

# NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND

# BIRD



# CLUB

Honorary President: Graham Bell

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## Membership Secretary

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## Acting Secretary

Mr Paul Ashdown,  
30 Creighton Place,  
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Treecreeper: Margaret Goodall



**NEW YEAR BIG DAY** A Dawn Start ensured that the annual search for as many species as possible on NYD had an *excellent* total. Check out John Lumby's report on page 2

**DECEMBER BIRD RECORDS** see page 5

Paul Snell



## RINGED PLOVERS ON LINDISFARNE

Club Member Paul Snell first studied the Ringed Plovers of the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve as a student at Durham University over forty years ago. Now retired and back in Northumberland, he has worked with the NNR to re-visit this work and provide a properly evidenced account of the shocking collapse of breeding Ringed Plovers on the reserve, which reflects only too well their national decline. Paul Ashdown's report appears on pages 3 & 4

Red Squirrel: Margaret Goodall



**SPINDLESTONE STAR....** Photogenically, Squirrel Nutkin 'stole the show' on the JL's Annual 'Big Day' even if it didn't make it on to the birdlist!!!

**WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE:** Check out Phil Hanmer's Roundup for his latest news during the winter months including his participation in the BTO's Winter Ringing Pilot Project

# NOTICEBOARD

## INDOOR MEETINGS BAMBURGH PAVILION

**! THE PAVILION IS OPEN ! WE ARE MEETING AS USUAL. PLEASE REMEMBER FACE MASKS. MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED TO TAKE A LATERAL FLOW TEST BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING.**

- **Friday 14th January 2022 at 7.30pm** The ever popular David Steel makes a very welcome return to the Pavilion for our first talk of the New Year entitled 'The Life and Times of the Atlantic Puffin'. Already well-known locally from his years working on the Farne Islands, he moved 'up the coast' a few years ago to become the Reserve Manager on the Isle of May (Scottish Natural Heritage).

**Field Trips & Residentials** [For all Field Trips Read please Risk Assessment on Website beforehand .

[For last-minute Cancellations e.g. adverse weather conditions, check our Facebook Page.]

**'The Hirsell,' Coldstream: Wednesday - 9th February 2022 10.00am**

Meeting point: in field next to main car park (**GR 828403** Explorer Map 339) - charge £2.50 for all day. The car park is about 1 mile from the main road, next to the 'Homestead buildings'. The main carpark has toilets and a newly improved cafe, if needed at the end of the walk.

Description: Woods, fields, river and lake views, some paths muddy in parts. Appropriate clothing & footwear advisable. Duration of walk 2&half to 3 hours - Walk about 3 miles, including last 1 mile around lake - optional.

**Leaders: Phil & Marge Noble**

**OBITUARY: Colin Lewis. It is with sadness that we record the death of one of our long-serving members on 2nd January, 2022. His funeral will be held on Tuesday, 11th January at 9am at the Borders Crematorium in Melrose. Our sincere condolences go to His wife Eileen and daughter Katrina.**

## **New Year Big Day January 1<sup>st</sup> 2022.**

Because of the covid risk and the high number of visitors to Bamburgh this year, another early start was required! Nine keen birders duly arrived at dawn in the High Newton car park on a very mild & sunny winter's day, for our now annual attempt to see as many different species as possible to kick-start our New Year List. Blackbird was number one.

We then drove to Low Newton scrape which was virtually empty, except for Mallard, Wigeon, Pied Wagtail and Redshank. Low Newton Pool only added Gadwall and Teal, a very slow start. Onto the beach/houses which gave us Pheasant, Mute Swan, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eider, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Carrion Crow, Starling, Jackdaw, Rook, Wren, Grey Heron, Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Dunlin, Robin, Herring and Black-headed Gulls, Cormorant, Woodpigeon, Dunnock, Stonechat, House Sparrow, Oystercatcher and Rock Dove/feral Pigeon. We had now clocked up a more encouraging 32 species. A flock of Pink-footed Geese & Kestrel were added en route to Knacker's Hole, Beadnell which also provided Grey Plover and Red-throated Diver, taking us to 36.

Seahouses provided us with Little Egret and Collared Dove, then onwards to Monk's House Pool where Common Gull, Moorhen, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Lapwing and Golden Plover obliged, whilst the short drive past Bamburgh Castle added Fulmar. At a few minutes to 10am (i.e. just in time), we arrived at Stag Rocks adding Rock Pipit, Turnstone, Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Scoter, 1 Black Scoter (the day's extremely rare visitor), Razorbill, Common Guillemot and Purple Sandpiper taking us to 55. As we pulled away, the visitor car park rush had started!

Budle Bay was our next stop, adding Shelduck, Great Black-backed Gull and Knot. Our next port of call, Waren Mill, gave us nothing, due to high water levels. Heading up the road to Harper's Heugh added c.500 Barnacle Geese, Brent Geese, Linnet, Fieldfare and Common Buzzard; we were now on 63. From the Heugh we drove via Elwick to the Fenham-le-Moor hide adding Yellowhammer and Pintail. Finally, we drove to Spindlestone South Hide where we managed to add Magpie, Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch and superb views of an obliging Red Squirrel. Our final tally was **75**, a decent total on the day. (One lucky couple even managed to add Song Thrush and Long-tailed Tit in coming and returning to their garden, so they managed 77.)

We then drove back through Bamburgh but could not park, so called it a enjoyable day!

**Report by John Lumby**

**N**BC's 2021 Christmas talk was given by club member Paul Snell, who first arrived in the North East in 1973 as a student at Durham University. As part of his course there he undertook a study of breeding Ringed Plovers on the Lindisfarne NNR in 1977. Now retired, and back in Northumberland, he has worked with the NNR to re-visit this work and provide a properly evidenced account of the shocking collapse of breeding Ringed Plovers on the reserve, which reflects only too well their national decline.

The talk included a quick introduction to the habits of a bird which is familiar to us all. Most of the Ringed Plovers we see are "residents", although we also have visits from long distance migrants breeding in northern Russia and wintering in Africa. Our "stay-at-home" birds remain loyal to our patch, and often to their mate, and are now



Photo of Ringed Plover: Paul Snell

known to live up to 22 years. They like to nest in shingle just above the tide-line, and as Paul's pictures showed, their eggs are incredibly well camouflaged. The little, fluffy chicks are up and active a couple of hours after hatching, but need care from their parents to survive the many challenges of weather and predators if they are to survive and fledge.

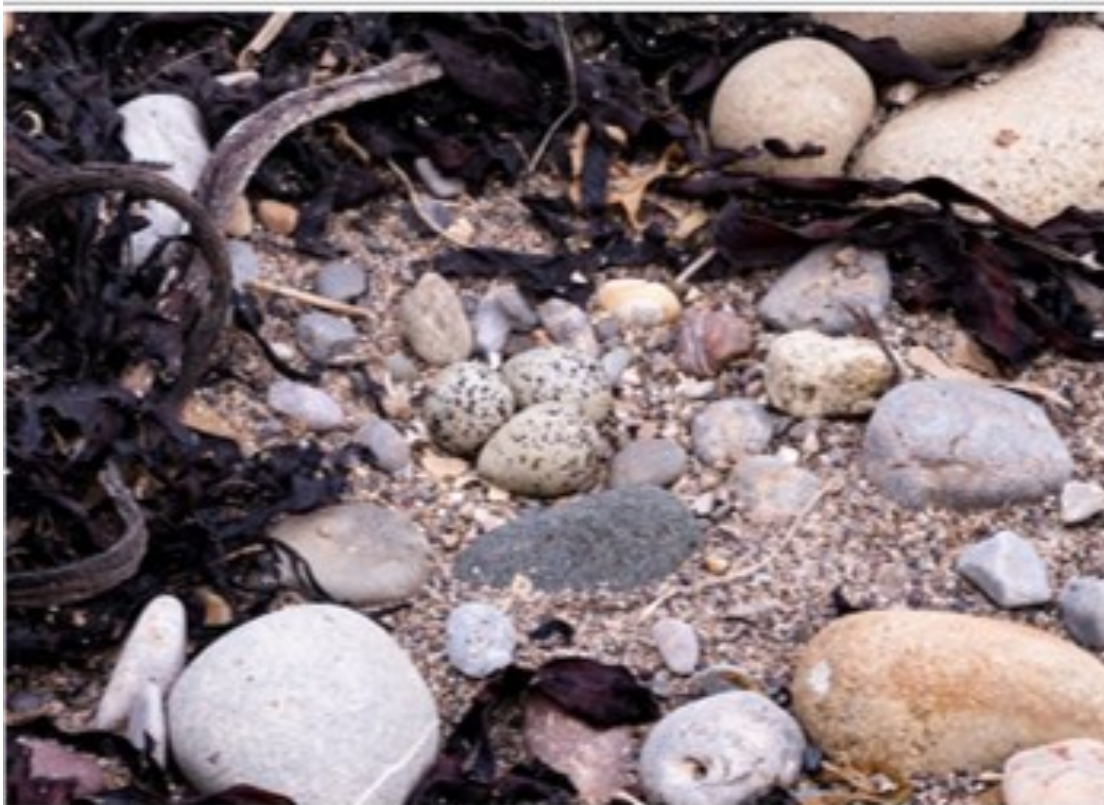
**P**aul painted a picture of Lindisfarne in 1977, already attracting large numbers of human visitors, but still full of excellent Ringed Plover habitat with remote corners seldom visited by tourists. He showed us the stretches of shingle ideal for nesting, and the mix of tidal zones full of food sources. From his hide perched on the dune tops he had been able to observe large numbers of birds, nesting almost colonially, but even back then, many nests failed, and many pairs would make repeated attempts to nest over the season.

When Paul returned in 2017 the picture was very different. Not only had tourist numbers increased dramatically, visitor behaviour had also changed with people evident in just about every corner of the reserve. The habitat had also shifted, with erosion damaging dunes, sand shifting to fill creeks and gullies, and the general rise in sea level impacting on vulnerability to high tides and storms. Against this backdrop, the birds have faced a very hard time.

The number of territories has declined, but even worse, the percentage of birds managing to nest successfully has gone into free fall. In parts of the reserve previously hosting successful nests, hardly any chicks manage to fledge at all.

Paul outlined two main underlying problems facing the birds. Firstly, climate change and rising sea levels have increased flood and storm events which wash out nests or bury them in sand all too often. Secondly, human disturbance places huge stress on the nesting birds, preventing them from incubating and brooding chicks, disturbing feeding patterns and increasing vulnerability to predators.

With this decline so clearly evidenced Paul and the NNR have responded in several ways hoping to reverse the trend. Where birds choose to nest close to, or even below, the high tide line, they are particularly vulnerable to being washed out. Paul and wardens try prevent this by gradually moving nests up the beach, a metre a day. This painstaking process has to include moving the local scenery along with the nest, so that the nesting birds recognise the rocks, driftwood and seaweed surrounding their eggs on each move. Even so, dramatic storms and surge tides can still destroy many nests, just as they wipe out tern colonies up and down our local coast. The second strategy aims to reduce human led disturbance by fencing areas and posting notices to encourage visitors away from nesting birds. This is often supported by volunteer wardens including many NNBC members.



**Ringed Plover Nest: Paul Snell**

Since these strategies started there has been some evidence of improvement, but the intervention of the covid pandemic made them difficult to sustain. Longer term, the clear conflict between using places like Lindisfarne NNR for recreational tourism, and its historic function as a haven for wildlife has to be resolved. The huge numbers of people passing through the reserve shows a collective appreciation of wild beauty and nature that needs to be turned into an understanding of how these magical places can be sustainably stewarded for both people and wildlife. If we don't manage to do this soon, Paul made clear that there is little future for breeding Ringed Plovers on the Northumberland coast.

**Report by Paul Ashdown**

## BIRD RECORDS DECEMBER 2021

<b>Brent Goose</b>	60 at Fenham Flats on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Barnacle Goose</b>	c.500 at Harper's Heugh on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Pink-footed Goose</b>	200 at North Sunderland on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL).
<b>Shoveler</b>	28 at Monk's House Pool on 30 <sup>th</sup> (JPL).
<b>Gadwall</b>	2 pairs at Howick on 31 <sup>st</sup> (PHa).
<b>Common Scoter</b>	300 off Stag Rocks on 16 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG) & 60 on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Black Scoter</b>	1 off Stag Rocks on 16 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG).
<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	1 off Stag Rocks on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Red-throated Diver</b>	11 off Newton Point on 12 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG), 1 off Stag Rocks on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Little Egret</b>	2 at Branton Ponds on 19 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD), 1 at Budle Bay on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Cormorant</b>	15 at Branton Ponds on 24 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Sparrowhawk</b>	1 at Yearle from 25/30 <sup>th</sup> (DG&RHB).
<b>Water Rail</b>	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Lapwing</b>	c.150 at Shoreston Hall fields all month (JPL).
<b>Golden Plover</b>	400 at Shoreston Hall fields on 9 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG), 600 at Low Newton on 12 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG).
<b>Curlew</b>	35 at Branton Ponds on 18 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD), 90 at Lowmoor on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Black-tailed Godwit</b>	20 at Annstead Point on 9 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG), 16 at Shoreston Hall fields on 13 <sup>th</sup> JPL, AB, 30 at Lowmoor on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Sanderling</b>	c.150 at Stag Rocks on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Purple Sandpiper</b>	25 at Low Newton on 12 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG), 85 at Stag Rocks on 16 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG).
<b>Woodcock</b>	1 at Brandon Ford on 27 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Lesser Yellowlegs</b>	1 at Budle Bay on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut). Probably the same bird that was Monk's House Pool in October, obviously now wintering in B Bay!
<b>Common Guillemot</b>	1 off Stag Rocks on 31 <sup>st</sup> (JPL,PHut).
<b>Barn Owl</b>	1 at Monk's House Pool on 9 <sup>th</sup> (DG&RHB), 1 at Branton Ponds on 18/ 21 <sup>st</sup> & 1 at Brandon on 27 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Kingfisher</b>	1 at Howick on 31 <sup>st</sup> (PHa).
<b>Peregrine</b>	1 at Budle Bay on 23 <sup>rd</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Jay</b>	2 at Spindlestone Wood on 16 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG), 7 at Howick on 31 <sup>st</sup> (PHa).
<b>Long-tailed Tit</b>	4 at Yearle from 14 <sup>th</sup> /31 <sup>st</sup> (DG&RHB).
<b>Blackcap</b>	1 at Branton on 19 <sup>th</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Treecreeper</b>	2 at Yearle all month (DG&RHB).
<b>Stonechat</b>	2 at Beanley Moor on 22 <sup>nd</sup> (I&KD).
<b>Rock Pipit</b>	6 at Boulmer on 18 <sup>th</sup> (A&MG).
<b>Bullfinch</b>	2 pairs at Howick on 31 <sup>st</sup> (PHa).
<b>Greenfinch</b>	4 at Alnwick all month (A&MG).

*Typing correction from October records:* Brent Goose should read Barnacle Goose.

**Observers** Adrian Baker (AB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Phil Hanmer (PHa), Paul Hutchinson (PHut), John P Lumby (JPL),

**January Records: please submit no later than 1<sup>st</sup> February to the Recorder, John Lumby,**

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