

# The Birds of Cumbria

## A County Avifauna

**A review of changing status and  
distribution up to 2019**

**with species updates post 2019**



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# Introduction

This is the first detailed assessment of the changing status and distribution of birds in Cumbria and has been written by members of the Cumbria Bird Club.

It sources records from the earliest written records up to and including 2019 for the present county of Cumbria.

In the case of vagrant and rare species and other species with significant records, updates beyond 2019 will be listed on the species title page.

It takes the form of individual species accounts which will be published on the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre website as they are written. Each species account can be accessed via the contents page.

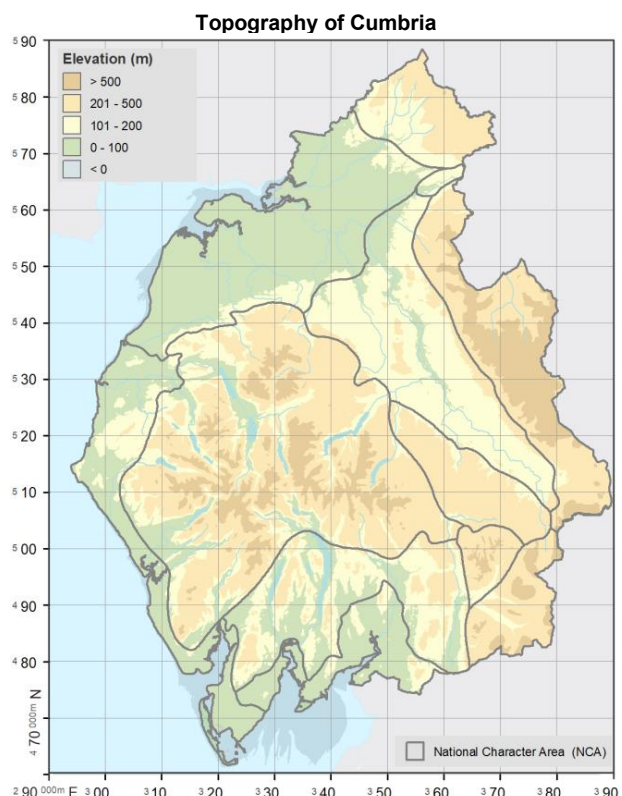
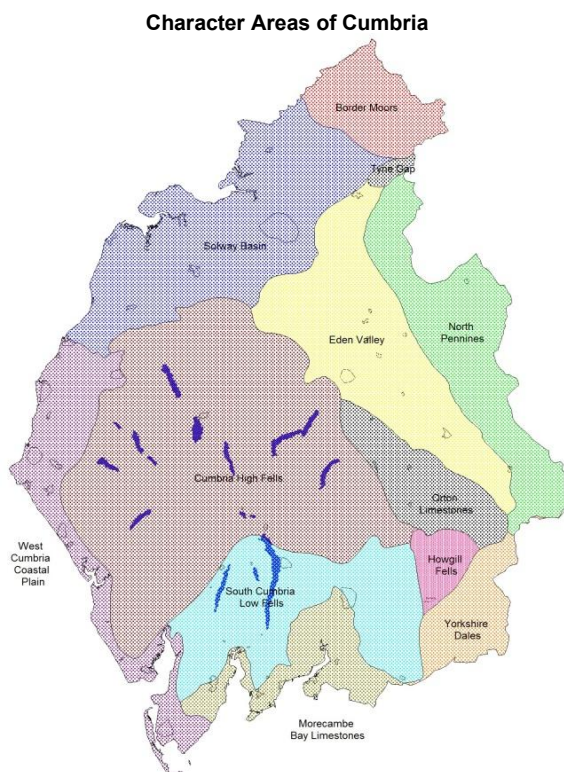
Until the final species account is written, the accounts can be revised in the light of any new information coming to light. Therefore the authors would encourage the submission of any relevant additional information and also comments on any factual inaccuracies or omissions. These can be sent to [info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk](mailto:info@cumbriabirdclub.org.uk)

## Defining Cumbria

The current county of Cumbria is an amalgamation of the old counties of Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire north of and including Morecambe Bay and parts of Northumberland and Yorkshire. It was formed in 1974 and is the defined area for this Avifauna. The landward boundary of the county separates it from Scotland in the north, from the administrative counties of Northumberland, Durham and North Yorkshire in the east and from Lancashire in the south. On its western seaward side the local government boundary extends no further out than mean low water spring tides. Adoption of such a tight limit for the purposes of this avifauna would not be appropriate as there is a substantial and growing body of detailed bird records well beyond its bounds which throw an important light on the feeding strategies, bird densities and offshore movements of Cumbria's birds. For this reason, the boundary of the United Kingdom territorial waters has been adopted as a more appropriate limit. This extends to 12 miles off the coast of Cumbria and is universally recognised.

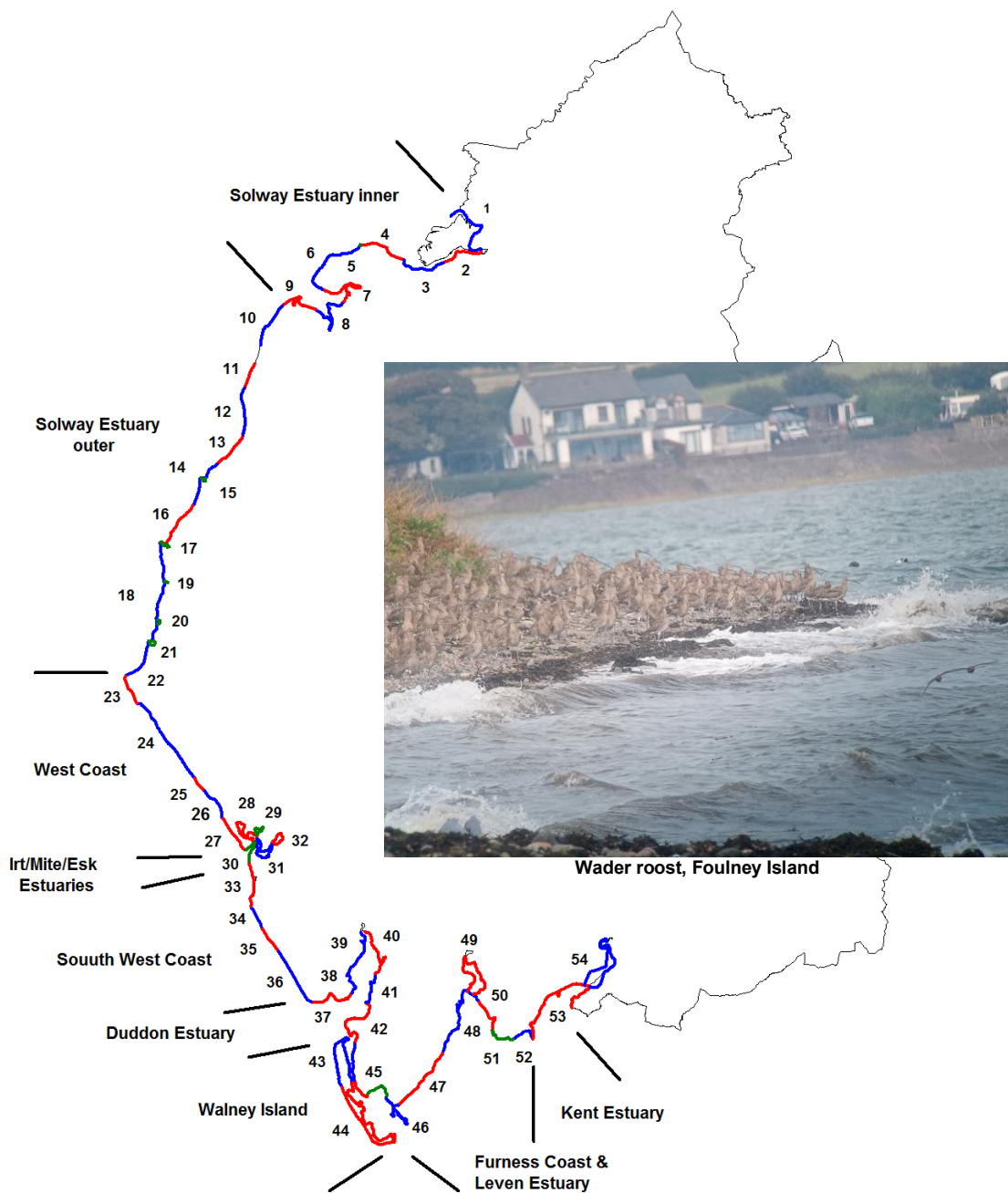
Cumbria possesses one of the most diverse landscapes in England, shaped by the complex interplay of geology, climate, landform, soils and vegetation and also by thousands of years of human activity. This, in turn, has influenced the status and distribution of the individual species of birds which occur within it. In order to help elucidate these issues within the individual species accounts, the county has been split into a number of geographic divisions by adoption of the *National Character Areas* as defined in 2006 by the then Countryside Agency. The geographic areas used in these accounts are similar to the National Character Areas except that the Cumbrian parts of the Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall are included in the Border Moors area. All at sea records and coastal records outside the breeding season are allocated to either an open section of coast or an estuary. The boundaries between most of these geographical divisions are not precise. A detailed description of the county's geography, geomorphology, habitats and birds will be available in an introductory section "The Geographic Divisions of Cumbria and their Bird Fauna".

Because of its size and diversity of habitats Cumbria supports a diversity of breeding species to rival any county in the British Isles. There are 178 current or former breeding species. Its position in the west does not perhaps lend its self to the migration spectacles and regular occurrences of rare species seen on the east coast with its proximity to the continental landmass. Nevertheless there are significant movements of several species during spring and autumn passage and it has hosted many rare species. The county list comprises 350 species at the end of 2019. With three major staging and wintering estuaries in the South Solway and Duddon Estuaries and the northern portion of Morecambe Bay all within its recording area, it holds Internationally important and nationally important aggregations of wildfowl, waders and gulls.



At sea coastal areas and Wetland Bird Survey coastal sectors

Sector	No.	Sector	No.	Sector	No.
Rockcliffe Marsh	1	Harrington Harbour	19	Haverigg	37
Sandsfield to Dykesfield	2	Parton Bay	20	Hodbarrow Mine Pond	38
Dykesfield to Glasson	3	Whitehaven Harbour	21	Millom Marsh	39
Glasson to Herdhill Scar	4	Whitehaven to St Bees Head	22	Kirkby	40
Herdhill Scar	5	St Bees Head	23	Dunnerholme	41
Herdhill Scar to Cardurnock	6	St Bees to Sellafield	24	Roanhead	42
Anthorn to Newton	7	Sellafield	25	North Walney	43
Calvo Marsh	8	Sellafield to Drigg	26	South Walney	44
Grune Point	9	Drigg to Drigg Point	27	Cavendish Dock and Roosecote Sands	45
Skinburness to Beckfoot	10	Irt Estuary	28	Foulney Island	46
Beckfoot to Mawbray	11	Mite Estuary	29	Furness Coast	47
Mawbray to Mealo	12	Irt/Mite/Esk Main Channel	30	Bardsea	48
Mealo to Bank End	13	Esk Estuary	31	Leven Estuary upper	49
Bank End to Flimby	14	Eskholme	32	Sandgate Marsh	50
Maryport Harbour	15	Eskmeals to Selker	33	Flookburgh West Plain	51
Flimby to Workington	16	Hyton Bay	34	Flookburgh East Plain	52
Workington Harbour	17	Hyton Bay to Gutterby	35	Humphrey Head to Arnside Viaduct	53
Workington to Whitehaven	18	Gutterby to Haverigg	36	Arnside Viaduct to Sampool	54

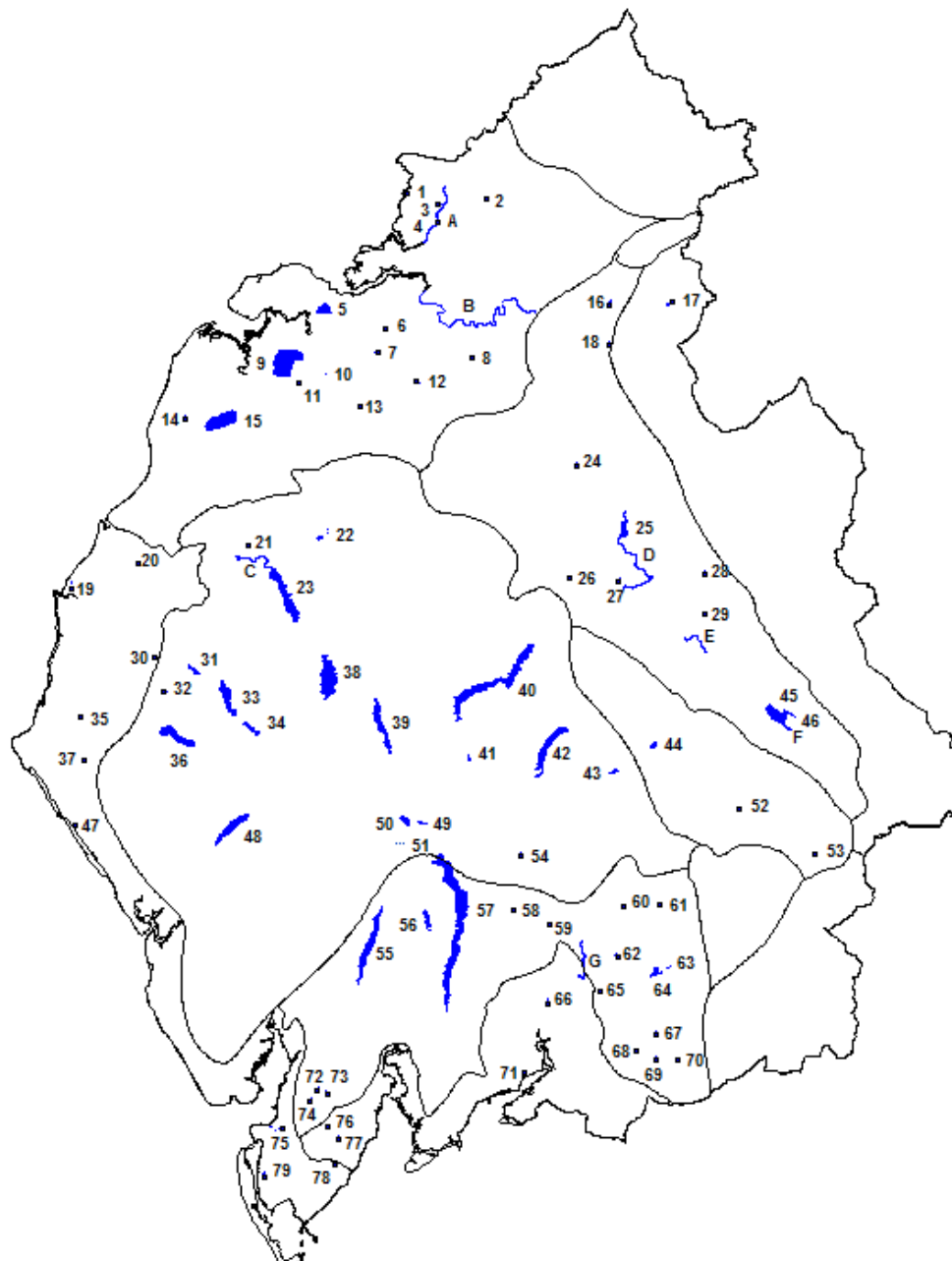


Regularly counted inland Wetland Bird Survey Sites

Site	No.	Site	No.	Site	No.	Site	No.
Longtown Ponds - Oakbank	1	Linseldfield Tarn	21	Brothers Water	41	Greyrigg Tarn	61
Longtown Ponds - Crofthead	2	Overwater & Chaplehouse	22	Haweswater Res.	42	Fisher Tarn Reservoir	62
Longtown Ponds - Gretna Rd	3	Bassenthwaite Lake	23	Wet Sleddale Res.	43	Lily Mere	63
Longtown Ponds - Arthuret	4	Abbots Moss	24	Hardendale Quarry	44	Killington Reservoir	64
Drumburgh Moss	5	Little Salkeld Meadows	25	Ormside Ponds	45	Underhelm Tarn	65
Thurstonfield Lough	6	Thaka Flash, Penrith	26	Bank End, Appleby	46	Lyth Valley Wetlands	66
Watch Tree	7	Whin's Pond	27	Braystone Tarn	47	Wyndhammere	67
Upperby Park	8	Blencarn fishery	28	Wastwater	48	Tarnhouse Tarn	68
Wedholme Flow	9	Black Leases Pond	29	Grasmere	49	Terrybank Tarn	69
Martin Tarn	10	Mockerkin Tarn	30	Rydal Water	50	Kltnere	70
Oulton Gravel Pits	11	Loweswater	31	Eiterwater	51	Ulpha Meadows	71
Cardew Mires	12	Cogra Moss	32	Sunbiggin Tarn	52	Harlock Reservoir	72
Moorthwaite Lough	13	Crummock Water	33	Tarnhouse Tarn	53	Pennington Reservoir	73
Tarns Dub	14	Buttermere	34	Kentmere Tarn	54	Poaka Beck Reservoir	74
Holme Dub	15	Keekle Flashes	35	Coniston Water	55	Thwaite Flatt/Roanhead Ponds	75
Talkin Tarn	16	Ennerdale Water	36	Esthwaite Water	56	Birkune Tarn	76
Tindale Tarn	17	Longlands Lake	37	Windermere	57	Urswick Tarn	77
Castle Carrock Reservoir	18	Derwent Water	38	High Fairbanks	58	Mere Tarn	78
Siddick Pond	19	Thirlmere	39	Ratherheath Tarn	59	Ormsgill Reservoir	79
Soddy Gap	20	Ullswater	40	Whinfell Tarn	60		

River Esk:	A	River Eden:	B	River Derwent:	C	River Eden:	D
Longtown to Metal Bridge		Newby to Rockcliffe		Bassenthwaite to Isel		Watersmeet to Little Salkeld	
River Eden: Kirkby Thore	E	River Eden: Ormside	F	River Kent: Kendal	G		



## Defining records

In the text and compilation of tables and graphs, the terms “record” and occurrence” are interchangeable. They are used to describe a bird event, normally involving vagrant, rare, scarce or uncommon species, occupying a site for either a short period of time or for a longer duration over several days or months. They do not refer to individuals, the number of which is specified in the text or graphics. Where a bird within one of the above status categories is joined by another or more on a second or more days, this is classed as a second occurrence and reflected in the text and/or graphics.

### Defining status and assessment of records

Each species has a county status below its name. This and the criteria used to assess it is taken from the “County List” maintained by the Cumbria Bird Club (CBC) and can be found on the Cumbria Biological Date Centre (CBDC) website at **CBDC-007-1-A-list-of-the-birds-of-Cumbria-final.pdf**

**The British List is maintained by the** British Ornithologists Union Records Committee (BOU) and regularly updated. **The validity of records of nationally rare species is assessed by the** British Birds Records Committee (BBRC) who produce an annual report published in the journal *British Birds*. The validity of records of species with vagrant or rare status in Cumbria but not nationally and some scarcer species has been assessed by the Cumbria Bird Club Records Panel (CBCRP) since 1994. Prior to that it was done by prominent ornithologists of the time.

## Data sources and Standard references

All references can be found in a separate document but the main recurring sources are also listed below. These are not included in the reference section of each species account. Records or statements specifically mentioned in the text prior to 1970 are referenced where possible. From 1970 onwards specific records are not generally referenced unless from targeted surveys and have been sourced from the annual Cumbria Bird Reports from 1970 onwards, records supplied to the Cumbria Bird Club since 1994, the British Trust for Ornithology’s Birdtrack reporting system since 2004 and from the Walney Bird Observatory database.

In addition the species accounts draw heavily on the national monitoring schemes run by the British Trust Ornithology (BTO). For non-breeding waterbirds these are the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and its predecessors the National Wildfowl Counts (NWC) and Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (BOEE). For the commoner more dispersed breeding species they are the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), its predecessor the Common Bird Census (CBC) and the Waterbird Breeding Bird Survey (WBBS). The Rare Birds Breeding Panel (RBBP) maintain a database of rare breeding birds and review their status annually.

The Cumbria Bird Club would particularly like to thank Walney Bird Observatory for access to it’s database. The Observatory was established in 1964 and is the single largest source of records from within the county.

### Maps

Unless otherwise stated maps are from the Cumbria Bird Club’s Cumbria Bird Atlas 2007 – 2012. Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre & Cumbria Bird Club [www.cbdc.org.uk/wildlife-in-cumbria/bird-atlas/](http://www.cbdc.org.uk/wildlife-in-cumbria/bird-atlas/) (Cumbria Atlas 2007-12), and are at tetrad level.

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The texts include references to several National and County Atlases. The most regularly occurring are by date:

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\*The National Atlas of 2007-11 ran concurrently with the Cumbria Atlas 2007-12 involving the same fieldwork but with the Cumbria fieldwork going on for an extra breeding season in 2012.

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- The Natural History Record Bureau, Carlisle. Annual Reports 1902 – 1912
- Lancashire and Cheshire Fauna Committee (LBR) 1914 – 1973. Annual Reports of the Ornithology Section
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# Mute Swan

## *Cygnus olor*

**A fairly common resident, passage migrant and winter visitor; breeds in small numbers**



**Data included up to 2019**

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- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

**Photograph: Watchtree, Great Orton, May 2004. (L. Still)**

## Mute Swan

### *Cygnus olor*

A fairly common resident, passage migrant and winter visitor; breeds in small numbers

<b>Atlas status: % tetrads</b>	<b>Possible</b>	<b>Probable</b>	<b>Confirmed</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Breeding 1997-2001</b>	2.92	1.30	3.95	8.16
<b>Breeding 2008-2012</b>	2.22	2.27	7.51	12.00
<b>Winter 2007/08-2011/12</b>				16.43
<b>Atlas status: % 10km sq with breeding evidence</b>	<b>1968-72</b>	<b>1988-91</b>	<b>1997-01</b>	<b>2008-12</b>
	50.53	33.68	51.58	55.79
<b>Atlas status: % 10km sq with wintering evidence</b>			<b>1981-84</b>	<b>2007-12</b>
			48.42	66.32

Mute Swans have a wide but discontinuous distribution from Ireland to Eastern China where introductions have probably extended their natural range. They have also been introduced to North America, Japan, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Northern and Eastern populations are migratory moving south to find ice free conditions (Parkin & Knox 2010, Wernham et al. 2002). There has been a marginal increase in range in Europe in the first 20 years of the 21st Century (EBBA 2020).

In the British Isles there is archaeological evidence of occurrence in East Anglia from at least 6000 years ago (Northcote 1980) when fenland habitat was much more widespread than today. However domestication from Roman times has probably extended distribution (Rowell & Spray 2002). Re-naturalisation has resulted in a wide distribution of mostly highly territorial pairs resulting in low density nesting in most areas below 300m a.s.l. In addition to the breeding population there is a large population of immature non-breeders. It is not a migratory species in Britain and Ireland but failed adults and non-breeders do undertake internal movements to favoured moulting sites in late summer. There is little regular migration to or from the continent though it has been evident in particularly hard winters into East Anglia (Wernham et al. 2002). The summering population has been estimated by several censuses since 1955, using mostly sampling and extrapolation methodology.

#### Summer population (birds) in Great Britain 1955 to 2002

1955/56	1961	1978	1983	1990	2002
19,000-21,600	19,000	18,400	18,750	25,750	31,700
Campbell 1960	Eltringham 1963	Ogilvie 1981	Ogilvie 1986	Delany et al. 1992	Ward et al. 2007

A decline was evident from the 1960s through the 1980s and was attributed to ingestion of discarded lead fishing weights and lead shot. The former was banned in 1987 after which the population recovered and has increased despite the continued use of lead shot. The flooding of obsolete gravel pits has contributed to the more recent increase by the creation of new habitat as has reduced levels of river pollution and an increased incidence of mild winters, promoting higher survival of juveniles (Ward et al. 2002). The GB breeding population was estimated at 6500 pairs in 2016 (Woodward et al. 2020) following an estimate of 6150 pairs in 2002 (Ward et al. 2007).

In Cumbria Macpherson 1892 considered it an introduced bird asserting "we have no evidence to show at what date the Mute Swan was first placed upon our private waters but that it was not later than the 17th Century". He found no specific evidence of this until 1787 when he knew of a few which were kept on Esthwaite. He went on to describe further domestication during the first half of the 19th Century evidenced by protests in 1840s and 50s newspapers against the shooting of birds which had strayed from private waters including one shot on Bassenthwaite. A flock of four on the Solway in January 1892 all suffered a similar fate. Blezard (1943) described a continued increase and that in some districts it was "too numerous"!

The first national census in 1955 found 33 nests with 23 nests and 70 non-breeders in Westmorland and Lancashire north of the Sands (now Cumbria) and 10 nests and 22 non-breeders in Cumberland, though coverage in both was incomplete (Campbell 1960). Stokoe (1962) described it as present on most inland waters of over one acre by the early 1960s. The 1968 to 1972 National Atlas found breeding evidence in 48 10km squares. These may not have all concerned proved breeding but even at a minimum of one pair per 10km this would suggest an increased



Watchtree, Great Orton, May 2004. (L. Still)

population. Published results from the 1978 and 1983 surveys are not directly comparable with the 1955 survey as they summarised results by different survey boundaries and were again incomplete in coverage. Hutchison (1986) did however give a total of 22 pairs in Westmorland and Furness in 1978. Ogilvie (1986), summarising results from the 1978 survey described a decline in the northern counties of Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire between 1955 and 1978 which had been almost exactly recovered by the 1983 survey. Evidence from the 1968 to 1972 Atlas suggests the initial decline may have been primarily in the 1970s. The 1990 national survey found 78 pairs in the county, 53 of which were in Westmorland and Furness with a further 281 to 295 non-breeding birds (Kinley 1991), suggesting a continued increase with the majority in the south of the county.

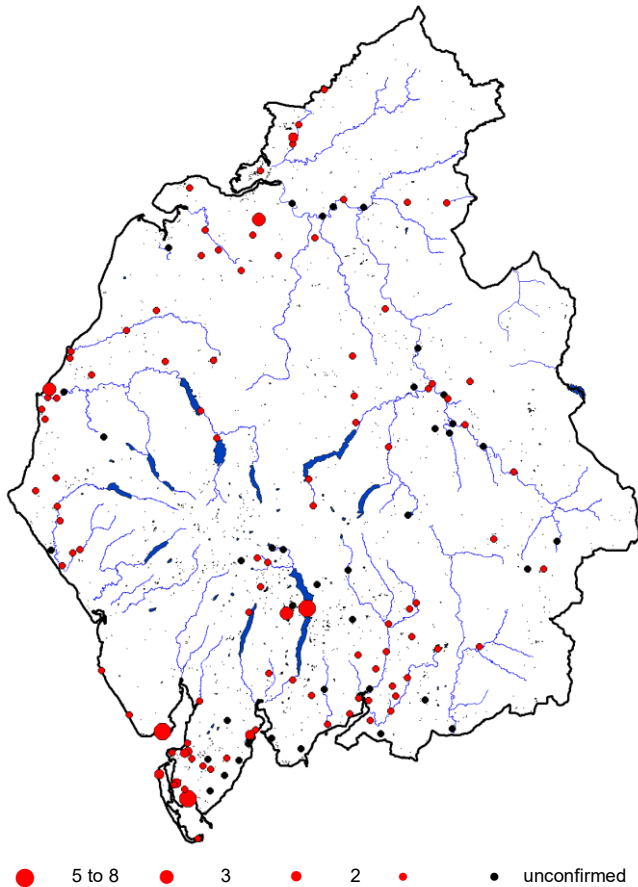
#### Numbers and types of nest site in 1955 and 1990

Year	Total	Lake & pond	Gravel Pits	River	Moss	Canal	Tidal	Un-specified
1955	33	19		5	3	3	1	2
1990	78	47	9	17		5		

The 1999 to 2001 Cumbria Atlas found breeding confirmed in 73 tetrads in 34 10km squares and a county nesting population of between 100 and 120 pairs was estimated at this time (Stott et al. 2002). The 2002 national Mute Swan survey used a sample 10km square methodology with very low coverage in Cumbria generating little meaningful data. However the 2008 to 2012 Atlas found confirmed breeding in 139 tetrads in 46 10km squares. This suggests an almost doubling of the breeding population in the first decade of the 21st Century. This seems unlikely and may in part be attributable to a more significant volume of records of a highly visible species generated from casual observation facilitated by the online reporting system. This may have resulted in duplication of mobile broods in different tetrads or duplication of nests which may have moved tetrads between years. Without access to the precise details of specific atlas records this is hard to verify.

Interrogation of published records and those supplied for the annual bird report have identified a minimum of 98 sites with confirmed breeding. Within this, different nest or broods on the same river have been classed as different sites as they are often significant distances apart. Conversely 11 lakes or ponds have held several breeding pairs in the same season and have been considered as single sites but account for 35 nest/brood locations. Therefore 120 different breeding locations have confirmed breeding. There are a further 38 locations where pairs have been present in the breeding season but no nest or brood has been recorded, or which are close to confirmed sites. These latter may be effectively refer to the same territory but could possibly be additional territories. Of the 11 water bodies with multiple nests Lake Windermere has held the most with eight broods in 2009 followed by Hodbarrow with six nests in 1997 and Cavendish Dock with five pairs in 1994. Thurstonfield Lough, Siddick Pond and Esthwaite Water have each held three nests in a breeding season and Oakbank Pond at Longtown, Thwaite Flat Ponds at Askam in Furness, North Walney Ponds, Ormsgill Reservoir and the Ulverston Canal have each held two. Some of the larger lakes have held greater numbers of pairs during the breeding season than nests found and have been assumed to be non-breeding for this analysis.

**Location of all documented specific breeding locations**



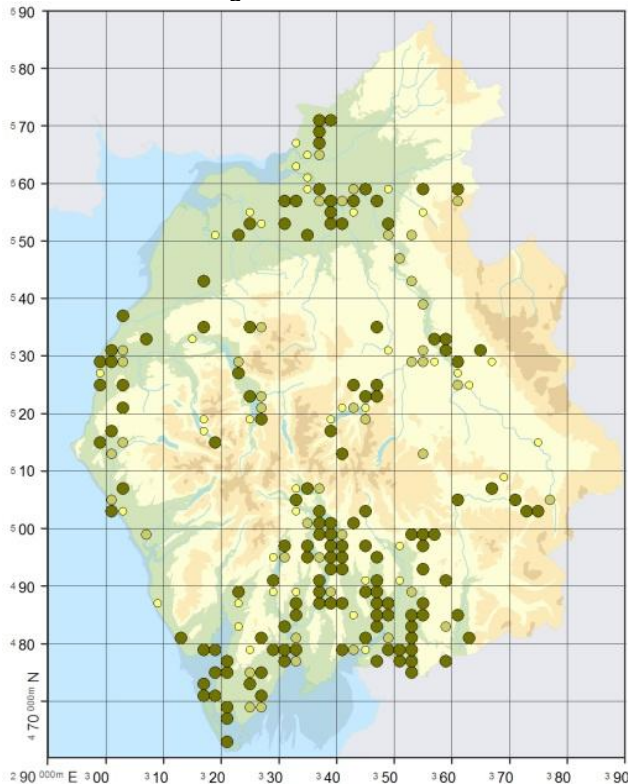
Despite a generally increasing breeding population the species has not spread to upland tarns to breed. The highest breeding sites are Tarn House Tarn near Ravenstonedale in the upper Eden Valley at 290m a.s.l. and nearby Sunbiggin Tarn in the upper Lune catchment at 255m a.s.l. The oligotrophic lakes, smaller ponds and faster flowing upper rivers are shunned by breeding birds. This aversion to these types of habitat would normally limit the size of the population and it is clear that freshwater bodies of anthropogenic origin have facilitated range expansion and the increase in the population. Of 120 confirmed nest locations where the habitat type is known, 52 (48%) have a human-made origin of amenity, ornamental, fishing or shooting pond, flooded gravel pit or quarry, abandoned reservoir, dock or drainage ditch. Notably, of the 11 still water sites with multiple breeding pairs, only three are of natural origin.

**Habitat type of confirmed nests**

Natural sites		Un-natural sites	
Pond	23	Man-made pond	22
Lake	17	Gravel pit	22
River	17	Dock	5
Tidal marsh	2	Canal	4
Dune pond	1	Reservoir	4
Freshwater marsh	1	Drainage Ditch	1
Lowland mire pool	1		

Perhaps the most remarkable breeding record concerns a pair which attempted to breed in the middle of the gull colony on Rockcliffe Marsh in 2000, though the nest was deserted and the site not used again. The smallest water-body used is probably a pond at Silecroft which is less than 25 meters in length and width. With their territorial nature adult Mute Swans are often involved in disputes with encroaching neighbours often involving attacks on young. Because of this pairs have been known to walk young incapable of flight to other waters to avoid aggression. This was regularly noted between Barrow Park and Ormsgill Reservoir in the 1960s – a distance of about two miles along public roads and also between South and North Walney (Sheldon 1992).

**Breeding distribution 2008 – 2012**



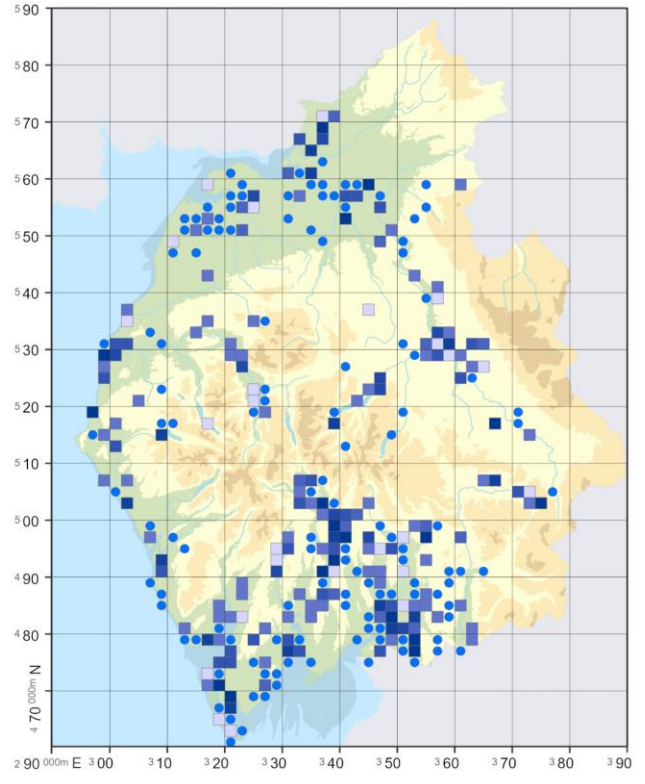
**Mute Swan**

Possible	41
Probable	43
Confirmed	138

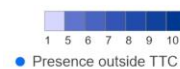
Evidence of breeding in the 2008-2011 survey. Category determined by the strongest recorded evidence of breeding by birds in suitable nesting habitat in the tetrad.

Includes records from Timed Tetrad Visits and Roving Records.

**Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12**



**Mute Swan**



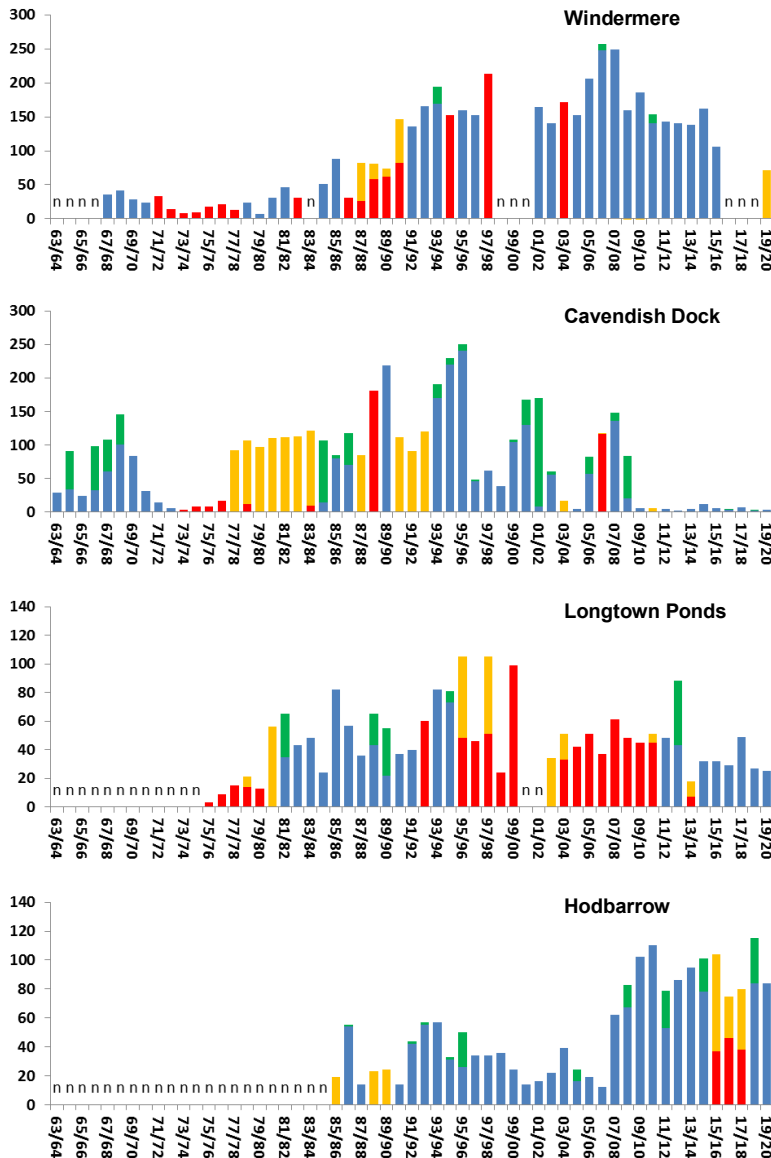
Relative abundance during the November to February Timed Tetrad Counts (TTC) in the 2007-2011 survey. Relative abundance category derived from the maximum number of birds recorded in one TTC. Categories: 1 = 1-1, 5 = 2-2, 6 = 3-3, 7 = 4-5, 8 = 6-6, 9 = 7-10, 10 = 11-82.

Winter distribution is remarkably similar to that in summer showing the species general dependence on the larger nutrient rich lakes and lower rivers and the resident nature of breeding birds Sites attracting young or failed breeding birds to moult in late summer into autumn have the highest counts. Four such sites have held 100 or more birds in the county. Windermere has the record count of 263 in July 2006 closely followed by Cavendish Dock with 250 in July 1995. Hodbarrow held 119 in August 2018 and Longtown Ponds and surrounding pastures 105 in August 1995 and June 1998. Count coverage of Windermere has been poor in recent years and current status outside the breeding season is unknown. In common with other wildfowl inter-year numbers at Cavendish Dock could be affected by the unique conditions found here.

The water was extracted for cooling the nearby power station and then returned back as warm water, thus providing an ice free refuge at times when other sites might be frozen in very cold weather. There was also prolific growth of pondweed which, until it got over-abundant created good feeding conditions. However the weed was mechanically cleared periodically, thus reducing the site's foraging appeal until the weed grew back (Lumb 2000). The power station closed in 2012 and numbers here have since crashed. Longtown Ponds seem to have also declined in importance in recent years leaving Hodbarrow the premier site. Here numbers have increased since the late 2000s perhaps benefitting from the adverse habitat change at Cavendish Dock.

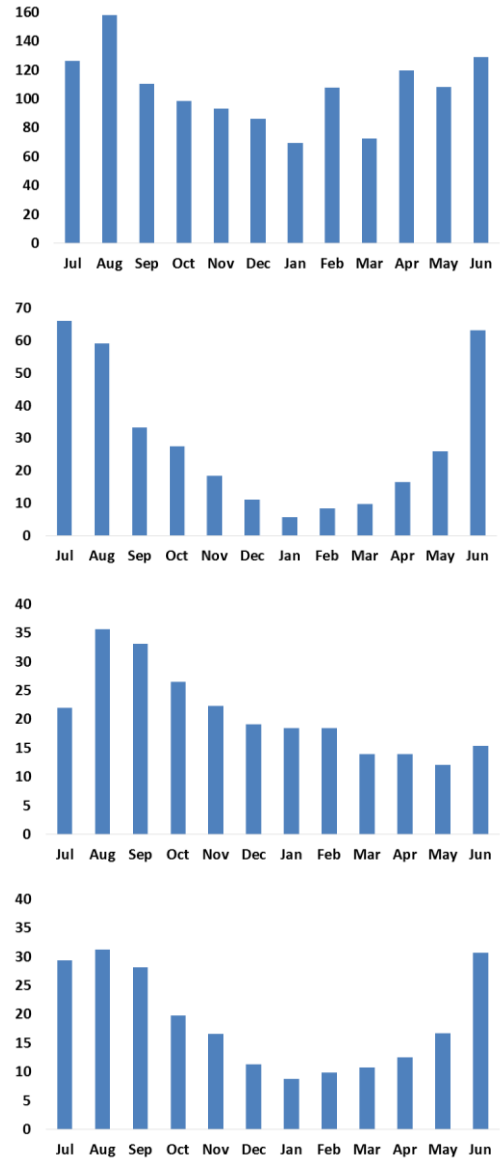
**Maximum WeBS counts at sites with counts of 100 or more 1963/64 – 2019/20** (note different axis scales)

season with good WeBS coverage, higher count than WeBS, season with poor WeBS coverage, non-WeBS count in season with poor or no count coverage, n = no counts



**Average monthly usage 1969/70 – 2019/20**

from WeBS counts only



**Maximum counts at all sites with counts of 20 or more birds**

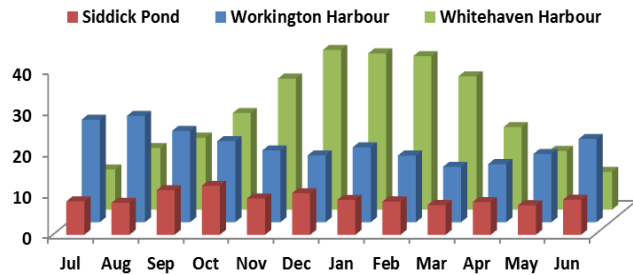
Site	Max.	Date	Site	Max.	Date	Site	Max.	Date
Lake Windermere	263	Jul 2006	Thurstonfield Lough	58	Dec 2015	Talkin Tarn	29	Nov 2017
Cavendish Dock	250	Jul 1995	Whins Pond	50	Feb 1989	Cardew Mires Quarry	28	Jul 2010
Hodbarrow	119	Aug 2018	Ulverston Canal	48	Dec 2017	Ratherheath Tarn	28	Jan 2000
Longtown Ponds	105	Aug 1995 & Jun 1998	Ehen Estuary: Sellafield	47	Oct 2014	Tindale Tarn	28	Jul 2010
Solway Est.: Eden & Esk Confluences	80	May 2002	Coniston Water	43	Jul 2004	R. Lune: Kirkby Lonsdale	24	May 2010
Workington Harbour	70	Nov 2013	Eden Valley: Middle	42	Mar 1999	Whinfeil Tarn	24	Jan 2008
Upperby Pond, Carlilse	70	Dec 2005	Ullswater	37	Dec 2010	Longlands Lake	23	Dec 2010
Ormsgill Reservoir	66	Jan 1998	Esthwaite Water	31	Sep 2013	Solway Est.: Moricambe Bay	22	Nov 1998
Siddick Pond	59	July 1975	Solway Est.: Bowness area	30	Oct 2017	Tarn House Tarns	21	Nov 14
Upper Kent Est. & Lyth Valley	57	Apr 2019	Eden Valley: lower	30	Jan 1991	Derwent Water	20	Mar 2015
Whitehaven Harbour	55	Dec 2010	Bassenthwaite Lake	30	Jul 2015			

Elsewhere nine other sites have maximum counts of between 50 and 80 birds and a further 20 of between 20 and 49. Most normally have annual peaks substantially below their maximums.

Most sites holding 20 or more birds are still water sites. Exceptions are Longtown Ponds where birds also use the surrounding pastures and other pasture sites. These are on the inner Solway Plain, the flood plain of the lower and middle Eden Valley and those adjacent to the discharges of the Rivers Esk, Eden and Kent into their estuaries.

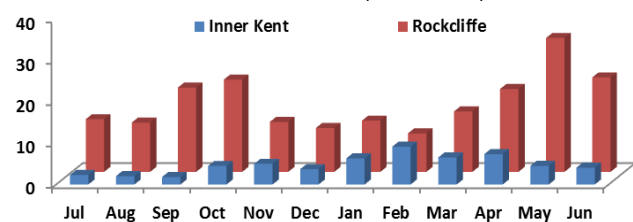
Not all sites with maximums of up to 80 birds could be characterised as post-breeding moult sites with some showing peaks in winter and less commonly in spring. Typical of these are the adjacent Whitehaven and Workington Harbours and Siddick Pond, all still water sites on the outer Solway coastal margin which show differing seasonal patterns.

**Average monthly usage at three Outer Solway locations 2004/05 to 2019/20 (WeBS data)**



The pastures surrounding Rockcliffe Marsh at the discharge of the Esk and Eden rivers show a peak in spring while other coastal pasture sites tend to show peaks in late winter or early spring. This is probably the case in the lower and middle Eden Valley pasture sites though there is insufficient summer and autumn count data to confirm this. It would seem likely that pasture sites are less likely to be used as moult sites as they would offer less protection from predation during the most vulnerable time of year. Nearly all pasture sites with significant numbers are also regular haunts of wintering Whooper Swans with which they often mix.

**Average monthly usage at two estuary side pasture sites 1993/94 to 2019/20 (WeBS data)**



As in summer the larger deep and nutrient poor lakes are rarely visited Haweswater and Ennerdale have between 30 and 40 records each while there is only one record for Wastwater and none for Thirlmere. The same is true of open coast locations away from estuaries. Small numbers on other lakes, ponds and rivers might often include family parties with young sometimes remaining with their parents in to the second half of the winter. There are notable exceptions, for instance the small Upperby Pond in a public park on the outskirts of Carlisle regularly held between 30 and 70 birds through the winters of 2005/06 to 2010/11, though numbers have declined substantially since.

It is difficult to quantify the size and status of the non-breeding population within the county. It probably increases in the late summer as birds from Lancashire attend southern moult sites before declining as they disperse back. It is likely that numbers increased up to around the mid to late 2010s as a result of the increasing breeding population. Since then the loss of Cavendish Dock as a major haunt has not entirely been compensated for by the emergence of Hodbarrow as a significant site and also nearby

Ormsgill Reservoir. Ormsgill saw an increase from 2009/10 with peak annual counts averaging nearly 40 up to 2019/20. It is therefore probable that peak late/summer autumn numbers may have declined. WeBS data is only partially useful for assessing the county population for a dispersed species whose population is not covered by all counted sites. In addition, poor coverage of key sites in some seasons can also have a disproportionate effect on overall totals e.g. the absence of counts on Windermere between 1998/99 and 2000/01 and again since 2016/17. The maximum summed count for the county is 557 in October 2007. The average maximum summed count between 2003/04 and 2015/16 when count coverage of the main sites was probably at its most comprehensive was 403.

Of just less than 2000 recoveries of birds ringed in Cumbria nearly 75% have been recovered or re-sighted within the county with about 15% in the neighbouring counties of Lancashire and 5% in Dumfries and Galloway. The remaining 5% are scattered throughout Britain diminishing with distance from the county. It is a similar pattern for birds ringed elsewhere and recovered or seen within the county with Lancashire again accounting for 75% and Dumfries and Galloway and Greater Manchester about 7% each. There are a handful of ringing exchanges within the Isle of Man indicating a low level of over sea movement and there is one from Ireland and none from abroad.

Colour ringing studies by the North West Swan Study Group in the late 1980s suggested interchange of birds between favoured Lancashire sites, particularly Fleetwood Marine Lake and Stanley Park at Blackpool and Cavendish Dock and to a lesser extent Windermere. In 1989 50 Lancashire ringed birds were seen at Cavendish Dock (Dunstan 1990). In the early days of the same study centred on the south of the county in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a suggestion of little interchange of birds between the north and the south of the county, though few birds had been ringed in the north (Halton 1992). No subsequent analysis has been published to confirm this. However it did confirm considerable interchange of birds between sites within the north west study area, for instance 49 different birds visited Ormsgill Reservoir in the summer of 1990 in addition to the resident pair (Sheldon 1992).

The longest lived known bird in the county was an adult male ringed at Cavendish Dock in August 1990 which was seen alive at an unknown location in Barrow in August 2014 making it very close to 24 years old. There are several other examples of birds of 20 years or more. The bird travelling the longest distance from Cumbria was ringed in its first winter in December 1961 at Ambleside on Windermere and was found dead in West Sussex in December 1968 at a distance of 432 km. An adult ringed at Lossiemouth in Nairn in January 1992 which was seen alive at Low Hay Bridge in the Rusland Valley in July 2003 is the longest travelling incoming bird at 348km, though its birth place is unknown (Robinson et al. 2020).

Of interest is the status of Mute Swans on Ullswater. Moon (1938) expressed concern at the regular mortality of birds on the lake in the 30 year prior to March 1938. In the three years prior to writing he had conducted or facilitated 13 autopsies or examinations. No bird had injury or disease but all had traces of lead in their tissue. Lead is known to be a cause of mortality in swans. It is possible they were suffering contamination by lead of their aquatic vegetation food from the Greenside lead mine via Glenridding Beck, and particularly the release of large quantities released at the time of a dam burst in 1927. The mine finally closed in 1961 but levels of lead are higher than in other lakes (Talling 1999). Dallman (1938) writing in response, suggested poisoning by the toxic plant Water Lobelia *Lobelia dortmanna* which he claimed carpeted the bottom of Ullswater. A definitive answer was never found and numbers on the lake remained largely in single figures until 2003/04, since when average annual peak counts have averaged 17 and been as high as 37 in December 2010.

# Bewick's Swan (Tundra Swan)

## *Cygnus columbianus*

An uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant



Data included up to 2019

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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

No records

Photograph: Kirkbride, 25th March 2004 (N. Franklin)

## Bewick's Swan (Tundra Swan)

### *Cygnus columbianus*

#### An uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant

The wintering Northwest European population of Bewick's Swan breeds mostly on the Arctic tundras of Russia to the west of the Ural Mountains. It winters in lowland areas of northwest Europe, from Denmark and Germany through the Netherlands and Belgium to Great Britain and Ireland, with smaller numbers regularly reaching southern France (Rees 2006).

Its population has been monitored by mid-winter co-ordinated counts in western Europe in 1984 and 1987 and every five years since 1990. From 16,436 birds in 1987 these have shown an increasing population up to 1995 when 29,780 were counted, but an overall declining population since with only 20,149 in 2015. The Netherlands holds the bulk of the population ranging from 40.3% to 66.6% but there have been recent significant changes in distribution. In Germany it has ranged from 4.2% to 27.0%, the latter in 2015 and in Britain from 21.7% to 49%. with a high point in 1990. Ireland held 7.0% to 7.5% in the 1980s but in 2015 held only 0.1% of the population. Overall there has been a significant range shift after 2010 with more of the population wintering in eastern countries, particularly Germany. There has also been a change in favoured foraging habitats after 1990 from pastures to arable crops (Beekman et al. 2019).

During the 19th century, large numbers were thought to have wintered in Scotland and Ireland, with many less in England and Wales. The first recorded increases in England and Wales were during the 1920s. A large influx into England occurred in the cold winter of 1938/39 which led to the establishment of a regular wintering site in East Anglia. In Britain the first co-ordinated census coincided with a cold weather influx in winter 1956/57, when 1600 birds were recorded, with a further 2700 in Ireland (Nisbet 1959). Numbers remained relatively stable into the late 1960s. Up to 3000 regularly wintered in Britain and 2000 in Ireland through the 1970s, rising to around 5000 and 500-1000, respectively, in January 1984 (Robinson et al. 2004). Subsequently numbers in the British Isles peaked in the early 1990s and have since been in decline with just under 1300 in January 2020 with only a handful reaching Ireland.

#### January counts of wintering Bewick's Swans in Britain and Ireland with Cumbria totals below

1987	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
9150	10758	7563	7597	7216	7100	4392	1290
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

data from WWT 2006, Beekman et al. 2019, BirdGuides 2021

Most birds are now concentrated in a small number of wintering areas with the largest congregations in south east England. In 2000 there were five regular sites in western England, three in Northern Ireland and three in southwest Ireland (Robinson et al. 2004), though the importance of these has since dwindled. There are no longer any regular haunts in Scotland or Wales (one on the English/Welsh border) nor in northeast England.

These changes over time have likely had a significant impact on the occurrence levels of the species in Cumbria where, though none of the early sources suggested anything more than sporadic occurrence with most records of shot birds, it was still more regular than at present. The largest flock documented by Macpherson (1892) was of 26 on 5th March 1888 over the Ravenglass estuaries. Blezard (1943) described it as a regular winter visitor to the Solway but rare elsewhere and noted a flock of 50 off Cardurnock Point on the inner Solway during a snow storm on 30th December 1908. He and Hope and Dunlop (1923) also listed several inland occurrences in 1905, 1908 1919, 1921 and 1922 and from the 1938/39 winter onwards. Records gradually increased through the next four decades, with at least one per winter from 1953/54 onwards with the exception of 1967/68. It was still only a handful per year and it wasn't until the hard winter of 1962/63 which produced six occurrences, that more than five records was exceeded in a single winter. This level of occurrence was not achieved again until the winter of 1974/75, though in mid-March 1964 Drigg hosted 24, the largest flock reported since 1908.

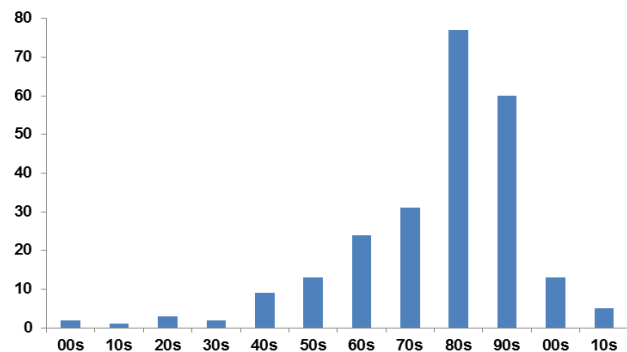
The 1974/75 winter marked the beginning of a more substantial increase in occurrence which was generally sustained up to and including the winter of 1991/92. This was the period when numbers



Kirkbride, 25th March 2004 (N. Franklin)

nationally were at their highest, though nowhere was there a regular wintering population in Cumbria. After this records tailed off and particularly so after the winter of 1995/96.

#### Number of occurrences per decade



Significant at this time of increasing occurrence may have been a small flock which developed on the north side of the Solway Firth, primarily at Caerlaverock, in the 1970s which peaked in numbers of 70 during the winter of 1980/81 (Brown 2007). This along with larger numbers in Ireland and on the Ribble, Dee and Severn Estuaries (Robinson et al 2004) may have contributed to the increase in records with birds commuting over the county to and between these areas. Notable in this period were more regular records on the Inner Solway where the maximum count was 44 on Burgh Marsh on 7th February 1982 and when up to 26 birds were reported in the Kirkbride area from 25th December 1991 to 1st March 1992.

On the western seaboard the Ravenglass area had a smattering of records including a maximum 33 heading north east on 22nd March 1988 and 45 headed south over Beckermert on 5th March 1989. Walney also saw an increase having only had its first record in 1969 (Dean 1990), with more regular records and a maximum of 26 flying south on 13th March 1978 and likewise the Duddon including 65 flying east in off the sea on 8th March 1981 – the largest flock ever seen in the county.

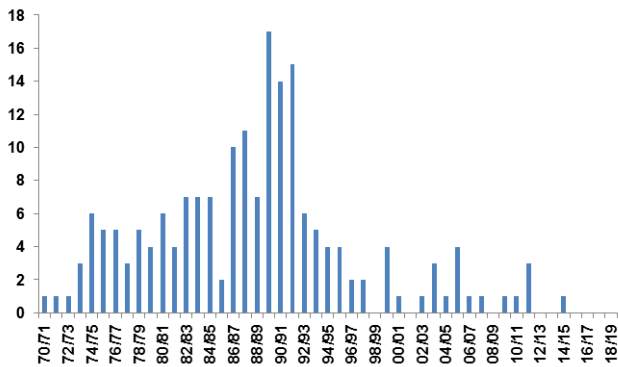
The two inland Whooper Swan wintering areas also saw records with the lower Eden Valley to the east of Carlisle sporadically holding birds in the Whooper Swan flock peaking at 20 at Scotby Holmes on 20th January 1986. Similarly the upper Eden valley between Langwathby and Sandford with a maximum of 12 on 13th November 1991 which included a bird ringed as a first year male at Caerlaverock on 29th November 1990.

This period also saw an upturn in records at other inland sites totalling 56 occurrences between January 1973 and February 1996. The largest flocks amongst these involving 24 at Coniston on 12th November 1983, 36 on Burnmoor Tarn on 24th March 1993 and 28 on Coniston Water on 27th March 1994.

More recently, as numbers have declined elsewhere, so they have in Cumbria and indeed including coastal sites there have been only 26 validated county records from 1996/1997 onwards and only four inland records. (There are additionally un-validated records of birds

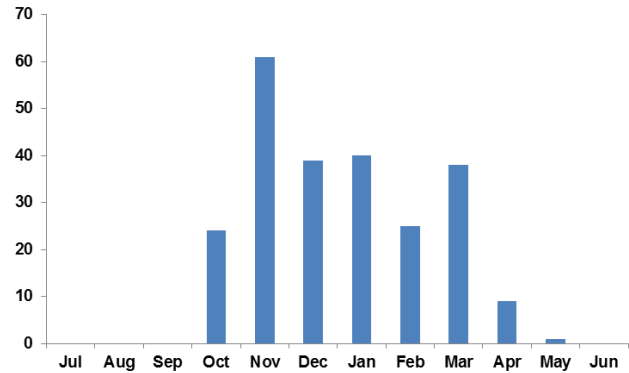
on Ullswater in November 2005 and February 2016). The last validated county record involved five flying south over Sandscale Haws and nearby South Walney on 29th October 2014.

Number of records per winter 1970/71 – 2018/19



The earliest record is of two at Walney on 8th October 2002 which lingered and were joined by another on 16th. Other early October records concern two at Killington on 16th October 1978 and one at Hodbarrow on 18th October 1991. Early annual records become more regular from 20th October onwards with a peak of first arrival in November. At the end of the winter April records are scarce but include a notable flock of 11 which occupied Roosecote Sands on the Furness Coast between 6th and 24th April 1960. The latest was one at Mere Tarn on 29th April 1989, other than two which frequented the Inner Solway area around Rockcliffe from 7th April up to 29th April 1996 after which one lingered until 29th. What was presumably the same bird was relocated here on 21st July 1996 presumably having summered.

Month of first occurrence



Records since the 1996/97 winter

Date	Location	No.	Age
01 Dec 96	Killington Reservoir	1	ad
15 Nov 97	Bassenthwaite Lake	3	
07 - 08 Feb	Kirkbride, Solway Est.	2	ad
23 Oct 99	Walney Island	2	ad
24 Oct 99	Carr Beds, Solway Est.	1	
05 Nov 99	South Walney	6	ad
06 Nov 99	Kirkbride, Solway Est.	4	
13 Nov 99	South Walney flyover	2	ad
15 Nov 99	South Walney flyover	4	ad
05 Nov 00	South Walney	2	ad
08 - 16 Oct 02	Walney Island	max 3	ad
03 Jan 04	Walney Island	2	
23 - 27 Mar 04	Newton Arlosh, Solway Est.	max 8	3 ad 5 juv
19 Apr 04	Grange over Sands, Kent Est.	2	
27 Dec 04	Wedholme Hill, Solway Est.	1	
01 Nov 05	Walney Island	6	
12 Nov 05	Loweswater	3	
24 Nov 05	Walney Island	4	
27 Dec 05	Cargo, Solway Est..	1	juv
19 Dec 06	Talkin Tarn	5	
10 - 13 Feb 08	Kirkbride, Solway Est.	max 6	ad
13 Dec 09	Eskmeals, Irt/Mite/Esk Est.	1	
30 Nov 11 - 08 Jan 12	Kirkbride /Abbeytown, Solway	max 11	6 ad 5 juv
14 Jan - 14 Mar	Longtown	1	
23 Jan 12	Irt Estuary, Irt/Mite/Esk Est.	1	
29 Oct 14	Duddon Estuary/Walney flyover	5	

# Whooper Swan

## *Cygnus cygnus*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant, has summered



Data included up to 2019

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### Post 2018/2019 records

- 2020/21** 600 at Kirkbide & 269 at Kirkbride on 27th October. If different flocks would be highest ever count in Moricambe Bay area
- 2021/22** 3 at Workington 3rd September 2021 is the earliest record for the county excluding suspected summering birds

Photograph: Carr Beds, Rockcliffe, Inner Solway, November 2011. (N. Franklin)

## Whooper Swan

### *Cygnus cygnus*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant, has summered

Atlas status: % tetrads	Total	
Winter 2007/08-2011/12	9.41	
Atlas status: % 10km sq	1981-84	2007-12
with wintering evidence	36.84	51.58

Most Whooper Swans wintering in Britain and Ireland are from the Icelandic breeding population. This population winters almost exclusively here and in Iceland itself, with small numbers in countries around the southern North Sea. The North European mainland population winters in Scandinavia, Northern Germany and the Low Countries, with only small but unquantified numbers recorded in Britain (Robinson et al 2004). The size of the Icelandic breeding population was little known prior to the early 1980s, though estimated at not more than 4000 in Great Britain in November 1961 (Boyd & Eltringham 1962). It has increased substantially since, evidenced by counts of the mid-winter populations of Iceland, Britain and Ireland every five years since 1986 with 43,255 counted in January 2020 (Brides et al. 2021).

Presently in Cumbria, the pastures and mudflats of the Inner Solway are important wintering areas. There are also two small wintering flocks just inland of the Solway and one well inland in the Eden Valley. Birds normally arrive from early October and have mostly departed by mid-April. Passage flocks are reported throughout the county, both overflying and on still waters.

During the early part of the 20th century, Whooper Swans fed on aquatic vegetation in coastal or freshwater habitats throughout their winter range. Since the 1960s, there has been a change in foraging habits in favour of intensively managed agricultural land, notably improved pasture, winter stubbles and root crops (Robinson et al. 2004). This is true in Cumbria where the choice of particular pasture fields could be related to the availability of nearby freshwater for drinking and to whether livestock are present. Birds rarely mix with sheep or cattle (F. Mawby & D. Hickson pers. com.). Birds move to roost on estuary mudflats or saltmarshes or on the sea itself at coastal sites, but on moonlit nights or when there is floodwater, they may stay inland. Inland flocks may move to roost on adjacent still freshwaters or rivers.

Evidence for early occurrence comes from the name Elterwater, an adaption of the old Norse word *Elptarvatn* meaning 'swan lake' (Airey 1954), suggesting that swans regularly visited this lake in much earlier times. MacPherson (1892) quoted 17th century records from Rydal and Naworth of 'wild swans' killed in mid-winter which may have been of this species. He also quoted Robinson who in 1793 asserted that they visited Ullswater only preceding or during hard frosts, and Heysham who likewise reported that they visited Cumberland in every severe winter. This included the winter of 1794/95 when a flock frequented the River Esk near Netherby, three of which were shot. In 1803 a bird likely of this species was shot on the River Eamont on 9th February. Also in 1803, 30 were on Bassenthwaite on 13th February (Carlisle Journal, Feb 19th 1803). MacPherson also listed occurrences on Ennerdale, Coniston, Esthwaite and Windermere prior to and including 1830. Again, quoting Heysham, the first documented record on the south side of the Solway appears to be on 20th February 1829 when two out of a flock of five were killed.

For the remainder of the 19th century and the early 20th century, there appears to have been little change in its status as a sporadic visitor to both lakes and rivers and the Solway Plain. Neither MacPherson nor Dunlop and Hope (1923) offered any evidence of regular wintering, other than the case of a single female which spent part of each winter between 1904/05 and 1910/11 with Mute Swans on the River Eden at Carlisle. This bird appeared with a mate and a second pair in December 1909, with the four birds staying until April. In November 1910, she returned with a partner and three juveniles and three other adults, all staying throughout that winter into spring (Hope 1912). MacPherson himself also watched four birds on Monkhill Lough in the Solway Basin from at least 7th February until at least 17th March 1891.



Eskmeals, December 2009 (P Heather)

By the early 1940s, Blezard et al (1943) described Whooper Swans as regular winter visitors. However, most specific records related to overflying flocks. They described it as annual though not numerous on the Solway Estuary and the still waters of its basin. The largest count being about 50 at Bowness on 26th December 1934. Stokoe (1962) reported 39 in Cumbria and Westmorland in November 1961 as part of a national survey with an unknown but at best smaller number in what was then Lancashire and now Cumbria. International January counts since 1986 have quantified the Cumbrian population in mid-winter, which while increasing before 1986 and after 2010 have not mirrored the magnitude of the increase in the overall biogeographic population.

#### January counts of the wintering Icelandic breeding population with Cumbria totals and number of flocks below

1986	1991	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
16,742	18,035	15,842	20,856	26,366	29,232	34,004	43,255
311	342	184	356	209	313	471	423
?	10	8	8	7	10	?	?

data sourced from WWT survey reports

In the second half of the 20th Century several regular wintering haunts developed and their history and relative importance is detailed below.

A small wintering population, centred on the southern lakes of Windermere, Grasmere and Elterwater but also encompassing Rydal Water and some of the smaller tarns of the area, was present from at least the late 1930s through to at least the 1964/65 winter. Whether birds were present for prolonged periods each winter is unknown but numbers increased between 1943 and 1955 (Airey 1955) when the area was certainly occupied for prolonged periods each winter. Birds tended to first arrive at Elterwater each year, with highest numbers occurring on Windermere when it remained ice free, as other smaller lakes froze in harder winters (maximum 42 on Windermere on 27th January 1952 (Blezard 1954)). Records in the area continued more infrequently up to the mid-1980s but it is unclear if they reflected prolonged periods of occupation. They have been more sporadic since where they have tended to concern short-staying passage flocks. Certainly, a wintering flock has long since disappeared as the overall population has switched from feeding on aquatic vegetation to pastures and stubbles.

This is also true of a small flock which frequented Tam House Tarn and the adjacent Sunbiggin and Greenside Tarns at the head of the Eden/Lune catchments from 1952 until at least the 1982/83 winter with a maximum of 38 on 11th November 1962 (Field Naturalist), but with much reduced numbers after 1976/77. Up to three may also have wintered here in 2010/11. The only other of the Lake District lakes which may have held a small wintering flock is Bassenthwaite which had regular records throughout the 1950 and early 1960s but without contemporaneous corroboration, these records could equally have referred to short-staying migrants.

Wilson (1933), writing of Westmorland and the North made no mention of Whooper Swans in the mid-Eden Valley, so the small numbers reported at Great Salkeld in the winter of 1955/56 were probably the first in the area. Early records referred to small numbers on the river itself, though birds were seen on stubbles in 1961 and floodwater in 1963 (Field Naturalist). As elsewhere, it is unclear when regular and prolonged wintering began but appears to have been well established by the mid-1970s and has continued to the present day, with birds primarily feeding on improved grassland.

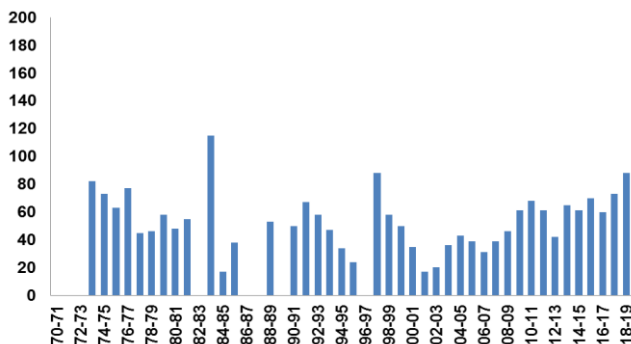
The flock has favoured different areas within the floodplain. Initially at Great Salkeld, then from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, most records came from the Kirkby Thore area. Following a few years of scattered records, Langwathby became the favoured area from the mid-1980s until the turn of the century, since when, Kirkby Thore has again become the most regular haunt. Though birds can be more scattered pre-departure, the flock has tended to stay as one group, at least in recent times. However, numbers within winters do fluctuate, indicating some immigration and emigration. The 115 at Culgaith in January 1984 was exceptional and since the winter of 1973/74, the area has held an average maximum count per winter of 54 birds. Peak numbers generally occur from January to March.

On the lower Eden floodplain east of Carlisle, there were no further records between that previously mentioned in 1910/11 until records in 1929 and April 1947 (Blezard 1943, 1954). Thereafter, there were sporadic records of no more than four birds up to January 1959 (Blezard 1958, Field Naturalist). Records of 30 in March 1962 and ten in January 1963 (Field Naturalist) hint at an escalation in its usage but there were no further records until January 1973 when 51 were present, leaving its status as a wintering area in the intervening period uncertain at best. Since 1972/73, there has been occupation each winter, with a maximum of 190 in January 1986 and an average maximum count per winter of 69 birds. The area of usage has involved the pastures adjacent to the Eden between Linstock in the west and Warwick Holme in the east, and, in recent winters has extended to include the often-flooded fields at Walby. The area is close enough to the Solway to have a regular interchange of birds within winters.

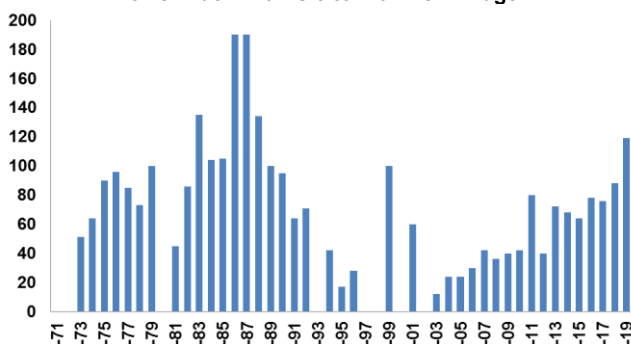
**Highest count per winter in two areas of the River Eden floodplain 1970/71 – 2018/19**

(blanks = no records but not necessarily absence)

**Middle Eden: Great Salkeld to Bolton**



**Lower Eden: Carlisle to Warwick Bridge**



It is unclear when the South Solway Estuary and its immediate surrounds became important wintering areas. On the Scottish side, Wigtown Bay and the River Nith floodplain south of Dumfries have long been regular haunts (Robinson et al. 2004). Remarkably, there were only a handful of documented records on the Cumbrian side in the 20th century prior to the early 1970s. Even when records began to increase in the 1970s, there is no strong evidence of prolonged occupation. Subsequently, two distinct wintering areas appear to have developed, one in the innermost Solway between Rockcliffe Marsh and the fields adjoining the River Eden at Cargo and the other at the mouth of the Inner Solway, predominantly around Moricambe Bay. The first count of 100 or more was of 130 at Cargo on 30th December 1985 at a time when high numbers were also present only a few miles to the east in the

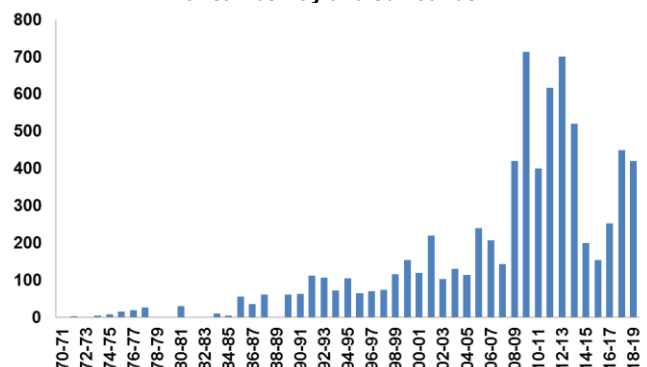
lower Eden floodplain, and it is tempting to think that there was significant interchange between sites at the time. The innermost Solway continued to host generally higher numbers through to the 1990/91 winter and from then until and including the 2007/08 winter, the higher annual peak numbers fluctuated between here and Moricambe Bay. Subsequently, much higher numbers have favoured the latter area and this has become the most prominent haunt. A remarkable 420 fed on stubble at Lessonhall in late December 2008 with more uncounted birds in the area. In the following winter, even this was surpassed. High numbers were apparent by early November 2009 and on the early morning of 15th November 712 were counting leaving night roosts. Numbers remained high in the following winters but following a drop from 2014/15 to 2016/17 have again increased. It is unclear why numbers have recently escalated so dramatically in the Moricambe Bay basin however it has coincided with more favourable management of wet grassland areas on Holme Dub and Commons Moss, and of the peat bog on Wedholme Flow. This has resulted in persistent winter floodwater offering a safe inland night roost, combined with some extensive areas of adjacent winter stubbles.

An area centred primarily on the Campfield Marsh RSPB reserve at Bowness and sitting between the two longer established and primary wintering areas has seen rising numbers in parallel with the Moricambe Bay flock and may involve much interchange as birds tend to be more sporadic here.

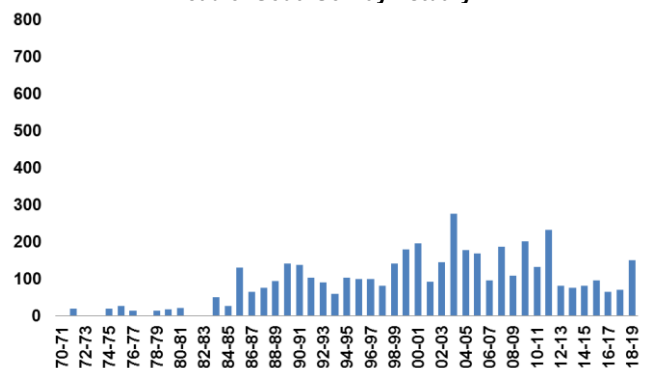
**Highest count per winter season in the main wintering areas of the South Solway Estuary 1970/71 – 2018/19**

(blank years = no records but not necessarily absence)

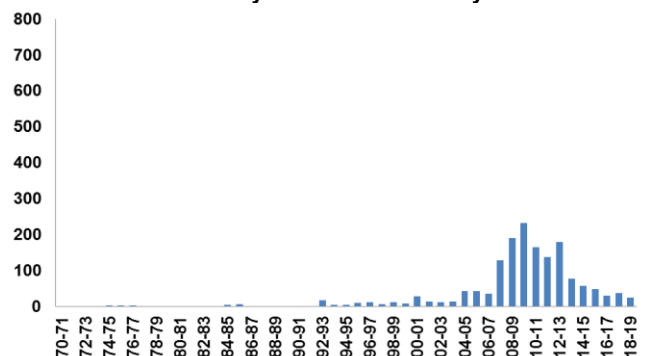
**Moricambe Bay and surrounds**



**Head of South Solway Estuary**

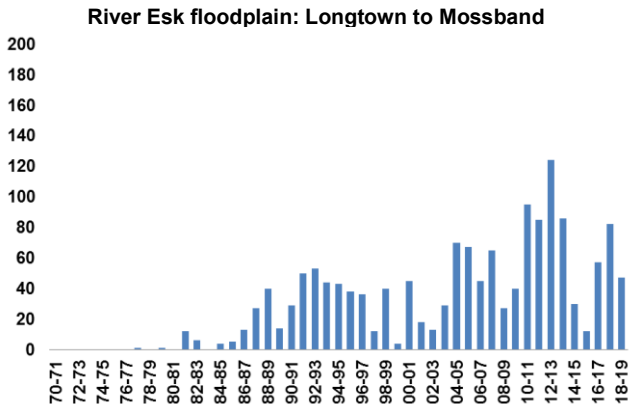


**Central South Solway: Bowness-on-Solway to Glasson**



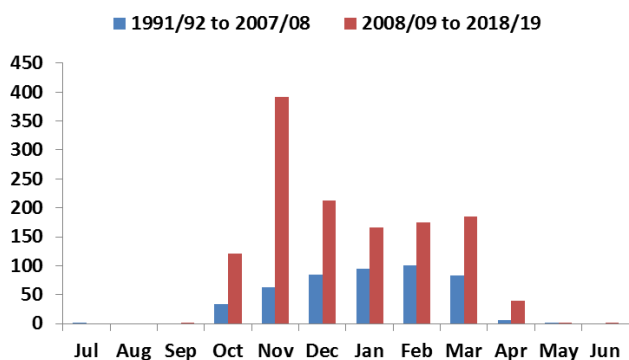
A further “satellite” area to the main wintering haunts on the Solway is the lower Esk Valley at Longtown, westward to Mossband on the northern shore of the estuary and close to the Scottish border. This has been a favoured area since at least the late 1980s and probably earlier, with the average maximum count per winter since 1991/92 of 46 birds and a maximum of 124 on 8th December 2012. Since the mid-2000s, peak numbers have been increasing here but the pattern of use through the winter has stayed broadly the same, with the highest numbers in the second half of the winter. There is almost certainly a degree of interchange here with the other inner Solway flocks and the Scottish flocks further west

**Highest count per winter season 1970/71 – 2018/19**  
(blank years = no records but not necessarily absence)

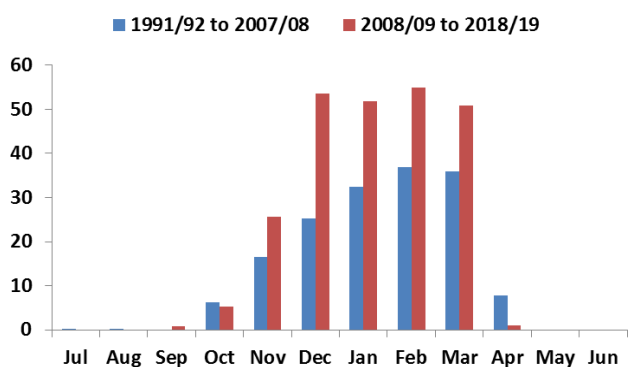


Prior to 2008/09, numbers built through the winter to peak in February around Moricambe Bay. Since the escalation in numbers, the highest counts have occurred between early November and late December, with lesser but still substantial numbers present throughout the winter. Of counts of 300 or more, only four have occurred in the second half of the winter, three in early January and the other, notably late on 7th March 2009. This change in the pattern of usage throughout the winter is as pronounced as the increase in numbers. It is also evident in the innermost Solway area, but not so in the inland flock in the mid Eden Valley, suggesting the Solway haunts may be a staging area for some birds which move on later in the winter.

**Average monthly maximum counts**  
**Moricambe Bay and surrounds**



**Middle Eden: Great Salkeld to Bolton**



Other parts of the coast have historically been devoid of wintering flocks, though there are instances of flocks making protracted stays at various sites, the most recent being up to 22 on flooded fields at Eskmeals between late October and late January in the winter of 2009/10 and up to 300 at the same site in October and early November of 2012/13, with much smaller numbers in the remainder of that winter. Historically, the Duddon Estuary and the Morecambe Bay Estuaries have perhaps surprisingly failed to attract regular wintering flocks though do host passage flocks, some of which have stayed for prolonged periods. However the Lyth Valley adjacent to the Kent Estuary has attracted single figure numbers for prolonged stays since the winter of 2009/10. In the winter of 2018/19 between six and 31 were present from mid-November to mid-March and subsequent observations suggest this may become a regular winter haunt.

Elsewhere, small numbers, particularly in autumn and often not much more than a single family, but with occasional influxes have wintered sporadically at various sites. Tindale Tarn in the North Pennines and Siddick Pond are more consistent examples. Notably Tindale Tarn hosted up to 76 in November 2003, probably attracted by prolific aquatic weed growth following a dry summer. Siddick Pond attracted up to 88 in November 1994 but generally has held a few adults sometimes with juveniles since 2004/05, suggesting perhaps the same returning individuals. Likewise, Lindskeildfield Pond near Cocker mouth between 2004/05 and 2011/12.

There have been several records between the second week of May and the first week of September. Most have concerned singles or two birds together and have been assumed to be injured birds unable to migrate back north. An early example is a young bird which spent the summer on Cavendish Dock in 1960 (Stokoe 1962). Some have lingered at single sites, notable being individuals or the same bird on Windermere between July 2005 and April 2007 and between October 2008 and October 2009. Some individuals probably wandered and account for several records at different sites within the same summer.

If individual birds are excluded on the grounds that they may have summered, the earliest autumn record is of three at Holme Dub on 9th September 2014. There are very few double figure counts before 10th October, from which date the main arrival commences and the earliest ever site count of 100 or more birds concerned 119 at Kirkbride on the Solway on 12th October 2018. Likewise in the pre-departure period, the latest ever 100-plus site count was of 116 also at Kirkbride on 7th April 2016 and double figure site counts are scarce after 15th April. Again, if suspected summering birds are discounted, then the latest spring record is of four at Bassenthwaite on 7th May 1954.

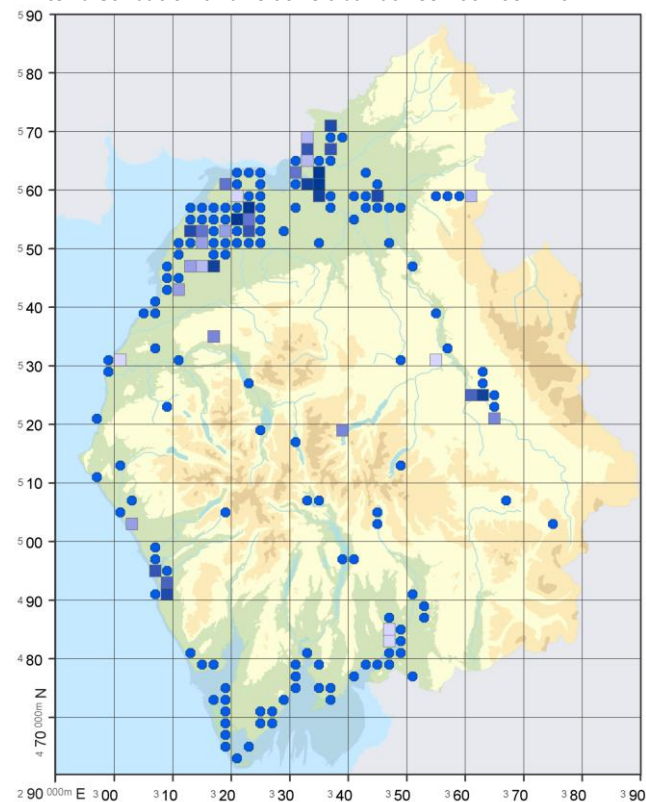
All ringing or colour marking records from Cumbria involve exchanges with Iceland, Scotland, Ireland and elsewhere in England, from sites known to hold predominantly, perhaps exclusively, birds of Icelandic breeding origin. As well as evidence of non-stop autumn migration to the Solway, there is also evidence of autumn staging from Northern Scotland onto southern Scotland, Northern England and to Ireland, but also first to Ireland and then to more southerly areas of Scotland and the Solway (Brazil 2003). So the routes by which birds find their way to Cumbria are likely to be varied. Ringing data also suggests some interchange within winters between Scotland, Ireland and Lancashire. The recent very high numbers around Moricambe Bay in the first half of the winter, followed by much lower numbers subsequently, suggests a degree of emigration to other sites perhaps local, but also further afield.

Over-flying passage flocks or birds on inland waters have been reported in all parts of the county and at all times of the autumn, winter and spring. The wintering flocks of the Ribble marshes and the southwest mosslands in Lancashire did not begin to establish until the 1970s and prior to this, the species was scarce to the south of Cumbria. The first 100-plus count in Lancashire was in 1983/84. Since then, the population has steadily increased and the area has held over 2000 birds since the mid-2000s (White et al 2008) with regular haunts just south of Lancaster. This is reflected in Cumbria where the incidence of passage records has increased in parallel. For example, there were only eight records at South Walney prior to 1975 (Dean 1990) and where since, there have been multiple records annually (WBO 2020). Any areas south of the Solway Basin and the middle Eden Valley are presumably on the flight path of birds heading to, or returning from wintering areas further south. The west coast has accounted for about 45% of all

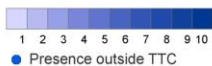
records not attributable to regular wintering areas since 1970/71, with Walney Island contributing about 60% of these. About 24% have come from the Morecambe Bay estuaries and Furness Coast, 19% from the Lake District and surrounds, and the remaining 12% from the Lune and Eden Valleys and the Pennines and Border Moors. Only about 15% of this type of record involves 20 or more birds.

Records from Walney Island, being away from any regular wintering area and with the most systematic coverage from Walney Bird Observatory, are probably representative of the seasonal pattern of passage. Here, the earliest ever record was on 15th September 2011 but it is not until the second week in October that passage really gets underway, to peak around the end of October with a gradual drop-off to a low in mid-December. There are then a small but regular number of records through until about mid-March when they increase again before declining after about 25th March, with only two records after 10th April, with the last on 18th April 2009 and 2015. Numbers involved are broadly similar in autumn and spring but with more smaller flocks in autumn. However, the largest day number here is 346 on 26th October 2019 (WBO 2020).

**Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12**



**Whooper Swan**



Relative abundance during the November to February Timed Tetrad Counts (TTC) in the 2007-2011 survey. Relative abundance category derived from the maximum number of birds recorded in one TTC.

Categories: 1 = 1-4, 2 = 5-5, 3 = 6-7, 4 = 8-8, 5 = 9-9, 6 = 10-12, 7 = 13-20, 8 = 21-41, 9 = 42-75, 10 = 76-400.

Perhaps surprisingly, inland still waters have not proved especially attractive. Not all records have differentiated between birds on the water or flying over. However, about 68 sites have records since 1970. If Tindale Tarn, Tarn House Tarn and Siddick Pond, which have held small numbers of wintering birds are excluded, then Bassenthwaite with at least 53 occurrences and Hodbarrow, just inland of the Duddon Estuary, with at least 46, lead the way (occurrences in this context have included singles or parties which may have lingered for several days). The highest counts on still waters have concerned 88 at Siddick Pond on 24th November 1994, 80 at Hodbarrow on 4th November 2013, 79 on Bassenthwaite on 22nd October 2014 and 76 at Tindale Tarn on 17th November 2003.

**Number of reported occurrences on inland still waters 1970/71 to 2018/19**

Location	Occ.	Location	Occ.
Bassenthwaite Lake	57	Angle Tarn (Ullswater)	2
Hodbarrow	46	Buttermere	2
Elterwater	29	Cardew Mires	2
Derwent Water	26	Devoke Water	2
Killington Reservoir	26	Drunken Duck Tarn	2
Sunbiggin Tarn	21	Easedale Tarn	2
Talkin Tarn	20	Hardendale Quarry, Shap	2
Ennerdale Water	16	Mere Tarn	2
Wet Sleddale Reservoir	16	Torver Low Common Tarn	2
Cavendish Dock	13	Urswick Tarn	2
Haweswater Reservoir	13	Wastwater	2
Tarns Dub	12	Abbotts Moss, Armthwaite	1
Coniston Water	11	Beacon Tarn, Coniston	1
Mockerkin Tarn	11	Blencarn Lake	1
Grasmere	10	Boretree Tarn	1
Grayrigg Tarn	10	Brotherswater	1
Lake Windermere	10	Burnmoor Tarn	1
Blea Tarn	8	Castle Carrock Reservoir	1
Linkskeldfield Tarn	8	Sewitt's Reservoir, Crook	1
Loweswater	8	Crummock Water	1
Thurstonfield Lough	8	Eel Tarn	1
Thirlmere Reservoir	7	Ghyll Head Res., Windermere	1
Little Langdale Tarn	6	Greenhills Pond	1
Kentmere Tarn	6	Loughrigg Tarn	1
Whinell Tarn	6	Mid Fairbank Tarn	1
Esthwaite Water	4	Moorhouse Tarn	1
Greenside Tarn	4	Overwater	1
Keekle Flashes	4	Stickle Tarn	1
Ormsgill Reservoirs	4	Upperby Pond, Carlisle	1
Ratherheath Tarn	4	Wise Een Tarn	1
Rydal Water	4	Whins Pond, Penrith	1
Ullswater	4	Wyndhammere	1
Winter Tarn, Shap	4		

# Smew

## *Mergus albellus*

A scarce winter visitor



Data included up to 2019

### **Non-standard References**

\*Macpherson, H.A. 1884. Smew, Hawfinch and Garganey in Cumberland. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 9: 32

Pavon-Jordan, D. et al. 2015. Climate driven changes in winter abundance of a migratory waterbird (Smew) in relation to EU protected areas. *Diversity and Distributions* 21: 571-582

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### **Post 2018/19 records**

**2019/20** no records

**2020/21** Redhead Longtown Ponds 17th January – 16th February & 10th April

**2021/22** Male & redhead Ennerdale 8th March

**2022/23** Redhead Siddick Ponds 17th November – 7th December & 19th December – 5th April, redhead Ennerdale 19th November, redhead Tindale Tarn/Talkin Tarn 7th December – 30th March

**2023/24** 2 redheads Rockcliffe Marsh 9th – 11th Decembr

**Photograph: Grinsdale, River Eden, 13th December 2010. (N. Franklin)**

# SMEW

## *Mergus albellus*

### A scarce winter visitor

Smew breed around the lakes of the Taiga zone from Kamchatka in Eastern Russia to Fennoscandia. Most breed in northern Russia with those in the east belonging to the Black Sea and East Mediterranean flyway population wintering in Eastern Europe. Those breeding further west winter on large lakes, lagoons, coastal waters and estuaries in west and central Europe within the north-west and central European flyway. Milder winters in recent years have seen a wintering range shift with many more birds remaining further east and north in the Baltic States and southern Fennoscandia, rather than in the Netherlands in particular (Pavon-Jordan et al. 2015).

Britain is at the extreme west of its wintering range and its recent range shift is reflected in declining numbers here, where it has never been numerous. South-east England was its favoured area and in the middle of the 20th century, 100 plus counts were not unusual at some southern reservoirs. Further north it was always much scarcer. With a lack of longer term monitoring data, it is unclear when this overall reduction in numbers started, but there appears to have been a small increase in the UK, France and Belgium on the south western edge of its winter range in the 1990s, followed by a decline through the 2000s (Pavon-Jordan et al. 2015). The current typical wintering population in Great Britain is estimated at just 130 birds (Frost et al. 2019) with few reaching Ireland. Larger influxes into its south western European range still occur during hard weather on the continent e.g. in 1997 and 2003 (Pavon-Jordan et al 2015), but their frequency has also declined.

In Cumbria as with other scarce species its early history of occurrence is scant and largely dominated by shot birds. Macpherson (1892) documented the events surrounding these records in some detail although with few specific dates or locations, with almost all coming from the Solway Basin and Lower River Eden. He also commented on a lack of records from the "heart of the Lake District". Blezard (1943) 50 years later reinforced its scarcity and that it favoured North Cumberland although listing several lakes in the Lake District and the southern coast as having held birds. Up to and including 1944 there are only 30 to 40 records, some without specific dates and from at least 24 sites. Notable amongst these were five birds, four of which were shot on the lower River Eden and one at nearby Monkhill Lough, during January and early February 1891 when there appears to have been an influx. Also of note were four at Moorhouse Tarn in the Solway Basin on 20th January 1924 and four again on the lower River Eden at Cargo on 27th January 1940 (Macpherson 1892, Hope 1923, Blezard 1943).

Since and including the winter of 1949/50 it has occurred in the county in every winter except six with the last 'empty' winter in 1988/89. Perhaps it is surprising that all of these barren winters were within the period of highest numbers in Britain, and possibly more a reflection of lower observer effort than today.

Highlights in the 1950s and 60s involved eight (two males and six

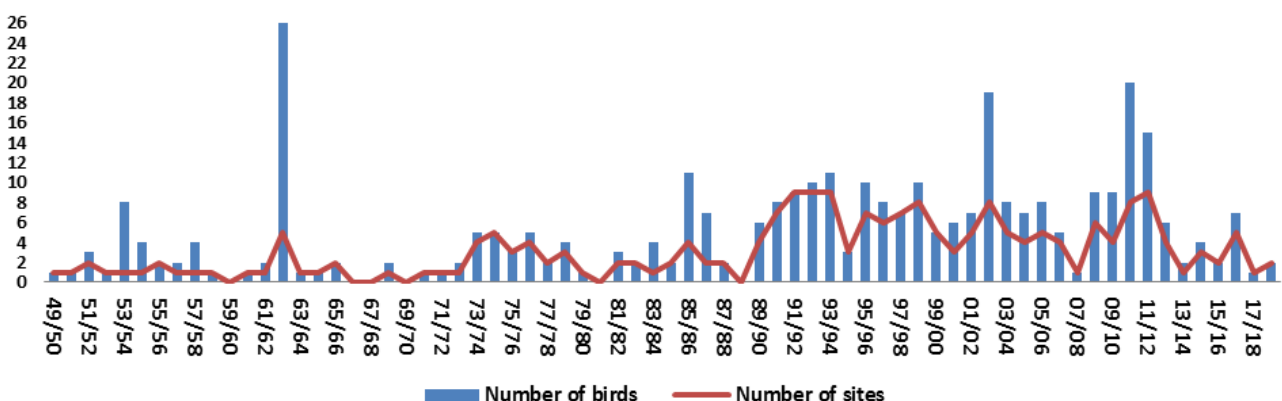


Talkin Tarn, 9th January 2013. (R. Ridley)

females/juveniles ('redheads')) on the Rusland Pool near Rusland Hall on 5th February 1954 during a period of hard frost, a record made all the more remarkable by the absence of any other records in that winter. The next highest counts of four on Coniston Water on 18th March 1955 and four on Bassenthwaite Lake on 4th January 1958 were also in winters of no other county records. However this could not be said of the harsh winter of 1962/63 which generated some of the highest site counts ever, although at only five sites. Amongst these was Cavendish Dock at Barrow where two on 19th January had increased to eight by 9th February with seven still on 17th February. Two remained here from 17th March to 11th April. Meanwhile the River Kent at Levens hosted five birds on 21st January, eight on 24th January and a county site record of 13 on 1st February, with the last record of five on 4th February. It is possible some of these birds frequented both sites in the period as might two at Haverthwaite, situated between the two sites, in February of that winter (Blezard 1958, Stokoe 1962, Stoke Archive, Field Naturalist).

Movement between sites within winters does confound assessment of the number of birds involved. The graph below probably does over-represent the number of birds in some winters particularly where adjacent sites have held birds. An example is likely to be single 'redheads' which are thought to have shared their time between Killington Reservoir, Fisher Tarn and Whinell Tarn in the winter of 1991/92, the first two sites in 1992/93 and all three again in 1993/94, and indeed were very likely the same returning individual over all three winters. Likewise at the adjacent Talkin and Tindale Tarns and Longtown Ponds. Here birds were present at Tindale in all 11 winters between 2002/03 and 2012/13 and in nine of those winters also at Talkin and in eight also at Longtown Ponds. Only in 2007/08 were there records only from Tindale and in most winters two or more birds were present with site maximums of five at Talkin in 2002/03, three at Tindale in 2005/06 and 2010/11 and six at Longtown in 2010/11. There were also records on nearby Castle Carrock Reservoir in 2002/03 with five on 19th January 2003, about the same time as the same number at Talkin.

**Number of sites and approximate number of birds per winter 1949/50 – 2018/19**  
(the sum of the maximum counts for each site per winter)



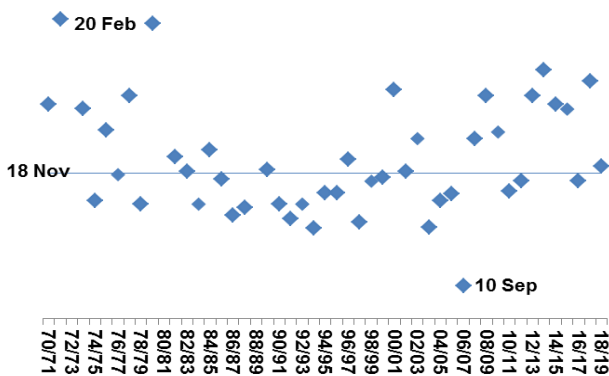
There is also the possibility of returning and interchanging birds at the afore mentioned Killington, Fisher Tarn, and Whinell Tarn along with the adjacent Wyndhammere, Kitmere and Lilymere in the period 1971/72 to 1976/77, when at least one site held a bird, sometimes two, in each winter, with up to three sites holding birds in the same winter.

While Tindale Tarn holds the distinction of the longest unbroken run of 11 winters, Bassenthwaite come close with 10 from 1996/97 to 2005/06 with a maximum of two in five of those winters. While Talkin Tarn has records in 15 of the 18 winters between 1995/96 and 2012/13 and Longtown Ponds in 19 of 35 winters between 1977/78 and 2011/12. In addition the River Eden between Crosby on Eden and Carlisle has records in eight of nine winters between 1991/92 and 1998/99 with up to two in three winters. Further downstream between Grinsdale and Rockcliffe there are records in 14 of 30 winters between 1986/87 and 2016/17, with up to three in 1986/87 and 2010/11. Killington Reservoir was occupied in seven of eight winters between 1991/92 and 1998/99. Most recently Derwentwater has been the most regularly occupied site with records in all eight winters between 2011/12 and 2018/19 with up to two in three of those winters. The above mentioned sites all have additional records from outside the periods described and are the most visited sites along with Hodbarrow, which has records in eight winters, five of which were in the period 1998/99 to 2003/04.

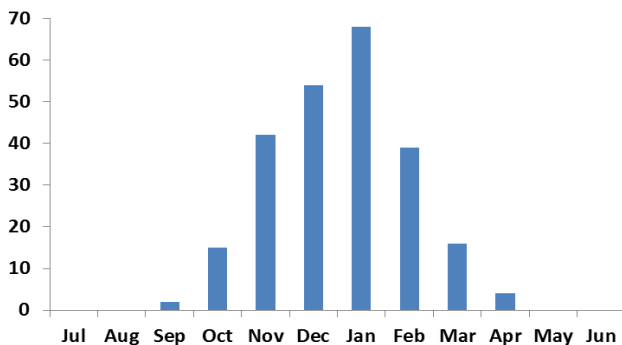
In all about 65 sites have records with most on inland still waters or rivers, relatively few on estuaries and none on the open coast.

A redhead on the River Eden near Rockcliffe on 10th September 2006 is by some distance the earliest bird seen in the county. The next earliest is 12th October 1986 and in all there are 15 or so October records of new birds, with the remaining 14 all in the second half of the month. The median date of first arrival for the period 1970/71 to 2018/19 is 18th November. New arrivals become more common as winter progresses to peak in January. There are eight winters in that period when the first arrival in the entire county was not detected until into January or February, the latest being at Kitmere on 20th February 1972 – the only county record of that winter. This mid-winter peak of arrival probably reflects displacement of birds by hard weather further north and east. New arrivals decline after January. There are about 15 arrivals at previously unoccupied sites in March and just four in April. These involve singles off Foulney on 10th April 1966, on Whinell Tarn on 8th/9th April 1975, on Elterwater from 11th to 17th April 1992 and on the River Eden at Sandsfield on 16th April 2000.

Date of first county record by winter 1970/71 - 2018/19



Month of first occurrence at different sites



These apparent later arrivals could as easily be relocating from other Cumbrian sites as from outside the county. There are a further nine records of long staying birds lingering in to April and indeed there have been many instances of long staying birds. The only record of a bird in May concerns the redhead present at Whinell Tarn/Killington/Fisher Tarn from 15th October 1993, which remained until 4th May 1994 – the longest stay of any bird in the county.

Summary of all records by site (ordered from north to south and by adjacent sites)

Site	Winters with records	Maximum count	Periods with records in consecutive winters
R. Lyne	1	1	
Longtown Ponds	20	6	6
R. Esk: Longtown	2	1	
Talkin Tarn	15	5	3
Tindale Tarn	13	3	1
Castle Carrock Reservoir	1	5	
Whins Pond	3	1	
R. Lyvennet	1	1	
Ullswater	1	1	
R. Eden: Little Salkeld - Warcop	2	1	
R. Eden: Lazonby	1	1	
R. Eden: Cummersdale	1	1	
R. Eden: Carlisle to Crosby	11	3	2
R. Eden: Rockcliffe to Cargo	16	3	2
Solway Estuary: Burgh	1	3	
Solway Estuary: Bowness	5	2	
Solway Estuary: Grune Point	1	1	
Solway Estuary: Skinburness	1	1	
R. Waver	1	1	
Silloth Airfield Pond	1	1	
Crofton Lake	1	1	
Monkhill Lough	3	2	1
Moorhouse Tarn	2	4	1
Soddy Gap	2	1	
Siddick Pond	2	1	
Derwentwater	11	2	1
R Derwent: Derwent-Bassenthwaite	2	2	
Bassenthwaite Lake	17	4	2
Overwater	2	1	
R. Derwent: Cockermouth	1	1	
Loweswater	1	1	
Ennerdale Lake	1	2	
Longlands Lake	1	1	
Harrington Reservoir	1	1	
R. Ehen: Sellafield	2	1	
R. Esk: Muncaster	1	1	
Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary	2	1	1
Duddon Estuary	5	4	1
Hodbarrow Lagoon	8	2	3
South Walney	3	2	
Cavendish Dock	4	8	1
Furness Coast Foulney Island	1	1	
Leven Estuary outer	1	1	
Leven Estuary upper	6	2	1
Coniston Water	2	4	
Rusland Pool	2	8	
Haverthwaite	1	2	
Lake Windermere	6	2	1
Elterwater	3	2	
Loughrigg Tarn	2	1	1
Grange over Sands	1	1	
Kent Estuary outer	1	1	
Kent Estuary inner	6	5	1
R. Bela: Dallam	2	1	
R. Kent: Kendal	2	2	
R. Kent: Levens	2	13	
Sizergh Castle	1	1	
Ratherheath Tarn	1	1	
Sunbiggin Tarn	1	1	
Wyndhammere	2	2	1
Kitmere	3	2	
Lilymere	2	1	1
Lune Valley: a small tarn	1	1	
Killington Reservoir	12	2	2
Whinell Tarn	6	1	1
Fisher Tarn	5	2	1

# Garganey

## *Anas querquedula*

A scarce summer visitor and passage migrant, has bred



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- \*Macpherson, H.A. 1884. Smew, Hawfinch and Garganey in Cumberland. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 9: 32
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- \*Mckerrow, M. 1929. Garganeys in Cumberland. *British Birds* 23: 22
- \*Taylor, R.J.F. 1948. Garganey in Westmorland. *British Birds* 41: 88
- \*Thorpe, D.L. & Hope, L.E. 1910. Garganey on the Solway. *British Birds* 4: 93
- \*Walker, R. 1949. Early Garganey in Westmorland. *British Birds* 42: 64

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

- 2020** Records from 3 sites in spring with a male at South Walney last seen on 1st June. Records at 5 sites in autumn
- 2021** Records from 5 sites in spring including 2 pairs at Brigsteer Moss in late March, long staying pairs at Arnside and Campfield Marsh and 1 at Longtown staying until 12th June. Records at just Ulpha Meadows in autumn staying until 20th October
- 2022** Records from 7 sites in spring including 4 males at Rockcliffe on 23rd May and 2 at Brigsteer on 15th & 16th June. Records at just Foulshaw in autumn
- 2023** Records from 11 sites in spring with pairs staying in to June at Brigsteer, Siddick Pond and Dalton in Furness with no proof of breeding. A site with 3 juveniles in early September was suggestive of breeding. Records at 4 sites in autumn including a late bird at Campfield Marsh on 10th October

Photograph: Longtown, 13th May 2009 (N. Franklin)

# Garganey

## *Anas querquedula*

### A scarce summer visitor and passage migrant, has bred

Garganey breeds across the Palearctic from western Europe to eastern Asia. It is thinly distributed in the breeding season with smaller breeding populations in Western Europe (EBBA 2020). It is strongly migratory. Western and northern European breeders migrate south in autumn either through the Iberian Peninsula or the central Mediterranean to West Africa or through the eastern Mediterranean to East Africa (Scott & Rose 1996).

In Great Britain there is a very small breeding population of about 120 pairs annually (Eaton et al. 2021) spread widely and mainly in England and Wales. Breeding in Scotland and Ireland is rare. There is no wintering population.

In Cumbria it was first recorded in the spring of 1848 when one pair were shot on the River Eden and a pair of which the male was also shot near Drumburgh. In all there have been about 220 documented occurrences of "new" birds.

There appear to have been at least three breeding attempts. A published report of a pair in April at Roanhead north of Barrow in 1961 (Field Naturalist, Barrow Naturalists) is corroborated by an unpublished note in the Stokoe Archive of summering pairs near Barrow in 1961, 1962 and 1963 with a nest found in 1962. At South Walney in 1990 a pair was present from 5th May to 11th June and eggs were laid but no young were subsequently seen. A pair at a "confidential site" in April 2003 followed by a record of pair with a juvenile at Sellafield on 16th July of the same year, with a comment that they were assumed to be from the "displaying pair", suggests this may have been the first successful breeding attempt. Interestingly, as in the "near" Barrow record of 1962, a pair was also reported at both these sites in the previous springs at Walney on 20th and 21st May 1989 and Sellafield on 23rd May 2002.

Other protracted stays in spring concerning at least a pair have involved:

1978	Siddick Pond	29 May-5 Jun	pair
1989	Mere Tarn	13 May-10 Jun	pair
1992	Sunbiggin Tarn	15-31 May	pair, with male to 4 Jun
1995	Sandscale Haws	29 Apr-6 May	Pair, with male to 23 May
2014	Campfield Marsh	5 Apr-6 May	3 males & a female sporadically

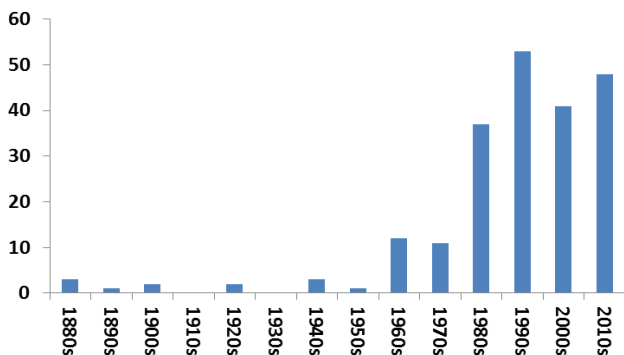
In addition there are late May/June records of shorter duration involving pairs:

1990	Carr Beds, Rockcliffe	2 Jun	2 males & a female
1992	Parkers Pond, Dalton	3-5 Jun	pair
1993	Irt Estuary	11 Jun	pair
1997	Campfield Marsh	27 May	pair
2011	Mazon Wath, nr. Sunbiggin	20-22 Jun	pair

A female and a juvenile were also at South Walney on 9th August 1998, but in all the above instances there was no evidence of breeding although it was suspected at Sunbiggin in 1992.

There are only about 29 documented records prior to 1970. Then, concurrent with an increase in bird watching activity and reporting, the level of occurrences began to increase through the 1970s and since 1978 it has been annual except for 1991.

Number of occurrences per decade

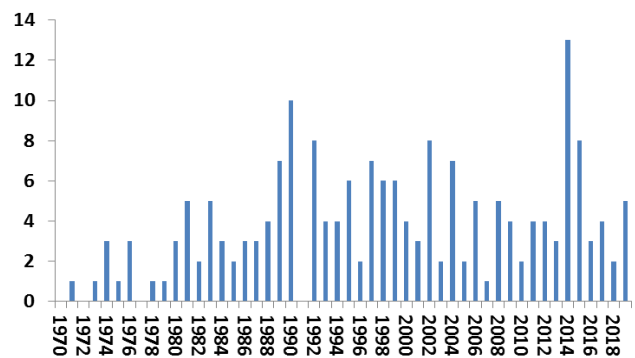


However levels of occurrence fluctuate widely between years and with occasionally changing numbers of birds during some occupations of sites, the number of new birds involved is hard to determine.



Carr Beds, Rockcliffe, R. Eden, 8th May 2006. (N. Franklin)

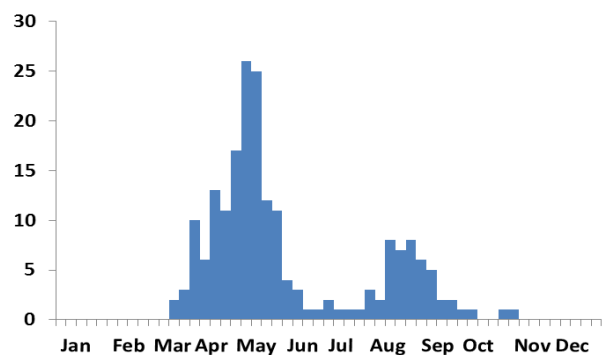
Number of occurrences per year 1970 - 2019



A seemingly remarkable record of seven on the River Lyne on an un-named date in February 1929, a male of which was shot, is most likely explained by the rearing of the species at nearby Netherby. In 1922 and 1923 five pairs of pinioned birds were received here and although none hatched young, the eggs of four pairs were hatched under bantams in 1925 and a pair was still nesting at Netherby Ponds in 1928 and 1929 (Bleazard 1943).

The first legitimate spring record is of a female on the River Kent at Sandy Bottoms on 17th March 2004. There are a further five March records, all on or after 24th, making the 2004 bird significantly early. Records of new birds increase through April to peak in the first two weeks of May, before falling sharply after that with only four records in the first week of June. Excluding breeding records there are 14 June records in total.

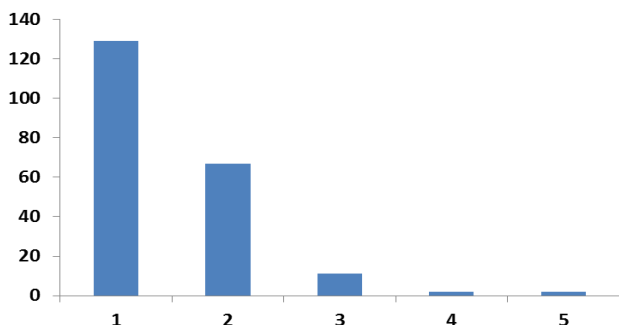
Week of first occurrence of new birds



Autumn passage is much less significant than spring. There are only four records in July and only four in the first week or so of August after which occurrences increase and plateau in the remainder of August. There are just 12 September records and two in the first week of October involving two at Mere Tarn on 7th October 1964 and a male at South Walney on 3rd October 1981. There are then outlying records of a female on Coniston Water on 26th October 1988 and remarkably five were on flooded peat cuttings on Wedholme Flow on 5th November 1996. In addition there is one December record of a male shot on the saltmarsh at Millom on an un-named date in 1884 (Macpherson 1892).

Most records have been of single birds but where two or more birds are involved there is a high incidence of at least a male and a female in an apparent pair. The two incidences of four together involve the previously mentioned breeding pair at Walney in 1990 and the pair at Sandscale Haws in spring 1995, both of which were joined by two additional males at some point. The only other record of five together other than the November record at Wedholme Flow in 1996 was at Wet Sleddale Reservoir on 25th August 1974.

**Figure 4: Frequency of different numbers of birds in records**



Up to 2019 65 different sites have held birds with South and Central Walney the most visited followed by Campfield Marsh at Bowness-on-Solway, Hodbarrow Lagoon, Siddick Pond and Ulpha Meadows, all of which have hosted occurrences in double figures.

**Number of occurrences at different sites**  
(ordered from north to south and by adjacent sites)

Gilsland	1	Wet Sleddale Reservoir	1
R Lyne	1	Nethertown	1
Netherby	1	Braystones/Braystones Tarn	2
Longtown Ponds	4	Sellafield	1
R Esk, Longtown	1	Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary	2
R Eden, Carr Beds	9	Hodbarrow Lagoon	18
Rockcliffe Marsh	6	Millom, Duddon Estuary	1
R Eden, Rickerby	2	Sandscale Haws	9
Carlisle	1	Roanhead, Duddon	3
R Eden, unknown	1	Near Barrow	3
Burgh by Sands	1	North Walney	1
Drumburgh	1	South and Central Walney	40
Glasson	1	Cavendish Dock, Barrow	1
Campfield Marsh, Bowness	21	Rampside	1
Biglands Bog, Bowness	1	Parkers Pond, Dalton	1
Bowness-on-Solway	1	Mere Tarn	8
Easton/Fingland floodwater	1	Urswick Tarn	3
Grune Point, Solway Estuary	1	Coniston Water	1
Silloth	1	Bardsea, Leven Estuary	1
Silloth Airfield Pond	1	Roudsea Tarn	1
Wedholme Flow	3	Lyth Valley	2
Crofton Lake	2	Meathop Moss	1
Watchtree, Great Orton	1	Ulpha Meadows	10
Hawksdale, Dalston	1	Sandy Bottoms, R Kent	1
Cardew Mires, Dalston	1	College Green, R. Kent	1
Soddy Gap, Great Broughton	1	Halforth	1
Aspatia	1	Milnthorpe	1
Siddick Pond	13	R. Bela, Dallam	2
Derwentwater	1	Black Dyke, Arnside	1
Bassenthwaite Lake	3	Mazonwath Tarn, Sunbiggin	1
Mockerkin Tarn	3	Sunbiggin Tarn	6
Tarn Wadling, High Hesket	1	Whinfell Tarn	2
Whins Pond, Penrith	2		

# Pintail (Northern Pintail)

*Anas acuta*

Common winter visitor, passage migrant & occasional breeder



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

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- Tomlinson, C.F. 1932. Pintail duck in the English Lake District. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 57: 227
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- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Records

- 2020/21 Winter:** max. 3285 November Duddon Estuary, max 1300 October Anthorn, Solway Estuary
- 2021/22 Winter:** max. 1677 November Duddon Estuary (No count October), max 1000 November Leven Estuary
- 2022/23 Winter:** max. 2900 October Duddon Estuary, 1340 December Kent & Leven Estuaries, 1200 November Grune Point, Solway Estuary
- 2023/24 Winter:** max. 2100 November Duddon Estuary

Photograph: Campfield Marsh, March 2006. (N. Franklin)

## Pintail (Northern Pintail)

### *Anas acuta*

Common winter visitor, passage migrant & occasional breeder

Atlas status: % tetrads

Winter 2007/08-2011/12 4.81

Atlas status: % 10km sq 1981-84 2007-11

with wintering evidence 20 27.37

Pintails breed across Northern Eurasia and North America. Birds breeding in Western Europe winter mainly in the Sahel area of West Africa but also with large wintering concentrations in Northwest Europe, the Mediterranean Basin and East Africa (Scott & Rose 1996), Birdlife International 2022).

Birds wintering or on passage in Britain and Ireland are from western Siberian, Fennoscandian, Baltic and Icelandic breeding populations. Numbers in the UK show a large amount of inter-year fluctuation (Austin et al. 2014). The reasons for this are unclear but make assessment of overall trends difficult. The UK WeBS index does however suggest a decline of 25% between 1993/94 and 2018/19, having peaked in the winter of 2005/06 (Frost et al. 2021). The UK wintering population was estimated at 20,000 birds between 2012/13 and 2018/19 (Frost et al. 2019). However, it is not clear if the Western European breeding population, from which our wintering birds are drawn, has actually declined or has alternatively undergone a 'range shift' in its wintering areas. Recent increases in the number of birds wintering in the Netherlands may indicate a range shift towards the east (Austin et al. 2014).

Birds arrive from September onwards and concentrate at a small number of sites, with the northwest of England particularly important. Morecambe Bay and the Solway and Duddon Estuaries are internationally important sites. There is a very small UK breeding population, averaging 27 pairs between 2013 and 2017 (Woodward et al. 2020). Both feral and wild birds have bred occasionally in Cumbria.

Only ever a sporadic breeder in the county, the status of various breeding attempts is confounded by birds bred from pinioned stock and subsequently released for shooting. The first documented record refers to a probably truly wild pair, which summered on Bowness Moss adjacent to the Solway in 1890, though with no proof of breeding (MacPherson 1892). Captive birds bred at Low Wood near Ambleside between 1877 and 1881 (Backhouse 1882), though the fate of any young produced is not known. However from 1903 onwards, up to 30 birds were released annually on the Netherby Estate north of Carlisle and by 1908 free-flying birds were nesting here. This continued up to at least 1919 and in 1920, birds hatched from eggs taken from Loch Leven in Fife were introduced. Though this breeding programme ceased in 1926, the species was by then a feral breeder in the area (Bleazard & Johnston 1943). Three pairs which nested on Bowness Common in 1917 (Hope 1923), a pair at the same location in 1925, several summering birds in Cumberland and Westmorland between 1927 and 1931 (Bleazard 1943) and a female incubating six eggs on a Westmorland Lake in 1932 (Tomlinson 1932), could conceivably all be traced back to the Netherby releases. Similarly, a few pairs which nested around the Duddon Estuary in the 1960s and on the Leven Estuary in 1965 probably originated from breeding pinioned birds on the WAGBI reserve at The Haws near Millom (Ruxton 1974). A pair which nested, but failed on eggs at Appleby in 1968 (Robson 1969) may also have been from this source.

Single pairs which bred in the Solway Basin in 1973, 1976 and 1982 and also in the Eden Valley in 1982 were more likely of wild origin. In 1983, breeding occurred at three sites and birds were present at two more (Hutcheson 1986, Fox & Meek 1993). However, there have been no further breeding attempts, though most years have May occurrences and there have been occasional summering birds. These have sometimes included pairs on saltmarshes or at inland moorland tarns which may offer suitable habitat, but birds in late spring probably involve late wintering or passage birds.

MacPherson (1892) considered Pintails to have been scarce in winter in the latter part of the 19th century, citing the experience of wildfowling who came across them only occasionally and mainly in



Campfield Marsh, Solway Estuary, October 2013 (J & J Rogers)

the company of Mallard or Wigeon. He noted shot birds from Morecambe Bay, Ravenglass and the Solway, particularly around Moricambe Bay and Rockcliffe Marsh. He also noted inland birds at Monkhill Lough in the Solway Basin, Armathwaite in the Eden Valley, Shap and the Rusland Valley.

By the 1920s, Hope (1923) described it as much more common on the Solway than in the 1890s, attributing the increase to releases from Netherby. However the release programme here is not likely to have boosted the winter population significantly and so numbers must have still been low.

The first moderately substantial count involved 92 on the Duddon Estuary on 2nd April 1922 (Bleazard 1943). In 1943 Bleazard again described them as commoner than in the early 20th century. On the Solway, he identified the Scottish side as more important, but with birds arriving on the English side from July and with autumn numbers generally higher than in winter, with birds lingering until late April. He also noted inland occurrence including 12 on a lough in the Solway Basin and a few birds on Westmorland still waters. Over 100 birds were seen at the head of Morecambe Bay during December 1944 (Oakes 1953). However, Bleazard (1954, 1958) only listed coastal records of a pair on the River Eden at Rockcliffe in February 1953, a maximum of five in Moricambe Bay on the Solway between 1953 and 1957, 26 on the Leven Estuary in December 1955 and 44 off Grange-over-Sands on the Kent Estuary in December 1955. Inland occurrences concerned birds at Thurstonfield Lough, Sunbiggin Tarn, Killington Reservoir, Siddick Pond and Bassenthwaite in the late 1940 and early 1950s (Stokoe 1962, Sedbergh School archive).

In 1959 and 1960, records of up to 12 on the Kent Estuary and 17 on the Leven Estuary were considered notable by Stokoe (1962), who also referred to a count of 'no less than' 200 on the Duddon Estuary on 19th November 1960, with 30 here on 16th April 1961.

The winters of the early and mid-1960s seem to have witnessed a significant increase in usage of the southern estuaries with 1000 on the Duddon on 18th November 1961 (Field Naturalist) a remarkable 2000 on 24th December 1962 (Stokoe archive), 400 at Sandside on the Kent Estuary on 23rd January 1966 and up to 1100 at Flookburgh on the Leven Estuary in October 1967 (Field Naturalist). This incidence of higher counts in the 1960s compared to the relatively light usage prior to this also happens to coincide with improved count coverage given by the National Wildlife Count scheme from the mid-1960s. However, the lack of larger counts prior to the 1960s does suggest a real increase at this time, though the reasons behind it are unknown. Meanwhile inland records remained scarce in the 1960s, with Thurstonfield Lough again featuring along with floodwater at Ormside near Appleby Wyndhammere, (Field Naturalist), Tarn House at Ravenstonedale, Haweswater and Bassenthwaite, (Stokoe Archive).

Count coverage of the Duddon Estuary was variable throughout the 1970s. By the time it improved from 1984/85 onwards, winter maximums were regularly in the order of 700 plus. In 1988/89 there were 2200 in October and since then 2000 has been exceeded several times including notably in March 2006 and 2009. The latter were the highest counts of both winters, suggesting a spring passage influx. More recently targeted low tide counts here since 2014/15 have regularly produced higher counts than WeBS core counts with 3000 exceeded in the autumns of 2017/18, 2018/19

and 2019/20 with a maximum of 3315 in November 2018. It is unclear if this is a real increase or due to the different count methodology.

Like the Duddon, count coverage in Morecambe Bay was not comprehensive enough prior to the winter of 1984/85 to assess status though Wilson (1974) detailed up to 1000 in a good year in the Leven Estuary. The advent of improved coverage immediately produced counts in excess of 2000 birds, with the Kent Estuary between Humphrey Head and the railway viaduct attracting most, with smaller numbers on the Leven Estuary primarily off Bardsea. Since 1984/85, the outer Kent Estuary has held in excess of 2000 birds in 16 winters though not since 2010/11. In two of these the maximum exceeded 3000 and in 1997/98 and 1998/99, over 4000, with the highest count of 4292 in October 1997. In all four of the winters with 3000 or more birds, the peak count was in October.

On the Inner Solway, the first large documented count was of 205 in September 1974 but, also with variable coverage, subsequently no more than 86 were counted until 550 in February 1990. Between 1990/91 and 1997/98, the highest monthly count was only 192 but then between the winters of 1998/99 and 2006/07, at least 1000 were counted in all but two winters. This included 3034 in November 1998, with 3000 of these on Rockcliffe Marsh and 4086 in October 2004, when 4000 were in Moricambe Bay. Rockcliffe Marsh also held 870 in February 2002 and 400 in September 2006 but otherwise has generally attracted few birds. All other substantial counts have come from Moricambe Bay which has remained the favoured haunt, though numbers have declined since 2007/08 back to pre-1998/99 levels with the last high count of 1000 on Calvo Marsh in November 2017.

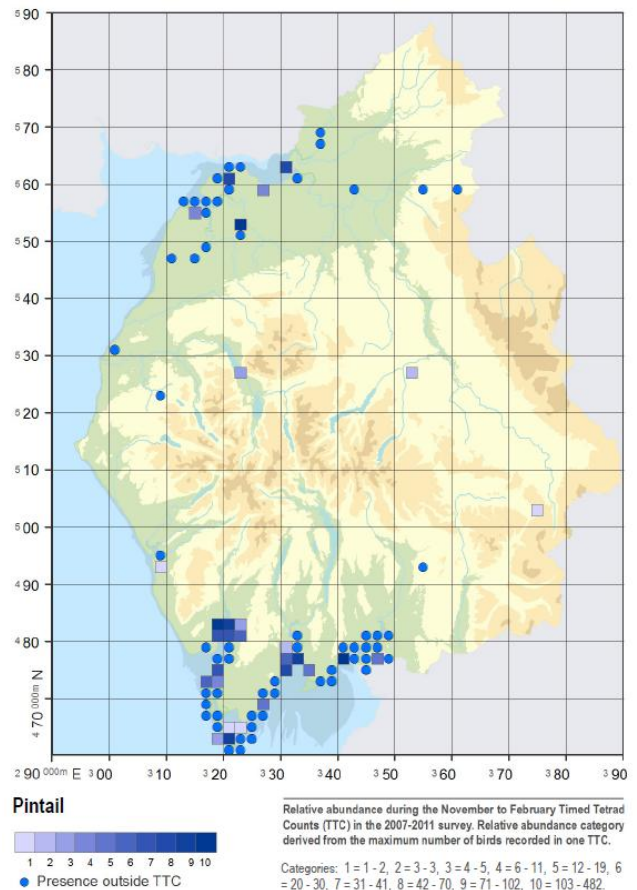
On the Kent/Leven Estuaries, the seasonal pattern has on average been of a peak in October followed by a gradual decline through the winter. On the Inner Solway, November has averaged the highest numbers, again followed by a decline through the remainder of the winter. This hints that, as well as being wintering sites, they may also host an element of autumn/early winter passage and is in contrast to the Duddon where the numbers have generally remained stable from October through January.

The remainder of the coast is little used, with surprisingly few records from the Ravenglass complex of estuaries which regularly attracts good numbers of Wigeon, with which Pintail often associates elsewhere. Further north, the Outer Solway with its lack of saltmarsh is largely shunned, the only records involving a maximum of 49 between the winters of 1974/75 and 1976/77.

Since 1970 inland occurrence has been more widespread but has remained sporadic and normally concerns less than double figure numbers. Exceptions on still waters have involved 41 on Tarns Dub, Aspatria in February 1982, 16 in March 1984, 33 in November 1984 and 25 in November 1988 all on Ennerdale Water, 16 at Killington Reservoir in late August 1990, 18 on Talkin Tarn in late February/early March 2002, 10 at Longtown Ponds in January 2005, 12 at Tindale Tarn in September 2012, 14 at Longtown between January and March 2013, 10 at Wet Sleddale in October 2013 and 42 at Haverbrack Pond, Beetham in October 2014.

In recent years, conservation efforts to raise water levels adjacent to the coast have attracted regular usage by small numbers. Examples with maximums in the Solway Basin are Campfield Marsh: 111 in February 2011, Lessenhall: 32 in October 2005, Wedholme Flow: 270 in January 2008, Holme Dub: 180 in November 2017 and the Lower Eden floodplain at Scotby: 20 in November 2010 and December 2013. Similarly, by the Kent Estuary, the recently created Alpha Meadows held 41 in January 2012 and the Lyth Valley 150 on floodwater in January 2005. The pools at South Walney occasionally attract mostly single figures.

Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12

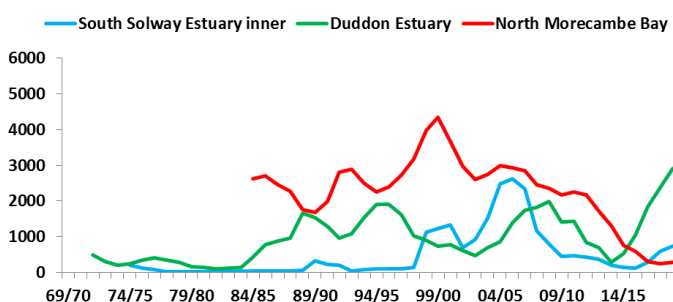


There have been just five ringing recoveries and only two involving exchange with other countries. A bird ringed at Longtown, a remnant of the release scheme, in March 1933 was found on the German coast in September 1933 and a nestling ringed in Finland in 1960 was recovered at Witherslack in December 1960 (Robinson et al 2020).

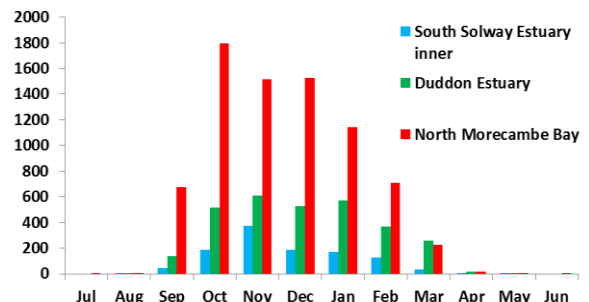
WeBS five season period maximums at main sites in Cumbria 1969/70 – 2018/19 (entire counts for "shared" sites)

	1969/70 1973/74	1974/75 1978/79	1979/80 1983/84	1984/85 1988/89	1989/90 1993/94	1994/95 1998/99	1999/00 2003/04	2004/05 2008/09	2009/10 2013/14	2014/15 2018/19
South Solway inner	21	205	49	86	550	3034	2187	4086	652	1024
Entire Solway Estuary	950	2870	1890	1575	2358	4436	4663	4817	4262	4374
Duddon	652	505	158	2200	2194	2261	1299	2481	1500	3315
North Morecambe Bay	1200	100	776	2810	3706	4765	3945	3337	2354	370
Entire Morecambe Bay	1214	284	804	2890	3979	4795	4161	3620	3186	911

Maximum counts on main estuaries (3 year rolling means)



Average monthly usage on main estuaries 1984/85 – 2018/19



# Black Grouse

## *Lyrurus tetrix*

An uncommon resident; once widespread but now confined to the Border Moors, North Pennines, and south eastern moors.



Data included up to 2019

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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

- 2020 Geltsdale lekking males: 26
- 2021 Geltsdale lekking males: 21. A male near Sunbiggin Tam on 7th May was a first recent record in a formerly occupied area
- 2022 Geltsdale lekking males: 17
- 2023 Geltsdale lekking males: 39

Photograph: Geltsdale, February 2006. (N. Franklin)

## Black Grouse

### *Lyrurus tetrix*

An uncommon resident; once widespread but now confined to the North Pennines, Howgill Fells and south eastern moors.

Atlas status: % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
Breeding 1997-2001	0.86	1.03	1.62	3.51
Breeding 2008-2012	1.41	1.35	0.49	3.24
Winter 2007/08-2011/12				3.78
Atlas status: % 10km sq	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
with breeding evidence	38.95	13.68	14.74	21.05
Atlas status: % 10km sq			1981-84	2007-12
with wintering evidence			23.16	21.05

Cumbria population estimate 2014 (GWT unpub.) 324 males

Black Grouse are widely distributed in Western Europe eastwards to Siberia and northern China (EBBA 2020). They are found in a variety of habitats, including mires, heathland, forests and meadows. Throughout much of their global range, populations are thought to be in long-term decline, particularly in lowland areas and in the south of its range (EBBA 2020).

In the UK they are most abundant in the Scottish Highlands, with separate populations in Central and Southern Scotland, Northern England and North Wales. The UK population was estimated at 5100 males in 2005 (Sim et al 2008). The 2007-11 National Atlas showed a 29% contraction in breeding range since the 1968-72 Atlas. Most notable losses were in Central and Southern Scotland, Wales and parts of Northern England. However, numbers fluctuate annually in relation to variations in breeding success (Warren et al. 2015). Only males are counted in surveys due to their conspicuous display behavior compared to the more secretive females.

Black Grouse were once more common and widely distributed within the county. By analysing place names Sellers (2015) infers a distribution between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries only excluding the northern Lake District fells and the west coast. Early accounts taken from MacPherson (1892) include "Evidence of the comparative abundance of this game on the English side of the borders early in the seventeenth century" as supplied by the Accounts of Lord William Howard of Carlisle. Black game did not appear at his table in the same abundance as 'grouse' but in some seasons there was plenty of it nevertheless. Analysing the game purchased for the Naworth household from August 1618 to the end of that year, I find that one hundred and twenty head of black game were bought". Nevertheless Heysham (1694) described it as a rare bird in Cumberland but commonest on the Netherby estate north of Carlisle. Cooking recipes for Black Grouse can be found as late as the mid-1950s with the publication of Dorothy Hartley's (1954) "Food in England", showing it would not be unusual to find it on the household menu in rural areas where it was available.

Certainly the species appeared to be numerous on the Border Moors. A sale advertisement of 'The manor of Bewcastle' published in 1829, tells us that of 17000 acres, 8300 acres consisted of 'unenclosed wastes abounding with black game and grouse' (Carlisle Journal, May 9 1829). MacPherson (1892) went on to say that the district in question still contained a fair sprinkling, though described it as having decreased in later years. Philipson (1954) described it as having been always common on the open moorlands of Northeast Cumberland and the Tindale Fells in the North Pennines, and referred to it as being regularly found on the tables of all hill farmers in the area at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He also recounted that at this time, it was so numerous that in winter, flocks of as many as 100 birds would come down to the cultivated fields, and had counted 150 within one square mile. He knew of many leks on the western side of the River Irthing north to the Scottish border including on the farm at Mosscoo and west to the Bewcastle moors, and had found nests in rush beds, heather, meadows and in open woodland under birch and rowan. Numbers were much reduced during the first war as there was little protection from gamekeepers and they provided a free food supply, but had recovered by 1930 and were nearly as numerous as ever. Hill Farm at Gilsland held 43 in November 1931 and in the same month 50 were in a meadow at Hallbankgate. Graham (1993)



Male, Nateby, 9th April 2011 (L. Gould)

believed the increase was sustained until at least 1935 particularly in the newly planted Bewcastle forest area. However from then on numbers began to slowly decline and then more rapidly as war again broke out from 1939. After the war Philipson (1954) found only single figure numbers and saw only one bird in 1948, ascribing the decline to over-exploitation for food in "these times of austerity" while Graham recounts hearing that "the forestry people were keeping them down" to prevent damage to trees. Perhaps benefitting from the new plantations, as late as 1952 up to 100 birds were believed to inhabit the Horseholme area on the Northumberland border north of Gilsland (Graham 1993) and a lek of up to 15 birds was present in the Brampton area in the 1950s (Stokoe 1962). Birds and nests continued to be reported on the Bewcastle Moors and in the adjoining pastures in much reduced numbers through the 1950s and in to the early 1960s as the forest canopy closed. The 1968-72 Atlas shows occupation throughout the Border Moors but by the time of the 1997-01 Atlas this was restricted to the extreme eastern edge of the Border Moors with the last "Bewcastle" record of two on Flimby Fell in September 1995. There were slightly more, but still sporadic records from the west through the 1990s, with the last single reported at Gowk Bank, Spadeadam in May 2000 and no records in the 2007-12 Atlas. However there have been records of up to six birds in the Spadeadam area since 2014.

In the late 19th century small numbers were present on the Solway Mosses. A few grey hens were reported to nest on the Solway Flow with a brood sometimes reared near Drumbrough Moss, but, owing to indiscriminate shooting, the species had never become firmly established there (MacPherson 1892). They were still present in small numbers up to the 1940s (Blezzard 1943) but not mentioned subsequently in any source.

Reference to the historical status of populations on the Pennine moors is generally under-represented in the literature compared to other areas. MacPherson (1892) noted "considerable numbers" in the Alston area and on Hartley Fell above Kirkby Stephen but also that they were in decline in the latter area. Blezzard described "a sprinkling" on the Pennine fringes between Tindale in the north and Mallerstang in the south (Stoke 1962). Five were reported on Croglin Fell in September 1959, nine in the Belah Gorge near Kirkby Stephen in November 1960, two on Tynehead Fell above Garigill in September 1964 (Field Naturalist) and nine above Brough in 1969 (Stokoe Archive). Despite reduced numbers and a scarcity of records in the 1970s and 80s, the 1988-91 Atlas showed occupation throughout the Pennine fells and there is no reason to think there has been anything but constant occupation. The most consistently important areas have been the Tindale and Geltsdale Fells (max. 59 males in 2015), Tynehead Fell (max. 24 males in January 2014 and 35 birds in October 2014), Stainmore Common (max. 12 males in January 2005), Winton Fell (max. 28 males in four leks in March 2018) and Mallerstang Common (max. 10 males in April 2011).

MacPherson (1892) lists the Lazonby Fells, Edenhall, Whinfell, Lowther, Reagill, Sleagill Julian Bower at Temple Sowerby, Long Marton and Kirkby Thore, all in the Eden Valley, as regular haunts. He infers introductions in this area, but it is also on the doorstep of populations on the Pennine Fells. It is unclear when these "valley" populations died out. While one was reported at Bowscar near Great Salkeld in November 1959 and in the 1950s birds were

present in the Hoff area near Appleby with six as late as January 1961 (Penrith NHS, Field Naturalist), it was certainly long before a single at Armathwaite in October 1996.

The Lowther game books suggest a reasonable population in the 1920s on the Crosby Ravensworth moors and populations were described by Robson (1960) as much reduced on Orton Scar and at Ravenstonedale by the late 1950s, suggesting occupation of the Orton Fells in the mid-20th century. One at Little Asby in April 1960 (Field Naturalist) was the last record for this area until one at Sunbiggin Tarn in October 2005.

MacPherson also noted populations at Shap on the edge of the Eden Valley and at Haweswater and Ullswater. All fell within the realm of the Lonsdale family estates and could have originated from or been supplemented by releases. Occupation of the eastern valleys of the Lake District from at least the 1880s is evidenced by the Lowther game books of the time which mention Askham Fell, Naddle Forest at Haweswater, Swindale and Shap up until at least the late 1920s. A few were still present in the Haweswater area in the early 1940s (Blezard 1943) but it is unclear if this population died out, or if they persisted on Shap Fell. Birds were present on Shap in the early 1970s following the establishment of plantations and persisted to the mid-1980s with the last record in May 1985.

Pearson (1850) referred to birds at Mell Fell above Ullswater which MacPherson obviously considered the product of releases. Nevertheless, towards the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Blezard (1942) noted that a fair number still bred in the districts around Greystoke and Mungrisdale. Birds in the Greystoke Park area were reintroduced in the early 1950s (Anon 1952) but much reduced and perhaps extinct by the early 1960s (Stokoe 1962) with a last documented record in 1962 (Brown 1972). Some were shot to protect forestry plantations in the Mell Fell/Troutbeck area in the 1960s (J. Cubby pers. com.). The only records for the Skiddaw and Caldbeck Fells are from the Leconfield Estate game books which record up to 21 being shot on Faulds Brow in 1912 declining to two by 1916, then none until one in 1937. The only other "bag" in the area concerned three on Caldbeck Common in 1913.

Presence in that part of Cumbria once in Yorkshire in the extreme south east of the county was noted by Nelson (1907) including near Sedbergh and in Garsdale. Birds were common on Baugh Fell and Firbank Fell near Sedbergh in the early 1920's but by 1926 Freddie Spencer Chapman wrote "My several attempts to find blackcock on the fells around Sedbergh have been unsuccessful" (Cleasby 1999). They were still relatively numerous on the Barbon Fells in the late 1930s, taking advantage of new forestry plantations, but thinned out on the east side of the Lune Valley (Blezard 1943). Also in the 1930s, there were occasional records from Uldale on the north side of Baugh Fell and Brackensgill in Dentdale. Post-war plantations in Upper Dentdale and Garsdale offered favourable habitat and the return of a "number" of pairs (Cleasby 1999), while birds were present in the Barbon Fells in the early 1960s (Stokoe 1962). During the mid-1970's there were two small leks around Killington Reservoir with a maximum of 14 birds at one and frequent sightings in Uldale and adjoining Mallerstang (Sedbergh School Ornithological Archive, Cleasby 1999). However, with the maturation of plantations, birds had vacated Lambrigg Fell, Lilymere, Burns Beck Moss and Upper Dentdale by 1990 (Priestley 1999), though one was at Killington Reservoir in May 1997. More recently, if once extinct, birds have re-established in Grisedale in Garsdale adjacent to the Mallerstang population and in upper Dentdale with up to 11 at Dent Head in November 2010 and 12 at Cowgill in January 2011 (Dunn 2012). Further west at Cautley three were present in January 2018.

Several attempts to re-introduce the species in various parts of Cumbria have been documented throughout the years, particularly in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These confound any assessment of its historical naturally occurring status, particularly so in the southern Lake District. The Black Cock Inn at Broughton-in-Furness is a pub named in honour of the species and dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, indicating a time when Black Grouse were perhaps naturally common in South Cumbria. Mitchell (1885) considered them absent from the Furness area until a few pairs appeared in about the 1840s. MacPherson (1892) relates introductions in the Rusland Valley between 1832 and 1840. Subsequently, the low fells and valleys either side of Windermere as far east as Scout Scar above Kendal and as far west as Woodland Fell by Broughton, seem to have held a small but

fluctuating population into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Oakes (1953) reported breeding on Finsthwaite Fell in 1926 and on Cartmel Fell about 1937. By 1943 they only occasionally visited the Lyth mosses, by which time they had become scarce in the area (Blezard 1943), but they were still described as perhaps more numerous than Red Grouse around Nibthwaite in High Furness in 1947/48 (Blezard 1954). Records in the 1950s including eight in the Windermere area in October 1954, five on Rusland Fell in 1955 and one at Claife Heights in 1958, with the last records on Rusland Fell, Whitbarrow and Cartmel Fell, all in 1959 (Field Naturalist) and Helsington Barrows in 1962 (Stokoe Archive). A female was flushed from juniper at Blind Tran Moss, Grasmere in January 1966 and birds were still present at Nibthwaite in 1967 (Stokoe Archive). Between 1977 and 1989 bird reports document a low level of occupation between Woodland Fell and Kirkby Moor in the west and the Rusland Valley to the east with isolated records further east of singles at Gummings How in October 1980, Whitbarrow in February 1986 and Scout Scar in November 1992.

To the north east Kentmere and Longsleddale were also favoured haunts, usually holding a fair stock. Maximum numbers were reached in these districts in the period from about 1912 to 1920 (a lek in Kentmere held up to 16 birds), and in good years spread out to colonize the rough ground east of Windermere and towards Crosthwaite and Crook (Blezard 1943). It was described as much reduced in Kentmere by the late 1950s (Robson 1957). There are no further records from specific sites here in the 1960s or early 1970s other than a reference in a bird report to a lek in Bannisdale to the north in 1976, but the 1968-72 Atlas does show occupation. Records in Bretherdale in January 1979, on Potter Fell in April 1980 and in Bannisdale in 1982 and 1983 could however all be explained remnants of the Shap population. However those at Selside in March 1989, Bannisdale in March 1990 and Skeggeswater in December 1991 are beyond the last known occupation of the Shap area.

The only occupied area in the west of the county known to MacPherson in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was around Cockermouth where "a sprinkling" were present. The area he referred to is unclear but may have included the fells on the north western edge of the Lake District. Moule (unpub. Diaries) saw a male near the top of Black Sail, Ennerdale on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1956 while Stokoe (1962) offered some evidence of its occurrence here with at least one pair on Bowness Knott, Ennerdale in 1961 and a cock at Hollow Moor, Blengdale, presumably at about the same time. Both valleys held leks into the 1970s (P. Ullrich pers. com.). Blezard (1943) referred to breeding in Eskdale prior to 1943 and there is anecdotal evidence of an introduced population on Muncaster Fell persisting into at least the early 1970s, the last being two males on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1972 (Stokoe Archive, Moule diaries).

Since 1978 there have been about 18 records from the western, central and northern Lake District in areas remote from remaining populations. Given the relatively sedentary nature of the species the status of these records is hard to assess. This is also true of a remarkable but un-validated record of one on Piel Island in the Walney channel in January 1969 (Stokoe Archive)

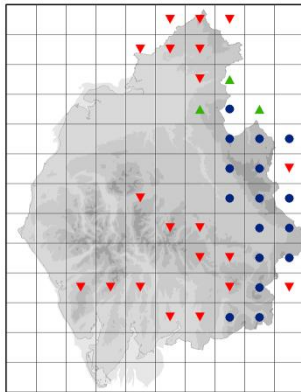
Presently Black Grouse are found only in the east of the county with the core population in the North Pennines, where 30% of tetrads were occupied during the 2007-12 Atlas. 5% of tetrads were occupied in the Howgills and Cumbria Dales and two tetrads were occupied in the Eden Valley, but on the Pennine fringe. Now confined to the uplands, the majority of the population is found at an altitude between 301 and 600m. Birds were present in a total of 21 10km squares in 2007-12 compared with 46 during the 1968-72 National Atlas, Losses during this period have been greatest around the Border Moors in the far north of the county and in the Lakeland Fells, where the species occurs no longer. Conservation efforts from the 1990's onwards in the North Pennines have resulted in localized increases. The Cumbrian population was estimated to be around 324 male birds in 2014, an increase of 75% from the 1997-2001 Cumbria Atlas (Stott et al. 2002) and about 23% of the English total.

**Counts of lekking male Black Grouse**

	1998	2002	2006	2014
Cumbria total	155	198	263	324
England total	773	895	1029	1437

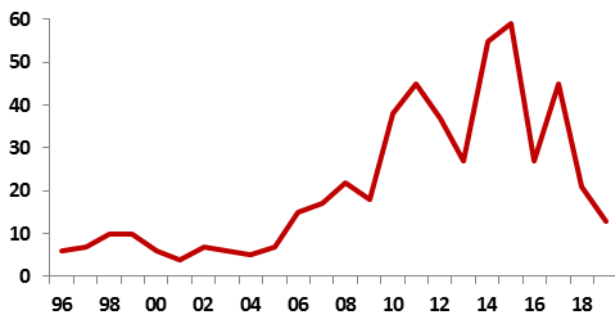
(Date supplied by GCWT& Warren et al. 2015)

**Breeding distribution change 1968 – 1972 to 2008 – 2012 by 10km sq.**



Areas heavily grazed by sheep will lack appeal for Black Grouse due to the lack of variety in the sward and herb structure. Habitat restoration work has occurred around the Geltsdale RSPB Reserve since the 1990s including a reduction in sheep numbers, an increase in cattle grazing on unenclosed land and native woodland planting. This area has seen the biggest gains with annual counts of lekking males rising from 12 in 2006 to 59 in 2015, including a 28 bird lek in the Gelt Valley, the largest in the county for some time. However numbers have dropped in recent years.

**Number of lekking males at Geltsdale RSPB Reserve**



((from RSPB Annual reports

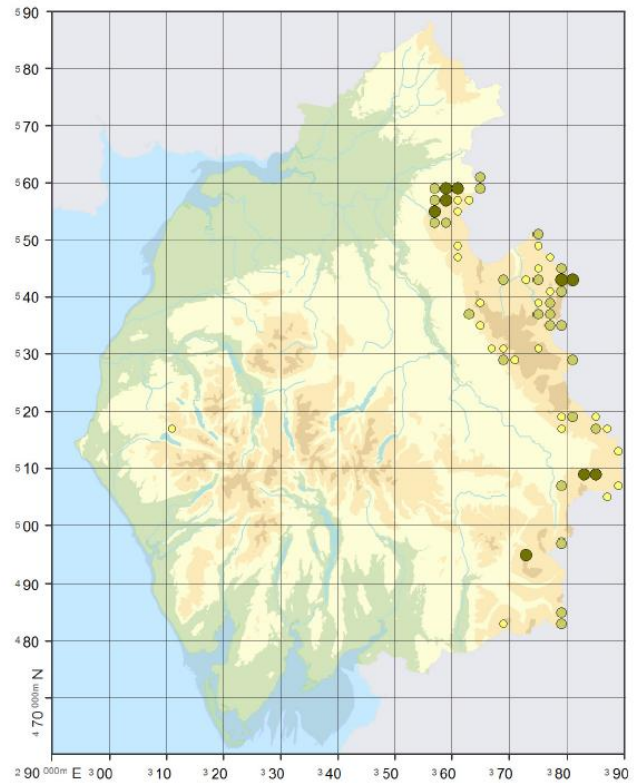
Black Grouse are mainly sedentary. The 2007 – 12 Atlas however shows some discrepancy between the winter and breeding distribution. Broods of young birds will disperse in the autumn, seeking new sources of food and could explain the greater number of occupied tetrads in the winter atlas. They require a mosaic habitat that provides different feeding opportunities throughout the year. Unlike Red Grouse, they consume a wide variety of vegetation from cotton grass in spring, grasses, sedges, bilberries during the summer and hawthorn berries and birch buds during the winter. In early summer, chicks require a diet of protein rich invertebrates during the first few weeks after hatching. The volatile climate of the uplands can bring cold snaps and heavy rain in June making this food source unreliable and broods will suffer as a result. Increases in the population and range of the species will often follow a fine summer when insects are abundant and productivity is high.

A food shortage during severe winters can see the species contract in both numbers and range. Monitoring by the Game Conservancy and Wildlife Trust in the North Pennines as a whole showed a decline from 1200 lekking birds in 2009 to 500 in 2010 (Warren et al. 2013). The decline followed one of the coldest winters on record. Suitable habitat is key to the species' survival and during this harsh winter birds in areas with fruit bearing trees such as hawthorn showed better survival rates.

As the fashion to shoot Red Grouse and Pheasants became more popular, Edwardian estate management focused less on Black Grouse and the species began to dwindle. It has managed to hang on around the fringes of sporting estates as a by-product of intensive game keeping and although the species is still on the quarry list, a request not to shoot blackcock by estate managers is now generally observed. Intensification of farming practices, drainage of marginal land and afforestation have all played their part in the demise of the species throughout the last century

With a reduction in sheep grazing and continued planting of patchy native broadleaf woodland, Black Grouse will continue to inhabit the Pennines and Howgill Fells. However, with a combination of a low dispersal range and a lack of year-round feeding opportunities, it is unlikely the species will see a permanent return to Lakeland areas in the near future.

**Breeding distribution 2008 – 2012**



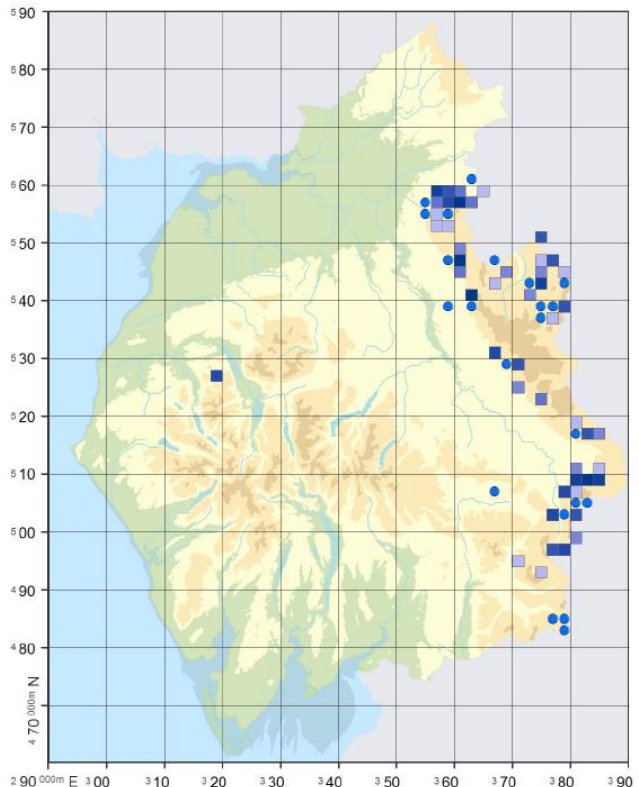
**Black Grouse**

● Possible	26
● Probable	25
● Confirmed	9

Evidence of breeding in the 2008-2011 survey. Category determined by the strongest recorded evidence of breeding by birds in suitable nesting habitat in the tetrad.

Includes records from Timed Tetrad Visits and Roving Records.

**Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12**



**Black Grouse**



Relative abundance during the November to February Timed Tetrad Counts (TTC) in the 2007-2011 survey. Relative abundance category derived from the maximum number of birds recorded in one TTC.

Categories: 2=1-1, 4=2-2, 5=3-3, 7=5-5, 8=6-7, 9=8-9, 10=10-29.

# Slavonian Grebe (Horned Grebe)

*Podiceps auritus*

A scarce winter visitor



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

\*Garnett, D.G. 1915. Colouring of soft parts of Slavonian Grebe, *British Birds* 8: 220

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Records

**2019/20** 1 Salthouse Pond, Millom 12th January- probably same as at Hodbarrow in Nov/Dec 2019, 1 Bowness-on-Solway 7th March

**2020/21** 1 Hodbarrow 12-18th March, 1 Silecroft 15th March, 1 Windermere 27th March

**2021/22** 1 Muncaster, Esk Estuary 20th January

**2022/23** No records

**2022/23** 1 Workington Harbour 5th – 10th November, 1 South Walney 14th & 16th November, 1 (pos same) Foulney 23rd November, 1 Roanhead, Duddon Estuary 28th November

**Photograph: Mockerkin Tarn, 16th November 2014 (D McAloon)**

# Slavonian Grebe

## *Podiceps auritus*

### A scarce winter visitor

Slavonian Grebe breeds from Iceland and Scotland eastward across Scandinavia and northern Europe across Russia to the Pacific, and in northern regions of North America. It migrates south to winter mainly at sea along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Eurasia and North America. It is suspected that Fennoscandian breeders winter furthest south in Britain whilst Greenland, Icelandic and Scottish breeders may occupy more northern areas in winter. The European breeding range has shifted northwards in recent years and concurrently the species has undergone an overall decline in breeding numbers, although Swedish and Icelandic numbers have increased (EBBA 2020)

The Scottish breeding population is currently estimated at 28 pairs having been as high as 73 in 1993, and the UK wintering population at 995 birds (Woodward et al. 2020). Highest winter numbers are around Scottish coasts but there are regular wintering areas as far south as the southern English coast. Numbers arriving in Britain may increase in severe winters as birds move further west to avoid harsh weather. UK winter numbers determined by WeBS suggest an undulating pattern with peaks in the winters of 1997/98, 2003/04 and 2012/13 and subsequent troughs culminating in lowest numbers in 1998/99, 2007/08 and 2017/18. WeBS data also suggests highest numbers generally occur in January.

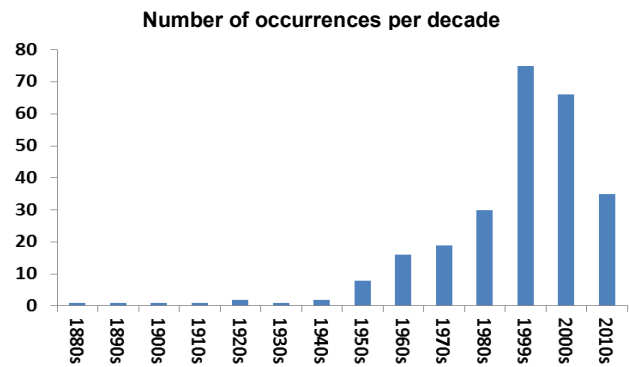
There are no annually occupied Cumbrian wintering sites. However Hodbarrow Lagoon on the Duddon Estuary and the Furness coast around Foulney and South Walney Islands along with the adjacent Cavendish Dock have hosted birds regularly. This involves mainly singles but occasionally two or three birds for parts of winters and during passage, and occasionally singles throughout a winter.

Macpherson (1892) documented records from six inland sites and only two from the coast, perhaps not surprising for a species which largely inhabits inshore waters generally away from the collector or wildfowling gun. Nevertheless all of the late 19th century and several of the early 20th century records were shot, the last to suffer this fate being at Arnside on the Kent Estuary on 1st March 1937. Up to and including the winter of 1960/61 there had only been 18 specifically dated records plus reference to a further six undated records and all but three were inland. With the advent of improved optics and increased seawatching activity, records did increase although of the 34 records from 1961/62 to 1980/81, most still came from inland waters or coastal lagoons reflecting the lack of attractive inshore wintering areas in the county. The number of occurrences (not birds) was at its highest in the 1990s and has since been in decline. This is largely due to a decline in inland records on still waters in the non-breeding seasons since 2005/06.

The first record for the coast around Foulney Island and South Walney along with the adjacent Cavendish Dock at Barrow was on 4th November 1961 (Field Naturalist). Since then it has hosted birds in all but 17 of the 59 non-breeding seasons between 1961/62 and 2019/20 and in 32 of the 39 since 1981/82 (82%). It is reasonable to assume that long staying birds at least, are likely to have frequented all three locations and that returning birds are involved. In only two of those seasons have birds been present in autumn, winter and spring but there have been several instances



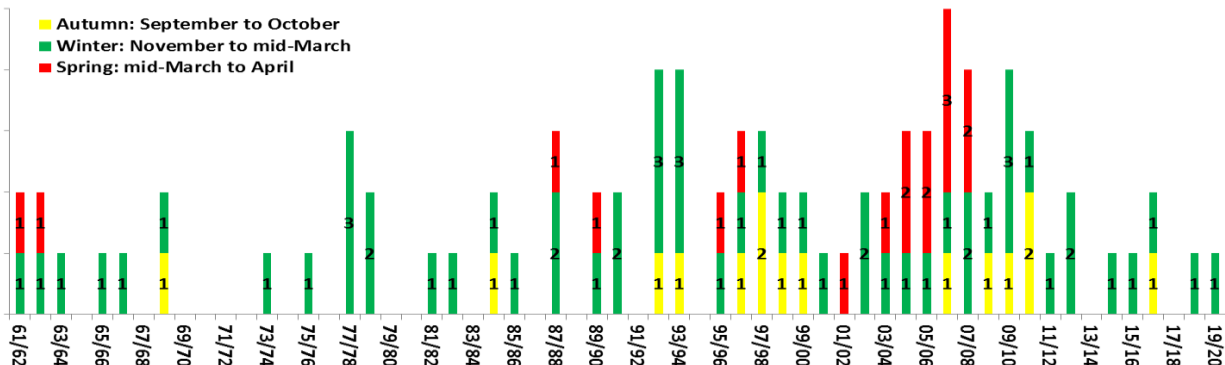
Mockerkin Tarn, 16th November 2014 (D McAleone)



Of long staying birds. A bird on 23rd October 1993 off Foulney preceded a bird in early November 1993 on Cavendish Dock which was joined by a second in early December and a third from 9th December to 18th February 1994. Even if the October bird were considered different, this still represents the longest occupation of the area. The highest number of birds present here is three which has occurred in five different non-breeding seasons. Curiously there have been no records on Cavendish Dock since the 2007/08 winter and it is possible changes in management may have reduced food supply here in recent years. The earliest date in autumn in this area is 9th September 1984 and there have been five September records. The latest is 29th April 1990 with 10 records in this month.

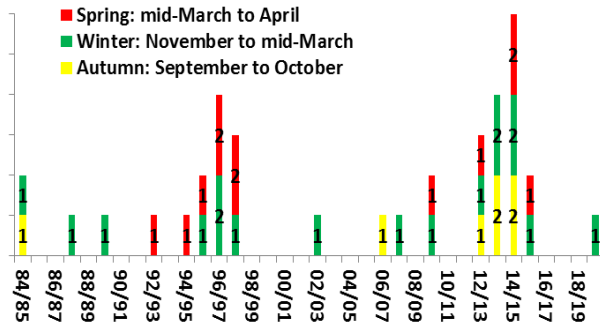
Other than a bird at Ormsgill Reservoir in March 1963 and one off North Walney in November 1964 (Field Naturalist, Stokoe Archive) the first on the Duddon Estuary and surrounds in more recent times was in November 1984 on Hodbarrow Lagoon. Since then there have been much less than annual, but nevertheless regular records on the lagoon with the site hosting birds in 17 of 36 non-breeding seasons (47%). These include two periods of four successive seasons offering the possibility of returning birds. Singles were also seen off Sandscale Haws, Askam-in-Furness and Borwick Rails on one occasion each in the same period and during times of occupation at Hodbarrow and are assumed to have concerned the same individuals.

### Maximum counts by season on the Furness Coast encompassing Foulney, South Walney and Cavendish Dock



Occurrence at Hodbarrow has mostly been of single birds but two have occupied the site on several occasions. The longest staying bird here and indeed in the county was first seen on 30th August 2012 and last reported on 14th April 2013. Also notable were two first seen on 18th September 2014 present into mid-October, followed by a single in early December and two again from mid-March to the 26th April 2015.

**Maximum counts by season at Hodbarrow and the Duddon Estuary**



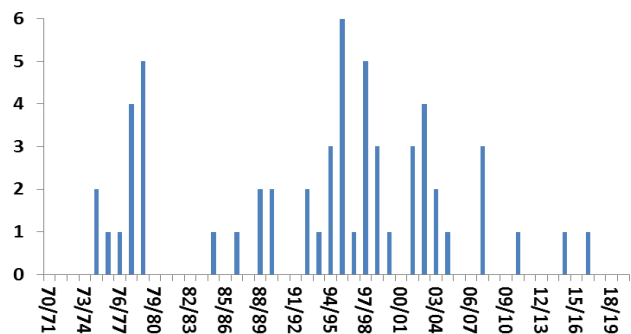
No other location has generated regular records although one observer at Silloth on the Outer Solway reported birds on 20 dates in four of the five non-breeding seasons between 2000/01 and 2005/06. Most were singles and other than two autumn and three spring records, were between November and January. Intriguingly they included six on 22nd November 2000, five on 21st December 2004 and three 10 days later. Presumably these involved displaced birds from elsewhere as there is no precedent for this magnitude of birds in Cumbria. The nearest regular and substantive haunts are Loch Ryan and Wigtown Bay across the Solway Firth in Dumfries and Galloway, the former of which is the premier wintering site in the UK and has held over 100 birds. Further in to the Solway birds rarely penetrate east of Bowness with just singles off Rockcliffe in March 1979 and 1985 and Port Carlisle in December 2003. Off Bowness winter records are also in the majority and while mostly involving singles, there are two on three winter dates, four on 3rd December 2001 and three on 24th October 2004. It is a similar picture to the south of Silloth as far as Workington with about 15 records all of singles except for two off Beckfoot on 22nd December 2002. Notable amongst these was what may have been the same bird first seen on Mossbay Reservoir at Workington on 14th February 1996 and which may have relocated to the River Derwent at Workington Harbour and then Siddick Pond where it was last seen on 17th March.

There are nine records off the open coast between St Bees and Kirksanton, from Sellafield, Nethertown and Kirksanton and include two birds on three occasions. The Irt, Mite and Esk estuaries at Ravenglass account for just three further records of singles and one of two birds. Further south the open coast off the west of Walney Island has only accounted for three singles. Within Morecambe Bay the Leven Estuary has just five records. These concern three records off Flookburgh West Plain including two in January 1998 at a time when only one was present to the west off the Furness Coast, one in the inner estuary off Greenodd and one on Ulverston Canal from 6th to 8th November 2004. Finally the Kent Estuary has just four records all of singles including a moderately long staying bird from early November to early December 1945 (Blezard 1946).

Inland waters account for about 80 records although several of these are at sites that had already held birds over a month previously which may have been commuting elsewhere or just overlooked in the intervening period, or may equally have been new arrivals. For example a bird on Windermere in November 1955 was followed by two on Grasmere on 8th January 1956 and then one on 11th February and Windermere again on 24th February. Intriguingly two were also on Haweswater Reservoir on 8th February 1956 (Robson 1957). Most have been relatively short staying birds of little more than a month at most. Bassenthwaite is by some distance the most visited inland site with records in 11 non-breeding seasons including two in January 1989, November 2002 and November and January of 2007/08. These include birds in seven of the 10 seasons between 1998/99 and 2007/08 and may have involved returning birds. Adjacent Derwentwater has

records in seven seasons including a long-staying bird from early January 1999 to early March, which may also account for records on Bassenthwaite in November and April of that season. Windermere has hosted birds in eight seasons all singles except for a remarkable four on 28th January 1963 and three on 29th October 2001. Longtown Ponds has attracted birds in four seasons including two consecutively in spring and winter in 1978 and two were present in October 1984. No other site has held birds in more than three winters and other than multiple birds already mentioned, all have been singles except two on Skegges Water from 25th March to 2nd April 1961, two on Rydal Water four days later on 6th April which may have been the same birds and two on Coniston on 12th October 1976. The most productive season was in 1995/96 with singles at six sites with the first on 16th October and the last on 13th March. This season also saw the longest staying bird at any one site involving one on Ullswater from 4th February to 4th April. (Interestingly this winter also saw the county's largest influx of Red-necked Grebes). Having peaked in the mid-1990s inland occurrence has declined sharply since the mid-2000s.

**Inland occurrences**

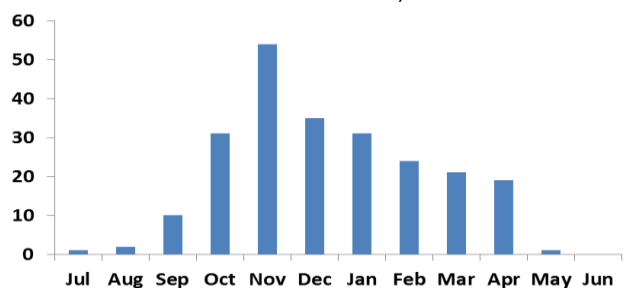


**Number of seasons with records at inland sites.**  
(ordered north to south, from west to east)

Site	Seasons	Site	Seasons
Longtown Ponds	5	Haweswater Reservoir	3
Thurstonfield Lough	1	Wet Sleddale Reservoir	2
Monkhill Lough	1	Whin's Pond	1
Talkin Tarn	3	Alston area	1
Tindale Tarn	2	Sunbiggin Tarn	1
R. Eden, Carlisle	1	Urswick Tarn	1
R. Eden, Wetheral	1	Coniston Water	2
Thirlmere	1	Esthwaite Water	2
Derwent Water	7	Blea Tarn, Langdale	1
Bassenthwaite Lake	11	Grasmere	1
Overwater	1	Rydal Water	1
Mockerkin Tarn	1	Elterwater	1
Loweswater	2	Lake Windermere	8
Longlands Lake	1	Skegges Water	1
Brotherswater	1	R. Kent, Kendal	1
Ullswater	2	Whinfell Tarn	1

The earliest bird by some distance is one in full summer plumage on Wet Sleddale Reservoir between 22nd and 27th July 1977. There are two August records at Bassenthwaite from 29th August to 3rd September 1999 and the long staying bird at Hodbarrow from 30th August 2012 to 14th April 2013. New arrival increase to peak in November before a slow decline in the remainder of the winter and spring. There are seven new arrivals in the second half of April with the latest staying bird last seen at Hodbarrow on 24th April 1995, other than a summer plumaged bird on Derwentwater on 13th May 1998.

**Month of first occurrence of new birds at all sites** (new birds defined as separated by at least a month at individual sites)



# Red-necked Grebe

## *Podiceps grisegina*

A scarce winter visitor



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- Birdlife International. 2022. Species Factsheet: *Podiceps grisegina*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org>
- Chandler, R.J. 1981. Influxes into Britain and Ireland of Red-necked Grebes and other waterbirds during winter 1978/79. *British Birds* 74: 55-81
- Forrester, R., Andrews, I., McInerney, C., Murray, R., McGowan, R., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M., Jardine, D. & Grundy, D. 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. Scottish Ornithologists Club. Edinburgh
- Murray, R. 2003. The first successful breeding of Red-necked Grebe for Britain, *Borders Bird Report* 2001: 123-126
- \*Wills, A. 1996. Red-necked Grebes - a quartet. *Cumbria Bird Club News* 7: 31

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 records

- 2020/21 No records
- 2021/22 1 21st December off South Walney, 1 Cavendish Dock, Barrow 12th January – 24th February
- 2022/23 1 South Walney 6th September, 1 Nethertown 7th December, 1 Bassenthwaite 8th – 15th December
- 2023/24 1 Talkin Tam 3rd – 26th November

Photograph: Killington Reservoir, 4th March 2006 (N.Franklin)

# Red-necked Grebe

## *Podiceps grisegina*

### A scarce winter visitor

The nominate race breeds in Northern Europe from Finland and Southeast Scandinavia eastward. Breeding populations have increased in Fennoscandia the first two decades of the 21st century but declined in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe (EBBA 2020). It winters from the North Sea south to the Mediterranean and east to the Caspian and Aral Seas. The closest significant wintering areas are the southwest Baltic Sea, Norway's west coast and the eastern North Sea (Birdlife International 2022).

The estimated GB wintering population is about 59 birds (Frost et al. 2019), mostly in Orkney and the Firth of Forth and on the Northumberland coast and the south and east coasts of England (Brown & Grice 2005, Forrester et al. 2007). There are sporadic influxes when severe weather pushes birds southwest across the North Sea. Rare in summer, there have been unsuccessful breeding attempts in England and Scotland, but a pair did fledge a chick in the Scottish Borders in 2001 (Murray 2003).

No evidence exists of regular wintering in Northwest England. In Cumbria, if records close in time at nearby locations are assumed to be the same birds, there have been c.190 occurrences since the first, recorded off Skinburness on the Solway in September 1894. All but 20 have been after 1973, since when it has been recorded at least once in all but seven non-breeding seasons.

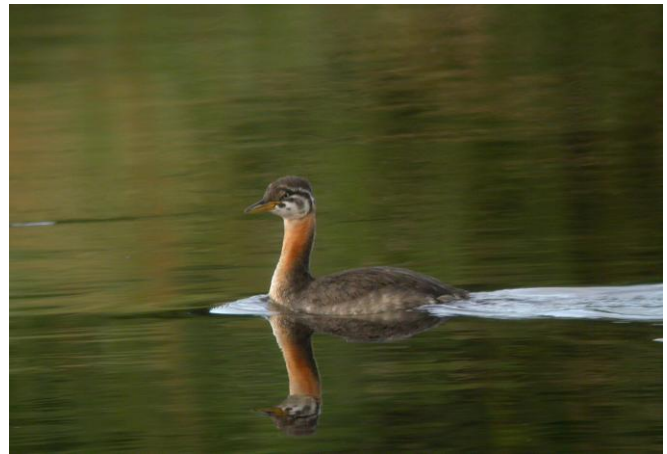
Coastal records, either on the open sea, estuary or coastal lagoon, account for about 75% of occurrences, with the remaining 25% on inland still waters, or on three occasions on rivers. The Furness coast from mid-Walney east to Foulney and into the outer Leven Estuary is the most favoured area, with about 67 occurrences in 34 non-breeding seasons, but in only five since 2001. This includes seven records in Barrow Docks and three on Ormsgill Reservoir. The Solway Estuary has held birds in 21 seasons involving 30 occurrences, including a long staying bird on Siddick Pond in the winter of 1983/84 and one in Silloth Docks in January 1988. There have been about 16 occurrences on the Duddon Estuary, all since 1978. Of these, 11 have been at Hodbarrow, though it is unclear how many were on the lagoon or the estuary. The coast between Nethertown and Selker has accounted for about 15 occurrences in 12 seasons between 2008 and 2015. The upper Leven and Kent Estuaries are rarely visited with just seven occurrences. Apart from two in 1907, all were between 1979 and 1996.

Lake Windermere with records in ten seasons and Coniston with records in seven, account for about 35% of inland records, perhaps not surprising they being the two closest lakes to the most visited part of the coast. Rare on rivers, there are just seven records, two perhaps concerning the same bird on the Eden at Carlisle and Armathwaite in February 1929. The latter was the furthest inland, the remainder being closer to the coast.

#### Number of winters with records at inland sites

Location	Winters	Location	Winters
Lake Windermere	10	Brotherswater	1
Coniston Water	8	Buttermere	1
Bassenthwaite Lake	3	Derwent Water	1
Killington Reservoir	3	Moorhouse Tarn	1
Longtown Ponds	3	R. Ehen, Sellafield	1
Esthwaite Water	3	R. Esk (Longtown)	1
Grasmere	2	R. Kent (Kendal)	1
Haweswater Res.	2	Abbeytown	1
R. Eden	4	Talkin Tarn	1
Ullswater	2	Tarns Dub	1

Analysis of occurrences by decade shows the 1980s and 1990s as richest in records. Influxes during national influxes occurred in 1978/79 (Chandler 1981) and 1995/96 (Forrester et al. 2007). The first record in 1978 was on 21st October and the last on 25th March. Birds were seen at three inland lakes and eight coastal locations. The first five records, all in 1978, and the last were only single day records of single birds, but between 18th February and 12th April five locations held single birds on multiple dates. Ulverston Canal by the Leven Estuary hosted a second bird on 20th-23rd February and with three other sites potentially holding birds during this four day period, there may have been five birds in the county at this time.

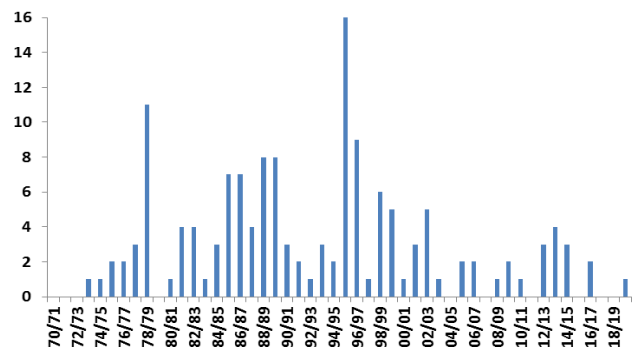


R. Eden at Rockcliffe, 13th September 2009 (N. Franklin)

The 1995/96 influx was more complex. Between early November and early April, birds were reported from the sea off South Walney, Foulney, Ulverston, Sellafield and Bowness-on-Solway, on the coastal lagoons of Hodbarrow and Cavendish Dock and inland lakes at Talkin Tarn, Windermere, Ullswater, Haweswater and Coniston. All were single birds, other than two in flight at South Walney and up to five on Windermere in February. Several, particularly on the still waters, were long staying. With the likelihood of some switching between sites, it is difficult to say how many birds were involved but on 25th February there were probably at least eight birds in Cumbria. The 1996/97 and 1998/99 winters provided more records than usual, but mostly of short-staying birds at adjacent sites, probably involving far fewer individuals.

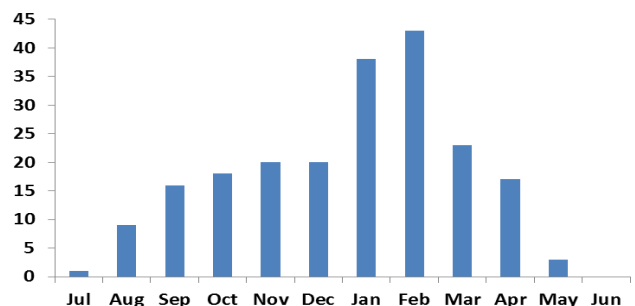
Both influx years were characterised by long-staying, and on occasion, multiple birds. Although generally not typical, with most records of short-staying single birds, there have been 11 other records of two birds together, and one of three together in September and October 1985, off North Walney.

#### Number of occurrences per winter 1970/71 to 2019/20



Typical for a county with no regular wintering population, the peak period of first occurrence is the late winter, when birds are most likely to be displaced from regular wintering areas by hard weather (Brown & Grice 2005). Apart from these displaced birds, records in autumn and spring could include birds commuting to wintering areas off the southwest coast of England. The earliest record was on 31st July 1908 off Anthorn on the Outer Solway and the latest, a bird off Foulney Island from 22-25th May 1989.

#### Month of first occurrence



# Black-necked Grebe

## *Podiceps nigricollis*

A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor; occasional breeder



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- \*Anon. 1912. Black-necked Grebe on Solway. *British Birds* 6: 166
  - Anon. 1956. Black-necked Grebe nesting in Lake District. *The Field Naturalist* 1: No. 5
  - \*Garnett, D.G. 1918. Black-necked Grebe in Westmorland. *British Birds* 12: 22
  - \*Garnett, R.M. 1919. Colourisation of soft parts of some birds. *British Birds* 13: 62
  - Garnett, R.M. 1940. Black-necked Grebes nesting in Westmorland. *British Birds* 33: 256-257
  - \*Hope, L.E. 1909. Eared Grebe on the Solway. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 34: 30
  - \*Mackay, H. 1912. Immature Eared Grebe in the Solway. *Scottish Naturalist*: 213
  - \*Macpherson, H.A. 1897. Eared Grebe in Cumberland. *Zoologist 4th Series*, 1: 83-84
  - Martin, B. & Smith, J. 2007. A survey of breeding Black-necked Grebes in the UK: 1973-2004. *British Birds* 100: 368-378
  - \*Walker, R. 1949. Black-necked Grebe in Cumberland. *British Birds* 42: 192
- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

No records

Photograph: Whinfell Tarn, 6th May 2004 (C. Inman)

## Black-necked Grebe

### *Podiceps nigricollis*

**A scarce passage migrant and winter visitor; occasional breeder**

Of three global races, the nominate race *nigricollis* breeds through central and southern Europe, central and eastern Asia. It favours shallow lakes with submerged and emergent vegetation. The European breeding population winters in Southwest Europe and North Africa (Parkin & Knox 2010).

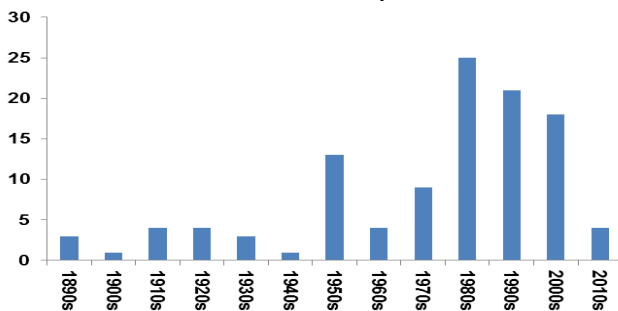
A rare breeding bird in Great Britain, currently averaging about 55 pairs at generally less than 20 sites annually with most in central or northern England (Holling et al 2019). There are favoured sites in Cheshire and Yorkshire which can account for the bulk of the population in any year. It has also bred regularly in Northumberland (Martin & Smith 2007). There is also a very small wintering population in Great Britain estimated at about 120 birds (Frost et al. 2019) with nearly all in sheltered inshore waters, bays and estuaries off the south coast of England (Brown & Grice 2005).

With breeding populations in adjoining or relatively nearby counties, it is perhaps surprising the bird has always been scarce in Cumbria and has had only a very rare and sporadic breeding history, which is also shrouded in some mystery.

Macpherson (1892) described it as one of our rarest "visitants" and quoted an undated record of a bird "procured" in the neighbourhood of Ravenglass which stands as the first Cumbrian record. The second was found washed up dead, presumably on the coast near Allonby following bad weather in September 1891. Further sporadic records followed with a further seven in the next three decades up to 1920, mostly of shot birds.

The next three decades up to 1950 fared little better with just eight more records including another casualty at Allonby in February 1922, but did feature three summer records. Following an adult at a tarn near Southwaite in May 1922, a pair was seen at an un-named tarn in Westmorland at 1000 feet altitude on 26th and 27th May 1931 (Bleazard 1943). Four years later an adult was seen at a different Westmorland Tarn feeding a very small chick on 18th July 1935 (Garnett 1940, Bleazard 1943). This remains the county's first and only confirmed breeding record. Both Westmorland records were supplied by Miss M Garnett of Windermere. A record of breeding on Loweswater during the war (Field Naturalist November/December 1956) was presumably discounted by Bleazard (1954, 1958) and Stokoe (1962) as they do not mention it.

**Number of occurrences per decade**



The 1950s saw an escalation in records with 14 and almost annual occurrence. There was a further instance of a pair and probable successful breeding at a southern Lake District tarn, again of unknown identity in 1956 (Field Naturalist 1956, Robson 1957) and on 25th August 1958 two adults and a juvenile were on Sunbiggin Tarn – coincidentally on the same date as a bird had been seen there in the previous year (Allen 1960). Probably the same pair was on the tarn again on 6th December of that year. However based on the lateness of the August record, breeding elsewhere cannot be entirely ruled out.

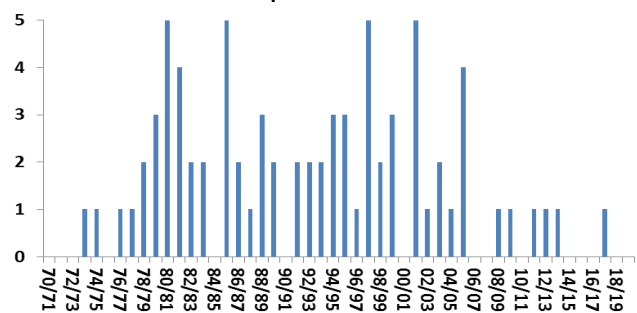
The 1960s produced only four records, two of which were also at Sunbiggin Tarn. A bird on 31st August 1965 was followed by suspected breeding here again in 1968 (Hutcheson 1986). The 1967/68 winter also saw the first case of likely overwintering by multiple birds when four were on Castle Carrock Reservoir on 31st December 1967 and three on 3rd February 1968 (Stokoe Archive, Hutcheson 1986)



**Whinfell Tarn, 6th May 2004 (C. Inman)**

Single birds were also present in June 1974 and March 1975 at Sunbiggin but without further evidence of prolonged occupation. These were the first of nine records in the 1970s and indeed 1974 to 2009 saw records in all years except four. However since 2010 there have been just four records.

**Number of records per season 1970/71 – 2019/20**



There have been no further records of possible or proven breeding although two were on Killington Reservoir on 25th May 1997, two on Talkin Tarn on 2nd May 1998 and a single subsequently joined by a second were present at Cardew Mires near Dalston in late April and early May 2013. In addition single birds were reported in spring at Sunbiggin Tarn on 29th May 1989, Urswick Tarn on 7th May 1975 and Whinfell Tarn on 5th/6th May 2004. Juveniles were also reported at Killington on 22nd July 1980, Sunbiggin from 3rd to 11th August 1983, Whins Pond from 28th July to 14th August 1992, Hodbarrow on 16th/17 August 1992 and Fisher Tarn on 25th July 2013, with an un-aged bird at Sunbiggin on 17th July 1993. However all appear isolated records with no evidence of breeding.

Inland sites account for about 58% of records compared to coastal or near coastal sites. Longtown Ponds are the most visited site including a remarkable run of autumn/early winter records in five consecutive years between October 1978 and October 1982. Sunbiggin Tarn including its possible breeding records is next, followed by Lake Windermere. Cavendish Dock at Barrow has the same number but if coastal birds off the adjacent, South Walney and Foulney Island are combined then this triangle of sites has accounted for the most records. Though the inner and outer Solway combined account for 14 records, all but four were before 1960 and of those latter four, all have been since 1988, but with none since 2001.

About 87% of records involve single birds. There have been ten instances of two together, four of three and three of four together.

**All records of more than two together at the same site**

Date	Location	No.
25 Aug - 06 Dec 59	Sunbiggin Tarn	max 3
31 Dec 67	Castle Carrock Reservoir	4
03 Feb 68	Castle Carrock Reservoir	3
04 May 88	Solway Estuary inner	3
17 - 24 Feb 02	Bassenthwaite Lake	max 4
14 Apr 02	Sellafield, West Coast	4
12 Jan 04	Bassenthwaite Lake	3

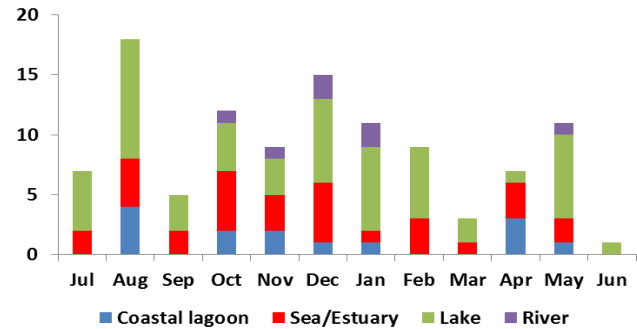
**Number of occurrences by location**  
(ordered from north to south and by adjacent sites)

Longtown Ponds	10/11	Wastwater	1
R. Esk, Longtown	1	Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary	1
Soulby, Kirkby Stephen	1	South west Coast	2
R Eden, Ormside	1	Hodbarrow Lagoon	3
Wet Sleddale Reservoir	1	North Walney Island	1
Brotherswater	1	South Walney Island	7
Ullswater	1	Barrow Docks	8
R. Lowther, Helton	1	Furness Coast	6
Whins Pond	1	Urswick Tarn	1
Southwaite	1	Lindal-in-Furness	1
Talkin Tarn	3	Blea Tarn (Langdale)	1
Castle Carrock Reservoir	1/2	Lake Windermere	8
R. Eden, Rockcliffe	3	Reservoir nr. Windermere	1
Solway Estuary inner	6	Leven Estuary	2
Cardew Mires	2	R. Kent, Kendal	1
Derwent Water	2	Fisher Tarn	1
Bassenthwaite Lake	4	Kent Estuary	2
Siddick Ponds	1	Sunbiggin Tarn	9
Solway Estuary outer	7	Killington Reservoir	3
Solway Estuary unknown	1	Whinfell Tarn	1
West Coast	4	Westmorland Tarn A	1
Ennerdale Water	1	Westmorland Tarn B	1
		Southern Lake District	1

An increase in occurrence in July peaking in August can be explained by post-breeding dispersal by adults and juveniles from outside the county. A further winter peak in December is slightly earlier than the WeBS national trend in January, but it would be misleading to say this is a wintering bird in Cumbria. Other than

the previously mentioned possibly overwintering record at Castle Carrock, there are just three instances of long staying individuals, all coming from Cavendish Dock at Barrow from 12th December 1981 to 26th January 1982, 27th October 1988 to 16th November 1988 and 16th November 1992 to 12th February 1993. More recently a bird at Green Lane, Lindal-in-Furness stayed from 24th January to 7th February 2018.

**Month of first occurrence by habitat**



Interestingly there are records at Bassenthwaite in three consecutive winters of up to four from 17th to 24th February 2002, two on 3rd January 2003 and three on 12th January 2004 which hints at the possibility of site faithfulness when it is difficult to explain what drives these late winter occurrences. There is another smaller peak from April onwards accounted for by spring passage.

# Corncrake

## *Crex crex*

Former breeder, now vagrant



Data included up to 2019

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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

2020 to 2023 No records

Photograph: Eskmeals, July 1998. (D. McAlone)

## Corncrake

### *Crex crex*

#### Former breeder, now vagrant

Atlas status: % 10km sq	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
with breeding evidence	48	2	3	0

Corncrake breeds across Europe and Central Asia as far east as Western China. The largest population is in Russia (EBBA 2020). Wintering takes place sparsely in Northwest Africa and mainly in Southeast Africa. Its conservation status is complex with many countries reporting short term increases in the 1990s following land abandonment in former soviet countries. However reclamation of this land for agriculture or natural succession to woodland has now reversed this trend (Bellebaum & Koffijberg 2018). In western Europe there have been large declines e.g. in Spain, Southern France and Ireland, but it has increased its range northward in Fennoscandia (EBBA 2020).

In Britain It has suffered one of the most catastrophic declines over the past century of any species, with Cumbria no exception. This has been attributed to mechanisation of grassland agriculture, which has led to the destruction of nests and young through mowing, and more latterly to a switch from hay to silage which has led to earlier cutting dates. The UK population reached its lowest point of 488 singing males in 1993 (Green and Gibbons 2000). It has since increased due to conservation action in its remaining strongholds on the Scottish Islands and in the last National Survey in 2009, there were estimated to be between 829 and 1166 singing males. However its increase has since slowed and there has been no significant re-colonisation of mainland Britain despite an introduction scheme at the Nene Washes in Cambridgeshire with first releases in 2003 (Wotton et al. 2015).

Former breeding in Cumbria was widespread and apparently characterised by locally high inter-annual variation in numbers. Numbers probably declined throughout the 20th century and though Cumbria was one of the last counties in England and Wales to hold breeding birds, they probably became extinct as a regular breeder between the mid -1970s and early 1980s and today it is a much less than annually recorded passage migrant.

Heysham (1794) recorded it as a breeding species in the 18th Century and McPherson (1892) described it as a common summer visitant at the end of the 19th century, while commenting that numbers varied annually. He mentioned that the former practice of luring and shooting them with a "wooden comb" on arrival in spring had become obsolete, presumably in the earlier part of the 19th century, resulting in an increase in numbers. Hay fields have probably always been the favoured habitat but Macpherson also listed gardens as breeding sites. Dickinson (1882) knew them to breed in hay meadows adjacent to Workington town and described destruction of adults during scything. Durnford (1878, 1880) also noted annual variation in numbers, describing them as scarce in the summer of 1877 in the Furness area but unusually abundant in 1878. More locally, Harting (1864) described them as "frequently met with" on Walney Island, suggesting a good population here in the mid-19th century.

At its peak, it probably occupied meadows throughout the county even in the higher districts of the Pennines and Border Moors, though the extent of its penetration into the valley floors of the high fells of the Lake District is unclear. There is scant recorded evidence of this, other than reference to it being a summer visitor to the few hay meadows of the Rydal area (Armitt 1902), with one shot on Kirkstone Pass at an altitude of 1200 feet on 8th September 1908, in the same area where one had been seen that August, and a calling bird at Hartsop at the head of Ullswater in 1954 (Robson 1957).

The British Birds organised Land-Rail Enquiry (Alexander 1914), which reviewed its national status, noted a decrease in Westmorland in the first decade of the 20th century but in Cumberland, except in the east, it appeared abundant with no change in numbers. Dunlop (1923) simply gave arrival dates for Westmorland, implying that the species was still common here. However, the same writer described a decline in some parts of Lakeland prior to 1913, though highlighting the Drigg area as a location where it was still common. Blezard (1943) also noted that they were numerous on the west coast until 1914 and that in 1912.



Cumberland prior to 1951 (W.B. Redmayne)

and 1913, they bred in sand dunes at Ravenglass (Drigg) as a result of high population densities in nearby meadows. They were plentiful in the meadows of the farms on Spadeadam Waste and on the edge of the Bewcastle and Gilsland Fells up to at least 1910 (Graham (1993)). However there is little specific information on nesting densities prior to the substantial decline to come. In July 1928, Brown (1972) found two nests 60 yards apart in a 10 acre field and in 1937, two nests 120 yards apart in an eight acre field, presumably in the Solway Basin or lower Eden Valley. In 1929, Tracy (1930) estimated five pairs within a quarter of a mile radius of where he was staying at Pooley Bridge. (Robson (1973) recalled hearing five calling birds in two and a half miles between Warcop and New Hall Farm near Appleby in 1934 and thought this typical of pre-war numbers.

Johnston (1933) described two pairs nesting near Crown Street, Carlisle in 1931 and 1932 but commented that they were generally less common than previously. Nevertheless, in the early 1930s, Wilson (1933) described them as being fairly well represented in the meadows of the Eden Valley. However, they were noted as becoming rarer in the vicinity of Gaisgill at Tebay by 1929 (Robson 1960). On Walney Island, there may have been up to six pairs at both the north and south ends of the island up to the late 1930s, but with no evidence of breeding after 1939, although calling birds were present in spring in 1945, 1960 and 1964 (Dean 1990).

The BTO led report into the status of the Corncrake in Britain and Ireland at the end of the 1930s suggested a continued decline in Westmorland and a more gradual decrease in Cumberland since 1920, but with fluctuations and losses in some areas compensated for by increases in others. It was described as still regular and generally distributed. In 1939, the survey received 60 reports of calling birds in Cumberland (Norris 1944).

Robson (1973) believed the 1939-45 war had adverse effects on numbers, with increased mechanisation in the interests of food production causing more losses of nests and young. By the early 1940s, there were signs that the fortunes of Corncrakes in Cumbria had taken a much greater turn for the worse. Blezard (1943) described its status at that time as irregular or scarce, commenting that they were formerly very common as breeding birds in most areas. He described a continuing decline in the central region first apparent in 1911, but that there were still a few pairs in the southern coastal plain, where against a pattern of decline some old haunts were occasionally reoccupied, such as in 1931 and 1942. In North Cumbria, he highlighted the Petteiril Valley as a regular haunt. He also noted annual variations, with increases in Cumberland in 1936 and 1937 and that in 1942, nests were found where there had been no singing heard, so perhaps their supposed local scarcity was sometimes somewhat illusory.

It seems that their decline was however not constant, possibly because of annual fluctuations and Blezard (1946) assessed them as being of wide occurrence in 1945 and 1946. In 1947, nesting was recorded at Siddick Pond where they had been common in the area until 1935 (Blezard et al. 1958). However, Oakes (1953) described it as now no more than a sporadic breeder in Furness and largely confined to the Cartmel area, though up to three were recorded calling in the vicinity of Broughton-in-Furness up to at least 1953 (Blezard 1958), and remarkably birds were recorded in many localities in 1954 in High Furness from which they had been previously absent for many years (Robson 1957).

Graham (1993) also lamented an overall decline on the edge of the Border Moors where birds no longer bred in the meadows of Spadeadam Waste but commented that most farms on the edge of the Bewcastle Fells still had at least one pair and this may have remained a stronghold throughout the 1950s. The same was not true of the Gilsand Moors where the bird was last heard at Horseholme in 1955 after an absence of at least 12 years. It was a similar story in the Sedbergh area where it was still thinly but widely distributed in the mid-1940s (Cleasby 1999). An increase was noted in 1953 (Robson 1957) but the last confirmed breeding in the area came in 1957 when a brood was seen at Borrett Farm (Cleasby 1999).

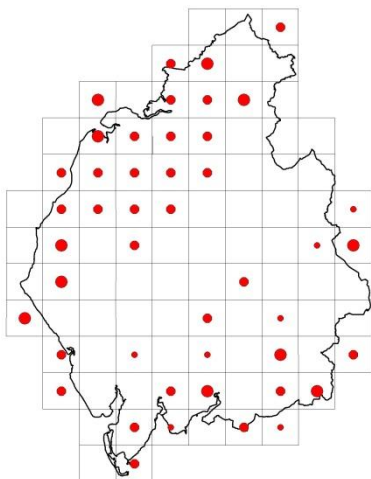
The early 1950s saw birds again recorded sporadically but with some indications of a recovery, particularly in the Eden Valley. Elsewhere in the south at Milnthorpe and Preston Patrick, fields were left partially uncut to allow successful fledging in 1952 (Penrith NHS 1952) and in 1953 records came from various South Westmorland localities. In 1954 notably a bird was killed by overhead wires at Bolton near Appleby (Penrith NHS 1955). A nest in the Mallerstang Valley in 1956 was the first known here (Field Naturalist). Blezard (1958) also referred to the species regaining some lost ground in the north in the early 1950s, with continued breeding in and around Carlisle, including on the rubbish tip at Stoney Holme - a regular haunt, and four or more calling around Blackwell in both 1954 and 1956 where they had previously been absent. It was still present in the vicinity of Sunbiggin Tarn in the early 1950s (Robson 1960).

Stokoe (1962), referring to the whole county, recounted their being much reduced breeders and described them as scarce but still regularly breeding in a few places, with more in good years. He also mentioned breeding without singing birds having been heard; this may be a reiteration of Blezard's (1943) earlier comments. He listed a notable nest in a young plantation at Rose Castle near Carlisle in 1957.

The second half of the 1950s onwards gave little reason to be optimistic. Breeding was still an annual event in the early part of the 1960s in the Bewcastle area., Ominously though a nest with eggs was destroyed here by a mowing machine at High Onsett on 1st August 1961 (Graham 1993) and a nest with young was destroyed at Fieldhead around 1964 (Jackson 1981). Elsewhere, there were records from several locations within the Solway Basin (Stokoe 1962, Stokoe Archive, Brown 1972), but few elsewhere. Remarkably there is a scarcity of records in the former stronghold of the Eden Valley around Appleby to Kirkby Stephen with just seven summer records from six locations from 1956 until 1967 (Stokoe Archive) and then a solitary further record at Musgrave in 1973. The decline here was confirmed by absence during the 1968-1972 National Atlas. Notable were records at Bassenthwaite Marsh in 1960 - the latter after an interval of eight years, though with no apparent return the following year (Stokoe 1962). Unfortunately specific site records from the 1968-1972 National Atlas are not available and there are few documented records from the late 1960s.

The 1968-72 National Atlas found confirmed breeding in 11 10 km squares with probable breeding in a further 27 and possible breeding in seven more 10 km squares in Cumbria. Four of these squares are on the county boundary and largely outside the county). Bearing in mind the perilous state of the population at this time, Brown and Grice (2005) expressed surprise at the number of occupied squares in England during this Atlas and stressed the survey work was over five years, with the population in any one year likely to be lower than the distribution suggested.

**Breeding distribution 1968 – 1972**



In the early 1970s, Cadbury (1980), presumably based on the earlier Atlas results, described it as still present but scarce in Westmorland and Lancashire, and that Cumberland was the last English county south of the Scottish Border to have a widespread population. At the same time three males were located at Bampton in 1971 during an RSPB survey of the Haweswater area (RSPB unpublished 1972), suggesting breeding may have persisted here in an area still holding many hay meadows but with no previously documented records.

The 1978 BTO National Corncrake Survey found only four calling birds in Cumbria in two 10km squares (Cadbury 1980). A repeat RSPB survey in 1988 found just five calling birds outside Scotland and two of those were in Cumberland (Hudson et al 1990), while the National Atlas of 1988-91 showed two occupied Cumbrian 10km squares which presumably involved the same records. One calling male was recorded in the county during the National Survey in 1993 and two in 1998 (Green 1995, Green & Gibbons 2000). Two of the three calling birds in three different 10 km squares reported in 1998 during the County Atlas period of 1997-2001 were presumably the same as the 1998 survey, (with the third falling outside the survey period in August). Neither the National Atlas of 2008-12 nor the National Survey of 2009 (Wotton et al. 2015) located any birds in the county.

From the 1970s onwards, there have been just intermittent records supplied to the annual bird report from a variety of different locations, but with only two records of confirmed breeding which, admittedly without the finding of a nest or brood, is impossible to obtain. All post 1970 records appearing in bird reports and from other sources are listed below. Some of these concerned birds lingering for several days or weeks and may indeed have involved breeding attempts. However, most are assumed to have concerned un-mated birds or migrants. Since the early 1970s, there have only been two confirmed breeding records where young were seen. At Isel Bridge in 1987 an adult and 3/4 juveniles were seen on 15-18 July after mowing and in 1990 three juveniles were seen at Abbeytown on 12th July, a year in which birds were recorded at other diverse locations. These included three presumed juveniles at St Bees on 26th August suggesting the possibility of local breeding here too.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a continuing pattern of sporadic records. The first two decades of the 21st century produced only three records each. It is important to view this recent scarcity of records within the context of a system of adjudication of records where the species has required a description since the mid-1990s. Consequently, more recent records have required a much higher level of validation compared to prior to the early 1990s.

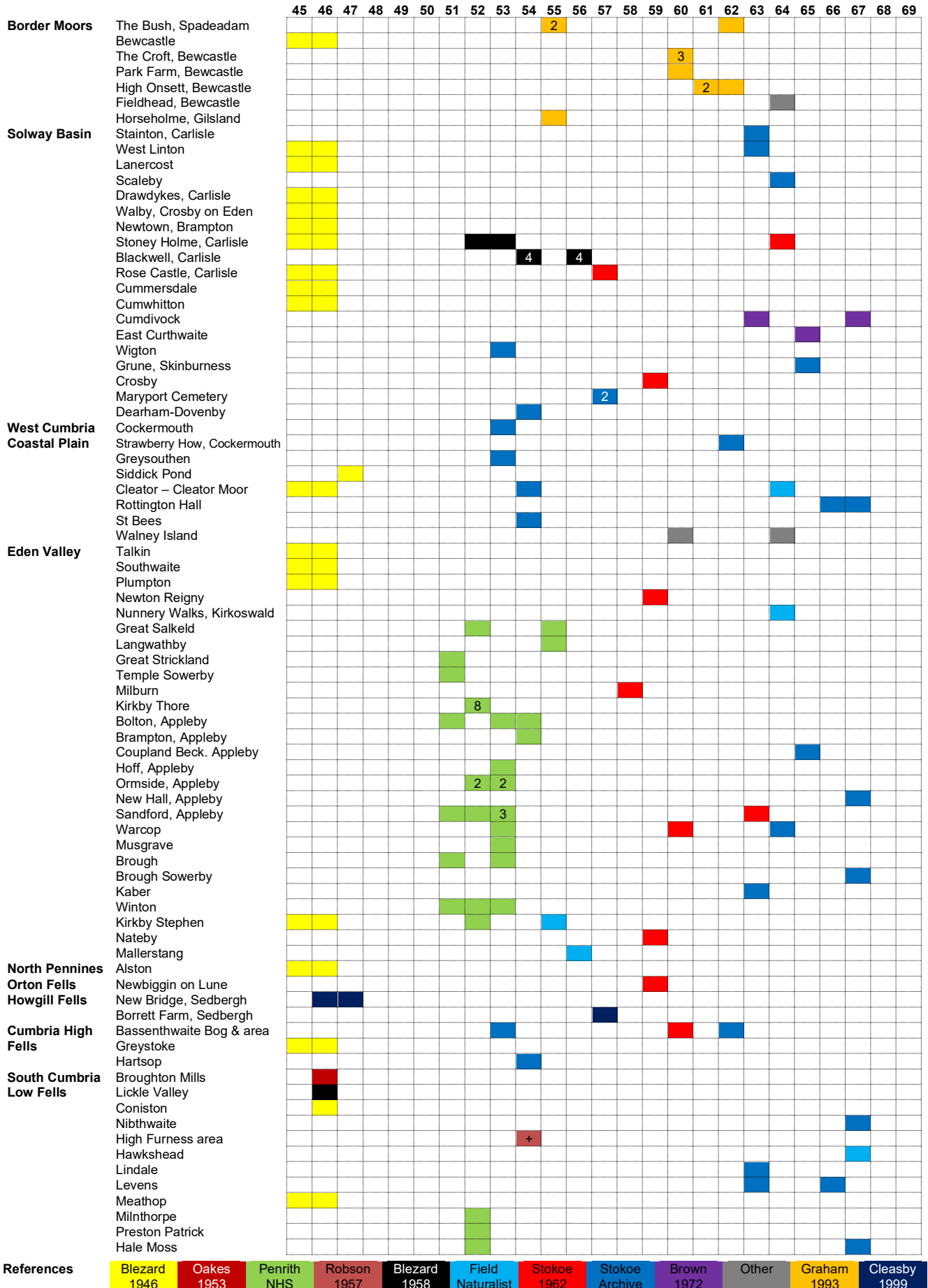
The only data available on nesting phenology within the county comes from Brown (1938, 1972). Of 40 nests he found, the earliest completed clutch was 11th May but with most hens not sitting until the third or fourth week of May with young hatching from mid-June.

This is a species rarely reported on passage and there is little data on arrival and departure dates even during the era of regular breeding in the county. Macpherson (1892) gave mid-April to late September as the normal period of presence in the county, but with stragglers killed up to the year end. Blezard (1943) asserted that most birds arrived in late April or early May with some remaining into September and listed birds recorded on 20th April at Carlisle, Kirkby Stephen and Ambleside. One was shot on Clifton Moor near Workington on 3rd January 1921.

Presumed migrants during the breeding era involved two at Calthwaite on 15th September 1952 (Robson 1957), one flushed from a sedge bed at the edge of Thurstonfield Lough in the Solway Basin on 26th August 1959 (Stokoe 1962), one flushed from an overgrown hedge at Cumdivock on 21st November 1959 (Brown 1972), and one flushed from a thicket of gorse at Biggar Village on Walney Island on 10th April 1960 (Stokoe 1962).

Few Corncrakes have been ringed in the county. Of two known recoveries, one was of a chick ringed at Gaisgill, Tebay in August 1918 and found dead a month later in the same area. The other concerned a bird ringed in Cumberland in July 1912 and recovered in France in the following September (Blezard 1943).

**Documented specific site breeding season records 1945 – 1969**  
 (assumed single calling males, nests or broods, except where numbered, + = several)



## Records since 1970

Year	Date	Location	No.	Details	Observer
1970	Jun	Wampool, Kirbride	1		Stokoe Archive
		High Steadash Farm, Spadeadam	brood	Adult and 2 juveniles	Stokoe Archive
		Low Nibthwaite, Coniston	1	Almost certainly bred	Lancashire Bird Report
	Jun	Torver, Coniston	1	Craking regularly	L. Cowcill, Stokoe Archive
1971		Oxenriggs Farm, Egremont	1	Craking for 3 weeks	Stokoe Archive
	Jun	Greenhead, Uldale	1		West Cumberland Field Society
		Brigsteer, Lyth Valley	1		F. Barker, J. Robinson
		Bampton	3	Calling males	RSPB unpublished
	27 Jun	Briscoe	1		Stokoe Archive
1973	May	Culgaith	1	Found dead	
	May	Musgrave	1	Heard	R. Robson
1975	29 Apr	Bassenthwaite Marsh	1		
		Keswick	1	Found dead	
1976	Jun	Carlisle Airport	1	Craking in cornfield	
	25-26 May	St Bees Reserve	1	Craking in hayfield	
	1-14 Jun	Moresby	1		
1978	May	Brampton	1	Craking throughout month	W. Mallinson
1979	8-22 Apr	St Bees Head	1		
	4 May	Strands, Millom	1		D. Walker
	27 May	Moss in SW Cumbria	3	Breeding not confirmed	
1980	May-Jun	High Harrington	2	Craking	M. Carrier
	Jun	Kirksanton	1	Craking	A. Battson
	16 Jun	Hartbarrow, Winster Valley	1	Craking	H. Hodge
	July	Saughtree, Bewcastle	1	Craking	W. & B. Smith
1981	26 May	Nr Brampton	1	Craking	J. Miles
	7 Jul	Nr Brampton	1	Craking	J. Miles
	6 Aug	Houghton	1	Craking	M. Ramsden
1982	20 Jun-7 Jul	Carlisle Airport	1	Craking	
1984	17-29 Jun	Sedbergh	1		H. Close, M. Priestley
	30 Apr-9 May	South Walney	1	Found with broken wing, died 9 May	WBO
1985	16-19 Apr	Gilpin Bridge, Lyth Valley	1		B. & J. Fereday
1987	12 May	Whinell Park, Penrith	1		B. Ward
	13 Jun-14 Jul	Isel Bridge	brood	Craking then adult and 3/4 juveniles seen 15-18 July after mowing	M. Godfrey
1988	Early summer	Newby West	1	Craking	
	6 Jun	Mungrisdale	1		
1989	13 Aug	Sellafield	1	Flushed from Marram grass	A. Strand
	21 Sep	Tindale Tam	1		J. Miles
1990	3 May	Nethertown	1	Craking from wall in rough pasture	D. & D. Allan
	1-16 Jun	Upper Dentdale	1	Craking	A. Meakin, S. Morris, A. Stoddart
	12 Jul	Abbeytown	brood	Adult and three juveniles	R. Tratt
	26 Aug	St Bees	3	'full-grown birds' assumed juvs	H. Walmsley
1991	7-8 Sep	Blackhall Wood, Durdar	1		M. Carrier
1993	June	Rack Bridge, Heathersgill	1	Craking persistently for 3 weeks	G. Broome, D. & G. O'Hara
	16 Sep	South Walney	1	Migrant seen briefly	P. Troake, P. Zaltowski
1995	1 Jul	Bridgefoot, Cockermouth	1	Walked out of field	J. Callion
1998	12 Jun	Heads Nook	1		P. Matthews
	29 Jun- 2 Jul	Eskmeals	1	Seen and heard	R. Irving, I. Kinley, D. Thexton
	2 Aug	Ormsgill Reservoir	1	Craked persistently	D. Griffiths, C. Raven
1999	24 Sep	South Walney	1	Trapped and ringed	N. Littlewood, C. Raven
2002	12 Aug	Aikbank	1	Craking	M. Critchley
2005	28 Oct & 16 Nov	Walney Island	1	Flushed	C. Raven
2007	18 May	Stagsike, Tindale	1	Singing	S. Westerberg
2013	July	Rusland Valley	1		G. Thomas
2015	23 April	Kirkbampton	1		R. Corran
2017	28 September	South Walney	1	Flushed from nettle bed	M. Douglas

# Avocet (Pied Avocet)

## *Recurvirostra avosetta*

An uncommon passage migrant, breeds in very small numbers



### Data included up to 2019

#### Non-standard References

\*Brown, P.E. 1948. The breeding of Avocets in England in 1947. *British Birds* 41: 14-18

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

#### Post 2019 Records

**2020** 24 adults were present at the northern breeding site on 30th April and six pairs bred. 1 Siddick Pond 28th May.

**2021** 20 adults present at the northern breeding site on 19th May but only 2 chicks thought to have fledged. 1 adult Foulney Island 13th April.

**2022** About 17 pairs at or near the northern breeding site produced 3 young to fledging from 2 broods. 2 to 4 Bowness on Solway 30th April. 2 Arnside, Kent Estuary 1st & 2nd June. 3 overhead Arnside, Kent Estuary 30th June. 1 Sandside, Kent Estuary 31st August. 1 Bowness on Solway 22nd October.

**2023** 38 adults at the northern breeding site produced 52 chicks, a minimum of 11 of which fledged. 2 Bowness on Solway 6th April, 2 Port Carlisle 18th April, 2 Hodbarrow 12th May, 1 South Walney 18th May, 5 over Foulney 17th August

**Photograph: Campfield Marsh, Solway Estuary, 26th November 2015 (N. Franklin)**

## Avocet (Pied Avocet)

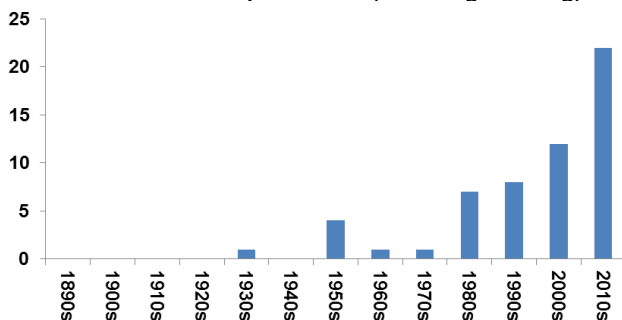
### *Recurvirostra avosetta*

**An uncommon passage migrant, breeds in very small numbers**

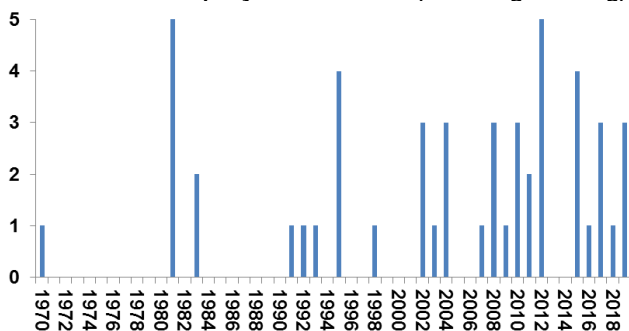
Avocets breed from the southern Baltic along the North Sea coast and south to Morocco, also in the Mediterranean and east into Asia, and in southern and eastern Africa. Though mainly sedentary, more northerly populations migrate to winter in southern Europe and West Africa. They have undergone a range expansion in Europe in recent years with the UK a significant contributor (EBBA 2020). In Britain, they formerly bred south of the Humber, but had ceased breeding by 1842. A recolonisation starting in East Anglia began in the 1940s (Brown 1948, Brown & Grice 2005). In 2019 the UK breeding population was estimated at 2154 pairs, with most in Southern England, but with Central and Northern England well represented and with one site in Wales (Eaton et al. 2021). A colony established at Leighton Moss just over the county boundary in Lancashire in 2001 (LDBWS annual reports). In 1947 birds began to winter regularly in England, and now several southern estuaries hold post-breeding and wintering populations, the latter thought to comprise both British breeders and continental immigrants (Brown & Grice 2005). The Great Britain wintering population was estimated at 8700 between 20012/13 and 2016/17 (Frost et al. 2019).

Avocets were extremely rare in Cumbria until the early 1990s. There were just seven records prior to 1981. It is only since 2015 and no doubt helped by the establishment of a small breeding population in the county from 2017 that they have become annual. The mobility of individual birds has likely accounted for some duplication of records throughout its more recent history of occurrence. Most recently the post-breeding dispersal of breeding adults and young has further confused the assessment of records. It is quite possible that the four records from 1981 on the Kent and Leven Estuaries may involve the same bird, likewise four records from Walney Island and Cavendish Dock at Barrow in 1995. There are several further instances of records within the same area in the same year as the species has become more regular. Hence the 55 records up to the end of 2019, totalling 91 birds, could actually involve as few as 76 birds in 42 occurrences.

Number of records per decade (excluding breeding)



Number of records per year 1970 – 2019 (excluding breeding)



Apart from at recently established breeding sites, few have been long-staying birds at any one site, even if the same individuals have subsequently revisited the same sites. Exceptions have involved a bird at Cavendish Dock in February/March 1995, one at Rockcliffe Marsh in April/May 2015 and what could conceivably be the same bird which arrived in late October and wintered at nearby

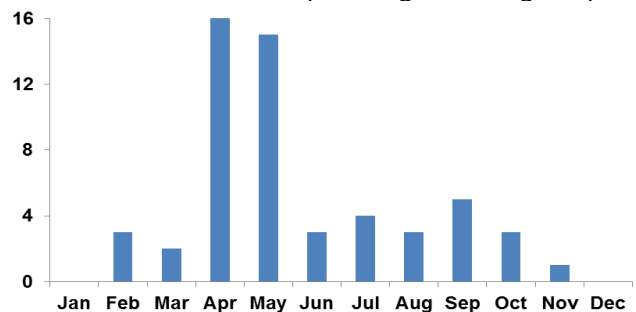


Port Carlisle, Solway Estuary, September 2017 (N. Franklin)

Bowness-on-Solway in 2015/16, being last seen in April. The presence of up to five birds including three juveniles in the Bowness-on-Solway area between late August and late September 2017 could have involved dispersing birds from the newly established northern breeding site.

There is a spread of records of first arrival throughout the year, with the exception of mid-winter, but with distinct peaks in the passage periods of April/May and September. The wintering bird at Bowness-on-Solway in 2015/16 is the only bird to have been recorded in December or January.

Month of first occurrence (excluding at breeding sites)



Most passage records have involved single birds. However, there have been 22 records of at least two together, seven of which have involved between three and six birds, and several are notable not just for their numbers. The records of three on the Kent Estuary in August 1934 and again on the Kent Estuary in May 1954 are from the period when Avocets were extremely rare in Britain, breeding having only resumed (unsuccessfully) in 1941. The six on Rockcliffe Marsh on 7/8th November 1993 were outside the main passage period and are the latest record excluding long staying birds, the four at Wedholme Flow in April 2008 were inland (though not far from the coast), and the three on the Leven Estuary in July 2015 included two colour ringed birds, ringed as chicks at Seal Sands, Cleveland earlier in the same year (Robinson et al. 2020).

The majority of records have come from the estuaries of Morecambe Bay, the adjacent Walney Island and from the inner Solway Estuary. There have been only two records from the Duddon Estuary and none since 1998 and no records from the Irt/Mite/Esk complex of estuaries at Ravenglass. Perhaps surprisingly, the Kent Estuary with 13 Cumbrian records in total has only provided seven since breeding commenced on the saltmarsh pools at Leighton Moss in Lancashire adjacent to the county boundary in 2001.

There have been just five inland records including three from Wedholme Flow just inland of the Solway Estuary. However, the other two are of particular interest. The bird at Tindale Tarn on 15 May 1981 was the first for 11 years and the first of the “modern era”. While the bird at Grisedale near Garsdale at the head of Dentdale between 1st and 4th June 1983 was particularly tame and may have been an escape from a collection.

Breeding was first recorded at a northern site in 2017 when two pairs fledged five chicks. The site was occupied again in 2018 and 2019 when in the latter year four pairs were present with two successfully fledging five young between them. A southern site held two incubating pairs in 2018, but both were washed out by high tides in June.

**All records (excluding breeding) up to 2019** (records in italics may involve the previous record or records listed)

Year	Date	Location	Sub Location	No	Year	Date	Location	Sub Location	No
1934	11 Aug	Kent Estuary		3	2004	5 May	Kent Estuary	Fishcarling Point	2
1950	18 Sep	Solway Estuary	Port Carlisle	1	2007	18 Jun	Kent Estuary	Sandside	1
1954	2 May	Kent Estuary		3	2008	17 Apr	Solway Basin	Wedholme Flow	4
1954	Mar	Duddon Estuary	Buckman Brow	1	2008	8 May	Solway Estuary	Burgh Marsh	1
1954	Sep	Solway Estuary	Port Carlisle	1	2008	4 Aug	Leven Estuary	Plumpton Bight	1
1960	5 Apr	Solway Estuary	Burgh Marsh	2	2009	11 May	Solway Estuary	Anthorn	1
1970	3 - 15 Oct	Kent Estuary	Arnside Marsh	1	2010	18 Apr	Solway Basin	Wedholme Flow	1
1981	15 May	Talkin Tarn		1	<i>2010</i>	<i>18 Apr</i>	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Grune Point</i>	<i>1</i>
1981	16 May	Leven Estuary	Bardsea	1	2010	25 Apr	Leven Estuary	Baycliff	1
<i>1981</i>	<i>19 May</i>	<i>Kent Estuary</i>	<i>R. Winster at Meathop</i>	<i>1</i>	2011	19 Apr	Walney Island	South Walney	2
<i>1981</i>	<i>5 Jul</i>	<i>Leven Estuary</i>	<i>Canal Foot</i>	<i>1</i>	2011	11 Jun	Kent Estuary	Ulpha Meadows	2
<i>1981</i>	<i>6 Sep</i>	<i>Kent Estuary</i>	<i>Foulshaw</i>	<i>1</i>	2012	13 Apr	Solway Estuary	Carr Beds, Rockcliffe	2
1983	8 May	Walney Island	Sandy Nook	2	<i>2012</i>	<i>24 - 25 May</i>	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Rockcliffe Marsh</i>	<i>2</i>
1983	1 - 4 June	Garsdale	Grisedale	1	2012	4 - 7 May	Kent Estuary	Arnside	1
1991	22 - 23 Feb	Kent Estuary	River Bela	1	<i>2012</i>	<i>28 May</i>	<i>Kent Estuary</i>	<i>Arnside</i>	<i>2</i>
1992	5 - 9 May	Kent Estuary	Arnside Marsh/Halforth	1	<i>2012</i>	<i>29 May</i>	<i>Walney Island</i>		<i>2</i>
1993	7 - 8 Nov	Solway Estuary	Rockcliffe Marsh	6	2015	16 Apr	Solway Estuary	Anthorn	2
1995	12 Feb	Walney Island	South Walney	1	<i>2015</i>	<i>27 Apr - 17 May</i>	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Rockcliffe Marsh</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1995</i>	<i>14 Feb-5 Mar</i>	<i>Furness Coast</i>	<i>Cavendish Dock</i>	<i>1</i>	2015	25 Jul	Furness Coast	Newbiggin outfall	3
<i>1995</i>	<i>11 Mar</i>	<i>Walney Island</i>	<i>North Walney (flyover)</i>	<i>1</i>	2015/16	29 Oct - 7 Apr	Solway Estuary	Campfield Marsh	1
<i>1995</i>	<i>3 May</i>	<i>Walney Island</i>	<i>South Walney</i>	<i>1</i>	2016	25 Apr	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Campfield Marsh</i>	<i>1</i>
1998	6 Apr	Duddon Estuary	Hodbarrow	1	2017	9 Apr	Solway Basin	Wedholme Flow	2
2002	16 May	Solway Estuary	Rockcliffe Marsh	1	2017	24 Aug - 30 Sep	Solway Estuary	Campfield Marsh	max 5 inc.3 juv.
2002	7 - 12 Sep	Solway Basin	Campfield Marsh	2	<i>2017</i>	<i>20-21 Oct</i>	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Campfield Marsh</i>	<i>2</i>
2002	16 - 18 Sep	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Bowness-on-Solway</i>	<i>1</i>	2018	23 Jul	Solway Estuary	Port Carlisle	1
2003	26 - 28 Apr	Kent Estuary	River Bela	2	2019	25 Mar	Walney Island	South Walney	1
2004	19 Apr	Solway Estuary	Skinburness Marsh	2	2019	19 Apr	Kent Estuary	Arnside	4
<i>2004</i>	<i>24 Apr</i>	<i>Solway Estuary</i>	<i>Bowness-on-Solway</i>	<i>1</i>	2019	14 Jul	Solway Estuary	Bowness/ Port Carlisle	1

# American Golden Plover

*Pluvialis dominica*

Vagrant



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

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Photograph: Anthorn, Solway Estuary, 3rd September 2005. (D. Robson)

## American Golden Plover

### *Pluvialis dominica*

Vagrant – 9 records

Total birds up to 2019	Pre 1970	Post 1970	Total
No. in Cumbria	0	9	9

The American Golden Plover, along with Pacific Golden Plover, was previously part of the species known as Lesser Golden Plover. This was split by the BOURC in 1986 to form two distinct species. American Golden Plover breeds in Arctic North America on the tundras of Western Alaska, eastwards through North Canada as far as Baffin Island, with a tiny population of less than 100 pairs in Russia (Birdlife International 2022). It migrates south to winter in Southern South America. It uses an elliptical migration path, in spring passing through central areas of America, but in autumn using a more eastern route, following the western seaboard of the Atlantic and over the Caribbean to winter in Patagonia (O'Brien et al. 2006). It is presumably this difference in migratory paths that leads to American Golden Plover being much more frequent in autumn in the UK than it is in spring.

American Golden Plover is a scarce but regular and increasing visitor to the British Isles. In England, Scotland and Wales it has averaged 16 birds annually in the decade 2010-19, double that of 1990-99 (White & Kehoe 2021).



Solway Estuary, 22nd September 2012 (D Robson)

The first Cumbrian record was on 2nd October 1997 on the Solway Estuary at Bowness, and indeed eight of the nine records have been from the Drumburgh/Bowness/Anthorn peninsula. All records have been in the autumn. That of 2012 was particularly prolific, with three records of different adults and a juvenile bird accepted as Lesser Golden Plover which was almost certainly of this species. All records have been of birds within European Golden Plover flocks.

Year	Date	Location	Sub Location	No	Age	Details	Observer
1997	2 Oct	Solway Estuary	Bowness	1	adult female		D. West
1999	7 - 9 Oct	Solway Estuary	Anthorn	1	moulting adult		D. West et al.
2005	14 Aug - 1 Oct	Solway Estuary	Anthorn	1	1st summer		T. Reid et al.
2012	18 - 26 Sept	Solway Estuary	Port Carlisle	1	adult		D. Robson, N. Franklin
2012	28 Sep	Solway Estuary	Drumburgh	1	adult	different to above bird	D. Robson
2012	25 Oct - 16 Nov	Solway Estuary	Cardurnock	1	adult	different to both earlier birds	R. Atkins
2012	5 Nov	Solway Estuary	Anthorn	1	juvenile	could not be specifically identified as either American or Pacific	N. Franklin
2015	2 - 3 Oct	Solway Estuary	Anthorn	1			N. Franklin
2016	30 Sep	Kent Estuary	Heversham	1			M. Jones

# Ringed Plover

## *Charadrius hiaticula*

**A fairly common resident, common passage migrant and winter visitor, breeds in small numbers**



**Data included up to 2019**

### **Non-standard References**

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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### **Notable Post 2019 Records**

- 2022** Breeding: A full survey of the coast found 198 occupied territories
- 2023** Autumn passage: 800 Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary 26th August

**Photograph: Flookburgh West Plain, Leven Estuary, April 2019 (D. Shackleton)**

## Ringed Plover

### *Charadrius hiaticula*

A fairly common resident, common passage migrant and winter visitor, breeds in small numbers

Atlas status % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
<b>Breeding 1997-2001</b>	0.3	0.9	3.2	4.4
<b>Breeding 2008-2012</b>	0.9	0.6	2.8	4.3
<b>Winter 2007/08-2011/12</b>			5.1	

National Surveys: Cumbria estimates (pairs)		Coast	Inland	Total	
1973/74	(Prater 1976)		229	18	247
1984	(Prater 1984)		164	26	190
2007	(Conway et al 2008)				159

Ringed Plovers are most often encountered on shingle beaches, their presence often given away by their plaintive alarm call or a bird running from the observer. Three races are recognised: *hiaticula* which breeds in southern Scandinavia, the Baltic, Britain, Ireland and France and winters in Europe and North-west Africa; *psammodroma* which breeds in north-east Canada, Greenland, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and Jan Mayen Island and winters in West and South Africa and *nname* which breeds in northern Scandinavia and Finland eastward across Russia to the Bering Strait and winters in West, East and South Africa and South-west Asia. Birds breeding furthest north "leap-frog" more southerly populations to winter further south. More southern breeders migrate less far south with some probably resident (Delaney 2009).

The United Kingdom breeding population, falling in the latter category, is in decline and was surveyed at 4,232 pairs in 2007 (Conway 2008), with nearly 63% in Scotland and just 159 pairs (3.76%) in Cumbria. The vast majority of Cumbrian breeders nest on the coast and are of the race *hiaticula*, while passage birds are probably drawn from all three races. Passage peaks in August and May involving a large turnover of birds on the coast and there is a much smaller and exclusively coastal wintering population.

In Cumbria Macpherson (1892) described it as breeding "constantly though sparingly" on the coast from Grune Point to the Kent Estuary, being most numerous at Ravenglass and on Walney Island and occasionally nesting on the saltmarshes. Mitchell (1985) writing of the Lancashire coastline including Morecambe Bay described it as the commonest of the resident shorebirds, but had already recognised the threat posed by recreational disturbance on the nesting beaches. By the 1940s Blezard (1943) believed nesting habits had changed and while once most nests had been on the shingle beaches, almost as many were then nesting on the saltmarshes and bare sands of the creeks.

In the 1950s Oakes (1953) re-affirmed Walney as the main nesting area in the south of the county, also highlighting the Duddon Estuary and Foulney Island and noting that many pairs nested in fields near the Morecambe Bay coast. He noted an increase at Walney in the late 1940s / early 1950s despite the presence of "trippers", with breeding around the entire island. In 1967 45 pairs nested at South Walney Nature Reserve and in the early 1970s up to 30 pairs, but by the 1980s only seven pairs were present and by the late 1990s only two (Raven 2005). Only one pair was found in 2016 (Booth 2017). In the 1980s up to 40 pairs nested on the west coast of the island and 20 pairs at the north end, with occasional nests on the east shore (Dean 1990). In 1996 just 12 pairs nested on the west shore and 12 pairs occupied the north end in 1998, but by 2003 – 2004 the whole island population was only about 18 to 20 pairs. Numbers appear to have stabilised since and in 2019 25 to 30 pairs were located on the Island (Raven 2005, WBO 2020).

In 1973–1974 the combined total for North Walney and Hodbarrow in the Duddon Estuary was 65 pairs. This had declined to 25 in 1994 when in the same year a survey of the entire estuary including North Walney found 51 pairs with 24 on slagbanks and 27 on beaches, and interestingly none on either saltmarsh or fields (Radford 1994). A survey of the same area found only 24 confirmed or probable pairs in 2016 (Booth 2017). Both Radford (1994) and Raven (2005) ascribed earlier declines on Walney Island and the Duddon to recreational disturbance, but also to loss of shingle to vegetation succession on the Duddon and the growth of the South Walney gull colony with an increase in associated predation here. Hodbarrow alone held 20 pairs in 1978 and eight in 1988 when it became an RSPB reserve. Since then it has been as



Foulney Island, 8th June 2008 (L. Gould)

high as 14 in 2000 but has declined since with just eight pairs in 2010, two in 2013 and four in 2019 (RSPB Reports).

At Foulney Island adjacent to Walney in Morecambe Bay six pairs in 1965 had increased to a high of 30 pairs in 1979 before fluctuating at lower levels, then reaching another high of 38 pairs in 2008 before dropping back to 15 pairs in 2012 and only seven nests were found in 2019 (CWT reports). In the remainder of the Cumbrian part of the Bay, Briggs (1983) found just four pairs along the west side of the Leven Estuary and three along the east side of the Kent Estuary in 1978. A 2016 survey of the bay found none on the Kent Estuary and just single pairs at Bardsea on the Leven Estuary and at Roosecote adjacent to Foulney (Booth 2017).

Further north there are breeding records in suitable habitat all along the coast but there is less quantitative data available. Drigg nature reserve held varying numbers between 1962 and 1985 ranging from a low of five nests found in 1982 and 1983 and a remarkable 27 in 1982 but more typically between 10 and 20 nests annually (Cumberland County Council reports). There were eight pairs here in 1987 (Baker 1987) and four to five in 1999 (Callion 1999). A study by Baker (1987) on several sections of beach on the outer Solway in 1987 remains the only in-depth survey of the species in the county. The number of nests and linear densities found is summarised below. Of 84 pairs studied, 30 (35.7%) failed to hatch young, with predation, human/dog disturbance, egg collecting and crushing by vehicles all implicated in nest failure.

#### Number of nests and linear densities at study sites in 1987

Site	Pairs	Density pr/m	Site	Pairs	Density pr/m
Allonby	8	335	Blitterlees	13	124
Mawbray	23	140	Grune Point	18	89
Beckfoot	7	77			(after Baker (1987))

At Rockcliffe Marsh CWT Reserve the population fluctuated between three and 18 pairs between 1970 and 1994, there was a short-lived increase in 1995 and 1996 when 22 to 24 pairs took advantage of newly created shingle areas following gravel extraction, but the population has since shrunk to between none and five pairs since 2003 (Carrier 2006, 2018).

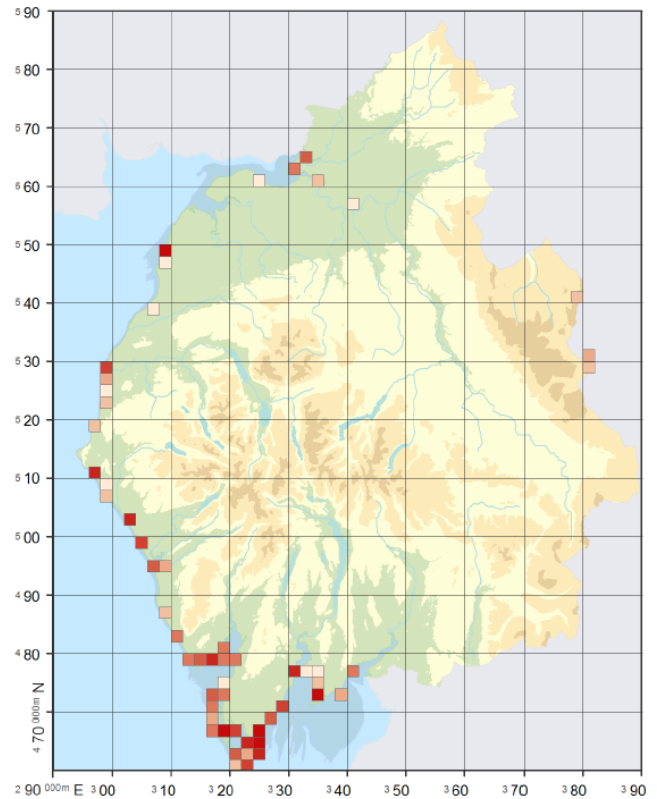
Macpherson (1892) also reported inland breeding on the gravel beds of the Rivers Esk, Eden and Irthing prior to 1892. By the early 1940s Blezard (1943) reported colonisation of the Rivers Lune and Caldew with the inland range gradually extending, siting possible breeding at Tindale Tarn in the North Pennines in 1925 and successful breeding at a busy north Cumberland aerodrome in 1941. On the River Eden one pair nested at Great Salkeld between 1947 and at least 1955 with pairs in summer at Musgrave in 1952 and Great Ormside in 1956. On the River Irthing two pairs were at Lanercost in May 1950 with a pair above Gilsland in 1963 (Blezard 1954, PNHS Bulletin, Field Naturalist), while Stokoe (1962) reported breeding at at least one fell tarn. Though up to 47 pairs were found on the River Lune south of Kirkby Lonsdale in Lancashire between 1978 and 1980 (Briggs 1983), there appears to have been little colonisation of the higher reaches in Cumbria. Despite Blezard's (1943) assertion of breeding here, there are no records in the Sedbergh School Archive and Cleasby (1999) described it as a former breeder with the last at Tebay in 1978.

There is little documented evidence of the status of the riverine population subsequently. In 1978 it was described as absent from four sites occupied in the previous eight years on the River Irthing. Birds were also reported from its upper reaches in 1980 and 1985

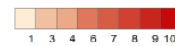
at Rotheryhaugh with proved breeding in 1997 at one site and probable breeding at another in 1999, both on small tributaries in the Spadeadam Forest area. Breeding may also have occurred on the River Tees on the boundary with Durham in 2000, was confirmed in two tetrads on the western shore of Cow Green Reservoir during the 2007-12 Atlas and may be more regular here at what is a rarely visited area. The River Esk at Longtown which has featured in all the Atlas surveys since the first in 1968-72 and held three pairs in 1987, is probably a regular breeding site with breeding proved in one tetrad and probable breeding in three others during the 2008-12 Atlas. However other than possible records close to its discharge into the Solway Estuary there appear to have been no inland records on the River Eden since the 1950s, on the Kent since the 1970s and the Irthing since the 1990s.

A handful of flooded quarries, reservoirs and industrial sites have hosted breeding pairs. A pair hatched at least one chick at Killington Reservoir in 1971 and though a pair was present in June 1991 and there have been several instances of August occurrence, there has been no further confirmed breeding. Two pairs occupied Wet Sleddale Reservoir in 1980, one pair failed due to rising water levels at what may have been this site in 1981, one pair was present in 1990 and two pairs in 1991 and 1992. A successful pair in an unnamed quarry in 1981 may have been at the nearby under-watched Hardendale Quarry at Shap, which also held a single bird in April 1984 and five in April 1985 and has probably been a regular breeding site, with regular summer occupation in recent years. A site at Oughterside at Aspatria held a pair in 1987 and in the same year there were two pairs at Kingmoor railway marshalling yards at Carlisle. The 1968-72 Atlas shows breeding in several inland 10km squares some of which could have involved the above sites. However none were occupied during the 1997-2001 Atlas. In the 2008-12 Atlas period breeding was deemed probable at Hardendale Quarry, the recently created Thacka Beck Nature Reserve at Penrith and at Perrys Dam Reservoir south of Alston. Additionally there was possible breeding at Cardew Mires Quarry near Dalston and at an industrial site in southeast Carlisle. However for whatever reason it seems that inland colonisation has not been sustained in Cumbria and is at best confined to a handful of sites, some of which may only be sporadically occupied.

Relative breeding abundance 2008 – 2012



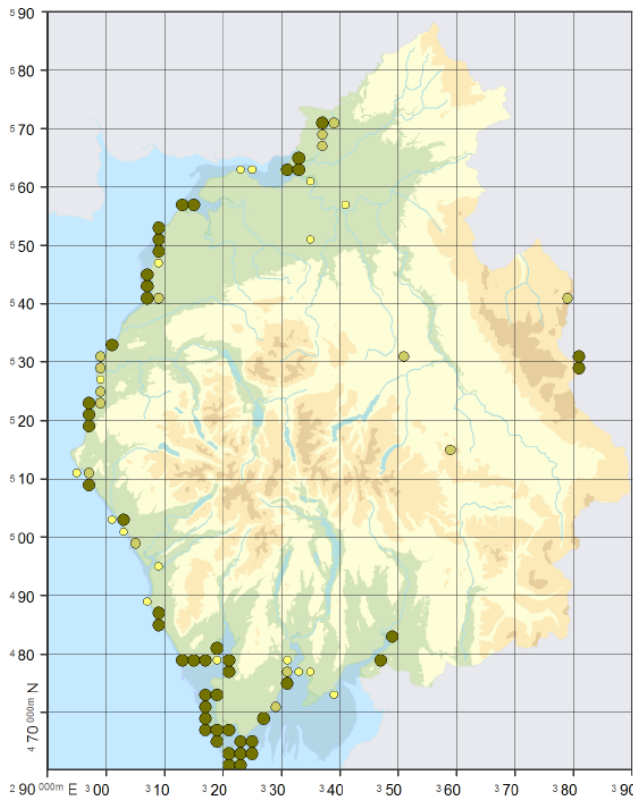
Ringed Plover



Relative abundance during the April to July Timed Tetrad Counts (TTC) in the 2008-2011 survey. Relative abundance category derived from the maximum number of birds recorded in one TTC.

Categories: 1=1-1, 3=2-2, 4=3-3, 6=4-4, 7=5-6, 8=7-10, 9=11-16, 10=17-93.

Breeding distribution 2008 – 2012



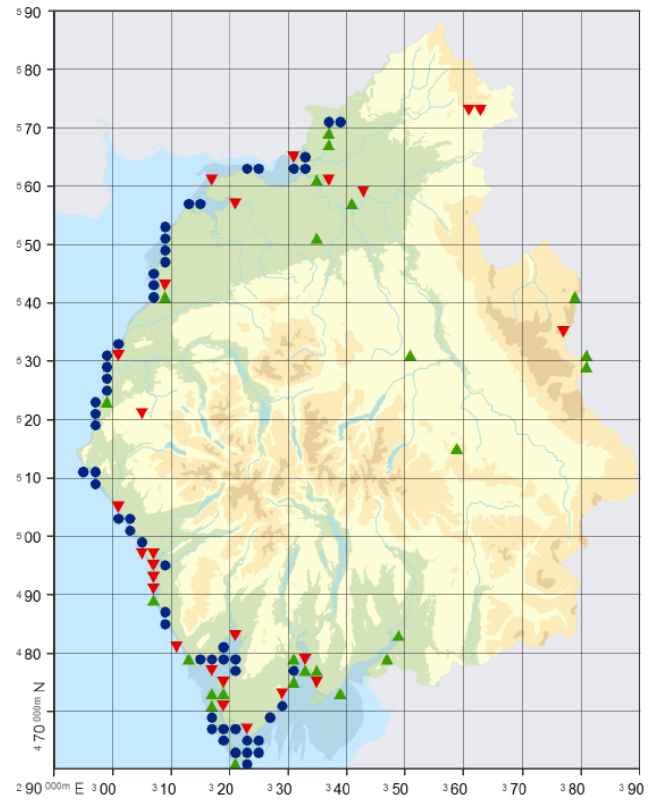
Ringed Plover

- Possible 17
- Probable 11
- Confirmed 51

Evidence of breeding in the 2008-2011 survey. Category determined by the strongest recorded evidence of breeding by birds in suitable nesting habitat in the tetrad.

Includes records from Timed Tetrad Visits and Roving Records.

Breeding distribution change 1997 – 2001 to 2008 – 2012



Ringed Plover

- ▲ Gain 25
- Stable 54
- ▼ Loss 26

Evidence of breeding in the 2008-2011 atlas compared with the 1997-2001 atlas.

Gain: Only present in national 2008-11 atlas. Stable: Present in Cumbrian 1997-2001 and 2008-11 atlases. Loss: Only present in Cumbrian 1997-2001 atlas.

Macpherson (1892) asserted that large flocks frequented the Cumbrian estuaries until the end of May and that many flocks of immatures arrived in September, particularly on the Solway between Maryport and Port Carlisle. Blezard (1943) reaffirmed that large flocks were present, but extended the period of occupation to include August. Oakes writing in 1953 off all the Lancashire coast including Morecambe Bay, described wintering flocks as usually small, but it was “as ubiquitous as the Dunlin” in the passage periods. In spring he noted a strong northward movement evident from late February, with the period of peak passage variable, often occurring in late March, but in some years not until mid-April. In Morecambe Bay “considerable numbers” lingered well into May with late passage flocks occurring with up to 50 staying through some summers. He described it as plentiful from early August on the coast with the highest numbers between mid-August and mid-September and large flocks remaining well in to October. He highlighted the Duddon beaches and Walney as important resorts with 200 to 300 often present. Larger flocks were scarce, and that he quotes 900 at Sandscale on the Duddon on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1948, suggests that number exceptional.

With the advent of the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (BOEE) in the late 1960s, Wilson (1973) was able to confirm an autumn influx in Morecambe Bay beginning in late July, peaking in mid-August to early September and continuing with smaller numbers through the remainder of September and October. By early November only a much smaller wintering population remained. In spring, in common with other Irish Sea coasts, passage was more substantial than in autumn and did not start until mid or late April, peaking in mid-May and then declining rapidly to leave only a small summer population by early June. Work by the Morecambe Bay Ringing Group from 1968 to 1972 indicated that spring passage involved birds entirely heading north to breeding areas in the Arctic. At the time this was believed to be in Greenland only but subsequent ringing has confirmed the presence of Canadian, Icelandic and Fennoscandian birds too (Wernham et al. 2002). By contrast, in autumn smaller numbers of these Arctic breeders used the Bay to refuel but not to moult in August and September, before moving on to wintering areas in Spain and West Africa. However, in addition, breeders from Ireland, North Sea and western Baltic Sea countries also used the Bay between late July and early October, the adults of which moulted, before moving on, though with some remaining to winter (Clapham 1978).

On the Cumbrian Solway there is no published work on the origin of birds using the estuary at different times of year, though it is likely to be broadly similar to Morecambe Bay. Research on the Scottish side in spring 1983 using dye marked birds, found that numbers at a roost in May remained fairly stable but all the individuals using the roost on 30<sup>th</sup> April had left by 14<sup>th</sup> May and had been replaced by a similar number of new birds (Moser & Carrier 1983). This suggests a high turnover of birds at a time when more northerly breeders would be expected to be passing through. BOEE data has shown seasonal usage of the Cumbrian coast to have remained similar to that described for Morecambe Bay in the early 1970s.

Grune Point and the adjacent Calvo Marsh on the Inner Solway, Roanhead on the Duddon and South Walney in Morecambe Bay are the most important WeBS sectors in their respective estuaries. Since 1993/94 all show peaks in August or September three of the four in May with relatively low numbers in mid-winter. Coverage of the coast between St Bees and Haverigg has not been good enough to determine seasonal patterns, though recent intensive coverage around the Ravenglass estuaries suggests a similar seasonal occurrence (D. Shackleton pers. com.). However the Outer Solway between Mawbray and Mealo shows the expected August peak but surprisingly not so in May.

Peak numbers have declined in both the Solway and Morecambe Bay at both the whole estuary and the Cumbria only level. The UK WeBS trend shows a decline of 19% between 2008/09 and 2018/19 and a 50% decline since 1993/94 (Frost et al. 2021). With the two races likely to make up the bulk of Irish Sea migrants – *psammodroma* declining and *hiaticula* possibly so (Delaney et al 2009), combined with a possible climate change driven propensity of birds to winter further east (Rehfishch et al 2004, Maclean et al 2008), numbers may continue to decline overall.

Passage on the open coast is largely un-quantified as it is poorly covered by WeBS. However a small population winters and has been counted five times at low tide in mid-winter since 1985 as part of the periodic Non-estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) and a Cumbria Bird Club survey in 1995. (Mawby 1995, 1998, 2008, 2018).

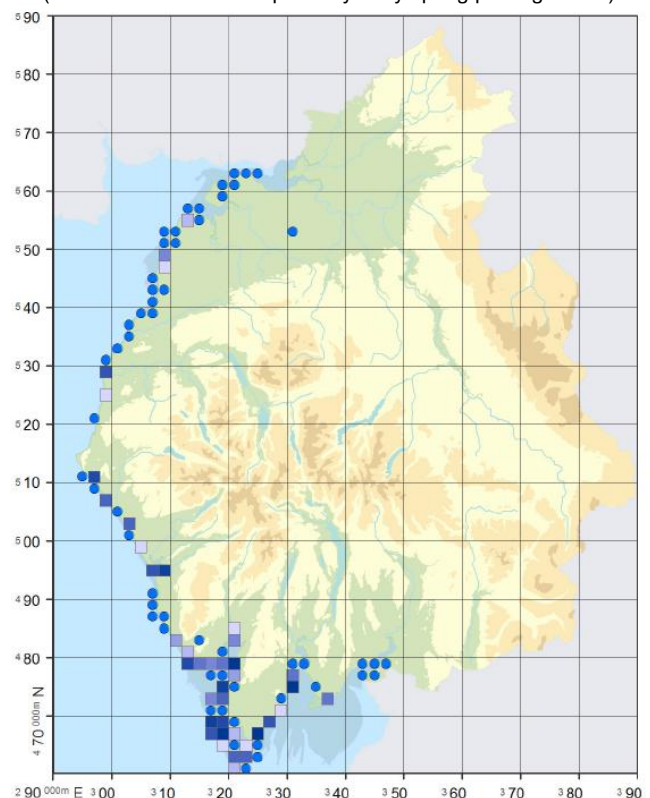
**Non-estuarine counts: Workington to Haverigg**

1985	1995	1998	2007	2016
125	47	85	60	184

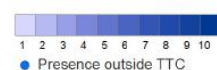
Notable counts prior to 1993/94 included 3000 at Biggar Bank on Walney Island in May 1980, 2075 on Rockcliffe Marsh on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1987, 1500 at North Walney on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1987 and 1045 at North Walney in August 1978 with five other counts of 700 or more birds. Since the WeBS season 1993/94 and up to the end of the 2018/19 season there have been 96 sector counts of 200 or more birds, of which 41 have been over 300, 24 over four hundred and just six of over 500 birds. Of WeBS sector counts of 200 or more 37.5% have occurred in August, 14.5% in September and 32% in May with only three in the period November to March and indeed numbers are much lower in this period with just 23 counts of between 100 and 200 birds. The most notable and in recent times exceptional WeBS sector counts involved 700 at Grune Point on the Solway on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015 and 925 at South Walney on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2017 and outside of WeBS of 730 on Foulney Island on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2011, about 1000 at Port Carlisle on the Inner Solway on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2013, 800 at Bowness-on-Solway on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2014 and about 1000 at Anthorn on the Solway on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015.

Inland wintering is extremely rare in Britain and records shown on the winter distribution map are likely to involve early returning breeders or passage birds. Inland passage can be hard to detect as it probably mostly occurs at breeding sites such as flooded quarries or reservoirs. Blezard (1943) referred to occasional occurrence at north Cumberland tarns in autumn and cited one on top of Hartside in March 1914, reported by the noted Northumberland ornithologist Bolam, who remarked in his journals that they were often to be seen in the Pennines on passage. However there is little evidence to support this more recently.

**Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12**  
(Inland occurrences are primarily early spring passage birds)



**Ringed Plover**



Relative abundance during the November to February Timed Tetrads Counts (TTC) in the 2007-2011 survey. Relative abundance category derived from the maximum number of birds recorded in one TTC.  
Categories: 1 = 1-2, 2 = 3-4, 3 = 5-5, 4 = 6-6, 5 = 7-7, 6 = 8-12, 7 = 13-15, 8 = 16-23, 9 = 24-30, 10 = 31-150.

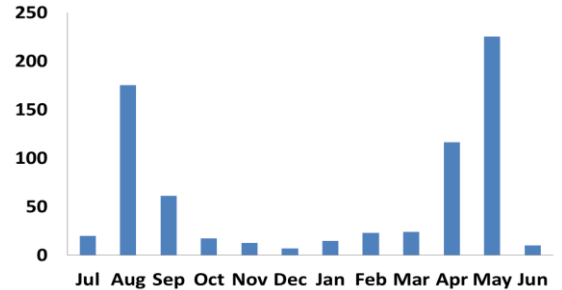
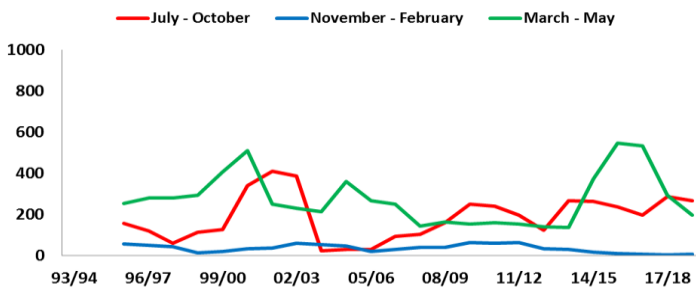
**WeBS five season period maximums at main sites in Cumbria 1969/70 – 2018/19 (entire counts for “shared” sites)**

	1969/70 1973/74	1974/75 1978/79	1979/80 1983/84	1984/85 1988/89	1989/90 1993/94	1994/95 1998/99	1999/00 2003/04	2004/05 2008/09	2009/10 2013/14	2014/15 2018/19
South Solway inner	2828	3285	1190	2075	660	1275	739	494	836	972
South Solway outer	547	593	270	550	504	368	520	541	490	328
Irt/Mite/Esk		389							350	238
Duddon	477	1254	312	552	865	530	372	700	407	513
North Morecambe Bay				697	1101	967	730	761	676	1115
Entire Morecambe Bay	12240	9650	598	1896	3018	1460	1041	1000	1043	2211

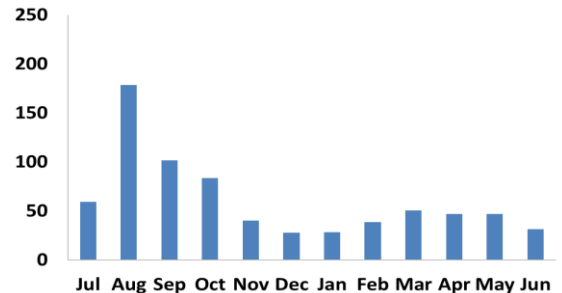
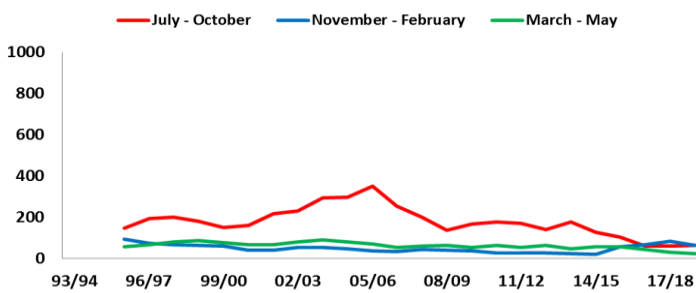
**Seasonal trends in maximum counts (3 year rolling means) on WeBS key sectors on different estuaries**

**Average monthly usage on WeBS key sectors on different estuaries**

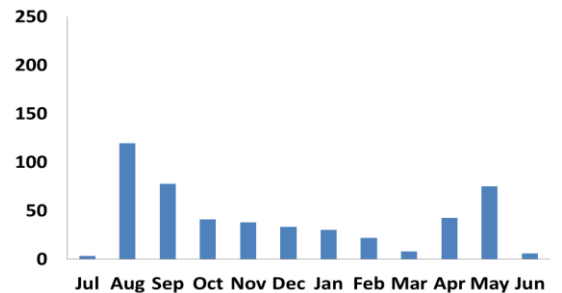
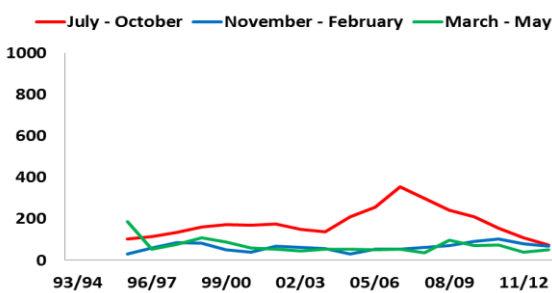
**Inner South Solway: Calvo to Grune Point 1993/94 – 2018/19**



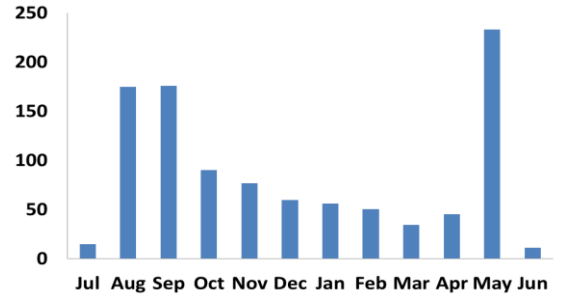
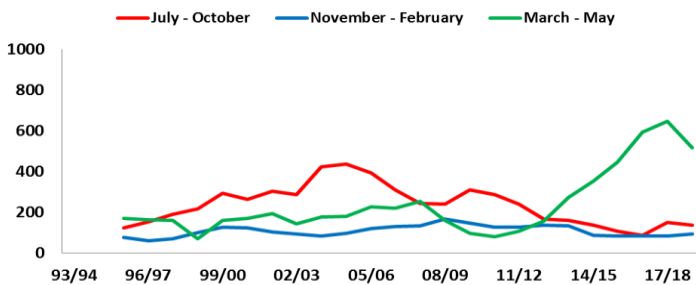
**Outer South Solway: Mawbray to Mealo 1993/94 – 2018/19**



**Duddon Estuary: Roanhead 1993/94 – 2012/13**



**North Morecambe Bay: South Walney 1993/94 – 2018/19**



# Little Ringed Plover

*Charidrius dubius*

*An uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant;  
breeds in very small numbers*



**Data included up to 2019**

## **Non-standard References**

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R.W. Robson & R. Stokoe unpublished personal notes

## **Selected post 2019 records**

**2022** 2 Kent Estuary 18th March is earliest ever record. 16 breeding sites occupied by 22 pairs  
**2023** 1 Solway Estuary 19th March. 17 breeding sites occupied by a minimum of 27 pairs

**Photograph: River Esk at Longtown, May 2014 (N. Franklin)**

# Little Ringed Plover

## *Charidrius dubius*

**An uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant; breeds in very small numbers**

Atlas status: % Possible	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total tetrads
Breeding 1997-2001	0.27	0.00	0.16	0.43
Breeding 2008-2012	0.11	0.32	0.86	.30
Atlas status: % 10km sq with breeding evidence	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
	1.05	6.32	7.37	14.74

Little Ringed Plovers breed throughout the Palearctic, from Western Europe to Japan, and from Southeast Asia northwards to India. Of three subspecies only *curonicus* breeds in Europe with a widespread breeding distribution. It winters in sub-Saharan Africa. (EBBA 2020).

The first pair bred in the UK in 1938 at Tring reservoir in Hertfordshire. Previously, it was considered no more than a rare visitor to Britain with only 13 records (Brown & Grice 2005). It has slowly become a widespread, though scarce, summer visitor, expanding its range further north in the UK and Europe. It now breeds regularly throughout England and Wales. In 2007, 746 pairs were recorded during a national BTO survey. The majority – 585 pairs were in England, with 141 in Wales and 20 in Scotland (Conway et al. 2008). It first bred in Ireland in 2006 (Brown 2007) but remains a rare breeder at the end of the 2010-19 decade.

In Cumbria, the first record was of a single on Rockcliffe Marsh on the Solway Estuary on 16th May 1970. This was immediately followed by the first breeding attempt, also in 1970. This was on shingle by the River Eden at Great Musgrave, north of Kirkby Stephen and fledged young by 10th July (R.W. Robson & R. Stokoe unpub. Personal notes). Along with the first colonisation of Northumberland in 1968 and a single nesting attempt in the Clyde area also in 1968, this was one of the most northerly British nests sites at the time (Parrinder & Parrinder 1975).

### Records between first and second breeding attempts

1970	16 Mar	Rockcliffe Marsh, Solway Estuary	1
		R. Eden, Great Musgrave	1 pair bred
1980	30 Apr	Siddick Pond	1
	24 Jul	Killington Reservoir	1
	29 Aug	Longtown Gravel Pits	1
1981	15 Aug	Foulshaw, Kent Estuary	1
	21 Sep	Grune Point, Solway Estuary	1
1982	01 Aug	Foulshaw, Kent Estuary	1
1983	21 Aug	Fishcarling Point, Kent Estuary	1
	29 Aug-7 Sep	South Walney	1
1984	15 May	Carr Beds, Solway Estuary	1
		Killington Reservoir	2 pairs bred

Despite a further nine passage records in the intervening period, a second breeding attempt was not found until 1984 when two pairs successfully raised seven young at Killington Reservoir during the drought of that year (Parrinder 1989). Since these early breeding attempts, assessment of breeding status has been hampered by a lack of annual and within season coverage of existing and potential breeding sites, combined with reporting at 'anonymous' sites through the need for confidentiality because of the threat from egg collectors. Hence, we have a fragmented picture of breeding numbers and distribution, which is likely to be an under-representation of true status. So it is unclear when regular breeding commenced in the county. However, since at least the late 1980s, records supplied to the CBC suggest it has probably been annual, with the number of sites steadily increasing and several sites probably occupied almost annually. Because of its fondness for newly created wetland habitats which then succeed to other habitats, or for industrialised habitats which often change or are heavily disturbed, some sites have lost their attraction and become vacated.

### Known nesting attempts 1984 – 2020 (second figure is the number of sites where breeding suspected but not proven)

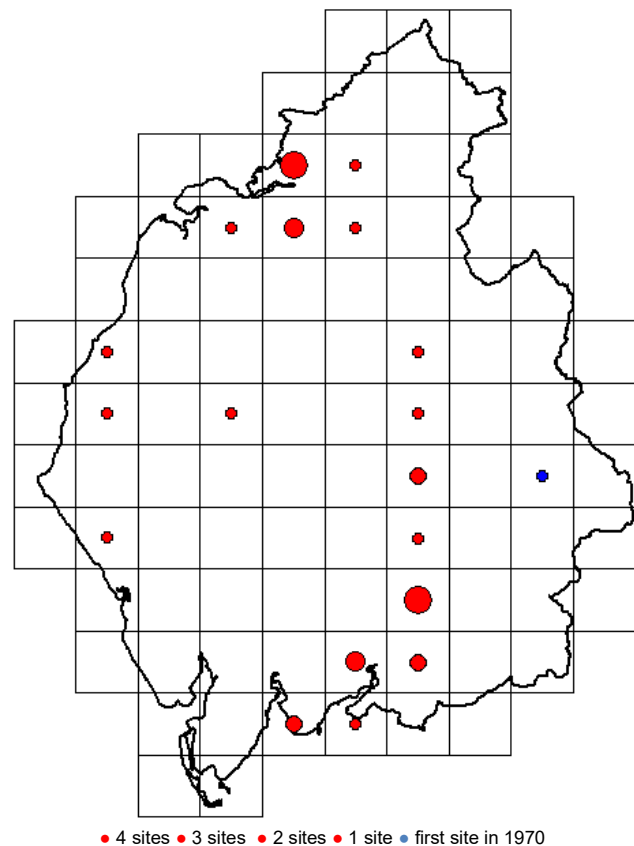
1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
2				1	4		2	2	1	0+1	0+4	0+3	2+1	2+2	1	4+1	0+3
2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
3+2	2	5	2+5	9+1	10+1	8+1	10+3	9+4	10+1	12+1	8+4	9+3	8+3	17+2	12+2	14+1	12+2



Kendal, April 2009 (L. Gould)

Without regular monitoring, the number of pairs and nesting attempts at individual sites in any given year can be hard to ascertain. It is a regular feature of many nesting 'events' that the number of adults present exceeds the proven number of pairs making a nesting attempt, and it is likely that some sites have either attracted unmated adults, or that perhaps failed nesting attempts have been overlooked. Nevertheless in 2016, it is likely that there may have been as many as 17 pairs on nesting territories at 11 sites, with a further two sites holding birds in suitable habitat. In all, there are records from about 65 sites up to 2019, of which breeding has been confirmed or suspected at 34.

### Breeding site locations by 10 km square 1970 – 2019

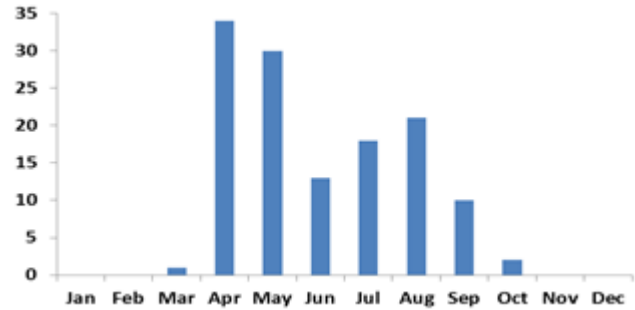


Both industrial and more natural breeding sites have been used, including partially flooded quarries (5), business parks (4), water treatment works (2), industrial complexes (1), refuse tips (1), gravel or other extraction pits (4), saltmarshes (3) lowland mosses (2), lake shores (2) reservoir shores (1), field flashes (1) and shingle banks in or by the side of rivers (8). These latter 'natural' types of site make their nests vulnerable to flooding in the heavy spring or summer rains of Cumbria and failure from this cause has been a regular feature at some sites. The lack of industrial sites and gravel pits that they often use elsewhere may be hampering their increase in the county.

Little Ringed Plovers arrive to breed in Cumbria from the end of March, but most breeding sites are not occupied until well into April or even May. There is also a small passage of birds, now annual, either not associated with breeding sites or which may occur at breeding sites but not involve breeding birds. The earliest ever record for the county is one on 19th March 2017 near a breeding site and, indeed, all remaining March records are from or near breeding sites, with the exception of a first summer bird at Hodbarrow on 27th March 2012. All other records of birds at non-breeding sites are from 7th April onwards and primarily from the latter half of April onwards. 'New' birds have turned up at non-breeding sites and probably also at breeding sites throughout the summer, presumably involving either late spring migrants, failed breeders or autumn migrants.

Breeding birds and offspring can remain well into August and even into early September, but from early July, the majority of birds away from breeding sites have been juveniles, with South Walney, the most visited site, accounting for many records at this time (16 as opposed to seven in spring here). In contrast at Hodbarrow, the second most visited passage site, seven of its nine records have been between late March and early June. There are regular records in September up to a bird at South Walney on 23rd September 2018, and then late juveniles both on the Duddon Estuary at Askam on 3rd October 1988 and at Hodbarrow on 8th October 1994.

Number of records by month of first arrival at non-breeding sites only



# Common Sandpiper

## *Actitis hypoleucos*

A common summer visitor and passage migrant, scarce overwintering bird; breeds in large numbers

Data included up to 2019

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### Post 2019 Records

#### Overwintering:

	First	Last
2020/21: Max. 4 R. Esk, Waberthwaite. 1 Meathop 14th Dec. 1 Asby Beck 26th Dec.	2020: 13th Mar.	20th Oct.
2021/22: Max. 3 R. Esk, Waberthwaite.	2021: 9th Apr.	16th Oct.
2022/23: Max. 5 R. Esk, Waberthwaite. 1 Rockcliffe 12th Nov. 3 R. Eden, Carlisle 11th Dec. 3 Arnside 7th Jan. 1 Whins Pond 19th Feb.	2022: 20th Mar.	23th Oct.
2023/24: Max. 3 R. Esk, Waberthwaite. 1 R. Kent, Kendal Jan., 1 Silloth Harbour 7th Jan. 1 Cavendish Dock 8th Jan.	2023: 2nd Apr.	28th Oct.
2024/25: Max. 4 R. Esk, Waberthwaite. 1 R. Esk, Longtown 16th Nov.	2024: 6th Apr.	4th Nov.

# Common Sandpiper

## *Actitis hypoleucos*

A common summer visitor and passage migrant, scarce overwintering bird; breeds in large numbers

Atlas status: % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
Breeding 1997-2001	3.24	8.05	7.95	19.24
Breeding 2008-2012	4.70	4.49	7.57	16.76

Atlas status: % 10km sq with breeding evidence	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
	82.11	71.58	70.53	72.63

Common Sandpiper breeds across Europe and northern Asia from Ireland to Siberia along rivers, lakeshores and less commonly the coast. It is migratory and winters in similar habitats from the Mediterranean, across Africa though the Middle East and India to Australia. Two populations have been recognised in Europe, one breeding in West and Central Europe and wintering in West Africa and the other breeding in Eastern Europe and wintering in East Africa (Parkin and Knox 2010). Its main European strongholds are in Fennoscandia and Russia. There is evidence of range contraction in the first 20 years of the 21st century particularly in Central and Southern Europe and the Fennoscandian population had declined during and since the last quarter of the 20th Century (EBBA 2020). This may be because of adversely changing conditions in migratory staging and wintering areas (Pearce-Higgins et al. 2008).

In the British Isles it breeds in upland areas of Wales, Northern England, Scotland and Western Ireland with few elsewhere. There was a 20% contraction in range between the national breeding Atlases of 1968-72 and 2008-11 with the largest losses in Ireland, central Wales and the lower lying areas of the English and Scottish uplands (Balmer et al. 2013). Based on results from the BTO Breeding Bird Survey and Waterbird Breeding Bird Survey the UK breeding population was stable to at least 1988 (Marchant et al. 1992) but declined by 28% between 1995 and 2020 (Harris et al. 2022). It was estimated at 13,000 pairs in 2016 (Woodward et al. 2020). British breeders are thought to winter primarily in West Africa south of the Sahara with a few further north around the Mediterranean. Though there is little evidence for this (Wernham et al. 2002), a bird fitted with a geolocator on its breeding grounds in Highland Region Scotland was tracked to its wintering area in South Senegal or The Gambia (Bates et al. 2012). There is a very small British wintering population estimated at 52 birds between 2012/13 and 2016/17 (Frost et al. 2019). Passage involving both British and Scandinavian breeders is most prominent in autumn with Scandinavian breeders evidenced by ringed birds passing through south-eastern England with few elsewhere (Wernham et al. 2002). Successful females and failed breeders can leave their breeding sites as early as mid-June and by mid-July successful males and juveniles have vacated breeding sites too. At coastal staging sites adults pass through first with juveniles later (Wernham et al. 2002).

In Cumbria the species is currently a widespread breeder on lakes and reservoirs, the middle and upper catchments of rivers where river flows are slow and at sites where shingle is present. Adults do not generally forage on shingle but it is important for foraging chicks (Holland 2018). On still waters it favours areas where streams enter and where shingle banks often form. Nesting is normally in vegetation a little distance from the water's edge.

Towards the end of the 19th Century within what was then Cumberland and Westmorland Macpherson (1892) asserted Common Sandpipers to be "one of most widely distributed birds, nesting in the neighbourhood of most of the lakes, tarns and rivers". At the same time Mitchell (1885) described it as a well-known breeder in similar habitats in the Furness Fells. Half a century later Blezard (1943) described a similar distribution and status. He also added that they bred on the shores of Morecambe Bay from Bardsea on the Leven Estuary to the Kent Estuary and on the tidal reaches of the River Eden, though offered no evidence for either. Oakes (1953) reinforced this, writing that it was especially numerous in Furness and that many pairs nested on the shores of Morecambe Bay and noted a nest on shingle just above the high tide line near Grange. Stokoe (1962) was of the same opinion as to its overall status and distribution with nesting up to 2350 feet and also mentioning coastal nesting and on the tidal River Eden. This is likely to have been based on records supplied

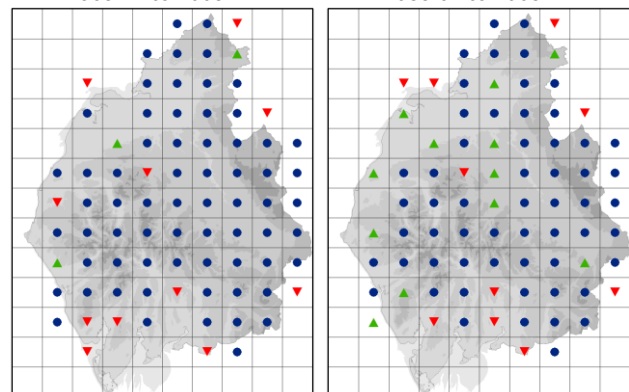


R. Esk at Longtown, April 2006. (N. Franklin)

by R.H. Brown who found nesting on the banks of the River Eden at Castletown, Rockcliffe in an unspecified year (Brown 1972).

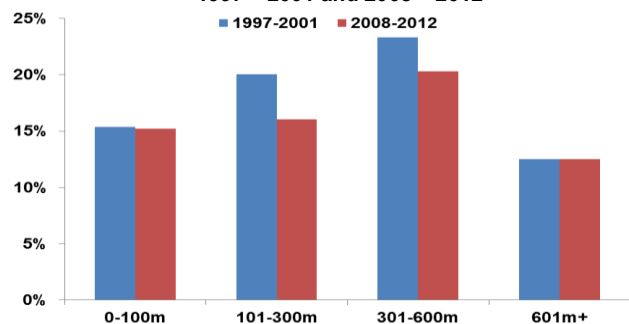
The 1968 to 1972 National Atlas found evidence of breeding in 78 10km squares but by the time of the 1988 to 1991 Atlas this had declined to 68. The population apparently stabilised between then and the time of the Cumbria Breeding Atlas in 1997 to 2001 when it was found in 67 and the recent National Atlas of 2007 to 2012 when occupancy was established in 69 10km squares.

Breeding distribution change 1968-72 to 2008-12      Breeding distribution change 1988-91 to 2008-12

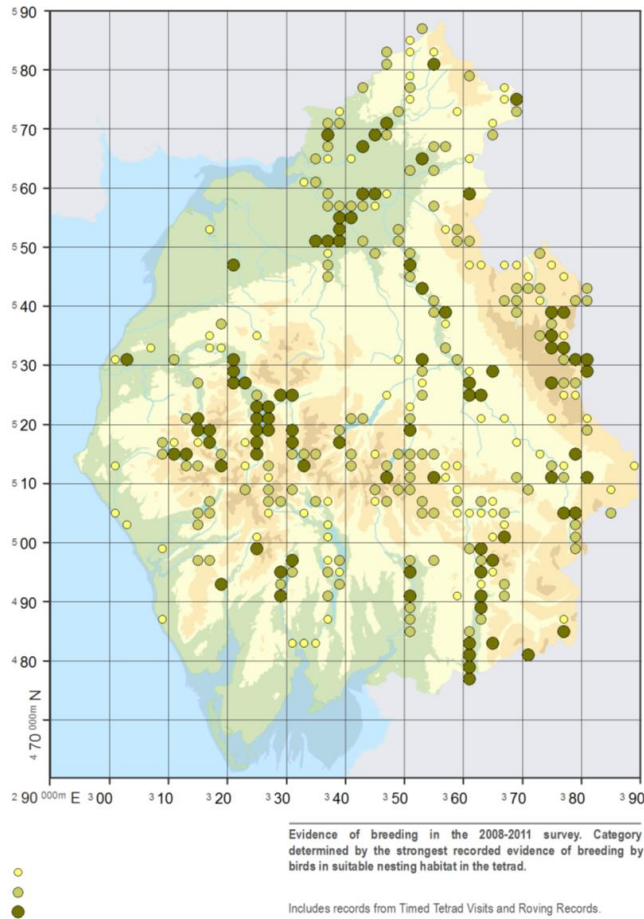


Recent atlas data confirm strongholds remain in the upland areas of the Border Moors, North Pennines and Lake District. However at the tetrad level there is evidence of a small contraction in distribution within the core breeding area of the altitudinal range of 100 to 600m above sea level. In the first decade of the 21st Century. It is probable that survey work in April and particularly late June/July might pick up migrants and that breeding occurrence is slightly over-represented in atlas data particularly in the altitude band up to 100m because of this. While nesting occurs on the lower reaches of some rivers, it is notable that coastal or tidal river nesting has not been recorded since about the mid-20th Century.

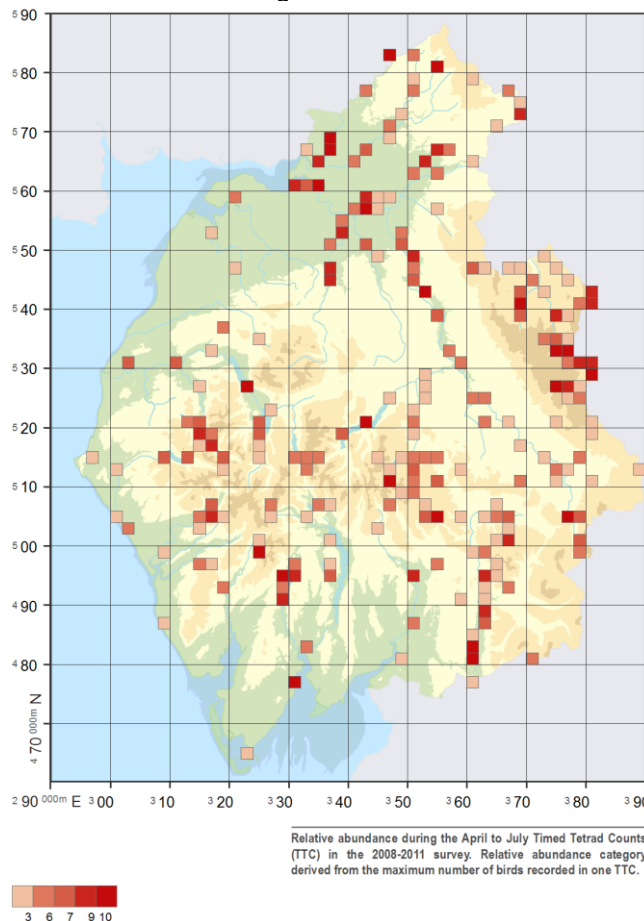
Percentage of tetrads with breeding by altitude 1997 – 2001 and 2008 – 2012



**Breeding distribution 2008 – 2012**

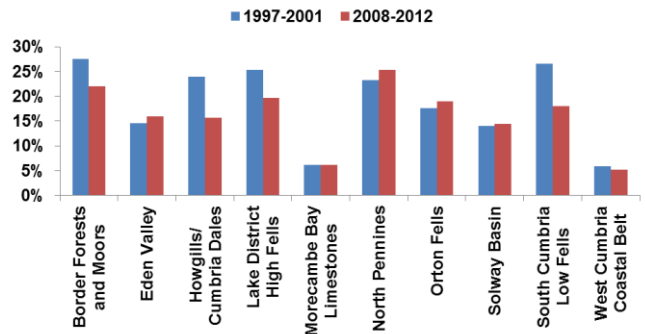


**Relative breeding abundance 2008 – 2012**

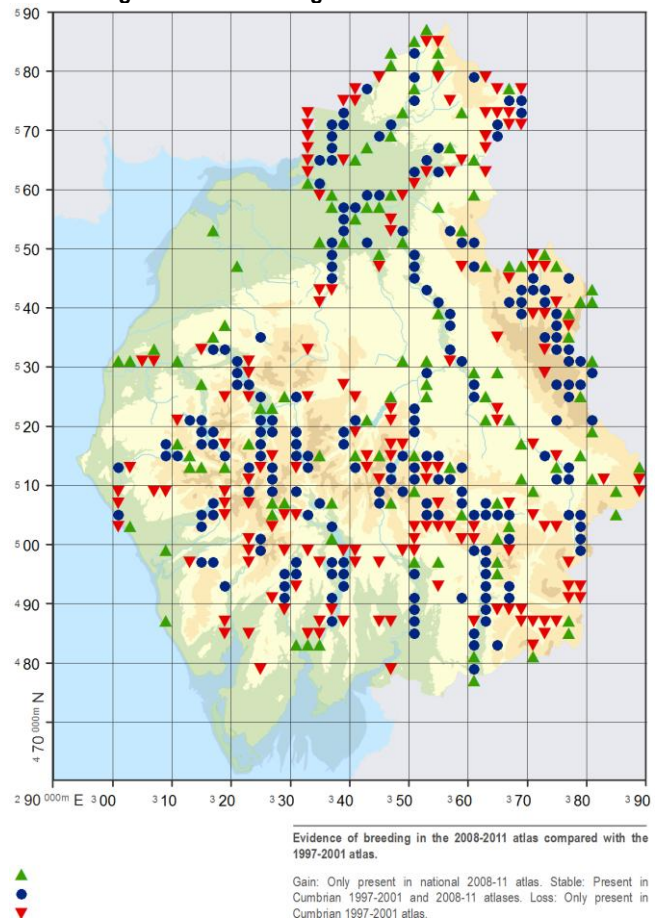


Atlas tetrad data shows some changes within Character Areas within the core breeding areas except in the North Pennines and Orton Fells. The Solway Basin in particular may be over-represented in the data because of the risk of encountering migrants in spring and particularly autumn, indeed one of the highest tetrad counts in the 2008 to 2012 Atlas was 12 in a Solway tetrad which seems unlikely to have involved breeders

**Percentage of tetrads showing breeding evidence within Character Areas 1997 – 2001 and 2008 – 2012**



**Breeding distribution change 1997 – 2001 to 2008 – 2012**



Over the years various targeted surveys have been carried out in the county to quantify numbers in specific areas. In 1939 the Sedbergh School Ornithological Society carried out the first intensive survey. This was on the River Lune and tributary streams in the Howgill Fells to the north and within five miles of Sedbergh. The 14 mile river section held 22 to 24 pairs but the fell becks only one additional pair. This was considered a poor year as in the previous year it was so numerous that a census was thought too difficult! (Sedbergh School Archive, Cleasby 1999). In 1951 (with some coverage in 1949 and 1950) a more extensive survey by the society found 75 pairs on 45 miles of river (including that covered in 1939) and 26 pairs on 60 miles of fell becks (Cuthbertson 1952). A re-survey of most previously occupied river and becks was carried out in 1971 finding 52 pairs on 42.5 miles of river and just 13 pairs on 17 miles of fell beck (Sedbergh School Archive, Magee 1971, Cleasby 1999).

**Surveys of the main rivers and fell becks around Sedbergh in the upper River Lune catchment 1951 and 1971 (pairs)**

	1951	1971	Length Km
<b>Rivers</b>			
River Rawthey	22	12	20.93
River Lune	40	34	20.93
River Dee	11	6	16.91
River Clough	2	0	9.66
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>68.44</b>
<b>Density: pairs/km</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>0.76</b>	
<b>Fell Beck</b>			
Barbon Beck	10	7	8.86
Cautley Beck	3	0	1.61
Deepdale	3	2	2.42
Cowgill Beck	2	0	4.03
Blake Beck	1	1	3.22
Bowderdale	5	2	4.03
Langdale	2	1	3.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>27.38</b>
<b>Density: pairs/km</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.47</b>	

A further repeat but incomplete survey in 1993 found 45 pairs compared to 51 in 1951 on the stretches of river surveyed in both years but only two pairs on fell becks surveyed in both years (Cleasby 1994).

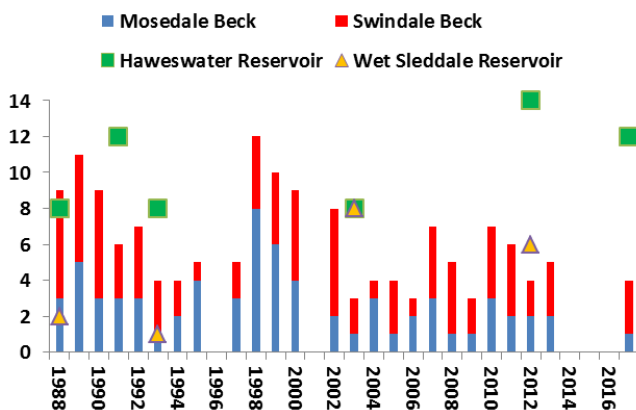
Other early estimates of densities came from Brown (1972) who found eight breeding pairs along a four mile stretch of Ullswater in 1948 at 0.62 pairs/km and six pairs along a two mile stretch of an un-named Lakeland beck in 1967 at 1.86 pairs/km. More recently between 1979 and 1983 Burnham (1986) recorded between 11 and 19 territories on five km of the upper River Tees between Tees Bridge and Cow Green Reservoir at Moorhouse on the county boundary with Durham in the North Pennines, giving a highest density of 3.8 pairs/km.

**Surveys of 5km of the River Tees from Tees Bridge to Cow Green Reservoir 1979 to 1983 (territories)**

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
<b>Territories</b>	15	16	16	11	19
<b>Density: pairs/km</b>	3	3.2	3.2	2.2	3.8

Territory mapping surveys of Mosedale Beck draining into Swindale Beck in the upper River Lowther catchment were carried out almost annually by the RSPB between 1988 and 2017. Like the earlier Lune and Tees surveys they showed high annual variation in numbers along the 11 km length of beck, varying between three and 12 territories with a highest density of 1.09 pairs/km (RSPB Haweswater annual reports). Nevertheless a decline in numbers since about 2000 can be explained to some extent by a reduction in suitable habitat in Mosedale where the length of available watercourse decreased as the beck straightened its course at the expense of a substantial meander.

**Territories on Mosedale/Swindale Beck (River Lowther) and adjoining Reservoirs 1988 – 2017 (blank = no survey)**

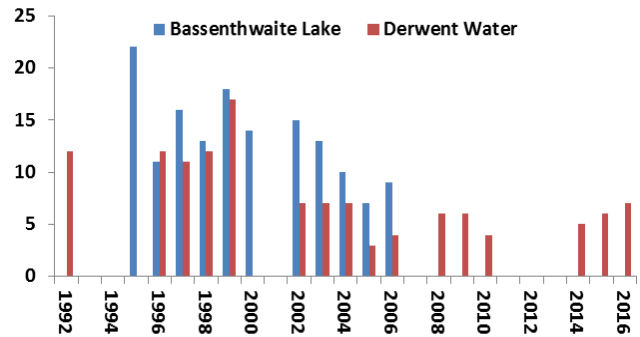


At the same time as the annual Mosedale/Swindale surveys were initiated in 1988, so too were periodic surveys of the adjacent Haweswater and Wet Sleddale Reservoirs situated in the adjoining valleys to the north and south respectively. Haweswater held between eight and 14 territories in the six years of survey with densities up to 0.92 pairs/km and Wet Sleddale between one and eight territories with a maximum density of 3.76 pairs/km (RSPB Haweswater annual reports). Though lacking repeated annual

surveys neither site appears to have declined overall.

Annual surveys of Bassenthwaite Lake by the Lake District National Park Authority between 1995 and 2006 revealed between nine and 22 territories and a maximum density of 1.24 pairs/km (P. Barron pers.com., LDNPA annual reports). Almost annual surveys of adjacent Derwent Water between 1996 and 2016 found between four and 17 territories with a similar maximum density of 1.23 pairs/km (D. Piercy pers. com.). Both these sites showed signs of decline in the early 2000s and though recent data is lacking for Bassenthwaite, the Derwent Water population appears to have stabilised at about half its late 1990s level. Barron (2004) expressed concern at increasing recreational levels at key nesting areas around Bassenthwaite as a possible driver of decline.

**Territories around Bassenthwaite and Derwent Water 1992 to 2016 (blanks = no survey)**



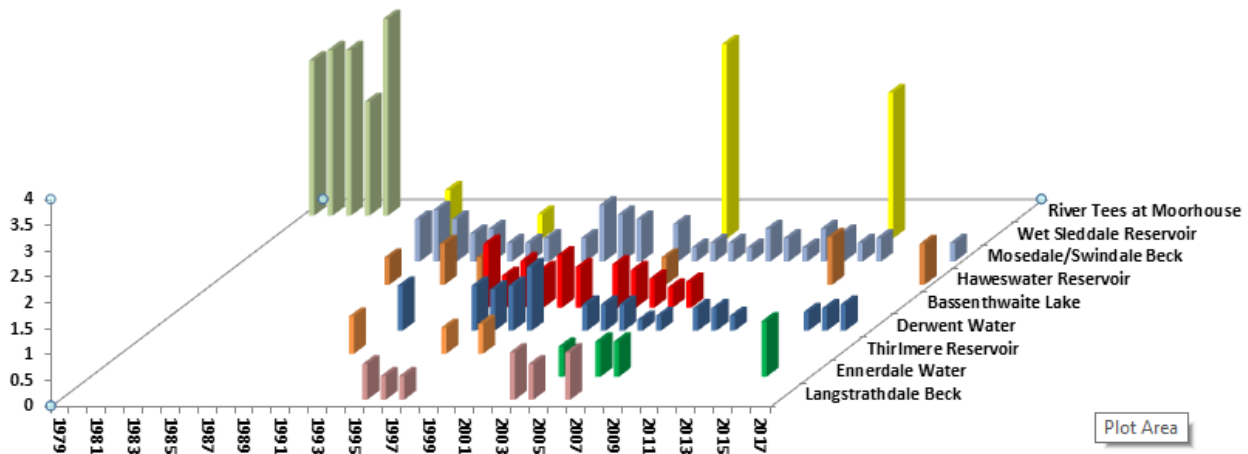
Langstrathdale Beck above Derwent Water received survey attention annually between 1995 and 1997 and again between 2003 and 2006 and varied in occupation between none and four pairs with a maximum density of 1.09 pairs/km. Elsewhere in the Lake District three surveys of Thirlmere in the 1990s found between seven and 10 pairs and a maximum density of 0.72 pairs/km (P. Barron pers. com.). Likewise four surveys of Ennerdale between 2006 and 2015 located between six and 11 pairs and a maximum density of 1.07 pairs/km (P. Ullrich pers. com, Wild Ennerdale reports). However these latter sites have not had enough survey attention to assess their longer-term status.

Approximate maximum densities of the nine sites in the county with survey coverage in more than one summer since 1979 have ranged from 0.72 pairs/km at Thirlmere to 3.8 pairs/km on the upper Tees at Moorhouse and 3.76 pairs/km at Wet Sleddale Reservoir. Thirlmere has had little coverage and may well have held higher densities. All but two of the rest fall within the range 0.92 to 1.24 pairs/km and these maxima may reflect carrying capacity at each site, with this most likely at those with the highest levels of coverage. Of the two sites with very high maximum densities, Wet Sleddale had high levels of occupation in two of its four years of survey and very low levels in the other two. The other, the River Tees at Moorhouse exhibited high occupancy levels within its short period of survey with its lowest years still being 2.2 pairs/km. It may be worth noting that the survey period at the Tees site fell before the period of national decline when densities may have been uniformly higher across the species range. It is also the case that this is the only monitored site with some predator control associated with grouse moor management at least on one side of its bank and this may have benefitted survival of both adults and young and promoted higher annual return rates.

**Summary of nine surveys from 1979 to 2019**

KM	Survey Period	Years of survey	Territories			
			Min	Max	Highest density /km	
River Tees, Moorhouse	5.00	1979 to 1983	5	11	19	3.80
Mosedale/Swindale Beck	11.01	1988 to 2013	24	3	12	1.09
Haweswater Reservoir	15.20	1988 to 2017	6	8	14	0.92
Wet Sleddale Reservoir	2.13	1988 to 2012	4	1	8	3.76
Thirlmere Reservoir	13.86	1991 to 1998	3	7	10	0.72
Derwent Water	13.78	1992 to 2016	16	3	17	1.23
Bassenthwaite Lake	17.79	1995 to 2006	11	7	22	1.24
Langstrathdale Beck	4.36	1995 to 2006	7	0	4	0.92
Ennerdale Water	10.24	2004 to 2015	4	6	11	1.07

**Breeding densities (pairs/km) at nine monitored sites 1979 to 2017** (blanks = no survey, except Langstrathdale in 2005)



For comparison a review of 25 local studies of over six km of linear length in Britain between 1951 and 1999 found average densities of up to 2.47 pairs/km (Dougall et al. 2004). Holland and Yalden (2012) found maximum densities of 2.25 pairs/km between 1979 and 2010 on their Peak District study becks. This population was relatively stable up to 1988 but declined after that to between 1.3 and three pairs. In addition Yalden (1992) found between 0.36 and 2.95 pairs/km on various parts of three Peak District Reservoirs in 1991 and considered reservoirs a preferred habitat as they were more buffered against Spring flooding than lakes and becks.

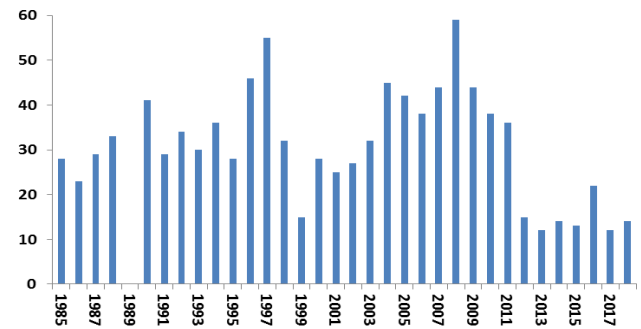
The reason for the high annual variation in numbers at monitored sites both in Cumbria and elsewhere are not easy to explain. All the Cumbria surveys used territory mapping rather than nest finding and surveys varied in timing and regularity. This might introduce a level of inaccuracy which could account for some variation. Nevertheless they are considered fair representations of the number of pairs present. Holland and Yalden (2012, 2018) offered ecological explanations based on studies in the Peak District. These include adult survival and reproductive success and juvenile survival in a previous year driven by flooding and predation which affects recruitment the following year. They also found evidence that cold weather in spring during re-occupancy of territories might prompt birds to move on or die and that flooding at the same time might also prompt early desertion to elsewhere. With these factors at play they felt that prospecting birds prefer to nest near established pairs so compounding low occupancy when it was already low. Spring flooding in 1996, 1998, and 2002 and cold spring weather in 1996 and 2005 at Bassenthwaite were all suspected causes of a drop in territory occupancy from the previous year (LDNPA Bassenthwaite annual reports).

The highest nesting pairs located in the county are at Red Tarn, Helvellyn at 718m a.s.l. and on Crowdundle Beck at 820m a.s.l. just below the summit of Cross Fell, both in an unspecified year (Brown 1972). The latter beck held four pairs in 1977 (Jones 1977). Unusual nests sites have included one in an herbaceous border by the Lyvennet Beck at Flass, Maulds Meaburn in 1962 (Field Naturalist), a failed nest within two metres of a minor road in Swindale (Shap) in 1990 and a successful nest within five metres of the A66 and near a footpath at Bassenthwaite in 1997.

Highest numbers away from breeding sites occur during Autumn on the coast and particularly on or near muddy creeks. Common Sandpipers tend to avoid open stretches of estuaries and coasts. The earliest coastal appearances are two on the Esk Estuary at Muncaster on 6th June 1996 and 13 on Burgh Marsh on 7th June 1994. However these are exceptional and first appearance is normally around mid-June. Numbers peak around mid-July and there is often a second peak in late August or early September, involving mostly juveniles. On the Solway Estuary the main passage sites are the lower Rivers Eden and Esk and associated creeks either side of Rockcliffe Marsh and on the Eden as far upstream as Beaumont, the creeks on Burgh Marsh to Port Carlisle and the mouths of the Rivers Wampool and Waver in Moricambe Bay. Further south the lower Rivers Irt, Mite and Esk at Ravenglass are favoured haunts as is Cavendish Dock at Barrow. The main sites on the Leven Estuary are the Carter Pool south of Ulverston and the mouth of the River Leven and its confluence with the Rusland Pool, though the creeks off Holker are probably under-

recorded. The creeks above above the viaduct at Arnside, the main drain from Meathop to Foulshaw, the mouth of the River Bela and the lower River Kent from Halforth to Sampool have all attracted significant aggregations on the Kent Estuary. Perhaps surprisingly the Duddon Estuary does not appear to attract many birds though the creeks of Millom Marsh and the Kirkby Pool may be under-recorded. More surprising is the relatively low numbers found on the well watched marshes on Walney Island where there are few double figure counts. With passage sporadic, WeBS data are probably not the best to indicate the status of the species as a passage bird, however a series of regular targeted counts of the Carter Pool from 1985 to 2018 showed lower numbers after 2008 (Outer Leven Bird Report).

**Maximum counts of the Carter Pool, Leven Estuary 1985-2018**  
(no count 1989, Outer Leven Estuary Annual Reports)



**Maximum counts at main staging sites**

Location	Date	Max.
<b>Solway Estuary inner</b>		
R. Eden lower (unspecified area)	30 Jul 03	50
R. Eden: Beaumont-Rockcliffe	11 Jul 89, 25 Jul 03	33
R. Esk: Rockcliffe Marsh	18 Jul 95	31
Burgh Marsh	21 Jul 04	21
Port Carlisle	16 Jul 17	26
R. Wampool: Anthon	07 Jul 90	51
R. Waver: Grune Point	late Jul 1988	24
<b>West Coast</b>		
St. Bees south beach	05 Aug 13	14
R. Ellen & Calder: Sellafeld	18 Jul 00	7
<b>Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary</b>		
R. Irt: Drigg	6 Jul 14, 7 Jul 16	15
R. Esk: Wabberthwaite-Eskmeals	27 Jul 80	37
<b>Duddon Estuary</b>		
Hodbarrow	20 Jul 85	21
<b>Furness Coast</b>		
South Walney	04 Aug 66	29
Cavendish Dock	9 Jul 94, 21 Jul 96, 17 Jul 99	10
Newbiggin	27 Jul 77	14
<b>Leven Estuary</b>		
Carter Pool	11 Jul 08	59
R. Leven/ Rusland Pool: Greenodd	28 Jul 60, 3 Aug 64	28
<b>Kent Estuary</b>		
Humphrey Head-Viaduct	25 Jul 09	14
Meathop/Foulshaw	21 Jul 74	37
Arnside Viaduct	22 Jul 14	13
Mouth of R. Bela	16 Jul 18	11
R. Kent: Halforth-Sampool	16 Jul 90	43

Birds staging at these sites are not likely to be local breeders moving down river after breeding. It is thought that dispersing breeders fly directly over land to access the coast (Holland 2009). Geo-location tracking of a bird from Highland Region, Scotland in 2011 indicated staging in Northwest England or North Wales hinting at the likely origin of these birds (Bates et al. 2012). Away from estuaries passage on the open coast and inland is very light. Birds are scarce at breeding sites after mid-July and records after this particularly on lakes and reservoirs may involve passage birds.

Passage diminishes after July but double figure counts persist through August with the highest count of 36 on the Carter Pool on 22nd August 1994. They are much scarcer in September with the highest count and latest double figure count involving 11 at Meathop on 16th September 1974. It is a scarce bird in October involving mostly single birds but with a maximum site count of seven at South Walney on 30th October 1980.

Last dates are difficult to identify because of the regular incidence of wintering birds. There are 18 November records at sites where there were no further records in that winter. However if records after 10th November are excluded as possible wintering birds the median last date between 1973 and 2019 is 12th October and the latest is one at Ulverston on the Leven Estuary on 9th November 2004. All November non-wintering records involved single birds except for two at Hodbarrow on 5th November 2019.

First spring arrival dates are equally confounded by wintering birds. There are 13 March records at a site with no records in the previous winter. For the purpose of this analysis birds seen before 10th March are considered likely to be wintering so an exceptional six on the River Wampool on 10th March 1996 is considered the earliest arrival. Two on the River Lowther at Whale on 12th March 1994 is the earliest arrival at a breeding site which with only light spring coastal passage is often where first dates occur. The median arrival date between 1974 and 2019 is 7th April and if March records are excluded it advances only by two days to 9th April. Main arrival is from mid-April onwards. There are only a handful of coastal records in March, mostly of single birds with the exception of the previously mentioned River Wampool record and three at Hodbarrow on 29th March 2003. In April there are only two double figure site counts both on the tidal Eden at Carr Beds involving 11 on 13th April 1993 and 15 on 21st April 1996. The highest May record is nine on the Kent Estuary on 2nd May 1996.

For the purpose of assessing winter status a bird has been considered as wintering if it occurred after 10th November and before 10th March to exclude any possible late or early passage birds. In some winters some sites have only one record and a bird may have moved on or died but at others there was observed continuous occupation throughout. Single wintering birds were first recorded in the county on Lake Windermere in January 1924 and again in January 1929 (Peters 1924, Astley 1929). There was a further single on the River Eden near Carlisle in December 1935 (Blezard 1943). One on the River Eden from Great Salkeld to Culgaith in December 1942 was a precursor to annual winter occupancy from the 1949/50 winter to the 1953/54 winter at Great Salkeld, possibly by the same individual and with two present in January 1954. There were further records here in 1960/61 and 1963/64. A November bird at Warcop also on the River Eden in 1951 may have involved the Great Salkeld bird, but may equally have been different. There were also two at Skelsmergh presumably on the River Mint north of Kendal in February 1960. Cavendish Dock at Barrow held what was probably a returning individual between 1964/65 and 1967/68 though with no records in 1966/67 (Penrith NHS, Field Naturalist, Stokoe Archive, Lancashire Bird Report). There were no further records until one again at

Cavendish Dock in 1977/78 and since then there has been occurrence in most winters since at one or more sites.

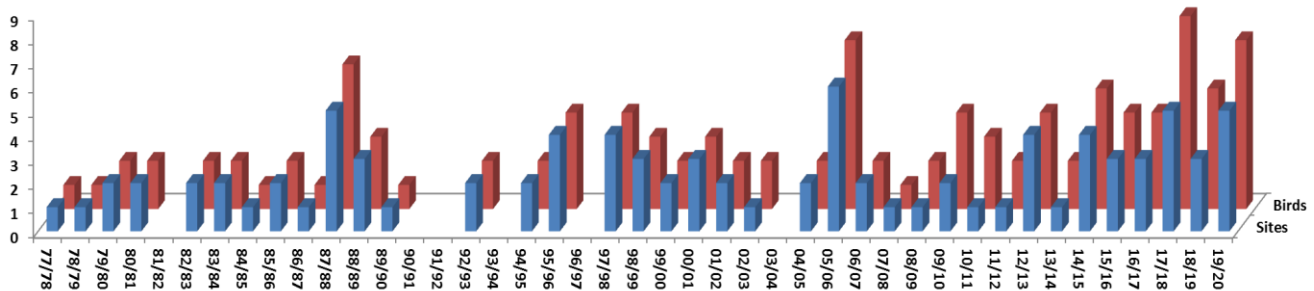
In all about 34 distinct areas have been identified as holding at least one bird at some point in a winter. Cavendish Dock has been the most favoured, closely followed by the River Esk/Longtown Ponds, the tidal River Leven and the tidal River Eden. Indeed tidal rivers are favoured sites with truly inland occurrence much rarer. Runs of occupation in consecutive winters are frequent and probably involve the same individuals. The tidal Esk between Waberthwaite and Muncaster has the longest run of seven consecutive winters from 2013/14 up to 2019/20 (with also a late March bird in the 2012/13 winter and continuing in subsequent winters) and also holds the highest site count of four in the 2017/18 winter and three in two other winters. The River Esk at Longtown only missed two winters between 2008/09 and 2017/18 and held three birds in two of those and two in a further two. The only other sites to have held two birds are Cavendish Dock in two winters, the Solway Estuary between Drumburgh and Carlisle, the River Eden at Great Salkeld and presumably the River Mint at Skelsmergh. The latter two are all the more notable for being inland and before 1961 when wintering may have been scarcer.

**Summary of winter occurrence by site (north to south)**

Location clean	Sub location	Seasons	Max.
R. Lyne	Westlinton	1	1
R. Esk (north)	Longtown & Arthuret Pond	9	3
Cardew Mires Quarry	Cardew Mires Quarry	1	1
Solway Estuary inner	Drumburgh to Port Carlisle	4	2
R. Eden/Solway Estuary	Rockcliffe to Grinsdale	8	1
R. Eden	Rickerby to Warwick Bridge	7	1
	Great Salkeld	6	2
	Warcop	1	1
R. Leith	Cliburn	1	1
Penrith		1	1
Ullswater		1	1
West Coast	St Bees Head	1	1
Derwent Water		5	1
R. Derwent	Bridgefoot	2	1
Siddick Pond		1	1
Irt Estuary	R. Irt, Drigg	6	1
Mite Estuary	R. Mite, Ravenglass	1	1
Esk Estuary	R. Esk, Muncaster	7	4
Duddon Estuary	Kirkby Pool	2	1
Parkers Pond, Dalton		1	1
Walney Island	South Walney	2	1
Barrow Docks	Cavendish Dock	11	2
Lake Windermere		3	1
R. Leven/Leven Estuary	Greenodd to Haverthwaite	9	1
Leven Estuary	Ulverston Canal	1	1
	Ulverston south	1	1
	Bardsea	1	1
R. Mint?	Skelsmergh	1	2
R. Kent	Kendal to Watercrock	5	1
R. Kent/Kent Estuary	Sampool	1	1
Kent Estuary	Kent Estuary unspecified	1	1
	Arnside Marsh	1	1
	Meathop	1	1

Nearly all of the 40 or so Cumbria ringing recoveries involve individuals ringed in the county. Several are of returning adults to the same breeding sites year on year in the upper River Lune catchment where most ringing has occurred. There are also recoveries from Morocco and France on autumn and spring migration respectively and 12 counties in England and one in Scotland (Robinson et al. 2020).

**Number of sites holding birds between 10th November and 10th March and summed number of birds 1977/78 - 2019/20**



# Wood Sandpiper

*Tringa glareola*

A scarce passage migrant



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

\*Robinson, M.G. 1946. Wood Sandpiper in Westmorland. *British Birds* 39: 57

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Records

**2020 Spring:** 3 records of singles including the earliest ever at Whasset, Milnthorpe on 11th April, Grinsdale on the River Eden and a late bird on Wedholme Flow on 11th June. **Autumn:** 3 records of singles, all in August at Rockcliffe, Beetham and South Walney

**2021 Spring:** 2 records of singles, both in May at Heversham Moss and Wedholme Flow. **Autumn:** 5 records of, all in August at Silecroft, Siddick Pond, 2 at South Walney and Hodbarrow

**2022 Spring:** 3 records of singles at Rockcliffe Marsh & Campfield Marsh. **Autumn:** 5 records of singles at Wedholme Flow, South Walney (On 21st June – the equal latest June record) and the Lyth Valley

**2023 Spring:** 6 records of singles at Greenodd (R. Craik), Snab Point (Walney), Cliburn Moss, 2 Longtown, 2 Rockcliffe, 1 Wedholme Flow on 18th June increased to 4 on 22nd June. **Autumn:** 8 records. Up to 2 Wedholme Flow in July, 3 Rockcliffe 20th July. Singles Bolton Fell Moss, Heversham, Killington Reservoir, Standing Tarn (Dalton), South Walney, 2 Brigsteer 26th August

**Photograph: River Esk, Longtown, May 2005 (N. Franklin)**

# Wood Sandpiper

## *Tringa glareola*

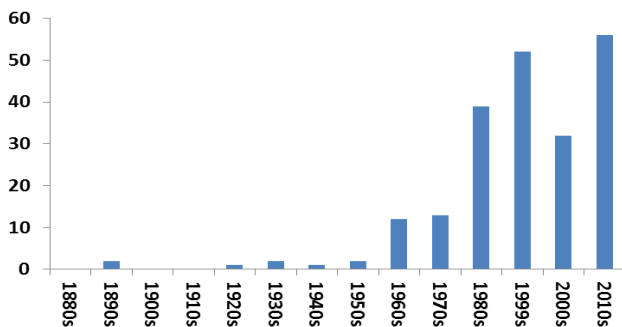
### A scarce passage migrant

Wood Sandpiper breeds in trees and scrub at the margins of bogs, swamps and wet heaths from Scandinavia eastward through the Baltic States and Russia, and as far south as the Czech Republic and Ukraine (EBBA2). There are small populations in Iceland and northern Scotland with one breeding record in England in Northumberland in 1874. It winters in sub-Saharan Africa. The Scottish population at the south western edge of its range may well be slowly increasing and is currently estimated at 30 pairs (Woodward et al. 2020). It occurs on passage in the British Isles in spring and more abundantly in autumn. Winter records are very rare.

The first Cumbrian record was documented by Macpherson (1892) involving five at Edenhall in the Eden Valley in 1867. In the context of all records since, this seems remarkable in terms of number and particularly so inland. As such it might be treated with some suspicion now, even though two of the birds were evidently "procured". Macpherson also rather cryptically recounted that W. Duckworth was "formerly" under the impression that he had encountered the species in the breeding season behaving in a similar way to those found by Hancock who had discovered the Northumberland breeding attempt in 1874. While offering no further details of date or location he went on to suggest that future discovery of nesting on "some remote Westmorland moss" was not entirely out of the question!

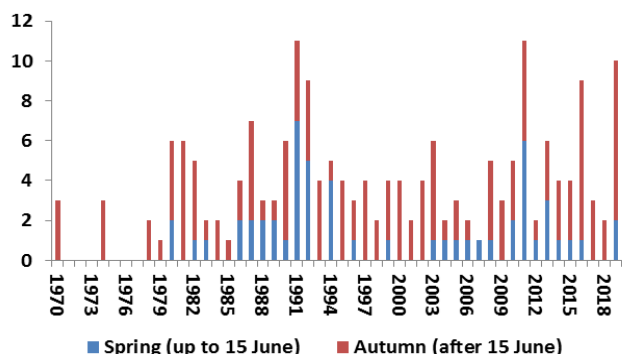
In the days before widespread birdwatching and good optical equipment it was rarely encountered in the county in the latter part of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. There were only 19 documented records up to 1969 (Bleazard 1943, 1946, Stokoe 1962, Brown 1974, Field Naturalist, WBO 2020). Several of the earliest concerned birds shot on the same pond at Skinburness between 1893 and 1931. Even after the arrival of annual bird reports in 1970 there remained few records prior to the beginning of the 1980s.

Number of occurrences per decade



Since 1978 after which records have been annual, it has averaged 3.04 occurrences per autumn and 1.29 per spring, where an occurrence is defined as a new bird at different sites (but not total numbers of birds). In only one autumn since then has there been no records (2007), but there have been 13 empty springs and it is much less than annual at this time of year.

Number of occurrences per season 1970 - 2019

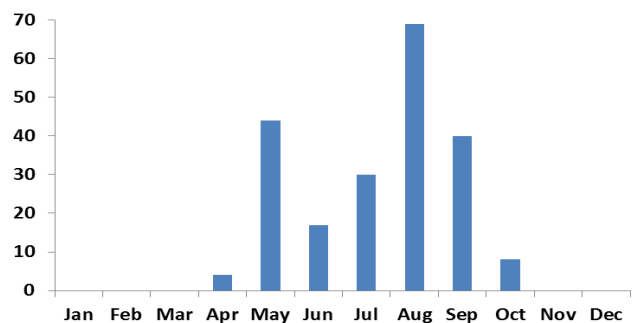


R. Esk, Longtown, 18th May 2008 (N. Franklin)

In total there have been about 210 new occurrences of which nearly 88% have involved single birds. Two birds have occurred together on 16 occasions, six of which involved a second bird joining a bird already present. There have been five instances of three together, again two of which involved new birds at already occupied sites. Other than the five already mentioned at Edenhall in 1867, there are just two records of more together. Both were at South Walney and involved eight on 14th September 1970 and up to 11 between 9th and 18th August 1980. Subsequently one remained here from 25th August to 14th October 1980 and remains the longest staying bird in the county (WBO 2020).

The earliest bird ever recorded was on the River Esk at Longtown on 25th April 2007. There are three further April records and 14 up to and including 9th May. After a short hiatus records resume on 13th May and are at their commonest for the next 10 days. From 23rd May onwards there are records of eight new birds in the remainder of May and nine more up to and including 15th June. This latest bird being on that date at Mere Tarn in 1989. A gap to the next at Askam Pier on the Duddon Estuary on 21st June 1990 suggests a demarcation between spring and autumn passage after mid-June. Seven further records in the remainder of June are followed by an even spread through July followed by a significant increase in August peaking mid-month. Numbers fall for the remainder of autumn. There are only three records in September after the 25th and a further eight in October, with the latest at South Walney on 20th October 1990 and at North Walney on 21st October 1995 (WBO 2020). There are no winter records.

Month of first occurrence



The vast majority of records have been on or near the coast with only 17 further inland than 6 km. Most have been on ponds, scrapes, floodwater or river banks. South Walney is the most favoured site with about 57 occurrences of new birds (27%) followed by the upper Kent Estuary with 16 and Campfield Marsh on the inner Solway Estuary with 15. The eastern end of the Solway and surrounds has also been prolific with the River Esk and Ponds at Longtown and the River Eden up river of Rockcliffe 11 records each and Rockcliffe Marsh itself a further eight. Further west Siddick Pond has nine records. With inland records rare it is noteworthy that Thacka Flash and adjacent reserve at Penrith had four records of individuals between 2009 and 2011 including two of only three inland spring records. The only other truly inland site to have more than one record is Sunbiggin Tarn in the Augusts of 1974 and 1986.

**Number of occurrences at different sites up to 2019** (ordered north to south, from west to east)

R. Esk & Ponds, Longtown	11	Santon Bridge	1	High Foulshaw/Ulpha Meadows	6
R. Eden, Carr Beds to Rockcliffe	11	Irt Estuary	6	Halforth-Sandside	10
Rockcliffe Marsh, Solway Estuary	8	Eskholme Marsh, Esk Estuary	1	Arnside Marsh	1
Drumburgh Moss	1	Kirksanton	1	Silverdale Moss flood	1
Port Carlisle	1	Haverigg	1	Crofton Lake	1
Campfield Marsh, Bowness	15	Hodbarrow	3	Low Mill, Dalston	1
Grune Point & Skinburness	5	Kirkby Pool	1	Cummersdale	1
Thornhill Meadows, Abbeytown	1	Askam Pier	1	Abbott Moss, Armathwaite	1
Wedholme Flow, Kirkbride	7	Roanhead-Sandscale Haws	3	R. Eden, Armathwaite	1
Blackdyke, Silloth	1	North Walney	1	Thacka, Penrith	4
Broughton Moor, Great Broughton	1	Standing Tarn, Dalton in Furness	1	Sewage Farm, Brougham	1
Arkleby Floods, Aspatria.	1	Biggar Bank/Rakes Lane, Walney Island	2	Edenhall	1
Tarns Dub, Aspatria	1	South Walney	57	Mallerstang	1
Siddick Pond	9	Roosecote Marsh, Furness Coast	5	Sunbiggin Tam	2
Parton	1	Foulney Island	1	R.Sprint, Burneside	1
St Bees	2	Mere Tarn	5	Fisher Tarn	1
R. Ehen	1	Bardsea	1	Lupton Beck, Hornsbarrow	1
Petersburgh, Beckermert	1	Ulverston	1		
Sellafield	2	Castle Head, Lindale	1		

# Baird's Sandpiper

## *Calidris bairdii*

An autumn vagrant

Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

O'Brien, M., Crossley, R. & Karlson, K. 2006. The Shorebird Guide. Houghton Mifflin, New York

## Baird's Sandpiper

### *Calidris Bairdii*

#### Vagrant

Totals up to 2019	Pre 1950	Post 1950	Total
No. in Cumbria	0	2	2

Baird's Sandpipers breed on the northern tundra ranging from Eastern Siberia, through North Alaska and Arctic Canada to Western Greenland. They are a long distance migrant, moving south through the Great Plains and along the Pacific coast of North America to winter along the western and southern seaboard of South America (O'Brien et al. 2006).

In Britain they are a rare vagrant averaging about seven birds per year during the decade 2010-19 (Holt et al. 2020). Most records are in autumn with September the favoured month. Most birds at this time are juveniles (Parkin & Knox 2010).

There have been only two records in Cumbria, both of single birds in the south of the county and characteristically both in September. The first on Arnside Marsh on the Kent Estuary on 25th September 1979 remained until 30th September. The second was a juvenile bird that frequented the Gate Pool on South Walney on 14th and 15th September 1994 (WBO 2020).

Year	Date	Location	Sub Location	No.	Age	Details	Observer
1979	25 – 30 Sep	Kent Estuary	Arnside Marsh	1			J. Wolsencroft
1994	14 – 15 Sep	Walney Island	South Walney	1	juv	on the Gate Pool	B. Makin, P. Zaltowski

# Black Guillemot

*Cepphus grylle*

An uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant, scarce in winter;  
breeds in very small numbers at one colony – St Bees Head.



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard references

Bennet, J.W. & Burns, P.S. 1940. Black Guillemots breeding in Cumberland. *British Birds* 34: 93-94

\*Bleazard, E. 1960. Birds on St Bees Head. *Cumbria*: 54

\*Cramp, S., Bourne, W.R.P. & Saunders, D. 1974. The Black Guillemot: numbers at St Bees. In *The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland*: 182

\*Franklin, N. 2014. An Inland Black Guillemot - with a twist in the tale. *Cumbria Bird Club News* 25: No. 34-35

\*Hind, C. 2017. The Whitehaven Black Guillemot. *Cumbria Bird Club News* 28: 13-14

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Records

**2020** St Bees standard count: 3 but 10 on 8th July. Records from Whitehaven, Biggar (Walney), Foulney

**2021** St Bees standard count: 4 but 7 in early April and mid-July. Records from Workington, Whitehaven, Tarn Bay (Bootle), Silecroft, Walney

**2022** St Bees standard count: 7 but 10 on 25th March. Records from Silecroft, Walney

**2023** St Bees standard count: 8. Records from Workington, Whitehaven, Mite Estuary (Ravenglass), Biggar (Walney), South Walney, Foulney,

**Photograph: Whitehaven Harbour, June 2008 (D. Shackleton)**

# Black Guillemot

## *Cephus grylle*

**An uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant, scarce in winter; breeds in very small numbers at St Bees Head.**

Black Guillemots breed around the Arctic Ocean and the northern North Atlantic. They remain close to their colonies in inshore waters outside the breeding season though a degree of dispersal is likely.

The majority of the British Isles population is found in Scotland and declined slightly in the early part of the 21st Century. The small Cumbrian colony at St Bees head is the only English colony and is at the southern edge of its UK range with only small numbers to the south in Wales. The nearest colonies are in south-west Scotland and on the Isle of Man, the latter of which held 602 individuals between 1998-2002 but had declined to 211 by 2015-21 (Mitchell et al 2004, Burnell et al, 2023).

### British Isles breeding population (individuals)

1998-02	2015-21
43,535	39,523

*Mitchell et al. 2004, Burnell et al. 2023*

Macpherson (1892) related the shooting of two individuals near Whitehaven about 60 years previously which, while being the first documented record for Cumbria, also hints at possible occupation of the coastline on or near St Bees Head. However it was over a century later in 1940 that breeding was first confirmed here (Blezard 1943). This has remained its only Cumbrian breeding site and indeed the only site in England.

In the intervening period there were just six records, two of which concerned birds at Silloth in 1986 and inland of Silloth in October 1891 (Macpherson 1892). Three were at St Bees in April 1921, July 1932 and July 1935, with a fourth nearby to the south at Seascale in March 1928 (Blezard 1943, Stokoe 1962). All were of singles other than the 1935 record which concerned two. Three pairs bred at St Bees Head in 1940 (Bennet & Burns 1940). There is a paucity of immediately subsequent records with the next in 1943 and then not until 1949 when again three pairs were seen (Brown 1974). Thereafter there are almost annual records of up to three pairs with four in 1954 (Stokoe Archive). Indeed Stokoe (1962) asserted that one to three pairs bred annually. Records suggest this probably remained the case up until the mid-1970s.

With the establishment of an RSPB Reserve in 1974 and a constant summer wardening presence, numbers started to apparently increase, though possibly because of increased observer effort and in 1978 there were at least five breeding pairs and a maximum of 12 birds. Annual reserve reports up to and including 1992 suggest an assessment of breeding numbers was made by a non-standardised combination of observed nesting holes and birds present. In most years a maximum count was given but often without a date. Subsequent count methods have involved a standardised pre-season count of birds to reduce the chance of counting non-breeding prospecting birds later in the season. That these standard counts have rarely been exceeded by later counts at St Bees suggests this may not be a significant issue at what is reasonably isolated site. Hence it is reasonable to assume that pre 1993 counts are comparable with counts after this date with the proviso that there has not been a constant wardening presence since 1995. This being the case it would appear the population peaked at 15 birds in 1987 and 1988 after which there was a gradual decline. There was something of a brief resurgence



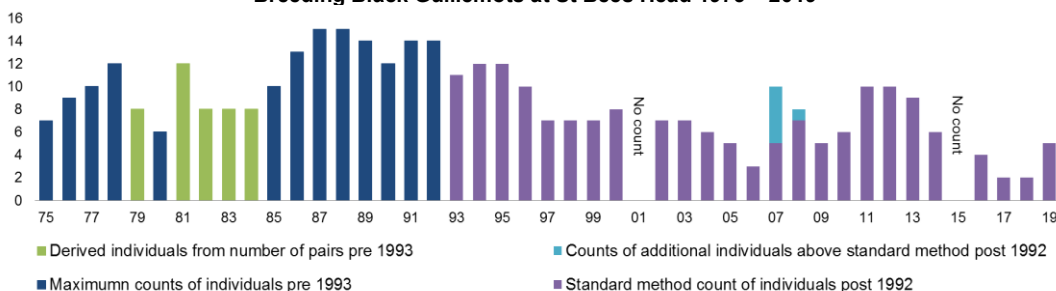
St Bees Head, 31st May 2018 (T. Marsh)

in possibly 2007 and 2008 and then 2011 and 2012 but the population reached its lowest point of two birds in 2017 and 2018. Stokoe's personal notes from the 1950s to the early 1970s suggest most nesting sites were in Fleswick Bay either on the south head or at the south end of the north head. However in 1957 he describes a "usual nest site" well north of the lighthouse. RSPB reports in the 1970s and 1980s described most sites between the main viewpoint and either side of Fleswick Bay with mention of a pair below the lighthouse in 1981. More recently all records have come from either side of Fleswick Bay.

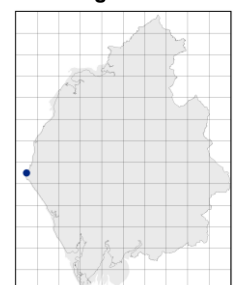
At the end of the breeding season at St Bees there are a decreasing number of records through July with just four August records, the latest on 11th August 1956, but remarkably they include 10 on 1st August 2007 and seven on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008. There are no September records and only one in October of one on 11th October 1957. With no records in November and December and a single bird on 11th January 1994 the only record for that month, it appears the species is absent from the breeding site in mid-winter. The earliest of just seven February records is on 1st February 2004 with four of the remaining six after 20<sup>th</sup> February and only four of the 17 March records are in the first half of that month. This suggests birds are not regularly present until mid-March. However this scarcity of pre-breeding season records may also reflect the lack of observer visits to the headland at this time of year.

The outer Solway coast north of the St Bees headland to Workington hosted only two records prior to 1987 concerning a single in Whitehaven Harbour on 10th January 1979 and one in Workington Harbour on 21st January 1982. Since 1987 it has regularly produced records with those between March and August outnumbering winter records by roughly two to one, raising the intriguing possibility of overlooked breeding. However these records could equally relate to failed breeders or particularly later in the summer dispersing birds from either St Bees or other Irish Sea colonies. Birds have been reported twice in Saltom Bay, both in the summer of 2011 which could have been from St Bees itself. Whitehaven Harbour has hosted birds in 15 of 32 summers between 1988 and 2019. The peak period was between 2008 and 2010 when up to four were present between early May and early August 2008, up to three between late April and mid July 2009 and up to two between late April and early June 2010. There are records from Parton Bay in 10 summers, Lowca in four and Harrington in one. Most have been of single or two birds together

### Breeding Black Guillemots at St Bees Head 1975 – 2019

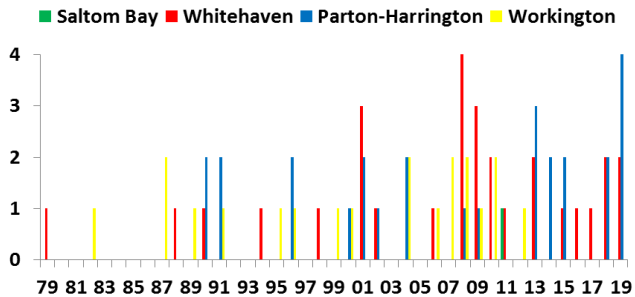


### Breeding distribution



but there were three off Parton on 1st May 2013 and four on 11th July 2015, and on several occasions birds have remained in the area for several days. Workington Harbour has records from 15 of the 33 summers since 1987, mostly of single birds and occasionally two, but generally appears to have held birds for shorter periods in summer than Whitehaven Harbour, exceptions being up to two in the second half of June 2004 and again up to two throughout June 2008.

**Maximum counts at Outer Solway bays and harbours**



There are 10 further March to August records north of Workington as far as Silloth, all of which involved single birds other than two off Silloth on 23rd August 1994. Likewise there are seven records for the Inner Solway from Grune Point eastwards, again of single birds other than a remarkable record of two which frequented the Rockcliffe Marsh coast line at the extreme east end of the estuary for an extended period between 12th August and 9th September 1990. Immediately south of the St Bees nesting site there are remarkably few records in spring and summer with just 12 records south to Sellafeld and a further 20 south as far as Silecroft. All have been since 1981

These Solway and West coast inshore waters have generated a further 63 records between September and February. Other than two dead birds at Maryport in November 1954 and January 1955 respectively (Stokoe 1962), all have been since 1977 and most have been of single birds but with five involving two. Notable was one which frequented Workington Dock between 1st October and 25th December 1995 and one likewise in Whitehaven Harbour between 16th January and 3rd February 2017.

There are perhaps surprisingly just two records from the Duddon Estuary, both of singles from Haverigg/Hodbarrow on 15th October 1981 and 15th May 1984. Much more significant an area are the inshore waters off Walney Island from Earnse Bay southwards where birds have been reported in all months. There are only three records prior to 1974 in July 1964, August 1966 and October 1968, but since 1974 it has occurred annually with a distinct peak in records in September, October and November. Like other sites the majority of records have involved single birds but two have occurred regularly and there are about 13 records of three birds, four records of four in September 1995, September 1999, April 2003 and November 2003 and a maximum of five on 12th December 1997. Notably there is a rare instance of a bird not on the sea when a juvenile was on the pools South Walney on 4th October 2019 (WBO 2020).

Almost equally important are the adjacent waters of the Piel Channel around Roa Island and off Foulney Island where it has also been reported in all months but not annually. With seven records of singles between 1961 and 1966 (Field Naturalist, Stokoe Archive), it was not reported here again until 1976, after which it has been reported in 23 of the 44 years since but not since 2014. The peak of occurrence here is in September and October with a low in February and March. Again single birds are in the majority but two together feature 14 times, three on four occasions, four twice and remarkably seven in September 1999. This was part of an apparent influx in the autumn of that year where four were still present in October, three in November and two in December. The autumn of 1996 also saw a similar influx with three in October, four in November and three in December.

The only record further east in Morecambe Bay concerns an ailing bird by Arnside Viaduct on the Kent Estuary on 24th September 1968 (Hutcheson 1986). There are just two inland records. The first was caught in a ditch adjacent to the Solway between Silloth and Abbey Holme in October 1891 (Macpherson 1892) and one much further inland which remained on Talkin Tarn for three days in December 2013.

Two ringed birds have been found in Cumbria and both had been ringed on Copeland Island on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The first had been ringed as a chick in July 1994 and was found dead at Newbiggin on the Furness Coast in August 1996 and the second was ringed in July 2005 and was found dead a month later at Silloth on the Solway Estuary (Robinson et al. 2020)

**Inland records**

Date	Location	No.	Details
October 1891	Silloth to Abbey Holme	1	Caught in a ditch
20–22 Dec 2013	Talkin Tarn	1	



**Talkin Tarn, 22nd December 2013 (N. Franklin)**

# Little Auk

## *Alle alle*

**A scarce winter visitor, usually storm-driven**



**Data included up to 2019**

### **Non-standard References**

- \*Astley, A. 1920. Little Auk inland in Westmorland. *British Birds* 14: 189
  - \*Astley, A. 1927. Little Auk inland in Westmorland in May. *British Birds* 21: 47-48
  - Birdlife International. 2022. *Species Factsheet: Alle alle*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org>
  - \*Macpherson, H.A. 1900. Little Auk on the Solway Firth. *Annals of Scottish Natural History* 9: 123
  - \*Robson, R.W. 1955. Little Auk exhausted at Appleby. *Penrith & District NHS Newsletter* 1955: no.12
  - \*Sergeant, DE. 1952. Little Auks in Britain 1948 – 51. *British Birds* 45: 122-134
- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### **Post 2019 Records**

- 2019/20** No records
- 2020/21** No records
- 2021/22** 1 off Biggar Bank, Walney 22nd October, 6th November, 18th November
- 2022/23** 1 off Biggar Bank, Walney 8th - 10th January

**Photograph: Flimby Rugby Pitch, 19th November 2003 (T. Reid)**

# LITTLE AUK

## *Alle alle*

A scarce winter visitor, usually storm-driven

At least 150 records involving about 210 birds

Little Auk breeds in large colonies in the Arctic from Baffin Island eastward through Greenland, Iceland, Svalbard, Bear Island, the Jan Mayen Islands to the Islands of the western Russian Arctic (Birdlife International factsheet). It winters further south in the northern North Atlantic with late autumn storms displacing them close to coasts, sometimes in large numbers and primarily in Britain on the east coast. They are relatively scarce on the west coast of Great Britain and off Ireland.

Its occurrence in Cumbria is entirely dictated by rough weather, and despite being a pelagic species, 33 of the 151 records (22%) up to 2019 have been inland. Macpherson (1892) commented on its irregular occurrence but listed just five specific records of single exhausted or dead birds in the 19th Century and Durnford (1883) noted washed up birds on Walney Island. Additionally there was a further record of a wreck involving many dead or exhausted birds in the Carlisle and Penrith areas in 1895 (Blezard 1943). There are a further 23 records up to 1970 again mostly of wrecked singles. These include another large wreck on the English west coast in January and February 1912 when individuals were found at Rockcliffe on the Solway and in the Eden Valley and remarkably a flock of about 30 was seen flying over a Grouse Moor at Kirkby Lonsdale on 7th February of that year with several found dead locally (Blezard 1943). One in Kentmere on 5th November 1959 preceded a smaller wreck in Late December 1959 / early January 1960 accounting for between two and four individuals at Aldingham on the Leven Estuary, one on Foulney Island and one inland at Crosthwaite. Remarkably the two birds seen off South Walney on 24th April 1966, though driven inshore by north-westerly winds, were the first birds reported in Cumbria which were not actually wrecked on land or in the confined waters of an estuary!

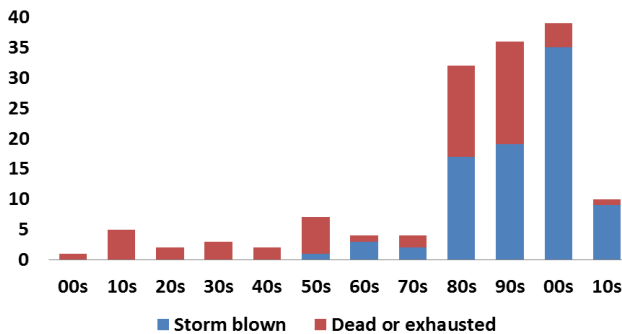


Flimby Rugby Pitch, 19th November 2003 (T. Reid)

Small wrecks or associated passage events have continued to occur. There have been eight such since 1980. The period 13th November 1982 to 13th February 1983 accounted for five inland birds as widely spaced as Distington, Argill near Stainmore, Dentdale and two on Windermere with two birds also logged off Walney. Likewise from 4th January 1984 to 26th February 1984 seven birds were reported with casualties at Gosforth, Shap and Nethertown with three birds at Walney and one at Whitehaven. Nine, four of which were exhausted or dead were reported between 10th January and 18th February 1988 although only one was inland at Bassenthwaite. Twelve between 1st November 1990 and 13th February 1991 included at least nine dead or exhausted birds but again only one was inland at Burneside near Kendal. This unfortunate bird was taken into care and subsequently released on the Kent Estuary but was shot 90 minutes later by a wildfowler!

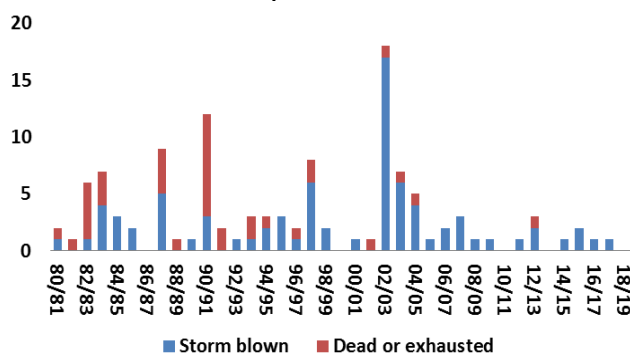
Between 4th November 1997 and 3rd January 1998 at least 15 were reported but involved only three wrecked birds. The remainder were logged off South Walney including seven on 29th November and three the following day. Similarly 50 birds were logged offshore in significant numbers between 25th October 2002 and 4th February 2003 with no inland casualties and only one wrecked bird which was oiled. Walney and Silecroft accounted for most with the latter site logging 20 on 31st December alone, while ten flew past Bowness on Solway in that period. The following winter also saw a displacement event with seven birds between 10th October 2003 and 6th January 2004, all were coastal and only one exhausted. The last such event took place between the early date of 19th September 2004 and 9th January 2005 involving five coastal birds and only one inland wrecked bird. Perhaps remarkably of the 17 records since that date until 2019 only one has been an inland wrecked bird at Shap on 17th November 2012.

Number of occurrences by decade

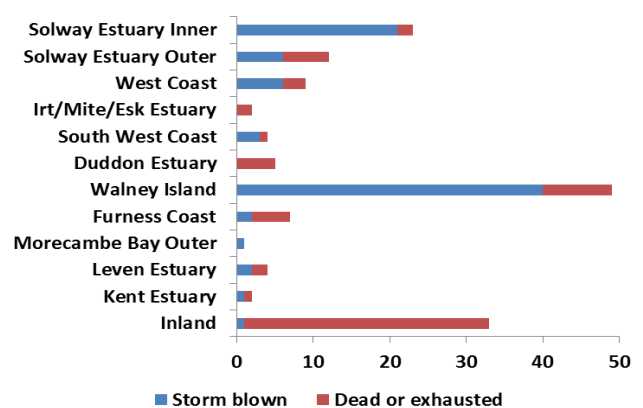


Prior to 1980 it was much less than annual but with the advent of better optics and an upturn in interest in seawatching particularly off Walney Island, records increased from the early 1980s onwards. Since that time there have been only five winters without records up to the winter of 2018/19.

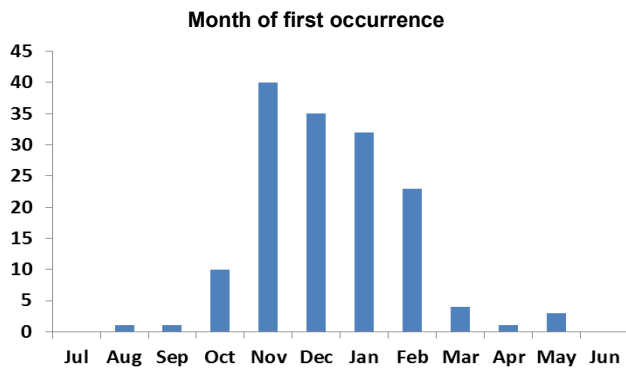
Number of records per winter 1980/81 – 2018/19



Occurrence by location



The earliest Autumn record was a dying bird at Haverigg on the Duddon Estuary on 1st August 1980 followed by one on 19th September 2004 at Skinburness on the Solway Estuary. There are three records from the first ten days of October with the next earliest on 23rd October after which records become more typical with a peak of first occurrence in November. Records diminish through the winter with a big drop after mid-February with just five records in the second half of February, four records in March and one in April. The latest are on 5th May 1927 at Ambleside, 11th May 1964 at Ravenglass and 17th May 1970 at South Walney.



All records have involved either coastal fly pasts or wrecked birds some of which have been taken into care. There are two records of wrecked birds that had prolonged stays. One from 15th to 20th December 1984 on the pools at South Walney and one on 11th/12th December 1997 on the Ulverston Canal which was assumed to have relocated to Ramsden Dock at Barrow from 15th to 28th December and was then taken into care before being released at South Walney.

Wrecked birds have turned up in odd places including in a farm building at Colby near Appleby on 23rd November 1955, in a housing estate in Workington on 30th December 1979, in a chicken run at Askam in Furness on 1st November 1990 and on Flimby rugby pitch on 19th November 2003.

# Sandwich Tern

## *Thalasseus sandvicencis*

A common summer visitor and passage migrant; breeds in moderate numbers



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- Anderson, N., & Evans, P.R. 1987. *Reasons for the decline in bird numbers breeding near the Ravenglass Estuary*. Radioactive Waste Management Research Programme DOE/RW-88.028
- \*Anon. 1909. The fish hatchery, Piel and Walney gullery. *Transactions of the Barrow Naturalists' Club* 17: 44-45
- \*Anon. 1909. Migration of terns. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 34: 402
- \*Bickerton, W. 1908. The Sandwich Tern (Ravenglass). *Country Life*: 3<sup>rd</sup> October
- \*Brown, R.H. 1926. New nesting colony of Sandwich Tern in Cumberland. *British Birds* 20: 108
- \*Brown, R.H. 1926. Young Sandwich Terns going to ground in hot weather. *British Birds* 20: 108-109
- Cabot, D. & Nesbit, I. 2013. *Terns*. HarperCollins, London
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- \*Donato, B. 2020. Sandwich Tern colour ringing at Hodbarrow. *Birds and Wildlife in Cumbria* 2019: 228-230
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### Post 2019 Records

- 2020 Range:** 24th March to 9th October. **Breeding:** 638 prs. fledged 171 yg. at Hodbarrow
- 2021 Range:** 22nd March to 1st November. **Breeding:** 765 prs. fledged 533 yg. at Hodbarrow
- 2022 Range:** 17th March to 25th November. **Breeding:** 589 prs. fledged between 238 and 884 yg. at Hodbarrow
- 2024 Range:** 17th March to 6th November. **Breeding:** 596 prs. fledged about 335 yg. at Hodbarrow. **High counts:** 1000 South Walney 18th August.  
**Inland:** 1 dead Ambleside 20th November

Photograph: Hodbarrow, July 2008 (L. Gould)

# Sandwich Tern

## *Thalasseus sandvicencis*

**A common summer visitor and passage migrant; breeds in moderate numbers, currently only at one colony**

Sandwich Terns have a fragmented breeding distribution around the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean. There are three races, of which the nominate *sandvicencis* breeds in Europe and winters on the coast of West Africa. The European population was estimated at 69,000 to 79,000 pairs in 2004, with Britain and Ireland holding about 20% (Mitchell et al. 2004). Between year numbers vary because of variation in the number of adults attempting to breed and distribution can be affected by relocation events between colonies.

In the British Isles, most of the population is found in a few large colonies, with the North Sea and Irish Sea coasts strongly favoured with few large colonies north of Northumberland. Following near extinction through hunting and egg collecting by the end of the 19th century, the population is thought to have increased up to at least the 1980s following legal protection, and has fluctuated since.

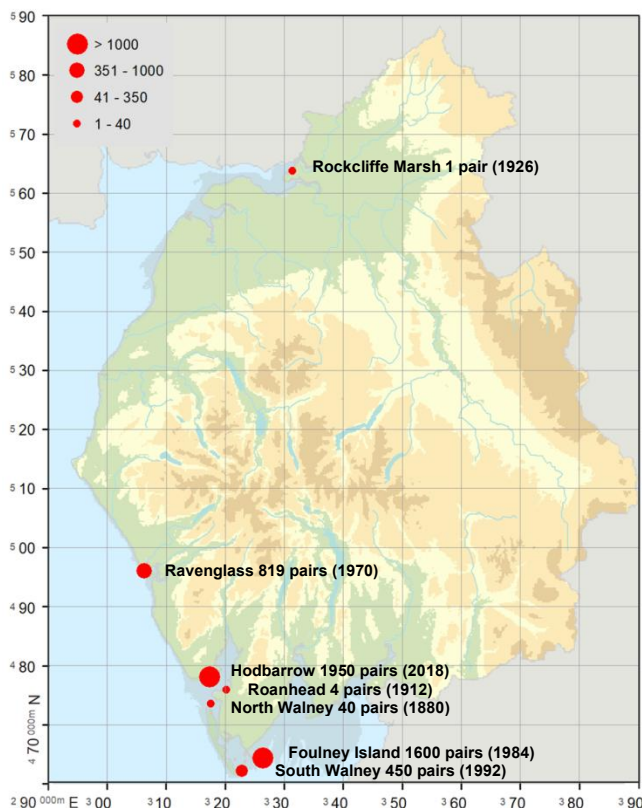
**British Isles breeding population** (apparently occupied nests)

1969-70	1985-88	1998-02	2015-21
12,073	16,047	14,257	15,484

*Cramp et al. 1974, Lloyd et al. 1991, Mitchell et al. 2004, Burnell et al. 2023*

Located on the edge of the Irish Sea, Cumbria has probably always been an important county for breeding Sandwich Terns and also attracts passage migrants, particularly in late summer and autumn. The first recorded nesting in the county was at North Walney in 1843 (MacPherson 1892) and in all breeding may have taken place at seven sites on the coast. Of these, Roanhead on the Duddon Estuary was only occupied by four pairs in 1912 and then only again the following year (Blezard 1943, Oakes 1953) while Rockcliffe Marsh on the Solway held a pair only in 1926 (Blezard 1943), and North Walney has had no documented breeding since 1946. They are prone to relocate colonies and/or have years of non-breeding, particularly in response to disturbance or predation events (Mitchell et al. 2004) and, although impossible to prove, the history of the Cumbrian colonies appears to reflect this propensity from the middle of the 20th century onwards. Currently there is just one breeding colony at Hodbarrow.

Maximum counts of all colonies



**Allonby Bay, Solway Estuary, April 2008** (*D. Shackleton*)

Detailed or annual site histories are not available before the second half of the 20th century, but it is known that the Walney Island gulleries and terneries received the attention of both egg-collectors and 'sportsmen' in the latter half of the 19th century. Oakes (1953) implied consistent occupation of the north end of the Island between 1843 and 1889, with 40 pairs in 1880. By 1889, it was abandoned in favour of South Walney where nesting was first recorded in 1879. However, by 1901, breeding had ceased here too but had restarted by at least 1909 when four pairs were in attendance. This rose to 30 pairs in 1912 but was followed by another decline during World War I. There was a post-war recovery peaking in 1930 when, though no count is available, 535 chicks were ringed, suggesting a substantial breeding population (Oakes 1953). Predation by Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls in 1932 virtually extinguished the South Walney colony, with birds possibly relocating to Ravenglass to the north, where 12 pairs in 1930 increased to 360 in 1932 (Robinson 1932). While the remnants of the main South Walney colony continued to attract the predatory attention of large gulls between 1933-1935, a second site at South Walney established in 1933 and increased steadily to 1940 and held a substantial enough population for 300 chicks to be ringed in 1938. Wartime saw another decline as troops were billeted on the south end of the Island with very few birds present in 1945 and the only nest found in 1946 was at North Walney. Remarkably, in 1947 there were 40 pairs (Oakes 1953), increasing to 350 pairs in 1949. There were still 250 pairs in 1952 and breeding continued until 1957, after which the colony was abandoned. There were brief revivals between 1969 and 1971 when up to 250 pairs bred, in 1986 and 1987, with a maximum of 180 pairs in the latter year and in 1992, when 450 pairs were believed to have been displaced from Hodbarrow.

Breeding appears to have been sporadic at North Walney in the early 20th century, with confirmed breeding in just 1933 (25 pairs) and 1946 (one pair), presumably as a result of predation and disturbance events at South Walney (Oakes 1953, Dean 1990).

The Ravenglass colony established sometime immediately prior to 1887 holding ten pairs at that time (MacPherson 1892). It continued to increase until at least 1909 when over 100 nests were found, but by 1915 there were only 15 and just seven in 1923 and 12 in 1930. The following year saw a big increase to 70 nests and by 1932 there were between 365 and 379 nests (Marples 1934), it becoming the premier colony in the county. From then on, its numbers fluctuated but remained high until the mid-1970s. There is little data on productivity at this colony, though, as with other tern species, it was subject to years of very low breeding success. One such was in 1938 when storms and continuous rain caused near-total or complete failure. As with the Black-headed Gull colony here, within which it nested, it probably benefitted from the protection from predators provided by the gulls, the estate through keeping and the presence of researchers from Oxford University who also deterred predators. However, there were still predation events, mostly involving foxes, which probably impacted the terns as well as the gulls. Fox control was ended in 1966 and this appears to have had little immediate impact on tern numbers as the period 1967 to 1976 saw the highest numbers at the colony, peaking at about 800 pairs in 1970 and 1971. However, fox predation began to have serious impact on the gulleries from the mid-1970s and while the gulls hung on until the early 1980s, there

was a sharp decline from 725 pairs to 150 pairs of Sandwich Terns between 1976 and 1977. The colony was abandoned after the latter year (Anderson & Evans 1987, Simpson 2001).

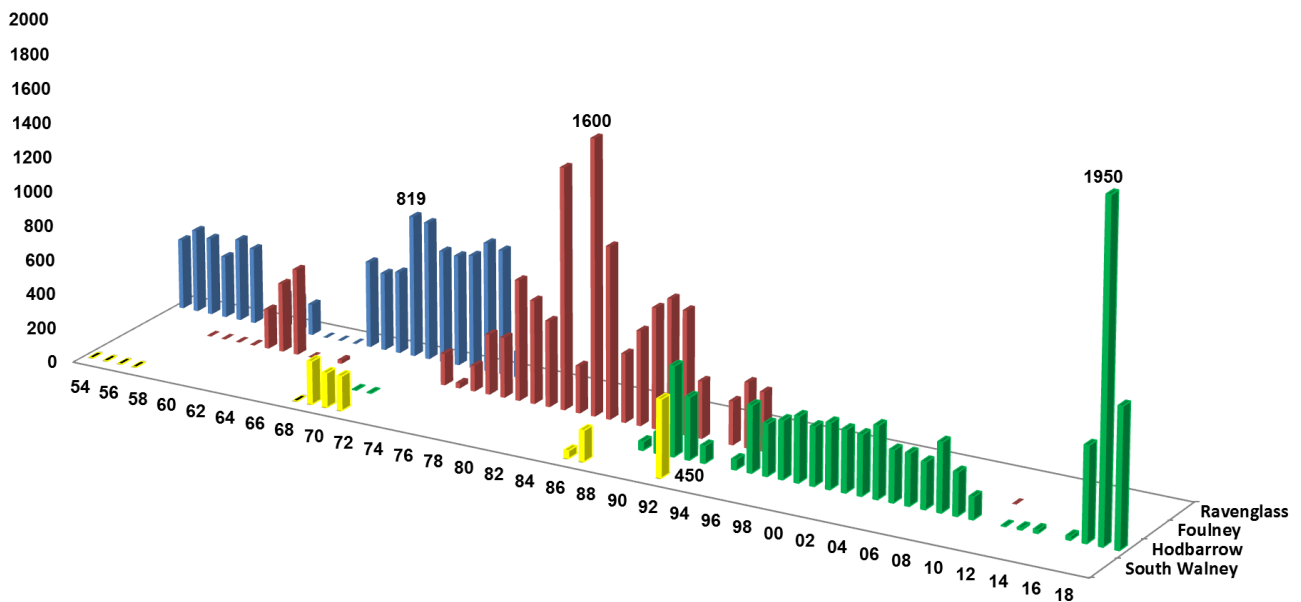
Breeding was first recorded on Foulney Island in 1958 when two pairs were present, and remained at that low level until 1962 when 230 pairs occupied the Island, increasing to 400 pairs in 1964. This was during a time of lower breeding numbers at Ravenglass and could have involved some displacement from here. In 1964, a combination of predation by Black-headed Gulls, stoats and rats and bad weather caused total breeding failure (Evans 1964) and by 1968, the site was abandoned. Breeding resumed in 1974 with the arrival of a substantial 184 pairs. Though numbers were still high at Ravenglass, the decline here in 1977 coincided with an increase to 350 pairs at Foulney, and with the extinction of the Ravenglass colony in 1978, Foulney became the county's only breeding site for several years. With protection from wardening, it thrived, attaining 1600 pairs in 1984 with consistently high breeding success, e.g. 1120 young from 1400 pairs in 1982 (Dean 1990). Following 770 pairs in 1990, the population halved the following year and in 1992 the site was abandoned, when, perhaps not by coincidence, 450 pairs occupied nearby South Walney for one year only. Numbers recovered at Foulney between 1993 and 1995, though not to mid-80's levels, but the site was abandoned after 1995 apart from a single failed breeding attempt by one pair in 2011. Recent attempts to attract birds here using decoys have attracted a handful of summering birds in recent years but so far with no breeding attempts.

Other than a reference to probable breeding in 1970 and 1971 (West Cumberland Field Society 1973), Hodbarrow Lagoon attracted its first 50 breeding pairs in 1989, rising quickly to 520 in 1991. Though the colony was vacated briefly in 1994, birds

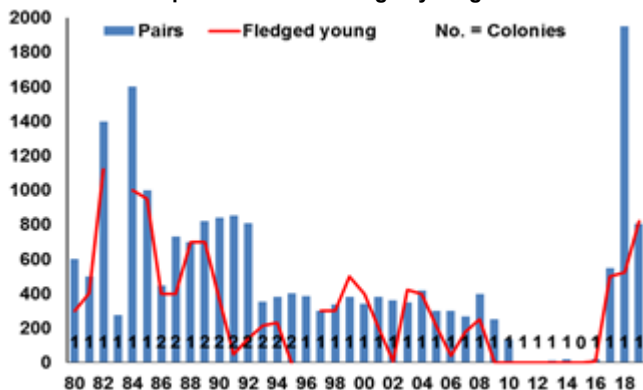
returned the following year and a large colony was present annually until 2010, peaking at 420 pairs in 2004, and has been the only colony since the demise of the Foulney colony in 1996. In its early years, productivity here was extremely poor, with young fledging only in 1990 (20 from 120 nests), with fox and stoat the main culprits. Subsequently, it improved through protection measures and a remarkable 500 fledged from 380 nests in 1999. However, it remained variable, with total failure the following year. In 2009, only one bird fledged from 250 pairs, with both predation and lack of food implicated. After a halving of the population in 2010 to 130 pairs, Hodbarrow became vacant in 2011. A pair may have attempted in 2012 and 10 pairs in 2013, but with no success and similarly 20 pairs in 2014. 2015 saw a re-occupation of the colony by up to 350 birds but with no evidence of breeding and in 2016 up to 1000 birds were in attendance and although there were only 22 nests at least 7 young fledged. In 2017 250 pairs arrived and settled fairly early in the season. They were joined by 300 pairs in mid-June which were suspected to have abandoned the Cemlyn Bay colony on Anglesey and 500 young fledged. This resurgence continued in 2018 when a remarkable 1950 pairs – the highest colony count ever from any site in Cumbria, fledged 525 young and although the colony more than halved in size to 805 pairs in 2019, it fledged 820 young. This recent high success rate being promoted by concerted efforts to protect the colony from both mammalian predators and gulls (RSPB Annual reports).

There is good productivity data from 1980 onwards showing a typically high degree of variation. In two years there was complete failure where breeding numbers were large. In five years it equated to more than one chick / pair with a high of 1.32 chicks / pair (500 chicks from 380 pairs) in 1999 at Hodbarrow. Overall it has averaged 0.54 chicks per pair since 1980 gulls (RSPB Annual reports).

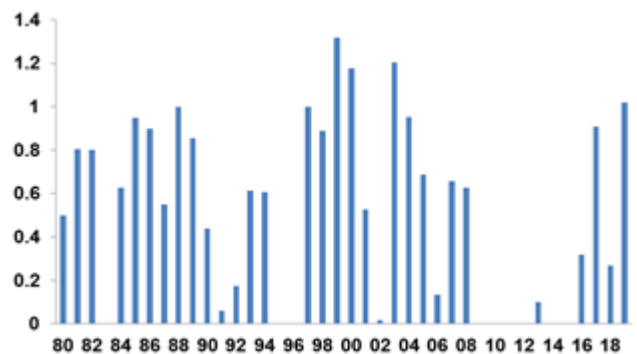
Number of pairs at colonies 1954 – 2019 (flat entries = occupied but number of pairs unknown)



Number of pairs and no. of fledged young 1980-2019

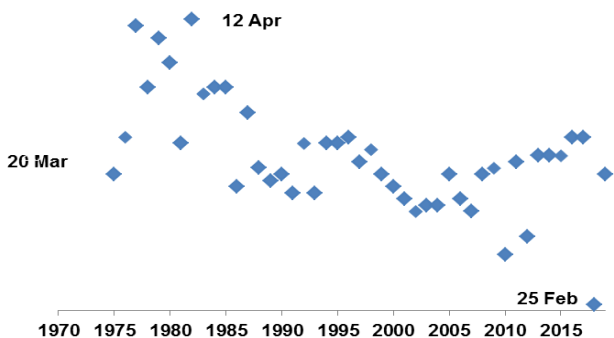


Number of young fledged per pair 1980-2019 (No data in 1983 and 1996)



In spring, birds begin to arrive in mid-March. The median first record date between 1970 and 2019 was 20th March, with the earliest ever being one on 25th February 2018 off Walney and then 16 on 5th March 2010 at Hodbarrow. Following the first arrivals, numbers can build quickly at nesting colonies and can exceed the eventual nesting population, e.g. 1100 at Hodbarrow on 13th May 2001 when 380 pairs bred in that year. The Duddon Estuary appears particularly important at this time of year and has been so even when the Hodbarrow colony was not occupied, e.g. Haverigg beach held 1100 on 29th April 1984. Elsewhere, there is no large build-up of birds, with a light passage off the west coast and in the Solway Estuary, except off Walney where numbers can be high throughout the summer, but are largely attributable to nearby breeding sites. Unexpected influxes have occurred in summer, notably 600 which appeared at Ravenglass, by then an extinct colony, on 29th June 1988. This event was attributed to displacement from another colony but if so, it is unlikely to have been the Foulney colony which had a successful breeding season in that year.

Spring first dates 1970 to 2019, Median date 20th March



Sandwich Terns do not immediately migrate south on dispersing from breeding colonies and can disperse in all directions in coastal areas (Cabot & Nesbit 2013). A build-up of birds on the west coast and sometimes in the Solway is evident from early July onwards. This is known to include a significant proportion of birds not from Cumbrian colonies as it includes a juvenile component, some of which are ringed when no chicks have been ringed in Cumbria that year and, indeed, in some years, no chicks have even fledged. The origin of these birds is unknown but with no large colonies on the west coast of Scotland, Lancashire, or the Isle of Man, the most likely sources are Ireland and North Wales. However, birds from North Sea colonies cannot be ruled out. A nestling ringed on the Farne Islands in Northumberland was recovered on the Isle of Man ten weeks later (Cullen & Jennings 1986). Examples of large roost counts at high tide during autumn and prior to 2013 included 400 at Kirksanton on the south west coast on 28th August 1983, 180 at Campfield Marsh on the Inner Solway on 19th August 2001, 159 at Port Carlisle also on the Inner Solway on 13th August 2001, 300 at Sellafield on 19th September 2001, 374 at Grune Point at the mouth of the Solway on 29th July 2003, and 733 at Haverigg on the Duddon Estuary on 1st September 2011.

With few local birds to impact on numbers following the cessation of breeding in Cumbria in 2011 and no or only a very small breeding population in the following five years, targeted counts of known roosts between Grune Point and the Duddon Estuary between 2013 and 2016 have quantified this influx. They showed a peak in numbers between the last week in July and the first week in September, with the timing of the peak varying from year to year. Highest total counts were 1566 on 6/7th September 2014, 1593 on 17/18th August 2015 and 1793 on 6/7th August 2016.

Highest autumn roost counts per site 2013 – 2016

Roost	Date	No
Grune Point	07 Aug 2016	253
Wolsty	19 Aug 2013	821
Crosscanonby	31 Jul 2015	74
Siddick	31 Aug 2014	440
Parton	24 Aug 2014	220
St Bees/Coulderton	24 Aug 2014	300
Sellafield	19 Aug 2016	900
Selker	24 Aug 2014	32
Haverigg/Hodbarrow/Borwick Rails	17 Aug 2015	913

Numbers declined after the first week in September and by the first week in October, no birds were found in roosts during these surveys (Shackleton unpub.). Nevertheless, a few birds linger and the median latest record between 1970 and 2019 was 8th October. However, there have been records throughout October, with several in the last week and notably one on 2nd November 2003 at Workington and the latest off Walney on 23rd November 2019. There are two mid-winter records involving singles at Sellafield on 9th January 2001 and off Workington on 27th December 2011 with presumably the same individual a day later off Kents Bank.

During spring, summer and autumn, birds can be seen around most of the coast. The south west coast holding the main breeding colonies from Ravenglass to Foulney, appears to have always been an attractive foraging area for both breeding and passage birds. It consistently holds substantially high numbers, particularly during autumn passage. Other areas to the north as far as Flimby Bay in the Outer Solway are also consistently occupied, again particularly in autumn but generally with smaller numbers. However, the further north east into the Solway, the less consistently it is used with low numbers in spring and summer and inconsistent presence in autumn. Allonby Bay only holds a small and sporadic autumn roost. The autumn roost at Wolsty was favoured much more so in 2013 than in the subsequent three years, and numbers in the Grune roost are likewise variable. Autumn roosts in the Inner Solway at Campfield Marsh and Port Carlisle appear to have been largely abandoned in recent years. These fluctuations perhaps relate to changing availability of food in adjacent waters both seasonally and in the longer term.

Though it occurs along the Furness coast off Walney Island in large numbers, in Morecambe Bay itself since the demise of the Foulney colony, it occurs in much smaller numbers. There are only a handful of records in some years and the further into the Leven Estuary, the more uncommon it gets. Exceptional counts have involved 178 at Baycliff on 22nd August 1988, 74 in the Leven Estuary on 16th May 2009, 124 at Rampside on 16th August 2010 and 69 roosting at Goadsbarrow on 26th August 2013. Perhaps surprisingly, considering there is a regular if light passage off Heysham in Lancashire towards the southern end of Morecambe Bay (LDBWS annual reports, Harrison 2000), there is very little penetration into the Kent Estuary. In fact, there are only nine documented records in annual bird reports between 1970 and 2019, with a maximum of six on 16th October 1988.

Birds have occasionally been reported fishing in Cavendish Dock at Barrow and in Hodbarrow Lagoon, and four were at Siddick Pond on 4th April 1985, but coastal lagoons are not an important foraging resource in Cumbria.

Overland passage of Sandwich Terns has been suggested in Britain (Ward 2000), but there is little evidence for this in Cumbria with just 21 inland occurrences.

**Inland records**

Date	Location	No	Details
12 Sep 1976	Whinell Tarn	1	juvenile
04 May 1978	Killington Reservoir	3	
05 Jul 1979	Carlisle	1	southward
21 Apr 1980	Carlisle	2	north-eastward
12 May 1987	R. Eden, Armathwaite	1	southward
15 Jun 1990	Killington Reservoir	3	
08 Jun 1996	R. Kent, Kendal	2	
30 Sep 1998	Killington Reservoir	1	adult
27 Jul 2000	Killington Reservoir	4	
17 Sep 2002	Talkin Tarn	1	
16 Jun 2003	Swindale, Shap	2	eastward
18 Aug 2004	Wet Sleddale Reservoir	1	
21 May 2005	Coniston Water	1	
27 May 2005	Bassenthwaite Lake	1	
26 Jun 2005	Stainton	2	
14 Aug 2006	Lake Windermere	1	
27 Jul 2011	Lake Windermere	2	adult + juvenile
16 May 2012	Lake Windermere	1	
28 Sep 2012	Lake Windermere	1	
06 May 2013	Killington Reservoir	2	northward
12 Aug 2014	Whinell Tarn	1	

Birds seen in Cumbria are either adult or juveniles. First-summer birds tend to stay in their winter quarters in West Africa (Wernham et al. 2002). There is just one example of this age group at Hodbarrow on 16th May 1999.



# Little Tern

## *Sternula albifrons*

A fairly common summer visitor and passage migrant;  
breeds in small numbers



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- \*Anon. 1909. The fish hatchery, Piel and Walney gullery. *Transactions of the Barrow Naturalists' Club* 17: 44-45  
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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

- 2020 Range:** 26th April to 9th October. **Breeding:** 11 prs. fledged 0 yg. at Hodbarrow, no successful prs. at Foulney, 6 prs. fledged 0 yg. at South Walney.  
**2021 Range:** 9th April to 14th August. **Breeding:** 47 prs. fledged 32 yg. at Hodbarrow, 21 prs. fledged 10 yg. at Foulney, 0 prs. at South Walney  
**2022 Range:** 18th April to 2nd August. **Breeding:** 44 prs. fledged 15 yg at Hodbarrow, 9 nests fledged 0 yg. at Foulney, 9-10 prs. fledged few yg. at South Walney  
**2023 Range:** 18th April to 30th August. **Breeding:** 53 prs. fledged 0 yg. at Hodbarrow, 1 pr. fledged 0 yg at Haverigg, 11 prs. fledged 6 yg. at Foulney, 10 prs. fledged 20 yg at South Walney

Photograph: Foulney, June 2008. (L. Gould)

## Little Tern

### *Sternula albifrons*

**A fairly common summer visitor and passage migrant; breeds in small numbers**

Little Terns breed in scattered colonies throughout the Western Palearctic, Asia and Australasia, mainly though not exclusively on the coast and are migratory.

British and Irish birds belonging to the nominate race *albifrons* are entirely coastal and winter in West Africa. The population increased in the latter part of the 20th Century but has since declined to its lowest level since surveys began.

**British Isles breeding population** (apparently occupied nests)

1969-70	1985-88	1998-02	2015-21
1,917	2,587	2,059	1,750

Cramp et al. 1974, Lloyd et al. 1991, Mitchell et al. 2004, Burnell et al. 2023

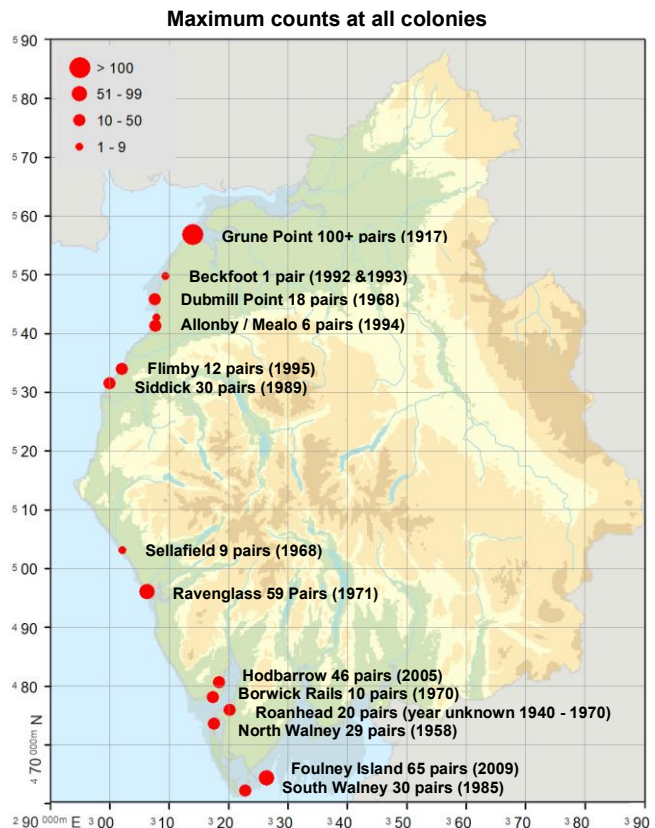
The specific site history of Little Terns in Cumbria is confused by a degree of secrecy in identifying sites. The threat of egg-collecting presumably the reason and compounded by the existence, but ephemeral nature of a minimum of 14 sites at which breeding has been confirmed. Being generally small colonies scattered along the coast and not always on nature reserves, there has also been a lack of year to year monitoring. Its preference for nesting on shingle beaches at or below the Spring tide high water level, makes nests susceptible to flooding and along with high levels of human disturbance and predation at many sites, creates a pattern of early failure and relaying, desertion and sometimes relocation to other sites. This means anything less than intensive monitoring gives an incomplete picture of colony status.

J. Heysham (1794) described the species as breeding in Cumberland but with no localities mentioned and his son T.C. Heysham writing in 1829 described it as a scarce visitor to the Solway Firth but received birds killed at Dubmill Point near Allonby on the Outer Solway in 1832 (Macpherson 1892). This may be the first documented breeding record. Mitchell (1885) added Foulney and Walney and Macpherson (1892) Skinburness and Ravenglass as breeding resorts, Macpherson also noting an autumn passage. Dunlop (1923) did not mention the species at all for the period up to 1913 though Hope (1923) up-dating Dunlop described there being several thriving colonies on the Cumberland coast, though not mentioning any specifically by name. Blezard (1943) and Oakes (1953) filled in some of the gaps, adding Roanhead as a breeding site. Blezard noted its susceptibility to flooding from high tides and drifting sand. Stokoe (1962) described small colonies of 15 to 20 pairs along the whole coast from Grune Point to Walney Island with colonies every three miles or so where there was uniform suitable habitat of shingle beach. Even as early as the early 1960s he had recognised not only natural threats but also disturbance to nesting colonies and attributed changes in productivity, numbers and locations to these factors. More recently the number of colonies has fluctuated, being as high as 10 in 1993 and as low as one between 2008 and 2012. Likewise the total number of pairs with a high of 77 in 1988 and just 18 in 1997.

The Grune Point colony is the furthest north known in the county and was occupied at least as early as 1843 (Marples 1954). Macpherson (1892) mentions adults being killed here. It held a pair in 1890 (Macpherson 1892) and Blezard (1943) believed it to hold a few pairs up to 1906 when there were 12 pairs present, and in 1917 he documented over 100 pairs. This appears to have been the pinnacle of the colony's growth after which it declined. There are records of 50 pairs in 1923, 30 in 1924 and 15 in 1925 (Brown 1972). However these are contradicted by Blezard (1943) who considered the colony had dwindled to almost none after 1919, though he reported 20 pairs in 1934 and presence in 1935 with 135 birds in August of that year. Between 1936 and 1942 numbers dwindled as a succession of bad breeding seasons took their toll (Blezard 1943). There are no further references to the site until about 20 birds with empty scrapes in May 1953 followed by about 20 pairs in 1954, occupation in at least 1957, but none in either 1960 or 1961 (Stokoe 1962). Again there is a data gap with the next documented record in 1968 of 15 nests between Skinburness and Grune Point. Breeding took place in 1970 (bird report) followed by a failed pair in 1971 (West Cumbria Field Society 1973) and at least two pairs in 1976 (J Callion pers. com.). In 1978 about 60



Little Tern (*T. Dean*)



present in late July were an un-typical congregation unless at least some were breeding. Fourteen were present in late May of the following year, but again with no specific evidence of breeding. An un-named Solway site held five juveniles in 1980 and may have been here, particularly considering there were records of up to 62 in late July of that year. Other than a record in mid-August 1984 which could have involved passage, the 1980s ended with summer records in all years from 1987 to 1990, before breeding was again confirmed in 1991. From then on there was annual breeding by mostly single figure numbers up to 2005, peaking at 13 in 2002, but with very poor productivity throughout. 2006 and 2007 saw birds present but no proved breeding and subsequently the site was vacated until a single nest was found in 2016, with occupation but with no proved breeding, again by one pair in 2017.

To the south the Outer Solway beaches between Beckfoot and Mealo have held colonies at various locations at different times. There are breeding records of mainly single figure order from Beckfoot, Dubmill Point, Allonby and Mealo with the first record in 1832 at Dubmill Point and another at the same location in 1891. Indeed Dubmill Point has been the main focus of activity and between 1921 and 1966 was regularly if not annually occupied with up to 30 pairs (Brown 1972). There was confirmed breeding here in 1968 when all 18 nests were robbed, with a further nest at Allonby (Stokoe archive), also at Mawbray in 1969 and 1970 and at Mealo

in 1971. There is a paucity of reports in the 1970s and most of the 1980s with only a record of two chicks ringed at Allonby in 1980 (J. Callion pers. com.). There are sporadic records at different sites from 1987 to 1995 with no more than two colonies occupied in any one year, except for three in 1993 when there were a total of 14 nests. An absence of records from 1996 to 1998 does not necessarily imply abandonment and indeed Dubmill Point held breeding birds from 1999 to 2007 with a maximum of seven pairs. However since 2007 the area appears to have been vacated.

Further south in the Outer Solway the Flimby to Siddick shore has only a more recent history with no records prior to 1980. However being similar in habitat to the beaches further north, it is most likely there was undocumented breeding prior to this. Indeed there is mention of birds at Siddick in 1971 but that “as usual they failed to breed because of disturbance” (West Cumberland Field Society 1973). From 1980 to 1984 and from 1987 to 1993 Siddick was annually occupied with a maximum of 30 pairs in 1989. Though 1989 saw a complete breeding failure, productivity here at this time was generally good including 32 chicks from 24 nests in 1988. Subsequent to 1993 there are just two colony counts of 12 pairs at Flimby in 1995 and 11 pairs at Siddick in 2000. Since then this length of coast also appears to have been vacated.

The coast from Workington to St Bees Head is less than optimal habitat with no breeding records. The long stretches of beach to the south of St Bees as far as Drigg Road End have just four confirmed breeding records all in the vicinity of Sellafeld, of nine nests in 1968, five to six pairs in 1970, seven nests in 1971 (Stokoe archive, J. Callion pers. com.) and one pair which fledged two young in 1990 (Radford 1990). In addition a record here of 10 on 18th July 1998 perhaps also hints at occupation. This general absence is surprising given the available habitat and may represent a lack of observer effort, but the species absence in more recent years is certainly apparent.

Macpherson (1892) references breeding on the Drigg Peninsula, Ravenglass prior to 1891. There are further records in 1902 (Country Life, May 1902), in 1907 (about 18 nests) and 1912 when only nine nests were found spread over two miles of beach (Bickerton 1912) and it is fair to assume it was an annual breeder at this time. In 1923 only one pair was found and it nested in 1925 (Marples 1954). However there are no further records until 1954 (Stokoe 1962) and there was subsequent annual occupation until 1981 (Anderson & Ferns 1987). As with the Black-headed Gull colony here, adjacent to which it nested, it probably benefitted from the protection from predators provided by the gulls themselves, the estate through keeping and the presence of researchers from Oxford University who also deterred predators. Though fox control was ended in 1966, perhaps paradoxically, the early 1970s appear to have seen the highest numbers with 59 pairs in 1971. However fox predation took its toll as with the gulls and other terns and the site has not been occupied since 1981 (CCC Annual Reports, Anderson & Ferns 1987, Simpson 2001).

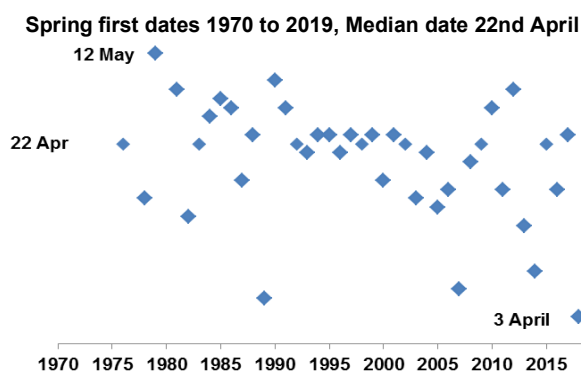
The early history of occupation of the Duddon Estuary (excluding North Walney) is unclear. There is first specific reference to a colony at Roanhead, presumably Sandscale Haws in 1942 (Blezard 1943). Though Mitchell (1885) and Saunders (1892) did not mention it, Oakes (1953) refers to an “ancient” mainland site in North Lancashire which may have been this site. There is a recovery of a chick ringed here in 1953 (Robinson et al 2020) and reference to former breeding here of up to 20 pairs one mile north of Lousy Point between 1940 and 1970 (Burton 2005). Breeding was reported in 1969 at an unspecified site (LBR 1969) and at Borwick Rails in 1970 (bird reports). Subsequently there are records of chicks either ringed or caught by ringers at Haverigg or Millom in 1974, 1976, 1977, 1980 and 1981 which could refer to any location around the Hodbarrow peninsula, before breeding at Hodbarrow Lagoon was first specifically recorded in 1984. It has carried on here annually to the present day, with exception of the period 2008 to 2012 when, though birds were present in spring, they failed to settle. Colony size has varied from only one pair in 1993 to a maximum of 46 pairs in 2005. Not untypical of the species, productivity has been generally low with complete failure in nine years and a best total of at least 15 fledged young from 26 pairs in 2007. Recent intensive efforts to deter predators both mammalian and avian have proved successful with 35 young fledged from a total of 57 nesting pairs (0.61 young/pair) in the three breeding seasons 2017 to 2019 compared to 77 young

fledged from about 522 nesting pairs (0.15 young/pair) in the 28 nesting seasons where breeding was attempted between 1984 and 2016 (RSPB reserve records, Peter 1999). During this period nearby Borwick Rails was also occupied in seven of the nine years from 1986 to 1994, and in 1988 produced a remarkable 20 young from 16 pairs. It also held single pairs in 2007 and 2009. In some years the shingle banks on Haverigg Beach just opposite Hodbarrow have also attracted prospecting birds though breeding has never been proved at what is a heavily disturbed location.

North Walney at the eastern mouth of the Duddon Estuary has breeding records from 1864 (Harting 1864) and in the 1880s (Durnford 1883), 12 pairs in 1946 (Oakes 1953), 29 pairs in 1958 (Dean 1990) and annually for the period 1962 to 1966, in 1969 and again in 1979 (Dean 1990), but with no occupation since. Described as much diminished in 1885 by Marples (1954) and a record of 18 pairs on Walney Island in 1891 (Macpherson 1892) could relate to either end of the island but are assumed to be at the south end (Dean 1990) and indeed South Walney has just as sporadic a history of occupation. There are records in four years between 1905 and 1913, in 1932 and 1933 and in 1946 and 1947 with a maximum of at least 14 pairs in 1913 and more than this in 1932 and 1933 (Oakes 1953), though it is unclear as to its status in the intervening years. Likewise in the period up to the next record in 1957, though 40 pairs bred on the whole Island in 1949 (Oakes 1953). Following this and with improved recording there appears to have been only sporadic occupation of no more than six pairs in just three years between 1957 and 1961 (Stokoe 1962) and then not until further pulses of occupation between 1968 and 1971 with a maximum of 14 pairs (Dean 1990) and again between 1981 and 1994 with a maximum of 30 pairs. Notable during this period were high levels of productivity in both 1984 and 1985 when 30 young fledged from 25 and 30 pairs respectively (Dean 1990). After a long period of absence the site was re-occupied in 2015 with up to 12 to 15 pairs in 2019 (CWT annual reports). It is likely that in this latter period that the site benefitted from displaced birds in mid-season from the nearby Foulney Island colony as appeared to be the case with late arrivals in 2018 following flooding at Foulney.

Foulney Island lying to the east of South Walney at the western edge of Morecambe Bay has exhibited the most constant occupation of any of the Cumbrian colonies. Mitchell (1885) infers it no longer bred here towards the end of the 19th Century because of constant hunting pressure. There appears no further reference to the site until 1946, when according to Oakes (1953) three pairs were present. Certainly since 1955 there has been almost annual occupation with an absence only in 1970, from 1972 to 1978 (Dean 1990), when it is unclear if this was a genuine absence or an absence of recording, and in 1998, 1999 and 2001. The 65 pairs here in 2009 is the highest county colony count other than the 100 plus pairs at Grune Point in 1917. With 24 hour protection from wardens it has also been the most productive site, fledging a remarkable minimum of 40 young in 2009. In 1991, 1992 and 2017 it fledged more than one young per pair, but has also had years of poor productivity and on occasion complete failure, notably in 2002 when 44 pairs failed entirely. The constant wardening presence at Foulney has revealed a pattern of regular nest failure, relaying and desertion, mostly caused by flooding and predation (including by Little Owl in 1964 (Evans 1964)). Even in good years productivity often includes an element of young from second nesting attempts and this is probably the case at other colonies.

The median date of first spring arrival between 1970 and 2019 is 22nd April but with extremely early dates of 3rd April 2018, 5th April 1989, 6th April 2007 and 8th April 2014.



There are no reports of large congregations at post-breeding roosts in Cumbria. Walney Island attracts foraging birds which may involve breeders from adjacent colonies. Counts of 20 or more birds from mid-July onwards have occurred here in eight years between 1970 and 2019 with maximums of 120 on 17th July 1982 and 100 on 17th July 2010. Numbers from August onwards are much lower and the latest count of 20 or more birds concerned 26 on 3rd August 2019 also off Walney.

In autumn the median last date between 1970 and 2019 is 27th August and remarkably there are less than 20 September records and just five in October. The latest date is 8th October in both 1988 and 1991.

With most casual records coming from the coast within or adjacent to its breeding range, Little Terns are scarce elsewhere. In the period 1970 to 2019 in the Inner Solway east of Grune Point there were just 31 records from off Bowness, two from Port Carlisle and one of a single juvenile in strong winds at Carr Beds on the River Eden just inland of the Solway, on the very late date of 3rd October 2009. Likewise in Morecambe Bay there are few records east of the surrounds of Foulney Island with just six records in the Leven Estuary, with five of those off Newbiggin between 1984 and 1986 and one of eight off Baycliff on 9th June 2009. The Kent Estuary has seen only four records of one on 8th September 1974 and three two days later, both off Arnside, four off Grange on 24th May 1976 and one off Arnside on 3rd May 1982 in the same period. That Heysham Bird Observatory in Lancashire logs a small but almost annual passage of birds entering into the Bay in spring suggests they may be under recorded in the Bay's outer environs.

The open coast away from active colonies has seen just one off St Bees Head on 30th July 2005, occasional records from Sellafield in 1985 and 1998 which might equally be suggestive of breeding and an adult feeding two juveniles at sea off Drigg and presumably on migration on 24th August 2008. The coast between Silecroft and Eskmeals, immediately north of the Duddon Estuary and south of Drigg has seen just 15 records since 1987.

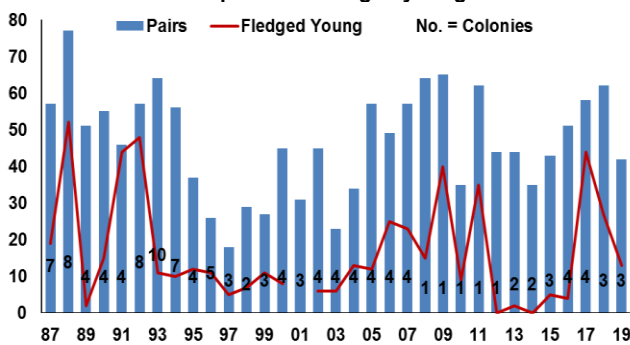
There have been 11 inland records with no seasonal pattern.

**Inland records**

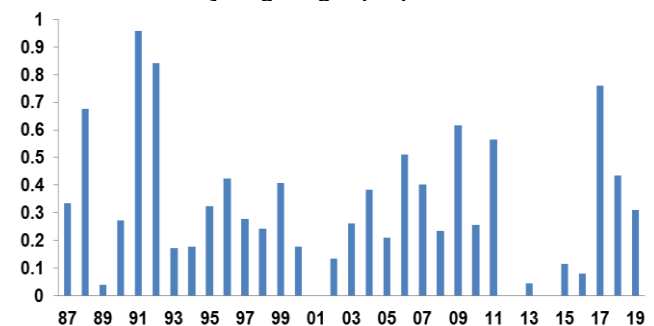
Sep 1917	Sizergh Castle	1	"Obtained"
08 Sep 1918	Waterhead, Windermere	2	"Seen, not shot"
May 1943	Thirlmere	1	Dead
24 Apr 1947	Coniston Water	1	Dead
Autumn 1953	Croft, Border Moors	1	Dead by R. Black Lyne
07 Jun 1956	Windermere	1	With 2 Common Terns
26 Sep 1957	R. Eden, Langwathby	1	After 5 days of easterlies
26 Aug 1958	Sunbiggin Tarn	1	
07 Aug 1959	Sunbiggin Tarn	1	Fishing
21 Sep 1981	Killington Reservoir	1	
29 Jun 2009	Tindale Tarn	1	Hovered then flew west

Few Little Terns have been ringed in Cumbria and of the 18 recoveries or retraps / controls, 11 have been in Cumbria, three at Gronant in Flintshire, two in the Isle of Man, one in Portugal and one in Spain. Birds found in Cumbria and ringed elsewhere around the Irish Sea involve two from Gronant in Flintshire and one each from the Isle of Man and counties Louth and Wicklow in eastern Ireland. From the east coast there are one each from St Cyrus in Aberdeenshire, Carnoustie in Angus, Lothian, Easington in Yorkshire, Tetney in Lincolnshire and Benacre in Suffolk and from Germany and the Netherlands. Most have been ringed as nestlings and found dead or re-trapped / seen alive at breeding colonies in subsequent years. The two overseas recoveries from Cumbria in Spain and Portugal were both in August and could have been on passage. There are no recoveries from favoured wintering areas. Several ringing histories show site fidelity for an example a bird ringed as a nestling in 1968 probably on Walney Island, (ringing site given as Barrow) was subsequently seen at Hodbarrow in the summers of 1974, 1977 and 1980. However they also indicate recruitment from different colonies both from within and outwith the county to their eventually breeding colony. With so little ringing data, there are no records to show colony switching. Interestingly a failed breeding adult at Foulney in 2018 (ringed as a chick in East Yorkshire in 2015) and last seen at Foulney on 2nd July 2018 was then then seen at the Gronant colony in Flintshire 15 days later (Robinson et al. 2020).

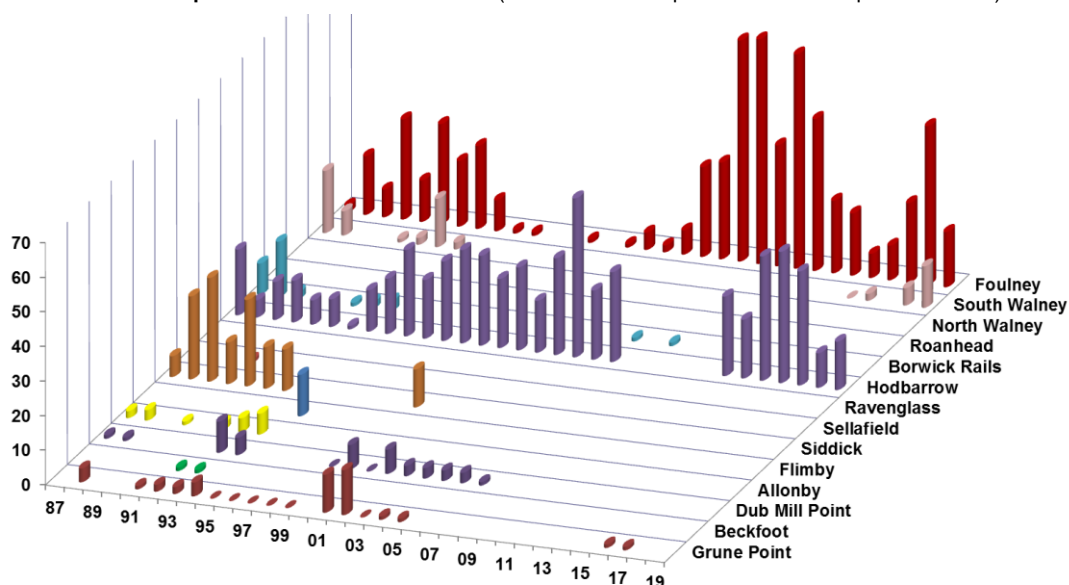
**Total number of pairs and fledged young 1987- 2019**



**Number of young fledged per pair 1987 - 2019**



**Number of pairs at colonies 1987 - 2019** (flat entries = occupied but number of pairs unknown)





# Glaucous Gull

*Larus hyperboreus*

A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant, has summered



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

Forrester, R., Andrews, I., McNerny, C., Murray, R., McGowan, R., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M., Jardine, D. & Grundy, D. 2007. The Birds of Scotland. Scottish Ornithologists Club. Edinburgh  
\*Greenhalgh, M.E. & Greenhalgh, P.A. 1970. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls in Lancashire. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 1970: 93-94  
Malling Olsen, K. & Larsson, H. 2004. Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America. Helm Identification Guides. A & C Black  
Petersen, A., Irons, D.B., Gilchrist, H.G., Robertson, G.J., Boertmann, D., Strøm, H., Gavrilo, M., Artukhin, Y., Clausen, D.S., Kuletz, K.J. & Mallory, M.L. 2015. The Status of Glaucous Gulls *Larus hyperboreus* in the Circumpolar Arctic. *Arctic* 68:107-120

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Records

2022/23 Juvenile Sandgate Marsh, Leven Estuary 1st-2nd January

2023/24 Juvenile Maryport, Outer Solway 7th November

Photograph: Juvenile, Old Sandsfield, Solway Estuary, February 2005 (N. Franklin)

# Glaucous Gull

## *Larus hyperboreus*

### A scarce winter visitor and passage migrant, has summered

Glaucous Gull has a circumpolar breeding distribution on the tundras, coasts and islands of the Arctic and is the only large gull to be found in the far north. Four sub-species are described but differences are subtle and it is sometimes described as monotypic. It winters primarily in the Arctic, and in Europe, south to the northern North Sea (Peterson et al. 2015).

Small numbers occur in Britain in winter and the few ringed birds found here have fledged in Greenland, Norway and Iceland though Icelandic and West Greenland populations are thought to be relatively sedentary (Dean 1984, Wernhan et al. 2002). Distribution in Britain has a northerly bias as wintering occurs generally as far north as the weather allows. The first birds arrive in September but most come later, with some not arriving until early January (Wernhan et al. 2002). In some winters there are substantial influxes, often associated with north-westerly gales which may disperse birds from fishing boats in Icelandic and Greenland waters (Forrester et al 2007). North-easterly gales are likely to bring in birds from arctic Russia (Malling Olsen 2004). There is evidence of birds returning to certain areas but this is often associated with intermittent records as birds wander a good deal. One of the most robust and predatory of gulls, it is a kleptoparasite and highly attracted to fish waste.

The earliest record for Cumbria is of an immature bird shot at Ravenglass on 23rd November 1877 (Macpherson 1892). Thereafter, it remained scarce through until the early 1970s, with just 17 records up to 1969. Notable were an immature bird which lingered near Windermere between January 30th and February 3rd 1922 (Hope 1923) and in that same year, a long-staying immature male which was shot near Anthorn on March 28th, having been on the Wampool Estuary all winter (Bleazard 1943).

#### Records prior to the 1970s (all singles)

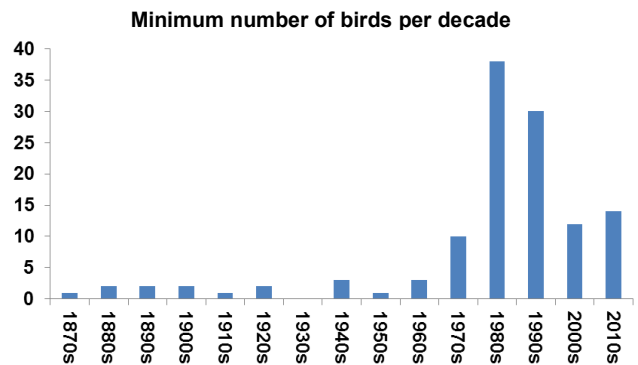
Year	Date	Location	Age
1877	23 Nov	Ravenglass, Irt/Mite/Esk Est.	imm
1883		Bowness, Solway Est. inner	
1888	23 Nov	Levens Est.	imm
1890	25 Jan	Allonby, Solway Est. outer	sub ad
1892	Feb	Solway Est. inner	imm
1900		Skinburness, Solway Est. inner	
1903		Allonby, Solway Est. outer	
1914	Feb – Mar	Carlisle	
1922	30 Jan – 03 Feb	Lake Windermere	imm
1922	28 Mar	Anthorn, Solway Est. inner	imm
1942	into early 1943	Rockcliffe, Solway Est. inner	imm
1943	25 Apr	Anthorn, Solway Est. inner	imm
1947	25 Nov	Arnside, Kent Est.	imm
1958	13 Mar	Coniston Water	
1965	17 Jan – 25 Apr	South Walney, Walney Island	juv
1966	04 Sep	South Walney, Walney Island	2nd sum
1969	21 – 22 Mar	South Walney, Walney Island	imm

In the 1970s there was a significant increase in the number of records and in addition, birds were more often referred to by more precise age definitions rather than just as adult or 'immature'. Both the increase in records and in those aged probably reflects the growing interest in gulls at that time. Because of the wandering nature of the species, some level of duplication in the recording of birds is inevitable, particularly in seasons when they are more numerous. The different age of birds has been used to identify individuals within winter seasons where possible, however there is likely to be some level of over-representation of total birds in the following graphs and tables because of within-season movement of individuals between areas. With this in mind the minimum number seen in the county up to 2019 is in the region of 120 birds.

The 1982/83 and 1983/84 winters saw another significant increase in records. The Furness Coast and particularly Walney Island and the adjacent Duddon Estuary were favoured areas, as was the Sellafeld area on the west coast and the Outer Solway harbours of Whitehaven and Workington and north into Allonby Bay.

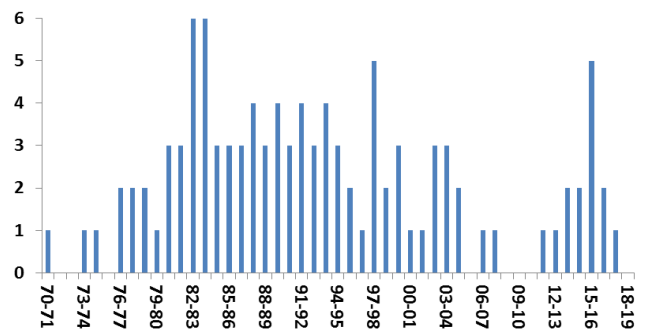


Juvenile, Outer Solway, February 2012 (K. Hamilton)



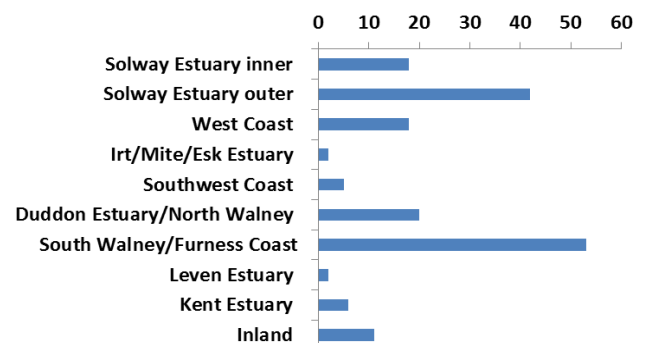
With the exception of the 1997/98 winter, the number of occurrences has declined such that after the 2004/05 winter, it has become less than annual. This recent downward trend has been mirrored in North and West Europe as a whole, and thought to be a result of changed fishing activities including the cleaning and discarding of fish waste out at sea, leaving less food in fishing harbours which observers have traditionally targeted (Malling Olsen 2004).

#### Minimum number of individuals 1970/71 – 2018/19



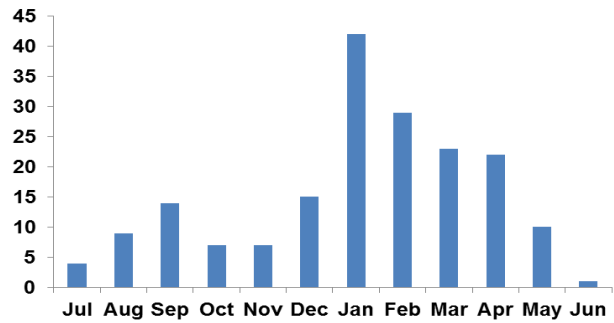
In Cumbria the majority of records have continued to be on or near the coast with Walney Island as a whole and the Outer Solway accounting for about one quarter each of all records.

#### Distribution of records 1970/71 – 2018/19



During the National Atlas 2007-11, the Cumbrian coast appeared the least favoured coastline for the species in the whole of Britain with Central England showing the greatest increase in numbers (National Atlas 2007-11). This may well reflect growing observer attention on inland landfill sites and the tendency of gulls to turn to these sites rather than fishing harbours as a food source. With a small human population Cumbria has fewer landfill sites than many counties along with less birdwatchers. Most inland Cumbrian occurrences here have been not far inland and often associated with landfill refuse sites such as at Tarns and Distington, both inland of the Outer Solway Estuary, and Kendal Quarry tip, inland of the Kent Estuary. By some distance, the furthest bird inland was the Cockermouth individual in January 2013 which was feeding on a sheep carcasse. (A bird first seen in the Lyth Valley in December 2014 and also feeding on a sheep carcasse, and subsequently seen on the Kent Estuary in early January 2015 has been classed as a coastal occurrence for the purpose of this analysis).

Month of first occurrence in different areas



Most records have involved single birds but during significant influxes, multiple birds have been recorded in the same area on at least 14 occasions. Most notable were two adults and two first years at South Walney on 20th February 1984 with three un-aged birds here on 10th February 1985. Elsewhere two juvenile birds and a second winter frequented Whitehaven and Workington Harbours and commuted to Distington Tip in the late winter of 1998.

**Inland records**

Year	Date	Location	No./Age
1914	Feb – Mar	Carlisle	1
1922	30 Jan – 03 Feb	Lake Windermere	imm
1958	13 Mar	Coniston	1
1989	05 Mar	Pelutho Grange	ad
1989	08 Oct	Tarns Dub	ad
1991	19 Feb – 27 Mar	Tarns Dub	ad
1992	18 Jan – 01 Apr	Tarns Dub	ad
1992	17 Apr	Tarns Dub	juv
1993	30 Jan – 01 Mar	Tarns Dub	ad
1994	09 Jan – 31 Mar	Distington Tip	2nd win
1994	18 Feb	Mockerkin Tarn	2nd win
1995	26 May – 04 Jul	Kendal Tip	2nd sum
1996	02 – 26 Feb	Kendal Tip	imm
1997	23 Nov	Bolton Low Houses	2nd win
1998	01 Feb – 23 Mar	Distington Tip	2 juv, 1 2nd win
2000	14 – 19 Feb	Kendal Tip	juv
2002	16 Jan – 06 Feb	Distington Tip	juv
2003	23 Nov – 20 Mar	Distington Tip	juv, 2nd win
2005	26 Jan	Distington Tip	2 2nd win
2008	18 Mar	Longtown	ad
2013	18 Jan – 19 Jan	Cockermouth	1

**Records of multiple birds at the same location**

Year	Date	Location	No./Age
1981	18 Jan	Green Road, Duddon Estuary	2
1982	Jan-Apr	North Walney	1st yr, 3rd yr
1982	Sep-Dec	North Walney	1st yr, 3rd yr
1983	27 Feb	South Walney	2 ad
1984	20 Feb	South Walney	2 ad, 2 1st yr
1985	06-15 Feb	South Walney	2
1985	10 Feb	South Walney	3
1985	25 Feb	North Walney	2
1986	17 Jan-05 Mar	South Walney	2 ad
1998	01 Feb-23 Mar	Whitehaven/Workington	2 juv, 1 2nd win
		Distington Tip	
2003	04 – 22 Mar	Whitehaven/Workington/	juv, 2nd win
		Distington Tip	
2004	01 Feb	Distington Tip	juv, 2nd win
2004	19 Sep	Cardumock, Solway Est. inner	2
2005	26 Jan	Distington Tip	2 2nd win

Most birds have only stayed for short periods at any one location. However, there have been at least 12 individuals whose stay was of four months or more duration. Nearly all were adults and could have involved some returning birds in successive winters. A notable exception involved a juvenile bird which went on to summer at Whitehaven in 1989.

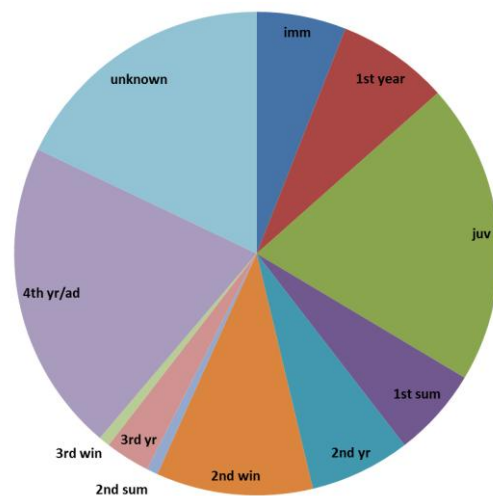
**Long staying birds**

Season	Period	Location	Age
1980-1981	30 Aug – 31 Dec	Workington	ad
1980-1981	20 Nov – 20 Jun	South Walney	1st yr
1983-1984	18 Sep – 19 Apr	Rampside/South Walney	ad
1983-1984	18 Oct – 31 Mar	North Walney/Hodbarrow	ad
1984-1985	28 Aug – 22 Mar	Hodbarrow/North Walney	ad
1988-1989	28 Aug – 30 Jan	Furness Coast/South Walney	ad
1989	05 Mar – 13 Sep	Whitehaven Harbour	1st yr
1989-1990	03 Oct – 18 Mar	South Walney/Biggar/Rampside	ad
1990-1991	10 Aug – 28 Feb	Rampside/South & North Walney	ad
1991-1992	29 Sep – 29 Feb	South Walney/Biggar/Rampside	ad
1992-1993	16 Aug – yr end	Furness Coast/South Walney	ad
1994-1995	20 Aug – 15 Mar	South Walney/Rampside	ad

(The 1983/84 birds could have concerned the same individual).

New arrivals in different areas have most commonly occurred from January onwards. There are 30 summer records, all of single birds between May and August. Several concerned long-staying individuals which had probably lingered elsewhere from the previous winter or spring.

Age composition (%) since 1970/71 of minimum identifiable individuals



# Iceland Gull

## *Larus glaucoides*

A scarce winter visitor and spring passage migrant



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

Birdlife International. 2022. Species Factsheet: *Larus glaucoides*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org>

\*Greenhalgh, M.E. & Greenhalgh, P.A. 1970. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls in Lancashire. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 1970: 93-94

Malling Olsen, K. 2018. Gulls of the World: a photographic guide. Bloomsbury Publishing. London

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 records

**2019/20:** no records

**2020/21:** Juvenile, 11th December to 10th January, Carr Beds, Rockcliffe, Solway Estuary. 2nd winter, 9th to 19th January, Workington Harbour. Juvenile, 15th to 19th February, Gretna Road Pit, Longtown. Juvenile, 23rd March, Mockerkin Tarn

**2021/22:** no records

**2022/23:** Juvenile Sandy Bottoms, River Kent 11th December

**Photograph: Juvenile, Old Sandsfield, Solway Estuary, February 2005 (N. Franklin)**

# Iceland Gull

## *Larus glaucooides*

**A scarce winter visitor and spring passage migrant, about 100 records.**

This pale, almost Herring Gull-sized gull derives its name from the fact that it was first identified in Iceland. Its breeding grounds are not in Iceland, however, but lie further to the north and west in Greenland and North East Canada. (Birdlife International 2022). Many remain in Arctic waters for the winter, but some can be found around Iceland and small numbers disperse further south, reaching Southern Scandinavia and Northern Britain with significant influxes in some winters. The birds occurring in Britain are of the nominate race *glaucooides*, which breeds in Greenland (Wernham *et al.* 2002).

Cumbria lies somewhat to the south of the Iceland Gull's normal winter range. Quite a number have appeared after westerly gales and, given that most have been immature birds, it looks as if most were storm-blown wanderers. That they have become much more regular in recent decades is probably no more than a consequence of improved coverage following the growth in birdwatching as a hobby, better optical equipment and improved ID knowledge. Similar increases have been found in several other English counties (Brown & Grice 2005). However there remains the possibility that some part of this change is due to a small but genuine growth in numbers, perhaps driven by a southward shift in the winter range but the evidence is not very compelling.

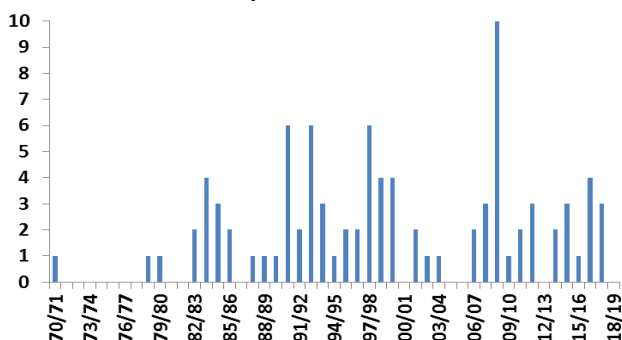
The first Iceland Gull recorded in Cumbria was an immature shot at the mouth of the River Calder on 20 February 1880, a fate to befall a further two of five other 19th century records. These include a rather vague one of a bird at Allonby on an unspecified date before 1900 (Macpherson 1892, Blezard 1943). The first seven decades of the 20th century gave rise to a further seven records, though one at St Bees Head in 1971 carries some doubt as an albino Herring Gull was present in the colony at that time.

### Dated records prior to 1980 (all singles)

Year	Location	Date	Age	Comment
1880	Calder Mouth, West Coast	20 Feb	imm	shot
1882	Millom, Duddon Estuary	28 Jan	imm	shot
1885	Duddon Estuary	24 Oct	imm	
1898	Carlisle	28 Feb		shot
1899	Maryport, Solway Estuary	10 Feb		
1905	R. Eden, Carlisle	26 Jan-20 Feb	imm	
1921	Anthorn, Solway Estuary	into 1922		with Glaucous Gull
1949	Carlisle	17 Feb	2nd yr	
1955	St Bees Head	05 Jan		
1963	South Walney Island	21 Dec	ad	
1971	St Bees Head	Feb		albino Herring Gull?
1979	St Bees Head	14 May-6 Jun	2nd yr	

Since the start of the 1980s there has been a marked increase in the frequency of sightings. In the 34 winters between 1978/79 and 2018/19, Iceland Gulls were seen in Cumbria in every winter except seven.

### Number of birds per winter 1970/71 to 2018/19



The number of individuals present in any winter has invariably been small, typically between one and four birds; though unless birds are individually recognisable or obviously of different ages, some double counting may have occurred. The best winter for the species was that of 2008/09 when as many as 10 individuals may have been present. By the end of the 2018/19 winter there had

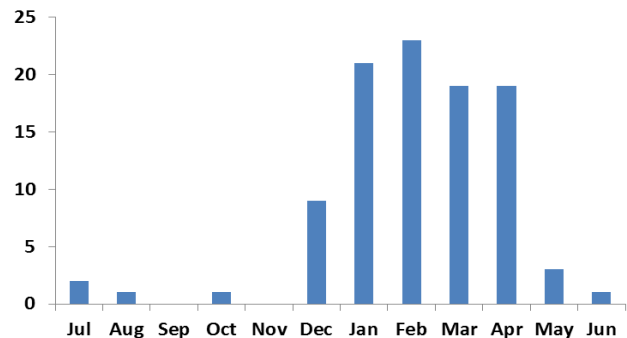


Juvenile, Maryport, January 2009 (N. Franklin)

been about 100 records almost entirely of single birds. The exceptions being two first-year birds at Tarns Dub near Aspatria on 20 May 1992, an adult and juvenile at Halforth on the Kent Estuary in mid-February 1998 and two juvenile birds at Sellafield on 20th January 2000.

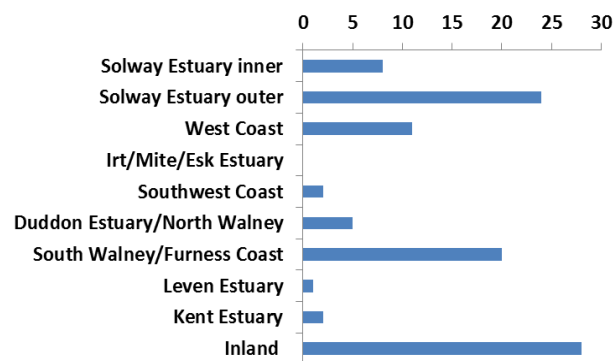
Most occurrences have been from December onwards. Exceptions involved immatures at Milton Tip near Brampton on 24th July 1985, at Workington from 30th July to 27th August 1995, on the Duddon Estuary on 24th October 1885 and at Mockerkin Tarn on 22nd August 2014. Most have departed by April but there are three May records, involving a second year bird at Rockcliffe Marsh on the Solway between 14th May and 6th June 1979, a second summer bird at Bowness-on-Solway on 23rd May 1979 and an un-aged bird at the same site on 17th May 2012. The only June arrival concerned a third summer bird at South Walney on 4th June 2016.

### Month of first occurrence



Most records have been on the coast, with outer Solway and South Walney and adjoining area particularly well represented.

### Distribution of all records



Birds rarely remain long at coastal sites, perhaps several days to a week or so in most cases. However, there have been a number of long-staying individuals, including juvenile bird at Whitehaven for at least 13 weeks during the first four months of 1998, and another juvenile in the same place for the same period two years later. Likewise inland where Tarns Dub and the nearby tip hosted longer staying juvenile birds in the winters of 1990/91 and 1992/93.

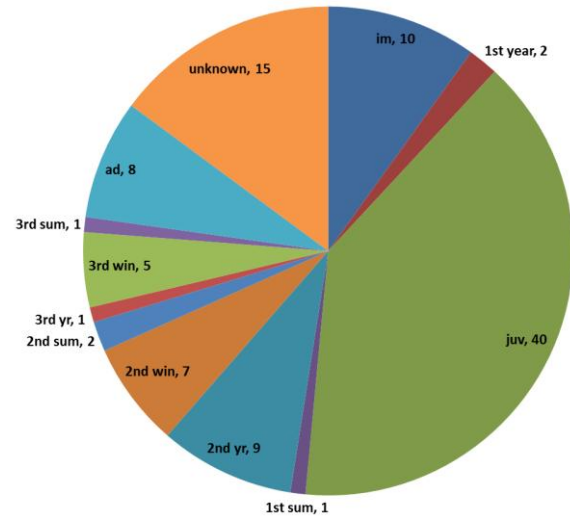
There have been 28 inland records, eight of which were at Tarns Dub, the last in March 1993 after which the refuse site here closed. These include a juvenile bird which frequented Penrith Tip and nearby Ullswater from late December 1990 to mid-February 1991 and a second winter bird at Bowness-on-Windermere from 21<sup>st</sup> January to 4th March 2017 which is assumed to have returned to the same location the following winter from 7th February to 5th April 2018.

Immature birds account for most records, with juvenile birds constituting almost half of all records, and second-winter birds the next commonest age group. Adult birds are few and far between with only eight records, two of which could have involved the same bird which frequented Kendal tip and the nearby Kent Estuary between 14th and 18th February 1998 with one at Parton on the Outer Solway Estuary 11 days later.

**Inland records (all singles)**

Year	Sub Location	Date	Age	Comment
1898	Carlisle	02 Feb		
1905	R. Eden, Carlisle	26 Jan-20 Feb	imm	
1949	Carlisle Tip	17 Feb	2w	
1985	Keswick	04 Feb	2y	
1985	Milton Tip, Brampton	24 Jul	2y	
1988	Tarns Dub	27 Mar-4 Apr	juv	
1990	Penrith Tip & Ullswater	22 Dec-14 Feb	juv	
1991	Tarns Dub	20 Jan-27 Mar	juv	
1991	Tarns Dub	24 Mar	juv	different to above
1992	Tarns Dub	18 Apr-4 May	juv	
1992	Tarns Dub	24 Apr-10 May	juv	
1992	Tarns Dub	6 Dec-14 Mar	juv	
1993	Tarns Dub	21 Mar	juv	different to above
1993	Tarns Dub	28 Mar	juv	different to above
1994	Low Wood, Windermere	20 Jan	ad	
1996	Wet Sleddale Res.	31 Mar	2w	
1998	Kendal Tip & Kent Estuary	14-18 Feb	juv	
2008	Longtown	10 Dec	imm	
2008	Soddy Gap	19 Dec	juv	
2009	R. Derwent, Cocker mouth	28 Jan	imm	1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> winter
2009	Briar Bank, Carlisle	Mar	juv	throughout month
2012	near Carlisle Airport	11 Jan	3w	or adult
2014	Longtown	30 Apr		
2014	Mockerkin Tam	22 Aug		
2015	Micklethwaite, Wigton	12 Mar		
2017	Bowness on Windermere	21 Jan-4 Mar	2w	
2018	William Gill, Hallbankgate	6-9 Feb		
2018	Bowness on Windermere	7 Feb-5 Mar	3w	same as 2017?

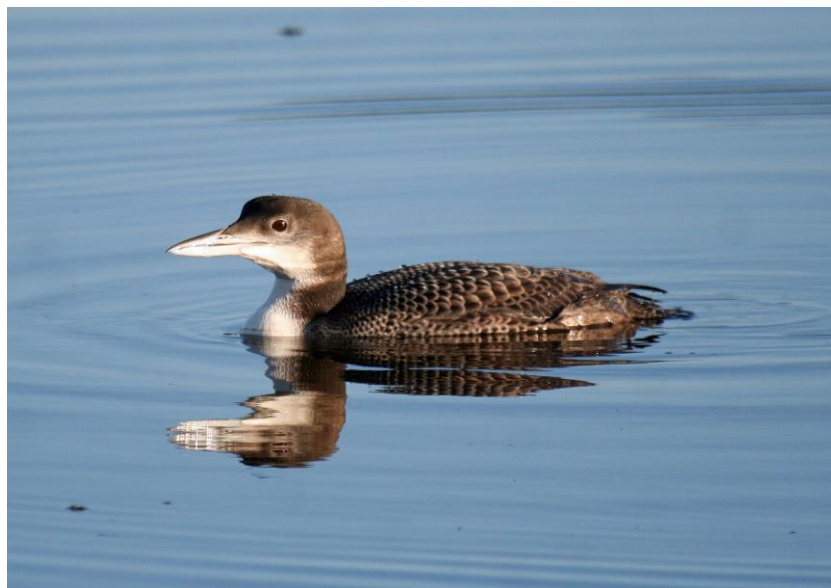
**Age composition**



# Great Northern Diver (Common Loon)

## *Gavia immer*

An uncommon winter visitor and passage migrant,  
scarce inland



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- \*Anon. 1867. Rare birds shot. *Carlisle Journal*: 1<sup>st</sup> February
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- Jardine, D. & Grundy, D. (eds.). *The Birds of Scotland*. Scottish Ornithologists Club
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- Sharpe, C.M., Bishop, J.P., Cullen, J.P., Giovannini, P.G. Thorpe, J.P. & Weaver, P. *Manx Bird Atlas*. Liverpool University Press
- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

- 2019/20 Inland:** 1 Wastwater 8th March. **High number:** 3 Bowness on Solway 23rd May
- 2020/21 Dock/lagoon:** 1 Cavendish Dock 27-29th November & 10th December. 1 Hodbarrow Lagoon 9th-23rd November, 9th December, 8th January, 11th March-28th April. **Inland:** 1 Windermere 21st November, up to 2 26th February-10th March, 1 24th-29th March. 1 Urswick Tarn 14th-21st December & 27th February.
- 2021/22 Inland:** 1 Coniston 14th-15th January. **Dock/lagoon:** 1 Hodbarrow Lagoon 25th February-4th March
- 2022/23 Inland:** 1 Windermere 13th November-15th March. **Dock/lagoon:** 1 juv. Ormsgill Reservoir 30th December-15th January, 1 Hodbarrow 15th January, 1 Barrow Docks 27th January
- 2023/24 Inland:** 1 Windermere 6th-11th December, 1 Ullswater 2nd-5th & 25th-26th December. **Dock/lagoon:** 1 Ramsdon Dock (Barrow) 12th-18th December

Photograph: Greenodd, Leven Estuary, December 2009 (F. Gould)



At sites off the Welsh coast and the Isle of Man, heavy winter gales have occasionally pushed multiple birds into sheltered bays, suggesting an adjacent offshore wintering population (Cullen & Jennings 1986, Donovan & Rees 1994, Sharpe et al. 2007). This has not been recorded on the Cumbrian coast, suggesting an absence of birds offshore. In summary, there is little evidence for anything other than sporadic partial wintering by a very small number of individuals on the Cumbrian coast and, when it does occur, it is confined to the coast adjacent to Walney Island.

There have been 51 inland records of 59 birds in the county up to 2019 (records in the same winter at the same site have been assumed to involve the same individual). Most have related to single birds, but at least two have been present together on six occasions and three once on Lake Windermere in the winter of 1916/17, one of which was shot! Several inland records have involved protracted stays.

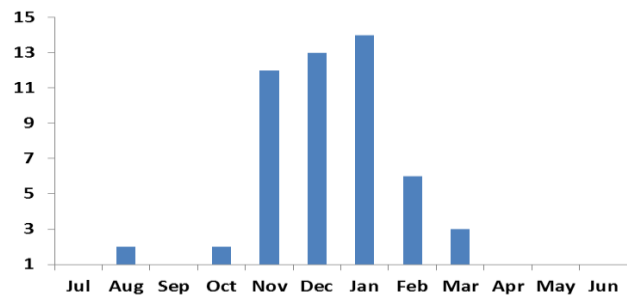
**Number of non-breeding seasons with occurrences at inland sites**

Site	Winters	Site	Winters
Lake Windermere	12	Elterwater	1
Derwentwater	8	Grasmere	1
Coniston Water	7	Haweswater Reservoir	1
Bassenthwaite Lake	3	Killington Reservoir	1
Ennerdale Water	2	Longtown Ponds	1
R Eden	2	Loweswater	1
Thirlmere	2	Lune Valley	1
Ullswater	2	Mockerkin Tarn	1
Wastwater	2	Rusland Valley	1
Brotherswater	1	Wet Sleddale Reservoir	1

It is perhaps not surprising that Lake Windermere and Coniston Water are frequently visited with their close proximity to the most favoured winter haunt off Walney Island. The relatively high incidence of birds on Derwentwater and adjacent Bassenthwaite combined is harder to explain. Remarkably Derwentwater has hosted two birds in three separate winters while Lake Windermere has attracted two birds in just one winter and three in another. A remarkable record involved an adult on floodwater in the Rusland Valley in November 2009.

There is no evidence of deliberate overland migration in Britain and birds on inland waters have most likely been blown off course and sought shelter in adverse weather, and may on arrival have been in a distressed and exhausted state. It is probably no surprise then that, in the age of the shotgun naturalist prior to 1900, the first six documented records all involved shot birds! The more frequent arrival of inland birds at different sites between November and February may to be a reflection of severe winter weather at sea.

**Month of first occurrence of inland birds**



**Inland records: (Records in italics involve birds in record above)**

Season	Date	Location	No.	Season	Date	Location	No.
1848/49	1 Nov	R Eden	1	1997/98	20 Nov - 25 Dec	Lake Windermere	1
1888/89	24 Nov	Lake Windermere	1	1998/99	15 Nov - 8 Dec	Coniston Water	imm
1889/90	August	Lake Windermere	1	1998/99	13 Dec - 8 Jan	Derwent Water	1
late 1800s		R Eden above Appleby	1	1998/99	31 Dec - 27 Jan	Lake Windermere	imm
late 1800s		R Eden above Carlisle	1	1998/99	27 Feb	Lake Windermere	2
late 1800s		Ullswater	1	1999/00	8 - 9 Jan	Ullswater	1
late 1800s		Wastwater	1	1999/00	15 Jan - 12 Feb	Derwent Water	1
early 1910s		A tarn in the Lune Valley	1	1999/00	15 Jan	Derwent Water	2
1915/16	30 Mar	Lake Windermere	1	2002/03	18 Nov	Coniston Water	1
1916/17	Dec - Feb	Lake Windermere	3	2004/05	13 Jan	Lake Windermere	1
1956/57	19 Jan	Lake Windermere	1	2005/06	10 Dec	Lake Windermere	1
1957/58	3 - 4 Aug	Ennerdale Water	1	2006/07	17 Dec - 2 Jan	Coniston Water	ad
1958/59	22 - 23 Nov	Derwent Water	1	2006/07	19 Dec - 5 Feb	Derwent Water	1
1977/78	29 May	Haweswater Reservoir	1	2006/07	6 Feb - 20 Mar	Derwent Water	2
1978/79	11 Nov	Wet Sleddale Reservoir	1	2006/07	24 Feb	Bassenthwaite Lake	imm
1978/79	9 - 10 Mar	Wastwater	1	2007/08	3 Feb	Derwent Water	1
1979/80	17 Nov	Elterwater	1	2009/10	21 - 22 Nov	Rusland (on floodwater)	ad
1979/80	7 - 16 Dec	Killington Reservoir	1	2011/12	27 Nov	Bassenthwaite Lake	1
1980/81	8 Jan	Longtown Ponds	1	2013/14	25 - 26 Dec	Coniston Water	1
1981/82	17 Dec	Lake Windermere	1	2013/14	9 Jan - 18 Feb	Coniston Water	2
1983/84	9 Feb	Lake Windermere	1	2014/15	29 Oct	Derwentwater	1
1984/85	5 Jan - 25 Feb	Coniston Water	1	2014/15	28 Dec - 10 Feb	Lake Windermere	ad
1984/85	20 Jan	Thirlmere	2	2015/16	19 Nov	Mockerkin Tarn	1
1985/86	1 - 2 Jan	Bassenthwaite Lake	imm	2015/16	1 Jan - 3 Mar	Ennerdale Water	1
1985/86	19 Jan - 2 Feb	Lake Windermere	1	2015/16	2 - 5 Jan	Coniston Water	1
1986/87	16 - 20 Jan	Coniston Water	imm	2015/16	16 Jan - 12 Mar	Derwentwater	1
1989/90	12 - 28 Feb	Grasmere	imm	2015/16	28 Mar - 21 Apr	Derwentwater	2
1990/91	11 - 13 Nov	Thirlmere	1	2017/18	29 Oct	Loweswater	1
1991/92	17 Nov - 28 Jan	Coniston Water	imm	2017/18	9 Dec - 7 Jan	Brotherswater	1st win
1991/92	14 Dec - 27 Mar	Derwent Water	imm	2018/19	15 Dec	Ullswater	1

**Docks and coastal lagoon records:**

Season	Date	Sub Location	No	Season	Date	Sub Location	No
1977/78	23 Dec - 8 Feb	Cavendish Dock, Barrow	1	2006/07	4 Feb	Silloth outer Harbour	1
1979/80	18 Dec - 3 Feb	Hodbarrow Lagoon	1	2006/07	20 Dec - 12 Mar	Cavendish Dock, Barrow	1
1984/85	26 Dec - 3 Feb	Barrow Docks	1	2006/07	6 Jan	Buccleugh Dock, Barrow	2 imm
1996/97	13 Nov - 5 Feb	Hodbarrow Lagoon	1	2007/08	6 Jan - 3 Mar	Ramsden Dock, Barrow	1
1996/97	17 Nov	Ramsden Dock, Barrow	1	2007/08	12 Jan	Cavendish Dock, Barrow	2
1996/97	20 Dec	Whitehaven Harbour	ad	2009/10	21 Nov	Hodbarrow Lagoon	
1998/99	10 Nov - 30 Jan	Hodbarrow Lagoon	imm	2010/11	13 - 14 Nov	Hodbarrow Lagoon	imm
1998/99	28 - 29 Nov	Hodbarrow Lagoon	ad imm	2012/13	6 Jan - 9 Feb	Ramsden Dock	1
2003/04	30 Nov	Hodbarrow Lagoon	1	2012/13	12 Feb	Ramsden Dock	2
2003/04	14 Dec - 19 Mar	Silloth Harbour	imm	2012/13	11 May 13	Hodbarrow	1
2005/06	2 Dec	Cavendish Dock, Barrow	1	2013/14	18 Jan - 21 Feb	Hodbarrow	1
2006/07	5 Nov	Silloth outer Harbour	1	2015/16	15 Nov - 23 Mar	Hodbarrow	1

# Bittern (Eurasian Bittern)

## *Botaurus stellaris*

A rare passage migrant and winter visitor; former breeder



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- \*Anon. 1865. Note on Bitterns in Cumberland. *The Field*: 11th February 1865
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  - \*Anon. 1951. Bittern in exhausted state at Armathwaite. *Penrith & District NHS Newsletter* 1951: no. 2
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- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 records

- 2020** 1 Black Dyke Moss, Arnside 8th May, 1 Foulshaw Moss/ Ulpha Meadows 30th August – 9th September, 1 Mere Tarn 10th-14th September, 1 Silloth 16th December.
- 2021** 1 Foulshaw/Ulpha Meadows 22nd March, 20th September, 22nd October
- 2022** 1 booming Brigsteer Moss 16 – 23rd May, 1 over Ulverson 17th August (by audio device), 1 Brigsteer Moss 23rd-24th August, 1 Foulshaw/Ulpha 31st August – 23rd November, 1 Siddick Pond 14th September – 8th November. 1 River Esk at Muncaster 26th September. 1 Campfield Marsh 28th November
- 2023** 1 Foulshaw Moss 27th January, 1 Campfield Marsh 11th February, 27th February & 8th April. 1 south Lakes site 17th March & 22nd May, 1 different south lakes site 14th July-11th August. 1 Siddick Pond 5th September and in December, 1 St Bees valley (flyover) 7th September, 1 Foulshaw Moss 18th October, 1 Gosling Sike (Houghton) 7th December-year end

Photograph: Siddick Pond, March 2014 (C. Shaw)

## Bittern (Eurasian Bittern)

### *Botaurus stellaris*

**A rare passage migrant and winter visitor; former breeder**

The Bittern is a widespread breeding species across Europe, North Africa and Central and Eastern Asia. In Europe it breeds from Sweden and eastern Finland to south Spain and Turkey in much reduced numbers, though recently it has expanded its range northward in Sweden and Finland and has increased in Western Europe. It can be resident or migratory, with low winter temperatures precipitating winter migration (EBBA 2020).

In Britain the species suffered the double assaults of habitat destruction as wetlands were drained and persecution by collectors and those seeking exclusive fare. It became extinct as a breeding bird around 1886. Breeding resumed in East Anglia from 1911 and with considerable conservationist effort, numbers rose to a high of 78 to 83 pairs across seven counties in the mid-1950s. Habitat degradation of many of the wetlands created in the wartime years then resulted in another decline and a low of 11 to 12 pairs in 1997 (Brown & Grice 2005). Further conservation initiatives have produced habitat improvements resulting in an average of 201 booming males in the period 2015-19 (Eaton et al. 2021). As a winter visitor to Britain from continental Europe, it was formerly very common with over 60 being killed in Yorkshire alone in 1831 (Mather 1986). Between 1981 and 1984, the British wintering population was estimated at 50 to 150 birds (Lack 1986). More recently during the winter of 2017/18, it was estimated at about 800; a reflection of an increased breeding population, (assumed resident), and about 390 migrants from abroad (Frost et al. 2019).

Macpherson (1892) considered it likely to be a more abundant winter visitor than breeder, but nevertheless quoted local sources that the bird frequented the Solway Mosses, and that the name Drumbogh (now Drumburgh) signified the Bittern's fen. Historical records of banquet fare at Naworth Castle as early as 1618 show Bittern having been sourced in July. Evidence of breeding on the mosses surrounding Morecambe Bay comes from Rusland where a field was formerly known as Drummell-Mire – an ancient name for the Bittern (Oakes 1953). However, it is unclear as to when this dates from. Evidence of breeding in the 18th century is scant but according to Macpherson (1892) Dr Heysham, writing presumably late in the century, described it as less numerous than the Heron. Again Macpherson (1892) quotes a local source that sometimes, though rarely, it bred on the moss at Honeypot by the side of the River Eamont near Edenhall. He also mentions booming at Arlecdon in West Cumbria in 1804, and likely breeding at Cardew Mire near Dalston, probably also early in the 19th Century. However, he chronicles its extinction in the early years of the 19th century as a result of drainage of its favoured fens and mires in the course of agricultural improvement. Post about 1830, the literature refers largely to birds being killed in diverse locations in Cumbria during the winter only. Despite re-colonisation of various parts of Britain in the 20th century, it has never re-occupied Cumbria as a breeding species, despite the presence of a small population at Leighton Moss just over the border into Lancashire probably from the late 1930s onwards (Spencer 1973).

The first record of a significant winter influx in Cumbria comes from 1831/32 when six were shot in the vicinity of the Solway, with a further two on the north side in Dumfriesshire (Macpherson 1892). However, by 1892 Macpherson lamented that when it appeared in winter, it was in lesser numbers than earlier in the century.

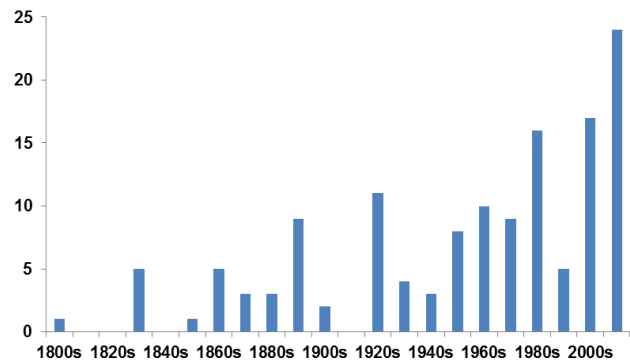
In the early 20th century, birds were still being killed in winter every few years. January 1892 and January 1924 appear to have seen small influxes to north Cumbria when three were shot within both



Siddick Pond, 22nd November 2011 (N. Franklin)

these months (Macpherson 1892, Blezard 1943). However, the tendency to observe rather than kill was becoming increasingly common and the second half of the century saw an end to the killing, and records came from a variety of locations where suitable habitat was available. Nevertheless records remained sporadic until the advent of annual reporting in 1970. Since the 1970/71 winter it has occurred in every non-breeding season at least once other than for the five from 1994/95 to 1998/99. 35 sites have held birds in the period 1970 to 2019. Prominent in the 1970s was Whinfell Tarn which, intriguingly, hosted a late bird on 30 May 1974 and an early bird just two and a half months later on 18th August. The same site also hosted a bird between 4th and 24th October 1977 and another late bird on 7th June 1980.

Number of birds per decade



In the winter of 1986/87 a bird was recorded at Siddick Pond north of Workington between 28th December and 27th February. No bird was reported in the following winter but one was present in the early part of the 1988/89 winter and annual wintering occurred at this site uninterrupted until 1992/93. There was then just one other record here in January 2002 until regular occupation of the site resumed in January 2005 and continued in each subsequent winter up to 2018/19. However the site was not occupied in the 2019/20 winter. In recent times, this has been the only regular wintering site in the county. Determining numbers of birds occupying a reed-bed is inevitably difficult but up to four were recorded at Siddick on 14th January 2006 and three were present on 2nd February 2012, 14th November and 11th December 2013. This remains the only site which has held more than a single bird at any one time. The only other site to have held birds in consecutive winters is Longtown Ponds which attracted a bird in December 1986 and January 1988.

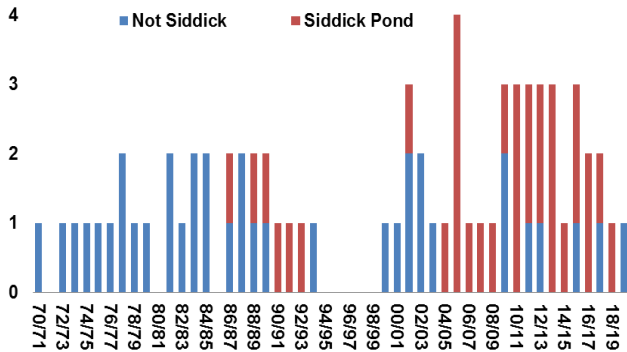
Annual maxima and date ranges of Bitterns at Siddick Pond, 1986/87 – 2019/20:

	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03
Max.	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
First	28 Dec		20 Oct	17 Nov	22 Oct	21 Oct	4 Nov									18 Jan	
Last	27 Feb		7 Nov	16 Feb	24 Feb	8 Feb	14 Feb									-	
	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20
Max.	0	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	2	2	1	1	0
First		?	16 Nov	?	7 Nov	27 Nov	13 Dec	30 Oct	20 Nov	mid Oct	4 Oct	14 Oct*	19 Oct	6 Oct	28 Sep	5 Oct*	
Last		16 Feb	? May	4 Feb	12 Jan	?	8 Jan	20 Feb	27 Mar	26 Mar	17 Mar	10 Mar	25 Jan	19 Mar	19 Feb	26 Nov	

\* There are un-validated records in early August 2014 and 19th August 2018

The maximum number of individuals reported in any one winter is six in the Solway Basin in 1831/32, with four in 1891/92 and more recently four all at the regular wintering site at Siddick Pond in the winter of 2005/06. Indeed, the attraction to Siddick in recent years may hide evidence of genuine influx years. The next most prolific winters have been in 1921/22 and 1923/24 and in addition, 2001/02, each with records from three sites, the latter of which included Siddick. These have been followed by the four winters from 2010/11 through to 2013/14 and 2015/16 also all with three birds, but either entirely or mostly at Siddick.

Number of birds per winter 1970/71 - 2019/20

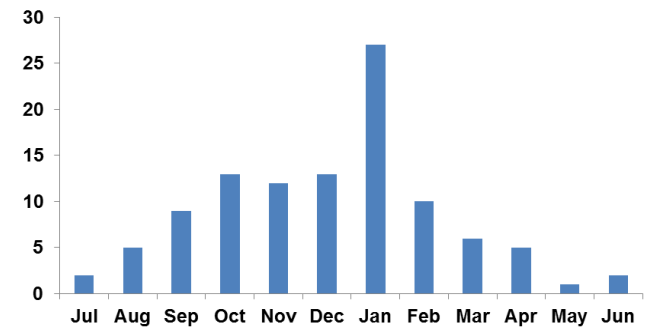


Away from Siddick records are often of one day duration but birds have occurred for short periods of a few days at various sites and occasionally, for more prolonged periods. Most intriguingly as it was in the breeding season, a booming male occupied Crosscanonby Marshes near Allonby from 23rd April to 22nd June 1965 (Stokoe archive). Other long stayers have included singles at a gravel pit at Silloth in October / November 1955, by the River Caldew between Dalston and Carlisle between early January and early February 1982, at Lantern Tarn Moss near Braystones in West Cumbria from late January to late March 2003 and at Urswick Tarn from late December 2009 to late February 2010. A bird seen at Grasmere on 31st August 1983 was followed by one at the same site on 1st January 1984, which has also been treated as the same bird, though it was not seen between these dates; likewise one at the Lyth Valley wetlands in September 2015 and February 2016.

There are five "summer" records including the already mentioned Crosscanonby bird of 1965. Others involved single birds at Ulverston on 15th June 1945, Whinell Tarn on 30th May 1974 and again at Whinell Tarn on 7th June 1980, while at least one of the four birds at Siddick in 2005/06 remained into May 2006. The first migrants or dispersing birds may arrive from July onwards. However there are just two July records, the earliest at an unnamed site in the north west of the county on 4th July 1977 and at Brougham near Penrith on 15th July 1962. The earliest August records both at Arnside on 4th August 1984 and 5th August 1969 may have involved birds from the adjacent breeding site at Leighton Moss, so the first genuine migrant arrival in that month may concern one on Windermere on 11th August 1933. There are only five August records although there are also two un-validated records for the first half of the month at Siddick in 2014 and 2018.

The incidence of new first records at different sites gradually builds to December, followed by a sharp rise in January with fewer new birds thereafter. The January peak could be a result of hard weather displacement from the continent in mid-winter. Of the five April records and other than the long staying Crosscanonby bird, the latest involved a bird at Sunbiggin Tarn on 23rd April 1957.

Month of first occurrence (excludes undated records)



There is just one ringing recovery. This concerns a bird ringed as a chick at Lake Malaren, Sweden on 15th June 1963 and found dead by the River Caldew at Dalston on 10th January 1965 (Robinson et al. 2020), and confirms that the county is the recipient migrants from the continent in winter.

All records excluding Siddick Pond

Year	Date	Site	No	Year	Date	Site	No	Year	Date	Site	No
1804		Arlecdon	1	1929	01 Jan	Rusland Valley	1	1975	23 Sep	Esthwaite Water	1
c 1830		Lorton	2	1925-1930		Solway Basin	4	1977	28 Jan	Kendal sewage works	1
1831/32		Burgh, Solway	2	1930	18 Apr	Solway Basin	1	1977	04 Jul	NW Cumbria	1
1831/32		Cumwhitton	1	1930		Ullswater	1	1977	04-24 Oct	Whinell Tarn	1
1831/32		Hayton	1	1933	11 Aug	Windermere	1	1979	03 Feb	Brathay Hall, Ambleside	1
1831/32		Abbey Holme, Abbeytown	2	1934	Sep	Monkhill Lough	1	1980	07 Jun	Whinell Tarn	1
1857	10 Feb	Rusland Valley	1	c 1936		Willow Woods, Walney	1	1982	01 Jan-08 Feb	R. Caldew,	1
1862		Sandford Mire, Appleby	1	1939	26 Dec	Carlton	1	1982	12 Apr	Workington	1
1865	Feb	Rickerby, Carlisle	1	1943	Jan	Cumberland	1	1982	28 Sep	Endmoor	1
1867	Jan	Brampton	1	1945	15 Jun	Ulverston	1	1983	31 Aug, 1 Jan 1983	Grasmere	1
1867	Jan	Esthwaite Water	1	1950	05 Feb	Walby, Crosby-on-Eden	1	1984	24 Jan	South Walney Island	1
1868	Dec	Rickerby, Carlisle	1	1951	04 Jan	Armathwaite	1	1984	04 Aug	Arnside	1
1873	03 Jan	Weddicar Rigg	1	1951	Jan	Holker	1	1985	20 Feb	Bassenthwaite Lake	1
post 1873		Skate, Dubs, Workington	1	1954	05 Feb	Rusland Pool, Rusland	1	1986	14 Dec	Longtown Ponds	1
post 1873		Lostrigg nr Workington	1	1954	Oct	New Hutton	1	1988	15 Jan	Longtown Ponds	1
1888		Bowness, Windermere	1	1955	Oct -27 Nov	Silloth	1	1988	29 Mar	Parsonby	1
1889	Dec	near Ambleside	1	1957	11 Mar	Burgh Marsh, Solway	1	1988	20-28 Dec	Nethertown	1
1889	Jan	near Ambleside	1	1957	23 Apr	Sunbiggin Tarn	1	1989	13-26 Nov	Goldmire, Barrow-	1
1891	autumn	Cardew Mires	1	1959	Dec	Bassenthwaite Marsh	1	1993	16 Dec	Esthwaite Water	1
1892	01 Jan	Cumwhitton Moss	1	1961	17 Sep	Millwood, Dalton	1	1999	04 Dec	Elterwater	1
1892	10 Jan	near Penrith	1	1962	01 Jan	Colemire, Lessonhall	1	2000	25 Sep	Waterside (flyover)	1
1892	Jan	Wedholme flow	1	1962	15 Jul	Brougham	1	2002	15 Feb	Parton (flyover)	1
1896	Jan	Oxen Park	1	1962	16 Sep	Elterwater	1	2002	30 Mar	Bassenthwaite Lake	1
1900	winter	Orton	1	1963	25 Jan	Glingerbank, Longtown	1	2003	26 Jan-23 Mar	Lantern Moss Tarn	1
1893-1906		Solway Basin	4	1964	15 Jan	Haverthwaite	1	2003	26 Jan	Mere Tarn	1
1906	29 Nov	Derwent Water	1	1965	10 Jan	R. Caldew, Dalston	1	2004	17 Mar	Keekle Flashes	1
1921	Dec	Windermere	1	1965	23 Apr	Crosscanonby	1	2009	25 Dec-27 Feb 2010	Urswick Tarn	1
1921	Nov	Anthorn	1	1969	17 Feb	Lake Windermere	1	2010	13 Mar	Lancaster Canal	1
1922	Jan	Netherby	1	1969	05 Aug	Arnside Marsh	1	2012	23 Mar-24 Mar	Arthuret Pools, Longtown	1
pre 1923		Esthwaite Water	1	1971	15 Feb	Dearham	1	2012	23 Dec	Tindale Tarn	1
1924	Jan	Solway Basin	3	1972	Oct	Grange-over-Sands	1	2015	16 Sep & 25 Feb	Lyth Valley	1
pre 1927		Rydal Water	1	1974	30 May	Whinell Tarn	1	2017	24 Sep	Sunbiggin Tarn	1
1927	Apr	Crooklands nr. Kendal	1	1974	18 Aug	Whinell Tarn	1	2019	04 Nov	Sunbiggin Tarn	1

# Little Egret

## *Egretta garzetta*

A fairly common resident, passage migrant and winter visitor, breeds in small numbers



Data included up to 2019

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Photograph: Port Carlisle, Solway Estuary, September 2017 (R. Ridley)

# Little Egret

## *Egretta garzetta*

**A fairly common resident, passage migrant and winter visitor  
Breeds in small numbers**

**Cumbria breeding population estimate 2019** 45 pairs

Little Egret is widely distributed at wetlands in southern Europe, Asia and Australasia and is partially migratory. It has undergone a recent range expansion northwards, probably benefitting from climate change. Despite this, numbers are thought to be decreasing overall as populations in southern Europe stopped increasing around 2000 and have declined since (EBBA 2020).

With fewer than a dozen recorded in Britain and Ireland prior to 1950 it started to become more regular in the second half of the century, mainly in southern England and in spring. This coincided with an increase in French and Iberian breeding populations. From 1989 post-breeding parties began to arrive with increasing numbers staying throughout the winter (Parkin & Knox 2010) and the BBRC stopped considering it a rarity from 1990. Breeding was first confirmed in Dorset, Cornwall and Wales in 1996 ((Lock & Cook 1998), Green 2002) and the population has increased immensely to an estimated 1100 pairs and 11 500 wintering birds in the UK by 2017 (Woodward et al 2020). Great Britain and Ireland are currently at the northwestern limit of its European range with Cumbria towards the northern edge. Breeding was first recorded in Cumbria and Northern Ireland) in 2012 (Perry 2013, further north than Cumbria in Northumberland in 2014 (Richardson 2015), but only as recently as 2020 in Scotland on the North Solway (Mearns 2020). There is significant juvenile dispersal from breeding sites and highest numbers are recorded on estuaries in September and October. However at both passage periods and during winter, numbers are much lower to the north of Cumbria than in the rest of Britain (Frost et al. 2021).

There is some confusion as to the date of the first Cumbrian record at Bowness-on-Solway in the winter of 1972/1973. The annual bird report has the date as 4th March 1973 whereas the Carlisle Natural History report within the same publication says it was present from November 1972 through to 29th January 1974. Meanwhile Kinley (2001) in his review of status has it from 26th December 1973 to 16th March 1974. This was followed by a bird on Rockcliffe Marsh also on the Solway Estuary on 29th May 1975 during a notable countrywide influx in May and June of that year. (This bird was not mentioned by Kinley (2001)). Further singles followed on Border Marsh on the Solway from 29th May to 4th June 1981 with another or possibly the same at Dunnerholme on the Duddon Estuary from 26th to 28th June also in 1981. Another was at Carr Beds from the River Eden near its discharge into the Solway on 3rd June 1984. However there was not a further record until one at Borwick Rails on the Duddon Estuary on 19th July 1990. An "extremely confiding bird" which took up residence on Skinburness Marsh from 30th August 1991 to 20th March 1992 carried a yellow colour ring and was considered of dubious origin (Kinley 2001).

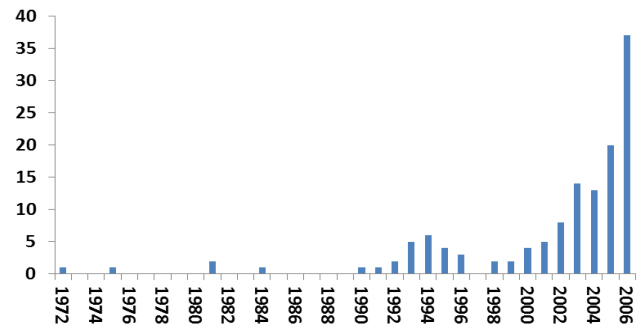
A bird at Sandscale Haws and North Walney in September 1992 heralded an era of almost annual occurrence, albeit initially at very low rates through the 1990s, with an absence only in 1997. These included the first multi-bird record when two frequented the inner Leven Estuary on 21st to 23rd August and then presumably the same birds were on nearby Sandgate Marsh on 20th/21st September 1993. Nevertheless, up to the end of 2002 there had been only a probable minimum of about 48 individuals recorded.

From then on it has become an increasingly common sight year round on our estuaries. With the exception of the first record, the probable escaped bird which wintered on Skinburness Marsh and one at Cavendish Dock at Barrow on 13th February 1996, all records prior to November 2003 were in the period April to October. With increasing numbers of records and throughout the whole year, the number of individuals involved becomes harder to determine. By adding the maximum counts for each estuary and inland site in the first and second half of each year and taking no account of possible duplication from birds moving between sites and turnover of birds from outside the county, an approximate minimum of 37 birds were reported in 2006. Indeed the years 2003 to 2006 account for about 65% of individuals cumulatively reported to that point, boosted significantly by increasing numbers on



Port Carlisle, Solway Estuary, September 2017 (R. Ridley)

Approximate number of individuals reported up to 2006



Walney Island. Thereafter it is impossible to track the population increase. Night roosts were first identified in 2007 on both Walney Island and at Allithwaite, the latter attracting birds from both the Kent and Leven estuaries. These immediately inflated peak counts, being a much more effective method of monitoring a dispersed day time population. Though sporadic, these counts produced maximums of 16 at Allithwaite in late October 2008 and 46 in late November 2013. At Walney up to 12 were reported in January and February 2007 and up to 13 between November 2007 and March 2008. Roost counts on Walney in mid-September 2008 produced 36 – a step change in abundance here and offered the first evidence of a significant autumn influx into the county. There followed 42 in mid-November 2009 and day counts of the Island since 2010 have confirmed Walney's importance with a maximum of 95 on 11th October 2019 (WBO 2020).

### Maximum whole Island counts of Walney Island 2010 - 2019

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
60	38	48	52	88	81	83	80	86	95
Nov	Oct	Oct	Oct	Oct	Nov	Oct	Oct	Oct	Oct

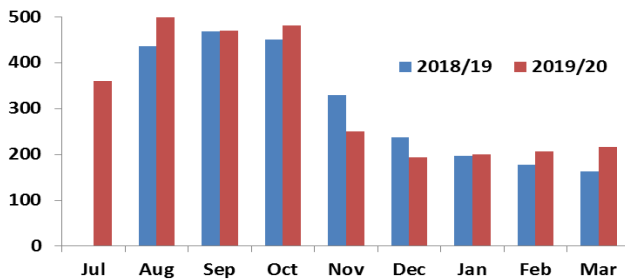
Counts at night roosts did not start with any regularity in Cumbria until the winter of 2014/15. By this time Morecambe Bay already hosted substantial numbers in both Lancashire and Cumbria. The Leighton Moss roost just over the county boundary in Lancashire, doubtless attracting birds foraging in Cumbrian parts of the Kent Estuary, attracted 127 birds as early as 2010. Regrettably count effort at roosts did not start early enough and at all roosts to be able to plot the increase in usage of the Bay. Initially effort concentrated on the Kent and Leven Estuary roosts at Dallam, Allithwaite and Conishead, with a smaller roost in the Lyth Valley discovered in 2018. Roosts at Barrow on the Furness coast, at Hodbarrow on the Duddon Estuary and at Muncaster on the Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary were added later. Details of first count date and maximum counts at each roost are detailed in the table below.

### Maximum counts at night roosts 2014 to 2019

Estuary	Roost	First count	Maximum	Date of max.
Kent	Dallam	Jan 2015	172	Jul 2019
Kent	Lyth Valley	Jan 2017	32	Feb 2019
Kent/Leven	Allithwaite	Nov 2014	145	Oct 2019
Leven	Conishead	Jan 2015	136	Aug 2019
Furness	Barrow	Aug 2018	125	Aug 2018
Duddon	Hodbarrow	Aug 2018	102	Aug 2018
Irt/Mite/Esk	Muncaster	Oct 2018	34	Jul 2019

Co-ordinated roost counts at all Cumbrian Morecambe Bay roosts and the Duddon roost at Hodbarrow were carried out in the non-breeding seasons of 2018/19 and 2019/20. These showed highest numbers between August and October, before a decline to a relatively stable mid-winter population at below half that of the autumn peak. Maximum totals were in September 2018 and August 2019 of 451 and 499 respectively. These totals are substantially higher than the total of adults and fledged young from all the Cumbrian breeding colonies combined, and confirm a significant influx in autumn from further south.

**Co-ordinated roost counts at Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary roosts 2018/19 and 2019/20 (no count in July 2018)**



The temporal pattern of usage does vary between roosts. The Dallam roost being the largest breeding site to date, has highest numbers in July which fall gradually to reach a low point in January after which numbers start to increase again. The adjacent Lyth Valley roost appears to attract birds only from October onwards and is vacant from April onwards. The Allithwaite, Conishead, Barrow and Hodbarrow roosts typically all peak in August, September or October. These roosts appear to be very constant in their usage although occasionally they have been unexpectedly vacant. It is possible that other winter roosts like the Lyth valley roost remain to be discovered as birds perhaps choose to roost closer to feeding areas during the shorter daylight hours. Numbers at roosts which are not breeding sites in April, May and June are low. In 2019 the Allithwaite, Conishead and Barrow roosts combined held 38 birds in April, 30 in May and at least 19 in June.

The number of birds using the inner Solway Estuary has proved harder to quantify. To date only one roost has been found. This in the MOD property at Eastriggs in Scotland where birds have been followed from foraging areas on the Cumbrian side of the estuary. Little counting has been done here but 50 entered the roost in October 2018. Birds can be found along the estuary from Grune Point to Rockcliffe Marsh but the largest congregations occur at a high tide roost at Port Carlisle where a maximum of 54 were reported in August 2019.

The open coast and adjacent hinterland attracts far fewer birds than the estuaries. Other than a bird flying over Harrington Reservoir and then at Siddick Pond on 15th May 1994, one on the River Derwent at Barepot Weir, Workington in March 2005 and one at Allonby in December 2010, the Outer Solway and surrounds did not see any regularity of records until 2014. Siddick Pond has become a regular haunt but with no more than three birds. The coast itself has many less records of mostly single birds in Allonby and Flimby Bays from 2016 onwards, with a maximum of four in Allonby Bay on 16th September 2019. The remaining open coast between St Bees and Haverigg and excluding the Ravenglass estuaries has similarly low but increasing occurrence rates. Following singles at Braystones in June 1994, January 2008 and August 2008, it has become annual on this coast. The Braystones to Sellafield area is favoured hosting up to two birds with Hyton Bay and Silecroft also attracting up to two, mostly on flashes and ditches inland of the coast. In addition birds from the Ravenglass estuaries regularly relocate to Drigg and Eskmeals beaches. Notable were six flying north past St Bees on 23rd June 2014.

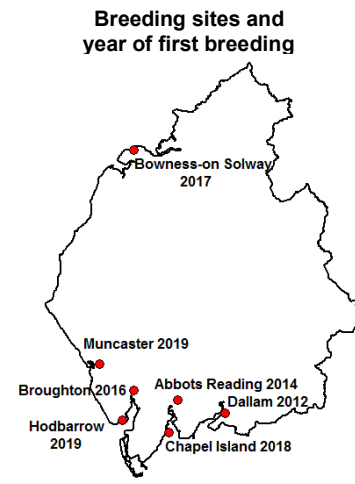
Though birds primarily favour the estuaries, the lower valleys and coastal plain inland of the coast regularly attract birds. Foremost amongst these is the Lyth Valley inland of the Kent Estuary, which regularly holds multiple birds and has its own roost. The wet grasslands of the Solway Plain are also well visited with Holme Dub, Wedholme Flow and Oulton Ponds all holding birds since 2015 including five at Holme Dub in February and March 2017. Inland of the Leven and Kent estuaries, Mere Tarn, Urswick Tarn the upper Rusland Valley, Helton Tarn and various sites inland of Arnside and the Lancaster Canal at Holme have all hosted birds.

Significantly inland occurrences remain scarce and only became annual from 2008. Prior to this there had been just three singles on the River Derwent at Cockermouth and Bassenthwaite in mid-May 1993, Windermere in June 1994 and Bassenthwaite again in August 2004. About 55 sites have hosted birds and the riparian and wetland habitats of the Esk, Eden, Caldew, Petteril, Derwent, Kent and Lune Valleys are well represented. These include birds as far upriver as Kirkby Stephen on the Eden in January 2017 and Sedbergh on the Lune in May 2012. Tindale Tarn, Cardew Mires, Bassenthwaite, Derwentwater, Mockerkin Tarn, Thirlmere, Wet Sleddale Reservoir, Killington Lake, Esthwaite Water and Windermere have all hosted birds.

Most have been singles with the first inland record of more than one concerning three which flew north west up Ennerdale on 6th July 2014. Since then the River Kent between Bowston and Kendal has hosted two birds on four occasions since September 2015, the River Lune at Rigmaden two in the winter of 2016/17, Church Moss at Wythop two in January and November 2019 with perhaps the same birds at Camerton on the River Derwent in the latter month and two flew over Patterdale on Ullswater in June 2019.

Only one site - Sunbiggin Tarn and nearby Tarn Syke appears to have attracted regular occupation. First recorded here in December 2016, a single was regular reported into the following March. Another or the same similarly frequented the area in December and January of 2017/18 and from January 2019, being joined by a second in mid-February and into March. A single returned again by 26th November 2019 and three were present on 27th December. No truly inland roosts have so far been found but it is clear that inland occurrence is increasingly commonplace.

Breeding was first confirmed at the Dallam heronry on the Kent Estuary in 2012 when three pairs raised at least eight young (LDBWS). It has continued annually here since. This was the most northerly breeding site in Britain at that time. Further colonies were confirmed at Abbots Reading near the Leven Estuary in 2014, near Broughton-in-Furness on the Duddon Estuary in 2016, at Bowness-on-Solway in 2017, on Chapel Island on the Leven Estuary in 2018 and at Hodbarrow on the Duddon Estuary and Muncaster Castle on the Esk Estuary both in 2019. Breeding has also been suspected at Conishead Priory adjacent to Chapel Island and indeed birds were present in summer at all these confirmed sites in at least the preceding year before confirmation of breeding. All, with the exception of Chapel Island are long established breeding sites of the Grey Heron and all are adjacent to estuaries.



All are also likely to have increased in size, though accurate annual monitoring data is absent. The Dallam colony had grown to about 15 pairs by 2018 but the others were likely to be still in low single figures by 2019 (D. Shackleton pers. obs.). Data on productivity is generally lacking but the Dallam colony had fledged between 97 and 121 young by 2017.

The origin of birds not fledged in Cumbria is evidenced by colour ringing data. Of 34 birds found dead or re-sighted in the county 29 were ringed as chicks in

Wales with four from Lincolnshire and one from Kent. Some have been seen more than once. A bird ringed at Bangor in North Wales in October 2010 was relocated at Ulpha Meadows by the Kent Estuary in October 2010 and was back on the Menai Straits 22 days later. Likewise a bird also ringed at the Bangor colony in 2011 was first seen on Walney Island in January 2012 and relocated there in December 2012, October 2014 and November and December 2016, though its whereabouts in the breeding season are unknown. A well-travelled bird in its first autumn, having been ringed in Lincolnshire in May 2010 was subsequently seen on the Firth of Forth in August 2010, on the Isle of Man 35 days later and then at Port Carlisle on the Solway a further 12 days later on 19th September, and again at nearby Campfield Marsh in early October.

# Great White Egret (Great Egret)

*Ardea alba*

Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor



Data included up to 2019

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## Post 2019 Records

**2020** 1 Sunbiggin Tarn 26th May, 1 Siddick Pond 28th May-1st June,  
5 Arnside, (Kent Estuary 16th-27th August, 2 Sunbiggin Tarn 17th September, 1 Wylock Marsh, Walney 27th October,  
1 Low Heskett/Little Salkeld/Edenhall in the Eden Valley 21st-29th November, 1 Geltsdale (flyover) 26th November  
**2021** 1 Langwathby, Temple Sowerby & Melmerby in the Eden Valley 1st January-1st February, 1 Scar End, Walney Island 18th May,  
1 Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary 7th July, 1 Coniston 21st July, 1 Siddick Pond 26-27th September, 1 Selker, south west coast 21st October, 1 Kirkoswald &  
Lazonby in the Eden Valley 20th November & 6th December, 1 Ullswater & Matterdale 7th & 21st December  
**2022** Present all year except April and June on Kent Estuary and surrounds maximum 9 at Arnside on 4th & 9th September. 1 Ravenglass 15th May, 1  
Sandgate, Leven Estuary 29th September, 1 Walney 24th September, 14th October & 14th December, 1 Bassenthwaite 4th & 28th January, 1  
Windermere 5th May, 1 Bowness on Solway 6th & 28th May, 1 Rockcliffe 7th June, 1 Grune Point 28th September and 1 Wigton 14th October, 1  
Siddick Pond 14th-16th August, 1 Tarnhouse, Tindale 3rd December  
**2023** Recorded from 14 locations on the Kent Estuary throughout the year with a maximum of 4 in October at Kents Bank.  
1 Lancaster Canal at Crooklands 28th January, 1 Duddon Estuary 25th March, 1 Humphrey Head 13th April.  
1 Haverigg 23rd June, 1 Drigg Point 31st August, 1 Humphtey Head – Flookburgh, 1 (pos same) Holker 14th-15th October, 1 Wylock Marsh, Walney  
2nd November

Photograph: Campfield Marsh, 16th January 2012 (N. Franklin)

# Great White Egret (Great Egret)

## *Ardea alba*

### Uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor

A globally widespread species, birds breeding in the tropical regions of the Americas, Africa and Australasia are sedentary or partially migratory in response to rainfall but undergo post-breeding dispersive movements. The north European population is migratory with birds largely wintering along the Mediterranean coast (BirdLife International factsheet 2022).

The species was common in central Europe in the mid-19th century. Persecution for the millinery trade along with wetland drainage in the second half of the 19th century caused a catastrophic decline and near-extinction in Europe. Habitat conservation, climate change and improved legal protection all contributed to an increase during the 20th century eventually resulting in the re-colonisation of former breeding sites. In the 1980s the species began to appear more regularly in northern and northwestern Europe. There followed an expansion of the breeding range to the north and west and nesting occurred for the first time in thirteen countries including Britain and Sweden. Since 2000 there has been a substantial increase in the wintering population in western and central Europe (Lawicki 2014, EBBA 2020).

After the first in Britain in Yorkshire in 1825, there had only been eight English records by 1958 (Brown & Grice 2005). With increasing records it was no longer classed as rare in Britain after 2005 (Fraser & BBRC. 2007) or as scarce after 2015 (White & Kehoe 2017). Early records were nearly all in spring and summer, probably involving overshooting spring migrants. This changed to a majority being autumn records through the 1990s possibly involving post-breeding dispersal from the growing French population and changed again to mainly winter records in the 2000s (Holt 2013). Breeding was first recorded in Somerset in 2012 (Holling & RBBP 2014) and by 2019 there were 16 to 24 pairs with the first breeding in Northern England in Cheshire & Wirral in that year (Eaton & RBBP 2021). In the same period a small wintering population has established in England estimated at about 72 birds (Frost et al. 2019).

The situation in Cumbria very much reflects the changes in the European population with the first bird not recorded until 2003 at Bassenthwaite Marsh. Since then records have become increasingly more frequent with birds returning in successive years to certain favoured locations. Determining the number of individuals involved has become harder as the number of sightings has increased with potentially mobile and multiple birds even within the same coastal areas. It is estimated that ten new individuals appeared in the county over the first decade of their presence.

#### Early records

Year	Date	Location
2003	1-2 Aug	Bassenthwaite Lake
2006	14-22 Mar	Skinburness Marsh, Solway Estuary
2006	9 Jun	Walney Channel
2006	27 Jun-1 Jul	Bassenthwaite Lake
2008	6 Jan	Sellafield
2008	4 May	Derwent Water

September 20th 2009 saw the first record on the Kent Estuary and this has become the major site in the county with birds also foraging just beyond its confines on the west side of Humphrey Head on Flookburgh Marsh. With Leighton Moss on the Lancashire side of the estuary a favoured site since 2009 (LDBWS 2010) this is not surprising. Birds have been reported on the Cumbrian side of the estuary in every year since, though with low occurrence levels between 2012/13 and 2014/15. Regularly returning birds are assumed to have been involved. In the earlier years records were confined to the autumn and winter but latterly this period has extended from late summer into spring. Mid-summer records have remained rare with just one late June record and no July records to date. Favoured locations have been Arnside and Foulshaw/Ulpha Meadows but the geographical range has increased with time around the estuary and its surrounds. First recorded by the Lancaster Canal at Holme in December 2013 birds have become more regular here, at nearby Fell End nature reserve near Beetham and at Black Dyke Moss at Arnside. The Lyth Valley has also been increasingly favoured and held three on 7th December



Campfield Marsh, 13th December 2011 (N. Franklin)

2016 following an influx of nine birds to the Lancashire coast in the preceding October (LDBWS 2017). Birds have been seen crossing the estuary in the direction of Leighton Moss where they share the Little Egret roost and one left the Little Egret roost at Allithwaite in January 2017.

#### Maximum number of birds on the Kent Estuary & surrounds

Winter	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
09-10			1	1	1	3	1					
10-11			1	1								
11-12			1	2	1	1	1					
12-13					1							
13-14						1						
14-15	1			1								
15-16	2	3	2	1	1							
16-17			2	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	
17-18			1	1	2		1	1	1		1	1
18-19			2	1		1	1	1	1			
19-20	1	2	1	1	1	1			2			

Perhaps surprisingly the Leven Estuary to the west and north of Flookburgh Marsh has provided only five records up to 2019. Walney Island and the Furness Coast, the Duddon Estuary and the Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary complex have produced three each and the West coast at Sellafield two. Further north there is an un-validated record at the coastal Siddick Pond in April 2015. All these records involved single and apparently short staying birds.

Having hosted a bird in March 2006, the Solway Estuary didn't see another until November 2011. It has had less consistent occupation than the Kent Estuary but nevertheless has had records in every year since. It also hosted the county's only summering bird when one frequented Rockcliffe Marsh from mid-April to mid-August 2017. Campfield Marsh at Bowness is the favoured location but birds have been found as far west as Skinburness and east as far inland as Carlisle and Longtown.

#### Maximum number of birds on the Solway Estuary & surrounds

Winter	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
11-12					1	2	1	1	1	1		
12-13				1	1							
13-14				1	1		1	1				
14-15		1	2						1			
15-16				1	1							
16-17				1	1	1				1	1	1
17-18	1	1		2							1	
18-19				1								
19-20			1	1	1	1			2			

Birds had been reported from five truly inland sites up to 2019. Of these Bassenthwaite Lake is most prominent but Sunbiggin Tarn and adjacent area hosted a long staying bird in the winter of 2017/18 and possibly a returning bird in spring 2018. Inland records have increased significantly after 2019.

#### Inland records to 2019

2006	27 Jun-1 Jul	Bassenthwaite	2017	20 Nov-4 Jan	Sunbiggin
2008	4 May	Derwent Water	2018	26 Apr	Sunbiggin
2011	2 Jun	Bassenthwaite	2019	14-16 Jul	Bassenthwaite
2011	18-24 Nov	Bassenthwaite	2019	16 Oct	Wetheral (flyover)
2016	5 Oct	Killington Res.			

# Cattle Egret

## *Bubulcus ibis*

Rare visitor



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

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### Post 2019 records

- 2020** 1 Fell End Nature Reserve, Beetham 8th November (J. Wilson)  
**2021** No records  
**2022** No records  
**2023** 1 Ulverston 27th January, 1 adult Rockcliffe Marsh 13th-23rd April, 2 adults Foulshaw 5th May, 1 Esk Estuary (Muncaster) 22nd-25th July, 1 Thacka Beck (Penrith) 30th September, max 7 Black Dyke Flash (Arnside) 11th -21st October, 10 Meathop 20th November, 9 Arnside 25th November

**Photograph: Grinsdale, Solway Estuary, 18th February 2008 (N. Franklin)**

## Cattle Egret

### *Bubulcus ibis*

Rare visitor – 12 records of 15 birds

Total birds	Pre 1970	1970 - 2019	Total
No. in Cumbria	2	13	15

Cattle Egret has an extremely wide distribution being found on all continents excluding Antarctica. It breeds in colonies but is not as dependent as other herons on wetlands, being able to utilise pastures and arable land. There are several races exhibiting differing degrees of migratory movement. Some are fully migratory, while many populations make dispersive movements related to food resources driven by seasonal rainfall. Some European birds migrate to winter in North Africa but most winter within their breeding range. Within Europe, it has undergone considerable range expansion in recent years particularly in south west Europe and large numbers breed in Iberia and France as far north as the Channel coast (EBBA 2020).

The first British record was in 1805, with only a further two being found prior to 1958. Records are now widespread and have been almost annual since 1962 (Brown & Grice 2005). It remained rare up to the mid-2000s but following an influx of birds between 2007 and 2011, it was classed as scarce but with high annual variation in numbers (White & Kehoe 2016). Following another large influx in 2016 (White & Kehoe 2018) and the establishment of a small wintering population in southern England estimated at about 65 birds (Frost et al. 2019), it is no longer considered scarce nationally, but remains rare in Wales, parts of northern England and Scotland (White & Kehoe 2019). A pair bred in Somerset in 2008 and possibly 2009, but not again until 2017 in England. Since then a small breeding population has established with an attempt as far north as Cheshire and the Wirral in 2019 (Eaton & RBBP 2021).

It was not until July 1964 that the first Cumbrian bird was recorded in a hayfield near Appleby. Later that month, a bird was on Walney Island (Harber & BBRC 1965). Though treated as different birds at the time there must be possibility that these records involved the same individual based on its rarity at that time. More than two decades elapsed before the next, feeding in a field of cattle by the River Eden at Scotby Holmes near Carlisle in 1987. Again there was a lapse of a further two decades before a bird favoured sheep fields at Grinsdale west of Carlisle in February 2008. It roosted in trees by the River Eden for four days and was perhaps a remnant of a national influx late in 2007. A possible second national influx in the autumn of 2008, but with birds still remaining from 2007

#### All records

Year	Date	Location	No	Details	Observer
1964	3 Jul	New Hall, Appleby	1	In hayfield	C. Hull, R. Robson
	26 Jul	South Walney Island	1		T. Bradshaw, F. Quale
1987	12 May	R. Eden, Scotby Holmes	1	Amongst cattle	D. Clugston
2008	17-20 Feb	Townhead Farm, Grinsdale	1	Amongst sheep	I. Carsewell et.al.
	17-18 Oct	Lanercost	1		M. Gardner et.al.
	20 Oct	<i>Crosby-on-Eden</i>	1	<i>Assumed to be same as above</i>	<i>Birdguides</i>
	13-27 Nov	Little Urswick /Urswick Tarn	1	Amongst cattle	D. Jewell, H. Stables et.al.
	23-29 Nov	Whassett, Milnthorpe	2		B. Airey, P. Robinson et.al.
2017	10 Oct-4 Nov	Arnside	max 3	2 on 5 dates between 20-29 October, 3 on 4 November	T. Walkington. M. Redman, G. Bottomley
2018	19 Sep	Orton	1	Flushed from edge of field	R. Bottomley
2019	9-30 Mar	Oulton	1		F. Mawby
	27 Apr & 2 May	Hodbarrow	1		C. Bell
	14 Aug	Sandside	1		J. Lishman



Grinsdale, Solway Estuary, 18th February 2008 (N. Franklin)

(Hudson & BBRC 2009), saw a bird first at Lanercost in October and then what was presumed to be the same bird at nearby Crosby-on-Eden two days later. Following close on in the south, a bird occupied cattle fields and roosted by Urswick Tarn near Ulverston for several days in November, followed by the presence of two birds together at Whassett, Milnthorpe in the latter part of that month.

Cumbria had to wait a further nine years for its next record. In 2017 three birds frequented the Leighton Moss area in north Lancashire with one present from early March and three from early April and subsequently throughout the year (LDBWS 2018). Two of these birds were reported on the Cumbria side of the border on five dates between 20th and 29th October with all three at Arnside Tower on 4th November. This was the beginning of a recent run of occurrences. In September 2018 one was flushed from a field edge inland near Orton and in 2019 there were three records. In March a long staying bird frequented the fields around Oulton Gravel Pits in the Solway Basin, a bird was seen on two dates at Hodbarrow in late April and early May and one was at Sandside by the Kent Estuary in mid-August.

Excluding the 2008 records which may have been the result of national influxes and the 2017 records when birds had been already present at Leighton Moss for a prolonged period, the remaining records all fall within spring and autumn passage or dispersal periods.

# Nightjar (European Nightjar)

## *Caprimulgus europaeus*

An uncommon summer visitor; breeds in very small numbers



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

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- \*Stafford, J. 1962. The Nightjar enquiry 1957-58. *Bird Study* 9: 104-116
- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 records

- 2020** Breeding: Records from 3 sites. Passage:1 Jockey Shield, Castle Carrock 3rd October
- 2021** Breeding: Records from 4 sites.
- 2022** Breeding: Records from 3 sites. Passage:1 Haverthwaite 19th September
- 2023** Breeding: Records from 7 sites including a moorland edge site at Geltsdale.

Photograph: Netherby pre 1948 (W.B. Redmayne from "Cumberland Scrapbook")

## Nightjar (European Nightjar)

### *Caprimulgus europaeus*

An uncommon summer visitor; breeds in very small numbers

Atlas status: % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
<b>Breeding 1997-2001</b>	0.05	0.16	0.11	0.32
<b>Breeding 2008-2012</b>	0.05	0.32	0.00	0.38
Atlas status: % 10km sq	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-2
<b>with breeding evidence</b>	16.84	2.11	4.12	4.21

The nominate race breeds across the Western Palearctic temperate and boreal zones south of the Arctic Circle and from North Africa to Mongolia. It winters largely in East and Southern Africa (Wernham et al., 2002) and is a summer visitor to Britain, which lies at the very northwest of its breeding range (EBBA 2020).

In Britain, it favours lowland heaths and raised mosses, open clearings in deciduous, coniferous or mixed woodland, scrubby commons and downland, and moorland or fell edges. It will also occasionally nest on sand dunes, shingle and industrial waste ground. Historically, traditional strongholds have been on heathland, especially in the southern heartlands. However, in the past century, newly-planted, clear-felled and re-stocked areas in conifer plantations have become increasingly significant. By 1992, this had become the single most important breeding habitat in England, holding 43% of churring males - compared to 36% on heathland (Morris et al. 1994). Stands of Conifers generally cease to be used when they are more than 15-20 years old (Bowden and Green 1991).

Across the UK as a whole, the Nightjar population underwent a marked decline between the 1930s and the 1970s (Sharrock 1976, Holloway 1996). Between the 1968-72 and 1988-91 National Breeding Atlases, there was a further range contraction of 51% across Britain and Ireland. This decline has been partly explained by habitat loss, changes in agricultural practices, notable increases in pesticide use, and the huge increase in recreational pressure. However, as this pattern was on a pan-European scale, there were also undoubtedly additional problems on migration routes and over-wintering grounds. Encouragingly though, there has been a notable population recovery in Britain since the 1980s. Between the dedicated BTO surveys of 1981 and 1992, there was an estimated population increase of 75%, with a further 36% increase between the 1992 and 2004 surveys when 4600 males were estimated (Gribble 1983, Morris et al., 1994, Conway et al. 2007). However, this has been principally a result of consolidation and expansion in the south and east. It appears to be struggling to recolonise its previous haunts in North-west Britain. Between the 1988-91 and 2007-11 Atlases, the bird has been completely lost from Northern Ireland, and nearly so from Argyll. In Dumfries and Galloway, conversely, it showed an 18% net gain in occupied 10km squares.

During the late 19th Century MacPherson (1892) asserted that Nightjars bred throughout Cumbria, 'from the mosses which fringe the Solway Firth to the Westmorland moors that march with Yorkshire'. He also stated that they would be a good deal commoner 'if spared by keepers'. Mitchell writing in 1885 of the part of Lancashire now in Cumbria described it as showing a 'greater partiality for the higher ground and there it often frequents the woods of the low fells becoming numerous in some parts of Furness'. In the same period, Higgins (1883) found a Nightjar nest at Meathop. Armitt (1902) noted its nesting on the fell slopes by a wood edge 'in several spots' in the Rydal area.

Up until World War II, the species still bred right across the county on peat-mosses and commons, in woodland clearings and on the lower moorlands and bracken-covered slopes of the fells, perhaps nesting to 1500 feet (457m). A particular stronghold was on the Solway mosses, where four to six birds may have been heard churring at once (Blezard, 1943) and where Redmayne photographed a nest at Netherby sometime prior to 1948. In the Furness area during the same period, nesting was regarded as 'regular' on the mosses and many of the low fells. Loughrigg, Ambleside, between Wray and Hawkshead, the western side of Windermere, Haverthwaite, Grange, Tam Hows, Coniston, Rusland Moss, Ulverston, Walney Island, and Barrow, all being regular haunts. Kirkby Lonsdale was also a favoured area (Blezard



Leven Mosses, 30th May 2011 (L. Gould)

1943, Oakes 1953). Ratcliffe (2002) referenced regularly nesting on the heathery Lakeland Fells (e.g. in lower Kentmere) well into the early 1940s. These, he said, are now long gone, since by the mid-20th century, the Lake District hills and Howgill Fells had been degraded to 'mainly grass-covered sheepwalks'.

Despite a BTO questionnaire survey in 1952 showing only breeding in the south of the county (Norris 1960), the Bassenthwaite / Keswick / Borrowdale area held birds in the 1950s (Penrith NHS Bulletin, Field Naturalist 1953-57). In addition Ratcliffe (2002) noted a favourite haunt on Penrith Beacon until at least 1955 and birds were also reported at Appleby in 1957 (Field Naturalist 1957) and on the sandstone ridge of Lazonby and Wan Fells to the north in 1960 (Field Naturalist 1960). By the beginning of the 1960s however, Stokoe (1962) deemed it 'uncommon' on the Solway mosses. He also described it as 'scarce' around the Coniston fells, where a marked decline had been noted by Cowcill (1961) during the previous decade. The limestone hills around Morecambe Bay still boasted several pairs, and good numbers were noted in the Winster Valley in 1959 and 1960 (Stokoe 1962).

Following a bird killed by a car in Eskdale in early August 1954 (Stokoe Archive) and a record in 1955 (Field Naturalist 1955), birds were regularly present in establishing conifer plantations at the mouth of Wasdale / Mitredale from at least the 1960s to the early 1980s. Up to four churring birds were present in some years in the early to mid-1970s (J. Callion pers. com.). If birds reported in Eskdale in 1981 and 1982 refer to the same site, the latter year appears to have been the last with records for this area. The recently afforested Ennerdale also held birds in 1964 and they were described as normally present but absent here in 1965 (Field Naturalist 1964, 1965).

Since the late 1950s, there have been only very sporadic records of fell-nesting Nightjars in Cumbria. In the North Pennines, there is just a single record of potential breeding, at Geltsdale in about 1970 (M. Carrier, pers.com). In the southern Lake District, birds continued to occupy the Coniston/Nibthwaite area up to the mid-1960s with records on the adjacent Blawith Fell and Oxen Fell in 1962 (Stokoe Archive). There were reports from Rydal in 1965 (Field Naturalist 1965), Birkrigg Common in 1977, Cartmel Fell in 1981, Wray also in 1981, High Dam in 1982, and Moor Top, Grizedale in 1999. Arnside Knott held birds in 1962, 1963 (Stokoe Archive), 1971 and 1982. Not all of these records were of confirmed breeding and all are in areas also holding plantation woodland and it is unclear as to the precise habitat association. A notable early 1960s record concerns three churring birds at Cockshot between Beetham and Storth in 1962 (Stokoe Archive). This is more likely a lowland moss site but again with the presence of woodland.

Remarkably, a record of a bird at Scaleby Moss in 1981 was the only record from any of the Solway mosses between the early 1960s and the end of the 20th Century. In both 1999 and 2000 and again in 2007, birds were reported from Dykesfield, Burgh-by-Sands with one at Bowness in 2002 and three at Salta Moss near Allonby in 2004. In 2012 and 2013, churring birds were located at two different sites in targeted searches of the Cumbrian north Solway mosses. In 2012, at least four churring birds were involved.

Other than in national survey years, there is little data generated by standardised survey effort on which to assess year to year status, and with the low detectability of the species, the records supplied

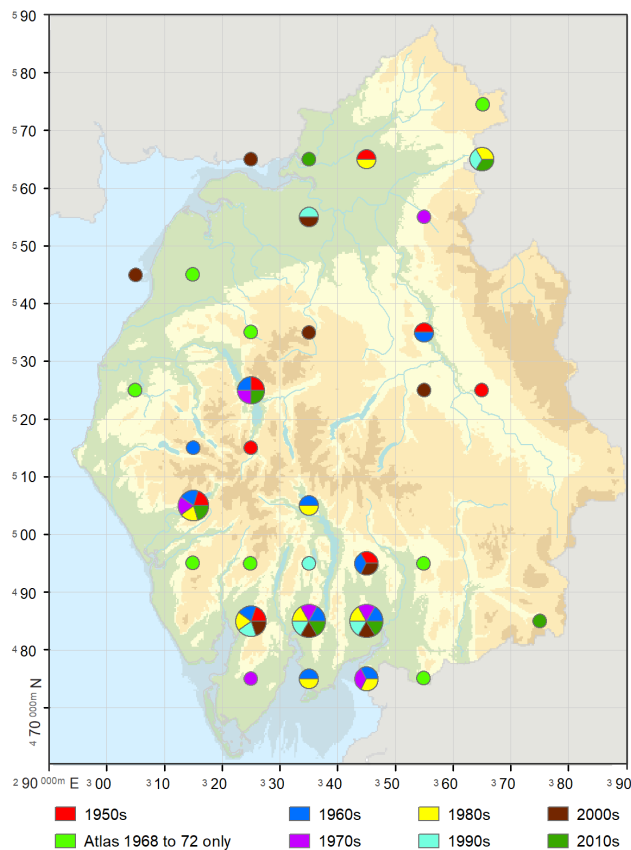
are likely to under-represent true distribution and numbers, with observers concentrating on known sites. Since 1970, there have been records from 32 to 35 general locations, but in recent decades, the species foothold has centred on the low land mosses bordering the Duddon, Leven and Kent Estuaries, with records from 1983 to 2000 around the Duddon, from 1982 to the present around the Leven and from 1979 to present around the Kent. At none of these locations were birds reported in every year during these periods, though it is unclear how much of this is attributable to recording effort and how much to genuine absence. On the Kent mosses there were records in only one year between 1984 and 2012! On the Duddon Mosses, up to five churring males were reported in the early to mid-1980s and up to 3 at each of the Morecambe Bay areas more recently. However in some years the annual bird reports do not identify specific sites and on the Leven, multiple records in some years from different but adjoining mosses make an assessment of numbers difficult.

Though there have been sporadic records from other areas, only the previously mentioned Wasdale/Eskdale site has exhibited prolonged longevity. Elsewhere, most occupation appears to have been short-lived of one or two years. Other than at sites mentioned in previous paragraphs, these have involved records of birds at Brandlehow (Derwentwater) in 1970 (Stokoe Archive), Grange-over-Sands in 1975 and 1989, Blawith in 1998, Windermere in 2005 and Greystoke Forest in 2006.

It was unknown on the Border Moors prior to the advent of commercial forestry mainly from the 1960s (Graham 1993). Subsequently the area appears to have been occupied during the 1968/72 National Atlas but with no documented records. It was apparently vacated sometime after until an isolated record in 1996 and then again held birds in 2014. A nearby plantation in the Tyne Gap occupied in the early 1980s but then apparently vacated, has attracted up to five churring males since 2013 following felling. A similar site has recently been found in upper Dentdale and there are a series of un-verified recent reports from various clear-fell sites in the south central and northern Lake District.

**Distribution and temporal change by 10km square and decade**

(note, a 10km square can include several discrete sites which may have variable occupation levels within decades)



\*Un-dated 10km records from the 1968 to 1972 National Atlas spanning two decades and which do not otherwise feature in other decades are treated separately.

Other status data comes from three BTO national Nightjar surveys.

**Results of national surveys in Cumbria**

Year	Sites	Churring males	Location of sites	Reference
1981	8	10	7 in the south 1 on the Solway Plain	Gribble (1983)
1992	2	6	2 in the south	Morris et al. (1994)
2004	3	6	2 in the south 1 on the Solway Plain	Conway et al. (2007)

In summary the species had effectively disappeared from the North Pennines, Eden Valley, East Lakeland, Lune Valley and Cumbrian Dales by the time of the 1968-72 Atlas. There were further dramatic declines by the time of the 1988-91 Atlas with the species located in just three of the 18 previously occupied 10km squares. Survey work for the 2008-12 Atlas located just four occupied 10km squares, two on the Solway Plain, one in the Morecombe Bay area and one in the Eden Valley. This is exactly the same number as found in the 1997-01 Atlas when there were three in the south of the county and one on the Solway Plain. Since then sites on the Border Moors and the Kent Mosses have been re-occupied and other sites found, though the extent of their longevity will require consistent monitoring.

It is interesting to compare this apparently bleak picture with the situation in Dumfries and Galloway and in North Yorkshire. In the former the population in 2004 was 25 males (Conway et al. 2007). Admittedly with an increase in monitoring effort through the establishment of a dedicated study group, it had reached 40 males by 2016 and 49 by 2018 with colonisation of both clear-fell forestry but also restored bogs on the North Solway Mosses (Gallagher 2016, Dumfries and Galloway Bird Reports) In North Yorkshire, the 2004 national survey located no less than 229 Nightjar territories within forestry plantations on the North York Moors, which was double the number found in the 1992 survey (Scott et al. 1998, Conway et al. 2007).

In Cumbria, there are large swathes of clear-felled and re-stocked forestry in the Border forests of Kershope and Spadeadam and in parts of the Lake District. There has also been restoration of lowland bogs on both the Solway and Morecambe Bay and this is continuing. This should clearly produce many areas suitable for breeding Nightjar and the apparent return of birds to the Border Forest and the Solway and Kent mosses in recent years is evidence of this. Lack of observer coverage may well be a major contributory factor here. Because of its twilight habits, the species is particularly difficult to detect using standard survey methodologies, and requires dedicated nocturnal visits to potential sites. Many such sites in Cumbria are particularly remote and often have access issues. Combining these factors with relatively few observers means the species must surely be under-recorded, and is probably also under-reported due to the perceived threats of disturbance and egg collecting.

The earliest date for Cumbria is 20th April 1996 on the Duddon Mosses, one of only five records before 11th May. There are only nine records in August and five in September. The latest is on 21st September 1963 (Stokoe Archive) at Grune Point. This bird was a migrant not attributable to a breeding site and, indeed, there are only 15 such records for the county as detailed below.

**All records of migrants (all single birds)**

Date	Location	Circumstances
14 Aug 59	Ravenglass	Picked up exhausted and died
21 Sep 63	Grune Point	Caught in mist net at dusk
29 Jul 80	Milnthorpe	Heard only
11 May 85	Siddick Pond	Flushed
26 Jun 85	Walney Island	
06 Sep 86	Middleton	Hawking over river
06 Sep 88	Rockcliffe Marsh	
10 Jul 90	Egremont	
17 Sep 90	South Walney	Female on passage
08 Jul 91	Foulney Island	Roosting under wardens caravan
26 Aug 91	Southwaite	On road
05 May 00	Campfield Marsh	Mobbed by Swallows in daylight
14 Sep 07	Kirkhead, Allithwaite	Flushed twice
30 May 12	Sedbergh	Heard only
10 Sep 14	Allonby	Caught in mist net in garden

# Long-eared Owl

## *Asio otus*

An uncommon resident, passage migrant and winter visitor; breeds in very small numbers



### Data included up to 2019

#### Non-standard References

- \*Archibald, C.F. 1901. Nesting of Long-eared Owl. *Zoologist 4th Series*, 5: 31  
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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

#### Selected Post 2019 Records

- 2020** At least 14 breeding sites including 8 in or near Geltsdale. 2 at Shap in December  
**2021** Only one possible breeding site following a vole crash. 2 to 3 in a day roost at Longtown in February. Singles at South Walney in October & December and Calder Bridge in November  
**2022** 1 confirmed breeding at Bampton Grange. Singles at Longtown 7th January (found dead next day), 1 South Walney 20th June, 1 Geltsdale 9th December  
**2023** 11 confirmed breeding sites and 1 possible site including 6 in or near Geltsdale. 1 at Shap in January, 1 soaked and moribund at the head of Windermere in late July following a thunderstorm

Photograph: Dentdale 2007 (G. Dunn)

## Long-eared Owl

### *Asio otus*

An uncommon resident, passage migrant and winter visitor;  
breeds in very small numbers

Atlas status: % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
Breeding 1997-2001	0.16	0	0.49	0.65
Breeding 2008-2012	0.22	0.27	0.49	0.97
Winter 2007/08-2011/12	0.86			
Atlas status: % 10km sq	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
with breeding evidence	12.63	5.26	10.53	13.68
Atlas status: % 10km sq			1981-84	2007-12
with wintering evidence			4.21	9.47

The Long-eared Owl has a circumpolar distribution, with the nominate race being found across the boreal and temperate zones of the Palearctic region. In Britain it is both an uncommon, but widespread resident breeder and a regular and semi-irruptive winter visitor. The current British breeding population is estimated to be in the range of 1600 to 5300 pairs (Woodward et al. 2020). It is a particularly difficult species to monitor and survey. Being highly nocturnal, surprisingly secretive, and often located in very remote locations (which is certainly the case in Cumbria), it must surely be one of the most under-recorded of all British birds. Typically, field voles account for 40-45% of the diet (Glue & Hammond 1974). As a consequence, numbers of both breeding and wintering birds fluctuate in response to vole cycles. The British breeding population is regarded as relatively sedentary, though not particularly site-faithful (Wernham et al. 2002).

In winter, they may form communal daytime roosts. Roosting birds can sometimes number well into double figures (Bird Atlas 2007-11), though there have been no historical records of such large assemblies in Cumbria. Roosts are often in thick hedges, shelter belts or hawthorn scrub, and invariably adjacent to open hunting terrain. The resident population is joined in the winter by a variable number of immigrants, dependent upon breeding success and food supply on their breeding grounds. Ringing recoveries indicate that these birds largely come from Fennoscandia, the Baltic and Eastern Europe, but with some also breeding in Iceland and the Faroes (Wernham et al. 2002; Robinson et al. 2020). It is not known whether immigrant and resident owls form mixed or separate roosts. Immigrants reach all areas of Britain, but are more concentrated in the east of the country (where the larger roosts generally form). Roosts are often at traditional locations, suggesting some degree of winter site-fidelity in individuals. In the absence of any relevant ringing recoveries, it is unclear whether any of our winter visitors ever remain to breed here (Wernham et al. 2002).

MacPherson (1892) offered limited evidence of the status of this species in Cumbria during the last quarter of the 19th Century, noting that opinions had always differed as to its relative abundance in the county. More specifically, he listed a bird killed in Barrowfield Wood, Kendal in 1875, and mentioned eight in Ulpha Wood, two of which were shot in an unknown year. In general, he described it as occurring sporadically in the larger plantations in the Pennines, mentioning Renwick, up to the very borders of Scotland, as well as in fell districts, and in the large woods of the lower grounds. In South Westmorland he described it as scarce, but that several had been killed near Kendal. He quoted Durnford who regarded the species as plentiful near Barrow in 1876, while Mitchell (1888) also referenced Durnford (1876) who said that it was often shot in winter and was particularly plentiful in 1875. Rather surprisingly, MacPherson added that it 'suffers more from pole traps than any other species of owl'.

According to Wilson (1933), it was 'somewhat local in its distribution' in the Eden Valley, mentioning Howgill Castle and that it favoured plantations of spruce and larch. Blezard (1943) described it as sparsely distributed across Cumbria, except in the northern district where it remained fairly common with a preference for the woodlands bordering the mosses and also the woods of the lower slopes of the fells. He did, however, note a recent notable decline on the Solway region and the Cumberland plain, and in Westmorland described it as of local occurrence having suffered



Geltsdale, North Pennines, 22nd April 2011 (N. Franklin)

decreases in some localities. In the Lune Valley and parts of the Pennines, it was scarce. He believed felling during the war period 1914-18 had affected its distribution. Ratcliffe (2002) also referred to a collapse in numbers around 1940 in the Solway area, from which it has never recovered. This may be partly explained by the felling of woodland and agricultural intensification in the area during World War II. Interestingly, Blezard mentioned four instances of ground-nesting in the period – three in the North Lakes and one in Cumberland. In the first half of the 20th Century in the Furness area, it bred in wooded areas from Barrow eastwards to Grange and the Rusland valley, and in several plantations near Windermere and the River Winster (Oakes 1952). Oakes mentioned two ground nests near Barrow. At this time he quoted Dodd who believed it was declining in the Barrow area where it favoured old Magpie nests. Oakes believed that competition with the increasingly common Tawny Owl and the recent destruction of woodlands may have accounted for apparent declines.

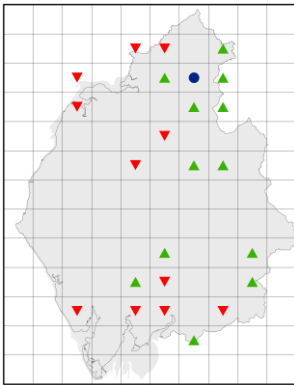
In 1956 pairs were found at Egremont and Lamplugh in West Cumbria (Field Naturalist), though it is unclear if these were breeding records. By the early 1960s, Stokoe (1962) affirmed a decrease in Cumbria and described it as 'generally sparse'. He described its main habitat at this time as scrub and remote woods on mosses, moors and fell slopes, where it bred up to 1200 feet (366m). However, in 1959 and 1960, he found pairs in several small woods on the Cumberland Fells between 1000 and 1200 feet including at Matterdale (Stokoe Archive), while Graham (1993) knew of breeding in Spadeadam in 1963 and 1964.

Reports of breeding Long-eared Owls supplied to annual bird reports since the 1970s are generally scant, with very little annual breeding evidence submitted. These have come from the Border Forest, the Tindale and Geltsdale Fells, the Kirkby Stephen area, Aisgill and Upper Dentdale all on the Pennine fringes, Mitredale in the Western Lake District, Calderbridge on the West Coast, Greystoke and Shap on the fringes of the Northern Lake District, Blencarn in the Eden Valley and Killington, Lillymere and Lambrigg in the south eastern low fells. Most have held pairs in several consecutive years but only the Geltsdale area has exhibited any prolonged occupation. Other areas with summer records but no confirmed breeding have included Grizedale Forest and surrounds, Arnaby, Maulds Meaburn, Oddendale (Shap), the Orton area, the Ulverston area and the Rusland, Winster and Kentmere Valleys.

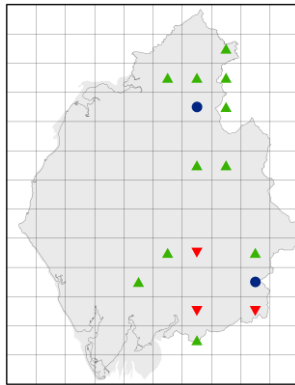
It is known that the number of Long-eared Owls attempting to breed in any one year is highly variable, and closely linked with food availability, particularly the number of field voles present (Glue 1977). In 1985, for example, breeding evidence was recorded in at least seven sites in the north-east of the county (Birds in Cumbria 1985). It is instructive to note that in 2014 a vole plague in the North Pennines coincided with a record eight occupied Long-eared Owl territories on or within a few kilometres of the Geltsdale RSPB

Reserve. These included a rare and successful crag-nesting pair (Howard 2014).

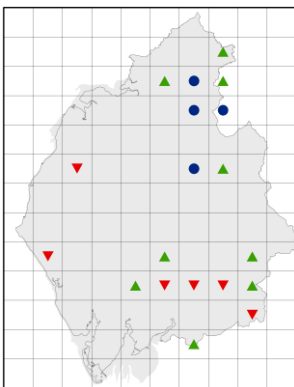
**Breeding distribution change 1968-72 to 2008-12**



**Breeding distribution change 1988-91 to 2008-12**

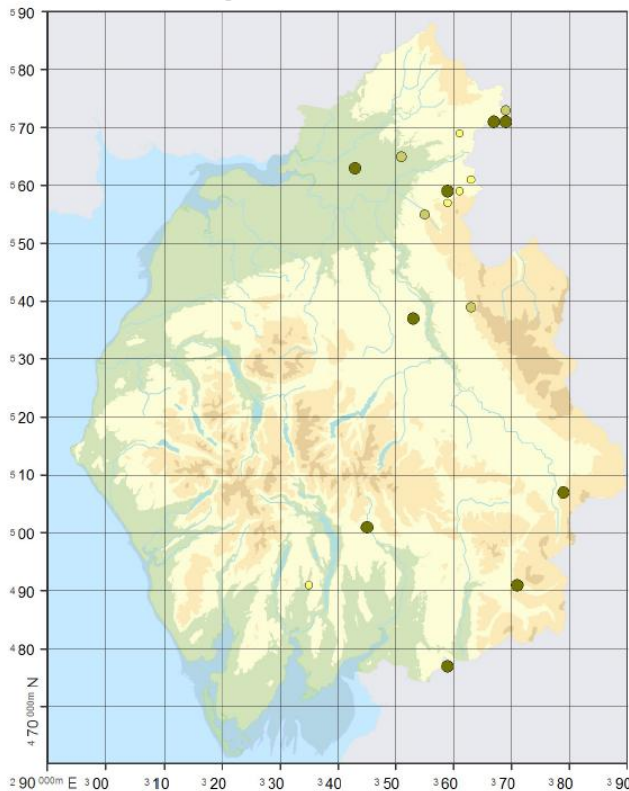


**Breeding distribution change 1997-01 to 2008-12**



Survey work for the Cumbria Atlas 2007-12 found breeding evidence in 13 10km squares in the county, a net increase of five 10km squares since the 1997-2001 Atlas. Breeding was confirmed in the Border Uplands, Solway Plain, North Pennines, Eden Valley, East Lakeland, the Cumbrian Dales and the Lune valley. There were losses in the West Lakeland foothills, but notable gains in the north-east of the county.

**Breeding distribution 2008 – 2012**



- Possible 4
- Probable 5
- Confirmed 9

Evidence of breeding in the 2008-2011 survey. Category determined by the strongest recorded evidence of breeding by birds in suitable nesting habitat in the tetrad.

Includes records from Timed Tetrad Visits and Roving Records.

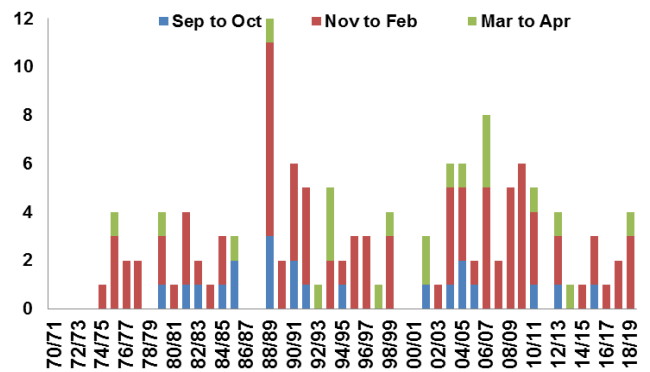
A dedicated county breeding survey conducted in January to March 2007 found up to 15 territories. The majority were in woods bordering open upland. Only limited areas with past history of occupation were surveyed, and it is probable that birds in remote and difficult-to-survey sites may have been missed. Breeding evidence came from the Pennines, the Eden Valley, the Lune Valley, the Cumbrian Dales, South and Central Lakeland and the Solway Plain (Piercy 2007). These results were in line with the findings of the Cumbria Atlas 1997-2001 which suggested a county population estimate of 10-15 pairs.

A second county breeding survey in 2019 unfortunately coincided with very low vole numbers and only located five occupied areas, only two of which were confirmed as breeding sites. (Howard 2019)

Compared to the breeding season, there have been more records for the winter period, though remarkably there were no documented November to February records before November 1974, probably through a lack of reporting opportunity rather than a lack of occurrence. However, even from 1970 onwards, it has been less than annually recorded in the non-breeding period from September to March, and even less so if the mid-winter period November to February is considered alone.

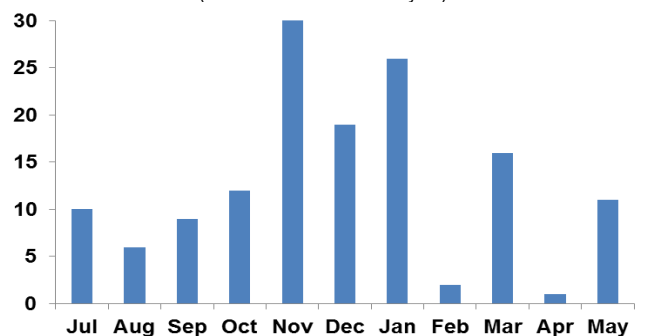
Because of the difficulty in distinguishing breeding birds and their dispersing offspring from migrants and winter visitors, determining patterns of arrival of new birds is difficult. Wernham et al (2002) considered arrival nationally to be spread from July to December, with a peak in October. The Cumbrian county data suggests the peak here to be in November. The earliest autumn records not associated with a breeding site and on or near the coast concern singles at South Walney on 8th July 2018, at North Walney on 16th July 1995 and at Yottenfews near Sellafield on 23rd July 2004. The latest spring coastal occurrences concern a bird found shot and dead at Crosby near Maryport on 10th May 1976 and two at Grune Point on 13th May 1962 (Stoke Archive). There are two near coastal records in June; at Barrow on 15th June 1992 and at Mere Tarn inland of the Leven Estuary on 5th June 2013. The migrant or breeding status of these records is unknown.

**Winter occurrence 1970/71 – 2018/19**



However, if only records from South Walney are considered the best proxy of patterns of immigration in the county (where the species has never bred and which has had the most systematic observer effort), then 12 of the 15 records have been between 17th September (1981) and 5th December (1976) with six in October which is more in line with national patterns. Of 69 coastal or near coastal non-breeding records countywide, just 23 (33%) have been after December.

**Month of first arrival of new records 1970/71 – 2018/19**  
(June excluded from analysis)



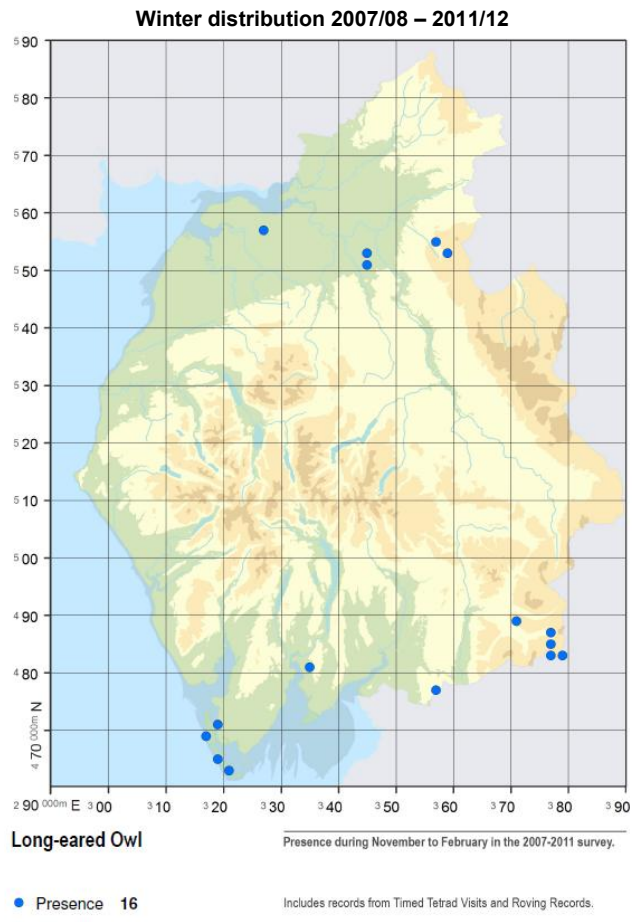
Most records outside the breeding season are of single birds, some of which involved roosts and most of which were single day records. Where more than one bird is reported, it has often involved a roost, (though this is not always specified in the record). There are 27 such records up to 2014, at least 17 of which were specified as roosts and at least 12 were present for extended periods. Exceptional by Cumbrian standards were 10 roosting at Whinfall Tarn on 14th January 1977. Few roosts have been occupied for multiple consecutive winters. A woodland roost on North Walney has come closest with records in nine winters since 1985/86, eight of which were between 1985/86 and 1998/99.

**Non-breeding records involving more than one bird.**  
(numbers in bold if specified as roosts)

Winter	First date	Last date	Location	Max
1958/1959	Mar		Newbiggin (Furness)	2
1975/1976	Aug		Siddick Pond*	4
1975/1976	Jan	Mar	nr Workington*	4
1976/1977	05 Dec 76		South Walney	2
1976/1977	14 Jan 77		Whinfall Tarn	10
1979			A roost in North West Cumbria	4
1981/1982	26 Jan 82	30 Jan 82	nr Carlisle	2
1982			nr Workington	3
1985/1986	31 Mar 86	09 Apr 86	Willow Woods, North Walney	3
1988/1989	28 Nov 88		Longtown Ponds	2
1988/1989	22 Jan 89	23 Apr 89	Willow Woods, North Walney	3
1988/1989	Dec		Carlisle	4
1988/1989	Jan	23 Feb 89	Birds Park Farm, Kendal	4
1989/1990	17 Dec 89	28 Jan 90	Siddick Pond	2
1990/1991	17 Nov 90	22 Nov 90	nr Nethertown	2
1990/1991	Dec	18 Feb 91	Longtown	3
1991/1992	24 Nov 91	03 Dec 91	North Walney	2
1993/1994	25 Nov 93		Dean Moor	2
1994/1995	25 Nov 94	09 Apr 95	Mart Close, Selside	5
1996/1997	01 Jan 97		Willow Woods, North Walney	2
1998/1999	23 Nov 98		Scaleby Moss	7
1998/1999	Sep	19 Jan 99	Willow Woods, North Walney	3
2003/2004	06 Mar 04		Talkin Fell, Talkin	2
2004/2005	05 Mar 05		Finglandrigg Wood, Fingland	2
2006/2007	29 Jan 07	04 Feb 07	Garnett Bridge, Longsleddale	2
2008/2009	19 Nov 08	07 Jan 09	Willow Woods, North Walney	3
2009/2010	10 Jan 10		The Helm, Oxenholme	2

\* may involve the same site

In winter, the Cumbria Atlas 2007-12 found birds in 16 10km squares in Cumbria, representing a 45% increase since the National Winter Atlas 1981-84. Of the eight gains, most were located in the extreme south of the county. These results are consonant with the national situation, where Long-eared Owls were recorded in 50% more 10km squares than in 1981-84. However, this apparent increase may be biased by increased coverage and observer effort. In addition, it is speculated that the two very cold winters of 2009-10 and 2010-11 could have triggered larger influxes than usual and/or made owls more detectable (Bird Atlas 2007-11).



Few birds have been ringed in Cumbria. A bird ringed at Walney in December 1976 was found dead the following August in the Mariy region of western Russia, some 3279 km away and an adult ringed at Grayrigg in April 1986 was found dead in Opland, Norway in September of that year. These indicate the origin of some of our wintering birds. Other recoveries involve an adult ringed at South Walney in October 1981 and killed by a car in Contin, Highland Region in October 1990, a chick ringed in the Border Forest in June 1994 and found dead at Edmondbyers, County Durham in May 1996 and a female ringed while nesting in the Border Forest in Northumberland in June 2013 which was found dead at Silloth in March 2019 (Robinson 2020).

# Golden Eagle

## *Aquila chrysaetos*

Vagrant, former breeder and resident



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

- \*Anon. 1813. Untitled - Golden Eagle in Keswick Museum. *The Cumberland Pacquet*: 6th July 1813
- \*Anon. 1844. Untitled - An eagle on Skiddaw. *Carlisle Journal*: 11th May
- \*Anon. 1845. Untitled - An eagle in the Lake District. *Carlisle Patriot*: 14th March 1845
- \*Anon. 1955. Golden Eagle in the Lake District. *Penrith & District NHS Newsletter* March 1955
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- Anon. 1961. Golden Eagle found dead in Bretherdale. *Field Naturalist* 6: No. 1: 7
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- Walker, D.G. 2000. Why aren't there more Golden Eagles in England. *Proceedings of the 1999 North of England raptor conference* Supplement to the Cumbria Raptor Group annual report
- Walker, D.G. 2001. Food supply and breeding performance of the Haweswater Golden Eagles. *Birds in Cumbria* 2000: 65-68
- Walker, D.G. 2002. Golden Eagle. in: Stott, M. Callion, J.C., Kinley, I., Raven, C. & Roberts, J. (eds). 2002. The Breeding Birds of Cumbria. A tetrad atlas 1997-2001. Cumbria Bird Club (Cumbria Atlas 1997-2001)
- \*Walker, D.G. 2003. Golden Eagle. 2003 North of England Raptor Conference Report
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- \*Watson, J. 1889. A list of the birds of the Lake District. *Westmorland Notebook and Natural History Record* 1: 45-48
- Watson, J. 1997. The Golden Eagle. T & A D Poyser, London
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- \* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

### Post 2019 Records

- 2022 2 Haweswater 10th April (from South Scotland reintroduction project, by satellite tracking)
- 2023 2 Geltsdale 28th-30th March (3rd calendar year birds from South Scotland reintroduction project, by satellite tracking)

Photograph: Male displaying, Riggindale, April 2006 (C. Godfrey)

## Golden Eagle

### *Aquila chrysaetos*

#### Vagrant, former breeder and resident

Golden Eagles breed across the northern hemisphere. Most populations are sedentary apart from birds from the most northern regions. Young birds will disperse over large areas but tend to return to their natal areas to breed. They can occupy a variety of habitats but in general, it is a bird of upland, mountainous areas free from intrusive human disturbance. In some parts of its range, it will breed on sea cliffs and in forested landscapes where there is enough open ground for it to hunt.

The United Kingdom population is non-migratory and is almost entirely confined to Scotland, primarily in the north and west, though breeding has since occurred in Ireland as part of a reintroduction scheme. Surveys approximately every decade since 1982 have shown a gradually recovering population following previous decline caused mainly by persecution, pesticide contamination and habitat loss and the UK population was estimated at 508 pairs in 2015 (Hayhow et al. 2017). An outlying population re-established in the Lake District in the 1960s, reaching three occupied territories in the late 1970s, but dwindled to extinction in 2015. In England Golden Eagles are considered rare. Adults remain in territories year round, so records away from nest sites are likely to concern roaming juveniles and immatures.

The species was possibly formerly a widespread breeding bird in the Lake District. Parish records of breeding eagles stretch back to the 17th century and although there is confusion with the two species, some almost certainly relate to the Golden Eagle. Blezard (1946) considered that it could only 'seperably' be ascribed to having nested at Keswick and Patterdale. Analysis by Walker (2004) found more than 40 crags with 'eagle' or derivations of such in the name. He considered the population of both species combined would probably never have exceeded 20 pairs, with the Golden Eagle occupying the more remote areas compared to the more confiding White-tailed Eagle which accounted for most of the historical records. These come largely from Macpherson (1892) and state that in the 17th century, eyries of eagles of either species were found in Martindale, Patterdale and Grizedale in the Ullswater Valley and Blea Crag in Grasmere. In the 18th century, more records were forthcoming with eyries in Buttermere and Borrowdale and also a bird seen attacking a lamb near Skiddaw in 1788, while in the spring of 1775 an eagle believed to be of this species which had taken several lambs, was shot in King Meadow at Carlisle (Macpherson 1892). As with the White-tailed Eagle, Golden Eagles were believed extinct in Cumbria by the late 18th century because of persecution with the last breeding by an eagle species in Eskdale in 1791 (Macpherson 1892).

In the 19th century a bird was shot at Millwood near Furness Abbey in 1825 (Durnford 1883). Single birds were seen at Buttermere and in the Newlands Valley both on 13th July 1835 and in May 1844 a bird was seen on Skiddaw with another at Esthwaite in March 1845 (Macpherson 1892). Macpherson also recounts the recollections of a T. Lindsay of Eskdale who remembered a solitary eagle which frequented 'Scawfell' between 1844 and 1846 and commuted to Drigg Common to hunt rabbits. Outside Lakeland, the only other area where historical records suggest possibly occupation was on Christianbury Crags near Bewcastle in the Border Moors, where birds were seen in 1824 and 1835. However, contemporary investigation discounted these as non-breeding birds with one shot in 1835 (Macpherson 1892). The last record in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appears to be a bird killed in Dunnerdale in 1860 (Macpherson 1892). The demise of both eagle species was undoubtedly related to direct persecution, with both adults, young and eggs destroyed, as related by parish records.

From the 1920s, an increase in sightings in Northern England suggests a overspill from Southern Scotland and, indeed, following recolonization of Southern Scotland prior to the 1950s (Watson 1997), birds became more regular in Cumbria during this decade. A completed nest was located in 1957 on Harter Fell in the Haweswater Valley (Brown 1974). It was repaired annually in the following years, but only a single bird was seen with the exception of September 1959 when two birds were present (Radcliffe 2002). It wasn't until 1969 that a clutch was finally laid at this site (Brown



Golden Eagle (male), Riggindale, 26th June 2004

1974) and although it was later deserted, it was the start of a long period of breeding here. Birds subsequently attempted to breed in the adjoining Riggindale valley in every year up until 2000, apart from in 1999, with occupation through to 2015. In all, four different nests were used in this area. Only five individual adults occupied the territory, with the original male being replaced in 1976/77, the female in 1980/81 and the second male in 2002 (Walker 2004). This latter male paired with the second female but by then she had ceased to lay eggs and was last seen in early 2004 and is assumed to have died at that time. The remaining male continued to occupy the territory up to at least September 2015 after which he is assumed to have died.

Though the core territory was always centred on Riggindale, the surrounding valleys were also regularly used and the resident birds ranged as far as Wet Sleddale to the south. Though two chicks were known to hatch in some years, only a single chick ever fledged in any one year. Juveniles stayed in their natal territory for varying periods post-fledging, with most last seen in October, though at least one, the 1984 juvenile, spent its first winter within the general area (Walker 1987, 1988, 2004). Of the 16 young fledged from this territory between 1970 and 1996, the only one whose subsequent fate is known was the 1986 chick. This flew into electricity cables and was killed near Grassington in the Yorkshire Dales on 21st November 1986, just 121 days after hatching. It had previously frequented the Gowthwaite Reservoir area a little further east in the Nidderdale Valley between 18th and 31st October and was seen hunting rabbits. This is an area which had previously hosted young eagles since the first successful fledging at Haweswater in 1970. Juveniles or immatures were reported here from 6th December 1970 to 7th March 1971, in April-May 1977, March 1978, November 1980 to January 1981 and December 1982 to May 1983 (Mather 1986).

Also in 1957, a nest was located in Eskdale but like the Haweswater nest, though it was regularly repaired, only single birds were ever seen. It was deserted by 1973, probably a result of climbing disturbance (Radcliffe 2002). However, in 1976 a nest was found in another western valley and this pair attempted to breed each year up to and including 1982 (Radcliffe 2002, Walker 2004). Walker (2004) considered they may also have nested in 1975. Just three young fledged from this site and the death of the female in the winter of 1982/83 brought an end to breeding here, though the male continued to occupy the valley until 1985 (Walker 2004). Remarkably, the 1982 chicks at both this and the Haweswater site had a deformed bill (Horne 1994).

Another Lake District territory was also occupied in the late 1970s but perhaps only for two or three years, with eggs laid only once and with no young reared (Walker 2002, 2004).

The increase in sightings in Cumbria in the 1950s reflected the Scottish range expansion referred to previously, and preceded and was then concurrent with the establishment of two occupied territories, albeit by single birds at that time. The 48 records between 1950 and 1969 would almost certainly have involved some of these pioneering birds. Notable was a roost used by two immature birds found near Garrigill on Cross Fell in July 1959 (Stokoe Archive). However Perhaps the most remarkable record at this time involved what transpired to be a sub-adult female found dead in Bretherdale south of Shap in early December 1960. This

bird had a gin trap attached to one of its legs which it had probably carried around for some time (Field Naturalist 1961). A scarcity of records in the late 1960s and early 1970s may be a result of these pioneering birds settling down and staying within territories.

Sightings of immature birds, presumably relating in part to the offspring of the breeding birds, increased from the mid-1970s. It is perhaps still surprising that then and subsequently, there have been so few records that could be directly attributable to dispersing young from the occupied territories. A record of six together over Elterwater in June 1983 in the bird report for that year seems in retrospect unlikely. Notably though, a third bird interacted with the resident pair in Riggindale in April 1985 and generally in the 1980s, there were more records. There were many less in the 1990s, possibly a result of the creation in 1992 of a formal county records panel since when, though several records have been submitted, few have reached the level of proof needed for acceptance. From 2001, apart from the Haweswater bird, only four other records have been accepted in Cumbria. An immature roamed the North Pennines and largely outwith Cumbria but was seen at Geltsdale in April 2002, with another in the same area in August 2002 possibly relating to the same individual. A sub-adult was seen with two Buzzards in May 2004 at Grasmere and a 2nd calendar year bird frequented Geltsdale in late August/Early September 2016.

This suggests few eagles are entering England from South Scotland leaving the future of Golden Eagles in Cumbria in a very perilous state. An increase in the southern Scottish population is required before we can hope of any future breeding and Southern Scotland has, since 2018, been the location of a re-introduction scheme (South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project 2022). However it is highly likely that the Lake District as a whole, can no longer support breeding pairs due to a low food supply (Walker 2000, 2001) and increasing human recreation. Long-term habitat improvements are underway in some areas, including the Haweswater estate, which hopefully will increase natural food supplies for eagles but this will take many years to develop.

**Productivity at sites fledging young since 1969**

Year	Mardale		Western Fells	
	Young	Details	Young	Details
1969	0	deserted		
1970	1	fledged 29th July		
1971	1	fledged 23rd July		
1972	1	fledged 19th July		
1973	0	deserted		
1974	1	fledged 22nd July		
1975	0	deserted	?	
1976	0	male died	1	
1977	1	fledged 30th July	0	robbed of eggs
1978	1	fledged 21st July	0	eggs deserted
1979	0	eggs infertile	1	
1980	1	fledged 23rd July	0	eggs snowed in
1981	0	yg disappeared	0	eggs snowed in
1982	1	fledged 22nd July	1	
1983	1	fledged 15th July		female died
1984	1	fledged 22nd July		male only
1985	0	eggs infertile		male disappeared
1986	1	fledged 24 July		
1987	0	chick died		
1988	1	fledged 26th July		
1989	1	fledged 25th July		
1990	0	eggs infertile		
1991	1	fledged 26th July		
1992	1	fledged 24th July		
1993	0	eggs infertile		
1994	0	eggs infertile		
1995	0	eggs infertile		
1996	1	fledged 4th Aug.		
1997	0	eggs infertile		
1998	0	1 egg infertile		
1999	0	did not lay		
2000	0	eggs infertile		
2001 – 03		no eggs laid		
2004 – 16		male only		



1983 chick, Riggindale, (G. Home)

**20th & 21st century records additional to known breeding birds**

Year	Date	Location	No.	Age/sex	Year	Date	Location	No.	Age/sex
1912	17 Apr	Nab Scar, Rydal	1		1961	28 May	Lake District	1	
1920	Into 1921	Border Moors	min 1		1961	Late July	Whinlatter	1	
1921	May	Geltsdale	1		1962	05 June	Cartmell Fell	1	
1920	15 Oct	Skinburness, Solway	1		1963	26 Mar	Nibthwaite	1	
1921	June	Helvellyn	1		1963	19 May	Kentmere & Gilpin Bridge	1	
1922		Grasmere	1		1963	28 May	Kentmere	2	
1930	03 Jun	Barbondale	1			01-16 July	Whitbarrow	1	
1937	Oct	Glenridding	1		1965	Mid summer	Longsleddale	1	
1938	Aug	Eskdale	1		1966	Mid summer	Longsleddale	1	
1950	April	Christianbury Crags	1		1966	10 May	Coniston	1	
1954	20 Jan	Cumberland Pennines	1		1968		Catbells	3	
1954	02 May	Dunnerdale	2		1969		Skiddaw/Blencathra	1	
1954	Dec	Honister	1		1969	28 Aug	Cross Fell	1	
1955	27 Feb	Easedale			1977	18 Feb	Lakeside, Newby Bridge	1	
1955	05 Jul	Honister	1		1977	09 Apr	Patterdale	1	imm
1955	06 Aug	Harrison Stickle, Langdale	1		1977	06 Jun	Carlisle	1	
1956	29 Aug	Barrenthwaite, Stainmore	1		1977	29 Jul	Watendlath	1	imm
1956	Sep – Oct	Bassenthwaite	1		1980	27 Sep	Keswick	1	adult
1956	21 Oct	Cartmel Fell	1		1981	01 Feb	Seatoller, Borrowdale	2	
1957	23 Jan – 27 Mar	A Lakeland valley	1		1981	27 May	Askham	2	
1957	31 Mar	Central Fells	1	imm	1981	20 Jun	Staveley/Selside	1	imm
1957	05 Apr	Wrynose			1981	01 Jul	Keswick area	2	
1957	29 May	Cumberland Pennines	1		1982	03 Apr	Mell Fell, Appleby Fells	1	
1957	28 Sep	Wasdale	1		1982	02 Oct	Keswick	1	imm
1958	11 Jan	Dunmail Raise	1		1983	20 Jun	Elterwater	6	2 ad 4 imm
1958	16 Mar	Bassenthwaite	1		1984	19 Mar	Geltsdale	1	imm
1958	08 Jun	Whitbarrow	1		1984	28 Apr	Keswick	1	imm
1958	06 Jul	Hobcarton	1	imm	1984	18 May	Rockcliffe Marsh, Solway	1	imm
1958	27 Dec	Keswick	1		1985	18 Feb	Geltsdale	1	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
1959	11 Jul	Garrigill, Cross Fell	2	imm	1985	17 Apr	Riggindale, Mardale	1	
1959	31 Jul	Westmorland Pennines	1	imm	1985	25 May	Portinscale, Keswick	1	
1959	05 Jan	Raise	2		1988	07 Sep	Skelton	1	juv
1959	19 Jan	Lake District	1		1988	23 Dec	Geltsdale	1	juv
1959	18 May	Whinlatter	1		1996	10 Sep – 1 Oct	Cross Fell area	1	imm
1959	12 Aug	Lake District	1		1998	24 Jan	East of the county	2	
1959	09 Oct	Lake District	1		1998	01 May	Helvellyn	1	imm
1960	09 Jan	Lake District	1		1999	Aug	Pennines	1	
1960	06 May	South Westmorland	1	imm	1999		Bassenthwaite Lake	1	imm
1960	28 Aug	South Westmorland	1	imm	2002	07 Apr	Geltsdale	1	imm
1960	02 Dec	Bretherdale	1	sub-ad	2002	18 Aug	Halton Lea, N. Pennines	1	
1961	08 Jan	Stainmore	1		2004	19 May	Grasmere	1	sub-ad
1961	09 Feb	Torver, Coniston	1		2016	28 Aug-3 Sep	Geltsdale	1	imm

# White-tailed Eagle

*Haliaeetus albicilla*

Vagrant, former breeder and resident



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

\*Watson, J. 1889. A list of the birds of the Lake District. *Westmorland Notebook and Natural History Record* 1: 45-48

Yalden, D.W. 2007. The older history of the White-tailed Eagle in Britain. *British Birds* 100: 471-480

Yalden, D.W. & Albarella, U. 2009. *The History of British Birds*. Oxford University Press

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Records

**2020** 1 Hayton, Carlisle (heading west) 6th May

**2021**

**2022** 1 Humphrey Head/Lindale/Meathop/Sizergh/Tarnhouse Tarn 1st- 6th September (from Isle of White reintroduction scheme via satellite tracking)

**2023** 1 adult Mossband (heading east) 27th April

**Photograph: Immature, Tindale Tarn, North Pennines, 13th October 2011 (E. Miles)**

## White-tailed Eagle

### *Haliaeetus albicilla*

#### Vagrant, former breeder and resident

Breeding throughout Northern and Central Europe and Asia, White-tailed Eagles are generally sedentary, though some populations may move south for the winter. Juveniles can be quite mobile and account for most extralimital occurrences. The European population has increased its range in recent years, mainly through legal protection and a consequent decline in persecution (EBBA 2020) and was estimated at 10 000 pairs in 2010-12 (Deinet et al. 2013).

Formerly a widespread breeder in the British Isles, it is first known to have existed in Britain from remains found in a cave dating back to the Pre-Ipswichian period (130,000 years BP). Roman sites account for the greatest number of remains and thereafter there was possibly a gradual decline in the population due to persecution, drainage and woodland clearance. (Yalden and Albarella 2009). It was extinct in the British Isles through persecution by 1916. Following reintroduction projects on the western seaboard of Scotland beginning in 1975, and followed by further introductions in Fife beginning in 2007 and Ireland also in 2007, the British and Ireland population in 2017 was estimated at 122 territorial pairs (Woodward et al. 2020).

This is a species rooted in human history, one of the first to appear in the archaeological record and one of the first to be obliterated by man from Cumbria's natural fauna. In a Cumbrian context, archaeological sites have yielded remains in Roman Carlisle and in Medieval Brougham Castle near Penrith. The Old English place name of Arlecdon in West Cumbria and the Middle English names of Eagle Crag in Borrowdale and Erne Crag on Rydal Fell are thought to refer to this species (Yalden 2007). Written records go back to 1692 when breeding was noted at Wallow Crag at Haweswater. There is further reference to this site in 1787 and a pair bred in Borrowdale in the 1700s (MacPherson 1892). Confusion or grouping together with Golden Eagles is likely to have occurred in these early periods. MacPherson (1892) cast doubt on sites at Buck Crag in Martindale and at Patterdale, believing them to be Golden Eagle haunts, nevertheless he included a painting of Buck Crag captioned as an eyrie of the "sea eagle". Amongst various of Macphersons correspondents, one mentioned the taking of waterfowl on Derwentwater which would almost certainly be this species.

Persecution was already occurring in the 18th Century. The Parish Book of the Rev. H.D. Rawnsley shows entries between 1713-1765 for payments made for destroying eagles in Borrowdale. The nests were accessed with the use of a long rope, which was kept in Borrowdale and used for that purpose in other nearby dales including Wasdale, Eskdale and Buttermere. Young birds taken were sold for high prices. Local shepherds were paid five shillings towards the taking of eggs and adult birds were shot. The birds last bred in Borrowdale in 1784 but continued in Eskdale, the last Cumberland breeding by an eagle species being in 1791 (Macpherson 1892).

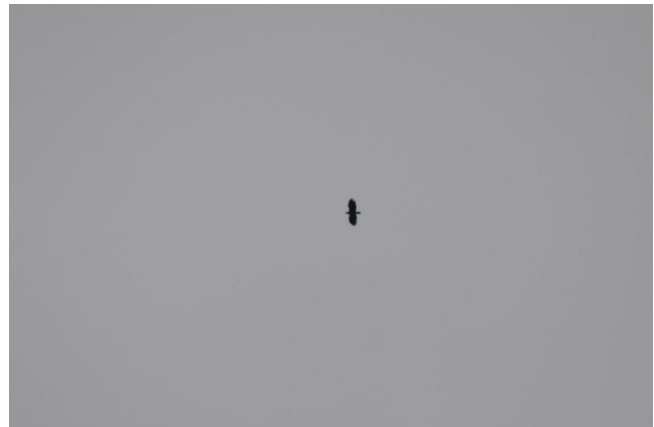
White-tailed Eagles breeding in Southwest Scotland continued to provide a source of dispersing birds into Cumbria during the first half of the 1800s. One was shot near Alston in 1834 and another seen nearby in 1844. One caught by a shepherd on Black Combe in Southwest Lakeland in 1838 was seemingly the last to be captured (and remained in captivity until 1846 or 1847 (Mitchell 1885). In Southern Lakeland, there is a reference to breeding 'in Whitbarrow Scaur as late as 1849' (MacPherson and Duckworth 1885).



**Immature Port Carlisle, Solway Estuary, 10th February 2009**  
(J. Murray)

There are just two documented records for Cumbria in the 1900s, neither of which has been reviewed by a records panel. On 9th June 1929 an immature bird was seen over Workington and subsequently perched on the shore at Seascale (Blezard 1943). On 21st March 1934, an adult was seen over Coniston Water (Blezard 1943). These are the last records of vagrant birds of natural origin prior to the Scottish reintroductions started in 1975.

With the successful reintroduction scheme in Scotland driving a slow but sustained range expansion southwards there have been two recent accepted records in Cumbria. The first concerned a bird from the Fife re-introduction scheme on the shore of the Solway at Port Carlisle on 10th February 2009 and was seen the next day at nearby Campfield Marsh. On 13th October 2011, an immature was seen near Midgeholm flying west over the Northumberland / Cumbria border in the North Pennines. It was relocated perched on a stone wall to the southeast of Tindale Tarn. It dropped out of sight behind the wall for about an hour and was later found to have been feeding on lamb carrion. It then flew towards the tarn and landed on the northeast shore before walking into the water to bathe. Then it flew a little way to land on posts in the east end of the tarn before taking off, gaining height and heading west towards the Solway. Four other records have been judged not proven since 2010.



**Immature Tindale Tarn, North Pennines, 13th October 2011**  
(E. Miles)

It can only be a matter of time before breeding takes place in Southwest Scotland and with its close proximity to Cumbria across the Solway Firth, it is likely that we shall see an increase in records in the county, with the tantalising prospect of breeding here at some time in the future.

#### 20th & 21st century records

Year	Date	Location	Sub Location	No.	Age/sex	Details	Observer
1929	9 Jun	Solway/West coast	Workington	1	juv	Later on shore at Seascale	
1934	21 Mar	Lake District	Coniston	1	ad	Flyover	
2009	9-10 Feb	Solway Estuary	Port Carlisle/Campfield Marsh	1	imm	Reintroduced bird from Fife	C. Murray
2011	13 Oct	North Pennines	Tindale	1	imm	Origin unknown	I. Ryding

# Hobby (Eurasian Hobby)

*Falco subbuteo*

A scarce passage migrant and summer visitor, may breed occasionally



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

Burton, J.F. 1995. *Birds and Climate Change*. Christopher Helm, London

Chapman, A. 1999. *The Hobby*. Arlequin Press, Chelmsford

Clements, R., Everett, C. & Messenger, A. 2016. The Hobby in Britain - a revised population estimate. *British Birds* 109: 316-323

\*Howard, P. 2023. Kleptoparasitism of Hen Harriers by Eurasian Hobbies. *British Birds* 116: 109-112

\*Macpherson, H.A. 1899. Hobby in Westmorland. *Zoologist 4th Series*, 3: 556-557

Parr, S.J. 1994. Population changes of breeding Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* in Britain. *Bird Study* 41:131-135

Prince, P. & Clarke, R. 1993. The Hobby's breeding range in Britain. What factors have allowed it to expand? *British Wildlife* 4:341-346

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2019 Selected Records

**2020** Summered at two sites – no proved breeding. 44 records in all

**2021** Regular summer records from one site – no proved breeding. 21 records in all

**2022** Summered at two sites – no proved breeding. About 60 records in all

**2023** 1 early bird at Geltsdale on 11th April. Summered at one southern moss site where up to 4 birds were recorded and where a fresh juvenile was present in early September.

Photograph: Thacka Beck, Penrith, 16th August 2015 (J. France)

## Hobby (Eurasian Hobby)

### *Falco subbuteo*

**A scarce passage migrant and summer visitor, may breed occasionally**

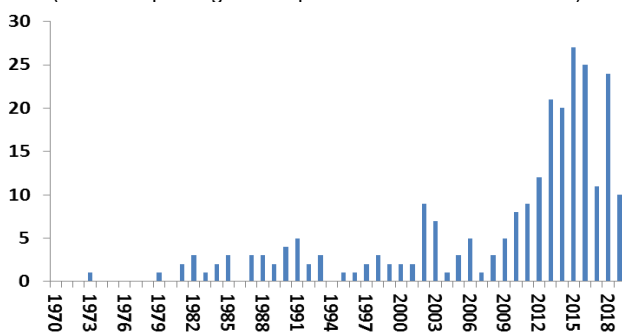
The Eurasian Hobby breeds across the Palearctic between Britain and Japan, within the continental, temperate and sub-boreal climatic zones. This fleet and highly aerobatic raptor is the only British falcon whose entire population winters in tropical Africa (Knox & Parkin 2010, Wernham et al. 2002).

Historical records in Britain prior to the 20th Century are scant. Early county avifaunas suggest that breeding Hobbies were very uncommon in Britain, and were the target of persecution by gamekeepers and egg and skin collectors. It was also suggested that in areas that were heavily kept, numbers were strongly limited by the lack of corvid nests (Brown & Grice 2005). Indeed, recent studies have shown a marked preference of Hobbies for Carrion Crow nests, which often constitute over 90% of nest sites in a study area (Chapman 1999). During the second half of the 20th Century, the British population increased and its range expanded. This has proved difficult to quantify, however Parr (1994) produced an index of abundance and estimated that there were probably 100-200 breeding pairs in 1970, 300-600 pairs in 1980 and 500-1000 pairs in 1990. Burton (1995) argued that climate change may have benefited the Hobby and its prey items (e.g. the northerly expansion of some dragonfly species). Another factor could well be the increase in the availability of corvid nests (Prince and Clarke 1993). Clements & Messenger (2016) estimated at least 3000 pairs in Britain by the mid-2010s.

In Cumbria MacPherson (1892) was only aware of two birds shot at Castle Rigg in 1864 and near Edenhall (no date given). In 1899, an immature male was reportedly shot at Melkinthorpe near Penrith (Dunlop 1923). It appears that we probably have to go back as far as the 1930s to find any firm evidence of breeding as according to Stokoe (1962) it is likely to have bred at least once in Cumberland in the 1930s. A local farmer claimed a pair had nested at Hutton (Cumberland) in an unknown year. At least four birds, including an adult pair, were shot in North Cumberland between 1930 and 1935. In addition, a pair was also present in a Solway pinewood from May to June 1937, after which they 'disappeared' (Bleazard 1943).

Rather surprisingly, there are no documented records after 1937 and before 1973, in which year an adult male was found dead in a Carlisle suburb on 24th July. Indeed, there were only seven records prior to 1979. Since the 1970s, however, each decade has seen an increase in the number of sightings, from two in the 1970s to 20 in the 1980s, 22 in the 1990s, 38 in the 2000s and a remarkable 250 plus in the 2010s. With the exception of 1980, 1986 and 1994, it has been recorded at least one each year since 1979. During 2007 to 2011, Hobbies were confirmed to have bred in adjoining Lancashire, County Durham, Northumberland and North Yorkshire (Bird Atlas 2007-11), so it is no surprise that the number of annual records has increased substantially in Cumbria.

**Occurrences per year since 1970**  
(sites with prolonged occupation counted as one record)

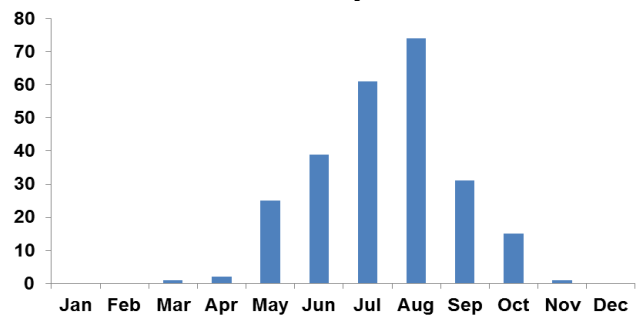


A remarkably early record at Great Calva, north of Skiddaw on 15th March 2017 is fully a month earlier than the next earliest at Grune Point on the Solway on 17th April 1989. There is just one other April record and less than 10 in the first half of May, after which records become more frequent, peaking in August. The latest of 15 evenly spread October records is at North Walney on 27th October 1991 with one later bird at Salta Moss on 3rd November 2002.



**Thacka Beck, Penrith, 16th August 2015 (J. France)**

**Occurrences by month**



Sightings presumably relate to a mixture of genuine passage birds, failed breeders from elsewhere and an increasing number of wandering, non-breeding immatures, and have come from throughout the county. Few birds have been aged and even less sexed, but most are likely to have been males, which do not pair up during their second summer. Some second summer females pair and establish territories, but do not usually breed successfully (Chapman 1999). Other than those involving potential breeding, all records have involved single birds, except for two over Carlisle city centre on 6th May 2003, at Kirkby Thore in the Eden Valley on 25th July 2010, at Foulshaw Moss on 2nd August 2010, at Bowness on Solway on 29th May 2015, over Burton in Kendal on 21st September 2018, at Rigmaden in the Lune Valley on 29th July 2019 and at Lessonhall on 17th August 2019. On three dates; 23 August 2013, 11th August 2015 and 12th August 2018, birds have been reported at three different locations within the county.

There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that there may have been recent breeding in Cumbria. If we take the earliest and mean egg-laying dates for England, together with the fact that juveniles invariably stay within their nesting territories for about four weeks after fledging (Chapman 1999), we can calculate that earliest feasible date for juvenile dispersal is around 22nd August, with the mean being around the 5th-9th September. Therefore any records of juveniles before about the second week of September may have been locally fledged. There are six such recent records which fall within this pre-dispersal period and are suggestive of successful breeding. In addition, Foulshaw Moss has hosted prolonged occupation by one or two birds in six breeding seasons since 2012 and has seen records in all but two years since 2005.

#### **Possible records indicative of breeding**

Year	Location	Evidence
2001	Bowness	Juv on 2nd Sept.
2005	Lowca	Juv on 7th Aug.
2012	Foulshaw Moss	Pos. juv on 11th Aug. with 2 other birds in Jul.
2013	Drumburgh Moss	Juv on 26th Aug. Singles 2nd Jul. to 8th Sep.
2014	Drumburgh Moss	Juv on 13th Aug.
2014	Bowness	1 regular 19th May to 2nd August, occasionally 2
2014	Carlisle	Juv on 8th Jul.
2014	Foulshaw Moss	2 regular from 10th Jun. to 11th Sep.
2015	Foulshaw Moss	2 regular from 20th May to 19th Sep.
2016	Foulshaw Moss	1 regular through Jun.
2018	Foulshaw Moss	2 regular from 28th May to 13th Sep.
2019	Foulshaw Moss	1 regular 6th Jul. to 10th Sep. 2 on 27th Aug.

# Great Grey Shrike

*Lanius excubitor*

A scarce winter visitor



Data included up to 2019

## Non-standard References

- \*Anon. 1952. Robin in larder of Great Grey Shrike at Portinscale. *Penrith & District NHS Newsletter*: 1952: no. 4
- \*Armstrong, T. 1859. Occurrence of rare birds near Carlisle. *Zoologist* 17: 6378
- \*Brown, R.H. 1929. Great Grey Shrike in Cumberland. *British Birds* 22: 330
- Brown, R.H. 1945. Great Grey Shrike and Whooper Swan in Cumberland in summer. *British Birds* 38: 199
- \*Cropper, J. 1937. Great Grey Shrike in Westmorland. *British Birds* 31: 238
- Fraser, P.A. & Ryan, J.F. 1995. Status of the Great Grey Shrike in Britain and Ireland. *British Birds* 88: 478-484
- Henderson, B.D., 2012. The Great Grey Shrike in Dumfries and Galloway. *Scottish Birds* 32: 99-107
- \*Macpherson, H.A. 1884. Notes occurrence of Red-backed Shrike, Woodchat Shrike and Great Grey Shrike in Cumberland. *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Association for the Advancement of Literature and Science* 9: 97-107
- \*Jopson, D.F. 1929. Great Grey Shrike in Cumberland. *British Birds* 22: 211
- \*Macpherson, H.A. 1884. Great Grey Shrike in Cumberland. *The Field*: 16th February 1884
- \*Macpherson, H.A. 1884. Great Grey Shrike near Carlisle, *Zoologist 3rd Series*, 8: 114
- \*Macpherson, H.A. 1888 Great Grey Shrike in Cumberland. *Zoologist 3rd Series*, 12: 185
- \*Mawson, G. 1883. Great Grey Shrike near Cockermouth, *Zoologist 3rd Series*, 7: 125
- \*Petty, L. 1900. Great Grey Shrike in Lake Lancashire. *Naturalist (Yorkshire)* 25: 32
- \*Robson, R.W. 1948. Great Grey Shrike in Westmorland in July. *British Birds* 41: 60
- \*Robson, R.W. 1954. On the Great Grey Shrike in North Westmorland. 2nd *North Western Naturalist* series: 365-366
- \*Robson, R.W. 1954. Food of Great Grey Shrike at Appleby. *Penrith & District NHS Newsletter*: 1954: no. 1

\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

## Post 2018/19 Records

- 2019/20 1 Brantwood, Coniston 4th – 9th March 2020,
- 2020/21 1 Brownrigg, Abbeytown 17th October 2020, 1 Oldside, Workington 18th October 2020
- 2021/22 1 Killington 3rd December – 7th February
- 2022/23 no records

Photograph: Dalton Craggs, Burton in Kendal 2011 (F. Gould)

# Great Grey Shrike

## *Lanius excubitor*

A scarce winter visitor

Atlas status: % tetrads

Winter 2007/08-2011/12 0.65

Atlas status: % 10km sq	1981-84	2007-12
with wintering evidence	9.47	9.47

Great Grey Shrike breeds across the Palearctic from Norway and central France eastwards. Four sub-species occur with the largest European populations in Fennoscandia and Central Eastern Europe. There has been a large breeding range contraction at the western edge of its range with large areas of France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Sweden vacated since the mid-1990s (EBBA 2020). Birds wintering in this country appear to originate from Fennoscandia, particularly Norway. They arrive in Britain from September onwards, with some birds then continuing onwards to wintering grounds in France and Spain, whilst others remain here through the winter. Some birds establish exclusive long-term territories, often extending over many kilometres, with site-fidelity from year to year well documented (Wernham et al. 2002). However, Fraser & Ryan (1995) estimated that a similar number of individuals appear to be far more nomadic in their behaviour. Favoured wintering habitats in Britain are lowland heath, scrubby commons and areas of clear-felled plantations. Influxes into Britain fluctuate widely, with greatest numbers correlating to years of high abundance of small rodents on their breeding grounds (Wernham et al. 2002).

The National Winter Atlas 1981-84 (Lack 1986) suggested a wintering population estimate of 150 birds for Britain. It was estimated at a maximum of 75 between 1986 and 1992 from an analysis of county bird reports (Fraser and Ryan 1995), while between 2012/13 and 2016/17 it was estimated at 98 based on Birdtrack data (Woodward et al. 2020). It appears that wintering numbers in this country were generally much higher in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting a marked decline in breeding numbers across most of north-west and central Europe since that time (Brown and Grice, 2005). Henderson (2012) noted a peak in wintering numbers in Dumfries and Galloway during the 1970s, which he suggests may be partly explained by the presence of much newly planted forestry.

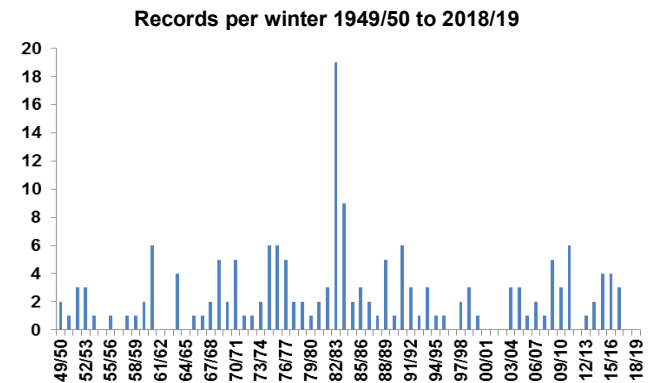
Records for Cumbria appear to have always been at a premium. In the late 19th Century, Macpherson (1892) considered it a 'very uncommon' winter visitor, being 'rather more frequent in Cumberland, especially in the west and north', with records in 'almost every month from October to April'. He listed 22 records between the first in 1848 and 1891 and there were no further records in the century. Of the 25 documented records up to 1921, at least 21 were shot or trapped!

During the first half of the 20th Century, Blezard (1943, 1946, 1958) noted records in all areas except the west coast, also in every month between October and April. Writing of the Furness area, Oakes (1952) affirmed that this shrike had not been recorded since the early years of the 20th Century. In all there were just 10 documented records during this period.

From the 1950s onwards there have been about a further 170 records in Cumbria up to 2019. Stokoe (1962) drew attention to a large influx into Britain in the winter of 1960-61, though went on to list just four records in Cumbria all from January onwards, though there were two previous records in the November of that winter (Field Naturalist). Since 1949/50 the frequency of birds recorded in Cumbria has varied markedly from winter to winter but it has occurred at least once in all but 12 winters of 70 winters from 1949/50 to 2018/19 with six of those blank winters in the last 19 years of that period. The 1982-83 winter clearly stands out, when between October and March there were a remarkable 19 records for the county. In several winters the number of individuals involved may have been less than the number of records because of movement between sites. For instance the 1983/84 winter contained nine records, six of which were from Little Langdale, Hawkshead, Rydal, Cunsey, Sawrey and Grasmere which could all conceivably relate to the same individual.

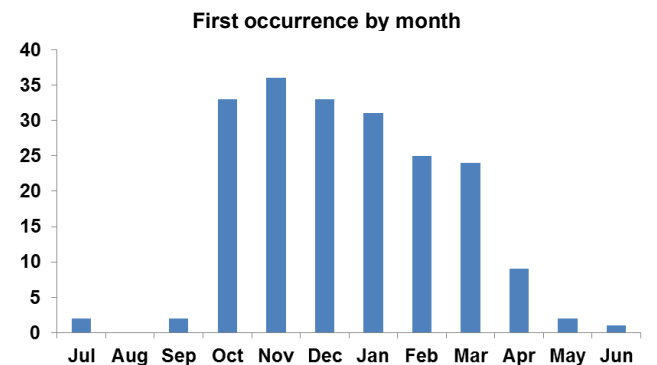


Low Knipe, Bampton, 2nd November 2007 (N. Franklin)



All records have involved single birds except for two on 29th March 2009 at Dalton Crag, Burton-in-Kendal when a second joined a long staying bird and again at the same location in 2015 when a long staying bird was again joined by another from 18th March to 6th April.

Month of first arrival at a new location within the county is generally evenly spread between October and January, with fewer in February and March and some later birds in April, reflecting the sometimes nomadic nature of the species once within the country.



With no August arrivals, there have only been just two records in September concerning a bird on 13th September 1894 at Slaggyford (which may have been outside Cumbria) and one at Moorhouse, Gaisgill on 22nd September 1979, and only two further records in the first week of October, after which first records become more frequent. New records decline substantially after March and in April there are only two records after the middle of the month. The latest records are of singles in the Duddon Valley on 14th May 1960 (Field Naturalist) and at Eel Tarn in Eskdale on 27th May 1985. There are anomalous summer records of an individual in early June 1888 near Nether Wasdale, (which Macpherson (1892) speculates may have been a Lesser Grey Shrike, *Lanius minor*), on 18th June 1944, at Watendlath (Brown 1945), and one present for three weeks in July 1947 near Appleby (Blezard 1954). Mention should be made of a bird first seen on Alston Moor on 4th and 9th April 2009. Later in that summer, what

was presumably the same bird, now in moult, was observed at the same location on 31st July and 3rd August – making it by far and away the latest ever ‘spring’ record for Cumbria and the only bird seen in August.

Of about 197 records up to 2019, only 52 have involved records on more than one day and most of these were for just a few days. There have however been 16 instances of prolonged staying individuals of a month or more and occasionally of probable returning individuals to the same wintering site in a subsequent winter. Perhaps the most notable is at Dalton Crags near Burton in Kendal adjacent to the Lancashire border which has held birds in six winters between 2005/06 and 2014/15 (and also a bird in February 1991). Here some birds have been present for prolonged periods, with a second bird present for at least one day in 2009 and for 20 days in 2015.

**Longer staying birds**

Date	Date to	Location
22 Nov 1960	February	Bootle
06 Mar 1961	30 Apr 1961	Scaleby
07 Jan 1977	16 Mar 1977	Skelwith Bridge
16 Feb 1977	25 Mar 1977	Bassenthwaite Marsh
10 Oct 1982	15 Nov 1982	Tebay
24 Feb 1984	01 Apr 1984	Old Tebay
01 Jan 1985	05 Mar 1985	Bassenthwaite Marsh
30 Oct 1988	24 Dec 1988	Cummersdale
30 Jan 1989	07 Mar 1989	Gosforth
27 Oct 1990	December 1990	Keswick
01 Mar 1991	11 Apr 1991	Longtown
20 Nov 2004	05 Feb 2005	Helsington Barrows
15 Dec 2004	25 Mar 2005	Haverthwaite
08 Mar 2011	09 Apr 2011	Dalton Crags, Burton
20 Nov 2014	06 Apr 2015	Dalton Crags, Burton
05 Nov 2016	28 Mar 2017	Great Broughton

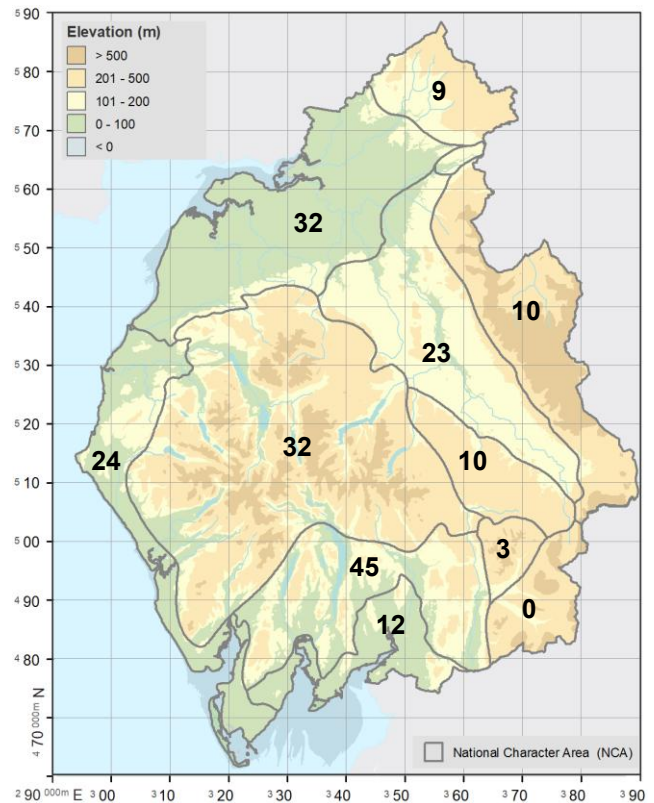
Distribution of occurrence is generally in favour of the southern part of the county with the coastal plain south of Sellafield, the lower Lake District Fells and the Morecambe Bay Limestones contributing the most records, though with significant occurrence in the Solway Basin, the Eden Valley and edge of the Lake District High Fells. Other than Dalton Crags mentioned above, Walney Island has attracted the most birds with six records, though all were single or two day passage birds.

During the 2007-12 Atlas period, Great Grey Shrikes were recorded in 12 tetrads across Cumbria: five in the Border Forests, two in south-west Lakeland, two in eastern Lakeland, two in the Lune valley and one in the Eden valley. These were located in nine 10km squares - the same total as in the Winter Atlas 1981-84 (Balmer et al. 2013, Lack 1986).

However, all these squares were different. The main changes were notable losses in the southern Lakes, but gains in the Border Forests. It seems highly likely that the current felling, restructuring and diversification of previously uniform conifer blocks now makes this habitat far more attractive to wintering shrikes.

**Total birds by Character Area**

(all documented records where specific location known)



A bird at South Walney on 2nd November 1994 was identified as of the eastern race Steppe Grey Shrike, *L. e. pallidirostris* (WBO 2020). At the time this was the ninth BBRC accepted record for Britain and remains the sole Cumbrian occurrence.

# Red-billed Chough

*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

A rare vagrant and former breeder



**Data included up to 2019**

## Non-standard References

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## Post 2019 Records

No Records

**Photograph: St Bees Head, 21st March 2005. (N. Franklin)**

## Red-billed Chough

### *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

#### Vagrant, former breeder

Red-billed Choughs are a sedentary breeder in mainly mountainous and coastal areas from Britain and Ireland westward through west and southern Europe, North Africa and through South West Asia and China. After widespread declines its population may have stabilised somewhat recently (EBBA 2020).

The nominate race is confined to the British Isles where it declined in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It has become confined to the western seaboard with west Wales, the Isle of Man, Islay, Colonsay and Jura in the Southern Hebrides and the coast of Ireland, excepting its eastern coast, holding the majority of the population. Since 2002, a small population has also established in Cornwall. The population of the UK and Isle of Man was estimated at 433 pairs in 2014 (Hayhow et al. 2018).

The distribution and abundance of Choughs in Cumbria prior to the 19th century is unknown. They formerly bred at St Bees Head on the west coast of Cumbria at least until the 1860s. According to Macpherson (1892) there were two or three pairs. In addition, Whitbarrow Scar, overlooking Morecambe Bay on the southern edge of the Lake District was also a breeding site. Here, breeding had probably ceased by 1870 with birds documented as having been shot (Macpherson 1892). In the 19th century, birds bred on the sea cliffs on the north side of the Solway and this is the likely source of the records at Carlisle and Longtown in the 1870s. However breeding had ceased in Kircudbrightshire by 1870 (Service 1886) and on the Wigtownshire coastal cliffs by the 1930s (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). At St Bees it is uncertain when breeding ceased but in the systematic lists published in the transactions of the Carlisle Natural History Society in the first half of the 20th century, there is no mention of occupation of the area.

There were no documented occurrences in the county between the 1870s and mid-1950s. Then between 26th February 1955 and 27th March 1957, between one and two birds were regularly present at St Bees Head with possibly four in April 1956, with records from the North Head to south of St Bees village. Also in April 1956, nest material was taken into the cliff face below the coastguard lookout station on the South Head. However, if there was a nesting attempt in this year, no young were subsequently seen (Rev G.W.H. Moule unpublished diaries, Stokoe archive, Shackleton & Ullrich 2007).



St Bees Head, 21st March 2005. (N. Franklin)

Of the 28 records since 1957, 17 have been on or adjacent to the coast. The Walney/Foulney coast has hosted six records (WBO 2020), St Bees five and the Gutterby/Whicham area below Black Combe three - possibly relating to the same bird from October 1978 to February 1980. Indeed, some clusters of records could relate to the same few individuals. For example, all four coastal records in 2005 could have related to the same individual, as could a bird in the Coniston area in spring 1976 and on two occasions the following summer. The Arnside bird in 2008 was more than likely the bird that roosted at Warton Crag just over the county boundary in Lancashire from 19th February to 28th August. There were also unconfirmed records within that period from Sizergh, Grange-over-Sands and Arnside between April and July. Several records have coincided with strong westerly winds suggesting a likely Isle of Man origin but with birds from the Southern Hebrides or West Wales also possible. There is no particular pattern of seasonal occurrence with a spread of records throughout the year.

Despite its proximity to the not insubstantial and increasing population on the Isle of Man, surveyed at 160 pairs and 11 non-breeders in 2014/15 (Moore 2018), and a short lived re-colonisation of the Wigtownshire coastline between 1988 and the mid to late 2000s (Dumfries & Galloway Bird Reports), it is disappointing but not surprising that there has been no re-colonisation of the Cumbrian coast. Research on the Isle of Man highlighted the importance of insect rich, seaweed strewn beaches as a winter food source – a resource not found in Cumbria and this, along with the intensively managed farmland inland of the coast, may make our coast unattractive to any over-spilling Manx birds.

#### All records

Year	Date	Sub Location	No.	Comment	Observer
1860s		Whitbarrow Scar	1	shot between 1862 and 1865	
1870		near Longtown	1	shot while feeding at a sheep trough	
1870s	c1874	Wigton	1	shot, a few years after 1870	
1955	26 Feb-17 Mar 1957	St Bees Head	2	regularly between these 2 dates	G W H Moule, H Smith
1961	21 Apr	Foulney Island	2		
1966	Summer	St Bees	1	found dead on the beach	Stokoe Archive
1968	22 Apr	Foulney Island	1	found dead	
1970	10 Jul	Threlkeld	1		L A Cowcill
1974	Apr	Dow Crags, Coniston	1		
1976	23 Mar-20 Apr	Coniston/Torver area	1	with local Rooks	L Grisedale
1976	9 Jul-11 Jul	Ennerdale/Wasdale	2		T O'Brien
1977	13 Mar	Walna Scar, Coniston	1		L Grisedale
1977	18 May	Holywath, Coniston	1		L Grisedale
1977	6 Dec	St Bees Head	1		G W H Moule
1978	10-27 May	St Bees Head	1		
1978	12-20 Oct	Gutterby	1		AB
1979	05 May	Mallerstang	1		W Ellwood
1979	14 Jul-24 Aug	Whicham Church	1		Kendal NHS/Duddon CNT
1980	10 Feb	Gutterby	1	with Rooks	L Grisedale
1981	Jun	St Bees Head	2		RSPB
1981	21 Oct	South Walney	1	flew south	WBO
1986	16 Jan	North Walney	1		T Dean
1986	30 Jul	Grisedale Pike	1	with a Raven	J T
1990	28-29 Mar	Allonby	1	just north of village with Jackdaws	N Henderson
2005	22 Jan	Walney Island	1		C Raven
2005	23 Jan-30 Mar	St Bees Head	1		C Shaw
2005	22 Apr	Walney Island	1		A Phizaklea, T Chadwick, C Raven
2005	23 Apr	Drigg Dunes	1		C Shaw
2008	23 Aug	Arnside	1	coastal path	R Partington
2009	04 May	Deepdale, North Pennines	1		A Dougherty
2010	12 Mar	Holmscale Quarry, Old Hutton	1	with c. 20 Jackdaws	G Gould
2015	15 May	The Old Man of Coniston	1		S Stuart

# Starling (Common Starling)

## *Sturnus vulgaris*

An abundant resident and winter visitor; breeds in very large numbers

Data included up to 2019

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### Selected Post 2019 Records

- 2019/20** 20,000 roost Watchtree November, 5000 roost Siddick November, 120,000 roost Longtown November, 11,000 roost Mere Tarn December, 50,000 roost Longtown January, 20,000 roost Sandscale Haws January
- 2020/21** 10,000 roost Watchtree August, 5-8000 roost Brampton November
- 2021/22** 12,000 roost Watchtree December, 4500 roost Fell End December, 10,000 Fell End Moss, Beetham January, 15,000 Brigsteer February. 5000 roost Penrith February/March
- 2022/23** 15,000 roost Watchtree November, 5500 roost Campfield Marsh December, 3000 Heversham & Arnside January, 4000 Crosscraze February, 5000 Temple Sowerby/Kirkby Thore January, 3000 Sunbiggin Tam February, 1000 Campfield Marsh February
- 2023/24** 10,000 Grange over Sands November with 2500 plus reported from Heversham, Foulshaw, Arnside & Gleaston. 3500 Watchtree November, 1000 Campfield Marsh November

## Starling (Common Starling)

### *Sturnus vulgaris*

An abundant resident and winter visitor;  
breeds in very large numbers

Atlas status: % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
Breeding 1997-2001	7.57	11.68	44.81	64.05
Breeding 2008-2012	11.73	8.56	36.86	57.46
Winter 2007/08-2011/12				67.78
Atlas status: % 10km sq	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
with breeding evidence	98.95	94.74	92.63	92.63
Atlas status: % 10km sq			1981-84	2007-12
with wintering evidence			92.63	93.68

Despite recent population losses, the Starling is still one of our most common birds, living and feeding close to human habitation. With its bold nature, it is a familiar bird to everyone, be they town or country dwellers. The species is endemic to Western Europe and to parts of Southwest Asia and has been introduced to many other parts of the world. It is a good example of a species that has adapted to the changes brought by us and has profited accordingly. The nominate race *vulgaris* breeds from Iceland eastward to the Urals. Its European distribution has changed little but overall populations have declined since the latter part of the 20th Century in western Europe, but not so in Eastern and Central Europe (EBBA 2020, Heldbjerg et al. 2019)

Historically in the British Isles, it was a scarce bird up to the early part of the 19th century and was uncommon in Scotland, Wales and in Northwest England. There followed a vast increase in population and distribution from about 1830 to 1880 (Parslow 1968). This situation continued into much of the 20th century. However into the 21st century, we are witnessing a very marked decline (Robinson et al. 2005). Numbers in Britain are swelled considerably in winter by the arrival of many thousands from the European Continent. Whilst our birds are in the main sedentary, those from the Continent are true migrants and return there in the early spring (Wernham et al. 2002).

MacPherson (1892) described it as a scarce breeding bird at the beginning of the 19th century but that it had increased 'enormously' since the 1860s as a result of the conversion of moorland and fen to grass pastures and arable fields, with a consequent increase in more accessible invertebrate food. By the 1890s, he affirmed that it nested everywhere in woods, haystacks, stone walls, under eaves of buildings and even in the burrows of Sand Martins as he discovered in 1888 at Maryport. He also noted a large summer population which particularly favoured the saltmarshes as foraging habitat and deemed them to be non-breeding birds. Mitchell (1885) confirmed similar recent increases in Lancashire, presumably including that part of the county now in Cumbria. In the parish of Ambleside, Armit (1902) affirmed there was no more numerous species and that it nested in trees and in the masonry of almost every house.

By the early 1920s, it was described as an exceedingly common nesting species by Hope (1923) and 20 years later as very numerous by Blezard (1943). Oakes (1953), writing of Lancashire, including that part now in Cumbria, deemed it as widespread and abundant, but notably singled out the Seathwaite area in the Duddon Valley as an area where it bred 'sparingly'. This provides the first hint that the species was still colonising the upland valleys. Graham (1993), writing of the Border moors between 1930 and 1966, provided an account of their status here. He had always found a few pairs nesting in the riverside rocks of the Gilsland Gorge, but it was only first seen around the farms of the area in 1941 and did not nest until 1953 when it began to colonise farm buildings and then trees in 1959. Stokoe (1962) also described it as abundant and widespread in the county, with breeding birds continuing to extend their range up unoccupied fell valleys, and Hutcheson (1986) wrote similarly 20-plus years later. Starlings bred at Moorhouse and the Silverband Mine in the North Pennines at altitudes of 550m and 700m, respectively, at some time between 1951 and 1971, but had ceased to do so by 1974 (Parkin 1974). This may be the highest recorded nesting in the county.

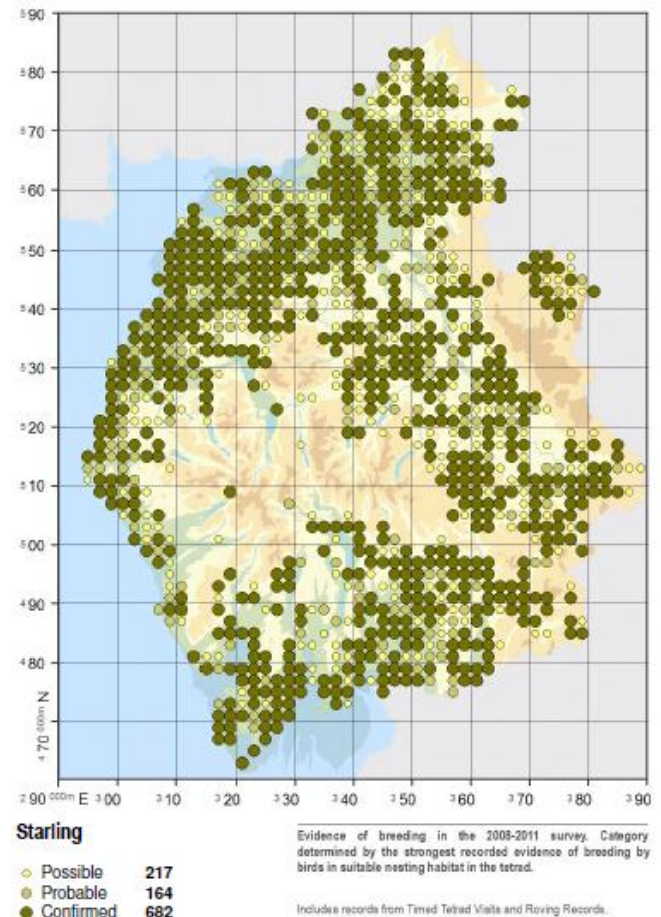


Whitehaven Harbour, January 2008 (D. Shackleton)

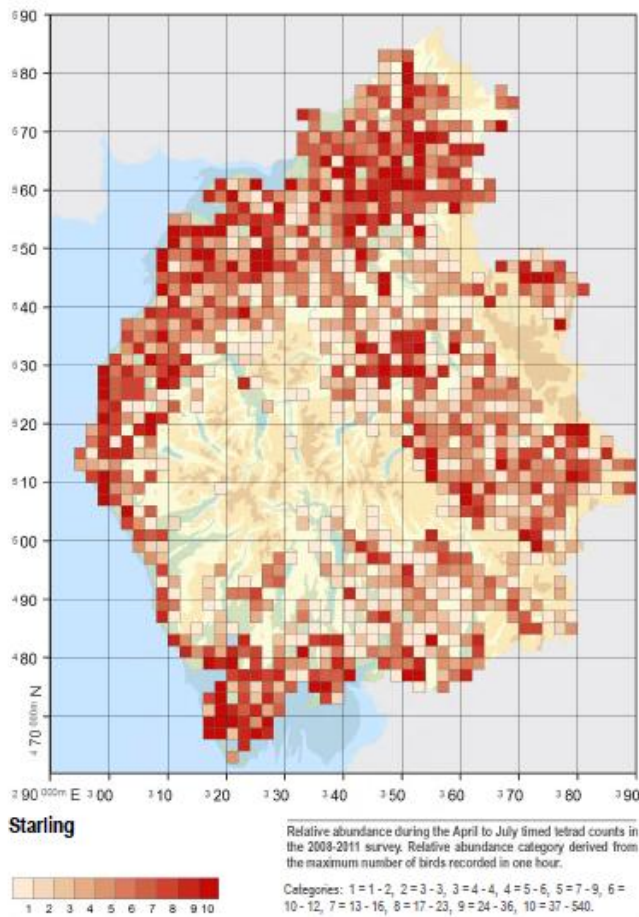
During the final years of the 20th century and continuing to date, numbers of Starlings in Britain have declined substantially. The BTO Common Bird Census showed a 45% decline in the UK between 1972 and 1996 (Mead 2000) and the follow on Breeding Bird Survey index showing a 61% decline between 1995 and 2018 with a 54% decline in Northwest England taken separately (Harris et al. 2020). The species is now red listed as one of conservation concern as a result of a 50% or greater decline in its breeding population over the last 25 years or longer.

Atlas work and the Breeding Bird Survey in Cumbria reflect these nationwide trends. Comparison between the 1997-2001 and 2008-2012 Atlases shows breeding birds lost from 246 tetrads, though with gains in 124 and with no change in 939 tetrads. Both losses and gains were mainly on the edge of the range on the upland fringe.

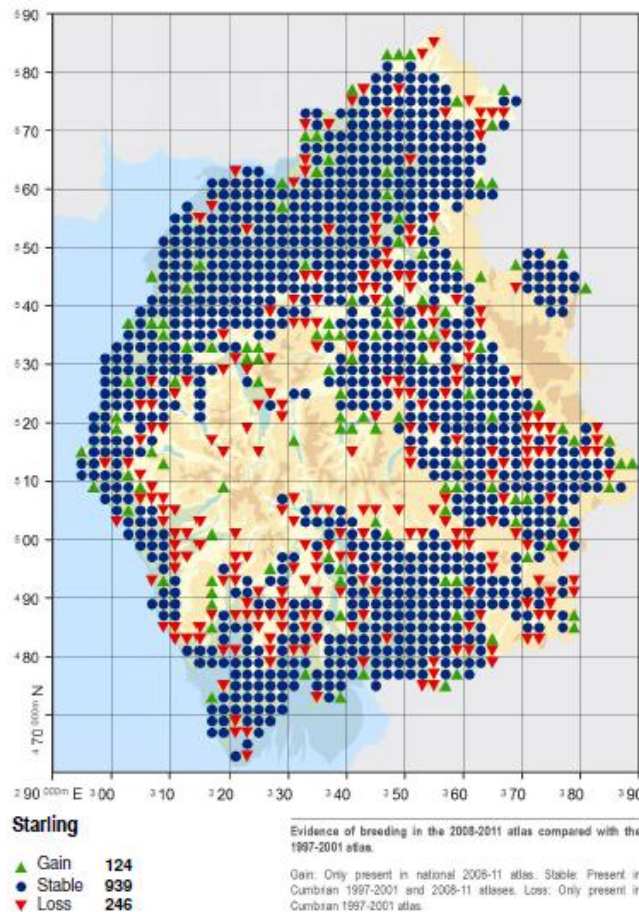
### Breeding distribution 2008 – 2012



Relative breeding abundance 2008 – 2012

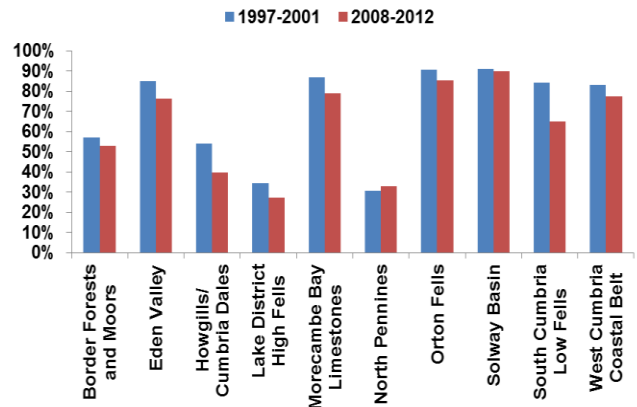


Breeding distribution change 1997 – 2001 to 2008 – 2012

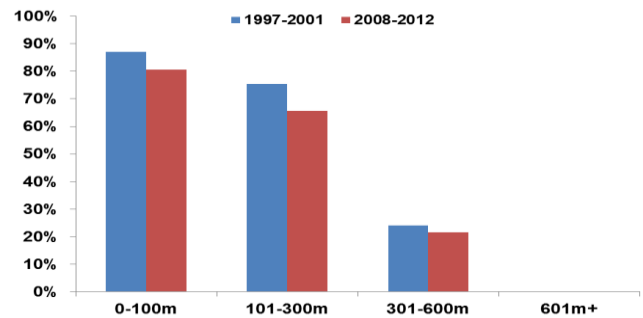


The two atlas periods showed a broadly similar pattern of breeding distribution with an avoidance of higher ground. With the exception of the North Pennines all Character Areas showed a slight contraction in the percentage of tetrads occupied.

Percentage of tetrads showing breeding evidence within Character Areas 1997 – 2001 and 2008 – 2012

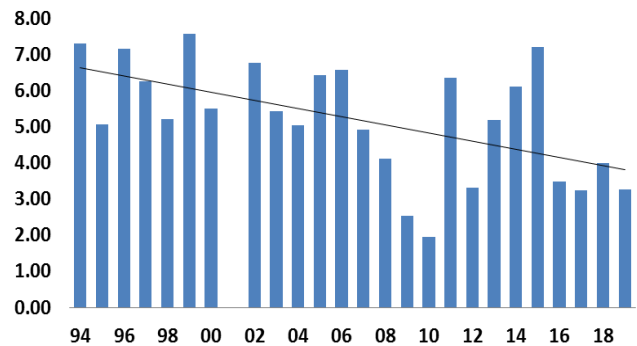


Percentage of tetrads with breeding by altitude 1997 – 2001 and 2007/08 – 2011/12

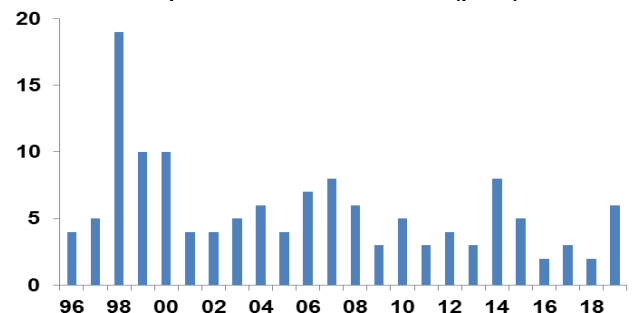


Average annual occupation of BBS 1km squares in Cumbria between 1994 and 2019 was 44.73% and has declined, being particularly below average since 2008. The number of birds counted per 1km square has averaged 5.21 birds and also declined, being particularly low between 2008 and 2010 and since 2016. Indeed, in 2010, there were only 1.98 birds per 1km square. The number of pairs at the RSPBs Campfield Marsh Reserve has a fluctuating almost cyclical trend with an exceptional year in 1998.

Average count/1km BBS square surveyed 1994 – 2019



Campfield Marsh RSPB Reserve (pairs)



Unusual nest sites have included in a pump at Urswick in 1887 (Dobson 1887), on a ship's mast in Ramsden Dock, Barrow in 1901 (Gaythorpe 1901), in an active Magpies nest near Maryport in 1912 where they regularly take over disused Magpie nests (Andrews 1912) and in the fork of the top of a fir tree at Barbon in 1929 (Savage 1929).

Post-breeding feeding flocks of Starlings, including a high proportion of juveniles, have become a feature of the late summer Cumbrian landscape. Perhaps surprisingly some of the biggest flocks have been reported from the uplands. The first record of high level congregations up to 2000 feet came from Blezard (1943) and Oakes (1953) also mentioned their presence on the hills. Many were feeding on the larva of the moth Mottled Umber *Erannis defoliaria* in Dovedale at the head of Ullswater on 1st June 1964 (Field Naturalist 1964). Brown (1972) noted birds feeding at 2700 feet in August in the Pennines. More recently, there were 2000 on Shap Fell on 22nd June 1989 and 5000 on the slopes of Cross Fell on 26th July 2006, with 3000 in the same area about two weeks later. The lower valleys and coastal plain are also important at this time of year. Walney Island regularly attracts sizeable numbers, notably 8000 on 30th August 1979. Other high counts include 2000 at Hodbarrow on 5th August 1989 and 1500 at Kents Bank on 21st September 2005.

The communal roosting of Starlings continues to be of great interest and is a major feature of the behaviour of the species. The larger winter roosts can draw birds from a radius of up to 30 miles (Marples 1934), and it is the aerial movements above the roost that is such a spectacle, often accompanied by Sparrowhawks, Peregrines and Buzzards taking advantage of the food supply. Since the late 19th century expansion of the breeding population, both urban and rural roosts, large and small, have occurred in many parts of Cumbria. These have either been just post-breeding roosts of presumably locally or regionally bred birds and comprised largely juveniles, or winter roosts only and including continental immigrants. At some roosts, the former has merged into the latter to form continuously occupied roosts from late summer through winter and sometimes into spring.

MacPherson (1892) described a post-breeding roost at Murrell Hill near Carlisle as the finest he knew of, suggesting others were also in existence in the late 19th Century. It attracted birds from as early as the second week in June, with numbers increasing up to the third week in October but declining thereafter. Hope (1923) confirmed the increasing number of these post-breeding roosts, particularly around Carlisle, and singled out the presence of a large flock in the neighbourhood of Dalston in June and July 1922. In the late summer and autumn of 1925 a large roost formed in bushes on the railway embankment at Culgaith in the Eden Valley. Unfortunately nearby telegraph wires killed 'a great many'. The bushes were cleared in the following spring but the roost formed in the following year on a bush covered slope in the near vicinity (Wilson 1933). By the early 1940s Blezard (1943) noted the existence of non-breeding flocks almost throughout the year with associated roosts, naming one at Kendal.

More recently, late summer into autumn roosts presumably comprising mostly our own or adjoining county post breeding birds have occurred at Killington Reservoir in most, if not all, years between 1991 and 2003, with an exceptional at least 40,000 on 1st July 1991, but more typically between 5000 and 15,000. However, there are no recent records from here, possibly as a result of lower observer effort. Other late summer roosts have included Sunbiggin Tarn with 5000 in August 1994, Mere Tarn with a maximum of 6000 in September 2007 and Watercrock sewage farm at Kendal with 1400 in June 2006.

Stokoe (1954) asserted that Siddick Pond had been known as a roost for over 50 years and that peak numbers were in August and maintained into November. Large roosts were present as early as 20th June and 15,000 were present on 11th August 1948, increasing to 20,000 as autumn progressed. He considered that the annual desertion of this roost in mid-winter was a consequence of the crushing of the reeds by the sheer weight of the birds until they were no longer suitable for roosting.

As late as the 1890s, MacPherson (1892) knew of no winter roosts in the county, asserting that by the first week of December, late summer / autumn roosts were no longer in use and that a much smaller population remained to winter, nor did Hope (1923) mention any winter roosts in the preceding 30 years. A national

enquiry into major roosts in the winter of 1932/33 (Marples 1934) listed only Gosforth, Siddick and Askham (near Penrith). However, Blezard (1943), listed roosts at Netherby, Rose Castle, Newton Reigny, Camsgill and Kirkoswald, all in North Cumbria, where winter visitors joined post-breeders to achieve numbers in excess of 10,000 birds, while Siddick Pond may have been occupied as at least an early winter roost in the early 20th century (see above).

Unlike Siddick, many roosts seemed to be short-lived around the 1950s. Typical was the mid-Eden Valley where a large roost at Bedlands Gate near Great Strickland, peaking at 15,000-plus in November 1950, was vacated after 1950/51. Subsequently, Eden Grove at Bolton reached 20 000-plus in 1951/52 and 1952/53 but was abandoned thereafter, possibly in favour of the Rectory at Great Salkeld which reached 20,000 in November 1953. However, this roost was deliberately evicted. In 1954, a roost appeared at Hoff near Appleby and was still in existence to at least 1957/58 and remarkably, 25,000 roosted on the open fell at nearby Orton in December 1955. In the same period, Fisher Tarn on the eastern edge of Kendal held large spring roosts in 1951 and 1952 including 30,000 in April of the latter year. However, this too was a roost deserted through deliberate measures to discourage it (Penrith & Dist. NHS Newsletter 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955).

Elsewhere the Staveley-in-Cartmel held a smaller roost of about 4000 birds in March 1953 and the Sawrey area on Windermere and nearby Esthwaite Water and Out Dubs Tarn held 10,000 birds in the October of the years between 1953 and 1956. The winter of 1959/60 saw a roost develop to hold 20,000 birds at Dovenby near Maryport. However, the wood was thinned in the following summer and the roost not used again (Penrith & Dist. NHS Newsletter 1953, Stokoe 1962).

It was not until the winter of 1959/60 that the first documented record of urban or industrial roosting occurred when 10,000 were counted in Barrow-in-Furness town centre (Barrow N&FC proceedings 1963). A nationwide investigation of major urban roosts in the early 1960s included Barrow and added Workington, both present in 1965 (Potts 1967). The only other large roost reported in the 1960s was at Kershope Forest which hosted one in the winter of 1960/61 (Graham 1993).

Records of roosts are absent but probably unreported in the 1970s and 1980s, other than one of 30,000 birds in October 1980 at Blea Tarn near Warcop in the Eden Valley. However, a statement in the 1989 bird report that there appeared to be a decline in the numbers of autumn birds arriving in the country, with the disappearance of some winter roosts which were a feature of the early 1980s, suggest that several were in existence in the 1980s. It is also the first indication of a decline in numbers which was again highlighted in the 1990 report.

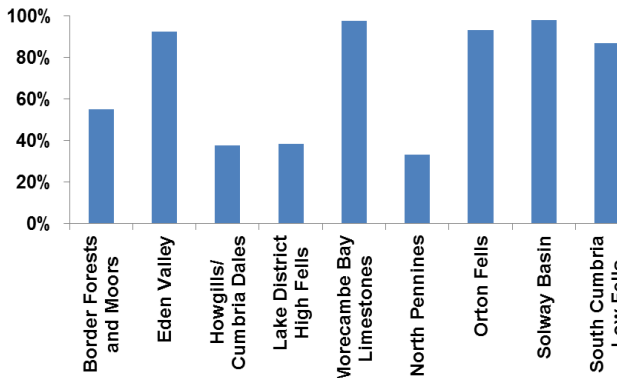
Since 1990, winter roosts have been reported from 53 locations, 31 of which have held 5000 or more birds. It is unclear how many of these are regular roosts, but the Carlisle area, Shap, Siddick Pond and Watercrock sewage farm at Kendal have all held roosts in multiple winters. The largest ever recorded in the county was the 200,000 strong roost in Carlisle's Kingstown Park in January 2016, and indeed all the 100,000 plus counts have come from Carlisle and surrounding area including the city itself, Longtown and Calthwaite. It should be noted that the huge roost at Gretna just over the border in Dumfriesshire certainly attracts birds foraging in Cumbria. Birds are regularly seen crossing the Solway at dusk and in recent years, the maximum count at the Gretna roost was 750 000 birds in November 2011 (Dumfries & Galloway Bird Reports). Likewise at Leighton Moss on the Lancashire border where birds head south over Arnside in the direction of the roost which has been in existence since at least 1941 (Oakes 1953) and where numbers peak in autumn, decline in mid-winter and again in spring (White et al 2008). This roost reached a maximum of 180,000 in September 1971 and 200,000 in the winter of 2010/11. More recently an alternative roost at nearby Silverdale Moss right on the county boundary has become an alternative roost and held 200,000 in December 2018 (LDBWS annual reports).

There is not enough regular counting at major regular roosts to determine pattern of usage throughout the winter, though the majority reported in the first half of the winter are not reported again in the second half. Many types of roost have been used. At Netherby, Blezard (1943) found that birds favoured birches until the leaves fell and then switched to pines and spruces. He also listed reeds, willows and laurel as other roost types and these have

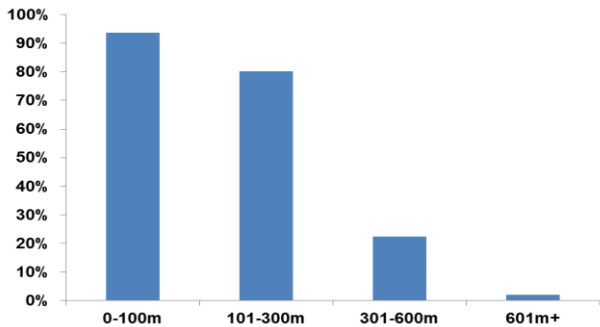
continued to be used since, with conifer plantations and reedbeds most favoured but also urban and industrial locations.

During the 2007/08 to 2011/12 winters, the bird was recorded in 67.7% of the county tetrads during atlas survey work. It was absent from the higher ground of the Lake District and North Pennines and overall mostly found below an elevation of about 300 metres.

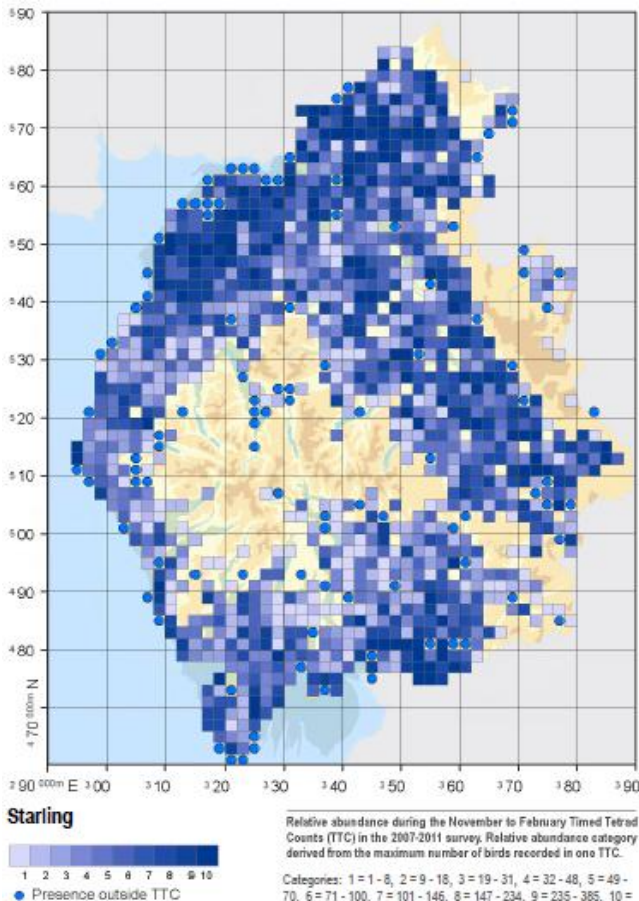
Percentage of tetrads showing winter occupation within Character Areas 2007/08 – 2011/12



Winter occupation of tetrads by altitude 2007/08 – 2011/12



Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12



The North European origin of our winter visitors is well documented in Britain. In Cumbria, birds ringed in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Germany and the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have been found or controlled in Cumbria. In addition, notable are five birds ringed at the biological field station at Rybachy on the Baltic coast in the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation and sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland, There are no recoveries from France or further south. In the reverse direction, the spread of countries is similar, though there are no recoveries in Belgium or the Netherlands and with Germany accounting for almost a third of all recoveries. No nestlings ringed in Cumbria have been found abroad. Exchanges of ringed birds within Britain and Ireland are widespread. Notable was a first winter bird ringed at Wick on the north coast of Scotland on 18th February 1994 and found dead in Cumbria two months later, indicating southern movement even late in winter. A first year ringed at Flimby in December 1981 and found alive in a building in West Sussex in May of the following year hints that internal British migrants are to be found in winter in Cumbria, which is consistent with more local breeding birds. Indeed Sellers (2013) listed other instances of "abmigration" from ringing recoveries where birds apparently wintered in Cumbria to the north of their likely breeding sites.

Summary of larger roosts 1990/91 to 2018/19

Location	Sub Location	Seasons with records	Highest count	Season highest count
Irthington		1	2000	2005/06
Roadhead		1	4000	2006/07
Brampton	Jubilee Pond	1	10000	2003/04
Hallbankgate	Coal Fell	1	1200	1990/91
Tindale Tarn		2	1600	2007
Longtown	Arthuret Pools	2	120000	2019/20
Warwick Bridge	Aglionby	1	present	1993/94
Carlisle	Harker	1	10000	2014/15
Carlisle	Kingmoor	1	10000	2015/16
Carlisle	Kingstown	1	200000	2015/16
Carlisle	Linstock	1	100000	2011/12
Carlisle	City Park	1	160000	1991/92
Carlisle	Portland Square	1	21000	2014/15
Port Carlisle		2	8000	2014/15
Bowness-on-Solway	Campfield Marsh	1	1200	1998/99
Skinburness		2	000s	2015/16
Anthorn		1	2000	2017/18
Great Orton	Watchtree	4	50000	2016/17
Finland		1	25000	2012/13
Skinburness		2	000s	2007/08
Kirkbride		1	2000	1998/99
Aspatia		1	1000	1997/98
Cockermouth		1	1000	1998/99
Wythop	Wythop Mill	1	5000	1994/95
Derwent Water	Portinscale	3	1000	2006/07
Calthwaite		1	100000	2018/19
Lazonby	Baronwood	1	35000	2004/05
Newton Reigny	Newton Rigg	1	3000	2016/17
Penrith	Thacka Beck	1	6000	2014/15
Penrith	Yanwath	1	25000	2011/12
Kirkby Thore		1	3000	2008/09
Skirwith		1	5000	2006/07
Shap		4	60000	2013/14
Sunbiggin Tarn		2	10000	2017/18
Tebay		1	1000	1997/98
Kelleth, Tebay		1	10000	2016/17
Siddick Pond		9	20000	1992/93
Egremont		1	20000	2007/08
Bootle	Barfield Tarn	1	6000	1997/98
Sandscale Haws		3	3000	2016/17
Walney Island	Jubilee Bridge	1	10000	2003/04
Walney Island	Vickerstown	1	5000	2013/14
Barrow-in-Furness	Barrow Park	1	present	1990/91
Barrow-in-Furness	Cavendish Dock	1	20000	2006/07
Ulverston		1	2500	2005/06
Mere Tarn		6	11000	2016/17
Grange-over-Sands		1	1000	1998/99
Helton Tarn		1	250	2006
Lyth Valley	Brigsteer Moss	1	2000	2016/17
Whinfell Tarn		1	3000	2005/06
Kendal	Watchgate	1	22000	2005/06
Kendal	Watercrock	5	12000	2005/06
Killington Reservoir		7	40000	1991
Beetham Holme		1	15000	2017/18

# Ring Ouzel

## *Turdus torquatus*

A fairly common summer visitor and passage migrant; breeds in moderate numbers



### Data included up to 2019

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\* not referenced in the text but used for data analysis and compilation of tables

#### Post 2019 notable records

- 2020** Winter: 1 Coniston 5th February. First: 24th March. Last: 4th November  
**2021** First: 30th March. Coastal: 1 South Walney 30th March. Large flock: 10 Harter Fell 2nd September. Last: 13th September Winter: 1 Keswick garden 19th November, 1 Lorton 8th December  
**2022** First: 15th March. Last: 20th October. Winter: 1 Wansfell Pike 1st December  
**2023** First: 23rd March. Last: 5th November. Coastal: 1 North Walney 28th October

Photograph: Forest Head, Geltsdale Fells, April 2015 (N. Franklin)

## Ring Ouzel

### *Turdus torquatus*

A fairly common summer visitor and passage migrant; breeds in moderate numbers

Atlas status: % tetrads	Possible	Probable	Confirmed	Total
Breeding 1997-2001	2.2	4.9	4.8	11.9
Breeding 2008-2012	1.5	5.3	3.7	10.5
Winter 2007/08-2011/12				0.05
Atlas status: % 10km <sup>2</sup> with breeding evidence	1968-72	1988-91	1997-01	2008-12
	51.6	40.0	36.8	37.9

Ring Ouzels breed in the uplands of Northern Europe and winter in the mountains of Southern Europe and North Africa where their occurrence is strongly correlated with stands of Juniper on whose berries they feed in winter. Three races are recognised, but only the nominate race *torquatus* occurs in the British Isles. The UK breeding population is now confined to the uplands of Scotland, Northern England and Wales with a very small outpost on Dartmoor. In a 2012 national survey the population was estimated at between 4 716 and 5 419 pairs (Wotton et al. 2016). It has shown a range contraction between the National Atlases of 1968-1972 and 2007-2011. A national sample survey in 1999 indicated a 58% reduction in numbers since the National Atlas in 1988-1991 (Wotton et al. 2002). The repeat survey in 2012 found a further 28% decline since 1999 (Wotton et al. 2016). However monitoring since the early 2000s within the core range through intensive annual surveys of study sites has revealed an almost cyclical population of peaks and troughs. (Sim et al. unpub., Fairbrother & Hutchinson 2020).

Birds re-occupy breeding areas in Cumbria from late March onwards with an additional spring passage of birds moving further north to breed. Territories are largely vacated by the end of July with a southward early autumn passage, followed by a late pulse of passage of presumed Fennoscandian breeding birds in mid to late October. Lake District breeding sites are characterised by deeply glaciated valleys with steep crags holding deep vegetation in which to nest, amongst predominantly grassland in which to feed. They are often distributed in a linear pattern along valley sides. Pennines sites are on smaller crags, in gills, quarries or old mine workings.

Without modern optical aids or easy access into the hills, early ornithologists would struggle to assess its status. It was described by Durnford (1883) as “not common” in the Furness Fells and by Macpherson in 1892 as “a few” enlivening the fells. Dunlop (1923) considered it “decidedly more numerous on the Pennines than in the fells of the Lake District”. In that part of Cumbria once in Lancashire, Oakes (1953) considered it a localised breeder in the Coniston and Dunnerdale fells but rare on many of the Furness Fells. Blezard (1943) and Brown (1974) commented on variation in numbers between years during observations between 1920 and 1970. Historical densities quoted in the literature are few but include six pairs in a two mile stretch of a Lakeland valley in 1929 (Brown 1972). The Border moors have probably never been a major stronghold. Graham (1993) writing of the period 1930 to 1966, considered them scarce and knew of only a handful of sites at the heads of the Black Lyne and White Lyne valleys including Christianbury Crags. These sites are now enclosed by conifer forest and the last documented nest was found in 1964. Though there were records during the 1968-72 National Atlas, searches in 1980 failed to find any birds (Jackson 1981).

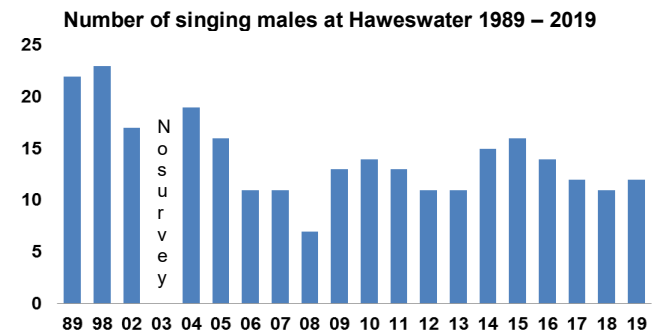
The first local surveys were carried out in the Howgill Fells by pupils at Sedbergh School from 1937 to 1939, again in 1957 and from 1966 to 1968. The area comprised that part of the fells encompassed by an arc of about five miles diameter centred on, and to the north of Sedbergh. It is an area intersected by numerous gills and even as early as the 1930s was predominantly vegetated by acid grassland. Patches of heather were still present on some of the steeper beck sides and at this time, most territories or nests found were associated with the latter habitat just above streams. In addition, it was found in the 1960s surveys that several pairs also occupied the substantial crags at Cautley. Nest sites were generally under some form of cover, e.g. heather, bracken, stone or overhanging grass on a bank and also under gorse bushes.



Newbiggin, North Pennines 15th April 2013 (G. Broome)

Numbers appeared to vary between years particularly in the early surveys. The survey reports state that no second broods were found. However, from recent research, we know the incidence of double brooding is higher than previously thought and the late dates for some nest records suggest that second broods may have been involved, possibly resulting in some over-counting. At the time predation by Merlin was considered the most likely cause of between-year variation in numbers. The 1930's surveys indicated a population of about 18 pairs, of which 12 were associated with fell becks, and in 1957 14 territories were located. The 1966 survey located 24 territories, with 22 in the following two years (Sedbergh School Ornithological Archive). Cleasby (1999) considered this increase to be due to increased survey effort at Cautley Crags where high densities of up to six pairs were found. No further dedicated surveys have been carried out in the area. However, field work for the 1988-91 National Atlas indicated decline and this was reinforced by that of the 1997-2001 Cumbrian Atlas, which located probable breeding in just three of ten tetrads which held breeding birds during the previous surveys. Declines here appear to have started earlier than more recent declines. Cleasby (1999) considered this due to the almost complete loss of the remaining heather and bilberry due to heavy grazing by sheep. Though there have been sporadic records since 2000, breeding was only finally confirmed in the area again at Cautley Crag in 2017 (Sharp 2017).

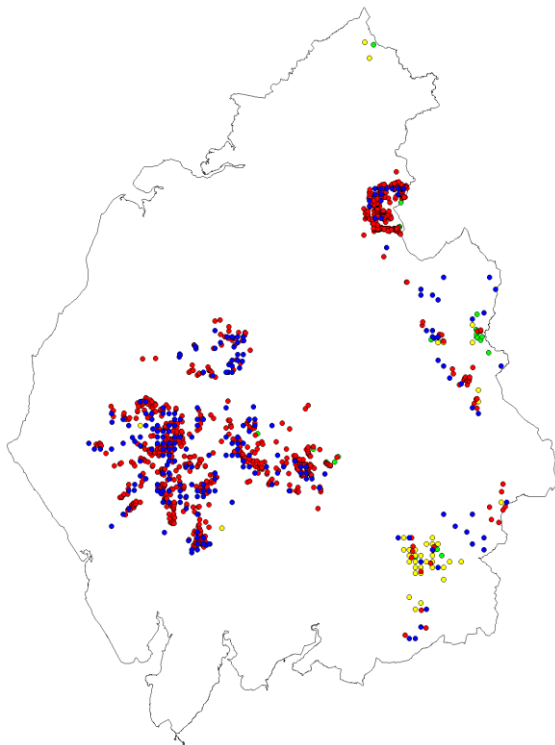
Surveys at Mardale Head at Haweswater and in adjoining Swindale in the North East Lake District were first conducted in 1989 and repeated in 1998. However, they did not account for mobile birds associated with second nest attempts and may have overestimated the population. Systematic surveys of singing males before dawn before the end of May were initiated in 2002 and have been repeated annually since 2004. A rolling pattern of decline and subsequent recovery is evident, including a drop to a low less than half of the population of 2004 in 2008 (RSPB annual reports).



Elsewhere in the Lake District, a survey of singing males on the southern slope of the Ennerdale Valley using the same methodology, found six singing males in 2007 and eight in 2015 (Ullrich 2007, 2015). Similarly, a survey in the catchments of Wanscale and Gatesgarthdale Becks (Honister Pass) at Buttermere found 14 to 16 singing males in 2009 (D. Shackleton unpub.). Recent surveys of singing males on the RSPB Reserve at Geltsdale in the North Pennines between 2009 and 2019 found between 8 and 21 singing males, compared to at least 22 pairs in 1992 (RSPB annual reports).

Few records prior to the 1990s were accompanied by a grid reference. Nevertheless the map below compiled from all grid referenced records between April and July in suitable habitat shows the historical county distribution of the species. (The absence of records from the Lake District and North Pennine fells prior to 1990 is a reflection of the absence of specific site details and to the overlaying of post 1990 records above.)

**Distribution of all known records with a grid reference**



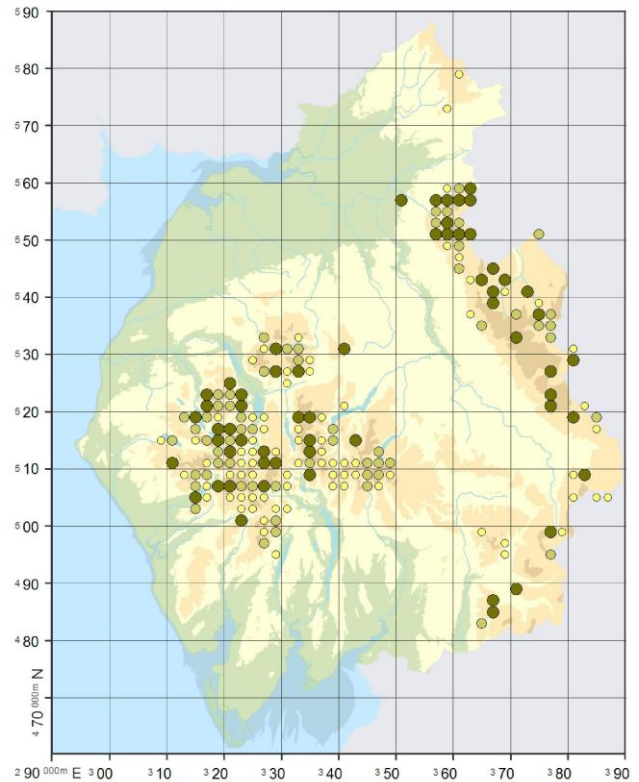
- 6 figure grid reference up to 1989
- 6 figure grid reference 1990 onwards
- 4 figure grid reference up to 1989
- 4 figure grid reference 1990 onwards

National surveys in 1999 and 2012 involved sample surveys of randomly selected tetrads using a tape-luring methodology. In 2012, this involved 22 tetrads in the Lake District (14 occupied), 12 in the Pennines (six occupied) and six in the Howgill Fells (two occupied). Survey coverage in 2012 was more than twice as great as in 1999. The surveys were designed to produce national totals, and with samples in discreet geographical areas small, extrapolation inevitably comes with wide confidence limits. No extrapolation was carried out for Cumbria as a whole, but within the Lake District National Park, 305 territories were estimated with 95% confidence limits of between 175 and 449 territories, compared with 356 with confidence limits between 106 and 761 in 1999 (RSPB pers. com.). The 2008–12 Atlas confirmed the importance of the Lake District high fells with 114 tetrads, with confirmed or probable breeding evidence compared to 53 in the North Pennines, Howgill Fells and Cumbrian Dales combined. If the ratio of tetrads in the Lake District compared to the population estimated from the 2012 national survey is also applied to the 53 tetrads elsewhere, then the remaining county population would be a further 142 pairs, giving a county-wide total of 447 pairs.

Overall 2008–12 distribution is broadly similar to that of the 1968–72 Atlas at a 10km square scale but with losses in 19 squares and gains in seven. Losses have occurred in the Border Moors, the South Western and North Western fringes of the Lake District and the fells of the Upper Eden and Lune catchments. Lack of records since the 1990's from these areas tends to imply these losses are real, where as some gains may involve just spring passage birds. The secretive nature of this species, combined with its occupancy of often inaccessible terrain, means atlas methodology is likely to under-record its distribution, abundance and level of breeding status, particularly at finer spatial scales. Hence, many of the tetrads with "probable" breeding in the more recent atlases are likely to actually refer to genuine breeding birds. This is particularly the case in the Lake District where the terrain is so difficult to survey. Comparisons at the tetrad level with the 1997–01 Atlas show a mixed picture of losses and gains, probably to some extent

because of this low detectability factor and to the occurrence of spring passage birds in the early survey period, but overall shows an approximate 10% decline in tetrad occupancy in the decade.

**Breeding distribution 2008-12**



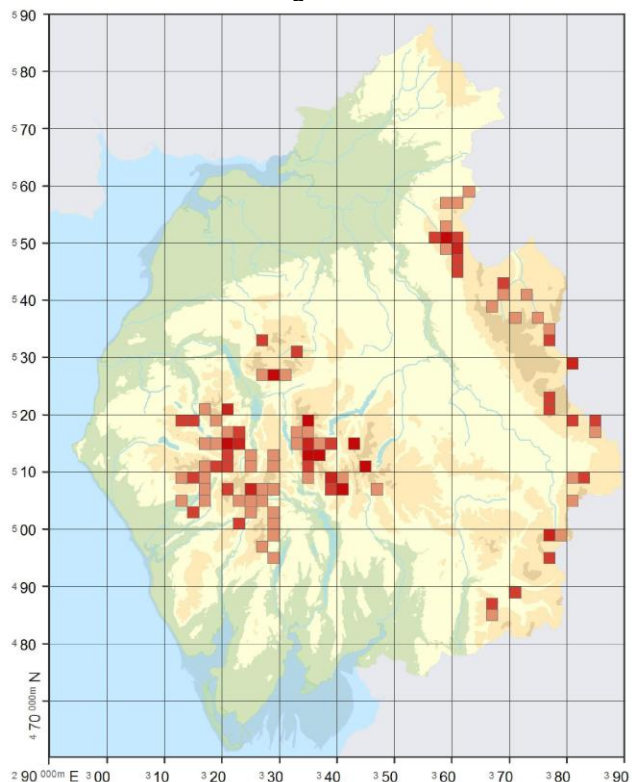
**Ring Ouzel**

- Possible 27
- Probable 98
- Confirmed 69

Evidence of breeding in the 2008-2011 survey. Category determined by the strongest recorded evidence of breeding by birds in suitable nesting habitat in the tetrad.

Includes records from Timed Tetrad Visits and Roving Records.

**Relative breeding abundance 2008 – 2012**



**Ring Ouzel**

- 5
- 8
- 9
- 10

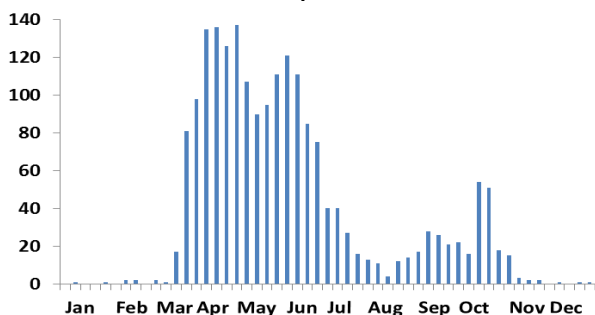
Relative abundance during the April to July Timed Tetrad Counts (TTC) in the 2008-2011 survey. Relative abundance category derived from the maximum number of birds recorded in one TTC.

Categories: 5 = 1 - 1, 8 = 2 - 2, 9 = 3 - 3, 10 = 4 - 7.

Duckworth and Macpherson (1886) mentioned a few pairs nesting annually on the cliffs immediately to the south of Whitehaven. However Macpherson (1892) failed to refer to this in his Fauna of Lakeland only a decade later and if coastal nesting is discounted then all nests found have been in the uplands. Brown (1974) found most nests between 1000 and 1700 feet. In the Lake District, very few nests have been reported above about 1800 feet, probably because of the inaccessibility of the terrain, but many territorial birds have been reported on the high crags of the higher mountains. The highest nest recorded in the Pennines by Blezard (1946) was on a limestone scar at over 2 400 feet, while Robson (1969) found one as low as 800 feet. In the Howgill Fells study area, nests were located between 750 and 1500 feet in the tributary valleys and up to 2000 feet on the crags. Unusual nest sites have included within derelict farmhouses and buildings associated with lead and barytes mines in the North Pennines (Blezard 1946, Robson 1969). Robson (1969, 1975) found nests as much as ten feet below ground in potholes (one of less than two feet diameter) on the Appleby Fells. Nests have been found in Gorse and Juniper in the Lake District but there is no record of tree nesting. Robson also noted the occasional proximity of Blackbird nests, citing an instance of an ouzel nest in the upstairs of a building and a Blackbird nest downstairs! Ring Ouzels often nest in close association with Peregrines in the Lake District and Merlins in the Pennines and no doubt occasionally fall prey to both. Nests were also raided by the resident Golden Eagles in Riggindale (RSPB Reports). Brown (1974) cites an instance of a successful Ouzel nest within 20 yards of Peregrine nest with young in 1929.

Analysis of the occurrence of non-survey records from 1992 (when all record data is available) to 2019 reveals a handful of records in the first three weeks of March, with the main arrival from the 20th March onwards. The median first record date for the period 1970 to 2019 is 23rd March. April and the first week of May see the highest number of records, probably corresponding to the period of greatest detectability around nest building and egg laying. This is followed by a reduction in detectability during incubation throughout the rest of May. A further spike in records between 31st May and 10th June corresponds with a higher incidence of singing as second nest attempts are started and also with the fledging of first broods. The number of records drops dramatically from mid-June onwards, reaching a low point around mid-August. Subsequently, there is an upturn in records from early to mid-September, presumably involving south-bound migrants from further north in Britain and locally departing breeders and young. A second pulse of occurrences begins in the first week of October and peaks between 12th and 22nd October, with a handful of records continuing into the first week of November. This is likely to largely involve Fennoscandian breeders heading south, often within flocks of Fieldfare and Redwing. The median last record date from 1970 to 2019 is 25th October.

Number of records per week 1992 to 2019



Flock size on spring passage is generally small and in single figures with just four of 10 or more birds, all falling in mid-April.

Spring site counts of 10 or more birds

Year	Date	Location	No.
1981	16 Apr	Smardale, Crosby Garrett Fell	10
2002	15 Apr	Croglin Fell	10
2018	19 Apr	Midgeholme, Cold Fell	12
2019	18 Apr	Selside Pike, Swindale Head	11

Autumn passage site counts are often larger, involving both juveniles and adults and there are 12 site counts of 10 or more birds. Records from Mardale Common, Mungrisdale and Grasmere all involved birds feeding on Juniper berries.

Autumn site counts of 10 or more birds

Year	Date	Location	No.
1910	05 Aug	Appleby Fells	30
1950	07 Aug	Cautley Crags, Howgill Fells	15
1982	14 Sep	Riggindale, Mardale	25
2002	10 Sep	Jockey Shield, Geltsdale	12
2005	22 Oct	Mosedale, Mungrisdale	20
2005	25 Oct	Mardale Common	10
2008	11 Sep	Tarnhouse Farm, Tindale	14
2010	23 Aug	Cat Crags, Tindale	12
2010	18 Sep	Mosedale, Mungrisdale	12
2011	11 Sep	Mardale Common	10
2011	20 Sep	Blindtarn Moss, Grasmere	25
2019	18 Sep	Cautley Crags, Howgill Fells	10

Passage is most evident inland and reported mostly from breeding areas, though regularly on the lower ground. Brown (1972) commented on a lack of records from inland non-breeding areas and this has remained the case until present. There are just 38 spring records and 16 autumn records of this type, with just two each in February and November.

Likewise on the coast, there have been 71 coastal records between late March and May, mainly of singles but occasionally two birds. The only exception was three at South Walney on 12th April 2016. The 57 coastal records between late July and early November represent about 11% of all records in this period. Again most have been single birds but occasionally two or three. However six were at South Walney on 20th October 1969 (Dean 1990) and four at Sandscale Haws on 19th October 1994 and at South Walney a day later. The majority of coastal records have come from Walney Island with only 33% from elsewhere.

Coastal records by area

Inner Solway	9	West Coast	4	Leven	4
Outer Solway	3	Duddon (exc. North Walney)	7	Kent	4
St Bees Head	11	Walney Island & Furness	102		

There have been 28 "winter" records after 7th November and before 3rd March. It is possible that some, particularly those up to mid-November and in late February, could have involved passage birds. Indeed, only eight may have involved longer staying, possibly wintering birds, and of these, three could have involved the same individual at lngs between 1934 and 1939.

Winter records

Year	Date	Location	No.
1921/22	late Dec -13 Feb	Patterdale	1
1927/28		Longsleddale	1
1927	29 Nov	Barbon	1
1932	29 Feb	Barbon Fells	1
1934/35	Nov & 06 Feb	Ings nr. Windermere	1
1935/36		Ings nr. Windermere	1
1938/39		Ings nr. Windermere	1
1949	24 Jan	Settlebeck, Howgill Fells	1
1958	24 Nov	Baugh Fell	1
1959	16 Feb	Moorhouse, N. Pennines	1
1962	10 Dec	Moorhouse, N. Pennines	1
1966	Jan	Mell Fell, Cross Fell	1
1984	19-20 Feb	South Walney	1
1987	11 Nov	Coniston (flyover)	3
1988	19 Nov & 25 Dec	Mardale	1
1989	19 Nov	Haystacks, Buttermere	2
1990	20 Nov	Willow Woods, Walney	1
1995	22 Nov & 02 Dec	Swineside, Mungrisdale	2
1996	02 Feb	Calderbridge	1
1996	06 -26 Feb	Lakeland Park, Keswick	1
1998	10 Feb	Barrow Gas Terminal	1
2007	11 Feb	Dock Tarn, Armboth Fells	1
2007	27 Nov	Bigland Hall, Newby Bridge	1
2014	13 Nov	Nineveh, Winster Valley	1
2014	16 Nov	Tarn House Farm, Tindale	1
2014	25 Dec	Toms Howe, Longsleddale	1
2014	29 Dec	Arnside Knott	3
2015	11 Dec	Shap Wells	1

Few Ring Ouzels have been ringed in Cumbria and most in the Appleby Fells by R.W. Robson in the 1960s. From 100 nestlings he ringed, only one was recovered. This was a chick ringed in a mine in Scordale in June 1963 which was killed by a car on the A66 near Appleby in August 1966. The only other recoveries involved a chick ringed at an unknown location in 1927 and shot in Navarra, Spain in the autumn of the same year and a chick ringed in Kentmere in 1970 and shot in the French Pyrenees in December 1975.

# Brambling

## *Fringilla montifringilla*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant. Probably bred once in 1984



Data included up to 2019

### Non-standard References

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### Post 2019 Selected Records

- 2019/20 First: 27th September. Last: 10th April  
2020/21 First: 1st October. Last: 16th April  
2021/22 First: 10th October. Last: 16th April  
2022/23 First: 17th October. Last: 16th April. Highest count: 120 The Row, Kershope 25th February  
2023/24 First: 10th October.

Photograph: Talkin Tarn, November 2010 (N. Franklin)

# Brambling

## *Fringilla montifringilla*

A common winter visitor and passage migrant  
Probably bred once in 1984

Atlas status: % tetrads Winter 2007/08-2011/12  
13.68

Atlas status: % 10km sq Winter 1981-84 2007/08-2011/12  
62.11 74.74

Bramblings breed in both deciduous and coniferous woodland across subarctic and boreal Northern Eurasia close to the limits of tree growth, with the largest populations in Fennoscandia and Russia. (EBBA 2020). They migrate south to winter as far south in the Western Palearctic as North Africa and the Middle East (Clement et al. 1993).

Arriving from mid-September in Britain, numbers wintering here and on passage are determined by breeding success in the summer and the availability of food on the continent with distribution largely dictated by the availability of Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) mast – their favoured food (Parkin & Knox 2010). Only a few prolong their stay beyond mid to late April. A very rare breeder in Britain, up to 10 pairs may breed in Scotland each year, but with only two pairs confirmed in anyone year (Newton 2007, Eaton et al. 2021)). There is just one instance of probable breeding in England – in Cumbria in 1984 (Brown & Grice 2005).

In Cumbria Macpherson (1892) summarised that Bramblings were “tolerably regular winter visitors to the Solway Plain and the Eden Valley, but in the south and south-west Lakeland they appeared to be decidedly uncommon”. They would forage in fields or plantations, and in farmyards with other small birds if frosty. According to a Mr Holdsworth, some chanting of summer song was heard before departure in the vicinity of Oxenholme until the second week of April. Armit (1902) referring to the Rydal area wrote that “it comes in flocks, sometimes of great size when snow is on the ground and the beech harvest has been full”.

Oakes (1953) reported large influxes in Lancashire in the winters of 1911/12, 1920/21, 1928/29 and 1933/34 though it is not clear if this included parts of that county now in Cumbria. Additionally, the species was not included in Dunlop’s or Hope’s status reviews (1923) so its status in the early part of the 20th Century is unclear. It was described in the 1940s as a “not uncommon but very erratic and local winter visitor” with a distribution favourable to Cumberland compared to the south of the county (Blezard et al. 1943). Its dependence on Beech mast was noted but also its usage of stubbles and the seeds of sedges. Arrival in Cumbria in the first half of the 20th Century was deemed to be from October onwards, with birds occasionally staying well into April and exceptionally one was at Windermere on 2nd May 1927 (Blezard et al. 1943). Small flocks of up to 30 were the norm at this time, but Astley (1920) estimated over 1000 at a Westmorland Lake District site in November 1920 and hundreds roosted in a garden at Kendal in the winter of 1933/34 – a winter of widespread distribution and high numbers (Blezard et al. 1943).

Widespread flocks were also present in the hard winter of 1946/47 including a flock of about 200 at Hawes End, Derwent Water on 28th December 1946 (Blezard 1954). Glenridding hosted a flock of 150 and Newby Bridge one of 100 both in December of 1948 (Penrith NHS Bulletin). The hard winter of 1953/54 winter saw 100 at Matterdale on 16th November with 40 unusually in a turnip field in the Vale of Lorton on 22nd November. (Blezard 1958). Stokoe (1962) upgraded its status to a “frequent winter visitor” but still with erratic occurrence and possibly still most regular in Cumberland. However he offered no flocks of more than 30 since 1953 and indeed the largest flock recorded in the 1960s was of only 70 at Abbotswood, Barrow-in-Furness on 3rd March 1963 (Field Naturalist). A bird ringed at Nibthwaite in February 1969 was the first recorded in the Coniston area by Cowcill since at least 1947 (Cowcill 1961, Stokoe archive).

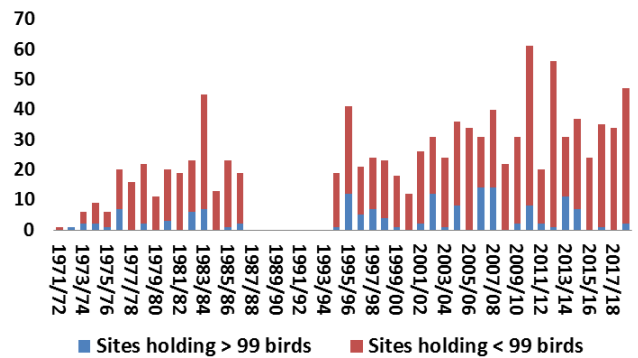
The 1970s saw an upturn in records with the advent of regular bird reports. Occurrence post this date has been annual in the county and though not documented previously is likely to have always been so. If the number of general locations holding birds in a winter



Male, High Stand, Armathwaite, October 2013 (D. Robson)

is reflective of the magnitude of the influx, then the winters of 1983/84, 1995/96, 2002/03, 2007/08, 2010/11, 2012/13 and 2018/19 all had 40 or more locations hosting birds. (There is no detailed site specific data available for the period 1987/88 to 1993/94).

Sites holding Brambling 1973/74 to 2018/19  
(incomplete data 1987/88 to 1993/94)



With the increase in garden bird feeding, birds are increasingly to be found in gardens, particularly in more severe weather and this has probably led not only to an increase in overall records, but also to a higher proportion of those involving single birds or small numbers. A Kendal garden hosted birds on 149 consecutive days and 167 days overall in the winter of 1997/98 including 45 in late March (Wheeler 1998).

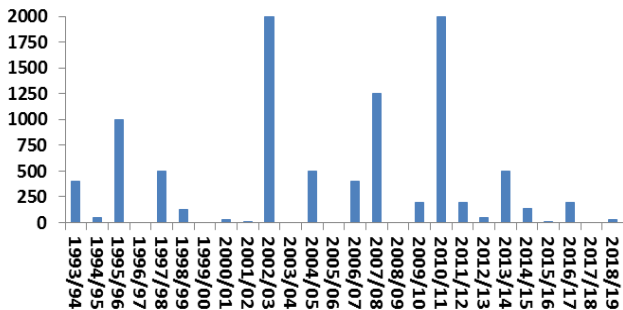
About 30% of records since 1970 have involved single birds and about a further 50% flocks of under 50 birds. Of the remaining 20%, most have been of under 500 birds with just 24 records exceeding this figure. Of these 11 have involved flocks of more than 1000 birds. Most large flocks have lingered over days, weeks or even months depending on the supply of Beech mast and will have involved roosts associated with the feeding flocks, though surprisingly only one record, that at Appletthwaite Ghyll on the flank of Skiddaw in January 2003 specifically refers to a large roost. Flocks are often mixed, mainly in association with Chaffinches. The highest ever site count is of about 6000 birds at Brampton in January 1977. Though not mentioned by Brown & Grice (2005) in their review of birds in England, this is of the order of magnitude of those flocks that are, and would appear to be one of the larger English flocks.

### Flocks of over 1000 birds

Winter	Date	Location	No.
1920/21	Nov	Lake District site	1000
1976/77	15 Nov	Harrowslack, Windermere	c 1000
1976/77	13 Jan	Brampton	c 6000
1995/96	24 Dec	Talkin Tam	c 1000
2002/03	13-31 Dec	Matson Ground, Windermere	c 3000
2002/03	04-07 Jan	Talkin Tam	c 2000
2003/04	January	Appletthwaite Ghyll, Skiddaw	c 1000
2007/08	29 Nov - 04 Jan	Talkin Tam	1250
2010/11	26 Nov	Talkin Tam	2000
2010/11	05 Dec	Grange-over-Sands	1700
2012/13	13 Oct	Low Hesket	1000

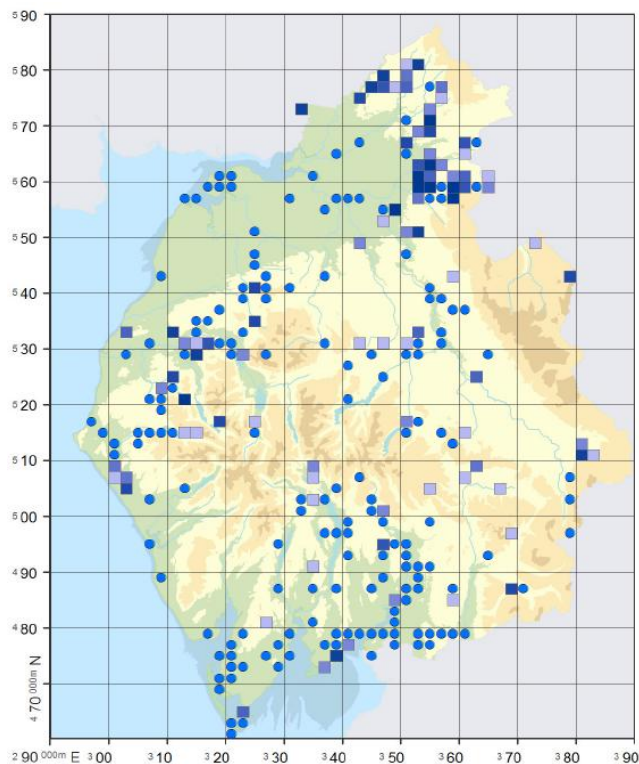
Regular locations are primarily associated with the availability of Beech mast. Areas that have regularly reported large numbers include Talkin Tarn, lower Geltsdale, Kendal and Sizergh Castle. To an extent this may be a result of observer bias, particularly so at Sizergh where records generated by an employee were annual from 1973/74 to 1998/99, but ceased following his retirement! Likewise Hawsmead Park and Serpentine Woods in Kendal which regularly hosted substantial flocks until the 1998/99 winter, but there have been few records since. Conversely, though there were irregular records from what is now the premier site in the county at Talkin Tarn prior to 1992/93, it has since occurred here almost annually and in four winters has held flocks of over 1000 birds.

Maximum counts at Talkin Tarn 1993/94 to 2018/19

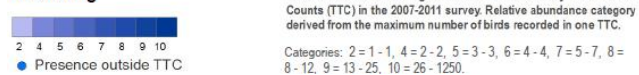


In contrast to the winter Atlas of 1981-84 which showed occupation in Cumbria of 62% of 10km squares and with a bias towards the north and northwest, bird reports and data supplied to the CBC since 1973 suggest more records submitted at that time and indeed subsequently have been from the south of the county. The recent 2007/12 Atlas confirmed this and found 74% of 10km squares holding birds with most of the gains in the south. Distribution was not surprisingly, highly correlated with wooded areas, with no records from the high fells of the Lake District or Pennines. The level of abundance was not correlated with distribution and areas of highest abundance were concentrated in the north east of the county with a much lower incidence of larger numbers in the south and west.

Winter distribution and relative abundance 2007/08 – 2011/12



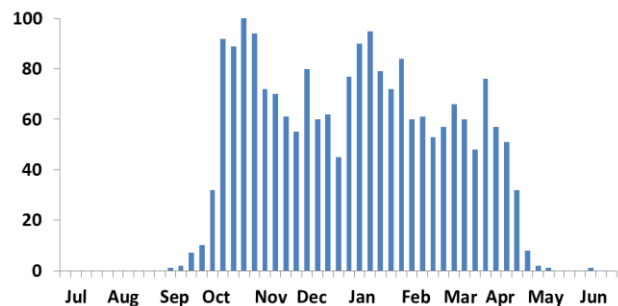
**Brambling**



Though the larger concentrations are primarily associated with Beech woods, other less favoured habitats have included larch stands, stubble and kale/quinoa crops. Tideline feeding has also been noted. At Rampside on the Furness coast a flock foraged on the saltmarsh in the winter of 1962/63 (Stokoe archive). More recently on the Kent Estuary at Grange-over-Sands and Kents Bank small flocks of up to 30 were present in the winters of 2005/06 and 2007/08. An unprecedented flock of 600 was present in December 2010 feeding on Common Cordgrass *Spartina anglica* seeds at Grange. At South Walney 120 stayed for most of January 1979 with 70 here in mid-December 1981, while during severe cold weather in late January 1984 150 stayed into early February with 130 at the north end of the Island at the same time (Dean 1990).

Fennoscandian breeding birds generally move southwards in September and in particular search out good crops of Beech mast. Birds arriving in Britain do so mainly in the ten weeks following the middle of September (Newton 1972). Analysis of the distribution of "new" records between 1994/95 and 2018/19 in Cumbria shows the county is no exception. Following a handful of records from 18th September to 4th October, there is a moderate rise from about early to mid-October followed by a significant increase from mid-October to early November. There appears to be something of a subsequent dip thereafter with the exception of a spike between 5th and 15th December. There is another increase in early January to early February with a gradual decline thereafter, other than a further spike in late March/early April, suggestive of spring passage from outside the county. There is a sharp decline in records after mid-April with very few records after 25th April.

Number of records per week 1994/5 to 2018/19



A record on 8th August 1983 at Holme Wood, Flimby is fully a month earlier than the next earliest on 11th September 2015 at Campfield Marsh, Bowness-on-Solway. Indeed there have only been 16 documented September records. The median first date from 1970 to 2019 was 12th October and the median last date in the same period was 24th April. Other than a remarkable and possibly questionable record of a flock of 100 birds feeding on Beech at Ambleside on 2nd June 1973 and one in Rickerby Park, Carlisle on 10th June 2015, the latest dates involve one at Brigham on 14th May 1997 and one at Bowston near Kendal on 18th May 1979. There have been just 11 May records in total.

Migration is mainly, though not exclusively at night (Newton 1972). However diurnal passage through South Walney Bird Observatory is observed in most years, but only in quite small numbers. Exceptions have included 70 on 22nd Dec 1982 and 50 on 8th Dec 2010 (WBO 2020).

Ringling data shows that birds arriving in Cumbria have travelled from as far as Sweden, Norway and Germany. One bird ringed near Kendal in December 1933 was trapped in Belgium (598km) in October 1934 (Robinson et al. 2020).

Cumbria hosts the only likely English breeding record. In April 1984 birds were present in a garden near Workington until 29th April. Subsequently a juvenile male and adult male (both in moult) were mist netted on 1st September with a female calling in close proximity to the net. As Bramblings do not migrate until after moult it was assumed they had nested nearby.

Birds will sing in this country prior to departure in April and May and this has been reported on several occasions in Cumbria. In the 1997-2001 Atlas the two records at all suggestive of breeding in Ennerdale and Kershope Forest were not repeated in the 2007-2012 breeding Atlas, but presumed late winter or passage birds were present in April in 19 tetrads in 15% of 10km squares.