



February Newsletter



Speaker Tim Dean



Robin - Ian Wilson

In this issue...

Club Information

Things you need (or might like) to know about North Northumberland Bird Club

page 2

Noticeboard

Lots of news and other stuff that might be of interest to you

page 3

Speaker's Presentation

Northumberland's Birds with **Tim Dean** See **Paul Ashdown's** report

page 4

Bird Sighting Records

Sightings made by club members last month, compiled by our Recorder **Paul Armstrong**

page 6

What's Up on WhatsApp

A quick look at some recent posts on the clubs WhatsApp Group

page 8

Members' Contribution

A Goose Chase by **Richard Poyer**

page 9

Ringer's Roundup

Phil Hanmer's roundup of recent ringing outings, with information on what was found

page 13

Epilogue

..and finally

page 16



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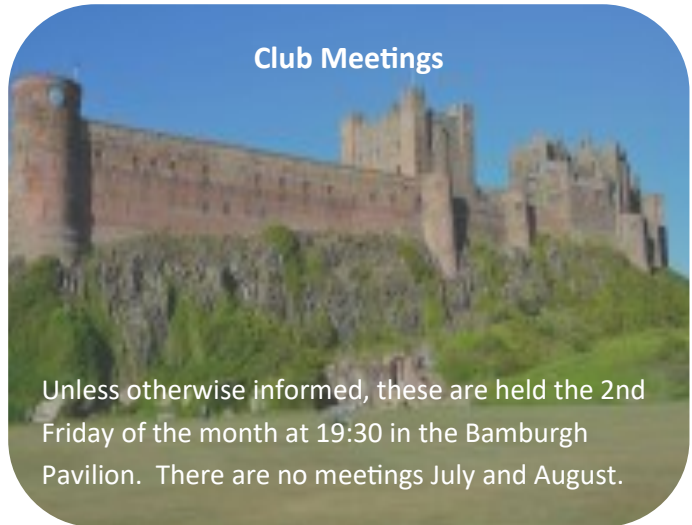
Chris Cobb



Committee Member

Sarah Elder

Club Meetings



Unless otherwise informed, these are held the 2nd Friday of the month at 19:30 in the Bamburgh Pavilion. There are no meetings July and August.



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Members WhatsApp Group Chat

NNBC Chat (Join by requesting a [link](#))



Noticeboard

Red Kite Fund-Raising...

Inspired by November's talk on Red Kites, by Harold Dobson, Rosemary Bell will be selling a selection of home-made marmalades and cakes at the February 14th meeting. Rosemary says she enjoyed the Red Kite talk and was reminded that 'Friends of Red Kites' (FoRK) is voluntary and that they need support for the costs of their monitoring work. The reintroduction of Red Kites to the North East was initially organised by the RSPB but they withdrew after 5 years when 'Friends of Red Kites' continued in the Society's footsteps. We were told that all subscriptions from FoRK's 150 strong membership (£10 per couple) goes entirely for payment of a professional tree-climber – required for ringing and satellite-tagging juvenile birds. For ease, all culinary items will be sold at £2 (please bring cash). NNBC will donate the funds raised to FoRK.



Upcoming Field Trips

Thursday 20th Feb Coquet Estuary.
Meet in Warkworth Beach Car Park at 09:30
Richard Poyer and Chris Cobb to lead.
What 3 Words: snooping.even.daosy

To look forward to...

We are also considering putting together more trips during this coming year...these may include longer day trips to the likes of Fairburn Ings and Tophill Low (Yorkshire); Blacktoft Sands (Lincolnshire); and perhaps multi-day trips to say Dumfries next wintertime.

For all Field Trips please read the Risk Assessment on our Web site beforehand. For dates and times and last minute changes / cancellations check our Facebook Page, NNBC Chat, or directly with Leaders for the event. Please car share if you can.

See web site for details of other Field Trips



"No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings"

William Blake

Upcoming Meetings

Friday 14th Feb at 19:30

The BTO and BTO Surveys with **Tom and Muriel Cadwallander**

Friday 14th March 2025 at 19:30

The Peregrine Project with **George Smith**

Friday 11th April 2025 at 19:30

To Antarctica & Back with Arctic Terns with **Chris Redfern**

See web site for details of other Meetings



Speaker's Presentation

Northumberland's Birds with Tim Dean



Our first indoor meeting of 2025 gave us all a chance to sit back and enjoy the wonderful bird-life of Northumberland, as County Recorder Tim Dean took us through his pictorial record of our county's birds. Woven into his presentation were great birding stories of how he had tracked down and verified some of the most startling surprise visitors, and reflections on shifts in bird populations he has noticed in his special role.

The evening also served as a good revision test for even the most accomplished birders amongst us. Tim's birds were not in any particular order, and he often left us in suspense a moment before

identifying some of the more difficult birds. I found the gulls particularly challenging. Whilst most of us are OK on the regulars, even some of the juvenile phases, Tim certainly threw me with Iceland, Caspian, Glaucous, Buonaparte's and Little Gulls, and a sneaky juvenile Mediterranean Gull. (To help us with this last one he explained that the give-away field trait for local Mediterranean Gulls is that they are always eating chips in Newbiggin!)

I also enjoyed the stories Tim shared about his heroes and villains in the bird world. He clearly admires the pluck and determination of Stonechats, hunkering down in the hills and valleys to face-down our hardest winters, only to be almost wiped out in freezing temperatures, leaving the county to be gradually re-populated by softy coastal birds. On the other hand, he will clearly never forgive Grey Herons for eating too many Goldeneye chicks, and doesn't like bully-Avocets either. Although I still get a thrill every time I see the Avocets at Low Newton, I do know what Tim means, as I have seen parent Avocets seeing off Mute Swans and even young cows if they get too close to their nests.

Most of the real rarities Tim covered were birds somehow lost on the most incredible migrations. Blown wildly off-course and ending up on the coast on Lindisfarne or Druridge, he has found an incredible cast of strays. Tiny little warblers which belong in Siberia, or waders, not that much bigger, blown across from Alaska, and of course our local star, the lonely American Black Tern at Long Nanny. At least geese appear quite robust, but it must still be a shock to be on the wrong continent!



Peppered throughout the evening were comments on how populations of various birds are doing. The saddest one for me was apparent confirmation that Little Owls are in serious decline. We haven't seen our pair in Embleton for a couple of years now. Better stories from lovely birds like Mandarin Duck and Goldeneye, and some of our



Speaker's Presentation

returning raptors like Osprey, Marsh Harrier and Red Kite. As yet unexplained declines in things like Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Pied Flycatchers and Wood Warblers have become all too familiar. In one or two statements covering birds like Woodcock, Grey Partridge and Black Grouse, Tim's "*I really don't know why they can still be shot*" is a sentiment shared by us all, I'm sure.

Despite some of these worrying asides, the evening overall left you a bit in awe of the birds we have on our doorstep and of Tim's skills and knowledge. So many fantastic



things to see, and I would be surprised (and impressed) if there was anyone in the room who had seen every bird that Tim showed us. The one image that really got to me was the Bluethroat. What a lovely bird, but so difficult to see here nowadays.

However, 2025 is a new birding year, and who knows what I might find... What I do know, is that I won't find as many as Tim Dean!

Paul Ashdown



Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for January 2025...

White-fronted Goose	5 Russian at Boulmer on 27th	M&JD
	1 at Harpers Heugh on 22nd	NH
	15 at Monk House Pool on 26th	PCA
Pintail	3 at Fenham-le-Moor on 2nd	NNBC
Scaup	1 at Branton Ponds on 15th	PCA
Velvet Scoter	4 at Ross Back Sands on 12th	NH
Black Scoter	1 at Cheswick on 16th	NH
Long-tailed Duck	14 at Cocklawburn on 14th	NH
	At Stag Rocks on 2nd	NNBC
Grey Partridge	c6 at Craster on 11th	M&JD
Water Rail	1 at Howick on 20th	P&AH
Great Crested Grebe	10 at Cocklawburn on 14th	NH
	21 at Alnmouth Bay on 10th and 5 on 28th	RP
Slavonian Grebe	7 at Cocklawburn on 14th	NH
Grey Plover	At Low Newton on 2nd	NNBC
Knot	2 at Coquet Estuary on 26th	RP
Purple Sandpiper	At Low Newton on 2nd	NNBC
Woodcock	1 at Low Newton on 16th	M&JD
	At Low Newton on 2nd	NNBC
Jack Snipe	1 at Monk's House Pool on 30th	M&JD
Snipe	At Monk's House Pool on 2nd	NNBC
Puffin	At Stag Rocks on 2nd	NNBC
Red-throated Diver	At Stag Rocks on 2nd	NNBC
	1 at Bamburgh on 11th	PCA
	2 at Alnmouth Bay on 10th and 28th	RP
Black-throated Diver	1 at Cocklawburn on 14th	NH
Great Northern Diver	1 at Ross Back Sands on 12th	NH
Barn Owl	1 at Yearle on 15th and 18th	DG&RB
	1 at South Chalton on 14th	PCA
	1 at Yearle on 1st and 5th	SV&AJM
Short-eared Owl	1 at Long Nanny on 10th	PCA
Kingfisher	At Stag Rocks on 2nd	NNBC
Peregrine	1 at Monk's House Pool on 30th	M&JD
Jay	At Spindlestone on 2nd	NNBC
Raven	At Spindlestone on 2nd	NNBC
Goldcrest	1 at Howick on 12th	P&AH
Nuthatch	1 at Yearle on 28th	DG&RB
	3 at Howick on 12th	P&AH
	1 at Yearle on 1st	SV&AJM
Buff-bellied Pipit	1 at Ross Back Sands on 12th	NH
Bullfinch	At Elwick on 2nd	NNBC
	2 at Doxford on 4th	PCA
	1 at Yearle on 1st	SV&AJM
Twite	c70 at Long Nanny from 10th to 30th	PCA



Bird Sighting Records

Redpoll	1 at Lemmington Hall on 14th	P&AH
Siskin	6 at Longframlington on 6th, 2 on 24th, 3 on 29th	JMcC
Snow Bunting	5 at Dunstanburgh on 12th	M&JD
Eider x Mallard Hybrid	1 at Seahouses on 4th	PCA



Yellow Billed Tropic Bird—Steve Newman

Contributors

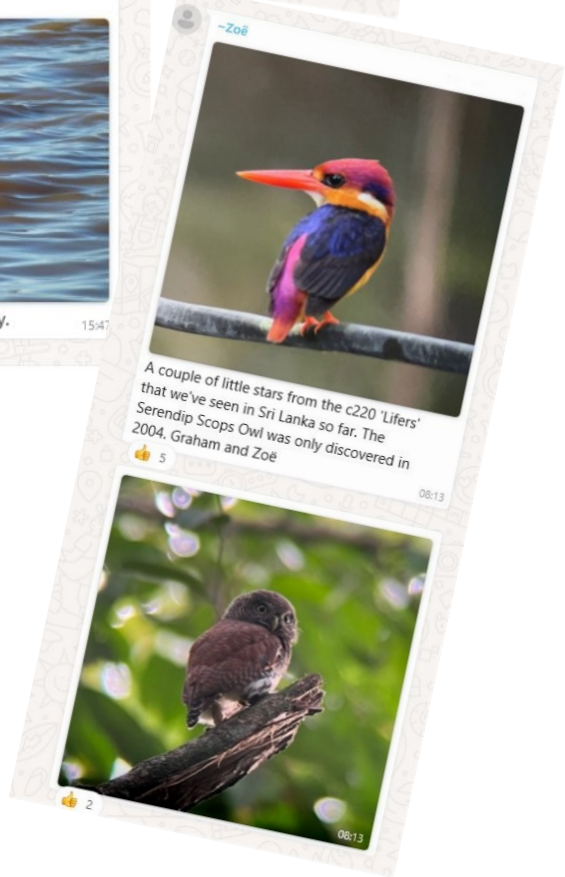
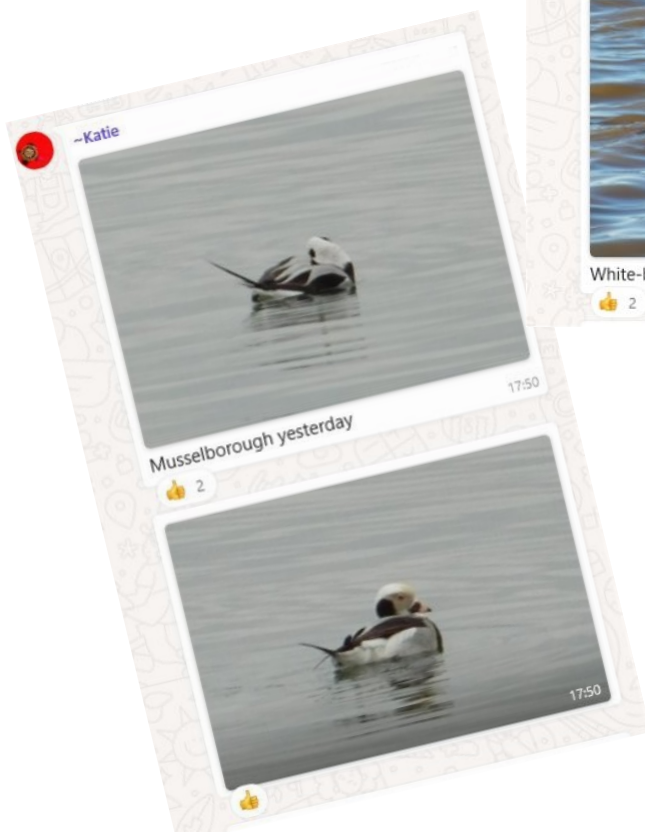
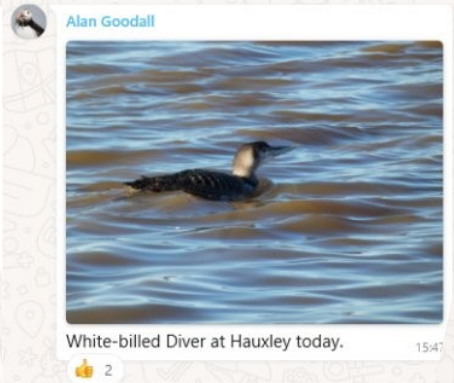
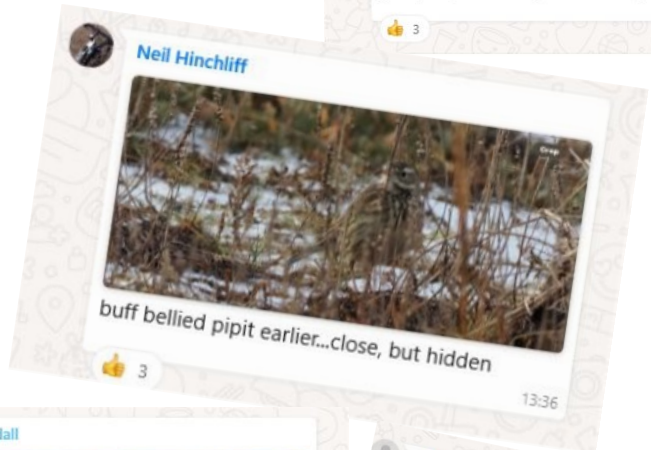
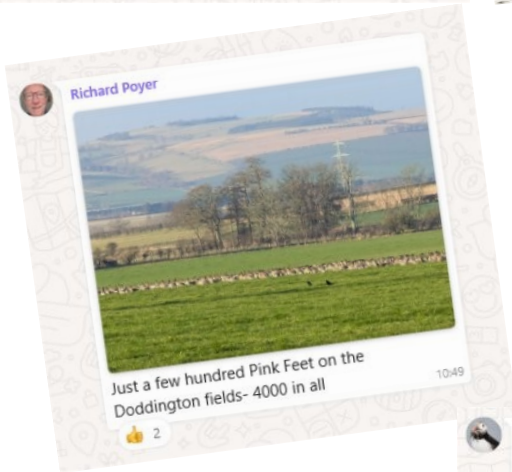
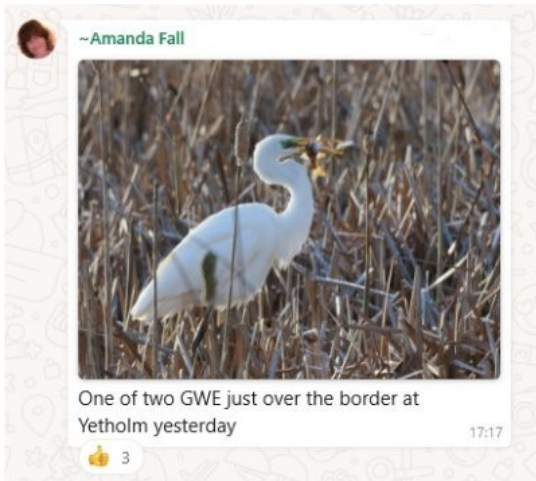
Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RB)
Mike & June Drage (M&JD)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Richard Poyer (RP)
NNBC Field Trip (NNBC)





What's Up on WhatsApp

NNBC Chat—A quick look at some of the posts on the club's WhatsApp Group page





Members' Contributions

A Goose Chase - Richard Poyer

A few weekends ago, I ventured north from the Coquet to the club's heartland. After a failure to find house plants at Berwick Garden Centre it was time to do some bird watching. A message via the website had told me about a large farm pond in the Chatton area that had Whooper Swans. The birds were still there, as well as a good number of Wigeon.



However, my main aim was to see the Pink-footed Geese in the Doddington area. Coming down the B6525, there on the Fenton side were a large number feeding on a harvested crop. Scanning the Plain showed two large groups and so I aimed to get closer to them. At the northern end of Doddington Farm the birds were easily seen from the road, with the backdrop of Hedgehope. Then skein after skein flew down, over my head, from the east. It was then, being so close, that I heard, for the first time, the flapping/clapping sound as they slowed down to come into land.

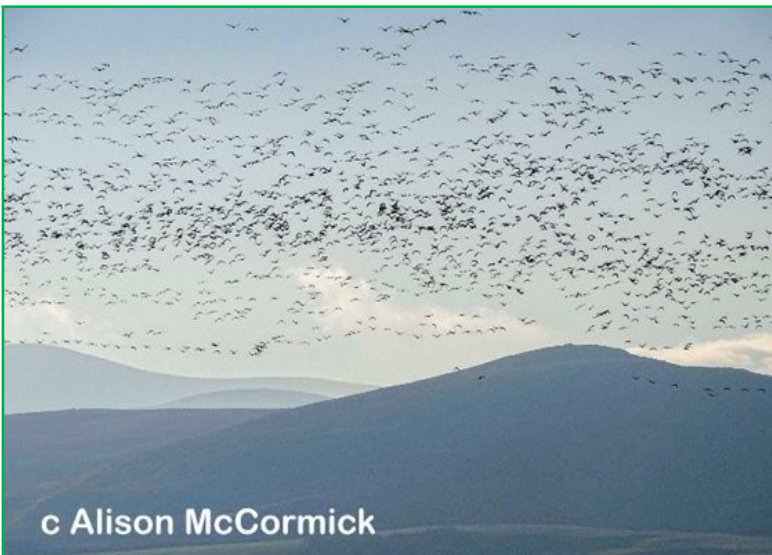




Members' Contributions



I spent a lovely thirty minutes watching them come in and land. A little later in the day, Alison McCormick posted her photograph of the Geese lifting, possibly caused by someone walking into the field.



Watching these birds and with my own experiences nearer home at Widdrington and Hauxley, together with many Februarys spent in Dumfries and Galloway, I started wondering about the Pink-foot, Barnacles and Greylags and their changing numbers and distributions over the years. My research showed just how little I knew.

I started with Barnacle Geese, having seen the thousands that are on the Solway many times. Coming back to live in Northumberland in 2007 and volunteering on the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve, I was used to seeing them

arrive in the Elwick area but then move on to the Solway. These birds fly in mainly from Svalbard. The October '84 NTBC Bulletin reports 40 to 80 birds at Fenham. In the Northumbrian Bird Atlas (2015) George Dodds writes of a record passage count of 25,000 birds on the 1st October 2008. Later he writes of a wintering flock of between 150 to 400 birds and concludes with, "It will be interesting to see if this species maintains its small foothold as a wintering species within the County".





Members' Contributions

That small foothold has grown to some 5,000 wintering birds in the Ross area. Many folk stop at the Harper's Heugh lay bye, as I did the other day, to scope the birds in the fields. The Svalbard Barnacle population (which over winters on the Solway and LNNR & adjacent land) is about 40,000.



The buildup of wintering Barnacles in Northumberland over the years is due to short stopping. These birds would previously have flown on to the Solway.

Turning now to the Greylag Goose, the UK's largest goose and the ancestor of most domestic geese. I showed my lack of knowledge of the Greylag until talking to Tom Cadwallender and Andrew Craggs. Sitting in a hide at Hauxley and seeing the large numbers of Greylag, I have always thought that they were just "there" – residents. I did not know of the division between the feral and migratory birds.

Some 230,000 birds migrate to the UK from Greenland, Iceland and Svalbard for wintering. (BTO). "Historically Greylag Goose was a scarce species within Northumberland". (Northumbria Bird Atlas (2015)). In 1946 the 300 birds wintering at Lindisfarne NNR were the main record at the time. At Lindisfarne NNR a high of 4000 Greylag were recorded during the 1988/89 season. By the mid-1990s there was a switch, with a declining Greylag population and an increasing Pink-footed Goose population. During the 1994/95 season 1500 Pinks and 500 Greylag were recorded at LNNR.



By the early 2000's there were an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 wintering in the county but in smaller groups than the Barnacle and Pink-footed Goose. In 2023 the largest flocks reported in the NTBC Bulletins were 1,700 (Kiln Hill) and 1,500 (Haughton Strother).



Members' Contributions

However, one site in the NNBC area has a special history and relationship with the Greylag Goose – Holborn Moss. It was first given protection in 1964 as an SSSI because of its important numbers of overwintering Greylags and later given RAMSAR and Special Protected Area status. “It is of international importance as a major roost for Greylag Geese of the Icelandic population, holding more than 1% of the North western Europe population” (NE SSSI 1983). Between 1994 and 1998 the average count was 2,935 (Wildfowl and Waders Count 1999-2000) but after that Holborn disappears from the tables because “it has not supported qualifying numbers since the late 1990’s” (WeBS Report 2001-2002). At Holburn the roost count during October 1995 was 130 Greylag and 300 Pinks, echoing the trend at LNNR.

Liz Harrison well remembers her visits to Holborn in the 60’s with her ornithologist father as they counted the roosting Greylags for the Wildfowl census. Returning to Northumberland in the 2000’s she found the Greylags largely gone, to be replaced by the Pink-footed Goose. The 2024/25 season goose roost count recorded 2720 Pinks and 140 Greylag on the 9/11/24.

From more or less equal overwintering UK numbers of around 100, 000 in 1980, the Pink-footed Geese have risen to 510,000 whilst the Greylag is around 230,000 (BTO).

Pink-footed geese numbers can now exceed 10,000 at the key roost sites within Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve. This balance between the two geese can be seen in Northumberland. The first Goose roost count of the 2024/25 season on the 13/10/24 recorded 1750 Pink Foot and 5500 Barnacles at Budle Bay with 1740 Pink Foot and 27 Greylag at Fenham Flats. 6400 Pink Foot and 1240 Barnacles were at Goswick Sands.

The Pink-foot Geese gather in numbers up to 3000 at Druridge, Widdrington, Budle Bay and Doddington whereas the Greylags are in their tens and hundreds and generally with a wider distribution. Those of us living in the coastal strip have the pleasure of hearing the distinctive call of the Pink-foot as they move between feeding and roosting grounds and then the sky search for the skeins. Will this experience continue? Even over the lifetime of many reading this, there have been significant changes in the fortunes of these three species. Now both Pink Foot and Barnacles occur in internationally important numbers at Lindisfarne NNR. We just don’t know what the future will hold.

I would like to thank Tom Cadwallender, Andrew Craggs and Alan Tillmouth for their help with data sources and sharing their knowledge of Northumberland’s Geese and Tom and Alison for the use of their photographs.

Any errors are entirely mine.

Richard Poyer



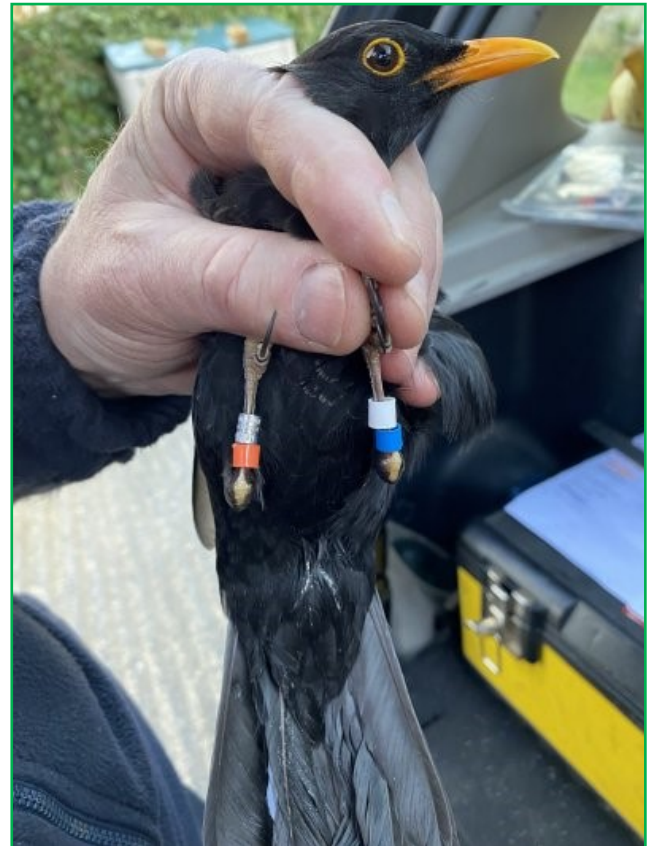
A Ringer's Year - January 2025

At the beginning of the month, it was interesting to get a return from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) about a Redpoll (AAZ9824) that I ringed at home on the 28/1/23; this bird having been 'controlled' at a colleague's ringing site on Corbridge Common on the 14/12/24. I was also copied into the movements of a Siskin (BJD0367) originally ringed by my C Ringer Allan, at Selkirk on the 29/3/24. On the 19th January this year it was at Strathyre near Stirling (that's 126 km's further north). Another colleague Phil C. has also received an update on a Redshank that he discovered regularly nests near Wooperton. This bird spends its Autumn and Winter in Langstone Harbour; where it was originally ringed in 2020; it returns to nest in Northumberland every Spring and then migrates back to Langstone in late Summer. It's been tracked since it was first ringed in September 2020 (in Langstone) and was at Wooperton again in June 2024 and is currently back in Langstone Harbour. So, if you're one of those photographers who complains about 'rings on waders' (*and I have come across one or two*) please remember that these rings are part of good scientific studies.

Regular readers of these Articles will remember that last year we colour ringed some Blackbirds at Howick to assist Wildlife Sound Recordist Geoff Sample in studying the behavior of individual resident blackbirds. It's been particularly nice to hear that most of the birds we ringed last year are still alive but with some new un-ringed birds having moved into the patch we have recently returned to ring a few more.

This year an Orange ring above the BTO Metal on the right tarsus indicates a 2025 bird (as distinct from White in 2024).

The attached photo shows adult Male Blackbird 'Blue above White' (on the left leg) with a very clean bright Yellow



beak. The next bird we ringed (Blue above Blue) a younger male, had a very different 'smudgy' beak (see picture). It will be interesting to see if this birds beak colour changes over time. As with last year there was a by-catch of Starlings and a Robin.

The tail of the Robin was particularly informative (see photo) being marked with a distinct 'bar' (which was also apparent in the wings). We call this 'a growth bar' and it generally indicates that the bird suffered a food shortage when it was very young but managed to survive but still shows the effects of the shortage of nutrients it suffered.





Ringer's Roundup



Continuing with the BTO's Winter Ringing Project on the 2nd January we captured 25 birds (14 new & 11 retraps). Ten of the fourteen new birds were adults (confirming yet again that *tits* in particular had a poor breeding season in 2024); including three new Robins. Interesting in the retraps was a Coal Tit and a Blackbird from 2021. There were also three adult Robins including one from 2022. At the next session we captured 22 birds (12 new & 10 retraps). In this session the preponderance of tits was less evident indicating the effects of freezing weather on these smaller birds. The retraps included the first Redpoll of the year, an adult male originally ringed as a one-year-old bird on the 5/3/24 (see photo).

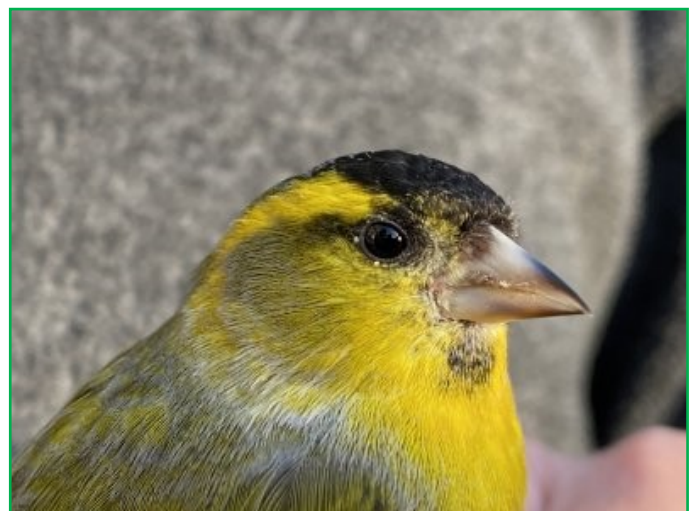


A week later we had a busy session capturing 46 birds (28 new & 18 retraps) with a small flock of Long Tailed Tits boosting the number of new birds; there were also four new Siskins; a Bullfinch and a Nuthatch. The retraps included another Siskin from 5/3/24. Another of my C Ringers (Kevin) ringed in Rothbury on the 28th and had a bumper catch of 64 birds (58 new & 6 retraps). He encountered 29 Siskins, all with significant fat, migrating north with a Redpoll in tow. There were also 9 Long Tailed Tits and our local rarity a Marsh Tit.

Finally at a ringing session at Hilary's site near Longframlington on the 31st we ringed 74 new birds of

which 45 were Siskins; confirming the big movement north that's happening.

Hilary decided it was a good idea to check over our Tawny Owl boxes during the last couple of weeks and this has proved useful; while we have not lost any boxes to high winds a large number of boxes proved to have temporary Grey Squirrel nests in them. Few of these were actually occupied but large balls of dry leaves will still prevent the owls (*and ducks like Goldeneye and Mandarin*) from nesting in the next couple of months; so, these have to be removed while a layer of fresh





Ringer's Roundup

wood shavings (horse bedding) is added to the bottom of the boxes.

I have also visited RAF Boulmer again this month to put up a Little Owl box sponsored by AWG. We were also contacted by some folks just south of Wooler to find a Barn Owl roosting in a Wood Shed. We provided this owl with a new box and within an hour a second owl was spotted; indicating that a pair just might be going to use the woodshed to nest later this year.



Phil Hanmer

S Ringer/Trainer, Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum)

Email: tytoalbas@btinternet.com



Curlew - Ian Wilson



Did my tiny bit for eBird in 2024

EVERYBODY (hopefully!) remembers that February 14th is Valentine's Day. But it also marks important (if less romantic) event - the start of National Nest Box Week, as families all over the country are invited to take up their saws and hammers, to make homes for garden birds. For the first time. National Nest Box Week, which runs from 14 to 21 is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), together with the founding sponsor, Jacobi Jayne & Company.

Simon King, naturalist and film-maker, combines his interest in conservation with the 'get involved' message: "If you've never built a nest box before, why not give it a go this year? Or, if you haven't got the time, it's easy to buy a good one. Go on, take part for Britain's birds."

Nest Boxes are very easy to build; out of a plank of wood; and can make a huge difference to the lives of our garden birds. In return, you get the enjoyment of watching birds raise a family. Blue Tits love them, but depending on where you are in the country you could get all manner of species moving in. More details on <http://www.bto.org> search 'Nest Boxes'. If you're not good at carpentry then nest boxes can be bought from many sources including the RSPB (or possibly our own NNBC member Philip Hanmer).

Does a relative or friend have a birthday coming up? Give them, a bird nesting box!

Graham Bell (*slightly adapted from Graham's article in 2009*)

A Blast from the Past - this month's hint

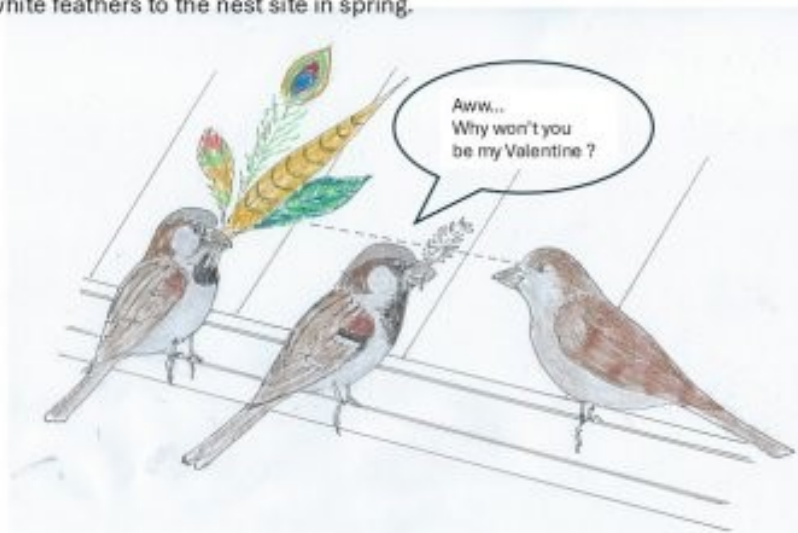
Use boiling water rather than chemical detergents for scouring and cleaning bird tables and nest boxes - simpler, cheaper and safer.

Hints are from Graham Bell's early newsletters



BIRD TALK – David & Trish Lloyd-Blake

This cartoon was inspired by us observing House Sparrow males bringing small white feathers to the nest site in spring.

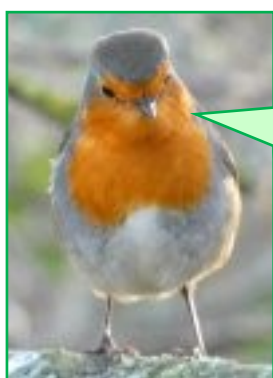


Members' Contributions to the Newsletter

Several members have submitted articles for publishing in the Newsletter, offered on their own volition to add interest, inform and entertain the other members.. so far all have been very interesting and much appreciated. BUT we need more, so please consider an offering you think will interest, enlighten or simply amuse your fellow members.

In 99.9% of cases, they should of course relate to birding!

Look forward to receiving your offerings!



*Got something
you'd like to add?
Please let us know.*

Content for the Newsletter

Submissions for inclusion in the form of notes, articles, photographs etc are welcomed. These should be Emailed to the Newsletter Editor. Deadline for copy is the first Friday of the month, but earlier is preferred. The target date for distribution is the weekend before the club's meeting, usually on the Sunday.