

# Alnwick Wildlife Group



Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna

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## Review of March 2014

NEWSLETTER 151

### NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2014

#### ALL ABOUT MINI-MAMMALS – ESPECIALLY AROUND ALNICK SPEAKER: VERONICA CARNELL

Veronica Carnell leads the Northumbria Mammal Group which is a specialist group within the Northumberland Wildlife Trust. Last year when a number of AWG members were involved with surveys at Slainsfield Moor Veronica came up from Newcastle with her husband John to carry out the small mammal trapping that added greatly to the range of results we were able to collect.

She is very knowledgeable about mammals, and particularly small mammals. In 2012 a definitive account of Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles of the North East was published by the Northumbria Mammal Group. Veronica was on the editorial team and she wrote the species accounts for our two squirrel species. Her talk should give us a fascinating insight into the elusive little mammals that are so often around us but are so rarely seen.

#### WHAT TO LOOK OUR FOR IN MAY

In our skies, the symbolic **Swallow** and the **Swift**, with its uniform coloration and scythe-shaped wings, should now be with us in considerable numbers.

More and more returning warblers will be singing in their chosen habitats. Listen for **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers**, with their distinctive trills and whistles, in the very places their names suggest. Hedgerows and scrubland are more likely to offer up the scratchy songs of **Common and Lesser Whitethroat**. The former is always the one likely to be more of a visible presence, often giving observers a song flight, as its party piece.

If we travel to higher ground this month we will inevitably hear the infectious warbling display call of the **Curlew** and the clicking call note of the **Whinchat** alongside the inimitable chirruping of resident **Skylarks**.

On our rocky coastline and islands, the air will be filled with competing calls of Gulls and Auks, those of the **Kittiwake** and **Puffin** being perhaps the most evocative.

Our rivers should now be showing evidence of successful first broods with **Mallards**, particularly in evidence, shepherding their downy young through the first days of the great adventure that is life. Wherever there is a semblance of protruding rocks and fast flowing water, now is a good time to search for more elusive riverine species like **Dipper, Grey Wagtail** and even **Common Sandpiper**.

May is very much the month when our native flora "takes off". Hedgerows will be flushed white with flowering **Hawthorn**, in many people's eyes symbolising the end of winter and beginning of summer. Among the many flowers now in full bloom, you may look out for **Greater Stitchwort**, typically on hedge banks and in wood rides. It is much loved for its modestly beautiful white flowers, which helps to explain one of its many country names – **Poor Man's Buttonhole**.

Another member of the Pink family now showing itself off to advantage, is **Red Campion** often growing alongside its cousin. Although its flowers are usually rose red – pink and white bloomed varieties are common. This is one of a number of May flowering plants that share popular names associated with the supposed arrival of the Cuckoo.

May is indeed the time to see the **Cuckoo Flower** itself, to be searched for in damp grassland and ditches. Some of you may know this flower by its rather more expressive name of **Lady's Smock**. But probably, most people's favourite wild flower spectacle this month is having the opportunity to feast on an extensive carpet of native **Bluebells**, most commonly found in our deciduous woodland.

Venture out and enjoy the audiovisual delights of May!

*Peregrini*

