

Berwick Wildlife Group

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Monthly Review August 2008

WILDLIFE REPORTS

Weather. August started by being exceptionally wet with 32mm (1.25 ") of rain falling overnight on the 1st. The month went by under the influence of Atlantic low pressure areas coming in a regular pattern from the west, more akin to winter. This gave us spells of calm mild days followed by days with heavy downpours, as overnight on the 13th when 22mm (0.85") fell and on the 21st and 31st with 16mm (0.6"). Altogether it was a very dull month with not many days of sunshine and a total rainfall of 190mm (7.4"), contrasting with the last two years in which August was exceptionally dry. Temperatures did not vary much throughout the month with the warmest day (28th) reaching 23°C (74°F).

Birds The first signs of Autumn migration occurred this month, with the Swifts leaving town (9th) on cue and the first returning northern chats, waders and raptors being seen, along with a constant stream of hirundines and warblers.

A family of **Willow Warblers** frequented gardens in Hiveacres (2nd), with a **Little Grebe** on Middle Ord pond (3rd) and a migrant group of 260 **Common Gulls** in the fields there. On the 4th a juvenile **Green Woodpecker** was spotted in Castle Terrace – it returned several times in the month. High tide on the 10th brought 138 **Redshanks** to roost on Union Bridge with 7 **Canada Geese**, 6 **Greylag Geese** and a **Greenshank** at Yarrow Slake. The same day on Little Beach were 22 **Ringed Plover**, 3 **Dunlin** and 27 **Turnstone**, while down the coast at Cocklawburn was a **Ruff** in a flooded field with 700 **Starlings**, 2 **Wheatears** and a **Buzzard**. A migrant immature **Marsh Harrier** was seen moving south. The **Ruff** was still there the following day (11th) with 310 **Lapwing** and 4 **Teal**. 56 **Mute Swans** were feeding in Meadow Haven, with 16 **Sandwich Terns** roosting on Little Beach. The **Ruff** moved to another flooded field at Red Cottage, Scremerston (13th) and went back to Cocklawburn for its final day (14th), where a **Kingfisher** was seen flying along the shore, probably displaced out of the Tweed, which was in full flood. The same day 5 **Wheatears** were seen and 40 **Common Scoters** offshore, 6 **Swifts** moved south over East Ord, and a **Black tailed Godwit** was found at Little Beach. An immature **Green Woodpecker** was seen and heard at Castle Hills (15th) – no doubt the one around Castle Terrace all month. Up the Tweed were 2 **Green Sandpipers**, 3 **Greenshank** and 55 **Graylag Geese** at Yarrow Slake.

4 **Swifts** flew south over Billylaw (17th), with 10 **Goosanders** and 4 **Tufted Ducks** at New Water Haugh. The same day a **Snipe** broke cover from a damp slack at Cocklawburn. A pair of **Sedge Warblers** were feeding newly fledged young (18th) at Cocklawburn where a flock of 70 **Goldfinches** had gathered. A late **Swift** was flying around Main Street, Tweedmouth (21st) while on the estuary gull roost were 42 **Great Black-backed Gulls**, 8 **Arctic Terns** and 12 **Goosanders**. A good movement of waders occurred at Little Beach (22nd) with 12 **Ringed Plover**, 26 **Sanderling**, 54 **Dunlin**, 2 **Knot**, 2 **Curlew Sandpipers**, a **Ruff** and a **Purple Sandpiper**. An unusual occurrence of 17 **Buzzards** was seen, the birds in a high spiral over Cocklawburn (24th), moving in off the sea. Where did they come from.... Germany, Scandinavia, or had they drifted down the Tweed and out over the sea on this lovely still summer morning? Nevertheless it was a good start to our Butterfly Week walk.

(more of that later). The 7 **Canada Geese** were still at New Water Haugh (25th) with 6 **Tufted Ducks** and 22 **Goosander**. A **Chiffchaff** was calling at the Sewage Works.

On the 26th, a female **Goosander** was near the Old Bridge, and at least 60 **Redshank** were roosting under the Royal Tweed Bridge. **Canada Goose** numbers rose to 11 at Yarrow Slake (27th). A late **Swift** was over East Ord (28th) with 14 **Cormorants** and 23 **Shags** on the Meadow Haven roost at high tide, and an immature **Yellow Wagtail** and a **Wheatear** were on Little Beach. The same day 3 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, 2 **Sanderlings** and 22 **Sandwich Terns** were roosting on the beach at Cocklawburn. 4 **Common Snipe** were found at Yarrow Slake (30th) and 2 **Purple Sandpipers** were on Little Beach.

Elsewhere. A female **Stonechat** was found at Old Dryburn, near Lowick (4th). 280 **Lapwing**, 6 **Long-tailed Tits** and a **Jay** were seen at Newbiggin, Norham (5th), and the same day 2 **Peregrines** at Blakey Heugh (S of Eyemouth) and also a **Whimbrel** there. The 10th saw the last **Swift** of the year at Reston and 76 **Ringed Plovers**, 5 **Sanderling** and 2 **Wheatears** were at Black Rocks, Cheswick with an **Arctic Skua** seen offshore. There was a **Kingfisher** beside the hide at Low Newton on the 13th, and a **Dipper** at the mouth of the Eye (in spate) on the 14th. 26 **Common Scoters** and 2 **Arctic Terns** were seen at Cheswick Black Rocks, also on the 14th. At Cheswick Black Rocks on the 18th were a **Whimbrel** and 7 **Bar-tailed Godwits**, with 7 **Shelducks** and 4 **Teal** flying south.

Butterflies. It's been a good month for Large and Small Whites, Meadow Brown, Peacock and Red Admiral. Green veined White and Small Tortoiseshell remain scarce. Common Blue and Small Copper have been seen along the coast.

Wall Brown have been recorded at Low Newton (13th), Cheswick and Cocklawburn, and along the coast to Coldingham, with a late record coming from Mill Farm, Tweedmouth. 2 **Grayling**, very scarce this year, were recorded between Eyemouth and Burnmouth throughout the month, at Ross Links on 14th and at Cheswick (24th). **Commas** have been seen around Tweedmouth (16th & 27th), Berwick (23rd), East Ord, Coldingham (23rd), Eyemouth (29th) and at Scremerston, a large increase over the last three years. On the 19th a late **Northern Brown Argus** was still on the wing at Blaikie Heugh. **Small Coppers** were abundant at Ross Links (14th) and in small numbers on the butterfly transects at Tommy-the-Millers (23rd) and Cocklawburn (29th). Single **Painted Ladies** were recorded at East Ord (24th and 25th) and Yarrow Haugh (27th – a new tetrad).

Our Group visit to Cocklawburn (24th) recorded 16 species including 2 late **Common Blues**, 6 **Small Coppers** and 4 **Wall Browns**, along with good numbers of 'Whites', **Peacocks**, **Red Admirals** and **Meadow Browns**. An excellent outing.

Moths. 2 **Humming-bird Hawkmoths** were in a Tweedmouth garden on the 27th.

Marine species. At Cove Haven, Holy Island, the following were recorded in the intertidal zone during spring tides: on 2nd, 3 Sea Hares, 1 Bootlace Worm, 2 Purple Henry Starfish, 1 Common Starfish, Breadcrumb Sponge, Broad-clawed Porcelain Crabs, Hermit Crabs, 2 dead Velvet Swimming Crabs, 2 Brittle Starfish; on 3rd, Worm Pipefish, Common Brittle Stars, Common Starfish, 3 Purple Urchins, 2 Purple Henry Starfish, 1 Butterfish, carcass of Lumpfish, 3 Squat Lobsters, 1 Moon Jellyfish, Long-clawed Porcelain Crabs; on 5th, 1 Sea Lemon, 2 Purple Urchins.

Plants. **Flat Sedge**, *Blismus compressus*, at Cocklawburn, 17th, NU 033 481 (see below).

Thank you very much everyone who sent in wildlife records. Please send us new records and photos. E-mail mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk or phone 01289 309046.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thursday 11th September (if 11th wet/windy, 12th). Bat Survey, The Avenue/Palace Street. A return visit to compare bats' feeding patterns with 2006 results. Meet at Palace Green at **8.00pm**.

Sunday September 14th . Squirrels in the Forest. A walk in Kylee Woods with Head Forester Ian Robinson + SoS Conservation Officer Mark Wilkinson. Walk lasting about 2½ hours. No charge, but collection for Scottish Woodlands Trust and Save our Squirrels. Meet at East entrance to Kylee Woods near Blawearie Cottages, about 1 mile S of Fenwick (NU 062 392) at **1.30pm** Limited parking, car share if possible.

Saturday 20th September. Litter Survey at Little Beach, Berwick for Marine Conservation Society. Meet at in the car park at Little Beach (Berwick, near Pier) at 10.00am. Bring warm waterproof clothes, strong footwear and tough gardening gloves.

Thursday 25th September (if 25th wet/windy, 26th). Bat Survey in Castle Vale. A survey to confirm (or otherwise) presence of bats from an old record for area immediately below Tweed Street gardens along to former Lily Pond. Meet at entrance to the station from Railway Street at **7.00pm**.

Saturday October 4th. Migrating birds. A walk led by Malcolm and John I, a chance to see some unusual migrants. Beginners welcome. **10.00 am.** at small car park above Little Beach, Berwick.

Wednesday 8th October. Talk on Birds of the Farne Islands by John Walton, Assistant Warden for National Trust. Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal, **7.30pm**.

Wednesday 12th November. Wildlife of St Abbs. A talk by National Trust for Scotland Warden, Kevin Rideout. Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, Spittal, **7.30pm**.

Wednesday 10th December. Big Cats. A talk on overseas experiences by Richard Wales (Now Red Squirrel Project Officer for Southern Scotland). **7.30pm.** Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL.

Members and non-members are welcome at all our events. There may be a small charge. Unless the weather is truly appalling (when all the wildlife is likely to be covering in shelter) outdoor meetings go ahead – bring waterproofs and suitable footwear. If in doubt on the day telephone 01289 330591.

Want to know more? Look at our website www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk , phone 01289 330591, e-mail mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk , or just come along to one of our events.

Group members (who benefit from lower charges at events, the monthly Wildlife Review, news of forthcoming surveys, and so on) do not need special skills or knowledge, just an interest in their environment. The fee is only £8.00 per year for individuals, £14.00 for families at the same address.

An Unusual Sedge at Cocklawburn

Mid-August saw a large group of botanists from the BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles) descend on Holy Island to admire local rare plants and, much more importantly, to find and record both rare and common plants in the area for the BSBI's invaluable databases. Among many things to check out, we were told that Flat Sedge, *Blysmus compressus*, had been recorded by Professor Swan in 1987 at Cocklawburn in the 5 km square NU04NW, "probably in the tetrad (2k x 2k square) NU04J or not far outside it" and "he remembered that *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (Adders-tongue Fern) was nearby".

Fortunately I had been shown Flat Sedge in flower by Michael Braithwaite earlier in the year (beside the Fangrist burn), so a friend and I spent some time examining the (very wet) marsh with the *Ophioglossum* in NU04J, but failed to find the plant. Rising from an uncomfortable crouch, we went for a walk in the dunes and on the way back past the marsh a casual glance from the path revealed several spikes of *Blysmus compressus* - you really need to "get your eye in" for this one. To see a photo, go to <http://www.berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk/MembersPhotos.html> , click [Fiona](#) and it's on the right hand side of the page. (The Common Lizard was in the dunes nearby).

Flat sedge is not exactly something you would give pride of place in your garden; it's small and brown and the flower-head looks as if it has been trodden on by an over-keen botanist. It is also very fussy about its growing conditions, requiring (according to Michael Braithwaite's Rare Plant Register for Berwickshire) "lowland calcareous flushes and riverside haughs subject to flooding".

It is endangered both nationally and locally, mostly because of destruction of its habitat. BSBI records show that, as of 1999, it occurred in only 131 of the 2,823 10k x 10k squares mapped for the latest GB and Ireland Atlas. More worrying, the plant had disappeared from 40% of "squares" since 1930, this 1930 total in turn representing less than half of previously known sites. In North Northumberland (VC68) Professor Swan shows it in only 3 (out of a total of 88) 5k x 5k squares, colonies in a further 3 squares having disappeared between 1968 and 1999. The culprits? (According to BSBI's "Millennium" Atlas): "drainage, loss of unimproved damp grassland, falling water tables, eutrophication and cessation of grazing". We hope the new grazing regime at Cocklawburn will help to keep it thriving here.

And just in case you were thinking "Oh, dear, sad, but only a few will mourn its passing", if the habitat is no longer available for *Blysmus compressus* , it is no longer available for whole ecosystems of plants, animals, fungi, bacteria and others, many of whose existence, distribution, habitats and role in the environment (CO² sequestration, for instance) we don't even begin to know about.

References.

Braithwaite, M.E., 2004. *Berwickshire Rare Plant Register*. Buccleuch Printers Ltd., Hawick.

Preston, C.D., Pearman, D.A., and Dines, T.D., 2002. *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*. Oxford University Press.

Swan, G.A., 1993. *Flora of Northumberland*. Natural History Society of Northumbria.