

The RSPB Lancaster Local Group Newsletter

Welcome to the “bumper issue” of the Autumn 2018 RSPB Lancaster Local Group Newsletter. We hope that you will join us over the coming months for our programme of Autumn and Winter indoor events and outings. As I compile this newsletter, winter migrants are starting to arrive, with 19,615 pinkfooted geese recorded during the International Goose Count at Pilling Lane Ends on 21 October and 211 whooper swans at Moss Lane, Thurnham on 29 October, a sure sign that winter is on its way.

In this newsletter Valerie has her leader's report and details of our participation in the Centre @ Halton Fun Day. David has some news regarding your membership of the local group. We have an update from John on little egrets locally and Gail Armstrong follows up her fascinating talk with an article on bats. Stephen Young reviews two new books on curlews and relates them to the plight of the curlew in our area. David Talbot gives a report of his trip to Ghana and we have an update from Leighton Moss from Joe Fraser-Turner and Naomi Wadsworth.

If you would like to contribute a short article, or have any interesting wildlife news from your local patch, please email your contribution for the next RSPB Lancaster Local Group Newsletter to kenharrison_1@yahoo.co.uk no later than 30 March 2019.

Ken Harrison – Newsletter Editor

Leader's Report

We are nearly at the end of another year of our group activities with the nights drawing in and the weather changing to a more autumnal theme. I hope you have enjoyed the events we have put together for you, we are always happy to hear of any ideas you may have for our meetings. We are in the process of putting together the programme for 2019 which will be finalised by the time you read this, but if you have any suggestions for indoor or outdoor events, or would be willing to lead a walk for us, please speak to me or any committee member and we will gladly incorporate these into future programmes.

We started our indoor meetings this year at the new venue of the Centre @ Halton and as this has proved successful we will be there again for 2019. Our autumn meetings started with a talk by David Tolliday about the Kruger National Park in South Africa. This was our annual meeting at Leighton Moss as we traditionally hold our AGM there each September. In October we are back at Halton with an illustrated talk by Lee Schofield, the site manager of RSPB Haweswater, who will explain how they are working to demonstrate more sustainable methods of hill farming. In November we have planned a social occasion which will include a quiz, a competition, a wildlife film presentation and refreshments with a Christmas theme. We hope you will join us for a friendly get together.

Our spring meetings in April started with a well attended visit to a wildlife garden in Ingleton, but our expectations of seeing plenty of migrants during our sea watch at Heysham were not fulfilled, as the wind was in the wrong direction. But to compensate for this, Jean Roberts was able to take us to an area at Middleton Lakes not usually accessible to the public and we had sightings of a total of 8 warblers. In May we had a visit to Littledale and in June to Hodbarrow. Unfortunately I was unable to lead the walk at Hay Bridge in July due to a broken ankle, but I did get a lift there and spent a pleasant time on

the veranda with good views of the resident pair of ospreys with their 2 chicks. I was able to meet the group before they set off around the reserve under the leadership of Michael Gardner, who had kindly stepped in to lead. The group returned for lunch on the veranda followed by a walk through the raised bog area. As there were also people visiting the reserve who called in at the veranda I had plenty of company to chat to. The day out was a real change during the 6 weeks with my leg in plaster. Our events for August and September were affected by the weather. At the bat evening we could not go out as planned with bat detectors, due to torrential rain, but we were treated to an excellent talk by Gail Armstrong. I hope you enjoy Gail's article in this newsletter. In September we abandoned the walk along the Lune, again due to torrential rain, and adjourned to the coffee shop at the Centre @ Halton for a drink and a chat.

In October, our visit is to Pilling to see the thousands of geese that gather there for the winter. For November we plan a train ride from Silverdale to Arnside and a walk back. Anyone finding it more convenient to travel from another station along the line should meet us at the station at Arnside. The start time has been changed due to the 10.00am train at Silverdale being cancelled, so we will now be catching the 10.30am instead. The details of the walk as shown in our original programme were incorrect and should have stated that after skirting the Kent Estuary at Arnside Marsh, we will head inland to the Local Nature Reserve of Teddy Heights, and the edge of Silverdale Moss. Passing through Gait Barrows NNR we will then make our way back to Leighton Moss and Silverdale Station. Our final meeting of the year in December will be at Teal Bay at the eastern end of Morecambe promenade, followed by mince pies and refreshments at the home of our friends at Heysham.

In addition to our advertised programme, we took our display board and leaflets along to the School Summer Fair at Glasson Dock in July and in September to the Fun Day at the Centre @ Halton.

On both occasions we joined the RSPB Events Team in their gazebo. These were excellent opportunities to speak to local people and promote awareness of our group in the community as well as membership of the RSPB. More details of both these events can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.



Halton Fun Day stall © Sophie King (RSPB Events Team)

Looking forward to seeing many of our members at our events in 2019 and thank you for the support over the present year.

Full details of all our indoor and outdoor meetings can be found on our website at www.rspb.org.uk/groups/lancaster

Valerie Hall – Local Group Leader

Committee Update

Great news for our committee is that we now have a secretary. Teresa Seed saw our advert for a secretary and volunteered to help. She was duly elected to the committee at the AGM in September and is now confirmed as our secretary. We welcome her to the group and the committee and look forward to working with her. We also thank Ken for his very efficient work as our minutes secretary since Michael retired last September. At the AGM we were sorry to see Sheila Cooper retire from the committee. She has served on the committee for many years, some of them as indoor meetings organiser. We thank her for all the time and effort she has given to helping the committee. We are pleased that she will now stay to help as a non committee volunteer. The AGM also saw the retirement of Jan Brook who has been a committee member for two years, but has found she cannot give the time that she would like to the role due to personal circumstances. We thank her for the help she was able to give.

Valerie Hall – Local Group Leader

Treasurer and Membership Secretary's Notes

Please note that due to changes by the RSPB Headquarters, we have changed the group's bank account. At the AGM a proposal to increase the annual group subscription to £5 per year from January 2019 was passed. Anyone paying by standing order will need to amend the amount they pay and also cancel their standing order to the Co-operative Bank and replace it with one to our new account at Lloyds Bank. Full details of the new banking arrangements are on the new membership renewal form. The membership form also asks you to indicate your preferences as to how we may contact you, so please tick the appropriate boxes. With increasing postage and printing costs, please consider paying by standing order and receiving your newsletter and other correspondence by email. A reminder that we have RSPB pin badges for sale at indoor meetings – a great stocking filler for Christmas! Please bring your used UK and foreign stamps to our meetings for the RSPB Albatross Stamp Appeal.

David Mann – Treasurer & Membership Secretary

What we do today can make a difference to wildlife tomorrow

A number of wildlife and environmental organisations (including the RSPB) collaborated to produce the "State of Nature Report" in 2016, with 25 organisations taking part and repeated the process in 2018, this time with over 50 organisations. These reports showed a dramatic decline in a large number of species of wildlife. The outcome for the environment after Brexit is also causing concern to these organisations and articles have appeared in their various magazines highlighting the problems facing the country and putting forward suggestions that the government could look into. There are now new moves to try to wake up the population of our country to take an interest in what is happening to the wildlife around us and what can be done to stop the decline.

A rally in London on Saturday 22 September was attended by 10,000 people of all ages to launch "A Peoples Manifesto for Wildlife", a lengthy document (146 pages) produced by Chris Packham and others. It includes essays from over 20 contributors who are either conservationists, environmentalists, ecologists or who have an interest in wildlife. Some contributions are from teenagers. All are worried about the environment and the decline in nature. The manifesto was presented to 10 Downing Street, hoping to influence the government on the way it looks at the environment. Chris Packham states that the document is only a draft to start with and he says "It is freely open to future contributions – we urgently need more ideas, discussion and debate to move conservation in the UK forward and cease the war on wildlife. Please distribute and please contribute."

A Little Egret Spectacle

I'm sure that all birdwatchers in this area are now familiar with the little egret, that lovely white heron with black legs and bill, and yellow wellies. I record them on most of my bird watching trips these days. But of course, it was not always that way. In fact the first record at Leighton Moss was on 25 May 1970 and it was so rare in Britain at that time that we had a marked rush of visitors to see it. We had to wait another five years for the next sighting and another six years for the third record. Now of course it is breeding in at least three sites in the area, all in established heronies. But the most amazing thing is the numbers around in autumn. A co-ordinated count of the three main roosts in our area in early September this year recorded an amazing 517 individuals. It is quite an experience to watch a roost build up. Leighton Moss is the easiest to watch, visible from the Causeway Hide. Birds start to arrive about an hour and a half before sunset and continue to arrive as darkness sets in. Choose a reasonably calm evening, as first arrivals provide a wonderful spectacle as they perch on the dead trees at the back of the pool, but on windy evenings they usually drop straight out of sight into the willows. You will be amazed at the spectacle and more than a little surprised at the harsh raucous calls they make as they compete for perching positions. Keep a look out for the larger great white egrets with the yellow bill, there has been up to six in recent weeks and as some of these feed on Leighton Moss they are often the first arrivals at the roost.



Little Egret © Ken Harrison

This large number of birds are not all from local colonies. Colour ringing has shown that numbers come from colonies further south, moving north after fledging. Most of the colour ringed birds have been ringed in a colony near Bangor in North Wales, although another came from a colony in Kent.

What they feed on is an interesting question. They certainly take small prey items as they wade in the shallow water, possibly small fish or aquatic insects such as water boatman. I was talking to an amphibian expert the other day and she was blaming them for the recent decline in frogs because they take many tadpoles! Whatever they are taking is obviously abundant, for they are catching prey items with great regularity.

John Wilson

Glasson Dock Summer Fair

On Saturday 14 July, Glasson Dock held their annual summer fair. I went along to help Sophie, a member of the RSPB fund raising team, to set up. I was amazed at the amount of equipment which came out of her vehicle! The fair opened at 12 noon. Many people showed interest in our display board and shared their stories of what birds and animals were in their gardens. Our stand this year was situated the far side of the lock, which didn't attract the same number as previously. The Punch and Judy show, coconut shy and refreshments were popular attractions on the other side of the lock! The day was hot and melted a lemon meringue pie, but I can recommend the lemon drizzle cake! During the afternoon a procession from the primary school took place. The costumes were very colourful, the theme being butterflies.

Anne Clark

Bats in North Lancashire & South Cumbria

There are only about 50 native terrestrial mammal species in the UK and bats make up over a third of these, with 17 breeding species. Typically, diversity reduces with latitude and only 8 breeding species are confirmed in this area, with three more species possibly present.

All our native bats are insectivorous and therefore sensitive to changes in any land use practice that reduces the abundance of nocturnal insects. Historically, their natural roost sites would have been trees and caves but nowadays many will roost in a building near you. They move around a lot but return to favoured roost sites time after time. This does make them vulnerable to human interference, even if not deliberate, and together with an observed decline in numbers was the driver behind giving them legal protection from 1981 onwards.

It's really only possible to study bats in the field if you have a bat detector to pick up the high pitched calls that the bats are making as they fly – echolocation – and convert them into either something audible to humans or (these days) display a sonogram on a smartphone or tablet. Automatic species identification is even possible, but has to be treated very cautiously because there is so much variation due to when, where, what and how many bats.

All eight local species will be found around the Lune Valley and Leighton Moss RSPB but common species will be found everywhere. Far and away the most common species we come across is the humble pipistrelle, weighing only 5g and with a wingspan of about 8-9 inches (22cm) they are found more or less everywhere, come out shortly after sunset and are easily recognisable by their fast and jerky flight.

Actually there are two pipistrelles locally, the species only being separated in 1991. The common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) is more of a generalist with the soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) usually found near to rivers, canals and lakes. As you might guess from its name, the latter has a higher pitched call and this is the main way we tell them apart in the field, the common pipistrelle peaking on a bat detector at 45 kHz with the soprano 10 kHz higher.

The Soprano pipistrelle may form a colony of several hundred in the summer, when female bats gather together in large “nurseries” whilst they raise their young. One of these can be found in the roof of the boiler house at Leighton Moss RSPB reserve where the largest number of bats counted was 545 in June 2017. In contrast, male bats hang out singly or in small groups for most of the year.

Our largest native bat is the Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), weighing in at 30g and with a wingspan of 40cm. They are the earliest emerging bat in the evening and mainly roost in tree holes or hollow branches. They rely on speed to avoid predators, often surging out of their roost all together in a rush. They fly high over the local rivers and other water bodies such as Pine Lake, but make steep dives to chase large moths or beetles. On a bat detector, their call is a loud two-part “chip-chop” sound.



Soprano pipistrelle © David Talbot

Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*) bats, sometimes called the water bat, do well on our lowland water bodies. They have large feet and trawl across the water picking up insects as they break the surface. Successful captures are deposited into the tail membrane, where the bat then snatches them with its jaws in a quite spectacular acrobatic display.

This year, during a training session, we caught a male Daubenton's bat from an old stone barn at Lancaster University. He was wearing a "band" on his forearm that had been fitted in July 2006 and so he is probably 14 years old or more. (Photo © Tara Hall). This is not that unusual, bats are quite special, having only a single offspring per year and consequently living a comparatively long life for such a small mammal.



Other species related to the Daubentons include Natterer's, Whiskered and Brandt's bats. All four species are similar in the hand and on a bat detector, so it takes a lot of practice to sort them out. However, Brandt's bats are a bit of a local specialist; there is a large summer colony at the Crook'o'Lune and another near Milnthorpe, whilst further south they are considered rare.

In contrast, the medium sized Leislars bat is present in Southern Scotland, West Yorkshire, Cheshire and the Isle of Man, but until February 2017 when a young male was recovered near Jenny Browns Point, we had never found one in our area. Such a puzzle! Bats will continue to fascinate and test us as there is still so much to discover.

The local bat with the biggest "wow" factor is undoubtedly the woodland specialist Brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*). It is a slow, manoeuvrable flyer and unlike the Noctule that emerges early and relies on speed, this is a stealth bat, coming out well after dark and flying low under the tree canopy to avoid possible predators.

Such large ears mean its echolocation calls need only be very quiet, so it's a difficult species to find away from a roost. It is in an evolutionary arms race with its main prey - moths. Long eared bats often fly silently to try to glean moths that are resting on leaves. Some moths take evasive action by suddenly dropping out of a bats flightpath or even creating their own noise to jam the frequency at which the bat is calling.



Brown long-eared bat © David Talbot

There are two other species which may be present, but no breeding sites are known. The Nathusius' pipistrelle is another puzzle with text books telling us they will be found near woodland and water yet they are not apparently present in the Lake District. The final cryptic species is Alcatheo's bat, first described in Greece in 2001. We have found its DNA locally (bat droppings can be tested), so we obviously need to look harder for the actual animals.

During autumn, bats look for mates at "swarming" sites, the best of ours is on the fells at Easegill, only just inside Lancashire. Think of these like a bat disco, but with traditional roles reversed. Male bats put on a "dancing" display by performing their aerial acrobatics, females look out for the biggest and best flyers and mating occurs before the bats enter caves to hibernate. Hibernation sites are cool and damp; bats have a lot of skin and need to avoid waking up too often to rehydrate, which they'd have to if the atmosphere were too dry. If these bats make it through the winter, the females become pregnant in spring, the nursery colonies form again and the whole circle of life starts over.

Gail Armstrong

Two New Curlew Books

Karen Lloyd (ed.), (2018), *Curlew Calling: an anthology of poetry, nature writing, and images in celebration of the curlew*. Numenius Press, ISBN 978-1-9997145-0-5, 49pp.

Mary Colwell (2018), *Curlew Moon*. William Collins, ISBN 978-0-0082410-5-6, 328pp.

Finding the curlews back on their breeding grounds on the tops in early spring has long been one of my own highlights each year. Searching out an old gardening book recently, I found scribbled inside the cover, “3/3/75 – day after hearing the first curlew back on the moor. Spring’s here!” In the Lancaster area, with huge winter flocks around the Bay and up the Lune valley, it’s easy to think all is well with them.

But in fact, the curlew is now a globally threatened species. Looked at nationally, their breeding numbers are in serious decline, particularly in Southern and lowland Britain. The 1968-72 BTO Breeding Atlas highlights the curlew’s “dramatic increase and spread” through the twentieth century, as it colonised lowland areas (p.178). But the breeding distribution maps in the BTO’s 1988-91 and 2007-11 Breeding Atlases show the astonishing declines, especially in Ireland.

It is now facing regional extinction in parts of the UK and Ireland, and has become Red Listed. This is mainly due to poor breeding success. The three BTO Atlases discuss the range of factors involved. It is partly caused by the spread of over-intensive agriculture. One example of this is the change from simple hay making to taking several cuts of silage from April through to September. Events since the publication of the 2007-11 BTO Atlas are covered on the curlewcall.co.uk website. It is a good starting point for the detail around the causes of breeding decline and the curlew’s vulnerability to various predators; through to newsletters and new initiatives.



Curlew © Ken Harrison

In May 2016, Mary Colwell began a 500 mile trek from the West coast of Ireland across to England’s East coast to publicise the curlew’s plight. *Curlew Moon* sets out her experiences. She draws from legends and old stories, while visiting sites where breeding numbers have been falling. Karen Lloyd’s anthology, *Curlew Calling*, aims to support the BTO’s Curlew Appeal and to raise funds for curlew conservation work.

Locally, the picture is a bit brighter. But here too, there is evidence of breeding decline. The LDBWS’s 1959 Ten Year Checklist cited it as a numerous breeder, extending its range to lowland meadows, and estimating there were c.2,000 pairs breeding in the nine main 10km squares the Society concentrates on. This spread can be clearly seen on the maps in the 1995 *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Lancaster and District*; and even as late as the 2001 *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Lancashire and North Merseyside*. These atlases, together with the three BTO Breeding atlases, discuss the factors affecting breeding densities per sq km in different lowland and upland habitats.

But the LDBWS Annual Reports now describe it as a “fairly common widespread but declining breeder”. One tiny example of the decline is the drop by a third in the numbers of

territorial pairs along the Lune from Kirkby Lonsdale to Skerton Weir, from 15 in 2013 down to 5 in 2016. The results of breeding wader surveys on Bowland farms have been a bit more encouraging. The 2014 survey of 27 farms found 133 breeding pairs of curlew. The 2015 one found 129 pairs on 29 farms. The 2016 one found 151 pairs on 32 farms. The 2017 one found 159 pairs on 33 farms. (Some of the farms stretch beyond the nine main 10km squares). For now these numbers seem to be holding up. The 2007-11 BTO Atlas breeding abundance map for curlew shows one of the highest concentrations to be the hills of the North of England, including the Forest of Bowland. But that was 7 years ago now.

Karen Lloyd's book, with an introduction by Mark Cocker, is an anthology interspersed with a variety of lovely images of curlew. It draws together 27 pieces of poetry and nature writing that cover the plight of the curlew in different areas of Britain. In addition, there is some useful analytical writing about aspects of wader behaviour; together with summaries of recent research. She writes with real feeling for the wildlife and for place, just as she did in her first, award winning book, *The Gathering Tide; A Journey Around the Edgelands of Morecambe Bay*.

The developing argument through the book is not just about the threat of extinction. It is to draw out the *cultural* loss that the curlew's extinction would bring. Few birds have inspired so much in the way of story, poetry, music and personal attachment, from Shakespeare through to Ted Hughes and on to more contemporary poets, as in this volume. Such is the species' resonance with people, there is now, on 21 April, a World Curlew Day.

Mary Colwell emphasises these issues too, both in her book and in her contribution to the anthology. She writes about her encounters with people during her 500 mile trek, and how there were "tears, hugs, warm handshakes, and a sense of determination to save this iconic bird" (p.13). These books show clearly, through a range of personal responses, why the curlew is a special bird for so many of us. The writing does not become anthropomorphic.

Curlew lovers will find all sorts to enjoy in the anthology. It would make a lovely present, not just for birders to dip into from time to time, but also for people with a more general interest in conservation. It sums up so poignantly both crisis and prospects for one threatened species. Given its iconic status, an Attenborough style TV documentary on this species would have a wide appeal, or perhaps Springwatch could focus on groups of curlew nests over several weeks, contrasting lowland and upland sites. As the RSPB & BTO conservation initiatives unfold over the next few years, we should learn more about which kinds of sites and approaches can bring us hope, and improve the curlew's prospects.

And if you think that, here in the midst of a RSPB Lancaster Local Group Newsletter, curlews are safe from Brexit, think again! In the past, different Stewardship schemes have helped protect wader breeding sites. The post-Brexit arrangements for these schemes have yet to be finalised... So far we have had warm, green words. But the extent to which such schemes will be able to play a significant role around potential curlew breeding sites in the future, may be lost in the storms of austerity, with the devil left in control of the detail. One thing the contributors do disagree about is the curlew's bubbling song and plaintive alarm call. For some they are sad and melancholic. For some they are haunting. The Scots' Gaelic name for curlew is derived from their words for weeping or lamenting (p.25). Others find the song joyful and uplifting, and love the rising crescendo of 'Courlie, courlie'. For Mary Colwell its call "gives powerful meaning to the landscape" (p.13). For Crumley its voice is "an anthem of wilderness itself" (p.32). Several contributors say hearing it in early spring on curlew breeding grounds is like hearing long lost friends returning.

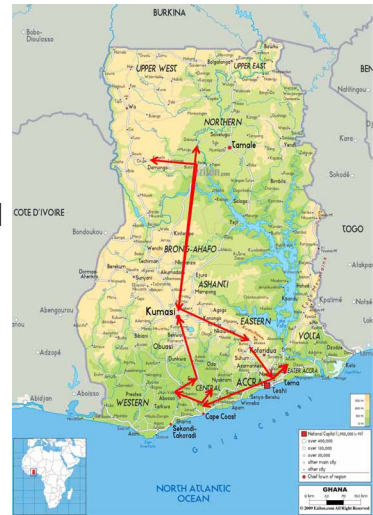
Stephen Young

Ghana – hardcore birding in search of Picathartes

For 10 days in March three friends and I toured Ghana with a view to see as many West African specialities as we could and of course, in particular, the splendidly unique yellow-headed rockfowl, often referred to by its genus moniker of Picathartes.

I booked the whole trip direct with a local guide called Kalu Afasi whom I found on the internet and whose reliability I was able to confirm with a UK birder who had used him last year. He provided an air-conditioned vehicle, driver and porter as well as his own excellent guiding for the full 10 days. Absolutely everything was included and which he booked – hotels, all food, park fees etc. All of which was communicated to us in advance. I booked the flights with KLM direct from Amsterdam and linked flight from Manchester for around £350. Not surprisingly the whole trip cost us way less than any of the few tour operators who run birding trips to this part of the world.

(Map: the extent of our travels. From the humid south around Cape Coast to the Guinea forests and eventually up to the north and the superb savannah of Mole National Park)



My heading of “hardcore birding” is quite apt. Never up later than 05.30 – temperatures 34-40 and in the south very high humidity – over 1000 miles on, at times some very bumpy roads – long tiring walks! Was it all worth it...was it! I’ve travelled widely in Africa on nature-based holidays and seen many birds on that continent, but of the 300 or so species we saw, 140 were new to me!

One of the highlights was of course seeing Picathartes in its forest cave setting. Not all birds! Some fantastic insects too, such as a variegated grasshopper! The butterflies were superb too.

Once in the north, a whole new suite of birds was open to us and a real favourite and, as we all agreed, a top three bird of the trip, was the most sought after egyptian plover which Kalu found for us on the banks of the Volta prior to entering Mole National Park.

Mole National Park, a rich savannah grassland, came with more fascinating birds like Forbe’s plover, oriole warbler, various finches, bee-eaters, barbets, woodpeckers and a stately Denham’s bustard. Our list in 9 days included:
13 species of sunbird; 11 species of dove/pigeon; 9 species of heron; 8 species of bee-eater; 8 species of kingfisher; 8 species of weaver; 8 species of barbet; 7 species of swift (all 4 West African spinetails)

If anyone wants any more information I’m very happy to supply.

David Talbot (01524 701570)



(Photos: blue-breasted roller & bearded barbet © David Talbot)

Leighton Moss Update

Breeding news

We start with the excellent news that bitterns have bred at Leighton Moss once again after 9 years. After the spring booming ceased and a quiet interval, an adult female was spotted making flights indicative of feeding through June and early July, allowing us to establish the location of a nest located just south of main dyke. It is suspected that two juveniles were fledged in the end. This goes to show the specialised management work of the reedbed at Leighton Moss, and promotion of the younger reedbeds at sites like Silverdale Moss and Barrow Scout, have paid off, and we have high hopes that bitterns will continue to breed here in the coming years. Since then, there have been rare occasional sightings of individual birds in the past couple of months.

Marsh harriers had a very successful breeding season. Though one nest failed, two nests successfully fledged six juveniles. At one stage, visitors could have views of up to 9 birds soaring above the area of reedbed spanning the south end of the reserve behind Lilian's and Grisedale hides. Whilst most of the marsh harriers have left the reserve and began migrating, three marsh harriers (an adult male, an adult female and a juvenile) continue to be frequently sighted, the likelihood being they will remain at the reserve over winter.

From Leighton Moss' first warden and bearded tit world expert John Wilson: "At first it looked as though the bearded tits had not done too well this year. When ringing nestlings in two nests, we found they had only 2 and 3 young when they usually have 5 or 6, so productivity was not good.

However, we have ringed 26 young, and from recaught birds and grit tray data we have identified by our colour ring sightings 16 adult males and 10 females. So, with unringed birds continuing to turn up on the grit trays, and being ringed, there's hopes that the year was better than thought previously". A newly-installed bearded tit viewing area on the Causeway has improved views of the grit trays for visitors hoping to catch a glimpse of them on autumn mornings.



(Bearded tit © Ken Harrison)

Avocets had a fruitful year with 29 pairs successfully rearing 20 chicks, an improvement on the lower number of hatchlings from the past 2 years. It was also an excellent breeding season for black-headed gulls. Sadly, there were no ringed plover pairs which bred on the slag tips this year, in part due to disturbances caused by open access. Despite disappointing breeding, flocks of lapwing and redshank, each exceeding 200 birds, were regularly present on the coastal pools over the summer, continuing to be so this early autumn, sometimes with many hundreds more (on Morecambe pool 663 redshank on 10 August, 455 lapwing on 2 September).

Roosts

Island mere once again has been the site of a huge egret roost. With roosting birds in single figures through to the end of July, the numbers jumped to regularly over 60 and at

most 179 little egrets, and 6 great white egrets, roosting here from August onwards, with numbers peaking in September. Through summer, both species were regularly seen in varying numbers moving to, from, and across Leighton Moss and the coastal pools. Though usually in smaller numbers, on some days all 6 great white egrets were spread across the reserve, and sometimes a group of over 20 little egrets could be found on the coastal pools from September onwards. A spoonbill was also sighted moving to and from the egret roost (30 June morning), and was sited a handful of times on the coastal pools late in June and early in July. Elsewhere on site, over 30 cormorants roosted in willows behind Grisedale pool, some remaining in daytime to fish and sunbathe at Causeway.

Warblers

In addition to the expected sizeable numbers of chiffchaffs and blackcaps, reed, sedge, and willow warblers (many still present into late September) there were multiple reports through the summer of individual garden, grasshopper and wood warblers, whitethroats, lesser whitethroats, and pied and spotted flycatchers being seen and heard across the woodland fringes of Leighton Moss and the paths to the coast hides.

Ducks

(Scaup © Ken Harrison)

A lone, young adult drake scaup lodged with us through early June, fraternising with a fleet of tufted ducks. Garganey arrived in late July, and since then up to 6 (4 September) have been seen on Lilian's pool, an unclear assortment of eclipse drakes, females and juveniles. A drake common scoter roosted on Causeway island on 11 September. A fleet of pintail visited in early September, totalling 48 individuals on the 12th. In early August over 30 little



grebe were counted across Leighton Moss and Barrow Scout, evidence of a successful breeding season. Many pairs were situated at the Causeway, and on 29 July, John Wilson saw 14, the most he'd ever seen there. A handful of pochards bred on site, with broods of between 8-10 ducklings. Through early summer close to 400 mallards spanned Leighton Moss. As autumn is progressing we are welcoming increasing numbers of gadwall (85 on main reserve on 30 September), shoveler, teal, wigeon, pochard, tufted ducks and pintails.

Waders

Notable wader activity included visits from curlew sandpiper (26 & 30 June, 1 July, 16 September) and wood sandpiper (5 & 6 August) on coastal pools, and common sandpiper (2 on 15 July, 16 August) and green sandpiper (2, 12 & 30 July, 2 birds on 2 August) on Tim Jackson and Grisedale pools, as well as Barrow Scout. A lone ruff moved about Barrow Scout and Allen pool on 16-17 July and 5 August, and a couple of spotted redshank were there in early October. Storm weather brought a grey phalarope to the Allen pool on the 20 September, which remained until the following day, unmistakable and showing exceptionally well both days.

On the coast, small numbers of knot (usually 1 or 2, but 48 seen on Lilian's hide 9 September), dunlin (78 on Morecambe pool on 10 August), little ringed plover (4 on 28 July), turnstone (6 on 15 June), goosander (9 on same day) and mergansers (13 on

Morecambe pool 26 September). There were regularly between 50-200 black-tailed godwits on the coastal pools through summer, sometimes leaving and reducing to less than a dozen, sometimes rising to over 450. Since the beginning of September many hundreds, often 1,000-2,000 and sometimes exceeding that, have been on Lilian's, with much smaller flocks on Grisedale and Tim Jackson pools. The huge flock at Lilian's at the beginning of September had up to 7 ruff and 3 spotted redshank in amongst them. There have been record numbers of greenshank, over 28 on the coast (1 October) and up to 19 (7 September) on Causeway through August and early autumn. A leucistic greenshank was with us through mid to late September, on Causeway island and Allen pool.

Raptors

The ospreys from the Foulshaw Moss reserve 11 miles away visited daily or every other day through the summer, fishing at the Causeway and occasionally at Lilian's. During late summer, when birds were on migration, 2 birds were seen together over Causeway several times, and several times one week there were 4 simultaneously fishing on the bay, seen from coastal hides. Peregrines were flying over Leighton Moss through the summer, either as individual birds or a pair. In late summer a juvenile regularly hunted coastal pools, sending up waders, and one was sometimes seen (particularly late afternoon/evening) flying close to Grisedale and Tim Jackson hides. There was a lot of hobby activity from late June onwards, with either a lone bird or 2 individuals seen hawking for dragonflies or perched on branches of dead trees on the far sides of Causeway, Grisedale, Tim Jackson and Lilian's pools. There have been very occasional sightings of hen harriers since June (male seen from Causeway on 6 June; a ringtail spotted above Grisedale the morning of 9 October) with an anticipated increase over the winter. There were a couple of sightings of individual red kites across June. Buzzards, sparrowhawks and kestrels have regularly been active on site.

Other birds

A juvenile yellow wagtail resided at the Causeway on 14 & 15 July. A black tern (18 September) and a common tern (through mid September) seen from Causeway and Lower hides. On 24 September 2 whooper swans stayed on the Causeway. A cuckoo was heard in woods besides path to Lower hide on 16 June. On 16 July a budgerigar was spotted on a fence close to Allen hide! Individual kingfishers have been seen perched on wooden posts and to fish close to the front of Lower, Morecambe and Allen hides, with sightings increasing as autumn progresses. Skeins of pink-footed geese have been flying over the reserve since late September. Huge numbers of 500+ hirundines, mostly 50/50 swallows and sand martins, flew above pools and reedbed on August evenings. Numerous water rails have remained very vocal and occasionally visible - in September a chick was repeatedly seen dabbling by the water directly in front of Lilian's hide.

Other animals

Autumn is the season of the red deer rut, and sightings of stags are beginning to increase, particularly from Grisedale and Tim Jackson hides. As of yet there have been no recordings of a monarch stag (16 tines), but royal stags (12 tines) have been sighted. Though unpredictable and requiring a lot of luck and patience, otters have been present and fishing on site all through the summer and autumn, favouring Causeway but also paying visits to Lilian's and Grisedale pools. A banded demoiselle was seen on the reserve this September, the first record ever for Leighton Moss. High fritillary butterflies have really struggled this year, but scotch argus and small pearl-bordered fritillaries have been in good numbers.

Joe Fraser-Turner & Naomi Wadsworth, Visitor Experience Interns, RSPB Leighton Moss

RSPB Lancaster Local Group joins in the Fun Day at Halton

Since January 2018 we have been holding our indoor meetings at the Centre @ Halton. The centre is run by a committee of volunteers and as well as indoor meeting rooms, a cafe and a catering kitchen, there are excellent outdoor facilities and equipment. It has become a vibrant hub for the local community. The centre manager and the marketing officer have helped to promote our meetings and attendance has been good. So when they decided to hold a Fun Day to celebrate 40 years of a community centre on the site, we were pleased to support them and booked a space on the field to set up a display about our group. We were joined by Sophie King of the RSPB Events Team who brought along the RSPB gazebo and general information about the RSPB.

We set up the local group display board along with our programmes and group membership information, as well as a children's tombola and make a dragonfly activity. There were many stalls and activities on the field and the day was well attended. Our stall received plenty of interest and we were able to chat to a lot of local people and make the community more aware of the group and the events we hold throughout the year.

A good day was had by all and the weather stayed dry and sunny which helped the Fun Day go with a swing.

Valerie Hall – Local Group Leader



Local group display board © Valerie Hall

Please Note: If you no longer wish to hear from RSPB Lancaster Local Group, please contact our membership secretary, Revd. David Mann, 113 New Village, Ingleton, Carnforth, LA6 3DJ. Tel. 015242 41131, Email: davidmannrspb@outlook.com confirming your name and address and stating that you wish to unsubscribe from RSPB Lancaster Local Group's communications.

The opinions expressed by the contributors to this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the RSPB or of the RSPB Lancaster Local Group.

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rspb.org.uk/groups/lancaster/
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