NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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Stephen Westerberg , RSPB Geltsdale *SVMcC*

WHINCHATS Stephen Westerberg, Site Manager at RSPB Geltsdale Reserve in Cumbria, gave a detailed and fascinating presentation of the painstaking efforts to improve the habitat of this large upland area for the special birds which breed here, including such iconic species such as Hen Harrier, Black Grouse, Golden Plover and of course Whinchats. A full account by Alan Goodall appears on pp.3&4

Cool conditions at John Muir CP *M.Noble*

JOHN MUIR COUNTRY PARK An intrepid group of birdwatchers well wrapped against the cold and blustery conditions gathered at the JMCP just north of Dunbar, where they were rewarded with some good sightings including a magnificent pair of Red-breasted Mergansers, a few Crossbills and Siskins in the conifers and a flock of Linnets . Turn to page 5 for Marge Noble's Report……..

BIRD RECORDS for MARCH page 6

Greater Flamingos, Mannar Island *D Richens*

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE: In these cool conditions of early April, why not escape to the warm sunshine of the little-known birding paradise of Mannar Island in Sri Lanka. Member **David Richens** invites us on a short tour- *with some excellent bird photographs to whet our appetite*– in his online article for the MagZine. Elsewhere, look out for Philip Hanmer's monthly **Ringer's Roundup**, where he introduces us to one of his 'favourite' Tawny Females and to the siskins and redpolls he is currently ringing.

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS — BAMBURGH PAVILION

- **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 ….**
- **Friday 10th May 2019 at 7.30pm DARREN WOODHEAD. Birds in Watercolour: Home and Abroad. Darren is a well-known artist based in East Lothian; by working outside directly from life, often in all weathers, he aims to capture the freshness and energy of his subject. He has reached a wider audience through several appearances on Springwatch and Autumnwatch, and is a member of the Society of WildLife Artists.**

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.]

- **Monday, 15th April at 10 a.m. Farm and Riverside Walk, West Loanend**

A walk of 2 to 3 hour's duration from West Loanend over rich farmland and along the South Bank of the River Tweed (opposite Paxton House) in search of farmland and riverside birds such as Grey Partridge, Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Skylark, Goosander, Goldeneye, maybe even a Kingfisher or an Otter by the river. Wear suitable footwear such as walking boots or Wellingtons.

Directions/Parking: At the roundabout on the A1 on the western edge of Berwick-upon-Tweed take the Coldstream Road **A698**. Proceed west for one mile; **on the brow of the hill turn right, signposted Horncliffe.** *[You will see also see brown tourist signs: "Chain Bridge Honey Farm" also "West Ord Holiday Cottages"].* Follow this road round a big right -angle and **continue towards Horncliffe**. In one mile there is a small double bend in the road on a tiny bridge **with an insignificant small road sign to East and West Loanend. Turn right.** [*Note yellow Council grit box on the corner]*. Proceed down towards the River Tweed and in half a mile you will arrive at **West Loanend Farmhouse.** (**O.S. ref: NT945513**). There is plenty of space for parking at the Farmhouse. Further direction-phone Mary Worsfold on 07742 728623 ***Leader:Martin Worsfold***

Sunday, 12th May at 5 a.m. Dawn Chorus on the Ford & Etal Estates. Our Annual visit to the beautiful grounds of the Estate nestled in the Till Valley, seeking out the rich birdlife including migrants such as Spotted Flycatchers, Wheatears, White-throats and other Warblers. Afterwards, Lady Harriet will kindly provide breakfast at Etal Manor for those who wish to partake (donation to local charity) with an opportunity to look round the woodland gardens of the Manor. **Full details in the May News-letter.** ***Leader: Lord James Joicey.***

OBITUARY One of our long-standing members, a very regular contributor to our monthly Bird Sightings, Mr James D. Lough of Duns has sadly passed away after a short illness. His kindly nature and sense of humour will be sorely missed by those who knew him; In keeping with his passion for birding, fellow birders attending his funeral at Duns Cemetery at 12 noon on 9th April are wearing suitable birding gear including binoculars.

Volunteering during the shore bird breeding season on the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve.

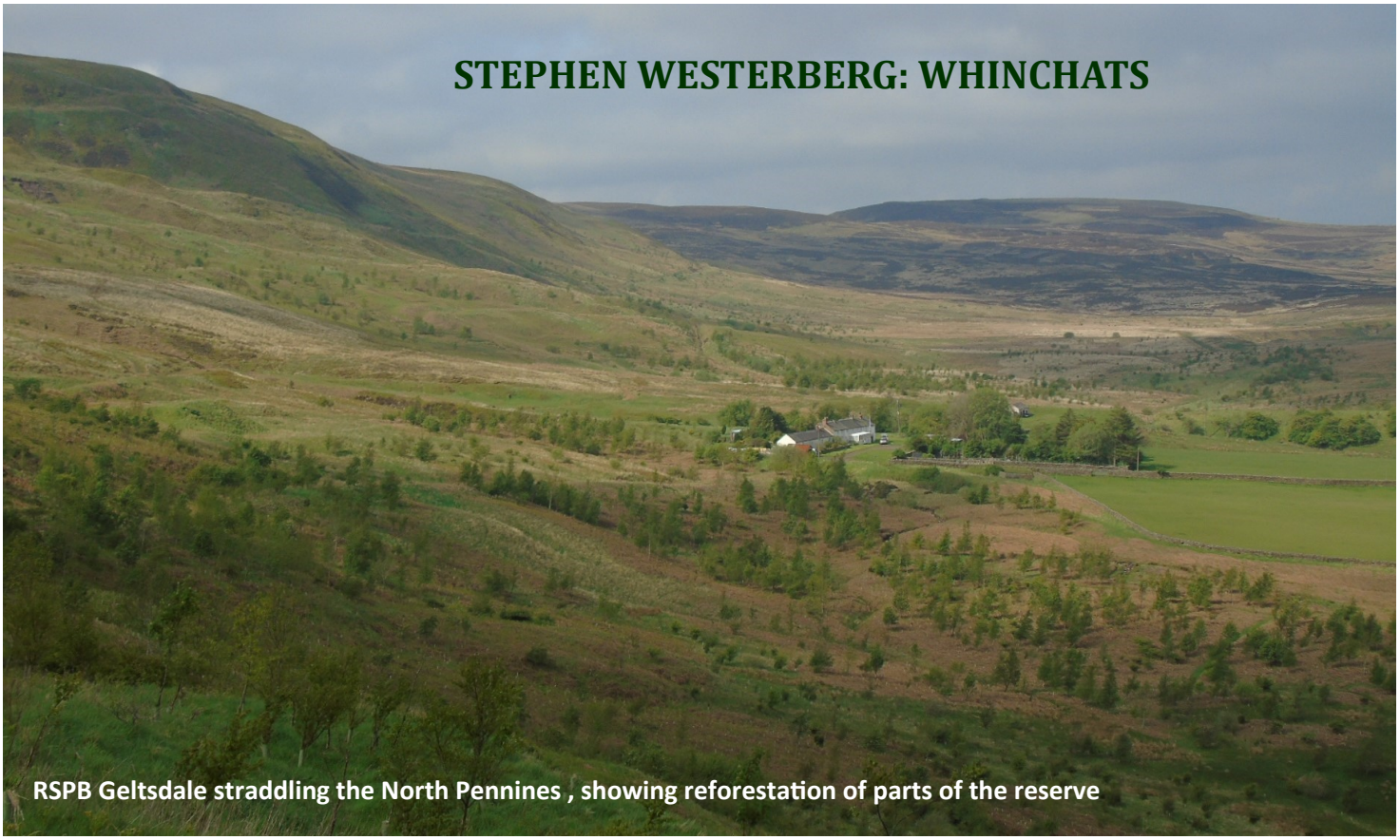
Several members of the bird club have looked after birds which breed on the shore for over 10 years, particularly on the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve and we are asking for people to help in the coming season please. The Reserve has been extraordinarily successful with the highest record of Little Terns produced in the north of the UK and now has increasing numbers of Ringed Plovers making a comeback. Unfortunately they make scrapes (nests) and lay eggs on flat open areas of beach and they need protection during this vulnerable phase. Birds of both species are very small and delightful to watch and to hear.

The areas involved are Goswick and Budle Bay and also Ross Back Sands. A few hours per week would be wonderful, for example a morning or an afternoon. Volunteering is very rewarding, meeting people, being out in the sun and protecting rare birds whilst they increase their numbers.

For more information please contact: Andrew.craggs@naturalengland.org.uk 01289381470 or david.sanders2012@yahoo.co.uk

Rookery Survey: Reminder: Rookery Surveys are best carried out in the 2nd half of April (for further details see Newsletter for March.)

STEPHEN WESTERBERG: WHINCHATS



RSPB Geltsdale straddling the North Pennines , showing reforestation of parts of the reserve

On 8th March 2019 an audience of club members and guests was entertained with a presentation entitled "WHINCHATS" by Stephen Westerberg, site manager at RSPB Geltsdale, Cumbria. This nature reserve is a large upland reserve in the north Pennines encompassing two hill farms. All of the reserve is over 200 metres above sea level and two thirds of the reserve is blanket bog 400 metres above sea level. The remainder is heath, grassland meadow and woodland, all important habitats for wildlife. Much of the woodland has been regenerated or replanted to create as 'natural' an upland woodland as possible. Thanks to sensitive farming, particularly increasing cattle grazing and reducing sheep grazing resulting in better vegetation and habitat for birds, numbers of Black Grouse, Short-eared Owl and breeding waders have increased significantly and the introduction of some horse grazing has benefited the Lapwing. Heather burning has also been replaced by heather cutting. Almost a hundred species of bird breed here including Black Grouse, Hen Harrier, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Curlew, Ring Ouzel, Merlin, Short-eared Owl and, of course Whinchat.

Whinchats nest around the edge of the blanket bog, closely associated to the bracken. On the higher ground they utilise the south facing slopes and on the lower ground the north facing slopes where grazing has not taken place. In 2011 two RSPB volunteers, Amanda Proud and Martin Ketcher from Hertfordshire joined Stephen at Geltsdale for a BTO re-trap adult survival (RAS) project to monitor the Whinchats and colour ring adults and chicks (pullus). Every year since then Amanda and Martin have returned to Geltsdale to carry on this work.

Male Whinchat at Geltsdale– note colour rings

Female Whinchat *Photo: Adam Moan (Volunteer)*

From 2012 to 2017 the Whinchat territories at Geltsdale numbered between 63 and 82, the variations being a result of weather and predation but 2018 resulted in a significant downturn of occupied territories to 46. The return rate for adults was average but the return rate for the first year birds that had been ringed in 2017 as nestlings was the lowest that had been recorded in the study at around 10%. In previous years the average had been about 20%. Twenty four nests were found and about 50% of them produced young but only 82 nestlings were ringed which was the lowest ever recorded total and only 24 of these were seen after fledging, whereas in the previous year 154 fledglings were seen. Vole numbers were significantly down in 2018 and as a result predators such as stoats and adders turned their attention to the nests of ground-nesting birds.

Since 2016 following successful testing in Nigeria, some Whinchats have been fitted with geolocators to build up a picture of their migratory behaviour and movements. The geolocators are tiny devices weighing less than 0.5 of a gram, but in order to gather the information from them the bird needs to be re-trapped the following year to remove the device and retrieve the data. In 2018 a Whinchat that had been ringed in Spain in May was found nesting at Geltsdale in July and is probably the first Spanish ringed bird to have been caught in the UK though at least 20 UK Whinchats have been recovered in Spain. Five birds that had been fitted with geolocators in 2017 returned to Geltsdale in 2018 but only 3 of these were re-trapped to retrieve the data. A bird that had been fitted with a geolocator in 2016 but had not been caught in 2017 was re-trapped in 2018 but unfortunately the bird had lost its geolocator.

Whinchats leave Geltsdale in September to spend winter across West Africa and return to Geltsdale late April. Last year Stephen had the opportunity to visit northern Liberia as part of a project to track the movements of Pied Flycatchers. This is also part of West Africa where Whinchats spend the winter. Whilst trapping their target species, the Pied Flycatchers, many of the more exotic local birds were also trapped in the mist nets and we were shown some stunning images of these. Last AND least, size wise anyhow, a gorgeous Pygmy Kingfisher, so small that the BTO don't have a ring small enough to fit its leg. What a grand finale to Stephen's presentation!

Report : Alan Goodall

The Highlands of Northern Liberia in West Africa., where many of our Whinchats overwinter.

(All photos by kind permission of Stephen Westerberg, except Female Whinchat)

NNBC Field Trip to John Muir Country Park 22nd March, 2019

At 10am on a chilly, blustery morning, 16 intrepid birdwatchers met at the John Muir Country Park, Dunbar. A few birds had already been sighted including Magpie, Blackbird and Wood Pigeon, and a Chiffchaff had been heard calling in the trees. We set off along the path, which seemed to be a wind funnel and we wondered how many self-respecting birds would be about. But in spite of the dust-bowl effect of the adjacent field a flock of Linnets was seen; Chaffinches and a Pied Wagtail were feeding on the ground nearby.

We walked as far as the estuary of the River Tyne; the tide was still well out but Oystercatcher, Shelduck , Curlew and Redshank could be seen feeding on the mudflats. In the trees nearby Crossbill and Siskin were darting between the branches, so we walked nearer for a closer look. Then, as we followed the edge of the estuary two Red-breasted Mergansers were seen swimming majestically along the river channel.

Arriving at the salt marsh we set up telescopes to watch Skylarks and Meadow Pipits plus a very obliging Stonechat posing on a nearby bush. Just then a Cormorant flew past, followed by a Little Egret. We walked back to the car park, adding two Treecreepers and a Dunnock which were seen from the picnic site.

After lunch we drove closer to Dunbar and visited Seafield Pond where we saw Little Grebe, Tufted Duck, Moorhen and Coot. The tide was now high in Belhaven Bay bringing Wigeon, Teal and Canada Goose closer to the sea wall, and in the distance Gannets could be seen circling Bass Rock.

Every one said how much they had enjoyed the day and 'thank you' to Phil for leading such a pleasant and interesting walk.

Report: Marge Noble

Photo: Marge Noble

SIGHTINGS: *Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Grey Partridge, Gannet, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Chiffchaff, Treecreeper, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Robin, Stonechat, Dunnock, Pied Wagtail, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Linnet, Siskin, Crossbill, Yellowhammer.* ***(53 species)***

BIRD RECORDS MARCH 2019

Barnacle Goose	550 at Harper's Heugh on 15th (JPL) & 200 at Budle Bay on 26th (GB).
Greylag Goose	200 at Budle Bay on 31st (JPL).
Taiga Bean Goose	22 east of Bradford Kaims on 15th close to road, very short stay (JPL).
Pink-footed Goose	400 at Bradford Kaims on 15th (JPL) & 160 at Budle Bay on 26th (GB).
Whooper Swan	15 still at Harper's Heugh on 15th (JPL), 13 at Branton Ponds on 21st & 31 by the 27th with 20 at Hedgeley Ponds on 24th (I&KD), 1 at Newton Links on 26th (GB).
Shelduck	2 at Monk's House Pool on 31st (JPL).
Shoveler	21 at Monk's House Pool on 31st (17 being male) (JPL).
Gadwall	2 at Monk's house Pool on 5th (GB).
Pintail	1 at Branton Ponds on 4th (I&KD).
Tufted Duck	4 at Monk's house Pool on 31st (JPL).
Common Scoter	4 at Stag Rocks on 5th & 2 at Seahouses on 26th (GB).
Goldeneye	1 pair at Monk's House Pool on 31st (JPL).
Red-throated Diver	1 off Holy Island on 30th (I&KD).
Little Egret	1 at Branton Ponds on 3rd & 21st (I&KD).
Red Kite	1 over Spindlestone on 24th (J&FS).
Curlew	110 at Branton Ponds on 9th (I&KD).
Purple Sandpiper	120 at Stag Rocks on 5th (GB).
Green Sandpiper	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 31st (I&KD).
Merlin	1 at Long Nanny on 1st (PA).
Jay	2 at Branton Ponds on 12th (I&KD).
Raven	1 over Brandon on 28th (I&KD).
Sand Martin	4 at Branton Ponds on 23rd & 13 on 27th (I&KD), 2 at Low Newton Scrape on 26th (GB).
Chiffchaff	1 at Branton Ponds on 3rd 3 on 9th & 6 by 23rd (I&KD), several at Twizel also on 23rd (EH), 1 at Newton on 26th (G&RB).
Starling	2000 roosting at Yearle by 14th (G&RB).
Fieldfare	30 at Hedgeley Hall on 24th (I&KD).
Redwing	20 at Hedgeley Hall on 24th (I&KD).
White Wagtail	1 at Branton Ponds on 10th with **Pied Wagtails** (I&KD).
Common Redpoll	1 at Hepburn Wood on 17th (I&KD).
Crossbill	13 at Beanley Wood on 23rd (I&KD).
Goldfinch	30 at North Sunderland all month (JPL).
Snow Bunting	1 at Beadnell on 1st (PA).

Observers Paul Armstrong (PA), Graham & Rosemary Bell (G&RB), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Elizabeth Harrison (EH), John P Lumby (JPL), John & Fiona Southern (J&FS),

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

DONATION TO HAUXLEY WILDLIFE DISCOVERY CENTRE

Following the opening of Northumberland Wildlife Trust's new Visitor Centre at Hauxley , NNBC have donated and presented two pairs of Binoculars for the use of visitors. They have been securely 'attached' in situ and a small plaque placed nearby .

Photos: R. Poyer