NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Chairman
Mr Richard Poyer,
12 Byron Street,
Amble, NE65 0ER
Tel: 07936 909649

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

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

Mark Newell

Treecreeper P & A Hanmer

50 YEARS of SEABIRD MONITORING on the ISLE of MAY

See a report by **Richard Poyer** on **Mark Newell's talk**

on pages 7 to 10.

Field Trip to STAG ROCK and BUDLE BAY

See report on pages 5,& 6.

BIRD BOOKS FOR SALE

See page 2

RINGER'S ROUNDUP

See pages 11, 12 & 13.

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

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

NOTICEBOARD

NNBC MEETINGS

INDOOR MEETINGS at THE HUB, SEAHOUSES.

- **Friday 10th MARCH 2023 at 7.30pm EM WITCUTT (RSPB St.Abbs) will give a talk on TRACKING SEABIRDS ON THE SCOTTISH COAST.**

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 JOHN MUIR COUNTRY PARK, Dunbar, East Lothian at 10am on16th MARCH,

led by Phil and Marge Noble.

Meet next to the toilet block in the John Muir Country Park - Linkfield Car Park (OS Explorer 351 grid ref: 652788) Parking charge £2.50 all day.

Directions: From the A1 take the 3rd exit at Thistly Cross roundabout signposted to Dunbar and North Berwick, then in less than half a mile at the Beltonford roundabout take the A1087 exit to Dunbar. In half a mile turn left on a small side road signposted East Links Family Park and John Muir Country Park. In a quarter of a mile fork right following the signs for the John Muir Country Park Linkfield Car Park, (this is a large car park with several areas).

We will explore the woodland of Hedderwick Hill Plantation, shingle beaches and salt- marsh. Bring warm clothing, stout footwear and a packed lunch. Walk duration 3 to 4 hours.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF OUR ANNUAL DAWN CHORUS WALK AT ETAL

which will take place on Saturday 29th April. Details in next month's newsletter.

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 tel. 01665 720654.

IMPORTANT NOTICE !!! OUR INDOOR MEETING IN MARCH 2023 WILL BE HELD IN SEAHOUSES.

Seahouses Hub , Stone Close, Seahouses, **NE68 7YL**

NOTICEBOARD

As the breeding season approaches it is worth reminding ourselves of our legal obligations.

PLEASE REMEMBER YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE WILDLIFE AND COUNTRYSIDE ACT 1981

It is an offence under the Act if any person intentionally :

- disturbs any wild bird included in Schedule 1 while it is building a nest or is in, or near a nest containing eggs or young
- OR disturbs dependent young of such a bird
- OR enters an area designated by the Secretary of State

A special license is required from Natural England to photograph a schedule 1 bird species at it's nest or to enter a special area designated by the Secretary of State.

There are 90 birds on the Schedule 1 list in the UK.

These include birds such as Barn Owl, Kingfisher, Little Tern and all raptors except Common Buzzard.

For a complete list Google or search : "RSPB Schedule 1 birds" and you will be taken to an alphabetical list.

Alternatively go to the NNBC website and look under "News".

NOTICEBOARD

Note to Members from the Committee

Members will probably recall that we wrote to our local MP, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, in late 2022, expressing our concerns regarding several aspects of the environmental policy emerging from the government. We received a short and polite “holding” response from one of her aides, explaining that she would find out more information regarding these issues and reply more fully later. Despite follow-up enquiries from our Secretary, no further response has been forthcoming, and as most of the issues have moved on since our original letter, the value of further correspondence seems limited. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that our MP appears to have avoided taking a position on these issues by not responding to us meaningfully at all. Perhaps her stance on environmental issues is shown by the fact that she voted against tightening the regulations governing discharging pollution into our rivers.

On the broader front, the announcements from the Government on some of the policy areas we raised have been cautiously welcomed by the major conservation charities like the RSPB. For example, the Environmental Payment Scheme for farmers, which is to replace EU farm subsidies, does seem to include support for many aspects of agricultural land management that will be good for birds and wildlife. However, the delayed environmental targets finally published last month have been watered down in some key areas, particularly on the amount and type of land to be enhanced for nature. The broad commitment to halt species decline in England by 2030 and to increase populations by 2042, seems woefully inadequate, and effectively licenses inaction. There is an increased focus on “food security”, which seems understandable in the current international situation, but it is important for policy to strike the correct balance between food production and longer term sustainability which, world-wide, relies on a healthy environment and climate stability. If we want the needs of birds and the wider environment to get the policies, resources and attention they need, it is up to us to make sure they are not forgotten. It is more important than ever for all of us to write to our MPs and other representatives in order to let them know that we really do expect them to live up to their commitment to be the first Government to leave the natural world in a better state than the one they found it in.

NNBC Field Trip – Stag Rock and Budle Bay

Saturday 11 February 2023

Searching for the elusive Long-tailed Duck….and others

A Robin greeted some members heading into the car park to the south of Stag Rock and with 19 members participating we took over most of the available space. Brief introductions made and a quick glance out to sea the group made their way towards Stag Rock, stopping several times between the Car Park and the Golf Club.

First sightings were of the Oyster Catchers scattered on the rocks to the south of Stag Rock, along with Crow, Ruddy Turnstones and Purple Sandpiper. Out at sea telescopes quickly picked up a small group of Common Scoters which started the first debate of the day. Standing out through the scopes one individual with a rather bright yellow tip to its beak caused a fair discussion which concluded it was a Velvet Scoter – quite a spot of this vulnerable species. The second debate centred on a single diver out at sea, definitely not a cormorant and more a grebe than a diver, the discussion considered Great Crested (unlikely), Slavonian (perhaps) and Red Necked Grebe. Mobile phones out and comparing graphics and photos we determined it was indeed a Red Necked Grebe, another good spot for lots of the group. Chatting to a local birder he said Red Necked Grebe had been evident for around a week, supporting our identification. Along with these a Red Throated Diver was also noted, as well as a Red Breasted Merganser.

Adjacent to the Golf Club with a decent elevation over the rocky shore we scoured for Long Tailed Duck a species known to inhabit the area but none were to be seen. The usual Black Headed and Herring Gulls flew just offshore, with Eiders not too far out and on the rocks and beach below we spotted Curlew, Sanderling, Turnstone and Purple Sandpiper. The group decided to take the beach route along to Budle Bay and traversed the footpath down to the beach. A single Grey Heron studying a rock pool was the first noticeable sighting as we reached the beach. With a reasonable wind (which was fortunately not too cold) and being low tide, expectations were not high that we might see much as we walked along. Looking at the group you could quite easily believe we were on a long-distance trek over some remote desert. As we passed a bit of a cliff face a couple of Northern Fulmar flew overhead and out to sea. Quite scattered out, we continued and turned into Budle Bay. Even with the low tide the white spots at the other side of the bay stood out, quickly identified as around 40 Shelduck feeding in the margins.

Finding a bit of shelter beside the concrete outcrop just below Newtown Gun Emplacement the group stopped for lunch. At this point a few members decided to head off back to their cars. Eating, chatting and spotting

continued simultaneously for a short while with Dunlin, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper, Little Egret, Mallard and Wigeon being noted. Lunch over, we decided to take the bridle path back to Stag Rock. Put off by a 'Private' sign and with a little Google Maps reading we climbed up the bridle path. As we approached the top a good view of Budle Bay and beyond to Holy Island, gave us a decent vantage point to scour the whole bay and the far shore. Several hundred Barnacle Geese were occupying a field at the other side of the bay, while on the flats a similar number of Brent Geese could be seen. A sizeable group of Pink Footed Geese provided us with a goose trio within a few minutes.

We continued our walk along the bridal path, adjacent to the golf course. During the walk sighting of Rook, Kestrel, Stonechat, Magpie. This elevated walk, with a pale blue sky, light wind and great visibility, gave us great views of Bamburgh beach and of course the majestic Bamburgh Castle stood out. Passing a green a single Redwing was spotted, which seemed to be enjoying the company of a group of golfers. As they tried to putt their balls into the hole the Redwing a few yards away seemed totally unperturbed.

Back at the golf club, the row of telescopes was soon out to scour the sea. A large flock of Scoters about 100 yards offshore, seemed to be very close together and looked like some large grey flotsam bobbing in the swell, making it difficult to estimate how many there were. Pleased with the sightings we made our way back to the car park, did a quick summary of the species and started to make our way home.

On a very pleasant February day all seemed to enjoy their spotting experience with a total of 35 species identified as follows:

Barnacle Goose, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-headed Gull, Brent Goose, Carrion Crow, Common Eider, Common Gull, Common Kestrel, Common Magpie, Common Redshank, Common Scoter, Dunlin, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Eurasian Skylark, Eurasian Wigeon, European Robin, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Cormorant, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Herring Gull, Little Egret, Mallard, Northern Fulmar, Pink-footed Goose, Purple Sandpiper, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-necked Grebe, Red-throated Diver, Redwing, Rook, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Velvet Scoter

John McCutcheon

Purple Sandpiper and Skylarks Photos Richard Poyer.

50 years of Seabird Monitoring on the Isle of May

Our February speaker, **Mark Newell**, gave an excellent talk that went to the heart of ornithological research – a long term study.

Mark, a scientist with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), is the Field Manager overseeing the day-to-day research on the Isle of May with particular responsibility for the bird ringing and training.

The Isle of May, in the Firth of Forth, is nationally important for its seabirds and the island was designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR) 66 years ago. As part of that Puffins, Guillemot, Razorbill, Shag, Fulmar and Kittiwake have been studied by the research team from the CEH for the last 50 years.

Mark and the team's year starts in February when they return after the winter on the mainland. Their research is based on detailed observations and records from six breeding sites on the Island. To do this they spend about 2 hours every day in quite flimsy looking hides on cliff ledges.

Here they build up colour coded maps for Guillemots and Razorbill of particular pairs of birds' nest sites, their breeding and activities.

For Shags, the position of nests in 12 areas are marked on photographs and the state and contents of these nests checked weekly from 1 April until 6 August.

As well as recording the demographics of the birds, their diets are studied. This is essential to examine the relationship between breeding productivity and food intake – both type and amount.

For instance, Danish fishing for sand eels between 1990 and 1999 appears to explain a decline in Kittiwake productivity. As surface feeders, they were soon affected by a change to food supply. After sand eel fishing was halted in 2000, productivity in both Kittiwake and Shag improved. However, there might also have been other factors influencing the change.

Mark described the variety of ways of investigating what the birds are actually catching.

Puffins are trapped in mists nets and they drop their catch – easy! Kittiwakes are not so easy and a noose has to be used to "persuade" them to regurgitate the catch. This is then put into the fridge for examination. The otoliths (ear bone) of the fish allows the size and age to be worked out.

The diet research appears to suggest that with Puffins there has been an increase in the numbers of sand eels per load of food, a decrease in weight and a decline in the average length of fish at peak demand. Mark asked, “Is this due to rising sea temperature and a migration of the cold-water favouring sand eels?” Further research is needed.

The third strand of the research is to record and analyse the movement patterns of the birds both in terms of foraging and seasonal migration. The development of tracking recorders such as geolocaters has allowed many questions to be answered.

Mark amused us when talking about the “Shag cam”. Attaching cameras to the birds showed one bird “filming” another catching a butterfish! Tracking showed that the Shags are not keen on flying far and that their feeding areas are concentrated on the doorstep – Fife.

The Shag population has a partial migration with 50% moving north to the Aberdeen area.

Colour ringing is used to study these migrations and Mark asked the members to keep a watch for birds with colour rings. Any sightings can be recorded to - shags@ceh.ac.uk.

Colour ringing studies have shown that those Shags that remain on the Isle of May have less chance of survival year to year than those the migrate.

In contrast, after breeding the Puffins migrate to the west coast of Scotland, the south-west of Ireland as well as the north of the North Sea.

Kittiwakes may travel much further, to Hudson Bay and the Grand Banks.

What are the number of breeding pairs of all these birds? Currently about 40,000 Puffins, 15,000 Guillemot, 3,500 Razorbill, 3,000 Kittiwake, 500 Shag and 300 Fulmar.

The second part of Mark's talk revealed what I think few of us will have known- that Storm Petrels are breeding on the Isle. It had been suspected there may be a colony on the island since 2019, when storm petrels were first spotted displaying and calling. The difficulty in confirming the breeding was that the "Stormies" are nocturnal, seasonal and lay one egg in a deep burrow. The vast majority of the birds nest on islands to the north and west of Scotland and in Ireland and whilst they are trapped and ringed on the Isle en route in mist nets, breeding had not been proved. It was the acute sense of smell that a member of staff has and her knowledge of the particular odour of the Stormies that helped to locate a burrow where, when a recording of the bird's call was played, a response was given. It could only be a breeding bird. Once the breeding pair was confirmed by thermal imaging and an endoscope, sniffer dogs were brought on the job and traced a further 63 burrows located – though not necessarily breeding sites. Mark said that, "to confirm the presence of these mystical, magical birds 200 miles from the nearest known colony is one of the highlights of my many years on the Isle"

A fitting end to a splendid talk. **Richard Poyer**

A RINGERS YEAR

FEBRUARY 2023 Despite unhelpful weather it has been possible to get out and about this month to put up some new small boxes in a woodland near Longhorsley, plus boxes for Tawny Owls. We have also got some Barn Owl boxes up and surveyed a number of new sites. We are rapidly running out of time to put any more up, not because you can't put new boxes up anytime (you really can) but because I and my assistants will soon have to turn our attention to monitoring the spring breeding season.

A little late in the Barn Owl breeding season last year we were invited to check a nest box west of Rothbury. On the 18/7/22 we found four nearly fledged young owls in this box but no sign of the adults. Returning to the same site on the 6th Feb this year, ostensibly to check on the safety of the box itself, we found a pair of healthy adult owls in residence. The male was a bird of 4 or 5 yrs old weighing 340g, while the female was only 3 yrs old and weighed 360g. The weight of the female is insufficient to lay eggs but she has got time between now and April to get up to something over 400g.

Female **Male**

Meanwhile returns from the British Trust for Ornithology tell us of two casualties from last years young owls. One hatched (out of three) from Warkworth was found dead near Alnmouth on the 8th February and another from Fontburn (out of five) was killed on the A1 near Morpeth on the 1st. There was also an owl from near Craster in its third year that was found dead inland near Rennington in November. This was notable as one of the many offspring of my 'Dumfries Owl' that had nested in that area until she was 10 years old. Sadly she is now lost herself.

Early in the month I was invited to visit a private Nature Reserve that's been created very close to Morpeth. It's called 'Clarke's Bog' and is well worth a visit if you get the opportunity. Having seen a number of such creations over the years I really do have to say this is excellent. So often you find such sites to be disappointing, consisting of little more than a field or perhaps a block of woodland. As the RSPB has proved, you really do have to move soil and create new habitats if it's to be meaningful. As part of the ongoing monitoring of this site a bird ringing programme has been started and some of my C Ringers have become involved in this.

One of my C Ringers has just used her relatively new permit to seek some proper warmer weather in The Gambia, at the Kartong Bird Observatory. This is now operating again after being shut down by Covid for the last few years. Birds ringed on the first day included Pied Kingfisher and Senegal Coucal. This observatory is pioneering some genuine new research and science education in West Africa.

I concluded my contribution to the BTO's Winter Ringing Initiative on the 14th Feb, by ringing with two nets in the garden for three hours. In total I did all eight sessions; at approximately two week intervals and captured a total of 272 birds from thirteen species. These were:

Blackbird, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Great Tit, House Sparrow, Long Tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Redpoll, Robin, Tree Sparrow and Wren.

For anyone who still thinks that a Robin they see in their garden in the winter is always the same bird, I should tell you that I ringed 17 new robins over the eight sessions! There were also notable recaptures ncluding a Blue Tit from 2019, a Coal Tit from 2018, a Tree Sparrow from 2018; and a controlled Redpoll that was first ringed at Waxham in Norfolk on the 12/10/20 as an adult male.

Ringing at one of Hilary's sites in a woodland near Longframlington on a cold and slightly damp morning proved interesting as we caught a rare Marsh Tit and we retrapped a resident Treecreeper (now an adult).

This wood is a regenerated birch woodland which is damp in places and logically should have resident Willow Tits. These need damp rotten wood in which to nest. However, as far as we can tell the only rare tits in the woodland are their close relatives, the marsh tit.

I have now prototyped my new Swift boxes based on researching all the multivarious designs you can find on the internet and produced a box that you can make for about #15.00. I have drawn up a plan of this which is available and I hope to get posted on some Web-Sites soon. Meanwhile anyone wanting a copy urgently is invited to e-mail me. Swifts are late migrants so it's not too late to put a box up – although realistically you may have to wait at least a year for it to be taken up.

Recently published in Birds in Northumbria 2021 (Annual Report of the Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club) is my paper on '*Clangers in space and time – Goldeneye in Northumberland and their travels*'. For a copy go to the Clubs Website for details. It contains lots of interesting reports and papers.

Best Regards

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

Bird Records February 2023

Below are the highlights for the month of February.

Whooper Swan	90+ north of Twizel Castle on 6th	PN&MN
	13 at Branton Ponds on 10th	I&KD
Pintail	1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 23rd	I&KD
Velvet Scoter	1 at Stag Rocks on 11th	JMcC
Black Scoter	1 off Stag Rocks on 13th	I&KD
Long-tailed Duck	8 off Stag Rocks on 13th	I&KD
Red-breasted Merganser	3 at Alnmouth Bay on 5th	RP
	2 at Budle Bay on 11th	JMcC
	1 at Stag Rocks on 11th	JMcC
	2 off Annstead Point, Seahouses, on 11th	DG&RB
Red Grouse	5 at Earlehillhead on 1st	SVM
Grey Partridge	2 at Northfield Farm Birling on 21st	RP
Red-necked Grebe	1 at Stag Rocks on 11th	JMcC
	1 off Stag Rocks on 13th	I&KD
Great Crested Grebe	16 at Alnmouth Bay on 5th	RP
	1 at Branton Ponds on 23rd	I&KD
Slavonian Grebe	1 off Stag Rocks on 13th	I&KD
Grey Plover	23 at Birling Carrs on 5th	RP
	3 at Beadnell on 9th	PCA
Purple Sandpiper	6 at Birling Carrs on 5th	RP
	1 at Beadnell on 9th	PCA
	8 at Budle Bay on 11th	JMcC
	4 at Stag Rocks on 11th	JMcC
Red-throated Diver	6 at Alnmouth Bay on 5th	RP
	2 at Budle Bay on 11th	JMcC
	1 at Stag Rocks on 11th	JMcC
	2 off Annstead Point, Seahouses, on 11th	DG&RB
	6 off Stag Rocks on 13th	I&KD
	1 off Long Nanny on 14th	PCA
Great White Egret	1 at Hedgeley Lakes on 6th	I&KD
Sparrowhawk	1 Female at Yearle on 28th	DG&RB
Barn Owl	2 at Doxford on 9th	PCA
Raven	2 near Eglingham on 2nd 2 near Shepherds Law on 6th	I&KD
	1 over Branton Ponds on 12th	I&KD
	1 at Chare End, Holy Island on 8th	PCA
	4 near Beanley on 23rd 2 over Branton on 24th	I&KD
Waxwing	3 at Glanton on 9th	I&KD
	3 at Glanton from 16th to 18th	DG&RB
Marsh Tit	1 at Throat Wood, Longframlington on 27th	PHa
Willow Tit	1 at Branton pools on 14th	SV&AJM
	1 at Branton Ponds on 20th	I&KD
	1 at Wooler on 24th	JMcC
Treecreeper	1 at Yearle for most of month	DG&RB
Redwing	3 at Chathill on 11th	PCA
	1 at Budle Bay on 11th	JMcC

(list continued on next page)

Fieldfare	42 at Chathill on 11th	PCA
Grey Wagtail	1 near Alnwick police station on 25th	PCA
Bullfinch	4 at Doxford on 25th	PCA
Twite	40+ on Holy Island on 11th	I&KD
	25 near Long Nanny on 20th	PCA
Linnet	220+ near Shepherds Law on 6th	I&KD
Crossbill	2 at Shepherds Law on 6th	I&KD

Please send March records to Paul Armstrong NNBCrecords@yahoo.com by 1st April 2023

If you want a bird adding to the highlights list, you will need to submit, the species, location, date(s) and count together with any comments. If you just want it added to the list of species seen in the month, then you only need submit the name of the bird.

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
Graham & Rosemary Bell (DG&RB)
Ian & Keith Davison (I&KD)
Phil & Alison Hanmer (P&AH)
Phil Hanmer (PHa)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
Phil & Marge Noble (PN&MN)
Richard Poyer (RP)