

From Bradford to Cornwall by Colin Moore

I joined BOG in 1987 after seeing an advert in Birdwatching Magazine and for my sins served on the committee as treasurer for a number of years before moving to near Lands End in 2001. I thought it might be of interest to make a comparison between birding in the Bradford area and in the West Penwith area of Cornwall.

Each area appears to have its specialist activity – raptor watching in BOG and sea watching in West Penwith. In fact the activity (or lack of it) are very similar, standing for hours at Barden watching the skyline or sitting for hours watching the sea. Although I noted on my last trip up north some elderly observers now sit on chairs! Wind direction has a great influence on both activities, the wind needs to be blowing onto Barden Fell and for sea watching a wind direction between south west and north west is required. Sea watching sites depend on the wind, Porthgwarra on a south west, Pendeen on a west and St Ives on north west.

There is a lack of woodland in West Penwith so nothing to compare with say Bolton Abbey, Tree-creeper is a rarity down here and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker does not breed. Certainly BOG has more reservoirs, and as I lived in Ilkley my local was Chelker. It produced quite a few surprises during my time for example when one of our neighbours came in and said there were about 40 white blobs in the middle – these turned out to be Whoopers.

Another surprise was a phone call from Mick Cunningham to tell me a Sabine's Gull was there. I saw it before work and my wife then took this photo (I'm not sure any other photos exist of this 1987 record?) When work was being carried out on Chelker in 1996 it was interesting what waders were attracted by the exposed edge. My local reservoir is Drift which is the last in the country, being only five miles from Lands End. Water levels do drop each summer producing many good passage waders and the occasional American wader. I have seen up to four Wood Sandpipers together there, reminding me of my first in BOG which required a rapid trip to Thornton Moor.

I suppose I would regard my local patches in BOG as Otley Gravel Pits and Barden Moor, considering the amount of time I used to spend at those locations. Where I now live, at the top of the Nanquidno valley, means I can cover my local patch by walking from our house. A walk down the valley starts with the grass of Lands End aerodrome on one side of the road. Past records showed this as a regular stopping off place for migrating dotterel, but I did not see my first until 2005. I had a similar long wait for my first in BOG, always spending the first week of May searching Ilkley Moor and Round Hill, so it was very exciting to see my first on Round Hill though unfortunately I did not find it. The bottom of my valley just before the sea is reached has areas of sallow and black-thorn and some small clumps of sycamore which do act as a migrant trap.

This Woodchat Shrike (see page 6) was a surprise find on one misty morning. I have learnt that in the spring the peak time to look for overshooting southerly migrants is when there are southerly winds – I suppose this is fairly obvious but we do not get these winds too often.

There are major differences between my current society – The Cornish Bird Watching and Preservation Society (CWPS) and the Bradford Ornithological Group. The Cornish society has well over 1000 members and covers the whole of Cornwall. This size gives practical problems, as where do you hold meetings/field trips and how do you create a society atmosphere?

The answer is that apart from the AGM and the very occasional speaker, meetings are not held so we do not have the benefit BOG has of discussions on surveys, log calls and local speakers and so the Cornish society is obviously the poorer for this. The birders local to me do have a monthly meeting in a pub, rather similar to the meetings of the original founders of BOG. The magazine of the Cornish society "Palores" is very similar to Lapwing. Weekly walks are held and I found these very useful as an introduction to the various sites. The society manages a number of reserves the most recent acquisition being Windmill Farm on the Lizard where a considerable amount of work has been carried out creating scrapes, boardwalks and dragonfly pools. I follow with interest the progress/reports being made at Stockbridge and Otley Gravel Pits and on my last visit I was very pleased to see the breeding reed warblers at the latter.

I must confess that my garden list is rather more impressive than my Ilkley list, which did not include hoopoe and golden oriole although it did include waxwing, a bird I have only seen once in

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Cornwall. Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts move through the garden each autumn, but no Wood Warbler so cannot claim the full Bolton Abbey complement!

I have recently acquired a two acre field next to my house and am trying to create a mini nature reserve which will hopefully extend my garden list. This can be overlooked from the garden of our holiday let, which is much appreciated by visiting birders, and on a clear day the Scilly Isles can be glimpsed.

I can't believe that I have been down here five years and that BOG has been going for twenty years – lets hope it continues for at least another 20 years.

Colin Moore, Penhale Cottage