



CAMBRIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

COS Bulletin

Cylchlythyr

Winter 2020 : Bulletin 189

Editor/Golygydd:

Geoff Gibbs,
Fron Wen,
Valley Road,
Llanfairfechan,
N. Wales,
LL33 0ET

Telephone/ Ffon: (01248) 681936

Email/ ebost:
geoffgibbs058@gmail.com

Editorial & COS News

Welcome to our new Chair/President Maryann Williams, who (rumour has it) is our first Lady President! And to our new Membership Secretary, Dr. Jeff Williams.

This Bulletin should go out with the 2018 Report, following the mailing in December of Membership Renewal details (*have you renewed?*) and the 2020 Programme, kindly sponsored by **Cambrian Photography**.

Now is the time to book your seat on the coach to **the Dyfi Estuary** on Sat May 23rd. This is a joint outing with NWWT, a repeat of the successful coach we ran in 2017. The morning will be spent at RSPB Ynys-hir, in the year they are celebrating 50 years since the reserve was founded (Bill Condry was the first Warden). In the afternoon we will visit Cors Dyfi (Mont Wildlife Trust), to inspect their new Visitor Centre, and then walk along the boardwalk through the reeds to the Observatory. Here we should have a close view of the Osprey nest and a superb panorama of the Dyfi valley. Please send Geoff a £15 cheque payable to Cambrian Ornithological Society to reserve your seat, or contact him for further information.

I'm delighted to include in this Bulletin an account of Jim Dustow's sabbatical when he checked out the breeding seabirds in Meirionnydd. Jim lives in Blaenau Ffestiniog and is of course the Bird Recorder for that Vice-County. The second part of Jim's article will appear in the next Bulletin.

Geoff Gibbs

2018 Seabird Safari in Meirionnydd

Editor's note: *Part 2 of this article will appear in the next Bulletin.*

A work-based sabbatical month from the day job at RSPB Vyrnwy gave me the chance to do some conservation work with basic expenses paid. Rather than go abroad like many people seem to do, I decided to do work in Britain. I spent 2 weeks in Feb-Mar 2018 surveying sites in Cornwall for Willow Tit and then 2.5 weeks in May-June 2018 in Meirionnydd, doing nesting seabirds to help out the 4th Census of the UK's Breeding seabirds 2015-2020. As no one had counted **anything** in under-birded Meirionnydd, any figures would be good. As it was, I virtually covered the whole county for suitable habitat, only skimming on the myriad of small upland lakes, though I did get to quite a few. Suspect I missed only a few mountain-cwm nesting Herring Gull that seem to rely on dropped walkers' scraps for food and maybe a small Black-headed Gull colony on a remote upland mire/lake somewhere. There is also the nagging doubt that I may have missed a couple of pairs of roof-nesting Herring Gulls in my home town of Blaenau Ffestiniog!

Blessed with huge seabird colonies Meirionnydd is not. Neither does it have a rugged sea coast. It does though possess some sections of sea cliffs: Harlech cliff c2km (just under 1 mile) in length is well vegetated and so not really suitable for nesting seabirds. Friog cliff, about 1 km (0.62 of a mile) in length is the only real sea cliff (with artificial buttresses added to protect and bolster the railway line) in the county, where nesting seabirds occur; these are Cormorant, Fulmar, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and occasionally Shag (last bred in 2008), a total in 2018 of 63-65 nests. The rest of the county's 8kms (5 miles) worth of cliffs north of Tywyn comprises of up to 10m high mudstone and is not really suitable for nesting seabirds. The total length of coastline from the Glaslyn estuary mouth of Porthmadog to the mouth of the Dyfi at Aberdyfi is approx 55km (34 miles) made of mostly of low mudstone cliff or sand dune or beach based, none of which is suitable for nesting seabirds. The only other seabird "cliff" in the classic (but unique!) mould is Craig yr Aderyn (Bird Rock), 8km (5 miles) inland up the Afon Dysynni, west of Abergynolwyn. Here nesting seabirds consist of Cormorant, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull; the Cormorant count this year was 55 nests. It is the only inland colony in Wales and has been present since at least 1695 (Pritchard 2012), though presumably present for eons beforehand especially when the sea levels were much higher and would have lapped at the base of Craig yr Aderyn. Recent counts of Cormorant

here peaked in 1993 when there were 95 nests so the population has almost halved in 25 years.

Due to the lack of cliffs for nesting sites and readily available food supplies and with an expanding population, larger gull species, mainly Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull have in the last 50 years at least, begun to nest on house roofs, factory-type flat roofs and chimneys of coastal towns in Meirionnydd, including Aberdyfi, Barmouth, Fairbourne, Tywyn and possibly inland at Blaenau Ffestiniog, Dolgellau and Penrhyndeudraeth. 28% of the county's 715 nesting pairs of Herring Gull used this habitat and appear to be very successful, with numbers increasing. Over half (57%) of the county's Herring Gulls nest at an inland lake site at Llyn Trawsfynydd where 408 nests were counted along with 86% of Meirionnydd's Lesser Black-backed Gulls. This is the only inland lake site used by large gulls apart from a possible pair of Great Black-backed Gull at Llyn Arenig Fawr. Large declines are occurring at this Trawsfynydd site.

The smaller gull species nesting in Meirionnydd comprises of only Black-headed Gull and these nest at present on only 2 inland lakes. The species is in serious decline in Wales, in 1969 there were 1260 pairs nesting at Llyn Trawsfynydd alone with another 500 pairs at other inland lakes. 2018 saw only 36 pairs and none at Llyn Trawsfynydd, the colony here disappeared around 2002. They are a fickle species and will suddenly up and leave a well-used colony for no obvious reason (to man) and then appear in a small boggy upland site the next year. 2019 held a small colony on such a site that was not used in 2018.

The final totals were as follows: Herring Gull 715 nests, Lesser Black-backed Gull 92 nests, Great Black-backed Gull 4 possible pairs, Black-headed Gull 36 pairs, Cormorant 58 nests, Fulmar 12-13 nests. Further details of all colonies are in the Cambrian Bird Report for 2018.

Jim Dustow

Scarce and Rare Birds in COS area

September 2019

Two **Dotterel** were at Uwchmynydd on 10th, and one was on Foel Fras on 14th. Onshore winds brought **Leach's Petrels**, with 11 birds passing Rhos Point on 7th the high count. **Long-tailed Skuas** were off Point Lynas on 5th and Llandudno on 22nd. A **Sabine's Gull** was off Bardsey on 4th. A **Black Kite** was over Talwrn on 25th. A **Rosy Starling** was at Aberffraw on 1st, then Cemlyn Bay on 9th then over 15-26th. A **Golden Oriole** was at South Stack Plantation on 19th. An **Isabelline Wheatear** was on Bardsey on 10-13th and a **Western Bonelli's Warbler** was at Uwchmynydd 1-5th. An **Alpine Swift** was over Brynsciencyn on 24th having been seen over Aberystwyth the previous day. A **Red-rumped Swallow** was over Bardsey on 25th and then an hour later over Aberdaron. An **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** was at Cemlyn over 25-27th and will be the first Welsh record if accepted. **Wrynecks** were on Bardsey on 20th. 2 **Lapland Buntings** were on the Great Orme on 8th and one on Bardsey on 8th and 18th.

October 2019

A **Cattle Egret** was at Dwyran on 9th whilst three **Great Egrets** over Bardsey were notable. Six **Little Gulls** were off Bardsey on 19th. **Sabine Gulls** were seen off Bardsey on 2nd. A **Glaucous Gull** was at Borth-y-Gest on 3rd and Bardsey on 26th and a **Long-tailed Skua** off there on 10th. **Firecrests** were on Bardsey on 12th, up to two at Aber Ogwen on 17-31st, Holyhead on 22nd, and one was ringed at Bangor on 28th. **Yellow-browed Warblers** were reported from several sites. **Siberian Chiffchaffs** were at Aberdaron on 24th. A **Blyth's Reed Warbler** was at Porth Eilian on 27th, the county's third record. **Richard's Pipits** were on Bardsey on 15-16th, the Alaw Estuary, the Great Orme on 23rd and at South Stack on 29th. **Woodlarks** flew over Bardsey on 20-21st. Two were at Carmel Head on 22nd. An **Isabelline Wheatear** was at Llandudno's West Shore on 2nd. A **Rosy Starling** remained at Cemlyn Bay on 1st. A **Wryneck** was on Bardsey on 14th. Nine **Lapland Buntings** were at Cemlyn Bay on 9-11th and one on Bardsey on 12-27th.

November 2019

A **Ring-necked Duck** was at Llyn Caer Euni on 17th. A **Richard's Pipit** was on The Range on 18th. A late Sandwich Tern was off Newborough on 18th and possibly the same at Foryd on 24th. A **Shorelark** was at RSPB South Stack on 25th.

December 2019

A **Ring-necked Duck** was at Bala Lake on 17th and a drake **Surf Scoter** was off the Great Orme on 25th. **Black Redstarts** were at on the Little Orme on 16th and one on the Great Orme on 21st. Also of note was an obvious influx of **Short-eared Owls** with over 

 20+ on Anglesey in total including up to 12 at Aberffraw. **Firecrests** were at numerous sites. **Swallows** were seen at Valley on 11th and over Brynsciencyn on 17th.

Rob Sandham

News of COS Members

- Welcome to New Members since Nov 2018: Ben Stammers; Trevor & Audrey Davies, Stephen Edwards, Gwynedd Roberts, Tony Gallon, Richard and Sheila Perry, Steve Miles and Linda Sammons, and Henry Cook.
- Mrs Eryl Olwen Davies of Brynmor Terrace Penmaenmawr died at the end of August. Her niece Helen says: *She grew up in the mountains of Penmaenmawr and loved nature. More recently, she spent a small fortune feeding the garden birds. Her garden was a haven. Regular visitors included nuthatches, tits and finches including a pair of bullfinches and even a sparrowhawk. Her great-nieces and great-nephew gained a knowledge and love of birds from happy hours spent looking out on the garden with her.*
- Alan Morley died at the end of December. He was an Assistant Warden on Bardsey when the Summer Tanager turned up in 1957, and ringed it. He wrote interesting items for the COS Bulletin, and had a very varied career. We will have more information on his life in the next Bulletin.

Geoff Gibbs

Field Trip to the Dee (north of Parkgate)

The Oct 29th field outing was to be led by David Lee, but I stepped in as he was on Panto duty. Luckily I was fully briefed, as Broad Lane, Lower Heswall, was difficult to find. It was a lovely morning, sunny but cold, as we scanned the creeks and saltmarsh of the Dee Estuary. Plenty of waders were visible on the mud, mainly Golden Plover, Redshank, Knot and Dunlin, plus a few Curlew and a Greenshank. As the tide rose, the waders were forced off the mud, giving excellent views of flying Knot and Golden Plover. The only distraction was passing dog-walkers who wanted to know 'what are you twitching?!' Once the incoming tide slowed, we moved on to Denhall (the Harp Inn), an excellent spot if the marsh flooded. Unfortunately, because of high pressure and the wind direction, this did not happen, so we moved on to Burton Wetlands RSPB Reserve. The high-point here for me was the view across the Dee estuary and marshes from Burton Point. As we walked back, a handsome group of Black-tailed Godwits flew overhead and Pinkfeet called nearby. A good day out.

Geoff Gibbs

Martin Mere Coach Trip

Despite the weather forecast saying it would be a fair day with some sunny periods Sunday 16th November conspired to be the usual fare for this autumn; overcast, dull and rainy. Such an inauspicious start to the day did not deter COS members and friends, who set off in high spirits for the WWT bird reserve at Martin Mere in Lancashire.

There were plenty of activities available there, catering for all tastes: bookstalls, natural history talks, bird ringing demonstrations, guided walks, the global wildfowl collections, and feeding of wintering swans and geese all being available as part of the North West Bird Watching Festival that weekend.

Having perused the bookstalls, I was keen to get started and headed out to the Discovery hide overlooking The Mere. A magical sight with most ducks, geese and snipe readily seen. Having logged the commoner species I was keen locate Willow Tit (*Poecile montana*) which had been seen on the feeders at the Janet Kear hide over the last few days. The hide had signs “closed between 12h00 and 14h00 for bird ringing” which did not augur well for my chances since it was already after 11h45. Then a brief microsecond view of what could only be a Willow Tit—unsatisfactory for absolute positive ID and away it went. Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Blue Tit, Great Tit all showed and then a Sparrowhawk scared all and sundry. Nothing ventured into the open for at least five minutes and I was getting twitchy at not having twitched! Then, in the nick of time, out it came in very good light even showing the pale wing patch to good effect. Willow Tit is decidedly uncommon even rare and declining, in Wales and the UK in general and this was my first for a year or two, with my last sighting being at Fairburn Ings, Yorkshire. Buoyed up with this success we returned to the café at the Visitor centre and had lunch, (beef baguette was excellent!).

Fortified, we headed west to the Raines observatory and then on to the Ron Barker hide from where we had distant views of two Marsh Harriers. Returning to the Raines observatory we were in for a treat. One person there said he had never seen so many birds at one time and I had to agree as there were literally thousands of birds on show. I counted over 300 Whooper Swans on The Mere itself and gave up counting and indeed there were many more in the field opposite the Visitor centre. Highlights were close encounters with male Pintails and a dozen or so Ruff living up to their specific name *pugnax* pugnaciously attacking each other right in front of our eyes just feet away. Perhaps the most visually impressive moments were when the Lapwings took flight when I estimated over a thousand birds were in the air together. On one occasion they were accompanied by a few  Golden Plover.

 During our visit we saw 49 different species (not counting the exotics!) the highlights of which are noted above, although Stock Dove, Black-tailed Godwit and Grey Wagtail perhaps deserve mention. After a brief sojourn in the shop where we bought a few Xmas gifts we joined the bus and left for home at 16h00.

Altogether the trip was very enjoyable and successful to birders and non-birders alike and if we count the Rooks we saw on the farm a few kilometres before Martin Mere we would have totalled fifty species for the day!

Tony Gallon

Borth-y-gest & Porthmadog Field Trip

On a sunny Saturday morning in September, 8 COS members met up at Borth-y-gest car park, surrounded by the amassing holidaymakers, and started by scanning the bay and estuary.

We soon picked up a Goosander, and Linnet flying around our heads. We then decamped to the far end of Porthmadog Cob, where we started in the NWWT hide. Here we added Black-tailed godwit to the list, as well as Greylag and Canada Goose. On the stroll along the cycle track to town, there were distant views of Peregrine hunting, and also a lone juvenile Ringed Plover, which caused us all to check our ID skills. As we approached Porthmadog, we could see good numbers of Knot and a larger group of black-wit, and the return journey produced up-close views of Kingfisher and Rock Pipit. All in all, a good day's birding, with the best part of 50 species seen.

John Small

Glaslyn Ospreys

The COS coach to the Dyfi in May won't have time to call in at Pont Croesor as the Dyfi excursion is quite a long day, but don't forget that the BGGW Visitor Centre there is open from 10am to 4.30pm every day from late March, when the first adult Osprey should reappear. The Centre is manned by friendly volunteers (and staff) and you can be promised a warm welcome, up-to-date information on the nest and other local wildlife (Otters, Kingfishers, Mergansers, Red Kites, summer migrants).....and a freshly brewed cup of tea!

Geoff Gibbs