

# Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



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NEWSLETTER 227 AUGUST 2020

REVIEW OF JULY 2020

## VIRAL MEANDERINGS (5)

It's amazing, isn't it? When I wrote the first of these Viral Meanderings pieces in the April Newsletter I suppose I thought that at most there'd need to be only two or three of them before we could get back to normal. Now we're on to number 5 with no realistic sign of it all ending. In fact, if anything, the outlook is threatening to become worse rather than better.

The topic I described in the July edition concerned whether or not we could think about re-starting our main meetings from September. I've canvassed our committee and talked at some length with Liz Spence, who manages St James's Church Centre. The St James's position is, in rough summary, that

- (a) The hall we use would be limited to a maximum of 30 as long as current social distancing rules apply
- (b) The hall would be suitably sanitised before we arrived to use it, but we would be asked to ensure it was properly cleaned after our use
- (c) Our use of the kitchen area would be strongly discouraged - so no refreshments
- (d) When it comes down to it, although St James's wouldn't say a definite 'no' if we were determined to have meetings, they'd really rather we didn't, at least this side of Christmas. I think the main problem is that if and when they use the space for their own Church purposes, their people are on hand to ensure everything is done to their satisfaction. But if other groups are allowed to hire the hall, whether it's for meetings or wedding receptions or whatever, the St James's management would not be present and so would not have first-hand confirmation that the use and post-use processes were being done correctly.

The AWG committee responses were largely, but not unanimously, that we should make the decision now not to try to hold any meetings before Christmas. All of this, of course, is before we know whether or not our speakers would be willing to come. **So, members should work on the assumption that there will be no AWG indoor meetings before Christmas.** If circumstances change and we feel able to reconsider this decision, then we'll let people know as far in advance as possible. Perhaps our member Michael Drage, who was due to do his Madagascar talk in October, would be willing to 'hold himself in readiness', just in case we feel able to reinstate meetings in November or December.

One possibility that has been suggested is that we try to schedule some autumn outdoor walks which don't have the same problems as indoor events, are not dependent on decent numbers of attendees to be viable, and can be cancelled at short notice if the weather or lockdown rules make the walk impossible. **If you would like to offer to lead a walk, do please contact me as soon as possible** ([rich.titlington@outlook.com](mailto:rich.titlington@outlook.com) or 01665 578346).

George, our Chair, has wondered whether it might be possible to hold some of the meetings on-line, by Zoom (or actually, he tells me, it would be via a platform called Microsoft Teams). He may be wanting to explore this possibility with our members. So, if you get a request from him by email asking about your enthusiasm for

holding meetings this way, do please respond so that we know whether to raise that idea with our speakers. Inevitably a Zoom-type approach would exclude those who do not use the relevant technology. On a facetious note I should be interested to discover how we could manage to do our Christmas nibbles by Zoom!

Looking out of our window as I write this, the farming year continues irrespective of any virus. Most of the lambs have been weaned from the ewes. In Northumberland this process is often called 'spaining', although despite the fact that it's a term we use when talking to the farmer or the shepherd, I'm never sure how one ought to spell it. I suspect that it's a Scots word and should probably be 'speaning'.

On this farm the calving happens perhaps a little later than on some, so the calves are still suckling, which means the two Aberdeen Angus bulls are restricted to bellowing at the cows and each other from considerable distances. When you have two bulls that are prone to fighting if they get too close to each other, the term social distancing takes on a whole new meaning.



The silage is all in and the hay has been cut and is still being turned to dry it before bailing. The barley for winter fodder is still to be harvested, but several of the fields are looking a promising straw colour, although I haven't the expertise to tell from the feel of the ripening seed heads whether they are ready for the combine.



In the garden there is no doubt that the House Sparrows, that have been having a poor time of it in recent years, have been making a come-back. They had almost disappeared from our garden feeders, being replaced by a large population of Tree Sparrows, but this summer both species seem to have raised large numbers of noisy young. The back garden currently has juvenile Robins, Pied Wagtails and Dunnocks, all continuously pestering their parents for food. A juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker (a red cap on top of the head) is a regular visitor to the peanuts and fat balls, while overhead we have the regular screaming of young Buzzards.

Out on the moor there are family groups of Stonechat and Reed Bunting and you can spend a fascinating half hour watching with binoculars across the tops of big bracken patches as the birds flit about. Sadly these days we never seem to get the Whinchats that used to be a feature of late summer on these moors.

In our back garden we've currently got a very energetic and regular Bank Vole. In the past we've had Field Voles, but this animal (or maybe it's not always the same one we see) has the particularly attractive chestnut brown colour on its head and back which is the easiest distinguishing feature when you are faced with an animal that moves like greased lightning.



Even more exciting is the fact that for the first time in several years we've got hedgehogs in the garden. First there was an adult in the gateway that I almost ran over and which seemed frozen to the spot from the trauma of the car passing over it. It submitted easily enough to being picked up with a towel and put somewhere safer. Then a few days later, in the same area there was a young animal. To be fair, our garden is not really too good for hedgehogs because of the attempts we have to make to try to keep rabbits out – not always with great success – and the netting will inevitably limit the access points for animals as large as hedgehogs.



Two groups of organisms I often find quite frustrating are fungi and caterpillars. In both cases you see something out in the field and think that it's very distinctive and will be no problem to identify back at home. Only then to discover that either you can't find anything in the books that actually looks like what you remember (and you didn't have a camera with you – again!), or there are several things that look almost identical and you've no idea which you'd seen. Thus, while in the Bamburgh dunes preparing material for this month's Plant Corner, it was really good to find a caterpillar whose identity is not in doubt. OK, so it

wasn't actually on its traditional food plant, Ragwort, but there was plenty of that plant around and anyway there is almost nothing that looks as clear and distinctive as a Cinnabar Moth larva even if you do find it on Germander Speedwell leaves.

One final question – probably rhetorical. A couple of months ago I wrote about wildlife indoors and talked about our recent experiences (for the first time in 25 years here) with the clothes moth, *Tinea bisselliella*. I also mentioned that we have a lot of Daddy-Long-Legs Spiders at the moment. What I want to know is why don't the spiders appear to be able to trap the clothes moth adults? We've never yet seen any moths caught in the spiders' webs. Answers on the traditional postcard please!

Richard

### WALKS, NOT TALKS!

You will see from the Viral Meanderings piece that we are to try to re-start some outdoor walks. Mike and June Drage are the first to have come forward to volunteer one. So, do make a note of this, and with luck we shall be able to have some more scheduled by the time the September newsletter comes out.

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September** Craster – the Arnold Reserve, heughs, castle and shoreline.

Meet in the main Craster carpark (NU 257 197) at 10.30am. This is pay and display, so bring coins. Total distance c. 3 miles. Choose appropriate footwear and clothing to suit what the weather forecast says. If it has been wet, the path under the heughs is often muddy. Binoculars would be good, if you have them. Social distancing will almost undoubtedly be necessary.



## PLANT CORNER

Over the past two or three years I've written several times about the weeds in our garden at Titlington Mount. I thought it was now time to turn the tables and look at plants that escape from gardens into the wider countryside. I'm going to avoid the temptation to deal with familiar alien invasives like Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed, largely because I don't believe there can be any gardeners these days who think growing these species in their gardens is a sensible idea. Yes, they were garden escapes, but with the emphasis on 'were'.

County Floras always include species that clearly must have had a garden origin. Such plants may survive for a year or two before being out-competed or simply finding the wild environment too difficult, but if any remain for longer than that then they get to the category of 'naturalised' plants and then begin to be botanically more interesting.

Modern recording often tends to include even plants growing on the road side of garden walls, but in this article I'm really talking about specimens that are sufficiently separated from the garden to be considered as having a genuine 'extra-garden' existence. Escapes may occasionally result when long rhizomes carry them under the fence or hedge to the outside, but I'd be hard put to say that I know any examples of that in my area. Alternatively the escape may be via the seeds being blown or carried on feet or tyres or pets out of the garden. In practice most seeds of garden species would rarely find themselves landing in a situation which is both favourable for their germination and sufficiently free of heavy competition for them to become established. By far the most likely route is from garden discards of whole plants and lumps of root stocks on to waste ground.

I'll start with the most impressive escapee at our home. Next to our garden fence is an enclosure where the farmer stores silage bales. The surrounding rough vegetation is predominantly nettles, docks, large rough grasses and an ominous patch of Ground Elder which I try to strim off each year before it can set seed. Wildlife gardening may be fine in theory, but I really don't want to have to deal with a heavy invasion of *Aegopodium podagraria* every year. About 20 years ago I threw an unwanted part of a clump of **Common Bistort** *Persicaria bistorta* over the fence into the long grass. Not only did it survive, but over the years it has grown into a large (c. 1m x 2m) clump that flowers spectacularly each spring. And this despite the competition and the fact that in some years the shepherd puts small groups of ewes and lambs into the enclosure while he is moving other animals around, and sheep eat things.



Meanwhile, in Bamburgh, by the coast road to the south of the village, there is an area between the road and the dunes that residents refer to as 'the tip road'. It has clearly been a place where people would dump their garden waste, but, as the current notice shows, are now discouraged from doing so. When one looks at the main BSBI plant database there has been a range of records between 2003 and 2017 of plants here that must have had a garden origin. Most are perennials – either woody, such as Laburnum and Tree Lupin, or bulbous like the two species of Crocus, or those that die down after the summer and come again from a persistent root stock, such as Aubretia or Pink Sorrel or the blowsy but most impressive Oriental Poppies.



It is worth giving a list of these recorded garden escape species at this location because it just shows how comparatively easy it is for an exotic garden to establish itself if the environment is right and if people dump their unwanted plants often enough.

<b>Aubretia</b>	<i>Aubrieta deltoides</i>	<b>Bearded Iris</b>	<i>Iris germanica</i>
<b>Adria Bellflower</b>	<i>Campanula portenschlagiana</i>	<b>Laburnum</b>	<i>Laburnum anagyroides</i>
<b>Snow-in-summer</b>	<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>	<b>Tree Lupin</b>	<i>Lupinus arboreus</i>
<b>Meadow Saffron</b>	<i>Colchicum autumnale</i>	<b>Pink Sorrel</b>	<i>Oxalis articulata</i>
<b>Yellow Crocus</b>	<i>Crocus x luteus</i>	<b>Oriental Poppy</b>	<i>Papaver pseudoorientale</i>
<b>White (Spring) Crocus</b>	<i>Crocus vernus</i>	<b>Canadian Goldenrod</b>	<i>Solidago canadensis</i>
<b>Hyacinth</b>	<i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i>	<b>Garden Tulip</b>	<i>Tulipa gesneriana</i>
<b>Duke of Argyll's Teapant</b>	<i>Lycium barbarum</i>		

Three comments, for those who check these things: the different spellings of Aubretia and *Aubrieta* is not an error; the White Crocus, despite its name, also comes in purple colours; the Oriental Poppy has fairly recently changed its Latin name to *Papaver setiferum* (not, you understand, by deed poll, but by botanists!).

Apparently in recent years, Natural England, in its wisdom, decided that these species ought not to be allowed to contaminate the natural dune environment and weed killer was applied. So, I thought I'd better go and have a look to see what is still present. Of course, when I did so it was late July, so it would be fair to assume that I wouldn't see the crocuses, the tulips or the hyacinth even if they are still there.

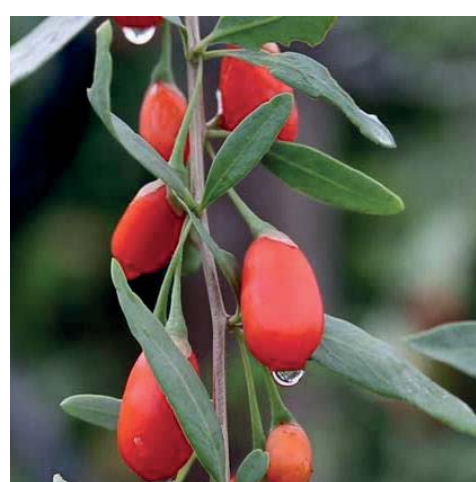
Of the list, the only things I found were the ones highlighted. There were lots of big Lupin bushes; plenty of Duke of Argyll's Teapant shrubs along the part of the roadside fence nearest the beach carpark (but too early for the startling red berries); lots of seed heads of the Poppies; and a solitary specimen of Pink Sorrel.



Tree Lupin (not taken this year) Tree Lupin flower head

Pink Sorrel

Oriental Poppy fruit



Duke of Argyll's Teapant – Flowers (my photo at Bamburgh); Berries (photo from the Web)



On the other hand I did find some different things that are probably garden escapes. There was a large, healthy, low-growing Lilac *Syringa vulgaris* bush – far too late for flowers (📷s left below). It must have been here for years.

I also came across this Greater Knapweed (📷 middle below). It's possible that *Centaurea scabiosa* has arrived here naturally because it is a native plant in Britain in calcareous grassland habitats, but it may also be a garden escape.



Then there were two species of Mint. Round-leaved Mint (also called Apple-scented Mint) *Mentha suaveolens* which was in flower and Spearmint *Mentha spicata*, which was not. As with the knapweed, either or both of these could be here naturally, but may also be of garden origin. I didn't photograph the spearmint, but the Round-leaved species is the image on the right, above. Even with my (NOT Covid-related!) lack of a sense of smell, I can get enough of the scent of both of these to know what they are.

My final find was a single specimen of Day-Lily *Hemerocallis* sp. You'll notice that I've not decided which of the two naturalised species (Orange or Yellow Day-Lily) it was. Until I got home and looked it up I hadn't realised there were two different ones, so I hadn't done any of the measurements of leaf size or counted the number of flowers per stalk which would have given me the answer. It looks yellow – but ....



At the other end of the eye-catching scale, we were doing some plant recording near Shipley along part of the road between Alnwick and Eglingham a few years ago. In the entrance to one of the (locked) gates into Hulne Park was a patch of the little plant called Mind-your-own-Business, which delights in the Latin name *Soleirolia soleirolii*.



I'm at a bit of a loss why anyone would deliberately want this plant in their garden. To me it looks like a terrestrial version of Duckweed or the type of cress used in egg and cress sandwiches, but apparently people grow it in shady, damp areas of gardens where it can form the equivalent of bits of lawn, and it stays evergreen in the winter. I don't know how it copes with trampling.

There have only been eight records outside the domesticated habitat in North Northumberland. The patch we found was a long way from any garden and it seems most likely that this was an example of spread by seed, rather than by dumping. I checked the place last year and could see no sign of it. The Web photo shows it on a wall among the fronds of Hart's-tongue Fern.

Richard

Late summer bird watching can be a quiet affair in Northumberland but sometimes the stars align to make an exception to the rule.

Last year, on a day in July, I went to work and forgot my phone for the first time ever. I returned home at 6.15pm to find 45 messages telling that a Sooty Tern had been tracked north along the Northumberland coast even passing by my own local bit of coast at Howick, but by the time I read the gripping stories, the bird was long gone.

The Sooty Tern is a very rare vagrant to the UK from its equatorial colonies. It is a largish tern, a powerful flyer and it generally stays out to sea for most of its life until it comes ashore on some tropical atoll to breed. When one arrives in the UK it always attracts a lot of attention from birders.

It seems the bird was the same individual that has turned up in the North Sea in summer since 2017. Would 2020 be different? Due to Covid-19 I am working from home, so the coast is within very easy reach should the bird call in again. When I heard of a sighting in Suffolk some weeks ago, I hoped we might just get another chance.

Then it happened. On the 28<sup>th</sup> July a birder visiting Embleton Bay reported an unusual looking tern that had flown out to sea. Alarm bells were ringing and the questions were asked. Could it be the Sooty Tern? After some research the observer agreed that it was indeed the Sooty Tern. Teams were mobilised into action but only one local struck gold before it did another vanishing act. It later transpired that before this sighting the tern had been photographed sitting on Howick cliffs with the Kittiwakes from mid-afternoon and the observers had not put the word out. I was a bit gutted to say the least, to think I had been in the house 300 yards away at the time.

The next morning those intrepid enough or not at work, were back on-site early doors. There was no sign of the Tern but a Red Kite came in-off the sea flew over my house without me knowing and neatly side stepped my patch list, again. Two new patch birds missed in less than 24 hours. This wasn't good.

Later I was quick to the phone when it rang. My friend Gary was on the line, saying 'Have you seen the message?' My phone was on charge in another room. 'The Tern is back on Howick cliffs'. Stunned, everything went into slow motion as panic set in. I downed the phone grabbed my gear and jumped into the car to drive 400 yards. I could have walked it, but every second counts.

After some initial run-around, I can't describe the relief and elation when, as I pushed through a blackthorn thicket to peer over at the kittiwake colony, and there it was, the large sooty black and white Tern was sat right on the top ledge just in front of me. What a bird. I rattled off some shots just as a returning Kittiwake forced it off the ledge and away around the corner. Luckily it came back to a brackish pool on the rocks to preen and bathe.

The tern stayed around the Howick Kittiwakes for the next three hours before flying north around Cullernose Point for the last time. It has not been seen since, but who knows what 2021 will bring?





Figure 1: Sooty Tern, Howick



Figure 2: Sooty Tern flies in to Howick



As if that excitement wasn't enough for the summer doldrums, a few weeks later, Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August was warm with a light NE breeze off a high pressure over Scotland.

This weather pattern can often be good for a movement of shearwaters, so John Rutter and myself were stationed on Cullernose Point from 6.15am. Visibility was good with a light cloud reducing sun glare, but birds were slow in coming. Dave Dack had a Great Shearwater pass him at Newbiggin, 25 miles south of us, earlier. Still, we gave it a couple of hours seeing 1 distant Balearic Shearwater, 34 Manx Shearwater, 4 Bonxie, 1 Arctic Skua, 49 Common Scoter, 1 Little Gull, 1 Little Tern and a Shoveler attached to a scoter flock. The Great Shearwater was not seen on any other points north.

It seemed that waders were on the move with quite large groups of Oystercatchers passing S a good distance offshore and over 220 Golden Plovers over the point held a single Knot.

What to do next? We decided to head along to Boulmer for morning tea and to look at the options.

We could walk south from the car park and look for passerines around Seaton Point. That was soon dismissed as there had not been any grounding rain over night, so we took the opposite approach and headed out to Longhoughton Steel to check the waders as the tide was still well in. We didn't make it as far as that last week due to photographing waders in front of the Fishing Boat Inn.

We didn't know what a good choice that was at this time, although we were aware that Daniel Langston had been out seawatching from here earlier.

On the way along the beach, on the couple of hundred yards walk north, we discussed what could be here. White rumped Sandpiper maybe? There are no Boulmer records but surely it's long overdue. The last thing you want to see is the actual white rump as that means it is flying away. We can check the Golden Plovers for a 'Lesser Golden Plover', now known separately as two species, American Golden Plover and Pacific Golden Plover'. I had checked a close group of 500 on Holy Island on Friday evening and we said how easy it should be to pick one of the 'Lesser's' out at this time of year as the adults retain breeding plumage longer than ours. They are one of those birds that when you see it, you'll know.

By now we rounded the corner and there were a few waders close in on the weed. 12 Dunlin, 2 Ringed Plover and a Whimbrel further out. Nice but no white rumped...

Onwards, around the corner and I lifted my binoculars to scan the shore.

Oofya! Look at this!' was my involuntary response. John casually scanned, by now my voice was raising a bit, 'there, over to the left end'.

There, feeding with a few Redshanks, Bar tailed Godwits, Dunlin and Oystercatchers was this full summer plumaged 'Golden' Plover. Surely not, after the discussion we had been having 10 minutes previously.

I said, 'John, tell me that's not just a bright Northern'. No, it was clearly one of those 'when you see it you will know' Lesser Golden Plovers, but we didn't know! Which one was it?

It was quite settled and showed no fear of us but the alarming Redshanks can lift waders into flight so care was needed. Just then a man with a Labrador came down the cliff. No way, if he was going to flush these I was going in for a photo. As it happened the dog was quite controlled and just walked along behind us.

I tried to call out and message other birders with the news but there is no signal whatsoever on my phone. We took a breath and looked at it rationally. This bird was not Eurasian Golden Plover for sure. All of our birds have nowhere near that amount of black on them now. It also had lanky -thin, long legs especially above the knee, so that's one species eliminated. American? There was no long primary projection diagnostic for that species but it was very black right the way under the tail. Pacific? It has too much black below the vent surely? So what is it? After a few minutes consideration we realised the bird was indeed a Pacific Golden Plover. The long tertials cloaked the primaries, it has some barring and vermiculations along the flanks too that were at odds with its American cousin.

The bird was showing very well so after stalking it for some id shots we retreated back up to the track on the cliff where the bird was left feeding undisturbed and the news was put out with the obligatory back of the camera shots. It once flew away out to the rocks but soon ran back to its favoured spot. It showed the diagnostic very dusky underwing and axillaries as it glided in. Much darker than I thought. I have seen 2 other Pacific and 2 American but have never seen this often quoted feature. It was darker than I imagined it would be.

The plover continued to feed here and a short way north on Longhoughton Steel for the rest of the day, attracting a steady procession of admirers.

We later heard that a chap had taken photos of this bird on Saturday but he didn't know what it was and didn't share his images or release the news until after we did today, so he definitely slipped up there!

This has been a great year locally and with autumn just beginning what else could be instore for us....



**Figure 3: Pacific Golden Plover, Boulmer**

*Stewart Sexton, Howick.*



## UPSIDES OF LOCKDOWN

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Lockdown from the middle of March derailed my longstanding weekday early morning routine – swimming at the local pool.

My replacement exercise was a lot less energetic: a long slow walk at first light, along the lower reaches of the river Aln, from Lesbury Old Bridge to the environs of Alndyke Farm.

I'd like to highlight 2 particularly interesting encounters with wildlife that took place during this period.

Mammals are generally very difficult to get close to, except by accident or by using great ingenuity. But one particular morning, as I was sitting quietly by the river weir near home, I did manage a very close encounter, for several minutes, with that very elusive creature, the Otter. Memorable though it was, it proved to be a one-off in spite of my persistent efforts to replicate the experience - there was no repeat show. Perhaps this is not surprising, given how sprawling their territories are – seeing one appears to be really pot-luck.

In contrast the second type of encounter became much more predictable: watching a Barn Owl out hunting. My walk traverses a traditional territory and there is one particular area of unimproved meadow on my route which is ideal for Field Voles, a Barn Owl's most preferred prey item. I found that if I was willing to sit still for a length of time in this "killing field", flight shots of an adult taking back prey, invariably voles, to the nest site, became a regular occurrence.

*Mick McMahon*



**YOU MAY NOW THIS ALREADY - BUT AVOCETS NESTED AT LOW NEWTON THIS YEAR FOR THE FIRST TIME;**

I first heard a rumour to the effect that these birds were nesting back in the real lock-down - and could not go out and check on it. Asking around in June I could not get any clear answers (and anyway I was rather busy trying to catch up with the more usual nesting birds that I monitor).

However, on the 6th July we watched a pair of adults and 2 quite well grown but still obviously juvenile Avocets feeding (in with the cattle) on the muddy field by the side of the pool (the scrape) at Low Newton.

*Phil*





**JULY 2020:** We opened up the Howick Ringing Station on the 11/7/20 this year with an exceptional catch of 46 new birds and 4 retraps. Not surprisingly (this early in the season) most were local resident birds rather than migrants but we did catch some birds that will start to migrate south next month. However, starting with the re-traps; these included a Male Chaffinch first ringed as a juvenile in 2018. Many of the new birds were juvenile tits (Blue, Great and Coal); 3 juvenile Robins, a Dunnock or Hedge Accentor (not to be confused with any sort of sparrow!) and a Goldfinch. The soon to be migrating birds were two juvenile Chiffchaff (Warblers) and two adult Willow Warblers. Entertainment was provided by a juvenile Nuthatch, a very pecky female Great Spotted Woodpecker and a rather better behaved pair of adult Bullfinch (see pict.). I say adult – but it was still possible to see the several retained juvenile Greater Coverts in the wing of the male (towards the outer edge of the wing); indicating that it was only hatched last year (see pict.). If you don't know which line of feathers are the Greater Coverts then go and turn up the introductory pages in a decent bird book and find a labelled diagram of the different parts of a wing.

Ringing on the 18th was something of a non-started as we quickly abandoned the session due to rain. However, this was not before we had the re-capture of a female Chaffinch originally ringed in 2014 as a juvenile. This was along with four Great-Tits including one from 2018. We did a little better on the 19th capturing 10 new birds and 11 re-traps. The re-traps included a male Great Tit from 2019. More interestingly the new birds included two of this years Chiffchaffs and a young Willow Warbler. These giving the trainees ample opportunity to identify (and distinguish between) these two species in the hand. The Willow Warbler while still a 'this year's juvenile' was clearly an 'older' juvenile. There was also a new juvenile Nuthatch – confirming that these birds had bred again successfully at Howick; which does seem to have a large population of these entertaining birds.

The 24th was a very good session with 50 new birds and 13 retraps. The retraps included a Bullfinch from 2018; while the new birds included juvenile Goldcrests, Robin, Chiffchaffs, Willow Warblers and Blackcap. The most interesting birds were two juvenile Garden Warblers. My trainees were unfamiliar with this bird which has a beautiful song but undistinguished plumage. One of them spent some time with a bird book and then a specialist ringers book to properly identify it. These birds are just starting their migration to winter quarters in Africa; from Senegal to Kenya and south to Angola. See pict.)

We also captured a new Tree Sparrow which on first glance looks like it's wearing a dark waistcoat. These are breast feathers that are very worn and dark (see pict.) I don't know what causes this effect although I have also seen it on the occasional Wren.

The 31st was exceptionally sunny and warm (and with a gradually developing breeze) and we only captured 11 new birds and 5 retraps. However, female Chaffinch 'D532693' proved interesting as it had been originally ringed back in July 2014 (and recaptured only once before in 2015).

This next month we will check on a few Barn Owl boxes for second (or late) broods. Given how early some of this years Barn Owls nested it is possible that we might find some. Its generally considered that the offspring from these late nests are less likely to survive the winter but we did have an example this year of a bird that was only ringed itself as a single owlet on the 13/8/19 south of the River Aln that subsequently was found as the successful breeding male at a site near Longhorsley with its own two very well grown young being ringed on the 1/6/20!

We are currently limited to 6 people at a time at the Howick Ringing Station, but this has not proved a problem to date.

Best Regards.

*Phil Hanmer S Ringer; Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum). E-mail: tytoalbas@btinternet.com*



#### THE PICTURES BELOW SHOULD HAVE APPEARED LAST MONTH.

Here is the extract from Ringers Year that goes with the pictures

This years surprise was also initially mistaken for a redstart – with its beautiful blue eggs but turned out to be a much rarer bird. This was a Pied Flycatcher (which in North Northumberland is very scarce); like its fellow migrant it travels to Africa although its wintering grounds are not well known. Some certainly spend time in the Ivory Coast. They are known to like using nest boxes (especially new ones) but this pair used one designed for redstarts with a large hole (showing it had definitely not been reading the books)! The male was a particularly vocal and fearless bird giving good views as it came into feed the young immediately after we had ringed them. See attached pics of the pulli and the male at the box.





## SIGHTINGS JULY 2020

BIRDS	
Red-throated Diver	2 past Longhoughton Steel on 5th
Great-crested Grebe	3 at Branton Ponds on 3rd
Little Grebe	9 at Hedgeley Lakes on 4th
Manx Shearwater	45 past Howick on 1st 33 past Howick on 8th
Grey Heron	12 at Hedgeley Lakes on 4th
Goosander	17 at Football Hole on 21st
Shoveller	1 plus 7 young at Monk's House Pool on 27th
Marsh Harrier	3 at East Chevington on 14th
Common Buzzard	1-2 at Yearle all month
Kestrel	4 at Newton Point on 21st
Grey Partridge	3 at Seaton Point on 5th
Water Rail	1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 4th
Turnstone	6+ at Boulmer on 27th
Lapwing	5 at Howick on 7th
Golden Plover	60 near Cullernose on 4th 120 at Football Hole on 21st
Dunlin	4 at Seaton Point on 5th 4 at Hedgeley Lakes on 27th and 5 on 28th 250+ at Boulmer on 27th
Common Sandpiper	5 at Hedgeley Lakes on 4th
Green Sandpiper	1 in Howick Burn on 25th 1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 27th and on 28th 1 at Dunstanburgh on 28th
Whimbrel	4+ at Boulmer on 27th 3 at Cullernose on 27th 1 at Longhoughton Steel on 28th
Curlew	32+ at Seaton Point on 5th
Bar-tailed Godwit	1 past Cullernose on 2nd 1 at Seaton Point on 5th 8+ at Boulmer on 27th
Arctic Skua	2 at Cullernose on 2nd 1 past Howick on 8th
Great Skua	2 past Howick on 8th 1 at Craster on 10th
Mediterranean Gull	1 at Howick on 2nd and 8th 1 at Boulmer on 28th
Sooty Tern	1 at Cullernose on 29th
Common Tern	9 at Branton Ponds on 5th
Roseate Tern	1 at East Chevington on 14th
Little Tern	2 past Howick on 8th
Puffin	117 past Howick on 1st
Stock Dove	1 at Yearle all month
Cuckoo	1 at Seaton Point on 5th
Tawny Owl	1 at Branton Ponds on 24th
Barn Owl	1 at Monk's House Pool on 4th 1 at Smeafield on 3rd
Swift	12 past Seaton Point on 5th 8 at Seahouses on 31st
Kingfisher	1 at Felton on 26th
Swallow	5 pairs in Harthope Valley on 2nd
Grey Wagtail	1 at Felton Bridge on 23rd
Yellow Wagtail	10+ at Boulmer on 27th 3 at Newton Scrape on 21st 1 at Boulmer on 28th 1 juvenile at Lnghoughton Steel on 5th
Rock Pipit	3 at Cullernose on 2nd
Dipper	1 at Felton on 26th

Whinchat	1 at East Chevington on 14th
Stonechat	1 in Harthope Valley on 2nd
Common Redstart	2 at Brandon Ford on 24th
Wheatear	1 at East Chevington on 14th
Mistle Thrush	30+ at Branton Ponds on 27th
Common Whitethroat	Pair with 3 young at Smeafield on 7th
Lesser Whitethroat	3+ at Seaton Point on 27th
Chiffchaff	4 in Harthope Valley on 2nd
Willow Warbler	1 in Harthope Valley on 2nd
Spotted Flycatcher	1 at Branton on 4th 5 young in nest at Langleeford
Nuthatch	1 at Yearle on 7th
Hooded Crow	1 at Boulmer on 27th
Siskin	5 at Yearle on 2nd and 4th
Lesser Redpoll	1 at Yearle on 2nd and 12th
Common Crossbill	6+ near Lemmington Banktop on 21st 12 south over Seaton Point on 27th
INVERTEBRATES	
Emerald Damselfly	5 at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Common Blue Damselfly	Lots at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Large Red Damselfly	15 at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Southern Hawker	1 at Branton Ponds on 12th 4 near Lemmington Banktop on 21st 1 at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	1 near Lemmington Banktop on 21st
Four-spotted Chaser	6 at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Small Skipper	4 at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Comma	1 at Branton Ponds on 20th
Small White	1 at Smeafield on 8th
Red Admiral	6 at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th
Ringlet	Lots at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th several at Yearle on 7th
Meadow Brown	Lots at Corbies Crag Wood on 8th many between Elwick and Smeafield on 9th
Small Tortoiseshell	Several at Yearle on 7th 10+ at Smeafield on 21st
Wall Brown	1 at Smeafield on 1st
Speckled Wood	1 at Smeafield on 8th
Scalloped Oak	4 at Branton on 25th
Ghost moth	1 at Branton on 17th
Swallowtail moth	2 at Branton on 17th and 2 on 25th
Northern Spinach	1 at Branton on 17th
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	1 at Yearle on 6th
Lesser-swallow Prominent	5 at Branton on 25th
Swallow Prominent	1 at Branton on 25th
PLANTS	
Birds-nest Orchid	At Howick on 3rd
Common Twayblade	At Howick on 3rd
Broad-leaved Helleborine	At Howick on 3rd
Northern Marsh Orchid	Many at Harwood Forest on 11th
Common-spotted Orchid	Lots at Harwood Forest on 11th



Bugloss	At Mouldshaugh on 19th
<b>FUNGI</b>	
Blackening Waxcap	At Felton on 20th
<b>MAMMALS</b>	
Otter	1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 28th
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	15 off Howick on 2nd 8 off Craster on 22nd
Harbour Porpoise	1 off Cullernose on 4th
Hedgehog	1 adult at Yearle on 13th and 22nd plus 1 juvenile on 22nd
<b>RAINFALL</b>	60mm
<b>OBSERVERS</b>	G&R Bell, W Brown, I&K Davison, G Dodds, M&J Drage,
	P&A Hanmer, A Keeble, E Panton, S Reay, J Rutter, S Sexton.

**Please send sightings reports** for August, no later than 6th September 2020 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.

**AWG welcomes contributions** for the newsletter and items for inclusion should be submitted by the **12th of the month** to [redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk](mailto:redsquirrel@alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk)