NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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FOLLOWING a Daughter around AUSTRALIA

The popular speaker Brian Clasper made a welcome return to the Pavilion to take us on a veritable 'Tour of the Continent'. Visiting his daughter on four separate occasions as she worked in different locations provided the ideal opportunity to bird much of the surrounding areas around Melbourne (Victoria), Western Australia and Queensland. You can read Liz Harrison's report on pages 4&5.

Australian King Parrot B.Clasper

KING PARROT is only one of the many colourful birds enjoyed by those who came to hear Brian's entertaining talk in January. Enjoy a further selection of his excellent photographs which enhance the write-up.

Photo: Alan Jack

ROOKS Ahead of the 2018 survey, Rosemary Bell takes a look at this familiar Corvid, loved by some but loathed by others. With helpful tips on how to take part in this year's survey, why not seek out your nearest Rookery and get counting?

Photo: Phil Hanmer

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE: Philip Hanmer gets his year off to an exciting start by ringing some scarce visitors to a garden in Longhorsely. To be able to hold a Willow Tit and a Marsh Tit side by side for comparison is not an opportunity to be missed! Can *you* tell which one is pictured here? Check out the complete photo and the article in the latest 'Ringer's Roundup' on the NNBC Website.

NOTICEBOARD

Indoor Meetings — Bamburgh Pavilion

- **Friday, 9th February 2018 at 7.30pm** *'Wildlife of the Falklands'*. Tim Mason. Following two periods of service as Headmaster of the Junior School on the Falkland Islands, which allowed him to indulge his twin passions of Photography and the Natural World, Tim will give us a fascinating insight to the birds and other wildlife of these windswept islands.
- [* N.B. This replaces the scheduled talk by Mike Watson on 'Colorado', which has unfortunately been cancelled at short notice, and will now appear in the programme for 2019]
- **Friday, 9th March 2018 at 7.30pm Sea Birds at KIELDER.** Martin Davidson…..

- **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.]

Sunday , 18th February, 2018 at 10a.m. Warkworth & Coquet Estuary Meet in the small public car park by Warkworth Golf Course (O.S.ref NU255064) . Please share cars if possible. We'll explore the area for divers, sea-birds, wildfowl and waders. Bring warm clothing, stout footwear and optional packed lunch (or an opportunity to visit one of Warkworth's cafés and/or pubs afterwards) ***Leader: Alan Goodall***

Saturday, 24th March at 10 a.m. Field Trip to Holy Island

Meet in the Car Park at the Beal end of the Causeway (O.S. ref. NU080427) just as the tide is receding to make the most of the available 'open' tide times. (safe crossing times 09:55-16:55). We should still encounter some overwintering geese, ducks and waders, plus the chance of some early spring migrants if the wind direction is favourable. Please wear suitable stout footwear and bring a packed lunch with you. ***Leader: Graham Bell***

RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND: BIRDING IN SPEYSIDE from 4th-7th JUNE 2018 3 nts DB&B for £232.50

One double room remains available for this attractive short break at the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown –on-Spey. If interested, further details are available from Fiona Southern. e-mail: jfs@robincottage.co.uk

OVERDUE MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS **If you have yet to pay your membership subscription, which was due by 1st January,** please complete a membership form for 2018 and send it with a cheque made payable to **North Northumberland Bird Club** or bring your completed form and cheque to our next meeting on 9th February. Any membership not renewed by 25th February will lapse, and Newsletters will only be sent out to those on the 2018 Membership List. [Membership Forms for 2018 are available on the Website]

CORRECTIONS to REPORT: In last month's Newsletter, it was stated in the write-up that John Lumby *missed* seeing the elusive Bristlehead while he was in Sabah, when in fact he saw a group of three Bristleheads. Likewise, the damage to Sukau Lodge caused by Elephants **did not actually occur whilst John was staying there.**

ROOKERY SURVEY 2018: If you would like to be involved as a volunteer this spring please contact Rosemary Bell in the first instance via the NNBC 'ringouzel' e-mail address (front page of newsletter). It would be good to repeat last year's colony counts and add further sites if possible: If you know of a Rookery in your vicinity, please consider idling away an interesting hour or so counting the active/occupied nests. February is a good month to do a casual check of your local area while the trees are still bare, though the counts (surveys) are best conducted in April (see article opposite) With thanks for any offers! ***Coordinator: Rosemary Bell***

Rooks and Rookery Survey – Spring 2018.

Love them or not, Rooks are colourful characters and not just another black corvid! In a good light, they sport a fine glossy purplish sheen on their plumage and wear diagnostic shaggy, plus-four, baggy trousers. Their pale bills probe and aerate the land as they search for earthworms, invertebrate larvae and beetles but, being omnivorous, they also take some seeds and a vast variety of other foods to balance their diet.

Above all, it is their behaviour that can be fascinating. It is usual for them to be monogamous, though there are always exceptions; amid a breeding flock one can generally pick out the paired couples. They are highly sociable birds and gregarious in their behaviour; this is best observed at the beginning of the breeding season. As in many wildlife (and human) communities, a variety of behavioural features are displayed: body posturing and bowing, tail fanning – all giving messages. Mutual support and allopreening by bonded couples is readily observed; also competition with others – at Rookeries this can sometimes lead to the theft of nesting material and twig wars. A raucous cacophony of expressive vocals can reveal squabbling and bickering; there are sometimes disputes as they form a hierarchy creating some dominant birds and consequently the odd outcast.

As the winter weather gives way to spring they act as natural barometers, returning to their nesting sites with thoughts of the breeding season. They prefer to nest colonially, and their stick nests typically built in the crowns of several adjacent trees are often re-used year after year. February is when Rooks begin to check out their nest sites but this is weather dependant. They generally choose clumps of trees and copses near to open landscape. Groves of trees in towns or villages are only usually chosen if there is easy access to open fields and the surrounding countryside. March to April is when nests are refurbished or replaced; soon after, the eggs are laid and incubating starts. Nest counts are more easily under-taken before leaf burst and best between: 15th- 30th April. (Only the female incubates and broods whilst the male does all the food gathering initially.) It is not always easy to distinguish the number of occupied nests; some old or abandoned nests can pose difficulties for the surveyor if only able to count from below rather than viewing with binoculars from a good vantage point where one can see the sitting females.

Rook: photo by kind courtesy of Alan Jack

[N.B Although you may often see Rooks flying around in a mixed flock along with Jackdaws, you can be assured that all the birds sitting on the stick nests will be Rooks; Jackdaws always nest in tree-holes, chimneys, rock crevices etc, never in the open nests of a Rookery!]

A national website of Rookeries has been established (www.rookeries.uk) and several NNBC members participated for the first time in 2017, surveying a total of 14 sites in North Northumberland with a count total of 394 nests. The number of nests at each colony varied from 7 to 59. If you are able to volunteer, by idling away an interesting hour or so counting Rook nests (easily done from a car), please contact Rosemary Bell (coordinator) via NNBC's own email address 'Ringouzel…', (found at the top of newsletters). It would be good to repeat last year's colony counts and add further sites if possible please – are more people willing to volunteer? Please submit information as follows:
1)Rookery Name. 2) O.S. Map Reference. 3) Date of count. 4) Number of Occupied Nests in Colony.
5) Tree species supporting nests if known.

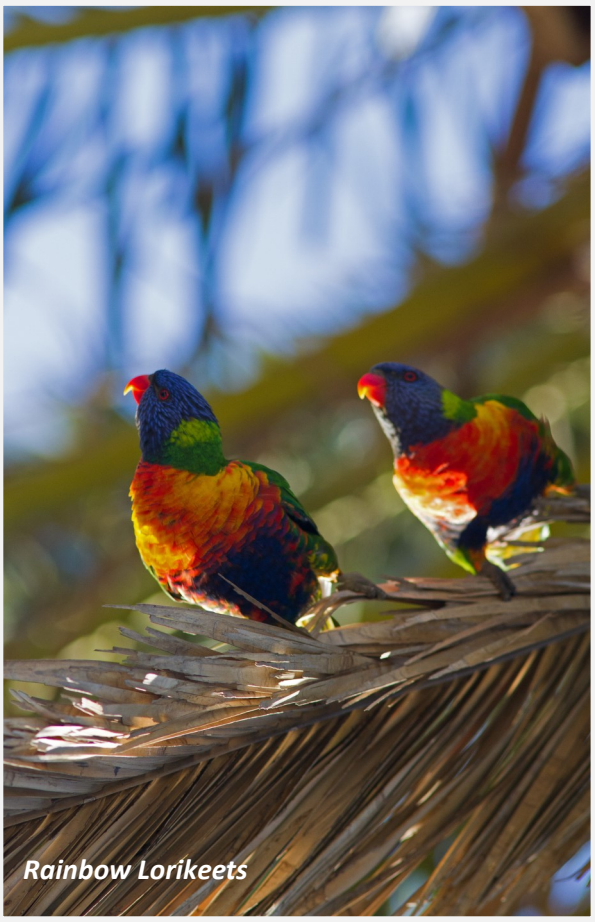
With thanks for any offers!

Rosemary Bell

FOLLOWING A DAUGHTER AROUND AUSTRALIA

At the first meeting of 2018 Chairman Richard Poyer welcomed Brian Clasper for his talk on 'Following a Daughter around Australia.' As Chairman of Teesside Bird Club, Brian is an acknowledged authority on birds and a popular speaker.

Brian's daughter has traveled extensively through working in Asia and Australia, and this has had huge birding benefits for Brian who has already made four visits to the continent! After a brief summary of the administrative and geographical make up of Australia, which is a union of six states, Brian started first with **Victoria** where he sought birds around the Melbourne area visiting the Yarrow River, Phillip Island, Victoria Park and Apollo Bay. He accompanied his account with superb photographs and descriptions of birds such as Purple Gallinule, Rainbow Lorikeet and numerous parrots. One bird which amused him was the Crested Pigeon which had an enormous crest suggestive of a 'Radio-controlled Bird'! At a 60's amusement park near St Kilda Beach, where he noted Rainbow Lorikeets and Little Wattlebirds, he was amazed when a Little Penguin calmly walked between his legs. These birds are *usually* seen on Phillip Island! At Apollo Bay, the southernmost part of Australia, the sea was very rough but Australian Gannet, Black Oystercatcher and Hooded Plover were three of the many species sighted. Eastern Grey Kangaroos are numerous which makes night driving hazardous. Koalas are stripping the Eucalyptus trees, which raises questions about control or even culling. Swamp Wallaby was another notable marsupial. He also encountered the Laughing Kookaburra which is allegedly partial to barbecued steak! A trip to Phillip Island with its Fur Seal Colony provided the opportunity to see more Penguins, as well as Pelicans that are partial to fish and chips! In addition to the bird species, Brian also had a close encounter with a Copperhead Snake, the second most venomous snake in the country!



Rainbow Lorikeets

Little Penguin

His next holiday was to **Western Australia** where he stayed around Kununurra. Here the local sewage farm hosted diverse bird species! The town (population 2,000) specialises in Sandalwood and pink diamonds. There is also a sanctuary for joeys whose parents have been killed on the highway by trucks. Despite being arid, colourful wildlife abounded such as Crimson Finches and Red-winged Parrots. Lake Argyle, one of the largest inland lakes, is home to Freshwater Crocodiles (known locally as 'freshies') which are not dangerous, unlike the problematic Golden Orb Spiders which are venomous! Elephant Rock near Kununurra, another arid area, is home to Flying Foxes and many birds of prey which are attracted by frequent bush fires; these are allegedly started by bored Aboriginal children whose schooling is inadequate. Next stop was Broome where 'salties' were a big problem. These dangerous Saltwater Crocodiles have the reputation of closing down shopping precincts or even the local airport when they call in! Here Brian found that Broome Bird Observatory was one of the best sites in the world for waders such as Great Knot and Red-necked Stint.

Spinifex Pigeon –arid regions of N.W. Australia

Migrant Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher

In 2016 Brian visited **Queensland**. At one location near Cairns, where mudflats provide a superb habitat for waders, conservationists were at loggerheads with the local Mayor's Office which persisted in nocturnal sand dumping in the area to attract bathers. This action will destroy the habitat of the rare Mangrove Robin. Waders here were less profuse than at Broome, but more confiding. A trip to the Barrier Reef followed combining some snorkelling with birding; Bridled Tern and Sooty Tern were among the many tern species seen. Inland from Cairns, Yungaburra seemed stuck in the 1950's but the surrounding grassland was a haven for birds of prey such as Brown Falcon and Black-shouldered Kite. A night hike in the area allowed sightings of Grass Owl and Lesser Sooty Owl. In the following days Brian visited such iconic sites as the Atherton Tablelands, Granite Gorge and Mount Lewis; he also enjoyed a river cruise on the Daintree River. These habitats offered a wide diversity of amazing birds and other wildlife from 'salties' to the Papuan Frogmouth! Here it was noted the later breeding cycle of the Buff -breasted Paradise-kingfisher was thought to be due to climate change.

Brian's talk presented us with a kaleidoscope of excellent photographs and a wealth of information, all delivered in his own inimitable way with a spot of politics, a smattering of geography, and lots of amusing anecdotes which delighted the audience.

Report by Liz Harrison

With 'Superb' ,'Splendid' and 'Lovely' being three of the species of this colourful family, you can guess why Fairy-Wrens in their breeding plumage are high on the list of favourite Australian Birds.

Superb Fairy-wren

Bird Records for January have been held over until next month due to the temporary indisposition of our Recorder, Mr. John Lumby. We wish him a speedy recovery.

February Records: please continue to submit your sightings no later than 1st March to the Recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, Seahouses, NE68 7WG. TEL: 01665-720654.
e-mail: j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk **or .com** .

Goldcrest in foliage at Wooler Common Ponds, January 2018

Submitted by David Richens

Pink-footed Geese over Glendale, February 2018

Submitted by Alison McCormick