



NEWSLETTER

JULY 2011

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Clockwise from top left: Dotterel at Cwm Cadlan (photo: Jeff Slocombe); Black-necked Grebe at Llanilid (photo: Richard Smith); Grasshopper Warbler at Maesteg (photo: Jeff Slocombe).

RECENT BIRD SIGHTINGS

March 2011

Highlights: The regularly returning spring **Bonaparte's Gull** appeared on cue at Cardiff Bay, where **Slavonian Grebe** and **Glaucous Gull** were also present. The wintering **Lesser Scaup** remained at Cosmeston. **Lapland Buntings** dropped in at Sker and Cardiff Docks. A **Great Grey Shrike** was still frequenting Llanwonno Forest, while another turned up at Bwlch y Lladron (Rhondda). A flock of 14 **Pink-footed Geese** lingered at Kenfig until early in the month.

Other Sites: The first **Wheatear** was logged at St Brides Major (3rd). **Little Egrets** were at Barry Old Harbour, Forest Farm and Ogmore Estuary. Raptors included **Hen Harrier** at Caer-lan Farm, **Merlin** at Sully and widespread sightings of **Red Kites**. Rhymney Estuary held 40 **Pintail**, 9 **Scaup**, 125 **Black-tailed Godwits**, 500 **Redshanks** and a **Yellow-legged Gull**, with another of the latter species at Cardiff Bay. Additional wader records were of **Greenshank**

at Kenfig, **Black-tailed Godwit** at Caerphilly Castle Moat and **Green Sandpiper** at Faendre Reen. Two **Black Redstarts** frequented Cardiff Bay and Penarth Head. Two **Firecrests** were found at Merthyr Mawr Warren.

April 2011

Highlights: A **Purple Heron** was discovered at Kenfig. A **Wryneck** was reported at Trowbridge. Cosmeston hosted a **Garganey**. Leftovers from the previous month were a **Great Grey Shrike** at Bwlch y Lladron and a **Slavonian Grebe** at Cardiff Bay. The only **Osprey** seen was over Taff's Well.

Other Sites: Early migrants included **Grasshopper Warbler** at Merthyr Mawr Warren (1st), **Redstart** at Llangynwyd (2nd), **Wood Warbler** at Caerphilly (7th) and **Swift** at Cosmeston (12th). A **Hen Harrier** was near Caer-lan Farm. A **Little Egret** was at Taff's Well. **Hobbies** were recorded at Llanilid, Roath and Whitchurch. Waders included **Little Ringed Plover** at Kenfig, **Greenshank** at Sully, **Jack Snipe** at Cosmeston, and **Green Sandpipers** at Llanilid and Rumney Great Wharf. A **Little Gull** was off Sker, 2 **Yellow-legged Gulls** were at Rhymney Estuary and a flock of 34 **Arctic Terns** moved off Cardiff Foreshore. A fall of 30 **Wheatears** arrived at Llanilid, a **Pied Flycatcher** was near Coedely and a **Ring Ouzel** stopped off in the Garw Valley.

May 2011

Highlights: A **Black Stork** over Mynydd Ty-talwyn (22nd) was a county first. A **Hooded Crow** was found at Sker (10th). Two **Dotterel** turned up at Cefn Cadlan, as in 2010. Llanilid held a **Black-necked Grebe** and a **Garganey**. **Hoopoes** were reported at Llanharry and Cowbridge.

Other Sites: Seawatching reports from Porthcawl included maxima of 9 **Storm Petrels**, 3 **Great Northern Divers**, 4,500 **Manx Shearwaters**, **Great Skua**, **Pomarine Skua**, 2 **Arctic Skuas** and 3 **Black Terns**. Possibly the same 3 **Black Terns** were seen off Nash Point, where an **Arctic Skua** was also logged, and another **Black Tern** was at Rumney Great Wharf. A **Storm Petrel** was off Summerhouse Point. A **Great Northern Diver** was inland at Llwyn-onn Reservoir. **Little Egrets** were at Rumney Great Wharf and on the River Taff, Cardiff. Raptors included **Hen Harrier** at Llanilid, **Merlin** at Rumney Great Wharf and **Hobbies** from eight sites. Two **Green Sandpipers** were at Llanilid, a late flock of 18 **Purple Sandpipers** were at Sker and a **Little Stint** at Kenfig Sands. A **Pied Flycatcher** was at Rumney Great Wharf, with another in the Llynfi Valley, where **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was also observed.

June 2011

Highlights: **Little Egrets** were noted at Kenfig and at three locations around Cardiff. Seawatching at Porthcawl produced 2 **Great Skuas**, an **Arctic Skua**, up to 9 **Storm Petrels** and an impressive count of 8,130 **Manx Shearwaters** (18th). **Hobbies** were seen at Bridgend, Kenfig, Cors Crychudd Reen and Rumney Great Wharf (3). A **Quail** called at Trowbridge Mawr. Waders included 36 **Whimbrel** at Rumney Great Wharf and a **Black-tailed Godwit** at Kenfig. A **Little Gull** and at least 20 **Mediterranean Gulls** – a high count for our area – were recorded at Rumney Great Wharf. **Nightjars** were observed at a number of widespread forestry sites. Nine pairs of **Wood Warblers** were logged at the Garw Forest. A flock of 10 **Crossbills** were at Llanishen, Cardiff. Six **Choughs** flew past Dunraven.

Paul Roberts

COMMITTEE NEWS

The Committee has met twice since the last newsletter. Three new Committee members were welcomed – Christian Jenkins, Strinda Davies and Anne Wilson.

- Paul Seligman has been trawling through the Charity Commission's paperwork in order to reclaim Gift Aid.
- Christian Jenkins has agreed to take over the web site from John Wilson.
- Anne Wilson is to take on the role of treasurer from Adrian Murch.
- Graham Powell arranged for the club to be featured in the *South Wales Echo* 'Club of the Week' column.
- Laura Palmer has been working on the GBC Library policy.
- John Wilson met with County Recorder David Gilmore to discuss the 2011 bird report. As this will be the 50th edition, we hope to make it a special one.

MEMBERS' NEWS

There are several new members to welcome: Roger and Helen Mansfield from Whitchurch, Rob Parry and Lizzie Wilberforce from Ammanford, Tim Adcock from Llanelli, Nigel Williams from Pontardawe, Ken Fifield from Pontlasce, and Eileen Evans from Pen-y-fai.

Most members have now renewed for 2011–2012; however, some have not. For those who have not, we hope this has been an oversight and that you wish to continue your membership. A reminder is included if you haven't yet renewed.

The increase in membership fees has had some hiccups. Some of those with Standing Orders have not yet amended them. Once again a reminder is included if you haven't yet amended yours. A couple of members also paid twice. Refunds will be arranged.

The Dawn Chorus Walk in Dyffryn Gardens went well. Twenty-seven participants arrived at the crack of dawn. Unfortunately it was drizzling; however, it didn't stop the birds 'performing' for us. All the usual woodland species were heard, although Song Thrushes seemed to dominate proceedings. We built up an appetite and appreciated the breakfast at the end of our walk. The Vale of Glamorgan has generously donated £50 to the Club for our help with this event.

Kenfig Nature Reserve held their annual 'Discovery Day' on 12 June. Unfortunately, the weather was awful and both the guided bird and wild-flower walks had to be cancelled. The rain drove people indoors with the result that Anne Wilson's cake stall did a roaring trade. She took £58, which was split 50/50 between the Club and KNNR.

Alan Rosney

BTO NEWS

Bird Atlas Update

July sees the end of the main survey period for the Bird Atlas project. Thanks to all who have taken part on this major survey. We've collected a huge amount of local data, and as we move into the post-Atlas period there's much to do to before atlases are published. A timeline is outlined below:

- look for signs of confirmed breeding of late breeders, e.g. Sedge Warbler carrying food, late broods of Swallow, Spotted Flycatcher feeding young (August 2011);
- breeding season 2011 record submission deadline (31 August 2011);
- data checking and validation;
- final record submission deadline for all four years (31 December 2011);
- data checking and validation;
- final national Atlas dataset complete (April 2012);
- national Atlas published (2013).

Wherever possible, would all volunteers ensure that their breeding season records contain a breeding code (<<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas/taking-part/breeding-evidence>>), even if it just for suitable habitat or a singing male.

I hope it has been an enjoyable and rewarding experience for everyone who has taken part. Perhaps it has whetted your appetite for bird surveying? There are several annual surveys we take part in locally, and BTO have a number of new surveys planned for the future.

Please get in touch if you'd like to get involved, or you can read more about what we do on the East Glamorgan BTO web site <<http://eastglambto.wordpress.com/surveys>>.

Make your birding count.



BTO Cymru: A New Dawn

BTO's strength in Wales is a testimony to the efforts of all its volunteers. For many years, BTO's Honorary Wales Officer, John Lloyd, and his team of volunteer Regional Representatives have promoted the Trust's work, leading training events and recruiting birders to take part in surveys.

In 2010, a BTO Cymru Appeal (<http://www.bto.org/support-us/current-appeals/bto-wales>) was launched, which has attracted £32,000 from birdwatchers; widespread and long-term support for the new Welsh Office is being sought.

I am delighted to announce that a new office, based at Bangor University, is now open, with three key aims for the next few years:

- attract more volunteers and members – so that we can provide more comprehensive information on important species of Welsh habitats – whether they be Pied Flycatchers in oak woods, farmland Lapwings, coastal ducks or House Sparrows in gardens;
- work with partners in Wales, particularly the Welsh Ornithological Society, RSPB and CCW, so that we can develop studies and research that can explain rapid changes in numbers for species like Curlew on upland farms;
- develop a Welsh voice for the BTO, focusing on issues that are important to Welsh birdwatchers – providing information in both English and Welsh.

Two key appointments were identified for the new office:

- Development Officer to work with Regional Representatives, to recruit more volunteers, promote the work of the Trust, develop courses for birdwatchers and represent the BTO in the media;
- Senior Ecologist to be the link between science teams at Thetford HQ and potential partner organizations in Wales, helping to focus attention on issues facing birds in Wales and other western parts of Britain. New surveys and ecological projects will all strengthen evidence-based conservation.

Kelvin Jones has now been appointed as the BTO Cymru Development Officer and Dr Rachel Taylor is our new Senior Ecologist and will take up her new post in October.

Kelvin has been passionate about birds since childhood and for many years like others, just did his own thing, not realizing there was a side of birding to which he could make a meaningful contribution. One quiet afternoon in 1991, he was diligently patrolling Porthmadog High Street, when he came across a number of young people all stood at the harbour bridge looking at something. The group was led by local RSPB stalwart Reg Thorpe, who pointed out a Black Guillemot. From here on Kelvin was recruited for BTO's Nightjar survey and subsequently took up training as a ringer, and the rest, as they say, is history. Kelvin has been very active at bird surveying, being an Assistant RR Caernarfonshire and Meirionydd, is on the North Wales Atlas Committee, and has been Chair of the Wales Raptor Study Group for several years. He is looking forward to work with the team of Regional Representatives, offering support at shows and training events.

Rachel currently works for Bangor University and was a late starter in bird ecology, starting out in biochemistry and physiology with field experience studying reptiles in the UK and southern Europe. Her PhD started out on 'the influence of spatial scaling in tropical biodiversity', but having realized that birds would be the ideal study group in tropical farmland, in 2002 she turned up on the BTO's doorstep as an aspiring trainee ringer with huge enthusiasm but absolutely no birding experience at all. Three years and 1,800 Costa Rican birds (plus rather a lot of UK passerines, waders and seabirds) later, bird ecology, ringing and the effects of agriculture on the natural environment had become the focus of her work (and play!) and remain so to this day. Rachel is an active bird ringer with SCAN (North Wales) and the Wash Wader Ringing Groups, amongst other projects. She anticipates a very challenging and exciting time helping to raise the profile of the BTO in Wales and working with its committed and talented volunteers, alongside partners in Government and conservation organizations to secure the future of Wales' iconic and charismatic birds.

BTO Cymru will be launched at the Royal Welsh Show, 18-21 July.
Welcome Kevin and Rachel, we look forward to working with you.

Wayne Morris

BTO Regional Representative in East Glamorgan

Email: eastglambto@gmail.com; web: <http://eastglambto.wordpress.com>

BTO Representative for West Glamorgan

I would just like to introduce myself as the recently appointed British Trust for Ornithology Regional Representative for West Glamorgan. You may well be aware that this role was previously undertaken by Bob Howells and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the sterling work Bob has done on behalf of the BTO. Bob has been the BTO RR for over 40 years, initially for Glamorgan and then for West Glamorgan from 1974. In addition, he has organized the Wetlands Birds Survey – WeBS (formerly the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry) for over 35 years.

Many volunteer surveyors have benefitted from Bob's support and expertise with one thing being clearly evident, Bob has always led by example. He has unbroken counts of the birds that use the Burry Inlet and Swansea Bay for over 40 years as well as organizing and collating data for many surveys over his time as RR. I'm sure I speak for everyone in expressing thanks to Bob for all his hard work as BTO RR for West Glamorgan. I know that Bob fully intends to continue with his survey work and I am grateful for his kind offer of support as I get up to speed with this new role.

My passion for birding was ignited about 35 years ago when I joined the RSPB's Young Ornithologists Club. After a rather passive few years in the 1990s, I decided to rekindle my interest and become a much more active bird-watcher. I enjoy birding on a local/regional basis especially when it involves the added dimension of submitting my observations/counts via a range of channels for the benefit of interested parties on a local and national basis. This to me is birding with both passion and purpose.

I have been a member of the GBC, GOS and the BTO for a number of years and the opportunities and support available has strongly influenced this dimension of my birding.

The current focus on BTO Cymru and potential momentum from the BTO Atlas work make this an exciting time to be part of the work with the BTO.

Wayne Morris has consistently provided excellent summaries of the BTO survey work available so all I will say at this time is that the same opportunities exist in the West Glamorgan region.

If you are interested in adding an extra dimension to your birding through participation in one or more of the BTO surveys please feel free to get in touch with me.

I look forward to working with BTO surveyors, current and new, in the future.

Alastair Flannagan

BTO Regional Representative and WeBS Organiser for West Glamorgan.

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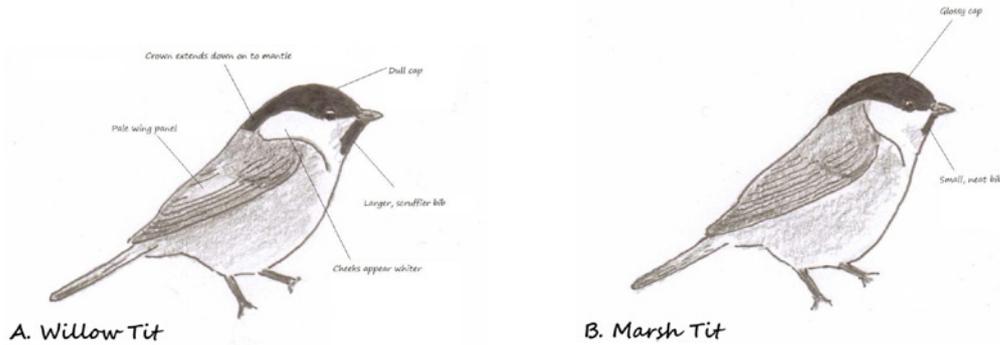
CONFUSION SPECIES

Willow Tit and Marsh Tit

I thought it would be good to have a series of articles on identifying tricky species. As you may know, I write a section for the bird report. Included in 'my' section are Willow Tit and Marsh Tit. Sadly, both species are in decline in our region and sightings are few and far between. Unless they call, they are difficult to separate. Marsh Tits have a distinctive pitchou call whilst Willow Tits have a buzzing, scolding call. Their names are a little confusing as the Willow prefers damp woodlands and carrs whilst Marsh prefers drier, deciduous areas.

The Willow Tit has a dull black crown, although this may be difficult to discern in poor light. The crown extends down on to the mantle giving it a bull-necked appearance. The bib is larger than that of the Marsh. A distinctive pale panel can be seen in the wing. Willow has slightly buffed flanks.

Marsh Tit has a glossy cap (think marsh – wet – glossy). Juveniles however have a duller cap. It has a small bib. The cheeks become dusky behind the ear coverts. The field guides state that Marsh has a squarer tail than Willow although I must admit that I haven't really noticed this feature.



The stronghold for Willow Tit in Eastern Glamorgan is undoubtedly the Cynon Valley. Tirfounder Fields in Aberdare are the best place to search for them. I recently saw one in Caerphilly however. Marsh Tits are more widespread. I used to get them visiting my garden feeders in Nantgarw until about four years ago. The area around Miskin Cricket Club is worth exploring and I saw one at Forest Farm last winter. The Craig-yr-Allt ridge near Tongwynlais may still hold some.

Alan Rosney

P.S. They do have feet – I'm not very good at drawing them.

THE GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN GLAMORGAN – JUST HOW MANY DO WE HAVE?

The Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) is one of those enigmatic birds that everyone wants to see. In East Glamorgan, it is historically a very scarce species (with fewer than 20 individuals recorded). Just north of the area, in Brecknock/Powys, however, the species is regarded as a regular winter visitor, albeit in small numbers, and as such is not a description species for that County.

Since the mid-2000s, at least one has wintered most years in the recording area. This past winter has seen numerous records and with probably two just over the boundary in West Glamorgan and two in Wentwood forest in Gwent, the question is: just how many wintered in the East Glamorgan this past winter?

The 'core' area to search for Great Grey Shrikes within East Glam is the Northern Valleys area (essentially any clear fell/recent regrowth areas north of Pontypridd), such as around the St Gwynno and Taf Fawr (inc. Penmoelallt and Onllwyn) forestry areas and Hirwaun Common. Those of us who bird these areas on a more regular basis believe that there were probably three and possibly as many as five in the area this winter – my personal thoughts are that there were at least four birds present. Given the species rarity value in Glamorgan, this appears to be unprecedented and, quite frankly, unbelievable numbers. So why do we think the numbers could be that high?

While it is widely thought that wintering Great Grey Shrikes cover an extensive area, the literature (BWP) would suggest a core winter territory of up to 150 hectares with wider wanderings of up to 5 km (3 m) from that core area. Just how far apart are the East Glamorgan sightings? Some of the sightings are some 20 km (12 m) apart (Llanwonno – Garwnant). The area covered by the sightings this winter amounted to some 100 km², so if it is just one bird it is wandering far and wide.

So what do I think are the core areas of our minimum of four birds? We think that there is at least one centred around Llanwonno – appearing at various times at the 'Nightjar site' and Perthcelyn. The fact there were two confirmed Shrikes in a much smaller area of Wentwood forest would suggest that two or even three birds could have set up winter territories in the St Gwynno forest area. The Perthcelyn bird has probably the same bird that has wintered in the area since at least 2007.

I believe there is one in the Taf Fawr forestry area, this being the bird seen above the former Baverstocks Hotel and above Llwyn Onn reservoir. I would suggest this bird has wintered in the area since 2008–2009 – I saw it on 3 January 2009, but didn't submit a description for the simple reason I viewed the bird from the Penderyn – Story Arms road,

putting the bird over a mile away and essentially my description would have been a grey, white and black dot on the top of a conifer! Not a very compelling description.

The third bird, I think, is centred around Hirwaun Common, the bird seen at Mynydd Bwlfa. It is conceivable that this could be the St Gwynno forest bird, but I think it is just too far away from that site to be the same bird.

I also believe a fourth bird set up territory in the lower Cynon Valley area, above Mountain Ash. I picked up this bird in January this year near the summit of Twyn Brynbuchan, but local walkers gave me a description of a bird they didn't recognize, which fitted GGS, in the same area in November 2010, only a couple of hours after Martin Bevan and Phil Hill had been watching a Great Grey Shrike near Abercwmboi (the Perthcelyn bird). While Twyn Brynbuchan is not far from Perthcelyn (certainly within 5 km), there are sufficient areas of clear fell and young regrowth to suggest that a bird could quite happily set up a core territory along the north ridge of the Cynon Valley/west ridge of the upper Taff Valley as well as another in the Perthcelyn area. If the Perthcelyn bird has been returning with some of its offspring, then, I would have thought, it is likely they would set up territory nearby.

The major down side to the 2+ bird theory is the apparent lack of birds being seen at different sights on the same day and similar times. At all the sites where Great Grey Shrikes have been seen this year they are often in the area for a short period before departing. Given this, it would be understandable for the Glamorgan Rarities Committee to consider that only one bird was involved. As such can I urge everyone who has seen a Great Grey Shrike in Glamorgan to submit their sightings to the Rarities Committee, no matter how poor the description, irrespective of whether you found the bird or were catching up with a bird found by others.

If there are two, three, four or more wintering in East Glamorgan, are these recent additions, or have they just been under-recorded previously? As Great Grey Shrikes tend to return to a winter territory over several years, it may be that one bird 'discovered' a favourable wintering site in Glamorgan (say Mynydd Margam in West Glamorgan) and in the following years brought some of its offspring to the area.

As Great Grey Shrikes tend to return to favoured territories, it may be possible to undertake a census of the species in East Glamorgan one day over the 2011–2012 winter, staking out known, or potential, sites logging if and when birds appeared. Only then could we really know whether the species is a regular, but scarce, winter visitor to the area.

Martin Bell

TRIP REPORTS

Field Outing to Goldcliff/Uskmouth 10 April 2011

Fifteen club members gathered at Goldcliff on a bright sunny morning. We had timed our visit to catch the rising tide. As the tide rises, it tends to push waders from the foreshore on to the lagoons. From the platforms good numbers of waders were present. A **Greenshank** showed very well and small groups of waders were busily feeding on the nearest island. Amongst the **Dunlins**, **Redshanks**, **Oystercatchers** and **Lapwings** were a few **Ringed Plovers**. Unfortunately, we weren't able to find any **Little Ringed Plovers** amongst them. Thirty-seven **Avocets** were located on the far lagoon. Suddenly all the duck and waders took to the air. The reason became immediately apparent. An **Osprey** flapped slowly over the lagoon and passed straight over our heads. What a start to a day's birding!

Newly arrived warblers were very active. **Blackcap**, **Chiffchaff** and **Willow Warbler** were present in good numbers. In addition a few **Swallows** were passing through. A **Stock Dove** flew over and we then got on to an obliging **Green Woodpecker** anting in a nearby field. This led to a Bird Club first – Rob Gaze had to 'lower' his telescope to allow others to get a good view. The bright sunshine meant lots of butterflies were on the wing. **Orange Tips** were the most numerous but **Peacock**, **Speckled Wood**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Holly Blue** and **Small White** were all present.

From the sea-wall, we scanned for Whimbrel without success; however, Stuart Hardcastle got on to a female **Merlin** sitting on a fence post. Must be the new scope, Stu!

At Uskmouth there were several **Cetti's Warblers** calling. As usual, they failed to show themselves. A couple of **Whitethroats** were more obliging, however. **Reed Warblers** and **Sedge Warblers** were singing from the reeds but

proved elusive. On the lagoons a few ducks were still present with **Goldeneye** and **Pochard** being added to our day list. **Great Crested Grebe** and **Little Grebes** also showed well.

On our way home, Gareth Jenkins and I decided to drop into Peterstone Gout, hoping to see either the Green-winged Teal or the Garganey that had been reported there. Unfortunately the tide had turned and the gout held very few birds. My day list was 62 species.

Alan Rosney

A Trip to South Central Alaska (18 May–4 June 2011)

I had for some years been excited by the prospect of a trip to Alaska. The dates chosen were in part financially driven and to some extent geared to have a chance of Kodiak Bear and winter seabirds/waders – in the event we missed both. Steller's Eiders, Western and Rock Sandpipers had all gone north by the time we arrived and just as bad no trips to the Katmai Peninsular were running – bears were slow. However, there was still plenty to savour.

Early reports about Denali were not favourable (snow) and I decided quite early on in the planning to give it a miss, deciding instead to go south from Anchorage to Homer, Kachemak Bay and then to Seward and the Kenai Fjords.

The route out was tiring: Cardiff – Amsterdam – Minneapolis – Anchorage; in total, with stops, about 24 hours. Minneapolis to Anchorage alone was about five hours! Weather conditions were similar to what would be expected of coastal Norway – rarely approaching 60° F and occasional rain especially near the glaciers. It did get progressively warmer, however, with some days at the end above 60° F.

18 May

The day dawned cold and after a lazy start from the Microtel at Anchorage Airport, we set off to the nearby Lake Hood seaplane base to check out ducks, etc. Hardly had we got there when we were told that a Black Bear had been found up a tree on the airport access road. So a detour was arranged whilst also checking out the ducks. A wrong turn had me face to face with an aircraft coming down the middle of the road! You need to be careful around here.

Adventures over, we set off for Westchester Lagoon (a favourite place for birding in Anchorage) getting **Greater Scaup** and **Lesser Scaup**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **Hudsonian Godwit**, **Shoveler**, **Mallard**, **Bufflehead**, **Tree Swallows**, **Solitary Sandpiper**, **Magpies**, **Mew Gulls**, **Bonaparte's Gulls** and **Arctic Terns**.

Next to Goose Lake in the University Complex where the hardy types were sunbathing! Here we had **American Wigeon** and a breeding pair of **Pacific Diver**, **Myrtle Warbler**, **American Robin**.

From there we went south of the City on the Seward Highway to Potters Marsh. This is a large area impounded by the railway/road embankment and it is the best place by far in Anchorage: **Arctic Terns**, **Mew Gulls**, 'small dark' **Canada Geese** (probably *minima*), **Ring-necked Duck**, **Gadwall**, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Bald Eagle**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **Canvasback**, **American Coot**, **Glaucous-winged Gull**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Sandhill Crane** and 6 **Myrtle Warblers**, **Raven** and **Rusty Blackbird**.

19 May

Again starting at Lake Hood where there were **Least Sandpiper**, **Goldeneye**, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Myrtle Warbler**, **White-crowned Sparrow**.

Then to Eagle River Nature Center, 14 miles north of Anchorage, another superb spot: **Pine Grosbeak** (2f + 1m), displaying **Wilson's Snipe**, 2 **Black-capped Chickadees**, **American Robin**, **Dark-eyed Juncos**, **Tree Swallows**, **Hermit Thrush** and **Raven**.

Then we drove north to the Glen Highway in search of Hawk Owl at mile 118. This trip was freezing cold with fine views of the Matanuska Glacier and several frozen lakes but also rainy and a long drive for just 2 **Moose**, 5 **Glaucous-winged Gulls**, a pair of **Belted Kingfishers** and a **Harlan's Hawk**, the latter two being at an iced-over Long Lake.

Back at Palmer there was **Raven** and we stayed the night at Wasilla in the excellent Best Western on Lake Lucille. Here again we had **Osprey**, **Red-necked Grebe** and **Arctic Terns**.

20 May

Drove North to Talkeetna to 'see' Mount McKinley (we saw the bottom half – top half in cloud on a beautiful sunny day almost 20° C. There were lots of **Violet-green Swallows** at the Talkeetna Lodge from where there are the best views of the Denali Mountains.

On our return we stopped at a Bush Floatplane dock in Talkeetna that had a pair of **Great Northern Divers** and our first **Redpoll**.

We called in to Eagle River NC and stayed in the town that night. Same birds as before with the addition of **Downy Woodpecker**. This is a regular spot for **Pine Grosbeak** around 5 pm when the office closes!

21 May

The day started well with 2 **Wild Turkeys**. Today's route aimed for Girdwood with a stop at Potter's Marsh, where we had **Canvasback**, 4–6 **Greater Scaup**, **Gadwall**, **Mew Gulls**, **Arctic Terns**, etc. This was a rainy day and we decided to see the Portage Glacier. From the boat we had **Bald Eagle** and **Merganser**.

Around the Alyesca Resort in Girdwood we had lots of **Pine Siskin** and a few **Redpoll**.

22 May

The rain continued as we boarded the boat excursion to Prince William Sound at Whittier. Whittier is a strange and hugely unattractive port especially in torrential rain.

However, the trip of 5–6 hours visits '26 glaciers' and produced a hatful of birds. In Whittier, there were **North-western Crows**, **Magpies**, **Kittiwakes** and **Pigeon Guillemots** and **Marbled Murrelets**. There is a **Kittiwake** colony on the far side of the inlet and **Bald Eagles** nested in the town.

When the boat got going we had **Pomarine Skua** and **Long-tailed Skua**, flocks of **Red-necked Phalaropes** and murre/murrelets, **Harlequin Ducks**, **Mergansers**, **Mew Gulls**, **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Glaucous x Western Gulls** roosting on ice flows, **Bald Eagle**, crows and some mammals – a lunge feeding **Humpback Whale**, numerous **Sea Otter**, **Dall's Porpoises** and **Mountain Goat** (6).

23 May

The rain held off for our drive to Homer. On the way, we stopped off at Tern Lake – well named – **Arctic Terns**, **Trumpeter Swan**, **Great Northern Diver**, **Red-necked Grebe**, and a petrol stop at Cooper Landing gave us **Bald Eagle** and a colony of superb **Violet-green Swallows**. Further along we stopped to investigate a raptor on a post, **Harlan's Hawk**, and at the pull-in a **Pine Grosbeak** and then a **Merlin** and a **Great Northern Diver** at a barely unfrozen lake. We also did the northern loop route to Skilak Lake. We created a lot of dust and saw **Golden-crowned Kinglet** and **Myrtle Warbler**. At Homer we had plenty of time for some birding over the next two days.

24–25 May, Homer

Homer is a major attraction for Alaskan and USA birders. The local wildlife group (the Kachemak Bay Birders) has signposted c. 26 local sites of birding interest around the town and adjacent villages and all the info can be gleaned at the superb Islands and Oceans facility on the road into town – this is worth a visit to see local stuffed birds on display.

It is next to the entrance to Beluga Slough where we saw **Starling**(?), **Hermit Thrush**, **Sandhill Cranes**, **Fox Sparrow**, **Lincoln's Sparrow** and **Savannah Sparrow**, **Black-capped Chickadee**, **Pheasant** with chicks!, **American Crow**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Short-billed Dowitcher** and **Green-winged Teal**.

Further down on the famous Homer Spit – a two-mile long flat finger of land stretching out across half the Kachemak Bay – we found **Glaucous Gull** and **Franklin's Gull** in the **Kittiwake** flock at the point. Someone counted the **Bald Eagles** and gave up after 26. Sea watching especially in the evening revealed thousands of **Common Murres** (**Guillemots**), **Pigeon Guillemots**, **Tufted Puffins**, **Marbled Murrelets**, **Black Scoter** and **White-winged Scoter** and four diver sp.: **White-billed Diver**, **Great Northern Diver**, **Red-throated Diver** and **Pacific Diver**. The smaller murrelets were not really identifiable to species at distance.

At the base of the spit there is an area called Mud Bay (well named). In April this area holds huge numbers (10k+) of first Rock Sandpipers and later Western Sandpipers, which stop here on northward migration. None was present when I was there in May – neither were the Steller's Eiders!

Mud bay attracted ducks and geese including **Brant Goose, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Greater Scaup** and **Lesser Scaup**.

Further east along the northern edge of the bay at Step Stone Lake there is a breeding colony of **Aleutian Terns** – these had not yet arrived but there we saw **Orange-crowned Warbler**. We continued to see these regularly for the rest of the trip.

25 May

On this day we drove back up the Sterling Highway to Anchor Point via the 'Old Sterling Highway' as suggested by the guide. We also took the road adjacent to the river down to the seashore. On this run we saw many more **Bald Eagles** and **Hermit Thrush, Wilsons Warbler, Gray Jay, Myrtle Warbler, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Herring Gulls** and **Mew Gulls, Orange-crowned Warbler** and **Snowshoe Hares** everywhere. We returned to Homer via the Ridgeway checking the river crossings for signs of bear – this being King Salmon season – plenty of tracks were found. **Ravens** were also quite common.

26 May

Today I had booked a trip out into the bay with Karl of Bay excursions – meeting at 8 am at the small boat dock. Karl has been running these trips around Kachemak Bay for some years. He knows his birds and he knows where to find them – trips last about four hours and visit Gull Island where 15k birds apparently breed.

White-billed Diver, Great Northern Diver, Pacific Diver, Pigeon Guillemot, Guillemot, Marbled Murrelets, Kittlitz' Murrelet, Red-faced Cormorant, Pelagic Cormorant, Harlequin Duck, White-winged Scoter, Common Scoter, Kittiwakes and usual gulls, **Black Oystercatcher, Surfbird, Aleutian Terns, Tufted Puffin, Sea Otters, California Sea Lions,**

In the evening, we visited the birding spot adjacent to the Airport terminal. Here we had **Gray Jay, Wilson's Snipe** in display, **Robin, Dark-eyed Junco, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Pintail, Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Trumpeter Swans, Orange-crowned Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Boreal Chickadee, Magpie** and a surprise **Golden-crowned Warbler** heard adjacent to the fish-and-chips take-away! There were also 6 **Aleutian Terns** at the base of the Spit.

27 May

Set off early to drive to Seward, stopping off to see the **Aleutian Terns** again at the base of the spit. We stopped again at Tern Lake to see the same birds as before. On arrival at Seward we booked a Kenai Fjords trip and had a stroll around the small boat harbour **Wandering Tattler, Surfbird, Lincoln's Sparrow**.

28 May

The six hour Kenai Fjords Trip was incredible. The boat was steering close in to the seabird action and great views were had. There is another boat trip limited to 20 people on a smaller boat that visits the Chiswell Islands – this is the best trip for birders, but as this was the first trip of the year it had been fully booked for not only today but several days/weeks beyond: **Kittiwakes, Short-tailed Shearwater (10), Guillemot, Tufted Puffin, Horned Puffin, Pigeon Gull, Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, Kittlitz' Murrelets (Aialik Glacier), Glaucous-winged Gulls, Arctic Terns, Pelagic Cormorant, Red-faced Cormorant, Black Oystercatcher, Bald Eagles, 20 Humpback Whales, 2 Fin Whale, 10 Dall's Porpoise, 20+ Orca, Steller's Sea Lions, Harbor Seals, Black Bear, Mountain Goats, Sea Otters.**

29 May, around Seward

Kittiwakes, Glaucous-winged Gulls, Raven, Bald Eagles, Marbled Murrelets, Harlequin Ducks, crow.

Bear Lake Woods: **Steller's Jay, Pine Siskins, Robin.**

30 May

Seward to Girdwood via Hope: **Raven, Hermit Thrush, Myrtle Warbler, Spotted Sandpiper** (Hope Rd). Alyesca Cable Car: **Violet-green Swallows, Golden Eagle, Redpolls, Pine Siskin and Varied Thrush** (3).

31 May

Crow Creek Road – Girdwood: **Wilson's Warbler** (3) at River crossing. Winner Creek parking: **Hermit Thrush, Pine Siskins, Townsend's Warbler** (2).

Potter Marsh: **Bald Eagle** took a **Canada Goose!** **Arctic Terns** and **Mew Gulls** breeding. **Red-necked Grebes, Blue-winged Teal, Green winged Teal, Magpie, Raven, crow, Lesser Scaup and Greater Scaup, Canvasback, American Wigeon, Short-billed Dowitcher, Rusty Blackbird, pr. Red-necked Phalarope, 100s Violet-green Swallows and Tree Swallows, Blackpoll Warbler, Sandhill Crane** (2), **Bank Swallows.**

1–2 June

Potter Marsh as previous but also **Muskrat, Savannah Sparrow** in heavy rain.

Richard Smith

Nightjar Walk at Llanwonno – 8 June

As part of Wales Biodiversity Week, the Club led a walk at Llanwonno to try and see Nightjars. This enigmatic bird is rarely seen and in the past it spawned a lot of folklore due to its eerie churring song, delivered as night falls.

Despite light drizzle, 27 participants met in the car park of the Brynffynnon Arms, just before dusk. The area where we usually have views has recently been clear felled, so we decided to explore a different area. We followed a forestry track for a short distance to an area overlooking some low conifers and scrub. It looked ideal for Nightjars. Fortunately, the drizzle stopped and insects started flying. Things were looking promising. Initially, we heard the churring of a male **Nightjar** in the distance. Next we heard the kwik call of a flying bird. We were treated to great flight views of a pair of **Nightjars**, the male showing his bright white wing and tail spots. As darkness fell, even more showed. In all, I believe the group saw a total of 8 birds.

Several other species were either seen or heard: **Redstart, Cuckoo, Swallow, Swift, Tawny Owl, Song Thrush, Blackbird** and **Wren**. In addition, both **Pipistrelle** and **Noctule** bats were seen.

Alan Rosney

Footnote: On the drive home, my car headlights picked up two pairs of shining eyes. A pair of **Nightjars** were sitting in the middle of the road.

FUTURE CLUB EVENTS

Indoor Meetings

These are generally held on the first Tuesday of the month during the winter months. Start 7.45 pm in the Kenfig National Nature Reserve's Visitor Centre, Kenfig. For details, please contact Paul Denning on 01443 202 607 or <pgdenning.naturepics@virgin.net>.

Tue 1 Oct

Northern India

An illustrated talk by Alan Rosney.

Field Trips

Please contact John Wilson on 029 2033 9424 or <john_wilson@glamorganbirds.org.uk> at least seven days before the trip date. The meeting point for non-local trips is normally at St. Margaret's Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff – just off

junction 32 of the M4. Departure times vary, but John will be able to give you the information for each trip. These trips are suitable for birders of all levels.

- Sun 7 Aug *WWT Penclacwydd*
Reverse migration should be under way. Entry fee for non-WWT members.
- Sun 4 Sep *Goldcliff*
Passage waders and whatever else we can find. High tide at 12.49 pm.
- Wed 5 Oct *Kenfig & Sker*
High tide at 14.17 pm. Migrants.

Monthly Walks (Kenfig NNR)

These take place on the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Reserve Centre at 9.00 am. For details, please contact Dave Carrington on 01656 743 386.

Monthly Walks (Cosmeston Lakes and Lavernock Point)

These take place on the second Saturday of each month. Meet in the car park at Cosmeston at 9.30 am. For details, please contact John Wilson.

Monthly Walks (Forest Farm, joint walk with the Friends of Forest Farm and Cardiff RSPB)

These take place on the third Saturday of each month. Meet in the car park at Forest Farm Nature Reserve at 10.00 am. For details, please contact Alan Rosney.

AND FINALLY ...

Many thanks as always to everybody who contributed articles for this Newsletter. Deadline for submissions for the next one is Saturday **24 September**.

Best wishes and good birding Joek

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