

# Berwick Wildlife Group

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

## Monthly Review October 2008



### WILDLIFE REPORTS.

**Weather.** A drop in temperature over the month plunged us into the reality of the approaching winter, cutting short the Indian Summer of September. Frost was recorded on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>. Snowfall was recorded in some areas on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Even with 16 days of recorded rainfall October precipitation was below average: 93mm (3.7 ins.), the wettest day being the 15<sup>th</sup> with 15mm (0.6 ins.). Stormy conditions are normal in October, and a northerly gale occurred on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, with south-westerlies blowing on the 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> and a cold north-easterly with wintry showers on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Birds.** A good month for the arrival of our winter migrants, particularly on the 26<sup>th</sup> which saw a huge Goose arrival off the sea.

In Meadow Haven (1<sup>st</sup>) were 12 **Shags**, 9 **Guillemots** and 6 **Sandwich Terns**. 2 **Velvet Scoter** flew north and 84 **Barnacle Geese** flew south. A **Swallow** was seen around Letham Shank. 3 **Bullfinches** and a **Chiffchaff** were at the same site (3<sup>rd</sup>) with a **Grey Wagtail** at Chateau Pedro. 2 **Red-throated Divers** and 4 **Guillemot** were in Spittal Bay. The northerly gale brought a northerly movement of 570 **Gannets**, 3 **Sooty Shearwaters**, 4 **Sandwich Terns** and 2 **Arctic Terns** past the Pier during an hour in early morning. By mid-afternoon brds were still on the move with 7 **Red-throated Divers**, 36 **Sandwich Terns**, 30 **Arctic Terns**, a **LittleTern** and 7 **Kittiwakes** passing northwards through Spittal Bay. A single **Whooper Swan** appeared on the Estuary.

Numbers of waders on Little Beach on the 5<sup>th</sup> were 46 **Ringed Plovers**, 70 **Dunlin**, 48 **Sanderlings**, 7 **Bar-Tailed Godwit** and a single **Stonechat**. 2 **Coal Tits** and a **Goldcrest** were at Pier House. Up river at West Ord were 10 **Canada Geese**, a **Red-breasted Merganser** and 2 **Goosanders**. 2 **Grey Plover** were on Little Beach on the 10<sup>th</sup>, with 17 **Shags** and 11 **Cormorants** on the Meadow Haven roost. 6 **Red-throated Divers**, 9 **Guillemots** and 2 **Sandwich Terns** were in Spittal Bay. 3 **Grey Wagtails** were seen at West End. On 11<sup>th</sup>, 2 **Common Snipe** were on Yarrow Slake. Ducks appeared on Middle Ord Pond (12<sup>th</sup>) with 36 **Teal** and 12 **Mallard**. A movement of geese (13<sup>th</sup>) saw 458 **Barnacles** in 3 skeins and 850 **Pink-footed Geese** in 4 skeins flying south over Cocklawburn. Also there were 3 **Little Grebes** on the pond, a **Common Snipe** and 4 **Stonechats**. A single **Brent Goose** was in Meadow Haven with 18 **Guillemots** and 14 **Shags** and on Little Beach were 124 **Turnstone** which joined the other waders. 156 **Barnacle Geese** passed overhead southwards.

12 **Goldfinches** and 14 **Linnets** were at Cocklawburn (16<sup>th</sup>) with a skein of 170 **Pink-footed Geese** flying south. The Estuary WeBS count (17<sup>th</sup>) comprised 24 **Grey Herons**, 35 **Mute Swans**, 14 **Whooper Swans**, 9 **Canada Geese**, 11 **Barnacle Geese**, 14 **Teal**, 83 **Mallard**, 6 **Goldeneye**, 6 **Goosander**, 1,210 **Lapwing** and 230 **Redshank**. Dawn on the same day saw 120 **Redwings** and 80 **Fieldfares** flying west at East Ord, with 180 **pink-footed Geese** flying north. On Spittal Bay (18<sup>th</sup>) were 4 **Red-throated Divers** with 16 immature **Gannets** feeding close inshore. At Yarrow Slake were 10 **Common Snipe**, a **Dunlin** and a flock of **Long-tailed Tits**. Further upstream at Toddles Shiel were 5 **Goldeneye** and c.15 **Tree Sparrows**. A female **Scaup** was at Cocklawburn pond (22<sup>nd</sup>) along with a **Tufted Duck**, 4

**Little Grebes** and 5 **Moorhens**. A flock of 70+ **Wood Pigeons** flew west over Ord Moor (23<sup>rd</sup>). On 26<sup>th</sup> a flock of 5+ **Long-tailed Tits** were spotted in a Berwick garden.

Duck numbers on Middle Ord Pond had risen by 26<sup>th</sup> to 64 **Teal** and 110 **Mallard**. 14 **Blackbirds**, 3 **Redwing** and a **Fieldfare** were in a Hiveacres garden (27<sup>th</sup>), while at Cocklawburn there were 310 **Golden Plover**, 80 **Lapwing** and 5 **Stonechats**. 2 **Goldcrests**, a **Stonechat** and a male **Sparrow Hawk** were at Pier House (29<sup>th</sup>) with another pair of **Stonechats** at Spittal. A stormy day (31<sup>st</sup>) brought 10 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, 12 **Eiders** and a **Red-throated Diver** into the Estuary mouth. A sea watch for an hour at high tide saw 120 **Gannets**, 8 **Kittiwakes**, 380 **Common Scoters**, 94 **Wigeon**, 6 **Shelducks**, 22 **Eiders** and 160 **Dunlin** all flying north against the wind. The **Green Woodpecker**, seen last month at Castle Terrace was absent in October – but returned briefly today (3<sup>rd</sup> Nov.). No longer in juvenile plumage, with black moustache, so a female.

**Elsewhere.** Skeins of **Pink-footed Geese** were seen over Eyemouth on 2<sup>nd</sup> (and 22<sup>nd</sup>), and an **Osprey**, a **Merlin** and 4 **Short-eared Owls** on Holy Island on the 5<sup>th</sup>. A **Merlin** was over Cheswick Dunes (8<sup>th</sup>). 4 **Red-throated Divers**, 38 **Eiders**, 4 **Common Scoters** and 5 **Knot** were on Cheswick shore on the 13<sup>th</sup>, with 800 **Pink-footed Geese** in fields at Haggerston. 60+ **Fieldfare** were in a field by the railway at Ayton Station (15<sup>th</sup>). Most days around 20<sup>th</sup> October, 50-100 **Lapwings** flew over Cot Hill, SW of Duns, and a **Barn Owl** was a frequent visitor. 500 **Pink-footed Geese** were in fields around Oxford (27<sup>th</sup>) and 6 **Whooper Swans** were in fields at Cheswick. 2 **Purple Sandpiper**, 2 **Knot** and 2 **Bar-tailed Godwits** were on Black Rocks (29<sup>th</sup>). The same day the first Redwings and Fieldfares arrived at Cot Hill.

**Butterflies.** The onset of a cold spell in mid-month saw the demise of most of our butterflies. At East Ord the last **Small White** was seen on the 1<sup>st</sup>, one on the 5<sup>th</sup> in Eyemouth, **Large White** at Blaikie Heugh on 13<sup>th</sup> with **Small Tortoiseshell** at East Ord, **Peacock** (East Ord, 16<sup>th</sup>) and a late **Red Admiral** at Wallace Green on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Thank you very much to Malcolm Hutcheson and everyone who sent in wildlife records.** Please send us your records and also photos, particularly if we can use them in our "Berwick is Brilliant for Wildlife" CD for 2008 (printed photos can be scanned). E-mail [mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](mailto:mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk) or phone 01289 309046.

## **COMPUTERS AND ADDRESSES.**

Most of you receive this newsletter by e-mail, which makes it much easier (and cheaper) for us – and even if you have not given us an e-mail address we hold members' phone nos. and postal addresses on computer (including laptops) and on paper. We assure you we will not give this information to anyone other than fellow BWG Committee members, and I do try (occasional lapses, sorry) to send out "blind" copies of all multi-person e-mails. **If anyone has any objection to this arrangement please let us know.** (We can always keep your details handwritten; my handwriting is so appalling that should be reasonably secure).

## **NEW BUTTERFLY PUBLICATION.**

A terrific new e-publication, Butterfly Conservation Newsletter for the Scottish Borders, has recently appeared. This beautifully produced and professional newsletter includes a number of lively articles on butterflies and moths, illustrated with superb photographs, and most ably demonstrating the vital importance of amateur observation (by beginners and experts) for conservation of Lepidoptera and other species. I will ask Barry and John if a link to it can be made from our website. In the meantime if anyone wants a copy just ask me (Fiona).

## **GRANT FOR EQUIPMENT FROM NORTHERN GAS NETWORKS**

We are delighted that Northern Gas Networks has generously awarded us a grant of £509.00 for wildlife survey equipment. This will enable us to buy:

- **A Frequency Division bat detector** plus sound analysis software. Biological Record Centres now only accept records of bats when sounds can be confirmed using a sonogram – essential for distinguishing the Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, for example.
- **Tree Girding Tapes**, to enable us to measure tree girth quickly, essential for our annual survey of Amenity Trees on Ord Drive for the Forestry Commission, and studies of town trees for the Council.
- **A simple, modern GPS unit**, for pinpointing records of just about anything. Again, record centres are beginning to expect at least 8-figure grid reference.

We thank Northern Gas Networks very much for this grant, which will make our hours of voluntary recording work much more efficient and productive.

## **WINTER TALKS**

Our indoor programme got off to a splendid start with a talk by John Walton, Manager of the the Farne Islands for the National Trust.

Mr Walton explained that at high tide there are 15 islands and at low tide there are 28. Many of us visit the islands thinking of them primarily as a place to see seabirds, unaware that although this is undoubtedly so, they are also a major pupping area for grey seals. In addition to the seabirds, there are regular “visits” from rarities such as a red-spotted bluethroat, probably blown off course on migration. Some of our more common “little” birds are also found: 5 or 6 pairs of pied wagtails have nested; 28 pairs of rock pipit; in 2007 red-breasted mergansers bred for the first time and this year wrens bred, also for the first time.

Wardens live on the islands from March till September, a somewhat Spartan existence since there is no fresh water and calor gas provides all the energy. They have many and varied tasks: painting stones (to mark nests), guiding visitors, but above all counting. Groups of birds are monitored in various ways; the number of eggs, the number of hatchlings and the number of fledglings are all carefully noted and compared with previous years’ records. All cliff nesting birds are counted at dawn on 10 mornings in June, when they hope for calm weather.

Figures for 2008 are interesting, if depressing. 42,000 guillemots nested, shag numbers were down by 1300 pairs since 1970, there were 2,500 pairs of arctic terns and 600 or 700 pairs of common terns. The roseate tern has been extinct as a breeding bird on the islands since 2002, but 75 pairs did nest on Coquet Island, approximately 98% of the UK population. Puffin numbers are well down, mirroring the decrease on the Isle of May. This coincides with a reduction in the numbers of sand-eels, which provide good nutrition for the “pufflings” and an increase in the numbers of pipe-fish, which do not.

Yet another example of how painstaking fieldwork is demonstrating the urgent need for conservation.

(Adapted from the original written by Molly Hardie).

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **2008**

**BTO tetrad survey of Oxford square.** BWG members are welcome to join Malcolm Hutcheson as he surveys this 2k x 2k square for the Bird Atlas 2007-11. Times to be arranged – 4 visits in Nov./Dec 2008; Jan/Feb 2009; April/May 2009 and June/July 2009. If you are interested (beginners welcome) please phone 01289 309046 or e-mail [mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk](mailto:mail3@berwickwildlifegroup.org.uk).

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November. Wildlife of St Abbs.** A talk by Kevin Rideout of the National Trust for Scotland. **7.30pm.** Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL,

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

### **2009**

**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. Everyone welcome. No charge, but donations welcome!

**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, sensible boots or shoes (can include cliff-top walk).

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February. "Putting Berwick on the Geological Map".** 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**". Gill Young. **7.30pm.** Berwick United Reformed Church, Main Street, SPITTAL.

**Members and non-members are welcome at all these events.** Most surveys and some walks are free to members, but non-members will 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 for legal reasons 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 (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 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.