

Alnwick Wildlife Group

Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna



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NEWSLETTER 231 DECEMBER 2020 REVIEW OF NOVEMBER 2020

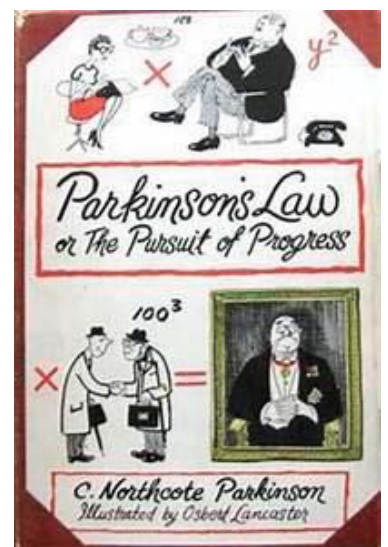
VIRAL MEANDERINGS (9)

There are a couple of words that have surfaced recently in my befogged consciousness. The first is 'fair'. Ever since the government announced the tier arrangements to come into force on 2nd December after the latest lockdown there have been many complaints about the decisions not being fair. Of course it's not fair! No fair system could, for example, lump rural North Northumberland into the same regime as for south east Northumberland and Tyneside. No fair system could deny hospitality businesses the right to operate when they are in communities that have very low rates of infection, simply because their counterparts in larger towns and cities would be likely to become centres of transmission if they were allowed to accept customers.

But, hang on a moment. Unless things have changed overnight, life isn't fair and never has been and viruses are not organisms that play fair by any measure of human rules. Otherwise, why should person A get the virus but be asymptomatic; person B gets it and is quite unwell for a week; person C gets it and is still experiencing 'long-covid' symptoms seven months later; and person D gets it and dies?

Whatever opinion I may have about the government's competence throughout 2020, I shan't be complaining about the unfairness of the present set of decisions. For any system there will be winners and losers and I have to accept that, on balance, Jane and I have so far been winners because of where we live; because of not being in dire financial straits; and because we've not caught Covid-19 (as far as we know). So for me to suffer the continued inconvenience of being in tier 3 is an unfairness I can put up with. Whether I'd feel the same if I owned a café in Alnwick or Bamburgh is a different matter, and I have to say that Jane is not quite as sanguine about the situation as I am.

Which brings me to my second word, 'motivation'. Having the advantages I've just listed, combined with a prohibition on doing some of the more time-consuming and bothersome things that would have been in my diary this year, leaves me with plenty of freedom to do other things. Unfortunately, all this available opportunity has a tendency to founder on the rocks of lack of motivation. In the 1950s a man called C. Northcote Parkinson produced a seminal slim volume called *Parkinson's Law*. His law states that *work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion*. Much of the reason for the truth of this law is a human tendency to procrastinate: to put off even starting a project until it becomes really urgent. In my case this year what has made it worse is that the project in question is often optional rather than essential, so when I've put it off long enough then it has never happened at all.



In the first lockdown, because we live on a big moorland-edge farm, we got into the habit of leaving our front gate and just walking different routes on the farm. It got to the point that last week we agreed we really needed to motivate ourselves to get off the farm and go somewhere different. Our decision was to drive



through Rothbury to Greenleighton Quarry which is part of the National Trust's Wallington Estate. By chance I stumbled across the two photos of the quarry taken by one of our members, Russel Wills. There is a project to photograph every 1km Grid Square in Britain and Ireland – you can get more information by looking at www.geograph.org.uk and Russel's photos were taken as contributions to this exercise. He was happy for me to use his photos for this newsletter. They are on the next page.

The walk was not very inviting. There was a keen wind with the distinct threat of rain and the combined work of sheep and rabbits had cropped down what remained of the vegetation to a rather

sparse covering. The quarry is botanically interesting because it is on limestone and so the vegetation is rather different to that on the more

common acid moorland in our county, but clearly late November is not the ideal time to visit. Luckily Jane's keen eyes spotted a patch of something different in the upper level of the site. We knew these unprepossessing black things were the fruiting bodies of a fungus, but had to wait until we got home to check exactly what they were. The answer was **Earthtongues**. There are several species of *Geoglossum* and to be certain which one requires microscopic examination of the spores, but a friendly mycologist has said they are probably *Geoglossum fallax*, commonly known as the Deceptive Earthtongue, and who am I to argue! Apparently, these black fruiting bodies are sometimes mis-identified as the fungus *Xylaria polymorpha* Dead-man's-fingers (📷 right), but this one grows on old dead wood, not in unimproved grassland



The other thing of interest we spotted was an area that had a big population of small snails. There are lots of groups of organisms that I'm not very confident about identifying, and snails is just one of them. But a bit of detective work came up with the answer, that I'm fairly sure is right, that these are the very common Brown-lipped Snails *Cepaea nemoralis*. Almost all the shells we saw were empty, but to find so many must show that there is a good living population in the quarry. The left-hand photo was taken on site, while the underside view, which is needed for a diagnosis, was taken back at home. I'll be very happy if anyone can tell me if I'm wrong in my identification.



While on the topic of correct identifications, Dorothy Nelson, who has been an AWG member for a long time, sent in a photo of the nest of a social wasp from Claremont Road in Newcastle near where she lives. Until the tree had lost its leaves the nest hadn't been easily visible because it was about 15 feet from the ground. It was attached to the tree by one of the fine twigs and her question was whether this might be a wasp's or a hornet's nest.

Both Dorothy and I would be very interested in any suggestions from our members. Hornets often nest in trees, but the emphasis is on the word 'in' because they tend to use holes in the trunk caused by rot where a branch has been shed, or in the central hollow in the trunk of a tree damaged by storms. Wasps, on the other hand, can be ground nesters or can make their nests in garden sheds or roof spaces or in the interior of quite dense bushes. None of these seem right for the one in the picture. Any thought anyone please? Let me know on rjpoppleton@outlook.com



At the moment I'm part of a Google Email Group where members of the botany group from the Natural History Society of Northumbria share sightings and information. It has become quite clear that some members have been much more adventurous than I have in getting out to walk in different areas, particularly by the coast in south east Northumberland and in the Tyne Valley around Hexham. As a result they keep posting sightings of urban weeds and other interesting specimens that they've seen on their walks. And that

brings me back to motivation. In the New Year, probably starting with the New Year Plant Hunt, I really must get myself out to more places that are away from my home patch.

Most of this article was written before the news emerged of the imminent availability of one or more vaccines, so at last there's some hope on the horizon. As soon as my age category reaches the top of the queue I shall certainly be on the phone to our GP surgery to find out how and where to get the jab. It seems to me that any risk of a few days of feeling somewhat grotty after the vaccine will be worth it if we can avoid wave after wave of lockdowns next year.

Do, please, have as good a Christmas as conditions allow and continue to take all sensible precautions with your own and your family's health.

Richard

As another year comes to its close the next New Year Plant Hunt hoves into view. I'd hoped that we might be able to offer one or a couple of group excursions, but obviously that's still impossible within the rules of Tier 3. So, perhaps I can persuade some of our members to get out to do their own separate plant hunts. The dates for this year are **Friday 1st to Monday 4th January**. For those who've not done one of these before – or

NEW YEAR PLANT HUNT 2021: how to take part and stay safe
When and how to hunt for plants in bloom – following local guidance and staying safe.

The rules are simple to try to keep data comparable between different areas and over different years – but there are two extra stages in this year's instructions to reflect the situation around Covid-19.

1. Before you start planning your hunt, please check local Covid restrictions – it is **essential that you follow the latest guidelines for your area. Make a check before you go out to see if there have been any last-minute changes.**
2. Pick a day between Friday 1st and Monday 4th January when the weather is decent enough to record in. It's up to you whether you go out alone as long as you are following local guidance, but the BSBI is not promoting any Group Hunts this year – sorry!
3. Record wild and naturalised plants (but NOT planted or garden species) in flower. Please check that plants are actually flowering – that catkins on trees are open; that grasses have open florets with stigmas or anthers on show, etc. Don't include ferns, mosses, fungi or lichens, none of which has flowers.
4. Record for up to 3 hours (you can "stop the clock" for tea breaks, lunch and comfort stops). You can contribute as many different lists as you like from different areas as long as you don't exceed the 3-hour limit for each new list.
5. Use the BSBI recording app to send us details of what you saw, with photos of possible please. The app is very user-friendly and we can help with identifications if you get stuck – just email the Support Team. If you found nothing in bloom please let us know anyway. Nil records are important and will feed into the analysis of results. Just email us the Grid Reference for the area where you hunted and head your email 'Nil records found here'.

even for those who have but who've forgotten the rules - here they are, as quoted on the BSBI website.

At the end of this article there is a download of an extra page of advice from the BSBI website which includes links to useful resources and to help with reporting your finds.

FINALLY – do please also send your sightings lists to me (rich.titlington@outlook.com) so I can do a summary of what our AWG members have found.

I mentioned in my Viral Meanderings piece in this newsletter that if one doesn't stray too far from home then the range of interesting plants you come across will inevitably be limited. But even in what, at first sight, seems a limited habitat there are often good corners of fields or road verges or patches of hillside that provide interest despite the time of year. On the hill behind our home there's a fairly small patch where, probably because the soil is very shallow over rock, the vegetation looks rather different from much of the surrounding moorland and sheep-grazed pasture.

The three photos at the top of the next page (all taken on 7th December this year) show parts of this area, and they deserve some close attention.



Heather and Reindeer Lichen



Crowberry



Purple Moor-grass

The upper left shot shows an area of remarkably low-growing heather *Calluna vulgaris*, interspersed with very prominent patches of the 'reindeer lichen' *Cladonia portentosa*. The enlarged photo on the right shows this lichen in better detail.

The heather is not low-growing because it has been recovering from burning – it has been that height for the 25 years we have known it here and its growth must have been limited by the shallowness of the peat overlying the sandstone. The *Cladonia* is one of around 40 species in this genus of lichens and it is comparatively common on heaths and dunes and acid peaty soils, but visually it is very striking.



The upper right-hand picture is of a close-by patch which has some heather and reindeer lichen (looking a bit bluer in this shot), but the main plant in view is Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*. This is a close relative of the heathers, but the leaves are quite distinctively different and seem to be rather fleshy in a way that you might perhaps expect more of a coastal plant whose main problem would be to retain water in swollen leaves. The close-up photo of crowberry shows it with its crow-black berries, but on our moors it is a rather shy flowerer and so often you find plenty of the leafy shoots with few if any berries.



This patch of peaty soil has comparatively few grasses, but there are some stand-out clumps of Purple Moor-grass *Molinia purpurea* (see picture 3), which is such a common component of many Northumbrian moors. It is very unusual in that it is the only native British grass that is truly deciduous. The individual leaves (but not the flower stalks) develop a layer of cells near their bases (the abscission layer) which weaken the leaf so it spontaneously breaks off. This is an identical process to that which happens to the leaf stalks of deciduous trees. Other grasses have leaves that die off in the winter, but don't actually break off at their bases.



There is one thing about this small part of the moor that rather disappoints me. Further south in the county, near Bolam, is an area of rock outcroppings called Shaftoe Crag. Superficially, parts of the Shaftoe site look remarkably like the Titlington site I've been describing, but Shaftoe has two particular lichens that are most unusual for the height of the site and for the fact that it is much further east than their main stronghold areas. One is Iceland Moss *Cetraria islandica*. Despite the common name it is not a moss and it is reasonably common in the Scottish Highlands. Its main claim to environmental importance is its role across the sub-arctic land masses of the world in providing a key food for reindeer and caribou. My photo, taken at Shaftoe a few years ago shows the broad, flattened lichen fronds among the moss and heather.

The other lichen at Shaftoe is one called Rock Tripe *Lasallia pustulata*. The photo on the right (courtesy of Mike Cruse) shows clearly where the *pustulata* part of its name comes from. This is also quite common in upland parts of the west of Britain, where it can form extensive colonies on wet rocks where there are nutrient-rich runnels of rainwater. It has, in the past, been used in dyeing, producing a red dye if soaked for a long time in urine. It has also been touted as a 'survival food' and has formed part of the training for elite troops when they are taught how to live off the land in remote areas. Hence, presumably, the common name 'rock tripe'. Interestingly, Janet Simkin, who lives in Northumberland and is an erstwhile president of the British Lichen Society, says that in fact the lichen has no nutritional value at all, tastes vile, and often causes digestive upsets!



The reason I've described these two lichens is that I've harboured hopes that the Titlington site might have them – the habitat looks absolutely right and if they are at Shaftoe, why not here? Unfortunately, despite careful searching, I can't find any trace of either of them, so any hopes of achieving lichenological fame have evaporated.

Richard

As I said at the start, the following detail is on the BSBI website to help you with getting advice on recording, reporting, getting identification help and generally communicating with the New Year Plant Hunt team. Unfortunately, copying the information from the website and reprinting it here doesn't retain the web links, so you can't click on the relevant bits of blue text and get anything to happen.

You therefore need to go to the BSBI website www.bsbi.org, click on the <Get Involved> tab at the top of the front page and then choose the New Year Plant Hunt option from the left-hand list. In the first paragraph of the text that comes up is the link to <[how to take part](#)> and if you click on that the instructions appear. But I've printed them out here as well.

How to send in your New Year Plant Hunt records

- We will have an updated New Year Plant Hunt app (recording form) for use in 2021.
- The updated app will be ready for you to download by 31st December from the [Plant Hunt website](#).
- The "app" works on all phones (Apple/iPhone, Android, Windows), tablets and computers.
- Please make sure you are using the 2021 version of the app - it's even more user-friendly than old versions still available from the Apple and Android stores, so be sure to delete any old versions from your phone.
- You can use the app on your phone while you are out recording, or on your computer once you get home. It's free, quick and easy to download (from our NYPH website only) and there's no registration required.
- Records and images submitted via the app, once verified, will appear on [this Results page](#). Click on the marker on the interactive map to see the list of all the plants recorded there.
- If you run into any problems using the app, you can [email us at nyplanthunt@bsbi.org](mailto:nyplanthunt@bsbi.org)
- Nil records are important too, so if you found nothing in bloom in your square please [let us know](#). These data will also feed into our 2021 New Year Plant Hunt analysis.
- We hope you will also tweet your finds to us at [@BSBIbotany](#) using the hashtag [#NewYearPlantHunt](#) - these tweets will be streamed to the [New Year Plant Hunt website](#).
- You can also post your finds on the BSBI Facebook pages for [Britain](#) and [Ireland](#) and on the [BSBI Instagram account](#) - but finds posted on social media can only be included in the final total if you also send them to us via the app.
- The deadline for getting your records to us is midnight on Thursday 7th January.
- You can [email the New Year Plant Hunt Team](#) if you have any questions about this year's Hunt and [how to record](#).
- Everyone is welcome to take part in the New Year Plant Hunt - you don't have to be a [BSBI member](#) or an experienced botanist - and we'll help you if you get stuck: a few tips [here](#) to get you started.

November's weather was a bit of a mixed bag. Periods of dry weather and blue skies followed Atlantic weather systems with short periods of strong winds. The first frost of the year saw the end of the leaves on the trees. Fieldwork in College Valley in the last week of the month saw the first flakes of snow of the winter. The total now stands at 249 species for the backyard and pavement (Birds 53, Mammals 3, Insects 136, Plants 52 and Mushroom 1) at 5 Front Street, Glanton. The list has grown by a further 8 species in November. This included four species of Bryophyte; **Rough-stalked feather-moss**, **Silky-wall feather-moss**, **Common feather-moss**, and **Thick-point grimmia**. Three species of moth; **Pine carpet**, **Winter moth** and **Angle shades** and one species of Hoverfly **Syrirta pipiens**. It is hoped that 250 species can be broken in the last month of the year. Sunny days have been the most surprising even at low temperatures. Several species of fly have been found basking on the brickwork. This has included the Hoverfly named above and its relative **Sericomyia silentis**. This is despite having very few flowering plants and no **Ivy**.



Figure 1 Hoverfly *Sericomyia silentis*



Figure 2: Liverwort – *Bifid crestwort*.

The beginning of November, also saw another momentous move. After 18 years at the same venue, I moved offices. The new venue at North Bellshill Farm sits on the Sandstone ridge with panoramic view over the coastal plain towards Berwick, Lindisfarne, The Farne Islands and Dunstanburgh. Ros Castle and Hedgehope/Cheviot can be seen to the west. My lunchtime walk is about 1 hour to an area of mixed woodland. Other habitats include a small area of heath, several very small woodland ponds, spring-lines, arable fields with margins and a very small amount of species-rich grassland. My thoughts have turned to increasing creating a patch list for the farm. In five weeks, the I have recorded 188 species. This includes Mammals 4, Birds 52, Invertebrates 10, Plants 106, *Bryophytes* 13 and Mushrooms 5. Highlights have included a flock of 72 **Whooper swans** moving south, male **Goshawk** and good numbers of **Common crossbills**. The *Bryophyte* list is growing steadily with interesting species including **Crisped pincushion** which can be found on **Elder** and the liverwort **Variable-leaved crestwort** growing with its commoner relative **Bifid crestwort**. It is hoped that this list can flourish in 2021 and I will try to provide regular updates.

I hope that you all have an happy Christmas and a prosperous 2021. Thank you for your continued support.

Stay safe.
Jack Daw

Only a couple of weeks to go until Christmas and the end of the year. More importantly I only have four working days left then I am off until January!

This is the time I try to make some plans for the forthcoming year about what Natural History I can go out to look for. This time it is with some trepidation as last year's plans didn't go too well. This time I am going to take it one month at a time, so before spring this year I will be having a look out for Snow Flea *Boreus hyemalis*. This is probably not what you expected but I always like a target that is possible and is easily identifiable without a microscope. Snow Flea is not a flea at all but a flightless relative of the common Scorpion Flies we find in our hedgerows and gardens. It thrives in the cold, is mostly a northern species and lurks in thick moss on heaths and moorland. Watch this space.

Since the last newsletter, the weather has been 'mixed' shall we say so my time out has been spent birding the coast locally with only a single trip inland onto the moors.

Migration has slowed to a standstill as you would expect now, but right until the last week, we have been getting decent numbers of Woodcocks on the coast, my best day being the 28th November when there 6 around our village including 4 seen from our garden. One even flushed from below the bird table.

The Howick Hooded Crow has been a star recently, showing very well around the Seahouses Farm car park fields.



Figure 1: Hooded Crow, Seahouses Farm, Howick

It is a bit of a loner wandering the fields but it will watch for walkers around the car park and call out at them. Whether this is an alarm or just curiosity I don't know but it has bundles of character.

Our local Barn Owls have been hunting in daylight until recently. This seems to be a feature of November and February as the days lengthen or shorten. They must forget to change the clock..



Figure 2: This Howick Barn Owl isnt carrying prey as I first thought it was, it just has big muddy feet!

On 19th November I was drawn away from Howick, all of 12 miles south to Amble where a new bird for Northumberland had been found. An American Buff bellied Pipit was on the beach opposite the caravan site for a couple of days. A very subtle and easily overlooked bird, indeed the finder thought he had located a Water Pipit with Rock Pipits until social media stepped in with a correct identification.



Figure 3: American Buff bellied Pipit, Amble

This is a rare bird in the UK with only around 25 records and with no wonder really being so tricky to identify.

Getting back to basics, regular walks with the dog along to Howick Pond produced a few interesting sightings. Of the regulars, Teal were in reasonable numbers for this site with 31 birds present on several days along with a handful of Mallard, 2 Tufted Ducks and a lone Wigeon. It is just a small wooded pool, East Chevington it is not. Despite this, there was some excitement on 20th November. I was pondering the silence when a loud rush, nearly a roar of wind above me caused me to jump. I glanced up to see a Peregrine in full stoop after a Woodcock. The noise through the wings must often be the last sound an unwary bird hears. The Woodcock had other ideas and dropped like a stone into willow scrub behind the pond forcing the Peregrine to pull up sharply and move off without a meal.

While getting over the disturbance things slowly quietened down and two Water Rails showed quite well along the rear bank of the pond.

At home at least two Sparrowhawks make daily appearances at our feeders. I didn't realise how dependant they are on the birds attracted here. You tend to see more by working from home especially in winter when I usually only see daylight here at the weekend.



Figure 4: Sitting below the bird table, a Sparrowhawk waits for visitors to return.

Finally, on 4th December the weather was cold and rainy with a moderate Easterly blow, so I sat out on Cullernose Point to see if there was any late seabird movement. A few Red throated Divers and Goldeneye were about it until I got a message saying there had been a Grey Phalarope on the sea at Longhoughton Low Steads and it had flown North towards Howick. I have always fancied the tide race off Cullernose for this species and was even standing up looking for one as the message came through. A second scan and there it was! Unbelievably the bird had dropped in exactly as I had imagined one would for years without luck. These pot bellied pelagic waders look so tiny and fragile on the sea but close up they are quite a stocky starling sized bird well capable of living a life on our cold oceans in winter.



Figure 5: Common Gull at the top, compared to the Grey Phalarope at the bottom.



Merry Christmas All, Stewart Sexton, Howick.

A RINGERS YEAR; BARN OWLS IN 2020

NOV 2020: With ringing at a seasonal low (not even considering the restrictions of the Pandemic) I am taking this opportunity to report on this year's Barn Owl breeding season:

This study (of around 100 sites) in North Northumberland (outside the National Park) indicates that this was the best breeding season since 2017 (and second best since 2006). Numbers were well above the long-term average of *only 30% occupancy*; with 53 pairs trying to nest (51 successfully i.e. 51%). The weather was good in the winter and the exceptionally warm spring led to pairs nesting in March & April with most eggs laid right at the start of April. The summer started well but did become unsettled and eventually wet; mitigating against many late broods occurring.

The average number of eggs laid per clutch was 4.5 although one '8' was recorded as well as five '6's'. The average number of owlets fledged was 3.2 although one pair did raise eight! 168 owlets were ringed/fledged.

Fourteen new adult Barn Owls were ringed and 17 re-trapped; including a pair that nested again near Fallowdon raising three young. The male who came from Howick is eight years old while his mate, from Rochester (in the Military Ranges), is seven. A female that nested again near Boulmer is approximately ten years old (while her mate is only three). A notable feature of this year was the breeding by several birds that were only in their first adult year (*that is being hatched themselves in 2019*); these occurred near Howick (with a female from Wallington – See PHOTO); near Longhoughton (with a male from a late brood hatched south of the River Aln) and near Longhorsley (with a female that had moved across the A697 from East to West).

Jackdaws were still a problem occupying many owl nest sites; I made an effort to clean out some of these boxes in early Summer and this enabled three late broods to be successful in sites that had been full of jackdaw 'sticks' in the Spring: near Rock (See PHOTO), Craster and Embleton. Those that nested near Rock and Craster were in fact second broods and the pair at Craster were even more remarkable as they had done the same thing in 2019!

Generally, the most successful areas were towards the coast (*in the extended AONB area between the A1 and the sea*) although nesting was again biased towards the southern half of this patch between Warkworth and Newton by the Sea (these included some new National Trust box owls; see PHOTOS). However, numbers also increased inland between Longhorsley and Netherwitton indicating that these areas had finally recovered from the last harsh winter.

Kestrels were again thin on the ground with only two pairs using owl boxes to raise young near Lowick and Bamburgh. Tawny Owls did not take over any 'Barn Owl boxes' this year but had a reasonably good year 'swopping' boxes with our rare breeding Goldeneye ducks. The relaxing of the lock-down occurred only just in time for these tawny's & goldeneye to be monitored this year; indeed, it is possible some were missed.

Successful Barn Owl nests were near: Wooler, Doddington, south of Berwick-upon-Tweed, Bamburgh, Fallowdon, Newton by the Sea, Rock, Embleton, Craster, Howick, Alnmouth, Warkworth, Boulmer, north of Alnwick, Whittingham, Longhorsley and Netherwitton. I take this opportunity to record my thanks to all those who have helped with this project (especially this year) and those organisations and individuals who have kindly donated money for the making of boxes etc.

As I still hold the Schedule One Licence for Gosforth Park Nature Reserve (next to the Newcastle Racecourse) I thought you would be interested to know that not only did Barn Owls nest there this year raising four young (for the first time in many years) but that the capture of the adult female (by my Agent Phil Jordan) revealed she was already ringed (a Control). This enabled the BTO to tell us that she had been ringed only the year before, in July 2019 at Woodhurst in Cambridgeshire! The revelation that she was only one year old and had travelled 313km's to nest underscores the value of ringing birds.

Best Regards.

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



From Wallington, Female



National Trust, Adult



National Trust, Owlets.



Owlets, September, Rock

HANMER & WOOD OWL BOXES RESULTS 2020 (2006 DATA SUPPRESSED FOR CLARITY)

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Nesting	30%	22%	28%	29%	20%	33%	20%	33%	22%	30%	64%	22%	36%	53%
Successful nest	24%	14% (14)	26% (26)	22% (22)	18% (18)	26% (26)	16% (16)	33% (33)	21% (21)	23% (23)	58% (58)	13% (13)	32% (32)	51% (51)
Eggs per clutch	5	4	5	4	4	3.5	3.3	4	3	3.5	3.7	4	3.9	4.5
% eggs hatched	59%	53%	69%	68%	96% (69)	73% (85)	83% (55)	93% (127)	92% (57)	69% (73)	69% (196)	36% (32)	69% (97)	76% (182)
Average hatched	3	2	3	3	4	2.5	2.8	4	3	2	3	1.5	2.7	3.4
Average fledged.	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	4	2	2	2.8	1.4	2.5	3.2
Percent of eggs 'ringed'	42%	32% (24)	59% (74)	55% (59)	88% (63)	66% (73)	61% (40)	89% (121)	84% (52)	84% (61)	92% (181)	34% (30)	65% (92)	76% (168)
Eggs were mostly laid	First half of April	Second half of May	Second half of May	April, May & June	April to May	April and later.	May but some later.	March & April	April	May but many later.	March & April	May	April & May	Early April
Weather (Met Office summary)	Exceptional warm April temperature but followed by above average rainfall.	Coldest April since 2001 and above average rainfall; weather deteriorated further in June.	Warmer, dryer and sunnier than average in April & May. June was warmer and dryer than average.	Heavy snow in late winter & early spring.	Heavy snow in early Winter (Nov & Dec 2010)	Exceptional warm. March & April; followed by above average rainfall; which continued.	Very cold spring. Below average temp. in June. Fine weather from July.	A mild winter followed by early warm spring; with hardly any frosts. Fine summer weather only declining in August.	A benign winter was followed by a short period of dry sunny and warm weather in April. However, May onwards was cool and wet.	Winter was the second wettest since 1910. Spring was dryer. April was cool and summer did not become settled until later.	Mild winter followed by a dry spring. Warmer than average from March to June. From mid July the weather was cooler and wetter.	Winter and spring had low average temperatures and late snow. May was warmer and the Summer very dry & hot.	Winter was milder & dryer than average. Temps fluctuated in April & May but the summer started warm; eventually becoming unsettled.	Winter was mild & dry. Spring was warmer & sunnier than average. The summer gradually became unsettled and finished wet.

SIGHTINGS NOVEMBER 2020^[DT1]

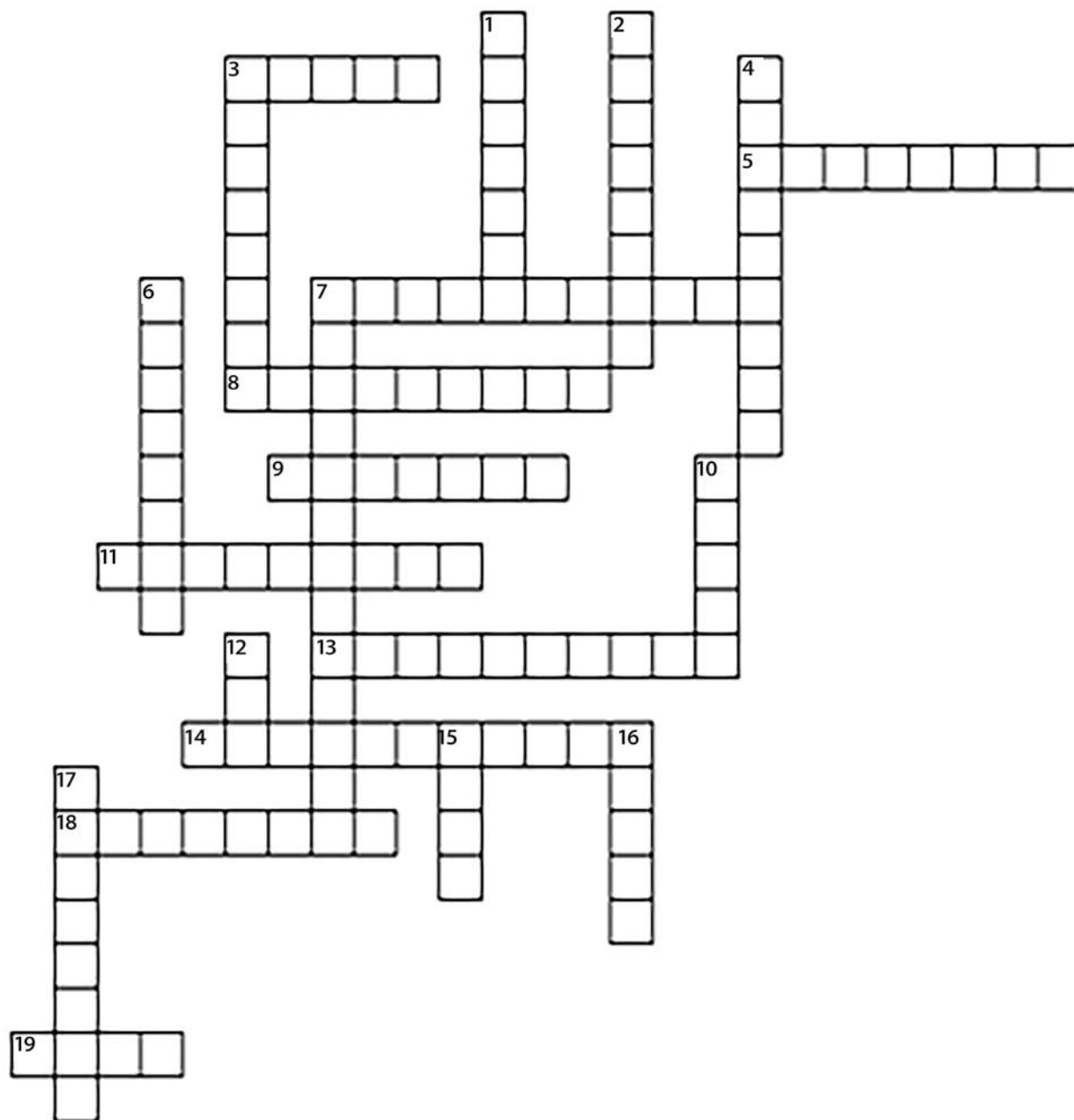
BIRDS	
Red-throated Diver	3 off Boulmer on 15 th
Little Grebe	2 at Howick on 16 th and 5 on 30 th
Great-crested Grebe	1 at Branton Ponds on 27 th
Slavonian Grebe	2 off Ross Sands on 23 rd
Sooty Shearwater	2 past Boulmer on 1 st
Grey Heron	1 at Howick on 30 th 2 at Monks House Pool on 27 th
Little Egret	2 at Branton Ponds ponds 2 nd and 10 th 2 at Hedgeley Lakes on 10 th 3 at Branton Ponds on 12 th 1 at Long Nanny on 20 th and 22 nd 1 at Budle Bay on 27 th
Great-white Egret	1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 10 th and 2 on 11 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 12 th 1 at Caistron on 14 th 1 near Brandon Ford on 23 rd 1 on a garden pond in Alnwick on 29 th
Mute Swan	2 at Howick on 10 th and 16 th 2 at Monks House Pool on 27 th
Whooper Swan	65 at Howick on 3 rd 64 over Craster on 3 rd
Greylag Goose	190 at Outchester on 27 th
Pink-footed Goose	2300 at Howick on 5 th 400 at Dunstan Square on 24 th
Barnacle Goose	25 at Dunstan Square on 24 th 8 at Outchester on 27 th
Teal	10 at Howick on 16 th and 26 on 30 th 26 at Monks House Pool on 27 th
Tufted Duck	2 at Howick on 30 th 1 at Monks House Pool on 27 th
Mallard	20 at Monks House Pool on 27 th
Gadwall	29 at Hedgeley Lakes on 11 th
Red-breasted Merganser	1 off Boulmer on 15 th
Hen Harrier	1 in recording area on 18 th
Common Buzzard	1-2 at Yearle all month
Peregrine	1 at Longhoughton Steel on 15 th 1 at Howick on 20 th
Merlin	1 at Boulmer on 15 th
Kestrel	1 at Yearle on 22 nd 1 at Bamburgh on 27 th
Sparrowhawk	1 in Amble on 4 th 1 at Branton Ponds on 27 th 2 at Howick on 28 th up to 2 at Yearle on 10 th 22 nd and 26 th
Goshawk	1 near Fowberry on 3 rd
Grey Partridge	2 at Howick on 28 th 2 at Boulmer on 22 nd 5 at Craster on 10 th
Woodcock	1 at Howick on 9 th and a second on 20 th 5 at Howick on 28 th 1 at Craster on 24 th 1 at Dunstanburgh on 28 th
Water Rail	1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th 1 at Howick on 20 th
Moorhen	4 at Middleton Hall Pond all month, 6 at Monks House Pool on 27 th
Curlew	Many in fields near Warkworth all month, 250 at Waren Mill on 27 th
Purple Sandpiper	150 at Stag Rocks on 27 th
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 10 th 2 at Hedgeley Lakes on 11 th
Sandwich Tern	1 at Dunstanburgh on 16 th
Barn Owl	1 near Warkworth on 3 rd 1 near Branton on 16 th 1 at Howick on 28 th
Kingfisher	2 at Branton Ponds on 27 th 1 at Howick on 16 th
Swallow	1 at Boulmer on 1 st
House Martin	1 at Boulmer on 1 st
Buff-bellied Pipit	1 of the form rubescens at Amble on 18 th
Waxwing	2 at Felton on 19 th
Dipper	1 at Felton Bridge on 24 th and 30 th
Fieldfare	70 at Seaton Point on 8 th 160 at Yearle on 4 th 12 th and 13 th with 70 on 18 th
Redwing	34 at Seaton Point on 8 th
Blackbird	91 at Seaton Point on 8 th
Mistle Thrush	5-6 at Yearle on 22 nd

Song Thrush	22 at Seaton Point on 8 th
Blackcap	1 at Howick on 16 th
Dusky Warbler	1 at Seaton Point on 11 th
Goldcrest	10 at Howick on 16 th
Long-tailed Tit	25 at Howick on 30 th 12 at Yearle all month
Hooded Crow	1 at Howick on 13 th
Jay	2 at Yearle on 22 nd
Common Crossbill	16 at Howick on 2 nd 25 at Howick Hall on 7 th
Twite	40 at Long Nanny on 11 th
Brambling	1 at Seaton Point on 8 th 5 at Howick on 5 th and 1 on 28 th
Bullfinch	3 of the Northern form near Belford on 4 th 4 at Felton on 27 th
Hawfinch	5 near Morpeth on 20 th
Yellowhammer	2 at Howick on 28 th 3 at Felton on 27 th
Snow Bunting	1 at Howick on 2 nd 1 near Threestoneburn on 16 th 1 at Newton Links on 11 th 3 at Ross Sands on 23 rd
AMPHIBIANS	
Smooth Newt	1 at Branton on 9 th
MAMMALS	
Roe Deer	2 at Branton Ponds on 27 th
Harbour Porpoise	3 off Cullernose on 10 th and 21 st
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	15 off Craster on 1 st and 7 on 28 th
INVERTEBRATES	
Feathered Thorn	1 at Branton on 11 th
December moth	1 at Branton on 20 th
Water Cricket (Velia caprai)	20 at Swarland Wood on 29 th
FUNGI	
Earth Star	1 at Branton on 19 th
Earth Tongue	Several in Branton on 23 rd
OBSERVERS	G&R Bell, L Capper, I&K Davison, S Dawson, J Dean, G Dodds,
	M&J Drage, K Griffin, P&A Hanmer, P Jobson, A Keeble, E Panton,
	J Rutter, S Sexton.

Please send sightings reports for December, no later than 6th January 2021 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.

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



Across

- 3 There are both Large and Small versions of this butterfly genus
- 5 This species can be a bird, plant of arable ground or a common bryophyte
- 7 No one knows where this species is wintering in Africa
- 8 A butterfly that is a combination of a Christmas shrub and a boys colour
- 9 This plant is a major flavour in gin
- 11 A hoverfly that can be spread on your toast
- 13 This plant can be a common weed
- 14 This eagle flew past Howick in 2020
- 18 The common name for this maritime grass
- 19 What is the Confused

Down

- 1 An early version of a Frog
- 2 Blechnum spicant
- 3 The large finch that seeks out Hornbean seeds
- 4 A yellow flowering plant of acid grassland and moorland
- 6 The common name for Auricularia auricula judae
- 7 The latin name for Yorkshire fog
- 10 This goose can be Dark and Light
- 12 Major tree species suffering from a fungal infection
- 15 Genus name for a Swift
- 16 The instrument being used by Fame Island wardens to monitor Grey seal pups in 2020
- 17 An unfortunate casualty of modern society