NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Honorary President: Graham Bell

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Darren Woodhead at Bamburgh: SVMcC

BIRDS IN WATERCOLOUR: HOME & ABROAD

Well-known Wildlife Artist Darren Woodhead amused and entranced everyone at The Pavilion as he talked about his passion for capturing his subjects directly 'in the field' and demonstrated his skill and technique in front of our eyes! Neither rain, nor wind, nor even snow deters him in his quest; indeed it can add to the immediacy and magic of the moment.

Turn to page 3 for ***Fiona Southern's report*** of a memorable evening.

5 o'clock Sunrise over fields near Etal :A J McC

DAWN CHORUS at TINDAL HOUSE

A beautiful but cool sunrise greeted those members and friends who gathered at 5a.m. for this annual event on the Ford & Etal Estates, led as ever by Lord James Joicey , with the mouth-watering prospect of a cooked breakfast back at the Manor House for those who participated. Turn to page 4 for an enjoyable and entertaining account of our endeavours

Report by James Joicey

BIRD RECORDS for MAY

see page 6

Little Owl Silhouette in Spain: F. Southern

NNBC TRIP TO SPAIN

Several members visited the birding hotspots of Extramadura and the Gredos Mountains in Central Spain on a weeklong holiday in late May, organised for the Club by Naturetrek. It was 'a wonderful week which went so quickly. Every day was a different habitat …….the sounds of Cuckoos, Hoopoes, Larks and Warblers filling our ears...'

Daily diary on page 5 compiled by Fiona Southern

WEBSITE & FACEBOOK

Phil Hanmer reports on the fortunes of many of our familiar breeding birds on 'Ringer's Roundup.' Chairman Richard Poyer reports on his recent visit to Somerset on facebook post of 5 june.....

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS — BAMBURGH PAVILION

- **Friday 14th June 2019 at 7.30pm STEVE RACE 'WILD SHETLAND'.** The Award-winning professional photographer and a director of Yorkshire Coast Nature, (formerly RSPB Education Officer at Bempton Cliffs Reserve), will talk about Shetland, one of his favourite places for wildlife…….
- **Friday 20th September 2019 at 7.30pm IAIN ROBSON DRURIDGE POOLS:** *'When A Local Patch Becomes an Obsession'*. We welcome Iain back as our Speaker tonight, when he will talk in his own inimitable style about his local patch (a flood-meadow and small pool managed as a Nature Reserve by Northumberland Wildlife Trust).

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, 16th June 2019 *** **St. Abbs Head National Nature Reserve (National Trust for Scotland).** Meet at the Reserve Car Park (O.S. NT913674) about a mile north of Coldingham on the minor B6438 to St Abbs. Walk to the headland for spectacular views of the seabird communities including Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, a few Puffins and the new overspill colony of nesting Gannets(first chick recorded in 2017). Other wildlife interest might include cetaceans, butterflies and a profusion of wildflowers. Wear stout shoes/ walking boots and bring a packed lunch (alternatively there are cafes at the reserve centre or nearby village of St Abbs.)

[*please note change of previously intimated day from Saturday 15th to Sunday 16th]

*[*N.B.£3 car parking charge for non-National Trust/NTS members, but access to the Reserve and Centre is free]*

Leader: Richard Poyer

It is with great regret that we record the death of Richard Narraway of Bamburgh at the age of 72. A long-standing member of NNBC, he also served with great diligence on the Committee for eleven years as our Club Secretary, only stepping down at the end of 2015. Our thoughts and condolences are with his wife and family at this sad time. A service will be held at St Aidan's Church, Bamburgh on Saturday, 15th June at 1pm.

Monday, 26th August. Liz Harrison will be representing the NNBC again at the Glendale Show on Bank Holiday. Why not pop in to the Countryside Tent to support her if you are visiting or attending the Agricultural Show at Wooler.

Safety speed Restriction at the Pavilion: Members and Visitors are requested to observe a speed limit not exceeding 5 m.p.h. on the approach road to the Pavilion.

Honey Buzzard FS

(continued from page 5) ————

Day Seven. A quick walk before breakfast to say farewell to the feathered residents along the road and we set off home. We stopped at a Parador which had crested tits in the grounds but which were only heard. However there were squirrels, at least half a dozen all over the place. We then had a Bonelli's Warbler in full song on a branch in front of us. Rob our guide took a video with an i-phone through his telescope and it is on the Club facebook page along with an excellent daily record of our holiday.

It was a wonderful week which went so quickly. Every day was a different habitat, the wild flowers, the sounds of Cuckoos, Hoopoes, Larks and Warblers etc filled our ears. Our wonderful daily picnics produced by Rob our guide were a veritable feast and Rob himself was a brilliant guide with an encyclopaedic knowledge of his birds. His enthusiasm was infectious and we enjoyed every minute. Thank you Rob!

Report: Fiona Southern

Birds in Watercolour: Home and Abroad Darren Woodhead

Artist Darren Woodhead's enthusiasm for his craft had our full attention from the start. His passion began at an early age and he showed us notebooks full of drawings of birds, moths and butterflies over the years. He spoke of those who had influenced* his work and how he came to use only watercolours, brushes (no drawings) and to look for the movement of his subjects. The joy of "one wash" was illustrated by his painting of a kittiwake on a rock which also showed how 'less can be more'.

He spoke of how he always paints outside with his birds in all weathers. Sometimes the paint crystallises with the cold in spite of using boiling water. The rain is of little consequence as it introduces another dimension to the development of the painting.

Painting outside is simple, three brushes (synthetic not sable), a palette of seven or eight colours and paper. The brushes may not be the most expensive but the quality of the paint and paper is essential.

He talked about the different shapes of birds going about their daily life, birds in the wind and always in their natural surroundings all illustrated with his work.

At the moment, he is studying birds in rivers and hedgerows in particular Dippers, Kingfishers and Tree Sparrows. The series he displayed to the audience on the life of Kingfishers was outstanding.

In the last half hour of the talk Darren painted a Kingfisher. He spoke of how the different colours worked together, how with just a brush and watercolours he could change the shape and size (in fact just about anything of his subject) and how the weather (*simulated with fine droplets from a spray gun*) can affect painting out of doors; it had us all enthralled.

It was an excellent evening with Darren's humour, talent and enthusiasm shining through. A vote of thanks was given by the Club's President, Graham Bell, who also shared his painting of swallows by Darren with which he had been presented when he retired as Chairman after thirty years.

Report by Fiona Southern

[* including Eric Ennion and John Busby]

Photo: SVMcC

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Dawn Chorus Report 2019 - Tindal House, Sunday 12th May

Rosemary Bell has a wonderful knack of knowing these things. Nobody else (not even your host!) had appreciated that this was the 25th Dawn Chorus on Ford & Etal. Although we are all older, and few of us probably any the wiser about the birds we love and enjoy, this morning's walk did at least show that, 25 years on, we are all still fit, can climb a very steep hill and can scramble over a stile. It surely proves that long-term membership of the NNBC gives access to the Fountain of Youth. [Now that's a marketing strapline …]

A lot has changed in the last 25 years. Birds of prey were much more frequently seen, whilst our circumambulations of Ford Moss used to reveal Cuckoos, Curlews and Snipe. By contrast, birds now considered relatively *ordinaire*, such as the Nut-hatch and Greylag Goose, were virtual rarities and only a fortnight ago the first Ring-necked Parakeet arrived in Etal village.

Each of our 25 Dawn Choruses has had its moments. This year – the 5th and 10th anniversaries of previous visits to Tindal House – provided grandstand seats for us to appreciate how powerful the voices of small birds are. Surrounded by 45 hectares of gloriously blooming Oilseed Rape – which should yield enough to fill 90,000 litre bottles of rapeseed oil – we had the opportunity to hear at close range the song of the Dunnock, a bird that is often overlooked and undervalued. Its tonal range is very narrow but it produces a lovely sweet sharp burst of song. Later, we watched another pair, their beaks full of insects, waiting for us to move on so that they could get in to their young.

We stood under a bush from which, at very close hand, a Willow Warbler gushed out its sweet strong scale-descending song. But by far the most *virtuoso* performance came from a Blackcap, somewhere at the top of a tree – and as far as can be recalled it remained unseen by anyone. The power and clarity of its beautiful song made us stand in awe and wonder for several minutes. The Blackcap is 'up there' with the best of any summer bird song.

A frosty, cold but extraordinarily clear morning had warmed up into a lovely sunny one by the time we made our way to Etal Manor. Despite being a week earlier than last year, the woodland gardens were less full of colour, thanks to the frosts of late April – and not forgetting how the winter storms of early 2018 had delayed things. A tour through the gardens allowed us to record a good number of species that we would not have noted earlier in the morning. Then it was time for the by-now traditional breakfast, in which locally-made sausages and eggs from the Etal hens were a prominent feature, enjoyed around tables onto which (thanks to Rosemary of course!) small silver-coloured '25' confetti had been liberally scattered.

Harriet, recently installed as the High Sheriff of Northumberland for the year 2019-2020, is immensely grateful for the contributions (totalling £182) towards the High Sheriff's Fund – which makes grants to organisations across Northumberland that help young people to make a solid start in life and thus avoid the slippery slope that lands them in trouble. And I add my own thanks for a wonderful card and bottle of champagne which Graham and Rosemary presented.

Greylag Goose, Mallard, Goosander, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Sand Martin, Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer. [46 species]

"A frosty, cold but extraordinarily clear morning …."

"A tour through the gardens to record a good number of species"

Photos:

Alison McCormick

NNBC Trip to Extremadura and the Gredos Mountains 16th -23rd May 2019

The three hour drive from Madrid brought us to our hotel for the next four days in the middle of the steppes. A ruined building nearby was like a tenement block of White Storks' nests (approximately 30) mostly with well grown young. Supper was overlooking this area and we had to keep reaching for the binoculars. The highlight was a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos who sat on the fence giving us good views.

The next day most of us were woken by the resident Hoopoe and a chorus of the Bee-eaters and Crested Larks. We went to Montfrague National Park. We stopped by the cliffs, home to a vast number of Griffon Vultures: In amongst them a Black Stork nest was spotted, and a Peregrine. In contrast to them were the stunning Blue Rock Thrushes. Overhead flew Black Kite, a Black Vulture, and a Short-toed Snake Eagle. We also had Four Egyptian Vultures, three Booted Eagles and a Bonelli's Eagle. A superb picnic by the river gave us Swallows and Martins amongst others. When we cleared away a red deer came to clear up what we had left, which of course was nothing! In all we had 72 species and it was only our first full day!

Day three we started out on the plains in a cold wind. There were Bee-eaters, Larks and Iberian Magpies. The next stop we had seven male Great Bustards and one Lesser Bustard. Further on there was the tree which had an Imperial Eagle's nest in it. The Eagle made two very brief appearances but if you blinked you missed it! Lunch was by another river which was full of Iberian Pond Frogs and Spanish Pond Terrapins. Two Kingfishers showed well. Later the road was covered in grasshoppers with twenty plus black kites feasting in front of us. On the wires were European Rollers and Lesser Kestrels, plus four Black-bellied Sandgrouse at the next stop. Returning home, a Little Owl was perched on a wall finishing off another excellent day.

Day four took us into the Madronera Woodland, mainly downy/Pyrenean oak mostly covered in lichen. Golden Oriole called all around and were finally spotted when flushed out by an Iberian Magpie. Also present were Woodlarks, Sardinian Warblers, Bonelli's Warbler, Nuthatch and Blue tits. Hawfinch were everywhere and there was the wonderful sight of a fledgling with very stubby tail and wing feathers sitting on a branch calling for food. It finally fell/dropped into the long grass below. Lunch on an old stone bridge over a stream was another delight. We watched a Stonechat family feeding, listened to a Nightingale which finally came and perched just in front of us. The Woodchat Shrike also showed well. Everywhere we went today had wonderful flowers and butterflies in abundance.

In the afternoon we went back to Trujillo, the town nearest to our hotel to see a colony of Lesser Kestrels. Then we walked round the walls of the Castle which gave good views for miles of the surrounding countryside. In the evening the setting sun gave a fabulous blood red sky and a lovely Little Owl silhouetted on the end of a barn. It then went hunting and was mobbed by a bat! We listened to the call of the Stone Curlew and the Red-necked Nightjar.

Photo: Liz Harrison

Day five was time to move on. We started off in scrubland which yielded larks and warblers, the highlight being Dartford Warbler and a Spectacled Warbler which showed well. The reservoir gave us a Bittern, Purple Gallinule, Purple Herons, Marsh Harriers and Penduline Tits. Then we went to look for the Black-winged Kite. Eventually it was spotted, though some distance away, and was also seen in flight. We continued up into the Gredos Mountains where the temperature had us reaching for the fleeces after the 33 degrees we had just left. The sight of the Old Roman Road wending its way alongside our road was quite a sight. Little did we know we were going to walk up another part of it the next day! Our hotel at Hayos del Espino was also excellent but very different. We took pictures of the views from the windows across the valley and also of beautifully presented food! The pre-dinner bird species count was 77,the best yet. Day five started with a pre breakfast stroll along the road where Serins were in abundance. Black Redstart, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Nightingale which showed well daily. Cuckoos were heard and a Hoopoe. We then headed off to the Plataforma de Gredos a National Park to walk up the immaculately restored Roman Road. Stunning views of Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, Northern Wheatear and Ortolan Bunting were had. Spanish Ibex were everywhere and about twenty of them passed by as we sat on the plateau above a stream having lunch. Walking back down our guide found us a Viperine Water Snake. An excellent day and everyone got all the way up and safely back down again!

Day Six and our last full day saw us in Puente del Bunol also known as Bonelli's Wood because of the Western Bonelli's Warbler which is there in abundance. In abundance also were the wild flowers particularly Peonies and yet more butterflies. We came out on to a raised area of huge rocks to see two pairs of Honey Buzzards displaying overhead much to the concern of a Black Kite nesting nearby. We watched and admired them for some time and then realised we had seen eight different birds of prey that day. Then it was nine as a Hobby was seen by our eagle-eyed guide. On the way home we went by the Torres River where we saw Ocellated Lizard, Iberian Water Frog and a large Red Fox, which was actually very blond!

(turn to foot of page 2 for final section…….)

BIRD RECORDS MAY 2019

Shelduck	1 pair at Branton ponds with 8 ducklings on 17th (I&KD).
Gadwall	1 female + 2 ducklings at Branton Ponds on 12th (I&KD).
Goldeneye	3 at Branton Ponds on 3rd (G&RB).
Quail	1 at Kimmer Lough on 11th (I&KD).
Golden Eagle	1 mobbed by **5 Buzzards** in Harthope Valley on 14th (G&RB).
Red Kite	1 at Milfield Hill on 19th/21st (RC).
Crane	2 flying high south at Cocklawburn on 7th (K&JW).
Black-tailed Godwit	1 at Branton Ponds on 1st & 3 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Ruff	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Temminck's Stint	1 at Low Newton Scrape on 15th & 2 on 27th (A&MG,I&KD).
Little Stint	1 at Low Newton Scrape on 27/29th (I&KD,SVM).
Common Sandpiper	4 at Harthope Valley on 27th (SVM).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 11th (I&KD).
Wood Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Little Tern	3 at Holy Island on 19th (I&KD), 38 at Long Nanny on 24th (A&MG).
Cuckoo	2 at Holburn Wood on 1st (CD), 1 at Branton on 17/18th (I&KD), 1 at Galewood (CW), 2 at Beanley Moor on 24th & 1 at Chillingham & Botany on 25th (I&KD).
Little Owl	1 at Branton on 13th (I&KD).
Short-eared Owl	1 at Goswick on 25th (E&EH).
Swift	2 at Alnwick on 9th (IA), 18 at Seahouses/North Sunderland on 15/30th (JPL).
Raven	4 near Chillingham on 25th (I&KD).
Sand Martin	200 at Branton Ponds on 3rd (G&RB).
House Martin	c.40 at Beadnell & c.35 at Seahouses/North Sunderland all month (JPL).
Reed Warbler	many at Goswick on 5th (E&EH).
Blackcap	1 at Wooler all month (RC).
Garden Warbler	several at Branton Ponds all month (I&KD).
Lesser Whitethroat	2 at Holy Island on 19th (I&KD).
Whitethroat	1 at Harthope Valley on 14th (G&RB).
Fieldfare	1 at Holy Island on 19th (I&KD).
Spotted Flycatcher	4 at Holy Island on 19th (I&KD), 2 at Harthope Valley on 27th (SVM).
Pied Flycatcher	1 at Holy Island on 19th (I&KD).
Redstart	1 near Branton on 7th (I&KD), 1 at Sinkside Hill on 11th (EH), 1 at Eslington Hall on 12th, 1 on Holy Island on 19th & 1 at Shipley Lane on 27th (I&KD).
Whinchat	3 near Ingram on 11th (I&KD), 2 at Harthope Valley from 14/27th (SVM).
Stonechat	1 pair +1 young near Ingram on 11th (I&KD), 2 at Harthope Valley on 14th (GB).
Wheatear	2 at Goswick on 25th (E&EH).
Grey Wagtail	1 at Happy Valley on 13th (DR), 1 at Harthope Valley on 15th (G&RB).
Bullfinch	1 at Galewood on 23rd (CW).
Lesser Redpoll	4 at Wooler all month (RC), 3 at Yearle on 3rd & 7 on 4th (G&RB).

Observers Irene Ajo (IA), Graham & Rosemary Bell (G&RB), Roderic Craig (RC), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Chris Duncan (CD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Euan & Elizabeth Hardman (E&EH), Elizabeth Harrison (EH), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM), David Richens (DR), Katherine & John Walker (K&JW), Claire Ward (CW).

June records, etc please continue to submit records at any time throughout the summer for county record submission. For September newsletter submit all outstanding records by the 2nd to the recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, NE68 7WG. TEL:01665-720654 j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk. or .com