

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



REVIEW OF FEBRUARY 2012

NEWSLETTER 126

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

email: redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY 25TH APRIL 7.30P.M

TERNs AND THE NATIONAL TRUST SPEAKER: KEVIN REDGRAVE

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN APRIL

Spring is well on its way. Bumblebees and butterflies are already on the wing eagerly visiting suitable plants in flower. Flowering willows attract the greatest attention and up to six species of bumblebees and three species of butterfly can be found on some south facing bushes in warm sunshine. Frogs and toads are also on the move and are very apparent crossing roads on damp / wet nights. In places, water levels are very low and some sites are dry. These amphibians may try to search out other sites but most will retreat to damp habitats such as woodlands and may not breed this year.

In badgers' setts and foxes' dens, new cubs are being tended to by their mothers. It will be a number of weeks before these young animals will venture out of their respective homes. Badgers give birth, to two or three cubs, anytime between January and late March depending on weather conditions. Foxes give birth to short black-coated cubs in March and early April. The cubs of both species do not venture out of their underground homes until late April or early May.

The spring bird migration has started with the first chiffchaffs and sand martins starting to appear. The chiffchaff is one of the earliest migrants to start singing in our woodlands. Its characteristic chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff song resonates from suitable areas of woodland or scrub especially where there are areas of willow, hawthorn or birch. Its cousin the willow warbler will start to appear towards the end of April in similar habitats to the chiffchaff. These two species can be difficult to tell apart in the field with the exception of their song and leg colour: chiffchaffs tend to have black legs and willow warblers are pale pink yellow. The willow warbler's song is a melodic rippling phrase that rises quickly before slowly dying away. It is almost unique amongst birds in that it moults all of its feathers twice in a year, on the breeding grounds and again in its wintering areas.

In upland areas, golden plover are starting to gather on suitable pastures, their plaintive calls and song are an indication that spring is starting to arrive in moorland areas. The speckled golden brown mantle and dark brown front and belly fringed with white makes this bird one of the stunning species of upland Northumberland. As birds arrive in the uplands, they gather on suitable pastures. These pastures are often traditional gathering areas that have been used for decades. Pair bonds are reaffirmed on these pastures before they commute back and forth to their breeding grounds on blanket bogs. The first eggs are laid in late April. It was a question about the flight speed of golden plover that prompted Sir Hugh Beaver (then Chairman of the brewery) to found the Guinness Book of Records in 1955.

Hopefully the weather will be suitable to enjoy the sights and sounds of this time of year. *Jack Daw*

SISKIN REPORT PHIL HANMER

The last time there were good numbers at my site near Lemmington Hall, Alnwick, Northumberland, was on the 21st Aug 2011. On that day I supervised a Trainee ringing some 40 birds, mostly 3J Siskins. Then over the next few days every single Siskin disappeared from the area, with none remaining on the feeders. I then did not see a Siskin here until two turned up on a feeder on the 11/2/2012! On the 3/3/12 I caught and ringed a single new Siskin (along with 35 other birds, Tresp, Chaff and Tits). On the 4th March I counted 7 Siskins on feeders in some bad weather. At the time of writing there are two on a feeder.

This is all very unusual at this site.

So the end of 2011 and so far in 2012 its been a very poor Siskin year.

MEETING OF WEDNESDAY 29TH FEBRUARY 2012

An audience of 41 gathered on Leap Year Day and passed round George's specimens: a YTree Sparrow, doing well in our area despite the national decline; a Manx Shearwater skull from North Uist (UK has >90% of the world's breeding population); the carapace of a Squat Lobster; a twig of Grey Willow with catkins just opening – a favourite food source for early bumblebee queens.

There were plenty of audience sightings (too many to record here) and then the speaker, Blánaid O'Connell from RSPB spoke on *Farmland birds and the Kielder Ospreys*.

75% of the UK is farmed and the RSPB tries to engage with all types of farmer. 23,000 ha of RSPB-owned land has some form of farming and RSPB owns several farms. Over the last 50 years farmland birds have declined by 40%, although the different key species have varied widely in their success and not all parts of the country are alike. Reasons are all based on changes in farming methods: loss of mixed farms; use of pesticides and herbicides; decline in spring cropping; loss of fields left in stubble; grassland 'improvement'; loss of hedges; land drainage schemes; predation encouraged by reduction in cover. The CAP is much to blame, although more recent stewardship schemes are improving things.

The RSPB's Hope Farm in Cambridgeshire shows what can be achieved. In the 11 years since its purchase farm birds have increased by >200% and with improved farm profitability. Techniques include Skylark plots in arable fields; good quality wide field margins; wild-bird-seed areas; retention of winter stubbles.

The Osprey story is of extinction in England in 1840 and in Scotland by 1914. Causes were the fashion industry; egg collecting, persecution by fishing interests and organo-chloride pesticides. Breeding restarted at Loch Garten in 1954 and by 1976 there were 14 pairs. The 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act gave greater protection and by 2001 there were 155 pairs in Scotland. A pair bred at Kielder in 2009 for the first time in 200 years, helped by artificial breeding platforms spattered with white paint to simulate bird droppings. 3 chicks fledged in '09 and another 3 in '10. Last year there were 2 nests but two chicks were lost to severe storms, although a third late hatcher survived and did well.

Ospreys feed solely on fish and can carry up to ⅓ of their body weight in specially adapted talons. They pair for life and are faithful to the same nest site which is added to annually until it can be 'king-sized bed' size. They first breed at 3 – 5 years. Once fledged juveniles can hunt successfully the parents migrate to West Africa and the youngsters must follow later on their own.

Richard Poppleton.

SWARLAND SNAPSHOTS –FEBRUARY 2012

After an unusually quiet spell at the feeding points during the first week, activity returned to the more familiar level expected at this time of year, except for the three common tit species. Greenfinch and Chaffinch formed the largest groups present at any one time, sometimes with at least dozen of each at the more remote of the feeders. Goldfinches were present daily, generally four or five at a time but eleven were counted on the 22nd, along with up to six Lesser Redpolls and occasional Siskins. Curiously these three species appeared to be favouring the feeders closest to the house over those in the more open/woodland location. Bullfinches continue to be regular visitors with fourteen caught this month of which all but four were males, seven Yellowhammers came to a handful of wheat on the 17th and a single female Brambling was present on the 28th.

The number of tits using the feeders has fallen away noticeably, this drop is reflected in the number of birds caught. Blue Tit was the most numerous with 28 caught (17 new birds; 11 retraps) compared to a total of 44 caught in January; Coal Tit was down to 13 caught (5 new; 8 retraps) against a total of 48 in January; Great Tit was just 3 new birds versus a total of 15 in January (8 new birds; 7 retraps). This change in activity may well be an indication of an early start to breeding behaviour, as Blue Tits were observed inspecting a nestbox on the 18th and the following day another box in a Great Tit territory was found to already contain some fresh moss. The only other tit activity was a flock of at least 15 Long-tailed Tit on the 7th.

Dunnocks began singing on the 3rd of the month and were joined by Chaffinches on the 5th, a Blue Tit was singing on the 12th (both Coal and Great Tits having begun in January), The first Song Thrush was heard on 27th whilst both Mistle Thrush was singing and Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming on the 28th.

A single flock of 150 Pink-footed Geese flew north on the 17th, otherwise there has been no sign of any other of the familiar "winter" species here. Sightings of raptors have been sparse, a Buzzard flew out of a spinney on the 7th at Old Swarland, a Kestrel occasionally hunted along the roadside verges and following a brief encounter with a mist-net a female Sparrowhawk spent five minutes in a tree rearranging her displaced plumage before setting off to find less hindered hunting ground.

Dave Makepeace.

BEYOND THE BORDER FEBRUARY 2012

Environmental pressures are, unfortunately, seldom far away and the proposed expansion of Wind Farms in the Scottish Borders returned to the news. You only have to visit certain vantage points within the Southern Uplands to realise just how many masts now exist and sometimes it is possible for the view to consist of a massive arc of turbines as one site seems to almost merge with the next. The masts are often a controversial topic of discussion. Some people see them as the most sensible source of much-needed power – and jobs – whilst others express concern at the blot on the landscape, the possibility of birds and bats being sucked in and the damage caused (by turbine-foundations + access roads) to the often fragile upland habitat.

Many-zoned Polypore (*Trametes versicolor*) – also known as Turkeytail – is a fungus which can be found all year but fresh fruiting bodies were noticed at a number of sites during February. These included the old railway-line near Galashiels (13th) and riverside woodland at Darnick (nr. Melrose/21st). It is a common species, but, nevertheless a rather attractive one. Rotting logs and stumps support tiers of brackets which are concentrically coloured with shade of black, brown, gold, grey and purple – hence the (Bronze) Turkey's tail.



Common Whitlow-grass (*Erophilla verna*) is a minute 'Crucifer' with tiny, deeply-cleft white petals. It was growing on the Battery Dyke at Melrose (Feb.21).

Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*) was also there (flowering on the same date)

and alongside grew **Sweet Violet** (*Viola odorata*) but although an early plant it was not quite in bloom. **White Butterbur** (*Petasites albus*) which smells of Vanilla grew on the verge of the main A68 road just NW of Lauder (27th) and the coastal haunt of Cove had the most impressive show of **Coltsfoot** (*Tussilago farfara*) with over two hundred spikes open in the sun (Feb.28). A great many wonderful **Snowdrop** (*Galanthus nivalis*) shows continued throughout the month but Bemersyde House (nr. St. Boswells/14th) had massive and exceptional displays.

A few invertebrates began to appear and amongst them were 3 **Common Pond Skaters** (*Gerris lacustris*). They were found near Airhouse (Oxton/27th) but being extremely common hundreds more will probably soon appear as temperatures rise. A **Stem Sawfly** (probably=*Cephus pygamaeus*) sought the warmth of a car parked in sunshine near Dowlaw (Coldingham/28th) despite the fact that it is not supposed to appear for several more months! The first of the 2012 **Seven-spot Ladybirds** (*Coccinella 7-punctata*) adopted similar behaviour that same day. A few **Common Wasps** (*Vespula vulgaris*) and **Bumblebees** (*Bombus sp.*) appeared in coastal areas during late-February.

The new fishing season for **Atlantic Salmon** commenced on February 1st although upstream movement along the River Tweed had been noticed throughout the winter months. Wet conditions on the night of February 23 triggered the mass-movement of **Common Toads** as they ran the gauntlet of roads to reach their Spring spawning sites. One Berwickshire farm not only has a colony of endangered **Great Crested Newts** but sometimes receive visits from them. I was privileged to be shown a ♀ which (Feb. 25) had entered the sun-lounge of the farmhouse! She was very beautiful – with gritty-textured skin that was jet-black and a sharply contrasting vivid yellow belly. (Do remember that it is a criminal offence to disturb or possess a Great Crested Newt unless lawfully acquired).

Regular sightings of **Little Grebes** were again possible and included a maximum count of 7 on the River Tweed nr. Sprouston (Feb 5). **Fulmars** had returned to their nesting ledges and about 55 were occupying the cliffs at Cove (Feb 28). A few short lines of **Gannets** occasionally passed Rammel Cove (nr. Coldingham/28th) as some of the birds continued with their return flight – northwards to Bass Rock. A group of 14 **Grey Herons** rested in a stubble field close to Melrose (21st) and there were several gatherings at other riverside haunts with almost as many being seen.

11 **Whooper Swans** fed near Shortacres (Crailing/1st) and there were 6 at Banff Mill (Sprouston/2nd) but they dispersed thereafter. Most **Mute Swans** had formed into pairs by the end of February (although several sizeable herds remained on the haughs to the west of Coldstream). Minor scuffles regularly broke out as cobs chased off potential rivals and last year's 'ugly ducklings' which are no longer tolerated.

I was fortunate to obtain additional views of the ♂ **Pintail** when this bird obliged by remaining on the Tweed at Sprouston (Feb 19+24). **Wigeon** also frequented that same river but Bemersyde Moss Reserve (nr. St. Boswell's/14th) attracted 70+ despite it having 60% ice-cover. As additional 140+ on Whitrig Bog nr. Smailholm (Feb 14). **Teal/Mallard/Tufted Duck/Goldeneye** and **Goosanders** often fed within the area and numerous examples of courtship behaviour were noted.



I sat at Scott's View (Bemersyde/14th) eating my lunch amongst the relative shelter of **Gorse** (*Ulex europaeus*) bushes and had a **Peregrine** fly low over me whilst there. On another occasion I was turning to leave an almost deserted beach at Pease Bay (nr. Cockburnspath/28th) when a Peregrine flew SE across the sand and sea. A **Red-legged Partridge** was present near Anton's Hill (Leitholm/28th) whilst pairs of **Grey Partridge** could be seen and heard on

many Borders farms.

There were instances of **Lapwings** returning to their breeding grounds during February but most remained in flocks and these included 60+ near Easter Hendersyde (Kelso/2nd) and 200+ at Wiselawmill (Addinston, Lauderdale/27th). A **Woodcock** was flushed from alongside (Roman) Dere Street near Jedburgh on the 1st of the month and next day there were singles near Leitholm and Hunthall (Fogo, Duns). Another bird which remained fairly loyal to its chosen wintering site (below Coldstream + Kelso road) was the **Green Sandpiper** with its presence recorded on February 2nd, 5th and 19th.

Reports were received of 4 **Iceland Gulls** which were said to be associating with 4000+ **Herring Gulls** close to Galashiels. Mixed flocks apparently moved back and forth between Langlee Rubbish Tip and Tweedbank Pond with the former species quite easily spotted as they had such snowy-white plumage. I encountered just one **Barn Owl** north of the border – near Rutherford (Maxton/Feb 16). **Tawny Owls** were sometimes heard but good views were possible (Feb 2) of a lone bird near Nisbet House, Gavinton. **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** continued their territorial ‘drumming’ with the 2 seen and heard in Duns Castle Reserve (28th) being just one of many instances during February.

A **Skylark** was in full song near Third (St. Boswells/14th) and that, again, was a sound much heard – and savoured – thereafter. There were instances when **Grey Wagtails** could be seen back in their future breeding territories and amongst these sightings was one beside Jed Water (Jedburgh/1st) and another along the River Tweed near Newstead (Melrose/21st). A relatively short stretch of the Jed Water supported 7 **Dippers** in/close to the town (Feb 1) and there were smaller numbers on sections of Gala Water, the River Blackadder (Greenlaw) and the Tweed (Melrose, Benrig etc.). Another flew downstream past Sprouston (Feb 26) and with the area not being suitable Dipper-habitat it was presumably off in search of a potential new territory.

The first pair of **Robins** were seen behaving amicably on February 9 whereas in previous weeks ♂’s and ♀’s would have squabbled aggressively. (That’s the result of the ♀’s taking on ♂ hormones during the mid-winter period.) **Fieldfares** were absent until February 4 when snow drove a flock of 40+ into my garden. A further 10+ appeared at Lurdenlaw (nr. Kelso/Feb 16). It was whilst wandering in the grounds of Duns Castle (28th) I thought I’d heard a few notes being uttered by a Tawny Owl and so paused to investigate. They turned out to be created by the mimicry of a **Song Thrush**! A pair of **Treecreepers** ascended the near-parallel trunks of the same **Alder** (*Alnus glutinosa*) tree nr. Redden (19th) and produced near-perfect synchronised movements.

All my sightings of **Ravens** were restricted to the 28th when I witnessed one near Edin’s Hall Broch (Lammermuir Hills), one above the cliffs nr. Dowlaw and a pair nr. Cambus (Cockburnspath). There was much activity at a rookery above Abbey Green (Kelso/13th) and Rooks congregated at many other traditional sites thereafter. I had seen 150+ **Linnets** in a game-plot at Lempitlaw during December and returned to the site (Feb 3) to discover that 220+ were now in residence. **Greenfinches** produce a wheezing sound each Spring and I first noted that at Galashiels (Feb 13).

Grey Squirrels have certainly spread out across the area and (Feb 27) I disturbed one beside the remote upland setting of Channelkirk Church (Lauderdale). **Brown Hare** sightings consisted of 1-3 animals with the exception of Feb 23 when a group of 5 were spotted near Kerchesters. It was at that same location (Feb 17) that I found a **Stoat** in full ermine.

I had been making my way alongside a stretch of wooded riverbank beside Galawater (Feb 13) and was watching a ♀ Goosander slowly drifting downstream towards me. The river was neither very wide nor very deep at this point. Having come to within twenty-five yards from me the bird suddenly shot skywards amidst noisy panic. It was at that very moment (1042hrs) that something akin to a prehistoric monster lurched up from the depths; it was an adult **Otter**. I’d seen nothing



beforehand and so was completely unprepared. (It almost made me choke on the coffee I was drinking from my flask!) With the Goosander gone the Otter then proceeded to fling itself down into the water, before surfacing and repeating this energetic plunge (at the identical location) seven or eight times. My knowledge of the ecology of Gala Water is, so far, very limited and so I do not know what likely prey was hidden on the stony riverbed. A probableholt was noticed close by.

ROGER MANNING.

ALNWICK WILDLIFE GROUP BIRD SURVEYS

Currently, members of AWG are carrying out two bird surveys on behalf of Northumberland Estates. The aims are to try to find out what effect the estates' management may be having on the local wild bird population. Gamekeepers and wildlife enthusiasts don't always see eye to eye, so it's refreshing to be asked to survey the areas where they are working and see the results for ourselves. Shooting interests have always had a strong influence on the development of our countryside, with woodland planting, moorland management and game keeping. I can understand that the control of predators is not always easily acceptable but I believe that a good balance can be achieved. Carrion Crows, as one example, do a great deal of damage to many species at nesting time as do Foxes with ground nesters.

The first survey (Northumberland Estates' Bird Survey; NEBS) has just completed its fifth year and covers five areas in the Alnwick Moor district. Here an attempt is being made to increase the numbers of Red Grouse to a point where some sustainable shooting would be possible. Habitat improvements are being made by providing more reliable water and grit supplies and by heather burning to produce younger, more nutritious feed, along with some predator control.

Five visits per year are made to each of these areas and counts made of all birds seen or heard. The main interest is directed at a list of the commonest moorland species which are most likely to be affected by game keeping. This includes, Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Curlew, Lapwing and about twenty others which we call the "target" species. There is a reasonable number of Red Grouse on the area of heather moorland inside Hulne Park and by improving the condition of the heather in other areas outside the Duke's wall, it is hoped that they will spread there. This process has already started and small counts of Grouse are now being made across the Post Office Pylon and on to the Black Clough area. The survey will continue for some time before it may be possible to draw any useful conclusions.

The second survey is carried out on Lesbury Fieldhouse and Townfoot, two of the lowland farms on the Estate, which are part of their Grey Partridge scheme. This is aimed at increasing the numbers of Grey Partridge, and has been working for about ten years and proving to be very successful. More farms are being added each year so that it now covers a large area. Members of AWG make six visits each year to these two farms, which have recently been included in the scheme. The "target" species here are those most commonly found in a mainly arable farming area and include Blackbird, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer, Linnet, Tree Sparrow etc.

Fieldhouse farm is of special interest as it includes a large part of an old airfield where there are no hedges, trees or shelter of any kind, which makes it attractive to various species of waders wintering on the east coast. Skylarks are here in good numbers, Lapwing and Meadow Pipits all breed and just possibly, we may see Corn Bunting returning to the area. Many of the birds included in our target species are on the national endangered list, their numbers having reduced considerably in the last few years. It would be satisfying if it were possible to show that they were benefiting from the same management that is helping Grey Partridge and Red Grouse. Both farms are in Agricultural Environment Schemes, which means that hedges and field boundaries are being managed in a more wildlife friendly way, and some areas are sown down to crops specifically for bird feed and shelter. A further area is to be sown to permanent grass for the benefit wintering waders.

Some data from our survey is being used by Natural England. It is gratifying to know that it already has value. For anyone who is interested in the surveys and may wish to join our group of volunteers, the skills necessary are not too great, although we record all the birds we see, the target species are the commoner birds which are well known to most observers. The routes we walk on Alnwick moor are more demanding, with some long heather to contend with, but walking on the lowland farms is easier. If you ask them, I'm sure you will find that our group of volunteers enjoy doing the surveys and find it satisfying too. Northumberland Estates make an annual contribution to the group, which is helping to improve our finances.

Jim Clark.

Howick February 2012 Highlights.

No dramatic weather this month. The 'average' breezy, cool winter looks set to continue.

On 4th a female **Blackcap** was a new arrival to the feeders in the garden where it lingered with up to **20+ Tree Sparrows, 2 Great Spotted Woodpeckers** and the usuals.

Three **Meadow Pipits** and a **Pied Wagtail** were the first ones this year in the village on 5th. On the shore at the burn mouth were **3 Grey Plover, 15 Knot, 8 Goldeneye and 9 Purple Sandpiper**. A lone **Pale bellied Brent Goose** was on top of the Rumbling Kern and a young **Grey Seal** was sunning on the rocks..

On 11th a **Great Crested Grebe** on the sea from the Bathing House was the first I've seen here. 2 male **Sparrowhawks** hunted together through the village. An **Early Moth** (that's its name!) was on our door.

The 16th was mild pleasant day. **Grey Wagtail** was a year first in the village, **90 Pink footed Geese** flew north and 3 **Hérons** were active at the heronry near the pond. A **Red Chestnut** was in the moth trap.

Four or more **Redwings** were at the Old Rectory on 17th.

The 21st produced my first **Toads** of the year when I rescued 4 from the Howick Lane End at dusk as they crossed the road. 2 -3 **Pipistrelles** were flying around at the same time.

A fine morning on 25th produced 3 **Crossbills** west over the garden, 32 **Curlews** in the back field and a pair of **Roe deer** in village wood, the buck being in velvet.

A walk from home up to the Hips Heugh on 28th was good for birds of prey with **4 Buzzards** being mobbed by a **Peregrine** while 3 **Kestrels** squabbled for territory in the woods. A pair of **Reed Buntings** were in the hedgerow, but the rarest sighting of late was a **Greenfinch** on our peanuts. This bird has declined dramatically in our area in recent years.

A very warm afternoon on 28th had me checking a flowering Sallow in the village wood. It was covered in hundreds of **honey bees** with one **Buff tailed Bumblebee**. A **Red Admiral** was sunning nearby, the first sign of true spring to come.



Pale bellied Brent Goose,
Rumbling Kern, Howick.



Common Toad, Pond Field, Howick.

Plant Corner

On Holy Island last week there were already one or two dandelions in flower. In a Plant Corner article I wrote in 2001 I included dandelions (*Taraxacum* spp.) and I did a composite drawing (botanical pun!) of what I believed was a representative selection of four 'types' of dandelion (see right). But that was before I met John Richards, the retired Botany Professor from Newcastle and national dandelion expert. I then bought his book (see below for details) and went on a dandelion field trip with him. As a result I now realize that Taraxacology is a complex and fascinating area of botanical study. I shall risk quoting from the introduction to John's book:



Everyone knows what a dandelion looks like, but how do you tell them apart? Most botanists know that a select, or perhaps, rather, a self-selecting coterie [of botanists] recognize hundreds of 'microspecies' of Taraxacum. We suspect that most other botanists think they are mad.

Mad or not I thought it was worthwhile taxing your little grey cells with a bit of dandelion information this month. If there are so many microspecies of dandelions, why not of most other plant genera? The answer lies in the phenomenon of *Apomixis* – the process of producing seeds without sexual fertilization, which happens in dandelions. This means that unless there is a rare advantageous non-sexual mutation, the seedlings will be exact genetic copies of the mother plant and because dandelion seeds have a most effective wind-borne dispersal mechanism these identical offspring are quite likely to spread to other locations where conditions are favourable.



In Britain there are about 150 of these microspecies. Identifying them firstly requires that you get to them in the fortnight or so early in the season when they are in full, fresh flower – not, for example, when semi-diseased and stressed specimens make yet another attempt to flower after you've mown them off in your lawn for the tenth time in the middle of August. When you've got a good specimen you need to look at such factors as spotting or blotching on the leaves; the colour of the leaf midrib; the colour of the leaf stalk (petiole); the sizes, shapes and arrangements of the leaf lobes; whether the bracts on the outside of the flower clusters are pressed close or reflexed back.



Realistically, once you've noted all these features, you need to go to a copy of *Dandelions of Great Britain and Ireland* by Dudman & Richards (BSBI Handbook No 9) and try to follow the keys to get to the specimen you are holding. Looking at the photos of the three specimens scattered about in this article you can see, even if just from the leaf shapes, that they are quite different. If anyone is inspired to go dandelion hunting this spring – good luck!

	SIGHTINGS FEBRUARY 2012
BIRDS	
Little Grebe	1 at Branton Ponds on the 24 th , 2 on the Tweed Estuary on the 6 th , 4 at Carham on the 19 th , 1 at Warkworth on the 17 th , 2 on the River Breamish on the 3 rd
Red-necked Grebe	2 at Holy Island on the 25 th
Slavonian Grebe	5 off Stag Rock on the 25 th , 1 off Seahouses on the 23 rd
Fulmar	6 Ness End (Holy Island) on the 11 th
Grey Heron	20 on the Tweed Estuary on the 6 th
Brent Goose	200 at the Rocket Field (Holy Island) on the 11 th , 1200 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , 200 at Holy Island on the 25 th
Pink-footed Goose	1800 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , 90+ at East Chevington on the 17 th , 150 at Swarland on the 17 th
Bean Goose	1 at Budle Bay on the 27 th
Barnacle Goose	300 at Budle Bay on the 2 nd
Canada Goose	105 at Hedgeley Ponds on the 3 rd
Greylag Goose	257 on the Tweed Estuary on the 6 th , 85 at Hedgeley Ponds on the 3 rd
White-fronted Goose	9 near Elwick Hide on the 12 th , 100 at Budle Bay on the 2 nd
Long-tailed Duck	2 at Guile Point on the 12 th
Common Scoter	60 off Stag Rock on the 16 th
Gadwall	4 at Hadston on the 17 th
Eider	148 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th
Goldeneye	12 at Branton Ponds on the 7 th , 4 at East Chevington on the 29 th
Teal	35 on the River Breamish on the 3 rd
Tufted Duck	47 at Hedgeley Ponds on the 3 rd
Smew	1 at East Chevington on the 17 th
Wigeon	800+ at Budle Bay on the 7 th
Pochard	3 at Branton Ponds on the 23 rd , 4 at Branton Ponds on the 27 th
Shelduck	1 at Branton Ponds on the 7 th , 154 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , a pair at Branton Ponds on the 17 th and 7 at Branton Ponds on the 23 rd
Peregrine	1 at Branton Ponds on the 21 st , 1 on Holy Island causeway on the 25 th , 1 at Embleton on the 7 th , 1 at Harehope Farm on the 20 th and 21 st
Goshawk	2 at Holystone on the 26 th
Red Grouse	21 at the Post Office Pylon on the 6 th
Grey Partridge	20 at Ratcheugh Farm on the 24 th
Water Rail	1 at the Lough (Holy Island) on the 11 th
Woodcock	1 at Howick on the 7 th , 4 at Ratcheugh Farm on the 28 th
Curlew	123 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , 5 on the River Breamish on the 3 rd
Oystercatcher	457 at Guile Point on the 12 th , 15 at Branton Ponds on the 17 th
Greenshank	1 at Budle Bay on the 2 nd and 16 th
Grey Plover	32 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , 200 at Budle Bay on the 2 nd
Redshank	90+ on the Tweed Estuary on the 6 th
Knot	700 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , 300 at Budle Bay on the 2 nd
Sanderling	42 at Fenham Flats on the 12 th , 420+ at Berwick on the 6 th , 6 at Druridge Bay on the 17 th
Iceland Gull	1 at North Shields Fish Quay on the 18 th

Woodpigeon	1400 at Ratcheugh Farm on the 24 th
Barn Owl	1 near Chatton on the 10 th , 1 at Branton Ponds on the 12 th , 1 on the Straight Lonnon(Holy Island) on the 25 th , 1 near Colwell on the 8 th , 1 near Edlingham on the 23 rd
Tawny Owl	1 all month at Branton Ponds;1 near Belford on the 10 th
Short-eared Owl	5 near the Black Lough on the 6 th ,1 Holy Island on the 11 th
Kingfisher	1 all month at Branton Ponds
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1 at Newton on the Moor on the 4 th and 1 at Swarland on the 28 th
Grey Wagtail	1 at Holystone on the 26 th
Dipper	2 on the River Breamish on the 3 rd
Fieldfare	11 at Branton on the 4 th , 40+ at Middle Ord on the 6 th
Redwing	70+ at Berwick on the 6 th
Marsh Tit	1 at Weldon Bridge on the 6 th
Raven	1 over Branton on the 23 rd , 2 at Holystone on the 26 th 1 at Hulne Moor on the 7 th , 2 at Harehope Hillend on the 1 st
Jackdaw	600 at Branton Ponds on the 20 th , 42 at Swarland on the 29 th
Jay	4 at Harwood on the 26 th , 1 at Hulne Moor on the 7 th
Tree Sparrow	22 at Ratcheugh Farm on the 28 th
Greenfinch	Up to 20 at Swarland all month
Goldfinch	11 at Swarland on the 22 nd
Bullfinch	Up to 9 at Swarland on the 7 th , 14 at the Post Office Pylon on the 6 th
Brambling	5 at Branton on the 8 th , 1 at Swarland on the 28 th and up to 20 at Swarland all month
Linnet	150 at Branton on the 8 th
Twite	20+ in Cresswell Dunes on the 7 th
Siskin	Up to 10 in Swarland all month
Crossbill	20+ in Harwood Forest on the 26 th
Yellowhammer	7 at Swarland on the 17 th 80 at Ratcheugh Farm on the 24 th
MAMMALS	
Otter	2 on the River Breamish near Hedgeley on the 1 st
Fox	1 near Chatton on the 10 th , 1 at East Kylee on the 17 th , 2 at Newton on the Moor during the first part of the month
Badger	1 during the first week of the month at Newton on the Moor
Stoat	1 at Branton on the 11 th ,1 on Holy Island(in full ermine) on the 25 th , 2 in full ermine near Chatton on the 17 th , 1 in part ermine near Chathill on the 18 th
Red Squirrel	1 at Newton on the Moor on the 16 th
Roe Deer	3 at Branton Middlesteads on the 28 th
Fallow Deer	6 on Hulne Moor on the 7 th
Feral Goat	A total of 12 in the Old Yeavinger /Yeavinger Bell area on the 7 th and 15 on Yeavinger Bell on the 23 rd
REPTILES	
Adder	1 at Branton Ponds on the 21 st and 3 on the 24 th
AMPHIBIANS	
Frog	Frogspawn in ditch in Harwood Forest on the 26 th
Common Toad	500+ between Kirknewton and Mindrum on the 23 rd , 1 at Bamburgh on the 28 th
Common Lizard	1 in Bamburgh Dunes on the 27 th

PLANTS	
Coltsfoot	At Branton Ponds on the 20 th
INVERTEBRATES	
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	1 at Branton Ponds on the 22 nd
Small Tortoiseshell	1 at Branton on the 28 th
Ladybird(7 spot)	1 at Swarland on the 28 th
OBSERVERS	J&E Clark, I&K Davison, G Dodds, M Edgell, A Keeble, D Makepeace, R Manning, R&J Muggeridge, H Tindle, B Welch, S Webster.

Please send sightings reports for March, no later than 6th April to: Ian & Keith Davison, The Bungalow, Branton, Powburn, NE66 4LW or Tel: 01665 578 357 or email to redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk
Copies of the monthly Newsletter and sightings will be made available on the web site one month after the paper publication.