

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

Email: redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

NEWSLETTER 205 OCTOBER 2018

Review of September 2018

NOVEMBER MEETING – WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 28TH – SPEAKER SHAUN HACKETT

Please note that the scheduled speaker for November (John Grundy – Revealing Reptiles Project) has had to pull out. Instead Shaun Hackett, Northumberland National Park Ranger, has agreed to talk to us about Spiders. He has said he may bring some specimens, but arachnophobic members need be reassured that no-one will be required to handle things they don't like! You may want to come along anyway on the "know your enemy" principle.



Please send sightings reports for September, no later than 6th November 2018 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.

AWG welcomes contributions for the newsletter and items for inclusion should be submitted by the **12th of the month** to redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

BARN OWL BREEDING SEASON 2018:

I take the opportunity this month to give my annual report on our Barn Owl studies in North Northumberland. This study (of around 100 sites) indicates that this was the poorest breeding year since at least 2006 for Barn Owls and that the climate (or in simple terms the weather) was the predominate determining factor in this outcome. Only 22 pairs tried to nest; and only 13 succeeded in raising young.

Consequent on the poor winter and appalling spring weather many birds did not even try to nest; others laid eggs as the weather improved towards the end of May but then lacking the body reserves to incubate them successfully gave up (there were 9 failed broods). Many adult birds seemed to be under weight.

While the weather improved in the summer, becoming remarkably warm (not to say hot) no late or second broods were located. This was probably because it also became very dry which suppressed the small mammal population; essential as the owls food supply.

The average number of eggs laid was 4 (little different than usual) ; although one pair laid '8' and then abandoned them. The average number of owlets fledged was only 1.4 but one pair raised 4 and four raised 3. Only 30 owlets were ringed and fledged.

Ten new adult Barn Owls were ringed and 23 were re-trapped; including one female which is 9yrs and another 7yrs old. The 9 year bird was ringed as an owlet in 2009 and has bred itself successfully (always early) every year since 2012 in a box close to the sea; only a few miles from its natal site. The 7yr old bird is our now resident female owl from Dumfries (ringed in 2011) bred again successfully, as she has done every year since 2012, raising 3 young. A female that failed to breed last year (when she was only a year old) did breed successfully north of Wooler (raising one young); while another that was hatched on the coast in 2014 and had moved inland to Whittingham to breed successfully in 2017 failed to hatch her eggs this year. Similarly a female with 'Guttata' characteristics (of North Eastern Europe) which had bred successfully near Craster in both 2016 & 17 also failed. However, another Guttata type owl raised young (for probably the second time) near Crookham. Two of the pairs of owls that failed were only one year old; as were another two that occupied boxes but did not breed; and another pair found in a Goldeneye Duck box at the end of August, just roosting. It's to be hoped these birds will all survive the winter to breed successfully in 2019.

Generally the successful nests were in the north and towards the coast; while inland towards the south and west very few owls bred successfully. A well grown female owl hatched this year is shown in the attached photograph. Jackdaws again occupied a number of nest sites but were less of a problem than normal.

Kestrels did not seem to be able to take advantage of the owls failure and only two pairs used nest boxes.

A pair of Tawny Owls took over one Barn Owl box and raised 2 young; although this box is near a conifer plantation so perhaps this is not surprising.

Successful Barn Owl nests were near: Longhorsley, Netherwitton, Warkworth, Howick, Craster, Wooler, Berwick upon Tweed and Lindisfarne.

Thanks are due to all those who have helped with this project; in what has been a frustrating year. Philip Hanmer 2018.

Anyone interested in ringing is invited to get in touch. E-mail: tytoalbas@btinternet.com

Phil Hanmer

'A' Ringer/Trainer Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum)

E-mail: tytoalbas@btinternet.com

HANMER & WOOD OWL BOXES RESULTS (2006 DATA SUPPRESSED FOR CLARITY)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Nesting attempts	30%	22%	28%	29%	20%	33%	20%	33%	22%	30%	64%	22%
Successful nesting	24%	14% (14)	26% (26)	22% (22)	18% (18)	26% (26)	16% (16)	33% (33)	21% (21)	23% (23)	58% (58)	13% (13)
Ave. eggs	5	4	5	4	4	3.5	3.3	4	3	3.5	3.7	4
% eggs hatched	59%	53%	69%	68%	96% (69)	73% (85)	83% (55)	93% (127)	92% (57)	69% (73)	69% (196)	36% (32)
Av. hatched	3	2	3	3	4	2.5	2.8	4	3	2	3	1.5
Av. fledged.	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	4	2	2	2.8	1.4
Percentage ringed	42%	32% (24)	59% (74)	55% (59)	88% (63)	66% (73)	61% (40)	89% (121)	84% (52)	84% (61)	92% (181)	34% (30)
Eggs were mostly laid	First half of April	Second half of May	Second half of May	April, May & June	April to May	April and later.	May; some later.	March & April	April	May but many later.	March & April	May
Weather	Exceptionally warm April temperatures but followed by above average rainfall. Exceptionally warm April temperatures but followed by above average rainfall.	Coldest April since 2001 and above average rainfall; weather deteriorated further in June.	Warmer, dryer and sunnier than average in April & May. June was warmer and dryer than average.	Heavy snow in late winter & early spring.	Heavy snow in early Winter (Nov & Dec 2010)	Exceptionally Warm. March & April; followed by above average rainfall.	Very cold spring. Below average temp. in June. Fine weather from July.	A mild winter followed by early warm spring; with hardly any frosts. Fine summer weather only declining in August.	A benign winter was followed by a short period of dry sunny and warm weather in April. However, May was cool with above average rain. Summer was cool and wet.	Winter was the second wettest since 1910; Jan was exceptionally wet. April was cool and wet and summer did not become settled until April.	Mild winter followed by a dry spring. Warmer than average from March to June. From mid July the weather was cooler and wetter.	Unsettled winter. Feb, March & April had below average temperatures & widespread snow. The end of May was warmer and the Summer very dry & hot.

A TRUE WINTER THRUSH

Scientifically the Thrush family is very extensive and includes Robins, Redstarts and Wheatears. But most of us, when we think of true Thrushes, would probably limit ourselves to the garden-visiting Blackbird alongside the Mistle and Song Thrush.

However, every winter these native species are joined by two winter migrants from Scandinavia and Russia, the Fieldfare and Redwing. While the former is more striking in looks, it is the Redwing's arrival, which, in many ways, encapsulates the onset of winter. The bird is particularly noted for its far carrying flight call of "see-ip", which can be heard, on clear evenings, from late September onwards. The Redwing is a classic nighttime migrant and they can arrive, on our shores, in flocks many thousands strong.

Superficially, Redwings are similar to Song Thrushes in size and overall colouring, but can be distinguished by their distinctive head pattern with its whitish stripe both above the eye and below the cheek. Also, when perched, they show a rusty red crescent along their flanks. Although their name actually derives from a feature, which can only be observed in flight, a long patch of the aforementioned rusty red on the underside of both wings.

Like other migrants Redwings have to change their diet to fit the season. Thus their predilection for insects in summer gives way to searching out berries in winter. However, earthworms are a year round essential element to their diet and they can sometimes be seen in numbers foraging in fields for worms, typically moving a few hops at a time following a pause.

As with many of our winter migrants, coming as they do from the far north, they will have had little or no contact with Man. Typically such birds are often very confiding and even quite tame. Redwings however very much buck this trend!

At the first sight of encroachment from humans, they typically beat an immediate retreat into the depths of any nearby trees and more often than not quickly burst away from sight, calling frantically, as though in a state of wild desperation.

In any given winter up to a million Redwings may arrive in the UK, but as they are extremely nomadic and move according to food supply, they invariably quickly pass through a coastal area like ours. Harsh weather conditions, to which they are very susceptible, may push them rapidly westwards.

But there is always the prospect of seeing them as they make their return journey, a sure sign of winter giving way to spring!

Mick McMahon



There were 34 of us in the hall for the first meeting of our 2018/19 season. The meeting started rather poorly when the planned AGM had to be postponed until the October meeting because Richard had forgotten to bring his carefully prepared agendas and financial notes! No-one else present seemed to be upset at all by the lack of the AGM.

George produced several specimens. First there were two bird skulls – Common Guillemot and Black Guillemot. Despite a superficial impression in life that Black Guillemots are rather small birds than their common cousins, the skulls if anything showed the opposite with the black skull being slightly heavier and larger. There was then an Earth Star fungus that Keith Davison had found in the churchyard at Branton – a comparatively rare find, but with the precise species undetermined. Lastly there was a primary wing feather from a Long-eared Owl. When this was passed round the fringe of 'hairs', on the narrower side of the feather were clearly visible. These aid the silentness of owl flight.

We then welcomed our speaker, Graham Holyoak, from Northumberland Wildlife Trust. Graham has for the past several years led the *Restoring Ratty* project which has been reintroducing Water Voles to the head-waters of Kielder Reservoir. The National Lottery, which is very environmentally-minded, has provided £420,000 towards the cost of the project.

Water Voles, the largest of the British voles, come in two varieties on Britain – a dark brown form in the north (see photo) and a lighter brown variant in the south. The voles involved in this Northumberland project have all been the northern strain. In good vole habitat a single territory might cover about 130 metres of river bank, but in poorer upland areas the territory will be much bigger.



Water Voles in history used to be a terrestrial species, but changes in farming practices in the 20th C effectively drove the animals to occupy riparian habitats. The voles remain more terrestrial in much of the rest of Europe. They are quite effective swimmers even though their feet don't have real swimming adaptations. The fact that their bodies are quite buoyant in the water – much more so than rats – aids their swimming and makes them comparatively easy to identify when swimming.

They are prolific breeders, producing multi litters of 6-7 young each year. And the fact that young voles reach breeding age at about 15 weeks adds to their productivity. Despite this habitat loss caused numbers to start to go down throughout the 20th C, with flooding, predation and starvation being particularly problematic, and then the escape and naturalisation of American Mink from mink farms made things much worse. The rise of the Otter in areas like Northumberland has added to the threats faced by the voles.

The Restoring Ratty project came in two three-year phases. The first phase mostly involved surveying suitable habitat; trying to find out whether there was an existing vole population in the Kielder area; looking at places from which voles could be taken to be released in Kielder; and, most importantly, surveying the mink populations in the intended release areas. Once it had been established that at the head-water end of Kielder there were few if any mink it was clear that this would be a suitable release site.



Voles are taken from existing Northumbrian sites in the North Pennines and from southern Scotland where there are good places in unlikely situations in Glasgow housing estates. The animals trapped are taken in late summer from litters whose members would still be small at the start of winter and therefore be unlikely to survive in the wild. Live trapping involves lots of apple used as bait. The team were a bit disappointed that the voles seemed to prefer New Zealand Discovery apples to any of the British apple varieties. Also, when transferring animals from traps to cages and checking their weights, Pringles tubes proved significantly superior to any other receptacles.

Once trapped the voles have to be taken to vole farms to overwinter. Unfortunately there are only two of these in the country that are suitable equipped and staffed – one in Kent and one in Devon. This project has used the Devon farm, but the eight hour car journeys each way don't seem to bother the caged voles too much and there have been no losses of voles in transit.

At the Devon farm the animals are quickly grouped according to sex and behaviour. Individual voles tend to be either “hangers” or “chewers”. Hangers present an escape risk when one tries to remove the top of the cage to extract the animal because it is usually hanging from the bars on the roof of the cage and is not readily dislodged. Chewers on the other hand engineer their own escape routes and the most persistent of these end up having to be housed in glass tanks. Fortunately the large rooms on the farm where the cages are kept are themselves well sealed to prevent further escape, so animals that have gained their freedom are quickly recaptured and returned to their proper accommodation.

In the spring the voles are brought back north and released into their wild areas along small burns in areas like the Forest Drive in Kielder where they quickly recolonise ancestral vole burrows that may not even have been visible to the surveyors. In 2017, the first year of the second phase of the project, 317 voles were released in June and another 243 in August. Then in 2018 another 400+ have been set free. The intention is to release a total of 3000 animals before the end of the project. The photo shows Mike Pratt, NWT Chief Executive, muscling in at a release.



Subsequently there will still be the task of monitoring the success of the releases. Evidence is collected via foot pads which are placed to record footprints and also by looking for the latrine areas which the voles use as territory markers. None of this effort, both of the releases and the monitoring could be done without a vast amount of volunteer effort to support the small number of “water vole professionals” employed by NWT for the project. Many of the release sites cannot be accessed other than on foot and even then with difficulty.



For the monitoring the staff and volunteers are provided with electronic recording devices which have proved more accurate than asking people to use pen and paper. Particularly useful is the fact that the electronic system accurately records nil returns which are often as useful as positive counts.

Graham's talk was amply illustrated with short video clips of the different stages of the process from trapping to overwintering on the farm in Devon to the release phase. He was keen to point out the efforts that have been made to involve local communities and particularly children. The photo shows a primary school group with Kelly Hollins, Graham's fellow NWT officer with voles ready for release in 2017.

When you work your way through some parts of plant identification keys – particularly ones that help you to identify plants that are not in flower – you find yourself being asked whether your specimen produces latex when cut or damaged. So the first question is ‘what is latex?’

All the higher plants (flowering plants, conifers, ferns etc.) have sap. This term applies both to the water with its dissolved salts that moves from the roots to all other parts and also to the liquid transported from the leaves and containing the products of photosynthesis. These two saps move in different parts of the plant transportation system.

Latex, however, is quite different. It is a specially produced defensive liquid that travels in separate latex tubes in plant stems. Only about 10% of flowering plants produce latex. This is perhaps rather surprising when you consider how effective it is against herbivorous insects and their larvae and against other herbivores like slugs. It acts defensively in three different ways: firstly the chemicals in the latex are usually toxic to the plant’s assailants; secondly the latex tastes foul (can insects and slugs taste??) so they will be deterred from biting into the plant tissues; thirdly latex quickly becomes sticky when exposed to air and this can trap small insects.

Several of the best-known plants with latex are things you may find in your garden – either as cultivated species or as weeds. Poppies all have white latex but when it dries it either turns orange-brown as in the popular Oriental Poppy *Papaver pseudoorientale* (top photo) or it turns red as in the weedy species like Common Poppy *P. rhoeas* (lower photo) and Long-headed Poppy *P. dubium*. Then of course there is *P. somniferum*, the Opium Poppy, that is sometimes grown in gardens. Its copious latex is the source of heroin as well as various legal pharmaceutical drugs. In fact there are now a number of ornamental varieties of Opium Poppy whose latex is sparse and has almost none of the active opiate ingredients.



One colour variant of Opium Poppy



Opium Poppy latex from seed capsule

I expect some of your gardens will have the poppy-relative Greater Celandine *Chelidonium majus* as part of their herbaceous border plantings, but in others, like mine, it appears occasionally as an uninvited weed. Its main claim to fame or notoriety (apart from being entirely unrelated to Lesser Celandine) is its bright yellow-orange latex. Perhaps because the latex is very obvious it is used in herbal medicine and in homeopathic remedies. But before you decide to use it to treat yourself be aware that even in moderate doses the whole plant is toxic because it contains a range of dangerous alkaloids. When used in correct small dosages it has numerous therapeutic uses. The whole plant is on the left and the latex at the cut stem on the right.



As you are on your hands and knees doing the weeding you will soon be aware of the amount of latex in your average Dandelion *Taraxacum* and there are many other plants in the same Asteraceae family that also have latex, like the Sow-thistles *Sonchus spp* and Fox-and-cubs *Pilosella aurantiaca* (photo right). It is certainly the case that I can't remember ever having seen any of these plants being attacked by slugs or caterpillars, so probably the latex is doing its job. Or perhaps it's a pity they aren't attacked because Fox-and-cubs can be quite an invasive weed.



One group of plants that are particularly rich in latex are the Spurges. Some of the larger ones are grown as garden ornamentals, but the small annual Petty Spurge *Euphorbia peplus* (left) is often encountered as a garden weed and the latex can be an irritant for people with sensitive skin. On the other hand it has long been used to treat skin conditions where excess cell growth causes skin lesions or small cancers.

All of this is interesting, but when you are botanising in the countryside you sometimes come across trees which, particularly when young, are hard to pin down as Sycamores *Acer pseudoplatanus* or Norway Maples *A. platanoides*. Actually the diagnosis is easy if you think latex. Break or cut a leaf stalk and if it oozes white latex it is a Norway Maple and if it doesn't it's a Sycamore. I was going to show a photo of the two cut ends of leaf stalks, but this late in the season as the leaves get ready to fall I couldn't find a Norway Maple that had any decent quantity of latex, so you'll just have to take my word for it.

Richard

For most bird watchers, autumn is a time of high hopes and unreasonable expectations. We have great ideas about big falls of migrant birds, lots of rarities and some great sea watches with birds thundering by in their thousands. Usually the reality is much different and 2018 is up to prove a point.

Since Early September the predominant weather system has veered between full southerly winds to westerly gales. Very little indeed has come from the bird producing half, the east, so here I'll give a little taster of September and October so far.

On the 2nd August, as I said, full of hope and expectation, we visited Boulmer to hunt for drifted migrants. Seaton Point was very quiet with no migration evident at all, but a short look behind the small caravan site near Boulmer Village found a lone Whinchat, a Yellow Wagtail and a fly past Green Sandpiper, an uncommon bird in this area that is generally free of muddy edged fresh water so loved by these birds.

At Howick a lot of butterflies were in our garden with 40 individuals of 9 species including 2 Painted Lady. There is some migration happening after all. Better still came later on when a Hummingbird Hawk-moth, one of three this year, fed at our buddleia.



Figure 1: Hummingbird Hawk-moth, Howick.

We took our annual September trip to Suffolk for a week from the 7th.

On 16th September a visit to Newton point produced 6 Great Skua, 5 Red throated Diver and a hunting female Merlin.

Storm Ali, the first named storm of the season, called in on 19th, snapping trees in our garden and generally causing a right old mess. Further afield, large oaks were snapped off and even small saplings were uprooted in the Howick Arboretum.

A walk to check the damage on 21st found a lot of butterflies and dragonflies on the wing down the Long Walk where 3 Comma and 2 Migrant Hawkers were the highlight. A Spotted Flycatcher was an increasingly rare sight these days in the Red Wells birch trees.

The wind almost veered away from the south on 23rd with a light WNW 3 so a sea watch at Beadnell Point was on the cards. Again hopes were dashed as all we could muster were 19 Manx Shearwater, 1 Great Skua and 15 Red throated Divers.

At home, in our Howick garden I was looking for nectaring butterflies on the Michelmas Daisies when a large hairy fly caught my attention. Not one I've seen before, *Tachina fera*, showed well on the flowers.

On 25th September, the field north of Seahouses Farm, Howick had 2 Mediterranean Gulls in with a few Black headed, the first multiple occurrence of Med Gull on my patch.

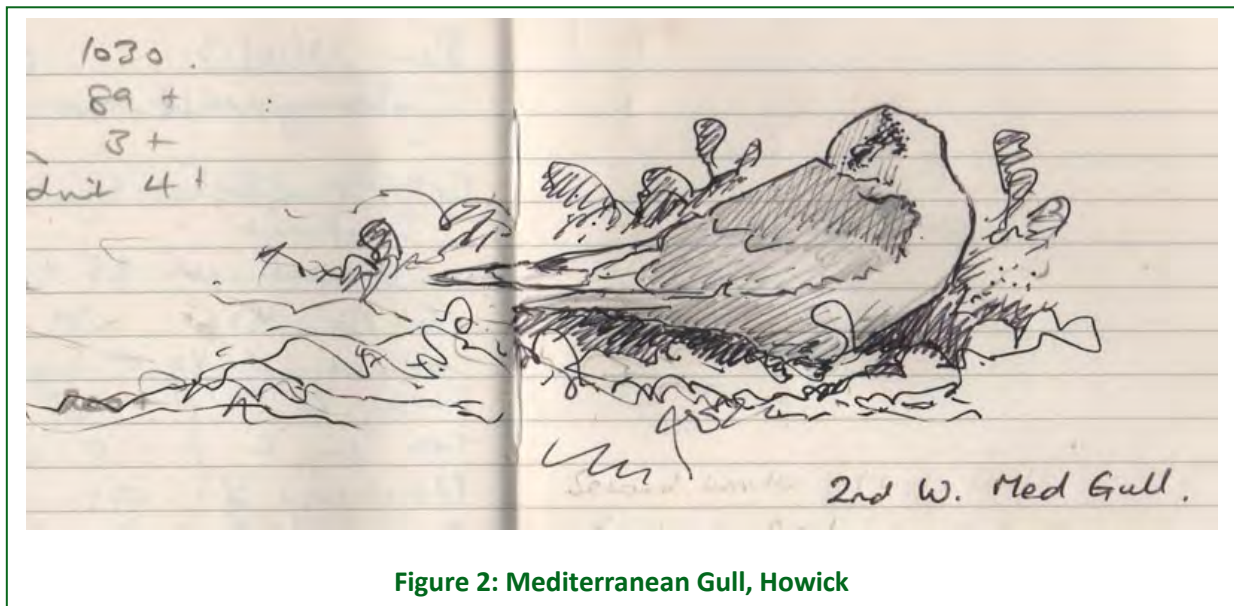


Figure 2: Mediterranean Gull, Howick

More regular and to be expected were 450 Barnacle Geese migrating N along the coast on 28th.

In the garden a Brown Rat below the bird feeders on 29th was my first here since early April. Action may be required!

By October our gathering of Swallows and Martins at Howick had moved on, and by now they might even be in Africa. I'm already eagerly awaiting their return next year.

On the 6th October a walk with Peggy, our terrier, took in the Rumbling Kern and the coast path at Howick. In the small field as the brace earlier, now 4 Mediterranean Gulls were gathered. I hope this recent increase in numbers becomes a regular feature, as the adults are lovely smart birds. 2 Chiffchaffs were in the village, while a southerly movement of migrating birds included 11 Siskins, 2 Coal Tit and 9 Skylark. At sea were 1 Arctic Skua, 1 ad Common Tern and 2 juv. Arctic Tern, all late stayers.

A look off Cullernose Point in the afternoon found very few seabirds but a Small Copper butterfly may have been my latest record.

It seems that weather is no barrier to all bird migration as on 7th October a calm morning with a clear sky proved quite interesting for migrating birds down the coast. From Craster car park we had 9 Brambling, 60 Redpoll, 58 Siskin, 5 Crossbill, 442 Pink footed Geese, 38 Redwings, 3 Song Thrush over S while a large Great Northern Diver going north high above the car park was very unexpected. Other birds noted in the scrub were 3 Willow Tits, a Treecreeper, 2 Grey Partridge, 2 Chiffchaff and 3 Fieldfare.

A large arrival of Thrushes on Thursday 11th October got local birders out from their slumber and hunting the regional hotspots. A Pallas's Warbler and a Woodlark were on Holy Island. Both great birds to brighten any autumn.

On Sunday 14th October it was cooler and with a light west wind we ventured back to Boulmer. It was a good choice as we soon located 2 Yellow-browed Warblers, 10 Swallows S and 1 House Martin S, a Pintail flew inland, 1 Black-throated Diver N, a Merlin hunted the shore and a Purple Sandpiper was with other waders on washed up seaweed.

Inspired by our limited success we headed to Warkworth Beach Car Park and found 3 Yellow-browed Warblers, 1 Ring Ouzel, 1 Lesser Whitethroat and 2 Blackcaps.



Figure 3: Yellow browed Warbler from Siberia to Boulmer and

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

IN RESPONSE TO RICHARD'S REQUEST FOR 'INTERESTING' PHOTOS I ATTACH A COUPLE.

The first shows one of two Grey Wagtails which foraged around our Felton garden for 10 minutes in early September. This was a garden first and surprised us as we are almost a mile from the nearest water course (River Coquet). The second is an Angle Shades moth which appeared on our kitchen splashback during the evening of October 10th.

Andrew and Meg Keeble



AWG EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE FOR MEMBERS TO BORROW

Item(s)	Who to contact to borrow
Bat detectors (2)	George Dodds
Trail Cameras (2)	George Dodds
Simple Microscopes (2)	George Dodds
Pooters (for small invertebrate collecting) + Bug Pots (to hold collected specimens)	Richard Poppleton
Folding Butterfly net (for adult b'flies & moths) Small Sweep net (for collecting in vegetation) Medium Sweep net (ditto)	Stewart Sexton
Telescopic pond net	Stewart Sexton
Small sampling trays } for spreading and Large sampling trays } sorting net catches	Stewart Sexton
Telescopic pond net	Stewart Sexton
Field Studies Council laminated identification charts	Richard Poppleton

Contact details:

George Dodds: 01665 578645 (home) 07702 492229 (mobile) george@georgedodds.co.uk

Stewart Sexton: stewchat@btinternet.com (or via Richard Poppleton – see below)

Richard Poppleton: 01665 578346 (home) richard.pop@btinternet.com

PROJECTS

One of the things that helps to keep AWG going as a lively and interesting group is the range of projects that we get involved with. We recognise that surveys and walks will not be what all members want from AWG, but we hope that some will want to get involved with one or more projects.

WALKS

Each year during the spring to autumn period we try to offer a programme of trips and walks, often with a particular wildlife focus. These are always listed in the newsletters, usually starting from the March issue. For these you don't need to book – you just turn up at the advertised time and place. Almost all the walks tend to be suggested and led by members of the Committee, but we'd love other members to suggest trips and we say very clearly that you don't need to be an expert in anything, you just need to have planned the route and be willing to be the nominal leader on the day.

If you have any ideas for a walk next year, do please let Richard richard.pop@btinternet.com or George george@georgedodds.co.uk have details of your suggestions.

NEBS

This handy acronym stands for Northumberland Estates Bird Surveys. For more than ten years AWG has carried out bird surveys for the Estates on five different upland sites and two coastal farmland sites. We do two winter survey visits and three spring visits to each site each year, simply following, roughly, the same set route and recording the numbers of the different bird species we see and hear. Each visit happens in a particular scheduled week, but you have choice over which day you make your visit. For each visit you need to set aside half a day.

If you think you might like to become part of the team of members who do these NEBS surveys, do contact Jim Clark jandec1@tiscali.co.uk who will talk you through what is involved and, if you like, will arrange for you to do a first visit with one of the existing team. You could specify that you just want to do a single survey visit in a year or possibly be willing to do two or three.

FARM/ESTATE SURVEYS

In some years we manage to arrange to do quite detailed wildlife surveys of a particular site over the course of a year. Often these have been at the request of Lord James Joicey of Ford & Etal Estates who has been a member of AWG for many years. We have surveyed Ford Moss (three times), Slainsfield Moor, Kyloe Quarry and Branton Ponds and written up a detailed report for each year's efforts. Our survey efforts cover birds, botany, moths and butterflies, small mammals and any other groups of organisms for which we have some expertise. Individual members can get involved as much or as little as they wish.

In 2020 we shall be due to do our fourth 5-yearly survey of Ford Moss if James Joicey wants us to do so, but for 2019 George Dodds is trying to arrange a survey effort on an upland farm near Rothbury. Details will be in the newsletters if and when we have them.

DETAILS OF ALL THAT IS GOING ON WILL APPEAR IN THE NEWSLETTERS, SO WHEN YOU GET YOURS, DO CHECK TO SEE IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED

SIGHTINGS SEPTEMBER 2018

BIRDS	
Red-throated Diver	2 at Boulmer on 16th and 7 on 23rd
Great-crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on all month
Manx Shearwater	9 at Boulmer on 16th and 23 on 23rd 1 at Craster on 28th
Cormorant	A flock of 13 over Alnwick on 15th
Little Egret	2 at Budle Bay on 4th and 11th 9 at Holy Island on 22nd 1 at Craster on 11th
Grey Heron	7 at Monks House Pool on 11th 2 in College Valley on 16th
Canada Goose	22 at Budle Bay on 20th
Greylag Goose	300+ at Branton Ponds on 2nd 100 at Budle Bay on 4th
Pink-footed Goose	11 over Branton on 15th 1000 at Budle Bay on 25th
Barnacle Goose	150 at Holy Island on 22nd 3000 at Fenham Flats on 26th 32 north over Howick Village on 29th 100's north at Newton Point on 28th
Shoveler	30 at Budle Bay on 20th
Mandarin	1 at Branton Ponds on 15th and still there on 23rd
Wigeon	4 at Branton Ponds on 2nd 30+ at Branton Ponds on 13th
Goosander	6 at Branton Ponds on 1st and 13 on 15th
Gadwall	2 pairs at Branton Ponds on 2nd and 8 pairs on 30th
Goldeneye	1 at Branton Ponds on 2nd
Peregrine	1 at Boulmer on 9th
Kestrel	1 in College Valley on 16th 1 in Alnwick on 8th
Sparrowhawk	1 in College Valley on 16th 1 at Howick Pool on 29th
Common Buzzard	1 at Alnwick on 26th
Grey Partridge	1 at Howick Village on 29th
Coot	40+ at Branton Ponds on 13th
Snipe	10 at Branton Ponds on 18th
Golden Plover	1400 on Holy Island causeway on 17th
Lapwing	300+ at Branton Ponds on 2nd
Dunlin	3 at Branton Ponds on 2nd
Ruff	2 at Monks House Pool on 4th
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 16th 1 at Ingram on 18th
Black-tailed Godwit	110 at Monks House Pool on 4th
Greenshank	2 at Holy Island on 13th 2 at Budle Bay on 13th
Whimbrel	12 at Smeafield on 17th
Great Skua	1 at Craster on 4th
Arctic Skua	1 at Boulmer on 16th and 2 on 23rd
Pomarine Skua	2 at Boulmer on 16th and 1 on 23rd
Lesser Black-backed Gull	262 at Branton Ponds on 1st and 148 on 23rd
Sandwich Tern	1 on Holy Island causeway on 17th
Barn Owl	1 north of Alnwick on 26th
Little Owl	1 at Lemmington Bank
Long-eared Owl	1 on Holy Island on 15th
Short-eared Owl	1 on Holy Island on 15th
Kingfisher	2+ at Branton Ponds all month 1 at Brandon Ford on 2nd
Yellow Wagtail	1 juvenile at Branton Ponds on 5th 2 at Boulmer on 9th
Pied Wagtail	16+ at Branton Ponds on 5th
Dipper	1 in Harthope Valley on 18th
Wheatear	4 on Holy Island on 15th 1 at Howick Village on 29th 4 at Craster on 27th
Blackbird	An influx at Yearle on 27th
Song Thrush	5 at Howick Hall on 28th
Mistle Thrush	11 at Howick Hall on 15th 10 at Howick Hall on 28th
Common Whitethroat	1 at Howick Hall on 15th

Chiffchaff	1 at Howick Hall on 1st ,5 on 8th and 3 on 15th 1 at Yearle on 8th 6 at Howick Hall on 28th
Blackcap	5 at Howick Hall on 15th and 6 on 28th
Goldcrest	10 at Howick Pool on 29th
Long-tailed Tit	16 at Howick Pool on 29th
Spotted Flycatcher	1 at Craster on 7th
Coal Tit	14 at Smeafield on 14th
Treecreeper	1 at Yearle on 20th
Raven	1 at Newton Tors on 22nd 3 over Glanton on 23rd 2 in Harthope Valley on 18th
Jay	1 at Yearle on 15th 1 in College Valley on 16th
Crossbill	2 at Beanley Woods on 2nd
FUNGI	
Yellow Fieldcap	At Branton Ponds on 12th
Giant Puffball	Several at Branton Ponds on 12th
Shaggy Inkcap	At Branton Ponds on 24th
Scarlet Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 22nd
Meadow Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 22nd
Butter Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 22nd
Golden Waxcap	A small group on Holy Island on 15th
Hollow Bolete	At Beanley Woods on 22nd
Wood Hedgehog	At Beanley Woods on 22nd
Yellow Club	At Beanley Woods on 22nd
Yellow Stagshorn	At Beanley Woods on 22nd
Dog Vomit Slime Mould	At Branton Ponds on 18th
INVERTEBRATES	
Southern Hawker	4 at Branton Ponds on 2nd 1 at Lemmington Hall on 28th
Migrant Hawker	1 at Druridge Pools on 18th 4 at Howick Pool on 29th
Common Hawker	4 at Howick Pool on 29th
Common Darter	1 at Branton Ponds on 12th 1 at Beanley Woods on 23rd 30 at Howick Pool on 29th
Common Blue Damselfly	1 at Branton Ponds on 15th
Comma	1 at Branton Ponds on 26th 1 at Yearle on 30th
Red Admiral	15+ at Branton Ponds on 12th 2 at Yearle on 8th with 3 on 18th and 1 on 30th 7 at Smeafield on 11th and 12+ on 12th
Peacock	4 at Yearle on and 1 on 18th
Wall Brown	4 at Smeafield on 2nd
Painted Lady	2 at Smeafield on 2nd and 3 on 11th
Speckled Wood	6+ at Branton Ponds on 2nd with 20+ on 13th 2 at Smeafield on 9th and 4 on 24th several in Alnwick all month
Small Copper	1 at Beanley Moor on 2nd 1 at Branton Ponds on 2nd 1 at Yearle on 15th
Common Blue	1 at Branton Ponds on 15th
Small Tortoiseshell	Up to 6 at Yearle between 2nd and 26th 1 at Smeafield on 24th
Black Rustic	1 at Branton on 2nd
Canary-shouldered Thorn	4 at Branton on 1st
Red-green Carpet	4 at Branton on 1st
Feathered Gothic	1 at Branton on 1st
Brown-spot Pinion	39 at Branton on 1st
Poplar Hawk-moth	2 at Branton on 1st
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	1 at Branton on 27th
PLANTS	
Grass of Parnassus	Lots on Holy Island on 16th
MAMMALS	
Harbour Porpoise	1 off Boulmer on 23rd 2 at Craster on 6th
Bottlenose Dolphin	2 at Craster on 18th

Grey Squirrel	1 at Yearle on 25th 1 in Alnwick on 30th 1 at Brizlee Woods on 18th 1 at Craster on 18th
Red Squirrel	1 at Branton Ponds all month
Roe Deer	3 at Wooler G C on 14th
REPTILES	
Slow Worm	1 on Beanley Moor on 23rd
RAINFALL	71 mm
OBSERVERS	W Banks, G&R Bell, I&K Davison, G&J Dodds, M&J Drage,
	A&M Goodall, P&A Hanmer, P Jobson, S Reay, J Wilson,
	AWG outing.

SQUIRREL SIGHTINGS

Quite often Keith and Ian Davison get details of squirrel sightings from members to include in our Newsletter sightings pages. In practice it would be much more useful if these sightings of both Red and Grey Squirrels were sent to one of the local squirrel groups.

The nearest group to Alnwick is the Lower Coquetdale Group and by far the best way to report squirrels to them is by opening up their website: www.lcreds.org.uk. Find and click the <Report a Sighting> tab on the right hand side at the top of the main page. What comes up is then a brief sightings form and a map alongside.

If you fill in the details on the form you can either quote the location as a place (e.g. central Alnwick garden) or much better zoom the map and move the cursor to the place you saw the animal, which is then shown at the bottom of the screen as GPS co-ordinates in Latitude and Longitude readings. The map gives them to umpteen places of decimals, but we would suggest that you just quote them to three decimal places – so, for example, Lat 55.398 Long -1.784. Then click on the <Submit Sighting> tab and it's done.



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