

# Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



## REVIEW OF AUGUST 2011

### NEWSLETTER 120

[www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk](http://www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk)

email: [redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk](mailto:redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk)

**NEXT MEETING – 26<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2011 AT 7.30P.M.**

**SPEAKER: GEOFF SAMPLE – SOUNDS OF THE BORDERS AND BEYOND.**

Geoff is one of the leading sound recordist in the UK. This will be one of the highlights of the autumn calendar and will be an audio and visual experience not to miss. We will hear a lot of singing birds, take in the sounds of fantastic landscape and experience the vocal ranges of grasshopper and crickets.

### **A LAND OF WIND, WAVES AND WILDLIFE**

Jack Daw is taking a couple of months off. Below is summary of the Dodds' holiday to the North Uist.

To me the holiday did not start until we reached Uig on Skye. The ferry across The Minch was a welcome relief from the long drive from Glanton. Kittiwakes, shags and hooded crows were much in evidence as we left the bay. Lion's Mane jellyfish could also be seen. Once the ferry was out in open water, the seabirds started to appear with the highlights being Sooty Shearwater (2), European Storm Petrel (20+) and lots of Guillemots, Razorbills and Gannets. Three Common Dolphins sped past the ferry close enough to see their intricate markings. We eventually arrived at Kelp Cottage, Loch Eiport, North Uist at 8:15 pm, twelve hours after setting off from Glanton.

The first day was spent close to base and a search of the local area was fruitful. A female Scaup, Teal and Wigeon fed with Mute Swans and Greylag Geese in the sea loch to the south east of the cottage. The beach at Baleshare is a huge expanse of white sand with a series of sand dunes and Machair on the landward side. The afternoon walk produced good numbers of migrating 'northern' Ringed Plovers and Sanderling as well as a flock of Golden Plover and small numbers of Rock Doves. When we got back to base there was a male Otter feeding in the sea loch. What a start to the holiday!

Day two, we ventured north to Berneray. This small island is one of the jewels of the Hebrides. A late spring and summer meant that the sand blown Machair was still in flower. Large drifts of Flowering Eyebright, Red Clover, Kidney Vetch and Cat's Ear were accompanied by Devil's Bit Scabious, Lady's Bedstraw and Autumn Gentians – fantastic. Birds include a Peregrine hunting local waders which was escorted out of the area by Ravens. A Little Gull, Twite and a Red-throated Diver in summer plumage were highlights. A female Hen Harrier and a Short-eared Owl floated past the cottage in the evening.

The RSPB reserve at Balranald was the target for day three. This is a fantastic peninsula that sticks out into the North Atlantic. Alas, we were too late in the year to see Corncrakes but there were both Corn Buntings and Twite feeding amongst the Corn Marigolds and Field Pansies. There were large numbers of Manx Shearwaters passing as well as Arctic Skuas and Fulmars. A female Hen Harrier was found hunting in the dunes and there was a good selection of waders in the bay.

Day four, a depression moved in from the west and the weather changed for the worst. A short walk was called for to look for a Common Seal haul out. Good numbers were seen along with a small number of Grey Seals. The weather worsened and we decided to head for 'Stinky' Bay. Yes, this seaweed ridden beach is well renowned on Benbecula. It is a very good place to watch waders such as Turnstones, Knot, Grey Plover and Sanderling.

Day five, the wind blew and blew and the rain came. A short walk out produced only wet binoculars and children. The rain had eased by the time we got back to the cottage to be greeted by an adult Golden Eagle within close range.

Day six and the storm had blown through. We headed towards South Uist and in particular Ardvule Point. This place is a family favourite – the most westerly point on the Hebrides. We had great views of Common Seals as well as an excellent selection of wading birds. Out to sea, there were Pomerine and Great Skuas, Sooty and Manx Shearwaters, Puffins and Arctic Terns. A great day was had by all!

Day seven saw us venture south to Eriskay. This is a small island off the southern end of South Uist. The small areas of Machair were again in full flower and patches of Devil's-bit Scabious attracted Dark Green Fritillary and Common Blue Butterflies as well as small flocks of Twite. Eriskay is smaller than Lindisfarne but we still managed to see four Golden Eagles circling together.

Day eight we made our way to Sollas. Here there are huge expanses of both beaches and sand dunes. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed this 5 hour walk. Highlights included 4 Great Northern Divers, a White-tailed Sea Eagle, Peregrine, a prehistoric settlement and a good selection of wading birds.

The next day, wind and rain blew in from the west again. On a short walk around the Langass hotel to see the standing stones and large burial site. We managed to see an Otter, Chaffinch and Pheasant (both relatively rare on the Uists) as well as three species of dragonfly; Common and Black Darter and Common Hawker.

For a second time we ventured to the southern end of South Uist where we had good views of hunting Hen Harriers and large flocks of Twite. A juvenile Cuckoo was a surprise as well as Black-tailed Godwit and Stonechat. We came back up the island and stopped off at Ardivachar which is another exposed peninsula. Highlights include large numbers of Goose Barnacles washed up, Little Stint with a flock of Sanderling, Shelducks and a male Hen Harrier.

Day eleven, we ventured back to Berneray, our favourite island. A quick climb to the highest point gave us spectacular views of Harris and some of the smaller islands. St Kilda could be seen in the distance and there was a steady stream of Gannets returning to the largest colony in the northern hemisphere. Common Seals, a Great Skua and Red-throated Divers were seen at close quarters. On the way back to the cottage, a garden at Sollas produced a Greenfinch, 2 Goldfinches and a Chiffchaff; all new for the trip.

Day twelve, we headed west and climb the small hill known as Boreval (120m). This was a great walk and the weather could not have been better. Large Heath Butterflies and a Golden Eagle were seen on the heather and we got very close to a small group of Red Deer. The view of The Minch and Skye was exceptional.

The wind started to blow again on the last day and this was going to mean an interesting crossing. A White-tailed Eagle put in an appearance as well as several Whooper Swans and a Merlin.

The ferry crossing was for me great. A bit of a swell and a stiff westerly wind produced plenty of birds. Highlights included a Leach's Petrel, lots of Storm Petrels, a Little Gull, 4 Great Skuas and lots of reflections on a great holiday. One thing I have not mentioned was the midges – we saw or heard relatively few!

*George Dodds.*



## HOLY ISLAND 17<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2011

On a day which began with cloudy skies and dampness in the air, 6 hardy souls met in the car park at Beal prior to driving across to Holy Island itself. We were soon rewarded with what turned out to be a stunning warm sunny day. We parked at Chare Ends and headed off in the direction of the village, stopping only for one member to buy produce from a wayside stall. From the village we headed off along the Straight Lonnen and due to the damp conditions the day before we were hopeful of finding some rarities, this was not the case, we did however see lots of birds of all descriptions and the time passed very quickly.

From the north end of the Lonnen we turned east and headed for the white pyramid which is known as Emmanuel Head. At this point we stopped for lunch and indulged in a spot of very productive seawatching as species such as Manx Shearwater, Arctic Skua and Gannet were added.

After lunch we turned south and aimed for the Castle, for once not brooding menacingly over the harbour. After a quick look at the Rocket Field we headed for our last destination of the day, the Vicars Garden; this is usually a magnet for migrating birds but on this occasion it was very quiet.

As is often the case for Holy Island there can be lots of things to see or absolutely nothing. We probably picked a day somewhere between the two; but on such a glorious day the scenery was the winner and the wildlife was pretty good too! Here is a list of what was seen:

**Mammals** Grey Seal

**Invertebrates** Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock.

**Flowers** Grass of Parnassus, Centaury, Red Bartsia, Hop Trefoil and Storksbill.

**Birds** Bar Tailed Godwit, Little Egret, Skylark, Swallow, Shelduck, Starling, Linnet, Robin, Blue Tit, Wren, Collared Dove, Willow Warbler, Kestrel, Black Headed Gull, Teal, Lapwing, Mute Swan, Wood Pigeon, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Blackbird, Chiffchaff, Short-eared Owl, Carrion Crow, Meadow Pipit, Goldfinch, Golden Plover, Stonechat, Oystercatcher, Knot, Gannet, Great Black-backed Gull, Cormorant, Pied Wagtail, Grey Heron, Eider Duck, Redshank, Manx Shearwater, Arctic Skua, Wheatear, Rock Pipit, Jackdaw, Herring Gull, Ringed Plover, Wigeon and Goldcrest.

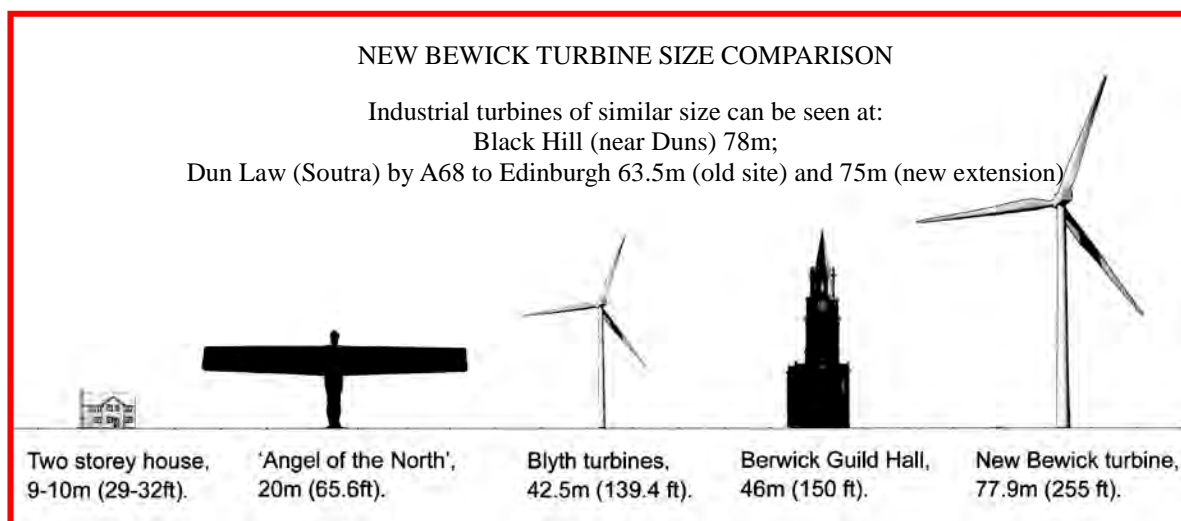
Ian and Keith Davison

## WIND TURBINE APPLICATION

If you've read recent letters in the Northumberland Gazette you may wish to get an idea of the sheer size and landscape impact of the proposed new turbine at New Bewick, just east of the A697 at Wooperton.

We are a local wildlife group. Members may feel that this turbine would seriously detract from our ability to enjoy the wildlife and environment in the Breamish Valley. The National Park has already submitted an objection. If you also feel inclined to add your weight to local objections, then letters should be addressed to:

Andrew Simm, NCC Planning Department, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF and use the reference: Planning Application No: 11/01132/RENE Singlewood Wind Turbine of 50m to hub and 77.9m to tip and associated infrastructure at New Bewick. Objection letters need to be with the planners by mid-October at the latest.



To get a more realistic impression of the effects on the landscape of the Breamish Valley, take a look at page 1 of the latest Glanton Village website at [www.glantononline.net](http://www.glantononline.net)

## PLANT CORNER

If you read botanical journals you periodically come across debates about alien plants and their significance in our habitats. Authors seem to fall into two broad camps – those who regard aliens as an unmitigated “bad thing” and those that think the threat to our native species caused by aliens is much exaggerated. But then you might ask ‘what is an alien anyway? And what’s the difference between an alien and a weed?’

My first species this month appeared as a weed in our vegetable garden in August, or at least that’s when I first spotted it. We keep getting these unexpected and uninvited weeds – last year it was the Many-seeded Goosefoot (*Chenopodium polyspermum*) which I wrote about in one of our newsletters at the time and which has appeared again this summer in greater numbers.

This time it took me a while to identify what it was. Clearly a member of the cabbage family – Brassicaceae – but not one I was familiar with. I eventually decided it had to be **Marsh Yellow-cress** (*Rorippa palustris*). Our specimen is only about 30cm tall and with quite a bushy growth habit. The stems are reddish and grooved. The yellow flowers never look fully open because the sepals are as long as the petals, so the latter



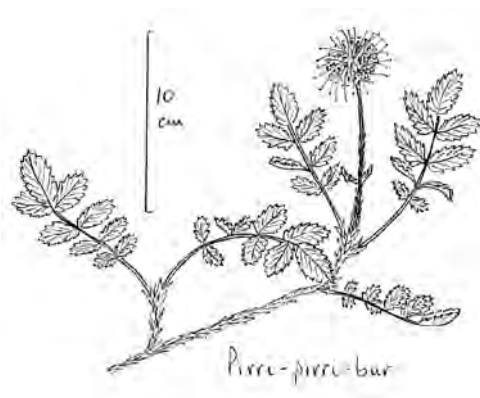
can’t spread as they do in most brassicas. The rather short fruits are quite stocky and curved with a short stout style at the top.



So, a weed. But then it’s certainly an alien in my garden and since its usual habitat is in much wetter places than in our free-draining light soil, perhaps it has

plans to become an invasive alien as the Goosefoot is threatening to do. Incidentally the genus *Rorippa* used to include the watercresses, but they have recently been shifted into the genus *Nasturtium*.

My second species is definitely an alien. **Pirri-pirri-bur** (*Acaena novae-zelandiae*) is a native of New Zealand and Australia. It is assumed to have reached Britain in wool fleeces in the early 1900s. At one stage it seemed to be present in Northumberland in large pestilential numbers only by the coast and particularly on Holy Island. In the early ‘80s it started appearing by forestry tracks in Holystone, but the extent of its spread was brought home to me in mid-August this year when I walked up from Kielder Castle through the forestry to Deadwater Fell. The sides of the forest roads were lined with the stuff, despite efforts of Forestry Commission staff to remove it. It is tough and low growing, tolerant of trampling, with a tendency to carpet suitable habitat and crowd out the native ground flora.



Richard Poppleton.



## SIGHTINGS AUGUST 2011

### BIRDS

Great-crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds all month
Little Egret	1 at Branton Ponds from the 20th
Wigeon	100+ at Fenham Flats on the 14th
Red-breasted Merganser	3 at Howdiemont Sands on the 22nd
Goosander	108 at Bamburgh on the 6th
Sparrowhawk	1 at Branton on the 16th
Peregrine	1 at Chevington on the 22nd
Marsh Harrier	1 (probable) at Allerdean on the 9th also 1 at Druridge on the 9th
Osprey	2 at Fenham Flats on the 14th and 1 at Smeafield on the 13th (with fish - possibly a Mullet)
Red Grouse	3 at Elsdon on the 6th
Quail	4 at Shoreswood on the 9th
Grey Partridge	19 at Allerdean on the 9th
Water Rail	1 at Druridge Pools on the 12th
Ringed Plover	50 at Low Hauxley on the 20th
Golden Plover	500 at Holy Island on the 24th
Black-tailed Godwit	3 at Monks House Pool on the 6th also 2 at Cresswell on the 20th
Bar-tailed Godwit	85 at Elwick on the 14th
Snipe	3 at Branton on the 17th
Curlew	550 at Elwick on the 14th
Greenshank	2 at Cresswell Ponds on the 12th
Spotted Redshank	2 at Druridge Pools on the 9th and 12th
Ruff	1 at Druridge Pools on the 9th, 5 at Cresswell Pond on the 20th and 1 on the 12th
Whimbrel	1 at Long Nanny on the 8th, 1 at Branton on the 16th and 26 at Elwick on the 14th
Sanderling	4 at Guile Point on the 14th, 2 at Low Hauxley on the 20th and 20 at Holy Island on the 24th
Turnstone	15 at Howdiemont Sands on the 22nd
Arctic Skua	1 at Bamburgh on the 6th and 2 at Low Newton on the 8th
Sandwich Tern	1 at Branton Ponds on the 10th
Roseate Tern	1 at Low Newton on the 8th
Swift	8 at Allerdean on the 9th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds all month and 2 on the River Breamish on the 29th
Grey Wagtail	1 at Smeafields on the 31st
Yellow Wagtail	2 at Elsdon on the 6th, 6 at Cresswell Ponds on the 12th and 4 at Howdiemont Sands on the 22nd
Pied Wagtail	15 at Howdiemont Sands on the 22nd
Redstart	1 at Branton on the 15th
Whitethroat	6 at Newbiggin on the 20th
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Craster on the 26th
Garden Warbler	1 at Smeafield on the 6th and 31st
Willow Tit	1 at Craster on the 26th
Raven	7 over Cheviot Summit on the 22nd
Siskin	12 at Swarland on the 29th
House Sparrow	200 at Elwick on the 23rd
Yellow hammer	2 at Smeafields on the 9th

### MAMMALS

Red Squirrel	1 at Yearle all month and 1 at Jocky's Bridge on the 31st
Hedgehog	1 at Yearle on the 21st and 1 at Swarland on the 27th
Stoat	1 at Yearle on the 26th
Weasel	1 at Akeld on the 27th
Roe Deer	Female with 2 young at Smeafield on the 10th

### FLOWERS

Round-leaved Sundew	Elsdon on the 6th
Bog Asphodel	Elsdon on the 6th
Grass of Parnassus	Holy Island on the 24th

### INVERTEBRATES

Large Heath	3 at Elsdon on the 6th
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Small Heath	2 at Elsdon on the 6th
Small Copper	1 at Elsdon on the 6th
Wall Brown	6 at Seahouses on the 20th and 1 at Smeafield on the 5th
Peacock	1 at Yearle on the 23rd and up to 3 at Smeafield on the 1st to 6th
Small Tortoiseshell	1 at Yearle on the 23rd, 2 on the 31st and 6 at Smeafield on the 6th
Red Admiral	1 at Yearle on the 29th and 1 at Smeafield on the 5th
Ringlet	1 at Smeafield on the 22nd
Southern Hawker	1 female laying eggs at Swarland on the 21st
Old Lady Moth	1 in garage wall at Smeafield Farm (see website for photo)
<b>REPTILES/AMPHIBIANS</b>	
Common Lizard	10 at Elsdon on the 6th
Slow Worm	1 at Branton Ponds on the 20th
Common Toad	1 at Elsdon on the 6th
<b>RAINFALL</b>	109.9mm
<b>OBSERVERS</b>	G&R Bell, I&K Davison, G Dodds, A Keeble, S Reay, M Rolley, D Taylor.

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

**ALNWICK WILDLIFE GROUP - Final Accounts for 2010**

**NOTES**

**RECEIPTS**

Subscriptions and pay-at-the-door	£1,100.00
Mannings store sponsorship	£50.00
Northumberland Estates survey payment	£400.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,550.00</b>

**PAYMENTS**

Insurance premium	£110.00
Website maintenance	£58.74
Hire of Hall (8 @ £50)	£400.00
Speakers' expenses (3 @ £50)	£150.00
Projector stand purchase	£64.99
Room hire for Committee mtgs (4 @ £16)	£64.00
Newsletter costs	£251.40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,099.13</b>

8 meetings - Nov 2010 was snowed off  
 Only 3 speakers claimed expenses  
 New committee required 4 meetings

Bank balance (incl. float) at 1 January 2010	£980.43
Add receipts	£1,550.00
	<b>£2,530.43</b>
Less payments	£1,099.13
<b>Balance at 31 December 2010</b>	<b>£1,431.30</b>

£1406.43 in bank and £25.00 in float

*The increase in balances held is largely due to the small number of speakers who claimed expenses (£300 saved) plus the loss of one meeting due to the weather (£50 saved), plus the extra £50 sponsorship income*

*I have examined the records of income and expenditure presented to me, including an explanation of the activities of the group. I believe this summary to be an accurate record of the financial activities of this group.*

*Norman Duncanson  
 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011*

# Hanmer & Wood Owl Boxes 'RESULTS'

Year	2006 (4 records)	2007 (15 records)	2008 (19 records)	2009 (28 records)	2010 (29 records)	2011 (19 records)
Nesting attempts	22%	30%	22%	27%	22%	15%
Successful nesting	17%	24%	14%	25%	18%	15%
Average eggs per clutch	4	5	4	5	4	4
% eggs hatched	44%	59%	53%	69%	68% (73)	96% (66)
Average number hatched	2	3	2	3	3	4
Number of pulli fledged per nest	1	2	1	3	2	3
Percentage of eggs fledged (& ringed)	25% (4)	42% (33)	32% (24)	59% (74)	55% (59)	87% (60)
When eggs were mostly laid	Second half of April	First half of April	Second half of May	Second half of May but some earlier.	April & May & June	April to mid May
Weather	Slightly above average temperatures in April; which continued into the summer.	Exceptionally warm April temperatures but followed by above average rainfall which continued into the summer.	Coldest April since 2001 and above average rainfall; the weather deteriorated further in June, coldest since 2001; and the rainfall increased to be above long term averages by July & August.	Warmer, dryer and sunnier than average in April & May; June was warmer and dryer than average. A better summer than 2007 & 2008.	Heavy snow in late winter & early spring.	Heavy snow in early Winter (Nov & Dec 2010)

## BARN OWL BREEDING SEASON 2011:

The heavy snow in November and December 2010 caused the death of many adult Barn Owls in the winter, particularly inland (west of the A1); suggested that 2011 would be a very bad year for nesting Barn Owls. However, as the attached figures show it was not as bad as it might have been expected. To get a complete picture it would be necessary to add together data from all nesting sites in Northumberland but what is indicated from this study is that because the weather was unusually good in the early spring and there was a plentiful supply of food (voles) the adult owls that had survived started to nest early.

These surviving adults were mostly 'resident' in the coastal strip or close to it (e.g. near Alnwick) and laid eggs in April or early May and hatching an unusually high percentage of eggs and raising most to fledging.

Only one nest was successful in the 'Netherwitton' area; and only two in 'Glendale'.

As well as the usual problem with Jackdaws - competition for nest sites was observed between Kestrels & owls.

### Successful nests were near:

'Lindisfarne' 2	Alnwick 2	Fallowdon	Howick	Craster 2
Warkworth	Lesbury 2	Lee Moor	Longhoughton 2	Amble
'Netherwitton'	'Glendale' 2	(& Acklington)		