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***BIRD NEWS***  
***Vol. 34 No. 3 Autumn 2023***

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please contact the Secretary who holds some.



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## Club news and announcements: AGM and meeting

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### **AGM: Friday 3rd November 2023 at The George Hotel, Penrith. 7:30pm.**

The club currently has vacancies for the office of Chairperson and Newsletter Editor. There are also opportunities for two new Council members to be elected. If you would like to stand or to nominate someone else for any of these posts, please contact the Secretary at [info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk) not later than seven days before the AGM (i.e. by Friday 27th October).

Following the AGM there will be a talk by Conrad Dickinson.

### **Owls, Birds of Paradise and more... A photographic journey.**

Conrad is the President of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, a stalwart volunteer at RSPB Geltsdale and an award-winning photographer. Since retiring as a Polar Expedition Guide he has returned to his first love of birds and wildlife. We are very much looking forward to hearing him and hope you will be able to join us.

*Sue King, CBC Secretary*

### **Wednesday December 13th at Tullie House, Carlisle: 7:15pm**

Joint CBC/Carlisle Natural History Society meeting.

[John Callion: Comparative Studies of Stonechats and Pied Flycatcher](#) .

Click for further details.



*Pied Flycatcher, Ashness, Tony Marsh*



*Stonechat, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

### **Vacancy - CBC Newsletter editor**

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

[daveandkathypiercy@btinternet.com](mailto:daveandkathypiercy@btinternet.com) 07484 230362 or 01768 73201.

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

*Dave Piercy*

## Curlew recovery South Lakes update

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Four Curlew chicks are now confirmed to have fledged from the Lyth Valley population, described in the last CBC newsletter. This number may seem low but it's three more than last year when only one chick fledged and, although low, the productivity rate is not dissimilar to many, much larger projects. Many thanks are due to all the volunteers and farmer who supported the work. However, it illustrates the very long odds that lowland Curlew chicks face.



*Male parent, John Dodds*

In total we located 18 nests and fenced 12. This paid off as only one fenced nest was predated. Nest cameras were useful for identifying the time of hatching and allowed licensed ringers from Natural England and the University of Lancaster to attach standard BTO rings and, also, leg 'flags' to identify the chicks as Cumbrian birds. Unfortunately, hatching success was less than 50% and we're waiting to see if Sheffield University can identify why that is from the unhatched samples.

The most interesting element of the project was tracking each family once the chicks had hatched. This was done daily, using binoculars and telescopes from footpaths and roadsides and was straightforward as long as the birds didn't move too far!

Interestingly, of the four successful chicks, three moved relatively short distances (< 500 m) and generally remained in pasture fields. The exception was a fledgling which was moved over a distance of 3 km to avoid various agricultural operations, crossing the River Gilpin and two roads on its journey.



*Chick, John Dodds*

We are hoping to continue the project next year and are currently discussing ways we can help increase the number of successful fledglings.

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.*

## Satellite tags for Hen Harriers in Cumbria: A request for donations

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A new *JustGiving* site has recently been set up for personal donations towards the purchase of satellite tags for Cumbrian Hen Harriers. This is an initiative of Conrad Dickinson, President of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, and dedicated Hen Harrier volunteer with the RSPB.



*Hen Harrier, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

All monies received will go directly and entirely towards financing the cost of the tags. These units can be fitted on Hen Harrier nestlings, generating accurate location fixes for up to seven years (if the bird survives that long). Satellite tags are quite expensive, and it costs around £4000 to purchase the hardware and access the transmission data over a two-year period. The tags will be fitted by trained fieldworkers, and the satellite data managed by the RSPB. Satellite tags have proved invaluable for tracking the movements of harriers year-round. They can flag up potential breeding areas and pinpoint winter roost sites.

The data also highlights locations where Hen Harriers sadly go missing. All this has proved to be vital in the ongoing battle against human persecution. Tags secured through this scheme will supplement those that the RSPB and Natural England are able to provide. Clearly, the more harrier chicks that can be sat-tagged the better. (Next year a grant application will also be submitted directly to the CBC Council for funding towards this project). If you would like to individually support this important conservation project, then please use the following link to the dedicated *JustGiving* site: [Satellite tags Just Giving](#)

*Pete Howard*

### **WeBS counter needed for Lake Windermere**

Are you interested in putting your water bird ID skills to good use? If so, and you live near Lake Windermere, there's currently a vacancy for a Wetland Bird Surveyor. As England's largest lake, it is a high priority WeBS site but it's been un-surveyed for several years. This lack of data raises issues for the many organisations with an interest in the health of its wildfowl populations and for those involved in the lake's management such as the Lake District National Park Authority.

The size of the lake makes it difficult to survey as a whole so we'd love to hear from anyone who could survey any part of it on a monthly basis. You can find out more about what's involved at [Wetland Bird Survey | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#). If you're interested, or would like to discuss things, please contact the local WeBS organiser Dave Shackleton at [d.shackleton@btinternet.com](mailto:d.shackleton@btinternet.com).

## 2023 - Some observations on breeding birds on the Solway

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It was a mixed season for the Tits. At Watchtree a Stoat or Stoats raided at least 19 nest boxes with mostly Great Tits. However, a brood of Great Tits and a late brood of Blue Tits survived. They did better in a thin strip of woodland away from the main woods where three broods of both Blue and Great Tit fledged. In Finglandrigg Wood all the occupied boxes were successful.

Long-tailed tits at both sites seem to have fared less well and I have only seen small family groups. They seemed to take a while to start laying, which may have been a weather related or even a food issue. The moth trappers reported poor early spring catches and there was a noticeable lack of insects generally, especially hoverflies and bees.



*Great Tit, Watchtree, Tony Marsh*



*Tree Sparrow, Watchtree Tony Marsh*

We only had two broods of Tree Sparrows at Watchtree and are not sure why they are deserting the site. Notwithstanding this the numbers coming to the feeders shows they are breeding nearby. They do move and one of our ringed birds was recaptured at Mockerkin.

There was an abundance of singing Willow Warblers, Garden Warblers and Blackcaps, but fewer Whitethroats. However, our ringing at Watchtree suggests a significant breeding failure. I surmise the possible cause to be the drought from mid-May to mid-June. Most should be feeding chicks in the first two weeks of June and the very hot dry weather may have had an impact. Not sure if this is widespread or a very local effect.

There were a good number of Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers this year but again the breeding season at Watchtree seemed rather poor. The weather held up our ringing effort and it could be that many juveniles had gone by late July. We shall have to wait until next season now to make a judgement. Certainly ringers in the Midlands and southern England were ringing good numbers of all species of warblers. The only species that has done well is Chiffchaff, we



*Chiffchaff, Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*

## 2023 - Some observations on breeding birds on the Solway

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probably had our highest ringing total with many juveniles. We assume at least a proportion of them were bred at Watchtree but given that some years ago one of our ringed birds was caught by a ringer in Norway in the breeding season who knows.

As the woodland and scrub develops there has been notable decline in the number of breeding Goldfinch, Linnets and Lesser Redpoll at Watchtree. Goldfinch flocks seem quite small this year and I wonder if the dry weather affected the early nest attempts. Similarly the dry spell could have affected our Blackbird and Song Thrush. Bullfinch numbers at Watchtree also seem lower and again this is perhaps related to the new plantations maturing.

We are energetically trying to manage areas of scrub and thinning the plantations to try and get a good edge and shrubby understory but it is not easy trying to get nature to 'hurry up'. On the other hand scrub like Blackthorn, Birch and Willow grow so fast it is hard keeping up with a suitable coppice regime.



*Goldfinch, Watchtree,  
Tony Marsh*

I have been ringing Swallows at Bowness Hall since 2004 and monitored nests and ringed chicks. I saw the number of nests rise to 20 by 2019. However, in 2020 (covid year) they crashed and when I returned to ring in 2021 I only had 10 nests. We usually had three pairs at Watchtree and have had none since 2020. My total nests for this year was 31. I recorded 31 nests which fledged 126 chicks. Most had two broods and I think two had third broods all of which had fledged by mid-September. There were good numbers around Kirkbride and Kirkbampton too.

On the other hand we only had six House Martin nests on our house and only three went onto second broods. Three pairs came quite late and perhaps were held up by the hot dry weather. This was down from ten nests last year and well down on the maximum we have had of 13 nests. Looking at the weather over Spain and Portugal at migration time one wonders if that had a significant impact on numbers. Lots of my ringing contacts around the country also noted lower numbers.



*House Martin and Swallow, Adam Moan*



## 2023 - Some observations on breeding birds on the Solway

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Contacts tell me that Pied Flycatchers had a very good season and lots of large broods of eight and nine were noted. Our House Sparrows had a very good season and they had chicks in the nest well into August. I regularly have over 100 feeding on my lawn and have had up to an estimated 170 at times.



*Starling, Tommy Holden*

Starlings too seem to have bred well if the numbers in the village are anything to go by. I had three broods in the boxes on our house and unusually they were on quite a long stagger. Judging from his frequent singing and displaying it took one male quite a long time to find a mate.

I checked 24 Barn Owl Boxes and ringed 30 chicks in 15 boxes. Brood sizes were quite low with only four broods of three, most were only ones or twos. I ringed single Tawny Owl chicks in two boxes, one in Watchtree and another in Finglandrigg Wood. On the BTO Woodcock survey I estimated at least four roding males at Finglandrigg Wood and the usual single bird at Watchtree.

I am not sure what happened on our water bodies but I do know that very few Mallard ducklings fledged and no Coot, Moorhen or Little Grebe chicks fledged. For the second year the new pair of Mute Swans on our small lake failed too. Our long resident pair in the wetlands have not bred for three years now. The possible reason for such a failure rate could be a visitation by an Otter, which also caused quite a high failure rate in 2021 but gave us a miss in 2022 or came later. Mink might be another reason. We have so many visitors nowadays and many members visit out of hours so I am surprised that nobody saw an Otter or a Mink.



*Mallard, Watchtree, Tony Marsh*

It is always difficult to judge the success of our Skylarks but Liz Still tells me that the usual numbers of singing males were present. Liz has carried out a comprehensive bird survey for Defra since 2004 and there is now a most remarkable data set for the site. I am indebted to Liz for these and her survey has helped me to compile this account.

*Frank Mawby*



## Fish fly fishing?



On Saturday 2nd of September I took the picture above from our riverbank of a small flock of birds taking insects over the river surface. Given the low light, and the distance from me of the birds, the detail of the birds was marginal, so I sent the image to Chris Hind for help with ID. In the picture all of those flying are Sand Martins with the exception of one which is a Swallow.

It was after I'd sent the picture to Chris that I noticed the "event" you will see in the top-left-hand quadrant of the picture. My first inclination was what had been recorded was a fish and a bird competing in air for the same insect.

It was then suggested to me by a wildlife-photographer friend of mine that it was more likely to be simply the fish going (successfully) after the bird. See the expanded cropped area of the picture including the fish with its catch.



I combed the internet for hours and found only a single instance (in South Africa) of a river-fish taking a bird in the air. This depicted a "Tigerfish" (about the size of a big Trout) taking an in-flight Swallow.

I then decided to contact Glyn Freeman, who is perhaps the most famous fly-fisherman in Cumbria. He has been a fly fisherman for about 32 years so he has spent a lot of those watching fish jump in English and Scottish rivers. He is the River Keeper for part of the Eden about two miles downstream from my stretch where I've met him there on one or two occasions. I sent him the cropped shot.. He replied (verbatim) :

*It certainly looks as if that's happening with an open mouth like that, more than likely a big Brown Trout. Never seen anything like that here before, I've seen them do that to Damselfly, young ducklings, mice swimming on the surface but not birds!*

*Russel Austin*

## Ambleside Swifts “Annual Report” 2023

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At just before 10am on May 3rd I was sat on a car park wall waiting for someone. Which was when and where I heard, then saw, my first Swifts of 2023. Ted Hughes nailed it: “They’ve made it again/ Which means the globe’s still working”. That first sighting is so important to so many people, and I love hearing from folk about theirs.



*Swift, Portinscale, Tony Marsh*

The first Ambleside Swifts, that I know of, had been seen down at the lake a couple of days before. Which is pretty normal; what I’d expect. And as I’d expect, numbers grew rapidly in those first days of May. There were 13 over the University accommodation on the 5th, 9 over Birch Road on the 6th, 16 over Millans Park on the 9th. Birds were soon screaming around nest sites and buzzing buildings. Overall numbers seemed slow to build up and several folk commented on how it was very quiet. But I hear that comment every year: we always remember the exciting, busy and noisy times!

My first count of over 20 was on 21st May, by which point the weather was set fair. It was good weather for Swifts for the next month, with June high counts of 50-plus over the village from Fisherbeck on the 3rd, and 60 over Millans Park on the evening of the 16th. I described the latter in my notebook as “general madness”: a dozen birds flew repeatedly at one house while more circled at a higher level.

But numbers never reached those heights again, so far as I am aware. In late June cooler, more unsettled weather set in. And whilst the Swifts are always there, folk don’t hang around so much outside to watch them, and the birds are less inclined (I think) to be noisy and sociable. There were 40-plus counts from the meadows on the morning of July 7th; over Millans Park the evening of the same day; over the village on the evening of 20th July and the morning of 3rd August. A couple of times that week a sparrowhawk was mobbed, giving counts of 30-plus and 24. As usual, numbers fell off rapidly during August.

The last bird I know of was seen briefly over the school field on the 20th. In comparison to previous years there were fewer counts of more than 30 birds: but whether that means there were fewer Swifts around, or the weather made them less inclined to hang out in screaming parties, or we were staying dry inside, it is hard to know.

In terms of nests, the headline figures are that birds were seen entering or leaving 21 buildings in the village, in 27 places (that I’ll call nests, though it is hard to be certain of that). In 2022 the numbers were 16 buildings and 22

nests, So on the face of it numbers might be up (previous years had been 25 and 37, 20 and 38, 21 and 35, which suggest numbers have been well down the last two years). In five years of recording, we have now found 41 buildings in the village that have had Swifts going in and out.

Any discussion of Swift nests needs to mention the difficulties of recording. Whilst birds are very often faithful to exactly the same nest site and some buildings containing nests are “spot lit” by screaming parties, not all are. And those screaming parties are often younger birds looking at nest sites for next year! The actual nesters may well be silent, entering stealthily. Comings and goings will almost always be rapid, often infrequent, and sometimes a parent bird may not come back for a day or more. The actual location and recording of a precise site involves a mixture of chance, patient staking out and looking in exactly the right place at the right time. Absence of evidence for nesting is not evidence of Swift absence!

So with these caveats in mind, what do this season’s observations tell us? Across Ambleside the majority of nests are in traditionally constructed stone buildings, where nests are (most frequently) at the roof line, but sometimes in the wall. Birds could have been using those buildings for a hundred years or more. But not all: there are a number of nests in more modern buildings such as the council-built homes on Stonecroft and Millans Court older persons housing. Many of the nests sites are high up and with a long view/ flight path to them (but not all: a number are in walls relatively close to the neighbouring building).

Over recent years the parts of the village with most Swift nesting activity have been Millans Park, and the Stonecroft/ Blue Hill/ Fisherbeck area. Both appear to have had significantly fewer nesting birds this year than in 2019-21. In Millans Park a number of nests that have been used for several years were unused; some that had more than one pair in the past had only one: I miss the particularly noisy pair in Millans Court. On the other hand, there was at least one new nest site, directly opposite my office window! Swifts nested here a decade or more ago, but it is many years since I saw a bird go in.

This year, however the screaming parties seemed to take in the wall, and on June 5th, one went in by a projecting purlin. Birds were seen entering on several other occasions, but my suspicion is that it was a young pair investigating for next year.



*Swift, Portinscale, Tony Marsh*

## *Ambleside Swifts “Annual Report” 2023*

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Likewise, in the Blue Hill/ Stonecroft/ Fisherbeck area, there were fewer nesting birds on Wansfell Terrace than in some years, and a rat infestation appears to have dissuaded birds from nesting in one of the council-built homes on Stonecroft.

There were other previously used sites where it appeared Swifts were not nesting this year. Despite several visits, for example, I was unable to see any birds interested in St Annes chapel.

On the other hand, new nest sites were found in a couple of areas I've had suspicions about for a few years. There seemed to be more birds around on the Gale, and I found a couple of buildings being used that weren't when we did the first nest site stake outs there in 2019. There also appeared to be more nests this year in the big houses along Lake Road between the car park and Wansfell Road. Nests were confirmed in a couple of buildings near the Kelsick Road car park where they have been every year since 2019, in the University accommodation and near the Mountain rescue base.

There do not appear to have been any redevelopments/ building work that affected Swift nesting over the last couple of years: Swifts nested in two buildings that had seen work done over the previous winter.

This year I did not manage to visit as many of the sites out of the village as I'd have hoped: the weather forecast discouraged trips out after the 20th of June. My single visit to Wray Castle gave a high count of only 18 birds, though I found 7 nests. Both counts are well down on previous years, though it is impossible to watch all sides of the building on a single visit!

In Grasmere, two nests were found in the “Wordsworth Trust complex”, but more may have been occupied as there was no concerted effort made to observe what was going on. I also saw information that they are nesting in the school- and one bird fell through the ceiling! It is also suspected that they are nesting in the village centre, but no conclusive evidence was found.

I was made aware (for the first time) of a nesting site near Knipe Fold. I didn't manage to make it out to Little Langdale this summer, but did manage an evening at Skelwith Bridge. The maximum number of birds seen was only 12, but I did find 9 nests (one more than last year) across at least four buildings. It is a place definitely worth visiting if you want to see how chaotic it can seem when birds come in at dusk.

We didn't have any Swift walks this year, or manage the concerted counts that I had hoped for: maybe next year.

This year has seen a lot of media attention on “Swift bricks” flowing the fantastic campaigning work of Hannah Bourne-Taylor and her petition to parliament. It would appear, from the evidence I have seen, that in many parts of the country Swift bricks are very effective at getting Swifts to nest in them. Whether this can slow the alarming drop in numbers is another question. Whilst they are a way of mitigating the design of modern housing and building repair that prevents holes in walls and roofs, it may well be that the observed decline in Swift numbers is more to do with a decreased number of insects either here, in their wintering zones or on migration routes. Or maybe it's to do with climate change, and unfavourable weather- which might affect more than just food supplies. My gut feeling is that nest sites for Swifts are not a problem in Ambleside: I think most buildings in the village are eminently suitable, being well-supplied with cavities. I am aware of one building with Swift nest boxes in the village. These have been there for a number of years without being occupied. That doesn't, of course, mean they shouldn't be included in any developments: Swift boxes are also used by other species such as House Sparrows and even House Martins!


So, to summarise, the numbers of birds seen were down a little this year, but the poor weather in July was probably responsible for some of that. Numbers of nests found were up on last year, but down on the years before that, but it is hard to draw conclusions. There are some sites where birds seem not to have nested this year when they have done so in the past, but there would also appear to be sites where birds nested this year but have not done so in recent times...

My thanks to those who have contributed counts, information, and anecdotes this year: Ann Fawthrop; Ashley Cooper; Benedict; Brian Nicholson; David Stothard; Gaynor Rhodes; Harry Coghill; Helen Baker; Jack; Jane Cooper; Jennifer Moffett; Matt; Mike Green; Mike Withers; Millie; Rachel Bunting; Rebecca Costello; Ros Taylor; Stuart Shuttleworth.

Apologies to those I have forgotten/omitted to mention. And thank you also to everyone else who has expressed interest in what we are doing. To find out more, or get involved next year, please get in touch: [thorcotage@hotmail.com](mailto:thorcotage@hotmail.com)

**Edward Meyer's**  
talk on  
**Urban Biodiversity-vital for our survival**

*Founder of the Swift conservation advice service,  
Edward will explain what we must do to save swifts from extinction,  
along with the rest of the natural world.*



7pm, 16th November

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

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

supported by Penrith Town Council

*Pete Martin, October 2023*

## Preliminary results of Keswick Swifts nest survey

Keswick Swifts and friends succeeded in carrying out the first comprehensive survey of Swift nests throughout the town during the summer of 2023. This built on several years of observations by Dave Piercy and others, for the Cumbria Bird Club.

Swifts can certainly make their presence felt when they are flying high, in groups, catching insects on the wing, with their distinctive exuberant cries.

Equally, you'll know they're there when they get together in smaller groups, the so-called "screaming parties", when they fly very fast and straight at rooftop level. But it takes a lot of patient watching to spot where Swifts are nesting, as they slip quietly and discreetly into and out of their hard-to-spot nest holes in buildings, or under the eaves, in no time at all. So the survey required many hours of careful observation by the eleven people who contributed.



*Swift at "natural" nest site, Keswick  
Robert Folder*



*Some very important and spectacular colonies were found in the outlying settlements around Keswick. Significant numbers were found in Threlkeld, Braithwaite and Borrowdale.*

*In particular Simon Ireland discovered a thriving colony of around 17 nests in the converted barn that is used for staff quarters at the Castle Inn near Bassenthwaite as photographed by Simon above. All but one nest was up and around the eaves and all were on the south facing elevation shown.*



## Preliminary results of Keswick Swifts nest survey



*An extraordinary nest, less than 3m height with a rotary washing line to navigate around/through?*

*Robert Folder*



*One of the nest holes in the largest colony in Keswick illustrating the typical use of holes in Lakeland stonework. Not all were in such a distinctive hole and most were not easy to locate*

The reasons for carrying out this work were threefold. First, to get a better idea of how many Swifts are still coming back to Keswick from Africa to nest; second, to set a base line, to monitor how this situation changes over time; third, to help focus future conservation efforts most of all on those buildings and streets that are the most crucial for the survival of these birds in our town.

In total, the survey identified 48 nest sites occupied by breeding Swifts, or by young adult birds searching for and laying claim to the site that they can return to in future years to breed. Additional work established some very useful data on Swift nest sites in outlying villages and settlements, that Keswick Swifts will build on and use in coming years.



*Simon Ireland*

*It was rare to find traditional nests in the eaves of rendered buildings. This one had been noted as in use for some years. Such sites can be easily missed and are prone to being lost due to maintenance.*

## Preliminary results of Keswick Swifts nest survey



The two wooden “peak” boxes were occupied this year. They were a welcome addition to a street that anecdotally held many pairs but were decimated by modernisation leaving just a single house with two nests.

The “Impeckable” nest boxes were added to several properties by Mike Hodgson. Swifts did show an interest in these so we are hopeful for the future. The Swift bricks on the right, despite being some distance from any other colonies, attracted prospecting birds. Swift calls were played at all three sites.

The data have given some useful, fascinating, sometimes encouraging and sometimes worrying insights into these delightful summer residents.

**First, Swifts are nesting across almost all parts of the town**, which bodes well for attracting more birds to come here, as people put more and more Swift bricks and Swift boxes up on suitable buildings in a range of locations.

**Second, Swift bricks and boxes work.** Although there are so far only a modest number of bricks and boxes in the town, five boxes and two bricks had Swifts in residence this summer. In all these cases, the owners had advertised their availability by playing Swift calls for a couple of hours each day in the nesting season - although this isn't always essential. It took between two weeks and two years for Swifts to discover these boxes and bricks, after they'd been put up.

Exterior finish	No. Buildings	Nest holes occupied	Nest box holes occupied
Lakeland Stonework	9	31	
Rendered with nests in eaves	3	10	
Occupied nest boxes only	3		7
<b>Total</b>	15	41	7

Table 1. The importance of traditional Lakeland stonework.

## Preliminary results of Keswick Swifts nest survey



Robert Folder



Sections of the two major colonies in Keswick. A contrast in building structures. The density of nests in the stonework is far greater than the nests in the eaves of the rendered property. These two buildings hold the majority of nests found in Keswick.

The remaining 41 occupied nest sites were all discovered in holes in the walls and under the eaves of buildings – typically, but not exclusively, in traditional slatestone-built houses. This poses the risk that the Swifts will be made homeless, with very serious consequences, if these buildings should need to be repaired or renovated; much of the severe decline in Swift numbers over recent decades is attributed to this. But we now know that there are ways of minimising and mitigating the risks to the Swift population when renovations take place, and Keswick Swifts will be happy to advise.

Our third key finding is that **the Swift population is very heavily concentrated in two colonies.** In Keswick, we have just two substantial colonies of Swifts remaining – having lost at least two other colonies, and probably more, to building renovations over recent years. Encouragingly, however, in another part of town, an old depleted colony is becoming revitalised through the erection of Swift boxes on neighbouring houses.



Robert Folder

The survey showed that nearly two in every three nests in this town are currently located in just two buildings. Because this concentration could make them particularly vulnerable, Keswick Swifts will be working to encourage people in the close vicinity of these buildings to put up Swift bricks and boxes on their properties, with the aim of getting the colonies more spread out, and therefore more robust.

## Preliminary results of Keswick Swifts nest survey



*A town centre nest pinpointed and photographed by Rosie McGuinness. A Swift entered the horizontal crack above the central window at approximately 10 pm. She was watching the site as she had seen a screaming party fly between the two buildings only 5 minutes earlier.*

*The short distance (shop width) between the face of the building with the nest site, and the building opposite means a Swift must access between the buildings and then take a sharp 90 degrees turn.*

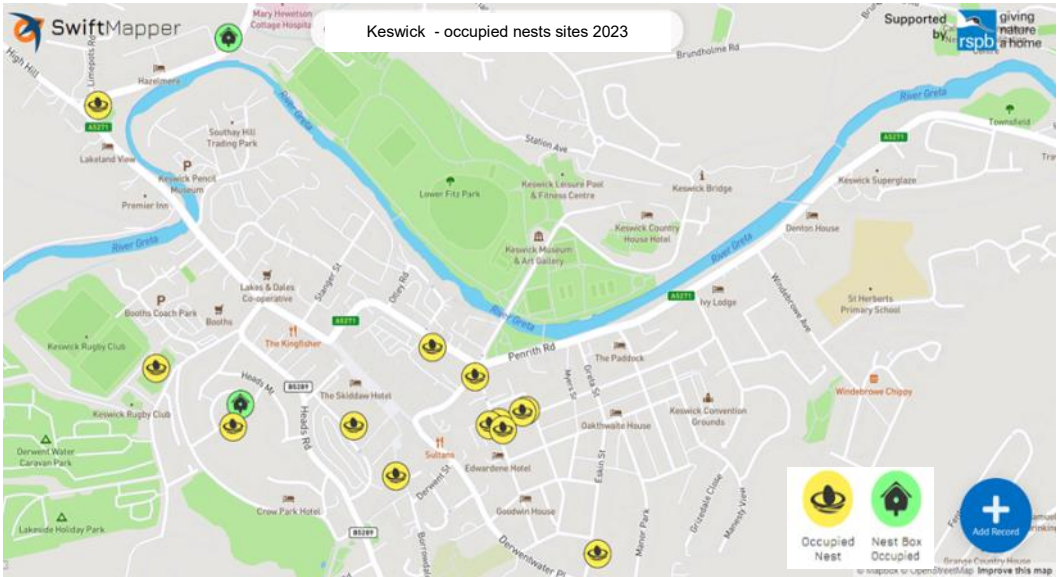
For this reason, Keswick Swifts are very excited to hear of the proposed rebuilding of the Keswick Rugby Club premises, as these will be very close to the second largest Swift colony in town, and the club have already indicated their willingness to install a number of Swift bricks into their new buildings.

Other towns have achieved an amazing increase in Swift numbers by getting people to put up considerable numbers of Swift bricks – and while time is running out, it's hopefully not too late. Maybe, over time, Keswick could become known as a Swift-friendly town, and the sight of these amazing birds could become one of our special visitor attractions!

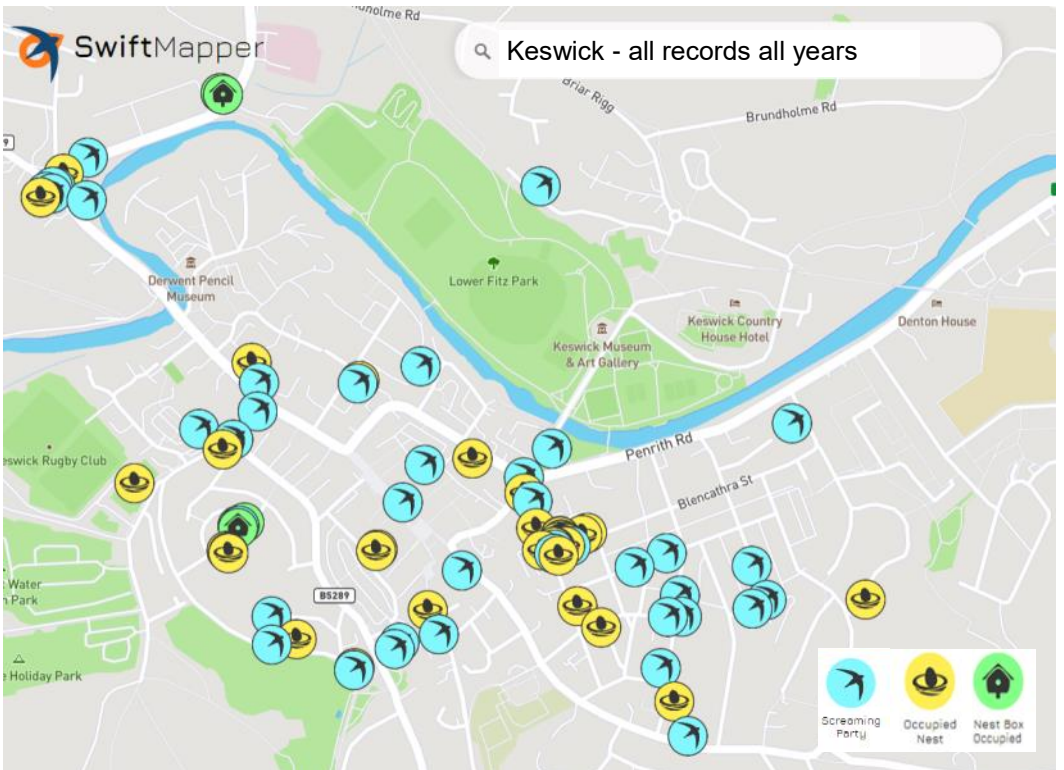
For further information, contact Nicki Baker at [nicki.baker@btinternet.com](mailto:nicki.baker@btinternet.com)

Grateful thanks to Dave, Jane, Jean, Kathy, Liz, Nicki, Robert, Rosie, Simon, Tony and Val for all their patient hours of observation!





RSPB SwiftMapper. Above filtered to show this year's occupied nests only. Below shows all types of records logged from 2018. Anyone can use SwiftMapper and your information could be used to protect nesting sites.



## Recent reports

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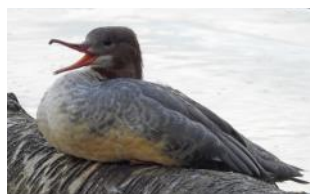
The period covered is from June to September 2023 inclusive. Some records are unauthenticated and may require review.

### **Wildfowl**

**Pink-footed Geese** arrived in force in September, with large influxes of 7420 over Walney and 2280 over Ravenglass on the 12th and 6330 over Walney the next day. **Pale-bellied Brent Geese** arrived in the Walney – Roa Island area from the 20th September with 160 by the end of the month, elsewhere one was at Ravenglass on 26th. There were 75 **Barnacle Geese** at Rockcliffe on 26th September that were clearly wild, 40 or so at the same time on the Duddon Estuary at Kirkby-in-Furness were less clear-cut.



*Common Scoter with Tufted, RSPB Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*



*Goosander, Talkin Tarn,  
Adam Moan*

The only records of three ‘seaduck’ in the period all came from Walney. **Long-tailed Ducks** were noted there on 15 June and 26 September, a **Velvet Scoter** was there on 27 June and a drake **Scaup** passed on 14 August

**Garganey** were at Brigsteer Wetland on 1 June and 5 September, the latter being a juvenile. The only **Pochard** in the period was at Hardendale Quarry on 14 August. A **Goldeneye** at Hodbarrow on 23 July presumably summered. A **Mandarin** was on Howard Pond, Geltsdale on 25 July whilst the species bred at an undisclosed site. The largest count of a smattering of inland **Common Scoter** records were 20+ at Tindale Tarn on 31 July and four there on 4th August. Up to 17 **Gadwall** were at Foulshaw /Ulpha Mosses in August.

**Eider** counts included 5200 at Walney on 23 June and 8750 off Foulney on 17 August, in the north singles were at Grune on 18 June and Cardrunk on 17 September. **Red-breasted Merganser** on the Duddon Estuary peaked at 72 on 5th August, down on other recent years. **Goosander** flocks included 58 at the head of Lake Windermere on 19 September and 45 in to roost at Hardendale Quarry, Shap on the 7th.



*Goosander, Derwent Water, Tony  
Marsh*



Two **Whooper Swan** summered in the south of the county, and were at Halforth in early September with one of them lingering there due to injury.



*Whooper Swans, Ennerdale,  
Peter Ullrich*

### **Waders**

Cumbria's second **Lesser Yellowlegs** was at Port Carlisle between 10th and 16th September. The Yank theme continued through the month with a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Rockcliffe on the 17th and another in the south at Leasgill, Halforth from the 24th to the 26th. Also notable was a **Grey Phalarope** on the sea at Silecroft on 21st September.

An adult **Little Stint** lingered at South Walney from 11th to 14th June, at least one was at Port Carlisle in September with records on 10th and 30th. **Curlew Sandpiper** were more numerous; birds were seen on five dates in June at South Walney and two dates in July at Port Carlisle before an adult at Ravenglass on 26th August and an influx in September including up to nine at Rockcliffe, three at Port Carlisle and Walney and one at Eskmeals.

### **Game Birds**

It was a good summer for **Quail** with reports of calling birds in June and early July at Cliburn, Greystoke, Langwathby, Renwick and Thornhill Meadows. At Red Hall Farm, Wigton a bird sang in Barley for two weeks in July then twelve were reported during harvesting activity on 29 August. A pair of **Grey Partridge** were successful at the latter site, with seven half grown poults seen.

### **Swifts, Nightjar**

An **Alpine Swift** was reported at St Bees Head on 27th August, if submitted and accepted it would take the total this year to a remarkable three. Over 400 **Common Swift** moved south over Kendal on 30th July. **Nightjars** were reported churring, although the sites remain confidential.



*Lesser Yellowlegs, Tony Marsh*

## Recent reports

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An excellent run of **Wood Sandpiper** records from Wedholme Flow in mid-June peaked at four on the 22nd whilst there were singles at Walney that month, at Wedholme Flow again in July and on the Kent estuary, at Killington Lake and Standing Tarn, Dalton-in-Furness in August.

**Ruff** records included two at Wedholme Flow in both June and July, two at Anthorn on 12th July, three singles at Walney in both August and September and other singles in the latter month at Moricambe Bay, the Irt estuary, Leasgill and Penrith.

**Spotted Redshank** were noted from two sites – at Wedholme Flow there was one on 18 June and up to two in the first half of July whilst at Port Carlisle juveniles were seen on 19th August and 14th September.



*Spotted Redshank, Wedholme,  
Roger Ridley*



*Green Sandpiper, Burgh Marsh,  
Roger Ridley*

The normal dominance of Walney and Ravenglass in **Greenshank** peaks was seen once again, with maxima of 32 on the Mite Estuary and 27 at South Walney in September. The peak **Common Sandpiper** passage reported was 14 at Hodbarrow on 12th July. There were thirteen **Avocet** at Bowness-on-Solway on 14th July whilst five flew into the Leven Estuary off Rampside on 17th August.

### **Gulls, Terns and Skuas**

A probable **Sooty Tern** was watched for twenty minutes at St Bees Head on 5th July. A **Sabine's Gull** was reported from the same site on 22nd August.

There were several **Black Tern** records in the period. In late spring one was on Windermere on 1 June. An influx in mid-August brought eight past Silecroft, one from Workington and one off Walney on 19th, three at Walney on 20th and one at Port Carlisle on 24th. Finally one was again past Silecroft on 20th September.

Reflecting the losses from avian influenza there was only one **Great Skua** noted in the period, from Walney on 29 September. By contrast over fifty **Arctic Skua** sightings from Walney included eight on 30th July and six on 29th August with smaller numbers at other seawatching locations.



*Snipe flock, Campfield, Tony Marsh*

There were just two **Little Gull** in the period, a juvenile at Haverigg on 7th September and one from Walney on 25th of that month. The expected **Mediterranean Gull** post-breeding dispersal appeared lower key than usual until a report came in of 226 between Flimby and Maryport on 20th September.

Productivity monitoring of **Kittiwake** at St Bees head showed a poor year with 0.30 young per nest produced from 71 nests. The regular high tide autumn beach roost at Sellafield peaked at 18 birds on 25th July.

### **Auks**

There was a very significant toll of **Guillemots** lost to the avian influenza outbreak during the period, with large numbers of dead birds washed up on beaches the length of the county.

Away from St Bees virtually all scarce auk reports came from Walney. There were 27 **Puffin** bird days in June, with a peak of five on the 4th, whilst a juvenile was seen on 29th August. **Black Guillemot** were seen off the isle on 26 June, 16 July, 11 August and 26 September whilst one was in Workington Harbour on 18th September.

### **Divers**

An early **Great Northern Diver** went south past Silecroft on 20th September. **Red-throated Diver** return began at Walney on 23 June, with a peak of 51 south on 30th September.

## Recent reports

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

A **Cory's Shearwater** was reported heading south then back north past Silecroft on 30th July.

The only **Leach's Petrel** of the period was from Walney on 21st September. **Storm Petrel** sightings from here comprised 5 on 3rd, one on 18th and ten on 30th July and 12 on 1st and three on 13th August; elsewhere one passed Silecroft on 13th August.

**Shag** reports from Walney built from two in both June and July through 18 in August to a site and county record of 57 in September. The only other reports were of possibly the same juvenile at Roa Island and roosting on Cavendish Dock on 25th September.

**Manx Shearwater** passage included 833 off Silecroft on 13th August and 760 from Walney on 26th July. Very few **Fulmar** were reported and six from Walney on August 22nd appears to have been the highest count.

### **Herons and Allies**

A juvenile **Purple Heron** was briefly at Milnthorpe on 25th August, this was almost certainly the bird that had previously been at Leighton Moss and probably the same individual seen later on a farm pond near Slaidburn (both sites in Lancashire).



*Herons, Port Carlisle, Tony Marsh*

It's difficult to be clear whether well-spaced **Cattle Egret** records from Campfield Marsh on 20th June, the Esk estuary at Ravenglass on 22-26 July and Thacka Beck, Penrith on 30th September were linked or not.

**Spoonbill** were thin on the ground, with several staying just to the south singles at Skinburness on 1 June and Ravenglass on the 22nd of the month were the only reports. **Great White Egret** sightings in the north included Old Sandsfield on 23 June, over Carlisle on 30 June, Rockcliffe 4 July, Port Carlisle 29 July, Warcop 14 September, Rockcliffe and Sunbiggin Tarn on 17 September and Bassenthwaite on 26 September.

A **Bittern** had returned to Siddick Pond by early September.

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## Birds Of Prey



*Long-eared Owls, Near Geltsdale, Barry Robson*

**Hobby** sightings included up to two at Wedholme Flow, and one in a Tindale Fell garden on 10th July whilst some sights were understandably kept confidential. Fledged **Marsh Harriers** were seen at Campfield Marsh, and elsewhere up to three were at South Walney in the period and two at Foulshaw Moss and presumed migrants were seen in September at Bassenthwaite Lake on the 15th and at Sunbiggin Tarn on the 17th.

A pair of **Long-eared Owl** nested successfully near Geltsdale.

## Hoopoe

Challenging the Rosefinch for most photographed bird of the year, a **Hoopoe** on the beach at Aldingham from the 21st to 26th September was the second in the county in 2023 following one on Walney more briefly in the spring.



*Steve Lewer*

## Corvids

The resident **Hooded Crow** on Walney was present throughout, and again bred with a **Carrion Crow** with three hybrid young seen. Other Hoodies were seen in the Ravenglass area in both August and September and throughout the period at St Bees whilst hybrids were regular at Parton.

## Hirundines

A total of 2170 **Swallow** headed south over Walney on 5th September. There were 330 **Sand Martin** at Wedholme Flow on 28th July.



Recent reports

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**Warblers, Crests**

**Cetti's Warblers** are probably taken for granted at many sites now, but away from core habitat birds were noted at Walney BO on August 9th and 31st and Silecroft on 13th August.

**Thrushes, Chats and Flycatchers**

**Ring Ousel** records included up to five at Dow Cragg on 18th June and other reports from Helvellyn, High Raise and Scafell Pike. There were 40 **Wheatear** on passage at Eskmeals on 12th September. A **Mistle Thrush** roost on Irton Pike held up to 40 birds in August.

**Sparrows**

**Tree Sparrow** movements over Walney included 78 on 5th September.

**Wagtails and Pipits**

**Yellow Wagtail** migrant totals at Walney included thirteen in August and 52 in September with a stand out peak of 23 on the 3rd. A **Blue-headed Wagtail** was at Walney on 8th September. Other peak counts of diurnal migrants here included 1410 **Meadow Pipit** on 12th September and 1580 on the 13th, 40 **Tree Pipits** on 23rd August and 29 **Grey Wagtail** on 2 Sept.



*Wheatear spp Greenland,  
RSPB Geltsdale,  
Adam Moan*

**Finches and Buntings**

The **Common Rosefinch** from May previously ringed on Fair Isle remained at Plumgarths, Kendal to at least 22nd June. Two **Snow Bunting** were on the beach at North Walney NNR on 25th September. A flock of 40 **Greenfinch** were at Allonby on 19th September.

*Stephen Dunstan*



*Greenfinches, Tony Marsh  
Yellowhammer, Tommy Holden*



## Our little nature reserve

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My wife and I bought a run down house at Sizergh , seven years ago. After fixing up the house, we started on the garden which at over an acre was no quick fix. Large areas were covered in dense brambles with a few Black-thorn and Hawthorn bushes. We attacked the brambles but left large areas at each end of the garden as nesting and feeding places for birds and other wildlife.



I put a nest box up for Kestrels and a pair took it over and had five chicks. I have also put up 40+ boxes for our smaller birds. My biggest project was a garden pond. I had always wanted a big pond for wildlife, so I picked an area at the rear of the garage so rainfall from the garage would top the pond up. Unfortunately part of the old A6 runs the length of the garden in places with 50mm soil over. Yes, you guessed right, directly under the pond. Well, I

like a challenge. It took me two months to break out the 200mm tarmac and cart to the tip. A friend with his excavator dug out the 600mm of limestone below this, and we took it down to over a metre.

On looking at all the limestone, I realized there was no way I could put a liner with underlay on, so I mixed 50mm concrete and covered the whole area including a bog area of 6m by 4m. Then laying a few layers of old carpet plus underlay and liner, I had a pond 8m by 4m plus bog area. Various dragonflies and damselflies have used the pond with Emperor and Southern Hawker laying each year. This year, 65+ Southern Hawkers have hatched.



Other items of interest in our garden are 100 Greater Butterfly Orchids and 100+ Twayblades and 50+ Earthstars. The wildflowers keep increasing each year now that they are not covered in brambles.

*David Finnegan*



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## Information for contributors

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

Please send contributions to Dave Piercy (see inside cover)

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