NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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John Lumby *Photo– SVMcCormick*

MADAGASCAR: A FAMILY ODYSSEY

Following the short AGM, our Bird Recorder John Lumby took centre stage at the pavilion to give his talk on the fascinating Island of Madagascar and its unique assemblage of wildlife including several endemic families of birds such as Couas, Vangas and Asities...
Turn to page 3 for the full report by SV McCormick

Water Rail at Saltholme-*Photo R Poyer*

SALTHOLME Nineteen members met at the RSPB wetland reserve on the outskirts of industrial Middlesbrough for an exciting day's birding. Turn to page 4 for Richard Poyer's report

NOVEMBER BIRD RECORDS

see page 5

LINDISFARNE NNR PEAK COUNTS

see page 5

Brambling at Howick– *Photo P Hanmer*

NNBC WEBSITE

Phil Hanmer caught and ringed a Brambling at Howick on one of his last regular ringing sessions of 2019. In his monthly Ringer's Roundup he also gives a summary of the breeding success of Barn Owls this year as part of his long-running study.

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS — BAMBURGH PAVILION

- **Friday 13th December 2019 at 7.30pm MEMBERS' NIGHT** Based on the successful format of previous years, members and friends are invited to join us for Mulled Wine and Festive Nibbles, which will accompany a couple of presentations by club members. **PHILIP HANMER** will talk about 'FROSTY POLAND– Seeking owls, woodpeckers and other wildlife' while **DAVID RICHENS** will take us to exotic SRI LANKA with 'Bird Watching in MANNAR'
- **Friday 10th January 2020 at 7.30pm** **Dr Chris Redfern (** Emeritus Professor at Newcastle University who has led the latest research into Arctic Terns and the impact of Climate Change) will give our first talk of the New Year on 'Arctic Terns on the Farnes', based on his detailed studies of these birds over the last twenty years.

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.]

TRADITIONAL NEW YEAR'S DAY VISIT: Meet at High Newton free car park (O.S. NU234249) at **8.30 a.m.** and bird local sites all day until the light goes (or sooner if you prefer), then retire to the nearest Hostelry**.** ***Leader: John Lumby***

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Please note that all subscriptions are due by 1st January 2020. A Membership Form is sent out as an attachment with this e-Newsletter, which can be completed and returned with the appropriate payment by post or in person at the January Meeting. **It is also possible to pay online by BACS transfer** to the club's bank account. The sort code of our Barclays Account is **20-58-17** and the account number **00607703. Please provide your name as a Reference**. [It would be appreciated if those members paying by Bank Transfer could also email membership secretary Fiona Southern at jfs@robincottage.co.uk so that she can send out your membership card and mark you as paid.]

NNBC EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

- An EGM will be held at the meeting of January 10th 2020,.This meeting is needed to propose a change to the "Dissolution" paragraph in the Constitution.

" Waiting for the Water Rail at Saltholme"- a study in patience and perseverance! ***Photo by Richard Poyer***

MADAGASCAR: A FAMILY ODYSSEY

John Lumby, NNBC Bird Recorder took centre stage at the pavilion after the short AGM to give his talk on the fascinating Island of Madagascar, which has a unique assemblage of wildlife thanks to its prolonged isolation from other landmasses. Now lying well off the east coast of Africa, it separated from that continent about 150 million years ago, since when its animals, reptiles, birds, insects and plants have evolved to form many endemic species. Lemurs readily spring to mind, alongside lots of colourful butterflies and moths, fantastic Chameleons, tiny well-camouflaged Geckos and many other curiosities; He ensured that we savoured the rich diversity of this, the fourth largest island in the world. The birds of course were given pride of place. Not only does the island boast many endemic and *near* endemic species of bird, but it is home to at least five **completely endemic families** of birds, including the Vangas, Couas, Asities and Ground-Rollers.

John's presentation largely followed the route of his journey, travelling with a wildlife group to several areas of contrasting climates around the island, sharing with us the wildlife and habitats they found and photographed day by day. From the capital Antananarivo (often known simply as 'Tana') they first headed to the east coast where the predominant rain-bearing winds have created lush tropical rainforests, home to many creatures including the largest of the Lemur family, the famous Indri and its haunting far-reaching call (which we even *heard*, courtesy of a phone recording replayed by a member of the audience recently returned from the island!) Madagascar Wagtail was the first of many birds we saw bearing the prefix 'Madagascar', followed by an impressive Madagascar Long-eared Owl and a splendid Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher, a species which comes in several different colour morphs. Poor weather frustrated the group's attempts to see any of the colourful Ground-Rollers which are found in this habitat; it was a relief to move on to the hot, arid south- west of the island where they did manage to locate a Long-tailed Ground-Roller and a Sub-desert Mesite.

This area of spiny forest is home to another celebrated lemur called Verreaux's Sifaka, famed for its balletic 'dancing' movements when it has to cross gaps too wide to jump across between the spiny trees. Birds here included several members of another endemic family-the Couas- including the Giant Coua and Red-capped Coua, most of this family having distinctive electric-blue caruncles surrounding their eyes. The group also saw the rare Red-shouldered Vanga, a bird restricted to a tiny area of the south -west. A visit to the neighbouring Isalo National Park with its impressive baobab trees also produced a sighting of the rare Benson's Rock Thrush.

Finally moving to Mahajanga in the north west of the island, including a visit to the offshore island of Nosy Be, they continued their quest for more bird species, including the Sickle-billed Vanga and Schlegel's Asity, a member of yet another endemic family sporting amazing colourful caruncles! The critically endangered Madagascar Fish Eagle was also seen on this final leg of their journey, one of the rarest species on the planet. All too soon, it was time to return to Tana for the flight home, carrying such memories of this amazing island. ***Report by Stewart McCormick***

Clockwise from above:
Long-tailed Ground Roller;
Schlegel's Asity; Sickle-billed Vanga:
Red-capped Coua

NNBC Trip to Saltholme 24th November 2019

Seventeen members, with driver Mike from Travelsure set off early that Sunday morning and arrived at RSPB Saltholme at 10am. Under grey skies but no rain, we spent the next 5 hours exploring the large reserve and some of the surrounding pools to the south. The pools are a relic of the era of the ICI chemical industry, still surrounded by oil storage tanks and the Transporter Bridge.

Over the course of the five hours, fifty six species were seen or heard as we moved around in groups. There were the usual ducks such as Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler and Gadwall together with Barnacle, Pink- feet and the ubiquitous Canada and Greylag Geese. A few experiences stand out.

We were told of a Water Rail in easy view at the Watchpoint Hide and we all, at various times during the visit, duly spent 10-15 minutes waiting for it to appear from the reed beds. Paul, a regular bird watcher at Saltholme, gave us amusing prompts and encouragement to be patient. We heard its call, like a creaky door hinge; eventually, we were duly rewarded with seeing it emerge from the reeds. Margaret took a great photo of it climbing a branch.

Away at the south west corner of the reserve was the other highlight -a Long-Eared Owl.

When Alan and Margaret arrived at Saltholme they met up with Mick and Kathy in the visitor centre. Alan then had a word with one of the RSPB volunteers and asked him if the Long-eared Owls had arrived at the reserve. He said that at least one had arrived on Wednesday and could hopefully be seen from the Haverton Viewpoint. Alan and co., joined by other members, set off. Margaret and Mick arrived first and were shown the location of the owl by one of the volunteer rangers. With limited space for a view of the owl they had to take turns at viewing it. Luckily the owl was actually closer than it had been in previous years but nevertheless it wasn't easy to see hidden in the vegetation. As Margaret was one of the early birds she was able to get a few pictures.

The other bird that there was a possibility of seeing (more likely hearing) was Bearded Tit. This was over the main road at the Dorman Pool. Graham and Rosemary had met an old friend from the Teesmouth Bird Club and they went in search of the bird – with no success. Mike (our driver) and I also went and again no Bearded Tit but we did see the Black Swan.

Late in the trip Martine and Paul were surprised and pleased to hear a Cetti's Warbler.

Alan met another friend - Ian -a fellow volunteer with the NT in Northumberland. He gave the heads up on a fieldfare and Margaret duly took a good photo of it. Earlier she had caught the Water Rail tree climbing! - great shot.

With refreshments from the cafe and retail therapy for some in a well stocked shop it was a good and very enjoyable trip

Species Seen:

Mute Swan, Black Swan, Pink-footed Goose, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Barnacle Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Pheasant, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Kestrel, Peregrine, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Snipe, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull, Greater-black backed Gull, Stock Dove, Woodpigeon Long-eared Owl, Magpie, Jackdaw, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Robin, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Tree Sparrow, Reed Bunting (57)

← **Water Rail**

Long-eared Owl →

Photos by

Margaret Goodall

Report by

Richard Poyer

BIRD RECORDS NOVEMBER 2019

Pink-footed Goose	200 over Yearle on 28th (SVM).
Whooper Swan	5 at Low Newton Scrape on 3rd (JPL), 4 at Budle Bay on 10th (JPL), 14 at Hedgeley Ponds on 10th & 9 at Branton Ponds on 11th with 16 on 24th (I&KD), 50 at Warkworth on 30th (I&KD).
Shoveler	30 at Budle Bay on 10th (JPL).
Long-tailed Duck	1 at Monk's House Pool from 6/19th (GB&JPL).
Red-throated Diver	3 off Holy Island on 2nd & 4 off Amble on 30th (I&KD).
Black-throated Diver	1 off Holy Island on 2nd (I&KD).
Great Northern Diver	1 off Amble on 30th (I&KD).
Little Egret	1 at Branton & Hedgeley Ponds on 9th & 10th (I&KD), 1 at Holy Island on 17th (GB).
Purple Sandpiper	68 at Berwick Quay on 17th (MG).
Woodcock	1 at Holy Island on 2nd (I&KD).
Peregrine	1 at Craster on 18th (PA).
Raven	2 at Branton on 14th (I&KD).
Waxwing	1 at Outchester Farm on 3rd (F&JS).
Chiffchaff	2 at Branton Ponds on 9th & 1 on 24th (I&KD), 1 at Craster on 18th (PA).
Fieldfare	50 at Branton Ponds on 7th (I&KD), 300 at Ford on 20th (SVM), 100 at Waren Mill on 22nd (JPL).
Redwing	20 at Branton Ponds on 7th (I&KD), 90 at Ford on 20th (SVM).
Brambling	1 at Howick on 2nd (PH).
Bullfinch	3 at Yearle on 21st (SVM).
Siskin	50+ at Branton Ponds from 2nd/14th (I&KD).

Observers Paul Ashdown (PA), Graham Bell (GB), Michael Gallico (MC), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Phil Hanmer (PH), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart McCormick (SVM), Fiona & John Southern (F&JS).

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

LBB Geese at Beal Point, 9th December 2019 *Photo: Alison McCormick*

PEAK COUNTS of SELECTED SPECIES for NOVEMBER: LINDISFARNE NNR

Light-bellied Brent Geese – 3000 **Pink-footed Geese- 3500** **Greylag Geese– 161** **Barnacle Geese– 1300**

Shelduck – 1996	**Pintail – 140**	**Wigeon – 11000**	**Mallard – 322**
Shoveler – 74	**Common Scoter – 1200**	**Slavonian Grebe – 3**	**Shag – 76**
Ringed Plover – 259	**Golden Plover – 8514**	**Lapwing – 1579**	**Turnstone – 50**