

# Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



## REVIEW OF AUGUST 2013

### NEWSLETTER 144

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**NEXT MEETING – OCTOBER 30TH, 2013 AT 7.30P.M.**

**‘Bird Ringing and Migration’** Speaker: Seumus Eaves.

Seamus is an extremely knowledgeable naturalist from Lancashire with a passion for birds and especially ringing and migration. October’s talk should be a thoroughly entertaining evening of slides and props.

#### WHAT WILDLIFE TO LOOK FOR IN OCTOBER 2013.

The weather in September has been good but the mornings are getting colder and the nights are drawing in. As I write this article, it is only now that we are starting to see the first sings of autumn in our native trees and shrubs. The fruit crop in some species is extraordinary with rowan in particular ‘dripping’ with the weight of their berries. Starlings, blackbirds, song and mistle thrushes and have started to attack the crop with gusto. It will not be long before they are joined by their northern cousins – redwings and fieldfares.

October is a month of colour change in leaves, fungi and continuing large scale migration of birds. It is also a month of beauty, aroma and atmospheric landscapes. Below are three habitats or taxa to look for wildlife this October:

**1 – Waxcaps.** Species such as pink ballerina, crimson, blackening or scarlet wax caps along with a variety of others can be found in suitable sites throughout our area. Some pasture can contain at least 15 different species. A number of the most colourful are found on acid grassland where the sward is relatively short and not been improved with fertiliser. Places to find them include sand dunes (e.g. Cocklaburn), grazed unimproved pastures or moorland (e.g. Harthope Valley, College Valley and the Northumberland Sandstone ridge).



Meadow coral fungus



Parrot Wax Cap

**2. – Goldcrest.** This is one of the smallest British breeding birds. They can be a common site/sound within conifer and mixed conifer / broadleaved woodlands. At this time of year, migrant goldcrests will reach our shores from Scandinavia and further afield. This 8.5 cm long relative of the warbler can reach our shores in large numbers. Their persistent plaintive call zi-zi-zi can be a feature of hedgerows, scrub and woodlands along the coast in autumn. One of my best birdwatching memories was sitting sea-watching from the Brownsman cottage (The Farne Islands) and goldcrests searching my tripod, shoulders and head looking for food! Some of the best places to find goldcrests and migrant warblers are at Craster, Low Newtown by the Sea and Bamburgh.

**3. White-clawed crayfish.** These 11 cm long lobster shaped crustaceans are starting to prepare their watery homes for the winter by collecting leaves and vegetation that have found their way into the watercourse. Mating takes place in August and September. Eggs are carried through the winter and spring before hatching. The female continues to carry the young until the following September. The North East has some of the best remaining white-clawed crayfish rivers in the UK and some may argue the world. The best river is the Wansbeck but they can also be found on the River Aln. The easiest way to locate white-clawed crayfish is to look for burrow in the bank at water level or the spraint of otter.

Autumn is a great time of year to sample the delights of nature in Northumberland. Where ever you go there will be wildlife – just take the time to enjoy it.

*Jack Daw*

## Howick August 2013 Highlights.

The warmer than usual summer continued into August...

On the 1<sup>st</sup>, a walk along the coast path turned up my first **Roseate Tern** of the year, plus 9 **Whimbrel** on the rocks.

A walk north from Howick to Craster on 4<sup>th</sup> found a lot of butterflies on the wing with **30+ Whites**, **2 Green veined white**, **3+ Small Copper**, **16+ Small Tortoiseshell** and **10+ Meadow Browns**. A **Green Sandpiper** flushed from the burn running through the Arnold Reserve and headed off south.

At this time, **Tawny Owls** began hooting in the woods around Howick.

On 10<sup>th</sup> a young **Kittiwake** almost landed on our chimney, the first I've seen from the garden, though we do here them throughout the spring. A **Willow Warbler**, **15+ Tree Sparrow** and a **Red Admiral**, the first of the autumn, were all in our garden.

Tonight we held a Moth Trapping Event for National Moth Night at Howick Village Hall. It was a two part session with 19 visitors attending on the evening and a further 23 guests on the Sunday morning. Alan Fairclough, John Rutter and myself caught 630 moths of 83 species, a nice selection as an introduction to Mothing for all of the attendees. Thanks to all for taking part.



Above – Moth Traps into the distance...

Finally our **Swallows** nesting in the shed had young on **14<sup>th</sup>** after some failed attempts earlier on and an unsuccessful season last year.

Several spikes of **Broad leaved Helleborine** were blooming in the Village Wood.

On **16<sup>th</sup>** a walk around the Village had 6 **Brown Hares**, 1 **Stock Dove**, 5+ **Willow Warblers** and a **Whitethroat**. Later, myself and John Rutter had a run up to Detchant Woods. This was quite profitable, seeing masses of butterflies amongst other things.

We had **9 Wall Brown**, **47 Speckled Wood**, **3 Green veined White**, **2 Meadow Brown**, **4 Large White**, **4 Peacock**, **2 Small Copper** and **6 Small White**. Also 4 **Southern Hawker** dragonflies were on the wing, an **Adder** crossed our path and a **Common Lizard** gave a bizarre sight as it had two tails! This is caused by the original being damaged and the animal growing a second.



A rare 2 tailed Lizard!

Back at Howick, **21<sup>st</sup>** had a **Barn owl** fly over our house.

The weekend of **24<sup>th</sup> / 25<sup>th</sup>** saw a change in the weather with some easterly winds, mist and fog. I was out hoping to find some grounded migrants but they were very few and far between. 1 **Yellow Wagtail** flew N, 4+ **Chiffchaff** were presumably locals, 11 **Whimbrel** flew S as did 6 **Golden Plover**.

There was some excitement on **25<sup>th</sup>** however when a **Barred Warbler** turned up in our garden. This is the third record here in four years, a rarity, commoner than common species!



On 30<sup>th</sup> a neighbour brought me a moth to identify. I was well jealous when I saw it was a **Convolvulus Hawk-moth**. This is one of the largest moths to be found in Britain. And a scarce immigrant from the continent. To get an idea please see pics below...



Convolvulus Hawk-moth.

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

## PLANT CORNER

When you begin to take an interest in a new subject, like botany, every time you go out you find things that are new to you. Sometimes they are plants you've noticed before, but for the first time you look closely and identify what they are. Inevitably, as you gain knowledge and experience, any individual walk or day out in your general home area is less likely to reveal anything new. Of course you constantly rehearse and refine the knowledge you have and, particularly at the start of each new growing season, you find you've forgotten some of the things you thought you knew last year. But the pleasure of finding a new species, or even of re-finding something you've not seen for years becomes more of an event because it happens less often.



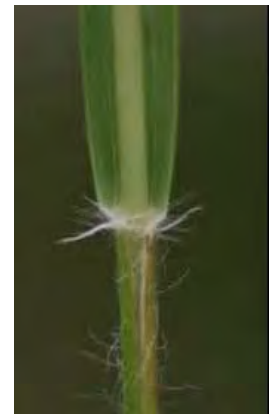
So it was in the College Valley in late July that, in an area of apparently run-of-the-mill moorland, there was a wet patch with some small pink flowers. Closer inspection showed that the small fleshy leaves were classic Stonecrop (*Sedum*) foliage, but stonecrops have yellow or white flowers don't they? Then a careful look with a hand lens showed that the leaves were hairy (see photo). The pink flowers and glandular hairs (that produce rather sticky secretions) showed that this was **Hairy Stonecrop** (*Sedum villosum*), a distinctly uncommon alpine stonecrop that needs calcium-rich wet



places. So this little patch on the way up to the border ridge north of Cheviot must have had a small outcropping of limestone under the surface. It was then a considerable coincidence that three weeks later we found another *Sedum villosum* patch up near Kidlandlee above Alwinton.



My second example was a re-find. Several years ago I'd identified a small patch of **Heath Grass** (*Danthonia decumbens*) on our local moor at Tittington Mount. This is a rather neat grass with rather few well-defined florets in each flowering spike. It's a tufted grass and the tufts are often lie rather flat, even if they haven't been trampled, hence the specific name *decumbens* which implies 'lying down'. The clinching diagnostic feature, which you can see without a lens, is that at the point where the leaf blades meet the stem there is a tuft of hairs where many other grasses have a membranous structure called a ligule.



More recently I'd vaguely looked for this grass again on the moor, but failed to find it. In mid-August on our usual route out from our house on to the moor I was leaning on a gate and, lo and behold, when I looked down I found I was standing on a tuft of Heath Grass. If nothing else it was a classic lesson on the need to keep your eyes peeled even in areas you think you know well.

**SIGHTINGS AUGUST 2013**

<b>BIRDS</b>	
Great Northern Diver	2 off East Chevington on 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Red-throated Diver	1 at Newton Point on 27 <sup>th</sup>
Little Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 on 14 <sup>th</sup> with 9+ on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Great Crested Grebe	2 still at Branton Ponds 2 juveniles at East Chevington on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Little Egret	1 at East Chevington on 24 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Alnmouth all month, 2 at Budle Bay on 6 <sup>th</sup>
Spoonbill	1 at Budle Bay on 1 <sup>st</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup>
Manx Shearwater	1 off Newton Point on 4 <sup>th</sup> , 120+ off Stag Rock on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Sooty Shearwater	3 off Stag Rock on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Goosander	3 at Branton Ponds on 14 <sup>th</sup> , 90+ off Stag Rock on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Gadwall	10 at Cresswell Pond on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Pochard	1 at Branton Ponds on 30 <sup>th</sup>
Goldeneye	At least 7 at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Osprey	1 (juvenile) at Hedgeley Bridge on 19 <sup>th</sup>
Honey Buzzard	1 at Holy Island on 26 <sup>th</sup>
Marsh Harrier	3 at East Chevington on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 1 at Fenham Flats on 25 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at East Chevington on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Merlin	1 at Mindrum on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Peregrine	1 at Budle Bay on 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Hobby	1 at East Chevington on 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 1 at Holy Island on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Grey Partridge	2 at Widdrington on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Water Rail	1 at Branton Ponds on 14 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at East Chevington on 24 <sup>th</sup>
Spotted Crake	1 (juvenile) at East Chevington from 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> and 24 <sup>th</sup>
Snipe	3 at Branton Ponds on 8 <sup>th</sup> and 12 on 14 <sup>th</sup> 5 at Alnmouth all month, 20 at Monks House Pool on 29 <sup>th</sup>
Greenshank	4 at East Chevington on 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 1 at Branton Ponds on 8 <sup>th</sup> , up to 2 all month at Alnmouth
Whimbrel	14 at Newton Point on 1 <sup>st</sup> and 4 on 4 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Alnmouth on 19 <sup>th</sup>
Black Tailed Godwit	11 at Newton Point on 1 <sup>st</sup> 2 at Alnmouth on 29 <sup>th</sup> , 36 at East Chevington on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Knot	1 at Alnmouth on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Turnstone	3 at Newton Point on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Ruff	4 at East Chevington on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 30 on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Curlew Sandpiper	1 at East Chevington on 24 <sup>th</sup>
Spotted Redshank	3 at East Chevington on 24 <sup>th</sup>
Little Stint	1 at East Chevington on 24 <sup>th</sup>
Common Sandpiper	14 at Branton Ponds on 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 1 at Alnmouth on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and several days during month, 1 at Alnmouth all month
Little Ringed Plover	2 at Branton Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> and 3 on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Lapwing	450+ at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup> , 100 at Cresswell Pond on 31 <sup>st</sup> , 50 at East Chevington on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Pectoral Sandpiper	1 at Low Newton on 15 <sup>th</sup>
Arctic Skua	1 at Newton Point on 27 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Hadston Carrs on 25 <sup>th</sup>
Great Skua	3 at Newton Point on 27 <sup>th</sup>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	22 at East Chevington on 31 <sup>st</sup>

Little Gull	1 (juvenile) at East Chevington on 24 <sup>th</sup>
White-winged Black Tern	1 at East Chevington on 10 <sup>th</sup>
Black Tern	1 at East Chevington on 25 <sup>th</sup>
Roseate Tern	3 near Stag Rock on 29 <sup>th</sup>
Sandwich Tern	12 at East Chevington on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Cuckoo	1(juvenile) at Biddlestone on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Barn Owl	1 near South Charlton on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Tawny Owl	2 in Branton on 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 1 near Branton on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Swift	1 over River Breamish on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> , 1 near Hedgeley Bridge on 19 <sup>th</sup>
Grey Wagtail	1 at Smeafield on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Yellow Wagtail	1(juvenile) at Newton Flash on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Whinchat	2 pairs with fledged young in College Valley on 15 <sup>th</sup>
Redstart	4 at Smeafield on 13 <sup>th</sup>
Reed Warbler	Several at East Chevington on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 1 at Smeafield on 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Druridge Pools on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Blackcap	At Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Garden Warbler	At Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Booted Warbler	1 at Hadston Carrs on 24 <sup>th</sup>
Pied Flycatcher	1 on Holy Island on 25 <sup>th</sup>
Willow Tit	2 at Low Newton on 27 <sup>th</sup>
Raven	2 at Powburn on 8 <sup>th</sup> , at Branton Ponds on 19 <sup>th</sup>
Bullfinch	Several juveniles at Branton Ponds on 14 <sup>th</sup>
Crossbill	Several in Thrunton Woods on 17 <sup>th</sup>
<b>INVERTEBRATES</b>	
Painted Lady	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 <sup>st</sup> , 1 at Ingram Valley on 15 <sup>th</sup>
Small Tortoiseshell	At Swarland all month, 1 at Ros View on 28th
Small Copper	1 at Branton Ponds on 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 on 18 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Ingram Valley on 15 <sup>th</sup>
Orange Tip	2 at Smeafield on 12 <sup>th</sup>
Grayling	1 at Holy Island on 25 <sup>th</sup>
Small Heath	2 at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Red Admiral	1 at Ros View 28th
Peacock	2 at Branton Ponds on 7 <sup>th</sup> , several at Druridge Bay on 19 <sup>th</sup> , 3at Ros View 21 <sup>st</sup> , 7 at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Meadow Brown	1 at Ros View 28th
Wall Brown	1 at Ingram Valley on 15 <sup>th</sup> , several at Thrunton Woods on 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2 at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 at Ros View 28th
Large White	6 at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup> , at Swarland all month
Small White	4 at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup> , at Swarland all month
Speckled Wood	Many at Druridge Bay Country Park on 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2 at Kyoie Woods on 26 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Branton Ponds on 27 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Low Newton on 27 <sup>th</sup> , at Swarland all month
Comma	1 at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup> , 1 Swarland Wood on 30 <sup>th</sup> , several around Smeafield all month
Magpie Moth	1 at East Chevington on 10 <sup>th</sup>

Common Blue Damselfly	Many at Branton Ponds on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	1 at Branton Ponds on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Common Hawker	1 at Branton Ponds on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Black Darter	4 at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup> , several at Holy Island on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Ruddy Darter	2 at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2 at Elwick on 25 <sup>th</sup>
Common Darter	1 at Branton Ponds on 12 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Thrunton Woods on 17 <sup>th</sup> , several at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup> , several at Druridge Bay on 19 <sup>th</sup>
Southern Hawker	1 at Branton Ponds on 14 <sup>th</sup>
Giant Woodwasp	1 at Hauxley on 11 <sup>th</sup>
Dor Beetle	4+ at Weetwood Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Oiceoptoma Thoracica	A carrion beetle, 1 at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup>
<b>REPTILES</b>	
Common Lizard	2 at Bamburgh Beach on 1 <sup>st</sup>
<b>MAMMALS</b>	
Hedgehog	2 in Branton on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Common Shrew	1 at Hipsburn on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Hare	2 near Chatton on 21 <sup>st</sup>
Mink	3 at Branton Ponds on 4 <sup>th</sup> - not a welcome sight.
Roe Deer	1 at Branton Ponds on 12 <sup>th</sup> , 1 in Swarland Wood on 30 <sup>th</sup>
Red Squirrel	1 at Branton on 10 <sup>th</sup> , 1 in Swarland from 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 1 at Swarland on 31 <sup>st</sup>
Otter	1 female and 2 youngsters at East Chevington on 11 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Alnmouth on 21 <sup>st</sup>
Porpoise	3 off Stag Rock on 20 <sup>th</sup>
<b>PLANTS</b>	
Sundew	Near Harbottle Lake on 10 <sup>th</sup>
Cranberry	In fruit near Harbottle Lake on 10 <sup>th</sup>
Bilberry	Near Harbottle on 10 <sup>th</sup>
Crowberry	Near Harbottle Lake on 10 <sup>th</sup>
Cowberry	In Thrunton Woods on 17 <sup>th</sup>
Grass of Parnassus	Many plants at Holy Island on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>RAINFALL</b>	60.10mm
<b>OBSERVERS</b>	W Banks, I&K Davison, G & R Bell, G Dodds, J Elliott, A Keeble, D Makepeace, M McMahon, S Reay, M Rolley, H Tindle, S Webster.

Please send sightings reports for September, no later than 16th October 2013 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) Copies of the monthly Newsletter and sightings will be made available on the web site one month after the paper publication.