

Lancashire & Cheshire Fauna Society

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Lancashire Bird Report 2003

The Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside

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Introduction

D. A. Bickerton, S. J. White

The work involved in the compilation of the Society's reports is an ever-increasing one and, as you can see from the contents page, we now have many compilers of certain sections of the bird report. This sharing of the load certainly helps in reducing the reliance on certain key people but also, I believe, results in a more comprehensive species account. We are always looking for volunteers to help with the compilation of the report, so if you have access to a computer and e-mail and could help then please e-mail the editor, Steve White.

This year has certainly been a busy one; earlier in the year we published the General Report 2004, the first for eight years. This publication included systematic lists and articles on Cetaceans, Fishes and Macro-Lepidoptera to name a few. This was received well by the membership and there are plans to get another one out in a couple of year's time. Also on the boil is work on the Avifauna of Lancashire, a book that we plan to publish in 2005. Details of pre-publication and membership offers will be circulated nearer the time.

Membership of the Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Society is still only £5 a year though there are plans to increase this in 2006 as subscription rates have not increased in many years and publication costs have risen considerably. However, when you consider that this year's subscription includes this report and the General Report posted to your home as soon as they're published, I think you would agree that it is fantastic value for money. The Society is non-profit making charity, manned totally by volunteers who give many hours of their time freely. It provides data that is key in many aspects of conservation in the North West. Please consider joining. Details can be obtained from the web site or directly from the Honorary Secretary.

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SUBMISSION OF RECORDS

The task of compiling the report is becoming ever more daunting with the increasing number of records coming into us. With the authorship of the report split between nine people and the growing number of people using bird recording software or word-processing, the preferred method of submission is via e-mail, though posting a disc or written records is still perfectly acceptable. Please can you ensure that records are submitted in systematic order. Files sent by e-mail or on disc should be in Word or simple text format and can be zipped up to save downloading time. Paper records should preferably be on one side of A4. In order to keep to our very strict deadlines so that the report can be published during September, all records from individuals should reach us by the end of February and reserve or area reports by the end of March. All records in whatever format you wish to use should be sent to the County Recorder.

BRITISH BIRDS RARITIES

Descriptions of nationally rare species (for the list, see British Birds Rarities Reports) should be submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee via the County Recorder at the address above.

The following records have been accepted by the BBRC since the publication of our last report:

Great White Egret, Eric Morecambe Pools, 5 August 2003
American Golden Plover, Fishmoor & Parsonage Reservoirs, 28 October to 11 November 1995
American Golden Plover, Marshside & Crossens, 19 October to 28 November 2003
White-rumped Sandpiper, Wyre estuary, 3 to 11 August 2003
White-winged Black Tern, Seaforth, 14 to 17 July 2003
White-winged Black Tern, Lune estuary, 14 to 24 August 2003
Great Reed Warbler, Marton Mere, 21 to 29 May 2003
Savi's Warbler, Leighton Moss, 4 to 23 May 2003
Dusky Warbler, Fairhaven dunes, 23 to 24 October 2003

The following record is still under consideration by the BBRC and the BOURC:

Blue Jay, Thornton, Merseyside & Ainsdale, 5-7 June 2003

The following record was not accepted by the BBRC:

Black Kite, Little Singleton, 15 April 2003

COUNTY DESCRIPTION SPECIES

Descriptions of species considered to be county rarities (see list below) should be sent to the County Recorder, preferably as soon after the sighting as possible. Most descriptions now come in by the preferred e-mail route, some with digital images attached, but paper records are perfectly acceptable. The increase in digital submissions has meant that the county records committee has been able to circulate records and make decisions promptly. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in time spent in assessment of each and every record submitted with problematical records left to the annual meeting held in May. Current members of the committee are Steve White (Chair), Maurice Jones, Barry McCarthy, Pete Marsh and John Wright.

The job of the committee is to run the rule over every record of a species that requires a description and they have an obligation to apply the rules even-handedly. On odd occasions this means that a perfectly good record will be rejected (normally through lack of detail). It is very rare that a record is thought to be incorrect, just that it is not 100% proven or there is some doubt.

Many county rarities get to be seen by many observers and the committee generally accepts such records on the nod - but it is still important that someone writes the record up so that all records can be reviewed by future generations.

All records of scarce migrants and rare breeding birds are submitted each year for publication in *British Birds*. This makes it vital that we are confident about the accuracy of all records. In the past we have had two categories of 'description species' but have decided to drop the 'basic details only' one so that only major county rarities require descriptions. These need to be as full as possible - if anyone needs any guidance, please contact the recorder.

The records committee has had particular difficulties in making decisions on bird records that have been identified from calls/song only. These fall into two main categories -

- those in which the bird was only heard
- those where the call has been used to identify a bird seen only in silhouette

A third category, that of birds only heard singing, accounts for only a tiny percentage of the records received.

The purpose of this short note is to give guidance to observers on the type of information required by the committee to help us assess these records correctly.

Flyover Sightings - With the increase in the number of birders involved in observing visible migration the number of flyover records is increasing. The information the committee would like in these cases is as follows -

- the number and type of calls heard
- a literal description of the call notes (including length)
- the observer's familiarity with the species

If the bird is seen, a description of the 'jizz' of the bird would also be helpful - size, shape, mode of flight etc.

Singing - The same criteria would apply to song as to the calls described above. The committee is aware of the increase in the use of video cameras that present the opportunity to record the sound as well as sightings of unusual species. The committee would be happy to consider sound recordings but we would ask that observers only submit copies of tapes for evaluation - in case these go missing in transit.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

We are grateful to everyone who has provided illustrations and photographs. Virtually all of the images used in this report have been generated digitally. The standard is improving all the time, and this year we have had submissions from Chris Batty, Mark & Margaret Breaks, Phil Tomkinson and Steve Young as well as several others. We always welcome photographs or images from all sources; for the more unusual species, they do not need to be of top professional quality as they are useful as 'record shots'.

Illustrations this year have been kindly donated by Tony Disley (e-mail: tdisley@aol.com) and Nicola Breaks.

NEW ORDER FOR THE BRITISH LIST

The British Ornithologists Union in 2002 made some substantial changes to the species order of birds appearing on the British list. It is expected that this will be widely adopted in all future ornithological publications and is used in the Lancashire Report for the first time this year.

The main change is that wildfowl and game birds now appear at the beginning of the list. In addition the order of species within the genus *Sylvia* has been changed slightly, and finally Stilt Sandpiper is now regarded as a member of the genus *Calidris* – we look forward to incorporating this in a future report!

SPECIES REQUIRING FULL DESCRIPTIONS

These are all marked with an asterisk in the systematic list.

American Wigeon	Nightjar
Ring-necked Duck	Bee-eater
Surf Scoter	Hoopoe
Black Grouse	Wryneck
Red-necked Grebe	Short-toed Lark
Great Shearwater	Shore Lark
Sooty Shearwater	Richard's Pipit
Cory's Shearwater	Tawny Pipit
Balearic Shearwater	Yellow Wagtail (other than <i>flavissima</i> and <i>flava</i>)
Purple Heron	Nightingale
Night Heron	Bluethroat
Honey Buzzard	Cetti's Warbler
Montagu's Harrier	Aquatic Warbler
White-tailed Eagle	Marsh Warbler
Golden Eagle	Icterine Warbler
Rough-legged Buzzard	Melodious Warbler
Spotted Crake	Barred Warbler
Corncrake	Dartford Warbler
Common Crane	Pallas's Warbler
Stone Curlew	Yellow-browed Warbler
Kentish Plover	Red-breasted Flycatcher
Temminck's Stint	Golden Oriole
Pectoral Sandpiper	Red-backed Shrike
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Great Grey Shrike
Red-necked Phalarope	Woodchat Shrike
Grey Phalarope	Chough
Pomarine Skua (autumn only)	Rose-coloured Starling
Long-tailed Skua	Serin
Sabine's Gull	Common Rosefinch
Ring-billed Gull	Lapland Bunting
Roseate Tern	Ortolan Bunting
Black Guillemot	Little Bunting
Little Auk	Cirl Bunting
Puffin	

KEY TO STATUS OF BIRDS IN THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

BREEDING

Based on Breeding Bird Survey 1997-1999

Rare: breeding in < 7 tetrads or < 11 pairs

Scarce: breeding in < 38 tetrads or < 51 pairs

Uncommon: < 251 pairs

Fairly common: < 1001 pairs

Common: < 5001 pairs

Abundant: > 5000 pairs

Occasional: less than annual

Former: not in last ten years

PASSAGE/WINTER

Based on records for last 25 years (1975-1999)

Vagrant: < 11 records

Rare: < 26 records

Scarce: < 101 records

Uncommon: < 21 annually

Fairly common: < 201 annually

Common: < 2001 annually

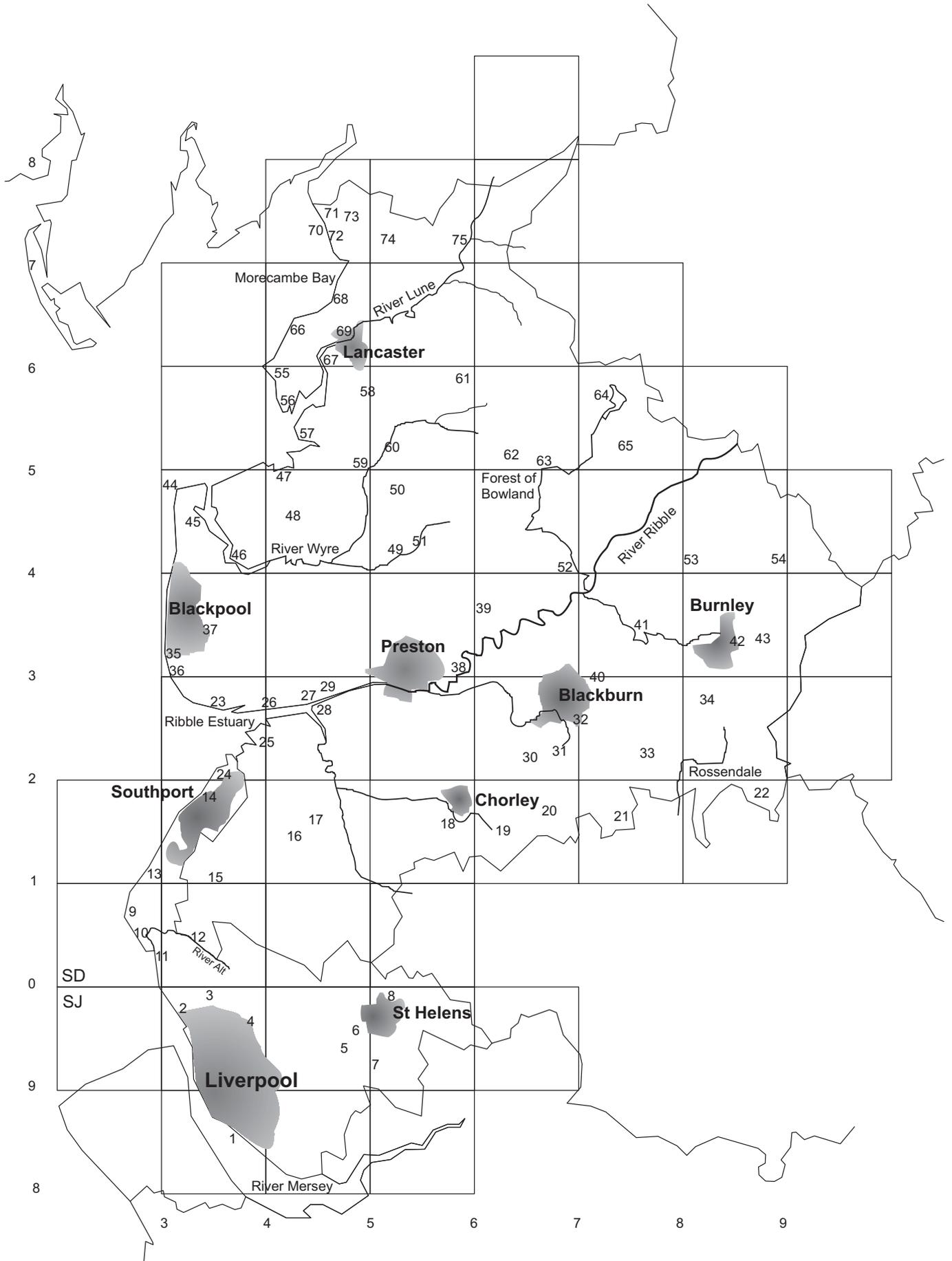
Abundant: > 2000 annually

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

1S - first-summer, 1W - first-winter, and so on.

GC	Golf Course	BBRC	British Birds Rarities Committee
GP	Gravel Pit	BOURC	British Ornithologists Union Records Committee
LNR	Local Nature Reserve	BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
NR	Nature Reserve	CBC	Common Bird Census (BTO)
NNR	National Nature Reserve	BBS	Breeding Bird Survey (BTO)
ML	Marine Lake	WeBS	Wetland Bird Survey
SW	Sewage Works		
Res	Reservoir	CNHS	Chorley Natural History Society
EMP	Eric Morecambe Pools complex	ELOC	East Lancs Ornithologists Club
MBR	Morecambe Bay Reserve (RSPB)	FBC	Fylde Bird Club
MB(ay)S	Morecambe Bay South (Lancashire section of Morecambe Bay WeBS)	LBWS	Lancaster and District Birdwatching Society
MMWWT	Martin Mere Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Reserve	LWT	Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside Wildlife Trust
MSW	Mere Sands Wood (LWT)	ROC	Rosendale Ornithologists Club
SNR	Seaforth Nature Reserve (LWT)	SWLRG	South-West Lancashire Ringing Group

A Guide to Birdwatching Sites in Lancashire and North Merseyside



Site	Map No.	Grid ref.			
Ainsdale Dunes NNR	13	SD290100	Leighton Moss (RSPB)	73	SD480750
Aldcliffe Marsh	67	SD460600	Longridge Res.	39	SD605360
Allen & Eric Morecambe Pools (RSPB)			Longton Marsh	28	SD450265
	72	SD475730	Lytham St Annes NR	36	SD310305
Altcar Withins	12	SD325050	Marshside (RSPB)	24	SD355205
Arkholme	75	SD590720	Martholme/Altham	41	SD760330
Banks Marsh/Old Hollows Farm			Martin Mere (WWT)	16	SD425145
	25	SD390230	Marton Mere	37	SD345353
Barnacre Res.	50	SD525478	Mere Sands Wood (LWT)	17	SD448160
Belmont Res.	20	SD670170	Morecambe Stone Jetty	66	SD425635
Birkacre	18	SD572150	Newton/Clifton Marsh	29	SD455290
Blea Tarn Res.	58	SD495585	Ogden/Calf Hey/Holden Wood Res.		
Brock Bottoms	51	SD550430		33	SD765225
Brockholes Quarry	38	SD585305	Otterspool	1	SJ370860
Cabin Hill NNR	10	SD280050	Pendle Hill	53	SD805415
Carr Mill Dam	8	SJ525980	Pilling Lane Ends	47	SD415495
Champion Moor	65	SD745525	Pilling Moss/Eagland Hill	48	SD425450
Claughton Hall Heronry	49	SD525425	Pine Lake/Dockacres	74	SD515725
Cleveley Mere	59	SD500500	Plex Moss	15	SD340105
Clowbridge Res.	34	SD830280	Prescot Res.	5	SJ470940
Cockersands/Bank End	57	SD430530	Rimrose Valley	3	SJ335995
Cowm Res.	22	SD880190	Rishton Res.	40	SD715300
Dunsop Valley	63	SD655500	Rivington/Anglezarke Res.	19	SD620155
Eccleston Mere	6	SJ482950	Roddlesworth Res.	30	SD650220
Fairhaven Lake	23	SD340273	Rossall Point	44	SD310475
Fazakerley	4	SJ390965	Rowley Lake	42	SD860330
Fishmoor Res.	32	SD700260	Seaforth NR/Crosby Marine Lake		
Fleetwood ICI Pools	45	SD335455		2	SJ315975
Formby Point	9	SD270065	Skerton Weir	69	SD480630
Foulridge Res.	54	SD890415	Southport Marine Lake	14	SD335180
Freckleton Naze	27	SD435275	Squires Gate	35	SD303320
Hambleton Marsh	46	SD365415	Stocks Res.	64	SD730560
Hest Bank	68	SD470670	Sunderland Point	56	SD420550
Heysham NR & Harbour	55	SD405595	Sunnyhurst Woods/Darwen Moor		
Higher Hodder Bridge	52	SD695412		31	SD680230
Hightown	11	SD295030	Ward's stone	61	SD590590
Jenny Brown's Point	70	SD460735	Warton Bank & Marshes	26	SD400270
Langden Valley	62	SD630510	Wayoh/Jumbles Res.	21	SD735160
Lea Green Flash and Tip	7	SJ503920	Woodwell	71	SD463743
Lee Green Res.	43	SD880335	Wyreside Fisheries/Street Bridge GP		
				60	SD515520

The sites shown on the map have been determined according to the frequency that they have appeared in the systematic list over the past few years. Full grid references have been included to help you pinpoint any site.

Review of the Year, 2003

John Wright

January

The year began with a week of cold, crisp weather with frost at night. Milder weather then persisted until the 20th, when cold weather returned with northerly winds, frost at night and snow on the 31st.

Wildfowl were a major feature, starting with five Long-tailed Ducks off Blackpool on the 1st, and WeBS counts indicating a minimum of 149 Scaup present in Liverpool Bay. Rare wildfowl were also a feature with the female Ferruginous Duck and drake Green-winged Teal from 2002 still present at MMMWT, the drake American Wigeon remaining on the Wyre Estuary and a drake Ring-necked Duck which appeared at Lower Rivington Reservoir on the 3rd. Whooper Swans broke all records again with 1770 at MMWWT, where 151 Ruff were also notable.

The early cold snap revealed an amazing count of eight Bitterns at Marton Mere on the 5th. In the east of the county four Iceland and three Glaucous Gulls were feeding at Whinney Hill tip and roosting at Fishmoor Reservoir, and good numbers of Short-eared Owls were present with six at Champion Moor and seven at Twiston Moor. Passerines also made a good showing with an impressive 500 Brambling at Woodwell on the 11th and 125 Corn Buntings at Sefton Meadows on the 5th with 110 at Bickerstaffe on the 15th.

February

After sleet and snow on the 2nd and 3rd, high pressure with easterly winds brought a dry, cold spell of weather with sunny days and frosty nights, with temperatures dipping to as low as -4°C. During the last week, high pressure gave way to the first heavy rain for over a fortnight.

Waxwings were much in evidence delighting birders across the county. The first returning Pinkfeet from Norfolk brought with them an adult Ross's Goose (of unknown origin), which was seen regularly in the Eagland Hill area from the 4th. Not far away, Mythop Road flood attracted up to 18 European White-fronted Geese and 14000 Common Scoter were counted on Shell Flat, suggesting a wintering flock in excess of 40000!

Passerines again featured strongly with 115 Corn Buntings, 72 Yellowhammers and 250 Skylarks in the Bradshaw Lane area on the Fylde. A Wheatear at Lane Ends on the early date of the 26th was the first 'summer' visitor and rounded off an impressive month for the Fylde. Welcome news from further inland was the sighting of two Hawfinches in Witton Park, Blackburn – the first record of this elusive species in the area for several years.

March

The month began with south-westerly winds with showers and a longer spell of rain on the 8th, when over an inch was recorded. From the 11th a high-pressure system took over and produced a remarkable 20 days of dry weather.

Crossbills from the 2002 eruption continued to be seen, particularly in Bowland, with a count of 46 in the Dunsop Valley on the 2nd. One of the most astonishing records of 2003 occurred on the 12th when a second-calendar-year White-tailed Eagle flew over Stocks Reservoir. Spring tides attracted observers to Bank Lane, Warton where Water Pipits peaked at a lowly five although they were joined by a Black Redstart. The hordes of Wigeon at Marshside attracted two drake American Wigeon on the 25th. The month ended as it had started in the Dunsop Valley where a Rough-legged Buzzard was seen on the 31st.

April

A wet first day was followed by nearly three weeks of record-breaking warm, sunny weather, with a temperature of 72°F recorded on the 16th. Low pressure from the 24th brought slow-moving fronts which were responsible for most of the month's rain.

Avocets returned in force with Marshside and Leighton Moss both recording double-figure counts. An early influx of Black Terns occurred with a peak of 20 off Blackpool on the 20th. It was encouraging that a strong passage of Lesser Redpolls took place with peaks of 60 at Marshside on the 18th and 87 at Heysham on the 17th. An adult Ring-billed Gull was a good find at Myerscough Quarry on the 27th. Spring seawatching in Morecambe Bay proved to be productive with highlights including five Pomarine Skuas on the 27th and 12 Arctic Skuas and 544 Arctic Terns on the 29th. Dotterel passage was not heavy but observers who braved the climb up Pendle Hill were rewarded with a peak of five on the 28th

May

Low pressure brought frequent showers and periods of heavy rain for the first three weeks, providing a complete contrast to April, with very few completely fine days until the final week.

A typically busy month began with a Dartford Warbler – a county first – which took up residence on Darwen Moor from the 3rd-17th. Pomarine Skuas continued to feature in Morecambe Bay with a peak of five past Heysham on the 5th. A Savi's Warbler arrived at Leighton Moss on the 9th, remaining until the 24th and regularly rewarding patient observers with excellent views. The following day a Common Crane flew over to add to the excitement. Myerscough Quarry scored again with four summer-plumaged Black Necked Grebes which performed well for visitors. The pace did not let up with a Great Reed Warbler being found at Marton Mere on the 23rd – only the third county record, the raucous song of this bird attracted the attention of many observers until it departed on the 29th. At the end of the month an excellent count of 8200 Sanderling was recorded on the Ribble.

June

Warm and sunny weather throughout most of June was followed by a rainy spell at the end of the month.

The second (and final) Ring-billed Gull of the year occurred on the 6th – again inland - this time a first-summer at Brockholes Quarry. Surprisingly, there were none at Seaforth in 2002. Stocks Reservoir was again the place to be in the middle of the month with a singing Golden Oriole on the 14th and a Manx Shearwater on the 18th. Temminck's Stints had a poor showing so a late spring migrant at MMWWT on the 26th was particularly notable. After the population crash for Bearded Tits at Leighton Moss it was pleasing to note the recovery continues with an increase in the breeding population from 10 to 18 pairs.

July

The weather was fine and warm for the first fortnight with the temperature reaching 81°F on the 15th. The second half of the month was wet with nearly 1¾ inches of rain falling in the east of the county on the 30th.

The warm and largely dry summer produced a good breeding season for many species. A total of 111 pairs of Common Terns bred on the Ribble Marshes; while Seaforth's 168 pairs fledged a good total of 130 young. The increase in the population of Mediterranean Gulls continued with a new record of seven pairs at two sites in the county and the Marsh Harriers at Leighton Moss fledged eight juveniles. Passerines also fared well – a combination of winter feeding and nest box provision in the Pilling-Preesall area produced 126 pairs of Tree Sparrows and a similar scheme encouraged eleven pairs to breed in the east of the county at Martholme. Four pairs of the usually scarce Wood Warbler bred at Roddlesworth with another three at Moor

Piece, near Bashall Eaves. Autumn passage got underway with the only Roseate Tern of the year passing Formby Point on the 13th. This site also recorded an impressive movement of 365 Manx Shearwaters on the 30th. Rarity interest was maintained with a White-winged Black Tern in full breeding plumage making several appearances at Seaforth from the 14th-17th.

August

Hot weather from the beginning of the month reached a peak of 81°F on the 9th. After thunderstorms and heavy rain on the 10th and 11th, dry weather returned and temperatures remained pleasantly warm for the rest of the month.

August produced a run of rare birds beginning on the 3rd with a summer-plumaged White-rumped Sandpiper found on the Wyre Estuary at Shard Bridge. After a long gap this species has now been recorded annually in the county since 2001. On the 5th Lancashire's second Great White Egret appeared on the Eric Morecambe Pools but soon moved on, much to the disappointment of listers in the north of the county. Also on the 5th a Corncrake was seen briefly at Sefton Meadows with another at Weeton on the 15th. A moulting White-winged Black Tern on the Lune Estuary at Conder Green on the 14th –24th was much more obliging.

September

Changeable weather at the start of the month gave way to high pressure, resulting in warm, dry weather from the 12th to the 17th. Autumnal weather from the 24th to the end of the month produced average temperatures during the day but chilly nights.

The most notable feature of the month was the influx of Pectoral Sandpipers across the country with Lancashire records between the 8th & 14th at Stocks (2), Brockholes Quarry, Anglezarke Reservoir and Birkdale. Seawatching produced Black Guillemots off Formby on the 10th and Starr Gate on the 17th. An adult Red-breasted Goose appeared amongst Pinkfeet at MMWWT on the 28th and stayed in the area until the end of the year. Initially it generated a lot of interest but after wintering with the feral Barnacles it ended up at Knowsley Park in 2004.

October

The month started with changeable weather but from the 11th cold northerly and easterly winds kept temperatures down. There was only one day of appreciable rain, the 26th.

An exciting month began with a flock of 250 Twite at Cant Clough Reservoir on the 5th. Strong onshore winds early in the month produced a Grey Phalarope off Crosby and Leach's Petrels at a number of sites, with a peak of ten off Jenny Brown's Point on the 9th. Another Pectoral Sandpiper appeared at the ICI Pool, Thornton on the 12th.

The easterly winds produced a Yellow-browed Warbler at Marshside on the 13th. Visible migration watchers noted excellent passage during this period with Jays and Coal Tits prominent and the highlight being an arrival of Richards Pipits. The earliest was particularly noteworthy, being the first east Lancs record at Parsonage Reservoir on the 14th-15th. This was followed by sightings at Marshside on the 19th to 22nd and Crosby Marine Park and Heysham on the 24th. Equally well received was a passage of Hawfinches with two over Marton Mere and Fairhaven on the 14th and one the following day at Heysham. The Great Grey Shrike returned to Stocks on the 17th but attention was again focussed on Marshside on the 19th with the discovery of a juvenile American Golden Plover. Although initially elusive, the bird eventually settled on Crossens where it could be observed along with a dozen Short-eared Owls. The crowning moment of the month occurred on the 23rd with the discovery of a Dusky Warbler at Fairhaven. Only the second record for the county, this skulker showed well at times to a large and appreciative audience and was last seen on the 24th.

November

A mild month with rainfall totals close to normal. There was a wet spell from the 11th to the 19th, with gales on the 14th and 28th.

A count of 171 Gadwall at Leighton Moss on the 5th was a reserve record. Two Shorelarks arrived at Fairhaven on the 11th but regular disturbance on this busy beach ensured that they soon moved on. Three Velvet Scoter off Blackpool on the 19th was the highest count of the year, and the Ferruginous Duck returned to MMWWT on the 20th. On the 21st a boat trip out to the Shell Flat to monitor the Common Scoter flock located the probable Lancashire wintering grounds of Little Gulls for the first time, with 200 on Shell Flat near the Lune Deep. Another surprise on this trip was a high count of ten Little Auks. A second Great Grey Shrike appeared in Bowland on the 24th, setting up a winter territory near Chipping, and a Red Kite also took up residence in the Hodder Valley. Interest in the saltmarsh pipits of Lancashire has sparked much debate recently and high tides revealed 15 Rock and one Water Pipit at Heaton Marsh on the 25th.

December

The month began with cold northerly winds and frosty nights. There was a change to wet weather from the 20th with a week of poor weather until the 28th when the cold northerly winds returned, bringing snow on the 31st.

A most unusual record was of a first-winter Turtle Dove seen on the 5th at Whyndyke Farm, Blackpool. The Ring-necked Duck returned to Lower Rivington Reservoir on the 8th and remained to the month's end. Smew were hard to find with the only records being single redheads at Stocks and Leighton Moss. The two Shorelarks relocated to St. Annes Beach along with four Snow Buntings, whilst an impressive flock of 50 Snow Buntings took up residence on the summit of Pendle Hill.

What is most notable about Lancashire in winter is the wildfowl and wader spectacle and this was highlighted by the roost of 30000 Knot on the Helipad at Heysham and the 58817 Wigeon on the Ribble, forming over a quarter of the British wintering population.

Systematic List

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MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor*

Uncommon breeding resident, common winter visitor.

International importance: 2400. National importance: 375

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	42	138	119	103	37	78	39	131	113	53	199	173
Ribble WeBS	42	154	74	69	80	25	6	17	22	65	65	114
Southport ML	108	63	40	71	146	128	140	151	176	193	116	154
Marton Mere	38	11	12	14	10	14	13	8	9	9	3	14

Ribble WeBS counts do not now include Southport Marine Lake. At Fleetwood Marine Lake there were 89 in January, 32 in March and 57 in October, but no counts were received for the formerly important Fairhaven Lake.

Elsewhere on the Fylde there were large numbers in the Glasson/Thurnham area with 125 on 23 Aug and up to 167 in November and December; 96 at Conder Green on 21 June and 136 on 17 Aug; c.80 at Cockersands on 12 April; up to 25 at Myerscough Quarry in October to November; 18 at Reams Hill Lake, Mythop on 12 April and up to 20 there in September to October; 41 at Sand Villa, Pilling on 25 Oct, and 17 at Freckleton on 23 March with 27 on 9 Nov. Other maxima outside the breeding season included 42 at Brockholes Quarry in September, 29 on Crosby Marine Lake on 20 Aug and eleven overflying Newton Lake, St Helens on 13 April. It is probable that the adult population in the ELOC area totalled no more than 20 birds, although there were small numbers elsewhere in the east. Two at Stocks Reservoir on 21 March and one on 2 June were only the eighth and ninth records for this site.

Breeding was reported from many sites, including three pairs at Leighton Moss and Fairhaven Lake (two successfully at the latter site), and at least three fledged young at Southport Marine Lake. Single pairs bred successfully at the following sites: Glasson Dock and Glasson Canal; Freckleton; Newton Marsh; Pilling, Marton Mere; Cypress Point, Lytham; Longton Marsh; Hesketh Out Marsh; Marshside; Rishton; and Fleetwood Power Station Lagoon.

Unsuccessful breeding was reported from a number of sites, including Sefton Park, Liverpool; SNR; MSW; Heysham; Brockholes Quarry (two pairs); river Calder at Altham-Marholme; Gawthorpe Hall, Padiham; Lowerhouse Lodges, Burnley; and Birkacre, Chorley. Seventeen pairs were recorded during the BTO Waterways Survey on the River Lune between Lancaster and Kirkby Lonsdale, the second highest total in 22 years recording.

BEWICK'S SWAN *Cygnus columbianus*

Common but declining winter visitor.

International importance: 290. National importance: 81.

The county continues its seemingly inexorable decline in importance for Bewick's Swans. MMWWT did not have a flock attaining even national importance this year, whilst the Ribble flock failed to reach international significance.

The number of marked birds within the Lancashire population continues to decrease, so it is more difficult to follow the movements of individuals. One, with the code ZCI on its plastic leg-ring, was at the Ribble on 12 Jan and 6 Feb, but in the meantime was reported at Welney, Cambridgeshire on 24 Jan! The number of juveniles in the flocks was low in the first winter period with, for example, only ten juveniles out of two flocks totalling 198 birds on 2 Feb; but there were more juveniles in the second winter period, with 27 amongst two flocks totalling 149 birds on 15 Dec. There were comparatively few birds on the Fylde with the exception of a large flock on the north shore of the Ribble at Warton.

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	65	12	1	12	40	50
Ribble	208	198	148	29	48	149
N Fylde	23	16	0	0	12	15
S Fylde	5	3	0	0	2	6

Apart from a singleton that called in briefly at MMWWT on 29 March, the last were three on Longton Marsh on 23 March, the laggards from a flock of 60 birds there on 15 March. A single on 22 Oct was the first bird back in autumn.

In the first winter period the Ribble birds fed either on winter wheat at Hundred End or Hesketh Out Marsh, on saltmarsh at Longton, or, unusually for this species, on ungrazed saltmarsh at Warton, a new feeding site, which had up to 183 birds in February. In the second winter period they fed on re-sown grass either at Hundred End or at Beconsall Lane, Hesketh Bank.

Away from the major areas, birds were observed at the following sites: Leighton Moss, with five on 4 Dec; Marton Mere, with three on two dates in January and February, two on 8 Nov and up to six on three dates in December; one at SNR on 21 March; five at Weeton, near Blackpool on 1 Jan and six nearby at Peg's Lane, Lytham on 15 Jan; four were at Mythop, near Blackpool on 30-31 Dec; up to twelve at Glasson on 29 Nov to 31 Dec, feeding with Mute Swans; nine at Naze Point, Freckleton on 29-30 Dec; and five seen flying south along the shore at Lytham on 30 Dec. In east Lancashire, there were five on Parsonage Reservoir on 7 Nov and three at Fishmoor Reservoir on 7 Dec with two there on 31 Dec. Unusually, there were no records at Marshside.

WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus*

Common and increasing winter visitor.

International importance: 210. National importance: 57

2002. There were two birds at the 'traditional' site at the Turton–Wayoh Reservoir on 22 Oct and five were at Delph Reservoir on 14 Nov.

2003. MMWWT recorded another site record of 1770 in January, a slight increase of eight over 2001, and as in 2002 there were large flocks in both north and south Fylde. In the past ten years or so the normal pattern has been that many birds have fed on or near the Ribble estuary in autumn but with fewer than 50 in this area after Christmas. 2003 was different and up to 170 birds remained, feeding either on winter wheat at Hundred End and Hesketh Out Marsh or on saltmarsh at Warton or Longton, until at least mid-March. In the main they fed alongside Bewick's Swans but mostly roosted at MMWWT, unlike most of the Bewick's which largely roosted on a large pool on Hesketh Out Marsh or on the river Ribble. In the first winter period the percentage of juveniles amongst the MMWWT flock was about average with 13.6 % young.

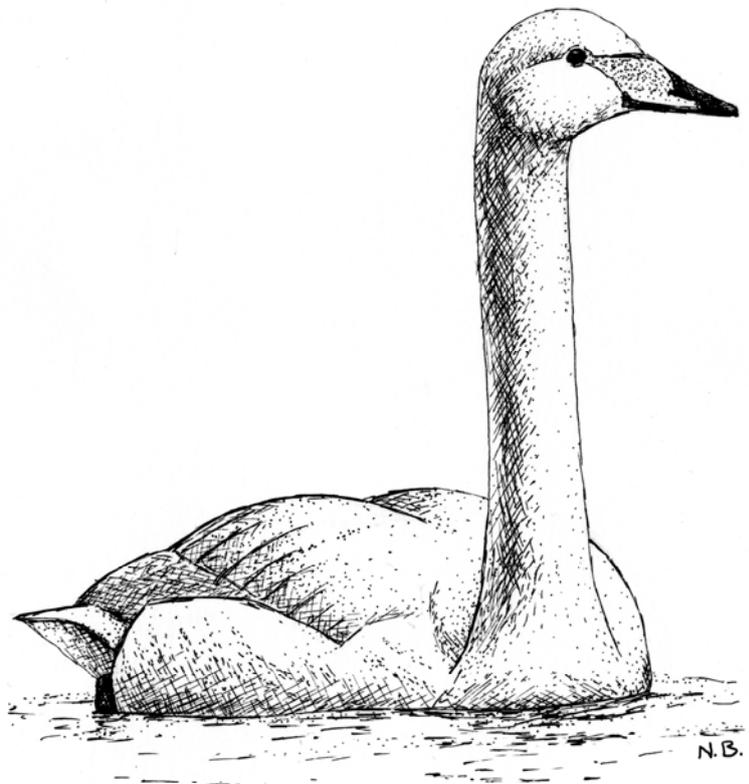
Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
MWWT	1770*	1620	1480	23	23	860	1478	1580
Ribble	71	167	91	1	0	27	261	277
N Fylde	107	43	16	0	0	36	86	95
S Fylde	46	15	20	0	0	5	91	91

* Site record

The north Fylde flocks fed largely either on flooded fields at Fluke Hall, Pilling or on Stalmine Moss. They tend to leave this area earlier than is the case with the MMWWT birds and the last left on 21 March. In south Fylde up to 46 were feeding at Ream Hills Lake, Mythop in January and early February and single figures stopped briefly at Marton Mere on 18 & 24 Jan.

Five flew over Darwen on 5 Jan and two on 22 Jan, while five adults were at Stocks Reservoir on 3 April. Forty-four at Belmont Reservoir on 14 April comprised the largest herd at the site since 1982.



Four injured birds spent the summer at MMWWT but the last healthy birds left the region from MMWWT on the night of 6 April. Migration started in earnest on 11 March and by the 15th the flock of 1400 at MMWWT had almost halved in numbers. This passage was observed at Starr Gate, Blackpool when early morning watches recorded 65 flying north-west on 13 March, 21 on 14 March and 73 on the 30th.

The first to return were 19 at MMWWT on the early date of 23 Sept. By the end of October up to 600 Whooper Swans were feeding on stubble fields at Low Meadows, Rufford and about 350 at MMWWT, and by early November numbers had increased to almost 1500. In November and December up to 300 fed at Hundred End and Hesketh Out Marsh on re-sown grass and winter wheat. On 19 Nov 149 were trapped at MMWWT, including 45 previously-marked birds.

More than 300 marked individuals were recorded at MMWWT or on the Ribble and eight in the north Fylde area in winter 2003/4.

The first were recorded in north Fylde on 7 Oct when two flew over Eagland Hill and by 2 Nov there were 83 in the area; the bulk of these fed in the Pilling area in November and December. The first in south Fylde were two at Ream Hills Lake, Mythop on 12 Oct, and numbers increased to 91 by the end of November, remaining until the end of the year. Up to six stopped at Marton Mere on three dates in the second winter period and one at Fairhaven Lake on 4 Nov was unusual.

Away from the main haunts, there were up to 13 on the Irrigation Lake, Downholland Moss in October to early December, and eleven were seen to fly in from the south-west and land on the sea off Formby on 23 Oct, flying off to the north after a short rest. Perhaps they had overshot their destination at MMWWT? Up to eleven were at Leighton Moss on five dates in October and two adults were on Stocks Reservoir on 21 Oct with six adults there on 1 Nov, joined by two juveniles on 3 Nov with two adults remaining until 4 Nov. Five were on Belmont Reservoir on 30 Oct and eight on 4 Nov, with two on Rivington Reservoir on 28 Oct, while eight flew over Delph Reservoir on 6 Nov. Three were at Farleton in the Lune Valley on 12 Oct with seven there on 8 Dec.

NOTE: Records for several goose species published in the 2000 report actually referred to 1999. In order to keep the historical record accurate, the correct records are published below.

BEAN GOOSE *Anser fabalis*

Uncommon winter visitor.

An adult *fabalis* was at Pilling on 8 Jan (MJ) and this or another at MMWWT from 15 March until 7 May (CGT *et al*). Three of the same race were at MMWWT from 13-29 Dec (LB).

A single *rossicus* was at MMWWT on 7 Jan (LB) and three of this race were there on 21 Jan, with one from 18 Feb until at least 12 March. A single *rossicus* was at MMWWT from 2 Oct until the year's end (LB, CGT *et al*).

Six birds of indeterminate race were at Todderstaffe Hall, near Blackpool on 31 Dec (PE, PS).

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Abundant winter visitor.

International and national importance: 2400.

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	10000	8650	2200	600	250	6	2	6	9200	12100	7200	10500
Ribble(WeBS)	5138	710	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	15853	10162	15600

There were approximately 6000 fewer birds in the county in January compared with the counts for 2002. A total of 26860 was counted across the county on 5 Jan, with 14600 on the Fylde, 4500 on the Ribble, 4700 at MMWWT and 3060 at Altcar-Little Crosby. Until mid-January there were few birds roosting or feeding at MMWWT but by early February 8650 birds roosted there, mostly feeding on the reserve. There were 6000 at Blundellsands in January and 3850 there on 16 Feb. Other large flocks included over 4000 on Cumming Carr, Pilling on 7 Jan; a total of more than 8000 in the Pilling-Staining area on 31 Jan; 7000 at Preesall on 1 Feb; and 5000 at Cockerham, 5000 at Eagland Hill, Pilling and 2000 at Stalmine on 15 Feb. A massive flock of 20000 was in the Sweetings area, near Cockerham on 22 Feb and more than 10000 were at Pilling Marsh the next day. There were still 1400 birds at Eagland Hill on 19 April.

Away from the main sites, 850 were on Aldcliffe Marsh on 1 Feb with there 452 on 2 March and 680 on 16 March, and at least 2000 at Reed's Moss, Rainford on 21 Jan. Throughout the first winter period 28 flocks, totalling 1960 birds, were recorded flying, mostly west, over east Lancashire. On 4 Jan 500 flew over SNR, mostly north, while 60 flying over Princes Park, Liverpool at midday on 15 Feb were unusual. A very late flock of 300 birds over Heysham on 10 May almost coincided with the departure of 230 birds from MMWWT on 8-9 May. The last 24 birds left MMWWT on 12 May.

A group of nine on Pilling Marsh on 17 Aug (probably injured birds) were followed by six free-flying individuals on Pilling Marsh on 30 Aug and perhaps the same birds, consisting of a family group, at MMWWT the following day. These were almost certainly feral birds. The first 'genuine' arrivals were 38 flying south over Pilling Lane Ends on 8 Sept and 23 south over Garstang the next day. A hundred arrived at MMWWT on 11 Sept and within two weeks there were 9200 birds there. A total of 1300 flew south over the sea past Starr Gate, Blackpool in the space of four hours on 21 Sept and 4000 were feeding on stubble and potato fields at Eagland Hill, Pilling on 27 Sept.

A coordinated count on 18 Sept produced a total of 27600 in the county, with 6300 roosting on Pilling Sands (feeding at Eagland Hill), 1800 roosting on Preesall Sands (feeding at Pilling Lane), 2000 roosting on the Wyre estuary (feeding at Knott End), 9600 roosting on the Ribble estuary, 6368 at MMWWT, and 958 at Downholland Moss, near Formby. The count of 16 Nov yielded a total of 24983: 6100 roosting on Pilling sands, 4000 roosting on Preesall Sands, 3300 roosting on the Wyre estuary (now feeding at Stalmine), 4160 at MMWWT, 2000 at Downholland, and 1730 at Altcar-Little Crosby.

There were 7400 at Scarisbrick on 20 Oct, c.5000 at Plex Moss on 22 Oct, 1400 at Bickerstaffe on 13 Nov and 8000 on Banks Marsh on 16 Dec with at least 5000 there on 29 Dec. In north Fylde there were at least 2-3500 in the Pilling area throughout November, 4000 at Pilling on 9 Dec, 2700 at Todderstaffe Hall, near Blackpool on 30-31 Dec and 3200 at Rawcliffe Moss, near Great Eccleston on the same days. 1700 flew west over Crosby to their roost on Taylor's Bank on the Alt Estuary on 1 Oct; 300 roosting on mud-flats at Fairhaven on 12 Nov were unusual. There were 34 skeins totalling approximately 2700 birds reported flying over east Lancashire during the second winter period, some heading east and some west. A skein of 130 flying east over Lowerhouse Lodges, Burnley on 1 Nov at 7.50 am was unusual for this area. A few scattered feral birds were in east Lancashire.

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons*

Uncommon winter visitor.

2000

Russian race

There were few records of either race. A family group of two adults and three juveniles was at MMWWT in January and a juvenile at Marshside between 9-28 April.

Greenland race

One was with Pink-footed Geese at Pilling on 24-26 Feb and one at Thurnham from 27 Feb to 4 March, with a second there on 28 Feb. One was at Aldcliffe Marsh on 11 March and perhaps the same individual was at Pilling on 16-17 March. Singles were at Downholland Moss on 5 Feb and MMWWT on 1 Nov and 17-18 Dec. Two of indeterminate race flew over Aldcliffe on 24 Dec.

2003

Russian race

There were up to six birds in the Fleetwood area during January and five in February, up to nine in Over Wyre from January to March, with one still there on 23 March, and up to 18 in the

Staining-Mythop area from January to March, with the peak occurring from 23-25 Feb. It is probable that the Fleetwood, Over Wyre and Staining sightings all refer to the same individuals.

Two were on Heysham Moss on 25 Feb, while MMWWT had one on 8 Jan, two on 21 Jan and one from 26 Feb to 25 March, and two were on Downholland Moss on 25 Feb.

In the second winter period there were three at Thurnham, near Glasson on 9 Nov, and two at Pilling from 7-9 Dec. At MMWWT there was one on 24 Sept; one on 7 Oct; a juvenile on 22 Oct; two juveniles on 1 Nov; eight, including five juveniles, on 12 Nov; one on 24 Nov; four on 3 Dec; one on 12 Dec; and an adult and a juvenile on 19 Dec. An adult was at Marshside on 9 Dec.

Greenland race

One was in the Over Wyre-Cockerham-Pilling area on 22-26 Feb. There were two adults at MMWWT on 28 Jan; one there from 5-7 Feb (with perhaps the same individual at nearby Scarisbrick on 6 Feb); one on 21 Feb; and two on 7 & 12 March. An adult on Catchdale Moss on 15 Nov was only the third record for St Helens. Two juveniles at MMWWT on 11 Oct were followed by an adult and juvenile there on 13 Dec and an adult from 20-30 Dec. Finally, a juvenile was at Todderstaffe Hall, Blackpool on 31 Dec.

Feral

In the east of the county, up to four birds, described as feral, were at Walverden Reservoir from 16-26 Feb, with presumably the same group noted at the same site on 16 Nov.

GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser*

Scarce feral breeder and uncommon winter visitor.

International importance (wild): Icelandic 1000; NW Scottish 90.

National importance (wild): Icelandic 819; NW Scottish 96.

2000

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	308	214	13	9	11	15	150	440	500	473	440	360
Marshside	20	12	28	20	41	36	86	60	110	93	100	34
Wilkinson's												
GP, Preesall	100	7	54	39	8	36	148	221	175	/	176	244
Southport ML	115	97	117	33	73	209	19	17	12	11	22	10

A total of nine pairs bred at four sites in north Fylde, producing an amazing total of 59 young. Numbers were lower in east Lancs, with a peak of eight at Stocks Reservoir on 27 June. A single with Pink-footed Geese on Plex Moss on 12 Feb may have been wild.

2003

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	420	92	57	24	27	20	16	73	372	620	580	650*
Marshside	/	/	/	34	54	35	152	374	280	91	80	70
Bourbles Pit,												
Preesall	182	/	/	/	/	/	115	/	368	330	419	410
Southport ML	79	113	136	52	154	214	150	8	54	7	13	13
Leighton Moss	280	288	318	154	94	118	97	186	170	270	230	344

* Site record

Birds move between different sites within regions, so that MMWWT, Marshside and Southport Marine Lake, for example, "share" the same birds, and the Morecambe Bay WeBS counts will include Leighton Moss birds.

Away from Bourbles Pit, other large flocks on the Fylde included 127 in March and 155 in December at Wilkinson's Gravel Pit, Preesall, 135 at Stalmine in July, and 85 in January and 110 in July at Stanley Park, Blackpool. Stocks Reservoir held a record 34 on 17 Dec and Brockholes Quarry a record 29 on 30 March. Thirty-seven circled over Ogden Reservoir, Haslingden on 3 June, 60 flew north over Croston Moss on 11 Oct and 70 were on Eccleston Mere, St Helens on 24 Sept.

The previous record count at MMWWT of 635 from August 1996 was broken with 650 in December. The peak count in the Lune Valley was 127 on 12 Oct. It is probable that there are more than 1500 birds in Lancashire.

There were 61 goslings on Southport Marine Lake in May, 71 in June and 17 in July – it is assumed that these were from nests on this lake. In addition to this important breeding site, single pairs bred at Marshside, Stocks Reservoir, Wilkinson's Gravel Pit, unsuccessfully at MSW and possibly at Prescot Reservoirs. There were 18 pairs breeding at Leighton Moss but success is not known.

The following birds, seen in flocks of Pinkfeet, may have been wild: two in Over Wyre from 1-8 Jan; three at Pilling on 4 Feb; one in the Pilling area from February to early April, and one at Marshside-Crossens on 7-9 Dec. John Wilson presents a detailed account of the situation regarding wild birds in north Lancashire elsewhere in this report.

CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis*

Fairly common breeder and common winter visitor.

2000

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Marshside	51	2	9	27	45	80	188	185	105	176	120	58
SNR	60	139	31	13	11	43	71	80	100	125	80	30
Stocks Res.	163	87	74	48	69	304	273	153	175	144	62	129
Anglezarke	4	0	0	3	2	70	94	135	357	2	20	13

Annual maxima at other sites included 157 at MMWWT in September; 220 at Eccleston Mere in November; 191 at Wrightington, near Parbold in September; 152 at Fairhaven in July; 132 at Belmont Reservoir in June; 198 at Foulridge Reservoir in January; 129 at Rishton Reservoir in December and 113 at Brockholes Quarry in October. There was a reserve record of 210 birds at MSW on 18 Sept.

The main breeding sites were Stocks Reservoir, Eccleston Mere and Belmont Reservoir.

2002

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Belmont Res.	40	61	110	74	114	176	179	64	76	22	21	22

2003

Despite 14 years of licensed control measures at Belmont Reservoir, the June total was a site record and numbers continued to increase in the region as a whole. 50 pairs bred around in the Belmont area, but they reared only 13 young. Delph Reservoir, in the same catchment, logged a site record of 64 on 28 Aug. In east Lancashire there were annual maxima at the following reservoirs of 105 (Nov) at Parsonage; 116 (Jan) at Rishton; 120 (Aug) at Black Moss; unusually 221 (Aug) at Lee Green; and 123 (Dec) at Whitemoor. 420 at Fairhaven Lake on 15 Jun were exceptional.

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Marshside	/	/	/	34	35	67	120	300	18	100	17	100
Southport ML	63	107	84	36	141	189	156	132	61	51	35	53
SNR	205	/	/	/	20	73	83	81	60	20	31	35
Stocks Res.	234	202	82	80	102	308	252	300	255	266	240	232
Foulridge Res	/	400	/	/	/	/	225	265	425	/	200	400
Walverden Res	/	380	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	300	211	337
Belmont Res	6	39	105	82	187	260	155	125	47	38	6	25

Other peak counts included 230 at Myerscough Quarry on 23 Sept, 136 at the Snab, River Lune on 16 Feb, and 300 at Eccleston Mere, St Helens in September. There were 42 juveniles with 189 adults at Southport Marine Lake in June, three pairs produced 26 goslings between them at Marshside, 48 adults with 33 goslings at Calderstones Park, Liverpool in July and 50 adults with 30 goslings on Eccleston Mere in May. Breeding success such as this is helping to drive up the regional population. In September 370 there were on the river Douglas at Hesketh Bank, a record 424 at MMWWT, and a record 291 at MSW – all records probably refer to the same flock.

Other races.

A small bird of uncertain race was with Pinkfeet at MMWWT on 7 Feb (CGT), and a small, dark bird was with Pinkfeet at MMWWT on 29 Oct (MJ)

BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis***Uncommon winter visitor and scarce feral breeder.****2000**

Wild birds were seen in both winter periods with Pink-footed Geese. The flock of 15, including four with darvic rings, which had been at Marshside at the end of 1999, lingered there until 23 Jan. Two were at Preesall on 9 Jan, one at Pilling on 29 Jan, three at Pilling on 5 Feb, whilst ten (perhaps some of the Marshside group) were at Pilling on 6 Feb. Up to five were in the MMWWT area between 5 Oct and 10 Nov, three of them with darvic rings. Singles were at Ince Blundell on 20 Dec, Carnforth Inner Marsh on 7-8 Oct and Pilling on 13-15 Oct & 27 Dec. A group of seven flew south-east over SNR on 16 Oct and may also have been wild.

Feral flocks included up to 43 at MMWWT in both winter periods, eight at Stocks Reservoir in August and 30 at Eccleston Mere in September.

2003

Birds thought to be of wild origin were almost all with flocks of Pinkfeet. They included one at MMWWT on 10 Jan and five on 23 & 28 Jan and 3 Feb, including one with an orange 'darvic' ring, definitely from the Svalbard population. One was with Pinkfeet near Pilling on 12 Jan with up to four in the same area in February, and there were singles at Fleetwood on 2 Feb and Mythop on 16 March.

There were two probably wild birds at MMWWT on 25 Sept and a single at Crossens on 29 Dec. Five possibly wild birds were at Pilling on 30 Sept, eight there on 5 Oct and three on 9 Oct. An intriguing sighting of 74 birds flying north over Pilling on 28 Sept may have been birds from the Solway population that had overshot.

The usual feral flock numbering up to 62 birds was at MMWWT from 1 Jan; all had left by 21 March. Thirty were at Knowsley Park on 8 March and the same feral flock was seen on Prescott Reservoirs, peaking at 50 on 9 Feb. They returned to MMWWT later in the autumn than usual with no substantial numbers until 41 on 21 Oct, increasing to 56 by the end of the year. The late arrival date at MMWWT coincided with sightings of 47 birds at Prescott Reservoirs on 24 Sept.

Up to 16 were at Stocks Reservoir during August and there were sightings of odd birds from other sites in east Lancashire.

BRENT GOOSE *Branta bernicla*

Uncommon winter visitor.

2000

Dark-bellied race (*bernicla*).

Two or three birds were at Pilling Lane Ends from 1 January to 21 Feb. An immature was at MMWWT on 4-21 Jan and 12-25 Feb. One of unspecified race was at Marshside on 9 April and perhaps the same was there on 19 May.

The most important event of the year was a flock of c.70 flying south off Heysham on 30 Oct, an unprecedented number for Lancashire. One flew south past Cockerham on 1 Oct and perhaps the same bird was on the marsh there on the following day. One flew north past Blackpool on 21 Oct and one was Heysham on 24 & 27 Oct. Two were at Pilling on 2-29 Oct. A juvenile was at Knowsley on 22 Oct and an adult was at Crossens on 23 Dec.

Pale-bellied race (*hrota*).

The only bird in the first winter period was one was at Marshside on 1 & 9 Jan. One was at MMWWT between 19 Sept and 19 Oct, and one was in north Fylde from 28 Oct until the year's end. Two flew past Rossall Point on 10 Dec and one was at Marshside on 27 Dec.

2003

Dark-bellied race (*bernicla*).

An adult was at Pilling on 27 Feb to 5 March and perhaps the same individual at Marton Mere during the same period. There were three adults at Marshside on 9 Nov and three adults and a first-winter at Warton Marsh on 16 Dec. Five were at Pilling on 7 Nov and an adult at Preesall on 27 Nov.

Pale-bellied race (*hrota*).

An adult was at Mythop from 1-3 Jan and probably the same individual at various sites Over Wyre from 5 Jan to 10 April.

SHELDUCK *Tadorna tadorna*

Abundant winter visitor to the coast and estuaries. Fairly common breeder. Scarce in east where occasional breeder.

International importance: 3000. National importance: 782

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	2566	1185	1581	1187	848	1361	652	184	2822	3314	2748	3589
Ribble	2025	1585	1821	1538	1038	1367	1834	986	3632	3829	1564	3063
Alt	204	148	68	98	64	121	79	10	217	387	277	26

Monthly peak counts

MMWWT	1350*	1435*	1210	617	356	192	/	/	17	204	285	884
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* site record

In addition to the At Morecambe Bay WeBS data, 2630 were counted between Pilling and Cockerham Marshes on 9 Jan. On the north side of the Mersey 263 were in Oglet Bay in March with 387 there in September.

Two trends from the key sites were reinforced this year. A new record count was made for the eighth consecutive year at MMWWT, Britain's most important inland site for this species. Secondly, summer counts on the Ribble Estuary, consistently the county's best site, continue to

build as more birds stay to moult in the region. The only evidence of eastbound moult migration was of 34 flying over Clowbridge Reservoir on 27 July. A month later 225 were counted in several flocks going north off Starr Gate, Blackpool on 24 Aug, indicating a return migration from moult sites.

Several hundred pairs breed in the county most years, utilising the broad band of some 10-20km of lowland farmland along the coast and inland along the Lune. The BTO Waterways Bird Survey, covering the River Lune between Lancaster Skerton Weir and the county boundary at Kirkby Lonsdale, recorded 53 territorial pairs. At MMWWT a typical minimum of 27 broods hatched between late May and early July. Away from the coastal and mossland breeding areas there was one successful pair in the Chorley area near Withnell Fold, while in the east a pair was at the former breeding site of Wood End Waste Water Treatment Works, near Burnley in late May, but was not seen subsequently. There was an unusual record of two adults and six juveniles at Foulridge Reservoir in August.

WIGEON *Anas penelope*

Abundant winter visitor, especially on the Ribble Marshes. Fairly common on some reservoirs in the east.

International importance: 15000. National importance: 4060

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	4268	3261	637	38	15	1	1	0	279	1201	2083	3508
Ribble	33940	31862	9927	457	8	10	4	2	4162	26068	40914	58817

Monthly peak counts at Inland Sites

MMWWT	1260	1300	1000	112	4	3	1	0	106	580	690	1770
Stocks Res	71	7	34	16	3	0	2	4	26	99	200	466
Myerscough												
Quarry	352*	246	267	30	0	0	0	0	53	/	/	228
MSW	173	135	93	6	0	0	0	0	2	4	20	133
Foulridge	115	134	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	2	20	55

* site record

Typically, the Ribble Estuary held nearly 15% of the British wintering population, but the peak count was nearly 20000 less than last year's. The massive counts on the Ribble somewhat eclipse other sites, but this year's peak counts at the inland sites of Myerscough Quarry and Stocks Reservoir were notable for this estuary-loving duck.

Counts dropped dramatically during early May, only five sites hosted the species by the end of the month. Late passage was noted off Starr Gate, when seven flew south on 10 May. There were one or two records in July and early August which were thought to relate to over-summering birds. The first evidence of return migration was on 26 Aug when two were at Brockholes Quarry. By late September regular wintering sites were consistently recording the species; this was perhaps a little earlier than in recent years.

AMERICAN WIGEON * *Anas americana*

Vagrant.

An adult drake from 2002 remained on the Wyre Estuary until 8 Feb, favouring Barnaby's Sands on the eastern side of the estuary. It was subsequently reported from the pool at Fleetwood Tip in early March.

For the third spring out of four an adult drake was discovered at Marshside. The bird appeared on 23 March and was joined by a second drake on the 25th (PK). Perhaps one of

these was the Fylde bird, following the similar pattern of movement noted in the 2000 county report.

The county total stands at approximately 22, though some records doubtless refer to returning birds; all but two have been drakes.

GADWALL *Anas strepera*

Fairly common in winter when supplemented by immigrants. Rare in east. Scarce feral breeding populations, especially south-west and north.

International importance: 600. National importance: 171

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Monthly peak counts, Leighton Moss complex												
EMP	33	31	31	20	/	27	24	4	1	20	107	151
L Moss	10	17	6	9	3	76	86	118	111	/	175*	14
Monthly peak counts: West Lancashire												
MMWWT	73	54	21	10	7	5	1	0	19	11	13	20
MSW	30	18	14	12	7	3	1	3	8	17	20	26

* site record

There will have been duplication of birds within these two pairs of sites. No data were submitted from Nuck's Wood, which lies between Mere Sands Wood and MMWWT and has hosted 50-100 in recent winters.

The record counts at Leighton Moss and high counts at the Eric Morecambe Pools build on last years upturn in numbers and follow a series of disappointing years.

The only double-figure counts elsewhere were 19 at Brockholes in March with 16 there in November and December, twelve at Prescott Reservoirs in March and eleven there in November, a site record twelve at Marton Mere in December and eleven on the Ribble WeBS in April. Just nine records from the east reinforced this duck's uncommon status away from the key sites. The eastern peak was of six at Lee Green Reservoir in November.

Breeding was confirmed at the main sites of MMWWT and Leighton Moss with six pairs at the latter. Eight pairs were confirmed at Marshside, a key county site. Single broods were seen at MSW, Prescott Reservoirs and at Warton Bank, the latter a rare event for the Fylde.

TEAL *Anas crecca*

Abundant winter visitor in west. Small flocks in east. Scarce breeding bird.

International importance: 4000. National importance: 1920

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	1689	521	157	158	4	1	68	204	748	1370	868	1838
Ribble	4068	3572	1032	244	14	1	0	95	1933	3305	4903	6590
Monthly peak counts												
MMWWT	3580	2700	1300	195	13	50	90	600	2320	3700	3350	4100
Stocks Res.	200	40	23	53	2	11	13	90	102	200	150	1000
MSW	767	351	214	21	2	1	4	28	158	460	645	955
L Moss	450	224	196	67	1	3	312	308	304	/	569	866
Marton Mere	400	285	143	50	4	1	6	74	250	176	320	821
SNR	650	350	110	38	3	2	4	71	82	215	195	493

The internationally important sites of the Ribble estuary and MMWWT were the only ones to produce average or above average counts; others struggled to reach typical peaks. All the tabulated sites except Stocks Reservoir have reached 1000 in recent years, but it was not until

December that the species reached close to average winter numbers at any of these sites. The peak at Stocks Reservoir was one of the highest ever there, but was only maintained for two days, after which numbers fell back to a more expected 400. This perhaps indicated that the county-wide December influx had come from the east. The species' steady build-up to record numbers in Morecambe Bay in 2002 was not repeated this year, falling short of the record-breaking 2000+ of the early months of the first winter period. A count of 400 on Pilling Marsh on 30 Aug was considerably higher than the Morecambe Bay South WeBS for that month.

Summer numbers at MMWWT were impressive and a glance down the columns for July reinforces that this is one of the first 'winter' wildfowl to return.

Typically, numbers were low away from the key sites on the main estuaries and their spheres of influence. On the north side of the Mersey 604 were counted in September along Garston Shore and Oglet Bay; in the St. Helens area the highest counts came from Newton Lake (120 in October and November, 111 in January); the Jameson Road Pools, Fleetwood held 132 in March and there were 120 at Bartle Pools, just north of Preston on 22 Nov.

Breeding was confirmed at Belmont Reservoir, where there were two broods, the same as last year. Three pairs were reported from Marshside. The Bowland estates provide several suitable breeding areas. The June peak at Stocks Reservoir indicate that birds were certainly in the area during the breeding season and on 5 July six ducklings were seen with a female.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL *Anas carolinensis*

Rare winter visitor.

This American duck was present in the county for its eighteenth and nineteenth consecutive winters. However, there was probably only one individual involved in 2003, a disappointing tally, particularly when compared with four last year.

One of the two drakes at MMWWT from 2002 remained during the first winter period until at least 25 January. An adult drake re-appeared at this favoured site on 15 November and was seen intermittently to year's end.

The conservative county total remains at ten.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos*

Abundant winter visitor and common breeding resident.

International importance: 20000. National importance: 3520

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	725	178	267	188	256	525	478	699	642	547	974	689
Ribble	1087	576	386	244	186	558	341	397	552	894	724	953
Alt	1062	341	52	29	36	142	80	114	494	365	375	67

Monthly peak counts

MMWWT	1930	1510	1200	670	810	1340	/	1720	2950	3350	3200	2650
Stocks Res	356	49	23	53	12	49	415	227	260	249	360	1000*
Barnacre Res	/	140	/	/	/	/	64	343	539	/	599	711
L Moss	290	127	84	53	38	111	434	622	251	/	116	112
MSW	280	209	81	22	34	95	188	280	260	279	277	356
Marston Mere	217	45	21	25	/	57	268	219	275	55	130	97
Marshside	/	/	/	107	40	131	73	24	40	209	261	449

* site record

The tabulated sites are those that held counts of 275 or more and for which there were at least six monthly counts. The threshold of 275 has dropped from 300 last year and 400 in 2001, yet

fewer sites appear in the table this year. Does this reflect a couple of disappointing years or is it more evidence of a steady decline in the species' fortunes? MMWWT, however, hosted over 3000 birds on several occasions for the third year running and is by far the most important site in our area for Mallard. The unexpected peak at Stocks Reservoir in December came on 6 and 7 Dec; on the 5th and 8th there were around 300 birds. This short-lived influx coincided with an equally brief increase in Teal numbers.

The species is inevitably under-recorded. Many of the records received are one-off counts or WeBS data, rather than consistent monthly maxima. The appearance of reasonable flocks on park lakes, shooting flashes and temporary floods, sites not traditionally counted by many birdwatchers, also leads to under-representation in this report. It is also an adaptable and opportunistic species: there was a count of 270 in one corner of a stubble field on Downholland Moss in August. Linear waters can also host large numbers, but are generally under-surveyed. There are some exceptions: a regularly watched section along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal between Bootle and Litherland revealed a peak of 417 in November. Moreover, annual shooting releases somewhat blunt enthusiasm to count religiously throughout the year. A count of 750 on the River Darwen at Hoghton in June referred to a recent release.

There were records of 100+ birds from 26 sites (17 last year, 12 in 2001, 27 in 2000). Peak counts from most sites tend to fall into two categories: post-moult congregations from July to early September and winter immigrant peaks later in the year. Post-moult flocks of more than 200, from sites not tabulated above, came from Lane End Pools at Pilling (400 in August) and Coronation Park Lake, Ormskirk (240 in July).

Winter peaks of more than 200 or more were at Bourbles Pit, Preesall (500 in November), Ream Hills Lake, Weeton (400 in December, 250 in October), Prescott Reservoirs (338 in December, 300 in November), Lane Ends, Pilling (260 in March), Southport Marine Lake (253 in December), SNR (228 in January), Stanley Park Lake, Blackpool (220 in January) and Oglet Bay/Garston Shore, Mersey Estuary (200 in September).

On the Lune 249 pairs were recorded between Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale, an average number for recent years. Marshside recorded 45 breeding pairs. Unfortunately no breeding data from two key sites (MMWWT, Leighton Moss) were submitted, so trends cannot be fully assessed for this common and widespread, but possibly declining, species.

PINTAIL *Anas acuta*

Common winter visitor to coasts, especially Ribble. Occasional breeder.

International importance: 600. National importance: 279.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	38	205	29	38	3	0	2	0	137	1096	1149	2454*
Ribble	944	128	37	7	0	0	0	0	333	48	2562	653

Monthly peak counts

JB Point	2	4	1	0	0	0	0	13	760*	1100*	1017	2203*
MMWWT	548	537	438	4	4	3	2	3	11	127	235	460
Marshside	/	/	/	10	/	/	/	/	/	6	66	345

* site record

Morecambe Bay hosted record numbers for the second successive year and for the first time held more birds than the Ribble, when averaged over the year. Note that Jenny Brown's Point is included in the Morecambe Bay South WeBS counts but is tabulated here separately as well as it was counted on several occasions in addition to those on WeBS dates and contributed the majority of the WeBS birds. Similarly, Marshside is part of the Ribble WeBS. In contrast, the

species has almost disappeared from the north side of the Mersey; two on Garston Shore on 5 Jan was the only record.

In addition to the Ribble WeBS counts, 1000 were seen off Lytham on 17 Dec. Other notable counts included peaks at Leighton Moss of 129 in January and 130 in September. The peak count in the east was a disappointing 21 in December from Stocks Reservoir; this site accounted for all but two east Lancashire sightings.

Many coastal movements were recorded during the second winter period, but few during the first. The peaks were 340 west past Jenny Brown's Point on 24 Nov and 202 south past Starr Gate, Blackpool two days later.

During May there were records from MMWWT and the Eric Morecambe Pools only; the latter site still holding 31 on the 2nd. Return passage was late; only four sites recorded Pintail in August.

Two sites hosted individuals throughout the summer. At MMWWT a female was seen with eight young in June, this was only the seventh breeding record for the county.

GARGANEY *Anas querquedula*

Uncommon spring and autumn passage; rare in the east. Rare breeder. Vagrant in winter.

Number of individuals recorded across the county

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
0	0	22	21	12	5	6	9	3	1	0	0

It was an early season for this summer duck, with the majority of records coming in March and early April. Last year there were just two March records; in 2003 there were 22 (although some birds may have been recorded at more than one site).

Six (four drakes) were discovered at Fleetwood Tip on 15 March and a pair was still present by 1 April; half this small flock visited other pools within the Jameson Road complex on several occasions.

A drake that appeared at Leighton Moss on 17 March was joined by a duck next day and there were five (three drakes) by the 21st. One pair probably bred at Leighton Moss. Only the male was seen after early May until three fledged young appeared during July; these had not definitely been raised on site but it seems likely.

Three at Sands Lake, Ainsdale (two drakes) on 21 March were next to arrive; the flock remained to 11 April, with one drake hanging on until the 17th. A pair visited MSW from 22-24 March and two drakes and a duck were at Marshside on the 23rd. At MMWWT a duck was present from the 24-27th and was then joined by a drake until the 29th. A drake was at Oakenclough from 25 March to 2 April. The final arrival in March was a drake at Brockholes on the 27th, which remained to 6 April, visiting the River Ribble for long spells.

The next wave of migration came in mid-April. A pair appeared near Poulton at Woodhouse Farm Pool, Carleton on the 8th and remained until the 17th, often visiting nearby Robin's Lane pool. Cabin Hill NNR, Formby hosted a pair on the 9th, a drake was on the Ribble at Longton on the 17th, next day a pair arrived at Marton Mere for a nine-day stay and what was assumed to be the Ainsdale trio were recorded from Marshside discontinuously mid-month; the final April arrival was a pair at Brockholes, present from the 16-20th.

There was a lull in the passage until a drake arrived at Marshside on 7 May (remaining to at least the 11th.); there was a drake at MSW on the 9th, followed by two new drakes at Marshside from the 19-26th, one remaining to 28 May. Two birds were seen at MMWWT during May, a drake on the 17th and another on the 27th. The final new report of the month was of one at the Eric Morecambe Pools on the 31st.

Other than the summer residents at Leighton Moss the only other site report in June referred to a female at MMWWT on the 26th. Drakes were seen at MMWWT on 4-5 July and at SNR on the 16th, indicating return passage.

Passage during August included juveniles: a female/juvenile was on Aldcliffe Marsh on the 9th; an eclipse drake was at Marton Mere on the 18th and another individual was there from 31 Aug to 2 Sept. A juvenile was at SNR from the 21-24th and a juvenile appeared at the main pool at Brockholes on the 28th, where it remained for 37 days. The only other September birds, during a thin autumn passage, were a juvenile at Leighton Moss on the 18-19th and a drake there on the 21st. The only October record was of the long-staying juvenile at Brockholes Quarry, which remained until 3 October.

SHOVELER *Anas clypeata*

Common winter visitor to west and north. Scarce breeder.

International importance: 400. National importance: 148.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	65	14	77	74	7	47	10	0	0	80	102	110
Ribble	191	178	108	69	8	14	0	0	1	14	66	150
Monthly peak counts												
EMP	64	26	86	67	50	47	12	6	4	89	154	146
L Moss	11	11	24	29	4	38	50	88	48	/	48	24
Marshside	/	/	/	117	16	14	4	2	1	28	120	280
MMWWT	/	/	18	36	10	8	/	45	116	162	121	42
Marton Mere	68	53	65	8	2	4	4	30	33	117	144	156
Stanley Park	70	54	47	/	/	/	/	/	/	19	26	57

There is known movement between Marton Mere and Stanley Park and the similar peak counts in January and February may reinforce this, but simultaneous count data are not available, so the true Blackpool total is not known. Lower numbers at Stanley Park (and relatively higher counts at Marton Mere) in the second winter-period were thought to be due to changes in angling activity at the park.

The summer and winter populations of Shoveler are from different European flyways and during a comprehensive year of recording the importance of different sites for the different populations can be seen.

Generally, the species is thinly spread away from the key sites. Counts of 15 or more came from only two sites other than those in the table: on the Jameson Road Pools, Fleetwood there were maxima of 37 in March, 20 in February and 19 in January; and at Brockholes there were 24 in March and 16 in January. A smaller but notable count of seven was made at Grimsargh Reservoir on 9 Dec, a record for this regularly counted site. In east Lancashire, where the highest single-site count was three, there were only 16 sightings (17 last year).

Shovelers were recorded off the coast on several occasions, one was on the sea off SNR on 6 April and two were seen off Jenny Brown's Point on 4 May. One was watched moving south off Starr Gate, Blackpool on 11 Aug. This was preceded by first autumn dates at Marton Mere on 5 August, both SNR and Stocks Reservoir on the 10th, Brockholes on the 12th and Aldcliffe March on the 18th.

Breeding was confirmed on the Ribble Estuary at Naze Pool; up to four pairs were at MMWWT and two were at MSW but young were not seen at either of these sites. Marshside is one of the most important breeding sites in the northwest and eleven pairs were confirmed there this year, while five pairs bred at Leighton Moss and a further five on the Eric Morecambe Pools.

ANAS hybrid

A drake Mallard x Pintail was at Fairhaven Lake at the end of the year; its second successive winter.

POCHARD *Aythya ferina*

Common winter visitor. Rare breeder.

International importance: 3500. National importance: 595.

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	750	663	520	7	7	7	3	2	7	185	291	420
SNR	56	20	14	0	0	2	8	8	4	24	139	240
MSW	170	5	6	5	2	4	0	0	0	3	31	10
Stocks Res	90	83	1	0	0	0	4	0	2	32	168	60
L Moss	94	44	33	26	8	12	21	69	137	/	47	7
Fairhaven ML	125	28	17	0	0	3	0	0	0	23	70	89
Marton Mere	94	66	41	1	1	2	29	56	47	47	29	108
Thornton ICI	102	50	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	20	80

There were generally fewer birds in the county in the second winter period than in recent winters. The exception to this was the November peak at Stocks Reservoir, the highest count there since March 1997. There are known movements between MMWWT and MSW and between Fairhaven Lake and Marton Mere. The December count at Leighton Moss is particularly low and may be a 'count' rather than a monthly maximum.

Elsewhere, there were flocks of 30 or more at the following sites: Upper Rivington Reservoir (145 in January), Ribble Estuary (128 in January), Morecambe Bay South (103 in December), Pine Lake, Carnforth (95 in February), Eric Morecambe Pools (49 in June), Brockholes (44 in January and 30 in November) and Prescott Reservoirs (30 in January). Also worthy of mention was a record count of 27 at Myerscough Quarry on Christmas Day.

Six broods were seen at Leighton Moss and another two pairs bred on the Eric Morecambe Pool. Two broods were seen at MMWWT in June and a female was flushed from breeding habitat at MSW in May.

RING-NECKED DUCK *Aythya collaris*

Vagrant.

A drake was found amongst the large flock of Pochard and Tufted Duck on the recently re-flooded Upper Rivington Reservoir on 3 January. It remained at the site until at least 14 March.

What was presumed to be the same bird had returned to the site by 8 Dec and remained until Christmas (when it briefly relocated to nearby Rumworth Lodge in Bolton, Greater Manchester), re-appearing at Upper Rivington Reservoir on 31 Dec.

This was the first in county since 1995 and was the fifth or sixth for Lancashire and North Merseyside.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK *Aythya nyroca*

Vagrant.

The first-winter female reported at MMWWT earlier in the winter was last seen there on 15 March when it was among 350 Pochard, its disappearance coinciding with a major exodus of Pochard from the site.

An adult female, presumed to be the same individual, was discovered with Pochard on the Mere again on 20 Nov (AB). This individual commuted with a small group of Pochard to MSW on several dates from 30 November (TD, DJR) into 2004. It has still not been submitted to BBRC but if accepted the county total will stand at thirteen.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula*

Common winter visitor, particularly to south and west. Uncommon breeder.

International importance: 12000. National importance: 600.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
Ribble	94	2	45	2	4	9	14	0	15	5	30	47

The Ribble birds favour Sands Lake, Ainsdale, where the peak count received was 140 in November; Southport Marine Lake is also part of the Ribble WeBS, and a count of 211 there on 31 Dec was much higher than the WeBS date count and the largest flock recorded in the county in 2003.

Monthly peak counts

Prescot Res	180	30	32	30	/	/	212	50	10	15	/	45
MSW	39	18	33	24	8	14	6	3	1	27	54	194
Marton Mere	32	31	34	38	27	5	26	66	147	166	51	60
Stanley Park	/	42	42	32	/	/	/	/	/	/	23	28
SNR	55	43	21	24	16	45	63	60	115	102	103	104
Rivington	35	70	20	7	/	/	/	20	60	/	105	30
L Moss	56	64	74	52	42	40	91	37	26	/	41	35
Thornton ICI	46	70	20	/	/	/	/	/	/	25	50	45
Brockholes	28	44	25	26	13	12	21	28	42	36	32	14

The criterion for tabulation is those sites that are regularly counted and hold more than 40 birds annually. No systematic records were received from the Pine Lake/Dockacres complex this year; these pits have yielded the county's top counts in some years. Although several east Lancashire sites were counted regularly, none reached the 40 threshold.

The peak count at Fairhaven Marine Lake was just 22 (in January) a disappointing total when compared with the 156 there twelve months earlier. Other sites hosting more than 40 birds were Nuck's Wood, a site close to MMWWT (41 in February) and Newton Lake, St. Helens (40 in February). The peak in the east was at Parsonage Reservoir (29 in August).

Breeding data were received from 18 sites. Multiple broods were recorded from Leighton Moss (6 pairs), the River Lune (minimum of four pairs), Prescot Reservoirs (3 broods), Sand Villa, Pilling (3), Marshside (3), Stanley Park, Blackpool (2), Belmont Reservoir (2), MMWWT (2) and MSW (2). Brockholes Quarry recorded its first ever brood.

SCAUP *Aythya marila*

Uncommon winter visitor to coasts. Occasional inland.

International importance: 3100. National importance: 76.

There were high numbers in the first winter period in the south but it was a disappointing year in the north.

Morecambe Bay

A quiet start to the year, with the peak count being six off Barnaby's Sands on the Wyre Estuary on 23 Feb; there were singles off Jenny Brown's Point in January and three sightings off

Morecambe Stone Jetty in March. A female was on the Lune Estuary at Glasson on 3 March and the last of the season was at late bird on Cockersands on 5 May.

The second half of the year was even quieter. The first was a juvenile female on the Middleton Estate from 27 Sept to 1 Oct, followed by just three on the Lune Estuary between 12 Oct and 5 Dec, recorded off Glasson and Cockersands.

Liverpool Bay

Monthly WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alt	84	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	5	12

There were high numbers in January on the Alt and the Ribble Estuaries. The Ribble WeBS in January was 65; combined with the Alt WeBS this indicates a minimum of 149 Scaup in Liverpool Bay in January. The Ribble birds were made up of wintering flocks off Marshside, which peaked at 47 in January, and off Starr Gate, Blackpool, which peaked at 65 also in January. The Alt records came largely from Formby and contained around 60% adult drakes in January. Elsewhere, there were up to six in the Wyre Estuary, including a well-watched female at the Jameson Road Pools, Fleetwood and Thornton ICI which was seen until 11 April, three sightings from SNR, including a late pair on 18 April and one report from Marton Mere on 22 Feb.

The first returning bird was on the Alt Estuary on 4 Sept. During the second half of the year SNR hosted as many of the Alt birds as Formby and in November the flock at SNR built from one to nine birds, eventually peaking at 14 on 11 December. A female was with Pochard at Marshside from 19-21 Nov.

Three birds were seen off Starr Gate, Blackpool on several dates between 11 and 28 Sept and up to six in November between the 3rd and 26th. By 8 Dec the flock built to 17 and remained for most of the month.

Up to two were at Fairhaven Marine Lake from 17-19 Sept, 11-13 Oct and again from 16-20 November. There is much interchange between this site and Marton Mere, and three birds (two 1W ducks and a 1W drake) were at the latter site on many dates between 29 Sept and 15 Dec. A female briefly on Ream Hills Lake, Mythop on 20 Sept may belong to this sequence. Further north a female was seen on the Wyre Estuary on the Thornton ICI pools on 24 Dec.

Inland

Two birds remained from 2002: females at Grimsargh Reservoir until 5 April and at Dean Clough and Parsonage Reservoirs to 29 March. An additional winter record came from Leighton Moss when one was seen on 16 Feb.

A drake at Alston Reservoir on 21 April and a duck at Prescott Reservoirs on the 30th evidenced inland spring movements. A rare summer record came from Stocks Reservoir on 9 July.

The first of five inland autumn and winter birds was a juvenile at Leighton Moss on 17 Sept; there was a female at Brockholes on the 24th; the female returned to Parsonage Reservoir on 14 Oct and remained into 2004, often visiting Dean Clough Reservoir as it had last winter. It was probably this bird that also visited Foulridge Reservoir on 22 Nov; a female was at Rivington Reservoirs on 15 Oct; and a female was at Myerscough Quarry on 21 Oct.

AYTHYA Hybrids

The Pochard x Tufted Duck, which has been visiting the pit complex in the Carnforth and Silverdale area for the past eight winters, was present with Tufted Ducks until mid-February at least, favouring Pine Lake.

A hybrid Lesser Scaup-type hybrid visited Marton Mere on 28 Aug. A female resembling a Scaup was at Wood End Sewage Works, Burnley for a second winter, reported on several dates in November.

EIDER *Somateria mollissima*

Common winter visitor, especially N. Fylde. Uncommon in south. Rare breeder. Very rare inland.

International importance: 15600. National importance: 730.

Morecambe Bay

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	10	24	18	52	22	1	8	5	0	41	53	25
Monthly counts												
Rossall Pt.	7	5	21	43	9	/	/	/	37	66	50	36
J. B. Pt.	/	/	1	36	18	5	0	0	1	11	13	8
Morecambe	6	10	0	26	19	1	5	0	12	11	20	3

The April and May counts reinforce the typical pattern of the flocks drifting north as spring approaches.

There was no confirmed breeding this year, but three juveniles accompanied by an adult female were seen off Morecambe from 11-13 August.

Liverpool Bay

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
Ribble	0	0	28	56	0	7	3	30	9	38	0	0
Monthly counts												
Lytham	25	/	/	10	39	18	14	33	71	77	28	/
Starr Gate	7	15	18	9	4	0	0	10	10	7	40	2

Numbers are definitely increasing at the northern end of Liverpool Bay. The September count was one of the highest ever. Breeding is thought to be regular on the Ribble, but rarely recorded. This year at least four sets of young, accompanied by females, were observed in late July in the Ribble Channel from Lytham Green

LONG-TAILED DUCK *Clangula hyemalis*

Uncommon winter visitor to coasts. Scarce on inland waters.

Following on from an excellent series of records off Starr Gate, Blackpool at the end of 2002, five were seen there on New Year's Day (considered to be an adult and immature drake, and three females). Regular sightings of up to three then followed until 15 Jan and again on 25 March with a final record of one moving south on 10 April. Elsewhere in Liverpool Bay there were reports of singles from Rossall Point on 31 Jan & 14 Feb and off Formby Point on 3 Jan.

In Morecambe Bay one was off Jenny Brown's Point on 3 Jan, a pair flew into the bay on 2 April and the last of the season were three flying into the bay at Morecambe on 17 April.

The second winter period was no less productive. The first off Starr Gate, Blackpool came on 18 Sept, with regular singles there from 23-27 Oct, two from 28-30 Nov and three on 6 Dec; at least four different birds were involved in this series. Another three were seen flying past there on 24 Dec and were subsequently recorded on the sea at Starr Hills on several dates to year's end. On the south side of the Ribble Estuary female(s) were seen off Ainsdale (25 Oct & 7 Dec), Marshside (26 Oct) and Formby Point (9 Nov).

In Morecambe Bay birds were seen from Heysham flying into the bay on 10 & 31 Oct and a lone bird drifted in with the tide at Bank End, Cockerham on 21 Nov.

COMMON SCOTER *Melanitta nigra*

Present all year on Shell Flat, abundant in winter. Common off Blackpool and Formby in winter. Uncommon inland on early return passage, scarce there at other times.

International importance: 16000. National importance: 500.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Monthly counts (aerial survey)*												
Shell Flat	5537	14002	/	/	0	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Ribble	163	1142	/	/	1238	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Formby	272	715	/	/	6	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

Monthly counts (shore-based)

Blackpool	500	/	1000	2800	230	185	440	225	2415	2800	3275	5000
Formby	436	323	62	65	18	/	332	87	360	887	1821	388
M Bay	0	0	0	236	187	6	14	1	16	27	14	9

* aerial surveys are only partial counts and represent minimum number of birds

The Countryside Council for Wales aerial survey (detailed in the 2000 Report) continues to produce huge winter totals on Shell Flat, an area 5-15km west of Blackpool and Cleveleys. Survey data for the second winter period are as yet unpublished. In addition to the aerial survey data from Shell Flat there were estimates from boat surveys of 12000 in January and 8000 in March. Neither survey method counts all birds but WWT and CCW have now refined a statistical means of estimating total numbers ('distance analysis') from the aerial survey transect results. This indicated that around 79000 Common Scoter were present in Liverpool Bay (from Anglesey to Rossall Point) in February 2003 (95% confidence intervals = 43500 to 143750). Almost 16000 (60%) of the 26250 birds counted that month were in Lancashire waters, so a reasonable estimate of actual numbers would be around 48000, with very roughly 42000 on Shell Flat, 3500 off the mouth of the Ribble and 2200 off Formby Point. On the basis of three years of survey, Liverpool Bay is now proposed as a marine Special Protection Area for Common Scoter, as well as Red-throated Diver.

The Blackpool and Formby Point shore-based records provide a glimpse at the population that is out at sea in Liverpool Bay. They also provide a useful reference for future years when aerial surveys are not done.

Away from the sea but still fairly coastal, there was a mid-January influx. A female was at Fleetwood Marine Lake on the 12th, a drake spent two days at Marton Mere from the 14th before moving to the small De Vere Hotel pool on the 16th! One visited a small pool at Birkdale on 15 Jan, a drake was at the Jameson Road Pools, Fleetwood on the 16-17th, a female visited Marton Mere on the 19th and a drake appeared at SNR on the 20th. The latter bird stayed until 6 Feb, roosting on the freshwater pool and visiting the sea at other times.

Two drakes visiting Marton Mere on 4 April marked spring passage (the fourth birds of the year there), but a pair at Belmont Reservoir on 25 May could have been early returning migrants. Inland summer passage followed a typical pattern. A female was at Stocks Reservoir on 13 June, a female was at Parsonage Reservoir on 8 July, a female/immature at Stocks Reservoir on the 19th and a drake there on the 22nd. The last of the summer series coincided with a rainstorm on the morning on 10 Aug: nine were discovered then at Stocks Reservoir (all but one were adult drakes) and a staggering 22 (all drakes) were at Prescott Reservoirs.

VELVET SCOTER *Melanitta fusca***Uncommon in winter, often with Common Scoter flocks.**

Increased seawatching effort off Starr Gate, Blackpool is presently proving this species to be less scarce in the county than once considered.

Off Starr Gate a female was seen on the sea on 7 Feb, and there was a short sequence of spring records there too: a duck flew north on 2 April and two flew north on the 17th (and one was seen later that morning moving south). The only early year record away from Starr Gate referred to a drake south off Formby Point on 3 Jan.

During the autumn there were sightings off Starr Gate on 11 Oct (a drake), 3 Nov (a pair north), 18 Nov (drake and two female/immatures south) and 22 Nov (a duck). During December both drakes and ducks were involved in a series of records of up to two birds seen between 16th and 22nd. A drake seen from Heysham flying into Morecambe Bay on 13 Dec was the only other record.

GOLDENEYE *Bucephala clangula***Common winter visitor. Stronghold Morecambe Bay. Former feral breeder at Mere Sands Wood from mid-1980s to late 1990s.**

International importance: 4000. National importance: 249.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	72	214	41	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	88	53
Monthly counts and peak counts												
SNR	53	39	25	15	1	0	0	0	0	27	57	87
Brockholes	23	48	44	3	0	0	0	0	0	6	18	20
Marton Mere	11	14	16	43	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	9
Southport ML	28	32	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	14
Thornton ICI	30	20	21	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Prescot Res	14	22	28	2	1	0	0	0	0	10	3	3
L Moss	10	15	14	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	26	6
Stocks Res	12	20	14	8	0	0	0	0	0	5	7	12

All regularly counted sites with a peak of 20 or more are tabulated. However, by far the most important part of the county is Morecambe Bay, particularly the Lune Estuary. Counts at Glasson (Lune Estuary) in excess of the WeBS counts were 100 on 22 Jan and 67 on 30 Dec.

Away from Morecambe Bay and other key locations, double-figure counts were received from seven sites. The only ones above 15, during what was a quiet year for this species, referred to Ribble Estuary sites and the Lune: 24 were counted from Starr Gate, Blackpool on 1 Jan and later that month the Ribble WeBS count was 53 (some of these will have been on Southport Marine Lake, see table). Nineteen were between Mears Beck and Claughton Beck on the Lune on 14 Dec.

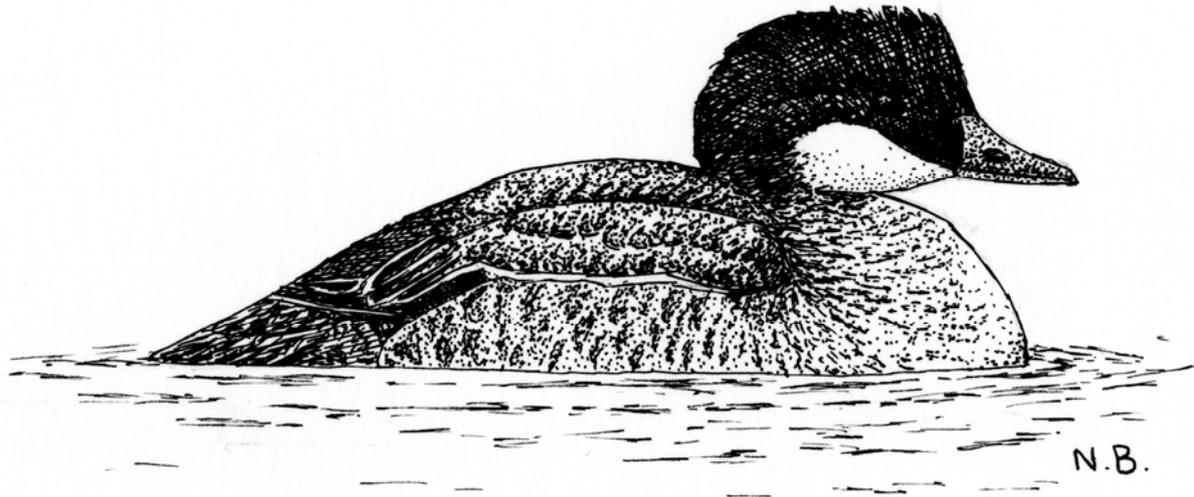
Four May records were received, one at SNR on the 1st, a drake at Prescot Reservoirs on the 3rd, a female at Cant Clough Reservoir on the 8th and a female at MMWWT on the 30th. The only summer record was of two females at MSW in July.

This duck is typically late returning in autumn, not occurring consistently until October, as evidenced by the tabulated sites. A female at Crosby Marine Lake on 17 Aug was particularly early. The only September record received was a female at Clowbridge Reservoir, Rossendale on the 8-9th.

SMEW *Mergellus albellus*

Uncommon winter visitor.

A redhead, present since mid December 2002, was at Borwick Waters until 2 Jan when it moved to Pine Lake until 4 Feb. This bird was seen at Leighton Moss on 4 Jan and on its last date of 9 Feb. A second bird was in the county that month: a drake visited Belmont Reservoir on the 20th.



There were probably three individuals around during the second winter-period. A redhead was a rare visitor to SNR and Crosby Marine Lake on 8 Nov as was another redhead at Stocks Reservoir on 19 Dec. The only long-staying individual was the, probably returning, redhead in north Lancashire. This bird was on the Eric Morecambe Pools on 11 and 12 Dec and again on the 22-24th, visiting Leighton Moss between these dates on the 17-18th.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER *Mergus serrator*

Fairly common winter visitor to coasts. Commonest in north. Scarce inland. Rare breeder.

International importance: 1700. National importance: 98.

WeBS

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	31	36	36	23	6	14	9	2	8	64	34	26

Another set of relatively low counts for Morecambe Bay. The last three years have failed to reach 70. However the bay's dominant position for this sawbill was emphasised in comparison with peak counts on the Ribble of four (October) and on the Alt of three (April).

The only double-figure count away from Morecambe Bay came from Stocks Reservoir, where pre-breeding movements led to a peak of eleven in April. The first migrant to return to Stocks Reservoir, the county's most consistent breeding site, was a female on 8 March. It was the 29th before the first drake joined it. There were six drakes and five ducks by the time the flock peaked. Breeding, albeit unsuccessful, was strongly suspected. The last bird, a drake, disappeared from Stocks Reservoir on 15 June.

GOOSANDER *Mergus merganser*

**Fairly common winter visitor to east. Uncommon on coast and in the south-west.
Uncommon breeder.**

International importance: 2500. National importance: 161.

Monthly counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Delph Res.	38	31	15	3	0	0	0	0	0	9	18	28
L Moss	20	11	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	11	9	3

The tabulated sites are those with counts of 20 or more that are counted consistently. The numbers at Delph Reservoir were a little lower than last year, following two record winters. The West Pennine Moors reservoirs typically held the largest flocks: in addition to those at Delph there were peaks at Yarrow Reservoir of 24 in December and 19 in January, at Anglezarke Reservoir of 27 in March and at Higher Bullough Reservoir of 21 in January.

East Lancashire records

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of records	21	17	27	28	16	6	5	9	13	6	29	26
No. of sites	8	10	13	11	5	3	3	4	3	3	13	15
Max count	29	18	41	15	6	10	11	12	6	3	27	41

Goosanders are found in good numbers across east Lancashire with no single site dominating. There were widespread reports in every month involving a total of 37 sites, including lakes, reservoirs and all east Lancashire stretches of the Rivers Calder, Hodder and Ribble. The table reveals a clear seasonal pattern with peak numbers in the two winter periods. The rise in the summer counts in both tables is due to the inclusion of the year's juveniles.

Elsewhere in the county, sites with 15 or more were Grimsargh Reservoir (28 in December), Barrow Lodge (23 in January) and Brockholes (peak of 17 in March).

Migration and movements are difficult to assess for this species. Perhaps the best evidence of migration was a pair overhead at SNR on 5 May, well away from breeding haunts. A redhead at Heysham Observatory on 15 Oct was the first ever grounded there.

Comprehensive breeding data were received again from the River Lune population. Twenty-five pairs were noted between Kirkby Lonsdale and Skerton Weir (compared with 20 in 2002), while on the Leck Beck to Arkholme viaduct section a typical nine broods were located (the first on 12 May), with a total of 99 young counted, 43 reaching fledging age (identical to last year). In nest boxes there females laid 116 eggs and hatched 48 young (three more than last year). Jackdaws foiled half of the nest box nesting attempts. One, containing ten Goosander eggs, was taken over by a Jackdaw, which proceeded to incubate two Goosander eggs as well as one of its own. Ultimately this nest was deserted.

RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Fairly common post-breeding and winter visitor. Scarce feral breeder.

In 2003 the government's trial cull was extended beyond the initial Midlands and Anglesey experiment but no sites in our recording area were targeted.

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Prescot Res.	70*	/	20	10	/	5	1	/	9	12	/	3
L Moss	0	0	3	3	6	6	7	12	1	1	1	0
MMWWT	1	4	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	5	7	9
Thornton ICI	1	1	3	8	2	/	/	/	/	8	2	1

* county record

A new county record was reached at Prescott Reservoirs for the second consecutive year; the count of 70 was made on 10 Jan. There was also evidence of range expansion with a first record for Rossendale at Calf Hey Reservoir on 22 Aug. However, elsewhere the species was thinly spread and generally recorded in the progressively smaller numbers that have been experienced for several years now.

As noted last year, as well as those counts (above) for Prescott Reservoirs, the adjacent Knowsley Park lakes have in recent years held large winter flocks and many breeding pairs, but these waters are now largely unsurveyed. No breeding data were received from Merseyside this year. In fact the only proved breeding record received for anywhere in the county was of one brood at MMWWT. Notably, there was no breeding at MSW (there were regularly ten pairs there in the late 1980s) and there was no repeat of last year's first-ever east Lancashire breeding record at Bracewell Reservoir, near Barnoldswick, although a drake was accompanying two ducks there in April.

Elsewhere, three pairs bred at Leighton Moss and there were pairs in suitable breeding habitat in spring at Thornton ICI (Wyre Estuary), Marshside, Ulnes Walton and Freckleton Naze.

During the winter periods, there were records from 20 sites (17 last year) but away from those areas tabulated the only site with more than three was Grimsargh Reservoir, with seven on 14 Sept.

RED GROUSE *Lagopus lagopus scotica*

Fairly common breeding resident

Massive moorland fires swept across 20km² of the West Pennine Moors in March and April, resulting in an estimated 9km² of burnt-out heather moorland. This affected grouse distribution, pushing five pairs onto an un-burnt area of Belmont Moor that would normally only support 1-2 pairs in late April, and a pair by Belmont Reservoir from late March which went on to rear three young. Gamekeeper counts in early August over a sample area of the badly fire-damaged Anglezarke Moor produced only eight pairs with 22 juveniles, resulting in shooting being cancelled for the year.

In contrast, Darwen Moor was largely unaffected by the fires and enjoyed a good year. The first brood (seven young) was seen here on the early date of 9 May. Gamekeeper counts with dogs estimated over 500 grouse present in late July, resulting in a successful season with c.150 birds shot during three days driving. Additionally, a minimum of 50 was on Belmont Moor when shot on 16 Aug, and three were on Edgerton Moss, Pickup Bank on 22 December.

The picture in Bowland remained similar to that of 2002, with numbers continuing to recover slowly, evidenced by the resumption of a limited amount of driven shooting. Observations indicate that the highest numbers are still to be found in very localised areas, with some areas still virtually grouse-free. The highest count received from this area was 16 between Saddle and Snape Fells in mid-February.

Away from Bowland, records in the ELOC area comprised low single-figure counts from Boulsworth Hill, Cant Clough Reservoir and Thursden Valley, with eight on Pendle Hill in December the highest count.

In the Rossendale area, successful breeding by one or two pairs was noted at Cowpe Moss. Additionally, 1-2 birds were noted at Alden Ratchers, Bentley Moss and Cowpe Lowe in March and five were in the Top of Leach area in September. Ten were noted on Haslingden Moor on 12 Oct.

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa*

Fairly common breeding resident. Population supplemented by regular releases in most areas.

A single on the Sunderland Peninsula, Lune Estuary, apparently noteworthy for the area, was the only report received from the north of the county.

On the Fylde, an extensive release programme in the region of 4000 birds took place in the Over Wyre area throughout the winter, with maximum covey sizes of up to 34 reported by observers, particularly in the Fluke Hall and Bradshaw Lane areas. Breeding pairs with five young were reported from three locations. Elsewhere in the Fylde, between 1-5 birds were reported from Carr House Green Common, Marton Moss, Naze Pool and Ream Hills, Mythop.

A total of 39 reports was received from the east Lancashire area involving 1-10 birds, the vast majority as usual from Bowland. Additional reports came from Darwen Moor and Harwood Bar, whilst twelve at Hoghton Bottoms on 5 Feb was the highest count.

The only report from Rossendale involved a pair seen in the Plunge area during June and July.

Records from the CNHS area came from three sites: Bretherton, Eccleston and Croston, with 16 on Croston Moss in December the highest count of the year in this area.

In the south-west of the county, with the exception of 77 at Altcar Moss on 8 Nov, the only double-figure counts received were from Churchtown (1 covey of 26) and the St. Helens area: Reeds Moss (2, max covey 20) and Dairy Farm Rd. (1 covey of 10). Counts of up to ten birds were reported from: Ainsdale, Birkdale, MSW, Roby Mill, Catchdale Moss and White Moss, with successful breeding confirmed at latter two localities. Releases continued at Altcar Rifle Ranges in the Sefton coastal dunes.

GREY PARTRIDGE *Perdix perdix*

Common but declining resident in the south and west

Singles at Middleton Industrial Estate, Heysham in late January and in fields bordering the Eric Morecambe complex in October were the only records received from these areas, indicating the species' very precarious status in the very north of the county. Records from both sides of the Lune Estuary were only slightly more encouraging. On the north side, single pairs were noted at Heaton in January and Peggy's Marsh in March. The south side fared better: two pairs were at Aldcliffe throughout including a pair with nine young, and a covey of seven was at Conder Green. Several coveys of up to ten were noted in the Cockersands area, including two pairs with a maximum of nine young.

A good number of records were received from Over Wyre throughout the year, of coveys ranging in size from 10-33, mainly from the Eagland Hill/Fluke Hall/Pilling areas, though only a single pair with young were reported. Known releases occurred at Eagland Hill (75 in August) and Preesall (c.100 in mid-October). Elsewhere, the largest coveys were at Blackpool Airport (20 in September), Freckleton Marsh (26 in November) and ten at Warton Bank in October. Further site maxima included six at Lytham Moss and eight at Reams Hill, Mythop, with 1-5 reported from Heron's Reach, Newton Marsh, Larbreck and Staining. Marton Mere recorded birds in eight out of twelve months, including a pair with three juveniles and a maximum of ten in September.

There were 19 reports from the ELOC area during the first six months of the year, totalling an estimated 22 birds, with an encouraging number of coveys reported from eleven widely scattered locations giving an estimated 81 individuals in the second half of the year. The highest counts came from Higher Lees Farm (c.25) and Waddington (19), while reports of single figures came from the Chipping and Longridge areas. The behaviour of a covey of 26 near Rishton Res in mid-November strongly suggested they were captive bred.

Around Rossendale, pairs were noted at Musbury and Clowbridge, with singles noted at both Calf Hey and Cowpe.

The only record of successful breeding received from the CNHS area was a pair with three young at Belmont Reservoir, with additional sightings of pairs noted at Croston, Bretherton and Lead Mines Clough during the year. The maximum count was ten at Ulnes Walton in November.

A good number of reports came from the south-west. Encouraging news from the Merseyside BTO BBS revealed numbers up by 30%, from eighteen census plots surveyed and all virtually the same plots as in previous years. Good news also came from the Halsall Estate where a total of 112 pairs represented a 50% increase since Countryside Stewardship measures involving 6m uncultivated field strips were introduced.

Elsewhere, successful breeding involving single pairs was confirmed from Bootle Golf Course, Cabin Hill NNR and MSW. Three pairs bred at MMWWT, with 21 birds noted in August. A better year was reported from White Moss, Skelmersdale, with a maximum covey size of 25 in October. In the St. Helens area, double-figure coveys were noted at two sites, Reeds Moss (maximum 10) and the Old Coach Rd (maximum 30).

Selected counts from other sites included: Crossens Outer Marsh (10), Downholland Moss (18), Old Airfield, Speke (21) and Oglet (13), with 1-9 birds noted at Birkdale, Cronton Colliery, Halewood, Marshside, Newton-le-Willows, Prescott Reservoirs and Roby Mill.

QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*

Scarce summer visitor to lowland areas, occasional influxes.

As usual, most records came from the mosses in the west and south-west of the county. In the Fylde, all records were in Over Wyre, with a calling male(s) at Copthorne/Eagland Hill from mid-June to mid-August (RED, SD, MJ).

A very early individual was in fields adjacent to Mere Sands Wood on 29 April, with what the observer presumed to be the same bird nearby on 19 June (PG). At the irrigation lake, Downholland Moss, one male on 29 May increased to 5+ by 30 July (DW).

Two records came from the east of the county. The first was calling at New Laithe Farm, Newton on 26 June (MKB, NB), whilst in the Rossendale area one was reported crossing the A681 at Sharneyford on 13 August.

PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus*

Abundant on or near kept estates, fairly common elsewhere

Under-recorded from much of the county in 2003. In the north, data came from just two localities, Heysham and Leighton Moss. At the former, the species is regarded as maintaining a welcome low profile, whilst the only available data from the latter, in the first quarter of the year, indicated presence only.

Records from the Fylde came from Over Wyre (3, maximum count 15), Newton Marsh (1) and Cockersands (1), whilst Marton Mere had records in all months bar July with a maximum of eleven in January.

Reports from the ELOC area were equally scant with five from Bowland, (maximum 37 at Burholme in November), and two elsewhere, at Longridge (maximum 14) and Lomeshaye, Nelson. Observers in the Rossendale area reported this species to be increasing at a number of sites.

In the CNHS area, regular reports came from Cuerden Valley Park, whilst census work in Roddlesworth Woods during the breeding season revealed eight calling males. The annual release of several thousand birds on the West Pennine Moors resulted in 200+ present at Belmont Reservoir in mid-October.

The only report received from any Ribble Valley site came from Brockholes Quarry where a newly-established feeding station resulted in an increase to low double figures.

Data came from seven localities in the south-west: at White Moss, Skelmersdale this species is a common breeder, while MSW registered a maximum count seven. Two pairs bred in the Marshside area and small numbers were recorded throughout the year at Garston, Oglet, Newton-le-Willows and Speke Hall.

RED-THROATED DIVER *Gavia stellata*

Fairly common winter visitor and spring passage migrant. Scarce inland.

International importance: 10000. National importance: 50

Morecambe Bay

Records were typically scarce in both winter periods with peak counts at Heysham of six on 15 Jan, twelve on 2 March and 18 in early December, which seemed to have disappeared by the end of the year. Up to ten were seen fairly regularly at Jenny Brown's Point in spring with the last on 21 May, while Heysham reported a better than average passage with a peak of 30 on 27 April.

The first returning bird at Jenny Brown's Point on 8 Sept was followed by 10-14 there on the 26-28th and final records of eight on 26 Oct and two on 24 Nov.

Liverpool Bay

2002

Eight definite Red-throated and 37 diver sp. were seen on the aerial survey of Shell Flat on 15 Nov.

2003

The most regular counts came from Blackpool, with notable counts of 26 on 20 Feb, 70 on 16 March, 134 on 19 April, 21 on 9 May, 20 on 24 Sept and 22 on 6 Dec; none were seen between 25 May and 7 Sept. Smaller numbers were recorded at Rossall Point, including 19 on 13 April, ten on 18 April and seven on 21 Sept.

Occasional small numbers were seen in the Southport area, including a locally notable count of eleven north off Marshside in fog on 4 March and 19 off Ainsdale on 27 Sept. Formby Point was, as always, the most productive Sefton Coast site with records in all months except June, July and August. Monthly peaks there included 72 on 3 Jan, eleven on 29 April, 48 on 23 Oct, eleven on 22 Nov and nine on 7 Dec.

A sickly adult on Crosby Marine Lake on 25-27 Sept was the only 'inland' record.

Fourteen were seen during the Shell Flat boat survey on 10 Feb, together with 24 diver sp. The CCW aerial survey recorded 27 divers in January off the mouth of the Ribble and 36 off Formby Point, and 40 off Formby in February. The total number of divers wintering in Liverpool Bay is now estimated at 250 to 1200 (for details of calculations see Common Scoter account). The majority of these are in Welsh waters but the Lancashire population probably regularly exceeds 100 and is perhaps as high as 300.

BLACK-THROATED DIVER *Gavia arctica*

Uncommon annual winter visitor, mostly on coast.

Singles flying north off Formby Point on 3 & 5 Jan and two seen during a boat survey of Shell Flat on 27 Feb were the only records in the first winter period.

There were four records of singles in early September: off Rossall Point on the 5th and 10th, Formby Point on the 6th and 10th, and Blackpool on the 10th. One at Rossall on 23 Nov

was the last on the Fylde coast but singles were seen fairly regularly off Formby between 2 Oct and 7 Dec with two there on 12 Oct and 4 Dec.

One, probably this species, was off Jenny Brown's Point on 9-13 Oct.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER *Gavia immer*

Scarce, less than annual, mostly on coast.

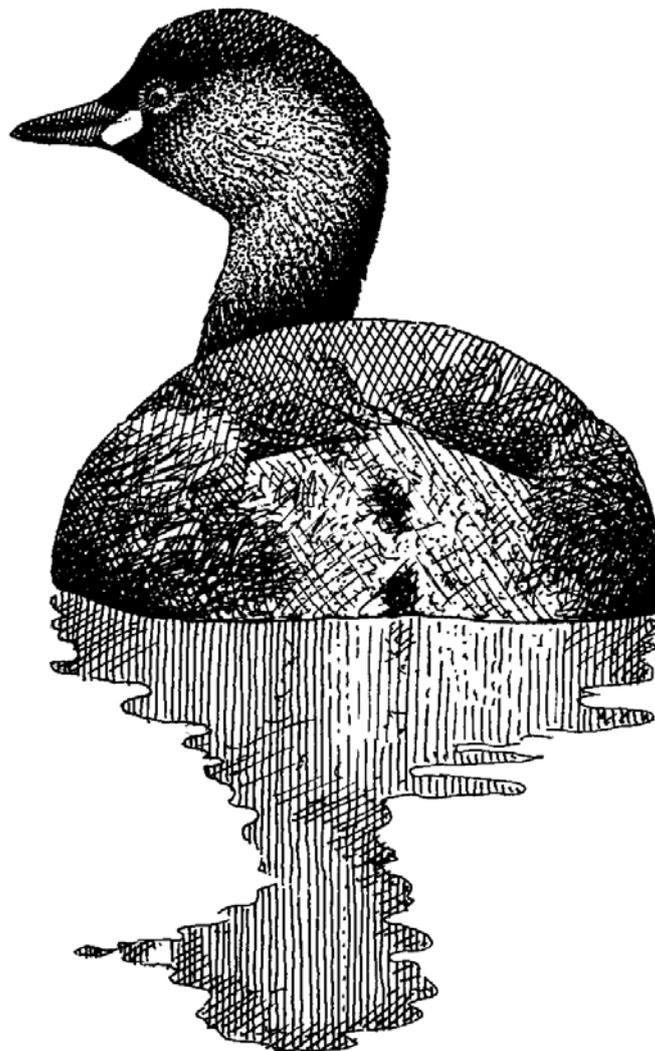
One was close inshore off Morecambe Stone Jetty for half an hour on 3 Jan and two were seen off Formby Point the same day, one of which lingered until the 12th. Spring passage consisted of one at Formby Point on 1 May, two at Rossall Point on the 4th, one off Blackpool on the 5th and a different bird there on the 15th.

A record year was rounded off with singles off Blackpool on 24 Sept and 9 Dec and Rossall Point on 8 Nov, while Formby Point seawatchers recorded two on 23 Oct and 4 Dec and singles on 9 Nov, 22 Nov and 7 Dec.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Uncommon but increasing breeding bird. Fairly common in winter.

International importance: 3400. National importance: 78.



First winter period peak counts were: 17 at Southport Marine Lake (Jan), 15 ICI Lagoons, Stanah (Jan), eleven SNR (Jan), ten MSW (March), eight Nuck's Wood, Holmeswood (Feb) and

four Newton Lake (Feb). Ones and twos were reported from 15 other sites during this period including Lea Green Reservoir, Burnley, Stocks Reservoir, Ream Hills Lake, Pilling Lane Ends, Conder Green, Sefton Park, Liverpool and Marshside. Six were on the River Lune in January and February.

Maxima from the latter end of the year were: 23 Southport Marine Lake (Nov), twelve ICI Lagoons (Oct), 13 Sand Villas Pond, near Pilling (Nov), eight SNR (Oct-Dec) and Lea Green (Oct), and six Marshside (Oct). Groups of five were at Pilling Lane Ends, Conder Green and Myerscough Quarry, four at Ream Hills Lake and three at Aldcliffe. Birds, predominantly singles, were present at a further 16 sites. Offshore, three were seen at Blackpool (Oct), two at Fleetwood and one flying north at Formby Point in October.

Breeding was reported from 18 sites (33 pairs) but was only definitely successful at six (Carleton, Pilling Lane Ends, Myerscough Quarry, MSW, Lea Green) with nine juveniles definitely recorded (MSW reported six broods but no numbers on juveniles). Pairs were reported as being present at a further 14 sites but with no records of attempted breeding. A further nine sites held single birds throughout the summer.

Post-breeding dispersal started with adults and juveniles (four birds) appearing at SNR (July-Aug) rising to nine in September. Additional late summer peaks were twelve at Brockholes Quarry, 7+ on the ICI Lagoons, 7 at Lea Green Reservoir and 5+ at Myerscough Quarry and Ream Hills Lake.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus*

Uncommon but increasing breeding bird. Common in winter with concentrations in Morecambe Bay. No longer of national importance on the Mersey.

International importance: 4800. National importance: 159.

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mbay WeBS	131	124	57	43	12	13	12	12	40	89	134	102
Blackpool	25	25	4	2	3	2	0	4	4	11	83	89
Formby Point	17	26	1	2	1	1	1	4	9	27	2	22

Numbers at the main wintering site in Morecambe Bay have remained fairly stable for many years. Birds are usually much scarcer south of Heysham so the high November and December counts off Blackpool were unusual.

Apart from a peak of 15 on the February Ribble WeBS count, no other significant coastal records were reported although the low numbers reported from the Shell Flat boat surveys – ten on 23 Jan and six on 27 Feb – confirmed the inshore preferences of this species. Marton Mere had peak winter counts of ten in January and nine in October to December.

Further inland, the three St. Helens sites, Carr Mill Dam, Prescot Reservoirs and Eccleston Mere, all held up to ten during both winter periods, while there were peak counts of eight at Pine Lake in January to March and six at Rishton Reservoir in January with nine there in March. Ones and twos were reported from twelve other sites from January to March and from a similar number of sites during the second winter period.

Breeding was reported from 32 sites, 16 of which were unsuccessful. All attempts failed at Foulridge, Stocks, Burwains, Wayoh, Anglezarke and Brownhills Reservoirs. The outcome of the pair seen from the Public Hide at Leighton Moss is unknown and the pair that bred last year on Sefton Park Lake, Liverpool, fledging three young, failed this year due to disturbance. Fifteen sites reported the presence of juveniles between May and August: nine at Carr Mill Dam, five at Eccleston Mere and at Glasson Dock, four at Heapey Lodges, three at Upper Rivington, Rishton and Springs Reservoirs, two at Belmont Reservoir, and singles from Brockholes Quarry, Marton

Mere, Nuck's Wood, Holmeswood, Stanley Park, Blackpool and Dean Clough and Walverden Reservoirs.

Sizeable post-breeding counts included 24 at Foulridge in August, eleven at Pilling in September and ten at Marshside in August. Ones and twos, presumably mostly adults, were reported inland from a further nine sites throughout the summer and autumn including Thornton ICI pools, Myerscough Quarry, Ream Hills Lake and Crosby Marine Lake.

SLAVONIAN GREBE *Podiceps auritus*

Scarce winter visitor

International importance: 50. National importance: 50.

A better than average year with sightings of ten birds reported.

The bird that ended 2002 at Crosby Marine Lake eventually left on 6 January. A solitary bird in winter plumage was seen off Formby Point on 3 Jan. One at Marshside on 12 Oct was the second site record and the first since 1978. Further north, one was off Blackpool on 4 Dec and one was logged during the November WeBS count of Morecambe Bay.

Inland, a bird that was first seen on Grimsargh Reservoir on 31 December 2002 remained into January. A juvenile at Prescott Reservoirs on 5 Aug was the first in St Helens for 13 years.

BLACK NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis*

Scarce visitor, mostly in spring and autumn.

International importance: 2800. National importance: 50.

An adult-summer reported from Prescott Reservoirs on 27 March was only the second record for St Helens, the first being in 1995. A bird in similar plumage was present there on 6 April and 8 May, with a juvenile on 4 August.

A pair was reported from Leighton Moss over a nine day period in May while Myerscough Quarry hosted two to four birds during the same month. No records of attempted breeding were reported.

A sea-watch off Heysham North Harbour wall on 19 April identified a flying bird as a probable Black-necked Grebe in summer plumage.

FULMAR *Fulmarus glacialis*

Fairly common on coasts in late summer and early autumn during onshore winds.

There were no winter records this year and counts were low everywhere, with just one double-figure day-count.

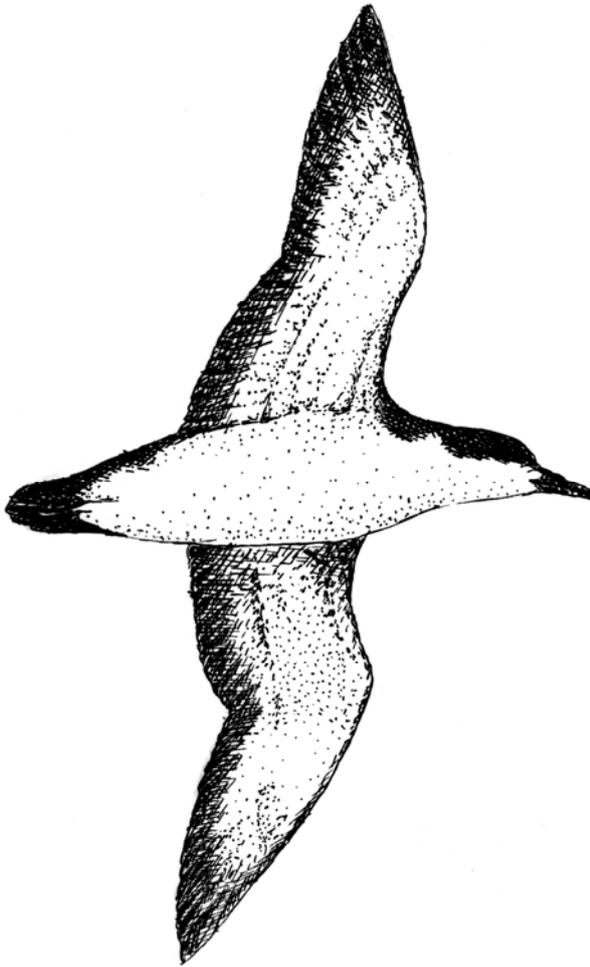
Small numbers were recorded infrequently along the length of the coast between 2 March (off Blackpool) and 6 Oct (off Heysham and on the Mersey at Seaforth). Heysham reported a total of just 44 bird-days all year and the tally off Blackpool was strikingly similar. The only counts of any note were twelve at Rossall Point on 8 May, nine at Heysham on 13 May, seven at Formby Point on 11 July and four off Blackpool on 19 Aug.

MANX SHEARWATER *Puffinus puffinus*

Common offshore in late summer-autumn, especially during onshore winds.

Unusually, none were seen in April and the first were three off Blackpool on 8 May. Moderate numbers were then seen fairly regularly from the main seawatching stations into early June, including 29 off Heysham on 9 June with 38 there the following day, 21 off Blackpool on 23 May and 31 on 19 June, and 22 off Formby Point on 18 May.

Heysham had a very poor autumn with seven on 21 Aug the only record, but further south rather more were seen than in recent years. Birds were seen off the Fylde coast on at least a dozen days during July, usually in fairly small numbers but with notable counts of 82 on the 11th and 180 going north in two hours on the 30th. Formby Point also registered its largest count of the year on 30 July with 365 going south. Records were less frequent during August but included some significant counts: 250 off Rossall Point on the 9th, 60 off Blackpool on the 10th with 146 there on the 21st, with 117 off Formby Point also on the 21st. Strangely, after this date none were reported from the main sites and the final records were singles on the Mersey at Seaforth on 22 Sept and 6 Oct.



A most unusual inland bird was found at Stocks Reservoir late in the afternoon of 18 June where it remained until at least 21.30hrs, spending much of the time in flight. Inland records are always notable and almost always occur after autumn storms – a very large proportion have been of birds that have been taken into care. The Stocks bird, however, arrived in calm weather and appeared to be in perfect health. It was the first record in east Lancashire since a moribund individual at Foulridge Reservoir on 26 Sept 2000 and, prior to that, one in a garden at Hapton on 1 Sept 1986.

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Fairly common offshore in variable numbers during September and October gales.

Seawatching conditions were poor throughout September and it was well past the peak period for Leach's Petrels before any strong onshore winds arrived. With the exception of one off Rossall Point on 29 Sept, all records came within a seven-day period between 4 and 10 Oct.

Three on the Mersey at Seaforth on 4 Oct were the first of these. None were seen the next day but a force 6 north-westerly on the 6th produced six at Seaforth and three off Blackpool. Perhaps as many as ten were seen at Seaforth on the 7-8th with one at Heysham on the 8th and five there the next day. The year ended with a minor flourish on 10 Oct when twelve were seen off Jenny Brown's Point and Cleveleys, three at Rossall Point, and two each at Heysham, Blackpool and Seaforth.

GANNET *Morus bassanus***Common summer and autumn visitor offshore in variable numbers. Scarce in winter.**

A 'reasonable total' of 616 bird-days was reported from Heysham between 2 March and 5 Oct. The majority appeared in spring, including 37 on 27 April and 76 on 1 May, but the largest count was 114 on 11 July.

Fylde coast records followed a broadly similar pattern, beginning with two off Blackpool on 28 March and ending with one there on 6 Oct. Notable counts from Rossall included 57 on 13 April, 100+ on 26 April, 60 on 24 July and 44 on 6 Sept. Records were most frequent off Blackpool during April and May but birds were seen far more consistently there in autumn than in Morecambe Bay; the most significant counts were 65 on 12 April, 177 on the 26th and 108 on the 27th, 60 on 13 May, 27 on 21 June, 100+ on 10-11 July, 125 on 25 Aug, 108 on 7 Sept and 83 on the 22nd.

As usual, most major movements off Formby Point were southbound, even in spring. These included 206 on 1 May and 114 on the 13th, 155 on 28 July and 176 on the 30th, 100 on 21 Aug, 48 on 13 Sept and nine on the late date of 23 Oct. The only count of any note further south was 40 off Crosby shore on 5 May.

Surprisingly, MMWWT recorded a Gannet for a third successive year: an immature on 29 April, while another immature flying south-west over Colne on 14 Oct was the first record in east Lancashire since June 1984.

CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo***Common and increasing on coasts and estuaries. Local but increasing inland.**

International importance: 1200. National importance: 230

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SNR	700	267	448	294	72	50	75	70	300	430	750	515
Formby Pt	249	63	9	78	38	/	0	125	180	299	222	222
Ribble WeBS	174	36	247	61	1	5	30	74	225	341	375	456
Mbay WeBS	46	81	79	27	27	21	46	110	40	88	112	43
Stocks Res	39	46	28	24	9	12	16	36	49	42	48	35

Lancashire's Cormorant population has probably been relatively stable over the past decade and 2003 was no exception, with none of the main sites in the table registering more than slight fluctuations.

The largest counts at Seaforth came, as usual, during strong onshore winds: 700+ on 28 Jan, 729 on 3 Nov, 750 on 14 Nov and 515 on 28 Dec. The southern Liverpool Bay birds are more dispersed in calmer weather with many roosting on buoys and sandbanks in the Mersey Channel as well as at Formby Point. Fifty or more now regularly roost at Liverpool's Pier Head, flying out into the bay in the early morning. Several large counts came from Southport this year, including 126 on Marshside beach on 12 Oct with 310 there on 9 Dec, and an unprecedented 620 on the shore opposite Hesketh Road on 9 Dec.

More than 85% of all Cormorants counted during the CCW aerial surveys of the whole of Liverpool Bay in January and February were located in the rectangular sea area between Formby Point, the Mersey mouth and the Point of Air, indicating just how important the waters off Merseyside are for this species.

Significant counts from other coastal sites included 85 at Naze Point on 23 March, 112 at Rossall Point on 7 Sept with 92 there on 19 Oct, and 56 by the Wyre Light on 15 Aug. Heysham reported about 30 birds during both winters while Jenny Brown's Point had a peak count of 63 on 9 Sept.

Few were reported from inland sites except Stocks Reservoir. They included a record 42 at MMWWT on 10 March, 51 at Brockholes Quarry on 16 March, 25 at Prescott Reservoirs on 8 March, 48 inland over Fazakerley on 2 Jan, peaks of 16 at Foulridge Reservoir and five at both Belmont and Rishton Reservoirs, and 13 on the Ribble near Clitheroe between Hurst Green and Siddows on 28 Dec. Single-figure counts on the Lune between Caton and Hornby and at Arkholme were typical.

The injured ringed *sinensis* bird remained at Glasson Dock all year, another was at Marton Mere during January, with perhaps as many as four present in the Stanley Park area that month, and a final single at Skippool on 6 Sept. None were seen at Seaforth all year.

SHAG *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Uncommon but probably increasing on coasts. Most records are of immatures.

An unexceptional year, in which at least nine birds were recorded, began with one at Glasson Dock on 3 April. A group of three 'immatures' was found at Heysham on 27 April, at least two of which remained until the 30th. The next two records came from Fylde: one off Rossall Point on 4 May and another found dead by the railway line next to Lytham St. Annes Nature Reserve on 22 May – the latter having been ringed as a pullus on Puffin Island, Anglesey in 2000.

An adult feeding close inshore at Formby Point on 28 July was followed by a juvenile at Blackpool on 21 Sept with presumably the same bird there on the 24th. The last records of the year were back at Heysham: juvenile(s) on 9 Oct, 21 Nov and 25 Dec.

BITTERN* *Botaurus stellaris*

Rare breeding bird Leighton Moss. Scarce winter visitor elsewhere.

In the first winter period one was at Belmont Reservoir from 5 Jan to 11 March, occasionally also visiting small pools on the other side of the busy road, and there were singles at MMWWT on five dates from 7-23 Jan, two on 1 April and one the next day. The main wintering site was, however, Marton Mere, where no fewer than eight were present early in January before quickly dropping to two or three in late January and February with the last on 20 March.

Five were recorded at Leighton Moss on 8 Jan and an emaciated bird was found dead on the 18th; although a maximum of only two was noted in February, this presumably underestimated totals given March reports. The first booming was heard on 3 March, and on the 24-28th one was booming and five were 'gull-calling' whilst flying at height. Some reports suggested there may have been two booming males, but the Leighton Moss breeding data indicated only one, probably a young male given its booming was weak and started late. Two active nests were located including one of the radio-tagged young female from 2000, but both were thought to have failed during a cold and wet spell in May. Up to three were reported in September and five were in view simultaneously from Lillian's Hide on 27 Oct.

Away from Leighton Moss, a presumed passage migrant was in a ditch at Saltcotes, Lytham on 23 Oct and the first arrived at Marton Mere just two days later on the 25th, with two there that month. Wintering numbers were again outstanding at this site with seven on 15 Dec, probably the highest density of wintering Bitterns in the country. The only other report in the second winter period came from MSW on 22 Nov.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta***Scarce but increasing visitor, mainly to coastal marshes.**

First White Storks, now Little Egrets. A number of escapes, apparently from more than one source, led to a very cloudy picture in the county this year. This is particularly unfortunate when the majority of reports, especially on the coast, probably related to wild birds. Where captive origin is known (either due to the nature of colour rings or restriction/absence of yellow on the feet) this is reflected below.

At least six were reported to have escaped from Blackpool Zoo. To confuse matters, not all of these birds were ringed and, whilst several had all dark legs, others showed some yellow on the toes. A Darvic-ringed bird which spent much of the early autumn roosting on the island of Southport Marine Lake was also an escape, having restricted yellow on the feet and a ring colour not fitting with any scheme used in the wild. Birds at Marton Mere and Stanley Park in May were clearly fresh out of the zoo and escaped birds were apparently still thriving on the Ribble estuary and perhaps elsewhere at the year's end.

The year began with one roosting at Fluke Hall, with presumably this bird nearby at Lane Ends and Damside to 7 Feb. One was also reported at Warton Bank, a favoured site, on 14-16 Jan.

Spring passage appeared to get underway with one at Warton Bank in mid-April, though it is possible this was the wintering bird. There was certainly an influx in May, even allowing for fugitives, with at least two seen at south-west sites (SNR, Marshside, Ainsdale and Banks) during the month and three at Leighton Moss on the 27-29th.

The first suggestion of a wider escape issue came in June, with a bird probably from the zoo (colour ring and leg pattern) at Brockholes Quarry on the 9th. Other records that month came from SNR on the 5th, Heysham Village Bay on the 10th, over Thornton (Fylde) mid-month and at Leighton Moss late in the month. One at Skirden Beck on 18 & 22 July was a rare east Lancashire record – it was unringed and had yellow feet. The only other July report came from Leighton Moss on several dates towards the end of the month.

In August one was at Burrows Marsh, Fylde on the 1st, one still at Leighton Moss throughout and two apparent wild birds were in the Conder Green-Cockersands area for much of the month. Further reports came from Sunderland Point on the 27th, over Rossall and then at Pilling Lane Ends on the 30th and MMWWT on the 31st. One at Wayoh Reservoir on 20 Aug was apparently an escape on foot colour.

In September the two at Conder Green-Cockersands and single at Leighton Moss remained. Other reports comprised a juvenile at Overton on the 4th, singles at Freckleton Naze and Skippool on the 16th and one at Marshside on the 27-28th. Into October at least one lingered on the Lune Estuary, whilst a colour-ringed escape (not the earlier bird) was at Brockholes Quarry and nearby Avenham Park, and a bird with apparently pink feet flew over Blackpool South Shore on the 16th.

One remained on the Lune estuary during November and December, roosting at Ashton Hall Lake and usually feeding in creeks on Colloway Marsh. Other reports came from Morecambe on 2 Nov, Hest Bank on 5 Nov and Marshside on 7 & 18 Dec. At least one escaped bird wintered on the Ribble, initially at Avenham Park before moving to Warton Bank in 2004.

Trying to cut through the impact of escapes is nigh on impossible, because birds at any distance on coastal marshes could not be assigned either way. However, taking a guess it appears that numbers of wild birds were similar to recent years, levelling off after a large increase. Certainly the large roosts and regular nesting attempts elsewhere still look some time away in Lancs.

Could all observers please note the foot coloration and any rings on Little Egrets to enable assessment of the future impact of this year's significant number of escapes.

GREAT WHITE EGRET *Egretta alba*

Vagrant

One was present on the Eric Morecambe Pools for an hour on 5 Aug, before departing south-east at 0950 hours (MD, JR, RH). It seems highly likely this was the bird previously at Bassenthwaite Lake, Cumbria on 1-2 Aug, the first Cumbrian record but the third for Lancashire, following birds at Banks Marsh and MSW in 2001 and Martin Mere in 2003.

This record has been accepted by the BBRC.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

Scarce breeding resident, regular passage migrant and winter visitor

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
Ribble	11	6	8	5	6	24	12	9	31	23	20	19
M Bay S	6	11	46	18	7	11	30	26	40	12	29	18
Alt	13	8	0	2	4	14	14	14	21	15	14	5

Numbers seen on WeBS counts were broadly similar to 2002.

The Claughton heronry was estimated at c.50 pairs, giving some hope that numbers may have stabilized following marked declines. Having gone in the other direction, the Entwistle Reservoir heronry has also stabilized somewhat, with 39 nests and young seen in 36 of these. At the south-western sites of Knowsley, Ince Blundell, Formby and West Crantham a total of c.41 young fledged from 63 active nests, significantly higher productivity than in 2002. In north Lancashire there were 25 nests at Tunstall (and apparent spillover of one pair to Melling), nine near Skerton Weir and five at Ashton Hall. On the Fylde there were eleven nests on Stanley Park north island and four at the new site of Centre Farm, Forton which had apparently relocated from nearby Centre Wood. There were five pairs at Waterfoot in Rossendale (fledging seven young) and active heronries – but no further information – in east Lancs at Bolton-by-Bowland, Reed Hall and Winkley Hall. There were two nests at Cuerden Valley Park, and a bird was seen carrying nesting material over Centre Wood, Cockerham.

Few large counts were received away from nest sites excluding the WeBS data. Double-figure totals consisted of 14 at SNR on 15 June, 19 there on 17 Aug and 20 on 16 Sept; 14 at Skippool on 19 July and 12 at Marshside in June, whilst inland 13 were at Eccleston Mere on 12 July, 12 at Foulridge Reservoir on 14 Sept and up to 15 were recorded at Brockholes Quarry. Up to nine were seen on the Mersey at Garston. The lack of many large casual counts may reflect a decline in nesting numbers, birds were scarce at Myerscough Quarry following the fall in the Claughton nesting population.

At Heysham one came in-off then headed south on 12 Jan, possibly a hard weather movement; more typical was one in-off then south there on 21 Sept. The only other coastal migrant reported was one south offshore at Starr Gate on 27 June.

WHITE STORK *Ciconia ciconia*

Rare passage migrant, true picture increasingly clouded by free flying captive birds.

One flew over the A59 at Barrow Lodge on 1 April. There was a report of one near Haydock on 27 April. There was no evidence of an influx into northern England in 2003 and these records are considered to relate to tame birds wandering from the Harewood estate near Leeds.

SPOONBILL *Platalea leucorodia***Scarce annual visitor in summer and autumn to coastal marshes**

An unseasonal juvenile was found by visiting birders at Brockholes Quarry on 29 Nov, remaining to 4 Dec and reappearing briefly on the 8th (AM, CS *et al*). If this wasn't surprising enough it was then found wintering on the Ribble estuary at Hesketh Bank on 24 Dec (CFL) and Longton Marsh on 29th (CIB); the bird continued to be seen on the Ribble into 2004.

The small number of Spoonbills in the country at the time enabled this immature to be tracked as it moved through the country. It was at Queen Mother Reservoir, Berkshire from 6 to 25 Nov; Wilstone Reservoir, Herts on the 25-27th, and at Blithfield Reservoir, Staffs on the 28th before appearing in Lancs the next day.

Previous wintering records consist of one shot at Formby on 28 Feb 1922; one at Formby and the south Ribble marshes in winter 1933/34 and three over Seaforth on 1 Dec 1997. The Seaforth birds had previously been in Cleveland and were later seen at Conwy RSPB.

HONEY BUZZARD* *Pernis apivorus***Rare passage migrant.**

Records of this enigmatic raptor continue to increase overall and there were six this year. The first was an early adult at Lydiate Station on 28 April (JKB). There were then none until late June, when a sub-adult was seen at Nuck's Wood, Mere Brow on the 29th (JKB).

A pale bird went south over Grimsargh Reservoir on 27 Aug (DH), and a dark juvenile flew over Larkholme, Fleetwood on the 21st and was also seen off Cleveleys (IB, SE); interestingly, given the species' rarity in Ireland, this bird was heading out to sea and could not be picked up at south Fylde sites. Completing the year, a pale phase flew east over Brockholes Quarry on 5 Oct (JW *et al*).

RED KITE *Milvus milvus***Formerly vagrant, now rare but annual visitor largely due to successful reintroduction schemes elsewhere in Britain.**

Reports of this species are still on the increase as reintroductions continue to flourish, though most records this year came from east Lancashire and many of these are considered to relate to a single individual wandering in Bowland. In the ELOC area and neighbouring recording areas birds were seen over Wray on 25 March, Marshaw on 14 April, Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on 18 April, Dunsop Bridge on 17 June, Brierfield on 17 Sept, the Hornby/Gressingham area on 10 Oct, the Trough of Bowland on 29 Oct and Stocks Reservoir on 30 Oct. If there was only one bird responsible for the Bowland records in the above set it was well staked out from mid-November to mid-December, being seen regularly near Boarsden and also occasionally in the Brennand Valley and at Whitendale.

There were just two records elsewhere, one in spring and one in autumn. One headed east over Hag Delph, near Knowsley Safari Park on 27 March with presumably the same at Prescott Reservoirs on the 30th, and one was over the M58 on 20 Oct.

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE *Haliaeetus albicilla***Vagrant**

One flew north east past the Stocks Reservoir boardhouse car park on 12 March (RT, PW). The bird was in its second calendar-year, and had blue wing-tags, indicating it was one of ten fledglings marked in north-west Scotland in 2002.

This is the third Lancashire record and the first in recent times. It is also the furthest proven movement of a Scottish reintroduction White-tailed Eagle. Perhaps surprisingly, it was not reported anywhere else in northern England or southern Scotland. See separate article.

MARSH HARRIER *Circus aeruginosus*

Uncommon passage migrant, rare in east. Rare breeder. Rare in winter.

Wintering Marsh Harriers, extremely notable less than a decade ago, are now almost expected. They tend to be most frequent in the south-west, and at least two were at MMWWT in January and February with perhaps one of these at Banks Marsh on 5 Jan.

As often happens, the first bird back at Leighton Moss (a male on 18 March) was earlier than any passage migrant sighting, though a female passed Southport Pier the next day. A further two birds, both females, were on site at Leighton by the month's end and another male was seen on 1 May. A handful of migrants were reported in mid-April, from MMWWT on the 14th, and over Heysham and Marshside on the 20th. Overall, spring passage was fairly light, with none from Marton Mere or any other Fylde site. The only May report came from MMWWT on the 19th.

A male and three females were at Leighton Moss over the summer and two nests fledged no fewer than nine young, five and four respectively; the third female was believed to have nested unsuccessfully. What was presumably a non-breeder was at Tockholes on 6 July, and the first juvenile was at MMWWT on the 28th.

Showing how regular this species has become in the county up to ten different birds were thought to have been seen at MMWWT in the second half of the year, making thirteen in total in 2003. The largest site count here was five on 15 Sept.

Elsewhere, there were site peaks of at least three in Over Wyre on 17 Aug and four on the Ribble marshes at Tarleton on 16 Sept. Notable inland records comprised birds at Brockholes Quarry on 1 Aug, Cliviger fishponds on 5-8 Aug and 7 & 8 Sept, at Belmont from 13 Aug to 9 Sept with a second bird there on 30 Aug, and over Roby Mill on 17 Aug.

At least one lingered at Leighton Moss into October, when there were also reports from MMWWT, Marshside, MSW, Prescot Reservoirs and Warton Bank. By November and December all records were again restricted to the south-west, with up to two throughout on Crossens Outer marsh (presumably one of these visiting Marshside in November), and at least two at MMWWT in November and one in December.

An interesting insight into the movement of this species was provided by a distinctive leucistic juvenile. First seen at Pilling Lane Ends on 17 Aug, it was reported on Downholland Moss from late August to early September and was also seen at MMWWT around this time. It was apparently not one of those fledged at Leighton Moss, leaving questions as to its origins.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus*

Uncommon visitor to coasts and hills outside breeding season. Rare breeder.

Breeding census work in Bowland was made more problematic by high numbers of replacement clutches, and birds moving between estates. At least two nests were destroyed by a moorland fire, but both known losses led to second attempts, one of which was successful. There were nine nesting attempts on United Utilities land, including three replacement clutches; three were successful and ten young were fledged. There were also three nests on the Abbeystead estate, one of which was successful. All fledglings were wing-tagged and had radio transmitters fitted. There was no evidence of breeding away from the Bowland fells.

Birds were reported from widespread inland and coastal sites in the first winter period. There were no large counts at this time, but sites holding at least two birds included Champion Moor-Stocks Reservoir, Twiston Moor, MMWWT and Marshside. A bird at MSW on 14 Jan and

Plex Moss the next day had been marked in the Yorkshire Dales National Park in 2002. One north-east over Heysham on 27 Feb may have been an early return migrant; there was no such doubt attached to a ringtail moving north offshore past Starr Gate on 18 April. A late bird was at Marshside sometime in May.

Autumn movement can be difficult to pick out but perhaps began in late August when a ringtail moved south-east over Darwen on the 25th and another appeared at Leighton Moss on the 26th. Movement appeared to continue until at least November, when a ringtail spent the 10-11th at the unusual site of Marton Mere.

A roost of eight birds, six ringtails and two males, was discovered at a coastal site in November. Other winter records included a good run of reports by recent standards from MMWWT, with at least three different birds recorded in all months October-December. There were also up to three seen at Marshside, two at Banks Marsh and regular reports across the estuary at Warton Bank. Inland, at least three were seen at Belmont at this time, and birds remained widespread at ELOC sites with Stocks Reservoir and Champion Moor again particularly favoured.

GOSHAWK *Accipiter gentilis*

Rare breeding bird. Possible rare spring and autumn passage migrant / post breeding dispersal.

There was no information on success from the established breeding sites, but display was noted at a couple of sites.

Otherwise, a typically diverse scattering of reports of single birds came from Brindle on 23 Feb, Leighton Moss on 13 April, Musbury in Rossendale on 26 May and 23 Oct and one flying from Glasson to Overton on 31 July. Although this species is no longer on the description list several of these reports were not even supported by an observer's name, and although some are certainly genuine others may be misidentified Sparrowhawks. Additionally, escapes have been a problem in some parts of the county, particularly the south-west, though all birds should continue to be reported.

SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus*

Fairly common breeding resident, uncommon passage migrant.

The only migration reported in spring concerned a female north over Morecambe Stone Jetty on 27 March and one at Heysham on 13 April. Autumn movement was similarly light or unrecorded, with one south at SNR on 24 Aug and one south over Pilling Lane Ends on 21 Sept the only reports away from Heysham where there were eight in total between 21 Sept and 17 Oct.

The BTO bird trends website shows that numbers have stabilised nationally over the last decade following a previous rapid increase. Insufficient information was submitted to enable the Lancashire situation to be accurately assessed, other than from Rossendale where a decline in wintering reports and possible decline in breeding pairs was noted. Three pairs nested near Brockholes Quarry. A number of successful pairs were noted in south Liverpool.

Reports of prey species included one in pursuit of a Green Woodpecker at Gisburn Forest in April, a female taking a Magpie at SNR in August and one taking a Snipe at Birkdale in December. There were several reports of Collared Doves falling victim to garden-hunting Sparrowhawks in the Chorley NHS area.

BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

Uncommon but increasing breeding and wintering bird. Uncommon passage migrant.

Buzzards continue to thrive in the county, with some further range expansion apparent during the year. It has been suggested in some quarters that this is now the most common bird of prey in the country, it has probably not got to that stage yet in Lancashire but it is still a clear success story. Breeding information included up to eleven pairs in Bowland and at least one other pair in east Lancashire. There appeared to be at least three occupied sites in the Fylde as colonisation there continues. Birds were seen frequently at farmland areas around the edge of south Liverpool.

Early year maxima included eleven at Prescot Reservoirs, up to ten at Leighton Moss, eight at east Lancashire sites and seven at Lune Valley sites. In terms of migrants the situation has perhaps become too clouded by wandering resident birds, but there was arguably still some evidence of clear-cut movement rather than dispersal. Of eight reports at SNR all bar one in January were during the spring and autumn, including birds seen to come in off, and may all have been on passage. Similarly, birds over Aldcliffe on 12 April and Heysham the next day were probable migrants.

Records of autumn migrants were complicated by juvenile dispersal, but one intriguing record concerned seven over Poulton-le-Fylde on 14 Sept, when an initial two were joined by five others before they all drifted off west. A possible migrant went over Heysham on 7 Sept, and 16 bird-days at Marton Mere between 26 Aug and 28 Sept probably included some migrants as well as local dispersal. There was an increase in reports from Brockholes Quarry at this time suggestive of a passage influx. Two migrants were also reported in Rossendale in September.

At Leighton Moss the peak counts in the second half of the year were nine in August and eight in September. Elsewhere, submitted counts included eight at the Old Coach Road, St Helens, seven at MMWWT, and five at Churchtown, MSW, Kirkham and Mythop.

A bird superficially resembling a Rough-legged Buzzard was seen over the Ainsdale dunes in the first winter period.

ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD* *Buteo lagopus*

Rare passage migrant and winter visitor.

One was seen at Whitendale, Bowland on 31 March (WDF). This is the first record since one at Leighton Moss in April 1999, prior to which one spent three successive winters in the Whitendale area from 1996 to 1998.

This takes the county total to a minimum of 27 birds.

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

Fairly common passage migrant

As in 2001 there were records in no fewer than eight months of the year, and it is a sign of how far things have come that Ospreys are now 'fairly common' in Lancashire. It is sometimes difficult to know whether sightings are linked without the times the birds were seen, but it is probably safe to say at least 52 Ospreys passed through this year with around 22 in summer and autumn almost as productive as the roughly 30 in spring.

Very early birds were over Arkholme on 14 March and Forton on the 16th, also in that month birds were noted at Leighton Moss and Myerscough Quarry on the 26th, Fairhaven and Rossall (same) on the 28th, Leighton Moss and Blackpool on the 29th and Darwen on the 30th.

The strongest pulse of records all year came in six days in early April from Stocks Reservoir, Dunsop, Longridge and Roby Mill on the 3rd; Heysham and Leighton Moss (same),

Brockholes and Grane on the 4th; Bispham, Salwick and Grane on the 5th; LSANR and Marton Mere (same), Birkdale and Sawley on the 6th; and Leighton Moss, West Bradford and Bank End on the 8th. Other April reports came from Grane on the 9th, Marton Mere on the 10th, Wyre estuary on the 11th, Rossall on the 13th, Darwen on the 15th and 16th, MMWWT on the 15th, Stocks Reservoir on the 21st, Leighton Moss and Lancaster on the 26th and Newton and Arkholme on the 27-28th.

May was surprisingly quiet, perhaps because conditions had been conducive to early movement, and one over Heysham and then Leighton Moss on the 10th was the only report.

Summer occurrences continue to increase and an interesting set this year were singles west over Waddington on 26 June, rather unusually perched at Leck Fell on 6 July and also that month on the Ribble estuary on the 12th, Leighton Moss on the 22nd and over Higher Hollinbank, Musbury on the 26th.

Clear return movement began in mid-August, with birds were noted over Darwen on the 17th, Pilling Marsh and Heysham on the 25th, Broughton and Darwen Moor on the 27th, Lower Rivington Reservoir on the 29th and Stocks Reservoir the next day. Singles passed over Anglezarke and Brockholes Quarry on 2 Sept; there was then a gap until birds at Marton Mere on the 13th, Staining on the 14th, MMWWT on the 15th, Dunsop Valley, MSW, MMWWT and Cloughton on the 21st and again in the Dunsop Valley on the 29th. The year was rounded off by one over Roddlesworth Reservoir on 2 Oct.

KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

Fairly common breeding resident, uncommon passage migrant.

In the Pilling-Preesall area 11 monitored pairs laid 55 eggs from which 45 young fledged, the fledging rate of just over four chicks per pair was among the best in recent years. In Bowland there were nine territories on United Utilities land, with confirmed nesting at five of these but no details of success. Good numbers generally were noted at Heysham, and in the ELOC area. One correspondent suggested that the species is now very scarce as a suburban bird in south Liverpool. There was no evidence of breeding this year in the well-watched Arkholme study area.

In spring three apparent migrants were noted at Heysham on 13 March but no other spring movement was recorded. Autumn movement was much more pronounced, six birds were noted at Heysham from 31 Aug to 17 Oct and other reports came from Morecambe Stone Jetty on 5 & 8 Sept, Marton Mere (two) on the 11th, Starr Gate on the 15th and Fairhaven on 7 Nov.

The traditional feeding gathering on the saltmarsh off Marshside peaked at 17 in August, with up to ten still in October. Interestingly, 13 birds were noted on the other side of the Ribble on Warton Bank on 25 Aug, and these may have been overlooked in prior years.

Interesting information on feeding/aggression activity concerned a family of seven mobbing a Marsh Harrier at Cliviger on 8 Aug, and one robbing a Short-eared Owl at Twiston. More unusual prey species reported concerned a Sand Lizard taken at Birkdale and a Corn Bunting at Eagland Hill.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius*

Uncommon winter visitor, particularly to coasts and mossland. Scarce breeder in hills.

In Bowland there were six nesting attempts, against eight in 2002, but some compensation was provided by good success with a minimum of 21 young fledged. Elsewhere, three pairs in the ROC area had very mixed fortunes; one fledged four young but the other two appeared to have had their eggs removed or chicks taken. Two pairs were successful in the West Pennine Moors, which had been hit by moorland fires in March and April destroying at least three nest sites. At least three other pairs were recorded at upland sites.

The typical pattern of coastal wintering records included three each at Marshside, Pilling Lane Ends and Warton Bank. Birds also appear to be wintering increasingly in upland areas, with reports from six ELOC sites though such behaviour is still much less regular in Rossendale.

Late reports in April included presumed migrants at Heysham on 6 & 15 April, with others at this time at Marshside and Pilling Marsh on the 18th and an apparent northbound migrant over Marton Mere the next day. The last reports, however, came from MMWWT, where birds were seen until 6 May.

Return to the coast was early; the first was at the Eric Morecambe Pools on 24 July with another at MMWWT the next day. There were two at the EM Pools by early August, with other notable dates at Warton Bank on the 3rd and the Wyre estuary by the 8th. Unusually, the peak count for Marshside came during August when up to four birds were present.

Passage migrants began with one over the sea at Starr Gate on 25 Aug. At the height of visible-migration-watching others were seen in October at Fairhaven and Marton Mere on the 12th, Darwen Moor on the 20th and Starr Gate again on the 31st. Four migrants passed through Brockholes Quarry between mid-September and mid-October.

A bird at Ainsdale in late March was described as showing some characteristics of the Icelandic race *subaesalon*; although birds from Iceland are known to occur in the county (with a ringing recovery in November 1935), they are not safely distinguishable in the field although larger and darker birds may be from this source.

HOBBY *Falco subbuteo*

Uncommon but increasing passage migrant, rare breeder.

Records of this sought after, aerobic falcon continue to increase with a five-month spread of reports but a typical mid-summer peak. The first returning birds were noted in May: at Brockholes Quarry on the 6th, over Lancaster on the 11th, MMWWT on the 21st, Altham on the 26th, SNR on the 29th and Stocks Reservoir on the 31st.

The summer months brought regular reports from Brockholes Quarry, MMWWT and the West Pennine Moors; at the latter site two birds were seen to hunt Northern Eggar moths regularly in June. Away from these sites, June records came from Reed's Moss, St Helens on the 1st, Prescott Reservoirs (hunting Swifts) on the 14th, Stocks Reservoir on the 18th, the River Lune at Aughton on the 22nd, Oakenclough on the 27th, and Dunsop Bridge on the 29th. July records came from Gillars Wood, St Helens on the 1st, Altham on the 5th, Forton on the 7th, Pilling Lane Ends on the 12th & 13th, Barton (Fylde) on the 13th, hunting Swifts over Wavertree on the 14th and Wood End sewage works and Warton Crag on the 30th. There were also reports from Dean Clough and Dunsop Bridge at this time.

The number of reports thinned out a little in August; birds were seen at Eccleston on the 3rd, the Eric Morecambe Pools on the 5th, MSW and Brockholes Quarry on the 6th & 8th, Altham on the 8th, Pilling Lane Ends on the 16th and Barnacre on the 24th. There were four reports in September: at Stocks Reservoir on the 7th, tracking Swallows south over Ingol on the 13th, and finally at both Eccleston and Myerscough College on the 18th.

It is probably not too far from the day when this species is summarised in the county report. However, the breeding population may still only be a handful of pairs, though it is difficult to be sure with a species whose nests are fortunately difficult to locate. There are still some areas where the lack of records is notable, particularly Marton Mere which has a large autumn hirundine roost but no recent Hobby reports.

PEREGRINE *Falco peregrinus*

Uncommon winter visitor, especially to coasts. Scarce breeder.

Winter distribution was in line with recent trends, with some coastal sites holding two or three birds regularly, and numbers remaining in east Lancashire outside the nesting season considered stable.

Success was mixed in the breeding strongholds. Although the eight pairs nesting on United Utilities land in Bowland was a high total, poor weather in late May led to five failing and only three young fledging from the other three. At least five other pairs nested elsewhere in Bowland and five elsewhere in east Lancashire, success was mixed with five young fledged from one nest and failures including one case where young were removed. Birds were micro-chipped and DNA samples taken in some cases to help protect birds. At least six pairs were reported in the lowlands, probably a gross underestimate; sites included Heysham power station, Thornton ICI and Blowick gasometers, where at least two young fledged.

A very large female was seen at SNR from October and presumably the same bird was seen taking on Pochards and Herring Gulls in December. Another large female, also possibly of northern origin, hunted the Morecambe Stone Jetty area in the second winter period. Up to two were roosting on the Pilkington's factory chimney in St Helens in the second winter period.

WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus*

Uncommon winter visitor. Rare breeder.

Monthly peak counts.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Marton Mere	5	6	6	2	/	/	1	1	4	6	7	6

A tape-lure census at Leighton Moss, the county stronghold, revealed numbers to be up on the previous year and back to normal levels with 139 territorial birds located, comprising 103 paired and 36 single responses. This upturn in population was thought probably due to reduced winter reed damage by roosting Starlings, as in 2002 extensive damage to the reedbeds was thought to have led to reduced availability of suitable nesting sites.

Low numbers were reported wintering in the Heysham area during both winter periods with perhaps just three individuals. There was once again a strong suggestion that breeding occurred at Heysham NR, with an adult and fully-fledged juvenile in close proximity, without territorial conflict, on 30 August. This species was last confirmed breeding there in 1998.

On the Fylde, one was in a ditch at Cockerham on 5 January. A maximum of two were present throughout the first half of the year at Warton Bank, where a failed breeding attempt was presumed to have taken place, thwarted by the drying out of the saltmarsh. A single was present to the year's end. The only other reports during the first winter period were of singles at Savick Brook, Preston in January and Bradshaw Lane, Pilling in February. Data for the main Fylde wintering site, Marton Mere, are tabled above. Singles were reported during the second winter period from Sand Villa, Pilling in November, and on the Wyre Estuary at Burglars Alley and Larbreck in December.

In central Lancashire, two were at Greenhalgh Castle Tarn during the first winter period with a single noted in November. A maximum of two birds were present at Brockholes Quarry between mid-September and early-November.

At least nine birds were noted at several water bodies within the ELOC area during the first winter period, and one frequented a rushy field at New Laithe Farm, Newton, coming to food that had been put out for livestock. In the second winter period, Lee Green Reservoir, the most reliable east Lancs site for this species in recent years, held up to three birds from mid-September to the year's end. A single at Wood End Sewage Works in November was the only other report in this period.

At least one was regularly heard at Cuerden Valley Park lake in the first winter period, desilting was deemed responsible for a lack of sightings here in the second period.

Birds were reported from twelve locations in the south-west. Breeding was assumed to have taken place at MSW, with presence noted well into May and a maximum of two present in November. MMWWT recorded just three birds all year, including two in November. One was at Hightown in December, while Marshside logged singles in the first winter period and from July to November, with a peak of two in December. Other records from the Southport area came from Birkdale LNR (one in January) and Sands Lake, Ainsdale (peak of three in January). Records from the Liverpool area came from Crosby Marine Park (one from mid-October to the year's end), Fazakerley (four in the first winter period), Rimrose Valley (one in January, two in October, one in November to December) and SNR (one throughout Dec), whilst in the St. Helens area one was at Bold Moss in October and three in the Sankey Valley in January.

CORNCRAKE *Crex crex*

Rare passage migrant.

2002: On 22 Sept, Mr. W. Perry found a partial corpse on a pavement near the Royal Liver Building in central Liverpool, the apparent victim of a Peregrine kill. Intrigued by the fact the remains did not appear to be that of a feral Pigeon, WP retained the corpse and sent it to the Natural History Museum for identification, who in turn passed it on to the RSPB, where the specimen, based on measurements and the condition of the surviving plumage, was aged as a full-grown juvenile. Not only a remarkable record, but also an interesting example of a Peregrine kill and an unfortunate end for a nationally scarce bird embarking on its first southbound migration.

2003: One was flushed at Sefton Meadows on 5 Aug (JKB). One at Great Plumpton Sidings on 15 Aug showed briefly on three occasions to the fortunate observer (MM).

MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus*

Common winter visitor and breeder.

International importance: 20000. National importance: 7500

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Marshside	/	/	/	75	28	22	17	10	22	26	33	30
MMWWT	/	450	330	320	310	/	/	/	440	380	410	390

This species remains under-recorded in most areas of the county. Once again only limited data were available from Leighton Moss, with a peak count of 31 in September. In the Heysham area, successful breeding was reported on the Nature Reserve (1 pair) and Middleton Industrial Estate (3+ pairs). Results from the BTO Waterways Bird Survey of the River Lune and associated pools between Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale located 26 territorial pairs, the highest figure since 1997 when 27 were recorded.

On the Fylde, double-figure counts came from Bispham Marsh (12 in March), Marton Mere (16 in January), Newton Marsh (23 in November) and Stanley Park Lake, Blackpool (21 in February), with counts of 14 and 15 at two sites in the Pilling area in August and November respectively. The only breeding data received were of single successful pairs at both Lytham Crematorium and Marton Mere, although two pairs were resident at Myerscough Quarry.

Fifty-six reports came from thirteen sites in the ELOC area, compared to thirty-six from ten sites in 2002. Most involved one or two birds, with the exception of seven on the River Calder at Altham in November, ten at Lee Green Reservoir in January and February, six at Walverden Reservoir in December and twelve at Wood End Sewage Works in August with 13 there in

December. The only confirmed breeding report came from a pair at Stocks Reservoir, where thirteen in September was the peak monthly count.

Thirty-seven were an a stretch of the River Ribble adjacent to Brockholes Quarry in September. Birds were present on all the usual waters and rivers in the Rossendale area, with successful breeding noted at Holden Wood Reservoir, Holmes Terrace lodge, Lancashire Stock lodge and on the River Irwell at Waterfoot.

Moorhens bred on all available stretches of water in the CNHS area, at Birkacre, Cuerden and Withnell Fold. Seven pairs bred at Belmont Reservoir, with a peak count of 15 on 23 March. Additionally at Belmont, eight were feeding on corn scattered for Pheasants in woodland hundreds of metres from water on 5 Nov.

A good number of records came from the south-west of the county. This species is frequently encountered on ponds and ditches on farmland along the edge of south Liverpool, with multiple broods noted at three of the city's parks, Calderstones, Princes and Sefton. Counts of 100 and 89 were made on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal from Bootle to Litherland in October and November respectively. Peak counts at MMWWT, which consistently hosts some of highest numbers in the country, were down on the four previous years (see table). Ribble WeBS counts peaked at 70 in March. Elsewhere, double-figure counts came from Calderstones Park (29 in January), Eccleston Mere (30 in January), MSW (22 in March), Newton Lake (30 in February) and Wicks Lane Pool, Formby (14 in December). Breeding records were received from Marshside (20 pairs), Martin Mere (44 broods), MSW (4 broods), Rimrose Valley (5 pairs), Seaforth (3 pairs, only one successful) and White Moss, Skelmersdale (2 pairs).

COOT *Fulica atra*

Abundant winter visitor and common breeder.

International importance: 17500. National importance: 1730

Monthly peak counts:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	880	645	300	58	92	98	109	90	164	426	575	630
Southport ML	346	181	25	7	13	42	178	608	511	474	791	875
Leighton Moss	164	90	101	48	38	211	538	545	180	/	191	24

Data were sparse from the north of the county away from Leighton Moss, the major site. In the Heysham area, numbers remained stable at five pairs on Middleton Industrial Estate, though productivity was thought to be low. Results from the BTO Waterways Bird Survey of the River Lune and associated pools between Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale located nine territorial pairs.

Reports came from twelve sites on the Fylde, with maximum counts from Marton Mere (230 in July), Myerscough Quarry (148 in October), Glasson Basin (100 October), Stanley Park Lake, Blackpool (200 in January), and Ream Hills, Mythop (99 in January). Breeding reports of 1-5 pairs came from eight sites, including Sand Villa Pool, where four pairs laid 24 eggs but only four fledged. A leucistic bird was noted at Marton Mere in October.

In the Ribble Valley, peak early autumn numbers at Brockholes Quarry have more than halved in the two years since the record site count of 500 in 2001. Several pairs successfully bred at two sites in the Longridge area.

Records were received from seventeen sites in the ELOC area, with largest counts of 45 and 40 from Foulridge and Parsonage Reservoirs in February and October respectively. Breeding attempts were under-reported, coming from only five sites. Low water levels in the second winter period affected numbers, with favoured waters holding very few birds. Breeding records in the Rossendale and Chorley areas came from three and six sites respectively.

Marshside, with 42 breeding pairs, had the highest number at a single site by quite a margin, followed by Carr Mill Dam with 15 pairs and MMWWT with twelve. Eight other widely

scattered sites reported breeding attempts by 1-5 pairs, but productivity appears to have been low at most.

On the Leeds-Liverpool canal from Bootle to Litherland, counts of 151 and 125 were made on 17 Oct & 25 Nov respectively, with other treble-figure counts at Marshside (147 in April) and SNR/Crosby ML (202 in January). Double-figure counts came from Bold Moss, St. Helens (30) and Prescott Res (45), while 48 at MSW in early December was the highest count there since February 1998.

COMMON CRANE *Grus grus*

Rare passage migrant

2002: Records were omitted in error from the previous report. One at Hyles Moor, Bowland on 16 March was a first record for the east of the county (KM). A Pilling farmer reported two on 20 March (per RED). An adult at Cabin Hill on 9 April (LA, DW) was presumably the same individual that flew north over Marton Mere (FB), then Heysham an hour later next day (PJM).

2003: One circled high over the Public Pool at Leighton Moss on 10 May before gaining height and drifting north-west (PB, LP, TP, DT).

OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*

Abundant winter visitor. Common breeding bird.

International importance: 10200. National importance: 3200

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alt	3147	2189	3209	757	114	151	571	1382	1190	694	1147	775
M Bay S	25772	19233	13619	4679	4261	3831	9695	17059	19748	28632	26221	24626
Ribble	12395	4721	3467	2140	2306	1979	2231	10639	9030	16042	11065	13990

Peak counts on the Ribble were down on last year but figures for the Alt Estuary were slightly up, while peak numbers in Morecambe Bay returned to the ten-year average after last year's very high count in October.

Birds returning to inland sites early in the year included a pair at Arkholme on 18 Jan, rising to twelve by the 29th; two at Myerscough Quarry in January; two at Belmont Reservoir on the 7 Feb, rising to 20 on the 24th; one at Clitheroe on the 7 Feb; two at Brockholes Quarry on 9 Feb, rising to nine on the 11th; nine at Stocks Reservoir on 10 Feb and 18 at Prescott Reservoirs on 27 Feb. Inland movements increased during March with 40 at Newton on the River Hodder on the 1st, 40 at Brockholes Quarry on the 2nd, 80 at Stocks Reservoir on the 5th, rising to 100+ on the 21st, 79 at Myerscough Quarry and 420 at Arkholme on the 14th.

Breeding records included 26 pairs on Carnforth Marsh; 163 pairs on the River Lune between Lancaster Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale, 56 territories of which were at Arkholme where 31 pairs nested, fledging just nine young; six pairs between Altham and Martholme, fledging at least two young; and five pairs at Belmont Reservoir fledging around nine young. Elsewhere, several pairs bred at Stocks Reservoir, one at Brockholes Quarry, six at Marshside and two at Reed's Moss, Rainford.

Most birds had vacated upland areas by the end of August, although one was reported at Rishton Reservoir on the 19 Nov.

AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Recently established breeding bird, scarce passage migrant, vagrant in winter.

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	0	0	8	16	22	/	27	0	0	0	0	0
Ribble	0	0	0	3	12	16	4	0	0	0	0	0

Now in its third year as a breeding bird, the RSPB's corporate logo seems set to stamp its mark for the foreseeable future on Lancashire's avifauna map, although compared to last year breeding success was low, mainly as a result of adverse weather conditions.

First arrivals were a pair on the Eric Morecambe Pools complex on 2 March which were still present on the 3rd. There were no further sightings until 11 March when five birds were seen, growing to six the next day. A pair was mating on the 14th and birds were seen forming a scrape on the 18th. Numbers increased throughout March with birds also spending time on the Kent Estuary and by 31 March at least twelve were present including five pairs, rising to a minimum of 18 birds by the end of April, including six pairs with four active nests. The first two chicks hatched on 1 May and up 13 chicks were present by the 11th, but an extended spell of poor weather had reduced numbers to five by the 14th. What was considered to be a non-breeding pair was seen to attack two recently hatched groups of chicks with murderous intent, pecking, shaking and even flying with them, but all survived! A rise in water level caused the loss of one nest by the 19 May. By 28 May 16 adults were present, three pairs guarding a total of four chicks with five pairs incubating, and the final outcome by the end of June was that these eight pairs fledged three young from the 15 that hatched. The peak count came on 8 July with 24 adults and three young and all had departed by 27 July.

The first pair arrived at Marshside on 25 March; nine were present by 23 April and a peak of 22 during May, which included at least six pairs. Ultimately, five pairs nested and fledged three young with the low productivity being blamed on drought. One other pair bred at a new site elsewhere on the Ribble marshes, bringing the county total to a minimum of 14 pairs.

Birds were seen at a number of other sites, presumably mostly on their way to and from Leighton Moss and the Ribble. These included one at Cockerham on the 11 April; a pair at Pilling on 12-14 May and again on the 18th; singles at MMWWT on 13 June, SNR on 11 July and Prescott Reservoirs the next day (a first for the St Helens area); and three adults at Freckleton Naze on 26 July. Final sightings for the year were singles on 3 Oct at Leighton Moss and 4 Nov at Crook Farm, Cockersands.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius*

Fairly common on passage. Scarce breeder.

The first of the year was one at Prescott Reservoirs on 14 March and birds arrived at several other sites later that month: one at Ogden and Holden Wood Reservoirs on the 18th, a pair at Altham on the 19th which were seen displaying on the 22nd, one at Marton Mere also on the 22nd, two at Brockholes Quarry on the 23rd, two at Hare Tarn on the 26-27th, two at Borwick Lane Pit on the 27th, and one at Knuzden Flash, near Rishton on the 30th.

Peak counts in early spring included four at Brockholes Quarry on 7 April with five there on the 27th, four at Newton Marsh on 8 April, three at MMWWT between 9 & 10 April, up to four at Stocks Reservoir between 11 & 30 April, up to five at Bartle Pools between 20 April and 16 May, six at Belmont Reservoir on 26 April, and an impressive ten at Arkholme on the 29th.

It was a very poor year for breeding if the reports, or rather the lack of them, are anything to go by. At Arkholme three pairs attempted breeding, fledging at least five young, while Brockholes Quarry reported the fledging of two young from one pair, and a single pair nested at

Belmont Reservoir. Others were suspected of breeding at several other sites, including Aldcliffe Wildfowling Pools; Conder Green, Knuzden Flash, where five were present all spring until at least 5 July; SNR and at Altham, where a nest with eggs was deserted due to nearby flood defence work.

Six at Brockholes Quarry on 5-8 June must have included some additional, perhaps non-breeding, birds, while eight on the Eric Morecambe Pools on 22 June and four at MMWWT on the 28th may have marked the beginning of the return passage.

Definite passage birds reported in July included one at Marton Mere on the 2nd, and one at Upper Foulridge Reservoir on the 8th, with two adults and four juveniles there on the 12th and 13 birds on the 17th. Up to four were at Stocks Reservoir until 8 July, while Brockholes Quarry had four adults and one juvenile on the 10th, and Anglezarke Reservoir two on the 20th. There were two juveniles at MMWWT on 10 Aug, and a juvenile and an adult at Brockholes Quarry also on the 10th, rising to one adult and three juveniles between the 11th & 12th. The peak count at Leighton Moss was nine on 27 August. The last record of the year was a juvenile at Brockholes Quarry on 9 Sept.

RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor. Scarce breeding bird.

International importance: 730. National importance: 330 (winter); 300 (passage)

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alt	7	51	27	284	89	10	8	770	134	12	54	52
M Bay S	76	59	53	150	38	6	59	87	60	106	60	74
Ribble	23	18	43	99	4300	21	19	727	132	67	7	31

The Ribble Estuary WeBS count for May was the third highest ever recorded there and indicates the major importance of this area as a feeding site for passage birds. Apart from the WeBS counts 21 were recorded on Garston Shore on 5 Jan, 45 were at Starr Gate on 30 Jan and Rossall Point had 30 on 1 Feb.

The first inland record was at MMWWT with a single bird on 17 Jan. The first notable inland passage movements were 40 at Catchdale Moss, St. Helens on 1 April and 34 flying north over Prescott Reservoirs on the 3rd. Singles were at Brockholes Quarry on 17 & 29 April with twelve there on May and a further 15 throughout the month, while Alston Reservoir had one on the 18 April and nine on the 30th. Other inland records included six at Belmont Reservoir on 26 April, two at Withnell Fold Flash the next day, two at Mythop Flood on 13 May and up to 36 on the drained Alston Reservoirs on 22-23 May.

Breeding records were sparse. Up to 15 pairs bred on Carnforth Marsh hatching 15 young. The Waterways Bird Survey of the River Lune between Lancaster Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale recorded nine territorial pairs, slightly up on last year's seven pairs, the lowest number ever recorded; four of these were at Arkholme where four young fledged. MMWWT recorded five breeding pairs, while four pairs fledged seven young from six clutches at SNR.

Inland autumn passage records saw one at Brockholes Quarry on 3 Aug, an adult and juvenile there on the 7th, five on the 9th and 16 on the 23rd. Foulridge Reservoir had one adult and two juveniles on 23 Aug and three adults were at Clowbridge on the 24th with one the next day. A juvenile was at Clowbridge on 7 Sept, two at Prescott Reservoirs on the 10th, four at Foulridge Reservoir on the 19th and one at Brockholes Quarry on the 22nd. The final inland record was an unconfirmed report of a single bird at Foulridge Reservoir on 8 Nov.

DOTTEREL *Charadrius morinellus***Uncommon, but regular spring migrant, scarce in autumn.**

Spring passage began on 18 April when four arrived at the traditional upland site of Pendle Hill. Sightings continued there with one on the 20th, three males and one female on the 23rd, two males and two females on the 24th, three between the 26th & 27th, four males and one female on the 28th, with four remaining until the 30th and a single male until 5 May.

Cowpe Moss, Rossendale had a female on 4 May which was present the next day with a male. Hawthornthwaite Fell was also checked on several dates in late April to early May but none were seen. There were no reports from favoured lowland sites.

Two birds were reported on autumn passage: a juvenile on Pendle Hill from 7 to 10 Sept, and a moulting adult on Hawthornthwaite Fell on 9-10 Sept. These were the latest ever east Lancashire records.

AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis dominica***Vagrant****1995**

It came to light during preparations for the forthcoming county avifauna that the record of the well-watched first-winter at Fishmoor and Parsonage Reservoirs from 28 October to 11 November had not been accepted by the BBRC. Worse than that – it had never been submitted! A classic case of everyone assuming someone else had done it. Fortunately, the finder (WCA) had retained detailed notes and the record has finally been accepted by the BBRC.

2003

A juvenile was found on the Stanley School playing fields opposite Marshside on 19 Oct (BMcC, NH, ST). The weekend appearance resulted in many birders increasing their life and Lancashire lists as the bird was present until dusk, roosting with Golden Plovers on one half of the football pitch whilst a kick-about occurred in the other half. It was not seen again until 4 Nov on the beach off Marine Drive, and then reported on the 6th and again on the 8-10th. The final run of sightings were on Crossens Marsh between 25 & 28 Nov. The record has been accepted by the BBRC and becomes the fifth for Lancashire, the others occurring in 1984, 1988, 1995 and 1998, the latter date also at Marshside.

GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis apricaria***Abundant on passage and in winter near coasts. Scarce breeding bird.**

International importance: 8000. National importance: 2500

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	330	22	720	0
M Bay S	1526	2574	1115	521	0	0	141	25	643	559	5201	2891
Ribble	657	911	1275	20	0	0	0	501	260	2980	3300	2588

Counts in addition to the WeBS data in the table included 2000 at Pilling in March, 850 at Marshside in April, 460 at Cockersands in August and 5000 at Glasson in December. Numbers were very low in the first winter period on the Ribble but recovered to roughly average levels in the second. The majority of Alt birds usually roost at SNR, which had another poor year with a peak count of just 200 in September; the only significant numbers were at Formby Point in November. In contrast, numbers were generally high in Morecambe Bay in both winters and the

5201 counted in November was the highest WeBS total there since 1993. The only significant count from the Lancashire sections of the Mersey was 193 at Garston Shore on 5 Jan.

The first birds moved back towards the breeding areas in February. A single was at Altham on 1 Feb, another at Cowpe Moss on the 2nd, 24 on the moors above Belmont on the 16th, 19 at Ulnes Walton on the 21st and a pair on breeding territory at Crutchender Fell on the 23rd. At a traditional inland gathering point 170 were at Trawden on 28 March, dropping to 100 by the 8th, while 40 were at a similar site near Nelson also on the 28th with 55 there on 2 April. Other counts from inland sites included 38 at Knuzden Flash on 8 April and a peak of 120 at Champion Moor on the 16th.

Breeding records were very scarce. Four pairs bred on the West Pennine Moors around Belmont, including two pairs on moorland reduced to bare peat by fire in late March. At least four pairs were present on Cowpe Moss and three pairs were on Pendle Hill between April and May. A pair were on Crutchender Fell and there were two territories on United Utilities estate land at Bowland. Two pairs were seen at Knowl Moor together with one large juvenile. Birds were also seen during the breeding season on Bentley Moss, Musden Head Moor and Haslingden Moor. A survey of a 2km-wide strip of moorland fringe from Wycoller to Coal Clough recorded 60 birds from 17-26 April and 40 between 9-23 May.

The first returning coastal birds were recorded at Shard Bridge on the Wyre, with two on 25 June rising to 130 on 5 Aug. A Conder Green count of 1550 on the 12th was the highest by some margin in September. Away from breeding areas, inland sites mostly recorded the first movements in September, the exception being a single bird on 28 Aug at Brockholes Quarry where autumn passage peaked at 24 on 11 Sept. Parsonage Reservoir had three birds on 18 Sept, 21 went south at Coldwell Reservoir on the 19th, while Foulridge Reservoir had 16 on 28 Oct and a further 28 on 1 Nov. The last inland records were 15 over Pendle Hill on 23 Nov and four there on the 5 Dec.

GREY PLOVER *Pluvialis squatarola*

Abundant passage and winter visitor to coast. Uncommon inland.

International importance: 2500. National importance: 530

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alt	287	3340	1099	3756	2428	1	28	1863	1204	2467	3098	374
M Bay S	250	182	32	23	31	2	17	11	104	212	475	433
Ribble	1183	914	845	2032	4580	3078	3366	1330	506	1205	1421	634

Numbers continued to decline in Morecambe Bay; the peak count of 475 was half that of 2002 and the lowest since 1996. For some years declining winter numbers on the Ribble have been matched by an increase on the Alt and this continued during 2003; the 3340 on the Alt in February was the largest ever winter WeBS count there. Spring passage numbers were down a little on the Alt compared with 2002 but this was balanced by an increase on the Ribble; when totals for the two estuaries are combined there has been little change over the past ten years.

Records higher than monthly WeBS counts included 300 at Knott End on 17 Aug, 60 at Heysham on 24 Aug, 152 at Pilling on 13 Sept and 300 at Heysham on the 21st.

Only three inland records were received. Two were found at the drained Alston Reservoir on 21 April and were still present on the 22nd, a single bird remained here until the 27th. MMWWT had its nearly annual record with one on 27 Aug, and the final record was a juvenile at Foulridge Reservoir from 2-4 Oct.

LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus*

Abundant but decreasing winter visitor, passage bird and fairly common breeder.

International importance:20000. National importance: 20000

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS counts												
Alt	65	10	0	9	5	125	285	255	399	1210	818	/
M Bay S	4318	6754	795	301	143	1361	1651	2486	6229	4621	16069	16800
Ribble	8145	2351	1291	330	157	201	465	2347	3356	6532	10421	15374
Inland monthly peak counts												
MMWWT1500	1500	400	250	/	670	1100	2800	3400	1200	1600	1900	
Brockholes48	70	80	37	60	100	400	750	700	350	150	80	
Stocks Res52	25	2	20+	5	61	175	164	64	111	60	200	

December WeBS counts on Morecambe Bay and the Ribble were the highest winter figures since 1997. Numbers fluctuate widely between winters on both estuaries but the Ribble continues to show a long-term decline while Morecambe Bay shows no discernable trend. Low numbers on the Alt reflect the apparent abandonment of SNR as a major roost site.

WeBS counts do not fully reflect winter numbers as many birds remain inland. Examples included 22 at Bradley Farm, Rivington on 9 Jan, 444 on the Lune between Caton and Hornby on 16 Jan, 200 at Catchdale Moss on 21 Jan, 420 at Lytham Moss on 25 Jan, 130 in the Burholme area on 13 Feb and 200 at Altham on 23 Feb with 250 at Prescot Reservoirs and 200 at Reed's Moss, Rainford the same day.

These later counts probably involved birds returning to the breeding areas and territorial behaviour was noted at Bradley Farm, Rivington on 11 Feb and White Moss, Skelmersdale on the 24th.

One hundred and eighteen pairs bred at MMWWT, an 80% increase on the record year of 2002. The Leighton Moss complex held 81 pairs while Marshside had 71 confirmed breeding pairs. A survey of two farms at Abbeystead recorded 57 pairs, with one farm fledging at least ten young. Forty-three pairs nested at Arkholme, 36 in the Fluke Hall-Lanes End area and 30 around at Belmont Reservoir. Breeding records came from 38 sites in the ELOC area and several in the CNHS area, including seven pairs at 1000' asl on bare peat on Belmont Moor, four on Darwen Moor and ten on Bradley Farm, Rivington. Successful nesting was recorded at several St. Helens sites, including Billinge, Reed's Moss, the Old Coach Road area and Eccleston Mere, and further records came from Great Harwood, Roby Mills, Oglet, Heysham, Marton Mere and Mythop. A survey of a 2km-wide strip from Wycoller to Coal Clough located a minimum of 107 birds on 17-26 April. and 123 adults with twelve young between 9-23 May.

Post-breeding counts included 620 at Skippool on 6 July, 500 in the Bradshaw Lane area, Fylde on 24 July and 400 at Eagland Hill on 4 Aug. More than 350 were near Bashall Town on 28 Sept, and Conder Green had a peak count of 2300 on 12 Oct. Roof-top roosts were noted at Daneshouse on 1 Nov and Hapton on 3 Nov but no figures were given. Apart from the WeBS counts the highest total of the year was recorded in the Pilling Lane Ends-Sand Villa area with 7500 on the 19 Nov.

KNOT *Calidris canutus***Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant to coasts. Uncommon inland.**

International importance: 4500. National importance: 2800

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	38344	25878	2485	1	2	10	7	0	179	971	57909	45145
Ribble	9159	7098	23691	15989	7350	6190	3629	10626	9400	26320	20355	7660
Alt	2518	2032	19067	9000	1436	1	740	15000	6219	11146	27904	3270

After the very high numbers on the Alt in Feb 2002, the annual maximum reverted to the norm; as usual, the bulk of the Alt flocks were at Formby Point. The annual peak count on the Ribble was 8000 lower than the average over the past four years, continuing the decline which began in the mid-1990s. Numbers in Morecambe Bay increased dramatically at about the time those on the Ribble began to fall and this year's peak count was close to the average since 1997. Overall, it seems that county totals are holding up but with some redistribution northwards.

Notable flocks, mostly incorporated into the WeBS totals, included 6000 at St Annes on 22 March, 10000 flying south past Cleveleys and 8850 past Rossall (presumably the same birds) on 28 April, 10000 on Fairhaven beach on 7 Nov and 12000 at St. Annes on 9 Nov. Overshadowing them all, though, was the wonderful spectacle of up to 33000 at Heysham heliport during December.

Inland, one was at MMWWT on 26 March, two at Brockholes Quarry on 4 May, one at Altham Bridge, near Great Harwood on 7-8 April and one at Stocks Reservoir on 29 April. The only autumn records came from Brockholes Quarry: four juveniles on 9 Sept, one staying for five days; another juvenile on 30 Sept and four flying west on 6 Oct.

SANDERLING *Calidris alba***Abundant passage migrant and common winter visitor.**

International importance : 1200. National importance: 210 (winter); 300 (passage)

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Ribble	1180	370	695	700	8203	580	165	745	1535	1021	2400	856
Alt	934	1431	991	4318	4892	0	47	6894	1852	783	778	439

The numbers in the first winter period on the Ribble were disappointing with the record winter numbers of December 2002 moving rapidly away, producing a January total 1000 lower than the five-year mean peak winter count. Numbers returned to usual levels in November but these too quickly disappeared. The February count on the Alt, however, was 200 or so higher than the five-year winter mean but slightly below this in the second winter period. The long-term trend for birds wintering on the two estuaries remains unchanged with numbers fairly stable on the Ribble and increasing on the Alt; between them they support more than 15% of the country's winter population. Most of the Alt's birds roost at Formby Point but they feed as far south as Crosby shore, where 700 were counted on 4 Jan and 400 during the November WeBS count. The majority of Ribble WeBS birds in February and March were at St Annes, although there were 500 on a high-tide roost at Ainsdale on 20 March.

The spring passage on the Ribble and the Alt was very impressive, with the May WeBS totals being the second highest on both estuaries. All the Ribble birds during the April WeBS count were at St Annes, as were the bulk of those in June. The majority of the Alt flocks were at Formby, and the massive count in August – the largest ever on the Alt in any season – was comprised of three flocks feeding on the upper shore on a multitude of crustaceans and flies

after a thunderstorm. Additional counts at Formby recorded 410 there on 31 July and 654 on 16 Aug while on Crosby shore there were large flocks of 250 on 27 Aug and more than 200 on 6 Sept.

The only birds recorded in the Morecambe Bay South WeBS counts during the year were 13 in Nov and 19 in Dec. Heysham had a dreadful year for the species, with one on 21-22 April, two on 20 May and one on 20 Aug the only records. There were 54 at Rossall Point on 25 March and up to 14 there in September to November.

Inland, singles were recorded at MMWWT on 7 & 20 May; there were two at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir, Darwen on 4 May; two different birds were at Alston Reservoir, Longridge on 23 & 24 May, and a total of five at Brockholes Quarry on four dates at the end of May to early June.

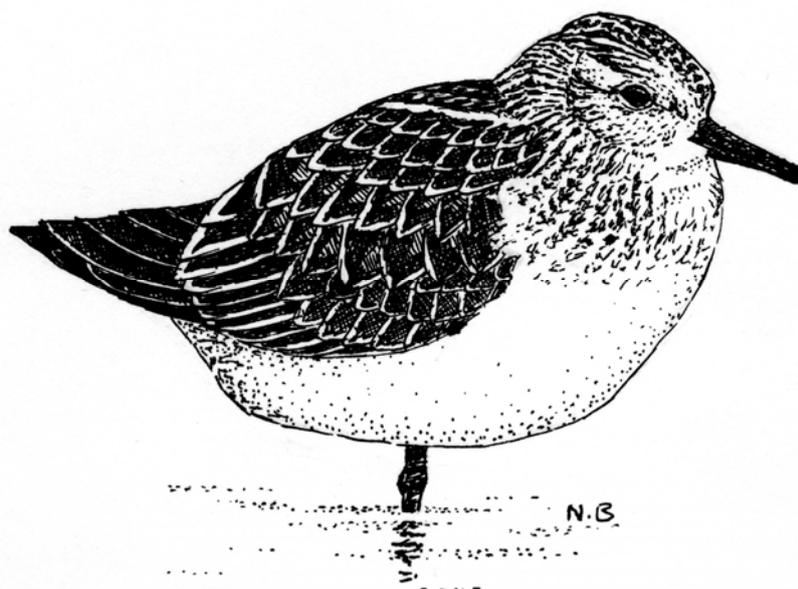
LITTLE STINT *Calidris minuta*

Fairly common passage migrant. Scarce winter visitor.

Three or more were on the Sefton Coast during January with two on that month's Ribble WeBS count and three on Birkdale Green Beach on the 5th. One was at MMWWT on 17 & 29 Jan and two at Marshside in March.

A single, possibly on spring passage, was at MMWWT on 9 & 11 April, with two late birds there on 6-9 June and a presumed non-breeder on 30 June to 1 July. Single(s) at Leighton Moss on 24 & 30-31 May were the only other spring records.

The first of autumn was one at Greta Foot in the Lune Valley on 16 July, following a single at the same site in 2002. The main return passage began with an adult at SNR on 4 Aug and one at Leighton Moss on 7-9 Aug. A juvenile followed at SNR on 27 & 29 Aug and up to three at Leighton Moss on 30 Aug to 2 Sept with another on 18-21 Sept. Two were at Rossall Point on 7 Sept, a juvenile was on the shore at Marshside on the 27-28th, and a juvenile at Stocks Reservoir from 30 Aug to 4 Sept.



Passage continued into October – there were two at the ICI Lagoons, Thornton on 4 Oct and one at Foulridge Reservoir on the 3rd, while the last of the year were two at Anglezarke Reservoir on the 19th.

TEMMINCK'S STINT* *Calidris temminckii*

Scarce spring and autumn passage migrant.

After the Lord Mayor's Show of the past two years there was dearth of records in 2003. One was at MMWWT on 29 May and another there on 26 June.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER *Calidris fuscicollis*

Vagrant

A moulting adult was at Skippool on the River Wyre from 3-11 August, ranging between Shard Bridge and Hambleton (PS). It was last seen flying off high with Dunlin on 11 August. This is the third successive year that this species had made a Lancashire appearance, and the 12th record for the county. The record has been accepted by the BBRC.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER* *Calidris melanotos*

Rare passage migrant

2002. One was at Stocks Reservoir on 23 April (DF) and one at Crossens on 8 Oct (TB). The juvenile cited in last year's report at Eagland Hill from 16-18 Aug should have been credited to LGB.

2003. It was an excellent year for a species that is now almost annual in Lancashire. All records were in the autumn.

The first was one on the Eric Morecambe Pools on 10-11 Aug (MJ, JFW) with another there on 12-14 Sept. Two juveniles were at Stocks Reservoir on 8 Sept (GH), a juvenile at Brockholes Quarry on 9-10 Sept, one at Anglezarke Reservoir on 14 Sept (NS) and on the same day another juvenile was found on Birkdale Green Beach, where it remained until 1 Oct (CF *et al*). It is possible that some sightings in September may refer to the same individuals. Finally, a single was at Fleetwood on 12 Oct.

CURLEW SANDPIPER *Calidris ferruginea*

Fairly common passage migrant.

One was at Marshside on 1 Feb but there were very few spring records, with a bird in summer plumage at Naze Point, Freckleton on 11 May, and, exceptionally for the ELOC area, a single on Alston Reservoir, Longridge from 13-22 May. One was at MMWWT on 24-26 May, another there on 24 June and one at Marshside sometime in May.

The first of autumn was one at Glasson on 6 Aug and ones or twos were reported from five other sites on the Fylde in August and September; five or six juveniles were at Skippool from 6-14 Sept, with the final bird on the Fylde being one at Pilling on 11 Oct.

There was one at Leighton Moss on 7-10 August and another from 11-20 Sept. A juvenile was at SNR on 12 Sept, and an adult on the shore at Marshside on 27 Sept with two juveniles there on the following day; five flew north along Ainsdale beach on 27 Sept. Four were at the ICI Lagoons, Thornton on 4 Oct and the last was one at Marshside on 12 Oct.

A juvenile at Stocks Reservoir on 8 Sept was the only inland record in the second half of the year.

PURPLE SANDPIPER *Calidris maritima***Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant.**

One bird was seen at Morecambe Stone Jetty during the first winter period until 18 March. Two were reported during the Morecambe Bay South WeBS count in January (presumably at the same site) and one in February. None was seen in Morecambe Bay during the second winter period and the only record was of one at Fairhaven on 28 Sept. A very sad state of affairs.

DUNLIN *Calidris alpina***Abundant passage migrant and winter visitor. Scarce breeding bird.**

International importance: 9500 (*schinzii*); 13300 (*alpina*). National importance: 5600.

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	9222	11052	1370	301	34	8	334	398	283	1625	2794	7347
Ribble	6300	3960	7621	7370	13148	3361	7653	13671	8892	9360	15855	10186
Alt	379	2455	1405	6522	2527	8	513	10643	2010	3186	1828	761

In both winter periods numbers on the Ribble were well down on the five-year mean (as at 2000/01) of 35537 and this was also the case in Morecambe Bay, especially in the second winter period. Numbers wintering on the Alt, which in essence means Formby Point, were stable in comparison with recent years. In the Lancashire sector of the Mersey Estuary, which is the most important winter site in Britain for this species, there were more than 2000 along Garston Shore on 5 Jan and 1700 in Oglet Bay at low tide on 23 Feb.

Passage birds included 540 in Oglet Bay on 24 April and an annual peak of 500 in July at SNR, which was an increase on the previous year. The June count on the Ribble was similar to the one in 2002, but both were atypical – there had not been a June total over 1000 since 1985. Records not picked up by WeBS included 3000 flying out of the Mersey at Seaforth on 5 May, 1000 at Skippool at the end of July, and 700 feeding at Formby on 31 July.

Inland, there were 81 at MMWWT on 20 May, 14 at Prescot Reservoirs on 22 Aug, and a minimum of 27 birds at Brockholes Quarry on 27 April, with many passing through there to and from the breeding grounds in May, July and August. A remarkable series of records in May emanated from Alston Reservoirs, which had been drained leaving large areas of mud: six on 30 April built up to a peak of 82 by 5 May, and large numbers continued to feed there until 26 May, when 42 remained, with a last single on 14 June. The peak at Foulridge Reservoirs was twelve during return passage on 17 July, while that at Stocks Reservoir was 19 on 17 Aug.

Breeding was reported from Rossendale, with at least five pairs displaying and calling, and one nest with eggs found. At least one pair bred around Belmont, and it is thought that the birds breeding in Bowland had a good season.

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax***Fairly common passage migrant and winter visitor. Occasional breeder.**

International importance: 10000. National importance: 50.

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
MMWWT	151	120	150	20	18	5	50	54	64	100	80	104
Marshside	6	1	46	56	1	2	0	18	10	5	16	3

Numbers at MMWWT were similar to recent years but low at Marshside in the second half of the year. Elsewhere, numbers were also low until late summer. There were one or two at Pilling

from January to March and up to four at Newton Marsh in the same period. Up to three were at Mythop in mid-April and two at Marton Mere on 7 April.

There were no reports of breeding or of lek sites this year.

Post-breeding passage started with five males at MMWWT on 22 June and by 2 July 25 were present. At Brockholes Quarry there were singles, mostly juveniles, on 13 dates from 11 July to 22 Sept, and at other inland sites one at Foulridge Reservoir on 17 -23 Aug, two there on 25-26 Aug, and one at Stocks Reservoir on 17 Aug.

On the coast up to ten were at Naze Pool, Freckleton from 12-24 Aug, six there from 14-16 Sept, up to three in the Pilling area in August and September and one at Marton Mere on 26 Aug. Singles were on the Eric Morecambe Pools from 14 July to 5 Aug, up to nine there later in August and 24 on 16 Sept. Three different individuals were at SNR in August, and two juveniles and a female there until mid-September.

In the second winter period one was at Marton Mere on 17 Oct, up to three at Conder Green in October and November, and perhaps the same three at Cockersands on 2-3 Oct. One was at Conder Green on 5 Dec, one at Pilling Lane Ends from 9-14 Dec, one at Damside, Pilling on 10-12 Dec and one at Newton Marsh on the 29th.

JACK SNIFE *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Fairly common, though overlooked, passage and winter visitor.

During the early part of the year there were six birds at Dean Clough Reservoir on 2 Jan, up to four at Fazakerley Reedbed, three on the saltmarsh at SNR on 4 Jan, three at MSW on 4 Jan, up to three at Heysham , two on the Wyre Estuary on 2 Feb, two at Myerscough Quarry and up to three in February and March on Birkdale Green Beach. Singles were recorded at up to 20 sites, both inland and coastal, and some lingered well into spring, with singles at Birkdale on 21 April and at Marshside in April.

A bird reported at Leighton Moss on 7 July was notably early. The largest second winter aggregations were at Birkdale Green Beach with twelve on 15 Oct and fifteen on 16 Nov, and there were up to nine at Myerscough Quarry during December. Five were ringed at Barley on 1 Nov. Up to two were at Heysham, two on Wyre Estuary on 23 Nov, two on the Eric Morecambe Pools on 5 Oct, and two at MMWWT on 24 Sept and 20 Oct. Singles were recorded from several other sites around the county at this time.

SNIFE *Gallinago gallinago*

Common but declining wintering and breeding bird.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS counts												
M Bay S	38	12	4	1	0	0	0	6	8	11	138	7
Ribble	16	16	3	10	0	0	0	0	8	47	36	23
Monthly peak counts												
Brockholes	3	16	10	10	1	0	6	20	60	31	52	20
Marshside	7	/	/	12	1	1	2	15	11	41	12	7
Padiham	19	26	34	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	25	44
Foulridge	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	6	24	33	21	12

There were very few early year counts from MMWWT and numbers at SNR were low throughout the year, with a peak of five in March. Grove Lane Marsh, Padiham also reported lower peaks than last year. Apart from the sites in the table, there were early year maxima at the ELOC reservoirs of ten at Lomeshaye in February and nine at Allsprings. On 23 Jan nine were at Great Hambleton and 14 at Hambleton. Up to 53 were at Heysham during the first winter period, but numbers were generally very low at Marton Mere, although 16 were recorded on an

unknown date between January and March. Other peak counts included 18 at Oglet Bay on 5 Jan, twelve on the River Wyre on the same date, 19 at Leighton Moss on 20 Jan, and 15 at Reed's Moss, Rainford on 22 March. Good numbers, presumably on passage, were seen at Arkholme in March and April, including 28 on 15 March and 15 on 14 April.

Breeding records included five pairs at MMWWT and four or five at Belmont, with a nest found on 17 May. No breeding was recorded at Marshside or in Rossendale and evidence of breeding in large areas of Bowland seemed scant. Drumming or other displays were recorded at a number of sites including Reed's Moss, Height o'th' Hill, Stalmine, Champion Moor, Cowhill, Rishton, Whitewell, Jeffrey Hill, Marl Hill, Twiston Moor, Crimpton, Waddington Fell, Darwen Moor, at least three at Trawden, at least four territories around Anglezarke, and six drumming at Oakenclough. There was an interesting sighting of a bird at Cabin Hill NNR, a former nesting site, on 18 April but one or two pairs at Freshfield Dune Heath, Formby provided the only proof of breeding in the south-west.

MSW recorded the first returning bird on 9 July. Very high numbers followed at MMWWT throughout August and September, with 60 there on 22 Aug, 200 on 11 Sept and 480 on 19 Sept. There were up to 24 at Foulridge in autumn, benefiting from low water levels which exposed areas of mud. Up to 20 were at Anglezarke in September.

Numbers were generally low in the second winter period; the largest counts being 100 at Heysham in November but with only 20 left by the end of the year, at least 45 on Belmont Moor at 1250 feet asl on 6 Dec and 35 at Burgler's Alley on the River Wyre on 23 Nov. Other peaks included 24 on Birkdale Green Beach in October, 20 at Myerscough Quarry in October with 15 in December, and nine at Marton Mere in October.

WOODCOCK *Scolopax rusticola*

Common winter visitor and fairly common breeder.

A total of 16 birds was reported from six sites in the ELOC area during the period 4 Jan to 25 March, with a largest count of five at Gisburn Forest on 15 March. Four were at Marton Mere in January and up to five at MSW in January, with the last seen on 10 March. Three were at Leighton Moss on 15 March and singles were reported from 15 sites around the region in both winters. However, apart from more than ten flushed by pheasant beaters at Belmont on 17 Dec and three at Prescott Reservoirs on 4 Dec, very few were reported in the second winter period

Roding was reported from Reed's Moss, Rainford with five birds there on 10 May, three from the Old Coach Road, St Helens on 11 June, two over Longridge Fell on 13 June, two at Stocks Reservoir on 1 June, one at Anglezarke in early March and breeding was proven at Moor Piece NR. A recently-fledged juvenile was at Belmont Reservoir on 15 June.

Indisputably the most interesting information on this enigmatic species came from the breeding survey at Roddlesworth Plantations, near Darwen. Previous records of males roding in these plantations never exceeded five birds. A comprehensive survey of the plantations was carried out in 2003 involving ten dusk visits. This showed that there were ten roding males in the area, which is, therefore, a very important breeding site for the species. The Lancashire breeding population is estimated at 300 'pairs', although this interpretation is fraught with difficulties, since woodcock are polygynous.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Abundant passage migrant and winter visitor. Rare breeder.

International importance: 350. National importance: 150

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	143	55	139	226	134	81	94	107	126	215	401	347
Ribble	356	248	975	612	231	120	682	1754	1071	1304	50	962
Alt	26	22	69	53	0	0	2	14	33	134	9	1

Monthly peak counts

Marshside	/	/	/	696	600	323	450	520	800	1000	250	1479
LM/EMP	110	102	137	223	150	134	156	211	230	230	350	358

The October WeBS count on the Alt was the third largest there but otherwise numbers were unexceptional. As usual the bulk of birds in Morecambe Bay were on the RSPB saltmarshes, while Marshside dominated the Ribble counts; numbers were slightly below the recent average on both estuaries.

There were 71 on the Mersey at Oglet Bay on 23 Feb, 36 on 29 July and 23 on 14 Sept. Significant counts on the north side of the Ribble included 567 at Fairhaven on 28 Feb with 600 there on 25 Aug, and 53 at Freckleton Naze on 2 Oct. Further north the largest flocks reported on the Wyre were 130 at Stanah on 26 Oct with 80 there on 31 Nov, and 70 at Fleetwood Dock on 21 Dec.

Up to 200 were on Newton Marsh during May and two pairs bred there with one, possibly two, chicks fledging.

Birds were recorded at MMWWT between 5 March and 30 July with a largest flock of 70 on 29 June. The first of the year at Brockholes Quarry were seven on 18 April and similar numbers were seen regularly until mid-May; nine on 9 June was the only record that month but there were frequent sightings of up to three between 2 July and 25 Aug, with 16 juveniles briefly on 9 Aug. The only other inland records were seven at Withnell Fold on 18 April with three there on 4 May and one on the 11th; eight at Prescott Reservoirs on 1 April with 13 there on 24 July; one at Stocks Reservoir on 16-17 April; and one at Arkholme on 6 July. None were seen in Rossendale.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*

Abundant passage migrant and winter visitor

International importance: 1200. National importance: 620

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	894	/	450	145	51	57	47	40	35	42	4321	967
Ribble	3111	2021	798	19	23	0	7	343	628	857	3674	2495
Alt	7102	1780	6973	3191	102	1	452	6411	3279	2779	6503	1190

The WeBS counts produced mixed messages. The December peak in Morecambe Bay was greater than the average over the past ten years and considerably larger than last year's 826, but numbers were low during the rest of the year, perhaps reflecting the difficulties of monitoring this species in the north. Numbers on the Ribble were less than half the ten-year average and the spring passage was almost non-existent, while numbers were roughly average on the Alt. Overall there is no indication of any significant change in the county's wintering or passage population.

Virtually all birds on the Alt WeBS counts were roosting at Formby Point – the one exception being the single injured bird in June, which summered at SNR for at least its sixth

year! Feeding flocks at Formby included 2400 on 31 July and 2700 on 16 August. Crosby shore continues to grow in importance and at least 2500 were feeding there throughout January and February and 2000 in late December.

The June WeBS counts picked up extremely few summering birds but 700 at Warton Bank on 28 June appeared all to be in winter plumage and were presumably first-summerers. Seventy-five at SNR on 29 July also appeared to be mostly first-years although some were in full breeding plumage.

Apart from Formby Point the only four-figure single-site counts received were 1200 on Fairhaven shore on 22 Jan with 1000 there on 4 Nov, while 645 were near Fluke Hall on 8 Nov and 500 at Glasson Marsh on 2 Dec.

There were just two records inland: singles at Stocks Reservoir on 23 April and Brockholes Quarry on 21 Sept. The regular summer-plumaged wintering male was first seen at SNR on 27 Dec.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

Common passage migrant, especially in spring.

International importance: 6100 (*islandicus*), 2300 (*phaeopus*). National importance: 50 (passage).

After an early bird at Tarn Farm, Eagland Hill on 21 March no more were seen until 7 April when one was at Nateby and 14 at Manor House Farm on the Fylde. The next were singles at Stocks Reservoir on 13 April and singles at SNR, Plex Moss and Heysham on the 14th. Ones and twos were reported from all parts of the county during the following week with larger counts of six at Brockholes Quarry on the 16th, eight at Eagland Hill on the 17th, twelve at Mythop on the 18th and twelve at Bartle pools on the 20th. The first really big movement was of 60 over Brockholes Quarry on 20 April when 27 also roosted overnight.

Spring passage continued strongly until the first week of May; the largest counts away from the main roost sites included ten over Prescott Reservoirs on 23 April, 29 at MMWWT on the 25th, 22 past Starr Gate, Blackpool on the 26th and 17 there the next day, twelve at Marton Mere on the 26th, 23 at Doeford Bridge on the 27th, 14 over Rossall Point on the 28th, a record 21 over Mere Sands Wood on the 29th, 24 at Eccleston, Fylde on the 30th, 38 past Jenny Brown's Point on the 2nd, 14 over Heysham on 3 May, 32 over Morecambe on the 7th and twelve over the River Brock at New Bridge Wood on the 10th. Stragglers continued to be reported throughout May and June but the only other big count was 38 at Jenny Brown's Point on 17 May.

Further daytime counts at Brockholes Quarry peaked at 30-40 on 6-8 May but the main event was the build-up of the evening roost to record levels (see below). No roost counts were received from Windy Harbour or Longton Marsh this year but the combined count at Barnacre Reservoir and Brockholes of more than 1050 on 1 May confirmed Lancashire's national significance for spring passage Whimbrel.

EVENING ROOST COUNTS

	Barnacre Reservoir	Brockholes Quarry
24 April	252	98
27 April	502	/
28 April	/	280
29 April	546	315
30 April	/	307
1 May	654	401 (site record)
2 May	/	300
4 May	/	335
5 May	/	150
6 May	374	/

As usual, autumn passage was far less dramatic, getting underway around mid-July, with a final record of one at MMWWT on 15 September and the only double-figure counts ten in Morecambe Bay on 29 July and 16 there on 15 Aug. One at Stocks Reservoir on 9 July was the only autumn record in east Lancashire.

Birds were extremely scarce on the West Pennine Moors, where the only records were of one to two at Delph Reservoir on 4 May, Belmont on 8 May with another on 2 June, and one at Anglezarke on 25 June. None were seen all year in Rossendale.

CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

Abundant winter and breeding bird.

International importance: 4200. National importance: 1500.

WeBS counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M Bay S	4078	5761	6618	3016	242	1061	5003	3265	6221	4084	3890	4812
Ribble	670	772	719	485	42	30	658	851	1206	1028	1156	1579
Alt	931	1028	551	209	11	57	1269	771	1433	1120	886	119

The peak WeBS counts were slightly lower than in 2002 on all three estuaries. Numbers on both Morecambe Bay and the Ribble have been declining after reaching record levels in the mid-1990s, while the trend on the Alt continues to rise and average numbers are now close to being nationally important. Morecambe Bay continues to be of international importance for Curlew but the Ribble is close to slipping below national importance in its own right.

Notable individual site counts in Morecambe Bay included 1050 at Bank End, Cockerham on 30 March with 1271 on Pilling Marsh the same day, and 1782 on Pilling Marsh on 11 Oct. 700 were feeding on flooded fields near Pilling Lane Ends on 12 Dec when 660 were also at Cockersands. Further north the RSPB reserve recorded 2445 on 24 March, 3685 on 14 July and 3486 on 12 Sept.

The only significant individual counts received from the Ribble were 335 at Freckleton on 9 Nov and 103 at Marshside in May, and from the Alt 300 at Blundellsands on 5 Jan and 633 at Formby Point in February with 618 there in August.

The first possible movement back towards the moors was noted on 15 Jan when 53 were at Bickerstaffe and 90 on Downholland Moss. Two were on the Calder at Martholme on 9 Feb, twelve days later than last year. The first to be reported from the uplands were two at Belmont on 7 February, followed by one flying east at Rivington on the 11th. The passage movement was well underway by the middle of February, sightings including 34 going north-east at Brockholes Quarry on the 15th, 100+ in the Lune Valley at Aughton on the 21st, a low count of 29 at Altham/Martholme on the 24th, 18 at Burholme on the 25th and 70 up the Ribble near Clitheroe on the 26th. None were reported from Rossendale before 11 March but birds were on the moors above Clowbridge by the 20th. Passage continued throughout March – with notable counts of 130 at Belmont on the 5th, 487 at Arkholme on the 16th and 120 at Brockholes Quarry on the 22nd – and into early April, by which time many birds were already on territory.

Records of proven and probable breeding came from Anglezarke, Roddlesworth, Darwen Moor, Belmont (where 35 pairs bred on 28km² of moorland in 2002), Eccleston and Croston, Winter Hill, Longridge, Great Harwood, Chipping and Arkholme. A survey of a 2km-wide strip of moorland fringe from Wycoller to the Coal Clough wind farm located 91 birds in April and 56 in May, giving an indication of the density of birds on suitable breeding territory. The BTO Waterways Bird Survey of the River Lune between Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale recorded 22 territorial pairs, the highest number since 1987. Breeding was also proven or probable at several sites in Rossendale, at least four in Over Wyre and on the Eric Morecambe complex.

As usual autumn departure from the moors was much less noticeable than the spring movement. No August or September report in the east was of more than three birds with the

exception of an unusual 166 at Foulridge Reservoir on 14 Sept. Final records in the uplands came from Rossendale on 16 Aug, Belmont on the 28th and Stocks Reservoir on 25 Sept.

A leucistic bird was on Glasson Marsh on 4 May.

SPOTTED REDSHANK *Tringa erythropus*

Uncommon passage and winter visitor.

At least three were wintering in the north of the county in January, with birds at Conder Green, Lane Ends and Morecambe Stone Jetty. The Stone Jetty bird only remained until the 21st, whereas the others both stayed into April with the Lane Ends bird last seen on the 5th and the Conder Green bird on the 26th. Other reports from Bank End and Glasson in this period may have related to one of these birds wandering.

As in 2002, passage was underway in late March, when birds were seen at Rossall on the 27th, Marshside on the 28th and Brockholes on the 29th, when a second bird was at Pilling. Five singles were reported at the Eric Morecambe Pools between 17 April and 5 May, and a long-stayer was at the unusual site of Bartle Pools, Fylde from 20 April to 5 May. Other May reports came from Marshside on the 3rd and MMWWT on the 13th & 16th.

After a gap of a month, return movement commenced in June with birds at Lane Ends on the 14-15th, the Eric Morecambe Pools on the 16th, and 2004—at Freckleton on the 28th. During July up to three were seen on the Eric Morecambe Pools, as well as the only record of the year at SNR on the 6th and one at MMWWT. The largest August counts were again from the Eric Morecambe Pools where up to five were present; others were seen inland at Brockholes Quarry and Fishmoor Reservoir and on or near the coast at Conder Green, Jenny Brown's Point, Marshside (up to four), MSW and MMWWT.

The highlight of the year was a site record count of ten, including up to nine juveniles, at Marshside on several dates in September. Conder Green, the Eric Morecambe Pools and MMWWT all held up to four birds and ones and twos were seen at several other sites; two at Downholland Moss irrigation lakes on the 1st was a notable local record.

Up to five remained at Marshside in October, four on the Conder estuary and ones and twos were seen at MMWWT, Jenny Browns Point, the Naze and Pilling Lane Ends. Up to two were still on the Eric Morecambe Pools in November but by the end of the month the wintering pattern was firmly established, with birds at Morecambe and on the Conder estuary. In December one briefly visited Marton Mere on the 7th, and the regular Conder Green bird was seen feeding on farmland at Jeremy Lane, Glasson on occasion.

REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

Abundant passage and winter visitor. Fairly common breeding bird.

International importance: 650 (*robusta*), 1300 (*'britannica'*). National importance: 1200

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	2877	3664	3137	2160	92	144	794	1101	2709	3088	2637	3024
Ribble	290	508	3119	872	211	85	686	1018	1049	2752	609	1724
Alt	734	486	595	353	6	2	166	920	540	882	532	58

Overall numbers on WeBS counts were slightly down on recent averages. There were no counts above the national importance threshold on the Alt estuary this year.

Up to 400 were feeding on fields in the Pilling area in January and there were up to 240 at Heysham in winter but no clear evidence of passage. Numbers were low at SNR throughout the year. Counts in March included 230 at Glasson Marsh on the 23rd and 600 at Bank End on the 30th.

Inland, two were wintering at Altham in January, and there were 17 on the Lune between Mears Beck and Hornby on 16 Feb but it is unclear to what extent this included returning birds. Spring movement inland was certainly obvious from the beginning of the March and peaks that month and in April included 37 on the Lune from Mears Beck to Hornby, 17 at Belmont Reservoir, 13 at Myerscough Quarry and 12 at Withnell Fold, Stocks Reservoir and Altham. There was an unusual record of one feeding on a pool at a building site in Whitechapel in central Liverpool on 14 March.

No fewer than 231 pairs were recorded on the Ribble Estuary NNR, 186 on the south side and 45 on Warton Marsh. The BTO Waterways Bird Survey of the River Lune between Lancaster Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale recorded 57 territorial pairs, a continued recovery from the low numbers in the 1990s (lowest 37 in 1998); breeding success was reported to be good on the Arkholme stretch. A total of 32 pairs nested at Marshside, 18 pairs at Leighton Moss with another five on the outer marsh, which was an increase, twelve at MMWWT, down from 20 in 2002, and six at Belmont Reservoir with one more nearby. Breeding was not proven in the ELOC area but was suspected at three sites. Two pairs at Brockholes Quarry apparently failed.

The autumn build-up began in June at Shard Bridge, where 110 increased to 380 in July and 520 in August. Inland post-breeding gatherings included 19 at Stocks Reservoir and 16 at Alston Reservoirs in June. There were 700 on the Lune estuary on 30 Aug.

Autumn counts included 447 at Glasson Marsh on 14 Sept, 971 at Fleetwood Docks on 23 Sept and 1047 at Pilling Marsh in October. There were widespread records in east Lancs late into the autumn, with up to six still at Foulridge Reservoir in November.

Up to 1080 fed in fields at Damside, Pilling in December. The largest count received for Marshside was 250 in December, though data were incomplete. Inland records came from five ELOC sites in December, with a peak of three at Colne on the 28th. Low water levels led to up to eleven feeding at Brockholes Quarry in December.

Leucistic birds were reported from Brockholes Quarry in both winter periods and Pilling Marsh on 12 Sept.

GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

Fairly common on passage, especially in autumn. Scarce in winter.

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
Monthly peak counts								
M Bay S WeBS	6	0	0	18	6	8	0	1
M Bay RSPB	1	1	1	20	40	27	5	1

Singles were at Carnforth Slag Tips on 3 Jan, on the Wyre at Little Singleton throughout January and at MMWWT on the 30th. The Little Singleton bird was the only wintering bird 'pinned down', being seen here and at nearby Skippool into March.

Spring passage got underway round about 14 April, when one was on Crosby Marine Lake. During the second half of April four were on the Lune at Greta Foot on the 27th, up to three at SNR/Crosby Marine Lake and singles at MMWWT, Marshside, Stocks Reservoir, the Eric Morecambe Pools and Freckleton Naze. Passage dried up after early May and the only other spring reports came from Aldcliffe on the 24th, Freckleton Naze on the 31st and Brockholes Quarry on 1 June.

Return passage was first recorded at the Eric Morecambe Pools and SNR on 24 June and Prescott Reservoir the next day, there were four at SNR by the 30th and seven at Shard Bridge by 5 July. The only other large July count not reflected in the table was seven on the Ribble at Freckleton. August saw numbers beginning to peak, with up to 21 at Jenny Browns Point (possibly because the EM Pools had dried up), and a dozen each at favoured Lune, Ribble and

Wyre sites. The best inland counts at this time were up to six at Brockholes Quarry and three each at Belmont and Foulridge Reservoirs.

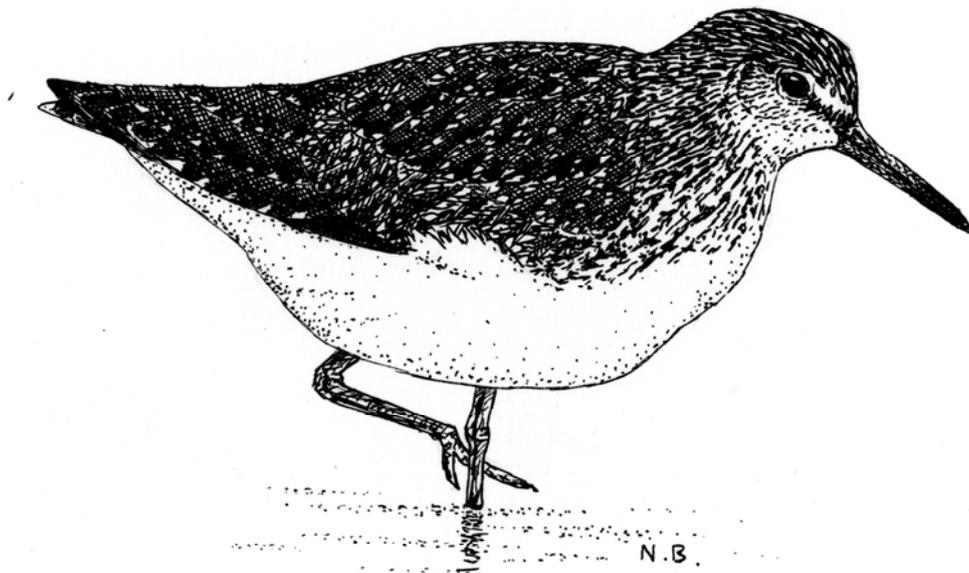
The peak of 27 at the EM Pools in September was presumably largely the birds involved in similar counts at nearby Jenny Brown's Point. Elsewhere, up to 21 on the Wyre around Shard Bridge late in the month was an exceptional count away from the RSPB properties so late in the season. Records at inland sites at this time came from Anglezarke, Belmont and Slipper Hill/Whitemoor Reservoirs

Up to nine lingered on the Wyre between Shard and Skippool in October. Other reports included a notable three at Anglezarke Reservoir on 26 Oct and birds at Belmont Reservoir (one lingering to 5 Nov), Conder Green, Freckleton Naze and SNR. After the Belmont bird and one at Jenny Brown's Point bird on 10 Nov, the last of the year were at MMWWT on 15 Nov and, finally, one on the Ribble at Freckleton Naze on 30 Dec.

GREEN SANDPIPER *Tringa ochropus*

Fairly common on passage, especially autumn. Scarce winter visitor.

There were several birds wintering at the start of the year, the most reliable being two at Aldcliffe and one at Eccleston seen from January to April. Elsewhere, up to two were recorded at Aughton (River Lune), Carr House Green Common, Catforth, Crossens, Myerscough Quarry, MSW and Poulton; singles were seen in the Fylde at Great Eccleston, Little Singleton, Mythop and St Michael's. There was presumably some interchange between Fylde sites. No fewer than six at Arkholme sites in mid-March probably included several birds that had wintered in the area.



There were no reports from the east until up to three at Altham in April, which may have been spring migrants. Two of the last reports of the spring were actually wintering birds, with last dates of 19 April at Aldcliffe and at Eccleston on the 21st. There was also one at Brockholes on 20 April and two there the next day.

Following a total absence in May, return passage began on 19 June at MMWWT; other early reports came from Tarnacre and Weeton on the 20th, Wesham on the 26th and both MMWWT and SNR on the 27th, with an undated June report from Marshside. Two sites stood out when passage was in full sway in August, Aldcliffe and MMWWT, both of which had maximum counts of eight. Elsewhere in August-September there were up to four at Brockholes

Quarry, the Eric Morecambe Pools and Stocks Reservoir. An estimated total of 22 passed through the ELOC recording area during the autumn.

Regular wintering birds were back at Eccleston from mid-July and Aldcliffe from September; there was again one on the Lune at Aughton in December and this is presumably also a regular wintering area. Other sites reporting birds from October onwards were Altham, Anglezarke, MSW, MMWWT.

WOOD SANDPIPER *Tringa glareola*

Uncommon passage migrant.

There was an average spring showing of four birds, taking mid-June as the perhaps arbitrary cut-off between passage seasons. One at Bartle Pools on 11 May was the only record of the year in the Fylde, and was followed by singles at more typical sites of Marshside on the 26th, SNR on the 27th and MMWWT on 6 June.

There was an arrival of presumably failed breeders from late June, and this set the tone for a year perhaps on a par with the record-breaking autumn of 1999. The majority of reports were from MMWWT, with birds seen at six other sites including one in the east. Early birds were at MMWWT on 18-20 June, 25-27 June and 1-2 July, and the Eric Morecambe Pools from 29 June to 3 July.

The next pulse of birds came in mid-July, with singles at MMWWT on the 14th & 18-25th, the Eric Morecambe Pools on the 15th and SNR on the 16th. The only other July report came from Banks Marsh on the 24th. An excellent August at MMWWT began with four birds on the 6th, with up to three regularly recorded until the 26th and one on the 31st. Other August reports comprised two at Aldcliffe Marsh from the 9th to 16th, with one remaining to the 22nd, and up to two at Marshside.

There were three September reports. One at MMWWT followed a gap of three days and may have been a new bird. The last of the year lingered at the Eric Morecambe Pools from the 14th to 29th. Most notable perhaps was the fifth record for the ROC area, at Holden Wood Reservoir from the 10th to 14th.

COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

Common passage migrant, uncommon breeding bird. Scarce in winter.

To shamelessly echo last year's report, wintering records used to be regular but there were none at all for the second successive year.

Singles at Stocks Reservoir and Marton Mere on 13 April were the first arrivals of the spring but birds were widespread at coastal and inland sites by the 14th and 15th. Spring peaks were generally not that spectacular, but did include eight at Brockholes Quarry, six at Stocks Reservoir and five at Myerscough Quarry.

Breeding data were generally encouraging in the east of the county but less so in the north. A record seven pairs nested at Belmont Reservoir, with nearby three at Delph Reservoir and one at Springs Reservoir. There were at least eight pairs in the Haslingden area and successful pairs at a minimum of four other sites in the ROC area. Nesting was only confirmed at four sites in the ELOC area, but good numbers in autumn were considered to reflect a productive season. The BTO Waterways Bird Survey of the River Lune between Skerton Weir, Lancaster and Kirkby Lonsdale recorded 36 territorial pairs, the lowest number ever recorded and almost half the average of the 1980s and early 1990s. On the Arkholme stretch, floods both in May and early June played havoc with first and repeat clutches, and success was therefore poor.

The return passage appears to get earlier and earlier; birds at MMWWT and the Eric Morecambe Pools on 13 June were the first, followed by one at Shard Bridge on the 15th.

Another early bird was at Pilling Lane Ends on 26 June, and there were maxima of six at Preston Dock and seven at Shard Bridge by the month's end.

The largest early summer passage concentrations were on the Fylde, with up to 23 on the Wyre at Shard Bridge and 17 on the Conder estuary in July. Peak numbers at Shard Bridge have sometimes been double this in recent years. Other site maxima included eight at MMWWT and on the Alt WeBS, and six at Marshside. A total of 51 at Arkholme on 16 July was seen as reflecting the poor nesting season.

Birds lingered at several sites in September, most notably six between Clowbridge and Clough Bottom. Two were at Brockholes in early October, one remaining to the 12th, and there were also singles at Shard Bridge on the 2nd & 14th, and at Foulridge on 5th & 15th, with the latter the final report of the year.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*

Common passage migrant and winter visitor

International importance: 1000. National importance: 640

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
WeBS												
M Bay S	192	91	247	475	281	1	9	19	31	152	135	400
Ribble	72	118	47	90	5	89	45	163	210	157	125	120
Alt	72	57	135	226	42	0	20	266	49	124	72	18
Monthly peak counts												
Lytham	248	/	/	/	/	50	183	307	175	/	/	/
Rossall/ Cleveleys	200	200	68	294	/	/	/	/	/	/	200	/

Although numbers in Morecambe Bay were somewhat higher than in 2002, particularly during spring passage, totals remain significantly down on the period prior to that when average peaks were over 1000. Numbers on the Ribble and the Alt were fairly stable, but the county now lacks a site of national importance.

At specific sites not mentioned in the table the decline continued at Heysham, with around 50 wintering (against 70-80 last year) and a spring passage peak of 165 on 29 April. Up to 172 were at Formby Point in August but the bulk of the Alt records were at SNR; peaks at Glasson Marsh included 64 on 22 March and 44 on 12 Oct. Smaller numbers were reported from other sites including Blackpool North Shore, Ainsdale and Marshside.

Movements were noted at five inland sites. MMWWT had an early bird on 11 March, up to three in mid-May and singles on 8 June and 1 July. Stocks Reservoir also had its highest counts in mid-May, with up to four noted and two on 3 June, and three were at Brockholes Quarry on 17 May with four further bird-days recorded that month. Completing the set of inland records, three were on exposed mud at Alston Reservoirs on the 21 May.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE* *Phalaropus lobatus*

Rare passage migrant.

2002. Correction: the bird at Wood End was a male, not a female as indicated in last year's report.

GREY PHALAROPE* *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Very rare autumn migrant and winter visitor, rare inland.

One seen in the mouth of the Mersey from Crosby Marine Park on 5 Oct (GW *et al*) was the only record supported by a description. October gales remain the best chance to catch up with this species in Lancashire, but records seem to be getting less frequent.

POMARINE SKUA* *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Uncommon double passage migrant. Scarce in winter

Morecambe Bay

The last few years have confirmed that spring passage in Morecambe Bay is not confined to the occasional sighting during fresh south-westerly/westerly winds but a regular event, even during calm conditions. There were 30 sightings between 16 April and 18 May, 17 at Heysham and 13 from Jenny Brown's Point (all on different dates to the Heysham sightings). Peak counts were four on 16 April at Jenny Brown's with five there on 18 May, and flocks of four at Heysham on 5 & 13 May. All were light morph adults except for one 'immature' accompanying two adults.

There are two main strands to the sightings. Heysham observations peak as the tide is turning and sandbanks covered, and appear to comprise birds that take a north-easterly overland route up the Keer/Lune 'valley' at considerable height; their altitude suggests that the river valley flightlines soon become irrelevant and the birds head north-east, rather than north up the Lune or east/south-east via the Wenning/Aire gap. Observations at Jenny Brown's are often of birds lifting off the sea on reaching the inner bay and either heading up the Kent Estuary or across to the Keer flightline – mostly within an hour of high water. Simultaneous observations from Heysham rarely pick up these JBP birds as they appear to remain out of sight on the sea in the outer Kent channel and float into the bay on the tide.

There were no autumn records.

Liverpool Bay

There were two records in spring – one off Bispham on 27 April and a light morph adult in the Mersey mouth at Seaforth on 5 May – and two in autumn, an adult off Crosby Shore on 6 October (PK) and a juvenile off Formby Point on 11 October (BMcC, MS).

ARCTIC SKUA *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Fairly common passage migrant, more numerous in autumn. Rare in winter.

Morecambe Bay

Arctic Skuas are regular spring passage migrants through Morecambe Bay in a similar manner to Pomarine Skuas. The main difference is that Arctic Skua numbers compare favourably with those utilising the Tyne Gap via the Solway Firth, while Pomarine Skua numbers are around 30% of the Solway total. The theory is that Arctic Skuas hug the coastline to a greater extent, whilst Pomarine Skuas often require a little push from westerly winds to divert them into the bay. Therefore, the closer to the 'Wales/Anglesey shadow' the higher the proportion of Arctic to Pomarine Skua (see Fylde records).

A total of 57 were seen at Heysham between 1 April and 23 May with dark morphs predominating by about 3:1, while Jenny Brown's Point logged 28 birds between 2 April and 24 May, just over half of which were light morphs. As with Poms, there was very little overlap in sightings between the two sites.

Far fewer were seen in autumn off Heysham, just two juveniles on 21 August and a probable on 9 October, and none from Jenny Brown's.

Liverpool Bay

Spring passage off the Fylde coast got underway on 1 April and stretched to 9 June, with eight records from southern seawatching stations and twelve further north, all but one of which was off Rossall Point during the period 18-29 April. Just four were seen in Merseyside: two off Crosby Marine Park on 20 April and singles at Formby Point on 13 & 18 May.

Most autumn records came from Staff Gate, Blackpool – five on 11 July, twos on 5 & 10 July and 21 August and singles on 26 June and 22 September – with twos off Rossall on 19

August and 1 September. Formby Point had a relatively productive season with records on nine dates between 29 July and 16 October, including three on 29 July and four on 10 August.

GREAT SKUA (BONXIE) *Stercorarius skua*

Fairly common on passage, mostly in autumn gales. Scarce in winter.

Morecambe Bay

Bonxies were by far the scarcest skua species in 2003. Heysham recorded just one in spring – on 13 May – and autumn singles on 6 & 10 October. Jenny Brown's Point was a little more productive with five birds on four dates between 2 April and 20 May, two on 9 September and one on 9 October.

Relatively few Great Skuas are seen in the Solway & Morecambe Bay on spring passage suggesting that they may go overland 'as and when' and are not that susceptible to being 'funnelled'. This is perhaps due in part to their northerly migratory direction to the Shetlands compared with Pomarines, which are heading north-east towards Scandinavia (perhaps with many of our Arctics) and Siberia.

Liverpool Bay

Spring singles were seen off Rossall Point on 26 April and Formby Point on 1 May.

Autumn was far more productive with records of singles on four dates off Starr Gate between 28 June and 22 August with two on 11 July; one off Rossall Point on 1 August with two or three there on 10 October; and a reasonable passage past Formby Point from 30 July to 29 October, including three on 22 August and two on 6 September.

Skua spp

The largest flock of unidentified skuas, either Artic or Pomarine, was ten floating out of the bay on the falling tide from Jenny Brown's Point on 24 May. There were eleven records of singletons from various sites, including a possible Long-tailed from Starr Gate on 20 October. Claiming a juvenile Pomarine Skua at medium/long range represents a tricky problem and only one was seen well enough to be certain

An interesting set of data relating the occurrence of skuas to wind direction came from Jenny Brown's Point (TWh). Wind direction on days when skuas were seen, with the number of days in brackets, was as follows: none (1), E (1), NE (1), ESE (1), S (1), SW (2), WSW (7), W (1), WNW (1), NNW (1). Similarly, on days which did not produce any skuas: none (2), E (2), SE (5), SSE (1), S (1), SSW (2), SW (2), W (1), N (1), NNE (1). All but one of the westerly component winds not producing skuas were during the last week of May when the passage had tailed off.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL *Larus melanocephalus*

Fairly common all year. Most numerous on southern coasts but increasing inland. Recently established rare breeder.

The steady increase continues unabated but, judging by the number of sightings reported to the information networks and this report, birders' enthusiasm for the species remains undaunted. Med Gulls can now turn up almost anywhere in Lancashire throughout the year. In the absence of detailed analyses from two key regional reports the numbers at the main 'sites' shown in the table below are almost certainly on the conservative side and it is likely that as many as 200 are now seen annually in the county, implying that the status of Meds should now be changed from 'fairly common' to 'common'.

Minimum number of individuals in each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SNR	2	3	6	3	5	2	10	11	8	3	3	3
Fylde	4	5	9	9	7	0	1	8	6	2	1	2
North Lancs	6	6	4	3	4	3	3	7	4	4	3	3
East Lancs	3	3	7	4	2	4	8	4	0	0	2	1

The pattern of records was broadly similar to previous years, although the spring passage of adults in February-March was perhaps a little less marked than usual. Numbers during the second winter period were about average but exceptional numbers – at least five adults and a 1W – were at Heysham/Morecambe in January and February.

At least 15 individuals were reported from Sefton Coast sites other than Seaforth throughout the year – almost certainly a considerable underestimate of the true numbers – but no consistent series of sightings was received from any one site.

Inland sites in North Merseyside and West and central Lancashire also reported good numbers. As usual, two adults were seen regularly during both winters in Fazakerley, one was at Lydiate on 9 Feb and another was in central Liverpool at the end of October. Prescott Reservoirs had an exceptional year with at least ten birds seen. Two adults were in a field at Burscough Bridge on 26 April, while Mere Sands Wood reported its second and third records (two 1W on 17 Feb) and MMWWT a likely year total of ten or so. At least seven individuals passed through Brockholes Quarry between March and early June.

Two pairs were present in the Black-headed Gull colony at Stocks Reservoir during March but it appears that only one pair actually nested. Three chicks hatched on 31 May-1 June but only one was still alive on 17 June. This bird fledged and was last seen with its parents on 19 July.

Five pairs nested on the south Ribble marshes – final confirmation of what has long been suspected – but the outcomes are not known.

LITTLE GULL *Larus minutus*

Fairly common gale-blown winter visitor. Common on spring passage, concentrated at Seaforth and Crosby Marine Park. Small numbers of first-years in summer.

2002

Thirty were seen during the aerial survey of Shell Flat on 15 Nov.

2003

For many years, regular sightings of 100 or more during onshore winds between December and February – from Rossall Point, and to a lesser extent the rest of the Fylde coast and Heysham – have suggested the existence of a wintering population somewhere offshore in the vicinity. It had been hoped that the CCW aerial survey of Common Scoters might locate it but only relatively small numbers were ever seen. But a boat survey organised by RSPB on 21 Nov may have provided confirmation when around 200 were found on the northern edge of Shell Flat close to the Lune Deep about 10km offshore. The birds were feeding in small groups and the date and flat calm conditions strongly suggested that they were settled in the area.

Records from onshore observers were rather sparse in both winter periods. Forty off Blackpool on 10 Jan, 23 off Anchorsholme on 20 Jan, 53 from Little Bispham on 2 Feb, 22 at Heysham the same day, and eleven at Seaforth on 4 Feb were the only notable counts in the early year. A total of 94 off Rossall Point on 29 Oct may have been birds moving to Shell Flat; twelve at Heysham on 3 Nov and ten off Blackpool on the 19th were the only double-figure counts late in the year.

A poor spring passage at Seaforth began on 14 March. Few were seen throughout March although 83 seen from Hilbre Island in the Cheshire Dee on the 27th indicated birds were in the

area. Seventy-two on Crosby Marine Lake on 6 April was the first sizeable influx and 105 (3x1S) on the 11th were presumably the same as 115 seen from Hilbre that morning. Numbers then declined to 80-90 until a second migratory wave began with 136 at Seaforth on the 23rd, peaking at 160 (57x1S) on the 27th. Numbers then fell rapidly with 52, mostly first-years, remaining on 4 May with the last seen on the early date of 31 May.

Sixty off Cabin Hill on 19 April were presumably part of the Seaforth assembly, while 70 off Rossall and 28 off Blackpool on 12 April may have been Shell Flat birds.

Heysham, Leighton Moss and the Fylde coast saw one or two first-years during June and early July but the first returning adult was at Seaforth on the early date of 27 June. Just three juveniles were seen on the coast in early autumn – at Seaforth and Blackpool – and no more than single figures were seen anywhere until late October.

Inland sightings were few and far between: singles at MMWWT on 27 April and 28 June; two adults at Parsonage Reservoir on 21 April; an adult at Brockholes Quarry on 13 April with one or two first-years there from 8 June to 11 July; and finally a juvenile on 14 Sept and an adult on 19 Oct on the Foulridge reservoirs.

BONAPARTE'S GULL *Larus philadelphia*

Vagrant.

2001: Correction. The record of a first-summer at Seaforth on 27 May 2001 was accepted by the BBRC but the sighting on 17 July 2001 was not.

BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus*

Locally abundant breeding bird. Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant.

International importance: 20000. National importance: 19000

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
MBS WeBS	1029	2021	1787	759	184	474	2244	4819	2293	1846	1099	891
SNR/Crosby	3000	2000	800	120	150	200	1200	4000	950	500	6300	2500
Formby WeBS	745	204	578	230	3	/	166	1055	1274	414	317	350
Delph Res	1100	1300	/	/	/	/	130	500	1700	1100	1200	1700

Black-headed Gulls continue to be very poorly recorded on the coast and the data from the sites in the table give no indication of the true numbers present in the county, although they do show the seasonal pattern. The only other significant coastal counts received were a peak of 969 at Marton Mere on 7 Jan, 1500 at Formby Point on 16 Oct, 5252 flying inland over the Rimrose Valley from coastal roosts at dawn on 19 Oct, and 1810 flying to roost off Blackpool on 26 Nov.

Information received from inland tips and roost sites was more comprehensive. Peak counts in the south-west included 1000 at Prescott Reservoirs on 12 Jan and 5700 at MMWWT on 26 Feb, and in the Fylde 3000 at Todderstaffe Hall on 9 February and 2000+ at Myerscough Quarry in March. In east Lancashire, 1500 were at Clowbridge Reservoir in January and 1000 in December; 2000 at Siddow's Tip, Clitheroe on 14 Jan; 600 at Whinney Hill Tip, Accrington on 11 Jan with 1000 there on 31 Dec; 1259 on Rishton Reservoir on 17 Jan with 800 there on 1 March; and 500 on Fishmoor Reservoir on 22 July. 500+ were feeding on Belmont Moor on 17 May, gorging on a massive crane-fly hatch.

The breeding colony at Stocks Reservoir remains fairly stable; the first birds returned to the breeding island on 28 Feb and 1250 occupied nests were counted on 6 June – together with those hidden from view 2000 breeding pairs were estimated. The colony at Belmont Reservoir reached record levels with around 285 pairs fledging 400+ young. The Leighton Moss colony was 29 pairs down on 2002 with a total of 1338 pairs, 176 at Leighton and 1162 on the Eric Morecambe complex. The five-yearly census of the Ribble Marshes located 8460 breeding

pairs, all of them on the south bank with none on Warton Marsh. Around 30 pairs bred on a small island at Borwick Waters on the Dockacres complex and a single pair was incubating at the new pool complex at Conder Green on 26 June. This county total of just over 12000 pairs is considerably lower than the Atlas estimate of 20000, but it is unlikely that it signals a real decline of this magnitude; the discrepancy is probably largely the result of different survey methods now being employed at the two main sites, the Ribble marshes and Stocks Reservoir.

RING-BILLED GULL* *Larus delawarensis*

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant, mainly in spring.

A poor year with just two records: an adult on fields near Myerscough Quarry on 27-29 April (SGP), and a first-summer at Brockholes Quarry – a first record for the site – on 1 June (C.Bu.).

COMMON GULL *Larus canus*

Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant.

International importance: 16000. National importance: 9000

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SNR/Crosby	380	1000	200	200	100	250	200	200	2000	300	700	5000
Formby WeBS	300	135	150	90	0	/	52	250	745	263	119	150

The only other significant coastal counts received were 126 off Blackpool on 26 Nov; 245, mainly 1S, at Heysham on 19 May and 860 flying inland over the Rimrose Valley from coastal roosts on 19 Oct with 633 there on 26 Nov.

The only indications of spring migration came with counts of 400 at Stocks Reservoir on 5 March and 323 at Arkholme on the 14th with 570 there on the 16th.

Inland roosts included 1000 at Prescott Reservoirs on 12 Jan; 600+ at Stocks Reservoir on 18 Aug with 1000 there on 11 Nov; and up to 100 in both winters at both Clowbridge Reservoir and Whinney Hill Tip, Accrington.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus fuscus*

Abundant breeder especially in Bowland and on the Ribble. Abundant spring and autumn migrant. Smaller winter population.

International importance: 4500. National importance: 500

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Formby Pt	475	81	270	509	320	/	243	470	945	555	90	31
SNR	200	200	120	150	80	100	150	1000	650	100	250	150
MBS WeBS	128	164	400	761	98	305	106	212	67	245	40	63

The census of the Ribble Marshes found 3348 breeding pairs, all on the south bank. One pair held territory and possibly bred at Belmont Reservoir. The only information regarding urban, roof-nesting birds came from Heysham, where breeding continued to be discouraged and few young fledged, but casual observations suggested that breeding pairs continued to increase and spread in Liverpool.

Inland roosts included 360 at Stocks Reservoir on 11 March with up to 100 there during August and September, 500 on the Hodder at Newton on 1 April, 91 at Whinney Hill Tip on 4 April with just one or two there at either end of the year, 300+ at Fishmoor Reservoir on 22 July, and 300 at Prescott Reservoirs on 19 June with 500 there on 31 Aug.

HERRING GULL *Larus argentatus*

Abundant winter visitor and passage migrant. Common breeding bird, mainly on the Ribble and in Bowland.

International importance: 13000. National importance: 4500

2002.

More detailed information was received from Ainsdale/Birkdale/Southport shore about the massive influx of gulls following shellfish wrecks on the coast in the winter of 2001/2002 (AJC). An estimated 4000 Herring Gulls were present before the wreck on 29 Nov 2001 but, after strong winds on 21 Dec, 25000 were seen, only around 20 of which were definitely identified as nominate *argentatus*. By 20 Jan 2002 the total number of gulls of all species had risen dramatically to an estimated 100000. About 85% of these were Herring Gulls and a staggering 5000 Scandinavian *argentatus* were counted, indicating that a very high proportion of the influx must have originated in eastern Britain or northern Europe. Interestingly, there appeared to be some separation in the roosts between *argenteus* and *argentatus* birds, with many of the latter seen in groups of up to 150.

Westerly force 6-7 winds on 26 Jan increased to force 8-9 on the 29th and continued throughout February, adding even more starfish and shellfish to the now rotting remains of the December wreck. Another count was made on 22 Feb, revealing the presence of 150000 to 200000 birds, more 100000 of which were Herring Gulls with around 25000 Common Gulls. The remainder were made up of a few hundred Great Black-backs, more than 1000 Lesser-black-backs and 5000 to 10000 Black-headed.

2003.

2003 was uneventful in comparison to 2001/02. The largest coastal counts received included around 5000 on the Fylde between St. Annes and Rossall on 17 Jan; 1000+ at Blackpool on 26-27 Nov; 1400 at Stanah on the Wyre on 26 Oct; 1143 at Formby Point on 16 Oct; and 1000+ at Seaforth/Crosby Shore on 12 Jan with 1200 (5-10 *argentatus*) there on 2 Feb, 600 on 9 Aug, 1100 on 3 Nov and 1000 on 28 Dec.

Notable inland roosts included 1200 at Whinney Hill Tip on 11 Jan, 500 at Rishton Reservoir on 12 Jan, 400 at Prescott Reservoirs on 12 Jan and 2000 at Stocks Reservoir on 25 March. Lower Rivington Reservoir was reported to still hold a winter roost of 'several thousand' large gulls, presumably mostly Herring, but no specific details were received. A count of 100 at Whinney Hill Tip on 31 Dec included ten nominate *argentatus*. A unique-looking leucistic bird seen at Whinney Hill and Fishmoor Reservoir in January was seen at Lancaster Tip on 8 Feb, giving an indication of how mobile Herring Gulls may be in winter.

The five-yearly breeding seabird census of the Ribble marshes revealed a total of 638 pairs, all on the south bank of the river. An adult and five immatures remained in the Black-headed Gull colony at Stocks Reservoir on 7 April but there was no indication of breeding there.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *Larus cachinnans michahelis*

Uncommon but increasing all year. Most numerous in late summer and on southern coasts.

Minimum number of individuals in each month

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SNR	1	2	2	2	3	1	1	0	2	1	1	0
N. Lancs	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0

The dramatic reduction in birds reported this year, from Seaforth at least, is almost certainly largely due to an equivalent decline in observer effort rather than a real decline in numbers.

The regular adult returned to Glasson during both winters. Single adults were recorded at Prescott Reservoirs in January, May and August to December and it was thought that at least

two individuals were involved. Further adults at Marshside on 2 Feb and Ainsdale on 29 Sept were the only others recorded in Merseyside.

Singles were reported at Jameson Road Tip, Fleetwood on 14 Feb, 28 March and 12 April, and an adult was at Marton Mere on 6 April. One was at Marton Mere on 10 Aug, with perhaps the same at Hambleton Marsh on 17th Aug and one was in the gull roost at Cocker's Dyke, Preesall on 12 Sept.

Two adults were in the Blackburn area during January and February, being seen at Whinney Hill Tip and Fishmoor and Rishton Reservoirs, and a juvenile was at Fishmoor on 8 Aug.

ICELAND GULL *Larus glaucoides*

Uncommon winter visitor and spring passage migrant, mainly January to April. Occasional influxes.

2002.

A 1W was at Ainsdale on 30 Jan with an adult there the following day.

2003.

All records were in the first winter period.

A 1W was in the vicinity of Lancaster Tip on 10-12 Feb and a 2S was in the same area from 21 April to 28 May. A 1W showing characteristics of the north American form *kumlieni* was on Ainsdale Shore on 17 Feb and an adult there on 22 March. A 1W was at Fairhaven on 5 April.

All other records came from the east of the county between 12 Jan and 28 Feb, involving at least four individuals – two 1W, a 2W and an adult – at Whinney Hill and Clitheroe Tips and Fishmoor and Rishton Reservoirs. Three of these were at Whinney Hill on 24 Jan to 8 Feb and at Clitheroe on 9 Feb.

GLAUCOUS GULL *Larus hyperboreus*

Uncommon visitor, mostly winter. Usually more numerous and more coastal than Iceland Gull.

A 1W was seen flying west at Freckleton towards the Ribble Estuary roost on 11 Jan and this or another 1W was at Fleetwood from 31 Jan to 2 Feb. At least three birds were seen regularly in east Lancashire in the first winter period between 10 Jan and 21 Feb: two 1W and a 2W, feeding at Whinney Hill Tip and roosting at Fishmoor Reservoir, occasionally stopping off to bathe at Rishton Reservoir *en route* – and there was a single record of one at Earnsdale Reservoir on 12 Jan. A 2W at SNR and Crosby Shore on 22 March completed the early year's sightings.

Three records in the second winter period began with a 1W on the Lune near Lancaster Tip on 30 Nov, with this or another 1W at Fleetwood on 6-7 Dec and a 1W at Fishmoor Reservoir on 9 & 12 Dec. The Lancaster and Fishmoor birds appeared identical and it is possible that all three of these records refer to a single wandering individual.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL *Larus marinus*

Common winter visitor and passage migrant on coasts. Rare breeder.

International importance: 4800. National importance: 400

Monthly peak counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Formby WeBS	178	32	90	117	0	/	53	220	275	47	49	27
SNR	120	131	/	60	50	32	40	30	40	101	102	160

Other counts of 50 or more included 65 at Rishton Reservoir on 17 Jan, an exceptional 224 at Fishmoor Reservoir on 31 Jan, 59 at Altham on 2 Feb, 65 at Delph Reservoir on 7 Feb, and 54 on the River Wyre at Stanah on 26 Oct.

Six pairs bred on the south Ribble marshes, and a single pair at Borwick Waters on the Dockacres complex although their nest site was lost to development.

KITTIWAKE *Rissa tridactyla*

Common passage migrant on coasts, fairly common in winter. Scarce inland.

The only three-figure counts came from Morecambe Bay, with the overwhelming majority seen from Heysham. These included 90 on 28 Jan, 78 on 10 March, 253 on 1 April (when 160 also went past Jenny Brown's Point), 336 on 2 April, 223 on 27 April (when up to 370 were off Jenny Brown's Point), 442 on 29 April, 290 on 1 May, and 372 on 3 Nov (the only large autumn movement).

Up to 20 were seen on Shell Flat in January to March while 70 off Bispham on 2 Feb, and 58 off Blackpool on 29 April with 40 there on 1 Nov were the only other significant Fylde counts.

Things were little better on the Sefton Coast: 69 off Formby Point on 29 April, 85 there on 1 May, and 25 on the Mersey at Seaforth on 5 May – with no double-figure counts in autumn.

Inland, first-winters were at Earnsdale Reservoir on 16 Jan and MMWWT on 17 Feb, and an adult at Brockholes Quarry on 7 May.

SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis*

Common spring and autumn migrant on coasts.

Morecambe Bay

Heysham/Morecambe reported 'reasonable numbers' in spring, beginning with three on 10 April; 432 bird-days were logged during April but the passage peaked early with 62 on the 26th and there were only a handful of records in early May. Just occasional single-figures were seen from Jenny Brown's Point from 14-29 April.

Autumn birds were much scarcer and, with the exception of five at Morecambe on 11 Aug, all came from Heysham, which recorded low single-figure counts between 27 July and 10 Oct.

Liverpool Bay

A good spring passage on the Fylde coast got underway with two past Blackpool and Rossall Point on 25 March. The first substantial movements were 316 past Rossall on 18 April and 249 the next day, and 532 bird-days were recorded on just six days off Blackpool. As in the north, the passage slowed sharply in early May but picked up a little late in the month, including 52 off Blackpool on the 27th. Up to 28 were seen at Blackpool during June but the autumn return probably began with 66 there and 33 past Rossall on 24 July, and peaked with 107 at Blackpool on 10 Aug and 103 on the 22nd. Late records were two off Blackpool on 18 Oct and one off Rossall Point on the 26th.

Similar numbers were seen on the less well watched Sefton Coast, where first and last records were on 14 April at Seaforth and 23 Oct at Formby Point. The largest counts at Formby Point were 81 on 29 April, 92 on 28 July, 134 on 30 July, 168 on 10 Aug, 145 on 16 Aug, 74 on 14 Sept and 15 on 16 Oct. An exceptional 70 at Marshside on 14 July and up to 27 at Seaforth in late April were the only other double-figure counts.

Inland

One at MMWWT on 16 April was the fifth record for the reserve.

ROSEATE TERN* *Sterna dougallii*

Scarce summer visitor.

One in partial breeding plumage flew south off Formby Point on 30 July (BMcC, PT). None were seen at Seaforth for the first time since 1993.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo*

Abundant spring and autumn migrant. Scarce breeder on Ribble, Lune and at Seaforth. Cross-Pennine migrant in small numbers.

Morecambe Bay

The first appeared on the Heysham outfalls on the early date of 15 April. Moderate numbers, just breaking into double-figures, followed into early May with a total of just 112 bird-days. Up to eight were seen occasionally at Heysham in June and one or two in July with autumn records of 15 on 21 Aug, two on 24 Aug and one on 22 Sept.

Elsewhere, singles were off Jenny Brown's Point on 27 May & 2 June, Leighton Moss on 22 Sept and Pine Lake on 27 Sept. Two pairs were on Colloway Marsh during the breeding season and two young birds were seen there on 9 Aug.

Liverpool Bay

Blackpool registered the first in the county on 12 April; 13 were at Rossall Point the following day and on the 20th but the only other double-figure count on the Fylde in spring was of ten at Blackpool on 10 May.

The first returned to the SNR colony on 15 April but numbers quickly increased to 70 by the 25th, 100 at the end of the month and 200 by 8 May. Non-breeding second-summer birds were late to arrive this year with no influx of any consequence until the third week of June; they swelled numbers on the reserve to 450 on the 29th.

Two large counts at Formby Point during April – 140 on the 20th and 64 on the 29th – were presumably heading towards the Seaforth or, more likely, the Ribble colonies. Few were seen there in May.

A total of 111 pairs bred on the Ribble Marshes, just one of which was on the north bank at Warton Marsh; while Seaforth's 168 pairs fledged a good total of 130 young out of 183 nestlings.

Post-breeding birds began to arrive at SNR in the second week of July, producing regular counts of 800 by the end of the month, 1050 on 11 Aug, 1000+ on the 14th and 1300 on the 15th & 16th. Dispersal was unusually rapid with just 500 remaining on the reserve on 24 Aug and 150 on 3 Sept, although there were still 80 offshore on 9 Sept and 50 there on the 22nd, with the last on 7 Oct.

The first large autumn counts from Formby Point were 100 on 11 July and 133 on the 13th, but there was a daytime roost there of 1036 on 10 Aug, when 600+ were also at Seaforth. More than 750 were offshore on 16 Aug and 250 went south in two hours on the 21st and 139 on 14

Sept. Passage on the Fylde coast was typically light with just one sizeable count of 83 off Blackpool on 10 Aug and only three records in September – the last on the 24th.

Inland

It was an extraordinarily productive year in St. Helens with a total of at least 74 bird-days recorded between 4 May and 11 Aug, mostly on Eccleston Mere and Prescott Reservoirs, but two of the largest counts came from Carr Mill Dam – ten on 4 July and five on the 25th. Other notable flocks included nine at Prescott Reservoirs on 22 May and five there on 8 July.

Other records in the south-west included a pair courtship-feeding at the irrigation lake on Downholland Moss on 17 June with two flying over there on 28 Aug; one or two at Mere Sands Wood on four dates in June and July; and nine records at MMWWT between 21 April and 1 Sept, including six on the latter date.

Up to three were at Myerscough Quarry during May and one at Cuerden Valley Park in August. The remainder were in the east of the county, beginning with singles at Stocks and Foulridge Reservoirs on 18 April, followed by further singles at Stocks, Alston and Rishton Reservoirs during April and up to three at Foulridge on the 28-29th. Three further singles were recorded in May at Stocks and Earnsdale Reservoirs, at Belmont Reservoir on 8 June, Clowbridge Reservoir on 19 June and Lower Wayoh Reservoir on 6 July.

ARCTIC TERN *Sterna paradisaea*

Common on spring passage, especially in Morecambe Bay, less numerous in autumn. Rare breeder.

Morecambe Bay

The spring passage at Heysham was unremarkable compared with some recent years. The first 13 were on 14 April and a further 1500 followed during April and 490 in May. Notable counts were 330 on 16 April, 221 the next day and 176 on the 18th, 544 on 29 April and 182 on 6 May. Numbers declined sharply after that and the movement was effectively spent by 24 May. Birds were seen in much lower numbers to the north of the bay at Jenny Brown's Point between 14 April and 17 May with peaks of 57 on 15 April, 138 on the 18th and 230+ on the 23rd.

The overwhelming majority of Heysham birds were heading north into the bay – some feeding briefly on the outfalls – and many were already gaining height as they left, suggesting, together with the far smaller numbers at Jenny Brown's Point, that most move overland to the north-east, following the line of the Keer.

Up to seven were seen on the Heysham outfalls sporadically during June and July and, as usual, the autumn passage was scarcely noticeable with just three singles (all juveniles) on 21 Aug, 25 Sept and 10 Oct.

Up to four pairs were on territory during the breeding season on Colloway Marsh but the outcome was unknown.

Liverpool Bay

One at Blackpool on 12 April was the first in the county. The first sizeable movement, 434 off Blackpool in 4 hours on 17 April proved to be the largest of spring on the Fylde coast. Other notable counts included 129 off Blackpool and 162 off Rossall Point on 18 April, up to 78 off Rossall and Blackpool on the 19th and 49 off Blackpool on 10 May. Presumed overland migrants included 108 flying east up the Ribble on 16 April. The largest spring counts from the Sefton Coast were 78 going north in 45 minutes at Marshside on 18 April and 60 north in an hour from Southport Pier on the 19th.

Small numbers of non-breeding birds were at SNR and the Fylde coast during June and July while nine at Blackpool on 21 July and 16 at Formby Point on the 28th probably marked the start of the return movement. Autumn passage was light in Fylde with just a handful of low

single-figure counts until 7 Sept. In contrast, exceptional large southward movements were seen from Formby Point, including 211 on 13 Aug, 152 on the 14th and 225 on the 30th. Unusually, a juvenile fed over the freshwater lagoon at SNR daily from 27 Aug to 23 Sept, while three on the Mersey on 6-7 Oct were the last of the year.

No nests were located during the seabird census on the Ribble marshes but one pair vigorously attacked ringers later in the season.

Inland

One at Foulridge Reservoir on 18 April, on a day of large passage on the coast, was the earliest ever in east Lancashire by three days. Stocks Reservoir had three on 3 & 17 May and one on the 7th, and singles were at MMWWT on 9 May and Brockholes Quarry on the 20th.

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*

Uncommon passage migrant on coasts.

One briefly at MMWWT on 15 April was the second earliest ever in the county and the third for the reserve.

The next was one at Blackpool on the more typical date of 26 April. A long series of records then followed at Blackpool with up to three on seven dates from 27 April to 7 June. The only other spring birds were singles at Formby Point on 29 April and SNR on 8 June, two on the shore at Marshside on 29 May, and one at Heysham on 27 April – the only record all year in the north of the county, where it is now considered a major rarity.

Two at Formby Point on 13 July were probably the first returning birds. A reasonable passage ensued with up to six at Blackpool on five dates between 24 July and 21 Aug, up to four at Rossall on four dates from 16 July to 21 Sept, two at Fairhaven on 30 July, five over SNR on 9 Aug with one there on the 12th, and an impressive further 53 bird-days at Formby Point which included eleven on 29 July and 21 on 10 Aug. The last of the year was on Crosby Marine Lake on 23 Sept, the latest ever in Lancashire.

BLACK TERN *Chlidonias niger*

Uncommon spring and autumn migrant. Usually more numerous and more coastal in autumn. Most northern records in spring.

A reasonable spring was followed by a very lean autumn.

With the exception of singles at SNR on 27 April to 1 May, Jenny Brown's Point on 29 April, Stocks Reservoir on 2-4 May and at MMWWT on the 7th, spring records were tightly clustered in the period 14-21 April. The first were two flying east up the Ribble and over Preston on the early date of 14 April, with another six doing the same on the 16th. One on 15 April at Stocks Reservoir was the earliest record, by eight days, in east Lancashire. Records then followed from Dockacres (1 on 18th), Heysham (4 from 16th-21st), Jenny Brown's Point (1 on 18th), Blackpool (1 on 17th, 19 on 20th), Rossall Point (2 on 20th), Formby Point (4 on 20th) and SNR (1-2 on 17-19th).

Singles at SNR on 30 May and 29 June were both presumably non-breeding sub-adults while a juvenile there on 19 Aug was the first return migrant. Another juvenile was at Heysham briefly on 21 Aug and another at SNR, feeding over the freshwater pool with a juvenile Arctic Tern, from 30 Aug to 22 Sept. The only other autumn records were three south at Formby Point on 6 Sept and one at Rossall on 10 Oct.

WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN *Chlidonias leucopterus***Vagrant.**

One in full breeding plumage was at SNR on 14-17 July (SJW). Its arrival had been expected since it had been seen regularly in North Wales and the Wirral for a week or more previously. What seems likely to have been the same bird was found on the River Lune on 14 Aug (PWo), where it remained until the 24th, spending much of its time hawking for butterflies and other insects over the saltmarsh between Conder Green and Glasson Dock.

Both records have been accepted by the BBRC and become the 19th (and 20th?) for Lancashire. The Seaforth record was the fourth for the reserve.

GUILLEMOT *Uria aalge***Fairly common offshore during autumn dispersal. Uncommon in winter.**

The vast majority of reports came from Starr Gate, Blackpool, where the largest day-count was of 22 on 9 April (SD). These are summarised in the table below. The pattern of records off Rossall Point was similar but numbers seen were far lower with a peak of eight on 19 Oct. Up to 30 were seen during boat surveys on Shell Flat in January, February and March.

Monthly peak counts.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Blackpool	2	14	7	22	9	6	1	0	7	3	1	1

None were reported off the Sefton Coast in either winter and the only counts of consequence were ten off Formby Point on 29 April (the first of the year), twelve on 1 May and 14 on 21 Aug, with a final single on 8 Nov. One off Marshside on 12 Aug was only the second live record there.

One or two were seen irregularly off Heysham/Morecambe in January and March and up to four in October to December. The only double-figure count was of twelve on 2 April.

Around 15 were reported to have been found dead on the tideline at St. Annes in late September and eight corpses were on Crosby Shore on 10 Oct. A fresh corpse found at St. Annes in late December was very dark and considered to be of the nominate race which breeds in northern Scotland and Iceland.

RAZORBILL *Alca torda***Common offshore during autumn dispersal. Uncommon in winter.**

Peak counts from Starr Gate, Blackpool are shown in the table below (SD). As for many years now, Razorbills are far more numerous than Guillemots off the Fylde coast as elsewhere in the county. The largest day-counts were 155 on 13 April and 30 on 20 Oct. Peak counts off Rossall Point were 15 on 13 April, 13 on 18 April and five on 1 Nov. Up to 20 were seen during boat surveys over Shell Flat in the first three months of the year.

Monthly peak counts.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Blackpool	0	10	20	155	2	1	0	0	21	30	2	1

The only sighting reported in the first half of the year from Formby Point was one on 29 April. Return passage there began with another single on 31 July but didn't really get going until September with peaks of ten on the 10th and nine on the 13th. October produced 29 north on the 2nd and 142 south on the 23rd, together with a number of smaller counts; the last were two on 22 Nov.

Ones or twos at Heysham on four dates between 9 Oct and 13 Dec were the only reports from Morecambe Bay.

Auk sp.

Significant counts of large auks that couldn't be specifically identified included 29 off Blackpool on 17 Feb with 27 there on 10 April, and 341 off Formby Point on 23 Oct with 57 there on 29 Oct and 105 on 8 Nov. If the proportions of specifically identified auks is any guide, the majority of these were likely to have been Razorbills.

The CCW aerial survey counted 193 in Lancashire waters in January (distributed fairly evenly between Shell Flat, the mouth of the Ribble and the Sefton coast) and 233 in February (150 of which were on Shell Flat). These are only partial counts and it is likely that the wintering population is at least twice, or even three times, as large as this.

BLACK GUILLEMOT* *Cephus grylle***Rare during autumn dispersal and in winter.**

A first-winter flew south off Formby Point on 10 Sept (BMcC) and another of the same age went north off Blackpool on 17 Sept (SD).

LITTLE AUK* *Alle alle***Scarce passage migrant.**

One found dead in a garden near Fluke Hall on 29 Jan (per JRe) was the only record in the first winter period but the autumn proved to be our most productive ever, thanks almost entirely to sightings of at least ten over Shell Flat during a boat survey in flat calm conditions on 21 Nov (TMel *et al*).

In addition, there were three shore-based records: singles close in at Formby Point on 23 Oct (SC), off Blackpool on 15 Nov (SD) and again on 21 Nov (SD).

PUFFIN* *Fratercula arctica***Scarce passage migrant.**

Two flew south together off Blackpool on 24 April (SD) and a breeding-plumaged bird went south at Formby Point on 1 May (BMcC).

FERAL PIGEON *Columba livia***Abundant and widely-distributed breeding resident**

The only indication of any change in the status or behaviour of this often-disregarded species comes from Rossendale, where besides maintaining its numbers in urban centres it is reported to be moving out into gardens and playing-fields, for example in Waterfoot and Gaghills. Street Pigeons are still numerous in Chorley town centre and in the Liverpool and Southport areas; 74 were counted at Waterloo on 23 March, 120 in Calderstones Park on 11 April, and up to 300 by Southport Marine Lake on 20 June. On the Fylde there were 130 in a 1km BBS square at Blackpool Pleasure Beach on 21 April and 70 at Sand Villa Farm, Pilling on 18 Oct.

STOCK DOVE *Columba oenas***Fairly common breeding resident; local flocks in winter**

The south-west mosslands and the Fylde continue to be the Stock Dove's strongholds, with the former area recording the only three-figure flocks in the early year, 200 on Kirkby Moss in January and 130 at Dairy Farm Road, St. Helens on 21 April. There were 62 on Churchtown Moss on 16 Feb, whilst 20 at Hyfly Hatcheries, Preesall on 5 Jan and Warton Marsh on 19 Feb were the peak counts from the Fylde. Twenty at Cant Clough Reservoir on 11 Feb and at least

30 at Cocklet Hill, near Stocks Reservoir on 15 March were the largest parties reported from the ELOC area, and up to five were present at several locations in Rossendale.

Reports of confirmed or probable breeding were widespread. Thirty-seven pairs in the Pilling-Preesall area laid 196 eggs in 95 clutches and fledged 124 young (35 pairs produced 123 young there in 2002); elsewhere in the Fylde nesting was considered probable at four locations around Catforth. There were two pairs at White Coppice in the Chorley NHS area and the species nested in at least five locations in east Lancashire, where two pairs were incubating as early as 29 Jan at New Laithe Farm, Newton. At MSW Stock Doves have been ousted from nest-boxes by Jackdaws, and it is probable that breeding did not take place this year.

Late-year gatherings were generally much smaller than those reported in recent years; the highest count was of 120 at Black Hill Farm, Pilling on 23 Aug, there were 51 at MMWWT on 19 Sept, 31 at Altcar Rifle Ranges, Formby on 12 Oct and 45 on Churchtown Moss on 8 Nov.

WOODPIGEON *Columba palumbus*

Abundant breeding resident; widespread winter flocks

After last year's massive autumn movements 2003 was rather uneventful. By far the largest January flock was 2700 at MMWWT on the 14th; other sizeable counts were 550 at MSW on the 13th and flocks of 300 at Mythop, Fylde on the 2nd, at Roby Mill on the 8th and in the Silverdale area on the 18-19th.

Five hundred at Todderstaffe Hall, Fylde on 1 Feb was that month's highest count; there were 420 at nearby Lodge Farm, Singleton on 5 March and 1000 on Reed's Moss, St. Helens on 2 April. Flocks further inland were generally very much smaller, although there were 250 at Rivington on 4 Jan, 200+ fed on beech-mast at Roddlesworth Plantations, Darwen during February, and there were about 200 at Spade Mill Reservoir, Longridge on 21 March; 45 at Grane, Rossendale on 1 March was that region's highest count.

Up to eight pairs bred at Heysham NR and two at Arkholme, but no other breeding data were provided; over a hundred feeding on fields at Walverden Reservoir, Burnley on 27 May was very unusual for the time of year.

Modest movements and flocks were reported from the middle of September; there were 800 at MSW on the 15th, 1000 at Mythop on the 20th and 300 at nearby Marton Mere on the 30th. A distinct pulse of southward movements in mid-October produced counts of 200 over SNR on the 12th, 204 over the Rimrose Valley, Crosby in 30 minutes on the 15th with 384 there on the 17th, and 760 south-east over Belmont in 50 minutes on the 19th. At least 300 passed over Fairhaven on 27 Oct and another wave of passage saw 300 flying south-east over Foulridge Reservoir and 203 over Caton Moor on 1 Nov. Fairhaven recorded 850 on 6 Nov and 1533 next day, the highest count of the autumn. Numbers at the year's end seem to have been unusually low everywhere; 1000 at MMWWT on 21 Nov, 190 at Catchdale Moss, St. Helens on the 29th, and 150 at Eagland Hill, Pilling on 21 Dec were the highest counts received.

COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto*

Common breeding resident, more local in the east; some coastal passage

Regional reports from Chorley, Rossendale and east Lancashire describe this species as a fairly common to numerous resident, but the majority of reports of large flocks came from further west, especially from the Fylde. Forty at Eagland Hill on 25 Jan and 30 at St. Annes on 12 Feb were the highest early-year counts, with 23 on Kirkby Moss on 16 Jan the only other double-figure report. Breeding data were, as usual, rather sparse; a pair was nest-building in a holly tree at St. Annes as early as 13 Jan and a bird was carrying nest material in Rossendale on 23 Feb. One or two pairs nested at Heysham NR and first breeding, by one and two pairs respectively, was recorded at Belmont Reservoir and Hesketh Golf Course, Marshside.

There was a greater than usual volume of migratory or dispersive movements in autumn. Heysham NR in particular reported a definite increase in southbound, high-flying birds, two in August, 39 in September (19 of these on 27-28th), and seven in October; 27 Sept also saw a movement by 26 birds in an hour south-east over Lytham St. Annes NR. Nineteen moved south at Fairhaven on 1 Oct, eight at Marton Mere on the 3rd, four at SNR on the 14th, and 19 flew south over the Rimrose Valley on the 19th. There were widespread reports of double-figure flocks from mid-October to the year's end, including 49 at Bradshaw Lane, Pilling on 25 Aug, 40+ there during October-December, 49 at Winmarleigh on 2 Oct and 50 at Whyndyke Farm, Mythop on 4 Dec. Over 40 frequented a garden feeder at Gaghills, Rossendale during November-December and there were up to 72 at Hyfly Hatcheries, Preesall and 38 at New Lane, Eagland Hill during the same period. Thirty-two at a garden roost in Ingol, Preston on 30 Nov increased to 43 on 5 Dec, and 40 at MSW on 16 Nov was a reserve record. Birds were already in song in Southport by the end of December.

TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur*

Rare breeding visitor to the south-west; scarce passage migrant elsewhere

Five birds were recorded in spring, two in autumn and, exceptionally, one in mid-winter.

One feeding with Collared Doves in Whitworth on 21 April may have been the first for Rossendale, and was the earliest in the county since 1999. A bird that flew in front of the observer's car at Staining on the Fylde on 19 May may just possibly have been the same seen at nearby Todderstaffe Hall on 17 June; one spent 29-30 May in a garden at Warton, Carnforth, and another was at MMWWT on the latter date.

For the second year in a row there was no evidence of any breeding attempt in the species' former stronghold in the south-west. Two migrants were reported in September, a probable juvenile at Heysham NR on the 8th and one at Jameson Road, Fleetwood on the 13th. Finally, a first-winter bird accompanied Collared Doves at Whyndyke Farm, Mythop from 1-5 Dec; the last winter record was of a single bird at Formby in January 1978.

CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus*

Uncommon breeding bird and double passage migrant, more numerous in spring

One at Ansdell on 13 April was the first to arrive, followed by singles at Marton Mere on the 16th and at MSW on the 18th; there were 20 further records in April, from all parts of the county, heavily concentrated during 24-28th. At least 40 were recorded in May, again very widely distributed; there were four at MMWWT during 12-15 May, three there on the 29th and at least three at the north end of Stocks Reservoir during 18-24th. Eleven birds were reported in June, mostly from upland areas of the east and north; the year as a whole was described as particularly poor for Cuckoos on the West Pennine Moors.

The only confirmation of breeding came from the ELOC area: there were two juveniles at Martholme on 2 July, one was fed by Meadow Pipits at Marshaw, Bowland on the 24th, and another was by Skirden Beck on 21-27th.

A female on Downholland Moss on 31 July, a bird at Blackburn on 5 Aug and a juvenile at Stocks Reservoir on the 17th were the only autumn records.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

Uncommon breeding resident; most numerous in the south-west and the Fylde

The usual flow of sight records from the Fylde, where birds were reported from at least 23 locations, and to a lesser extent from the south-west mosslands suggests that the population remains healthy in stronghold areas. Elsewhere, however, encounters with a Barn Owl continue

to be an unexpected birding bonus. Single birds at Barrow Scout, near Leighton Moss and at Heysham NR, both in January, and birds found dead near Nether Kellet in August and near Lancaster in October were the only records from the north. There were four sightings in the ELOC area, of birds at Samlesbury on 24 Jan, Longridge on 13 Oct, Cliviger on the 16th, and near Newton on 7 Dec. None was reported from Rossendale (there was one record in 2002), but one seen regularly in the vicinity of Belmont during November-December was the first in that area since 1993.

Breeding details were reasonably comprehensive this year. Forty-eight young were ringed on the south-west mosses; a pair bred successfully near Rufford and there were four territories in the general area of MSW. In the Chorley NHS area breeding was confirmed or reported at Eccleston, Croston, Bretherton and on Farington Moss. On the Fylde, ten pairs in the Pilling-Preesall area (nine in boxes and the other in a straw-bale) laid 48 eggs, hatched 28 young and fledged 27 of them; one pair had a second brood which failed, giving an overall mean of 2.4 fledged per pair, a very slight improvement in productivity on 2002. Elsewhere in the Fylde a pair at Eagland Hill fledged two young and up to four juveniles were in the Marton Mere area in late July and August.

Hunting Barn Owls seem to have encountered more than their usual share of hazards during 2003. One was deprived of its prey by a gang of at least six Magpies near Longridge on 13 Oct and was not seen again in the area; another was similarly robbed by a Kestrel on Lytham Moss in July, and a juvenile rescued from the clutches of a Harris's Hawk at Fleetwood on 1 Nov had been ringed at Preesall during the summer.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua*

Fairly common and widespread breeding resident

Their habit of perching on posts and roof-ridges in daylight always produces a rich crop of casual sight reports of Little Owls, and this year was no exception. The Fylde, as usual, reported the densest pattern of occurrences, from all parts of the area, but birds were also recorded at 26 localities in the ELOC region, ten within the Chorley NHS boundary, and seven in Rossendale. Only in the north and the south-west was there a dearth of records; it is unlikely that this reflects any real decline on the mosslands, but the Heysham NR Report notes that the species is no longer regularly encountered there.

At Pilling-Preesall 27 pairs laid 78 eggs, hatched 56 young and fledged 44, 78.6% of those hatched, maintaining the improvement noted in 2002. In the east pairs bred at Altham, Martholme and Pendle Hill (two) and probably nested at two further sites; in Rossendale breeding was confirmed at Clowbridge and a pair at Higher Hollinbank raised at least two young. A pair bred at Arkholme in the Lune Valley, and a pair near MSW was the only instance of confirmed breeding in the south-west.

TAWNY OWL *Strix aluco*

Common and widespread breeding resident

As a rule, our commonest owl is reported far less frequently than its scarcer cousins. Described as a numerous resident in the Chorley NHS area, the species was reported from at least seven locations, with confirmed or probable breeding at two. Tawny Owls were recorded at 27 sites in the ELOC area, although without confirmation of breeding; in Rossendale nesting was confirmed at Clowbridge and birds were reported from eight other locations. In the Fylde birds were reported from twelve sites, and a pair in Stanley Park, Blackpool fledged at least two young; in the Pilling-Preesall area eleven pairs laid 30 eggs, from which 20 young hatched and 14 fledged. Three out of four pairs in nest-boxes in the Leighton Moss area were successful and three pairs bred at MSW; a pair raised a single offspring in an old Grey Squirrel drey at Prescott

Reservoirs, St. Helens, but a pair in a nest-box at Arkholme on the Lune was ousted by Grey Squirrels at the egg stage, and deserted.

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*

Scarce and local breeding bird; uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

After a few years of apparent decline the regular winter roost at Marton Mere flourished again in 2003. Two birds were present on 13-14 Feb and one was found freshly dead on 27 April; a sighting of a bird in flight on 13 Nov led to a successful search for the roost, which held up to six birds throughout December, providing superb views to birders from far and near. Following disturbance the roost moved to a more secure site, and was present into 2004. One roosted in a hedge at Staynall, by the Wyre estuary, from 7 to 14 Dec when the hedge was cut, and a bird was seen at nearby Stalmine on the 9th; one was present in the Rimrose Valley, Crosby later in the month. One or two *Asio* owls seen at dusk at Brockholes Quarry on 13, 18 & 25 Sept were considered most likely to be this species.

Only one report of confirmed breeding was received from the Long-eared Owl's stronghold on the south-west mosslands; a pair nested near Bescar, and this may account for a sighting at nearby MMWWT on 15 Aug. Three pairs bred in the Burnley area, one fledging four young and the others three each, and a pair near Clitheroe raised three young. Two pairs bred on the West Pennine Moors in the Chorley NHS area; one fledged four young by 22 May but two were later found dead after heavy rain. A pair in west Rossendale had four eggs on 15 April but the outcome is unknown; a pair raised at least two young at Leck Fell, in the far north-east.

SHORT-EARED OWL *Asio flammeus*

Scarce upland breeding bird; uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

Wintering birds were widespread and seen in good numbers both in the uplands and on the coast in the early year. Up to seven remained on Twiston Moor from 2002 until 7 March and there were six on Champion Moor until 12 April; one was at Belmont in January-February. Eight birds hunted Sefton Meadows on 5 Jan and there were four on Marton Moss from late January to late March, and up to four on Lytham Moss in late January and February; single birds were reported from five other locations in the Fylde and the Lune estuary from 1 Jan to 10 April.

Passage birds were on the move over Birkdale shore and Rossall Point on 28 March, and another at Marshside on 18 April and two over Caton Moor on the 14th were also presumably migrants.

Voles were plentiful in the uplands this year and Short-eared Owls, on United Utilities land in Bowland at least, responded with gusto: there were eight confirmed breeding attempts and eleven more suspected, compared with four in all in 2002; breeding was considered probable at four other locations in the ELOC area. Birds were present in north Rossendale in spring and summer and one pair probably bred successfully; another was confirmed successful in west Rossendale. Two pairs on the West Pennine Moors relocated after potential nest-sites were destroyed by moorland fires, and both pairs raised young. Elsewhere, birds were present in the breeding season on Winter Hill, and in the lowlands at the Old Coach Road, St. Helens.

One over Birkdale shore on 13 Sept was the first late-year record on the coast. In spite of evident breeding success numbers at most regular sites in the second winter period were on the low side. Only Marshside-Crossens stood out; for the first time in nearly 20 years birds were almost continuously in view over the saltings from 18 Oct to the end of the year, peaking at 14 in late November. Elsewhere, there were two at Warton Bank and over Little Anne Moss in the far north-east in late December, and singles at MMWWT, Rossendale, and Champion Moor on various dates during the month.

SWIFT *Apus apus*

Common summer visitor and abundant passage migrant

Spring migration began with one over Brockholes Quarry on 19 April, followed by birds at SNR and Marshside on the following day. Widespread arrivals were underway by the 23rd and there were 200 at Marton Mere and 150 at Marshside on the 30th. Some very heavy movements were recorded during the first three weeks of May, including 1100 north-west over Haydock Park in two hours on the 1st, 560 at MMWWT on the 12th, and 500 at SNR in heavy rain on the 16th; over 1000 at Ewood Bridge Sewage Works, Rossendale also in a rainstorm on 18 May was an exceptional count for the site.

Breeding data were rather thin this year. Numbers were described as lower than normal at regular nest-sites in Rossendale; twenty had returned to Reedsholme by 14 May, and the latest were two over Edgeside on 12 Sept. By contrast, reports suggest a healthy situation in the Lancaster area with the last birds around nest-sites in Derwent Road on 13 Aug. A flock of 200 over Carr Mill Dam, St. Helens on 4 July was the largest summer gathering reported.

For the second year in succession autumn movements began early, and were quite conspicuous in many areas. The last week of July saw widespread and heavy passage; highlights included 150 over Warton Crag and 180 over Fairhaven Lake on the 24th, 250 over MMWWT and 120 at Skelmersdale White Moss on the 26th and up to 2000 over Clowbridge Reservoir next day. Over 150 fed above a cereal crop at Black Hill Farm, Pilling on 1 Aug, and later in the month 100 passed at Reed's Moss, St. Helens on the 25th and 160 at SNR on the 28th. Passage at Heysham NR, however, was negligible throughout.

Most parts of the county saw their last Swifts before the end of August, but there were September birds at Downholland Moss on the 2nd, Coldwell Reservoir on the 5th, Prescott Reservoirs on the 10th, Ribchester on the 13th and SNR on the 11th and 28th. Long after the hot summer was no more than a memory a single Swift flew south-east over Marton Mere on the morning of 7 Nov, one of the latest ever recorded in the Fylde and the latest in the county since one over Blackpool seafront on 14 Nov 1984.

KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

Uncommon but widely-distributed breeding bird, mainly in the east; post-breeding dispersal westwards

Most records of coastal birds in the early year came once again from north Fylde, with relatively few south of the Ribble, presumably a reflection of the fact that the species' main breeding areas are rather further away than in the north.

Both ELOC and CNHS reported an abundance of sightings throughout the year and confirmed or probable breeding at many regular locations. In Rossendale birds were regular on the River Irwell system, and nesting probably took place. Further north and west breeding was confirmed at Ellel Grange, Haslam Park, Preston and the Ribble near Brockholes Quarry, and three pairs nested at Arkholme on the Lune; a record total of twelve pairs was found by the BTO Waterways Survey along the Lancashire Lune, from Skerton Weir, Lancaster to Kirkby Lonsdale. Breeding was considered 'almost certain' at Eccleston Mere, St. Helens for the first time in recent years.

Westward movements were noticeable from the end of June, and there were up to seven widespread individuals on the Fylde in September-October; Heysham NR recorded singles on 26 June, 30 July and 27 Dec and there were up to three at MSW from 14 July to 16 Dec. The south-west in general secured a rather better share of these autumn wanderers than is usually the case, with birds reported from SNR, Downholland Moss, Southport Marine Lake, Marshside and Hightown during September-November.

HOOPOE* *Upupa epops*

Rare passage migrant

One was in the garden of a farmhouse at Great Altcar, inland of Formby on 24 Oct; it perched on wires for several minutes before being mobbed by corvids and flying off (GL), making 2003 the third year in a row to record this colourful and sought-after visitor.

GREEN WOODPECKER *Picus viridis*

Uncommon and local breeding resident, mostly in the north and east

Although occasional extralimital sightings periodically raise hopes, this species shows no real inclination to extend its breeding range westward. The ELOC report records 86 sightings during the year, from 28 localities and in all months; 37 were from Stocks Reservoir alone. Successful nesting was confirmed at Stainscombe, Hurstwood, Moor Piece and Wood End Sewage Works, Burnley. Chorley NHS, by contrast, had a poor year for records, with reports from only five sites; a breeding birds survey of Roddlesworth Plantations found two breeding pairs. Birds were recorded at seven sites in Rossendale during January-February, there were regular spring sightings at Crawshawbooth and Higher Hollinbank, and singles at five locations during the autumn. Further north and west there were regular sightings throughout the year at Leighton Moss and Warton Crag and several spring records at Brockholes Quarry; two were at Waddecar, Grizedale on 30 May, and in the Lune Valley three pairs nested at Arkholme and one at Aughton. There was a total of 15 records at Prescott Reservoirs, St. Helens in late winter and spring.

The only arguably extralimital records during 2003 were of a calling male at Heysham NR on 19 March, a more predictable juvenile there on 27 July, one at Glasson on 14 June and Seaforth NR's first record, a flying bird seen well on 12 April.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos major*

Common and widespread breeding resident; some autumn dispersal/passage

Regional reports reflect continuing abundance and breeding success for our commonest woodpecker. There were 92 sightings in the ELOC area in at least 40 locations, involving a minimum of 80 birds; in the Chorley NHS area 16 territories were located, and four nests found, in a survey of Roddlesworth Plantations and 20 territories were estimated in the Rivington-Anglezarke area. There were five successful nests in Cuerden Valley Park and another five at MSW, where the ringing group caught twelve birds during the year. In Rossendale at least three pairs bred in Staghills Wood and nesting was recorded at five other sites; five pairs nested in riverside trees at Arkholme. As usual widespread sighting and breeding reports came from the Fylde, but little information was received from the south-west.

Late autumn saw a fairly extensive, if light coastal passage; migrants were recorded at Fairhaven on three dates in late September and eight in October, and there were presumed passage birds at Marshside on 12 Oct, at Mount Park, Fleetwood on the 15th and at Lytham St. Annes NR on the 18th. Three adult birds were ringed at Heysham NR but there was no late autumn peak here as in previous years.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos minor*

Scarce and local breeding resident

This most appealing little drummer proved as elusive and as unpredictable as usual this year. However, there was a record number of sightings in the ELOC region, with single birds at Mitton Wood in late February and mid-March, at Langden Intake, Dunsop Bridge and New Laithe Farm, Newton in March, at Haugh Wood in late April, Cemetery Wood, Burnley in late October

and Stocks Reservoir in late November; in addition, there were unconfirmed reports of up to two birds at Stocks on dates in late November and December.

On the negative side, there were only three reports all year from the Chorley NHS area, single birds at Eccleston in January and in the Rivington area in late June and September; the species seems to be undergoing a decline in its former county stronghold.

Elsewhere, one was at Ellel Grange, south of Lancaster on 29 March, but there were no records at MSW for the second year in a row, although one was reported drumming at nearby Rufford New Hall on 2 March.

SKYLARK *Alauda arvensis*

Abundant breeding bird and winter visitor; common passage migrant

The largest flocks in the first winter period were to be found in the north Fylde and Southport areas: there were 250 at Eagland Hill, Pilling on 10 Jan & 4-17 Feb and a similar number on stubbles at nearby Bradshaw Lane on 5 & 17 Feb; a flock of 200+ was at Marshside on 1 Jan and 150 were on Churchtown Moss on 16 Feb.

Single birds had returned to Great Hameldon and Nutshaw Hill in Rossendale by 23 Jan and a male was in song on the former on 17 Feb; first song in the Belmont area was heard on the 15th. In the ELOC area the first returning bird was at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir, Darwen, on 29 Jan.

Spring movements seem to have been negligible everywhere; a small passage, in single figures per day, was noted at SNR during March.

Breeding data were sparse this year, and typically inconsistent. In the BTO-BBS survey of Merseyside the total number of individuals recorded in 18 1-km squares was up from 89 to 143, but breeding numbers were reported as unusually low in Rossendale. Forty were singing on Reed's Moss, St. Helens on 13 April, 50 pairs bred at MMWWT, 27 at Marshside RSPB, and at least twelve in the Rimrose Valley, as last year; there were eight singing males between Altham and Martholme on 26 April. Seven singing males were present in May in a 1-km BTO-BBS square on Darwen Moor.

Autumn passage was noticeable from about 20 Sept and was exceptionally light everywhere; a count of 108 over Caton Moor on the 27th was the only appreciable inland movement recorded. There were 175 at SNR on 1 Oct and 100 there, as well as 104 at Marton Mere on the following day, 190 at Cockersands on 18 Oct and 132 at Rossall Point on 1 Nov. Seventy-seven on Catchdale Moss, St. Helens on 29 Nov and up to 200 at Marshside on 13 & 29 Dec were the largest gatherings reported at the year's end.

SHORE LARK* *Eremophila alpestris*

Scarce and irregular winter visitor and passage migrant

Two adults found on the beach at Fairhaven on 11 Nov (JFW) remained until the morning of the 13th, when they flew off after disturbance by a dog-walker. On 10 Dec two adults were seen on St. Annes Beach (ST), and they ranged between there and Starr Hills and Starr Gate until the end of the year; there is some disagreement among those who saw both as to whether the November and December birds were the same, or two different pairs.

SAND MARTIN *Riparia riparia*

Common but local breeding bird, mainly in the east; abundant double passage migrant

The first spring arrivals were at Marton Mere, Skerton Weir on the Lune, and Gawthorpe in the ELOC area on 11 March but there were no substantial movements until the last week of the month, when 110 were at Pine Lake on the 25th, 220 on the 27th, and 53 at Marton Mere and

300 at Leighton Moss on the 26th. Subsequent passage was much lighter than normal, with peak counts of 106 at Marton Mere on 13 April and 100 at Calderfoot on the Ribble on the 19th.

At Arkholme on the Lune there were 330 nests above the viaduct and 60 below on 9 June; the BTO survey of the Lancashire stretch of the river found a total of 1338 occupied nest-holes between Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale (including those at Arkholme). Two important colonies, on the Altham-Martholme stretch of the River Calder and at Brockholes Quarry, experienced massive reductions in breeding numbers (to zero in the latter case) due to bank erosion or landscaping. There were 33 active nest-holes at Myerscough Quarry in July, four or five pairs nested at Colne Sewage Works and six at Barrowford in the ELOC region, about six pairs bred on the Irwell at Townsendfold in Rossendale, and several pairs nested at Cuerden Park and Clayton Hall Quarry, Chorley. New colonies were reported from Loyn Bridge, Hornby on the Lune and on the River Yarrow between Euxton and Croston, but no numbers were given, and nesting did not take place on Heysham Head this year.

A bird flying south off Starr Gate, Blackpool on 3 June may have been the first, very early, departure, and there were two at SNR on the 18-19th; migration proper began in mid-July and was on a very modest scale. There were 150 at SNR on 14 July and 100 at Stocks Reservoir on the 25th; 1500 at Leighton Moss on 2 Aug and 100 at Altham on the 17th were the only significant counts during that month. Most areas reported their last Sand Martins around the third week of September; there were singles at Marton Mere and Fairhaven on the 17th, ten at Waterfoot, Rossendale on the 21st, four at Martholme on the 23rd and two at Brockholes Quarry on the 27th. A bird at SNR on 2 Oct was the last migrant recorded.

SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica*

Abundant breeding bird and double passage migrant

Single birds at Fazakerley Reedbed and Marton Mere on 26 March were the first spring migrants; there were birds later in March at Leighton Moss, Marshside, Ainsdale Sands Lake, Anglezarke Reservoir and SNR (the first March birds ever at this site). One at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir, Darwen on 1 April was the first to arrive in the ELOC area, and birds did not reach Rossendale or the Belmont area until the 14th. Spring movements were unspectacular this year and 500 at Leighton Moss and 170 at Morecambe on 25 April, and 200 at SNR on 2 May were the highest counts reported; only 165 were recorded at Heysham NR in April and 112 in May.

In the Pilling-Preesall area 29 pairs laid 243 eggs in 53 clutches, and 206 young fledged; several pairs nested at Samlesbury Aerodrome and one or two, as usual, in Marshside Sand Plant, and there were seven pairs at Lower Broomfield Farm, Arkholme.

A trickle of southbound birds was evident at several sites from the last week of June, but the main passage did not commence until late July; movements were heavy, prolonged, and on a very broad front. Although none roosted at Middleton, Heysham this autumn there were significant gatherings at several other locations; up to 1000 roosted in maize fields at Ribchester on 25 July, increasing to 2500 on 9 Aug and 5000 on the 18th; up to 800 roosted at Holden Wood Reservoir, Rossendale on 14 Aug and 300 at Clowbridge on the 17th. Cereal crops near Brockholes Quarry held up to 1500 on 3 Sept and at least 5000 during the 8-12th. There were 700 at MMWWT on 8 Aug, 950 moved south at SNR next day and 600 on the 28th, 500 passed Southport Pier on the 25th and there were 200+ at the Old Coach Road, St. Helens on the 29th. September flocks included 395 flying south-west down the Lune Valley at Claughton in just 10 minutes on the 21st and 598 passed over nearby Caton Moor on the same day. There were 350 over Heysham NR on 8 Sept and 249 at Myerscough Quarry in an hour on the 13th, when 1000+ were also recorded at SNR.

October Swallows were more numerous and widespread than usual, and at least 13 sites right across the county saw their last birds during 10-13th. One was at MMWWT on 24 Nov, a bird at Altham on the 30th was east Lancashire's latest ever, and a party of five feeding on

midges in east Preston on 17 Dec before moving on south was the second December record in a row; there was one at Heysham on 6 Dec 2002.

HOUSE MARTIN *Delichon urbica*

Common and widespread breeding bird; abundant passage migrant

The first to arrive was over Leighton Moss on the early date of 23 March; the next were two over Lancaster on 2 April and another two at Altham on the 8th. The main passage began during 13-17 April across a broad front from Marton Mere and Marshside to MSW, Belmont, Brockholes Quarry, Heysham NR and Whitworth, Rossendale. For the third successive year spring movements were light; 100 at Leighton Moss on 23 April and at Marton Mere on 22-23 May, and 180 at Marshside on 3 May were the only three-figure counts reported.

Birds had returned to nesting-colonies at Catforth, Fylde by 16 April and in Rossendale by the 26th. Five monitored pairs at Black Lane Head Farm, Pilling laid 30 eggs in 10 clutches and fledged 23 young; there were 29 active nests in Belmont Village (33 in 2002), and 28 nests were counted on twelve terraced cottages in Abbey Village, also in the CNHS area. A few birds were still in attendance at colonies in Rossendale at the end of September and a pair was feeding young in the nest at Rishton on 10 Oct, only a day before the last House Martins departed the area.

Autumn migration began in mid-July with an early southward movement of 350 over Marshside shore on the 19th, but the main passage came in August and early September. There were 350 again at Marshside on 3 Aug and 200 there on the 24th; 164 were over Altcar Rifle Ranges, Formby on the 10th and 800 at SNR on the 28th. September counts included 150 at both SNR and MMWWT on the 11th, 80 at MSW next day and 70 at Rishton on the 14th; Heysham NR recorded 152 migrants during the month. Stragglers were recorded at nine widespread locations in early October, and three over Fairhaven on the 13th were the last of the year.

RICHARD'S PIPIT* *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Rare passage migrant, mostly in autumn

An influx involving four birds over a ten-day period in October made 2003 one of our best ever years for this charismatic Siberian. On the afternoon of 14 Oct one was found at Parsonage Reservoir, Blackburn (WCA *et al*); it remained until the 16th. Another was at Crossens on the morning of the 19th (DB); although it could not be relocated later in the day, what was almost certainly the same bird was seen again on the 22nd (WDF). Two Richard's Pipits were recorded on the morning of 24 Oct, at Heysham Golf Course, viewed from Heysham NR (PJM) and at Crosby Marina (PK *et al*). The most recent visit by this species was at Heysham NR in November 2000.

A large pipit, also probably this species, was seen briefly at Sand Villa, Pilling on 16 Nov (JR); unfortunately the bird did not call and clinch the identification.

TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*

Uncommon and local breeding bird in the north and east; fairly common double passage migrant

An exceptionally early bird was at Stocks Reservoir on 20 March (it remained there throughout the summer), and another was in the Langden Valley on the 22nd; the main spring passage began on 9 April. Coastal movements were rather more pronounced than usual; twelve were recorded at Heysham NR during 13-24 April, there were at least 13 at Marshside during the 16-30th with five on the 18th, and ten flew north over Downholland Moss irrigation lake on the 24th.

Rossall Point recorded four in mid-April and there were ones or twos during the same period at six other coastal or near-coastal sites.

Fourteen territories were located in Roddlesworth Plantations during the United Utilities survey, about 14% of the estimated county total. There were six singing males at Rivington, seven at Birk Bank, Clougha and five at Beacon Fell in late May, and breeding was considered probable at Longridge Fell, Coldwell Reservoir, Moor Piece and Downham in the ELOC area; none was recorded in Rossendale, however, for the third year in succession.

Autumn movements on the coast began with single birds at Marshside on 5 Aug, Heysham NR on the 6th and Knowsley Safari Park next day; there were three in all at Heysham in August and another three in September. Four were recorded at SNR between 24 Aug and 28 Sept and ones or twos turned up at eight other coastal or near-coastal watchpoints. Inland, there were single migrants at Darwen Moor on 16 Aug, Slipper Hill Reservoir, Colne on the 23rd, Caton Moor on the 30th, Barley the following day and Pendle Hill on 7 Sept; there were two at Longridge on the 8th. The last bird of the year was recorded at MSW on 10 Oct.

MEADOW PIPIT *Anthus pratensis*

Abundant breeding bird, especially in the east, and double passage migrant; scarcer in winter

As usual, small parties were widespread, both on the coast and in the uplands, during both winter periods. In January there were 30 at SNR, 45 at Dunnow and 25+ at 260m at Browsholme Heights in the ELOC area, and five at Loveclough, Rossendale; up to 20 were at SNR in December and 30 or more at Belmont Reservoir, Darwen Moor and Myerscough Quarry.

Light passage was observed at Starr Gate, Blackpool and SNR from the middle of March; 3152 passed over Heysham NR between 12 March and 21 April, with a peak of 520 on 13 April. Other three-figure counts included 331 north over Rossall Point on 27 March, 474 there on 5 April, 200+ at Damside, Pilling on 23 March and 250 at Marshside on 18 April.

Very few breeding data were reported: in Rossendale 43 were counted in a BTO-BBS 1-km square at Alden on 12 June and 60 at Musbury on 13 July; and there were 20 in a similar square on Darwen Moor in June. Eight to eleven pairs bred at Heysham, and possibly one at SNR; five territories were located in the Arkholme area.

Autumn movements began both inland and at coastal sites in the last week of August, but remained at a low level until the third week of September, when some very heavy pulses of migration were recorded over a broad front; these continued on-and-off until mid-October. Too many large movements were reported to cite them all, but passage on 21 Sept is worthy of special mention. On that date 6000+ passed at SNR, 450 at Pilling Lane Ends, 500 at MMWWT, 410 at Starr Gate, 600 at Heysham NR, and 509 at Rossall Point; further inland there were 200 at Cowpe Moss, Rossendale and at Belmont Reservoir, 300+ on Champion Moor, and 1975 birds were counted over Caton Moor, with flocks of a hundred or more at three further sites. Another heavy movement on 27 Sept brought 4834 south over Rossall Point in five hours, whilst 677 moved over Caton Moor and 290 at Starr Gate; 1006 were recorded southbound over Marton Mere on 2 Oct, when there were also 300 at SNR and 234 over Formby Dunes. The last sizeable movements of the autumn came in mid-October with 823 at Marton Mere on the 11th and 389 over Formby Point and 300 at SNR on the 12th; a total of 2784 was counted over Heysham NR between 28 Aug and 23 Oct.

WATER PIPIT *Anthus spinoletta***Uncommon winter visitor and scarce passage migrant**

The regular wintering-site at Warton Bank produced sightings again this year. There were single birds on 11 Jan and 1 March, while at least five and possibly ten were present on 19-20 March, reducing to two by the 22nd, and four were seen on 8 April. Peak counts in late March are typical at this site, suggesting that some, perhaps most, birds are early spring migrants rather than true winter residents; it may, however, be due mainly to the prevalence of very high tides at this time.

Elsewhere, the bird present at Leighton Moss since October 2002 was recorded on many dates from 1 Jan to 23 March, most often from Lillian's Hide and there was one at Marshside on 1 Feb. One was caught and ringed at Cant Clough Reservoir, Burnley on 24 March, although some who have viewed the photographs feel it was more likely to have been a *littoralis* Rock Pipit.

The first in the late year was at Crosby Marina on 21 Oct, followed by two at Warton Bank on the 25th; on 30 Oct the bird ringed in March returned to Cant Clough, where it remained for the rest of the year. There was another sighting of a single bird at Warton Bank on 12 Nov and one was at Burglar's Alley Marsh, of Rock Pipit fame, on the 23rd. Further north there were singles at Aldcliffe, also on 23 Nov, at Heaton on the 25th and at Middleton Industrial Estate, Heysham on the 28th; one was seen at Leighton Moss on 11 Dec and two were present on the 21st.

ROCK PIPIT *Anthus petrosus***Uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant, mainly in autumn**

As in 2002 the lion's share of records at both ends of the year came from the north Fylde and Morecambe Bay areas; the Fylde data have been clearly summarized, but lack of a systematic report from the Lancaster area this year makes most records from there impossible to collate. Seventeen were present in north Fylde in January, with up to five at Skippool; 34 in February included up to 20 at Burglar's Alley Marsh, Thornton on the 23rd and eight of the twelve March birds were also at Burglar's Alley. One was at Morecambe Stone Jetty on 11 Feb and 11 March and a probable migrant flew over Heysham NR on 10 March. In the south, there were up to six at Marshside in January and singles at SNR on 26-27 March and 11 April.

The first of autumn was at Morecambe Stone Jetty on 18 Sept, closely followed by one at Starr Gate on the 21st; there were singles at SNR on the 28th and one over Rossall Point next day. Twenty-two were recorded on the Fylde in October, including six migrants over Fairhaven on the 27th, and of 17 November birds twelve were seen at Burglar's Alley on the 23rd. There were up to seven in the Aldcliffe-Stodday area of the Lune estuary in early November and two at Morecambe Stone Jetty on 23 Nov. SNR recorded a total of ten or eleven in October-November, there were up to three at Marshside, and one at Hightown on 18 Oct. One at Parsonage Reservoir, Blackburn on 15-18 Oct and another at Stocks Reservoir on the 25th were the only inland records all year.

Numbers in December seem to have been low everywhere; there were three at Barnaby's Sands, Wyre on the 7th, one at Marshside throughout, and one at Sunderland Point on the 30th.

The proportion of our Rock Pipits that belongs to the British and Irish nominate race, versus the number attributable to the Fennoscandian race *littoralis*, has been a topic of lively debate within the county for the last few years; no resolution of the issue has yet emerged.

YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava flavissima*

Uncommon and declining summer visitor; fairly common passage migrant

Numbers in both passage periods showed a slight but encouraging increase on those of recent years. One at Brockholes Quarry on 13 April was the first spring arrival, followed by very widespread sightings from the 15th. A total of twelve was recorded at SNR between 15 April and 2 May; there were also twelve sightings at MMWWT, from 15 April to 17 June. A party of five flew east at Brockholes Quarry on 25 April, four migrants were recorded at Marshside, three at Rossall Point, two at Newton Marsh, and single birds at eight other locations.

This year's breeding success-story comes from the St. Helens area, where up to ten pairs were located between Reed's Moss and the Old Coach Road; adults and juveniles were seen together at the latter site on 3 July. In the Lune Valley three pairs bred at Arkholme, though only one fledged young, and there was another pair on territory at Wenningfoot. East Lancashire's only known pair successfully raised two broods at Read, and a pair was successful on Banks Marsh; nesting by at least one pair was considered highly probable at Curlew Lane, Rufford, a regular site, and on Downholland Moss.

Autumn migrants were on the move from mid-July and there was a very obvious peak in records during the last week of August. As in spring, SNR and MMWWT reported the highest numbers; the former had an excellent season, with up to 36 recorded up to 22 Sept, 15 of them on 28 Aug, whilst 19 were recorded at MMWWT between 20 July and 12 Sept. There were two at Fairhaven on 11 Aug, three there on the 14th and one on the 18th; up to two were reported from each of ten other coastal or near-coastal sites. Inland, there were single birds at Whitemoor, Barrowford and Parsonage Reservoirs in the ELOC area, all in the last week of August. One at Heysham NR on 2 Oct brought the year to a close.

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava flava*

Scarce passage migrant, mostly in spring

Both of this year's visitors were recorded at Marshside within a few days of each other. An adult male was present on 17 April (JKB) and another, probably a first-summer male on the basis of its whitish throat, on the 20th (JKB *et al*).

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

Fairly common breeding bird, mainly on upland streams in the east; common passage migrant, especially in autumn. Widespread in small numbers in winter

Ones and twos wintered at many locations, both inland and coastal, at both ends of the year; there were as many as five along the River Calder at Altham-Martholme. Unusually, a pair was feeding beneath a bird-table at Fence, Burnley from 13 Dec to the end of the year.

As usual, spring passage was either slight or nonexistent at most regular watchpoints; small movements were noted on the Fylde during March, with a very modest peak around the 20th, and five passed at Heysham NR between 26 Feb and 12 April.

ELOC, ROC and Chorley NHS reports all affirm the species' wide distribution on virtually all suitable waters during the breeding season, with many records of successful nesting; the BTO Waterways Survey found a record 20 pairs on the Lancashire Lune. Further west, roughly speaking beyond the line of the M6, Grey Wagtails are uncommon breeders and have scarcely extended their range during the past decade. This year nesting was confirmed on the River Wyre at Churchtown, there were two pairs on Barton Brook to the west of the Motorway, a pair bred on the Ribble near Brockholes Quarry, and nesting may have occurred on Skelmersdale White Moss.

True to form, autumn movements, which began in a small way in mid-July and gained momentum in late August, were on a much larger scale than those in spring, and around the average of the past few years. Ninety-eight southbound migrants were recorded at Heysham NR between 24 Aug and 14 Oct, with a peak of twelve on 28 Sept; at least 90 passed through SNR between 30 July and 2 Oct and ten or more were recorded on seven dates. Widespread movements in the Fylde began in mid-July and included 20 east at Marton Mere on the 21st; the peak count was of 49 south over Blackpool South Shore on 7 Sept. Inland, there were 17 at Altham-Martholme on 17 Aug and eight passed over Caton Moor on 27 Sept; migration had effectively petered out by the third week of October.

PIED WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Common and widespread breeding bird and winter visitor; abundant double passage migrant

At least 120 roosting in the docks adjacent to SNR and a roost of 100+ at Colne Sewage Works were the largest gatherings reported in the first winter period; there were 40 at MSW on 1 Jan and 70+ at Marshside on 8 Feb. Spring passage was unspectacular; 200 at Leighton Moss on 11 March and 188 at Carnforth Marsh on 14 April were the only three-figure counts received. Fifty-three were recorded at Heysham NR in March and 25 in April, there were 65 at Marshside on 11 March, 50 at Marton Mere on the 16th and 70 at Arkholme on the 31st. Widespread movements were recorded in Bowland on 21 March.

Breeding data were, characteristically, sparse; in the Pilling-Preesall area three monitored pairs laid 19 eggs in four clutches, from which 15 young fledged; two pairs bred at Brockholes Quarry, and the species was described as nesting successfully in dry stone walls on Longridge Fell; an excellent total of 22 pairs was located at Arkholme.

Autumn movements were unusually protracted, commencing in mid-July and continuing to the end of October. Passage was reasonably heavy and widespread this year, but without any spectacular peaks or marked influxes. On the coast 123 were recorded at Heysham NR in September and 155 in October, with a peak of 68 on 2 Oct; SNR had its highest counts of 200 on 18 Aug and 120 in early September, there were 80+ at Pilling on 2 Sept, 66 at Winmarleigh on 2 Oct and 71 at Marton Mere on the 11th. Inland there were 162 by the River Lune at Arkholme on 16 July and over 100 at Waddington, Clitheroe on 22 Sept; 33 passed over Caton Moor on the 27th and 30 at Ogden on the 29th was the highest autumn count in Rossendale. By late October a roost of over 250 had assembled at the Philips site in Blackburn and this remained in triple figures until the year's end; there were 100+ again at Colne and a three-figure roost at the Tickled Trout Hotel on the Ribble by Brockholes Quarry in December.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba alba*

Spring passage migrant in variable numbers, mainly coastal; much scarcer in autumn

Movements in spring were exceptionally widespread this year, although the Sefton coast, as usual, attracted the largest flocks. Four on Crossens saltmarsh and two at Greenhalgh Castle Tarn, Fylde on 22 March were the first birds recorded; there were six other occurrences before the end of the month, including five over Rossall Point on the 28th. April counts were dominated by 80 at SNR on the 17th, 150 there on the 26th, and 200 on Birkdale Beach on the 18th. There were 21 in the St. Helens area between 1 April and 4 May, ten by the Lune Estuary during 6-15 April, about 30 at Marshside-Crossens during the month, and single figures at Brockholes Quarry, MMWWT, five locations on the Fylde, and Heysham NR. Inland occurrences were exceptionally well-distributed; there were about 22 at eight sites in the ELOC area between 29 March and 5 May, including ten at Alston Reservoir, Longridge on 19 April. In the Chorley NHS area there were singles at Belmont on 19 & 30 April and Withnell Fold on the 27th. The last spring birds were at SNR on 9 May.

A rather brief autumn passage began with three at SNR on 24 Aug and ended with two at Stocks Reservoir on 14 Sept. Over two-thirds of the forty or so birds involved were in the St. Helens area, which recorded more in autumn than in spring; there were 20+ at Old Coach Road on 6 Sept, and fifteen there on the following day. SNR recorded a total of seven and there were two each at Marshside, Aldcliffe Marsh and Morecambe Dome.

WAXWING *Bombycilla garrulus*

Uncommon, irruptive winter visitor

After a near-absence in 2002 a major influx was one of the birding highlights of early 2003. Birds were recorded in at least 24 locations; many visits were fleeting, others prolonged, but only the broad picture can be sketched here, and readers are referred to the relevant regional reports for the day-by-day details. The geographical pattern was remarkably similar to that of the last major irruption, in 2001, with the bulk of records across a broad swathe of north and east Lancashire and sporadic and generally short-lived sightings elsewhere.

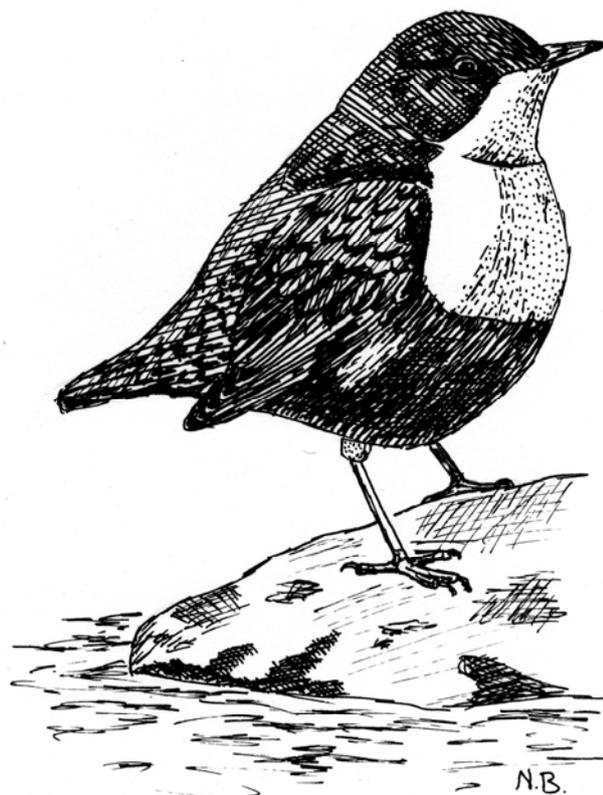
Small flocks were around the Lancaster and Morecambe urban and suburban areas more or less continuously from 2 Jan to mid-March with up to 14 present at several sites on various dates; fifteen were at Aughton in the Lune Valley on 7 Jan. The Blackburn-Burnley-Darwen area was the other main hot-spot, also with records through January-March; there were up to 15 in Burnley on 13-17 March and 40+ at India Mill, Darwen on the 24th. Elsewhere in the east there were reports of small parties from Clitheroe, Stocks Reservoir, Copster Green and Wilpshire in January and February. Birds were about in the Garstang area in mid-January and at Thornton, Fylde in early February, and there were four in St. Annes on 1 March; six were at Hartwood, Chorley on 17 Jan, two in Bootle at the end of the month, ten in Everton Park, Liverpool and one in Preston in mid-February, and a flock of 17 briefly in Southport on 3 March.

The late year, though less hectic, was nevertheless quite lively. There were early singles at Longridge on 23 Oct and Pilling Lane Ends two days later; one was at Heysham NR with a substantial arrival of thrushes on 6 Nov, and there were other November reports of one or a few from Tewitfield near Carnforth, Chorley, Burnley and Barnoldswick. In December up to ten were seen in Blackburn from the 7th, there were up to three in Lancaster and at Silverdale on the 5th and 8th, one flew in off the sea at Starr Gate, Blackpool on the 10th and there were further singles at Longridge on the 17th and Coldwell Reservoir, Nelson on the 30th.

DIPPER *Cinclus cinclus*

Uncommon breeding resident, mainly in the east

Although casual sightings were relatively few this year the three relevant regional reports, ELOC, ROC and CNHS all indicate stable populations. In the east, nesting by single pairs was confirmed at Roddlesworth Plantations, Langden Intake, Burholme Bridge and Twiston Mill; in Rossendale breeding occurred at Ogden and Reedsholme, and high autumn numbers suggest a good breeding season throughout the region. In the Chorley area breeding was confirmed at Cuerden Valley Park,



Birkacre and Hoghton Bottoms and considered probable at White Coppice. Four pairs bred on the Lune between Skerton Weir and Kirkby Lonsdale and a pair nested on the River Brock at Brock Bottoms; nesting probably took place on the Wyre at Scorton.

There were no really extralimital reports this year; a bird at Potter's Brook, Forton on 18-23 Jan and two at Broughton, Preston on 29 Oct were the most westerly records, but both locations are within a few kilometres of regular breeding areas.

WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Abundant breeding resident, passage migrant and winter visitor

A ubiquitous species, but seldom paid much attention by birders; twenty-five at Marton Mere on 4 April and twelve at Fazakerley Reedbed next day were the only reports of spring passage.

There were 19 territories on British Energy property at Heysham, three fewer than in 2002; productivity was described as poor, so subsequent high ringing totals, including 29 in October, are largely attributable to passage birds. The species was described as 'abundant' in the Chorley NHS area, but numbers were possibly down in Rossendale, where only three and two birds were found on visits to the 1km BTO BBS square at Alden, compared with ten and six last year. On the positive side, there were 58 singing males at MSW, a reserve record and an increase of 16 on last year; between 14 and 19 pairs nested in the Arkholme area, a similar total to 2002. In the ELOC area there were ten singing males in Spring Wood, Whalley on 24 April and 20 in Roddlesworth Plantations on 23 May; five pairs bred at Lomeshaye Marsh, Nelson as in 2002.

Apart from the ringing evidence at Heysham NR very little in the way of autumn passage was reported; peaks of twelve at Marton Mere on 28 Sept, ten there on 2 Oct and seven at SNR on 23 Nov presumably included a proportion of migrants.

DUNNOCK *Prunella modularis*

Abundant breeding resident and uncommon double passage migrant

The dowdy bird with the hectic sex-life received even less attention than usual in 2003. Twelve at Marton Mere on 3 Feb and ten at Bradshaw Lane, Pilling on 2 March were the highest early-year counts reported, and spring movements at Heysham NR were negligible.

Dunnocks were in song in Rossendale from 4 Jan; there were 14 territories at MSW and 45 were caught there by the ringers during the year. A total of 17 pairs on British Energy land at Heysham was only a little below average, but productivity was extremely poor.

There was no evidence of autumn passage at SNR and very low numbers at Heysham NR, producing the worst ringing total ever there, 19 birds during July-October. Birds at Fairhaven were displaying migratory restlessness on 17 Sept, and autumn peaks of eleven at Marton Mere on the 23 & 27 Sept may have included some passage birds. Peak late-year counts were of 20 at Whyndyke Farm, Mythop on 12 Dec and eleven at Marton Mere on the 28th.

ROBIN *Erithacus rubecula*

Abundant breeding resident, autumn passage migrant and winter visitor

Fifty birds at MSW on 7 Jan was a winter record count for the reserve; there were ten at Marton Mere on the same date and a maximum of nine during the first winter period at SNR. Thirteen were ringed at Heysham NR between mid-March and late April but no other reports of spring movements were received.

Breeding data were very sparse this year. A pair was nest-building at Whitworth, Rossendale on 11 Feb, and there were 15 territories on British Energy property at Heysham,

but very few juveniles were fledged. Forty territories were located at MSW and ringers there caught 57 birds during the year; 13 territories on the Lune between Leck Beck and Arkholme was a decrease on 2002's total.

Autumn passage was about average at most well-watched sites. At Heysham NR the first migrants appeared on 18 Aug; there were more grey-and-orange continental types than usual, especially in mid-October, and a total of 88 birds was ringed, mostly in October. Migration at SNR was recorded from 24 Aug and at Marshside from the 28th. There appears to have been a widespread influx on 2 Oct: 40 were recorded at SNR, 28 at Marshside, 22 at Marton Mere, and up to 31 were singing or 'ticking' along Victoria Road, Freshfield that morning. Subsequent pulses of migration brought 35 to Marshside and 16 to SNR on 23 Oct and a major influx, though without an estimate of numbers, was reported from the Rimrose Valley, Crosby on the 27th.

During the second winter period there were up to twelve in December at SNR and eight at Marton Mere, but an indication of the true abundance of the species in the wider landscape is provided by the fact that Robins visited every participating garden in the Chorley NHS area during the Winter Garden Birds Survey, and the species was equal chart-topper with the Blackbird.

BLUETHROAT* *Luscinia svecica*

Vagrant

On a morning in the second half of May a probable first-summer male of the nominate Scandinavian race stunned itself against a patio window in Ingol, Preston. While the bird was recovering, and just before it flew off, the householder took a photograph. By the time the film was developed and the picture passed on to birders a couple of months had elapsed, and the exact date of the occurrence could not be established. This is the tenth record for the county, and the first since 1998 (DMG, *per IA*).

BLACK REDSTART *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Rare breeding bird, uncommon double passage migrant and winter visitor

This was an exceptional year for this popular little chat. A female was at SNR on 7 Jan and an adult male at Earby, near Barnoldswick from December 2002 remained in the area, occasionally singing, until 18 March. A record of a female in a garden at Ashton-on-Ribble, Preston on 14 Feb was followed by another in nearby Plungington on 16 March; there was a female at Warton Bank on 19 Feb and yet another at Heysham NR on 22 April.

In a very interesting series of sightings in central Liverpool a singing male was present from 6 March until at least the 18th and a female was in the same area during 16-25th; there were no further reports, and breeding was not confirmed. A further survey of Liverpool's Central Docks, the city's last known breeding stronghold, again failed to register a single sighting. In early autumn there were some further suggestive records: a juvenile was at Ogden Clough, below Pendle on 26-27 July and another juvenile/first-winter was on Newton Fell during 3-8 Aug.

Autumn passage proper was the strongest for several years. One was at Rossall School on 1 Oct, a probable first-winter male was at Heysham NR on the 23rd, another first-winter male turned up at Starr Gate, Blackpool on 7 Nov, a female/immature was at Ainsdale Lido on 14-15th and another (or the same) further down the coast at SNR on the 16th was seen again on 5 Dec.

REDSTART *Phoenicurus phoenicurus***Fairly common breeding bird and double passage migrant**

For the second successive year coastal passage was very light in spring; only eleven birds were reported, the first, all males, at Marton Mere, Heysham NR and Morecambe Stone Jetty on 14 April. Three more males were recorded at Heysham between 15 and 26 April, males at Marshside on 19 & 23 April and 7 May, and single birds were reported from Rossall on 27 April and Stanley Park, Blackpool on the 29th. Birds returned early to inland breeding areas: to Roddlesworth Plantations on 13 April, Dunsop Bridge and Bashall Eaves by the 16th, Stocks Reservoir on the 18th and Anglezarke in the Chorley NHS area on the 19th.

Breeding data were less comprehensive than in 2002 but there are no grounds to suspect any real short-term decrease in numbers. There were nine occupied nest-boxes on the United Utilities Bowland estate, with excellent productivity: 57 young fledged, 40 of which were ringed; there were six further territories on the estate, in natural cavities, making a total of 15, the same as last year's. Four young were ringed at a nest in Bowland Wild Boar Park, an adult and two young were at White Coppice in the CNHS area on 1 June whilst a female with a single juvenile at Deeply Vale, Rossendale on 27 July were the only birds recorded in that region all year. There were reports of singing males, but no proof of breeding, at Stocks Reservoir and Marl Hill (six territories each), Rivington-Anglezarke woodlands (five), Roddlesworth Plantations and Arkholme (three each), and single males or pairs were at Downham and Pendleton near Clitheroe, Grizedale and Brock Valley.

Ten coastal migrants were recorded in autumn, compared with 18 in 2002, from the first, an early juvenile at Bank End, Cockerham on 8 July to the last at Formby Point on 18 Sept. Heysham NR only recorded a single bird and there were two each at SNR and Downholland Moss irrigation lakes. Inland, final records were on 31 Aug at Rivington and 6 Sept at Earnsdale Reservoir in the ELOC area.

WHINCHAT *Saxicola rubetra***Uncommon breeding bird on eastern hills; common double passage migrant**

Spring passage on the coast, which began with a male at Heysham NR on 14 April, was extraordinarily light; Heysham had no May records for the first time, and numbers at normally well-served locations, like Marshside and Marton Mere were only a shadow of normal. There were five at Marshside between 18 April and 11 May (19 in 2002) and seven were recorded at Marton Mere between 22 April and 29 May (20 in 2002). Elsewhere there were nine in the St. Helens area from 23 April, five at SNR and ones or twos at a mere ten other sites, mainly in the Fylde. The first birds reached inland breeding areas in the ELOC area at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on 21 April and at Belmont in the Chorley NHS area on the 23rd.

Fifteen pairs were located on the United Utilities Bowland estate; this compares with 27 pairs last year, but fieldwork effort was less in 2003. Elsewhere in the east, pairs with young were recorded at Marl Hill in mid-July and at Delf Hill, Burnley and Twiston Moor in late August. Males were on territory at Bottoms Beck, Gisburn Forest on 24 May and on Catlow Fell on 5 June. Two pairs bred on the West Pennine Moors around Belmont, while in Rossendale a pair was at Clowbridge in early June, but nesting was not confirmed; further west, a male was on Winter Hill on 21 June.

Post-breeding dispersal and passage movements inland were at an average level. Twelve passed through the Belmont area in August, including five on the 28th, and the last week in August also saw a noticeable and widespread movement elsewhere: there were five at Altham on the 24th, two at Clowbridge on the 27th and four at Ightenhill, Burnley on the 30th. Nine migrants were recorded at Belmont in September, the latest on the 13th; there was one at Parsonage Reservoir, Blackburn on the late date of 16 Oct, but one at nearby Rishton Reservoir from the 20th to 10 Nov was the last of the year, and a record late date for the ELOC area.

On the coast passage was even less impressive than in spring. The first birds were recorded at Aldcliffe Marsh, Prescott Reservoirs and Singleton, Fylde in early July; subsequent movements included four at SNR to 11 Sept, four also at Marshside, and six at Heysham NR, including four on 24 Aug. There were four together at Hesketh Bank on 16 Sept and reports of one or two birds came from five other locations; one on 26 Oct at Marshside was the last coastal migrant of the year.

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata*

Uncommon and local breeding bird; uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

The recent run of (relatively) mild winters seems to have allowed a proportion of our increasing upland population to overwinter successfully on the fells, while numbers in winter at coastal sites have not increased to anything like the same degree. Counts in the first winter period included at least six on Harrisend Fell on 23 Jan, four at Marshside and three at Heysham NR during the month, and three at Clowbridge, Rossendale on the 5th. A total of twelve birds was present at six locations in the ELOC area in January.

Passage was clearly observable in the Fylde from about 20 Feb. There was a widespread influx there on the 26-27th, with seven at Pilling Lane Ends and birds at nine other sites; nine were also at MMWWT and five at Heysham NR on the latter date. A second movement on 12 March brought birds to several Fylde locations as well as seven to Leighton Moss and five to Marshside.

Only two breeding records by single pairs were received from the Sefton coast, from Birkdale Dunes NR and inland near Blundellsands, but a pair nested near Blackpool Airport for the second year in a row and produced three young, whilst a pair at Middleton Industrial Estate fledged at least seven, in two broods.

It is in the uplands, however, that the Stonechat's core breeding areas now lie. A total of 35 pairs nested in the ELOC area, including 23 on United Utilities' Bowland estate and a pair at Ogden Clough, Pendle which fledged three broods. At least four pairs bred in Rossendale, five around Belmont, three on Darwen Moor and four elsewhere in the Chorley NHS area, and three pairs were found on Birk Bank, Clougha. Up to ten birds on Harrisend Fell in May were thought to include two pairs with offspring.

Autumn dispersal and passage produced some of the highest counts yet at inland sites, including twelve on Pendle Hill on 5 Sept and at Birk Bank on the 17th, and 18 at nearby Clougha on the 27th; there were nine in the Langden Valley and up to six at Belmont on 2 Oct, and ten in the Langden Valley next day. In comparison coastal and lowland movements, which began with one at MMWWT on 30 June, were rather sparse; ten at MMWWT on 21 Oct was the only double-figure count and none at all were seen at Heysham NR during the autumn. A total of seven was recorded at SNR between 18 Sept and 21 Nov and there were peaks of four at Marshside on 19 Oct and 6 Nov; ten were recorded at eight sites in the Fylde during October.

Numbers at the end of the year were rather lower overall than in recent years, although there were up to nine on Great Hameldon, Rossendale and birds at five other locations in the area; in the ELOC region there was a total of ten at six sites in December. On the coast up to four wintered at Marshside, five on the Fylde and a pair at Heysham NR.

WHEATEAR *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Fairly common though local breeding bird; common double passage migrant

A male at Pilling Lane Ends on 26 Feb was Lancashire's earliest ever record (the previous being on 1 March 1975) and was over a week ahead of the next to arrive, singles at Rossall Point on 8 March and at Heysham next day. Coastal migrants were widespread from 14 March;

the first records inland were at White Coppice on the 11th, Rishton on the 12th and Hurdles Quarry, Rossendale on the 15th.

Subsequent passage was unspectacular and a widespread influx during 24-26 April was the only noteworthy feature: up to 40 were on Colloway Marsh, Lune Estuary on the 24th and 20+ on Darwen Moor and 15 at SNR on the 26th. A total of 137 passed at Heysham NR between 16 March and 25 May but there were no high day-counts; about 35 large birds, likely *leucorhoa*, were recorded in mid-May. Peak counts in May included 25 in the Rossall area on the 4th, 18 at Clowbridge, Rossendale and 16 at Aldcliffe Marsh on the 5th and up to 20 at Marshside on the 7th; SNR saw its last migrant on the 30th and a late bird was on Birkdale shore on 6 June.

Eighteen territories were located on the United Utilities Bowland estate, several pairs bred on Pendle Hill and on Longridge Fell, and two at Belmont Reservoir. In Rossendale breeding season presence was recorded at eleven sites, and successful nesting confirmed at five.

The first autumn migrants were at five locations in the south-west and south Fylde between 11-16 July. A total of 37 was recorded at Heysham NR up to 25 Sept; 24 passed through Belmont in August, and three in September. There was a very noticeable surge of migrants at both coastal and inland sites in late August, including 15+ at Sunderland Point on the 24th, 23 at SNR on the 26th, twelve at Marshside next day and 20 at Rivington on the 29th. Movements continued on a very reduced level during September with seven at Hesketh Bank on the 16th and eight in the Heysham area on the 22nd the highest counts reported. Three at Love Lodge, Rossendale on the 28th were that region's last, singles at Anglezarke on 3 Oct and at Parsonage Reservoir on the 16th ended the year in the CNHS and ELOC areas, respectively, and the last coastal straggler was at SNR on the 18th.

RING OUZEL *Turdus torquatus*

Scarce and local breeding bird in the hills; uncommon double passage migrant

A female in the Langden Valley, Bowland on 16 March was the first arrival, beginning an exceptional spring at this location, which peaked at eleven birds on 11 April and six on the 13th; it is difficult to be sure, however, how many sightings were of birds passing through and how many were of birds already on territory. Elsewhere, two on Caton Moor on 28 March and singles at Rivington on 3 April, Smelt Hill Clough, Bowland on the 8th and Belmont on the 22nd completed a fairly thin passage inland. Coastal migration, apart from four at Marshside on 18 April, was equally unexciting, involving a mere nine birds at seven sites between 20 March and 21 April.

A limited survey of United Utilities Bowland estate located 15 breeding pairs, with reasonable productivity; elsewhere in the ELOC region males or pairs were recorded at eight locations, but breeding was not confirmed. A male at a former breeding-site near Belmont in July was the only indication of possible nesting in the Chorley NHS area.

Autumn movements began quite late and were very light this year; a female or immature at Heysham Red Nab on 21 Oct was the only coastal record. Inland, there were three at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir, Darwen on 23 Sept and two there on the 25th and on 19 Oct; singles at Langden Intake on 2 Oct, Darwen Moor on the 15th and Mearly Clough, Pendle on the 18th were the only other migrants recorded in the ELOC area. There were four at Lee Quarry, Rossendale on 13 Oct and one at Harrisend Fell on the 20th was the last inland migrant reported.

Finally, a male was in a garden at Fulwood, Preston on 12 Dec, the latest occurrence recorded in the county by a day; the previous sighting, also of a male, was on Darwen Moor on 11 Dec 2000.

BLACKBIRD *Turdus merula*

Abundant breeding resident and winter visitor; common double passage migrant, more evident in autumn

Forty at MSW on 7 Jan, 60 at Birkdale Dunes NR on the following day, 65 at Morecambe on 6 Feb and 31 at Longridge on the 22nd were the highest counts reported during the first winter period. There was an above-average spring passage of 51 birds at Heysham NR in March, including 24 on the 15th & 17th; a Norwegian-ringed individual was trapped on the 22nd, and eleven migrants were ringed during the month. Twenty at Marton Mere on 20 March was the only other report of likely passage birds received.

In Rossendale a male was in song on 26 Jan and the first song was heard on Darwen Moor on 13 Feb. There were 19 territories on British Energy land at Heysham, seven down on 2002, but extremely low productivity with few juveniles seen. Twenty-four territories were located at MSW on 29 April and 58 birds were caught there during the year. A 1km BTO BBS square near Skelmersdale held 31 birds on 15 May and there were 28 in another square at Billinge on the 19th, two or three pairs bred at SNR and three at Lomeshaye Marsh, Nelson. Eight monitored pairs in the Pilling-Preesall area laid 34 eggs, hatched 19 and fledged the lot. Twenty-eight singing males at Arkholme on 14 May was a big increase on 2002's total.

Autumn movements began later than usual, in early October, and continued well into December. Most of the action was concentrated in the second half of October and early November and several pulses of migration were simultaneously recorded at a number of watchpoints, mainly on the coast. Seventy-five birds were ringed at Heysham NR, 51 of them in October; there were marked influxes of 75 on 19 Oct and 80 on the 23rd, when 35 were also recorded at Marshside. In November 100 arrived at Heysham on the 6th, when an unprecedented overhead movement of up to 60 was observed at Fairhaven, and there were 30 at nearby Marton Mere and eleven at Pilling Lane Ends. Inland, up to 85 were on Darwen Moor on dates in October and early November and a flock of seven males was at Holden Wood, Rossendale on 8 Nov. Later peaks included 50 at Marton Mere on 16 Nov, 40 there on 4 Dec (when 17 were also seen at Clitheroe), and 60 on the 8th; thirteen passed at Heysham NR on 2 Dec.

As well as counts of 40 at Marton Mere on 16 Dec and ten in a Burnley garden on the 25th, Blackbirds were recorded in every participating garden in the Chorley NHS area during the end-of-year Garden Bird Survey.

FIELDFARE *Turdus pilaris*

Common to abundant winter visitor and passage migrant

There were very widespread reports of flocks in triple figures during the first winter period. In January there were 200 at Hightown and 100 at Martholme on the 5th, 700+ on Birkdale Dunes on the 8th and 200+ at Sagar Hill (near Stocks Reservoir) on the 11th; 240 on Leck Fell on 9 Feb was that month's peak count, but there were 200 at Belmont Reservoir on the 1st, 205 at New Lane, Pilling and 100 at Withnell Fold, Chorley on the 8th and 110 at Reed's Moss, St. Helens, on the 23rd. Pre-migratory or actual passage flocks in March brought 225 to MSW on the 3rd and 390 to Eagland Hill, Pilling next day; 20 flew in off the sea in fog at Starr Gate, Blackpool on the 20th and there were 200 at Moss House Farm, Great Eccleston on the 27th. There were many reports of quite sizeable flocks in early April with 500 at Stocks Reservoir on the 7th, 200 at Ulnes Walton on the 9th and 500 at Jeffrey Hill, Longridge on the 13th; 150 at the Old Coach Road, St. Helens on 22 April and 26 at Holden Wood Reservoir, Rossendale on the 26th were the last spring birds recorded.

Three birds over Darwen Moor on 23 Sept and two at Marton Mere on the 30th signalled the start of the autumn invasion. Very few were reported in early October; 50+ at Pilling and 112 over the Formby dunes on the 12th opened the floodgates, and the next few days saw very

heavy movements, right across the county. On the 13th 2780 were recorded south over SNR and 2257 at Fairhaven; 494 were counted over Heysham NR, 897 at Marton Mere and 860 at Watson Road Park, Blackpool. On the following day 1200 were seen near Abbeystead and four days of steady passage, up to 300 per day, began at Higher Hollinbank, Rossendale. Further widespread movements were reported up to 19 Oct, with flocks of up to 1000 at Burnley and Wycoller in the ELOC area, 408 at Caton Moor on the 18th and 540 over Belmont in 50 minutes on the 19th, when 500 were also recorded at Marton Mere and 300 at Heysham NR. A second major surge of migrants on 30 Oct brought 500 to Beacon Fell and 300 to Cockersands; highlights of the last significant arrivals of the autumn, on 6-7 Nov, were 578 at Fairhaven and 260 at Marton Mere on the 6th and another 142 over Fairhaven next day.

Numbers reported dwindled dramatically after that, although small flocks, typically fewer than 50 strong, were reported widely until early in December; for the remainder of the month Fieldfares seem to have been thin on the ground and 70 at Carr Mill Dam, St. Helens on 27 Dec was the only noteworthy gathering reported.

SONG THRUSH *Turdus philomelos*

Abundant breeding resident, common winter visitor and passage migrant

Up to 15 feeding on the Birkdale dunes after a thaw on 8 Jan and eight at Marton Mere on 2 March were the highest counts reported in either winter period.

Positive references to breeding numbers are more frequent nowadays, both in individual observers' and regional reports, than was the case only a few years ago; however, this species' troubles may not be over yet, as the North Merseyside BTO-BBS survey of 18 1-km squares found an overall decrease of 22%. Twenty-six territories were located in the United Utilities survey of Roddlesworth Plantations, there were eight at MSW, six in Cuerden Valley Park, four in the Rimrose Valley, Crosby and three at Brockholes Quarry. Six pairs on British Energy property at Heysham was a decrease of one on 2002, but still a vast improvement on the single pairs of the early 1990s; productivity was, however, poor. At Pilling-Preesall seven monitored pairs laid 25 eggs, hatched 19 and fledged 16 young, and all three pairs by the Lune at Arkholme were successful.

Autumn movements at Heysham NR had a clear-cut beginning, with three birds, presumed of British origin, on 12 Sept. A steady but light passage there extended from late September to early November, peaking at about 20 on 27 Sept; a very grey Continental bird was trapped on 14 Oct and a total of 17 birds was ringed during the autumn. Movements elsewhere included 15 in the Rimrose Valley on 15 Sept, 19 at Marton Mere on the 28th, thirteen there and six at SNR on 2 Oct, and five south-east over Belmont on the 12th. A small influx was noted at Fairhaven during late October and early November, peaking at five on 6 Nov; six at SNR on the 23rd was the last movement reported.

REDWING *Turdus iliacus*

Abundant double passage migrant and winter visitor

Flocks of a hundred or more were quite widespread during the first winter period, and 200 were reported at Spade Mill Reservoir, Longridge on 18 Jan, Roddlesworth Plantations (feeding on beech-mast) from 22 Feb into March, and at Mitton Wood on 2 March. Smaller parties, typically fewer than 40 birds, were reported from over twenty locations, well into March; there were eight April records and seven at Spinney Woods, Kirkby and a single at Birkacre, Chorley on the 19th were the last of spring.

Arrivals in autumn very closely mirrored those of the Fieldfare, and as with that species two over Darwen Moor on 23 Sept were the first recorded. There was a thin scatter of singles and small parties in early October, but migration shifted to a higher gear abruptly on the 12th as flocks of 100+ were reported from Pilling, Belmont and Formby Point. In company with

Fieldfares at many watchpoints the largest movements of the autumn were on 13 Oct; 1525 were recorded flying south at SNR, 1485 at Fairhaven, 1387 at Heysham NR, and flocks of over 300 were at Marton Mere and at Lowerhouse Lodges and Jackhouse Reservoir, Oswaldtwistle in the ELOC area. A second, lesser wave of arrivals on 18-21st brought flocks of 200 and more to Rimrose Valley, Stocks Reservoir, Longridge, Haslingden in Rossendale, and Caton Moor. Once again shadowing movements of Fieldfares, a surge of passage on the Fylde on 6 Nov produced counts of 432 at Fairhaven and 200 at Marton Mere; after that date numbers fell rapidly, and 200 at Clowbridge on 13 Nov and 400 over Liverpool on the 21st were the only significant counts during the remainder of the autumn.

Only small groups were reported in December; 40 at Staghills Wood, Rossendale on the 21st and at Eccleston, Chorley on the 26th were the highest counts received.

MISTLE THRUSH *Turdus viscivorus*

Common breeding resident; some autumn passage/dispersal

Fourteen on Darwen Moor on 3 Jan, 30 at MSW on the 5th and 17 there on 3 March were the largest flocks reported in either winter period; no evidence of spring passage was received.

Six pairs bred at MSW and at least three in Roddlesworth Plantations; three monitored pairs in the Pilling-Preesall area fledged a total of eleven young. Nesting by single pairs was recorded at about a dozen widespread locations, inland and coastal.

As is the norm with this species, post-breeding flocking and migratory movements began in June and continued on and off until mid-November, and these are typically just as likely to be recorded at apparently random inland sites as at established migration watchpoints. Up to 60 were in the Clougha area in late June and early July; on 31 July 24 were recorded at Myerscough College and 22 at Prescott Reservoirs, St. Helens. August reports included 56 over Leagram Mill, Little Bowland on the 24th and 23 at Skelmersdale White Moss on the 29th. The pace of movements quickened appreciably in September; up to 60 were at Sheepphouse Lane, Rivington on the 8th and on Rivington Moor on the 18th; there were influxes of 26 at MSW on the 15th, 39 at Downholland Moss Irrigation Lakes on the 21st and 20 at Marshside on the 25th. A clear movement in the south-west on 9 Oct brought 30 to Skelmersdale White Moss, 20 to SNR and about a dozen to Marshside; on the 12th there were 35 at SNR and 19 migrants were recorded at Rossall Point. Smaller numbers were involved in November movements, but 37 over Fairhaven on the 7th stand out; a total of 85 was recorded at this watchpoint on 16 days between 30 Sept and 11 Nov.

Males were recorded in full song at Higherford and Burnley in the ELOC region, and at Southport in the south-west, before the end of December.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER *Locustella naevia*

Uncommon breeding bird and fairly common passage migrant. Scarce on autumn passage.

A very early reeling male was recorded at Knowsley Park on 11 April, while birds were reeling throughout the spring at the adjacent Prescott Reservoirs, starting with two on 17 April, with three on the 23rd and singles through to the end of May. Up to four males were on territory in the Rimrose Valley with the first recorded on 20 April and at least three were reeling in the dunes between Hightown and Blundellsands from late April into May.

The first of the year on the Fylde were also very early; males reeling at Marton Mere and nearby Staining Nook from 16 April until early June. The first at Leighton Moss (where two pairs went on to breed) was on the 15 April whereas Heysham once again only recorded passage birds.

It was also a rather average year at inland sites. The first returning bird was at Birkacre on 19 April and recorded reeling up to 26 July. One was at Belmont from 22 April to 6 July whilst

two were on Darwen Moor on the 23rd. A pair bred next to Holden Wood Reservoir and during June and July there were records in suitable breeding habitat from Darwen Moor, Lee Green, Stocks Reservoir and Townley Holmes.

There were no autumn passage records.

SAVI'S WARBLER *Locustella luscinioides*

Vagrant

A single male was singing near the Tim Jackson hide at Leighton Moss from 9 to 24 May. (JS, JR, RH). This bird delighted many visitors as it was so close to the path although it was elusive at times.

This is the seventh Lancashire record and the first for eight years; the first record came from Marshside on 28 April 1977 followed by a two at Leighton Moss in the spring of 1979. There was a gap until 1991 when a bird took up residence in virtually the same place as this year's bird. In 1994 there was one at Heysham and one at Marton Mere in 1995, but neither stayed for long.

SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Common breeding bird in the west and double passage migrant.

The earliest ever spring migrant in Lancashire was recorded at Leighton Moss on 27 March and birds were generally early at other sites. Marton Mere recorded its first on 9 April with further birds turning up around the 15th to 17th, a good week earlier than last year. Similarly, early arrivals were at SNR on 15 April, MMWWT, Marshside and Pilling Lane Ends on the 18th and at Wood End Sewage Works, Burnley on the 19th, the earliest ever in east Lancashire. Though arrivals were early, passage was reported as very quiet at Marshside and Heysham. Numbers peaked at Marton Mere on 1 May when 30 singing males were counted.

Breeding numbers were generally down on normal, especially in the south-west; Marshside had eleven pairs (five fewer than 2002) and only six were singing in the Rimrose Valley in early May (normally over 30). There was only one record of two males singing in the St. Helens area. Numbers were also reduced in the east of the county where only single pairs bred at Grove Lane Marsh and Lee Green Reservoir. On 10 May there was a high concentration of singing males at Whitebirk Marsh, Blackburn and at least two pairs bred there. At least three pairs bred at Holden Wood Reservoir and several pairs at Lower Burgh Meadow, Birkacre. Heysham recorded six pairs, the same as last year.

The only areas recording an increase were MMWWT where 26 pairs bred compared to 22 last year, and along the River Lune where there were 20 breeding territories between Skerton Weir, Lancaster and Kirkby Lonsdale – a 25% increase on 2000 and the highest number ever recorded. One local observer commented that there seems to be more rank vegetation on the banks on the Lune around Arkholme after stabilisation of loose stone by Japanese Knotweed and thus more breeding habitat. Productivity was very good at Leighton Moss, with 595 young birds ringed at four sample sites.

Autumn passage was just as quiet as in spring. Post-breeding dispersal was in evidence at several sites from mid-July through August, but there were very few September records anywhere in the county, the last ones being at MSW on the 27th and Heysham on the 29th.

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Fairly common breeder in suitable habitat in the west, most numerous at Leighton Moss and Marton Mere. Uncommon passage migrant elsewhere.

2003 was a year of consolidation for Lancashire's Reed Warbler population after a very good 2002. The first arrivals were in mid-April (which is generally the norm); three were at Marton Mere and singles at Leighton Moss and MSW on the 15th.

It is sad to note that at Rimrose Valley, where there were nine+ males in 2002, the two reedbeds at either end of the valley (the largest in Merseyside) were repeatedly burnt out by vandals in late winter/early spring, resulting in very low numbers of breeding birds and no Reed Warblers.

Based on ringing data in four sample sites used in the Bearded Tit study, the breeding population at Leighton Moss was estimated at 400+ pairs. A total of 194 adults and 894 juveniles were caught at these sites which cover no more than 20% of the reedbed. This was the highest number caught since the study started in 1992 and productivity was obviously very good.

At Marshside, five pairs bred in the SSSI ditch, but two failed on M2, probably due to drought. MSW had 17 singing males on breeding territories on 5 June and 14 pairs bred at MMWWT, and there were up to 26 families present at Marton Mere during August. At least six pairs bred at Sand Villa Pool, Pilling, laying 35 eggs in 11 clutches, from which 24 young fledged. Several sites around the county had just a few breeding birds; four were on territory at Bretherton Ponds and a pair bred along the old canal nearby. Up to three males were present throughout the summer at the Downholland Moss irrigation lakes with at least one pair rearing young – the first breeding record for that site. Two juveniles at Myerscough Quarry at the end of August were that site's first record. One pair bred at Brockholes Quarry in the small but maturing reedbed there. One singing from a small patch of reed in a drainage ditch in central Morecambe on 11 July goes to show that this species is starting to take advantage of every available opportunity.

Autumn passage was rather variable – it was reported as good at Marshside but 'pitiful' at Heysham (very unusual). The last birds of the year were at Marton Mere on 2 Oct and Leighton Moss on the 5th.

GREAT REED-WARBLER *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

Vagrant

A male sang regularly from the island near the container hide at Marton Mere from 21-29 May (LGB, MJ). Though elusive at times it could be seen chasing Reed Warblers away from its territory and occasionally sat higher up in the reeds.

This record, accepted by the BBRC, is only Lancashire's third with the last one back in 1991 at Leighton Moss and the first one in the dim and distant past.

BLACKCAP *Sylvia atricapilla*

Abundant breeding bird and common passage migrant; fairly common winter visitor at coastal locations.

After several bumper years for Blackcaps, 2003 seems to have been relatively quiet. Spring migrants were generally much later than normal and the density of singing males was lower than in previous years.

Over-wintering birds were recorded at the usual coastal sites. On 8 Jan, there were twelve males and three females around Birkdale LNR, whilst in Liverpool a male present from the beginning of the year was in full song on 16 Feb. A maximum of four were recorded in a garden

in Freehold, Lancaster during January. There were more inland records than normal in the first winter period, including single males at Allsprings, Great Harwood during January to 4 Feb, and at Primrose Lodge, Clitheroe on 10 Jan. One frequented the feeding station in a garden in Gaghills, Rossendale from 4-27 February.

As usual there was a smattering of records in March that may have been early migrants. Several major sites recorded their first of the year in the second week of April but birds only became more widespread in late April.

It was estimated that there were 14 occupied territories At MSW, a large increase over 2002. Four territories were established around White Moss, Skelmersdale. The usual five pairs nested on Hesketh Golf Course, Marshside. Twelve singing males were recorded at Roddlesworth plantations and seven in Cuerden Valley, while breeding numbers were thought to be lower than normal in Rossendale.

Autumn passage was rather quiet with a relatively early departure from breeding sites and few late passage records with most birds gone by mid-October. November records were mostly of potential over-wintering birds; two were in the Dome bushes at Morecambe from mid-November to the end of the year, three were feeding on *Berberis* bushes in a Burnley garden at the end of November and several singles were reported elsewhere in the county, feeding on berries and fat-balls at feeding stations.

GARDEN WARBLER *Sylvia borin*

Common breeding bird and double passage migrant.

Apart from an early record at Marshside on 16 April, the earliest were recorded on the 23rd to 25th when singing males were located at Roddlesworth Woods, Anglezarke, Bashall Town and Heysham. Birds were widespread by the second week in May but nowhere common. Indeed, the paucity of passage records at Heysham was mirrored across the country at other west and south coast bird observatories.

Males were recorded singing in suitable breeding habitat from seventeen sites in the east of the county. There were an estimated seven pairs in the Roddlesworth Plantations but few other confirmed breeding records.

Autumn passage was light with few in evidence during late August and just odd ones during September – singles at MSW on the 5th, Round Wood Marsh on the 12th and Marton Mere on the 22nd.

LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia curruca*

Uncommon breeding bird. Fairly common double passage migrant.

There was a widespread arrival of birds on the western side of the county on the typical date of 22 April; Marton Mere had a count of five singing males that day and singles were recorded at Staining and Heysham.

Males were heard singing at several sites around Clitheroe in April and May suggesting wider colonisation of that area. Indeed, males singing at four sites between there and Burnley during June suggested more widespread breeding, although it wasn't confirmed. A pair was confirmed breeding at Salmesbury. Up to three males were recorded on the Birkdale dunes during May and there were single records from Eccleston Mere and Prescott Reservoirs. Singles were also recorded at two sites around Chorley and one in Rossendale.

The species' strongholds are in the central lowland belt of the county from Warton Crag down through the A6 corridor and into the Fylde. The usual hot spots had relatively good numbers throughout the summer, with an estimated five pairs between Stodday and Freeman's Wood, Lancaster and also five pairs around Heysham. Two males remained at Marton Mere and there were regular reports from Warton Bank and Staining Nook.

Autumn passage was almost non-existent and the last were recorded at Marton Mere on 7 Sept.

COMMON WHITETHROAT *Sylvia communis*

Common breeder, mostly in the west. Common double passage migrant.

There was a flurry of early arrivals starting with one near Darwen on the very early date of 14 April followed by one at Crosby Marine Park and Marton Mere the day after. Numbers increased on the 16th with five at Marshside and eight at Marton Mere.

The breeding population seems to have declined slightly at coastal sites and increased inland. Marshside had a total of 25 pairs, down by four on 2002 and nine from 2001, while Heysham had eleven pairs, down by two. At least twelve pairs bred along the Rimrose Valley and five territories were occupied at White Moss, Skelmersdale. Five families were noted at Marton Mere in July.

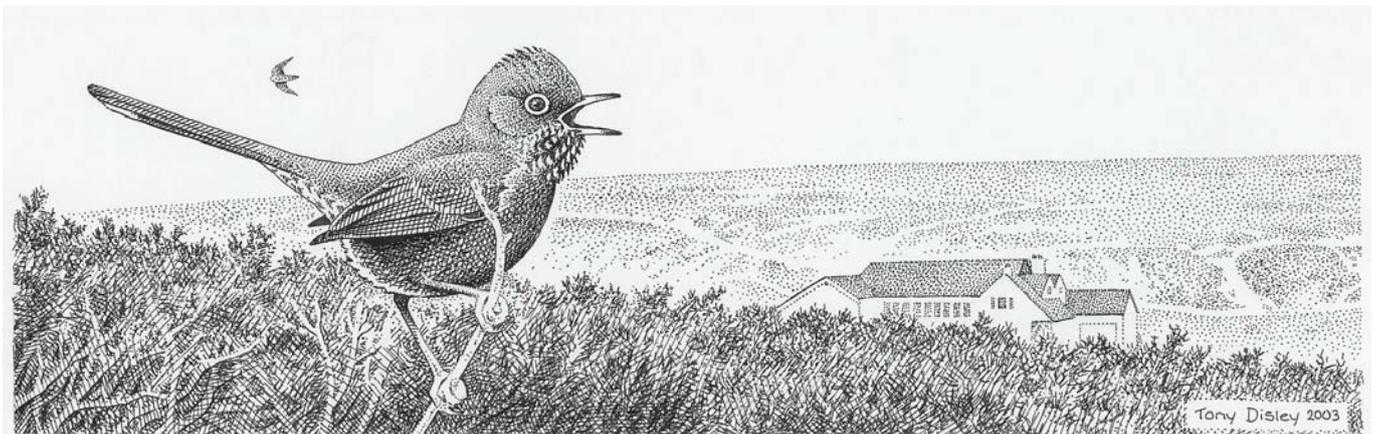
In the east of the county, birds were singing well into the breeding season from 14 sites – a further increase over the past two years. Singing males were recorded at four sites in Rossendale.

Autumn passage was variable – good at Marshside and quiet at Heysham. Peak passage activity was concentrated around the last week in August and continuing into the first week of September. Late birds were recorded above Darwen on 19 Sept and at SNR on the 28th.

DARTFORD WARBLER* *Sylvia undata*

Vagrant

An adult male, in full song, was discovered to the south of Lord's Hall, Darwen Moor on the morning of 3 May, during BTO BBS fieldwork (SJM). The bird stayed on territory until the 17th, but it was seen only by a handful of observers due to restrictions placed on access by the landowner and his gamekeeper. This represents the first record for Lancashire. A full account is included later in this report.



YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER* *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Rare autumn passage migrant.

Again, just one confirmed record this year and particularly disappointing considering the huge autumn influx in the rest of the country. On the afternoon of 13 Oct there was one by the main hide at Marshside (TB).

DUSKY WARBLER *Phylloscopus fuscatus***Vagrant**

On the 23 October, during a regular autumn check of the bushes to the west of Fairhaven Lake, Lancashire's second ever Dusky Warbler was found (MJ) – the first was at Heysham in 1994.

The news was quickly disseminated and although the bird was typically elusive, those with patience could get reasonable if sometimes only fleeting views. Even though the skies had cleared that night, the bird remained for a second day and fed actively, allowing a steady stream of observers to add this species to their Lancashire list. This record has been accepted by the BBRC.

WOOD WARBLER *Phylloscopus sibilatrix***Uncommon breeder in east and central areas; uncommon passage migrant, mostly in spring.**

The first was recorded on territory at Roddlesworth on 21 April. One turned up at Stanley Park, Blackpool on the 22nd and singles were recorded there on 5 & 7 May but migrants elsewhere were typically scarce. One was recorded in Sunnyhurst Woods, a former breeding site, at the end of April. In 2002 three birds were singing in the Grizedale Valley near Scorton but none were recorded this year.

A breeding bird survey of Roddlesworth plantations for United Utilities mapped seven singing males, of which a minimum of four were paired. Analysis of past records suggests that this is a relatively stable though fluctuating population with the favoured habitat being in stands of mature Beech or mixed woodland and not the often considered 'typical' habitat of Sessile Oak.

An increasingly favoured site for birders wishing to see Wood Warblers in Lancashire is Moor Piece, Bashall Eaves, where there were three pairs including an obliging family feeding young by the side of the road. This area is completely different in nature to the Roddlesworth woods, being a damp birch wood with some mixed stands of pines and beech. Two or three were singing at Black Coppice near Chorley during May and males were recorded at a couple of other suitable sites in the east. There were no records from Rossendale and only one record of a single male in June from the Lancaster area.

The only autumn passage records were from Downholland Moss on 12 Aug and at Lee Green Reservoir near Burnley on the 24th.

CHIFFCHAFF *Phylloscopus collybita***Common breeder and passage migrant. Uncommon but increasing in winter.**

Records in the first winter period came from Birkdale on 1 Jan, Rimrose Valley on the 4th, Marton Mere on the 8th and a 'Siberian' individual in the Watson Road bushes in Blackpool on the 2nd & 3rd. Apart from another 'brown' bird in Lancaster in early February, there were no other records until early migrants started to turn up at the end of February and through March.

One was singing at Queens Park, St Helens on 28 Feb and two were at MMWWT on the 26th. By about 12 March, Chiffchaffs were widespread throughout the county and numbers peaked at the end of the month with large number being reported from several sites – MSW had twelve on the 25th and numbers at Marton Mere peaked at eight on the 26th. This overall picture indicates an early arrival in 2003.

Eleven pairs bred at MSW, two higher than last year, and four pairs at White Moss, Skelmersdale. Seven singing males were recorded at Roddlesworth and six were counted in the Cuerden Valley. A pair at Hesketh Golf Course, Marshside raised two broods, while five pairs held territory around Heysham. Only two pairs were in residence at Arkholme.

A prolonged but light autumn passage was in evidence from the end of July though to the end of October at coastal watch-points. Singing migrating birds were recorded in Preston on 5 Oct, Cuerden on the 12th, Rimrose Valley on the 17-24th and Downholland Moss on the 19th.

A bird showing characteristics of *abietinus* was reported from LSANR on 2 Oct, the same day a confirmed *abietinus* was trapped at Heysham. A grey, *tristis*-type was at Heysham on 6 Nov.

Other November records included two at Heysham on the 11th, two in the Rimrose Valley on the 13th, one at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on the 18th and one at the Dome bushes, Morecambe on the 10th through to mid-December. In December there were also two at Freeman's Wood, Lancaster on the 7th, Marton Mere throughout, and singles at Birkdale LNR on the 10th, MMWWT on the 30th and Hurstwood near Burnley on the 31st.

WILLOW WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Abundant breeding bird and double passage migrant.

One was singing at Reed's Moss, St Helens on the very early date of 22 March and that was followed by the earliest ever for east Lancashire at Colne SW on the 24th, Stocks Reservoir on the 27th and MMWWT on the 28th. Several sites had their first birds on 30-31 March, including Rossendale's earliest ever at Irwell Vale. By 4 April, birds were singing everywhere but the main arrival was around the 16th (peaks of 11 at Marton Mere, 12 at Rimrose Valley and 17 at Marshside).

Breeding numbers were rather poor once again in lowland locations. Only two pairs bred on Hesketh Golf Course, the lowest ever at that site, and only four pairs at MSW, again the lowest ever there. At White Moss, Skelmersdale the observer noted that there was only one singing bird all summer, the lowest ever in 23 years of recording at the site.

However, in the east of the county, things seem to be different, perhaps suggesting a move to higher ground. This may well be a microcosm of the situation in the UK as a whole where there is a steep decline in numbers in southern England but a stable if not increasing population in Scotland. Good numbers were in song at Rivington, Anglezarke, Croston, Hoghton and White Coppice by mid-April. Four pairs bred at Lomeshaye Marsh, Nelson and five at Lee Green Reservoir. The huge concentration of birds around Gisburn Forest/Stocks Reservoir was exemplified on 22 April when 22 singing males were counted on a 2km stretch of road from Cocket Hill to the Causeway. Considering this was only a tiny sample of the area and done from the car, the area must be one of the prime sites in Lancashire for this species.

Return passage was fairly predictable with flurries of activity during August, notably 18 at Lowerhouse, Burnley on the 3rd and about 30 at Heysham on the 7th. Things quietened down rapidly through September but there were more October records than normal: one at Haslam Park on the 2nd, two on Darwen Moor edge on the 4th, Heysham on the 5th-11th, and the last of the year at SNR on the 12th.

GOLDCREST *Regulus regulus*

Fairly common breeding bird, especially in the east. Common double passage migrant and winter visitor in variable numbers.

2003 was a rather unspectacular, if not poor year, for Goldcrests. There were regular reports from all over the county of ones and twos all year, but very rarely was this diminutive bird ever seen in any great numbers apart from during the autumn passage period.

One was heard in full song on the very early date of 7 Jan at Roddlesworth. The only sizable spring count was of around 20 at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on 20 March. There were few confirmed breeding reports. Clough Bottom in Rossendale had a good year with three large parties seen in late summer, four pairs bred at MSW and single pairs were recorded at

Freckleton Naze and Sunnyhurst Hey, and eight pairs in woodland along the River Lune. In the annual survey of top tetrads in Lancashire, Goldcrests were breeding in 50% of them. On 23 April a bird at Woodland Gardens, Lytham gave an aberrant song with gaps between the notes giving a very different sound.

An influx on 2-4 October was noted in the Rivington area as well as SNR and at several sites around Blackpool and Fleetwood. There were several double-figure counts during September and October but by far the largest numbers were recorded at Sunnyhurst, Darwen with around 80 on 8 Oct and 100 on 4 Nov.

FIRECREST *Regulus ignicapillus*

Uncommon passage migrant, scarce in winter.

Two males remained around the north-west corner of Marton Mere (around the car park of the De Vere Hotel) from 2002 up to 12 Jan and then again on the 27th. Nearby, another one was seen in the vicinity of Victoria Hospital on the 15th.

Two were also seen regularly at MMWWT from November 2002 until 28 Feb. Other singles in the first winter period were noted at Lead Mines Clough on 8 Jan, Birkdale dunes on the 14th, Aintree on 21 Feb and Leighton Moss on 10 March. A single bird was observed feeding alongside Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs at Sands Lake, Ainsdale on 29 March.

Autumn migrants were relatively few; singles at Formby on 3 Oct and Heysham on the morning of the 17th. The single winter record was in a garden at Clayton-le-Woods on 4 Dec.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa striata*

Fairly common breeding bird and double passage migrant.

Another poor year overall for Spotted Flycatchers, though there are some signs of birds returning to once favoured haunts in the east of the county.

The first bird of the year (and the only one for April) was at Marton Mere on the 28th. Further inland the first were recorded at Dunsop Bridge on 6 May and nearby Croasdale House Farm the following day. There were very few records until mid-May when birds started turning up at regular breeding sites.

The rose-trellis nesting pair at Lea Town, Kirkham returned on 15 May and raised two broods totalling seven fledglings. Other breeding records of note included pairs at Higher Hodder Bridge and Belmont for the first time in several years. A survey of the Roddlesworth plantations recorded three pairs whilst up to eight pairs were present in the Rivington/Anglezarke area. One was at a ruined moorland farm above Belmont (at over 1000 ft above sea level) on 28 May. In east Lancashire, breeding was confirmed at eight sites and pairs were present at a further eight. Only two pairs were present in Rossendale and two pairs bred in Tarleton. None were recorded on a regular survey area along the Lune – the first time this has happened in six years.

Most birds had left the area by the end of August (including SNR's and Heysham's only records for the year), however, a count of eleven at Lee Green Reservoir on 25 Aug was notable. A family party of five birds in Rishton on 14 Sep was the last sizeable group and the final birds of the year were at Newton on 22 Sept, two at Darwen Moor edge on the 25th, and singles at Lee Green Reservoir and Marshside on the 27th.

PIED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Uncommon breeding bird and passage migrant.

The only flycatcher trapped and ringed at Heysham during the year was a first-winter male at Red Nab on the fairly early date of 15 April. The following day birds were in breeding areas at Rivington and Newton.

Nine nest sites were located in the Rivington/Anglezarke area and males were recorded in song at other sites in the area.

In Bowland there was widespread breeding success. A total of seven pairs used nest boxes on the United Utilities Bowland estate, all in woods to the north of Slaidburn. Productivity was very good with an average fledging rate of nearly seven per nesting attempt. Forty pulli and two adults were ringed at Bowland Wild Boar Park and five pairs bred at Moor Piece, Bashall Eaves. Birds were recorded at four other potential breeding sites through the summer.

In 133 nest boxes in six stretches of woodland in the Lune Valley there were 23 nesting attempts, of which 18 successfully produced fledged young. The mean clutch size was 7.2 and mean brood size 4.9, with 112 fledged young from 166 eggs.

Autumn records were extremely sparse, even by normal standards. One at Stanley Park on 17 Aug was clearly a migrant and the only other record was from Watson Road Park, Blackpool on the late date of 11 Oct.

BEARDED TIT *Panurus biarmicus*

Resident at Leighton Moss. Autumn and winter dispersal to Marton Mere, Blackpool. Rare elsewhere.

After coming close to extinction when numbers sank to seven pairs in 2001, the breeding population at Leighton Moss showed another welcome increase – from ten pairs in 2002 to an estimated 18 this year, twelve of which bred in nest-boxes. A total of twelve adult males and 14 adult females were captured, the first year of the study that females have exceeded males.

A total of 55 free-flying young were caught this year, compared with only 34 last year. Twenty-four were ringed as nestlings in the nest boxes of which 20 were re-caught as free-flying juveniles. In a reversal of sex ratios compared with previous years, of the 55 young, 25 were males and 30 females, only the second time in eleven years that females have exceeded males. Ringing effort was similar to previous years.

Survival of young from 2002 was at least 44% while adult survival over the same period was 55%. A return to normal survival after the catastrophic decline in 2000/2001.

There were no confirmed records away from Leighton Moss this year.

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

Common breeding resident. Some irruptive movement in autumn.

This species' population seems still to be rising; at least ten pairs bred at MSW where there was a maximum count of 50 birds on 28 July. Five pairs were located in the Inskip area, while at Arkholme three pairs nested successfully with nest-building starting on 15 March.

Long-tailed Tits are described as thriving in Rossendale – even here there were regular flocks of up to 12 birds in both winter periods and widespread breeding records. Some very large post-breeding flocks were recorded including 23 at Crawshawbooth on 25 June and at least 43 at Buckden Clough on the 29th.

Just to the west, flocks in excess of 30 birds were noted in Roddlesworth Plantations on 23 Feb and at Belmont on 1 Nov. Over 40 were at Roddlesworth during December. Numbers seem to have stabilised in east Lancashire but there were several double-figure counts in the second winter period, the most notable being approximately 30 at Darwen Moor edge on 14 Nov, increasing to 40 on 18 Dec.

Flocks in the forties were also recorded at Marshside on two dates in August, Stanley Park, Blackpool on the 28th and at Eccleston Mere on 25 Dec.

At Heysham there were an estimated four territories. Autumn passage there was significant with a higher number of birds being trapped than normal. Considering that several parties were seen passing through unringed, it seems to indicate a very healthy population.

MARSH TIT *Parus palustris***Uncommon breeder, virtually absent south of the Ribble and in the Fylde.**

This sedentary species has a rather stable population and is generally under-recorded in its north Lancashire stronghold. A family party was recorded in Silverdale on 23 May.

At Heysham Moss, two were recorded during the second winter period. Interestingly, one of these birds had a ring on its right leg (as did the last sighting here six years ago). If it had been ringed at the Observatory, then it must have been on or before 25 Sept 1997! So how is this population surviving considering there is no obvious link to any other breeding sites?

In east Lancashire there were only a small number of records from probable breeding sites at Whitewell, Bowland Wild Boar Park, Siddows and Mitton Bridge as well as confirmed breeding at Moor Piece, Bashall Eaves. Two at the feeders in the Cocklet Hill car park (near Stocks Reservoir) on 23 April were hopefully a sign of re-colonisation of the area where only a few singles have been recorded in recent years.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus***Uncommon breeder in the birch copses of the south-west. Very rare elsewhere.**

Just as the Marsh Tit population shrinks to its northern heartland, the Willow Tit population continues to decline and retreat to the south-central lowland belt. At White Moss, apparently the only regular site in the Skelmersdale area, one pair was seen regularly up to the middle of the year and two pairs then on to the end of the year.

None were recorded on Merseyside BBS squares and fewer than usual were seen in the Sankey Valley. There were odd scattered records from the St Helens area and due to their paucity, they are all detailed; three at Prescott Reservoirs on 20 Feb, one at Bold Moss on the 24th, one at Siding Lane on 12 April, one on the Old Coach Road on 13 Nov, two at Sankey Valley on the 23rd and three at Carr Mill Dam on 27 Dec.

Pairs probably bred in Blundellsands and at Mere Brow. A bird was singing in a garden in Blundellsands throughout April and in August there was an adult and two juveniles in the same garden. There was a single record from MMWWT on 2 April and the only record in the Chorley area came from Duxbury Woods on 1 Jan.

The only extralimital record came from Sykeside, Haslingden on 30 Nov.

COAL TIT *Parus ater***Common breeding bird. Some irruptive movements in autumn.**

The population of Coal Tits is still at a high level in the upland areas of the county. Feeding stations set up in the woods adjacent to Stocks Reservoir regularly have over 20 at any one time during the winter periods. One can only hazard a guess at the total number visiting there – a good reason to set up some regular ringing sessions perhaps?

This year was characterised by a large autumn irruption (the largest since 1985 at Heysham). The majority of birds passed though in the first week of October; 111 on the 2nd at Heysham passing south in small flocks at a height of 50 to 70 metres whilst over Belmont there were 60 in an hour on the 5th and 35 in 80 minutes on the 12th. Marshside and Fairhaven both had a good autumn for this species and numbers at SNR, including 15 south on 2 October and ten on the 14th, were quite unprecedented.

Preceding this there were some large flocks in east Lancashire during September indicating that there must have been a very good breeding season, although confirmed breeding was only reported from three sites, Gisburn Forest, Lee Green and Allsprings, where a pair nested under the observer's car port, the fledglings leaving on 25 May.

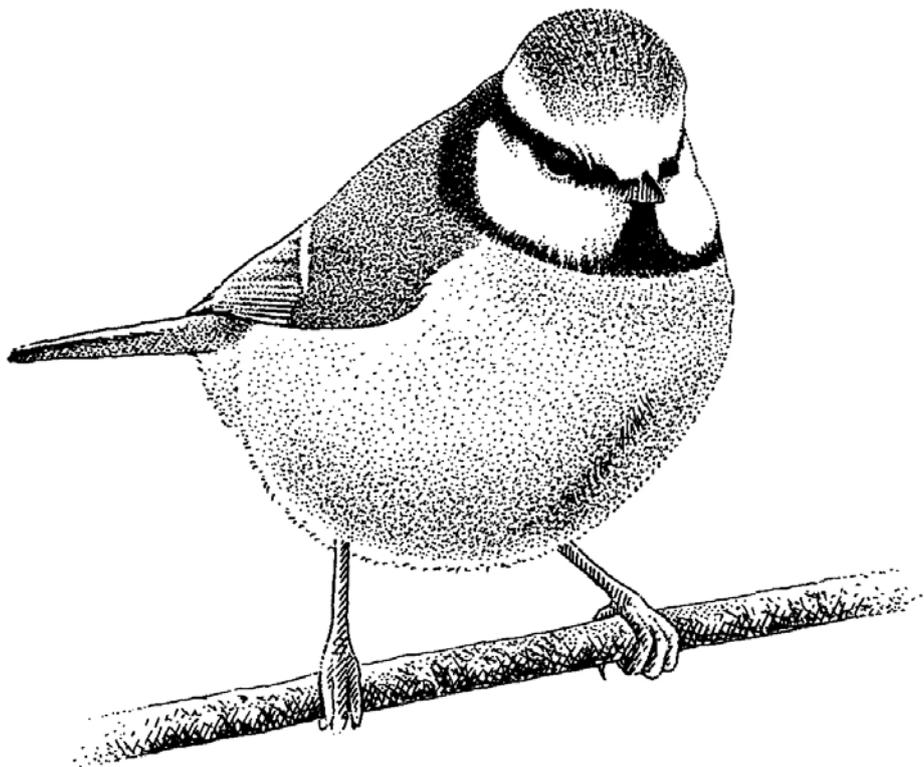
In Rossendale, a successful breeding season was noted with family groups at Clough Bottom, Staghills, Lea Bank and Ogden. An unusual record was of two on the moors above Clough Bottom plantation. At Arkholme, two pairs nested in boxes for the first time successfully raising 15 young. A pair also nested in the masonry of the railway viaduct.

BLUE TIT *Parus caeruleus*

Abundant breeding bird. Marked autumn passage.

The warning bells are ringing for one of our most loved and instantly recognisable residents. Blue Tits have had a really bad time of it over the last few years and 2003 was no exception. The untimely inclement weather of late May and early June had a seriously detrimental effect on the fledgling population.

In the upland woods of Bowland, eighteen nesting attempts were monitored but productivity was poor with a fledging rate of just 62%. In the Pilling-Preesall area 73 pairs laid 569 eggs of which 370 hatched and 267 young fledged. (Average per pair = 7.79 eggs, 5.07 young and a paltry 3.66 young fledged).



Contrary to the overall trend, it was another good year for the Lune Valley nest-boxes. Eggs were laid in 47 nests and of these 44 produced fledged young. A total of 434 eggs were laid with 364 young fledging. The mean clutch size was 9.2 and mean brood size 7.3, but how many survived much into the next few weeks is questionable. Nearby, in nest boxes around Arkholme, 13 pairs nested with a mean clutch size of 8.9 (mean laying date 20 April) , mean brood size of 7.9 and 6.38 fledged young per nest.

At Heysham there were fewer unringed birds in spring than normal which probably reflected the rather low number of juveniles following the poor breeding season the previous year. The local nest-boxes did reasonably well but it soon became apparent from people

monitoring larger and more rural schemes that the productivity of Blue and Great Tits was even worse during 2003. Therefore the complete lack of autumn movements did not come as a surprise.

One ray of hope came from MSW where there were an estimated 49 pairs - nine more than 2002 but still well below what was the norm a few years ago. There were just three pairs again at Marshside.

Autumn passage was noted at other sites in the county with some reasonable counts. Marshside had 27 on 31 Aug, 24 on the 16 Oct and 40 on the 23rd. At Greenhalgh Castle Tarn 18 were ringed on 5 Oct and 33 on the 11th. Twelve were in the Watson Road (Blackpool) rail bushes on 18 Oct.

GREAT TIT *Parus major*

Abundant breeding bird, less common on autumn passage than Blue Tit.

Just as with Blue Tit, poor breeding success was a feature this year but the species seems to be getting commoner.

In the United Utilities Bowland estate upland woods, the total number of pairs using nest boxes has shot up from just six in 2002, to 24 in 2003. However, productivity was lower this year with a fledging rate of just 74% compared to 88% in 2002 due to the poor weather in late spring and, perhaps, increased competition. In the Pilling-Preesall area 58 pairs laid 420 eggs of which 295 hatched and 221 young fledged. (Average per pair = 7.24 eggs, 5.09 young and 3.81 young fledged).

There were 27 nests with eggs in the Lune Valley nest boxes of which 22 produced fledged young. A total of 221 eggs were laid with 150 young fledging. Mean clutch size was 8.2 and mean brood size 5.6. At Arkholme, 14 pairs bred in boxes with a mean clutch size of 8.4 (mean laying date of 8 April), brood size of 7.42 and fledging rate of 4.9 per nest.

At Marshside there were four pairs and six pairs bred in the Rimrose Valley but at MSW there was an increase of four pairs to 27 occupied nest boxes. Ringers at the last site trapped seventy-one birds during the year and 37 were ringed at Greenhalgh Castle Tarn.

There was very little noticeable autumn passage save for 20 at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on 12 Sept and 15 at Marshside on 16 Oct. In December, there was a count of at least 20 at Marton Mere on the 4th and on the 21st a bird was in song at Altham.

NUTHATCH *Sitta europea*

Fairly common and increasing breeding resident.

Nuthatches continue to increase in all corners of the county. In its northern, central and eastern strongholds, it is reported from every suitable woodland and there are many breeding records. One trait this species shows in southern England but has rarely been reported here is visiting bird tables. However, that seems to have changed with one recorded on the feeding table at MSW on two dates in June and another visiting feeders in Formby where the bird is quite scarce. Feeders at Brockholes Quarry have attracted birds from nearby Boilton and Redscar Woods where several pairs breed.

The record of the year was the first at SNR on 1 Sept, several miles from the nearest wood. Similarly at Heysham, single birds were seen on 28 July and 7 Sept and then trapped and ringed on the 21st. This was the first to be ringed at the Observatory. Three pairs were located around Arkholme, an increase in the area.

There were frequent sightings of the only birds in Stanley Park, Blackpool throughout the year. The nearest reported to these were at Myerscough and similar woodlands along the A6. The species is a recent colonist to the Aldcliffe area and was noted increasingly throughout the year.

A breeding bird survey of Roddlesworth Plantations for United Utilities located 13 territorial pairs (plus one pair immediately adjacent). The long-awaited first record for Belmont occurred on 13 July, with later up to four birds seen regularly within Belmont Village until the year's end. The species remains scarce in Rossendale.

There were an estimated eighteen pairs at Rivington/Anglezarke, with two broods out of the nest by 25 May and eight family groups seen by early June.

TREECREEPER *Certhia familiaris*

Fairly common breeding resident.

At MSW there was a maximum count of six birds on 14 Jan and at least four pairs bred. A bird remained at MMWWT from 2002 up to 11 Feb. As is usual with this elusive, sedentary and solitary species, there were several records from the usual woodland habitats but very few elsewhere.

At Heysham there were three typical post-breeding season records, all of which were trapped and ringed; an early dispersing juvenile on 9 July and two October birds on the 13th and 19th.

GOLDEN ORIOLE *Oriolus oriolus*

Vagrant

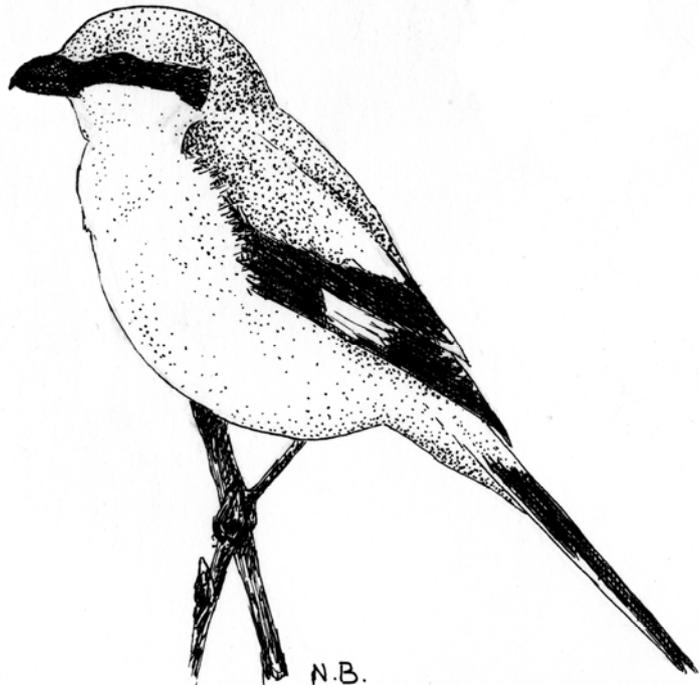
One was heard on a dawn chorus walk at 06:00 & 10:00 on 14 June in Gisburn Forest near the Stocks Reservoir car park (TM *et al*). The bird seemed to be singing from within a small grove of Aspen trees. Despite desperate searching by the regulars the bird could not be re-located.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*

Scarce winter visitor and passage migrant.

The two over-wintering birds from 2002 in the Slaidburn area stayed up to early spring; the Dunnow Hall bird was last seen on 5 Feb and the Stocks Reservoir bird on 27 March.

It was very pleasing to have one of the birds return to Stocks Reservoir on 21 Oct. This proved most obliging to its many admirers from this date through into 2004, ranging from the area of the car park up to the ruin to the north of the Hodder inlet. One seen near Chipping on 24 Nov (DL) was probably the bird that was seen regularly in early 2004 just 2km to the east in the Stakes area.



*JAY Garrulus glandarius***Common resident. Occasional irruptions, some winter dispersal.**

In common with Nuthatch, another resident of mature broadleaved woodland, Jays have continued their expansion across the county and are now turning up more regularly in areas where they were once rare, though still mostly during passage periods. At Rimrose Valley, there were two records in early spring while groups of three went south over SNR on 28 September and 12 October with one lingering nearby throughout October. Similarly, at Marshside there was a single April record and four autumn records of one or two birds.

The species is resident at MSW with about six breeding pairs but during September there was evidence of irruptive behaviour with 21 counted on the 15th. Peak counts elsewhere included twelve at Stocks Reservoir on 7 Sept, nine at Marton Mere on the 17th and seven at Fairhaven on the 21st. There were also large numbers of birds in the Rivington area on 18-20 Sept. The autumn passage period was then rather protracted with very good numbers of birds being seen throughout October and into November from many sites. Heysham in fact had its best year since 1983.

Jays are becoming well-established in Rossendale, and making more and more use of suburban gardens. They have been recorded at garden feeders taking peanuts, bread and fat balls with embedded nuts.

*BLUE JAY Cyanocitta cristata***Vagrant.**

What could turn out to be the bird of the century was found by Gordon and Brenda Milward on their garden feeders at Thornton near Crosby on 5 June. It was videoed during its 30 minutes stay before it flew off to the west. Remarkably, the bird was relocated on 7 June, again on feeders, in a garden at Hillside, Southport (D. Rothwell).

There is no doubt about the identification nor the authenticity of these records but there will inevitably be considerable debate about its origin. On the plus side, Thornton is only a few miles distant from the Seaforth Docks with their history of north American 'passengers'. The Blue Jay's range is almost wholly restricted to north America with its strict export controls and the species is not believed to be regular in captivity.

The record has been submitted to the BBRC but, as a potential first for Britain, the ultimate decision will be taken by the BOURC – prepare for a long wait.

*MAGPIE Pica pica***Abundant resident**

Magpies remain very common despite the increased attention of gamekeepers and the like. In the West Pennine Moors, they reported killing 176 Magpies (mainly through the use of Larsen traps) during the breeding season. However, the large roosts on the border with Greater Manchester had just as many birds as usual – over 200 on 12 Jan and over 169 on 7 Dec.

Other peak winter roost counts included 190 at Rimrose Valley on 25 Nov, 56 at MSW on 3 March and 50 on 12 Dec at Ewood Bridge Sewage Works in Rossendale, a site in use since the mid-1950s. There were fewer records than normal in the east of the county and the Lowerhouse roost site was completely abandoned.

Breeding was widespread but rarely reported. There were a record six pairs along the Marine Drive, Southport, four pairs on Hesketh Golf Course and flocks of up to 20 birds were regularly seen at Marshside throughout the autumn and winter. Peak numbers at Marton Mere and SNR indicated a hint of movement from mid- to late September. Five pairs were resident on the British Energy properties at Heysham.

On 24 June a pair with two juveniles were on a bird-bath in a garden in Waterfoot, Rossendale. Shortly before they had been in conflict with a cat; there were wing and body feathers on the lawn but the cat was pecked and had retreated.

JACKDAW *Corvus monedula*

Common breeding resident, some autumn movement.

During the first winter period the maximum count for the Martholme (Altham) feeding flock was 152 on 2 Feb, while the peak count at the Bottoms Beck roost site in Gisburn Forest was approximately 350 on 5 March. Numbers of Jackdaws at the main corvid roost-sites in the West Pennine Moors were over 150 on 4 Jan but rarely reached this level at the Delph and Roddlesworth plantation roosts. The continued expansion of the tip at White Moss, Skelmersdale has encouraged several corvid species such as Jackdaw, Rook and Carrion Crow into the area; the highest counts came in February with about 200 birds flying from the tip on the 1st and 180 birds resting on a field on the 20th.

At least 13 pairs bred in the two millstone-grit quarries at Withnell (one of which was active) and one pair bred in the steeple of St. Peter's Church, Belmont. There were counts of 40 and 70 in the Rawtenstall area near Ilex Mill, a colony which will be affected by the present reconstruction work. In the Pilling-Preesall area, 33 pairs laid 149 eggs from which 104 hatched and only 68 fledged, while at Arkholme twelve pairs used nest-boxes and twelve pairs nested in farm buildings. There was a post-breeding flock there on cut silage fields of up to 360 birds in mid-July.

Some significant movements were recorded during the autumn, though, rather oddly, Heysham reported nothing spectacular. At SNR 130 flew south on 12 Oct, 145 on the 15th and 280 on the 17th. Also on the 17th there were 476 over nearby Waterloo and at least 800 were counted over the Fairhaven visible migration watch-point. On the 18th there were around 500 birds in the Stocks area, while MSW recorded its maximum of 141 on the 14th. Numbers at roost sites in Rimrose Valley and the Formby pinewoods reached their peak at this time – 546 at the former at the end of September and 420 at the latter in mid-October.

Second winter period roost counts included approximately 800 at Upper Rivington on 9 Nov, 300 at Reed's Moss, St Helens on 7 Dec, 200 at Marton Mere on 28 Dec and 150 at Calf Hey on 22 Nov.

ROOK *Corvus frugilegus*

Abundant resident.

Exactly 400 nests were counted in the annual census of the eight active rookeries in the Chorley area at the beginning of April. By far the largest was at Croston which contained 162 nests.

Few nest counts were done in east Lancashire; they included eight at Buncer Lane (Blackburn), 18 at Feniscowles, 53 at Pleasington, 67 at Towneley Hall, Burnley and a further five at a new rookery in nearby Thanet Lee Wood. In Rossendale, 20 were present in the Broadclough rookery on 11 February and Rooks were building at Crawshawbooth on 23 February, where there were 49 nests on 13 April. Healey Dell rookery held 27 nests on 5 March and there were 18 at Acre and 48 in three rookeries in the Turton/Edgworth area, five more than 2002.

Over Wyre nest counts were 36 at Parrox Hall, Preesall, 35 near Nateby Hall, 21 at Knott End Library, four at St. Oswalds Church, Preesall and 71 at Stake Pool, Pilling. Larger rookeries in south Fylde had similar numbers to last year: 263 at Queensway, 112 at Warton Hall, 122 at Hatch Wood, Lytham, 129 at Westby Hill, 95 at Bradkirk Hall, 23 at Kirkham Station and 66 at Singleton Park.

Nests at Edge Farm in the Rimrose Valley numbered only five, down from eighteen last year. Along the Lune, the rookery at Greta Foot was down to 16 nests this year.

In the West Pennine Moors approximately 300 roosted at Entwistle on 4 Jan but only 50 in the second winter period, while the Upper Rivington roost had 500 on 9 Nov and 300 were at Roddlesworth on the 19th.

There was a hint of dispersal at the very end of September and the beginning of October; six went over Rossall Point on 29 Sept and the same number went over SNR on 1 Oct. Marton Mere had its peak counts in this period – eleven on 28 Sept and 75 on 2 Oct. Just odd singles were then reported during October at various coastal sites.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone*

Abundant breeding bird. Some southward movement in October.

During the year, efforts were made to estimate the total number of Carrion Crows using the five main roost-sites in the West Pennine Moors with the following results:

- Entwistle Plantations held 250 on 4 Jan and 1 Nov, rising to 400 on 11 Dec.
- Roddlesworth Plantations held approx. 200 on 25 Jan, 19 Nov and 21 Dec.
- Delph Plantations held over 300 on 5 Jan, 550 on 24 Nov, rising to over 650 on 3 Dec.
- Upper Rivington held 350 on 9 Nov but only 200+ on 30 Nov.
- Calf Hey held 600+ on 22 Nov with approximately 400 on 22 Dec.

From these counts, it is clear that these roosts in total hold a phenomenal number of birds in late winter and, taking into account some smaller roosts, in excess of 2000 Carrion Crows were estimated to be roosting in the West Pennine Moors in late November/early December.

Other large winter counts included 300 at White Moss, Skelmersdale on 1 Feb and 100 at Reed's Moss, St Helens on 7 Dec.

Breeding information from the Pilling-Preesall area showed that the eight pairs monitored laid 31 eggs from which 18 young fledged. Gamekeepers in the West Pennine Moors reported killing 202 Carrion Crows (by Larsen trapping & nest-shooting) during the 2003-breeding season. There was a build up of dispersing birds in July and August at several sites. On 7 July, 98 flew over MSW, a reserve record, 50 at Sawley on 6 Aug and 70 at Musbury on 18 Aug. Autumn passage was rather light but numbers included 30 over Belmont on 12 Oct, eleven over SNR on the 13th, ten over Fairhaven on the 17th and 19 over Rossall Point on 1 Nov.

There were several reports of all-white birds in east Lancashire. These could feasibly all relate to the same individual, but it seems there may be at least two – the birds were seen mainly at Clitheroe and Altham but also at Mitton and Hapton. The pure albino female which has resided on the Lune for the past eight years was not seen this year.

An interesting observation came from Morecambe where a Carrion Crow pursued and attacked a feral pigeon in straight flight and brought it down. It then proceeded to hack it to death.

HOODED CROW *Corvus cornix*

Scarce winter visitor; has bred with Carrion Crow.

A Hooded Crow that has been observed in the area adjacent to MSW since 27 November 2000 was seen paired to a Carrion Crow at Holmeswood corner on 21 March and 29 April. They may have attempted to breed on the arable edge beyond the reserve towards Holmeswood. What was probably the same bird was seen at MMWWT on 3 April and 13 June.

HOODED X CARRION CROW

Two different individuals were present on the Fylde in the early part of the year. One was seen at Fleetwood Tip on 16 Jan and then 15 & 19 March, Lytham Moss on 5-6 March & 3-4 April and then at Marton Mere on several dates between 8 April and 4 May.

RAVEN *Corvus corax*

Scarce breeding bird.

Ravens are still being reported in ones and twos from all corners of the county throughout the year though the recent spate of urban and coastal records seem to be declining. At SNR a pair was seen in the early part of the year and carrying nest material on 19 Feb, however, the indications during April seem to suggest that they didn't stay. Similarly, in the St Helens area the high hopes for breeding seem a distant memory with the only records for the area being around Prescott Reservoirs (peaking at four on 8 Feb). There was just a single record of two on the Southport gasometer in January and a couple of singles over the saltmarsh at Marshside. Two birds were calling as they flew over Tarleton on 26 Aug. At MMWWT, there were records of no more than two on ten days in the year.

Birds were present throughout the year in the Belmont area, with one pair in display flight on the very early date of 14 Oct. A pair was displaying over White Coppice in January and birds were seen at Hoghton Bottoms in April. A pair and four juveniles were noted at Rivington on 31 August.

On 16 Feb there were two at Lee Quarry in Rossendale and on 23 March a pair. They nested successfully with three young in the nest on 18 April and five birds, presumably the family group, on 12 May

A pair nested successfully in southern Bowland and a further three pairs were present during the breeding season. There were two other breeding pairs in east Lancashire.

Ravens are seen almost daily in the Lancaster area, especially around Leighton Moss. A pair successfully reared three young at Middlebarrow Quarry. On 9 April, two birds seen from the Allen Pool hides appeared to be taking Lapwing eggs.

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Abundant breeding bird, double passage migrant and winter visitor.

Monthly Peak Counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SNR	300	350	80	180	180	300	250	250	500	1100	450	300
Marton Mere	20	/	/	10	200	/	/	150	60	7000	7500	/

The comparison of the monthly peaks from this year to last seems to suggest that there wasn't a huge influx of continental migrants into our area in the autumn. Indeed, numbers reported were down throughout the region.

Breeding information was negligible but in the Pilling-Preesall area, the 31 pairs that were monitored laid 143 eggs of which 124 hatched and 117 young fledged.

At MSW, however, a summer roost built up from 300 birds on 11 August to a peak of 2400 on the 31st – a reserve record. Visible migration watchers at Fairhaven recorded 3519 on 23 days in autumn with peaks of 585 on 14 Oct and 769 on 8 Nov. A similar peak was noted at SNR with 1100 south on 13 Oct and 750 the following day. 2000 were seen over Parsonage Reservoir, Blackburn on the 15th.

There were some large counts away from traditional roost sites: 1200 feeding in a recently ploughed field at White Moss, Skelmersdale on 3 March; 15-20000 at Sand Villa Farm, Pilling on 18 Oct; and 1800 taking shelter at South Pier, Blackpool during a November rainstorm.

In Rossendale, migrating flocks of 3-4000 feeding on moorland above Clowbridge in June were the largest seen there for several years. A winter roost near Clowbridge totalled around 10000 birds in December. The peak count at Whinney Hill Tip, Accrington was in the region of 6000 on 25 Jan but only reached 1000 in the second winter period; a similar number was at Stanworth Quarry Tip on 2 Nov. The Stocks Reservoir roost peaked at 10000 in January and March but no counts were done during the second winter period.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*

Abundant but decreasing resident.

Breeding studies in the Pilling-Preesall area showed an increasing 23 pairs laid 234 eggs in 54 clutches from which 195 hatched and 175 fledged. This gives an average per clutch of 4.33 eggs, 3.61 hatched and 3.24 fledged – also an increase over last year. One can only presume that the continued winter-feeding in the vicinity helps this improvement in numbers and success. Counts of flocks during late summer/early autumn in Over Wyre showed there to be several in the 30 to 60 region. One flock near Hambleton peaked at over 200 on 11 Sept whilst numbers at the Birk's Farm feeding site reached 157 on 8 Aug (more than double last year's peak) and a flock of 120 was near Myerscough throughout the autumn. Winter numbers were down to 45 at the latter site and there were still several flocks of up to 20 in the area. At Myerscough numbers peaked at 70 on 10 July.

In Merseyside, BBS records showed an increase of 25% over 2002 though whether this is significant will only be shown through several years' data. At SNR, there were at least twelve feeding in Sea Buckthorn during late April/early May, presumably gathering chironomids for their young. A flock of over 80 at Marshside on 7 Aug was a record count for the site.

An estimated 15 pairs bred along two rows of cottages in Belmont Village in May and more than 55 were in a Belmont garden on 15 Nov. Clearly, it is during the post-breeding period that most birds are recorded. Other largish counts included a flock of 50 birds at Clowbridge during August, 64 at a roost site in Blackburn in July and 60 in a Burnley garden on 28 Aug.

There were many further reports of flocks of up to 20 from many gardens with feeders and at least twelve came to seed at Clowbridge in the winter. Whereas a few years ago, House Sparrows were discouraged from garden feeders, they must now be encouraged.

TREE SPARROW *Passer montanus*

Fairly common but declining breeding bird. Flocks in winter also decreasing.

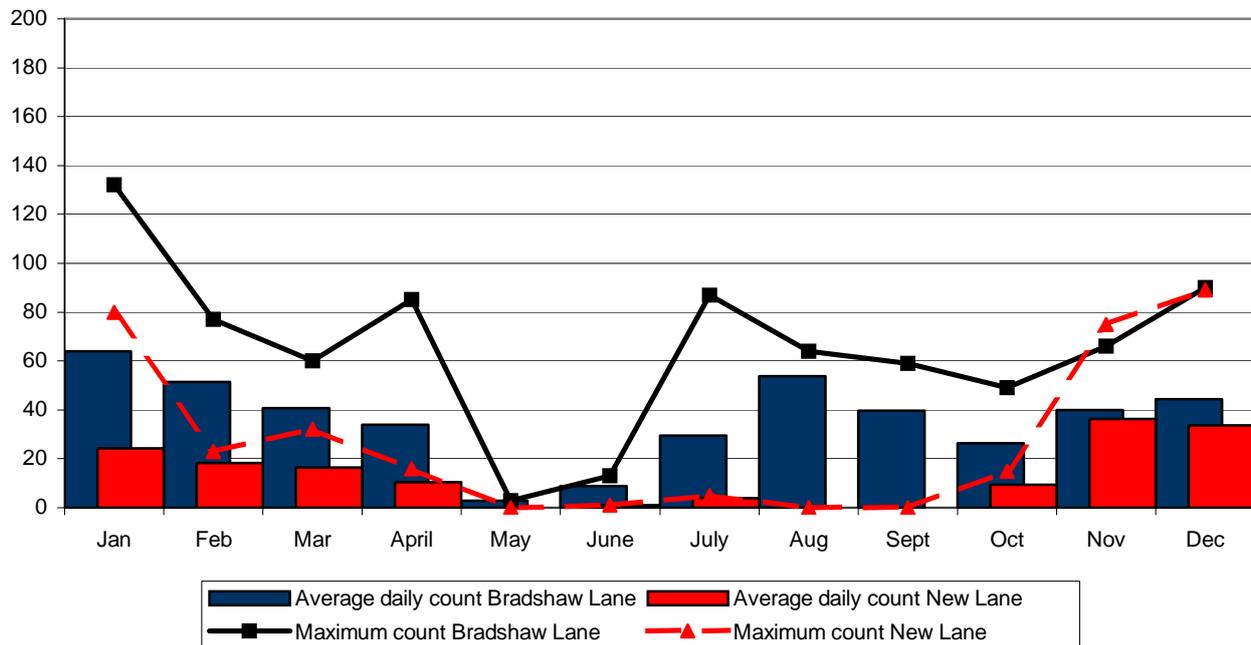
Numbers of Tree Sparrows seem to be holding up fairly well. The regular feeding of winter flocks in the Pilling area has certainly helped to stabilise and indeed increase the resident population. The graphs below show the numbers at these sites throughout the year. Numbers were perhaps slightly down at Bradshaw Lane but were more significant at New Lane; there were also good numbers at Birk's Farm, Eagland Hill including over 70 on 24 Aug.

The breeding survey in the Pilling-Preesall area recorded 126 pairs laying 1311 eggs of which 966 hatched and 851 young fledged. One pair had four clutches, 36 had three clutches, 44 had two clutches and 45 had singles giving a total of 245 clutches – a significant increase over the last few years. Two pairs bred at Myerscough and a family party at Warton on 26 May indicated breeding in the vicinity. At Arkholme, three pairs nested in boxes and one in the wall of a barn, but breeding success was poor with only 17 young fledged even though they were all double-brooded.

There is a similar effort taking place in east Lancashire where a nest box scheme in the Great Harwood/Marholme area had eleven breeding pairs of which two were double-brooded. At the associated winter-feeding site at Harwood Bar Caravan Site the peak count was 40 on 6

Dec, a splendid number for a bird on the very edge of its normal range. There were records from four other sites in east Lancashire through the year, but no breeding.

Tree Sparrow counts
at Bradshaw Lane & New Lane Feeding Stations, Pilling



The once regular breeding site of MSW showed a small increase with 14 records during the year but still no breeding. However, thirteen pairs bred at MMWWT and peak counts on the feeding tables were 70 in February and July, 80 in August and still over 60 in late October. Merseyside BBS recorded a dramatic increase of 28 birds from just two last year.

There were encouraging signs from elsewhere in the county. Two flew over the Fairhaven visible migration watchpoint on 17 Sept and one on 27 Oct – the first records there for many years. One flew over LSANR on 28 Sept and at SNR there were three briefly on 17 Oct. One was seen irregularly in a garden at Belmont (see also hybrid account) and birds were regularly recorded at Brockholes Quarry and at several sites in the Chorley to Preston area. A flock of 90 was recorded at Bickerstaffe on 18 Jan. Flocks of up to 30 were present at Reed's Moss, St Helens in the first winter period. There were, however, no records from the Lancaster district.

HOUSE X TREE SPARROW

A bird showing Tree Sparrow & male House Sparrow plumage characteristics was seen several times in a Belmont garden during December (and into 2004 when the presence of a second hybrid bird was confirmed).

CHAFFINCH *Fringilla coelebs*

Abundant breeding bird, passage migrant and winter visitor.

The large numbers of autumn 2002 rather fizzled out in the first half of 2003 with very few large flocks noted anywhere. The largest numbers remained in the east of the county with 40 at Roddlesworth and at Edge End Clough, Brierfield in January and about 100 at Pleasington Old Hall on 16 Feb. The feeding stations at New Lane and Ridge Farm in the Pilling area held around 55 throughout the first winter period – an increase on last year's first winter counts.

There were also good numbers at scattered sites across the county: a peak of 130 at White Moss, Skelmersdale at the end of February, over 200 feeding on the remaining beech

mast in Rivington during January and February and a peak of 200 at Ellet Grange. Approximately 100 roosted with Bramblings in rhododendrons at Belmont on 15 Feb.

Song was first noted at Marsden Park, Nelson on 2 Feb. Very few details on breeding were received but Heysham reported a rather disappointing season with only 19 males singing. Marshside also reported a continued decline with three pairs on Hesketh Golf Course. At Arkholme, 28 males were singing on 14 May and the annual top-tetrad survey of Lancashire recorded breeding in 90% of the squares covered.

Autumn migration was quite poor at certain sites with no significant passage reported at Marshside, MMWWT or Heysham. However, other visible migration watchpoints told a different story. At SNR, peak numbers were recorded on 12 Oct when over 800 flew south – the numbers preceding and following this date were only ever in double-figures. Similar numbers were recorded at Fairhaven where the first peak of 435 was also on the 12th but numbers remained quite reasonable over the next few weeks with several three-figure counts including 690 on the 16th and a clear autumn maximum of 1528 on 4 Nov. A similar pattern of movement was noted from other visible migration watchpoints, including over 450 going south-south-east over Belmont in 80 minutes on 12 Oct with another 180 in 50 minutes on the 18th. A peak of 80 passed south over LSANR on 11 Oct and 70 at Starr Gate on the 16th, while flew south over the Formby dunes on 16 Oct, followed by 200 in two hours over the Rimrose Valley on the 17th and 410 in 3 hours on the 19th.

Numbers in the second winter period were much lower in the east than the previous year due in part to a very poor beech mast crop. Peak counts were also low in the lowland arable areas with 200 along the Old Coach Road, St Helens on 7 Dec and a peak of 127 at the New Lane feeding station on the 22nd.

BRAMBLING *Fringilla montifringilla*

Winters in variable numbers. Fairly common double passage migrant, mostly in autumn.

Unlike the flocks of Chaffinches, Brambling numbers continued at a high level, sustained by the vast beech mast crop. Peak counts in the east were 200 at Slaidburn on 1 Jan, 500 at Whitewell on the 11th, 300 at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on the 14th, 200 at Browsholme Hall on the 19th and 400 at Barrowford on 6 Feb. There were many other smaller flocks in the area as well but these started to depart in the first week of March. The roost at Belmont still held 300 in early January and over 200 were feeding on beech mast in Roddlesworth Woods on 23 Feb. The last birds were seen around 18-20 April with one late one at Sunnyhurst Woods on the 28th. Many birds were singing at the Gaghills feeding station in Rossendale on 6 April.

The autumn passage was back to normal with most records in single figures. The number of birds recorded at Fairhaven between 2 Oct and 9 Nov was 67 with peaks of 13 on 27 Oct and 17 on 5 Nov. The overall total of passage birds reported from other sites was less than 100 with the only other double-figure counts being 20 at Sunnyhurst Hey/Darwen Moor in early November and twelve over Belmont on 18 Oct. Very few birds were seen up in the second winter period with just single records at feeding stations at MSW and MMWWT and two in a Belmont Garden.

GREENFINCH *Carduelis chloris*

Abundant breeding bird. Some autumn movement, flocks in winter.

The early part of the year was unremarkable with most sites reporting average numbers. Still, it seems that Greenfinches are especially attracted to feeding stations throughout the county.

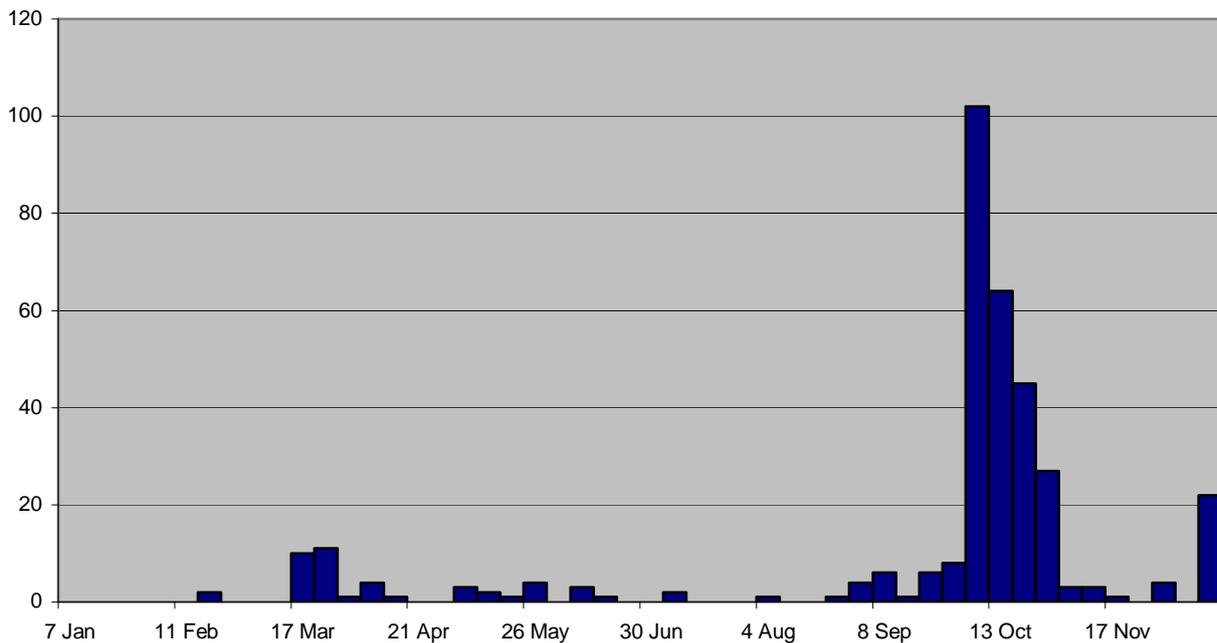
As can be seen from the graph below, autumn passage at Heysham got off to a slow start but then peaked dramatically in mid-October when 80 were trapped on the 11th. This pattern was replicated across the county and over the whole country with record numbers being

recorded at some places. As the Heysham Report noted, the passage of Greenfinches is normally rather difficult to document due to the large numbers of local birds milling around, but the trapping pattern fits the overall county one.

Visible migration counts at Fairhaven were at an all time high with 468 recorded between 12 Oct and 10 Nov, peaking with 468 on the 13th. About 100 birds dropped in briefly at SNR on the 12th before moving south, while large numbers passed over Rossall Point with 146 & 83 there on 19 & 26 Oct respectively.

Numbers rose suddenly to over 150 in the third week of October at the Bradshaw Lane feeding station at Eagland Hill, before falling off again to the usual ten or so. Two sunflower fields in the area, of about 2 acres, attracted up to 300 birds on 19 Oct, with birds moving between these and three more sunflower fields near Bone Hill Farm, Pilling. On 30 Oct, 200 were feeding on sunflowers in the grounds of Myerscough College.

Greenfinch - Heysham



These strong movements may have been indicative of a good breeding season. At Heysham there were 18 territories, an increase of four on the previous high. At Longwood, Pilling two pairs laid 14 eggs in three clutches, from which 14 fledged.

Apart from the remaining flocks in Wyre, the largest winter flocks were 300 along the Old Coach Road, St Helens on 7 Dec, 79 at a pre-roost gathering in the Rimrose Valley on 25 Nov and between 70 and 120 at a roost site at Heysham. The largest count at MSW was of 70 trapped and ringed on 10 Nov.

GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis*

Common breeding resident and passage migrant. Flocks in winter.

Numbers of Goldfinches were very low in the first winter period and generally remained that way throughout the year. Nowhere were there any great concentrations of birds apart from 100 on the Old Coach Road, St Helens on 14 Feb and 40 at Eagland Hill during January and February. Other double-figure counts were received from SNR, MSW and Skelmersdale.

Things started moving around mid-March when breeding pairs returned farther inland. A hint of spring passage was noted around 18 April when over 80 passed through Marshside and 16 were at Rossall Point.

Breeding data were rather scant but one pair nested above 1000' just to the south of Burnley. Juveniles were noted from June onwards and post-breeding flocks started to appear in July. In the east, the largest of these were 50 at Upper Coldwell Reservoir on 23 Aug, 100 on Champion Moor on 5 Sept, 80 at Fishmoor Reservoir on 2 Oct and 70 at Stephen Moor on the 6th. After mid-October most birds had left the upland areas but there was a late record on 50 from Rowley Lake, Burnley on 14 Nov. Further west, approximately 110 fed on thistles at Belmont Reservoir on 24 Aug and 60 were at Rivington on the 28th.

Larger concentrations were encountered on the coastal plain: 120 at SNR from mid-August through into September and 70 at Myerscough around the same time. 100 fed on thistles at Marshside on 7 Aug.

Autumn passage was described as good from Heysham where it was coupled with the highest ever annual ringing total. At Fairhaven, 87 were recorded on 12 days between 19 Sept and 10 Nov with a peak of 16 on 2 Oct, while 45 flew over LSANR on 27 Sept. An exceptionally late flock of c50 was at Rowley lake on 14 November.

The increased use of Niger seed is encouraging a lot more goldfinches into gardens and encouraging residency; 38 were recorded in a Belmont garden on 20 Sept and flocks of 38 and 27 respectively were visiting Chorley and Coppull gardens in December.

SISKIN *Carduelis spinus*

Uncommon recent breeding colonist. Double passage migrant and winter visitor.

Siskins were typically quite widespread in small numbers between January and March with a largest flock size of around 20. The only larger congregations noted were 50 at Eccleston Mere on 1 Jan, 45 at Belmont on the 4th, 50 in Burnley on 1 Feb, 50 at Cuerden throughout and around 100 at Longridge Fell on 16 March. This last flock could possibly have been on migration as a hint of passage was noted at other sites at that time, but otherwise spring passage was very quiet.

One was in song at White Hill Wood, Sabden on 21 Feb but, apart from single birds at Gisburn Forest on 20 April and 15 June, there were once again no other potential breeders in east Lancashire. Three pairs bred at Belmont, fledging at least nine juveniles, and at least two territorial pairs were located during the breeding bird survey of Roddlesworth Plantations for United Utilities. A record of three juveniles at Clough Bottom on 11 Aug suggested breeding in the area.

The autumn passage was poor by recent standards and, although it started reasonably early, it finished rather abruptly at the end of October. A couple of small flocks were noted in east Lancashire during early September and by the middle of the month, visible migration watchpoints were picking them up. Fairhaven had a total of 112 during the autumn with peaks of 31 on 1 Oct and 51 on the 15th. Marshside recorded a rather paltry peak of seven on the 19th.

Second winter period records were also rather patchy with very few in north Lancashire. Cuerden Valley Park had the most with around 50 again but there were very few flocks in excess of 30 birds – 40 were at Eccleston on 22 Nov and Stocks Reservoir on 9 Dec, 37 at Rowley Lake, Burnley on the 16th and 35 at Roddlesworth on the 22nd.

LINNET *Carduelis cannabina*

Common breeding resident. Double passage migrant, abundant winter flocks in the west.

Linnets roost in gorse bushes in winter at MSW, where the largest count in the first half of the year was of 73 on 7 Feb. In the latter half of the year there were only a few sightings and the highest count was 17 birds on 1 Nov. Some flocks numbered between 50 and 70 birds in the mosslands around Southport but the main concentration of birds was on the Fylde where there were several small flocks but the main one on the Lytham shoreline peaked at 340 on 1 Jan.

Passage was rather sporadic. At Heysham, the lack of resident birds allowed an accurate measure of passage. This began with a flurry of activity with birds recorded on seven days in the fortnight from 16 March – at the same time as the first ones and twos were arriving in the east of the county. There was then a brief lull until 9-24 April when the main passage took place peaking at 63 on the 14th. The only notable movements at Marshside also came during this period when 50 moved north on 18th.

Breeding data were rather mixed with some successes in Merseyside, where numbers increased, particularly at coastal sites, but some further reductions inland and at Heysham, where the lowest ever total of six pairs was due to loss of habitat. About four pairs nested on the Birkdale dunes and eight pairs bred at Marshside – three more than 2002. Many pairs were located on the Over Wyre mosses. At least five pairs were located in BBS 1km² on Darwen Moor and a further six were on Withnell Moor. Several well-scattered pairs were reported in east Lancashire while in Rossendale there were several pairs at Marl Pits and at least seven other pairs in the area.

Post-breeding flocks started to build during July and August – 150 were near Great Eccleston on 9 Aug and a flock at Mythop peaked at around 200 on the 25th. These were preceded by 80 at Todderstaffe Hall on the early date of 8 June and 60 at Pilling Marsh on 13 July. At SNR, there were 40-50 in late July

Autumn passage was split into two with a movement in mid-September and one in mid-October. Many double-figure flocks were reported throughout the county, including 148 at Black Hill Farm, Pilling on 8 Sept, 148 at Marton Mere on 11 Oct, 100 at SNR on the 12th and 120 on Downholland Moss on 9 Nov. Some quite reasonably sized flocks were in the east of the county during September; 100 at Parsonage Reservoir, 70 at Spring Mill, Rossendale and 60 at Cant Clough Reservoir were the peak counts and all on the 21st. Numbers reduced quickly during October, though a flock of 19 at Rishton Reservoir on the 11th was the best for the area in years.

Numbers remained high, especially on the Fylde, through to the end of the year. Coastal flocks included 200 on Lytham shore in mid-November, 75 on Crosby shore in December and up to 30 on Ocean Edge saltmarsh, Heysham, sometimes mixed with Twite. Wintering is exceptional in east Lancashire, so two at the head of the Dunsop Valley on 2 Dec was notable.

TWITE *Carduelis flavirostris*

Scarce and decreasing breeder. Winters on some coasts.

Twite has become a very high profile species due to several Biodiversity Action Plan schemes. The feeding station at Heysham, using black Niger seed & millet, has been used to attract birds in and colour-ring them. A similar program has been run at Cant Clough Reservoir in east Lancashire.

The initial findings show that the wintering population on the north Lancashire coast to be very mobile with colour-ringed birds moving between Bolton-le-Sands and the Wyre estuary. They also suggest that coastal wintering birds originate, at least in part, in the southern Hebrides, while the east Lancashire breeding population is separate from the coastal birds and appears to winter in south-eastern England.

First winter period flocks were widespread along the north Lancashire coastline, from Heysham around to the Wyre. Very few were recorded south of there, apart from at Lytham, and none at Marshside. The larger numbers were recorded at Glasson Marsh (peak of 40 on 18 Feb) and Cockersands (peak of 90 on 24 March). An interesting observation was made at Bourbles Pit, Preesall where between 100 and 200 were feeding in Pheasant pens throughout April.

About 60 remained at the Cant Clough feeding station through to the end of March but equally interesting was the number of winter records from Rossendale, where there were two at

Hutch Bank Quarry on 9 Jan, 30 at Higher Hollinbank during cold weather on the 12-14th and 20 at Musbury Road on 1 Feb.

Twite continued to maintain their tenuous hold as a breeding species on the West Pennine Moors, with one pair breeding on Darwen Moor and a pair with three juveniles seen at Belmont Reservoir on 3 Aug. A pair probably bred on Withnell Moor. However, only two sites recorded any during the breeding season in Rossendale. Twenty or more pairs bred in the moors to the south and east of Burnley.

The post-breeding flock at Cant Clough Reservoir numbered 64 on 31 Aug and, as in recent years, peaked during October with an impressive 250 on the 5th and 200 still present on the 14th, reducing to 50 on 8 Nov and 30 by 4 Dec. The only other autumn records from the east were one at Parsonage Res on 16 Oct, 6 at Rowley Hall on 14 Nov and 24 on Harcles Hill, Rossendale on the 27th.

During the second winter period, 106 were trapped at Heysham on 7 Nov and flocks of about 40-60 were recorded at Stodday, Fluke Hall and Cockersands. On the morning of 23 Oct, 22 flew in from the sea at Formby.

LESSER REDPOLL *Carduelis cabaret*

Fairly common but decreasing breeding bird. Common double passage migrant and winter visitor.

There seems to have been an overall reduction in the numbers of Lesser Redpolls this year. First winter period flocks were few and far between. In the south-west, 20 were in Everton Park, Liverpool on 18 Feb, 15 at Eccleston Mere on 21 Jan but numbers at MSW never rose above eight. A formerly well-populated area at White Moss, Skelmersdale is virtually deserted now. In the east there was just a thin scattering of records of up to six, apart from 12-20 recorded in the Stocks Reservoir area. More than 20 at Belmont on 11 March were probably a wintering flock.

Spring passage was quite good. Marshside recorded birds from 14 April to 19 May with peaks of 20 on 16 April and 60 on the 18th, and Heysham had similar peaks of 25 on the 16th and 87 on the 17th. The passage of the 18th was also noted at Rossall with birds flying north, and then at Lane Ends, Pilling where 23 flew over heading east – following the coastline by the looks of it. MMWWT recorded its only birds of the year in this period.

An estimated ten territorial pairs were counted during the survey of Roddlesworth Plantations, two pairs were at Clowbridge and birds were seen in suitable breeding habitat in just six sites in east Lancashire. What was probably a family party was noted at White Coppice during July and August but the largest parties noted during this time were 30 on Longridge Fell on 8 June and 41 at Stocks Reservoir on 25 Aug.

Autumn passage was almost non-existent on the coast with none recorded from Marshside, 15 from Fairhaven and just 17 from Heysham, all between mid-September and early November. Numbers remained high at Stocks Reservoir where there were 50 on 2 Oct, and at Lee Green Reservoir which had 23 on 1 Oct and 25 on the 13th. A flock of 20 were in Lead Mines Clough, Anglezarke on 3 Oct.

There were hardly any second winter period records with just ones and twos reported from several locations. The only flocks of note were rather paltry with 15 recorded around Nelson and Burnley during November, 20 at Bacup on 27 Dec and 60 at Roddlesworth on the 16th.

COMMON REDPOLL *Carduelis flammea*

Scarce winter visitor

Though there were several reports of Common Redpoll, mainly in the early part of the year, no supporting descriptions were submitted apart from the two over-wintering birds at Thrushgill that

were recorded up to 27 March. If anyone has descriptions for any other individuals, retrospective submissions would be gratefully received.

REDPOLL sp. *Carduelis* sp.

Tape-luring of spring Redpolls at Heysham in 2003 proved that they were all Lessers. Studies here have shown that Lesser Redpoll is generally a late spring migrant (normally late April to May) and returns in September. Any migrants much earlier or later than those date would have a higher probability of being Common, especially when arriving with influxes of continental Chaffinches. There was hardly any evidence of a passage of Commons this year, and therefore the few records submitted as "Redpoll sp." have been included in the Lesser Redpoll account.

CROSSBILL *Loxia curvirostra*

Rare breeding bird. Occasional irruptive movements.

The high numbers from 2002 remained into the first winter period of 2003 with 30 reported at Thrushgill plantation on 23 Jan, a flock of 25 birds feeding in the Larches at the start of the track to the Langden Valley on 13 Feb (with 20 still there in mid-March), 24 between Entwistle and Wayoh Reservoirs on 12 Jan, 18 at Belmont on 20 Feb and 18 at Anglezarke on 6 March. Birds remained around the Gisburn Forest, peaking at 30 on 4 Feb and with 14 still there on 14 April. Nearby at Kemple End numbers built up to 40 on 18 Jan with around 15 still present on 27 April, and up the Dunsop Valley there were 46 on 2 March and 25 still there on 10 April.

Away from the above sites, spring records included seven at Lytham on 17 March and five at Marshside on 23 April. Fifteen flew west over Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on 13 April.

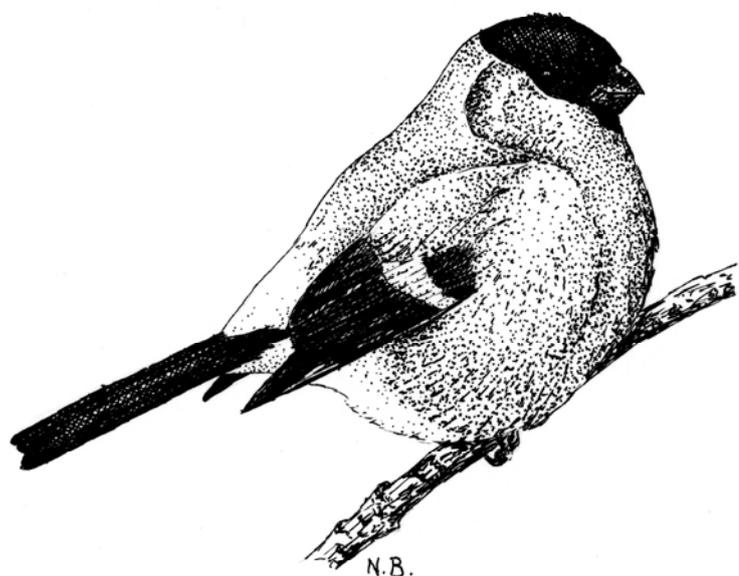
In the past, after a large winter influx, a few pairs peel off from the flocks and breed in the area and there was plenty of evidence to support this this year. A pair with two juveniles at Stocks Reservoir on 18 April strongly suggests successful breeding in Gisburn Forest and probable pairs were located at two sites in Roddlesworth Plantations in late April/early May. Twenty flew east over Sunnyhurst Reservoir on 2 June and a family party in Belmont Plantations on 27 July could have come from further afield. There were other ones and twos knocking about various sites during early summer.

Four flew over Formby on 10 Aug and one went south over Leyland on the 4th. The only autumn/second winter period records were of two at MSW on 14 Oct, nine at Calf Hey, Rossendale on the 25th (with at least one on 15 Nov), one at Stocks Boardhouse on 7 Nov and two at Prescott Reservoirs on the 11th.

BULLFINCH *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Common breeding resident.

In contrast to most areas of the British Isles, Bullfinches seem to be doing rather better in Lancashire in recent years. The ringing totals at Heysham were the equal highest with an unprecedented 16 juveniles of probable local origin being trapped. Around three to four pairs bred at Birkdale LNR but only one was found in 18 BBS census plots in Merseyside. There was an increase to six



pairs at MSW and 19 birds were trapped there during the year. Two pairs bred at White Moss, Skelmersdale where loss of habitat is having a dramatic effect on breeding birds.

At least eight pairs were present in the Rivington/Anglezarke area throughout the year and though breeding was only confirmed at three sites in east Lancashire, birds were reported widely in the area. Pairs were recorded at five sites in Rossendale.

Outside the breeding season there were a few significant roost counts: approximately 15 in the Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir area on 23 Jan, eleven at Clitheroe on 29 Jan and seven (all males!) at Belmont on 16 Nov. Unusually, there were quite a few reports of flocks of six to nine birds from several sites. A male at Marton Mere in October and November was the third record for the site – all have occurred during the same period in consecutive years.

A winter garden bird survey in the Chorley area registered Bullfinches in 50% of the gardens surveyed and increasingly searching out black sunflower seed. Similar behaviour was noted in Rossendale and east Lancashire.

HAWFINCH *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Rare and localised breeding resident.

The three birds from 2002 remained at Edge End Clough, Brierfield up until 5 Jan with one remaining to the 18th. It was pleasing once again to receive records from Pleasington Old Hall, Blackburn after a gap of several years – two were seen on 16 & 19 Feb and again on 15 & 16 March.

Woodwell, the favoured site for watching this species, produced an average showing this year with no more than three being seen there, but five were seen near Yealand Redmayne on 9 Jan.

Passage birds were noted at Marton Mere on 14 Oct when two were seen flying south. About 30 minutes later, what was probably the same two flew over Fairhaven and in-between one was seen over St. Annes. The following day, one was seen and heard flying south over Heysham. The latter was the observatory's second record.

SNOW BUNTING *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Uncommon winter visitor to summits and coasts.

The large flock on the summit of Pendle Hill remained from 2002 with 30 on 5 Jan and the last report of around ten on 20 Feb. Twenty were on Knowl Moor, Rossendale on 5 Jan.

A flock of up to nine was seen regularly on Ainsdale beach from the beginning of the year until 17 Feb whilst one frequented Rossall Point up until 1 Feb. Other first winter birds included singles at Heysham on 26 Feb and SNR on 21 March. One flew north past Rossall Point on 27 March.

Flocks of five and thirteen birds were recorded passing over Darwen Moor on 7 & 14 October and one flew past Rossall Point on the 13th. The first returned to Pendle on 26 Oct; by 30 Nov there were around 50 birds and 80 were reported on 31 Dec. A single turned up at Brockholes Quarry on 9 Nov and four were on Birkdale beach on the 8th.

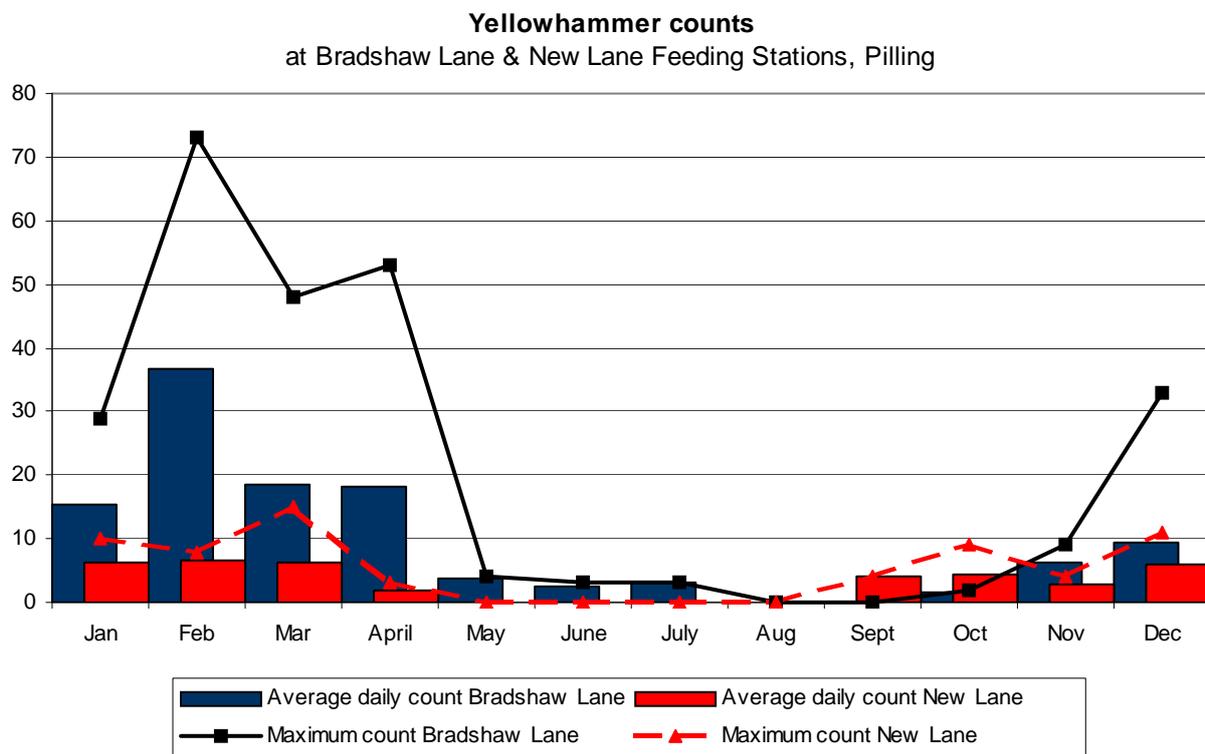
Three on Crosby shore on 3 Dec increased to eight on the 7th and up to 15 on the 10th. After that up to nine were seen regularly to the end of the year. Similarly, up to six were present on Lytham shore from 21 Nov until the end of the year. Possibly the same or another flock of four were at Fairhaven on 22-24 Nov.

YELLOWHAMMER *Emberiza citrinella*

Fairly common but decreasing resident, mostly in the south. Scarce autumn passage migrant.

As usual, peak numbers at feeding stations in the Fylde were recorded in the early part of the year. Data from the Pilling sites showed a similar pattern to last year with a peak day-count of 73 at Bradshaw Lane during February. At Reed's Moss, St Helens, a sizeable flock of over 60 birds was present from January through to late March.

Birds are resident at MSW, and breed in fields and hedges adjoining the reserve. On Kirkby Moss two flocks totalling 50 birds were noted on 16 Jan and during February up to 60 birds were feeding on a stubble field, while six were recorded on 17 June on BTO BBS of SD5300 at Billinge. The highest counts since 1997 were recorded at White Moss, Skelmersdale – a flock of up to 25 was in residence from January to February and again at the end of the year.



There were no records roughly east of the line of the M6/M61. What might be described as passage birds were seen at Warton Bank on 22 March, Marshside on 14 April, Heysham on 13-16 Oct and Brockholes Quarry on 12 March and 28 Oct.

Breeding data were rather scant and the BBS plots surveyed in Merseyside showed a 30% decrease over last year. Eleven males were counted at Kellamergh, near Warton on 31 March but only two at Birkdale. Singing birds were recorded at Tarleton, Hic Bibi, Coppull, Anderton and around Croston and Eccleston and at scattered sites in Over Wyre, and there was a single record from the traditional site east of Garstang, at Grizedale

REED BUNTING *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common breeding bird and winter visitor. Double passage migrant.

This species may be holding its own in Lancashire despite the national decline. The winter reedbed roost at MSW reached a record 100 on 15 Feb and 43 birds were ringed there during the year. Other large roosts were recorded at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir where 60 were present

on 3 Jan, increasing to around 100 by the 8th and remaining around the 50 mark throughout February. A hundred were on Docker Moor on 5 Feb.

Breeding numbers were down in some areas. Numbers on Merseyside BBS plots were 40% down but it is doubtful if this reflects the true picture. Things certainly weren't as bad as this suggests elsewhere in the south-west. At Marshside, 13 pairs were confirmed breeders, three at MSW, 32 at MMWWT and up to 14 males in the Rimrose Valley. Eight pairs bred around Belmont Reservoir and there were at least nine singing males in Rossendale. Widely scattered breeding pairs were recorded throughout east Lancashire and several pairs bred at Birkacre. Eight pairs bred on the Middleton Industrial Estate and four at Brockholes Quarry. An estimated 33 pairs bred at Leighton Moss.

Autumn passage was rather quiet with very few recorded at Heysham and none at Marshside. SNR recorded 31 birds with a peak of 19 south on 1 Oct, while visible migration counts at Fairhaven registered 125 in total from 11 Oct until 9 Nov with peaks around the 15 Oct and 6 Nov.

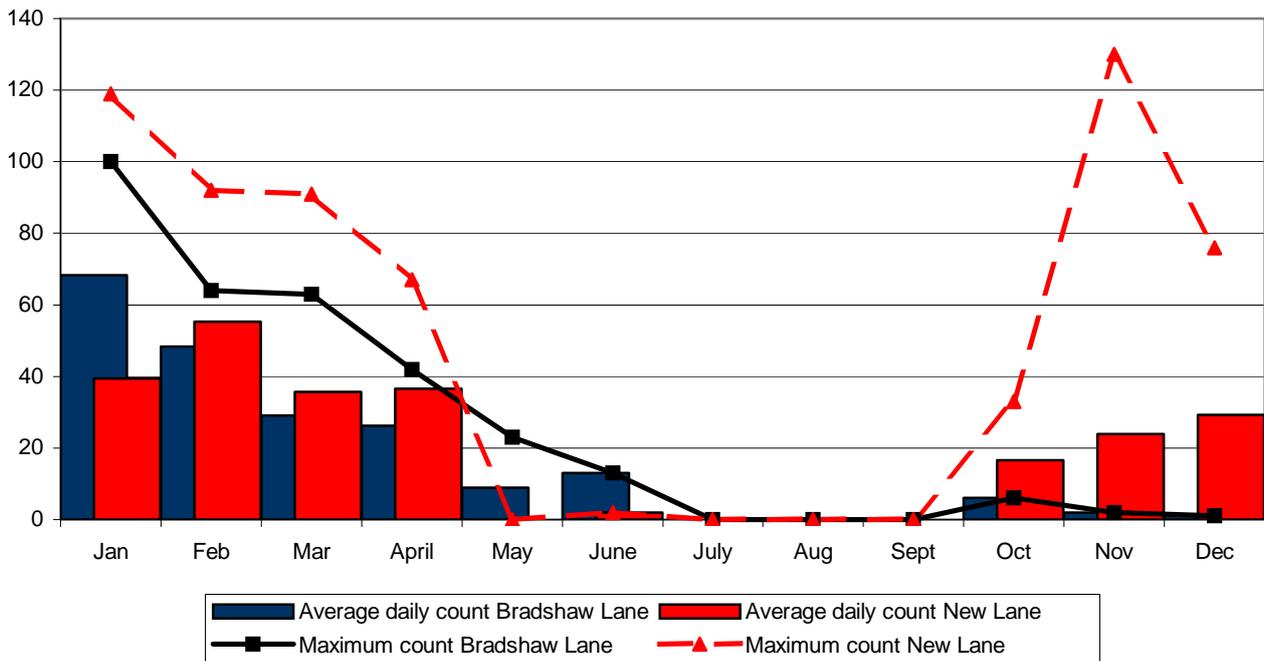
In the second winter period, several large gatherings were counted at inland sites. Approximately 60 in two groups were at Belmont on 5 Oct and over 40 were on the moors above Belmont at 1050ft above sea level on 23 Nov. 27 were on Winter Hill at 1100ft above sea level on 20 Dec. Other sizeable roosts included 30 at Sunnyhurst Hey Reservoir on 22 Nov, 25 at nearby Darwen Moor edge on 23 Dec and 47 near Churchtown, Southport.

CORN BUNTING *Emberiza calandra*

Common breeding bird in the south-west and Fylde.

Numbers of Corn Buntings at winter-feeding stations showed a similar pattern to last year although overall numbers were slightly depressed. The Pilling sites rarely got into three figures unlike last year but averaged around 50 in the early part of the year; several other flocks of 20-50 were reported elsewhere on the Fylde.

Corn Bunting counts
at Bradshaw Lane & New Lane Feeding Stations, Pilling



Flocks in the south-west of the county included 40 on Churchtown Moss on 7 Jan and 22 at Reed's Moss on 17 Feb but by far the largest were 125 at Sefton Meadows on 5 Jan and 110 at Bickerstaffe on the 15th.

Rather more breeding records were received this year. Seven singing males were recorded in the St Helens area and eleven on Altcar/Downholland/Plex Mosses, Corn Buntings were present on half of all BBS plots in rural Merseyside with one site reporting 14 individuals. At least eleven males were singing on the Over Wyre mosslands.

Six remained at Crosby Marine Park from 2002 into January and birds returned there in October – one on 5th, five in early November and nine in the last week of December.

SELECTED ESCAPES & FERAL BIRDS

BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus*

One visited Fairhaven Lake intermittently between March and October, with a pair there on 27 Nov. MMWWT had one on 2 April and two from 14 Nov-14 Dec. One was at Southport ML on 15 Oct, with two there on 2 Nov.

SWAN GOOSE *Branta leucopsis*

One was regular at Stanley Park, Blackpool throughout. Two visited Brockholes Quarry intermittently from April to August.

LESSER WHITE FRONTED GOOSE *Anser erythropus*

On the Fylde, single(s) were noted at Fairhaven Lake on 3 Jan and Stanley Park on 5-25 Jan, 29 March and 11 June, on Bispham Marsh on 23 March, and Bourbles Pit, Preesall on 16 Sept & 30 Nov. In the east of the county, three were at Upper Foulridge Reservoir on 3 Feb with the Canada Goose flock and with what appeared to be a Lesser White-fronted x Barnacle Goose hybrid. What was almost certainly the same hybrid was with the Canada Goose flock at Parsonage Reservoir on 5 Feb. An adult of unknown origin was at MMWWT from the second week of October until at least 1 Nov.

BAR-HEADED GOOSE *Anser indicus*

Singles were noted at Seaforth on 29 May, MSW on 27 Aug & 7 Sept, Belmont Reservoir on 15 Oct and Earnsdale Reservoir on 5 Dec. Six adults were at MMWWT on 25 Aug.

SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens*

There was a 'greater' of dubious origins on the Lune estuary on 15-25 Aug and 23 Nov. A 'lesser' was with Pinkfeet at MMWWT from 1 Jan-1 Feb, the same bird was on Downholland Moss on 25 Jan, and also at Marshside in April and possibly the same at Fairhaven Lake on 23 Feb.

ROSS'S GOOSE *Anser rossii*

One was well watched amongst the Pink-footed Goose flocks in the Over Wyre area between 4 Feb & 17 March. No doubt considered a contentious inclusion here by some, this bird has not been submitted to the BBRC at the time of publication.

A bird believed to have been a hybrid Ross's x Lesser White-fronted Goose was at MMWWT from 13 October until the year's end.

EMPEROR GOOSE *Anser canagicus*

One was at Southport Marine Lake on 14 Jan.

RED-BREASTED GOOSE *Branta ruficollis*

An adult was seen first amongst Pinkfeet at MMWWT on 28 Sept and stayed in the area until the end of the year. It was also at Crossens and Marshside during this period. At first it associated with Pinkfeet but subsequently switched its allegiance to the flock of feral Barnacle geese. The origins of this bird were always questionable, since in recent years there have been known escapes from captive flocks, the arrival date was a little early for a wild bird and its behaviour was also suspect. The question was probably finally resolved when it returned with the feral Barnacles to Knowsley Park in 2004, where it remained all summer. The record has not been submitted to the BBRC.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Two were at Marton Mere on 9 April.

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*

Four were noted during the Ribble WeBS counts in April.

MUSCOVY DUCK *Cairina moschata*

Up to five were present on Stanley Park Lake, Blackpool throughout. A single on the Leeds-Liverpool Canal at Burnley was joined by a second in Nov-Dec.

WOOD DUCK *Aix sponsa*

A female was at Birkacre throughout the year.

MANDARIN *Aix galericulata*

A pair was present on the Caton Green section of the River Lune throughout the breeding season but with no evidence of breeding. A drake was on the River Hodder at Dunsop Bridge from 16-29 April, and an eclipse drake was on the River Calder between Altham and Martholme on three dates between 1 Aug-6 Sept. Marton Mere hosted a drake on 23 Sept and a female on 5 November.

SPOT-BILLED DUCK *Anas poecilorhyncha zonorhyncha*

A pair of the Chinese race was noted at Brockholes Quarry on 29 Nov, with one on three dates in December.

CHILOE WIGEON *Anas sibilatrix*

One was at MMWWT from 17 March to 1 April. A drake was a MSW on 14 October.

RINGED TEAL *Callonetta leucophrys*

A drake was at Stanley Park Lake, Blackpool on 7 September.

AMERICAN BLACK VULTURE *Coragyps atratus*

One of the more impressive escapes this year was one in fields at Abbey Village near Blackburn in late October to early November.

PEREGRINE x SAKER FALCON

One bearing jesses made frequent appearances at Marshside throughout the year and was also noted at MMWWT intermittently from Oct-December.

FALCON sp.

Single unidentified birds with jesses were at Fishmoor Reservoir on 29 Aug and over the sea at Starr Gate on 21 September.

HYBRID FALCON sp.

What was probably the 2002 Liverpool Docks Saker x Peregrine or x Prairie Falcon was noted at Rimrose Valley on 15 April.

CRIMSON ROSELLA PARAKEET *Platycercus elegans*

A single was at Darwen Moor on 11 May.

RING-NECKED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

A bumper year with twelve reports! In the north of the county, a wide-ranging flock of three was noted at Haweswater, Silverdale on 4 Feb, then at Brookhouse, Lancaster on 16 Feb and finally at Morecambe Promenade on 5 March. A single was at Heysham on 5 August.

On the Fylde, one was at Knott End on 9 March and two were at Pilling on 2 Aug.

In the south-west, the bird from 2002 at MSW was noted on five dates in February and March, and singles were at MMWWT on 1 March & 28 Oct. On the Mountwood Estate, Skelmersdale, six birds were seen on 5 Sept. According to local residents, up to nine have been in this area for at least the last two years.

Elsewhere, a single was at the National Football Museum, Preston, on 28 Aug and three were in a Leyland garden on 1 Dec.

COCKATIEL *Nymphicus hollandicus*

Singles were recorded at Staining Nook on 6 July, Marton Mere on 27 Aug, Seaforth on 12 Sept and MMWWT on 11 Oct.

CHINESE BABAX *Babax lanceolatus*

A skulking individual frequented a Tarleton Garden from late June to the year's end, having first been sighted in Sept 2003. This species is closely related to the North American thrashers and was at first thought to be a Brown Thrasher.

RED BISHOP sp. *Euplectes* sp.

This gaudy wire-hopper frequented the Heysham area from 29 Aug-early December.

CANARY *Serinus canaria*

One was at Seaforth NR on 9 August.

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY *Serinus mozambicus*

One was at Seaforth NR briefly on 12 Oct before flying south with Greenfinches.

'WEST AFRICAN CANARY'

"A fine individual" visited a garden feeder in Ansdell on 27 July.

Lancashire Ringing Report

P.J.Marsh

First of all, I have had serious computer problems prior to compiling this report and some ringing recoveries sent by e-mail were irretrievably lost. If you feel you have something important from the period under review, please re-send and it will be included in next year's report.

Many thanks to everyone who submitted reports: SWLRG, Merseyside RG, Fylde RG, NLRG, Bob Danson, Tony Disley, Pete Crooks, Dave Sowter, Andre Raine, Steve White, Paul Ellis, Steve Dunstan, Chris Batty and Bill Aspin. Apologies for any omissions.

Comments have been made under the relevant species and the period covers all reports received since last year's deadline (July 2003). This means that some colour-ringed birds have "jumped the gun" and can be traced almost overnight. Metal-ringed birds can take much longer for various reasons. Please note the comment under Black-tailed Godwit with respect to the resources available to some projects but not others, affecting the speed at which information can be obtained.

As usual, please follow up and forward any ringing recoveries you hear about from members of the public as there is no way that I will hear about unless it is ringed by an "in-house" Lancashire ringer – in which case it is probably not very interesting!! Many thanks

Contact: Pete Marsh, Leck View Cottage, Ashley's Farm, High Tatham, Lancaster LA2 8PH
Mobile: 07989 866487 Tel: 015242 64944 E-mail: pbmarsh@btopenworld.com

Note recent changes of address and landline. No pigeon or local Mute Swan rings, please.

Mute Swan

NPZ/W04803	1W male	19.10.01	Amble Marina Northumberland
	Read in field	30.12.03	Jeremy Lane, Glasson Dock

These red darvic-ringed birds certainly stand out amongst the blues and whites of more local birds and please keep reporting them! This is the third recent movement from the north-east to north Lancs.

Greylag Goose

HCL	1W male	24.10.00	Loch Eye East Ross
	VV	26-27.10.00	L Balmuchy East Ross
	VV	21.01.01	Braganstown Estuary Co Louth
	VV	17-21.11.01	Loch Garten (Strathspey)
	VV	20-24.12.01	Westfield (Elgin)
	VV	4-10.11.02	Kilconquhar (Fife)
	VV	17.11.02	St Monan's (Fife).
	VV	24.11 - 08.12.02	Balmakin (Fife)
	VV	28.02.04	Leighton Moss

This interesting recovery confirms that some of the north-Lancashire Greylags are wild birds from the Icelandic population. Even without an Icelandic sighting, the movement of this individual fits in with the known pattern. VV = read in field

Pink-footed Goose

A couple of typical patterns of movement which include a well-established "straight to Norfolk, back via the Lancs coastal fields in spring" theme. VV = read in field.

CGIAN	Adult female	30.07.99	Thjorsarver Arness, ICELAND
	VV	19.10.99	Carsebreck (Perth)
	VV	23.10.99 & 09.01.00	Docking (Norfolk)
	VV	28.02.00	Loch Leven (Perth)
	VV	06.10.00	Edzell (Angus)
	VV	24.10.00	Loch Leven
	VV	03.01.01 & 18.02.01	Pilling
	VV	13.03.01 - 18.04.01	Loch Leven
	VV	16.12.01	Letton (Herts)
	VV	06.01.02	Holkham (Norfolk)
	VV	08.02.02 - 06.03.02	Martin Mere
	VV	10.03.02 - 08.04.02	Loch Leven
	VV	26.12.02	Martin Mere
	VV	12.01.03	Pilling
	VV	21.01.03	Martin Mere
	VV	23.02.03	Sweetings
	VV	01.03.03 & 02.03.03	Aldcliffe
	VV	07.03.03 & 11.03.03	Loch Leven
CGLAT	Adult male	29.07.00	Thjorsarver Arness, ICELAND
	VV	06.10.02	Edzell (Angus)
	VV	24.11.00	Holkam (Norfolk)
	VV	31.01.01	Horsey (Norfolk)
	VV	07.10.01	Loch of Strathbeg (Aberdeen)
	VV	09.01.02	Burnham Market (Norfolk)
	VV	03.10.02	Loch of Strathbeg
	VV	10.10.02	Martin Mere
	VV	01.03.03 & 02.03.03	Aldcliffe
Great White Egret			
CA61147	Pullus	28.04.03	Lac de Grand-Lieu, Loire Atlantique, FRANCE 47° 06' N 01° 40' W
Read in field		28.04.03	Lac de Grand-Lieu
Read in field		27.05.04	River Lune, Oxcliffe area
Read in field		27.05.04 - 30.05.04	Leighton Moss
Read in field		31.05.04 to at least 27.08.04	Various sites on Burry Inlet, Glamorgan, Wales
Grey Heron			
1090038	Pullus	25.05.79	Formby: 53°34'N 03°03'W
Found dead		27.02.03	Downholland Moss 53°34'N 03°01'W. 2km. 23yrs 278days
Little Ringed Plover			
Colour rings	1S female	breeding 22.06.04	Nosterfield Gravel Pits, N Yorks SE2881
Read in field		July 2004	Brockholes Quarry SD5830
Colour rings	Pullus	05.06.93	Belmont, Bolton, Lancs SD6616
Read in field		14.06.97	Belflask Quarry, N Yorks SE2977
Read in field		04.07.98	Lac de Nomas, Pyrenees-Atlantique, FRANCE 43° 25'N 26° 26'W
Read in field		07.06.03	Brockholes Quarry SD5830

Lapwing

DN86171	Pullus	28.06.87	Cockerham
Found dead		21.07.03	Bank End, Cockerham

Presumably breeding close to the natal area

Knot

SX48685	Adult	27.12.95	Nigg Oil Terminal, Cromarty Firth (Highland)
	Dead	13.01.04	Heysham. 414 km
R3WYBW	1W	01.08.03	De Richel Vieland, HOLLAND 53°17' N 5° 08'E
Read in field		25.01.04	Heysham heliport

Black-tailed Godwit

Colour rings	Ad female	04.05.00	Alftafjordur, SE ICELAND 64° 32' N 14° 35' W
Read in field		04.05.02	Alftafjordur
Read in field		20.11.02	Biervliet, Zeeland, NETHERLANDS
Read in field		15.02.03	Old Hall Marshes, Essex
Read in field		09.04.04	Ouse Washes, Cambridgeshire
Read in field		10.04.04	Snettisham, Norfolk
Read in field		29.04.04	Alftafjordur
Read in field		15-17.08.04	Mythop, Blackpool, Lancs SD3634

The Blackwit study provides an object lesson in how to respond to birders etc. who report sightings. The information is received promptly. However, birders must accept that this is a highly funded professional study and many amateur studies, in their own way of equal value, are carried out by people with far less time (and certainly no secretarial staff) to immediately respond to reports. Every effort should be made, however, from a public relations point of view, especially as some of the birds are on public j-pegged display on websites awaiting further details.

Mediterranean Gull

EX78711	Pullus	03.06.03	Chomoutov Olomouc CZECHOSLOVAKIA. 49°38'N 17°14'E
Read in field		mid-Aug 2003 to 26.03.04	Heysham outfalls, then harbour:
Read in field		22.7.04 until publication	Heysham Harbour. 1466km

Did it return to Czechoslovakia? Metal-only ring status makes any other confirmed sightings very difficult.

381322 & L75	Pullus	04.06.03	Fejer, HUNGARY. 46° 51'N 18° 33'E
Read in field		30.05.04	Brockholes Quarry, Preston, Lancs
FN27446 & 1P5	Pullus	14.06.03	Zastow Karmiski, POLAND. 51° 17' N 21° 49'E
Read in field		06.08.03	Brockholes Quarry
Read in field		08.08.03	Fishmoor Reservoir, Blackburn, Lancs
FN16023 & P98	Adult	21.05.03	Skoki Duze, Wloclawek, POLAND. 52° 36'N 19° 25'E
Read in field		July 2003	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Read in field		26.10.03	Seaforth NR, Liverpool

The Polish-ringed bird, first seen off Morecambe in 1995, again returned to the Stone Jetty area on 22.07.04

Black-headed Gull

ST206818	1W	24.07.99	Turku (Turku-Pori) FINLAND 60'29'N 22'21'E
Read in field		2002/3 & 2003/4	Battery car park, Morecambe
AA-3626	Adult	20.03.03 - 23.04.03	Svanemollebugeten (Copenhagen) DENMARK
MYS			55'43'N 12'35'E
Read in field		06.01.04	Battery car park, Morecambe
6194705	1S	17.06.03	Spillepeng (Malmo) SWEDEN
Dead		23.12.03	Cockersands
6206581	Pullus	15.06.01	Lindsta, Harbo, SWEDEN 60 6N 17 17E
Read in field		28.12.03	Battery car park, Morecambe

Common Tern

XR57677	Pullus	06.07.99	Ribble Marshes NNR
Unknown		06.03.03	Conakry, GUINEA. 9°30'N 13°42'W. 5006km.
XR88006	Pullus	23.06.91	Shotton Steel Works, Clwyd
Unknown		21.11.91	Grand Lahou, IVORY COAST 05°09'N 05°01'W
Read in field		29.05.95	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Unknown		22.01.03	Freetown, SIERRA LEONE. 8° 30'N 13° 15'W, 5053km

For a bird to be controlled in the West African wintering grounds twice is unprecedented. Its fate in 2003 is not known.

XR57740	Pullus	23.07.99	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Read in field		04.08.02	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Read in field		07.05.03	Griend, NETHERLANDS. 53°15'N 5°15'E 550 km
Read in field		26.05.03	Seaforth NR, Liverpool

The Dutch sighting is the first indication of migratory staging in continental Europe of a Seaforth bird. Bred for the first time in 2003 at Seaforth, where mid-May arrival is typical for first-time breeders.

XS96757	Pullus	11.07.88	Ribble Marshes NNR
Read in field		27.08.93	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Read in field		29.07.94	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Read in field		03.09.00	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Read in field		01.09.02	Seaforth NR, Liverpool
Found dead		20.07.03	Shotton Steel Works, Clwyd

Sightings of Ribble and Shotton birds at Seaforth are commonplace but this is the first record linking an individual with all three main colonies of NW England and N Wales. The likeliest explanation is that it was breeding at Shotton from about 1992, joining the very many birds that move from the Dee to the Mersey post-breeding.

SV32602	Pullus	03.07.99	Crompton Lodges, Farnworth, Greater Manchester
Read in field		15.06.03	Seaforth NR, Liverpool

Movements between Pennington Flash and Seaforth are common but this is the first from another GM site.

16Z 511 Pullus 24.06.93 Zeebrugge, BELGIUM

Breeding at Seaforth NR in 2003 for its eighth year.

CE73672 Pullus 14.07.82 Ribble Marshes NNR

XS96385 Pullus 10.07.85 Ribble Marshes NNR

XS72174 Pullus 28.06.86 Shotton Steelworks, Clwyd

Three of the original colonists at Seaforth breeding in 2003 for at least their fifteenth year.

SX15219 Pullus 17.07.90 Holme Pierrepont, Nottinghamshire

Breeding at Seaforth NR in 2003 for its eleventh year.

SX77609 Pullus 23.06.96 Baston Fen, Lincolnshire

Breeding at Seaforth NR in 2003 for its sixth year.

XR39874 Pullus 01.08.91 Ynys Gorad Goch, Anglesey

Breeding at Seaforth NR in 2003 for its ninth year.

XR97651 Pullus 04.07.91 Kingsbury Water Park, Staffordshire.

Breeding at Seaforth NR in 2003 for its eleventh year.

Barn Owl

GN26207 Pullus 07.07.00 Great Altcar

Freshly dead 18.03.03 Hale Nook, Out Rawcliffe.

53°53'N 2°56'W. 38km

GN44069 Pullus 30.06.03 Great Altcar. 53°33'N 03°02'W

Freshly dead 15.10.03 Bickerstaffe. 53°32'N 02°51'W. 12km

An unusual trans-Ribble recovery followed by the longest movement within West Lancashire.

Swift

SA50484 Adult 28.05.98 Fazakerley WWTW, Liverpool

Retrapped 14.07.01 Fazakerley WWTW, Liverpool

Freshly dead 04.07.03 Norris Green, Liverpool. 2km

Typical site fidelity for this species.

Sand Martin

R391136 Juvenile 13.06.03 Whittington

Controlled 16.07.03 Titchfield Haven, Hampshire. 386 km.

Robin

R390793 1W 19.02.04 Over Kellet, nr Lancaster

Found dead 10.04.04 Skelwith Fold, Ambleside (Cumbria). 36 km

P922940 Juvenile 16.06.03 Mere Sands Wood, nr Rufford, Lancs

Controlled 18.07.03 Formby. 15 km WSW over 32days

This seems quite a lengthy movement for a bird still in juvenile plumage. A fairly flat journey, however!

Blackbird

7424463	1W male	02.10.02	Bomyra (Rogaland) NORWAY 59°0'N 5°55'E
Controlled		22.03.03	Heysham

Very few continental birds are considered to make landfall at Heysham on spring passage.

Sedge Warbler

P649712	Juvenile	04.08.02	Heysham
Controlled		01.10.03	Trunvel (Finistere) FRANCE 47°55'N 4°19'W

Reed Warbler

J875307	1W	07.08.94	Leighton Moss
Controlled		26.05.04	Leighton Moss. 9 years 293 days

K492398	1W	16.08.96	Heysham
Controlled		02.05.04	Heysham. 7 years 260 days

K829860	1W	13.08.96	Leighton Moss
Controlled		21.06.04	Leighton Moss. 7 years 313 days

None of these long-lived birds had been retrapped in the intervening years – very odd given the limited area of suitable habitat at Heysham!

P694061	Adult	01.06.02	Heysham
Controlled		26.05.04	Leighton Moss

R510611	Juvenile	16.08.03	Leighton Moss
Controlled		07.09.03	Titchfield Haven, Hampshire. 387 km

R510164	Juvenile	09.08.03	Leighton Moss
Controlled		23.09.03	Woolston Eyes, Cheshire. 89 km

P259860	1W male	10.09.00	Chew Valley Lake, Avon
Controlled		22.06.03	Mere Sands Wood 258 km

R016393	1W	27.08.02	Leighton Moss
Controlled		10.08.03	Chenac St. Seurin d'Uzet (Charente Maritime) FRANCE 45°31'N 0°49'W

P887652	Adult	30.05.03	Scotman's Flash, Wigan
Controlled		22.06.03	Mere Sands Wood. 19km

Presumably a late migrant?

Blackcap

P648457	Juvenile	16.09.02	Heysham
Controlled		18.04.04	Flimby, Maryport, Cumbria. 82 km

Willow Warbler

ACD170	Juvenile	14.07.03	Leighton Moss
Controlled		10.08.03	Swindon, Wilts. SU1285 297 km

Goldcrest

6Z7706	1W male	19.10.02	Heysham
Killed by cat		12.12.03	Macclesfield, Cheshire. SJ9276 99 km

Not a good choice of wintering site. Note that the data reveal that it also migrated as an adult; there is no evidence to suggest that the origin of Heysham migrants is other than from the north

6Z7989	1W female	14.10.03	Heysham
Controlled		18.10.03	Pilling Marsh 12km

Relatively leisurely stuff from this partial migrant!

Long-tailed Tit

8U8221	Full grown	18.10.03	Pilling Marsh
Controlled		30.03.04	Grizedale Forest, Satterthwaite, Cumbria. 47km

Like Heysham, Pilling Marsh is likely to receive the more adventurous Long-tailed Tits on coastal passage. For this early breeding species, Satterthwaite is likely to be the natal/prospective breeding area.

Great Tit

K683162	1W female	26.01.97	Standish, Wigan. 53°35'N 2°38'W
Controlled		06.10.97	Wath Ings, S. Yorks. 53°31'N 1°22'W, 84km
Controlled		02.03.03	Old Moor Farm, Barnsley, S. Yorks. 53°31'N 1°23'W

A Great Tit whose memoirs are worth reading? Presumably originating in the Barnsley area and moving west for the first winter (only?). 23 years at Heysham has produced no evidence of any irruptive behaviour, obvious passage or long-distance recoveries of this species, in contrast to the supposedly more resident Coal Tit

Chaffinch

P922596	1W male	30.12.03	Ince Blundell, north Merseyside
Controlled		26.03.04	Over Kellet. 70 km

A Lake District or thereabouts bird moving back north from wintering on lowland agricultural fields?

V091688	1W female	21.10.00	Vlieland Barakkenkamp, Vlieland, NETHERLANDS
Controlled		03.03.03	Mere Sands Wood. 518 km

Greenfinch

VF90730	1W male	11.10.03	Heysham
Controlled		12.4.04	Slaley, Northumberland, NY9856. 112km

This is a very predictable recovery. Huge numbers moved through Heysham on a NE to SW heading during mid-October 2003 and this was one of them

TB45668	Ad female	30.10.03	Heysham
Found dead		11.01.04	Giggleswick, N. Yorks. SD8163, 42 km

This one, in contrast, was ringed after the north to south movement had petered out and it ended up moving north-east!

VF 90809	1W male	15.05.03	Heysham
Cat		04.02.04	Stainton, Cumbria. SD5285, 27 km

A typical northerly wintering site for this individual – unless it was a very late passage bird in May.

Siskin

P800531	1W male	15.02.03	Dimples, Garstang
Found dead		25.04.03	Rybachiy, Zelenogradskiy, Kalingrad, RUSSIA 1522km

Interesting: virtually all other recoveries seem to indicate birds from breeding sites in the north of Britain

R465171	1W male	08.02.03	Highley, Shropshire
Controlled		21.10.03	Heysham. 180 km

Twite

R547140	1W female	21.03.03	Heysham
Controlled		13.07.03	Sanda Island, Strathclyde. 220km
P447832	1W	09.08.03	Sanda Island
Controlled		17.11.03	Heysham
R387582	1W	27.07.03	Sanda Kintyre, Strathclyde
Controlled		07.11.03	Heysham

These are the recoveries traced to specific ring numbers. In addition, Heysham-ringed birds were seen in the field during the breeding season on Eigg, Sanda and (most interestingly and unexpectedly) Bornish machair on South Uist – Outer Hebridean birds were generally regarded as sedentary. Two Heysham-ringed birds from 2002/3 were controlled in 2003/4 at Borwick Rails, near Millom, Cumbria. Further details on the huge amount of ringing in east Lancashire will be presented in a future report, probably next year. As had been suggested by previous south Pennine studies, the wintering area comprised the coastal saltmarshes from Lincolnshire to north Kent. One or two were also seen inland on passage, notably a well-publicised bird from Fowlmere, Cambridgeshire. More contentious was a sighting of a Heysham-ringed bird on the Lincolnshire coast

Tree Sparrow

TB34913	Pullus	26.06.03	Eagland Hill, Fylde
Controlled		20.02.04	Forton. 10 km

This obviously suggests movement between different, albeit close, populations. Please report ALL sightings of colour-ringed Tree Sparrows during the coming year, as well as the number of unringed birds in the flock. This is part of a study by Bob Danson to try and find out the dispersal pattern outside the breeding season

Reed Bunting

N807201	1W	25.08.02	Dimples, Garstang
Controlled		19.01.03	Meols, Wirral, Merseyside. 61km
Controlled again		11.10.03	Dimples

Arguably the most informative and significant recovery in the whole report as it reveals the wintering site for a red-listed species where the decline is perceived as relating to lack of seed-rich farmland habitat in winter

DARTFORD WARBLER

NEAR LORDS HALL, DARWEN MOOR,

3 - 17 MAY 2003

Steve Martin

The morning had not looked promising, low cloud enveloping Winter Hill and a southwest wind raised thoughts of abandoning moorland surveys and sticking to the "low" ground at Belmont. However, the forecast gave grounds for optimism so I decided to chance it.

The survey had been largely uneventful with the odd wader punctuating the counting of Meadow Pipits, Skylarks and conspicuous cock Red Grouse. I had just sat down in an area of rank heather to view the panorama, the town of Darwen lay hemmed in its valley below and a distant Pendle Hill was now bathed in early morning sunshine; the day was certainly improving.

As I wrote "7.40 am" in the finish time box of the BTO BBS survey sheet, I caught a brief series of scratchy notes to my left and turning round saw a dark bird sink into the deep heather. My first thought was "odd Linnet", but assuming the bird would reappear I nonchalantly continued to take in the view. A minute or so later and more wheezy notes. Focussing on the singer my hands began to shake. I instantly knew what it was but my brain told me that it shouldn't be on a Lancashire grouse-moor! There was no mistake; I was looking at an adult male Dartford Warbler. Anyone who has been privileged enough to find a rare bird will appreciate the thoughts and actions of the following minutes as I desperately tried to think straight. Shaking like a leaf, I tried to contact another birder on the mobile who could verify the record whilst keeping track of the warbler which was now flitting amongst the heather whilst singing conspicuously. My father (D. S. Martin) was soon on his way but with thoughts that the Lancashire records committee may have me tried for nepotism, I tried unsuccessfully to contact other birder friends (holidaying in Poland and Lesvos as it transpired). I already had an inclination that access might be a difficulty, as my permission to access this area of private moorland had been granted subject to conditions, so after my father and I had enjoyed some superb close views (but not a camera between us) I contacted the landowner.

As I feared, he and his gamekeeper insisted that this area was not to be disturbed as it was a critical time for breeding grouse (on eggs or with small young) and other ground-nesting birds. After discussions with the County Recorder it was reluctantly decided that news of the bird could not be generally released. However, all parties agreed that the bird could be monitored (presuming it stayed) on a weekly basis, with attempts to photograph the bird made on these visits. If the warbler stayed long enough not to compromise breeding grouse (or if the bird moved to an area where it was visible from a public footpath) then the bird could be more widely enjoyed.

The warbler stayed for another fortnight, inhabiting a small area of rank heather at around the 1200-foot contour (not dissimilar in appearance to a southern heath) and was even observed to be constructing a cock-nest on one occasion. However, due to inclement weather conditions the bird became more skulking and no photographs of the bird were obtained although it did give opportunity for a tiny number of hopeful photographers to see the bird.

The bird becomes the first (much anticipated) record for Lancashire, following four previous records for northern England. One question remains. When did the bird arrive? The week before had been generally wet with a south-westerly wind, not conditions one would expect to bring a sedentary southern species to Lancashire. The warm settled spell with easterly and south-easterly winds in March and early April is probably favourite, but the intriguing possibility remains that the bird could have been present for some time, possibly even an undiscovered overwintering resident on a virtually unvisited section of moor.

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE

STOCKS RESERVOIR, 12 MARCH 2003

Roy Taylor and Peter Wilson

At about 17.15 we were saying our farewells in the car park after a meeting at Stocks Reservoir Boardhouse when we noticed a very large bird with slow wing beats flying north up the valley towards the dam. With the sun behind and to the right of it, the bird appeared as a dark silhouette; a Grey Heron was the obvious candidate but it was a very odd looking heron. Focusing on the bird, which was now about 100 metres away and flying at a height of approximately 30 metres above the dam wall, a number of images starting registering with RT. First, it was a very large bird of prey considerably bigger than a Buzzard. Second, its plumage appeared all dark brown and finally it had a massive, deep bill that was pale (yellowish?) towards the base and dark at the tip. It had to be a White-tailed Eagle – PW sprinted to his car and grabbed his own binoculars.

We watched the bird fly steadily north, at the same height, along the reservoir, putting up the entire gull roost as it flew through. Once the eagle had passed us, we noticed it was marked with blue wing tags on the upper forewings. It was in view for probably about a minute before it disappeared around the corner of the reservoir.

We immediately tried contacting Margaret Breaks, who turned out to be at the bird hide at the head of the reservoir, whilst Roy contacted NW Birdline. The bird failed to fly pass the hide, but Margaret did see the gulls already at the roost suddenly lift in unison into the air. The three of us continued to look for the bird until last light but failed to relocate it.

The next day we contacted Roger Broad of RSPB Scotland, who has been involved with the re-introduction of White-tailed Eagles. He confirmed that this was indeed a Scottish bird that had fledged in 2002. He also believed that this was the furthest proven movement of a Scottish White-tailed Eagle.

Description

First impressions (without binoculars) as it passed against a dark background, were of a very large, dark looking bird with paler 'patches' on the upper wing and body; it dwarfed nearby Herring Gulls. The wings were very broad and long, and had a very rectangular look, further enhanced by the 'square' wing tip. In addition, the bird appeared very front heavy, due to the apparently short tail in proportion to the rest of the bird.

More detail was revealed with binoculars. The head of the bird was very dark, almost black, with a very 'heavy' hooked bill – large in proportion to the rest of the head. The base of the bill was pale, perhaps yellowish, although colour was hard to discern in the poor, late afternoon light. The remainder of the bill (perhaps half or less) was dark. The pale looking lores appeared as a 'murky', off-white patch. The long neck and heavy bill gave it a 'front heavy' appearance. The bird flew steadily on slightly 'arched' wings, the wing beats were not particularly deep (nowhere near as deep as a Grey Heron, for instance), and the wing-tips were deeply 'fingered'.

The upper wings and body were a very dark shade of brown, their uniformity relieved by the presence of paler mottling on the mantle (but not contrasting markedly with the rest of the bird) and a dark, rufous colouration, appearing as a patch on the median and greater coverts. The wing-tags were extremely obvious on each down beat, as they were sucked upwards.

THE STATUS OF GREYLAG GEESE IN NORTH LANCASHIRE

John Wilson

In recent years there has been much controversy over the status of Greylags in north Lancashire and neighbouring areas of Cumbria. This stems from the comparatively recent colonisation by a feral breeding population and the resulting problems of distinguishing truly wild birds of Icelandic origin. The recent sighting of a Scottish-ringed bird at Leighton Moss almost certainly of Icelandic origin (see Ringing Report for full details) has brought the issue to the fore. This short note brings together the published information, mainly from the Reports of The Lancaster and District BWS and the Leighton Moss log, from 1959 onwards. The Society's recording area includes adjoining parts of Lancashire and Cumbria and so covers the whole winter range of this Greylag population.

In the 1960s the population ranged between the Kent estuary in Cumbria, along the Morecambe Bay shore and inland to the flood plain of the River Lune north of Caton in Lancashire. The table shows the maximum counts reported from each of these main resorts (it must be stressed that these are not co-ordinated counts). Coverage was rather *ad hoc* early in the period with no regular Wildfowl Counts (later WeBS) until the early 1970s, and even then counts were not undertaken regularly or co-ordinated and it was quite possible for the same flock to move between sites and be recorded at both. The published accounts depended on observers sending in counts and also on the report editor thinking them important enough to include so a blank in any year or site does not necessarily mean there were no birds there. Allowing for these factors there does appear to have been a somewhat fluctuating population, possibly related to the severity of the winter weather. A link with the Scottish population is shown by a bird ringed in Montrose on 22 Nov 1952 and found dead at Arnside almost a year later.

Barnes (1960) described the status of Greylags in the 1950s as "Regular winter visitor, mid October to early April, to Kent and Lune estuaries and marshes between them; they sometimes feed inland. Normal winter population two to four hundred". The next Checklist of the Birds of Lancaster District (Hague 1969) recorded the winter status unchanged from Barnes's account ten years previously. However, he added that "Recently there have been increasing reports of summer occurrences – probably connected with the current re-introduction of the species into Lakeland"

The table below confirms these status descriptions, that the species was purely a winter visitor of presumed Icelandic origin until the summer of 1965, when for the first time a small party of presumed feral birds were reported on the Lune and at Leighton Moss. The first attempt at introductions was being undertaken on the Duddon and in the Lake District by wildfowlers about this time.

Only small numbers (2-5) of feral birds were recorded irregularly at Leighton Moss until the spring and summer of 1979 when 8-10 summered. The first breeding record was in 1980 (five pairs). Unsuccessful breeding may have occurred the previous years as no attempt was made to find nests but the young are difficult to miss. Breeding numbers increased to about 20 by 1988, rearing about 65 young, there was also a non-breeding population or failed breeders of c.60 birds. The breeding population has stabilized at 20-25 pairs with c. 50-70 non-breeders.

The table details the recorded peak at each of the three wintering areas. Morecambe Bay shore has received the most coverage with at least weekly counts throughout the winter since

the early 1970s. The two other localities received much less attention. In recent years birders have tended to dismiss this species somewhat. The table also details the peak spring/summer counts made at Leighton Moss each year from 1979 on. These include breeding, summering and young birds close to fledging.

Table 1

Year	Kent Estuary (Cumbria)	Morecambe Bay Shore	Lune Valley	Leighton Moss Summer Population
1959	230	186		
1960		208		
1961		290	290	
1962			200	
1963			50	
1964	255	216		
1965	No data			
1966	230	480		
1967	140	124		
1968		126		
1969	150		155	
1970	260			
1971	275		220	
1972	348			
1973	340			
1974	420	250	275	
1975		363	250	
1976		55	430	
1977		100	300	
1978	153	295	200	
1979	161	240	53	10
1980	150	220		5 Pairs
1981		220	115	5 Pairs
1982		270	240	
1983		320	340	58
1984		350	255	55
1985	203	250	160	58
1986	171	400	253	55
1987	100	310	248	95
1988		265	61	165
1989		290	17	160
1990		312	110	160
1991	246	380	110	150
1992	240	420	200	140
1993		320	250	150
1994		340	4	140
1995		280		155
1996		345	6	175
1997		310		190
1998		290		

What is the present situation? Do Icelandic birds still winter in the area? It is not just a simple question of subtracting the Leighton summer population from the winter grand total because, although some of the Leighton birds remain in the area throughout the winter, some certainly winter elsewhere. This is well shown by birds with distinctive plumage characters which every year only turn up from late February to breed. It is possible that feral birds from other breeding sites winter in the area but there is no proof of this.

However, there are distinctive behavioural differences which enable wild and feral birds to be distinguished. Basically, the feral population roosts at Leighton Moss and for the most part feeds on the fields around the Moss although they do also feed out on the Morecambe Bay salt marshes, especially in autumn and early winter. By contrast, the wild population originally roosted mainly on the Keer estuary, but in recent years has taken to roosting on the lagoons of the Allen/Eric Morecambe complex and graze the saltmarsh or the fields adjacent to the marshes. They also still flight at times to the Lune floodplain (K. Woods pers. com.) and the Kent although both numbers and frequency are lower than in former times.

The two populations therefore mainly mix when grazing the saltmarshes. Differences in the behaviour of these two groups is, however, marked, especially in early spring. The presumed Icelandic birds grazing the saltmarshes and adjacent fields will not allow any close approach, taking flight even when a vehicle approaches the field. The Lune population is equally difficult to approach (K. Woods). By contrast, the feral population is difficult to get into flight even when an observer walks into the field shouting and clapping his hands. Both populations are disturbed by farmers attempting to protect their grazing, if anything the feral birds are subject to more such harassment than the presumed wild birds.

What then is the present size of the wild population? I would suggest that it is within the same range (200-400) as that of the 1960s and 1970s. In recent years there have been counts in early spring of around 200 birds behaving as described above. It is possible that the recent run of mild winters has led to a decline in the population allowing birds to winter further north; certainly the figures suggest that earlier peaks in excess of 400 have not been reached.

References

Barnes, J.A.G. (1959) A Checklist of the Birds of the Lancaster District. LDBWS

Hague, K.E (1968) A New Checklist of the Birds of the Lancaster District. LDBWS

WATER PIPITS ON THE NORTH RIBBLE MARSHES AT WARTON BANK

Stephen Dunstan

One of the most surprising developments in Fylde birding in recent years has been the regular presence of Water Pipits on the Ribble estuary at Warton Bank, surprising both because of the habitat and the numbers of birds involved. This short note discusses what Fylde birders have learned so far about these birds and sets out some of the things we have still to discover.

The first evidence of what is now almost taken for granted was in the winter of 1998/99, as a result of the observations of, amongst others, Dave Pitman and Geoff Wilby. Since then the occurrence pattern has been remarkably similar year on year as the following summary shows:

- 1998/1999** At least two wintering. Up to 19 on spring tides in early March. Still eleven present in late March, and three into early April.
- 1999/2000** Up to five confidently claimed throughout the winter period, and a suggestion of up to eight at the end of 1999. Counts on spring tides peaked at up to 19 in early March.
- 2000/2001** Again up to five confidently claimed throughout the winter period. Up to ten in unusually favourable viewing conditions on 10 Feb. Spring peak of 15 on 10 March, with six still on 9 April.
- 2001/2002** Up to two at the end of 2001 with six in January. At least 11 in early February, 15 in late February and at least eight in March.
- 2002/2003** At least four wintering, up to eight seen in March when optimum viewing conditions did not materialize.
- 2003/2004** At least two wintering. Spring peak a minimum of 12 in mid-March, birds present until 7 April.

So it can be seen that in terms of published records there is a very clear pattern of a small wintering group apparently augmented by passage birds in the spring, but some caution needs to be exercised – exceptional winter tidal conditions can reveal additional birds.

The Migration Atlas notes that for a montane species of southern Europe a surprising number of Water Pipits move north or north-west in winter. Sites occupied include *some brackish coastal sites* as well as coastal and inland freshwater sites (my italics). Birds arrive from mid-October to late November, most departing by the end of April. In this context the Warton Bank population is perhaps not so surprising after all. Birds arrive in November and leave by early April, as would be expected at one of the more far-flung wintering sites. The saltmarsh at Warton Bank is only flooded on the highest of tides, and a freshwater dyke flowing out of the British Aerospace factory enables Water Rails to breed successfully on their only known saltmarsh breeding site in Lancashire.

It has been suggested that the birds frequent the freshwater ditch and are flushed onto the marsh by high tides. Field observations suggest this is not the case. Typically, on a spring tide as the marsh starts to flood groups of perhaps half a dozen pipits are picked up distantly in flight. They may fly right past without landing and disappear for a while. This is repeated several

times and eventually some birds fly close enough to be heard calling, then they start landing on the fence-posts a few at a time. They are volatile and frequently fly off again in a group after a short stay.

On a good day, the airborne flock can increase to 25+ pipits flying around too distantly to identify. It is always the case that a lot more pipits are seen than identified. After more visits to the fence, birds begin to drop onto the ground and feed. This is when the good views start. They still frequently all fly off, but as the tide rises they become more faithful to the fence and ground below it and spend more and more time in view.

Typically they then start to move slowly downriver feeding on the shrinking grassy islands up to 100 yards downstream of Bank Lane. It's at this time that views can be at their best. As the tide drops they can return to the fence area and linger for a couple of hours after high tide, but usually they disappear after the peak.

Rock Pipits do occur at Warton Bank, all those that have been sub-specifically identified have been considered to be *littoralis* Scandinavian birds. When pipits are close enough to identify though it is invariably the case that Water Pipits greatly outnumber Rock Pipits. This is not the case anywhere else on the Fylde, even at sites as close to Warton as Fairhaven. There is clearly some attractive feeding for the birds on the saltmarsh, but at present we do not know what. There has been an interesting series of records across the river at Marshside suggesting that there has been a regular wintering population on the Ribble, but this is very much conjecture at this stage.

In a Lancashire context the Warton population is unique in terms of numbers, but the species has been regularly recorded since it was split as a full species. The only site in north-west England with numbers approaching Warton is the Dee estuary in the Neston area, identification of birds at that site is problematic but several Water Pipits undoubtedly do winter there. Identification of the Warton birds was contentious initially, but a detailed set of photographic records has been developed which has largely ended the debate about their identification. Some of this photographic database can be seen at:

http://www.fyldebirdclub.org/warton_pipit_page.htm

Reference:

Finding Water Pipits on the Ribble Estuary, Stephen Dunstan and Paul Ellis, Birdguides website

Regional Reports and Other Contributors

Alt WeBS	ELOC Report	Morecambe Bay Webs
Birdguides	English Nature	Myerscough Quarry Report
Brockholes Quarry Report	Fylde Bird Club web site	Ribble WeBS
BTO Migration Watch	Heysham Report	ROC Report
CNHS Report	LDBWS website	Seaforth Bird Report
Countryside Council for Wales	Mere Sands Wood Report	St. Helens Recorders Group
East Lancashire Birding website	MMWWT logs	United Utilities

AN ODD QUAIL AT PLEX MOSS

Chris Kehoe

An uncharacteristically obliging quail *Coturnix sp.* at Plex Moss in June 2002 was well watched and even photographed (see Lancashire Bird Report 2002). Just as unusual was the actual appearance of this bird. Rather than showing the characteristic black and white throat pattern of a typical Common Quail *C. coturnix* of the migratory nominate race, it showed a plain rufous-brown throat and head sides. References to dark-throated Common Quails are rather uncommon: resident populations from south of the Sahara, e.g. *C. c. erlangeri*, have dark throats (but are hardly likely vagrants) and BWP makes reference to an uncommon 'rufous morph' found in European birds among which dark-throated individuals are rarely found. Perhaps the Plex Moss bird was just such a rare variant.

However, a dark-throated but otherwise very Common Quail-like appearance also sounds a good match for male Japanese Quail *C. japonica* which might occur as an escape. Wild *japonica* occur no closer than Mongolia but most quail farming involves Japanese Quail, which was domesticated in China millennia ago and has been reared in Europe for almost as long. As a Schedule 1 protected species Common Quail cannot be kept without a special permit and the species may never have been domesticated anyway. Furthermore, *japonica* is also kept as an exotic, most quails scuttling around in tropical houses, or even up-market garden centres, are *japonica* (although the smaller Blue-breasted Quail *C. chinensis* is another favourite). Also, because of their rapid breeding cycle quails are favoured subjects in research laboratories and *japonica* is the most readily available species there too. So the escape risk is high and escapes could originate from various sources, there are even reports that escaped *japonica* may have bred 'in the wild' in the UK. Domesticated *japonica* are thought to lack the migratory urges of their wild ancestors so records of quail outside the summer period need to be considered very carefully, as do any unusually large concentrations of quail at any time.

In parts of southern Europe *japonica* are released as game and concerns have been raised about the conservation implications of such releases, especially because such birds may hybridise with wild *coturnix*. The two taxa do seem to hybridise reasonably freely and apparently produce fertile offspring in captivity (Birdwatch Magazine Oct. 2002, p10). Hybrid offspring are likely to inherit some of the migratory instincts of *coturnix*.

Given the long history of domesticated *japonica* in Europe, perhaps the whole notion of genuine *coturnix* sometimes having a dark-throat should be reviewed, but assuming both species occur how can they be distinguished. Voice is probably the best, and maybe the only, means of distinguishing genuine *coturnix* from *japonica*. The advertising song clearly doesn't work as a fully effective isolating mechanism but it is apparently distinguishable to the human ear. Although the 'song' of *japonica* is basically similar to that of *coturnix* in structure (and should be readily identifiable as that of a 'quail') it reportedly lacks the whistled quality of *coturnix* and is described as lower and more grunting (Grimmett *et al*, 1998; Robson, 2000). However, it is possible that because nobody has been listening for a difference some of us may have been hearing *japonica* without actually realising it. Just how a hybrid might sing is unknown.

As dark-throated *coturnix* are reportedly rare (if they exist at all), and the escape risks associated with *japonica* are very real, any dark-throated birds need to be viewed with caution. The exact scale of the problem of escaped or released *japonica* is unknown but a search for images on the internet of quail in Europe produces numerous returns featuring dark-throated birds, about 50% in fact. It is natural to assume that many, if not all, of these birds are *japonica*, especially as most are from countries where releases are known to occur. The very fact that these birds allow themselves to be photographed so easily is at odds with the typical behaviour

of wild *coturnix*. Another dark-throated *japonica*-like bird in Britain (in Dorset in September 2002) allowed itself to be photographed at 10 feet range!

It may not be possible to determine the true identity of the Plex Moss quail but there must be a doubt over whether it was a certain *coturnix*. If Japanese Quails are at large in the region then recording them as such is a conservation priority. As a first step, voice recordings would allow the scale of any problem to be assessed.

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Arrival and Departure Dates for Summer Migrants.

The table of first and last dates is a regular feature of the bird report giving an 'at a glance' view of actual and expected first arrival and last departure dates. The table summarises the following information:

The earliest spring arrival and latest autumn records in 2003.

The earliest recorded spring and latest recorded autumn records.

The average (median) earliest arrival and latest departure dates.

The trends for Earlier or Later arrival or departure where these are statistically significant between 1970 and 2003.

Records of presumed over-wintering and sickly birds have been omitted.

Trend data were last analysed in 2002. Newly significant trends are earlier arrival and later departure of Ring Ouzel; earlier arrival of Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat; and later departure of Lesser Whitethroat.

	Spring				Autumn			
	2003	Earliest	Median	Trend	2003	Latest	Median	Trend
Garganey	15/3	24.2.95	29/3	ns				
Osprey	14/3	8.3.97	6/4	E		26.10.99		
LRP	14/3	12.3.95 & 03	27/3	E	9/9	15.10.79	16/9	ns
Dotterel	18/4	29.3.89	28/4	ns				
Whimbrel	21/3	11.3.78	10/4	ns	15/9	6.11.88		
Wood Sandpiper	11/5	14.4.83	4/5	ns	29/9	28.10.78	21/9	ns
Common Sandpiper	13/4	21.3.66	7/4	ns	15/10	29.10.77	12/10	ns
Sandwich Tern	25/3	2.3.92	29/3	ns	26/10	2.12.94	11/10	ns
Common Tern	12/4	1.4.91	12/4	ns	7/10	17.11.77	22/10	E
Arctic Tern	12/4	1.4.94	17/4	ns	7/10	2.11.95	10/10	ns
Little Tern	26/4	13.4.91	24/4	ns	23/10	23.10.03	17/9	ns
Black Tern	14/4	11.4.80	28/4	ns	10/10	12.11.00	8/10	ns
Turtle Dove	21/4	13.4.80	3/5	L	13/9	18.10.92		
Cuckoo	13/4	23.3.00	18/4	L	17/8	29.9.75	30/8	E
Swift	19/4	4.4.90 & 02	21/4	ns	14/11	4.12.63	10/10	ns
Sand Martin	11/3	24.2.90	12/3	E	2/10	29.10.72	3/10	ns
Swallow	26/3	10.3.97	27/3	E	6/12	31.12.86	14/11	ns
House Martin	23/3	17.3.63	4/4	ns	13/10	31.12.81	2/11	E
Tree Pipit	20/3	17.3.57	6/4	ns	10/10	18.10.67		
Yellow Wagtail	13/4	24.3.96	9/4	ns	2/10	11.11.95	5/10	ns
Redstart	14/4	21.3.00	12/4	ns	18/9	10.11.82	9/10	E
Whinchat	18/4	20.3.76	20/4	L	26/10	12.11.79	19/10	E
Wheatear	26/2	26.2.03	11/3	ns	18/10	20.11.98 & 01	1/11	ns
Ring Ouzel	16/3	11.3.99	24/3	E	12/12	11.12.00	31/10	L
Grasshopper Warbler	11/4	9.4.75	17/4	ns	/	2.10.68		
Sedge Warbler	27/3	29.3.97	14/4	E	29/9	14.11.96	30/9	ns
Reed Warbler	15/4	7.4.02	18/4	E	5/10	14.11.93	10/10	ns
Garden Warbler	16/4	14.4.93	21/4	E	22/9	13.11.95	23/10	ns
Lesser Whitethroat	22/4	16.4.44	23/4	E	7/9	23.11.99	19/9	L
Whitethroat	14/4	6.4.65	20/4	E	28/9	23.10.90	29/9	ns
Wood Warbler	21/4	14.4.79	22/4	ns	24/8	26.9.67		
Willow Warbler	22/3	18.3.79	31/3	ns	12/10	18.11.89	12/10	ns
Spotted Flycatcher	28/4	20.4.85	1/5	ns	27/9	15.11.79	5/10	ns
Pied Flycatcher	15/4	12.4.94	17/4	ns	11/10	3.11.01	26/9	ns