



Little Auk

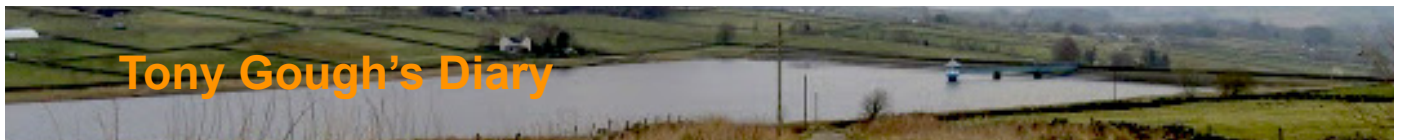
photo: Shaun Radcliffe

this a bird arriving from the continent as this species does visit here in the winter from northern & eastern Europe. On the lake on a small reserve on the island, we saw Shovelers, Wigeon & Teal. Finally, we finished up behind the Abbey overlooking the shore, facing inland. Here we heard the clicking of pebbles as the Turnstones busily searched for food. Walking back towards the carpark in a quiet part of the island, a Twite perched on a fence in front of us. Further on, we flushed a Woodcock (again!). What a great walk with good birding.

Some years ago, we walked along the headland near Spittal. This is almost next door to Berwick-On-Tweed. On that visit, we were fortunate to see a couple of Snow Buntings so we tried the walk again. No luck this time but to compensate, we saw (close in), seven Red-throated Divers (& the bird of the holiday), a Little Auk flew low past us going north.

Our final day (still dry weather), we walked from Beadnell to the small reserve at Newton-by-the-Sea and back again. The beach areas provided more sightings of Sanderlings feeding with Ringed Plovers.

On route, we saw three pairs of Stonechat. This species was recorded on every walk we did. The single hide at Newton-by-the-Sea, overlooks a lake with some rushes on the fringes. As we opened the shutter, right in front of us were 17 Whoopers, including five juveniles. It was a perfect way to end our week's holiday in the area.



Tony lived for many years in the village of Tong Park, on the edge of Baildon. In this issue, we concentrate on his 'home patch', an area known as Gill Beck which includes the local reservoir and the woodland to the north of the picturesque cricket ground.

#### **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 12.50 p.m. to 3.10 p.m.**

Fine and mainly sunny with broken/scattered cloud. Clear with excellent light. Wind moderate SE veering to light S by evening. The thaw came at last this week, starting last Tuesday, and snow disappeared rapidly. Still, a frost last night. Little ice on pools at home but plenty on reservoirs of Washburn Valley and some bits of snow still lying around Timble Ings and adjacent moors. Not so cold as of late.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** – A male seen near ford in High Spring Wood in an oak tree. Very good view for five minutes.

**Tawny Owl** – Two flushed from usual holly at NW end of High Spring Wood by mistake. They had picked a different piece of foliage from normal in which to hide and not seen till too late.

**Yellowhammer** – A group of four at top of field overlooking Tong Park Reservoir from SW

#### **Baildon**

**Collared Dove** – a pair in our back garden for c. ½ hour this morning. First time and not often seen in vicinity. Feeding heavily on breadcrumbs put out and ignored us staring at them through the window – came to two or three feet from window at times.

#### **Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> April 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 9.10 a.m. to 2.55 p.m.**

Clear, sunny and very cloudless till 10/10.30 a.m. when gradually clouded over till overcast by late a.m. and stayed so or virtually for rest of day. Cold. Wind light NW. Light rain after c5.20 p.m. Light and visibility good. Water everywhere, especially noticeable in Gill Beck Valley, after much rain during the week, particularly on Wednesday/Thursday, Gill Beck a raging torrent and pools and rivulets where seldom seen before.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** – One male in copse (much Alder) to NE of Tong Park Reservoir. Weak “tchick” call heard two or three times, also several of the more usual “pee-pee-pee” calls.

**Firecrest** – One in stream side trees at NW end of Frog Pond! Must be my star find and on my local patch too! A gem of a bird too and totally unexpected. Managed to view it down to 10 or 12 yards at one time before eventually losing it for good behind a stand of holly. Unable to relocate it even though I checked up and down the stream well either side several times. Entirely on its own too and me thinking it would be the first Willow Warbler or Chiffchaff on the patch when first seeing it. It soon dawned on me when seeing it, minuscule, alongside two Blue Tits which were the only other birds around, plus the eyestripe and, later, I had excellent, much closer views. Odd really as not another spring visitor to be found and otherwise dead in the stream side trees, apart from the pair of Blue Tits which, fortunately, the Firecrest once came close to. It should have been easy to relocate it.

**Goldcrest** – One, possibly two, in trees to west of High Spring Wood and two in strip of trees to west of ford. The first Goldcrests in the area since January no doubt due to the severe February cold. Had already seen the Firecrest before finding any Goldcrests and the nearest Goldcrests were some way off the Firecrest (c.300 yards). Still, it does seem likely that the two species came here in the same movement, though strange why they should separate by so much. Unless there had been many more and I just caught the tail-end of the passage?



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at Hirst Wood in 2008  
photo: Stephen Lilley

Checked the whole of Gill Beck from viaduct to caravan site and not a Dipper to be seen so must be absent. The pair that was probably nesting just below Tong Park Reservoir must have been washed out and either killed or disappeared. Same with Grey Wagtail, though the pair seen earlier could have left by now anyway. Tawny Owls not yet back in their usual holly tree roost at NW end of High Spring Wood – nesting elsewhere? Still no traditional summer visitors (Firecrest and, to a lesser extent Goldcrest excepted). This is serious and ridiculously late. Surely at least a few Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs should be back by now?

#### **Friday 2nd May 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 4.45 p.m. to 8.45 p.m.**

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** – One heard to give “pee-pee-pee” call at close range just before 7.30 p.m. in High Spring Wood but unseen. In same spot as Great Spotted Woodpecker heard and a woodpecker drumming loud and frequent just beforehand – seemed longish bursts. Lesser? On the other hand, drumming loud which indicates Great.

**Whooper Swan** – Two flying NW at 6.11 p.m. The birds of the day and a local patch tick – would have been easy to see from house too if I’d been there. Came in from east, circled once over cricket field/Willey Wood, and continued NW.

#### **Monday 5th May 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 11.10 a.m. to 2.30 p.m.**

**Wood Warbler** – One male singing at SE end of High Spring Wood, near beck. Seen quite well. A year tick in Britain.

**Spotted Flycatcher** – One near Wood Warbler (a usual haunt in a ravine formed by a feeder stream so probably a bird back on its territory – another British year tick – and quite early too) plus one at NW end of High Spring Wood near top.

**Redstart** – A male at NW end of High Spring Wood. Singing too. Another year tick.

#### **Wednesday 21st May 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 3 p.m. to 4.55 p.m**

**Coot** – pair on Tong Park Reservoir – building a nest! Seen from back window of house so now a house tick.

Later - the pair seen from house in morning still on Tong Park Reservoir but being harried and stoned by 4 boys (i.e. hooligans) who scarpered on being challenged. A sorry state of affairs indeed. The first breeding attempt by Coot I've come across here and they just do not stand a chance. Even if these idiots don't return to finish the job, the anglers will do it for them, albeit unconsciously, as they sit for hours on end and keep the birds off the nest for periods which are far too long for survival of eggs or young.

**Moorhen** – 1 on Tong Park Reservoir. Also under severe pressure from the louts – very young louts too, especially in 2 cases.

**Monday 9th June 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 4.05 p.m. to 5.35 p.m.**

**Hobby** – One seen briefly over trees at back of Frog Pond at 5.07 p.m. Range c.70 yards but only in view for a few seconds as it swung out over pond, only 50 or 60 feet up, apparently going into a soar and lost to sight as it circled, cut off by the steep slope. Got up the slope as quick as possible but could not relocate it so it probably went E or SE or just possibly N. A good but brief look at the heavily barred underwing and heavily streaked body together with the creamy face and dark moustache. Uppertail coverts not noted, only an impression of them being uniformly coloured and so contrasting with the rest of the upperparts. Upperparts not seen at all and not seen in normal flight but slim, rakish build noted and prompted me to put the bins on it rapidly as it looked different to Kestrel when first seen. Assumed to be an adult although could have been a 1st year bird – impossible to say without a detailed look at plumage. It seems that a first year may or may not substantially resemble an adult by this time, depending on state of moult. Nevertheless, what a local patch and Yorkshire tick! Not to mention year tick! Will it hand around?

**Swift** – c.50, especially around the slopes above Frog Pond where I had been standing watching them dash past me at close range only minutes before seeing the Hobby in that area. Had it been chasing the Swifts? What a view I would have had if it had appeared when I was on top of the slope – and I'd have been able to follow it.

**Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 8.05 p.m. to 10.05 p.m.**

**Hobby** – not seen again so presumably it passed straight through, much as expected. Still, what a bird just when again I thought the local patch was reaching the stage of being too dead to bother with.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** – One possible which flew from direction of a copse towards the cricket field. Also, later, another possible (no doubt same bird) flew past copse in the opposite direction towards the railway. However, only a possibility in each case, not a probability even. Not seen well enough or long enough either time.

**Woodcock** – 1 roding over High Spring Wood. First seen at 9.25 p.m. It covered a lot of territory too – entire length of main wood and then some.

**Tuesday 24th June 1986 Gill Beck Valley, Baildon 1.05 p.m. to 3.45 p.m.**

**Yellowhammer** – 1 male (singing too) just below Hazel Head Wood.

**Accipiter** – several sightings, mostly very distant. The first was much too large for a male Sparrowhawk and was probably a Goshawk, especially as it had slower, more deliberate wingbeats than Sparrowhawk when flapping between glides. Seen as it began to soar over fields around Frog Pond, quite low down at first but rapidly rising very high where lost, unable even to get a good look at silhouette. Still, I've not seen Sparrowhawk soar so high or for as long. Oddly though, a definite female Sparrowhawk seen soaring nearby shortly afterwards. Same bird? I rather doubt it despite the coincidence. This one mobbed by a Carrion Crow and it, in turn, mobbed the crow by using its superior height to stoop at it before drifting off to NW from where it was first seen over SE end of High Spring Wood. It or another seen again soon after soaring high over fields to SE of High Spring Wood – same area as possible Goshawk – though very distant and could only recognise it as an accipiter. Joined by another raptor briefly but not sure if even an accipiter. Latter slanted down to S of High Spring Wood and lost to sight but looked more falcon-like then so probably a Kestrel. First bird lost while still soaring. 15 minutes later a definite female Sparrowhawk seen soaring over High Spring Wood, vanishing to NW but, soon, a distant glimpse of almost certainly the same bird, which after being briefly mobbed by a Carrion Crow, drifted off far to NW. Difficult to say what today's sightings represent but I feel it is quite likely more than one Sparrowhawk involved (fledged young? – too soon) and probably one Goshawk. Was it conditions bring in a small movement of raptors along the valley? Seems odd no accipiter seen there recently and it all happened on one day. Or were they all sightings of one large female Sparrowhawk plus briefly a Kestrel?