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SECRETS of the NIGHT

Turn to pages 3&4 for Paul Ashdown's report on our recent ZOOM talk on OWLS, (including our commonest species, the Tawny Owl, featured on the front cover), presented by BTO Research Ecologist Dr Hugh Hanmer.

BIRD RECORDS for APRIL

turn to page 5 for the most recent sightings compiled by our Recorder, John Lumby

FERNIE HOOLET or TAWNY OWL ?

Turn to page 2 for a teasing quiz to pair twenty *dialect names* of our birds with their more familiar common names. See how many Letters and Numbers you can connect without sneaking a look at the answers on page 4

RINGER'S ROUNDUP

Phil Hanmer provides us (NNBC Website) with the recently published report on the **State of the UK Barn Owl Population 2020** , which makes for some interesting comparisons: the true picture suggested is of a much better performance in some areas, such as in Northumberland, than in other areas further south.

NOTICEBOARD

Indoor Meetings continue be cancelled at this time, but our programme for 2021 will continue with the welcome return of Richard Baines who will give a ZOOM Talk on Friday 11th June on 'The Turtle Dove Project in the North York Moors National Park'

DAWN CHORUS EVENT at FORD & ETAL ESTATE

Dawn Chorus Monday*, 17th May at 5.00 am Our Field Trips will resume again with the eagerly awaited visit to the Ford and Etal Estates for the peak of the Dawn Chorus! We will meet at SLAINSFIELD (O.S. National Grid ref: NT 950 394) for our annual Dawn Chorus event on the Estate, checking out the moorlands and woodlands looking and listening for spring migrants joining the resident birds. Afterwards, there will be the opportunity to look round the beautiful woodland and grounds of Etal Manor hoping to add a few more species to our 'list'.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? The Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOURC) regulate the official British List of nearly six hundred species. But turn the clock back a few generations and you would find a bewildering plethora of local names, dialect names, names converted from norse or gaelic to describe the local birds….. some still in use and familiar to this day! E.g. On a seabird cruise to the Farne Islands last week, the skipper still referred to a couple of species by their 'local' name!

How many letters and numbers can you pair up without sneaking a look at the answers on p.4

QUIZ

DIALECT NAMES OF BIRDS	BRITISH LIST
A speug	1 Curlew
B tammie norie	2 Black Guillemot
C lintie	3 Dunnock
D whaup	4 White-tailed Sea Eagle
E tirrick	5 House Sparrow
F tystie	6 Yellowhammer
G bonxie	7 Green Woodpecker
H gowk	8 Corncrake
I erne	9 Nightjar
J heathcock	10 Arctic Tern
K landrail	11 Red Grouse
L mavis	12 Blackbird
M shufflewing	13 Gannet
N solan goose	14 Red Kite
O scotch canary	15 Puffin
P gled	16 Little Grebe
Q yaffle	17 Cuckoo
R merle	18 Linnet
S goatsucker	19 Song Thrush
T dipperduck	20 Great Skua

(Footnote from Bird Records on page 5)

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

Secrets of the Night

Our Zoom-Meeting for May had a really topical feel for many of us who have been watching hungry Barn Owls hunting in broad daylight during recent weeks. Dr Hugh Hanmer's talk gave us up to date information on the status of all the UK's owls, and the latest surprises from new research, backed up with data and great images.

We started with a look at survey data on the population of each species. Hugh was careful to give all this a "health warning", as the nocturnal nature of owls makes them a challenging group for researchers. He was clear that **Tawny Owls** are by far our most plentiful owl, with something like 50000 pairs across the UK. Numbers may even be increasing, although there is evidence of low survival rates for juveniles once fledged. Where we live in Embleton, lack of woodland probably explains the absence of the wonderful night-time calls which usually give away their presence, but they are breeders in much of Northumberland.

Little Owls are, in contrast, doing far less well, with a 72% decline since the 1980s, and probably only about 3600 pairs across the UK. We are at the very northern edge of their range. Although not strictly a native species, being introduced by the Victorians, I am a real fan of this charismatic and feisty little raptor, and feel very lucky to have regular sightings in our garden.

Short-eared Owl :Photo by Kind Permission of Liz Cutting/BTO

Little Owl: by Kind Permission of John Harding/ BTO

Hugh described Barn Owls as a "conservation success story". Their readiness to use nest boxes, rapid reproductive rate, and the impact of climate change have all given them a boost, and although data is uncertain, there could be as many as 14000 pairs across the UK. After a quick look at Snowy Owls (last UK breeding in the 70s), and Eagle Owls (UK population mostly, if not completely, made up of escapees), Hugh looked in detail at the two most enigmatic and least well under-stood of our owls: the Long-eared Owl and Short-eared Owl.

The **Short-eared Owl** has been the subject of recent research as part of the BTO's Owl Project. It is a regular, but always

exciting, sight in winter Northumberland, but a far less common breeder, largely restricted to uplands and the western isles. Numbers are in decline, estimated to be between 620 and 2150 pairs. Hugh explained that our scientific knowledge of the species is really limited making conservation strategy difficult. The Owl Project used the latest GPS satellite telemetry technology to track, in detail, the movement of individual birds. This allowed researchers to build up a picture of how the owls use the environment when breeding, and also to look at wider movement patterns. This showed that hunting owls favour grassland over heather, and that they avoid higher altitude hunting grounds during the day, probably to avoid the attention of even bigger raptors! Even more fascinating was the information on movement patterns. It was news to me that the female owl often leaves the male to care for the nearly fledged chicks, and becomes largely nomadic. Hugh showed us the plots of several birds originally tagged near Stirling, many of which made epic trips around the whole of the UK and Ireland, into London, across the Channel, and as far afield as Russia, Norway, and Morocco. These are clearly "high risk" journeys, and many of these individuals didn't survive. Hugh suggested that the birds may be searching out new habitat, but they clearly range across the whole of Europe and beyond in stark contrast to the "stay-at-home" behaviour of Tawny and Little Owls. As Hugh said, they lead "hard, fast lives"!

We know even less about **Long-eared Owls.** Their secretive behaviour, often roosting concealed in the midst of dense woodland does mean that they are probably significantly under-recorded. They also move around quite a bit, and Hugh gave the population estimate as something between 1800 and 6000 pairs, (plenty of elbow room). This is certainly the species I am going to be on the look out for much more. Hugh finished by reminding us all to submit our records for owl sightings to help build up knowledge about these secretive birds. As his talk finished, I looked out the window into the darkening garden, but no, nothing to report yet… **Report by Paul Ashdown**

Long-eared Owl: by Kind Permission of Liz Cutting/BTO

A5 B15 C18 D1 E10 F2 G20 H17 I4 J11 K8 L19 M3 N13 O6 P14 Q7 R12 S9 T16

BIRD RECORDS APRIL 2021

Pink-footed Goose	1500 at Budle Bay on 2nd (I&KD).
Greenland White-fronted Goose	1 at Branton Ponds on 17th (DG&RHB) & 1 on 23rd (I&KD).
Whooper Swan	10+2 bugling over Berwick then 12 roosting on Tweed both on 1st (MG), 20 off sea at Long Nanny on 4th (PA).
Garganey	1 pair on Tughall pool on 13th (R&JW) still there on 15th (JPL,A&DB).
Hybrid Teal x Green-Winged Teal	1 at Monk's House Pool on 12/15th with Teal (JPL) & 1 on 20th (A&MG).
Grey Partridge	2 at Ford on 25th (I&KD).
Red-throated Diver	1 off Stag Rocks on 2nd (I&KD).
Osprey	1 on Tweed at Cornhill on 10th (DR).
Avocet	2 at Low Newton Scrape on 2nd (PA), 4 on 23rd (I&KD) & 2 on 28th (A&MG).
Black-tailed Godwit	2 at Hedgeley Ponds on 1st (I&KD), 2 at Tughall Pool on 15th (*islandica*) (JPL,A&DB), 2 at Low Newton on 23rd (PA).
Woodcock	2 at Hepburn Woods on 30th (EH).
Common Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley Ponds on 1st (I&KD), 1 at Branton Ponds on 5th & 2 on 10th (I&KD), 2 in Harthope Valley on 22nd (SVM), 4 at Twizell on 25th (EH).
Iceland Gull	1 at Branton Ponds on 21st (I&KD).
Sandwich Tern	12 at Budle Bay on 2nd (PS), 20+ at Stag Rocks on 13th (JPL,AL).
Little Tern	22 at Budle Bay on 24th (PS).
Common Tern	2 at Budle Bay on 24th (PS).
Cuckoo	1 at Ford Moss on 30th (JJ).
Little Owl	2 at Creighton Pools all month (PA).
Short-eared Owl	1 at Holburn on 13th (CD), 1 at Budle Point on 20th (A&MG).
Merlin	1 at Alnwick Moor on 21st (I&KD).
Peregrine	1 at Low Newton on 5th (PA), 1 at Twizell on 25th (EH).
Raven	1 at Harthope Valley on 3rd (EH) & 1 on 11th (JPL,PH), 1 at East Ord on 13th (EH), 1 at Dunstanburgh on 21st (A&MG),1 at Chillingham on 24th (I&KD).
Sand Martin	3 at Low Newton on 2nd (PA), 20 at Beadnell on 4th (PS), 26 at Alnwick on 8th (A&MG), 20 at Branton on 11th (SV&AJM), 60 at Twizell on 25th (EH).
House Martin	2 at Beadnell on 5th (JPL), 1 at Branton Ponds on 12th (I&KD).
Swallow	3 at Branton Ponds on 4th (RD), 2 at Beadnell on 4th (PS), 5 at Yearle on 14th (SVM), 3 at Etal on 17th (JJ), 2 at Yearle on 27th (DG&RHB).
Willow Warbler	2 at Branton Ponds on 11th (I&KD), 1 at Holburn on 12th (CD),1 at East Ord on 13th (EH), 1 at Breamish Valley on 15th (EH), 1 at Etal on 18th (SV&AJM).
Sedge Warbler	2 at Branton Ponds on 20th (I&KD).
Grasshopper Warbler	1 at Low Newton on 23rd (PA).
Blackcap	3 at Low Newton on 3rd (I&KD), 6 pairs at Twizell on 25th (EH).
Garden Warbler	2 at Low Newton on 27th (I&KD).
Ring Ouzel	3 at Harthope Valley on 3rd (EH), 3 on 5th (SVM), 7 on 11th (JPL,PH) & 4 on 13th (EH), 4 at Wooler Common on 14th (DR).
Bluethroat	1 possible at Wooler Common on 7th (DR).
Black Redstart	1 female at Longframlington on 24th (HGD).
Redstart	1 at Branton Ponds on 16th (I&KD).
Wheatear	2 at Humbleton Hill on 3rd (SV&AJM), 1 at Stag Rocks on 5th (PS), 5 at Harthope Valley on 11th (JPL,PH), 1 at Wooler Common on 11th (DR),1 at Corby Crag on 12th (I&KD), 3 at Breamish Valley on 15th (EH).
Yellow Wagtail	1 at Low Newton on 23rd (PA,I&KD), 1 at Goswick on 25th (PS).
Red-throated Pipit	1 at Low Newton on 23rd (PA,I&KD),
Crossbill	8 at Beanley Wood on 3rd (I&KD).
Siskin	6 at Yearle all month (SV&AJM).
Yellowhammer	31 at Branton on 6th (I&KD).

Observers Paul Ashdown (PA), Adrian & Debra Baker (A&DB), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (IB&KD), Richard Dickinson (RD), Hilary Gostelow-Drury (HGD), Chris Duncan (CD), Michael Gallico (MG), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Liz Harrison (EH), Paul Hutchinson (PH), James Joicey (JJ), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM), David Richens (DR), Paul Snell PS), Richard & Jackie Whiteley (R&JW). **(Footnote– see p.2)**