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FIELD TRIPS

Read **Lord James Joicey's** report on the Dawn Chorus field trip at Etal on May 15th. **(see pages 2&3)**

Phil Hanmer

CLANGERS in SPACE and TIME

Bucephala Clangula in Northumberland

Phil Hanmer gave a talk on the breeding success of **Goldeneye** in our region…….Turn to **pages 4&5** for **Paul Ashdown's** report.

BIRD RECORDS for MAY

The most recent sightings in our area will be compiled by our Recorder, **John Lumby.** (see pages

This is the final Bird Record to be compiled by John Lumby for our Club, as he has decided to retire from this role after many years. His birding skill and local knowledge are widely respected and remain a fantastic asset to us as he continues as a Committee Member. Thank you, John, for all the work and time you have given the Club.

Paul Ashdown

ALBINO ROBIN

Spotted by **Lord James Joicey** at Slainsfield, Ford & Etal on 29th May

BARN OWL INTERUPTS TEABREAK !

See **Andrew Green's** photos on Page 2.

NOTICEBOARD

NNBC MEETINGS and COVID

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

INDOOR MEETINGS BAMBURGH PAVILION

· **Friday 10th June 2022 at 7.30pm Mark Eaton** will give a talk on **The Work of the Rare Birds Breeding Panel.**

He is responsible for their work encouraging the recording of rare breeding birds in the UK, collating such data, maintaining a secure archive, and producing annual reports.

Barn Owl Interrupts Tea Break ! - at the indoor meeting in Bamburgh.

Fortunately for me I had my camera in the car, as I wanted to get some images of the castle in the dark after the meeting, I did not expect to be able to photograph a Barn Owl (my first). The images are ok, you can see it's a Barn Owl, but I would have liked to have had my longer lens!
Andrew Green - Member

Feedback on the Dawn Chorus Field Trip on Sunday 15th May

Last year I ended my report with the words: “It almost feels like the good old days may be coming back …” Well, this year the good old days really were back, with 22 keen members and ‘interlopers’ arriving at Etal Castle for a start at 05.30.

The early morning mist was hanging low but already the sun promised a good start to the 26th Annual Dawn Chorus. Lying nearby was a stack of hardwood timber cleared after Storm Arwen. The clear-up across the estate will take two years, with 18,000 tonnes of fallen timber to pick up, representing some 12% of the entire timber stock. Mature Scots Pine has been the major casualty, a species that is the home of the Red Squirrel. Clearance and new plantings will of course affect the landscape and, through that, the species mix that lives there; we shall certainly see some changes in the birds and flowers that we come to expect. Space and light are the elements at play; we saw several Treecreepers and Nuthatches throughout the morning, taking advantage of so many breaks and cracks in trees.

Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were everywhere; 2022 seems to be ‘their year’. Down on the river, a stately Grey Heron stood motionless by the weir. Further downstream its colleague had adopted an altogether different pose, crouched over a shallow bed of stones, its dagger bill darting in to spear the minnows. Screeching Mistle Thrushes and ‘pinking’ Blackbirds in the trees along the bank alerted us that something was amiss: a Tawny Owl flew up into a tree and tried to look inconspicuous. Piping Common Sandpipers gave a fly-past in both directions and a Moorhen gently jerked and prodded at the reeds and grasses.

NOTICEBOARD

Feedback on the Dawn Chorus Field Trip on Sunday 15th May(cont)

It wasn't clear who got the greater shock when a cock Pheasant sprang out of the long grass just inches from a pair of boots in the margin of an arable field. Just further along the first Common Whitethroat was recorded, a species whose arrival seems to vary quite a lot hereabouts. A solitary Swift flew fast across the open field, perhaps still on its journey to its breeding site.

Dropping down into the woodland garden at Etal Manor we entered yet another habitat of shrubs and cultivar trees, where almost the first bird to greet us was the high-pitched Goldcrest. There is always something to grab the attention in this garden; this year it was the spectacular numbers of tiny dark purple downward-pointing cones of a stately conifer tree, the identity of which has never formally been settled. A Siskin zipped overhead, a Pied Wagtail scuttled back and forth, and almost the last species to be recorded before breakfast was a Spotted Flycatcher.

Another superb breakfast was enjoyed and a rollcall of 49 – no, 50 – no, 48 … was read out, leaving me to go through Fiona's notes to ascertain the correct number. It is indeed 49! See below.

Harriet would like to thank everyone for their very generous donations (£170) which will be divided between Hospice Care North Northumberland and Siobhan's Trust, a small charity working very hard on the Polish/ Ukrainian border.

A final 'plug' that the gardens will be open again on Sunday 16th October under the National Gardens Scheme with some wonderful autumn foliage colours.

James Joicey

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.]**

St. Abbs Head

Saturday, 11th June 2022 10.00 at St. Abbs Head National Nature Reserve.(National Trust for Scotland). Meet at the Reserve Car Park (O.S. NT913674) about a mile north of Coldingham on the minor B6438 to St Abbs. Walk to the headland for spectacular views of the seabird communities including Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, a few Puffins and the new overspill colony of nesting Gannets(first chick recorded in 2017). Other wildlife interest might include cetaceans, butterflies and a profusion of wildflowers. Wear stout shoes/ walking boots and bring a packed lunch.

The cafe at the reserve centre is not guaranteed to be open.

[*N.B.£3 car parking charge for non-National Trust/NTS members, but access to the Reserve and Centre is free]
Leader: **Richard Poyer**

CLANGERS in SPACE and TIME

Bucephala Clangula in Northumberland

This month our indoor meeting featured a talk by Club regulars, the Hanmers, taking us through the fascinating work Phil has been doing with North Northumberland's small and secretive breeding population of Goldeneye, introduced by him as *Bucephala clangula*. The scientific name for these beautiful little ducks unfairly compares their heads to that of Alexander the Great's horse, and their call to noisy bells. By the end of the evening, however, we had all been charmed by the stories and images of the fluffy little chicks and doughty females, struggling to fledge huge broods in the face of every predator you have ever seen in Northumberland.

Phil's story began in 2000 when Goldeneye were noticed displaying in the Breamish valley. The species is a regular on our coasts and larger water-bodies over winter, with an estimate of about 21000 in the UK, but breeding has been restricted to a small population of about 200 females in Scotland centred on Speyside. Nests would naturally be in tree-holes in the sub-Arctic forest, but where these are scarce, they seem happy to use nest boxes. The RSPB had successfully experimented with these on the Insh Marsh Reserve, and after a visit to check them out, Phil began to install boxes around the Breamish valley in 2005. These are placed surprisingly low in the trees, and often in small groups, always fairly close to the water. In the years since, Phil and his helpers have monitored and recorded both the trials and the triumphs of this small population, and found increasingly sophisticated ways to explore their habits.

Checking the nest boxes and ringing individuals is obviously the foundation of this work. This enabled Phil to share with us the struggles these ducks face. The lovely boxes put up for them are also particularly attractive to Tawny Owls and, less welcome, to Jackdaws. Many brooding ducks are forced off their growing clutch when an owl decides to move in, while other nest boxes can be so full of twigs brought in by jackdaws (or squirrels), that there is no space for ducks. Even when the clutch of more than a dozen eggs is safely nestled in the nest, predation remains a very serious problem. Phil told us of one example when a stoat leapt out of a box he was checking, leaving it full of corpses. Given these challenges, the female duck does well to get her chicks to leap out of the box onto the forest floor soon after hatching, and make their way to the water. They are no safer there, and a huge proportion of the youngsters succumb to things like otter and pike. At least Northumberland has no Pine Martin to add to this list!

Female Goldeneye

CLANGERS in SPACE and TIME (cont.)

Probably everyone's favourite story of the night also came from Phil's work checking the boxes. He had explained that the Tawny Owls often take over the boxes half-way through a duck laying her clutch of eggs. It must still have been a real surprise to find a healthy little duckling nestled alongside a gangling, fluffy owlet in one nest. The chances seem remote, but the owl must have "accidentally" brooded one of the duck eggs left behind by the box's first occupant, and this duckling was lucky enough to be found by Phil before starving to death or ending up as owl-lunch. The duckling was rescued from this fate and released onto nearby water where it was able to join another brood to face further but more predictable challenges.

The work of Phil and his team had established all sorts of useful information about breeding habits, success, and competition. Steadily the numbers of boxes spread around the Breamish valley has been increased. Although these are not all used by Goldeneye, they have clearly enabled the development of a small but viable Northumberland population, reaching 19 nests in 2021. Phil's latest project has been to fit the adult females with logging devices which enable him to track their movements over the year, as long as they are re-captured back in a nest box in a later year so that the tracker can be retrieved.

The technology uses records of daylight to establish longitude and latitude, but is expensive and not easy to use. The first tracker rings fitted to birds in 2016 proved faulty, but Phil is nothing if not persistent, and gradually a small cohort of trackable ducks has been established. Because the re-capture rate of the loyal birds returning to Breamish nest boxes is so high, even this small number has given some fascination insights into the travels of the birds over the year. The fascinating maps shared with us showed our Breamish birds heading off all over the UK and beyond, with a noticeable bias to bountiful feeding grounds like major estuaries and water-bodies. The farthest journeys took them to Norway, Belgium & Holland, down as far as the Kent Coast, and west into Ireland. Ornithologists have long been aware that ducks are often long-distance migrants, but this is the first real evidence of how far British breeding Goldeneye travel.

This insight meant that, at the end of a fascinating evening, we had been treated to both some scientific ornithology, and to some fine birding tales, starring our own special characters – both the *Buscephala clangula*, and the *Familia hanmeri.*

Paul Ashdown

An extract from A RINGERS YEAR by **Phil Hanmer** For full story and photos go our website

MAY 2022: It's been an amazingly busy month for birds with the rather variable weather having miscellaneous effects on their nesting behaviour. Tawny Owls have done well after the disaster of last year (when we only monitored one nest). 'e. My colleague Hilary also had a surprise at one tumble-down hemmel at the edge of a golf course, where we had found owls back in March; when she discovered nesting Kestrels! Kestrels are in effect a day-time owl; eating very much the same food and liking the same nesting places. In this case there were five feisty youngsters (see photo). I also had a return from the BTO telling me that a Barn Owl we ringed as a nestling back in 2017, on Longhorsley Moor, was now breeding himself near Causey Park.

It would be really helpful to receive reports of owl sightings around buildings and trees where they just might be nesting; especially they are carrying food, perhaps in the early evening. After the winter storms some natural and artificial sites have been lost so some will be in new sites.

BIRD RECORDS MAY 2022

Red-legged Partridge	20+ Seahouses area all month now commonest partridge (JPL).
Grey Partridge	7 at Boulmer on 15th (A&MG).
Quail	1 at Branton on 31st (I&KD).
Barnacle Goose	3 at Low Newton on 8th (A&MG) & 1 on 10th (PA&MD).
Tufted Duck	6 male at Monk's House Pool on 6th & still 2 on 31st (JPL).
Red-breasted Merganser	2 off Long Nanny on 20th (A&MG).
Nightjar	3 at Beanley Wood on 28th (I&KD).
Swift	2 at Branton GP on 11th & 15 on 27th (I&KD), 3 at Seahouses on 13th (DG&RB) & 1 at Long Nanny (A&MG), 6 at Wooler on 17th (AJM).
Cuckoo	2 at Beanley Wood on 1st (I&KD), 1 at Ford Moss on 2nd (EH) & 2 on 10th (PA&MD), 1 at Harthope Valley on 16th (SVM).
Avocet	Up to 8 at Low Newton all month (PA&MD,A&MG,I&KD).
Little Ringed Plover	1 at Low Newton on 27th (A&MG).
Whimbrel	2 at Long Nanny on 14th & 1 at Holy Island on 17th (I&KD).
Ruff	3 at Low Newton on 8th (A&MG).
Curlew Sandpiper	1 at Long Nanny on 20th & 27th (A&MG).
Purple Sandpiper	6 at Stag Rocks on 13th (DG&RB).
Little Stint	1 at Low Newton on 27th (A&MG).
Pectoral Sandpiper	1 at Low Newton on 13th (I&KD).
Common Sandpiper	2 pairs at Tilmouth on 1st (EH), 3 at Hedgeley GP on 5th (A&MG), 1 at Bendor on 14th (DG&RB).
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley GP on 3rd (I&KD).
Wood Sandpiper	2 at Hedgeley GP on 3rd (I&KD) & 5th (A&MG).
Little Gull	2 at Long Nanny on 20th & 7 on 27th (A&MG).
Little Tern	4 at Embleton Bay on 10th (PA&MD). Up to 13 at Long Nanny from 13th (I&KD)(A&MG).
Arctic Tern	800 at Long Nanny from 13th (A&MG).
Black Tern	1 at Long Nanny from 13th (I&KD,A&MG).This is the American subspecies surinamensis.
Little Egret	1 at Holy Island on 5th (P&MN).
Marsh Harrier	1 at Low Newton on 3rd (PA&MD) & 2 on 8th (A&MG).
Sand Martin	50+ at Monk's House Pool on 6th (JPL), small numbers all month.
Swallow	9 pairs at Langleeford nesting. (per DG&RB).
House Martin	8 pairs at Langleeford nesting. (DG&RB) & 2 pairs at Yearle (SV&AJM).
Sedge Warbler	1 at Low Newton on 8th (A&MG) 2 at Monk's House Pool 1/31st (JPL).
Garden Warbler	8 at Branton GP on 8th & 1 on Holy Island on 17th (I&KD).
Lesser Whitethroat	2 at Holy Island on 17th (I&KD).
Whitethroat	1 at Tilmouth on 1st & 2 at Branton GP (EH,I&KD), 1 at Low Newton on 8th & 1 at Yearle (A&MG,SV&AJM), 3 at Holy Island on 17th (I&KD).
Spotted Flycatcher	6 at Holy Island on 17th (I&KD).
Bluethroat	1 at Holy Island on 17th (I&KD).
Redstart	4 near Beanley on 1st (I&KD).
Stonechat	4 at Beanley Moor on 1st (I&KD).
Wheatear	1 at Football Hole on 10th (PA&MD).

BIRD RECORDS MAY 2022 (cont)

Tree Pipit	1 at Beanley Wood on 1st (I&KD).
Egyptian Goose	1 at Low Newton on 8th (A&MG), probably of escape origin.

Observers Paul Ashdown & Martine Delbauve (PA&MD), Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RB), Ian & Keith Davison (I & KD), Alan & Margaret Goodall (A&MG), Liz Harrison (EH), James Joicey (JJ), John P Lumby (JPL), Stewart & Alison Mc Cormick (SV&AJM), Phil & Marge Noble (P&MN).

June Records: Do not submit them to me, after nearly 15 enjoyable years, I am throwing in the towel! John Lumby ex recorder.

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Additional Sighting Record received from Phil Hanmer

Cuckoo	3rd Alnwick Moor and 23rd Swineclose Wood, Doxford
Redstart	10th Whiney Hill Fm, Londhorsley
Pied Flycatcher	18th Whiney Hill Fm, Longhorsley
Marsh Tit	18th Whiney Hill Fm, Londgorsley
Mandarin Duck	17th Howick Pool
Mute Swan & Eggs	ditto
Little Grebe	ditto
Coot	ditto
Long Tailed Tits	ditto
Blackcap	ditto
Heron	ditto
Wheatear	17th Shoreston Hall

Bird Recorder Wanted !

As previously stated, our long standing bird recorder, John Lumby, is retiring. Therefore, we are looking for someone within the membership to take on this interesting role.

You don't need to become a committee member, simply corollate the sightings of our members and submit the list to our Newsletter Editor, David Lloyd Blake, each month. If this is of interest or if you would just like to talk through what is involved, please contact the Chairman, Richard Poyer.