

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



REVIEW OF JULY 2011

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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AUGUST

It just seems like yesterday when the first of the summer migrants had started to arrive in March. **Swallows**, **Sand** and **House Martins** have started to congregate around ponds, reed beds and other habitats throughout the area. Most of these birds are juveniles or failed breeders and are feeding up before they head south. Another long distant traveller that quickly leaves our area is the **Swift**. The 'screaming' flocks, so characteristic of urban areas will be gone by the end of the first week of August. Remarkably, another bird that appears to move on very quickly is the **Cuckoo**. This year at least four birds have been fitted with data loggers. One bird, which was caught on the breeding site, had moved into France after less than five weeks in this country. The latest news is that it has returned to Africa! At the time of writing, two of the other males had moved into France and Spain.

As the nights start to draw in, this is a good time to look for bats especially one of Britain largest, the **Noctule**. This flying 'teddy bear' is relatively uncommon but can be seen hunting over the ponds and rivers such as at Branton. These large bats feed mainly on larger insects such as moths and **Caddis** flies. Noctule bats will often hunt high over water and can be seen feeding with Swifts and Swallows. They roost in holes in trees and the site is often recognisable by staining on the tree below the hole. The roost site is used until the weather becomes cooler and the bats then migrate to caves and other suitable winter roost sites where the air temperature remains relatively stable through the winter.

Another mammal that is relatively easy to see at this time of year is the **Grey Seal**. Congregations of over a thousand animals have been recorded on the sand banks at Fenham Flats. The best place to observe and smell the 'haul out' is from the south-west corner of Lindisfarne. The 'haul out' is a mixture of age groups. Most of these animals will have been born on the Farne Islands. There will be a number from the other North Sea colonies. Satellite tracking indicates that seals will move large distances throughout the year. There is always a chance that you will see a **Common Seal**. This seal is now very uncommon on our coast. They used to breed on the Fenham Flats sand banks. A few are seen every year especially in the summer. Common Seals are easy to confuse with young Grey Seals. Look out for a 'dog' faced seal rather than one with a roman nose.

August can be a great time to see migratory butterflies and moths such as **Painted Lady**, **Red Admiral**, **Clouded Yellow**, **Silver-Y** and **Hummingbird Hawkmoth**. The arrival of these insects is dependent on southerly winds. There have already been a few Red Admiral, Silver-Y and the odd Clouded Yellow.

Let's just hope that the sun will shine throughout August.

Jack Daw.

Please send sightings reports for July no later than 6th August, to:-
Ian & Keith Davison, The Bungalow, Branton, Powburn, NE66 4LW
or Tel: 01665 578 357 or email to redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

Scarce Late Summer Butterflies in North Northumberland

Following on from the recent newsletter articles about scarce spring and early summer butterflies, this is a last note, for this summer at least, about three species that you may come across in the next month or so. The first two are definitely present, but the third is more in hope than expectation.



whole of the north-east in 2009.

The first is one that I mentioned in spring, the Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*. This is because it has two generations and the second one should be emerging just about as this newsletter reaches you. Whereas the spring generation uses Holly as the food plant, the summer generation switch to Ivy, *Hedera helix*, so it is likely to be found around blocks of Ivy, perhaps in churchyards or mature gardens and more than likely, Alnwick could hold a few. The spring generation this year was reasonable in Northumberland Park in Tynemouth where up to four were seen at any one time so it seems to have started to bounce back from a low of only 7 records for the



few weeks until late August.

The second of the three is one that Group members have found at two new locations in the past couple of years, in the Kyloes and near Amble. This is Grayling, *Hipparchia semele*, which has its strongholds in Lindisfarne NNR, particularly the dune systems and on brownfield land on the old coal storage areas of the demolished Blyth power station at Cambois. It has amazingly cryptic plumage and will probably only be spotted if it flies or flicks its wings. When on the ground on bare patches of sand, stones or ballast, it can be extremely hard to see. It looks rather like a Meadow Brown in flight but more colourful. Flights are often fast and short before it lands and appears to disappear! It is on the wing now and for the next



peeled!

The last butterfly is one that is not officially in the county but I have recently come across a photo taken at the upper lakes at Craggside in the 1970s. This is Scotch Argus, *Erebia aethiops*, where the nearest current records are over the border in the tetrad (2km square) NT6610. The Borders Atlas¹ reports that it is a butterfly of damp grassland that is lightly grazed or ungrazed and large colonies exist in open sunny glades in woodland, including conifers. Several sites in the Borders are on basin mires or fens, known locally as mosses. It is thought to be under pressure as populations move north under the effect of increasing temperatures. The Atlas¹ shows that it is on the wing from early July through to early

If you come across any of these butterflies, or indeed of any others, please let me know, noting the grid reference, to six figures preferably, and how many were seen. Given the extreme rarity of the last species, it would be extremely helpful if any sightings could be photographed and if I were contacted straightaway. I can be reached on 0191 285 8314 or at roger@norman784.plus.com. A spreadsheet for sightings can also be downloaded from our website at www.northeast-butterflies.org.uk

Roger Norman, Northumberland Recorder

Holly Blue and Scotch Argus photos courtesy of Jim Asher, Butterfly Conservation.

1 Mercer, J., Buckland, R., Kirkland, P., Waddell, J., *Butterfly Atlas of the Scottish Borders*, Atropos Publishing.

Howick moths – Mid June – Mid July a comparison between 2010 / 2011.

If I were to guess, I would have thought that this mid summer month in 2011 was probably wetter and definitely cooler than the same period in 2010. As a result of this, I expected that my garden moth catch for the period would be well down this year, so I was surprised to find that this was not the case.

In 2010, from mid June to mid July I caught 2745 moths of 168 different species. This year the total is a remarkably similar 2421 moths of 170 species.

Although the statistics are close, there are a few species differences. For example, in 2010, Pale Prominent, Scalloped Oak, Chinese Character, Common Wave, Grass Emerald, Lilac Beauty and Peach Blossom had all made an appearance. Some of these may still turn up yet though for others the year is over by now.

On the plus side however, this year, I have recorded new additions such as Ash Pug, Bordered Sallow, Hummingbird Hawkmoth, Large Emerald, White Plume Moth and the confusingly named, The Uncertain.

I am just hoping for an increase in temperature for the rest of July and August. You are never sure what might turn up...



White Plume Moth



Large Emerald



Hummingbird Hawkmoth



Ash Pug



Bordered Sallow



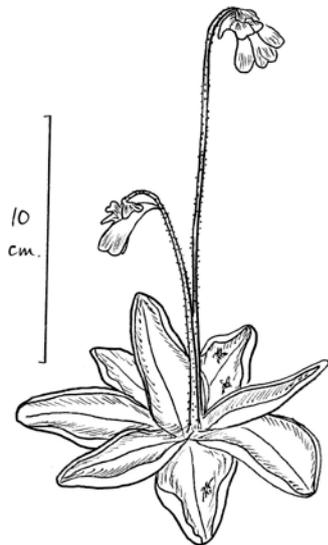
The Uncertain

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

PLANT CORNER

While I was doing the AWG bird survey visit to the Alnwick Moor site this week (mid-June) I couldn't avoid looking for interesting plants as well as recording the birds. Last year I found a good patch of one of our few carnivorous plants in flower in the middle of the moorland. This was

Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*).



Common Butterwort

The individual plants consist of a small rosette of yellow-green leaves at ground level and one or two upright flowering stems to a maximum of 20cm, each with a single violet-coloured and violet-shaped flower. Inside the throat of the flower is a pale patch and there is a petal spur at the back. The flowers can usually be found from May to July. Unlike the Sundews, the method of trapping insects does not rely on hairs. Instead the upper leaf surfaces are slimy and the small flies get stuck in the slime which gradually digests them. The outer leaf

margins are normally upwardly rolled which may also help to prevent the flies struggling free.



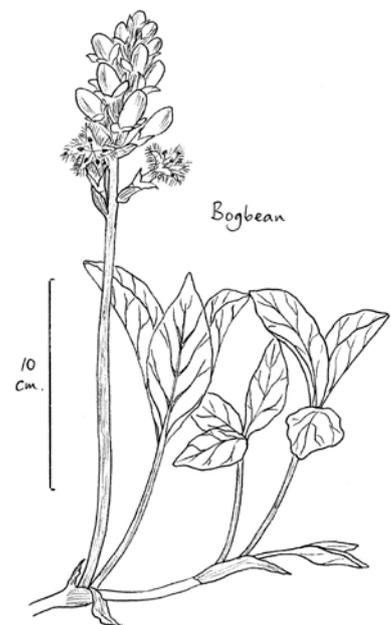
Then, further across the moor there is a wet dene which takes the run-off water from the Freeman's Gap pond in Hulne Park. In the wettest part there were three good plants, all of which have quite patchy distributions in North Northumberland and it was excellent to see all three together. One was Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*), the less common relative of the 'ordinary' Lousewort that I illustrated in the last newsletter. The second was Bog Asphodel (*Narhecium ossifragum*) which was still in bud. And the third, which I've chosen for this article, was **Bogbean** (*Menyanthes trifoliata*).



Bogbean is a native plant with roughly broad-bean-shaped leaves in groups of three on short stalks that protrude above the shallow acidic waters where it lives. It spreads by underwater rhizomes that can stretch for 1.5 metres. The flowers are startling. They occur

as a cluster on a stout stem 30cm high. Each flower is white, tinged pink on its outside, and on the edges and upper surface of the petals are dense white hairs.

Richard Poppleton.



SIGHTINGS JUNE 2011

BIRDS	
Little Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on the 17th
Great Crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds all month
Black-necked Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on the 11th
Pochard	1 at Branton Ponds on the 12th
Osprey	1 at Hedgeley on the 22nd and 1 at Roddam on the 25th
Peregrine	1 at Boulmer on the 25th
Red Grouse	Several chicks at Ingram on the 3rd
Quail	2 at Beal on the 20th and up to 4 all month at Branton
Golden Plover	1 on Cheviot on the 15th
Common Sandpiper	5 at Branton Ponds on the 25th
Spotted Redshank	1 at East Chevington on the 26th
Little Gull	8 at East Chevington on the 26th
Little Tern	2 at Ross Back Sands on the 12th
Cuckoo	1 at Ingram on the 3rd
Barn Owl	2 at Beal on the 20th, adults feeding young
Nightjar	1 at East Holburn on the 6th
Green Woodpecker	1 at Hannah's Hill on the 4th
Tree Pipit	1 at Coldmartin Lough on the 14th
Yellow Wagtail	6 at Beal on the 20th and 1 at Doddington Bridge on the 24th
Stonechat	8 at Bewick Moor on the 25th
Grasshopper Warbler	1 reeling at Kimmer Lough on the 14th
Wood Warbler	1 at the Cupola Bridge on the 3rd
Reed Warbler	1 at Branton Ponds on the 4th
Pied Flycatcher	2 at Allenbanks on the 3rd
Spotted Flycatcher	2 at Branton on the 7th
Long-tailed Tits	8 at Branton Ponds on the 9th
Raven	1 at Newton Point on the 18th
Tree Sparrow	8 at Beadnell all month
Siskin	2 at Smeafield all month
Lesser Redpoll	12 at Kimmer Lough on the 14th
Common Rosefinch	1 at Belford on the 10th
MAMMALS	
Hedgehog	Singles at Branton on the 7th and 23rd
Otter	1 female with 2 cubs at Hedgeley on the 23rd and 1 at Branton Ponds also on the 23rd
Red Squirrel	Singles at Branton on the 23rd and 25th also Bulbys Wood on the 4th and 4 in Park Wood, Belford on the 2nd
Brown Hare	4 at Smeafield on the 21 st and several at Doddington on the 24th
Roe Deer	Female with 2 young at Doddington on the 24th
PLANTS	
Heath Spotted Orchid	College Valley on the 11th
Rock Rose	Ingram on the 9th
Wood Cranesbill	Ingram on the 9th
Cow Wheat	Mid Hill,(Cheviot) on the 15th
Starry Saxifrage	Mid Hill (Cheviot) on the 15th
Butterwort	Cheviot on the 15th
INVERTEBRATES	
Red Admiral	2 at Smeafield on the 27th
Ringlet	Up to 6 at Smeafield on the 29th
REPTILES	
Slow Worm	1 at Allenbanks on the 3rd and 2 at Branton Ponds on the 21st
AMPHIBIANS	
Froglets and Toadlets	100's at Cragside on the 19th
	<i>The rainfall at Smeafield for June was 67.1 mm</i>
OBSERVERS	
	I &K Davison, G Dodds, J Givens, S Reay, P Rutherford, H Tindle