

## New Year's Day Bird Race 2013

What with Christmas lethargy having well and truly set in and the relentless wet and windy weather we were half tempted to sod tradition and knock the Bird Race on the head this year. Also, as there was no Bank Holiday on the 2<sup>nd</sup> we'd have no time off to recover the day after and just to add insult to injury there were absolutely no decent birds about. Could we be bothered forcing ourselves out of bed early to spend a stressful and depressing New Year's Day tearing round the Island? We knew there was no way we could beat our highest score of 89 and the way things were looking we'd be very lucky to equal our worst score ever of 80! Maybe it would be the post Christmas kick-start we needed to blow away the cobwebs, or maybe it would just totally knacker us out before the year had even started. Hmmm..... decisions decisions.

On New Years Eve the sky miraculously cleared and the forecast was looking good for the next day. Wendy had a quiet night, only popping round to her friends for quick drink. After wishing them a Happy New Year she was home early so we decided that it was definitely on! After seeing in the New Year with Jools Holland we went straight to bed, as we needed all the sleep we could get. Our only hope was that luck would be on our side for a change and it'd all be worth it.

After the alarm went off at 6.30am Wendy peered through the curtains in a daze to check the weather and was pleasantly surprised. Although it was still pitch black outside she could see that the sky was still clear....Phew! My first plan of the day was to try and get petrol, as I only had 100miles left in the tank, which wasn't enough to cover the day ahead. I couldn't believe I'd overlooked this the day before but somehow I'd skillfully managed to....Doh. I knew that there was a self-service payment terminal at the Milestone but having never used it before I wasn't even sure if it worked 24hrs a day so I tentatively headed off. If it didn't work then the New Year Bird Race was over before we'd started. Luckily it worked a treat and went without a hitch so my petrol tank was full and ready to go.....Phew!

We'd planned to be at Tromode by 8.30am but as there was no cloud cover it was getting light dangerously quickly. If we arrived too late our target birds would have gone already but if it was too early we wouldn't be able to see anything and there'd be nothing up and about yet, which had been our problem last year. Wendy had made me a sarnie and a poncey salad for herself with some crisps, cereal bars, drinks and a huge flask of coffee (for her obviously) so hopefully that would keep us going for the day. I'd also sneaked a few chocolates into her rucksack while she wasn't looking. Naughty me hahahaha :P.

At 8.17am we'd started to panic and left the house, kicking off the day when Wendy giggled, "**Robin!**" It was under our bird feeders in the garden and had flown off before I'd seen it but, even though it was still dark, she re-found it sitting on one of the fences by the car park. As we drove off we saw a **Herring Gull** and could hear a **Blackbird** singing somewhere nearby. Already our count was below what we'd see on a normal day and the stress levels were rising. Passing Cronkbourn Village we saw **Woodpigeon, Jackdaw** and at Tromode there was **Hooded Crow** and **Blue Tit** by the Industrial Units on the way to the Dam. I parked up at 8.23am and we walked up the path with our fingers crossed hearing **Great Tit, Wren** and the quacking of **Mallards**. We'd brought some bread with us to feed to the Ducks but my worry was that this would waste

precious time. As the Dam came into view we slowly edged our way forward hoping to see a bird that could be a problem to find elsewhere. The weather was much too calm to keep them there for long so we were hoping it would still be dark enough to hold them at their roost. Typical our luck.....there was no sign of the Goosanders we'd found only days beforehand, we must've been too late. Nooooooooooooo! We quickly fed the ever-hungry Ducks and ticked off **Coot, Moorhen, Mute Swan** and **Rook**. We'd been hoping for Long-tailed Tit and Goldcrest there too but the trees and bushes were silent. We gave up after feeding the Ducks, hurried back to the car and drove off at 8.30am with our next stop being Marine Drive.

A couple of days ago we'd gone up there to see if we could find Fulmar, as we'd be struggling for them anywhere else. We'd failed miserably but presumed it was because we'd gone at the end of the day and it was getting dark. We decided to keep it in our plan anyway, as we'd also spotted a huge Peregrine chasing Pigeons over the harbor, which would come in handy on the Bird Race. Driving past McDonalds Wendy shouted, "**Carrion Crow!**" but unfortunately I didn't see it so it didn't count and we'd have to find another somewhere else. At the last minute I thought we'd go via the Church at Rosemount to chance our arm at finding a Peregrine but there was nothing apart from some lucky **Feral Pigeons** that had obviously escaped its talons....for now anyway.

Another last minute brainstorm at 8.40am was to pull up at The Sea Terminal and have a look over the wall into Douglas Bay. This was something we've never done on a Bird Race and also a place we should probably look at more often. It actually proved to be a good move though and we started to rack up the birds. **Black-headed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Eider, Black Guillemot, Cormorant** and **Shag** were present on the sea and on the rocks below us were **Oystercatcher, Turnstone, Redshank, Curlew** and **Grey Heron**. Most of these birds I'd pencilled in at Langness, so having already seen them would mean spending less time there later. Langness was looking dodgy anyway, as it would be low tide when we'd be there, so finding anything was going to be more difficult. There was no way around it though, as we'd be up north by the time the tide was high, so we'd just have to hope for the best. Getting Black Guillemot there was a big bonus since the winds weren't strong enough to push them into Derbyhaven Bay so we would've been really struggling for them.

We couldn't find anything else so hastily returned to the car and headed off seeing **Magpie** and **Goldfinch** in the bushes on Head Road. I parked up at the gate on Marine Drive and we scuttled our way over to the first cove where we hoped to find Fulmar but just as we'd found the other day, there was nothing!



Marine Drive

Maybe the recent landslide had scared them all off? That idea had been a waste of time and we'd now be very lucky to find Fulmar at any of our planned stops from then on. Uh oh! One positive was that we'd both successfully managed to avoid the 7 tons of dog poo that covers the road! We were back in the car and setting off again by 8.57am seeing **Raven** and **Pied Wagtail** as we drove away.

Having failed to see Goosander at Tromode we thought that the recently reported birds at Leigh Terrace were worth a shot. We needed to go there anyway as it was probably our best chance of finding Grey Wagtail in the entire day. Luckily there was a parking space so we ran over the road and had a scan over the wall. No Goosander! Furthermore, there was no sign of a Grey Wag either and the whole area seemed dead. We couldn't afford to waste time and would just have to leave empty handed, which is never a good feeling. Just as we were about to walk away Wendy shrieked, "Under the bridge!" Thankfully she'd noticed that a lovely **Grey Wagtail** had made a last minute appearance and was running around on the concrete.....Phew! Happy with that we ran back over to the car and I remembered that our next stop off should get us Goosander, as I'd seen 3 there while I was out birding with my mate a couple of days earlier. This would be our last chance though and if they weren't there we'd have no choice but to scrub them off our list. As we headed out of Douglas we found **Chaffinch** in some bushes at the side of the road.

We pulled up at Eairry Dam at around 9.11am and added **Tufted Duck** and **Teal** to our list. Luckily, we'd stopped just as a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** worked their way through the trees in front of the car. We breathed a sigh of relief, as these birds have always proved difficult on Bird Races in the past. With nothing else new to add there I turned the car round and headed over to view Kionslieu from the road. Our first scan produced nothing but it wasn't long before Wendy shouted, "**Goosander!**" I looked down at the left hand corner and sure enough there were 2 including a nice male. We could now stop worrying about not seeing them.....Phew! I then noticed something sitting in one of the nearby trees and we were both very pleased to see a cracking male **Sparrowhawk**, which flew off moments later and disappeared. Having found what we'd gone there for we headed out of Foxdale seeing **Collared Dove**, **Starling**, a flock of **Redwing** flying over and we heard **Siskin**, which were calling from the top of a huge

conifer. I'd started to wonder how we were doing for time and realized that we should've brought last years notes with us as a comparison. While Wendy was positive that we were OK I wasn't convinced. Last year we'd stayed at Langness far too long and it had eaten into our time up north so we'd have to make sure it didn't happen again. This would all be down to luck especially if the tide was going to be out!

On the way down south we thought we could quickly incorporate South Barrule Plantation into the route. We parked up and wound the car windows down for a listen.



South Barrule Plantation

This would be our best chance to hear Redpoll flying over but all we heard was the high pitched trilling of **Goldcrests**. Not that we could complain, as Goldcrests on a New Year Bird Race is not to be sniffed at.

My next plan was to try Port St Mary for Purple Sandpiper but the tide was wrong for them to be at their usual roosts. Looking over the wall on the breakwater we only found **Dunlin** and **Ringed Plover** but they were handy to have, as you can never guarantee them at Langness. We scanned and scanned in the vague hope of finding the Purps but there was no sign but we did find a **Rock Pipit** to add to our list. I took a spin over to the flat rocks up the road but they weren't there either.....Disaster! We could kiss goodbye to them for the day :(. We didn't have time to hang around as we really needed to press on but I pulled over at the layby at Strandhall for a quick look. The only new birds we found there were **Common Gull**, **Shelduck** and **Wigeon** so we carried on and saw **Canada Goose** and **Greylag Goose** under the bridge at Castletown.

We arrived at Derbyhaven at 10.11am passing the **Brent Geese** down on the beach and we could just about make out the **Barnacle Goose** on the other side of the bay.





Derbyhaven

We heard then saw **Dunnock** and **Greenfinch** on the way over to the Airport side of the bay and parked up for a look. First off Wendy spotted a **Little Egret** fishing in the pools down on the rocks and scanning further down produced another, which made not just 1 but 2 Little Egrets.....Cool! We'd been worried that we wouldn't see any with the tide being out as they like to fish in the gullies at Langness making them invisible, so this find was good. Next off she spotted a **Little Grebe** out by the breakwater and just as I got onto it I spotted another one pop up nearby. Two Little Grebes was very good indeed and the best thing was that we could now ditch off Pooyl Dooey and the 2<sup>nd</sup> risk of dog poo shoe! This would also save us bags of time, as sometimes you have to walk a fair way before you catch up with them there AND cleaning your shoes afterwards takes time :). We thought that the pools over by the Flying Club would be worth a look for Snipe but the whole area was totally dead so we headed over to Fort Island to check the bay.

As we drove towards the causeway I spotted a **Grey Plover** sitting on the beach, which was lucky too and we parked up at around 10.30am and started to scan the water. Our Sea Terminal stop off was a great move as there wasn't much about, not even Black Guillemot, but then Wendy shrieked, "**Red-breasted Merganser!**" Brilliant, but I had my eye on a Duck, miles out, and got Wendy onto it. After giving it the once over she gleefully said, "**Goldeneye!**" Good old Derbyhaven, we'd certainly been lucky there and there wasn't much left for us to see that I'd pencilled in at Langness. Driving out of Derbyhaven there were some **Choughs** on the Golf Course and we continued over to Langness.

One bird I had as a definite at Langness was Pheasant and we'd just realized that we hadn't seen one yet. Normally they'd be everywhere but on this occasion there were absolutely none....weird! We had a look over the pools and drove up to Madoc's for a scan but we found nothing new there. I drove down to the flat area, where the camper vans park up, to get a better angle on things and we found a **Meadow Pipit** but it wasn't worth sticking around. There were no Snipe to be seen and the Barwits, which had been hanging around for ages, seemed to have cleared off altogether. We'd also hoped for Peregrine and Merlin there but they weren't playing ball either. Just before we left we had a bit of a laugh when Wendy shouted, "**Pheasant!**" Not exactly an exciting bird, I know, but we hadn't

bargained on them being so difficult to find and should've ticked them off hours ago! We had a look at Stinky Dubh but as usual it was completely dead.



Langness

With time on our side I reckoned Peel was now achievable. It's a bit out of the way on a race, so normally we'd miss it out, but we hoped that the diversion would pay off. We still needed Fulmar and Purple Sandpiper so Peel was our best bet. As we were approaching QE2 Wendy screeched, "**Mistle Thrush!**" I tried to look but had already passed the field it was in so I pulled over and tried to reverse back. All of a sudden the road became the busiest I've ever seen it with car after car whizzing past us! All this.....for a Mistle Thrush? Unbelievable! Eventually the traffic died down giving me just enough time to reverse and see the bird.....Urrghhhh!

Our first stop in Peel itself was the Shoprite car park, as the only recently reported Waxwings had been seen there a couple of days ago. We pulled in for a quick look but there was no sign of them, they could've be anywhere by then! That was our only chance of seeing Waxwing unless we hit a miracle somewhere else on our travels. Fat chance! We did see **House Sparrow** there though, which had been another strangely elusive bird to find that day. At 11.30am as we drove through Peel towards the breakwater, we noticed that something wasn't right. There were cars and people, many of whom were in fancy dress, everywhere. What was going on and more to the point would we be able to get a park? In the harbour entrance was a **Razorbill**, which we knew would be difficult to find, and then it suddenly dawned on us that it was the New Year's Day dip that was causing all the fuss.....Doh. I'm not sure which is the craziest way to spend the day, Bird Racing or chucking yourself into the freezing cold sea, but I knew which I'd rather be doing! Over at the breakwater we got out of the car and climbed up the steps to view the sea. We were hoping for Kittiwake and Fulmar but we saw neither plus it was blowing a gale, making it very hard to hold our bins still, which didn't help matters.



Peel Breakwater

Next we headed round to the rocks behind the Castle hoping for Purps but there was no sign of them either....Arrghhhhh! Eventually I spotted a Gull like bird coming in and amazingly it was a **Fulmar** flying over the rough sea. Wahey! Wendy then spotted a **Guillemot**, which strangely again we always fail to see on a Bird Race. The waves were crashing over the rocks and spraying us with salty water so we packed it up and went back to the car. It'd been another good move though and we'd been very lucky to be able to fit Peel in to our day.

We left at 11.50am (after utilizing the very conveniently open WC's) to make our way up north with our only dilemma being which route to take. Wendy wanted to go through Druidale but it would be slow going and we needed to keep time on our side as we still had a lot of ground to cover before the light started to fade. In the end I settled on taking the coast road, then through Kirk Michael, as the more direct and quicker option. We needed to get to Ballaugh where we'd found a brilliant garden with some very well used bird feeders hanging right by the road.

It was already 12.04pm when we pulled up at Bishop's Dubh for our last ditch attempt for Snipe. I was worried that it was so flooded they wouldn't be there but thankfully when we lifted our bins we instantly found a couple of **Common Snipe** and were on our way again. Next up, was the Ballaugh garden feeders and luckily they were teaming with life and we had our target bird straight away.....**Coal Tit**. It's crazy to think that we'd got all the way to Ballaugh before seeing a bird that would've been considered very common and easy to see just a couple of years ago. I think this garden must have the entire island's Coal Tit population in it! Our next plan was to catch up with the Whooper Swans at Ballaugh Cronk, which had only just arrived for the winter. Luckily for us they'd turned up when they did as we'd only been saying a few days before how we had no chance of seeing any on the Bird Race. We drove down the road and sure enough we spotted them right at the top of a field and could happily tick off **Whooper Swan**.

We continued to make our way steadily up north and going through Jurby Wendy shouted out, "What's that flying really fast.....**Peregrine!**" I looked up just in time to watch it zoom over the car and over the hedge out of sight....Phew!



We had a feeling that we'd be struggling for raptors on the Bird Race so this was a good spot.

We were now beginning to feel extremely hungry and desperately needed to stop somewhere for lunch. The only feasible place to do that is the Point of Ayre, as you have to put in a bit of time before things start to appear. We still needed to give Ramsey the once over as a Kingfisher had been reported at Mooragh Park earlier and you never know your luck for Waxwing. Hmmmmmm doubtful! We parked up near Mooragh Park and ran across the road to view the lake.....nothing. I crossed over to check the harbour while Wendy kept an eye out over the other side.



Ramsey Harbour

Still nothing and I'd checked everywhere, even round the corner looking back at the bridge....Urrghhhh! That was Kingfisher scrapped then :( As we drove along Ramsey Prom and past the grassed area, I said, "Oooooo Carrion Crow here would be nice." I looked down at the Rooks on the grass and laughed as the closest one to us turned out to be a **Carrion Crow**. She'd seen hers at 8.35am and it had taken us till 12.32pm to find another....Unbelievable!

There'd been 2x Gadwall reported from Glascoe Dubh and the possibility of a Shoveler was hard to turn a blind eye to so that would be our next plan. If it paid off it would be brilliant but if not it would be just another waste of time. Passing the flooded field Wendy jumped out for a quick gander over the hedge and picked up a flock of **Linnets**. When we arrived at the Dubh the sun was in our faces and the Ducks, of which there were very few, were black silhouettes...Aaaarrggghh! We had a good look but they were all just Mallards and a handful of Teal. Luckily we'd had Wigeon earlier at Strandhall or we'd have been hard pushed for them anywhere else too. It had started to feel a lot colder by then and there were some nasty looking grey clouds rolling in towards us. We really needed it to stay fine and dry until the end so crossed our fingers that it would hold off. Wendy then spotted some Thrushes flying low across the field opposite the Dubh. They disappeared behind the ridge so she crossed over and managed to relocate them right at the back in the hawthorn hedge. Her suspicions were right and sure enough they were **Fieldfare**. These were more



birds we weren't confident in seeing so that was another relief. By then it really was time to eat something so we headed off to the Point of Ayre.

We arrived at 12.50pm and normally we'd have seen or heard at least 1 Stonechat on the way over to the small lighthouse viewpoint but surprise surprise we hadn't! I parked up and wound the passenger side window down so we had a better view and could listen for any sounds outside.



Point of Ayre

After scanning for a while I spotted a distant **Kittiwake**, which up until then we'd given up on seeing. There were also 3x **Red-throated Divers** present on the sea but apart from them there seemed to be nothing else. We dug out our lunch and started tucking in like we'd been starved for days. My cheese and pickle sarnie and crisps was just what the Doctor ordered while Wendy was struggling with hers. She'd made a new salad concoction of Quinoa, Edamame beans (you what?) and various different things you'd feed to a Rabbit thrown in for good measure and her flimsy plastic fork was proving to be a useless tool for the job. When I laughed at her attempts to get it to her mouth without dropping it all over herself she wasn't amused. Not only that but it also turned out that her hands were numb because of the cold wind, blowing straight in at her from the open window...Ooops! I had an idea, I'd turn the car round and open my window as I was lovely and warm in my new Christmas present gear.....sorted :).

After we'd stuffed our faces and Wendy had warmed up with a couple of coffees we headed over to view the area at the Pits where Sean does his ringing, as this was our only chance of seeing Twite. As we approached we saw a bird flying low over the track and land in some brambles.....**Stonechat**! Worryingly there was no sign of the Linnet flock and our hopes of seeing the Merlin were already dead and buried. Luckily though the Linnets eventually appeared from the Gravel Pits and flew in nearby. All we could see were black silhouettes but we could hear some calls, which we were 99.9% sure were Twite. We couldn't add them if we had any doubts though. We got out of the car and went to look into the Pits from the fence and could just about make out some **Pochard** miles away. Without a scope it was pointless looking anymore but it was worth a shot anyway as there'd been a recent report of a Long-tailed Duck in there. Now THAT was a bird we would've loved to add to our Bird Race list! We'd noticed that the

Linnets were very twitchy so we were on Merlin alert but after a few minutes it hadn't appeared. We gave up but not before we'd finally seen some of the Finches, which landed near us, and had ID'd some of them as definite **Twite**. At 1.50pm we left and as Bride WC's were too near to turn down we made a beeline for them before doing anything else.

We drove through Andreas to try our luck at Red Legs and having seen none in the fields we resorted to having to park up in the layby by the airfield for a look over the gate. There appeared to be nothing there but right at the last minute 2x **Red-legged Partridge** ran out from behind a gorse bush onto the path ahead of us. Another lucky one! Realising that somehow (don't ask me how) we were miles ahead of schedule we thought we'd go and check the beaches on the NW coast.

Ballaghennie seemed like a good place to go next, maybe there'd be some Golden Plover on the beach, but all we saw there was an unusually high number of dog walkers! We reckoned it had to be people who'd vowed to get out more for New Year but couldn't help but wonder how many of them would keep their good intentions. Not many was our guess! The same could be said for Smeale, no new birds but loads of dogs and by then the light was fading and the temperature was plummeting. Blue Point was next on our list and fortunately we caught a glimpse of a hunting **Kestrel** just before it dived down behind the cliff. On the way to our last stop of the day we popped over to The Lhen as it was going to be the last look we'd get of the sea and we still needed 2 of the possible Divers and had seen no Scoters at all. When we arrived I noticed that if I hadn't filled the car up that morning we'd have just run out of petrol and would now be stuck!! We walked down the sandy track to view the beach from the gate to Cronk Y Bing Reserve and had to use the gate to steady ourselves, as it was soooooooo windy! There was no sign of any Scoters, which was a bit depressing, as last year we'd had a large flock there (which stayed for months) plus we'd seen one bird there the weekend before. Wendy then found 2x Divers miles out and said they were definitely too stocky to be Red-throats. After a couple of minutes of watching them, mainly disappearing behind the waves and diving, we'd seen enough features to confirm **Great Northern Diver!** Nice one!

Our next stop was some feeders in a garden at Ballaugh Curraghs and we never fail to get our bird there so I had it down as a deffo. When we arrived we could instantly hear the chirping of House Sparrows but we had to find a Tree Sparrow amongst them before we could leave. It was really dark so visibility was poor and every bird was deep in the bushes obviously thinking about roosting for the night. This was bad news but the same conditions as the previous year so we were still quietly confident of finding at least one. After 15mins of shivering and looking at House Sparrow after House Sparrow we realized that we were flogging a dead horse and gave up. We can only hope that these lovely and very scarce birds are still thriving somewhere around there and that we just weren't lucky enough to have seen them. We were now free to go to our last port of call and back at the car I whacked on the heaters to try and warm us up before getting out again. We were just about to go and freeze ourselves to the point where we couldn't take any more and would have to bail out and run back to the car.

It was 3.50pm when we reached our 'last chance saloon' that is Close Sartfield and there were 2 other cars parked up in the car park. It was also strangely light, far too light to go and sit at the hide.



Close Sartfield

We needed it to be dark, so we didn't have to stay there too long, as neither of us were particularly keen to end the first day of the New Year with hypothermia! We started to add more layers of clothing in preparation for what was ahead. Wendy still hadn't warmed up after standing looking for Tree Sparrow down the road so, while we had the time, she stayed in the car with the heating on. She wasn't looking forward to the next bit at all and had gone all Karl Pilkington on me again so I had a wander over to look in a field. She did have a point (not to mention some impressive chilblains) but we needed to stay out until it got dark if we stood any chance of an Owl, Hen Harrier or Water Rail. Wendy stayed put, drinking coffee and grasping her mug tightly in her hands to warm them up but it wasn't long before what went in had to come out! Normally she'd not think twice but as she positioned herself behind the car she noticed something slightly unnerving. The 4x4 parked up next to us had blacked out windows so there was no way of knowing whether or not there was anyone in it. She decided that if there was then they must be doing something far more interesting than her and wouldn't even notice so carried on to complete her mission regardless. She quickly jumped back in the car and shut the door, as it really was \*\*\*\*\* freeeeeeeezing by then. She was also very aware that she still had to go and say, "Happy New Year!" to her family and realized that they'd all be getting tired and would be wanting to go home soon.

It was getting close to when we should be heading over to the hide and the Greylags were starting to very noisily come in to roost. I looked up just as they were heading our way. Normally I wouldn't bother looking at them as they're just a bunch of feral (plastic) Greylag Geese but for some strange reason I decided to, possibly in the hope that a Pink Foot had joined them or something. I watched the whole flock fly over and not surprisingly found nothing so I put my bins down. Then I noticed another smaller group tagging along behind so, being a glutton for punishment, I put my bins back up. I couldn't believe what I was seeing but there was a smaller goose with the group, which was too far away to get any details. I locked on to the bird and as it flew overhead and was delighted



to see the black belly markings and then white forehead area of a **White-fronted Goose**! We hadn't seen one of these at all in 2012 so this was a complete shocker. I assumed that it was the same bird which joined the Point of Ayre flock a few years ago that has moved into the Curraghs flock, unless it's the same flock moving between areas? I quickly ran back to the car waving my arms frantically to alert Wendy. Luckily she'd noticed my panic, jumped out and picked out the smaller goose in the flock easily. Wahey!

After the boost of excitement I thought that Wendy would be raring to go but she still hadn't been able to warm up. I was now like a hyperactive child and grabbed my camera so I could race over to the hide just incase the White-front was about. I told Wendy that I'd text her if anything was happening Hen Harrier or Water Rail wise though and set off. On the way I passed two old couples, on their way back to the car park and looking severely bored, which didn't bode well at all. I sat down at the top of the hide and although it had been a relatively mild day (compared to the previous year) the wind was still biting cold so I hunkered down and waited. Very little was happening, not even small birds calling. Such a huge difference to years ago when there were small birds, Hen Harriers, Owls, everything. I don't know what's happened at the Curraghs but whatever it is it's not good. While I was contemplating the staggering reduction in wildlife Wendy suddenly appeared and joined me to absorb the nothingness as well. We scanned the horizon in desperate hope of seeing a Hen Harrier floating in but we knew that, even though the windy conditions were perfect, there just weren't any there anymore. To think that about ten years ago I'd watched about ninety Hen Harriers coming into roost in one evening and now, not one, was pretty grim. We waited and waited until I finally heard the squealing pig sound we'd been waiting for. I checked with Wendy that she'd heard it too, so we could go home, but she hadn't.....Aarrghhhh! This meant we'd have to stay longer! Ten minutes later there was another call and thankfully this time Wendy heard it.....Hurray! With **Water Rail** now ticked off we could finally call it a day.

I quickly tallied up our list when we got back to the car and found that we'd ended the day on 84. An excellent total and although not the highest it wasn't our lowest either. Considering the lack of decent things about I was very happy with that so I turned the heaters on to full and drove off. We had two choices for our route home and we could either go via Druidale and maybe see an Owl or go the quicker way through Tholt-Y-Will. I opted for the latter. Half way up the valley Wendy shouted, "WHAT'S THAT!" and pointed upwards. I craned my neck forwards and through the darkness saw a bird flapping like mad above the road. We both shouted, "**Woodcock**!" Absolutely crazy! Another bird I'd never have imagined we'd see on New Year's Day. What a way to finish! This now made our total an even more impressive 85 :).

Although we still had our eyes peeled for any Owls on the way home we saw nothing else and by the time I'd dropped Wendy off at her Sister's it was 5.15pm when I eventually got home. While she was thawing out in front of a log burner, joining in with the rapidly waning festivities with a glass of wine and telling everyone about the days events, I was making my much-needed tea.

It goes without saying that the next day, when we had to drag ourselves out of bed for work, we did wonder whether the blood, sweat and tears had all been worth it. OK there'd been no blood and it was so cold there wasn't even the

faintest trickle of sweat but the bitterly cold wind had certainly brought tears to our eyes!

#### Bird list

Mute Swan	Fulmar	Black-headed Gull	Mistle Thrush
Whooper Swan	Cormorant	Common Gull	Goldcrest
White-fronted Goose	Shag	Herring Gull	Long-tailed Tit
Greylag Goose	Little Egret	Great Black-backed Gull	Blue Tit
Canada Goose	Grey Heron	Guillemot	Great Tit
Barnacle Goose	Sparrowhawk	Razorbill	Coal Tit
Brent Goose	Kestrel	Black Guillemot	Magpie
Shelduck	Peregrine	Feral Pigeon	Chough
Wigeon	Water Rail	Woodpigeon	Jackdaw
Teal	Moorhen	Collared Dove	Rook
Mallard	Coot	Meadow Pipit	Carriion Crow
Pochard	Oystercatcher	Rock Pipit	Hooded Crow
Tufted Duck	Ringed Plover	Grey Wagtail	Raven
Eider	Grey Plover	Pied Wagtail	Starling
Goldeneye	Dunlin	Wren	House Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Snipe	Dunnock	Chaffinch
Goosander	Woodcock	Robin	Greenfinch
Red-legged Partridge	Curlew	Stonechat	Goldfinch
Pheasant	Redshank	Blackbird	Siskin
Red-throated Diver	Turnstone	Fieldfare	Linnet
Great Northern Diver	Kittiwake	Redwing	Twite
Little Grebe			