

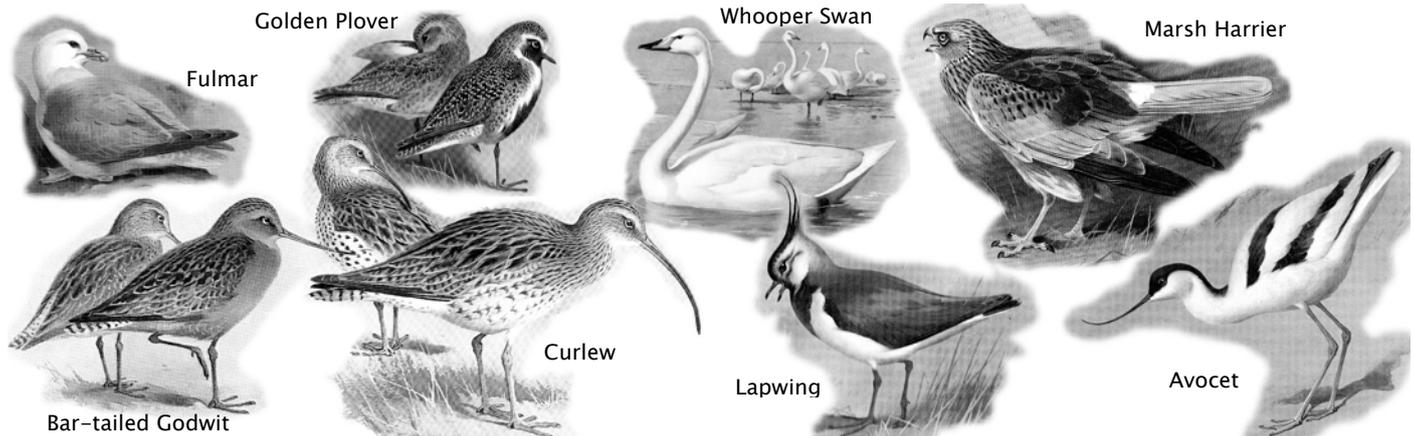


## After the Storms

by Sue Jones

For the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2014 we had actually booked to stay at a Travel Lodge in Chester to bird watch on the Wirral. However the weather forecast showed heavy rain and 70 mph gales in the North West so we headed East.

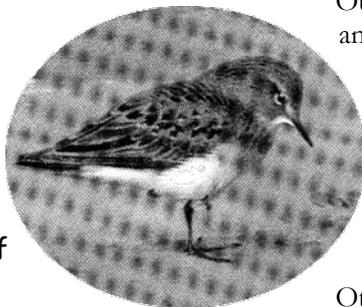
It was a little breezy when we arrived at Breydon Water near Great Yarmouth so we sought shelter by the bridge near the ASDA car park. The tide was full in and much of the water was like wigeon soup. The waders proved that 'birds of a feather flock together'. A band of gold on the near side of the spit was the golden plovers while avocets formed a black and white band on the far side. In between were the large brown waders in their groups - curlew and the godwits. Flocks of lapwing kept rising, circling and landing again while small groups of dunlin swept quickly past. The flock of knot swirling like a murmur of starlings reminded John of one of his poems called *Calidris*.



### *Calidris*

by John Bland

It's very hard to clearly see  
The plumage of a knot  
You never get one on its own  
You always get a lot  
A swirling mass of whirling  
wings  
In crisp formation flight  
Sometimes showing sort of  
grey  
And sometimes pearly white.  
Dunlins fly in little flocks  
They always seem quite chummy  
See them in the summer  
And there's black under their tummy.  
Sanderlings are clockwork toys  
Dodging every wave  
Dashing up and down the beach  
Tiny, pale and brave.



There weren't any sanderling at Breydon Water of course, nor did we see them on the beach at Great Yarmouth. What we did find were the Mediterranean gulls in their usual place near the South Pier. It was too early in the year for any of them to have their full black heads but the droopy red beaks were obvious, as was the fact that the adults have no black in their wings.

Staying overnight at Acle, we set off next morning round the Norfolk coast. Our traditional visit to Caister did not produce the hoped for snow buntings. Sea watching was also unproductive with a distinct lack of divers and that remained the case all day.

As we approached Horsey a female marsh harrier flew across the road. As John watched it through binoculars he saw a crane in the field behind it and, indeed, there were four of these spectacular birds. Near them was a flock of pink-footed geese. We stopped at the car park near the mill at Horsey Mere and as we walked beside the 'canal' that leads to

open water we were pleased to see a kingfisher perched on a reed.

Our visit to Sea Palling added no new species but it does have an example of what sea defences may have to look like in the future. At the top of the beach is a concave concrete sea wall, tall enough to stand in as shelter from the wind. About a hundred yards out in the sea is a series of 'reefs' constructed of huge rocks. The gaps between the reefs result in the waves reaching the beach weaker than they were.

Other birders had told us of a site at Edgefield Woods just South of Holt where the forest had been clear felled. As usual a few dead trunks had been left and one of these, which had side branches, was being used as a perch by about 8 parrot crossbills. Through the telescope we could see that the brick red male had a very heavy crooked beak.

We have normally seen snow bunting from the car park by the shingle bank at Salthouse but this year the shingle was on top of the car park, to a depth of about six feet. The area noted for buntings had been completely



overwhelmed, as had the shallow wet area where turnstones used to feed. They were still there but on the shingle and sharing the bread that some people were feeding to gulls.

There was a similar situation at the car park West of Cley. The storm had pushed the shingle bank inland along quite a length. A shelter, rather like a bus shelter, had been inundated. On the seaward side it was full of shingle to within 2 feet of the eaves. From the visitor centre we could see that hides had been lost and the lagoons looked like mudflats with very few birds. The quality of the latte and cake was undiminished, I am told.

At Titchwell we were told that the boardwalk leading out to the beach had been completely swept away. A major project is underway there to help cope with rising tides. At Hunstanton there was a lot more debris than usual at the base of the cliffs so there had clearly been some large landslips. On the clifftop they don't move the 'safety' fence back, they put up another one further from the edge so now in places there are four parallel fences. This makes birding a little more difficult but we did see a fulmar, one of John's favourite birds.

Driving into the car park at Snettisham we were delighted to see grey partridge close to but soon other birders told us of the sad situation there. The reserve was reported to be unrecognisable. Hides had been swept into the lagoon and the famous shingle bank where huge numbers of waders roosted at high tide had been swept away. We retreated inland via the bird feeders at Sandringham to the bird hide at a farm at Flitcham. On the way home we dropped in at Welney and saw lots of whoopers in the new lake that has been created to the south of the visitor centre.

## The Bottom of the Pile

By Liz Lonsdale

In our garden we have a pile of stones fashioned into a small cairn. From time to time this needs rebuilding as the weather and local wildlife destabilise its structure. The first time we rebuilt the cairn it was home to three toads. This year I took it apart and found a variety of snails and slugs which I tentatively indentify as *Arion ater* (black slug), *Limax flavus* (yellow slug), *Helix aspersa* (garden snail) and *Cepaea hortensis* (white-lipped banded snail).

Also right at the bottom of the pile were three monkey nut cases. The size of access into the cairn was too small for squirrel to have hidden them. So I can only presume some enterprising mouse has carried them some distance and sat in the dark for a quiet feed away from predators.



Photos by the author

## A Fondness for Pholcus

By Bill Grange

In June 2014, Diana and I had a week's holiday on the edge of Exmoor, near Dulverton in Somerset. This is a beautiful and wildlife-rich area, to be sure but the most memorable wildlife experience for me during the week was in the bathroom of our spacious self-catering cottage, watching and photographing a female spider tending her eggs and the young spiders which hatched from them!

The species in question was the cellar spider or daddy long-legs spider, *Pholcus phalangioides*, also known as the skull spider, due to its the markings on the cephalothorax. Both adult females and males have a body length of about 9mm but the spindly legs are about 5 or 6 times the length of its body. To the uninitiated they resemble harvestmen (which aren't spiders, but, like spiders are members of the Arachnida class), but have the body divided into two.

Originally restricted to warmer parts of the Palearctic, the species is found throughout the world living in heated buildings or cellars where the temperature does not fall below 10 degrees centigrade. A lax untidy web is spun to catch a range of insects. Suprisingly, these flimsy looking spiders are able to kill the much more robust and faster-moving spiders in the genus *Tegenaria* - which are the 'house spiders' known to most people.

In Britain, *Pholcus* seems to be represented in the southern half of the country (I have not seen it in Derbyshire, though almost certainly does occur somewhere in our county), its distribution orginally being determined by that doyen of spider experts, the late WS Bristowe. To quote him: "*Pholcus* did not live in my childhood home at Stoke d'Abernon, Surrey, although she thrived elsewhere only about ten miles further, so the quest of an explanation inspired me to trace her distribution. This had to await the acquisition of a motor-bicycle and then, with the impudence of youth, I zig-zagged across England,

## OBSERVATIONS 2015



ostensibly seeking rooms in hotels or lodgings, whose ceilings I viewed with nonchalant interest. My apologies are no doubt due to a host of hoteliers for gaining entry under false pretences”.

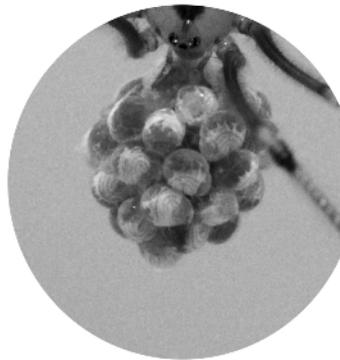
Back to the spider in the bathroom: I noticed the female spider on the ceiling in the corner near the door and was puzzled by a round blob-like object that she was holding in her chelicerae (this is what spiders’ jaws are called). After craning up to take a close-up photograph, I saw in the camera screen that the blob was a parcel of eggs within a silken envelope.

In the opposite corner of the bathroom, over the bath itself, I located a male spider (most probably the father), bearing the swollen palps, his intromittant organs, common to all male

spiders. I guessed that, following mating, the female had left him to seek safety for her eggs and young as far away as possible, as *Phlocus* are known to be cannibalistic.

Over the next few days, I witnessed and photographed the hatching of the young spiders and saw that the female stayed at her post, ready, no doubt to ward off any potential predators, including her suitor!

I was very pleased to obtain such a photographic record, suspecting that not too many other people had done so. Oh, yes, we did get out to enjoy the glorious scenery and wildlife outside, too!



UK Distribution of  
*P. Phalangioides* Records



*Pholcus phalangioides* at Dulverton, Somerset:

TOP: Female with eggs case and close up of the latter

MIDDLE: The young spider hatching

BOTTOM LEFT: Young spiders

BOTTOM RIGHT: Male (note the enlarged palps)