NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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Puffin entering its burrow at Sumburgh *Photo: SVMcC*

WILDLIFE SOUND RECORDIST CHRIS WATSON

filled the Bamburgh Pavilion to capacity for our September Meeting when the BAFTA award winning recordist of such programmes as David Attenborough's The Life of Birds or the BBC's Springwatch series placed four Speakers round the room and held us spellbound (sometimes in virtual darkness) as he took us on an aural birding tour . Read Marge Noble's report of our experience on page 3……

Photo: D. Richens
'thrilled to hear their siren calls'……

FIELD TRIP to HOLY ISLAND & SLAKE HIDES

A small group turned out for the September field trip to Holy Island and the hides at Fenham-le-Moor and Elwick, enjoying the returning geese and waders. Read Jane Gallacher's enjoyable report of her first trip with the group on page 4

Tory Island *SVMcC*

A DAY ON TORAIGH

the 'magic' of island birding p.5

Juvenile Treecreeper *Photo: Philip Hanmer*

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE:

It's not often you can check out a Treecreeper's Toenails, which are perfect whether climbing trunks of trees, roughcast walls or even scrambling about on narrow twiglets– just one of the species featured in Phil Hanmer's latest **Ringer's Roundup**.

BIRD RECORDS for SEPTEMBER

are on p.6

NOTICEBOARD

Indoor Meetings — Bamburgh Pavilion

- **Friday, 12th October,2018 at 7.30pm (Bamburgh Pavilion)**
  "Just My Cup of Tea" -Birds and other Wildlife of Sri Lanka: TOM CADWALLENDER

The eagerly awaited return of this popular speaker and photographer, with a colourful visit to the beautiful wildlife-rich island of Sri Lanka.

- **Friday, 9th November,2018 at 7.30pm (Bamburgh Pavilion)**
  AGM followed by 'From the Notebook' : STEWART SEXTON

We continue our recent pattern of squeezing in a short Annual General Meeting at the start of the November meeting, before welcoming a return visit from an all-round naturalist and patch birder whose wildlife blog 'From the Notebook' has a large following which stretches well beyond Boulmer…….

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.]

Saturday, 13th October 2018: Hauxley and Chevington. Meet at the Discovery Centre CarPark, Hauxley at 10 a.m., (O.S. **NU 283025**) where we will begin our visit to NWT's flagship centre at Hauxley before visiting East Chevington and perhaps *some* of the other Druridge Bay reserves based on current knowledge. Wear suitable clothing, stout footwear and bring a packed lunch. **Leaders: Alan & Margaret Goodall**

Proposed NNBC Trip to Spain 16th -23rd May 2019

This is a two-centre holiday with 4 nights in Extremadura and 3 nights in the Gredos mountains. It is a renowned area for birding covering a wide variety of habitats including many birds of prey and the world's largest population of Great and Little Bustards. Accommodation is in family run establishments and all rooms have private facilities. The Gredos hotel has an award winning restaurant and a cellar of over 500 wines!

This trip is organised through Naturetrek and costs £1545 with a single supplement of £195. This includes flights from Edinburgh to Madrid, accommodation, all food except for lunch on day one, guides throughout and transport.

If you would like to join us or know more about what may be seen etc. please contact Fiona Southern Tel. 01668214481 or email jfs@robincottage.co.uk

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Notices relating to the Annual General Meeting to be held on 10th November at 7.30pm

Nominations for the NNBC Committee If you wish to propose a member for the committee then you will need to email a written nomination together with the proposer and seconder to the secretary glynis.gower@btinternet.com or send by post (Secretary's address on front cover of the newsletter). A written acceptance from the nominee is also required.

- **Nominations should reach the Secretary by 26th October 2018**
- **If you have an item for AOB at the AGM please let the secretary know in writing by 2nd November 2018**

CORRECTION: Two fine images of Ptarmigan attached to Richard Poyer's Speyside write-up in the September Newsletter should have been attributed to **Photographer Mick Crawford** and not to the author of the article. Our apologies to Mick for this error.

CHANGE of WEBSITE MANAGER After nearly six years, Stewart McCormick is stepping down from running the NNBC Website, which will now be managed by the Club Chairman, Richard Poyer. Stewart shall continue as Editor of the Monthly Newsletter.

AN EVENING with WILDLIFE SOUND RECORDIST CHRIS WATSON

There was a packed audience in the Bamburgh Pavilion on the evening of Friday 21st September to hear the acclaimed BAFTA award-winning Wildlife sound recordist Chris Watson present them with a 'sound evening'. Placing a speaker in each corner of the room to envelop us in sound, and treading silently round the room in his socks, he took his enrapt audience on a night time tour of bird songs and calls from Shetland in the North to Suffolk in the South across a diverse range of habitats throughout Great Britain.

For Chris it all began with a tape recorder and a microphone linked to the bird table in his garden, so that he could watch the birds from the house, yet also hear them. The Wren's trill is 64 notes in 8 seconds; *we* don't hear the individual 'notes' but it is believed that Wrens have a much higher temporal resolution than we have. He was inspired by Eric Simms, an ornithologist and the first sound recordist at the BBC, who created 'Heralds of the Dawn' in 1951 and Chris would like to get that programme recommissioned. Everything he does has two aspects, the wide mix of sounds together and the fixed focus close up of sounds in mono.

He began with his recordings from Sumburgh Head, Shetland of the clear cries of Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins against a background of waves breaking on the rocks. He displayed the type of tiny personal microphone he would place very close to the birds (eg entrance to a Puffin burrow) and then use up to 100metres of connecting cable so that he wouldn't disturb them. We heard grey seals singing: Were these the songs that sailors in the past thought were 'mermaids'?

By Loch Maree, Wester Ross he recorded Ravens coming in to roost and the conversations they carry on through the night. It is thought they may be exchanging information about potential food resources for the following morning. Ravens are "super smart birds," perhaps the most intelligent, with a remarkable vocabulary. They reminded him of a woodcut he saw in Reykjavik, Iceland of Odin whose two Ravens' Hugin (thought) and Munin (memory)' would converse with him at night about what they had seen in the world during the day. Equally mesmerising were the haunting calls of Black-throated Divers from the same area.

He next played the sounds from the Caledonian Pine Forest of Speyside, a great place to record away from noise pollution. You could really hear the sounds of the forest; superimposed on them were the very intimate 'champagne-cork popping sounds' and powerful wing beats of the Capercaillie as it engaged with other males.

Travelling south, we heard the dawn chorus of the Curlew, Golden Plover and Lapwing from the heather moorland of Dryburn Moor, Northumberland and then on to the reed beds of Faxfleet Pools by the Humber for the booming of the Bittern with the accompaniment of Sedge Warblers, Reed Warblers and a Cetti's Warbler. In Norfolk Chris had managed to record a Nightjar by placing his microphone on the tree beside the perch to which it kept returning.

His final recording was from the RSPB reserve at North Warren, Suffolk. He had been commissioned to make a sound piece for the Centenary of Benjamin Britten's birth, called 'In Britten's footsteps'. Chris retraced the steps of Britten where he used to go on his afternoon walks alone, thinking about, considering and editing in his mind the music he had composed in the morning. On April 12th at 2.30 am he recorded a Nightingale (Britten's favourite bird) singing in the dense scrub around the mere.

Chris said that he always enjoys playing sounds to a live audience and there was real pleasure on his face at the end of the evening. There was also great delight on the faces of the audience who had been treated to a unique and amazing experience, with the Chairman saying it was a privilege to have him here tonight. **Marge Noble**

Chris Watson Photo: SVMcC

Field Trip to Holy Island and the Slake Hides

Inset– Curlew at Elwick: *D.Richens*

On a sparkling September morning, seven Club members met up at *The Barn at Beal* for our field trip. First stop was Holy Island. As we headed for our viewing point overlooking St Cuthbert's island, summer's last Swallows swooped low overhead. With prevailing north westerlies, no-one was expecting any passerine migrants in the vicar's garden – which is just as well, since we didn't get any!

Things were more rewarding on the water. One sandbank was rammed with Golden Plover, while Knots were gathered on another. They took flight briefly, cutting the air like diamonds, while a solitary merganser fed nearby. Colonies of Grey Seals were also hauled out on the shore. Fresh from Chris Watson's talk, we were thrilled to hear their siren song carried to us on the wind! And shimmering on the far shore was a long dark line – pale-bellied Brent Geese along with some Pink feet.

As the tide started to rise we headed back across the causeway. First stop was the hide at Fenham-le-Moor and then, escorted across the field edge by some inquisitive young cattle, the hide at Elwick. The geese were much easier to see at this lovely spot – about 2,000 Pale-bellied and 500 Pink feet, along with a few hundred Shelduck and Wigeon plus a small flock of Teal. Also a very nice sighting of a Little Egret flying past the hide, with a number of other individuals dotted around the flats. After an hour or so here, though, the cold had seeped into our bones and so it was time for home.

Although I've been a club member for over two years, this was my first field trip. With such decent birding and such good company, it won't be my last!

We forgot to keep a list but birds seen included: Pale-Bellied Brent Goose, Pink-Footed Goose, Curlew, Dunlin, Turnstone, Sanderling, Redshank, Wigeon, Shelduck, Red- breasted Merganser, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Ringed Plover, Little Egret, Bar-tailed Godwit, Swallow, Meadow Pipit, Tree Sparrow, House Sparrow and a possible Robin!

Flock of Pink-footed Geese seen from Elwick Hide ***Photo: D. Richens***

VISITOR NUMBERS & VISITOR BEHAVIOUR ON THE FARNE ISLANDS

Several members had raised with committee members their concerns about visitor numbers and visitor behaviour on the Farne Islands, with several declaring that the overcrowding was spoiling the experience. The club raised the matter with the National Trust and received a detailed response. In short, the NT is aware that visitor numbers should be controlled and that the current method is to restrict landings to four in any one hour. The NT is in on-going discussion with the boat owners to reach agreement so as to prevent further overcrowding, which is not an easy task given that the livelihood of the companies is seasonal and needs to be recognised. The impact of large numbers of people on the birds and other wildlife is carefully monitored and there is some evidence that terns in particular will seek out busy places for nest sites because people deter predators.

The behaviour of visitors is monitored, with the worst offenders being photographers! The NT does have a code of practice which it hopes that all responsible people will follow.

A VISIT TO TORY ISLAND

Puffin with sand eels

Many people are attracted to islands, enjoying everything from the boat trip to the coastal scenery, the 'magic' of being cut off from the mainland. Many islands are havens for birds also, often providing the ideal conditions for nesting and breeding which are increasingly difficult to find elsewhere in our crowded world, with less disturbance and fewer predators than on the mainland.

Returning to County Donegal on holiday this summer after an absence of fifty years was such a pleasure, with a day trip to Oilean Toraigh one of the real highlights of our stay. This cliff-girt island nine miles off the North West Coast faces the full fury of the Atlantic at times, but our visit was relatively calm as we set sail in the morning mist for the hour-long crossing. We were soon we seeing some seabirds from the ferry, including several Manx Shearwaters skimming the waves, a Great Skua passing by, and several Gannets.

Arriving on the island we headed towards the cliffs at the eastern end. The steep heathery slope ends abruptly with a sheer drop to the ocean 150ft below, so we join a few others who were lying on the heather and cautiously peering over the edge watching Puffins with beaks full of sand eels landing a few feet below us on a tiny ledge. Continuing round, we soon found some Razorbills in the darker overhangs and Guillemots sitting on guano splashed ledges– all very familiar to anyone living close to such places as St Abbs Head or the Farnes. But further round the headland, we heard a very distinctive call above our heads– a Red-billed Chough. A pair of these birds were flying in and out of a crevice in the cliffs, visiting their nest site. A few minutes later our 'bins' were fixed on a beautiful Black Guillemot out in the bay, soon joined by another. We followed the shoreline back towards the village (home to 150 people) adding Dunlin, Turnstone and many Wheatears to our ever growing list of over 40 species..

Corncrake on Tory

On the far side of the village, heading towards the pools at the Lighthouse at the western end, we suddenly heard the rasping calls of a Corncrake coming from a small field full of nettles, one bird we were particularly hoping to encounter! Imagine our joy when we suddenly SAW the source of this call, in a little open area between the clumps. Wow. Cameras were quickly in action, (though it didn't seem to be in any rush to regain cover) and we watched it for a good couple of minutes before it disappeared again into the vegetation.

By now the mist had burnt off and the warm afternoon sunshine made our walk to the Lighthouse a pleasure. All too soon we had to return to the village harbour for our return to the mainland. By the time we were back on the mainland the island had disappeared once more into the mist…… all part of the 'magic'.

Stewart McCormick

BIRD RECORDS SEPTEMBER 2018

Pink-footed Goose	11 over Branton on 15th (I&KD), 500 + at Fenham Flats on 23rd (NNBC), 70 at Horncliffe on 24th (JDL), 1000 at Budle Bay on 25/26th (GB,JPL).
Greylag Goose	100 at Budle Bay on 4th (GB) & 500 on 26th (JPL).
Barnacle Goose	6 at Budle Bay on 26th (JPL).
Brent Goose	500 + at Fenham Flats on 7th (JPL) & 1500+ on 23rd (NNBC), 4 at Budle Bay on 26th (JPL).
Mandarin Duck	1 at Branton Ponds from 15th to 23rd (I&KD).
Wigeon	30+ at Branton Ponds on 13th (I&KD), 3000 at Fenham Flats by 23rd (NNBC).
Shoveler	5 at Monk's House Pool all month (JPL,JDL).
Goldeneye	1 at Branton Ponds on 2nd (G&RB).
Goosander	6 at Branton Ponds on 1st & 13 by 15th (I&KD).
Red-throated Diver	2 at Boulmer on 16th & 7 by 23rd (I&KD).
Manx Shearwater	9 at Boulmer on 16th & 23 by 23rd (I&KD).
Little Egret	2 at Budle Bay on 4th & 4 on 11th (GB), 5 at Fenham Flats on 7th (JPL), 9 on 9th (JDL) & 3 on 23rd (NNBC), 1/3 all month at Horncliffe (JDL).
Great White Egret	1 at Fenham Le Moor on 9th (JDL).
Golden Plover	1400 at Fenham Flats on 17th (GB) & on 23rd (NNBC).
Grey Plover	5 at Fenham Flats on 23rd some still in partial breeding dress (NNBC).
Black-tailed Godwit	20 at Monk's House Pool on 2nd (JPL), 110 on 4th (GB), 26 on 5th (JPL), 40 on 11th (GB) & 11 on 12th (JDL).
Knot	1500 at Holy island on 23rd (NNBC).
Ruff	10 at Monk's House Pool on 2nd (JPL), 2 on 4th (GB) & 4 on 5th (JPL).
Dunlin	2 at Monk's House Pool on 2nd (JPL), 3 at Branton Ponds on 2nd (I&KD).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 16th (I&KD).
Pomarine Skua	2 off Boulmer on 16th & 1 on 23rd (I&KD).
Arctic Skua	1 off Boulmer on 16th & 2 on 23rd (I&KD).
Long-tailed Skua	1 off Holy Island on 29th (I&KD).
Sandwich Tern	10 at Stag Rocks on 12th (JDL), 1 at Holy Island on 17th (GB).
Long-eared Owl	1 at Holy Island on 15th (I&KD).
Short-eared Owl	1 at Holy Island on 15th (I&KD).
Merlin	1 near Swinhoe on 4th (JPL).
Ring-necked Parakeet	2/3 at Embleton all month (WB).
Raven	2 at Harthope Valley on 18th (G&RB).
Sand Martin	34 at Horncliffe on 13th (JDL).
Swallow	17 at Horncliffe on 13th & 7 on 21st (JDL).
Chiffchaff	1 at Yearle on 8th (G&RB).
Nuthatch	1 at Branton Ponds on 5th (I&KD).
Pied Flycatcher	1 on Inner Farne on 2nd (A&MG).
Wheatear	4 on Holy Island on 15th (I&KD).
Crossbill	2 at Beanley Wood on 2nd (I&KD).

Observers Winnie Banks (WB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (G&RB), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), James Lough (JDL), John P Lumby (JPL), club excursion = NNBC.

October Records please submit records by 26th October to the Recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, Seahouses, NE68 7WG.TEL:01665-720654 j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk.