



Berwick Wildlife Group

To promote wildlife within the Berwick area

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Newsletter: January-February-March 2006

RECORDS

BIRDS

January: Winter wader numbers on Little Beach had their seasonal ups and downs in the New Year with 318 **Dunlin**, 72 **Sanderling** and 320 **Turnstone** on 8th January feeding amongst the piles of seaweed brought in by winter storms. Also seen here were 11 **Purple Sandpipers**, and 8 **Bar-tailed Godwits**. By the 24th, 86 **Ringed Plover** and 4 **Grey Plovers** had joined them. 85+ **Oystercatchers** were feeding regularly on the Golf Course and the Meadow Haven roost held 10 **Shags** and 22 **Cormorants** on the 28th. Off Berwick pier the same day were 3 **Red-throated Divers** with a further 10 **Shags** and 47 **Eiders**.

A count covering the whole area of the Tweed Estuary on the 12th recorded 116 **Goldeneye**, 32 **Mute Swans**, 3 **Red-throated Divers**, and 24 **Grey Herons** with 1,320 **Lapwing** and 125 **Redshank** in the Yarrow Slake area. The **Fulmars** had returned to their nest sites on Union Bridge, with 6 birds there on the 19th. The evening gull roost saw 2,800 **Black-headed Gulls** in it on the 15th at dusk. Also at the Slake for most of the month were 17 **Greylag Geese** and 3 **Little Grebes**. On the shoreline fields, 8 **Grey Partridge** recorded on New Years day were the first for many years and 12 **Yellowhammers** were seen on the 7th.

In Spittal Bay, 3 **Red-throated Divers** were about all month along with a **Black-throated Diver** and a **Guillemot** on the 14th and a **Slavonian Grebe** and 3 early northbound **Gannets** on the 22nd.

Elsewhere, early records included a **Mistle Thrush** in Tweedmouth on New Year's Day, and a singing **Blackbird** in Wooler on the 6th. A pair of **Blackcaps** and 4 **Siskins** were around Hiveacres gardens all month. 160 **Fieldfare** were at West Ord on the 3rd with 3 **Buzzards** around Longridge School the same day. 44 **Twite** were seen in the "bird seed" field at Seahouse near Borewell Farm on the 28th. Last but not least on the 31st an **Avocet** was spotted in Budle Bay paddling about in a little poolbathed in bright sunshine....doing what Avocets do.

February: On the 5th a male **Stonechat** and 5 **Rock Pipits** were on Little Beach, while 6 **Red-throated Divers** and 5 **Red-breasted Mergansers** were spotted from Berwick pier. 100 **Gannets** were seen in half an hour here, flying north on the 19th. 170 **Pink-footed Geese** were flying north over the town on the 6th.



Drake Smew, photo John I

with 6 **Dunlin** and 3 **Turnstone** on the shoreline.

On the Tweed Estuary, a fine drake **Smew** joined the **Goldeneye** near the Union Bridge for a day on the 15th with a **Tufted Duck** there on the 19th. A “red letter day” at the gull roost on the 21st saw a **Ring-billed Gull** (a rare American vagrant), a **Mediterranean Gull**, and 2 **Kittiwakes** along with 10 **Wigeon**. A good number of American gulls were blown on to the British coast on late Autumn gales and the remnants of Hurricane Katrina. At Yarrow Slake 55 **Greylag Geese** and 12 **Dunlin** were seen on the 4th with a further 34 **Greylags** flying north on the 16th. At East Ord on the 18th on the river were a **Red-throated Diver**, 54 **Goldeneye**,

A cold day on the 2nd brought many birds to a Berwick garden, including a **Great-spotted Woodpecker**, a **Treecreeper** and a male **Bullfinch**. At Mount Carmel, Norham were 158 **Whooper Swans** feeding with 76 **Mute Swans** in a kale field on the 8th. The same day 22 **Yellowhammers** were seen at Loanend, and 4 **Siskins** (3 male and 1 female) at a garden feeder in Wooler. In Tweedmouth, 2 Mistle Thrushes were present on the 8th. Around East Ord a male **Blackcap** was seen all month with 6 **Long-tailed Tits** in the Industrial Estate on the 4th and 35 **Redwings** on the 9th.

March was a fairly cold month making looking for early signs of Spring difficult. At the Coastwatch station, on the 26th 16 **Linnets** and a **Snow Bunting** were among the **Pipits** and **Skylarks** migrating northwards. A **Little Gull** in Meadow Haven, also on the 26th was unusual for this time of year as was a **Black Redstart** on the tideline on the 31st. Waders at Little Beach varied according to the amount of disturbance, but a very high tide on the 31st saw 55 **Purple Sandpipers** with the pack of waders high upon the remnants of the tideline.

On the Estuary, 4 **Wigeon** were present from the 4th to the 11th and 2 **Red-throated Divers** were there from the 26th to the month's end. The monthly count on the 11th added 7 **Goosanders** and a **Knot**. At Yarrow Slake was a **Grey Plover** on the 4th and a **Shelduck** on the 18th.

Elsewhere, spring began to encourage activity among smaller birds – such as the **Siskins**, **Goldfinches**, **Long-tailed Tits**, **Wrens** and a **Goldcrest** reported from Wooler Common on the 3rd. At East Ord, 30 **Greylag Geese** flew north on the 3rd as did 54 **Redwings** on the 9th. A **Grey Wagtail** was in the Riverdene area from the 6th for a few days. **Bullfinches** were feeding on Osier buds at Scremerston on the 8th and 350 **Wood Pigeons** were feeding on Hawthorn and Ivy berries at West Ord on the 15th with 8 **Tufted Duck**, 10 **Goldeneye** and 3 **Goosanders** on the river the same day. The **Whooper Swan** flock at Norham held 135 birds on the 15th but all were gone by the 26th. The **Blackcap** in the garden at Hiveacres was last seen on the 15th and the **Siskin** numbers peaked at seven on the 27th along with a single **Brambling**. 35 **Lapwings** were gathered on the grass by the road between East Ord and Tweedmouth on the 24th, very vocal.

MAMMALS

On February 5th a **Woodmouse** (or Long-tailed Fieldmouse), mentioned in last quarter's newsletter, was again active in a garden in Tweedmouth. It was seen running behind the snowdrops collecting nest material. Large ivy leaves, dwarfing the mouse, were dragged into a hole at the bottom of the wall. Within second it came out again to carefully cut small sections of dead flower stem before running into the nest hole with them. After ten minutes the mouse had a rest, keeping totally still as two starlings fed nearby. Following a wash and groom it started the frantic collecting again. Two and a half hours later the gathering stopped and all became quiet under the sandstone wall.

Three Group members were lucky enough to see two **Otters** fishing in the Tweed at Paxton, managing to get quite close by sneaking up whilst they were diving.

On 22nd February, a quiet Sunday morning in Berwick, 3 **Roe Deer**, including one young buck with budding horns, appeared in a garden. They were browsing on shrubs, particularly the yew, which I hope is not poisonous to them. Even more remarkable was the way they left the garden, in a leisurely fashion but straight through an extremely large, dense hawthorn hedge. They must have very thick coats at this time of year so the thorns perhaps do not reach their skin, but I would never have believed it possible. Later inspection showed a trail of deer slots up to the hedge, but very little sign of anything (far less a large animal) having pushed through.

Brown Hares are especially active at this time of year and have been seen several times in the fields between Borewell Farm and Spittal, with two being seen on the 10th March by members of the group when we visited Borewell Farm. 4 **Roe Deer** were seen south of the farm and were noted in the coastal fields at Cocklawburn on the 13th February.

On 25th March, a member reported seeing a lovely view of a big dog **Fox** who was sitting watching and waiting for any mice to come to him. He kept moving a short distance before trying again. He was there for ages but did not catch anything.

INSECTS

The cold weather did not encourage hibernating butterflies out of their winter sites but a disturbed **Peacock** was seen in a Castle Drive garden on 5th February. The next **Peacocks** to be seen were at Sandstell Point, Spittal on the 25th March and at Union Park Road, Tweedmouth on the 26th. No other species have been recorded this quarter to date (2nd April). However we hope this will change as butterfly surveys in Tommy-the-Miller's Field and at Cocklawburn are planned (see Surveys, below).

PLANTS

Very early in February **Hazel catkins** appeared on the bushes planted on the Bypass. These cultivars flower a little earlier than the native Hazel plants, but were an encouraging sign of spring. Now flowers are appearing everywhere. Let us know what you find.

With many thanks to Malcolm Hutcheson, John Inglis, Elizabeth Bamford, John Rae and Sue Maddox for these records. To submit a wildlife record please phone Malcolm on 01289 309046 or use the record form on our website.

EVENTS PROGRAMME

AGM

Wednesday 10th May at 7.30pm in the St Aidans Room, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal. (Directions: Tweedmouth end, inland side of Main Street, Spittal.)

This will be as informal and as short as possible, although there are several important things to discuss – election of officers, subscription, our website, the new computer and surveying equipment, forthcoming surveys, walks and talks, our increasing local advisory role and so on. We hope most members will come to find out everything that has been going on, and suggest what else we might do or improve in the future.

Don't forget it's your Group, the Committee need feedback to make sure they run it as you want.

Following the business part of the AGM we have arranged a talk by Andy Swinburn, the Community Policeman responsible for investigating wildlife crime. Non-members welcome.

Saturday 20th May

Seabirds and Spring Flowers at St Abbs Head National Nature Reserve with Kevin Rideout, the Ranger.

Meet at 10.00 am at the Visitor Centre below the car park.

The walk will take about 3 hours, taking us past the spectacular cliffs with thousands of nesting seabirds and then returning inland.

There are cliff-tops and some steep slopes, and we will go ahead unless the weather is extremely bad, so please wear stout footwear and clothing appropriate to the day.

Everyone welcome, £2.00 charge for non-members.

Saturday 15th July

Dune Helleborines and Dark Green Fritillaries on Holy Island with Reserve Warden Phil Davey.

Meet at 10.00 am at Snook Car Park. Safe crossing times to Holy Island that day are about 09.50 to 16.50.

The walk is on level ground, and will go ahead unless the weather is extremely bad, so please wear appropriate clothing. It might be wet underfoot at the start (high tides) so wellies may be advisable.

Everyone welcome, £2.00 charge for non-members.

SURVEYS

Butterfly survey

A survey of the butterflies of Tommy-the-Miller's Field and the adjacent New Road will take place weekly throughout the summer, conducted by small teams of volunteers. The data will be sent to the National Biological Network and to Butterfly Conservation, and will also be used to update local lists. This is a good chance to learn to identify common butterflies, and maybe spot some which are more unusual. If you are interested in volunteering, training days will be held and volunteers will be asked to survey on a rota system (about every 3 weeks, but there's flexibility).

We will also take part in a national butterfly count on the last Saturday in July (29th) – probably at Cocklawburn, which has a slightly different butterfly fauna from Tommy-the-Miller's.

Bat Survey

Following on from our very successful "batty evenings" last year, we need to identify discrete groups of bats and try to find their roost sites. We will also be contributing data to a national bat survey. On Thursday 1st and Friday 2nd June we will be using bat detectors to establish whether or not bats have returned to the areas of Berwick where we found them last year.

Assuming we find bats again, the next step is to watch buildings around the area at sunset to see if we can see the bats emerging from roost sites. Weather permitting this will be done on Thursday and Friday 8th/9th and 15th/16th June. Subsequent studies in other parts of town depend on the success of these watches, and the interest of the volunteers.

Verges

Areas of road verge with particularly interesting flora, at Berrington, Purdy's Lodge and Unthank, were pointed out to us last year. We need to visit these in mid/late June and early July to assess the sites properly. At this time of year outdoor evening meetings are possible and proposed dates are Wednesdays 14th and 28th June and 5th July. Exact dates and times to be confirmed.

Pirri Pirri Burr

If anyone knows of any plants of this invasive perennial from New Zealand, English Nature would like to know, as they are trying to eradicate it on Holy Island and do not want seeds to spread. We will collate local sightings.

Badgers

We are also reporting active Badger Setts in the locality, in confidence, to the Northumberland Wildlife Trust Badger Group. If you know of any setts and would be willing to give details to the Badger Group, Berwick Wildlife Group will pass them on.

If you would like further details of any of these surveys, or would like to take part, please contact Fiona (see last page). We are delighted to help beginners to learn the necessary skills to take part in these surveys - although we would be equally delighted to have the assistance of experts

NEWS

Equipment

This year we have been lucky enough to have a substantial grant for equipment from the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Beauty. We are now owners of useful survey equipment (tape, compass, poles, etc.), two bat detectors, walkie-talkies, field guides, hand lenses, thermometers, field first aid kit, a new database to put all our records on, a computer on which to run it, a domain name and a website. As a second stroke of good fortune, computer-savvy members have offered to set up the database and the website, and both are now functioning, although work is still ongoing.

Website

The website is now accessible on www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk and is almost complete. Do have a look and let us know what you think, if there are any mistakes or if anything doesn't function properly (link to membership secretary not yet live). If you have suggestions for things that might be included or if you have text or pictures you would like to contribute please get in touch.

Database

Following an introductory course on 27th February, Recorder 6 will shortly be available for use by all members of the Group. When we have enough survey observations we plan to send our data to the National Biodiversity Network to make the information available to anyone. (see www.nbn.org.uk).

Tapee Pond

Tapee Pond is an area of reedbed, now occupying an old pond site just north of the railway bridge by Berwick Station. Berwick Wildlife Group are co-operating with the Castlegate Area Residents' Association, the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and the Tweed Forum to consider and implement the future management of the site. Does anyone remember what the site was like over 20 years ago? We have had reports of open water and newts – can you confirm these? What would you like to see done to the site? Do let us know.

The Future of the Town and the Tweed Estuary

This is currently the subject of a 20-year "masterplan" initially and inevitably involving a consultants' report. It is essential that the importance of the Estuary and its wildlife are considered from the very beginning of the plan, both for their own sakes and from the point of view of the considerable asset they represent for people living, working and visiting Berwick. Few other small towns have such a peaceful and beautiful haven in the centre – one interpretation is that it is like having a spectacular park in the middle of the town that everyone can appreciate (even if we can't actually walk through it). The Estuary has also been designated as a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC), primarily because it is a relatively natural and undisturbed estuary with good water quality and a wide range of brackish-water habitats – sand, mud, etc. (see www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1458 and click on Tweed Estuary). Again, we'd like to hear your views. Make sure the Borough Council knows of them, too.

YOUR HELP NEEDED

Berwick Wildlife Group belongs to its members – it exists because people give time and skills to promote the local wildlife. We are lucky enough to have a terrific team of volunteers, but we always need more help. In particular we are looking for:

- A Treasurer – since we are a small voluntary organisation formal book-keeping skills are not required, just someone who doesn't turn to a jelly when shown a page of figures.
- A Membership Secretary – to keep track of the names and addresses of members and collect subscriptions.
- A Secretary – someone to work with the Chairman and Treasurer on the day-to-day running of the Group (note-taking at a minimum as others have kindly volunteered for this).

OTHER GROUPS

As one of a number of groups in the area concerned with wildlife we believe we have a special role to play, in particular in organising scientific surveys. However we must work with, rather than compete with, other groups. We welcome members from these at all our meetings and vice versa – hence this invitation from Berwick GreenWatch.

Berwick GreenWatch

Once my children were into their middle teens I was able to leave them for the day and go out walking. As their age increased so did the length of my walks until I was following long distance trails for holidays.

With RA groups I did some work on overgrown paths but after retirement, I looked for an environmental group to expand this type of work, particularly as my extensive walking showed how badly remedial work was needed. After one or two false starts I heard of Berwick

GreenWatch. I've sawn and knocked in posts; pulled wire and posts out; cut back gorse, bracken, nettles etc; pollarded willow; cut down (small) fir trees, and felt great satisfaction at the rejuvenated landscapes - and enjoyed great company. Not bad for an octogenarian, who intends to be swiping at nettles until becoming a nonagenarian.



Berwick GreenWatch work on a variety of sites, on both sides of the border, one Saturday a month. Membership costs £10 a year. The group provides all training, tools and safety equipment. Transport to and from the work site can also be arranged. **There is no expectation of doing loads of work, everyone works at their own pace.**

For more details of how to get involved in Berwick GreenWatch projects contact Pete on 01289 382067 or email berwickgreenwatch@yahoo.co.uk

By Laurie Macaskill, aged 85

*****DON'T FORGET*****

If you have seen anything interesting (not necessarily anything rare, just an observation you might like to tell others about) please let us know for next quarter's Newsletter or the website.

Any comments or suggestions you have for the Newsletter, or for the Group in general, are much appreciated so don't hesitate to get in touch.

The AGM – Wednesday 10th May, 7.30pm, and our summer walks and surveys (see above pp 4 & 5).

CONTACT US

For general information about the Berwick Wildlife Group, activities and meetings or to join the group please go to our website:

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk

OR

Contact Fiona on 01289 330591

OR

Email: mail@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk

Wildlife Records: To submit a wildlife record please phone Malcolm on 01289 309046 or use the record form on our website.

MEMBERSHIP

Subscription renewals. These are due following the AGM (10th May). We must wait until the AGM to see if our proposed increase in subscription is acceptable to you all – being raised to £8.00 per year for individuals, £14.00 for all family members at the same address – still very reasonable. (If necessary we will refund those who have already joined for next year and paid at the higher rate!). We are also intending to cut down on costs by e-mailing the Newsletter to as many people as possible.

When you have finished with this newsletter please pass it on to anyone who you think might be interested in the activities of Berwick Wildlife Group.

Members do not have to have special skills or knowledge, just an interest in their environment. If you are not a member, why not come along to one of our meetings and see if you might like to join us?

