

### **4th March - Borwell Farm visit**

On Saturday 4th March, members of Berwick Wildlife Group visited Borewell Farm at Scremerston.

On arrival, John Whiteford, the Farm Manager welcomed them and gave them an illustrated introduction to the farm operations under the new DEFRA environmental grants scheme. He expressed satisfaction for what has been a change from traditional arable farming into the diversification of more "natural" farming with respect for and encouragement of wildlife. His farm is in a beautiful situation on the Northumberland coast and part is a Site of Scientific Interest, which requires careful management to benefit the cliff tops and dune slacks and their unusual fauna and flora.

The key to this change has been the build up of a new herd of pedigree Aberdeen Angus cattle and the conversion of some of the former arable fields along the coastline into grassland. Under the grant scheme John has also encouraged the return of endangered species by having wider field margins, replanting and repairing hedgerows, sowing small fields with mixtures providing seed for wild birds, leaving a few fields with winter stubble for migrant birds and also promoting more public access.

After the excellent talk the Group were taken round the well-kept farm buildings, where the stock were indoors on clean straw at this time of year. John is obviously proud of his herd and answered the many questions patiently. There is also a pottery enterprise, a farm shop with local goods, holiday accommodation in wooden "wigwams" and an excellent restaurant, all managed by John's wife Christine. After homemade soup and rolls at the farm café the party set off on a short walk.

In a stubble field was a fine march Hare, and Skylarks were already holding breeding territories along the wide grass field margins. On the coast were Oystercatcher and Redshank, with Eiders and a few Common Scoter on the sea. The fresh north wind and rising tide produced a good swell and we watched northbound gulls "surfing", using the uplift in the troughs between the waves to rise effortlessly. A small cliff-top field was planted with the seed-mix for wild birds, and had been recently tilled to encourage early growth of annual plants. Several Robins appeared along the cliff top, probably Scandinavian migrants, which regularly visit our shores in winter, sheltering in gullies along the Northumberland

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coast. Back towards the farm Rooks were repairing their nests in the Scots Pines in the wood. In the old walled garden of the farm is a replanting scheme, with northern varieties of apples along with perry pears, damsons and plums.

All in all it was a most enjoyable and instructive day, the weather cold but allowing fantastic coastal views in clear winter sunshine. Berwick Wildlife Group would like to thank John, Christine and their staff who all helped to make a fascinating insight into a modern day farm just that little bit special – thank you all.

Malcolm, 2nd April 2006