



# Anything About?

Craven & Pendle RSPB Newsletter

Autumn 2008

## Long Preston Deeps - Bird Surveys

Long Preston Deeps is the area of low-lying ground adjacent to the River Ribble from Settle Sewage Works downstream to Cow Bridge on the B6478 between Long Preston and Wigglesworth. Basically it is the area bordered by the B6478 and the back road from the Settle by-pass near Gildersleets via Rathmell to Wigglesworth.

The group's involvement at Long Preston was born out of a Field Meeting to the site on 8 June 2006, at which we were asked by the Steering Group who oversee the site, if we would like to partake in some bird survey work. The request we instantly accepted.

The original survey in the winter of 2006/7 was a wildfowl and wader survey made from 5 lay-byes on the Rathmell to Wigglesworth road, looking into the area. Because of the dangers of stopping and birdwatching from the A65, the only survey point on the Long Preston side was from a private site at Sour Dale Lane Barns for which we obtained access permission from the farmer for named individuals on submission of vehicular details and registration numbers. The survey was done every week from 15 November to the end of March 2007 on a

rota basis by 11 members of our group. The initial survey revealed firstly the large range of species using the site (31 that winter) including the occasional Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese as well as large numbers of Canada and Greylag Geese. It also revealed high numbers of some species (eg 1380 Wigeon on 16 December 2006) and some unexpectedly high counts of some scarcer species (ie 157 Pintail on 16 January 2007).

The success of this first winter survey led us on to a breeding wader survey through the summer of 2007. For this access to the land was essential, so the area was divided into 6 parcels, each section covered by 2 (in one case 3) group members who were responsible for their own particular patch. Each patch was surveyed on a 3 visit basis, each visit being undertaken in a specific time span. Some of the better wader breeding areas of the site had already been surveyed by professional ornithologists in 2003. So we covered the peripheral areas not covered by that survey.

The results of our breeder wading survey revealed a total of 57 breeding pairs of waders comprised as follows: Curlew 13 pairs, Lapwing 16 pairs, Oystercatchers 21

pairs, Redshank 5 pairs and Snipe 2 pairs. This was considered a very good haul given that we were only surveying secondary areas.

Driven by this success we did further wildfowl and wader surveys through the winter of 2007/8, but this time with access on to the land, with each team surveying the patch on which they had undertaken the breeding wader survey. This was done on a monthly basis from July 2007 through to March 2008.

This revealed similar results to the 2006/7 winter survey with over 700 Wigeon for 3 successive months (Jan, Feb, March). More importantly, however, were the 300 Pintail in February 2008. This count being more than 1% of the British breeding population is sufficient to register the site as being "of Special Importance."

The Steering Group had by this time hit funding problems and Adrian Shepherd, the project co-ordinator, was given his notice by the RSPB. So, in order to carry on, we registered the site as a WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) site under the flag of the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology). *Cont. page 2*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner

On the beautiful evening of May 3 the group celebrated its 21<sup>st</sup> birthday year with an excellent dinner and enjoyable gathering at Skipton Golf Club, attended by 33 people.

We were pleased to welcome Graham Wynne, Chief Executive RSPB, as guest of honour. He told us he had begun to work for RSPB 21 years ago, so it was a double celebration. His interesting speech gave an overview of the development of RSPB since 1987. The membership needs to continue to grow to support current projects. There is concern about the decline in nesting waders including curlew, redshank, lapwing - birds we are

still lucky enough to see and hear. Land drainage is a possible cause. Mention was made of the Birdlife International projects, criticised by some. But so many of "our" birds are international travellers throughout the year that global work is vital to them.

The group was congratulated on its 21 years of support for RSPB. He presented Sheila Clark with an award for 15 years' service to the group, and to Margaret Morgan for her 11 years' service. Colin Straker was thanked for organising the evening and was presented with a token of appreciation.

Alan Duffield, a previous Leader of the group, gave a vote of thanks to Graham

Wynne for coming to the event and presented him with a personalised, unique pen as a memento.

Sheila Clark

## How and when did you start birdwatching?

As a child? When you retired? Encouraged by a friend or a parent? When you first noticed a dipper? Finding a nest in a hedge? On holiday? In your garden? In the January edition we'd like to start a series of members' memories. Please send them in - anonymously if you prefer.

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Survey work continued through the summer but with slightly modified areas. One of the original parcels in the middle section which collects less flood water than the rest of the site was deemed unworthy of surveying and was split up, with bits of it added to 2 adjacent sites. The north east parcel was also difficult to work so was extended and new access negotiated.

We have throughout the surveys also surveyed Hellifield Flash as a control/ comparison with Long Preston Deeps.

Our group donated £1000 for work on the site. This was used to create some scrapes to "wet up" the site and also to increase the height of some of the drains so that flood water stands for longer. Most of the land in the survey area is now covered by environmental stewardship schemes which fund further scrapes, so work is ongoing.

The latest news from the Steering Group is that it has now obtained funding from the Environment Agency to cover the period from 1 July 2008 through to March 2011; also that Adrian has been re-employed as the co-ordinator.

When all the ongoing work is completed

and the site settles down, it is proposed that we will do a full breeding wader survey. This is now scheduled for the summer of 2010 and when it is completed we will be able to compare the results with previous surveys and thus see what effect the work has achieved. In the meantime we will continue to do WeBS counts each month on the designated date.

Given that there is no RSPB reserve in North Yorkshire, Long Preston Deeps has provided a local focus point for our group and those who have participated in the work have found it interesting and worthwhile. It seems unlikely that the site will ever become an RSPB reserve and the most we are probably likely to get out of this is a public hide situated adjacent to the Ribble Way footpath which traverses part of the site.

For those interested in the WeBS scheme, the results can be viewed on the BTO web site, <http://www.bto.org/webs/about/core>.

Now that Adrian is back in post he is trying to get Long Preston Deeps its own web page on the Yorkshire and Humber Environment Hub. If this happens I will let you know.

Colin Straker.

## Favourite birding moments

These are the first of what we hope will be many sent in by readers:

- Watching a crow being mobbed by black-headed gulls
- Leaning on the wall of a 3000 year old broch in Shetland watching Arctic and Great Skuas swooping low over the moorland, while out at sea loafing male eiders uttered their scandalised crooning calls and black guillemots bobbed up and down
- Little terns with their young or on their nests; hunting male marsh harriers
- Learning to focus a new scope on to bearded tits feeding young in a reed bed
- First-ever sight of an avocet; nuthatch close up on a feeder
- Finding the nest of a mandarin duck in Strid Woods; watching a pair of ravens fledging 5 young; terns at the Farne Islands
- Spotting a Scandinavian tree-creeper at Caerlaverock; water rail at Titchwell.

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## Residential to Suffolk June 2008

Perched up in the tops of the poplar plantation the golden orioles were birder-spotting. There were 16 or so birders, garbed in waterproof overtrousers of green and blue, jackets of red and yellow - the donning of which, the orioles had learned, was a supplication to the rain god: the rain stopped soon after the waterproofs were put on. The birders wore trainers, boots, even one set of green plus-four socks. Two were beige-and-brown-baseball-capped, several had white-bearded heads.

The group would split and rejoin, strolling slowly along three sides of the plantation, expectantly raising binos to the eyes, disappointingly lowering them again. The tripods and scopes they carried seemed never to be used.

"Shall I give them a flash?" asked one oriole.

"Nah, treat 'em mean, keep 'em keen."

"A song, then, just as a tease."

The orioles turned their attention to the passing trains. The most exciting identification was of a South West train in silver and orange: a rare vagrant in these parts. They noted several green-liveried East Midland and multi-coloured Anglia trains, very occasionally having more than two coaches. The other interesting sighting was of two railway trackmen in bright orange jackets perched high on a signal gantry.

So the weekend began at Lakenheath Fen. We didn't see the orioles (for the second visit running). The nearest we got was a green woodpecker at a distance and chocolate profiteroles at the evening dinner. Nor did we see the cranes. But we heard and saw the beginnings of what, by the end of the weekend, was a tally of 95 species. Late in the evening we moved on to Weeting Heath and did see a Stone Curlew with young from a crowded and excited hide full of loud whispered directions based on rabbits and nettle clumps. Not for the last time during the weekend we thought a few numbered posts would

help guide in the lenses. After dinner a few keen souls went looking for the nightjars in Thetford Warren. One was heard but none was seen, in spite of semaphoring white handkerchieves.

After that tiring first day only two of our number (both office-holding venerables) had the energy and enthusiasm to get up at 0445 for the dawn chorus. They were fittingly rewarded with good sightings of the woodlark. We then moved down to Minsmere for the day. There were many highlights including several Cetti's warbler, lovely-as-ever avocets, little terns feeding young scampering about on the pebbled windy beach like blown balls of grey down. Can you ever tire of watching terns diving? Other favourites were long-tailed tits, hobbies, little egrets, black-tailed godwits, spotted redshank, Mediterranean gull, reed buntings, stonechat and whitethroats.

Our final morning was at Strumpshaw Fen where we watched a mesmerizing display of flight from at least three marsh harriers, balancing and manipulating the wind. The writer saw only 68 of the total but these included Wordsworth's "restless bird",

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Shakespeare's "temple-haunting martlet" and Gerard Manley Hopkins' "dapple-dawn-drawn falcon." Also included in the group's total (almost but not quite equalling the Group record) were water birds such as the gaunt, scart, hernser, rodge, bald pate, scopperbill, blue neb, poker duck, bod gled, tree falcon, cuddy, bell kite, krocket, fopwing, sandy loo, barker, watery pleeps, yaup, hooded mew, shrimp catcher and dolly parton.

A brilliant weekend and many thanks to our organisers and expert always helpful and patient guides. We look forward to next year: in Fife in February, perhaps. Get the thermals aired!

John Roberts



## Talks programme September 2008—January 2009

### **10 September 2008, Peter Guy: A Bowland Year**

"A Bowland Year" is a film set to music and with natural sounds of the countryside but also has voice-over comments by the film-maker. Peter Guy, who is now retired, was a conservation manager for North West Water/United utilities and thus knows the area and its wildlife intimately. The film takes us through a year from January to December showing us the changing seasons, wildlife and landscape. It also shows people living and working in the area, and visitors enjoying this *Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*. Conservation issues of upland areas such as Bowland are covered and the film follows several nesting birds through the season - including Treecreeper, Ring Ousel, Peregrine and Merlin, and shows the ringing and wing tagging of Hen Harriers.

### **8 October, Tom Lawson: Camels and Crab Plovers**

Tom is a retired hospital consultant now running "Second Nature", his own second-hand book company. He is a lifelong bird-watcher and has recently finished a stint on the RSPB Council. "Camels and Crab Plovers" looks at the wildlife and landscape of Oman, one of the most accessible and friendly countries of the Arabian peninsula. Tom particularly covers the birds, including some of the specialities of this interesting country. Many of you will remember Tom's first visit to our group in February 2005 with his talk "Australian Walkabout".

### **12 November, Jonathan Pomroy: Sketching Birds...the Work of a Wildlife Artist**

Jonathan is a wildlife and landscape artist living in the Skipton area who exhibits with many galleries and societies including The Society of Wildlife Artists, Birdscapes at Cley in Norfolk and also at Slimbridge, Barnes and Arundal Wildlife and Wetland Centres. He works in both oils and watercolours, always based on field sketches, and his presentation seeks to show the importance of the latter. It will include a section on his special study of Swifts, both inside the nest (done by means of an infra-red camera) and in the air. He will also demonstrate field sketching using a decoy duck. For those of you wanting a preview of Jonathan's work log onto [www.jonathanpomroy.co.uk](http://www.jonathanpomroy.co.uk)

### **3 December, Colin Smith: New Zealand...a Wildlife Wonderland.**

Colin used to come to our group as part of the partnership of Smith and Walsh, but has not been since 1999. Now officially retired from lecturing, he has fortunately agreed to visit us one more time to tell us about his recent visit to New Zealand. This talk covers both North and South Island, looking at the landscape and wildlife en route. Some time was spent on Stewart Island to the south of South Island including a boat trip to see oceanic birds including 6 species of Albatross, Petrels and Penguins. The rain forest contains many wonderful ferns and exotic trees along with a variety of endemic birds. Colin is a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and a

member of Wigan10 Foto Club which last year became world champion club.

### **14 January 2009, Tim Melling: Northumberland Through the Seasons**

Tim has worked for the RSPB since 1988 where he is now the Senior Conservation Officer covering the whole of the North of England. Prior to this he lived in Northumberland for 10 years and thus has a thorough knowledge of this underrated county. This presentation, which has been specially updated for us, takes us through each month of the year, looking at some of the wildlife particularly the birds. It highlights some of the wonderful things that Tim has experienced whilst living there. Tim has been to our group twice before. His "Island of Scilly... A Wildlife paradise" is right up there with the best and his "Art of Bird Misidentification" was certainly the funniest.

*(details of later meetings - on 11 February, 11 March, 8 April and 13 May - will be in the New Year Newsletter)*

## Field Meetings September 2008 – January 2009

### **Thursday 25 September 2008, Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire**

Wind direction and weather conditions can play a big part in autumn birding. An onshore wind could bring Skuas and Shearwaters close to the headland. Overnight rain could bring a large fall of migrants, and mist could hold down any already there. Our itinerary may well be influenced by the bird information services but we will probably work the Old Falls hedge and plantation, as well as the set-aside and other headland areas.

### **Saturday 18 October, Roa Island and Foulney Island, near Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire**

A high tide at 1414 should give us ample time to walk out to Foulney Island and return before being cut off by the tide. Both Foulney and Roa Island project out into the Walney Channel and Morecambe Bay, the whole area being good for Dark-bellied Brent Geese, sea ducks and waders.

### **Thursday 20 November, England Hill and Pilling Lane Ends, near Preesall, Lancashire**

There are two special feeding stations near England Hill where food is put out to attract Tree Sparrows, Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings. This scheme is run by a consortium of local farmers and the Fylde Bird Club. We will probably work things as

we did on our last visit by assembling at Pilling Lane Ends, then shuttling people in two cars on a rota basis to the feeding sites. With high tide at 1643 we will look for geese and other wildfowl on the incoming tide at Pilling.

### **Saturday 6 December, Hurstwood and Cant Clough Reservoirs, near Burnley, Lancashire.**

Our planned trip to this site last year was cancelled due to torrential rain so we will try again. The purpose is to look for Twite at a special winter feeding station near the two reservoirs. Either reservoir may have Goldeneye at this time of year and there could be wintering thrushes etc in the surrounding conifer plantations.

### **Thursday 22 January 2009, Tophill Low, near Beverley, East Yorkshire**

This Yorkshire Water pumping station site is situated alongside the River Hull. There are shallow lagoons, marshy areas, scrub and small patches of woodland as well as two deep open water reservoirs, all surrounded by agricultural land. Now designated as a nature reserve, this diversity of habitat draws in a wide range of birds.

*(details of later field trips will be in the New Year Newsletter, including the residential 13-15 February and trips on 21 March, 16 April, 16 May and 11 June)*

## **Dawn Chorus**

Our leader Colin Straker gave a talk about the dawn chorus to 40 people at St Mary's Church Ingleton on a Friday evening. The following Sunday morning at 0500 he led 23 brave and enthusiastic souls to hear the chorus in reality along the Waterfall Walk. Amongst a big variety of birds seen and heard were blackcaps, a pair of bullfinches and garden warblers.

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## **Members' birding experiences**

Done any good birdwatching recently? Been on a birding holiday? Why not write a contribution for the next Newsletter?

**Any contributions—including memorable birding moments and how you started birding - need to be with the editor by November 30. Either post to John Roberts, 4 Lower Scholes, Oakworth, Keighley BD22 0RR or email to**

**[john@cravenandpendlerspb.org](mailto:john@cravenandpendlerspb.org)**

