

Berwick Wildlife Group

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Newsletter: October-November-December 2006

RECORDS

BIRDS

October. What turned out to be the “star” bird of the autumn in Berwick was a fine immature **Red-backed Shrike** which stayed from the 3rd to the 15th in the Pier House/Little Beach area. Seen from the Pier on the 3rd were 2 **Velvet Scoter** and an **Arctic Skua**, while on the estuary were 11 **Teal**, a female **Tufted Duck** and the first **Red-throated Diver** of the winter. Two male **Sparrow Hawks** were seen making coordinated attacks into a large flock of **Starlings** (unsuccessfully!) over the Golf Course (9th). Returning **Redwing** were scarce, but 6 were seen at East Ord (12th) where a **Nuthatch** was seen in local gardens (15th). A single **Fieldfare** flew in off the sea (17th) at Little Beach, with 36 **Dunlin** 12 **Bar-tailed Godwits** and a **Grey Plover** on the shore. 2 **Slavonian Grebes** and 7 **Red-throated Divers** were in Spittal Bay (20th), with a **Scaup** and 2 **Guillemot** in the Estuary. A **Black-necked Grebe** was found feeding on the Tweed at West Ord (22nd). The first 2 **Goldeneye** were seen off the Coastwatch station (29th) - rather late this year. There were 16 in Spittal Bay the next day with 2 **Long-tailed Ducks** and 2 late departing **Sandwich Terns**. A **Merlin** attacked the gathering **Starlings** in late afternoon over Spittal (31st) and a **Little Auk** was seen in the Bay earlier in the day.

November. After all the migrating goose movement last month, things started to slow down. On the 5th, 5 **Red-throated Divers** were seen near the Tweed Dock entrance, and also on the 5th 32 **Pink-footed Geese** were flying north over the town, with 84 **Greylag Geese** flying north the next day. Perhaps the mild weather had fooled them! A female **Blackcap**, 3 **Bullfinches** and a **Grey Wagtail** were at Castlehills on the 9th. 46 **Goldeneye** had gathered at New Water Haugh with a **Red-throated Diver** (12th) while at the mouth of the estuary was a **Great-crested Grebe**. A **Peregrine** was seen over Scremerston (13th) and a **Buzzard** on the 14th at Yarrow Slake was mobbed by crows and took refuge in the Plantation. Another **Peregrine** was seen to catch and kill a **Redshank** at Sea House (18th). Also at the latter site, 140 **Linnets** and a **Long-tailed Duck** on the sea. A lovely calm day (21st) saw 9 **Whooper Swans** on the sea in Spittal Bay along with 8 **Red-throated Divers**, a **Slavonian Grebe** and a **Little Auk**. Little Beach had a pair of **Stonechats** all month while a high count of 86 **Oystercatchers** was on the Golf Course (28th).

December. A late or an over-wintering **Chiffchaff** was found at Castle Hills on the 1st. A Norwegian ringed **Black-headed Gull** returned again to the Lifeboat Station (3rd). It was first identified here on 21st January 2005. One can only wonder where it has travelled during that time. Does it annually return to Norway to breed? A SW gale on the 4th saw 4 **Gannets** in Spittal Bay with 76 **Sanderling**, 42 **Dunlin** and 130 **Turnstone** on Little Beach. BWG Members met on the 9th for a low tide count, at the request of the BTO, of the shore from Little Beach northwards to Needles Eye. We were not disappointed as we saw all three species of **Diver**, 12 **Purple Sandpipers** and 2 **Grey Plovers** at Brotherston's Hole and a fine dog **Otter** feeding on the shore at Needles Eye. The outing

was a bit chilly but definitely worth the effort. Another gale on the 14th found 9 **Shag**, 2 **Guillemots**, 3 **Gannets** and a **Long-tailed Duck** in Spittal Bay. On the 16th, 6 **Long-tailed Tits** were seen at the entrance to East Ord caravan park. A large flock of 120 **Twite** with a pair of **Stonechat** were found on the cliff path at Spittal (17th). The last few weeks of the year saw a male **Peregrine** in our area. It was over town regularly hunting the feral **Pigeons** and terrorising the local gulls. The Tweed Estuary held 174 **Goldeneye** and 9 **Goosander** on the 19th. On the 20th a female **Blackcap** was spotted in a Tweedmouth garden, and the same day another female **Blackcap** appeared in a Berwick garden, together with a **Treecreeper**. A **Blackcap** was also noted in an East Ord garden on Christmas Day, and the one in Berwick stayed around into January.

MAMMALS.

On the 29th of November an **Otter** was spotted in Castle Vale Gardens, and there were several sightings of 2 **Otters** together in the upper Estuary in early December. As already noted one was seen by the Group members on the shore at Needles Eye on 9th December. Perhaps there are other otters feeding along our coastline at low tide? **Two Roe Deer** were seen at Borewell Farm on 21st November, with another two around the upper estuary near to Mill Farm during December.

INSECTS.

Butterflies. The mild weather at the end of 2006 saw many late records for our migrant butterflies. During late October there were two late **Commas** on 16th Oct. and the last **Painted Lady** was seen at East Ord on Oct 22nd. **Red Admirals** were seen in numbers into November with 12 on Ivy blossom in Flagstaff Park on October 29th. There were December records too, two at Castle Hills on the 1st and a single there on the 3rd.

NEWSLETTERS AND RECORDS.

Although we will continue to produce this quarterly web and print Newsletter, we are also endeavouring to produce a monthly record sheet (on the 8 months for which there is no quarterly newsletter) starting in January 2007. We hope to "bulk up" our local sightings and bring them to you much quicker. To save cost, this will be e-mailed to all those for whom we have an e-mail address, and hand-delivered to most of the rest. If you don't like this arrangement, please tell us!

Please send in your sightings as soon as possible to: Malcolm Hutcheson, 26 Cornwall Avenue TD15 2NX, phone 01289 309046, or use our sightings form on the website or e-mail mail2@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk .

CHARGES FOR MEETINGS

As some of you will be aware most outside speakers are now making a small charge for giving talks and leading outings - or if not we feel obliged to re-imburse them travelling expenses. However it does mean that often BWG loses money on an event, which it can ill-afford to do as your subscription money is needed for insurance, publicity, printing costs etc. even though we keep these to a minimum.

As you probably also know, we usually charge non-members £2.00 for attendance at talks etc. (on the basis that they haven't contributed to BWG funds via the membership fee). However we now feel it necessary to **charge everyone attending events with outside speakers** in order to cover our costs, **£2.00 for Group Members and £3.00 for non-members**. (Some visits require additional fees - this will vary but we try and negotiate a special rate). If the **Group's Committee members** are leading an expedition or survey (e.g. Feb. 3rd Bird Survey) we will **charge non-members £3.00 but Members can still attend FREE** (and the leaders will continue to come at their own expense - thank you all!).

If this puts you off attending the many events planned for 2007, some of which are shown below, please do let us know (don't just grumble and not turn up). E-mail or phone 01289 330591, or come and harangue us at the AGM and we can work something out.

NEWS.

Low tide shore-bird count, 8th December 2006, led by Malcolm and John I.

On a bright sunny morning a group of 12 members attended to survey the shoreline for waders and wildfowl, as part of a winter low tide count of the coast organised by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology). The group soon got into a set system of identifying small visual blocks and counting numbers of each species in each block, heading along the shore in a northerly direction.



The first area, Little Beach, was the most difficult as it has the largest area of rock and pools visible at low tide. By the end of the survey at Needles Eye we had seen all three species of Diver, recorded higher numbers of Oystercatchers and Redshank than expected, found a group of Purple Sandpipers and the odd Grey Plover near Brotherston's Hole and the "prize of the day" was a fine dog Otter working along the shore, in and out of the pools, near Needles Eye. Thank you so much John and Malcolm.

Photo of the group's lunch break by John R

Visit to Whinney Hill Farm, 30th September 2006, led by David Wood.

Last autumn Berwick Wildlife Group visited Whinney Hill Farm near Longhorsley, where wildlife conservation has been wonderfully integrated into a working farm by David Wood. The whole farm is managed to provide a wide range of wildlife habitats, the cultivation regime being carefully adjusted to include food and shelter for wildlife among the farm crops. There are wide grass field-margins, a damp peaty hollow, set-aside seeded with wild bird foods, an ancient woodland, more recently planted mixed broadleaved woodland, unfertilised grasslands, a small lake, three ponds and 120 different nest boxes to suit everything from blue tits to barn owls. The wildlife of Whinney Hill is privileged to have such an understanding and enthusiastic custodian of the land, and Berwick Wildlife Group were equally privileged to be shown the workings of this remarkable farm. Thank you very much, David.



EVENTS PROGRAMME, WINTER-SPRING 2007.

January 2007

- Wed 10th. Talk by Ann Middleditch of Chain Bridge Honey Farm on Bees. 7.30, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal

February 2007

- Sat 3rd Third Annual Estuary and Seabird Survey. Meet at Tweedmouth end of Old Bridge, 1.00pm (high tide 15.30). If conditions poor alternative date Sat 17th, 12.00 (high tide 14.30). Make sure you wear warm, waterproof clothes and boots.
- Wed 14th. Talk on British Bats by Steve Betts, ecological consultant and member of Northumberland Bat Group 7.30, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

March 2007

- Wed 14th. Talk on Red Squirrels by Philippa Mitchell of Northumberland Wildlife Trust and Red Alert North England. 7.30, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

April 2007

- Sat 14th. In Search of Dippers. An exploration of Wooler Water with Sue Maddox, to see spring flowers and birds (with luck including dippers). A walk on the flat, about 1½ hours, may be a bit muddy. Meet at 10.30 am in car park by Garden Centre in Wooler, NT 995 278.

May 2007

- Sat 5th 2.0pm. Guided walk at Paxton House. Tree management, wildlife and (with luck) red squirrels. Special reduced entrance fee (£2.50 each) negotiated for members of the party!
- Wed 9th 7.30 pm. AGM, followed by a talk by Ron McBeath of Lamberton Alpine Nursery. Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

June 2007

- Sat 9th. Walk from Magdalene Fields to Needles Eye. Seabirds and Spring flowers. Led by Group members (FA, MH, JI). Meet at 10.00 above Berwick Beach (by caravan park).

July 2007

- A Saturday, probably 14th, trip to the Farne Islands. This needs to be pre-booked, so if you think you might like to come please let us know – first come, first served.

Fieldwork, 2006 and 2007

We are currently planning this season's projects (provisional list in last quarter's Newsletter and on the web), but in the meantime two reports on last summer's fieldwork – on the **Bat Survey** and the **Butterfly Transect** – are due out soon and make very interesting reading. They will be posted on the web, but let us know if you would like a paper copy.

Like to learn more about us? Look at our website www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk, phone 01289 330591, e-mail mail2@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk or just come to an event.

Wishing you all a very happy and (particularly in view of our increased charges!) a prosperous New Year. Fiona Aungier, for BWG.