

# Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



## REVIEW OF JULY 2011

### NEWSLETTER 119

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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**NEXT MEETING - 28TH SEPTEMBER 7.30P.M.**

**RED SQUIRRELS IN THE NORTH EAST AND THEIR CONSERVATION.**

**SPEAKER: NICK MASON**

**VENUE: ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH HALL, CANONGATE, ALNWICK**

**Nick Mason** - Nick is an accomplished naturalist who has previously worked from the RSPB and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. His interests include birdwatching, peatlands, and of course, Red Squirrels. The talk will look at the conservation measures for this popular species in the North East.

**NEXT FIELD TRIP – SEPTEMBER 17TH 2011 – HOLY ISLAND. LEADERS: IAN & KEITH DAVISON**

Meet at 10am at car park on Beal side of Holy Island causeway, from there we will drive across to the Island and look for early migrants. Take a packed lunch and wear suitable footwear; we should be finished by 3pm (the safe crossing times are 9.20am till 4.30pm)

### SEPTEMBER 2011

Autumn is upon us again. Where has the summer gone? Even the Swifts seem to have got their timing wrong. There are still a small number flying around the houses as I write this. In most years, swifts have departed for Africa by the end of the first week of August.

September is a great month for wildlife watching. There are lots of species on the move. Southerly winds can bring large numbers of Painted Lady, Red Admiral and the odd Clouded Yellow Butterfly from the continent. This invasion can be accompanied by moths including the Silver-Y, Hawkmoths and Rush Veneer as well as dragonflies such as Common Darters and migrant Hawkers. This latter species can just about be found anywhere; a good place to look, for them, is on the sunny sheltered side of a big hedge or woodland. Often they are found high up in the canopy hunting for smaller insects such as flies. Another dragonfly to look out for is the Common Hawker. This large blue and green can often be found hunting around pools and long grass. These large insects can be very approachable if you are patient.

Large numbers of birds are also on the move. On the coast our winter visitors are starting to arrive in large numbers. Waders such as Knot, Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit congregate at Fenham Flat and are joined by Grey Plover and Golden Plover. The numbers of waterfowl also start to increase in numbers; noticeable species are the Wigeon and at the end of the month Pink-footed Geese. Late September and early October can see upwards of 40,000 of the Icelandic Geese in the Budle Bay area with many more passing overhead on their way to Lancashire or Norfolk. Migrant passerines from far and wide also appear on the coast when the winds are from the east or north east. Last year, there were huge numbers of Redstarts, Pied Flycatchers and Whitethroats all along our coast in early September. A 'fall' of passerines can be one of the wildlife events of the year. It is amazing to think that these small birds get blown off course over the North Sea and then manage to get themselves to southern Europe, West Africa and beyond.

Seeds and fruits are synonymous with autumn and one of the most attractive in the Horse Chestnut or Conker. Something is happening to this beloved tree of our landscape. Until recently, the trees held their green leaves until October. This pattern is starting to change, with damaged brown-leaved trees found by the middle of August and early September. The cause of this change is the Horse-chestnut Leaf-miner. This invasive micro-moth, whose larvae live in large numbers in mines' inside the leaves. The Leaf-miner Moth has spread rapidly across Europe since the 1970's. Currently, this micro-moth is mainly found in Yorkshire but it is spreading north and it has been recorded in the Newcastle area. It would be interesting to hear from any members if their Horse-chestnut tree leaves have turned brown early. The easiest way to tell if the tree is infected is the blotchy brown nature of the leaves.

Here is hoping that the weather improves and we get an Indian summer'. Autumn can be a spectacular time of year so, try to get out and about to enjoy the wildlife at this time of year. Jack Daw is migrating to the Western Isles for a holiday and looks forward to seeing you at the first meeting of the season on the 28th September at St Michael's hall, Alnwick.

*Jack Daw*

*Please note that the last Newsletter distributed in July was a review of June 2011.*

175  
Also -  
Storm Petrel 1 only briefly as it  
skipped over a wave and into a trough  
then not seen again  
Arctic Skua 8+ → N  
Bonxie 1 → N  
Puffin 3 → N  
Gosander 4 → N  
Whimbrel 2 → S

Rest of the day in garden. Warm and sunny  
pm.  
Small Copper 1  
Small Tortoiseshell 3+  
Large White 1  
GV. White 1  
Sm White 2+ egg laying on nasturtiums.  
Cuckoo in garden.  
Blackbird with second brood

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2011  
Fine, dry, sometimes cloudy. Light  
NE3.

Today I heard that there was still a  
good number of Storm Petrels moving  
at sea, so, after work, I headed  
down into the coast path to see if  
I could get a better view than yesterday.

As soon as I arrived I picked up 2

176  
Stormies → at a third range, pot flag distance  
Once I had my eye in, I found about 10  
of them, some feeding, some  
just skittering over the surface.

Light bouncy  
flight when  
flapping →

Bright, white, wrap  
around rump.  
Square

Very like  
House Martin.  
Stiff  
winged  
when  
gliding!

Foot pattering  
while feeding close  
in.  
Square headed

Shearing like  
a tiny man!

Black all over.  
Except pale bar  
under wing, seen easily  
on close birds.  
Not seen on distant  
birds.

A fantastic sight  
unprecedented in  
the county for me!



July 24th 1 Great Brocade (moth)  
a rare migrant from Scandinavia in  
the Howick moth trap. The only  
British ones of this rare species  
live in the highlands of Scotland.  
photo & notes Stewart Sexton

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2011.  
Mod - strong N4. Sea choppy. Overcast.  
Sea watch, Howick 7:15am - 8:25am.  
7:20am - Balearic Shearwater 1N then  
landed on sea and lost to view

Stiff, flappy flight

'Dirty' looking brown.  
Belly has paler patch  
and pale in wing  
lunps

Head mostly  
dark brown

Dark markings  
on underwing.  
Dark  
Axillaries

Under vent darker  
brown than rest

Short tailed and  
stocky

Smallest. Zig-zagging  
and tentative over the sea  
surface, then landed.

A nice dark individual, very distinctive, struc-  
turally different to Sooty Shearwater. Only shearwater  
seen!

## PLANT CORNER

As part of the drive to collect data for the new 'in-preparation' Flora of North Northumberland, I recently volunteered to survey two tetrads (2km squares) near our home. One of them includes a small pond by the side of a bridle way close to Beanley village. When I went to look at it in early August I was delighted to find the two main British species of Bur-reed growing within a few metres of each other.



All the bur-reeds have characteristic spherical spiny fruits, with the smaller male flower clusters nearer the tops of the flower spikes. The **Branched Bur-reed** (*Sparganium erectum*) was easy enough to identify with its broad upright Iris-like leaves. It was growing near the edge of the pond right by the path and it had some good flower spikes.

There are two sub-species, but they take some expertise

to identify – expertise which I lack!



Its very close relative **Unbranched Bur-reed** (*S. emersum*) is a bit more of a problem because it can usually be seen as a set of long floating leaves too far out in the water to get at without recourse to



long waders or a fishing rod. In the middle of this pond there were several clumps of leaves like that. But just when I thought I wouldn't get a decent view of

the plant or its flowers I realised that there were some leaves close to the edge and among them were some excellent flower spikes.



In North Northumberland there is plenty of the branched species by ponds, burns and rivers, but the un-branched one is far scarcer. Swan's Flora describes it as 'local and occasional' and his distribution map shows it as definitely present in only 13 of the 100 5km squares on which his data were organised. The south of the county, below the River Coquet, has rather more records. But, of course, one of the purposes of carrying out the current Flora surveys is to see if the intervening 20 years has shown any changes to the distribution of all our plant species.

## SIGHTINGS JULY 2011

### BIRDS

Great Crested Grebe	Up to 4 at Branton Ponds on the 8th
Sooty Shearwater	1 at Newton Point on the 25th
Manx Shearwater	1 at Cresswell 20th, 8 on the 25th , 12 on the 26th at Howick and 2 at Newton Point on the 25th
Balearic Shearwater	1 at Howick on the 24th
Storm Petrel	1 on the 24th,10 on the 25thand 32 on the 26th all at Howick also 15 at Newton Point on the 25th
Little Egret	1 at Arcot Pond on the 20th
Spoonbill	1 at Hauxley on the 12th and 17th
Bar-headed Goose	3 at Cresswell on the 17th
Common Scoter	4 at Stag Rocks on the 28th
Velvet Scoter	1 at Coquet Island on the 12th
Goosander	4 at Howick on the 24th
Tufted Duck	Female with 10 ducklings at Branton Ponds on the 12th and Female with 4 ducklings at Monks House Pool on the 14th
Peregrine	1 at Yeavinger Bell on the 7th
Osprey	2 at Branton Ponds on the 21st
Oystercatcher	1 at Ingram on the 21st
Lapwing	300+ at Monks House Pool on the 28th
Knot	1 in breeding plumage at Cresswell on the 17th
Black-tailed Godwit	1 at Branton Ponds on the 4th
Avocet	2 at Cresswell on the 13th
Common Sandpiper	1 at Ingram on the 21 <sup>st</sup> and 4 at Branton Ponds on the 23rd
Turnstone	3 at Stag Rocks on the 28th
Whimbrel	2 at Howick on the 24th
Little Stint	1 at Hauxley on the 12th
Arctic Skua	1 at Coquet Island on the 12th, 3 at Cresswell on the 20th, 2 at Newton Point on the 25thand 1 at Howick on the 26th
Great Skua	1 on the 24th and 1 on the 26th both at Howick
Mediterranean Gull	3 at Cresswell on the 20th
Little Gull	3 at Cresswell on the 13thand 17th
Arctic Tern	40 at Howick on the 26th
Roseate Tern	1 at Howick on the 25th
Stock Dove	3 at Branton Ponds all month
Cuckoo	1 at Hauxley on the 12th and 1 at Druridge Pools on the 17th
Barn Owl	1 at Smeafield on the 13th
Tawny Owl	2 at Branton on the 12th
Kingfisher	Up to 2 all month at Branton Ponds
Green Woodpecker	2 at Hedgeley on the 21st
Skylark	2 at Ingram with young on the 21st
Yellow Wagtail	2 at Cresswell on the 20 <sup>th</sup> 1 at Monks House Pool on the 14th and 5 on the 28th.
Grey Wagtail	3 at Allenbanks on the 25th
Dipper	1 at Ingram on the 21st
Redstart	1 at Branton Ponds on the 20th
Whinchat	4 at Blaewearie on the 5th and several at Humbleton on the 10th
Sedge Warbler	1 at Monks House Pool on the 14th
Marsh Warbler	1 at Hauxley on the 12th and 13th
Whitethroat	1 at Budle Bay on the 14th
Lesser Whitethroat	4 at Hauxley on the 17th

Spotted Flycatcher	3 at Swarland on the 12 <sup>th</sup> and 17 <sup>th</sup> and 6 at Ingram on the 14 <sup>th</sup> .
Raven	2 at Gleadscleugh on the 7th
Brambling	2 at Smeafield on the 9th
Siskin	6 at Swarland on the 29th and a family at Smeafield on the 11th
Crossbill	30+ at Thrunton Woods on the 9th

**MAMMALS**

Red Squirrel	1 at Branton on the 18th
Brown Hare	1 at Swarland all month

**REPTILES**

Slow Worm	1 at Yeavinger Bell on the 7th
Common Lizard	1 at Smeafield on the 1st

**INVERTEBRATES**

Emperor Moth	1 at Yeavinger Bell on the 7th
Hummingbird Hawk Moth	1 at Smeafield on the 29th
Great Brocade Moth	1 at Howick on the 24 <sup>th</sup> (very unusual for the area)
Small Copper	1 at Branton Ponds on the 20th and 1 at Smeafield on the 27th
Small Tortoiseshell	Several at Smeafield all month
Ringlet	15+ at Smeafield on the 5th
Red Admiral	1 at Smeafield on the 7th
Peacock	2 at Smeafield on the 29th
Comma	1 at Smeafield on the 29th
<b>RAINFALL</b>	At Smeafield for July 84mm

**OBSERVERS**

I & K Davison, P & A Hanmer, A Keeble, S Reay, M Rolley, S Sexton, H Tindle

Please send sightings reports for August, no later than 6th September, to:-  
 Ian & Keith Davison, The Bungalow, Branton, Powburn, NE66 4LW  
 or Tel: 01665 578 357 or email to [redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk](mailto:redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk)

Emperor Moth and caterpillar *Photos Laurie Campbell*©

