

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



REVIEW OF MARCH 2012

NEWSLETTER 127

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MOTH. HOWICK'S DARK SECRETS..... STEWART SEXTON 30TH MAY 2012.

Stewart is a leading naturalist in Northumberland with his main passions being birds and drawings, which can often be seen in our newsletter. Furthermore the quality of his photos and his knowledge of natural history are second to none. This should be an excellent end to the indoor season and we look forward to seeing you on the evening.

WILDLIFE NOTES FOR MAY

We have experienced a strange assortment of weather in the last two months; balmy spring days followed Arctic conditions, driving rain and frosts. Never mind spring has sprung and the breeding season is in full flow; flowers are blooming, insects are buzzing, birds are singing and leverets are up and running.

May is one of the best times to look in our hedgerows. Most hedgerows are dominated by a small number of trees and shrubs. One of the uncommon species is the Wych Elm. The word 'wych' has its roots in Middle English and means pliable, which perfectly describes the strong but supple twigs and branches of the tree. The wood is durable in wet conditions and almost impossible to split, making it an ideal multi-purpose timber. It is used for making boats, as groynes, and is the traditional wood from which coffins are made. The elm genus are notoriously difficult to tell apart, and to add to this, there are many hybrids and cultivars of elm, more, in fact, than there are true species. The Wych elm has purple flowers, which appear before leaves in the spring. The subsequent fruit comes in the form of a samara, a winged seed package, which grows in green clusters before turning brown and being shed in July. Wych elm and its derivatives can still be found in the hedgerows of mid Northumberland.

There are two large moths that can be found on moorland and open country at this time of year; the emperor moth and fox moth. The emperor moth is one of the largest British moths. The males, which have bright orange hindwings, fly during the daytime in search of the greyer females, which fly at night. Both sexes are on the wing in April and May. The male fox moth is generally more reddish-brown than the females, which are slightly larger and greyer. Like the emperor moth, the male fox moth fly in the afternoon and the females fly at night. The caterpillars of both species fed on heather and bramble.

The nesting season is in full flow with fledged chicks appearing every day. May and June are the best times of year to visit the Farne Islands. The main islands throng with breeding guillemots, razorbills, puffins, kittiwakes, fulmars, shags and terns (sandwich, arctic and common). By the middle of May the first of the chicks will have hatched and the constant passage of birds between the nest and their feeding sites is mesmerising. For those that can't get to the Farnes, there are a small number of seabird colonies that can be seen from the shore. These include the north side of Dunstanburgh Castle where you can see razorbills, kittiwakes, shags and fulmars. Other places include the Needles Eye, north of Berwick or further a field St Abbs Head. Small colonies of kittiwakes and or fulmars can be found almost anywhere along the coast.

This is a very productive time of the year for watching wildlife. Hopefully we will get suitable weather to enjoy the sights and sounds of our countryside.

Jack Daw

MEETING OF WEDNESDAY 28TH MARCH 2012

31 members were present. Richard began by letting members know of the sad death of Lord Ridley who has been so generous in his support of AWG. However, the planned Blagdon visit on 27th May is still to go ahead and details will be in the April newsletter. Our membership is currently 102 and members are encouraged to seek out potential new recruits.

George's specimens were a female Sparrowhawk and a Collared Dove, both brought by Dave Makepeace. A remarkably complete cast Adder skin had been brought by Keith Davison and George had some good quality pieces of a softish coral cast up on a Northumbrian beach.

Wildlife: New plants in flower were Marsh Marigold, Butterbur and Corn Spurrey. In the warm weather Red Asminal, Small White and Orange Tip had been seen. Moth traps have been getting good hauls, but nothing very unusual.



Dark-edged Bee-flies (*Bombylius majus*) have been regular on Aubretia in a Titlington Mount garden. A Swallow was seen at Tweedmouth on 27th. Two Marsh Harrier females are reportedly back at East Chevington. Two Short-eared Owls were at Boulmer on 28th and both Tawny and Barn Owls with eggs have already been found in nest boxes.

Speaker: George apologised for the non-appearance of the advertised speaker, but had stepped into the breach to talk about Zambian wildlife based on a personal trip to the Luangwa Valley (southern end of the Great Rift Valley) in 1988. He was there for several weeks in the dry season (June – August) ostensibly to study soils, but he actually studied and wrote his dissertation on Elephants, doing interesting things like germinating seeds from elephant dung.

The vegetation is largely semi-scrub Mopane tree forest, but further from the river there is African Ebony forest. George concentrated on the larger 'game' species – crocodile, hippopotamus, and buffalo, with briefer interludes on antelope, zebra, giraffe, hyena, leopard and lion. Hippos and buffalo are particularly feared by the local people – you don't get in the way when hippos are charging out of the bush to their slides into the river in the mornings and buffalo are notoriously bed-tempered all the time.

This part of Zambia has 600-700 bird species and George dealt mainly with larger species – herons, pelicans, snake birds, storks, hammerkops, egrets, skimmers and the 6 or 7 species of kingfisher. To add flavour to his talks he had brought a hippo tusk, and elephant-hair bracelet and a big spherical fruit from an ivory-palm.

BLAGDON HALL VISIT

Sunday 27th May at 10.00am. Maximum duration is expected to be 2½ hours.

Despite the recent death of Lord Ridley (now succeeded by his son, Matt, who becomes the 5th Viscount Ridley) our planned visit is still to go ahead by kind permission of the family.

We hope to have a good attendance and we must ask you to arrive ready for a prompt 10.00am start. We are to be escorted by Bob Gajdus (appropriately pronounced 'guide us'!) who knows the estate well and is an experienced birder. We hope to be able to get a good look at the spring garden displays, including Lord Ridley's favourite quarry garden, but also to look at some of the wilder areas being specially managed for wildlife.

The best access is to leave the A1 immediately south of Stannington. This exit takes you over the A1 so you are opposite the driveway to the home farm (at NZ 218 776). Enter the estate by this road and take the first available left fork by the farm buildings. This brings you to the parking area behind the Hall (NZ 215 772). There are toilets available near the parking area.

SWARLAND SNAPSHOTS – MARCH 2012

Finch activity around the two feeding points continued through the first three weeks at much the same level of intensity as was seen in February, but with numbers falling away noticeably during the last week of the month. **Greenfinch** and **Chaffinch** were the most numerous, both matching the average for the number ringed in March each year since 2000. Up to half a dozen **Goldfinches** were seen almost daily with most of the 11 ringed being males, which suggests the springtime passage seen here during April in recent years has been earlier than usual. The last of the **Lesser Redpolls**, which had so unusually been here all winter, was seen on the 10th and whilst there were a few **Siskins** from time to time there has to date been no sign of a spring passage movement beginning. Several pairs of **Bullfinches** continued coming to the feeders as previously, until the last week since when there has been just one pair at a time. Sighting of **Brambling** were limited to single females on the 10th and 12th, coinciding respectively with a male **Reed Bunting** and a female **Yellowhammer**, both having become unusual here in recent years.

Great, Blue and Coal Tits have all been much less frequent visitors to the feeders this month, this is not so unusual with the latter, as Coal Tits do tend to get into their breeding cycle earlier than the others, but both Great and Blue Tits have been seen paying attention to nest boxes already, although to date none of the boxes examined show signs of occupation, other than for roosting.

A **Willow Tit** was caught on the 14th, a small number of this nationally declining species continues to hold on locally, and on the same day a pair of Long-tailed Tits was caught one being a bird ringed here in last October. An unusual report was received from a neighbour in the village of one of a pair of **Long-tailed Tits** appearing to either attack or display to its own reflection in a window pane. This is a behaviour, well reported in **Chaffinch**, **Pied Wagtail** and various other species, that would appear to be unusual in Long-tailed Tits.

Buzzards were more often heard than seen, although on the 14th three were seen in brief vocal confrontation. A female **Sparrowhawk** seen lurking on the 23rd suffered the fatal misfortune of collision with a window next day. Three occasional sightings of a **Kestrel** were recorded between the 8th and 23rd. The regular foraging flock of **Rooks** and **Jackdaws** had dispersed by the end of February so it seems likely the very restless flock of about 120 **Jackdaws** on the 7th, which did not pause to forage before taking off towards the northwest, were probably migrants. The first **Chiffchaff** was heard singing on the 26th.

This has in many ways, for a month which is traditionally one of active transition from winter to springtime activity, been an unusually quiet period. No passing wildfowl, no early arrivals or passage of waders, no winter thrushes and few passage finches.

From early in the second week invertebrate activity was increasing with occasional **Small Tortoiseshell** butterflies and **White-tailed Bumblebees** on the wing from the 10th, frequent single **7-Spot Ladybirds** from the 11th, **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** from the 17th and a **Carder Bumblebee** on the 28th. The moth trap set on 26/27th took **Hebrew Character** (23), **Small Quaker** (19) and smaller numbers of **Common Quaker**, **Twin-spotted Quaker**, **Red Chestnut**, **Clouded Drab** and **Early Grey**.

The first few **Bluebells** were in flower on 30/3, who'll wager on snow next week?

Dave Makepeace.

Plant Corner

I know it's only April, but already my thoughts are turning to summer holidays and time to be spent at the coast. So I thought I'd highlight one or two coastal plants that you might like to look out for when you get fed up with lying in the sun and building sandcastles – always assuming that those couple of warm weeks in March don't turn out to have been our summer for this year.



Almost everyone will be familiar with the common Ribwort and Greater Plantains of grass verges, but have you looked for the two maritime ones?

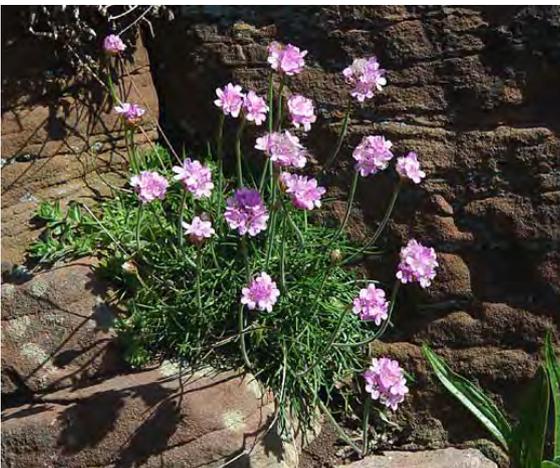
Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) shows some of the typical features of sea-shore habitats where the drying out effects of salt-laden winds have to be combatted. This plant's solution is to be low-growing, with a tufted growth habit which traps moist air and to have fleshy leaves which hold water. You can find it in salt marshes and on the upper reaches of beaches. The picture was taken on Arran, but the habitat is not unusual, amongst pebbles or boulders at the top of the shore.

A second Plantain of maritime habitats is the easy-to-identify **Buckshorn Plantain** (*Plantago coronopus*). The key to this one is its leaves. It is the only Plantain with pinnate leaves. The flower heads are quite similar to those of Sea Plantain, brownish but with yellow stamens if you catch it at the right time. This plant's solution to the desiccation problem, as well as having tufted growth, is to have hairy leaves which help to slow down evaporation. It often grows in turf above the beach or on cliff tops and its prostrate habit helps to avoid the effects of sheep grazing and trampling.

It is the only Plantain that sometimes grows as an annual, and despite its coastal preference it can also sometimes be found on sandy ground inland.



I've left the most attractive species to last. **Thrift** or **Sea Pink** (*Armeria maritima*) is a delightful little tufted plant found on many coasts and growing in coastal turfs as well as on cliff faces, as in the photo. It is also found in mountainous areas, especially in Scotland. The pink flowers are tightly clustered in almost spherical heads and they persist on the plant well through the winter as greyish bobbles which can sometimes be a bit confusing from a distance unless you focus binoculars on them. The foliage is a clump of thread-like leaves – water conservation again.



Where the name Thrift came from is unclear, but some of us will remember that this was the flower that featured on the reverse side of the old threepenny bits so beloved of childhood money-box coin collectors, so it was probably assumed that the concept of thrift went with the savings habit.

Howick March 2012 Highlights.

Generally the weather in March was quite spring-like, for a change. There were several mild, sunny days making winter look like a thing of the past...

On 3rd of the month my first **Lesser black backed Gull** and **Kittiwake** both flew south just offshore from the coast path, while the next day at the pond were 9 **Teal**, a pair of **Little Grebe**, 7 **Lesser Redpoll** and a pair of **Jays**. A **Stoat** half moulted out of ermine and a **Roe Deer** both showed well.

Along the coast path a flock of 11 **Purple Sandpipers** was a nice count for here on 10th. In the Village Wood a pair of **Long tailed Tits** had begun nest building in the unusual site of a pine tree quite high up, at about 12 feet. I usually find this species nesting in rose, gorse or blackthorn or other thorny shrub at a much lower level.

The 11th March turned out to be the warmest day so far at 16 degrees. This brought out **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Buff tailed and Red tailed Bumblebees**.

A flock of 5 **Crossbills**, possibly a family party already with fledged young, flew over the Pond Field on 13th and a single **Fieldfare** flew NW, calling.

Chiffchaffs became noticeable after 17th when 3 were in full song. Another, or the same, **Stoat** had to be chivvied off the road to prevent a casualty as it crept closer to check me out.

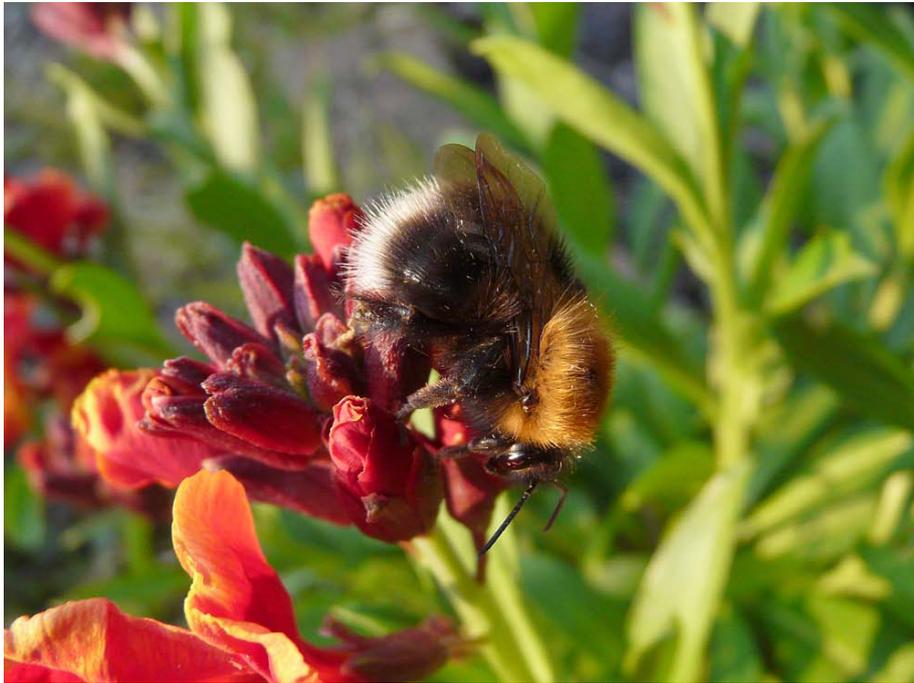
On 25th 10 **Meadow Pipits** flew north and a pair of **Bullfinches** were feeding on fruit tree buds along the lane.

The 26th was another warm and sunny day. **Small White, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies** were joined along our drive by a **Bee Fly**, an unusual and fascinating creature to watch feeding as it hovered from flower to flower. A **Blackbird** had three eggs in the ivy along our wall. Not to be outdone, a **Robin** and a **Wren** were both building nests in our outhouse. It is only a small building of about 3 square metres. When the Swallows arrive there will be little room for us to get in to the freezer!

A good walk around the area on 27th was quite good with a pair of **Yellowhammers** prospecting a nest site, **Great spotted Woodpecker** drumming, **Goldcrest** in full song, **Brown Hare**, **Butterbur** in flower along with **Opposite leaved Golden Saxifrage**, and **Field Horsetail**.

My most unusual sighting of the month was a single **Tree Bee *Bombus hypnorum*** in the moth trap on 29th. This species has only been in the UK since 2001 when it was discovered in Hampshire. After a couple of years it began to spread north. This record is one of the furthest north, but I believe it has recently even reached the Borders – keep a look out Roger if you haven't already found it!

The month ended with a nice **Barn Owl** along our garden edge, **Hedgehogs** seen nightly when out dog walking, 2 male **Sparrowhawks** having a territorial dispute in the Village Wood and 3 **Teal** on the pond.



Tree Bee.



Bee Fly

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

BEYOND THE BORDER

Number 5: MARCH 2012

March was an unusually warm, dry month and it was announced that “the best-ever temperatures were recorded in Scotland for the time of year”. Such conditions were not ideal for fungi although **Hairy Curtain Crust** (*Stereum hirsutum*) was amongst those which could still be seen. It is an extremely common species which often displays masses of overlapping clumps which encrust areas of big deciduous logs together with branches and stumps. The fruiting bodies are typically 1-3ins. (approx. 3-8 cms.) across, tough, leather-like and inedible. They form brackets which are orange-brown to yellow – with a fine covering of hairs but weather and dry to dull browns and greys.

Danish (Early) Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia danica*) has seen an astonishing spread along much of the network of Britain’s trunk roads. It owes much of this success to the sand/salt mixtures spread by Councils each winter. I first noted it around the Edinburgh bypass (March 23) but soon spotted more in the Scottish Borders. The related **Common Scurvy Grass** (*Cochelearia officinalis*) is easily found along the Berwickshire Coast. Hedge-planting schemes have led to greater variety within the green corridors of many local farms and amongst the species sometimes chosen is **Cherry Plum** (*Prunus cerasifera*). It typically produces blossom at the same time as the leaves begin to emerge whereas **Blackthorn** (*Prunus spinosa*) begins to flower before the leaves first appear.

A highly respected Botanist was kind enough to advise me of “the only site in Roxburghshire” where **Hairy Violet** (*Viola hirta*) is known. I visited the location – on calcareous grassland (March 30) and was pleased to not only find examples but they were open in the sun and rather more numerous than I had expected. **Sweet Violet** (*Viola odorata*) was also there but it was seen in many other parts of the Borders. Amongst those were Clintmains (nr. St Boswells/March 26) and Lochside Farm (Yetholm/Mar 28). *V. hirta* is unscented and has visible hairs on the stems whilst *V. odorata* is slightly fragrant, has very rounded leaves and regularly comes in both mauve-violet and white forms.

Few-flowered Garlic (*Allium paradoxum*) is a most unwelcome alien but one which has become firmly established in many parts of the Borders. Originally from western Asia but nowadays carpeting huge areas of our riverbanks and becoming all too evident along a great many roadside verges. Amongst these huge patches are white bell-shaped flowers but, as its name suggests, these are not particularly numerous and most of what you see are clusters of bulbils. These tiny bulb-like structures mature, drop off and add to the rapidly spreading carpet. I visited one of my favourite areas of deciduous woodland beside the River Tweed (March 29) and there found only one small clump of **Wood Anemone** (*Anemone nemorosa*) remaining. These delightful Anemones – which are an important indicator of sites of ancient woodland – had been permanently engulfed by the rampant spread of this most troublesome weed.

My first butterfly sighting of the year was a **Small Tortoiseshell** at Sprouston on March 1st but the last 10 days of the month led to warm and sunny conditions and this species seemed to flourish. Counts of 5+ and 10+ at single locations were fairly regular and from March 21 onwards they were joined by **Peacocks**. 3 within the Bowmont Forest began another steady flow but only one **Green-veined White** was noted (Sprouston/March 29). I was advised that small numbers of **Orange-Tips**, **Commas** and **Speckled Woods** could also be admired in parts of coastal and mid-Berwickshire during the last week of March.



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Water quality remains rather poor in many parts of our crowded island but the rivers and streams I’ve examined in the Borders seem to be of a very high standard. It was no surprise, therefore, to be watching **Brown Trout** beside The Yett (nr. Hownam/Mar 28). The very next day found me peering into the River Tweed where shoals of **Minnows** hugged the bankside shallows and a small group of silver-scaled fish that were probably **Grayling** (???) passed me by. Meanwhile **Atlantic Salmon** were leaping clear of the water just yards away.

Deposits of **Common Frog** spawn were found in a flood pool near Roxburgh (March 18) but on returning to the site (27th) the water was gone and the amphibians heroic efforts and all been in vain.

Scenes such as that must have occurred over and over again because (28th) tadpoles of the same species were condensed into squirming pockets of ‘soup’ as stretch after stretch of trackside ditch at The Yett drained and evaporated away. **Common Toads** had mixed success in crossing roads at Greenlaw, Hume and Stichill as they slowly made their way towards traditional breeding grounds on March 1.

Little Grebes were again found on the River Tweed from Kelso downstream to Berwick-upon-Tweed but others were encountered at Peebles (1/11th), Bemersyde Moss (2 seen + 2 more heard/26th) and Yetholm Loch (3/28th). They will build nests which amount to little more than a raised heap of aquatic plant material positioned in an area of still and shallow water. A group of 7 **Grey Herons** stood in a field beside Mertoun Bridge (nr. St. Boswells/13th)

35+ **Greylag Geese** appeared at Bemersyde Moss Reserve (26th) and that same day approx. 2000 **Pink-footed Geese** stopped off on migration to feed on Whitrig Bog nr. Smailholm. **Canada Geese** were present in small numbers (all month) on/beside the River Tweed and at several lakes and reservoirs. Up to 60+ **Wigeon** frequented haunts close to Redden during the first half of March and a further 20+ lingered near Bemersyde (26th). Good numbers of **Goldeneye** could often be found



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along the River Tweed and these included 60+ immediately upstream from Sharpitlaw Anna (nr. Kelso/15th) but not long afterwards they all seemed to quickly disperse. A few breed in Scotland but for most it's Eastern Europe. **Goosanders** could easily be seen and included 7 at Peebles (13th) and 26 beside Sharpitlaw Anna (15th).

Buzzards were a common sight over the Lammermuir Hills and good numbers are clearly residing in and around the Yarrow Valley to the west of Selkirk. Several residents of Duns were afforded close views of 2 **Ospreys** which regularly visited Hen Poo (lake) at the close of March. A pair of **Kestrels** were mating on the roof of Neidpath Castle nr. Peebles (13th). Loud alarm calls revealed that a **Peregrine** was on its breeding grounds not far from St. Mary's Loch (Selkirkshire/27th).

An area of the Lammermuir Hills in Berwickshire was visited on March 17 and a most wonderful spectacle of moorland birds was all around me. Several **Golden Plovers**, resplendent in their breeding plumage, announced their presence with plaintive calls and **Lapwings** put on a spectacular demonstration as they performed their tumbling display flights. **Snipe** passed low overhead 'chipping' away whilst others created 'drumming' sounds with their wings as they plunged from on high. Another evocative sound – also heard, for example, near Megget Reservoir (27th) originated from 'songflighting' **Curlews**. It's difficult to tear oneself away from such magical scenes. **Redshank** remained a familiar sight in coastal areas but 6 were also watched flying downstream nr. Sprouston (29th). **Barn Owls** remained scarce although one was out hunting nr. Chapel Knowe (Leitholm/1st).

Sand Martins are often one of the first summer migrants to return and 5 flew above the River Tweed, downstream from Sprouston, on the 29th. A flock of 60+ **Meadow Pipits** were returning to the hills nr. Cappercleugh (Ettrick/27th). Sightings of **Dippers** were possible along stretches of the River Teviot (eg. nr. Heiton Mill/10th), close to Peebles (3/11th) and on the Tweed at Dryburgh (nr. St. Boswells/26th) together with very many hill valleys. The first 2012 **Wheatear** was found beside Megget Reservoir – perched on a road sign!

Fieldfares began to pass through the area once more with 100+ nr. Wedderlie (Westruther/17th) stopping off on their gradual return to Scandinavia. 2 **Chiffchaffs** seen and heard in the Bowmont Forest (nr. Kelso/21st) were the first of the year but sizeable numbers poured into our area in the following days. Even when you failed to spot a **Nuthatch** their loud ringing trills helped to confirm that large populations now exist in and around a great many locations including Duns, Kelso and Peebles. Amongst the **Treecreepers** seen was a bird which squeezed into the roof-space of a wooden fishing bothy at Philiphaugh (nr. Selkirk/27th) whilst searching for insect life.

Approx. 100 **Jackdaws** swirled in a noisy flock above Bemersyde Hill (26th) but most were too busy choosing suitable nest holes in old Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees. I have found them to be quite a distraction whilst sitting working at my desk because several pairs have been particularly active at the chimney pots of my near-neighbours. Some garden feeders received regular visits from **Siskins** but others were shunned. A flock of 15+ fed high in the Larches (*Larix* sp.) of Bowmont Forest (21st). Plantations in the area of Megget Reservoir were found to be home to 5+ **Lesser Redpolls** and a pair of **Crossbills** (27th). **Bullfinches** were busily stripping buds within my neighbour's garden (22nd) but I'm quite sure that they will be doing the same to my Apple trees when I'm not looking! Such colourful birds with surprisingly powerful bills; a small price to pay.

Hedgehogs began to wake from hibernation during the last days of March. Adequate body weight will have been critical to their survival through the winter months. Fresh droppings and, most sadly, corpses on the road, remind us that they are active once more. The old saying "Mad March Hares" was very apt with chasing groups of **Brown Hares** seen on very many Borders farms. Meanwhile the new antlers of **Roe Deer** had regrown but remained covered with velvet. A **North American Mink** apparently caused damage to poultry near Morebattle but was later "shot by a keeper".

My 'highlight of the month' was, without question, another sighting involving the **Otter**. I had been walking along a riverbank when I heard a couple of gentle splashes (99+% of which turn out to be fish). You can imagine my surprise when I turned to find not one but three heads looking at me: mum in the middle and a half-grown cub on either side. The animals were no more than 10 yards from me. This Otter family looked like angels but that they were certainly not. These same animals have been responsible for the death of over 100 Common Toads which I've examined dead and dying. Predation seems to consist of snapping the tasty legs off!



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When I returned from this same walk I was surprised to see the Otters at the same location. Having advanced stealthily I was able to settle down and watch their behaviour. They knew I was there but proceeded to swim/dive/play/hunt and eat small fish and scamper around on the riverbank. This thrilling scene continued for a further twenty minutes. . . .

ROGER MANNING.

	SIGHTINGS MARCH 2012
BIRDS	
Red-throated Diver	1 off Stag Rock, 2 off Ross Back Sands on the 11 th , 1 in Embleton Bay on the 29 th
Great Crested Grebe	1 on Branton Ponds on the 1 st and 2 from the 4 th
Little Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds on the 22 nd , 2 on Newton Pool on the 29 th
Slavonian Grebe	2 off Stag Rock on the 11 th
Little Egret	1 on Fenham Flats on the 11 th
Fulmar	12 at Dunstanburgh Castle on the 6 th
Whooper Swan	14 flew over West Burton on the 29 th
Brent Goose	74 off Guile Point on the 11 th
Pintail	3 at Branton Ponds on the 5 th (1 male and 2 females)
Goldeneye	10 at Branton Ponds on the 18 th
Goosander	2 in Happy Valley on the 11 th
Red-breasted Merganser	2 off Guile Point and 17 off Ross Back Sands on the 11 th
Buzzard	3 at Swarland on the 14 th
Peregrine	1 at Stag Rocks on the 4 th and 1 at Branton Ponds on the 7 th
Sparrowhawk	1 at Swarland on the 8 th , 1 at Swarland on the 23 rd
Red Grouse	Many birds displaying near Broadstruther on the 6 th
Grey Partridge	2 in Branton on the 12 th
Curlew	510 on Fenham Flats on the 11 th , 100 at Newton Flash on the 8 th
Ringed Plover	2 at Branton Ponds on the 17 th
Oystercatcher	570 at Guile Point on the 11 th , 60 at Branton Ponds on the 18 th
Redshank	39 on Fenham Flats on the 11 th
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2 at Branton Ponds on the 12 th and 12 on the 18 th
Kittiwake	30 at Dunstanburgh Castle on the 6 th
Sandwich Tern	3 in Embleton Bay on the 29 th
Razorbill	10 at Dunstanburgh Castle on the 6 th
Barn Owl	1 at Lilburn Grange on the 9 th
Short Eared Owl	1 at Prestwick Carr on the 17 th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds on the 3 rd , 1 on the River Breamish on the 18 th
Green Woodpecker	1 in Callaly Wood on the 21 st
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1 at Swarland on the 3 rd
Swallow	2 at Bamburgh on the 9 th
Pied Wagtail	12 in a flock at Branton Ponds on the 14 th
Grey Wagtail	6 in Happy Valley on the 11 th
Waxwing	4 on the Kitty Brewster Estate near Blyth on the 18 th
Ring Ouzel	1 at Alnham Moor on the 31 st
Fieldfare	20 at Rugely on the 16 th
Chiffchaff	4 in Crawley Dene on the 18 th , 2 at Branton Ponds on the 21 st , 1 at Swarland on the 15 th , 1 at Harehope Hillend on the 24 th , 1 at Swarland on the 20 th
Willow Tit	1 at Swarland on the 14 th
Long-tailed Tit	2 at Swarland on the 14 th
Treecreeper	2 in Harehope Hall Wood on the 8 th , 1 at Swarland on the 2 nd

Great Grey Shrike	1 at Prestwick Carr on the 17 th
Jackdaw	120 at Swarland on the 7 th
Hooded Crow	1 at Ross Back Sands on the 11 th
Raven	5 over Cheviot on the 10 th , 2 at Old Bewick on the 17 th
Brambling	5 in Swarland until the 25 th , 1 on the 10 th and 12 th at Swarland - separate sightings
Siskin	10 at Swarland on the 5 th
Lesser Redpoll	5 at Swarland on the 7 th
PLANTS	
Cowslips	At Branton Ponds on the 27 th
Bluebells	In Brandon Dene on the 30 th ; in Glanton on the 27 th
Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage	At Old Bewick on the 8 th
Butterbur	In flower at East Lilburn on the 18 th
Haresfoot Cotton Grass	Near the Black Lough on the 29 th
MAMMALS	
Bat (species)	1 flying around Branton on the 12 th
Roe Deer	2 in Happy Valley on the 11 th
Brown Hare	1 in Happy Valley on the 11 th
Otter	Fresh spraint seen at the Black Lough on the 29 th
REPTILES	
Adder	1 at Branton Ponds on the 1 st rising to 9 on the 7 th
Slow Worm	1 at Branton Ponds on the 7 th
AMPHIBIANS	
Common Frog	Huge quantities of Frogspawn in puddles throughout the Harthope Valley
Common Toad	Huge numbers around Branton Ponds on the 12 th
INVERTEBRATES	
Orange Tip	1 at Howick on the 28 th
Hebrew Character	23 at Swarland on the 27 th
Small Quaker	19 at Swarland on the 27 th
Common Quaker	8 at Swarland on the 27 th
Red Chestnut	3 at Swarland on the 27 th
Twin Spotted Quaker	2 at Swarland on the 27 th
Clouded Drab	2 at Swarland on the 27 th
Early Grey	1 at Swarland on the 27 th
White-tailed Bumblebee	1 at Swarland on the 13 th
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	1 at Swarland on the 17 th
Carder Bumblebee	1 at Swarland on the 28 th
OBSERVERS	C Clark, J&E Clark, I&K Davison, A Gibson, A Keeble, D Makepeace, H Tindle, S Webster.

Please send sightings reports for April, no later than 6th May 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.