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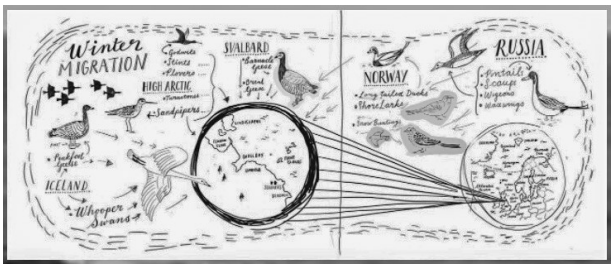
Sparrowhawk ***photo: Dr. Colin Bradshaw.***

THE RAPTORIAL SPARROWHAWK

Graham & Rosemary Bell appreciate the skill of this frequent visitor to their garden. Turn to Page 3 to read more…….



BIRD RECORDS for FEBRUARY

turn to page 5 for the most recent sightings

SNOW BIRDS TO SEAHOUSES

Turn to page 3 to discover how our Bird Recorder ended up as the Star Attraction in Neptune's front Window…….

Water Rail at Wooler Common ***photo: David Richens***

IMPACTS of MODERN FARMING ON FARMLAND BIRDS

Dr Ian Newton. Turn to pages 4&5 for **Paul Ashdown's** report of our latest Zoom Meeting on 12th March

RINGER'S ROUNDUP

Check out Phil's latest monthly blog on the NNBC Website– including this leucistic Robin— always an interesting read.

Leucistic Robin ***photo: Phil Hanmer***

NOTICEBOARD

Indoor Meetings continue be cancelled at this time, but our programme for 2021 will continue with a ZOOM Talk on Friday 9th April (details to follow when confirmed)

[A New Book on the Iconic Ring Ouzel, a bird which has featured as our logo since the club was founded in 1984]

The Ring Ouzel A View from the North York Moors *by Ken Hutchinson, Vic Fairbrother*

- The first comprehensive account of this evocative and elusive upland bird
- An inspiring account of the joys and rewards of observing the daily behaviour of the Ring Ouzel and its place in a habitat shared with other wildlife
- A remarkable record of twenty years' fieldwork by two dedicated amateur ornithologists in the North York Moors

Reveals the impact of people on the behaviour of Ring Ouzels and in particular the bird's ability to adapt to the rich industrial heritage of the North York Moors

Using vivid extracts from field notebooks and profusely illustrated with photographs as well as paintings and sketches by wildlife artist Jonathan Pomroy, the reader is transported to the beautiful North York Moors National Park. We can share in the excitement as the first Ring Ouzels of the year return from their winter quarters in North Africa, witness their courtship displays, the establishment of territories and the female ouzel painstakingly building her nest and laying eggs. This is followed by the monitoring of the hatching and fledging of chicks and the levels of predation – noted in order better to understand the productivity and sustainability of this vulnerable and isolated population.

...This is an invaluable book on a very important, but relatively little-known species by two remarkably enthusiastic fieldworkers in a part of the country renowned for its beauty. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have. Extract from **Foreword** by **Chris Rollie**, RSPB Ring Ouzel Plan Manager, Chair of the UK Ring Ouzel Study Group **£21.95 Whittles Publishing**

https://www.whittlespublishing.com/The_Ring_Ouzel

TIDE TABLES Please find four pdf copies of the 2021 Seahouses Tide Tables

FAIR ISLE UPDATE from NNBC ARTICLE IN OCTOBER 2020: The combined effects of Brexit and Covid have exacerbated the already challenging logistics of re-building the Observatory destroyed by a devastating fire two years ago: only one company has submitted a tender, several million pounds over the budget of £7.4m. Sadly, the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust have had to take the extremely difficult decision to make the warden, David Parnaby, and the administrator (his wife Susannah) redundant. The Trust remains fully committed to building a new observatory on Fair Isle and the Public Appeal remains open and active. SVMcC

SEAHOUSES in WINTER http://seahouseswinter.com/ The voluntary group Seahouses in Winter have organised the project which included the links between the school and the residents of Seahouses.(see pages 3 and 4) Further details can be found on their website.

THE RAPTORIAL SPARROWHAWK

Raptorial** ***(*adjective) adapted for seizing prey, as the bill or claws of a bird.*

[……..'rapere' in Latin translates as 'to seize' – it describes our raptor friends well. Something that is raptorial is thieving!]

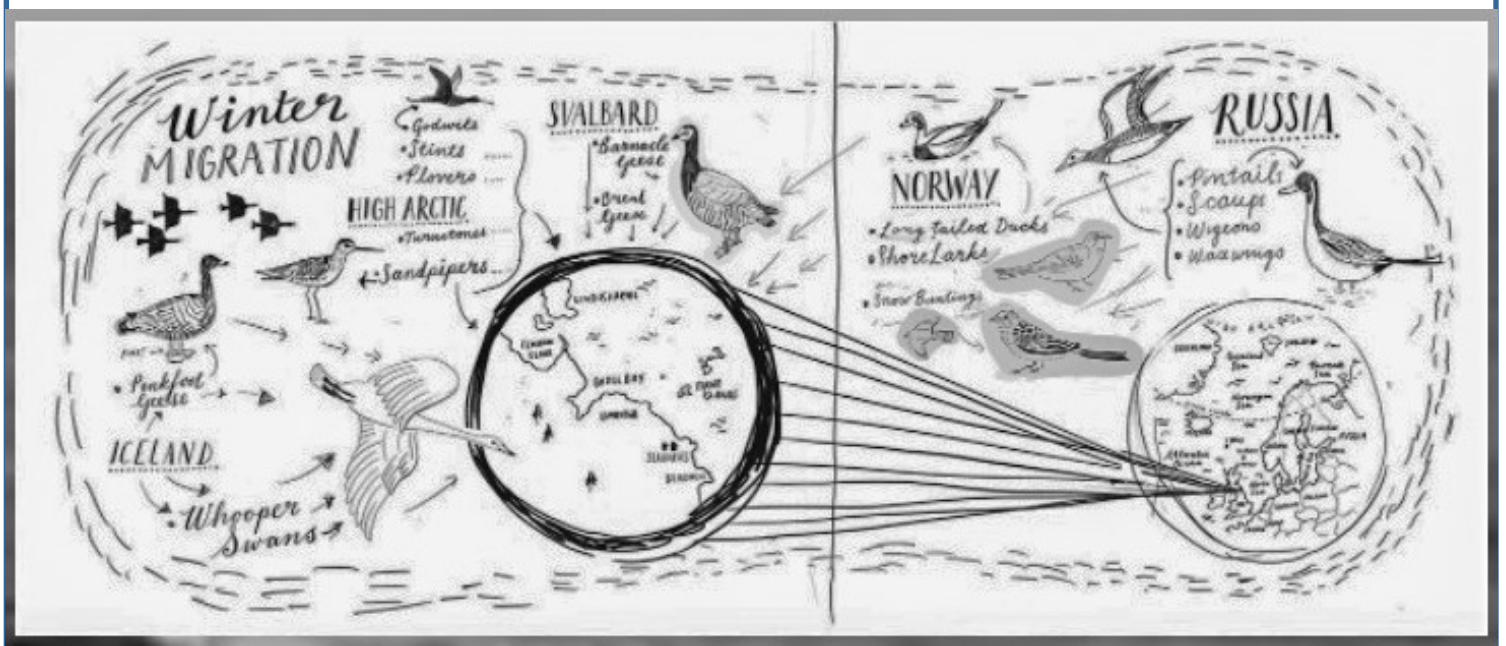
'Sparrowhawk unplucking its prey' ***photo by Alan Goodall***

Text: Graham & Rosemary Bell.

We see 'our' local Sparrowhawk fairly regularly, either dashing dramatically at break-neck speed through the garden shrubs and trees or stealthily waiting in upper branches of the tree from which hang our bird-feeders – either way it is attempting to seize its prey. Like it or loathe it, this **raptorial* species has to feed and there is only one Sparrowhawk (or should I say, a pair) in relation to many dozens of small birds from which it will take the old, weak, or ailing individuals. With those bright yellow watchful eyes, and its speed as one tactic, and patience when perched in-wait as an alternative tactic, one can't help but admire it! Shortly after the end of the recent snowy period, when welcome sunshine appeared, this local seemed to be quite happy sunning itself on atop a garden hedge-row, neither in wait nor chasing but relaxing – what superb views it gave us of its subtle colours!

All birds of prey had full legal protection in the UK from 1954 with the exception of the Sparrowhawk which only received protection in 1961. Raptors tend to live longer than most birds, with Golden Eagles living 25 years or more, but Sparrowhawks have the shortest lifespan of about 2-3 years on average - we should appreciate them!

SNOW BIRDS to SEAHOUSES…..A HEARTWARMING TALE



'Winter Migration' {Artwork in Neptune's Window) by Trina Dalziel

(story continued on page 4 ……..

Our Bird Recorder John Lumby is a very well-known character in Seahouses. The 'story' behind the wonderful Artwork is best told in John's own words…….

"The Seahouses Volunteer Group asked the school kids to write to several local residents. I got Marcus.

He wrote to me about snow, so I responded about the snow birds fleeing the winter freeze up in the high arctic & migrating south to North Northumberland for the winter.

My letter was judged the best so got top billing in the Neptune's window, superbly illustrated by a local artist Trina Dalziel who has captured autumn/winter migration very well indeed!" **John Lumby**

IMPACTS of MODERN AGRICULTURE on BIRD POPULATIONS Dr. IAN NEWTON

NBC's third Zoom talk was delivered by Dr Ian Newton and told the shocking story behind the catastrophic decline in farmland birds across the British countryside since 1970. None of us who visit the countryside can have been surprised by the information he shared, as all of us will have seen, in one way or another, the decline in species we used to take for granted, like starlings, house sparrows and song thrushes. What Dr Newton gave us was the hard scientific evidence for this collapse (from BTO surveys), and a detailed analysis and description of the way it has been driven by the intensification of modern farming. He acknowledged the huge increase in food production achieved under this regime, but showed us the long-term cost to the health and bio-diversity of our countryside that it has brought in train.

By bringing together a careful analysis of all the changes impacting on farmland, Dr Newton was able to highlight the immense pressure on bird populations, and showed how the various factors reinforce each other to severely reduce the capacity of farmland to support wild birds. The heavy use of pesticides and weed-killers not only reduces the amount of food available to birds directly, it has also enabled the shift away from traditional crop rotation and field management regimes so that early harvesting, winter sowing, and silage production further reduce food availability and also destroy nesting opportunities. The larger fields required for the machinery delivering these chemicals and for harvesting crops have led to a massive reduction in hedge-rows stripping the landscape of vital nest sites and food reservoirs. Even a seemingly benign practice like the routine treating of livestock with anti-parasite drugs has added to the catastrophe, as these drugs remain active in animal dung and persist in the soil, causing a huge reduction in insect life which, in turn, supported many birds. In the face of these interlocking pressures, it is no wonder that so many of the large fields we walk across seem devoid of birdlife.

Dr. Newton was not able to offer a great deal of positive news to lighten this depressing picture. He did point out that concerted intervention and conservation measures had managed to save species like the corncrake, cirl bunting and stone curlew from extinction in the UK. A small number of species have also found ways to exploit or survive agricultural change. Goldfinches have increased as they now supplement traditional food with garden feeding, and wood pigeons thrive by feeding on the crops themselves. This is precious little in comparison to the massive declines faced by so many other species. The only glimmer of hope offered for these was the opportunity for changes to agricultural practice which might emerge from the government's new support regime for farmers which is to re-place the subsidies of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. If this new approach effectively pays farmers for "common good" like hedgerows and wildlife friendly farming, rather than encouraging them to produce more and more whatever the cost, there is hope that we might see a gradual recovery in coming years. This, of course, is politics, so we all have our part to play! **PAUL ASHDOWN**

BIRD RECORDS FEBRUARY 2021

Barnacle Goose	c.1500 at Harper's Heugh on 5th (JPL), 1 at Branton Ponds on 10th (I&KD).
Pink-footed Goose	300 at Harper's Heugh on 5th (JPL), 1000 at Doddington on 22nd (SV&AJM), 6000 at Budle Bay on 26th (DG&RHB).
Whooper Swan	4 over Branton on 19th (I&KD), 5 at Alnmouth on 26th (JPL).
Shoveler	12 at Monk's house pool on 1st (JPL).
Pochard	1 at Branton Ponds on 19th (I&KD) & 1 on 24th (A&MG).
Common Scoter	50 off Birling Carrs on 22nd (A&MG).
Goldeneye	11 at Branton Ponds on 19th (I&KD) & 8 on 27th (SV&AJM), 2 at Logan's Pool (Seahouses) on 17/18th (JPL,AB).
Red-throated Diver	1 off Cheswick on 26th (SVM), 1 at Stag Rocks on 26th (DG&RHB), 5 off Boulmer on 26th (A&MG).
Fulmar	16 at Dunstanburgh on 1st (A&MG).
Red-necked Grebe	1at Logan's Pool (Seahouses) from 15/19th (A&MG,JPL,AB), coming into breeding plumage.
Little Egret	1 at Long Nanny on 15th (A&MG), 2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 20th & 4 on 25th (I&KD), 1 at Doddington on 22nd (SV&AJM).
Red Kite	1 at Charlton Mires on 14th (JPL).
Buzzard	5 over Branton on 8th (I&KD).
Grey Plover	6 at Beadnell all month (JPL,A&MG), c.5 at Budle Bay all month (JPL).
Turnstone	40 at Stag Rocks all month (DG&RHB,JPL).
Purple Sandpiper	60 at Stag Rocks all month (DG&RHB,JPL).
Snipe	2 at Dunstanburgh on 1st (A&MG), 3 at Branton Ponds on 10th (I&KD), 1 at South Hazelrigg on 23rd (CD).
Green Sandpiper	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 20th (I&KD).
Greenshank	1 at Budle Bay on 18th (JPL,AB).
Common Guillemot	85 at Needles Eye on 26th (SVM).
Razorbill	15 at Needles Eye on 26th (SVM).
Barn Owl	1 at Branton ponds 10/14th (I&KD), 1 at Beadnell on 15th (A&MG), 1 at Doddington on 22nd (SV&AJM), 1 at Logan's Pool on 26th (JPL).
Skylark	12 at Needles Eye on 26th (SVM), 65 at Breamish Valley on 27th (I&KD).
Tree Creeper	2 near Hedgeley Hall on 7th (I&KD).
Fieldfare	35 over Branton on 16th (I&KD).
Mistle Thrush	2 at Holburn on 8th (CD).
Black Redstart	1 male feeding on the Ramparts at Berwick-on-Tweed on 11th (MG) & 1 male feeding near Logan's Pool on 19th (A&MG).
Brambling	1 at Ellingham on 15th (MH).
Bullfinch	1 pair at Wooler on 10th (DG&RHB), 12 at Branton Ponds on 19th (I&KD).
Greenfinch	4 at Ellingham on 15th (MH).
Crossbill	c.7 at Hedgeley Ponds on 23rd & 2 at Beanley Wood on 27th (I&KD).
Siskin	1 at Holburn on 8th (CD), 48 at Alnwick on 9th (A&MG), 2 at Branton Ponds on 9th (I&KD), 6 at Ellingham on 15th (MH).

Observers Adrian Baker (AB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KD), Chris Duncan (CD), Michael Gallico (MG), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Michael Hall (MH), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM).

March records: please submit records no later than 1st April 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.**