



BIRD NEWS
Vol. 34 No. 2 Summer 2023

Club news and announcements
Flimby shore meet
Atypical Wren's nest
Parkside
Can Curlew survive in Lowland Cumbria?
A Common Rosefinch in Kendal
Woodcock in a tree
Ravens getting flying lessons
Yorkshire to Cumbria
Swifts - a strange start to 2023
Red Kite
Nightjar in a meadow
Recent reports

Contents - see back page

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Great Crested Grebe Survey



Many thanks to everyone who volunteered for this survey. Owing to your amazing response, we have achieved 100% coverage of the 115 potential Great Crested Grebe breeding sites in Cumbria.

By now you should have received survey instructions and record forms. When you have completed your surveys, if possible, we'd like you to enter your results online at [CBC Great Crested Grebe Survey \(google.com\)](https://www.google.com) . This puts the data straight into a spreadsheet and saves a huge amount of time, allowing us to get down to the analysis quickly.

However, we are also very happy to receive forms by email to info@cumbriabirdclub.co.uk or by mail to Sue King, The Coach House, Hampsfell Road, Grange over Sands LA11 6BG.

Many thanks to everyone who has completed and returned their first visit results already. We'd like all the sites to have a second visit in the period mid-July – mid August, even if no Grebes were seen on the first one. This is just to be sure there are no late nesters.

Thanks again. Sue King

If you are interested in taking on this role. Please contact Dave Piercy to discuss what is involved.:

daveandkathypiercy@btinternet.com 07484 230362 or 01768 73201.

Time for a change. Perhaps also time for a change of format?

Dave Piercy

Flimby Shore meet 22nd April 2023

The Flimby Shore meet was scheduled for a 9a.m. start with the aim of getting into position and letting the rising tide bring waders to us. Unfortunately the weather forecast promised rain until 2p.m. and having had a wet meet on the Duddon earlier in the year we certainly didn't fancy sitting in the rain at Flimby!

Such is the British weather. On the basis of the forecast the event was cancelled at 24 hours notice. It was a disappointment for all but there was an opportunity to fit in an afternoon visit, for any who could make it, on the promise of clearing weather, - which is what led to five members salvaging something out of the day. This is an account of the follow up and illustrates the vagaries of birds and weather, time and place.

With a few remaining spots of rain our small group hit the shore line at high water on a spring tide which left very little shoreline exposed. The good news was that passing Sandwich Terns were fishing very close in, affording great views, views last enjoyed back in September. Two terns sat out on waters edge boulders providing good scope views for us to savour. Meanwhile a splendid looking male Linnet sat close by, drawing our attention and distracting us from the shoreline.



*Linnet, RSPB Geltsdale,
Adam Moan*

With the tide fully in we had to adapt our approach in order to get views of waders, gone was the idea of sitting and watching birds in front of us. Instead we could only pop our heads up and view along the shoreline, making progress step by step without disturbing the birds we wanted to watch. Fortunately there was a substantial recent strand line of sea wrack and Turnstones in varying degrees of summer plumage were busy and preoccupied, turning it, all along the shore – probably a couple of hundred in total for the afternoon.



Turnstone, Flimby, Tony Marsh

As a Skylark or two sang behind us three or four Swallows passed northwards along the shore, like the terns they were a delight and still a novel sighting at this time of the year. Back along the shoreline the Oystercatchers were mostly paired up and in smaller numbers than at other times of the

year, only a single Redshank was seen but at high water they would have headed off to roost elsewhere. There were also a few pairs of Ringed Plovers establishing territory as well as a few probable passage birds with their secondary wing feathers partially moulted.

We soon realised that there were more hirundines passing northwards, some low over the water and others just behind us over land, it made for a challenge to try and pick out a couple of Sand Martins and just a single House Martin let alone keep a tally of how many were passing – visual migration after the poorer weather of the morning.

With our interest in shorebirds we were distracted from this passage but during the two hours on the shore we estimated that upwards of 200 Swallows had passed us heading north maybe to be seen at Allonby where John Callion regularly monitors their passing.

Although it was a different experience than the planned meet we were not disappointed, there was a single Guillemot offshore and a mixed flock of Curlew and Whimbrel were disturbed by a passing train with about 20 Whimbrel outnumbering the Curlew and a separate group of just seven Bar-tailed Godwits.

Although the Mediterranean Gulls are absent at this time of year we had enjoyed a good selection of birds and the Swallows definitely providing a highlight. We will offer this venue next year and hope for better weather.



Redshank, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan



Sedge Warbler, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan



Goldeneye, Flimby, Tony Marsh

To round off the afternoon we dropped in at Siddick Ponds to see a single male Shoveler, a pair of Goldeneye and to hear Cetti's and Sedge Warblers.

Mike and Lyn Mills.

Atypical Wren's nest - June 2023

Usually, Wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), build their domed shaped nests off the ground in shady places, where the outer structure of mosses, leaves and grasses blend with nature's natural colours and shapes. The nest is lined with feathers and has a front entrance hole.



Ferguson-Lees et al (2011), describe other sites such as nest boxes, also the old nests of other birds, such as Barn Swallow, though they make no reference as to whether these nests are domed or open.



On 7th June, in a barn ruin near Crummock, I was inspecting several Swallow nests with the purpose of ringing the nestlings. In this particular barn there were three Swallow nests of which one had four eggs and the other had three eggs. All of these were approximately 2m high.



To my surprise, in the last nest were six brown feathered chicks, certainly not Swallows; they were nestling Wrens, which became obvious when the parents entered the barn and started scolding me.

As the nest was open and accessible I ringed the six chicks and quickly left the site. The Wren had nested in an old Swallow's nest, but had not built a standard Wren's nest, no dome, but the cup was feather lined.



Thalia Sparke & John Callion

Reference: A Field Guide to Monitoring Nests, **James Ferguson-Lees, Richard Castell and Dave Leech (2011)**. Published by **British Trust for Ornithology**



Parkside

March at Parkside and Parkside pond saw a boom in the garden birds, Reed Buntings were plentiful as well as the usual Great, Blue, Coal and Long-tailed tits, Robins, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Greenfinch and House and Tree Sparrows. The Starlings were murmuring over the fields in small numbers, no more than 300 at a time. Visiting the garden we also saw a regular Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreepers (x2), Jackdaws, Carrion Crows and the occasional Rook.

The Chiffchaffs were plentiful this year both in the garden and the surrounding cycle track, as were the Wrens, Bullfinches and Garden Warbler and Willow Warblers.

The pond was also busy with a couple of visiting Tufted Duck, the resident pair of Grey Herons, Mallards, Herring Gulls, Oystercatchers, Little Grebes, Moorhen, Canada Geese, and large numbers of Greylag Geese. The Sand Martins returned to the pond early March and were quickly followed by the House Martins and Swallows, all in good numbers.

April saw the Goosanders return and a visiting pair of Goldeneye and towards the end the Swifts appeared, not nesting here this year but they did check out the newly installed boxes so hopefully we will see them nest next year. It was however noticeable that there were not as many Swifts as last year or the year before and I never totalled more than eight feeding over the pond at one time.

May saw a drop in garden and pond birds, down no doubt to nesting but we did see the Goosander raise six chicks, and the Mallards saw 22 young through to fledging, a record number as last year most were lost to predation.

We also saw a young Mute Swan move onto the pond, but was alone and we haven't seen a mate. The pair of Oystercatcher also have just one juvenile. Skylarks were in the field nesting and a pair of Curlews.

We continue to see a visiting Buzzard overhead and have heard but not seen both Barn and Tawny Owls.



Tawny Owl, Threlkeld, Tony Marsh

Guy Broome

Can breeding Curlews survive in lowland Cumbria?



Curlews, Park End Moss, Tony Marsh

All over lowland England curlews are declining. Development and changes in farming practice are threatening their survival and may ultimately lead to their extinction as lowland breeding birds. The most recent Cumbria Bird Atlas reflected this decline, particularly in the valleys of the Eden and south Lakes [Cumbria Bird Atlas \(cbdc.org.uk\)](http://cbdc.org.uk).

Curlews are ground-nesters and prefer open, flattish areas where vegetation grows tall enough to hide their nests but allows them to watch out for predators. In the Lyth Valley they often nest in silage fields and here, a local volunteer group - Curlew Recovery South Lakes - is working with an amazing group of farmers who have agreed that, once located, nests can be fenced to exclude predators and allow farming operations to continue around them.

In total, the group has fenced 12 nests. This is excellent as experience shows that fencing significantly increases hatching success. Unfortunately, we know that five unfenced nests have been lost to predation.

Of the 12 nests, six have now hatched and where we've had nest cameras, we've been able to identify the right time to call in ringers from Natural England and Lancaster University. Chicks have been ringed with standard alloy rings plus colour rings and numbered 'flags' identifying them as Cumbrian birds.

Can breeding Curlews survive in lowland Cumbria?

Curlew chicks leave their nests almost immediately on hatching and, with only their anxious parents to guard them, this is a very risky period. This year's challenge for CRSL is to track the progress of these chicks until they can fly. The sad news is that in 2022, we think only one chick fledged from the Lyth and Underbarrow areas with the rest lost to predators or farm machinery.



Curlew, Bowness, Tony Marsh

Curlews live to a ripe old age – the oldest known so far was 32 ! Even so, each pair need to fledge at least 0.5/0.6 chicks per year to keep the population stable. Can we increase their chances of doing this in the Cumbrian lowlands? At Curlew Recovery South Lakes, we hope so. To this end, we are working hard with other Curlew groups; running specific projects e.g. an Audiomoth project with Durham University to identify the link between Curlew calls and nesting success and using temperature loggers to investigate nest failure. Most importantly, we are working with willing farmers to develop Curlew-friendly techniques. Our fingers are firmly crossed for our 2023 chicks.

Find out more on Facebook at [Curlew Recovery South Lakes | Facebook](#) or Twitter [Curlew Recovery South Lakes \(@CurlewSLakes\) / Twitter](#).

Sue King. CBC Secretary & Trustee of Curlew Recovery South Lakes. Reg Charity No. 1201723

A Common Rosefinch In Kendal and social media collaboration

Most people reading this will know there has been a Rosefinch in the county this spring. For those who don't, or don't know the full story, it's an interesting case study in birding in the online era in a couple of ways.

On 26th May Naomi Lock saw and heard what she thought was a Common Rosefinch around her garden, with a blush red head and clear song. She asked for confirmation on the Cumbria Birding Facebook group and was given a number of suggestions of species that would need to be eliminated. Naomi checked these (Linnet, Redpoll etc) and said the appearance and call were both wrong but she couldn't get a decent image.

At this point it was suggested that with a mobile phone she would probably be able to get a good enough sound recording if the call was so audible. On 27th May Naomi obtained some video footage with sound and put it on the Facebook group. This confirmed that her identification had been correct, and eliminated any escape possibilities.

Or so it seemed. When the first birders successfully twitched the bird that evening the first photographs showed it was ringed on the right leg. This could be proof of either captive origin or a wild bird, but needed better images to confirm.

It was relatively quickly identified from images shared on social media that the ring was likely to be from a wild bird scheme. The next step was to identify what country it was from, and again progress was made and it was confirmed that it was from a British scheme. Further refinement from comparing different images narrowed it down to a handful of birds with the partial combination that was confirmed.

When the full code was eventually confirmed (as ARN5741) this showed the bird had been ringed as a first summer male on Fair Isle on 13th June 2022. It stayed there until 17th June. It wasn't the only Rosefinch on the isle at that time, with a pair present that nested and went on to fledge one youngster.

In a period where stories about twitching and birding are often negative or polarised it was good to have a case study where many people worked together to a positive outcome. Some parties did claim that the bird was being excessively disturbed for the purpose of obtaining images, but whilst some selfish behaviour may have occurred the fact the bird remained for a month suggests it was quite happy despite the attention.

Stephen Dunstan

Woodcock in a tree



I participated in the BTO Woodcock roding survey in Buckinghamshire this year and saw nothing in my allotted quadrant, apart from a large amount of barking Muntjac. In the Duddon valleys woodlands, however, I spotted roding Woodcock from 15th April. This was not part of the BTO survey.

And then on 31st May at 22:21hr one of the roding Woodcock landed in a tree next to me. It stayed there for about 90 seconds, which was long enough for me to take a photo on my phone. This is a behaviour I have never seen before, or indeed read about. Anyone else noted this behaviour?

James Pennefather

Ravens getting flying lessons from their parents?



Ravens, Castle Carrock, Adam Moan

In Swindale, I saw two Ravens initially flying very close together - one mimicking the other's movements. This was Saturday, 27th May, far too late for courtship behaviour. Then another pair joined the party - also flying as a pair. There were most "unravenly" sounds coming as well - not a deep croak, but I'm not very good at describing sounds. I may be totally wrong, but I thought it might be two parents educating their fledglings in the art of flying. Do Ravens do this?

Dee Gaffney

Yorkshire to Cumbria

After living in Yorkshire for 42 years we decided to move to Cumbria. From our house in Clayton West near Huddersfield we could walk up to the villages of Emley and Denby Dale along country lanes, often seeing a Little Owl, Barn Owl and Tawny Owl. The ageing farmer had a few sheep on his fields and the edges were full of wild flowers that encouraged Goldfinch flocks, Yellowhammers, Starlings, Wheatears on passage and Whinchats.

The old Park Mill Colliery stack in the village was planted up in the late 1980s and is now a small nature reserve attracting a variety of birds, Badgers, Foxes and an Otter was spotted on the river via a webcam. The old farmer retired and his farmhouse and barns were converted to housing. Slowly but surely the fields rented out to a nearby farmer saw a decline in wild flowers, hedgerows and the birds, butterflies and insects fell dramatically as he ploughed the edges and sprayed the fields!



Heather & John



Heather & John

We have had newts, frogs, dragonflies and damsel flies visit our garden pond, also the odd Heron and Coot! A plethora of birds visited the garden amongst the rarer Willow Tit, Goldcrest, Willow Warbler and Nuthatch. We often saw Buzzards and the occasional Red Kite flying over the village.

Sadly over time we have lost the Willow Tits, we no longer hear the Cuckoo, the Curlews that used to breed have disappeared along with the Lapwings and Lesser Whitethroats no longer arrive, some

species however are doing better, such as Little Egrets are thriving and Ravens have returned, nesting in trees rather than the usual cliff or rock face, but overall the decline is very concerning.

The nature reserve continues to survive with a dedicated group of volunteers, last year the appearance of yellow rattle and the early purple orchid was very encouraging.

However, the dramatic change in farming practice, house building on flood plains next to the River Dearne has meant the dawn chorus is now dominat-



*Yellowhammer, Wigton,
Tommy Holden*

ed by car noise as the main road is a traffic jam from 5am onwards as commuters head to Leeds, Manchester, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Barnsley and Sheffield, all within an hours drive.

Hence our move to Cumbria.

Since our arrival in November 2022 we have been exploring our local area of Haile near Egremont. We put feeders out in the garden and were overjoyed to have Tree Sparrows, Siskin, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatch, Coal Tit and even eight Yellowhammers and a Reed Bunting dropped in. A great introduction to Cumbrian birds.

One of the winter highlights were the many skeins of Pink-footed Geese heading for the Solway. We also have two Red Squirrels visiting the garden, I once had Red Squirrels in our garden in Yorkshire but that was over 60 years ago.

We visit Drigg and Seascale beach each week and delight in its rugged backdrop of fells, it is wonderful to see the shorebirds, Curlew, Grey Plover, Sanderlings. We have joined the Cumbrian Bird Club and the Cumbrian Wildlife Trust and are looking forward to exploring Cumbria and its wonderful landscape.



Reed Bunting, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

We even heard a Cuckoo from our garden! Priceless.



Cuckoo, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Heather and John Baxter

Swifts - a strange start to 2023

This year we had the earliest record for Swifts returning to their nest sites at Lowgill, with two birds surprisingly arriving on April 29th and three birds on April 30th. This was not a herald of a general early start to the season however, as although several more did come in the first week of May, there was then a lull. Consequently we have a big overlap between nests this year, with – at the time of writing on 23 June – nests with chicks that are 18 days old whereas some pairs are still incubating eggs.

In total last year we had 34 pairs of Swifts, 19 pairs in nests with cameras. Messages from around the country this year reported that their Swifts were late and they were missing birds. The weather was bad throughout Europe and it was feared that this had adversely affected the migration. Indeed, we have ended up with 6 Swifts (not pairs) failing to return out of our 19 pairs (38 Swifts) that are on camera. If a singleton comes back it waits for its mate for one to two weeks before going out to draw in a new partner. In one of our boxes the original mate did then return late, resulting in fighting which can be quite vicious. They lock claws with the intention of forcing one Swift to leave. The original Swift in our case must have won as the eggs laid by the newly formed pair were ejected.

We believe that two of our singletons have paired up. Last year two previously unoccupied and adjacent eaves nest sites were occupied by new pairs. They did not breed, but just roosted and built nice nests in preparation for returning the following year to breed. We were very disappointed that only a single bird has returned to each of these nests. Amazingly one of them then roosted each night alone for over a month waiting for its mate to come back. One morning it flew out never to return. The likelihood of the pairing was the timing: an hour later a bird appeared in the adjacent nest site to join the other single Swift that had arrived only a week before. Our assumption is that this bird had simply popped next door. Luckily they were a male and female, and are now incubating eggs. However sadly one of the nests built last year is still unoccupied and we are a pair down.

Swifts only have one brood, the average clutch being two eggs. Another record this year is that we have 12 pairs incubating three eggs, when previously the highest was five pairs. Eggs are usually laid two days apart but not incubated until all are laid, in an attempt to synchronise hatching.

We think that we may have lost at least two Swifts to a Sparrowhawk that was seen lurking around. They were Swifts that had returned from migration but both disappeared within a day. A Sparrowhawk cannot catch a Swift in flight, but learns where nests are, and will perch and wait to pounce as the Swift leaves the nest. Hobbies can catch flying Swifts, but are not found near us, and remains of Swifts have been found in Peregrine nests in city towers.

The exceptionally hot sunny weather in late May and June seems to have brought on some fantastic 'banging' activity, when parties of Swifts fly up to walls and eaves at great speed and even cling on for a second or two. They focus on occupied nests and the residents scream back out of their holes to encourage them. Some mornings we had upwards of 20-30 Swifts hurtling around and it felt like something out of Hitchcock's film *The Birds*. It's called banging because you can hear the noise as they sometimes hit the woodwork of fascia boards. The bangers are Swifts that are not old enough to breed, and are prospecting for future nest sites and practising their technique of approaching holes.



In the heat it was not nice to see how the young swiftlets were panting in the nests, and the adults spread wings to cope, as shown in this picture.

Finally, for our engagement with the community, we spent another super morning at Leighton Moss RSPB reserve in March with the young ornithologists group (now called Wildlife Explorers). It is run by volunteers on Saturday mornings to encourage

their interest in birds and wildlife, a great idea to get children involved.

As well as talking about the amazing lifestyle of Swifts, one of the activities we did was to create a poster of Swift migration. We took a large sheet with a map of Africa and showed the migration and wintering locations, and a chart with the flags of all the African countries.

The children cut out Swifts and coloured them in the colours of the flags of countries that Swifts migrate through.



It's a great geography lesson too as there are a lot of West and Central African countries! The Swifts were then stuck on the map and the resultant poster has been put up in Lillian's hide on the reserve. It's very colourful.

Tanya and Edmund Hoare

Red Kite



Red Kite, Cartmel Fell, G. Halstead

Until recently a raptor overhead here was inevitably a Buzzard. Now there is always the chance of a Red Kite. Things have changed.

During the middle ages the Red Kite along with the Raven were valued in the City of London as they fed on human waste, refuse and dead animals. It was an offense to kill these birds.

However increased sanitation and metalled roads meant neither bird had a place as a refuse collector. The hand of man turned against birds of prey and over 400 years of raptor destruction across Britain began. Gamekeepers and later Victorian egg collectors had a passion for mounted species, and so birds would be taken from the nest, hand reared and then killed so that a specimen in a glass case could be produced. County by county Kites were exterminated from the British countryside. By 1870 the last Kite bred in England followed in 1879 in Scotland.

The 1880 - 1902 series of bird protection acts gave little protection and it seemed this once valued bird had gone from our skies forever.

However, Wales fared a little better and against all odds three pairs there in 1931 expanded to six pairs during the war, all in the hanging oak woods of central Wales. Both locally and nationally various groups were set up with the aim of protection of the birds, but the bitterly cold winter of 1962/63 took its toll, as did a rise in cases of myxomatosis which badly hit the rabbit population in Central Wales - one of the Kite's main source of food.

Due to the dedication and hard work of many people the 1970's saw success. Twenty-four nests were protected and this rose to 30 by 1980 with 27 young

fledged. The corner had turned and it became possible to show people the birds. Indeed a farmer at a public site was feeding hundreds of Kites, Buzzards and Ravens in the winter.

It was now time for the long-awaited English reintroduction to swing into action and from 1989 to 1993, 93 young Kites mainly from Sweden arrived in the UK and were distributed in both England and Scotland. More releases occurred around the turn of the century and by 2000 the population stood at 1600 pairs. Forward to the present time the figure is nearer 4400 pairs.



Red Kites have been released in Cumbria and this programme was well documented. In parts of Southern England particularly they are the most common of birds and will visit gardens when food is made available to them.

So from the Middle Ages to the last ditch struggles in Central Wales we have become so far as to be able to enjoy this bird from our living room windows—How good is that!

Mike Carrier and Trevor Gunton

Nightjar in a meadow

At 22.15 on 23rd May I went for an evening walk through our one acre re-wilding field / garden at Cumrew in the North Pennines. I was surprised and delighted to hear the churring of a Nightjar. I was familiar with the sound from West Africa and Hampshire. The churring lasted 12 minutes and in the dusk I could just see the flashes of its white wing spots as it repeatedly settled on the sparsely vegetated unsurfaced track.

The lush meadow habitat of the re-wilding field, managed for voles, owls and insects is totally unsuited to Nightjars but there would have been some moths around so it may have been feeding up. I didn't have my camera and no photography would have been possible.

I have not seen or heard the bird since. I have had one evening search of the nearest habitat, post clear-felled heathland with hardwood plantings, 0.7 Km to the West but without success. I will keep searching and report back.

Guy Broome, 1/6/23

Recent reports

The period covered is from March to May 2023 inclusive. Some records are unauthenticated and may require review.

Game Birds

Two **Quail** were calling at Whittrigg on 24 May.

Wildfowl



Smew, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Presumably the same drake **Green-winged Teal** in the last quarter was mobile in the north of the county during the period. It was at Tindale Tarn on 5 March, Port Carlisle on 7 March and at Campfield Marsh on 9 and 17 April. One of the two **Ring-necked Ducks** returned to Longtown pits on 20 March and 2 April.

The **Snow Goose** was in the

Whittrigg area from 6 to 11 March; a **Dark-bellied Brent** was seen in the same area on the 6 March. Counts of **Pale-bellied Brents** from Walney included 331 on 22 March and 220 on 7 April. **Whooper Swan** passage was again well monitored, with peaks of 132 over Penrith on 26 March and c400 over Ambleside the next day.



Garganey, Siddick, Tommy Holden



Common Scoter, Rickerby Park, Roger Ridley

Smew lingered in March at Tindale Tarn to the 18 and Siddick to the 22. A drake **Garganey** was at Leasgill on 29 March, with another at Siddick Pond 8-9 April. A pair at Brigsteer Wetland on 26 April went up to four males and a female in early May with three lingering subsequently. The wintering **Long-tailed Duck** was at Hodbarrow until 1 May. The wintering **Scaup** at South Walney was last seen on 22

March, but seawatching on 30 March yielded no fewer than eleven.

Freshwater **Common Scoter** were seen in ones and twos at Appleby GC, the Eden in Carlisle, Hardendale Quarry, the Kent in Kendal and Tindale Tarn between 25 March and 16 April. There were clearly still birds on the sea though as a remarkable 22000 were seen in three flocks off Walney on 21 May. A good period for **Velvet Scoter** sightings saw most at Walney (two on 8 and 13 April, four on 1 May, three on 7 May and one on 19 May) but with a peak count of five at St Bees on 1 May. There were 4250 **Eider** gathered off Walney on 7 April.



Teal, Geltsdale, Adam Moan,

Swifts

Just as it seemed as though the county would miss out in the national influx of **Alpine Swift** one was seen from a Burton-in-Kendal living room on 1 April. This will be the first county record for over 50 years if accepted. The first **Swift** was reported from Penrith on 23 April, with 20+ over Carlisle on 1 May the largest group.

Waders

A **Black-winged Stilt** flew over Frizington on 18 April. The other stand out shorebirds of the period were both at Wedholme Flow – a **Temminck's Stint** on 24-25 May followed by a **Pectoral Sandpiper** on 28 May. A good run of **Wood Sandpiper** reports was comprised of birds at Walney on 30 April, in the Eden Valley on 3 May, the Esk at Longtown on 4-5 May and Wedholme Flow on 28 May.

Curlew Sandpipers were seen at either end of May, the first at Bowness-on-Solway on the 3rd and the second at Walney on 29-30 May. **Ruff** were seen at Walney on 28 May and Wedholme Flow on 30 May. **Avocets** were reported from Bowness-on-Solway on 6 April, Campfield Marsh on 17 April and Walney on 18 May.

Wintering sandpipers on the Esk Estuary at Muncaster consisted of a number of **Common Sandpipers** and one (possibly two) **Green Sandpipers**. There were still seventeen **Greenshanks** from the wintering population on the Ravenglass estuaries on 22 March, with ten still at Walney the same month before small numbers passed through in May. Peak **Whimbrel** passage counts were 45 at Watchtree on 30 April and 40 at both Flimby on 23 April and Crosscanonby on 14 May.



Ringed Plover, Flimby, Tony Marsh

Gulls, Terns and Skuas

The full set of spring skua species were seen, but it was a close run thing. Following avian flu impacts the only **Great Skua** was off Walney on 13 April. Single **Long-tailed Skuas** passed Bowness-on-Solway on both 17 and 18 May. A **Pomarine Skua** at Walney on 2 May was bookended by one on 19 April and three on 3 May at Bowness-on-Solway.

A total of 44 **Arctic Skuas** were seen from Walney over the period, with peaks of five on 29 April, seven on 10 May and six on 16 May. Elsewhere there were singles off Bowness-on-Solway on 3 and 10 May, and two past Drigg Point on 26 May.

Following a single on 11 April, Walney got in on the pronounced overland **Little Gull** passage through northwest England with nineteen on the 20th and twelve on the 22nd. More expected were small numbers through Longtown in May from the 7th, peaking at five on the 18th with last on 26th.

Up to two **Roseate Terns** were seen at Hodbarrow 6-8 May. **Kittiwake** passage peaked in early April with 740 at Bowness-on-Solway on 2nd and 314 at Walney on 6th. **Mediterranean Gulls** were probably under-reported in the period, but included one on Walney on 19 March, Dalton-in-Furness on 27 May and several dates at Hodbarrow.



*Kittiwake, St Bees,
Tony Marsh*

Auks

The upsurge of **Puffin** sightings off Walney continued this spring; four dates in April including three on the 29th were followed by 83 bird days in May and peaks of eighteen on the 10th and eleven on the 24th. Otherwise the only report away from St Bees was of one off Bowness railings on 25 May.



Razorbill & Guillemot, St Bees, Tony Marsh

All **Black Guillemot** away from the St Bees nest sites were also seen off Walney with single birds seen on 27 and 30 March and 13 and 18 May. The peak of large auk passage off Walney was on 16 May, when 468 **Guillemots** were logged.

Divers

Following the good early year showing of **Great Northern Diver** in the county one was off Walney on 19 March, with spring passage birds there on 10 May and from Bowness-on-Solway on the 18th of the month. There were a minimum of 89 **Red-throated Diver** between Silecroft and Drigg on 2 April.

Petrels, Shearwaters, Gannet, Shag, Cormorant

A **Sooty Shearwater** moved out of Morecambe Bay past Walney on the morning of 11 April. **Manx Shearwater** were seen from 23 March, with the peak count in the period 410 off Walney on 10 May.

The only **Shag** seen away from Walney was at Parton on 7 March. On Walney monthly peak counts were seventeen in March, fourteen in April and eleven in May.



Gannets, St Bees, Tony Marsh

Hérons and Allies

A **Night Heron** was seen flying over the M6 near Longtown on 2 May, there was a good influx of this species nationally during the period. Two **Cattle Egret** were at Low Foulshaw on 5 May.

Great White Egret reports came from Bassenthwaite on 7 March, at Foulshaw / Ulpha Meadows in March and April and at Brigsteer Wetland on 23 March. A **Spoonbill** was at Drumburgh on 28 March, with scattered reports of one or more singles in the south of the county.

Birds Of Prey

A **Short-toed Eagle** flew low over Ambleside on the morning of 22 May. One has been summering in Scotland in recent years, so it could conceivably have been that individual and one was reported north of the border 36 hours later.

Up to three **Marsh Harrier** were at Foulshaw / Ulpha Meadows in March and April. Records of **Goshawk** came from two sites and **Hobby** were reported at one, specific details are not given because of the sensitivity of these species.

Hoopoe

One was in the dunes at South Walney on 12 May.

Corvids

The regular Walney **Hooded Crow** was present throughout. It was joined by a second year bird 11-15 April, and two migrants passed through the island during light corvid passage on 6 May. Elsewhere one was at Bransty on 7 March, and two were at St Bees on 22 May.

Hirundines

A **Red-rumped Swallow** was briefly at Waterhead, Windermere on 23 April, an excellent local patch record with good photographs obtained.

Arrival dates for the more regular species were 17 March at Longtown for **Sand Martin**, 25 March at Skelwith Bridge and Walney for **House Martin** and 28 March at Campfield and Kendal for **Swallow**.



*Red-rumped Swallow, Ambleside,
Ashley Cooper*

Warblers, Crests

Singing **Chiffchaffs** at both Ormsgill and Roanhead were presumably wintering birds responding to milder weather. Arrival dates in April, all from Walney, included **Willow Warbler** on 1st, **Grasshopper Warbler** on 14th, **Lesser Whitethroat** on 21st and **Garden Warbler** on 29th.

Cetti's Warblers included several at Siddick Pond, three at Foulshaw / Ulpha Mosses and three also at Brigsteer Wetlands. One was seen carrying food, proof of breeding, at Roosecote Marsh.



Wood Warbler, Ashness, Tony Marsh



*Blackcap, Castle Carrock, Adam
Moan*

Thrushes, Chats and Flycatchers



Pied Flycatcher, Ashness, Tony Marsh

Ring Ousels were seen on the coast at Walney on 30 March and St Bees on 11 April. On 31 March several were reported on Carrock Fell. The only **Black Redstart** in the period was at Clifton, Penrith on 11 April. A coastal **Pied Flycatcher** was on Walney on 18 April. At least 12 migrant **Spotted Flycatcher** passed through Walney in late May, whilst there were five pairs in the vicinity ofSizergh Castle car park.



Stonechats, Whinchat, Redstart, Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Wagtails and Pipits

Good numbers of **Water Pipits** were attracted to the floods at Biggar, Walney following high tides. In March there were eight on 23 March increasing to fourteen the next day, whilst there were up to nine on 6-7 April.

Yellow Wagtail sightings included four on the Esk at Longtown on 4 May and also at Walney on 7 May. A **Channel Wagtail** intergrade was at Longton from 5th to 7th May. A smattering of **White Wagtails** were seen from 1 April. Peak **Meadow Pipit** passage counts were on 17 March, when there were 300 on Walney and 97 at Lowca.

Finches

A male **Common Rosefinch** at Plumgarths, Kendal from 27 May was confirmed from recordings of the song and then proved extremely popular with birders as it lingered and is still present (at the time of writing). The bird has a metal ring, and the code on this was eventually successfully read and showed it to be an individual caught as a first summer on Fair Isle last spring.

Twite flocks in March included up to 57 at Walney, 45 at Rockcliffe and ten at Hodbarrow. There were 200 **Linnet** in a flock in Whitehaven on 26 March. Up to eight **Hawfinch** were around the Sizergh Castle car park in April.



Hawfinch, Sizergh, Tony Marsh

Buntings

There was one **Snow Bunting** reported in the period – at Brown Crag, Thirlmere on 4 March.

Escapes / Unknown Origin

A White-fronted goose species low over the head of Lake Windermere on 23 April was confirmed as a **Lesser White-fronted Goose** from photographs. A lone bird of this species would presumably not be accepted as a wild individual.



Ashley Cooper

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 for details of how to do so.*

The Sierra De Gredos- Summer is on the doorstep

Those chilly mornings and lovely pleasant warm days of springtime now seem a distant memory, the thrushes that we see in wintertime have followed the thousands of Common Cranes along with the other winter visitors and have headed north, the many Rock Buntings that enjoy picking through the lawn over the colder months are now feeding young up on the Sierra de Gredos, only around ten miles from our house at La Sayuela but at up to almost 2600mtrs asl it is a different world, they have been joined by our summer breeders like Ortolan Bunting, Water Pipit, Spectacled and Bonelli's warblers, Rock Thrush, and Bluethroat to name a few.



Egyptian Vulture



Southern Grey Shrike

It is Friday and we have just been to the supermarket, on our return there was a fabulous Short-toed Eagle perched up on the end of our drive, I think that they are breeding close by because there is often a pair around. The other day there was a commotion and when I looked outside they were giving 'short shrift' to a passing pale phase Booted Eagle, now that is not something that I would see from our garden in Maryport.

Sitting here at the computer it is around 37 degrees outside, I have a window open on the shaded side of house and a lovely Cirl Bunting is singing around ten metres away, those males look fabulous in breeding plumage.

The start to the year was incredibly dry and it was looking disastrous for wildlife. With no plants growing there are no larvae to feed young birds etc. Then, during the last week of May it started to rain, and rain, for three weeks we had the explosion



Great Spotted Cuckoo

The Sierra De Gredos- Summer is on the doorstep

of colour and vibrancy in the meadows, and lots of food for hungry young birds. I think that we have had between five and seven Iberian Magpies breeding in our garden, unlike their other European cousins they are nice to have around with much bickering between families and a much softer tone than the raucous European Magpie. The Golden Orioles are now feeding fledged young, it doesn't seem long since they arrived and now we are hearing the almost constant contact calls between the young birds and the adults, it seems that the young birds spread between different trees and the parents visit them individually to feed them.

In April we had the pleasure of some other visitors here at La Sayuela, we were lucky to have Chris Hind (Cumbria County Recorder) and his wife Liz stay with us for a few days. It was fabulous to get out to do some walks and bird watching with them (Chris has kindly let me use his photos in this article).

While out we spotted this Wryneck in some woodland below the village. It was distant but great to see and even better to see it a couple of weeks later carrying food. I believe that makes us on the southern boundary of its breeding range.



Wryneck

Now that summer is upon us it is worth saying that this area is not only about the birds, I have found that the diversity of butterflies here is astonishing.



Chapman's Green Hairstreak



Provence Hairstreak

The Sierra De Gredos- Summer is on the doorstep



Pearly Heath



The Nettle Tree Butterfly

A simple walk in the wildly varying habitat can take hours with many new sights and sounds. Then of course there is the challenge of putting a name to what you see and hear. This can be quite a task, especially with the juvenile birds around now. Above is a small gallery of some butterflies that you can see.

Finca La Sayuela, near the small village of El Raso, Candeleda is a small development of three rental cottages set in a fabulous natural environment, situated in the south of the province of Castilla y Leon and bordering Extremadura.

It is perfect for visiting Monfrague and the Sierra de Gredos, owned and managed by Keith & Jane Hamilton.

Please see our website for more details <https://fincalasayuela.com/> or call (UK number) 07769738306. Keith has a thorough knowledge of the bird-watching areas of northern Extremadura and The Gredos Mountains, guided tours are available.

Contents

Club news and announcements	35
Flimby shore meet - 22nd April 2023 <i>Mike & Lyn Mills</i>	36
Atypical Wren's nest June 2023 <i>Thalia Sparke & John Callion</i>	38
Parkside <i>Guy Broome</i>	39
Can breeding Curlew survive in lowland Cumbria? <i>Sue King</i>	40
A Common Rosefinch in Kendal and social media collaboration <i>Stephen Dunstan</i>	42
Woodcock in a tree <i>James Pennefather</i>	43
Ravens getting flying lessons <i>Dee Gaffney</i>	43
Yorkshire to Cumbria <i>Heather & John Baxter</i>	44
Swifts - a strange start to 2023 <i>Tanya and Edmund Hoare</i>	46
Red Kite <i>Mike Carrier & Trevor Gunton</i>	48
Recent reports <i>Stephen Dunstan</i>	50

Information for contributors

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

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