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Whoopers stop over at Low Newton *photo: M. Delbauve*

Ulley Valley, haunt of the Snow Leopard *photo: M.Watson*

Spotty young female Barn Owl *photo: Phil Hanmer*

SPRINGTIME, ANYONE? **Paul Ashdown** reflects on the 'Arctic' Weather Front . Turn to page 3

BIRD RECORDS for MARCH turn to page 6 for the most recent sightings compiled by our Recorder, John Lumby

LADAKH in WINTER by Mike Watson. Turn to pages 4&5 for **Paul Ashdown's** report of our April Zoom Meeting

DO YOU KNOW YOUR LARKS FROM YOUR LINNETS.....in LATIN? Turn to page 2 for a little quiz matching the familiar names of twenty well-known birds with their scientific names

RINGER'S ROUNDUP Check out Phil's latest monthly blog on the NNBC Website– featuring this young female barn owl displaying her characteristic 'spotty' front. Owl Nest-Box inspections and repairs are carried out at this time of year; but she was unexpectedly found when cleaning out some 'goldeneye' nest boxes.....

NOTICEBOARD

Indoor Meetings continue be cancelled at this time, but our programme for 2021 will continue with a ZOOM Talk on Friday 7th May by Dr. Hugh Hanmer, BTO Research Ecologist, on Project Owl: 'Secrets of the Night'.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

As mentioned in the December Newsletter No. 370 the Committee decided that NO subscription would be due until the 1st September 2021.

This puts both the Financial Year and the Membership Year starting on the same day, namely 1st September in each year. The months of January to August (8 months) this year have therefore been Ex Gratia.

This will have to be ratified at the next AGM.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE - 1st SEPTEMBER 2021. ***(Instructions for payment will follow in due course.)***

Couple/Family £15, Individual £10, Full-Time Student/Junior Free.

DAWN CHORUS EVENT at FORD & ETAL ESTATE As coronavirus regulations begin to relax, it is hoped that we can re-instate this popular event in mid-May when a socially distanced group of up to 30 participants should be able to meet in this way. Discussions are underway with Lord Joicey, and full details will be circulated to members a.s.a.p.

Can you tell your Larks from Linnets……..in Latin? Graham and Rosemary Bell enjoy a little 'Latin Quiz' now and again just for fun, pairing the familiar bird name with its scientific name. Below you will find their list of twenty scientific names (A-T) plus the corresponding familiar names (1-20). How many can you pair up by jotting down the letter and its appropriate number, (without first resorting to a bird book or iPad?) You can always check it out later (in your bird book, or at the foot of page 5). Enjoy!

Scientific Names	*English Names*
A Corvus corone	1 Robin
B Erithacus rubecula	2 Black-headed Gull
C Parus caeruleus	3 Jackdaw
D Pica pica	4 Dunnock
E Anser anser	5 Blackbird
F Troglodytes troglodytes	6 Great-spotted Woodpecker
G Turdus philomelos	7 Blue-Tit
H Larus argentatus	8 Barn Owl
I Tyto Alba	9 Mistle Thrush
J Passer montanus	10 Herring Gull
K Larus ridibundus	11 House Sparrow
L Anas platyrhynchos	12 Song Thrush
M Corvus frugilegus	13 Wren
N Corvus monedula	14 Tree Sparrow
O Dendropocus major	15 Carrion Crow
P Prunella modularis	16 Magpie
Q Turdus merula	17 Mallard
R Sturnus vulgaris	18 Greylag Goose
S Passer domesticus	19 Rook
T Turdus viscivorus	20 Starling

SPRINGTIME, ANYONE ?

Paul Ashdown muses on our 'Arctic' Weather Front….

Primula Vulgaris (photo: SVM)

Viola odorata (photo: SVM)

Sitting at my computer writing this as the wind howls outside and the powdery snow rattles on the windows, spring seems far, far away. Only a few days ago I felt like we were there, and the long, lockdown winter had just about finished. We should know it never goes that smoothly, but perhaps this year we have all been keener than ever to spot the tell-tale signs of the changing season as we tread our familiar local walks.

We know we are lucky on the Northumberland coast to have such fine walks on our doorstep, walks that are full of spectacular wildlife whatever the season. This winter, our regular walks have changed slightly to avoid muddy fields, but the dunes and bays between Long Nanny and Dunstanburgh Castle have been our regular haunts. Best winter moments have included watching the local pair of Ravens wash energetically in a cattle trough, the fields at Low Newton suddenly full of Fieldfares, and dapper Goldeneye popping up and down in the water of just about every bay, lake, or river we pass. Now though, we search out signs of change on every walk: post-Game of Thrones, "Winter is Going"…

The start of these changes hasn't yet cleared out the winter residents. In fact, numbers of geese and swans seem to have gone up, ready for their migrations perhaps. We saw our biggest flock of well over 1000 Pink-footed Geese on the fields behind Newton Links in late March, and a flight of over 80 Whooper Swans went over us on Embleton Bay on the 20th. There are still plenty of Sanderling and Purple Sandpiper around, but we only see the odd, lonely Dunlin, and the largest flocks of Curlew seem to have thinned out. The waders that have given us the biggest lift are arrivals, not departures. On the evening of 22nd March, the scrape at Low Newton was filled with soft evening light, and the water covered in Wigeon and a couple of dozen Whooper Swans. Their soft calls filled the air, and in the middle of it all, swaying through the water, were the unmistakable forms of two Avocets. If it hadn't been so cold, I could have stayed for hours.

Whoopers stop over at Low Newton *photo: M. Delbauve*

Another sign of changing times is the increase in owl sightings. Longer days reveal more activity, and we manage to spot Barn Owls most morning or evening walks. We also have Little Owls on the patch, and neighbours have seen spectacular conflict between the two, with the Little Owls shooting out of their nest site to knock the hunting Barn Owl out of the sky. Barn Owls will take Little Owl chicks, but clearly not without a fight.

Looking for other spring arrivals is still hard work. We have plenty of Chiffchaff, even in our garden, and our very first was at Low Buston (away from our normal haunts) on 16th March. Our first Swallows and Sand Martins were at Low Newton on April 2nd, and we have also had a couple of Swallows over the garden, including one very sad looking individual, perched on a neighbour's roof, hunched against the snow, probably wishing it had stayed in Africa! Not so worried by the cold, Lesser Black-backed Gulls showed up in Low Newton on April 2nd, and on the 4th we saw Gannets fishing off Long Nanny. Nearly all the Black-headed Gulls are back in summer dress, and best of all, we saw our first Sandwich Terns moving north along Embleton Bay on 5th April.

Still so much to look forward to, but for now, winter is back with a vengeance, and even our regular walks will have to do without us for a day or two.

Paul Ashdown

LADAKH in WINTER

Snow Leopard *photo: Mike Watson*

April's talk, "Ladakh in Winter" may not have been intended to make us feel better about the wintry weather we have faced recently, but by taking us to the frozen Himalayas, and describing wildlife watching in temperatures as low as minus 30°C, Mike Watson did put our cold snap into perspective. His stunning photography of the scenery, geology and wildlife created a fascinating talk, peppered with anecdotes which brought the experience fully to life.

We started by acclimatising at Leh, in the Indus Valley, where the birds were a mix of the almost familiar and the stunningly exotic. One of my favourites was the Ibisbill, a charismatic upland wader, with the long, curved bill the name indicates. A whole raft of passerines flew across our screens, often with names as exotic as their looks: Güldenstädt's Redstart, Mongolian Finches and Blue Whistling Thrush. Compared to these, Russian Greylag geese, Red-crested Pochard and Great Egret seemed rather ordinary.

However, things got wilder and colder as we followed Mike to the camp in the Hemis National Park where his groups are based in their search for Snow Leopard. The uplifted limestone scenery, often set in snow, gave an incredible backdrop to this search. The combination of expert field-craft from the guides, and Mike's photography, provided us with a series of awesome images of this almost mythical cat. The amazing bulk of the over-size tail, the exquisite markings on the body fur, and above all, the piercingly cold, grey eyes were all captured and shared with us. And birds too… Great pictures of a

Ibisbill *photo: Mike Watson*

Tibetan Partridge *photo: Mike Watson*

Next stop was the Ulley Valley where the geology changed to granite and we saw more of the local people, providing home-stay accommodation for the expedition. As well as more interesting birds like Snow Pigeon and Brandt's Mountain Finch, we saw how leopard-proof shelters for livestock were helping to reduce the potential for conflict between farmers and wildlife. The last flourish of birds in Ladakh proper came from the ancient juniper grove at Hemis. This included some real jewels: Pine Buntings, White-winged Grosbeak, Wallcreeper, and Tibetan Blackbird.

Mike finished with images from a side-trek out of the mountain peaks onto the high Tibetan plateau. Frightening cold and punishing altitude combined to create terrifying sanitary arrangements, but the wildlife was worth it! We saw wonderful images of Tibetan Wild Ass and the incredibly reclusive Pallas's Cat, as well as a host of high-altitude specials on the bird front: Tibetan Snowcock, Tibetan Sandgrouse, Spotted and Streaked Rosefinch, and Tibetan Snowfinch. And all seen from the warm comfort of our own homes!

Paul Ashdown

Güldenstädt's redstart *photo: Mike Watson*

Great Rosefinch *photo: Mike Watson*

Lammergeier *photo: Mike Watson*

White-winged Grosbeak *photo: Mike Watson*

Indus River, Ladakh *photo: Mike Watson*

A15 B1 C7 D16 E18 F13 G12 H10 I8 J14 K2 L17 M19 N3 O6 P4 Q5 R20 S11 T9

BIRD RECORDS MARCH 2021

Pink-footed Goose	30 at Branton Ponds on 22nd (I&KD), 400 at Doddington on 22nd (DG&RHB), 2100 at Harper's Heugh/Budle Bay on 27th (DG&RHB), 5000 at Doddington on 27th (RD)
Greenland White- fronted Goose	1 at Branton Ponds on 22nd (I&KD).
Bewick's Swan	23 low over Tughall Pool on 24th (JPL,AB) shortly afterwards 23 on the sea near Monk's House (D&JT). (940 were at Welney during January/feb:).
Whooper Swan	3 at Branton Ponds on 4th & 11 on 22nd with 30+ over Branton on 21st & 26 on 30th (I&KD), 29 at Budle Bay on 27th (DG&RHB), 34 near Cornhill on 27th (SV&AJM), 26 at Low Newton Scrape on 22nd (PA) & 24 on 31st (A&MG), 17 at Black Lough on 31st (I&KD).
Shoveler	11 at Monk's House Pool on 14th (JPL), 20 at Low Newton Scrape on 28th (SVM).
Pintail	3 at Hedgeley Ponds on 5th (I&KD) & 4 on 30th (A&MG).
Tufted Duck	6 at Monk's House Pool on 14th (JPL).
Common Scoter	50 at Stag Rocks on 14th (JPL).
Long-tailed Duck	3 at Stag Rocks on 7th (SV&AJM), 5 at Seahouses Harbour on 12th(IR) & 4 on13th(JPL).
Goldeneye	4 at Long Nanny on 15th (A&MG), 22 at Branton Ponds on 23rd (I&KD)
Grey Partridge	1 pair near Tughall Pool on 24th (JPL,AB).
Red-throated Diver	1 at Berwick on Tweed estuary on 22nd (MG).
Little Egret	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 5th & 1 at Branton Ponds on 22nd (I&KD),1 at Budle Bay on 20th (A&MG).
Water Rail	1 at Wooler Common from 9/15th (DR), 1 at Branton Ponds on 18/19th (I&KD).
Avocet	2 at Low Newton Scrape on 21st (JPL), 2 on 22nd (PA) & 2 on 31st (A&MG).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 30th (A&MG).
Mediterranean Gull	1 at Long Nanny on 15th (A&MG).
Lesser Black-backed Gull	23 at Branton Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Sandwich Tern	1 at Cocklawburn on 31st (EH).
Little Owl	1 at Embleton on 15th (A&MG).
Short-eared Owl	1 at Bamburgh Golf Course on 31st (FS).
Hooded Crow	1 at Howick on 20th (A&MG).
Sand Martin	1 at Branton Ponds on 19th & 50 on 26th (I&KD), 2 at Harthope Valley on 29th (SVM), 12 at Hedgeley Ponds on 30th (A&MG), 3 at Cocklawburn on 31st (EH), 10 at Bamburgh Golf Course on 31st (FS).
Swallow	1 at Titlington Mount on 30th (I&KD), 9 at Cocklawburn on 31st (EH) 3 at Low Newton Scrape on 31st (A&MG).
Chiffchaff	2 at Branton Ponds on 13th & 20+ on 26th (I&KD), 1 at Etal on 21st (JJ), 6 at Twizell on 27th (SV&AJM), 1 at Belford on 30th RD).
Ring Ouzel	1 at Harthope Valley on 31st (SV&AJM).
Redwing	28 at Etal on 12th (SV&AJM), 26 at Yearle on 13th (DG&RHB).
Stonechat	6 at Beanley Moor on 20th (I&KD), 2 at Low Newton on 21st (JPL).
Wheatear	1 at Hedgeley Hall on 30th (I&KD), 3 at Cocklawburn on 31st (EH).
White Wagtail	1 at Boulmer on 28th (A&MG).
Siskin	1 in Berwick garden on 23rd (MG).
Snow Bunting	11 at Berwick Pier on 17th (A&MG).
Escape Bar-headed Goose	1 at Branton Ponds on 22nd (I&KD).

Observers Paul Ashdown (PA), Adrian Baker (AB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KD), Richard Dickinson (RD), Michael Gallico (MG), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Liz Harrison (EH), James Joicey (JJ), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM), David Richens (DR), Iain Robson (IR), Denise & John Taylor (D&JT), Fiona Southern (FS).

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