

Berwick Wildlife Group

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Newsletter: April-May-June 2008

WILDLIFE REPORTS FOR JUNE

Weather. June has been a wet month with average temperatures. In the first two weeks the wind was in a northerly direction bringing cool air and coastal 'frets' almost daily. The last part of the month was in a westerly phase with bright starts building into heavy thundery showers by most afternoons. There were two days of heavy rain, the 3rd and the 22nd, the latter with a total of 24mm (1 inch) in a couple of hours. Total rainfall for the month was 110.5mm (4.3 inches), the wettest June out of the last ten.

Birds. June, as usual, has been a quiet month with most species busy with the breeding cycle. Of note was a late movement of **Barnacle Geese** and several successful breeding pairs of **Stonechats** around Berwick.

A sea watch off the Pier (1st), saw a northerly movement of **Guillemots** 400+/hour, **Kittiwakes** 500/hour and **Fulmars** 70/hour along with 3 **Manx Shearwaters**. A single **Barnacle Goose** was in the Gull roost on the end of Sandstell Point. 32 **Sanderling** were at Cocklawburn with 120 **Common Scoter** and 60 **Eiders** (mainly males). A pair of **Tufted Duck** were on the pond here and 15 **Barnacle Geese** flew north over the sea mid-morning. The same day saw a **Red-throated Diver** in summer plumage in Spittal Bay, along with 12 **Guillemots**, 2 **Razorbill** and a **Puffin**. 36 **Greylag Geese** were on Yarrow Slake (3rd) and a **Garden Warbler** was singing in trees at the Railway Station.

Cocklawburn pond (4th) was host to 7 **Tufted Ducks** and a female **Mallard** with 3 ducklings. 10 **Canada Geese** flew south over East Ord (5th) and a pair of **Grey Partridge** were on Billylaw (6th) with a pair of **Tufted Ducks** on Middle Ord pond. A flock of 46 **House Sparrows** were noted feeding on the seed heads of the Marram Grass on the dunes at Sandstell Point.

15 **Greylag Geese** flew south east over East Ord (7th). A pair of **Goosander** were at West Ord (8th), also a male **Stonechat** with 3 newly fledged juveniles. The same day at Little Beach was an immature **Mediterranean Gull**, 13 **Ringed Plover**, 2 **Dunlin** and a single **Turnstone**. 77 **House Martins** nests were counted under Canty's Bridge (12th). 5 **Magpies** were noted along Rotary Way, Ord (13th). A **Bullfinch** was at Yarrow Haugh (16th) and was still there 21st. A **Kestrel** was carrying prey from the Golf Course to a site in the Flagstaff Park area (18th). 44 **Common Scoters** were at Cocklawburn (24th) with the first 3 post-breeding **Common Gulls**. The WeBS Estuary count on the same day found 9 **Grey Herons**, 363 **Mute Swans**, 34 **Goosander**, 132 **Kittiwakes** and 4 **Sandwich Terns**.

A drake **Teal** was on Middle Ord pond (26th) for 4 days and 9 **Goosanders** were at West Ord. 7 **Canada Geese** flew north at Cocklawburn. The same seven birds were on Yarrow Slake (28th) and were still there on the 30th. 4 **Common Terns** were on the Calot Shad

(29th), with 16 **Sandwich Terns** and 7 **Tufted Ducks** were present at West Ord. A visit to Needles Eye (30th) found a pair of **Shag** and 2 pairs of **Cormorants** breeding on the cliffs with the other sea-birds. Also here were 3 **Grey Herons**, a pair of **Kestrels**, and a family group of **Sedge Warblers** with 8 **Puffins** on the sea. The same day at Little Beach were 34 **Goosanders** and a female **Shelduck** with 3 very young ducklings.

Elsewhere. The first week of the month saw a rarity in the shape of a fine **Lesser Grey Shrike** at Long Nanny, Beadnell. It was closely followed a few days later by an adult **Rose coloured Starling** in what has been a good late Spring on the Northumberland coast for rare migrants.

Mammals. There was an encouraging report of a **Red Squirrel** at Hepburn Wood near Chillingham, but unfortunately **Grey Squirrels** continue to spread in Berwick with one seen in Devon Terrace at the end of the month.

Butterflies. Windy, cold conditions prevented many butterfly sightings, but in sheltered areas there were numbers of 'Whites' with the odd late **Orange Tip**. On the 4th, just over the Border N. of Lamberton at Catcairn Bushes 6 **Small Blues** were discovered, and a single **Clouded Yellow** was seen at nearby Hilton Bay. On our transects, a single **Common Blue** was recorded at Cocklawburn on 16th, 23rd and 30th, with the first **Meadow Brown** on 16th off the transect. More butterflies seem to have survived at Tommy-the-Miller's field, with the first **Common Blue** on the 10th, single **Meadow Browns** on the 20th and 29th, and **Ringlet** numbers building from 8 on the 20th to 24 on the 29th. A calm sunny morning on the 24th saw good numbers of **Common Blues** on the cliffs at Spittal, with 6 in the Spittal tetrad and 5 in the Scremerston tetrad. 4 **Ringlets** were at Mill Farm, Berwick (28th) and three at Needles Eye on the 30th.

With many thanks to all those who have supplied wildlife records. To submit a record please e-mail them to us via <http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk/Sightings.html> or phone 01289 309046, or send photos via mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk.

SURVEYS

This is supposed to be summer and the peak of the fieldwork season! BWG are busily engaged between showers. Some proposed surveys (for bats and birds) are shown in the Events section below, others are not arranged far in advance, but include **weekly butterfly transects** at Cocklawburn and Tommy-the-Miller's field and regular surveys for signs of **red and grey squirrels**. Another proposed study is a **Pilot Survey of "Insects in the wider countryside" for Butterfly Conservation**. Very little is known about the changing abundance of common insects in the UK, and this has been devised to enable volunteers to test a method of monitoring a suite of common and widespread insects in "wider countryside" – i.e. not in areas known to be "good" for insects. The survey must take place some time in July, when it is dry, preferably sunny and not too windy!

If you would like to take part in butterfly, insect or any other surveys do please let us know (e-mail mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk or phone Fiona on 01289 330591). Beginners and experts are equally welcome. We have found that together, and with a little practice, we are able to get useful results and a great deal of interesting information, fun and satisfaction from surveys even when we have little or no previous expertise.

Survey of ancient buttercups.

Recently Molly came across a survey being organised by Dr John Warren of the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences at Aberystwyth University. Dr Warren has a theory that you can estimate the age of meadows by counting the number of petals on creeping buttercups. Preliminary research has shown that old buttercups from older pastures are more likely to have extra petals than young buttercups. We examined three areas of Tommy-the-Miller's Field and a further buttercup patch near Askew's walk, finding 14%, 9%, 5% and 6% of the buttercups to have more than 5 petals. We then had to estimate the time since the place where they were growing had been undisturbed (quite tricky), and on that basis (although our sample is much too small for conclusive results) it might well be that multi-petalled buttercups do indicate undisturbed pasture. Dr Warren is collecting buttercup petal counts from all over the country to test his theory.



Normal 5-petaled and less usual multi-petaled Creeping Buttercup flowers, in this case from Holy Island.

MEMBERS' PHOTOS.



Sedge Warbler on Holy Island by John Inglis



Ringlet by Gill Young



Grayling by Iain Cowe



Red Squirrel by John Rae

MEMBERSHIP

Subscriptions were due in May for all except those who had joined for the first time earlier in 2008. **If you have not paid your subscription for 2008/09 this will be the last newsletter you receive, and you will have to pay full price at all events.** The fee remains £8.00 per year for individuals, £14.00 for families at the same address. Send to our Treasurer, Enid Turnbull, 5 Springfield Park, East Ord, Berwick, TD15 2FD.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Wednesday 9th July (if relatively dry). **Tree Survey for Forest Enterprise**, Ord Drive, Berwick. Meet at **7.00 pm**. at tiny car park on N side of Ord Drive, E side of cottage. Roadside work – wear non-slip footwear, bright clothing, not suitable for children or dogs.

Thursday 10th July (if 10th wet/windy, 11th). **Bat Survey**, Mount Road/Tower House, Tweedmouth. A survey to follow up results from 2005 and to investigate other reported sightings. Meet at Dock Road, below Tower House at **10.00pm**.

Sunday 13th July. **Second 2008 Butterfly Walk at Cocklawburn**, with Jaci Beaven of Butterfly Conservation. Meet at **10.30 am**. at car park at end of Cocklawburn road by pill box – NU 032 481. Sensible shoes and binoculars if you have them. Sorry no dogs.

Tuesday 15th July (if relatively dry). **Tree Survey for Forest Enterprise**, Ord Drive, Berwick. Meet at **7.00 pm**. at tiny car park on N side of Ord Drive, E side of cottage. Roadside work – wear non-slip footwear, bright clothing, not suitable for children or dogs.

Sunday July 20th. **A bird survey around Scremerston**, the second summer visit to BWG's adopted tetrad for the BTO Atlas 2007-11. Meet opposite Scremerston Church (NU 006 493) at **10.00 am**. Wear sensible shoes and if possible bring binoculars. Beginners (and experts) welcome, about 2 hours very slow walk.

Thursday 31st July (if 31st wet/windy 1st August). **Bat Survey, Norham Castle.** An opportunity to survey a Daubenton's bat roost. Meet at Norham Castle car park **9.00pm**.

Thursday 14th August. **BIG BAT EVENT.** From **6.00pm to 8.00pm** talks and **demos** on bat ecology at United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL, followed by **expedition to Canty's Brig** with two bat-work trainers to enhance identification skills. Meet at car park at west end of Canty's Brig, NT 957 525, **8.30pm** (continues until dark).

Sunday 24th August. **Third 2008 Butterfly Walk at Cocklawburn.** Meet at 10.30 am. at car park at end of Cocklawburn road by pill box – NU 032 481. Sensible shoes and binoculars if you have them.

Members and non-members are welcome at all these events. Most surveys and some walks are free to members, but non-members will be charged £3.00. At events with an outside speaker/leader we ask everyone to contribute to cover expenses, usually £2.00 for members and £3.00 for non-members.

Contact us. Look at our website www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk, phone 01289 330591, e-mail mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk or just come to an event.

Addendum

Hi All,

1) Error in Newsletter. Sorry, I do apologise for titling the picture of the Sedge Warbler in the Newsletter as a Reed Warbler. Entirely my silly mistake (not John's).

2) I have wildlife records from Barry which were not included in the Newsletter :

BIRDS

Manx Shearwater - Eyemouth - several sightings, mostly moving north, including 20+ on 12 June

Canada Goose - flocks of presumably moult migrants seen flying N past Eyemouth on 4 June (~40), 17 June (~25) and 18 June (27)

Hobby - 1 at Lumsdaine Moor on the edge of the plantation flying at tree height

Redshank, Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe (drumming), **Golden Plover** - all on Greenlaw Moor in breeding habitat

BUTTERFLIES

Small Blue - the colony discovered in 2007 just over the border is still OK with sightings by several people on different days. Good news as it could be the last remaining site for this species in the Scottish Borders

Northern Brown Argus - first seen on 16 June at Burnmouth and then in good numbers there on 18 and 23 June

Common Blue - first seen on 18 June at Coldingham

Wall - 4 seen between Blaikie Heugh and Coldingham during the month

Meadow Brown - first seen on 20 June nr Grantshouse

Ringlet - first seen on 28 June at Linkim Shore, S of Coldingham

Small Heath - seen since 7 June in quite good numbers on the Scottish side

MOTHS

Dew Moth - several seen along the coast between Burnmouth and Eyemouth. This is a local species with limited distribution around here.

Thank you for all these records.

3) **Chaffinch** deaths. A friend in Foulton has just reported unexplained mortality (sudden dropping-dead of apparently healthy birds) among chaffinches, and he wondered if the same was happening in the Berwick area? He has sent a corpse for autopsy, but whatever the result it would be useful to know the area affected. If anyone has seen any dead chaffinches (or an unexplained absence of chaffinches), please would you let me know - 01289 330591 or e-mail.

4) A reminder that our **next Event**, on Sunday 13th July, is a **Butterfly Walk at Cocklawburn**, led by Jaci Beaven of Butterfly Conservation. Meet at 10.30 a.m. at car park at end of Cocklawburn beach road by the pill-box, NU 032 481. Sorry, no dogs please. Just hope the weather improves!

Best wishes, Fiona.