

# Berwick Wildlife Group

[www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk)



## Newsletter: October-November-December 2008

### WILDLIFE REPORTS FOR DECEMBER

#### Weather.

The last month of the year was fairly quiet and cold. Snow came on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and hung around for a few days. The 13<sup>th</sup> brought rain and milder temperatures with a maximum of 10°C (50°F) for the next two days. A huge high pressure area built up from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the month's end with quiet days, mostly overcast with brief glimpses of the sun. Frosts occurred on 15 nights with the lowest temperature on the 1<sup>st</sup> being -4.5°C (23.9°F). Total rainfall for the month was 74mm (3.1 ins.)

The total rainfall for the year was 997mm (39.3 ins), making it the wettest of the last five years. (In 2004 we had 865mm (34.1 ins); in 2005 856mm (33.7 ins); in 2006 575mm (22.6 ins) and in 2007 646mm (25.8 ins)).

#### Birds.

This month showed a notable lack of winter visitors like Brambling and Siskin, but it was a prime time for garden feeders and some surprises were found at sites of the second season of the Winter Atlas survey. Some high wader numbers were recorded.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> a **Blackcap** visited a bird feeder in East Ord. 17 **Tufted Duck**, 2 **Wigeon** and 4 **Little Grebe** were on Cocklawburn pond (3<sup>rd</sup>), 34 **Golden Plover** were in the coastal fields and 9 **Whooper Swans** flew over north, with 24 **Pink-footed Geese** flying in the opposite direction. Also on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 12 **Eiders**, 5 **Red-breasted Merganser** and a **Red-throated Diver** were in Meadow Haven, with a pair of **Stonechat** on Little Beach. 15 **Grey Herons**, 54 **Goldeneye**, 73 **Greylag Geese** and 11 **Canada Geese** were on Yarrow Slake (7<sup>th</sup>), with a **Green Woodpecker** at Mill Farm. This bird has been seen in this area on several occasions since. Waders on Little Beach included 94 **Ringed Plover**, 160 **Dunlin**, 130 **Sanderling**, 2 **Grey Plover**, 7 **Bar-tailed Godwits** and 24 **Carrion Crows**. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, 20 **Goldeneye** and 4 **Eiders** were in Tweedmouth Dock, and 2 **Magpies** and 4 **Goldcrests** were seen at Yard Heads. 58 **Greylag Geese**, 10 **Canada Geese** and 36 **Redshank** were at Yarrow Slake, and that day a pair of **Gadwall** appeared at Cocklawburn pond and stayed until the 15<sup>th</sup>, a rare duck in North Northumberland.

The estuary WeBS count (12<sup>th</sup>) recorded 4 **Little Grebe**, 2 **Shag**, 27 **Mute Swans**, 136 **Mallard**, 114 **Goldeneye**, 6 **Red-breasted Merganser**, 8 **Goosander**, 220 **Lapwing**, 110 **Redshank**, 11 **Turnstone** and 54 **Great Black-backed Gulls**. A pair of **Bullfinches** were at Toddles Shiel, and a **Redwing** in a garden at East Ord. On the 13<sup>th</sup> a male **Blackcap** visited a feeder in Riverdene, and a **Goldcrest** was seen at a fat-feeder in Castle Terrace, with a **Nuthatch** in the tree below. 6 **Siskin** were on feeders in Hiveacres (15<sup>th</sup>) and a pair were seen in East Ord, and another **Goldcrest** in Castle Terrace. 2 **Waxwings** were seen at Highfield (16<sup>th</sup>). 10 **Eiders** and 2 **Grey Plover** were at Dodds Well (17<sup>th</sup>), with 7 **Bar-tailed Godwits** and 5 **Sanderling** in Fishermans' Cove, and 54 **Pink-footed Geese** flew south overhead. 10 **Red-breasted Merganser** were at the Estuary mouth and 7 **Sanderling** were on Sanstell Point dodging the 'doggie-walkers'.

A goose movement in the early morning at Cocklawburn (19<sup>th</sup>) saw 300 **Pink-footed Geese** flying west up the Tweed Valley with another 130 flying north. A **Red-throated Diver** was offshore with 120 **Eiders** and 130 **Oystercatchers**. 5 **Long-tailed Tits** were spotted at Mill Farm on the 20<sup>th</sup>, while a **Green Woodpecker** and about 25 **Tree Sparrows** were near the sewage farm. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, 160 **Mallard** squeezed into Middle Ord pond with 38 **Teal** and 6 **Wigeon**. Two **Whooper Swans** were at West Ord. 2 **Sparrow Hawks** circled over the Station (22<sup>nd</sup>) and 72 **Goldfinches** visited feeders in Hiveacres, while 12 **Grey Partridges**, 3 **Song Thrushes** and 14 **Goldfinches** were at Cocklawburn. 264 **Lapwing** were here on the 24<sup>th</sup> with a single **Fieldfare**, and 7 **Purple Sandpiper** and 22 **Turnstone** on the shore.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> a **Red-necked Grebe** was near the Old Bridge and a **Peregrine** on the Royal Border Bridge. 54 **Oystercatcher** were on the Golf Course (27<sup>th</sup>) with 4 **Ringed Plover**, and a **Brambling** visited the feeders at Hiveacres. 42 **Curlew**, 4 **Grey Plover** and the first return **Fulmar** were at Cocklawburn (29<sup>th</sup>), and about 45 **Goldeneye** were in Tweedmouth Dock. Garden feeders produced a **Goldcrest** at Castle Drive (30<sup>th</sup>) and a female **Blackcap** at Hiveacres. A flock of 55 **Chaffinches** were at Billylaw, with 18 **Goosander** on the Tweed at West Ord and a **Sparrow Hawk** at Yarrow Slake. About 180 **Greylag Geese** were heading south over Tweedmouth. A **Treecreeper** appeared at Hiveacres (31<sup>st</sup>). That day, a high tide count on Little Beach saw 270 **Oystercatchers**, 23 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, 62 **Curlew**, 13 **Grey Plover**, 160 **Dunlin**, 70 **Ringed Plover** and 35 **Sanderling**. A large evening Gull roost on the Estuary contained 1,700 **Black-headed Gulls** and 330 **Common Gulls**.

**Elsewhere.** 3 **Long tailed Duck** were at Cheswick (3<sup>rd</sup>). 24 **Tufted Duck** and 6 **Goldeneye** were on Oxford pools (14<sup>th</sup>). 136 **Whooper Swans** were at Mount Carmel, Norham (21<sup>st</sup>) with 36 **Greylag Geese**. Also on the 21<sup>st</sup>, 2m and 1f **Long-tailed Duck** were off Bamburgh Beach. 120 **Ringed Plover** were at Cheswick Black Rocks (22<sup>nd</sup>) with 5 **Dunlin** and 7 **Purple Sandpiper**; 16 **Grey Partridge** and 160 **Linnet** were in the dunes. On the 29<sup>th</sup> 54 **Common Scoter** fed offshore here.

**Winter Atlas survey.** The best sightings this month were **Pink-footed Goose**, **Tufted Duck**, **Grey Partridge**, **Buzzard**, **Bullfinch** and **Reed Bunting** at Oxford and **Tufted Duck**, **Coot**, **Raven**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Bullfinch** and **Lesser Redpoll** at Old Dryburn, near Lowick.

**Mammals.** A **Stoat** was seen to attack a Sparrow Hawk on the ground with Blackbird prey at Cocklawburn (3<sup>rd</sup>). It had 'second thoughts' when the bird opened its wings and gave a repeated warning call! 2 **Harbour Porpoises** were seen close to shore (27<sup>th</sup>) at Spittal.

**Lepidoptera.** **Winter Moths** were attracted to a kitchen window in Eyemouth, single insects on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. An **Angled Shades Moth** (I think, see picture below) caterpillar emerged from an indoor Gerbera plant mid-month, and once provided with dry, friable compost went into hibernation below the "soil" surface.

**Plants.** On 8<sup>th</sup> December a **Celandine** was in full flower beside the New Road.

With many thanks to the recording team, who would like to wish you all a Happy New Year.

Anyone can submit records, so please do so. They are useful to us and are also sent to other wildlife organisations. They don't have to be of unusual species – notes on common creatures doing interesting things are equally valuable. Phone 01289 309046, or use our webpage <http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk/Sightings.html> or e-mail [mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](mailto:mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk) .

**PHOTOS.**



Female Eider by Colin Green



Winter Moth by Barry Prater



Angled Shades Moth (?) caterpillar by Maurice



Palas's Cat – see below (photo from Wikimedia)

**LARGER THAN THE AVERAGE MOGGY.**

On Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> December we were treated to a fascinating glimpse into the world of big cats through a talk by Richard Wales. Richard is currently Red Squirrel Project Officer for South Scotland, but until recently worked with large cats, mostly in South Africa.

Richard began by outlining the variety of cats on our planet. The true big cats are all able to roar, but unable to purr on the inhale like domestic cats. Lions are the only sociable big-cat species, co-operating in hunting which enables them to tackle really large prey. The provision of a calorie-dense meal does not normally take long so lions average 21 hours sleep a day. Leopards are solitary animals, good climbers, extremely strong and very adaptable. Snow Leopards, from the mountains of Asia, are a different species. Tiger numbers are being decimated by use of tiger bones in Chinese medicine, and habitat loss. Jaguars are the only New World big cat. They have the most powerful bite of any cat species, giving them the ability to crush skulls but also dental problems as they sometimes break their teeth. Black panthers are black jaguars, carrying a double dose of the recessive melanistic gene.

In addition to the big cats, there are medium-sized cats – such as the caracal (African lynx), puma, serval, ocelot and lynx. Most of these are also endangered. Indeed the trade in ocelot pelts is still legal, not because the animals are so plentiful, but because no-one knows how many remain so no protection laws can be drafted. Small cats include the European wild cat, the black-footed cat, the jungle cat, the domestic cat and Palas's cat which is unique among cats in having round pupils (see above).

Cheetahs are also cats, but in a separate sub-family of their own. The fastest land animal, they are able to go from a standstill to 70 mph. in only 2 seconds. They run down their prey, but as they are able to keep up their phenomenal speed for only about 600m they are exhausted and vulnerable when they have finally caught their meal.

Richard's wonderful slides showed all these animals, but the most amazing shot was of him sitting on a sofa beside a fully-grown cheetah (an orphaned cub which he had reared). He also discussed ways of estimating the populations of cats: camera traps; foot-print identification; photographing faces (to record unique whisker-spot patterns); playing recordings of challenge calls; radio telemetry and so on. As people encroach more and more onto the cats' territories it is vital to monitor the remaining populations accurately. There are more big cats in captivity in America (where the laws on keeping dangerous wild animals are lax) than in the wild. Without accurate counts, effective conservation laws and the means of enforcing them, many groups of these magnificent animals will soon be extinct.

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS.**

### **★ ★ WEDNESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY. BERWICK IS BRILLIANT FOR WILDLIFE EVENT ★ ★**

A display to consolidate and show off BWG's work in 2008, plan for 2009 and especially to celebrate our wonderful local wildlife. **7.30pm.** Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL. Refreshments. Last year this event was great fun – and it's free!

**★ ★ Please come, and bring anyone you think might be interested. ★ ★**

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February (or if weather v. bad, 21<sup>st</sup> February). Wader and wildfowl Survey.** Berwick Wildlife Group's annual assessment of wildfowl and waders on the coast and estuary. Meet at Tweedmouth end of Old Bridge, Berwick, **10.00 am.** Wear warm, waterproof clothing and sensible boots or shoes (can include cliff-top walk).

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February. "Putting Berwick on the Geological Map".** An illustrated talk by Ian Kille of Northumbrian Earth. **7.30pm.** Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL.

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March.** An illustrated talk on "**Scenery and flora in the Western Cape of South Africa**" by Gill Young. **7.30pm.** Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL.

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1.30pm. Lichen/moss walk** with Dr. Janet Simkin of the University of Newcastle. Venue to be arranged (probably local churchyard).

**Sunday April 19th. Walk with Berwick Save our Squirrels Group** in Detchant wood looking for signs of squirrels. Meet at **1.30 pm** at entrance to the wood opposite bungalow called Detchant Park, on minor road between Detchant and Fenwick (NU 082 373). Limited parking (car share if possible). Probably muddy - wear boots or wellies.

**Members and non-members are welcome at all these events.** Many are free to members, but non-members may 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. No charge is made for children, but they must be accompanied by an adult.

**Want to know more?** Look at our website [www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk) , phone 01289 330591, e-mail [mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](mailto:mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk) , or just come along to one of our events. Group members do not need special skills or knowledge, just an interest in the environment. The fee is only £8.00 per year for individuals, £14.00 for families at the same address. Send fee with your name and address to The Treasurer, Berwick Wildlife Group, 5 Springfield Park, East Ord, Berwick-upon-Tweed, TD15 2FD.