

In Search of Dippers, Wooler.
Saturday 14th April.
Leader Sue Maddox.

A perfect Spring Day in mid April. Willow trees were turning a fresh green and down by the bridge near the Glendale Garden Centre a grey wagtail elegantly flitted over the water. A group of twelve Berwick Wildlife Group members and guests gathered to go searching for dippers.

Wooler Water is the small river which runs along the bottom of the hill below Wooler and takes clean water collected from the hills by Harthope and Carey burns to the River Till which feeds into the Tweed. It was alive with small fish and many of the rocks had telltale white splashes that gave away the presence of dippers. As the group walked along beside the fast moving shallow water they were able to see several of these handsome birds, some flying low and direct up or downstream, one standing on a rock preening and occasionally bobbing up and down and another plunging into the water and walking along the river bed, head down, searching for small invertebrates.

Further along a pair of bullfinches were spotted but quietly withdrew behind a tree and over a bank before many of the group had caught up and focused their binoculars. There was plenty to see so they had to be content with grey wagtails, reed buntings, a yellowhammer, a heron flying over and then, later, three herons in a circle in the middle of a field. It was very uplifting to see the returning Summer migrants. Many willow warblers were singing from the tops of the willows and alders. Swallows came flying over and were later seen on telegraph wires, and just as the group were deciding they really should turn back a colony of sand martins were glimpsed through a huge willow tree, swooping in and out of holes in a sandbank further downstream.

What a wonderful introduction to the delights of summer! With many thanks to the leaders, Sue and Bob Maddox, who knew exactly where to find all the birds.

Birds seen and heard: heron, mallard, black headed gull, wood pigeon, kingfisher, sand martin, swallow, grey wagtail, pied wagtail, dipper, wren, dunnoek, robin, blackbird, song thrush, willow warbler, jackdaw, rook, carrion crow, starling, chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch, bullfinch, yellowhammer, reed bunting.

Berwick Wildlife Group

Sue Maddox, 20th April 2007