

Alnwick Wildlife Group



Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

Email: redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

NEWSLETTER 170 NOVEMBER 2015 Review of October 2015

NEXT MEETING 9TH DECEMBER, "HUMPS, BOTTLES AND KILLERS". SPEAKER: STEVE LOWE

Steve is Head of Conservation at Northumberland Wildlife Trust. In his own words in 2012 he said: "I am probably happiest poking around in rock pools or watching birds at Cresswell Ponds, but ... my new favourite is bobbing about on a boat looking for whales and dolphins, something I have recently started to participate in". In the three years since then Steve has developed a close knowledge of the cetaceans around our coasts and he will share some of his knowledge and experiences with us.

CHRISTMAS MEETING

Don't forget that this is two weeks earlier than in other months – Wednesday 9th December.

- Steve Lowe will talk about "Humps, Bottles and Killers"
- The now legendary Christmas Quiz will tax us all. Stewart Sexton is doing it this year – Stewart's decisions will be final and there will be no referrals to the third umpire.
- There will be NIBBLES – provided you all remember to bring them. We've never failed yet, so let's make 2015 a good spread.

FORD MOSS REPORT

The Ford Moss report is now printed. Anyone wanting to read it can find a pdf version at at this link :-
alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FORD-MOSS-2015-Full-Report.docx

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subs are due from 1st January but I shall be more than happy to accept them earlier than that. For the twelfth year running they remain unchanged at £10 (single) or £17.50 (two or more at the same address). BUT existing members will know from our recent communication that for 2016 you will enjoy concessionary rates. (For those who pay by Standing Order, we will arrange the appropriate partial refund).

Cheques, please, to:

Richard Poppleton, Greystone Cottage, Titlington Mount, Alnwick NE66 2EA
OR cash or cheques at the December or January meetings.

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

WHAT WILDLIFE TO LOOK FOR IN DECEMBER 2015.

Cold, wet and windy weather has seen a dramatic change in the landscape and I am starting to feel the onset of winter. There are still good numbers of Fieldfares, Redwings, Scandinavian Blackbirds, Chaffinches and Bramblings. On the colder days there have been southerly movements of Whooper Swans, White-fronted Geese and parties of thrushes.

As a little bit of a change I thought I would provide some festive facts about some of our festive species:

THE ROBIN



First recorded in literature in Anglo-Saxon times. It is a bird that prefers broad-leaved and conifer woodland as well as scrub and urban environments. There are approximately 6 million pairs in the UK. Many breeding birds migrate to the continent and further afield for the winter and are replaced by Scandinavian relatives.

Robins were first depicted on Christmas cards in the 19th Century. This was in honour of the postmen of the time who wore bright red uniforms. The postmen in their red-breasted coats resembled the much-loved British bird, the 'robin red-breast', earning Victorian postmen the nick-name: Robins.

HOLLY AND THE IVY



Holly (*Ilex*) and Ivy (*Hedera helix*) have been used as winter decorations since ancient times. Adorning homes with these plants freshened the air and their greenery reminded occupants of the coming spring. In many ancient cultures, the howling, icy winds in the dark nights of winter were believed to be ghosts and demons. Decorating with holly and ivy was thought to ward off these evil spirits.



The use of Ivy during winter also goes back thousands of years. The fact that Ivy, like some hollies, stayed green throughout the year led some to believe it had magical properties and led to its use as home decor in the winter months. It too, symbolized eternal life, rebirth and the spring season.

Over time, many customs from pagan (non-Christian) celebrations were incorporated by Christians into religious holidays. For a period, Ivy was banished as decor by Christians due to its ability to grow in shade, which led to its association with secrecy and debauchery. Nevertheless, the custom of decorating with Holly and Ivy during Christian holidays was eventually accepted. Religious meaning was later attributed to the physical properties of Holly, in particular. Its sharp leaves were said to symbolize Christ's crown of thorns and its red berries the blood he shed.

From the Committee of Alnwick Wildlife Group, we wish you a happy Christmas and prosperous 2016.

Jack Daw.

STEWCHAT...

As I left on last month with a mention of a Siberian waif, the Yellow browed Warbler, it seems a fitting place to start this time.

Each autumn we seem to get more and more of these, once rare, little birds and this year continued the trend. It is believed that over 600 of them arrived in the UK during the first part of October, the majority being on the northern isles and along the east coast. Here at Howick I was lucky enough to have almost daily sightings, with two birds even having a fight in the shrubs along our driveway! The best day for them was the 6th when I saw 3 at Craster and 2 at Howick. They are very active little birds and quite difficult to see in the thick leaves of sycamore trees, their favourite haunt.



Figure 1: Yellow browed Warbler

It was interesting to watch the unfolding migration of birds south during the month. My last Swallows were 3 birds at Craster on the 4th while 22 Barnacle Geese were going the other direction. A few Crossbills were seen on different dates, the largest gathering being 15 north behind our house on 16th. Lots of winter thrushes arrived mid-month accompanied by several Bramblings and a steady passage of Redpolls were notes going south on most days.

The 27th was a foggy dull day that grounded a few birds along the coast. 100+ Redwings and 5 Fieldfares were in our village, when a big surprise appeared out of the mist – 2 Little Egrets flying low North over the houses was only my third sighting here in 7 years. Better was to follow however when a little bit further on to the coast road I flushed a small Jack Snipe from the verge, my first patch record, and well over due.

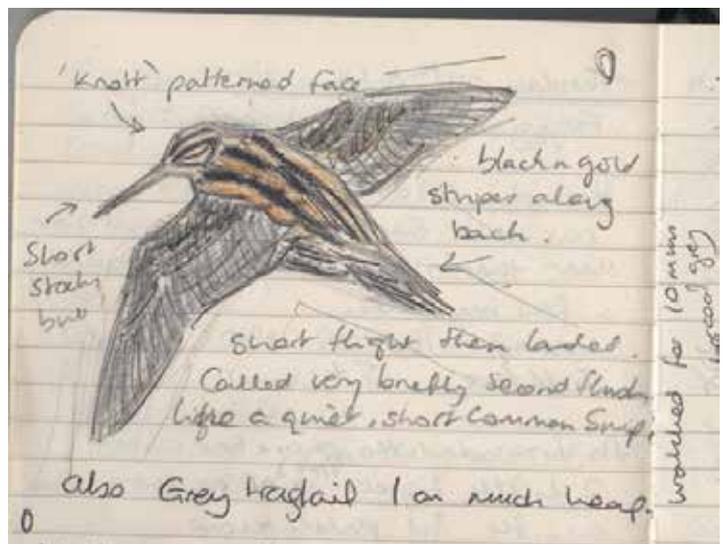


Figure 2: Jack Snipe notes...

The thrush migration continued till the month end with many arriving on 28th along with Woodcock and Great spotted Woodpecker looking very odd flying in from the sea.

With all of this avian excitement, I hope November doesn't turn out to be a damp squib!

Stewart Sexton, Howick.

PLANT CORNER

Anyone who read the details on the Cawledge Burn report that came out with the September Newsletter may have noticed a reference to an Elm that we found in the wood. We identified it as Small-leaved Elm *Ulmus minor* ssp. *minor*, although that has to be a tentative determination. Stace in his *New Flora of the British Isles* says, helpfully (!), "Over large areas of the country the elm population exists solely or largely as hedgerow suckers and is now largely unidentifiable". I'll return in a minute to the question of why our find was noteworthy.

The difficulties that many broad-leaved trees present to the botanist as well as to the casual observer are two-fold:

- Hybridisation. Many trees such as Oaks, Poplars and Willows freely hybridise naturally. Very often hybrids are not fertile, but because trees are so long-lived, sterile hybrids in the countryside are likely to stick around for at least decades and they can present real problems of identification.
- Introductions. Over the centuries gardeners, horticulturalists, foresters and plant hunters have looked overseas for species they think will suit their particular needs in Britain. Having brought them here they then, as often as not, confuse the picture still further by deliberately crossing them with native trees or with other introduced species.

So it is clear that if you personally find it hard to decide what tree you are looking at, you are not alone. At least there are a few, like Ash and Horse Chestnut, which can be pretty reliably identified in the countryside.

Which brings me back to Elms. Fifty years ago much of the British landscape was enriched by large Elms, many of which were English Elms *Ulmus procera* or the subspecies of *Ulmus minor*. However many of these Elms were not necessarily 'true' species but were long-established hybrids. In these Elms it is not just that an individual hybrid tree can survive for hundreds of years, but they produce many root suckers some distance from the parent tree and so in a given area often all the Elms were suckered clones of a single parent. From the trees' point of view it is a good job that they are able to reproduce by suckers because, as hybrids, it is rare for them to reproduce by seed.

Then in the 1970s Armageddon struck in the form of DED (Dutch Elm Disease). This is a fungal disease

spread by bark beetles of the genus *Scolytus* and it arrived in Britain in imported timber. Because of the clonal nature of many Elms a susceptible tree would tend easily to spread the disease to its equally susceptible cloned offspring. The end result of this was that in Northumberland, where English elms were not as common as further south, virtually all were killed off. But of course the common Elm in our county is Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra*. Wych Elm doesn't produce clones. It reproduces by seed and initially these trees seemed largely resistant to DED.

Sadly, in 1974 a different species of *Scolytus* beetle appeared which favoured Wych Elm and by 1984 the beetle and the disease had reached epidemic proportions throughout northern Britain. The process of de-barking imported timber to prevent the spread of the disease was useless because the larvae of this new beetle burrow 8mm deep into the wood before they pupate.

And yet ... and yet ... surely there are plenty of Wych Elms around in our hedgerows and woodland edges? Yes, but how many of them are large mature trees? The answer is virtually none because as soon as a tree reaches a trunk girth of more than about 20cm it becomes attractive to the beetles. So the younger plants can survive but the old trees die.

Our Elm at Cawledge Burn looks as though it is about 20 years old. It is producing plenty of small suckers from its root system. Sadly though, its chances of surviving for more than a couple more decades is poor, although some of its suckering offspring may survive long enough to produce suckers of their own before they too die of DED. Whether our plant was deliberately introduced as a transplanted sucker from elsewhere or whether it was a sucker of a now long-dead parent tree in situ cannot be known, but suckering elms in Northumberland are now so uncommon that this was a very interesting discovery.



Wych Elm Fruit



Wych Elm leaves (note unequal base, typical of elms)



English Elm leaves



English Elm copse - parent tree plus numerous suckering offspring

Richard Poppleton

MEETING OF WEDNESDAY 28TH OCTOBER

33 people braved the unpleasant weather. George began by explaining that Tim Dean, the scheduled speaker, had suffered the death of his mother on Monday night and couldn't be with us. But he had let George have his presentation and notes.

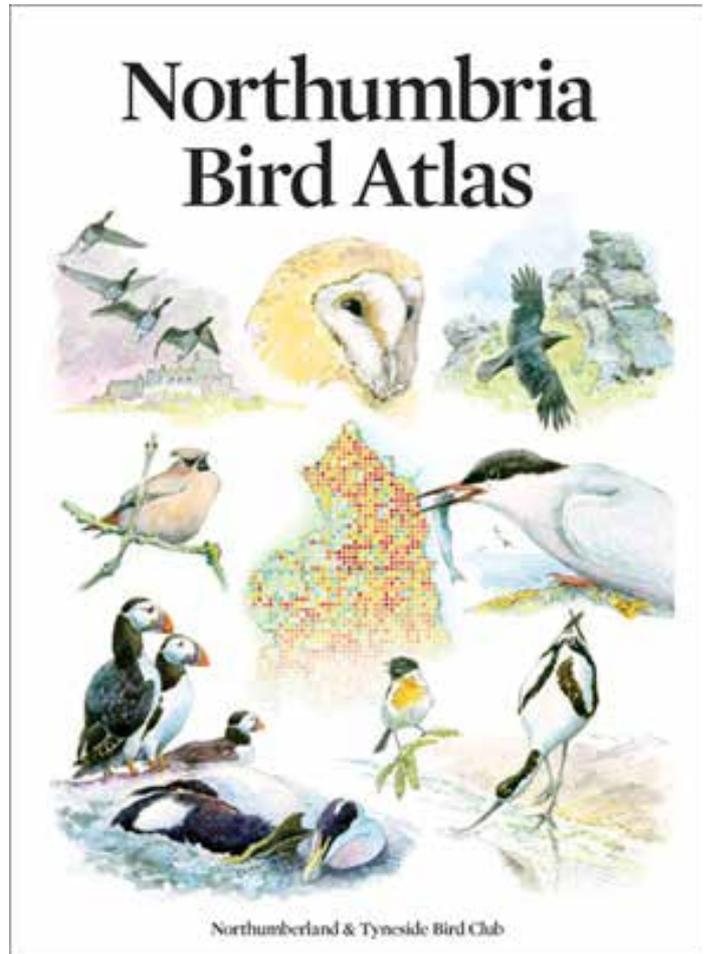
We started with a couple of fungi, one of which was a good specimen of Dead Man's Fingers. There was also a card from the Northumberland Hedgehog Rescue Centre thanking AWG for funding a new incubator.

George then presented the talk on the Northumbrian Bird Atlas, published last year. It was good of George to agree to do this since he had had Tim Dean's notes for less than 24 hours.

The Atlas period covered the years 2007 to 2011. 1440 tetrads (2km squares) were visited both in the breeding season and in the winter. 163 volunteers carried out 4440 hours of surveying and two thirds of the tetrads were visited at least 3 times in the breeding season. The coverage was similarly thorough in the winter.

Each species is allocated a double page with an excellent photograph (except for Quail which no-one could get a decent shot of) and text covering the history of the species in Northumberland and Tyne & Wear; the data collected and population trends. Maps show summer and winter abundance and the extent of change since the previous atlases in 1995 (breeding birds) and 2003 (wintering birds).

George then took us through a selection of species from the different taxonomic bird groups. One question mark that inevitably arose with many species when comparing data to past records was the extent to which apparent increases were solely a measure of improved survey effort and expertise in the current atlas period. It was also clear that already four years have passed since the end of the atlas surveys and for some species there may well have been further change which won't be recognised in this new atlas.



MOTH OF THE MONTH - DECEMBER

Yes, it has to be the December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*)! Flying from November to early January they vary from a dark chocolate brown to black and have strongly bi-pectinated (feather-like) antennae. There is a good chance of seeing them because they are strongly attracted to house lights. The larvae feed on broadleaved trees.

Something else to look out for during the winter

months was prompted by a picture sent to me by Richard Poppleton. This showed whitish tubes sticking out of the seed-head of a Rush (*Juncus*) species. These are the larval cases of a Coleophorid micro moth, which feed on the seeds of many species Rush. There are three species of moth that they could be, all very similar, but they are almost certainly the very common *Coleophora alticolella*, the adult of which is shown in the right-hand image. So when you are out and about this winter, take a look at Rush seed-heads and you will probably find them.



Alan Fairclough.

The North East Region of the Garden Moth Scheme have a moth trap that they are willing to lend to a suitable person living in the vice-counties of Durham and Northumberland for the 2016 season.

Could anyone interested in the chance of volunteering, please email Mike Cook on: michael_j_cook@btinternet.com as soon as possible, in any case no later than 4th January 2016, attaching the completed Questionnaire.

You can also contact Mike on 01912843396 for more information.

Stewart Sexton would be happy to give anyone advice and assistance if they fancy giving the survey a try. He does it each year on Friday nights between March and November.



Are you interested in learning to trap and identify moths, but are unwilling to make the initial investment in the equipment?

The North East Region of the GMS has a moth trap that it is willing to lend out from March until November 2016. In return, the recipient will agree to run the trap overnight in their garden once a week for at least 27 weeks of the 36 weeks of the Garden Moth Scheme.

- The planned GMS night is the Friday night of each week, but trapping can take place as early as the Tuesday or as late as the Monday if necessary.
- Trapping should take place on at least 27 of the 36 weeks of the GMS, with no gap longer than 3 week.
- The recipient will record catches on an electronic form (MS Excel). The completed form will be emailed to the Regional Coordinator after each 9 week period of the 36 week GMS.
- At the end of the year the recipient will return the trap in working order to the GMS (North East Region) so that it can be loaned out again in 2017.

What's in it for you?

- The chance to try a fascinating hobby without the initial outlay.
- A newsletter every 9 weeks and an annual report early in 2017.

What's in it for us?

- We'll have a year's worth of valuable data from a new location that we would not have otherwise.
- We may have recruited a recorder who will carry on recording moths.

Contact the North East Regional Coordinator:

Mike Cook,

Tel: 0191 2843396

Email: michael_j_cook@btinternet.com

www.gardenmoths.org.uk

GMS GARDEN QUESTIONNAIRE

Name

Address

Grid Reference Vice County

Trap Type & Wattage

Area Features:

Your garden is;	Urban (mostly terraced houses, flats, industrial buildings etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sub-urban (mostly detached/ semi-detached houses, bungalows etc with gardens)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rural (in a small village or open countryside)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Soil type is;	Acid (on sand, granite etc with heather, bilberry etc nearby)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral (average garden soils)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Basic (on chalk/limestone with Old-Man's-Beard etc nearby)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Distance from nearest open country, farmland etc	Adjacent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50m	<input type="checkbox"/>	50m to 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance from nearest wood	Adjacent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50m	<input type="checkbox"/>	50m to 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance from nearest water (stream, river, pool, canal etc)	Adjacent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50m	<input type="checkbox"/>	50m to 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance from nearest coast-line	Adjacent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50m	<input type="checkbox"/>	50m to 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance from nearest greenspace (public park, amenity land, nature reserve etc)	Adjacent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50m	<input type="checkbox"/>	50m to 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance from nearest streetlight	Adjacent	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50m	<input type="checkbox"/>	50m to 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Over 2kms	<input type="checkbox"/>

Garden Features:

Size; In square metres (pace the length & width of your garden)	Small Less than 50 m ²	<input type="checkbox"/>	Medium 50 to 200 m ²	<input type="checkbox"/>	Large 200 to 400 m ²	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very Large Over 400 m ²	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Does Your Garden Have:

	Lawn over 25m²	<input type="checkbox"/>	Log Pile	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pond	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bird-table	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tree over 10m	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oak tree over 10m	<input type="checkbox"/>	Compost heap	<input type="checkbox"/>	Long grass	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Native species hedgerow	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildflower meadow	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wild Honeysuckle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wild Ivy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pussy willow	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nettle Patch	<input type="checkbox"/>	Buddleia	<input type="checkbox"/>		

SIGHTINGS OCTOBER 2015

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BIRDS	
Black-throated Diver	1 at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Red-throated Diver	1 off Howick on 3 rd 20 at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Great Crested Grebe	3 at Branton Ponds on 18 th 1 at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Little Grebe	8 at Branton Ponds on 18 th
Cormorant	8 at Branton Ponds on 2 nd
Bittern	1 (probable) in Glanton-Eglingham area on 30 th
Little Egret	7 at Warkworth on 26 th 4 at Holy Island on 8 th and 2 at Budle Bay on 27 th 16 at Smeafields on 9 th
Whooper Swan	6 at Branton Ponds on 23 rd 4 at Turvelaws near Wooler on 7 th
Greylag Goose	100 at Budle Bay on 9 th
White-fronted Goose	1 of the form "albifrons"(eurasian) at Branton Ponds on 29 th
Pink-footed Goose	100+ near Warkworth on 26 th 1000 at Budle Bay on 9 th 300 over Wooler on 15 th and 20 on 27 th 3000 at Smeafields on 9 th
Brent Goose	330 at Fenham Flats on 18 th
Barnacle Goose	22 at Howick on 3 rd 200 at Smeafield on 9 th
Bean Goose sp.	5 over Holy Island on 4 th
Goldeneye	1 at Branton Ponds on 2 nd 9 at Branton Ponds on 18 th
Gadwall	6 at Branton Ponds on 3 rd and 8 on 19 th
Wigeon	9900 at Fenham Flats on 18 th 200+ at Warkworth on 26 th 44 at Branton Ponds on 18 th
Common Scoter	13 at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Goosander	55 at Branton Ponds on 7 th
Peregrine	1 at Boulmer on 2 nd 2 near Warkworth on 26 th 2 at Elwick on 27 th
Woodcock	1 at Craster on 6 th 8 on Holy Island on 29 th 1 near Glanton on 29 th
Jack Snipe	1 at Fenham Flats on 18 th 1 at High Humbleton on 22 nd
Turnstone	40+ at Stag Rock on 12 th
White-rumped Sandpiper	1 at Stag Rocks on 18 th for 4 th day
Spotted Redshank	1 at Budle Bay on 6 th
Greenshank	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 st and 2 nd
Golden Plover	2500 at Fenham Flats on 29 th
Grey Plover	18+ at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Knot	10+ at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Sanderling	2 at Birling Carrs on 26 th
Lesser Black Backed Gull	44 at Branton Ponds on 7 th
Great Black Backed Gull	1 at Branton Ponds on 7 th
Barn Owl	1 at Bamburgh on 27 th and 1 at Wooler on 27 th 1 at Alnwick on 30 th 2 at Elwick all month
Tawny Owl	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 st 1 at Howick on 26 th 1 at Alnwick on 27 th
Short Eared Owl	1 at Holy Island on 8 th 1 at Bamburgh on 27 th
Kingfisher	1 at Branton Ponds on 8 th and 11 th 2 at Branton Ponds on 16 th
Skylark	10+ at Newton Point on 31 st
Swallow	1 at Newton Scrape on 31 st
Pied Wagtail	30 at Lowick on 11 th
Grey Wagtail	1 at Smeafields on 16 th
Wheatear	1 at Low Newton on 11 th
Redwing	1 at Budle Point on 6 th 20+ at Budle Point on 12 th 30+ at Ashington on 5 th several hundred on Holy Island on 29 th
Fieldfare	90+ at Budle Point on 12 th 150+ on Holy Island on 29 th
Blackbird	Several hundred on Holy Island on 29 th
Ring Ouzel	1 at Budle Point on 6 th 1 at Holy Island on 8 th
Song Thrush	20+ at Craster on 6 th
Blackcap	4 at Branton Ponds on 1 st 2 at Craster on 6 th
Barred Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 13 th and a second bird on 14 th
Chiffchaff	4 at Craster on 6 th 5 on Holy Island on 14 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 20 th 1 at Howick on 26 th 1 at Holy Island on 29 th 1 at Low Newton on 31 st
Radde's Warbler	1 at Holy Island on 8 th
Yellow-browed Warbler	3 at Holy Island on 4 th 1 at Howick on 4 th 3 at Craster on 6 th 2 on Holy Island on 14 th

Goldcrest	Several around Branton Ponds on 2 nd 6+ at Craster on 6 th many on Holy Island on 13 th
Bearded Tit	3 at Holy Island on 13 th and 1 on 14 th
Long-tailed Tit	8 at Branton Ponds on 1 st
Treecreeper	1 at Spindlestone on 27 th
Jay	2 at Branton Ponds on 24 th 1 at Spindlestone on 27 th
Lesser Redpoll	2 at Low Newton on 31 st
Crossbill	3 at Warkworth on 4 th several at Holystone Woods on 25 th
Brambling	1 at Ashington on 5 th 2 at Holy Island on 15 th 1 at Spindlestone on 27 th 1 at Low Newton on 31 st 30+ near Lilburn on 31 st
Goldfinch	120 at Fenham Flats on 18 th 18 at Smeafield on 9 th
Reed Bunting	20+ at Budle Point on 6 th
Lapland Bunting	1 at Holy Island on 4 th 1 at Fenham Flats on 18 th
PLANTS	
Cowberry	In berry and in flower at Thrunton Woods on 24 th
Bilberry	At Thrunton Woods on 24 th
MAMMALS	
Red Squirrel	1 at Branton Ponds on 1 st and 4 on 2 nd 1 at Ellingham on 12 th 1 at Beanley on 17 th 1 at Lilburn on 18 th 2 at Spindlestone on 27 th 1 in Branton on 30 th
Stoat	1 youngster at Holy Island on 8 th
Roe Deer	10 at Holy Island on 13 th
INVERTEBRATES	
Southern Hawker	3 at Branton Ponds on 1 st and 1 on 7 th 1 in Branton on 21 st
Common Darter	Several at Branton Ponds on 1 st
Red Admiral	1 at Yearle on 1 st and 7 on 2 nd
Small Tortoiseshell	1 at Yearle on 1 st and 2 on 2 nd
Peacock	1 at Yearle on 2 nd
Speckled Wood	2 at Branton Ponds on 1 st 1 at Holy Island on 13 th
Silver Y	1 at Yearle on 1 st and 2 nd
December Moth	1 at Branton on 29 th
Feathered Thorn	2 at Branton on 29 th
Angle Shades	1 at Branton on 25 th
Red Swordgrass	1 at Howick on 10 th
Merveille du Jour	1 at Branton on 5 th 1 at Howick on 10 th
Canary Shouldered Thorn	1 at Branton on 5 th
Spruce Carpet	1 at Branton on 5 th
Setaceous Hebrew Character	1 at Branton on 5 th
Pink-barred Sallow	1 at Branton on 5 th
Large Wainscot	1 at Howick on 10 th
Brick	1 at Branton on 25 th
FUNGI	
Porcelain Fungi	At Roughting Linn on 10 th
Parrot Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 23 rd
Crimson Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 26 th
Honey Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 23 rd
Blackening Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 23 rd
Meadow Waxcap	At Shepherds Law on 23 rd
Meadow Coral	At Shepherds Law on 23 rd
Common Puffball	At Holystone Woods on 25 th
Dusky Puffball	At Holystone Woods on 25 th
Downy Milkcap	At Beanley Woods on 26 th
Amethyst Deceiver	At Beanley Woods on 26 th
Hoof Fungus	At Beanley Woods on 26 th
Birch Polypore	At Beanley Woods on 26 th
RAINFALL	53mm
OBSERVERS	G&R Bell, I&K Davison, G Dodds, G Dunn, P Jobson, K Mundy, R&J Poppleton, S Reay, J Rutter, S Sexton.