# **Alnwick Wildlife Group**



# Promoting awareness of the countryside and its flora and fauna

www.alnwickwildlifegroup.co.uk

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NEWSLETTER 245 FEBRUARY 2022 REVIEW OF JANUARY 2022

# 2021/22 WINTER WALKS

We are getting to the end of our organised walks for the period November 2021 to March 2022. When you get this newsletter, we shall already have had the February walk at Alnmouth with Mick McMahon. In the March newsletter we should be able to give you some details of our spring/summer walks programme

# **PLEASE NOTE**

In the January Newsletter we'd added an extra walk at the end of February, focusing on a search for yellow varieties of snowdrop. Unfortunately, it now seems that following the three winter storms, the place we were to visit is covered in fallen timber and is not safe to visit. BUT please see the Snowdrop article elsewhere in this issue for further explanation.

All details are included in each walk description. If the weather looks bad and you want to check if a walk is going ahead, please work on the assumption that things have to be pretty awful for us to cancel, but if necessary ring Richard on 01665 578346 before 8.30 on the day. If you have an idea for something extra we could add do get in touch on the number above or by email to <u>rjpoppleton@outlook.com</u>.

### Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March Berwick walls and Little Beach

**George Dodds** 

Meet at 10:30 am by the entrance to the Castlegate car park, Berwick upon Tweed (under the arch on the right hand side as you go NW out of the town – next to the BMS store). The Long-Stay section is free all day – the Short Stay part is free for 2 hours.

The walk will be 1 ½ to 2 hours long. It will mainly be on hard surfaces with a short section on grass along the cliffs. There are several short sharp inclines. If the weather is suitable we will walk along the pier looking for seabirds, divers and possibly grebes.

Car Park is at Grid Ref NT 9968 5309 OS Landranger 75 or Explorer 346

**Please send sightings reports** for Febrary, no later than 6th March 2022 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

Please note the change in programme for the **March** meeting. Neither the original speaker (Liz Clark) nor her replacement (Pauline Braviner) is now able to do the scheduled talk about Hedgehog Conservation. So, in their place, Chris Metherell will represent the Natural History Society of Northumbria and introduce the 2022 Common Orchid project which AWG hopes to get involved with. Then Richard Poppleton will give a short talk about some of the plants in the large family Asteraceae to whet your appetite for the coming botany season.

| 2022   |   |  |
|--------|---|--|
| 23 Feb | Graham Sorrie   | Morpeth Swift Conservation   |
| 30 Mar | <ul><li>(a) Chris Metherell</li><li>(b) Richard Poppleton</li></ul> | <ul><li>(a) The 2022 Common Orchids project</li><li>(b) "Delightful Daisies"</li></ul> |
| 27 Apr | Philip Hanmer (AWG)   | The butterflies and natural history of the Cirque du Gavarnie, French Pyrenees         |
| 25 May | Dr Vivien Kent (The Otter<br>Network)                               | Making Otters Count – the use of citizen science to monitor otter populations          |

## A Garden Mystery - responses



Readers may remember that in the January newsletter we published a photograph from a garden near the coast in North Northumberland. The question posed was "what could have caused the gnawing and enlarging of the gap between the planks to enable something to get more easily at the seed in the bird feeders on the other side.

We had two responses. The first was from Roger Manning, the founder of AWG, who these days lives in the Scottish Borders.

"I have seen the work of badgers producing similar evidence – using teeth and claws – but the scale of the picture appears to show the access route being much too narrow for such a creature. The most likely culprits would therefore be Brown Rats which may have gnawed at part-rotten wood in order to access the food and perhaps (??) to use the shavings as insulation in their nest. A site visit might reveal smears, droppings or footprints as confirmation".

The second response from Vivien Boulton at Newton-on-the-Moor said:

"May I suggest that the damage to the fence is not caused by gnawing but by chafing. I think that a branch could have become lodged between the planks & it has been blown by recent high winds up & down the space. The

larger width of chafing at the bottom was caused by the fact that it could not go down further due to the cross piece on the other side. Surely no animal would go to such lengths when it clearly was able to reach the top of the fence anyway.

If Roger is right then it would confirm the fears of the owner of the fence about rats being the culprit. Vivien's ideas represent a good piece of lateral thinking and seem like a good possibility.

Many thanks to both for having taken the time to respond.

### **SNOWDROPS**

You will have seen my apology on the front of this newsletter that the extra winter walk at Fowberry to look for yellow variety snowdrops has been cancelled. Part of this is all my fault, because when I said Fowberry I actually meant Fallodon! Then when we went to check the splendid snowdrop wood at Fallodon we found it was impassable due to fallen timber – and that was even before the most recent storms Malik and Corrie. So, I fear you will have to make do with some snowdrop pics and a bit of text.

The picture of the yellow variety of *Galanthus nivalis* and the one of the broad-leaved *G. elwesii* were taken by Jim Bowyer who lives near Hexham and who took these at a couple of different churchyards in the Tyne Valley. The one of the standard *G. nivalis* is one I took at Fallodon a few years ago, as is the one with the unusual twisted "shaggy" petals. This "shaggy" one probably has a more correct name, but I can't easily discover what it might be. The *G. woronowii* and the double-flowered (*flore pleno*) variety of *G. nivalis* are borrowed from Google images.

When Jane and I went to check out the Fallodon site in late January and found it impossible to access we then went up to the churchyard at Chillingham and it was worse. How the church itself managed to avoid major damage from some of the fallen big trees, I don't know. There were snowdrops present, but the best part of the churchyard, which had some yellow forms in the past, was invisible under the timber.

The pictures do little more than to emphasise that not all snowdrops are the same. The problem in the wider countryside is similar to that with daffodils – you can't easily tell what has appeared naturally, what has been deliberately planted, and what has escaped by itself from cultivation. My assumption, which might well be challenged by galanthophiles, is that most of the strange varieties, like the yellow ones, are varieties of *G. nivalis*. The one with the broad, but rather glaucous (grey/green) leaves is the Greater Snowdrop, *G. elwesii*, while the one with the broad but glossy green leaves is the Green (or Great) Snowdrop, *G. woronowii*.

You should be getting this newsletter in mid-February and there'll be plenty of time to go looking for good patches of snowdrops. If any members get photos of good, unusual species or varieties, do please consider sending them to me at <u>rich.titlington@outlook.com</u> and we could then have a gallery of pictures in the March newsletter.



Galanthus nivalis

Galanthus elwesii



Galanthus woronowii



G. nivalis (flore pleno form)



G. nivalis (yellow variety)



G. nivalis ("shaggy" variety)

Richard

#### MEETING OF WEDNESDAY 28TH JANUARY 2022

31 members and visitors gathered to hear our speaker, AWG member, Tom Cadwallender, with a presentation entitled *Paddington gets the Bird – Birding Darkest Peru*.

This was a much-delayed talk having, like many others, been a victim of the pandemic. Tom explained that it was a product of 2 visits to Peru - one to the North in Spring 2018 and a second to the South of the country in Autumn 2019.

He started by paying homage to Ted Parker ( right), an American ornithologist, who almost singlehandedly revealed to the world knowledge of the vast range of birds to be found in South America (over 2000 species). Parker died in a jungle plane crash in 1993 at the age of just 40.

The trip to northern Peru taking place in Spring, was early enough to view

a wide range of North American migrants that had not yet started their annual journey to the United States to breed. Tom spent a considerable amount of time viewing birds in the scrubby forest habitat of the Tumbes. A particular goal was to find examples of **endemics** - birds only found in a particular micro-climate. The weather for much of the time was very wet – a state of affairs that affected the human birders more than the birds! The second trip, this time to the south of the country, meant spending time alongside the single-track Manu Road which is a main transport artery running through Peru and involved much walking in Cloud Forest which was invariably on the wet side! Observation of any species required following the enigmatic calls that forest birds use to communicate.

The birds' plumages ranged from the dowdy to the spectacular, with the prolific families of Tanagers and Hummingbirds filling the latter spot. A favourite species was the Andean Cock-of-the-rock with the male's fantastic plumage.





As ever, Tom's effervescent approach in his delivery meant the hour's talk seemed to pass very quickly. He was warmly applauded and given a sincere thank you from the Chairman.



#### **PLANT CORNER**

There have been references before in our newsletters to Mistletoe. Most recently Vivien Boulton provided information about her success in introducing it to her garden in Newton-on-the-Moor, and we referred to the presence of some very good growths in Felton Park. The general ideas about *Viscum album* are that it is a species in decline, largely because of the disappearance of larger, older apple orchards in Britain.

However, a very recent article by a chap called Jonathan Briggs in the journal *British & Irish Botany* paints a rather different picture and I thought it might be of interest to our many members who go on holiday to different parts of the UK and who may see plenty of mistletoe, to write a bit about this plant. I shall make selective use of some of the information in Briggs's article, but adjusted for the generalist reader rather than the botanical specialist.

That brings me to the three new terms in the article that I'd not come across before which may be of interest to those of you who share some of my fascination with words. At one point mistletoe is described as 'a very **synanthropic** species'. Perhaps that's not too difficult. The prefix 'syn-' means with or together (as in synchronous – at the same time) and '-anthropic' has to do with humans. So, this parasitic species' distribution is closely tied up with human activity in cultivating suitable host trees.

More taxing will be the pair of terms **endozoochorous** and **ectozoochorous**. Apparently these relate to the different way that mistle thrushes and blackcaps disperse mistletoe seeds. Thrushes eat the fruits whole and carry the seeds internally ('endo-') until they are dispersed in the birds' faeces, while Blackcaps get the seeds stuck to their beaks when they eat the very sticky flesh of the fruits and they therefore carry them externally ('ecto-') before wiping them off their beaks on suitable twigs and branches. I'm happy with the 'endo' and 'ecto' parts and the 'zoochorous' bit apparently refers to transport by animals. In the end I rather wish that heavily esoteric scientific terms like these could be avoided, even in material that is aimed at a scientific audience.



Enough of the terminology. Mistletoe is a unique plant in the British flora. Our *Viscum album* is not the only mistletoe species in the world but it is the only one in Britain and it is parasitic only on deciduous trees. Even though it has green leaves and can photosynthesise it is entirely dependent on its host tree and can never exist independently. It grows in a very disciplined fashion, with each shoot tip branching into a pair of new shoots each year, so that, as the plant gets older, it becomes a more or less spherical mass. Also, if you can reach a clump, you can tell how old it is by counting the number of branching points from the base to the tip of the longest shoots. Undisturbed clumps can live for decades. It produces its green leaves only at the time of year

when the host tree has shed its own. Its final peculiarity is that its ripe fruit are white – the only native British plant to have white berries (the shrub Snowberry is not native) – which seems to limit the number of birds that will disperse the seeds. Many birds do not seem to recognise white fruit as an edible food source, which might seem a shame since the fruits ripen in mid-winter when other food is scarce.

Mistletoe has had all sorts of historical, and probably pre-historical, properties associated with it. Unfortunately, many of the supposed pre-historic uses are based on myths and many of them originate from accounts by the Roman historian Pliny the Elder in the first century AD. Pliny was, unfortunately, a very unreliable source. For example, he wrote about druidical practices based around winter harvesting of mistletoe from oak, using golden sickles. The fact that it very rarely grows on oak did not stop Pliny's myths from being re-stated as facts for 2000 years. A common-sensical modern writer, Roy Vickery, wrote in 1995 that "more nonsense has been written about mistletoe than any other British plant".

Even if we ignore the other species of mistletoe which are only found in southern Europe, our plant is *Viscum album* subsp. *album*, just one of four subspecies of *V. album*, the others of which are parasites on various coniferous trees in parts of Europe. In fact, even experts cannot tell the four subspecies apart other than by seeing which host trees they are infecting – but the mistletoes know because their seeds will only germinate on the correct hosts.

Each mistletoe plant is single sexed, but sometimes one comes across clumps which apparently have both sex flowers. If these clumps are examined it can be shown that they are a mixture of two separate plants – either growing very close together or even one growing as an 'epiparasite' on the other. The flowers develop in February and March and are very simple, although I'm uncertain whether this simplicity is a primitive feature or whether it is has evolved as a secondary characteristic (like snakes which have evolved from legged reptiles but have lost their external legs). There are no stamens in the male flowers and the pollen develops in pores on the surface of the tepals (structures that are a combination of petals and sepals). The female flowers have a simple style and stigma on which the pollen must be deposited by the small flies and bees that are the main pollinators. Both sexes of flower are very small, lack stalks, and are largely yellow/green.



Male flowers with pollen on the surface of the tepals



Clusters of female flowers, each with a stubby central style and stigma

Once the female flowers are pollinated the fruits develop very slowly, not arriving at their almost translucent white colour until November. As the berries grow, so do the pair of leaves at each new flowering node so that, by the time the host leaves fall the whole spherical mistletoe mass is green with its small clusters of white fruit at the next node down on each stem. Not, of course, on male plants!

The dispersal of the seeds seems to depend almost entirely on birds. For many years the main dispersers were thrushes – particularly Mistle Thrush. Unfortunately their method of dispersal is not very efficient. Having eaten the berries (and incidentally expended quite a lot of energy in defending their 'own' mistletoe clumps from rivals) they then tend to have latrine perches so that their droppings get concentrated in a confined area and usually not very far from the food plants. In addition, the glutinous droppings often hang in strings from the latrine tree twigs, so that even if the seed do start to germinate they are not in contact with the tree's tissues and they dry out and die.

Increasingly in recent years as the climate has started to warm, Blackcaps have begun to overwinter reliably in the UK. They tend to wipe the seeds from their beaks on tree branches, often some distance away from the food source, and the germination and success rate is greater than it is for the thrush-dispersed seeds. It seems clear that mistletoe berries are not the most favoured food source, even for the birds that specialise in eating them. As a result they tend to be eaten rather late in the winter after other food sources are exhausted. But this favours the mistletoe seeds which germinate best in early to mid-spring when temperatures have started to rise. Gardening books often say that mistletoe seeds are not easy to germinate, but this is wrong. Seeds will germinate very readily even in situations where they are highly unlikely to survive, such as on fence posts or suspended in mid-air in strings of gelatinous droppings among twigs. The problem for the plant is not any difficulty in germinating – it is that very few end up in situations where they can grow on and into the tissues of another suitable host tree.

For people trying deliberately to establish new plants, the error they make is in pushing the seeds into bark crevices or using raffia to bind them into place on the host branches, and in both cases the germinating seeds are likely to fail because they cannot get enough light. A most peculiar aspect of the germinating seeds is that they take so long to show any real signs of becoming successful plants. It usually takes as long as four years for the first pair of leaves to become visible and a fifth year for the first fruits to appear and for the branching to begin. The germinated seed in the photo on the right is probably about a year old. A suckering disc has grown and attached to the bark and below it the seedling will be starting to penetrate the host tissues.



Young seedling

So, harking back to the comment about telling the age of a plant by counting the number of branching nodes from the base, you really need to add five years to the count to allow for the very lengthy seedling stage. If you are deliberately trying to introduce the plant to your garden, you have to be very patient and not assume that germinated seeds will quickly become evident.

Once a new plant has become established it gradually causes the host branch to swell abnormally and to cease to grow properly. If there is a singe or just a few mistletoe plants on a host, that may not matter too much, but if there is a heavy infestation the host can be significantly weakened. It also seems that in dry winters when the host tree has closed its breathing pores (stomata) to conserve water, the mistletoe plants continue to transpire rapidly, causing much water stress for the host. Thus, pretty as mistletoe may be with its green clumps and white berries visible in the winter, it is still a harmful parasite for its host tree and big infestations can kill.

Mistletoe grows on Apple trees – right? Well not really right if you assume that means that apple is its only or main host. Over time there have been no fewer than 452 woody plant species in Britain that have been shown

to be mistletoe hosts. Not only will it infest many native species, but in botanic gardens it has been happy to grow on a whole range of exotic broad-leaved trees and shrubs. Having said that, it is true that the main hosts are species and varieties of three particular genera – *Malus* (Apple), *Populus* (Poplar) and *Tilia* (Lime), with *Crataegus* (Hawthorn) also being quite susceptible. Outside the UK Birches and Maples are also favoured hosts. Mistletoe can be quite picky about suitable host trees, with some apple varieties seeming to be rarely affected and other closely-related trees like Pear and Plum being largely resistant to infection.



**On Apple in Scotland** 

On Poplar in southern England

What is also true in Britain is that the occurrence of mistletoe in natural woodland is uncommon. Almost all significant colonies are in cultivated trees in orchards, hedgerows, parkland and gardens. If you want to be sure of easily finding mistletoe while on your travels in the UK, you need to go to its stronghold area of the south west Midlands and south Wales. Traditionally, the main Christmas market for the plant is in Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire. But climate change seems likely to be the driver for a considerable spread of the plant to areas further east and north in the country, and the fact that apple orchards represent only one of a range of good host species certainly suggests that the loss of big orchards is not the disaster for the plant that was feared 25 or more years ago.

Richard

## STEWCHAT.

Since mid January the weather has not been to favourable for us, with regular blasts of gusty, windy weather, though it has been quite dry.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January, **105+ Curlews** were in fields at the Rumbling Kern, Howick while on the 17<sup>th</sup> 22 of this flock, I assume, were nice to watch from our kitchen window as they fed around the field flood behind us.



A little bit of excitement, if only on a very local patch scale came on the 18<sup>th</sup> with a nice group of **4 Gadwall** on the hall pond, a record count here. This increased further over coming days to 7 birds, an unprecedented count for here. If this wasn't good enough they were joined by **3 male Shovelers**, another scarce bird locally that remained until early February at least. This shows that rare birds are best taken in context! Also around Howick at this time were **2-3 Treecreepers**, a pair of Stonechat, **3 Goldeneye and 3 Red throated Divers**.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> two **Woodcock** were watched flighting out from village wood, at dusk, to feed across the coast fields.

A female **Marsh Harrier** was very unexpected as it flew west over the pond field on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January, my first winter record here.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> John and myself had a wander around Alnmouth for a change. Offshore from the south side were a good number of **Great crested Grebes** with 17+ seen. A pair in winter plumage were even doing a head shaking weed display showing that spring may not be too far off after all. Also with the grebes were **6+ Red throated Divers, 2 Common Scoter and 1 drake Red breasted Merganser**.

**Gadwall** proved noteworthy again with a pair on the gravel just upstream of the road bridge, with 50 **Wigeon**. Gadwall are not a regular feature at this site either according to Mr Cadwallender of Hipsburn.

Good numbers of other species were along the estuary with **30+ Teal, 4 Little Grebe, 100+ Lapwing and 4 Shelduck**. We walked north along a busy shoreline to the north end of the golf course where **9 Greenfinches** were feeding on the strandline just down from some sea buckthorn bushes.



On the 30<sup>th</sup> January, day 2 of another 35 hour power cut, courtesy of Storm Malik and Northern Power Grid, we joined many thousands of observers across the country in doing the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. We recorded 16 species, the highlight being **22 Tree Sparrows**, two thirds of our usual flock. Since this weekend the road verges at Littlehoughton have had a nice show of **Winter Heliotrope** in flower.



The first **Kingfisher** of 2022 appeared at Howick Pond on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February. Usually they are ever present around the Christmas to New Year period but not this year so it was nice to see one back again.

As for the first part of February, it has lived up to its reputation as being one of the quietest months of the year. I'll certainly be please to see my first butterflies and bees on the wing as winter merges properly into spring.

Tonight, 13<sup>th</sup>, the first **Toads** are crossing the road at Howick lane end and **Song Thrushes** are in full song this morning.



Stewart Sexton, Howick.

#### NATURE NEWS - JANUARY.

The North East seems to have been 'blessed' with a series of hefty storms this winter. Storm Arwen set the tone, followed by Storm Malik and several lesser blows from the west in January. These storms have 'shaken up' the ecological system. In habitats where there is minimal human influence, these storms can be seen as important in creating age diversity in stands of trees and habitat regeneration. Unfortuantely, in mandominated landscapes, the storms have shown a lack of natural 'investment' in our countryside in the last 100 years. What will our ancestors be saying in 200 years time when north Northumberland looks like a prairie due to the lack of old trees!

I always enjoy my drive to and from work in the twilight. **Barn owls** are a regular feature in the early morning. There are number of individuals that can be recognised in both behaviour and the locality. **Woodcock** are another species that are regular especially in the evening when the are moving between woodlands and feeding areas. Sometimes, there are jewels such as the female **Hen harrier** that drifted over the A697 on its way to the moors. Or the young male **Goshawk** hunting pigeons as I was filling my car with fuel at Haugh Head. Driving the roads of north Northumberland can be very rewarding.



Figure 1: Female Hen harrier



Figure 2: Flowering Lesser celandine

At home, the twice daily precession of gulls is increasing. The morning movement is in a south-westerly and in the evening they move north-east back to their evening roosts at Budle Bay and beyond. The main species are **Common** and **Herring gulls** as they seek out fields that have been ploughed or pastures rich in worms and/or leather-jackets. A pair of **Ravens** moved west over Glanton in late January. Recently, large flocks of both **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** have gathered in south-facing pastures. Most of these birds seemed to move to the south. Despite frost on cold westerly / north westerly winds, I managed to find my first flowering **Lesser celandine** on the 12<sup>th</sup> February.

The office list is moving closer to 500 species. The current list stands at Birds 83, Mammals 15, Amphibian 1, Invertebrates 99, Plants 226, Bryophytes 30 and Fungi / lichens 35 = 489. January was a good time to take stock and review the lists. Both **Sparrowhawk** and **Great spotted woodpecker** had not been added despite the Sparrowhawk hunting regularly along the track outside my windown and the woodpecker visiting the house bird feeder! Additions since the New Year include **Oytercatcher**, **Common snipe**, **Horse chestnut**, evidence of **Knopper oak gall wasp** was found on wind-blown **Pedunculate oak**, **Vineyard snail** and **Oakmoss** (a common tree-lichen). The aim is to hit 500 species by the 31<sup>st</sup> March.

Daily walks can produce surprises such as my first butterfly of the year on the 8<sup>th</sup> February – a smart **Peacock** and the evidence that a **Golden plover** had been plucked by an avian predator.

There is plenty to be found if you take your time.

Stay safe. Jack Daw

#### **A RINGERS YEAR**

**JAN 2022:** Returns from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) have been particularly interesting this month and have included a new report on the Barn Owl (FH92017) that went from Snitter (west of Rothbury) to Wrexham in North Wales. This female owl was ringed as a pulli on the 7/6/14 and then 'controlled' nesting down near Wrexham on the 12/7/18. It was controlled again on the 31/12/18 when a member of BTO witnessed its ring number. The most recent capture was on the 9<sup>th</sup> January this year at a different site but still near Wrexham. There was also news of a Blackbird (LN65135) that was ringed at Howick back on the 11/2/21 near my home at Lemmington Hall – its currently residing at Friesland in Holland. Next there was a welltravelled (and long-lived) Blue Tit (S284197); ringed back on the 2/9/16 which was controlled down on the Isle of Wight on Christmas Day! Two more local and more characteristic Blue Tit movements were also reported; one ringed at Swarland in February 2020 was at my house on the 18/12/21; and another also ringed at Swarland on the 10/7/21 was at Howick on the 9/10/21.

Getting back to the BTO Winter Ringing Pilot Project I did a session at home on the 9/1/22 and captured 47 birds (35 new and 12 retraps) including four Long Tailed Tits (Lotti's) from January 2021; we can therefor say that they are definitely adults (and must be at least in their second year of life; and possibly older). We can only derive this from ringing dates because it's impossible to age a Lotti from its plumage at this time of year. If it was a Blue Tit or Great Tit, we could look for the presence or absence of juvenile covert feathers to get an indication of age but because Lotti's do a complete moult into 'adult type' feathers within a few months of leaving the nest they cannot be aged (see pict). This also proves that Lotti's are not closely related to our other common tits. Of the new birds there were another eleven Lotti's (which we can only age in a general sense of not having been hatched in 2022); Blue Tits, Tree sparrows, Coal Tits, Dunnocks, a single Blackbird, a Robin and a beautiful adult male Greenfinch (pict). Greenfinches are unfortunately quite a rarity these days being particularly susceptible to several diseases.

Setting up again on the 16/1/22 we captured only 24 birds (12 new and 12 retraps). The retraps included a Blue Tit from 2018 and a Nuthatch from last year. The new birds included Coal Tits, a Robin, Great Tits, Blue Tits and Dunnock.

We are still discovering the after-effects of Storm Arwen and will need to raise some more funds sometime to replace broken bird boxes – including tawny/goldeneye duck boxes in the Breamish Valley and Barn Owl boxes at other locations. This is not to mention small boxes at sites like one near Doxford; were I have a long-term study running, as illustrated by the attached photo showing the storm damage (photo).

Fortuitously the Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty currently has DEFRA funding to erect some Barn Owl boxes on farms that adjoin the coast this year and working with Coast Care Volunteers at Seahouses I recently instructed on how to put these together. Surprisingly it proved to be a warm sunny day for outside bird box joinery (see photo). Starting to check on box sites further north on the 28<sup>th</sup> we erected one new box, located an entirely new male owl in an existing box near Wooler and found a dead owl on a farm south of Wooler. The dead owl was ringed and proved to be one of last years few owlets that apparently died with a few months of leaving its nest.

In order to monitor the effect of this current winter on our local owls please report findings of dead owls to myself or your local Natural History Group/Society (especially if they have a ring number).

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



| SIGHTINGS JANUARY 2022      |   |  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| BIRDS                       |   |  |
| Red-throated Diver          | 5 at Stag Rocks on 2 <sup>nd</sup> 4+ off Ross Sands on 9 <sup>th</sup> 50+ at Warkworth on 3 <sup>rd</sup> 36 at   |  |
| Plack threated Diver        | 1 off Boss Sands on O <sup>th</sup> 1 off Stag Bosks on 16 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Greet northorn Diver        | 1 of Cullerness on 5 <sup>th</sup> 1 of Stag Rocks Of 10 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Great-northern Diver        | 1 at Widdrington Moor Lake or 22 <sup>nd</sup>  |  |
| Red-necked Grebe            | 1 at Widdrington Moor Lake on 22 <sup>m</sup>   |  |
| Gannet                      | 1 off Cullernose on 20 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Great-white Egret           | 1 at Fenton on 20 <sup>cm</sup>   |  |
| Spoonbill                   | 1 at Castle Island on 22 <sup>th</sup> and 25 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| whooper Swan                | 4 at Hedgeley Lakes on 4 <sup>th</sup> 5 near Chatton on 3 <sup>th</sup> - 10 <sup>th</sup> 6 at Branton Ponds on 19 <sup>th</sup> 8 at Low Newton Pool on 20 <sup>th</sup> |  |
| Pink-footed Goose           | 30+ over Branton on 1 <sup>st</sup> 900+ at Budle Bay on 16 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Barnacle Goose              | 500+ at Budle Bay on 16 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Brent Goose                 | 700+ at Fenham Flats on 16 <sup>th</sup> 340 at Beal on 23 <sup>rd</sup>  |  |
| Pintail                     | 1 at Big Waters on 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1 at Branton Ponds on 22 <sup>nd</sup>  |  |
| American Wigeon             | 1 at Big Waters on 22 <sup>nd</sup>   |  |
| Wigeon                      | 500 at Low Newton Haven on 20 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Gadwall                     | 35+ at Hedgeley Lakes on 12 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Pochard                     | 1 at East Chevington on 1 <sup>st</sup>   |  |
| Shoveler                    | 25+ at Budle Bay on 2 <sup>nd</sup>   |  |
| Shelduck                    | 1 at Branton Ponds on 10 <sup>th</sup> and 3 on 20 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Black Scoter                | 1 off Ross Sands on 9 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Common Scoter               | 100+ off Stag Rocks on 2 <sup>nd</sup> 3 at Cullernose on 5 <sup>th</sup> 30 off Stag Rocks on 27 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Long-tailed Duck            | 12+ off Stag Rocks on 16 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Smew                        | 1 at Widdrington Moor Lake on 1 <sup>st</sup> and again on 22 <sup>nd</sup>   |  |
| Red-breasted Merganser      | 1 at Seaton Point on 9 <sup>th</sup> 11 at Budle Bay on 27 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Hen Harrier                 | 1 in recording area on 27 <sup>th</sup> 1 in a different location on 31 <sup>st</sup>   |  |
| Marsh Harrier               | 2 at East Chevington on 1 <sup>st</sup> 1 at Howick on 22 <sup>nd</sup>   |  |
| Common Buzzard              | 1 occasionally at Spindlestone Hides  |  |
| Sparrowhawk                 | 1 occasionally at Spindlestone Hides  |  |
| Peregrine                   | 1 at Branton Ponds on 6 <sup>th</sup> 1 at Warkworth on 3 <sup>rd</sup>   |  |
| Woodcock                    | 1 at Beanley Wood on 1 <sup>st</sup> 2 at Howick on 20 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Golden Plover               | 1000 at Monks House Pool on 27 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Oystercatcher               | 2 at Branton Ponds on 22 <sup>nd</sup> 40 at Stag Rocks on 27 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Purple Sandpiper            | 15+ at Stag Rocks on 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 125 on 27 <sup>th</sup> 8 at Seaton Point on 9 <sup>th</sup> 30 at Craster on 20 <sup>th</sup>                                     |  |
| Sanderling                  | 20+ at Stag Rocks on 2 <sup>nd</sup> 108+ at Seaton Point on 9 <sup>th</sup> 20 at Holy Island on 23 <sup>rd</sup> 120 at Low Newton on 20 <sup>th</sup>                    |  |
| Curlew                      | 24 at Branton Ponds on 22 <sup>nd</sup>   |  |
| Spotted Redshank            | 1 at Castle Island on 22 <sup>nd</sup>  |  |
| Kittiwake                   | 4 off Cullernose on 20 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Guillemot                   | 20 at Cullernose on 5 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Stock Dove                  | 1 near Branton on 1 <sup>st</sup>   |  |
| Ring-necked Parakeet        | 1 at Castle Island on 25 <sup>th</sup>  |  |
| Barn Owl                    | 1 near Lilburn on 9 <sup>th</sup> 1 near Bolton on 15 <sup>th</sup>   |  |
| Great-spotted<br>Woodpecker | 6 daily at Spindlestone Hides   |  |
| Rock Pinit                  | 4 at Stag Rocks on 2 <sup>nd</sup>  |  |
| Dipper                      | 1 at Brandon Ford on 18 <sup>th</sup>   |  |

| Dunnock          | 2 daily at Spindlestone Hides   |
|------------------|---|
| Stonechat        | 1 at Stag Rocks on 2 <sup>nd</sup>  |
| Fieldfare        | 20+ in Branton on 6 <sup>th</sup>   |
| Redwing          | 10+ in Branton on 6 <sup>th</sup>   |
| Cetti's Warbler  | 1 at East Chevington on 1 <sup>st</sup>   |
| Goldcrest        | 18 at Howick Pool on 18 <sup>th</sup>   |
| Long-tailed Tit  | 30 at Howick Pool on 18 <sup>th</sup> 6 daily at Spindlestone Hides                                     |
| Willow Tit       | 2 at Branton Ponds on 14 <sup>th</sup> and 1 on 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1 at Hauxley on 4 <sup>th</sup>        |
| Marsh Tit        | 4 at Brinkburn High House Wood on 22 <sup>nd</sup> 1 at Felton on 8 <sup>th</sup>                       |
| Treecreeper      | 4 daily at Spindlestone Hides   |
| Nuthatch         | 2 at Weldon Bridge on 18 <sup>th</sup> 3 at Lemmington Hall on 8 <sup>th</sup> 4 at Howick Pool on      |
|                  | 18 <sup>th</sup> 4 daily at Spindlestone Hides  |
| Raven            | 1 at Cullernose on 5 <sup>th</sup> 2 at Howick Pool on 18 <sup>th</sup>                                 |
| Jay              | 6 at Howick Pool on 18 <sup>th</sup> 3 daily at Spindlestone Hides                                      |
| Tree Sparrow     | 25+ at Branton on 4 <sup>th</sup> 8 at Lemmington Hall on 8 <sup>th</sup> 6 daily at Spindlestone Hides |
| Common Crossbill | 4 at Beanley Woods on 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 on 23 <sup>rd</sup>   |
| Twite            | Several at Cullernose on 5 <sup>th</sup>  |
| Siskin           | 75+ at Branton Ponds on 16 <sup>th</sup>  |
| Lesser Redpoll   | 5 at Branton Ponds on 16 <sup>th</sup>  |
| Hawfinch         | 1 at Abbey Mills near Morpeth on 11 <sup>th</sup>   |
| Chaffinch        | 40 at Lemmington Hall on 15 <sup>th</sup>   |
| Brambling        | 5 at Lemmington Hall on 15 <sup>th</sup>  |
| MAMMALS          |   |
| Otter            | 1 at Weldon Bridge on 18 <sup>th</sup> 1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 24 <sup>th</sup>                          |
| OBSERVERS        | C Cresswell, I&K Davison, G Dodds, P&A Hanmer, A Keeble,  |
|                  | J Rutter, S Sexton, P Watson.   |