

Alnwick Wildlife Group



Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna

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Review of August 2014

NEWSLETTER 156

NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29TH 2014

A Year from the Notebook

Speaker: Stewart Sexton

Stewart is one of the best and most dedicated wildlife watchers in AWG. He has great expertise with Birds and with Moths and a pretty good generalist knowledge of many other types of wildlife. Since he joined AWG his notebook articles have enlivened the Newsletters and his skills as a watercolour field artist are very notable. This should be a most instructive and entertaining evening.

The **September** meeting will begin with the AGM. But fear not, those who have experienced our past AGMs will know that they are contenders for the shortest in history.

The accounts, which the meeting will be asked to approve, were published in Newsletter 152. We currently have a couple of vacancies on the committee, so if you would like to help to organize AWG, please come to the meeting ready to volunteer. Or email Barbara, our Secretary, at redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

Please send sightings reports for September, no later than 6th October 2014 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.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN OCTOBER

The autumn has come around quickly. The leaves on the trees were changing colour in late August after a cool period of weather. In the **House Martin** nest at 5 Front Street, Glanton, the second brood fledged on the 30th August but are still returning to the nest for a 'sleep-over'. It is hard to tell but there have been at least 6 chicks fledged from the nest and all are winging their way to the Congo basin.

Hedgerows are again brimming with fruit once again. **Hawthorn, Dog rose, Blackthorn** and even **Hazel** are laden with berries and nuts. The opposite may be the case for the trees. The autumn of 2013 was a spectacular year for fruits of **Ash, Oak** and **Rowan**. This year does not appear to be the case, although there are some Rowans where the berry crop is good. A hedgerow laden with the berries mentioned with **Bramble** and last remaining **Raspberries** for 'afters', is always a great place to look for wildlife. The main beneficiaries are the insects and the birds but there are others that will benefit. The last of the **Speckledwood** and **Red Admiral** butterflies can be found in sunny glades sampling the fruity juices. These are accompanied by **Common Darter** and **Common Hawker** dragonflies. In the under-growth, **Wood Mice** and **Short-tailed Field Voles** search for fallen fruit. In the canopy, the local tit flocks are accompanied by the last of the **Chiffchaffs** and **Blackcaps**. **Robins** are busily defending their 'patch' from 'all-comers' and Scandinavian **Redwings** are seeking out the best of the berry crop. As the days become shorter, the warblers and butterflies are replaced by wintering thrushes and gnats. These events are played out across the Alnwick area and beyond and a quiet stroll along a hedgerow or scrub can be quite rewarding.

October is a fantastic month for watching wildlife whether it be in your garden, in a hedgerow, woodland or on the coast. Hopefully the weather will stay fine and you will have plenty of encounters with your local wildlife.
Jack Daw.



Speckledwood Butterfly

Photo Laurie Campbell



Common Hawker Dragonfly

Photo Laurie Campbell



Short-tailed Field Vole

Wildlife Trust

Stewchat...

As in July, August remained largely dry and warm, with cooler breezy spells and the odd shower.

The month began with a garden 'second record' when a **Red Squirrel** was investigating my Tree Sparrow nest boxes. It was tricky to see well in the thick foliage, so no photos. Maybe next time.

By now the first signs of autumn are showing. On 3rd, a heavy dew coated everything with trees dripping loudly and the hips on *Rosa rugosa* were glistening while young Swallows lined up on the village wires.

A trip up to Newton Pool produced a few waders with **Ruff**, **Black tailed Godwit** and **Little Ringed Plover** on the scrapes while down at Foxton, an unprecedented 5 **Little Egrets** were on the river. One was colour ringed, and further investigation showed that it had been ringed as a nestling in Lincolnshire in May this year.

Our buddleia continued to attract butterflies with **Small Skipper**, **Wall**, **Peacock**, **Large and Green veined White** all together. While sitting watching them on the 7th, a **Whimbrel** flew south over head and a **Bullfinch** raided the Honeysuckle berries right next to our door.



Figure 1: Bullfinch on Honeysuckle

A 'marmite' rarity turned up at Amble Harbour mid month. By this I mean that either you loved or hated the sub adult **Caspian Gull** that mugged chip shop goers and is still present into September. This gull was once considered to be a race or form of Herring Gull that occurs near the Black Sea but it has now achieved species status.

It is easy to pick out as it sports a yellow colour ring, marked PKCS. It was ringed in a Caspian Gull colony in southern Poland as a nestling. Apart from the ring, it has very long legs and bill, with a dark 'piggy' eye unlike the pale eyed Herring Gulls locally.



Figure 2: Caspian Gull, Amble Harbour

Back home, in the village wood, the **Broad leaved Helleborines** haven't had a good year this time with only 6 spikes found.

On 18th I had another visit up to Newton Pool. 2 **Wood Sandpipers** were the bird highlight, but a **Little Grebes** nest containing 4 new chicks next to the hide was nice to see. The mint humbug striped chicks were all trying to get pole position on mothers back. It was such an engaging scene I was inspired to have a quick sketch...



Figure 3: Little Grebe or Dabchick, Newton Pool.

Lots of butterflies were along only 20 mtrs of track between the hide and the wardens house including my only **Painted Lady** so far this year –



Figure 4: Painted Lady, Newton Pool.

It is after mid August that the small passerines begin migrating in earnest. Its great to watch elders and brambles for parties of small warblers fattening up before heading off on that massive journey to Africa. It seems that the breeding season is successful this year as I don't recall seeing as many in recent years as I have this time.

Numbers of **Willow Warblers, Sedge Warblers and Whitethroats** are replaced as the month progresses by **Chiffchaffs, Blackcap, Garden Warbler** and **Lesser Whitethroats**. If the wind swings east, we might find a Barred Warbler, but I am still waiting for one in 2014.

In the quiet late summer sunshine, the seeps of **Meadow Pipits** over head and the soft 'hoowet' calls of warblers combine with the sight of blackberries and rosehips ripening to give a golden autumnal feel.

At Corby Craggs, a few **Black Darters** were on the wing despite the site being chopped and covered in piles of hardcore to make a road!



Figure 5: Back Darter, Corby Craggs.

On the evening of 28th, birds were visible migrating south over the field behind our house. From 6.30pm – 7pm **209+ Swallows, 16+ House Martins, 1 Swift, 1 Sand**

Martin, 2 Pied Wagtail, 4+ Meadow Pipit, 3 Goldfinch and 1 Linnet were counted all heading steadily in the same direction.

Hedgehogs fattening for hibernation are nightly visitors to the food we put out as well as 2 or more **Wood Mice** and a **Bank Vole** at the bird table.

An unusual thing happened on 30th when a neighbour's son came to the door to say he had seen a bat drowning in a dish near the village hall? On investigation, a tiny **Pipistrelle** was just hanging on with its chin up in a small bowl left out for dogs to drink from. It has been very unlucky to get stuck in there! It was removed and left in our bathroom to dry off for the day and was successfully released at dusk when it flew off very strongly.



Figure 6: Pipistrelle rescued.

With September now upon us, the next couple of months should hopefully see some more interesting birds being found...fingers crossed!

Stewart Sexton, Howick...

Bats in the Attic

Some confusion perhaps between ‘bats in the belfry’ and ‘cash in the attic’? Our first talk of the new season at the end of September is all about bats, so my discovery, initially in July, of a small summer roost of **Brown Long-eared Bats** in the roof space of a house near Alnwick was timely.

This house also has a sizeable summer roost of Pipistrelles – probably Common Pipistrelles – but they use the space under the eaves on top of the wide stone wall of the house. The Long-eared roost is in the roof space itself and the animals cling to the beams. They don’t always use the same location in the roof, which makes it a bit of a problem trying to deal with the mess created by their droppings, although fortunately these are quite dry, in common with those of many bat species.

In my photo, if you count the ears you can see there are six individuals, but that number varies from day to day. These medium sized bats are common in Northumberland. They emerge from their roosts very late in the evening, often after dark. They hawk for insects along woodland edges and among the trees but they also hunt low over vegetation. Sometimes they actually land on the ground to take larger insects and this lays them open to attack from ground predators, particularly domestic cats.



PLANT CORNER

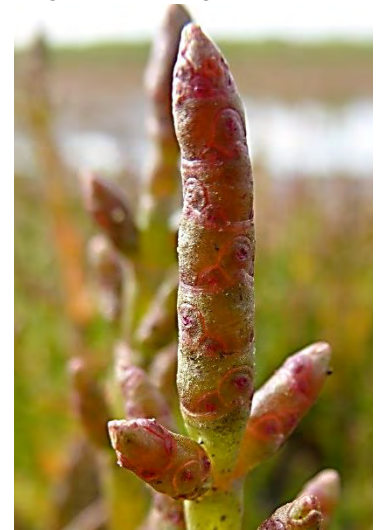
September is an ideal time for coastal botany. Admittedly there will be species that have ceased flowering and, in the case of some annuals, will no longer even have foliage visible. But there are two particular genera found abundantly in saltmarshes and on sandy shores that are very difficult to identify to species until later in the year when their reproductive structures are mature.



The first of these are the **Glassworts** or **Samphires** (*Salicornia* spp.). Samphire is a very early coloniser of mud flats and salt marsh. Richard Mabey describes it as like “plump, jointed pipe-cleaners” and its salty succulent stems are supposedly a culinary delicacy. When the new Morrisons store opened in Morpeth last year their fruit and veg section had a range of unusual things and we spotted samphire and bought some. Shan’t bother again!

Samphire is a classic example of the lumping vs. splitting dilemma that I wrote about in Newsletter 151.

Swan’s *Flora* lists five species in Northumberland, but I’m reliably informed that new thinking has lumped these into just two, which makes life a bit easier. At the Buston Links saltmarsh on the south bank of the A1n in early September all the samphire we found was *Salicornia ramosissima* (Purple Glasswort) and it is this species I’ve illustrated using the photos I took in early September.



You think these plants aren’t in flower? Think again! The flowers are those little circular structures peeking out from the joints between the stem segments. The plants at Alnmouth all seemed to have a prominent central flower and two much smaller peripheral ones. This is one of the features that distinguishes Purple Glasswort from the other species with a real mouthful of a Latin name, *S. dolichostachya* (Long-stalked Glasswort) whose three flowers are far more equal in size.

Then we have the genus *Atriplex*. These plants are mostly called **Oraches** and in the past some of them have been eaten, when young and tender, as salad plants. The two main features that determine species identification are the shape of the lower leaves (best seen earlier in the year) and the fruits which don’t really ripen until the middle of August. At Buston Links we identified six species of *Atriplex* and the key characteristics are the shapes and other features of the ripe fruits. The ones I’ve illustrated are *Atriplex prostrata* (**Spear-leaved Orache**) and *A. praecox* (**Early Orache**), both at Alnmouth this month. The Spear-leaved species was mostly on the salt marsh itself while the Early species was most common on raised sand hummocks at the beach edge of the dunes.

I hope readers will forgive the slightly abstruse nature of this month’s article. Perhaps, at least, when you next risk your car on the exciting track down to the Buston Links dunes you’ll have a look at the saltmarsh and recognise some glassworts and oraches even if you can’t do the species distinctions.



Spear-leaved Orache + close-up of fruits



Early Orache fruits

	SIGHTINGS AUGUST 2014
BIRDS	
Red-throated Diver	1 at Craster on 25 th
Great Crested Grebe	6 at Branton Ponds on 5 th
Little Grebe	10+ at Branton Ponds on 7 th 8 at Hedgeley Lakes on 10 th 15+ at Branton Ponds on 26 th
Manx Shearwater	12 off Newton Point on 20 th 76 at Craster on 25 th
Sooty Shearwater	2 off Snab Point on 26 th
Little Egret	5 at Foxton Bends on 3 rd 7 at Fenham Flats on 10 th 2 at Holy Island on 29 th 4 at Branton Ponds on 30 th 2 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
Shelduck	47 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
Wigeon	53 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
Eider	11 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
Goshawk	1 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
Snipe	30 at Cresswell Pond on 10 th 30+ at Newton Point on 20 th
Sanderling	4 at Coquet Estuary on 3 rd 9 at Guile Point on 10 th
Knot	17 at Coquet Estuary on 3 rd
Dunlin	117 at Coquet Estuary on 3 rd 100 at Amble/Warkworth on 10 th
Pectoral Sandpiper	1 at Charlton Mires scrape on 27 th
Curlew	300 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
Whimbrel	3 over Branton on 29 th
Spotted Redshank	1 at Cresswell Pond on 10 th 1 at Amble/Warkworth on 10 th 1 at Budle Bay on 24 th
Redshank	250+ at Coquet Estuary on 3 rd 200 at Amble/Warkworth on 10 th
Greenshank	2 at Foxton Bends on 3 rd 1 at Coquet Estuary on 3 rd 3 at Cresswell Pond on 10 th 2 at Druridge Pools on 10 th
Ruff	2 at Newton Scrape on 3 rd and 7 on 5 th 4 at Cresswell Pond on 10 th 9 at Newton Scrape on 20 th 2 at Hoppen Kiln Flash on 24 th 8 at Charlton Mires flash on 27 th
Lapwing	300+ at Branton Ponds on 29 th
Little Ringed Plover	1 at Newton Scrape on 3 rd
Black-tailed Godwit	14 at Newton Scrape on 3 rd and 12 on 20 th 2 at Hoppen Kiln Flash on 24 th
Bar-tailed Godwit	172 at Fenham Flats on 10 th
Avocet	10 at Cresswell Pond on 3 rd including 3 young
Stilt Sandpiper	1 at Druridge Pools still on 3 rd and 10 th at Cresswell Pond
Wood Sandpiper	1 at Newton Scrapes on 5 th 2 at Druridge Pools on 10 th
Green Sandpiper	2 at Branton Ponds on 8 th 1 at Druridge Pools on 10 th 1 on River Breamish on 10 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 21 st
Common Sandpiper	4 at Cresswell Pond on 10 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 26 th
Arctic Skua	1 off Snab Point on 26 th 11 at Craster on 25 th 6 off Newton Point on 27 th
Caspian Gull	1 at Amble on 11 th
Little Gull	1 at Craster on 25 th
Sandwich Tern	2 at Guile Point on 10 th
Arctic Tern	43 at Guile Point on 10 th 40+ at Craster on 25 th
Common Tern	3 at Guile Point on 10 th
Little Tern	17 at Guile Point on 10 th

Swift	Large flock at Belford from 20 th - 28 th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds on 7 th 1 on River Breamish near Hedgeley on 10 th
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1 at Royal Oak Gardens on 28 th
Yellow Wagtail	4 at Newton Scrape on 20 th
Stonechat	Family group at Budle Point on 24 th
Whinchat	Several family groups at Bewick Moor on 16 th
Blackcap	Family group at Branton Ponds on 21 st
Whitethroat	1 at Budle Point on 24 th
Willow Tit	1 at Branton Ponds on 21 st
Raven	2 over Bewick Moor on 16 th
PLANTS	
Grass of Parnassus	Holy Island on 29 th
MAMMALS	
Red Squirrel	1 at Hulne Park on 13 th
Porpoise	3 off Ross Back Sands on 24 th
Brown Hare	4 at Fenham Flats on 4 th
INSECTS	
Common Darter	2 at Branton Ponds on 5 th
Migrant Hawker	1 at Branton Ponds on 30 th
Common Hawker	1 at Branton Ponds on 30 th
Common Blue Damselfly	Many around Branton Ponds on 5 th
Blue Tailed Damselfly	Several around Branton Ponds on 5 th
Comma	1 at Smeafields on 5 th
Peacock Butterfly	Many around Branton Ponds on 5 th 3 at Howick on 3 rd 150+ at Smeafields on 7 th
Wall	1 at Howick on 3 rd 1 at Smeafields on 9 th 1 at Belford Churchyard on 10 th
Meadow Brown	15 at Smeafields on 8 th
Small Skipper	1 at Howick on 3 rd
Small Copper	1 at Titlington Pike on 23 rd
Red Admiral	7 at Smeafields on 7 th
Herald moth	1 at Branton on 8 th
Canary Shouldered Thorn	1 at Branton on 15 th
Chinese Character	1 at Branton on 15 th
RAINFALL	69.2mm
OBSERVERS	S Binyon, I&K Davison, G Dodds, S Reay, J Rutter, S Sexton, A R Wills.