

Berwick Wildlife Group

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Newsletter: January-February-March 2007

WILDLIFE REPORTS FOR MARCH

A fairly average month, with frost occurring on nine nights with a particularly mild few days mid month. The lowest temperature being -1°C (30°F) on the 21st. The last two weeks of the month were duller and damper with sea mist on several days, but the average daytime maximum temperature was high, around 7°C to 10°C (46°F to 50°F). The recorded rainfall was low with 38.5mm (0.96 inches).

Birds

March is when birdwatchers look for the first signs of Spring and the return of early summer migrants.

Mar. 2nd A **Tufted Duck** was on the sea with **Eiders** at Cocklawburn and 66 **Twite** were at Sea House. A **Treecreeper** graced a Berwick garden with a visit.

3rd A pair of **Goldfinches** were spotted in a Tweedmouth garden, and 3 more in a Berwick garden, the latter still regular visitors.

4th 86 **Pink-footed Geese** flew north over East Ord with 55 seen over town later.

5th 80 **Sanderling** on Little Beach, with a large group of 30 **Rock Pipits**.

6th 6 **Red-throated Divers** were in Spittal Bay with a **Guillemot** and 2 **Red-breasted Mergansers**.

7th At Cheswick, 8 **Red-throated Divers**, 7 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 5 **Guillemots**, 7 **Sanderling**, 2 **Purple Sandpipers** and 34 **Twite**.

11th A **Red-throated Diver** was in the Estuary and 240 **Gannets** in an hour were seen moving south, off the Pier in a strong south-west wind.

12th A **Red-throated Diver** and 12 **Sanderling** were in Fishermans Haven, with 38 **Eider**, 9 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 24 **Cormorant**, 9 **Shag** and 3 **Red-throated Diver** "next door" in Meadow Haven. 12 **Teal** were on Middle Ord pond.

13th On Little Beach were 68 **Sanderling**, 6 **Dunlin** and a **Snow Bunting** which stayed for three days.

14th A fine female **Peregrine** was seen chasing and catching feral pigeons on Spittal cliffs and 30 **Whooper Swans** flew north approx a mile out over the Bay. The WeBS count on the Estuary found 52 **Mute Swans**, 6 **Wigeon**, 3 **Tufted Duck**, 116 **Goldeneye**, 12 **Goosander** and 220 **Redshank**.

15th A **Little Grebe** was in the Tweed Dock. A pair of **Bullfinches** visited a Berwick garden, returning regularly until the end of the month to feed on blackthorn buds.

16th A **Black-throated Diver**, 5 **Guillemots**, and 6 **Razorbills** were in Spittal Bay, with 400 **Gannets** passing south in an hour.

18th 6 **Wigeon** and a pair each of **Teal**, **Coot** and **Moorhen** were on Middle Ord pond.

19th 140 **Turnstones**, 4 **Purple Sandpipers** and a **Grey Plover** were on the very high tide at Little Beach. Also 3 **Red-throated Diver** and 3 **Kittiwakes** were seen in the Estuary mouth.

- 20th A pair of **Tufted Ducks** were on Cocklawburn pond.
- 22nd 4 **Ringed Plover** and 6 **Snow Buntings** at Cocklawburn, and 6 **Snow Buntings** (the same flock?) at Spittal Point.
- 23rd 10 **Red-throated Divers** and 7 **Shags** off Berwick Pier. Also 1 **Snow Bunting** at Little Beach.
- 24th 2 **Shelduck** and 2 **Tufted Duck** at Yarrow Slake.
- 25th 11 **Goldeneye** and 4 **Goosanders** were at West Ord, with a **Little Grebe**, 8 **Teal** and 22 **Mallard** on Middle Ord pond.
- 26th A pair of **Shelduck** and 4 **Common Scoters**, 3 **Red-throated Diver** and 10 **Guillemots** were at Cocklawburn while along the coast at Cheswick were 7 **Purple Sandpipers** and 5 **Sanderlings**.
- 27th A visit to the cliffs at Needles Eye found 370 **Kittiwakes**, 64 **Fulmars**, 50 **Guillemots**, 26 **Razorbills**, 4 **Shags** and 24 **Cormorants** on and around the cliffs. A female **Goldeneye** was on the sea.
- 30th 46 **Sanderling**, 110 **Turnstone**, 20 **Purple Sandpipers** in the pile of 'wrack' at high tide on Little Beach, with a pair of **Goldeneye** plus the pair of **Stonechat** which have been here all month. At Tommy-the-Miller's Field 2 **Kestrels** were seen, one hunkered on a branch, the other hovering above. They hunt here regularly, taking advantage of the tussocky grassland and the updraft as SW winds hit the slope.
- 31st 24 **Tree Sparrows** with 8 **Yellowhammers** and 4 **Reed Buntings** on the Waggonway, Borewell. A female **Merlin** launched an attack at birds using a garden feeder near the Tapee Fen.

Elsewhere in the area.

Whooper Swans were notable with 43 at Carham (1st), 32 at Mount Carmel, Norham (2nd) rising to 86 (7th); 29 at Velvet Hall (11th) and 16 at Loanend, Horncliffe (18th). About 500 **Greylag Geese** were at Mount Carmel (2nd) with c.60 **Wigeon** and c.30 **Teal** in a flooded field. 10 **Fieldfare** were at Shoreswood (11th). A superbly camouflaged domed **Long-tailed Tit** nest was spotted low down in shrubs at the Hirsell, Coldstream, on the 26th.

Mammals.

There have been several **Otter** sightings during the month on the Tweed, with a male at Carr Rock fishing on the 3rd and 11th and two others being seen around the Border Viaduct mid-month.

Four **Common Hares** were seen in a group 'boxing', in a cornfield at Borewell, early morning on the 26th.

Fish.

A Pipe Fish (species unknown) was seen floating at the waters edge at Spittal on the 21st

Amphibians.

We have had many reports of breeding **Frogs**, the first in the area from Wooler (3rd) and Beal (7th). 50+ **Toads** were being very vocal and pairing up on the 12th on the footpath at Cocklawburn pond.

Butterflies.

The 22nd saw a **Peacock** in a Riverdene garden. The 25th was a warm still day which tempted hibernating butterflies out, with several **Peacock** at Tommy the Miller's Field and a single **Comma**. A **Small Tortoiseshell** was seen in Hiveacres.

Bees.

Queens and some workers are now out and about, the first local reports being of a Red-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*) on the 3rd and an Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) on the 4th.

With thanks to the contributors of these records, including Malcolm Hutcheson, John Inglis, John Rae, Elizabeth Bamford, Molly Hardie and Philomena Johnston.

We would like to have more records – simple records, longer behaviour or habitat observations, photographs, etc. To submit a wildlife record please phone Malcolm on 01289 309046 or use the record form on our website (www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk/Sightings.html). Sightings here and in our monthly record sheets cover the core of our BWG's area – from the Scottish Border to Scremerston on the East side of the A1. Records on the website cover a wider area (including Eyemouth and Wooler) – we just don't have room for them all here. So send in your records by your chosen method.

NEWS.

The Future of Berwick.

As you will know, several weighty documents with plans for Berwick, including "The Future of Berwick – a Vision and Development Framework" and the "Core Strategy for the Borough of Berwick upon Tweed", have been out for public consultation. BWG do not feel that either the part that wildlife plays in making Berwick such a wonderful place, or the scientific importance of conserving this wildlife (the Estuary and coastline are of international value) have been appreciated by the authors of these reports. We have let them know! Our responses to the documents have been widely circulated. (If you want a copy, just ask us).

Little Beach.

The Group have obtained a grant from the AONB to put up interpretive panels at Little Beach, describing the waders using the beach for feeding and resting and asking visitors to give them peace to do just this. Yes, of course the birds come back after people have gone, but a constant stream of visitors means they may use more energy flying away and returning than they obtain feeding. Little Beach is a link in a chain of feeding-stations on movement and migration routes – every site is important. The panels should be put up this summer, ready for the autumn migration. If you have any comments, or want to offer to help with this project, do please let us know.

Subscriptions. These are due following the AGM (Wednesday May 9th). We are intending to hold the present subscription rates (£8.00 for individuals and £14.00 for more than one person at the same address). Any new members wishing to join now will be paid up until May 2008. We will continue to make modest charges for outside speakers (to cover the costs they often pass on to us) and for publications (to cover paper, ink and binder costs).

Annual General Meeting. This is your chance to tell us (the Committee) how you want the Group run, what you like, what you dislike and what else we need to do. So come along – and also hear all about Alpine Plants from Ron McBeath of Lamberton Alpine Nursery. May 9th, 7.30, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

SURVEYS

One of our aims is to collect as much information as possible on local wildlife (both for our own interest and as a basis for conservation), and also to feed data in to national surveys. Last year's surveyors enjoyed the experience (most have volunteered for more work this year), **so why don't you join us?** Although we would be delighted to have the help of experts, we are equally delighted to help beginners to learn the necessary skills to take part in surveys. Please contact Fiona on 01289 330591 or e-mail mail2@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk if you might like to join in any of these.

Butterfly Transect, Tommy-the-Miller's Field.

This is part of the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, which has monitored changes in the abundance of butterflies since 1976. For further details see www.ukbms.org or buy the report of our 2006 survey (£3.00). To be of value our transect needs to be continued for several years. Counting has already started, but we'd love to have more participants. Surveys are weekly (but with 2 survey groups people only partake every fortnight), between 11.00 and 15.00 on any day with suitable weather conditions.

Butterfly Survey, Cocklawburn. Several butterfly species at the northern limits of their range are now moving further north, mostly along the coast, probably in response to climate change. Cocklawburn Dunes is one of the "hot spot" areas where this phenomenon is beginning to show. Our survey here involves a series of 3 counts led by Malcolm Hutcheson, scheduled for 26th May, 21st July and 1st September.

Bumblebee survey.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust urgently need more information about the abundance and distributions of bumblebees (even the common species, see photo p. 5). Their Beewatch 2007 involves recording species you see in your garden, or when out on a walk. A member of the Trust will be giving us a teach-in day (probably in Berwick), or BBCT will identify species from digital photos. They would also like garden owners to take part in a nest box trial – as soon as possible. Visit http://www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk/nest_boxes.htm (if not on web ask and we will send you a print-out of the web page). We may also have some more formal Bumblebee counts - dates to be arranged.

Red Squirrels.

Red Squirrels in our area are under threat as Greys are invading from both north and south. It is important to know where both species are currently established, so that the Reds (our native squirrel) can be encouraged. Six BWG members have now been trained in squirrel monitoring techniques by Philippa Mitchell and Mark Wilkinson of Save our Squirrels. Permanent transects will be established in Kyloe Woods, and visited in spring and autumn for the next 3 years (dates to be arranged).

Bats.

Bats are protected by law (killing them carries a maximum fine of £5,000 per bat!) but they cannot be protected unless their whereabouts is known. Our bat surveys last year were a great success and also much enjoyed by those who took part. This year we want to build on last year's results with more surveys in Berwick, Spittal and East Ord, and we will also take part in an "emergence" survey (surrounding a building at dusk, to see what might fly out) just outside the town, for which we particularly need

more volunteers. Surveys are mostly for an hour or two around dusk. We have allocated 2 dates to each survey, the second being a fallback date if weather conditions are not right the first evening: May 17/18 and 24/25, June 07/08, 14/15 and 28/29, July 12/13 and 26/27, August 09/10 and 23/24 and September 06/07 and 20/21. A dawn survey is also possible. Various locations.

Adopt-a-Beach.

Beach litter is a problem on a global scale, with major impacts on wildlife, both on the beaches and at sea. Levels of beach litter have doubled in the UK in the last 10 years. Did you know that a crisp bag takes 100 years to break down completely, a plastic bottle never does? The Marine Conservation Society needs help to quantify the type of litter found on our beaches and identify the source so the polluters can be targeted and suitable solutions found. Berwick Wildlife Group hope to survey litter on Little Beach, Berwick (photo below). Of course we will remove the rubbish too! This is not just a litter-pick, but a means of protecting the seas from pollution at source, so do come along. Four surveys a year, dates (probably Sat. mornings) yet to be arranged.

Town Trees.

Berwick, Tweedmouth, Spittal and East Ord form an attractive urban area, with many green spaces and fine trees among the buildings. There has never been a comprehensive tree survey in the towns and we will start one this summer, beginning in Berwick (south of the Tweed in 2008). We will identify, measure and map specimen trees. This is an ideal occupation for fine summer evenings, so why not join us for an instructive and useful evening stroll (7.00pm, 13th, 20th and 27 June and 4th July), various locations in Berwick.

SPRING PHOTOS



Little Beach, Berwick



Peacock Butterfly by Elizabeth



Common White-tailed Bumblebee



10-spot Ladybird in a Blackthorn flower

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

As well as the surveys described above, we have arranged the following:

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. Please come along to this – **you** need to tell **us** what you want us to do!

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

- Sunday 8th. **Border Green Festival**, Mill Farm, Tweedmouth. "Thinking a bit about changing the way we live and about having some fun at the same time". BWG will have a stall, among many others – do come along.
- Saturday 14th. **Boat trip to the Farne Islands**, including guided walk on Inner Farne. Afternoon (2½ to 3 hours). Cost varies according to numbers, but will probably be about £12.00 for boat trip, plus £5.40 landing fees for Inner Farne (free to NT and NTS members). There is still (just) time to book, so if you would like to come please let us know as soon as possible (see below).

August 2007

- Sat. 11th. **Visit to Ford Moss**, a lowland raised peat bog which is a Northumberland Wildlife Trust Reserve and of international importance, with Duncan Hutt, NWT Estates Manager. Parking limited so car-sharing advised. Meet at entrance to Ford Moss (NT 962 377, on unclassified road between Ford Common and Kimmerston) at 11.00 a.m.

Want to know more? We'd love to see you at the surveys and events above – the more help and support we have the better. Or maybe you are the sort of person who prefers to go out by yourself and watch fauna and flora in peace and quiet? Lots of us do! Either way, why not send us some of your records or photos, or take part in a **bee or butterfly survey in your own garden** or favourite patch (we have record sheets). Berwick is Brilliant for Wildlife – lets keep it that way. The more we know about the local plants and animals, the better the chance we have of effective protection and conservation.

Contact us. Look at our website www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk, phone 01289 330591, e-mail mail2@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk or just come to an event (non-members very welcome).