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Image courtesy of ***Alan Withrington****, Friends of Red Kites.*

Tree-top Pigeon in the Snow ***Kevin McCormick***

Murmuration Magic ***David Richens***

NORTHERN FLIGHTS

Dr. Colin Bradshaw gave a very entertaining Zoom Presentation of his travels in Northern Europe to see and photograph the wonderful birds and mammals of Iceland, Norway and Finland. Turn to pages 4&5 for **Paul Ashdown's** report.

RED KITES

Rosemary Bell is excited by the prospect of more Red Kite sightings in North Northumberland, while Liz Harrison reminisces on Kites visiting her garden in West Yorkshire on page 2.

TREE-TOP BIRDING

Kevin McCormick enjoys watching the visitors from his 'tree-top' view on Page 3

BIRD RECORDS for JANUARY

page 6

MURMURATION MAGIC

During lockdown, David Richens has enjoyed the spectacle, towards dusk each evening, of a starling murmuration from his back door. Turn to page four to find out how the 'show' ends……

RINGER'S ROUNDUP

Check out Phil's latest monthly blog on the NNBC Website– always an interesting read.

NOTICEBOARD

Indoor Meetings continue be cancelled at this time, but our programme for 2021 will continue with a ZOOM Talk on Friday 12th March entitled 'Impacts of Modern Agriculture on Bird Populations' presented by the eminent academic and ornithologist Professor Ian Newton. Now retired, he has held led or chaired several organisations during his career such as the Council of the RSPB and the BOU, and has written many authoritative books over the past fifty years including a post-doctoral study of *Finches* in 1972, his acclaimed monograph on *Sparrowhawks* in 1986 and his most recent *Farming and Wildlife* of 2017.

RED KITES in NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND

Two recent reports in January of a pair of Red Kites being seen in our area remind us to 'keep our eyes to the skies' and to report any sightings to the Friends of Red Kites (FoRK). As daylight hours lengthen, now is a good time for any dispersing birds to look for suitable nesting sites. Red Kites are likely to be actively engaged in nest-building activities in March.

With last month's Zoom Talk and Report of the Scottish Borders Golden Eagle project still fresh in our minds, many members will also be aware of the similar five-year scheme, running from 2004 – 2009, under the auspices of the RSPB. On completion of this 5-year project, the voluntary organisation **Friends of Red Kites** was formed. Having recently celebrated their 10th anniversary they continue to do sterling work. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), supported by RSPB, controls monitoring and survey work – although currently somewhat restricted. However, last year, more than 40 territories were confirmed and FoRK's autumn newsletter reported, "Red Kites have had their best breeding season ever this year" with 42 chicks having fledged; they expect in excess of 85 roosting Kites in their forthcoming survey. What a privilege it would be if they managed to spread to our area permanently.

For further information about FoRK, whether to report a sighting, find out more about Red Kites or even become a member, (£7 individual, £10 per household) - go to their very informative website https://friendsofredkites.org.uk/contact-us
As the website says "every single member counts, all money goes directly to monitoring, welfare and protection of our stunning red kites. In a year where we have been unable to fundraise, the extra finance will make a welcome difference".

Rosemary Bell

RED KITES at our 'BIRD TABLE'

Prior to returning to my native Northumberland ,we lived for 26 years in Pool in Wharfedale, West Yorkshire, a stone's throw as the Kite flies from Harewood House and Estate where, in 1999, 68 young Red Kites were re-introduced from the Chilterns in a partnership between Yorkshire Water, RSPB and (then) English Nature. I well remember regularly seeing the birds over the Harewood estate woods which I passed by daily on my short drive to Harrogate, where I worked as a Hospital Social worker.

In those days we had a long, narrow garden which stretched almost to the banks of the River Wharfe . One day , glancing down the garden where we had some mature Oaks and Elms, I noticed some bright orange objects in one of the trees. Reaching for the binoculars, I was thrilled to realise these were the numbered identification tags of five or six Red Kites perched among the branches!

The next plan was to encourage them closer to the house so we could watch them; this entailed putting out food on the areas of the garden awaiting cultivation. The real excitement was watching their strategies -first eying up the scraps of meat and chicken carcasses from a height, becoming more and more daring as time went on. The day I looked up from the kitchen sink by chance and looked straight into the eyes of a Red Kite clutching some scraps of raw meat as it swooped up and over the house is one I will *never* forget!

After that memorable day, we saw them regularly as they flew over our garden or further afield, always looking for more food. To this day on trips up and down the A1, I always look out and up near Wetherby and there is rarely an occasion when we don't see at least one of the descendants of 'our' Red Kites which are now a self-sustaining population, increasing yearly!

Liz Harrison

TREETOP BIRDING - 'City wildlife from a top-floor Glasgow tenement'

We moved into our top-floor, red-sandstone tenement flat in the west end of Glasgow back in 2017. At the back of the flat we look out on to a small play park which has several mature sycamore trees within it.

We see typical park and garden birds all year round with blue tit, robin, great tit, dunnock, chaffinch, wren, wood pigeon and blackbirds amongst our regular species. Urban foxes are a relatively common sight too. We have noisy magpies that have nested in a different tree every spring but by the summer all the dark-green leaves make it hard to see anything at all. The lesser black-backed gulls return in spring and raise their young on the roof tops across from us at the front of the flat - calling from first light (4am!) much to everyone's annoyance.

In the autumn, the leaves drop, and the 'helicopter' seeds spiral down to the grass. Neither are cleared and the rain turns the leaves into a mulch that provides good foraging for the blackbirds. When the ground elsewhere is frozen, I notice this damp leaf-cover can still be turned over and that brings in redwing, fieldfare and mistle thrush.

Back in September, the resident grey squirrels took over the most recent magpie nest, filling it with leaves. Unfortunately, their breeding plans came to nothing as some windy weather in December blew most of the leaves out and as I write there isn't much of the squirrels' dray left.

We are lucky to have a good-sized flock of siskins each winter. These pretty yellow-green finches are an aural delight, chattering away constantly in the bare trees. We owe this joy, along with the goldfinches that join them, to a top floor flat further along the street who have a couple of feeders screwed into the sandstone that they keep stocked with niger seed and sunflower hearts.

Another delight of being four floors up comes with getting good views of mixed small bird flocks making the most of the short daylight hours. It's the high-pitched call of the long-tailed tits that will alert us first and we'll stop for a few minutes to watch them feed. Some years they bring a goldcrest or a treecreeper with them. Not too far away they had a firecrest back in 17/18 but we've not been so lucky (yet)!

Article & Photograph: Kevin McCormick

STARLING MURMURATION & ROOST IN WOOLER David Richens

Photo: ***David Richens***

'No, it's not a smoking chimney fire, it's just our late-afternoon entertainment in Wooler!' The murmuration starts around 4pm, involving about 2000 birds although it is getting bigger all the time (usually we only have about 10-20 resident birds). After an insane sky dance for around 30 mins they dive-bomb at speed into the hedge, where they chatter for a while and then quietly roost overnight. When I go past in the dark the whole hedge rustles and shakes a bit plus the odd flapping noise but otherwise there is no sign that they are there. The hedge is the original hedgerow from the an old farmhouse next door, so it is around 200+ years old. It is mainly beech and holly but has many other species and usually provides cover for greenfinches, tree sparrows and the odd dunnock, with the occasional bizarre resident such as a moorhen (we have no water around us). Our street is quite residential. This picture was taken recently in the driving rain from my back door.

NORTHERN FLIGHTS Dr. Colin Bradshaw

NBC's second Zoom Meeting took us on a fantastically illustrated tour of far northern Europe, visiting Iceland, Finland and Norway to photograph stunning birds and spectacular mammals. Dr Colin Bradshaw shared his superb photos and expert knowledge with plenty of humorous tales to keep us entertained.

Young Golden Eagle in the Snow, nr.Trondheim, Norway

He started with a series of winter trips to the Trondheim region of Norway on a quest for eagles. Carrion is used to attract the birds to hides, but in order to avoid spooking them, Colin had to enter the hides before light, and re-main inside till dark. This commitment paid off with some superb images of White-Tailed and Golden Eagles, and fantastic Goshawks. I think few of us in the audience shared his concern that he had been too close to the birds for his preferred compositions, we were just amazed by the intimate and crisp portraits of these charismatic birds. I'm sure we also appreciated the dedication he described with such a light touch, as he explained that during these long hours in the hide, he had to wait for less than 10 birds (of any species) over the day, only to have one Golden Eagle decide to rest on top of the hide rather than pose where it should have! The reward of his Patience on the second day was this beautiful Grey-headed Woodpecker.

Grey-headed Woodpecker

Alongside the eagles Colin also showed us some of the other residents of the mountains and forests of central Norway. Some were familiar, even if out of our usual winter migrant context, but many felt wonderfully exotic. These included far northern specialities like the Siberian Jay and Pygmy Owl, and birds which are increasingly rare visitors for us, like Black-throated Diver and Bluethroats. One particularly close encounter, high on the Trøndelag plateau, involved an overnight stay

in portable hides to catch the lek of the Great Snipe. Again, Colin described how *some birds just don't get the idea of a photo shoot*, as one Great Snipe decided to wriggle its way under the material of the hide ending up poking about between his feet.)

Lekking Great Snipe, Trøndelag, Norway

After the mountains of Norway, we headed to the wide sweep of the forests in eastern Finland around Viiksimo and Lieksa, in early August. The birds and bird photos were great, (Ural Owl, Black Woodpecker and Nutcracker amongst my favourites), but this section was really about mammals. Once again, hides featured large in the tales. Colin shared awesome images of Brown Bear and described how one had displayed typical behaviour in deciding on a good back scratch, the only problem being the scratching post was his flimsy hide rather than a tree. He also gave us fantastic images of Wolverine, but lamented that he had never managed to see Grey Wolf. (This probably made us all feel better; haven't we all got at least one "Holy Grail" species we seem fated never to spot?)

Great Grey Owl, Kirkenes, Norway

Next stop was the far north of Iceland which is just outside the Arctic Circle. We had our last few mammals, with pictures of Humpback Whales and a Blue/Fin Whale hybrid, but mostly it was back to birds, which had to be hunted down amidst the swarms of flies covering everything in the high northern summer. Colin explained that for most of his images he had to get low on the ground, under the fly-layer, to get good shots. And what shots! A Black-Tailed Godwit in bright summer plumage, a glowing Slavonian Grebe, and the monochrome beauty of a Great Northern Diver. Ducks also began to feature in Colin's show at this stage – starting with two special residents of the rivers flowing out of Lake Myvatn. Barrow's Goldeneye and Harlequin Duck are not only real northern specialities, but they are also exceptionally beautiful birds, captured in some wonderful images despite the flies.

Our final flight took us back to Norway, this time in early spring, to the far north and the border with Russia. With snow still thick on the ground access to the forest was on husky sled allowing Colin to capture some more real northern stars like Pine Grosbeak, Great Grey Owl, Hawk Owl and Siberian Tit. However, the final (and probably most beautiful) images of our evening were captured from a freezing, floating hide, moored in the harbour at Båtsfjord on the White Sea. This time, Colin's dedication had him dressed in a cramp-inducing diver's dry suit while stuck in the hide for long hours photographing some incredibly special ducks. Colin's skill used amazing reflections and colour to capture fantastic images of all three species of eider in Europe: our familiar Common Eider, the King Eider and the Steller's Eider. This set of images was a final flourish to an evening full of good tales, super birds, and wonderful photos. What a great way to spend a chilly night in Northumberland

Report by Paul Ashdown ***All Photos by kind permission of Dr. Colin Bradshaw***

Barrow's Goldeneye Lake Myvatn, Iceland

Steller's Eider Batsford, Norway

BIRD RECORDS JANUARY 2021

Barnacle Goose	1600 at Harper's Heugh on 2nd (JPL) & 1600 on 18th (JPL,AB), c.1500 at Budle Bay on 24th (JPL) & 1000 on 19th (A&MG).
Pink-footed Goose	300 at Harper's Heugh on 16th & 18th (JPL/AB), 1200 at Newton Links on 17th (A&MG), 1100 at Doddington on 24th (SV&AJM).
Whooper Swan	24 at West Loanend on 16th (MW), 18 at Birling Carrs on 29th (A&MG).
Shoveler	45 at Budle Bay on 18th (JPL,AB) & 12 at Monk's House Pool on 31st (JPL).
Gadwall	8 at Hedgeley Ponds on 2nd (SVM).
Common Scoter	150 off Howick from 7/15th (A&MG).
Goldeneye	12 at Longhougton from 3rd /31st (A&MG), 10 off Howick on 15th (A&MG).
Grey Partridge	10 at Snableazes on 12th (A&MG), 8 at Goswick on 17th (EH).
Red-throated Diver	1 off Howick on 15th & 1 off Low Newton on 17th (A&MG).
Fulmar	50 at Howick on 7th & 62 on 15th (A&MG).
Little Egret	1 at Branton Ponds on 1st (I&KD), 1 at Boulmer on 3rd & 1 at Newton Links on 17th (A&MG), 1 at Doddington on 24th (SV&AJM).
Red Kite	pair at Eglingham on 15th (DG&RHB) & a pair at Branton Ponds on 16th (per SR).
Golden Plover	400 at Boulmer from 3rd /31st (A&MG), 32 at West Loanend on 16th (MW), 600 at Goswick on 17th (EH), 200 at Doddington on 18th (SV&AJM).
Grey Plover	20 at Boulmer from 3rd /31st (A&MG).
Sanderling	140 at Boulmer from 3rd /9th (A&MG).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Branton Ponds on 1st & 1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 17th (I&KD).
Short-eared Owl	1 at Low Newton on 17th (A&MG).
Kingfisher	1 at Stag Rocks on 3rd (P &MN), 1 at Boulmer on 24th (A&MG).
Merlin	1 at Boulmer on 3rd (A&MG), 1 at Chathill on 20th & 1 at Preston Hall on 26th (JPL).
Raven	1 at Ford Moss on 15th (EH).
Willow Tit	1 near Branton on 26th (I&KD).
Blackcap	1 Berwick on 14th (P&MN).
Tree Creeper	1 at Yearle all month (SV&AJM,DG&RHB).
Fieldfare	10 at South Hazelrigg on 19th (CD), 60 at Doddington on 24th (SV&AJM),120 at Low Newton on 31st (JPL).
Redwing	25 at Snableazes on 13th (A&MG).
Stonechat	3 at Goswick on 31st (EH).
Grey Wagtail	1 at Boulmer on 31st (A&MG).
Brambling	1 at Branton on 15th (I&KD).
Bullfinch	pair at Yearle on 15th (SV&AJM), pair at Holburn on 19th (CD).
Greenfinch	1 at Doddington on 24th (SV&AJM).
Siskin	70 near Branton on 2nd (I&KD) 4 at Yearle from 18th /31st (SV&AJM).

Escapes **Bar-headed Goose** 1 at Buston Links on 29th (A&MG).

Observers Adrian Baker (AB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KD), Chris Duncan (CD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Liz Harrison (EH), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM), Phil& Marge Noble (P&MN), Sue Rogers (SR), Martin Worsfold (MW).

February records: please submit records no later than 1st March by e-mail, telephone or post to the recorder, John Lumby, Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, NE68 7WG. TEL:01665-720654
e-mail j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk or .com if difficulty. **many thanks.**