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Silloth & District Pensioners Association

At the Whist Drive Party in December 2003 a Presentation was made to Mr Jack Hayton who won the most games during 2003.

Jack was presented with £25 and his name will be engraved on the plaque which was presented to the association by Silloth Rotary on memory of David Routledge.

David's Father donated the prize. David was a regular and keen Whist player.

Solway Superstars

Many readers have commented on what appears to be a shortage of 'seagulls' this winter. Regular promenade walkers are witnessing a changing situation, which is now widespread, but please, not 'seagulls'!

With Silloth being the capital city and administration town of the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, please let us all have the nomenclature right with our wonderful coastal birds. 'Seagulls' have no place in Silloth for they have never been seen there; 'seagulls' make good reading in city life or tourist literature but are not a feature of the AONB. You will not find a 'seagull' in any field guide but you will see Black Headed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Lesser Black Back Gulls, and Common Gulls, etc, etc, and whilst they are a feature of the coast most have little interest in the sea. The only gull, which could possibly be termed a 'sea'gull, is the wonderful little kittiwake, which in January/February will be well out at sea, only returning to St. Bees Head for the summer breeding season and usually visiting the Silloth area in the autumn.

The gull we have seen generally during the past winter months has been the Black Headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*, which breeds on the marshes and moors. Probably the most famous colony over several decades at Drigg Dunes vanished within a few days and reinforced smaller colonies at Aspatria (Brayton) on Newton Arlosh and Rockcliffe marshes and inland hills and moors.

Between the RNLI station and the harbour these gulls fascinate visitors and locals alike and during February changes in plumage will be clearly visible.

More and more dark plumage appears on heads, which should, one supposes, carry nothing more than a dark spot marking each ear for some time yet. This poses the question. When do these head feathers change and what controls them? Could it be the mild winter temperatures we have had?

One aberrant gull of this noisy and quarrelsome species, seen near the harbour on New Year's Day already bore the dark hood of spring and summer complete.

Scanning these birds, often huddled down against the wind, will reveal that in February they are all in various stages of winter plumage, many complete with white heads growing nothing but a small dark mark in the vicinity of each hidden ear. Looking closely you may also find a single Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*, bearing a darkening about the back of the head - yet another sign of the rapidly changing season.

The Black Headed Gull will be seen en masse during autumn as the fields are being ploughed, or when, as recently, fields are flooded with rain water, in both cases feeding on earth worms.




Norman & Florence Hammond, RSPB, Tel 016973 20440.

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