

## **North Cumbria (the coast, Pennines and lakes) – April 2015**

### **Introduction**

This report covers a short trip made to north Cumbria with the intention to connect with a number of local specialities, in particular Black Grouse and Black Guillemot. The trip was made with my partner and was far from a full birding weekend, bar an early morning start at RSPB Geltsdale, with most of the outings casual and the target list relaxed.

However it proved to be a much better than expected trip, in regard to the species list, which was 84. A number of northern species that are difficult to connect with in the south were seen well and this combined with the impressive total resulted in a thoroughly enjoyable few days.

With so much to do in the Lake District I would greatly recommend a similar trip for those travelling with non-birding family/partners.

### **Accommodation and transport**

Embleton Spa – moderately pricey but a very relaxing stay and kitchen facilities beneficial. Welcoming staff and ideally placed in the north of the Lake District – the coast and Pennines both less than an hour away with Bassenthwaite Lake just a few minutes' drive south.

Transport to, from and around was made by car. Considerable walking was required for some sites.

### **Books**

- Best Birdwatching Sites: The Solway – Cumbria/Dumfries & Galloway (Miles)
- Where to Watch Birds: North West England & the Isle of Man (Conlin, Sharpe et al)
- Birdwatching Walks in Cumbria (Dean & Roberts)

### **Itinerary**

#### **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April**

Arrive at hotel at 17:00. Short evening walk through Powterhow Woods and along the SW side of Bassenthwaite Lake.

#### **Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April**

Morning trip to RSPB St Bees Head near Whitehaven on the Cumbrian coast. Afternoon trip to Dodd Wood.

#### **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April**

Dawn start at RSPB Geltsdale in the Pennines followed by brief drive through Talkin Fell. Afternoon trip to Aira Force National Trust followed by an unplanned visit to RSPB Haweswater.

#### **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April**

Brief morning visit to N side of Bassenthwaite Lake followed by short walk at Caldbeck Fell before departing for home.

### **Highlights**

Osprey, Black Grouse, Black Guillemot, Dipper, Grasshopper Warbler & Pied Flycatcher.

### **Species List**

**Mute Swan** – 3 on Ullswater on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Greylag Goose** – 2 W over Bassenthwaite Lake on the 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Canada Goose** – fairly regular on water bodies throughout

**Barnacle Goose** – 13 flew from N to field on W side of Bassenthwaite Lake on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. From a feral population in the Lake District

**Mallard** – seen often throughout

**Wigeon** – 5 on Bassenthwaite on the 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Teal** – 10 on Bassenthwaite on the 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Tufted Duck** – seen on Bassenthwaite and Ullswater

**Red-breasted Merganser** – 3 low NE over Bassenthwaite on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 3 on Haweswater reservoir on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Black Grouse** - 5 males displaying at a lek at Geltsdale on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Seen as part of an RSPB led event.

**Red-legged Partridge** – 5+ seen from the car around Talkin Fell on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Pheasant** – seen often throughout

**Fulmar** – c.20 including nesting birds at St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Gannet** – 3 S seen from St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Cormorant** – 30+ including nesting birds at St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Grey Heron** – seen on a handful of occasions throughout

**Osprey** – a nesting pair seen from the RSPB watch-point in Dodd Wood overlooking Bassenthwaite Lake on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Buzzard** – flyover birds seen on a handful of occasions

**Sparrowhawk** – 1 female at St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Kestrel** – seen on a handful of occasions throughout

**Peregrine Falcon** – 1 hunting at St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Moorhen** – seen often throughout

**Coot** – seen fairly often at water bodies throughout

**Oystercatcher** – 2 at Fleswick Bay, St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 2 at Haweswater reservoir on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Lapwing** – seen on a handful of occasions throughout

**Curlew** – 2 birds at Geltsdale and 2 at Talkin Fell on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Common Sandpiper** – 2 heard at Haweswater reservoir on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Black-headed Gull** – seen fairly regularly throughout

**Herring Gull** – seen often throughout

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** – seen on a handful of occasions throughout

**Puffin** – 1 on the sea at St Bees Head on the 24th

**Black Guillemot** – 1 on the sea at Fleswick Bay, St Bees Head on the 24th

**Guillemot** – 1000+ at St Bees Head on the 24th

**Razorbill** – 300+ at St Bees Head on the 24th

**Feral Rock Dove** – seen often throughout

**Woodpigeon** – seen often throughout

**Stock Dove** – 1 seen near Keswick on the 25th

**Collared Dove** – seen fairly often throughout

**Cuckoo** – 1 heard at Talkin Fell on the 25th

**Kingfisher** – over Bassenthwaite Lake on the 24th

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** – 2 at Dodd Wood on the 24th

**Skylark** – 4 at St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 5 at Geltsdale on the 25th

**Swallow** - seen fairly often throughout

**Rock Pipit** – 1 at Fleswick Bay, St Bees Head on the 24th

**Tree Pipit** – 1 at Powterhow Wood on the 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Meadow Pipit** - seen fairly often throughout

**Pied Wagtail** - seen fairly often throughout

**Grey Wagtail** – 1 at Haweswater reservoir on the 25th

**Dunnock** – seen often throughout

**Robin** – seen often throughout

**Dipper** – 3 at Aira Force on the 25th

**Redstart** – 1 singing male at Haweswater on the 25th

**Wheatear** – 2 at Haweswater on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 2 at Caldbeck Fells on the 26th

**Stonechat** – 1 at Talkin Fell on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 3 at Caldbeck Fells on the 26th

**Song Thrush** - seen fairly often throughout

**Mistle Thrush** - seen fairly often throughout

**Blackbird** – seen often throughout

**Blackcap** – 1 singing at Powterhow Wood on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 1 singing at Aira Force on the 25th

**Grasshopper Warbler** – 1 reeling bird at Geltsdale at dawn on the 25<sup>th</sup> and another reeling individual on Talkin Fell later that morning

**Wood Warbler** – 1 heard at Dodd Wood on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Willow Warbler** – seen or heard fairly often throughout

**Chiffchaff** - seen or heard fairly often throughout

**Goldcrest** - seen or heard fairly often throughout

**Wren** – seen often throughout

**Pied Flycatcher** – 1 heard at St Bees Head on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1 male seen at Aira Force on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Great Tit** – seen often throughout

**Coal Tit** - seen fairly often throughout

**Blue Tit** – seen often throughout

**Long-tailed Tit** – seen on a handful of occasions throughout

**Nuthatch** – 2 heard at Aira Force on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Magpie** – seen often throughout

**Jay** - seen fairly often throughout

**Jackdaw** – seen often throughout

**Rook** – seen often throughout

**Carrion Crow** – seen often throughout

**Raven** - seen fairly often throughout

**Starling** – seen often throughout

**House Sparrow** – seen often throughout

**Chaffinch** – seen often throughout

**Goldfinch** – seen often throughout

**Siskin** – 2 at Aira Force on the 25<sup>th</sup> and c.5 at Haweswater on the 25<sup>th</sup>

**Bullfinch** – 1 heard in Powterhow Wood on the 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Lesser Redpoll** – 2 heard at Dodd Wood on the 24<sup>th</sup>

**Reed Bunting** – 1 male near Caldbeck Fells on the 26<sup>th</sup>

### **Targets**

**Osprey** – the nesting pair at Bassenthwaite were seen well from Dodd Wood. Easy to see this way. A bird flew over our car on the 25<sup>th</sup> as we drove past Bassenthwaite Lake

**Black Grouse** – given the wet and windy conditions fairly decent scope views of 5 lekking birds were had at RSPB Geltsdale. The 05:30 start was part of a special RSPB-led walk on the species and I

imagine finding them otherwise on what is a huge site would be a combination of hard work, time and luck!

**Black Guillemot** – the books suggested this species was fairly straightforward at their only English breeding grounds, St Bees Head. It took a couple of hours of scanning both on Fleswick Bay shore and on top of the cliffs before a bird showed well resting on the waves.

**Dipper** – several sites are listed as regular for this species and it took a few minutes after arrival at Aira Force waterfall before Dippers were seen. Worth visiting for the scenery too.

**Wood Warbler** – got lucky despite only hearing the one bird. Powterhow Wood is listed as a top site but after no joy there on the 23<sup>rd</sup> 1 was heard briefly from the Osprey watch-point in Dodd Wood.

**Pied Flycatcher** – surprisingly caught up with this species at St Bees Head when a bird sang from deep in gorse. 1 male showed exceptionally well at Aira Force on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

### Dips

**Golden Eagle** – technically not a dip as it didn't start out as a target bird, however after a spontaneous decision to visit Haweswater no luck was had in locating the sole male who had otherwise shown fairly well this spring according to the helpful RSBP volunteers.

**Red Grouse** – the most frustrating dip. No joy at Geltsdale, or driving around Talkin Fell following recommendation from the reserve manager. A final failed search at Caldbeck Fells on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Willow Tit** – never likely but woods on the N side of Bassenthwaite Lake are suggested as a possible site, and a brief stop on the 26<sup>th</sup> yielded Blue, Great and Coal but no Willow.

Other birds not on the species list include Green Woodpecker and Greenfinch, and even Ring Ouzel or Whinchat could have been expected. However, these were made up for with the birds that weren't expected to be seen. Easily the most welcome surprise was the 2 reeling Grasshopper Warblers with Redstart, Gannet and Tree Pipit also nice additions to the list.