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# Cumbria Bird Club



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## **BIRD NEWS**

### **Vol. 35 No. 3 Autumn 2024**

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**CBC - dates for your diary**

**Yellowhammer survey**

**New CBC logo**

**CBCRP voting system new voting process**

**CBC Hodbarrow meet**

**Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria 2023**

**The breeding season - Bill Angell**

**The breeding season - Barry Jackson**

**The breeding season - Frank Mawby**

**The breeding season - Guy Newbold**

**Snow Goose - a true vagrant?**

**Heron swimming in the Eden**

**Breeding success for RSPB Geltsdale Harriers**

**Recent reports**

**Common Sandpipers of Ennerdale**

**Curlew recovery South Lakes**

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New South Wales, Australia

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## Cumbria Bird Club – dates for your diary

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### Subs reminder

This is a gentle reminder that if you pay your CBC subscription annually by cheque, it becomes due in November 2024. Our long-standing Treasurer, David Cooke, is retiring this year and will be handing over to Andrew Poole in November so, in the interim, please send cheques to Sue King (Secretary), The Coach House, Hampsfell Road, Grange over Sands LA11 6BG.

Please can **ALL** members check that their Standing Order or Direct Debit payment amounts are up-to-date? Annual membership is currently £20 individual or £25 family. PayPal is our preferred method of subs payment as this is much more straightforward to administer. If you have any queries about your subs please email Sue at [info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk) Many thanks.

### Indoor Meetings

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024: Cumbria Bird Club AGM.** The George Hotel, Penrith at 7.30pm.

The AGM will be followed with a talk by Andy Lester of Hampshire Ornithological Society entitled “It shouldn’t happen to a birder.”

**Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025: Joint meeting with Carlisle Natural History Society** at Tullie House, Carlisle at 7.15pm (NB earlier start time).

“Conserving Curlews: A Tale of Dedication and Hope”, Susannah Bleakley from Curlew Recovery South Lakes (CRSL) will talk about the work of local curlew volunteers and how they are protecting nests and monitoring chicks in the Lyth Valley and north of Kendal. She will be joined by Thalia Sparke and members of the Melbreak Curlew Group to report on the 2024 Curlew nesting season in the north Lakes.

**Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025: CBC Indoor meeting** at Parish Rooms, Ambleside at 7.30pm. “Birding Cyprus,” Drawing on his experience as a tour leader Roy Atkins will give an insight into this exciting destination.

**Note:** A recent ‘meetings’ email mentioned the Carlisle Natural History Society meeting on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024. Please note that this is now for CNHS members only as demand is expected to be high.

### Outdoor Meetings

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024: South Walney** with Mike Douglas.

Autumn at South Walney offers the excitement of both variety and numbers of birds. Timed to coincide with a midday high tide the walk will cover 3-4 miles of the South Walney Nature Reserve – Warm/waterproof clothing, own food and refreshments plus £3 entry for non Cumbria Wildlife Trust members. Full details and booking for both of these outdoor meets to Mike and Lyn Mills, [meetings@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:meetings@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk) Tel. 01946 590616

## Yellowhammer Survey

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*Yellowhammer, Cumwhitton, Adam Moan*

Forty-nine members signed up to survey tetrads (four square kilometres on an O.S. map) between April and the end of July and while many of us drew a blank for Yellowhammers we certainly derived some satisfaction from planning our route, finding other wildlife, meeting a farmer or two and explaining just what we were doing to other folk along the way. Fair to say that it wasn't the best of Spring/Summer periods but it was good to be out with a purpose.

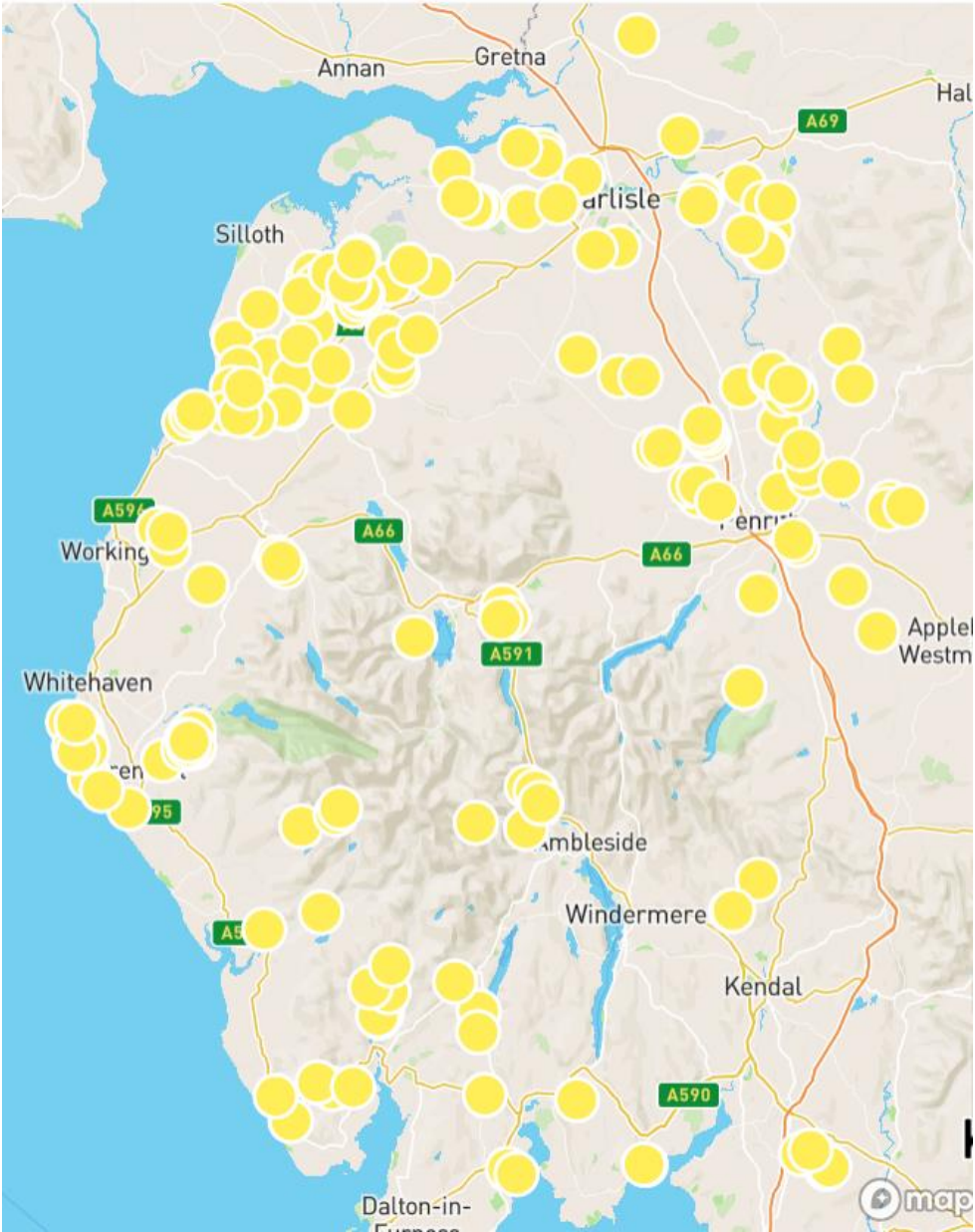
Results are in, and if we haven't replied to everyone who has sent in their returns then please accept our thanks for your input – even if it was a nil return. At a late stage of the planning we introduced the Canvis App for posting individual records which built a picture of Yellowhammer distribution in the county from entries, largely by members and non members who were not undertaking tetrad surveys, thanks to all of you who contributed – there were a total of 215 sites entered.

See overleaf for an image of Canvis App distribution map of Yellowhammers in Cumbria 2024 as at 26th September. Of 215 entries on the Canvis App, only 18 sites were within our survey tetrads!

We now have the analysis of survey returns to complete and a write up of the survey for future publication – watch this space.

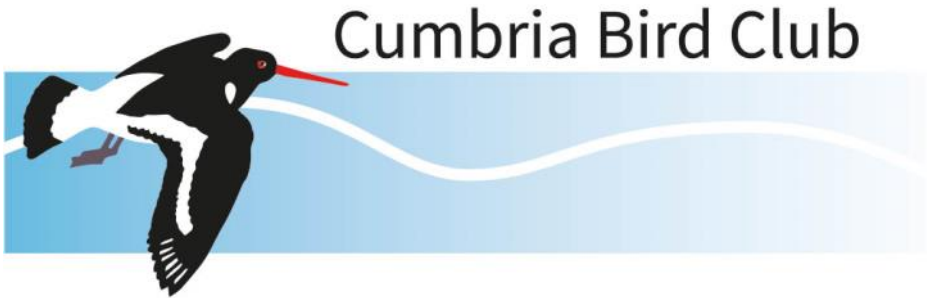
*Mike and Lyn Mills*

*Yellowhammer Survey*



*Canvis App distribution map of Yellowhammers in Cumbria 2024 as at 26/09/24.*

## New Cumbria Bird Club logo



Following the deadline for submissions to the logo competition, CBC Council members voted to find a winner. Images of a number of species were submitted which included Goldeneye, Black Grouse, Oystercatcher and Pied Flycatcher.

Council members considered the criteria required and these were –

- Clear sharp image
- Easily recognisable species known to most people
- Widespread and typical of Cumbria
- Image that looks good in black and white as well as colour
- Will look good on website, business cards, leaflets and letterhead.

There was almost unanimous support for the image above of Oystercatcher submitted by Barry Robson.

The history of Oystercatcher in the county is an interesting one. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was almost entirely a coastal species. During the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Oystercatchers started to breed in the Grampian region of Scotland and by the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were breeding in the upper Eden Valley.

This trend of inland breeding has continued to this day. Inland breeders move rapidly to the coast after breeding and birds are mainly coastal between August and February. Along with Oystercatcher's habit (which is unusual among waders) of feeding their young this has opened up the opportunity for rooftop breeding.

Going further back in history, MacPherson 1892 tells us that the species was often supplied to the table of Lord William Howard at the price of two pence a bird in 1612. It was known by the name of seapie at that time but in 1731 Mark Catesby the English naturalist, working in America coined the name 'Oyster catcher' which he applied to American Oystercatcher *H. palliates* when he observed that species feeding on oysters.

Then in 1843 William Yarrell established this as the preferred name to replace Sea pie as the name for Oystercatcher *H. ostralegus* which notably does not feed on oysters. MacPherson goes on to recount how in his day the species was concentrated on the Solway where birds were shot and on Morecambe Bay where they were netted for the market. These estuaries hold large numbers of wintering birds today.

*Chris Hind CBC Chair*

## **Cumbria Bird Club records panel – a new voting process**

A conversation I had with Paul French BBRC Chair a few months ago sowed the seeds of a change to the way we vote on submissions to the Panel. Voting has always taken the form of a decision, that is either 'Accept' or 'Not proven'. This has usually been accompanied by some comments explaining this decision. In the case of 'Accept' it has explained why the Panelist is convinced by the description. Whereas for a 'Not proven' it might have mentioned that another similar species was not eliminated or might have simply shown that the description did not adequately describe the bird.

These votes from each panelist have been sent to the CBCRP Secretary and not shared among the Panel. It has only been in cases where further discussion has been required that comments were shared and even then these were anonymised.

During my conversation with Paul he described how by using an online system BBRC members are able to see the decisions and comments of other members which can also be edited up until a closing date. So as was the case with the way that CBC determines status categories using a rolling or 'decaying' sample, we are now following the BBRC model. I discussed this proposed change with Roy Atkins the newly appointed CBCRP Secretary and Roy was immediately on board with the idea and set up a new online voting process.

This is how it works –

Our Panelists are given access to a secure online site for each batch of submissions. Each submission carries a sheet with panelists' names next to which they can add votes and comments which are visible to all Panelists. Panelists can then consider the opinions of others and change their decisions if they think fit. This atmosphere of openness provides the chance to share ideas and expertise and also fosters a culture of civility which we now see working very well.

*Chris Hind CBCRP Chair*



## CBC meet at RSPB Hodbarrow on 22<sup>nd</sup> June



*CBC at Hodbarrow, Barry Jackson*

There were occasional good days during the summer and one of them coincided with the meet at Hodbarrow on 22<sup>nd</sup> June. We had great company and we were hosted by Rachelle Regan, RSPB Site Manager, who gave superb account of the reserve and associated wildlife.

Having met up at the Haverigg side of the reserve we wandered round to the hide with views of a Great Egret and Godwits on the estuary, Pyramidal, Bee and N. Marsh Orchids along the trackside en route. The hide and adjacent viewing area occupied us for a good while with so many species and their young to sort through – Sandwich, Common, Little and Arctic Terns taking centre stage with Great Crested Grebe, Tufted Duck, Merganser, Shelduck, Eider and even the 'odd' pair of Bar Headed Geese thrown into the mix.

With our thanks to Rachelle we moved on to a lunch break overlooking the estuary and completed the circuit back to the vehicles with a look at the Marsh Helleborines and a scan of the Little Egret/Cormorant/Heron colony – no sign of Spoonbill or Cattle Egret.. A classic visit to a classic site.

*Mike and Lyn Mills*

### **Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria 2023**

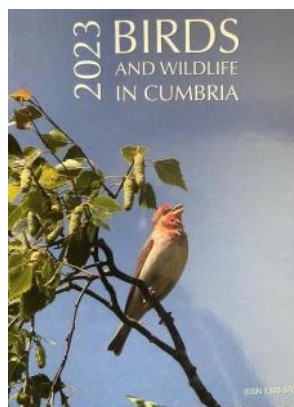
The recently published 2023 Annual Report has now been distributed and all fully paid-up CBC members should have received a copy. If you have not received yours then please get in touch with us at [info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk)

The Report is very much a team effort among CBC members. It is a great testament to the commitment, talent, knowledge and expertise of members that it is produced in such a short time particularly compared with most other counties.

It is also thanks to the members who submit their records in good time that this is possible. The high standard of the photographs is also worth a mention particularly in the light of Cumbria's small birding community and where there are few bird hides to give close views of the birds.

If you have any good photographs of birds taken in the county during the current year then please do submit them for consideration. Likewise any articles or papers are welcome for submission.

*Chris Hind BWiC editor* [chris.m.hind@gmail.com](mailto:chris.m.hind@gmail.com)





## Observations on the breeding season - Bill Angell

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In spite of periods of wet weather birds in and around my garden appear to have had a largely successful breeding season. Blue Tit, Coal Tit and Great Tit all raised successful broods, the Great Tit from a nest box. A pair of Tree Sparrows raised two broods, also in a nest box.



*Swallow, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

A pair of Swallows returned to nest in our garden shed, raising and fledging two broods of three, the first on 3<sup>rd</sup> July and the second flying on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

The neighbouring rookery was busy with young from mid March to mid June often visiting the garden as a food source. Young Starlings abounded from the end of May visiting the feeders in noisy parties. The House Sparrow flock numbered about 20 birds by end of July.

I've not seen any juvenile Robins in the garden this year and Dunnock has been noticeably absent. Two juvenile Blackbirds were often busy taking Raspberries and Rowan berries. Juvenile Chaffinches are plentiful making up the majority of the 40 strong flock which comes to feed each day. Young Greenfinches and Goldfinches have been seen at the feeders too.



*Dunnock, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

Further afield the pairs of Mute Swans on Martin Tarn both raised three young to full size. The pair on Oulton Ponds had a brood which was not seen again after 13<sup>th</sup> May Webs visit. A pair of Coot on Harrison's pool at Aldoth had a brood of three young on 10<sup>th</sup> June.

Good numbers of Curlew were present on Holme Dub and surrounding farmland during the breeding season with several holding territories, although no young were seen.

*Bill Angell*

## Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

A brief assessment of the probability of its occurrences as a vagrant in Cumbria

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When Robin Sellers and I created *A List of the Birds of Cumbria (Hind & Sellers 2023)* we did this as an evidence-based exercise and the primary source was fully authenticated records using ringing recoveries as appropriate. Snow Goose had previously been included in the Cumbrian Bird List as it is published on the Cumbria Bird Club website. As there is no hard evidence that it has occurred in the county as a true vagrant it was then placed on the Supplementary List and carried the Footnote - Snow Goose:

There is little doubt that some of the Snow Geese that appear in Britain are genuine vagrants but this is a species widely kept in wildfowl collections and a frequent escapee (Cramp & Simmons 1977, pp.422-424); distinguishing between the two is virtually impossible. There have been a number of unsuccessful breeding attempts in Cumbria (Stott et al 2002), but the species does not have a self-sustaining population in the county and given the uncertainty about the origins of these birds, the species was relegated to this Supplementary List.

In recent years there have been numerous records of Snow Geese and within the past decade there have been several each year. Most of these are undoubted escapes and this doubtless reflects the fact that it is now commonly kept in captivity where it breeds easily (Reeber 2015).

While in conversation with Paul French BBRC Chair, the question of determining the provenance of birds such as Snow Geese arose. It transpired that BBRC does not require hard evidence of genuine vagrancy, rather it considers a number of criteria that should be applied to a potential vagrant to distinguish it from probable escapes. These are :

- Association with relevant carrier species
- Arrival and departure at plausible times of year – arriving in the autumn at the same time as wild geese and departing at the same time as these wild geese leave.  
Presence or absence of a ring with reference to what that indicates
- Behaviour in terms of ‘wildness’

If BBRC considers that these criteria are met then it accepts a record.

This seemed to open the door to assessing all records of Snow Geese in the county according to these criteria and determining the probability of each being a vagrant. The cumulative effect of a number of probable vagrants would surely give strong circumstantial evidence of vagrancy.

Below are listed just two of the more likely vagrants from among the 111 or so records in total :

Bowness-on-Solway: A blue-phase Lesser Snow Goose was seen with Barnacle Geese flying east on 1st May 1991. It was seen subsequently at Rockcliffe Marsh: on 10th May 1991.

This bird had spent the winter at Caerlaverock with the Barnacle Geese and was a probable vagrant. The long period of this bird's association with a carrier species and movement with them in the spring points strongly toward its status as a vagrant.

Calvo (NY1554): A first-winter bird was located in a Pink-footed Goose flock on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February 2023. It was seen again at Newton Marsh on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2023. Photographs of this bird clearly indicate wild behaviour and lack of a ring which along with its faithful association with a carrier species satisfy many of the criteria pointing towards a true vagrant.

These records suggest that genuine wild Snow Geese have indeed occurred in Cumbria and as a result it is proposed to include Snow Goose in the main section of the County List when it is next updated.

So what is the likelihood of acquiring incontrovertible evidence of vagrancy to Cumbria? With a population of 5-6 million birds (American Bird Conservancy) it would seem rather unlikely that a ringed bird would be recorded in Cumbria. A rather more likely source might be using stable isotope analysis of a feather sample (NatureScot 2023), although the difficulty of acquiring a feather sample would be far from simple. It would seem that for the foreseeable future we shall have to rely on probability evidence.

Thanks to Ronnie Irving for collating recent records.

The full version of this assessment will be published in Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria 2024.

### **References:**

American Bird Conservancy [abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)

BTO [home](#) » [understanding-birds](#) » [birdfacts](#) » Snow Goose [bto.org](http://bto.org)

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Hind, C & Sellers, RM, (2023) *A List of the Birds of Cumbria* [https://www.cbdc.org.uk/Articles/CBDC\\_007\\_2\\_A\\_list\\_of\\_the\\_birds\\_of\\_Cumbria.pdf](https://www.cbdc.org.uk/Articles/CBDC_007_2_A_list_of_the_birds_of_Cumbria.pdf)

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Reeber, S (2015) *Wildfowl of Europe, Asia and North America*, Christopher Helm, London.

*Chris Hind CBCRP Chair*

## My perspective on the bird breeding season - Frank Mawby

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Almost all of Blue and Great Tits in my nest boxes at Watchtree and Finglandrigg fledged successfully and most were a few days earlier than recent years. However, they fledged into that awful weather of early June and I do wonder how well they survived. The autumn and winter ringing and nest recording results by the BTO will be a good judge.

My Pied Flycatcher contacts tell me they had a disappointing season with lots of broods losing some or all nestlings. Their Blue and Great Tits suffering a similar fate. The indications are that the later migrants, including Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Reed Warbler fared much better when the weather became warmer and drier in the second half of June. Willow Warblers seem to have fared badly, they would have been hatching in early June and the weather probably affected their invertebrate food supply along with competition for food with the fledged Tits. From our ringing results at Watchtree Chiffchaff seem to have done well and first broods fledged before the end of May.



*Swallows, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

The Swallows I have been nest recording for 20 years (BTO nest recording scheme) and ringing nestlings and some adults at a farm near Bowness on Solway had a good year. I think I had thirteen pairs, and most had second broods. I believe I had two third broods which as I write should be close to fledging. Only one nest failed when the eggs were deserted. This is a slight increase on last year and an improvement since they crashed in 2020; prior to that date I had 20 pairs. However, some folk tell me their Swallows did not return and for the second year we had none at Watchtree. I only had five active House Martin nests on my house in Kirkbride and one nest failed. Only one pair returned for a second brood and I am not sure if any chicks fledged as the adults stopped coming to the nest in the very wet weather in August. I hope other sites have done much better.

## *My perspective on the bird breeding season - Frank Mawby*

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The Barn Owls I monitor had a mediocre year and nest attempts were remarkably well synchronised, again a possible outcome of the wet cold spring, which held off laying until Mid-April. My brood sized averaged just over two. One notable bird was a male we captured on a box, which had been ringed as a nestling two years previously near Pilling in Lancashire.

The other breeding birds in boxes on my house are Starlings, of which three broods fledged and one pair had a second brood. However, it seems that the brood sizes were lower than in previous years. I used to ring five or six nestlings and this year they were threes and fours. They may have done okay judging from the numbers sitting on the wires in the village.

The House Sparrows as usual produced lots of young and most went for three broods. Looking at the numbers of juvenile Rooks and Jackdaws coming in to feed on my garden I would guess they have had a good year. I am not sure about Tree Sparrows, we only had one brood in one of our Watchtree boxes although good numbers kept coming to the feeders and my own feeders at home. We have no idea why they are not using the boxes at Watchtree.



*Lesser Redpoll, Hallbankgate,  
Adam Moan*

I have only seen one flock of about 90 feeding Goldfinches at Watchtree and my suspicion are they have had a difficult year. Likewise Chaffinch and Bullfinch. Numbers of breeding pairs at Watchtree seemed lower than usual but this could also be the effect of habitat change as the new plantations are now well past the scrub stage favoured by many species. We have lost most of our breeding Redpoll, Bullfinch and Goldfinches.

Is it my imagination or are there fewer Wrens and Blackbirds about.

Our ringing catches are low. I have not seen many large flocks of Long-tailed Tits and wonder if they too have fared badly, although I did ring 15 in my garden in early August.



*Wren, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

## *My perspective on the bird breeding season - Frank Mawby*

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The usual numbers of Skylarks (estimated 20 pairs) were at Watchtree but I suspect that many failed with nests flooded during the frequent wet days. There were very few around in July. There were more on Border and Calvo Marshes on my monthly WeBs count visit and they perhaps did a little better.

In late summer I have a quick look through the Lapwing and Black-headed Gull flocks. My impression is that there were good numbers of juveniles of both species.

Around the country I read reports of low numbers of invertebrates and many folk have noticed the low numbers of most of the common butterflies. The moth trappers reported low spring catches. I am never certain how much the birds rely on these spring moth caterpillars, I think the winter moth caterpillars are perhaps more important food for them.

Many bird ringers, particularly those who ring small passerines are reporting catches are much lower than usual, but we can only wait for the BTO ringing and nest recording analysis to see the true picture.

*Frank Mawby*

### **Heron swimming in the Eden**



Here is a picture that I took on the 8th July of a Grey Heron swimming in the Eden. Apparently this is unusual. Pete Howard tells me he's only seen it once before in his career.

It had flown there from a standing position, and landed in the deep water, *i.e.* it didn't wade then float.

I estimate the water depth at chest height of a fisherman.

It seemed to have taken offence at something a drake Goosander said to it, and was squawking at it as loudly as I've ever heard one squawk.



When I next caught sight of it, it was flying at the Goosander which was escaping by swimming away. I saw it take off and land twice before I lost sight of it/them altogether.

*Russel Austin*



## Notes on the breeding season - Barry Jackson

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Photos from counts at Mawbray. Sanderlings below. Pleased to see Curlew holding up and the above large flock of Knot in July was a nice bonus.



As regards breeding - our three garden nest boxes only yielded one brood of Great Tits this spring unusually, but I guess also weather related. That said we have noticed good numbers of young tits and finches around the feeders recently and a family group of Greenfinches were a very welcome sight after several years of dwindling numbers.

We have also seen young Blackcaps around with adults introducing them to the apparent delights of honeysuckle berries. Chaffinches and Goldfinches seem to have bred well with the latter juveniles showing up well on the seed heads, a great sight this time of year.

Down the road, towards Mosser, Shelduck and Lapwing have bred successfully once more. I keep hoping the Curlews return one day - we hear and see them on occasions but only fleetingly.

Our non-birding wildlife highlight this summer is the Hare that seems to have taken up residence in our vicinity and turns up most days around the house. It's a real treat to see such a fine creature up close so often and unlike the Rabbits he/she doesn't destroy the garden!

*Barry Jackson*



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*I have included the butterfly because they have all seemed scarce this Summer, unsurprisingly .*



## Record-breaking success for breeding Hen Harriers at RSPB Geltsdale

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*One of the breeding females (Conrad Dickinson)*

This summer a total of eight young Hen Harriers fledged from two nests on the Reserve, four from each nest. This makes it the most successful breeding season at Geltsdale since birds re-established themselves here in the late 1980s (following an absence of a century due to relentless human persecution). All the chicks were fitted with colour rings, and two of the males were also satellite tagged. It will be both fascinating and instructive to see where these two juveniles wander during the coming months. As I write (September 11<sup>th</sup>), they have (separately) already ventured across to Kielder Forest, up into the Scottish Borders, over to Langholm Moor and down to the Forest of Bowland...

This year's success was all the more remarkable given the paucity of voles (numbers crashed in early spring) and the unusually cold and wet weather experienced during the North Pennine 'summer-that-never-was'. On the positive side, and for the first time in many years, there was no real evidence that human persecution or disturbance had any adverse effect on nesting attempts this season. The two breeding males were in fact both grey adults, birds which invariably never survive the breeding season here because of direct persecution. We can only hope that this state of affairs will continue.

## *Record-breaking success for breeding Hen Harriers at RSPB Geltsdale*

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Prior to the breeding season, the number overwintering in the local area was most encouraging, with one monitored roost site peaking at eight in the autumn, and another site hosting up to six birds in March. The latter roost was regularly used by the sat-tagged female that bred here in 2023, and she went on to nest successfully again in 2024 (within one kilometre of her 2023 nest).

Up to 12 committed volunteers helped to watch and protect both nests this year, with eight of those doing regular shifts. Their time and dedication to the Harrier cause (in often extremely inclement weather!) is truly appreciated, and was a vital contribution to this year's success story. One volunteer and CBC member, Conrad Dickinson, was also able to take some superb photos of the birds, under license, a couple of which are kindly included here.



*Aerial Food Pass – adult female to juvenile (Conrad Dickinson)*

**Pete Howard (Hen Harrier Protection Officer, RSPB Geltsdale)**

## Recent reports

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The period covered is June to August 2024. Records of rarities are subject to acceptance by the County Records Panel. Whilst efforts are made to trace as many records as possible there may be omissions and this is not intended as a definitive record.

### **Wildfowl**

Early returning ducks at Walney included a drake **Scaup** on 29 June and a female **Velvet Scoter** on 6 August.



*Common Scoter, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

**Common Scoter** included up to 2125 at Walney in June, whilst inland birds included singles at Hardendale Quarry on 29 June and 12 July, one at Salterhall Quarry (Rowrah/Alrecdon) on 12 August and an apparently injured individual at Standing Tarn from late July through August.

A **Garganey** at Wedholme Flow was the only one reported in the period. A **Pochard** visited Bassenthwaite on 18 August. A **Goldeneye** was at Loughrigg on 12 July. Hardendale Quarry held 133 **Tufted Duck** in July.

The earliest ever return of **Brent Geese** was noted on Walney, with the first four birds on 25 August. **Canada Goose** moult migration included 115 over Walney on 13 June. Away from the southern strongholds five **Eider** were at Ravenglass in June and July. There were 69 **Red-breasted Merganser** drifting into the Dudson Estuary on 4<sup>th</sup> August.



*Mandarin, Chapel House Pond, Adam Moan*

### **Gamebirds**

A **Quail** was calling at Allonby on 20 June. The only **Grey Partridge** reported in the period was one at Langwathby on 11 July.

### **Nightjar, Swift, Cuckoo**

Migrant **Cuckoo** were seen at Walney on 1-2 June, 13-14 July and 1-4 August. A juvenile was feeding on caterpillars in the sand dunes at Eskmeals on 27th July.

## **Rails and Crakes**

Up to two Water Rail were at Foulshaw in June and July.

## **Waders**



*Curlews, Mawbray, Barry Jackson*

Two **Wood Sandpiper** were seen together at South Walney on 12 July. **Curlew Sandpiper** were on a flooded field at Dalton-in-Furness on 13 July, at Port Carlisle on 4 August with two at Silecroft on 9 August. A **Ruff** was at Campfield Marsh on 12 August, with three on floods at Heversham Moss on 29-30 August.



*Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Siddick Ponds, Tommy Holden*

**Greenshank** were typically most evident at Ravenglass and Walney, with up to 25 at the former site and 22 at the latter in August. **Common Sandpiper** post-breeding dispersal included 23 at Anthorn on 15 July and 12 on the Esk Estuary on 10 July. Two Sanderling on Ullswater on 7 June was a good inland record. **Green Sandpiper** were reported from widespread sites but no more than singles at any site.

## Recent reports

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

**Great Skua** continue to be scarce following avian flu and the only one seen was off Walney on 25 August. **Arctic Skua** were seen in all months at Walney with two on 7 and 10 June and 14 July; one was off Drigg on 2 July.



*Common Gull & Osprey, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

**Mediterranean Gull** were most numerous in the Flimby area, where there were 51 on 22 July before numbers apparently increased to around tenfold that number at the end of the period.

**Kittiwakes** had a poor breeding season at St Bees Head with just eight young fledging from a sample of 62 occupied nests visible from the view-points. Numbers in the high tide beach roost at Sellafield were extremely low with a maximum of just six on 13 August.

### **Auks**

**Puffin** movement past Walney in June comprised three on 2<sup>nd</sup>, one on 3<sup>rd</sup>, one on 7<sup>th</sup> and three on 12<sup>th</sup>. At St Bees a late individual was on the sea on 28 July.



*Guillemot, Workington Harbour, Tony Marsh*

### **Divers**

The first **Red-throated Diver** of the autumn was off Walney on 25 August.

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

A **Storm Petrel** was off Workington on 4 July. A **Fulmar** passed Walney on 6 August. Peak monthly **Shag** counts from Walney were two in June, four in July and five in August.

## ***Herons and allies***

Up to eight **Spoonbill** were at a site in the west of the county, whilst another was at Grune Point on 20-21 June. A **Bittern** was seen at Foulshaw / Ulpha Meadows from 12<sup>th</sup> August. **Great White Egret** included up to three at Foulshaw / Ulpha Meadows in August, and singles at Walney in July and Arnside in August. **Cattle Egret** were seen at Kirksanton and Storth on 3 June and Greenodd on 12 August, with three together at Arnside on 26 August.

## ***Raptors***

An adult **Red-footed Falcon** was at Wedholme Flow in late June and early July, there were different views on whether this was one and the same as the second year seen earlier in the season.

**Hobby** were seen at several sites and the first confirmed breeding for the county was noted.



*Red-footed Falcon, Kelsick, Roger Ridley*

**Red Kite** sightings in June included singles at Orton on 5, Oulton Ponds on 10, Wheyrigg on 19, Appleby on 28, Penrith on 30. Singles were also at Heversham on 13 July, Hackthorpe on 21 July and Croglin on 14 August.

**Marsh Harrier** reports included a male and female on different dates in August, and up to three at Foulshaw Moss in August. A **Hen Harrier** was on the coast at Walney on 31 August. **Goshawk** were noted at sites in the south of the county.

## ***Owls***

**Short-eared Owls** away from breeding areas included birds at Dubmill Point on 3 August and Walney on 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August.

## ***Corvids***

The resident **Hooded Crow** remained at Walney throughout, and raised young in a hybrid pair. The regular Eskmeals bird was seen in July



## Recent reports

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### **Starlings**

A **Rosy Starling** was at Currock, Carlisle from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Thrushes, Chats and Flycatchers**

A fall of 102 **Wheatear** was noted on Walney on 31 August. **Spotted Flycatcher** records included singles at Walney on 5 June and 31 July and four on 31 August. Two were at Foulshaw / Ulfha on 24 July.

### **Wagtails and Pipits**

**Yellow Wagtail** nested at Langwathby with other records from Longtown on 8 June and Walney on 24 and 28 July. A **White Wagtail** on Walney on 23-24 July was unusual in summer. **Tree Pipit** passage at Walney included 20 bids on 11 August.



*Crossbills, Jockey Shields, Roger Ridley*

### **Finches and Buntings**

**Crossbill** records included 25 at Foulshaw on 10 June and 12 at Lakeside on 24 July. Away from Sizergh a **Hawfinch** was seen in Coniston on 16 June.

### **Escapes**

Eleven Bar-headed Geese at Foulshaw on 19 July had presumably wandered from Grange duckpond area.

*Stephen Dunstan*



## Common Sandpipers of Ennerdale Water

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*Common Sandpiper, Siddick Pond, Tommy Holden*

Over recent years Common Sandpipers have suffered mixed breeding success around Ennerdale with the fluctuating water levels associated with the drawdown of West Cumbria's water supply. There have been years when the draw down has been significant, followed by heavy rainfall, resulting in large scale breeding failure.

This year (2024) sees the lake relieved of water abstraction and with a wet early summer the lake level has remained consistently high. With this in mind we set off to see how the sandpipers were faring.

Previous counts have estimated between 9 and 11 territories around the lake shore (9 in 2022, 11 some years earlier).

Counting from the kayak in the same manner as previous occasions our estimate for 2024 is 15 territories – good news if this carried through to fledged young.

While a less fluctuating lake level will present less risk to breeding sandpipers it also provides a more productive food web to support them – both of which may account for an increase in numbers. The sandpipers are to be found around the shoreline in those places least vulnerable to human and canine disturbance – similar to the topical plight of Ringed Plovers and Oystercatchers on the coast. The reduction in grazing pressure around the lake shore over recent year has led to an increase in vegetation cover but may end up crowding out suitable nesting habitat in the future.

*Mike and Lyn Mills.*

## Observations on the breeding season - Guy Newbold

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I was lucky enough to observe the nests of a pair of Kestrels, Peregrine Falcons and Barn Owls, all on the cliff faces of a disused quarry with no public access. The quarry is normally a great place to watch with a variety of waterfowl and gulls etc, but this year had seen a marked reduction in numbers, there were no Mallards, Teal, or indeed any ducks at all.

The Kestrels and the Barn Owls were nesting high on an East facing cliff, the Barn Owls managed three chicks and the Kestrel two. The Kestrels were the first to fledge and by the beginning of August they had successfully both flown the nest, leaving the adult hunting in the surrounding area but abandoning the nest. The Barn Owls however took a little longer, presumably because the very wet weather slowed down hunting, and the chicks seemed to take longer than normal to fledge, indeed to date two of the three have left the nest, but one remains and is still being fed by the adult.

The Owls have had an interesting time, having the nest attacked by Stoats and gulls at different times, the adult bird was roosting close to the nest but not in it, and luckily was at hand during both events to deter the attackers.

The Peregrines were nesting further along the cliffs in a East facing crack in the rock. Two chicks were seen to leave the nest at the end of July and to date are still in the area and being fed on the wing by the adult bird.



## Observations on the breeding season - Guy Newbold

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Nearby there has been another nesting Barn Owl, this one with just a single chick in an old barn, both seemed to be doing well through July and early August but I've not managed to see if the chick has fledged, but I have my fingers crossed.



In the same place there has been breeding Lapwings, Chiffchaffs, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Cuckoos, Buzzards, Jays and lots of Stonechats.

At home the season has been less successful for the breeding birds. The pair of Mute Swans on the pond left in June and to date have not returned. Another pair on another local pond failed to breed for the second year in a row.



The Swallows, House Martins and Sand Martins have all been here but in smaller numbers than usual, they were late to arrive but successful in breeding and have spent most evenings and morning skimming the pond.

The Swifts which are normally here have not returned this year, we can usually expect around eight birds to arrive and nest locally but not this year. There were a breeding pair around a mile away which we occasionally saw over the fields, but again this was far fewer than normally nest there. The evening screeching has been very much missed.

June on the pond saw a pair of nesting Mallards, which managed to see three chicks reach maturity from a clutch of nine. There were two pairs of Oystercatchers, both of which managed one chick each, and we briefly saw a female Goosander with six chicks in tow. Apart from that the pond has been very much empty, in fact it's been the worst year in the five years we have been monitoring it. The Grey Herons are the only species that seem to have thrived this year with four young being raised and three regular adults that visit and fight each other for territory.

## Observations on the breeding season - Guy Newbold

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One exciting visitor to the pond and a first for us, was a dog Otter which came for three days in a row in June, and hasn't been back since. I've had a trail camera out just in case but no joy since the first visit. He came early morning , caught seven or eight Tench, ate them and left, during which time he didn't seem remotely bothered by me sitting close by with a camera. I assumed he came to us via the beck that runs down to the river.

Garden birds have been plentiful with Great Tits, Coal Tits, Blue Tits, Long-tailed Tits, Goldfinches, Greenfinches and Robins all breeding in very good numbers. There has been two pairs of Great Spotted Woodpeckers nesting nearby, and there were at least two Cuckoos. The Treecreepers are less common than normal but there were still two as regular visitors along with a sporadic visit from a pair of Goldcrests.

Along the cycle track there has been good numbers of all the usual suspects, Wrens, Chiffchaffs, Reed Warblers, Flycatchers, Jackdaws , Rooks, Collared Doves, Buzzards and Kestrels. The fields on the edges of the cycle track have also had good numbers of Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Curlews and Lapwings along with sporadic visits of Common Sandpipers in the wet areas.

In conclusion this year has been very much normal in the garden, cycle track and fields but very much quieter on the pond, and the reason for this is only speculation, maybe the after effects of Avian Flu ?

Guy Newbold (all photos by Guy)

[www.photosbyguy.co.uk](http://www.photosbyguy.co.uk)



## Curlew Recovery South Lakes: 2024 summary

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This has been a good year for Curlew Recovery South Lakes (CRSL). The aim of the group was to protect and promote the lowland Curlew population in the Lyth Valley and surrounding areas, particularly by increasing fledging success and 2024 has been significantly more successful than 2023.

We know that putting predator fences around nests dramatically increases hatching success and this year we fenced 20 nests.

As always, local farmers have been incredibly helpful by allowing us to fence in their silage and grazing fields, delaying mowing and, in one or two cases, moving chicks which had been disturbed accidentally by machinery. Awareness of the project has also increased through outreach activities such as talks to schools and local groups. This led to information on a number of additional pairs.

In total, we tracked 24 families from hatching and know that between 18 and 20 chicks finally fledged. This is a big increase on last years four chicks (plus a possible fifth detected only by sound recording). This means that things are certainly moving in the right direction. However, it is hard to calculate productivity accurately as we know there are some nests we didn't find.

The project will be described in more detail by Susannah Bleakley, a founding member of the group, at the joint CBC/Carlisle Natural History Society on 5 February 2025 at Tullie. She will be joined by members of the Melbreak Curlew Group and ringer, Thalia Sparke, to talk about their similar project in the north lakes.



*Curlew, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*



*Curlew, Geltsdale, Adam Moan*

Follow CRSL on social media at <https://linktr.ee/curlewslakes>

*Sue King*



## Contents

<b>Cumbria Bird Club - dates for your diary</b> <i>Sue King &amp; Mike Mills</i> .....	59
<b>Yellowhammer survey</b> <i>Mike and Lyn Mills</i> .....	60
<b>New Cumbria Bird Club logo</b> <i>Chris Hind</i> .....	62
<b>Cumbria Bird Club records panel - new voting process</b> <i>Chris Hind</i>	63
<b>CBC meet at Hodbarrow on 22nd June</b> <i>Barry Jackson</i> .....	64
<b>Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria 2023</b> <i>Chris Hind</i> .....	64
<b>Observations on the breeding season -</b> <i>Bill Angell</i> .....	65
<b>Snow Goose</b> <i>Anser caerulescens</i> a brief assessment of the probability of its occurrences as a vagrant in Cumbria <i>Chris Hind</i> .....	66
<b>My perspective on the breeding season -</b> <i>Frank Mawby</i> .....	68
<b>Observations on the breeding season -</b> <i>Barry Jackson</i> .....	71
<b>Record-breaking success for breeding Hen Harriers at RSPB</b>	
<b>Geltsdale</b> <i>Peter Howard</i> .....	72
<b>Recent reports</b> <i>Stephen Dunstan</i> .....	76
<b>Common Sandpipers of Ennerdale Water</b> <i>Mike and Lyn Mills</i> .....	79
<b>Observations on the breeding season -</b> <i>Guy Newbould</i> .....	80
<b>Curlew recovery South Lakes 2024 summary</b> <i>Sue King</i> .....	83

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