

Berwick Wildlife Group

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Newsletter: April-May-June 2006

RECORDS

BIRDS

April. Spring migration got into full swing, although some species were notable by their absence. The remnants of the Winter visitors were also moving northwards.

A female **Black Redstart** seen on the tideline of Little Beach on the 1st and 2nd, along with 55 **Purple Sandpipers** and 160 **Turnstones** feeding on the "wrack" at high tide was a good start. 60 **Pink-footed Geese** flew north over the town on the same day, while 3 **Red-throated Divers** were off the Coastwatch site. A **Swallow** was seen over the estuary on the 3rd, while 6 **Sand Martins** were at West Ord with 7 **Goldeneye** and 6 **Gooseanders**. The monthly estuary count on the 11th saw 28 **Goldeneye**, 2 **Shelduck**, 4 **Greylag Geese** and 33 **Redshank**. On the 12th the last **Brambling** was seen feeding in a Hiveacres garden. A pair of **Stock Doves**, a **Blackcap** and a **Chiffchaff** were in Tweedmouth cemetery on the 14th. In Flagstaff Park on the 16th was a **Tree Pipit**, a **Willow Warbler** and another **Chiffchaff**, and on the same day a **Great Crested Grebe** was seen on the estuary with the unusual sight of a **Moorhen** feeding in the seaweed on the shore at the Lifeboat Station. Yarrow Slake was visited by 11 **Canada Geese** on the 19th while 40 **Brent Geese** were seen flying north offshore at the Golf Course. The 21st brought a pair of **Long-tailed Ducks**, 2 **Red-throated Divers** and a **Razorbill** into Spittal Bay, while 4 **Puffins** were seen off Needles Eye and 120 **Kittiwakes** roosted in the estuary. Also on the 21st 12 **Siskins** visited a Hiveacres garden. On the 23rd 12 **Sandwich Terns** and 8 **Shags** were in Meadow Haven, with a pair of **Teal** on the estuary and the last 2 **Redwings** seen at East Ord. A heavy passage of **Gannets** was recorded on the 24th, through Spittal Bay with 780 birds flying south in an hour, in a strong southerly wind, with further large numbers (50+ in an hour) from the Coastwatch Tower on 28th. A **Garden Warbler** was found in trees at the Lifeboat Station on the 26th with an unusual sight of a pair of **Grey Partridge** at Yarrow Slake, when a peak of 62 **Turnstones** appeared on the estuary.

May. Spring migrants were still on the move throughout the month, despite variable weather conditions. 50 **Turnstones** were observed from the Old Bridge on the 1st, and a single **Swift** and 2 **Siskins** were seen at East Ord on the 2nd. The pond behind Middle Ord Farm held a pair of **Tufted Duck** on the 3rd. A quiet month on the estuary, but there were 24 **Goosander** on the 5th, 6 **Swifts** were around Tweedmouth church. On the 7th 3 **Tufted Duck**, a **Goldeneye**, a **Greenshank**, 60 **Turnstones** and 12 **Sandwich Terns** were on the estuary, and a **Sedge Warbler** and a **Whitethroat**

were seen and heard at West Ord. 2 pairs of **Sedge Warblers** were on the railway bank at Highcliffe on the 10th, with a **Whitethroat** singing at Marshall Meadows. The estuary count on the 12th saw 196 **Mute Swans**, 19 **Eiders**, 76 **Ringed Plovers**, 44 **Turnstones** and a lone **Arctic Tern**. The same day saw 2 **Whimbrel** and 2 **Purple Sandpipers** at Spittal. An **Osprey** flew north into our recording area on the 17th, in off the sea at Cocklawburn. The same day a **Spotted Flycatcher** was seen in East Ord. **Ringed Plover** numbers peaked on the 24th with 168 at Little Beach, and 130 **Sanderling**, 46 **Dunlin**, 8 **Turnstones** and 36 **Eiders**. The same evening saw 144 **Sandwich Terns** feeding on the falling tide off the Pier. 3 **Buzzards** were seen at Mordington on the 24th, and a fine drake **Garganey** on the pond at Middle Ord Farm – a superb find at a relatively unwatched site. A good seabird movement was recorded on the 30th, with 630 **Gannets**, 120 **Guillemots**, 6 **Puffins**, 18 **Manx Shearwaters** and 2 **Little Terns** seen flying north in half an hour over Spittal Bay in a strong north wind.

June. A late migrant or resident breeding female **Wheatear** was found on Ord Moor on the 1st. A few lingering migrant or non-breeding waders were still about early in the month with 14 **Ringed Plovers** and 3 **Dunlin** on Little Beach on the 3rd with a pair of breeding **Stonechats**. 35 **Oystercatchers** and 12 **Redshank** were on Ladies Skerrs off the Coastwatch site on the 4th. On the same day the sight of 5 **Sandwich Terns** feeding in fresh water on the Tweed between West Ord and Chain Bridge, Horncliffe was notable. Also on the 4th nesting colonies of **Sand Martins** were recorded, with 38 nests at New Water Haugh and 15 nests at West Ord. 34 **Canada Geese** were seen flying north over Tweedmouth on the 5th while a family group of **Greylag Geese** comprising 8 adults or immatures and 8 goslings were seen at Yarrow Slake on the 6th and have frequented the estuary for the rest of the month. Also on the Slake on the 6th were a pair of **Shelduck** and a **Yellow Wagtail**. A **Quail** was heard on the evening of the 6th calling in fields near Shoreswood, while another bird was flushed on the coast path at Needles Eye on the 20th. The seabird colony was counted on the 20th and recorded 1,350 **Kittiwake** nests, 68 **Guillemot** nests, 18 **Razorbill** nests, 5 **Shag** nests and a single **Cormorant** nest. 5 **Puffins** were seen to use three burrows. Also on the site were a pair of **Kestrel** with 3 newly-fledged young and a **Pheasant** with 5 chicks. Also on the 20th, at Little Beach were 14 **Ringed Plovers** and 3 **Dunlin**, along with 18 immature **Common Gulls** and a **Shelduck**. Eight **Goosander** were on the estuary on the 21st with a further 17 at West Ord on the 22nd, where there were 2 **Common Sandpipers** and a pair of **Yellow Wagtails**.

MAMMALS

Brown Hares have been seen several times in the fields between Borewell Farm and Spittal, and four were seen at Mutron on 14th April. A **Stoat** with an unusual coat of two shades of brown was seen near Cocklawburn pond on 24th April, and a **Weasel** was noted hunting on Needles Eye on the 20th. 3 **Harbour Porpoises** were seen in Spittal Bay for 10 days from 12th May.

The **Grey Squirrel** has arrived in our area. As from mid-May I have been told by several of my neighbours that a pair of Grey Squirrels are frequenting the grounds of East Ord House, coming to bird feeders in the village and the gardens of Hiveacres – although I've not seen any myself. If you have any sightings of these animals, please let us know.

BUTTERFLIES

The fairly cold spring did not encourage early butterfly movement, except for numbers of **Peacocks** during April. Several **Small Tortoiseshells** were seen on warm days and the first of the "whites", a **Green-veined White** and a **Small White** were seen at Lamberton on 23rd April.

The sighting of a **Red Admiral** during April or May is a rare occurrence, as it is yet to be proven that the species can hibernate and survive the cold temperatures of our winter months. However singles at Mill Farm, Tweedmouth on 15th April and East Ord on 5th May, with others seen to the north of our area at Eyemouth on 4th May and Dowlaw Moss on 8th May, make one speculate that they were early migrants carried from central Europe on warm south-easterly winds which occurred at the time. This was a fascinating group of records.

Early May saw the first **Orange Tip** at Tommy-the-Millers Field on the 1st with others at West Ord (3rd), East Ord (5th) and the Goody Patchy, Tweedmouth (8th). Several migrant **Large Whites** were seen at Unthank on the 28th May with regular numbers after that date. **Painted Ladies** showed up early with a single at Sea House on 19th June and others at Highcliffe and two at Needles Eye (20th). An early **Common Blue** was seen at Needles Eye on the 20th along with several Silver Y moths and the normal appearance of **Red Admiral** was seen in a Hiveacres garden on 22nd June. On the 23rd an Angle Shades Moth appeared in a Tweedmouth garden.

With many thanks to Malcolm Hutcheson, John Inglis, Liz & Tony Houghton and Elizabeth Bamford for these records. To submit a wildlife record please phone Malcolm on 01289 309046 or use the record form on our website. The sightings recorded here in the Newsletter cover the core of our "Wildlife Group" area – from the Scottish Border to Scremerston on the East side of the A1. The records on the website cover a wider area (including Eyemouth and Wooler) – we just don't have room for them all here. So, let us know of your wildlife sightings by your chosen method.

EVENTS CALENDAR, from July 2006

The Committee has been very busy arranging surveys, walks and talks for the rest of the summer and next winter. Do come along and bring your friends and family. Non-members welcome, although there may be a small charge. Info: 01289 330591.

July

- Sun 2nd Border Green Festival, Mill Farm, Tweedmouth. 11.00am to 6.00pm. BWG will have a stand! Come and support us and the rest of the festival.
- Thurs 6th Verges (3) – place & time to be arranged (phone 01289 330591).
- Thus 13th Bat Survey. Governors Garden area. Meet at entrance to The Avenue at 9.30pm.
- Sat 15th Holy Island 10.30am. Helleborines and Dark Green Fritillaries, Snook Car Park (NU 026 484). Led by Phil Davy.
- TUESDAY 18th BWG Committee Meeting – 7.00, Castle, Berwick.

- Thurs 20th Bat Survey. Meet at Castle Terrace/North Road junction at 9.30pm.
- Sat 29th (or, if wet, Sun 30th) Butterfly Count at Cocklawburn 10.30am. Meet at car park below old pill box (NU 031 481). Led by Malcolm
- Butterfly survey along New Road continues

August

- Thursday 3rd. Bat Survey, Meet at Parade Car Park, 9.00pm.
- Thursday 10th. Bat Survey. Possibility of long-eared bats around Holy Trinity. Meet in Parade Car Park at 8.45pm.
- Wed 16th BWG Committee Meeting – 7.00, Castle, Berwick
- Butterfly survey along New Road continues

September

- Wed 20th BWG Committee Meeting. 7.00, Castle, Berwick
- Sat 23rd to Fri 29th Final Butterfly Survey, all surveyors and others interested invited, date & time depends on weather. Contact Fiona.
- Sat 30th Sept. Tour of Whinney Hill Farm led by David Wood. Grid ref: NZ 128 924. About 4km SW of Longhorsley, 10km NW of Morpeth. 12.00 noon, bring a picnic to eat before the tour. Shared transport – phone 01289 330591.

October

- Sat 7th. Autumn Bird Count, Berwick. A chance to see some unusual migrants and help build up our database on local birds. Meet at 10.00am in the Rose Garden, Flagstaff Park. Beginners welcome.
- Wed 18th. BWG Committee meeting, 7.00, Castle, Berwick.

November

- Wed 8th Talk on Butterflies by Dr. Sam Ellis of Butterfly Conservation. 7.30pm, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.
- Wed 15th BWG Committee meeting. 7.00, Castle, Berwick

December

- Wed 20th Committee meeting, 7.00, Castle, Berwick

January 2007

- Wed 10th Talk by Willie Robson on Bees. 7.30pm, 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 very poor alternative date Sat 17th, 12.00 noon (high tide 14.30)
- Wed 14th – talk by Steve Betts on Bats. 7.30pm, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

March 2007

- Date and venue to be arranged (probably 8th March, Berwick United Reformed Church). Talk on Red Squirrels.

SURVEYS

Butterfly survey in Tommy the Millers Field. A survey of the butterflies of Tommy-the-Miller's Field and the adjacent New Road is taking place weekly throughout the summer using small teams of volunteers. The data will be sent to Butterfly Conservation and used to update local lists. We will also take part in a national butterfly count on Saturday 29th July at Cocklawburn (see Events Calendar above).



Results are posted on the website. For the surveyors the weekly change in numbers and species is fascinating. We have now logged a total of 289 butterflies of 11 species (Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Orange Tip (above), Small White, Green-veined White, Large White, Small Copper, Meadow Brown (left), Ringlet, Common Blue and Small Blue). The study should form a valuable record at the end of the survey in September.

Bat Surveys. Three bat surveys took place in June. A preliminary investigation to determine the presence of bats in Ravensdowne, examining window sills for droppings, and using the detectors to locate pre-emergence activity, drew a complete blank. However, once darkness fell bats were detected along the Walls from Ravensdowne to Kipper Hill, in the adjacent parkland and in nearby residential areas. The feeding behaviour of the bats appeared to be very much influenced by wind direction, most bats being found where trees and buildings provide shelter.

Two more evenings in the same area have borne out these preliminary observations, and subsequent studies in other parts of town have been arranged for July and August (see above). If you are interested do come along – phone 01289 330591 for more details.

Verges. Areas of road verge with particularly interesting flora were pointed out to us last year. Most are beside the A1 where it is too dangerous to survey, but the species-rich verge on the Wooler road near Berrington was examined on 22nd June. This had been trimmed by the time of the survey, but we were able to identify most of the plant species. Another interesting verge near Roughting Linn was examined the following week, again cut (fortunately just at the edges) days before our visit. A good range of plants was identified, including Northern Marsh Orchid, Twayblade and Quaking Grass – which seemed odd as it likes basic soils and the adjacent ground was moorland. Once records from both these sites have been sorted out we will try and negotiate a more plant-friendly mowing regime.

Breeding Birds. Our survey of the Breeding Birds of Magdalene Fields Golf Course, carried out last year and long in the report-writing stage is finally nearing completion, and we will post it on the website. All those who took part will receive free a copy. If others want a paper copy, please ask – but we may charge the cost of production.

NEWS.

Our Recorder 6 database. The Group now have 4 copies of a wildlife recording database called Recorder 6. It is planned to use this software to record all of the Groups sightings, observations and survey data. When we have enough survey observations we also plan to send this data to the National Biodiversity Network database to make it available to anyone throughout the country. A small group of computer-savvy members have completed the initial implementation of Recorder and have written a user manual for our Group. We hope to have an internal teach-in for Group members in the autumn. John Rae. 25th April 2006.

Our second AGM was held on 10th May in the St Aidan's Room at Berwick United Reformed Church, Spittal. Fiona thanked the many people who had helped the Group over the past year. The accounts showed a current balance of £400.41 (compared with £805.19 last year). Officers were elected as follows: Chairperson (re-elected), Fiona. Joint secretaries, Margaret and Elizabeth. Treasurer, Enid. It was also agreed to:

- Change the subscription rates from £5.00 for individuals and £10.00 for families, to £ 8.00 for individuals and £14.00 for families
- Become affiliated to (but remain independent from) Northumberland Wildlife Trust, and
- Change the winter meeting day from the 4th to the 2nd Wednesday of the month (to allow members to attend Alnwick Wildlife Group meetings & vice versa).

Seabirds and Spring Flowers – the Reverse Route - 20th May 2006. "I think what we'll do, is do the walk in reverse order" Reverse order? There were 10 furrowed brows and a good few raised eyebrows – most unexpected! However we started by listening to bird song in the car park. Then we were on our way at a brisk pace along the road to the St Abb's Head Reserve boundary. An area of mixed woodland lay before us and behind it the Mire Loch, built many years ago, stocked with trout and serviced by a fishing lodge which has seen better days. The loch today has mostly perch and an odd pike, also eels. "How do they return to sea?" The eels slither their way across the piece of land between the loch and the beach. Amazing.

The track along the west side of the loch passes through mixed woodland and gorse. Spring flowers edged the route, primroses, dog violet, celandines and cuckoo-flower. Pausing in a sheltered clearing we listened to the songs of chiffchaff, wren, willow warbler and reed bunting. We climbed gently up from the reedbeds to Pettico Wick, and then steeply on to the headland. Here an icy blast greeted us, onshore from a boiling sea. Hundreds of nesting birds were clinging to tiny ledges on the cliffs. Fulmar, guillemots, and a rare glimpse of a puffin entertained us in their mastery of the severe wind. The weather won, we were literally driven along the cliff path by an onshore gale at our backs. Reaching Kiln Hill we sheltered. Today this area is fenced, protecting the habitat of the Northern Brown Argus. Climbing the next steep hill we were treated to a spectacular view of St Abbs village. The walk was nearly complete. And now we understood why walking "the route in reverse" was a wise decision. Elizabeth, 24th May 2006.

Anything interesting about wildlife to report – do let us know! 01289 330591 or mail@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk .