

# Monthly Newsletter



ISSUE 4

www.blackburnbirdclub.com

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## Looking Ahead to a New Birding Year

As we move into a new year, this issue looks ahead to upcoming indoor meetings and winter field trips. We also reflect briefly on recent club activities and thank everyone who contributed to another successful year of meetings and walks.

## December Indoor Meeting

Our last meeting of the year was a thoroughly enjoyable evening, with member Kevin Scott sharing highlights from his climb of Mount Kilimanjaro some years ago. Alongside breathtaking scenery, Kevin picked out some memorable wildlife encounters, including birds such as the White-naped Raven.

The journey then continued on to the Serengeti, where Kevin treated us to a superb safari experience featuring an impressive range of wildlife, from a variety of birds to Zebra, Lions, Hyenas and Elephants. It was another excellent and engaging talk — many thanks to Kevin for a wonderful evening.

## Questionnaire

Many members completed a questionnaire at the last meeting, and the responses made for some really interesting reading. Thank you to everyone who shared their thoughts — all comments will be taken on board. More questionnaires will be available in January for anyone who didn't get the chance to fill one in.

## Bird Food

Thank you to everyone who completed the questionnaire and shared suggestions on bird food. We've listened carefully to your feedback and will be adding new items over time. Your support in purchasing from the club is greatly appreciated and helps us continue our work.

**Available now: full coconut fat feeders and boxes of suet blocks.**

Looking Ahead To  
The New Year

What's On in  
December & January

Questionnaire & Bird  
Food

Meetings, Field Trip &  
Quiz

Birds To See In  
January & Bird  
Sightings In  
December

Answers to Quiz &  
Nest Boxes

Bird Of The Month

Waxwings Irruption

Other News

## January Indoor Meeting 7<sup>th</sup> January

We are delighted to welcome back local tour guide Mike Watson, who will be sharing highlights from his wildlife tours to India. Expect stunning encounters with birds, big cats, bears, crocodiles, rhinos and much more. Mike is a familiar and popular speaker at the club, with a wealth of experience and plenty of memorable stories — this promises to be a fascinating and entertaining evening. Don't miss it!

## January Field Trip 12<sup>th</sup> January

Jan 12 (Mon) – 10.00am (4 hours)

MARTIN MERE WWT

We start the year with a visit to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve at Martin Mere.

Large numbers of wintering waterfowl can be seen at this time of year, including Whooper Swans, all viewable from the comfort of several well-placed hides.

An entrance fee applies for anyone who is not a WWT member.

Meet: Reserve Car Park

Leader: Jonathan Fry

Postcode: L40 0TA

A great time of year to visit this reserve, with plenty to see. If you've not joined us on a field trip before, this is an ideal one to start — come along, enjoy a few relaxed hours with the club, and get to know fellow members.

Please bring your own lunch, or make use of the café on the reserve.

## Wildlife Quiz – Test Your Knowledge!

**How many can you get right?**

**(Answers and a “Did You Know?” section can be found on page 4.)**

1. Which swan species is most commonly seen wintering at Martin Mere?
2. What is the collective noun for a group of geese?
3. Which UK bird is known for its loud “yaffling” call?
4. True or False: The Whooper Swan breeds in the UK.
5. Which bird holds the record for the longest migration in the world?
6. What mammal is Britain's largest native land predator?
7. Which bird of prey is sometimes called a “windhover”?
8. True or False: Otters are found in both freshwater and coastal habitats.
9. What is the collective noun for a group of swans?
10. Which wetland bird is famous for its booming call in spring?

# What Birds Can We Expect to See in January

January is one of the best months for birdwatching in Lancashire. Winter visitors are still with us, and shorter days often mean birds are easier to spot as they feed for longer. Wetlands and reserves are especially rewarding at this time of year. Look out for wintering ducks such as Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Pintail and Goldeneye, along with Goosander on lakes and rivers. Whooper and Bewick's Swans remain a highlight at sites like Martin Mere and Leighton Moss.

Along the coast and estuaries, including Morecambe Bay and the Ribble Estuary, large flocks of waders dominate the scene. Expect Knot, Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Grey Plover, with Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits also present. Pink-footed Geese continue to put on a noisy and impressive show.

In woodland, farmland and gardens, winter thrushes such as Redwing and Fieldfare may be feeding on berries, while flocks of Siskin and Redpoll often visit feeders. Familiar species like Robins, Tits, Finches and Great Spotted Woodpeckers remain active throughout the month.

Birds of prey are often easier to see in January, with Kestrel, Buzzard and Sparrowhawk regularly encountered. Barn Owls can sometimes be seen hunting in late afternoon, especially during cold, clear weather.

January offers plenty to enjoy — wrap up warm and make the most of this excellent winter birding month.

## Recent Bird Sightings Around Lancashire (December)

Here are some recent bird sightings and species being seen around the Lancashire area (late 2025 / early winter records):

### Recent Local Sightings (Lancashire)

From local birding groups & county records: [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk+1](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk+1)

#### Common & Winter Visitors

- Pink-footed Goose — flocks moving south over Towneley Hall area. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Redwing & Fieldfare — good numbers around Towneley Woods / Burnley. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Pintail, Teal & Little Grebe — seen at Brockholes Nature Reserve / Wood End Sewage Works. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Siskin & Goldfinch — small finches reported at woodland sites. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit — regular garden / wood birds. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit — woodland feeders around Burnley and surrounding. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Bullfinch & Greenfinch — recorded in gardens and woodland. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)

#### Notable Visitors

- Cattle Egret — single sighting recently noted at Brockholes. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Brambling — occasional winter migrant seen at Brockholes. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)
- Sparrowhawk — seen around Blackpool rooftops and local patches. [fyldebirdclub.org](http://fyldebirdclub.org)
- Goldcrest — reported in Blackpool South Shore sightings. [fyldebirdclub.org](http://fyldebirdclub.org)

- 🦆 Martin Mere Wetland Reserve (Burscough area)
- Recent highlights (mid-December 2025): [WWT](#)
- Ring-necked Duck — the American vagrant male still showing. [WWT](#)
- Short-eared Owl — regularly hunting over outer fields. [WWT](#)
- Whooper Swan & large wildfowl flocks — wintering on the mere. [WWT](#)
- Pochard, Wigeon, Shelduck, Pintail — all present in good numbers. [WWT](#)
- 🏡 Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve (Silverdale area)
- Also nearby in the county: [RSPB](#)
- Marsh Harrier — regularly seen over pools. [RSPB](#)
- Female Scaup, Teal, Shoveler & Coot — good numbers on the reserve. [RSPB](#)
- Large Starling murmurations — big evening gatherings. [RSPB](#)
- Occasional Kingfisher — spotted from hides. [RSPB](#)
- 📌 Other Local Reports
- Cackling Goose reports circulating in local birding groups (e.g., Facebook sightings). [Facebook](#)
- Various common garden birds such as magpies, woodpigeons, blackbirds and robins are being logged frequently. [eastlancsornithologists.org.uk](http://eastlancsornithologists.org.uk)

## Answers & Did You Know?

- Whooper Swan – Did you know Whooper Swans migrate to the UK from Iceland and Scandinavia each winter?
- A gaggle – Did you know geese in flight are often called a skein?
- Green Woodpecker – Did you know its “yaffling” call is usually heard before the bird is seen?
- False – Did you know Whooper Swans breed in the far north, not in the UK?
- Arctic Tern – Did you know it travels from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back each year?
- Badger – Did you know badger setts can be decades old and have multiple entrances?
- Kestrel – Did you know it can hover almost motionless while hunting?
- True – Did you know otters live along rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal shores?
- A bevy – Did you know swans in flight may also be called a wedge?
- Bittern – Did you know a bittern’s booming call can carry up to two miles on a still night?

## Spring Is Round The Corner – Bird Nesting Box

The best time to put up a bird box is autumn or winter, but it's never too late. Although it's still winter, the shortest day has now passed, and from here on the days will slowly begin to lengthen. Before we know it, spring will be upon us, and many birds will already be looking for suitable nesting sites. Some species will also use boxes as a safe place to roost during cold weather, so putting them up early has real benefits.

That said, bird boxes can still be put up in spring, and they may well be used by later nesters such as Blue Tits and Great Tits.

Make one or buy one

Whether you choose to make your own bird box or buy a ready-made one, both are equally worthwhile. There's a real sense of anticipation in putting a box up and waiting to see if it's chosen. Once a box is occupied, the rewards are huge — watching adult birds coming and going throughout the day, feeding their growing chicks, and, if you're lucky, seeing the young birds fledge is an amazing experience and one that never gets old.

A few simple tips:

Place boxes 2–4 metres up, out of reach of predators

Face the entrance north or east to avoid strong sun and rain

Try not to disturb the box once birds have started nesting Bird boxes can bring wildlife right to your doorstep and offer some of the most enjoyable birdwatching you can experience at home.

Photo By Carol Brown



Photo By Brian Taylor



Photo By Brian Taylor



## Bird of the Month: Sparrowhawk

**A compact, fast and highly skilled hunter, the Sparrowhawk is one of the most exciting birds of prey to encounter in our gardens and countryside.**

Often seen as a sudden blur through the garden or a flash of wings along a hedgerow, the Sparrowhawk is one of our most thrilling everyday raptors. Perfectly adapted for surprise attacks, it uses speed, agility and cover to ambush small birds, particularly during autumn and winter when garden feeders attract prey. Once heavily persecuted, the Sparrowhawk has made a remarkable recovery and is now a familiar sight across Lancashire — a positive sign of a healthy local bird population.

### Identification

The male Sparrowhawk is smaller, with blue-grey upperparts, orange barring on the breast and striking red-orange eyes. Females are much larger, brown above with grey barring below and yellow-orange eyes. In flight, both show short, rounded wings and a long tail, often flying in a distinctive flap-flap-glide pattern. Females can appear almost as large as a male Kestrel.

### Behaviour

Sparrowhawks specialise in hunting small birds and are often seen around gardens, where their sudden appearance sends other birds scattering. Males usually take smaller prey such as tits and finches, while females can tackle larger birds including thrushes and pigeons. Despite their reputation, Sparrowhawks do not cause long-term declines in garden bird populations and play an important role in natural balance.

### Breeding & Where to See

They nest in dense woodland between April and July, with females incubating the eggs while males provide food. In Lancashire they can be seen year-round in woodland edges, farmland, parks and increasingly in urban gardens, especially during the winter months.

### Why It Matters

The Sparrowhawk's return to gardens and towns reflects decades of improved protection and changing attitudes toward birds of prey. Once heavily persecuted, the Sparrowhawk has recovered well following legal protection. Its regular presence across Lancashire is now seen as a positive indicator of a healthy and balanced environment.

### Members Sightings

Seen a Sparrowhawk? We'd love to hear about it! Please send Date, Location and a short note to **[bennetsbarn@gmail.com](mailto:bennetsbarn@gmail.com)**

We'll share sightings in a future newsletter



Photo Jonathan Fry



Photo Jonathan Fry



## Did You Know

Waxwings irruptions don't affect the whole country evenly, even in a national irruption year, birds may concentrate in eastern or southern Britain and never reach the North West at all. This is why Lancashire can miss out completely in some winters, while other areas enjoy large flocks. Such patchy distribution is entirely normal and what makes Waxwing movements so unpredictable.

# Waxwing Irruptions

## Waxwings, Irruptions and Mast Years – Why Some Winters Are Special

Waxwings are one of those birds that capture the imagination of birders and non-birders alike. Smartly dressed, sociable, and often remarkably confiding, they are birds many of us always hope to see each winter — even though some years they simply don't appear at all.

Waxwings breed in the far north of Scandinavia and Russia and migrate south in winter to escape harsh conditions. In most years, only small numbers reach Britain, usually along the east coast. However, every so often, large numbers move well beyond their usual winter range. This phenomenon is known as an irruption.

### What is an irruption?

An irruption is an irregular and unpredictable movement of birds, usually triggered by a shortage of food in their normal wintering areas. For Waxwings, the key factor is the availability of berries — especially rowan and juniper — in Scandinavia. When these fail, birds are forced to move west and south in search of food, sometimes reaching Britain in impressive numbers.

### Lancashire's best Waxwing winters

Not all irruption years affect the whole country equally, and Lancashire can sometimes be bypassed altogether.

For local birders, the benchmark Waxwing winter remains 2012–2013, when birds were widespread across the county. Flocks appeared in towns, retail parks, roadside plantings and gardens, often staying for weeks where berry supplies were good. It was a winter many Lancashire birders still remember vividly.

The winter of 2016–2017 ) also brought Waxwings into the county, with some good local flocks recorded. However, distribution was patchier and sightings were generally shorter-lived than in 2012–13.

More recently, 2023–2024 saw a notable Waxwing irruption into the UK as a whole, but the distribution was very uneven. While some parts of the country enjoyed regular sightings, much of Lancashire saw few or no Waxwings, highlighting just how unpredictable these movements can be.

### What is a mast year?

Another term often mentioned in connection with Waxwings is a mast year. This is when trees and shrubs produce an exceptional crop of berries, fruit, seeds or nuts — such as rowan berries, hawthorn, acorns or beech nuts.

Mast years don't happen everywhere at once and vary by region and tree species. When they occur, they provide a valuable food source for wildlife and are great news for our resident birds over the winter.

### How mast years affect Waxwings

Whether Waxwings arrive in Britain depends far more on conditions in Scandinavia than here in the UK. If berry crops there are good, Waxwings may stay closer to home and never reach us in significant numbers. If crops fail, large-scale movements become much more likely.

This year, we've experienced a mast year in the UK, meaning food is plentiful for many species locally. Whether that coincides with good or poor berry crops in northern Europe will ultimately determine if Waxwings appear in numbers this winter.

### A bird worth watching for

All of this reminds us how closely bird movements are tied to natural cycles — and why Waxwings remain such an exciting and unpredictable winter visitor. Some winters they are everywhere; others, they are completely absent.

Even in quiet years, it's always worth keeping an eye on berry-laden trees — because when Waxwings do arrive, they often do so suddenly and in style.

## Bird Calls - Merlin App

Learning the calls of birds can really transform your birdwatching. Many species are heard long before they are seen, and once you begin to recognise their calls, birds that were previously overlooked suddenly become obvious. Knowing the call adds a whole new level of enjoyment to birdwatching. The **Merlin app**, which is free to download and works on most smartphones, can be a useful aid when learning bird sounds. You can use it in the garden or out on a walk and it will suggest which birds are calling nearby. Like any app, it isn't always 100% accurate, so if it suggests a bird you know wouldn't be right for the area, it's best to take that with a pinch of salt. Should anyone need any help downloading or using the app, please feel free to ask at any of the meetings — many members already use Merlin and will be more than happy to help. You may find yourself using it quite often, and over time it can really help you learn bird songs and calls more easily.

## Raffle & Prizes

There were some interesting comments in the questionnaire about the raffle. Many members very generously buy raffle tickets each month, and some even choose to put their raffle money straight into the bucket without taking tickets at all — something we are extremely grateful for.

All raffle prizes are kindly donated by members, and we really do appreciate this support. When we have an abundance of prizes, any extras are kept and carried over to months when prizes are fewer. If you would like to donate a prize — however small — we would be very grateful. Your generosity helps keep the raffle going and is much appreciated.

## Interactive 2026 Birdwatching List

We've created an interactive birdwatching list for 2026 that members can use as a personal checklist throughout the year. The list includes a wide range of UK species and allows you to tick off birds as you see them, as well as record the date and location of each sighting.

Once you've logged a sighting, your list saves automatically, so you can close it and return at any time using the same link on the same device. Each member's list is private and independent — perfect for keeping your own year list.

You can use the search and filter options to quickly find species, track your progress, and see how many birds you've spotted so far. There's no need to create an account or log in — simply open the link and start recording your sightings.

**Tip: On phones, avoid force-closing your browser to keep your list saved.**

## BIRDWATCHING LIST LINK

Wishing you all good birding, and we hope to see many of you out in the field or at our next meeting.

GROUP

