

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



REVIEW OF MAY 2013

NEWSLETTER 141

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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NEXT MEETING: SEPTEMBER 25TH, 2013 AT 7.30P.M.

'World of Lichens' Speaker: Janet Simpkin.

Janet Simpkin is an Ecological consultant specialising in botanical and lichen surveys, national vegetation classification, biological records, and ecological research.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN JULY

In a normal year, the breeding season for birds should be over with the exception of late breeding species such as **yellowhammers**, **corn buntings** and others. 2013 has been a very late breeding season for many species including **auks**, **kittiwakes** and a number of woodland birds. The cold spring has also affected the food-plants and thus the emerging times of butterflies and moths. July can be the month of the unexpected with rare birds, **basking sharks**, whales, migrant butterflies (e.g. **clouded yellow**) all having turned up in the past.

Flat calm days on the coast can be the best times to look for some of our marine visitors. **Manx** and **Sooty Shearwaters** can turn up almost anywhere. The best time of day to find these long distant travellers is in the early morning or in the evening. The black and white Manx Shearwaters are on the search for food from their breeding colonies on the west coast of Britain (e.g. Rhum and Skomer). The all-brown **Sooty Shearwater** arrives from the southern hemisphere to spend time in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Other marine visitors join the local populations of **harbour porpoises**. Visitors include **Bottle-nosed** and **Common Dolphins**. These species of dolphin can turn up at almost any time of year but most sightings are during the summer months. A 'mega' pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins of about 100 animals patrolled the north-east coast last autumn. This time of year can also be the best time to locate **Minke** and other species of whales. If you do decide to watch the sea on a flat calm day, you may also have a chance of finding a **Basking Shark**. Animals have turned around the Farne Islands at this time of year. If you see a slow moving triangular fin above the surface then you are onto a winner! The best places to find shearwaters, dolphins, whales and possibly basking sharks include; Emmanuel Head, Lindisfarne; Stag Rocks, Bamburgh; Newtown Point, Low Newtown-on-the-Sea and Boulmer. You may have a chance of seeing any of these species on our coast.

Species-rich grasslands and meadows can be at their best at this time of year. Orchids, vetches, bedstraws and hawkbits are in full-flower. Dry grasslands on the coast can be especially interesting as the flowering plants attract a wide range of invertebrates including **Grayling** and **Dark-green Fritillary** butterflies as well as specialist moths such as **Five** and **Six-spotted burnets**. Coastal grasslands can be found at Cocklaburn, Lindisfarne, Dunstanburgh and Embleton dunes to name but a few. Away from the coast, one of the best places to see flowering plants is at Barrowburn upland hay meadows. These meadows that bristle with flowers are sites of Scientific Interest and contain species such as **Meadow** and **Wood Cranesbill**, **Lady's Mantle**, **Yellow Rattle**, **Eyebrights**, **Meadowsweet** and many more.

There are plenty of hours in the day to search our countryside for wildlife.

Jack Daw

Please send sightings reports for May, no later than 6th July 2013 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.

Meeting of Wednesday 29th May 2013

For our last meeting of the season an audience of 37, including five visitors, started with George's specimens. These were: two Kittiwake eggs predated by a Carrion Crow, found at Howick; a large female Adder skin, amazing in its completeness, found at Branton; a leaf of one of the Alchemilla (Lady's Mantle) species.

A number of members reported significant numbers of Siskins and Redpolls on garden feeders – probably because in the cold weather their larch cone food (Siskins) and alder cones and catkins (Redpolls) remain tightly closed so the birds need another food source.

Speaker **Emma Wright** (Red Squirrels Northern England)

The immediate Red Squirrel picture is that we've had a very bad winter following a poor summer and autumn and this has hit Grey Squirrels hard with populations at only 33% of spring 2012. But Reds seem to have survived well.

There are 285 squirrel species in the world, but only two here. All are herbivorous and our Reds have a very varied herbivorous diet. Individual Reds will have up to 14 dreys on the go at the same time – some for resting, some for breeding etc. Reds and Greys may at different times use the same dreys. Red kits are born in Feb/Mar. The adults moult in mid-April and in a good year they may have a second litter in May/June.

The Red vs Grey problem is partly to do with Squirrel Pox which Greys carry but to which they are resistant, plus food competition – Greys tolerate much higher tannin levels so they can eat unripe nuts, depriving Reds of many food sources. Greys also breed faster with bigger litters.

RSNE aims to improve prospects for Reds. 12 Rangers trap and dispatch Greys in areas where this can be effective. They work closely with landowners and gamekeepers and they involve a volunteer network to help with the control task. 17 reserves are designated totalling 460km². These are mostly managed coniferous woodlands and those with the best populations are designated as Strongholds which attract government grants. The nearest to Alnwick is Kyle Woods.

Evidence for the effectiveness of Grey control comes from biannual site monitoring, detailed research programmes and the collation of sightings and cull records. Monitoring is by trail cameras and by feeders with sticky patches to collect hairs from visiting animals. Microscopically Red and Grey hairs are quite distinct. Much of this monitoring is dependent on volunteers.



Mapping shows plenty of Reds outside the Strongholds, but Grey distributions are quite similar. There is lots of research on the Pox disease and if, in say 20 years, there is an effective oral vaccine then that will be much more effective than pure culling. The recording efforts will begin to produce significant trend patterns in 2014 when some confident conclusions should be possible for the first time.

Two case studies (Wallington and Kirkley Hall) show that areas where Reds had more or less disappeared can see their return when there are concentrated culls of the Greys – so we know culling works on a local scale.

We are all encouraged to record sightings of both species on the RSNE website (www.rsne.org.uk) from which the picture above was copied, and to consider becoming a "Friend of the Red Squirrel". Emma was warmly thanked for an excellent presentation.

Plant Corner

It used to be the case that botanical recording in the field had strict rules about what you should and shouldn't record. Anything artificially planted was off-limits (including trees) and anything close to a garden was regarded with great suspicion.

More recently ideas have changed. If something is growing, surviving and even spreading and reproducing 'in the wild' then it doesn't matter how it got there - you record its presence. Even the pavement side of garden walls are now fair game. Some recorders even argue that it is right to record trees planted in gardens on the grounds that they may well still be there long after the house and garden are no more.

On a Sunday early in June I was involved in a botanical survey of the area of dunes at Bamburgh, south of the castle. This is a SSSI site and we identified an impressive number of plants. I wasn't the one keeping the list but we must have found well in excess of 150 species. One particular area that added lots of things to the list was just across the road from Armstrong Cottages where Barbara Welch, our AWG secretary, lives. I don't know its history, nor whether it had ever been someone's garden. As it is on the sea side of the road that doesn't seem entirely likely, but it does have a whole range of unexpected species.



The most spectacular, which was also growing profusely along the road verge towards Bamburgh village, was **Oriental Poppy** (*Papaver pseudo-orientale*). The intensity of the red of the petals and the deep purple of the flower centres are amazing.

Then there are the **Tree Lupins** (*Lupinus arboreus*). This spring has been so cold that the growth is still at an early stage

(which tells you that the photo was NOT one that I took this year), but I'm sure that when the flowers are out they'll be very impressive because there were lots of plants.



There were quite big patches of **Garden Solomon's-seal**. This plant has two 'natural' species, one of which does grow in some places in Northumberland, but the plants at Bamburgh were almost undoubtedly the garden hybrid, *Polygonatum x hybridum*. However they got into this area they are clearly doing well because there are quite extensive clumps of them. In our garden they often suffer later in the season from Solomon's-seal Sawfly caterpillars, so it would be interesting to see if these plants have the same problem.

Finally there was a small clump of the attractive pink flowered relative of the Wood Sorrel. Not unreasonably called **Pink-Sorrel** (*Oxalis articulata*), this is a perennial, although there is another similar garden species that is an annual.

All in all this area, immediately adjacent to the entrance to the dunes car park, is well worth a look if you are in Bamburgh in the next couple of months.



SIGHTINGS MAY 2013

BIRDS	
Black-throated Diver	2 past Emmanuel Head (25 th)
Red-throated Diver	1 at Bamburgh (25 th)
Great Crested Grebe	A displaying pair on Branton Ponds (31 st)
Manx Shearwater	8 at Newton Point (24 th)
Purple Heron	1 at East Chevington (4 th)
Great White Egret	1 at Hauxley (5 th)
Spoonbill	1 at Hauxley (27 th), 2 at Druridge Pools (30 th)
Barnacle Goose	1 at Branton Ponds (19 th)
Common Scoter	30+ off Stag Rock (6 th), 4 at Bamburgh (25 th)
Long-tailed Duck	2 off Stag Rock (6 th)
Shelduck	A pair with 13 chicks at Branton Ponds (30 th) rising to 20 by the 31 st
Garganey	2 males at Druridge Pools (9 th)
Marsh Harrier	2 at East Chevington (4 th)
Quail	1 calling at Branton (28 th)
Water Rail	2 at Branton Ponds (7 th)
Turnstone	4 at Bamburgh (25 th)
Snipe	1 at Black Lough (19 th)
Common Sandpiper	1 at Black Lough (19 th), 3 at Branton Ponds (19 th)
Sanderling	23 at Fenham Flats (12 th)
Grey Plover	139 at Fenham Flats (12 th), 5 at Holy Island (25 th)
Golden Plover	70 over Holy Island (25 th)
Ringed Plover	100+ over Holy Island (25 th)
Little Ringed Plover	1 at Branton Ponds (2 nd), 1 on River Breamish (6 th), 1 at Branton Ponds (17 th)
Temminck's Stint	1 at Cresswell Pond (27 th)
Pectoral Sandpiper	1 at Bradford Kaims (10 th)
Wood Sandpiper	9 at Bradford Kaims (10 th), 1 at Druridge Pools (9 th)
Bar-tailed Godwit	45 at Fenham Flats (12 th), 200+ over Holy Island (25 th)
Black-tailed Godwit	6 at Druridge Pools (30 th)
Greenshank	1 on River Breamish (6 th), 1 at Bradford Kaims (10 th), 1 at Alnmouth (15 th)
Whimbrel	1 at East Chevington (4 th), 2 at Holy Island (19 th), 8 at East Chevington (19 th), 8 at Newton Point (24 th), 7 at Cresswell Ponds (9 th)
Arctic Skua	1 at Newton Point (24 th)
Little Gull	1 at East Chevington (9 th)
Little Tern	4 at Long Nanny (28 th)
Sandwich Tern	2 at Budle Bay (6 th)
Common Tern	1 at Budle Bay (6 th)
Cuckoo	1 at Branton Ponds (1 st), 1 at Holystone Woods (5 th), 1 at Fallowlees Burn (7 th), 4 at Black Lough (19 th), 1 at Debden (19 th), 2 at Holystone (27 th), 5 at Holystone Woods (31 st), 1 at Alnwick Moor (5 th), 1 at East Chevington (6 th), 1 at Warkworth Gut (19 th)
Tawny Owl	1 at Branton Ponds (1 st)
Barn Owl	1 at Low Newton (2 nd), 1 at Lesbury (7 th +8 th)

Short-eared Owl	1 (17 th), 2 (21 st) at Holy Island, 1 at Warkworth Gut (19 th)
Swift	3 at Ford Moss (6 th), 15 over Branton Ponds (11 th)
Kingfisher	1 on River Breamish (6 th), 1 near Branton Ponds (17 th)
Tree Pipit	5 at Fallowlees Burn (7 th), several at Holystone (27 th)
Yellow Wagtail	2 at Low Newton (2 nd), 2 at Elwick Flash (6 th), 1 at Fontburn Reservoir (7 th), 1 at Bradford Kaims (10 th), 1 at Bamburgh (25 th)
Bluethroat	1 at Holy Island (17 th)
Redstart	1 at Slainsfield Moor on t(4 th), 1 in Harthope Valley (6 th), 10+ at Fallowlees Burn (7 th), 1 at Holy Island (17 th), 2 at Holystone (27 th)
Black Redstart	1 at Holy Island (21 st)
Whinchat	1 at Branton Ponds (21 st), 2 in Harthope Valley (6 th), 3 at Black Lough (19 th), 1 at Holy Island (30 th)
Wheatear	6 at Low Newton on(2 nd), 15+ at Slainsfield Moor (4 th)
Stonechat	4 at Black Lough (19 th)
Ring Ouzel	2 in Hawsen Burn (6 th)
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Slainsfield Moor (4 th), 1 at East Chevington (4 th), 1 at Holy Island (17 th)
Reed Warbler	1 at East Chevington (4 th)
Great Reed Warbler	1 at East Chevington (19 th)
Garden Warbler	Several at Branton Ponds (8 th)
Lesser Whitethroat	5 on Holy Island (19 th), 1 on Holy Island (30 th)
Collared Flycatcher	1 – a 1 st summer bird at Low Newton (8 th) – a 1 st for Northumberland
Pied Flycatcher	1 at Fallowlees Burn (7 th), 1 at Holy Island (17 th), 1 at Holystone Woods (31 st)
Spotted Flycatcher	1 (17 th) and 2 (30 th) at Holy Island
Willow Tit	1 at Branton Ponds (8 th), 2 at Low Newton (9 th)
Red-backed Shrike	1 (19 th), 2 (21 st) at Holy Island , 1 at East Chevington (28 th)
Lesser Grey Shrike	1 at Holy Island (19 th)
Raven	2 in Harthope Valley (6 th)
INVERTEBRATES	
White-tailed Bumblebee	At Titlington Mount since start of month
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	At Titlington Mount since start of month
Red-tailed Bumblebee	At Titlington Mount since start of month also at Fallowlees Burn (7 th)
Early Bumblebee	At Fallowlees burn (7 th)
Bee-fly	2 or 3 at Titlington Mount from start of month
Orange-tip Butterfly	2 at the Hirsal (13 th)
PLANTS	
Opposite-leaved Saxifrage	At Fallowlees Burn (7 th)
Celandine Saxifrage	At Wark (North Tyne) (22 nd)
Primroses	At Fallowlees Burn (7 th)
Common Cottongrass	At Fallowlees Burn (7 th)
Hares-tail Cottongrass	At Fallowlees Burn (7 th)
Northern Marsh Orchid	At Holy Island (25 th)
Bluebell	A huge carpet in Crawley Dene (25 th)
Chickweed Wintergreen	At Titlington Mount (27 th)

Heath Milkwort	At Titlington Mount (27 th)
Bloody Cranesbill	At Long Nanny (28 th)
Purple Milk Vetch	At Holy Island (30 th)
Yellow Pimpernel	At Holystone Woods (31 st)
MAMMALS	
Red Squirrel	1 at Fallowlees Burn (7 th), 1 at Branton (24 th), 1 at Biddlestone Edge (27 th)
Common Shrew	3 at Yearle (2 nd + 3 rd)
Brown Hare	1 at Lilburn (10 th), 5 at Branton Ponds (17 th)
Fox	1 at Bradford Kaims (10 th)
Roe Deer	6 (25 th) + 10 (30 th) at Holy Island
AMPHIBIANS	
Palmate Newt	1 in an Eglington garden (9 th)
OBSERVERS	W Banks, G Bell, I&K Davison, G Dodds, M McMahon, NNBC, R&J Poppleton, M Rolley, S Wilson.