Cumbria Bird Club

BIRD NEWS
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LIST IS ALSO A HYPERLINK TO EACH ARTICLE

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New South Wales, Australia
http://www.cboc.org.au

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Submitting Bird Records

With so many reporting channels it's important to understand what happens to records submitted in the various ways that now exist.
For sightings to become formal records that go into the archive and contribute to the annual Bird Report they need to go through one of these channels –

- BirdTrack
- eBird
- CBC recording spreadsheet (also known as CBC recording template)
- Going birding in Cumbria? (this is accessed from Recent Sightings on the CBC website)

Going birding serves two functions – it shares recent sightings that can be seen on the CBC website, and it is a formal way of submitting records.

Three other platforms exist –
Cumbria WhatsApp Group - This is useful for putting immediate news out while in the field
Birding Cumbria Google Group - This is a news / discussion platform
Cumbria Birding Group – Facebook - This is a discussion platform with photographic emphasis
None of these platforms are formal records submission channels – sightings posted on these do not go to the Records Team and will not enter the archive or contribute to the Bird Report.

The closing date for bird records for 2025 is the end of January 2026

Chris Hind County Recorder

Obituary for Derek Hayward

We are very sad to report the death of Derek Hayward in November 2025. Derek was originally a Cumbrian ringer, working with the Cumbria Raptor Study Group chaired by Pete Davies. He had a particular interest in Ravens and his work is credited in Derek Ratcliffes' excellent monograph on the species.

Latterly, he lived and worked in Scotland. He was a member of the Argyll Raptor Study Group and was instrumental in the ringing of many Golden Eagles on Mull. He also supplied a number of moulted feathers that contributed to Natural Research's (Phil Whitfield et al.) recent submission on using DNA from moulted feathers to estimate apparent survival rates. A full obituary is being compiled by colleagues in the BTO and Argyll Raptor Study Group and will be published in the next newsletter. *Sue King*

Outdoor Meetings September to November

Ravenglass 21st September with Dave Shackleton

Despite the recent wet and windy weather, the day provided us with a wonderful weather window of sunshine and a light breeze and we shed the outer layers of clothing as the day progressed.

Keith Barker

Despite our aims of limiting numbers to a manageable group of 12 there were 13 of us meeting up with Dave Shackleton and scanning the estuary off the village green, the first Mergansers, a Canada Geese fly past and a few distant Pink-footed Geese. Dave has been resident in Ravenglass for the past five years since retiring from RSPB Haweswater and as archivist for the Bird Club and with kitchen window views over the estuary he was very much the man to guide our walk. Following our introductions, we set off under the railway bridges and alongside the River Mite, the smallest of the three rivers merging at Ravenglass and the one with the muddiest estuary. Here were good numbers of Redshanks, some early Wigeon and the gathering of Greenshanks which roost out the tide, certainly 9 birds although likely more. Having spent time scoping the Mite we headed back into the village and down the main street to the hard where we scanned the joining of the three rivers as the tide flooded in, and out to sea where a few Cormorants and duck marked the edge of the channel. Meanwhile a few Little Egrets and Herons dotted the shore. As Dave explained, both species now nest at the Muncaster heronry further up the River Esk. With the tide making and the team being willing Dave guided us along the Esk shoreline with its views over to the Eskmeals CWT reserve. Our pace was quite leisurely and not too wet under foot, indeed three of us were happy with our walking boot choice of footwear over the recommended 'wellies' as we negotiated a few muddy channels. On a small area of salt marsh with dead heads of Sea Aster, a small flock of around 25 Twite were busy feeding, later to be joined by Linnets to make up a larger flock when disturbed by our passing.

Outdoor Meetings September to November

The sun and rising water made for a comfortable pause for scanning through telescopes interspersed with information from Dave ranging from the historical Black Headed Gull Colony of Drigg dunes to the prospects of Natterjack Toads on Eskmeals. Someone slipped in the word coffee at this point and with that flask's emerged from bags and the conversation and scanning continued. There followed something of a pow-wow on whether to turn back and return to Ravenglass before the tide blocked us or to carry on up the Esk and return by another footpath route. The upriver route won out and we passed under the railway heading inland along the coastal path where we were sheltered from the breeze and found the going quite warm as we threaded through a phragmites reed bed with occasional views to the Waberthwaite side of the estuary where a Grey Phalarope had been present for 3 days earlier in the week.

Keith Barker

The path then enters the wooded estuary side and onto a track which lead along below Muncaster Castle. We continued far enough below aged Oaks which were dropping some of their abundant crop of acorns into the water as we enjoyed a calling Nuthatch and the view across to Waberthwaite Church and a Common Sandpiper. From this point we backtracked a short way to pick up the footpath which leads uphill below the site of an ancient beacon affording fine views of the estuary at high water. From the high point it was downhill back to Ravenglass, although it was far from downhill for the boot wearing trio as the track was blocked with a 25M flood requiring full height wellingtons. The shenanigans of wading this flood provided further entertainment for the team before we wended our way back to our start point, the culmination of a wonderfully scenic route in great weather and good company. Our thanks to Dave Shackleton for his input. *Mike and Lyn Mills*

Outdoor Meetings September to November

Longtown October 26th October 2025 with Connor Fraser

Adam Moan

In the very north of Cumbria, Longtown sits just 4km from the Scottish border, and is a familiar birding spot for those of us in the north of the county. The lifeblood of the site, The River Esk, flows south for much of its course, before flowing west, through the town, and towards The Solway Firth. Accompanying The Esk, Arthuret Pools lie just 1km downstream from the town, and the scrapes along Gretna Road are well known for their abundance of wintering waterfowl, hosting a returning ring-necked duck in recent years. Longtown's intriguing geography and range of habitats means it supports a variety of species all year round, and, as records show, is more than capable of producing a surprise or two.

We had a good turnout of nine members, on what was a grey Cumbria morning, and it wasn't long before the drizzle set in for the day. Activity was quiet early on, although a trickle of migrating thrushes and an active Dipper gave us something to point our binoculars at. We picked up Goldcrest and a wintering Chiffchaff near the sewer works, before spotting a Buzzard and one our target species – Kingfisher – as we approached Arthuret Pools. The pools offered us several waterfowl species, including Little Grebe and a lone juvenile Whooper Swan, as well as a host of new passerines. At this point, the drizzle became rain, but through misty optics we picked up a Redshank and two of our second target species – Green Sandpiper - all feeding around the shingle on the riverbend. On our way back there were a couple of other nice additions, including a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Jay. As the rain tailed off, we relocated to a second site: Metal Bridge. The overpass by the train tracks offers great views of newly created scrapes and oversees where The Esk meets the Solway Firth.

Adam Moan

Unfortunately, the conditions were far from ideal, with rain and strong westerly winds, though we did manage to pick up two more geese species, Curlew, and a very distant Great White Egret. Despite the weather, we amassed an impressive 57 species overall and certainly made the most of what the Longtown area had to offer. *Connor Fraser*

Outdoor Meetings September to November

Foulney Island 8th November with Mike Douglas

Chris Hind

With all thirteen participants assembled in the car park at the Roa Island causeway well in advance of time we could immediately hear the soft calls of the Brent Geese on the West side of the causeway. As we scanned along the shoreline towards Cavendish Dock there were predominantly Pale-bellied Brents as far as the eye could see.

On the exposed rocks away from the water's edge a flock of several hundred Golden Plovers showed nicely in the welcome sunshine – again their calls came across on the light breeze. There was no time to lose though as we knew that the rising tide was on its way in.

Chris Hind

As we headed out over the slippery stones along the Foulney causeway there were more Brent Geese in the bay to our right – once we got into a good position with the sun behind us, we had lovely close views of these mainly Dark-bellied Brents with just a few Pale-bellied birds mixed in. This mix of the two races is unusual in Britain. The Canadian population of Pale-bellied bird's winters mainly in Ireland where other populations are scarce, the Svalbard population of Pale-bellied bird's winters mainly around Lindisfarne and while some Dark -bellied birds occur here they are mainly transient. In the rest of Britain, they are almost entirely Dark-bellied birds and certainly in Norfolk Pale-bellied bids are a rarity. Presumably the Pale-bellied birds here at Foulney are of Canadian origin.

Chris Hind

The water was lapping up to the narrow track as we made it onto the island with dry feet. Mike Douglas our leader had got the timing right! A brief shower quickly passed and pleasant sunshine returned. With the rising tide there was a spectacle of waders and ducks on the move as they landed and quickly relocated as the tide advanced. Some Golden Plovers flew high overhead in nice formations and Curlews flew in ragged lines low over the spits. A few Dunlin were mixed in with the Redshank and Golden Plover flocks and some groups of around 100 Turnstones rose from behind the spits before landing again nearby. There were strings of Wigeon along the shoreline feeding quietly while more distantly Shelducks floated on the calmer water.

Chris Hind

Offshore there was a group of seven Great Crested Grebes and as we scanned around there were more single birds. Some of these were in complete winter plumage while others showed strong remnants of breeding plumage. Red-breasted Mergansers were present in small groups, some of the males starting to give their characteristic head throwing displays. As we progressed down the island good numbers of Eiders gave close views as they loafed on the shingle spits. A Greenshank call was heard, and two birds were picked up as they flew low across the bay before dropping in on the west side. A few more groups of Bar-tailed Godwits continued to relocate along with seemingly constant Curlew flights. On the western side some small groups of Grey Plovers lined the shore, moving tentatively along in their characteristic way. A Whimbrel called to the south of us; but unfortunately it wasn't seen!, Mike picked out a Guillemot feeding near the spit before it drifted round and out of sight.

We found a handy spot where the grassy edge met the shingle for lunch. By now the Eiders were leaving the shingle spit and flying by to give some lovely views in the winter sun. Quite remarkably a Purple Sandpiper suddenly appeared on the shoreline only thirty metres or so away to give everyone an unexpected treat.

Mike Douglas

We retraced our steps back along the causeway, now even more slippery after its inundation, and enjoyed further views of Red-breasted Mergansers and distantly bobbing Shelducks. Everyone expressed their enjoyment of the day and we all felt as if it had been a truly immersive experience with birds all around us as they fed, loafed and generally responded to the dynamic waters. This was all enhanced by Mike's guiding skills as he pointed out the various species, often highlighting important identification features as we watched the birds. It was a rewarding day out with club members from across the county and as far afield as Oxford. In all we had 41 species between us, a decent haul!

Stephen Dunstan and Chris Hind

Chris Hind

CBC Annual General Meeting 7th November

This year's AGM was held at The George Hotel, Penrith and following a very short AGM talk by Chris Hind and Andrew Poole. About twenty members attended and had the pleasure of hearing a great talk by Ashley Cooper entitled **"Climate Change on All Seven Continents",** that was supporting with some fantastic award-winning, professional photographs.

As Ashley clearly highlighted the problems of global warming from all over the world, which was very thought provoking and slightly depressing however, he did finish off with some of processes that are being adopted to mitigate the problem. He was also very generous in selling his book 'Images from a Warming Planet', for £10 rather than the usual £30!
Adam Moan

Upcoming Meetings

Sleeping on the wing - Wednesday 7th January, 7.15 – 21.00 at Tullie, Carlisle: migration marvels with Tanya Hoare (CBC/CNHS joint meeting). Tanya, from Sedbergh Swift Group will talk about Swift migration. Please note the 7.15 pm start time.

Member's night, 7.30—21.00 Thursday 19 March 2026, George Hotel, Penrith

We're organising a CBC member's evening on 19th March in Penrith where we'd like to hear from you.

The plan is to have short talks from about six members who'd be happy to speak for 10 minutes on a birding topic of their choice. So, do you have a favourite species, project or a special collection of photos you'd like to share? The talk can be accompanied by slides or not as you wish. Although it doesn't sound long, a lot of information can be crammed in to that time.

This will be a great chance to share your enthusiasms and socialise with other club members so we look forward to hearing from you. The topics will be published nearer the time and there may be a quiz!

If you'd like to give one of the talks, please contact Sue King (Secretary) and let her know your topic either by emailing info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk or calling on 07879 815276.

The Cumbria Bird Club Bird Race
Sunday 25th January 2026

At the November council meeting of the Cumbria Bird Club, it was agreed to start having an annual January bird race once again as several members had expressed an interest. Phil Evans and Christine Nuttall who took over running the bird races from Colin Gay in the years prior to Covid have agreed to run them once again.

The council decided to make changes to the format of the race in an attempt to make it as 'green' as possible and to try to lower the carbon footprint. It was agreed that two individual races would be held. Cumbria would now be split into two and a north/south divide created. The two bird races 'northern' and 'southern' would each have a winning team. The Council are also looking to add another 'green' bike or 'on foot' competition.

After some thought, the north south areas will be split west to east from St Bees Head, with a line drawn to the top of Dunmail Raise (north of Grasmere), then extending on to the summit of Shap fell on the M6.

St Bees Head and other areas along the watershed can be accessed by both teams. The southern bird race teams can also count birds seen on the drive towards the finishing point north of the dividing line (owls for example), so they can continue birding until the 5.30 pm finishing time. Another big change is that the race will take place over 24 hours starting at 5.30 pm on Saturday the 24th January, so those wishing to try for owls etc. can do so the night before if they wish and still get a good night's sleep. The finish of the two bird races will be at 5.30 pm at the Agricultural Inn in Penrith on the 25th January, the main day of the race. This year's bird race will unfortunately not take place until late in the month due to the M6 motorway closures on the weekends of the 4th and 11th and the wetland bird survey count on the 18th.

For newcomers who are not aware of the rules, teams can be made up of two, three or four people. If there are two people in a team then both have to see or hear the bird. If there are three people in a team then two out of three have to see or hear the bird and if there are four people in a team then three out of four have to see or hear the bird to be able to count it. The teams cannot split up whilst birding. Each team must contain at least one member of Cumbria bird club. For those who are late to the finishing point, one species will be deducted from their total for every 15 minutes over time.

As mentioned, the race finishes at the Agricultural Inn where food will be organized. The choices are steak and ale pie and chips or a vegetarian option consisting of, either cheese and onion or butternut and bean pie. Both the steak pie and chips and the veggie options cost £14 per person. All food must be booked via Phil Evans before Tuesday 20th of January so the Agricultural Inn know how many to cater for.

Contact Phil Evans via email at orcinus.phil@protonmail.com or via mobile on 07377 653342 to confirm your entry, whether you are competing in the north or south race, your team name, the number in your team, and your individual meal options.

In the unlikely event that the race has to be cancelled due to weather forecasts predicting unsafe driving conditions, an email will be sent out to the participants as early as possible.
Good luck to everyone! *Phil Evans*

Subscription Fees update

From 2022 the Club's subscription fees were revised in line with the cost to print Birds & Wildlife in Cumbria, a publication that continues to be provided to all members as part of the membership package and I'm sure you all eagerly await receiving this each summer, as I know I do.

Whilst there are no plans to increase the membership fee in the foreseeable future, our costs continue to rise and it may be no surprise to many of you that the cost of producing Birds & Wildlife in Cumbria now accounts for the majority of the Clubs annual subscription fee receipts.

We are therefore asking all members to review their annual payment arrangements and bank mandates, as there are still members who have not increased their payment to the latest rates.

For ease of reference these are:-
Single/Corporate Membership : £20
Joint/Family Membership : £25
Reduced/Junior : £15.00

Our bank account details remain unchanged and are available to check on the Club's website.

It's also an issue for us when members inadvertently *overpay* their subs, this is usually because their old mandate hasn't been cancelled; this takes a lot of (voluntary) admin time and postage costs to identify and refund, which could easily be avoided.

Many thanks for your continued support. *Andrew Poole*

Members Photos

Greenshank, River Wampool,
Adam Moan

Little Stint, Bowness Railings,
Nick Franklin

Grey Heron,
Burgh-by-Sands Marsh,
John Ramsden

Adoption of juvenile Osprey by Foulshaw adult male

Adam Moan

The summer of 2025 was another routine success story for the long-time resident Osprey pair at Foulshaw Moss with the male, white YW and the female, blue 35, producing their 30th, 31st and 32nd chicks at their regular nest with all three chicks being ringed in July. The post-fledging period was anything but routine however when in early August an un-ringed juvenile joined the three ringed Foulshaw juveniles at the nest at feeding time with the three home juveniles seemingly accepting its presence without undue complaint. When the resident male white YW brought in fish, he appeared not to notice the intruder and the un-ringed juvenile competed with the home juveniles for the food and, possibly due to hunger, became the dominant presence often appearing to prevail to have first go at the prey offered. As the month wore on, the home juveniles appeared less frequently on camera presumably beginning to assert their independence prior to migration as is normal and had ceased to return to the nest altogether by the end of the month with their first migration probably underway. Not so the un-ringed juvenile however which remained close to the nest throughout and continued to be supplied with fish by his apparently adoptive parent, white YW.

Adam Moan

In every preceding year, with wife and kids gone by the end of August, white YW is home alone in the first half of September and enjoys a blissful holiday feeding, resting and piling on the grams ready for his departure, before finally slipping away south around the middle of the month. On September14th this year, his adopted juvenile was still at the nest in the evening when he dropped off a fish for the last time. There were no camera sightings on the 15th but one unknown bird was seen over the reserve which proved to be the final sighting of 2025 with both birds presumed to have migrated on that day or the previous evening.

Adoption of juvenile Osprey by Foulshaw adult male

The origin of this un-ringed juvenile remains a mystery as all known Osprey nests in the immediately surrounding area had their young ringed during July with the nearest known nest where the chicks are not ringed being around eight miles away as the Osprey flies. If it was from that nest, why had it travelled so far at an age when juveniles usually remain close to the nest being fed by their parents? Speculation that its biological parent(s) had met with some tragedy remains just that but either way it was a unique event in my limited experience and one well-worth recording. *D B Thexton*

Common Sandpiper Survey

Mike Douglas

CBC are organising a Common Sandpiper survey for the 2026 breeding season and are looking for expressions of interest from any members who would like to take part. Cumbria hosts a significant proportion of the English population of Common Sandpiper, but given its river and lakeside breeding habitat, it is likely to be affected by increases in recreation, summer flooding and other pressures during incubation and chick rearing. The 2026 survey will assess occupancy at sites with previous breeding records, as well as covering other suitable areas currently lacking in breeding records.

The survey will involve a minimum of 2 visits to each site in May and June, using linear walks, and / or vantage points to cover historic and potential breeding sites. Reporting will be via paper forms or online submissions, and surveyors can also use the Canvis mapping app to record breeding sandpipers outside of their survey areas.

If you would like to take part, please email us on info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk, and let us know where you are based and how far you would be willing to travel to carry out surveys. *Mike Douglas*

Grey Phalarope near Penrith 13th to 17th November

Roy Bottomley

On the morning of 13th November 2025, and after a night of heavy rain, my son (Craig) wanted to see the extent of any flooding from the River Eamont. As expected, we saw that the river had burst its banks and flooded most of the field between the A66 and the river. I noticed that there were quite a few birds feeding on and around the floodwater, including several Black-headed Gulls, Mallards, Heron, Little Egret, Pied Wagtails and Meadow Pipit.

I made a couple of scans with my binoculars, and on my second scan, I noticed a very small grey and white bird swimming near a couple of Black -headed Gulls. It was quite a distance away, and looked like a tiny gull, but not even a Little Gull was that small! I turned to Craig to say that I think I've seen a phalarope. I ran the short distance back to the car to fetch my camera, and quickly returned to take a few distant record shots. I was able to confirm it was definitely a Phalarope, and most likely to be a Grey by this late date.

(Red-necked Phalaropes usually pass through in August to September). I went back home, and returned with my wife (Sheila), and now armed with my scope and tripod. I was able to confirm it was a Grey Phalarope and show it through my scope to Sheila and Craig. I then put news out onto Birdguides and Going Birding Cumbria. The following day, I returned in the morning, and found that the floodwater had receded a little, but there was too much water to enable closer views of the still present Phalarope without wellies. I returned to my car, and met Colin Auld. I returned to the bird with him in order to point it out. We were both enjoying the Phalarope through our scopes when a dog walker arrived with a boisterous Golden Retriever. To our horror, the welly wearing dog walker waded

Roy Bottomley

through the floodwater straight towards the Phalarope! Amazingly, the Phalarope remained unmoved when man and dog got within a few feet from the bird. It only took off, when a stick was thrown for the dog. The phalarope flew around a short distance and settled down on another bit of floodwater.

Nick Franklin

Later on that day, Sheila, Craig and I called in again to find Nick Franklin photographing the Phalarope at close quarters. Like Nick, I also had my wellies on, and waded through the water to get better views of the bird. We were able to get great views of the confiding Phalarope down to a few feet, as it swam and fed completely unconcerned of our presence. I returned to check the Phalarope's presence for the next three days, and met several visiting birders from within and outside the county.

Nick Franklin

I managed to get a few photos of the Phalarope on each day. On its final day, the floodwater had receded to a few pools which were mostly frozen. The phalarope was still feeding on the last bit of unfrozen water. The next day, the last few pools were all frozen, and the Phalarope had finally gone. The Grey Phalarope is best identified by its bill, which is shorter and stouter than the Red-necked Phalarope's longer and needle-like bill. The Grey's bill also has a pale base to the bill which Red-necked lacks.

This Grey Phalarope was one of a few this autumn in Cumbria, including one on the River Esk near Ravenglass, on Lake Windermere at Ambleside and on Paddle Beck Flash near Cockermouth. *Roy Bottomley*

Glossy Ibis in Cumbria

I visited Campfield RSPB lonning on a few occasions hoping to see the reported Glossy Ibis. On my first visit on the 18th October my wife Maureen drove me out and we saw it from Kingsland Hide, it was over the field near the opposite fence feeding on worms and took some short flights. On my second visit on the 20th October, I took the bus arriving about 1.15pm, the bus driver kindly dropped me right outside the entrance to the reserve. At first I couldn't see it from Kingsland or Paisley hides, but after returning to Kingsland at 2.15pm it was there close to the lonning, it stayed for 45 minutes before flying over to the opposite fence.

Roger Ridley, RSPB Campfield

Roger Ridley, RSPB Campfield

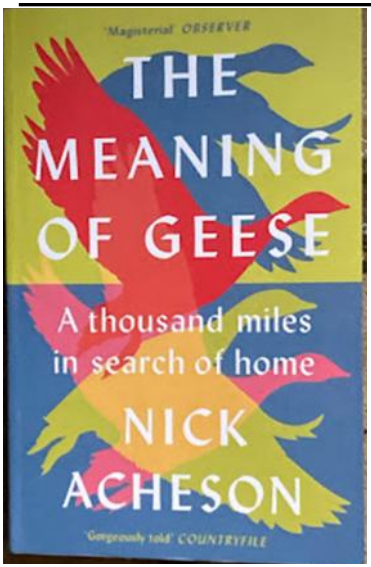
Nev Wright 21st Oct, RSPB Campfield

On my subsequent visits it was viewable from Kingsland and also from Paisley sometimes out of view behind the row of trees. Quite a treat *Roger Ridley*

Before this one was seen in the south of the county at Heversham and then on the 4th November five were seen by James Turner! I'm sure even more people must have seen them there? *Steve Taylor*

Steve Taylor,, 1st Oct, Heversham Moss

The Meaning of Geese by Nick Acheson



I started reading this book at the end of last winter just as the wintering geese on the Solway were departing for their breeding grounds. I was so enthralled by the content and so much liked the direct but nevertheless lyrical writing style that I temporarily shelved it. This was because I wanted to be immersed in my local north Cumbrian wintering flocks of geese while reading it. The past few weeks have seen vast flocks of Barnacle Geese return to the Solway from their Svalbard breeding grounds and returning Pink-footed Geese from where they breed in Iceland. The scene was now set for me to finish the book.

This book is generally to be found under the 'Nature Writing' section in bookshops. This category is one with which I have some difficulty. I would have a preference for placing it somewhere that reflects its degree of specialisation and authority. This is no run of the mill 'Nature book'. It is interesting and probably significant that while Nick has written columns in some prestigious publications this is actually his first book.

The form that the book takes is by progressing through the winter starting in September with the earliest arrivals of geese and concludes at the end of April when most have departed. It recounts Nick's journeys on an old red bicycle around the lanes of north Norfolk as he searches for flocks of geese. He is a native of that part of Norfolk and keeps in contact with James McCallum that wonderful water colourist whose speciality is geese and also with a few other knowledgeable observers and ringers of geese.

The narrative while being based on Nick's travels around his local area also brings in a wealth of information related to when the different species of geese arrive and depart and also where their core breeding areas are located. The whole text comes across as being completely honest; it is sprinkled with details that give atmosphere while it never seems forced or includes unnecessary embellishment.

This is undoubtedly one of the most enjoyable, inspiring and informative accounts that I have read. I would have little hesitation in awarding it my wildlife related book of the year. *Chris Hind*

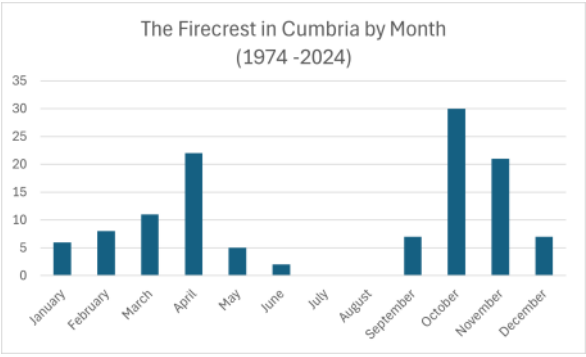
Firecrest in Cumbria

Adam Moan

The Firecrest. It's just one of those names isn't it: looks good when read, sounds good when said. Try it, say it out loud, a little theatrically perhaps. THE FIRE REST! Oh, maybe make sure there is no one around first! Scientifically "christened" in 1820 and, in earlier days, referred to as the Fire-crested wren, I can imagine a nod of approval being conveyed to us Johnny-come-lately bipeds with regard to the eventually settled upon moniker.

Like many of you no doubt, this evocatively named bird caught the eye and fired the imagination when eyes set upon it in early bird guides of youth. The south coast of England however, may as well have been a far and distant land to this 10 year old and thoughts of an encounter were a fanciful pipedream (non-opium induced I hasten to add). So it came to pass, decades later, advancing years and with the hoped for random encounter not materialising, I decided in January 2020, to leave the confines of West Cumbria and venture north to a place I had long fantasised about visiting - Longtown Sewage Works; or Waste Water Treatment Works, as these places are known in polite society. It was there that I finally made my acquaintance with *Regulus ignicapillus.* Quite a few of you were there too, befitting of it's "scarce passage migrant and winter visitor" county status.

The following seasonally dark evenings inevitably had me trawling through back issues of Birds in Cumbria for context, which leads me, somewhat tardily, to present the following summary of the period 1974 - 2024. During the period in question the Firecrest has been recorded in 39 of the 51 years with no birds recorded in the following years - 1977, 1987, 1991, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2018 and 2022.



Odd perhaps, that as the British breeding population increased and range expanded, from Hampshire (first confirmed breeding in 1962), then Buckinghamshire (1971) and beyond, documentation in Cumbria has apparently decreased with nine of

those absence years occurring between 2000-2022. Of course, and apologies for stating the bleedin' obvious, a bird so small in a county so big will undoubtedly have gone unnoticed at times and one can but speculate as to how many have slipped under the birding community radar. Nevertheless, an apparent tailing off.

Records come from every month except July and August, though the recent record of 30th June 2024 suggests the possibility of a July presence but, records are records and 10 out of 12 ain't bad. In the top ten countdown October is comfortably top of the pops with 30 records, April coming next with 22. Calendar breakdown as follows, referencing *presence in a given month* i.e. some of these are the same bird in consecutive months. January (6), February (8), March (11), April (22), May (5), June (2), July/August (0), September (7), October (30), November (21), December (7). Not surprisingly, Walney Island has been, by considerable margin, the county hotspot. Multiple records also come from Eskmeals/Irt Estuary (5), St.Bees (3) and Siddick Pond (7). Yes, Siddick Pond, on my doorstep. I must get out more.

In broader geographical terms the south of the county has had the bulk of the records with Furness peninsula sightings in particular, cementing southern area predominance. The west of the county is comfortably second, with the species, expectedly perhaps, scarcer in the northern and eastern areas. The majority of records have been of single birds but there have been several instances of multiple birds, the most noteworthy being four birds at S.Walney on two occasions (April '83 and October '89) and three birds at both S.Walney (April '94) and Siddick Pond (April '83). Taken at face value there have been perhaps 110 birds recorded during the period in question, approximating to two per year (ok, 2.15), however, 71 of those were during the 25 year period 1974 - 1998 (2.84 per year) with only 39 during the 26 year period 1999 - 2024 (1.5 per year) suggesting the annual average would appear to have decreased. Despite the low numbers and the apparent downward trend, if the optimists among you are fantasising about the possibility of future breeding within the county (think Cetti's Warbler) well, has this already occurred perhaps? Consider this: "a pair was observed displaying in a well wooded garden in SD37" in May 1972 (British Birds - April 73). Ok, this was Lancashire at the time but, hey. On a personal note, two subsequent visits to the New Forest have provided additional, enjoyable encounters and this is as good a

Adam Moan

place as any if you feel the need for a Firecrest fix, with other treats also on the menu. In summary, any Firecrest sighting within Cumbria is always going to be a noteworthy delight but you will garner a little extra local kudos if you see one in July or August. I very much look forward to another encounter with this little gem of a bird and if that is in Cumbria - see you there?
P.S. As a follow up, perhaps members would care to share first or memorable Firecrest encounters? *Paul Reeves*

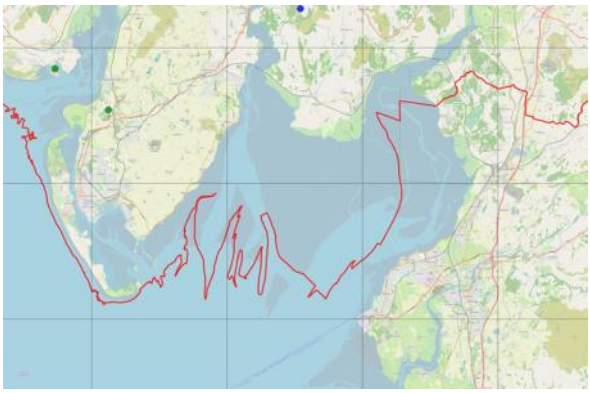
The Outer Limits

On 1 May 1993 a pioneering Cumbrian Bird Club pelagic from Maryport was amply rewarded with the county's first White-billed Diver. Except technically it wasn't, as the British Birds Rarities Committee* deemed it to be 'at sea' and published it as such.

A rather pragmatic approach has since been taken and the record is now included in the county list (https://cumbriabirdclub.org.uk/reporting/cumbria-bird-list/) but it does highlight the importance of boundaries. I was reminded of this when a Forster's Tern appeared in Morecambe Bay earlier this year, and have pulled something together on this whilst newsletter copy is in relatively short supply.

On 28 March this year Nick Godden's WeBS count at Morecambe Stone Jetty in Lancashire was spectacularly enlivened by a Forster's Tern heading south 50 metres offshore. Observers already at Heysham and others who quickly assembled there did not definitely see the bird, but what may have been it was seen distantly flying out into Morecambe Bay.

[It's not directly relevant to the point of this article but if you're not familiar with this record it's well worth reading up on. It had been in Dorset and was still there on the 25th, and after the Morecambe record was at Skippool Creek, on Lancashire's Wyre Estuary on the 30th before surprising everyone and reappearing off Brownsea Island in Dorset by the following afternoon].



This got me thinking about rare bird records in Morecambe Bay, but it applies equally to the Solway.

The Outer Limits

A bird could in theory be observed from Cumbria or Lancashire (or Cumbria and Dumfries & Galloway), but at any given point it could only be in one recording area. I asked Mike Douglas about the county boundary for Morecambe Bay and he kindly sent me the attached: I'm not sure about the offshore stuff around Walney but it's clear that in some places, for example the outer Kent Estuary, it might not be very clear whether a bird was in Cumbria or Lancashire.

So, what are the practical implications of this? Well for sea watching it might be useful to establish the locations of any features such as buoys and other markers. Practicing estimate distance may be helpful; there are apparently ways to increase observer accuracy by training using radar, but it's not my area of expertise.

Apologies if this article is a bit niche and not of everyday relevance but with improving optics and cameras it's more likely to be occasionally relevant. In the last few days, a Black Scoter and a couple of Surf Scoters have been seen off Dumfries and Galloway, they were clearly close in from the evidence of the excellent pictures but in theory they could turn up a lot closer to the Cumbrian side of the Solway later in the winter.

*White-billed Diver is no longer a national rarity but was at the time.
Stephen Dunstan

Osprey Platform at RSPB Geltsdale

Despite not attracting nesting Osprey this year, the reserve has seen an interesting array of visitors caught on camera at the Geltsdale nesting platform.

We've captured Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Tawny Owl, Cormorants, Mistle Thrush, Jackdaws, Common Redstart, Nightjar,

Chaffinch,
Blue Tits, Great Tits, Great Spotted Woodpecker and very surprisingly a male Ring Ouzel in September.
Ian Ryding

Digitising Tullie House bird skins

We have been working for the last 3 years with Wednesday Batchelor, Curator of the Wildlife Collections as Volunteer Curators at Tullie House, digitising the Bird Skins collection, both specimens and their data labels.

Icterine Warbler

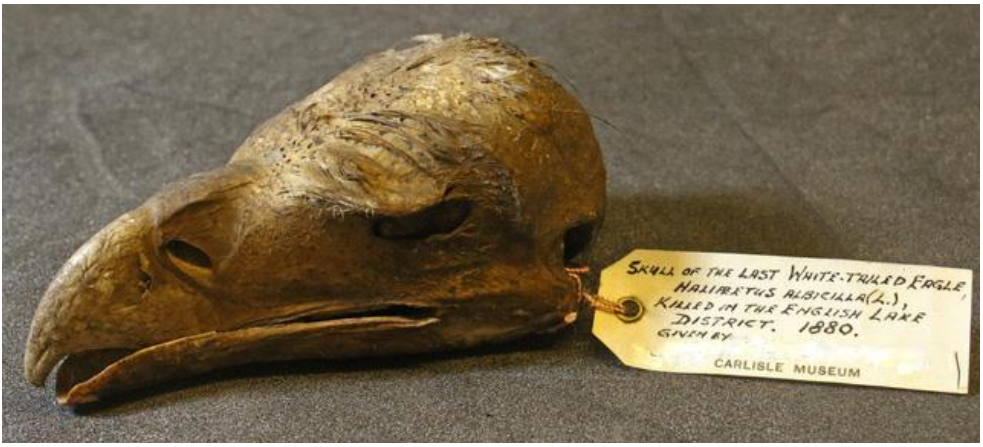
Records extend back to the mid-19th century, mainly from Cumbria but also from the rest of Britain and other countries, particularly Canada. Up to the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 and the availability of modern camera kit, lethal collection by shooting and mist netting were the mainstays of Avian Biodiversity Recording. In later years the collection has been supplemented by accidental mortalities such as birds flying into windows. The result of this project is that digitised records will be searchable online by researchers worldwide.

Starling

We have started with Passerines and have completed Thrushes, Tits, Warblers, Finches and others too, this is a huge on-going and future task. A preceding project with Curator Simon Jackson and Guy

Digitising Tullie House bird skins

Broome, prior to Covid lock-downs digitised some of the highlight iconic species specimens such as the last Cumbrian White-tailed Sea Eagle skull illustrated but did not attempt to cover the collection in a systemic and comprehensive way.



White-tailed Eagle

The digitised records may help to elucidate decline of species such as Willow Tit and Wood Warbler. Some limited DNA analysis of these specimens is technically possible if considered useful. The collection has a large number of leucistic specimens. There is speculation that leucism could possibly be increased in areas of heavy metal mining such as the North Pennines. It is doubtful whether heavy metal analysis of specimens is viable as skin preservation uses arsenic compounds.
Chris Hind and Guy Broome

Blackbird Leucistic

Donald Watson (1918-2005) Bird artist and writer

It is very likely that a considerable number of birders will have heard of Donald Watson (DW) and have admired his artwork. I first became aware of his art when I received the *Oxford Book of Birds* (OBB) as a Christmas present from my parents. Written by Bruce Campbell, it could be argued that the OBB was not very useful as a field guide due to the fact that the illustrations were mainly limited to adults in breeding plumage. Nonetheless, these illustrations by Donald Watson cleverly showed the birds in their habitats. However, Campbell's succinct text alongside DW's artwork and the clever 12-month scale showing residency, breeding season and singing season of each species, ensured that I used OBB an enormous amount.

Greenland white-fronted geese by Loch Ken, 1970

Donald Watson lived most of his life in St John's Town of Dalry, in the Glenkens area of Galloway. Not far away are the wetlands of Ken-Dee marshes and the uplands of the Rhinns of Kells (including the hill Corserine which retains its *Racomitrium* heath due to the removal of sheep grazing many years ago). DW got to know the Galloway region and Solway coast extremely well and many of his paintings are set there. His paintings of the woods, glens, lochs and uplands with their birds are highly evocative of the subtle character and charm of that landscape. My wife and I have visited the Glenkens twice this year and had lunch at the CatStrand community centre in New Galloway where there is a small exhibition about Donald Watson with some of his paintings. The shop sells prints and cards of his work.

Also available at The CatStrand is information about two trails produced by a group set up to promote Donald's work (see website quoted below). One is a road trail and another is a walk from Dalry taking in Mulloch Hill, said to be one of his favourite walks.

Donald Watson (1918-2005) Bird artist and writer

Earlier in 2025, a book of essays was published written by people who knew Donald Watson. It is an affectionate and readable collection of reflections and reminiscences of a much-respected artist and writer (See the bibliography below).

DW's own writing style is both imaginatively descriptive and informative. Perhaps the most important piece of work was his 1977 seminal study of the Hen Harrier (recently re-published by Bloomsbury) but his illustrated diary "A Bird Artist in Scotland" is a wonderful blend of his paintings with his evocative writing style. (See bibliography below)

I would recommend that birders visit the Glenkens, perhaps visiting the RSPB Ken-Dee marshes, (where there are often Greenland White-fronted Geese in the winter) then walking in DW's footsteps at St John's Town of Dalry and having something to eat at the CatStrand with its shop in New Galloway. There is plenty more absorbing detail in both the website and the essays edited by Roger Crofts (see below). *Stephen Mott*

Selected bibliography

Website: www.watsonbirds.org

Donald Watson – Bird artist and writer, Ed Roger Crofts. Whittle Publishing, 2025. ISBN 978-1-84995-592-8 (Copies can be bought at The CatStrand or online)

The Hen Harrier, Donald Watson. Bloomsbury, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4729-4614-)

A Bird Artist in Scotland, Donald Watson. H,F & G Witherby Ltd, 1988. ISBN 0-85493-167-8 (Out of print but used copies may be available in second-hand bookshops or online).

CatStrand, New Galloway

Café & Shop 11am – 4pm Tues-Saturday (Seasonal changes – please refer to website below)

High Street New Galloway DG7 3RN

www.gcat.scot

Patchwork Challenge

We have received an e-mail from the team at Patchwork Challenge.

“Patchwork Challenge is a fun birding competition, focused on engaging and understanding your local birding patch, to see how many species of bird you can see on your patch year on year. It works by participants watching a patch which is 3km^2 (or 10km radius from home which is a relatively new part of the competition) and seeing how many species you can see in a calendar year, and these are then compared year on year as a comparative score. Each species equates to a certain amount of points, with one point for a ‘common’ species and five points for a ‘mega’. There is a very strong emphasis on finding your own birds, which is one of the aims of the competition, with bonus points scored for finding scarce and rare birds. If you find a scarce species, points for that species are doubled, for example Radde’s Warbler will be worth 3 points if you twitch it, but 6 if you find it yourself. While if you find a rare or mega, points are tripled, for example Eastern Subalpine Warbler would be 4 points if you twitch it, but 12 if you find it. For Cumbria, there are three main mini-leagues to participate in, these are Inland North and Coastal West England. “

I was introduced to it by Steve Westerberg and enjoyed participating, but stopped doing it due to Covid. Also when Steve left RSPB Geltsdale it was not as much fun competing against people that were located further away, but would recommend it to a group of people living close together. *Adam Moan*

Many thanks, The Patchwork Challenge Team.

https://patchworkchallenge.blogspot.com/

Recent Reports

The period covered is September to November 2025. Some records are unauthenticated and may require review.

Wildfowl

Richardson's Cackling Goose and Barnacle Goose, Rockcliffe Marsh, Nick Franklin

The presumably returning **Richardson's Cackling Goose** was seen with Barnacle Geese on several dates in November on Rockcliffe Marsh. A **Snow Goose** was reported with Barnacles at Old Sandsfiled on 15th October. The first **American Wigeon** found in the county for several years was at Heversham Moss (aka Milnthorpe Marsh) 17th-23rd October, relocating to Ulpha Meadows the next day until 12th November. Presumably the regular returning female **Ring-necked Duck** was at Longtown on 10th September and 21st November, whilst a duck and drake were seen together on Derwent Water 24th-26th November.

Ring-necked Duck, Longtown, Adam Moan

Velvet Scoter singles were noted past Walney on 7th October and Silecroft on 25th October, with two from the former site on 9th November. **Scaup** were on Sunbiggin Tarn on 10-20th October, at Walney on 15th October and with the Derwent Water Ring-necked Ducks on 24th-26th November. Up to three **Long-tailed Duck** were in the Hodbarrow area in November, one on the main lagoon and two different birds at Redhills Quarry.

There was a scattering of singleton **Garganey** in September through to mid-October, with birds noted at Arnside Tower, Heversham Moss / Milnthorpe Marsh, Park End Moss and Ullswater. **Pochard** records included up to ten at Hardendale Quarry in November, whilst one at Walney BO on 15 October was the first island record since 2022.

Brent Goose counts in the Walney / Foulney area included Pale-bellied totals of 330 in October and 363 in November. An **Egyptian Goose** was

Purple Sandpiper, Parton Beach, *Tony Marsh*

at Longtown Ponds on 16th November. At least one **Bean Goose** was heard from a group of three geese over Borrans Park, Ambleside on 24 September.

Gamebirds

A family of seven **Quail** were seen on the road at Wiggonby (NY35) on 6 September and another was grounded on the road at Wigton on 29th September.

Grey Partridge coveys comprised six at Hackthorpe (NY52) and four at Grune Point.

Swifts, Nightjar

There were 60 Swift over Borrowdale, Keswick on 11 September.

Pigeons and Doves

A **Turtle Dove** was on Walney on 8th September.

Rails and Crakes

Water Rail bred at Foulshaw Moss whilst seven were at Sea Wood, Bardsea in November.

Waders

There was an excellent showing of **Grey Phalaropes** during and after the autumn storms. One was on the Esk Estuary, Ravenglass on 16th-18th September, and one at Walney 17th-19th September. A bird seen by a boat angler on Windermere in late September was presumably the one that was at Waterhead, Ambleside on 1st-2nd October. Others were at Paddle Beck Flash (NY12) on 12th October and lingering at Brougham Castle, Penrith 13th-17th November.

A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was in the Lyth Valley on 20th-21st September. A **Dotterel** was on Great Carrs (NY29) on 27th October. **Wood Sandpipers** were seen in September at Heversham (4th), Wedholme Flow (4th and 10th) and Carr Beds, Rockcliffe (23rd). **Little Stints** were on the Kent Estuary on 7th and 21st September and on the Solway at Bowness Railings on 7th September and Port Carlisle on 5th October.

Curlew Sandpiper, Bowness Railings Adam Moan

Curlew Sandpiper and Dunlin,
Bowness Railings, Tony Marsh

A good influx of juvenile **Curlew Sandpipers** in September and early October included up to 13 at Bowness Railings, five on the Kent Estuary, three on the Leven Estuary and two at Walney.

Ruff included up to nine at Heversham / Milnthorpe / the Kent Estuary and three at Wedholme Flow in September. **Green Sandpiper** were widely distributed with a peak of four at Pyes Bridge, Holme in November. In November there were up to three **Common Sandpipers** at Muncaster, where they may stay to winter, and Cavendish Dock. At the favoured **Greenshank** haunts there were peak counts of 26 at Walney in September and 19 on the Ravenglass estuaries in November.

Gulls, Terns and Skuas

A smattering of **Black Tern** appeared during the September spell of gales; up to two were at both College Green / Milnthorpe Marsh and Hodbarrow with singles at Cavendish Dock and Walney. The only **Little Gull** report received was of one off Walney on 28th October.

Arctic Skua passage off Walney comprised one on September 6th, two the following day and two more on 15th. **Mediterranean Gull** gatherings included 85 at Flimby in September and 16 at Workington in October.

Auks

Black Guillemot were noted off Walney on 17th September, Foulney on 12th October and Silecroft on 23rd November. **Razorbill** passage included 190 off Walney on 19th October.

Guillemot, Port Carlisle,
Tony Marsh

Divers

A **Black-throated Diver** was in Whitehaven Harbour on 15th September, another lingered at Barrow's Ramsden Dock from 26th November to the end of the month.

Great Northern Diver were seen at Foulney, Silecroft, St Bees and Walney; the last of a number of reports at the latter site was one that took up residence on the pools. Vigils from Maryport yielded an exceptional count of 514 **Red-throated Diver** in October.

Grey Heron with Vole, Thacka Beck, Tony Marsh

Petrels, Shearwaters, Gannet, Shag, Cormorant

Leach's Petrel in the September gales were limited to Walney, where three passed on the 16th and four on the 17th. A **Fulmar** was also noted from Walney on 11th September.

Shag maxima off Walney comprised 44 in September and 37 in October. Inland one was at Waterhead, Ambleside on 22 September.

Herons and Allies

A national influx of **Glossy Ibis** eventually produced the goods locally with one in the Heversham Moss / Milnthorpe Marsh area on 29th September-2nd October followed by five together there on 20th-23rd October. Another was at Campfield Marsh on 16th-21st October. **Cattle Egret** included four at Arnside on 19th September and more unusually one at Allonby on 25th October.

A **Spoonbill** was at Rockcliffe on 9th November. **Bitterns** were noted in all three months covered at Ulpha Meadows, and also at Waterhead, Ambleside on 25th September. **Great Egret** continued to increase and reports included seven together at Rockliffe Marsh and three each at College Green and Allithwaite.

Raptors

All **Hobby** reports were from the Foulshaw area in September. Away from uplands **Hen Harrier** records included up to two at Foulshaw and Ulpha Meadows and singles at Bassenthwaite and Walney.

Hen Harrier, RSPB Geltsdale, Roger Ridley

Marsh Harriers were present throughout at Foushaw / Ulpha Meadows throughout with up to four birds, with others noted at Rockcliffe and Walney.

Red Kite observations came from Aglionby, Foulshaw Moss, Kirklinton and Wetheral. **Goshawk** sightings came from three areas in the south of the county.

Merlin and Dunlin, Grune Point, Tony Marsh

Raven and Carrion Crow, Braithwaite Moss, Tony Marsh

Corvids

The resident **Hooded Crow** continued to be in the Biggar Bank area of Walney. Another or perhaps an intergrade was at Eskmeals in October. **Jackdaw** passage at Walney peaked at 2800 birds on 23 October.

Tits

Up to six **Bearded Tit** were seen at both Park End Moss and Foulshaw Moss / Ulpha Meadows in October and into early November. It isn't known if one group was moving between the two sites.

Coal Tit irruption recorded through Walney in October included 50 on 3rd, 55 on 6th and 80 on 13th whilst up to 100 were noted at Muncaster.

Hirundines

Presumably weather grounded **Swallows** around Barrow on 17th September included 400 at Cavendish Dock and 300 over Ormsgill Reservoir, whilst November birds were seen on Walney on 1st and at Botchergate, Carlisle on 11th.

Blue Tit and Coal Tit Braithwaite , Tony Marsh

Skylark, Grune Point, Tony Marsh

Larks

There were 120 **Skylark** at Grune Point on 12th October, and 65 at Port Carlisle on 19th November.

Warblers, Crests

An apparent ***blythi*** **Lesser Whitethroat** was at Cavendish Dock, Barrow on 17th November.

Yellow-browed Warblers were not seen at recognised coastal hotspots but birds were noted at Cardew Mires Quarry on 27th September, Port Carlisle on 5th October and Kendal Parish Church on 8th November.

A late **Grasshopper Warbler** was at Walney Bo on 24th September. **Cetti's Warbler** counts included 12 at Foulshaw Moss, nine at Ulpha Meadows and five at Sea Wood, Bardsea.

Thrushes, Chats and Flycatchers

The sole **Black Redstart** in the period was at Whitehaven on 12th November. Migrant **Spotted Flycatchers** included three September singles on Walney, whist on 21st two were at Birkrigg Common and one at Carter Pool, Ulverston.

Fieldfare, RSPB Geltsdale, Adam Moan

Redwing, Braithwaite Moss, Tony Marsh

Sparrows

Up to 75 **Tree Sparrows** were feeding on cut maize in Kendal in October, whilst passage through Walney that month included 35 on 16th and 36 on 23rd.

Bullfinch, Braithwaite Moss, Tony Marsh

Wagtails and Pipits

There were six passage **Yellow Wagtail** on Walney over six September dates, with a late bird on 9th October. Elsewhere singles were at Bowness-on-Solway on 7th September and Penrith on 16th September. Up to 200 Pied Wagtails roosted at Appleby Golf Course during the period.

Goldfinch, Siddick, Tony Marsh

Finches and Buntings

Snow Bunting reports, all of singles, came from Skiddaw on 15th October, Workington Pier on 24th-25th November and Scafell Pike also on the latter date. **Twite** included up to 60 at Hodbarrow Mains in September, and nine on Walney in November.

The largest **Crossbill** flocks noted were 16 at Scotby in October and 11 at Borrowdale in September. **Hawfinch** reports included up to four in Grange-over-Sands and two at Witherslack. A flock of 120 **Redpoll** was on Cliburn Moss on 15th October.

Escapes / Ferals

The presumed **Common x Ruddy Shelduck** hybrid was in the Grange area in November. *Stephen Dunstan*

As usual, a really big thanks to Stephen for putting the Recent Reports together, as it is a major part of the Newsletters.

Contents

Information for contributors

The deadline for copy for the next issue is March 1st 2026

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