NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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

Membership Secretary
Mrs Fiona Southern,
Robin Cottage, Spindlestone Mill,
Belford, NE70 7ED
Tel: 01668 214481

Acting Secretary
Mr Paul Ashdown,
30 Creighton Place,
Embleton NE 66 3FA
Tel: 01665 576771.

Honorary President: Graham Bell

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

www.facebook.com/NorthNorthumberlandBirdClub

David Steel makes a welcome return to Bamburgh

FIELD TRIPS

As our 'New Year's Day' trip made it into the ***January Newsletter***(!) there is no 'report' this month**,** just the anticipation of joining Phil and Marge Noble on their enticing visit to the Hirsel Estate on 9th Feb (see details page 2)

BIRD RECORDS for JANUARY

turn to **page 6** for the most recent sightings compiled by our Recorder, John Lumby.

THE ATLANTIC PUFFIN

David Steel, having spent thirteen years as reserve manager on the Farne Islands, is now the reserve manager on the Isle of May, situated in the Firth of Forth, and uniquely well qualified to speak on this endearing species……. Turn to page 3&4 for Richard Poyer's report.

Greenfinch, nr. Lemmington Hall : P. Hanmer

RINGER'S ROUNDUP

Phil Hanmer highlights the impact of Storm Arwen and other winter damage on many of their Boxes, which will need replacing a.s.a.p……. Birds recently re-trapped include some from as far as Friesland, Holland, and Wrexham in Wales alongside those more typically 'local'. A fascinating read as usual

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS BAMBURGH PAVILION

· **Friday 11th February 2022 at 7.30pm Iain Robson** makes a welcome return to the Pavilion to give his talk **'Georgia in Spring: Birding at the edge of Europe'** This mountainous European Country on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, lying between Russia and Turkey, is a fascinating and rewarding destination for intrepid birders…….

NNBC MEETINGS and COVID

In line with government guidance, the wearing of face masks is now a matter of personal choice

Field Trips & Residentials [For all Field Trips Read please Risk Assessment on Website beforehand . [For last-minute Cancellations e.g. adverse weather conditions, check our Facebook Page.]

'THE HIRSEL, COLDSTREAM: Wednesday - 9th February, 2022 10.00am

Meeting point: in field next to main car park (**GR 828403** Explorer Map 339) - charge £2.50 for all day. The car park is about 1 mile from the main road, next to the 'Homestead buildings'. The main carpark has toilets and a newly improved cafe, if needed at the end of the walk.

Description: Woods, fields, river and lake views, some paths muddy in parts. Appropriate clothing & footwear advisable. Duration of walk 2&half to 3 hours - Walk about 3 miles, including last 1 mile around lake - optional.

Leaders: Phil & Marge Noble

EAST CHEVINGTON: Saturday - 26th March, 2022 10.00am

Meeting Point: near the turning circle at the end of the rough track at grid reference **NZ 271984.**
Directions from Amble: take the **A1068** south and **continue on the main road** beyond the left turning to Druridge Bay Country Park. Take the **next left (**almost opposite the turning to Red Row) and carefully follow the track to the turning circle at the very end. We will be walking around the North Pool after a short walk to Chibburn Burn to sea watch whilst the tide is still high. **Leader: Alan Goodall**

Update on Red Kites:

Raptors are usually solitary birds except in the breeding season. However, the beautiful Red Kite is an exception, being gregarious – particularly in winter when they can be found roosting in high numbers as a social group.

Friends of Red Kites (FoRK) has recently surveyed about nine roosting sites in the wider area west of Newcastle and Gateshead, finding roosts with numbers varying from 12 to 34 birds. Frequently pre-roosting activities can be observed undertaking aerial acrobatics and calling (reminiscent of a small starling murmuration) and "juveniles speed chase and talon grapple in the late afternoon sunshine". Kites leave their roosts in very early morning to find their food source, with juvenile members of the group following to an expected good food source.

Since spring activities, and growth, seem to be arriving earlier, it is hoped NNBC members will keep their eyes to the skies in the hope of locating one or two of these impressive birds as they spread out from their introduction area to Northumberland, seeking new territory for the breeding season (e.g. Hulne Park, Alnwick, is a possibility, or any other fairly secluded woodland site).

You might wish to visit: www.friendsofredkites.org.uk FoRK very much appreciates your membership or a donation which goes towards monitoring and employing a tree-climber to enable licenced ringers to undertake their work.

Rosemary Bell

The Atlantic Puffin David Steel

The club's first talk of 2022 was given by one of the best-known figures in Northumberland birding, David Steel having spent thirteen years as reserve manager on the Farne Islands. Now reserve manager on the Isle of May, situated in the Firth of Forth, he has many years of experience in managing and studying the behaviour of this iconic species. David started by pointing out that the Atlantic Puffin is one of four Puffin species, the others being the Horned Puffin, the Tufted Puffin (living in the Pacific Ocean) and the Rhinoceros Auklet.

The stronghold of the six million pairs of Atlantic Puffin is Iceland with 60% of the total; the other main colonies are in Norway, the Faroes and the Western Atlantic (Newfoundland and Labrador). The UK holds 10% of all Puffins, with major colonies on St. Kilda, the Shiant Isles, Sule Skerry, the Isle of May and the Farne Islands.

The Atlantic Puffin photo: David Steel

Returning with sand eels photo: David Steel

David surprised many of the audience by telling us that the Puffin is the commonest breeding bird in Northumberland! He took us through the life cycle the Puffin. A individual spends most of its life feeding in the North Atlantic and north of the North Sea, returning to their breeding sites in late March. In the non-breeding period they have a short black bill, but by the time they are back at their breeding sites they will have the familiar, colourful bill. Arriving back on islands such as the Farnes, the individuals – who mate for life – re-unite at the burrows they occupied in previous years. Pair bonding with billing takes place, though mating is usually at sea. If the burrow needs renewing or a new one made, their sideways-bending claws facilitate excavation. One egg is laid at the end of April/start of May and is incubated for 40 days. During that period, activity at the nest is quite limited and visitors to the Farnes or Isle of May are often disappointed to see such little action. This changes when the chick emerges as a Puffling in June. From this point on, the parent birds are busy for up to 20 hours a day at sea, catching sand eels to feed the growing chick.

David's photographs showed the denticles on the upper beak which hold the sand eels in place and allow the adult to hold those large numbers of sand eels so popularly shown by photographers. One hundred and twenty six is the record! The Pufflings stay in the burrow for around 40 days until they fledge in July, at which point they fly off to the sea at night -the best time to avoid predation. For the next three years the young remain out there on the oceans, until they reach breeding maturity.

With 21 years of sharing his island homes with them, David has a wealth of interesting stories to tell about the Puffin. The burrow has two chambers – one for the egg (and later the Puffling) and the other a toilet. Putting your arm and hand down the wrong chamber to count and ring the birds is not a pleasant experience. However, putting it in the correct chamber is equally challenging, coping with the Puffin's sharp claws and beak. Much better now to put an endoscope down the chamber!

When the Pufflings emerge from the burrows they are quite likely to wander off in any direction as they head to the sea, so they may be found at this time down hard paths, or in offices, on chairs, and even in showers!

Having got safely to the sea, a Puffin should have a long life – 30 to 35 years. Not evolved to travel easily on land they are superb divers and can go down to 70 metres. Their wings beat at 400 beats a minute when flying and they can get up to 58mph, hence the difficulty posed in photographing them in flight.

Both the Puffins and Pufflings face many dangers and threats, as David related. For the Pufflings it is being attacked by bird predators such as Greater Black-backed Gulls and Peregrines. Being mainly island dwellers they generally escape the land-based predators such as rats and foxes.

More generally, the greatest threats to the species come from over-fishing of sand eels (their food supply), plastics in the marine environment and climate change. Research has shown that sand eels are decreasing in size, leading to chicks growing more slowly and fledging at a slightly older age.

Due to the difficulty of counting burrows and estimating numbers, detailed counts of Puffins usually take place every 5 years. David's graphs showed how numbers in the UK rose from the 1980's to 2002 (580, 714) but have subsequently declined in breeding colonies such as the Farnes, probably due to the issues mentioned above. Some sites, such as Coquet Island, have seen increases from a small base and numbers overall seem to be stabilising.

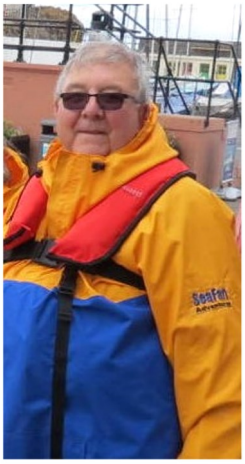
With his humour, first-hand knowledge and excellent photographs, David provided the audience with an excellent start to the year.

Report by Richard Poyer

Emerging puffling ***photo: David Steel***

Tribute to Colin Lewis, who died last month after a long illness.

'Always a cheery smile, and often a joke with a familiar burst of laughter or chuckle' – that is how many will remember Colin, a long-standing member of the Bird Club'. He attended most field walks, & indoor meetings, until latterly, when his deteriorating health restricted his attendance from NNBC activities. We are greatly indebted to Graham & Rosemary Bell for checking through the NNBC Archives, where they selected the two articles reprinted below, which reflect Colin's long interest and involvement with the Bird Club and his cheerful good humour.



Colin Lewis kitted out for the crossing to visit the Isle of May: NNBC Field Trip, May 2016 Photo: S.V.McCormick

MONK'S HOUSE POOL.

Dr. E.A.R. Ennion (1900 - 1981), a Cambridge G.P. and Naturalist, in 1945 directed the first Field Study Centre at Flatford Mill, Suffolk. He later bought Monk's House, between Bamburgh and Seahouses, and in l95l he opened it as a Bird Observatory and Private Field Study Centre.

Dr Ennion was above all an ornithologist as well as a celebrated artist, and it was he that began the ringing of migrant birds on a large scale in the county, using a Heligoland trap and mist nets (the latter for the first time in Britain). The story of Monk's House is told in the book written by him and called 'The House on the Shore.' (1960). I quote: "Only a little way from Monk's House lies a field with a rushy hollow in it, close by the coast road. In a dry summer (or from attempts at drainage) the water may disappear entirely; nevertheless, we call it 'Monk's House Pool'. Few such places in the county can have been 'bird watched' more assiduously and fewer still, considering its small size and lack of privacy, have produced such a tally of interesting birds - the two go hand in hand. The list includes four kinds of geese: Greylag, Pinkfoot, Brent and Barnacle; all three swans, Whooper, Bewick and Mute; fifteen kinds of duck, including in April 1952 a lovely drake Green-winged Teal, shortly after another American vagrant, a Baldpate Wigeon, had been shot on Holy Island flats; Coots and Moorhens, Dabchicks and a Black-necked Grebe which spent a winter there; Little, Glaucous, Iceland and all the commoner gulls and Black and Sea Terns; and at least twenty different kinds of wader, to say nothing of Reed and Snow Buntings, Wagtails, Pipits, Wheatears and Larks. It is one of the few places in Northumberland where you can count on a Black-tailed Godwit on passage in breeding plumage at least once during the spring; and on Greenshanks, both Redshanks, Ruffs, Wood and Green Sandpipers in the autumn. With long experience of inland and coastal marshes I can think of few more fascinating and productive bird haunts of its size. It lies, "Lower" too close to the road and offends the eye of the passing Powers That Be. Its days I'm afraid, are numbered, in common with those of so many other little wayside havens and contrarieties which, for the naturalist and genuine country-man, sustain an interest far exceeding their intrinsic worth, reclaimed or not. One often wonders whether the cost involved in ironing out odd corners here and there is worthwhile, either to the country or to the farmer. But the odds are that the next few years will see the last of Monk' House Pool. Or it may cheat the hangman by choking itself with its own lush vegetation." Eric Ennion, were he alive today, would be delighted to know that Monk's House Pool still struggles to survive and that the N.N.B.C. is seeking to secure its future. **Colin Lewis.**

WHAT A LARK!

The walk along the edge of this relatively small reservoir was bracing' Despite the sunshine, there was a coolness to the strong breeze. We didn't see much birdlife except in the distance on the water two families of Canada Geese with nine juveniles. Towards the end of the reservoir. We were brought to a halt by a stream which was obviously feeding the reservoir.

Approximately sixty metres beyond the far side was a wire fence supported by wooden posts. We both saw it at the same time. There on a fence post was perched a Sparrowhawk. We both raised our binoculars to get a better view * it was an adult female' but what was that other thing? At that instant along came a Skylark and landed on the Sparrowhawk's head! it remained there for four or five seconds and then flew on to the top wire about a metre from the predator's talons. No reaction: The Hawk just continued to bob about to maintain balance in the blustery wind. Up flew the Skylark again in a semi-circle and landed on the back of the Sparrowhawk. This procedure of landing on the fence and on the Hawk continued, even when the latter for a short period moved down on to the strut supporting the post, probably to get out of the wind - or away from the Skylark!

After about ten minutes the Skylark flew into the grass some 7 to 8 metres away. The Sparrowhawk suddenly flew down in the same direction as the Skylark had taken but not, as we subsequently discovered, to catch its tormentor but to find a peaceful place. 'We spotted her moving occasionally in the grass and finally from the same area the Skylark rose into the air - no doubt having scared the Hawk away from its nest' Mission apparently accomplished!

Colin Lewis & David Johnston

BIRD RECORDS JANUARY 2022

N.B. County species list change: now starts with **Gamebirds**.
Branton & Hedgeley *Ponds* will now be **GP (gravel pits).**

Grey Partridge	12 at Snableazes on 9th (A&MG).
Brent Goose	30 at Harper's Heugh on 1st (NNBC), 700 at Fenham Flats on 16th (I&KD).
Barnacle Goose	c.500 at Harper's Heugh on 1st (NNBC), & 500 at Budle Bay on 16th (I&KD).
Pink-footed Goose	c.250 in Beadnell/Seahouses area all month (JPL), 30+ over Branton on 1st & 900 at Budle Bay on 16th (I&KD), 1000 at Doddington on 11th (SV&AJM).
Whooper Swan	5 at Chatton from 3rd /10th (PW), 4 at Hedgeley GP on 4th & 6 at Branton GP on 19th (I&KD) with 6 at Howick Pool on 18th (PHa).
Shoveler	c.70 at Budle Bay all month (JPL,SV&AJM)
Gadwall	35 at Hedgeley GP on 12th (I&KD) & 40 on 22nd (A&MG), 4 at Howick Pool on 18th (PHa).
Pintail	c.50 at Fenham Le Moor on 1st (NNBC).
Common Scoter	300 off Stag Rocks on 1st (NNBC), 100 on 2nd (I&KD).
Black Scoter	1 off Stag Rocks on 1st (NNBC) & 1 at Ross Back Sands on 9th (I&KD).
Long-tailed Duck	4 off Stag Rocks on 1st (NNBC) & 12 on 16th (I&KD).
Goldeneye	5 at Football Hole on 22nd & 2 at Embleton Quarry on 24th (PA&MD).
Great-crested Grebe	1 at Long Nanny on 14th (PA&MD).
Slavonian Grebe	12 at Ross Back Sands on 24th (SVM).
Lapwing	c.500 at Shoreston Hall fields all month (JPL).
Golden Plover	c.500 at Shoreston Hall fields all month (JPL).
Black-tailed Godwit	1 at Low Newton on 1st (NNBC).
Woodcock	1 at Beanley Wood on 1st (I&KD).
Jack Snipe	1 at Holy Island on 15th (I&KD).
Common Sandpiper	2 at Low Newton Scrape on 17th (PA&MD).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley GP on 22nd (A&MG).
Red-throated Diver	5 off Stag Rocks from 2nd/16th & 4+ at Ross Back Sands on 9th (I&KD), with 3 off Ross Back Sands on 24th (SVM).
Black-throated Diver	1 off Ross Back Sands on 9th & 1 off Stag Rocks on 16th (I&KD).
Fulmar	1 prospecting Bamburgh Castle cliff on 1st (NNBC).
Great White Egret	1 at Fenton on 20th (I&KD).
Little Egret	1 at Seahouses on 1st (NNBC).
Peregrine	1 at Branton Ponds on 6th (I&KD).
Raven	2 at Howick Pool on 18th (PHa).
Skylark	4 at Newton Point on 17th (PA&MD).
Shore Lark	2 at Holy Island on 15th (I&KD).
Greenfinch	4 at Alnwick all month (A&MG).
Twite	30 at Long Nanny on 14th (PA&MD), 6 at Holy Island on 14th (P&MN).
Lesser Redpoll	5 at Branton GP on 16th (I&KD).
Crossbill	4 at Beanley Wood on 1st & 2 on 23rd (I&KD).
Siskin	75 at Branton GP on 16th (I&KD).
Snow Bunting	18 at Goswick Sands on 16th (P&MN).

Observers Paul Ashdown & Martine Delbauve ((PA&MD), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RHB), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Phil Hanmer (PHa), Liz Harrison (EH), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison McCormick (SV&AJM), Phil &Marge Noble (P&MN), Peter Watson (PW), Club Excursion (NNBC).

February Records: please submit no later than 1st March to the Recorder, John Lumby,
Shearwater, 2 St Cuthbert Close, North Sunderland, Seahouses, NE68 7WG. **TEL: 01665-720654.**
e-mail: j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk **or .com if any difficulty**.