

# Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



## REVIEW OF JUNE 2013

### NEWSLETTER 142

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 AUGUST 2013

July is turning out to be a very warm month. In places, grassland has started to burn up and flowering plants have shrivelled especially where the soils are shallow. This will have another impact on our butterflies. Certain species such as the **whites** and **small tortoiseshells** have been difficult to find. Others such as **meadow browns** and **ringlets** appear to be relatively common especially in suitable habitats. As silage and hay is cut **brown hares** and **roe deer** are again easier to see. Is it me or are there more female **roe deer** with twins this year?

August is a month of change – some say summer. I say early autumn. A couple of species of bird that may be nesting are the **yellowhammers** and **corn buntings**. Recent research has indicated that both species are late nesters and these can be more successful. The main reason for this is a plentiful supply of **caterpillars**, **crane-flies** and other **invertebrates** as well as improved nesting conditions. **Yellowhammers** choose optimum sites within hedgerows whilst **corn buntings** will nest within suitable crops such as spring-drilled cereals or field margins with tall herbage. **Yellowhammers** are still relatively common and can be found throughout the area especially where there are good hedges or patches of scrub. **Corn buntings**, on the other hand, are virtually extinct within the County with only a handful of records within the last five years. Areas where birds might still be found would be around Shoreswood, Beal or on the border at Lamberton.

August is the main month of the school holidays. This is also a time when large numbers of people visit our beaches. Most people restrict themselves to the sand. Very few look in the rock pools and fewer still search the strand lines. The rock pools in Northumberland are some of the best in England. Seaweeds such as **sea lettuce** (green), **oarweed** (brownish), **Irish moss** (red), **toothed-rack** (brown), **bladder-rack** (brown), **kelp** (tan brown) and **dulce** (red) can all be found relatively commonly on our rocks or in our pools. The seaweeds are home to a wide range of species including **shore, hermit and paddler crabs, shrimps, blennys, goby, several species of anemones, mussels, whelks, top-shells and periwinkles**. There are some outstanding rock pools around including the Boulmer area, Beadnell and Berwick. Kick off your shoes and socks and go and have a look for yourselves!

This time of year, the moth trap starts to fill up with several bully boys; the **large yellow underwing**, the **lesser yellow underwing** and the **mouse moth**. Some moth trappers may disagree with my sentiments but these three characters can cause major disruption in the trap. When inspecting the trap or moving egg cartons on a warm morning, these species tend to go on the walk-about in search of a nook or cranny to their liking. Anything in their way tends to be trodden on or merely flies off to get out of their way. I have lost a number of interesting moths to their bullying tactics. Both species of underwing can arrive in garden traps in large numbers. They can will also fly in hot sun-shine when disturbed from vegetation.

I am migrating north for the early part of August. Look out for my sightings from the Outer Hebrides on the Alnwick Wildlife Group blog. I am looking forward to September and the start of the indoor season.

*Jack Daw*

Please send sightings reports for May, no later than 6th August 2013 to: Ian & Keith Davison, The Bungalow, Branton, Powburn, NE66 4LW or Tel: 01665 578 357 or email to [redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk](mailto: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.

## BRANTON PONDS FIELD-WORK DAY

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June a group of ten (an ideal size for this type of field work) met at 10.30 at the Branton Ponds car park. The forecast had been slightly worrying, threatening some heavy showers, but all was dry and mild at the start and despite a short shower near lunchtime we were really very lucky.

The aim of the day was to allow members who had little or no experience of trying to identify plant species in the field to have a go at doing so rather more systematically than just by leafing through pictures in a field guide. Richard was relying on the age-old trick of calculating that although he only knew a limited amount, with luck he would know more than his class.

Two keys were used, one to try to sort out species of Forget-me-nots (*Myosotis spp.*) and the other to see if Willowherbs (*Epilobium spp.*) could be identified vegetatively, before they had come into flower.

The range of plants at Branton is quite unusual. Over a period between about 20 and 10 years ago various seed mixes have been used to help create the flora at this small reserve. As a result there are several species that are not normally native in Northumberland, but since the ones that have survived are clearly holding their own, it is botanically acceptable to record their presence as naturalized plants.



Once we had sorted out the correct technique for using x10 hand lenses, we tackled a number of Forget-me-nots. The most common was *Myosotis arvensis* (Field Forget-me-not) [pictured] with hooked hairs on the sepal tube, spreading hairs on the stems, and small flowers. Then for *Myosotis laxa* (Tufted Forget-me-not) we had to see that the hairs on the sepal tube were lying flat and that the tops of the sepals were forming isosceles triangles rather than equilateral ones! All highly esoteric and not particularly easy, but with these species just looking at pictures is unlikely to enable you to identify the correct species – you need to use the key.

The Willowherbs also required close looks at hairs on the stems and things like whether the leaves were stalked or not.

By the time we'd done all that and seen some other good plants we returned to the cars for lunch. The rigours of the morning proved more than enough for some who decided to call it a day at that stage, but six of us remained to walk round the whole reserve and see some of the more interesting plants that were there. Or at least Richard thought they were interesting. Among the star finds were Hare's-foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense*) [pictured], Squirrel-tail Fescue (*Vulpia bromoides*) – a diminutive little grass which showed why rather barren-looking patches of ground are quite often more botanically interesting than more lushly vegetated areas, and the most showy of the rarities, Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*).



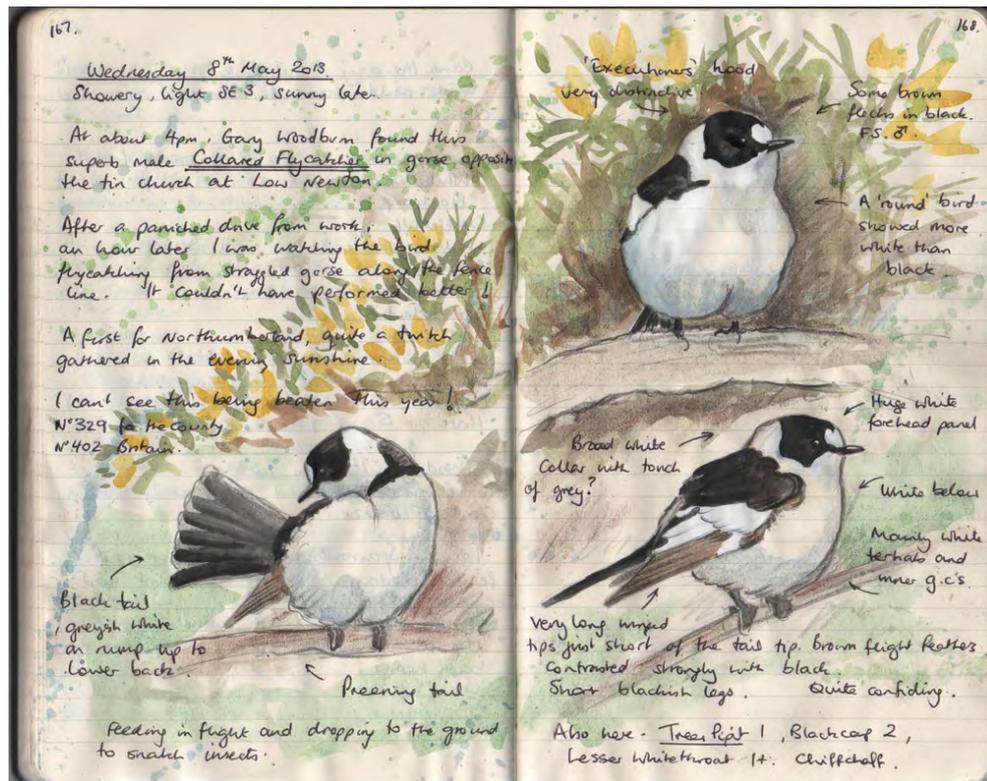
Altogether it seemed to have been a successful day and something AWG hasn't tried before. With luck one or two of those who came will have gone away with a little bit more knowledge than they started with. At various points some of the class were disobedient and insisted on looking at birds, but Richard soon whipped them back into line!

RP

## Howick Catch Up!

After a couple of months leave of absence due to other commitments, here is a short round up of what I've been up to and seeing.

The beginning of **May** was still quite cool, but a dash up the coast on the **8<sup>th</sup>** warmed things up a bit when a male **Collared Flycatcher**, a county first, was found at the Tin Church at Low Newton. What a fine little bird, it certainly brightened up the gorse edging the paddock.



If only it had been a few miles to the south...

A week away in Suffolk from the 17<sup>th</sup> was excellent, not even dampened by having all four seasons in a week, when we saw lots of birds, moths and wildflowers to keep us going.

Back home, some fungi were beginning to show – **Chicken of the Woods** and **Dryads Saddle** both on willow near Howick Pond on **26<sup>th</sup>**. Our first garden **Tree Sparrow** fledglings of the year were fed by adults on **30<sup>th</sup>** when the moth trap attracted an influx of the tiny migrant micro, the **Diamond backed Moth** when 70 were recorded.



Above – left; Chicken of the Woods and right; Dryad's Saddle

A Sunday back up at Newton Pool on **2<sup>nd</sup> June** gave us a big surprise when we found a female **Golden Oriole** flying over the pond. It showed quite well in the wardens garden before flying off high west.



Golden Oriole, Newton Pool. Pic by Gary Woodburn

From here we headed up inland to the Carey Burn, where **Parsley Fern** was a new plant for me growing all over the scree slopes there.

On **8<sup>th</sup> John**, George Dodds, Ian and Keith Davison and myself made an intrepid nothing expedition into the darkest recesses of the College Valley with excellent

results. The weather was warm and overcast with some rain, ideal for trapping moths, so we managed to catch 252 moths of 42 species including several rare or scarce upland species such as **Barred Umber**, **Broken barred Carpet** and **Grey Birch**.



Barred Umber, we caught 8, the first since 1971 in Northumberland.

On 17<sup>th</sup> June myself and John Rutter headed off the Catalonia, Northern Spain for a week looking for butterflies and birds, but there's enough material there to fill a book so that's for another day.

The rest of the period was mainly continuing the garden moth studies.

Back to normal for the July episode, hopefully!



Dawn in the College Valley.

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

## PLANT CORNER

This issue of our Newsletter is ending up rather too botanical, and although I don't mind that in the least I'm aware that not all our members will feel the same. The answer, of course, is easy. If you think we're becoming fixated on plants, then send Barbara your articles on other wildlife topics – birds, invertebrates, marine life or whatever you are interested in and you think others might be too. Articles don't have to be lengthy. It could just be a short paragraph telling others about a recent observation that has caught your attention. If you can add a digital image to go with it that would be even better.

But this is Plant Corner, so for this page you're stuck with plants! Our countryside often seems to go through colour phases. Late spring definitely seems to be a yellow time of year with the dandelions and buttercups and, perhaps less attractive, fields of oilseed rape. But now I think we're moving into a red/blue/purple phase and I've chosen three species in that colour range.

If you drive out of Alnwick on the moor road towards Rothbury, when you get to the right turn that would take you towards the Brizlee 'golfball' and Abberwick have a look at the hedge on the corner opposite the farm buildings. For several years there's been a scrambling plant that is rather out of the ordinary. The **Two-flowered Everlasting Pea** (*Lathyrus grandiflorus*) is well named both in English and in Latin. At each flowering point it has a pair of flowers which do last a long time and each flower certainly deserves its "grandiflorus" specific name.



At Slainsfield when we were doing our first survey visit in June (see separate article in this issue) one small part of the site had a collection of plants that clearly indicated an outcropping of more alkaline soil in the otherwise acid moorland. A key indicator plant of these types of conditions is **Salad Burnet** (*Poterium sanguisorba*). The upper female flowers, as shown in the photo, are red because of the brilliantly-coloured feathery stigmas that stick out from the centre of each greenish flower.

In early July I was looking at vegetation in a wet area where water drains out of the big Beanley plantation on its way down to join the River Breamish. In such a dry spell of weather it was good to find somewhere where marshy conditions were persisting and among the bright green rushes and splashes of yellow from the Lesser Spearwort was the best display of spikes of **Common Spotted Orchids** (*Dactylorhiza fuchsia*) that I've seen for a while. The contrast with the pathetic show of Heath Spotted Orchids on our moorland was very marked.



So, a rather random selection of red/purple flowers for this article and already the road verges are showing plenty of the blue of Meadow Crane's-bill, with the late summer Harebells just beginning to emerge.

RP

## SLAINSFIELD MOOR – progress report

A first group visit was made to Slainsfield Moor on 15<sup>th</sup> June. As well as several AWG members we were joined by Fiona Aungier who leads the Berwick Wildlife Group, Stephen Block, also from Berwick and Veronica Carnell from the Natural History Society of Northumbria.

Stephen had been to the site with Richard a week earlier to place some roofing-felt squares in places where he thought there might be a chance of them being used as refuges by reptiles. Veronica had also been to Slainsfield earlier in the week to set out 20 Longworth Small Mammal Traps. Her dedication, with her husband, was such that they had come up again from Newcastle on the Friday to set the traps in the middle of the night and had then visited them at an ungodly hour on the Saturday morning to check for captured animals and to release them. Fiona was able to bring her botanical expertise to add to that of Richard and Carolyn to ensure we could record the maximum number of species. We are tremendously grateful to all our visitors for their efforts on behalf of our survey.



We started as a whole group visiting Veronica's traps and Stephen's *refugia*. The latter were unsuccessful, but the traps had a number of Common Shrews and a Field Vole. These animals come to no harm in the traps because they are baited with plenty of food and bedding material and in fact they probably represent quite a welcome free meal and place to rest until they are released. This exercise gave people who hadn't been before the chance to get a feel for the whole site.

Back at the cars we paused for lunch and then made a start on the plants. Ian and Keith soon set off to survey the birds on the site and between us all we had a really productive visit. There were 121 plant species and 80 birds of 15 species.

Our next visit is due on 11<sup>th</sup> August when there will be further plants in flower that weren't evident in mid-June. In between times Stephen has been determined to venture into the pond in search of pond weeds and insect larvae and is currently arranging with Richard to visit with his chest waders. Presumably Richard's role will be to be the safety man on the other end of a rope so Stephen can be hauled out when he finds it's deeper than he bargained for.

After the 11<sup>th</sup> August visit we'll pull all the results together and draft a report for Lord Joicey. The draft version of the report will be circulated to all who have taken part so everyone will have a chance to make additions or corrections. We'd hope to have a finalised report perhaps by the end of October.

RP

	<b>SIGHTINGS JUNE 2013</b>
<b>BIRDS</b>	
Red-throated Diver	1 at Embleton Bay on 29 <sup>th</sup>
Great Crested Grebe	2 at Branton Ponds all month,
Manx Shearwater	27 off Newton Point on 17 <sup>th</sup>
Grey Heron	4 at Kimmer Lough on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Brent Goose	1 light bellied at Fenham Flats on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Pochard	1 male at Branton Ponds on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Shelduck	A pair + 20 chicks on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Wigeon	A pair still at Branton Ponds on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Eider	155 which included 31 ducklings at Fenham Flats on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Goosander	1 female with 3 young at Lesbury on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Marsh Harrier	1 at East Chevington on 14 <sup>th</sup>
Red Kite	4 at Derwent Valley on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Quail	1 calling at Branton on 6 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Smeafield on 17 <sup>th</sup>
Water Rail	2 calling at Branton Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup>
Woodcock	2 at Thrunton Woods on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 1 at Southernknowe on 8 <sup>th</sup>
Common Snipe	2 at Kimmer Lough on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Little Ringed Plover	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 <sup>st</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup>
Common Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 at Lesbury on 10 <sup>th</sup>
Spotted Redshank	1 at Branton Ponds on 11 <sup>th</sup>
Sanderling	7 at Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Curlew	243 at Fenham Flats on 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 100 at Smeafield on 28 <sup>th</sup>
Bar-tailed Godwit	88 at Fenham Flats on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Knot	28 at Fenham Flats on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Grey Plover	14 at Fenham Flats on 23 <sup>rd</sup>
Little Gull	3 at East Chevington on 12 <sup>th</sup>
Roseate Tern	1 at East Chevington on 12 <sup>th</sup>
Stock Dove	2 at Branton Ponds on 7 <sup>th</sup>
Cuckoo	1 at Thrunton Woods on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 1 at Holburn Moss on 4 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Carey Burn on 4 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Linhope on 8 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Hethpool on 8 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Alnwick Moor on 9 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Kimmer Lough on 16 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Newton Lowsteads from 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Cuddy's Cave on 21 <sup>st</sup> , 1 at East Chevington on 14 <sup>th</sup>
Tawny Owl	1 at Holburn Moss on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Barn Owl	1 at Lesbury on 5 <sup>th</sup>
Nightjar	2 at Holburn Moss on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	4 at Smeafield on 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2 at Swarland on 29 <sup>th</sup>
Tree Pipit	1 at Thrunton Woods on 17 <sup>th</sup>
Yellow Wagtail	2 near Netherwitton on 20 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Ingram Valley on 22 <sup>nd</sup>
Grey Wagtail	2 at Lesbury on 18 <sup>th</sup>
Redstart	1 at Allenbanks on 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 1 at Holystone Woods on 7 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Debden Woods on 6 <sup>th</sup>
Ring Ouzel	1 on 9 <sup>th</sup> and 2 on 19 <sup>th</sup> at Hawsen Burn, 1 at Humbleton Hill on 18 <sup>th</sup>

Song Thrush	Several youngsters at Smeafield on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at East Chevington on 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2 at Cresswell on 12 <sup>th</sup>
Wood Warbler	3 at Allenbanks on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Blackcap	Several youngsters around Branton Ponds on 17 <sup>th</sup>
Spotted Flycatcher	1 in the Harthope Valley on 4 <sup>th</sup> , 1 on 19 <sup>th</sup> and 2 on 25 <sup>th</sup> at Branton ,1 at Swarland on 5 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Lesbury on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Pied Flycatcher	2 at Allenbanks on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Golden Oriole	1 at Newton Pool on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Raven	1 at the Carey Burn on 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2 at Alnwick Moor on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Starling	600 at Smeafield on 28 <sup>th</sup>
Tree Sparrow	3 at Swarland on 13 <sup>th</sup>
Yellowhammer	1 at Newton Lowsteads on 19 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup>
<b>INVERTEBRATES</b>	
Common Blue Damselfly	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Large Red Damselfly	1 at Alnwick Moor on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Orange Tip	1 at Branton Ponds on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Common Blue	1 at Branton Ponds on 26 <sup>th</sup>
Wall Brown	1 at Yearle on 13 <sup>th</sup> , 1 at Slainsfield Moor on 15 <sup>th</sup> , several at Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Striped Twin-spot Carpet	6 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Autumn Green Carpet	1 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Broken-barred Carpet	3 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Barred Umber	8 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Grey Birch	1 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Glaucous Shears	6 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Poplar Hawk-Moth	4 at Southernknowe on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Garden Tiger Moth	Many caterpillars at Holy Island on 1 <sup>st</sup>
Cinnabar Moth	Several at Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Lattice Heath Moth	2 at Kimmer Lough on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Green-veined White	4 at Branton Ponds on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , and 6 at Harthope Valley on 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Cockchafer(May bug)	1 at Netherwitton on 20 <sup>th</sup>
Dragonfly(sp)	Several emerging from water at Branton Ponds on 21 <sup>st</sup>
<b>PLANTS</b>	
Wild Garlic	At Crawley Dene on 2 <sup>nd</sup> , at Allenbanks on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Sweet Woodruff	At Allenbanks on 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Chickweed Wintergreen	At Alnwick Moor on 9 <sup>th</sup> , at Kimmer Lough on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Lousewort	At Alnwick Moor on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Dryad's Saddle	Bracket fungus almost 40cms across at Titlington Mount on 4 <sup>th</sup>
Scots Lovage	At Bamburgh on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Purple Milk Vetch	At Bamburgh on 9 <sup>th</sup> , at Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Northern Marsh Orchid	Many at Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Common Spotted Orchid	At Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Scarlet Pimpernel	At Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>

Common Cottongrass	At Holy Island on 16 <sup>th</sup>
Flowering Rush	At Branton Ponds on 19 <sup>th</sup>
Grass Vetchling	At Branton Ponds on 19 <sup>th</sup>
<b>MAMMALS</b>	
Roe Deer	1 at Thrunton Woods on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 at Holy Island on 1 <sup>st</sup> , 3 in Harthope Valley on 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 3 at Bamburgh on 27 <sup>th</sup>
Badger	1 at Hethpool on 9 <sup>th</sup>
Brown Hare	2 at Bamburgh on 27 <sup>th</sup>
<b>REPTILES</b>	
Adder	1 young adder only 6ins long at Branton Ponds on 7 <sup>th</sup> and 1 on 17 <sup>th</sup>
Slow Worm	2 in Harthope Valley on 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Common Lizard	1 at Kimmer Lough on 16 <sup>th</sup>
<b>RAINFALL</b>	25.5mm
<b>OBSERVERS</b>	W.Banks, G&R Bell, V&P Boulton, I&K Davison, G Dodds, A Keeble, M McMahon, NNBC, R&J Poppleton, S Reay, M Rolley, J Rutter, S Sexton.