

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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*Chorley and District Natural History Society is a
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EDITORIAL

I recently returned from a short holiday in Northern France to be greeted with the news that DEFRA in its infinite wisdom had decided, following lobbying by game conservancy organisations, that research was needed into the effects of the increasing Buzzard numbers on Pheasant poult numbers and possible ways of controlling the Buzzard population. It therefore proposed to fund a three year study into non-lethal means of achieving this and acquired funding from the government amounting to £375,000.00!

The funding was for a field trial, which was to use such means as permanent translocation of captured birds to falconry centres, and the destruction of Buzzard nests – both actions are currently illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. We are talking here of a conservation success story being undermined for the sake of a species which was introduced into this country chiefly for sporting purposes, and of which millions are released each year purely to provide moving targets for shotguns!

Fortunately the RSPB, BTO and Raptor Protection Groups condemned or washed their hands of the proposals, and following the subsequent public outcry, DEFRA seems to have performed a U-turn at least in respect of the proposed field trials. However, I don't suppose the threat has gone away. The shooting lobby is far too powerful for that, so we need to remain vigilant if we wish to continue enjoying the magnificent sight of Buzzards soaring over the Chorley countryside.

Better news on the home front. The Society obtained a Green Partnerships Grant from Lancashire County Council for a second tern raft at Yarrow Valley Park, which was quickly constructed and floated into position by the park Rangers. A pair of Common Terns now has three young on the original raft, and a second pair looks likely to make a breeding attempt on the new raft. In a similar way, the Society has also provided an interpretation board for the bird feeding station behind Pets Corner in Astley Park – with photography by secretary Phil Kirk. Have a look the next time you are passing.

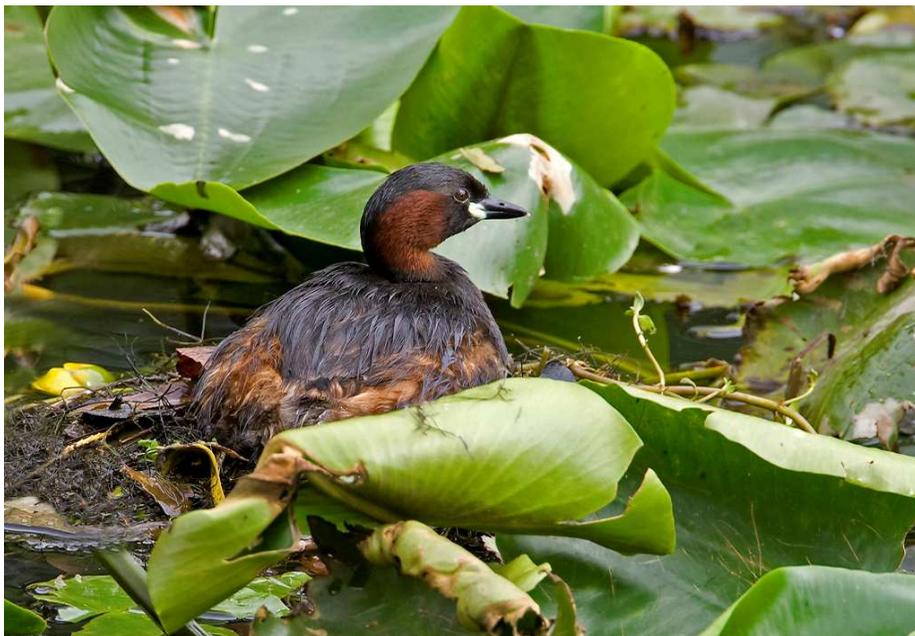
Finally, I note that our Flora Recorder, David Beattie is moving in high circles, having been invited by HRH The Prince of Wales to a Reception at Highgrove House in recognition of his long service as a volunteer with Lancashire Wildlife Trust. Congratulations, David. I trust you enjoyed the experience, but hope that there was no pheasant on the menu!

Neil Southworth

BIRD REPORT

January

The mosses were the place to be during the month, both for numbers and for special birds. As well as skeins passing over, Pink-footed Geese were often found to be feeding, especially on Croston Moss, usually by the river. Numbers increased during the month from 300 on the 11th to over 1500 by the end of the month. In with the Pink-feet on the 11th were 7 White-fronted Geese. Whooper Swans too, were seen regularly, including a flock of 26 over Mawdesley Moss on the 8th.



Little Grebe

On the River Douglas, a Little Grebe and 4 Goosander were noted on the 8th, and 5 Shelduck on the 28th. Away from the mosses, Little Grebe were recorded on Common Bank lodge (1st) and on Astley Park lake (15th). A pair of Goosander was on Common Bank lodge (1st) and 6 were on Anglezarke reservoir (15th). 5 Goldeneye were on Heapey No.3 lodge on the 29th. The male and female Pochard were still together on Anglezarke Reservoir on the 2nd, but presumably they didn't get on because the female had moved to Yarrow Valley Park by the 16th. Four male and a female Mandarin were at Arley Nature Reserve on the 9th and 26th. An Egyptian Goose was on Adlington reservoir on the 25th. Finally, a Mallard with a chick was noted at a private site at Ulnes Walton on the 20th.

Bird of the month, however, had to be the Great White Egret, photographed at Anglezarke Reservoir on the 10th by a United Utilities employee. Unfortunately, it flew off and presumably out of the area.



Great White Egret

Elsewhere 3 Grey Heron were on Mawdesley Moss on the 3rd and a Cormorant found Big Lodge at Yarrow Valley Park much to its liking for most of the month, being joined occasionally by a second bird.

A flock of 23 Lapwing was at Belmont Reservoir on the 2nd, one of 25 was at Gale Moss on the 15th and 15 were at Ellerbeck on the 16th, but the largest flocks were on the mosses with 120 on Croston Moss on the 14th and 200 there on the 29th. Six Snipe were at Bretherton on the 4th and a couple were on Croston Moss on the 8th. Three Jack Snipe were at Eccleston on the 2nd and another was at Bretherton on the 4th. A Woodcock was at Eccleston on the 2nd. Perhaps a sign that Spring was on the way was an Oystercatcher at Ulnes Walton on the 25th.

Raptor highlight was a Merlin on Mawdesley Moss on the 1st. A Peregrine was on Morrison's chimney on the 2nd, and other sightings included Whittle (15th), Croston Finney (16th) and Coppull (18th). Buzzards continued to be recorded across the area with the most notable sighting being 5 over Croston on the 26th. Kestrel records included three together at Bretherton on the 7th.



Little Owl

Four species of owl were recorded during the month including Little Owl on Croston Finney (14th), Barn Owl on Mawdesley Moss on several dates and another at Croston on the 9th. Tawny Owls were noted at Eccleston (5th) and in Chorley (15th). Several Short-eared Owls spent the winter just outside the area in Rufford, and one or two of them strayed across the border occasionally onto Mawdesley Moss (17th and 23rd).

Three species of woodpecker were noted, including Green at Cuerden Valley Park (1st), Great Spotted at Bretherton (4th), Croston Moss (8th) and Cuerden Valley Park (19th), and Lesser Spotted heard in Yarrow Valley Park (17th and 21st). Kingfishers were seen on Mawdesley Moss (3rd), Yarrow Valley Park (10th), Withnell Fold (13th), Common Bank Lodge (15th) and Arley nature reserve (26th). Dippers too were well recorded with pairs in Cuerden Valley Park (12th), Yarrow Valley Park (14th) and at White Coppice (28th).

Redwing sightings were confined to a small flock at Eccleston on the 2nd, and 30 at Whittle on the 15th. Similarly Fieldfare records were limited to a small flock at Coppull (5th) and a flock of 200 at Great Hanging Bridge (16th). A Black Redstart was reported from Tatton Recreation Ground (14th), a Stonechat was on Croston Finney (29th) and a Blackcap was in a Chorley garden (21st). Willow Tit records were encouraging with two at Coppull (9th), one at Arley nature reserve (26th) and 2 on Croston Moss (29th).

Finch flocks included 15 Goldfinch at Lower Healey (7th) and 28 at Coppull (20th). A flock of 20 Twite was reported from Charnock Richard (2nd). Brambling numbers in a Chorley garden increased from 4 on the 2nd to 5 on the (15th), and 9 Siskin were seen

in a Coppull garden on the 24th. A massive flock of over 500 Linnet was seen regularly on Croston Finney between 14th and the end of the month. A flock of around 20 Tree Sparrows was seen regularly on Croston Moss.

Finally, four species of bunting were recorded. A flock of 10 Corn Bunting was on Mawdesley Moss (8th) and on the same day at least 20 Yellowhammer were on Croston Moss. Over 20 Reed Bunting were on Mawdesley Moss on the 11th, but stars of the show were the Snow Buntings on Winter Hill, which increased in number from 2 on the 1st to 6 by the 29th.



Snow Bunting

February

Pink-footed Geese were again seen regularly on the mosses including a flock of at least 1000 birds feeding on Croston Moss on the 6th. Amongst them was at least one White-fronted Goose. Shelduck were also seen on the adjacent River Douglas with 2 on the 4th and 4 on the 10th. At the same site Teal numbers increased from 20 on the 3rd to 50 by the 7th, whilst further east 140 Teal were on Lower Rivington Reservoir on the 7th and 30 were at Withnell Fold Flashes on the 27th. Other wildfowl records continued to be disappointing, Three Goldeneye on Heapey lodges was the only record received. Goosanders remained in single figures including 6 on the Douglas (4th), 5 on Lower Rivington (7th), 7 on Anglezarke (8th) and 4 at Belmont (12th). The female Pochard remained at Yarrow Valley Park until at least the 3rd and 3 were on the Douglas (18th). A Gadwall was at Arley nature reserve on the 15th when there were also 7 Mandarin present. 7 Great Crested Grebe had returned to Anglezarke Reservoir by the 26th, and a Little Grebe was again noted on the Douglas at Croston (7th). Two Water Rail were on Arley nature reserve on the 26th.

An incredible 10 species of wader were seen during the month. Most unexpected of these was a Knot at Belmont Reservoir on the 12th.



Knot

Most spectacular were the Golden Plover on Croston Finney during the first two weeks of the month, when around 100 birds were seen daily, peaking at around 200 on the 4th. Up to three Dunlin were seen amongst them during this period. A Green Sandpiper was at Arley nature reserve on the 15th, when 3 Woodcock and 4 Snipe were also flushed. Snipe were also seen along the Douglas at Croston (4th) and at

Withnell Fold (19th). The first Curlew was back at Withnell Fold on the 19th and 9 were there on the 22nd. A Redshank was along the Douglas at Croston on the 17th, when 8 Oystercatcher were also present. These had increased to 15 by the 23rd, and 5 were at Belmont Reservoir by the 26th. Flocks of Lapwing included over 100 birds on Croston Moss ((6th), 30 at Withnell Fold (23rd) and 80 at Belmont Reservoir (26th).



Hen Harrier

Star raptor was a ring-tail Hen Harrier seen on several dates on Croston Moss. Both male and female Merlin were seen on the mosses on the 7th, 12th and 14th. One was also seen at Lower Healey on the 15th. Peregrines were seen on the mosses on the 2nd and 17th, and a pair was back at St George's on the 11th. Short-eared Owls again strayed onto Mawdesley Moss including 2 on the 3rd and singles on 12th, 25th and 29th.

A Barn Owl was noted on Mawdesley Moss (3rd and 19th), and Little Owls were seen at Heskin (11th) and Heapey (19th).

The Lower Rivington gull roost was counted on the 2nd but was much smaller than in recent times with just 2000 Black-headed Gulls, 100 Common, 40 Herring, 12 Lesser Black-backed and 2 Great Black-backed.

Numbers of Stock Dove on Croston Moss had increased to an amazing 100 birds by the 3rd. Also on the moss on the same day was a similar number of Skylark. 5 of the species were back in song at Great Knowley on the 18th. A flock of 30 Pied Wagtails was at Eccleston on the 10th.

Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were again heard calling in Burgh Wood (5th), and in Duxbury Woods (15th). A Great Spot was drumming in Astley Park on the 13th. Kingfishers were noted along the Douglas at Croston (4th), at Arley (17th), Heath Charnock (26th) and Yarrow Valley Park (26th).

Redwing flocks continued to be on the small side, albeit well distributed – 12 at Coppull (17th), 20 at Whittle (19th), 15 in Yarrow Valley Park (21st) and 12 at Hoghton Bottoms (26th). Fieldfare flocks were larger including 100 on Croston Moss (4th) and 50 at Hoghton Bottoms (26th). Other noteworthy flocks included 200 Linnet on Croston Moss (25th), 300 Starling along Eyes Lane (12th) and 14 Corn Buntings on Mawdesley Moss (25th).

Other records of interest included a male Blackcap and 3 Brambling in a Chorley garden (4th), Willow Tits on Croston Moss (3rd) and at Arley (15th), female Stonechats on Croston Moss (3rd) and at White Coppice (15th and 23rd). A pair of Raven was over Chorley on the 15th.



Raven in Flight

Five Snow Bunting were still on Winter Hill on 12th but these had decreased to a single bird by the 29th. Star bird, however, was probably the Hawfinch in Duxbury Woods on the 15th. We seem to receive records of this species about once every five years, and yet there are those who believe it is probably resident in the area. Most intriguing record was a possible Cetti's Warbler on Mawdesley Moss (14th), but only a fleeting glimpse and no call made by the bird ruled out a positive identification, although the observer remains convinced.

March

Wildfowl numbers reduced greatly to the extent that the only Pinkfoot record was of two birds feeding in a field by the Douglas at Croston on the 8th. A Greylag was on the Douglas on the 3rd and 9 were on Upper Rivington Reservoir on the 11th. Two Gadwall were on the Douglas on the 24th, and 4 Goosander on the 1st. Possibly two of these were then seen on the Yarrow at Eccleston on the 5th. Shelduck numbers on the mosses had built up to 23 by the 26th. Elsewhere, a total of 6 Goldeneye were recorded on the WeBs count (11th) – 3 on Heapey Lodges, 2 on High Bullough and one on Yarrow. A pair of Little Grebe was on Astley Park lake (4th) and the pair of Great Crested Grebe were nest building at Yarrow Valley Park by the same day.



Gadwall

A flock of around 50 Golden Plover was seen at Bretherton on the 2nd, and then a single bird was seen on the moors on the 4th, followed by a pair on the 8th. A Green Sandpiper was again seen along the Douglas at Croston on the 27th and 31st. Other waders were returning to breeding territories. 4 Redshank were along the Douglas on the 3rd and 2 were at Belmont on the 14th. A single Curlew was at Eccleston on the 5th, 4 were at Withnell Fold (10th), one at Anglezarke Reservoir (11th), 6 at Coppull (14th) and 30 at Croston (31st). 16 Oystercatcher were along the Douglas on the 1st, 3 were at Anglezarke Reservoir, 2 at Yarrow reservoir and 3 on Lower Rivington Reservoir (all 11th), a single was at Coppull (13th), 2 at Belmont (14th) and 2 at Withnell Fold (18th). A flock of 30 Lapwing was at Withnell Fold (18th) and Woodcock were seen at Great Knowley (11th) and Croston Moss (12th). Two Grey Partridge were at Bretherton on the 2nd when one was also seen on Croston Moss. 9 Red Grouse were noted on the moors on the 4th and up to 20 on the 18th.

Records of Little Owl came from across the area with a pair on the moors (8th), singles at Heskin (11th) and Eccleston (12th), a pair at Hoghton Bottoms (12th) and singles at Cuerden Valley Park (27th) and Croston Moss (28th). Short-eared Owls were noted at Rivington on the 11th and on Mawdesley Moss (28th). A Barn Owl was seen hunting on Croston Moss (8th). The ring-tail Hen Harrier was again seen on the mosses on several dates between 1st and 24th. A Merlin was seen on Croston Finney on the 28th. Peregrines were also reported from various sites including a pair on Morrison's chimney (8th), 3 at Whittle (8th), one at Hoghton Bottoms (17th) and a pair at White Coppice (19th). A raptor on migration was an Osprey at the E-shaped pond, Betherton (23rd).



Chiffchaff – an early summer visitor

Other summer visitors arriving or passing through were led by Chiffchaff at Euxton and Cuerden Valley Park (16th), followed by Sand Martin at Eccleston (24th), a couple of Wheatears at Withnell Fold also on the 24th, Ring Ousel on Winter Hill (28th) and finally Willow Warbler at White Coppice (31st). Of course, winter visitors were still around. The two Blackcaps in Cuerden Valley Park on the 26th could have been either – we'll never know. Flocks of Fieldfare included 100 on Croston Moss (5th), 70 at Withnell Fold (10th), and 50 in Marsh Lane, Brindle (24th). As has been the case throughout this winter, Redwing flocks were much smaller and fewer with just 10 along Syd Brook, Eccleston (10th) and 10 at Yarrow Valley Park (11th) being recorded. There was just a single Brambling record from an Euxton garden on the 23rd. A Black Redstart was again on Winter Hill (28th) and 6 Siskin were at Great Knowley (11th). 7 Goldcrest were in Astley Park (8th) and 2 were at Heskin (11th).

Some resident birds were starting to breed with Collared Doves on the nest at Great Knowley (4th) and with 2 young at Eccleston (18th). A Robin with young was at Euxton on the 27th. Riverine species were on territory with Kingfishers along the Douglas (1st), in Yarrow Valley Park (6th), at Hoghton Bottoms (18th), along Syd Brook (23rd), in Cuerden Valley Park (27th) and at Euxton (27th). Dippers were on the Yarrow at Birkacre (1st), the Goit at Anglezarke (18th) and the Lostock at Whittle (18th), and Grey Wagtails were along the Yarrow at Birkacre (1st), the Douglas at Croston (1st) and the Yarrow at Bretherton (2nd).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was again heard in Burgh Wood (4th), a Stonechat was again at White Coppice (4th), and Willow Tits were again on Croston Moss (3rd), Coppull (10th) and Arley (16th).

Noteworthy flocks included over 1,000 Black-headed Gulls and 300 Starling at Withnell Fold (18th), and 100 Linnet and 100 Corn Bunting on Croston Moss (12th). Around 30 Tree Sparrow were again on Croston Moss (22nd), and Yellowhammer sightings included 7 at Bretherton (2nd), 10 on Croston Moss (12th) and 25 at Arley (16th).

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, P.Catterall, J.Cobham, B.Derbyshire, J.Dermott, D.Downing, T.Dunn, J.Edwards, K.Haydock, P.Hodkinson, D.Holland, D.Holding, R.Hoyle, C&T.Johnson, P.King, P.Kirk, P.Krischkiw, E.Langrish, A.Leach, G.Lilley, I.Lynas, A.Makin, B.Makinson, T.Morton, L.Poxon, C.Rae, P.Rhodes, J.Riley, P.Ross, A.Ryding, N.Southworth, R.Spencer, , C.Thistlethwaite, B.Thomas, M.Thornhill, R.Todd, N.&T.West, P.West, T.Westhead, P.Whittaker, I.Whittle, C.Winder, K.Woan, I.Woosey.

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

Neil Southworth

THE CAIRNGORMS IN LATE WINTER

When my wife and I booked a long weekend break to the Cairngorms in March, we were expecting snowy landscapes and freezing conditions. We therefore purchased a snow shovel and made sure we had the right clothes. What we didn't expect were four days of sunshine, with just a hint of snow remaining on the mountain tops, at least we would be able to get around easily.



Crested Tit

Our first stop on our arrival was a small feeding station near the Boat of Garten, where we watched a red squirrel, then a couple of lovely little crested tits feeding on the peanuts. We walked along the shore of Loch Garten, the trees reflecting in the perfectly still clear water, Tufted Ducks were displaying and Buzzards calling, breaking the otherwise dreamy calm.

The RSPB Osprey visitor centre was still closed and there had been no sightings of Ospreys yet so we moved on to Milton Loch on the edge of the village. As we walked around the small shallow loch, a large bird caught our attention as it circled over the water, it was an Osprey, just arriving back at its breeding grounds, the local rooks mobbing the bird as it fished. We watched and thought of the journey this bird had just made, before heading for our accommodation in Aviemore.



Red Squirrel

Our second day was spent with Tracey doing a bit of shopping, while I went photographing red squirrels with local wildlife photographer Neil Macintyre, followed by a lovely walk through an ancient Caledonian Pine forest, where Goldcrests flitted around and occasionally a crested tit could be heard although not easily seen. We visited Inshriach Nursery, where a glass fronted tea-room looks out over numerous peanut feeders, visited by Red Squirrels, Great Spotted Woodpeckers and lots of Chaffinches amongst other species of birds.

In the evening we visited a Badger hide nearby, where we heard Tawny Owls before watching four Badgers enjoying some peanuts before venturing off into the darkness.



Common Toad

On day three we had decided to visit Findhorn Valley, but the journey down the single track road down the valley was quite slow, as we had to keep stopping to usher Toads from the road as they migrated to their breeding ponds. Well we couldn't let them get squashed, could we?

We watched a pair of Mountain Goats with two kids feeding at the base of a mountain slope before we parked the car and scanned the mountain tops. I was looking for Mountain Hare and had just found some burrows when Tracey shouted EAGLE. I turned round as a Golden Eagle rose over a ridge on huge wings and without flapping its wings drifted across the sky and disappeared beyond another mountain. We walked along a track climbing slowly up into the mountains looking round when we heard Red Grouse calling, and getting nice views as a pair took flight and circled us before landing out of sight.



Mountain Hare

We then saw our first Mountain Hare, looking totally out of place, still in its white Winter pelage, surely an easy target for the Buzzards and Eagles. We saw several more Hares sitting around the entrance to their burrows, quickly disappearing if we got too close, and also got great views of another Golden Eagle twisting in the air with talons outstretched as it was being attacked by a Buzzard, which was small in comparison. We returned to the car and went back to our accommodation rescuing several more Toads as we went.

On the fourth day we had a walk around Loch an Eilean surrounded by birdsong, before we made our journey back home.

Tony Dunn

FISH SPECIES OF THE RIVER YARROW

By Darren Wilson, Environment Agency Fishery Officer

The River Yarrow is diverse and supports a broad range of fish species. Fish species are dictated by the available habitat that is primarily governed by the characteristics of the river, mainly flow. The Yarrow rises in the upland areas of Anglezarke and meanders its way down through Chorley, Ecclestone and Croston where it meets the tidal Douglas. With its headwater at an elevation of approximately 320m (1060ft) above sea level, the river is joined by several small tributaries as it flows for approximately 3km (1.8 miles) in a westerly direction down the steep moor land and in to Yarrow Reservoir, part of the Rivington chain. The River Yarrow then forms again from the discharge of Anglezarke Reservoir at an elevation of 170m (560ft) above sea level, before proceeding west towards the coast. By the time the river leaves Yarrow Valley Country Park 8km (5 miles) downstream, it's down to approximately 50m (165ft) above sea level. The remaining 15km (9.5 miles) slowly make their way to sea level. The upper reaches of the river are therefore relatively steep in gradient giving fast flowing water whereas the middle to lower reaches are at a much lower gradient giving slower, more gentle waters.

The gradient of a river, and therefore flow, dictates the range of habitats and the species of fish. The faster flowing steeper gradients are more suitable for species such as Brown Trout which utilise the well oxygenated clean waters to make their home, whereas species such as Roach prefer slower flowing water and utilise the middle to lower reaches. In total, there are 16 species of freshwater fish that call the Yarrow their home, along with some marine species. Fish populations are routinely monitored by the Environment Agency using electric fishing. Members of the Trout family are commonly found from Yarrow Valley Country Park and upstream, along with the migratory Sea Trout thanks to the installation of fish passes. Adult Salmon are also seen and it's hoped juveniles will be found in the near future. A full range of coarse fish species are commonly found from downstream of the park, although there is some overlap. Freshwater species include; Chub, Dace, Roach, Barbel, Perch, Pike, Ruffe, Carp, Gudgeon, Bullhead, Stone Loach, Stickleback, Minnow, Brown (Sea) Trout, Eel and Brook Lamprey. Marine (brackish) species are found up to Croston Weir with Flounder commonly seen up to the weir and Mullet often seen downstream of Croston. Sea Lamprey are often seen spawning in the river too.

Copied with thanks from Friends of River Yarrow newsletter, Autumn 2011