NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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North Park Prairie Photo: Mike Watson

BIRDING COLORADO'S HIGH PLAINS

Mike Watson of Birdquest made an eagerly anticipated return to Bamburgh Pavilion to bring us a most enjoyable talk focusing on the fabulous lekking grouse and other species surrounded by the spectacular scenery of this American State straddling the Rocky Mountains. Turn to page 3 for Richard Poyer's report….

Coquet Estuary Photo: Liz Harrison

COQUET'S SUNNY COASTLINE

As the editor is finalising this month's Newsletter looking out over cold snow-covered fields, he finds it hard to believe that new record winter temperatures were being set only a week ago! Turn to page 2 for Fiona' Southern's report of a beautiful warm and sunny morning spent birding the Coquet Estuary on the February Field Trip.

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ROOK SURVEY 2019 page 4

Heron at Howick …….. Photo: Philip Hanmer

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE: Remember to check out Philip Hanmer's monthly **Ringer's Roundup**; Contrary to comments in the media suggesting that birds are nesting now, he points out that –NO- many of our familiar birds do not begin until there are sufficient insects/caterpillars around with which to feed their young! If you would like to see some birds that *do start to nest early* then visit Howick and watch the Herons near the Pool squabbling over last year's nests as they rebuild them."

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS — BAMBURGH PAVILION

- **Friday 8th March 2019 at 7.30pm STEPHEN WESTERBERG: WHINCHATS. Stephen is the Site Manager at the RSPB Reserve in Geltsdale, CUMBRIA with a particular interest in this rapidly declining migratory species. 'Whinchats are very colourful, beautiful birds that inhabit special wild places……..'**

- **Friday 12th April 2019 at 7.30pm TONY LIGHTLEY: The Tweed Valley Osprey Project. Tony is Environment & Heritage Manager of the Dumfries & Borders District of Forestry Enterprise Scotland, which includes overseeing and protecting the Ospreys which nest in the Scottish Borders ….**

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.]

- **Friday 22nd March 2019 at 10.00a.m. John Muir Country Park, Dunbar.** Meet next to the toilet block in the John Muir Country Park - Linkfield Car Park **(OS ref: NT 652788)** Parking charge £2 all day. **Directions:** From the A1 take the 3rd exit at Thistle Cross roundabout signposted to **Dunbar and North Berwick**, then, in less than 1/2 mile at the Beltonford roundabout take the **A1078 exit to Dunbar**. In half a mile turn left on a small side road signposted **East Links Family Park and John Muir Country Park**. In a quarter of a mile **fork right** following the signs for the JMCP Linkfield Car Park, (this is a large car park with several areas). We will explore the woodland of Hedderwick Hill Plantation, sandy beaches and saltmarsh. Bring warm clothing, stout footwear and a packed lunch. Following lunch, optional parking at Shore Road Car Park 1 mile away (662786) and then walking to Seafield Pond next to Belhaven Caravan Park.
  Leader: Phil Noble

- **NNBC TRIP to SPAIN 16th –23rd MAY 2019**
  This visit to Extremadura and the Gredos mountains organised through Naturetrek is already guaranteed to go ahead, but there are still a few places available if any other members wish to join those already 'signed up' for this two-centre holiday. For further details: see December Newsletter or contact Fiona Southern Tel. **01668214481** / or email **jfs@robincottage.co.uk**

- **GAMBIA TALK CLARIFICATION:** Richard Poyer's *report* of Phil Hanmer's talk (see February Newsletter) might have been construed by some readers as 'attempting to trap birds many hours before ringing them'. Philip was happy to clarify what *actually* happens: "Nets are put up before dusk one day, then tightly furled so they don't catch anything overnight. They are then opened just after dawn to start the ringing session. If you had them open overnight in this environment you would in fact catch bats that carry rabies. You would then have to extract these (which is dangerous) before you could use them to catch any birds. Birds are never left in nets for more than 30 mins".

NNBC meeting at Warkworth 24th February 2019

We had to remind ourselves that it was only February on this warm sunny day. Twenty one of us met in the car park near Warkworth golf club. We walked down to the "Old Water" or "The Gut" as some people call it where we had good sightings of several Reed Buntings on one side and Wigeon and Teal on the other. A bit further on Skylark could be heard and seen singing well which made us all smile.

The tide was right out and the many Curlews were busy feeding along with the Redshanks, Oystercatchers and various ducks and gulls. There was a small group of Golden Plover resting and then a flock flew round overhead but decided against joining them and disappeared into the distance.

We moved on to the sea wall where we saw large numbers of wigeon on the sea close to the shoreline but they were still distant due to the low tide. Common Scoter, Gannet, Guillemot and a distant Red-throated diver were also seen.

After this, lunch called and a cup of coffee in the sunshine finished off a very pleasant morning. Many thanks were given to Richard, our leader of the day.

Pink-footed Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Pochard, Eider Duck, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Diver, Gannet, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Golden Plover, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Knot, Dunlin, Redshank, Guillemot, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Greater-black Backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Woodpigeon, Magpie, Rook, Carrion Crow, Skylark, Blue Tit, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Robin, Stonechat, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Reed Bunting. (43species) **Report-Fiona Southern**

BIRDING COLORADO'S HIGH PLAINS

Greater Prairie-Chicken

White-tailed Ptarmigan

Greater Sage-Grouse

Whilst gales buffeted the windows of Bamburgh Pavilion, Mike Watson took the members birding on Colorado's High Plains at the February meeting of the North Northumberland Bird Club, . These are to the east of the Rocky mountains and the natural vegetation is prairie grassland. Whilst the Plains were the main focus of his talk he also visited the snow covered mountains. Having led many bird trips to the state, Mike has great knowledge of the different ecosystems and a set of superb photographs to illustrate each one.

One of the major attractions of Colorado at this particular time of year are the seven species of grouse. The majority live on the Plains at around 1,000m but some are also found on the mountains. Snow equipment is an essential part of the trips to the mountains and often plans have to be altered even on the Plains due to several feet of snow falling overnight.

Rising early is part of the experience to see the leks of these birds of the Plains: Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Greater Sage-Grouse, Sharp Tailed Grouse, Lesser and Greater Prairie Chickens. Dusky Grouse and the White -tailed Ptarmigan are the mountain species and need much more effort to reach and enjoy.

Gunnison Black Canyon, Colorado

Unfortunately five of the grouse species are on the endangered or threatened list due to the extension of grazing, drilling and settlement in the Pawnee National Grasslands on the E Plains. The Gunnison Sage-Grouse has only seven isolated groups and six of those are in decline. There was only a total population of approximately 4,000 birds in spring 2017. Mike described how he can no longer take visitors to see the lek of the Lesser Prairie Chicken as the sites are on private land.

The displays of these birds at the lek is similar to those of our Black Grouse but their colours are more vibrant ranging from orange to pink air sacks.

Braving the snows of the Rockies, Mike goes in search of the White-tailed Ptarmigan. Other mountain birds include the Chickadee, species of Rosefinch, Pine Grosbeak with its rosy red head, Evening Grosbeak and Stella's Jay.

On the Plains we saw photographs of birds such as the inappropriately named Mountain Plover (related to the Dotterel), Long-billed Curlew, Sandhill Crane, many species of Sparrow and the Greater Road Runner, also known as the Snake Killer!.

Colorado has no lack of colourful birds with the Red-winged Blackbird, the Mountain Bluebird and the scarcer Vermillion Flycatcher. It also has its share of raptors including Golden Eagle and twelve types of Hawk. Mike's trips cover 3,600 miles in two weeks. For us at NNBC it was a comfortable evening tour of this most interesting State. Just make sure that if you should go to birding in Colorado, or anywhere else in the USA, don't confuse your hosts by asking the way to the hide when you should be asking for the blinds!.

Report by Richard Poyer

BIRD RECORDS FEBRUARY 2019

Barnacle Goose	800 at Harper's Heugh on 1st (JPL) & c.400 on 10th (SV&AJM).
Pink-footed Goose	several hundred in the Newham area all month (JPL).
Whooper Swan	15 at Harper's Heugh on 1st (JPL), 12 at Budle Bay on 25th (FS).
Shelduck	2 at Branton Ponds on 13th & 4 on 16th (I&KD).
Shoveler	30 at Budle Bay on 10th (SV&AJM).
Gadwall	11 at Hedgeley Ponds on 17th (I&KD).
Wigeon	103 at Branton Ponds on 16th (I&KD).
Pintail	1 at Branton Ponds on 3rd & 1 on 21st (I&KD).
Pochard	5 at Branton Ponds on 14th (I&KD).
Goldeneye	7 at Branton Ponds on 16th & 10 on 21st (I&KD).
Red-throated Diver	5 off Stag Rocks on 10th (SV&AJM).
Black-throated Diver	1 in mouth of the River Tweed on 7th (JP&MFN).
Little Egret	1 over Branton on 2nd (I&KD).
Red Kite	1 over Humbleton Hill on 24th (SB).
Oystercatcher	55 at Branton Ponds on 16th (I&KD).
Lapwing	172 at Hedgeley Ponds on 17th (I&KD).
Woodcock	1 at Branton on 2nd & 1 at Beanley Woods on 13th (I&KD).
Green Sandpiper	3 at Hedgeley Ponds on 17th (I&KD).
Barn Owl	1 at Branton all month & 1 at Broome Park on 12th (I&KD), 1 on Holy Island 14th (SV&AJM), 1 near Alnwick on 19th (JPL).
Short-eared Owl	2 at Holy Island from 11/14th (J&CV,SV&AJM).
Merlin	1 at Newham on 6th (JPL), 1 male near Berwick on 11th (D&TLB).
Red-backed Shrike	1 female on Holy Island on 11th (J&CV), a very early record, one for climate change.
Jay	1 at Beanley Woods on 13th (I&KD).
Raven	1 over Branton Ponds on 13th & 1 over Fawdon on 16th (I&KD).
Willow Tit	1 at Branton Ponds on 15th (I&KD) & 1 near Branton all month (I&KD).
Skylark	7+ near Branton on 16th (I&KD).
Twite	30 at Holy Island on 14th (SV&AJM).
Goldfinch	50 at North Sunderland all month (JPL).

Observers Sarah Bray (SB), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), David & Trish Lloyd Blake (D&TLB), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM), Phil & Marge Noble (JP&MFN), Fiona Southern (FS), John & Caroline Vickers (J&CV).

March Records please submit records by 1st April to the Recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, NE68 7WG. TEL:01665-720654 j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk. or .com

ROOKERY SURVEY 2019

It's that time of year when we indulge in counting Rooks as an ongoing commitment to a national survey. We hope that those who have volunteered in previous years will be happy to resurvey their rookeries , and that there may be a few more members (?) who would like to join us in this venture. Whether new or existing volunteers, **please contact Rosemary Bell (coordinator)** in the first instance to coordinate the coverage of our local area., using the NNBC email address: ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk (Further information can be found on the NNBC website under 'NEWS'.)

The information that is required is 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.

Please send any queries or completed data via NNBC address ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

With thanks for any offers! ***Rosemary Bell***