



BIRD NEWS
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Twinned with Cumberland Bird Observers Club

New South Wales, Australia

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

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please contact the Secretary who holds some.



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Club news and announcements

An introduction to the new Secretary Sue King

I moved to Grange-over-Sands four years ago and am still discovering the many delights of birding in the south Lakes and Cumbria in general. As a new resident I've found CBC to be a mine of information and am looking forward to acting as Secretary to the committee.

I've recently retired from my job as an environmental consultant where my main role was providing ornithology advice to developers and government departments on offshore wind farms, mainly in the North Sea but I continue to undertake some onshore bird and plant survey work, including in Cumbria. Locally, I carry out the Leven Estuary WeBS count and wader surveys in the Winster valley.



Highlights of my birding over the years include working on a Zino's Petrel conservation project in Madeira and a study of interactions between nesting Peregrines and rock climbers for the British Mountaineering Council.

Reminder - Subscriptions - Standing Orders and PayPal payments

From 1st April 2022 the annual subscription rates will be raised, as noted in the last newsletter.

Rates are now: Joint/Family £25; Single/Corporate £20. A reduced rate for those unable to afford the above is available on application to council. The new rate is particularly to cover the substantial increase in printing and postage costs of the annual Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria report.

If you pay your subscription by standing order but do not use online banking, please inform your bank as soon as possible of the new rate to be paid as above.

If you joined online and your subscription is paid annually either directly via PayPal or your own credit/debit card, CBC will amend your payment to the new rate by April 2022. At this point you will automatically be sent an e-mail informing you of the change. At this point you have the option to unsubscribe and resign your membership,

Sue King



Rooks, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

2022 CBC Rookery Survey

We still need more volunteers to help with the Rookery Survey as detailed in the last newsletter. Please help by taking on a 10 kilometre square or a half/quarter 10km square from the list of vacant squares below to achieve a complete count of all Cumbrian Rookeries between April 6th and 24th.

SD28(North Furness)
NY02(Branthwaite area)
NY12(Loweswater area)
NY23(Uldale area)
NY24(Wigton)
NY31(Thirlmere/South Ullswater)
NY32(Blencathra area)
NY33(Upper Caldew Valley)
NY34(Lower Caldew Valley)
NY42(North Ullswater area)
NY43(Skelton area)
NY45(Lower Eden Valley)
NY52(Great Strickland area)
NY53(Great Salkeld area)
NY45(Armathwaite area).

Instructions, recording forms and information from the 2013 survey will be dispatched soon. If you can help please contact:

Malcolm Priestley, Havera Bank East, Howgill Lane, Sedbergh, LA10 5HB
e-mail: mmphavera@hotmail.co.uk tel: 015396 20104

WeBS Counters needed

WeBS surveyors monitor the UK's internationally important non-breeding waterbirds. Following a tradition begun in 1947, wetland sites are counted once per month, providing data for population and trends in abundance and distribution. The network of sites legally protected for their importance to wintering waterbirds depends fundamentally on the WeBS counts. Counts include wildfowl, waders, rails, divers, grebes, cormorants and herons. Gulls and terns are optionally included.



Pintail, Campfield, Roger Ridley

Time/skill required: One visit per month, preferably on the Sunday core count priority date. The ability to identify waterbirds that regularly occur at your allocated WeBS site.

We are looking particularly for a counter to help out at Border and Calvo Marshes near Abbeytown. These are large marshes with a long walk where a knowledge of the geography of the marshes and the tides is essential to count safely. A few counts can be carried out alongside the existing counter to find the best way to count the section. The area holds good numbers of Barnacle Geese, Wigeon, Dunlin, Curlew and a host of other waterbirds – a great day's birding once a month and chance to contribute to an important survey, helping protect the UK's most important bird sites.

If interested please contact Frank Mawby fjmawby@redshank.org.uk for further details

Help with Lancaster and District BWS atlas needed

Anyone out there with a regular local patch in SD48, 58 or 68 (squares south of OS line SD90000) or tetrads D (chunk of urban Grange), E (Eggerslack wood etc) in SD47 might like to contact me to help with the LDBWS breeding bird Atlas.. Pete Marsh PMrsh123@aol.com

CBC New Year bird list challenge 2022

At the start of the New Year, with a line under the previous year's list, comes the opportunity for a new beginning and apart from anything else it provides the motivation to get out and about in winter. The idea also allows for a sustainable approach in that it has to be self powered and thereby limited to how long you wanted to be out, how far you could cover and which habitats you could include in your outing.

In 2021 we had a cold snap of weather in the first days of January which made an impact. Despite this we had nine lists sent in from around the county. This year in milder weather we only had seven lists, so where was everyone else? The results of this small event prove interesting, now with two years worth of results.

The Challenge can be taken at any level and there is no need to be put off by thoughts that you cannot achieve a high scoring list, so it is less competitive and more of a personal challenge. In 2021 Barbara Nelson was unable to get down off Cold Fell in W. Cumbria, due to the iced up road conditions, so set out from home and still managed 28 species. At the other end of the scale Walney Island has produced the highest score of 80 species in both years.



Bullfinch, Campfield, Roger Ridley

Over the two years the small sample of venues, with Walney Island in the south west, Whitehaven in the west, Campfield and Longtown in the north, Geltsdale and Castle Carrock in the north east, Derwent Water and Buttermere centrally placed, Clifton Moor, Penrith in the east and Ulverston/

Roudsea in the south, have achieved a good spread across the county resulting in a total species count of 111 in 2021 and 112 in 2022 with eight species only seen in one of the years giving an overall total of 120 species approximately the same total achieved by all teams in past Winter bird race events.

'Listers' have also sent in lists for both years enabling them to gain a comparative score by improving or equalling their previous score. Hence Peter Howard (Longtown) and Adam Moan (Castle Carrock/Geltsdale) improved by +3 this year while Colin Raven at Walney scored 0 and Dave and Kathy Piercy at Derwent Water +4. Mike Douglas at Ulverston managed a +15 score and Mike and Lyn Mills (Whitehaven area) -2!

It would be good to get more participation next year.

Mike and Lyn Mills

Club outing to Foulney March 5th

Ten members gathered in the reserve car park just off the Roa Island causeway on a day of interesting weather – it was absolutely glorious sunshine but there was a biting wind from the north east. We had a little bit of time before the Foulney causeway would be inundated, so leader Mike Douglass suggested we looked at the birds in Walney Channel first. The whole group enjoyed great views of Golden Plover in light that showed them at their best.



Golden Plover Anthorn, Roger Ridley

There were decent numbers of Brent Geese in the channel, and others in the lee of Foulney Island. Mike explained that often the Pale-bellied birds were west of the Roa causeway and Dark-bellied birds to the east, and that was pretty much how it was for our visit.

As we crossed the Foulney causeway we saw plenty of additions to the trip list, including both Meadow and Rock Pipits and a singing Skylark. There were plenty of Wigeon, but unfortunately no Pintail among them. I had hoped that there might be a few Whooper Swans on the move, but the wind was too strong and in the wrong direction for that.

On the island marooned from the mainland we initially worked through the wildfowl on and around the spit. Among the cooing Eiders were a few each of Great Crested Grebe and Red-breasted Merganser. There were several wader roosts to work through. A large group of Dunlin we tackled first didn't have anything else among them, though there were Turnstones and Ringed Plover in the vicinity. Other mixed assemblies included Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey Plover and Knot. There were particularly good numbers of Grey Plover..

For our lunch stop we perched on the beach on the south east tip, where we had some respite from the wind. There were another group sitting out the tide and they were taking photographs of Grey Seals lingering offshore; it was easy to see why as they were approaching fairly close inshore. If you could forget the wind behind the ridge it was easy to convince yourself we were somewhere far more exotic with the sun glinting on the sea.

Going as close as we could to the spit without disturbing the Eider we saw a few Snipe and a handful of Linnet. Mike picked up a Red-throated Diver but it was moving quickly on the racing ebb tide and it was a challenge to get good views. The tide dropped just in time for me to get across the emerging causeway to watch Barrow v Walsall – I might have been better having been stranded a bit longer!

Stephen Dunstan

Outdoor meetings for early 2022

Sat. 16th April. Watchtree Nature Reserve, Wiggonby, Carlisle with Frank Mawby. Varied habitats and early spring migrants.

Sat. 14th May. Crossscanonby Reserve and shore with John Callion.

Sat. 28th May. Geltsdale with Chris Hind and Adam Moan.
Whinchats will be back on the RSPB upland reserve.

For more information and **booking** email meetings@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk or phone Mike and Lyn on 01946 590616.

There are locations around Cumbria which you may not have visited and not had the opportunity to explore. We have selected a few sites for visits with guides who know the patch, its birds and natural history thereby making a sociable opportunity for small groups.

Group size will be limited to 8-10 people pre booked through our meetings organisers Mike and Lyn Mills. Under 16s, who we would encourage to attend, will need to be accompanied by an adult and all who attend must take personal responsibility – clothing, footwear, food and drink requirements etc. Our guides for visits will provide the information and guidance.



The poster features a scenic background image of a stone building in a green valley. A semi-transparent green box contains the text. In the top right corner, there is a logo of a bird in flight with the letters 'BBS' below it.

BBS training days
For the Yorkshire Dales National Park

Session 1: **6th April**, 7pm (virtual)
Session 2: **11th April**, 7pm (virtual)
Session 3: **23rd April**, 9am (Thornton Rust Village Hall)

Book your place at: bit.ly/YDNP_BBS_training

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Bird surveys using remote audio devices

CBC are aiming to carry out a number of surveys using remote audio devices (Audiomoths) in the near future and are keen to hear from members who would like to get involved. Having recently acquired funding for a further eight devices from Kendal NHS dissolution fund, CBC will soon have 12 Audiomoths for use on specific species surveys.

Audiomoths are the audio equivalent of camera traps and the use of this technology will allow many hours of recordings to be taken over a period of weeks or months, without the need for people to be present at the best detection periods (often dusk and dawn). Data can then be downloaded and scanned for the songs of target species.

A trial run will take place in 2022, installing devices in potential Nightjar habitat in the county. You could help by installing and retrieving pre-programmed Audiomoths, or alternatively you could learn how to set up the devices yourself and then look at the resulting data using free software. Please contact Mike Douglas if interested. Training in Audiomoth set up and analysis will be given in May 2022.

Mike Douglas – taz.mike@yahoo.co.uk



Nuthatch, Harrington, Tony Marsh

Starling murmuration

This winter, one of my ambitions has been to observe one of the great natural wonders of the world – a starling murmuration. I studied the internet and spent quite a lot of time and fuel driving round Gretna and Longtown areas. Then I asked Dave Piercy, who advised me to park at the defunct Llama Karma Kafe on the A66.

On Friday, 7th January 2022, the calm weather conditions were promising so I drove from Penrith towards Appelby on the A66, however the Llama Karma Kafe is not only closed, but there is little evidence which building it might have been. I drove rather too far, turning back at Temple Sowerby, and driving up towards Centre Parcs where I



Starlings, Siddick, Tony Marsh

stood up on a gate and looked in all directions, and saw nothing. Then I parked at Brougham Castle and wandered on the icy road keeping an eye open and making enquiries from random passers-by. Some looked puzzled, but one man actually pointed towards Penrith and said he'd seen one in the morning. I didn't think starlings murmured in the mornings but this was the best lead so far.

I did see flocks of 50 to 100 all heading North West so decided to "follow those birds". I drove back to the roundabout and along the A686 signposted Alston. There they were. About a mile from the roundabout I turned into a newish housing scheme on the left (NY 531 300) and parked. The murmuration flew over my head (as I sensed messages dropping from the sky onto my head and shoulders I remembered the advice to bring an umbrella) and wheeled around, metamorphosing into mythical animals and weird shapes, then occasionally splitting but more coming together and growing in number as other small flocks joined in.

I could hear the wing beats. The shape shifted in the sky like a single living thing, it was hard to believe the entity was made up of individual birds. It was stupendous. A dog walker paused briefly otherwise I was the sole appreciative audience. Suddenly the flock gravitated towards the trees south of the road where another building project is taking place, and appeared to flow like a waterfall into some mature trees. Another half continued to murmurate for a few minutes. The show was over about 4.30.

I will definitely return for another showing.

Dee Gaffney

Swifts and Red Sixty Seven

Last December the sad but not unexpected news was published, that Swifts have been added to the UK red list of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC), with an official decline of 58% over the last 25 years. It is only a quirk of the system that Swifts were not on the red list earlier. One of the criteria for red-listing is a population decline of 50% over 25 years, but the problem for Swifts was that we did not have records for 25 years, even though their rate of decline was already greater than 50%.

Red is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action. The first BoCC review was in 1996, assessing the fortunes of our breeding and wintering birds, and it takes place every five years. House Martins too have now been red-listed, with a decline of 57%, and Greenfinch went straight from green to red listing. In total the red list has now increased from 67 to 70 species.



“Red Sixty Seven” is a book that we wish did not exist. It is a collaboration of 67 authors and 67 artists dedicated to all the birds that were on the UK red list of BoCC until last year. Each bird is beautifully illustrated on separate pages, in a very wide variety of artistic styles. (Our son, Ben, wrote the text for the Lesser Redpoll !). It is published by the BTO and although currently out of print, it is due to be re-issued later this year (should it be called Red Seventy?), with proceeds going to bird conservation. On the BTO website you can browse through the entire book, clicking past each and every bird.

So what can we do? For Swifts the future is in our hands. We must encourage people not to block up the entrance holes to nest sites when renovations are done. Also to increase nest sites by putting up boxes and installing internal nest bricks. It is simple and inexpensive so let's get on and spread the word. New buildings with sealed eaves and walls offer no nesting opportunities, so the future looks bleak unless we act.

NB: We now have a facebook page for Sedbergh Community Swifts.

Tanya & Edmund Hoare

Red in tooth and claw

House Sparrows

I and many neighbours feed birds so we have a thriving population of House Sparrows. I always thought of them as rather sweet and sociable, but no longer. On Saturday 5th March, a nice sunny morning, I observed a major argument between two sparrows on the lawn. The aggressor seemed to be trying to peck the other to death and the subordinate sparrow made desperate attempts to escape while the superior bird held it with one foot and pecked very unkindly.

My first instinct was to intervene but instead I just watched. After about a minute the subordinate managed to get on the wing and flapped frantically about five metres to land on the top of a Beech hedge. The aggressor chased for a few metres then decided to go elsewhere. The aggressor was a female, the subordinate might have been male or female – I think female, but was so bedraggled it was hard to tell. There was definitely a bleeding head wound, so I thought the poor bird had suffered enough without me disturbing it any more. It sat on the hedge for at least an hour, almost invisible camouflaged against the Beech leaves. Has anyone observed such behaviour before?

Dee Gaffney



Great Tit, Portinscale, Tony Marsh



Treecreeper, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

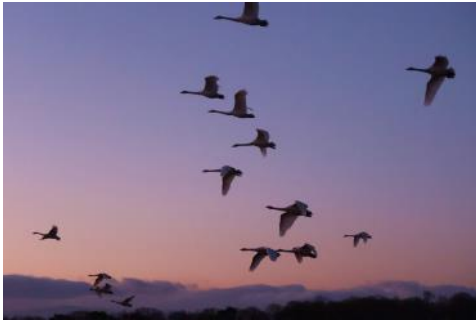
Great Tit

I was observing a Treecreeper at Killington last week, as it was moving from tree to tree a Great Tit was harassing it and followed the Treecreeper where ever it went. It looked like the Great Tit was trying to steal food that the Treecreeper was finding. a bit reminiscent of Skuas with seabirds. I watched for about 15 minutes. The Great Tit waited till the right moment and then pounced whenever food was found.. I have never seen this behaviour before. Do you know if any other birders have seen this behaviour?

Gary Gould

Whoopers and Pink-feet at Wedholme Flow

Early doors, 28th February 2022



Three of us: Frank Mawby, Stephen Hewitt and Guy Broome met up at Wedholme Flow car park at 6.00 am. Get up times ranged from 4.00 am to 5.30 am. This was part of the co-ordinated Inner Solway Pink-foot count and Frank had been keeping an eye on large flocks of Pink-feet and Whoopers over-night roosting on the Flow. I was filming and Frank was familiar with the exact flight paths that would see the Swans flying right over the dawn pre-sunrise.

After a 30 minute walk to the middle of the Flow we were rewarded with 215 Whoopers and 3700 Pink-feet lifting off in the splendid light of dawn and flying across the imminent sunrise, for me, one of my best birding photography moments ever. We were lucky with the weather with a clear morning and just enough cloud in the East to give a reflective pink sky.

These are a sample of still images (for photographers, taken at 40,000 ISOS with a 100mm lens). The video film will be posted on Carlisle Natural History Society website.



Guy Broome

Seventy years of bird nesting

This Spring it will be seventy years since my Dad showed me a Robin's nest, hidden in a mossy bank close to the River Derwent between Clifton and Camerton. The nest contained five speckly red eggs over a white background in a deep cup lined with horse-hair.



Grey Wagtail, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

I was hooked and since then have spent every breeding season looking for bird's nests; initially trying to discover more about the species that were nesting close to where I lived, and trying to outwit the birds; after all, no bird's nest is meant to be discovered or accessed. Many species go to great lengths to keep their nests, eggs and chicks safe. Sea-birds nest on precipitous cliffs, Rooks on the highest branches of the tallest trees, woodpeckers and tits in cavities, warblers in the thickest of cover, open nesting waders use cryptic colouration of both eggs and chicks to evade predation.

Before I was ten, I found Dippers with their technical constructed nests under bridges and tree roots, Grey Wagtails on the banks of the River Marron and Lostrigg Beck at Bridgefoot, Long-tailed Tits in stands of gorse or hawthorn, Stock Doves in tree cavities, Lapwing and Curlew on the moors and ploughed spring fields close to home. It was only about then, that I started to understand the changing seasons and started to discover the mystery of migration.

Late spring brought new challenges, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Blackcap nested within reach of home; these nests were either on, or close to the ground, hidden in bramble tangles or thick ground cover.

These early years in the west Cumbrian countryside, then, still untouched by chemicals and the destructive hand of man were an idyll for me; one that was soon to be shattered by moving house!

About 1956 we moved to Workington, only four miles away in distance, but shock waves away in reality. We rented a grey two bed-



Long-tailed Tit, Keswick, Tony Marsh

roomed terrace house on the edge of the Steelworks, outside toilet, no running hot water or bathroom, or heating without the fire. The Solway Coal Mine and Workington Harbour and Docks within a mile. Everything seemed dark, ugly, noisy and smelly compared to my rural start to life.

Thankfully, within two years we had moved to a new housing estate on the north side of town; what ecstasy when I discovered Siddick Pond and shore at my back door, about this time I also got my first pair of binoculars.

Siddick introduced me to new species, not only nesting, but passage migrants and winter visitors. I was in my element searching for the nests of Reed and Sedge Warblers, Whitethroat, Reed Bunting and the 'impossible' Grasshopper Warbler around the pond, Tufted Duck and Pochard nesting in the large dense grasses, on the water in floating vegetation I found Little Grebe, Coot and Moorhen, together with Little Tern, Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher on the shingly shore.

Redshanks and Lapwings also nested in the rough fields around the pond and close to the shore, and once I found the nest of the fabulous Yellow Wagtail. About the same time I went north on my bike to Mawbray and found the now 'lost' Corn Bunting nesting in clumps of thistles.



Reed Bunting, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Having once climbed to a Carrion Crow's nest and discovering I was afraid of heights, I concentrated my efforts at lower levels!

In 1972, I got married, bought a car, moved to High Harrington, and, perhaps, ornithologically speaking, more important, discovered and joined the British Trust for Ornithology!

Soon, I met Bob Spencer, the head of Bird Ringing and a native of Loweswater; he told me the value of information from data collected from breeding birds and their nests, he introduced me to the Nest Record and Bird Ringing scheme, and the value of science as a conservation tool. All of this seemed a good fit for what I had been doing for the previous twenty years, but gave a fulfillment and a sense of purpose.

Seventy years of bird nesting

Quickly I gained a ringing permit, during the winter, constructed and erected over a hundred nest boxes in the Loweswater and Wythop valleys. In anticipation of the following May I could hardly wait, I needn't have worried, I had over thirty Pied Flycatcher nests, half a dozen Redstarts and lots of tits.

That June, I ringed over 150 nestling Pied Flycatchers - I was entranced and captured, and so it continues to this day. We annually, collect data on first egg dates, clutch size, number of chicks hatched from eggs laid and number of chicks fledged from chicks hatched. Through this study, I learned how synchronized the nesting of single brooded Pied Flycatchers are to the short span of defoliating caterpillars.



*Blackbird, Portinscale,
Tony Marsh*

A car gave me opportunities to get to less easy places, in 1978, I found my first Dotterel nest on one on the Buttermere Fells, found Dunlin and Golden Plover in the Pennines, Merlin, Short-eared Owl, Ring Ouzel and Whinchat in Skiddaw Forest.

In 2012, I moved to Allonby and studied Stonechat and Grasshopper Warbler nests between the high tide line and the coastal path, I found Rock Pipits nesting in the old industrial relict buildings around Maryport Harbour. Also, I discovered Reed Buntings nesting in atypical dry habitat of marram grass only a few metres above the high tide line.



Dunnock, Stanwix, Roger Ridley

In my garden I have Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Dunnock and Goldfinch nesting each year; House and Tree Sparrows nest in my boxes fixed to the Apple and Willow trees. Occasionally I have Robin and Blackcap nesting too.

Data from my Grasshopper Warbler nests (mostly, but not exclusively from Allonby) has shown that two clutches is the norm, and, if the first nest is successful, the following nest will be very close to the previous one, generally within ten metres, if the first nest fails, the second is usually more than 100 metres away.



Stonechat, Workington, Tony Marsh

My studies with Stonechats, which includes colour-ringing the nestlings has shown that females generally move more than 25km from their natal area for their first breeding year, whereas males seldom move more than 10km - perhaps a way of reducing inbreeding ? Also from the same study, it's been revealed, that even from within the same brood different siblings can have different migratory strategies, with some remaining close to where they were born, others moving to the Mediterranean for the winter. None of this information would have been known without collecting data from nests.



Dipper, Portinscale, Tony Marsh

As I write this on the last day of February with the rain pelting on my westward window, I'm still travelling in anticipation of another nesting season and hoping my restricted mobility won't stop me pursuing a life-time's pleasure.

John Callion

The European Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) in Cumbria

The nominate race of this species breeds across the Western Palearctic temperate and boreal zones south of the Arctic Circle, from north Africa to Mongolia. It winters largely in east and southern Africa (Wernham et al., 2002). It is a summer visitor to Britain, which lies at the very north-western edge of its breeding range. The earliest and latest arrival and departure dates for Cumbria are 20th April and 21st September respectively. The U.K. breeding population has been most recently estimated at 3,770 – 5,500 males (Conway et al., 2007).

The Nightjar is physiologically adapted to a highly crepuscular life, being mainly active at dawn and dusk. It feeds almost entirely on air-borne insects, particularly moths and beetles. It nests on the ground, where it relies upon its cryptic plumage to evade detection by predators. Its optimum habitat preference is for open, well-drained and relatively sheltered sites with scattered trees or bushes for use as song posts and lookouts. For nesting, Nightjars require bare or sparsely vegetated ground, with leaf or wood litter in which to locate their unlined nest scrape, and remain camouflaged (Tate, 1989). In Britain the prime habitats fulfilling these requirements are lowland heaths and raised mosses, open clearings in deciduous, coniferous or mixed woodland, scrubby commons and downland, and moorland or fell edges. They will also occasionally nest in sand dunes, areas of shingle and industrial waste ground. It is worth noting here that in coastal locations in Cumbria the churring song of the Nightjar can, and has, been confused with the mating call of the natterjack toad.

Historically the traditional stronghold for the species in Britain has been on heathland, especially in the southern heartlands. However, in the past century newly planted, clear-felled and re-stocked areas in conifer plantations have become increasingly significant. In fact by 1992 this had become the single most important breeding habitat in England, holding 43% of churring males - compared to 36% on heathland (Morris et al., 1994). Stands of conifers generally cease to be used by the species when they are more than 15-20 years old (Bowden and Green, 1991).

During the late 19th Century, Macpherson tells us that Nightjars bred throughout Cumbria, 'from the mosses which fringe the Solway Firth to the Westmorland moors that march with Yorkshire'. He also states that they would be a good deal commoner 'if spared by keepers' (Macpherson, 1892). Up until the Second World War the species still bred right across the county, 'on peat-mosses and commons, in woodland clearings and on the lower moorlands and bracken-covered slopes of the fells...perhaps nesting to 1,500 feet' (457m). A particular stronghold was on the Solway mosses, where '...four to six birds may be heard churring at once' (Blezard, 1943). In the Furness area during the same period, nesting was regarded as 'regular' on the mosses and many of the low fells (Oakes, 1962).

The European Nightjar (Caprimulgus europaeus) in Cumbria

By the beginning of the 1960s, however, the Nightjar was deemed to be 'uncommon' on the Solway mosses, and 'scarce' around the Coniston fells, where a marked decline had been noted during the previous decade. But the limestone hills around Morecambe Bay still boasted several pairs, and good numbers were noted in the Winster valley in 1959 and 1960 (Stokoe, 1962). Ratcliffe (2002) remarks that the bird once 'nested widely' on dry heathland in the county, and that they had a favourite haunt on Penrith Beacon 'until at least 1955'. He also tells us that the birds regularly nested on the heathery Lakeland fells (e.g. in lower Kentmere) well into the early 1940s. These nesting habitats are, he says, now long gone, since by the mid 20th Century the Lake District hills and Howgill fells had been degraded to 'mainly grass-covered sheepwalks'.

Since the late 1950s there have been only very sporadic records of fell-nesting Nightjars in Cumbria. In the Lakes there have been just four records of birds using this habitat since 1960, the latest being in 1998 on a south Lakeland low moor. In the North Pennines during the same period there is just a single record of potential breeding, which is for Geltsdale in c.1970 (M.Carrier, pers.comm). In the Cumbrian Dales there is again just a single record; an unconfirmed report from the Sedbergh area in 2012.

Across the U.K. as a whole the Nightjar population underwent a marked decline between the 1930s and the 1980s. Between the 1968-72 and 1988-91 Breeding Atlases there was a range contraction of 51% across Britain and Ireland. This decline has been partly explained by habitat loss, changes in agricultural practices, notable increases in pesticide use, and the huge increase in recreational pressure. However, as this population decrease was on a pan-European scale, there were also undoubtedly additional problems on migration routes and over-wintering grounds.

Encouragingly, though, there has been a notable population recovery in Britain since the 1980s. Between the dedicated BTO surveys of 1981 and 1992 there was an estimated population increase of 75%, with a further 36% increase between the 1992 and 2004 surveys (Morris et al., 1994 and Conway et al., 2007). However, this has been principally a result of consolidation and expansion in the south and east, with the Nightjar apparently struggling to recolonise its previous haunts in the north-west extremities of Britain. Between the 1988-91 and 2007-2011 Atlases, the bird has been completely lost from N.Ireland, and has decreased by 60% in Argyll. In Dumfries and Galloway, conversely, it has shown an 18% net gain in the number of occupied 10km squares. Here, though, there has clearly been a marked increase in monitoring effort, with the establishment of a dedicated Nightjar Study Group in the early 1980s.

The European Nightjar (Caprimulgus europaeus) in Cumbria

In Cumbria, the species had effectively disappeared from the North Pennines, Eden Valley, east Lakeland, Lune valley and the Cumbrian Dales by the time of the 1968-72 Atlas. There were further dramatic declines by the late 1980s (1988-91 Atlas), with Nightjar located in just three of the 22 previously occupied 10km squares.

Sadly, in recent decades there has been little evidence of a recovery in the county. The findings of the three BTO National Nightjar Surveys are summarised below:

Survey year	Number of occupied sites	Location of sites	Total number of churring males found
1981	8	7 in the south; 1 on Solway Plain	10
1992	2	2 in the south	5
2004	3	2 in the south; 1 on Solway Plain	5

The recent Bird Atlas (carried out between 2008 and 2012) located just four occupied 10km squares: two on the Solway Plain, one in the Morecambe Bay area and one in the Eden valley. This is exactly the same number of occupied squares found in the Cumbria Atlas (1997-2001), when there were three in the south of the county and one on the Solway Plain.

It is interesting to compare this apparently bleak picture with the situation in North Yorkshire. Here the 2004 National survey located no less than 229 Nightjar territories within forestry plantations on the North York Moors, which was double the number found in the 1992 survey (Brown and Grice, 2005). In Cumbria there are large swathes of apparently similar habitat in the border forests of Kershope and Spadeadam, and in forestry blocks in many other parts of Lakeland. In the border forests (where planting began in the late 1950s) there have surprisingly been only six documented Nightjar records from just five sites, all since 1996.

Felling and re-stocking operations in these areas should clearly produce many areas suitable for breeding Nightjar. Lack of observer coverage may undoubtedly be a major contributory factor here. Because of its twilight habits, the species is particularly difficult to detect using standard survey methodologies, and really requires dedicated nocturnal visits to potential sites. Many such sites in Cumbria are particularly remote (and midge-ridden) and often also have serious access issues.

The European Nightjar (Caprimulgus europaeus) in Cumbria

Combining these factors with a relatively sparse human population means that the species must surely be vastly under-recorded, and is probably also highly under-reported (due to the perceived threats of disturbance and, historically, collecting).

The possible effect of Climate Change on Nightjars remains a topic for debate. Warmer summers could potentially assist a northward range expansion into Cumbria, though wetter conditions and/or more extreme weather events would certainly have a negative impact on their flying insect prey.

There are, however, some positive indications for the future. Forestry Commission Management Plans for clear-felling, re-stocking and re-structuring (including areas of broadleaves) are now far more sympathetic to the needs of the Nightjar. This is particularly significant in view of the increasing importance of this habitat for the species in Britain. During the decade since the 2007-11 Atlas work, there has also been an encouraging increase in the number of Nightjar records from areas of regenerating deciduous or mixed private woodland, particularly in the north of the county. However, with little consistent monitoring from year to year, the current status of the Nightjar in Cumbria remains unclear. In view of this, it is hoped that a county-wide Nightjar Survey could be run by the Bird Club in the summer of 2023 (using the model of the D & G Nightjar Study Group).

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Peter Howarth

Recent reports

The period covered is from December 2021 to February 2022 inclusive. Some records are unauthenticated and may require review.

Wildfowl



A Greylag that has been adopted by a small group of Mute Swans. I believe the Greylag is a resident that lost a mate. The same group of Mute Swans have also adopted a Whooper Swan that can no longer migrate.

Russel Austin

The two **Todd's Canada Geese** were still with the Barnacle flock on Rockcliffe Marsh on 5 January, one of them was still there on the 23rd. Away from the Furness stronghold a **Brent Goose** was on the Irt/Mite/Esk estuaries on 11 February.

Four **Greenland White-fronted Geese** were with Whooper Swans at Kirkbride throughout December but not subsequently. Three **Eurasian White-fronted Geese** were with Greylags at Winter Tarn, Shap on 6th February and a lone first winter was at Anthorn on the 26th of the month.

Pick of the ducks were two **Ring-necked Duck** at Longtown, both females. One on 27 December was joined by a second on the 30th and 31st. In January they were both seen on New Year's Day, one was present on the 3rd and they were both seen again from the 11th to the 14th.



Ring-necked Duck, Longtown, Roger Ridley

Three **Scaup** were seen during the period. A female was at Sunbiggin Tarn from 5 December to 21 January. A first winter drake was on Siddick Pond at least 17-19 January and 14 February. A drake was on Campfield Marsh 17-19 February.



Scaup, Campfield, Roger Ridley

There were only single reports of **Velvet Scoter** and **Long-tailed Duck**. The **Velvet Scoter** went past South Walney on 3 December, the **Long-tailed Duck** passed Silecroft on 28 December.

A **Ruddy Shelduck** was seen at Arnside on 19 January, mid-winter is not the best time for a wild origin but who knows. Reflecting the recent decline in records there were no Smew seen during the period.

Partridges to Cormorants

A large covey by current standards of nine **Grey Partridge** was at St Bees Head on 21 December, with five between Glasson Moss and Rogerscough on the 19th.

Great Northern Divers were seen off Silecroft on 4 December, on Coniston Water on 15 January and on the lagoon at Hodbarrow from 26 February into March.

A **Red-necked Grebe** was at South Walney on 21 December; what was likely to be the same bird took up residence on nearby Cavendish Dock from 12 January to 24 February where it proved a popular attraction.



Red-necked Grebe, Cavendish Dock, Rob Pocklington



Cormorant with Pike, Derwent Water, Tony Marsh

The wintering juvenile **Spoonbill** was present until at least mid-January; it generally favoured the saltmarsh north of Askam-in-Furness but also wandered across the estuary to Hodbarrow.

Reports of **Great White Egret** in the south of the county where they are more regular included three at Fell End nature reserve on 6 February and two at Ulpha Meadows on 9 February. Records from further north of single birds came from the Eden at Little Salkeld (1 January and 3 February), Braithwaite (4 January and 3 February) Carr Bank (14 January), Kings Meadburn (15 and 31 January) and Lazonby (26 February).

Raptors to Waders

Red Kites were reported from Clifton, Penrith on 4 January, over both High Hesket and Kendal on 29 January and finally Helton, Penrith on 24 February.

Hen Harrier reports from the coast included a male at Campfield Marsh on 15 January.



Bar-tailed Godwits, Mawbray, Barry Jackson

A **Spotted Redshank** was on the west shore of the Leven Estuary by the viaduct on 5 December. There were at least three **Common Sandpipers** wintering on the River Esk between Ravenglass and Waberthwaite. A good total by recent standards of 800 **Bar-tailed Godwits** was at Mawbray on 23 January.

Gulls to Auks

Increased coverage at Cavendish Dock with the Red-necked Grebe in residence produced a juvenile **Iceland Gull** briefly on 7 February. The only **Little Gull** report received during the period was of one at Parton on 4 December, with none noted during the subsequent gales as the species winters in lower numbers in the Irish Sea.



*Mediterranean Gull, Adam Moan
Ringed in Holland pullus 26/6/15
Coquet Island 6/5/18
Hallbankgate 27/2/22*

Pigeons to Buntings

The only lowland **Short-eared Owl** report concerned one on the marshes at Flookburgh on 14 February.

In a poor winter nationally for them a **Great Grey Shrike** was near Killington Reservoir on 3-18 December then again 15-26 January.

The lone **Hooded Crow** at Walney near the old tip remained throughout the period.

In a winter where **Waxwing** were very scarce nationally it wasn't surprising that there was only one record, an individual at Harrington Reservoir LNR on 28-29 December.



*Hooded Crow, Walney,
Rob Pocklington*

A **Swallow** was reported at High Foulshaw on 1 January.

Cetti's Warblers reported may not have included all birds seen as they begin to establish in the county, but included birds at Brigsteer Wetlands, Siddick Pond and Urswick Tarn.

A **Firecrest** was seen at Upper Blengdale, Nether Wasdale Common on 2 December.

Ring Ouzel records are very unusual in winter so one in a garden at Lorton on 11 December was very notable.

All **Water Pipit** records came from flooded fields at Biggar Bank, Walney on high tides. Birds were seen there in all months of the period under review with peaks of two in December and January and four in February.

Recent reports



*Blackcap, Arnside garden, 17th Feb,
Paul Glading*

Twite flocks included 30 at Askam-in-Furness in January, 27 by the Leven Viaduct west shore in December, seven at South Walney in February and five at Anthorn in January. A good total of 25 **Hawfinch** was seen at Witherslack on 23 January.

There were 63 **Tree Sparrows** neat Esk boathouse, Rockcliffe on 15 January.

A **Lapland Bunting** was seen on the shore at Askam-in-Furness on 19 December.

There were surprisingly no coastal **Snow Bunting** reports during the period; on the fells one was at Tarnhouse Rigg, near Tindale Tarn on 4 January and four on Dollywaggon Pike, north of Ambleside on 25 February. The RSPB bird count featured a Snow Bunting in a Braithwaite garden!



Siskin, Stanwix, Roger Ridley



*Tree Sparrow, Watchtree,
Tony Marsh*

As ever, we are indebted to all the contributors, too numerous to list.

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

Stephen Dunstan



*Barn Owl, Hallbankgate, Adam Moan
Pleased to actually catch the pellet dropping*



*Crossbill, Spadeadam, Adam Moan
My first ever juvenile photo.
Surprised to see it fully fledged on
the 25th February?*



Brambling, Talkin Tarn, 1/2/22, Roger Ridley

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Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is June 1st 2022

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