October Newsletter

Last month's Speaker **Phil Hanmer**

Barn Owl: John McCutcheon

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Club Information

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John Lumby

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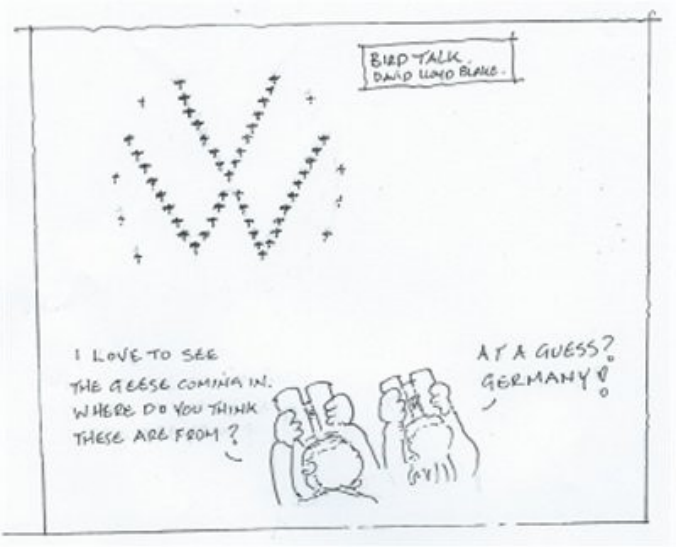

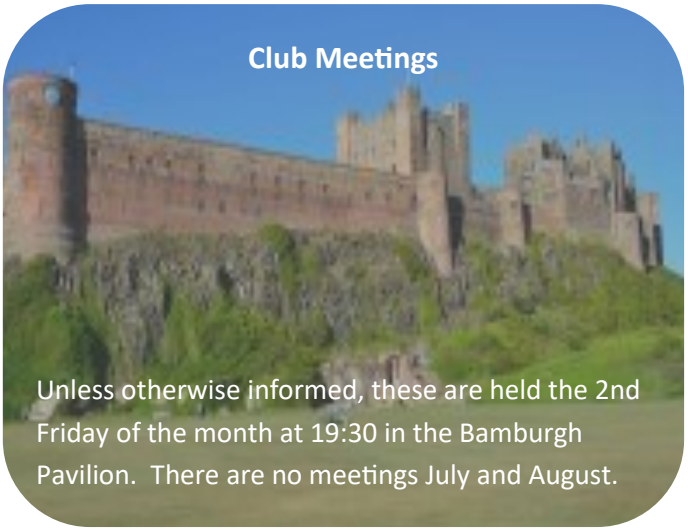

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Check out our Internet presence

On our web site at:
northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

On our Facebook page at:
www.facebook.com/NorthNorthumberlandBirdClub

Email us at:
ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

"Tame birds sing of freedom, wild birds fly" (John Lennon)

Noticeboard

Notice of the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of the North Northumberland Bird Club to be held at Bamburgh on 10th November 2023

The club is run by a Committee of ten members. At the AGM there will be two vacancies for the committee. Any member interested in serving on the committee is encouraged to put their name forward to the Secretary before the closing date. Nominations for the committee are to be with our Secretary, Paul Ashdown, by 27th October 2023, email ashbauve.pm@gmail.com
Nominations must be seconded and the nominee must have given their agreement to the nomination.

Any Other Business
Items of AoB must be with the Secretary, Paul Ashdown (ashbauve.pm@gmail.com), by 27th October 2023

Membership Subscriptions are now due
Subscriptions for 2023/2024 became due on 1st September—please pay at your earliest convenience if not already paid.

Thank You...

A huge thank you to **David Lloyd-Blake** who is standing down from editing the Newsletter after many successful years. Starting with this issue, our new Newsletter Editor is John McCutcheon.

John McCutcheon
Tel: 01665 570784
Mobile: 07710 401025
Email: john@waterstar.uk

Upcoming Field Trips

October
Aberlady Bay
Leaders: Marge and Phil Noble

For all Field Trips please read the Risk Assessment on our Web site beforehand. For dates and times and last minute changes / cancellations check our Facebook Page

See web site for details of other Field Trips

Upcoming Meetings

Friday 13th October at 19:30
Mhairi Maclachlan will give a talk on Cumbria's Coastal RSPB Reserves

Friday 10th November at 19:30
Dr Colin Bradshaw will give a talk entitled "Just two hours from Tyneside—Barcelona"
Preview photo of Blue Rock Thrush below

See web site for details of other Meetings

Proposed NNBC 6 day Birding Excursion to Norfolk in 2024

Further to last month's proposal and interest shown I can now firm up some details. The trip will be 6 days (5 nights) staying in Wymondham for 5 nights at The Townhouse Hotel, using a Travelsure 19 seater coach. The date is from 28th April to 3rd May 2024. Leader John Lumby.

Birding Itinerary

Day 1: 7-30am drive from Northumberland with stops to RSPB Frampton Marsh Reserve near Boston and then via King's Lynn to Wymondham, overnight at hotel.

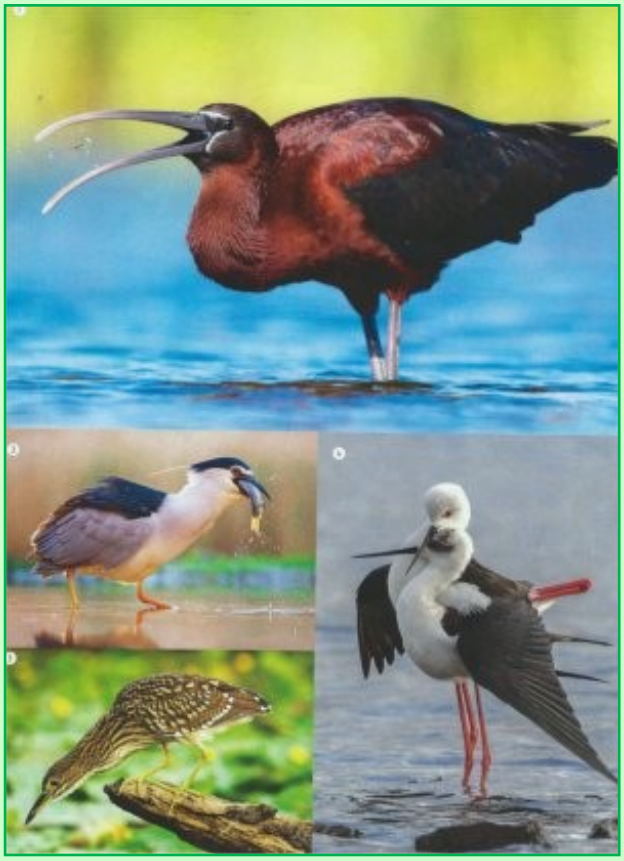
Day 2: Go north from Wymondham to Cley next the Sea NOA Reserve & area, return to hotel.

Day 3: Go north west from Wymondham to Weeting NOA reserve, Holme & RSPB Titchwell Reserves, return to hotel.

Day 4: Go south east from Wymondham to RSPB Minsmere reserve, etc return to hotel.

Day 5: Go south to RSPB Lakenheath Reserve return to hotel.

Day 6: Return home first stopping at a reserve near Spalding then to Northumberland.



6 days will give a very good bird list with over 120 species, including many unusual such as Wood Lark, Stone Curlew, Bearded Tit, Bittern, Black-winged Stilt, Night Heron, a trip of 30 Dotterel, Spoonbill, Marsh Harrier, Montaque's Harrier, Common Crane, Nightjar, Avocet, Nightingale, Golden Oriole, Glossy Ibis, possible Honey Buzzard etc.

Typical costs, Townhouse Hotel = bed & breakfast £75 pp/n, = £375. Evening meals extra. Cost of a coach seat will vary depending on number of participants, but £168-43, with 19 participants is current guide. The full itinerary & final costs will be confirmed once number of participants is known.

There are still a few places left, so please let **John Lumby** know of your interest as soon as possible.
Tel 01665 720 654 or Email j.lumby@yahoo.co.uk

Regards John Lumby

Speaker's Presentation

Queensland and Further North, with Philip Hanmer

At the start of the club's new season, members Phil and Alison took the audience to the spring warmth (28C) of Queensland on their 2018 trip. With a base at Cairns, they made visits to varied environments within 3 hours' drive from the city.

Only a short distance from their hotel, with a walk along the Cairns Esplanade, they were sighting birds and wildlife new to them. On the water's edge were a group of Pelicans, a Black-fronted Dotterel, and an incredible looking Masked Lapwing. On the nearby grass verges were an interestingly named Willie Wagtail, Bush Stone-Curlew, Magpie Lark and Common Myna whilst the trees and shrubs had Great White Egret, Double-eyed Fig Parrot (Australia's smallest Parrot), Australian Figbird and Nankeen Night Heron. But it wasn't just birds on this local walk, there were bats and crocodiles. What a start to the trip.

Speaker's Presentation

At the end of the Esplanade is an area of mangroves with Australian White Ibis, Black-tailed Godwit, Eastern Curlew, Gull-billed Tern, Lesser Sand Plover and Terek Sandpiper. Climate change, Cyclones and development are threatening the mangrove areas.

Moving inland, the next ecosystem they visited was the bush. Here they saw the appropriately named Brush Turkey. This is what is called a megapode. The male builds a large mound of vegetation, attracts a mate and the eggs are laid in the mound. The chicks hatch fully feathered and ready to fly. Other birds of the bush seen were Cuckoo Shrike Dove, Rainbow Lorikeet, Friarbird and Pacific Bazza. In this region there are creeks and lakes which hold Green Pygmy Geese and Little Pied Cormorant. In the Granite Gorge area, they got close to Rock Wallabies.

Their northern journey took them to Daintree River region in the Cape of York Peninsular. Here are 430 species of bird, over half of the species in Australia. As well as looking for new species of birds in a tropical forest environment, they were fortunate to have good views of both the Duck-billed Platypus and crocodiles – not too close. They made an early morning start on the river trip and amongst their many sightings were the Azure Kingfisher, Victoria's Riflebird, Papuan Frogmouth, Australian Figbird, Shiny Flycatcher and Bush Stone Curlew again – this time with young.

What struck me about many of the species that Alison and Phil saw was how colourful many of them are, quite a contrast to the more subdued colouring of our species.

A wonderful trip with sightings of birds, crocs, insects and plants to remember for a long time. Thanks for sharing it with us.

Report by Richard Poyer

Field Trip Report

LOW NEWTON - 27th September 2023
Leaders: Paul Ashdown and Martine Delbauve

Our first Club Field Meeting of the autumn at Low Newton was timed alongside the arrival of the autumn's first storm. With strong winds and rain forecast for the afternoon, we had to make the most of the morning's good weather. 14 members set off from the 'tin church' and quickly stacked up a familiar list of passerines as we walked towards the coast. We all enjoyed the lively sound of Chiffchaffs calling as though it were spring time, and also caught some of our last Swallows and House Martins.

Everything seemed caught between seasons as we had energetic Skylarks filling the air, alongside the sound of geese flying overhead. We were treated to a flight of Bar-tailed Godwit over the coastal meadows, and then began picking up more coastal specialities looking over Football Hole and Newton Point. The sea was beautifully calm but the coast was full of holiday-makers, reducing the scope for waders on the shore. Nevertheless we had good sightings, including a wonderful pair of Wheatear and a Red-throated Diver.

After walking down the southern shore of Newton Point we had a convivial lunch in the square at Low Newton, and trained the scopes on the relatively small number of waders being pushed into the corner by the almost high tide. Amongst the Redshank, the special bird of the day was spotted first by Neil Hinchliffe, giving many of us our first view of a Curlew Sandpiper.

After lunch, with the weather beginning to close in, we walked along the back of the village to the muddy 'scrape'. The avocets of the summer are long gone and the field was dominated by a large flock of Greylag Geese, hiding a couple of Pink-feet in their midst, plus some nice Lapwing adding another tick.

We all squeezed into the National Trust hide for a look over the pond where we added our final few species, giving us a final total of 60. As the rain started in earnest, we decided to forego the increasingly windswept and inhospitable beach, and headed home for, in our case, a hot chocolate!

Paul Ashdown

Field Trip Report

The field trip produced an impressive list of 60 species:

1. Goldfinch
2. Blue Tit
3. Robin
4. Chiffchaff
5. Greylag Goose
6. Pheasant
7. Black-headed Gull
8. Blackbird
9. Rook
10. Wren
11. Canada Goose
12. Skylark
13. Curlew
14. Stonechat
15. Chaffinch
16. Yellowhammer
17. Carrion Crow
18. Black-tailed Godwit
19. Reed Bunting
20. Jackdaw
21. Grey Heron
22. Red-throated Diver
23. Eider
24. Herring Gull
25. Great Black-backed Gull
26. Oystercatcher
27. Shag
28. Kestrel
29. Cormorant
30. Mallard
31. House Martin
32. Guillemot
33. Common Tern
34. Gannet
35. Razorbill
36. Redshank
37. Turnstone
38. Teal
39. Merganser
40. Brent Goose
41. Wheatear
42. Goosander
43. Sandwich Tern
44. Swallow
45. Rock Pipit
46. Meadow Pipit
47. Pied Wagtail
48. Golden Plover
49. Curlew Sandpiper
50. House Sparrow
51. Lapwing
52. Wood Pigeon
53. Pink-footed Goose
54. Gadwall
55. Shoveler
56. Moorhen
57. Starling
58. Dunnock
59. Dunlin
60. Magpie

Bird Sighting Records

Below are the highlights for September...

Brent Goose	25 Pale-bellied at Fenham-Le-Moor on 6th	PN&MN
	30 Pale-bellied at Holy Island on 13th	PN&MN
Red-breasted Goose	1 at Ross on 27th	NH
Whooper Swan	2 at Bamburgh on 30th	PCA
	4 at Bamburgh on 24th	PCA
Velvet Scoter	24 at Fenham-le-Moor on 9th	PN&MN
Common Scoter	118 at Alnmouth Bay on 30th	RP
American Golden Plover	1 at Holy Island on 23rd	NH
Bar-tailed Godwit	2 at Low Newton on 26th	PCA
Knot	65 at Birling Carrs on 2nd	RP
Ruff	2 at Coquet Estuary on 3rd	RP
Purple Sandpiper	2 at Birling Carr on 25th	RP
Green Sandpiper	1 at Hedgeley on 9th	JMcC
Redshank	312 at Coquet Estuary on 3rd	RP
Greenshank	1 at Long Nanny on 13th	PCA
	15 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
Pomarine Skua	1 at Annstead Point on 6th	NH
Arctic Skua	1 at Annstead on 16th	PCA
Red-throated Diver	17 at Alnmouth Bay on 30th	RP
Great White Egret	1 at River Aln on 6th	PCA
Osprey	1 at High Letham on 16th	D&TLB
Sparrowhawk	1 at Doxford on 2nd	PCA
	1 at Powburn on 3rd	PCA
Kingfisher	1 at Hedgeley on 6th	JMcC
Red-footed Falcon	1 at Eglingham Moor on 22nd	PCA
	1 at Eglingham Moor on 23rd	PN&MN
	1 at Eglingham on 22nd	NH
Raven	1 at Howick on 22nd	HRS
Chiffchaff	200+ at Howick on 22nd	HRS
Blackcap	7 at Howick on 30th	HRS
Garden Warbler	1 at Howick on 1st	HRS
	1 at Howick on 9th	HRS
Lesser Whitethroat	1 at Howick on 1st	HRS
Goldcrest	1 at Holy Island on 7th	PN&MN
	1 at Howick on 9th	HRS
	1000+ at Howick on 30th	HRS
Nuthatch	1 at Doxford on 2nd	PCA
Red-breasted Flycatcher	1 at Holy Island on 18th	PN&MN
	1 at Holy Island on 18th	NH
Pied Flycatcher	1 at Holy Island on 18th	NH
Wheatear	1 at Long Nanny on 15th	PCA
	1 at Dunstanburgh on 23rd	PCA
Siskin	1 at Hedgeley on 9th	JMcC
Snow Bunting	1 at Boulmer on 26th	RP

Bird Sighting Records

Contributors

Paul Armstrong (PCA)
John McCutcheon (JMcC)
David & Trish Lloyd Blake (D&TLB)
Phil & Marge Noble (PN&MN)
Neil Hinchliff (NH)
Howick Ringing Station (HRS)
Richard Poyer (RP)

Please send sighting records to **Paul Armstrong** NNBCrecords@yahoo.com by 1st of next month
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 species list, then you only need to submit the name of the bird.

Members' Contributions

The 2023 struggle of the Ringed Plovers at Amble Links by Richard Poyer

This year there has been a special effort to locate, protect and monitor Ringed Plovers along the Northumberland coast. The professionals at Natural England, Space for Shorebirds and Coast Care led the project but volunteers spent many hours spotting and watching the nests, engaging with the public and doing "chick watch". The experiences at Amble Links are typical of many of the nest sites.

Ringed Plovers had nested amongst the shingle and sand last year and returned again this year. The site, some 500m south of Amble was first seen towards mid-May. Katherine and Ben of Space for Shorebirds erected a fence and the nest had four eggs.

Guarding the first nest

Incubation was going well until, as happened at several sites, corvids took the eggs.
The pair re-laid four eggs some 20m south of the first site but still within the fenced enclosure.

Second nest

Again, all was going well until the evening of the 4th of July. That evening I sat and watched as a 5.1m high tide gradually moved forward over the nest. Being a volunteer, I could not move the eggs of this red listed bird. I passed the news to Richard and Katherine.

The next day they came down, collected the scattered eggs and moved them away from danger. The birds accepted this move and began to incubate the eggs again.

A busy time with family meant that I didn't go back to the nest site until Tuesday 11th July. Arriving at the beach at 7am, I scanned the nest site and the good news was that I saw one tiny chick, with an adult nestling down on two eggs.

I told Richard and Katherine the good news. They came down later in the day, located the chick but sadly the other two eggs had been damaged by the tide and were not viable.

Going down to the beach the next day, I discovered Katherine setting up new fencing some 25m further south than the original nest site. The chick had decided to go for a wander and so new protection was needed. However, when I returned to the beach in the early evening the chick, no respecter of fenced areas, was exploring the area between the fences, with the parents giving plenty of alarm calls when people passed by. There were quite a few walkers along the beach and many were interested in knowing what was going on and viewed the birds through the scope. The dog walkers were cooperative, keeping low down the beach, going the other way or putting their dogs on the lead. As I left, five crows flew along the dune/beach margin.

The week passed without any drama. The chick was difficult to find amidst the shingle but did venture down to the adjoining beach area.

The two parents kept a close eye on the chick, cajoling it to safety, calling to it with their "peeps" and brooding it when people and dogs came close.

All seemed to be going well and then Richard (Space for Shorebirds) messaged on the 17th to say that they couldn't see the chick anywhere. I went down later in the day and there were two adults feeding on the beach but sadly no sign of the chick.

Whilst there have been successes, for example at Beadnell, all too often chicks have been taken before fledging.

Richard Poyer

A Ringer's Year - September 2023

The after-effects of Storm Arwen are still apparent to many of us that live in the countryside with partially cleared woodlands on our doorstep and even some that are still a jungle of fallen trees, making the woods all but impenetrable. In one wood up the Breamish Valley we had assumed two boxes had been lost entirely. However, regaining access to this site recently revealed a pleasant surprise. Not only had one box survived intact but it had definitely been used by a Goldeneye duck in 2023 (with three unhatched eggs being left behind in a box lined with duck feathers and small bits of hatched eggshell). Checking three boxes at this location and revisiting all the other data on the usage of these boxes along the valley means I have to revise my earlier figures. So, there were 14 nesting attempts by Goldeneye between April and June (the same as in 2022), 11 of which were successful (also the same as 2022).

Although arguably an additional nesting attempt took place in a box that was subsequently taken over by a Tawny Owl, as two cold duck eggs were found when the box was cleaned out in September! This was the 'usual situation' of an owl taking possession of a box that it considered was its property, a situation we had sought to mitigate by erecting two additional boxes near this location at Hedgeley a few years ago. However, due to Storm Arwen damage these boxes were both lost and it's been impossible to replace them. As already reported a couple of months ago, a fascinating reversal of this 'usual situation' occurred at another location west of the A697. Here a duck started nesting and laid seven eggs, then an owl attempted a take-over (*and we even captured and ringed it*). Then the duck came back, apparently chased the owl away and laid some more eggs and actually evicted one of the owl's eggs! This female Goldeneye [FH79908] had first nested at this same location in 2022.

Four brand new adults were ringed and eight retrapped. Of the retraps, two had been first ringed back in 2017 and so are probably eight years old. Three clutches were not incubated - at least one having been the victim of egg dumping - with 16 cold eggs being found in the box. This is still the only regular colony of Goldeneye Ducks in England & Wales. There were also three successful Tawny Owl nests.

The exciting event of this month, for my trainees, has been their introduction to the sometimes 'wet' activity of ringing families of Mute Swans! The resident male swan at Howick is easily recognisable by his colourful darvic or plastic ring ZJP (white letters on a red background). He has been at Howick since 2014 and acquired his present mate in 2021 (now ZKA). She was ringed as a cygnet in 2018 at Herrington Country Park so we know exactly how old she is. This pair first bred in 2022, raising two young. This year they originally had four young but lost one a few months ago.

On the 1st September we gathered at Howick, and Alison and the Head Gardener (Robert Jamieson) enticed all the swans up onto the bank with the offer of grain and duck pellets. Everyone had been briefed to catch the young birds as a priority, because once these are caught the adults do tend to be so inquisitive that they will come very close to see what is happening and they are more easily captured by the stronger members of the ringing team! So, everyone was shown how to put first a 'permanent' metal ring on one leg and then the larger brightly coloured darvic on the other.

We took some biometrics and noted particularly that the cygnets weighed: 7.25kg (ZKB); 7.0kg (ZKC); and 6.5kg (ZKF) - almost certainly a female. We were able to put a darvic on the female (in addition to the metal she already carried) so she is now much more recognisable as ZKA and found she weighed 9.0kg. Finally capturing Male ZJP he weighed in at a heavy 12.75kg! All the swans were rapidly released and within a few minutes were coming back to accept food (see photos).

Some of the same team gathered at South Linden on the 5/9/23. Here a rather laid-back male swan (ZKH) and an unusually dominant (not to say feisty) female (VAH) have taken up residence. They raised two cygnets this year which weighed 6kg (ZKR) probably a male; and 4.5kg (ZKT) female. The most interesting fact here is that we can tell from ringing that female VAH is 19 years old, having been originally ringed at Tynemouth in January 2005. This is a great age for a breeding female swan (see photo).

Finally, we were invited down to ring more swans at a Nature Reserve in Morpeth. Here we were able to ring 4 cygnets out of 5 (*one just got away*) at 5.75kg (ZKI); 4.0kg (ZKJ); 2.25kg (ZKL); and at 4.25kg (ZKN). We also caught the female and added a darvic (ZK6) to her metal ring that told us she was ringed in March 2019 at Woodhorn; she weighed 10.25kg. We did not catch the male but we do know from his existing rings that he was ringed in July 2017 at Annitsford Pond (see photo).

Ringer's Roundup

I have laboured the point of the colourful darvic rings because we really would like <u>your</u> help in tracking these swans (*In fact any darvic ringed swan*). Please if you see a swan with a plastic ring on just make a note of the letters or numbers and their colours and tell me where you saw it.

Still dodging the unsettled weather (and getting worse weather forecasts) we have continued to ring at Howick Arboretum. On the 1st September we ringed 75 birds (46 new and 29 retraps). The retraps included a 9 year old female chaffinch that we ringed at the same site in 2014! The highlight of the new birds was a Lesser Whitethroat that was on its first migration south. They migrate south via Northern Italy and then apparently down to winter in Sudan, Chad and Ethiopia. We captured another new Garden Warbler the same day perhaps on its way to Ghana or Nigeria.

There were also a number of Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, and our rather more sedentary local Tits. One of the Chiffchaffs stayed around in a low tree for several minutes after being ringed enabling me to take its picture (see photo.) Gathering again on the 2nd September, for a rather quieter morning we only captured 26 birds (17 new and 9 retraps) but again including several Blackcaps which love to feed on the berries in the Arboretum.

On the 8th September we were back up to 60 birds (40 new and 20 retraps) with the new birds including Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs. Notably some of the Blackcaps were carrying a lot of stored fat, indicating their preparations to migrate south to the Mediterranean and North Africa. On the 9th we captured 39 birds (29 new and 10 retraps) including a retrapped Goldcrest, first ringed in 2022 <u>as an adult</u>. This is actually quite unusual because the proportion of young (hatched in the current year) Goldcrests in the population is always huge relative to older birds. Included in the new birds were a lot more Goldcrest (indicating an influx of migrants from the north and east) Blackcaps, and yet another Garden Warbler.

On the 17th we were up to 75 birds again (55 new and 20 retraps) including yet another 9 year old Chaffinch (Howick chaffs live a long time). The new birds included an influx of Blackbirds (coming to eat berries) and migrating Blackcaps. The 22nd yielded 52 birds (42 new ands 10 retraps) including travelling Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs both moving south.

Finally, on the 23rd we caught 50 birds (33 new and 17 retraps). Notably Bullfinches (something of a Howick specialty in the winter) seemed to have moved into the ringing site to hunt the bushes for nice berries (see photo).

There were also Goldcrests (coming in) and Blackcaps and Chiffchaff (going out). I have added a good photo of a male and female Blackcap, both young birds but showing their proper adult colours. Finally, on the 30th we were able to ring again and captured 53 birds (43 new and 10 retraps). There was still no sign of significant migration from Scandinavia (of Thrushes for example) but there were a lot of Goldcrest, Chiffchaff and Blackcap moving through Howick.

Best Regards
Phil

Phil Hanmer
S Ringer/Trainer, Natural History Society of Northumbria Ringing Group (Hancock Museum)
Email: tytoalbas@btinternet.com

Epilogue

Books for Sale

From John Lumby (Shearwaterbooks)
North Sunderland, Seahouses, NE68 7WG

Day & Hodgson The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Northumbria 2003 1st ed, dw, very fine £20. (for sale at Barter Books for £42).
Vaughan In Search of Arctic Birds 1992 1st edition, dust wrapper, fine £20.
Brooke The Manx Shearwater 1957 1st edition, dust wrapper, good £15.
Gaston The Ancient Murrelet 1992 1st edition, dust wrapper, very good £15.
Marzluff & Balda The Pinyon Jay 1992 1st edition, dust wrapper, very good £9.

On sale a small donation will be made to club funds.

Heard about Merlin?

A useful Birding App for your mobile phone that is entirely free. Merlin from Cornell University is a handy tool for identifying birds. A great feature is bird sound ID, which listens for and identifies what you should be looking for. A great help for the amateur and expert alike.
Merlin is available for both Apple and Android from their respective App Stores.

Got something you'd like to add?
Please let us know.