

Local Birding - Laycock area by Peter Williams

My patch, west of Bradford contains two small areas of water, woodland and plenty of fields. It is a beautiful area in which to walk, but for birds it is not a hot spot and new birds after June are hard to find. It has been my patch for years though and as such it becomes very personal. My area, in which I have listed 85 species, encompasses the rock, where I can view the valley and dream one day of seeing a Yellow-Browed Warbler making its way through the hawthorns and Redcar Tarn where a board used to promote Common Tern and Goldeneye to my garden which has mature trees and is surrounded by fields.

Sadly, this year is my last in Laycock. The for sale board is up and we will be moving once a buyer is found. 2014 started well with all of the expected winter visitors including Brambling, Redpoll and Siskin on the feeders. That most beautiful of birds the Bullfinch also brightened many a frosty morning and a skein of Pinkfeet flew over in January. The garden provided Tawny Owl, Nuthatch and Kestrel as well as all of the usual woodland fare including a Treecreeper.

Spring brought a whole host of migrants with my earliest ever Swallow on the 29th of March over Wren Farm. All of the common hirundines followed as well as the first Chiffchaff. April brought the first patch gold moment when a female Ring Ouzel flew from elders across my path with a harsh chack and off into a ravine not to be seen again. My first for the patch had me buzzing all day.



Red-breasted Merganser on Redcar Tarn.
Photo: Stephen Lilley

In May, a trip up to Keighley reservoir notched up Red-Legged Partridge to add to its commoner grey cousin – a real find this one although it did almost end up in my tyre tread as it crossed the road. Little-Ringed Plover was on the reservoir which was being drained for repairs. Although I never saw more than one it appeared very defensive and stayed throughout the summer – so I suspect breeding may have taken place. Common Sandpipers had returned and were equally vocal.

During the summer, notable breeding birds were three pairs of Green Woodpecker, a pair of Buzzards and the garden held breeding Nuthatch, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Wren, Great Tit and Robin with Tawny Owl and Kestrel just outside. A real highlight of the birding year was stumbling upon three balls of fluff, young Tawnies sitting just feet away. Holding my fixed, stunned expression I spent several minutes watching them as they watched me, neither wanting to move a muscle. Later in the year, one of the Tawnies spent three weeks roosting in the open in daytime in our garden, and could be watched from the comfort of an easy chair.

In August the levels on the reservoir were low and looking good for waders. The glorious 12th put paid to that however with shoots causing too much disturbance. I did however score big with two Sanderling working their way along the north side. These little wind up toys were running in bursts along the edge in very classic style but didn't seem to mind my presence at all. In a year where I have dipped on Ruff, Greenshank and Green Sandpiper this was my undoubted wader highlight.

Whinchat and Stonechat were good additions from the moorland, the former in particular one of my favourite birds along with Wheatear which was seen right up to the end of September. Further disappointments this year have been the shortage of more unusual wildfowl. Whilst Teal and Wigeon were added in the autumn, I would normally expect an occasional Great Crested, Shoveler, Pochard or Gadwall but all were noticeably absent. Best of all however, was a Red-Breasted Merganser which joined the increasing Goosander numbers at the Tarn for three days in October. Unlike the Ring Ouzel, this was a very unexpected patch first.

Finally into the winter, my job has taken me away from patch a little more resulting in missing Whooper Swan, Snow Bunting and most frustratingly of all Shelduck which were found by my fiancée while walking the dog, only to be gone ten minutes later when I drove up to see if they were still there.

2014 is my last full year at Laycock. With the move closer to work, North Ferriby to Brough becomes the new patch. It is exciting to start somewhere new (although no comparison) but it is also tinged with sadness.