

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

Email: redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

NEWSLETTER 166 July 2015

Review of June 2015

NEXT MEETING: SEPTEMBER 30TH 2015 – “LADYBIRD SPOTTING IN NORTHUMBERLAND” SPEAKER: CATHLEEN THOMAS

Cathleen is the recently appointed Community and Events Officer for Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

She completed her PhD in the evolution and ecology of ladybirds at Hull University and since then has worked for a number of years in conservation posts. One of the more exotic of these was as Education Officer at the Welsh Mountain Zoo!

MOTH OF THE MONTH - AUGUST

For August I have chosen the Large Yellow Underwing (*Noctua pronuba*), possibly the commonest large moth species in the British Isles. An average of 12,000 individuals are recorded in Northumberland each year, with peak numbers in early August and in a good year I can have more than 300 in the trap on a single night. A large moth with a 50 mm wingspan, it has variable brown forewings with orbicular and reniform stigmata outlined on the middle of wing and a black wedge on the leading edge towards the wing-tip. The hindwings are designed to startle predators when revealed, being bright yellow with a black stripe near the edge.



While mainly a night flying species, they will fly strongly and erratically if disturbed during the day. The larvae feed on many herbaceous plants, hiding underground during the day. Interestingly, this species has been shown to be able to detect the echo location calls of some species of bat and will close their wings and drop to the ground to avoid them.

Alan Fairclough.

We apologise for this being a rather slim issue, but with so many people away this is inevitable.

Please send sightings reports for July, no later than 6th August 2015 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.

DONATIONS

Members will be aware that each year we receive donations from Northumberland Estates and others in recognition of the survey work we carry out for them. One effect of this has been to enable us to keep our annual subscription rates unchanged since AWG's foundation in 2001.

Despite this we do tend, gradually, to build up a small surplus and at our last committee meeting in May we discussed how we might best use some of this. This year the surplus has been swollen by the £400 income we achieved from the Laurie Campbell event in February.

In 2014 we made £200 donations each to John Steele and Philip Hanmer, both AWG members, to help with their Barn Owl work in different parts of the county. This year we are seeking new ideas for good, wildlife focused, ideally fairly local projects to support. Mora Rolley came up with an idea based on Red Squirrels. Her email said:

“At Wednesday's meeting George said there was some money available for projects. Recently we visited a friend, John Rae, who is involved with the red squirrel conservation survey in Kyloe woods. It is supported by Berwick Wildlife Group. They are in need of financial support but he also told me that there is a big blank re. red squirrels between Morpeth and Berwick and suggested that even putting up a couple of squirrel feeders in the woods we are surveying in Alnwick would at least alert them to where grey squirrels are around. I'm just putting this idea up for discussion by the committee.”

Committee members who responded thought that in principle this would be a good use of funds, but there were two concerns. AWG, at the moment, is in no position to become the organiser of a Red Squirrel group in the Alnwick Area **unless there are a few keen members who would want to take such a project on.** Secondly there was concern that simply putting up feeders in, say, Cawledge Burn and Thomas Percy woodlands might not provide any useful data unless they were accompanied by cameras to record what visits them – which starts to become very expensive and ripe for vandalism and theft.



So unless anyone says anything to the contrary we shall:

1. Ask Mora to talk some more to John Rae to discuss our two concerns and see whether, by simply providing some funding support, AWG would be able to help.
2. See if any of our members wants to run with the idea of an Alnwick-based project. **If you do, please contact the committee via the redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk email address.**

Meanwhile David Turnbull, who has joined our committee, wrote to Northumberland Wildlife Trust to see if they have projects we could consider supporting. Duncan Hutt replied with six possible ideas. Two are a bit too far away, in Kielder and the Tyne Valley. One is expensive, so any donation from AWG would just get swallowed up with other funds. The other three all look possible:

1. **Otter Survey.** Elsewhere in this newsletter you will see a request from NWT for help with surveying otters on the River Aln. With luck there may be several members who will want to get involved with this and will contact Sarah Beeson (sarah.beeson@northwt.org.uk). But we could also help with a



donation to fund the DNA testing of otter spraint (see photo), both from the Aln and other Northumberland rivers. Tests cost £25 each, so we could tailor any donation to what we feel is reasonable from our funds.

2. Annstead Dunes. The dunes between Beadnell and Seahouses need more suitable pedestrian access gates to enable better controlled grazing to take place. This grazing is very helpful for the dune flora. The gates would cost about £400, so we could potentially offer to fund the full cost if we wished to do so. Incidentally, NWT also want volunteers to help with their annual fight against Ragwort, so individual members might want to see how they could help with this.

3. Druridge Bay. Various small projects would benefit from some funding. These include the creation of a new pond and scrapes at East Chevington and bird/bat boxes at Linton Lane and Hauxley. Costs vary from £20 to £500.

It would be easy for the committee just to decide which, if any, of these to support, but it would be much better if members would be willing to let us have their opinions. So **PLEASE** email us at redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk to let us know what you think we should spend some of the surplus funds on.

PLANT CORNER

We eat plants, so why shouldn't plants eat us? There's something very strange and macabre about carnivorous plants. John Wyndham's Triffids were an extreme fictional take on the situation, but if we were insect-sized we might well find some of this month's subjects equally scary.

Enthusiasts with heated greenhouses often grow Venus Flytraps and Pitcher Plants which in their different ways are totally adapted to their roles as partial carnivores. If I were to make the unwise statement that there is no plant that is an obligate carnivore – with no alternative way of gaining nutrition – then someone would probably tell me there's a thing in the forests of Papua New Guinea that has no chlorophyll and no means of gaining food other than from animal victims. But my British specimens are certainly all part-time carnivores.



The general rule is that these are plants whose usually acid moorland habitats provide little in the way of mineral nutrients and which therefore supplement their diets with insects and other small invertebrates. Venus Flytrap has a mechanical mechanism for trapping victims, but our species basically rely on snaring their prey in sticky fluid secreted from glands. Once trapped, the insects can be digested at leisure by enzymes also secreted from glands on the plant tissues.

In boggy parts of Northumberland you may well find our fairly common **Round-leaved Sundew** (*Drosera rotundifolia*) – top photo. Very occasionally in South Northumberland you might also find the much scarcer **Great Sundew** (*D. anglica*) with its larger long-oblong leaves. In Ireland in late June I found a patch of the Round-leaved species and growing with it were plants of **Oblong-leaved Sundew** (*D. intermedia*) – lower photo - with leaves half way between the other two extremes. These, of course, are flowering plants and it is really good when you find specimens in flower with their flower spikes on long leafless stalks with pretty small white flowers at the top.



The sundews all have very obvious glandular hairs on the leaves which produce very sticky secretions. Quite

often you will see small flies trapped on the surface. It wasn't until the 1800s that botanists realized what these plants were doing. Far more exciting were the beliefs in many rural areas that the sticky droplets could be used as love potions and lads would try to slip sundew leaves into the pockets of girls they liked. There was even a drink distilled from sundew secretions which was thought to have aphrodisiac powers.

There were once sundews at Ford Moss, but the drying out of the bog seems to have caused their disappearance in recent times. Perhaps the re-wetting of the Moss will improve the habitat and they will return.



The other genus of insectivorous plant you are likely to find in our area is *Pinguicula*, the Butterworts. The only one you will normally find in our county is the **Common Butterwort** (*Pinguicula vulgaris*). The yellowish-green rosette of rather fleshy leaves can often be picked out in wet patches on peat moors. The leaves are covered in a slimy secretion in which insects get trapped. In late June and early July the plants produce a single erect stalk from the middle of the rosette bearing a single violet flower. Again in Ireland amongst a good patch of Common Butterwort I found a single plant that had smaller grey-green leaves and



a small pale-lilac flower. At first I thought it was just a sickly specimen of the normal species, but a quick look at the book told me it was **Pale Butterwort** (*P. lusitanica*) which isn't recorded in Northumberland. My main photo shows the leaves but the flower is out of focus, so I've inserted a close-up of the flower in better focus.

The Butterwort family also includes another genus of insectivorous plants – the Bladderworts – but I've only once knowingly seen any of these and, because they are totally aquatic, you need to be willing to wade into the slow-moving fresh water pools where they grow. Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles*, the botanists'

bible, uses the term 'scattered' about all the species of Bladderwort (*Utricularia*) which is a pretty good indication that you are going to be lucky to find any. George Swan's *Flora of Northumberland* says 'probably extinct in North Northumberland', so you can forget about them in our area.

Richard

SIGHTINGS JUNE 2015

BIRDS

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Great Crested Grebe | 3 at Branton Ponds on 1 st and 2 pairs on 20 th |
| Cormorant | 4 at Fenham Flats on 18 th |
| Little Egret | 3 at Warkworth on 21 st |
| Spoonbill | 2 at East Chevington on 12 th |
| Pink-foot Goose | 1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th |
| Greylag Goose | 2 over Smeafield on 3 rd |
| Canada Goose | 2 over Smeafield on 5 th |
| Mallard | 8 at Fenham Flats on 18 th |
| Common Scoter | 30 flying north at Annstead on 26 th |
| Shoveller | 2 males at Branton Ponds on 2 nd a pair at Branton Ponds on 25 th |
| Shelduck | 88 at Fenham Flats on 18 th |
| Eider | 8 at Fenham Flats on 18 th |
| Marsh Harrier | 1 at East Chevington on 12 th 1 at Cresswell Pond on 12 th |
| Red Kite | 1 over Howick on 3 rd 1 at Bridge of Aln on 10 th 1 at Glanton on 30 th 1 at Yearle on 21 st |
| Quail | 1 at Branton on 4 th and 25 th 1 on Hulne Moor on 21 st 1 at Branton on 28 th |
| Water Rail | 1 at Branton Ponds on 3 rd |
| Woodcock | 2 at Beanley Woods on 27 th |
| Oystercatcher | 2 with young at Branton Ponds on 1 st |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 26 at Cresswell Pond on 24 th |
| Dunlin | 15 at Fenham Flats on 18 th |
| Little Stint | 1 at Low Newton scrape on 9 th |
| Common Sandpiper | 7 pairs on River Breamish on 8 th |
| Avocet | 5 at Cresswell Pond on 24 th |
| Little Gull | 11 at East Chevington on 12 th 5 at East Chevington on 5 th |
| Cuckoo | 3 at Beanley Moor on 9 th at least 1 seen or heard in College Valley on 7 th , 9 th and 11 th |
| Little Owl | 1 at Branton on 20 th |
| Barn Owl | 1 at Branton on 7 th and 8 th 1 at Brandon Ford on 9 th 1 at Branton on 29 th |
| Tawny Owl | 1 at Beanley on 9 th |
| Nightjar | 1 calling at Beanley Moor on 9 th and 2 on 10 th male and female in courtship flight and wing clapping |
| Swift | 30+ over Branton Ponds on 23 rd |
| Kingfisher | 1 at Branton Ponds on 19 th |
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | 1 at Brandon Ford on 8 th a family at Smeafield on 14 th |
| Skylark | 7 at Smeafield on 18 th |
| House Martin | Many at Dunsdale on 7 th |
| Grey Wagtail | 1 on 5 eggs at Dunsdale on 7 th 4 had hatched by 12 th |
| Dipper | 1 at Dunsdale Bridge on 7 th |
| Redstart | 1 at Branton on 1 st and 2 on 17 th |
| Stonechat | 6 on Hulne Moor on 21 st 1 at Ross Links on 11 th |
| Whinchat | 3 at Kimmer Lough on 22 nd |
| Reed Warbler | Several at East Chevington on 12 th |
| Blackcap | Many at Branton Ponds on 1 st still singing |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Garden Warbler | Several at Branton Ponds on 1 st |
| Common Whitethroat | Several at Branton Ponds on 1 st |
| Lesser Whitethroat | 1 at Holy Island on 4 th |
| Chiffchaff | 2 at Smeafield on 21 st |
| Spotted Flycatcher | 1 at Holy Island on 4 th several in Branton all month |
| Nuthatch | 1 in Branton on 24 th |
| REPTILES | |
| Adder | 1 at Branton Ponds on 1 st and 2 on 8 th 1 young Adder in Branton Village on 10 th |
| Slow Worm | 1 (dead) at Yearle on 5 th 1 (dead) at Dunsdale Bridge on 9 th |
| MAMMALS | |
| Roe Deer | 1 with very young fawn near Branton on 2 nd |
| Brown Hare | 6 at Smeafield on 18 th |
| Grey Squirrel | 1 near Woorpton on 22 nd |
| Hedgehog | 1 at Branton on 24 th 1 at Smeafield on 24 th |
| Weasel | 1 at Smeafield on 12 th |
| Common Dolphin | 4 off Ross Back Sands on 12 th |
| INSECTS | |
| Blue-tailed Damselfly | Several at Branton Ponds on 2 nd |
| Common Blue Damselfly | 1 at Branton Ponds on 8 th and many by 10 th |
| Azure Damselfly | 1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th |
| Banded Demoiselle | On River Aln near Lesbury on 24 th and 4 on 27 th |
| Four-spotted Chaser | 1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th |
| Northern Eggar | 1 on Hedgehope on 27 th 1 at Branton on 27 th |
| Angle Shades | 1 near Whittingham on 3 rd |
| Small Angle Shades | 1 at Branton on 25 th |
| Brimstone moth | 19 at Branton on 29 th |
| Buff-tip | 1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th |
| Elephant-hawkmoth | 1 at Howick on 26 th 1 at Branton on 27 th |
| Chimney Sweep | 2 at Brandon Ford on 10 th |
| Bordered White | 1 at Branton on 27 th |
| Peach Blossom | 1 at Branton on 27 th |
| Lunar Thorn | 1 at Branton on 29 th |
| Mottled Beauty | 1 at Branton on 29 th |
| Light Emerald | 1 at Branton on 29 th |
| Lychnis | 2 at Branton on 27 th |
| Chinese Character | 1 at Branton on 19 th |
| White-spotted Pug | 1 at Branton on 19 th |
| Ruby Tiger | 1 at Branton on 19 th |
| Poplar Hawk Moth | 3 at Howick on 19 th 1 at Branton on 24 th and 2 on 27 th |
| Small Magpie | 2 at Branton on 24 th |
| Common Blue | 1 at Branton Ponds on 18 th 3 at Long Nanny on 30 th 1 at Bamburgh on 29 th 1 at Ross Links on 11 th |
| Small Copper | 1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th |
| Small Heath | Several at Holy Island on 4 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 9 th |
| Large Heath | 1 on Hedgehope on 27 th |
| Peacock | 3 at Ross Links on 11 th |
| Dark Green Fritillary | 1 at Long Nanny on 30 th |
| Ringlet | 1 at Branton Ponds on 25 th |

Speckled Wood 3 near Lesbury on 27th

Tree Bumblebee Several in Branton on 25th

PLANTS

Round Leaved At Holy Island on 4th

Wintergreen

Petit Whin At Kimmer Lough on 22nd

Common-spotted Orchid 1 at Branton Ponds on 25th

Maiden Pink At Warkworth on 21st

Starry Saxifrage On West Hill(Cheviot) on 8th

Rock Rose At Dunsdale Bridge on 9th

Butterwort On Clodburn Hill on 9th

RAINFALL 41 mm

OBSERVERS

W Banks, G&R Bell, I&K Davison, G Dodds, S Reay, J Rutter, S Sexton, B Welch, S Williams, S Wilson.



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The Search is On for the North East's Otters!

Northumberland Wildlife Trust is launching a county-wide hunt for otter populations and we need you to help us find them.

Since the last survey in 2002, we have very little comprehensive data on otter populations in the region, so we don't know whether the population has remained stable or fallen.

This 2015 survey will give us a better understanding of current otter distribution throughout the Northumberland and Tyne River Catchment Areas.

Otters are generally difficult to see and surveying with normal techniques can be a challenge. NWT is looking for volunteer surveyors for a number of sites across the region to look for signs and collect spraint (otter droppings) from these locations

The survey sites and methodologies are located in the two following catchment areas:

Northumberland rivers: to simply look for spraint on **one day** during the survey season.

Tyne Rivers: to collect spraint for laboratory DNA analysis on **three separate days** during the survey season (separated by two-week intervals).

If you are interested in taking part in this exciting volunteer opportunity please contact [Sarah Beeson](#) at Northumberland Wildlife Trust.