NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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Graham Sorrie *Photo: SVMcC*

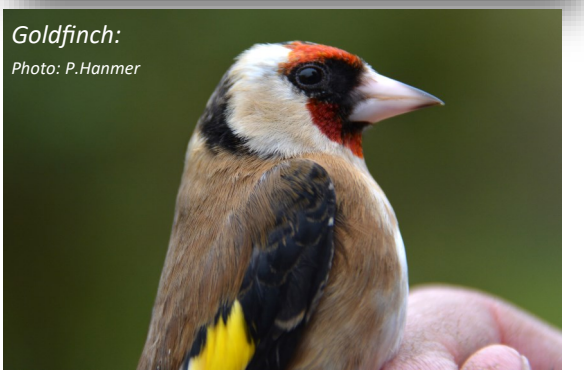
GRAHAM SORRIE: Keeping Morpeth's Skies Alive'

Graham brought a welcome ray of sunshine to the Pavilion in the gathering storm clouds of the Coronovirus Pandemic as he spoke to the members whilst they were seated in a pattern endeavouring to provide greater 'social distancing'! His passion and enthusiasm for these amazing birds knows no bounds; he inspired many to ask more about how they could set up their own Swift Boxes and follow his fine example. Report by Stewart McCormick on page 3, including the contact details for Swift Boxes.....

Chiffchaff
Photo: Richard Poyer

BIRD RECORDS for MARCH

(which latterly reflect the 'restrictions on movement of people' since the imposition of measures by the government.) Chiffchaff is one of the earliest common migrants likely to be seen or heard in gardens or local walks..... Records on p.4



Goldfinch:
Photo: P.Hanmer

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE

Phil Hanmer covers several topics in his latest Ringer's Roundup, including how to recognize male from female Goldfinches (why not try it out if they regularly visit the feeders in your garden!) There are also some pictures of Barn Owls

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS

BAMBURGH PAVILION

All Indoor Meetings, Field Trips and Committee Meetings are cancelled during the UK Government's Directive in response to the Coronovirus Pandemic. The Committee continue to monitor and assess the situation and remain in contact with each other via telephone and email. All Members will be contacted by email or phone as and when we can resume our meetings. Meanwhile stay safe and stay well.

Some recent photos submitted by members:

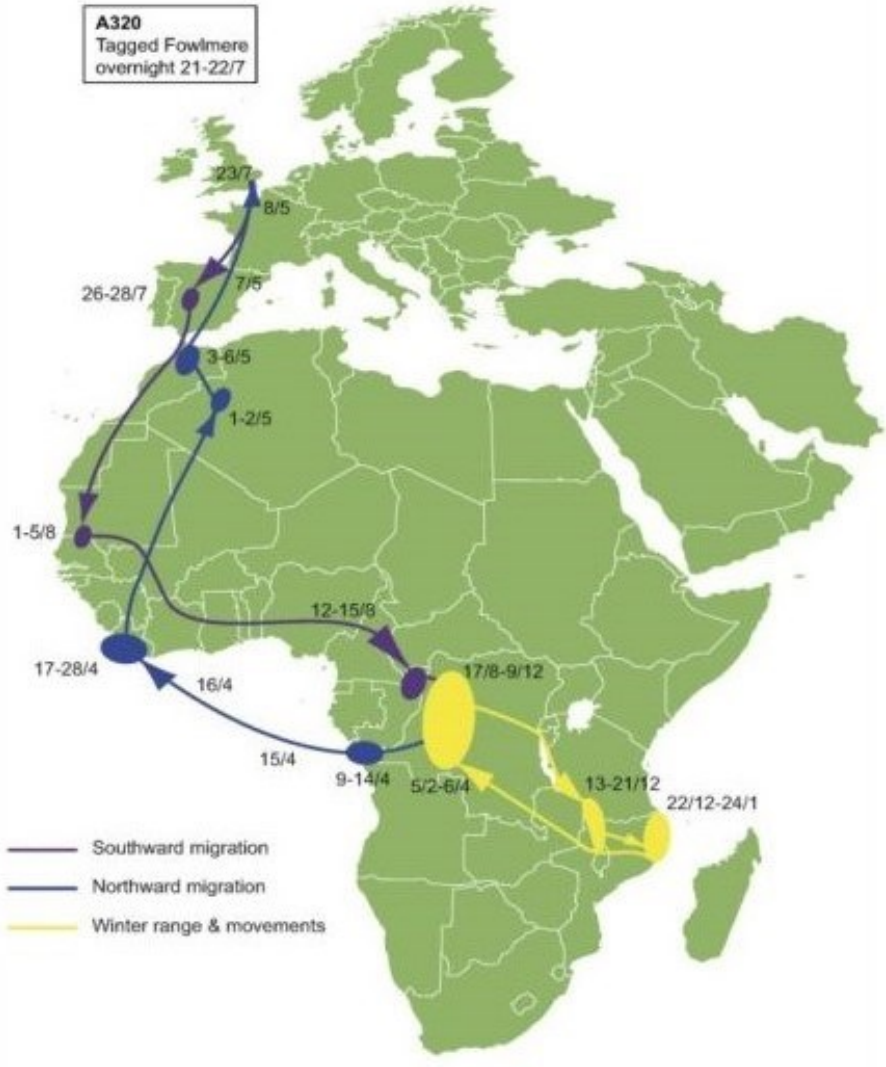
Bar-tailed Godwit & Curlew on Coquet Estuary (Richard Poyer-Amble)

Redpolls on a Garden Feeder (David Richens– Wooler)

CONTACT for wooden SWIFT BOXES : (model 10)

j.stimpson@btopenworld.com

Map showing migration route and wintering areas of a Swift tagged in England. (see page 3)



SWIFTS: Keeping Morpeth's Skies Alive Graham Sorrie

Graham Sorrie's visit on Friday 13th March brought a welcome ray of sunshine to the Pavilion in the gathering storm clouds of the Coronovirus Pandemic! He spoke with great knowledge and passion about SWIFTS, not as a professional ornithologist but as a birder who moved to a house in Lancaster Park, Morpeth "which just happened to have a pair of swifts nesting behind the soffit boards". Graham soon added a swift nest box to his house but failed to attract any new 'takers' in the first few seasons. Baffled, he contacted the Swift Expert- Edward Mayer- who encouraged him to put up a triple nest box. By the next year all sites were occupied, and he was well and truly 'hooked'. He now has eight nest sites on his modern home, the nucleus of the programme. Then a neighbour asked him about fitting a box to *his* house, which immediately found an occupant the year it was erected. 'Success'…. sowing the seeds of more ambitious plans!

Concerns that swifts returning to the UK are declining by more than 5% per annum led Graham to create the **Morpeth Swift Project** in 2013. What if more people could be persuaded to have Swift boxes? What if local builders could place swift bricks (integral nest boxes) in each new house they built? What if local Bird Clubs and Natural History Societies would donate money to buy more nest boxes? Graham has become an ambassador for Swifts, speaking to local clubs, asking for donations to MSP rather than speaker fees, and approaching local building firms to consider providing swift bricks in their new-build houses. Northumberland County Council are also 'on board' recognizing swift boxes are a very effective way to support biodiversity. All Saints Primary School (also in Lancaster Park) now has several boxes, as does Morpeth Rugby Football Clubhouse- bringing the total number of boxes added since 2013 to a magnificent 80.

The first part of Graham's fascinating talk provided an excellent history of the Swift family, beginning with a picture of the earliest known fossil of a swift-like ancestor *Scania cypselas* dating from 49 Million Years Ago. The Common Swift *Apus apus,* with which we are more familiar, dates back 25mya, one of a hundred different species of Swift worldwide. They are remarkable birds- the fastest bird in level flight- a bird which lives on the wing as soon as it leaves the nest, feeding, drinking, even sleeping as it flies, and will not land again until it returns to its nest site in a couple of years. Their legs are so short they generally only cling or scrabble up vertical surfaces using their four little grappling claws on each foot*, and have great difficulty getting airborne again if they ever find themselves stranded on the ground.

They are best thought of as 'African' birds, spending most of their life in that continent, (see map) which only fly north in late spring arriving around 7th/8th of May, (immediately settling to nest and raise a family) before setting off again in late August. Some amazing statistics underline their prowess in the air such as 'five days' to fly from Africa to their breeding territory in Northumberland, or their ability to engage in long-distance feeding forays to the near continent in poor weather when insect food is temporarily unavailable. One more alarming statistic is the steep decline in their numbers, with a 51% drop between 1995-2015 (BTO) meaning that they are currently 'amber' listed but may well be added to the 'red' list at the next review! Many other topics from unique species of swift lice to practical info on acquiring swift nestboxes were covered, and Graham was thanked by Richard for his fascinating insight to the amazing world of this charismatic bird of our summer skies. **Photos: Graham Sorrie** **Report: Stewart McCormick**

[*Undoubtedly the geeky word of the talk was '**pamprodactyl'** describing this unusual arrangement of four forward-facing toes]

Young Swift

Triple and Single Swift Boxes on Graham's House in Morpeth

BIRD RECORDS MARCH 2020

Pink-footed Goose	c.100 at Hoppen Kiln Flash on 7th (JPL).
Brent Goose	300 at Budle Bay on 10th (GB)
Whooper Swan	53 at Low Newton Scrape on 3rd(GB) & 41 on 9th(A&MG), 12 at Branton Ponds on 3rd & 21 on 19th (I&KD).
Shoveler	2 pairs at Monk's House Pool on 3rd (GB).
Gadwall	32 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Wigeon	40 on sea at Low Newton on 3rd (GB).
Ring-necked Duck	1 male at Branton Ponds on 29th (I&KD).
Tufted Duck	Pair at Monk's House Pool on 3rd (GB).
Common Scoter	40 at Stag Rocks on 3rd & 10th (GB).
Goldeneye	24 at Branton Ponds on 8th (I&KD).
Red-breasted Merganser	2 from Stag Rock on 3rd & 10th (GB).
Grey Partridge	2 at Branton on 23rd (I&KD).
Red-throated Diver	1 from Stag Rock on 3rd & 10th (GB).
Great Crested Grebe	1 at Branton Ponds on on 19th (I&KD).
White Stork	1 flying west towards Spindlestone Wood at a height of 50 feet on 7th (JPL), also, a possible was seen at Branton Ponds on the 5th (ID).
Little Egret	1 at Monk's House Pool on 24th (JPL).
Goshawk	1 on the 14th & 1 on 21st at two different locations in our area (A&MG, EH).
Red Kite	1 on the 21st in our area (EH).
Common Buzzard	1 -2 regularly at Yearle all month. (G&RB).
Curlew	300 at Budle Bay on 10th (GB).
Green Sandpiper	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Great Spotted Woodpecker	3 regularly drumming and chasing at Yearle all month (G&RB, SV&AJM)
Mediterranean Gull	2 at Branton Ponds on 17th (I&KD,A&MG).
Common Guillemot	120 at Needle's Eye on 3rd (SVM).
Razorbill	50 at Needle's Eye on 3rd (SVM).
Little Owl	1 at Embleton on 22nd (PA).
Peregrine	1 at Spindlestone Wood on 7th (JPL).
Starling	Murmuration and roost of c.2000 birds at Yearle diminishing towards end of month (G&RB, SV&AJM)
White Wagtail	1 at Boulmer on 23rd (A&MG).

Observers Paul Ashdown (PA), Graham & Rosemary Bell, (G & RB) Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG),), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV & AJM).

April records etc. DUE TO CORONAVIRUS please submit records by telephone or post throughout the Summer for County Record Submission to the recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, NE68 7WG. TEL:01665-720654 j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk

For September newsletter please submit all outstanding records by the 3rd to the recorder, thanks.