

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Newsletter No. 144

Winter 2013/14

*Chorley and District Natural History Society is a
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FLORA REPORT

October commenced quite warm so much so that I still didn't need my sweater. There were also lots of trees with leaves remaining but they had started shedding acorns, beech mast and chestnuts. As I mentioned in the last quarter's newsletter, berries were in abundance. For those who like to forage, nettles, blackberries, damsons, elder berries, rowan, and sloes offered ingredients for soups, jellies and alcoholic beverage. Ivy berries meant several wasps in the day and moths at night. A windy couple of days early October soon carpeted our woodlands with rust, contrasted by gold originating from Meadowsweet still blooming. In mid-October we still had balsam, and white dead nettle.



Meadowsweet

Hundreds of acres of an ancient forest are being felled because trees are infected with disease, the Woodland Trust has said. Larches in Wales's largest ancient forest, Wentwood Forest, near Newport, Gwent, have been confirmed as infected with *Phytophthora ramorum*, a fungus-like disease that causes extensive damage and death to trees. On Cuerden we continue to fell larch as a preventative measure but none of the trees here has either this disease or ash die-back.



Mid November still had a few flowers showing including yarrow, creeping buttercup, red campion and the ubiquitous Herb Robert. There were the ones I would expect to still be in bloom such as common daisy and gorse but both are in flower for 12 months of the year.

December was still unseasonably warm and we had smooth sow thistle, more red campion, a few daisies and the start of Hazel catkins showing in the last two weeks of December. No doubt by the time you read this snowdrops and crocus will be all over the place. May I again ask for as many folks as possible send in your records. If you do, I promise the quiz in December will be much easier!

David Beattie

BIRD REPORT

October



Summer visitors still around included a late Common Redstart in a garden at Coppull from the 26th to the end of the month. More conventionally, 2 Wheatear were at White Coppice on the 5th and 2 more were near Arley nature reserve on the 12th. A Blackcap was at the same site on the same day. Singing Chiffchaffs were noted throughout the month including singles at Croston Moss (1st), Euxton (3rd), Belmont (5th) and finally 2 at Euxton on the 28th. Hirundines on the move included 10 Sand Martin at Anglezarke (6th) and 5 House Martin at White Coppice (21st). Swallows were recorded on several days including 2 at Eccleston (6th), 6 at Heapey (10th) with the last being one over Charnock Richard Golf Course (25th).

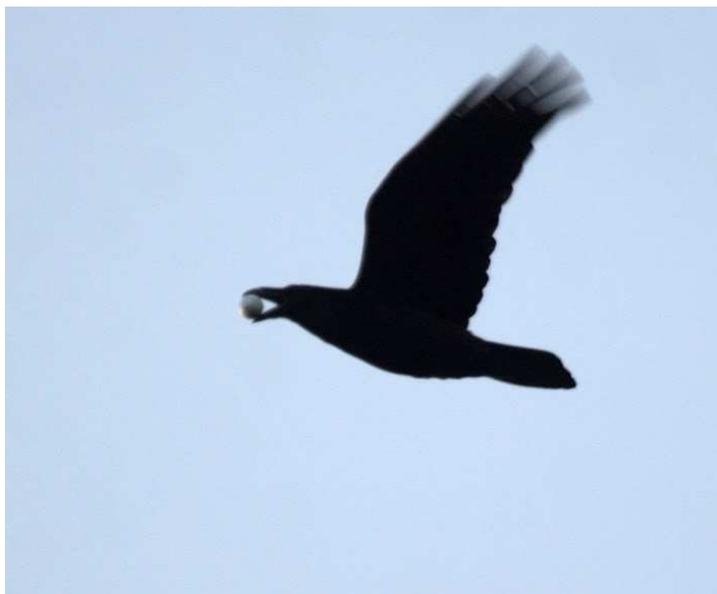
The first Redwing back was one over Great Knowley on the 5th, 200 over Eccleston on the 11th, followed by a large passage on the 12th, including 500 counted over Chorley, 250 over Withnell Fold and a massive 3000 over Arley nature reserve in a ninety minute period. 300 passed over Great Knowley on the 20th. Fieldfare as usual were a week or so later with the first over Eccleston and Great Knowley (11th), followed by 110 over Eccleston (19th), 60 over Croston Moss (20th) and a large passage of several hundred birds at White Coppice in a 2 hour period (24th). Single Bramblings were noted at Belmont (5th) and White Coppice (24th).

Winter wildfowl included 4 Whooper Swan over Croston Moss (13th), 15 there on the 27th and 40 on the 28th. 18 flew over Eccleston on the 15th. Pink-footed Geese were

arriving in numbers with 100 over Ecclestone (5th), several hundred on the 6th and 800+ on the 13th. Birds feeding on the stubble on the mosses included 300 (7th), 3000 (13th) and 1000 (20th and 27th). Teal records included 20 on the Douglas (1st), 6 at Yarrow Valley Park (2nd), 24 at Withnell Fold Flash (12th) and 11 on Anglezarke Reservoir (13th). Tufted Duck numbers at Yarrow Valley Park had built up to 11 by the 30th. At Arley nature reserve at least 8 Mandarin and a single Gadwall were noted on the 12th. 5 Greylag Geese were on Mawdesley Moss on the 5th. Wandering Mute Swans included 12 on the Douglas (1st) and one on Common Bank Lodge (15th). Little Grebe included 3 on Common Bank Lodge (13th) and 2 on Astley Park lake (15th). A Water Rail was on Top Lodge at Yarrow Valley Park on the 13th.

Green Sandpipers were seen at two separate locations at Ecclestone, more or less daily between 12th and the end of the month. Three Snipe were at Yarrow Valley Park on the 11th and 11 were at Coppull on the 28th. Woodcock were noted at Ecclestone on 21st and 27th. A covey of 7 Grey Partridge was a welcome sighting on Croston Moss on the 7th.

A Red Kite at White Coppice on the 16th was a rare sighting of a species which we might expect to see more of in view of reintroduction schemes in Yorkshire and the Lake District. Final Hobby of the season was one at Ecclestone on the 8th. Peregrines were noted at St George's (5th), Moss Lane (6th) and Morrisons (7th). Record of the month and perhaps year, was a sighting of 4 Arctic Skuas passing over Belmont Reservoir on the 5th.



Ravens were noted at Bretherton (19th) and Whittle (27th), the latter complete with golf ball!

Kingfisher sightings came from Eccleston (10th), Kem Mill (12th), Heapey Lodges (13th), Common Bank Lodge (15th) and Yarrow Valley Park (22nd). Other records of interest included 2 Willow Tit at Arley nature reserve (12th) and another in an Euxton garden (25th). A pair of Stonechat was on Croston Moss on the 31st.



Willow Tit

Flocks of birds on Croston Moss included 15 Stock Dove (1st), 70 Collared Dove (20th), 100 Skylark (8th), 50 Goldfinch (8th) and 50 Greenfinch (27th). Pied Wagtail roosting flocks included 35 at Eccleston (5th) and 80 at B & Q in Chorley (9th).

November

Pink-footed Geese continued to use the mosses for feeding with several hundred on Mawdesley Moss (17th), 500 on Croston Moss (23rd) increasing to 1500 by the 30th. Whooper Swan sightings included 9 over Mawdesley Moss (17th) and 6 over Croston Moss (23rd). Nine Wigeon on Anglezarke reservoir (26th) was a good record these days. A single male was also on Lower Healey top lodge on the same day. First Goldeneye of the winter was at Yarrow Valley Park (2nd), another was at Lower Healey (13th) with 2 there on the 26th. One was on the Douglas at Croston (30th). Teal were well distributed around the area with 7 at Arley (9th), 45 on Anglezarke Reservoir (10th), 18 on Lower Rivington Reservoir (24th) and 20 on the Douglas at Croston (30th). Tufted Duck numbers at Yarrow Valley Park peaked at 13 on the 1st. Eight were on High Bullough Reservoir on the 10th. 15 Mandarin Duck were noted at Arley nature reserve on the 9th. Little Grebe were to be found at Yarrow Valley Park (10th), Common Bank Lodge (3 also 10th), Croston Moss (17th) and Astley Park (21st). The Water Rail was again noted on Top Lodge at Yarrow Valley Park on several occasions between 1st and 7th.

The first Jack Snipe of the winter was noted at Eccleston (7th) and again on the 20th. 6 Common Snipe were at the same site (11th) and 20 were on Mawdesley Moss (17th). Two Woodcock were noted at Eccleston on the 24th. The only other wader record received for the month was of a flock of 30 Lapwing on Coppull Moor on the 14th.

The best raptor record was of a Merlin on Mawdesley Moss (10th). The town centre Peregrines continued to be seen around Morrison's and St George's church.

The Coppull Redstart was last seen on the 1st, probably making it the latest ever record for the species in the area. Its cousin – a Black Redstart – was seen on Winter Hill on the 30th. A pair of Stonechat was seen regularly on Croston Moss, including 10th, 17th and 30th. Fieldfare sightings included 100+ at Eccleston (6th), 40 at Coppull (12th), 60 at Withnell Fold (16th), 30 on Croston Moss (17th) and 150 at Euxton (20th). In contrast, the only record of Redwing was of 8 on Croston Moss (17th). One other thrush record of note was of a Mistle Thrush in full song at Tesco on the 22nd! Other significant flocks recorded included 2750 Woodpigeon over Belmont (2nd), 30 Stock Dove at Withnell Fold (16th) and 30 on Croston Moss (17th), 500 Starling at Withnell Fold (16th), 105 Brambling at Belmont (2nd), 30 Meadow Pipit at Euxton (21st), 30 Skylark on Croston Moss (30th) and 36 Pied Wagtail at Euxton (18th).

A Mediterranean Gull was in the Lower Rivington gull roost on the 24th. Kingfisher sightings included the Yarrow Valley Park bird throughout, plus birds at Cuerden Valley Park (7th), Eccleston (8th), Heapey Lodges (10th), Lower Rivington (10th) and Anglezarke (12th).

A Willow Tit was seen in a Great Knowley garden on the 28th. A Nuthatch was seen attacking a Blue Tit in an Euxton garden on the 6th. Finally, what was believed to have been a Ring-necked Parakeet was seen at Whittle and at Euxton – both sightings on the 15th.

December

It was a good month for wildfowl records with Croston Twin Lakes providing many of them. 20 Wigeon, several Gadwall, 6 Tufted Duck and 100+ Coot were at the site on the 30th. A Wigeon was also at Lower Healey on the 14th, when there were also 2 Goldeneye and 4 Tufted Duck present. Mandarin Ducks were seen on the Yarrow at Eccleston (4th), Arley nature reserve (10 on the 8th) and along the canal near Frederick's (13th). Teal were also widespread with 20 at Arley (8th), 10 on the Douglas at Croston (14th), 4 in Yarrow Valley Park (15th) and 10 on Anglezarke Reservoir (15th). Goosander were similarly widespread with 8 on Cuerden Valley Park lake (10th), 2 on the canal near Frederick's (13th), 14 on the Douglas at Croston (15th) and 23 on Yarrow Reservoir (15th). Pink-footed Geese records included 250 over Eccleston on the 7th and 700 on Croston Moss (28th). A Whooper Swan was seen flying west along the Douglas at Mawdesley (29th). A Little Grebe was on the Douglas (28th), but all other sightings came from Chorley with 5 on Common Bank Lodge (10th), 1 in Yarrow Valley Park (15th) and one still in Astley Park (22nd).



A **Little Egret** was seen flying west over Mawdesley Moss on the 29th. The end of the month brought multiple sightings of Green Sandpiper with individuals on Mawdesley Moss (26th), Syd Brook, Eccleston (26th) and Arley nature reserve (31st). Lapwing flocks included 70 at Lower Rivington Reservoir (1st), 80 at Brinscall (11th) and 200 at Bretherton (30th). Jack Snipe were recorded at Euxton (15th), Bretherton (27th) and Arley (31st). Its Common cousin was recorded at Croston (3 on 7th), Croston Moss

(13 on 15th), Buckshaw (30 on 25th), Arley 4, Ellerbeck 5 and Hic Bibi 3, all on 31st. Woodcock were similarly well distributed including 2 at Croston (7th), singles at Hoghton Bottoms (9th), Cuerden Valley Park (9th) and Eccleston (23rd), 3 at Arley, 2 at Ellerbeck and 4 at Hic Bibi (all 31st). A Red Grouse was noted on Winter Hill on the 1st.

Raptor sightings included a Merlin on Croston Moss (15th), and a Sparrowhawk taking a Collared Dove at Eccleston (25th). A Little Owl was on Croston Moss (15th). Sadly a Barn Owl was found dead by the Lostock at Bretherton on the 30th.

Winter flocks included 40 Meadow Pipit on Croston Moss (15th) and 100 Skylark at the same site (26th). 100 Fieldfare were at Eccleston (4th) and 70 were at Gale Moss (11th). 10 Redwing were at Rivington (10th), 200 were at Cuerden Valley Park (11th) and 40 were at Eccleston (21st). 200 Linnets were on Croston Moss (15th) and 150 were on Mawdesley Moss (26th). 20 Lesser Redpoll were at Arley Nature Reserve (8th) and 10 Brambling were at Rivington (10th).

Local rarities included a possible Lesser Spotted Woodpecker calling near Top Lodge in Yarrow Valley Park. There was also a report of Waxwings in Lower Burgh Way on the 1st. Definite sightings included a Snow Bunting on Winter Hill (1st), 2 female Blackcaps in Croston (22nd), 2 Stonechat on Croston Moss (29th) and Willow Tit at Hic Bibi (3rd), Lower Healey (14th) and Common Bank Lodge (22nd).

Many thanks to the following for submitting records:-

I.Ball, D.Beattie, D.Beevers, S.Bottomley, B.Derbyshire, J.Catt, D.Downing, J.Edwards, M.Gardner, M.Greenhalgh, D.Holding, R.Hoyle, C&T.Johnson, P.Kirk, P.Krischkiw, E.Langrish, A.Leach, G.Lilley, I.Lynas, A.Makin, S.Martin, D.North, L.Poxon, C.Rae, J.Riley, A.Rimmer, L.Rose, P.Ross, P.Rowlands, N.Southworth, R.Spencer, C.Thistlethwaite, M.Thornhill, N.&T.West, T.Westhead, I. Whittle, K.Woan.

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

Neil Southworth

THE 50 GREAT BRITISH TREES

To commemorate the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002, the Tree Council invited their Tree Wardens to nominate trees worthy of the term "Great British Tree". Fifty were chosen. In December 2012, having seen 4 or 5 of these trees, Joanna and I decided to spend 2013 visiting the rest of them. Actually, I decided and Joanna went along with it. She planned the timing and the route and organised the accommodation. I did the driving and took the pictures!

24 species are represented on the list. There are lots of Oaks (14) and Yews (10) because of their longevity, but less obvious choices such as Apple, Monkey Puzzle and Sycamore make the grade.



Each tree was provided with a commemorative plaque. 36 of these plaques are still in place. I expect some were stolen. A couple probably got removed when all or part of the tree collapsed, and I have a strong feeling that the National Trust removed the plaques from trees on their properties – maybe they did not allow them to be put in place at all.

Some are truly ancient. The oldest trees in England, Wales and Scotland are all listed. The Yew in the churchyard at Fortingall, Perthshire is estimated to be over 5000 years old, making it older than Stonehenge and older than many of the Pyramids. It is probably the oldest living thing in Europe. It is well worth the trip north. They say that ancient Yews are found in churchyards because, long before the churches were built, the trees had been places of pagan worship. The churches were typically built at these sites.

The oldest English tree is the Yew at Ashbrittle in Somerset and the oldest Welsh one at Llangernyw – both found in churchyards. The Ankerwyte Yew at Runnymede was a mature tree when the Magna Carta was signed.

Oaks are said to grow for 300 years, remain in maturity for 300 years, and take 300 years to perish. Several of the Oaks listed exceed 1000 years. Most of these are in a state of advanced decay. Indeed two of them – the Doomsday Oak at Bristol and the Pontfadog Oak near Wrexham – have collapsed since the 2002 designation. The one at Bristol is still living, but only 20% of it remains.

Sadly the Pontfadog Oak collapsed in the storms of April 2013 and nothing of it remains. We visited it a week after it collapsed. I assume that by now it will have been removed from the site. It was one of the saddest things I have ever seen. It was reputed to have been Britain's oldest Oak.

Some of the trees were designated because of their association with historic events or characters. The *Sequoiadendron giganteum* or Wellingtonia was named after the famous Duke, and his very own Wellingtonia stands in the grounds of his house at Stratfield Saye. The tree where the Tolpuddle Martyrs met is a Sycamore and stands proud on the green at Tolpuddle, Dorset. The Apple which fell onto Isaac Newton's head did so from the tree which survives in the grounds of his home at Woolsthorpe Manor – incidentally this is the only National Trust owned tree to retain its plaque.

Some trees are included because of their economic importance. The Parent Larch at Dunkeld is the sole survivor of the original five Larches planted in Britain. How its descendants have dominated the landscape since then. The first Douglas Fir is on the list, planted at Scone from seed sent back to Britain by head gardener David Douglas from his plant hunting expeditions in the Americas. He died on his travels so never saw the tree grow, but what an impact this had on the timber industry in Britain.

The very first Bramley Apple tree still bears fruit in the garden of an elderly lady in Southwell. The Hawthorn at Appleton Thorn, Cheshire not only gives the village its name, but is the focus of a midsummer festival – Bawming the Thorn – where the tree is decorated and the schoolchildren dance and sing around the tree. The tree itself is a descendent from the Glastonbury Thorn, which is said to have grown from the staff of Joseph of Arithemea. Sadly the Glastonbury Thorn itself has been destroyed by vandals quite recently.

Until quite recently, the tallest British tree was the Douglas Fir at the Hermitage, Dunkeld, Perthshire. This has now been superseded by the Grand Fir at Ardkinglas, Argyll which has recently been measured at 212ft. Neither of these is on the list. But only a few yards from that tallest tree stands my favourite of all those listed. It is a monster of a tree – not the tallest, but the most massive tree in Europe. It is a Silver Fir and as long ago as 1881 someone wrote “No true conception of this noble tree can be formed from reading a description of it”



The Ardkinglas Silver Fir

Those words are absolutely true, so my advice to all is – Go See It!

Phil Kirk

EXPLORING THE BLACK ISLE

The 3 day break in the Black Isle, north of Inverness, was planned to include an area we had not explored before on our way to a long overdue visit to our friends who have lived in Orkney for over 20 years.

The Black Isle turned out to be a revelation, as we had no idea what to expect other than possibly dolphins and red kite. We visited in early August which turned out to be the best time to see the dolphins, but was also wonderful for spectacular views of fields of golden grain; soon to be harvested for barley and wheat. There were yellowhammers 'wheezing' away in all the hedges, and the lanes were lined with magnificent raspberries.

Avoch (pronounced 'och') was our base; wonderfully welcoming especially for the full Scottish breakfast including fruit, fresh morning rolls and home-made raspberry jam!



We visited historic Fortrose on our way to Chanonry Point every day where the dolphins were leaping and feeding on the salmon run and also flipping jelly fish in the air for fun. This was a truly surreal experience, as the people on the beach watching ranged from children playing in the sand with buckets and spades, dog walkers with dogs running into the sea, people with binoculars and cameras, and all from different nationalities. There were crowds of folk mesmerised by the close proximity of up to 30 dolphins, apparently oblivious to the presence of people. Some photographers appeared with huge lenses, camouflage gear, and even picnic chairs so they could actually sit in the sea at the front.

Rosemarkie was another destination where we walked along the base of magnificent cliffs with dolphins offshore, and visited Fairy Glen a small RSPB reserve. A wooded clough not unlike some of our cloughs in West Pennines and no doubt very good for birds and flowers in spring. As this was only a very short break we spent a day driving and pottering taking in Cromarty and The Sutors, with its war time history and butterflies, flowers and birds and views of more dolphins. Nigg and Udale Bays were the next port of call with a bird hide and a chat to the RSPB warden, where we saw good numbers and varieties of waders which are much greater in winter. We had hoped to take the Nigg ferry from Cromarty but unfortunately ran out of time; maybe on our next visit.

Then there was the Rosehaugh Estate. On our first evening we spotted a small unsigned car park just off the main road, so next day we pulled in and explored. It was akin to discovering our Terraced Gardens at Rivington for the first time. There were the remains of a demolished very grand house with magnificent woodland, fields, and a lake with dabchick, mute swans and coot. All the time red kites were calling and soaring overhead. Deep in the woods was a memorial to James Douglas Fletcher, who died in 1927 who had created this wonderful Estate and his wife Lilian. However when she died in 1953 there was no one to inherit and ultimately the house was demolished, although the Estate grounds and farm are still well managed. We chatted to locals who lived in an Estate cottage, who told us to look at Munloch Bay. A roadside car park enabled us to look over Munloch Bay, which is empty at low tide and must be a good place for waders. However we had fantastic views of an osprey fishing as the tide came in, and on our last morning a bird carrying a fish flew overhead. As we watched there were yellowhammers in the hedges and linnets on the wires and a distant view of red kite. This was a spectacular farewell to a wonderful area.

If you decide to visit the Black Isle you can break your journey at Loch Garten, as we did, and see osprey and crested tits. The people of the Black Isle are very welcoming and eager to share their area with visitors. The excellent steak and sea food were a bonus! All round a place to visit.

Chris and Tony Johnson

FIELD TRIPS

It isn't often that I put pen to paper but I thought it was a good time to encourage members to join us on our field trips or summer evening walks especially those who don't have access to our forum to see what we get up to. All our outings are very leisurely and in most cases the terrain is kind enough to accommodate all abilities and for those who do not have transport lifts can be arranged to get you to the starting point. The only thing that cannot be controlled is the British weather. The good thing about our outings is that we have many very knowledgeable members who are only too willing to share their knowledge and experience and I have learnt a lot from listening to them as they identify all sorts of things and give advice on what and where to look for things to help you identify not only the birds but flowers and insects too.

Our first outing was a leisurely stroll through Duxbury Woods on a pleasant May evening with plenty of Bluebells in bloom and large swathes of Ransoms which filled the air with their garlic odour. 18 species of birds were recorded including a pair of Dipper flying up and down the river. In all 10 species of flora were noted along with 3 types of fungi and one rabbit. Next was an evening visit to White Coppice in June. The evening was dry and gloomy but still yielded a total of 23 bird species including Cuckoo. Also noted was a large Bracket Fungus on an Oak tree. This was followed by a stroll at Hoghton Bottoms on a beautiful summer evening in July but which unfortunately led to a lack of bird song but we still managed to record 14 bird species including Peregrine and Sand Martin along with Small Skipper and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies along with rabbits and a common toad.

Our August walk started in Froome Street passing the two small reservoirs, followed part of Black Brook and then made a gentle ascent into the lower parts of Healy Nab before returning to our starting place. This was the night when the weather really let us down as it rained the whole time and the grass, which was quite long, was saturated as were we by the time we finished but everyone enjoyed the walk non-the-less.

On a sunny September Sunday morning we had our annual fungal foray which this year was conducted in Chorley Cemetery which could almost be classed as a nature reserve such is the abundance of wildlife and flora within its boundary. The visit recorded 17 bird species, butterflies and 28 different species of fungi several of which are regarded as scarce for the Chorley area.

Come October and we embarked on our first weekend field trip which took place at Knott End starting at the car park and walking along the coastal path towards Pilling. Once again we were blessed with a bright sunny morning and as we walked the tide rose and pushed the waders closer to the shore which made observation easier. The highlights were the sighting of at least two Black Redstarts and two Wheatear. An even better sighting would have been a Lapland Bunting but on closer inspection of the photograph it turned out to be a male Reed Bunting in moult. Several kinds of waders were abundant as were several skeins of Pink footed Geese and lots of rabbits.

In November we ventured to Burton Mere Wetlands which is near Neston on the Wirral Peninsula and which was a first for several of the members present. Again it was a beautiful sunny day which unfortunately had the side effect of making it difficult to look out over some of the water because of the reflections. It didn't however prevent us recording over 40 species including a Merlin.

I hope the above might have whetted your appetite to join us on a future expedition. Look out for notices in the newsletter or announcements at the indoor meetings.

Keith Woan