NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Honorary President: Graham Bell

www.northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk **ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk**

www.facebook.com/NorthNorthumberlandBirdClub

Chairman
Mr Richard Poyer,
12 Byron Street,
Amble, NE65 0ER

Membership Secretary
Mrs Fiona Southern,
Robin Cottage, Spindlestone Mill,
Belford, NE70 7ED

Secretary
Mrs Glynis Gower,
50 Ravensdowne,
Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1DQ
Tel: 01289 330969

Low Newton & Dunstanburgh Castle: *Martine Delbauve*

Red Kite: *courtesy of Harold Dobson (FoRK)*

Marsh Harrier over Somerset Levels *: R. Poyer*

'LOCKDOWN' LOW NEWTON

Like many other people, **Paul and Martine** have suddenly had to adapt their lives and activities to new routines. Luckily, they live on the edge of this wonderful coastline/reserve and can still walk there from the front door as their daily exercise. Turn to page 3 to catch up with some of the special birds they have seen and recorded on their perambulations……

APRIL BIRD RECORDS

are listed on page 6.

LOOKOUT FOR RED KITES

As Red Kites slowly spread out from the re-introduction project based in the Derwent Valley , sightings in our area should become more frequent. **Rosemary Bell** reports (page 4) on the fortunes of this iconic raptor and how we can all help by sending details of any sightings we have to FoRK, the charity dedicated to their welfare in our region.

A YEAR AGO THIS WEEK……

On page 5 Richard Poyer reflects on a wonderful holiday spent on the Somerset Levels last May in the halcyon days before Covid 19 and its restrictions.

WHAT'S NEW ON THE WEBSITE

Philip Hanmer, unable to monitor nest boxes at this normally busy time of year might well feel like 'tearing his hair out'….. but it is another one of his garden residents nicknamed 'Baldy' who features in his latest 'Ringer's Roundup'…….

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS

FIELD TRIPS

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 any of our activities. Meanwhile stay safe and stay well.

'DAWN CHORUS *WITH A DIFFERENCE*'

For many years , one of the most enjoyable and eagerly anticipated NNBC field trips each year has been the annual Dawn Chorus Event hosted by Lord James Joicey on the Ford & Etal Estates. Last year in May, we celebrated our 25th meeting, but sadly, due to the current restrictions, the 2020 event cannot go ahead as initially planned. In its place we are proposing a 'Dawn Chorus *with a Difference'* which will be open to all members of the Bird Club and members of the North Northumberland Tourist Association. This will take place on Saturday 9th May for an hour (*suggested* time 6-7am) from your bedroom, front-door or garden, listening to the wonderful and uplifting chorus of birdsong at this peak time of year. [N.B. There are links to birdsong recordings and other helpful website links to assist with I.D.]

There are two pdf. attachments accompanying this Newsletter– an invitation from Lord James Joicey to participate in the event and an accompanying *shortlist* of birds you might see or hear. All completed lists and any other responses from NNBC members such as texts, photos or recordings, should be sent to the Editor of the Newsletter stewart@yearle.plus.com

RED KITES SIGHTING SHEET (see article on page 4)

Please let us know if you see any Red Kites

Please provide your name, address and Contact number/e-mail

Location	Time/Date	Grid Ref	Wing Tag number/ colour	Comments

Please e–mail your records to info@friendsofredkites.org.uk or send to Friends of Red Kites, 63 Victoria Road, Barnard Castle, Co Durham DL12 8HR

☆ PICTURE ROUNDUP ☆

Many thanks to Alan & Margaret Goodall of Alnwick who have recently sent in these pictures of a family of Lapwings that they are seeing on their local daily exercise, with 'mum' looking after her precocial chicks.

"LOW NEWTON LOCKDOWN"

I am sure that many NNBC members have found birding on their "home patch" one of their most important consolations during these testing times. We are lucky enough to live just off the coast in Embleton, so our daily walk takes us across the fields and down to Low Newton and Embleton Bay. We have done this walk fairly regularly since we moved here nearly three years ago, but as other local-ish walks have become problematic, we find ourselves adopting it as our 'exercise' at least every-other day. At the start of April things still felt a bit grey and wintery. We saw our last Red-throated Diver on the bay on April 1st, and we did have a nice group of up to 14 Black-tailed Godwit on the Newton Scrape, looking particularly fine in summer plumage. The winter birds have gradually fallen away with my last lonely Dunlin on 16th, and the godwits finally heading off by 23rd. You can never be sure though, since other local birders have seen good numbers of Golden Plover just as the summer migrants start to arrive. Perhaps I will catch these even now.

On Newton Scrape, the star summer birds which gave us a real thrill to see are our very own Avocets! At the start of the month there were four, but two of these flew on to greener pastures very quickly, leaving us with a pair which seem determined to claim the fame of being the most northerly pair going. Their unmistakable profile is impossible to miss and brings something really special to the patch. Of course, they are not the only summer occupants of the scrape and pond at Newton. Amongst the noisy Mute Swans, Canada and Greylag Geese there are plenty of interesting ducks which are busily pairing off. Most days we are able to spot Mallard, Teal, Widgeon, Shoveler, Gadwall, Tufted and Shelduck, plus Eider still floating around on the bay.

More challenging is keeping abreast of the smaller summer arrivals. The bushes and trees have been alive with Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings and Linnets from the start of the month. Knowing that we would soon have a good set of warblers as well, I have tried really hard to improve my song recognition. I try to listen to my warbler CD regularly and do feel I am making progress. So far, I have been rewarded with plenty of Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, plus the odd Blackcap, and excitingly, at least three calling Grasshopper Warblers. (First one on 19th April.) On 24th April I was helped by another local NNBC member to identify my first Lesser Whitethroat call. We have also seen a Yellow Wagtail which seems to particularly like the unusually quiet golf-course.

The bay and beach are also seeing a change of cast. The first Sandwich Terns we spotted were on April 16th, and we are now treated to spectacular aerobatics on every walk. On 24th April, the bay was becalmed and the southern end was dotted all over with little black spots, resolving into Razorbill and Guillemots through the glasses. With far fewer people on the beach the number of waders has increased, and amongst the regular Oystercatcher, Redshank, Curlew and Turnstone, we have even seen a couple of Ringed Plovers reclaiming what could be prime territory for them without the flood of holiday makers.

As we walk back home up to Embleton, we sometimes pop into the old quarry on the edge of the village which usually gives us a couple more birds. It is where we saw our first House Martins and Sand Martins of the year on 17th April, and our last Goldeneye on the 7th. The quarry is also home to a thriving, noisy and boisterous colony of Tree Sparrows which you can't miss.

Just to complete our list for April I need to add a couple of special birds seen even closer to home in our garden. We have regular and absolutely thrilling visits from a Little Owl, and what seems to be an annual visit from Black Redstarts who like the building works still going on around us. Altogether, our April list, without ever getting in the car, is an amazing 83 species.

Despite the thrill of this stunning tally "on our doorstep", I am still keeping out an eager eye for a couple of special summer arrivals who might just choose Embleton for landfall: no Ring Ouzel, and no Wheatear. Still, with at least a few more weeks under the current regime, and a few days left in April, I am hoping to increase my warbler list, and, hopefully, to see wader and wildfowl families on the scrape and pond. There is still plenty to look forward to!

Paul Ashdown & Martine Delbauve

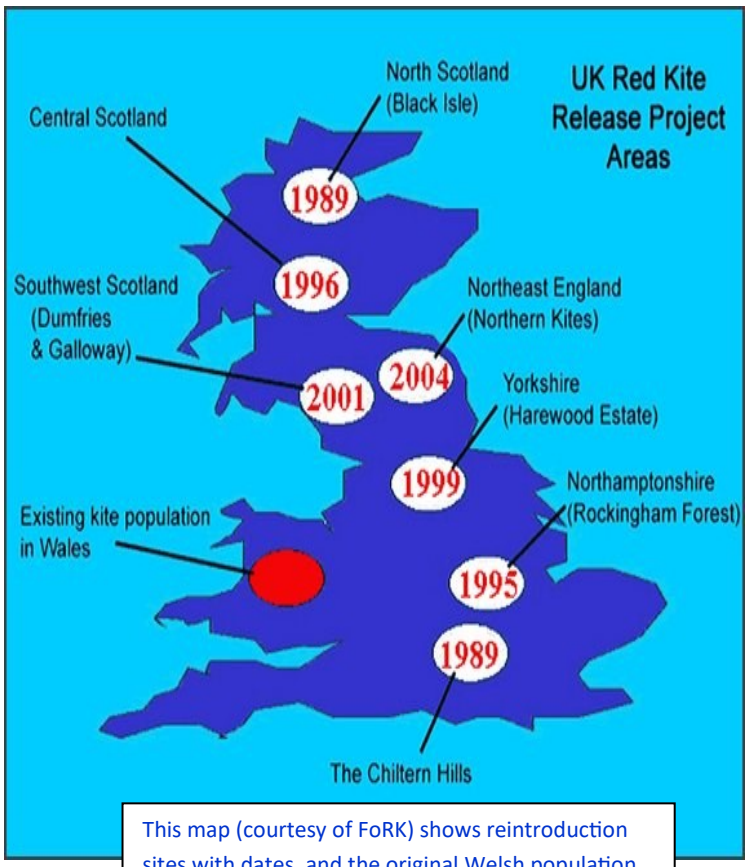
Red Kites in North East England

The Red Kite is a magnificent bird – and marvellous to watch in flight as it displays both its superb aerial agility and the bewitching fine adjustments of its forked tail. Historically, Red Kites suffered regular persecution, leaving only a small remnant population in mid-Wales until an ambitious re-introduction programme began over thirty years ago. This was staged with sites especially chosen to enable the birds to eventually spread and join up (see map below).

The most recent re-introduction of these magical birds in the North East was initially managed by the RSPB, but now the monitoring and protection of these birds is carried out by a group of dedicated volunteers supported by the charity, Friends of Red Kites (FoRK). Secretary Harold Dobson says "It's fifteen years since the first red kites were re-introduced to the Lower Derwent Valley. They are faring well in the valley itself and we enjoy watching these impressive, majestic birds of prey. As mainly scavengers, the red kites are of no threat to anyone or anything. However, we fear that persecution is preventing them from naturally expanding their range: since 2010, seven red kites have been found poisoned or shot near the Derwent Gorge and surrounding Durham Moorland. We fear that this may be the tip of the iceberg and that many more persecuted kites are never found. It is worthwhile flagging that, like all raptors, red kites are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) which makes it an offence to deliberately kill or injure a wild bird. Those found to have done so could be given an unlimited fine and/or a prison sentence."

FoRK report a good breeding season in 2019 with 58 kites recorded from two roost locations. Over time it is hoped that these birds will disperse, spreading from their core area not far from Gateshead, the most 'urban' location of the seven re - introductions. Tagged birds have been recorded from the Pennines to the Scottish Border-it is likely that they might be seen in our area anywhere from the Tweed or the Cheviot Hills across to the coast. Keep an eye on the skies! Please forward any sightings (in addition to sending to NNBC recorder), to FoRK**, using the form details from page 2**. This information will prove invaluable to the FoRK monitoring teams. Please document the location (with 6-figure O.S. grid reference number if possible) and any additional comments which you feel are relevant. (Golfers at Bamburgh Golf Course have, in the past, reported a red kite which stayed in the vicinity for four hours, giving the players plenty of time to concentrate on a different 'birdie'.) For further information or details please visit www.friendsofredkites.org.uk

Report by Rosemary Bell



This map (courtesy of FoRK) shows reintroduction sites with dates, and the original Welsh population.

Description: The red kite has a wingspan of five and a half feet. It has a reddish-brown body and wings with black tips, a grey head and distinctive rufous forked tail. The undersides of the wings are black and brown with white 'mirror' patches.
Weight: 800 - 1200g. Generally, males are lighter than females by approximately 5% but there is an overlap.ie a large male could be heavier than a small female.
Feeding: Carrion, small mammals, worms, fish.
Habitat/nesting: Wooded hills and open country. Nests in woodland trees, 8 - 20 metres from the ground. Kites will sometimes use an old buzzard's or crow's nest. The nest is made from twigs and lined with wool, often decorated with coloured polythene, rags and unusual objects such as gloves, socks and toys.
Breeding: 1- 3, occasionally 4 eggs, laid from late March onwards. Incubation takes 31 - 33 days, fledging in 50 - 70 days.
Life span: Usually 4 to 5 years, but individuals can live for 25-30 years.
Song: Their call is a high, often repetitive 'mewing'.

“A year ago this week.....

.....we were enjoying the first of two weeks on holiday in a cottage just off the Somerset Levels. The village of Blackford stands on higher ground and it is a mere five-minute car journey south to be down on the Levels and amongst the birds. We were there to enjoy the birds (myself) and the flora (my wife) of Somerset-a county we had never explored before- and to see family who live in Bristol.
The part of the Levels is now called the Avalon Marshes and consists of many reserves managed by such organisations as Natural England, RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust - Ham Wall, Westhay, Shapwick and Catcott all close to each other. This concentration of reserves has made it one of the most visited areas by birders in the UK. The reserves have been created from the old peat workings of companies such as *Fisons*. Surprisingly, some peat extraction still goes on. The rest of the landscape consists of grass paddocks grazed by dairy cattle.

So, what about the birds? Over the last 30-40 years reed beds have colonised the lakes created after the peat extraction. These have become the home for the largest number of booming male Bitterns in the UK (48 in 2019) as well as marsh harriers. One early morning (6am) walk that I took at Shapwick was magical with booming Bitterns, Cuckoos calling, Marsh Harrier circling and Great White and Little Egrets feeding, Great Crested Grebe on a nest and endless warblers.
One bird that I particularly wanted to see was the Hobby. Hobbies migrating back from Africa funnel into the Levels, attracted by the insects such as dragonflies, and are in large numbers in early May. On the first Saturday afternoon I went to the Westhay Moor NNR (the nearest reserve to Blackford), entered the first hide overlooking the water and there, way above in the sky, were four Hobbies. They are the most acrobatic of aerial hunters, capable of catching swifts, and just watching them made me feel dizzy. The highlight was when two (a pair?) headed straight for the hide at low level, then rose above it with their high-pitched squeaky call.
Egrets have been breeding on the Marshes since the 1990s. First was the Little Egret, then in 2012 the Great White Egret and finally in 2017 the Cattle Egret. Never having seen Cattle Egret in the UK I was keen to find one. One day, not far from the cottage and driving along one of the narrow roads that separate the grazing paddocks and drains, I spotted a large group of Egrets feeding around a herd of grazing cattle. Finding a place to park, not easy on these single-track roads, I checked them out through the scope; sure enough they were a flock of Cattle Egrets doing what they do the world over.
On the evening of our arrival I went down to the Levels close to the cottage to see what was about.
Parked on one of the wider parts of the road was another car, and the gentleman there told me that two short-eared owls had been hunting in the area for some days. Before long they arrived, and in the low evening sun it was lovely to watch them gliding around the paddocks. My friend went to his car boot and got out the largest telephoto lens I had ever seen - £7,000 worth of Nikon glass.
The hills of Somerset are also good birding areas and we had two visits to the Quantocks. The first visit was to see Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts in the oak filled coombes. Despite having read up on the best ones, we obviously chose a coombe that the birds were not visiting that day! Still, we had a good walk with spectacular views from the top of the hills.
The Mendips have their specialty too - the Nightjar. However, it was quite a long journey from the cottage to the Nightjar site and so I never did go there. Neither did we go in search of the Cranes now breeding in the west of the Levels. Another year, yet more new birds to see in Somerset, but sadly it will not be this year.

Cattle Egret *Photo: R.Poyer*

Hobby *Photo: R.Poyer*

BIRD RECORDS APRIL 2020

Ruddy Shelduck	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 19th & 27th (IB&KDa).
Shoveler	2 pairs at Monk's House Pool all month (JPL).
Gadwall	2 pairs at Monk's House Pool all month (JPL), 2 at Embleton on 7th (PAs).
Tufted Duck	3 pairs at Monk's House Pool all month (JPL).
Ring-necked Duck	1 at Branton Ponds from 6th to 14th (IB&KDa).
Grey Partridge	2 at Embleton on 2nd (WMB).
Red-throated Diver	1 at Embleton Bay on 1st (PAs), 2 at Stag Rocks on 22nd (JPL).
Great White Egret	1 at Low Newton Pool on 22nd (PAs).
Osprey	1 over Branton Ponds on 16th (IB&KDa).
Goshawk	1 over A1 on 22nd (JHa).
Avocet	4 at Low Newton Scrape on 6th then 2 from 17th (PAs).
Little Ringed Plover	1 on River Breamish on 5th & 3 on 26th (IB&KDa), 1 other site (WMB).
Whimbrel	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 27th (IB&KDa).
Black-tailed Godwit	14 at Low Newton Scrape on 1st down to 1 by 22nd (PAs), 6 at Branton Ponds on 12th (IB&KDa).
Turnstone	15 at Stag Rocks on 22nd (JPL).
Ruff	1 at Branton Ponds on 7th (IB&KDa).
Purple Sandpiper	19 at Stag Rocks on 22nd (JPL).
Jack Snipe	1 at Monk's House Pool on 14th (JPL).
Common Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 6th & 2 on River Breamish on 10th (IB&KDa) earliest.
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (IB&KDa).
Greenshank	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 27th & 3 on 29th (IB&KDa).
Sandwich Tern	c. 50 moving north at Stag Rocks on 22nd (JPL).
Cuckoo	1 at Alnwick on 7th (A&MG), was the first. 3 other sites at end of month.
Little Owl	1 at Embleton all month (PAs,WMB).
Sand Martin	50+ at Branton Ponds on 5th (IB&KDa), 20 at Alnwick on 9th (A&MG).
Swallow	2 at Alnwick on 6th (A&MG), 2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th (IB&KDa).
House Martin	1 at Branton Ponds on 5th (IB&KDa), was the first. 2 other sites later.
Willow Warbler	1 at Branton Ponds on 6th 3 on 9th & 11 on 10th (IB&KDa), were first.
Chiffchaff	5 at Yearle on 5th (DG&RHB).
Sedge Warbler	1 at Embleton Quarry on 15th (WMB), 1 at Branton Ponds on 16th (IB&KDa).
Grasshopper Warbler	3 at Low Newton on 19th (PAs), 1 at Embleton Quarry on 26th (WMB).
Blackcap	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 6th & 20+ at Branton Ponds on 9th (IB&KD).
Garden Warbler	1 at Branton Ponds on 21st (IB&KDa), 1 at Yearle on 24th (SV&AJM).
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Low Newton on 24th (PAa).
Whitethroat	1 at Embleton Quarry on 15th (WMB), 2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 27th (IB&KDa).
Ring Ouzel	9 at Harthope Valley on 22nd (SVM) and (Walter Brown).
Redwing	1 at Branton Ponds on 10th (IB&KDa).
Spotted Flycatcher	1 at Yearle on 26th (SV&AJM).
Black Redstart	1 male at Embleton all month (WMB,PAs).
Stonechat	5 at Monk's House Pool from 1st /3rd (JPL).
Wheatear	1 at Langleeford on 10th (Walter Brown), 3 at Alnwick on 13th (A&MG).
Yellow Wagtail	1 at Low Newton Scrape from 8th to 25th (WMB,PAs).

Observers Paul Ashdown (PAs), Winnie Banks (WMB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Walter Brown, Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KDa), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM).

May records etc, DUE TO CORONAVIRUS please submit records by Telephone, Post or e-mail 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 3th September at the latest to the recorder, many thanks.**