

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



REVIEW OF JULY 2013

NEWSLETTER 143

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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NEXT MEETING – INCLUDING AGM: SEPTEMBER 25TH, 2013 AT 7.30P.M.

‘World of Lichens’ Speaker: Janet Simpkin.

Janet Simpkin is an Ecological consultant specialising in botanical and lichen surveys, national vegetation classification, biological records, and ecological research.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN SEPTEMBER 2013

A dry spell at the end of August has seen a large reduction in the amount of flowers in the countryside. These have been replaced by colourful ripening fruit such as **Crab Apples**, **Rowan Berries** and **Bilberries** (in the uplands). This colour has been enhanced by migrating butterflies such as **Red Admirals**, **Peacocks**, **Wall Browns** and **Small tortoiseshells**. On the estuaries, mudflats and shallow pools moulting waders such as **Black-tailed Godwits**, **Curlew Sandpipers**, **Knots**, **Grey** and **Golden Plovers** have started to lose their colourful breeding plumage.

Certain insects are noticeable at this time of year. Around the time of the harvest in August onwards the **Craneflies** (or Daddy-long-legs) appear in their greatest numbers and seemingly fly in a haphazard rather inebriated way. The craneflies' legs break off easily as a way of escaping predators (including small boys). The larval stage of this family of insects (there are many species) is known as a *leatherjacket*. It is a destructive maggot-like larva which feeds on cereal and other roots, but which is an important food source for many birds. Craneflies will appear almost anywhere.

There are seven different wasp species in Britain. **Common** and **German Wasps** seemingly suddenly appear in September but this is because their pattern of obtaining food has changed. Their summer past time of killing insects to feed to the larvae in the nest has come to an end (the larvae provide a sweet saliva in return). This is because their queen has now stopped laying eggs and the food incentive has gone. As a result they then move onto other sweet substitutes, such as the sugars of fallen fruit or the jam in your picnic sandwiches. Unfortunately it is now that wasps, with their ability to sting and not die, become particularly unpopular in the garden.

Of the many fungi of note, one that you may smell before you see, is the rather shocking **Stinkhorn**. Follow your nose to seek out this species in the woodlands where it thrives. The rancid smell attracts flies which feed on the sticky tip and carry off the fungus's spores to a new location. A rather more attractive species is the **edible Giant Puffball** which can be found, if you are lucky, littering permanent pastures by the dozen. This species grows to an enormous size and eventually dies to yield its many spores when it is ruptured, maybe by a passing cow!

This is a great time to look for wildlife and you never know what you may find e.g. **Two-barred Crossbill**, **Camberwell Beauty Butterfly** or **Minke Whale**.

Jack Daw

Please send sightings reports for May, no later than 6th September 2013 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.

Howick Notes July 2013

Well at last after several years of wet and cold summers, this year has turned out to be quite a good one, with temps regularly into the 20s with dry settled days.

As is the norm in recent years, moth trapping in the garden and elsewhere took up most of my time this month, the warm weather giving some great catches peaking on **20th** with 816 moths of 117 species giving my best garden day in four years. All taken in one Robinson Moth Trap.

This catch included a nice **Bordered Pug**, a new addition for the garden...



Bordered Pug

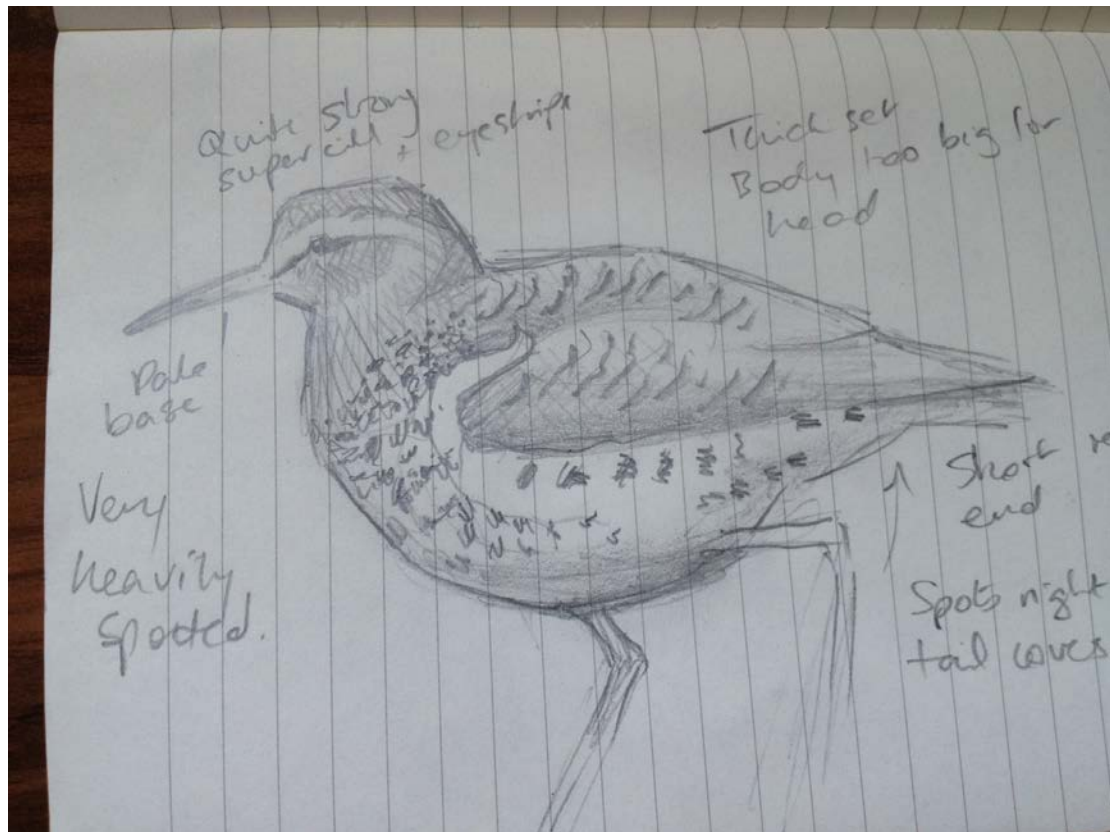
Other noteworthy sightings during the month included, on **1st**, a **Red Squirrel** on our bird feeders briefly early in the morning with 40+ **Swifts** overhead in the evening.

Possible the sighting of the month came on the **7th**, when and hours seawatch from the coast path had 18 **Manx Shearwaters** N 3 **Harbour Porpoise** off Cullernose and one off Howick, a lone **White beaked Dolphin** and to top it off a **Minke Whale!** Seen twice in half an hour, I was amazed that this bus sized animal was not even noticed by people fishing, sailing, out on dinghys etc on a mirror calm sea. This is the first I have seen from Northumberland though I have seen them off the Isle of Skye a couple of years ago.

On **14th**, a **Large Skipper** butterfly was on territory in our garden.

Another seawatch on 20th didn't give any further views of the whale, but I did see 1 **Pomarine Skua**, 1 **Arctic Skua**, 61 **Manx Shearwaters**, 2 **Arctic Terns** and 10 **Common Scoter**.

Social media alerted me to a new bird species for me in Northumberland on 27th when a summer plumaged **Spotted Sandpiper** spent the day at Foxton on the River Aln. It showed very well alongside 5 **Common Sandpipers** and 2 **Greenshank**. This American version of our own Common Sandpiper was decked up more like a Song Thrush than a wader...



Spotted Sandpiper field notes.

On the same day a few of us headed up to Slainsfield Moor near Etal to carry out some moth surveying for a couple of hours. Thanks to Fiona and Maurice Aungiers light set up we caught a very respectable 74 species in only 3 hours. On our way back, a nice **Long eared Owl** posed for a while at point blank range on a gatepost.

Stewart Sexton, Howick

PLANT CORNER

In my update of the Slainsfield Moor survey work I mentioned one or two less usual plants we found and it seems appropriate to say a bit more about them here.



The big pond was rather disappointing, with no pondweeds or other floating vegetation away from the margins. We suspect that as this is probably an old mining subsidence pond it may be quite deep in the middle and so probably too deep for aquatics to root. However, near the edge on the north side were some good patches of **Water-purslane** (*Lythrum portula*). In Swan's *Flora of Northumberland* it is only recorded in six other locations in North Northumberland, so this was a good find. Most incongruously it is in the same genus as Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), a tall, brightly-coloured plant of damp water margins. I've shown pictures of the two side by side so you can be amazed how closely two such dissimilar plants can be related.



Still in wet habitat, but this time in the bottom of a drainage ditch, was **Marsh Speedwell** (*Veronica scutellata*). Many of you will be familiar with the veronicas or speedwells. You may know the common wayside Germander Speedwell or the Slender Speedwell in your lawn, or perhaps you may grow some of the larger garden veronicas which are varieties of the rare wild Spiked Speedwell. But unless you are more botanically inclined you probably won't have come across Marsh Speedwell. It isn't particularly uncommon, but you need to be plodging around in rather acidic pools or wet ditches to find it with its rather attractive small pale lilac flowers. Taking photos of this plant isn't easy because it's rather straggling and other vegetation gets in the way but I hope the picture I've borrowed from the Web will show what it's like.



Most of the Slainsfield site is acid moorland but near the northern edge is a small area of calcium-rich soil whose flora is immediately obviously different. Earlier in the year we found Rock-rose, Wild Thyme and Salad Burnett, plus good quantities of Quaking Grass. Our best surprise in August was the discovery of a patch of 29 flower spikes of a white-flowered form of **Autumn Gentian** (*Gentianella amarella*). There are plenty of records from coastal habitats where calcareous sandy soils are often the norm, but inland in North Northumberland there are only four recorded locations, none of which is at Slainsfield.

Altogether it has been an interesting botanical time at Slainsfield and to have ended up with a list of 154 species from what at first looked like a rather uninspiring moorland – good for grasses, but not very species-rich – is really quite good. I'm sure there'll be a few things we've missed, but not many.

SLAINFIELD MOOR – Update

In the last issue I reported on the first group visit to Slainsfield Moor where AWG is doing a wildlife survey for Lord Joicey at Ford & Etal. Since then there has been quite a lot of new activity.

- 27th July saw seven of us, led by Stewart Sexton, on a moth night on the moor. Stewart had his Robinson light trap and Fiona and Maurice Aungier from Berwick brought both a Robinson trap and a very impressive sheet and lights trap. We set up at about 9.30pm and by 10.00 it was dark enough to start catching. Being by the traps and being bombarded by some big moth like Drinkers, Dark Arches and the larger of the Yellow Underwing moths as they blundered towards the lights was quite an experience – especially for me who had only ever been on two previous moth trapping exercises, neither of which had yielded very much.



The final count seemed amazing to me, 548 moths from 74 species, and I just might remember one or two if I met them again! Included were a couple of rather special micro moths. If you want the full details you'll have to go on to our AWG Blog via the website and look at Stewart's posting from 28 July.



- On 30th July Stephen Block from Berwick and his wife, Sue met me on site. Stephen had chest waders and a pond dipping net and I had a long rope. Thus armed, Stephen spent some time in the edges of the pond taking samples while Richard minded the safety rope and Sue made records. The standouts for me were an adult Great Diving Beetle (an enormous beast which, with its larvae, is the top invertebrate pond predator); several quite advanced Palmate Newt tadpoles plus an adult; quite a bit of an aquatic plant called Water-purslane which is distinctly uncommon in North Northumberland.
- Then most recently on 11th August four of us made a second day trip to add more plants to our list, plus any new birds and anything else that caught our attention. Stephen Block had put down some more of his 'refugia' floor tile and roof felt sheets a couple of weeks earlier, hoping to attract reptiles. Sadly only a single Common Lizard was found, sunning itself on one of the refugia, warmed by the sun.

The plant highlights were a small population of Marsh Speedwell in a wet ditch and a good patch of white-flowered Autumn Gentian. There are more details of both these species in Plant Corner also in this issue. In total our plant list now stands at 154 species with a few good rarities for North Northumberland.

My thanks and that of AWG are due to all who have taken part, especially our partners from the Berwick Wildlife Group. In due course the full report will be available to all our members, either via the website or as paper copies.

Richard Poppleton

SIGHTINGS JULY 2013

BIRDS	
Little Grebe	2 adults and 2 chicks at Branton Ponds from the 7 th
Manx Shearwater	23 at Newton Point on 11 th
Gannet	200+ passed Newton Point on 11 th
Little Egret	1 at Alnmouth on 28 th
Brent Goose	1 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Wigeon	1 at Branton Ponds on 11 th
Eider	215 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Marsh Harrier	1 at Druridge Pools on 23 rd
Merlin	1 at Dunstanburgh on 31 st
Kestrel	1 at Branton on 5 th
Sparrowhawk	1 near Low Newton Church on 18 th
Quail	1 at Branton on 2 nd
Water Rail	1 at Branton Ponds on 13 th
Woodcock	1 on nest in College Valley
Avocet	13 at Cresswell Pond on 30 th
Little Ringed Plover	1 on River Breamish on 11 th
Golden Plover	25 at Newton Point on 18 th
Lapwing	1000 at East Chevington on 30 th
Knot	10 at Budle Bay on 23 rd
Little Stint	1 at Budle Bay on 23 rd
Sanderling	18 at East Chevington on 19 th
Common Sandpiper	6+ at Branton Ponds on the 7 th , 2 at Alnmouth on 21 st
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 30 th , 1 at East Chevington on 29 th
Wood Sandpiper	1 at East Chevington on 29 th
Curlew Sandpiper	1 at East Chevington on 30 th
Spotted Sandpiper	1 at Alnmouth from 27 th
Greenshank	1 at Branton Ponds on 4 th , 1 at Cresswell Pond on 30 th , 1 at East Chevington on 30 th
Curlew	500 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Whimbrel	3 at Newton Point on 11 th , 1 at Budle Bay on 23 rd , 7 at Alnmouth on 28 th
Bar-tailed Godwit	400 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Black-tailed Godwit	1 at Hauxley on 14 th , 1 at Budle Bay on 23 rd , 1 at Cresswell Pond on 6 th
Oystercatcher	34 over Branton on 17 th , 450 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Arctic Skua	1 at Newton Point on 11 th , 1 at Hauxley on 14 th
Little Gull	1 at Druridge Pools on 23 rd , 5 at Cresswell Pond on 6 th
Mediterranean Gull	3 at Newbiggin on 30 th
Arctic Tern	70 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Common Tern	30 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Sandwich Tern	10 at Fenham Flats on 21 st
Tern(sp)	1 at Branton Ponds on 2 nd
Bridled Tern	1 at Inner Farne for second day on 2 nd

Roseate Tern	1 at Hauxley on 14 th , 1 at Newbiggin on 30 th , 6 at Coquet Island on 25 th where more than 70 pairs have nested this year.
Long-eared Owl	1 at Slainsfield Moor on 27 th
Barn Owl	1 at Lesbury on 1 st 1 at Smeafield on 8 th
Tawny Owl	1 at Branton on 8 th and 2 on 10 th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds on 27 th , 1 at Lesbury on 7 th
Yellow Wagtail	1 at Druridge Pools on 23 rd
Dipper	2 on River Breamish on 7 th
Stonechat	2 pairs College Valley
Whinchat	1 pair College Valley, several in Harthope Valley on 18 th
Wheatear	Numerous juveniles in College Valley
Redstart	Several at Fontburn on 2 nd
Common Whitethroat	Several including juveniles at Branton Ponds on 6 th
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Bilton Mill on 4 th
Reed Warbler	1 near Lesbury on 4 th
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Druridge Pools on 30 th
Marsh Tit	1 at Fontburn on 2 nd
Raven	1 at Murder Cleugh(near Wooler) on 15 th , 2 at Hepburn on 16 th , 3 in College Valley
Albino Sky Lark	Elwick on 9 th
INVERTEBRATES	
Humming-bird Hawk-moth	1 at Branton on 1 st
Dark Arches	1 at Branton on 9 th
Barred Straw	1 at Branton Ponds on 13 th
Snout	1 at Branton on 15 th
Light Emerald	1 at Branton Ponds on 9 th
Meadow Brown	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 st and 6 on 3 rd
Wall Brown	Numerous on the 3 rd
Common Blue Butterfly	1 at Branton Ponds on 3 rd and 9 on 14 th
Ringlet	4 at Branton Ponds on 3 rd , 1 near Lesbury on 4 th ; many at Branton Ponds on 7 th
Small Heath	Many in Cheviots near Wooler on 13 th
Large Heath	1 in College Valley
Orange Tip	3 near Lesbury on 4 th
Large White Butterfly	Several near Lesbury on 4 th
Small White Butterfly	Several near Lesbury on 4 th
Small Skipper	1 at Branton Ponds on 7 th
Large Skipper	1 at Branton Ponds on 6 th
Banded Damoiselle	1 near Lesbury on 4 th
Common Blue Damselfly	Many at Branton Ponds on 6 th
Blue-tailed Damselfly	1 at Branton Ponds on 6 th
Southern Hawker Dragonfly	1 at Branton Ponds on 6 th
Mountain Bumblebee	10 in College Valley
REPTILES	

Adder	2 at Branton Ponds on 7th 1 at White Law on 15th
Slow Worm	1 at Branton on 27 th
Common Lizard	1 on Cheviot on 18 th
PLANTS	
Maiden Pink	Numerous plants at Middleton Old Town(near Wooler) on 13 th
Harebell	Several plants at Middleton Old Town on 13 th
Heath Spotted Orchid	Several in Harthope Valley on 18 th
Bog Asphodel	Many in Harthope Valley on 18 th
Cloudberry	Many plants on Cheviot on 18 th
Dwarf Cornel	Small patch on Cheviot on 18 th
Dyers Greenweed	At East Chevington on 19 th

OBSERVERS

W Banks, G Bell, I&K Davison, G&G Dodds, A Gibson, A Keeble, M McMahon, M Rolley, S Sexton. S Reay.

ALNWICK WILDLIFE GROUP - Final Accounts for 2012

RECEIPTS

Subscriptions	£866.00 ✓
Pay-at-the-door	£44.00 ✓
Mannings store sponsorship	£50.00 ✓
Northumberland Estates survey payments	£800.00 ✓
Donations	£12.00 ✓
TOTAL	£1,772.00 ✓

PAYMENTS

Insurance premium	£113.00 ✓
Website maintenance & licence	£0.00 ✓
Hire of Hall	£450.00 ✓
Speakers' expenses	£252.60 ✓
PA System	£599.00 ✓
Room hire for Committee mtgs (1 @ £17.1 @ £10)	£27.00 ✓
Stamps, envelopes & printing for newsletters	£500.41 ✓
Refreshments	£4.06 ✓
TOTAL	£1,946.07 ✓

n.b. Invoice not presented until Jan 2012

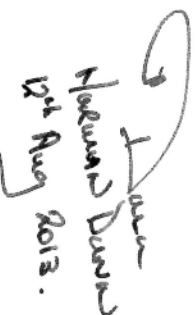
Bank balance at 1 January 2011	£2,290.85
Float at 1 January 2011	£27.08
Add receipts	£1,772.00 ✓
Sub-Total	£4,089.93 ✓
Total	£4,089.93

Less payments	£1,946.07 ✓
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Balance at 31 December 2011 **£2,143.86 ✓**

n.b. End of year balance comprises £2093.75 in bank plus £50.11 in float

I have examined the record 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 the group


Howard Downes
12th Aug 2013.