

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Newsletter No. 139

Autumn 2012

*Chorley and District Natural History Society is a
Registered Charity: Registration Number 513466*

AN APPEAL

Our December meeting (December 13th) is to be a Members' Evening. This will involve short presentations, maybe a quiz and maybe a Photo Competition.

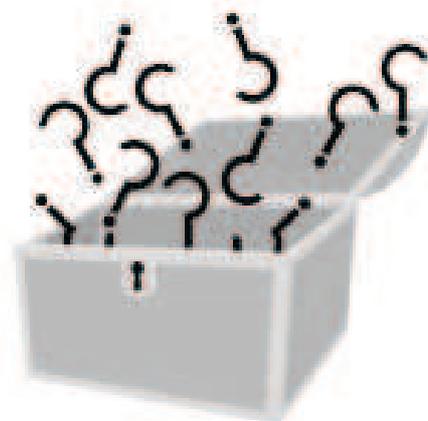
1 If you would like to contribute a short talk or similar (10 minutes would be fine) then please let me know.



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2 If you would like to enter a Photo Competition, then please send me up to 3 photographs of a natural history or a local landscape subject and I will enter them for you. All entries will be anonymous except for the winners. Digital only I am afraid.

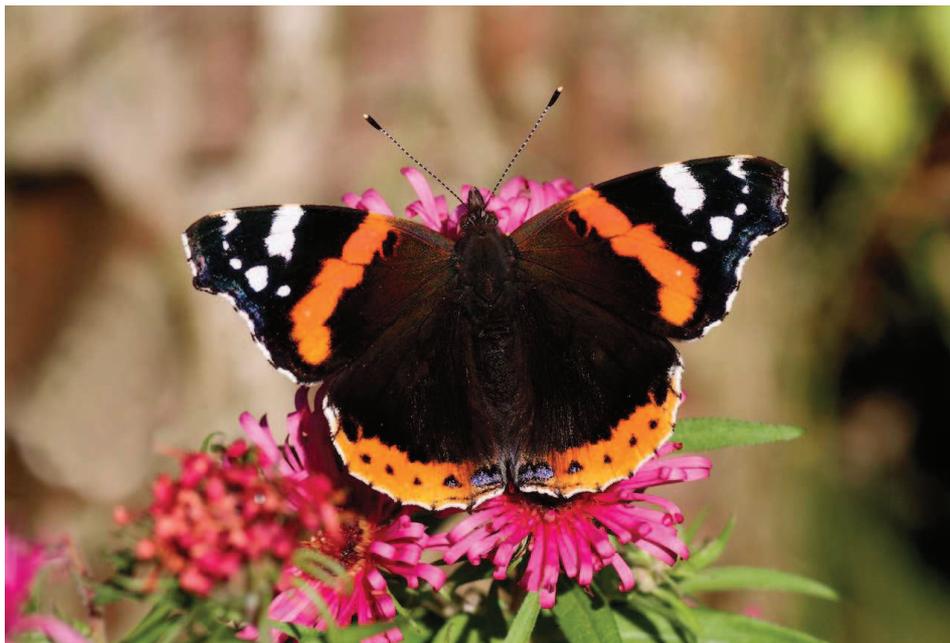
3 If you have a secret ambition to be a quizmaster, then this could be your chance. Volunteer needed!



Phil Kirk

INSECT REPORT

Given the exceptionally wet weather of the “summer” months, it is not too surprising that insect records have been fewer than usual. Some species seem to have fared reasonably well – for example small Tortoiseshells have been seen in good numbers throughout the quarter. On the other hand the Red Admiral has been practically non-existent. I have received only 9 records in total for the species when in a typical third quarter I might expect 50 or so (in 2006 I received a staggering 138 records in the three months July to September). As I write this on 1st November, I can say that October was no better. I expect this to be the worst Red Admiral year ever.



Red Admirals were scarce this year

There have been no sightings whatsoever of the Wall butterfly which is really sad, as it used to be a reasonably common species. If you have seen one this year, please do let me know. The Small Heath also has been scarce, with only a single record of 2 insects at White Coppice in early July. Again, if you have seen the species locally, please send in your record.

No sightings of Painted Lady either in the last three months. Then if you were a migrant would you have stayed?

Hic Bibi is a site well worth visiting for insect interest. It is a disused clay pit formerly used in the manufacture of bricks. It has been designated a Local Nature Reserve for some years. Recent work has been done to extend the size and number of ponds, and although at present these are rather unsightly, the surrounding vegetation will recover and the ponds are already teeming with insect life. The site is a good spot for butterflies and you can expect to come across Common Blue regularly, as well as Small Copper and Large and Small Skippers. However the most interesting records this summer have been of Odonata.



Brown Hawker Ovipositing at Hic Bibi

Emperor dragonflies have been observed emerging and also ovipositing. Brown Hawkers are frequent and have been observed mating and ovipositing. Migrant Hawkers and Southern Hawkers are also residents at the site. Common Darters are very frequent. Both Broad Bodied and Four spotted Chasers have been seen there in the quarter, but are best looked for in June. All our three blue damselflies occur there in good numbers and the Emerald Damselfly has been seen there this year. Not a first for the site, but the first time for a few years. Hic Bibi is also an excellent site for flowers and for bird life. I recommend a visit – take wellies!

The Emerald Damselfly also turned up at Ulnes Walton, which is a new site for the species. Normally the most reliable site for the species is the pond at Healey Nab, where indeed it has been frequent this summer along with Black Darters, Emperor Dragonflies and Common Hawkers.

Phil Kirk

BIRD REPORT

July

Great Crested Grebe families at Yarrow Valley Park and Croston Twin Lakes remained as in June. The pair of Little Grebes in Astley Park was still prospecting for nest sites, pretty much as they had last year. A pair of Mallard at Yarrow Valley Park had 5 young on the 4th, a pair of Coot had 2 chicks on the same day and a pair at Park Hall had 3 young on the 6th, when there was also a Mute Swan present. A flock of 24 Cormorant flew south over Lower Rivington reservoir on the 25th, with a few landing briefly.

Six species of wader were recorded during the month, some of them resident, and others early returning migrants. Residents included post-breeding flocks of Lapwing, the largest of which was 120 at Belmont Reservoir on the 14th. A flock of 12 was at Withnell Fold (7th) and 50+ on Croston Moss (30th). A single Little Ringed Plover spent most of the month on a flooded field at Charnock Richard. Four Oystercatcher were at Heath Charnock (6th), 2 were at Withnell Fold (7th) and 2 were on Lower Rivington Reservoir (14th). The Common Sandpiper on Anglezarke Reservoir on the 31st could have been either, but the Green Sandpipers at Belmont Reservoir (14th) and along the River Douglas at Croston (3 on the 30th) were undoubtedly returning birds. The same could well have been true of the 2 Snipe on Croston Moss on the 30th.

Society members on an evening walk enjoyed excellent views of a Hobby at Chisnall on the 12th. Also seen on the walk were a family party of three Kestrels and a couple of Buzzard. Another Hobby was seen over Mawdesley on the 21st. Several Kestrels were seen on Croston Moss on the 10th and may well have been family groups. Definitely a family were the 2 adult and 4 juvenile Kestrels at Euxton on the 25th. Sparrowhawks seen were usually in hunting mode including one at Heath Charnock (6th) being mobbed by hirundines and one at Eccleston (27th) taking a Collared Dove, which managed to break free and escape. Peregrine sightings came from Croston Moss (10th), Morrison's (13th), Belmont Reservoir (14th) and Ulnes Walton (27th). Barn Owl sightings included two on Mawdesley Moss (11th) and one at Great Knowley (23rd). Little Owls were seen on Croston Moss (14th) and at Heskin (15th). Tawny owls were seen at Great Knowley (15th) and at Eccleston (25th).



Little Owl seen on Croston Moss

5 adult and 3 juvenile Common Terns were at Yarrow Valley Park on the 3rd and 6 adult and 2 juveniles were there on the 20th. Elsewhere a pair was seen flying west over Eccleston on the 5th and one was at Chisnall on the 12th.

A Pheasant with 5 young was at Withnell on the 10th and a pair with young was noted on Croston Moss on the 21st. Juvenile Great Spotted Woodpeckers were at Euxton (9th) and Chorley (23rd). A pair with 2 young was at Chisnall (12th). Post-breeding flocks of Mistle Thrush included 18 on Croston Finney (8th) and 12 at Withnell Fold (27th). A Song Thrush with young was at Chisnall (12th).

Spotted Flycatchers were at White Coppice (5th) and Withnell Fold where three were seen on the 7th. 20 Whitethroat were counted on a section of Croston Moss (8th), and a Garden Warbler was noted at Croston (11th). Three singing Reed Warblers were on Top Lodge at Yarrow Valley Park (17th). Other records of interest were a flock of 20 Crossbill at Belmont Reservoir (12th), Willow Tit on Croston Moss (14th) and Black Redstart near the TV mast on Winter Hill (21st).



There were 3 singing Reed Warblers at YVP

August

The pair of Great Crested Grebe at Yarrow Valley Park was down to 2 young by the 1st, but the pair at Croston Twin Lakes still had its young. The Mute Swan family at Yarrow Valley Park lost one of its cygnets to fishing line on the 7th. A pair at Common Bank Lodge continued to summer. Three Little Grebes were at a Whittle quarry (9th) and the pair at Astley Park finally hatched 2 young by the 19th. Other wildfowl records included 4 Tufted Duck on Croston Twin Lakes (11th) and 7 Teal on Mawdesley Moss (13th).



Little Ringed Plover was amongst the many wader species recorded

Nine species of wader were recorded, which surprisingly doesn't include Oystercatcher, which may suggest a poor breeding season if they had left early for the coast. The flooded Loch Meadow and adjacent River Douglas at Croston provided most of the records. Up to three Green Sandpiper were on the river for the first two weeks, and a Common Sandpiper was on the field on the 27th. Two Greenshank were along the river on the 12th and a Little Ringed Plover was on the field from the 1st to 4th. Snipe numbers in the field built up from 2 on the 4th to 26 by the 12th. Elsewhere, A Little Ringed Plover flew over Gillibrands North on the 26th followed by a Curlew on the 28th. A Curlew was seen over Mawdesley Moss on the 27th, and a flock of 15 Black-tailed Godwits had flown over the same site on the 4th. Three Bar-tailed Godwits had been seen over Lower Rivington Reservoir also on the 4th. The post-breeding flock of Lapwings at Withnell Fold flash had increased from 30 (4th) to 100 (18th).

It was also a good month for raptors. A Hobby was seen at Back Lane, Heath Charnock (3rd) and another at Knowles Wood, Eccleston (31st) – in both cases being mobbed by hirundines. An Osprey was seen at Eccleston on the 24th. A female / juvenile Marsh Harrier was noted on Mawdesley Moss on both 1st and 3rd. The pair of Peregrines, which failed at St George's, bred at another site hatching 2 young. Peregrines were also seen at Morrison's chimney on the 2nd, with two there from 19th to 23rd. Were these the same birds or last year's young? Buzzard sightings included a juvenile at Withnell Fold (4th), 2 on Mawdesley Moss (5th), 3 over Knowles Wood (6th), 5 at Euxton (8th) and 3 over Coppull (20th).



Kingfishers frequent at YVP

The pair of Common Tern at Yarrow Valley Park was last seen on the 1st. A Green Woodpecker at White Coppice on the 12th was a welcome sighting of a species which had been conspicuous by its absence this summer. Kingfishers on the other hand were very much in evidence with sightings from Yarrow Valley Park (1st), Knowles Wood (1st), Heskin (3rd), Gillibrands North (7th), Astley Park (21st), Brinscall Lodge (26th) and Common Bank Lodge (26th).

Swifts normally leave us during the first week of August, but perhaps because of poor early weather, pairs were still feeding young at Clayton and Eccleston and didn't finally leave until 12th and 13th respectively. Later sightings included 3 at Eccleston (20th), one over Chorley (25th) and one at Coppull (31st). House Martins were also still feeding young and 5 were around a nest site at Coppull on the 31st. 60 at White Coppice on the 26th, however, were definitely on the move, as were the 80 Swallow along the River Douglas at Croston on the 2nd.

Visible migration was evident from a sighting of Spotted Flycatcher on Mawdesley Moss (4th), when 3 or 4 were still present at their breeding site at Withnell Fold. Another on the move was in George's Lane, Rivington (10th) along with a Pied Flycatcher. Seven Wheatear were note above the quarry at White Coppice on the 24th.

Finally, three Willow Tit were noted on Mawdesley Moss (4th), and 2 Crossbill were over Chorley (10th).

September



Pink Footed Geese

Pink-footed Geese were early returning this year with a skein of 14 over Eccleston (7th), a small skein over Ulnes Walton (11th), skeins of 34 and 90 over Croston Moss (15th) and 100 and 60 over Eccleston (28th). Three Mute Swans dropped onto Upper Rivington Reservoir on the 29th. A Pintail on Loch Meadow was a good record on the 2nd. Teal numbers at Withnell Fold increased from 6 on the 1st to 30 by the 28th. A further 20 were on Mawdesley Moss on the 26th. A juvenile Great Crested Grebe was at Ulnes Walton on the 3rd. Three adults and 2 juveniles were at Croston Twin Lakes (13th). The pair of Little Grebe and two young remained in Astley park throughout..

Numbers of Snipe on Loch Meadow increased throughout the month, peaking at 81 on the 29th. Two Green Sandpiper were again at the site on the 15th. Common Sandpiper were noted on Lower Rivington Reservoir on 8th and 30th. Three Dunlin flew over Clayton on the 16th. Three Golden Plover flew over Eccleston on the 14th and two were on Mawdesley Moss (18th). A late Curlew was at Eccleston on the 7th. 35 Lapwing in two flocks were noted on Croston Moss on the 15th.

A Hobby was watched for 5 minutes chasing hirundines near Top Lock, Whittle, on the 1st and presumably the same bird was seen again there on the 14th. Suburban raptors are usually Sparrowhawks, but an unholy commotion from a neighbour's roof on the 28th drew my attention to a Peregrine with a pigeon in its talons, whilst the local Magpies and Jackdaws scolded incessantly. A juvenile Peregrine on Mawdesley Moss on the 30th took a Mallard and had to defend its kill from a kestrel, heron and carrion crow. Seven Buzzards were seen together over Mawdesley Moss on the 15th.

A Green Woodpecker was seen along George's Lane, Rivington, on the 8th. Kingfisher sightings came from Astley Park (1st), Common Bank Lodge (2nd), Yarrow Valley Park (2 on 6th), River Douglas (10th), and the old canal at Whittle (26th).

Heavy hirundine passage was noted at Withnell Fold (1st) and Ulnes Walton (2nd), when hundreds of birds passed through. 40 Swallow were seen at Croston Moss (5th) and 12 were at Yarrow valley park (30th). 30 House Martin were at Eccleston on the 19th and a similar number were at Withnell Fold on the 28th. Steady Wheatear passage was noted during the month with 3 at Withnell Fold (1st), 2 at Rivington (8th), single on Mawdesley Moss (10th), 4 at Arley (16th) and 2 on Winter Hill (23rd). Two Stonechat were at Rivington (8th) and a Whinchat was on Lower Burgh Meadow (16th). Four Redstart were at Rivington (8th) and one was in the grounds of Chorley Hospital (10th). A female / immature Black Redstart was on Winter Hill (2nd and 3rd) and a male was there (23rd). A Pied Flycatcher was at Arley nature reserve on the 16th, along with several Willow Warbler. The latter was also noted at Ulnes Walton (3rd) along with Reed warbler, several of which were also noted at Yarrow Valley Park on the 8th. Singing Chiffchaff were heard in Chorley (4th), Ulnes Walton (9th), Withnell Fold (15th), Eccleston (16th) and White Coppice (22nd).



Wheatear

Other records of interest featured Mistle Thrush parties of 8 at Eccleston (10th), and 7 at Whittle (24th). Willow Tits were at Croston Moss (8th) and Arley nature reserve (16th). Flocks of Goldfinch include 30 at Croston sewage works (13th), 30 on Croston moss (15th) and 60 at Eccleston (16th). Three Lesser Redpoll were along the canal at Withnell Fold on the 28th. Two Tree Sparrow were in a garden at Great Knowley (29th) and a flock of 20 was on Croston Moss on the same day.

Many thanks to the following for submitting records:-

I.Ball, D.Banks, D.Barker, I&D.Barnett, D.Beattie, D.Beevers, J.Bolton, J.Catt, J.Cobham, B.Derbyshire, K.Dougan, D.Downing, T.Dunn, J.Edwards, K.Haydock, P.Hodkinson, D.Holland, D.Holding, R.Hoyle, C&T.Johnson, P.Kirk, P.Krischkiw, E.Langrish, A.Leach, G.Lilley, I.Lynas, A.Makin, B.Makinson, L.Poxon, C.Rae, P.Rhodes, J.Riley, P.Ross, P.Rowlands, J.Smith, N.Southworth, R.Spencer, , C.Thistlethwaite, B.Thomas, R.Todd, J.Waidson, N.&T.West, P.West, T.Westhead, P.Whittaker, I.Whittle, S.Wilkins, K.Woan.

Please continue to send your records to the forum or the editor.

Neil Southworth

A WHORL AWAY

As if by magic and the whorl of a wand, the local expert birder Mr T came to our rescue as my Thai birdwatching friend Dui and I were scanning thousands of waders, mostly Red-breasted Sandpipers and Curlew Sandpipers, looking for a needle in an avian haystack - the very rare and celebrated Spoon-billed Sandpiper. After all the recent publicity surrounding the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust rearing and returning seventeen Spoon-billed chicks to Russia for a second time this year I was keen to see one of these tiny migrants on our holiday to Bangkok this Autumn.

Dui had been told that birds had been seen at two sites but they were both large saltpan farms. However the Khok Kham bird-watching site was likely to be the best bet depending on the state of the tide. After having been out birding since a 6.00am dawn and having already found two rare migrants in the form of a Milky Stork and a Rosy Starling we travelled for an hour in a heavy downpour and arrived late afternoon just as the rain subsided. After tramping on to the saltpans in the hot and humid weather we were confronted by phalanx after phalanx of waders preening and resting after a busy feeding frenzy. We weren't having much luck finding our "prey" and the sun was starting to set. Then Mr T arrived, not quite the A Team but Dui knows him from survey work he has done for the birdwatching community; he knew the whereabouts of a lone bird which he had been monitoring and off we set some quarter of a mile away, and there it was out in the open feeding vigorously in a small pool with just a few other waders. Obviously the water level was just right for the diminutive feeder; any more than few centimetres and it would have been too deep. Mr T could identify the bird even without binoculars because of its feeding habit of keeping its beak in the water all the time rather than probing in and out. Unfortunately this meant that I was not able to get a decent picture of it with its unique beak.



Earlier in the week AM and I had visited a government educational centre and nature reserve where they were trying to re-establish the mangroves as part of a coastal protection project. They had erected a barrier made of bamboo inside which they were planting new mangrove plants. A couple of dozen students were sitting in the mud to avoid sinking out of sight attaching small saplings to stakes. They seemed to be enjoying the experience going by the laughter emanating from the rather amusing situation. We did not have much time to stay but I returned for a second visit to catch up with lots of different waders, some of which I could not easily identify.

On another day we travelled to a reserve where we were able to drive down what we later discovered was a cycle track, but it was too far and too hot to go on foot. A large

pond next to a huge lake was the target location, but with it only just being the end of the monsoon season, the water levels were high and there were not many birds around. However a grassy area was good for the birds and butterflies. Uh oh, the park ranger arrived! I thought that I was in trouble but, after a brief chat and a handshake, they wanted to take my picture and meet the former Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries whom they were waiting for to show around! Certainly a better result than when I was "spoken" to by a similar official in Abu Dhabi.



One bird which I wanted to see was the Painted Stork, because it is not very common and I had not seen it on our first visit in 2008. My friend Dui took me to a likely location and we saw a few flying around almost immediately as the sun rose. Then, when we visited another government agricultural project, we were able to

observe a couple in a tree from below in the car before they flew off at a very leisurely pace. Dui who has a degree from Yale University and is now a lecturer in one of Bangkok's universities is so keen that we nearly got stuck in the mud of a rubbish tip looking for Thick-knees without any luck, but we did glimpse a shy Slaty-breasted Rail.

One old South-east Asian industry is cultivating birds' nests. There are large plain buildings with small openings which allow Swiftlets to enter and build their nests. After the breeding season the nests are then harvested for Birds-nest soup! At least that was another tick for me. I did not manage to see any squirrels this trip but we did see some Crab-eating Macaques which live around the fishing villages and are a bit of a pest. The main industry along the coast is fishing as in the shrimp and prawn farms as well at sea. Also tourism is getting a hold in the form of whale watching in the Gulf of Thailand for dolphins and porpoises as well as whales. However the weather was too dodgy and the trip too long for me to venture out like I had done in Hong Kong.

I have put more of my pictures on the website below. It seems a world away now.

<http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/chris.rae2>

Chris Rae.

Editor's note:- the image of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper was kindly supplied by Alan Hayden of Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group, whose website can be found at www.chog.org.uk

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

The Garden Bird Survey again took place during the winter months between December 2011 and March 2012. 23 completed forms were returned, which was one less than last year's return. Thank you to all those who took part. The distribution of gardens was as follows:-

<u>Location</u>	Urban	Suburban	Rural
	1	18	4
<u>Size</u>	Small	Medium	Large
	2	16	5

The medium sized suburban garden remains the most numerous contributor. The average number of species per garden was 22, which is two down on last year. The highest number of species in a single garden was 32 in a garden at Euxton, closely followed by a garden in Rivington which recorded 30 species.

The total number of species recorded this year was 46, a decrease of 4 on the previous year, perhaps because of the milder winter. There was no new addition to the list. The total number of species recorded in the 13 years or so that the survey has been running now stands at 66. The following chart is based on number of gardens visited by each species. A weighting is then used to separate species in case of equality. Thus the first five in the table visited all 24 gardens, but Blackbird and Blue Tit were again the most frequent species based on the weighting.

The weighting system does produce a few anomalies such as Long-tailed Tit, which visited all gardens but was not a daily visitor in many of them, and consequently languishes in 14th place. Greenfinch numbers still appear to be affected by the parasitic disease *Trichomonosis* which has blighted the species for a few years now, but Chaffinch numbers could well be recovering as it regained its long term position of 6th in the chart, after falling to 9th last year. Starling and House Sparrow continue to occupy positions in the lower half, because they are absent from some gardens, but it should be noted that where they do occur, they are usually the most numerous visitors. Nuthatch regained its position in the Top 20, whereas Great Spotted Woodpecker dropped out, which confirms a general feeling that the latter were hard to find last winter. Goldfinch continues to make progress up the charts being 11th in this survey compared to 17th at the beginning.

Year				Species	Weighted score	Gardens visited
'12	'11	'03	'98			
1	1	1	1	Blackbird	69	23
1=	1=	3	2	Blue Tit	69	23
3	3	1=	4	Robin	65	23
4	4=	4	3	Great Tit	64	23
5	4	5	7	Dunnock	60	23
6	9	6	6	Chaffinch	53	22
7	6	14	15	Woodpigeon	52	22
8	7	8	9	Collared Dove	52	21
9	8	10	13	Coal Tit	51	22
10	11	6=	5	Magpie	48	22
11	13	16	17	Goldfinch	43	20
12	10	14	11	Starling	41	18
13	14	11	8	House Sparrow	41	17
14	12	13	14	Long-tailed Tit	40	23
15	15	9	10	Greenfinch	32	18
16	---			Nuthatch	28	13
17	19	19	---	Bullfinch	26	17
18	18	18	16	Jay	25	14
19	16	12	12	Wren	21	16
20	16	17	20	Song Thrush	19	13

Outside the Top 20, Goldcrest, Siskin and Redwing were recorded in several gardens, but there was no record of Fieldfare and, perhaps surprisingly, Tree Sparrow. The species which didn't make the Top 20 were as follows:-

Sparrowhawk (15 gardens), Carrion Crow (9), Great Spotted Woodpecker and Siskin (8), Goldcrest (7), Pheasant (6), Jackdaw, Redwing and Treecreeper (5), Grey Heron (4), Mallard, Buzzard, Tawny Owl, Black-headed Gull, Stock Dove, Pied Wagtail, Mistle Thrush and Reed Bunting (3), Feral Pigeon, Blackcap, Willow Tit and Brambling (2), and Moorhen, Grey Wagtail, Rook and Linnet (one each).

We will again be running the survey on the same basis in the coming winter, so I look forward to receiving all your forms, plus perhaps a few more besides?