

Berwick Wildlife Group

www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk



Newsletter: July-August-September 2006

RECORDS

BIRDS

The Summer months are usually a quiet period for birds when they fall into the moult or are rearing second broods of young.

July started with a large flock of 150 **Swifts** on 2nd, hunting low over the corn fields at Middle Ord, and between 3rd and 5th 3 **Black-tailed Godwits** were feeding on the Slake. On the 10th a pair of **Yellow Wagtails** were found at Needles Eye and a single **Sandpiper** at Toddles Shiel. The count on the estuary on the 15th, recorded 510 **Mute Swans** gathering for their moult here along with 9 **Greylag Geese**, 2 late or locally breeding **Wigeon** and a **Whimbrel**. 17 **Guillemots** and 2 **Razorbill** were in Spittal Bay (17th) and 2 **Puffins** and 82 **Goosanders** (18th) - part of an increasing moult flock in the Bay. Also on the 17th there were 2 **Black-tailed Godwits** at Yarrow Slake, and between 19th and 26th it was visited by 2 **Little Egrets**, the first on the Tweed for 30 years. **Little Egrets** have been spreading rapidly northwards over the last decade with increasing numbers breeding in Southern England. Also at the 'Slake' were 2 **Dunlin** (19th), a hunting **Peregrine** (21st) and a **Yellow Wagtail** (24th). 4 **Sandpipers** were seen by the sewage outfall on the 26th. A pair of **Stock Doves** and 6 **Tree Sparrows** were found at Marshall Meadows on 28th. The gull roost at the Calot Shad at the estuary mouth held 220 **Kittiwakes** and 12 **Sandwich Terns** on the 31st, and the same day in Spittal Bay 4 **Arctic Terns** and an **Arctic Skua** were seen and there was a **Peregrine** over the Border Bridge.

August began with strong winds and high tides. In a northerly gale on the 2nd 630 **Kittiwakes** were recorded in an hour flying into the wind over Spittal Bay, along with 6 **Arctic Terns**, while at Cocklawburn were a male **Pied Flycatcher** and 2 **Sedge Warblers**. **Mute Swans** peaked at 583 birds on the estuary count on the 11th. This is an increase on last year's figure, showing the importance of the Tweed for moulting Mute Swans from Northern England and Southern Scotland as a safe refuge when they cannot fly. We hope 'the developers' of the proposed Marina in the estuary will bear this in mind when they plan to introduce many more small craft into the estuary at the peak of the moulting season. Also in the count were 58 **Greylag Geese**, 6 **Canada Geese**, 28 **Grey Herons**, a **Little Egret**, 102 **Goosanders**, 6 **Common Terns** and 16 **Sandwich Terns**. Another 'blow' on the 14th recorded 3 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 8 **Arctic Terns** and 3 **Little Terns** in Spittal Bay. Two **Manx Shearwaters**, a **Great Skua** and 2 **Common Terns** were off the Pier the next day, and the rough weather brought early returning waders back to Little Beach with 62 **Turnstones**, 34 **Ringed Plover**, 18 **Dunlin**, 3 **Sanderling** and 82 **Oystercatchers** (all on the 15th). The moult flock of **Goosander** in Spittal Bay rose to 116 on the 16th, and with 106 in the Tweed estuary the same day takes the area above the Great Britain threshold of national importance for the species. A **Little Egret** was around the New Water Haugh

area between 11th and 22nd. Also on the 22nd at Yarrow Slake were 73 **Greylag** and 10 **Canada Geese**, numbers rising to 82 and 32 respectively by the 24th - unusual numbers for the estuary, along with 58 **Goosander**, a **Greenshank** and a **Common Sandpiper**, and 30+ **Golden Plover** at Cocklawburn.

Other birds in the area included 160 **Swifts** over Tweedmouth on the 5th, but all had left the Berwick area by the 15th. A young male **Peregrine** was in our area from 9th to 27th, causing panic to the waders and gulls (perhaps a cure here to a local problem!!). A **Quail** was heard on Halidon Hill (7th) and a family group of **Stonechats** frequented the railway bank at Spittal all month. There was a **Pied Flycatcher** at Sea House, Scremerston on the 22nd, a **Nuthatch** (23rd) in an East Ord garden, and an **Osprey** flying fairly low over Tweedmouth on same day. On the 29th there was a **Buzzard** over Mill Farm, on the 30th 3 **Wheatears** and about 40 **Twite** at Cocklawburn. On the 31st a count of **House Martin** nests on the Royal Border Bridge recorded 86, a big drop from 2005 when there were 129.

September was still warm and started an 'Indian Summer' situation, which lasted throughout the month. Migrants continued to arrive, with 2 **Wheatears** on the 5th at Little Beach, and 59 **Greylag Geese**, 4 **Canada Geese** and 1 Hybrid at Yarrow Slake on the 9th. The monthly estuary count on the 11th, recorded 172 **Greylag Geese**, 2 **Pochard** drakes, 74 **Goosanders**, 33 **Grey Herons**, 1770 **Lapwings** and 218 **Redshanks**. On the 12th 84 **Arctic Terns** and 50 **Sandwich Terns** formed a large feeding flock off the Coastwatch Station and 4 **Common Snipe** and 45 **Pied Wagtails** were at Little Beach feeding among the seaweed, with a further 4 **Wheatears** and 130 **Ringed Plovers** there on the 15th. At Yarrow Slake there were 23 **Teal** and 4 **Dunlin** on the 16th, and at Cocklawburn on the 20th 4 **Ruff** were sighted. Little Beach held 8 **Bar-tailed Godwits** and 1 **Wheatear** on the 21st. 9 **Teal** were at Yarrow Slake on the 23rd. On the 26th 2 **Grey Plovers** were at Little Beach, with 3 **Red-throated Divers** and 9 **Wigeon** at the Estuary mouth. By the 27th 9 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, 24 **Twite** and a roosting flock of 68 **Kittiwakes** were recorded at the Estuary mouth with 3 **Snipe** and a **Ruff** at Yarrow Slake. On the 29th 9 **Guillemots** and 2 **Razorbill** were at the Estuary mouth. Our local Auk population is obviously suffering from a lack of food as two weak **Guillemots** 'hailed out' onto the Lifeboat Station ramp to roost briefly. Many birds have been seen feeding close inshore all along the Northumbrian coast.

By the 22nd the last **House Martins** had flown south. Some exciting migrant finds included a **Pied Flycatcher** and 2 **Chiffchaffs** at Pier House(26th). A immature male **Peregrine** was in our area all month. It was seen attempting to catch a **Ringed Plover**(27th) over Little Beach, making at least six unsuccessful 'stoops' at it in the air. At Sea House, Scremerston, were a **Spotted Flycatcher** and 2 **Chiffchaffs** (16th), a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** with a **Willow Warbler** (27th) and 2 **Chiffchaffs** and 2 **Goldcrests** (29th). This is only the third published record of Red-breasted Flycatcher in our area.

MAMMALS

A family of young **Stoats** performed their 'train action' when they were seen running around, in nose to tail formation at the foot of the wall of the coastal footpath at Sea House on 25th August.

A rare dolphin, a young **White-beaked Dolphin** was washed up in Greenses Bay on 24th June. Despite efforts to save it, it died later that day. The corpse was sent to the Natural History Museum for an autopsy. Two **Harbour Porpoises** were seen regularly in Spittal Bay during late August and early September.

REPTILES

A pregnant female **Common Lizard** was recorded near the coast south of Berwick on 11th August. A very unusual and encouraging record. Do please send us any other reptile records.

INSECTS

Butterflies



Comma by Elizabeth

The teams recording on our Butterfly Transects at Tommy the Millers Field did well recording 1472 individuals of 13 species (see under Surveys p5 below).

Elsewhere, one lucky member found a rare **Camberwell Beauty**, briefly on a buddleja bush in their Palace Road garden on the 6th July. New records for our area include **Small Skipper** at Spittal cliffs and Cocklawburn in August, **Comma** records from Paxton House, Askew's Walk and East Ord and several 'new' tetrad records for the **Wall**

butterfly which is expanding its range. Their stronghold seems to be around Scremerston and Spittal with eleven seen on 25th August along the 'waggonway' from Spittal to Scremerston and around Borewell Farm. The **Grayling** was recorded in two new sites around their traditional Cocklawburn site, while the **Dark Green Fritillary** continues to spread northwards with three more new tetrads north of the Tweed. It has been a good year for the migrant butterflies with plenty of **Peacocks**, **Red Admirals** and **Painted Ladies**, although the **Small Tortoiseshell** is still a little scarce. The **Common Blue**, **Small Copper**, **Meadow Brown** and **Ringlet** have all done well, particularly along the coast.

Moths

It's been an outstanding year for migrant **Silver-'Y' Moths** with 'thousands' appearing along the coastal sites in August. Many records of **Humming-bird Hawk-moths** have been received with several individuals staying for many days in favoured gardens. Favoured nectar plants include hedging Fuchsia, Buddleja, Valerian, herbaceous Aster and *Verbena bonariensis*, all good butterfly plants.

PLANTS

Two "alien" weeds have been reported from Berwick Quayside. One, growing in cracks in the paving around the Chandlery is **Alsike Clover**, *Trifolium hybridum*, introduced from Europe and commonly naturalised. This was first reported on 6th July, and a new plant had appeared on 13th September, when another introduced plant was found where the electricity building and lobster shed once stood.



Alsike Clover

This is *Melilotus altissimus*, **Tall Melilot** (although in this thin soil it is not very tall). It's another plant of the pea family, with elongated racemes (long heads rather than the round heads of the clover) of bright yellow flowers, also a native of mainland Europe.

With many thanks to the contributors of these records, including Malcolm Hutcheson, John Inglis, Elizabeth Bamford, John Rae, Mic Mclaughlin and Molly Hardie. 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 cover the core of our "Wildlife Group" 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.

SQUIRRELS

Red squirrels are Britain's only native squirrel. Here in the North East they are still familiar and much loved. Northumberland remains a stronghold, but the grey is invading from north and south. Recently there have been reports of grey squirrels on the outskirts of Berwick both north and south of the River Tweed. So this is the time to draw attention to the plight of the red squirrel which has all but vanished from the rest of the country where the North American grey squirrel now dominates.

There are 20-30 thousand red squirrels in England, three quarters of them are in our county. What can you do to help save the red squirrel? Easy, just report to us (or direct to Red Alert Northeast via Northumberland Wildlife Trust) when and where you see a squirrel, red or grey. Berwick Wildlife Group are helping Northumberland Wildlife Trust in making an up to date map of where squirrels can be seen in our region. Squirrels can be confusing to distinguish especially if they are young squirrels. Red squirrels are smaller, have tufted ears and their tails are one colour all over. They are slender in the body, are shy and spend a lot of time in the trees. Grey squirrels are larger and never have tufted ears. They are stockily built, are bold and are very often seen on the ground. So enter your sightings on our website, send an email to mail@northwt.org.uk. or telephone us on 01289 330591. Go on make a difference!

NEWS

BWG members have had an extremely active summer including some not-to-be-forgotten outings.

Holy Island was visited on 15th July, where the Lindisfarne Heleborine and Dark Green Fritillaries dutifully appeared (among a plethora of other plants and insects) on a day of sparkling sunshine.

A Butterfly Walk at Cocklawburn was arranged for Butterfly Week, and we were able to see seven species of butterfly, several species of moth and a selection of other insects and colourful plants.

Our visit to Whinney Hill Farm near Longhorsley took place on 30th September in beautiful sunny weather. We were privileged to see a place where wildlife conservation has been wonderfully integrated into a working farm by David Wood, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of wildlife and an outstanding ability to manage habitats.

Our Round Robin bird watch was the final outing of the season (7th October), beginning and ending at the Rose Garden in Berwick, where migrants encountered included late Scottish swallows and stonechats.

SURVEYS

Our study of Bats (ably led by Leslie) occupied several evenings in June, July and August listening and looking around the Ravensdowne area of Berwick, and a visit to Spittal near the Spa Well. Several colonies of Pipistrelles have been identified, and the report of the Spa Well survey is now on our website. There may be a chance to check out an English Heritage site for winter roosts, and we will continue the survey next summer. The report on the Spa Well area can be seen on our website.

Flower-rich road verges. Four areas of verge were examined in detail (near Berrington, Lickar Dean, Roughting Linn and Kyloe), revealing between 41 and 79 species on each (short) stretch of verge, including many that are declining nationally, such as Cuckoo Flower, Wild Angelica, Marsh Thistle, Yellow Rattle, Hemp Agrimony, Twayblade and Marsh Valerian. Do you know of any other areas of flower-rich verge locally? We'd really like to know. Our report can be viewed on the website or a paper copy obtained.

Butterfly Survey, Tommy the Miller's Field. This was our main survey this year, the complex logistics being organised by Elizabeth. During the 24 weekly counts we logged 1,472 individual butterflies of 13 species. I'd like to say a big "Thank you" to all the recorders, who were ready to go out at short notice of a "good butterfly day", traversed a very steep, rough and nettle-infested trail and who (after the first two weeks when it was too cold to record) never missed a single week's recording. A sterling effort – thank you all so much. The results (painstakingly and cleverly worked up by John) are now on our website. Thank you also to those who submitted regular records of garden butterflies and casual sightings of rarities. All data will be sent to Butterfly Conservation.

Surveys Proposed for Next Year.

- Estuary and Seabird Survey - A continuation of the group's annual survey to gather data on important areas for wintering waders, wildfowl and seabirds around Berwick. February 2007.
- Coastal Seabird Low Tide Counts - surveys to gather data on the numbers of wintering waders, wildfowl and seabirds around Berwick. December 2006 to January 2007.
- Continuation of this year's survey of the bats to be found in and around Berwick. Summer 2007.
- Continuation of this year's very successful survey of the butterflies of Tommy-the-Miller's Field and the adjacent New Road taking place weekly April to October 2007.
- A new survey of the butterflies to be found at Cocklawburn taking place weekly April to October 2007.
- A new survey of the bumblebees to be found at Cocklawburn taking place weekly April to October 2007.
- A new survey of the flora to be found at Cocklawburn taking place in June and July 2007.
- A new survey on dragonflies. Details to be finalised.

We are a friendly group and this year's surveyors reported that they have enjoyed logging useful data, learnt many interesting facts and had fun! Remember, although we would be delighted to have the help of any experts, we are equally delighted to help beginners to learn the necessary skills to take part in surveys. Please contact Fiona (01289 330591 or via mail2@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk) if you would like to join in.

WINTER PROGRAMME.

Our winter series of indoor and outdoor activities begins shortly, and we already have plans for next summer. Do come along and bring your friends and family. Non-members are very welcome, although there may be a small charge. Info: 01289 330591.

November

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

December

- December/January. Low tide bird counts on coast. Details to be arranged.
- Wed 20th Committee meeting, 7.00, Castle, Berwick

January 2007

- Wed 10th Talk by Ann Middleditch from 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)
- Wed 14th – talk by Steve Betts, local Bat recorder, on Bats. 7.30, Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

March 2007

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

April 2007

- Sat 14th. In Search of Dippers. 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 May, 2.0pm. Guided walk at Paxton House. Tree management, wildlife and (with luck) red squirrels. Special reduced entrance fee (£2.50 each) negotiated for Group members!
- Wed 9th May, 7.30 pm. – AGM, followed by talk by Ron McBeath of Lamberton Alpine Nursery. Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal.

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.

