NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

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Mike & Jane Drage

MADAGASGAR – Paradise lost ?

Mike and Jane Drage gave a talk on MADAGASCAR—Paradise lost ?

Turn to pages **4 & 5** for **Paul Ashdown's** report

EMBLETON FIELD TRIP

See report on our Notice Board on **page 2**

RINGER'S ROUNDUP

See **pages 6 & 7**

Sparrowhawk Photo supplied Phil & Alison Hanmer

BIRD BOOKS FOR SALE

See **page 2**

NOTICE OF CHANGE OF VENUE FOR JANUARY, FEBRUARY,AND MARCH

see **Noticeboard** on **page 2**

NOTICEBOARD

INDOOR MEETINGS BAMBURGH PAVILION

Friday 9th December 2022 at 7.30pm John Lumby will give a talk entitled

" Above 15,000ft in the Andes "

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.]

Field Trip at 10.00am on Monday 12th December 2022 to Coquet Estuary and Birling Carrs..

Meet in the Warkworth Beach public car park (O.S:NU255064) . Please share cars if possible.
We'll explore the Estuary, Bay and Birling Carrs for divers, sea-birds, wildfowl and waders.
Bring warm clothing, stout footwear and packed lunch (or an opportunity to visit one of Warkworth's cafés and/ or pubs afterwards) Leader Richard Poyer 07936909649

January 2023 Field trip to Dumfries and Galloway.

You will have received information directly regarding this field trip. This is a reminder to make payment by Bank Transfer or Cheque by 9th December,

BIRD BOOKS FOR SALE

John Lumby will bring to this and future club meetings, a selection of bird books etc for sale (club funds to benefit). If members/visitors have any book title requests, please let John know by telephoning 01665 720654. Poyser's, New Naturalist's Wayside & Woodland and general natural history are all available.

Also, at **THIS MONTH's** meeting on 9th December , Wildlife Artist Jane Harbottle, will be bringing a selection of her work from her studio in Lowick (percentage going to Club funds). The items will make ideal Christmas presents, so bring your wallet !

COMMITTEE at the AGM in November the membership voted in the Committee as proposed in the Agenda and it was stated that the current structure would be maintained.

IMPORTANT NOTICE !!! OUR INDOOR MEETINGS IN JANUARY, FEBRUARY,AND MARCH 2023 WILL BE HELD IN SEAHOUSES.

Seahouses Hub , Stone Close, Seahouses, NE68 7YS

NOTICEBOARD

EMBLETON FIELD TRIP 16th NOVEMBER 2022.

November 16th dawned bright and fresh for this month's Field Meeting, rather a different outlook from the clammy mistiness of our last visit to Low Newton! We had in fact, chosen the best day of the week, a short dry spell in between torrential rain. The good weather drew out 14 members who set off from the "Tin Church", towards the coast. We rapidly collected a good mix of passerines in the wood and scrub, and had a nice view of roe deer as a bonus. As we came out onto the open space of Newton Point, we were all surprised by skies full of Skylark, some singing away like it was spring. The meadow was also full of Redshank, Starling and Oystercatcher giving us plenty to look at.

We climbed to the top of the little scarp to look across the fields and dunes towards Football Hole, and could see a large flock of geese in the middle distance. A close look corrected our initial assumption that these would be Pink-feet, they were in fact Greylag, and a stray spot of colour in their midst was identified as an unexpected Ruddy Shelduck seemingly adopted into the flock. Looking towards the sea, we had more wildfowl on the water. Alongside the expected Eider, we had a great view of Goldeneye riding the waves coming into the bay, and further out, the special sight of two male Long-tailed Duck.

As we moved to the point itself we collected the standard gulls, Cormorant and a Red-throated Diver, plus Rock Pipit very appropriately in the rocks. The rocky shelf as we came back towards Low Newton gave us Turnstone and nice views of Purple Sandpiper, plus a Gannet out to sea, and a Kestrel inland. A fine skein of Pink-footed Geese flew overhead so they could get onto our list too. The rock and mud of bay in front of the village is always worth a careful look, and we notched up Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling and a lonely Bar-tailed Godwit. The sun had gone in by this stage, so we decided to stop for lunch in the shelter of the village, a lunch which many of us shared with friendly House Sparrows.

After lunch we moved behind the houses to the scrape, which is now filling up after the dry autumn. It was nicely full of Lapwing and Golden Plover. And then on to the National Trust hide where we added Shoveler and Gadwall to our wildfowl, but despite all of us searching the reeds, no Coot, which we could hardly believe. We did, however, find a Black-tailed Godwit, just as lonely as the earlier Bar-tailed, feeding in the shallow water at the back of the lake.

Out of the hide, we moved across the dunes and had the treat of Redwing feeding in the hawthorn. Viewing the beach from the top of the dunes, we were lucky to spot Grey Plover before holidaying dogs spooked them. Then, looking out to the Emblestones, we had long discussions over a mystery goose which kept popping its head above the rocks just for a few seconds at a time. Eventually, through scopes, birding apps, and collective experience, we agreed that it was a Bar-headed Goose, native of China. Since a pair (probably escapes) have been around Low Newton before, this isn't quite as outrageous as it sounds.

From the beach, the short walk up the hill back to the church completed the walk. Totting up, we had a very satisfying 60 species. What a great birding spot to have on our doorstep!

NNBC Field Trip, Wed 16/11/2022

Newton Loop: Tin Church (St Mary's Church), cliff above Football Hall, Newton Point, Newton Haven, Newton Scrape and Pond, Newton Beach, Tin Church.

14 people

In recording order:

Black Bird, Wood Pigeon, Song Thrush, Wren, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Rook, Dunnock, Blue Tit, Robin, Jackdaw, Chaffinch
Great Tit. Black-headed Gull, Pheasant, Crow, Redshank, Stonechat, Starling, Yellowhammer, Skylark, Great Black-Backed Gull
Mallard, Herring Gull, Curlew, Oystercatcher, Ruddy Shelduck, Greylag Goose, Eider Duck, Goldeneye, Sanderling
Long-tailed Duck, Cormorant , Rock Pipit, Red-throated Diver, Turnstone, Golden Plover, Purple Sandpiper, Gannet
Kestrel. Ringed Plover, Teal, Bar-tailed Godwit

MADAGASCAR – Paradise Lost ?

Mike and Jane Drage

Report by Paul Ashdown

This month the Club's original talk was cancelled, and at very late notice, NNBC member Mike Drage stepped in to "save the day" with a fascinating description of his trip to Madagascar, sharing with us weird tales of the magical island's birds, lemurs and reptiles. Rather than cataloguing what he and his wife had seen, Mike placed this wonderful wildlife in an ecological and social context, encouraging us all to reflect on the amazing process of evolution which has created such variety. The talk was subtitled "Paradise Lost?", drawing our attention to the colossal threats facing this special "ark" of biodiversity. Mike's pictures of bare eroded hills, rapidly developing roadsides, and paddy fields showed us these forces in action, but the charismatic wildlife, and his hopeful narrative, left us space to be positive.

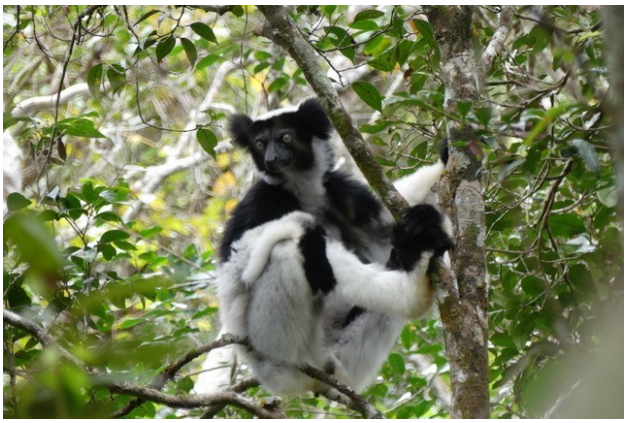
The journey started in the bustling sprawl of the capital, Tana (Antanarivo). Even here, in what looks like an archetypal developing city, wildlife managed to find a home wherever a tiny bit of protection was provided. However, the real treats were found in a series of reserves and national parks reached on a punishing schedule of long coach journeys in hot weather on terrible roads. The sheer variety of landscapes and environments helps to explain the parallel variety of wildlife. We moved from lush rainforest, through dry limestone hills, and into weird "spiny forest", a type of prickly low scrub, which looks so in-hospitable you cannot imagine anything making a home there. Nevertheless, each special environment had special animals and plants to match.

Amongst great images of statuesque baobab trees, weird geckos and chameleons, two sets of species kept coming back: the wonderfully charismatic Lemurs, and more in the mainstream for the Bird Club, the wonderful array of Vangas. Both these groups are, like so much of the wildlife we saw, endemic to Madagascar, developing in isolation after the huge island was left adrift in the Indian Ocean. The lemurs are just irresistible. We saw not only the familiar Ring-tailed Lemur, but also wonderful beasts like the Golden Bamboo Lemur, the Diadem Sifaka, and the Indri, whose eerie wailing call filled the pavilion and took us all to the heart of a misty rainforest. Vangas are the avian equivalent of Lemurs in that they are a group which has developed from a single common ancestor to fill a huge range of ecological niches, and in the process giving us a magnificent show of the bizarre twists and turns evolution can follow. Mike showed us, for example, the Sickle-billed Vanga, with a long curving bill, a stark contrast with the little Nuthatch Vanga, which has taken a totally different direction behaving like, well, a Nuthatch!

Madagascar (cont.)

The downside of this magnificent show is that many of these species have developed for tiny environmental niches and are restricted to a frighteningly small territory, sometimes only a few hundred square miles in extent. This leaves them horribly vulnerable to the pressures of deforestation and agricultural development, and often reliant on the fragile protection of reserves and National Parks. This is the story behind one beautiful bird Mike showed us, the Long-Tailed Ground-Roller. This superbly marked denizen of the thorny scrub has an electric-blue go-faster stripe, but the range shown on the little map in my bird-book is a tiny red dot in the south-west corner of the island.

Mike's pictures and stories showed us clearly the pressures birds like this face. With trees being cut down to produce charcoal, forest being cleared for rice-paddy and the all-pervasive impact of erosion stripping the hillsides bare, it could be a very depressing tale. Mike however, was hopeful and positive. He gave us news of local communities developing their own reserves to promote sustainable eco-tourism, and spoke of good work being undertaken by a range of charities and NGOs including WaterAid. The Madagascan people, who face immense challenges beyond our experience, are justly proud of their wildlife, and lemurs have always held a special place in their culture. Hopefully, more sustainable development will find a balance to protect this special "Paradise" for all our futures.



NOV 2022: Our last ringing session at Howick was on the 4/11/22 when we captured 40 birds; 24 new and 16 retraps. All migrant warblers seemed to have moved on from the area but due to the presence of lots of juicy berries (*from both native a near-native trees and bushes*) in the Arboretum the site was being plundered by lots of Blackbirds and Bullfinches. Its highly likely that many of the Blackbirds were continental in origin but its very difficult to identify these; as distinct from the more sedentary residents. It is generally believed that continental birds have 'blacker' smudgy beaks but so do juvenile residents (as distinct from adults). As well as processing 9 blackbirds there was also a Mistle Thrush (most likely a migrant). We also caught a female Sparrowhawk (photo) in the act of trying to predate a blackbird! Handling this sharp beaked and taloned bird was an interesting experience for one of my trainees but he survived the experience uninjured!

The need to repair and clean-out some barn owl boxes north of Wooler led to the locating of a male Barn Owl in a farm hemmel which proved to be [GY65453] (photo). This bird was first ringed in 2017 when it raised three young; in 2018 it raised another three; it had a new mate in 2019 but did not nest; in 2020 they did not breed (unless it was at another site) but he did in 2021 although only raising one young. Looking at the pattern of feathers in his wing would actually suggest he was only 4 or possibly 5 years old but ringing tells us he is at least 6 (photo). At another box, in a tree, we had a surprise when a Tawny Owl came out! This was a new bird, definitely an adult, probably four plus years old. Its possible that this made may remain in this box to nest in the spring although tawny owls often prefer a location which is a bit more dark and secluded (photo).

In response to requests for a fuller update on this years Barn Owl Nesting I have attached my summary table of this years 'Results' and can add the following commentary:-

A RINGERS YEAR (cont.)

BARN OWL BREEDING SEASON 2022:

My study (of around 100 sites) in **North Northumberland** (outside the National Park) indicates that this was a much better year than 2021; although not as good as 2020. At 39% occupancy it was above the long-term average of 30%; although only 34 were successful at raising young. The exceptionally stormy weather of the winter may have disrupted some nest sites and pairs (indeed we recorded three instances in the spring when pairs seemed to have changed partners during the early stages of nesting!?); we did lose some sites. However, the weather did eventually become calmer and most eggs were laid in April and May.

As the summer moved on it became hot and dry. This initially seemed to encourage some late broods; although of five which could be said to fall into this category, only three were successful with young being ringed in August. This can probably be explained by the exceptionally dry weather in August suppressing the numbers of small mammals. One of the late nests, near Longhorsley, was a replacement brood. The pair originally had 3 eggs in May but for reasons that we can't understand stopped incubating these and laid 6 more in June from which they raised 4 at the end of August. Another of the successful late broods was raised by a male who occupied a nest site all year; his mate died early in the year but he continued to occupy the site and eventually attracted a new mate towards the end of June. We were able to ring 4 young at the end of August.

The average number of eggs laid per clutch was up at 4.4 although four '6's' were recorded. The average number of owlets fledged was 2.9 although three pairs did raise 6. A total of 107 owlets were ringed and apparently fledged. 32 new adult Barn Owls were ringed and 28 re-trapped/controlled; including a pair that seems to always nest *early* near Bamburgh; another that was evicted from their usual box by *Tawny Owls* but went onto to use the tawnies own box instead!

As well as damage and disruption caused by the winter storms Jackdaws were still a problem occupying owl nest sites. The attempt of this species to bury owl eggs under 'jackdaw sticks' was again observed. Kestrels were exceptionally thin on the ground with only one pair using an owl box; although they were seen around two other sites.

Tawny Owls did take over one barn owl box and turned up in some slightly odd sites (probably the result of losing nest sites to the winter storms). However, they had a successful nesting year and they did compete (as is usual) with our rare breeding Goldeneye ducks for nest sites.

Successful Barn Owl nests were near: Whittingham, Doddington, Wooler, Alnwick, Allerdean, Fallowdon, Newton, Bamburgh, Craster, Bilton, Warkworth, Rothbury, Coltpark, Netherwitton, Longhorsley and Longframlington.

Thanks are due to all those who have helped with this project; and those that have donated money for the making of boxes etc.

Best Regards

Phil Hanmer S Ringer/Trainer; Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum). E-mail: tytoalbas@btinternet.com

The Bird Sightings List for November is attached as a separate item this month.

POSTSCRIPT

Don't forget……

1st January Our now annual chance to try to see as many birds as possible locally

on a short winter's day, finishing with a meal at the Castle Inn in Bamburgh.

Meet at 8-15 am at the car park on the right, at the entrance to High Newton.

Leader John Lumby. 01665 720654

Female Blackbird. Lowick

David Lloyd-Blake

Season's Greetings from your Editor

David Lloyd-Blake