jack, J. 1984. Hen Harrier and Merlin hunting together. *British Birds* 77: 72-73.

Watson, D. 1977. The Hen Harrier. T. & A.D. Poyser. Berkhamstead.

Spike Webb

Carrion Crows hunting adult Sand Martins at a colony on the River Eden

On 10th April 2011 while walking a stretch of the River Eden near Carlisle I noticed several large flocks of Sand Martins *Riparia riparia* feeding and visiting nesting banks along the river. I estimated over 300 birds in total. At one area, where large numbers were actually flying into the banks and obviously visiting old nest sites, a pair of Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* were in attendance watching intently from a nearby tree. Suddenly both birds swooped down with one snatching a martin as it flew out of a hole and killing it quickly on the ground. It then proceeded to pluck and eat its prey.

I have witnessed Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* snatching Sand Martin nestlings from holes before but never adult birds. Whether this is a regular habit is not known.

Spike Webb

Cantabric Yellow-legged Gull - a Cumbrian visitor ?

A multi-stranded trip with diverse objectives always holds the greatest appeal; the idea of fulfilling some long-held ambitions being a good ingredient. It was with these thoughts in mind that Liz and I boarded the Bilbao ferry in late August 2011.

Seabirds, cetaceans and the lure of the open sea was an exciting prospect. Calm conditions prevailed as we entered the deep water of the Bay of Biscay at first light. Fin Whales and Striped Dolphins were new creatures for me and the Common and Bottle-nosed Dolphins delighted as always. A brief squall produced some Great Shearwaters and Storm Petrels appeared from time to time. Late afternoon saw the Spanish coast loom out of the brewing storm - we felt lucky.

A couple of hours drive had us west of Santander and into an interesting region. This was the terrain of a gull I had long wanted to study. The bird in question is the Spanish north coast form of Yellow-legged Gull. This form was first noted by Teyssedre in 1984 and later commented on by Dubois and others (Dubois 1987). The taxonomy of the large white-headed gulls has been problematic for many decades, and remains so. It is interesting to note that Yellow-legged Gull was only given full species status by the BOU in 2007 ; DNA studies have shown it to be more closely related to Great Black-backed Gull than to Herring Gull. This Cantabric form is now generally referred to as the form '*lusitanus*'.

Some consider *lusitanus* to be a subspecies of Yellow-legged Gull, along with the nominate and the *atlantis* races. Whatever the taxonomic status of *lusitanus*, it is a bird which looks very different from the Yellow-legged Gulls which occur in the Mediterranean region.

I spent a few days observing and photographing these gulls along the coast of Cantabrica.

The most noticeable differences from the Mediterranean form are :

Structure - small size (similar to *graellsii*), slight build with small rounded head, thinnish neck and a bill lacking a marked gonydeal angle.

Adult plumage - Paler mantle, less dark on trailing edge of underwing, less solid black on wingtip and thinner black band on P5.

1st yr plumage - mantle more reddish brown hue, more obvious primary window and rump more mottled.

Moult - relatively more retarded.

Cantabric Yellow-legged Gull - a Cumbrian visitor ?



Adult *lusitanicus*
22nd August 2011,
San Vicente de la
Barquera estuary,
Cantabrica.

Note the small head and
slim build.

Adult *lusitanicus*
22nd August 2011,
San Vicente de la Barquera
harbour, Cantabrica.

The state of moult is rather
inconvenient ! The extent of
black on the wing is neverthe-
less noticeably less solid and
the trailing edge of the under-
wing less dark.



1st yr *lusitanicus*
22nd August 2011
San Vicente de la
Barquera , Cantabrica

Note particularly the red/
brown colour tone of the
mantle.

Cantabric Yellow-legged Gull - a Cumbrian visitor ?

1st yr *lusitanicus* 22nd August 2011, San Vicente de la Barquera, Cantabrica

The less 'crisp' appearance of the tail and rump and the more obvious pale primary window can be seen here.



Our next port of call was the western Pyrenees. The raptor migration was well under way and certainly quite visible from St. Jean Pied-de-Port in the Basque country. Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Black Kites and really impressive numbers of Honey Buzzards were moving through and the numbers of Pied Flycatchers were particularly high. A day at the raptor migration watchpoint at Organbidexca was more reminiscent of a bad November day in Cumbria than anything else !

Then it was off to the Mediterranean coast at Gruissan to see more Yellow-legged Gulls for comparative purposes. These nominate birds were clearly different structurally and were in a much more advanced stage of moult.

Our journey up through France included a few days in the Brenne. This region certainly warrants another visit, perhaps in the spring. Great White Egrets were positively common and some Black Storks were an unexpected treat. Middle Spotted Woodpeckers were surprisingly vocal in the mature woodland.

Returning to the matter of gulls, the interesting question is whether *lusitanicus*

Cantabric Yellow-legged Gull - a Cumbrian visitor ?

has the potential to visit Cumbria. This is probably a question which would only be answered with the appearance of a ringed bird - on the basis of present knowledge at least.

This form (*lusitanus*) could offer an explanation for some atypical looking Yellow-legged Gulls seen in northern Britain. On 14th March 2011 I watched a Yellow-legged Gull at Loch Ryan. The structure did not look quite right, it was much slighter and more slender billed. It looked very much like the birds I saw in northern Spain.....

It may not be possible (at present at least) to reliably identify *lusitanus*, but it could be a reason why some Yellow-legged Gulls look rather different from the norm.

Chris Hind



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The winter goose influx - a finders account



Snow Goose, Lessonhall, Darren Robson

I had a bit of free time on my hands so thought I'd have a drive about seeing what geese I could find, target geese were White-fronts. I had been told of a group of Whooper Swans with geese on a back road to Silloth but nothing to suggest species. The directions were fairly vague. Driving from Silloth towards

Calvo a group of geese flew over - five White-fronted geese, Bingo!

I needed to find these so checked the back road when I found another small group in a maize field. I rang Keith as he wanted to see any geese I found. He arrived and told me he had seen a group of swans and geese further down the road. So we went to check these out and to our surprise we managed to count a massive 76 Bean Geese with quite a few European White-fronted Geese. We had hit the jackpot. Biggest influx of rare geese in donkies years even ever! Over the next few hours plenty of people connected with the mass of geese which is always great and over the next few weeks the Bean Geese and White-fronts returned to the same fields.

In the mean-time my next target species were Bewick's Swans, a couple had been seen a couple of weeks before at Silloth airfield, but today Keith and I managed to find a family group of four, 2 adults and 2 juvs on a back road to Lessonhall, we couldn't believe our eyes, we didn't really expect to find any. Over the next few weeks I managed to find smaller groups of European White-fronts and Greenland White-fronts.

I found another groups of geese and swans in flooded fields at Abbeytown, these included Bewick's Swans, Whooper Swans, European White-fronts, Bean Geese and amazingly the blue morph Snow Goose.

By the end of the winter I had managed to seen all the major geese in Cumbria except Lesser White-fronted Geese. I managed to see the Ross's Goose on Skinburness marsh, Red-breasted Goose at Cardurnock and Brent Goose in a flock of pinks.

What an amazing winter for geese.

Craig Shaw

Spring migrant arrivals 2012

Below are listed (in taxonomic order) the earliest arrival dates for 2012, with locations, of the commoner summer migrants as reported at the time of writing. In some cases (e.g. Common Sandpiper, Blackcap and Chiffchaff) it is difficult to distinguish genuine migrants from overwintering birds so a bit of informed guesswork has been employed.

Ian Kinley

Grasshopper Warbler, Campfield, Darren Robson



Species	Location	Date
Common Sandpiper	Dalston	6 th April
Sandwich Tern	Walney	19 th March
Common Tern	Walney	27 th April
Arctic Tern	Walney	17 th April
Little Tern	Hodbarrow	25 th April
Cuckoo	Arnside	19 th April
Swift	Kendal	20 th April
Sand Martin	Moota Quarry	5 th March
Swallow	Campfield Marsh	28 th March
House Martin	Anthorn	19 th March
Tree Pipit	Tindale Tarn	12 th April
Yellow Wagtail	Longtown	16 th April
Redstart	Derwent Water	11 th April
Whinchat	Walney	30 th April
Wheatear	Walney	18 th March
Ring Ouzel	Geltsdale	23 rd March
Grasshopper Warbler	Campfield Marsh	18 th April
Sedge Warbler	Beckermest	12 th April
Reed Warbler	Walney	20 th April
Lesser Whitethroat	Campfield Marsh	22 rd April
Whitethroat	Walney	20 th April
Garden Warbler	Waterside	26 th April
Blackcap	Walney	29 st March
Wood Warbler	Gelt Woods	26 th April
Chiffchaff	Walney	13 th March
Willow Warbler	Old Sandsfield & Hodbarrow	25 th March
Spotted Flycatcher	Walney	2 nd May
Pied Flycatcher	Derwent Water	11 th April

Recent reports

The period covered is March to May 2012. 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



Long-tailed Duck, Soddy Gap, Craig Shaw

The lingering **Bewick's Swan** remained at Longtown to 10th March. **Whooper Swan** numbers gradually declined but northbound birds included a total of 184 at Walney, 56 over Thacka, Penrith; 35 at Grasmere, 19 on the Kent Estuary and 10 on the Leven Estuary in March followed by 17 on the Kent Estuary in April and two unseasonable birds there on 19th May.

Tundra Bean Geese were limited to six on the Irt Estuary near Ravenglass, two at Longtown and a single at Whitrigg. **Pink-footed Geese** remained in good numbers on the Inner Solway during March while a total of 550 late birds flew through Walney in the first week of May. Meanwhile **European White-fronted Geese** peaked at 23 at Lessonhall where a remarkable 80 **Greenland White-fronts** were also counted. Another nine **European White-fronts** were recorded at Longtown while two more **Greenland White-fronts** were on the Irt Estuary near Ravenglass. The blue morph **Lesser Snow Goose** reappeared on the Inner Solway, this time at Lessonhall and Raby Cote from 12th to 15th March while the **Ross's Goose** continued to associate with the **Barnacle Geese** to 9th April whereas the latter included 10,000 on Rockcliffe Marsh and 35 at Walney. Rampside hosted 62 dark-bellied **Brent Geese** while up to 153 pale-bellied birds were recorded at Walney where a dark-bellied individual was logged on 13th May.

A drake **Garganey** at North Plain from 26th March to 14th April was followed by two drakes and a duck there on 15th April and a drake at Braystones on 20th May. **Long-tailed Ducks** continued to linger at Longtown to 30th March,

Soddy Gap to 12th April and Walney to 27th May while two were seen at Bowness-on-Solway on 7th May. Redhead **Smew** were seen at Longtown Ponds on 18th to 19th March and Derwent Water on 13th March. Rare these days was a female **Ruddy Duck** at Watchtree N.R. in April. Other wildfowl counts in the period included c3,500 **Eider** between Foulney and Aldingham and 226 **Common Scoters** at Walney.

Divers to grebes

Red-throated Diver totals at coastal locations included 22 at Walney in March; 33 at Bowness-on-Solway and 22 at Walney in April and 45 at Bowness-on-Solway in May. The highest totals of both **Manx Shearwaters** – 117 in May – and **Gannets** - 115 in April and 175 in May – were recorded at Walney. **Shags** were restricted to Walney with monthly maxima of six in March and two in April. At least two **Bitterns** lingered at Siddick Pond during March and, less expectedly, one was at Arthuret Ponds, Longtown on 23rd March. **Little Egrets** consisted of 11 on the Kent Estuary, eight at Walney, four at Rampside, two on the Esk near Ravenglass, two in the Lyth Valley and one on the Inner Solway in March, followed by nine on the Kent Estuary, three at Walney and one on the Inner Solway in April then nine on the Kent Estuary and one at Walney in May. Meanwhile the **Great White Egret** remained at Campfield Marsh to 15th April. Three **Glossy Ibises** briefly visited Campfield Marsh on 28th April while the Leighton Moss bird made occasional forays into the county, appearing near Arnside on 18th, 25th and 26th April. A **White Stork** over Wetheral on 23rd March appeared next day at Houghton Hall Garden Centre near Carlisle. Of even more dubious provenance were singles around Tebay Services on the M6 and near Dalton-in-Furness, the latter a known escape from the nearby wildlife park. A **Spoonbill** lingered at Campfield Marsh from 2nd to 5th May. Scarcer grebes were limited to a **Red-necked** off Sellafield on 30th March

Raptors to waders

A **Black Kite** flew west over Gilpin Bridge near Levens on 26th May. Away from the vicinity of the Grizedale release scheme, a **Red Kite** was at Embleton on 7th March. At least two different **Marsh Harriers** were seen regularly near Arnside throughout the period while passage birds were seen in May at Walney, Maryport and Campfield Marsh. A **Rough-legged Buzzard** was a brief visitor to Geltsdale on 15th March.

The Bassenthwaite **Osprey** pair included a new male reared at the site in 2007 and three eggs were laid during April though just a single chick was hatched. At least three additional birds were also seen here, perhaps accounting for the three seen flying together over Derwent Water on 22nd May.



Whimbrel, Bowness-on-Solway, Darren Robson

Meanwhile, passage birds were noted in March at Finglandrigg Wood and Walney followed in April and May by individuals at Great Corby, the Irthing Valley, Wetheral, Longtown, Fisher Tarn, Killington Reser-

voir, Walney and on the Kent Estuary. There were also regular sightings on the Inner Solway in April and May. A **Common Crane** flew down the Gelt Valley on 25th May.

On 28th May, Cumbria's first **Black-winged Stilt** was an all-too-brief visitor to Hodbarrow. Two **Avocets** at Rockcliffe on 13th April were followed by up to two on the Kent Estuary in May and two at Walney on 27th May. Away from known or possible breeding sites, a **Little Ringed Plover** visited Campfield Marsh on 15th April. Two **Dotterel** on an eastern fell on 16th May were the only ones reported. A **Curlew Sandpiper** at Walney on 15th May was the only one of the spring. **Purple Sandpipers** began to dwindle in numbers with peak counts of 12 at Walney and 11 at Workington. Single **Ruff** were noted at several sites in March while up to three lingered at Campfield Marsh in April.

Also in April, 40+ **Common Snipe** and four **Jack Snipe** were counted on Rogersceugh farm wetland. A **Long-billed Dowitcher** lingered at Hodbarrow from 9th to 12th May, the sixth county record, the first away from the Solway and the first in spring. **Black-tailed Godwits** included 11 at North Plain in March before increasing somewhat in April when counts included an exceptional 1100 on the Kent Estuary



Long-billed Dowitcher, Hodbarrow, Ian Kinley

and 38 at North Plain followed in May by 48 near Arnside. **Whimbrel** included site maxima of 135 at Walney, 40 at Watchtree N.R., 28 at Kirksanton and 12 at Soddy Gap. Two over-wintering **Spotted Redshanks** remained on the Esk Estuary near Ravenglass in March before April brought a single to North Plain Farm. **Greenshank** were, as usual, most numerous at Walney where monthly maxima comprised nine in March and four in April. Elsewhere winter lingerers remained at Cavendish Dock and on the Mite Estuary in March before spring passage produced two at Carr Beds and one at Old Sandsfield.

Skuas to auks

In predominantly east or northeast winds, skua passage through the Inner Solway during April proved abysmal with several sightings of what may have been the same **Great Skua** from 8th followed by meagre totals of just one **Pomarine**, four **Arctic** and one **Great** by the month end. A brief spell of westerly winds in May provided something of a boost though totals remained modest with just 123 **Pomarine**, 35 **Arctic**, 13 **Great** and four **Long-tailed** logged during the month. Elsewhere, an **Arctic Skua** and two **Great Skuas** were seen at Workington while Walney logged three **Arctics** and two **Greats** in April and 10 **Arctics** and two **Greats** in May.

Kittiwakes included site maxima of 80 at Walney in March, 230 at Walney and 170 at Bowness-on-Solway in April and 500 at Bowness-on-Solway in May. A few **Little Gulls** appeared in March and April with two at Bowness-on-Solway, two at Workington and two at Walney followed in May by up to four at both Bowness-on-Solway and Longtown, two at Walney and a single at Hodbarrow. Cumbria's second **Laughing Gull**, a first-winter, entertained observers near Dalton-in-Furness on 17th and 18th March. **Mediterranean Gulls** remained scarce with just the usual one-legged bird at Workington in March followed by first-summerers at Soddy Gap and Workington in April and first-summerers at Walney and Bowness-on-Solway in May. An unseasonable juvenile **Iceland Gull** also appeared at Bowness-on-Solway on 17th May. The juvenile **Glaucous Gull** lingered between Maryport and Allonby to 5th March while the other long-stayer was seen intermittently in the Rockcliffe area to 5th April.

Single **Black Terns** at Killington Reservoir on 26th April and on the River Esk at Long-



Little Gull, Longtown, Tristan Reid



Black Tern, Longtown, Nick Franklin

town on 8th May were the only ones of the spring. A **Sandwich Tern** appeared inland at Windermere on 16th May. **Arctic Tern** passage during May brought site maxima of 630 at Bowness-on-Solway and 48 at Walney while inland records were limited to four at Killington Reservoir.

A **Puffin** was logged at Walney in April with two there in May while four at Bowness-on-Solway on 13th May were

particularly noteworthy. Walney also logged the only **Black Guillemot** away from St Bees Head, a single on 7th May, along with daily maxima of 100 **Guillemots** and 150 **Razorbills** in April.

Owls to buntings

Short-eared Owls continued to be recorded widely into April and included four at Broughton Dump, three at Soddy Gap, two on Foulney Island, one at Campfield Marsh and one at Walney. In addition, one was seen crossing the Inner Solway on several occasions in May and a single also lingered at Walney through May. A **Nightjar** flying over a Kendal garden at dusk on 25th May was a bizarre sighting. A **Bee-eater** found near Branthwaite on 29th May eluded most would-be observers while a **Hoopoe** was photographed near Stainton on 15th April.

Hooded Crows were restricted to a single at Walney in April and May. A good passage of **Goldcrests** was recorded at Walney during March, peaking at 60 on 15th. A roost count of 385 **Sand Martins** at Thacka Pond, Penrith on 2nd April was impressive. A **Dartford Warbler** appeared briefly at the rather unlikely location of Park Point near Arnside on 6th March, the



Sedge Warbler, Campfield, Roger Ridley

second for the county. A large fall of spring migrants on Walney Island on 2nd May included 310 **Willow Warblers**, 255 **Wheatears**, 46 **Blackcaps**, 12 **Whinchats**, 12 **Chiffchaffs**, eight **Redstarts**, seven **Grasshopper Warblers** and three **Tree Pipits**.

A male **Black Redstart** appeared at Workington on 22nd March and 7th April while a female/immature was on buildings at Eskmeals on 24th and 25th March. A **Water Pipit** was found amongst 16 **Rock Pipits** at Walney on 10th March and **Meadow Pipits** were also much in evidence on the island with a daily maximum of 510 in March. **Twite** flocks dwindled with a peak of 60 at Walney. **Common Crossbills** included 18 near Foulshaw. **Hawfinches** peaked at 17 at Grange-over-Sands, 14 at Sizergh Castle and two at Bowness-on-Windermere. Up to 10 **Snow Buntings** were on Helvellyn.

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

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



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Contents

Club news and announcements	33
Black Grouse return to South-east Cumbria <i>Graham Dunn</i>	38
A first for Cumbria & other highlights. Champagne moments	42
Thacka Beck - a new nature reserve near Penrith <i>Lee Schofield</i>	44
Bird ringing news – some strange movements <i>Robin Sellers</i>	46
Short notes <i>Spike Webb</i>	47
Cantabric Yellow-legged Gull - a Cumbrian visitor ? <i>Chris Hind</i>	48
The winter goose influx - a finders account <i>Craig Shaw</i>	52
Spring migrant arrivals 2012 <i>Ian Kinley</i>	53
Recent reports <i>Ian Kinley</i>	54

Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is September 1st 2012

If you have a computer: please send contributions to Dave Piercy

- on disk (your disk will be returned if requested); or
- as e-mail attachments to daveandkathypiercy@tiscali.co.uk

If you do not have a computer: please send in as clear a format as possible to Dave Piercy,
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