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***BIRD NEWS***  
***Vol. 31 No. 2 Summer 2020***

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Club news and announcements

Successful Little Ringed Plover nest 2020

Miscellaneous notes mainly from lockdown

Nocmig recording in lockdown

A winter wetland survey

The Sand Martin colony at Askam

Recent reports

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*Contents - see back page*

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## Club news and announcements

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### **AGM**

All being well the AGM will be held at Penrith United Reformed Church on Friday 2nd October 2020 at 7.30pm.

### **Vacancies on Council: Chair, Vice-chair x 2, Secretary, Treasurer.**

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 27th September).

### **Vacancies on Council: three ordinary members.**

We would welcome three new faces on council. Please feel free to put yourself forward. There are generally just three council meetings a year. If you would like to know more about what is involved please contact any current officers or members whose details are on the inside cover.

### **Long-eared Owl information request**

2020 has proved to be a bumper year for breeding Long-eared Owls, in very stark contrast to last year when we conducted the county survey! As of 1st July I am already aware of at least ten successful sites just in the north of the county where young have been heard/seen this summer.

I am very keen to hear from anyone who has been lucky enough to find breeding Long-eared Owls this spring/summer. I would be interested in any of the following information:

- Location of the nest site (as vague or specific as you like)
- Earliest date of begging chicks (and/or calling adults)
- Precise time of day calls were heard
- Nesting habitat (conifers/deciduous/mixed/hedge/scrub)
- Immediate surrounding hunting habitat

All this information will be most valuable for planning future surveys.

Many thanks, Pete Howard (Vice-Chair) [p.howard691@btinternet.com](mailto:p.howard691@btinternet.com)

### **Swift survey**

Many thanks to those surveyors who counted Swifts from their own homes during the lockdown. As restrictions are lifted you may feel encouraged to go further afield. Please ensure you stay within both the letter and the spirit of the law.

Details of the over 800 nest holes found so far will appear in the next newsletter. I ran out of room in this issue!

## Surviving the lockdown

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What the current situation is doing for me is making sure I sit down quietly in one or two places locally and just watch. One such place is a neighbour's garden. Here the birds and mice are well fed and it has been grand to just watch the comings and goings. Of particular interest one morning was the sight of an adult Coal Tit feeding two young Great Tits. This went on for several minutes with the youngsters adopting the typical "feed me" wing shaking approach.



*Coal Tit, Nr. Keswick,  
Tony Marsh*

On another occasion I watched in horror as an adult Great Spotted Woodpecker landed on the back of a young Blue Tit, which was feeding on the nuts, and literally hammered it to death. It happened all too quickly for me to intervene. Later though the adult woodpecker brought two young to the feeders and we had excellent views.

The other place I am able to visit is the fishing hut alongside the river. I take my dog and sit for long enough just watching. Early June saw a parade of Greylag Geese. There were six adults supervising 52 young. They all passed in a long line with the adults spread out to make sure the young behaved. Young Mallard were also being closely watched by the female and it was interesting to see the young dive under which they rarely do if ever as adults.

A Treecreeper was feeding young behind a piece of tree bark. Overhead in the last few weeks I have had good views of Goshawk, Osprey and Red Kite. So being locked up isn't that bad but I will be more than pleased to get back to normal.

*Mike Carrier*



*Rook, Nr. Keswick,  
Tony Marsh*

### Cross Fell query

Walking on 9th June up Cross Fell we saw large flocks of Black-headed Gulls, some Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and young Rooks. Does anybody know why they would be up there wheeling around and on the moss, grasses and sedges. They were about 500 metres up, not on the very top. What detrimental effect would this have on Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Curlew?

*Chris Evans* [hawkatburn@googlemail.com](mailto:hawkatburn@googlemail.com)

## Buzzard and Curlew interaction

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The first I became aware of the incident was the Curlew's persistent alarm call. I thought perhaps it was me upsetting it, but when I left the woodland cover at the south western entrance to Glasson Moss NNR and looked up above the sheep grazed pasture next to the path to Rogersceugh Farm I saw a Curlew flying round and round with a Buzzard circling about a few metres above it. The Buzzard was silent but the Curlew was constantly alarm calling. There was no physical interaction such as grappling or bombing as with corvids. I thought perhaps there might be young Curlew around but couldn't see any. After a few minutes of this behaviour the Buzzard headed south and the Curlew flew north towards Bowness Hall, still alarm calling. 28th May 2020. Has anyone else seen such interaction?



*Buzzard, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

Quentin Cox [quentin.cox68@outlook.com](mailto:quentin.cox68@outlook.com)

## Furloughed focus on summer migrants

My furloughed focus has been within walking distance of where I live in Staveley. Here's the list of dates:

March: Chiffchaff 19th, Wheatear 24th.

April: Willow Warbler 6th, Blackcap 8th, Swallow 10th, Common Sandpiper 14th, Redstart 17th, House Martin 20th, Garden Warbler 21st, Cuckoo 23rd, Pied Flycatcher 25th, Whinchat 27th, Swift 28th.

At the time of writing (1st May) I've yet to see or hear a Tree Pipit, where in previous years I would have heard one or more by now. Also, a couple of places where I usually see a Redstart have so far turned up nothing. Ditto the above about Whitethroat though their absence has been of more years duration. (I thought I might have heard, then seen one a few days ago in bushes by the main road but walking by there yesterday I heard a Blackcap). I didn't hear a Garden Warbler singing as early in April as usual but I'm pretty sure I heard one on the 21st, though I couldn't see the bird itself to check if it wasn't wearing a black cap.

In this world of lockdown I sometimes feel my senses are heightened, a bit like those British World War Two P.O.W.s in Germany who in their diaries detailed the movements of migrating birds. I wish I was so clever and dedicated and for that matter kept a diary (though I am glad I'm not a prisoner of war. "Tonk tonk tonk", I'm knocking on wood).

*.Matt Stephenson*

## Successful Little Ringed Plover nest 2020

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I have recorded Little Ringed Plovers locally each year for the past few years, and doubtless they have been visitors long before I started regularly birding the area. However until this year, I have failed to witness a successful breeding attempt.

To the best of my knowledge the birds arrived on the 24th of April, with nesting behaviour first observed on the 29th. The movement restrictions due to the virus meant that I was unable to visit the site as regularly as I would usually. Although the nest site is close enough to home, I needed to manage my time out of the house carefully so as to allow me to get some proper exercise as well as going birding. Cycling to the site became a neat solution to combine both these things, although did impose restrictions on time and freedom of movement (i.e. It's not that easy to push a bike through a scrubby area looking for migrants whilst holding your binoculars in the other hand!).

Further visits throughout April and May showed the pair sitting tight on the nest scrape which I had pinpointed by scanning downwards whilst lined up with a skyline feature until the position came into view. Then on the morning of May 23rd, a scan around revealed the adult pair along with four fledglings. They had moved onto a softer, less shingle covered area near to the nest site where they were all foraging. The adults called the chicks to them when any threat appeared, such as a passing gull or corvid, shielding them beneath their outstretched wings.

The subsequent easing of lockdown movement restrictions, combined with the hot and sunny weather conditions lead to an increase in recreational use on the Little Ringed Plover's territory. This sudden upsurge in disturbance following weeks of quiet, made me fear the worst for the chicks.

With only occasional sightings of the adults over the next week or so, I thought that they had perished. But on the 8th of June, with the weather cooler, breezier and overcast after heavy rain, the adult pair plus two young, now in juvenile plumage, were all feeding near to the nest site. This has led me to wonder whether the increased bankside disturbance following fledging has actually contributed to the success? Did the increase of recreational users, which at times was considerable, deter natural predators from using the area thereby allowing the chicks to forage and grow safely in nearby grassy areas?

Persistent low water levels had also provided extensive suitable nesting habitat. Recently however, more typically Cumbrian weather has caused these areas to be submerged once again. On my most recent visit, 22nd June neither adults nor juveniles were observed. I presume that they have now dispersed into suitable nearby habitat. The nest site is now below water level. All things considered, I think the combination of extraordinary circumstances, timing and conditions have contributed to this successful outcome.

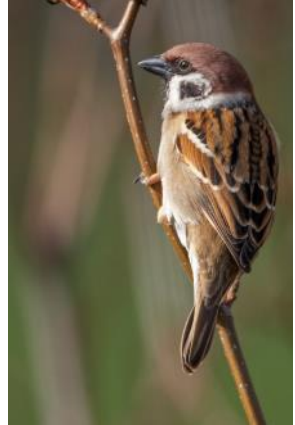
*Neil Whorton*

## Notes from near Penrith

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Where we live, near Penrith; there has been a severe non-occurrence of Swallows (just one pair nesting, when there would normally be three or four pairs), and House Martins doing a fly-by visit, but none stayed to nest, when there are usually at least three pairs. Could be that the weather catastrophe in Greece has had a major impact?

On a lighter note - back in January I erected a nest-box in a new position in the garden and fitted a remote camera to see what may happen....After a couple of days in late January several species of birds came to investigate: Great Tit, Blue Tit, Robin and Tree Sparrow. All taking turns to look inside and chase others out! It seemed that the Tree Sparrows had won the battle; by placing a few grassy twigs inside. Sorted? Not really, as for all the little battles that went on it was never finally occupied as a nest site - how fickle our feathered friends are!



*Tree Sparrow, Nr. Keswick, Tony Marsh*

Just last week I had a very close encounter with a Goldcrest, which was so engrossed looking for insects on the hanging flower baskets, just a couple of feet away that it did not see me, and I was able to watch this exquisite little bird for quite some time. It actually reminded me of a CBC jaunt on the Solway Firth sailing on a small fishing boat out of Maryport Harbour; sometime in the late 1980's, when a heavy mist came down and Goldcrests were landing on our garments! At the same time, various gulls were taking and eating small birds that had floundered on the calm, misty sea - mostly Wrens. On this trip we also saw a White-billed Diver, which I managed to film on video. I remember John Callion and Peter Ullrich, among others being on board - happy memories!

*Stephen Hill*

### **CBC Meeting programme 2020/2021**

**Friday Oct 2nd (AGM): Penrith United Reformed Church 7.30pm**

Members slide show by Mike Carrier, Jake Manson & Adam Moan

**Wednesday 6th January 2021: Tullie House 7.15pm** Joint with Carlisle NHS

Andre Farrar - 'Birds of moor and mountain - controversy or cooperation ?'

**Monday 8th March 2021: Friends House, Stramongate, Kendal**

The third Fred Gould Memorial Lecture joint with KNHS

Gary Gould - 'Nature through the lens'. A selection of slides by Fred Gould, showing a variety of flora and fauna.





*Roger Ridley's lockdown collage*



Lockdown and home schooling House Sparrow style, Cumrew 15th of May 2020



Kids are getting bratty and hungry for their breakfast after being up all night on their Xbox. Mum does her best but Dad has just spent the morning having a tiff with the bloke next door and posing, also scoffing the food himself and not feeding the kids. Later that day the kids fledge and leave home in disgust.

*Guy Broome*



## Notes from lockdown in Aspatria

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*Barn Owl, Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*

Our first two Swifts came back on 1st May. As usual they had to wait for the Starlings to fledge two weeks later before they could get in one of the three boxes. We've had four pairs of House Sparrows nesting in various places around the house, two boxes with Tree Sparrow, two with Blue Tit and one with Great Tit. Also Wrens nesting in their usual spot in the field shelter and a pair of Barn Owls that have frustratingly laid right at the back of the box under the camera where we can't see them! Keeping fingers crossed, as last year the male disappeared when the chicks were only a few days old in the middle of a cold wet spell and they didn't make it.

The other thing to note was the number of birds congregating to feed and gather mud around the sprinkler on some new sown grass in the field, it has been so dry they really appreciated some damp soil – Mistle Thrush, Blackbird and Starling all took advantage. Update! We have at least one Barn Owl chick! Walked into camera shot trying to eat a mouse last night.

Also just had three Starling families on the lawn/fat balls. six adults and 12 youngsters so they've obviously done pretty well. I'm having to ration them though – I put two fat balls out at nine o'clock this morning and they've just finished the last scraps now – 2pm!

Another plus to mention was getting the children more engaged with birds during lockdown. They've been doing some of the Wild Days lessons for their home schooling which has helped give a focus. Simon drew a Kittiwake as part of this and was then so excited to see real Kittiwakes at St Bees Head last week. We also found a Great Spotted Woodpecker nest in Lanthwaite woods and they spent ages watching the adults coming in and out and loved seeing the youngster sticking its head out on our second visit. Ellen has been designing a tiny woodland to hopefully create at her school. As part of a Geography project I asked Simon to design a poster to encourage people to visit Portugal and he chose to draw a Hoopoe as we saw one there in February. Lovely to see them getting so interested.

*Hazel Wainwright*

# Nocmig recording in lockdown

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## Introduction

This spring I recorded the calls of thirty-three species over our Ulverston home, including eight wildfowl, 11 waders, three thrushes, and enough 'unknowns' to keep anyone interested (was that Moorhen, Rook or a distant Crane in the early hours of 27th March??). The realisation that birds never seen during the day such as Coot, Water Rail and even Common Scoter would regularly pass over the house at night was amazing and left me feeling like I had started birding all over again - fortunately just at a time when published and online learning resources are widely available to cater for this growing aspect of birding.

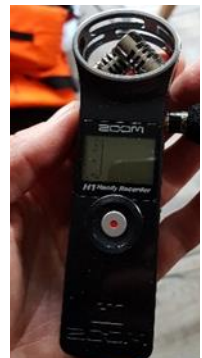
My own interest in bird sounds has built up over the last few years, during the same period in which many others have started recording and sharing bird sounds online. In particular, there has been a pronounced increase in the recording of nocturnal migrants ('nocmig'), and as my own confidence improved and new kit was bought, I found myself dabbling in this recording of night flight calls (NFCs). This coincided with the beginning of lockdown due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, which meant that many including myself had a lot of time on our hands with only limited travel possible, something which only increased the appreciation of local wildlife. The accompanying lack of noise from cars and planes made this a fantastic time for recording NFCs and those that I picked up in late March and early April spurred me on to continue recording throughout the spring migration period.

## The Site

Our urban house and small garden sit close to the south-eastern edge of Ulverston, surrounded by other houses and a scattering of trees and small green spaces. In terms of proximity to decent areas of breeding bird/stop-over habitats we are 300m from the closest farmland, 750m from Ulverston canal to the north, and almost 2km from the Leven Estuary to the east.

## Recording kit

We've had a couple of Zoom H1 recorders for years and have mostly used these connected to bat detectors during professional surveys. I have attempted to record birdsong with them but was left unimpressed by the built-in microphones which didn't compare too favourably with the voice recorder on my mobile phone. The addition of a plug-in Edutige ETM-001 microphone changed the performance massively. This omnidirectional microphone has more in-built gain (pre-amplification), and by plugging in earphones with the recorder switched on I quickly came to appreciate this, as previously silent gulls passing over at high altitude became audible, a blackbird singing at 50m distance became very loud and my wife asking if I'd like a cup of tea at



*Fig 1, Zoom H1 with Edutige mic*

my shoulder nearly deafened me. Although largely aimed at making videos and attaching to Go-pro cameras it seems to work well for recording birds, and even though a mic with in-built gain requires a source of energy, the single AA battery in the Zoom H1 worked perfectly for a single night's recording. The cost of the newer versions of the Zoom (H1n) is around £80, while the Edutige mic came in at £30.

I must add that I haven't had any experience with other hand-held recorders, of which a variety are available, with Tascam and Sony models regularly recommended. I have however started to use Audio-moth remote detectors which can be left for months at a time to record pre-programmed periods. These are proving to be a valuable addition to the field surveys I carry out and could be of use for targeted single species surveys (there's a whole separate article there), but some use them for Nocmig recording too. I used one for a single night alongside the Zoom set-up and it compared quite well, picking up almost all of the same birds but without the gain and with more 'noise.'



*Fig 2, Zoom H1 set up on tripod*

### Recording Method

The recorder was set up on a tripod in the centre of the back-garden and switched on at or before 'civil dusk.' It was then left switched on for the whole night, with the Zoom H1 splitting this period into files of 2hr 4minutes by default and storing this on the 32GB Sd card. Lo-cut filter and auto-level functions were switched off and format was switched to 'WAV' rather than 'MP3'. Local breeding birds which call frequently at night, including large gulls, corvids and owls were omitted from totals in this article (and from Trektellen submissions – see below), although Oystercatcher records, which are likely to show a mixture of breeding and passage birds, were included.

### Analysis

Freely available software now means that anyone can open recordings in sonogram format and pick out bird sounds by flicking through pre-set time periods relatively quickly, rather than having to listen back to the whole recording. Both Raven and Audacity software are widely used, although I've only tried the latter. There's a good guide for setting Audacity up in 'nocmig' mode at: <https://nocmig.com/configuring-audacity/>, and I've roughly followed this so that when I open a file in Audacity it displays the recording in Spectrogram format, showing zero to 10kHz (the vast majority of sounds produced falling within this range). I then zoom in until one minute of the recording is displayed. By clicking on the scroll right bar along the bottom I then look at each minute in turn, and in this way look through a whole night's recording in

## *Nocmig recording in lockdown*

much less than one hour if birds were few, and up to two hours if more birds or more difficult calls were encountered. Looking at pages showing less than one minute will show more detail, but will add more time to the analysis, and I've found that even the shortest calls of less than 100 milliseconds are displayed clearly at this setting.

When calls are seen on screen they can be quickly listened to and identified in many cases, but more difficult calls can be copied and opened in a new window. Here they can be zoomed in on, manipulated by using 'noise reduction', 'amplify' or 'high pass filter' functions, and exported for later reference or comparison (see figures 3 and 4).

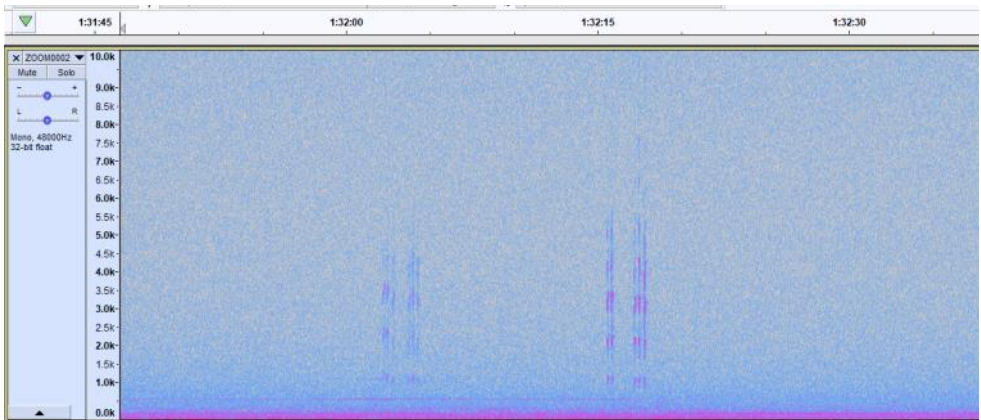


Figure 3, Moorhen repeated 'kek' call shown on 1-minute view

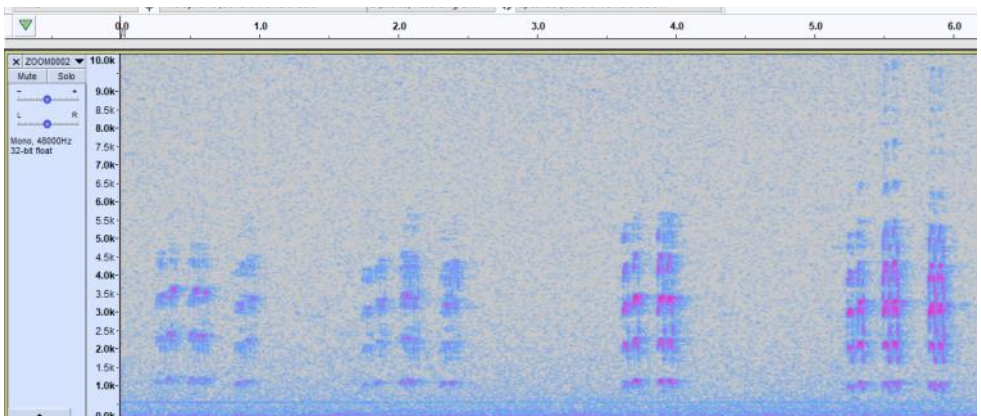


Figure 4, same Moorhen call with nine seconds of intervening time cut out, zoomed in to show just seven seconds

### Identification

Many of the birds I thought I knew well use different calls at night, or shorter fragments of their regular songs and calls, and I never thought I would end up spending so much time trying to separate Whimbrel from Little Grebe, Ringed Plover from Golden Plover or even Moorhen from Rook and Common Crane! While many of these will have to stay in the unknown box, many others can now be definitively identified by using a number of online resources which provide access to a rapidly building body of knowledge.

Perhaps the most well-known tool available for identifying bird sounds is the Xeno-canto website. Bird sound recorders from across the world share their recordings on this website and if you have an inkling of what your species might be, you can type it into their search and immediately have hundreds of recordings at your disposal for comparisons with your sound. It's also easy to upload your sound recordings to the site, and if you're really stumped you can upload to their 'Mysteries' section and get feedback from experts from across the UK and Europe. This has helped me identify Little Ringed Plover, Knot and Spotted Flycatcher NFCs and is a great way to share experiences of a wide range of people.

I also visit the nocmig.com website frequently to check on numerous sonograms of the more commonly heard migrants such as Coot, Water Rail, Moorhen and Little Grebe (as well as to look at more in depth articles on specific species/groups), and I'm constantly referring to 'The Sound Approach' website which is a mine of information regarding all types of bird sounds. Individual species accounts include numerous examples of calls and songs, and comparisons with similar species alongside their respective sonograms. This last aspect is essential and I no longer try to identify new or difficult recordings by sound alone, always looking at the extra detail shown in sonograms such as sound frequencies, length of call and resulting shape of the sound when displayed on-screen.

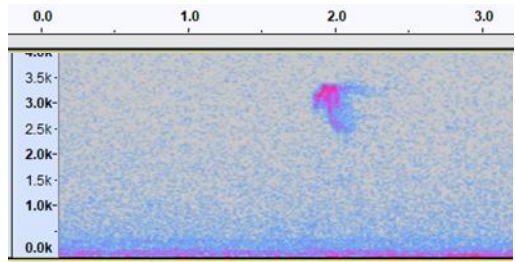


Fig. 5, the distinctive trace of a Little Ringed Plover, recorded 11th Apr 2020

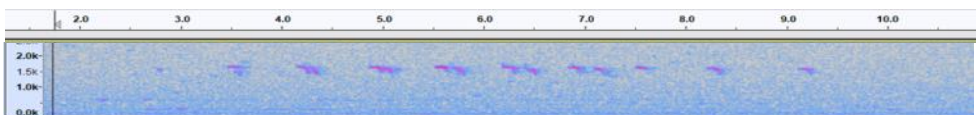


Fig. 6, sonogram showing passing Common Scoter calls, 31st March 2020

Species	No. of nights recorded	Total No. of flyovers	First date*	Last date*
Pink-footed Goose	2	4	04/04	08/04
Greylag Goose	1	1	22/04	22/04
Canada Goose	1	1	08/04	08/04
Shelduck	1	1	10/04	10/04
Teal	2	2	25/03	03/04
Wigeon	1	1	03/04	03/04
Mallard	14	26	04/04	26/05
Common Scoter	3	6	30/03	28/04
Grey Heron	3	3	26/03	08/04
Little Egret	1	1	26/05	26/05
Little Grebe	4	4	03/04	03/05
Water Rail	8	9	27/03	26/05
Moorhen	8	10	04/04	13/05
Coot	15	27	25/03	27/05
Oystercatcher	25	113	25/03	28/05
Golden Plover	3	3	10/04	16/05
Little Ringed Plover	3	3	11/04	27/05
Ringed Plover	2	3	06/04	08/04
Whimbrel	3	3	10/04	02/05
Curlew	6	8	25/03	03/05
Knot	1	1	02/05	02/05
Dunlin	4	4	08/04	02/05
Common Sandpiper	1	2	07/05	07/05
Redshank	6	6	10/04	03/05
Snipe	1	1	27/03	27/03
Common Gull	1	1	10/04	10/04
Black-headed Gull	2	2	09/04	25/04
Pied Wagtail	1	1	04/04	04/04
Blackbird	2	2	04/04	08/04
Song Thrush	1	1	25/03	25/03
Redwing	7	15	25/03	08/04
Spotted Flycatcher	2	2	20/05	26/05
Robin	1	1	13/05	13/05

Table 1, fly-over species recorded at Ulverston, 25th Mar to 29th May 2020

\*Dates given refer to the date on the evening the recorder was set.



### Fly-over birds recorded

Alongside local breeding birds/residents such as the large gulls, corvids, Tawny Owl and Barn Owl, 33 additional 'fly-over' species were recorded in 30 recording sessions from 25th March to 29th May. See Table 1.

Eight species were recorded on five or more nights: Mallard (14), Water Rail (8), Moorhen (8), Coot (15), Oystercatcher (25), Curlew (6), Redshank (6) and Redwing (7), while a further 12 species were recorded on only one night. In addition to the identified sounds shown in the table, another 15 calls were left in the unknown category.

### Data submission and Trektellen

The Trektellen website is used to share migration data from sites across Europe, and they are keen to receive information from those collecting data at least once a week through key migration periods. All of my data has been submitted to the site and it is great to know that this will help compile information on migratory birds across the continent. It is quick and easy to input data and to link details of a recorded bird sound to a Xeno-canto upload. I've done this for better recordings and for those submitted to 'Mysteries,' and where people add these details it adds value to the website and gives the reader access to huge amounts of mostly very recent information.

Referring to the 'analysis' section of the website allows you to look at summaries of information including yearly totals, phenology of migration and record counts. So for instance, I can look at a graph showing the phenology of Golden Plover migration – at an individual site, UK sites, or nocturnal migration sites only and quickly see how likely it is that I'll record Golden Plover on a given date. Alternatively I can look for patterns at my own site for a particular species (see figure 7).

#### ■ (h=213:02 / n=115) **Oystercatcher - average no. per hour/standard week**

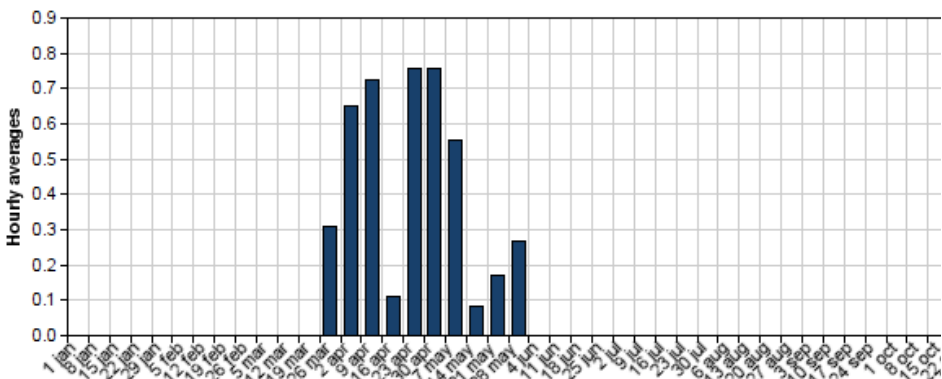


Figure 7, Oystercatcher NFCs recorded at Ulverston, 2020, taken from <https://www.trektellen.org/species/graph/0/2699/133/0?jaar=0>



### Discussion

I may never again have the time to record quite as much as I did this spring, and I'm very unlikely to have such quiet nights, which probably improved number of detections, quality of recordings and ultimately, successful identification of some of the sounds. Spring 2020 was also atypical in other ways – the UK experienced its sunniest spring on record and its fifth driest spring ever (Met Office, June 2020), another factor which encouraged more recording through this period.

There were some real surprises for me as I started recording NFCs – I never expected to record so many Water Rail throughout the March to May period for instance, but Trektellen shows that I was not alone, and that this species is commonly recorded at most sites. Until recently I assumed that birds moved to suitable breeding sites in March and April, and were then mostly sedentary until the end of the breeding period, and this was backed up by Cramp et al (1980) who suggest that migration virtually ceases by the end of April. Trektellen data shows a different story though, and this is one of the things that makes nocmiggng so exciting – the feeling that you are helping to uncover new information about the movements of some species, particularly the 'difficult' birds that are problematic to monitor in other ways.

Another of these difficult to monitor species is the Common Scoter and with the increase in NFC recording across the UK and elsewhere, the spring of 2020 saw unprecedented numbers of passing flocks registered as they migrated overland. I recorded one passing flock in March and then five in late April, and again Trektellen data shows that this is far from unusual, with other sites much further inland in the UK and in central France recording passing flocks. Numerous articles covering Common Scoter movements can be found online, painting a picture of how common overland migration is, and illustrating how useful nocmig recording can be in this respect.

Another surprise was in the lack of some species. Whimbrel for instance, which use surrounding fields around Ulverston and the Leven Estuary extensively in spring, were only recorded on three nights, and Common Sandpiper only on one night, despite large numbers breeding in Cumbria and further north. Of course, species travelling on a broad front may easily have missed Ulverston, not called while flying over our house, or may have flown too high for calls to be picked up, but questions raised by this first season of recording only encourage me to stick at it and see what comes in future migratory periods. I'm also keen to keep adding to the garden list, something which I never thought would include Scoters, Water Rail, Little Ringed Plover or Knot!

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<https://soundapproach.co.uk/> for anything concerned with bird sounds and recording, including in depth articles into individual species and groups.

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Mike Douglas



*Golden Plover, Hallbankgate, Adam Moan*

## A winter wetland bird survey.

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We agreed, Malcolm Priestley and I, that I would take on about fifteen tarns in the wetland survey. One of the out of the way tarns on my list was Three Dubs tarn above Sawrey on Claife Heights. I'd already done two of the tarns below, where Mallard and Tufted Duck exclusively occupied Moss Eccles Tarn, while those two species were joined (over my two visits) by Goldeneye, Mute Swan and Dabchick on Wise Een Tarn.



*Woodcock, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

Three Dubs Tarn was half surrounded by quite a mature and dense conifer plantation and even from just a look at the map I didn't feel very hopeful of finding much on there. But on the cold day I first arrived to view it coming down through the trees I disturbed a Woodcock (as it turned out the only one I came across during the survey). But that was it for that visit, as far as wetland birds went. (A Woodpigeon sat briefly in one of the tall conifers on the opposite bank but...).

The second visit was much later in the season, mid February I seem to recall. I hoped for better things and anticipated flushing the Woodcock once more as I approached, but this time nothing got up. I even did a circuit of the tarn thinking all the time of the Woodcock, but nothing. So I sat in the plantation looking out over the tarn and ate some peanuts and an apple which were in my bag from a previous excursion.

I got up to go and pulling on my backpack looked through the trees at the tarn where on the far side I thought I saw a ripple, the wake of something moving on the water surface. I shifted my position to get an unobstructed



*Mallard, River Derwent, Tony Marsh*

view. Yes, ducks! Where had they come from? Where had they been hiding? A handsome drake and his missus. I raised my arms above my head. It was okay, the Mallards didn't see my celebration, they kept on paddling, undisturbed.

*Matt Stephenson*

## The Sand Martin colony at Askam in Furness

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Bad weather a couple of winters ago resulted in a collapse of the sandy cliffs where the colony was situated at the north end of the village beside the Duddon estuary. Last summer the birds returned but didn't stay. This year they have returned and started tunnelling again into the new cliff line. By the 2nd May there were c30 new tunnels. As of 1st June there are c65 tunnels though some are probably aborted attempts. There is currently a lot of activity around the colony despite the fact that a lot of people pass close by on their daily exercise just a few yards away. Pictures are from 2nd May.

*Andrea Collins*

### A Bittern flew past

One interesting observation, yesterday (30th May). About 8.00 pm Pauline and I were standing in the front garden on High Knott Road, Arnside. A Bittern flew past heading north (towards the village and estuary). The bird was closely followed by a Jackdaw, which seemed to think it was chasing an owl or ? Buzzard. It took a second or two for us to realise the first bird was a Bittern! For a second we thought ? Grey Heron, but not white and too small. Also it was brown and striations visible on abdomen, and long beak, then ?? Purple Heron, but too small again. Nevertheless a good bit larger than the Jackdaw (a useful if serendipitous yardstick). Certainly not a Woodcock.

It can only be a Bittern; probably took no more than five minutes to fly here from Leighton Moss!

*Robert Blewitt*

## Recent reports

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The period covered is from March to May 2020 inclusive and for obvious reasons is somewhat curtailed compared with other years particularly missing the reports from Walney Observatory which closed on 24th March. Some records are unauthenticated and may require review.

### **Wildfowl**

Significant numbers of **Whooper Swan** remained during March with on 9th 26 at Walby, 68 at Kirkandrews on Eden and 112 at Kirkbride. Forty birds on the sea in the Outer Solway on 19th were presumably passage birds. 106 birds passed through Walney on 20th. On 21st 96 flew north west over Torver Low Common and 158 were heading north low over the sea at Silecroft. The final records were of 29 at Carlisle Airport on 5th April.

**Pink-footed Geese** on Wedholme Flow on 22nd March numbered 3000 with a further 9500 in Moricambe Bay. Final birds reported were 700 “on the empty beach” at Allonby – something perhaps not possible in a “normal” year with more disturbance. At Walney 1600 birds passed north between 4th and 20th March with a maximum day total of 600 on 14th. Two thousand **Barnacle Geese** were on Rockliffe Marsh on 15th March with the **Todd’s Canada Goose** which has been on the Inner Solway all winter. A further 1000 Barnacles were at Anthorn on 21st April but regular monitoring of the birds collecting on Rockliffe Marsh wasn’t possible this year but large numbers of birds were seen by several residents departing to the north east over Longtown on the evening of 6th May. At least one satellite tagged bird was amongst them according to WWT. The Walney **Pale-bellied Brent** flock had 405 birds on 11th March reducing to 107 by 23rd. One was in the Irt estuary on 25th May.

Sixty **Shelduck** were on Holme Dubh on 9th March. On 24th May a pair of **Teal** with seven very small chicks were near St Bees. Of note were a pair of **Pochard** photographed on the River Eden at Warwick Bridge on 25th April.

A day later a pair of **Mandarin Duck** were on the River Rothay at Ambleside.



*Garganey, Sandpiper Haws, Andrea Collins*

The only **Garganey** reported was a male at Sandscale Haws from 21st April, leaving by the end of the month and another from Longtown on 20th May. A male **Wigeon** was at Grinsdale on 4th May. In the first week of April **Common Scoter** were detected in overnight sound re-

cordings from both the south west and north of the county; they were part of an apparently exceptional movement through England; perhaps confirmation of another example of overland migration by “marine species”. **Gannets** were present in the Solway at Bowness on several days in mid May – 20 on 17th.

### **Partridges to Herons**

Two **Grey Partridge** were at Allonby at the end of March. **Quail** were at Sedgwick on 22nd May and Langwathby on 29th. Two **Great Northern Divers** passed Bowness on 23rd May with a single a day later. Twenty seven **Red-throated Divers** were off Walney on 23rd March with lesser numbers during the month. There were at least 25 at Workington Pier on 13th March. Silecroft numbers peaked at around 20 on 20th March and Bowness at around 50 on 18th May. Up to 20 **Manx Shearwaters** were off Lowca on 2nd May and at the end of the month up to 80 were in the Inner Solway in strong winds.



*Great White Egret,  
Darren Bell, Siddick*

Numbers of **Little Egret** at Rockliffe remained high with 24 there on 12th March and small numbers on the Solway thereafter, although two at Allonby on 7th May were unexpected. In the south of the county a **Great White Egret** was at Arnside on 6th and 15th March and at Milnethorpe on 17th May. At the end of May a bird was at Sunbiggin Tarn on 26th and at Siddick ponds on 28th. The only **Spoonbill** recorded were two birds over Arnside on 20th April. A **Common Crane** was reported over Loughrigg Fell on 26th April. A pair of **Little Grebes** with two juveniles were at Parkgate Tarn on 29th May.

### **Raptors to Waders**

**Osprey** started to return by the end of March with the early ones being a bird over Kendal on 24th March and at both Bassenthwaite Lake and Carlisle Airport on 31st. In late March two were flying languidly over the valley between Arnside Knott and Storth, In April, in the north. birds were at Crummock Water and Ambleside had quite a few sightings.

There was an increase in numbers of **Red Kite** reported mainly from the south of the county but also on occasions from the extreme north east corner where one was feeding on road kill pheasants, as



*Osprey, garden near  
Barrow, Ray Whittam*



well as north Lakes. One drifted north over Egremont on 6th May. A **Honey Buzzard** flew over on 28th May. A ringtail **Hen Harrier** was in the south on 2nd March. **Marsh Harrier** were recorded mainly from the southern mosses but others included a bird (probably immature male) from Ulverston on 21st April and sightings on the South Solway mosses. **Hobby** were at Sandale on 6th May and at Kendal on 23rd. The only report of **Merlin** was of one hunting Sanderling at Allonby on 22nd April. **Goshawk** was reported from the south of the county on 23rd March. A **Sparrowhawk** was seen taking a rat from below bird feeders at Ireby in early April.



*Sparrowhawk, near Maryport,  
Tommy Holden*

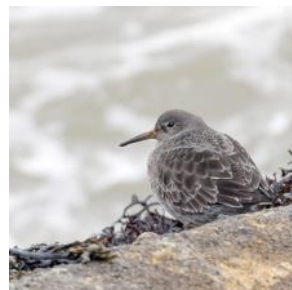


*Ringed Plover, Maryport,  
Tommy Holden*

Twelve pairs of **Oystercatcher** were on Carlisle Airport on 5th April. There were still large numbers on the south Solway in mid May with an estimated 2500 at Bowness on 17th. An **Avocet** spent one day at Siddick pond on 28th May. Around 700 **Golden Plover** were on Holme Dubh on 9th March, passage included 200 on Orton Scar on 14th April. A flock of 145 northern race birds stayed from the 5th to the 28th April, in a field at Hallbankgate.

There were several reports of breeding **Little Ringed Plover** but of note was a pair on the shores of Ullswater taking advantage of the very low water levels. A **Ringed Plover** was at Wetsleddale on 31st May. Three thousand **Knot** were on Walney on 7th March whilst in the north west 2000 were at Allonby on 17th April with a week later 700 near Maryport. Eight hundred **Sanderling** were present on 22nd April also at Allonby. The only **Curlew Sandpiper** was reported from Bowness on 12th May. Of note was a **Wood Sandpiper** at Grinsdale on 12th and 13th May.

Around 25 **Purple Sandpipers** were in the Foulshaw area on March 13th. There were widespread records of **Common Sandpiper** from 10th April (two on the River Eden, Carlisle) with birds at Staveley, Tebay, Portinscale and Bowness on Sol-



*Purple Sandpiper, Workington, Tony Marsh*



way reflecting widespread arrivals. Up to 400 **Redshank** were at Silloth Dock on high tide 8th March. Three **Greenshank** were at Glasson Point, a regular site on 12th March; singles were at Borwick Rails on 4th March and Eskmeals and Hodbarrow on 20th; another bird was at Allonby on 11th April. Most reports of **Whimbrel** came from the west coast from Lowca to Allonby the first being a single bird on 6th April; of note were 16 resting at Lowca on 20th April and 44 dropping into Lowca “from a great height” on 3rd May. Inland birds were 30 near Glasson Moss on 25th April, 14 at Thurstonfield on 27th and least expected a bird heard calling over Wetheral at 4.15 hrs on 30th April. A **Jack Snipe** was flushed from a ditch at Geltsdale on 3rd March and on 7th March one was with 13 **Common Snipe** at Cliburn Moss. On 22nd March Wedholme Flow had three **Ruff** and a **Long-billed Dowitcher**; presumably the bird that had been periodically at RSPB Campfield over the winter.

### **Skuas to Auks**

Once again weather patterns were not suitable to bring a decent skua passage and it wasn't until the middle of May that there were westerly winds and an easing of lockdown producing **Arctic**, **Pomarine** and **Great** on several days in the latter half of the month with a **Long-tail** on 23rd. A group of ten Long-tails seen very distantly, spiralled up into the clouds well to the west at the end of the month. As in 2019 an adult overwintering **Mediterranean Gull** was still present at Allonby in March. A **Yellow-legged Gull** was on Flimby Beach on 13th March. Five adult **Little Gulls** were off Walney on 1st March and singles were at Bowness on Solway on 16th & 17th March – much more unexpected was a bird going east over Brampton on 20th April. The usual **Kittiwake** passage in the Solway continued throughout with 75 on 7th March, 200 on 17th and 30 still on 23rd May, Big numbers of **Common Gull** — described as “hundreds” were off Bowness on 17th March, Apart from birds off St Bees a **Black Guillemot** was moving south off Lowca on 2nd May.

### **Pigeons to Buntings**

Despite the lockdown **Cuckoo** seemed to be widely reported with very early birds at Ambleside and Meathop Moss on 18th April then birds arriving from 20th April onwards. Both **Long** and **Short-eared Owls** appeared to benefit from the high number of voles with increased numbers of breeding birds be-



*Long-eared juvenile, and adult, Barry Robson.*

*Short-eared, Adam Moan*



*Tawny Owl, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

ing reported on the edges of the Pennines and in the Lake District. A **Tawny Owl** was seen to take a rat in a garden at Sedgwick. The first **Common Swift** was reported from Kendal on 19th April and widely thereafter but north winds from the end of April seemed to reduce numbers generally. 30 were at Maryport at the end of May so it will be interesting what the Swift Survey produces this year.

The first **Sand Martin** was a single heading north over Foulshaw on 9th March. The next were at Siddick Ponds on 18th March, then two over Grasmere and birds at Helton a day later were “the earliest date in the valley”.

The earliest **Swallows** reported was a bird at Ulverston on 3rd April and then quite widespread in the following week. Passage was noted on the coast at Allonby with a steady flow of 100 birds per hour north on 20th April and on the following day 200 moved north in an hour – keeping very low in a strong easterly wind. Even at the end of May there were still small numbers moving north. The first **House Martins** were by the Petteril on 26th March, then seemed to arrive widely in the first week of April.



*Swallow, Nr. Keswick, Tony Marsh*



*Citrine Wagtail, Siddick, Darren Bell*

A **Green Woodpecker** calling near Cotehill on 2nd May was unusual there. **Yellow Wagtails** were reported from the River Eden near Carlisle and at two sites in the mid Eden Valley including at one, a “Channel” plumaged bird. Siddick Pond continued to attract interesting birds with an adult **Citrine Wagtail** photographed there on 20th April. A **White Wagtail** was at Frizington on 9th April.



*Black Redstart, Siddick,  
Darren Bell*

Offshore northward passage of **Pied Wagtails** was noted at Lowca on 20th April and was “still in progress” on 3rd May. The earliest reported **Common Redstart** were on 7th April at both Thacka Nature Reserve Penrith and at Grange in Borrowdale. Siddick Ponds had also had a **Black Redstart** there on 25th March whilst another spent a short period in Castle Carrock village from 10th April. There had been a bird at Walney on 13th March.

The first **Northern Wheatear** were reported from Bannishead Quarry on March 19th then Lowca Brows on 22nd then more widely thereafter. **Whinchat** started to appear in mid April – Frizington on 18th, three at Milnthorpe on 20th and at Lowca on 22nd. Seven males were on Torver Low Common on 26th. Four **Stonechat** at Carlisle Airport frequented the area around the Vulcan Bomber in early March recalling memories of the Black Redstart that wintered there a few years ago. Seven pairs were in the Allonby area by 6th March.



*Stonechat with prey,  
Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

The first **Ring Ouzel** was reported from RSPB Geltsdale on 25th March then April 1st on Torver High Common. In early April two males flew north west over Kendal. Nine males – presumably including passage birds – were at Castle Carrock on 13th April with still eight on 17th. On 13th May there were two in song on top of Wastwater Screes (then three singing on 28th plus two fledged juveniles).



*Ring Ouzel, Geltsdale, Adam  
Moan*

The High Heskett area had **mixed thrush** flocks in March – 150 birds on 3rd and 200 by 22nd. More specifically 200 **Redwings** were at High Heskett on 6th March; the latest reported was a bird preening in a Penrith garden on 27th April. **Fieldfare** were reported widely throughout March and April with the latest being ten at Ainstable on 27th April; the biggest flock was at Fletchertown consisting of 160 birds moving north on 25th

## Recent reports

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March these plus 35 **Blackbirds** there on the same day were presumably part of a wider movement. Moresby old open cast site, now rehabilitated has a fantastic snail population and an estimated 11 pairs of **Song Thrush**.

A male **Blackcap** over-wintering in a Whitehaven garden was still present on various dates up to 9th April. The observers were unsure if this is resident or a change over of winter and summer visitors as breeding takes place around the garden area. Elsewhere the first heard was at Abbeytown on 26th March and widely thereafter. **Garden Warbler** were widely reported from 21st April.



*Grasshopper Warbler, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

Reports of singing **Lesser Whitethroat** came from Crosscanonby on 15th April and Allonby a day later. **Common Whitethroat** were at Beckermert on 14th April and Frizington and Abbeytown on 19th April. An early **Reed Warbler** was at Foulshaw on 22nd April. The first **Sedge Warbler** reported was at Portinscale and Beckermert on 10th April and more widely thereafter. All reports of **Grasshopper Warbler** came from the north west of the county the first being at Beckermert on 10th April then Braithwaite Moss on 14th April.

**Willow Warblers** first arrived on 4th April with song in Rickerby Park Carlisle and a day later one was in Ambleside and three at Thacka NR Penrith were “overnight arrivals”. A “decent fall” was noted at Allonby on 11th. On 20th April **Wood Warbler** was singing at Skelwith then on 23rd they were reported at Brampton and Derwent Water. One singing in Blackhow Wood, Dent, near Egremont, was well outside the core range of the species now.



*Wood Warbler, Ashness Woods,  
Tony Marsh*

A **Chiffchaff** at Hodbarrow on 4th March was presumed to be over-wintering. Elsewhere arrivals were widely reported, the first being on Walney on 14th March and then 19th at Harrington and Abbeytown; it is interesting that nine at Fletchertown on 25th coincided with large numbers of thrushes there suggesting a wide move-





*Spotted Flycatcher, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

ment. The long staying **Siberian Chiffchaffs** were still present at Longtown Sewage Farm in early March with the last report being two on 2nd March.

**Spotted Flycatchers** arrived in the first week of May. One was seen feeding young near Smardale on 28th May. The first **Pied Flycatcher** was in Naddle Forest on 7th April; presumably a passage bird was at Harrington NR on 21st April. A **Great Grey Shrike** was present at Craghead, Coniston from 4th to at least 13th of March. Three **Bramblings** at Sedbergh on 11th March were "first for some time"; 20 were in Wasdale on 16th and the last was a male at Keswick on 20th.

One regular recorder reported more **Greenfinches** in the Blencowe and surrounding area than the previous ten years. At the end of March several small mixed flocks of **Redpoll**, **Goldfinch**, **Linnets** and **Meadow Pipits** were observed moving north at Allonby. Over 120 Linnets were at St. Bees on 16th March.



*Reed Bunting, Portinscale, Tony Marsh*

The only report of **Twite** were ten at Rockliffe Marsh on 15th March. Twelve **Crossbills** were at Uldale near Egremont on 28th April. **Hawfinch** numbers at Sizergh Castle peaked at ten on 16th March with birds also seen at Beetham in April and May, Kendal in April and at Ambleside in early May. Three **Snow Buntings** were on Seatallen on 18th March. **Yellowhammers** were regular at Waterside, Wigton during the winter with 20 there on 18th March.

*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](mailto: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](http://www.cumbriabirdclub.org.uk) for details of how to do so.*

*Bob Jones & Dave Piercy*

## Contents

<b>Club news and announcements</b> .....	31
<b>Surviving the lockdown</b> <i>Mike Carrier</i> .....	32
<b>Cross Fell query</b> <i>Chris Evans</i> .....	32
<b>Buzzard and Curlew interaction</b> <i>Quentin Cox</i> .....	33
<b>Furloughed focus on summer migrants</b> <i>Matt Stephenson</i> .....	33
<b>Successful Little Ringed Plover nest 2020</b> <i>Neil Whorton</i> .....	34
<b>Notes from near Penrith</b> <i>Stephen Hill</i> .....	35
<b>CBC Meetings programme</b> .....	35
<b>Lockdown collage</b> <i>Roger Ridley</i> .....	36
<b>Lockdown House Sparrow style</b> <i>Guy Broome</i> .....	36
<b>Notes from lockdown in Aspatria</b> <i>Hazel Wainwright</i> .....	37
<b>Nocmig recording in lockdown</b> <i>Mike Douglas</i> .....	38
<b>A winter wetland survey</b> <i>Matt Stephenson</i> .....	46
<b>The Sand Martin colony at Askam in Furness</b> <i>Andrea Collins</i> .....	47
<b>A Bittern flew by</b> <i>Robert Blewitt</i> .....	47
<b>Recent reports</b> <i>Bob Jones and Dave Piercy</i> .....	48

## Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is September 1st 2020  
Please send contributions to Dave Piercy (details inside cover)

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## Cumbria Bird Club Website

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

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