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***BIRD NEWS***  
***Vol. 34 No. 1 Spring 2023***

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## Take part in the Great Crested Grebe survey 2023

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Could you help to survey breeding Great Crested Grebe between April to July this year? Cumbria Bird Club carries out an annual survey and has selected Great Crested Grebe because the species hasn't been thoroughly surveyed for many years and appears to be declining.



*Great Crested Grebes, Hodbarrow, Tony Marsh*

We've identified 115 possible sites which we'd like to cover based on previous nest records, WeBS information and other likely habitat. The list can be found here: <https://cumbriabirdclub.org.uk/surveys/survey-opportunities/>

Sites already covered by WeBS surveyors are shaded orange but if you would like to volunteer for any of the others, please contact [info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk) stating which you are interested in.

Survey methods are straightforward. You are asked to visit the site twice if possible, the first between May and mid-June and again between mid-July to mid-August, to record the presence of Grebes, any behaviour and nesting success plus the surrounding habitat.

Results can be sent in on paper or submitted on-line. Further details will be sent out to volunteers at the beginning of April.

We look forward to hearing from you.

*Sue King*

### **CBC Meets April - June 2023**

23rd March - Sizergh Hawfinches and Park End Moss with Rob Pocklington

22nd April - Flimby Shore with Mike and Lyn Mills

13th May - Crosscanonby Carr. Passerines with John Callion

3rd June - Bolton Fell Moss with Colin Auld and Chris Hind.

Details and booking email [meetings@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:meetings@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk)  
or call Mike and Lyn Mills on 01946 590616.

### **CBC Duddon Estuary Walk, 8th January 2023**

The aim of this walk was to track waders and wildfowl as the incoming tide pushed them up the estuary. Hoped for species included Pintail and Twite. Unfortunately our arrival coincided with persistent heavy rain and strong westerly winds, so expectations were quickly driven down. Nevertheless we had a nice surprise at the start of the walk, as a Greenshank joined a few feeding Redshank in the fragmented salt marsh.

Further out we could see flocks of small waders (probably Dunlin) flying along the tide line and small numbers of Oystercatcher and Lapwing faced up to the wind at the far edge of the marsh. An impressive strandline of weed and dead wood drew in several Linnet and Reed Bunting close to the golf course, but these would be the last species to add to our very short list. Time spent drinking a cup of tea in the shelter of Dunnerholme Rock failed to produce any Rock Pipit, although we did pick out a single Dunlin amongst small roosts of Redshank and Oystercatcher.



*Dunlin, Tommy Holden*

*Mike Douglas*

### **CBC walk round Talkin Tarn, 25th February 2023**

I visited Talkin tarn on the 24th, when it was bright and cold, but on the 25th it was grey with a freezing north-east wind, so the bird numbers were well down. Unbelievably there were no Canada Goose, Wigeon, Goosander, Cormorant and the rarer pair of Gadwall had gone (Chris Hind has seen them since then!).

We did a complete circuit of the Tarn concentrating on the wildfowl, then after dropping off scopes at the carpark we headed back into the woods on either side of the cafe and carpark. The highlight of the day was seeing good numbers of Brambling, feeding on Beech mast with hundreds of Chaffinch.



*Redwing ,  
Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

It was difficult to get an accurate count but people were seeing six Brambling at a time through their bins. Again it was strange to see no Lapwing, Fieldfare and Redwing in the surrounding fields. In total 37 species were noted

*Adam Moan*

## New year bird list challenge

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The Bird List Challenge, now in its third year, offers a low carbon opportunity to get out and start a bird list in the opening days of the new year.

Challenges like this send you to places where you think that you can reliably see species to add to the list. Unfortunately it often ends up being just the occasion when some expected species, which you were banking on, simply do not show. On the other hand there can be compensation when the unexpected turns up and this year was no exception.



*Long-tailed Tit, Cliburn,  
Tony Marsh*

Well, there were very few participants this year – the four day window to get out (1st-4th January) didn't really produce the weather to tempt us out and it tends to be a low point in the year with other demands on time. However, Walney Island is a great location so have a read of Colin Raven's account of his day, the pluses and minuses, and the variety on offer in winter:-

Monday 2nd January began bright, sunny and calm with a light frost – ideal conditions as I arrived at in the car park at Biggar Bank on Walney Island at 08:00hrs, along with the first throes of daylight. These produced Red-throated Diver, Common Scoter and Guillemot on a surprisingly choppy sea while the nearby fields added Pied Wagtail, Mistle Thrush and Stonechat as the sun began to creep above The Pennines.



*Bullfinch, Siddick,  
Tony Marsh*

The low early morning tide (7.5metres at 0754hrs) necessitated an early morning walk northward along the coastline in search of waders and this soon resulted in all the target species collected including Golden Plover, Purple Sandpiper and a bonus Bar-tailed Godwit while the sea added a male Goosander amongst Red-breasted Mergansers and a first-winter Shag. Then turning eastwards across the island added Greenfinch – an increasingly scarce species on the island, along with Bullfinch, Jay, Long-tailed Tit and Pheasant with both Grey Wagtail and Water Rail in the wetter areas.



*Goosander, Derwent Water, Tony Marsh*

The first disappointment of the day then followed when the guaranteed Tree Sparrows failed to show, although this was made up for by the unexpected bonus of an overwintering female Blackcap and a Chiffchaff during the fruitless wait.

## New year bird list challenge

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A Merlin - stalking a flock of Linnet preceded a Lesser Black-backed Gull – the fifth gull species and increasingly scarce in winter on the island these days following the dramatic decline of the colony. A Little Egret and a group of pale-bellied Brent Geese were next to fall prior to a Sparrowhawk providing a flypast. Heading back west added Collared Dove, Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Grey Heron and finally Rock Pipit to leave the total on 66 species as a brief break allowed lunch to be taken during a second, though fruitless, check of the sea.



*Shoveler, Campfield, Tony Marsh*

The walk southwards proved spectacularly unrewarding until a flurry of activity added Snipe, Reed Bunting and Skylark but alas no Jack Snipe. The lack of tide then revealed several miles of barren saltmarsh and empty fields and hedgerows which was compounded by the lack of the long-staying Hooded Crow – the second disappointment of the day. At last, a Kestrel was added along with Moorhen, Shelduck, Tufted Duck and Mute Swan to leave the total on 74 species.



*Sparrowhawk,  
Hallbankgate. Adam Moan*

The decision was taken to head onto South Walney Nature Reserve. This was to prove rewarding with Wigeon, Scaup, Goldeneye and Little Grebe on the pools, an overflying flock of Twite and a group of Greenshank feeding energetically on the mudflats. Great Crested Grebe was next to fall before Teal and Shoveler brought the sightings to a close with a total of 3,174 birds of 83 species recorded.

As is always the case, a number of expected species were not seen with Pink-footed Goose, Pintail, Peregrine, Jack Snipe, Fieldfare, Redwing, Raven, Hooded Crow and Tree Sparrow, all eluding me.

Stephen Dunstan's account, also based on the Furness peninsular, gives a flavour of what the Challenge offers:-

Having recently read John Lewis Stempel's 'Nightwalking' about nocturnal nature experiences I had grandiose ideas of starting my on foot bird challenge at Roa Island whilst it was still dark. With other commitments on 2nd January including the Barrow v Rochdale match at Holker Street I was thinking perhaps seven in the morning until about half twelve. But then life got in the way and I wasn't well in the two days previously. Having persuaded Jane I was just about improved enough to be allowed out, it was around sunrise at 8.25 that I made it to the Foulney Island car park. I was glad I made the effort as it was an absolutely stunning morning, the ebbing tide around Foulney and Piel was like a millpond and the sun shone for an hour.

I hadn't much of a clue what target to set myself. Prior to being ill I had plucked 50 out of the air. Traversing the causeway and scanning from several points I racked up 25 species, so I was already halfway there without much pedestrian effort. Highlights of this stint included Brent Geese, a flock of Pintail and a single Red-breasted Merganser, Golden Plovers and a Kestrel which is the only raptor I was to see. Heading for the Westfield Nature Trail I had a Rock Pipit, which was unexpected as the tide was now receding, and several Reed Buntings. At the start of the trail a female Bullfinch was welcome, they aren't regular at all where I live. By the time I reached Salthouse Mills and the dock I was only two or three species short, and soon got over the line with the likes of Water Rail, Goldeneye and Grey Plover. I ended up with 54 species. I saw that a motorised bird race the same day yielded 102 species. I've done plenty of bird racing in my time, but I think I've reached the point where if I can see most of what's available in a seven or eight mile walk I would prefer that.

With a tally of 40 species around Keswick, Dave Piercy and Kathy Morris managed to add Brambling to their list but all participants failed to locate their regular Tree Sparrows.



On the West Coast our list was determined by the locations which we could reach by bike (not ebike!) linking Parton beach and Whitehaven Harbour, St. Bees Head Cliffs and Longlands Lake near Egremont. Overnight rain meant that Lowca Beck, at Parton, was flowing brown which wiped out the chances of Dipper and Grey Wagtail there but while finding Turnstone among seaweed covered rocks and gulls on the shore a Kingfisher sat on a boulder and occasionally hovered and dived into rock pools.

En route to Whitehaven a Shag was another unexpected sighting but the local Ravens failed to show. The coastal path up to St Bees cliffs gave views of three Fulmars round the ledges and on a hunch that the calm conditions might yield a Guillemot on the RSPB section the ride out to the cliff proved worthwhile as the Guillemots were there by the hundred. The rest of the route was less productive with plenty of people round Longlands Lake and as we headed home, Greylags and Tree Sparrows failed to show and we remarked that we hadn't had a single bird of prey all day, only to score the last three species of the day as the light failed – Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk.



It's good to get out.

*Mike and Lyn Mills*



## Atypical Rock Pipit nest sites in West Cumbria



*Adult with food, Nick Franklin*



*Natural nest site at Maryport with near-fledged chicks, John Callion*

According to Ferguson-Lees et al (2011), natural Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus*) nest sites are usually in maritime situations, generally very close to the upper tide limits, mostly on rugged coasts or islands, with the nest well hidden in deep vegetation or in natural cavities; though, Callion (2020), and Mills (2021) also highlight and describe ‘man-made’ nesting situations in Cumbria.

In West Cumbria, between and including Whitehaven and Silloth Docks, most Rock Pipits nest in brick structures relating to the area’s industrial past (Mills), including harbour walls, and, especially between Harrington and Siddick, in the remnant banks of slag, that have cavities eroded by wind and water.

In recent years, four unusual nest sites have been found, using plastic, wood, stone and metal sheeting.

The most extra-ordinary of these, was one found by Graham Burr on the open shore near Harrington in 2022.

The nest itself was under a plastic bucket lid lodged among the flotsam and jetsam in the highest tide line. When found, on 1st June, the nest contained three well grown chicks which fledged a few days later.



*Nest situation under plastic bucket lid, Harrington, John Callion*



## *Atypical Rock Pipit nest sites in West Cumbria*

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In 2020, newly fledged chicks were seen being fed on a permanently moored boat in Maryport Harbour.

Even though it's not out of the question that the nest may not have been on the boat; it was well away from the harbour wall, and unlikely in the opinion of the observer (JC), that such young (at least three) chicks would have been able to fly so far and all be in the same location.

Again at Maryport, in 2022, after two days trying to locate the nest of a pair that were feeding young; the nest site was eventually found by Peter Blinco on an interior hidden ledge of a graffiti adorned old fireplace in one of the historic buildings that surround the harbour .

At Workington in 2021, a pair were watched carrying food into a covered outbuilding near the RNLi boatshed on the north side of the harbour. This nest was less than 50m from another pair nesting in one of the nearby banks of slag.



*Old fireplace, Maryport Harbour,  
John Callion*

### **Summary**

It seems Cumbrian Rock Pipits began to adapt to nesting in man made industrial artefacts in the post industrial age, but in recent years they have taken it further, using moored boats, plastic debris on the open shore and semi-permanent structures as seen at Workington harbour. Even though they seem to have a specific habitat requirement for nesting, the actual nest site shows a level of flexibility that is both unexpected and remarkable.

### **References**

- Callion, John. (2020) *Rock Pipits in Cumbria*. Lakeland Naturalist (Vol: 8) Autumn Carlisle NHS
- Mills. M & L. (2021) *A Survey of Breeding Rock Pipits*. Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria. Cumbria Bird Club.
- Ferguson-Lees, J; Castell, Richard & Leech, Dave. (2011) *A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests*. British Trust for Ornithology.

*John Callion*

## Half term in Portugal

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In our half term holiday we went to Portugal, staying in the eastern Algarve. We went to several different places to see birds but we also heard a Hoopoe while we were swimming and saw it from the garden later. I saw fifty-eight different species of birds altogether. One of my favourites was the Black-shouldered Kite, we watched one hunt over a Roman villa.



On the last day we went for a walk and saw so many birds we didn't know which one to look at! There was a mix of Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Blackcap, Nut-hatch, Green Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Azure-winged Magpie, Sardinian Warbler and Jay. When we went to the beach we saw Waxbill on the fence. On a different beach we saw Sanderling, they look like clockwork toys running along the shore.

At Quinta do Largo Sao Lourenco we saw lots of egrets flying in to roost and a Spoonbill flew the other way. We saw lots of ducks, waders and more. We saw a Little Bittern, Teal, Gadwall, Coot, Little Grebe, Pochard, Green Sandpiper, Grey Plover, Black-winged Stilt and there were lots of Shoveler. We heard a Cetti's Warbler but couldn't see it. An Azure-winged Magpie sat on the fence outside the hide very close.

At Tavira we saw Flamingos and Cormorants fishing. We went for a walk through the pine woods and saw several Crested Tits and Siskins, plus Robin, Treecreeper and Stonechat. On the way back home that day we saw lots of Glossy Ibis. One of my favourite moments was seeing Bonelli's Eagle in the hills, they were a long way away but we were confident that's what they were as they flashed white underneath as they circled up. I enjoyed seeing so many birds on my holiday.



*Simon Wainwright age 10. Photos by the family.*

## Water Rail ferocity. Bittern and Hawk surprise.



*Water Rail, Foulshaw, Tony Marsh*

The feeders at Foulshaw Moss are very busy throughout the year and especially in winter. There was lots of activity on a sunny winter's day in January.

The tranquil scene was disrupted when I witnessed the ferocity of a Water Rail. Both a Water Rail and Chaffinch were enjoying the seed and knock off from the feeders on the ground below. Both looked quite content and focused on what they were doing.

The Chaffinch started to move in closer and peck at the floor closer to the Water Rail, the Water Rail didn't seem to notice, until - in a split second it turned and grabbed the Chaffinch by the beak with its own beak and ran into the reeds with a flapping Chaffinch in its catch.

*Keziah Taylor*

### **Bittern - a first for Ennerdale ?**

On 28th February a dead Bittern was found by Philip-pa Chadwick of West Cumbria Rivers Trust adjacent to the River Ehen at Low Moorend Farm near Ennerdale Bridge whilst tree planting with Wild Ennerdale volunteers.

This is currently being checked to see if the bird died of avian flu. If tests prove positive, then this would be the first time this disease will have occurred in this species.

This was a remarkable record for the Wild Ennerdale project with the species never having been recorded in the valley previously. The only time that I've ever seen Bittern in West Cumbria outside of the known Siddick Pond wintering site was at Keekle Flashes.

*Pete Ullrich*



### **Sparrowhawk landing**

On December 26th I was watching some Goldcrest along the track between the house and Howard pond when a female Sparrowhawk came and landed on my arm! She is a regular visitor because of the feeders and on February 25th a male put in an appearance.

*Barry Jackson*

## Stonechats 2022/23

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On the coast, between Parton and Silloth, most Stonechat breeding territories, especially the ones close to Allonby have been monitored annually since 2003. It has been established (Callion 2015; Callion and Westerberg 2021) that some upland fell nesting Stonechats move to the Cumbrian coast to undergo the post breeding moult. Sightings of colour-ringed birds in autumn, winter and in the breeding season confirm that some may not return to their natal site.



*Female Stonechat,  
near Parton, Mike Mills*

In 2021 and 2022, more than 150 Stonechats were ringed, including more than 100 with colour-ringed combinations. These included nestlings from Wythop, Haweswater and Geltsdale; the remaining birds were either adults or juveniles trapped and ringed in late summer/early autumn in the meadows, at or close to RSPB Geltsdale.

Between Workington and Maryport all of the territories are in a narrow linear band to the west of the Carlisle-Barrow Railway. From Maryport to Silloth all of the territories are to the west of the B5300. All the land to the east of these highways is unsuitable for Stonechats. With most territories being linear it's fairly easy to monitor these for Stonechats, given their habit of perching high (birds on sticks, according to my granddaughter) and being reasonably tolerant of indirect disturbance.



*Male Stonechat,  
near Flimby, Thalia Sparke*

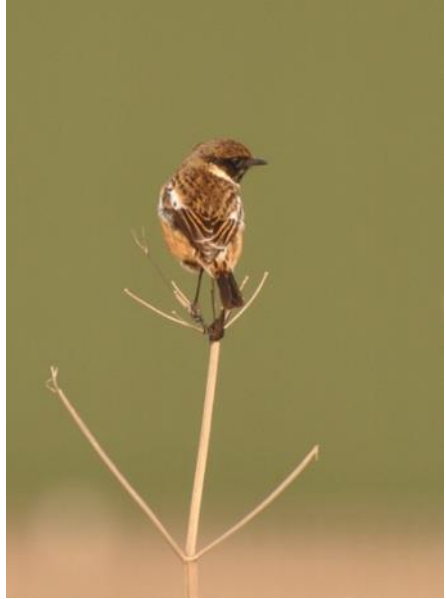
Stonechats are a particularly interesting passerine; they form pairs and hold winter territories; however, come spring, the pair bond loosens and most find a different mate to breed with.

Also, unlike most small insectivorous passerines, including their cousin the Whinchat that has a total trans-Saharan migration for the winter; Stonechats have evolved to be partial migrants, with some making a short migration to the western Mediterranean, while others, sometimes siblings of migrants, 'tough it out' here for the winter; sometimes with high mortality levels.

From October 2022 to March 2023, a group of us; Rhiannon Baker; Ruth Billinge; Peter Blinco; Lucy Dunn; Derek McAlone; Thalia Sparke; Maynall Weir and the undersigned undertook a monthly monitoring project.

Regular visits to two isolated territories at Parton were made at least monthly, the entire coastal stretch from Harrington to Silloth, was visited once a month with the aim to look for any colour-ringed birds and monitor the survival of birds through the winter.

We found during our October and November counts there were thirty-seven winter territories. Between 7th and 17th December, severe weather with very low nighttime temperatures between a high of -3 and a low of -11 persisted at the shortest daylight period.



*Male Stonechat,  
near Flimby, Thalia Sparke*

The January count, revealed a 50% loss of birds due to the adverse weather conditions. It will be interesting to see if these territories are occupied when the winter migrants return throughout March?

We didn't find any colour-ringed birds, but we did witness nature at its most testing. We hope to colour ring more Stonechats this year, so please lookout for them.

*John Callion*

#### References

- Callion, J. (2015) Breeding European Stonechats in Cumbria. *British Birds*. **108**: 648-659
- Callion, J. & Westerberg S (2021) Philopatry in male and female Stonechats, *Lakeland Naturalist* Spring 2021 Carlisle Natural History Society.

## Reflections on pastures new

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By chance, I spent an hour or so recently putting the notebooks in order in which I have been logging bird records for the last four decades or so. In so doing, I was able to confirm that the first probable time that I went birding in Cumbria was on Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1982, a participant in a small group being guided by a family-run firm called Mountain & Wildlife Ventures, then based in Morecambe, but which I believe later moved to one of the Sawreys.

The venues for that first foray to Cumbria were Cavendish Dock and Walney Island, with the rollcall of species including Black Guillemot; one of several species that week that were less likely to be seen down in the 'soft south' whence I hailed. In truth, the weather that day may not have been the best advertisement for a stay in the county, but the week improved and according to my notes, we also visited Brothers Water and Dove Crag, and what was probably Hay Bridge nature reserve, near Bouth.

We also went to neighbouring counties and ascended Ingleborough, walked by the River Wenning at Hornby, and went to Leighton Moss, the latter yielding what remains my only record of Spotted Crake, quietly looking for food in the gathering dusk. My visit to Cumbria came under three years after I had joined the RSPB, soon after which I had started to volunteer for one of its local groups, which then led to several other voluntary positions with other conservation groups in Dorset.

Little could I have imagined though that within a decade of visiting Cumbria for the first time, I would have both chaired the Dorset Bird Club, and started a three decades-long career in the environmental sector; even less credible that I would be living now between Barrow and Bouth.

Our move north in late 2021 was to enable us to be 'nearer' to our eldest son in Derbyshire, whilst also being able to enjoy coast and uplands, with Cumbria edging North Wales as what might suit us best. When we were house-hunting, Arnside soon became a favoured spot, but trying to buy from 300 miles away in the midst of a boom in the housing market meant that we had to be flexible and so have ended up just south of Ulverston, although we can still see Arnside Knott from the top of our hill; indeed, we can see Ingleborough from our lounge!

After living near Utttoxeter for nearly twenty years (we like towns beginning with 'U'), we had spent most of the next four years either living on the birding Mecca of Portland, or beside RSPB Radipole Lake in Weymouth, home to the likes of Bearded Tit and Marsh Harrier, the latter sometimes flying above the garden calling at high altitude. One of the problems though about Weymouth and Portland is that they are both expanding quite rapidly and so for a 'country lad', the draw of somewhere less busy was alluring.





Luckily, my new local patch is very quiet and incredibly varied: largely pasture with some arable, dry-stone walls, thick hedges, SSSI Common, SSSI woodland, estuary, reedbed, saltmarsh, becks (some seasonal), 2 or 3 tarns, other, smaller woods, a golf course, and large sweeps of Morecambe Bay, including various scars etc. (I do walk quite long distances, so my 'patch' could be larger than many, and if being greedy could extend to Foulney and environs!)

But however large the area I call home now, I'd argue that it is even better than one rural home area I enjoyed in Dorset that had lowland heath, chalk stream and cressbeds; we even had a Nightjar once hunting down our road! And whilst I have lost the likes of Dartford Warbler, Nightjar, and other southern heathland specialities, I have gained so much by way of seemingly larger numbers of commoner species, plus the upland and woodland ones I love, which are not that far away.



What is particularly enjoyable is how bird-rich the 'ordinary' land around us is; yes, it's varied in nature which is always a good start, but having livestock in the fields, and farmyards that are not pristine, helps too. 'My' patch also has room for 'messy' edges in places: little patches of reeds, damp flushes, and in winter what can grow to quite large ephemeral pools, these factors combining to provide superb, temporary retreats for waders, gulls, and wildfowl when the tide in the Bay is high.

I have no doubt that numbers of many species have declined in Cumbria over recent decades, reflecting reductions across the UK. But arriving here as an incomer and having last lived in Dorset that might be regarded as #2 county in England for birds (after Norfolk), I feel confident in saying that the 'commoner' species are more common where I live now than anywhere I have lived for decades.



How much better to encounter three species of owl, or to be listening to the songs of multiple Song Thrushes, Skylarks and Willow Warblers, for example, under a mile from my home in 'working countryside', than having to rely on visiting sites managed specifically for wildlife and sometimes for notable species; both have their roles to play in retaining and restoring our avifauna, but there are only so many resources available for nature reserves and specific species recovery programmes, when the biggest gains can be made across whole landscapes managed by multiple owners.



One of my aims this year is to improve my ID of what are commoner species in Cumbria than they were in Dorset. I must do better with wader-ID, and be confident with the calls made by different geese, as it really would be good to be sure that was a flock of c100 Pink-foots overhead whilst writing this article, in the same way that I am 100% confident that I've seen and heard Cetti's Warbler in the reedbeds close to home. (Cetti's are common at Radipole Lake).



One of the species that I recorded on more than one day on my trip to the North-west in 1982 was Spotted Flycatcher, so as it seems to be more abundant in Cumbria than it is now in Dorset, here's to success in 2023 in finding one nearby, as well as getting to many new parts of this wonderful county in pursuit of birds.

*Guy Corbett-Marshall*

## The Sierra De Gredos



It is Friday 10<sup>th</sup> March here as I write this short update about what is happening here at La Sayuela, Sierra de Gredos, we are looking forward to a lovely warm week ahead and things are starting to move. For about two weeks or so the Common Cranes have been steadily leaving to head north to their breeding grounds along with our other winter visitors like Brambling, Redwing, Golden Plover, Lapwings, Kestrels and thrushes etc



Soon the summer passerines will be arriving and the garden will be alive with Nightingale and Golden Oriole. I saw my first Black Kite of the season the other day, the Storks are back in force and all the resident birds Cetti's, Serin, Little Owl, Cirl Bunting, Firecrest, Woodlark, etc. are singing.

At 'Finca La Sayuela', we have three holiday rental cottages set in a natural environment, they are owned and managed by Keith & Jane Hamilton who have been operating them for two years, please see our website for more details <https://fincalasayuela.com/> or call (UK number) 07769738306 for more details. Keith has a thorough knowledge of the bird-watching areas of northern Extremadura and the Gredos mountains. Guided tours are available.



## The next big thing

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Most people reading this would love to find a first for Cumbria. Even those who've already been skilled, persistent or fortunate enough to have already done so probably dream about doing so again. I'm answering Dave's call for content with a look at some of the relevant factors in this, and a personal selection of some of the most likely candidates to be the next big thing.

Some people reading this may be asking how they would know what is already on the Cumbrian list. You can see this on the club website at:

<https://cumbriabirdclub.org.uk/reporting/cumbria-bird-list/>

The hyperlink may get lost in the process of the newsletter being prepared for publication. You can find it in the drop down menu under 'Reporting' on the website as shown below:



There is also a spreadsheet that can be downloaded which lists 358 species. Since then there have been three additions in 2022 (Long-toed Stint, Marsh Sandpiper and Elegant Tern) and one in 2023 (Olive-backed Pipit). If you are working from the webpage rather than the spreadsheet the 2022 additions are on, but OBP is still to be added. Anyway that is, if my math holds up, a total of 362 species, which means that additions will be increasingly hard to come by as potential new birds fall.

Before looking to the future it's worth considering a few points about past records. Firstly accepted records are not set in stone, and can be reviewed with new knowledge of identification features or occurrence patterns. The list can fall as well as rise therefore, the most striking example of this in terms of the Cumbrian list being the April 1990 Walney Bulwer's Petrel, which was accepted but then found not proven along with all other British records on review. The list can also contract with 'lumping' of species, at present there are three Redpoll species on the Cumbrian books which could reduce to one with current taxonomic developments. A species found no longer acceptable can be added back by being re-found of course.

Going the other way from 'lumping' splitting a species into two or more species can open up new opportunities for finding a first for Cumbria. To give an example the splitting of Subalpine Warbler into three species sees Eastern Subalpine Warbler on the list, whereas Western Subalpine Warbler and Moltoni's Warbler haven't occurred.

With splitting of species there is an increased likelihood that old records could be discovered from a review of notes or photographs, I am not aware of any recent examples in Cumbria but a Taiga flycatcher from Spurn in 1976 uncovered from a review of photographs last year is a case in point ('Finding A First For Britain In The Attic', Birdguides website, October 2022).

The nature of the county and its location will lead to some groups being largely 'completed' in terms of the possible species that could occur, whilst others offer more opportunity. Geese are more or less a full house, with only Ross's currently missing but records awaiting acceptance. For its location Cumbria has done very well for terns as well, including Bridled, Caspian, Elegant, Sooty, Whiskered and White-winged. Waders probably also have a good number of rare species on the book including Greater Sandplover, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Long-tailed Stint and Stilt Sandpiper but more gaps to go at.

Changes in birding and monitoring techniques will have some bearing on what species are more likely to be detected, notwithstanding population changes and range spreading due to climate change etc. The ability to record calls of nocturnal migration will increase detection rate of those species that pass over the county at night. Satellite transmitters may mean that species can be proved to have occurred over the county or off our shores without them being seen or heard by birdwatchers. Thermal imaging could also be relevant, enabling more secretive species to be seen more often.

The nature of rare birds is that some can be foreseen and some will be vagrants in the truest sense that might never be recorded again in the county. The former category has seen Little Egret followed by their Great and Cattle relatives, whilst Mediterranean Gulls and Cetti's Warblers have also become established.

On the other hand records like American Coot, Greater Sandplover and Spanish Sparrow came out of the blue. The list of contenders that follows is therefore imperfect, and will doubtless prove to be wildly inaccurate but it's always fun to do some crystal ball gazing. So without further ado here are, using the horse racing analogy, ten to follow whilst acknowledging predicting the future is a bit of a mug's game:

## *The next big thing*

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### *Red-flanked Bluetail*

There may be people reading this who made the pilgrimage to Dorset thirty years ago for the first properly twitchable individual. Since then the species has become increasingly regular on the mainland as well as offshore islands. As they become more regular they are even overwintering, and in 2021/22 one did so as close to Cumbria as Middleton-in-Teesdale. They've occurred on Hilbre Island and three times on Bardsey so Walney is arguably due one.

### *Red-throated Pipit*

This species has had fluctuations in fortunes. It came off the BBRC species list for several years but has been back on since 2014. Reasons for including it in this set of predictions are twofold. Firstly there are a smattering of records from north west England, including an inland bird on moorland in Greater Manchester. Secondly part of the upturn in fortunes relates to birds being sound recorded, and one so noted in Knott End in Lancashire had presumably gone through Cumbrian airspace undetected.

### *Penduline Tit*

In some ways the lack of records of this dainty bird in the county isn't surprising. There isn't a single Scottish record for example. On the other hand there has been one at Leighton Moss, an individual was seen in both Greater Manchester and Cheshire this winter and three even reached Ireland for the first time. They like reedmace so if you have any on your patch it may be worth learning the call, rather like a drawn out, downslurred Reed Bunting note.

### *Gull-billed Tern*

Having said that the county tern list is impressive this is the surprising omission. There have been four records in Lancashire and others in Cheshire. The fact that there is both regular seawatching effort in parts of the county and also well watched tern colonies would suggest it is perhaps only a matter of time before one is clinched in Cumbria. The most recent Lancashire record was in a field several miles inland so there's hope for all patch watchers.

### *Pied Wheatear*

Pied Wheatear is a species that remains stubbornly rare, but other than being predominantly coastal there is no great rhyme or reason to where they turn up. To the south of Cumbria there have been records either side of the Wirral at Seaforth and New Brighton. They've occurred a couple of times in a few years on the east coast opposite Cumbria. They don't seem to need particular habitat. Persistence at a time when passerine migrants have dried up anywhere on the coast might be rewarded.



### *Collared Pratincole*

It's surprising that Collared Pratincole isn't on the Cumbrian list but Black-winged Pratincole is. It's another species that has turned up in other north west England counties, most recently in Cheshire but with a couple of birds in Lancashire as well. The Solway somewhere could turn up trumps, not least because of the number of birders in the area scrutinising wader flocks.

### *Siberian Stonechat Group*

As such this is three species now, none of which have been recorded in Cumbria. It has been suggested that they are overlooked where there are lots of Stonechats, I'm not completely convinced but if so then it would be relevant in the county. There was one that wintered in Cheshire a couple of years ago, and one has just been claimed inland in Yorkshire. Photographs might not be enough, you could need a faecal sample for a full ID.

### *Savi's Warbler*

It is perhaps surprising that Grasshopper Warbler is the only locustella warbler on the Cumbrian list. Savi's Warbler is a species that has been on and off the BBRC list, but the ones that are detected are often itinerant singing males at inland reedbeds. There have been five in neighbouring Lancashire, and whilst the large reedbed at Leighton Moss has done best, sites like Mar-ton Mere and Brockholes are more akin to Siddick Pond and offer hope.

### *Iberian Chiffchaff*

Following its relatively recent split there have been increasing numbers of this species occurring in Britain, perhaps climate change driven. Records have generally involved singing males, including two in Lancashire, whilst remarkably a pair bred on the Gower peninsula in 2015. 'Mixed singers' are an issue and any record will need a sound recording to support it (unless it's trapped and biometrics are obtained). There was a claim at Barrow-in-Furness railway station but it was never substantiated.

### *Pallid Swift*

Last but not least a species that surely occurred in the county last autumn, but this doesn't appear to have been proved. In a year where there was a large influx of Pallid Swifts at a time when few Common Swifts were present several birds were seen in Cumbria but unfortunately not photographed well enough to clinch. Pallid Swift may revert to a very rare bird again after last autumn's influx, but on the other hand it could be a recurring event and we might get another bite at the cherry.

*Stephen Dunstan*

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## Recent reports

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The period covered is from December 2022 to February 2023 inclusive. Some records are unauthenticated and may require review.



*Black Grouse, Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*

### Game Birds

A covey of eight **Grey Partridge** were at Brisco on 27th January.



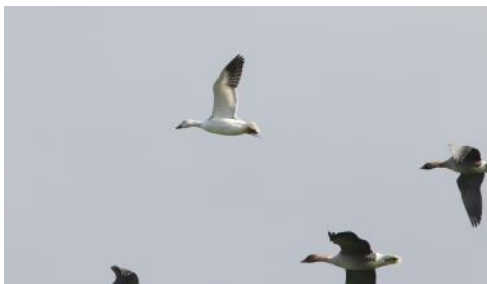
*Red-breasted Goose, Saltcoates, Nick Franklin*

### Wildfowl

Notwithstanding caveats on origin a **Red-breasted Goose** with Barnacle Geese was popular at Saltcoates, Abbeystown 27th-31st December before reappearing on Rockcliffe Marsh on 27th January and again at Brownrigg on 17th February. A series of reports of light morph **Snow Geese** in February from the 20th at Anthorn, Calvo, Campfield and Seafield proved to involve two individuals when photographs were examined.

The **Todd's Canada Goose** was with Barnacle Geese at Cardurnock on 10th December, Whitrigg on the 29th and Rockcliffe Marsh on 26th January. A **Tundra Bean Goose** was with Pinkfeet at Whitrigg on 23rd February. Eight Eurasian **White-fronted Geese** were seen on Heversham Moss and at Ulpha Meadows in late December, whilst birds of unspecified race included three at Rockcliffe on 13th February, two at Kirkbride on 14th January and one at Whitrigg on 5th February.

**Brent Geese** totals included peaks of 379 Pale-bellied birds and a further 82 Dark-bellied on Walney on 19th February, away from here and Roa Island / Foulney the only record was one at Maryport on 26th January. Away from the Solway **Barnacle Goose** flocks included 50 over Walney and 25 on Sandgate Marsh, these were as likely to be dispersing feral birds as Solway overshoots.



*Snow Goose, Calvo, Nick Franklin*

A **Green-winged Teal** was with Eurasian Teal at Rockcliffe Marsh on 15th January; probably the same bird seen at Port Carlisle on 19th and 27th February. One of the two female **Ring-necked Ducks** reappeared at Longtown Ponds from 25th January to 4th February. There were two redhead **Smew** lingering in the period, one seen mostly at Siddick Pond and the other commuting between Talkin Tarn and Tindale Tarn. The **Smew x Goldeneye** hybrid was at Longtown Ponds on at least 2nd January. There were 50 **Goldeneye** on both Bassenthwaite in December and Longtown Ponds in early February.



*Smew, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

In terms of 'seaduck' the **Long-tailed Duck** was at Hodbarrow through from December to 7th February, and another lingering from 2022 was seen at Coniston Water on 25th January and 22nd February. All reports of **Velvet Scoter** related to singles – a female off Walney on 11th December, an immature bird in the channel off Hodbarrow on 15th-17th December and a bird past Silecroft on 4th January. All **Scaup** observations came from Walney, with three on 3rd December, a first winter drake on Christmas Eve and a female remaining from 22nd December throughout. **Eider** assemblies peaked at 8500 off Walney on 27th January, whilst 41 **Red-breasted Merganser** were on the Ravenglass estuaries on 10th December.

**Mandarin** reports came from Tindale Tarn on 6th December, Castle Carrock Reservoir on 23rd January and Derwent Water where there were a minimum of two pairs in mid February.

### *Pigeons and Doves*

A large gathering of 300 Stock Dove was at Cliburn on 1st February.



*Teal, Harrington, Tony Marsh*



*Water Rail, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

### *Rails and Crakes*

**Water Rails** were reported regularly from the feeding stations at Foulshaw Moss, an article on behaviour here appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

## Recent reports

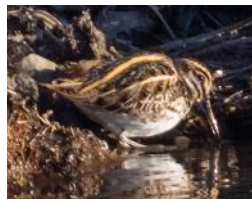
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*Little Grebe, Park End Moss, Tony Marsh*

### Grebes

A **Red-necked Grebe** was seen off Netherton on 8th December, with perhaps the same bird on Bassenthwaite the same day and remaining to the 15th.



*Jack Snipe, R. Derwent, Tony Marsh*

### Waders

The Leven Estuary at Ulverston held both a very late / wintering **Whimbrel** on 1st December and a **Spotted Redshank** on 2nd February.

Wintering **Greenshanks** included two double figure gatherings. On the Irt / Mite / Esk estuaries there were 19 in mid-January, whilst at South Walney there were 11 in December and ten in January.

The regular wintering site on the Esk at Muncaster held four **Common Sandpiper** in December and five in January.



*Knot, Mawbray, Barry Jackson*

### Gulls, Terns and Skuas

Both the traditional winter 'white wingers' were seen in the period – a juvenile **Iceland Gull** at Sandy Bottoms on the River Kent in Kendal on 11th December and a juvenile **Glaucous Gull** on Sandgate Marsh, Flookburgh on 2nd and 3rd January.



*Sanderling, Tommy Holden*

Wintering **Little Gull** numbers in the Irish Sea have dwindled significantly and this was reflected in the meagre totals in the midwinter storms – just a single off Walney on 26th December and two there on New Years Day.

There were 85 **Kittiwakes** off Port Carlisle on 19th February.



*Whooper Swans, nr Kirkbride, Tony Marsh*

### *Auks*

Most of the scarce auk reports came from Walney. A **Little Auk** passed there on 8th January. **Black Guillemots** were seen there on 2nd and 6th December, 27th January and 26th February whilst five were back under the cliffs at St Bees on 11th February.

### *Divers*

A **Black-throated Diver** was off Silecroft on 4th January. There was a good showing of **Great Northern Divers** in the south of the county. As well as three sightings off Walney in December and two there in January birds were on freshwater at Thompson's Holme Island, Windermere on 5th December, Ormsgill Reservoir 30th December – 13th January and Waterhead, Windermere 9th January to the end of that month. Finally one was off Silecroft on 27th January.

Larger totals of **Red-throated Diver** in the period were 141 off Maryport on 26th January and 145 from Silecroft the next day.

### *Petrels, Shearwaters, Gannet, Shag, Cormorant*

The dominance of Walney in **Shag** numbers continued with maxima of 40 in December, 35 in January and 30 in February and none reported elsewhere. **Gannet** sightings included six off Walney on 21st December.



*Heron, Harraby,  
Andrew Morrison*

### *Hérons and Allies*

A **Cattle Egret** was well received by county listers at Brick Kiln Lane, Ulverston from 28th January to 1st February. A **Bittern** was seen at Campfield Marsh between 3rd-22nd February, with another at a private site the same month.

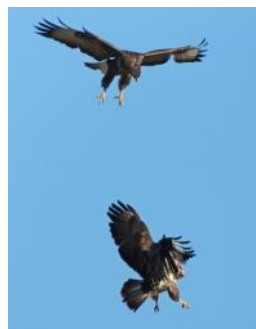
**Great White Egrets** were seen at Arnside, Crooklands and Ulpha Meadows in the south of the county, further north one was at Langwathby on 3rd January and one apparently ringed in Somerset was between Kirkoswald and Lazonby on the 15th.



## Recent reports

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### Birds Of Prey



*Peregrine, Merlin, Buzzards, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

**Marsh Harrier** records included up to three at Ulpha Meadows. Birds were also noted at Border Marsh, Flookburgh, Oulton Pits and notably Walney Island where wintering records have previously been very limited.

**Goshawk** display was noted at a confidential site in February.

### *Owls, Woodpeckers, Shrikes*

Coastal **Short-eared Owls** included birds on Walney on 7th December and at Flookburgh on 2nd January.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** reports came from Westfield Point, Barrow on 15th January and Foulshaw Moss on an unspecified date.

### *Corvids*

The **Hooded Crow** remained throughout on Walney, generally favouring the old tip area and sometimes being seen with its hybrid offspring. Another Hoodie was at St Bees on 11th February.

### *Larks*

Larger **Skylark** flocks were circa 400 at St Bees Head on 13th December and 250 at Border Marsh on 11th December.



*Buzzard, Bowness,  
Tony Marsh*





*Kingfisher, Workington,  
Tony Marsh*

### *Warblers, Crests*

A **Yellow-browed Warbler** was photographed at Hodbarrow on 7th December, but was not seen again. A **Firecrest** was seen at Siddick Pond from 23rd January to 12th February.

**Cetti's Warbler** sightings or 'hearings' in the period included Foulshaw, North Walney, Ormsgill Reservoir, Park End Moss, Siddick and Ulpha Meadows.

### *Thrushes, Chats and Flycatchers*

**Ring Ousel** appear to have wintered in the county, with birds seen on 1st December at Wansfell Pike and 5th February at Langdale.



*Robin, Portinscale,  
Tony Marsh*

### *Wagtails and Pipits*

The county's first confirmed **Olive-backed Pipit** was at Muncaster Castle on the afternoon of 9th December. Single **Water Pipits** were seen on floods at Walney with 24 **Rock Pipits** on 24th December and 19 of the latter species on 23rd January.



*Goldcrest, Portinscale, Tony Marsh*



*Lesser Redpoll, Talkin Tarn, Adam Moan*

## Recent reports

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*Starlings, Wigton, Tony Marsh*

### *Finches*

Peak **Brambling** flocks were circa 200 at Keswick on 15th January, and 160 near Bewcastle on 25th February. The **Greenfinch** flock at Carelton Clinic, Carlisle was 150 birds strong on 1st February. **Twite** flocks included up to 90 at Walney, 40 at Rockcliffe and 30 at Askam Pier.

### *Buntings*



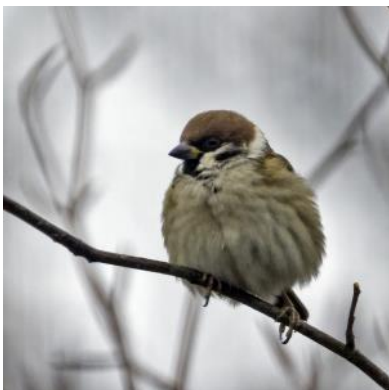
*Yellowhammer and Tree Sparrows, Oughterside, Tommy Holden*

There was a lack of coastal **Snow Bunting** records but on the tops there were seven at Mungrisdale on 20th December and a single at Great Dun Fell on 6th February. Up to eight **Yellowhammers** visited a member's garden in Haile.

*Stephen Dunstan*

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



*Song Thrush, Tree Sparrow, Nuthatch, Tony Marsh. Tufted Duck, Skylark, Adam Moan.  
Blackbird, Tommy Holden*

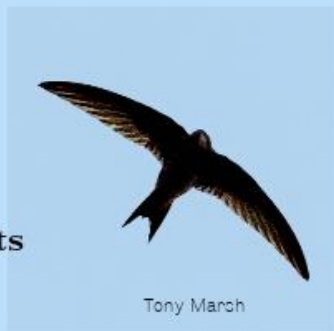
# Swifts, swallows and martins



Bolton and Bury Swifts

**Thursday 13th April 2023**

**Talks by Louise Bentley  
Bolton and Bury Swifts**



Tony March

**6.30pm - 7.15pm  
Rehabilitation of grounded swifts**

**7.30pm - 8.30pm  
Saving swifts, swallows and martins**

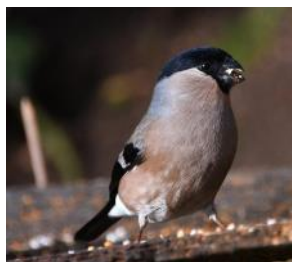
**Come and find out more about these magical migrants**

*You're welcome to attend either one or both talks*

**Quaker Meeting House, Meeting House Lane,  
Penrith. CA11 7TR**

**Contact [susanrowlands1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:susanrowlands1@hotmail.co.uk)  
Penrith Swift Group**





*Finches, Oughterside, Tommy Holden*

## **Kirkoswald Environmental Group**

### **Help us support swifts**

**Can you give a swift a home?**



**Limited number of swift nest boxes,  
swift callers and installation  
offered to residents of Kirkoswald**

**Contact [susanrowlands1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:susanrowlands1@hotmail.co.uk)  
07913775442**

**Supported by the Fellfoot Forward project**

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## Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is June 1st 2023

**If you have a computer:** please send contributions to Dave Piercy  
[daveandkathypiercy@btinternet.com](mailto:daveandkathypiercy@btinternet.com)

**If you do not have a computer:** please send in as clear a format as possible  
to Dave Piercy, 64 The Headlands, Keswick CA12 5EJ; tel 017687 73201

Opinions expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily those of Cumbria Bird Club, its Editor, nor any of its Officers.

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