QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Newsletter No. 141 **Spring 2013**

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

EDITORIAL

After much deliberation it has been decided that members' subscription rates for 2013/14 need to be increased. The last increase was in 2002/03, some eleven years ago, and since then our costs, especially speakers for the indoor meetings, have steadily escalated. The cost of producing and distributing the quarterly newsletter and annual report has also risen. Most of the printing cost had been provided 'gratis' but this is not now the case and even though we have invested in our own printer the cost of the printing inks have to be met.

In order to try to encourage young members it has been decided that membership for under 18's will now be free. So, if you have any children or grandchildren who fall into this category, please encourage them to become members and attend our meetings and walks for if we do not encourage and get new, younger members the Society will gradually wither and die.

The new rates for 2013/14 will be as follows:-

Adult		£ 10.00
Family		£ 15.00
O.A.P	..	£ 8.00 (over 65)
O.A.P. Family		£ 12.00 (over 65)
Young member		Free . (under 18)

It would save our Membership Secretary and Treasurer a lot of extra work if members who currently pay by **Standing Order** could make arrangements with their bank or building society to have their standing orders amended before the next payment falls due as this is something we cannot do.

It is hoped that you will understand the reasons for the decision to raise subscription rates and trust it will not affect your decision to remain a member of the Society.

Keith Woan (Chair).

FLORA REPORT

I feel like I am giving the Budget speech. Thanks to conditions in Europe we have had very little growth. However, it is low temperatures rather than low interest rates that are affecting our flowers. We had a reasonable start to the year with gorse and snowdrops making their usual appearance on January 1st. However, mid-January brought snowfall which covered all the snowdrops anyway. A little respite in early February meant a single cowslip made a *very* early appearance on Cuerden accompanied by Groundsel and Herb Robert. Lesser Celandine showed in Euxton on 20th January but we did not see any more until this one on Cuerden on 20th February

Lesser Celendine

Butterbur, Dog's Mercury and Barren Strawberry were all out at Birkacre on February 16th but then apart from Golden Saxifrage and Blackthorn everything stopped in March. Grass will not grow below 5 degrees C and in March we only had 5 days with the temperatures above 9º, but 10 days with the temperature below 5º. I am sure this is also having an effect on insects and therefore birds. Hopefully, April will start to see temperatures rise and more floral colour added to our neighbourhood. Please, if you can, get involved in the "Wildflowers Count" survey that Plantlife do, or the Common Plant Survey

David Beattie

BIRD REPORT

January

A skein of 200 mm Pink-footed Geese flying south east over Chorley brought in the New Year. 150 were feeding on Mawdesley Moss on 13th and around 1000 were on Croston Moss on the 20th. 3 Whooper Swans flew over Yarrow Valley Park on the 5th. Highlight of the month, though, was a Slavonian Grebe found on Lower Rivington Reservoir during the monthly wildfowl count on the 13th. It was still present the next day, but was not seen again after that. A pair of Little Grebes was on Common Bank Lodge throughout the month, and singles were on Croston Moss (5th) and on the Yarrow at Eccleston (21st). A single Great Crested Grebe had returned to Yarrow Valley Park by the 10th and 2 were on the lake in Cuerden Valley Park on the 30th. There were a few records of Wigeon, including a drake at Yarrow Valley Park (13th), another at Cuerden Valley Park (20th), and a pair on Anglezarke reservoir (22nd – 28th). Shelduck had begun to move back inland with one on Mawdesley Moss (12th) and 2 in the Croston / Eccleston area (27th and 28th). Good numbers of Teal were in the area including 30 at Withnell Fold (6th), 10 on Lower Rivington reservoir (13th), 11 on the Yarrow at Eccleston (15th) and 50 on the Douglas at Croston (16th). Goosander were widespread but in single figures with the high count being 10 on Lower Rivington Reservoir on the 22nd.

Lapwing

Six species of wader were recorded with pride of place going to the 60 Golden Plover on Croston Moss on the 16th. Several records of Woodcock were received including birds at Euxton (7th and 21st), Lower Rivington (14th), Eccleston (16th and 31st) and Mawdesley (31st). Common Snipe included 5 on Croston Moss (13th), 2 at Eccleston (16th) and 4 on Lower Burgh Meadow (22nd), where a Jack Snipe was also noted. A Curlew at Whittle on the 9th was unseasonal. Lapwing flocks included 110 at Withnell

Fold (6th), 80 at Denham (13th), 27 on Croston Moss (17th), 40 on Mawdesley Moss (21st) and 31 at Eccleston (24th).

Raptor of the month was a stunning male Hen Harrier on the mosses on 1st and 20th. A Merlin was another good sighting on Croston Moss on the 3rd. Peregrines were seen on Croston Moss on 1st and 3rd and on Morrison's chimney on several dates. Croston Moss hosted 6 species of raptor with Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk also being seen regularly. Other Buzzard sightings came from Withnell Fold and Cuerden Valley Park. Barn Owls were recorded – no prizes for guessing – on Croston Moss on 1st and 20th. Tawny Owls were noted at Eccleston (2nd) and at Great Knowley (26th).

Another feature of winter on the mosses was the huge flocks of Woodpigeon, which at times involved several thousand birds, which needless to say attracted the attention of Peregrines. Other mossland birds included a covey of 15 Red-legged Partridge (13th) and 10 Grey Partridge (27th).

Passerine record of the month and a first for the area, if accepted by the County Recorder, was a Pallas's Warbler found by John Edwards on Croston Moss on the 22nd. Unfortunately, it couldn't be subsequently relocated. Over-wintering Blackcaps were noted in members' gardens in Whittle (5th), Chorley (7th) and Euxton (24th and 26th). Waxwings were still around with single birds at Whittle (9th), Clayton (11th) and 12 on Croston Moss (12th). Kingfisher records came from all parts including sightings at Eccleston, Mawdesley Moss, Common Bank Lodge, Yarrow Valley Park and Cuerden Valley Park.

Corn Bunting

Perhaps the most noteworthy flock seen was one of 150 Corn Bunting on Croston Moss (20), which must be by far and away the largest flock of the species recorded in the area for many, many years. 20 Yellowhammer in the same location whilst not in the same league was nevertheless a good count. Other flocks included 1500 Jackdaw at Cuerden Valley Park (16th) and 700 on Croston Moss (5th), 50 Fieldfare on Croston Moss (5th) and at Withnell Fold (6th) with 20 at Denham Hall (13th), 65 Redwing at White Coppice (16th) and 31 at Cuerden Valley Park (24th). 300 Linnet were on Croston Moss (3rd), 100 Skylark there (16th) and 100 Chaffinch (20th). 100 Starling were at Withnell Fold (6th) and 500 at Denham Hall (13th).

Other records of interest included Stonechat at Euxton Park (26th), 13 Bullfinch in a garden at Clayton (17th), small flocks of Siskin at Common Bank (12th), Eccleston (16th) and Clayton (31st), and Brambling at Eccleston (1st), Croston Moss (3rd) and Common Bank (12th).

February

Wigeon

Just a couple of skeins of Pink-footed geese were reported including 200 at Croston Moss on the 3rd. Two juvenile Mute Swan turned up on Anglezarke reservoir (2nd) and remained for the rest of the month. Great Crested Grebe numbers at Yarrow Valley Park had increased to 4 by the 11th. The pair of Little Grebe remained on Common Bank Lodge. Nine species of Duck were recorded which is good for Chorley. These included the pair of Wigeon at Anglezarke reservoir (still there on the 2nd) and the drake Pochard at the same site until at least the 17th. Goldeneye included 6 at High Bullough (2nd), 7 at Lower Healey (18th) and 3 on Heapey No.3 Lodge (17th). Goosander again were widespread, being seen on the River Douglas at Croston, Yarrow Valley Park, Common Bank Lodge, Lower Rivington Reservoir, with a highest count of 19 on Yarrow Reservoir on the 23rd. A drake Mandarin turned up on Common Bank Lodge on the 21st and was relocated on Astley Park lake on the 28th. 40 Teal were at Withnell Fold on the 16th with a few at Arley Nature reserve on the 21st. 8 Tufted Duck were noted on Croston Twin Lakes on the 17th. Finally, Shelduck numbers had increased to 6 on the River Douglas by the 17th and 3 were seen at Eccleston on the 21st.

It was another good month for waders with 9 species recorded. Oystercatcher numbers on the Douglas had built up to 12 by the 17th, when a couple had also made it to Anglezarke Reservoir. 6 Golden Plover were noted with the Lapwing at Withnell Fold on the 21st. Lapwing flocks included 200 on Croston Moss (1st), 40 at Eccleston (19th), 90 at Withnell Fold (21st), 200 at Brindle (23rd) and 65 on Gale Moss (24th). A single Redshank was on the Douglas on the 17th. A party of 15 Dunlin on Croston

Moss on the 28th was a good find. Curlew continued to move inland with 6 at Eccleston (19th) and 12 at Withnell Fold (21st). Wintering birds included 5 Snipe at Withnell Fold (16th), a Jack Snipe at Eccleston (28th) and Woodcock at Whittle Quarry (9th), Eccleston (10th), Cuerden Valley Park (20th) and Yarrow Valley Park (28th). Unfortunately the heads of one or two Woodcock were also found at the foot of Morrison's chimney.

The male Hen Harrier was again on Croston Moss on the 27th. Peregrines were seen either at Morrison's or St George's on several dates, and one was on Croston Moss (28th). Buzzards seen included 4 at Eccleston (1st), 3 at Anglezarke (2nd), 2 at Withnell Fold (16th) and 3 at Arley (21st). A Short-eared Owl was noted on Croston Moss on the 1st and 22nd, and Little Owl was at the same site on the 12th and 28th. Barn Owls were recorded on Mawdesley Moss (19th) and at Eccleston (19th and 28th). Tawny Owls were noted at Great Knowley (8th), Eccleston (17th) and Withnell Fold (23rd).

Waxwings reappeared in numbers with up to 50 at Great Knowley between 9th and 15th, up to 25 at MacDonald's between 18th and 22nd, when 30 were reported from Eaves Green. 20 were in Astley Road on the 28th and 7 were in Worcester Place on the same day. Redwing flocks included 20 at Eccleston (1st), 100 at Whittle (4th) and 50 at Euxton (12th). Fieldfare included 40 on Croston Moss (3rd), 30 at Adlington (3rd), 50 along the Douglas at Croston (7th) and 30 at Eccleston (22nd). Woodpigeon numbers on the mosses were still well in the thousands. Other flocks there included 300 Starling, 50 Chaffinch, 40 Linnet and 100 Corn Bunting (all 7th). Elsewhere, 250 Starling were at Eccleston (8th), and 148 Siskin were at a "jewellers" in Clayton (13th).

A flock of 35 Meadow Pipit at Eccleston on the 28th was probably moving back inland from the coast. 7 Lesser Redpoll in a garden at Great Knowley was a reminder that this species is now using feeding stations more regularly. A male Blackcap was in a Chorley garden on the 2nd, and females were there on the 5th and 10th. A male was in the shrubbery at Morrison's on the 8th. Bramblings were noted on Croston Moss (3rd), Eccleston (3rd) and Great Knowley (5th).

Lesser Redpoll

March

A *Little Egret* on Croston Moss on the 29th reinforced hopes that this species will eventually become a regular sight in the recording area. Geese appear to have moved away from the area, but other wildfowl sightings were similar to February. Mute Swans were noted at Common Bank Lodge, Lower Healey, Astley Park, Yarrow Valley Park and Anglezarke Reservoir. Great Crested Grebes were at Yarrow Valley Park, Lower Healey, Anglezarke reservoir, Adlington reservoir and Twin Lakes at Croston.
Ten species of wader were recorded this month with a Black-tailed Godwit in a field at Mawdesley (24th) being a nice surprise for one observer. A Green Sandpiper at Eccleston on the 19th could well have been a wintering bird. The Golden Plover flock on Croston moss attained an impressive total of around 300 birds on the 31st. Even Lapwing could not match that with the largest flock being one of 250 at Brindle (3rd). Prenuptial Curlew flocks included 24 at Eccleston (13th) and 50 at Euxton (12th). A Little Ringed Plover at Belmont Reservoir on the 30th was the first back.

Also moving through on migration was an Osprey seen heading north over Eccleston on the 28th. Still wintering was the male Hen Harrier seen on several dates on Croston Moss between the 10th and 31st. A Merlin was also at the site on the 5th. Tawny Owls were seen or heard at Euxton (7th), Cuerden Valley Park (24th), Great Knowley (25th) and Common Bank (31st). Little Owls were at Eccleston (3rd) and Croston Moss (3rd), with Barn Owls at similar locations.

Gulls don't often get much of a mention in these reports, but a Kittiwake on Lower Rivington Reservoir on the 16th is a pretty unusual occurrence. It was part of a larger cross country movement at the time. Still with gulls, two adult Mediterranean Gulls made a brief appearance on Big Lodge at Yarrow Valley Park on the 22nd.

There were still plenty of flocks of Waxwing around. The flock of up to 20 birds in Astley Road remained until at least the 3rd. Up to 22 were around MacDonald's between the 8th and 10th, 40 were in Collingwood Road on the 10th, 17 were in Adlington on the 11th and 12th and up to 50 were around Morrison's and Atholl Grove between the 22nd and 24th. The largest Redwing flock was one of 50 birds at Eccleston on the 26th, and of Fieldfare was one of 90 birds on Croston Moss on the 14th. Flocks of other species had to a large extent dispersed.

Birds which prefer their own company included Green Woodpecker on Healey Nab (10th) and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker heard at White Coppice on the 29th.

Kingfishers were recorded at Yarrow Valley Park (10th), Arley (11th), Croston Moss (14th) and Kem Mill (22nd). A female over-wintering Blackcap was in a Chorley garden on several dates between 2nd and 18th and a male was there on 24th. Stonechats were at Belmont Reservoir (12th) and Croston Moss (29th).

First returning summer visitors were rather late Chiffchaffs at Eccleston and Croston (23rd), and probably not much better, Wheatear on Anglezarke Moor (30th) and Sand Martin at Roddlesworth (31st).

Wheatear

Many thanks to the following for submitting records:-

I.Ball, D.Barker, D.Beattie, D.Beevers, J.Bolton, J.Burgoine, J.Catt, J.Cobham, B.Derbyshire, K.Dougan, D.Downing, T.Dunn, J.Edwards, S.Field, M.Fishwick, J.Frankland, L.Harrison, K.Haydock, M.Hilton, R.Hoyle, C&T.Johnson, P.Kirk, P.Krischkiw, E.Langrish, A.Leach, G.Lilley, I.Lynas, B.Makinson, D.North, L.Poxon, C.Rae, J.Riley, P.Ross, N.Southworth, R.Spencer, , C.Thistlethwaite, J.Waidson, N.&T.West, P.West, T.Westhead, P.Whittaker, K.Woan.

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

Neil Southworth

I'M A GALANTHOPHILE!

For me there is no more welcome sight than the first Snowdrops of the year brightening a gloomy February day and letting me know that Spring is on the way. These fragile-looking flowers can even appear when snow is still on the ground giving one of their many alternative names 'snow-piercer'. The Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis,* is a perennial bulb that is native to large parts of Europe, including probably the South West of England, although it is likely that in our area Snowdrops were initially planted and have become naturalised in woodlands.

Some folklore sees Snowdrops as being unlucky, possibly as they often grow in cemeteries and churchyards but in some religions they are a sign from the gods that good times are coming once more. One of my favourite tales is that when Eve was expelled from the Garden of Eden, flowers failed to bloom and she started to cry. An angel caught a tear, breathed on it and let it fall to earth, where it became the first Snowdrop. Their pure white blooms have long been accepted by the Catholic Church as a symbol of Candlemas (2nd February), the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary and in the past, village maidens would gather bunches of Snowdrops and wear them as symbols of purity. The link with monastic sites is striking right across Britain and many churchyards still have spectacular displays.

Snowdrops provide an early feast for bees, which in turn pollinate the flowers. The plant is used in medicine and Galantamine, which was first isolated from Snowdrops, and has been used to treat Alzheimer's disease, neuritis and neuralgia.

We are fortunate in the Chorley area to have at least two woodland sites with good displays of Snowdrops. These are Great Wood in Astley Park, especially down the slope by the path leading from the lake and Bank Hall at Bretherton. This latter site holds 'Snowdrop Sundays' during February, when for a small entry fee as fund raising towards the restoration of Bank Hall, visitors can stroll round the woodland areas of the grounds with their beautiful displays and even buy a few surplus Snowdrop bulbs to plant at home, as I have done.

Joyce Riley

ASH DIEBACK

It is only a few decades since we had the great disaster of Dutch Elm Disease which was first recognised in Europe in 1910, reached Holland in 1921 and North America in 1928 but was first diagnosed in England in 1967. Once in the UK it spread rapidly, reaching Edinburgh by the late 1970s and Inverness by 2006. The disease was first found in England around 1965 and caused havoc with the UK elm population in the 1970's. The causal agent was one of three species of the Ascomycete fungus *Ophostoma* which were spread as spores by the Elm Bark Beetle *Scolytus.* There were two species of the beetle which acted as vectors of the disease – the European Bark Beetle *S. multistrictus* and the Large Elm Bark Beetle *S. scolytus.*

The taxonomy of the genus Ulmus is complex and much disputed by Botanists with as many as 7 distinct species recognised and up to 12 interspecific hybrids suggested. The native English Elm – *Ulmus procera* – and many of its hybrids were almost entirely eliminated by the disase and what we have remaining are hedgerow plants suckering from the stumps of diseased trees. These suckers generally manage to live for about 5 or so years before succumbing again to Dutch Elm disease. The Wych Elm – *Ulmus glabra* - which was the commoner elm in the north of England and Scotland showed slightly more resistance to the disease but it too has disappeared as a mature tree from most of England though some do survive in Scotland.

Now we face another tree disease with the potential to reduce our Ash tree population in a similar manner. The Ash – *Fraxinus excelsior* – is a common tree and very important as a constituent of woodlands throughout the British Isles. It is our only native species although the Mediterranean and Southern European narrow-leaved Ash – *F. angustifolia* – is widely planted in parks, roadsides etc. This does mean that the gene pool of the Ash is much smaller than that of the rather varied Elm population so resistance to a pathogen may also be rather more limited.

Ash Dieback is caused by an another ascomycete fungus *Chalara fraxinea* which was first noted attacking Ash trees in Poland in 1992 and reached England, probably in imported trees from Holland, in 2012. It was first reported from a nursery in Buckinghamshire and soon afterwards was found in Norfolk and Suffolk. A Forestry Commission report in February 2013 noted a total of 376 outbreaks from all over the United Kingdom with some 30+ outbreaks in Scotland, around 20 in Northern Ireland

and around 10 in Wales with the remainder scattered over England with the majority in Norfolk, Suffolk and Kent. Even in Lancashire there are 3 records.

The fungus spreads by windblown spores produced from miniature toadstools on fallen leaves and twigs. These were formerly named as *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus* but we now know that these little toadstools are merely the sexual reproduction stage in the life cycle of *C. fraxinea.* The spores are shed in late spring from leaves and twigs which have fallen the previous autumn. Mature trees over about 40 years in age appear to have some resistance to this new disease but younger trees do succumb rapidly, especially in the youngest specimens. There is little we can do to fight the disease in an infected tree but if you have an Ash in your garden still not infected then collecting up all the fallen leaves and twigs in the autumn may help to prevent the disease spreading, though the windblown spores can travel many miles.

Robert Yates

BOOK REVIEW

Vegetation of Britain and Ireland

The first book published by Collins in the New Naturalist series was E.B. Ford's "Butterflies" published in 1945. My Father, who was interested in butterflies, an interest triggered by a concern about the life-cycle of the cabbage whites which decimated his wartime allotment, was given a copy in July 1947 and I still have it on my bookshelves. It sits there with some 44 other titles in this splendid and very useful series.

Now they have been joined in March 2013 by No 122 in the series "Vegetation of Britain and Ireland" by Michael Proctor who was Reader in Plant Ecology at Exeter University. He was a few years after me at Cambridge but I was interested to see in his introduction that he paid tribute to Harry Godwin and Max Walters as inspirational teachers of Botany. Harry, or to give him his full rank, style and dignity Sir Harry Godwin FRS as he later became, I thought an especially fine teacher of Botany – his main research interest was in pollen analysis and the history of the British vegetation – and always very approachable. His monumental book, "A History of the British Flora – A Factual Basis for Phytogeography", was a pioneer work in this field of research. I still refer to my copy – the 2nd edition of 1975 – produced in his retirement.

Dr. Proctor's new book does not follow in Godwin's footsteps but is a much needed work following in the footsteps of A. G Tansley's monumental work "The British Islands and their Vegetation" published by Cambridge University Press in 1939. The general topic of the flora of Britain has been surveyed before in the New Naturalist series with No 5 "Wild Flowers" by John Gilmour and Max Walters, published in 1954 and No. 10 "British Plant Life" by W.B. Turrill published in early 1948 (the New Naturalist series has never been very good at keeping to their timetable) just in time for me to buy a copy before I took my Biology examination for the Higher School Certificate.

The lengthy gap of 59 years between 1954 and 2013 has brought many changes to our British flora, some due to “development” and the consequent loss of habitats, some due to climate change which has enabled more alien plants to flourish and pushed many of our native species further north. Dr. Proctor has compiled a book about British vegetation as communities, not a book about individual habitats or plant species nor does it contain species lists for individual communities or even individual habitats. What he had done is pay sound attention to the many changes to the vegetation of the British Isles which have taken place over the years since the Second World War. He commences his book with a chapter on the climate and geology of Britain and Ireland which shape the habitats and hence plant communities which we find today. He then gives us 2 chapters on the history of the British vegetation from glacial times to the present day which owe a great deal to Harry Godwin’s pioneer work.

It is only by page 73, in the 4th chapter, that the author discusses plant communities in detail, treating them as climatic climaxes which are the consequence of plant successions that depend collectively on the requirements of individual plant species, the animals that consume them and in more recent years the impact of man’s activities. In the 16 following chapters Dr. Proctor gives a detailed account of the wide-ranging individual communities which collectively make up the vegetation of Britain and Ireland. He covers all the major community groups from seacoast, sand dunes, shingle and sea cliffs through meadows and pastures, heaths and heather moors, via the range of woodlands to fens, bogs and peat-lands and to the heights of mountain vegetation in a thorough survey of our varied plant communities.

This is a big book with 516 pages and suggestions for further reading with copious references as up-to-date as 2011. The book is well-illustrated with 328 figures, most of which are Dr. Proctor’s own colour photographs though a few are black and white distribution maps or other diagrams. My only criticism is that occasionally 4 colour photographs have been crowded on to one page, which tends to make them too small for real clarity.

The other problem with this book is its off-putting cover price of £55 but, as is common nowadays, various on-line booksellers are offering it at substantial discounts. I paid £33, post free, for my copy from a well-known on line retailer of almost everything and at that price I am satisfied that I have value for money in this very useful book.

Robert Yates

DATA PROTECTION

Records of name, address, telephone numbers and type of membership of the Society's members are now stored on computer. If you object to this information about yourself being stored in this manner, please notify the Membership Secretary in writing of your objection.