

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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NEWSLETTER 168 September 2015

Review of August 2015

NEXT MEETING: OCTOBER 28TH 2015

NORTHUMBRIA BIRD ATLAS

SPEAKER: TIM DEAN

Tim is one of Northumberland's leading bird watchers. His knowledge regarding birds in Northumberland and further afield is second to none. Tim played a major role in the development of the Northumbria Bird Atlas and visited every tetrad in the County in the search of breeding and wintering species. This should be a fantastic talk from a very dedicated ornithologist.

ALNICK LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES – AWG SURVEYS

Members may remember that earlier this year AWG agreed to carry out some basic survey work for Alnwick Town Council. The Thomas Percy woodland and the Cawledge Burn woodland had both been proposed as Local Wildlife Sites in the Alnwick and District Local Plan.

Several members got involved in looking at the wildlife in these two woods, with a strong emphasis on plants. The plants have the great advantage that they do not move around or hide. Usually it is the vegetation of an area that determines the rest of the wildlife because it provides food and shelter and places to breed – the three components of a habitat.

I should like to thank those members who helped out with this work. Based on what we found I wrote up two reports for the Town Council. I took the liberty, without consulting anyone else, of including some straightforward recommendations for the future if the Council does decide to adopt the two woods.

Please send sightings reports for August, no later than 6th October 2015 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.

A RINGERS YEAR

AUG 2015: I ringed two late Barn Owl broods in August both near Longhorsley and nesting in plastic barrels; one with a single pulli and the other with three. I also helped return two Tawny Owls to the wild – which had been looked after by Peter Middleton at High Trewitley Farm. Unfortunately well meaning folk tend to pick young tawny pulli up from the ground and instead of putting them safe ‘up a tree’ tend to hand them in to vets and sanctuaries. Of course if they really are injured this makes sense but often they have just tumbled out of a tree and their parents will come back to feed them. To the best of my knowledge no tawnies bred near Lemmington Hall this year so releasing this young male and female made sense.



Along with trainees I did five ringing sessions at Howick this month and the migration of warblers to Africa is clearly underway – starting with the Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, and most recently 9 Willow Warblers on the 22nd.

I departed to Portugal in the last week to monitor migration (and the local birds) in the Algarve. MZ and I had the pleasure of ringing the resident Little Owls, Kingfishers, Azure Winged Magpie; and a range of warblers (on their way south). However, the most exciting catch to me was a Nightingale on its way to Senegal (and very likely hatched in Southern England).



I will be continuing to try and ring at least once a week at the autumn (migration) ringing site at Howick Arboretum until November. This will generally be on a Saturday morning but may be moved by the weather and circumstances. You're welcome to come along to learn/watch/take pictures; just look for us by the picnic benches in the car park. Get in touch if wanting to check a day and times.

*Phil Hanmer
A Ringer & Trainer
Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing
Group (Hancock Museum)
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STEWCHAT

August is an exciting month on the Northumberland coast for wildlife. It's the first month of proper autumn migration, of birds, moths and butterflies.

If we get a spell of 'easterly' weather just about anything can happen on the bird front, while nice warm southerlies should make the garden lepidoptera interesting. Should the days turn cool with a northerly blow, its to the sea we turn, to look out for some special seabirds tracking up the coast. However, maybe its best not to mention a westerly.

This year we have been lucky and sampled a variety of weather patterns during the month.

On the 1st we still had young **Tree Sparrows** in our nest boxes, possibly from third broods showing that whilst autumn is creeping in, summer might not be over just yet.

The first flurry of excitement came on the 2nd. Firstly though, I checked out the Coquet Estuary during the morning seeing, amongst others, **7+ Little Egrets, 1 Greenshank, 4 Shoveler, a Roseate Tern** fishing and last year's returning **Caspian Gull**.



Figure 1: Little Egret, Amble Marina.

At lunchtime, news filtered through of a juvenile **Black Stork** on a non-descript farm track just north of Haggerston Castle, so off I went with high hopes. Unfortunately they were dashed as the bird had flown off several hours earlier to be found the following morning at Spurn Point, East Yorkshire.

The highlight of the next week had to be Tom Jones at Alnwick Pastures on the 8th despite what the press say. I returned home to get some nice views of

a barrel shaped Tawny Owl huddled against a pine near our Howick Village Hall.

On 9th, another visit down to Warkworth was very pleasant. **2 Kingfishers** chased and squabbled along the river at the Butts, seen from the road bridge first. Up at the beach car park, **4+ Yellow Wagtails, a Wheatear** and several common warbler species were the best on offer.

Back home at Howick **7 Swifts** flew south.

A gloriously sunny day on 11th tempted me to take a flexi day off work and head again down to the Coquet at Warkworth. A **Peregrine** flew low overhead at Amble Marina while a **Comma** butterfly was seen on privet next to Amble top Co-Op car park.

Back home, a **Spotted Flycatcher** near Howick Pond Field was my only record here this year, though it was a juvenile so it may have been from local stock.

The evening of the 13th saw me down at Craster looking at a sea almost devoid of bird life. On the rocks though were **356+ Golden Plover, 2 Dunlin and a Knot**. The Dunlin and Knot are tricky to catch up with on our rocky shore at Howick (common on sandy or muddy shores) and the Golden Plover flock was an exceptional count here.



Figure 2: Pied Flycatcher in our garden.

On Sunday morning 16th there appeared to have been an arrival of common migrants at Warkworth Beach Car Park with **6+ Whitethroat, 6+ Blackcap, Sedge Warbler, 6+ Willow Warbler, 4+ Chiffchaff and a Yellow Wagtail**. Down on the estuary wader numbers were on the up too with **228+ Dunlin and 58+ Ringed Plovers** boosting totals.

In our Howick garden there were a number of butterflies – **Wall Brown, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Meadow Brown, small and Large Whites.**

The stronger easterly wind did its magic in our garden on the 23rd when later in the afternoon, **2 Pied Flycatchers** dropped in. These were new for the garden and I was very excited to see them.

I wondered if they were indicators that something rarer might be about so I called in a days holiday the next morning and headed up to Craster for a look. Numbers were a bit disappointing compared to the conditions, with a lone **Lesser Whitethroat** being the best on offer.

The annual leave wasn't a waste though because back at Howick a rare moth in Northumberland, the **Annulet**, had side dodged the moth trap to be found resting on our bedroom wall. Out in the garden both **Green Sandpiper** and **Greenshank** flew overhead and lots of butterflies were around of 9 species including migrant **Painted Ladies** with 3 on our buddleias.



Figure 3: The Annulet

Over the August Bank Holiday Weekend some nice weather meant that bird migration, was reduced, but birds continued to trickle through. Short stops at Charlton Mires Pond had **3 Green Sandpipers, 13 Ruff** and a **Greenshank**, Warkworth had **2 Reed Warblers**, a bizarre record of a **Nuthatch** in the beach car park with a female **Redstart. 2 Black tailed Godwits** were at the marina. On the Monday I popped down to Craster again to view the sea. It was still relatively quiet but my first **Great Skua** and **Wigeon** of the year were added to my patch list (136 so far).

Whilst the month didn't provide anything earth shattering, a nice variety of migrants kept things ticking along nicely. Lets hope September keeps up the good work.

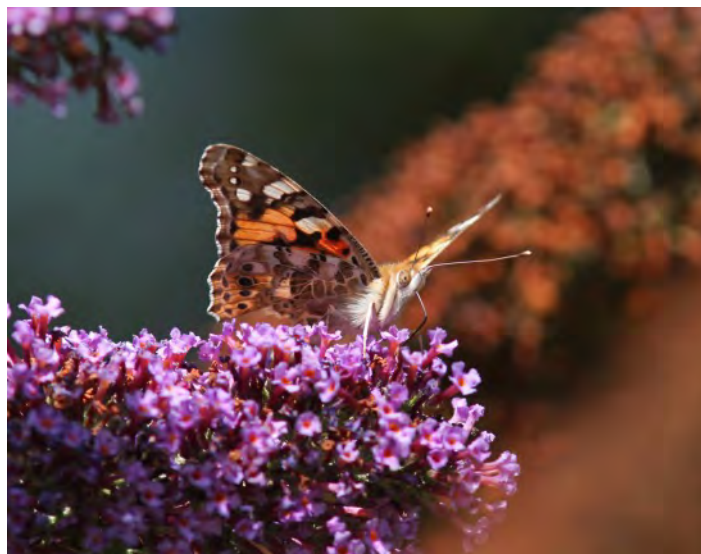


Figure 4: Painted Lady in our garden.

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

MOTH OF THE MONTH - OCTOBER

One of the commonest moths throughout the autumn is the Yellow-line Quaker (*Agrochola macilenta*). There is another closely related species (shown in the right-hand image) around at the same time but less common, called the Red-line Quaker (*Agrochola lota*).

As you can see, they both have a red and yellow line across the wing at about four-fifths from the base, but the strength of the red line is much greater on the Red-line Quaker. The background colour is usually a yellowish brown on the Yellow-line Quaker and a greyish brown on the Red-line Quaker, but both species can vary to a mid-brown colour making identification more difficult.



The larvae of the Yellow-line Quaker feed on many trees and herbaceous plants, while those of the Red-line Quaker only feed on catkins and leaves of willows/sallows. The adult moths feed at autumn flowers, especially those of Ivy, and can be attracted to sugar mixtures, but are more likely to be seen at lit windows.

Alan Fairclough.

PLANT CORNER

Drawings or photographs – that is the question. My Plant Corner articles have been in every newsletter except for the very first one. Until issue 110 they were all illustrated with my own line drawings of the plants I was writing about. But then, gradually, the rot set in and I began to use digital photos. As often as possible these have been my own, but some have been ‘borrowed’ from elsewhere.

The shift from drawings to photos happened for several reasons. One was laziness! Another was that, after drawing about 360 species I was tending to be left with ones that were, for me, very hard to draw with an accuracy that would actually show up the differences from other very similar species. Cow Parsley and Upright Hedge Parsley, for example, are both fiddly to draw and are very like each other.

Recently I started to think about the relative value of drawings and photos in botanical articles. Certainly good quality photos can be very striking, but the problem is that a single photo is rarely able to show all (or even any) of the diagnostic features needed to make a correct identification. Drawings, however, can and do artificially show all the important characteristics of a specimen if they are well drawn.

In this month’s Plant Corner I thought I’d try to illustrate the point, using as my example Prickly Sow-thistle (*Sonchus asper*) and Smooth Sow-thistle (*S. oleraceus*). Until you know what to look for they are not dissimilar in the field. They are both prickly, despite the English name of the second one. So let’s start with photos:



On the left is the Smooth Sow-thistle. It’s nicely pictured against a dark background and in good lighting. The same is true of the Prickly Sow-thistle on the right. But if you were asked to pick out the diagnostic characters, apart from the right hand one being more prickly, you’d be hard-pressed to be precise.

Then we look at line drawings. These are the same two species and the images are taken from an excellent German book *Exkursionsflora von Deutschland*. The illustrations show the quite different shapes of the leaves

and that not all the leaves on the same species are necessarily always the same. The artist has also used the device of adding little arrows to point out the most important characteristics – the lobed leaves of the Smooth species and the different leaf bases and the ways they clasp the stems. This book has almost no written descriptions, which for me is very useful because my grasp of German is rudimentary. And it really doesn't need much written text apart from comments about colour and size which you can't tell from the drawings, although even then there are measuring bars added to relevant parts of the drawings (the solid bars are centimetres and the dotted ones are millimetres).



I certainly know which type of illustration I find more useful when trying to make an identification, and it's almost always not the photos.

All of this might suggest that I'm about to return to using my own drawings in these articles in the interests of diagnostic accuracy, but I fear that may be wishful thinking!

Richard

SIGHTINGS AUGUST 2015

BIRDS

Great Crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds all month
Grey Heron	3 at Fenham Flats on 3 rd
Little Egret	3 at Warkworth on 11 th 3 at Fenham Flats on 16 th 1 at Budle Bay on 22 nd 5+ at Warkworth on 23 rd and 30 th 1 at Fenham Flats on 17 th
Pink-footed Goose	1 at Branton Ponds on 29 th
Common Scoter	1 off Craster on 31 st
Teal	134 off Craster on 31 st
Scaup	2 at Fenham Flats on 3 rd
Eider	39 at Fenham Flats on 1 st
Red Breasted Merganser	1 at Fenham Flats on 13 th
Goosander	12 at Amble on 11 th 12 at Branton Ponds on 20 th
Red Kite	1 at Hulne Park on 30 th
Marsh Harrier	1 on Holy Island on 19 th
Hen Harrier	1 at Holy Island on 25 th
Peregrine	1 at Coquet Estuary on 11 th 1 at Holy Island on 25 th
Osprey	1 at Holy Island on 25 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 31 st
Sparrowhawk	1 at Holy Island on 25 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 25 th
Grey Partridge	8 at Smeafield on 3 rd and a pair with 11 young on 17 th
Quail	1 calling near Branton on 9 th
Water Rail	1 at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Ringed Plover	143 at Fenham Flats on 16 th 61+ at Warkworth on 23 rd
Little Ringed Plover	6 at Bamburgh on 19 th
Grey Plover	55 at Fenham Flats on 16 th
Golden Plover	56 at Warkworth on 23 rd
Dotterel	1 at Newton Point on 20 th
Dunlin	128 at Fenham Flats on 16 th
Sanderling	14 at Fenham Flats on 16 th
Turnstone	20+ at Craster on 21 st
Oystercatcher	513 at Fenham Flats on 16 th
Bar-tailed Godwit	377 at Fenham Flats on 16 th
Black-tailed Godwit	4 at Low Newton scrape on 20 th 1 at Warkworth on 23 rd 2 at Amble on 30 th
Curlew	126+ at Warkworth on 23 rd 550 at Fenham Flats on 3 rd
Whimbrel	8 at Holy Island on 24 th
Ruff	1 at Branton Ponds on 9 th and 3 on 21 st 1 at Budle Bay on 22 nd 13 at Charlton Mires flash on 30 th
Lapwing	50+ at Branton Ponds all month 260+ at Warkworth on 23 rd 100+ at Charlton Mires flash on 30 th
Knot	126 at Fenham Flats on 16 th 73+ at Warkworth on 23 rd
Temmincks Stint	3 at Monks House Pool on 25 th
Little Stint	1 at Low Newton scrape on 20 th 1 on Low Newton beach on 26 th
Redshank	150+ at Warkworth on 23 rd
Spotted Redshank	1 at Budle Bay on 22 nd 1 at Branton Ponds on 23 rd
Greenshank	1 at Low Newton on 13 th 1 at Fenham Flats on 16 th 2 at Budle Bay on 22 nd 1 at Howick on 24 th 1 at Charlton Mires flash on 30 th
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 11 th and 22 nd 1 at Howick on 24 th 3 at

	Charlton Mires flash on 30 th
Purple Sandpiper	11 at Guile Point on 16 th
Common Sandpiper	7 at Branton Ponds on 24 th 2 at Charlton Mires flash on 30 th
Great Skua	1 off Craster on 21 st and 2 on 31 st
Mediterranean Gull	1 at Amble on 11 th
Caspian Gull	1 at Amble on 2 nd
Roseate Tern	1 at Budle Point on 27 th 2 off Craster on 31 st
Tawny Owl	2 in Branton on 11 th 1 at Eglington on 26 th
Short-eared Owl	1 dead on 8 th on dunes at Greenhill
Swift	8 at Low Newton on 26 th 20+ at Budle Point on 27 th 6 at Bamburgh on 30 th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds on 7 th and 11 th 1 at Amble on 11 th 1 at Hedgeley on 16 th and 2 on 22 nd 1 at Fleetham NWT pond 1 st
Wryneck	1 at Holy Island on 24 th 1 at Budle Point on 27 th
Redstart	1 near Branton on 8 th 2 at Holy Island on 24 th 1 at Warkworth on 30 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 31 st
Whinchat	1 at Ross Links on 13 th
Stonechat	2 at Ford Moss on 15 th
Sedge Warbler	5 at Warkworth on 30 th
Reed Warbler	2 at Warkworth on 30 th
Barred Warbler	4 on Holy Island on 19 th
Whitethroat	At Warkworth on 30 th
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Low Newton on 25 th
Blackcap	Several juveniles at Branton Ponds on 7 th 3 at Warkworth on 30 th
Icterine Warbler	1 on Holy Island on 19 th
Willow Warbler	18+ at Warkworth on 30 th
Chiffchaff	6 at Warkworth on 30 th
Spotted Flycatcher	7 at Holy Island on 24 th
Pied Flycatcher	1 on Holy Island on 19 th 12 at Holy Island on 24 th 2 at Howick on 23 rd
Red Backed Shrike	1 at Holy Island on 24 th and on 30 th
Linnet	6 at Ross Links on 13 th
PLANTS	
Hair St John's Wort	At Branton Ponds on 10 th
Grass of Parnassus	At Holy Island on 18 th
Autumn Gentian	At Holy Island on 18 th
Common Centaury	At Holy Island on 18 th
MAMMALS	
Red Squirrel	1 near Breamish House on 5 th 1 near Beanley on 13 th
Porpoise	1 off Stag Rocks on 27 th
INVERTEBRATES	
Small Heath	Many at Ford Moss on 1 st
Ringlet	Several at Ford Moss on 1 st
Meadow Brown	Several at Ford Moss on 1 st 11 at Ross Links on 6 th
Wall	Several around Branton on 20 th 1 at Ross Links on 13 th
Small Skipper	6 at Ford Moss on 1 st
Small Copper	1 at Branton Ponds on 8 th and 3 on 11 th 5 at Ford Moss on 15 th 1 at Ross Links on 6 th

Common Blue	3 at Ross Links on 13 th
Red Admiral	3 at Smeafield on 17 th
Small Tortoiseshell	3 at Branton Ponds on 10 th
Grayling	Several on Holy Island on 19 th
Painted Lady	Several on Holy Island on 19 th 6 at Fenham Flats on 17 th 1 at Smeafield on 31 st
Dark Green Fritillary	1 on Holy Island on 19 th 4 at Fenham Flats on 17 th 1 at Smeafield on 31 st
Peacock	1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th 1 at Ford Moss on 15 th 3 at Ross Links on 13 th
Comma	1 at Amble on 11 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 16 th 1 at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Common Hawker	1 at Branton Ponds on 11 th several at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Southern Hawker	1 at Ford Moss on 1 st 1 at Branton Ponds on 6 th and 7 on 23 rd
Common Darter	1 at Branton Ponds on 3 rd 40+ at Hedgeley Lakes on 8 th 1 at Ford Moss on 15 th 8+ at Fenham Flats on 16 th several at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Black Darter	1 at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Large-red Damselfly	1 at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Elephant Hawkmoth	1 at Branton on 3 rd
Garden Tiger	1 at Branton on 3 rd
Antler moth	2 at Branton on 1 st
Scalloped Oak	1 at Branton on 1 st
Large Yellow Underwing	23 at Branton on 1 st
Dark Arches	25 at Branton on 1 st
Drinker	1 at Branton on 1 st
Dingy Shears	1 at Branton on 5 th
Purple Bar	1 at Branton on 5 th
Beautiful China-mark	1 at Branton on 11 th
Lesser Swallow Prominent	1 at Branton on 15 th
Chevron	1 at Ford Moss on 22 nd
Annulet	1 at Howick on 24 th
Sallow	1 at Branton on 25 th
Canary-shouldered Thorn	1 at Branton on 30 th
Great Water Beetle	1 at Branton Ponds on 27 th
REPTILES	
Adder	1 at Branton Ponds on 11 th
RAINFALL	77mm
OBSERVERS	W Banks, N Case, I&K Davison, T&J Dean, D Dallard, S Reay, M&B Rolley, J Rutter, S Sexton, B Welch, Des Taylor, Trish Smith.